

Heidelberg Catechism

Item: 16-11 Report of the GA Special Committee on the Heidelberg Catechism

GA Committee Assignment: 16- Theological Issues and Institutions

Summary of the business and what it wants the Assembly to do:

Allow the Special Committee on the Heidelberg Catechism to remain in place another two years and possibly recommend to the 2012 GA a new translation of the Heidelberg that is done in cooperation with the Christian Reformed Church in North America(CRCNA) and the Reformed Church of America(RCA).

In addition, the GA would request that the Special Committee consider including Scripture citations that correspond to each article of the Catechism.

Background: The GA Special Committee on the Heidelberg Catechism was appointed by Bruce Reyes-Chow in response to the 218th GA (2008) action on item 13-06, an overture from Newark Presbytery, requesting that translation problems be corrected in 4.019(Q.19), 4.033 (Q.33), 4.055 (Q.55), 4.074(Q.74), and 4.087(Q.87).

Of specific concern is Q.87, that includes a reference to “homosexual perversion.”

A minority report from the 218th General Assembly committee was submitted to plenary. It argued against any changes saying, “the confessions constitute a living tradition that expresses the church’s beliefs. The current translation... faithfully and clearly declares to the members of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and to the world who and what we are, what we believe and what we resolve to do (G-2.0100a).” The minority report was not approved.

Analysis of the business and its effect on the church:

The Special Committee has been in contact with a translation committee made up of representatives from the CRCNA and the RCA. That committee is proposing a new translation to those bodies this spring at their national meetings. The PC(USA) Special Committee has had input into that translation committee. However, a copy of the translation that will be going to the CRCNA and RCA assemblies is currently not available. In addition, the translation could be modified by those assemblies.

If those bodies approve a new translation, the PC(USA) Special Committee will determine if it wants to recommend that translation to the 2012 GA to replace the current translation in the *Book of Confessions*. Their recommendation, whatever it is, would have to be approved by the 2012 GA and then approved by a 2/3 vote of the presbyteries.

Note that their recommendation to this GA, which would continue their process toward a new translation, goes beyond what the Special Committee was asked to do by the 218th GA in action 13-06.

Commissioners should consider the following. By leaving the current Special Committee in place for another two years, the PC(USA) GA is approving the Special Committee’s request to consider the entirely new translation being voted on by the CRCNA and RCA. Continuing the committee adds

momentum to efforts to change the Heidelberg. Is there a need for a more faithful translation? Does the current version express the church's faith today?

Commissioners should also be aware that at the same time this Special Committee is seeking a more accurate (historically faithful) translation of the Heidelberg, the proposed Belhar Confession has been altered from the original to include inclusive language. In the case of the Belhar, faithfulness to the original translation yields to particular cultural trends.

The report submitted by the Special Committee on the Heidelberg references several proposed changes that would provide a more accurate expression of the church's faith and therefore a more helpful teaching tool. A new translation would most likely remove "homosexual perversion" from Q 87. It may include a Scripture reference in the footnotes to 1 Cor 6:9-10. A thorough analysis of the proposed changes must wait until a specific retranslation is proposed to the church.

Pertinent Resources: *Book of Confessions*, Heidelberg Catechism (4.001ff, page 29ff).

Action by GA that will help the Church:

Commissioners to this Assembly will not have the new translation and thus will not be able to assess the merits of the proposed changes.. If commissioners approve the recommendation to continue this Special Committee process, they should amend

Recommendation 1 of Item 12-01 to read: "**Appoint the presently constituted Special Committee on the Heidelberg Catechism to determine whether to respond to the action of 218th GA (2008) (13-06) with a recommendation to the 2012th GA of a new translation of the present Heidelberg Catechism in *The Book of Confessions* in cooperation with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) and the Reformed Church of America (RCA).**

And amend Recommendation 2 to give instructions

- on including the specific pertinent Scripture references
- specify that the Scripture referenced be one with the highest degree of accuracy in translating from the original language