

21. Doctrinal matters

21.1 REPORT DEPUTIES DOCTRINAL MATTERS : ALTERNATIVE FORMS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION (Artt 89, 253)

- A. Rev JP Kruger delivers the Report.
- B. **Decision:** The Report is referred to Commission Doctrinal Matters 1.
- C. Rev BCG Fourie reports on behalf of Commission Doctrinal Matters 1.

D. REPORT

1. Mandate of the Deputies (Acta 2006:535, 5.1–5.5)

- 1.1 During their study the Deputies should pay attention to the content of comments concerning the formulations that can possibly lead to uncertainties and misunderstandings.
- 1.2 The Deputies have the freedom to co-opt knowledgeable persons on the terrain of Dogmatics and Church and Dogma History. Any other person or persons who wish to make an input should be granted the opportunity.
- 1.3 The Deputies should pay attention to guidelines according to which the next National Synod can evaluate the suggested Alternative Form(s) for the Celebration of the Holy Communion.
- 1.4 Such concept Alternative Form(s) for the Celebration of the Holy Communion should adhere to the framework of Scripture, Confession and Church Order, should reflect the spirit of the Reformation and should comply with the requirements of the Description Points.
- 1.5 The Deputies should consult with the other Afrikaans Churches regarding this matter through means of the ICC (Deputies Ecumenicity: National).

Decision: Points 1.1 to 1.5 noted.

2. Interpretation of the mandate

- 2.1 The emphasis of the mandate of the Deputies' lies in the assignment to compile guidelines based on which the proposed form(s) for the celebration of Holy Communion can be evaluated. It comes down to the Synod having to be advised with regard to the criteria that the form for the celebration of Holy Communion should meet.
- 2.2 The Commission Report at the Synod of 2006
 - 2.2.1 The Report states that "things can be mentioned that can lead to serious dogmatic mistakes with regard to content", but then only states "a few examples." The Deputies processed the comments with regard to the named examples, and continued to evaluate every alternative form for the celebration of the Holy Communion that has been proposed as thoroughly as possible from a dogmatic point of view.
 - 2.2.2 The comments of the Commission touch on two matters of content, namely the remembrance character of concept form 1, and the discounting of the meaning of the Old Testament Passover meal in the proposed alternative forms. The rest of the commentary of the Commission touches on matters of formulation.
- 2.3 Written commentary by prof Paul Krüger addressed to the Synod of 2006 was also made available to the Deputies, and was discounted in the proposed new forms.
- 2.4 The **method** that the Deputies followed was the following:
 - 2.4.1 The comments on the alternative forms that were received during the Synod of 2006 were processed.
 - 2.4.2 The criteria that a form for the celebration of the Holy Communion should meet were determined. The Deputies felt that the principle study included in the Report before the Synod of 2006, in essence includes the criteria for a form for the celebration of

the Holy Communion, and that this criteria should merely be systematised. The study of the previous Deputies is included as Addendum. Two further criteria are added by the current Deputies (4.5 and 4.6 of the Report.)

- 2.4.3 The criteria, as well as the comments that have been received, have been applied to the proposed alternative forms.

Decision: Points 2.1 to 2.4.3 noted.

3. Church political considerations

- 3.1 A church political consideration that comes to bare is whether a variety of forms for the celebration of the Holy Communion does not endanger the unity of the church. According to the Deputies the unity of the church is not founded in having only one form for the celebration of the Holy Communion, but in having one single confession. Different alternative forms for the celebration of the Holy Communion that emphasises the different accents of the Holy Communion, can serve the one confession of the church. It is practically impossible to let all the different accents of the Holy Communion come to their fullest in one form for the celebration of the Holy Communion. Several churches with who the GKSA is in correspondence have different alternative formularies. Currently the GKSA already has a shortened form besides the classic form, as well as several confessions of faith.
- 3.2 A second church political consideration is that of whether alternative forms for the celebration of the Holy Communion is admissible from a church political point of view, since article 62 CO only speaks of one form for the celebration of the Holy Communion. The Deputies judge this matter as follows:
- 3.2.1 The articles of the Church Order should be judged in the light of their historical origin, the Scriptural principles that they aim to give practical embodiment to, and their spirit and purpose.
- 3.2.2 Article 62 CO merely refers to a form for the celebration of the Holy Communion in its singular form because the church only had one form at the time of the formulation of article 62 CO. The purpose of the article is not to exclude the possibility of a variety of forms, but to refer to it in a generic manner.

Decision: Points 3.1 to 3.2.2 noted.

4. Guidelines for the evaluation of the proposed forms

- 4.1 The Synod itself provides the basic guidelines for the evaluation of proposed forms, namely that it should be in accordance with Scripture, the confessions accepted by the GKSA, and the Church Order of the GKSA. The Synod itself adds that the forms should maintain the spirit of the Reformation and should meet the requirements of the description points that are being addressed (Acta 2006:535, 5.4).
- 4.2 In the Report of the Deputies Doctrinal Matters that served before the Synod of 2006, the criteria that a form for the celebration of the Holy Communion should meet are presented in the run of the argument (Acta 2006:520–526). It is summarised as follows:
- 4.2.1 It becomes clear from church history that the form played the role of an **introduction to the celebration of the Holy Communion**. This introduction was encouraging in nature, but it especially also contained thanksgiving (the meaning of the name *eucharist*, which is a general term for the Holy Communion). Since the Reformation the form for the celebration of the Holy Communion also gained a **didactic function** insofar as it was necessary to transmit a clearly explicated doctrine of the Holy Communion to believers in which – although hidden – the church takes a clear stand against other views of the Holy Communion (from 2.2.2.1 of the 2006 Study Report).
- 4.2.2 Rediscovered sources from the early history of liturgy indicate that during the earliest celebrations of the Holy Communion, there was an awareness of the **worldwide unity of the believers**. Coupled with that, there was also an **eschatological directedness** and a strong **missionary awareness** (from 2.2.3.2 of the 2006 Study Report).

- 4.2.3 Point 2.2.3.3 of the 2006 Report states that the Holy Communion is strongly related to **Passover** as covenant meal. This aspect should therefore also feature in a form.
- 4.2.4 Point 2.2.3.5 of the 2006 Report mentions a series of important accents of sensible, heartfelt celebration of the Holy Communion. The following have not been mentioned above and can serve as further criteria that a form for the celebration of Holy Communion should meet:
- 4.2.4.1 A form for the celebration of Holy Communion should do justice to the institutional words in their variety.
- 4.2.4.2 The communion with the glorified Christ that is being celebrated in the Holy Communion should become apparent.
- 4.2.4.3 Justice must be done to the character of the Holy Communion as a *celebration* of the community of believers (see Acta 2003:634-636).
- 4.3 Although there is a danger that the Holy Communion can be seen as a meal of remembrance exclusively, there is also a valid element of **remembrance** of the death of Christ on the cross that should be apparent in the form. It is this element that is strongly foregrounded in the current form.
- 4.4 In the existing form for the Holy Communion the aspect of **humiliation** is strongly emphasised.
- 4.5 A further criterion for a form for the celebration of the Holy Communion is that it is also **contextual** in the sense that it formulates the eternal meaning of the Holy Communion in a current manner.
- 4.6 A case can be made that a form should have a **functional length**. This can also serve as a criterion for a form for the celebration of the Holy Communion.

Decision: Points 4.1 to 4.6 noted.

- 4.7 The following is a summary of the criteria that have been identified:
- (a) It should be in agreement with Scripture, the Confessions and the Church Order
 - (b) It should be in line with previous Synodal decisions
 - (c) It should reflect the spirit of the Reformation
 - (d) It should be an introduction to the celebration of the Holy Communion
 - (e) It should be encouraging
 - (f) It should contain thanksgiving
 - (g) It should contain teaching with regard to the Holy Communion
 - (h) A sense of ecumenicity should become apparent
 - (i) An eschatological directedness should become apparent
 - (j) It should reflect a missionary awareness
 - (k) The relation with Passover as covenant meal should be apparent
 - (l) It should do justice to the institutional words in their variety
 - (m) It should express the fact that the Holy Communion is a celebration of community with the glorified Christ
 - (n) It should give expression to the fact that the Holy Communion is a participatory celebration
 - (o) It should give expression to the remembrance of the crucifixion of Christ
 - (p) It should bring the congregation to humiliation before the Lord
 - (q) It should be contextual
 - (r) It should have a functional length

Decision: Approved.

5. Argumentation along the lines of the identified guidelines

- 5.1 It is not practically possible to include all the elements referred to in 4.7 in one form. The research of the Deputies therefore confirms the proposal of the Deputies Report that served before the Synod of 2006 regarding the need for additional forms for the celebration of the Holy Communion.
- 5.2 If it is furthermore taken into account that the historical integrity of the existing, "classical" form for the celebration of the Holy Communion is conserved (see 2.2.1 b and c from the Report before the Synod of 2006, Acta:520, 521), it makes sense to

look at which of the criteria do not receive adequate attention in the existing form, to group them, and to suggest alternative forms based on such a process. Naturally there will be overlapping of elements that appear in more than one of the alternative forms.

- 5.3 In the light of the identified criteria (4.7 of this Report) the Deputies comes to the conclusion that four overarching categories of focus can be used as guidelines in the formulation of additional forms. The four over-arching categories are the following:
 - 5.3.1 In the first place there is the focus on the remembrance of the substitutional suffering and death of Jesus Christ.
 - 5.3.2 In the second place there is the focus on the Holy Communion against the background of the Old Testament Passover: Jesus Christ is the true Passover Lamb that has been slaughtered. Through Him we are liberated from the servitude of sin and we enter into a new, reconciled relationship with God, who remained hidden in the Old Testament. This is a wonderful reality.
 - 5.3.3 In the third category of focus the emphasis falls on the wonderful communion with the living Christ, where He nourishes us as Host at the table through the Holy Spirit (see BC art 35).
 - 5.3.4 In the fourth category of focus there is an emphasis on the catholicity of the church and the missionary awareness that flows from that, as well as the expectation of the fulfilment of everything.
- 5.4 A Sub-group of the deputies considered the concept forms that were suggested during the Synod of 2006 in the light of the identified criteria and categories, and also worked on the formulation of additional concept forms. However, the Deputies ultimately came to the conclusion that neither the concept forms that were presented to the Synod of 2006, nor the new concept forms are ready to be presented to churches for commentary.

Decision: Points 5.1 to 5.4 noted.

6. Recommendations

In the light of the argumentation, the Deputies make the following recommendations:

- 6.1 The Synod takes note of points 1-5
- 6.2 The Synod gives a mandate to the Deputies: Ecumenicity (National) to present the criteria and identified categories of focus to the ICC for commentary, and to address a request for co-operation to them.
- 6.3 The Synod appoints a Deputies group consisting of at least a linguist, an Old Testament scholar, a New Testament Scholar, a scholar in liturgy and a scholar of Dogmatics, as well as a representative from the black Reformed Churches, to formulate additional forms based on the fixed criteria, and to take responsibility for the translation of such documents in English.
- 6.4 The concepts that served during the Synod of 2006, together with the foundational work on further additional forms by a subgroup of the Deputies, are attached to this Report and can serve as background information for the appointed Deputies.

Decision: Approved. Synod should note that the wording in Art 62 KO may be affected if the recommendations are accepted since *formulary* is mentioned and not *formularies*.