

21.15 PETITION OF PROTEST: PE VAN DER DUSSEN: AGAINST BC, ART 36 (Artt 19, 42, 208)

- A. The Petition of Protest is regarded as stated.
- B. **Decision:** The Petition of Protest is referred to Petition of Protest Commission 7.
- C. Rev CJJ Putter reports on behalf of Petition of Protest Commission 7.

D. PETITION OF PROTEST

Protest, calling on BC, artt 27-29 against *Decision (nr 2) point 1 (Acta-1982 p 383ao)* of the forty-first synodal assembly of the GKSA at Potchefstroom on 6 January 1982 and the days following.

1. Decision that is protested

- 1.1 “Decision (nr 2) point 1: The translations of the BC and the Heidelberg Catechism as they were completed with the DRC and the NHK, are accepted by Synod...” – Acta 1982:383.
- 1.2 This protest only concerns BC, art 36. The decision changed BC, art 36 drastically.¹ This is indicated in detail in Appendix A.²
- 1.3 Appendix B provides a summarised background.

2. Why the Petition of Protest is stated

- 2.1 Already before Dordt 1618-1619 there was agreement amongst Reformers that the Confessions (at the time the BC and the HC) **have to agree with the Word of God in full**. Since Dordt this principle (together with the Doctrines of Dordt) has been accepted as such by Reformed churches world-wide. **Amendment of the BC (and other Confessions) may therefore only take place based on Scripture**. The decision by Synod 1982 to amend the Confessions, destroys this certainty. It creates confusion and uncertainty in the Churches and amongst church people and promotes the age old tendency towards relativism that is currently expressed in postmodernism.
- 2.2 **Amendment** of the Dordt-Afrikaans version on the above-mentioned grounds entails that it should be indicated unequivocally **that there is not agreement with the Word of God**; there should be **necessity** for the rejection of the controversial version. If this can not be done, the existing version stands.
- 2.3 **Replacement** of a rejected section is not necessary and can only take place if it can be unequivocally indicated that (a) replacement itself is **Scripturally necessary**, and (b) the replacement **agrees with the Word of God**. If these conditions are met, the replacement must take place, since necessity and purity have been indicated.
- 2.4 **If the above requirements are not met clearly and definitely, a change robs the Confession in its entirety of its certainty that confession means to say the same as what the Word of God says.**
- 2.5 **The essence of the 1982 amendment opens the gate to further amendment, even based on non-Scriptural considerations.** The fact that this danger is not imaginary and lives in the thinking within the GKSA denomination, becomes clear from the following suggestion of the Deputies Government Synod 2003 to Synod 2006:³ *The Synod assigns it to the to-be-appointed Deputies Government to do a fundamental evaluation of the constitutional-democratic state system in which the RSA currently stands based on the Reformed Confessions ... The purpose of such an evaluation is to judge in the light of our Confessions how the church can fulfil its task as servant of God*

1 Acta 1982:383ao.

2 PE van der Dussen: *Kerk van Christus – Waarheen? Reformasie teenoor Transformasie* (Rotsvas Publishers, Pretoria, 2006) provides a full explication and argumentation of the grounds of protest and the Appendix.

3 Acta 2006:175-176, 3.3 and 3.4.

within a constitutional democracy. At the same time it should be ascertained if and how BC, art 36, is executable within the political reality in which we find ourselves in its current formulation. In 1994 a constitutional democracy was established in South Africa that brought a shift in the relationship between government and churches.¹ Since 1994 it has become clear that the traditional method followed by the GKSA to testify towards the government should be revised. At the same time BC, art 36 originated within a historical context in which theocracy² was the state form. The reality is that our situation differs radically from the situation in which the BC originated. It is therefore necessary to pay attention to the hermeneutical question: How should we testify within a new political dispensation? How do we arrive at a responsible reading of the Confessions in which the difference in historical context is taken seriously, but where we still attempt to listen to what is communicated to us?³

The suggestion is interspersed by subjective claims and statements that can not stand the test of reality, such as the senseless claim that theocracy was the state form in the 16th century. In addition the entire approach is a continuation of the new hermeneutics that is based on the socio-historical Scripture exegesis. Synod 2006 neither approved the suggestion nor rejected it outright, and did not indicate to the Deputies or the assembly of the GKSA that the suggestion is contrary to BC, art 29.

It was indicated that amendment of the Confession may only take place if it comes from the Word of God and when the original has been shown not to agree with God's Word. **However, the Deputies ask for an amendment of BC, art 36 based on historical, political and ideological considerations.** D'Assonville warns against this⁴: ***The policy of the state may never replace the confession of the church or the fact that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God. It is the prophetic task of the true Church to at all times and in all circumstances testify in a Scriptural manner from the Word of God.***

The Church may not set its sails to the wind of a new political dispensation. It should fulfil its office on the fixed foundation of the Word, then the power of the prophetic witness will remain sacrosanct. Whether the government listens to the witness of the church, is of no importance in the fulfilment of its task.

- 2.6 Amendment of one article causes **tension with other articles**. BC, art 36 does not stand separate from the rest of the Belgic Confession (and in fact all the Confessions) and especially not from BC, art 29. See Appendix A par 4.2(1).
- 2.7 The 1982 amendment of BC, art 36 causes **tension within the article**. This for instance goes for the replacement of *verorden* with *aanstel*, which is at odds with the phrase *hulle te gehoorsaam in alles wat nie met die Woord van God in stryd is nie*.

3. Ground for Protest 1: The Study Deputies and the Advice Commission transgressed the assignment of Synod 1979 according to the explanation in the Acta.

- 3.1 Assignment 1.1 of 1979 is quoted as follows: ***A founded, critical adjudication of the preliminary translation*** (Acta 1982:383).

The emphasis is clearly **linguistic**; the decision itself says that the assembly approves the **translation**, and different points in par 2 on p384 confirms the linguistic emphasis. **However, BC, art 36 was fundamentally changed in content and meaning without the following Scriptural information being indicated:**

- (a) **Why the Dordt-Afrikaans text directly translated from the Dordt-Dutch was Scripturally incorrect with regard to the amendments, and**
- (b) **That the amendments were Scripturally needed and pure.**

1 The preceding sentence is highly subjective, laiden and controversial. See BC, art 29.

2 There was no theocracy in the 16th and 17th centuries.

3 Footnote 4 on the previous page is applicable here as well.

4 VE d'Assonville sr: *Die Koms van Christus en die Antichris*, Marnix, 2006:73.

- The necessity for amendments are therefore not indicated.¹
- 3.2 To confess the true faith means to say the same as the Word of God.² Reformed churches world-wide accept the Confession because it agrees with Scripture completely. Since the Word of God is unchangeable, the Confession should be accepted as unchangeable unless it can be proven from Scripture that it contains an error. Totius³ says about this *that in using his/her church confession, the Reformed believer is completely persuaded that the torch that the fathers have passed on to us had been ignited in the flame of the Word of God, and for this reason we should, according to the wish of the international theologians at the Synod of Dordt, 1618-1619, carry this torch until the coming of Christ. Our souls should be pledged to this torch. Totius confirms that the Confessions are as unchangeable as the Word of God because it says the same as the Word of God.*
- 3.3 The 1982 Synod put the Gereformeerde Kerke on the route to relativism and postmodernism with this objectionable decision. The amendment of one article indeed affects the foundation of the entire Confession.
4. Ground for Protest 2 [Addendum A par 4.2(1)]: *Verorden* (ordain) in the original Dordt-Afrikaans version has been replaced by *aangestel* (appoint). The two words are not synonymous. This entails a far-reaching shift in meaning.
- 4.1 **Dordt-Afrikaans version:** “*Ons glo dat onse goeie God vanweë die verdorwenheid van die menslike geslag, konings, vorste en owerhede verorden het, omdat dit Sy wil is dat die wêreld geregeer moet word deur wetten en regeringe, sodat die losbandigheid van die mense bedwing kan word en alles met goeie orde onder die mense kan geskied*”.
- 1982 version:** “*Ons glo dat ons goeie God vanweë die verdorwenheid van die menslike geslag konings, vorste en owerhede aangestel het. Dit is immers Sy wil dat die wêreld deur middel van wetten en regeringe geregeer moet word, sodat die losbandigheid van die mense in bedwang gehou kan word en alles onder die mense ordelik kan verloop*”.
- 4.2 **Ordain** means to *prescribe, determine, order, direct*. The HAT (Handwoordeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal – *Hand Dictionary of the Afrikaans Language*) even provides this example at *verordineer*: **Something that is ordained by God**. The Dutch text **that had been approved by Dordt**, also uses *verorden*. **In other words, God determined, ordered, directed, ordained** that there should be kings, rulers and governments that should rule the fallen man, should stand over them, therefore above them, their superiors in power and authority.
- Appoint** is described by the HAT as *choose someone for a position and appoint him/her in it*. In the Old Testament God chose the judges (Moses, Josua and others) and kings himself until the coming of the age of kings. The theocratic principle was continued in the fact that God Himself not only anointed David as king, but ordained his entire progeny to eternal kingship over God’s people. With the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and the establishment of His eternal Kingdom this set-up is confirmed in the New Testamental earthly dispensation. The eternal kingship of the progeny of David over the people of God was fulfilled in Christ.
- *Appoint* implies that God Himself appoints the government of the day and that such a government’s word is law for the God-fearing man at all cost. **Which person that fears God, will act against His appointee?** Think of the punishment that Korah, Dathan and Abiram received when they acted against Moses, and David’s refusal to act against Saul, an anointed of the LORD, even after Saul was rejected. The believer acknowledges that God **wants and calls**

1 At least not in the Acta. Certainly this is crucial with regard to such an important matter.

2 JG Feenstra: *Onze Geloofsbelijdenis*, Third Ed, J H Kok NV, Kampen, 1950:8-9.

3 *Versamelde Werke van JD du Toit (Totius)*, (after this Totius), Part VII, Dagbreek-boekhandel, 1961:11-13.

kings, rulers and governments by His own hand as He calls every person. However, if one testifies that God *appoints* governments, it is insurgence against God Himself to express criticism against the government of the day, and even more so to vote for an opposition party. **Democracy is therefore sinfull according to this translation.**

- 4.3 The replacement of *verorden* with *aanstel* brings tension with the condition for obedience to governments: *Verder is elkeen, van watter hoedanigheid, toestand of staat hy ook al mag wees, verplig om hom aan die owerhede te onderwerp, belastings te betaal, aan hulle eerbied te betoon en hulle gehoorsaam te wees in alles wat nie stry met die Woord van God nie* (Furthermore, each of you, in which ever capacity, circumstance or state, is compelled to subject to the government, pay tax and to respect the authorities **and to obey them in all that is not contrary to the Word of God**). *Aangestel* robs the citizenry of its **official duty** to continually judge government actions according to the Bible and the Confessions. This is even more valid for the believer, and therefore for the Reformed member.
- 4.4 This ammendment causes a clash between the new BC, art 36 and artt 27-29. The true Church does not allow itself to be dictated by human thinking, not from within its own ranks and not from outside. This Scripturally prescribed requirement is clearly endangered if governments are *appointed* by God.
- 4.5 The replacement of *verorden* with *aanstel* falls together with the depersonalisation of authorities and government and the absolutisation of the state, which leads to the misconception that state, authority and the government of the day is one and the same and not distinct offices within a regime – any regime.

5. Ground for protest 3 [Addendum A par 4.2(2). [Also see par 6, 7 and 8]: *Vromes* (pious) in the original Dordt-Afrikaans version is replaced by *deugsames* (virtuous). These words are not synonyms and the replacement entails a far-reaching shift in meaning.

- 5.1 **Dordt-Afrikaanse version:** *Vir dié doel het Hy die owerheid die swaard in die hand gegee om die kwaaddoeners te straf en die vromes te beskerm.*
1982 version: *Vir dié doel het Hy die owerheid die swaard in die hand gegee om die kwaaddoeners te straf en die deugsames te beskerm.*
- 5.2 The replacement of *vromes* with *deugsames* detracts from (a) the concept **true Church**, (b) the **doctrine** implied in *Soli Dei Gratia*, and (c) promotes the doctrine of **justification by works**. **The emphasis is no longer on the *vromes* (pious), the collected Church of all centuries, but on the *deugsames* (virtuous), therefore the good.** Every pious person has the virtue of faith, not from himself, but because it is granted to him. **However, the virtue of faith lets believers testify that they have no virtue in themselves and that there is none that is good, not even one.**¹ This causes tension between the 1982 version and BC, artt 15-17, which deals with the total depravity and undeservedness of man and the election. Yet the virtue of faith brings the believer to good deeds so that he shows vitue. In this sense all pious are also virtuous. Over and against this there are non-believers that are **humanely** virtuous and do “good things”. All virtuous are therefore not pious. The replacement of *vromes* with *deugsames* bring good works to the fore. The question is justified whether the 1982 version of the BC, art 36 is reconcilable with the Doctrines of Dordt.²

6. Ground for Protest 4 [Addendum A par 4.2(2). Also see par 5, 7 and 8]: The replacement of amp (office) with taak (task) is a continuation of the replacement

1 Rom 3:10-12.

2 The current discussion on the matter of whether a Hindu who does good things go to heaven, shows that this matter is current. This discussion is not only going on in South Africa under the guidance Desmond Tutu and certain Afrikaans academics, but is also taking place in the Netherlands and the USA.

of *verorden* with *aangestel*. This places the government in the purely secular circle and robs it of its responsibility as called before God.

- 6.1 **Dordt-Afrikaans version:** *En hulle amp is om nie alleen ag te gee op en te waak oor die burgerlike regering nie ...*
1982 version: *En dit is nie alleen hulle taak om aan die staatsbestuur aandag te gee en daaroor te waak nie ...*
- 6.2 Scripturally *office* implies a calling from which assignments and tasks spread forth.¹ *Task* is a narrower concept within this context and is subject to *office*, and can not replace it. The replacement of *amp* with *taak* is far-reaching² and detaches BC, art 36 from the ecclesiastical use of vocabulary.
7. **Ground for Protest 5 [Addendum A par 4.2(3). Also see par 5, 6 and 8]:** *Burgerlike regering (civil governance)* is replaced by *staatsbestuur (state management)*. This is a crucial change that touches on the root of the BC, art 36. The civilians or people are no longer the emphasis, but the state. Rom 13 describes the government as *servant of God for your (= civilian) benefit*. In the 1982 version the emphasis is no longer on the office of the government to rule in such a manner that the pious might have a peaceful life so that (because) the evildoers are under control. The emphasis moves to the management of the state.
- 7.1 **Dordt-Afrikaanse version:** *En hulle amp is om nie alleen ag te gee op en te waak oor die burgerlike regering nie ...*
1982 version: *En dit is nie alleen hulle taak om aan die staatsbestuur aandag te gee en daaroor te waak nie ...*
- 7.2 According to Dordt the government has *the office* closely observe the civil governance, which is explained as *closely watch* by the HAT. The 1982 amendment makes it the **task** of the government *to attend to state management*. *Attend* is described in the HAT as *act of attentiveness*. *Rule* includes according to the HAT *management, practicing authority*. The Dordt-Afrikaans version directs the ruling office at the citizens or people according to Romans 13 in BC, art 36. To attend to civil governance entails that the authorities closely monitor the effects of their behaviour on the citizens or people, so that they can continually ensure that they fulfil the office to which God has ordained authorities, namely that everything should run smoothly among the people so that the pious are protected and the evil-doers are punished. This is formulated in the office *to guard civil governance*. **They must guard civil governance.**
- 7.3 In Ex 18:17-22 Jethro advises Moses to distinguish between the first two parts of being over others³. Moses should fill the *office of king* himself and appoint *rulers or head officials* and guide them to guard the people and to deliver jurisprudence. In Rom 13 the office of being over others is described as the protector of the pious and the one who punishes the evil-doers. **In each example the office of being over others is aimed at the people, the citizens, and not at the maintenance of the state.**
- 7.4 The 1982 edition makes it the **task** of the authorities to *attend to state management* and to guard it. With that the emphasis shifts from the civilians or people to the management of the state. *State* means according to the HAT *country or country governance*. *Management* as noun means *guidance, rule, control*. *State management* therefore means the *management of the country and country governance*. According to the 1982 edition it is the task of the government to guide the country and country governance, to rule over them, and control them. The concern is no longer the

1 See the Formulary for the Confirmation of Elders and Deacons.

2 BC, art 36 states principles from which guidelines arise: The practical application is addressed in the discussion of CO, art 28 in PE van der Dussen, ch 5 and 6.

3 **To be above** indicates authority over someone or something. *Ower* comes from *over* which becomes *oor* in Afrikaans. *Owerheid* can then be transferred to *oorheid*. *Owerheid* has the meaning of a governing or ruling entity, but it is not applicable here.

protection of the pious and punishment of the evildoers, but the management of the state. A depersonalised abstract statement takes the place of the civilians (people) as subject of government action. This is contrary to Rom 13 and foreign to art 36, and in fact to the entirety BC and the salvation revelation.

8. **Ground for Protest 6 [Addendum A par 4.2(3). Also see par 5, 6 and 7]:** It is not the **task** of the government to protect the holy ministry of the Word and in so doing to fight false religion and heresy. Its **office** is to keep its finger on the holy Church service so that the true church can fight heresy and false religion in its fulfilment of its calling. In the salvation revelation the emphasis is on the chose pious, the people that Christ is gathering for Him (BC, art 27). From the election comes the **office** of believer, which is also applicable to the authorities of this dispensation.
- 8.1 **Dordt-Afrikaans version:** *En hulle amp is nie alleen om ag te gee op en te waak oor die burgerlike regering nie, maar ook om die hand te hou aan die heilige Kerkdiens, om te weer en uit te roei alle afgodery en valse godsdiens ...*
1982 version: *En dit is nie alleen hulle taak om aan die staatsbestuur aandag te gee en daaroor te waak nie, maar ook om die heilige Woordbediening te beskerm om sodoende alle afgodery en valse godsdiens teen te gaan en uit te roei ...*
- 8.2 The Church is the *gathering* of the pious, and the local Church is the visible *assembly* of the pious. According to the Dordt-Afrikaans version the government should keep *their* (note the plural form) *finger on the holy Church service*.¹ In addition to this BC, art 29 may not be left out of consideration. In accordance with the Confession it can not be anything other than **Church in the Holy Church service being the service of the true Church**. The duty of the government is not to keep their finger on **any** church service. The addition of *to fight all heresy and false religion* attests of this fact. It is the **office** of the government to **keep their finger on the true Church of Christ** and to see to it that **their is no block on the continuation of the true Word**.
- 8.3 The **office** of the government acknowledges the calling of the true Church as the proclaimer of the Gospel. The government itself is not called to ministry of the Word, but they should keep their finger on the true Church that should proclaim the Word.
- 8.4 The 1982 version of the BC, art 36 assigns **the task (assignment) to protect the ministry of the Word** to the government. This is over and against *their calling to keep their finger on the holy Church service* so that the Church may fulfil its prophetic calling correctly and justly. The new version virtually calls the government and gives them the right to transgress the boundary of their capacity and to run the ministry of the Word themselves and to supervise it. **In this way the 1982 version creates tension with the BC, artt 27-29**. It is a far-reaching change that touches the relationship Church/government in its core. Not only does it open the way for a state church, **the church gives the government the authority to rule over it and opens the door for a state controlled church**. This harms the Scriptural principle that the true Church only knows one King – Jesus Christ the Lord who became flesh.
9. **Ground for Protest 7 [Addendum A par 4.2(4) and (5)]:** The Dordt-Afrikaans version uses the word *weer* (fend) of idolatry and false religion. *Fend* implies action with a visible purpose. The true Church keeps evil away from the flock that was entrusted to it. Confession is part of the comforting of the people of God that Christ gathered for Him as Church and stands against the world's attack on the true Church. In opposition to this the 1982 version uses *oppose* which is much weaker and without aim. The change frees the government from the office of involvement with the holy Church service.

1 The Dutch uses *kerkendienst*, which means that it is the office of the government to be involved with **every local church service**.

- 9.1 **Dordt-Afrikaans version:** *En hulle **amp** is nie alleen om ag te gee op en te waak oor die burgerlike regering nie, maar ook om die hand te hou aan die heilige Kerkdiens, om te weer en uit te roei alle afgodery en valse godsdiens, om die ryk van die Antichris te gronde te rig en die koninkryk van Jesus Christus te bevorder, die Woord van die Evangelie orals te laat preek, sodat God deur elkeen geëer en gedien word, soos Hy in sy Woord beveel.*
1982 version: *En dit is nie alleen hulle **taak** om aan die staatsbestuur aandag te gee en daaroor te waak nie, maar ook om die heilige Woordbediening te beskerm om **sodoende** alle afgodery en valse godsdiens teen te gaan en uit te roei, **die ryk van die Antichris te vernietig en die koninkryk van Jesus Christus te bevorder**, die Woord van die Evangelie orals te laat verkondig, sodat God deur elkeen geëer en gedien word soos Hy in sy Woord beveel.*
- 9.2 The word **sodoende (in so doing)** in the 1982 version refers to the preceding phrase *to protect the holy ministry of the Word*. It is unacceptable in the context that it is the **task** of the government to *protect the holy ministry of the Word*. No government is equipped or capable to do so. Consequently no government is able to fend idolatry and false religion along this route. **The office of the government is to see to it that nothing disturbs the true Church in its execution of the office that has been assigned to it, namely the proclamation of the Gospel.**
- 9.3 The Dordt-Afrikaans version uses to *ruin the rule of the Antichrist*. This takes place through the sustenance of the true Church that has the office to proclaim the true Gospel everywhere and always, which includes that the Devil as the commander of the Antichrist has already been conquered. Think of the rock that was loosened without the help of humans to crush the statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw in a dream, also the gold and silver and other metals in it, so that it became like dust and was blown away by the wind (Dan 2). The rule of the Antichrist was destroyed not by humans, but by God himself through the Lord Jesus Christ with His death and resurrection, even though the visibility of this fact still lies in the earthly future (Rev 17-20). The 1982 version says **ruin the rule of the Antichrist**, and this does not do it justice. No earthly power is able to destroy the rule of the Antichrist. Man is naturally inclined to sin and to hate God and his fellow men. With that man rather promotes the rule of the Antichrist. This is also valid for earthly governments that consists of men. This change is not only arrogant, **but contrary to the Confession itself in that man can only remain standing through the grace of God.**
10. **Ground for Protest 8 [Addendum A par 4.2(7) to (9)]:** **The addition of *onderdanigheid (obedience/submissiveness)* in the 1982 version hangs together with the shift in emphasis from *civil government* to *state management*. It is a reduction of the following conditional requirement that the government should be obeyed in everything that is contrary to the Word of God.**
- 10.1 **Dordt-Afrikaans version:** *Verder is elkeen, van watter hoedanigheid, toestand of staat hy ook al mag wees, verplig om hom aan die owerhede te onderwerp belastings te betaal, **aan hulle eerbied te betoon** en hulle gehoorsaam te wees in alles wat nie stry met die Woord van God nie; vir die owerhede voorbidding te doen, **sodat die Here hulle mag bestuur in al hulle weë** en ons 'n rustige en stil lewe kan lei in alle Godsvrug en waardigheid. Wat dit betref, verwerp ons die Wederdopers en ander oproerige mense; en in die algemeen almal wat die owerhede en regeerders verwerp en die regterlike mag omver wil stoot, wat die gemeenskap van goedere invoer en die eerbaarheid wat God onder die mense vasgestel het, in verwarring bring.*
1982 version: *Verder is elkeen verplig, van watter hoedanigheid, rang of stand hy ook al mag wees, om hom aan die owerhede te onderwerp, belasting te betaal, **aan hulle eer en onderdanigheid te bewys**, hulle te gehoorsaam in alles wat nie met die Woord van God in stryd is nie en vir hulle voorbidding te doen **dat die Here hulle in al hulle handeling mag bestuur**, sodat ons in alle Godsvrug en eerbaarheid 'n rustige en stil*

lewe kan lei. Hierin verfoei ons die Wederdopers en ander oproerige mense en in die algemeen almal wat die owerheidsgesag en regeerders wil verwerp en die regsorde omver wil stoot, terwyl hulle die gemeenskaplike besit van goedere invoer en die eerbaarheid wat God onder die mense ingestel het, versteur.

- 10.2 The Dordt-Afrikaans version states it as the duty of the subjects to pray for the government **so that** the Lord may guide them in all their **ways and** we can all have a peaceful and quiet life. The use and placement of **so that** indicates that the guidance is by the Lord *because the subjects pray for it* and acknowledge their dependence on the Lord in this manner. The use of ‘and’ indicates that a peaceful and quiet life flows from this guidance. Contrary to this the 1982 version states that the subjects should pray for the government *that* the Lord may guide them *so that* we may have a peaceful and quiet life. The Dordt-Afrikaans version puts guidance and the consequence on the same level and as part of the same behaviour. However, the new version has the peaceful and quiet life coming from the guidance by the Lord.¹
- 10.3 Add to this that according to the Dordt-Afrikaans version the result of the prayer is that the Lord guides the government *in all its ways*. The 1982 version replaces *ways* with *actions*. Idiomatically ‘ways’ is a wide concept, anything like behaviour, actions, appearance, attitude, aim, an environment or milieu, a lifestyle. From this there can be blessing. In contradiction to this ‘actions’ is a reduction of the approach and consequently the reviewed version lets it seem as if a peaceful and quiet life comes from the actions.
- 10.4 *Waardigheid (dignity)* is replaced by *eerbaarheid (honour)* in the 1982 version. ‘Waardigheid’ in this context means ‘solemn, restrained, serious’. In comparison to that ‘eerbaarheid’ is similar to respectable. ‘Waardigheid’ in other words touches on the behaviour of every person, while ‘eerbaarheid’ emphasises the image to the outside, in other words how others see a person. In Reformed pious life ‘waardigheid’ should receive preference.
- 10.5 The rebaptisers are not **rejected** in the 1982 version, but **detested**. *Reject* presupposes action, while *detest* merely communicates a sentiment. Furthermore, *governments*, which consists of people, is replaced by the depersonalised *governing authorities*.² Similarly the *judicial power* – the power of judges, people – is replaced with the abstract *legal order*. *Community of goods* is replaced by *communal property of goods*. This movement away from people to concepts elicits the question: **Who carries the responsibility?** With the link with people the responsibility rests on them, but in the case of bodies and concepts the responsibility is easily dodged by blaming “the system” when things go wrong. This links up with the earlier mentioned change of civil governance to state management.

11. Findings and Conclusions

- 11.1 Fundamental shifts in meaning occurred with the 1982 amendment of BC, art 36. The GKSA therefore currently has a different Confession regarding the relationship between the church and the government than before 1982. The changes in meaning concern the current over-emphasis of (the task of) the State as independent entity rather than the authorities as servants of God who have to rule over people.
- 11.2 **The Gereformeerde Kerke only accepts a Confession that agrees with the Word of God in all respects.** The Word of God exists for all eternity and is unchangeable³, which means that the Confession is fixed and binding and may only be changed if it can be shown that it is contrary to the Word of God.⁴ With regard to the 1982 version

1 DCS van der Merwe presented a Petition of Protest to Synod 1973 regarding problems with the Afrikaans adverb **om** in BC, art 36 (Acta 1973:191). This will provide insight into the discussion of the adverbs **sodat** and **so** and **dat** and the conjunction **en** in this exposition.

2 See in this regard LS Kruger, HLM du Plessis, B Spoelstra and TT Spoelstra: *Handleiding by die Kerkorde van die Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika*, Pro Rege Press Limited, Potchefstroom, 1966:169-170.

3 Isa 40:8.

4 Acts 1970:411, 7.b.

of BC, art 36 this was not proven or indicated. In fact, the above exposition shows that there are more serious questions regarding the 1982 version based on Scripture and Confessional grounds. Thorough thought on the matter of the amendment of the BC (and other Confessions) is necessary and crucial for the sake of the Scriptural purity of the texts.

12. Request

The Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika, in their delegates in assembly in January 2009 are in the light of the exposition above requested to –

- 12.1 amend Decision (nr 2) point 1 (Acta 1982:388) by recalled the words “BC and”; and
- 12.2 appoint Study Deputies to study the full versions of the BC and the HC that were approved by Synod 1982 in order to ascertain whether other changes were included that essentially harm the Dordt-Afrikaans BC and HC in addition to those to BC, art 36, or changes that may be understood by members alternatively.

E. REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

1. Mandate

Petition of Protest PE van der Dussen against BC, Art 36

Decision: Noted.

2. Matters for cognisance

- 2.1 The commission contacted the protestor to give him the opportunity to address the commission. He did not make use of the opportunity to personally address the commission.
- 2.2 The commission noted the appendix in which the protestor provided the “Dort-Dutch text” that he used.
However, it should be noted that the accepted text at the Synod of Dordt 1618/1619 was the French text (see Schaff, 1983’s “The Creeds of Christendom” p.383).
This is also why the Deputies of Synod 1982 did the translation from the French.
The commission interviewed Prof. CFC Coetzee, who was involved with the translation of the Creeds that were approved in 1982.

Decision: Noted.

3. Decision that is being protested and the protest – pt 1

The translation of the Belgic Confession (BC) and the Heidelberg Catechism (HC) as approved in 1982, especially with regard to art 36 BC. The protest is that this decision radically changed the content of BC art 36.

Decision: Noted.

4. The protestor’s reason for making the protest – pt 2

The commission noted this, since it is not part of the grounds for protest that the petition should prove.

Decision: Noted.

5. Adjudication of grounds of protest

5.1 Ground of protest 1

5.1.1 Claim of the protestor

The protestor claims that the study deputies and advice commission transgressed the mandate of the Synod 1979.

5.1.2 Argumentation of the protestor

The protestor argues that the decision of 1979 was linguistic – it concerned a translation that had to be done. According to the protestor the content and meaning of BC art 36 were essentially changed without the necessity of the changes having been indicated from Scripture. He states that if it was necessary to change the

content, it could only be done based on Scripture. He also claims that this decision of 1982 put the GKSA on the slide to relativism and postmodernism.

5.1.3 Adjudication

The protestor makes claims but does not prove that the Deputies have changed the content of BC art 36 with their translation from the approved French text. He also does not prove that this put the GKSA on the road to relativism and postmodernism.

5.1.4 Finding

The protestor does not prove that the study deputies and advice commission transgressed the mandate of Synod 1979.

Decision: Points 5.1.1 to 5.1.4 noted.

5.1.5 Recommendation

Ground of protest 1 does not succeed.

Decision: Approved.

5.2 *Ground of protest 2*

5.2.1 Claim of the protestor

The protestor claims that the replacement of the word “verorden” [ordained] with “aangestel” [appointed] in 1982 comprises a shift in meaning since the terms are not synonyms.

5.2.2 Argumentation of protestor

According to the protestor the word “verorden” [ordained] according to the HAT means “voorskryf, bepaal, beveel, gelas” [prescribe, determine, command]. The protestor thus claims that the BC art 36 before 1982 meant that God only commanded/determined that there should be a government that should govern fallen man.

“Aanstel” [appoint] according to HAT means: “iemand vir ‘n pos kies en hom daarin aanstel” [choose someone for a post and appoint him thereto]. The protestor claims that God appointed judges/kings in the Old Testament for Israel, but this has been fulfilled in Christ. With this the protestor means to say that after Christ it is no longer the case that God appoints governments, but that he just wants governments and that he calls them as he calls individuals.

The protestor claims that replacing “verorden” [ordain] with “aanstelling” [appointment] brings strain with the condition to only be obedient to the authorities in everything that is not contrary to God’s Word, as well as with art 27-29 BC. He claims that criticism against the government or voting against the government would consequently be rebellious against God. The protestor claims that democracy would then be sin.

5.2.3 Adjudication

The protestor does not take into account the fact that God in the Old Testament not only appointed Israel’s kings, but also those of the heathen nations. In Dan 2:21 Daniel says of God to the heathen king Nebuchadnezzar: “...he sets up kings and deposes them” and in 2:37 “You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory;...”, and in 4:32 “You will be driven away from people...until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.”

In John 19:11 Christ says to the heathen ruler Pilate: “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”

In Rom 13:1 where Paul calls the government an “institution of God”, he uses a Greek word of the stem *τασσω* which means *appoint* (aanstel) as well as *command* (beveel) (Dictionary in the UBS Greek Bible).

Greijdanus, in his “Kommentaar op het Oude Testament” at Rom 13:4 where Paul calls the government a servant (*διακονος*) of God, says that since the more general word *δουλος* was not used, it means that God appointed the government.

A government is therefore an institution and appointment of God.

The word “verorden/verordineer” [ordain] does not always mean only “beveel” [command] or “wil hê” [want], as the protestor claims. In Acts 13:48 it is used with regard to the election: “...almal wat verordineer was tot die ewige lewe” (NIV: ...and all who were appointed for eternal life believed).

The government as appointment does not imply unconditional obedience to it when its orders are contrary to the Word of God. In Acts Hand 4:5, 19 and 5:27-29 Peter and John tells the elders, leaders and high priests that they should be obedient to God more than to people.

5.2.4 Finding

Replacement of “verorden” with “aanstel” in 1982 does not bring about a far-reaching shift in the meaning of BC art 36.

Decision: Points 5.2.1 to 5.2.4 noted.

5.2.5 Recommendations

Ground of protest 2 does not succeed.

Decision: Approved.

5.3 Ground of protest 3

5.3.1 Claim of the protestor

The protestor claims that the replacement of “vromes” [pious] with “deugsames” [virtuous] in 1982 makes a significant difference to the meaning.

5.3.2 Argumentation of the protestor

“Vromes” [pious] according to the protestor indicates the collected church of all centuries while “deugsames” [virtuous] indicates good people. He claims that not all “deugsames” [virtuous] are “vromes” [pious]. “Deugsaam” [virtuous] according to the protestor brings man’s own merit to the fore and is therefore contrary to BC art 15-17.

5.3.3 Adjudication

That “deugzaamheid” [virtuosity] is based on own merit and only indicates “good people”, is not church language. The church fathers and Reformers often used the term “deug” [virtue] with regard to believers. Augustine for instance distinguishes seven important virtues of which the first three are gifts of the Spirit: faith, hope and love (Patrologia Latina, Vol 42, p 1082). Luther also calls faith “the religious main virtue” (See Loofs, 1902. Handboek voor de beoefening van de Dogmengeschiedenis, p 353).

In any event, in the French text the following is used: *et maintenun les gens de biens* which literally means: “to protect those who do good”.

5.3.4 Finding

The protestor does not prove that the replacement of “vromes” [pious] with “deugsames” [virtuous] in 1982 brought about a fundamental change in meaning of art 36.

Decision: Points 5.3.1 to 5.3.4 noted.

5.3.5 Finding

Ground of protest 3 does not succeed.

Decision: Approved.

5.4 Ground of protest 4

5.4.1 Claim of the protestor

The protestor claims that the replacement of “amp” [office] with “taak” [task] in 1982 puts the government in a secular circle and robs it of the responsibility as called government.

5.4.2 Argumentation of protestor

The protestor claims “amp” [office] Scripturally means a “roeping” [calling] from which tasks flow. “Taak” [task] is narrower than “amp” [office] and subject to it and detaches art 36 from church vocabulary use.

5.4.3 Adjudication

Scripturally “amp” [office] means: “diens” [serve] and does not exclude “taak” [task]. Polman uses “taak/amp/werksaamheid” [task/office/ labour] as synonyms throughout in his commentary of art 36 (Woord en belydenis – art 36). “Taak/amp” [task/office] are thus used as synonyms in church language.

5.4.4 Finding

The protestor does not prove that the replacement of the word “amp” [office] with “taak” [task] changes the meaning of art 36 fundamentally.

Decision: Points 5.4.1 to 5.4.4 noted.

5.4.5 Finding

Ground of protest 4 does not succeed.

Decision: Approved.

5.5 Ground of protest 5

5.5.1 Claim of the protestor

The essence of the protestor’s claim is that the replacement of “burgerlike regering” [civil government] with “staatsbestuur” [management of state] is a fundamental change of art 36 because the citizenry or people are not longer emphasised, but the management of state.

5.5.2 Argumentation of protestor

The protestor claims that with the above-mentioned replacement the emphasis shifted from the citizenry/nation to “depersonalised”, abstract state as object of government action.

5.5.3 Adjudication

Polman (Onze Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis, p 270) clearly shows the distinction in this article between the spiritual and political, of which the first relates to the soul and the second to the present things. The first is internal and the second guides the external mores.

The commission adjudicates that the external government is not guided by the term “burgerlike owerheid” [civil authority], but with the confessions, which should be instituted through laws that should limit people’s promiscuity, through the might of the sword, and with regard to the church, through the protection of the ministry of the Word.

5.5.4 Finding

The replacement of “burgerlike regering” [civil government] with “staatsbestuur” [management of state] does not endanger the content of art 36 and does not change anything with regard to the task of the government as the article formulates it.

Decision: Points 5.5.1 to 5.5.4 noted.

5.5.5 Finding

Ground of protest 5 does not succeed.

Decision: Approved.

5.6 Ground of protest 6

5.6.1 Claim of the protestor

The essence of the protestor’s claim is that the government’s task is not the protection of the “holy ministry of the Word” (as in the 1982 translation) to counter idolatry and false religion, but their calling is to “om die hand aan die heilige kerkdiens te hou” [keep its hand on the holy church service] so that the true church can, in fulfilment of its calling, fight false religion and idolatry.

5.6.2 Argumentation of the protestor

The protestor claims that the change of the words “hand aan heilige kerkdiens te hou” [keep its hand on the holy church service] to “om die heilige Woordbediening te beskerm” [to protect the holy ministry of the Word], gives the government the authority to rule over the true church and opens the way to a state governed church. According to the protestor it gives the government the right to transgress the boundaries of its authority and to appoint them to practice the ministry of the Word themselves and to guard over it. According to him this brings art 36 into conflict with art 27-29.

5.6.3 Adjudication

The protestor does not prove his claims that the translation of 1982 will cause the government to practice the ministry of the Word or to guard it, nor how it brings art 36 into conflict with articles 27-29.

Polman (*Woord en belydenis*, p 309) describes the task of the government as to remove obstacles out of the path of the gospel so that the Word can run its course. Feenstra (*Onse Geloofsbelydenis – 1966*) teaches at art 36 that the government has the task to see to it that the church can practice religion undisturbed. Kruger *ao* (*Kerkorde verklaring*, 1966. p 170) describes holy church service as primarily services and other public events.

According to all the above-mentioned the main content of the holy church service is the ministry of the Word.

5.6.4 Adjudication

The protestor does not prove that the translation of “heilige woordbediening” [holy ministry of the Word] changes the content of art 36.

Decision: Points 5.6.1 to 5.6.4 noted.

5.6.5 Finding

Ground of protest 6 does not succeed.

Decision: Approved.

5.7 *Ground of protest 7*

5.7.1 Claim of the protestor

The protestor claims that the change of the word “weer” [repel] of idolatry to “teengaan” [resist], frees the government of the calling to “hand aan die heilige kerkdiens te hou” [keep its hand on the holy church service].

5.7.2 Argumentation of protestor

The protestor’s argumentation deals with the change of “ten gronde rig van die antichris” [break the antichrist down to the ground] to “die ryk van die antichris te vernietig” [destroy the empire of the antichrist], and claims that it is arrogant because no earthly power, in other words no government, can destroy the kingdom of the antichrist and that man can only remain standing through the grace of God.

5.7.3 Adjudication

The “weer/teengaan” [repel/resist] of idolatry stands in relation to the ministry of the Word. Synod 1973 changed it due to a protest of Prof DCS van der Merwe, which indicated that the government does not have a fourfold task, namely to pay attention to state governance, to protect the ministry of the Word, to counter idolatry and false religion and to promote the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The government should pay attention to state governance and the protection of the ministry of the Word, so that the ministry of the Word can counter idolatry and false religion and can promote the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The protestor fails to indicate how the change of “ten gronde te rig” [break down to the ground] to “vernietig” [destroy], has anything to do with the change of “weer” [repel] to “teengaan” [resist].

In this section the protestor’s argumentation of 9.3 is incoherent.

5.7.4 Finding

The protestor does not prove that the change of “ten gronde rig” [break down to the ground] to “vernietig” [destroy] frees the government of its calling “die hand aan die heilige kerkdienst te hou” [keep its hand on the holy church service].

Decision: Points 5.7.1 to 5.7.4 noted.

5.7.5 Recommendation

Ground of protest 7 does not succeed.

Decision: Approved.

5.8 *Ground of protest 8*

5.8.1 Claim of the protestor

The protestor claims “eerbied” [respect] means: “hoogagting” [respect] and “eer” [honour] means: “agting en aansien” [honour and reputation]. The protestor claims that the change of “eerbied” [respect] to “eer” [honour] and the addition of “onderdanigheid” [submissiveness] in 1982 bring a weakening of the condition that governments should be obeyed in all that is not contrary to the Word of God.

5.8.2 Argumentation of the protestor

In each point the argumentation of Ground of protest 8 brings new matters to the fore that has nothing to do with the Ground of protest.

10.1 quotes different translations, 10.2 deals with “dat” [that] and “sodat” [so that], 10.3 with “weë” [ways] and “handelinge” [acts], 10.4 with “waardigheid” [worthiness] and “eerbaarheid” [worthy of honour], 10.5 with the rebaptisers that should not be “verwerp” [rejected], but “verfoei” [despise].

5.8.3 Adjudication

The commission sees no relation between the argumentation and the Ground of protest.

The inclusion of “onderdanigheid” [submissiveness] and the change of “eerbied” [respect] to “eer” [honour] do not change the content of art 36. “Eer” [honour] is used in the Bible with regard to the government in Rom 13:7 and 1 Pet 2:17. Heidelberg Catechism Sunday 39 also implies submission to the government.

5.8.4 Adjudication

The protestor does not prove Ground of protest.

Decision: Points 5.8.1 to 5.8.4 noted.

5.8.5 Finding

Ground of protest 8 does not succeed.

Decision: Approved.

6. **Matters that the Synod should decide on**

Finding with regard to the petition of protest: The protest does not succeed in its entirety.

Decision: Approved.

7. In the light of the fact that there are Deputies for the retranslation of the confessions, the protestor’s attention is directed to the fact that he may give input at this deputy group with regard to the translations.

Decision: Approved.