

READER

FOR

LITK 221 EB

THE LIFE OF OUR CHURCHES AS REFLECTED IN OUR LITURGY

1. BACKGROUND

Throughout the history of the Reformed Churches in South Africa, church councils and major assemblies have devoted a lot of serious attention to liturgy. It was the handling of a liturgical matter which contributed to the founding of the Gereformeerde Kerk Rustenburg in 1859. In 1994, the Synod of the GKSA gave the Deputies for Study the following assignment, and, after their report report, including amendments and resolutions, was approved in 1997, they were instructed to publish a document containing the decisions of 1985 and 1997:

- to outline explicit principles, liturgical contents and forms from Scripture, the Confession, the Church Order and church history; and
- to establish which liturgical contents, forms and types of order should be left to the discretion of local churches, and which should be approved by the church as a whole to ensure uniformity during church services.

2. WHAT IS LITURGY?

The Deputies for Study briefly defined the main concepts:

The Synod noted the following:

2.1 Liturgy

Liturgy (from Greek leitourgia) refers, from a personal, home and church perspective, to people's actions when they meet God, listen to him, worship him, and glorify him. This is the Biblical assignment to the church in its communion with the Lord. Even when the minister of a church is absent, the onus rests with the church to observe the liturgy.

2.2 *Liturgical order*

This refers to the order and not to the sequence of events during a service. The sequence may be a facet of the order, but liturgical order is not synonymous with sequence, nor with formal liturgy. Order particularly includes harmony in the actions during a specific assembly, as well as the liturgical content of the actions.

2.3 *Church service*

This is often viewed as a static concept, as though a church service is a programme that has to be started and concluded. The dynamic aspect of an assembly in Spirit and truth, namely to encounter and obey God and to listen and worship wholeheartedly, does not always come into its own. The act performed by the people as a congregation during the assembly is known as worship and as Gottesdienst in German. The listening and worship are carried on in the believers' homes and private rooms for prayer as a continuation of their assembly as the people of God.

3. **BACKGROUND TO LITURGY AS MANIFESTED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, NEW TESTAMENT AND CHURCH HISTORY**

The Synod noted the following:

- 3.1 In the Old Testament, liturgical forms and contents are mainly found in the liturgy of the temple. God prescribed the forms and contents of the temple service in fine detail: sacrifices, tours of duty, clothes, measurements, objects, and so forth. Temple service was a daily and, thus, ongoing practice. God implemented his will through office bearers (priests) called to this office. The Old Testament contains harsh criticisms of formalistic services which focused on externalities. The liturgy of the temple with its symbols, sacrifices, choral singing, and so forth, was an inspiration to the chosen people never to stop serving God in their homes. The rent in the curtain of the temple and Pentecost imply that Christ has fulfilled the liturgy of the temple. Thus, in the church of the New Testament, the worshipping of God becomes an instruction to all nations and languages. Apart from the liturgy of the

temple, the liturgy of the Old Testament was also observed through circumcision and the paschal repast in the homes.

In the New Testament, the liturgy of the sacraments of baptism and of "breaking bread" is based on the activities performed in the Old Testament. God is present in Christ, and also in the homes and during the Agape (love/communal meals) of the first believers in the New Testament where he is worshipped and served.

- 3.2 Synagogal liturgy had great influence on the development of the dialogic character of the liturgy of the New Testament. The elements of reading out the Ten Commandments, reading and explaining Scripture, prayers and benedictions have become an integral part of Christian liturgy. However, synagogal liturgy lacks the crucial Christological and Pneumatological point of departure and theological focus.
- 3.3 The liturgy of the New Testament links up with synagogal liturgy, but the Early Church differs from synagogal liturgy in that it assumes its own form. The congregation assembles and worships in Spirit and truth; it does not stop with Moses and the temple and the synagogue.
- 3.4 There are quite a few important elements in the Middle Ages. Although rhetoric initially occupied a prominent position, the Service of the Word lost ground and was gradually replaced by sacramentalism during the sixth century. The celebration of Mass was substituted for the Communion meal, and the liturgist was dissociated from the congregation. Church members became spectators and participated in Communion without the cup and only by means of the bread. A positive aspect of mediaeval liturgy is the endeavour to acknowledge the presence of Christ, although this led to debasement of Holy Communion. Calvin appreciated the elements of the Credo (confession), confession of guilt, prayers and absolution in the liturgy of the Mass, but strongly rejected the doctrinal deviations. Even before the Reformation there was a revival of the Service of the Word (prompted by the Renaissance and Humanism), and this had a certain influence, also on some of the Reformers. Consequently Holy Communion became purely a reminder of the suffering and death of Christ as a visual sermon.

- 3.5 Although liturgy was important to the multitude of believers in the Reformation, it was not the subject of much reflection. In the Reformation in the Netherlands, the sermon (didactic theme) received priority over other liturgical acts. Calvin placed strong emphasis on the presence of Christ in and through the Holy Spirit and in spiritual communion. This particular element was lost, since the concept "church service" originated in the Netherlands during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the dynamic liturgy (in which God's people meet, worship and praise him) was replaced by a static event (the church service).
- 3.6 There has been a liturgical awakening within the Roman Catholic church and later also among other churches. In the past decade, liturgy has become a focal point, which, on the one hand, revealed a lack of fundamental reflection on liturgy and, on the other hand, led to liturgical experiments in order to "revive the church service".
- 3.7 By way of summary we can say that the churches in South Africa inherited the following with regard to liturgy: emphasis on regular assemblies in which the sermon plays the main role, and a separate, quarterly service for Holy Communion with the emphasis on remembrance and faith. People understood and experienced the presence of God in Christ through the Spirit much less strongly, as a result of overemphasis on the didactic element. This also becomes evident in the Forms which, though they accurately reflect doctrine, are less successful in guiding the congregation in what happens liturgically so as to meet, glorify and worship God in the Eucharist and Communion. The perception among church members and visitors alike is that the liturgy focuses too strongly on the minister and the sermon. People might easily fail to realise and experience that they have met God and one another through and in the Holy Spirit. This is a legacy from Humanism, which advocates that we experience enlightenment and change when we learn something intellectually.

4. DECISIONS BY THE GKSA ON LITURGY

The Synod noted the following:

- 4.1 The Synod of Dordt 1618/19 determined only the liturgical Forms and laid them down in the Church Order. Nothing was formulated on liturgy as such nor on liturgical sequence. There were broad liturgical customs and agreements in the Netherlands which were transferred to South Africa in 1652. In this country there is basic agreement among the mainstream of Reformed churches.
- 4.2 The GKSA was born when the changing spirit of the nineteenth century was reflected in the liturgy of the local churches. A wish to cling to the liturgy associated with the Bible as the Word of God conflicted with the demand by the church to make room for the new spirit. The 15 men who resigned from the NH church on 11 January 1859 therefore described their reason for leaving as follows: "to protect the doctrine, discipline and service of our fathers as revealed at Dordrecht in the period 1618 and 1619 and modified according to our present circumstances" (translation).
- 4.3 In other words, since the Reformation, people have regarded the service (liturgy) as a norm and expression of ecclesiastical communion, but have also conceded that certain adaptations can be made according to present circumstances. The Gereformeerdes did not approve the introduction of the Evangeliese Gesangbundel into the church of the Cape Province since 1814, and when use of this volume became mandatory, they founded churches at Rustenburg, Reddersburg, and so forth. With the founding of the churches in 1859, it was decided to adopt the liturgy of the churches as prescribed by the National Synod of Dordrecht in 1618/19. Note that the first General Synod of 1862 did not provide liturgical details (Acta, art 12).
- 4.4 It is important to establish what is meant by the "liturgy as determined by the Synod of Dordrecht of 1618/19", especially since the General Synod of 1862 published an Official Declaration (Openlike Verklaring) which contained the following sentence: "We also adopt the liturgy as determined by the Synod in question (Dordrecht 1618/19) for use in our church service" (translation). However, the Synod of Dordrecht 1618/19 only prescribed the text of the Forms, restricted church hymns

to the psalms and a few gesange (in Datheen's rhymed version), and ruled that feast days should be celebrated soberly and sedately. It did not prescribe a fixed liturgical order for the assembly in church; there is no mention of it in any of its decisions. In other words, the above-mentioned sentence from the Official Declaration did not refer to the sequence of events in the assembly in church, and this was also the intention of the General Synod of 1862.

- 4.5 In response to the liturgical movement in Europe, a point for discussion was submitted to the Synod of 1907, namely that the Synod should express itself on the liturgical order during church services. The decision of the Synod was not to attend to the request (Acta, art 96).
- 4.6 The matter was again discussed at the General Synod of 1924 after a request that the Synod should appoint a commission to study the liturgical order. This request was granted, and Deputies were appointed to report to the next Synod.
- 4.7 The Deputies duly reported to the Synod of 1927 by means of a report entitled *Oor liturgiese orde en erediens* (On liturgical order and church service) (Acta, art 83). The Report contained a sequence of events for morning service and for afternoon or evening service, without providing any substantiation for their findings. It dealt with the collection for the poor, announcements, Baptism (place of assembly, prayer in the Form, and the fact that parents should stand to answer the questions), Holy Communion (reading out the Creed, Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer only once, no speeches, and remaining seated while singing), and marriage (a request that the Synod should express itself on the church service in this regard). It is noteworthy that two ministers requested more than a "liturgical sequence"; they discussed the liturgical content and meaning and divided the assembly in church into a Service of Reconciliation, as Service of the Word and a Service of Thanksgiving. The Synod approved neither this proposition nor one to prescribe the recommended liturgical sequence. However, after a proposal by two elders, the Synod decided to approve the liturgical order for the morning service as described in the Report, and to leave its adoption to the discretion of each church council. It also approved the rest of the Report.

- 4.8 In other words, for the first time since the founding of the Gereformeerde Kerke in 1859 (68 years), the churches have laid down a liturgical order (sequence). The Report in question appears in the Acta (1927:80, 81), and the decisions in this regard on pages 34 and 35.
- 4.9 The Synod of 1952 dealt with two points of discussion tabled by the Particular Synods of Southern and Northern Transvaal. The Synod decided to appoint preadvisory deputies to investigate the liturgy of the Church.
- 4.10 The Deputies reported that they had included the following matters in their mandate:
- (1) Cultivation of greater awareness of liturgy among members of the congregation;
 - (2) sequence of events during the church service; and
 - (3) suggestions to achieve greater participation by church members in the service.

The Synod appointed prof. JP Jooste as Deputy to write a book on the cultivation of liturgical awareness among church members. The Synod decided to retain the sequence of events determined by the Synod of 1927, and that the salutatory benediction would be in the Name of Holy Trinity. It adopted the Report of the Commission (point 1) with gratitude to serve as a guideline on greater uniformity in the church service of the various churches. Point 1 deals with suggestions on how liturgical activities can come into their own (Acta 1955:395-406).

- 4.11 The Deputies stress the importance of liturgical awareness among church members. One of their statements is that it is essential that people understand, and consciously cultivate, the significance of the liturgy in church. For the first time we find the term "sequence" in a synodal decision; the term "liturgy" of 1862, became "liturgical order" in 1927 and "sequence" in 1955. In subsequent discussions and decisions of Synods, the focus was mainly on liturgical sequence rather than on the significance of liturgical acts. This implies that the level of liturgical awareness and of reflection on liturgy is not adequate in the GKSA; liturgy (ie, what people do when

they worship God) is largely concerned with the "order of events" (programme) for the "service".

- 4.11 The Synod of 1982 dealt with two points of discussion submitted by the Southern Particular Synod: the first dealt with use of the Ten Commandments and the Creed in the second church service, and the second with liturgical content. The discussion was primarily concerned with liturgical content and not liturgical order.
- 4.12 The Synod of 1982 decided to grant the request in the following way: The National Synod undertook to look at the whole matter of liturgy once again; it duly appointed Deputies to make a study of it, especially with regard to the rich variety of liturgical material in the Word of God, and to report to the next Synod.
- 4.13 A comprehensive Report was submitted to the Synod of 1985 which included a historical perspective, liturgical guidelines, liturgical forms and content, other related liturgical matters and a proposed liturgical order (Acta 1985:398-425). The Synod made decisions on both the content of liturgical acts and the liturgical order. A few matters regarding the liturgical order were left to the discretion of local churches.
- 4.14 At the Synod of 1994, the Particular Synod of Western Transvaal lodged a complaint (gravamen) against certain of the decisions made by the Synod of 1985 (see point 1 of that Report).
- 4.15 To summarise: it is obvious from the Word of God, history and reflection on the motives for introducing liturgical forms, that the congregation should approach, assemble and be constituted in an orderly manner with the object of meeting God (Hb 10:23; CB art 27-32), proceed to humble themselves and confess their guilt - which include forgiveness and absolution - pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit (epiclesis) in listening to the Service of the Word, and, finally, respond to the meeting by giving thanks in prayer to God, interceding for all governments, pleading for the alleviation of all need, and so forth. Throughout history and today, psalms should serve as prayer, confession, praise and intercession and may be used instead of certain spoken prayers.

5. POINT OF DEPARTURE: A DYNAMIC LITURGY

The Synod noted the following:

- 5.1.1 A dynamic liturgy implies one practised in Spirit and truth. The Holy Spirit empowers the church to meet, honour and glorify God in a dynamic manner.
- 5.1.2 The necessity for a dynamic liturgy when the congregation assembles becomes clear in Acts 2:42. The faith of the first believers after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is reflected in their liturgy (see also Ac 2, 3 and 4). They assemble and do things together, such as devoting themselves to the doctrine of the Apostles, prayer, petition, praising God and confessing their guilt. They baptise the people who have come to believe and discuss the great deeds of God. They share food and possessions and break bread from house to house. In their liturgical acts they become visibly united.
- 5.1.3 The concept of order in the New Testament has an explicit meaning, particularly as it appears in a liturgical context in 1 Corinthians 12-14. In 1 Corinthians 14:26 the question is put: "What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together ...". This passage forms a ring composition with 1 Corinthians 11:7 where the Apostle gives directives for the assemblies and refers to disorderly incidents. The answer to the above-mentioned question appears in 1 Corinthians 14:33: "For God is not a God of disorder but of order and peace." Disorder arises when people or objects no longer occupy the place allotted to them by God or when someone tries to dominate the others or oust them from the assembly. Peace means that everything functions harmoniously. When gifts are applied to the advantage, equal care and upliftment of one another in equal measure (see 1 Cor 12-14), then there will be order. The word order can also be translated with seemliness; it correlates closely with the word used for rude (unseemly) in 1 Corinthians 13:5. Seemliness means that people should consider each other in a spirit of love. These are concepts from ordinary human life, in contrast to the group of people in the church of Corinth who concentrated on "celestial experiences". Orderly therefore embraces everything that truly builds up people, in other words, everything that is normal, proper, decent and tidy.

It is essential to reach liturgical consensus on certain acts to ensure the Biblical application of liturgical principles, unity of the church and combined reflection on liturgy. The primary criterion should be how liturgy, as a whole and in its greater components, and as encounter and worshipping, can enhance the building up of the body. Orderliness is concerned with the proper participation of everyone in the assembly. Liturgical decisions should provide for full participation of members, or else the assembly would, from a rigoristic viewpoint, seem to be orderly, though it may in fact be disorderly from a Biblical point of view. Orderliness and sequence are not equal, and the freedom of the Spirit does not permit the liturgist to conduct an assembly without any biblically-based liturgical acts. The Spirit links the assembly to acts (see confession, prophesy, psalm, prayer, and speaking in and explaining different languages in 1 Cr 12-14).

- 5.1.4 Synodal decisions on liturgy in the GKSA fundamentally recognise a dynamic assembly and a meeting of God with his church and, in Christ through the Spirit, a meeting of the congregation with God and with one another. The object of the decisions is that the liturgy should lead to humble worship of and prayer to Holy Trinity. Yet there is reason to believe that dynamic assembly and worship are not fully experienced by everyone and that the church service and the sermon have priority for many people.
- 5.1.5 We see from history the wish, on the one hand, that the liturgy should reflect the unity of the churches in a fellowship and, on the other, to respect the uniqueness of the freedom in Christ within the local church.
- 5.1.6 During the first seventy years of the history of the GKSA, liturgical discussions focused on activities such as hymns, prayers and ceremonies used during the service and not on the liturgical sequence of acts. In other words, the emphasis was on the dynamics of liturgy as a meeting with and worshipping of God. As a result of influences from the Netherlands, the emphasis during the past seventy years has shifted to the sequence of acts, which could be the reason why the liturgy has acquired a more static character. This is particularly obvious from the statement by the Synod of 1955 that there was a need for an elevated and

inspiring liturgical order. The Report submitted to the Synod attributed the problem to a lack of activity by the congregation during the assembly.

- 5.1.7 The dynamics of the liturgy is served by the unity of churches with one another. The principle of Acts 15 also applies to the liturgy; hence the churches should consider one another with regard to liturgical acts. This principle was adopted by the GKSA as early as the Synod of 1862 when it passed the Openlike Verklaring (Official Declaration). In this, the Synod and subsequent major assemblies stated that they adopted the confession of the Gereformeerde Kerk in the Netherlands, and that of the Synod of Dordrecht, as established and compiled in the years 1618 and 1619. The Declaration continued that they also adopted the liturgy of that church as a prescription for conducting the service.

The question is, however, what the Synod of Dordrecht meant by "liturgy", since no liturgical order was determined there. It did make important decisions on the Psalms and Liturgical Forms which were regarded as binding. The articles of the Church Order established at that synod were principles and did not prescribe a particular sequence. Church Polity experts agree that the concept "liturgy" in the Official Declaration does not refer to a liturgical sequence. Such a rigid sequence conflicts with the nature of the Church Order which does not lay down regulations. The unity of the church is manifested when liturgical principles and essential actions in the assembly are endorsed by all the churches.

- 5.1.8 In his Institution, Calvin provides explicit principles in this regard. Liturgical freedom lies in complete compliance with the Word of God. Consequently, conscience may on no account be bound by prescriptions of human institutions. Freedom does not imply arbitrariness, complete lack of restraint and slovenliness. There should be order in the Biblical sense of the word, which means that we differentiate between what is laid down in the Word of God and what has been instituted by people. In this regard Calvin strongly warns against an unnecessary binding of conscience through slavish uniformity of the ceremonies. He even regards it as undesirable to strive for a single particular sequence in the assembly of the church and he advocates adaptation to the circumstances of the time in which the church finds itself and to the composition of a particular church. That is

why Calvin has different liturgies in different places and not only one liturgy for a specific place. However, in each liturgy the actions are those prescribed by Scripture.

- 5.1.9 The proposal submitted to, but not adopted by, the Synod of 1927, should act as a guideline on the liturgy; it should include the Introit, Service of Reconciliation, Service of the Word, and Service of Worship/Thanksgiving. Within these broad liturgical guidelines, each church can determine the sequence of actions according to its particular circumstances (humiliation, thanksgiving, praise, intercession as the focus of the assembly). The nature of the church and the period in history also play a role.
- 5.1.10 The concepts freedom of the local church and freedom of the liturgist are also taken into account. The expression freedom of the church appears in a liturgical context in the Church Order (art. 67). It concerns the observing of religious feast days. The same principle also appears in article 62 of the Church Order which deals with the structuring of Holy Communion. Freedom in Christ, as opposed to any form of legalism, constitutes the foundation for the freedom of the church to make its own liturgical decisions. The council of the local church must, however, remain within the framework of liturgical and Scriptural principles when determining the liturgy for each assembly since it is accountable to God. Freedom of the church council implies responsible decision making. The freedom of the liturgist is restricted by the decisions of the church council on the liturgy of a particular assembly. The church council, as the overseers of the church, carries the responsibility for the members who practise the liturgy.
- 5.1.11 The comprehensive Report of 1985 contains the following premises: God's meeting with his church and, thus, the meeting of the congregation with God and with one another, represent primarily a meeting of the God of the Covenant with his chosen people. This encounter and communion with God are possible solely as a result of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the renewal brought about by the Holy Spirit. This meeting is therefore a ministry of reconciliation. The assembly is, secondly, one of discussion, since God addresses his church through the extensive Service of the Word and the congregation

responds through the *Reponsoria* (Service of Response). The assembly can also be an encounter of discovery and grace, since God reveals himself through his mercy. Fourthly, the assembly is a festive encounter, since joy is the keynote, especially on the Day of Resurrection - the ultimate feast of believers. The assembly is also a constructive, stylish, active and a voluntary yet compulsory meeting. It is a public meeting under the guidance of the services (see Acta 1985:406-410 for a more detailed description). We see, then, that the liturgy of the church is a precious opportunity and gift of God; what a privilege it is to be involved in it; what support and inspiration it provides for our daily lives; and what gross negligence it would be to disobey and allow the opportunity to pass without becoming involved.

5.2 Summary of premises

The Synod made the following decisions:

- 5.2.1 We see from the foregoing discussion that, according to the Bible, the meeting of God with his church, and of the congregation with God and with one another, should be one which contains liturgical acts which enable everyone to meet, worship, praise, honour and serve God through his Word and Spirit (Jn 4:23). For this purpose the church should assemble in an orderly manner, especially on the day of rest, to listen to the Word of God, partake of the sacraments, pray openly to God, and bring Christian alms (see HC Lord's Day 38).
- 5.2.2 Liturgical acts are founded on the meeting of God and his church in the power of the Spirit and in truth. A powerful liturgy results from the presence of God in the assembly: sincere humiliation before God, vigorous proclamation of the Word, conscious and active worshipping of God in the response of the congregation, and dismissal of the congregation to serve God whole-heartedly in the home and in their daily lives. Liturgy is guided by the principle that everything in the assembly should happen in an orderly manner (1 Cor 14:26-40). "Order" implies peace, harmony, affectionate consideration of others, and utilisation of the alms of the members to the advantage, care and upliftment of everyone in equal measure (see HC, Lord's Day 21; Rm 12; 1 Cor 12-14; 1 Pt 4).

- 5.2.3 In the light of the foregoing discussion and of the 1985 liturgical report (pp 399-410), the liturgical procession of events in a service should include the following main elements: Service of Introit, Service of Humiliation and Reconciliation, Service of the Word, and Service of Response (*Reponsoria*). They will be discussed in points 6 to 9 below.
- 5.2.4 The unity of churches in a fellowship should be manifested in the liturgy. It should be evident from the adherence to the scriptural principles of liturgy, the acts prescribed for liturgy in Scripture, the essential main liturgical elements in the assembly, and the liturgical acts agreed upon by the various churches. The freedom of the local church is rooted in the principle that each church at a particular time and place is a manifestation of the body of Christ. The liturgy should therefore reflect the nature of the local church and of the type of assembly. This means that the sequence of events in the assembly need not be the same everywhere and at all times. Freedom and maturity in Christ are the foundation for responsible liturgical decisions. The church council must, however, be able to account to God for the liturgy chosen for the assemblies within the framework of the main liturgical elements. Freedom of the church council implies responsible decision making. The freedom of the liturgist is restricted by the decisions made by the church council on the liturgy of assemblies. Sequences as determined by previous synods should serve as guidelines (the guidelines of 1985 will be provided later in this document).

6. INTROIT (Service of Encounter)

The Synod noted the following:

- 6.1.1 *Introit* means *entrance, to go in*. This part of the liturgy contains the *votum* (opening prayer), that is, the acknowledgement that God is present in the assembly to meet his people and to enable them to meet Him and one another. It also includes God's indispensable benediction without which the meeting, Service of the Word and worship are impossible. It thirdly includes the assembly of church members in the holy presence of the Lord. As a result of the reconciliation of

Christ (Hb 10:19), the church receives the instruction: "*Let us draw near to God...*" (Hb 10:22)! The congregation's response to the entrance of God, namely to worship him by means of song and to make confession by means of word and song, forms part of the Introit.

The Synod made the following decision:

- 6.1.2 The Introit comprises the following four elements: *votum*, salutatory benediction, hymns of praise, and confession of faith

6.2 *Votum*

The Synod noted the following:

- 6.2.1 The communion of believers performs the liturgical act of openly declaring that the assembly is official so that God can meet his church and that further encounters may follow. When the church, through the Spirit and in truth, is in a state of expectancy to become reconciled with God, listen to his Word and worship him, the public declaration of the specific nature of the assembly is essential.

The Synod made the following decisions:

- 6.2.2 The function of the *votum* is that the congregation declares openly, humbly and solemnly that the service is an assembly of God with his church and, thus, of his church with him and with one another. In this way the members confess their dependence on and "focusedness" on God.
- 6.2.3 In order to ensure that the formula of the *votum* functions in Spirit and truth, it should consist of direct citations from Scripture which comply with the above-mentioned liturgical principles.
- 6.2.4 Since the *votum* is an act performed by the congregation, the public declaration can be expressed by means of the words spoken by the liturgist or the singing of a rhymed version of Scripture.

6.2.5 Examples from Scripture that meet the requirements for a *votum* include certain psalms, since they represent the people's worshipping of or confession to God:

- Ps 124:8: "Our help is in the name of Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."
- Ps 121:1, 2: "I lift up my eyes to the hills - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." The rhymed version of verse 1 can be sung by the congregation as a *votum*.
- Ps 95:6-7: "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care." The rhymed version of verse 4 can also be used.
- Ps 19:14 in conjunction with Ps 124:8" : "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."
- Ps 43:3 in conjunction with Ps 124:8: "Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell." The rhymed version of verse 3 can also be used.
- A passage from the New Testament which complies with the principles for the *votum* is Romans 11:36: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever!"

6.3 *Salutatory benediction*

The Synod noted the following:

6.3.1 The two benedictions by means of which God blesses the congregation, namely the salutatory and the concluding benediction (Acta 1985:411, 412), cannot be equated since this gives the assembly a static character. The primary purpose of the second benediction is to send forth the people to continue the church service in their daily lives. They receive this blessing since the worshipping of God, which is the culmination of the assembly, has to continue in the daily life of each church member.

- 6.3.2 God sends his plenipotentiaries (representatives with full power) to bring and pronounce his salutatory benediction to the church. This benediction is based on the one found in the Epistles of the New Testament, where the Apostles proclaim it in the Name and on the authority of the One who has sent them. The salutatory and the valedictory benedictions are conferred on the congregation on the command of and on behalf of God himself, as reflected by the words and body language when the hands are raised.

The Synod made the following decisions:

- 6.3.3 The formula used for the salutatory benediction during assemblies must be the words of God, addressed to churches. These formulas appear in the Epistles of the New Testament addressed to specific believers and also in Revelations 1:4 and 5 where the seven churches in the province of Asia are addressed.
- 6.3.4 It was decided to change the word *aanvangse* (benediction at the beginning) to *groetse* (salutatory benediction), since the former term may give the impression that "church service" is a static concept which is started and ended by a benediction. The rest of the decisions (Acta 1985:412) are upheld: the liturgist pronounces the salutatory benediction with raised hands.

6.4 *Psalm of praise*

The Synod made the following decision:

- 6.4.1 The particular object of this liturgical act, which is performed by the congregation and forms part of the Introit, is to respond to God's salutatory benediction. More than one hymn of praise may be sung.

6.5 *The Creed*

The Synod noted the following:

- 6.5.1 The creed forms part of the Introit by means of which the congregation as believers approach God as a unity in the true faith, strengthen one another and dissociate themselves from the world. In this way the congregation declare their identity as one body in one true faith (Jn 4:32; HC, Lord's Day 21; CB, art 27-29).
- 6.5.2 Initially, the Nicene Creed enjoyed priority, but since the sixteenth century the Apostolicum has mainly been used in Reformed churches. However, the three ecumenical symbols are equal and all three can in principle be used in the liturgy.
- 6.5.3 The creed usually follows the psalm of praise. The congregation may, however, confess their faith at other suitable times during the assembly, for instance, when the sacraments are administered, as confirmation of their faith, and at the confirmation of catechumen.
- 6.5.4 All three ecumenical symbols (Twelve Articles or Apostolicum, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed) may be used in the liturgy.
- 6.5.5 Any of the three liturgical forms (read and heard, recited in unison, and sung by the congregation) may be used, as determined by the local church.

7. SERVICE OF HUMBLING (SUPPLICATION) AND RECONCILIATION

The Synod noted the following:

- 7.1.1 During the assembly the congregation constantly experience the greatness of God and acknowledge their own insignificance and sins. The confession of sin and the certainty of reconciliation through the blood of Christ are manifested in the actions of the *votum*, creed, Ten Commandments, prayers, Forms and sermon. Since confession of sin and reconciliation are an integral part of the liturgy, they may constitute a separate activity in the assembly.
- 7.1.2 This facet of the liturgy contains the congregation's humble entry into the holy presence of God. It includes supplication through listening to God's demands (reading of the Ten Commandments, summary of the law or suitable scriptural

passage), confession of sin through prayer, absolution by God and subsequent reconciliation, and the proclamation of the Ten Commandments as the rule of gratitude for the reconciled people of God.

- 7.1.3 When believers in the assembly with God come into the holy presence of the God of the Covenant, they should be conscious of their insignificance, worthlessness, and the blemish and burden of sin. This realisation can materialise in the hearts of sinners only by confronting them with the demand of the Kingdom and through the influence of the Holy Spirit.
- 7.1.4 The realisation of their burden of sin in the presence of God urges the congregation to confess their guilt, blemish and worthlessness and to beg forgiveness and absolution. Thus the people of God are exercised in supplication to God through the solemn custom of confessing their guilt (Calvin's Institution 3.4, 11). In the Word of God we find the principle of individual and collective confession in such incidents as the one where the people of God, led by Ezra and Nehemiah, confess their guilt after exile. When the congregation confess their sins by means of a Psalm, humble body language, such as remaining seated, would be suitable.
- 7.1.5 Confession of sin and supplication are followed by entreaty for mercy and an appeal to God's charity. Calvin was convinced that forgiveness of sins and certainty about this were a crucial matter in the assembly of the congregation and in proceeding to hear the Word and worship God. Without forgiveness there can be no communion with God. We see in Hosea 2:17 and Jeremiah 33:8 that God reconciles himself with us through his charity. He not only admits us into his community, the church, through reconciliation, but also protects and preserves us through this very forgiveness and reconciliation. The message of reconciliation must be proclaimed to the church. Forgiveness of sins is the product of God's mercy, the sacrifice of Christ and the sanctification of the Spirit.
- 7.1.6 Confession and absolution correlate with customs in Christian churches during the most important periods in the history of the church. Although Calvin fully realised that preaching was essentially the administering of reconciliation, he nevertheless wished to introduce a separate element into the liturgy at the beginning of the

public service, since the people appeared before God in all their guilt. He based his view mainly on Scripture, but also wished to return to the customs of the early church so as to reject the deformation that gradually invaded the church. He frequently cited the Apostolic Fathers and the patriarchs since he firmly believed that they adhered to the Scriptural line. In that period there was often talk of public confession of sin and, especially, supplication before God. We read in Didache: "Confess your sins in the assembly of the congregation and do not approach prayer meetings with a bad conscience.... Celebrate Communion after confessing your sins so that your sacrifice might be pure" (translation).

- 7.1.7 In Roman Catholic liturgy, public confession of sin is replaced by confession to a priest. The leaders of the Reformation, however, once again made room for public confession: Zwingli introduced it after the sermon at the end of the service and Calvin put it at the beginning of the service, thus following Bucer who said in Strasbourg: "Let the Sunday service commence with a collective confession of guilt" (translation).
- 7.1.8 There is a close relationship between confession and forgiveness of sin. Bucer held firmly to this opinion, and Calvin agreed with him. Bucer based his belief on 1 Timothy 1:15, namely that Christ had come into the world to save sinners. Both Bucer and Calvin maintained that absolution from sin was based on the fact that God was a forgiving God who acquitted us of sin when we prayed for it and also gave thanks for it.
- 7.1.9 Despite opposition to his liturgy and the necessity to relinquish some of the important elements used in Strasbourg, Calvin managed to retain confession of guilt and absolution in Geneva. Right after the *votum* followed a moving confession of guilt, expression of repentance and begging for mercy. He was later forced to exclude the words of absolution and comfort. However, three years before his death he wrote that he had had to exclude these words because he had been accused of introducing innovations, even though these so-called innovations were new only when compared with Farel's liturgy. They were already "old" since they had been used as early as the time of the first church.

- 7.1.10 Calvin's influence was retained in some of the refugee churches, and especially in the churches under Knox in Scotland. Datheen primarily followed Calvin's principles from Strasbourg, but in 1581 (Middelburg), the elements of confession and absolution were excluded under the influence of Gaspar van der Heyden. This situation applied in the Netherlands and was transferred to South Africa. Only at the end of the nineteenth century did Kuyper address the matter, but no decisions were made to include these elements in the liturgy. In Reformed churches throughout the world, these elements were reintroduced during the past few decades of this century.

The Synod made the following decisions:

- 7.1.11 After the Service of the Introit, the congregation is acutely conscious of the holiness of God, which contrasts strongly with the people's sin, wretchedness and worthlessness. The congregation must, and wish to, admit and confess this contrast in the presence of God (Is 6:3-7) and thus humbly confront the Lord. This realisation can only be manifested in the hearts of sinners through the influence of the Holy Spirit.
- 7.1.12 Confession of guilt is essential so that the meeting of the holy God with his church can take place in a spirit of reconciliation. Only then can the holy God be in close communion with his church and his church with him. In this way comfort and peace are enhanced early in the liturgical activities of the assembly. It strengthens the people's confidence to be in the presence of the Lord, to listen to him and to address him.
- 7.1.13 Throughout the assembly, the congregation experience the greatness of God and admit their own insignificance and sin. Confession of sin and certainty of reconciliation through the blood of Christ are embodied in the activities of the *votum*, confession of faith, reading of the Ten Commandments, prayers and sermon. Since confession of guilt and reconciliation are such an integral part of the liturgy, they may constitute a separate activity in the assembly.

- 7.1.14 The Service of Supplication and Reconciliation comprises church members' humble entry into the holy presence of God. It includes supplication through listening to God's demands, confession of guilt, absolution by God and the proclamation of the Ten Commandments as the rule of gratitude for the reconciled people of God.
- 7.1.15 God's people may know with certainty, and therefore hear it in the absolution, that the Lord has forgiven them because of the redemption of Christ. Absolution should be proclaimed and should follow the confession of guilt.
- 7.1.16 In conjunction with the proclamation of grace, there may also be a warning that those who do not repent but persist in their sins invite the threat of punishment and judgement. This is also described in the Form for Holy Communion.
- 7.1.17 The liturgical elements of confession of guilt and absolution cannot be prescribed according to a fixed pattern or as a matter of routine. Church councils should reflect on these elements, teach the people about their necessity and charisma, and employ them according to the particular council's judgement. These elements occur in the preaching and the Forms (especially Holy Communion). They may occur at the beginning of the service, but in certain cases also during the sermon, prayers, Forms, and even at the end of the service. The principle of the freedom of churches applies here; hence there are no prescribed rules. Churches who wish to include these elements in the liturgy are free to do so, but the church members must be fully informed about the procedure.

7.2 *Proclamation of the Ten Commandments*

The Synod made the following decision:

- 7.2.1 The reading of the Ten Commandments, as a source from which we know our wretchedness, as disciplinarian towards Christ and as a rule of gratitude, has a specific place in the Service of Supplication and Reconciliation. The congregation, as the church of the Covenant, must listen to the Ten Commandments in its entirety at least once every Sunday so as to confirm their covenantal relationship

with God. The reading of the Law from Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 highlights the Commandments as a whole. Other Scriptural passages that focus on the promises and demands of the Commandments as the book of the Covenant (eg Eph 4:25-5:3; Rm 12:9-12; sections of the Sermon on the Mount; and Col 3:5-17) may be used to supplement the reading of the Ten Commandments.

The Synod noted the following:

7.2.2 Guidelines on the application of these principles include the following:

God's commandments are described in Scriptural passages, for instance the commandment to love one another in James 2:10,11.

Other scriptural passages that may be used with regard to supplication and realisation of our guilt are: Ezr 9:5-10; Ps 32:2-5, 38:1-5, 51:3-14&19, and 130; Is 59:1-3; Ja 4:3-10; 1 Pt 1:13-25; 1 Jn 1:5-2:5, 2:15-17.

Supplication can be effected through the reading of suitable passages (by the precentor) or preferably through the singing of a psalm by the congregation, for instance Ps 6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 53, 130.

The following texts are appropriate to absolution: 1 Jn 1:9; Ezk 36:26, 27; Rm 5:1; 8:1,2.

The following may be read at the warning of judgement should God's grace be rejected: Jn 3:18, 36; Heb 10:28, 29.

8. THE SERVICE OF THE WORD

The Synod noted the following:

- 8.1 The Service of the Word comprises prayer for illumination by the Spirit, Scripture reading as a separate activity, Scripture reading on which the sermon is based, preaching and the sacraments.

8.2 *Prayer for illumination (epiclesis)*

The Synod noted the following:

- 8.2.1 The congregation confess that the Holy Spirit effects and reinforces faith through the Word. The Spirit also strengthens their faith through the use of the sacraments. Prior to partaking of Holy Communion and administering Baptism, the Forms contain a prayer for the working of and illumination by the Holy Spirit (Communion: "...so that we may be nurtured and refreshed by the power of the Holy Spirit..."; Baptism: ".. that you would incorporate this child in your son, Christ, through your Holy Spirit..."). If this is required in the prayers of the Forms before the administering of the sacraments, it is all the more necessary before the administering of the Word.

The Synod made the following decisions:

- 8.2.2 The necessity of prayer to invoke the illumination of the Holy Spirit with a view to the Service of the Word is once again stressed without, however, prescribing the contents of the first prayer (whether or not it may include more than the epiclesis). These prayers can occur before or after Scripture reading and may be spoken or sung by the congregation.
- 8.2.3 Because of the darkness in the hearts and minds of people and because of the divine nature of the Word, the office-bearer should pray that the Service of the Word will truly be an opening, exposition and application the Word, that the people will accept this Service as the Word of God and that the Word will bear fruit. The prayer by the congregation reflects their total dependence on God the Holy Spirit as the Ultimate One who inspires and interprets the Word of God. The prayers for illumination concern not only the sermon, but also and especially the reading and listening to the Word.

- 8.2.4 The prayer is that, in reading and listening to the Word, God will address his people so that they will accept, appropriate, obey and propagate the Word they have heard as the unique Word of God.

8.3 *Scripture reading as a separate activity*

The Synod noted the following:

The full status of Scripture reading as a separate activity in the liturgy rests on the following foundation:

8.3.1 *Scripture reading is divine revelation*

The miracle of the life of the church is that we can hear about the most profound mysteries of God through the working of the Holy Spirit and that we may know and believe in them (1 Cor 2:10-16). The Spirit penetrates these mysteries, reveals them to the heart and intellect of the proclaimers of the Word and inspires them to explain the mysteries to listeners and readers by means of comprehensible human words. This is why the reading and hearing of the Word are indispensable in the official assembly of the God of the Covenant and his chosen people. God reveals himself through Scripture reading.

8.3.2 *God speaks directly through Scripture reading*

The Word of God is powerful since it engineers what it proclaims, namely the salvation of people and deliverance from sin and the powers of death to the glory, worshipping, thanking and service of God. The authors of the Bible books did indeed write the actual words of God since they had received the inspiration of the Spirit. In other words, what we hear during Scripture reading is the Word of God.

8.3.3 *Scripture is explicit and sufficient*

Scripture can only be understood and explained through the special assistance of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is simultaneously Writer and Interpreter of the Bible (Jn

14:25, 26; 16:12,13; Rm 8:5-7; 1 Cor 2:10-16). God ensures not only that we receive a reliable report of his acts of salvation in history but also - through the same Spirit - that we understand the report correctly. Scripture reading in church comes from the Bible which is explicit; moreover, the people who receive the Word in a spirit of prayer and who are filled with the Spirit have the certainty that the Holy Spirit himself will interpret the Word for them. This indicates the sufficiency of the Bible (2 Pt 1:19-21; CB, art 7), so that it is not necessary to supplement it in any way. This means that even an assembly which lacks an ordained office-bearer to preach, remains one of meeting, worshipping and glorifying God. Overemphasis on the proclaimer and his sermon diminishes the assembly of the church and conflicts with the Creed (HC, Lord's Day 38).

8.3.4 *The congregation as the addressee*

The significance of Scripture reading during the service is determined by the content of the Bible itself. The Word of God demands that it should be read not only by individuals, but that believers collectively should listen to certain promises and instructions (eg Eph 4; Heb 10). The Spirit has unified the church; therefore the church, like each individual, is an addressee, in other words, a person who is being addressed. In its appropriation of the Word, the congregation acts as one body, and this gives its participation in Scripture reading a corporate character. Through listening to and appropriating the Word, the congregation as a body not only discovers new wealth in Christ, but also develops a new view of fellow believers so that their communion is experienced as spiritual koinonia (communion).

8.3.5 *Scripture reading is the act through which God speaks directly and explicitly to his people*

Since God retains the initiative in the encounter, his direct addressing of the people are the main activity in this encounter. In Scripture reading, God directly approaches us in Christ and through his Spirit to work in and at our lives. In the reading, the living Word of God demonstrates its power, since God addresses his

people to pardon and judge them. Scripture reading has a definitive influence on the other activities in the assembly .

8.3.6 *The testimony of history*

- 8.3.6.1 In the Old Testament, Scripture reading and the oral narration of the Word play an important role. In the synagogal service, which had a strong influence on the Christian church service, the Torah was systematically read through, and later passages from the Prophets as well were read. This was a separate activity in the assembly and was regarded as an end in itself. From the very beginning, the reading of Scripture was one of the essential elements of the Christian service, and the office-bearer read from the Law and the Prophets and later from the Epistles and even from Revelations. This applied during the first few centuries.
- 8.3.6.2 During the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the *lectio continua* (uninterrupted Scripture reading) received strong emphasis under the leadership of Calvin, in contrast to the voluntary pericope system of Scripture reading during the Middle Ages. The Reformers endeavoured to restore the service as it was held in the early church. We learn from the Reformation that, as soon as Scripture reading is neglected, it usually leads to excessive intellectualism in the sermon; the restoration of a disintegrated liturgy usually happens in conjunction with the reinstatement of Scripture reading as a separate liturgical activity.
- 8.3.6.3 One of the reasons for the awakening of liturgical consciousness at the beginning of the twentieth century is the correct understanding of the meaning of Scripture reading during the service. The heart of the matter is that the Word of God should be brought to the congregation not only through preaching, but directly through Scripture reading in particular. Scripture reading as an activity of the service can be traced right from the tabernacle, temple, synagogue, and through the New Testament to the twentieth century; it is therefore the (sole?) connecting element that has remained crucial through the ages in the meeting of God with his people. During the principal periods of history, Scripture reading has virtually always been regarded as an activity on its own, separate from the Scripture reading on which the sermon was based and from pure Scriptural preaching.

8.3.7 *Practical application of Scripture reading as a separate activity*

- 8.3.7.1 The unity of Scripture is a basic premise of Reformed confession and, thus, of the practical application of Scripture reading as a separate activity. The Old Testament is as much the Word of God as the New Testament. Each in its own way, both Testaments are involved in the unique revelation of Trinity. The object should therefore be to read at least once every Sunday from both Testaments. The Bible is an organism, which incorporates diversity, and this is not incidental. This organic unity and diversity are expressed in multiple readings. Scripture reading (one, two or three passages) as a separate activity, reading of the Scriptural passage on which the sermon is based, and Scriptural preaching conjointly constitute one major service of the Word. In decisions on separate Scripture reading, it is crucial to take account of history, especially of the customs in the church of the New Testament and the Early Church. The tendency towards arbitrariness is restrained through the decisions to place Scripture reading under the discipline of history. This was Calvin's viewpoint, too, with regard to the restoration of the liturgy according to the model of the Early Church.
- 8.3.7.2 Scripture reading should consist of complete passages and not of a number of brief fragments. The passages should therefore be taken from the entire Bible in the one or more assemblies of the congregation. Because of lack of time and the desire to read from the Old Testament, Epistles and the Gospels in one service, it might easily happen that the passages chosen are all too brief. On the other hand, too lengthy passages are not suitable either.
- 8.3.7.3 Since the Gospel, advent, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the focal point of divine revelation, the aim during assemblies should be to read from the reference to the focal point (Old Testament), the unfolding of the focal point (Epistles, Acts, Revelations), and the focal point as such (four Gospels). This may be done through the method of historical revelation, in other words, through the systematic reading of prominent events in the Bible according to a timetable for the year. This will largely prevent random selection of passages. Deputies of the Synod may annually provide guidelines on separate Scripture reading to churches.

8.3.7.4 Separate Scripture reading may continue without interruption, even when a visiting minister presides, when the office of minister is vacant or when the minister is on leave.

8.3.8 *The benefit of Scripture reading as a separate liturgical act can be summarised as follows:*

- ◆ The members of the congregation are educated to listen independently to God in his Word, precisely because the Word is meant to be heard.
- ◆ The Word is revealed to the congregation in its full width and depth, diversity and coherence when they listen to it as the body of Christ.
- ◆ Since they listen to more (and frequently less well-known) passages, their knowledge of God is extended and their faith deepened.
- ◆ The effect on the preaching is profound. Through the reading of different Scriptural passages, the minister is diverted from typological, thematic and moralistic preaching to exegesis and true Scriptural preaching.

8.3.9 *Distinction between Scripture reading as a separate activity and Scripture reading on which the sermon is based*

In both Scripture reading as a separate activity and Scripture reading from which the text is selected, God speaks directly to his church. The difference lies in the purpose for which it is used. Scripture reading as a separate activity emphasises that, even today, God is, and should be, speaking to his church, and it helps to manifest the rich diversity and coherence of the Word. Church members are educated to experience both types of Scripture reading as the actual proclamation of the Word and the culmination of the church service. In the Scriptural passage on which the sermon is based, God himself speaks directly to his church, and this activity also helps the congregation to understand the context of the passage.

8.3.10 Participation and involvement of the congregation in independent Scripture reading

8.3.10.1 The reader/reading of Scripture

The institution of a reader (lector) existed during the Reformation, and his task was to read from the Word before the beginning of the actual service. In this way the threads of the old church were picked up again through Scripture reading by elders and deacons, even though it initially occurred before the service. When the minister himself performs all the liturgical acts, the idea is created that the people come to listen to only one person and that any additional activities have mere decorative status and may as well be omitted. By allowing church members to do the reading, the office of believer is respected, but it is essential that the readers should be carefully trained so that the reading is explicit and always intelligible. It is in such reading that the common priesthood of believers is expressed, especially when the readers are alternated. The main prerequisite for both reader and listener is that they must be filled with the Holy Spirit. The translation of the Word in a contemporary idiom is essential for the successful reading of Scripture in the liturgy. Church history shows that translation of the Bible has a profound effect on the liturgy. The Lord has given his Word to his people and entrusted it to the church.

8.3.10.2 The act of listening to the Word

The congregation participates in Scripture reading by listening actively. The Bible links the acts of reading the Bible, listening to it and taking it to heart, especially in a passage such as Revelations 1:3: "Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near." No listener lags behind the reader in participating in the salvatory effect; listening is not a passive institution, since the listeners must preserve what they hear, take it to heart and act according to what they have heard. In other words, this activity can be described as an appropriation, not only of words, but of Christ, the focal point of the content of God's revelation.

The Synod made the following decision:

- 8.3.11 Scripture reading as a separate activity is recognised as a liturgical element of the Service of the Word. The implementation of this activity is left to the discretion of the local church.

8.4 *Scripture reading on which the sermon is based*

The Synod noted the following:

- 8.4.1 The reading of the passage on which the sermon is based is essential so that the congregation may understand the context from which the text has been taken. The close relationship between Scripture reading and preaching is based on Luke 4:21, Acts 13:15 and, particularly, Nehemiah 8:6-8.

The Synod made the following decision:

- 8.4.2 The function of preaching is to open up and apply the Scriptural passage on which the sermon is based and should be closely linked to it. The linking of Scripture reading and sermon is left to the discretion of the local church.

8.5 *Preaching/the sermon*

The Synod noted the following:

- 8.5.1 The unique nature of divine revelation, Holy Scripture, which constitutes the core of the Christian faith, requires the church to preach or proclaim the Word of God.
- 8.5.2 The function of preaching is to serve. The relationship between Christ and the preacher defines the "serving" nature of preaching with regard to the Word of our King, Scripture reading. Both preacher and preaching are in the service of Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God. The "serving" function of preaching determines the relationship between Scripture reading and preaching. We see from the history of the Synagogue and the church of the New Testament that the

sermon followed directly after Scripture reading. This reflects its dependence on Scripture reading and its foundation in Scripture.

- 8.5.3 The congregation frequently hears that the hymns to be sung or the passage to be read has been chosen "with a view to the sermon". The reason for this may be that the congregation experiences the assembly in too intellectual a way. It is also possible that the preaching by present-day preachers is equated with that of the Prophets and Apostles. However, the Bible encompasses much more, and in the reading of and listening to it, the congregation is exposed to a much wider appeal to acknowledge the grace of God and to repent. The preaching covers only one aspect of a Scriptural passage which is brought into the concrete situation of the church.
- 8.5.4 God must speak through the sermon. The sermon does have authority, but only of a provisional nature. It must always be tested against the Bible, and the preacher must bear in mind that preaching can be self-destructive and destroy both preacher and listener without the power and communion of the Holy Spirit. Since God speaks through the sermon, preaching has the power of the keys. Jesus Christ is active in the preaching, since he is busy in, with and during the liturgical activity of preaching. God's own message, which he had long since given in a specific form to specific people, must be extracted and proclaimed vigorously in the assembly, so that the people of today may be filled with wonder before the God of Trinity.
- 8.5.5 A sermon is true preaching only if the lines are drawn from the text right through the central content of the Bible to the people of today. The living Word of the living God motivates the preacher to convey the message in a vigorous, dynamic and appealing way during the sermon.
- 8.5.6 The congregation participates in the activity of preaching through listening in a spirit of prayer. Active listening comprises understanding, agreement and appropriation of the message. The "amen" at the conclusion of the sermon is therefore not that of the preacher, but the "amen" of the congregation who have appropriated the message so that it becomes their sermon. Thus the

congregation must pray for the gift of prophesy, that is, the gift to apply the message to a concrete situation.

The Synod made the following decision:

- 8.5.7 The meeting of God with his people is manifested in the powerful Service of the Word where God, through conveying his charisma, comforts his people through the promise of his Covenant and admonishes them through its demands. The Service of the Word is a special liturgical act through which the keys of the Kingdom of God are administered in the assembly. God is the Speaker because the function of preaching is to proclaim the Word. The living Word of the living God is proclaimed (expounded and applied), and inevitably leads to a lively, dynamic and appealing proclamation of the Word.

8.6 *The Sacraments*

Holy Communion

The Synod (1985) noted the following:

- 8.6.1 During the serving of Communion, the formulas for distribution may suffice. They put into words precisely what the participants should do while they are eating and drinking. There should be no reading or singing while the bread and wine are passed around. The appeal in the Form for Communion (to elevate the heart) immediately before the distribution emphasises the requirement that participants should be engaged only in that particular act. By way of variety, appropriate passages from the Bible may sometimes be read at the table.
- 8.6.2 Calm, meditative celebration of Communion is strongly recommended. The eating of the bread must be completed before the cup is offered. We read in 1 Corinthians 11:25: "... after the supper...", in Matthew 26:27: "Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them", and in Luke 22:20: "...after the supper...". Church members must not be obliged to perform two acts simultaneously; for

instance, the formula is spoken while they are accepting the bread, and they should hear it mentally. This prevents mechanical action and superficiality.

8.6.3 The benedictory gesture when the cup is lifted should be omitted. This has no foundation in the Bible and is meaningless.

8.6.4 In the Bible we find a high frequency of celebrating Holy Communion (Ac 2:42-46).

The Synod (1985) made the following decisions:

8.6.5 Reading a Scriptural passage during the celebration of Communion is optional.

8.6.6 Communion should be celebrated in a calm and meditative manner.

8.6.7 A higher frequency of celebrating Communion should be considered by local churches.

8.6.8 The benedictory gesture at the lifting of the cup must be omitted.

Baptism

The Synod (1985) made the following decisions:

8.6.9 The Sacrament of Baptism is administered after Scripture reading and the sermon, because the sacrament follows the Service of the Word.

8.6.10 The parents of the child to be baptised face the congregation during the administering of Baptism.

9. THE SERVICE OF RESPONSE (RESPONSORIA)

The Synod noted the following:

- 9.1.1 The *Responsoria* is the congregation's response to all the preceding activities, namely the introit, confession of sin (absolution) and the Service of the Word as a gift of grace and discipline from God.
- 9.1.2 The Holy Spirit ensures that the assembly of the congregation has the character of a meeting in which an encounter, worshipping and experience of covenantal communion occur. This includes the entrance of God into the midst of the official assembly of the church. The meeting of God with his people is manifested in the powerful Service of the Word where God admonishes and comforts his people and conveys his charisma. The Service of the Word is the crucial activity in the assembly, and the *Reponsoria* (response through worshipping and thanksgiving) is possible only as a result of this Service. The *Reponsoria* usually consists of worshipping through prayer in which the precentor leads the congregation, the prayers sung by the congregation, and the giving of alms. Since this represents the congregation's response, the confession of faith and of guilt may also be included occasionally.
- 9.1.3 The sermon is the culmination of the meeting, since God is the One who speaks, and the object of the sermon is the Word of God. However, the people, too, are speakers, since the preaching which is carried into the church has a confessional character, it is testimony and echo of God. Through the Service of the Word, God evokes prayer, worship, thanksgiving and supplication in the hearts of his people. Praise, worship, confession of guilt, thanksgiving, entreaty and intercession are expressed in the prayers of the precentor and those sung by the congregation.
- 9.1.4 The *Reponsoria* is an activity performed by the congregation. As response to God's grace, the acts of supplication, confession and worship are the people's main liturgical activities and therefore indispensable to the liturgy.

The Synod made the following decisions:

- 9.1.5 Although the congregation respond continuously to God's words, the Service of Response is the culmination of their response. The *Reponsoria* is therefore the congregation's response to all the preceding liturgical activities, namely the

Services of Encounter, Supplication and Reconciliation, and the Word. God evokes prayer, worship, thanksgiving and supplication in the hearts of the people, especially through the Service of the Word.

- 9.1.6 The congregation's response to the encounter with God up to this stage takes place through prayer, Christian assistance and singing. Prayers may be said by the precentor on behalf of the congregation or they may be sung by the congregation.

9.2 *Response by the congregation*

9.2.1 *The "amen" of the congregation*

The Synod noted the following:

- 9.2.1.1 The "amen" following the sermon is not that of the preacher but the "amen" of the people by means of which they appropriate the message as their very own sermon.
- 9.2.1.2 The prayer during the assembly is that of the congregation. The assembly is a communion of worshippers who are praying to God. A prerequisite for unity-in-prayer is sincerity by precentor and silent participants alike. This cooperation in prayer can be greatly strengthened if the term "amen" is seen from the right perspective. In the liturgies of the Old Testament, Synagogue and New Testament, the "amen" is an act performed by the congregation and not the precentor. During the Middle Ages, the "amen" was taken away from the congregation, but it was restored during the Reformation, even though it was not reinstated in all the places. By saying "amen", the contents of the prayer is officially appropriated as one's own words.
- 9.2.1.3 The "amen" said by the congregation is vital in confirming the confession of faith. Since most congregations do not chant the creed in unison, their confirmation of it by saying "amen" at the end is of crucial importance.

The Synod made the following decision:

9.2.1.4 The "amen" spoken at the end of actions such as preaching, prayer and confession of faith expresses the congregation's confession and confirmation of concurrence. It means that the people take firm hold of what God promised in his Covenant and it is the confirmation of what has been confessed and prayed (see HC, Lord's Day 52). For the sake of order, the precentor leads the congregation in this or asks them to sing it together.

9.2.2 *Congregation's response through prayer by a precentor*

The Synod noted the following:

9.2.2.1 The Reformers of the sixteenth century differentiated between the prayer before and after the Service of the Word. The epiclesis before the Service of the Word was brief and consisted of praise; it concerned the illumination of the Spirit with a view to listening to, understanding and appropriating the Word. The prayer after the Service of the Word was the main prayer invoked by the Word. It comprised worship, confession of guilt, thanksgiving, intercession and entreaty.

9.2.2.2 Worshipping by means of prayer in which a precentor leads the congregation must occur in Spirit and truth. "Pray in the Spirit" (Eph 6:18) means to know, like a child, that God is the Father and to speak reverently, confidently and intimately to the Father, in the awareness that the words spoken by the congregation are sanctified by the Spirit and carried into the heart of the Father.

9.2.2.3 The Word invokes prayer (e.g. Ps 51; Lk 17:12-19; Eph 3, where the prayer is interrupted for the Revelation of the Word: see verses 1 and 14). The revelation of who God is and what his wish is, is a prerequisite for prayer. Without communion with the Word of God there can be no communion of prayer.

9.2.2.4 Prayer is spiritual entrance into the sanctuary of God, direct addressing of God, confession by those united in prayer and the most important part of believers' life of gratitude. JD du Toit maintains that silence is the spiritual space in which a

person's spirit is prepared in the purest form for worshipping. Habakkuk 2:20 links silence to entrance into the presence of God. After the Service of the Word and before the response through worship and supplication, there may be a brief period of silence before the prayer. The congregation, who has been transported through the Service of the Word, must proceed to a different activity in prayer. Silence before God, especially after the Word of God has spoken, is an integral part of the congregation's encounter with God. Silence is a major activity and emanates from reverence for God's power and glory.

9.2.2.5 The response of the precentor who leads in prayer must contain the following elements:

- ◆ Praise, worship and reverence: this is the most intimate and highest form of worship, and the reason why the congregation worships God for what he is.
- ◆ Thanksgiving: The congregation gives thanks to the Lord for everything he gives and does for them, such as the gifts necessary for our daily lives and, especially, the gifts presented to us by God because of the redemption of Christ.
- ◆ Confession of guilt: collective confession of guilt by the sinners in church in the presence of the Holy God constitutes an essential part of their common prayer. This must occur in the *Reponsoria* when the Service of the Word evokes it. In encountering God's great love, we, though insignificant and humble before God in our consciousness of sin, may ascend to God to thank him, lay our needs before him, pray (intercede) for other sinners (as is proper), and enjoy the communion of the Covenant.
- ◆ Intercession/entreaty: The church may and must ask everything they need of the Father in heaven so as to demonstrate their childlike dependence on God. The congregation must intercede for the church, people in need, governments and the world.
- ◆ Promises: God has made many promises to which the congregation can appeal in their prayers (Ps 50:16; 119:38; Lk 11:13).

9.2.2.6 No Synod has made the use of the prayers in the Forms mandatory, but has merely recommended them for use and as guidelines on and instruction in the compilation of suitable prayers. Since the prayers in the Forms no longer meet all the requirements of our time (language, need of the time), there should be greater emphasis on their instructional dimension.

9.2.2.7 The Synods have decided to leave the posture of the body during prayer to the discretion of the churches. In this, churches should consider the following: nowhere in the New Testament is there any prescription for posture during prayer. The nature of the prayer determines the posture. Since there is no provision in our churches for people to kneel down, the humble attitude of sitting down during the confession of guilt and the epiclesis prayer would constitute suitable body language.

After the Reformation, there were only a few chairs in the venues for worshipping, and the men remained standing throughout the service. In the time of Voetius, the women rose with the men during prayer. In the cold climate of Europe, it was the practice among women to bring along small containers with hot coals to warm their feet and they therefore never rose during the service. This may have established the custom that men stand and women remain seated during the prayer. This custom was reinforced by the influence of the Puritans who differentiated between the posture of men and women during prayer on the basis, incorrectly, of 1 Corinthians 11:7 and 8. It must be remembered that there is no differentiation between the posture of men and women in any other liturgical act. There is no Scriptural basis for such differentiation. The posture during prayer is not a principle; old people or church members who find standing difficult may remain seated. Their inner attitude towards the Lord is what matters. The most desirable option is that the entire congregation assumes the same position during prayer.

9.2.2.8 Precentors other than the minister may lead the congregation in certain activities. Decisions have already been made with regard to reading the Forms and leading in prayer. According to his calling, the minister proclaims the Word through

preaching and administering the sacraments. However, the church council may entrust the services of prayer, reading the Ten Commandments and reading a passage from Scripture to other precentors. They must always be well prepared, also when they are leading the congregation in prayer.

The Synod made the following decisions:

- 9.2.2.9 The place of prayers in the liturgy is left to the discretion of the local church, but it is recommended that the prayer for illumination is said before the Service of the Word, and that the more comprehensive prayer of praise, worship, thanksgiving, supplication and confession of guilt, and entreaty and intercession, should occur in the *Reponsoria* since worshipping is evoked by the Service of the Word.
- 9.2.2.10 The liturgical act of maintaining silence after the Service of the Word and before the act of worshipping in response to the Word, is left to the discretion of the churches.
- 9.2.2.11 Prayers during the assembly of the congregation should be concerned with the following: illumination of the Spirit with a view to the Service of the Word, worship, confession of guilt, thanksgiving, invocation for the need of the church, intercession for the church, governments and the sinful world, and an appeal to the promises of God (eg Neh 1:8-10; Lk 11:13).
- 9.2.2.12 Posture should be suitable to the liturgical significance and essence of the particular prayer and should always reflect reverence for the fact that the God of Trinity is being worshipped. The posture of the entire congregation during prayer is left to the discretion of the churches.
- 9.2.3 *Worshipping and other responses by the congregation through the singing of psalms*

The Synod noted the following:

- 9.2.3.1 In some psalms and hymns it is God who is speaking and who is addressing his people (eg Ps 78; 82). Most of the Psalms express the people's (or poet's) worshipping of, supplication before and entreaty to God. In the light of this, a psalm has an independent liturgical function and is not merely a function to be performed "with a view to" another liturgical activity. As in the liturgical acts of the Old Testament, we are here concerned with recalling and celebrating the great deeds of God in the past, the same God who still performs great deeds among his worshippers.
- 9.2.3.2 Singing and accompaniment are functional to the words by means of which the congregation communicate with God in the liturgy, since this is where they speak collectively. The Psalm serves as a Form, as it were, to worship, entreat, confess, praise, glorify and supplicate as a unity. Since singing is an excellent opportunity for uniform activity by the entire congregation, the number of hymns or verses to be sung should not be restricted by other activities. Hymns are inspired words which express the congregation's attitude of reverence and love of God.
- 9.2.3.3 The congregation help to build up one another by singing together. The words of many Psalms inspire believers to worship God, to supplicate themselves before him or to confess their guilt as a group. The congregation should be consulted in determining at least some of the hymns to be sung during the assembly. The independent status of hymns allows participants to indicate in advance which psalms they would like the precentor to announce for singing. This is a way of participation by church members in building up the church through the singing of psalms.
- 9.2.3.4 Substantiation for antiphony (alternate singing by two groups):
- ◆ David introduced antiphony, for instance when priests and Levites, and sometimes all the people alternated in singing. The antiphonal character of certain psalms indicates that the temple choirs made use of alternation (eg Ps 136). Other psalms are structured as question and answer (eg Ps 15, 24, 118). The refrain of the psalms was apparently a fixed liturgical formula which

occupied a prominent place in the cultic context (eg Ps 46, 80, 115, 118, 136), and its content, meaning and beauty came into its own through antiphony.

- ◆ The parallelist structure of Hebrew poetry led to antiphony in the synagogal service which in turn found its way into the church of the New Testament, especially in the singing of psalms. Antiphony can be traced from Exodus 15 (the song at the Red Sea) up to Revelations 15 (the song of the Lamb). In Revelations we read of antiphony in heaven (eg Rv (4:8, 11; 5:9, 13, 14; 7:9; 11:17; 14:3; 15:3; 19:1)). It occurred in church services during the first century, as we can see from Plinius's remark that it was the custom of the Christians to assemble and praise Christ as the Lord through antiphony.
- ◆ During the Reformation, antiphony had a fixed place in Lutheran liturgy. There is also reason to believe that Calvin made use of it in Strasbourg, but it did not achieve a fixed place in Calvinistic liturgy.
- ◆ In Western liturgy and in Reformed churches all over the world, we are experiencing a revival of antiphony as was customary in the Old and New Testaments. This correlates with a need for a more festive meeting of the congregation with God and the restoration of the dialogic nature of Christian liturgy. It enhances the awareness of fellowship in the assembly, that is, the realisation that the meeting of God with his people leads to a meeting of the people with one another. The use of antiphony also counteracts a rigid rational approach to church singing.
- ◆ There is no question of drama or theatre in antiphony, since its main object is not musicality but the Word which can speak so vigorously and which is carried into the hearts of people by the Spirit. Antiphony remains simple and joyful group singing by means of which the members educate and reinforce one another in the singing of psalms. Nobody remains passive. The purpose of antiphony in the liturgy is not to introduce something new (it existed as far back as the time of the temple) nor to experiment. It is used since it is

eminently suited to the nature of the liturgy, namely that it is a meeting, and especially to the meeting between church members.

The Synod made the following decisions:

- 9.2.3.5 Congregational singing is not only a prominent part of the Service of Response, but as a means of response by the congregation it also occurs as a liturgical act in other liturgical activities. Singing serves the words by means of which the people communicate with God in the liturgy, since the entire congregation speaks as one through singing. Singing serves as a Form, as it were, to worship, entreat, confess, praise, glorify and supplicate as a unity.
- 9.2.3.6 Antiphonal singing can be used in the case of suitable psalms according to the discretion of the churches.

9.2.4 *Alms or Christian assistance*

The Synod noted the following:

- 9.2.4.1 Alms form part of the *Reponsoria*, the people's response of gratitude to the Service of the Word. Through this act the congregation gives thanks to God for his charisma in the Service of the Word where the people are called upon to bring alms to alleviate need and expand the proclamation of the Gospel. The meeting with the God of mercy, who has shown infinite grace to wretched sinners, evokes love in the hearts of his people which they show in a concrete manner by helping the needy.
- 9.2.4.2 Since the place of alms in the liturgy is a matter of lesser importance, it is left completely to the discretion of church councils whether to collect them during or after the service.

The Synod made the following decision:

- 9.2.4.3 Alms or Christian assistance forms part of the response of gratitude to the Service of the Word. By means of this act the congregation express their gratitude to God for his charisma. The congregation should be informed, preferably on the previous Sunday, of the purpose for which the alms are intended.

10. DISMISSING THE CONGREGATION BY PRONOUNCING THE BENEDICTION OF THE LORD

The Synod noted the following:

- 10.1 We see from the priestly benediction in Numbers 6 that the benediction is not merely a means to mark the conclusion of the assembly, but in fact a dismissal of the people to enter a new period of grace in the blessing of the Lord. The benediction does not end the worshipping of God, but the people are dismissed to continue it in their homes and places of work. This is precisely why God blesses the assembly of believers with the gifts of grace, protection, hearing of prayers, love and peace.
- 10.2 The congregation should understand that, with this benediction, God blesses them with gifts for their lives and dispatches them to perform active service. Churches must ensure that their members receive suitable education for this purpose. The minister who pronounces the blessing of the Lord on the congregation should occasionally draw their attention to the significance of the benediction by adding a brief formula, such as "Through this benediction, the Lord dispatches us to serve him in our homes and places of work."

The Synod made the following decisions:

- 10.3 The blessing of the Lord at the end of the service does not indicate the conclusion of the assembly; it dispatches church members to perform active service in the blessing of the Lord.

- 10.4 It should be liturgically clear in the use of the words and hands that the minister is empowered to pronounce the blessing of the God of the Covenant on the church.
- 10.5 The valedictory benediction is pronounced according to the formula in Numbers 6:24-26, 2 Corinthians 13:13 or 1 Peter 5:10,11. This benediction is pronounced with the hands uplifted (Lv 9:22).

11. LITURGY FOR FURTHER ASSEMBLIES BY THE CONGREGATION

The Synod noted the following:

- 11.1 A study of the ceremonies that took place on the Sabbath during the time of the Old Testament does not enable us to establish the number of occasions on which God was worshipped on that day. Nor does the New Testament contain prescriptions for the number of assemblies to be held on a Sunday. This is why the Creeds, especially the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 28), refrain from prescribing two services for a Sunday. Nor does the Church Order deal explicitly with the second service on a Sunday. The Church Order (Art 68) stresses the importance of doctrinal preaching (from the Catechism) and links it to the second assembly. This does not, however, make the second assembly mandatory.
- 11.2 The explanation of the Fourth Commandment in the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 38) implies that the church need not be satisfied with the minimum number of assemblies, but that it may assemble more frequently to practise communion with the God of Trinity. The Church Order (art 66) therefore contains provisions on special assemblies, even on weekdays.
- 11.3 In the course of history, the second assembly took place in the afternoon or evening. For practical reasons, for instance safety or long distances to be travelled, a custom has developed to have the two assemblies in close succession. The repetition of the salutatory benediction a few minutes after pronouncing the valedictory benediction, as well as other repetitions, led to the question of whether the second assembly has become a mere obligation merely to comply with the "prescription" of a second assembly. It makes one suspect that

"church service" is understood as being static, in other words, having a beginning and an end, instead of being dynamically continued in the lives of believers.

The Synod made the following decisions:

- 11.4 According to the principle laid down in the Church Order (art 68), the chief content of Christian doctrine, as contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, must be expounded. If a second assembly is not viable, it may be included in the liturgy of the first assembly.
- 11.5 The structure of other assemblies on a Sunday or a weekday should follow the dynamic course of Service of Encounter, of Supplication and Reconciliation, of the Word and of Response. In other words, every assembly must be an encounter of God with the people, of the people with God and of the people with one another. It need not be a replica of the first assembly, but the church council should consider the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 38) and the Church Order (art 68) in structuring it. This also applies to special services, such as those described in the Church Order (art 66), which require their own liturgy, for instance more than one prayer by more than one precentor.

12. DECISIONS ON HYMNS TO BE FINALISED AT A LATER STAGE

- 12.1 Certain alternative melodies for use in the assemblies of the church have been approved. A list of these melodies appears in the Acta of the Synod (1997:771-773).
- 12.2 A number of new Scriptural hymns for use in Afrikaans churches have been approved. They come from the Gesangebundel and are the work of a number of poets (see Acta 1997:784-785). The work has not yet been completed.
- 12.3 It has been decided to continue cooperating with other Afrikaans churches in compiling new rhymed versions of the psalms. The final product will be assessed by the next Synod.
- 12.4 Work on minor editorial changes to Totius's text of the psalms is continued. Certain obscure words will be explained by means of footnotes.