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Publisher's Note

It is with great pleasure that I send you this Geneva Press publication, the seventh installment in the Price H. Gwynn III Church Leadership Series. This essay is being sent to you free of charge, in the hope that it will stimulate theological reflection on a very important issue in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): to what extent and how are we Presbyterians a confessional people, and what does it mean to be a “confessing church”?

This latter concept came into theological currency in the last century with the Theological Declaration of Barmen, which, under the aegis of Karl Barth, sharply delineated the authentic Christian church from the one being co-opted by Hitler's National Socialism as a German state institution. The term “confessing church” has come to mean something altogether different in the current Presbyterian context, however, as right-wing organizations seek to use confessional statements as theological sledgehammers to bludgeon Presbyterians into a rigid orthodoxy that divisively excludes certain persons from ecclesiastical leadership.

It is in this context that Union Theological Seminary—Presbyterian School of Christian Education professor Douglas Ottati, inarguably one of the most insightful progressive theological voices in the Presbyterian Church today, examines the significance of our *Book of Confessions*, which includes multiple confessional documents, and in particular the Confession of 1967.

This series of publications is intended to honor the fine leadership of Price Gwynn during the formative days of Presbyterian Publishing Corporation as a newly minted, financially self-sustaining agency of the PC(USA). I trust this essay specifically will do precisely that, since I know that Price Gwynn relishes few things more than a vigorous and honest theological discussion about issues that matter to the church he loves so well.

Davis Perkins
President & Publisher



Price H. Gwynn III, Moderator of the 202nd General Assembly (1990) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), is the son and grandson of Presbyterian ministers, and became a successful businessman as well as an extremely effective elder of the Presbyterian Church. Prior to his election as moderator, this North Carolina native was vice-president and director of Lance, Inc., having previously served as president of two other major companies. After being elected, Gwynn became the only moderator of our denomination to be featured in *The Saturday Evening Post* for his extensive business experience. Such experience prepared him to serve as chairman of the board of Presbyterian Publishing Corporation during an important time of transition. Gwynn served on the board from 1993 to 2001.

His experience and leadership at all levels of the Presbyterian Church are equally impressive. Gwynn has served as deacon, elder, Sunday school teacher, and synod representative and has held extensive presbytery committee assignments, as well as acting as moderator of his presbytery. He was awarded five honorary degrees from Presbyterian colleges, including Davidson, where he also served on the board of trustees. During his distinguished career, he chaired the board of Presbyterian Hospital in Charlotte, and he was an active member of the board of trustees of Union Theological Seminary in Richmond.

Further national church leadership roles include former membership on the General Assembly Council, the Committee on the Spiritual Welfare of the Church, and the Special Committee for Review of the General Assembly. Gwynn has combined all of these activities with a distinguished military career, outstanding civic service, and, with his wife, Katherine, strong family ties with their three sons and their grandchildren.

Confessional Standards for a Confessing Church

The Confession of 1967
and the *Book of Confessions*

Douglas F. Ottati



Geneva Press
Louisville, Kentucky





Confessional Standards for a Confessing Church

Time was when the study of authoritative church doctrine seemed comparatively boring and arcane. Only the most meticulously minded church theologians and historians had much interest. But times change. Today, questions of church teaching, its content, scope, and authority, are matters of intense controversy and debate, whether the presenting issue is Roman Catholic politicians and abortion or proposals for gay ordination and gay marriage. For Reformed Protestants, questions concerning church teaching are connected with creeds, confessions, and catechisms that, from time to time, have been recognized and adopted by different Reformed churches. Moreover, among Presbyterians in the United States, something rather fundamental in this regard took place in 1967: The United Presbyterian Church, which until then had recognized only the Westminster Standards, adopted a number of additional confessional documents, including a new text called the Confession of 1967. This essay concerns some of the theological implications of that decision.

The Confession of 1967, or C-67 (as we affectionately and more efficiently often call it), was adopted together with eight other documents to form the first *Book of Confessions* of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America acknowledges itself aided in understanding the gospel by the testimony of the church from earlier ages and from many lands. More especially it is guided by the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds from the time of the early church; the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Second Helvetic Confession from the era of the Reformation; the Westminster Confession and Shorter Catechism from the seventeenth century; and the Theological Declaration of Barmen from the twentieth century. ¹

Essentially and very briefly, what happened was this. After years of study and debate, the church decided to remove from its confessional standards the (Westminster) Larger Catechism and to include the Westminster Confession, the Shorter Catechism, C-67, and six additional documents. The Larger Catechism was reinstated when the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. reunited



with the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1983, at which time “southern” emendations also were added to the text of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The *Book of Confessions* took on its present shape when A Brief Statement of Faith was added in 1991.

It might easily be argued that, doctrinally speaking, the most significant thing the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. did in 1967 was to approve a book of confessions (plural). The net effect of adopting a collection of confessional documents has been to introduce a measure of *plurality* into the Church’s doctrinal standards. At the time, however, it was the text of C-67 that drew much of the conservative critical fire. The Presbyterian Lay Committee Inc. was formed in the spring of 1965 to oppose the C-67 and to work for conservative policies in the denomination, and the more moderate group, Presbyterians United for Biblical Confession, pressed for revisions in the text of the new confession. At a special synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church, Rev. Carl McIntire declared that modernism had triumphed through the adoption of the new document.²

Nevertheless, some conservatives clearly recognized that the change to a *collection* of relatively diverse confessional documents had deep theological significance. For example, Mariano Di Gangi of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia asked, “When there are differences between the various documents in the *Book of Confessions*, which is to take precedence over the others?” He also complained that people who commit themselves to a collection of confessional documents do not commit themselves to “a clearly-defined body of truth” or a “system of doctrine.”³ His main point was that a collection of confessions cannot furnish a single, detailed, and self-consistent rule, and in this contention, he was exactly correct.

Stated more positively, a book of confessions (plural) puts the church into conversation with a rather diverse cloud of witnesses from different places and times. One general thesis of my essay is that this has had comparatively salutary consequences for the way in which the church regards its confessions. Specifically, I believe that the decision to adopt a book of confessions encourages Presbyterians to understand their confessional authorities as particular, ecumenical, and living or dynamic standards. My second general thesis is that it is difficult to imagine some of the more innovative features of the text of C-67 that finally was adopted by the church apart from the decision also to adopt a book of confessions.



I. Understanding Our Confessions

For many years, the Westminster Confession of Faith functioned as the sole confessional standard of the major Presbyterian bodies in the United States. But, of course, the actual standard was not the original text of 1647. It was that text revised early and often to reflect the practices and judgments of American Presbyterians. (See, for example, the paragraphs of the Confession having to do with the civil magistrate, marriage and divorce, the “Gospel of the Love of God and Missions,” and the “Declaratory Statement” concerning predestination and God’s love for all humankind as well as the election of those who die in infancy.)⁴ That is, when Westminster was the sole confessional standard, there were strong and regular pressures to revise it when it appeared to be at odds with the church’s current faith, practice, or theology. This changed when the Presbyterian Church adopted the *Book of Confessions*.

Historically Particular Statements

Pressures to revise specific confessions abated with the adoption of a collection of documents from different places and times. There now seems little reason to alter the documents themselves in order to achieve (what could only be an artificial) uniformity or strict agreement with current faith and practice. So, for example, in the current *Book of Confessions*, the claim in A Brief Statement of Faith that the Spirit “calls women and men to all ministries of the Church” stands in flat opposition to the insistence of the Scots Confession that “the Holy Ghost will not permit [women] to preach in the congregation.” Consider, too, the subtle differences in the ways that the Second Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Confession of 1967 articulate the relationship between the Word of God and the texts of Scripture.⁵

A presumption entailed by the adoption of the *Book of Confessions* is that the collection of confessional standards is at least relatively diverse and that it quite properly reflects historical and theological differences in the church’s confessions. Moreover, behind and beneath the comparatively strong pressures to revise Westminster, is a tendency that, from a Reformed and Protestant viewpoint, can only be described as troubling. It seems comparatively easy to mistake a document that functions as a sole confessional standard for “the rule of faith and practice,” even when the document itself says (as Westminster does) that the products of synods and councils are not to be understood as



constituting such a rule.⁶ At the very least, it seems rather easy to mistake a single confession for the authoritative “Cliffs Notes” on the Bible and so, in practice, to displace the Bible itself. This danger threatens the historic Protestant affirmation of *sola scriptura* (the affirmation that Scripture alone rather than church tradition is the final authority of faith and practice), and the threat was significantly reduced when the church adopted a somewhat diverse *Book of Confessions*. For now, precisely because the confessions are *not* entirely self-consistent and uniform, it becomes more difficult to claim that they ever could function as an entirely self-consistent rule.⁷ (Of course, this is one reason why we sometimes encounter renewed efforts to introduce authoritative lists of “essential tenets.” Accordingly, it should also be emphasized that it is the entire *Book of Confessions*, rather than anyone’s summary of or Cliffs Notes on the collection, that forms the authoritative confessional standard for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)). Practically speaking, from a Reformed perspective and as a matter of self-description, a diverse collection of confessions encourages us to take them for what they really are: authoritative yet fallible and subordinate standards that point to the one true Word.⁸

Indeed, as C-67 itself makes clear, and as is apparent to virtually anyone familiar with the entire collection, the several documents in the *Book of Confessions* are the particular statements of specific churches at particular places and times. They point to the same Word, but they do so on different occasions, in different cultures and different idioms, and in the face of different problems and different crises.⁹ “The Confessional Nature of the Church,” a paper commended for study by the 198th General Assembly in 1986 and mandated to be published with the *Book of Confessions* by the 209th General Assembly in 1997, makes a similar point.

This multiplicity of confessions, written by many people in many places over such a great span of time, obviously means that the Reformed tradition has never been content to recognize any one confession or collection of confessions as an absolute, infallible statement of the faith of Reformed Christians for all time. In the Reformed tradition confessional statements do have authority as statements of the faith of Reformed Christians at particular times and places, and there is a remarkable consistency in their fundamental content. Some have had convincing power for a long time. Nevertheless, for Reformed Christians all confessional statements have only a provisional, temporary, relative authority.¹⁰



In short, the decision to adopt a book of confessions (plural) introduces a profound *historical consciousness* into the church's understanding of its doctrinal standards. When confessional statements are recognized to be historically particular, their authority is *provisional* because they are understood to be “the work of limited, fallible, sinful human beings and churches” that reflect the biases and scientific and cultural limitations of specific circumstances. Their authority is *temporary* because Christians are to ask what God is doing and how we may be faithful and obedient “in every new time, place, and situation.” Moreover, the recognition of their historical particularity also fits with another, classic point about their authority: it is *relative* because church confessions “are subordinate to the higher authority of Scripture.”¹¹

Ecumenical Standards

Another point worth emphasizing is that the *Book of Confessions* itself is ecumenical, because the collection incorporates elements of the plurality of Reformed Christianity into the life of the Presbyterian Church. Before the end of the sixteenth century, Reformed churches were present in Switzerland, Germany, France, Holland, Scotland, Hungary, and Poland. Multiple theologians and church leaders operating at multiple centers and in varied contexts produced multiple theological treatises, confessional documents, liturgies, and polities. Today, there are over two hundred Reformed churches in more than one hundred countries. True, the nine documents produced by Reformed churches that are included in the *Book of Confessions* do not reprise the full diversity of Reformed Christianity, but they do point toward this diversity more clearly and forthrightly than any one of them could on its own. Written into the constitution of the church itself, as it were, is an explicit recognition that, through the centuries, there have been multiple strands within the Reformed tradition, multiple ways of being Reformed. Again, “The Confessional Nature of the Church” makes a similar point.

The *Book of Confessions* as a whole enriches our understanding of what it means to be Reformed Christians, helps us escape the provincialism to which we have been prone, and expresses our intention to join the worldwide family of Reformed churches that is far bigger and more inclusive than our particular denomination.¹²

It is also ecumenically significant that the *Book of Confessions* begins with the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds; for this constitutes



an explicit recognition that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and Reformed Christianity more generally participate in a wider Christian movement. It serves to remind us that many of the most important features of Presbyterianism and Reformed Christianity are neither distinctive nor unique, but commitments and gifts bestowed on the “one holy catholic and apostolic church.”¹³

Moreover, within Reformed circles at least, these ecumenical aspects to the *Book of Confessions* are also somewhat traditional. The first official standard of Presbyterianism, the Scots Confession of 1560, did not function alone. Additional Reformed documents were also used and approved by the Church of Scotland, including Calvin’s Geneva Catechism of 1545, the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, and the Second Helvetic Confession of 1566. “Indeed, Knox’s *Book of Common Order* did not include the Scots Confession but the confession adopted by the English-speaking congregation at Geneva in 1556, and the *First Book of Discipline* required communicants to be familiar not only with the Scots Confession, but also the Apostles’ Creed.”¹⁴ Since 1567, the Hungarian Reformed Church has recognized both the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession, and in 1581 Theodore Beza put together *A Harmony of Confessions of Faith* drawn from Reformed churches in Europe that even included a revised form of the Lutheran Augsburg Confession.¹⁵

Living and Dynamic Witnesses

A third point is that the adoption of the *Book of Confessions* entails the assumption that the confessional standards of the church are living and dynamic, subject to emendation, revision, and addition. The adoption of C-67 (a new document) together with a collection of older documents was itself a significant demonstration of this assumption (as were the earlier revisions of Westminster). So was the addition of A Brief Statement of Faith in 1991.

The profoundly Protestant and *negative* corollary, of course, is that the church’s confessions are subject to revision and correction because they are fallible and subject to error. As C-67 puts it “no one statement is irreformable.” Or consider the more colorful language of the Scots Confession:

As we do not rashly condemn what good men, assembled together in councils lawfully gathered, have set down before us; so we do not receive uncritically whatever has been declared to men under the name of the general coun-

cils, for it is plain that, being human, some of them have manifestly erred, and that in matters of great weight and importance.¹⁶

The profoundly *positive* corollary is taken up in the first sentence of C-67: “The church confesses its faith when it bears a *present* witness to God’s grace in Jesus Christ.”¹⁷ That is, it is the business of the church to confess, to bear witness today and in every time and place.

In every age, the church has expressed its witness in words and deeds as the need of the time required. The earliest examples of confession are found within the Scriptures. Confessional statements have taken such varied forms as hymns, liturgical formulas, doctrinal definitions, catechisms, theological systems in summary, and declarations of purpose against threatening evil.¹⁸

In this sense, and with all intentional reference to The Theological Declaration of Barmen, which also was adopted into the *Book of Confessions* along with C-67, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) understands itself to be a “confessing church.” A faithful and present witness—this is the engine or dynamic that makes for a living confessional heritage from the New Testament and Nicea to Heidelberg, Westminster, Belhar, and beyond.¹⁹

That the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms the *Book of Confessions* means that it understands itself to confess a faith that has been handed down through the ages and that it understands itself to confess this faith in its own particular time and place. Thus, the Scots Confession says that part of the reason for church councils is “to give public confession of their faith to the generations following.”²⁰ Both the continuity and contemporaneity of this living activity come through in the final paragraph of the preface to C-67. “God’s reconciling work in Jesus Christ and the mission of reconciliation to which he has called his church are the heart of the gospel in any age. Our generation stands in peculiar need of reconciliation in Christ. Accordingly, this Confession of 1967 is built upon that theme.”²¹ Among other things, the *Book of Confessions* stands as an encouragement for us to do in our own time and place what other Christians and their communities have done in theirs.

A collection of confessional statements from different times highlights a tradition of Christian confessing through the ages. Only this tradition is not a matter of static and rotely repetitive uniformity, but a matter of living witness. It is a matter of asking, on the basis of what the prophets and apostles said yesterday and





informed by the church's confessions in many ages, how we shall witness today. It is a matter of asking what God is doing here and now and how we may respond faithfully and obediently.²²

II. The Dependence of the Confession of 1967 on the *Book of Confessions*

With these observations, we have already touched on two additional features of C-67. Both are connected with the fact that it was the first confessional document written expressly for inclusion in the *Book of Confessions*. Taken together, I believe they indicate that some central features of the text of C-67 are virtually unimaginable apart from the broader collection.

A Thematic Confession

The first feature is clearly stated in the preface. C-67 recognizes that confessional statements have taken varied forms, that there have been "hymns, liturgical formulas, doctrinal definitions, catechisms, theological systems in summary, and declarations of purpose against threatening evil."²³ Moreover, "this Confession is not a 'system of doctrine,' nor does it include all the traditional topics of theology."²⁴ C-67 is a thematic confession built upon the theme of reconciliation. As such, one may argue that it seems ill suited to be the sole confessional standard of a church. This is true as well of the Theological Declaration of Barmen, which also is not systematic, and which, in any case, encouraged Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches "to remain faithful to our various Confessions."²⁵ Surely, it is true, too, of the somewhat lyrical and liturgical "Brief Statement of Faith," whose preface says that it is "not intended to stand alone, apart from other confessions of our church," and that "it does not pretend to be a complete list of all our beliefs, nor does it explain any of them in detail."²⁶

Whatever the original intentions may have been when the Special Committee on a Brief Statement of Faith was first appointed in 1958, it may be argued that, in 1967, the church was freed to approve a thematic document precisely because C-67 did not pretend to be a sole confessional standard for the Presbyterian Church.²⁷ Instead, as we have seen, the document affirmed that the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America is not guided by C-67 alone, but is "aided in understanding the gospel" by a number of testimonies and witnesses "of the church from earlier ages and from many lands."²⁸ Moreover, some of these testimonies and witnesses are indeed theological systems in summary that touch on virtually all of the



traditional topics of Reformed theology—for example, the Scots Confession of 1560, the Second Helvetic Confession, and the Westminster Confession of Faith. The church therefore could be assured that, as a whole, the *Book of Confessions* outlines the full complement of theological topics that Reformed churches historically have found important for understanding Christian faith and the gospel. Apart from this broader collection, then, it seems unlikely that the church would have approved a confession that had taken the form of a thematic document built on reconciliation as an especially appropriate way to witness to the heart of the gospel at the time.

A Reading of the Circumstances Calling for Witness

This brings us to another feature of C-67 that seems significantly dependent on the presence of additional documents in the wider collection and on a heightened awareness that confessions are particular standards that quite properly reflect the specific challenges that the church confronts at a particular place and time. C-67 includes an explicit interpretation of the then-current circumstance of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. It presents a definite theological reading of what was at stake.²⁹

Arguably, an interpretation of current circumstances is at least an implicit feature of almost any confessional statement. So, for example, as can be surmised from their prefaces, readings of particular challenges and circumstances stand in the background of the Scots Confession of 1560 and the Heidelberg Catechism. (A particular challenge for the Scots was the long-awaited opportunity to form a Reformed church and to make “known to the world the doctrine which we profess and for which we have suffered abuse and danger.”³⁰ For Frederick III it was the need to standardize and improve the instruction of young people as well as the general population in sound Protestant doctrine during a time of controversy and disagreement.³¹) Moreover, Barmen clearly focuses on the threat to the lordship of Jesus Christ posed by the “German Christians” and the coercive interventions of Nazis in church affairs.

The explicit interpretation of circumstances in C-67 comes to the fore at two closely interrelated points: (1) in the judgment that the reconciliation theme promised an especially suitable way of witnessing to the gospel at that particular place and time and (2) in the section of the confession on reconciliation in society.³²



The judgment that “our generation stands in peculiar need of reconciliation in Christ” is, on the one hand, simply the classical theological insistence that all persons are sinners, that sinners are subject to divine judgment, and that good and abundant life is available in Jesus Christ. In their sin, people are turned against God and one another. They become exploiters and despoilers of the world. “They lose their humanity in futile striving and are left in rebellion, despair, and isolation.”³³ But “in Jesus of Nazareth, true humanity was realized once for all.”³⁴ Reconciliation in Jesus Christ brings about new life in community. It overcomes divisions that separate people from God and from one another.³⁵ This is a statement of the heart of the gospel. It is true in every age, and so it is also true in every age that humanity stands in need of reconciliation in Christ.

In C-67, however, what makes “our generation” stand “in *peculiar* need of reconciliation in Christ” is a series of intense and damaging divisions that the writers found to be especially prominent in their own time and place. These particularly urgent problems are taken to be clues to the will of God in the then-current situation as well as to our faithful and obedient response. And, in fact, to recognize these problems as well as their intensely divisive and alienating pattern is to discover the peculiar appropriateness of a witness to the gospel in 1967 that is built on the reconciliation theme.

The explicit and definitely theological reading of circumstances comes in the section “Reconciliation in Society,” and it emphasizes four alienating divisions:³⁶ (1) God’s reconciling love overcoming the barriers and boundaries that separate us calls all people to receive one another as persons, and it highlights the divisive issue of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference. (2) As the ground of peace, justice, and freedom, God’s reconciliation in Jesus Christ commends to the nations the search for cooperation and peace, particularly in an age of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons when we divert so many resources from constructive uses and instead risk “the annihilation of mankind.” (3) Jesus’ identification “with the needy and exploited,” which makes “the cause of the world’s poor the cause of his disciples,” encourages the church to engage economic affairs and to denounce and work to overcome “enslaving poverty in a world of abundance.” (4) The new life in Christ and its meaning for interpersonal relationships of mutuality, joy, responsible freedom, and respect throws into sharp relief alienation and anarchy in sexual relationships in an age of birth control, effective treatments for infection, pressures of urbanization, exploitation of sexual symbols, and world overpopulation.



There is ample room for a variety of judgments as to the material substance or content of the confession's positions on these points.³⁷ My point here is simply that in highlighting these four urgent issues, C-67 presents an explicit reading of the specific challenges facing the church and its witness to the gospel at that time. Indeed, if the divisive pattern of these issues shows the appropriateness of the theme of reconciliation, then the reconciliation theme also serves to highlight these particular and divisive issues. The relationship between theological norm and situational analysis is therefore both explicit and circular. Moreover, the willingness of the writers of C-67 to present a text of this sort accords with the tendency of a collection of confessions from different places and times to highlight the particularity of the church's confessional task.³⁸

C-67 and the *Book of Confessions* Belong Together

Letty M. Russell noted in 1983 that, "if we might want to write the 'Reconciliation in Society' section differently today, we would also find a mandate for doing just that" in C-67's "call for continuing confession of faith in Christ and continuing reformation as the needs of the time require."³⁹ I agree. Indeed, depending in part on our reading of the circumstances, we might find a mandate in C-67 for writing an entirely new confessional document, something the reunited church did when it adopted the Brief Statement of Faith in 1991. I say this not because I am in favor of including yet another new document at this time, but simply to make a point: the emphasis on continuing mission and confession in history—so characteristic of C-67 and so important to both its form and its content—is strengthened by a collection or a book that encourages us to understand confessions as the historically particular statements of particular churches at particular places and times. C-67 and the *Book of Confessions* belong together, and they are, in fact, confessional standards for a confessing church. For, when taken together, they re-enforce some signal judgments that good Presbyterians can only applaud. Confessions sometimes draw boundaries and state general agreements (although their ability either to mandate or constrain detailed agreement is attenuated once we adopt a collection of confessions and recognize their fallible and historically particular character). But there is an additional and rather essential point of confessions, namely, to spur and sustain ongoing theological conversation and ongoing confession within a living tradition.⁴⁰



Notes

1. *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Part I, Book of Confessions*, Study Edition (Louisville KY: Geneva Press, 1996), 9.04. All subsequent references to the *Book of Confessions* are from this study edition.
2. McIntire's remarks were reported in the *New York Times* (December 28, 1966).
3. Di Gangi's statements come from his pamphlet titled "The New Confession: Comments on 'The Proposal to Revise the Confessional Position of the United Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.' or The Confession of 1967."
4. *BC*, 6.129, 6.131–9, 6.188–93. The altered section on the civil magistrate was adopted in 1787. Chapter 34, "Of the Holy Spirit," and Chapter 35, "Of the Gospel of the Love of God and Mission," as well as a closing "Declaratory Statement" were added by the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1903. Somewhat similar statements, Chapter 9, "Of the Holy Spirit," and Chapter 10, "Of the Gospel," were added by the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1942. Chapters on marriage and divorce were added by both of these denominations during the 1950s. From time to time alterations and additions were also made concerning works done by unregenerate people, the Lord's Supper, and Synods and Councils. Moreover, it should be noted that most of these changes were truly significant, and that the chapter "Of the Gospel of the Love of God and Mission" and the "Declaratory Statement" contradict the plain sense of some rather important passages in the original text of 1647.
5. *BC*, 10.4, 3.22. Along these lines, one might also argue that, although it is helpful to have an inclusive language text of C-67 for liturgical purposes, the original text of C-67 in the *Book of Confessions* ought to be retained. And the reason why is not just that some judge the inclusive version not to have grappled with all of the theological issues presented by the original text, but also, as Heidi Hadsell points out, that the original text of C-67, so jarring with its specifically masculine language, reminds us of the near total absence of women in the confession and makes women aware of how difficult it is to see themselves in noninclusive language. See "Reflections on the Presence of an Absence," *Church and Society* 92, no. 5 (May/June 2002): 81–90.
6. See *BC*, 6.175.



7. Not that some haven't tried and even, to a degree, succeeded. See *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, Part II, *Book of Order* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, 1999), G-60106. "Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament."
8. *BC*, 9.03.
9. *BC*, 9.02, 9.43.
10. *BC*, p. 359.
11. *BC*, pp. 359–60.
12. *BC*, p. 362.
13. *BC*, 1.3.
14. *BC*, pp. 25–6.
15. Edward A. Dowey Jr., *A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and an Introduction to "the Book of Confessions"* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 31–2.
16. *BC*, 9.03, 3.20. See also the Westminster Confession of Faith (*BC* 6.175). "All synods or councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both." For the Scots, councils, creeds, confessions, catechisms and the like are to be confirmed by "the plain Word of God" (3.20). The preface to the Scots Confession indicates that the authors intended their own work to be subject to this same standard when it asks anyone who notes a chapter or sentence that is "contrary to God's Holy Word" to "inform us of it in writing." Although, in practice, a politically realistic objector might have deemed it wise to book passage to a New World before posting his or her letter.
17. *BC*, 9.01. The emphasis is mine.
18. *BC*, 9.02. See also Edward A. Dowey Jr., *A Commentary on the Confession of 1967 and an Introduction to "the Book of Confessions,"* 29.
19. The Belhar Confession was officially adopted by the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church at Belhar, Cape Town, Republic of South Africa, on September 22–October 6, 1986, and it rejects apartheid on theological and moral grounds.
20. *BC*, 3.20.
21. *BC*, 9.06.
22. See also "The Confessional Nature of the Church," *BC*, p. 360.
23. *BC*, 9.02.
24. *BC*, 9.05. See also 9.06.



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25. *BC*, 8.08. See also 8.02–4, 8.06.
 26. *BC*, p. 339.
 27. Of course, the move to a collection of confessions that includes the Westminster Confession of Faith as well as the Confession of 1967 may well have been prompted by the practical and political recognition that the church would not approve the new confession standing on its own. If so, then I am prepared to argue that this was a theologically fortunate and profound political compromise.
 28. *BC*, 9.04.
 29. This is also the place to mention a related point. C-67 encourages the church to be “instructed by all attainable knowledge” as it seeks to discern God’s will and to respond appropriately. See *BC*, 9.43. It therefore intimates the importance of empirical studies, of situational analyses and interpretations of circumstances, for a theological ethic.
 30. *BC*, p. 31.
 31. *BC*, pp. 57–8.
 32. *BC*, 9.06, 9.43–7.
 33. *BC*, 9.12.
 34. *BC*, 9.08.
 35. *BC*, 9.20–6, 9.31.
 36. *BC*, 9.43–7. Arnold B. Come regarded the inclusion of a social ethic within the scope of God’s reconciling work in Christ as “the most original and distinctive contribution of C-67,” and he claimed that the four areas mentioned here “are critical to world-wide human existence.” However, Charles C. West noted that “C-67 does not have a full political or social ethic, even as it does not have a full systematic theology.” See Arnold B. Come, “The Occasion and Contribution of The Confession of 1967” and Charles C. West, “Comment on Reconciliation in Society” in the *Journal of Presbyterian History* 61, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 23, 27, 127. Regardless of whether or not one considers the social ethic in C-67 extensive, it seems clear that C-67 does indeed contain an explicit and definitely theological reading of circumstances.
 37. Beverly Wildung Harrison claimed that C-67 did well to emphasize the importance of just relationship but lamented the addition of the notion of God’s “ordering” at this point in the text of the Confession. See “Human Sexuality and Mutuality: A Fresh Paradigm,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 61, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 143–4, 150. This also points to a larger question I have sometimes heard raised by Eugene TeSelle about the christocentric character of C-67 and the

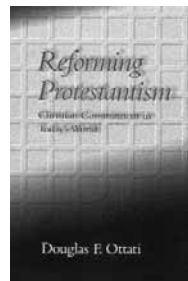
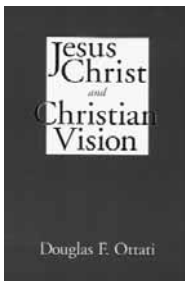


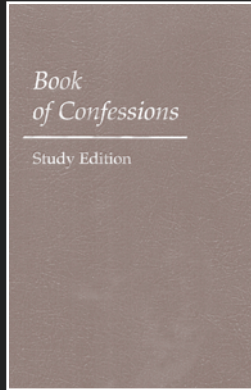
doctrine of creation. In general, creation comes in for little emphasis in the confession, and it seems fair to say that the confession has more to say about history than nature. Moreover, to my mind, 9.16 has a rather unfortunate, anthropocentric, and finally indefensible ring. “God has created the world of space and time to be the sphere of his dealings with men.” I have noted some shortcomings of such statements in an unpublished paper titled “Which Way Is Up? An Experiment in Christian Theology and Recent Cosmology.” Interestingly, however, although the confession says relatively little about creation, it seems unable to deal with the issues of racial discrimination and sexuality without references to creation.

38. Edward A. Dowey Jr. noted that the committee chose the name “Confession of 1967” at its final meeting in order to draw explicit attention to their understanding that this is a confession uttered at a given time and place in a concrete situation. “Creedal Reforms in the UPUSA [*sic*] Church,” an audiotope made at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia in 1965 and available in the William Smith Morton Library.
39. Letty M. Russell, “Forms of a Confessing Church Today,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 61, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 100.
40. The important thing is to engage an extensive and living heritage. This accords with Edward A. Dowey’s observation that Westminster alone is neither modern enough nor ancient enough to represent the Presbyterian heritage. “Creedal Reforms in the UPUSA [*sic*] Church,” an audiotope recorded at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia in 1965 and available in the William Smith Morton Library.



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