

Suggested Report and Request for Membership Committee Concerning the Sabbath

As part of our report, the Membership Committee wanted to briefly address the nature of our application process as it relates to our confessional commitment to the perpetuity of the fourth commandment, or the Christian Sabbath, and also to confirm whether this is acceptable to the Network.

The Membership Committee believes that it has a general sense of what would or would not be acceptable in terms of substantial agreement to our confessional standard on this subject and gives advice to candidates accordingly. As stated in the RBNet Constitution, *“what RBNet means by substantial subscription is confession of the doctrines expressed in each chapter of the 1689 LBCF, yet with liberty and charity over minor matters of wording, application and nuance not essential to those doctrines as a whole.”*

Yet the committee does not bar anyone from application. We simply seek to acquire the pertinent information regarding the church applying and convey this information to you all as the actual voting body with our report. The duty of determining what is allowable in terms of an applying church’s confessionalism is, ultimately, determined in each case by you.

Recently, our sister church from Barcelona, Spain, was put forward for membership in RBNet, and there was a question regarding its Sabbath position. It was described as a “continental view,” which we have since learned can be a loaded term that means different things on either side of the Atlantic. R.C. Sproul has written these words concerning the European Continental view (as we understood it and meant it at the 2019 GA): “In keeping with what has been often regarded as the Continental view of the Sabbath, we believe that recreation is permitted as part of resting on the Lord’s Day. But as many good and godly Christians have differed over this issue, Sabbath observance is not something that should divide us.” In other words, within the history of reformed conviction concerning the perpetuity of the fourth command as the New Covenant Lord’s Day, there have been differences regarding what constitutes acceptable forms of rest on that day.

We do apologize for any confusion that this may have caused at last year’s GA, as apparently there was a controversy among Calvinistic Baptists from the 1970’s onward concerning a viewpoint which denied the perpetuity of the fourth commandment and was held by a North American group known as “Continental Baptists.” We hope this has clarified what was intended by the statement last year and has cleared up any confusion.

However, this has caused us as the membership committee to feel the need to explain the parameters in which we have assumed to operate when evaluating applying churches on this question and to make sure that our approach is acceptable to the member churches.

To put it simply, we believe that substantial subscription to chapter 22 of our Confession, “Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day,” requires confessing the perpetuity of the moral aspect of the Fourth Commandment as expressed in the New Covenant Lord’s Day as a day of rest, worship, and ministry. It has been our assumption that aspects of 22.8 are not essential to subscription to the doctrine and may be understood and applied differently among our churches. Examples of the differences of which we speak include:

1. *There may be differences concerning what constitutes proper rest on the Lord’s Day.* Some of the Puritans put great emphasis on this rest being a “spiritual” rest and, indeed, it is. Yet it also clearly involves the idea of *physical* rest as well, since under Moses even the beasts of burden were to

rest on the Sabbath. Therefore, to enjoy a measure of physical rest, relaxation and refreshment is one of the purposes of the Sabbath. Of course, this leads to the question, “What are acceptable forms of rest on the Lord’s Day?” We do not expect everyone in RBNet to land on the same place when it comes to this question, or require them to, in order to be presented by the membership committee to the GA for full membership.

2. *There may be differences concerning what constitutes a work of necessity.* There may be some situations where the answer to this question with reference to a particular work may not be as clear-cut as with others. Again, we do not expect everyone to land on the same place here to be presented by the membership committee to the GA for full membership. However, this is not the same as denying the category of works of necessity and the necessity of making distinctions between those that are and those that are not. We all must reckon with this before God. However, we acknowledge that we may not all land in exactly the same place.
3. *There may be differences with regard to the question of unnecessary commerce on the Lord’s Day.* For example, this involves questions about eating out on the Lord’s Day, buying or selling, traveling and so on. Nehemiah 13:15ff is informative here concerning the avoidance of *unnecessary* commerce. However, we recognize that this can sometimes be a tricky matter in a secular culture. We do not live in a theocracy as did Old Covenant Israel and, even if we did, it would be proper and likely that some businesses, such as a select number of gas stations, eating establishments and hotels etc. would be kept open for emergencies or for situations of mercy or necessity. Therefore, those seriously devoted to the perpetuity of the fourth commandment may land at different places on certain details related to this question as well. As with the previous areas mentioned, we do not expect complete unanimity with regard to this in order to be presented to the GA for full membership.

We, the members of the Membership Committee, set before the GA these parameters under which we operate when it comes to the differences on the application of the New Covenant Sabbath or Lord’s Day in churches we present for full membership in RBNet. We do not mean to imply that we believe there is no place for any member church or its leadership to have strong convictions about some of these questions. We are simply describing the areas of difference we have assumed to be allowed within the membership of RBNet and we are asking the GA if this is acceptable with the members. If so, this is the way the membership committee will continue to proceed on the Sabbath question moving forward.

Addendum

The view that has come to be known as the Continental view was summarized by the Synod of Dordt in session 148 in the following manner:

1) In the fourth Commandment of the divine law, part is ceremonial, part is moral. 2) The rest of the seventh day after creation was ceremonial and its rigid observation peculiarly prescribed to the Jewish people. 3) Moral in fact, because the fixed and enduring day of the worship of God is appointed, for as much rest as is necessary for the worship of God and holy meditation of him. 4) With the Sabbath of the Jews having been abrogated, the Lord’s Day is solemnly sanctified by Christians. 5) From the time of the Apostles this day was always observed in the ancient Catholic Church. 6) This same day is thus consecrated for divine worship, so that in it one might rest from all servile works (with these excepted, which are works of charity and pressing necessity) and from those recreations which impede the worship of God.