

# **ACTS**

**General Synod 1998**  
of the  
**Canadian**  
**Reformed Churches**

Fergus, Ontario

General Synod 1998  
of the Canadian Reformed Churches

Acts

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Top Row: Rev. R.J. Eikelboom, br. W. Oostdyk, br. W. Smouter, br. W. Pleiter.  
Middle Row: br. A. Van Leeuwen, Rev. A.J. Pol, br. J. Schouten, br. L. Jagt, br. T.M. Veenendaal, Rev. W. B. Slomp, Rev. J. Moesker, br. P. Vanwoudenberg  
Front Row: Rev. W. den Hollander, vice-chairman, Rev. R. Aasman, chairman, Rev. G. H. Visscher, first clerk, Rev. P.G. Feenstra, second clerk



**ACTS**  
of the  
**General Synod**  
of the  
**Canadian Reformed Churches**  
held at  
**Fergus, Ontario**  
**May 5, 1998 – May 22, 1998**

**MORNING SESSION – TUESDAY, MAY 05, 1998**

**Article 1**

**Opening**

On behalf of the Church at Fergus, its counsellor, Rev. J. G. Slaa, calls the meeting to order. He asks the brothers to sing from Psalm 122: 1, 2, reads from Ephesians 1, and leads in prayer. Thereafter he addresses the meeting with some fitting introductory words (as found in appendix 1).

**Article 2**

**Examination of Credentials**

Officebearers of the church at Fergus examine the credentials which are found to be in order. All primi delegates are present with the exception of Rev. R.J. Eikelboom who is an alternate delegate to Rev. R.A. Schouten. In attendance are:

From Regional Synod East:

Ministers: W. den Hollander, P.G. Feenstra, A.J. Pol, G.H. Visscher  
Elders: L. Jagt, W. Oostdyk, J. Schouten, W. Smouter.

From Regional Synod West:

Ministers: R. Aasman, R.J. Eikelboom, J. Moesker, W.B. Slomp.  
Elders: W.A. Pleiter, A. VanLeeuwen, P. Vanwoudenberg,  
T.M. Veenendaal.

### **Article 3**

#### **Election of Officers**

Voting for officers of Synod takes place, with the following result:

Chairman:	Rev. R. Aasman
Vice-chairman:	Rev. W. den Hollander
First clerk:	Rev. G. H. Visscher
Second clerk:	Rev. P. G. Feenstra

On behalf of the convening church, Rev. J. G. Slaa declares General Synod Fergus 1998 constituted. He invites the officers to take their places.

### **Article 4**

#### **Welcome**

Rev. R. Aasman thanks everyone for the confidence placed in him and the other members of the executive. He expresses appreciation for the words of Rev. J. deGelder during the prayer service the previous evening and the words of Rev. J.G. Slaa this morning. Rev. R. Aasman thanks the church at Fergus for their extensive labours in preparing for this Synod. He expresses words of welcome to Rev. C. Bouwman who is present as a fraternal delegate from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Also the schoolchildren from the Maranatha Canadian Reformed School of Fergus are welcomed, as are the members of the press. It is decided to seat the counsellor of the church at Fergus, the Rev. J.G. Slaa, as advisor to Synod. Thereafter Synod takes a break in order to give the executive an opportunity to make some arrangements for the proceedings.

### **Article 5**

#### **Presence on The Internet**

Synod meets in order to discuss some introductory matters. Synod is informed by the convening church that the possibility exists for Synod to have a home page on the Internet. It is agreed that the Acts will be uploaded to this home page ([www.fergus.net/synod98](http://www.fergus.net/synod98)) as they become available.

### **Article 6**

#### **Privilege of the Floor to Representatives**

The Executive places the following items of the provisional agenda before Synod.

The church at Ancaster requests Synod to allow representatives from the United Reformed Churches of North America to be given the privilege of

## Acts of General Synod

the floor. It is decided that besides fraternal delegates from federations with whom the Canadian Reformed Churches have official relations, observers from ERQ, RCUS and URCNA will also be given this privilege.

Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad informs us that Rev. C. Bouwman will be present as representative of the FRCA, that Rev. G. Syms and Elder David Stelpstra will represent the Reformed Church in the United States.

### Article 7

#### Committees of Synod

The executive makes the recommendation that the following committees be formed with material assigned to each committee as designated below.<sup>1</sup>

<i>Executive:</i>	Items II.DD, III.E, III.Z, IV.C, IV.J.
<i>Committee I:</i>	J. Moesker (convener), G.H. Visscher, W. Oostdyk, P. VanWoudenberg
OPC	I.C, II.M, II.T, II.X, II.NN, II.TT, II.BBB, III.F, III.V, IV.E, IV.F, IV.L, IV.N, IV.Q, IV.S, IV.T.(re OPC), IV.V(re OPC), IV.Y, II.B, III.D, III.G, III.BB, II.SS, III.X
PROLIFE	II.MM
<i>Committee II:</i>	R. Aasman, W.B.Slomp (convener), W.A. Pleiter, T.M. Veenendaal
Appeals re Dismissal of Rev. Hoogsteen	III.K, III.M, III.N, III.O, III.Q, III.R
Appeal re Hofford	IV.A
Appeal Burger et al.	III.L, III.Y
Book of Praise	I.E, II.A, II.C, II.H, II.L, II.II, II.QQ, II.XX, II.YY, II.DDD, IV.B, IV.D, IV.H, IV.R, IV.T(part 3), IV.V(part 5), IV.BB
<i>Committee III:</i>	W. DenHollander (convener), P.G. Feenstra, W. Smouter, A. VanLeeuwen
Appeals re Denver	II.D, III.C, III.I
RCUS	I.D(re RCUS), II.GG, II.HH
L'ERQ	I.A, II.J, II.K, II.N, II.Q, II.R, II.V(part 2), II.Y, II.AA, II.JJ, II.LL, II.OO, II.VV, II.WW, II.ZZ, II.AAA, II.CC, IV.G, IV.T(part 1), IV.V(part 6)
FRC	II.G, II.V(part 3), IV.V(part 6)

<sup>1</sup> Numbers below are based on the designation given to the Third Provisional Agenda of General Synod.

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FCS	I.D(re FCS), III.S, III.T, III.U, III.X
PCK	I.D(re PCK), III.W, III.X
ICRC	I.D(re ICRC), II.O
CRCA	I.D, II.S, II.V(part 1), II.W, II.CC, II.FF, II.UU, IV M, IV T (part 4), IV.V(part 3), IV.W, III H
Appeal W Heights	III.A

*Committee IV:* R.J. Eikelboom, A.J. Pol (convener), L. Jagt, J. Schouten

General Fund	I.H
Archives	I.I
Inspect Archives	I.J
Audit Finances	I.K
Theological College	I.B, II.Z, II.BB, II.KK, IV.K, IV.O, IV.U, IV.V(part 1), IV.Z
Women's Voting	II.C, (II.F), II.I, II.RR, (III.B), III.P
Bible Translation	I.G, III.J, III.AA, IV.V(part 4), IV.X
URCNA &Deputies	I.F, II.P, II.V(part 1), II.EE, IV.I, IV.J, IV.P, IV.V(part 6) IV.AA
Mexico	II.PP
Appeal Vandermeulen	II.U

### Article 8

#### Time Schedule and Procedures

The Executive made the following recommendations:

a. The time schedule will be:

Monday* to Friday	9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
	2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
	7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

\*Monday sessions will begin at 9:30 a.m.

Saturdays will be optional.

Synod plans to meet on the holiday, May 18.

Upon request of the Foundation for Superannuation, Synod will not convene on Saturday, May 9, 1998.

- b. Synod shall begin and close each day with prayer and thanksgiving in plenary sessions.
- c. Press Release will not be published until after Synod has been closed.
- d. Advisory committees shall provide each delegate with a copy of their report, plus three copies for the first clerk, before it is dealt with in plenary sessions.



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- e. Copies of documents are available only to members of Synod, and fraternal delegates.
- f. For all procedures the Guidelines as adopted by the General Synod of Cloverdale 1983, Acts, Article 45 (and as amended by following Synods) will apply.
- g. The chairman confirms that those who have expenses related to travelling to Synod may submit them at any time to sr. T. Swaving. Mileage is set at twenty-five cents per kilometre.

ADOPTED

### **Article 9**

#### **Presentation to chairman**

Br. H. Bouwman of the church at Fergus presents the chairman with a gavel for his labours here and his possession later as a memento. The chairman expresses great appreciation for the labours of br. H. Bouwman and other members of the church at Fergus.

At noon, after singing from Psalm 121: 1, 4, Synod adjourns for lunch. Thereafter committees will meet until the next plenary session.

## **AFTERNOON SESSION – MAY 05, 1998**

### **Article 10**

#### **Reopening**

At 3:00 pm, the chairman, Rev. R. Aasman reopens plenary session.

### **Article 11**

#### **Late material**

It is noted that the Guidelines for Synod (published by the convening church) state that "All material for Synod should be received by the convening Church (in twenty-two) copies no later than six weeks prior to the convocation date of General Synod. Material received after this date shall ordinarily not be added to the agenda unless Synod is satisfied that the reasons given for later arrival are reasonable" (see Appendix II *Acts of Synod Abbotsford 1995*, p.103; cf. Article 110 and 111 of the same). In this instance the date six weeks prior to convocation date was March 24, 1998.

With this rule in mind, Synod considers whether to add the following material to the agenda.

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1. CCOPC, recommending that Synod appoint a representative to the next meeting of General Assembly of the OPC. Received March 30, 1998. Declared admissible.
2. Abbotsford re OPC, CRCA and ERQ. Received April 1. Declared inadmissible.
3. Langley re women's voting. Received March 28. Declared inadmissible.
4. Smithers, re ERQ, Governors, OPC, CRCA, Bible Translations. Received March 28. Declared inadmissible.
5. Chilliwack: re ERQ. Received March 31. Declared inadmissible.
6. Owen Sound, re ERQ. Received March 25. Declared inadmissible.
7. Owen Sound, re Standing Committee for Book of Praise. Received March 25. Declared admissible.
8. Houston, re first rule for ecclesiastical fellowship. Received March 28. Declared inadmissible.
9. London, re Standing Committee for Book of Praise. Received March 31. Declared inadmissible.
10. Ebenezer Burlington, report of the CRCA. Received April 2. Declared inadmissible.
11. Grace Winnipeg, re URCNA. Received April 6. Declared inadmissible.
12. Brampton, re OPC, ERQ, CRCA. Received April 6. Declared inadmissible.
13. Smithville, re Pastoral Proficiency Program, and ERQ. Received April 6. Declared inadmissible.
14. Brampton, re CRCA and Pastoral Proficiency Program. Received April 7. Declared inadmissible.
15. Smithville, re CCOPC. Received April 10. Declared inadmissible.
16. Hamilton, re ERQ and the Pastoral Proficiency Program. Received April 3. Declared inadmissible.
17. Grand Valley, re CRCA. Received April 14. Declared inadmissible.
18. Financial Statements for Theological College, replacement copies of previous report with some corrections. Declared admissible.
19. Denver, re CCOPC. Received April 15. Declared inadmissible.
20. Aldergrove re Surrey's proposal. Received April 16. Declared inadmissible.



*Acts of General Synod*

21. Willoughby Heights re Standing Committee for Book of Praise. Received April 16. Declared admissible.
22. Ebenezer Burlington, report as Address Church. Received April 18. Declared admissible.
23. Watford, re CRCA. Received April 18. Declared inadmissible.
24. Br. Bill VanderVeen of Carman, re Nicene Creed. Received April 28. Declared inadmissible.
25. Redeemer Winnipeg, re endorsement of Grace Winnipeg. Received April 28. Declared inadmissible.
26. Rockway, re CRCA. Received April 28. Declared inadmissible.
27. Standing Committee for Book of Praise, reacting to comments received on Nicene Creed. Received May 1. Declared admissible.
28. T. Kingma, edited copies of his earlier submissions. Received May 4. Declared inadmissible.
29. Burlington-Waterdown, re Inspection of the Archives. Received May 5. Declared admissible.
30. CRCA re appointments and retirements. Declared admissible.
31. Rockway, re the meeting on Saturday May 9 1998 where Dr. J. Faber and Dr. P.Y. DeJong will speak. Received for information.

The items declared admissible above will be added to the agenda of Synod (see Article 18 below. These items are designated as L plus the number given above).

Synod adjourns for supper.

**EVENING SESSION – TUESDAY, MAY 05, 1998**

**Article 12**

**Reopening**

Synod meets in plenary session.

**Article 13**

**Rockway's Request re Procedure ad Article 32, C.O.**

The Executive presents:

I. MATERIAL

Agenda Material II-DD

*Acts of General Synod*

II. OBSERVATIONS:

- A. With a view to their concerns about the appeals relating to their church and the Rev. T. Hoogsteen, the church at Rockway asks:

In the event that a delegate to General Synod has participated as a delegate to a minor assembly in a decision of that assembly pertaining specifically to a person, such a delegate shall not:

- a. serve on the advisory committee appointed with respect to such matter; and
- b. vote;

in the disposition of an appeal of that decision by that person to General Synod.

III. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. Rockway's interpretation of article 32 is contrary to the intent of this article. Article 32 pertains to matters in which a delegate would judge in his own case (personal or local church).
- B. Whether delegates abstain from voting on matters which they needed to make a decision about before depends upon their own personal discretion and judgement.
- C. Synod has already taken into consideration the concerns of Rockway in that it has given the matters pertaining to Rockway and Rev. Hoogsteen to a committee composed entirely of delegates from the west. This is also a standing practice of general synods.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

That Synod not accede to Rockway's request.

ADOPTED

**Article 14**

**Late Information re VanAndel Appeal**

A letter is received from C. & A. VanAndel indicating support of other brothers and sisters re their appeal. Declared inadmissible.

**Article 15**

**Adjournment**

Rev. A.J. Pol requests that H. 47: 1, 2, 3 be sung whereafter he leads in prayer.

**MORNING SESSION – WEDNESDAY, MAY 06, 1998**

**Article 16**

**Opening**

Rev. R. Aasman asks that Ps. 71: 1, 2 be sung, reads 1 John 1, and leads in prayer. Roll call shows that all are present.

**Article 17**

**Adoption of the Acts**

The Acts, Articles 1 – 15 are adopted.

**Article 18**

**Adoption of the Agenda**

The following is adopted regarding the remainder of the agenda:

8. Incoming Mail<sup>2</sup>

I. SYNOD PROCEDURES

- I. H. Church for Administration of the General Fund
- I. J. Church for the Inspection of the Archives of General Synod (see L.29)
- I. K. Church to Audit the Finances of General Synod 1995
- II. DD. Church at Rockway, ON re proposed amendment to the Guidelines
- III. E. Church at Burlington (Ebenezer), appeals Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 117)
- III. Z. Church at Guelph, ON, re Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 117)
- IV. C. Church at Smithers, BC.
- IV. J. Church at Ancaster, ON re inviting URCNA representatives
- L.22. Burlington (Ebenezer), report as Address Church

II. RELATIONS WITH OTHER CHURCHES

A. ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

- I. C. Report of Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church
- L. 1. CCOPC, re representative to next General Assembly
- II. M. Church at Yarrow, BC

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<sup>2</sup> Numbers in Article 18 are based on the designation given to the Third Provisional Agenda of General Synod.

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- II. T. Church at London, ON
- II. X. Church at Attercliffe, ON
- II. NN. Church at Calgary, AB
- II. TT. Church at Lincoln, ON
- II. BBB. Church at Elora, ON
- III. F. Br. W. DeHaan of Watford, ON
- III. V. Church at Grand Rapids, MI
- IV. E. Church at Willoughby Heights, BC
- IV. F. Burlington (Ebenezer), ON
- IV. L. Church at Surrey, BC
- IV. N. Burlington (Fellowship), ON
- IV. Q. Church at Guelph, ON
- IV. S. Church at Blue Bell, PA
- IV. T. Church at Orangeville, ON
- IV. V. Church at Taber, AB
- IV. Y. Church at Elora, ON

1. Appeals re OPC

- II. B. Church at Watford ON, appeals decision of Synod Abbotsford 1995
- III. D. Church at Attercliffe appeals Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 106)
- III. G. Church at London, ON appeals Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 106)
- III. BB. Br. T. Kingma, Lynden, WA appeals Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 101 & 106)
- II. SS. Church at Grand Rapids, MI appeals Synod Abbotsford 1995
- III. X. Church at Blue Bell, PA appeals Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 101, 106), Synod Lincoln 1992 (Art. 72, 11, 128), Synod Coaldale 1977 (Art. 91).

2. Appeals re Denver

- II. D. Church at Taber AB appeals Acts Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 115)
- III. C. Church at Barrhead appeals Acts Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 115)
- III. I. Church at Coaldale, AB appeals Acts Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 115)

3. Appeals re Rev. Hofford

- IV. A. Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic, OPC re statements of Rev. Hofford.

B. REFORMED CHURCH OF THE U.S.

- I. D. Report of Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad
- II. GG. Church at Yarrow, BC

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- II. HH. Church at Fergus, ON
- C. EGLISE REFORMEE DU QUEBEC
  - I. A. Report of Committee for Contact with the E.R.Q.
  - II. J. Church at Watford
  - II. K. Church at Chatham
  - II. N. Church at Yarrow, BC
  - II. Q. Church at Willoughby Heights, BC
  - II. V. Church at Surrey, BC
  - II. Y. Church at Attercliffe, ON
  - II. AA. Church at Lincoln, ON
  - II. JJ. Church at Fergus, ON
  - II. LL. Burlington (Fellowship), ON
  - II. OO. Church at Calgary, AB
  - II. VV. Church at Guelph, ON
  - II. WW. Church at Houston, BC
  - II. ZZ. Church at Grand Valley, ON
  - II. AAA. Church at Neerlandia, AB
  - II. CCC. Church at Elora, ON
  - IV. G. Burlington (Ebenezer), ON
  - IV. T. Church at Orangeville, ON
- D. FREE REFORMED CHURCHES
  - II. G. Regional Synod West re formation of committee for contact with the Free Reformed Churches of North America
  - II. V. Church at Surrey, BC
- E. UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES & DEPUTIES FOR ECCLESIASTICAL UNITY
  - I. F. Report of Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity
  - II. P. Church at Hamilton
  - II. V. Church at Surrey, BC
  - II. EE. Church at Rockway, ON
  - IV. I. Burlington (Ebenezer), ON
  - IV. J. Church at Ancaster, ON
  - IV. P. Burlington (Fellowship), ON
  - IV. AA. Church at London, ON
- F. FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND
  - I. D. Report of Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad
  - III. S. Grand Rapids, MI appeals Synod Abbotsford 95 re FCS
  - III. T. Grand Rapids, MI appeals re the FCS and Rule 5 for ecclesiastical fellowship
  - III. U. Grand Rapids, MI
  - III. X. Church at Blue Bell, PA appeals Acts Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 101, 106), and Acts Lincoln 1992 (Art. 128)

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- G. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF KOREA
  - I. D. Report of Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad
  - III. W. Church at Grand Rapids, MI appeal re Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK)
  - III. X. Church at Blue Bell, PA appeals Acts Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 101, 106) and against Acts Lincoln 1992 (Art. 111)
- H. INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF REFORMED CHURCHES
  - I. D. Report of Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad
  - II. O. Church at Yarrow, BC
- I. COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD & OTHER INTERCHURCH MATTERS
  - I. D. Report of Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad
  - L.30 CRCA re appointments and retirements
  - II. S Church at London, ON
  - II. W. Church at Aldergrove, BC
  - II. CC Church at Willoughby Heights, BC
  - II. FF. Church at Yarrow, BC
  - II. PP. Toronto, ON re establishing relations with the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico
  - II. UU. Church at Guelph, ON re GKN
  - III. H. Church at London, ON appeals Synod Abbotsford Art. 101
  - III. BB Br. T. Kingma, Lynden, WA re Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 101 & 106)
  - IV. M. Fergus, ON
  - IV. T. Orangeville, ON
  - IV. V. Church at Taber, AB
  - IV. W. Church at Elora, ON
- III. BOOK OF PRAISE
  - I. E. Report of Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*
  - L.27 Standing Committee for BoP, re Nicene Creed
  - II. A. Watford ON
  - II. C. Burlington (Ebenezer) ON
  - II. H. Church at Cloverdale, BC
  - II. L. Church at Langley, BC
  - II. II. Church at Fergus, ON
  - II. QQ. Burlington (Fellowship), ON
  - II. XX. Church at Barrhead, AB
  - II. YY. Church at Grand Valley, ON
  - II. DDD. Church at Elora, ON
  - IV. B. Church at London, ON
  - IV. D. Church at Carman, MB
  - IV. H. Burlington (Ebenezer), ON
  - IV. R. Church at Guelph, ON



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- IV. T. Church at Orangeville, ON
- IV. V. Church at Taber, AB
- IV. BB. Br. J.D. Gansekoete, Fergus, ON
- L.7 Owen Sound, ON
- L.21. Willoughby Heights, BC
- IV. THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE
  - I. B. Report of Board of Governors Theological College
    - 1. Board of Governors Report
    - 2. Financial Report
    - 3. Certificate of Pastoral Proficiency Program
    - 4. Proposal for expansion of the College facilities.
  - L.18. Financial Statements for Theological College
  - II. Z. Church at Burlington (Ebenezer), ON
  - II. BB. Church at Willoughby Heights, BC
  - II. KK. Church at Burlington (Fellowship), ON
  - IV. K. Church at Watford, ON
  - IV. O. Church at Burlington (Fellowship), ON
  - IV. T. Church at Orangeville, ON
  - IV. U. Church at Lincoln, ON
  - IV. V. Church at Taber, AB
  - IV. Z. Church at Elora, ON
- V. WOMEN'S VOTING
  - II. C. Church at Burlington (Ebenezer), ON
  - II. F. Church at Burlington (Fellowship), ON.
  - II. I. Church at Aldergrove, BC
  - II. RR. Church at Burlington (Fellowship), ON
  - III. P. Church at Burlington (Fellowship), ON appeals Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art.51)
- VI. BIBLE TRANSLATIONS
  - I. G. Report of Committee on Bible Translations
  - III. J. Church at London, ON appeals Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art 72)
  - III. AA. Church at Elora, ON appeals Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art.72)
  - IV. V. Church at Taber, AB
  - IV. X. Church at Elora, ON
- VII. OTHER APPEALS
  - 1. Appeals re Dismissal of Rev. Hoogsteen
    - III. K. Br. M. Werkman, St. Mary's, ON appeals Regional Synod East of Nov. 15, 16, 1995 (Art. 19)
    - III. M. Rev. Hoogsteen, appeals decisions of Regional Synods
    - III. N. Rev. Hoogsteen and Br. C. VanAndel, appeals Regional Synod East 1997

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- III. O. Br. & Sr. C. VanAndel, appeals Regional Synod East 1995
  - III. Q. Br. H. Ouwersloot of Vineland, ON appeals Regional Synod East 1996
  - III. R. Br. H. Ouwersloot of Vineland, ON appeals decision of the Council of Rockway
2. Grand Rapids – Burger et al.
- III. L. Mrs. A. Burger, Mrs. I. Kruyswijk, Miss A. Sikkema, Mrs. W. Sikkema of Grand Rapids, MI re Regional Synod East 1995
  - III. Y. Br. G. Kruyswijk, Kentwood, MI appeals decisions of Synod 1992 and Synod 1995
3. Miscellaneous
- II. U. Br. P. VanderMeulen, Langley, BC re admittance to Lord's Supper
  - III. A. Church at Willoughby Heights, BC, appeals Regional Synod West of Dec. 5, 1995 (Art. 5B)
  - II. MM. Church at Toronto, ON re Pro Life Policy of the Can. Ref. Churches
9. Appointments
10. Censure ad Art. 44 C.O.
11. Publication of the Acts
12. Financial Matters
13. Preparation next General Synod
14. Adoption of the Acts
15. Approval of Press Release
16. Closing.

### **Article 19**

#### **Adjournment**

Synod adjourns for committee work.

### **Article 20**

At the end of the day, Synod meets for closing devotions. Psalm 34:1,2 is sung and br. J. Schouten leads in prayer.



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**MORNING SESSION – THURSDAY, MAY 07, 1998**

**Article 21**

**Opening**

Rev. R. Aasman asks that Ps. 72:1,10 be sung, reads 1 John 2: 1 - 17, and leads in prayer. Roll call shows that all are present.

**Article 22**

**Adoption of Acts**

Articles 16 - 20 of the Acts, pertaining to May 06, 1998 are adopted.

**Article 23**

**Internet Re Appeals**

It is proposed by the executive that the first clerk be instructed to keep from the publication of the Acts on the Internet, either at the discretion of the executive or by instruction of Synod, sensitive matters such as appeals by persons. The reason for this is to prevent such situations where an appellant who has made an appeal on a sensitive issue would have people discussing the response to his appeal without he himself knowing the result of his appeal.

ADOPTED

**EVENING SESSION – THURSDAY, MAY 07, 1998**

**Article 24**

**Adjournment**

After having spent the day in committee work, Synod meets for closing devotions. Hymn 42: 1, 2, 8 is sung and Rev. W. B. Slomp leads in prayer.

**MORNING SESSION – FRIDAY, MAY 08, 1998**

**Article 25**

**Opening**

The chairman asks that Ps. 73: 1, 8 be sung, reads 1 John 2:18 - 29 and leads in prayer. Congratulations are conveyed to br. J. Schouten with his wedding anniversary; mention is made of the wedding in the W.den Hollander family today. Roll call shows that all are present.

**Article 26**

**Adoption of Acts**

Articles 21 - 24 of the Acts, pertaining to May 07, 1998 are adopted.

**Article 27**

**Closed Session**

Synod continues in closed session.

**Article 28**

**Appeal of br. M. Werkman**

In closed session, Committee II presents a proposal regarding br. M. Werkman's appeal. After discussion, Committee II decides to take it back for the further consideration.

**Article 29**

**Appeal of br. H. Ouwersloot**

Committee II presents re the first appeal of br. Ouwersloot.

I. MATERIAL

Appeal III.Q., Br. H. Ouwersloot, Rockway, Ontario.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod declares this appeal admissible.

III. OBSERVATIONS

- A. Br. H. Ouwersloot appeals the decision of Regional Synod East Nov. 13, 1996, Acts Art.13, and states: "From their answer it is evident that they missed my concern. 'Regional Synod East 96 decides #1... point #2. Br. Ouwersloot does not advance compelling grounds to invalidate the decision to dismiss Rev.

Hoogsteen.' Brothers I did not ask in this appeal that this decision be invalidated. My appeal was to the action of Classis appointing a committee, and the false witness that resulted from the committee's work."

B. Regional Synod noted the following, in its decision regarding br. H. Ouwersloot's appeal:

1. Classis was faced with a request from the Council of the Church in Rockway for approbation of a decision to dismiss Rev. Hoogsteen according to Article 11 C.O.
2. Such a decision by Classis is not to be taken lightly.
3. A proposal to simply proceed with dismissal according to Article 11 C.O. on the basis of the information of the Council was defeated (cf. Art. 23 of the Acts of Classis Ontario-South of August 23,24/Oct. 11, 1995).
4. In order to do full justice to the matter (including the principle of hearing all parties), Classis decided to appoint "an advisory committee with the mandate to talk to the council, the minister and the congregation." There are good Biblical grounds for such an investigation by Classis concerning the complaints brought forward. See Proverbs 18:17.
5. Classis defined the mandate of the advisory committee as follows: "in order to facilitate a responsible decision regarding Rockway's request."
6. With a view to facilitating a *responsible* decision, it was within the mandate of this committee, after having heard all parties, to give advisory or corrective remarks concerning the complaints as formulated by Council.
7. A committee report is not binding. Both the Council and Classis are free to accept or reject what is brought forward.
8. The decision of Classis took the request of the Council of the Church in Rockway and the report of its committee into consideration. The final decision of Classis does not necessarily imply agreement with every element in either the "package" from the Council or the committee report. Therefore criticism of certain elements of the "package" from the Council or of the committee report does not necessarily imply that the final decision of Classis is invalid.

IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. It is evident to General Synod from the decision of Regional Synod, that it clearly dealt with br. Ouwersloot's objection to Classis appointing a committee.

V. RECOMMENDATION

Synod does not accede to the appeal of br. H. Ouwersloot.

ADOPTED

It is noted that Rev. W. den Hollander abstains from voting.

**Article 30**

**Second Appeal of br. H. Ouwersloot**

Committee II presents the following re the second appeal of br. H. Ouwersloot.

I. MATERIAL

Appeal III.R., br. H. Ouwersloot, Rockway, Ontario.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod declares this appeal admissible.

III. OBSERVATIONS

- A. Br. H. Ouwersloot states that his appeal to Regional Synod East Nov. 12, 1996, Acts Art.13, "was not properly dealt with." He states further, "If the lording it over Rev. Hoogsteen as explained in my appeals was indeed as Reg. Synod implies in their reply, (under consideration point #1) admonition & further discipline, there would have (should have) been thankfulness & rejoicing when Rev. Hoogsteen accepted council's request to a "T"... Brothers: these office bearers Lorded it over Rev. Hoogsteen, as I spelled out in my appeals attached, and are unwilling, after admonition to repent."
- B. Regional Synod quotes from the decision from Classis Ontario South of November 6, 1996 which denied the appeal of br. H. Ouwersloot "taking certain measures to help correct a problem is not to be seen as a 'Lording it' over the minister but a serving of the minister and the congregation."
- C. Regional Synod considered that
  1. Worldly compulsion (e.g. the threat of imprisonment or torture) is to be avoided by the church. Admonitions and further discipline can and must on occasion be used for the benefit of the Church and those ministering within in the Church. The appellant does not demonstrate that "taking certain measures" (which certainly included the measure of discipline) as outlined in the correspondence between him and the Classis is indeed the kind of "compulsion" that Reformed Church Polity rejects. See art. 27 C.O., art. 32 BC.

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2. The appellant fails to take into account that a Consistory, after receiving suitable advice, and a minister's promise of cooperation, can oblige him to follow a certain procedure designed to improve his ministry for the edification of the Church.
3. A minister's refusal to heed the "good counsel and advice of the elders" can lead to him lording it over the Consistory, negating the elder's duty to supervise the minister's doctrine and conduct (see art. 22 C.O.).

### IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. Regional Synod dealt properly with the appeal with br. H Ouwersloot, demonstrating how the Consistory of Rockway had not lorded it over Rev. Hoogsteen. A consistory must take the necessary measures to ensure that the ministry is maintained for the edification of the congregation, and in this way the elders fulfill their task as outlined in Art. 22 C.O.
- B. As to br. H Ouwersloot's claim that Rev. Hoogsteen accepted council's advice to a 'T', he gives no proof or documentation to substantiate this.
- C. Br. H. Ouwersloot brings no grounds to show how he was wronged by the decision of Regional Synod.

### V. RECOMMENDATION

Synod does not accede to the appeal of br. H. Ouwersloot.

ADOPTED

It is noted that Rev. W. den Hollander abstains from voting.

## **Article 31**

### **Adjournment**

Rev. W. den Hollander requests permission to be absent for the remainder of the day for the wedding of his son; this is granted. Synod adjourns the meeting in order to do committee work.

## **EVENING SESSION – FRIDAY, MAY 08, 1998**

## **Article 32**

### **Reopening**

The chairman asks that H. 40:1, 2 be sung. Roll call shows that Rev. W. den Hollander is absent with notice. The chairman welcomes Rev. C.

Bouwman, the fraternal delegate of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and gives him the privilege of the floor.

### **Article 33**

#### **Address of Rev. C. Bouwman**

Rev. C. Bouwman then addresses Synod with the words that can be found in Appendix 1. Rev. J. Moesker is then given the opportunity to respond to the address of Rev. C. Bouwman. These words too can be found in Appendix 1. It is striking that this evening in Fergus these two brothers, both with family roots in Fergus, today represent church federations on two continents many miles apart but united in faith and heart.

### **Article 34**

#### **Contact with Churches Abroad: Australia and South Africa**

Committee III presents:

Agenda item: I.D.

#### **I. MATERIAL**

- A. Report of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad regarding the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) and the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA).**

#### **II. INTRODUCTION**

The Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad received from Synod 1995 the following mandate.

#### **A. General**

- 1. To continue Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FRCA and the FRCSA in accordance with the adopted rules.
- 2. To charge the CRCA to send an invitation to the sister churches abroad to attend the next General Synod as soon as its date has been established and published by the convening church and to have our churches represented by a delegate to General Synods of such churches abroad if invited and when feasible.

#### **B. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia**

- 1. To request the CRCA to convey our appreciation for the support given by the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to our Theological College.



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2. To mandate the CRCA to solicit a response to our reservations about the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship adopted by the Free Reformed Churches.

### OBSERVATIONS

#### C. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

##### The CRCA notes

1. The FRCA decided to terminate their membership in the ICRC. The main reason for this action was "the membership of the FRCA in the ICRC has not promoted harmony and unity in the churches."
2. The FRCA gave an explanation of the words "give account" in one of their Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, which reads "the churches shall give account to each other concerning the establishing of relations with third parties," as questioned by Synod Lincoln 1992. They responded by stating that "in their opinion this wording provides details and grounds for the impending relationship that was to be entered into by our sister churches, and would then enable rule 1,2,3 to be practised should that be deemed necessary by the informed church." They also added that this rule was never intended to "lord it over" any sister church.
3. With respect to interchurch relationships Synod Kelmescott decided
  - a. To continue sister relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, the Presbyterian Church of Korea, and the Reformed Churches of Indonesia (Sumba, Savu, and Timor)
  - b. To continue contacts with other Reformed churches in Indonesia
  - c. To strive for sister relations with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.
4. It was decided to continue to "recommend" the use of NKJV in the churches and to "recognize" the NIV as a faithful and reliable translation which may be used by the churches which prefer this translation of the Bible.
5. Synod Kelmescott decided to continue their support for the Canadian Reformed Theological College.
6. Synod Kelmescott decided to change the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons so that the charge to the

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deacons now reads, "Encourage the congregation to do good to all men especially to those of the household of faith", and to inform the Canadian Reformed Churches of this change.

### D. The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

The CRCA notes

1. The FRCSA gave an extensive update of developments in their churches. Mention was made of several ministers and a congregation leaving the Dutch Reformed Church and requesting membership in the FRCSA.
2. Upon repeated request the CRCA decided to send Rev. J. Moesker to visit the churches of the FRCSA.
3. Synod Capetown 1996 gave much attention to the work of mission. Deputies for mission explored the idea of an office of evangelist in mission. Synod instructed them to report further on this to the next Synod.
4. Synod Capetown instructed deputies for theological training to look into initiating theological training in South Africa. Ad-Hoc Synod 1997 appointed five instructors and five curators for the work of theological training with the FRCSA. As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1998 the FRCSA has its own theological college.
5. Synod decided to continue sister church relations with the FRCA, CanRC, and RCN. They maintain brotherly contact and exploratory contact with various federations including the PCK and the ERQ. Synod instructed the deputies to urge the Australian sister churches to reconsider their withdrawal from the ICRC. Synod also instructed deputies to study the Report on Theological Affirmation made to the ICRC in 1993, and to exchange ideas with sister churches concerning the recognition of other churches as "true churches" within the same country.

### III. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. From the correspondence and the Acts of the FRCA and the FRCSA we may gratefully conclude that these churches are faithful to the Word of God, the Confessions, and the Church Order.
- B. The CRCA has fulfilled its mandate regarding our Ecclesiastical Fellowship with these churches.
- C. The FRCA are to be commended for the generous support they give to the Theological College in Hamilton.



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- D. The response of the FRCA to "our reservations about the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship" has been answered sufficiently.
- E. The FRCSA are to be commended for their endeavours in establishing a Theological College.

### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide

- A. To thank the CRCA for the work done since 1995.
- B. To continue Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FRCA and the FRCSA in accordance with the adopted rules.
- C. To request the CRCA to convey our commendations to the FRCA and the FRCSA.
- D. To charge the CRCA to send an invitation to these sister churches to attend the next General Synod as soon as its date has been established and published by the convening church and to have our churches represented by a delegate to General Synods of their churches if invited and when feasible.

ADOPTED

### **Article 35**

#### **Contact with Churches Abroad: The Netherlands**

Committee III presents Agenda items: I.D, II.S, II.W, II.CC, IV.W, II.UU, IV.M, IV.T (part 4).

After discussion this report is taken back by the committee for further consideration.

### **Article 36**

#### **Adjournment**

In closing br. W. Smouter requests that Ps. 24:1,5 be sung and leads in prayer. The chairman adjourns Synod until Monday, 9:30 a.m.

## **MORNING SESSION – MONDAY, MAY 11, 1998**

### **Article 37**

#### **Reopening**

The chairman reopens Synod, asks the brothers to sing from Psalm 75: 1, 6. He reads from 1 John 3: 1 - 10 and leads in prayer. Roll call shows that all are present. It is noted that Rev. P. G. Feenstra the day before

declined the call to Redeemer Winnipeg. The chairman also welcomes Rev. George Syms from the Reformed Church of the United States.

### **Article 38**

#### **Adoption of the Acts**

Articles 25 – 36 of the Acts, pertaining to May 08, 1998 are adopted. Synod adjourns for committee work.

## **EVENING SESSION – MONDAY, MAY 11, 1998**

### **Article 39**

#### **Reopening**

The chairman asks that Ps. 92: 1, 2 be sung. Roll call shows that all are present. Visitors are welcomed. A special welcome is extended also to br. D. S. Stelpstra of the Reformed Church of the United States. A warm welcome is extended also to Rev. J. J. Peterson of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

### **Article 40**

#### **Committee for Churches Abroad: RCN**

Committee III presents:

Agenda items: I.D, II.S, II.W, II.CC, IV.W, II.UU, IV.M, IV.T (part 4)

#### **I. MATERIAL**

- A. Report of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad regarding the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Vrijgemaakt)] (RCN).
- B. Letters from the churches at London, Aldergrove, Willoughby Heights, Guelph, Fergus, and Elora.

#### **II. INTRODUCTION**

- A. The Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad received from Synod 1995 the following mandate:
  - 1. To continue Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in accordance with the adopted rules.
  - 2. To charge the CRCA to send an invitation to the sister churches abroad to attend the next General Synod as soon as its date has been established and published by the convening church and to have our churches represented by

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a delegate to General Synods of such churches abroad if invited and when feasible.

3. To mandate the CRCA to discuss with the Dutch deputies, pursuant to our Rule Six, our questions concerning the "blessing elder" and its possible consequences regarding the distinction between the offices of elder and minister in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.
4. To mandate the CRCA to seek clarification from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands concerning the use of the word "inform" in Rule Three [of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship].

### III. OBSERVATIONS

#### A. From the Committee Report we note:

1. The CRCA asked the deputies of the RCN to respond to the matters of the "blessing elder" and about the word "inform" in Rule Three of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship but the report does not indicate whether an answer was received.
2. The RCN informed the CRCA of their decision to intensify contact with the Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil.
3. The RCN continues to be very busy in their contacts with churches abroad such as CanRC, OPC, and RCUS.
4. Synod Berkel decided to cease all official contact with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken especially in light of the toleration of deviation from the Reformed Confessions in those churches.
5. Synod Berkel upheld the decisions of Ommen 1993 regarding voting rights to women and allowing elders to give the benediction.
6. Synod Berkel approved an alternate Form for the Solemnization of Marriage which no longer makes reference to the husband's obligation to work faithfully in his daily calling so that he may support his family. The CRCA recommends that they inquire further about this change.

#### B. From the churches the following concerns are raised:

1. The churches of Willoughby Heights, London, and Fergus, observe that the CRCA did not receive a response to their inquiry concerning the matter of "the blessing elder" and on the wording "to inform" in Rule 3 of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

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2. The churches at Elora and Fergus urge General Synod to accede to the Committee's recommendation to explore the reason why the RCN has approved an alternate Form for the Solemnization of Marriage.
3. The church at Aldergrove expresses disagreement with Synod 1995 mandate to the Committee with respect to the "blessing elder". They also disagree with the CRCA's recommendation regarding the alternate Form for the Solemnization Marriage
4. The church at Willoughby Heights suggests that the Committee be instructed to use the actual name of the "Reformed Churches in the Netherlands" . They suggest to do the same when referring to churches in countries where the language is other than English.
5. The church at Fergus notes that Synod Berkel 1996 upheld the decision of Ommen 1993 giving women voting rights, notwithstanding the fact that 35 submissions were received to the contrary. Fergus requests that the deputies try to convince the Dutch churches to take back this decision since it does not reflect the overall sentiments of the churches.
6. The church at Guelph brings to Synod's attention statements made by certain ministers in the RCN which they believe to be in conflict with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions and in violation of the Form of Subscription. They refer to an article published in *Reformed Perspective* dealing with homosexuality. They question whether the commitment to the authority of Scripture and the Reformed Confessions is being upheld. They also cite a series of articles in *De Reformatie* addressing an alleged deviation from Reformed doctrine regarding Christ's suffering on the cross, the concepts of eternal death and of substitutionary atonement. They question whether the Form of Subscription is being upheld.

### IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. From the correspondence and the Acts of the RCN we may gratefully conclude that these churches are faithful to the Word of God, the Confessions, and the Church Order.
- B. The CRCA should as yet obtain an answer to their inquiry about the "blessing elder" and the word "inform" in Rule Three of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship of the RCN.
- C. The CRCA does not need to receive a specific mandate to investigate matters of concern. In Rule 1 of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship there is already the mandate " to assist

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each other in the maintenance, defense and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations”.

- D. Synod disagrees with the church at Aldergrove that the matter of the “blessing elder” and the alternate Form for the Solemnization of Marriage needs more substantial proof before it falls within the scope of Rule Six of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Rule Six speaks of information and consultation when major changes and additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or liturgy. The above issues fall within these parameters.
- E. Although Synod could agree with the church at Willoughby Heights in regards to the name of the sister churches in the Netherlands, Synod considers establishing a rule applying to all churches abroad is neither feasible nor practical.
- F. The request of the church at Fergus falls outside the mandate of the CRCA. Synod cannot judge to what extent the 35 submissions reflected the overall sentiments of the churches.
- G. Synod agrees with the concerns expressed by the church at Guelph. In view of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, the church at Guelph could have conveyed its findings directly to the CRCA.

### V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide

- A. To thank the CRCA for the work done since 1995.
- B. To continue the Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCN in accordance with the adopted rules and to be vigilant in applying these rules in regards to any concerns coming to their attention.
- C. To mandate the CRCA as yet to inquire about the matters of the “blessing elder” and the word “inform” in Rule Three of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship of the RCN.
- D. To mandate the CRCA to discuss the points raised in observations III A.6 & III. B.6.
- E. To charge the CRCA to send an invitation to RCN to attend the next General Synod as soon as its date has been established and published by the convening church and to have our churches represented by a delegate to their General Synod if invited and when feasible.

An amendment is proposed to add to the end of V.D.:

And addressed in Considerations IV. G.

DEFEATED



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An amendment is proposed to change Recommendations V. D. to

To mandate the CRCA to discuss the points raised above.

ADOPTED

An amendment is proposed to add the following recommendation between V. D. and V.E.:

To inform the churches that if there are concerns about relations with churches with whom we have ecclesiastical fellowship they should address those concerns directly to the CRCA.

An amendment is proposed to this amendment, namely to change the word "should" to "may."

ADOPTED

The proposal of Committee III as amended is put to a vote.

ADOPTED

Thus Recommendations V reads:

Synod decide:

- A. To thank the CRCA for the work done since 1995.
- B. To continue the Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCN in accordance with the adopted rules and to be vigilant in applying these rules in regards to any concerns coming to their attention.
- C. To mandate the CRCA as yet to inquire about the matters of the "blessing elder" and the word "inform" in Rule Three of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship of the RCN.
- D. To mandate the CRCA to discuss the points raised above.
- E. To inform the churches that if there are concerns about relations with churches with whom we have ecclesiastical fellowship they may address those concerns directly to the CRCA.
- F. To charge the CRCA to send an invitation to RCN to attend the next General Synod as soon as its date has been established and published by the convening church and to have our churches represented by a delegate to their General Synod if invited and when feasible.

**Article 41**

**Committee for Churches Abroad: ICRC**

Committee III presents matters pertaining to the ICRC. After discussion the Committee takes the matter back for further consideration.

**Article 42**

**Closing**

Br. A. Van Leeuwen asks that Ps. 116: 1, 7, 10 be sung, and leads in prayer. Synod adjourns until the next morning.

**MORNING SESSION – TUESDAY, MAY 12, 1998**

**Article 43**

**Reopening**

The chairman calls the meeting to order, requests that Ps. 76: 1, 5 be sung, reads from 1 John 3: 11-24 and leads in prayer. Roll call shows that all are present.

**Article 44**

**Adoption of the Acts**

Articles 37 – 42 of the Acts, pertaining to May 11, 1998 are adopted.

**Article 45**

**Committee for Churches Abroad: ICRC (continued)**

It becomes apparent that some new proposals have been drafted by members regarding the ICRC.

The following motion is made:

To distribute the submission by Rev. Pol and br. Pleiter to all the delegates and that this matter be tabled until the matter of RCUS has been dealt with.

DEFEATED

**Article 46**

**Appeal of br. M. Werkman**

Synod meets in closed session.

Committee II presents the following.

I. MATERIAL

Appeal III.K., br. M. Werkman, St. Mary's, Ontario.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod decides to declare this appeal admissible.

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### III. OBSERVATIONS

- A. Br. M. Werkman appeals the decision of Regional Synod East of Nov. 15-16, 1995, Acts, Art. 19, and requests General Synod to declare:
1. Regional Synod East should have declared that Classis (Acts, Art.38) did not deal adequately with my appeal, and did not answer my request.
  2. Regional Synod should not have placed one-sided blame on the minister since according to the Committee Report the Council of Rockway also made serious errors, did not live up what was agreed upon but violated their own decision to abide by the advice of Church Visitors (Committee Report, p.7, Example # 1).
  3. Regional Synod should have declared that the Council should have accepted the minister's offer of co-operation on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1995, according to their own decision to accept the advice of the Church Visitors. It was their duty to assist the minister with good counsel and advice (Article 22 of our Church Order and Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons, p. 630 BoP).
  4. Regional Synod should have declared that Classis should not have approbated the decision of the Council of Rockway to dismiss the minister but should have accepted Recommendation # 2 on p.10 of the Committee Report.

### IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. Br. Werkman appealed to Regional Synod that 'Classis does not go into any substance of my appeal, neither refutes any of my arguments, does not seem to have paid any attention to the material presented, and completely ignores my request', to which Regional Synod responded 'Classis did send the appellants its decision and the report of the Adhoc Committee.' (Considerations, 3.a) What Regional Synod is saying, thereby, is that the Classis decision and the report of the Adhoc Committee covers the substance of br. Werkman's appeal. An examination of the these documents does show that br. Werkman's concerns are addressed, namely, the matter of Rev. Hoogsteen's willingness to cooperate, (Adhoc Com. B.3., pt 4 of Classis Decision), the need for congregational involvement (Adhoc Com. A.4.), the matter of preaching and the alleged lack of cooperation (Adhoc Com. B.2., B.3, pt.1,3 of Classis Decision), the need for withdrawal of dismissal, (Adhoc Com. Rec.C.1., Conclusion of Classis Decision).

It is true that Classis did not make the specific declarations as requested by br. Werkman. However, being convinced that the



substance of br. Werkman's appeal was dealt with by Classis, Regional Synod did not agree with br. Werkman and therefore refused to agree that those declarations should have been made.

- B. With respect to his second request to General Synod, br. Werkman explains "Regional Synod claims that '*...all the problems...stem from the preaching.*' This is contrary to what Council told the congregation and contrary to the committee's Report and places one-sided blame on the minister, while the Committee reported to Classis: '*In its investigation, the Committee recognized mistakes and heard regrettable statements from the consistory, the minister, and the congregation.*'

How can Regional Synod claim that all the problems stem from the preaching? Reg. Synod has placed one-sided blame on the minister!"

When Regional Synod says that "all of the problems in the matter concerning Rev. Hoogsteen stem from the preaching" it is not denying that mistakes and regrettable statements were made by the consistory, the minister, and the congregation. But as Regional Synod states shortly afterwards "But it does become apparent that this (i.e. the preaching) is at the bottom of all the grievances..." and Regional Synod continues:

This problem is compounded by the unwillingness of Rev. Hoogsteen to follow up the suggestions of his Council in a consistent and wholehearted manner. These two factors are brought forward in the letter of the consistory to the congregation, handed out on July 23, 1995 (see Appendix J of the submission of the Council of Rockway to Classis) and are also evident in the Committee Report on Rockway's decision to dismiss Rev. Hoogsteen, page 8, Paragraph B.2. Therefore as Rockway also says on page 2 of its letter to the Regional Synod, dated 7 November 1995, there is not a discrepancy between the position of Rockway and the decision of Classis ("But the entire package to classis was our grounds, not just the concluding remarks.")

The assessment of the Deputies fails to take into account the fact that the two elements of the lack of understandability of his sermons and his lack of full co-operations are interrelated. (Considerations, 1.1.)

The bottom line is that even though mistakes may have been made by different parties, there is no denying that the main problem is Rev. Hoogsteen's preaching and that is where the problem lies.

- C. In his third request br. Werkman states that "Regional Synod should have declared that the Council should have accepted the minister's offer of co-operation on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1995, according to their own decision to accept the advice of the Church Visitors." Regional Synod provided the following outline, concerning the events that lead up to and included the dismissal of Rev. Hoogsteen and his reaction to it:

The escalation of the problem... took place because of Rev. Hoogsteen's ongoing failure to acknowledge that he had a problem to deal with concerning his preaching. For this reason the church visitors were asked for advice on January 26, 1995. After initially agreeing to this advice, Rev. Hoogsteen reversed his position and refused to cooperate along the lines of the advice given by the church visitors. This was expressed in his letter to the consistory, dated May 9, 1995, (see Appendix G. of Rockway's submission to Classis) written after the Senate of the Theological College had informed consistory that it would assist consistory 'by examining the sermons of Rev. Hoogsteen,' 'pointing out where, in their view, the sermon could be improved' (see letter from the Theological College, dated April 27, 1995 – Appendix F of Rockway's submission to Classis). He maintained his refusal to cooperate fully until July 5, 1995, (see page 16 of Rockway's submission to Classis). After the Council decided unanimously on July 6, 1995, to follow the advice of church visitors regarding Article 11, Rev. Hoogsteen finally promised to send manuscripts of his sermons to the Theological College. It is very strange that he presented this letter requesting the Council to 'remove the proposal regarding Art. 11' (see appendix I of the submission of Rockway to Classis) after the decision of Council, whereas if he had made his promise to send sermons manuscripts to the Theological College at the outset of the discussion that evening, the proposal Article 11 would not have needed further discussion at the point.

Even then he still failed to acknowledge the full extent of the problem. (See page 16 of the Council's submission to Classis, dated 8 August, 1995, and page 4, paragraph 3.c, of the letter of the Council to the Regional Synod, dated November 7, 1995.) (Considerations, 1.3.c.)

Considering the sequence of events leading up to the dismissal, especially Rev. Hoogsteen's unwillingness to co-operate, and then his sudden promise to co-operate that same evening after the decision to dismissal had been made, it is understandable that Council questioned Rev. Hoogsteen's sincerity. Therefore

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Regional Synod had good reason not to declare that Council accept the minister's offer of cooperation on July 6, 1995.

- D. Based on the above considerations, and Regional Synod's conclusion that "It is at this point no longer realistic to assume that Rev. Hoogsteen is able to feed this congregation fruitfully (Considerations, 1.5)", General Synod can not declare that Regional Synod and Classis should not have approbated the decision of the Council of Rockway to dismiss the minister.

V. RECOMMENDATION

Having considered the appeal of br. Werkman, General Synod judges that:

- A. Regional Synod was correct in directing br. Werkman to the decision of Classis and the Report of the Adhoc Committee which dealt adequately with the substance of br. Werkman's appeal.
- B. Regional Synod did not place one-sided blame on the minister. Instead Regional Synod correctly asserted that Rev. Hoogsteen's preaching was at the bottom of all the grievances.
- C. The council of Rockway was right in not accepting Rev. Hoogsteen's offer of co-operation immediately after the decision of dismissal had been made.
- D. Regional Synod was correct when it approbated the decision of the Council of Rockway to dismiss Rev. Hoogsteen according to Article 11 C.O.

General Synod does not accede to the appeal of br. Werkman.

A motion is made to delete the following lines from IV A.:

It is true that Classis did not make the specific declarations as requested by br. Werkman. However, being convinced that the substance of br. Werkman's appeal was dealt with by Classis, Regional Synod did not agree with br. Werkman and therefore refused to agree that those declarations should have been made.

DEFEATED

The proposal of Committee II is put to a vote.

ADOPTED

It is noted that Rev. W. den Hollander abstains from voting.

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**Article 47**

**Appeal of br. and sr. Van Andel**

Synod continues in closed session. Committee II presents the material re this appeal. After discussion the material is taken back by the committee for further consideration.

**Article 48**

**Adjournment**

Synod adjourns until the evening in order to do committee work.

**EVENING SESSION – TUESDAY, MAY 12, 1998**

**Article 49**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Hymn 10: 1, 9, 10 be sung. Roll call shows that all are present. A special welcome is extended to Revs. Paulin Bedard and Jean Guy de Blois from the Eglise Reformee du Quebec. The floor is given to Rev. George Syms of the RCUS.

**Article 50**

**Address of Rev. G. Syms**

Rev. G. Syms, also on behalf of br. David Stelpstra, expresses his gratitude for the possibility of being here this evening. He addresses Synod with the words found in Appendix 1. Thereafter br. T. M. Veenendaal speaks some appropriate words (as also found in Appendix 1).

**Article 51**

**Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad: RCUS**

Committee III presents: Agenda items: I.D, II S, IV W, II GG, II HH.

I. MATERIAL

- A. Report of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad regarding the RCUS.
- B. Letters from the churches of Yarrow, Fergus, London, and Elora.

II. INTRODUCTION

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- A. The Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad received from Synod 1995 the following mandate regarding the RCUS:
1. To continue the mandate regarding the Reformed Churches in the United States: "to investigate the RCUS with a view to entering into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, making use of the findings of the church at Carman."
  2. To report on this to the churches at least six months prior to the next General Synod, and to the next General Synod.

### III. OBSERVATIONS

- A. From the Committee Report
1. The 251<sup>st</sup> Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States decided to invite the Canadian Reformed Churches to enter into a fraternal relationship (sister-church relationship) of ecclesiastical fellowship.
  2. The Committee has used the work done by the church at Carman.
  3. The CRCA has studied the history, background, doctrinal standards and their maintenance, church government and practices of the RCUS.
  4. The RCUS now has the Three Forms of Unity as their confessional standards.
  5. The CRCA is of the opinion that the RCUS maintains the marks of the true church.
  6. The sermons which were heard reflected the preaching of the gospel of grace. By means of the Three Forms of Unity the preaching is safeguarded further.
  7. With regard to the pure administration of the sacraments the Committee states, "As we share the same confessions, we can conclude that the sacraments are understood scripturally". The Committee adds a section of the RCUS Constitution to show how they work out the confession concerning the sacraments.
  8. With respect to the proper administration of discipline the Report includes a sampling of some of the articles of the RCUS Constitution dealing with the application of discipline. It also makes mention of the practice of erasure.
  9. In light of its investigation and contacts which show the RCUS to meet the marks of the true church, the Committee recommends that the Canadian Reformed Churches enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Churches in the United States under the adopted rules.



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- B. The churches express the following concerns:
1. The church at London considers the recommendation of the CRCA to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCUS to be premature for the following reasons:
    - a. The fact that we have the same confessions does not mean we have the same understanding of the administration of the sacraments.
    - b. The criteria for admission to the Lord's Table seem to present a double standard with respect to what they demand of their own members compared to what they expect from visitors coming from other denominations. The issue of the supervision of the Lord's Table is still an outstanding impediment for Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC and therefore should also be considered an impediment to establishing Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCUS.
    - c. The underlying problem is the RCUS' understanding of the doctrine of the church. They have a pluriformist view of the church. This was " the major concern in the findings of the church at Carman." The CRCA did not deal with this underlying concern.
    - d. Sunday observance in the RCUS is cause for grave concern due to the fact that generally in the RCUS there is only one worship service per Sunday, "it was acknowledged that some (members) work due to economic pressure...it is not uncommon for people to go out for dinner on Sunday." This is not a minor difference in ecclesiastical practice but a principal one.
    - e. The RCUS is a member of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC ), and is "considering working towards some sort of closer relationship with all NAPARC churches," (Report CRCA) which would include the Christian Reformed Church at that time.
  2. The church at Elora in a similar fashion raises concern about Sunday observance, the fencing of the Lord's Table and is convinced that these points are not to be considered as minor points of Church Order and ecclesiastical practice. They recommend to instruct the Committee to continue the mandate with a view to these concerns, and that it is premature to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship at this time.
  3. The church at Fergus expresses concern in regards to the fencing of the Lord's Table and in keeping the Sabbath Day.



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4. The church at Yarrow raises the same concerns on the matters of the doctrine of the church, the fencing of the Table, and Sabbath observance. The church at Yarrow also overtures General Synod 1998 "not to invite the RCUS to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CanRC."

### IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. Synod gratefully takes note of the positive contact between the two Committees and thankfully acknowledges the decision of the RCUS to adopt the Three Forms of Unity as their confessional standards.
- B. The Report of the CRCA states that the "RCUS does guard the table, and all who attend must receive permission from the elders. More latitude is allowed in that confession of the Reformed faith is not necessarily required of visitors" (Report of CRCA page 48). The churches at London, Yarrow, Elora and Fergus are correct that in the RCUS the Lord's Supper is not fenced in a manner that is compatible with our Reformed understanding of what the Bible requires on this point. Synod 1992 stated with respect to the supervision of the Lord's Supper that although an identical practice regarding the Lord's Supper is not required, a profession of the Reformed faith is required in the presence of the supervising elders from the guests wishing to attend the Lord's Supper (Acts, Article 72, IV.A.1.e.i).
- C. The matter the churches at London and Yarrow raise regarding the doctrine of the church deserves further discussion in view of the fact that the RCUS has now adopted the Belgic Confession as one of their standards.
- D. The church at London judges the doctrinal integrity of the RCUS. They incorrectly call into question the statement of the CRCA that "as we share the same confessions, we can conclude that the sacraments are understood scripturally." When two church federations have the same confessional standards we must assume that the understanding of what the Word of God teaches on these points of doctrine will be the same (eg. The doctrine of the Trinity, Scripture, sin, election etc.). At the same time honesty demands that we admit to diversity in understanding among our churches as well.
- E. The practices in the RCUS with respect to Sunday observance (one worship service per Lord's Day, and non-essential employment, eating out in restaurants) are not in harmony with Scripture or the Reformed Confessions (Nehemiah 13:15-22; Isaiah 58:13; Acts 2:42; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 38) and Article 180 of the RCUS Constitution. The churches at Elora, Fergus, London and Yarrow rightfully point Synod to this matter.

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- F. In the Report of the CRCA, page 22, Art. 119 mention is made of the practice of erasure whereby church membership is terminated. Further clarification should be sought on this practice as to what gives rise to the distinction made between Article 118 (the process of discipline culminating in excommunication) and Article 119 (the process of discipline culminating in erasure).
- G. The church at London suggests that, since the RCUS has stated it desires closer relationships with all NAPARC churches, that this would include the Christian Reformed Church. The church at London, however, overlooks what is stated in the appendix of the CRCA report (page 51) that the RCUS turned down the request of the CRC to enter discussions with them even though both are members of NAPARC. Nevertheless, the continued participation of the CRCNA in NAPARC warrants further investigation.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide:

- A. To thank the CRCA for fulfilling its mandate with regard to the RCUS.
- B. To acknowledge with gratitude the commitment of the RCUS to the Word of God and the Reformed heritage.
- C. To decline the invitation of the RCUS at this time to enter into a fraternal relationship (sister church relationship) of ecclesiastical fellowship.
- D. To give the following mandate to the CRCA:
  - 1. To continue working towards a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCUS;
  - 2. To resolve the matter of proper supervision of the Lord's Supper so that only those who confess the Reformed faith will be admitted;
  - 3. To discuss the matter of Sunday observance and the doctrine of the church;
  - 4. To seek clarification of the concept of erasure;
  - 5. To investigate the position of the CRCNA among the NAPARC churches;
  - 6. To serve Synod 2001 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the opening of Synod.

ADOPTED

**Article 52**

**Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad: ICRC**

The discussion continues on Committee III's proposal re the ICRC

I. MATERIAL

- A. Report of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad regarding the ICRC (I.D)
- B. Letter from the church at Yarrow (II.O)

II. INTRODUCTION

The Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad received from Synod 1995 the following mandate:

- 1. That the Canadian Reformed Churches continue to participate in the ICRC and report to Synod 1998 its findings and evaluation.
- 2. That the Canadian Reformed Churches be represented at the next meeting of the conference scheduled to take place in Korea during the month of August in the year of our Lord 1997.
- 3. That the Rev. C. VanSpronsen and Dr. N.H. Gootjes be sent as voting delegates.

III. OBSERVATIONS

The CRCA reports:

- A. The Conference took place October 15-23, 1997, in Seoul, South Korea. Rev. C. VanSpronsen and Dr. N.H. Gootjes attended as voting delegates.
- B. The following churches were received as new members: The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (North America), The Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Christelijk Gereformeerd), the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales, the Gereja Gereja Masehi Musyafir N.T.T. (Indonesia), the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and the United Reformed Churches in North America. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia withdrew their membership. This brings the membership in the ICRC to twenty-one.
- C. The main themes of the Conference were the matter of expressing our unity in the Lord and the execution of the great commission to preach the gospel to all nations.
- D. The next meeting of the Conference has been scheduled for 2001, to be held in the USA. The hosting church will be the OPC.

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- E. The number of presentations should be limited to four so as to make more time available for the delegations to have informal meetings.
- F. The CRCA recommends
  - 1. that the Canadian Reformed Churches continue to participate in the ICRC.
  - 2. that Synod give a mandate to the CRCA to recommend to the ICRC that the next meeting of the Conference limit its speeches to four and allow for meeting time between delegations.
  - 3. That Synod give a mandate to the CRCA to send a normal sized delegation of two voting delegates and two advisors to the next meeting of the Conference to be held in the Northern USA.
- G. Synod observes appendix 3 (Report on the Fourth meeting of the ICRC held in Seoul, Korea from October 15-23, 1997) mentions a change in the Constitution of the ICRC. Article IV, 1 which used to read "Those Churches shall be admitted as members which: a. adhere and are faithful to the confessional standards stated in the Basis" now reads: "Those churches shall be admitted as members: a. which faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed faith." The rationale adduced for this change is that "this defines the faith shared by the member churches as the Reformed Faith expressed in the Three Forms of Unity and several versions of the Westminster Confession of Faith, thus making clearer the intent of the original wording."
- H. The church at Yarrow places an overture before Synod, since they "believe that our membership in the ICRC can usurp the authority of our ecclesiastical bodies, thereby challenging the integrity of our church federation." They overture Synod
  - 1. To mandate the CRCA not to make any membership recommendations at the ICRC for churches with which we do not have official sister church relations.
  - 2. To mandate the CRCA to express to the next ICRC that we can no longer accept the basis of the ICRC as per Article III.1 in the current ICRC Constitution, and mandate the CRCA to propose the following constitutional changes:
    - a. That Art. III. 1 of the ICRC Constitution be changed to read: "to seek and promote unity of faith with member churches of the Reformed confession."

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- b. That Art. IV.1.c be changed so that churches shall be admitted as member to the ICRC which "are accepted by an unanimous vote." This would replace the current two-thirds majority vote.
3. To terminate our participation in the ICRC if the proposed changes to the ICRC Constitution are rejected.

### IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. An Interim Committee establishes the agenda of the next Conference (see Proceedings of The International Conference of Reformed Churches Seoul,1997 Article 84, point 7, p.38). Limiting the number of presentations at the Conference should be taken up with them.
- B. Article V of the Regulations of the ICRC states that "each member Church shall be entitled to send two voting delegates to the meeting." Concerning advisory delegates the same article states, "Each member church may appoint two advisors...". This article does not speak about a "normal sized delegation". Synod also takes note of the fact that at the last ICRC ten member churches out of fourteen sent voting delegates only.
- C. The CRCA should have highlighted and evaluated in its Report the "significant move" of the Conference (ICRC 1997 Press Release) to revise Article IV. 1. a of the Constitution. The notes of the Proceedings explain the change on page 78, "This does not require any applicant church to subscribe to all of the six documents, or even to any of them, thus leaving open the possibility of admission of churches who subscribe other Reformed Confessions than those listed. Such churches and their confessions would have to be in agreement with the Reformed Faith as summarized in the six documents."
- D. The new reading of the Constitution makes an unnecessary distinction between the Reformed Faith and the confessional standards contained in the Basis. It leaves open the question "What is the Reformed faith?" The concept of "the Reformed Faith" could be perceived as the lowest common denominator in confessional unity and takes away from the need for a confessional basis. It has the potential of opening membership in the ICRC to churches whose confessions, upon examination, are found wanting.
- E. What Yarrow proposes in their first recommendation is in line with what Synod Abbotsford expressed in Article 101, IV, B. 3, "that the CRCA should not have supported the request of the FRCNA and the RCUS. The letters of support state more than our Synods have decided with regard to these churches." It should be made part of the mandate given to the CRCA that they



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make and support membership recommendations at ICRC for those churches only with which we have official sister-church relations.

- F. The church at Yarrow fails to show how their proposed change to the purpose of the Constitution is substantially different from the present wording. The words "express and promote" can refer to two types of members of the ICRC, that is, those with whom we have Ecclesiastical Fellowship and those with whom we do not. Therefore Synod Lincoln 1992 could state, "the integrity of our churches is not jeopardized by our being members of the ICRC."
- G. The church at Yarrow does not provide grounds why unanimity would be required for admittance to the ICRC.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide

- A. To thank the CRCA for the work done with regard to the ICRC.
- B. That the CanRC continue to participate in the ICRC and that the CRCA submit a report to General Synod 2001 on the activities of the Conference, along with an evaluation.
- C. That the Canadian Reformed Churches be represented at the next meeting of the Conference scheduled to take place in the USA in 2001 by two voting delegates.
- D. To mandate the CRCA to make and support membership recommendations at ICRC for those churches only with which we have official sister-church relations.
- E. To mandate the CRCA to convey to the next meeting of the ICRC that the Canadian Reformed Churches disapprove of the change made in the Constitution Article IV.1.a. and to recommend that this Article be changed in such a way that the concerns of the CanRC are addressed.

It is moved to add the words "as outlined in Considerations. C and D above" to V.E.

DEFEATED

It is moved to divide the vote re the five recommendations above.

DEFEATED

The proposal of Committee III above is put to a vote.

ADOPTED



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**Article 53**

**Adjournment**

Br. P. Vanwoudenberg requests that Psalm 19: 3, 6 be sung, after which he leads in prayer.

**MORNING SESSION - WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 1998**

**Article 54**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Ps. 77: 1, 5 be sung, reads 1 John 4:1-6, and leads in prayer. Roll call shows that all are present.

**Article 55**

**Adoption of the Acts**

Acts 43 – 53 of the Acts, pertaining to Monday, May 12, 1998 are adopted.

**Article 56**

**Appeal of br. and sr. Van Andel**

Synod meets in closed session. Committee II presents their proposal re this matter (III.O.) once again. After some discussion, the Committee takes it back for further consideration.

**Article 57**

**Appeal of Rev. T. Hoogsteen**

Synod continues in closed session. Committee II presents their proposal regarding his appeal (III.M.). After ample discussion, the Committee takes the proposal back for further consideration.

**EVENING SESSION – WEDNESDAY, MAY 13, 1998**

**Article 58**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Hymn 4: 1, 2, 3, 4 be sung. Roll call shows that all are present. A welcome is extended to the members of the audience, and a special welcome to Rev. A. de Jager from the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. He is given the floor.

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### **Article 59**

#### **Address of Rev. A. de Jager**

Rev. de Jager addresses Synod (some notes re his address can be found in Appendix 1). Thereafter Rev. A.J. Pol responds on behalf of the CanRC (with words found in Appendix 1).

### **Article 60**

#### **Address of Rev. J. J. Peterson**

Next Rev. J. J. Peterson of the OPC is given the floor and addresses the Synod with words found in Appendix 1. Thereafter the vice-chairman, Rev. W. den Hollander gives the floor to Rev. R. Aasman who responds on behalf of the CanRC (as also found in Appendix 1).

### **Article 61**

#### **Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad: Strategy**

Committee III presents a proposal regarding this matter. After ample discussion, the Committee takes the proposal back for further consideration.

### **Article 62**

#### **Adjournment**

Farewell words are expressed to Rev. C. Bouwman who is leaving us tomorrow. He is asked to convey greetings to the brotherhood in Australia. Rev. Bouwman responds with appreciation for the time spent at Synod Fergus and wishes Synod the Lord's blessing for its further deliberations.

Br. T. M. Veenendaal asks that Ps 119: 34, 35 be sung, and leads in prayer.

## **MORNING SESSION - THURSDAY MAY 14, 1998**

### **Article 63**

#### **Reopening**

The chairman requests that Ps. 78: 1, 2, 3 be sung, reads from 1 John 4:7-21, and leads in prayer. It is noted that the Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity of the United Reformed Churches of North America, the Rev. R. Stienstra, and Rev. P. Vellenga, as well as Rev. R. Sikkema of the same federation, are present. They are welcomed.

**Article 64**

**Adoption of the Acts**

Articles 54 – 62 of the Acts pertaining to Wednesday, May 13 are adopted.

**Article 65**

**Appeal of br. and sr. Van Andel**

Synod continues in closed session. Committee II presents their proposal on item III.O again.

I. MATERIAL

Appeal III.O., br. And Sr. VanAndel, Rockway, Ontario.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod declares this appeal admissible.

III. OBSERVATIONS

- A. Br. and Sr. VanAndel appeal the decision of Regional Synod East of Nov. 15-16, 1995, Acts, Art. 19, and request General Synod to declare that the grounds used for the dismissal of Rev. Hoogsteen by Regional Synod were wrong. They give as grounds the following observations:
1. We disagree that R.S. had the right to approbate or concur with the dismissal; Art 11, C.O. clearly states that this is the responsibility of classis with the concurring advice from the Deputies according to Art. 48 CO....
  2. A major concern is what we read on p. 3 of the report of the Deputies according to Art. 48, Oct. 30/95. We quote: "Without giving attention to the appeals of various brothers and sisters of the congregation Classis 'observed' that Rev. Hoogsteen is unable to feed the congregation." Please note: Classis "observed," could not prove its point, since it had not given proper attention to the appeals...
  3. Preaching style and way of delivery can never be a ground for Art. 11 C.O. and discipline...
  4. Re: the preaching of Rev. Hoogsteen. R.S. '95 state, p. 6, 3E that from the beginning of Rev. Hoogsteen's ministry in Rockway, it has been evident that there are problems in connection with his preaching." R.S. failed to distinguish here: there can be problems of communication/presentation, but also of unreformed contents...

IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. Brother and sister VanAndel claim that Regional Synod does not have the right to approbate the dismissal of a minister. However it is common practice that when deputies do not give concurring advice to a classis decision, then the matter is referred to Regional Synod for its judgment. We refer to the Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordering of Joh. Jansen

De afzetting staat aan de classe met *advies* van de Deputaten der Provincie. De classe *beslist* hier en de Deputaten der Provincie geven alleen *advies*. Maar bij ernstig verschil en na vergeefsche poging om alsnog tot overeenstemming te komen, moet een beroep op de particuliere synode gedaan worden. Aan het oordeel der classe moet men zich dan onderwerpen, of eventueel in appel gaan bij de synoden. (Page 345, 1923 edition.)

(Translation: The deposition is to be decided by classis with advice of Deputies of Regional Synod. The classis decides here and the Deputies of Regional Synod give advice only. But if there is serious difference and after unsuccessful attempt to come yet to an agreement an appeal must be made to Regional Synod. One must submit then to the judgment of classis, or eventually launch an appeal to Synods.)

Although Jansen is speaking here about the deposition of ministers, he does outline the procedure when deputies of Regional Synod cannot agree with the decision of Classis. This was the procedure that was followed by Regional Synod in the approbation of Rev. Hoogsteen's dismissal.

- B. Br. and Sr. VanAndel refer to the report of Deputies of Regional Synod which states that "Without giving attention to the appeals of various brothers and sisters of the congregation Classis 'observed' that Rev. Hoogsteen is unable to feed the congregation" and the appellants conclude "Classis 'observed,' could not prove its point, since it had not given proper attention to the appeals." As far as the appeals of various brothers and sisters of the Rockway congregation are concerned, it can not be determined from Classis documents that Classis dealt with the appeals which were submitted.

Classis did however make a judgement on whether Rev. Hoogsteen was able to feed the congregation with his sermons, by referring to the report of the Adhoc Committee which made clear the following:

The consistory in its package to classis states that 'council didn't dismiss Rev. Hoogsteen primarily because of his

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preaching.' Rather, 'council decided to dismiss Rev. Hoogsteen because of his consistent and persistent refusal over the years to comply with council's and consistory's advice to seek help' (p.26.) Although this is a fact, the consistory also indicated in the same package that the basic problem with Rev. Hoogsteen is 'whether he is able to feed the congregation with his sermons' (Consistory package, p.1.). The committee found that this indeed is the crux of the matter: the alleged refusal stems from steps taken to deal with the sermon problems. Of the 26 respondents who supported the consistory decision, 22 indicated that they had difficulty with the preaching. Of the 26 who opposed the consistory decision, 17 admitted that they had difficulty with the sermon at times (with varying degree of difficulty). The 3 undecided about the consistory's decision all indicated difficulty with the sermons.

The main problem in the sermons appears to be understandability: Rev. Hoogsteen tends to use complex sentences and big words. Many find it very difficult to follow his train of thought. Many members have sought to rectify their lack of understanding by study ahead, by taking notes, etc.. Many said that since they usually can not understand the sermons, they are simply not being feed, a condition which usually does not happen when visiting ministers preach. For the most part, even those who feel strengthened by the preaching say that Rev. Hoogsteen is not easy to follow.

On the basis of the documents of Classis, it can not be judged that the appeals of various brothers and sisters of the Rockway congregation were dealt with. This does not take away the fact that Classis could and did prove its point on the basis of the committee's report, the council's package, and input from the congregation.

- C. Br. and sr. VanAndel state that preaching style and way of delivery do not constitute a ground for the use of Art. 11 C.O. Article 11 makes it clear that when proper procedure is followed, then a minister can be dismissed when "a minister of the Word is judged unfit and incapable of serving the congregation fruitfully and to its edification, without there being any reason for church discipline." As br. and sr. VanAndel show, the concern with Rev. Hoogsteen's preaching is not with the content of his preaching. In other words, there are no doctrinal issues which would lead to the use of Art. 72 C.O. What br. and sr. VanAndel fail to understand, however, is that a minister's preaching style and way of delivery can become so deficient that such a minister becomes unfit and incapable of feeding the congregation, and



therefore Art. 11 C.O. comes into consideration. That has very serious consequences for the congregation. It is necessary for the congregation to be built up by the preaching as we see in a passage such as Ephesians 4:11-13. In such a case, the Council of a church has to consider the use of Art. 11 C.O. Since it has been shown by the Council of the Church at Rockway to both Classis and Regional Synod that Rev. Hoogsteen is unable to feed the congregation, Art. 11 C.O. may be used to dismiss Rev. Hoogsteen.

- D. Br. and Sr. VanAndel claim that "R.S. failed to distinguish here: there can be problems of communication /presentation, but also of unreformed contents. If the latter was the case, action would have to be taken along the way of Art. 72 CO..." The appellants do not fairly represent the decision of Regional Synod which had no reason to concern itself with the issue of unreformed contents. (Art. 72 CO.) The matter under consideration is whether the communication/presentation problems had developed to the point where Rev. Hoogsteen could no longer feed the congregation. Compounding the problems relating to the preaching, was Rev. Hoogsteen's refusal to cooperate on working on this problem. (see Regional Synod Cons.1.1 & 1.3.c.) For this reason, and based on consideration 3 above, it is correct to use Art. 11 C.O. in the dismissal of Rev. Hoogsteen.

#### V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Having considered the appeal of br. and sr. VanAndel, General Synod judges that:

- A. Regional Synod had the right to approbate the dismissal of Rev. Hoogsteen even when the Deputies did not concur with the approbation.
- B. It is unable to determine whether Classis gave attention to the appeals of the various members of Rockway.
- C. Problems with a minister's preaching style and way of delivery may become so significant that they become the ground for using Article 11 C.O.
- D. Regional Synod had no reason to concern itself with Article 72 C.O.

General Synod does not accede to the appeal of br. and sr. VanAndel.

ADOPTED

It is noted that Rev. W. den Hollander abstains from voting.



**Article 66**

**Appeal of Rev. T. Hoogsteen**

Synod continues in closed session. Committee II presents their proposal on item III.M again.

I. MATERIAL

Appeal III.M., Rev. T. Hoogsteen, Rockway, Ontario.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod decides to declare this appeal admissible.

III. OBSERVATIONS

A. Rev. Hoogsteen asks that Synod rule:

1. That Regional Synod responded to my appeal with allegations unworthy of Reformed officebearers;
2. That the grounds presented for concurrence to Classis Ontario South's decision are not substantiated.

B. Rev. Hoogsteen presents 141 observations in his appeal which interact point by point with Regional Synod's response to his appeal.

IV. CONSIDERATIONS

A. Throughout his appeal, Rev. Hoogsteen refers to "allegations" of Regional Synod and he attempts to refute those "allegations." To state, however, that these are "allegations unworthy of officebearers" is to suggest that Regional Synod made statements without proof or substantiation. While Rev. Hoogsteen might disagree with Regional Synod, a reading of Regional Synod's response shows that Regional Synod consistently substantiated its conclusions. Nowhere in his appeal does Rev. Hoogsteen specifically say: here is an allegation unworthy of Reformed officebearers. He simply speaks of allegations unworthy of officebearers as a general conclusion to his appeal. Synod finds no evidence that Regional Synod responded to Rev. Hoogsteen's appeal with allegations unworthy of officebearers.

B. Regional Synod states in its consideration 1.1:

It is clear that all of the problems in the matter concerning Rev. Hoogsteen stem from the preaching. This matter is not placed in the foreground by the Council of the Rockway Canadian Reformed Church in the first sentence of its "Conclusion" on page 26 of its letter dated August 8, 1995. But it does become apparent that this (i.e. the preaching) is at the bottom of all the grievances raised in the subsequent

sentences on that page. This problem is compounded by the unwillingness of Rev. Hoogsteen to follow up the suggestions of his Council in a consistent and wholehearted manner. These two factors are brought forward in the letter of the consistory to the congregation, handed out on July 23, 1995 (see Appendix J of the submission of the Council of Rockway to Classis) and are also evident in the Committee Report on Rockway's decision to dismiss Rev. Hoogsteen, page 8, Paragraph B.2. Therefore as Rockway also says on page 2 of its letter to the Regional Synod, dated 7 November 1995, there is not a discrepancy between the position of Rockway and the decision of Classis ("But the entire package to classis was our grounds, not just the concluding remarks.")

The assessment of the Deputies fails to take into account the fact that the two elements of the lack of understandability of his sermons and his lack of full co-operations are interrelated.

Rev. Hoogsteen responds to this in four sections and deals with each separately. In the first section of consideration 1.1, Regional Synod speaks about "It is clear that all the problems in the matter concerning Rev. Hoogsteen stem from the preaching....it does become clear that this (i.e. the preaching) is at the bottom of all the grievances..."

Rev. Hoogsteen responds to this in Point 9, "Council chose not to concentrate on preaching, but on a lack of cooperation" and Point 10, "Classis Ontario South, August 23, 24 & October 11, 1995 chose to change the point of contention to a more 'substantial' matter." If Rev. Hoogsteen had dealt with Regional Synod's consideration 1.1 as a whole, rather than divide it up and deal with it piecemeal, he would have had to connect these comments in Point 9 and 10 to what Regional Synod says at the end of the consideration, "the two elements of the lack of understandability of his sermons and his lack of full cooperation are interrelated." This undermines his argument that Classis changed the "lack of cooperation" to "the preaching." This also undermines his serious charge in Point 11, "To change the ground constitutes a deviation of the rules for approbation." In spite of all the interaction that Rev. Hoogsteen has with this first consideration of Regional Synod, he does not come with compelling evidence to show that there was indeed a change in the basis for his dismissal.

- C. Regional Synod states in consideration 1.2, "the Council of Rockway could have known that there was a problem with Rev. Hoogsteen's preaching style. But the Deputies overlook that the Council could not know in advance the difficulties the Council

would encounter in trying to take corrective measures." Rev. Hoogsteen responds to this by saying that there were few if any references to communication problems in his preaching. He concludes in Point 31, "Whatever weaknesses in feeding the congregation, Consistory met no opposition, until the brothers insisted that I do something wrong: send sermons prior to delivery to the Theological College for 'examining sermons.'" It is striking that Rev. Hoogsteen alleges "the brothers insisted that I do something wrong." This is striking because after the Council of the Rockway Church decided to dismiss Rev. Hoogsteen, then "Rev. Hoogsteen finally promised to send manuscripts of his sermons to the Theological College (Regional Synod Considerations. 1.3c). Rev. Hoogsteen explains this in Point 65 of his appeal to General Synod: "My cooperation promise stemmed from the deep desire to get on with the work of ministry." This undermines Rev. Hoogsteen's claim that for the brothers in Rockway to insist that he submit his sermons to the Theological College would involve him in something wrong. If this was wrong earlier, why would Rev. Hoogsteen agree to do it after the decision to dismiss him? This kind of inconsistency only underlines the difficulties which the Council of the Rockway Church encountered in trying to take corrective measures with Rev. Hoogsteen's preaching.

- D. Rev. Hoogsteen interacts with consideration 1.3a of Regional Synod which speaks about Rev. Hoogsteen breaking the agreement with Council to seek help from the Theological College. He states in Point 32, "The matter to be addressed to the Theological College staff involved communications. I was not aware that the Consistory meant a carte blanche investigation involving 'examining the sermons.'" He also says in Point 34, "it belongs to the office of elders to examine the preaching, not a responsibility to be farmed out. If a consistory is inadequate, or if something is wrong, it is possible to send tapes anywhere." While Rev. Hoogsteen states this, this contradicts what Regional Synod stated in consideration 1.3c, "After initially agreeing to this advice, Rev. Hoogsteen reversed his position and refused to cooperate along the lines of the advice given by the church visitors." This also contradicts what the Council of the Rockway Church said in a letter to Rev. Hoogsteen on August 8, 1995 concerning the decision to dismiss him, "the Church Visitors, advised you to seek help at the Theological College. Although you initially agreed, you later persistently refused to cooperate wholeheartedly with the Council and come to grips with the situation." In connection with the latter statement, Rev. Hoogsteen states in Point 51, "Consistory changed the terms of agreement, asking for examination of sermons." Rev. Hoogsteen makes such a statement but gives no substantiation to prove that

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he is right that the entire council and with the advice of church visitors was wrong.

- E. Regional Synod states in its consideration 1.3b, "The comments made by Rockway indicate that the problems concerning Rev. Hoogsteen's preaching had already been discussed with the church visitors prior to 1995 and surfaced at Classis March, 1995." In response to this, Rev. Hoogsteen states in Point 35, "This is a blanket condemnation without grounds." He adds in Point 39, "To make such allegations as Council's in the November 7, 1995 letter and for R.S. to accept such unsubstantiated allegations runs contrary to what we confess with respect to the Ninth Commandment." The letter of the Council of the Rockway Church to Regional Synod, dated November 7, 1995, mentions specific concerns about the preaching: "Already at the church visitation of 1993 (?) the visitors, Rev's. Stam and Moes were told that there were problems with the preaching but that it was being worked on. Then in January 1995, visitors Stam and Ludwig read letters from members of the church and discussed the matter at length with Council. The church visitors didn't detail these discussion to Classis, but only noted that advice had been given on some matters. Rev. Hoogsteen can say that Regional Synod accepted unsubstantiated allegations concerning his preaching, but the letter of council to Regional Synod shows that there were indeed specific concerns about his preaching prior to escalation of the problem with Rev. Hoogsteen's preaching in 1995.
- F. Regional Synod in its consideration 1.3c outlines how the problem with Rev. Hoogsteen's preaching escalated "because of Rev. Hoogsteen's ongoing failure to acknowledge that he had a problem to deal with concerning his preaching." Only after Council decided unanimously on July 6, 1995 to follow the advice of the church visitors regarding Art. 11 C.O., "Rev. Hoogsteen finally promised to send manuscripts of his sermons to the Theological College." Rev. Hoogsteen responds to this by saying, among other things, in Point 51, "Consistory changed the terms of agreement, asking for examination of sermons." This is dealt with in consideration 3 above. Rev. Hoogsteen also states in Point 58, "This sort of 'examination' is highly unusual in our churches and against the office of the ministry; ministers in good standing may not be forced to submit preaching to examinations prior to delivery." To say "forced to submit preaching to examinations" contradicts what Council says when it speaks of having an agreement with Rev. Hoogsteen to submit his preaching to the Theological College. Rev. Hoogsteen does not convince General Synod on the basis of what he supplies in his appeal with its appendices that he was forced to do something against his will. His compliance with sending his sermons to the



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College immediately after the decision to dismiss him goes to show that Rev. Hoogsteen was willing to go along with something that he calls "highly unusual in our churches." The bottom line is this: when a minister of the Word is not feeding the congregation with his preaching, it is the responsibility of the elders, in accordance with Art. 22 C.O., to take corrective measures. One of the options that would be available to the assist the consistory and minister in regards to the preaching is to make use of the expertise of the Theological College.

- G. Regional Synod states in its consideration 1.3c, "Even then he still failed to acknowledge the full extent of the problem." Rev. Hoogsteen counters in Point 73, "Subsequent developments, cf. Charge of apostasy against the Rockway Council, indicate that the problem is with the Council; the brothers to this day find it easier to remove faithful preaching of the Word than to acknowledge a gross sin: deviating from the Scripture and Confession." Then he writes in Point 74, "The dismissal and apostasy are incontrovertibly linked." These counter charges are completely unsubstantiated. Through such unsubstantiated charges against the Rockway Council Rev. Hoogsteen continues to show that he fails to understand that it is his preaching and his lack of willingness to cooperate in improving his preaching which is the true root of the problem.
- H. The rest of Rev. Hoogsteen's appeal continues to attempt a refutation of Regional Synod's decision regarding his appeal to Regional Synod. Repeatedly, General Synod is not convinced by his argumentation. Upon thorough consideration of the entire appeal Synod is convinced that Rev. Hoogsteen was not wronged when Regional Synod approbated the dismissal of Rev. Hoogsteen.

### V. RECOMMENDATIONS

General Synod judges that

- A. Regional Synod did not respond to Rev. Hoogsteen's appeal with allegations unworthy of Reformed office-bearers;
- B. The grounds presented for concurrence to Classis Ontario South's decision are substantiated.

Synod decides not to accede to the appeal of Rev. Hoogsteen.

ADOPTED

It is noted that Rev. W. den Hollander abstains from voting.

**Article 67**

**Appeal of Rev. T. Hoogsteen and br. C. Van Andel**

Synod continues in closed session. Committee II presents their proposal on item III.N again.

I. MATERIAL

Appeal III.N., br. Rev. T. Hoogsteen and br. C. VanAndel, Rockway, Ontario.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod decides to declare this appeal admissible.

III. OBSERVATIONS

A. Rev. Hoogsteen and br. C. VanAndel ask Synod to declare:

1. that App. C is an unreformed document,  
and
2. as a result, that Council make real amendment as we indicated on the last page of our charge, simply –  
admit the evil committed by means of the dismissal, rescind the decision entirely, and promise wholeheartedly to follow again your ordination promises.

IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. The appellants, Rev. T. Hoogsteen and brother C. VanAndel, charge the Council of the Church at Rockway with apostasy. Their basis for this charge is that Council included in their original package to Classis an Appendix C which the appellants claim is an unreformed document. The Council of the Church at Rockway, with the support of Classis and Regional Synod, has shown that this is an unfounded accusation. The point is this: Council did include Appendix C as part of their package to Classis as proof or grounds that there were difficulties regarding the preaching of Rev. Hoogsteen. Council did not say thereby that it agreed with the contents of this Appendix C, but it presented it as part of the package to show the unrest within the Rockway congregation concerning the preaching of Rev. Hoogsteen.
- B. The appellants still insist in their appeal to General Synod that Council endorsed Appendix C as part of their package to Classis. They understand this as meaning that the Council supports and agrees with the contents of Appendix C. Since the appellants see the contents of Appendix C as unreformed, they conclude that "Council via App. C promotes man-centered



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preaching." This leads to their charge of apostasy against Council.

It is clear that the appellants have a completely different view than Council, Classis and Regional Synod on how Appendix C functions in the Council's package to Classis. However, when Council, Classis and Regional Synod all state, basically, that the purpose of Appendix C is not a position paper of Council but only evidence of the problems in Rockway which demonstrates irresolvable differences, it is impossible to agree with the appellants that Appendix C, regardless of the nature of its contents, can be regarded as the opinion or statement of Council itself. It is exactly as Regional Synod said in its consideration A, "It is, however, a jump in logic to say that all supporting documents are therefore to be considered documents whose contents are endorsed by consistory." Moreover, when Council states that it does not endorse Appendix C in its contents, then that should end the matter. They can no longer be accused of endorsing its contents unless other proof is provided.

- C. Therefore Synod also agrees with Regional Synod's consideration D: "the accusation that Classis Ontario South, June 11, 1997 gave less than a Christian answer to their appeal is groundless and uncalled for. The answer of Classis clearly identifies and sufficiently addresses the issues and is neither contrary to Scripture nor the Church Order." In their letter of January 21, 1997, the Council of Rockway openly pronounces, "As Council we stand behind the doctrines the Reformed Churches have summarized in their confessions. We recognize the dangers of Arminian teachings and in no way promote them." Therefore the appellants do grave injustice to the Council of Rockway by unjustifiably maintaining the charge of apostasy on the basis of Appendix C. In support of the truth, and of "righteous adjudication" Regional Synod judges Classis correctly stated, "The consistory of Rockway cannot therefore be accused of apostasy. The appellants' strong allegations have no grounds and ought to be withdrawn."

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

General Synod judge that:

- A. Neither Classis nor Regional Synod needed to make a judgement whether Appendix C is unreformed as that issue is not germane to the function of this document in the decision to dismiss Rev. Hoogsteen.
- B. The accusations of the appellants against the Rockway council are unjustified.

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Synod uphold the decision of Regional Synod East, November 12, 1997 and deny the appeals of Rev. Hoogsteen and br. C. VanAndel.

ADOPTED

The chairman notes the seriousness of this matter because it relates to a minister in our federation and expresses thankfulness for the unanimity with which Synod could come to a decision.

**Article 68**

**Adjournment**

Synod adjourns for committee work until the evening.

**EVENING SESSION – THURSDAY, MAY 14, 1998**

**Article 69**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Hymn 46: 1, 2 be sung. He welcomes the guests among us, also the young people and the children.

**Article 70**

**Address of Rev. Bédard**

Rev. Paulin Bédard then addresses the Synod and the audience with the words found in Appendix 1. Rev. G. H. Visscher responds with words that can be found in the same appendix.

**Article 71**

**Address of Rev. R. Stienstra**

Rev. Richard Stienstra prefaces his address with some personal reflections on what he has seen during the day's visit to Synod, expressing appreciation. He then addresses Synod with the words found in the appendix. Thereafter Rev. W. B. Slomp responds with suitable words, as found in the appendix.

**Article 72**

**Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad**

Committee III presents Items ID, IIFF, IIW, IV T, IV V, IV W,

I. MATERIAL

A. The Report of the CRCA

- B. Letters from the churches at Aldergrove, Elora, Orangeville, Taber, Yarrow

II. OBSERVATIONS

- A. The CRCA has been having internal discussions on the matter of how best to deal with requests to enter into new relationships with churches in different parts of the world (eg. Lanka Reformed Church).
- B. The CRCA has also been led to question whether it is possible for a small church federation such as ours to do justice to an ever-increasing number of relationships (via establishing ecclesiastical Fellowship with churches in different parts of the world, or via the ICRC).
- C. The CRCA observes that the sister churches in the Netherlands have pursued many relations around the world, also in North America. This makes for a more complicated, even confusing ecclesiastical scene. The CRCA observes that "it would seem more realistic and responsible for the RCN to concentrate its efforts on establishing relations with faithful Reformed churches in its part of the world and for the CanRC to do the same in North and South America."
- D. The Committee considers that this may give a more focused approach, which will enable them to do greater justice to present and future relations, make better use of manpower and resources, and prevent overlap and possible disagreement between sister churches.
- E. The CRCA recommends that Synod mandate the Committee as follows:
  - 1. Whenever the CanRC receives new requests for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CanRC priority will be given to churches located in the Americas, that is North and South America;
  - 2. Whenever the CRCA receives a new request from a church located in Africa, Asia or Europe to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CanRC, it shall direct that church to take up contact with one of the sister churches in that part of the world;
  - 3. Discussions be entered into with those churches with which we currently maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship with a view to the merits of this strategy and to ask them to give serious consideration to adopting the same.
- F. The church at Aldergrove considers that CRCA does not substantiate why the RCN's large number of contacts abroad

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might make meaningful relations with those churches impossible. The CRCA fails to argue why the size of our federation makes contact with churches beyond the Americas irresponsible.

- G. The churches at Elora and Taber fully endorse the recommendations of the CRCA.
- H. The church at Orangeville support the recommendation of the Committee to give priority to establishing relationships with churches in our immediate geographical area (North and South America). To facilitate the implementation of the proposal of the Committee Orangeville suggests a restructuring of the Committees appointed for contact with other churches.
- I. The church at Yarrow overtures Synod to mandate the CRCA
  - 1. Whenever the CanRCs receive new requests for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CanRCs *priority* will be given to churches located in the Americas, that is, North and South America;
  - 2. Discussions be undertaken with the current sister churches on the advantages and disadvantages of the 'regionalized' approach (as proposed by the CRCA) and a full report be provided six months prior to Synod 2001.

### III. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. The reports and actions of the CRCA make clear that the time has come for reviewing the manner in which we maintain and establish our international contacts.
- B. The CRCA is correct when it suggests that it would seem more realistic and responsible for our sister churches to concentrate their efforts on establishing relations with faithful Reformed churches in their parts of the world and for the Canadian Reformed Churches to do the same in North and South America.
- C. Restructuring the work of CRCA should not detract from our ecumenical calling. Therefore Synod upholds the consideration of Synod Lincoln 1992, Article 128 III D, namely that "a regional approach towards contact with other churches does not exclude the worldwide calling, and cannot avoid worldwide contacts, although by reason of proximity, resources and other practical factors, priority should be given to the ecumenical calling in the church's home environment."
- D. The proposal of the church at Orangeville facilitates a restructuring of the Committees for contact with other churches. With this approach Synod addresses the concerns of the CRCA in the following manner:

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1. *Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad.*

- a. This Committee will continue functioning as the present Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (that is those outside of North and South America) with whom we presently have a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
- b. A request for contact will be followed up in consultation with a sister-church in the part of the world from which the request originates.

2. *Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas.*

This Committee will take over the mandate of the CRCA in as far as it relates to the Americas by establishing and maintaining relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship with churches located in North and South America.

- E. By this approach the need for prior consultation with sister-churches abroad is obviated and the points raised by the church at Aldergrove and Yarrow are addressed.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

Synod decide:

- A. To restructure the committees for contact with other churches into two Committees known as the Committee for Relation with Churches Abroad (CRCA) and the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA).
- B. To take this into consideration when formulating the mandate of the CRCA and the CCCA and when making Committee appointments.

ADOPTED

**Article 73**

**Presbyterian Church of Mexico**

Committee IV presents: Agenda item II.PP

I. MATERIAL

Overture from Bethel Canadian Reformed Church in Toronto regarding the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

This overture comes from a local church and is presented to General Synod as a new matter. Neither Classis Ontario-North nor Regional Synod-East have dealt with this matter. According to Article 30 C.O. "a new matter which has not previously been presented to that major



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assembly may be put on the agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it."

III. RECOMMENDATION:

Synod declares this matter inadmissible.

ADOPTED

**Article 74**

**Inspection of the Archives**

Committee IV presents: Agenda item I.J (L.29)

I. MATERIAL

Letter from the church at Burlington-Waterdown re: inspection of the General Archives.

II. OBSERVATION

The church at Burlington-Waterdown informs Synod that the archives of General Synod Abbotsford 1995 were inspected by two members of their consistory and found to be in good order.

III. RECOMMENDATION

Synod decide to thank the church at Burlington-Waterdown for examining the archives and reporting to Synod.

ADOPTED

It is noted that while the Church at Burlington West was appointed for this purpose, the Church at Burlington-Waterdown reported because the Church at Burlington West split into two churches: Burlington-Waterdown and Flamborough.

**Article 75**

**Address Church**

Committee IV presents: Agenda item L.22

I. MATERIAL

Report from the address church, the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington-East.

II. OBSERVATIONS

- A. The church at Burlington-East reports on its correspondence as address church.
- B. The church at Grand Rapids, which is our address church in the United States of America, has not submitted a report.



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III. CONSIDERATION

- A. The church at Burlington East has fulfilled its mandate as address church.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide:

- A. To thank the church at Burlington-East for the work done as address church.
- B. To reappoint the church at Burlington-East as address church in Canada, and the church at Grand Rapids as address church in the United States of America.
- C. To instruct these address churches to report to the next General Synod.

ADOPTED

**Article 76**

**Finances of Synod**

Committee IV presents: Agenda Item I.K

I. MATERIAL

- A. Statement of income and expenses from the Finance Committee of General Synod 1995.
- B. Audit report by the church at Yarrow, BC concerning the books of the treasurer of the Finance Committee appointed by Synod Abbotsford, 1995.

II. OBSERVATIONS

- A. General Synod Abbotsford appointed the church at Yarrow to audit the books of the finances of General Synod 1995.
- B. The financial statement discloses the following expenses:

Stationery	1340.41
Telephone	129.67
Postage	505.66
Travel (Western delegates)	1336.07
Travel (Eastern delegates)	6200.34
Food	2164.76
Equipment & rentals	2210.46
Printing	13936.48
Miscellaneous	<u>333.77</u>
TOTAL:	\$28157.62

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- C. The church at Yarrow has audited the books of the finances of General Synod 1995, and reports that they were found to be in good order.

### III. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Synod decide:

- A. To express appreciation for the work done by the Finance Committee of General Synod 1995 and by the auditing church.
- B. To discharge the Finance Committee for General Synod 1995 on the basis of the auditors' report of the church at Yarrow.
- C. To appoint a Finance Committee which will pay the expenses incurred by General Synod 1998, using funds submitted by the churches in each Regional Synod. This committee will forward any balance of funds to the convening church of the next General Synod. They will also submit a financial statement to the next General Synod, audited by the church at Guelph.
- D. To appoint as Finance Committee of General Synod 1998: sister T. Swaving and brother H. Bouwman.
- E. To appoint the church at Guelph to audit the books of the finances of General Synod 1998 and report to the next General Synod.

ADOPTED

## **Article 77**

### **General Fund**

Committee IV presents: Agenda Item I.H

#### I. MATERIAL

Report from the church at Carman re: General Fund

#### II. OBSERVATIONS

- A. The church at Carman, MB, submits a financial report of the General Fund for the period from February 6, 1995 to January 20, 1998. The income was \$29,505.86. The disbursements were \$24 801.13. The final balance was \$4 704.73.
- B. The books were audited by two office bearers of the church at Carman and found to be in good order.
- C. The church at Carman notes that the churches have already been assessed 2 times \$2 per confessing member to cover the costs of the General Fund.

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- D. The church at Carman requests Synod to thank br. G. Vandersluis who has taken care of the books for the General Fund.

III. CONSIDERATIONS

It is within the mandate of the church at Carman to request funding as required.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide:

- A. To express gratitude to the church at Carman for the administration of the General Fund, to the office bearers who audited the books, and to brother G. Vandersluis for keeping the books.
- B. To authorize the church at Carman to collect funds from the churches as required.
- C. To discharge the church at Carman of duties completed during the period of February 6, 1995, to January 20, 1998, and reappoint the church at Carman for the General Fund.

ADOPTED

**Article 78**

**Adjournment**

The chairman speaks some farewell words to the fraternal delegates who are leaving soon. He thanks them for their participation and wishes them the Lord's blessing. He also thanks br. and sr. John Hutten, who are in the audience this evening, for all the work they did with respect to the mail and the provisional agenda for Synod Fergus 98.

Thereafter Rev. G. H. Visscher asks that Hymn 40 1, 2, 5 be sung, and leads in prayer.

**MORNING SESSION - FRIDAY MAY 15, 1998**

**Article 79**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Ps. 79: 3, 5 be sung, reads 1 John 5: 1 – 12, and leads in prayer. Roll call shows that all are present.

**Article 80**

**Adoption of the Acts**

Articles 63 – 78 of the Acts, pertaining to Thursday, May 14 are adopted.

**Article 81**

**Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity**

Committee IV presents their proposal regarding the matter of pursuing unity with churches which have left the Christian Reformed Church of North America. After discussion, the committee withdraws their proposal for further consideration.

Synod adjourns for committee work until the evening.

**EVENING SESSION – FRIDAY MAY 15, 1998**

**Article 82**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Psalm 135: 1, 2 be sung. Roll call shows that all are present. A special welcome is extended to the professors of the Theological College and their wives.

**Article 83**

**Theological College: Tenure of Dr. J. De Jong and Dr. N. H. Gootjes**

Committee IV presents their proposal re: Agenda Item I.B.1.

I. MATERIAL

Report of the Board of Governors to General Synod 1998

II. OBSERVATIONS

A. On September 5, 1996 the Board of Governors of the Theological College decided:

"To ask General Synod 1998 to direct the Board of Governors to grant tenure to Prof. Dr. J. DeJong and Prof. Dr. N. H. Gootjes. According to past practice tenure should have been requested at Synod 1995. This did not happen due to an oversight of the Board of Governors."

B. Synod Abbotsford 1995 adopted a procedure for the granting of tenure (Article 97, paragraph II.B.13).

III. CONSIDERATION

## *Acts of General Synod*

- A. Tenure should have been granted to Prof. Dr. J. DeJong and Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes in 1995.
- B. The fact that this did not take place at that time was caused by an oversight on the part of the Board of Governors.
- C. For this reason, the current procedure adopted by General Synod Abbotsford 1995 has not been followed in the case of Prof. Dr. J. DeJong and Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes.

### IV. RECOMMENDATION

- A. To direct the Board of Governors to grant tenure to Prof. Dr. J. DeJong and Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes.
- B. To invite Prof. Dr. J. DeJong and Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes to attend a session of Synod, so that Synod may have the opportunity to inform them of this decision and congratulate them accordingly.

ADOPTED

Thereafter the chairman speaks some suitable words to Dr. J. de Jong and Dr. N.H. Gootjes.

## **Article 84**

### **Theological College: General**

Committee IV presents their proposal re: Agenda item: I.B.1

#### I. MATERIAL

- A. Report of the Board of Governors to General Synod 1998.

#### II. OBSERVATIONS

The report of the Board of Governors covers its work and decisions since May 1995. From the report the following highlights are observed.

- A. The work at the Theological College could continue without interruption during the past three years.
- B. The work of the Board was done in brotherly harmony, and the professors were also able to do their work without serious problems.
- C. In 1997 Dr. Faber was minister of the Word for forty-five years, and in the same year he and his wife also remembered their forty-fifth wedding anniversary.
- D. In September 1995 Rev. G.VanDooren passed away. The Board remembers with thankfulness how he instilled in many students the love for preaching the gospel and the pastoral work.

## *Acts of General Synod*

- E. On Oct.12, 1996 Dr. C.VanDam celebrated his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the ministry of the Word and Dr. and Mrs. VanDam also celebrated their 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.
- F. From June 1<sup>st</sup> 1996 to and including December 1996 Dr. VanDam was on a sabbatical. Drs. Hagens from DeBilt-Bilthoven served as his very capable and appreciated replacement. The Senate has indicated to the Board that they consider this first sabbatical to be a success.
- G. Dr. Gootjes is presently serving as Principal of the college. The Board proposes that General Synod appoint Dr.DeJong as Principal for the period 1999-2002, with the transition to take place after the Convocation of 1999. The Board also proposes to appoint Dr. C.VanDam as Principal designate for the years 2002-2005, the Lord willing.
- H. Currently fourteen students are enrolled. Twelve students graduated during the last three years, of which seven entered the ministry of the Word.
- I. The Board is considering ways in which they can help foreign students who lack the funds they need to study at the College.
- J. The Governors have regularly visited the lectures. The reports are invariably positive.
- K. In 1995 Prof.J.Geertsema visited the churches in Alberta/Manitoba. In 1996 Dr.J.DeJong visited the churches in Classis Pacific, and also attended the meeting of the Alliance and Synods of the United Reformed Churches. In 1997 Dr.N.H.Gootjes went to Alberta/Manitoba again, and attended the ICRC in Korea. Dr. VanDam went to Mexico in 1997, and gave guest lectures at the Juan Calvino Seminary. The reports of all these activities were positive.
- L. Under the skilful direction of sr. Margaret VanderVelde the automation of the library cataloguing system is progressing well. Upon request of the Senate the Board has made her position permanent.
- M. The Board wants to express its thanks for the work and the contributions of the Women's Savings Action.
- N. The Board acknowledges with appreciation the dedication of sr. Catharine Mechelse, the College's administrative assistant.
- O. The Board also acknowledges the assistance of many volunteers who help out in the library in various ways.

### III. CONSIDERATIONS



*Acts of General Synod*

- A. On the basis of the report received Synod considers that the professors are making a positive contribution to the churches, not only through the College but also through their other activities.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. To approve all decisions and actions of the Board and of its committees for the years 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998 until the day of the Board's Report.
- B. To express gratitude that the work at the Theological College continues without interruption and that all instruction is given in harmony with the Word of God and in agreement with the Confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches.
- C. To acknowledge the contribution of the professors to the broader ecclesiastical community.
- D. To appoint Prof. Dr. J. DeJong as Principal for the period of September 1999 to September 2002, and to designate Prof. Dr. C. Van Dam as Principal for the years 2002 to 2005, the Lord willing. This transfer of responsibilities will take place the day after the Convocation in 1999.
- E. To express gratitude for the work done by Rev. G. VanDooren during his lifetime.
- F. To express gratitude for the work of Drs. Hagens of our sister-church in De Bilt-Bilthoven during the sabbatical of Dr. Van Dam.
- G. To express gratitude for the work of the Board of Governors of the Theological College.
- H. To acknowledge the contribution of the Women's Savings Action, Miss M. VanderVelde, the librarian, and also Miss C. Mechelse, the administrative assistant, as well as the many volunteers.

ADOPTED

**Article 85**

**Theological College: Board of Governors**

Committee IV presents their proposal regarding the matters pertaining to the Board of Governors. After discussion, Committee IV takes this matter back for further consideration.

**Article 86**

**Theological College: Finances**

Committee IV presents their proposal regarding Agenda item 1.B.2.

I. MATERIAL

- A. Tri-Annual Reports of the Finance and Property Committee of the Board of Governors of the Theological College to Synod Fergus 1998
- B. Report from the Board of Governors

II. OBSERVATIONS

Regarding matters pertaining to the property and finances, the Board reports:

- A. The Finance and Property Committee met regularly. These meetings were attended by the current Principal and the college's administrative assistant, Miss Catharine Mechelse.
- B. Regular maintenance of the college property was continued. Repairs and renovations have been undertaken with a view to the long term objectives of the College.
- C. A new handbook was produced and printed for the 1996-1999 academic years and was sent to all of the Governors and the churches.
- D. The salaries of all professors have been reviewed and increased annually based on the prescribed formula. At the present time one retired professor is supported. The salaries of the staff have been reviewed and where appropriate, increased.
- E. The churches continue to support the College faithfully. Special appreciation is expressed for the substantial contributions from our sister churches in Australia.
- F. The transition to a computerized accounting system was completed. A decision was made to commence reporting financial matters on a calendar year basis beginning in 1997. Audited statements of years ending May 31, 1995, May 31, 1996 and the subsequent seven month period ending on December 31, 1996 are included as appendices.
- G. Tuition fees for students have been set and approved by the Board of Governors.
- H. Based on the College financial budgets, assessments per communicant member have remained at \$63.00 since January 1, 1995.

III. CONSIDERATIONS

*Acts of General Synod*

On the basis of the reports received, Synod considers that the affairs of the Theological College are being well managed.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide

- A. To receive for information the audited financial statements and the report of the Auditors for the previous fiscal periods; to relieve the Treasurer of the Board of all responsibilities for these fiscal periods; and to appoint sr. A. Spithoff, C.A. as Auditor until the next General Synod.
- B. To express thankfulness for the support from the churches in Canada, the United States of America and Australia.

ADOPTED

**Article 87**

**Theological College: Expansion**

Committee IV presents Agenda Items: I.B.1, I.B.4, II.KK, II.ZZ, IV.K, IV.U, IV.V, IV.Z

I. MATERIALS

- A. Proposal from the Board of Governors of the Theological College with respect to the expansion of the College Facilities.
- B. Letters from the Canadian Reformed Churches at Burlington-South, Watford, Burlington-East, Lincoln, Taber, Orangeville and Elora.

II. OBSERVATIONS

- A. The matter of the expansion of the College facilities was placed before Synod Abbotsford 1995. Section IV, I. states:
  - “To direct the Board of Governors to study and prepare a more detailed and definite proposal for the expansion of the College facilities, and seek the possibility of financing this project without increasing the assessment to the churches. A proposal should be submitted to the churches and the next Synod at least six months before the next Synod.”
- B. The Board of Governors appointed a committee “to further consider and develop a comprehensive plan and proposal for the expansion of the Theological College.”
- C. The committee was advised by the Senate, faculty, and staff that the library is the primary impetus for the expansion.
- D. The committee met in 1996 to review the mandate given by Synod Abbotsford 1995 and the direction of the Board of

*Acts of General Synod*

Governors. The library technician was requested and instructed to undertake a 'needs assessment' for the library and to seek input from other professional librarians, to formulate any other needs of the College, and determine by way of available statistics and other current resources what the library's needs will be in the next 20 years.

- E. The architect who was consulted was able to demonstrate that it was more cost effective and easier to construct a building specifically for the library than to spread its functions throughout the building and to remodel the building to accommodate those library functions. After extensive discussion with the architect, it was decided that a two-floor plan would best suit the library's needs and would be better situated on the property.
- F. The recommended plan includes 6702 feet of 'additional' space. Of this space, 6250 square feet are devoted to the library and the remaining 452 square feet are comprised of washrooms and an elevator which complies with the current building accessibility requirements.
- G. The recommendation of Synod Abbotsford 1995 included "... and seek the possibility of financing this project without increasing the assessment to the churches." One of the considerations, under Article 97 section III.D states: "... This proposal should indicate how this project can be financed from sources and means other than the regular assessment so that it does not necessarily burden the churches..."
- H. It is expected that the construction period would be approximately six to eight months. Target construction commencement is the summer (September) 1999.
- I. The project is expected to cost \$ 680,160.00. By the end of fiscal 1997 (December 31) the college will have approximately \$193,000 set aside and appropriated for the expansion. Conservatively it appears that the Women's Savings Action will be able to contribute \$75,000 for the expansion. This means that additional funds of approximately \$500,000 must be raised.
- J. It is proposed that the College obtain commitments of at least 80% of the funds required before construction may commence. The remaining 20% of funding may include private borrowing at preferred or low rates from members of the church federation. The Board requests permission to make its own funding arrangements for the remaining 20% if required.
- K. The Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington suggests that General Synod, via the Board of Governors, revisit the proposal with the intention of scaling it down in view of the financial obligations presently in our communities.

## *Acts of General Synod*

- L. The Grace Canadian Reformed Church at Watford feels that the cost is somewhat prohibitive for their small church. They ask General Synod to keep this in mind when determining the final cost.
- M. The Canadian Reformed Church at Elora encourages General Synod to accept the recommendations of the Board of Governors.
- N. The Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington suggests that construction be postponed until 80% of the funds are collected.
- O. The Canadian Reformed Church at Lincoln reminds us of the decision of General Synod Abbotsford 1995 mentioned in observation G above and that at least 80% of the money should be collected prior to start-up.
- P. The Taber Canadian Reformed Church suggests that the proposal is "a well-considered and suitable one" and offers its full endorsement.

### III. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. The plan as presented has been well received in the churches.
- B. Several churches have questioned whether we can commence building when money is promised to us, but when it has not yet been received. We trust that our people honour their pledges and therefore we find this stipulation unnecessary. We trust the Board of Governors to use their own discretion on this matter.
- C. Concerns have been expressed with respect to the annual assessments being raised. The committee emphatically states that "the regular college assessment must not and will not be increased as the result of the expansion." Over the last few years the College has been able to set aside \$41,000 of accrued surpluses which will be dedicated to the expansion plan. The assessment has remained at \$63 per communicant member since January 1 1995.
- D. Implementation of this proposal will necessarily encounter many unforeseen circumstances and the Board must have the authority to modify the plan and its implementation provided that such modification or alteration is not materially or substantially different than the recommended plan.

### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide:

- A. To thank the Board of Governors and its expansion committee for the thoroughness of their presentation.



- B. To instruct the Board of Governors to proceed with the 'Recommended Plan' on the basis as set out in this report.

ADOPTED

### **Article 88**

#### **Theological College: Pastoral Proficiency Program**

Committee IV presents their proposal regarding this subject. After discussion, the Committee takes this matter back for further consideration.

### **Article 89**

#### **Address of Dr. N. H. Gootjes**

The chairman expresses thankfulness to the faculty of the Theological College for their dedication and the high caliber of their work. Thereafter he gives the floor to Dr. N. H. Gootjes. He expresses appreciation for the tenure given to himself and Dr. J. de Jong. He notes that today was the last day of the academic season. He notes that all delegated ministers at Synod 1998, with the exception of one, are graduates of the Theological College. He reflects on some aspects of his own field, dogmatology, and on the challenge of teaching theology in a Scriptural and confessional way in today's world. He thanks Synod 1998 for the opportunity the faculty has had this evening to offer their input, noting especially the strong display of support for the expansion of the College building, and expressing the wish for the blessing of the Lord on the rest of Synod's labours.

### **Article 90**

#### **Adjournment**

After asking that Ps. 119: 42,44 be sung, Dr. N. H. Gootjes leads in prayer. The meeting is adjourned until Monday, May 18 at 9:30 am.

## **MORNING SESSION – MONDAY, MAY 18, 1998**

### **Article 91**

#### **Reopening**

The chairman asks that Psalm 80: 1, 2, 3 be sung, reads from 1 John 5: 13 – 21, and leads in prayer. Roll call shows that all are present.



**Article 92**

**Adoption of the Acts**

Articles 79 – 85, 87 – 90 of the Acts, pertaining to Friday, May 15, 1998, are adopted (Article 86 was inadvertently omitted and will be provided for adoption later).

**Article 93**

**Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity**

Committee IV presents their material on this matter. After discussion, the Committee takes it back for further consideration.

**Article 94**

**The Relationship with the ERQ**

Committee III presents their material on this matter. After discussion, the Committee takes it back for further consideration.

**EVENING SESSION – MONDAY, MAY 18, 1998**

**Article 95**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Hymn 38: 1, 2, 3, 4 be sung. Roll call shows that all are present.

**Article 96**

**Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity**

Committee IV presents: Agenda items I.F, II.P, II.V, II.EE, IV.I, IV.P, IV.V, IV.AA.

I. MATERIAL

- A. Report of Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity;
- B. Letters from the churches at Hamilton, Surrey, Rockway, London, Taber, and the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington.

II. INTRODUCTION

- A. General Synod Abbotsford 1995 re-appointed Deputies for the promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity to promote the unity of Reformed believers who have left the Christian Reformed Church with the mandate:

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1. to make their presence known for the purpose of information and consultation wherever necessary;
2. to make themselves available for advice on local developments;
3. to represent the churches, whenever invited, at assemblies or meetings held for the purpose of pursuing ecclesiastical unity;
4. to report on its activities to the churches and to the next General Synod. (Acts General Synod Abbotsford 1995, Art. V.B.).

### III. OBSERVATIONS

Deputies remember with gratitude the work that the late Rev. J. D. Wielenga did as deputy.

From the report of deputies, Synod takes note of the following:

#### A. Activities

1. Our churches were represented at meetings of the Alliance of Reformed Churches on November 14-16, 1995, November 11-13, 1996, October 16 and 17, 1997. Dr. J. DeJong was invited to prepare a memorandum to the committee on the church order as it was being discussed among the Alliance churches. The church order was later adopted at the Synod of the URCNA in 1997. Deputies hope to continue discussions on the church order with the Committee of Inter Church Relations of the United Reformed Churches (URCNA).
2. Deputies sent a delegation to the first Synod of the United Reformed Churches, held on October 1 and 2, 1996, in Lynwood, when the URCNA federated. Deputies also attended the second Synod of the URCNA, held October 21-23, 1997. There is rapid growth in the URC; there is much movement and flux in these churches.
3. The Inter-Church Relations Committee of the UCRNA reports to Synod gave considerable priority to the relation of the URC to the Canadian Reformed Churches, but the Synod itself pursued a policy of treating Reformed and Presbyterian churches equally. This has led deputies to believe that "federative unity has become much more of a long term option than before." They see the decision to establish fraternal relations with twelve other national and foreign church federations as implying "that the specific goal of federative unity with Reformed churches of a more

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immediate range and historical background has been let go in favour of a broader policy on ecumenical relations."

4. In December 1996, a letter of support and encouragement was sent to the Inter-Classical Conference organizing Committee, based in Escondido, California. Many churches in the conference are considering secession from the CRC.
  5. The committee was also invited to send a delegate to the Classis East of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches. They see this as an opportunity to initiate talks on a local level, after which overtures can be presented to major assemblies for the purpose of attaining federative unity.
  6. Several churches of our federation informed the committee of their work and asked for advice in their discussions with independent churches.
- B. Proposal from the deputies
1. Deputies propose that Synod make the following additions/modifications to their mandate:
    - a. that deputies be instructed to pursue continued fraternal dialogue with the United Reformed Churches in North America with a view towards establishing federative unity;
    - b. that deputies pursue a more restricted involvement in the Alliance of Reformed Churches with a view to pursuing federative unity with unfederated (independent) Reformed Churches;
    - c. that deputies represent the churches (when invited) at meetings of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, with a view to promoting greater understanding and exploring possibilities of federative unity;
    - d. that a new deputy be appointed from western Canada to fill the vacancy among the deputies created by the loss of Rev. J.D. Wielenga.
- C. Overtures from the churches
1. The Council of the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton overtures Synod to:
    - a. investigate with Deputies from the United Reformed Churches the possibility of a federative unity between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches in North America, and

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- b. present to the churches a report on this investigation, one year before the next General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Since 1992, the Council of the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton has been engaged in discussions with the Rehoboth United Reformed Church (formerly the Hamilton Independent CRC). Through these discussions, Council of the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton and the Rehoboth United Reformed Church recognized each other as true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, according to our confession in Art. 27-32 of the Belgic Confession. Classis Ontario-South, while expressing great joy over the fact that this recognition could be given, felt that implementation of this recognition is not permitted according to the Church Order, since such an arrangement appears to be a matter of the churches in common. The Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church respects this decision, and consequently brought this matter to General Synod. They expect the Rehoboth United Reformed Church to place a similar overture on the agenda of their major assembly.

The specific grounds for this overture, then, are summarized:

- i. Contact between the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church and the Rehoboth United Reformed Church has continued for three years since these churches officially recognized each other as true churches according to our mutual confession.
  - ii. The decision of Classis Ontario-South, March 8 1995 obliged both Hamilton churches to question how to experience together the recognition given and how to give concrete content and meaning to the communion of saints.
  - iii. The United Reformed Churches have (since the given recognition) adopted the same confessional basis and the same liturgical forms as the Canadian Reformed Churches have.
  - iv. It is within the mandate of General Synod to deal with federative unity (Article 30 C.O.). It is important, however, that local contact is maintained at the same time as contact is in progress at the federative level.
2. Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church at Surrey proposes:

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"To mandate the existing Committees for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity and Contact with L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec or a new committee to work towards establishing a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the United Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Reformed Churches, L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec and the Free Reformed Churches under the existing rules of Ecclesiastical Fellowship as a stepping stone towards possibly further federative unity in the future." The church at Taber supports this proposal.

3. Rockway Canadian Reformed Church proposes:  
to appoint Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity and to authorize these brothers to approach the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches for the purpose of engaging in official discussions with these bodies that are aimed towards ecclesiastical unity.
4. The Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington-East proposes:  
"that deputies be instructed to pursue continued fraternal dialogue with the United Reformed Churches of North America and specifically explore and discuss the impediments towards establishing federative unity."
5. The Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington-South endorses the Hamilton overture and supports the recommendation of the deputies:  
"to continue fraternal dialogue with the URCNA with a view towards establishing federative unity."
6. The Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington-South informs Synod that:  
"we regret that the Deputies' speech at the 1997 URCNA Synod appears to impose as a precondition to unity that there be "mutual understanding ... that the Liberation of 1944 was an act of obedience and a necessary development. (Appendix 8)"
7. The Taber Canadian Reformed Church indicates agreement with point 2 of the proposed renewed deputies' mandate.
8. The Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church at London report on their contacts with the United Reformed Churches at Aylmer, Woodstock, London and Clinton. They express frustration because they perceive a lack of willingness on the part of the local URCs to deal with the real issues. The



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Canadian Reformed Church at London has taken the position that pulpit exchange is only possible in a sister-church relationship but notes that other Canadian Reformed ministers do not follow the same rule. They request Synod if possible "to give some direction on this matter in their mandate to the DPEU."

### IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. Deputies are requesting a mandate that is generally more aggressive and focused in approach. This approach is consistent with our Scriptural calling for unity, and it also reflects the expressed desire of the churches to pursue substantial progress in this respect.
- B. Instead of being instructed to deal with those who "left the Christian Reformed Church" in general, deputies propose to continue dialogue in particular with the URCNA. Deputies do not need a specific mandate with respect to the Alliance of Reformed Churches because it is adequately covered in points 1,2 and 3 of their mandate.
- C. The proposal of the church at Rockway as well as the 'package' presented by Hamilton both acknowledge that their proposals should have gone to classis before coming to Synod. The submission of the church at Surrey – supported by the Church at Taber - is a new proposal in the sense that it allows Ecclesiastical Fellowship as a stepping stone towards *possible* further federative unity. It is unfortunate that these proposals were not discussed in the minor assemblies before they came to General Synod. Since this was not done, General Synod can do no more than pass on these submissions to the deputies for discussion. The churches should be encouraged to bring these proposals to the minor assemblies, to resolve their differences there, so that the churches may proceed in a united and orderly fashion.
- D. The proposals from the churches at Hamilton, Surrey, and Rockway, and the supporting statement from Taber, offer suggestions on the procedure that should be followed in establishing federative unity. Deputies should be given some freedom, depending on what develops in the dialogue. They should also take into account the suggestions of these churches.
- E. With respect to the concern expressed by the Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington-South, deputies at the 1997 URCNA Synod did not impose any preconditions to ecclesiastical unity. Instead they said that a mutual understanding and appreciation for the Liberation of 1944 would indicate that we have come a long way.



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- F. From the reports submitted by the various churches, it appears that local discussions with the URC are encountering different obstacles and proceeding at different rates. In these circumstances it is appropriate that the churches inform the deputies appointed by General Synod of their positive and negative experiences. The deputies should also make themselves available to assist the local churches in particular matters. In this way the concerns expressed by the church at London are addressed.
- G. The church at Hamilton has proposed that deputies be instructed to report to the churches a year before the next Synod. The current mandate of deputies is to report to the churches and to the next general Synod. Deputies should be instructed to report regularly for the greater involvement of the churches.
- H. The proposal of the Ebenezer Church at Burlington is a good one. The desire of the churches to establish federative unity with the URCNA would be expeditiously accomplished by focusing on what impediments are keeping us apart, and how they can be resolved.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide:

- A. To thank the deputies for their labours.
- B. To acknowledge, with gratitude to the Lord, the contribution of the late Rev. J.D. Wielenga to the work of the deputies.
- C. To rename the 'Deputies for Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity': The 'Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity.'
- D. To appoint a committee, including a new committee member from western Canada to fill the vacancy created by the loss of Rev. J.D. Wielenga.
- E. To give this committee the following mandate:
  - 1. to make their presence known for the purpose of information and consultation wherever necessary;
  - 2. to represent the churches, whenever invited, at assemblies or meetings held for the purpose of pursuing ecclesiastical unity;
  - 3. to pursue continued fraternal dialogue with the United Reformed Churches in North America with a view towards establishing federative unity;
  - 4. to represent the churches (when invited) at meetings of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, with a view to

promoting greater understanding and exploring possibilities of federative unity;

5. to make themselves available upon request of Canadian Reformed Churches for advice on local developments;
6. to discuss and develop a proposal as to how to proceed in encouraging federative unity;
7. to provide information to the churches at regular intervals, and to serve Synod 2001 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.

ADOPTED

### **Article 97**

#### **Relationship with L'Église Réformée du Québec**

Committee III presents: IA, IJJ, IJK, IIN, IIQ, IIR, IYY, IIAA, IIJJ, IILL, IIOO, IIVV, IIWW, IIZZ, IIAAA, IICCC, IV G, IV T (part 1).

#### **I. MATERIAL**

- A. Report of the Committee for Contact with l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec
- B. Letters from the churches at Watford, Chatham, Yarrow, Willoughby Heights, London, Attercliffe, Lincoln, Fergus, Burlington South, Calgary, Guelph, Houston, Grand Valley, Neerlandia, Elora, Orangeville, Burlington East.

#### **II. INTRODUCTION**

General Synod Abbotsford 1995 gave the Committee for Contact with l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ) the following mandate:

- A. To discuss with the deputies of L'Église Réformée du Québec the differences in Confession, Church Polity and worship which exist between our federations;
- B. To discuss with the deputies their relations with the Christian Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church in America, and evaluate them;
- C. To further investigate whether it is possible to have the Canadian Reformed Churches and L'Église Réformée du Québec as part of the same federation;
- D. To make use of the report submitted by the church at Ottawa and Classis Ontario North;
- E. To keep the churches informed about L'Église Réformée du Québec so that their financial needs and other needs as missionary churches can be responded to in a positive manner;

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- F. To serve Synod 98 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.

### III. OBSERVATIONS

#### A. From the Committee Report:

1. The ERQ bases its faith on the revealed Word of God as found in the Old and New Testament and has officially adopted the Westminster Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism as its confessional statements. The Committee did not evaluate the Westminster Standards since Synod 1965 already "considered and judged that a church federation maintaining the Presbyterian church government and subscribing to and upholding the Westminster Standards would be a product of the Calvinist Reformation and a true church of the Lord".
2. The Preamble to the Westminster Confession, which was added by the founding Synod of the ERQ in 1988, allows for freedom of conscience in relation to articles concerning the place of the political government in the life of the church, marriages with consanguinity, and in relation to the occupations and duties to be accomplished on the Lord's Day. Furthermore The Preamble does not bind the conscience to some of the polemical expressions found in the Westminster Confession.
3. The Committee is of the opinion that no further discussion is necessary on The Preamble.
4. At present the ERQ has no official relationships with any other church federations. Contacts are growing with the United Reformed Churches. The ERQ now has a Committee for Inter-Church Relations.
5. The Committee states that a Reformed church polity shines through in the ODE (Order and Discipline of the ERQ). The Committee reports that though some weaknesses can be pointed out it does not articulate these weaknesses.
6. The office of deacon is open to all members (2.4.3, pg. 29), in contrast to the office of elder which is restricted to the male gender (2.2.4, pg. 28). Thus the office of deacon is open to women. Deacons are not part of the ruling council of the church (5.1.2.1, pg. 10), deacons are "elected" and "ordained" to office. "Pastoral visits must be made part of the work of elders, ministers of the word and deacons under the direction of the local council. The purpose of these visits is to watch over the spiritual growth of the members and particularly their faith and their conduct." (4.2.5, pg. 31).

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The Committee quotes Calvin's Institutes to prove that there were deaconesses in the early church.(5.1.2.3, pg. 11)

7. "As in the CanRCs there is no officially adopted order of worship in the l'ERQ." (5.1.3, pg. 12). This same section adds that "there is one worship service a week, generally on Sunday morning" as well that "occasionally a minister from another church may be invited to preach, at the discretion of the local pastor and elders" . The Committee Report provides further information regarding the elements of the worship service in the ERQ. "Prayers in the worship services are led by the conductor of the service and by some people of the assembly. "(5.1.3.6, pg. 14) "On these occasions there might be alternation of appropriate songs and Bible readings, short meditations, banners, Bible stories for and by children etc." (5.1. 3. 6, pg. 15)
8. The Lord's Table is deemed to be "rather open " in that some people who are not members also participate. The ERQ committee admitted "that there is a growing awareness that the councils needed to fence the table more closely. " The Committee recommends that within the framework of Ecclesiastical Fellowship the CanRCs could urge movement to a more closely fenced table.
9. With regards to Public Profession of faith it is stated that "a thorough knowledge of the Reformed doctrine is not demanded." Confession of and binding to the Reformed doctrine are not required (5.1.3.5, pg. 14).
10. There are no standardized liturgical forms (5.1.3.8, pg. 15). "This has as a result some lack of uniformity of practice." The Report states that "though the use of standard liturgical forms is relatively important, the lack of such forms should not be an insurmountable barrier to Ecclesiastical Fellowship."
11. In view of the Committee's mandate "to further investigate whether it is possible to have the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Eglise Reformee du Quebec as part of the federation" the Committee considered two possibilities: a "French Classis" and "full integration". Neither of these models seemed to be workable. The Committee cannot recommend that church union or merger would be beneficial or advisable. Language is the great divider. The Committee states that "it is important for the CanRCs to understand that the ERQ now needs to maintain this independent 'Francophone' identity."
12. The Committee recommends Synod accept the request of l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec, made to Synod '95, and

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reaffirmed at their Synod of Sept 12/13, 1997, to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship and to do so under their adopted Rules (1997).

13. The Committee recommends to appoint a Committee for Contact with l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec with the following mandate:
  - a. To respond if specific requests for assistance and advice are made in matters of confession, church polity and worship;
  - b. To initiate and continue discussions with the ERQ CICR concerning the supervision of the Lord's table with a view to admitting only professing members of the church to the table; the need for professing members to express agreement with the confessional standards; the necessity and desirability of adopting liturgical forms;
  - c. To respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend Synods of the ERQ;
  - d. To be ready to give assistance in developing mission possibilities in Quebec;
  - e. To keep the churches informed about l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec so that we can respond in a positive manner to their financial and other needs as missionary churches;
  - f. To serve Synod 2001 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod;
  - g. To inform the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the relationship with l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec.
- B. Through overtures and letters several concerns are raised and suggestions are given by the churches:
  1. The church at Watford suggests we are not ready to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship since the ERQ allows for women to serve as full-fledged deacons. They also have difficulties with the prominent role given to Synods in ordaining ministers and in matters of discipline.
  2. The church at Chatham is not in favour of entering into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship until the ERQ adopts a stricter policy regarding the fencing of the Lord's Supper.



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3. The church at Yarrow urges Synod not to accept the request of the ERQ to enter Ecclesiastical Fellowship because of how they view the fencing of Lord's Supper, confessional membership, women deacons, Sabbath observance. The church at Yarrow is of the opinion that the last two matters should be added to the mandate of the Committee.
4. The church at Willoughby Heights is not in agreement with the report of the Committee and questions why Ecclesiastical Fellowship should be established under the rules suggested by the ERQ.
5. The church at London disagrees with the recommendations of the report. They question whether the matters under discussion are minor points that fall within the scope of Article 50 of the Church Order. The church at London is especially concerned about the confessions (Westminster), church polity, style of worship of the ERQ. They also raise concerns about the worship services and about the ERQ's position on deaconesses.
6. The church at Attercliffe is of the opinion that the considerations and conclusions of the Committee Report "are seriously flawed and that at this time there is no ground to recognize the ERQ as a faithful and true church of the Lord Jesus Christ and enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship." They disagree with the Committee's suggestion that federative unity is impractical and take exception to the reasoning of the Committee on this point. The church at Attercliffe also has difficulties with the Committee's reference to Synod 1965. "Having studied Article 141 of General Synod 1965 Council disagrees with the report. Synod 1965 did not judge that a church federation maintaining Presbyterian church government and subscribing to the Westminster Standards is a true church of the Lord. If that would be true than the implication is that the Canadian Reformed Churches have made such a judgement concerning all kinds of Presbyterian churches."
7. The church at Lincoln overtures Synod not to accept the recommendation of the Committee but to amend the recommendation to read:
  - a. Accept the request of L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec, made to Synod'95, and reaffirmed at their Synod of Sept. 12,13, 1997, to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship and to do so under their adopted rules (1997), subject to the mutual satisfactory conclusion of the discussions on the matters listed in point B 2, of the recommendations as a, b, and c.



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- b. To list under B 2 in addition to a, b, and c:
    - i. The necessity and desirability of conducting two (2) official worship services on each Lord's Day.
    - ii. the desirability of not ordaining women to the office of deacon.
  - c. To delete point C from the recommendations.
8. The church at Fergus is not in favour of entering into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship at this time due to problems with confessional membership and the fencing of the Lord's Supper.
  9. The church at Burlington South expresses some reservations about the way the Lord's Day is observed in the ERQ and about entering into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship on the basis of their terms.
  10. The church at Calgary is of the opinion that the same approach should be taken with the ERQ as with the OPC. This church wants more extensive discussions with the ERQ on the fencing of the Lord's Supper, confessional membership, deaconesses and on the fact that ministers from other denominations are allowed to preach in the ERQ.
  11. The church at Guelph questions the report on the matters of deaconesses, worship, fencing of the Lord's Supper, profession of faith, lack of standardized liturgical forms and why we would have to enter into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship on the basis of their rules.
  12. The church at Houston is not in favour of entering a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship until the issues of fencing the Lord's Supper, confessional membership, the need for adopted liturgical forms and the matter of women deacons are resolved.
  13. The church at Grand Valley is of the opinion that the matters of the fencing of the Lord's Supper, Confessional Membership, and women deacons are obstacles for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
  14. The church at Neerlandia raises concerns about one worship service per Lord's Day, admission to the Lord's Supper and about having women deacons.
  15. The church at Elora urges Synod not to follow the recommendations of the Report because of the issues of Sabbath Day observance, ordination of women deacons, fencing of the Lord's Supper, absence of adopted liturgical

## *Acts of General Synod*

forms and order of worship, lack of clarity on their status with the PCA and the position of Synods within in the ERQ.

16. The church at Orangeville expresses concern about the ordination of women deacons and the lack of standard liturgical forms.
17. The church at Burlington East supports the recommendations of the Committee.

### IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. It is obvious that the ERQ is in the beginning stages of church development. On certain matters and issues they have not articulated a position (e.g. liturgical forms, fencing of the Lord's Supper, order of worship). A relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, therefore, is neither feasible nor advisable at this time.
- B. From the observations and concerns expressed by the churches it is evident that the following areas need further clarification and should remain topics of discussion:
  1. The nature and status of the deacons and deaconesses;
  2. The matter of liturgical forms, order of worship, supervision of the pulpit and Lord's Day observance;
  3. The fencing of the Lord's Table and possible different practices among the various congregations;
  4. The need for confessional binding for members and office bearers;
  5. The differences in the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship of the ERQ and the CanRCs;
  6. The question whether federative unity is possible or not.

### V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide:

- A. To note with gratitude the contact and developing relationship with the ERQ.
- B. To decline the invitation of the ERQ to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship at this time.
- C. To re-appoint the committee for contact with the ERQ with the following mandate:
  1. To clarify and discuss the points raised in Consideration B in view of the concerns raised by the churches;

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2. To keep the churches informed about the ERQ so that they may be able to respond to financial and other needs of the ERQ;
3. To respond if specific requests for assistance and advice are made in matters of confession, church polity, and liturgy;
4. To respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend Synods of the ERQ;
5. To serve Synod 2001 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.

It is moved to delete from IV.B.6: "The question whether federative unity is possible or not."

DEFEATED

The committee proposal is voted on.

ADOPTED

**Article 98**

**Relationship with the Free Reformed Churches**

Committee III presents: II G.

I. MATERIAL

Letter from Regional Synod West

II. OBSERVATIONS

- A. Regional Synod West of December 2, 1997 dealt with the overture of Classis Pacific of December 10, 11, 1996 concerning contact with the Free Reformed Churches of North America. Regional Synod gratefully took over the overture of Classis Pacific *in toto*.
- B. Classis Pacific made the following recommendations:
  1. Classis Pacific notes with joy and thanksgiving the confessional unity which the Canadian Reformed Church at Aldergrove and the Emmanuel Free Reformed Church at Abbotsford have observed in each other and which has led to a mutual recognition as true Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.
  2. Classis Pacific urges the Regional Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Western Canada to support this unity endeavour by overturing General Synod 1998, at Fergus Ontario, to establish a committee for contact with the Free Reformed Churches of North America with the intent of reaching full federative unity.

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3. Classis Pacific advises the Canadian Reformed Church at Aldergrove to refrain from implementing its relationship with the Emmanuel Free Reformed Church at Abbotsford pending the decision of General Synod 1998.
4. Classis Pacific encourages the Church at Aldergrove to keep alive this matter of promoting unity locally and federatively.

### III. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. The church at Aldergrove has taken the proper ecclesiastical way by channeling their requests via the minor assemblies and by providing these assemblies with sufficient information.
- B. In the light of the developments between the Emmanuel Free Reformed church at Abbotsford and the Canadian Reformed Church at Aldergrove, the cause of unity would require that discussions between churches in these federations also take place on a federative level.
- C. "Fellowship with other churches should be initiated only after a thorough and serious investigation is made and it is clear that these churches not only accept the Reformed confessions and regulations of Reformed church government but also abide by them" (Synod Edmonton 1965, Acts, Art. 141 II). From the enclosed material it appears that the Free Reformed Churches of North America hold that the Holy Scriptures are the inspired and infallible Word of God, have as their doctrinal standards the Three Forms of Unity, and base their church government on the same church polity as the Canadian Reformed Churches.

### IV. RECOMMENDATION

- A. To note with gratitude the contact between the Canadian Reformed Church at Aldergrove and the Emmanuel Free Reformed Church at Abbotsford.
- B. To add the following to the mandate of the Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity:
  1. To take up contact with the External Relations Committee of the Free Reformed Churches of North America.
  2. To initiate fraternal dialogue with the Free Reformed Churches in North America with a view towards establishing federative unity.

ADOPTED

**Article 99**

**Adjournment**

Rev. W. den Hollander requests that Psalm 122: 1, 3 be sung and leads in prayer. Synod is adjourned.

**MORNING SESSION - TUESDAY, MAY 19, 1998**

**Article 100**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Psalm 81: 1, 2, 3 be sung, reads from 2 John, and leads in prayer. Roll call shows that all are present except br. J. Schouten who is absent with notice.

**Article 101**

**Adoption of the Acts**

Articles 86, 91 – 99 of the Acts are adopted.

**Article 102**

**Appeal of Mr. G. Kruyswijk**

Synod meets in closed session. Committee II presents their proposal re this matter.

I. MATERIAL

Appeal III.Y., Mr. G. Kruyswijk, Grand Rapids, MI, U.S.A.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod decide

That the appeal is inadmissible on the grounds that the matter of Mr. Kruyswijk's censure has been dealt with sufficiently by the major assemblies.

ADOPTED

**Article 103**

**Overture of br. P. VanderMeulen**

Synod continues to meet in closed session. Committee IV presents: Agenda item II.U.

I. MATERIAL

Overture from brother P. VanderMeulen re: the method of admittance to the table of the Lord.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod declare this overture inadmissible because:

This overture comes from an individual member of one of the churches and is addressed to General Synod. According to Article 30 C.O., "a new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly may be put on the agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it."

ADOPTED

**Article 104**

**Appeal from the Church at Willoughby Heights**

Synod continues to meet in closed session. Committee III presents: III A

I. MATERIAL

Appeal from the church at Willoughby Heights (Port Kells) (III A).

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod declares the appeal of the church at Willoughby Heights admissible since it is an appeal of a decision made by Regional Synod West Dec 5, 1995.

III. OBSERVATIONS

- A. Regional Synod West held Dec. 5, 1995, Article 5B, concurred with the judgment of Classis Pacific Oct. 3/95. Classis stated that:
1. Article 70 of the Church Order does not speak about members who have withdrawn from the church, but who have been excommunicated.
  2. Article 74 Church Order does not apply. Since the brother is outside of the church, the church of Surrey does not lord it over the church at Port Kells by dealing with the brother.
  3. Article 62 also does not apply, since the church at Port Kells no longer had any jurisdiction over this brother.
- B. Regional Synod West concurred with the decision of Classis on the following grounds:
1. Withdrawal discontinues a relationship of a church member with his church. Therefore we must speak about admission, not readmission (cf. Art. 62, 70 C.O.).



## *Acts of General Synod*

2. The discussion between Surrey and Port Kells leaves room for improvement. The churches would have been better served if the opportunities for reconciliation could have been completed before Surrey Maranatha accepted this brother as a member in good standing. However, Regional Synod does not consider this a matter of lording it over each other (cf. Art. 74 C.O.).
- C. The church at Willoughby Heights disagrees with these grounds and asks General Synod to judge:
1. That the first ground (of the decision of Regional Synod West) cannot be sustained for the following reasons:
    - a. Whereas it is true that withdrawal discontinues a relationship of a church member with his church, the "Therefore" phrase does not logically follow. When such a person seeks to become a member again, it is a matter of rejoining. Since the person rejoins, you must speak of readmission not admission.
    - b. Stating that we must speak about "admission, not readmission" on the ground that the person joins another congregation is sophistry which makes null and void the bond of churches. It gives the message that one can escape discipline, and go to the congregation of one's choice by simply withdrawing and seeking to be readmitted.
  2. That the second ground is not a ground at all for the following reasons:
    - a. Regional Synod expressed a "pastoral" opinion, which it was not called to do.
    - b. Simply saying that it "does not consider this a matter of lording it over each other" is making a statement without giving grounds."

#### IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. Synod agrees with the judgement of Regional Synod West of December 5, 1995 to uphold the answer given by Classis Pacific October 3, 1995 that the Articles 70, 74, and 62 of the Church Order do not apply.
- B. Regional Synod is correct that "withdrawal discontinues a relationship of a church member with his church".
- C. Regional Synod is correct that the word readmission ad Article 70 C.O. does not apply in this case.

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- D. Although Willoughby Heights expresses itself too strongly when it speaks of "sophistry which makes null and void the bond of churches," it is true that in the way of cooperation and communication among the bond of churches there could have been reconciliation before the acceptance of this brother as a member of the church at Surrey.
- E. Even though Regional Synod is correct when it expresses in its second ground a better way of dealing with the matter, a pastoral opinion as such is no ground.
- F. Willoughby Heights is incorrect when stating "simply saying that it 'does not consider this a matter of lording it over each other' is making a statement without giving grounds." Regional Synod made more than a statement; it reaffirmed the judgement of Classis: "since the brother is outside of the church, the church of Surrey does not lord it over the church at Port Kells by dealing with the brother."

### V. RECOMMENDATION

Synod decide to deny the appeal of the church at Willoughby Heights.

ADOPTED

## **Article 105**

### **Theological College: Board of Governors**

Committee IV presents Agenda items I.B.1, II.Z, IV.U.

#### I. MATERIAL

- A. Nominations for the Board of Governors from Regional Synod West, December 2, 1997 and Regional Synod East, November 12, 1997.
- B. Report of the Board of Governors to General Synod 1998
- C. Letters from Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church (Burlington-East)
- D. Letter from the Canadian Reformed Church at Lincoln

#### II. OBSERVATIONS

- A. With respect to the appointments to the Board of Governors, Synod observes:
  - 1. General Synod 1995 appointed brothers R. Aasman, M. Kampen and J. VanderWoude to the board;

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2. Brother A. VanEgmond, one of the governors of the college passed away, after having served on the board for eight years, and needs to be replaced;
  3. Brothers van Spronsen and Veldkamp have completed their terms as governors and need to be replaced;
  4. The Board of Governors recommends that Synod "appoint, elect, or re-appoint six active ministers to hold office until the next General Synod and to appoint at least three substitutes from each Regional Synod."
  5. Regional Synod West December 2, 1997 nominated the following ministers to serve as Governors of the Theological College: R. Aasman, J. Moesker, J. Visscher; alternates (in order): R.A. Schouten, W.B. Slomp, E.J. Tiggelaar.
  6. Regional Synod East November 12, 1997 nominated the following ministers to serve as Governors of the Theological College: D.G.J. Agema, W. den Hollander, P.G. Feenstra; alternates (in order): G. Nederveen, P. Aasman, C. Bosch.
  7. The Report of the Governors makes the following recommendations with regard to the Governors who will serve on the Finance and Property Committee:
    - a. to re-appoint brother H.J. Sloots as Governor for a term from the date of his re-appointment until the first General Synod held after the date of his re-appointment;
    - b. to re-appoint the brothers M. Kampen and J. VanderWoude as Governors for a term from the date of their re-appointment until the second General Synod held after the date of their re-appointment;
    - c. to appoint the brothers W.Oostdyk and T. VanPopta for a term from the date of their appointments until the third General Synod held after the date of their reappointment (with as alternates the brothers H. van der Velde (for W. Oostdyk) and W. Smouter (for T. Van Popta).
- B. With respect to the appointments to the Board of Governors, Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church observes that all the ministers nominated by Regional Synod East are due to retire in 2001. They suggest that the Board would be able to perform its duties better if the retirement dates were staggered to ensure more continuity.
- C. The church at Lincoln expresses support for all the appointments proposed by the Board.

III. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. In accordance with section 3.04(a) of By-Law Number 1 (as amended by By-Law number 3), General Synod shall appoint or re-appoint six active ministers to the Board of Governors.
- B. In accordance with By-Law Number 1, section 3.04(b), General Synod shall appoint or re-appoint five brothers who are not ministers.
- C. Because the Property and Finance Committee is involved in the general operation of the college, it is advantageous to have those governors live in the vicinity of the Theological College. The proposal to expand the College makes this even more important.
- D. Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church is correct when they observe that all ministers nominated by Regional Synod East are due to retire in 2001. According to the by-laws of the College, the Board may "provide for the election and retirement of Governors in rotation, but no such by-law shall come into effect until it has been confirmed by synod." This is a matter that Regional Synod could have addressed. The Board of Governors has not indicated that this is a concern.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide:

- A. Not to intervene in the matter raised by the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church of Burlington-East with respect to the retirement schedule of ministers from the Board of Governors of the Theological College.
- B. To acknowledge the expiration of the term of office of the brs. C. VanSpronsen and K. Veldkamp with grateful acknowledgement of their labours.
- C. To acknowledge with thankfulness the work that brother A. Van Egmond did as Governor of the College.
- D. To re-appoint as Governors of the Theological College the following active ministers and their alternates: From Eastern Canada: D.G.J. Agema, W. den Hollander, P.G. Feenstra; alternates (in order): G. Nederveen, P. Aasman and C. Bosch.
- E. To re-appoint as Governors of the Theological College the following active ministers and their alternates: From Western Canada: R. Aasman, J. Visscher; and to appoint, J. Moesker. To appoint as alternates (in order): R.A. Schouten, W.B. Slomp, E.J. Tiggelaar.

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- F. To re-appoint br. H.J. Sloots as Governor for a term from the date of his re-appointment until the first General Synod held after the date of his re-appointment.
- G. To re-appoint brs. M. Kampen and J. VanderWoude as governors for a term from the date of their re-appointment until the second General Synod held after the date of their re-appointment.
- H. To appoint the brs. W. Oostdyk of Guelph and W. Smouter of Ancaster as Governors for a term from the date of their appointments until the third General Synod held after the date of their appointment (with as alternate for W. Oostdyk, br. H.T. VanderVelde of Attercliffe and as alternate for br. W. Smouter, br. T. VanPopta of Langley).

ADOPTED

It is noted that members of Synod appointed to positions above abstained from voting. The discussion re IV H was done in closed session.

**EVENING SESSION – TUESDAY, MAY 19, 1998**

**Article 106**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Psalm 104:1, 2 be sung. Roll call shows that all are present.

**Article 107**

**Theological College: Pastoral Proficiency Program**

Committee IV presents Agenda Items I.B.1, I.B.3, II.Z, II.BB, IV.O, IV.U, IV.V, IV.Z.

I. MATERIAL

- A. Report of the Board of Governors to General Synod Fergus.
- B. Proposal from the Board of Governors re: Certificate of Pastoral Proficiency.
- C. Letters from the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington-East, the Fellowship Church at Burlington-South, and the churches at Willoughby Heights, Lincoln, Taber and Elora.

II. OBSERVATIONS



*Acts of General Synod*

- A. The current proposal from the Board of Governors is the response to feedback received from students, consistories and ministers expressing the desire for "some more practical orientation" in the program of studies offered at the College. The proposed program is intended especially for those students who have misgivings concerning the nature of the work of the ministry.
- B. A proposal for a Certificate of Pastoral Proficiency was submitted to the churches. Ninety percent of the thirty churches that responded were in favour of this proposal. Some of the suggestions that came from the churches have been incorporated into the current proposal.

The Board has considered two options: integrate the program into the overall program of the College, or leave it in the jurisdiction of the churches, eg. to be implemented by means of classical deputies.

- C. The Board asks for the proposed certificate to be considered part of the requirements for admission to the ministry as regulated by the Church Order, Art. 4.B.1.
- D. The Board acknowledges that there are still outstanding matters which have to be looked at, but it is of the opinion that they can best be evaluated by the Senate and the Board as the program is implemented.
- E. The Board proposal includes a three month internship added to the regular training, leading to a Certificate of Pastoral Proficiency. This would not be part of the Master of Divinity degree, but an additional notation to the degree, strictly for ecclesiastical purposes.
- F. The Board insists that the professor of diaconology and ecclesiology should not be burdened with the organization of this program. The Board proposes that it be authorized to appoint an experienced minister to this task. He should be instructed to work in consultation with the professor of diaconology, and be accountable to the Senate.
- G. The Board has submitted a proposed curriculum to Synod, outlining what would be required of the students in every year of their study. The details of this program are contained in the Proposal to Synod 1998 re: Certificate of Pastoral Proficiency program.
- H. The Board proposes that a coordinator, in consultation with the professor of diaconology will draw up a list of ministers who can suitably function as designated mentors for students during their terms of internship in a congregation.



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- I. The Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church (Burlington-East) supports the aim of this report, but expresses several reservations regarding the implementation of the program:
  1. The administration structure and the students evaluation procedure is confusing and muddled.
  2. Much of the pastoral work can only be done effectively and legitimately by office bearers.
  3. It is not necessary that students prepare sermon outlines or deliver sermons for this certificate, since sermon outlines are already prepared for the Theological College, and experience in sermon delivery is also possible if a student has preaching consent from classis.
  4. The experience that can be acquired in this program is very limited because it would generally take place in the summer months when ministers take their vacations and consistories are generally less active.
  5. To require that the designated church financially support the student during this internship is not really proper, because there would be little real benefit to the particular church.
  6. The necessity or advisability of having a separate program is questionable.
  7. This practical training component rightly falls within the responsibilities of the Diaconiology Department of the college. What is mainly needed is to make these means compulsory for fourth year students and to devise evaluation procedures for them.
- J. The church at Willoughby Heights is of the opinion that this 'Certificate of Pastoral Proficiency' is an unnecessary addition to the present requirements for students seeking to be declared eligible for a call to the ministry, and therefore they urge Synod not to adopt this proposal. They raise the following objections:
  1. The implementation of this program will require a change to the Church Order.
  2. This whole proposal originates from the Board of Governors, and not from one of the churches.
  3. There is a questionable application of the Theological College Act, Art. 11 C and D because the work of the program coordinator does not fall in the category of administrators, but approaches that of a faculty member.
  4. The coordinator has considerable input as to whether a student should be granted a Certificate of Pastoral

## *Acts of General Synod*

Proficiency, and yet the churches (via General Synod) have no say in his appointment. If anything, General Synod should be involved in his appointment.

5. Some of the components of this program appear to be superficial. For example, the presence of a student with a minister would silence confidential conversation.
  6. The concept of 'internship' is rather clinical, because the student does the work of ministry without being called to that office.
  7. It is questionable whether someone can be called pastorally proficient after three months.
  8. Many components of this course naturally belong in the diaconological and Church Polity courses presently taught at the college.
  9. Consistories and churches, and especially the professors at the Theological College should be pastoral enough to address young men who are academically competent yet unsuitable for the office.
- K. The Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church (Burlington-South) supports the recommendations of the Board of Governors, but expresses the following opinion:
1. Part of the program should take place during the Fall or Winter, so that students may be exposed to 'regular' congregational life.
  2. The program is really an extension of the Theological College, and therefore it should be supervised by the professor of diaconology. This would also allow the practical component to dovetail with the academic portion of the course taught.
  3. It is unrealistic to expect a minister to add the responsibility of coordinating this project to his own workload.
- L. The Canadian Reformed Church at Lincoln is of the opinion that this program is unnecessary. They raise the following objections:
1. The cost factor has not been presented in depth. The churches will finally end up paying for both the coordinator as well as the student, regardless of whether it occurs through the Theological College assessment, or through the churches being served by the students, if necessary in conjunction with the Fund for Needy Students.
  2. The most challenging pastoral visits are not open to the student since they involve confidential matters.

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3. Students can obtain the same experience by visiting the sick and the lonely in the congregations of which they are a member. This would be less of a financial burden to the churches and the same experience could still be obtained.
- M. The church at Taber is convinced of the need for a pastoral proficiency program.
- N. The church at Elora encourages Synod to accept the Board's proposal.

### III. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. The task that the churches have entrusted to the Theological College is that of training young men for the ministry (Article 19, C.O.)
- B. There is at present already the option for students to obtain some measure of practical experience in the future work of ministry through teaching catechism classes or speaking an edifying word in the churches.
- C. Article 4.B.1 of the C.O. stipulates that those presenting themselves for a preparatory examination by the classis must "prove that they are members in good standing of one of the churches and have successfully completed a course of study as required by the churches." The Board of Governors in co-operation with the Senate of the Theological College have been given the mandate to ensure that young men are properly trained for the work of the ministry. It can be left up to them how to certify that the necessary course of study approved of by Synod has been completed, whether by means of an M.Div. degree only, an M.Div. degree with an additional notation, or an M.Div. degree with an additional certificate. It is however questionable whether a student should be declared pastorally "proficient" by means of a separate certificate, since the word suggests a high level of expertise or skill, whereas there would only have been a relatively brief exposure to some of the practical aspects of the work of a minister.
- D. Churches already pay students for teaching catechism and for speaking an edifying word. Whether students should be reimbursed for other activities must be left to the discretion of the churches.
- E. The task of the coordinator is more than an administrative one. There are elements in it which have direct connections with work being done in the Diaconological department of the Theological College, e.g. *assessing* the evaluations of the mentors, consistories, and others involved in this program, *consulting with* the professor of diaconology regarding this evaluation and together with him *making recommendations to the Senate* on the

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participation and work of the students in the program. Evaluation procedures must be developed and discussed with both the students and the designated ministers and consistories assigned to supervise the students.

- F. The Board of Governors must contemplate the addition of another faculty member for the diaconological department. If the Board proceeds with the appointment of a 'coordinator' such an appointment must be kept temporary until a future synod determines what the financial consequences are. Furthermore, it must be demonstrated that the task is only administrative. Otherwise a future synod should be involved in this appointment.
- G. Although direct supervision of a student by a minister is an advantage for a student, it must be remembered that the work of a minister is also subject to the supervision of his consistory and that his work is done in co-operation with his fellow elders. From this perspective, a case could be made to expand the provisions of the program to allow for the possibility of a student being exposed to the work of the ministry under the supervision of a consistory in a vacant church in conjunction with its counsellor (Art. 45, C.O.), or in a church while the local minister is on vacation.
- H. Various practical concerns pertaining to visits undertaken by the student with or without a minister have been raised. These concerns indicate the limited value of an internship. They are factors which will need ongoing attention and evaluation if the program is to be implemented. Other avenues need to be explored next to or even in the place of such an internship in order to facilitate the entry of the student into the pastoral work he will be required to do in the future.
- I. Whereas the churches already have experience with students teaching catechism classes and speaking an edifying word, the concept of an internship is a relatively new element in a more practice-oriented approach. Its practical implications are not yet fully evident. The provisional character of the present proposal must therefore be stressed. In this regard we take note of a statement in the report of the Board of Governors: "The Board is well aware that this proposal is not the final word, but rather a start of something that the Board and, going by the responses, also the churches would like to see implemented."

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide

- A. To express gratitude for the proposed changes to course content and orientation, allowing for the presence of guest lecturers,

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seminars and workshops, to give a more practical orientation and content to the training for the ministry.

- B. To express thankfulness to the Board of Governors for this report.
- C. To direct the Board of Governors:
  - 1. to proceed with the components of the proposed program, including the internship, on a trial basis, assessing their effectiveness and considering possible alternatives without making them prerequisites for entrance to the ministry at this time (Art. 4.B.1 C.O.);
  - 2. to consider how elements of this proposed program can best be integrated with the academic courses presently being taught at the College, and whether this can be accommodated without extending the present course beyond four years;
  - 3. to consider the addition of another faculty member for the diaconological department;
  - 4. to serve the next General Synod with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.

ADOPTED

### **Article 108**

#### **Grand Rapids Appeal re Presbyterian Church of Korea**

Committee III presents agenda item III W.

#### **I. MATERIAL**

An appeal from the Church at Grand Rapids re: Presbyterian Church of Korea

#### **II. ADMISSIBILITY**

Synod decides that the submission of the church at Grand Rapids is admissible since it is an appeal of Acts 1995 Article 106 VI H.

#### **III. OBSERVATIONS**

A. The church at Grand Rapids requests Synod 1998 to judge

- 1. that the decision to establish Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the PCK be rescinded
- 2. that an explanation and apology be sent to the PCK...



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3. that we reaffirm to the PCK our desire to continue contact with them with a view to resolving all impediments remaining which prevent full Ecclesiastical Fellowship,
  4. that the CRCA be instructed to investigate the two issues of supervision of the Lord's table and confessional membership and report to another General Synod.
- B. A similar appeal was made to Synod Abbotsford 1995. Synod 1995 denied the appeal of the Church at Grand Rapids based on the following considerations:
1. "The requests to rescind the decision to have Ecclesiastical Fellowship or to declare that Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FCS and PCK was premature is based on the assumption that these two federations have the same position as the OPC which to date has prevented Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC. This assumption has been addressed under Consideration A.1.b" (Synod 1995, Article 106, Consideration D.2).
  2. "It must be admitted that with respect to the PCK Synod is not able to evaluate the situation with the information available to us" (Synod 1995, Article 106, Consideration A.2).
- C. The church at Grand Rapids considers that "Synod 1995 gave no reason for denial" of their appeal to rescind the decision of Synod 1992 regarding the PCK.
- IV. CONSIDERATIONS
- A. The church at Grand Rapids appeals the decision of Synod Lincoln 1992 with respect to the PCK on the grounds that the OPC has charged our churches with having a double standard on the issues of confessional membership and the admission to the Lord's Supper. The OPC's CEIR stated "both the PCK and the FCS have essentially the same position as the OPC in matters of confessional membership and the supervision of the Lord's Table"(Synod 1995, Appendix V.II.B.1). The Committee for Contact with the OPC asked for more evidence that this is indeed true (Acts Synod 1995, Appendix V.II.B.4). To date such evidence has not been provided by the OPC.
  - B. The church at Grand Rapids also does not provide Synod with any new information which would justify severing ties with the PCK.
  - C. Grand Rapids is correct that these two issues should have been resolved prior to a relationship. There is, however, no justification for reversing the decision to have Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the PCK simply on the basis of third party information. Synod



1995 should, however, have made these concerns part of the mandate of the CRCA.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide:

- A. To deny points 1, 2, and 3 of the appeal of the Church at Grand Rapids
- B. To include in the mandate of the CRCA a further investigation of the practices regarding the fencing of the Lord's Supper and confessional membership in the PCK and report to the next Synod.

ADOPTED

**Article 109**

**Appeal of Burlington Ebenezer re Women's Voting**

Committee IV presents agenda item II.C.2.

I. MATERIAL

Appeal from Ebenezer Church at Burlington-East re: Women's participation in election of office bearers.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod declares this appeal admissible.

III. OBSERVATIONS

- A. Synod Abbotsford 1995, in Article 51, declared an overture from sister C. VanEerden on the subject of women's voting rights to be inadmissible on the following grounds:
  - 1. "That according to Art. 33 C.O. matters once decided upon may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds;
  - 2. A new matter which has not been previously presented to that major assembly may be put on the agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it (Art. 30 C.O.)."
- B. The council of Ebenezer Church in Burlington asserts that:
  - 1. Synod Abbotsford 1995 tried to side-step the issue of women voting "while it implicitly made the decision that the practice of our Dutch sister churches is scriptural";
  - 2. this decision (to the effect that the practice of our Dutch sister churches is scriptural) is implicit in the fact that, in spite of this decision of the Dutch churches, Synod nevertheless concluded that "these churches are faithful to

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the Word of God, the Confessions and the Church Order [Acts art. 19.IV.A];"

3. if the Dutch churches are right, then there are new grounds for us to consider, and therefore General Synod should have granted the request of Sr. VanEerden; if the Dutch churches are wrong, on the other hand, then we must correct our Dutch sister churches of the error of their ways;
  4. that the 1996 General Synod at Berkel has upheld the decision of Ommen.
- C. The council of Ebenezer Church in Burlington overtures Synod 1998 "to appoint a committee to study the matter and report to the churches no later than six months prior to General Synod 2001."

IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. The submission of Sr. VanEerden submitted to General Synod Abbotsford 1995 was not an appeal but an overture. Thus it was, "a new matter"(Article 30.C.O.) and for this reason it was inadmissible.
- B. If the Ebenezer Church in Burlington questions the legitimacy of our continuing relationship with our Dutch sister-churches in the light of their decision to allow women to vote, they may appeal this matter. If the Ebenezer Church wants to deal with the matter of women's voting rights again, the Church Orderly path must be followed. A proposal must proceed through the minor assemblies until it reaches General Synod.

V. RECOMMENDATION

Synod decides:

- A. to declare that General Synod Abbotsford 1995 did not err when the overture of Sr. C. VanEerden was declared inadmissible.
- B. not to appoint a committee as requested by the Council of the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington-East.

ADOPTED

**Article 110**

**Appeal of Burlington Fellowship re Women's Voting**

Committee IV presents agenda item III.P.

I. MATERIAL

An appeal from Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington regarding Article 51 of Synod Abbotsford 1995.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod declares this appeal admissible.

III. OBSERVATIONS

A. The Council of Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church appeals the decision found in Article 51 of the Acts of General Synod Abbotsford 1995 on the following grounds:

1. This decision contradicts earlier Synod decisions with respect to the jurisdiction of Synod.

This is substantiated by the following arguments:

- a. the matter of women's voting was not a new matter, and has been dealt with (at) various Synods directly: see Synod Coaldale, 1977, Art 27; Synod Smithville, 1980, Art. 83; Synod Cloverdale 1983, Art. 160;
  - b. the request to appoint (re-establish) a committee is not an appeal, but an overture, and the request was not within the province of a minor assembly.
  - c. matters which belong to the jurisdiction of the federated churches (i.e. matters involving the churches in common) can be placed directly on the agenda of General Synod: see Synod Abbotsford 1995, Art.73 III b.
2. Synod incorrectly declared the overture inadmissible on the basis that there were no new grounds. This is substantiated (partly) as follows:

having decided that the matter was inadmissible for lack of jurisdiction, it was inconsistent and incorrect for Synod Abbotsford to then consider the merits of the request, including the consideration of whether there are new grounds.

B. The Council of Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church requests that, if this appeal is granted, General Synod Fergus 1998 "establish a committee with the mandate to study once more the matter of women's voting rights, having regard to the developments since 1983, which committee is to present a report with its specific recommendations to the next Synod."

IV. CONSIDERATIONS

A. It is true that 'Women's participation in the election of office bearers' is not a new matter in the sense that it has never been dealt with by the churches before. Yet the submission of Sr. C. VanEerden was not an appeal against a decision of a previous

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assembly; instead it was submitted to General Synod as a new matter to be dealt with. It is "a new matter"(Article 30, C.O.).

- B. It is also true that previous General Synods have dealt with matters even when minor assemblies had not dealt with them. The appellants are also correct in their assertions that synods have, on occasions, defended this course of action on the basis that these matters 'belong to the churches in common.' This is not normative, however, because it is contrary to the adopted Church Order.
- C. It is unfortunate that these precedents have given the appellants the impression that when matters belong to the churches in common, it is no longer necessary for the minor assembly to deal with them first. The fact that Article 30 C.O. was not always applied properly in the past, however, does not mean that we should violate the adopted order today.
- D. It is also true, as the appellant observes, that the request was not within the province of a common assembly. This does not mean, however, that these minor assemblies do not have to deal with them first. On the contrary: it is first necessary that a consistory place a matter on the agenda of a classis; and only if a classis is convinced of the validity of the proposal will it be placed on the agenda of Regional Synod. If Regional Synod is convinced that the proposal is valid, it will place the matter on the agenda of General Synod.
- E. When an overture is declared inadmissible on the basis of Article 30, C.O., it is not appropriate for Synod to interact with the substance of the overture.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide

- A. to declare that General Synod Abbotsford 1995 did not err when it declared the overture of Sr. C. VanEerden inadmissible on the ground of Article 30 C.O.
- B. to declare that General Synod Abbotsford 1995 erred when it used Article 33 C.O. as a second ground to declare the overture of Sr. C. VanEerden inadmissible.

To deny the appeal of the Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington South.

ADOPTED

**Article 111**

**Overture of Aldergrove re Women's Voting**

Committee IV presents agenda item II.I

I. MATERIALS

Overture from the Church at Aldergrove regarding the matter of Women's Participation in Election of Office Bearers.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

This is an overture from a church directly to General Synod and consequently it is inadmissible on the ground that "a new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly may be put on the agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it." (Article 30 C.O.)

III. RECOMMENDATION

Synod declare this overture inadmissible on the ground of Article 30 of the Church Order.

ADOPTED

**Article 112**

**Overture of Burlington Fellowship re Women's Voting**

Committee IV presents:

Agenda item II.RR

I. MATERIAL:

Overture from the Fellowship Church at Burlington-South regarding the involvement of sisters of the congregation in the election of officebearers.

II. ADMISSIBILITY:

This is not an appeal, but an overture that comes directly from a church to General Synod. The subject matter does concern the churches in common, but it is a new matter, and therefore Article 30 of the Church Order applies: "A new matter which has not previously been presented to that major assembly may be put on the agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it."

III. RECOMMENDATION:

Synod declare this overture inadmissible on the ground of Article 30 of the Church Order.

ADOPTED

**Article 113**

**Adjournment**

Rev. R.J. Eikelboom requests that Psalm 90: 1, 3 be sung, and leads in prayer. Synod adjourns.

**MORNING SESSION - WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 1998**

**Article 114**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Psalm 82: 1, 2 be sung, reads from 3 John, and leads in prayer. Roll call shows that all are present.

**Article 115**

**Adoption of the Acts**

Articles 100 – 113 of the Acts, pertaining to May 19, 1998 are adopted.

**Article 116**

**Appeals from Barrhead, Coaldale and Taber re Denver**

Committee III presents their proposal re these appeals. After a round of discussion, the Committee takes the matter back for further consideration.

**Article 117**

**Appeal of the Mid-Atlantic Presbytery of the OPC re Rev. Hofford**

Synod meets in closed session. Committee II presents their proposal re this appeals. After a round of discussion, the Committee takes the matter back for further consideration.

**EVENING SESSION – WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 1998**

**Article 118**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Hymn 41: 1, 4 be sung. Roll call shows that all are present.



**Article 119**

**Grand Rapids Appeal re the Free Church of Scotland**

Committee III presents: Agenda items III S, T, U.

I. MATERIAL:

Three appeals from the Church at Grand Rapids re:

- A. The Free Church of Scotland and the Scots Confession
- B. The Free Church of Scotland and the issues of Lord's Supper and Confessional membership.
- C. The Free Church of Scotland and Rule 5 for Ecclesiastical Fellowship

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod decides that the appeals of the church at Grand Rapids are admissible.

III. OBSERVATIONS

- A. The church at Grand Rapids requests Synod 1998 to judge:
  - 1. That the decision to establish Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FCS be rescinded.
  - 2. That an explanation and apology be sent to the FCS...
  - 3. That we reaffirm to the FCS our desire to continue contact with them with a view to resolving the differences between us so that full ecclesiastical fellowship can be established.
  - 4. That the CRCA be instructed to discuss these issues with the FCS and report to another General Synod.
- B. This request is based on the fact that the FCS holds teachings (civil magistrate, the doctrine of the church), and practices (fencing of the Lord's Supper, and confessional membership) which are in conflict with the Scripture and our confessions. According to the church at Grand Rapids "the OPC's objection to the double standard..." in the face of the information available, reflects their understanding that the variation in practice is not a difference in principle.
- C. The substance of the first two appeals is identical to appeals which were made to Synod Abbotsford 1995. Synod 1995 denied the appeals of the Church at Grand Rapids based on the following considerations:
  - 1. "The requests to rescind the decision to have Ecclesiastical Fellowship or to declare that Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FCS and PCK was premature is based on the

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assumption that these two federations have the same position as the OPC which to date has prevented Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC. This assumption has been addressed under Consideration A.1.b." (Synod 1995, Article 106, Consideration D.2)

2. "...information available to Synod regarding the Lord's Supper, indicates that there are different practices with regards to the supervision of guests at the Lord's Table in the FCS compared to the OPC (see Acts 1989, p. 161; Acts 1992, p. 126; see also Report CCOPC II.B.4)." (Synod 1995, Article 106, Consideration A.2)
  3. "With respect to the doctrinal point about the civil magistrate raised by the church at Grand Rapids, it should be kept in mind that this issue is not fully resolved in our own federation (see the words in brackets in Art. 36 of the Belgic Confession). The opinion that the views of the role of the civil magistrate expressed in the Scots Confession as well as in the Westminster Confession are contrary to Scripture and our Confession, is not proven by the conclusion that these views are not taught in the Three Forms of Unity. Further, with respect to the doctrine of the church, it is uncertain what edition was used. The two editions consulted do not agree with the quote 'Then wherever these notes are seen and continue for any time, be the number complete or not, there beyond any doubt is the true Kirk of Christ.' Instead, it reads, 'Wheresoever, then these former notes are seen, and of any time continue, (be the number never so few, about two or three) there, without all doubt, is the true Church of Christ; who according to his promise is in the midst of them: Matt. xviii.19, 20' This sheds a different light on the matter."
- D. The church at Grand Rapids finds it impossible to consistently fulfil our obligation under Rule 5 of Ecclesiastical Fellowship: "the churches shall open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches." Discomfort with maintaining this rule stems from the fact that the church at Grand Rapids is of the opinion that what the Scots Confession teaches about the church and the civil magistrate is in conflict with Scripture and confession.

#### IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. General Synod agrees with the church at Grand Rapids when it states that General Synod 1995 "erred in thinking that the differences in editions of the Scots Confession referred to in their response altered the considerations of Grand Rapids." General

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Synod 1995 does not substantiate the statement "This sheds a different light on the matter".

- B. The church at Grand Rapids is incorrect that the practice of fencing the Lord Supper in the FCS is similar to the OPC. They fail to observe that in the FCS the practices surrounding the admission to the Lord's Table are implied to be alike for members and guests (see Synod Winnipeg 1989, p. 161, 5.2, Synod Lincoln 1992 p. 126, and confirmed by the Proceedings of the ICRC 1993, Report for Theological Affirmation p.80).
- C. There is no justification for reversing the decision to have Ecclesiastical Fellowship simply on the basis of third party information. Furthermore, previous synods have stated the doctrine of the church is not an impediment to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Acts Synod 1995 Article 106 V C 5). The CRCA could, however, be instructed to seek further clarification on the practice of confessional membership, the doctrine of the church, and the position of the civil magistrate in relationship to the church.
- D. The church at Grand Rapids misrepresents and misinterprets Rule 5 of Ecclesiastical Fellowship when they turn what is optional into an obligation. The actual reading of rule 5 is as follows: "the churches shall *in principle*, open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches." In the actual application of the rule every local consistory has the option of inviting a guest minister from within our federation and from those churches with whom our churches have Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

V. RECOMMENDATION

Synod decide to deny the appeals of the church at Grand Rapids.

ADOPTED

**Article 120**

**CRCA on Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Korea**

Committee III presents: Agenda Item I D.

I. MATERIAL

Report of the CRCA on the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church in Korea

II. INTRODUCTION

Synod 1995 gave the CRCA the following mandate:

## *Acts of General Synod*

- A. To continue a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the the Presbyterian Church in Korea in accordance with the adopted rules.
  - B. To mandate the CRCA to investigate the suggested exchange of professors between Hamilton and Pusan (Acts 1995, Art 101, II, C, 2, 3).
  - C. To continue a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland ...in accordance with the adopted rules. (Acts 1995, Art. 101, II, C, 2)
- III. OBSERVATIONS
- A. Regarding the Presbyterian Church in Korea
    - 1. The CRCA reports that even though they have received regular letters of invitation to attend the General Assembly of the PCK they have no longer been receiving an English summary of the PCK's decisions and activities.
    - 2. From the Acts of sister churches in Australia and the Netherlands as well as from the impressions received at the ICRC in Seoul it would appear that the PCK continues to conduct herself as a faithful church of Jesus Christ.
    - 3. The CRCA recommends that a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship be continued and that every attempt be made to improve communications between our respective churches.
  - B. Regarding the Free Church of Scotland
    - 1. According to a policy of the CRCA of deputizing ministers and professors if their trips abroad coincide with a major assembly of a sister church, Rev. K. Jonker was delegated to attend the General Assembly of the FCS in 1996.
    - 2. For some time the FCS has been involved in a controversy regarding the person of Prof. D. Macleod. Apparently criminal charges were brought against him and this resulted in much unrest in the Church with members and ministers taking sides. In the fall of 1996 Prof. Macleod was acquitted of all charges. Steps were taken by the 1997 General Assembly to promote healing in the Free Church.
    - 3. At the General Assembly in 1997 it was decided that "the teachings commonly known as Theonomy or Reconstructionism contradict our subordinate standard, the Confession of Faith and are inconsistent with our supreme standard, the Bible, particularly on the question of the expiry of the judicial laws."
  - C. The CRCA recommends:

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1. that Ecclesiastical Fellowship be continued with the Free Church of Scotland under the adopted Rules.
2. That it be charged to express the prayerful support of the Canadian Reformed Churches of the Free Church of Scotland as it enters into what will hopefully be a time of healing and reconciliation.

### IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. The CRCA correctly draws Synod's attention to the lack of communication with the PCK. For a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship to function properly there must be meaningful communication.
- B. Synod 1995 mandated the CRCA to investigate the suggested exchange of professors between Hamilton and Pusan. There is no evidence in the report of the Committee that this mandate was fulfilled. In all likelihood the lack of communication contributed to this. The CRCA should as yet be instructed to complete this part of their mandate.
- C. The CRCA did not have to wait for a mandate of Synod to express the prayerful support of the Canadian Reformed Churches for the Free Church of Scotland. It may have been better if the CRCA had informed the churches in our federation about the unrest within the FCS so that our local congregations could have prayed about these concerns.

### V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide to give the CRCA the following mandate:

- A. With regard to the PCK
  1. To continue a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Presbyterian Church in Korea in accordance with the adopted rules (Acts 1995, Art. 101, II, C, 2).
  2. To mandate the CRCA to investigate the suggested exchange of professors between Hamilton and Pusan (Acts 1995, Art 101, II, C, 2, 3).
  3. That every attempt be made to improve communications between our respective churches.
- B. With regard to the FCS
  1. To continue a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland in accordance with the adopted rules (Acts 1995, Art. 101, II, C, 2).



2. To express the prayerful support of the Canadian Reformed Churches of the Free Church of Scotland as it enters into what will hopefully be a time of healing and reconciliation.

ADOPTED

## **Article 121**

### **Bible Translations**

Committee IV presents: Agenda items I.G, IV.V, IV.X

- I. MATERIALS
  - A. Report from the Committee on Bible Translations (CBT)
  - B. Letters from the Canadian Reformed Churches at Elora and Taber
- II. INTRODUCTION
  - A. General Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Acts, Art. 72,V.D) gave the Committee on Bible Translation the mandate to pass on valid concerns about the NIV text to the NIV Translation Center. According to the mandate, the concerns may come from any of three sources:
    1. correspondence from churches and/or members;
    2. previous synod reports as well as the committee's reports and its appendices;
    3. letters sent to Synod Abbotsford expressing concerns about certain Bible passages.
- III. OBSERVATIONS
  - A. The CBT met nine times, primarily to deal with concerns about the publication of a gender-inclusive version of the NIV.
  - B. The CBT sought further information about this new version before it began to carry out its own mandate, because it seriously questioned "whether we would be interested in participating in improving an inclusive language edition" of the NIV.
  - C. On May 27, 1997, the International Bible Society (IBS) announced the cancellation of the whole inclusive language project. At the same time it announced that "there are no further plans for a further revised edition."
  - D. Upon further enquiries, the CBT learned from the NIV Translation Center that the normal refining process of the NIV will continue. It is only subsequent to this that the CBT actually



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began to carry out the mandate that it received at General Synod Abbotsford 1995.

- E. As a result of the CBT's review of reports submitted to previous General Synods, five matters were brought to the attention of the NIV Translation Center for minor changes to the text.
  - F. As a consequence of the seventeen letters that were sent to General Synod Abbotsford 1995 and subsequently passed on to the CBT, five more matters were brought to the attention of the NIV Translation Center for minor changes to the text.
  - G. Since 1995 only one item of correspondence was received from a member of one of our churches. The CBT was not persuaded that any matters that were raised in this letter should be sent to the NIV Translation Center.
  - H. The CBT reports that "we can wholeheartedly confirm the recommendation of the former Committee on Bible Translations, and the decision made in Article 72 of the Acts of General Synod Abbotsford 1995."
  - I. The CBT suggests that if General Synod deems it necessary to appoint a new committee, it should include a member with expertise in English linguistics who can help the committee grapple with the inclusive language issue.
  - J. The consistory of the church at Elora expresses thankfulness to the CBT for taking upon itself the responsibility of looking into the matter of a 'gender-inclusive' edition of the NIV, but urges Synod to consider that the IBS's decision to shelve plans for this edition was not a principal one but rather an economic one. Consistory requests that a new committee be instructed to address the IBS about our principal objections against a 'gender-inclusive' Bible translation, because unless the IBS is convinced that this is wrong, it will only be a matter of time before this issue comes up again.
  - K. The consistory of the church at Taber expresses great appreciation for the work of the CBT. In principle, consistory endorses the work of the committee.
- IV. CONSIDERATIONS
- A. When the CBT learned that the IBS intended to produce a 'gender-neutral' edition of the NIV, it was appropriate that the CBT dealt with this issue before it began to carry out its own specific mandate. Synod should take thankful notice of this work.
  - B. The consequence of this delay, however, is that the CBT did not have time to carry out the mandate that it received: the nine

textual matters that were brought to the NIV Translation Center do not appear to be resolved.

- C. Although the CBT only received one submission from the churches since General Synod Abbotsford 1995, it is appropriate that the churches and its members have an address where they can send their concerns.
- D. A committee is needed to monitor the development of the NIV as it is being revised. It would be advisable to include an expert in English linguistics on this committee, not only for confronting the inclusive language issue, but also to help the committee deal with grammatical and stylistic questions.
- E. The fact that the IBS even considered producing a 'gender-inclusive' edition of the NIV is not encouraging. The IBS responded to the negative reaction of mainstream evangelical churches by shelving these plans. It appears that it is not the IBS that has to be convinced that "gender-inclusivity" is wrong. The mainstream evangelical churches in North America will probably decide this issue in the long-term. However the committee should continue to monitor the activities of the IBS in this regard and express our concerns where there is a suitable opportunity.

V. RECOMMENDATION

Synod decide:

- A. To thank the CBT for the manner in which they served the churches.
- B. To continue to recommend the NIV for use in the churches.
- C. To continue to leave it in the freedom of the churches if they feel compelled to use other translations that received favourable reviews in the reports.
- D. To reappoint a CBT including one member with expertise in English linguistics if possible.
- E. To give the CBT the following mandate:
  - 1. to receive comments from churches and/or members about passages in the NIV in need of improvement;
  - 2. to scrutinize these comments, and pass on valid concerns to the NIV Translation Center;
  - 3. to bring to a resolution those matters that have already been submitted to the NIV Translation Center;
  - 4. to monitor developments in the NIV as the text is revised;

5. to serve the next General Synod with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.

ADOPTED

## **Article 122**

### **Appeals Regarding Bible Translations**

Committee IV presents: Agenda item: III.J, III.AA.

#### **I. MATERIAL**

Appeals from the churches at Elora and London regarding Acts of General Synod Abbotsford 1995, Art. 72.

#### **II. ADMISSIBILITY**

These are appeals against a decision of a previous General Synod. They are declared admissible.

#### **III. OBSERVATIONS**

A. The church at Elora appeals the decision of General Synod Abbotsford 1995 "to recommend the NIV for use within the churches" (Art. 72.V.b).

B. The church at Elora requests that General Synod:

1. Rescind the decision of General Synod Abbotsford to recommend the NIV for use in the churches.
2. Form a new committee to study and recommend another translation to General Synod 2001, possibly giving attention to the NKJV since most of our sister churches in Australia use the NKJV.

C. This request is based upon three arguments:

1. A lack of confidence in the NIV. The report to General Synod Smithville 1980 as well as the observations, considerations and recommendations recorded in the Acts of that synod spoke highly of the RSV but criticized the NIV. The consistory at Elora feels that "nothing has changed" since 1980, and therefore the criticism against the NIV still stands. The consistory at Elora also notes that although General Synod Abbotsford has recommended the NIV to the churches in 1995, widely diverging evaluations of the NIV continue to appear in Clarion.
2. The NIV is too free. This was the opinion of the Bible Translation Committee that reported to General Synod Smithville 1980. It was also the opinion of some people who

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sent letters to General Synod Abbotsford 1995 expressing concern on this matter. This seems to be the result of "the International Bible Society (IBS) desiring readability and what they think the people and the churches want rather than accuracy." They fear that if the IBS moves towards an 'inclusive-language edition,' the present edition of the NIV may not be available for long.

3. The decision to recommend the NIV has created disunity within the federation and within the churches. Not all the churches have accepted the NIV.
- D. The church at London appeals the same decision of General Synod. This appeal is based on five grounds:
1. General Synod Abbotsford 1995 failed to interact with the observations and considerations that functioned in the decision made by General Synod Smithville 1980.
  2. There is no "systematic attempt" in the Acts of Synod 1995 to "disprove the criticism of Synod 1980." The mandate of the committee appointed in 1992 was specifically to make use of past studies.
  3. The observations and considerations recorded in the Acts of General Synod Abbotsford 1995 even reiterate some of the criticism and the main concerns of General Synod Smithville 1980.
  4. General Synod Abbotsford acknowledged that the NIV has some weaknesses, but dismisses them with the comment that "there is no such thing as a perfect translation." London is of the opinion that "although this statement as such is true, it does not help in selecting the most faithful translation.."
  5. General Synod Abbotsford did not interact with the objections that Dr. J. van Bruggen raised against the NIV in 1980.
- E. The church at London requests General Synod:
1. to rescind the decision of Synod 1995 Art. 72, V.B.
  2. to mandate the Committee on Bible Translations to renew their study of the NIV in light of the above-mentioned objections and concerns.

## IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. The decision of General Synod Abbotsford 1995 was based on an extensive report from the Committee on Bible Translations in which criticism brought against the NIV was addressed. The

appellants have not brought up any specific matter which was considered to be important in 1980 but ignored in the report of the Committee of Bible Translations to General Synod Abbotsford 1995 (cf. pages 127,128).

- B. The CBT that reported to General Synod Abbotsford responded to the criticism that the NIV is too free with the observation that "a careful paraphrase is sometimes more accurate than a literal translation." (Quoted from B. Holwerda: Report, page 9; see also appendices 1,3,5,6,9).
- C. Although uniformity of practice among the churches is desirable, this may take some time to develop. In the meantime, those churches that feel compelled to use another translation are free to do so.
- D. The church at London asserts, correctly, that General Synod Abbotsford 1995 did not interact explicitly with the decision of General Synod Smithville 1980. There was, however, interaction with the arguments that Synod Smithville used to reject the NIV (Acts, Art 72.III.B. 2.a,d). The CBT has dealt specifically with past studies (page 23, appendix 5) as well as "voices that were raised against the NIV" (pages 23,24, appendices 8 and 9).
- E. In 1980 both the majority report and the minority report of the Committee on Bible Translations recommended also allowing the use of the NIV in the worship services. This recommendation shows that the standpoint of the committees serving Synod 1980 is not far removed from the decision of Synod Abbotsford 1995 recommending the NIV.
- F. It is not true that the Committee on Bible Translations failed to interact with Dr. J. van Bruggen. Reference to his criticism of the dynamic equivalent method of translating is found in the 1995 report (p.36,37).
- G. The assertion that 'there is no such thing as a perfect translation' should not be taken out of its context. It is meant to indicate that weaknesses as such are not a reason to reject a certain translation. This statement functions along with other considerations, leading in totality to the recommendation of the NIV for use in the churches.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide:

To deny the appeals of the churches at Elora and London.

ADOPTED



**Article 123**

**Appeal from London re Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship**

Committee III presents Agenda item III H.

I. MATERIAL

Appeal from the church at London regarding Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

II. OBSERVATIONS

A. In answering a proposal of the church at London to change the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship as adopted by Synod Lincoln 1992, Synod Abbotsford 1995 states in Consideration 101 VII, B, "the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship have been adopted by General Synod 1992. In order to change these Rules, the church at London must prove that the current Rules are against Scripture, Confession or the Church Order. London does not do this. Therefore Synod cannot do this."

B. The church at London disagrees with this decision and request that General Synod rescind the decision of Synod 1995 and deal with the original proposal.

III. CONSIDERATIONS

A. Synod 1995 erred when it answered the submission of London as if it were an appeal. Synod should have declared the proposal inadmissible according to Article 30 of the Church Order.

B. The church at London fails to follow the proper procedure in regards to this submission.

1. Prior to Synod 1992 the proposed changes to the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship were submitted to the churches for consideration and evaluation. Any change or objection could be weighed by General Synod.

2. After the adoption of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, churches which desire to propose a change must submit their proposals to classis in order that via the ecclesiastical way the churches again have opportunity to consider and evaluate such changes (Article 30, Church Order). Therefore also the proposal submitted to Synod 1998 should follow this route.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. To rescind Article 101 VII C of Synod Abbotsford 1995.

B. To deny the request of the church of London to deal with their original proposal.

ADOPTED



**Article 124**

**Adjournment**

Rev. P. Feenstra asks that Hymn 48: 3, 4 be sung and leads in prayer. Synod is adjourned.

**MORNING SESSION - ASCENSION DAY, MAY 21, 1998**

**Article 125**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Psalm 47: 1, 2, 3 be sung, reads from Revelation 5, and leads in prayer. Roll call shows that all are present.

**Article 126**

**Adoption of the Acts**

Articles 114 – 124 of the Acts, pertaining to Wednesday, May 20, 1998, are adopted.

**Article 127**

**Relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church**

Committee I presents their proposal re the relationship with the OPC. After a round of discussion, the Committee takes the proposal back for further consideration.

**Article 128**

**Appeals from Barrhead, Coaldale and Taber re Article 115, Synod 1995**

Committee III presents their proposal re these appeals. After a round of discussion, the Committee takes the proposal back for further consideration. Synod adjourns for committee work.

**EVENING SESSION - ASCENSION DAY, MAY 21, 1998**

**Article 129**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Hymn 32: 1, 2, 3 be sung. Roll call shows that all are present.

**Article 130**

**Relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church**

Committee I presents their proposal again.

I. MATERIAL

Re I.C, II.M, II.T, II.X, II.NN, II.TT, II.BBB, III.F, III.V, IV.E, IV.F, IV.L, IV.N, IV.Q, IV.S, IV.T9(re OPC), IV.V(re OPC), IV.Y, II.B, III.D, III.G, III.BB, II.SS, III.X

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Because this issue is of major concern to the churches, and to avoid the impression of not doing full justice to the matter, all the material above is declared admissible (cf. Acts Abbotsford 1995, Article 106, II, p. 63)

III. INTRODUCTION

Synod Abbotsford 1995 gave the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church the following mandate:

- A. to work towards formalizing the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the adopted rules by using the statements of Synod Lincoln 1992 (Acts 1992, Art. 72, IV.A.1.e.i,ii) as a guideline to arrive at an agreement with the OPC on the matters of the fencing of the Lord's Table and confessional membership;
- B. to communicate to the OPC the discomfort in our churches with respect to their continued relationship with the CRCNA;
- C. to communicate that there is a need to continue to discuss the differences in confession and church polity in accordance with the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Rule 6);
- D. to serve the churches with regular reports of the work of the Committee, and to serve General Synod 1998 with a report, to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod. (Acts, p. 75)

IV. OBSERVATIONS

- A. The CCOPC in its report to Synod Fergus 98 makes the following recommendations:
  - 1. In view of the positive developments mentioned in this report the Committee recommends that General Synod 1998 of the Canadian Reformed Churches decide:
    - a. To acknowledge gratefully the commitment of the OPC to be faithful to the Scriptures and to defend the reformed heritage.

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- b. To acknowledge thankfully that with the statements on the Fencing of the Lord's Table and on Confessional Membership an agreement has been reached on the outstanding issues.
  - c. To note with thankfulness that the OPC, by terminating the Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRCNA has taken a clear stand in maintaining the truth and authority of the Word of God, and has removed another obstacle for the Canadian Reformed Churches to come to ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC.
  - d. To invite the OPC to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, according to the adopted rules for this relationship.
  - e. To discontinue the Committee for Contact with the OPC, making the contact and discussion with the OPC part of the mandate of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA).
- B. Re IV. A. 1. b. above, the CCOPC came to the following Proposed Agreement for opening the way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship:

*Concerning Fencing the Lord's Table:*

The churches of the Reformation confess that the Lord's supper should not be profaned (1 Cor. 11:27, see Heid. Cat. Lord's Day 30, Q&A 82; Westminster Confession ch. 29,8). This implies that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is to be supervised. In this supervision the Church exercises discipline and manifests itself as true church. This supervision is to be applied to the members of the local church as well as to the guests. The eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord's Supper.

*Concerning Confessional Membership:*

The churches of the Reformation believe that they have to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and are called to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned (Rom. 16:17). Anyone who answers the membership vows in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible. The patristic church has summarized this teaching in the Apostles' Creed and the churches of the Reformation have elaborated on this in their confessions. Every confessing member is bound to this doctrine and must be willing to be instructed in it.

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The Committee also points out

"It may be added that these statements are not intended to prevent further discussions. Rather, it is agreed that there is need to continue to discuss the differences in confession and church policy which can take place within the relation of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The intention of such discussions will be mutual upbuilding in the faith to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph.4:3).

- C. In 1997 the CEIR thus reported to the Sixty-fourth General Assembly "that the relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches has taken an important step forward. It reported in full detail the Proposed Agreement for opening the way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The CEIR report further stated:

"We look forward to the next General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches (in 1998) with the expectation that, in view of this agreement it will act to establish a bond of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC in which we can continue to discuss our differences as churches, and so, if God grants, arrive at a more perfect unity in doctrine, polity, and life."

- D. Numerous Churches have reacted to the Report of the CCOPC to Synod 1998.

1. **The Church at Yarrow, BC (II M)** does not believe that the mandate given by Synod 95 was completed, since the guideline adopted by Synod 92 and referred to by Synod 95 (Article 106, IV D 1), namely, that "it should be agreed that a verbal warning alone is insufficient" was not adhered to. Yarrow states "We read nothing of any such specifics in the statement [Proposed Agreement]. Therefore Yarrow overtures Synod 98
  - a. not to invite the OPC to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CanRC
  - b. and to mandate the CCOPC to continue discussions with the OPC on the matter of the fencing of the Lord's Table.
2. **The Church at London, ON (II. T.)** remarks that the 50<sup>th</sup> General assembly of the OPC, in dealing with the complaint of Rev. B. Hofford et al, submitted the Report of a special committee struck by the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic in 1971, which stated regarding methods of fencing the table: "The first and most common in the OPC, as well as in other

Presbyterian Churches, is to have the minister make a statement at the beginning of the service, clearly setting forth the Scriptural qualifications for worthy participation, and then inviting those who meet these qualifications to participate, warning those who are not qualified of the consequences of partaking if not qualified, but leaving it to the individual to decide whether or not he is eligible. The second, and most common in the Reformed churches, is to require visitors who wish to participate to meet with the session before the service for questioning concerning eligibility. The session then either approves or disapproves the person for participation"(cf. Acts Burlington 1986, Appendix 2E, p.170 #4). The 50<sup>th</sup> Assembly also says, in reference to the complaint of Hofford et al that their approach to the fencing of the Lord's table contains "dangers of a denominational exclusivism in practice if not in principle, an exclusivism that may compromise our witness to the Table as the Lord's." Furthermore, London also notes that "the 33<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly determined that members are not to be examined for membership according to the standards" (*Minutes 1967*, pp.92-6); they also refer to the 34<sup>th</sup> General Assembly which "decided that those who deny baptism to their children, as well as Arminians and other 'evangelicals' may be admitted to membership as the individual sessions see fit (*Minutes 1968*, pp. 135-6)."

London therefore asserts "firstly that because of the vagueness of the statement 'concerning fencing the Lord's Table' the CCOPC has not fulfilled the mandate given it by Synod Abbotsford 1995. And secondly, we submit that the conflicting evidence within the OPC against the statement 'Concerning Confessional Membership' is not a minor matter, and therefore warrants further discussion of this divergency within the present relation of 'temporary ecclesiastical contact.'" London requests Synod "to:

- a. judge that despite the statements on the Fencing of the Lord's Table and on Confessional Membership an agreement has *not* been reached on the outstanding issues.
  - b. renew the mandate of the CCOPC to continue the discussions with the OPC on these divergencies in our present relationship of temporary ecclesiastical contact, with an attempt to resolve them by dealing with the doctrine that underlines them both, namely, the doctrine of the church."
3. **The Church at Attercliffe, ON** (II. X.) also refers to the 50<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and asks how the Proposed Agreement



functions within the OPC. Attercliffe submits that it does not address how the fencing at the Lord's table takes place. They ask: "If the OPC maintains the position of the 50<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, what is then the meaning of this proposed agreement?" They question whether the matter of confessional membership is adequately addressed in the Agreement. They add: "Does accepting this statement mean that the questions asked at Public Profession of faith have changed? (See Directory for Worship, chapter 5)." Therefore Attercliffe requests Synod not to adopt B and D of the report from the CCOPC.

4. **The Church at Calgary, AB** (II. NN.) urges Synod "to acknowledge thankfully that with the statement on Confessional Membership an agreement has been reached on this issue." However they point out that the guideline for the CCOPC "adopted by Synod Lincoln 1992 and reiterated by Synod Abbotsford 1995 states clearly that simple agreement on the question of whether or not the celebration of the Lord's Supper should be supervised is insufficient. Instead there must also be some agreement on the manner in which the celebration of the sacrament is supervised; and both synods insisted that a general verbal warning is not enough." Therefore they also ask Synod "to note that the matter of 'fencing the Lord's table' has not been resolved in a manner consistent with the mandate given by Synod Abbotsford 1995."
5. **The Church at Lincoln, ON** (II. TT.) points to the statement of Synod 1992 which reads "it should be agreed, however, that a general verbal warning alone is insufficient and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required in the presence of supervising elders from the guests wishing to attend the Lord's Supper" (Acts 1992, Art.72, IV.A.1.e.i,ii, underlining added). They also refer to the fact that "at least in the past, the OPC has worked with a 'two-tiered system' for church membership. On the one hand, officebearers are required to fully subscribe to the doctrine of Scripture as summarized in the Westminster Standards. On the other hand, members are required to make 'a credible confession of faith in Christ.'" Lincoln refers in this regard to how the OPC has worked with those applying for admission who do not agree with infant baptism (cf. OPC 33<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, pp.92-96). They then ask whether the Proposed Agreement means "that the OPC will no longer use this 'two-tiered system.'" Furthermore Lincoln refers to the fact that the Directory of the OPC suggests that in a significant number of OPC churches there is only one worship service per Lord's Day. Based on the above Lincoln requests Synod "to not enter



into ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC at this time, until the above matters have been *properly and fully* addressed."

6. **The Church at Elora, ON** (II. BBB) notes that in their judgement the words of the Proposed Agreement "do not indicate that changes have occurred with respect to the supervision of the Lord's Supper and confessional members in the OPC," and therefore urges Synod Fergus "not to follow recommendation III D of the committee."
7. **The Church at Willoughby Heights, BC** (IV.E.) expresses reservation about the Report because of "a degree of ambiguity" and asks Synod to consider whether the Proposed Statement "means that the OPC now follows a different practice than it did formerly."
8. **The Church at Burlington (Ebenezer), ON** (IV. F.) concurs with the Report and hopes that Synod will accede to the recommendations.
9. **The Church at Surrey, BC** (IV.L.) endorses the recommendations made by the Committee.
10. **The Church at Burlington (Fellowship), ON** (IV. N.) supports the recommendation that the Churches enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship. However they urge Synod "to continue discussions with the OPC with a view to tightening up some of the expressions in the agreement. For example, the term 'membership vows' is not defined. We suggest that the adherence to the doctrinal standards be spelled out. Further this commitment is ongoing, and reflected not only in word, but also in deed. We request that either the CCOPC be continued, or that the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad take up the matter, so that clear language can be worked out, and a clear understanding as to the accepted practices is in place."
11. **The Church at Guelph, ON** (IV.Q) raises two concerns in connection with the Proposed Agreement. First, that it does not spell out that a general verbal warning is insufficient. Second, they ask whether there is evidence that a change of practice regarding supervision of the Lord's Supper has taken place throughout the OPC.
12. **The Church at Blue Bell, PA** (IV. S) suggests, regarding fencing the table, that "the issue has *never* been whether or not the elders should supervise the Table....The issue has *always* been how the Table is to be supervised by the elders and who is to be admitted. This statement does not address these issues." They refer to the position of the OPC that there are non-Reformed true churches (Acts 1992, p.167)

and ask who would not be admitted then. Hence, they say, "we believe that this statement does absolutely nothing to advance agreement, or even understanding between ourselves and the OPC." At bottom, they ask: "Can the OPC affect, affirm, and practice the principle and manner of fencing the Lord's Supper Table found in article 60 (sic, actually article 61) of the Church Order?"

Further, regarding confessional membership, Blue Bell wonders if anyone who answers the membership vow in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the confessions of the church or just to the undefined "doctrine of the Bible." "Can the OPC accept, affirm, and practice binding members to the confessions as is found in the first question of the 'Form for the Public Profession of Faith'?"

13. **The Church at Orangeville, ON** (IV. T.) finds "that the *Proposed Agreement* is somewhat vaguely worded, and does not satisfy the mandate given to the Committee by Synod 1995." They also feel "that we should strive for greater clarity and further agreement on the matter of fencing of the Lord's Table according to the guidelines of Synod Lincoln 1992. Further, it should be ensured that practices in the local churches of the OPC are in keeping with this agreement."
14. **The Church at Taber, AB** (IV.V.) expresses gratitude for the progress that has been made and hope that by adopting the recommendations the "protracted discussions" will be concluded.
15. **The Church at Elora, ON** (IV.Y) asks whether the issues preventing ecclesiastical fellowship have been resolved.
16. **The Church at Grand Rapids** (II SS) also overtures Synod 1998 to reject recommendations B,D of the CCOPC Report. They do not believe that the CCOPC has fulfilled the mandate given to it by Synod 1995.

Grand Rapids states, concerning the fencing of the Lord's Table, "The first problem is that the CCOPC Agreement omits any reference to what Synod [1992 in its guidelines] stated should be agreed upon, namely, that a general verbal warning alone insufficient...The second problem with the CCOPC Agreement is that it omits any reference to the fact that a profession of the Reformed faith is required in the presence of the supervising elders from guests wishing to attend the Lord's Supper...In fact, the most common practice in the OPC is for guests to be admitted by the general verbal warning. It is left in the hands of the visitors to make the judgement." A third problem Grand Rapids has

with the proposed Agreement on the Lord's Supper is that admission to the Lord's Table not only requires confession of the Reformed faith, but also a life consistent with that profession (c.f. Art.61 C.O.; H.C., L.D.30 Q/A 81,82). They state that it is simply not possible to establish a history of faithful living by interviewing a guest before the Lord's Supper celebration.

Grand Rapids states concerning confessional membership, "The Committee [CCOPC] took a perfectly clear statement [about confessional membership in 1992 guidelines] which expressed the unbreakable tie between confessing faith and the confessions of the church and created a less clear statement [in the proposed Agreement to Synod 1998] which clouded the connection between confessing faith and the confessions of the church." Grand Rapids notes that in the proposed Agreement both sides agreed that each church would continue to follow their own practices, but adds that then "we must conclude that nothing has really been solved."

- E. Appeals from the churches and individual members regarding the relationship with the OPC and the decisions of previous synods. Regarding the synods, the churches are saying as follows.

**1. Re Synod 1977**

**The Church at London** (III.G.) is of the opinion that the decision of 1977 "to recognize the OPC as a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts, Article 91, II, p. 41) was premature since no official testing or evaluation of the OPC was provided and the justification for it only came by way of the "Evaluation of Divergencies" provided to Synod 1986 (Appendix IIB, pp. 142-151) which they consider "mere formality and tokenism." Their concern is that in 1977 the OPC was still a member of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, still had a fraternal relationship with the Christian Reformed Church, and the CCOPC had not yet completed its mandate.

**2. Re Synod 1986**

- a. **The Church at London, ON** (III.G.) points out that the CCOPC submitted an official "Evaluation of Divergencies" and Synod "receives this report as the detailed evaluation of the divergencies which the General Synod of 1977 neglected to give for its decision to recognize the OPC as a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Article 126, B, Rec 2, p. 55). However, London says this Evaluation was incomplete as two

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doctrinal points were omitted, namely "more or less pure churches"(Acts 1968, Article 50, p. 58-63), and "Jesus' descent into hell (Acts 1971, Article 92, p. 166).

**b. The Church at Grand Rapids (II SS)**

Grand Rapids requests Synod to:

- i. Judge the validity of the conclusions in the document submitted to Synod 1986 by Classis Ontario-South (Art.137 B.4).
- ii. Call the OPC to repentance, and if this repentance is not forthcoming, break the present relationship of contact.

The church at Grand Rapids refers in Art.137 B.4 of the Acts of Synod 1986 to a report sent to Synod 1986 by Classis Ontario-South concerning the Tri-County Reformed Church and Rev. B. Hofford and their departure from the OPC. Synod 1986 stated, "Classis Ontario-South also forwards a document 'convinced of the need for Synod to seriously take into consideration the report and its conclusions when judging the case of Tri-County Reformed Church, and when discussing our relationship with the OPC.'" Synod 1986, in response to this (Art 137 C.3), considered that the "Hofford issue" was a matter that at that time had not yet been dealt with in the minor assemblies, and asked Classis to cooperate fully with the CCOPC regarding this issue. Grand Rapids draws attention to the fact that in that Report to Classis about Tri-County Reformed Church it was stated in the Conclusion that since the complaint of Hofford and others about the fencing of the Lord's Table was rejected by the highest assembly of the OPC, "our relationship with the OPC requires serious reconsideration" and "there is a problem here which must be resolved by General Synod." In its letter to Synod 1986 accompanying the report, Classis Ontario South of March 5, 1986 stated that it was "convinced of the need for Synod to seriously take into consideration the Report and its Conclusions when judging the case of Tri-County Reformed Church and when discussing our relationship with the OPC." The church at Grand Rapids maintains that these issues have never been dealt with by a General Synod and believes they must be taken seriously as Classis recommended for the sake of the honest resolution of the Lord's Supper question which caused Hofford and Laurel to leave the OPC.

**3. Re Synod 1992**

- a. **The Church at Grand Rapids, MI** (III. V.) believes that “accepting the profession of a guest in the presence of the supervising elders eliminates the possibility of validating officially (i.e., by the Christ-appointed officebearers) the membership of the guest. The supervisors are left taking the word of the visitor regarding their membership....It is for this reason that Art. 61, of our C.O. requires attestations concerning both doctrine (including membership in a true church) and conduct.” Thus Grand Rapids believes there are the following deficiencies in the Synod 1992 decision, namely, “a profession of the Reformed faith in the presence of the supervising elders from the guests wishing to attend the Lord’s Supper is inadequate” (Acts 1992, Article 72, IV.A.1.e.i.) and that “the guideline fails to take into account the necessary criteria for admission to the Lord’s Supper” (in accordance with Article 61 C.O. and Lord’s Day 30). In their appeal Grand Rapids claims: “This misses Grand Rapids’ point. The point is not that Art.61 C.O. is the only possible means of fulfilling the requirements of LD 30; rather the point is that both criteria (cf. Esp. Q.82: “confession and life”) for admission to the supper be met.” Therefore they ask Synod to “reformulate the guideline for the Lord’s supper issue to take into account the above deficiencies.”
- b. **The Church at Attercliffe** (III. D.) asks Synod 98, because they feel that Synod 95 did not adequately deal with their appeal re Synod 92 (see below), to “judge as yet that Synod Lincoln 1992 was incorrect in Art.72 V. B. on the basis of the grounds outlined in our appeal to Synod 1995.”

Attercliffe points to the fact that Synod 1992 decided “to conclude from previous Synods’ decisions that the divergencies evaluated in 1971 and 1986 have been sufficiently discussed to confirm that these are not impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC, but may be discussed within the framework of church unity.” Attercliffe says that previous synods did not decide that the divergencies had been sufficiently discussed; rather, Synod 1971 decided that the divergencies were “serious enough to remain the subject of further and frank discussion” (Synod 1971, Article 92, conclusion 7) and Synod 1986 decided to “continue the discussion of divergencies” with the hope



that they will "remove obstacles to full correspondence" (Synod 1986 Article 128 C, recommendations 3 & 4).

**4. Re Synod 1995**

- a. **Appeal W. DeHaan (III.F).** In his appeal, br. W. DeHaan refers to the Acts of General Synod Abbotsford 1995, Art.106, Consideration C3 where it says; "It should be noted that no church reacted to the substance of the evaluation of divergencies received by Synod 1971 and Synod 1986. None of the submissions challenge that report. The appellants are reacting to the status of the Report rather than the substance of the Report. The burden of proof that the divergencies are not discussed sufficiently and therefore are still impediments for Ecclesiastical Fellowship lies with the appellants, which they do not provide." Br. DeHaan then states, "I do not question whether the divergencies are discussed. I believe they are. The point is whether they are sufficiently discussed, and I dare to say: they are not. For as Canadian Reformed Churches, we have also knowledge about the happenings of 1944 in the Netherlands: the Liberation and the necessity of the Liberation. ...Therefore, since according to G.S. 1995, proof is not given that there are still impediments for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, there must still be the opportunity to do so, Art.33 C.O." The brother then proceeds to explain the points which in his opinion are still major points of difference.
- i. He outlines how, though the Larger Catechism speaks of covenant with believers and their seed, the Westminster Confession speaks of the covenant as made with Christ as second Adam, and in Him with all the elect. He then explains how the OPC, because of this, reasons out from the viewpoint of election, as did the Synodicals in 1944, and misunderstand that the covenant promises are conditional on faith.
- ii. He explains a difference between what we confess about the church in the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession, and what is confessed about the church in the Westminster Standards. He explains how regarding the church from the viewpoint of election leads, in the Westminster Standards, to working with the idea of the invisible church.



- iii. He then points to a difference in the fencing of the Lord's Table. Br. DeHaan remarks that the verbal warning in the Book of Church Order in the Directory of Worship, Ch.4, c.2 shows that there is no real supervision of the elders over members or guests who celebrate the Lord's Supper.
  - iv. Br. DeHaan also outlines the issue of confessional membership. He compares the questions asked at profession of faith in the OPC with those asked at profession of faith in the Canadian Reformed Churches, and notes the lack of reference to the confessions in the former. Rev. J.J. Peterson, in his address to Synod 1995, mentioned welcoming of new converts from paganism or who are Baptists into the OPC and described them as follows, "Babes in Christ – first generation believers. The smell of the world, the smell of the Baptists cling to the clothing, but they have taken the step of faith and united with a Reformed body of Christ, and they don't really know what they're getting into, and you don't know that the Lord has put in your way, but you move on in full trust of the Lord of the covenant...and we feel, we cannot, we must not, exclude them from the body of Christ and the sacraments."
  - v. Br. DeHaan also describes what he sees as hierarchy in the OPC. He points to the Book of Church Order, Form of Government of the OPC (1992 edition) where it speaks in Ch.12 and 13 about "higher" and "lower" assemblies, in Ch.15 about the general assembly "which is the convening body of the whole church," and Ch.25 which speaks of ruling elders being commissioned to "higher judicatories."
- b. **The Church at Grand Rapids, MI** (III. V) appealed to Synod 1995 raised the objections as above [see IV. E. 2 a.] but Synod 95 rejected their appeal because they had not proved their position from Scripture. Grand Rapids thus appeals to Synod 98 on the same matter.
  - c. **The Church at Elora, ON** (IV.Y) questions whether the differences between the OPC and the Can. Reformed Churches were sufficiently resolved so that Synod Abbotsford 1995 could give the mandate that it did to the CCOPC.

- d. **The Church at Watford ON** (II.B.) points to the fact that Synod 95, in connection with discussions re ERQ referred to Synod 65 which said that "fellowship with other churches should be initiated only after a thorough and serious investigation is made" (Synod 65, Article 141,II), but then Synod 1995, after suggesting in Art.106, V.B.3 that there are practices which "give reason for concern" says a little later "we judge each other not on the basis of local practices, but on the basis of our confessions and official documents" (Article 106 V.B.6). Thus Watford appeals to Synod 98 to declare that Synod Abbotsford 1995 erred in stating that "there is reason to continue to discuss these practices [i.e. Confessional membership, admission to the Lord's table, contact with the CRC] but they cannot in the end be made a condition for Ecclesiastical Fellowship" (Article 106.B.3, square brackets Watford's). Thus Watford asks Synod 98 to mandate the CCOPC "to investigate local practices in the OPC, particularly those followed with respect to fencing of the Lord's Supper table, and confessional membership. This information can be gleaned from the OPC committee or from OPC congregations via letters."
- e. **The Church at Attercliffe** (III. D.) appeals the decision of Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Article 106).
- i. Attercliffe refers to the fact that Synod 1995 considered that Attercliffe and others are "reacting to the status of the Report [to Synod 1986] rather than the substance of the Report" (Article 106, V.C.3). Attercliffe however says that the reason they did not react to the Report submitted to 1986 was that Synod never officially adopted this report.
  - ii. Furthermore to Synod's comment that "The burden of proof that the divergencies are not discussed sufficiently and therefore are still impediments for Ecclesiastical Fellowship lies with the appellants, which they do not provide" (Article 106, V.C.3), Attercliffe says that Synod 1995 has turned matters around, expecting the appellants to provide grounds against decisions when the synods never provided grounds in favour of the same decisions in the first place. As a result "the impression that is given is no matter what the churches say, we go ahead anyways."
  - iii. Attercliffe is also concerned that if the Canadian Reformed Churches enter into fellowship with the

OPC without having discussed the divergencies further, "a minister in our federation who would teach these divergencies can not be disciplined because as churches we have judged they do not prevent unity."

- iv. Attercliffe responds to the fact that Synod 1995 considers that these matters actually deal with practices and not confessional documents of the OPC (Article 106,V.B.3.) by pointing out that our churches in making decisions re OPC are dealing with matters about which our own confessions speak.
  - v. Attercliffe points out that Synod Abbotsford 1995 submitted that to rescind 1977 would undermine our credibility and mean declaring OPC a false church, to which Attercliffe says: "Should our first concern not be faithfulness to Word and Confession? We will gain in credibility when we admit we were wrong....In rescinding 1977 we do not make a statement that the OPC is a false church."
  - vi. On the basis of the above, Attercliffe appeals Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 106) and asks Synod 98 "to judge that 1. Synod 1995 was incorrect in dealing with the letters and appeals together, 2. Synod 1995 was incorrect in rejecting our appeals."
- f. **The Church at London, ON (III. G.)**
- i. London notes that they have requested Synod 1995 "1. To rescind the decision of 1977 thus withdrawing the recognition of the OPC as a true church and ending the temporary ecclesiastical contact; and 2. To continue the discussion of ALL the divergencies ON A COMMITTEE LEVEL with the OPC since they claim unconditionally to accept the authority of the Holy Scriptures."
  - ii. London suggests that there has been "a shift in the procedure for discussing the divergencies.... 1. Pre-1977 on a committee level; 2. Post-1977 within a relationship of 'ecclesiastical contact'; 3. post-1995 within church unity (?)". Therefore London requests Synod Fergus "to judge whether the departure from no.1 is justified."
  - iii. London also refers to another shift. Whereas earlier synods spoke about "serious confessional

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divergencies"(e.g. Acts 1986, Article 132.E. Consideration b, p.6), Synod 1995 referred to the fact that "churches have their own histories" and "ecclesiological and/or historical differences"(Article 106, V.C.1.a; V.B.3). London cannot find any ground for this switch and therefore asks Synod 1998 not to follow this change.

- iv. London also refers to the fact that whereas in earlier synods references were made to whether an issue being discussed was in agreement with the Scriptures (e.g. CCOPC Report to Synod 1980, Appendix V, p.196) later synods were less critical, often referring to whether a divergency should prevent recognition of the OPC as a true church.
- v. London also believes Synod 1995 is contrary to fact when it argues that "The complaint that the matters at stake (confessional membership, admission to the Lord's table, contact with the CRC) are of a confessional nature actually deals with certain *practices* in the OPC and not its confessional documents...they are not proven to be a matter of the Westminster Standards. Rather, these are more a matter of the OPC living up to its standards" (Article 106, V.B.3). London rejects this "confessional-practical" distinction.
- vi. London also disputes the statement that "It is well known that already since the days of the Secession, there was good contact with churches maintaining the Westminster Standards, and they were recognized as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ"(Article 106, V.C.1.b), and proceeds to point out that the churches of the Secession did not distinguish 'recognized' and 'unrecognized' churches when it came to attestations, etc., and to refer to instances since 1948 when the Westminster Standards were viewed less favourably.
- vii. London points out that OPC has "generally been cordial but not receptive to our Scriptural testing of the divergencies"
- viii. London thus submits that "obedience to the Word of God is at stake...."
- ix. London suggests that since relationships with the FCS and the PCK were also made without sufficient evaluation, Synod should not now argue

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for a relationship with the OPC on the ground that we have one with the FCS and the PCK.

1. On the basis of all the above, London requests Synod 98
2. to withhold establishing Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC.
3. to continue the discussion of all the divergencies on a committee level with the OPC since they claim unconditionally to accept the authority of the Holy Scriptures.
4. to indicate to them that if no progress is made on these confessional and principal divergencies before our next General Synod, then our present relationship of "ecclesiastical contact" would have to be reassessed.

London requested Synod Abbotsford 1995, on the basis of their concerns above (re Synods 1977, 86....) "1. To rescind the decision of 1977, thus withdrawing the recognition of the OPC as a true church and ending the temporary ecclesiastical contact."

- g. **Br. T. Kingma, Lynden, WA (III. BB)** appeals Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 101 & 106) and asks Synod Fergus 1998 to judge (as he summarizes his appeal: "pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in judging:
  - i. Synod '95, when it summarizes what it perceives the ground of our appeal to be in article 101 VIII. A. 2. a. b. c., fails to acknowledge and deal with the very thrust and central ground of our entire appeal, namely, that the explanatory remarks, which provide numerous proofs from the Word of God, the adopted Confessions and/or Church Order of the CARC's, clearly indicate that the divergencies in the adopted standards of the OPC, PCK, FCS are in conflict with the Word of God and the adopted standards of the CARCs which according to our vows [re: the adopted subscription form (see *With Common Consent*, p. 355), form for the public profession of faith, form for the baptism of infants, and article 27 of the Church Order] do fully agree with the Word of God (see appendix #1 of which the explanatory remarks are again a central ground for this appeal to Synod '98).



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- ii. Synod '95, when it grouped and answered the CCOPC report and the 28 other letters, overtures and appeals together in Article 106 in addition to our appeal, it:
  1. failed to do complete justice of the God-given right (based on Art 31 CO) of the appellants....
  2. Observation IV, C.6. fails to acknowledge and form as the basis for its considerations the very thrust and central ground for our appeal, namely, the explanatory remarks which provide numerous proofs that the divergencies in the adopted standards of the OPC, PCK, FCS are in conflict with the Word of God and the adopted standards of the CARCs....
- iii. That the explanatory remarks in our appeal (see appendix #1, p # 1-3) addressed to Synod Abbotsford '95 and included as part of this appeal gives adequate proof from the Word of God, the Confessions and the Church Order of the CARCs that what Synod's since 1965 repeatedly referred to as "*divergencies*" ... in confession, and church polity, which includes church life, are indeed in conflict with the Word of God, the adopted Confessions and/or the Church Order of the CARCs.
- iv. That should some of the explanatory remarks in our appeal sent to Synod Abbotsford '95 ... **not** ... be in full agreement in all points with the Word of God and the adopted standards of the CARCs, to inform the appellants ... where precisely and on what point we have deviated from the Word of God, the adopted Confessions and the Church Order of the CARCs.
- v. That General Synod Abbotsford '95 failed to recognize that the change to the new rules is a false ecumenism ....
- vi. To follow through via the CCOPC and the CRWCA with our final plea ...
- vii. That the considerations made in this appeal in response to the Considerations B1-6, C1-6, and D1-2 in the Acts General Synod Abbotsford, B.C. 1995 of the CARCs be taken over by Synod '98 to inform the churches of its decision to return to the Word of God, the adopted Confessions, and

Church Order in all points of doctrine in its considerations regarding the subject of this appeal."

- h. **The Church at Blue Bell, PA** (Ill. X.) appeals Synod Abbotsford 1995 (Art. 101, 106), *Synod Lincoln 1992* (Art. 72, 11, 128), *Synod Coaldale 1977* (Art. 91).

The church at Blue Bell denies Abbotsford's assertion that no church has challenged the substance of the Evaluation offered by Synod 86 since they challenged the substance of it both with respect to the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the covenant to Synod 95 (p.2); Blue Bell asserts that Synod Abbotsford 1995 shifted the grounds of the debate from confessional differences to historical differences (p.3), and maintains that "there may be no divergences of substance between the two sets of confessional documents."(p.4). "The Catechism makes no distinction between the Reformed confession and the gospel; the OPC does."(p.8)

Blue Bell outlines the status of the Westminster Standards within the OPC judging that they do not function well and then traces this to Presbyterian roots. In their judgement the looser view with respect to membership is also rooted in Presbyterianism (cf. A.A. Hodge "The doors of the church must be as wide as the gates of heaven" *Outlines of Theology*, 1908, p.114). Blue Bell then turns to the question how the Elders and Ministers in the OPC maintain the Westminster standards and makes the very serious statement that "it is highly suspect whether any of the ministers and elders subscribe to the propositions in their own standards....In short, we have no way of knowing just what is believed in the OPC" (p.12). Blue Bell maintains that the OPC's method of fencing the Lord's Table rests on the assumption that there are also non-Reformed churches that are true churches. Thereafter Blue Bell revisits many matters (the church, covenant, church government) which have been discussed above and/or by previous synods.

## V. CONSIDERATIONS

### A. Regarding the reactions to the Report of the CCOPC .

1. Synod 1995 did charge the CCOPC with the mandate "to work towards formalizing a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the adopted rules by using the statement

of Synod Lincoln 92 (Acts 92, Article 72, IV A 1 e) as a guideline..."

2. Synod 92 did state clearly in the guideline concerning the fencing of the Lord's Table that "a verbal warning alone is insufficient and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required in the presence of the supervising elders from the guests wishing to attend the Lord's Supper." The Report of the CCOPC and the Proposed Agreement make no specific mention of the statement in the 1992 guideline concerning the fencing of the Lord's table that "a verbal warning alone is insufficient."
  3. Synod 1992 also stated clearly with respect to confessional membership that though the different situations in the churches must be taken into account, "it should be agreed, however, by the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC that all who profess their faith accept the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the confessions (standards) of the churches." This guideline was not adequately taken into account in the proposed agreement presented by the CCOPC.
  4. Judging from various letters, especially London's (III.T.), it appears that on the points of Fencing and Confessional Membership, there are divergent views between those held in the OPC and those in the Canadian Reformed Churches. They refer to the 50<sup>th</sup> GA 1983, 33<sup>rd</sup> GA 1967, 34<sup>th</sup> GA 1968 which put forward a broader view of admission to the church and the table. This begs the question, as London also asks: *have there been any changes in the OPC positions and practices since then?* According to our fraternal delegate from the OPC, Rev. J. J. Peterson, who was present for Synod 98 Committee I's discussions, there has been no change in the OPC positions and practices; the exact nature of those practices continues to be largely left to the local session. See also his article "Fencing the Lord's Table" *Ordained Servant* (Volume 3, Number 4), where he commends the report to the 50<sup>th</sup> General Assembly quoted by London in the above.
- B. Re Appeals from the churches and individual members regarding the relationship with the OPC and the decisions of previous synods.

**1. The History of the Relationship between the OPC and the Canadian Reformed Churches**

In view of the fact that there seems to be confusion about the actual history of the relationship between the CanRC and the OPC, and since Synods have not always been clear and the

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CCOPC has not always adequately fulfilled its mandate (Acts Synod 1983 Art.55 C 1 b; Acts Synod 1989, Art.94 D I 2 a b), Synod 1998 presents this following analysis of the relationship.

One common complaint is the fact that Synod 1977 did not provide adequate grounds for its decision. Despite the explanations given so far for such a procedure, it is apparent that it would be good for it to be recognized once again that this was a wrong approach to the matter. Synod 1965 had stated that a thorough investigation should precede a decision to establish relations with another federation of churches. This was not done adequately in 1977. Synods have admitted that they have confused matters. Synod 1980 expressed regret that the evaluation of divergencies was not explained by Synod 1977 and that this may have given the impression in the churches that this decision was premature. (Acts 1980, Art.97 II C Recommendations 1,2).

Thus when subsequent synods were faced with the matter, being convinced that the final decision was justified, they sought yet to rectify it by providing grounds. For this purpose the CCOPC provided Synod 1986 with an "Evaluation of Divergencies" (Acts 1986, Appendix II B).

The complaint voiced by the church at Attercliffe is that this 1986 Evaluation of Divergencies was not adopted by the churches and did not have an official status. W. de Haan similarly complains that the divergencies were not *sufficiently* discussed. These complaints are without sufficient ground however, for Synod 1986 not only thanked the committee "for publishing the detailed evaluation of the divergencies for the benefit of the churches", but also decided: "Synod receives this report as the detailed evaluation of the divergencies which the General Synod of 1977 neglected to give for its decision to recognize the OPC as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 1986, Article 126, Recommendation 1 and 2, p.55). It may be said that Synod 1986 did not officially adopt the report as the final answer to all the divergencies, but that was because it also acknowledged that various developments in the OPC after 1977, in connection with the Shepherd case as well as the churches at Blue Bell and Laurel, brought to the fore additional divergencies which necessitated further discussions. Therefore synod only *received* the report, but received it *as the grounds for the 1977 decision* (cf. 1986's comment on p.55: "This part of the mandate was for historical purposes, i.e. to provide the detailed evaluation not given by the General Synod of 1977"). The churches, including Attercliffe in particular, could still have reacted to this report as it still had a function as the grounds for 1977.



London's complaint that there are divergences that have not been discussed is not entirely true. It is certainly regrettable that the synods were never provided with a "detailed evaluation" on the point of "more or less pure churches." It should be noted however that, given the fact that this matter deals with the doctrine of the church, synods appear to have concluded that this point became intertwined with the question "invisible – visible church." Moreover, the matter of "the descent into Hades" was already dealt with by Synod Toronto 1974 when the CCOPC Committee wrote to the CEIR and stated re the Larger Catechism (q/a 50) "This answer interprets the article of the descent into hell as Jesus' stay 'in the state of death and under the power of death.'...We are aware that both interpretations have had a place in the teachings of the Churches of the Reformation" (Appendix 1, Synod 1974, p.105 cf. Article 149 of same, p.58). This also came to the attention of Synod Smithville 1980 by way of a statement in a letter which the CCOPC wrote to the CEIR which said: "The different interpretation of the clause in the Apostles' Creed 'descended into hell' should not become a point of disunity" (Appendix V, Synod 1980 Report of the CCOPC to Synod, p. 198).

It needs to be noted as well that Grand Rapids' complaint to the effect that the Classis Report concerning Blue Bell and Laurel to Synod 1986 was never dealt with is not true since Synod passed this matter on to the CCOPC (as noted in Article 137, D.1.2. Acts 1986); therefore it subsequently became a matter for the CCOPC to deal with. The Classis Report led to the matters of confessional membership and fencing of the Lord's table becoming issues of priority. Thus these matters became part of the discussion which led up to the Proposed Agreement in the Report of the CCOPC which is before Synod 1998. And therefore Synod 1998 no longer needs "to judge the validity of the conclusions in the document submitted to Synod 1986 by Classis Ontario-South (Art.137 B.4)." Furthermore the requests from Grand Rapids and others to call the OPC to repentance go too far at this point as these matters are still being discussed.

## **2. Remaining Divergencies**

Many churches and individuals have expressed concern about what happened to the divergencies and the report on the divergencies to Synod 1986 as well as the context in which discussion about these divergencies ought to take place.

The Report of the Divergencies to Synod 1986 was the report that was received not for the state of the question at that time but as the decision which formed the basis of 1977. It was stated that though these divergencies need further discussion, they



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need not be seen as impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship. But between Synod 1977 and the Report to Synod 1986, two churches separated from the OPC and joined the CanRC. This brought two other issues to the fore, namely the fencing of the Lord's table and confessional membership. These matters still need to be resolved. *Synod then remarked (Acts 1992, Art.72 IV Considerations A 3 d): "The matters which have come up since Synod 1983, especially 'confessional membership' and 'supervision of the Lord's table' are of a more serious nature (see Acts Synod 1983, Art.55, Acts Synod 1986, Art.132, and Acts Synod 1989, Art.94)." These Acts show that these synods did indeed regard these matters as being of a serious nature.*

In this regard Synod 1983, (Art.55, C Considerations 2.d) stated that: "... the matter of 'fencing' the Lord's Supper and the admission to the Lord's Supper concerns the Church discipline as well as the doctrine of the Church and should be looked into by General Synod (see B Observations 2, c, i, ii, iii)." That same Synod also recommended (Acts 1983, Art.55, D Recommendations 2.e) "to pay special attention to the new developments in the OPC, with respect to the so-called Shepherd case (see Observations 2, a, i, ii, iii), the Hofford case (see Observations 2, b) and the 'fencing' of the Lord's Supper (see B Observations 2, c, i, ii, iii, and d), and to come to the next Synod with recommendations in this respect...."

Also in this regard, Synod 1986 noted in its considerations (Acts Synod 1986, Art.132 E Considerations b,d,e):

"b. ...'the committee[s]...recommendation that 'the Canadian Reformed Churches should use their ecclesiastical contact to address the OPC on this issue of fencing the Lord's table' indicates that the matter of fencing the Lord's Supper is, indeed, a serious confessional divergency, which is a major issue of mutual concern.

d.... Although guests are not specifically mentioned in Article 61, Church Order, the conclusion of the committee, Observation 5, cannot mean that Article 61, C.O., has no bearing on the admission of guests to the Lord's Supper. Synod considers that Article 61, C.O., is the rule which governs the admission of all those who seek to partake in the Lord's Supper.

e. The Canadian Reformed Churches have from the beginning of contact with the OPC considered the admission to the Lord's Supper as an essential matter of discipline."

Thus Synod 1986 recommended (Recommendation 3) "To pass on the report about fencing of the Lord's table (including the sections A, B, and C) to the OPC through its committee for

Ecumenicity, along with the above considerations of the General Synod 1986 and invite the CEIR to have meetings about these matters."

Likewise, Synod 1989 dealt with the CCOPC report and noted some disappointing aspects (Acts 1989, Art.94, D Considerations 2.c): c. "the matter of fencing the Lord's table, considered by Synod 1986 as 'a serious confessional divergency which is a major issue of mutual concern' (Acts Synod 1986, Art.132. Considerations B), should be treated and presented in this light. Although a beginning has been made, further discussion is mandatory." This Synod mandated the CCOPC (Art.132, E Recommendations 1.5c): "to be diligent to continue the discussion on and evaluation of the divergencies such as the doctrine of the covenant, visible and invisible church, the assurance of faith, the observance of the law, the fencing of the Lord's table, confessional membership, church-political differences, and the contact with the CRC." Note that here the two new and major issues: confessional membership and fencing of the Lord's table, have become lumped together with the other divergencies which were reported on in 1986 and determined not to be a bar to ecclesiastical fellowship.

The same Synod stated, when considering the churches which have withdrawn from the OPC and been accepted into the CanRC (Art 72, IV A 2 c I) that "The withdrawal of these churches from the OPC may have the positive effect of underlining the need for the OPC and the CanRC to resolve the matter of divergencies which are considered to be impediments to Ecclesiastical Fellowship."

The next synod, Synod 1992, also maintained, in Acts Art. 72, IV Considerations, A 3 f, "From all of the foregoing it becomes clear that the impediments that still need to be removed are:

- i. Lack of agreement on the meaning and application of 'confessional membership.'
- ii. Lack of agreement on the supervision of the Lord's table.
- iii. Lack of agreement on the relationship of the OPC with the CRC.

These items must be addressed by the CCOPC with the OPC. Here, as the Committee itself suggests in its analysis, it may be helpful to discuss whether these divergencies stem from ecclesiological and/or historical differences."

This led Synod 1992 to include in the mandate to the CCOPC (Art 72, V C.5): "to inform the OPC that the matters which still require resolution for the establishment of full ecclesiastical fellowship are (see IV,A3v):

- a. the matter of confessional membership
- b. the matter of supervision of the Lord's table, and

- c. the matter of the relationship with the Christian Reformed Church.

Seeing how c. above has been addressed by the OPC, the remaining question before Synod 1998 is whether these matters, confessional membership and fencing of the Lord's table have been adequately addressed so that the CanRC can enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Although there still is a need to continue discussing the other divergencies within the context of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, the focus has consistently remained and remains on these two in particular.

### 3. Shift or Development?

Some churches have complained that there is a shift here. London asserts that there has been a shift in the procedure for discussing the divergencies. Synod 1965 stated "fellowship with other churches should be initiated only after a thorough and serious investigation is made and it is clear that these churches not only accept the Reformed confessions and regulations of Reformed church government but also abide by them" whereas Synod 1995 said that "there is reason to continue to discuss these practices" and thereby it means to discuss them within Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Watford complains about the shift that takes place from the above 1965 statement to the 1995 comment which says "they cannot in the end be made a condition for Ecclesiastical Fellowship"(Article 106.B.3). It is true that there is a shift here, but this was a natural process and development as the Synods struggled with the matter and considered how to move from a relationship of Ecclesiastical Contact to Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

It should be noted that this process was already foreseen by General Synod 1977 when it stated that ecclesiastical contact could serve as the basis for "further discussion with the OPC with the hope and intent that eventually full correspondence expressing the unity of the true faith can be established" (Art.91, Consideration e). Already from the beginning then, while the terminology would change, a natural progression from ecclesiastical contact to a sister-church relationship was the goal.

### 4. Other Issues

- a. **Grouping of Appeals.** Some of the appellants complain that the letters and appeals were grouped together and thus were not sufficiently answered. However it is not unusual to group letters and appeals by subject matter. Nor is it incorrect procedure. The question is whether the concerns are given their corresponding weight and consideration. A thorough

investigation of the considerations of Synod 1995 dealing with letters and appeals concerning relations with the OPC shows that the appellants raised matters that were previously considered.

- b. **Appeal of br. T. Kingma.** Regarding this appeal also, it should be said that there are really no new grounds provided here. In his appeal to Synod 1995 he attempts to convince from the Word of God that the points being discussed about the Westminster Standards are more than divergencies. Synod cannot interact with all his arguments here. Having reviewed his arguments and proofs however, Synod considers that the brother has not proven his point nor has he brought to the fore aspects of Scripture which have not been examined by others (e.g. the Report to Synod 86 re Divergences).
- c. **Background of many of the appeals.** Many of the appellants have argued that the differences between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church are not just divergencies between two Reformed Churches but differences of such magnitude that recognition of the OPC is unwarranted because it simply is not a Reformed Church. In this regard, for example, a remark of br. T. Kingma (p.3): "having liberated from the superscriptural teachings... of the GKN which were proven to be unscriptural and yet made binding by the synod '43/44". [See the same in Blue Bell III-X, p.18]. Behind this thinking, however, there is a flawed interpretation of our own history. Although appellants are sometimes more careful in their wording, there is frequently the suggestion as above that the Liberation of 1944 was a liberation from the superscriptural teachings whereas, in fact, it was a liberation from *the binding* to the superscriptural teachings. The two are not the same. The concern of the appellants then is that they believe that the Westminster Standards bring these teachings back into the church. Some appellants question whether a minister who teaches what is taught in the OPC would be tolerated in the Canadian Reformed Churches. What the appellants fail to realize is that while Dr. K. Schilder and others were willing to discuss Kuyperian views within the one federation of churches, the Synod was not willing to have them discussed but made them binding instead. The Synod, in effect, elevated Kuyper's teaching on these points to a "fourth Form of Unity" and hence would not tolerate any who differed with his views. What the appellants often do however is



implicitly elevate Schilder's teaching to the level of doctrinal status and attempt to ensure that anything that seems similar to Kuyper's views is not tolerated. Hence the reaction against the Westminster Standards which they believe are the same as the views of Kuyper. In this regard, they often quote Schilder failing to realize that Dr. K. Schilder, fully aware of the weaknesses of the Westminster Standards, was willing to accept them as Reformed documents and to tolerate Kuyper's views within the Reformed Churches as long as they could continue to be discussed and were not made binding upon himself and other members of the churches.

It should be understood that there is no doubt that the divergencies need to be discussed on an ongoing basis. But it should then also be realized that they *can be* discussed within a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. Meanwhile, no one in the Canadian Reformed Churches is bound to the Westminster Standards within such a relationship. The confessions of others may be of interest and value to all, but one is bound only to the confessions adopted by the federation of which one is a member or officebearer. Similarly, in a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, though the pulpits are in principle open, this is still by invitation only.

- d. **Worship Services.** Regarding the suggestion by Lincoln that there are some OP Churches where there is only one worship service, this letter does not sufficiently prove whether there are churches which have only one worship service, nor do they clarify the nature of services in those places. According to our fraternal delegate from the OPC, Rev. J. Peterson, the prevailing approach is to have two services per Lord's Day. Places where this is not the case may very well be new posts where facilities or manpower is limited.

### **C. The Present State of the Relationship**

1. As illustrated above, it has to be acknowledged that, despite many appeals and much discussion, the Canadian Reformed Churches have maintained a fairly consistent line which is summarized in the 1992 guidelines to the CCOPC. The CanRC have continued to maintain 1977 and to work towards closer relations according to the guideline of Synod 1965, namely that "Fellowship with other churches should be initiated only after a thorough and serious investigation is made and it is clear that these churches not only accept the Reformed confessions and regulations of Reformed church



government but also abide by them" (Synod Edmonton 1965, Art. 141). Two divergencies remained which still required resolution before entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Synod Abbotsford 1995 mandated the CCOPC to work towards coming to an agreement on these two remaining divergencies and to formalizing a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, hopefully in 1998.

2. Hence the CCOPC has come to General Synod Fergus 1998 with the text of the Proposed Agreement between the CanRC and the OPC as mentioned above. However, there is considerable concern as outlined above that the agreement is too vague and does not sufficiently address the differences. Proceeding with the relationship under the Proposed Agreement as it is will only add to the unrest in our churches and will not help the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to function in a manner that is suitable to one of the Churches of the Reformation.
3. Our concerns are underlined by the position of Rev. J. J. Peterson who in his speech to both Synod Abbotsford 1995 and General Synod Fergus 1998 defends the right of the OPC to admit to membership and to the Lord's table those who do not make profession of the Reformed faith (E.g. to Synod 1998: "Synod 1992 said 'a verbal warning alone is insufficient.' To those of us who use this method or supervision to hear that 'a verbal warning alone is insufficient' is to depreciate the power of the proclaimed word"). These comments and positions are out of line with the proposal of the CCOPC to General Synod Fergus 1998. The archives of the CCOPC show that the original context of the Proposed Agreement re the Fencing of the Lord's Table contained references to the ICRC Conference in 1993 (Under the proposal the words were added: "See *Report of the Committee on Theological Affirmation*, in *Proceedings of the ICRC 1993*, pp. 80f."). This report of the Committee on Theological Affirmation (pp. 80-81) is defending a more restricted and Reformed approach to admitting people to the Lord's Table. It cites also Westminster Confession (chapter 29, section 8):

*Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in the sacrament, yet they receive not the thing signified thereby; but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. Wherefore all ignorant and ungodly person, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table, and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they*

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*remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto.*

Rev. G. I. Williamson reflects also the concerns of the CanRC when he says about this same point: "In the Orthodox Presbyterian Church...persons are commonly admitted of whom the Session know nothing. I have never been able to see how this common practice can be reconciled with the clearly stated requirement of our confession which says..." (as above, quoting W.C. chapter 29, section 8. G.I. Williamson, "On a More Adequate Fencing of the Lord's Table", *The Ordained Servant*. Volume 3, number 4, p.76). Therefore Synod 1998 suggests to add the words to the first part of the Proposed Agreement: *This means that a general verbal warning by the officiating minister alone is not sufficient and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required.* As to supervision of life, reference can also be made to the Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. & A. 173: "*May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, be kept from it? Such as are found to be ignorant or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament by the power which Christ hath left in his church, until they receive instruction, and manifest their reformation*", cf. Heidelberg Catechism, q. & a. 82 "confession and life"). For every church the danger is real that it requests less of guests than it asks of its members. Scripture is quite clear that we cannot automatically take someone's word for it if he professes to be an upright Christian. Matthew 7:21 warns us: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who *does the will of my Father* who is in heaven"(cf. also 1 Cor. 5:11; Mt. 7:6). If elders are faced with guests who have not been under their supervision and of whom it cannot be ascertained that they are indeed God-fearing people, it is therefore important for them to receive a positive written or verbal testimony concerning such guests before admitting them to the Lord's supper. Therefore it is also proposed to add to the Proposed Agreement the words: and confirmation of a godly life.

Regarding the second part of the Proposed Agreement, the concern is that again the OPC leaves room where room ought not to be left. In the Form for Profession of Faith in the OPC profession is made of faith in the doctrine of the Bible alone. It might be assumed that this would mean faith in the doctrine as confessed in the standards of the church. However, it is stated in the document entitled "COEIR-OPC

Response to Papers Prepared by CCOPC-CanRC" submitted to Synod 1992 (Acts Synod 1992, Appendix II, p. 170), "We [OPC] affirm what you [CanRC] reject – that the church is competent to determine as valid and credible a confession of the Christian faith for communicant membership that is not also in full accord with the church's confession." Therefore, Synod 1998 adds the word "as" in the second part of the Proposed Agreement so that the sentence reads: "Anyone who answers the membership vows in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible as the patristic church has summarized this teaching in the Apostles' Creed and the churches of the Reformation have elaborated on this in their confessions."

4. Synod 1998 thus proposes that the Proposed Agreement read as follows (additional words underlined):

- a. *Concerning Fencing the Lord's Table:*

The churches of the Reformation confess that the Lord's supper should not be profaned (1 Cor. 11:27, see Heid. Cat. Lord's Day 30, Q&A 82; Westminster Confession ch. 29,8). This implies that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is to be supervised. In this supervision the Church exercises discipline and manifests itself as true church. This supervision is to be applied to the members of the local church as well as to the guests. This means that a general verbal warning by the officiating minister alone is not sufficient and that a profession of the Reformed faith and confirmation of a godly life is required. The eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord's Supper.

- b. *Concerning Confessional Membership:*

The churches of the Reformation believe that they have to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and are called to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned (Rom. 16:17). Anyone who answers the membership vows in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible as the patristic church has summarized this teaching in the Apostles' Creed and the churches of the Reformation have elaborated on this in their confessions. Every confessing member is bound to this doctrine and must be willing to be instructed in it.

5. It is our prayer that the General Assembly of the OPC may find the above proposal acceptable, and that they will communicate their agreement to the CCOPC, so that the

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relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship may then be initiated and the CCOPC can make arrangements according to the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

6. This also means that the Canadian Reformed Churches would need to allow time for the OP churches to define and implement the practical consequences after the acceptance of this agreement by the General Assembly.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Synod decide

- A. To express regret once again and to remind the appellants that Synod 1980 (Acts 1980, Article 97, C, 1, p. 69) already did so when it expressed "regret that the evaluation of the divergencies, as discussed in the letter of April, 1976, was not explained in detail by the Synod Coaldale 1977, before stating that these divergencies 'do not form an impediment to recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.' (Acts 1977, Article 91, Consideration h)."
- B. To affirm that the Evaluation of Divergencies presented to Synod 1986 by the CCOPC is the document which provided the grounds for the 1977 decision to recognize the OPC as a true church.
- C. That no new grounds for declaring previous decisions contrary to Scriptures, confessions and the Church Order have been brought forward. Moreover, that the differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards are not such that they prevent Ecclesiastical Fellowship but they are divergencies about which there can continue to be discussions among those who belong to Reformed Churches.
- D. To acknowledge gratefully the desire of the OPC to be faithful to the Scriptures and to defend the reformed heritage.
- E. To note with thankfulness that the OPC, by terminating the Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRCNA has taken a clear stand in maintaining the truth and authority of the Word of God, and has removed another obstacle for the Canadian Reformed Churches to come to ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC.
- F. To adopt the Proposed Agreement as amended here below as the basis for Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC, and to instruct the CCOPC to pass it on to the CEIR for adoption by the General Assembly:

*Concerning Fencing the Lord's Table:*

The churches of the Reformation confess that the Lord's supper should not be profaned (1 Cor. 11:27, see Heid. Cat.



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Lord's Day 30, Q&A 82; Westminster Confession ch. 29,8). This implies that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is to be supervised. In this supervision the Church exercises discipline and manifests itself as true church. This supervision is to be applied to the members of the local church as well as to the guests. This means that a general verbal warning by the officiating minister alone is not sufficient and that a profession of the Reformed faith and confirmation of a godly life is required. The eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord's Supper.

### *Concerning Confessional Membership:*

The churches of the Reformation believe that they have to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and are called to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned (Rom. 16:17). Anyone who answers the membership vows in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible as the patristic church has summarized this teaching in the Apostles' Creed and the churches of the Reformation have elaborated on this in their confessions. Every confessing member is bound to this doctrine and must be willing to be instructed in it.

- G. Should the General Assembly of the OPC adopt the Agreement on Fencing of the Lord's Table and Confessional Membership as stated above, to invite the OPC to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, according to the adopted rules for this relationship.
- H. To instruct the CCOPC, as a sub-committee of the CCCA, upon the adoption of the above by the OPC, to initiate Ecclesiastical Fellowship according to the adopted rules, and to inform the churches and the next General Synod accordingly.
- I. That any further discussion re differences in confession and church polity must take place within the relation of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The intention of such discussions will be mutual upbuilding in the faith to 'maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, (Eph.4:3; cf. Report of the CCOPC to Fergus 1998, p. 3).
- J. If the General Assembly of the OPC does not adopt the above, to reconsider the present relationship of ecclesiastical contact with the OPC at the next General Synod. In that case, the CCOPC must make recommendations to the next General Synod.

ADOPTED



The chairman notes that this is a historic moment in the life of the Canadian Reformed Churches as a decision has been made which will hopefully serve the Orthodox Presbyterian Church well and will bring this matter to rest in the churches. He notes with gratitude the fact that this difficult decision could be made unanimously.

### **Article 131**

#### **Appeals from Barrhead, Coaldale and Taber re Article 115, Synod 1995**

Committee III presents Agenda items II D, III C, III I.

#### **I. MATERIAL**

Submissions from the churches at Barrhead, Coaldale, and Taber appealing Acts 1995, Article 115 wherein Synod responds to "Appeals against Regional Synod West 1993, Art. 11," from (among others) the Churches at Barrhead, Coaldale, and Taber.

#### **II. ADMISSIBILITY**

Synod declares the submissions of the churches at Barrhead, Coaldale, and Taber admissible since they are appeals regarding a decision made by General Synod Abbotsford 1995.

#### **III. OBSERVATIONS**

- A. The church at Barrhead "judges Synod to have given wrong consideration in coming to its decision to deny the appeals. Barrhead's difficulty in particular is with Consideration IV.A. paragraph 2 and 3."
- B. The church at Coaldale asks General Synod Fergus, 1998 to rescind Article 115 of General Synod Abbotsford, 1995, "since it is our conviction that this decision contradicts what we confess in article 27-29 of the Belgic Confession, and is not in accordance with what we, as churches, agreed upon in our adopted church order." Coaldale submits objections to Considerations IV. A, B, and C, and states that "the grounds adduced by Synod for the rejection of Coaldale's appeal are untenable in the light of the Confession, the Church Order and the apparent meaning to the considerations of the decision of Regional Synod West, 1993, article 11."
- C. The church at Taber "requests General Synod Fergus, 1998 to rescind Article 115 of General Synod Abbotsford, 1995 ... in light of the following confessional and church orderly concerns." Taber expresses "Confessional Concern Re IV Consideration A..., and Church Orderly Concern Re IV Consideration B of article 115 General Synod Abbotsford, 1995." Taber also requests Synod "to state that, although it would not now be kind

nor even-handed to expel the American Reformed Church of Denver from the federation, the admission of the American Reformed Church of Denver was in violation of the Confession and the Church Order.

IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. The churches at Barrhead and Taber, in their confessional objections against the admission of the church of Denver correctly adduce the normative character of the articles 27-29 BC. Synod Lincoln 1992 already articulated the same when it considered "these admitted churches are therefore under obligation to pursue, together with the Canadian Reformed Churches, unity with the OPC. This remains, in any case, the striving of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the CCOPC" (Art. 72,IV,2,iv, p.51/52). Article 28 of the Belgic Confession shows the dynamic character of the call to join the true church. In the midst of the difficulties that had developed in the local OPC church (Acts 1995, Art. 115, IV, C,5.), the church at Denver sought to be obedient to the norm of Article 28 by joining a federation of churches they considered true and faithful to the Word of the Lord. Obedience to Articles 27-29 was being sought in the whole process.
- B. The appellants take issue with the interim situation in the relationship between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC. The interim situation had come about because Synod 1977 acknowledged the OPC to be a true church without entering a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Synod offered the OPC a *temporary* relationship called "ecclesiastical contact". Special rules were devised (Acts Synod 1977 Article 91), acknowledging a relationship of "full correspondence" could not be entered into at that time because of identified divergencies. It was this temporary relationship and the subsequent developments (e.g. fencing and confessional membership) that complicated the situation.
- C. In regard to the "Church Order Concern" about Consideration B, adduced by the churches at Coaldale and Taber, Synod 1995 noted that Coaldale and Taber did not appeal this decision in the minor assemblies, so that it "can be concluded that appellants accepted the March 1993 decision as settled and binding." Hence, Synod considered "Art. 33 C.O. is not relevant at Classis AB/MB Oct. 1993." Furthermore, Synod explained that "the matter of Denver's requests had been reopened at the Classis March 1993 with as ground the decision of General Synod 1992. General Synod's decision constitutes the new ground according to Art. 33 C.O." Coaldale and Taber seek to prove a discrepancy in the interpretation of the process by suggesting that Synod "confuses 'reopening' a matter with 'proposing' to change a

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decision without new grounds." Making such distinctions, however, only confuses the issue. Synod maintains the 1992 decision *itself* was the new ground, leading to the investigation.

- D. From the material presented it can be concluded that more consultation and communication between the OPC and the CanRC's in the process of admitting Denver into the federation would have been helpful. It is evident that the evaluation of the process of admission of the church at Denver into the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches hinges on the evaluation of the history of our contact with the OPC since 1977. This appears from the interpretation of and interaction with the considerations of Regional Synod 1993 as submitted by Coaldale and as dealt with by Abbotsford 1995.

### V. RECOMMENDATION

Synod decide to submit the above considerations as its answer to the appeals of the churches at Barrhead, Coaldale, and Taber.

ADOPTED

## Article 132

### **Mandate of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) and the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA)**

Committee III presents: Agenda Item I D, II CC, L 30

#### I. MATERIAL

- A. Report of the CRCA regarding the mandate, finances and other matters of the Committee
- B. Letter from the church at Willoughby Heights

#### II. OBSERVATIONS

- A. The CRCA reports on its correspondence with the Lanka Reformed Church and recommends that the LRC be advised to take up contact with the Free Reformed Churches in Australia and/or the Presbyterian Church in Korea.
- B. The CRCA reports on retirements, appointments and the finances of the Committee. It notes that in the period of 1995-1998 the Committee spent \$ 10,847. The proposed budget is \$10,000.
- C. The church at Willoughby Heights draws the attention of Synod to the point that the CRCA "should be given enough funds to meaningfully fulfill its mandate."

#### III. RECOMMENDATIONS

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Synod decide:

- A. As a result of the adopted restructuring, the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) will retain the responsibility for:
1. Our continued participation in the ICRC;
  2. Our relationship with the following churches: the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa, the Presbyterian Church in Korea, and the Free Church of Scotland.
- B. To advise the CRCA to consult the Free Reformed Churches in Australia and/or the Presbyterian Church in Korea to take up contact with the Lanka Reformed Church.
- C. The Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA) become responsible for contact with the following churches:
1. L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Reformed Churches of the United States.
- D. To mandate the CRCA and the CCCA to:
1. Investigate diligently all the requests received for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship;
  2. Respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend Assemblies, Synods, or meetings of other churches;
  3. Report on their findings with suitable recommendations to the next General Synod.
- E. To adopt the following budget for the CRCA
- |                   |          |
|-------------------|----------|
| ICRC fees         | \$3,500  |
| Meeting ICRC 2001 | \$1,000  |
| Travel            | \$2,500  |
| Miscellaneous     | \$3,000  |
| Total             | \$10,000 |

ADOPTED

**Article 133**

**Adjournment**

Br. L. Jagt asks that Hymn 46:1, 2 be sung, and leads in prayer. Synod is adjourned.

**MORNING SESSION – FRIDAY, MAY 22, 1998**

**Article 134**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Psalm 84: 1, 2 be sung, reads from 1 Corinthians 12: 31b – 13:13, and leads in prayer. Roll call shows that all are present, except for Rev. A.J. Pol who is absent with notice.

**Article 135**

**Adoption of the Acts**

Articles 125 –133 of the Acts, pertaining to Thursday, May 21, 1998 are adopted.

**Article 136**

**Appeal of the Mid-Atlantic Presbytery of the OPC re Rev. Hofford**

Synod meets in closed session. Committee II presents their proposal on this matter.

I. MATERIAL

Appeal IV.A., Commission of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic Orthodox Presbyterian Church

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod declares this appeal admissible because it could not be finished by the minor assembly (Article 30, C.O.).

III. OBSERVATIONS

A. In June 1983, Rev. B. R. Hofford brought a complaint concerning the fencing of the Lord's Table before the 50<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the OPC that was denied. Rev. Hofford reacted in his letter dated September 10, 1983 to the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic, by stating that:

...because of your mishandling of the Lord's Supper complaint and your denial of the complaint, I am forced with great reluctance, to follow Paul's instruction in Romans 16:17, and Titus 3:10. Further, I am compelled to solemnly declare you ministers and elders of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church false shepherds.

It was this concern that caused Rev. Hofford and fellow members of the Covenant OPC to secede from the OPC in July 1982.



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- B. In their letter to Rev. Hofford dated *December 17, 1991*, the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic, Orthodox Presbyterian Church requests

...that you withdraw your solemn declaration of the ministers and elders of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as false shepherds. Although Presbytery has found no biblical basis for repentance of the Lord's Supper complaint, and has not reconsidered its denial of the complaint, your declaration is unwarranted since Presbytery has not apostatized.

- C. Being dissatisfied with answers received from the consistory of the Tri-County Reformed Church, the Presbytery presents its concerns to the broader ecclesiastical assemblies. The Presbytery now appeals the decision of Regional Synod East – November 13, 1996 and places the same request before Synod, namely to declare:

that the Consistory of Tri-County Reformed Church should have either persuaded Mr. Hofford to be reconciled to his brothers and sisters in the Lord (as understood by the submissions of Presbytery) or to have brought Mr. Hofford under discipline.

The Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic interacts with the considerations of Regional Synod East, and states that:

1. "Presbytery faults classis for tolerating sin of slander by a minister of the federation ."
2. "...subsequent discussions were broken off by Mr. Hofford and Consistory by their demand that discussion be confined only to their 'underlying issues.'"
3. "Presbytery is not asking for direct discipline of Mr. Hofford by Classis...we are asking for a simple finding of error as outlined in the documents."
4. "We will grant that Mr. Hofford raised serious concerns and did so in a substantial way. We do not grant that he so proved the importance and clear validity of his position that it merited calling ministers of Christ's true church 'false shepherds.'"
5. "If Mr. Hofford will not publicly disavow his statement until his own set of 'underlying issues' are both discussed and resolved, then it appears he has erected a road block to unity and reconciliation."

## IV. CONSIDERATIONS

- A. The key issue in the appeal of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic Presbytery is that Rev. Hofford is guilty of the sin of slander because in 1983 he "labelled members of Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic 'false shepherds.'" However, for Rev. Hofford the key issues relate to how the General Assembly responded to his appeal. His concern is two-fold, namely, "...the biblical basis for the proper fencing of the Lord's Supper..." and the "...biblical duty to handle such questions with Scripture." (cf. letter dated September 10, 1983 to the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic.) While the Presbytery focuses on the label itself in the broader context of church relations, Rev. Hofford maintains the need to consider the label within its specific context.
- B. The point has been expressed by the CanRC ecclesiastical assemblies that the label of "false shepherds" could or should be withdrawn (cf. Classis Ontario South, March 6/April 17, 1996, and Regional Synod East, November 13, 1996). Rev. Hofford himself, in a letter to Rev. T. E. Tyson dated July 18, 1990, made clear that in his "...judgment the real issue is not what precise label I give you. I suppose it could be debated whether or not you are properly termed 'false shepherd.'" (cf. Classis 1996, Art. 8, Cons. 2.) In other words, Rev. Hofford himself, acknowledged that the appropriateness of the label "false shepherds" is disputable.
- C. The CanRC ecclesiastical assemblies demonstrate that Rev. Hofford made the statement of "false shepherds" in a specific time and context. This is supported, for instance, by Regional Synod when it stated that "Regional Synod does not agree that Rev. Hofford's statement of 1983 is to be seen as "slanderous" in the given context, for Rev. Hofford had raised serious and substantiated concerns in the matters presented to the OPC assembly." (Regional Synod 1996, Art. 8, Cons. 4) The point is not to determine whether the label is in fact slanderous, but to engage in thorough discussion of the issue raised by Rev. Hofford in order to seek reconciliation. Regional Synod noted that "Rev. Hofford and Tri-County consistory also indicated the willingness to discuss the underlying issues in order to come to possible reconciliation (letter Sept. 3, 1992, Doc. #6). Classis correctly understood that Tri-County Ref. Church would pursue withdrawal of the "statement" made by the minister if the Presbytery was willing to discuss and resolve the underlying issues." (Regional Synod, Art. 8, Cons. 2.)
- D. Rev. Hofford gives his reason for stating the charge of "false shepherds" in his original letter to Presbytery, dated September 10, 1983:
- Because of your mishandling of the Lord's Supper complaint and your denial of the complaint, I am forced, with great

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reluctance, to follow Paul's instructions in Romans 16:17, and Titus 3:10. Further, I am compelled to solemnly declare you ministers and elders of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church false shepherds.

Clearly Rev. Hofford's charge of "false shepherds" is tied to the manner in which his appeal was dealt with. This is something, which has had Presbytery's attention as they have discussed this with Rev. Hofford and the Tri-County consistory. Presbytery states in its appeal to General Synod;

We further note, that presbytery did discuss the underlying issues with Consistory as evidenced by the papers produced for the single discussion held with Mr. Hofford and Consistory. Subsequent discussions were broken off by Mr. Hofford and Consistory by their demand that discussions be confined only to their "underlying issues."

What Presbytery fails to understand is that Rev. Hofford is seeking a full hearing on his concerns about the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The fact Rev. Hofford has not been properly heard on the underlying issues keeps him from retracting the charge of "false shepherds."

- E. What Presbytery really wants is for "Rev. Hofford to be reconciled to his brothers and sisters in the Lord." Reconciliation is also what Rev. Hofford desires as he outlined in his letter to Presbytery, dated September 3, 1992. Based on the documents provided, it is evident that a door is open for Presbytery to discuss the "underlying issues" with Rev. Hofford, which as a result should lead to the withdrawal of the charge of "false shepherds." Synod urges the Presbytery and Rev. Hofford to heed the scriptural demand that brothers be reconciled. This will take place when brothers can listen and talk with one another, speaking the truth in love. (cf. Matt. 5:24, Matt. 18:15, 2 Cor. 5:18, Eph. 4:15,16)

V. RECOMMENDATION

Synod judges that it is necessary for the Presbytery and Rev. Hofford to seek reconciliation in the manner outlined above.

ADOPTED

**Article 137**

**Appeal of Mrs. A. Burger et al. Re Regional Synod East of Nov. 1995**

Committee II presents their proposal re this matter.

I. MATERIAL

Appeal III.L, Mrs. A. Burger, Mrs. I. Kruyswijk, Miss A. Sikkema and Mrs. W. Sikkema.

Re decision of Regional Synod East of November 15, 1995.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

Synod decides to declare this appeal admissible.

III. OBSERVATIONS

A. The appellants request Synod to declare:

1. Regional Synod erred in failing to deal with what we requested in our letter of Oct. 6, 1995 under a, b, c, d, and f.
2. Regional Synod erred in stating "the letters of the consistory (July 3, 1987, Dec. 27, 1987, and Feb. 3, 1988) indicate the appellant's censure involved the Spaanderman case, as well as the censure of Mr. C. J. Burger and Mr. G. Kruyswijk.
3. Regional Synod East, 1995 erred in failing to recognize and act upon the heart of our appeal, namely:
  - a. That we did not abstain from the Table of the Lord because of the sin of br. R. TenHaaf but, because of the refusal of the consistory to deal with these sins, both of Rev. Kingma and br. R. TenHaaf.". The "unfaithfulness of the consistory has lead to our abstaining from the table of the Lord".
  - b. That therefore the appellants have merely heeded the warning of Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 82 namely that: "the covenant of God would be profaned and His wrath kindled against the whole congregation".
4. Classis Ont. South of March 1995 erred in failing to address the legality of our censure.

B. The appellants are appealing the following decision of Regional Synod:

Considerations:

1. At the heart of the appeal is the appellants suggestion that Classis erred in stating in the last paragraph of its letter of March 13, 1995: "Classis judges that therefore the legality of

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their censure cannot be separated from the legality of the censure of Mr. Burger and Mr. Kruyswijk.”

2. Regional Synod November 16, 1994, judged that the appellants are correct that the legality of their censure (which in this case is the only outstanding issue) was not addressed by Classis Ontario South (Sept. 14, 1994) either in its committee report or in its previous decisions.
3. The appellants themselves in their letters (June 26, 1981, August 27, 1987), and the letters of consistory (July 3, 1987; Dec. 27, 1987 and Feb 3, 1988), indicate the appellants' censure involved the Spaanderman case, as well as the censure of Mr. C.J. Burger and Mr. G. Kruyswijk.
4. Classis Ontario South, March 8-9, 1995, was correct in stating that “the legality of their censure cannot be separated from the legality of the censure of Mr. Burger and Mr. Kruyswijk.”

Recommendation:

Regional Synod does not accede to the requests of the appellants.

#### IV. CONSIDERATION

The response of Regional Synod to the appellants is unclear. As a result, General Synod is unable to deal adequately with the appeal against the decision of Regional Synod 1995. Regional Synod states that Classis was correct when it decided that “the legality of their censure cannot be separated from the legality of the censure of Mr. Burger and Mr. Kruyswijk.” Regional Synod does not clarify the statement when it states, “the appellants' censure involved the Spaanderman case, as well as the censure of Mr. C.J. Burger and Mr. G. Kruyswijk”. The appellants were not given a clear answer by Regional Synod and thereby justice concerning the legality of their censure was not provided.

#### V. RECOMMENDATION

Synod decide:

That Regional Synod East of November 15 and 16, 1995 did not adequately and clearly address the submission of the appellants. The appellants could still submit their appeal to a subsequent Regional Synod.

ADOPTED



**Article 138**

**Request of Toronto re Pro-Life Stance**

Committee I presents their proposal re this matter. After discussion, the committee takes it back for further consideration. Synod adjourns for some committee work and for lunch.

**AFTERNOON SESSION – FRIDAY, MAY 22, 1998**

**Article 139**

**Request of Toronto re Pro-Life Stance**

Committee I presents their proposal re this matter re Toronto's Request re Pro-life (II-MM)

I. MATERIAL

Request from the Bethel Church at Toronto (II-MM) with enclosure (*Report of the Committee to Study the Matter of Abortion of the 38<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the OPC, 1971*).

II. OBSERVATIONS

A. The Bethel church at Toronto, because of the involvement of a sister in pro-life activities and legal difficulties encountered, asks Synod to adopt the above Report of the OPC and give it official status in the midst of the churches.

III. CONSIDERATION

A. Though churches and their members may benefit from adopting a pro-life policy, the structure of the Canadian Reformed Churches does not allow for a major assembly to make statements about political and social concerns.

B. The nature of the Reformed church polity of the Canadian Reformed Churches is such that a statement of the Council of the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church at Toronto should suffice also for legal purposes. In the polity of the Canadian Reformed Church, the Council of the church (elders and deacons) is the highest ecclesiastical body, from which all other assemblies derive their authority.

C. In respect to the matter of abortion, Synod Fergus 1998 has no doubt that the Canadian Reformed Churches are of one mind, namely, that with the possible exception of cases in which the life of the mother might be in jeopardy, the abortion of pre-born human life, from conception to birth, is considered to be contrary to God's Word (Exodus 20:13; Psalm 139:13 - 16) and the

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Confession (Lord's Day 40, Heidelberg Catechism) of the Canadian Reformed Churches. In this respect, reference is made also to the *Report of the Committee to Study the Matter of Abortion* of the 38<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1971.

- D. It is regrettable that this matter did not come to General Synod via the minor assemblies as outlined in Article 30, C.O.

### IV. RECOMMENDATION

Considering the above, Synod cannot accede to the request of the Church at Toronto.

ADOPTED

## **Article 140**

### **Matters re The Book of Praise**

Re: Report of the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise*

Committee II presents:

Agenda Items: I.E, II.A, II.C.I, II.H, II.L, II.II, II.QQ, II.YY, II.XX, II.DDD, IV.B, IV.D, IV.H, IV.R, IV.T (part 3), IV.V (part 5), IV.BB, L7, L21,L27

### I. MATERIAL

- A. Report of the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise*
- B. Letters from the churches at Watford, Burlington East (2), Cloverdale, Langley, Fergus, Burlington South, Grand Valley, Barrhead, Elora, London, Carman, Guelph, Fergus, Orangeville, Taber, Owen Sound, and Willoughby Heights, and a letter from br. J.D. Gansekoole
- C. Letter from Standing Committee for Publication of the *Book of Praise* re: response to several letters received from the churches

### II. GENERAL INFORMATION FROM THE STANDING COMMITTEE'S REPORT

- A. Observations
1. The Committee authorized a new printing of the *Book of Praise* shortly after Synod Abbotsford 1995. This edition incorporates the changes adopted by Synod 1995. It also includes an improved hardcover binding. Since then the stock has been depleted and another printing will have to be considered.

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2. The *Introduction to the Church Order* was included in the 1996 edition of the *Book of Praise*.
3. In addition to placing the provisionally adopted text of the Nicene Creed in the 1996 edition of the *Book of Praise*, the Committee distributed the text to the churches with the request for comments. Having received these comments from the churches, the Committee provides the final form of the proposal of the text of the Nicene Creed. Subsequent to the report to Synod, several churches submitted further comments to which the Committee responds. (See below.)
4. Regarding the availability of the *Book of Praise* in electronic format, the Committee suggests that Synod appoint a church to develop and maintain a formal web page of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.
5. The Committee notes that Rev. G. Nederveen is about to retire from the Committee and that br. L. Kingma has requested to be relieved from the Committee due to other commitments.
6. Ebenezer church at Burlington expresses its support for the Committee's report.
7. The church at Orangeville requests Synod not to incorporate provisional material into the published editions of the *Book of Praise*.

### B. Considerations

1. Since the current stock has been depleted, the Committee should authorize another printing, to serve the churches for the next 3 years. The Committee should clearly note the year of edition on the cover.
2. Except by the specific mandate of General Synod, future printings of the *Book of Praise* should not include provisional material. The solicitation of comments from the churches must not be done by including provisionally adopted material into the *Book of Praise*.
3. Synod concurs with the Committee to make available the *Book of Praise* in an electronic format and to develop and maintain a formal presence on the internet. Consideration must be directed to the matter of copyright and the matter of cost. Instead of appointing a particular church to maintain the web-page, several brothers who are competent in these matters can be appointed for this purpose.

### C. Recommendations

Synod decide

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1. to express gratitude for the years of service offered by br. L. Kingma and Rev. G. Nederveen.
  2. to continue the Committee, consisting of four members and appoint two members to fill the vacancies (at least one with musical talents).
  3. To appoint a new Committee for the purpose of creating and maintaining an official web page for the Canadian Reformed Churches with the following mandate:
    - a. to serve the churches by creating and maintaining an official web page which would contain official and semi-official materials that reflect the life of the churches, are of benefit to the membership, and of assistance to her witness in this world;
    - b. to report to the next General Synod regarding the activities and noticeable benefits of this web page.
- II. ALTERNATE MELODY FOR HYMN 1A (ZWART; STRASBOURG)
- A. Observations
1. The Committee notes that it prepared the Strasbourg melody for distribution to the churches by adjusting the melody to fit the English text and by providing a harmonization which is in line with the historical time period of the melody. Both Zwart and Strasbourg melodies and their harmonization were distributed to the churches for comment. In view of the clear consensus of the churches that these melodies should not be considered, the Committee recommends that Synod Fergus put this matter to rest.
  2. The church at Burlington East urges Synod to direct the Committee to cease all efforts to find an alternate melody and harmonization for Hymn 1A, to lay the matter of an alternate melody to rest.
  3. The church at Orangeville agrees that the alternate melodies of Hymn 1A be put to rest.
  4. The church at Guelph requests that the existing melodies for Hymn 1A and 1B be maintained and this matter be put to rest.
- B. Considerations.
1. Since both the Committee and a number of churches have made clear that the matter of an alternate melody of Hymn 1A is not desired, the Committee's mandate should be

considered completed and that the existing melodies for Hymn 1A and 1B be maintained.

C. Recommendation

1. To lay the matter of an alternate melody and harmonization of Hymn 1A to rest and to discharge the Committee of this mandate.

III. OVERLEAF MUSICAL NOTATION

A. Observations

1. Regarding the Overleaf Musical Notation, the Committee is of the opinion "that the overleaf repetition of the melody does not serve the churches well at this time" because, in an attempt to be consistent, all melodies will have to be repeated. The repeated melodies will likely add approximately 100 pages to the *Book of Praise*. The cost will likely increase by 30% because of the labour involved.
2. The church at Owen Sound requests that the melodies of the psalms be repeated 'overleaf' to help improve congregational singing for the difficult tunes. They also state that while this will change the numbering of the pages, it is inconsequential as the page numbers are already different from previous editions.
3. The church at Willoughby Heights senses a double standard in reference to the cost regarding the overleaf musical notation and changing the prooftexts from RSV to NIV.

B. Considerations

1. Although the Committee is not in favour of Overleaf Musical Notation, repeating the musical notation when a psalm or hymn continues on the over-leaf (as done in the Dutch church book) has merit (cf. Synod 1995, Art.44, Cons. H.). The church at Owen Sound correctly asserts that adopting overleaf musical notation will help improve congregational singing and appreciation for the (difficult) psalms and hymn in the *Book of Praise*. Since the cost should not be a overriding factor in this matter, the concerns of Willoughby Heights are addressed.

C. Recommendation

1. To mandate the Committee to prepare the *Book of Praise* with an Overleaf Musical Notation, and to present this revision to the next General Synod.

IV. FUTURE REVISIONS OF THE BOOK OF PRAISE

A. Observations



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1. Regarding a future revision of the *Book of Praise*, the Committee seeks direction from Synod on the modification of the rhyming of the Psalms to reflect the text of the NIV.
2. Regarding the use of the NIV for the prose sections of the *Book of Praise*, the Committee, acknowledging that it was outside of its mandate, has been proactive at the Committee level in its decision to initiate an in-depth comparative review of the RSV/NIV proof-texts found in the Three Forms of Unity and the texts used in the prose of the Liturgical Forms. The Committee also occupied itself with an update of the Prayers with respect to addressing the Lord as 'You'. The Committee urges Synod Fergus 1998 to provide the Committee with a clear mandate on these matters. The Committee wonders whether the NIV should replace the RSV in prose sections, or whether both versions should be made available.
3. The church at Cloverdale asks Synod to mandate the Committee to update "the Scripture quotations and references used in the Canons of Dort, the Belgic Confession, and the Heidelberg Catechism from the present text quotations to reflect and be consistent with the NIV." They also asks for the same in "the Liturgical forms and the Prayers to reflect the language used in the NIV." Cloverdale makes these requests so that the present use of archaic language may be removed. Cloverdale also requests Synod to mandate the Committee to make it a high priority to have a suitable revised *Book of Praise* to present to the first Synod of the next century, Synod 2001.

Furthermore, the church at Cloverdale asks Synod to mandate the Committee to update and change the language of the Psalms and Hymns to reflect the present usage as we have it in the New International Version of the Bible (as the translation recommended by General Synod 1995). This would include not only the pronoun forms (Thou, Thee, Thy, etc.) but also the antiquated verb forms used, e.g. "sitteth" to "sits," "thence" to "there," and others."

4. The church at Burlington South requests an updating of the language and the text of the psalms, hymns, forms and the prayers, as well as offering alternate melodies for the psalms.
5. The church at Fergus is of the opinion that by revising the *Book of Praise* with NIV may result in two versions which "would cause confusion and would certainly not be beneficial for the federation, not to mention the cost involved." They also feels that "to update the prayers to

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address the Lord with 'You' is not necessary as everyone is free to use the pronoun 'You,' 'Thee,' or 'Thou.'" Furthermore, they state that "to change the rhyming of the Psalms would be detrimental to the whole generation of members who have learned the Psalms by heart and sing them from memory during the worship service."

6. The church at Grand Valley requests Synod to refrain from modifying the rhyming of the songs to reflect the text of the NIV. They state that the *Book of Praise* never intended to reflect a particular Bible translation, and that the poetic text always resists change.
7. The church at Orangeville requests Synod "not to be too hasty in initiating revisions of the *Book of Praise* to reflect the use of the NIV, in light of the uncertainty in several churches as to which Bible translation to use."
8. The church at Guelph express concern over a possible future revision of the psalms. They feel "that revising the Psalms and prose section of the *Book of Praise* to reflect the NIV Bible translation would not be proper at this time. They suggest that we should take into consideration our Australian sister churches who have adopted the NKJV.
9. Br. Gansekoele requests Synod not to adapt the *Book of Praise* to the NIV until more churches have switched to the NIV.
10. The church at Willoughby Heights suggests that any changes to the wording of the psalms be measured by the Hebrew original.

### B. Considerations

1. While some churches are uncertain in regard to which Bible translation to use, the NIV has been recommended to the churches, so it would be consistent to change the RSV quotations to the NIV in the confessions and prose section of the *Book of Praise*. In this revision, the Committee should take into consideration the input of our Australian sister churches.
2. Changing the forms and prayers to incorporate the pronoun 'You and Your', would be consistent with the use of the current Bible translation as recommended by the Canadian and Australian General Synods, i.e. the NIV and NKJV.
3. The churches at Cloverdale and Burlington South request a major revision of the language in the Psalms and Hymns to reflect the language of the NIV Bible translation. They also request allowing changes in the melodies in the Palms for

Hymns. However, it is questionable whether such a major change is indeed necessary on this basis alone. It could be argued, as with the Hymns of previous centuries (which have not been revised or altered by previous Synods) that the Psalms and Hymns are poetic and reflect the history and tradition of the reformation. Synod acknowledges that such a major change may also alienate a large section of our church members who have committed these Psalms and Hymns to memory.

4. It is understood that any revision to the Psalms that is deemed necessary by Synod will remain faithful to the original text, thus the concern of Willoughby Heights is addressed.

C. Recommendations

Synod decide

1. To mandate the Committee to prepare the Prose section of the *Book of Praise* with NIV Bible references, and to present this revision to the next General Synod.
2. To mandate the Committee not to proceed with changes to the Psalms and Hymns.

V. PROPOSALS FROM THE CHURCH AT WATFORD

A. Observations

1. The church at Watford proposes that Synod instruct the Committee for the *Book of Praise* to do the following:
  - a. To find a suitable tune for the Nicene Creed for usage in the worship services. Watford reasons that this creed is very suitable for communal confession in the afternoon worship service (especially with the change from first person singular to first person plural). Such a confession is better sung by the entire congregation instead of just recited by the minister, since it is the confession of the entire congregation (cf. Rom10:10). The congregation at Watford would use the Nicene Creed more often if it were put to melody.
  - b. To find suitable music for the votum (Ps.24:8) used in our worship services. Watford reasons that the votum is the confession of the congregation, and is thus more appropriately sung by the entire congregation than spoken only by the minister on behalf of the congregation (cf. Rom10:10).
  - c. To find suitable music with which the congregation can sing a responsive Amen at the end of the worship

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services. Watford gives as grounds that the "Amen" is the response of the congregation to the blessing of the LORD and to the entire worship service, and as such is more appropriately sung by the entire congregation than spoken only by the minister on behalf of the congregation (cf. Rom10:10; Neh8:6; 1Co14:16; 2Co1:20; Rev5:14).

### B. Consideration

1. The specific requests to set the Nicene Creed, Votum and the responsive Amen to music should be directed by the Church at Watford to the Committee for their consideration.

### C. Recommendation

Synod decides not to accede the proposal of the church at Watford.

## VI. CANONS OF DORT

### A. Observations

1. The Committee reviewed the matter raised by br. L. van Zandwyk and recommends that Synod 1998 does not accede to his request. The Committee wishes to retain the present words 'value and worth' as they are used in a discriminatory sense and which have distinct meanings that best fit the context.
2. The church at Guelph partially agrees with br. L. van Zandwyk's proposal to translate '*valoris et pretii*' as 'power and value' instead of 'value and worth.' and suggests that it be translated as 'power and worth', as the word 'power' is the primary meaning of '*valoris*.'

### B. Consideration

1. The church at Guelph provides no new arguments.

### C. Recommendation

1. To deny the submission of the church at Guelph and accept the Committee's recommendations.

## VII. NICENE CREED

### A. Observations

1. General Synod 1995 decided, "To adopt provisionally the following revised edition of the Nicene Creed requesting the churches to test it and to send their comments (if any) to the Standing Committee of the *Book of Praise* for evaluation." The revised edition of the Nicene Creed is found in the Acts, Recommendation F.

Four churches responded to the Standing Committee. Typographical errors in punctuation were corrected and the appearance of the text in printed form was adjusted to facilitate the reading of the text. The Committee presents the final form of the text of the Nicene Creed to Synod.

The Standing Committee sent a late report to Synod as an interaction with the church at Langley's submission and several letters from other churches. The Standing Committee gives a careful response to the submission of Langley and does not concur with any of its suggestions. A final form of the text of the Nicene Creed is presented with some corrections in punctuation and a suggested lay-out of the text (indentations) as it would appear in the *Book of Praise*.

2. The church at Orangeville requests that a drastic revision of the Nicene Creed not be undertaken. It can agree with a limited linguistic revision. Orangeville points out that the present version of the Nicene Creed has not been proven to be unscriptural and that a revised edition of the Nicene Creed would hinder ecumenical contacts with other churches.
3. The church at Taber is not convinced that a change in the Nicene Creed be made from the singular "I" to the plural "We."
4. The church at Langley asks Synod to consider their submission regarding the Nicene Creed which had been sent earlier to all consistories and the Standing Committee.
5. The church at London and the church at Carman express their concurrence for the proposal re Nicene Creed as proposed by the church at Langley. Carman expresses its agreement with the proposal. London states that the translation of the Nicene Creed submitted by Langley is linguistically sound, faithful to the originals, and sensitive to the longstanding version used in the English speaking world.

B. Considerations

1. The revision of the Nicene Creed is not a drastic revision, as the church at Orangeville states, but it is as Synod 1995 stated, "The proposed revision of the Nicene Creed is more than a linguistic revision. It is also a structural change. The Committee has followed the suggestion of Dr. N. H. Gootjes and translated the original text making allowances for English language and theological development." The present form of the Nicene Creed does not have to be proven unscriptural in order to have a linguistic and



structural change. Revising the Nicene Creed into modern English does not create a hindrance in ecumenical contacts with other Reformed churches who subscribe to the same confessions.

2. The Standing Committee has satisfactorily addressed the concern of Taber. The Committee demonstrates that the Greek text of the Nicene Creed uses the plural form (cf. Acts 1995, Art. 44 Considerations D.2).
3. The letters of the churches at Carman and London give no proof in their letters to show that the Langley translation of the Nicene Creed is to be preferred over the translation of the Standing Committee.
4. The Standing Committee has satisfactorily addressed the submission of the church at Langley. The final form of the text of the Nicene Creed as presented by the Standing Committee is to be preferred.

#### C. RECOMMENDATION

Synod decide

1. To adopt the revised version of the Nicene Creed, as recommended by the Committee, which reads as follows:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,  
begotten of the Father before all ages;  
God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God;  
begotten, not made,  
of one substance with the Father;  
through whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and our salvation,  
came down from heaven  
and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary  
and was made man.

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;  
He suffered and was buried;  
and the third day He arose, according to the Scriptures,  
and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father,  
and He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead;  
whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son;  
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified;  
who spoke through the prophets.

And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins;  
and we look forward to the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

VIII. STANDING COMMITTEE'S MANDATE

A. Observations

1. The Committee suggests the following mandate:
  - a. To function according to the arrangements for publishing and distribution accepted by *General Synod Cloverdale 1983 (Acts 1983, pp. 297-299)*.
  - b. To maintain its corporate status in order to be able to protect the interests of the Canadian Reformed Churches in all matters concerning the *Book of Praise*.
  - c. To foster an increased awareness of the existence of the *Book of Praise* among others and to promote the availability of a book of harmonization facilitating the use of the *Book of Praise* in the English-speaking world.
  - d. To serve as the address to which any correspondence regarding the *Book of Praise* can be directed.
2. The church at Willoughby Heights is uncomfortable that the Committee saw it necessary to be "proactive" with respect to the RSV/NIV proof-texts of the confessions.
3. The church at Elora requests Synod to disapprove of the fact that the "Committee is starting to take on a life of its own", and to instruct the Committee to make two versions of the *Book of Praise* available to the churches, one with the prose in the NIV and the other with the prose in the RSV.
4. The church at Burlington South is encouraged to read that the Committee is proactive in its work. They feel the Committee work in the future should be broader in scope, and therefore recommends that "an expanded mandate would ensure that we would be looking for continuous improvements in all facets of our *Book of Praise*
5. The church at Barrhead and Burlington South request that the Committee's mandate be expanded to be open to receiving additional music and to adding to the current selection of hymns to cover such subjects as "our missionary mandate, God's gift in nature, the work of the Holy Spirit and the new covenant.."
6. The church at Burlington South mention that the Committee should tap into the work that has already started in the Netherlands. They provided two names to serve on the Committee.

B. Considerations

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1. It is true that the Committee has been proactive by undertaking a comparative study of the RSV/NIV proof texts in the confessions and prose section of the Liturgical Forms. While this initiative troubles the church at Elora and Willoughby Heights, there should, however be no need for concern. Being proactive in their work, suggests that the Committee is 'alive and well' and prepared to address perceived needs of the churches. However this does not imply that Synod supports all their initiatives or is compelled to take over any or all of their suggestions.
2. While there may be possibilities to add additional hymns to the *Book of Praise*, the churches at Barrhead and Burlington South provide no compelling reasons or concrete suggestions for Synod to entertain this.
3. Synod disagrees with the church at Elora to have a *Book of Praise* with NIV references and a *Book of Praise* with RSV references as it is more advantageous to have only one version of the *Book of Praise*.

### C. Recommendations

Synod decide:

1. to acknowledge the work done by the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise*.
2. To mandate the Committee:
  - a. To function according to the arrangements for publishing and distribution accepted by *General Synod Cloverdale 1983 (Acts 1983, pp. 297-299)*.
  - b. To maintain its corporate status in order to be able to protect the interests of the Canadian Reformed Churches in all matters concerning the *Book of Praise*.
  - c. To foster an increased awareness of the existence of the *Book of Praise* among others and to promote the availability of a book of harmonization facilitating the use of the *Book of Praise* in the English-speaking world.
  - d. To serve as the address to which any correspondence regarding the *Book of Praise* can be directed.
  - e. To present to the next General Synod a revision of the *Book of Praise* incorporating the mandates mentioned above.

ADOPTED

**Article 141**

**Matters pertaining to Agenda of Synod**

Executive presents: Agenda item IV.C

I. MATERIAL

Overture from the church at Smithers regarding the trend to have letters from individual members added to the material of General Synod.

II. ADMISSIBILITY

This overture is connected directly with an item on the agenda of Synod 'Adoption of the Agenda' and must therefore be declared admissible.

III. OBSERVATIONS

A. The church at Smithers concludes from the Acts of Synod Abbotsford 1995 that "there is a trend to have letters from individual members added to the material."

B. The church at Smithers considers that, on the basis of Article 30 of the Church Order, "letters of individual members who have not addressed their local consistories first", should all be declared inadmissible. This would prevent arbitrariness.

IV. CONSIDERATIONS

A. Article 30 C.O. does not say that people may not address Synod unless they have first addressed their consistories. Instead the Church Order says that "a new matter which has not previously been presented to a minor assembly may be put on the agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it."

B. Individuals may not place matters on the agenda of synods. But once a matter has been placed on the agenda of General Synod – either via the minor assemblies or via deputies' reports – individuals are free to respond.

V. RECOMMENDATION:

Not to accede to the request of the Church at Smithers.

**ADOPTED**

**Article 142**

**Regarding Acts of Closed Session**

Executive presents:

Agenda items III.E and III.Z

I. MATERIAL:

Letters from the churches at Burlington-East, Guelph

II. ADMISSIBILITY:

Both letters appeal the decision recorded in Article 117 of the Acts of General Synod Abbotsford 1995 and are declared admissible.

III. OBSERVATIONS:

A. The church at Burlington-East makes the following observations with respect to the past practices of Synod:

1. General Synod 1992 decided to print 'confidential acts' separate from the 'general acts.' (Article 109)
2. General Synod 1995 decided to "delete from the Acts all Articles dealing with discussion in closed or closed-restricted sessions, and to send two copies of these Articles dealing with discussion in closed or closed-restricted sessions, and to send two copies of these Articles to each Consistory."

B. The church at Burlington East observes that the matters addressed in the acts of closed sessions include:

1. Appeals regarding interpretation of Scripture or doctrine.
2. Appeals regarding procedure and Church Order at prior ecclesiastical assemblies.
3. Appointments to offices or committees.

C. The church at Burlington-East considers that:

1. It is the duty of individual members of the congregation as well as the consistories to review the Acts of Synod and to appeal if the articles are not in accordance with Scripture and Church Order. Past synods have admitted appeals from members even if they are not directly involved in the original case.
2. The decisions of synods establish precedents, doctrinal statements and guidelines by which members of the churches and ecclesiastical assemblies direct their lives in the service of the Lord.



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3. The General Synod is the broadest and therefore final court of appeal in the churches, and therefore it is necessary that justice should not only be done, but also appear to be done. In this way the churches will be edified
  4. There is nothing in the confidential acts of Synod Abbotsford that "contained anything that could be detrimental to anyone's reputation in any way.
- D. The church at Guelph appeals the decision recorded in Article 117 of the Acts of Synod Abbotsford 1995 on these two grounds:
1. The practice of deleting all articles dealing with discussions in closed or closed-restricted session is a significant change from the long standing practice of including all business conducted by synods in the published Acts. As such, a decision to delete certain items is a matter of principle on which the churches should first be heard.
  2. When all the articles are published in the Acts, all church members can judge the action of Synod in light of Scripture, and they can benefit from the judgments made concerning specific issues involved. When honour and reputation is at stake, names can be omitted. It is also possible that honour and reputation are not upheld precisely because an article has been deleted from the Acts.
- E. The church at Guelph requests Synod 98:
1. To judge that the churches will be better served when all business conducted is included in the published Acts of Synod. When honour and reputation is at stake, names can be left out.
  2. To decide that changes to the long standing practice of including all business conducted by Synods to be included in the published Acts of Synod should not be made without input from the churches.
- IV. CONSIDERATIONS:
- A. The question of what is published in the Acts of Synod is not regulated by Scripture or Church Order.
  - B. The Regulations of General Synod do not make any provision for 'public acts' and 'confidential acts.'
  - C. All ecclesiastical assemblies retain the right to decide for themselves what should be made public and what should be kept confidential. Thus it would be inappropriate to make a general rule that all Acts of Synod must be included in the 'general acts.' Instead it is the responsibility of every synod to

decide for itself whether or not a particular Act should be kept confidential.

V. RECOMMENDATION:

Synod decide not to accede to the request of the churches at Burlington-East and Guelph.

ADOPTED

**Article 143**

**Appointments**

The appointments are dealt with in closed session.

The following appointments are made:

I. BOARD OF GOVERNORS:

Academic Committee:

Eastern Canada: D.G.J. Agema (2001), W. den Hollander (2001), P.G. Feenstra (2001). Alternates: (in order) G. Nederveen, P. Aasman, C. Bosch.

Western Canada: R. Aasman (2004), J. Moesker (2007), J. Visscher (2001). Alternates: (in order) R.A. Schouten, W.B. Slomp, E.J. Tiggelaar.

Finance and Property Committee: br. M. Kampen (2004) br. W. Oostdyk (2007), br. H.J. Sloots (2001), br. W. Smouter (2007), br. J. VanderWoude (2004).

II. COMMITTEE FOR RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD:

Rev. E. Kampen (convener) (2001), Rev. C. VanSpronsen (2001), br. H.A. Berends (2001), br. H. Hoogstra (2007).

III. COMMITTEE FOR CONTACT WITH CHURCHES IN THE AMERICAS

RCUS Subcommittee: Rev. J. Moesker (convener) (2004), Rev. K. Jonker (2007), br. W. Gortemaker (2004), br. A. Poppe (2007)

ERQ Subcommittee: Rev. P.G. Feenstra (coordinator of CCCA and convener ERQ) (2004), Rev. A.J. Pol (2007), br. W. Oostdyk (2004), br. John Boot (2001).

OPC Subcommittee: Rev. J. deGelder (convener) (2004), Dr. N.H. Gootjes (2001), br. G. Nordeman (2001), G. VanWoudenberg (2004).

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- IV. COMMITTEE FOR THE PROMOTION OF ECCLESIASTICAL  
UNITY:  
East: Dr. J. DeJong (2004) (Convener), Rev. W. den  
Hollander (2001), br. F. Westrik (2007).  
West: Rev. R. Aasman (2001), Rev. W.B. Slomp  
(2007), br. P. VanWoudenberg (2004).
- V. STANDING COMMITTEE FOR THE *BOOK OF PRAISE*:  
Rev. C. Bosch (convener) (2007), Rev. B.J. Berends (2001), sr.  
C. VanHalen-Faber (2004), br. T.M.P. VanderVen (2007).
- VI. COMMITTEE ON BIBLE TRANSLATIONS  
Rev. P. Aasman (2001) (convener), Dr. W. Helder (2007), Prof.  
J. Geertsema, Dr. C. VanDam.
- VII. CHURCHES FOR DAYS OF PRAYER: THE CHURCH AT  
BURLINGTON-WATERDOWN AND THE PROVIDENCE  
CHURCH AT EDMONTON
- VIII. GENERAL FUND: THE CHURCH AT CARMAN
- IX. ARCHIVES: THE CHURCH AT BURLINGTON-EAST
- X. INSPECTION OF ARCHIVES: THE CHURCH AT  
BURLINGTON-WATERDOWN
- XI. AUDIT FINANCES OF SYNOD 1998: THE CHURCH AT  
GUELPH
- XII. ADDRESS CHURCH  
Canada: the church at Burlington-East  
US: the church at Grand Rapids
- XIII. COMMITTEE FOR PRINTING THE ACTS: THE CLERKS OF  
SYNOD 1998
- XIV. COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL WEB-SITE:  
Br. T. Flach, br. J. Hoogerdijk, Rev. R.E. Pot, Rev. G.H.  
Visscher (coordinator)
- XV. CONVENING CHURCH FOR NEXT SYNOD: NEERLANDIA  
(MAY 2001)

ADOPTED

**Article 144**

**Delegation to General Assembly of OPC**

Regarding material L1, the request of the CCOPC to appoint a delegate to the next General Assembly, Synod decides that the CCOPC should appoint one of its members.

**EVENING SESSION – MAY 22, 1998**

**Article 145**

**Reopening**

The chairman asks that Hymn 59: 1, 2, 3 be sung. Roll call shows that all are present br. A. van Leeuwen and Rev. W. B. Slomp who are absent with notice.

**Article 146**

**Adoption of the Acts**

Articles 133 – 143, pertaining to May 22, 1998, were adopted.

**Article 147**

**Censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order**

The chairman judges that censure is not necessary.

**Article 148**

**Publishing of the Acts and Press Release**

Synod decides that these matters will be taken care of by the Executive. Decisions regarding the Acts will be made especially by the clerks, and the vice-chairman will write the press release.

**Article 149**

**Next General Synod**

The next Synod will be convened, the Lord willing, by the church at Neerlandia in May 2001.

**Article 150**

**Closing Words of the Chairman**

The chairman addresses the Synod and the audience with suitable closing words, thanking the delegates for their co-operation and the

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communion enjoyed, and thanking also those who laboured behind the scenes to make this Synod possible. His words are found at the end of Appendix 1.

### **Article 151**

#### **Appreciation for the work of the Chairman**

Rev. W. den Hollander, the vice-chairman, expresses his appreciation to the chairman for the fine way in which he led the meetings and directed the proceedings.

### **Article 152**

#### **Closing**

Rev. W. den Hollander requested that Psalm 118: 1, 4 be sung, and led in prayer. Rev. R. Aasman then declared Synod Fergus 1998 closed.

By order of Synod

Rev. R. Aasman	Chairman
Rev. W. den Hollander	Vice-chairman
Rev. G. H. Visscher	First Clerk
Rev. P. G. Feenstra	Second Clerk



## APPENDIX 1:

# Speeches to Synod Fergus 1998

### A. Opening Words of Rev. J.G. Slaa

Rev. J. G. Slaa, counsellor of the church at Fergus, welcomed the delegates with the following words.

Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

On behalf of the consistory and congregation of Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church, I bid you a heartfelt welcome to Fergus, Ontario, Canada! We hope that you will enjoy the warm hospitality, and that you will have fond memories of it for years to come. The brothers and sisters of Fergus have been working steadily and steadfastly to prepare for this assembly of the churches. And now the day has arrived for Synod to begin. We have good reasons to expect that these same brothers and sisters will serve you in the next 3 weeks with the same dedication they have shown in the past 3 years. Thus, you may concentrate on the task at hand!

And this is good, because, as I understand, every bit of concentration will help! The task which is before you today is an important one. And it is also a difficult one.

It is an important task, because the matters at hand pertain to the well-being of the churches which are gathered under their one Shepherd and Head Jesus Christ. Christ has shed His precious blood for His church, and has made her His own possession. This church consists of His people, gathered together throughout all times and places, who through the office-bearers in the local church receive direction and guidance in their daily lives of thanksgiving. As God's people, we read in Eph 1, they have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of His glory. You, brother delegates, have received the special calling to care for these lambs of Christ, so that they are able to live in such a way before Christ. God has entrusted to you the task of caring for them by completing the matters lawfully placed on the table of this ecclesiastical assembly. Thus, these are not idle matters, but important ones, for they concern the well-being of God's precious children in this world.

Not only is the task before you important, but it is also difficult. You must make decisions on behalf of the churches. That is a great and heavy

responsibility that will not be easy. Individuals and churches appeal to you, because they believe they have been wronged by previous decisions. Some churches have sent overtures, of which there are a number that call for change that will affect us in a variety of ways. Committees have served you with reports which make significant recommendations. And of course, you are also aware of the voices coming out of the churches in response to these matters. From the provisional agenda, it is clear that the churches have spoken. They even offer advice which in many instances appears to conflict. Undoubtedly, you are hearing those different voices in your heart, too. Thus, the solutions to these matters do not come easily. Your inclination, perhaps, is to find solutions that will appease and satisfy all those voices. But that may not always be possible. To add to this, as was already alluded to last night, we can expect to hear those different voices during the discussions here at synod. Yes, your task is difficult.

Whatever your discussion, brothers, whatever your feeling, let your decisions be based on God's Word, and let them render justice to God's holy Name. That is, after all your task: to point both individuals and churches, in the considerations and decisions of Synod, to God's Word. Your task is to show the churches on what Scriptural basis and by what biblical principles you are being guided in your decisions.

Remain hopeful in the fact that Jesus Christ will bless those who are faithful to him, who labour for His church, and not for themselves. Be hopeful in the fact that God is above all, and that He has placed Christ in control of all things for the church, as we could read this morning in Ephesians 1: "He has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all." May you take courage in the fact that Christ has power over life and death, and that He rules heaven and earth, also in these weeks, for the church. This we teach and learn so well in these weeks of commemoration of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and outpouring of His Spirit. Brothers, if your focus is on Jesus Christ, the ruler of heaven and earth, and if it is your desire to obey and please Him, the Head of the church, in all your decisions, and if what you want is the growth of the churches, then you may be assured that Christ will bless you. Christ has given His Spirit, so that men, having a sinful condition, but changed by the power of Christ, can make sound and faithful decisions that will be a blessing for the churches. Therefore, you may hand over all of these matters to Him, who will give His guidance.

Today, in other regions of the world, there is tension and instability. There are wars, and there are also rumours of wars. Also today, in another city, a different sort of meeting is taking place that may well have a profound impact on the political future course of this world. We know and therefore pray that God has His hand in those discussions. You are meeting, in this place, to deal with different responsibilities. But we also know that God will use your decisions to shape the course of the churches here in this country. Therefore, we pray for God's hand in and His guidance over the

discussions and decisions of Synod Fergus 1998. We also pray that it will be your heartfelt desire to treat each other as brothers in the Lord who seek together to worship God's name, and who work together for the benefit of Christ's church-gathering work in this world.

And now, it's time to get to work. With the apostle Paul, we express our desire that God will give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened. God bless you. You will be constantly in our prayers. With these words I declare Synod Fergus 1998 opened.

I invite you to sing with me now from the 122nd Psalm, stanza 3.

## **B. Address of Rev. C. Bouwman, fraternal delegate of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia**

Esteemed brethren in our Lord Jesus Christ!

It is distinctly a pleasure for me to be in your midst. It's a pleasure for me personally, for it's most enjoyable to be back in the town of my youth and make acquaintance again with so many with whom I've grown up. I note with delight that there are brothers at this Synod with whom I used to cavort and discuss at Young Peoples' Society in this very building – and I like to think we're none the worse because of it! Equally, it's a great pleasure to renew contact with various with whom I've spent time at the Theological College – and I admit: it brings back many pleasant memories! And possibly what gives me the greatest pleasure in being here is the opportunity to observe that Australian blood is well and truly represented amongst the delegates to this Synod – undoubtedly for the great benefit of this meeting!!

All of that, Mr Chairman, illustrates something of the warmth and closeness of the bonds existing between the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Canadian Reformed Churches. It's that closeness that also prompted our previous Synod in Kelmscott two years ago "to send a delegation to the next Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches" on the ground that "the degree of common interests we have with the Canadian Reformed Churches makes face to face contact desirable."

"The degree of common interest we have," said our Synod. Yes, brothers, our bonds go far beyond the ties of friendships and family. You in Canada (and I admit: even after being gone for ten years it sounds strange to me to speak about "you in Canada!") and we in Australia have a common origin and so a parallel history. As one of your delegates to our 1994 Synod said it: "we are churches that have developed through immigration from a common ancestral home, with a common confessional heritage.... That history of immigration presents us with common difficulties and challenges...." You in Canada have established a Theological College for the Training of the Ministry, and we in Australia reap the fruits, for the majority of our ministers received their training at this institute. You in Canada have developed a *Book of Praise*, and we in Australia make grateful use of it, Sunday by Sunday in the church services and daily in our homes and schools. You in Canada have a reformed teacher training institute, and we in Australia

eagerly accept graduates from Covenant College to teach the covenant children in the schools we've received. You in Canada produce reformed literature in the English language, notably *Clarion* and *Reformed Perspective*, and these magazines find their way into very many of our homes and hearts. You in Canada raise the young men and the young women, and we send our boys and girls to your land to steal them for ourselves... – and, O yes, we do send some back to assist in cross fertilisation too.... In so very many ways, then, we in Australia benefit greatly from the gifts the Lord has given to our bigger sister in Canada, and it is only fitting to thank the Lord in your hearing for what He in mercy has given to us in you over the years. It is our heartfelt prayer that the Lord will continue to use the Canadian Reformed Churches as a source of blessing for the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. We are a small bond of churches, consisting of nine congregations with some 3300 members, and so very much feel the need for warm contact with the churches in Canada to whom we are so close.

Yes, we are small. But both Canada and Australia are historically members of the British Commonwealth, and so have inherited from Great Britain the same language, the same legal system, the same political system. The result is that there are no pronounced cultural differences between Canada and Australia – except in those areas that relate to climate. As the children of the first Free Reformed migrants grew up and knew themselves to be dinkie-die Aussies, their sense of affinity to Holland and what that land had to offer to Australian church life lessened in favour for growing affinity with Canada. We understood in Australia: we have so much in common with Canada that bonds with Canada need to grow and be strengthened. We understood too: it is not necessary for us in Australia to do for ourselves what you have already done in Canada. We see, then, no need today to begin our own Training for the Ministry. It is for us no problem to send our young men to the Theological College in Hamilton. I may mention that the College in Hamilton receives regular mention in our prayers as well as collection rosters, so much so that we in Australia refer to the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches as “our” College. We remember with deep appreciation the fact that the Canadian Reformed Churches sent Dr Faber to visit us at the time of his retirement, and our upcoming Synod needs to consider a proposal from our Deputies for the Training for the Ministry to invite one of the professors of the College to come to Australia in order to raise the profile of the College in our midst still more. For my part, our Deputies for the Training for the Ministry requested me to take the opportunity while in Canada to meet with the faculty of the College, and I may mention that the meeting was very helpful as we set ourselves to encouraging and preparing our young men for studies in Hamilton.

The same may be said in relation to the *Book of Praise*. You in Canada have laboured for years to develop a Book for the churches, and we in Australia see no need to do that work again. One travels, then, as far away from Fergus as is possible in physical miles, and the church service is the same, with the same confessions, the same psalms and hymns, the same



liturgical forms – word for word (be it, as some would say, in purer English pronunciation). It prompts the question: as you consider further developments for the *Book of Praise* –and I notice that suggestions to this extent are on your agenda– might it be possible that ways and means are found for our two bonds of churches to work together in developing the *Book of Praise*? Admittedly, that course will not be without its challenges. Our last Synod, for example, made a small change to the form for the Ordination of deacons so that the command of the apostle in Gal 6:10 (to “do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith”) is no longer addressed to the deacons but to the congregation as a whole. Similarly, the large majority of our churches are using the New King James Version, while you prefer a different translation. Such decisions on our part are not meant to be criticisms upon your decisions. Instead, they represent the fact that we are two separate bonds of churches, both responsible for affairs within our own lands. At the same time, such differences do not preclude close consultation and cooperation. We would ask, therefore –given the great amount on interaction between us– that where our decisions differ from your decisions as recorded in a valuable resource as the *Book of Praise*, you grant us the honour of giving our decisions your careful consideration – even as we have considered and will consider your decisions carefully.

I observe that your Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad has informed your assembly that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia decided in their 1996 Synod to terminate membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches – of which the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Canadian Reformed Churches were both charter members. In time past we have requested from your deputies some assistance in coming to grips with the implications of our ICRC membership, and I take the opportunity today to thank you and your deputies for the assistance given. Precisely because we have requested your assistance, it seems to me correct to give some account of why we decided to terminate our membership.

Our Synod mentioned as *Ground* for our decision primarily this: “the membership of the FRCA in the ICRC has not promoted harmony and unity in the churches.” This is a reality we have experienced since the initial decision to join was first made in 1983. Over the years, many overtures and appeals have been presented to Synod and deputies have written numerous reports. In writing these appeals and reports, as well as in digesting and answering them, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have definitely studied and made use of the thinking that has occurred in the sister churches on the doctrine of the church. (Consciously we seek to prevent that our relative geographic isolation be a handicap to us!) Yet we could not persuade each other that membership in the ICRC was either commanded by God or forbidden by Him. When Synod Kelmscott, then, was confronted with appeals and overtures from three of our nine churches to terminate membership in the ICRC, our Synod decided to do so. Please note: we have stepped out of the ICRC not on grounds that membership in the ICRC might be unScriptural, but rather on grounds that internal division is not worth



the price of ICRC membership. And I may mention to you that our decision to farewell the ICRC has indeed served to restore more harmony and peace within our churches.

Still, you will wonder why membership in the ICRC has been such cause for discussion and difficulty in our midst that one third of our churches requested Synod to terminate this membership. Allow me to mention a couple of reasons.<sup>1</sup> Possibly the reason easiest to explain is this: all member churches of the ICRC consider each other, by virtue of their ICRC membership, to be true churches of the Lord.<sup>2</sup> This reality gave problems in our midst because we have been striving for numerous years to come to the point where we could recognise the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia as a true church of the Lord – and have not been able to. So, within the international forum of the ICRC we were saying that the PCEA was a true church, but within our own country –where the FRCA and the PCEA both live– we could not say that the PCEA was a true church. This tension between saying Yes and No at the same time heightened pressure in our midst to step out of the ICRC. Did Jesus not said that our Yes must be Yes, and our No, No? (cf Mt 5:37). A second reason relates to the urge of the stated aim of the ICRC Constitution, where the members are encouraged to seek contact and unity with fellow members. So the ICRC was seen as the engine that determined with whom the FRCA ought to establish and formalise contact.

Before we withdrew from the ICRC, concern was communicated to us by sister churches that departing from the ICRC would cause us to be isolated. It is now two years ago that we have withdrawn our membership, and to date there are no indications that we are becoming an island to ourselves. We continue to have contact with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, to the point that our coming Synod needs to consider a concrete proposal concerning how to make progress with this church. (For that reason we are also keenly interested in what you will decide regarding the Orthodox Presbyterian Church – and why you will decide it.) Further, our previous synod answered positively a request from the churches to "instruct deputies to continue to gather information regarding the Free Reformed Church of the Philippines..., with the aim of seeing whether official contacts should be opened with them" (*Acts 1996*, Art 68). Again, regarding the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, Synod 1996 could declare its "gratitude for the faithfulness which deputies found in the RCNZ" and instruct deputies to "strive for a sister church relation with the RCNZ" (*Acts 1996*, Art 53). We are also very heavily involved with our sister churches in Indonesia, the

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<sup>1</sup> Deputies' reports over the years, appeals to previous Synods and the submissions from the three churches to our recent Synod give various reasons why there was unrest with ICRC membership.

<sup>2</sup> See the "Theological Affirmation" report, as printed in the *Proceedings* of the 1993 meeting of the ICRC: "If a church is admitted..., it implies that at least two thirds of the member churches acknowledge it as true church" (pge 76).

Gereja Gereja Reformasi Indonesia, and have also been involved in giving assistance to the so-called Musafir churches in Indonesia.

You will notice: we are concentrating our contacts to churches in our quarter of the globe. We are small, and so can not be all things to all men. Accordingly, we decided in 1990 already to develop new contacts only with churches who were geographically close to us, for whom we therefore have a greater responsibility. Other churches around the world we would leave to our existing sister churches living in proximity to the new church (see *Acts* 1990, Art 58). Our current practice, then, resembles what your Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad has recommended to this Synod.

As to mission work, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have for years been busy in Papua New Guinea. Of late responsibility for the work that's been done in Port Moresby and Ekorok has passed to Toronto – here's an example of helping each other. We for our part are investigating possibilities in the PNG city of Lae. Efforts are also under way in our midst to establish mission work in India and in China. There certainly is enormous scope for mission work in our part of the world! Maybe, just maybe, we can do more work together in mission.

Dear brothers in the Lord, I must come to an end. Your sister churches in Australia greet you in the name of the Lord, and wish you God's indispensable and promised blessing on all your labours. May we meet more often, consult together more often, do more things together. When all is said and done, we need each other as brothers of one culture, one language, one heritage, one faith.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all.

**Response by Rev. J. Moesker**

Brother Bouwman,

I have been asked to respond to you on behalf of this assembly and the Canadian Reformed Churches in general, and I do so with great pleasure. On a personal level. Br. Bouwman, it's a pleasure for me as former Fergusite to address you as former Fergusite too. We both spent our youth as members of the convening church of Fergus, and knew each other fairly well. But it's not only a personal pleasure. I may address you as delegate from a federation of churches which, though distant in geographic terms, are very close to us here in Canada in heart, spiritually.

Thank you, brother, for the warm greetings you gave here on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. We are certainly grateful that the Free Reformed Churches sent a representative to Synod Fergus 1998. It gives our relationship a very personal touch.

Your presence at this assembly certainly signifies how close we are as churches. You yourself are Canadian born and raised, as are some other ministers and members in the Australian churches. On the other hand, at this assembly we have among the delegates two brothers – a minister and an elder – who were Australian born and raised. This shows how close we are as churches, in spite of the geographic distance between us.

There is much travelling back and forth, between Australia and Canada, among the members of our respective churches.

And no wonder. You mentioned that too. We share a common heritage, the heritage of the Dutch Reformations. We have a common language, You share our Book of Praise. You substantially support the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, something for which we as churches are very grateful. You share our college, we could say.

We are not identical, though. We are different and develop differently in some areas. Although the Australians speak English as we do, we don't always catch on to what you are saying, and wonder sometimes why you don't just speak "real" English. Different words and expressions. Different method of church government, without classis. The Australian churches have picked the New King James as their Bible translation of choice. They also, in spite of the assistance given from here to come to grips with what membership in the ICRC means, are no longer member churches of the ICRC with us. So there are differences.

However, what holds us together is far greater than any differences between us. We share a common faith in the one true God and in His Word. We share a common desire to be true to the Word and to serve and glorify His Name in our respective countries. And it is our hope and prayer that even though there may be separate developments and adaptations in our very different countries, we will continue to enjoy that bond of our common faith and that common desire to serve and glorify God. May we continue to seek each other and help each other and even grow in affection for each other as churches. We need each other in this world which, as a famous Canadian stated, is ever more becoming a "global village." Also an ecclesiastical "global village," I might add.

Br. Bouwman, we thank you again for your brotherly greetings from "down under" and we wish the Free Reformed Churches of Australia God's continued blessing and care. We also wish you a good stay here yet among us, also with family, and may God grant you a safe return to your own family, church and country. Peace be with you all.

### **C. Address of Rev. George Syms, observer of the Reformed Church in the United States**

Esteemed Brothers:

It is truly our joy to address you who are delegates to this General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and we bring greetings to you from the Reformed Church in the United States. Elder Stelpstra and I are blessed to have been requested by our Synod's Committee on Interchurch Relations to come as observers in your midst. We thank you for your hospitality and kindness to us in the Lord, and for the kindness and care of our host families.

We are thankful to God for the seriousness and thoroughness with which the Canadian Reformed Churches approach the things of our Sovereign

Lord. We also him for the Reformed heritage to which you have remained covenantally faithful, for your unequivocal commitment to the Three Forms of Unity. It seems a rare thing indeed, to find churches such as the Canadian Reformed, that unashamedly proclaim the infallible, inerrant, and authoritative Word of the Living God. We do indeed, "thank God, upon every remembrance of you."

We are grateful that in the Providence of God, after many years of discussions, visits, and study, our Synod voted to extend to the Canadian Reformed Churches an invitation to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship. While we have something of a different ethnic and cultural background, we recognize in your churches a common commitment to the historic Reformed faith as confessed in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. We have, in a sense, found each other in day when much confusion abounds as to the truth of God's Word. Subjectivism and worldly success are the distinctive marks of modernity which is making inroads even into churches professing the Reformed Faith. We also recognize that few churches today bear all three marks of the true church. In the midst of this present religious scene, we are encouraged by your zeal to maintain the purity of doctrine, both in proclamation and instruction, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline. We must include the fact that the articles, books, and other materials produced by your ministers and professors have been extremely helpful to us in the ministry of the Word. May God continue to bless your labors in making known his truth.

It is our desire as well to report to you some of the developments in the RCUS which may be of interest to your churches.

All four of the Classes have ratified the new *Directories of Worship*, one in Old English, and the other in Modern English. The vows for office bearers and members have now been strengthened in binding all to the confessions of the church. These also were ratified by each of the Classes at their Spring meetings this year. These matters will be finalized, D. V., at the meeting of our Synod, Garner, Iowa, May 18-21, 1998.

In the land of Kenya, our Synod's Foreign Ministries Committee was instrumental in the establishment of the *Free Reformed Church of Kenya*. The Reverend Ministers R. Grossmann and H. Opp administered the first adult and infant baptisms. They also ordained two men to the pastoral ministry, and provided training and instruction in doctrine and polity to congregations there.

The RCUS continues to work co-operatively with the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, Vrijgemaakt*, through the committees which oversee the assistance given to the *Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo*. It is our prayer that God will bless the labors of faithful ministers and also the missionaries of our Dutch brethren in his church-gathering work in that nation, to the glory of his name.

At home in the U.S.A., we are now very hopeful for the establishment of a new church at Minneapolis, Minnesota. We are also investigating the



possibilities of beginning such a work in Fargo, North Dakota. Brothers, we ask that you will pray for these efforts, that God would be pleased to grant an open door for his Word. We also kindly request of you any names of contacts that you may have in these areas, in order that we may initiate correspondence regarding these mission endeavours.

Another opportunity that we hope the Canadian Reformed Churches will consider, is that of an international, Reformed Radio ministry. We are aware that you have much experience in this area, and are anxious for you to contribute your leadership and wisdom to what appears to be a viable opportunity for a faithful proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. It is perhaps one of the first missions to the nations of the world, where churches of the ICRC may labor together in proclaiming the Reformed and Biblical faith. The possibilities for expansion into many languages seem to be good. Of course, the foundations must be laid well, and the course well charted before such a work is undertaken. I am not ashamed to say, that faithful Reformed Churches need and desire the help of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

There are two theological matters that are of particular concern to us at present, especially in light of the pervasive effort in our society to overturn the created order. The first is that of maintaining the covenantal practice of voting by men only in the meetings of the congregation. The impact of humanism and feminism on our culture is obvious. Many in the churches are unaware that they are being subtly influenced by that same culture. We are convinced that we must maintain the antithesis in our thinking and practice, and that we must persevere in teaching the same.

The other matter of serious concern is what we perceive to be a frontal attack on the historic Reformed interpretation regarding the days of creation. Those that presently hold to a literal-six-day creation are pejoratively dubbed "fundamentalists" and the like. The name-calling is the least of our worries, but our real concern is the *undermining of a consistently Reformed hermeneutic*. If the creation account is simply a literary or poetic device, could not the account of the resurrection of our Lord be the same? The framework hypothesis is in our opinion a dangerous tampering with the doctrine of creation, and will inevitably lead to the the undoing of historic Reformed orthodoxy. We do trust that we may further discuss these important matters together, as the issue is very much alive in the seminaries and churches in the United States.

I do appreciate the time and attention you have given to your servant, and it has especially been a personal delight to address you on behalf of the Reformed Church in the United States. We have been made aware of the need to clarify terms, to address some of your concerns, as well as your willingness to continue to speak together on these matters. We believe that you are true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, and trust that someday soon we may join hands in ecclesiastical fellowship as we labor for our Master in our respective nations. In days like these, we need each other.



Indeed, "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." Brothers, may God bless the Canadian Reformed Churches and the work of your General Synod, as you labor for his Kingdom and glory.

**Reponse by br T. M. Veenendaal**

Mr Chairman,

I feel very privileged and honoured to reply on behalf of General Synod to the kind words addressed to us by the representatives of the Reformed Church in the United States. Rev. Syms, we very much appreciate the fact that we have you and elder David Stelpstra in our midst. Your presence here indicates to us that the RCUS has a deep interest in the Canadian Reformed Churches. I hope that you will find your time spent here interesting.

My interest in the RCUS is partly personal, because I am a member of the church at Carman, Manitoba. Our Carman church has had contact with your churches since 1986, and we are, as Rev. Syms mentioned to me yesterday, your closest neighbour. I was privileged to visit many of your pastors a number of years ago, and the church at Carman shares with a good number of your congregations the great North American plains.

I believe very strongly that my personal interest in the RCUS is shared by the members of this assembly and, indeed, with many other members of the Canadian Reformed Churches. This is due, for a very large part, to the fact that we share with you the very same doctrinal confessions, namely the three Forms of Unity.

The fact that your churches have, besides the Heidelberg Catechism again readopted the Canons of Dort and the Belgic Confession would indicate to us that your church-federation is moving in a very positive direction.

It is my wish that the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Reformed Churches in the United States will make every effort to become more acquainted with each other. For many years I have subscribed to your official church paper, 'The Reformed Herald', which in my opinion promotes good reformed leadership and direction. Perhaps, Mr. Chairman, you will allow me to insert a commercial here, encouraging the members of this assembly to subscribe to 'The Reformed Herald.' Such a subscription will definitely be a positive move to further acquaint ourselves with the RCUS.

I sincerely hope and pray that by the grace of our heavenly Father we may continue and increase our understanding and appreciation of each other's church federations, so that in time, and via an orderly way we may come to realize church unity. The basics are in place in our common confessional statements.

Reverend Syms, and brother Stelpstra: thank you for representing your churches at our synod by your presence. Please pass on to all your church members our thanks and best wishes.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me the privilege of addressing the

official delegation of the Reformed Church in the United States to the 1998 synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

**D. Address of Rev. A. de Jager, fraternal delegate of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland**

*The following are some notes on this address, later approved by Rev. de Jager.*

He thanks the chairman for the invitation extended to his committee and to the GKN. He mentions that his committee at the time was getting ready for Leusden 1999. First they thought that no one could come, but he volunteered because he liked to observe our work. However, he admits that he did not realize the consequences of going. Having read the papers and checked the web page, he decided to speak about some items that are on our agenda.

He realizes that he is not just here as a brother who served one of the CanRCs, but as one who serves the GKN. He always feels at home among us, even though he also feels he has lost touch with the English language – his third language (after Frisian and Dutch!).

*The Country*

May 4, 1998 was Remembrance Day in the Netherlands. He travelled to Holten, met veterans of the war. It is good to remind ourselves of the freedom enjoyed today also because of the contributions of the Canadians. One can wonder what our people do today with the freedom they enjoy; unfortunately they do not use it to seek the Lord but they use it against the Lord, as was evident again May 6 in the outcome of the federal elections. This displayed the course the Netherlands is on with the socialists cooperating with the Liberals; the Christian Democratic Party (CDA) again lost much support. We have a very materialistic society, and most probably we will again have a purple government (red with the blue liberals).

*The Churches*

We are still involved in an ongoing struggling to remain Reformed as churches. This is a struggle on more fronts than one. The days are evil. The spirit of the times creeps in. It's hard to build walls because walls alone do not keep away such spirits.

With respect to our young people, we may mention that it is hard to pass on to the next generation that which we have received from the Lord. All other matters seem to be attractive to them. History does not speak to them much anymore, and there is a tendency towards individualism.

In the churches there are also changes, especially with respect to preaching and liturgy. The preaching is done with a view to reach the hearts of the people rather than over their heads. After the Liberation, we were used to a solid exegesis out of the text in order to bring about changes in the lives of the people. But that is no longer effective. Nowadays it is said that we tend to forget the emotional aspect (what we

refer to as the second stage).. The solid exegesis has to remain largely in the study and is not brought so explicitly to the pulpit. The attempt is to touch the people; thereby we seek to mould their lives. (I am speaking about the didactical aspect; of course we understand that the Spirit of God must bring about these changes). The Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken always had that element. Kampen is rethinking this matter and is instructing future ministers accordingly.

We are also busy rethinking mission. First, the relation between word and deed, between the preaching and the work of mercy. The responsibility of the work of mercy will be brought back from organizations like *De Verre Naaste* to the churches themselves via the deacons. We also have an I.R.T.T. (International Reformed Theological Training); at the moment there are about twenty people who are being trained by pastors and professors from Kampen for six weeks.

#### *National relations*

We are dealing with the Netherlands Reformed Churches (Buiten Verband). Last synod discussions about relations could not progress because there is too much freedom among them with respect to the binding to the confessions. On the other hand, there is locally lots of variety among the ministers and the churches. Thus synod encourages the local contacts in getting local bodies to address their federal body.

The attitude of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken towards our churches is also changing. Discussion is happening for which we are thankful. Here the difficulty is that many are connected with the Netherlands Reformed (Buiten Verband).

#### *International Relations*

There seems to be some concern about the number of relations we have. Relations cannot just be seen in themselves; they are always related to history. E.g., Reformed Church of New Zealand chose for the synodical churches and now acknowledge that they were wrong to do so and thus this is corrected. We will most probably have a sister church relationship with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. There are Liberated people who are members there who became emotional when visited to establish relations. That kind of thing also happens in mission work. There we have met the OPC and the RCUS.

Another aspect here is the pastoral care of our people who are literally all over the world and struggle with where to go to church. There is a need also to safeguard these people. Finally, there is a dynamic with respect to article 47 (your article 50, C.O.) in that regard. There is a need to do "as much as possible" (art. 50, your C.O.) because there is one Lord and one Church (Eph.4). Sound Scriptural ecumenicity has a broad view with respect to relations with churches abroad.

#### *Canadian Reformed Churches*

Regarding the Canadian Reformed Churches, I know there is discussion. We are helped very much by *Clarion*, regardless of what you think about it. "We take it along and distribute it and seek to keep up with what's

## *Speeches to Synod Fergus*

happening here. When it's not so friendly and the tone is not so good, we leave it at home. Maybe Reformed Polemics is somewhat better, but I don't know yet. Otherwise we take both of them."

Regarding relations with churches in North America, "I want to say that you do not need to fear us. We know that you do a good job in thoroughly discussing relations beforehand and have taken initiative (e.g. URCNA).

I would like to encourage you in your relation with the RCUS. They were one of the first ones to discuss women's voting with us. They have addressed us about that matter; one brother spoke to one of our synods about this. From that we concluded: "that's why we have sister churches." Before, we often had the attitude: "we know Reformed theology." The times are changing. You need not fear that we will squeeze in. We only seek to help, also with respect to the OPC. We would like to see more progress. We will be sympathetic to your response and we will not be ahead of you. At the same time when we meet them, e.g. on the mission field, we will cooperate with them, but carefully.

### *The Marriage Form*

I understand that you are concerned about the fact that we will have a new marriage form. I was surprised that you did not take up the main concern. It is true that it has been reworded that it no longer just says that a husband will take care of his family but this is a matter of husband and wife together. This is because of many students who have to do this together with their spouses and therefore cannot say "yes" to this form. It has to do with "Double income families." Your main concern should have been the question about headship, which is also going to be discussed again at the General Synod of Leusden. Some say "head" is "chief", "boss"; others: "head" has to be explained from the context of Ephesians 5, someone who gives himself, who is a servant. This discussion is going on and will come up more.

### *Greetings*

We are thankful for the course you are going. We pray for you because we know how hard it is for you with respect to relations with others and the difficulties you face in your midst as a result. I convey the greetings to you from your sister in the Netherlands. I hope you will remember us before the Lord also with respect to that battle we are waging so that we may be faithful before the Lord who will guide us in this age.

### **Response by Rev. A.J. Pol**

Rev. DeJager: Our personal acquaintance with each other goes back about twenty two years, when we first met each other in Kampen. It is a privilege and with thankfulness to our God and Father that I have the opportunity now to greet you on behalf of General Synod Fergus, 1998. We meet each other as brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ and as members of His church. The fact that you come to us here in Canada as a delegate from our sister churches in the Netherlands highlights the catholicity of the church of Jesus Christ. This church is not confined to one place or to one group of people. Our Lord Jesus Christ gathers His church throughout



this world. We may also see that in this work there is continuity with the past. We have a common bond with our Lord and Saviour. Within this bond we observe the faithfulness of the God of the covenant, who works from generation to generation. As a result, there are also family bonds between members of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and the Reformed churches here in Canada and the United States. This gives occasion to much travel back and forth between this continent and the Netherlands, as families reaffirm their bonds with each other. And on Sundays there is the renewed joy of worshiping the LORD together as His people. In this way, the significance of fellowship with each other through ecclesiastical relationships receives an extra, very personal dimension.

We are united through faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. We verbalize what our riches are together as Reformed churches through our confessions. What a testimony this is in a world full of unbelief! You must struggle to maintain the truths of Scripture in the midst of a society that is showing more and more its rejection of the Christian faith and Christian values. Our struggle is not essentially different. We share the calling to fight the good fight of the faith and to guard the riches that the Lord has entrusted to us. Let us continue to stand together!

Your church federation is larger than ours. You have a wide variety of means and opportunities for engaging in internal discussions. This is a strength that also has an inherent weakness. Intensive discussions can lead to quick successions of developments that may or may not be beneficial for the life of the churches. As you look at us here on the North American continent, where distances pose barriers for interaction and our smaller numbers compel us to focus differently on various issues, it may seem to you that we are slow and perhaps even far behind you in certain respects. Yet perhaps our situation has an advantage that your people may not always be quick to perceive. When church life is lived at a slower pace there is a greater opportunity for reflection. This does not always mean that such an opportunity is always well used. Initiatives and developments in the midst of your churches can therefore also stimulate discussion and reflection among our churches as we are confronted with issues that you deal with.

We have a God-given obligation to "make every effort keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Phil 4:3). For this reason in our relationship as churches together, what may be real or only perceived differences of insight on matters affecting the life of the churches must sometimes be discussed. We hope that through our Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad this will continue to be possible in a spirit of brotherly love and with a desire to help each other to stand firm in the faith. We also hope that critical questions concerning matters raised by the committee will be seen in this light.

We are thankful for your description of developments in our sister churches in the Netherlands. You touched on a variety of subjects. How to pass on the Reformed heritage to the next generation is also a concern for us. Matters of liturgy and the preaching of the Word of God are very



important. New developments in your midst will therefore undoubtedly be the subject of discussion among us too. Since we also support mission work, we will be interested in hearing more about the re-thinking in your churches of the underlying principles and their application in the execution of this work. We face questions concerning how to go about fulfilling our obligation to seek unity with other Reformed churches on this continent. So we are also very interested in hearing how you approach similar questions in the context of your country.

We continue to see a clear adherence to our Reformed confessions on our part as being of vital importance in our interaction with other churches. And when dealing with churches of a Presbyterian background we regard their faithful adherence to their Westminster Standards as being an important point of departure in being able to establish clearly what we have in common and what matters perhaps need further discussion in the light of Scripture as we seek to promote unity in faith. You will see this reflected, for example, in the decisions of our Synod concerning the ICRC. In particular we have reservations about the change in its Constitution. It no longer speaks of adhering and being faithful to the confessional standards listed in the Basis, but of faithfully adhering to "the Reformed Faith" stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis. We understand fully that this is an attempt to promote commonality between the member churches. Yet the undefined nature of the expression "the Reformed faith" leaves room for a limited instead of whole-hearted acceptance of any of the confessions listed in the Basis. We hope that this concern of ours will also be yours we both seek and promote unity with other churches. True unity can only be pursued and maintained on the basis of a clear and shared understanding of the doctrines of Scripture.

We have a rich heritage. We share in great riches together as churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. We also look forward to a glorious future: the completion of His church-gathering work at His return in glory. Knowing that it is His work encourages and obliges us to maintain the unity of faith with you and to reach out to others in our country and abroad.

It is our prayer for your churches that the Lord will continue to be the object of your faith, the source of your strength, and your guide at all times through His Spirit and Word. May He sustain you as you "contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). Please pass on our greetings to our Dutch sister churches.

Rev. De Jager, allow me now to end on a personal note. We wish you the Lord's blessings during your stay in our midst, in your further travels, and on your life and ministry in the Netherlands.

Thank you.

**E. Address of Rev. J. J. Peterson, fraternal delegate of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church**

Brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ,

It is a privilege to be with you again as the fraternal delegate of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the OPC, to a synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches. This is my fourth time with you — first in 1983 at Cloverdale, then at Winnipeg in 1989, the third time in Abbotsford in 1995 and now in Fergus in 1998. At Cloverdale Brother VanderWel gave me the name Texas Jack - I like that. And so, Texas Jack is back.

In 1936 ecclesiastical trials were held for several ministers in the Presbyterian Church USA. Those who were defrocked were removed from office because they preached the gospel of our Lord and insisted that the church faithfully proclaim that gospel and that Christ, faithfulness to the confessions of the church. On June 11, 1936 the first general assembly of the OPC was held in the New Century Club in downtown Philadelphia, and the OPC was born.

You see, we began as general assembly - a group of 200 souls — ministers, elders and general office bearers. Yes, a few congregations. Fully committed to the Word of God and the Westminster standards. Irregular? Perhaps.

For many years we were looked on and treated as outcasts. We had left a so-called mainline church. We were and are very small. We were narrow — Only the Bible. Only the Reformed faith as summarized in our confessional standards. You know, sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, sola Christus.

We had few friends. One of the very close friends in the '30s and '40s was the Christian Reformed Church in North America. They sent a telegram of greetings to our First General Assembly. They encouraged us. We took some of their finest men - Stonehouse in New Testament, Van Til in apologetics, R. B. Kuiper in systematics and practica. They sent fraternal delegates to our assemblies. At that time we as church didn't even know about 1944 — only later. That is why we were willing to work patiently with the CRCNA.

We have now terminated our relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRCNA. It was an extremely painful decision to have to make - we did it with aching heart - but we did it.

What's going on in the OPC? We are rejoicing that churches, groups of believers, individuals, are coming to us for information, help, assistance, fellowship. In home missions several congregations in our country have come to us seeking closer ties, and some have united with the OPC. In the area of foreign missions groups from all over the world are asking for our help. We have a full time missionary/teacher at the Bible School, a school for training pastors, officers and members, of the Presbyterian Church in Uganda and on the faculty of the Reformed Theological Seminary of the Reformed Church in Japan at Kobe. We have a teacher training pastors and church workers in Ethiopia. We have requests for

teachers in Nigeria. All this in addition to requests for missionary pastors in several fields.

Ecumenically speaking, we rejoice in being a member of the ICRC. We have enjoyed the gathering of the churches at ICRC Seoul 1997. The fellowship with churches who confess the Reformed faith is enriching and encouraging. Our delegates took the opportunity to have individual meetings with other delegations. In that way we also had personal, individual contact with churches.

The OPC now has an official relationship of "Ecclesiastical Fellowship" with 11 churches. They are the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Free Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin), the Presbyterian Church in America, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Reformed Church in Japan, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, the Reformed Church in the United States and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. We view the relationship of "Ecclesiastical Fellowship" as an expression of the unity of the church demanded by our Lord and as a step toward organic union, or federation. Our document the "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church" sets forth how our confession of the unity of the church works out in our relations with other churches. That document states three things about unity in the section "Toward Perfecting Biblical Unity". They are

1. The unity of the church is in Christ and it is both a given reality and also a requirement. The unity of the faith is both a gift and mandate.
2. The church is compelled to give expression to this reality and requirement, this gift and mandate, by actively seeking the promised goal, namely, that of being one body which serves the Lord in perfect peace, purity, and unity.
3. The ultimate goal of the unity of the church is nothing less than one world-wide presbyterian/reformed church.

Our two churches have been having conversations for over 35 years. I have been privileged to be in on almost 30 of those years. There is now a much greater understanding of and appreciation for the redemptive/historical approach to Scripture. Schilder's trilogy has always been on our book-shelves. S. G. deGraaf's "Promise and Deliverance" is widely used and taught. We were encouraged that you have entered into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church in Korea/Kosin, both from the presbyterian family of churches.

And now we have come to a significant point in our history together. Synod Abbotsford 1995, after giving the mandate to the CCOPC expressed *"the hope that in this way the protracted discussions between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC can be concluded by the establishment of a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship within the next*

*three years so that, the Lord willing, it can be finalized by Synod 1998"* [Acts, p. 75].

Then the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (CCOPC) and the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the OPC adopted the joint document, 'Proposed Agreement For Opening the Way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship.'

In 1997 we reported to our General Assembly "We look forward to the next General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches (in 1998), with the expectation that, in view of this agreement, it will act to establish a bond of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC, in which we can continue to discuss our differences, as churches, and so, if God grants, arrive at more perfect unity in doctrine, polity, and life."

Let me now address the first part of the statement of agreement which says "Concerning Fencing the Lord's Table: The churches of the Reformation confess that the Lord's Supper should not be profaned (1 Cor. 11:27, see Heid. Cat. Lord's Day 30, Q&A 82; Westminster Confession ch. 29,8). This implies that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is to be supervised. In this supervision the [c]hurch exercises discipline and manifests itself as true church. This supervision is to be applied to the members of the local church as well as to the guests. The eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord's Supper."

Let me assure you, brothers of the Synod and brothers and sisters of the Canadian Reformed Churches that the elders of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church supervise the Lord's Table. We take seriously the responsibility given us by the Lord of the church. Discipline is carried on in the OPC.

But what about guests? How are they supervised? The decision of the 50<sup>th</sup> General Assembly 1983 was that the local session bears the responsibility to determine how the guests are to be supervised. In at least one congregation in the past that supervision was carried out by restricting participation to members of the OPC. In many of our local congregations that supervision is carried on by interviewing guests who wish to partake before the service plus the verbal fencing and warning during the service. Others supervise by the verbal fencing and warning during the service only.

It is the latter that has caused reaction by your churches. Synod 1992 said "a verbal warning alone is insufficient". To those of us who use this method of supervision to hear that "a verbal warning alone is insufficient" is to depreciate the power of the proclaimed word.

When you turn to the Word of the Lord and seek light on the question 'how do you supervise the table of the Lord?', it is striking that the one place where that specific question is dealt with, 1 Corinthians 11:27-34, the admonition of the Word of the Lord is "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup" and that the unworthy participation will be judged by the Lord himself.



We are talking about the Lord's Table - HIS table - who do you exclude - who do you admit?

You see, although we do it differently, the table is supervised.

Let me put into real life - experience from Grace Church in San Antonio, Texas.

A family comes to us from baptist background. They say, 'we have found a church home. You feed us the Word of God. We meet our Lord when you preach, we enjoy this fellowship' How do we respond? Dare we refuse to them a place at the Lord's table?

Let me give you an example of how the table is fenced and warning given in San Antonio. And I'll do it as I do existentially - as though I were addressing our congregation in San Antonio. After stating that the Lord's Supper is instituted by our Lord himself and the meaning of the presence of the Lord in the supper, I often say:

*The Supper is an object lesson. Jesus says, this bread is my body - my body given for you - given in sacrifice to make payment for your sins. This cup is the new covenant in my blood - poured out for the forgiveness of sins. This bread and this cup are as essential to you, yes even more so, than the food that you will eat when you get home. Jesus, his body given as the sacrifice for sin, his blood poured out so that your sins might be forgiven, invites you to his table to eat and drink remembering him, feeding on him and anticipating the feast of heaven.*

*But he also warns you - if you don't know Jesus in this way, if you don't know Jesus and your Lord and savior, if you don't walk in fellowship and obedience to him - don't partake of the supper. Let the elements pass by. For if you partake when you don't know Christ as your Lord and savior, instead of a blessing the sacrament becomes a curse. As Paul puts it "you will eat and drink judgment to yourself".*

Back to that family from baptist background: or do we say to this family, we will work with you and teach you and in one, two, three, I've even heard five, years, and then we will welcome you into the church and to the sacraments. Do we? Brothers, no we don't. We, with Philip and the eunuch and Paul with the jailer, — "then, immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God — he and his whole family." Risky? You bet. Babes in Christ - first generation Reformed. The smell of the world, the smell of the baptists cling to their clothing - but they have taken the step of faith and united with a Reformed body of Christ, and they don't really know what their getting into, and you don't know what the Lord has put in your way, but you move on in full trust of the Lord of the covenant - and you preach and you teach and you fellowship - and the Lord "gathers, defends and preserves for himself, by his Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life."

That's the reality of life in the OPC



Now the issue - knowing this, knowing our differences in understanding the proposed agreement in the supervision of the Lord's table and in confessional membership, the OPC desires to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with you. And our prayer is that you will invite us into that relationship with you.

Brothers and sisters, we in the OPC love you. We have learned from you. Our understanding of the Word has grown through learning from you about the covenant and redemptive/historical understanding of the Scriptures. We want to walk with you and live with you in full ecclesiastical fellowship which will be a step toward the full unity of the church which comes with organic union

Brothers, and sisters, in the Lord, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church greets you. I thank you for your gracious hospitality and the warmth of the fellowship I enjoy when I am with you. We love you in the Lord.

Dank je wel!

**Response by Rev. R. Aasman**

Rev. Jack Peterson, on behalf of the brothers at Synod, I express appreciation for your address to this assembly. You tell us: we love you in the Lord. Please know this: the CanRC also love the OPC in the Lord. I feel privileged to have this opportunity to respond to you at this occasion. This is partly for personal reasons. You and I have known each other for over ten years and have met at meetings of the CCOPC and CEIR, at POD of the OPC, and at several synods of the CanRC. In fact, over the years I have seen a couple of nicknames adopted for you, namely, Texas Jack and Cactus Jack. Both nicknames allude to your place of residence which is the state of Texas. There, we have heard, quite a number of cacti make their home as well. The point is this: nicknames are usually developed between friends. The fact that we have two nicknames for you can only be seen as an expression of the close personal bond, which we have together. How wonderful it is to have you in our midst again, to renew our friendship and to develop the bond, which we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For many years, there has been good contact between the CanRC and the OPC. This has been expressed in sending delegates to each other's assemblies, the meetings of the CCOPC and CEIR, and more recently, our mutual membership in the ICRC. It is clear that your participation in the ICRC, of which our churches are a charter member, has been well received.

Over the years, there has been much discussion between our respective churches about certain concerns and differences. As we mention that, it needs to be added that some of the major concerns have been clearly addressed by the OPC. At one time the CanRC warned the OPC about membership in the RES. Although the OPC had been deeply involved in the RES and played an important role in the RES, it withdrew its membership when it could not keep the RES on the reformed path. Similarly, the CanRC warned the OPC about its relations with the CRC. It

needs to be appreciated that the OPC had very close ties with the CRC and had been supported by the CRC during the rough times in the OPC's history. Nevertheless, after strong warnings to the CRC concerning the women in office issue, it was decided at the General Assembly 1997, by a unanimous vote, to terminate the relationship with the CRC. How tough it must have been for the OPC to terminate this relationship with an old friend! How indicative this is of wanting to serve the Lord in accordance with His Word! There is something else that I feel should be appreciated. Some concerns have been expressed over the years about whether the OPC has a pluriform concept of the church. At Synod 1989, the CCOPC presented to Synod a document from the OPC entitled, "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church." In this document it was made clear that the OPC does not want to flee into fantasies of an invisible church concept. Rev. Peterson has referred to this in his address to us.

In a day and age when so many churches are weakening in their commitment to the Word of God and are fleeing into the fantasy of an invisible church concept, we note with deep gratitude that the OPC struggles to be and remain a faithful church of our Lord Jesus Christ. We acknowledge with gratitude that in the OPC, God's Word is seen as infallible and inerrant, the Word of God is seen as determinative for both faith and life, and that true ecumenical unity in the light of John 17 is something to be sought. May the Lord continue to bless the OPC in being faithful to His Word. Rest assured, Rev. Peterson, that as the OPC has requested on many occasions, we keep your churches and the needs of your churches in our prayers.

The CanRC have relied to a large extent on their Dutch heritage, which includes Dutch literature. But as our church members are increasingly seeking good reformed literature in the English language, books and articles put out by OPC theologians are being read. In my own library I have a good number of books by OPC authors and I value them highly. We hope to receive more such literature in the years to come.

Our previous Synod mandated the CCOPC, "to work towards formalising the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the adopted rules by using the statements of Synod Lincoln 1992..." Synod also expressed "the hope that in this way the protracted discussions between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC can be concluded by the establishment of a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship within the next three years so that, the Lord willing, it can be finalised by Synod 1998." Rev. Peterson, you can see that this whole matter is on the agenda of our present Synod. I do not want to pre-empt the discussions, which will come out about this during plenary sessions. I would like to say one thing in connection with our discussions about Ecclesiastical Fellowship. You can see that there is a genuine and strong desire from our side to see Ecclesiastical Fellowship between our churches on a proper basis. And we know from your side that there is a heightened anticipation and a sense of joy that such fellowship might soon take place. May the Lord bless the important decisions which will be made at this General Synod.

Rev. Peterson, please convey to your churches our appreciation for your representation at our General Synod. May your presence here and the discussions, which take place, be mutually beneficial to your churches and our churches, that is to say, the churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**F. Address of Rev. Paulin Bédard, observer of the Église Réformée du Québec**

Esteemed Brothers,

It is a joy and a privilege to be with you. I would like to thank you, also on behalf of Rev. deBlois, for the welcome we received. This is the first time I am present at one of your Synods. But it is not the first time I have the pleasure to meet with some of you.

My first official contact with your churches goes back exactly four years ago. In May 1994, I met the consistory of the church at Ottawa. I went with another delegate of our Synod. We were appointed by the Synod of l'Église Réformée du Québec to initiate contacts with the Canadian Reformed Churches. At that time, we didn't know much about your churches and about the kind of relationship that was possible between you and us. We contacted the church at Ottawa. I can bear witness here with gratitude that we have been warmly received by their consistory. They were quite interested to hear about who we were and what was the Lord doing among us in Quebec. We appreciated their willingness and availability to help us go through the whole process of developing official contacts with your Federation. We worked together to prepare an overture presenting the ERQ. The consistory at Ottawa sent the overture to Classis Ontario North. I also had the privilege to be there, in December 1994, for that second step. Rev. deBlois was also there. Classis accepted to send the request for Ecclesiastical Fellowship to Synod Abbotsford, three years ago.

As you know, Synod Abbotsford appointed a committee for contact with our churches. And again, I had the privilege and the responsibility to be part of the next step. Rev. deBlois, Mr. Thibaudeau and myself were appointed by our Synod to work with your committee. And we had the joy to meet together, to work together and to know each other. More than that, we together have appreciated to learn what the Lord was doing in the long history of your churches as well as in the very short history of our churches. I can give evidence again in favor of Rev. Visscher, Rev. VanPopta, Mr. Oostdyk and Mr. Boot. I have appreciated their ability to listen, to ask specific questions, to answer our questions, to raise some concerns, and to give us encouragement. In a word I have seen in their attitude, in their words and deeds a brotherly love, for which I am thankful to the Lord. The committee didn't consider their mandate lightly. After many meetings, readings and discussions, they have submitted a lengthy report to your churches.

During these years, I also had the opportunity to visit some of your congregations and to meet some other people of your churches. And



each time I have been impressed by the rich spiritual heritage the Lord gave you and by your serious desire to transmit it to the next generation. Through these experiences I can say, personally, that my vision and my understanding of the church of the Lord has deepened, and my confidence in the Lord's gathering and preserving His people has grown. Not that we should live by sight. No we live by faith alone in His promises. But the fact that the Lord has graciously given us brothers and sisters is a strong encouragement.

Having myself been born and raised in a strong Roman Catholic family, I must admit that it would be easy for me to covet what the young people of your congregations may receive at home and in your churches: the pure Gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ, the faithful teaching of the Bible, regular prayer, catechism, words of wisdom, fellowship with brothers and sisters in the Lord, many good examples of Christian families, and so many other things that some of the members of your churches may sometimes take for granted. I encourage them not to take them for granted, and not to neglect, or even to despise the heritage received. If the contacts between you and us may be helpful at least in this area, I would be happy. Whatever will happen in the future about our relationship, the work already done would have not been in vain.

But I am not complaining about what I have not received. I have so many reasons to be thankful. I even fear that if I had to count all the blessings I received from the Lord, I would forget many of them. The king David said: *"Bless the Lord, o my soul, and forget none of His benefits."* (Ps. 103:2). It would be too long here to tell you my story: Having been baptized in the Roman Catholic church, having received all the Roman Catholic doctrine; then as a teenager starting to read the Bible, being converted at eighteen, rebaptized in a brethren assembly, and later on, providentially discovering the Reformed faith, struggling with the doctrine of the covenant and infant baptism, and finally accepting and confessing what the huguenots, my ancestors, believed four hundred years ago! And today I have the so great privilege and responsibility to be minister of the Word and sacraments! How can it be possible?

In our churches in Quebec, we are a total of about three hundred people. Most of them have gone through a more or less similar experience. And today, we have children. We teach them the Bible and the Reformed doctrine. By God's grace, we want to be a good example for them. We pray the Lord for this second generation. We also want to reach other people around us with the Gospel that we cherish. The road before us is full of challenges. The world around us is full of dangers. And we lack so much experience. But yes, there are so many reasons to be thankful because there are so many blessings to count!

If you are looking for an established, well organized Reformed federation in Quebec, may be you will be disappointed. May be you will not find it the way you would like to find it. It would be easy for you to say: "Look here, they don't have this, they don't have that, they are not like us." Of course, we are not. How could we be? Yes, we have shortcomings. And

you have too. Yes, it takes time to build a Reformed church. And the Lord took time to build your churches. And it is not finished. But should we first concentrate on what we do not have or on what we do very imperfectly? To my eyes, our very existence is a miracle of God's grace! And of course God's grace comes with God's law. There are promises and obligations in His covenant! You see, I have learned it. So, as a new Federation we have to grow, to learn and to apply God's Word in all the areas of our church life. For example, we have to discuss things like confessional membership and the fencing of the Lord's table. And I believe that you may be helpful in these things, as well as we may be helpful to you in other areas.

We have studied your rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. We have adopted quite similar rules. One thing that attracts me a lot in these rules is the mutual character of the relationship. How could two different Federations, of two different sizes, with two different histories and experiences, be bound in a mutual relationship? This is a good question. We may have the right answer on paper. And I think the rules give a clear answer. But then we have to live up to them. The smaller and younger brother may be tempted to have an inferiority complex. The bigger and older brother may be tempted to have a superiority complex. It must not be so in the Lord's family. We both have things to give to the other and things to receive from the other, mutually. The rules, I believe, express that truth clearly.

But maybe I anticipate too much. The Ecclesiastical Fellowship is not established yet. Our Synod has accepted to approach you and to propose to you such a relationship. But you may still have some questions, some concerns that must be dealt with. Is it feasible to come to such a fellowship? Is it the appropriate time? Are there other discussions and works that should be done before? Your Synod has to make decisions in this regard. I know that you will not consider the subject lightly, but that you are devoting prayer, time and energy to it. All that I can say here is this: May God's will be done and may you have wisdom to make decisions for His glory.

If I may say something about other decisions you still have to make, three words come to my mind: *Faithfulness*, *consistency* and *courage*. I encourage you to continue to be faithful to Scriptures, to be consistent specially in the way you deal with other churches, and to have the courage to make the good decisions that will express faithfulness and consistency. On one hand, I know your deep desire to help others. To me, it is obvious. On the other hand, I know where you stand with your Confession. It is also obvious. Sometimes you may wonder how those two can go together. How to abide by the Confession, in doctrine and life, and at the same time how to keep your hands opened, ready to help others and share your heritage with others? I have no magic formula to propose to you. But I believe, I have the conviction that they go together, consistency and openness, even if you may not always see it. Sometimes you may have tensions among you, among your churches,



about that, even tensions inside yourselves. We live by faith, don't we? Our refuge is in God's wisdom, not ours, isn't it? The best way you can help others is to be faithful, consistent and courageous, and all this by God's grace only. But now I am starting to preach to you. Please forgive me.

I think it is appropriate here to conclude with a word about your generosity. Since your last Synod, and even before, many of your congregations have supported us financially. They have done that *"not reluctantly or under compulsion"*, but as cheerful givers and with amazing generosity. As the Apostle Paul says: *"Whoever sows generously will also reap generously."* (2 Cor. 9:6). May your churches reap, by God's grace, one hundred times what they have given. And be sure that your generosity results in many expressions of thanks to God!

In conclusion, my prayer is that the Lord will continue to guide us together. In each of our congregations, in our respective Federations, and all together may we *"be like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose"* (Phil. 2:2), having the same attitude as that of our Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you.

#### **Response by Rev. G. H. Visscher**

Rev. Paulin Bédard, Rev. Jean-Guy deBlois, brothers in the Lord, brothers and sisters

The joy that I experience this evening as I respond to you on this occasion is in one line with the joy and thanksgiving to the Lord that has grown over the past number of years as I have come to know the two of you, and your other committee member, br Luc Thibaudeau. I am sure that I speak for all the members of our committee (also br. W. Oostdyk present here, br. J. Boot, and Rev. John van Popta) when I express tonight the appreciation that we have for you and your churches and your stand for the Reformed faith in that province which still is and hopefully will continue to be part of our great country. In the meetings that took place between our two committees, in Montreal, Quebec City, Cornwall, and Burlington, we have always appreciated the fact that even though it was hard for you and your churches you have sought to remain faithful to the Reformed heritage.

As the sub-title of our report also suggests, in one country we have indeed "two solitudes." It is hard for us west of the province of Quebec not just to understand your language but even more to comprehend the special challenges that you have because of the context in which you live and work – a context which is so predominantly Roman Catholic and yet so entirely estranged from the Word of God. You mentioned growing up Roman Catholic and not reading the Bible until 18; Luc Thibaudeau told us once how he too grew up in a Roman Catholic home but had never even opened a Bible until he went to a Bible study at university. He expressed also the pain that he felt in being rejected as a result by members of his own family. This is pain that you too have and do experience in many ways. What further pain all of you must feel because

having come into the community of Reformed churches you have experienced rejection also there. Churches who were involved in the formation of the Église Réformée du Québec are now also strange to you because of the choices they made, choices which you so rightly said were not in accord with your basis, nor your direction. It is because of all this and so much more that you are here tonight and we thank God for you and your churches. We rejoice in the fact that though we may have two solitudes, we know of a deep and wonderful unity. It is not a unity that we create. It is not yet a unity on paper. But it is a unity in the Spirit of God. Our confession speaks of this: a *truly* Catholic church which is "joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith"(Article 27, B.C.). It is only because of that unity that we have been able in the past years to have our discussions.

The fact that we know of such unity and welcome you here tonight does not mean that we do not have differences. You know, we know, they are there. We have discussed them in significant detail as can be seen from our report to Synod Fergus. And you will experience, no doubt, that the Synod will be even more taxing than the four of us in the committee appointed by Synod Abbotsford 1995. But it is our hope and prayer that, regardless of what this Synod decides and how it evaluates our recommendations, you will be patient and not lose heart.

It is my hope that the last number of years have been only a beginning of a longstanding and beneficial relationship. And it certainly does not need to be onesided. You have acknowledged your need for help with respect to directing your course, with respect to benefiting from that common heritage of the Reformation, and with respect to the limitations in your resources. We will be glad to help as we can. Our heritage is our joy. And it is not painful for us either to share with you the financial resources God has entrusted to us for a while. What are we to do with all that but use it as God wants us to? But it is not a one-way street. You need to help *us*. Help us to reach out to the rest of our common nation, help us to speak to a nation which is increasingly become estranged from God, and His Word.

Let me speak at the same time for a moment to the other members of Synod Fergus 1998 about this matter. There will be the temptation to say that we have to use the same standards with respect to the ERQ as we have used with the OPC, as we are using with the RCUS, and all the others. But the great question that we have been wrestling with as committees in the past years is the question: can we do that? Does the Lord ask that of us? Can we relate to the mission churches of Irian Jaya in the same way as we would relate to the RCUS? Can we expect of the mission churches of Brazil what we expect of the United Reformed Churches of North America? Can we relate to the ERQ in one line with these other churches on our continent? Not that they are the same as those mission churches. They are not. As br Bédard once said (you can find it in our report) "we are not refugees!" But yet, all the Lord's people and all the Lord's churches are not the same. To those who are given

much, much is required. But to those who are given less, less is required. Brothers, by the grace of God, there are seven ministers of God's Word in a federation that has no more than 300 people, struggling to reap a harvest in a field in our own country that is "ripe for harvest"(John 4:35)? The question before us is: will we embrace and extend the right hand of fellowship as we continue to help them, and be helped by them as we work in our own backyards?

Brs Bédard, de Blois, on behalf of Synod 1998, I ask you to pass on the greetings to all the brothers and sisters in the province of Quebec. Tell them not to give up. Urge them to remain strong in the faith. For the times are evil and will become more so. And remember: until our Lord returns, the churches that stand on the basis of the Word of God and the precious heritage of the Reformation should not divide and fragment more and more but join arm in arm, heart to heart against the real evil one and those who are his.

### **G. Address of Rev. R. Stienstra, observer of the United Reformed Churches of North America**

Esteemed Brothers,

As spokesman of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the United Reformed Churches in North America, I first of all want to thank you for extending the invitation to us to be present as observers at your General Synod in 1998. For us this is a historic occasion. Whereas we have had a number of times during the past years when we became acquainted with your deputies at our assemblies, today constitutes a special event for us, and we treasure it.

On behalf of the committee I bring you fraternal greetings from our federation. The 70 churches consisting of some 17,000 souls wish you God's richest blessing as you strive to be faithful and true to the high calling of being His people in the midst of a sinful world. May the Lord Who gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself a church chosen unto everlasting life, continue to use and bless your federation in the North American setting as He has done so evidently in the past fifty years.

Your deputies for the promotion of ecclesiastical unity have responded to the correspondence from the URC committee for ecumenical relations and church unity in a positive way. After a year or two of such correspondence, and with the input of the URC Synod of St. Catharines in 1997, our committee considered the time had come to propose that the progress made in previous correspondence be advanced by face to face meetings. With the willingness of your deputies two of such meetings have taken place in 1998 with a third one scheduled in September.

From our side we are pleased that your deputies were agreeable that our mutual objective should be integrated federative unity. The two sides could not (yet) agree on the most suitable pathway or strategy toward that unity. In general both parties agreed to follow the Dutch model of *verkenning*, *herkenning*, and *erkenning*. The deputies proposed



“recognition, acceptance, and union.” The committee suggested, “exploration, recognition, and integration.” A suitable resolution is being worked out.

I expect that your deputies have reported these matters to the Synod. In any case a report will in due time appear in the church papers. I wish to add some comments, however, in conveying the greetings of the United Reformed Churches.

Our two federations have much in common, such as the Three Forms of Unity and an identical Form of Subscription; not to mention the same ecclesiastical forms, as well as the Church Order of Dort as basis for our respective orders. But there are some distinctives. We share a similar history, yet one which has its distinctives as well. One such distinctive, I continue to use the word here, is the fact that the URC finds its beginning in the secessions during the present decade from the Christian Reformed Church.

Most of our members were born and raised in the CRC, and most of the churches of our federation are in the United States and do not trace their history directly via the Doleantie of 1886, nor the Secession of 1834. Their forefathers immigrated during the 1850s and founded the CRC in 1857. Of course, our 29 Canadian churches consist mainly of members who share your origins in the Gereformeerde Kerken in Holland, but who did not join the Liberated churches in 1944.

In some sense the United Reformed Churches are the legitimate continuation of the Christian Reformed Church. We seek to be faithful to the Confessions and true to the Scriptures. This brings me to the matter of recognition and the true church of Christ in terms of the Belgic Confession, Articles 27-29.

We confess as you do that we are “a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood and sealed by the Holy Spirit.” As such we are part of the one catholic or universal Church. The United Reformed Churches consider themselves to be the true church of Christ. With dedication and faithfulness the office-bearers see to it that the pure preaching of the gospel is proclaimed. The churches maintain the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them. The elders seek to exercise church discipline for the correcting and punishing of sins.

Although weakness and sin continue to be evident in our churches, and hypocrites are mixed in with the good, yet without hesitation we consider ourselves the true church of Christ. It is out of this conviction that our committee is persuaded that mutual recognition of each other as faithful and true churches of the Lord needs to take place sometime on the road to integrated ecclesiastical unity between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches. I stress sometime during the process rather than at its conclusion.

But then, mutual recognition is not an empty, vague gesture nor an expression of the concept of church pluriformity. We view the teaching of

church pluriformity unscriptural and non-conforming to the Reformed confessions. Our committee is convinced that mutual recognition has serious consequences for both church bodies. We propose that after adequate dialogue between us has taken place, some ecclesiastical fellowship be entered upon which contains the ingredients that in principle pulpit exchange and table fellowship be allowed to be a stimulant in the movement toward full integration.

Let me expand a little. To our committee it is inconceivable that the Scriptures teach, or that the Reformed Confessions propound that when two churches are in agreement that both demonstrate and practice faithfully the three marks of the true church as confessed in the Belgic Confession, Article 29, there should not be some form of Biblical fellowship between them beyond the perfunctory.

I conclude with this final notation. The URC committee on which I serve has written to your deputies that we "consider the secession of 1944, or the Liberation, to be God's way and work to bring His people back to Himself from deviant teachings and practices." We also wrote to you that "we believe that the CRC should have established relations with the liberated churches in the Netherlands and discontinued them with with Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland."

Brothers, may the King of the Church prosper and bless you in your labors as General Synod these days, and may He also bless and prosper our mutual efforts toward ecclesiastical unity. To Him alone be the glory!

**Response by Rev. W. B. Slomp**

Dear Rev. R. Stienstra, Rev. P. Vellenga, and Rev. R. Sikkema,

I was given very short notice that I would be responding to your address. Thus my words may not be as well-chosen as I would like them to be. My response, therefore, will be more from the heart than from the head. In other words, my words will deal more with the substance of the matter than with the details. For I have the added disadvantage, as far as my preparation is concerned, of not being on the committee charged to deal with you. I am not privy to the fine details of our current dealings with each other on a federal level.

Nevertheless, I am quite pleased to be asked to speak a few words to you. For your churches are very close to my heart, both physically and spiritually. For as you may or may not be aware, I come from the church at Neerlandia, and members of your churches use our church building. Also Rev. Hoekstra, the minister of the local URCNA, lives right across the road from me. Furthermore, living in the small community such as Neerlandia, the people are in frequent contact with each other. Thus, because of our daily contact with each other, we are constantly reminded of our separate ecclesiastical existence. And that hurts us. We are desirous also of a spiritual unity.

In Neerlandia we were glad when a group of people left the CRC, not because a split came about in the CRC, but because it meant a going back to the truth of the Scriptures, and as they are confessed in the Three



forms of unity. And when a few years later the Emmanuel church joined together with others to form the URCNA, we were also glad. For that meant there was the realization that an independent existence as local church cannot be maintained on the basis of the Scriptures. The Lord teaches us that as His children we belong together. He teaches us that we also need each other. We live in a world that is hostile to God and His commands. Satan attacks us from all sides. He attacks us from without and within. All our energy is needed to withstand the fiery darts of the evil one. Our energy ought to be pooled, and ought not to be used to be in continuing our division. We are one in faith. We must also express that unity.

Thus, I was very much encouraged when I heard you speak the words as you did this evening. It is clear from your words that we are already very close, and that you also see the need for even greater closeness. You have already adopted your version of the Church Order of Dort, which is not that much different from ours. And now I also hear you say that you consider "the secession of 1944, or the Liberation, to be God's way and work to bring His people back to Himself from deviant teachings and practices." In your synod report you also make similar statements and have many positive things to say about us. Furthermore, you state in that report that the CRC was wrong in not establishing contact with the liberated churches in the Netherlands.

Such statements gladden our hearts. They gladden our hearts, not so that we can now say, "See, we were right after all." No, the pain of our separate existence from the CRC was always keenly felt. That is why the post-war immigrants who belonged in the Netherlands to the Liberated Churches first joined themselves to the CRC. And that is why we also wrote our appeals in 1963 and in 1977 when you were still in the CRC. And now, for all intents and purposes, the concerns expressed in those documents have been addressed.

Why did we want those issues to be dealt with in one way or the other? So that the truth may be established, not for our sakes, but for the honour and glory of God, and so that there may be a people here on earth established in the truth.

Brothers, on behalf of synod I welcome you in our midst. May your presence contribute to the maintenance of God's truth, and to the unity of His people in true faith. May the Lord bless our contact with each other. May the Lord bless you and guide you.

#### **H. Closing Words of Rev. R. Aasman, chairman of Synod Fergus**

Brothers:

We have come to the end of our agenda and therefore our work as General Synod Fergus 1998. Every one of us will agree that we have carried out our work with excellent harmony and unanimity. Rev. J. DeGelder seems to have set the tone and theme for our work as Synod in the Prayer Service when he preached about "speaking the truth in love."

We spoke the truth and we did so in love for God, his Church and for one another. It cannot be said that this was easy to do because we had an agenda which lent itself to quick agreement. We had a long and difficult agenda which dealt with some serious issues. No doubt we all came to this Synod with some personal concerns and strong feelings. We wondered how we could deal with issues in a manner that would not divide us and our churches. But we did our work with much singing, Bible reading and prayer, and the Lord blessed us. We talked together, we listened, we worked, and we spoke the truth in love, with the result that we made some very important decisions and we did it unanimously. In fact, all of our decisions were made either unanimously or close to it. No one will be going home saying, I did it my way. We did it in the way of the Word, the confessions and the church order. In other words, we did it the Lord's way. Thus we can go home with a rich measure of confidence that in spite of our weaknesses and shortcomings, our decisions should be a blessing to the churches.

On a more personal level, it should be observed that we will all go home enriched. Just working through all the material on the agenda has increased our understanding and appreciation of important matters, which live within our church federation. We have also developed new friendships and solidified old ones. We have grown in character as we have learned more and more to speak the truth in love and to hear the truth in love. Certainly this will enhance our lives as we carry this on in our families, our relationships, our work and our task as office bearers.

As Synod we would like to extend our deep appreciation for the support we have received from our brothers and sisters here in Fergus. A very special thanks to sister Betty Dykstra. Betty, under your capable leadership we have been served with wonderful meals and refreshments. In so far as it is possible, you have turned a room in this church building into a comfortable little bistro where we could eat and drink together under the most pleasant circumstances. Please pass on to all the brothers and sisters who assisted you our heartfelt thanks and appreciation. We also thank the Church at Fergus for hosting this Synod. We have mentioned before the names of brother H. Bouwman and brother and sister John and Joanne Hutten and the work they have done in preparing for this Synod. We again express our appreciation for what they have done. We also thank brother Butch Medemblik who made arrangements for our computers; in connection with this, we express appreciation for the equipment and employee time given by Walinga Inc.; brother Theo Flach who organised and maintained Synod's web site; brother Terry Medemblik who took care of the sound system; brother and sister Cor and Irene Bultena who had to do extra work as caretakers of the church property; and brother Jim Stienstra who cleaned up the mess that we left behind at the end of the day. I hope that I have not forgotten anyone: in general, we express our appreciation for all the help we received from the congregation here at Fergus.

*General Synod Fergus 1998*

I would like to thank the vice-chairman and the two clerks for their support and good advice in the executive. I would also like to thank all of the brothers for allowing me the privilege of being your chairman at Synod.

Now Synod is coming to an end. In a few minutes we will no longer be members of General Synod. What will remain, however, is our recorded decisions. The churches will be scrutinizing what we have done. Hopefully they will appreciate the decisions and be served by them. But more importantly, the Lord will know our decisions and He will judge. May He take our work and use it to serve the coming of the kingdom.

Soon we will get into our cars and on the planes, which will bring us back to our families, our homes and our work. Brothers, may the Lord bless us as we go our separate ways.

## APPENDIX 2:

# Report from the Committee on Bible Translation<sup>1</sup>

Dear brothers,  
Greetings in the Lord.

We submit to you our report in fulfillment of the mandate given to us by General Synod Abbotsford 1995. We are pleased to announce that we have completed our mandate and that we may confirm the recommendation made to Synod Abbotsford.

### 1 Mandate

Our Committee had received as mandate from General Synod Abbotsford 1995 the following charge:

To continue the Committee on Bible Translation which would receive comments from churches and/or members about passages in the NIV in need of improvement, scrutinize those comments, and pass on valid concerns to the NIV Translation Center. The Committee should also glean from previous Synod reports as well as from the Report and its appendices any recommendations for change which need to be presented to the NIV Translation Center. The letters which were sent to Synod

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<sup>1</sup> The original report contained the following appendices:

1. Gleanings from Reports to Previous Synods
2. Analysis of Passages Cited in Letters to General Synod 1995
3. Analysis of Passages Cited in Correspondence after Synod 1995
4. Letter to Eleven Inquiring Churches, August 16, 1975
5. Press Release of CBT in *Clarion*, January 24, 1997
6. Press Release of CBT in *Clarion*, July 25, 1997
7. Press Release of the International Bible Society, May 27, 1997
8. E-mail from Mr. S. Johnson, July 25, 1997
9. Recommendations Addressed to the NIV Translation Center

expressing concerns about certain Bible passages should also be sent to the Committee. (Acts, Article 72)

This mandate assigned to the Committee contains the responsibility of passing on valid concerns about the NIV text to the NIV Translation Center. According to the mandate, the concerns may come from any of three sources:

- i. from past reports of the Committee,
- ii. from letters sent to Synod which contain concerns about certain Bible passages,
- iii. from correspondence from churches and/or members.

## **2 Meetings of the Committee**

In order to fulfil this mandate, the Committee met nine times. However, nearly every agenda for these meetings included, or was even dominated by a matter, which was not part of the above quoted mandate: the publication of an inclusive version of the NIV. This matter demanded a great deal of time from the Committee and distracted us from pursuing the original mandate. We are pleased, nevertheless, to report that we are confident that we have done justice to all the responsibilities assigned to us by General Synod Abbotsford 1995.

## **3 Passing On Valid Concerns about the NIV Text to the NIV Translation Center**

### **3.1 From Past Reports of the Committee**

The Committee has gleaned through reports which have been submitted to previous Synods for relevant discussions on the NIV text. This investigation can be found in "Gleanings from Previous Synod Reports" (Appendix 1) As a result of this investigation, five areas of significance were identified and have been brought to the attention of the NIV Translation Center for minor changes to the text.

### **3.2 From Letters sent to Synod**

The committee was given copies of 17 letters related to the NIV, twelve from individual churches and five from members. Of these, five letters expressed concern about specific passages in the NIV, and therefore, required our attention. Attached to the letter from the Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church, Edmonton, Alberta, were two articles. While the first article was written by a minister within our federation of Churches, the second was not, therefore, we did not deal with it. Our assessment of these five letters are contained in the study entitled, "Analysis of Passages Cited in Letters Submitted to General Synod Abbotsford, 1995" (Appendix 2). As a result of this study, we were able to make five recommendations for minor revisions to the printing of the NIV text.



(Appendix 2). As a result of this study, we were able to make five recommendations for minor revisions to the printing of the NIV text.

### **3.3 From Correspondence from Churches and/or Members**

Only one item of correspondence from Churches and/or members containing specific concerns about the NIV text was received by the Committee. It was a paper containing the main points of an address which Dr. J. De Jong had delivered to one of the churches and which he had subsequently sent to us. Our assessment of the concerns expressed in that paper are contained in "Analysis of Passages Cited in Correspondence after Synod 1995" (Appendix 3). There were no matters arising from this study that persuaded us to address the NIV Translation Center for textual changes to future editions of the NIV.

## **4 Events Subsequent to Synod Abbotsford**

### **4.1 Inclusive Language**

In the Committee Report to General Synod Abbotsford 1995, no indication was given that the International Bible Society was contemplating the publication of an inclusive language edition of the NIV. That Committee was entirely unaware of such developments. It was of the persuasion that the International Bible Society was biased against inclusive language, as evidenced by one of the draft text studies on Psalm 121 where it was observed that while KJV, RSV, NASB and NKJV all offer a gender neutral translation, "thy / your children", the NIV has chosen to translate the Hebrew in a gender specific fashion, "your sons".<sup>2</sup> That Committee had assumed then, that inclusive language was a non-issue in relation to the NIV.

At the very first meeting of the present Committee, the secretary was requested to confirm whether there was any substance to the rumour that an inclusive language edition of the NIV was being published. Inclusive language remained a matter of major concern for us for two years of our mandate (from October 4/95 to July 17/97). This had the following effect: First, it demanded much of our energy, requiring several lengthy exchanges of letters with various bodies to secure and to confirm information so that we could inform the churches of this unexpected development. Secondly, it cast into doubt the meaningfulness of the Committee pursuing its mandate.

### **4.2 Correspondence**

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<sup>2</sup> This discussion was only part of a draft proposal. It was thought to be insignificant and therefore, it was dropped before it was adopted by the Committee. That is why this discussion is not found in the 1995 Report to General Synod.

The rumoured projection of an inclusive language NIV was clearly a matter of great concern to the churches. At our meeting of June 19, 1996 we had received unofficial inquiries from ten different churches about this matter and an official inquiry (via letter) from one of the churches. Although the matter of inclusive language was not, as such, a part of the mandate of this Committee, we chose to deal with it because it could not have been predicted by Synod 1995 and because it concerned the continued use of the NIV by the churches. We responded to these inquiries with a letter to the eleven churches (see Appendix 4). For the next five months, we sought sufficient information to issue a press release regarding the current status of an impending inclusive edition of the NIV and the future availability of the current form of the NIV. The Press Release was published in Clarion on January 24, 1997 (see Appendix 5).

Many of the churches were still very concerned. We received three more official inquiries from different churches about the direction of the NIV and the International Bible Society. However, the International Bible Society unexpectedly announced on May 27, 1997 that it had decided to terminate the whole inclusive language project (see Appendix 7). After reviewing the matter ourselves, we published a press release to inform the churches of this latest development on July 25, 1997 (see Appendix 6).

#### **4.3 Enduring Meaningfulness of the Committee's Mandate**

From the first meeting on, the Committee has been seeking to ascertain whether its work for textual improvements to the NIV will have any positive effect for the churches. There were two reasons why the Committee sought clarification. First, the Executive Director of the NIV Translation Center, Dr. K.L. Barker had assured the former Committee that the NIV Translation Center was planning a light, but complete revision of the NIV early in the 21st Century. We were confident, then, that our work would be meaningful for this upcoming revision. When it became known that the revision was to be a gender-inclusive one, and that the revision had already been completed in the United Kingdom, it seemed that it was too late to make any contributions to its text. Even if it were not too late, it was questionable whether we would be interested in participating in improving an inclusive language edition.

When the IBS issued its press release on May 27, 1997, it also announced the cancellation of the whole inclusive language project. Significantly, this Press Release announced: "There are no plans for a further revised edition" (for the full text of this Press Release, see Appendix 7). This is the second reason why we should inquire whether our work still had any meaningfulness. In response to further inquiries, we learned that "the 1984 text [of the NIV] will remain in distribution indefinitely. However this does not preclude the normal refining process that the NIV and all translations go through in the interest of increasing accuracy, and responding to critical analysis." When we pressed the IBS

to explain the difference between "normal refining process and "a new edition", we learned the following:

The refining process has always been based on the critiques of scholars, linguists and theologians who occasionally have comments about particular verbiage or verses. Those critiques are taken under advisement and if valid, are incorporated into the text during the next printing. A new edition, however, is a process in which the CBT evaluates the entire text for the purpose of increasing accuracy or updating a particular component of the text. IBS has agreed that we will not engage in a revision process of the 1984 text, but ongoing critiques of the text will be taken into consideration as has always been the case with the NIV.<sup>3</sup>

This information allowed the Committee, for the first time since its initial meeting, to fulfill its mandate with the assurance that its work might have some enduring meaningfulness for the churches.

## **5 Conclusion**

In the light of the latest developments in the IBS, we are pleased to report that we can wholeheartedly confirm the recommendation of the former Committee on Bible Translations, and the decision made in Article 72 of the Acts of General Synod Abbotsford 1995. We have made nine recommendations to the NIV Translation Center (Appendix 9 contains a copy of our recommendation to the NIV Translation Center), and we can only wait to see if they will be incorporated into a future printing of the NIV. In grappling with the inclusive language issue, it was observed that if General Synod thought it necessary to appoint a new committee, it should include a member with expertise in English linguistics.

Respectfully submitted by your committee,

P. Aasman  
J. Geertsema  
W. Smouter  
C. Van Dam

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<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from an e-mail message dated Friday, July 25, 1997 from Mr. Steve Johnson, Director of Communications of the IBS, to Mr. William Smouter. For the full text of this e-mail, see Appendix # 8.

## APPENDIX 3:

# Report from the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise<sup>1</sup>

Esteemed brothers,

The *Standing Committee for the Publication of the 'Book of Praise'* hereby submits the report on its activities in regard to the mandate given to the Committee by General Synod Abbotsford 1995.

### **1.0 *Printing and Distribution:***

The Committee authorized a new printing of the *Book of Praise* shortly after Synod Abbotsford 1995. In addition to the correction of a few typographical errors, this edition incorporates the changes adopted by Synod 1995, the inclusion of the provisionally adopted text of the *Nicene Creed* and the introduction to the *Church Order*.

In order to increase the lifespan of the books, a hardcover binding was introduced. It is considered to be a marked improvement over the previous softcover binding.

The Committee authorized the printing of just over 4,000 copies, of which 1,892 copies have been sold to churches, 551 copies to schools and 1,612 copies to bookstores. This means that the current stock has been depleted and another printing will have to be considered.

### **2.0 *Renewal of Contract:***

Since the current five-year contract with Premier Printing Ltd. runs until February 2000, no renewal of the contract was necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> While appendices to reports received are not usually published with the reports, appendix 1 is added (as Addendum I below) because it contains the proposed text of the Nicene Creed. The original Report also included an appendix entitled: "Re: Request by br L. van Zandwyk [LvZ] for revision of Canons of Dort [CoD] II,3 and 4 (Acts 1995: Art.44 IV-G); it has not been included. Synod received an additional letter from this Standing Committee; it has been included below as Addendum II.



### **3.0 Corporate Status:**

The committee has maintained its status as a corporation, and all necessary documents for this purpose have been kept up to date.

### **4.0 Publicity:**

The Committee continues to respond to the various requests for information regarding the *Book of Praise*. Frequently, these requests originate from individuals outside of our Federation of Churches, who discovered a copy of the *Book of Praise* in a library, in a local bookstore or in a book catalogue. It is encouraging to note the interest in and respect for the rich heritage of the Reformed faith as it is expressed in the Psalms, the Hymns and the *Three Forms of Unity*.

The Committee deals with the requests for the use of materials from the *Book of Praise* on a per-request-basis, and responds in a manner which seeks to maintain the purpose and intent of the *Book of Praise*. Also in this respect, the Committee is encouraged by recent audio recordings and concert performances by choral groups featuring Psalms taken from the *Book of Praise*. The *Anglo-Genevan Psalter* continues to function actively in all aspects within our Federation of Churches.

The Committee received the request to make the *Three Forms of Unity* available in electronic format. We are pleased that br. D.Moedt of Taber has prepared an electronic version complete with a help file. In keeping with the copyright statement and to ensure proper use of the material found in the *Book of Praise*, a *Memorandum of Agreement* was extended to D.Moedt - Taber Secretarial & Computer Services Ltd. Currently, this file may be accessed under the internet Website of the *Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches*.

### **5.0 Mandate:**

With respect to the mandate the Committee received from Synod Abbotsford 1995, we may report the following:

#### **5.1 Introduction to the *Church Order (Acts 1995: Art. 44 IV-D)***

The *Introduction to the Church Order* was included in the 1996 edition of the *Book of Praise*.

#### **5.2 Provisionally Adopted Text of the *Nicene Creed (Acts 1995: Art. 44 IV-F)***

In addition to placing the provisionally adopted text in the 1996 edition of the *Book of Praise*, the Committee distributed the text to the churches with the request for comments. Only four churches responded. Typographical errors in punctuation were corrected and the appearance of the text on the page was adjusted to facilitate the reading of the text at



the recommendation of one of the churches. The Committee presents its proposal of the final form of the text of the *Nicene Creed* in *Appendix I*.

### **5.3 *Canons of Dort* re. question raised by br. L.van Zandwyk ( Acts 1995: Art. 44 IV-G)**

The Committee reviewed the matters raised by br. L.van Zandwyk and recommends that Synod 1998 do not accede to the request of br. L.van Zandwyk.

The Committee presents its reasoning in *Appendix II*.

### **5.4 Investigation re. Repeating the Musical Notation Overleaf (Acts 1995: Art. 44 IV-L6)**

Having considered the input received from the printer, the Committee is of the opinion that the overleaf repetition of the melody does not serve the churches well at this time.

Grounds:

- a. In an attempt to be consistent, all melodies will have to be repeated. This implies that the melody for psalms with many stanzas will have to be repeated several times.
- b. The repeated melodies will likely add approximately 100 pages to the *Book of Praise*, adding to the bulk of the book and changing its pagination significantly.
- c. The cost will likely increase by 30%, due to the labour involved in scanning the melodies, placing new text under the melodies and reconfiguring the entire psalm and hymn sections.

### **5.5 Alternate melodies for H.1A [Zwart; Strasbourg] (Acts 1995: Art. 44 IV-H-amended)**

The Committee prepared the Strasbourg melody for distribution to the churches by adjusting the melody to fit the English text and by providing a harmonization which is in line with the historical time period of the melody. It is noted that the Strasbourg melody had to be adjusted to such an extent that the original melody became an adaptation at best.

The Zwart and Strasbourg melodies and their harmonizations were distributed to the churches for comment. Responses from sixteen churches were received.

The clear consensus found in the responses of the churches is to finalize this matter: All churches were in favour of maintaining Hymn 1A and Hymn 1B as currently found in the *Book of Praise* and not to consider the Zwart and/or Strasbourg melodies as alternate melodies. Furthermore, several churches requested that this matter be put to rest.

In view of the responses received from the churches, the Committee recommends that Synod Fergus 1998 puts this matter to rest.

## **6.0 Other Matters:**

### **6.1 Implications of the use of the NIV for the prose sections of the *Book of Praise***

Although not part of its mandate as received from Synod Abbotsford 1995, the Committee has been proactive at the committee level in its decision to initiate an in-depth comparative review of the RSV/NIV prooftexts found in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. The Committee has also initiated a review of the implications of using the NIV text in the prose of the Liturgical Forms. Furthermore, the Committee occupied itself with an update of the Prayers with respect to addressing the Lord as 'You'.

The Committee urges Synod Fergus 1998 to provide the Committee with a clear mandate with respect to the introduction of the NIV text in the prose section of the *Book of Praise*. For example, does the introduction of the NIV in the prose section replace the RSV prose section or is it the task of the Committee to ensure that both versions are available to the churches?

### **6.2 Future Revision**

The implementation of the recommendation to the churches to adopt a new bible translation for use by the churches may imply a substantial modification to the rhyming of the Psalms to reflect the text of the NIV. It is the opinion of the Committee that such a substantial change in the future ought to be planned carefully in the present.

The Committee seeks direction from Synod in this matter.

### **6.3 Availability of the *Book of Praise* in electronic format**

The requests we received for material taken from the *Book of Praise* in a format other than the paper format we currently have, leads us to suggest that Synod appoint a church to develop and maintain a formal web page of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

## **7.0 Further Recommendations:**

Pursuant to the approach we propose above, we would make the following recommendations:

### **7.1 Committee Membership**

That the *Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise* be continued and that the size of the Committee be kept to four members. Rev. G. Nederveen is due to retire from the Committee in 1998 (*Acts 1995*, p.86). Due to other commitments, br. L.Kingma has requested to be relieved from the Committee.

## 7.2 Committee Mandate

- i. To function according to the arrangements for publishing and distribution accepted by *General Synod Cloverdale 1983 (Acts 1983, pp.297-299)*.
- ii. To maintain its corporate status in order to be able to protect the interests of the Canadian Reformed Churches in all matters concerning the *Book of Praise*.
- iii. To foster an increased awareness of the existence of the *Book of Praise* among others and to promote the availability of a book of harmonizations facilitating the use of the *Book of Praise* in the English-speaking world.
- iv. To serve as the address to which any correspondence regarding the *Book of Praise* can be directed.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. B.J.Berends  
Mr. L.Kingma  
Rev. G.Nederveen (convener)  
Mrs. C.van Halen-Faber (reporter)

## ADDENDUM I:

### Re: Proposed Final Form of the Text of the *Nicene Creed*

With respect to comments received from the churches, the Committee recommends that:

- a. Line 1: "We believe" be maintained in favour of "I believe" - since the Greek text uses the plural form (c.f., *Acts 1995, Art. 44 Considerations D.2*)
- b. Line 10: "men" be maintained in favour of changing the word or deleting the word altogether. The term translated as "for us men" is found in the original text. Further, the expression in line 10 is echoed in line 13 in "and was made man", against the teachings of the Docetists. Given the close link between the two expressions in lines 10 and 13, changing the one would also imply a change to the other.

In addition to correcting the typographical errors in punctuation which crept in the provisional text of the *Nicene Creed* printed in the 1996 edition of the *Book of Praise*, the Committee recommends to change the overall appearance of the text.

To facilitate the reading of the *Nicene Creed*, the Committee suggests the lay-out of the text on the page in the *Book of Praise* as follows:

### Appendix 3: Book of Praise

[NB: the line numbering 1-27 does not belong in the text but serves only to clarify comments below]

1 We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,  
2 Maker of heaven and earth,  
3 of all things visible and invisible.  
4 And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,  
5 begotten of the Father before all ages;  
6 God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God;  
7 begotten, not made,  
8 of one substance with the Father;  
9 through whom all things were made.  
10 Who, for us men and our salvation,  
11 came down from heaven  
12 and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary  
13 and was made man.  
14 He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;  
15 He suffered and was buried;  
16 and the third day He arose, according to the Scriptures,  
17 and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the  
Father,  
18 and He will come again with glory to judge the living and the  
dead;  
19 whose kingdom shall have no end.  
20 And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life,  
21 who proceeds from the Father and the Son;  
22 who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified;  
23 who spoke through the prophets.  
24 And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic church.  
25 We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins;  
26 and we look forward to the resurrection of the dead,  
27 and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Suggestion re Punctuation:

1. replace the ";" after made (line 7) by a "," since the "of one substance with the Father" clarifies the "not made" in the same way as the "not made" clarifies "begotten".
2. replace the ";" after Scriptures (16), Father (17) by a "," since these words are followed by the conjunction "and". The semicolon disrupts the thought and flow of the connective.

Indentation:

indent line 9 less to make it stand out that all things were made through Christ. Otherwise it seems to refer to the Father. It is easy to read: "one substance with the Father; through whom all things were made." The semicolon is easily skipped at this point. Specific indentation will make the distinction clearer.

In order to keep the indentation uniform throughout, lines 2-3, 5-8, 11-13, 16-18 and 21-23 should be indented further than the others because

- lines 2-3 describe the work of the Father.
- lines 5-8 describe the unique nature of the Son.
- lines 11-13 describe Christ's humanity
- lines 16-18 describe what was required to make salvation possible
- lines 21-23 describe the work of the Holy Spirit

## ADDENDUM II:

Esteemed brothers,

As a Standing Committee, we wish to provide you with one final update regarding the *Book of Praise*. After the text of our *Report to General Synod Fergus 1998* had been finalized, we received letters from several churches. Since these letters deal with the text of the *Nicene Creed* and the Committee seeks a clear mandate from *General Synod Fergus* to finalize the provisionally adopted text, we feel it is important to provide you with our comments in order to facilitate your discussion.

Letters were received from:

- Church at Hamilton (October 17, 1997) - Expressed the desire that the *Nicene Creed* be a faithful rendition of the original text and ought not to be a matter of polling opinions. In all discussions regarding language revisions, it ought to be kept in mind that the *Nicene Creed* is not the sole property of the Canadian Reformed Churches.
- Church at Surrey (October 7, 1997) - Expressed endorsement of the *Koat Report*.
- Church at Langley (October 22, 1997) - A copy of the report *Comments on the provisional adoption of the revised edition of the Nicene Creed*, researched and interpreted by R.Koat (August 16, 1997).
- Church at Houston (November 5, 1997) - Expressed endorsement of the *Koat Report*.
- Church at London (November 27, 1997) - Expressed endorsement of the *Koat Report*.
- Church at Lincoln (March 4, 1998) - Expressed concern regarding the word "in" [*and we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church*].

Since most letters deal with the *Koat Report*, the *Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise* makes the following observations:



Previous Synods mandated the *Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise* to update the language of the Creeds. Synod Abbotsford adopted provisionally the proposed version of the Committee. Only a few churches provided comments about the revised text and one church provided a proposal for the text lay-out on the page which might aid the reading of the text. [See *Report to General Synod Fergus 1998 - Appendix I*].

In fall of 1997, the Church at Langley sent a report to all the churches. This report was received by the Committee on October 22, 1997, well after the text of our report to *General Synod Fergus 1998* was finalized for distribution to the churches.

As noted above, we have received a few reactions from the churches in response to Langley's report. One of the churches stated that they were not in the position to analyze the work of br. Koat, but they nevertheless fully endorsed the report. This letter was received by your Committee before we received the actual report from Langley. The Committee is rather puzzled to receive an endorsement to a report that the brothers felt incompetent to analyze.

For the benefit of Synod 1998, your Committee felt the need to respond to some of the comments in the report submitted by the Church at Langley. It is our hope that this matter can be brought to a conclusion so that this section of the *Book of Praise* can be completed.

Our comments follow the format of the report from the Church at Langley which, we understand, was also submitted to Synod.

***“of all things visible and invisible”***

The report states that *“and of all things”* gives the impression that something is added to *“heaven and earth.”* The Committee believes that it is indeed an *impression*, but not a fact. Synod's simple version is to be preferred.

***“Of one substance with the Father***

The Committee is of the opinion that it is unnecessary to insert the verb “being” because we are dealing here with concise creedal statements about who the Lord Jesus Christ is. We confess the Son to be “God of God ... begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father.” The accumulative description of who Christ is leaves no doubt that these concise statements reinforce the idea that the Son of God shares the same quality with the Father.

The examples Langley and br. Koat present in support for their argument are weak. The sentence about the happy couple is simply incomplete without the verb “being,” and would therefore be incorrect English. The same holds for the reference to Philippians 2:2. That is not the case with our creedal statements. Therefore br. Koat's argument is not convincing.

***“through whom all things were made”***

The committee believes that “through” is the better translation because it refers to the Son.

We all acknowledge God the Father as the creator. We say: the world was created by God. But the church is making here a statement of faith about the Christ, not the Father. And Scripture indicates clearly that the Father created the world *through* the Son. This has nothing to do with listing examples of “through” as penetration. These examples miss the mark.

God the Father is the agent: the world was made by him. Christ the Son is the medium: the Father made the world through the Son. That is also how both the RSV and NIV translate Hebrews 1:2 and 1 Corinthians 8:6. For that reason the Committee urges that for clarity’s sake Synod will maintain the version “*through whom all things were made.*”

***“Who, for us men and our salvation...”***

Synod’s version is to be preferred. The Church at Langley and brother Koat feel that the repetition of “for” is more emphatic. The repetition is possible, but not necessary. The single use of “for” emphasizes precisely that Christ came into the world to save sinful mankind.

***“and became incarnate...”***

The Committee supports the adopted version of Synod 1995.

Langley and br. Koat assert that “was incarnate” is preferable because the incarnation took place only once, and therefore the change to “became incarnate” is not for the better. With reference to usages by Milton and others, br. Koat writes: “Quoted usages of the verb ‘become’ *lack* the immediacy and directness of the simple ‘was’ in this context.” The Committee wonders how useful this argument is since we are not dealing with the language of Milton, but with English for today!

The simple fact is that at one time Christ was not in the flesh. He became man. About the two natures of Christ we make the distinction that the Son of God, at his incarnation, remained what he was (and is), namely God, and *became* what he was not, namely man. The Committee is not convinced by br. Koat’s argument, and would strongly suggest that the adopted version by Synod ‘95 is a marked improvement.

***“He was crucified”***

The version of Synod ‘95 is better. The suggestion to insert the word ‘also’ into the text even though it is not in the Greek is spurious and unnecessary.

***“and the third day He arose”***

The Bible uses both. In 1 Thess 4:14 we read, “We believe that Jesus died and rose again.” Still, the Committee would support Synod

Abbotsford's rendition because "He arose" is a very powerful statement that is not open to possible misinterpretation. It also diminishes the possibility of thinking that Christ has risen before.

Langley and br. Koat write, "We do not in the least subscribe to Gootjes' notion that it seems 'to imply that Jesus Christ has risen before this.'" And further: "Besides, it is difficult to comprehend that this idea would ever find foothold in orthodox Reformed theology." The Committee has understanding for the reasoning presented, but is not persuaded. The change from "He arose again" to "He arose" has nothing to do with a short coming on the part of someone whose first language is not English.

The current committee is of the opinion that Dr. N.H. Gootjes made a very good point in trying to prevent possible misconceptions regarding Christ's rising from the dead. This is prudent and should be lauded. It is always best to waylay misunderstanding right from the start and prevent it from creeping in. That is what the powerful statement "He arose" does far better than "He arose again."

### ***"and sits at the right hand of the Father"***

Once again the report gives plenty of examples of which not all prove the point. Once again, the Committee is convinced that Synod Abbotsford's version is the preferred one.

The Church at Langley and br. Koat do not prove that the expression "sit *at* the right hand" lacks the idea of authority. To just mention expressions like 'sit *on* the bench', or 'sit *on* the Senate', or 'sit *on* the throne', and then deduce that only the translation 'sit *on* the right hand' conveys authority is overstating one's case.

Acts 7:56 relates that Stephen saw the Son of Man standing *at* the right hand of God. Lord's Day 19 of the Heidelberg Catechism has more than once been explained with reference to Solomon honouring his mother above all the others in his presence by having her sit *at* his right (1 Kings 1:19). In the Apostle's Creed we say that Christ sits *at* the right hand of God. So in the Lord's Supper form: let us lift up our hearts to where Christ is, *at* the right hand of God. The revised version is a definite improvement.

### ***"and He will come again..."***

In modern usage the verb "will" is correct. Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum note regarding 'will' and 'shall':

*Will* for future can be used in all persons throughout the English-speaking world, whereas *shall* (for 1st person) is largely restricted in this usage to southern BrE [British English] (*A University Grammar of English*, London: Longman, 1973, p. 47);

On page 54 they write:

*Shall* is, on the whole and especially outside BrE, an infrequent auxiliary with restricted use compared to *should*, *will*, and *would*; *will* is generally preferred, except in 1st person questions: Shall I ...?

***“with glory”***

The original Greek does not have “with glory” between commas.

***“who spoke through the prophets”***

The NIV translates Hebrews 1:1 as “through the prophets.”

***“and we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church”***

The Committee supports Langley's plea for the rendition “we believe *in* one holy catholic and apostolic church.”

***“We acknowledge one baptism...”***

This is the way the ‘old’ version of the Nicene Creed reads in the 1984 and 1993 editions of the *Book of Praise*. Therefore the committee did not recommend any change.

Langley's report contains a quote from a semanticist pertaining the use of ‘acknowledge’ in modern English. The Committee feels that his view of ‘acknowledge’ is a rather restricted one, and doubts whether it has the overriding connotation of reluctance as he suggests. A quote by the same semanticist about the word ‘confess’ in today's usage would have been helpful.

Synod 1995 was correct in maintaining “we acknowledge one baptism.”

Hopefully our comments will add to a constructive discussion. May our heavenly Father grant you wisdom and insight as you seek to serve the churches to the praise of His glory.

For the *Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise*,

C. van Halen-Faber, Secretary.

April 9, 1998

## APPENDIX 4:

# Report of the Board of Governors of The Theological College

Esteemed Brothers in the Lord,

The Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches hereby submits to your assembly, according to section 6.1 of the Canadian Reformed Theological College Act, 1981, a report of its work and decisions since May 1995.

In article 19 of the Church Order the churches have agreed to

... maintain an institution for the training for the ministry. The task of the professors of theology is to instruct the students of theology in those disciplines which have been entrusted to them, so that the churches may be provided with ministers of the Word who are able to fulfil the duties of their office ... .

The Board of Governors can report with thankfulness to the Lord that the work at the Theological College could continue without interruption during the past three years. The Board expresses thankfulness for the support of the churches in prayer and financial contributions. Special mention must be made of the support by the Australian churches. The Board reports with thankfulness that the instruction could continue without interruption and that the professors were faithful in their teaching. Also during the past three years the churches were provided with ministers of the Word. This is the purpose of maintaining a College and instructing students.

### **1. Board of Governors**

The Board of Governors met five times during the past term (Sept. 1995, Sept. 1996, Feb 1997, Sept. 1997, Nov. 1997). Copies of the minutes of these meetings will be available for Synod. The Academic Committee met three times (Sept.1995, Sept. 1996, Sept. 1997). The Property and Finance Committee met regularly as well and will submit its own report on its meetings to your assembly.

General Synod 1995 appointed the brs. R.Aasman, M.Kampen and J.VanderWoude, to the Board. These brothers signed the Declaration of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed



Churches in the first meeting they were present (Sept. 1995). The Board was saddened by the sudden death of one of the Governors, br. Adri VanEgmond. We remember with thankfulness the work he could do as Governor during the eight years he served on the Board and wish his family the comfort of the Lord. His passing away left a vacancy in the Board which your assembly will have to fill. In addition to this vacancy, the brs. VanSpronsen and Veldkamp will complete their term, as Governors. The Board expresses thankfulness for their dedication and participation in the work of the Board and the College. The Board submits a proposal to fill the two vacancies in the Property and Finance Committee. Your assembly will receive confidential information concerning the proposed appointments.

In summary, we report with thankfulness that the work of the Board could be done in brotherly harmony.

## **2. College**

### **2.1. Senate/Faculty**

The difference between the Senate and the Faculty is that the Senate consists of current professors as well as emeriti professors, whereas the Faculty consists of the professors in active service. In other words, the difference between the Faculty and Senate at this point of time is Dr.J.Faber. No small difference indeed. The Board is thankful that Dr.Faber is still involved in the work of the Senate. In 1997 Dr. Faber was minister of the Word for forty-five years. He and his wife also remembered their forty-fifth wedding anniversary in the same year. We are thankful for Dr.Faber's faithful service within the churches. We also wish him and his wife God's blessing.

The Board also wants to mention the passing away of Rev.G.VanDooren in September 1995. Rev.VanDooren had been lecturer for many years at the College. He instilled in many students the love for preaching the gospel and the pastoral work. As churches we can be thankful for what the Lord gave to the churches through this servant.

When we now move on to the Faculty, the Board can report that the professors were able to continue their work without serious problems. There were situations of illness, accidents or concern but it did not hinder their work. The Lord has given to the professors the health and strength necessary to fulfil their task. Each year the Board received a report from each professor outlining their course work.

The Board wants to convey to your assembly its appreciation for the dedication of the professors to their task. When one keeps in mind that our College has only four professors and has to cover in a scholarly manner the same subject areas as other Seminaries or Colleges then one realizes the heavy work load our professors have. We pray that the Lord may give them the wisdom and strength to continue their work. The Board comes to your assembly with a request regarding granting tenure.

On Oct.12, 1996 the College community could celebrate the 25th anniversary of Dr.C.Van Dam in the ministry of the Word. This was celebrated with an Open House in which many church members showed their appreciation. In the evening this joyful event was remembered by the college community. It was a very festive evening.

The professors are also involved in other activities. To give you some examples: Prof.J.Geertsema was asked to teach in Kampen in May 1997. Dr.C.Van Dam went to Mexico and taught at the Juan Calvino Seminary. Dr.J.DeJong attended the meeting of the Alliance and Synods of the United Reformed Churches. Dr.N.H.Gootjes was delegated by the churches to attend the ICRC in Korea. The professors always asked the Board for permission to be involved in these activities. Any change in the Series Lectionem is faithfully brought to the attention of the Board. The Board receives a report of these activities as well.

The Fall of 1996 saw a first in the history of the College. Dr. C.Van Dam received a half year sabbatical. He was replaced by Drs. G.Hagens of the Gereformeerde Kerk of De Bilt/Bilthoven. Dr.Van Dam reported to the Board on the work done during the sabbatical. The Board received this report with thankfulness. This report ends with this positive conclusion regarding the sabbatical policy:

"It stimulates the initiation of larger projects and allows more time to do systematic research and writing. In the long run, such work can only improve the teaching at the College and enhance the reputation of our College."

The Senate indicated to the Board that it regarded this first sabbatical a success. Currently plans are being made for a sabbatical for Prof. Geertsema.

General Synod Abbotsford appointed Dr.N.H.Gootjes as Principal. The transition took place after the Convocation of 1996. The Board thanks Prof.J.Geertsema for his work as Principal. The current Principal, Dr.Gootjes is present at all the meetings and the Board appreciates his input. His term will be completed in 1999. General Synod 1995 appointed Dr.J.DeJong as principal designate. At this time the Board proposes that the General Synod appoint Dr.DeJong as Principal for the period 1999-2002, with the transition to take place after the Convocation of 1999. The Board also proposes to appoint Dr. C.Van Dam as Principal designate for the years 2002-2005, the Lord willing.

## **2.2. Students**

Since the Board's report to Synod 1995 several students have entered as well as left the College. Currently fourteen students are enrolled. Twelve students graduated during the last three years, of which seven entered the ministry of the Word. With thankfulness the Board notes that the students could continue their work as well. All received the necessary health. The Board also reports with thankfulness that there is a good bond between professors and students. A number of students received support

from the Faber-Holwerda Fund during the past three years. In 1997 the Selles Book Award was awarded for the first time.

Over the last years the College has received requests for admission from students from foreign countries. At times these requests could not be met due to lack of funds on the part of the student. The Senate brought this matter to the attention of the Board and the Board is considering ways in which these students could be assisted.

We pray that under the blessing of the LORD the churches continue to endeavour that there be students of theology.

### **2.3. Visits to the Lectures**

According to By-Law 1, section 3.16 (b) it is the task of the Board upon the advice of the Academic Committee to exercise supervision over the confession, doctrine and life of the faculty, including temporary instructors and over the instruction they give at the College in order that everything may be barred from their teaching that is not in accordance with the Holy Scripture, the Confession and Church Order of the churches.

As part of fulfilling this task the Governors regularly visit the lectures. Two members of the Academic Committee visit in the Fall, and two other members in the Spring. They report on these visits to the Board. Usually these reports take very little time at the Board meetings. This is not because of lack of interest, but rather because the conclusions are always very positive. This is certainly a reason for thankfulness. In this report the Board wants to convey to your assembly its thankfulness for the instruction at the College. As visiting Governors we may witness the commitment of the professors to their task. The lectures are presented in a clear and scholarly fashion. The faithfulness to the Word of God and the Reformed Confession is clear as well. Hence it is for good reason that students from abroad are attracted to study at our College. We express our gratitude not to put the focus on people, but to give reason for thankfulness to the Lord for the work that takes place at the College. We pray that this may continue.

### **2.4. Visits to the Churches**

The College is maintained by and exists for the churches. To express and maintain this vital bond with the churches the professors regularly visit the churches in the West. In 1995 Prof.J.Geertsema visited the churches in Alberta/Manitoba. In 1996 Dr.J.DeJong visited the churches in Classis Pacific. In 1997 Dr.N.H.Gootjes went to Alberta/Manitoba again. The reports of these visits are positive.

## **3. Facilities**

In the reports of the Property and Finance Committee you will find more and detailed information concerning this point. In this report the Board will restrict itself to only a few items.

### **3.1. Library/Librarian**

The Library continues to grow. According to the Library report of June 9, 1997, which served at the Board meeting of September 1997 the following general information is given: "The library contains approximately 21,952 volumes in a variety of languages, including English, Dutch, German, French and Afrikaans. Areas of subject coverage include biblical study, biblical language study, biblical commentaries, dogmatics, ethics, diaconology, missiology, history and related fields. There is also a respectable rare book collection, with the oldest volumes dating from the sixteenth century. A number of these books have never been reprinted, and are therefore indispensable for the College."

Under the skillful direction of the Librarian sr. Margaret Van der Velde the cataloguing and automation continues steadily, resulting in a library that becomes more and more accessible. Initially sr. Van der Velde was hired to help with the change over of the cataloguing. Upon request of the Senate the Board has made her position permanent.

Due to the increasing need for expansion the Board comes to your assembly with a proposal.

### **3.2. Women's Savings Action**

One cannot speak about the Library, without mentioning the work and the contributions of the Women's Savings Action. Each year many sisters go out and gather "pennies" for the Library of the College. Each year Women's Savings Action presents the Principal of the College with a substantial cheque. The Board wants to express its thanks for this work and these contributions. If it were not for these contributions the College would be unable to acquire the necessary resources without raising the assessment.

### **3.3. Staff/Volunteers**

The Board wants to mention with thankfulness the work of the non-teaching staff at the College. Also because of their work the College continues to function smoothly. For many years sr. Catharine Mechelse has served the College as administrative assistant. The Board expresses its appreciation for her dedication.

The bond with the churches is also apparent in the many volunteers which help out in one way or another. To quote again from the report of the Librarian: "Volunteers continue to come in on a regular basis. Reshelving, accessioning, and labelling of the books are all tasks performed by volunteers, leaving the librarian more time to devote to other tasks. Several volunteers are very senior in age and their assistance is all the more appreciated."



## **4. Proposals**

### **4.1. Tenure**

In September 5, 1996 the Board decided:

"To ask General Synod 1998 to direct the Board of Governors to grant tenure to Prof.Dr.J.DeJong and Prof.Dr.N.H.Gootjes. According to past practice tenure should have been requested at Synod 1995. This did not happen due to an oversight of the Board of Governors."

The Board regrets this oversight and therefore brings this request to your assembly.

### **4.2. Certificate of Pastoral Proficiency**

Some years ago the Board send out a Questionnaire to Consistories and Ministers which dealt with the Program of Studies offered at the College. The Board received many valuable responses and suggestions. Several of them could be implemented without major changes to the curriculum.

Many consistories and ministers suggested to give more time and attention to the preparation for the practical work of a minister. In response the Board appointed a committee to study this and come with recommendations. General Synod 1995 was informed of this (Acts, Art.97 II.B.8). The result of this study was a proposal for a Certificate for Pastoral Proficiency. This proposal was sent to the churches for their input in the spring of 1997. Thirty churches responded. These responses showed a overwhelming support (approximately 90 %) for the proposal. The Board received some valuable suggestions as well. Some of these suggestions have been incorporated into the current proposal.

Given the overwhelming support by the churches the Board felt it was proper to bring this matter to your assembly. The proposal for a Pastoral Proficiency Program is the result of much discussion within the board and with the members of the Senate. The suggestions that came from the churches were discussed within the Board. Some were taken over, others not. The Board is well aware that this proposal is not the final word, but rather a start of something that the Board and, going by the responses, also the churches would like to see implemented.

Already in an early stage in considering this matter, the Board had to deal with the question whether this program should be integrated into the whole program at the College, or whether it should be placed within the jurisdiction of the churches e.g. by means of classical deputies. Though both positions may have positive elements it was felt that in the current situation neither one was a good solution. To integrate this program in the overall program at the College would cause difficulties for students from other churches that study at our College. It would also put an extra work load on the Faculty. If this program comes in the hands of classical deputies the whole program can be come a patchwork of practices and requirements. The question whether three months is sufficient was also



considered. This time period is not etched in stone. However, to make it longer will have serious financial consequences for the students. Although the task and responsibility of the coordinator has been spelled out, the Board realizes that this is only an outline. His remuneration has not been addressed either.

The Board is of the view that these are matters that will have to be looked at and evaluated as the program is put in place. Rather than continuing to discuss them, the Board feels that they can best be evaluated as the program is implemented. This even more so, because of the overwhelming support from the churches for such a program.

The Board also asks your attention for that fact that the Certificate proposed be considered part of the requirements for admission to the ministry as regulated by the Church Order, Art. 4B1.

### **4.3. Expansion**

General Synod 1995 considered the following:

With respect to the Theological College expansion proposal, it is proper that the Board of Governors approached Synod for a mandate regarding future expansion. Based on the evidence submitted by the Board of Governors regarding the growth and future needs of the library and other College functions, it is clear that an expansion of the College facilities is warranted. Considering that the submission of the proposal came late to the churches, the cost considerations are of a major concern to the churches, the proposals have incomplete cost estimates and it is not evident that the expansion is required immediately, it is therefore advisable that the Board of Governors study and prepare a more detailed and definite proposal. This proposal should indicate how this project can be financed from sources and means other than the regular assessment so that it does not unnecessarily burden the churches. A proposal should be submitted to the churches and the next Synod at least six months before the next Synod.

General Synod decided:

To direct the Board of Governors to study and prepare a more detailed and definite proposal for the expansion of College facilities, and seek the possibility of financing this project without increasing the assessment to the churches. A proposal should be submitted to the churches and the next Synod at least six months before the next Synod.

The Board comes to your assembly with a proposal for expansion of the College.

### **5. Recommendations:**

1. to receive this report and all its appendices.

*General Synod Fergus 1998*

2. to acknowledge the expiration of the term of office of the brs.C.VanSpronsen and K.Veldkamp as Governors with grateful acknowledgement of their labours, and pursuant to Section 5(2) of the Act and Section 3.04 of By-Law 1 (as amended)
  - a. to appoint, elect or re-appoint six active ministers to hold office until the next General Synod and to appoint at least three substitutes from each Regional Synod area;
  - b. to re-appoint the br.H.J.Sloots as Governor for a term from the date of his re-appointment until the first General Synod held after the date of his re-appointment;
  - c. to re-appoint brs.M.Kampen and J.VanderWoude as Governors for a term from the date of their re-appointment until the second General Synod held after the date of their re-appointment;
  - d. to appoint the brs.W.Oostdyk of Guelph and T.VanPopta from Langley as Governors for a term from the date of their appointment until the third General Synod held after the date of their appointment (with as alternate for W.Oostdyk, br. H.T.VanderVelde of Attercliffe and as alternate for br. VanPopta, br. W.Smouter of Ancaster).
3. to appoint Prof.Dr.J.DeJong as Principal for the period of September 1999 to September 2002, and to designate Prof.Dr.C.van Dam as Principal for the years 2002 to 2005, the Lord willing. The transfer of principalship will take place the day after the Convocation in 1999.
4. to approve all decisions and actions of the Board and of its committees for the years 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998 until the day of this report.
5. to express thankfulness for the support from the churches in Australia
6. to grant tenure to Dr.J.DeJong and Dr.N.H.Gootjes.
7. to adopt the proposal for a Certificate of Pastoral Proficiency program.
8. to adopt the proposal for expansion of the College facilities.
9. to consider the audited financial statements and the report of the Auditors for the previous fiscal periods; to relieve the Treasurer of the Board of all responsibilities for these fiscal periods; and to appoint sr. A.Spithoff C.A. as Auditor till next General Synod.

The Board informs you that if Synod needs more input in connection with the proposal for expansion, the chairman of the Finance and Property Committee, br. K.J.Veldkamp is willing to assist your assembly. With regard to the proposal for the Pastoral Proficiency Program the Board is confident that members of Synod who are also Governors can give the necessary information.

The Board presents this report to your assembly with the prayer that the Lord may give you the necessary wisdom.

*Appendix 4: Theological College*

For the Board of Governors,

R.Aasman

D.G.J.Agema - secretary

W.DenHollander

P.G.Feenstra

M.Kampen

H.J.Sloots - treasurer

K.Veldkamp - vice chairman

J.Visscher - chairman

C.VanSpronsen

J.VanderWoude

# APPENDIX 5:

## Report from the **Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad<sup>1</sup>**

Esteemed Brethren,

We hereby submit to you our report on the activities of the Committee on Relations With Churches Abroad (CRCA), appointed by General Synod 1995.

### **I. MANDATE**

General Synod Abbotsford 1995 gave our Committee the following mandate:

#### **A. General**

1. To continue the Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa in accordance with the adopted rules. (Acts 1995, Art. 19, V, B)

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<sup>1</sup> The report to Synod included the following Appendices:

1. FRCSA - Report of the Visit to the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa in April 1996.
2. ICRC - Press Release 1997.
3. ICRC - Report on the Fourth Meeting of the ICRC held in Seoul, Korea from Oct. 15 - 23, 1997.
4. RCUS - 1995 Report of the Committee to Study and Defend RCUS Polity.
5. RCUS - Minutes of the Meeting of the RCUS Interchurch Relations Committee and the Canadian Reformed Churches Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad, Oct. 18, 1995 in Spokane, WA.
6. RCUS - Report on Visit to the 250th Synod of the RCUS, May 21-23, 1996, in Eureka, SD.
7. RCUS - Letter from the 251 Synod inviting the Canadian Reformed Churches to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCUS.

2. To charge the CRCA to send an invitation to our sister churches abroad to attend the next General Synod as soon as its date has been established and published by the convening church and to have our churches represented by a delegate to General Synods of such churches abroad if invited and when feasible. (Acts 1995, Art. 19, V, D)

**B. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)**

3.1. to request the CRCA to convey our appreciation for the support given by the Free Reformed Churches in Australia to our Theological College in Hamilton.

3.2. to mandate the CRCA to solicit a response to our reservations about the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship adopted by the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. (Acts 1995, Art. 19, V, C, E)

**C. The Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK)**

4.1. to continue a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with . . . the Presbyterian Church in Korea in accordance with the adopted rules.

4.2. to mandate the CRCA to investigate the suggested exchange of professors between Hamilton and Pusan. (Acts 1995, Art. 101, II, C, 2, 3)

**D. The Free Church of Scotland (FCS)**

5. to continue a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland . . . in accordance with the adopted rules. (Acts 1995, Art. 101, II, C, 2)

**E. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN)**

6.1. to mandate the CRCA to discuss with the Dutch deputies, pursuant to our Rule Six, our questions concerning the blessing elder and its possible consequences regarding the distinction between the offices of elder and minister in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

6.2. to mandate the CRCA to seek clarification from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands concerning the use of the word 'inform' in Rule Three. (Acts 1995, Art. 19, F, G)

**F. The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)**

7.1. to continue the mandate regarding the Reformed Church in the United States to investigate the RCUS with a view to entering into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, making use of the findings of the church at Carman, MB.

7.2. to report on this to the churches at least six months prior to the next General Synod, and to the next General Synod. (Acts 1995, Art. 101, III, C, 1, 2)



### **G. The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)**

7.1. that the Canadian Reformed Churches continue to participate in the ICRC and report to Synod 1998 its findings and evaluation.

7.2. that the Canadian Reformed Churches be represented at the next meeting of the Conference scheduled to take place in Korea during the month of August in the year of our Lord 1997.

7.3. that Rev. C. VanSpronsen and Dr. N.H. Gootjes be sent as voting delegates. (Acts 1995, Art. 101, IV, C, 1, 2, 3)

### **H. Committee Mandate**

8. to give the CRCA the following mandate:

1. to investigate diligently all the requests received for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship;
2. to respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend Assemblies, Synods, or meeting of other churches;
3. to report on its findings with suitable recommendations to the next General Synod. (Acts 1995, Art. 101, VI, C, 1, 2, 3)

### **I. Finances**

9. Synod decided to adopt the following budget for the CRCA:

ICRC (fees)	2,500.00
Meeting of ICRC	3,000.00
Meeting RCUS	1,500.00
Miscellaneous	3,000.00
Total	\$10,000.00

### **II. RULES FOR ECCLESIASTICAL FELLOWSHIP**

The Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship read as follows:

1. The churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations.
2. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or Minutes and otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to the respective churches (if possible, in translation).
3. The churches shall consult each other when entering into relations with third parties.
4. The churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate.
5. The churches shall open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches.

In exercising these relations, the churches shall strive to implement also the following:

6. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or liturgy, the churches shall be informed in order that as much consultation can take place as possible before a final decision is taken.
7. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as much as local regulations permit." (Acts 1992, Art. 50, IV B, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)

### III. GENERAL ACTIVITIES

#### 1. Declarations

- a. The following ministers and professors of the Canadian Reformed Churches, planning to travel abroad, requested and received a declaration that they are ministers in good standing in the Churches:  
The Revs. K. Jonker and H. Versteeg and the Profs. J. Geertsema and N.H. Gootjes.
- b. The CRCA was also requested to grant a declaration to Candidate J. Plug with a view to his trip to the Netherlands.
- c. The CRCA was informed that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia had issued a declaration to the Rev. A. Veldman,

#### 2. Acts

When the Acts of General Synod Abbotsford 1995 were received, a sufficient number of copies was sent to those churches with which we maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

#### 3. Notifications and Invitations

Letters of notification and invitation were sent to the sister Churches regarding the convening of General Synod Fergus 1998. Copies of the Provisional Agenda were sent.

#### 4. Interim Information to the Churches

A number of articles have appeared in *Clarion* during the last couple of years informing the Churches of some of the activities of the CRCA. They are as follows:

- November 15, 1996, Rev.J. Moesker reported on his visit to the FRCSA;
- August 22 and September 5, 1997, Rev. K. Jonker reported on a visit he made on behalf of the CRCA to the 1996 General Assembly of the FCS.

In the Acts 1995 of Synod Abbotsford mention is made of a church in the federation that objects to the use of *Clarion* for making reports to the churches. In a consideration Synod agreed with this objection; however, Synod failed to come back to this matter in its Recommendation regarding the Mandate of the CRCA. As a result, the CRCA continued to make use of *Clarion* during the past years. If Synod 1998 wants the CRCA to communicate directly to the churches, it should realize that this will greatly increase the workload of the CRCA, as well as add to its expense. The CRCA would as a matter of course communicate directly with the churches if it needed to pass along sensitive material. Up until now, this has never been the case.

#### IV. THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA (FRCA)

##### 1. Correspondence

- a. After the Synod of 1995 met, the FRCA was informed about the decisions taken that pertained to them. Appreciation for their support of the Theological College was expressed. They were also asked to respond as yet to our reservations to one of their Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
- b. On March 13, 1996, the FRCA informed us about their forthcoming 1996 Synod of Kelmscott and invited us to send delegates.
- c. On June 21, 1996, the FRCA informed us that they had decided to terminate their membership in the ICRC. The main reason for this action was "the membership of the FRCA in the ICRC has not promoted harmony and unity in the churches." As a result of this decision, the FRCA withdrew its proposed constitutional amendment.
- d. On Sept. 24, 1996, the Deputies of the FRCA informed us that they questioned whether there was ever a Supplementary Report to Synod Lincoln 1992 in which comment is made about one of their Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. (A copy of this Report was located and sent to them.) They also sent us two copies of Synod Kelmscott and requested us to bring Article 89 to the attention of the Standing Committee on the Book of Praise. (This request was passed along to it.)
- e. On May 20, 1997, the Deputies of the FRCA responded to the reservations that Synod Lincoln 1992 originally expressed about one of their Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, which reads "the churches shall give account to each other concerning the establishing of relations with third parties." Synod had said about the words "give account" that they were "too intrusive, and it was never practised." The Deputies explain that in their opinion this wording "provide(s) details and grounds for the impending relationship that was to be entered into by our Sister Churches, and would then enable rule 1, 2, and 3 to be practised should that be deemed necessary by the

informed church." They also add that this rule was never intended to "lord it over" any sister church.

## **2. Acts of Synod Kelmescott 1996**

From the Acts we glean the following highlights:

- a. The following officers were elected: Chairman - Rev.W. Huizinga; Vice Chairman - Rev.A. Veldman; First Clerk - Elder B. Veenendaal; Second Clerk - Rev.C. Bouwman.
- b. Synod decided to continue sister relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, the Presbyterian Church in Korea, and the Reformed Churches of Indonesia (Sumba, Savu and Timor).
- c. It was decided to give permission to theological students to "speak an edifying word/preaching consent" under certain conditions.
- d. A proposal from the Church at Kelmescott to form three classes was not adopted.
- e. Synod declared its gratitude for the faithfulness that the Deputies found in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and decided to strive for sister relations with the RCNZ.

It was decided to discontinue the contacts with the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore seeing that there had been no improvements in the contacts.

With respect to the Reformed Churches of Timor and Savu, the Synod decided to work towards an eventual recommendation of sister relations.

Synod accepted the decision of the Reformed Churches of Australia wherein they acknowledged that their sister relations with the GKN(S) were "unjust, inconsequential and the express cause for lack of unity" but refrained from entering into official contact with the RCA because of current trends. It was decided to send a letter of appeal to the RCA.

- f. It was decided to continue to "recommend" the NKJV as the translation for use in the churches and to "recognise" the NIV as a faithful and reliable translation which may be used by the churches which prefer this translation.
- g. Synod decided to request the churches to contribute \$38.00 per communicant member per annum for the support of the Theological College in Hamilton. It also requested those churches who were supporting a theological student to provide details to the deputies in order that the burden is spread over all the churches. In addition, it was decided to look into the possibility of inviting guest lecturers from Hamilton.



- h. Synod was in favour of a change in the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons so that the charge to the Deacons now reads, "Encourage the congregation to do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith." The Canadian Reformed Churches were to be informed of this change since both federations use the *Book of Praise*.
- i. Synod decided to terminate membership in the ICRC, with the main reason being that "membership of the FRCA in the ICRC has not promoted harmony and unity in the churches."

### **3. Considerations**

- a. From the general correspondence and the Acts, we may conclude that the FRCA continue to be faithful to the Word of God, the Reformed confessions and the Church Order.
- b. It is reason for much thankfulness that the FRCA continue to be major supporters of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario.
- c. While respecting the decision of Synod Kelmscott 1996 to terminate the FRCA membership in the ICRC, it should remain our fervent hope that the Lord will restore harmony and unity to the FRCA, and that this will also make it possible for the FRCA to re-join the ICRC at a future date.
- d. Seeing that a response has been received from the Australian Deputies about their Rules and that the wording of their Rules do not hamper our mutual contact, this matter has been sufficiently addressed.

### **4. Recommendations**

Your Committee recommends that General Synod 1998 continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Furthermore, it recommends that the FRCA be thanked for their support of the Theological College.

## **V. THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN KOREA (PCK)**

### **1. Correspondence**

- a. On May 22, 1995, we were informed about the meeting of the 45th General Assembly in Kwangjoo City and invited to send a delegate. A letter of greeting and blessing was sent.
- b. On July 26, 1996, we were informed about the meeting of the 46th General Assembly in Pusan and invited to send a delegate. A letter of greeting was sent and the PCK was informed that finances were limited and that next year two delegates from the CanRC would be in Korea for the meeting of the ICRC.
- c. On Nov. 18, 1997, your Committee wrote to the PCK asking them to provide us on annual basis with an English summary of the decisions



of their General Assembly. This had been done in the past but perhaps due to a change in the make-up of their Committee it has been overlooked for the last three years.

## **2. Considerations**

- a. Although the CRCA receives regular letters of invitation to attend the General Assembly of the PCK, we have no longer been receiving an English summary of their decisions and activities. A letter has been sent asking them to revive the former practice.
- b. From the Acts of the sister churches in Australia and the Netherlands, as well as from the impressions received by your delegates to the ICRC in Seoul, it would appear that the PCK continues to conduct herself as a faithful Church of Jesus Christ.

## **3. Recommendations**

Your Committee recommends that General Synod 1998 continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Presbyterian Church in Korea. Furthermore, it recommends that every attempt be made to improve the communications between our respective churches.

## **VI. THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS (RCN)**

### **1. Correspondence**

- a. The CRCA wrote to the RCN on Nov. 11, 1995, and informed them about the decision of Synod Abbotsford 1995 to maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship. They were thanked for the presence of their two delegates at Synod 1995 and were asked to respond to two matters mentioned in the ACTS of 1995 about "the blessing elder" and about the word "inform" in their Rule Three of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
- b. On Dec. 1, 1995, the RCN informed us about the upcoming Synod of Berkel 1996 and invited the CRCA to send delegates. (They were informed that the CRCA would not be sending a delegate(s) to this Synod due to budgetary restraints.)
- c. On Sept. 18, 1996, the RCN sent us a copy of the decision of Synod Berkel 1996 regarding the Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil. They did so because of the mission work being done by the Canadian Reformed Churches in Brazil.
- d. On Sept. 27, 1996, the RCN informed us about decisions taken with respect to the Christian Reformed Church in North America. They also requested information about those churches that have left the CRC. (This last request was passed on to the Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity.)
- e. On Feb. 18, 1997, the RCN, through its Deputies, sent us copies of decisions made by Synod Berkel 1996 on the Canadian Reformed

Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Christian Reformed Churches, the Reformed Church in the United States, and the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

## **2. Acts of Synod Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996**

From the Acts we pass on the following highlights:

- a. Synod received 35 submissions with respect to the decision of Synod Ommen 1993 giving voting rights to women. Synod upheld the decision.
- b. Synod decided to study the procedure of classical examinations as Classis Kampen was burdened with an extraordinary work load since most of the students resided in churches in that classical region. For the time being it was decided that examinations should be conducted by the classis to which the church belonged that issued a student's attestation before he went to the Theological University. In order to be examined a student must also submit a certificate that he has completed a practical segment added to the training for the ministry.
- c. The Synod received many letters concerning the decision of Synod Ommen to permit elders to give the benediction. The decision Synod of Ommen was upheld.
- d. Much attention was paid to matters of liturgy. A variant of the "B Liturgy" was adopted which gives room for confession of sin and declaration of forgiveness early in the worship service. The law is then read after the preaching of the gospel. There is much activity to provide the churches with a greater selection of hymns.
- e. Synod approved an alternate Form to be used to solemnize a marriage. The notable difference in this form is that it has deleted reference the husband's obligation to work faithfully in his daily calling that he may support his family.
- f. Contact with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken is to be continued. Synod noted with thankfulness that the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken no longer speak of serious differences which would prove a hindrance on the way to ecclesiastical unity. Deputies have the mandate to also discuss the contacts the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken have with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken as well as the matter of the authority of Scripture.
- g. Synod decided to cease all official contact with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken especially in light the toleration of deviation from the reformed confessions in those churches.
- h. Synod adopted rules for contact with churches of another church federation at a local level. A local church must have the approbation of classis in such matters as mutual recognition as true church, access to the pulpit, and admission to one another Lord's Supper Celebration. Such decisions shall only be made when the churches involved are communicating on a national level and have both

declared that they wish to stand on the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions.

- i. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands continue to be very busy in their contact with churches abroad. Of particular interest are the following:

CanRC - Synod decided to maintain the sister church relationship. Particular attention is to be paid to developments of the relationship with the OPC and RCUS. Deputies were also mandated to consult with the CanRC in relationships with churches in those regions where CanRC are or where the CanRC are doing mission work.

OPC - Synod mandated the deputies to develop the existing relationship in close cooperation with the CanRC and the RCUS and to possibly propose to the next Synod the establishing of a sister church relationship.

CRC - Synod mandated the deputies to remain alert to developments in the CRCNA, and seek contact with churches that seceded from the CRC and the church federations formed by such churches.

RCUS - Deputies were instructed to inform the RCUS of the decision concerning the appeals with regard to women's voting since the RCUS indicated difficulties with the decision of Synod Ommen 1993.

IPB (IGREJA PRESBITERIANA DO BRASIL) - Deputies have come to know the IPB as a church of Christ which takes seriously her calling in the world. Synod decided to intensify contact with this church, to provide assistance in theological instruction and mission and or evangelization.

### **3. Considerations**

- a. The elimination in the alternate Form for Marriage of the husband's duty to be faithful in his daily calling to support his family and help those in need is not explained in the grounds. The deputies should be asked to give further information, since on the surface this suggests a shift in a long standing view of the task of the husband to provide for his family. Such a change needs more explanation.
- b. The Dutch sister churches continue to be very active in contact with churches abroad. The question should be posed as to whether the large number of contacts will make it difficult to exercise relations meaningfully according to the adopted rules. Further, the question should be asked whether it would not be better to leave contact with churches in other countries to be pursued by churches with whom they already have a sister church relationship in those countries.

### **4. Recommendations**

- a. Your Committee recommends that it be given a mandate to discuss with the Dutch Deputies matters pertaining to the alternate Form for

Marriage, as well as the development of a better strategy for pursuing relations with other churches.

- b. Your Committee recommends to General Synod 1998 that Ecclesiastical Fellowship be continued with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in accordance with the adopted Rules.

## VII. THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (FCS)

### 1. Correspondence

- a. On Nov. 11, 1995, the CRCA sent copies of the ACTS 1995 to the FCS.
- b. On Jan. 30, 1996, the FCS informed us that the 1996 General Assembly would meet in May and invited us to send a delegate.
- c. On May 9, 1996, we issued a credential to the Rev. K. Jonker to attend the General Assembly of the FCS as a delegate of the CanRC after he informed us that he would be in Scotland during that event. (The CRCA has long had a policy of deputizing ministers and professors if their trips abroad coincide with a major assembly of a sister church.) Rev. Jonker's report on this visit can be found in the August 22 and September 5, 1997, issues of *Clarion*.
- d. On Jan. 24, 1997 we were once again informed of the May meeting of the General Assembly and invited to send a delegate. (We informed them we were not in a position to send a delegated and extended the greetings and best wishes of the CanRC by mail.)

### 2. Acts of General Assembly 1995

From the Principal ACTS of the General Assembly we pass along the following:

- a. Due to the difficult financial position of the FCS a number of appointments could not be made and the Assembly agrees to delay them until such time as the financial position of the church has improved. It was also decided to appoint a Day of Humiliation and Prayer because of these difficulties.
- b. It was agreed to change the name of the Presbytery of Ontario and Western Canada to the Great Lakes and Western Canada Presbytery.
- c. The regulations regarding the Admission of Ministers and Probationers from other denomination or churches into the FCS were revised and clarified.
- d. The Assembly also approved a re-organization of the Board of the Free Church College.
- e. The General Assembly noted with regret that there is an "apparent lack of interest in arrangements for maintaining the Reformed tradition of Psalmody, especially among the next generation. They



invite Kirk Sessions to consider how they might stimulate such interest within their Congregations."

### 3. Acts of General Assembly 1996

From the Principal ACTS of the General Assembly we pass along the following:

- a. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was congratulated on her 70th birthday. The Assembly received a visit from Princess Anne as her Majesty's Commissioner.
- b. The Assembly appointed a new editor for *The Monthly Record* in the person of the Rev. I.D. Campbell and thanked the retiring editor, Mr. R.C. Christie.
- c. In response to the Report of the Committee on Public Questions, Religion and Morals, the Assembly spoke out again on a number of issues, among them being lotteries, homosexuality, care for the elderly.
- d. The same Committee was also mandated "to undertake a careful and full study of the teachings of Theonomy ... with particular reference to their relationship to the Confession of Faith."
- e. Seeing that he was visiting Scotland at that time, the Rev.K. Jonker of Winnipeg was deputized by the CRCA to represent the Canadian Reformed Churches at the General Assembly. He was very well received and his insightful report can be found in *Clarion*. (August 22, September 5, 1997).
- f. A number of decisions were made pertaining to the FCS mission fields in India, Peru and South Africa. It was also decided to continue the support for the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF).

### 4. Acts of General Assembly 1997

From the Principal ACTS of the General Assembly we pass along the following:

- a. It was decided that "the teachings commonly known as Theonomy or Reconstructionism contradict our subordinate standard, the Confession of Faith and are inconsistent with our supreme standard, the Bible, particularly on the question of the expiry of the judicial laws."
- b. Prof. A.I. Macleod, who occupied the Chair of Apologetics and Practical Theology at the Free Church College, asked to be released from his post seeing that he had received a call from the Free Elder Memorial Church in Leith. This was granted, and the Rev. Dr. D. MacDonald was appointed as his replacement.
- c. For some time now the FCS has been involved in a controversy regarding the person of Prof. D. Macleod. Apparently criminal charges were brought against him by persons unknown to us and this resulted in much unrest in the Church with members and ministers



taking sides. In the fall of 1996 Prof. Macleod was acquitted of all charges in the Sheriff Court. Steps were taken by this Assembly in an attempt to promote healing in the Free Church.

### **3. Considerations**

- a. From the general correspondence and the principal Acts of 1995, 1996, 1997, we may conclude that the FCS continues to be faithful to the Word of God and the Reformed confessions.
- b. From the Acts it also is evident that the FCS has been going through a very trying time in the matter relating to Prof. D. Macleod and that much healing needs to happen before the FCS will be restored to full unity.

### **4. Recommendations**

- a. Your Committee recommends that Ecclesiastical Fellowship be continued with the Free Church of Scotland under the adopted Rules.
- b. Your Committee recommends that it be charged to express the prayerful support of the Canadian Reformed Churches for the Free Church of Scotland as it enters into what will hopefully be a time of healing and reconciliation.

## **VIII. THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA (FRCSA)**

### **1. Correspondence**

- a. On May 30, 1995, the Deputies of the FRCSA sent us an update regarding developments in their churches. Mention was made of several ministers from the Dutch Reformed Church leaving and requesting membership in the FRCSA.
- b. On Oct. 1, 1995, we received an English summary of the Acts of the Synod of Johannesburg 1994.
- c. In early January of 1996 the Convener of the CRCA received a telephone call from the Secretary of the Deputies of the FRCSA requesting us to send a delegate to their next General Synod in April. Our Convener urged them to send us a letter repeating the request, which they did on Feb. 8, 1996. The CRCA weighed the request carefully and decided that because of the urgent nature of the request, as well as the changing situation in the FRCSA, it would be best to send a delegate. Rev.J. Moesker was appointed and the account of his visit can be found elsewhere in this report.
- d. On July 4, 1996, the Deputies sent us a letter expressing "deep appreciation and thankfulness" for the visit of the Rev.J.Moesker and his wife, Christina.

## **2. Acts of Synods 1995 and 1996**

### **a. Ad-Hoc Synods 1995**

- i. An Ad-Hoc Synod was convened in Capetown on May 26, 1995, for the purpose of dealing with the request of a brother to be admitted to the ministry of the Word according to Article 8 Church Order, and also to deal with a request by Rev. C.F. Heiberg (formerly minister in the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (DRCSA) to be admitted to the ministry in the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA).

The brother was examined, but Synod was not convinced that he possessed the exceptional gifts to be admitted to the ministry of the Word.

Rev. Heiberg delivered a sermon and was examined in dogmatics, symbolics and church polity. Synod decided to grant this brother eligibility for call within the federation, and he signed the Form of Subscription. After Synod, he accepted a call to the church of Johannesburg.

- ii. Another ad-hoc synod was convened on October 20, 1995, at Bethal. The purpose of this assembly was to consider the request of a congregation and its minister, Rev. P. Nel, to be admitted to the FRCSA. This church and its minister had separated from the DRCSA in Bethal due to liberal theology and practices. Synod decided to admit the church at Bethal to the federation. After examination in matters of doctrine, Synod decided to admit Rev. P. Nel as minister of the Word in the FRCSA. This church has since experienced steady growth.

### **b. Synod Capetown 1996**

- i. A Synod of the FRCSA met from August 6th to 9th, 1996. In his opening words, Rev. E. Viljoen of the church at Capetown mentioned that this was the first synod of the FRCSA where 4 churches (instead of 3) were represented. For the first time delegates of the church at Bethal were present. This church, together with Rev. P. Nel, had separated from the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (DRCSA) due to liberal theology and practices in that church and was accepted into the federation in 1995. Each church in the FRCSA sent three delegates to Synod. Three missionaries and one emeritus minister, the Rev. W. Boessenkool, were present as advisers.
- ii. A major item on the agenda was the peremptory examination of candidate D.M. Boersma, missionary-elect of the church of Pretoria. He successfully completed this

- examination, signed the Form of Subscription and was given best wishes for his work as missionary in Soshaghuve.
- iii. Mission work dominated much of the agenda. A number of churches in the Netherlands have agreed to support the expanding mission work carried out in the Pretoria and Capetown areas. Four mission deputies were appointed to maintain good contact between mission and supporting churches in the Netherlands. Deputies for Diaconology in Mission Churches also made an extensive report reflecting on the structure of the offices in the mission churches. The deputies explored the idea of an office of evangelist, and Synod instructed the deputies to look further into the office of evangelist in mission, paying attention to, among other things, the distinction between this office and that of minister and elder, the task description of such an office, the term of such an office, and the preparations needed to fill such an office. A report will be made to the next Synod.
  - iv. Synod instructed deputies for theological training to look into initiating theological training in South Africa, possibly supplementing training given at theological colleges within the country.
  - v. Synod also dealt with an extensive report of the Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA). Deputies reported on communication with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Synod decided to continue sister-church relations with these churches. Synod instructed the deputies to urge the Australian sister-churches to reconsider their withdrawal from the International Conference of Reformed Churches. Thankfulness was also expressed for personal contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches through the visit of Rev. J. Moesker in April 1996. He met with the deputies and visited all the churches, reporting on the situation of the churches in Canada. Synod also decided to continue the brotherly contact with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (RCSTS), and the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK).

Exploratory contact will be maintained with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the USA, the Igreja Reformada Colonia Brasolandia, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, the Eglise Reformee Confessante au Zaire, the Eglise Reformee Confessante au Benin, the Christian Reformed Fellowship in Kenya, and the Eglise Reformee du Quebec.

A successful African mission conference of ICRC churches was held in Capetown in 1995. The next African mission conference is scheduled for 1999, to be hosted by the Eglise

Reforme Confessante du Zaire in Lubumbashi. Synod decided to send a delegate to the 1997 ICRC conference in Korea, as it is important for a small church federation which is not large enough to maintain relations with many churches to maintain contacts via the ICRC. Synod also instructed deputies to study the Report on Theological Affirmation made to the ICRC in 1993, and to exchange ideas with sister churches concerning the recognition of other churches as "true churches" within the same country.

- vi. Deputies for Contact with Churches within South Africa (DCC) reported on their expanding work. There are numerous contacts with concerned members and ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (DRCSA), and the deputies were urged to continue to seek them out. Synod decided not to adopt a set protocol for churches or ministers who request to join the FRCSA, since every situation differs. Synod encouraged local contacts with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (RCSA) according to guidelines which have been drawn up by the DCC. This includes half-year reports to the KBK by churches holding talks. Contacts will also be maintained with the English Reformed Church in Randburg, the Free Reformed Church "the Door" in Pretoria, the Presbyterian and Reformed Church Monte Vista, and the Free Church in Southern Africa.
- vii. Synod discussed the uncertainty surrounding the use of the New Afrikaans Translation of the Bible, and confirmed its decision that only the Afrikaans Version of 1933 is suitable for official use in the churches. The New Afrikaans Translation will be further examined and any new developments in Bible translations will be closely followed by deputies Bible Translation.
- viii. It was decided to update the language of the church order, but not to change the articles to reflect the assemblies in the small FRCSA situation since the Church Order should represent the "normal" situation in a larger federation, and as such does not hinder the functioning of the present federation.
- ix. Synod decided to mandate the Deputies for Liturgical Music to establish guidelines so that the congregations can try hymns as to content and music. Such a guideline, together with a selection of new hymns, will be passed on to the churches.



**c. Ad-Hoc Synod 1997**

Another ad-hoc synod was convened on July 4, 1997. The following information is from a short report published in the Capetown church bulletin "Pro Ekklesia".

This synod dealt with two main matters. First, it examined Dr. H. Breytenbach, a minister who separated from the DRCSA due to liberal teachings in that church and joined the FRCSA. He was questioned about his convictions concerning Reformed doctrine and church polity. He also presented three sermons, one of which was delivered in the presence of synod. Synod decided to grant this brother eligibility for call within the churches. He would be given some time before a call for the purpose of studies at Kampen, the Netherlands, to orient himself in the liberated churches. He has since accepted a call to Capetown to take over the work of mission there from Rev. E.L. Van'tFoort who is repatriating to the Netherlands near the beginning of 1998.

The second matter dealt with by this synod was a report of Deputies for Theological Training which proposed a start to such training within the FRCSA commencing in 1998. Five instructors and five curators were appointed for this work. As of January 1st, 1998, the FRCSA will have its own theological college.

**d. Consideration**

From the Acts and correspondence received it is evident that the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa continue to govern their church life according to the Holy Scriptures, the subordinate confessions and the Church Order.

**e. Recommendation**

Your Committee recommends that Ecclesiastical Fellowship be continued with the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa under the adopted Rules.

**IX. THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES (ICRC)**

**1. Correspondence**

- a. On May 31, 1995, The Secretary of the ICRC, the Rev. M. van Beveren, sent us a report of the Committee on the Revision of the Constitution and Regulations of the ICRC. He also informed us that the Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America were applying for membership.
- b. On Oct. 19, 1995, the Secretary sent us a Newsletter dealing with the subjects and speakers at the Seoul, Korea meeting. We were



## *Appendix 5: Committee for Relations Abroad*

informed that the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands were applying for membership in the ICRC.

- c. On Oct. 7, 1996, the Secretary sent us another Newsletter in which he informed us that also the Reformed Church in East Africa, the Reformed Churches in New Zealand and the United Reformed Churches in North America were applying for membership.
- d. From April to September 1997, the Secretary sent us many documents in view of the ICRC meeting in Seoul, Korea for October 1997.

### **2. The Fourth Meeting of the ICRC in Seoul, South Korea, Oct. 15 - 23, 1997**

- a. For specific details of this meeting we refer you to the *Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches* (Oct. 15 - 23, 1997, in Seoul, South Korea).
- b. Delegated to this meeting were Dr. N.H. Gootjes and Rev. C. Van Spronsen. Rev. M. Van Beveren and br. H.A. Berends also attended as Corresponding Secretary and Treasurer, respectively. Only the delegates were paid directly by the Canadian Reformed Churches for their traveling expenses.
- c. Your delegates participated in the public discussions on the speeches and proposals. In addition, they had many private discussions with other delegates. They see this as valuable for mutual understanding, support and encouragement.
- d. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia withdrew their membership.

The following churches were received as new members:

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (North America);  
The Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands  
(Christelijk Gereformeerd);  
The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales;  
The Gereja Gereja Masehi Musyafir N.T.T. (Indonesia);  
The Reformed Churches of New Zealand;  
The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America;  
The United Reformed Churches in North America.

This brings the membership in the ICRC to 21.

- e. The budget for the next four years amounts to US\$ 119,000. The share for the Canadian Reformed Churches for this period amounts to US\$ 4,180.
- f. The next meeting of the Conference has been scheduled for 2001, to be held in the U.S.A. The hosting Church will be the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A.

### **3. Considerations**

- a. Your Delegates felt that membership and participation is a most worthwhile effort for the promotion of the church gathering work of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout the world. The main themes of the Conference that stood out were the matters of expressing our unity in the Lord and the execution of the great commission to preach the Gospel to all nations.
- b. Delegates felt that it is important for the participating churches to have discussions on topics of general interest. However, the days were mostly filled with sessions during which official business was dealt with and the papers were discussed. There was little time reserved for formal and informal meetings between delegates. We think that the value of the ICRC meetings could be increased by limiting the number of papers to four and by reserving more time on the agenda for the delegations to have meetings.
- c. The benefits of meeting member churches from all over the world are mutual. We can learn much from each other. We must also bear in mind the benefits for other, smaller churches, often living in great isolation, to be able to have a forum to share their experiences, to be encouraged in their work for the Lord and to stimulate each other to remain faithful to Scriptures and the Reformed confessions. It also urges us to seek closer fellowship at home with those Churches near to us with whom we share the same Reformed faith.

### **4. Recommendations**

- a. Your Committee recommends that the Canadian Reformed Churches continue to participate in the ICRC and that the CRCA submit a report to General Synod 2001 on the activities of the Conference, along with an evaluation.
- b. Your Committee asks for a mandate to recommend to the ICRC that the next meeting of the Conference limit its speeches to four and allow for more meeting time between delegations.
- c. Your Committee recommends that the CRCA be mandated to send a normal size delegation of two voting delegates and two advisors to the next meeting of the Conference to be held in the northern U.S.A.

## **X. THE REFORMED CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES (RCUS)**

### **1. Correspondence**

- a. On March 6, 1997, the CRCA received an invitation to attend the 251st Synod of the RCUS which would be meeting in Sacramento, CA. from May 19 - 22, 1997. The CRCA decided to send a delegate; however, because of other commitments none of the Committee members were available. Greetings and best wishes were extended to the Synod by means of the telephone through the good offices of

## *Appendix 5: Committee for Relations Abroad*

the Rev. Ron Potter, Chairman of the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the RCUS.

- b. On Oct. 20, 1997, the CRCA received a letter from the RCUS stating, "It is with great joy that I convey to you the formal action of the 251st Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States with respect to the Canadian Reformed Churches namely, to invite you to enter into a fraternal relationship (sister-church relationship) of ecclesiastical fellowship with us." (See the Appendices for this letter in its entirety).

### **2. Reports**

- a. From May 21 - 23, 1996, the Rev. C. VanSpronsen visited the 250th Synod of the RCUS (His report is included in the Appendices).
- b. On Oct. 18, 1995, Rev. E. Kampen, Elder A. Nap, and Rev. C. VanSpronsen met with representatives of the RCUS in Spokane, Washington (Their report is included in the Appendices).

### **3. Activities**

- a. The Committee has gratefully used the work done by the Church at Carman (See Acts Synod Lincoln 1992, pages 136-154).
- b. Since receiving a mandate with respect to the RCUS in 1992 it has:
  - 1. Studied the history, background, doctrinal standards and their maintenance, church government and practices of the RCUS (See Acts Synod Abbotsford 1995, pages 181-183 & Report of CRCA to Synod 1995, pages 27-32).
  - 2. Sent observers to Synods of the RCUS in 1993, 1994, and 1996.
  - 3. Been witness to a number of worship services.
- c. On Oct. 18, 1995, Rev. E. Kampen, br. A. Nap and Rev. C. Van Spronsen met with Rev. N. Hoeflinger, Rev. T. Jorgensen and Rev. N. Jones who represented the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the Synod of the RCUS. The minutes of this meeting are added as an appendix.
- d. Rev. C. Van Spronsen visited the 250th Synod of the RCUS, held May 21-23, 1996, in Eureka, S.D.

### **4. Developments**

Two items are worthy of note:

- a. Since the RCUS officially has adopted the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort, it was discussed whether the form for profession of faith should be modified to reflect that. It was noted that there was a desire "to be a more confessional church", with the result that the form will be modified to refer to the Three Forms of Unity. However, the required approbation by Classes was not received. The ground for this rejection is the belief that this would require more than the Scriptures do of a candidate for baptism and church membership.

(From communication received from Rev. Potter, Chairman RCUS Interchurch Relations)

The Synod of 1997 proposed the following wording for the first vow in the forms for Baptism of Adults, Confirmation and Profession of Faith: "Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testament, to be the inerrant and infallible Word of God, and its doctrine, summarized in the confession of this church, to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?" (1997 Abstract, p. 69, point 3) This will need to be ratified by the classes.

- b. The Inter-Church Relations Committee suggested a study of the possibility of establishing differing levels of fellowship as well as formulate guidelines and a philosophy of ecumenical relationships (Abstract 1996, p. 30). This was not adopted by the Synod (Abstract 1996, p. 70, # 18).

## 5. Evaluation

The Marks of the Church

- a. In article 29 of the Belgic Confession we confess that "[t]he true church is to be recognized by the following marks: It practices the pure preaching of the gospel. It maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them. It exercises church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head. Hereby the true church can certainly be known...." In order to ascertain whether we can enter into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with a federation, the RCUS must be evaluated according to these three marks.
- b. *Pure preaching of the Word.* Though there were only limited opportunities to hear the Word preached, the sermons which were heard reflected the preaching of the gospel of grace. Also in discussions it could be noted that there is a real desire to uphold the preaching of God's grace and flee all evidence of Arminianism. This desire to be reformed also is reinforced by the official adoption of the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort beside the Heidelberg Catechism. By means of these confessions the preaching is safeguarded further. Licentiates are required to subscribe to the following formula and undergo rigorous examinations:

"I hereby testify that I honestly and truly accept the doctrine of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession of Faith, and the Canons of Dort as in accordance with the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, and promise faithfully to preach and defend the same. I also declare and promise that I will carefully observe all the ordinances in accordance with the Word of God which now are, or may hereafter be enacted by the authorities of the Church, and that I will cheerfully submit to all the admonitions and decisions of these



authorities so long as I remain in connection with the Reformed Church in the United States." (article 22 of the Constitution)

Before a licentiate is ordained to the Gospel ministry he shall undergo trials. Trials for ordination for a candidate who has been licensed by the Classis shall consist of the following: (1) the evaluation of written and oral testimonials as to the candidate's satisfactory exercise of the gifts for the Gospel ministry; (2) an examination of any areas of weakness as evidenced in the candidate's licensure examination; (3) an examination, as the Classis may require, in the Confession and Constitution of the Church and the presentation of written discourses. If one-third of those voting in the Classis are dissatisfied with the examination, the candidate shall not be ordained but be required to undergo another examination at a future meeting of the Classis. A satisfactory vote of the majority on the second examination shall be sufficient for ordination. The report of the committee examining the candidate may report weaknesses and require further study in the weak areas. His progress is to be reported in his parochial report. (article 24 of the Constitution)

The respect for the preaching is also shown in the articles pertaining to worship.

ARTICLE 178. The essential parts of public worship are a call to worship, salutation, invocation, singing, prayer, reading of the Word, preaching a sermon, giving the offerings, the benediction, and the doxology. These elements of worship approved or recommended by the Synod shall be used in the regular Lord's Day service.

ARTICLE 179. Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost – and all days appointed by ecclesiastical or civil authority for fasting or thanksgiving -- may be duly respected and observed by congregations and families by attending public worship in their churches.

ARTICLE 180. The Lord's Day (Sunday) shall be kept a holy day, devoted to the public worship of the Lord, to reading the Holy Scriptures, to private devotions, and to works of love and mercy. Week-day meetings for prayer and daily family worship are also commended as important religious services.

- c. *Pure administration of the sacraments.* As we share the same confessions, we can conclude that the sacraments are understood scripturally. The following section of their constitution shows how they work out the confession concerning the sacraments.

ARTICLE 181. The sacraments of the Church instituted by Christ are two: Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

ARTICLE 182. Children are received into the Church by baptism and are subject to its care and discipline. As soon as they are old enough to learn the Catechism and to be benefited by the pastor's instruction, they shall become members of the catechetical class.



ARTICLE 183. A child shall be baptized if one of its parents is a member of the Church.

ARTICLE 184. The previous article shall not be so construed as to prevent persons who adopt orphans or other children into their families from bringing them to God for baptism and giving them the sign and seal of the covenant of grace.

ARTICLE 185. Adults shall be baptized if a minister has ascertained that they possess correct views of Christian doctrine, give evidence of true repentance and faith, and are willing to yield obedience to the requirements of Christ. But if in these respects the minister discovers deficiencies, he shall direct them to attend the usual catechetical instruction, and shall afterward proceed in relation to them as with other catechumens. If this, however, is impractical, he shall instruct them in some other suitable way.

ARTICLE 186. Baptism shall be administered publicly in the church, if possible. The forms provided in the liturgy of the Reformed Church in the United States shall be used.

ARTICLE 187. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper shall be observed publicly in every congregation at least twice a year, and the celebration conducted according to the established order of the Reformed Church in the United States.

ARTICLE 188. Every sermon based upon Scripture must necessarily conform to the spiritual meaning of the Lord's Supper; and unless the Spiritual Council has taken official disciplinary measures against a communicant member, he shall not be denied the privileges of attending the Lord's Table. In the congregational records the dates on which the holy communion has been administered and the names of the members who have communed shall be noted.

ARTICLE 189. Members, in good standing, of other congregations of the Reformed Church, and of other denominations holding the essential doctrines of the Gospel, should be invited to participate in the observance of this sacrament.

ARTICLE 190. The Lord's Supper shall be administered to the sick and infirm communicants who are not able to come to the house of God and who express a desire to receive the sacrament.

The point of admission to the Lord's Supper was discussed in the meeting held in Spokane. It was noted that here we have more a theoretical rather than a practical problem. Though there is divergence of practice in terms of admission of guests, we conclude that efforts are made to guard the table of the Lord and that the Sacraments are administered according to the Word of God.

- d. *Proper administration of discipline.* What follows is a sampling of some of the articles of their constitution dealing with the application of discipline:

*Appendix 5: Committee for Relations Abroad*

ARTICLE 112. Christian discipline is the exercise of that authority and the application of those laws which the Lord Jesus Christ has established in His Church, to preserve its purity and honor, and to promote the spiritual welfare of its members.

ARTICLE 113. An offense is anything in doctrine, principles, or practice of a church member, officer, or judicatory that is contrary to the Word of God: and nothing shall be admitted as matter of accusation or considered an offense which cannot be proved contrary to the Scriptures or to the regulations of the Church founded on them. The following sins especially merit discipline: heresy, schism, blasphemy, adultery, fornication, lascivious wantonness, theft, fraud, perjury, lying, contentiousness, intemperance, profanation of the Lord's Day, impudent scoffing, cruelty, and other violations of the Ten Commandments.

ARTICLE 114. Discipline shall be exercised in the form of admonition, censure, erasure of name, suspension, deposition, excommunication and restoration. The Spiritual Council shall inform the disciplined offender(s) of the right to appeal, the right to counsel, and the necessary procedures in filing an appeal.

ARTICLE 115. Should any of the lower judicatories pass an action of censure or reproof upon an individual or any part in the Church in their unavoidable absence, the Secretary or Stated Clerk of said judicatory shall give those concerned immediate notice of such action; and should they feel aggrieved by it, they shall have thirty days time from date of notice for giving notice of appeal to the officers of said judicatory, and thirty days further time for lodging their reasons for appeal.

ARTICLE 116. Every case in which there is a charge of offense against a church member or officer shall be known, in its original and appellate stages, as a judicial case. Every other case shall be known as a non judicial or administrative case.

ARTICLE 117. All members of the Church are subject to its government and discipline. If the unconfirmed fall into sinful ways, the pastor and elders shall remind the parents of their duty in regard to them, and shall also seek by direct approach to bring them to the obedience of Christ.

ARTICLE 118. Members of the Church who upon being convicted of an offense reject the admonition of the Spiritual Council or judicatory that found them guilty, or who have committed an act of public scandal, shall be suspended from the communion of the Church. Those thus suspended shall be treated not as enemies, but as erring brethren, and shall be admonished as such, in accordance with apostolic direction (2 Thess. 3:6-15). But if this suspension and these admonitions are ineffectual, offenders shall be excommunicated (Matt. 18:17). A suspension may or may not be announced publicly, at the discretion of the church judicatory that tried the case; a

sentence of excommunication, however, shall always be publicly pronounced.

ARTICLE 119. If a member is negligent in partaking of the Holy Communion, or refuses to contribute to the support of the Church, or continually absents himself from public worship, such conduct, in one or all of these requirements, shall be regarded as an offense against the Church, and he shall be admonished by the pastor or elders. If after admonition he continues in such negligence of duty, the Spiritual Council shall notify him that he is no longer in good and regular standing. If after not less than six months and not more than one year of such suspension he continues in such neglect of duty, the Spiritual Council shall erase his name.

If any member shall unite with another congregation of the Reformed Church or of another denomination without a certificate of dismissal, the Spiritual Council shall likewise erase his name.

When a member is erased, it shall be specified in the minutes of the Spiritual Council whether this action is administrative or judicial.

ARTICLE 120. If a minister, an elder or a deacon shall commit an offense that brings dishonor upon the Church or is punishable in the criminal courts, such a person shall upon trial and conviction by a church judicatory be removed from office; if an elder or a deacon, by the Spiritual Council; if a minister, by his Classis. In case a minister is involved in a grave public scandal, the Spiritual Council shall temporarily prevent him from exercising his ministerial function and refer him at once to his Classis for trial.

ARTICLE 121. If an ill report concerning the moral conduct of a minister, an elder or a deacon is in circulation, the Spiritual Council shall institute an immediate investigation and proceed as the interests of religion and as justice to the individual may require. If the Spiritual Council neglects to investigate ill reports concerning a minister, the Classis shall investigate them without waiting to be requested by the Spiritual Council. But if the Classis discovers that the Spiritual Council is already occupied with the case, it shall for a reasonable time await the result of the inquiry. A prosecution based on evil rumors shall not be instituted unless there is a specification of particular sin or sins and the rumors are generally circulated, permanent and not transient, and accompanied with strong presumption of truth (1 Tim. 5:19).

ARTICLE 122. If a pastor shall have been suspended or deposed from his ministerial office, the relation previously existing between him and his pastoral charge shall be dissolved and the charge declared vacant.

ARTICLE 123. If a minister accused of an offense shall refuse to appear, either in person or by counsel, after having been cited twice, he shall for his contumacy be suspended from his office; and if after another citation he refuses to appear, either in person or by counsel,

he shall be suspended from the communion of the Church, if the alleged offense warrants such suspension.

ARTICLE 124. An accusation in case of scandal shall not be heard unless presented within one year after the crime is alleged to have been committed, except it can be shown that insurmountable difficulties existed, which prevented the presentation of the accusation within that time.

It was acknowledged that there was weakness in actual application, but there was a desire to grow in faithfulness (see minutes of Spokane meeting). Though there are different practices (eg. Erasure), the articles of the Constitution show that effort is made to apply discipline according to the Scriptures both for doctrine and conduct.

## **6. The doctrine of the Church.**

The major concern in the findings of the Church at Carman was the functioning of the doctrine of the Church as this showed up especially in admission of visitors to the Lord's table, and in the way members could transfer to other denominations. For the benefit of all, the "Report of the Committee to Study and Defend RCUS Polity" as submitted to the RCUS Synod of 1995 has been appended. Obviously, this will remain an area of discussion in the Reformed Churches in general. As for the practical implications in terms of admission to the Lord's Supper, as can be noted in the Minutes of the Spokane meeting and is worthy of reiteration, this problem is more theoretical than practical. The RCUS does not practice open communion in terms of no restraints whatsoever.

## **7. Further Information**

### **a. Statistics (1996)**

- i. The RCUS consists of 38 churches and 3 chapels.
- ii. The RCUS has 40 Ministers on the roll of Synod, 97 Elders, 93 Deacons, 3 licentiates and 4 students under care.
- iii. The RCUS has 3185 communicant members, 1065 non communicant members (total: 4250) and 1676 families.

### **b. Ecclesiastical Relations**

The RCUS maintains Fraternal Relations with the following churches:

The Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)

The Reformed Confessing Church of Zaire

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

The RCUS is also a member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches and a member of NAPARC.



- c. The 251st Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States meeting from May 19 - 22, 1997 in Sacramento, CA., decided to send two observers to the 1998 General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

## **8. Recommendation**

In light of its investigation and contacts which show the RCUS to meet the marks of the true church, the Committee recommends that the Canadian Reformed Churches enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Church in the United States under the adopted rules.

## **XI. OTHER MATTERS**

### **A. The Lanka Reformed Church**

#### **1. Correspondence**

- a. On January 6, 1997, the CRCA received a letter, with enclosures, from the Lanka Reformed Church informing us about the history of this Church, its creedal basis and requesting money be sent for building rentals, ministerial stipends, and printing of materials. They also requested that missionaries and theological teachers be sent.
- b. On Feb. 25, 1997, the CRCA informed the Lanka Reformed Church that it had no funds at its disposal. More information was also requested from this church.
- c. On June 25, 1997, the Lanka Reformed Church asked us to send a copy of our Church Order, Liturgical Forms, Three Forms of Unity. They also mentioned that they had recently received a delegation from our Dutch sister churches. Finally, they requested permission to translate certain material into Sinhala and Tamil.
- d. On July 2, 1997, the CRCA sent a *Book of Praise* to Sri Lanka.
- e. On August 6, 1997, the CRCA received a letter from the Lanka Reformed Church supplying further information about the number of churches, pastors and members, as well as a list of urgent financial and material needs.
- f. During August and September, 1997, a considerable number of email messages have been received by the Convener of the CRCA. Some of these included attachments that could not be deciphered.

#### **2. Considerations**

- a. If Synod decides that there is merit to our new strategy as far as international contacts is concerned then it would stand to reason that the Lanka Reformed Church be referred to our sister churches in the area of Asia.
- b. Seeing that the Canadian Reformed Churches already have two sister churches in Asia, namely the Free Reformed Churches in



Australia and the Presbyterian Church in Korea, it would be possible to refer this church to them.

## **2. Recommendation**

The CRCA recommends to General Synod 1998 that the Lanka Reformed Church be advised to take up contact with the Free Reformed Churches in Australia and/or the Presbyterian Church in Korea.

### **B. The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council**

The CRCA regularly receives invitations to send observers to the meetings of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). Thus far we have always declined to do so. Furthermore, the CRCA, having studied the structure of NAPARC, as well having taken note of decisions made by that organization, sees no benefit to the Canadian Reformed Churches in sending observers. Unless instructed otherwise by General Synod 1998, the CRCA will maintain this policy of non-involvement.

### **C. The Foreign Mission Board of the Canadian Reformed Church at Toronto**

The Foreign Mission Board requested the advice of the CRCA regarding future contact with the Reformed Churches in Irian Jaya. Advice was given.

## **XII. STRATEGY FOR FUTURE CONTACTS**

### **a. Considerations**

For some time already the CRCA has been having internal discussions on the matter of how best to deal with requests to enter into new relationships with churches in different parts of the world. In this connection the request of the Lanka Reformed Church is but the latest in a series.

At the same time the CRCA has also been led to question whether it is possible for a small church federation such as ours to do justice to an ever-increasing number of relationships? How many relationships can we responsibly handle?

In addition, there is also the fact that the Canadian Reformed Churches have established Ecclesiastical Fellowship with churches in different parts of the world. As well, we are member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches which includes faithful Reformed churches in still more foreign countries.

To illustrate the current situation, we may point to the approach of one of our sister churches, namely the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN). They have relations and contacts with so many churches around the world that the question arises as to whether it is possible to stay abreast of all of these situations. As there is no indication that this

process will slow in the future, we can expect that even more churches will be added to their list of sister churches.

In addition, the RCN are also becoming more active in pursuing contacts in North America and have requested the CRCA to give them information on various church federations on this continent. These requests for information can only be with a view to gathering information and possibly establishing relations with these churches at a later date.

It has to be recognized that the RCN is much larger than the CanRC and thus has more resources, as well as manpower, to deal with this situation. It also has to be admitted that the CRCA has never received a mandate to object to the RCN establishing ties with churches on this continent.

Nevertheless, the fact of the matter is that this does make for a more complicated, even confusing, ecclesiastical scene. Why is the RCN so eager to expand its contacts in North America? Is this really necessary? Would the RCN look forward to receiving requests for information from the CanRC about the Christelijke Geremeerde Kerken and the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken?

From our perspective it would seem more realistic and responsible for the RCN to concentrate its efforts on establishing relations with faithful Reformed churches in its part of the world and for the CanRC to do the same in North and South America.

**b. Recommendations:**

In order that the Committee

- a. may have a more focused approach;
- b. be able to do greater justice to present and future relationships;
- c. make better use of manpower and resources;
- d. prevent overlap and possible disagreement between sister churches;

it is recommended that Synod mandate the Committee as follows:

- a. Whenever the CanRC receives new requests for entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CanRC priority will be given to churches located in the Americas, that is North and South America;
- b. Whenever the CRCA receives a new request from a church located in Africa, Asia or Europe to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CanRC, it shall direct that church to take up contact with one of the sister churches in that part of the world;
- c. Discussions be entered into with those churches with which we currently maintain Ecclesiastical Fellowship with a view to the merits of this strategy and to ask them to give serious consideration to adopting the same. For us as CanRC this would lead to new requests from Asia being directed towards the FRCA and the PCK, to new requests from Europe being directed to the FCS and the RCN,

and to new requests from Africa being directed to the FRCSA. Should a church be too small to deal with such request it could either request the assistance of neighbouring sister churches or of churches which are members of the ICRC.

### **XIII. RETIREMENTS AND APPOINTMENTS**

According to the retirement schedule adopted by Synod Abbotsford 1995, the terms of the following members of the CRCA have run their course: A. Nap, J. Visscher, and J. Vanderstoep. In addition, br. S.H. DeBoer has moved to the Maritimes and can also be considered as retired. In order to aid Synod in finding suitable replacements living in the Fraser Valley, the CRCA will send a separate letter to General Synod containing the names of possible replacements.

### **XIV. BUDGET 1998 - 2001**

The CRCA submits for your consideration and approval the following budget for the years 1998 - 2001.

ICRC (fees)	3,500.00
Meeting of ICRC 2001	1,000.00
Travel	2,500.00
Miscellaneous	3,000.00
Total	\$10,000.00

Respectfully submitted by your Committee,

Mr. H.A. Berends

Rev. E. Kampen

Rev. J. Moesker

Mr. A. Nap

Dr. J. Vanderstoep

Rev. C. VanSpronsen

Dr. J. Visscher (convener)

#### **List of Abbreviations:**

CanRC = Canadian Reformed Churches

CRCA = Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad

DRCSA = Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa

EPCI = Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland

ERCS = Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore

ERCZ = Confessing Reformed Church in Zaire

ERQ = Reformed Churches in Quebec

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FRCA = Free Reformed Churches in Australia  
FCS = Free Church of Scotland  
FRCNA = Free Reformed Churches of North America  
FRCP = Free Reformed Churches of the Philippines  
FRCSA = Free Reformed Churches in South Africa  
ICRC = International Conference of Reformed Churches  
LRC = Lanka Reformed Church  
NAPARC = North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council  
OPC = Orthodox Presbyterian Church  
PCEA = Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia  
PCK = Presbyterian Church in Korea  
RCA = Reformed Churches of Australia  
RCN = Reformed Churches in the Netherlands  
RCNZ = Reformed Church of New Zealand  
RCSA = Reformed Churches in South Africa  
RCSTS = Reformed Churches of Sumba-Timor-Savu  
RCUS = Reformed Church in the United States  
RCZ = Reformed Churches in Zaire  
RPCGA = Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly  
RPCI = Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

## APPENDIX 6:

# Report of the Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity

### A. MANDATE

The Deputies received the following mandate from Synod Abbotsford 1995:

Synod decide...

B. To re-appoint Deputies for the promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity to promote the unity of Reformed believers who have left the Christian Reformed Church, with the mandate:

1. to make their presence known for the purpose of information and consultation wherever necessary;
2. to make themselves available for advice on local developments;
3. to represent the churches, whenever invited, at assemblies or meetings held for the purpose of pursuing ecclesiastical unity;
4. to report on its activities to the churches and to the next General Synod. (Acts General Synod Abbotsford 1995, Art. 86 V.B)

### B. THE COMMITTEE AND ITS WORKINGS

As deputies we have enjoyed a good working relationship. Most of the work is done by correspondence, but some is also done by telephone and fax. So far communications have worked very well. We have decided as deputies that the local concerns in western Canada would be dealt with by western delegates, and that local issues (meetings, consultations, etc.) in eastern Canada would be covered by the eastern delegates.

In this connection we must mention the passing of one of our delegates, Rev. J.D. Wielenga, who was called home by the Lord on January 29, 1996. We remember with gratitude the work he did as a deputy. Even though this was a relatively short period, he did this work with all his heart, and offered much time and effort for this cause. We are thankful to have had the opportunity of working with him, and it is our hope and prayer that his efforts for church unity may not be fruitless.



As deputies appointed by Synod 1995, we have sought to build on the preliminary work done by the deputies appointed by Synod Lincoln 1992. For example, we have made use of the discussion paper *Pursuing Ecclesiastical Unity*, as drafted by the previous deputies. However, since this document was not adopted by General Synod 1995, we have not felt obliged to operate entirely within the parameters of this discussion paper. Our approach was somewhat eclectic, determined in part by the reaction of various churches to the "Discussion Paper" and Synod's considerations on this matter, (Acts, 1995, Art. 86 IV, p. 46).

## **C. ACTIVITIES**

### **1. Contact at meetings**

#### **a. Alliance of Reformed Churches, November 14-16, 1995, Lynwood, IL.**

Two committee members represented our churches at the meeting of the Alliance of Reformed Churches in November, 1995. They also stayed for the meeting of the independent churches which immediately followed the Alliance meeting. These were the churches desirous of federating as soon as possible. Rev. Den Hollander spoke a few words of greeting at the Alliance meeting, and this address was later published in *Clarion*, (see Appendix 1 for reports and speech). This was a positive visit, although it was evident at this meeting that the brothers were going to move ahead directly to the formation of their own federation.

#### **b. Constitutive Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America, October 1,2, 1996, Lynwood, IL.**

Upon contact with Rev. Jerome Julien, who at the time was the stated clerk of the Alliance of Reformed Churches, the committee decided to send a delegation of observers to the first Synod of the United Reformed Churches held on October 1, and 2, 1996, in Lynwood, IL. A report of the is meeting was published in *Clarion*, as well as the speech held by Dr. J. De Jong, see Appendices 2 and 3). There was a very positive atmosphere at this synod, and one could notice a strong desire to move ahead as a separate federation of churches. There are now three classes, one in the west, one in the midwest, and one in the east; however, growth has been so rapid that a new division may be required. The American churches have flocked in the classis mid-west, but since most of the growth in the past year has occurred there, future developments will no doubt include another one or two classical regions in the USA.

The federation has been in existence for almost a year, and as stated has experienced rapid growth. The next synod is scheduled to be held D.V. October 21, 1997 in St. Catharines, Ont., and we will be sending a delegation as observers to this synod. It is clear that this has become a period of consolidation and growth for the URCNA. Several churches have

## *Appendix 6: Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity*

joined since the formation of the federation, and several more are contemplating joining this new federation.

The founding synod also appointed an Inter-Church Relations Committee composed of two ministers and two elders. We have received a letter from this committee expressing the desire to pursue talks with us aimed at a growing understanding of each other's traditions and backgrounds. A reply was sent to this letter (February 1997), and we received another letter dated July 15. These letters, as well as the reports of the Inter-Church Relations Committee to the forthcoming synod of the URCNA indicate that much attention is being given to the contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches. We can only be grateful for these developments.

### **c. Synod of the United Reformed Churches, October 21-23, 1997, St. Catharines, ON.**

The second Synod of the United Reformed Churches was held in St. Catharines, Ont., from October 21 to October 23. For the most part, Rev. Den Hollander functioned as the fraternal delegate from the Canadian Reformed Churches, (see Appendices 7 and 8 for the report and speech). He was accompanied by brother H.T. Vandervelde for two sessions (afternoon) and one afternoon session by Dr. J. De Jong.

There are now 63 churches in the URCNA, with six classes. There has been rapid growth, especially in the US during the last year. Thus there is still much movement and flux in these churches.

This synod appointed a Committee for Ecumenical Relations with the mandate to pursue ecumenical relations with a number of Reformed and Presbyterian churches, including our own federation. While the Inter-Church Relations Committee in its report to synod gave considerable priority to the relation of the URC to the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Synod itself pursued a policy of treating all these churches equally. Thus, federative unity has become much more of a long term option than before.

### **d. Alliance of Reformed Churches, November 11-13, 1996, Holland, MI**

Dr. J. De Jong represented the churches at the meeting of the Alliance of Reformed Churches. A report on this meeting was published in *Clarion*, as well as the speech that was held there (see Appendix 4). This was a good visit, in which many contacts could be made, and many informal discussions could be held. The Committee feels that at present our contacts with the Alliance should continue, with the specific purpose of promoting federative unity.

### **e. Alliance of Reformed Churches, October 16 and 17, 1997, Kalamazoo, MI**

Rev. W. Den Hollander represented our churches at the 1997 meeting of the Alliance. The most notable decision of this assembly was to permit federations of churches to be members as well as local churches. This

would include federations from the Presbyterian tradition as well. It was also decided to use the ARC as a forum to discuss matters dividing Reformed and Presbyterian Churches. Rev. Den Hollander's report and speech at the Alliance is attached, (see Appendix 6).

## **2. Contacts by Correspondence**

### **a. Contact with former Independent Churches (URCNA).**

As mentioned above we have received an initial communication from the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the United Reformed Churches. Our aim is to pursue this contact initially by mail; however, we hope it will result in some further exploratory meetings between the two committees.

At the (oral) invitation of Rev. J. H. Gangar (Wellandport) a memorandum prepared by Dr. J. De Jong was sent to the committee on the church order appointed by the Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1994, (see Appendix 5). This memorandum was forwarded early in 1996 in order to provide comments on the proposed church order as it was being discussed among the Alliance churches. This church order was later provisionally adopted by the first synod of the United Reformed Churches. The Committee of Inter Church Relations of the United Reformed Churches has agreed to send us a copy of their church order once it has been definitely adopted (at synod 1997). We hope to continue the discussion on the points that were raised in 1996 in the further correspondence and possible meetings with this Committee of the URCNA.

### **b. Contact with Other Reformed groups seceding from the CRCNA**

In December 1996 we sent a letter of support and encouragement to the Inter-Classical Conference organizing Committee, based in Escondido, California. Many churches in the conference are considering a form of secession as one of the options they must pursue. Therefore, we felt it was a duty to reach out to them in the hope that this will lead to further contacts in the future. Since 1996, several of these churches have left the CRC and are contemplating or requesting to join the URCNA.

### **c. Contact with Other Churches**

We received a letter from a committee appointed by Classis East of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches. This letter was also addressed to the United Reformed Churches and Free Reformed Churches of the Ontario region. Although we believe this task should move to the level of committees appointed by synod, we still responded positively to this letter, and hope to send a delegate as observer to the next Classis East. We envision this as a doorway to initiate talks among like-minded churches on a local level, after which overtures can be presented to the various minor and major assemblies for the purpose of attaining federative unity.

**d. Local Contacts**

Several churches of our federation informed us of their work, and also asked for our advice in their discussions with independent churches. We received communications from the churches of Elora, Hamilton, Rockway, Toronto, Watford, and Winnipeg, as well as from a Committee of Classis Pacific of April 1995. A letter was also received from the Committee for Contact with the Churches Abroad re the attempts of the sister churches in Holland to pursue some contacts with those churches seceding from the CRCNA.

**D. DEPUTIES' ASSESSMENT**

On the whole we are thankful for the opportunities provided for us, and we can be positive about having made our presence known in the current ecclesiastical scene in both Canada and the US. Discussions at the public meetings indicated quite clearly that the Canadian and American Reformed Churches are known as a group of churches that desire ecumenicity on a solid Reformed basis. The very fact that we are introducing ourselves and our background to believers seceding from the CRCNA is a positive step. Many people are hardly aware of our existence, and if they are, they attach no direct significance to us, since their perspectives are clouded with misconceptions regarding what we stand for.

We were very encouraged by the most recent exchange with the Committee of Inter-Church Relations of the URCNA. From this correspondence it is obvious that they place considerable importance on continuing their relations with us, with a view to establishing federative unity. We feel it is our duty to examine carefully their new church order, isolate our differences, and carry on the discussion concerning these differences.

The position of the most recent synod, on the other hand, was less encouraging. It did not give a clear endorsement to the Committee's approach to the Canadian Reformed Churches, and concentrated on the establishment of fraternal relations with twelve other national and foreign church federations. This implies that the specific goal of federative unity with Reformed churches of a more immediate range and historical background has been let go in favour of a broader policy on ecumenical relations.

With regard to the latest developments in the Alliance of Reformed Churches, we do not feel that it falls within the scope of the original mandate given to the deputies to be a part of an organization designed to discuss issues that divide Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. Therefore we do not feel that as deputies we have an integral role to fulfil in this situation. However, given the fact that there are still several churches among the Alliance that remain unfederated, and that the involvement of the Canadian Reformed Churches is most sincerely appreciated, we feel that a more restricted involvement, particularly with regard to the churches that are still independent, should be maintained, if only to continue to let obligation to church unity be voiced.



## **E. SUGGESTIONS AND REQUESTS**

Despite slow progress, we are convinced that this work must continue, if only to show to the contemporary ecclesiastical world in Reformed North America that we are dedicated to the principles of Reformed ecumenicity, and that this is a vision that ought to be shared by all Reformed churches, especially those sharing our background and heritage. This is another avenue for us to heed the call of Christ who died for His church, that also through our voice, His sheep may be one, as He calls them to be, (John 17:21). Our efforts are modest, but if they are done in the conviction of love and service to God then we may be sure of God's blessing even in ways we least expect. Therefore we believe the Deputies' mandate should be renewed with the following additions and/or modifications:

1. that deputies be instructed to pursue continued fraternal dialogue with the United Reformed Churches of North America with a view towards establishing federative unity.
2. that deputies pursue a more restricted involvement in the Alliance of Reformed Churches with a view to pursuing federative unity with unfederated (independent) Reformed Churches.
3. that deputies represent the churches (when invited) at meetings of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, with a view to promoting greater understanding and exploring possibilities of federative unity.
4. that a new deputy be appointed from western Canada to fill the vacancy among the Deputies created by the loss of Rev. J. Wielenga.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. R. Aasman

Dr. J. De Jong

Rev. W. Den Hollander

Elder P. Van Woudenberg

Elder H.T. Vandervelde



## APPENDIX 7:

# Report of the Committee for Contact with L'Église Réformée du Québec

### 1. Introduction

Esteemed Brothers

The Committee for Contact with *l'église réformée du Québec* [hereafter l'ERQ], appointed by Synod 1995, submits the following report in order to fulfill its mandate.

### 2. Mandate / Membership

#### 2.1 *Mandate: General Synod Abbotsford 1995*<sup>1</sup>

General Synod Abbotsford 1995 gave this committee the following mandate:

1. To discuss with the deputies of the Église Réformée du Québec the differences in Confession, Church Polity and worship which exist between our two federations;
2. To discuss with their deputies their relations with the Christian Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church in America, and evaluate them;
3. To further investigate whether it is possible to have the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Église Réformée du Québec as part of the same federation;
4. To make use of the report submitted by the church at Ottawa and Classis Ontario North;
5. To keep the churches informed about the Église Réformée du Québec so that their financial needs and other needs as missionary churches can be responded to in a positive manner;
6. To serve Synod 1998 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.

#### 2.2 *Membership of the Committee*

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<sup>1</sup> *Acts of Synod 1995, Article 73 IV D*

Synod 1995 appointed the following brothers to the Committee: Revs. G.H. Visscher (convener) and J.L. Van Popta, Brs. J. Boot and W. Oostdyk.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Meetings of the Committee

Your committee has met 9 times since Synod 1995; 3 other meetings were held with l'ERQ's Committee for Inter-Church Relations (CICR).<sup>3</sup> The four appointed members attended all the meetings. To facilitate our evaluation of the material, one visit was made to Quebec City by the whole committee in May of 1996. Two members of the committee attended an ERQ Synod as well. The committee also assisted the Home Missions Committee of l'ERQ to make contact with the Toronto Board of Foreign Mission to discuss possibilities for mission work in Quebec.

### 4. Overview of the Committee's Activity

#### 4.1 Mandate 1: Differences in Confessions, Polity and Worship

##### 4.1.1 Confessions

The committee examined the historical position of the Canadian Reformed Churches with respect to the Westminster Standards.<sup>4</sup> Since the churches have judged that the Westminster Standards in themselves are not a barrier to ecclesiastical fellowship,<sup>5</sup> the committee examined where there might be deviation from or changes to the Westminster Standards and evaluated these.

##### 4.1.2 Polity

The committee used the Church Order and Discipline (ODE) of l'ERQ as presented to Synod 1995 in the appendices of the overture concerning l'ERQ.<sup>6</sup> The content and structure of the ODE was compared to the Church Order of Dort (CO) as revised and adopted by the Canadian Reformed Churches [CDNRC].

##### 4.1.3 Worship

The committee evaluated differences in worship, discussing with the CICR the order of worship in various congregations in Quebec.

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<sup>2</sup> *Acts of Synod 1995*, Article 118 VI.

<sup>3</sup> This committee was originally the Committee for Contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches but was renamed and given a new and broader mandate in the Spring of 1997.

<sup>4</sup> *Acta van de Generale Synode Edmonton, 1965. Report on a Possible Approach of the OPC: Historical Section.* (pg. 89-90)

<sup>5</sup> *Acts of General Synod, 1986*, pg. 146 ff; *Acts of General Synod 1995*, pg. 72.

<sup>6</sup> The ODE was translated by James Dykstra (Canadian Reformed, Edmonton) and Paulin Bédard the primary author of the original document (and member of the ERQ Committee for Inter-Church Relations). It can be found as "Appendix 1" of this report.

Committee members attended church services in l'ERQ on various occasions.

#### 4.2 Mandate 2: Relations with other Churches

The committee inquired about the extent of l'ERQ's relationships with other federations and evaluated these contacts.

#### 4.3 Mandate 3: Federational Unity

The committee discussed at length the possibility of federational unity between the CNDRCs and l'ERQ.

#### 4.4 Mandate 4: Use of Available Material

The committee has made extensive use of the overture prepared by the Church of Ottawa and submitted to Synod 1995 by Classis Ontario North, Dec. 1994.

#### 4.5 Mandate 5: Communication

Twice, letters to the churches were mailed out informing the consistories of the activities of the committee. As well, a press release was placed in *Clarion* in Jan. 1997 at the midpoint of our mandate. Requests for information by various consistories were answered by the secretary. Other requests by church members concerning l'ERQ were also answered. The committee assisted the *Fund Raising and Newsletter Committee* of l'ERQ to communicate to the CDNRCs concerning the work in Quebec. The committee also explored the possibility of l'ERQ placing regular reports in *Clarion*. This may be implemented in the near future.

#### 4.6 Mandate 6: This Report

This report is submitted in fulfillment of mandate 6.

### 5. Discussion and Evaluation of Differences

#### 5.1 Differences in Confessions, Polity and Worship [Mandate 1]

##### 5.1.1 Confessions

##### 5.1.1.1 Documents

L'ERQ bases its faith on the revealed word of God as it is found in the Old and New Testaments. It alone is received as the infallible and inspired Word. It officially recognizes the great ecumenical creeds: The Apostles' Creed, The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Athanasian Creed. The Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession of Faith have been officially adopted as confessional statements. All office bearers must subscribe to these confessions. These confessions have been translated into French by a joint Dutch-French project. It did not seem wise to spend many hundreds of dollars purchasing and mailing copies of these French language documents to all the churches but they have been made available by l'ERQ. L'ERQ has adopted French language translations based on the original 16th and 17th century documents.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Original German and Latin versions of the Heidelberg Catechism can be found in J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink. *De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften*.

Other confessions of the Reformation such as the Confession of La Rochelle, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort are also used by l'ERQ and recognized as faithfully Reformed, though they do not have official status as binding confessional documents.

#### 5.1.1.2 Preamble to the Westminster Confession

The following preamble to the WCF was added by the founding synod of l'ERQ in August 1988.

L'église réformée du Québec subscribes to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (published by Éditions Kerygma, Aix-en-Provence, 1988, also by the Revue, No. 153-1988/1 p. 1-64).

However:

1. We allow freedom of conscience in relation to articles XXIII.3 and XXXI.2 concerning the place of the political government in the life of the church, and in relation to article XXIV.4 concerning marriages with consanguinity.
2. We accept the sections XXX and XXXI as far as they agree with the church order of l'église réformée du Québec.
3. In these times of questioning the traditional rest from commercial activity in our society, we reiterate the value and correctness of consecrating the Sunday to the Lord. However, we allow freedom of conscience in relation to the occupations and duties to be accomplished in section XXI.8.
4. We remember the historical context in which this confession has been originally written as well as the controversies of those times, so that we can attenuate some hurting expressions in parts of articles XXII.7, XXIV.3, XXV.6, XXIX.2, XXIX.6.
5. We consider that in article XVIII.3, "*développer l'assurance*" (develop the assurance) or "*affermir*" (strengthen) would be a better translation of "make sure" than the word "*assurer*" that might imply a salvation by works.
6. We consider that in article XXIV.5, "*fiançailles*" (engagement) would be more appropriate in our context than "promise of marriage."

#### 5.1.1.3 Evaluation of Preamble

It is important to note that l'ERQ has adopted already translated and published documents. They do not have the time, energy or manpower at this time to translate their confessions anew from English and German.<sup>8</sup> This preamble suffices to address what l'ERQ perceives to be the major

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Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1976; The Westminster Confession (without the American changes) can be found in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: Vol. III, The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*. New York: Harper & Bros, 1919.

<sup>8</sup> The Canadian Reformed Churches did this as well, adopting the Three Forms of Unity and the liturgical forms of the CRC, while at the same time working on new translations.



weaknesses in the original document and how they function in the North American context. Your committee evaluated each of the points in *The Preamble* and came to the following conclusions.

5.1.1.3.1 Political Government

Article XXIII.3 reads, "The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and Sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven: yet he hath authority, and it is his duty to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God."

Article XXXI.2 reads, "As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers and other fit persons to consult and advise with about matters of religion; so if magistrates be open enemies to the church, the ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons, upon delegation from their church may meet together in such assemblies."

*The Preamble* allows freedom of conscience on these matters. In other words, I'ERQ does not hold as confessionally binding the Westminster Confession's statements which allow for state interference in matters of the church. This is similar to the bracketing of a certain part of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession concerning the role of the state in relation to the church. Here where the Westminster Confession allows for the civil magistrate to call synods and attend them, I'ERQ follows the lead of American Presbyterianism. Your committee recommended to I'ERQ that they might want to examine the changes in the American revision that reflect the clearer separation of church and state.

Article XXIV.4, concerning marriages with consanguinity, is left to the regulation of the state.

5.1.1.3.2 Church Government

Articles XXX and XXXI concern *church censures* and *synods and councils*. These matters are laid out carefully in the ODE. *The Preamble* states that here the church order has priority, especially in the matter of the role of the state in calling synods and councils.

5.1.1.3.3 Sunday Observance

The Westminster Confession in XXI.8 states concerning the Lord's Day:

This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts, about their worldly employments



and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

*The Preamble* allows freedom of conscience in the matter that "men... are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy." In discussions with the CICR it was made clear that L'ERQ holds to a high view of consecrating the Lord's Day, but that it also allows for Christian freedom in how this consecration might be exercised by church members. L'ERQ allows, as the CDNRCs do, certain freedom concerning words, thoughts and recreations on the Lord's Day.

#### 5.1.1.3.4 Hurting Expressions

*The Preamble* does not bind the conscience to some of the polemical expressions as found in the Westminster Confession.<sup>9</sup> This is similar to changes made by the CDNRCs in the Belgic Confession concerning the Anabaptists in Articles 34 and 36.<sup>10</sup>

#### 5.1.1.3.5 "Make sure"

*The Preamble* disputes the translation of a word and would prefer one which would indicate more strongly that the assurance of salvation is not salvation by works. This change only strengthens the Reformed position of *sola gratia*.

#### 5.1.1.3.6 Contract of Marriage

*The Preamble* brings the matter of pre-nuptial agreements into the modern setting and so makes the confession much more relevant to the lives of church members.

#### 5.1.1.4 Summary

Noting that as early as Synod 1965<sup>11</sup> the churches have considered and judged that a church federation maintaining Presbyterian church government and subscribing to and upholding the Westminster Standards would be a product of the Calvinist Reformation and a true church of the Lord, your committee only evaluated mandate 1(a) in reference to *The Preamble*. Since the Canadian Reformed Churches are in ecclesiastical fellowship with various "Westminster" churches already, the committee did not discuss the differences between the Westminster Standards and the Forms of Unity. It should be noted that L'ERQ also adheres to the

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<sup>9</sup> At certain places in the WCF very strong language is used. For example in 24.3 the WCF speaks of "infidels, Papists, or other idolaters..." In the 25.4 Pope is called "the Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition...."

<sup>10</sup> The Belgic Confession previously read in Art 34, "Therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists..." It now reads, "...for that reason we reject the error of the Anabaptists." In the past we confessed in Art 36, "Wherefore we detest the Anabaptists and other seditious people..." This has now been changed to, "For that reason we condemn the Anabaptists and other rebellious people...."

<sup>11</sup> Acts of Synod 1965 pp. 30, 89

Heidelberg Catechism, and in its church order accepts the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort as Reformed confessions.

When the committee examined, discussed and evaluated the disclaimers as presented in *The Preamble* it found nothing that it would consider to be a matter for further discussion. These changes could easily be accepted if and when l'ERQ would translate the WCF into French for use in this modern Canadian setting. The difficulty lies in that they need to use already published documents which were translated outside of their Canadian context and without their input.

*The Preamble* also clearly shows that l'ERQ wants her adopted confessional standards to function in the life of the churches and its members. The preamble allows for freedom of conscience on certain matters. By inference then, the confessions are binding on all other matters. The care in which the contents are examined for doctrinal fidelity demonstrates that subscription to the Confessions is taken seriously.

Your committee judges that on the basis of her confessional documents and their maintenance, relations with l'ERQ can and should be established.

#### 5.1.2 Church Polity

L'ERQ has written, developed and adopted a church order, based on Biblical principles, called *Ordre et Discipline Ecclesiastiques de l'Église Réformée du Québec* [ODE]. This document has been translated by James Dykstra of the Edmonton Providence CDNRC in cooperation with the deputies of l'ERQ. Every chapter is headed by scripture proof texts displaying the clear understanding that the Lord desires that his church not be lacking in structure and organization and that all things be done decently and in good order. The basic principles that function are these: Jesus Christ alone is Head of the church and no one else has the right to take this position; the Bible is the only rule for the life of the church; other rules established by the church may be useful and important, but must always be evaluated, and if necessary, reformed in the light of scripture.

##### 5.1.2.1 The Offices

L'ERQ recognizes three offices: elder, minister of the Word, and deacon. Elders are called and ordained to guide the local church according to the scripture. They form, with the minister of the Word, the local council. To form this council there must be at least two elders and the pastor.<sup>12</sup> The council supervises the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments as well as Christian education in the congregation. It also administers the church's business. This council has the right and duty to pass judgment and exercise discipline in the name of Jesus Christ. Elders provide pastoral aid and direction to the church members. They are elected by the local church and are ordained after an exam by the Synod and with its approval. Elders in l'ERQ are ordained to serve for life.

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<sup>12</sup> The ODE 4.2.2 allows for a council of two in extraordinary circumstances, but only with the approval of synod.

Deacons are called and ordained for service to the local church and to the outside world. As with the elders, deacons also are ordained for life. Through their ministry, Christ's love is shown and made visible particularly to the poor and needy and also to those suffering materially, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Deacons must be examples to the church, stimulating each member to commit themselves faithfully to service in the church. Deacons are chosen and ordained by the local church. The ODE does not specifically forbid the ordination of women to the office of deacon<sup>13</sup> as it does for the office of elder and of minister of the Word, however, the deacons do not make up part of the ruling council of the church but work in the ministry of mercy under the supervision and direction of the council.

The ministers of the Word are dedicated to studying and teaching God's word and to prayer. The ministers are of two kinds: evangelist and pastor.

An evangelist is a minister of the Word in a local church, called to this task by that church, fulfilling his ministry under the supervision of the synod. The principle task of an evangelist is to form and organize new local churches. He must be able to evangelize by preaching and teaching the Word, to administer the sacraments, to provide basic training in Christian doctrine, also for children, and to carefully and competently manage the affairs of the new church.

The pastor is also a minister of the Word in a local church. His main duty lies in the edification of the already established local church. He must preach and teach the Word of God, administer the sacraments, and lead in public prayer. With the local council, he supervises the doctrine and life of the members of the church and manages the affairs of the church.

Within the present context some of the pastors are engaged in "tent-making ministry" in which they hold down part-time employment besides their congregational work. This is because of financial necessity, not a matter of principle or preference. This financial need has been communicated to the CDNRCs who have in turn generously provided funds for the work in Quebec. The CICR notes this generosity with gratitude to the Lord.

#### 5.1.2.2 Differences

The differences in church polity are complex. L'ERQ has drafted its own church order. However, having examined this church order, your committee concludes that it is one which reflects a deep reverence for the role of the Word of God in prescribing church government. A Reformed church polity shines throughout the ODE.

Though some weaknesses can be pointed out, the ODE admirably displays the principles articulated in par. 3 of the introduction: "In submission to the rule of scripture: 'Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way' (1 Cor. 14: 40) we clearly articulate the Biblical principles for this church and we establish the following ecclesiastical order and

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<sup>13</sup> See 5.1.2.3 below

discipline." Throughout, the ODE presents scripture references to buttress its position. Considering that the ODE is a new work for a new church federation l'ERQ can be commended for its work. We should also note that the ODE says in its *Preamble*

The ecclesiastical order and discipline of the Reformed Church of Quebec are formulated to most effectively serve God in obedience to his will. Their formulation aims to assure a great degree of liberty to the congregations and to their members; liberty which rests on the acceptance of a common discipline. Therefore this formulation is subject to modification in the future if the situation of the Reformed Church of Quebec requires it....<sup>14</sup>

#### 5.1.2.3 Deaconesses

As noted above, the ODE does not specifically forbid the ordination of women to the office of deacon as it does for the office of elder and of minister of the Word. The deacons, however, are not part of the ruling council of the church, but work in the ministry of mercy under the supervision and direction of that council.<sup>15</sup>

#### 5.1.2.4 Summary

Having examined, discussed and evaluated the differences in church polity, your committee considers that these should be judged to be within the parameters of the "minor points of church order," (CO Article 50) and on the basis of these differences l'ERQ should not be rejected.

#### 5.1.3 Worship / Praxis

As in the CNDRCs, there is no officially adopted order of worship in l'ERQ. The worship service varies from one congregation to another, at the discretion of the pastor and/or elders. The service, however, is seen as a covenant celebration where God gathers his people and speaks to them by his Word. There he reminds them of his law and grace which is also represented and sealed in the sacraments. In the worship services he receives from his people an answer of adoration, confession of sin, thankfulness, dedication and request for help after which God returns them home and to the market places of life everywhere in the world. There is one worship service a week, generally on Sunday morning.

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<sup>14</sup> See page 26 of this report.

<sup>15</sup> John Calvin in his *Institutes* at 4.13.19 acknowledges that there were deaconesses in the early church mentioned in 1 Tim 5. These deaconesses were (in Calvin's view) created "to discharge the public ministry of the Church toward the poor and to strive with all zeal, constancy and diligence in the task of love." This is the model followed by the ERQ, not the model prescribed by the Church Order of Dort or the Belgic Confession.

P.Y. De Jong in his book, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today*, (Grand Rapids, Baker: 1952) writes of the development of the office of deaconess in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands in the years 1575 - 1600. Many of the churches and the early Synods allowed for deaconesses. In Amsterdam at one time there were 28 deaconesses. The office of deaconess functioned in the Amsterdam church until the time of the French Revolution 200 years later.



#### 5.1.3.1 Sermon

The sermon is an exposition of a scripture text. Within I'ERQ it is required that he who expounds the Word be ordained or be a student of theology whose sermons are approved by an ordained minister. Occasionally a minister from another church may be invited to preach, at the discretion of the local pastor and elders. The sermon is in depth exposition, not exemplary nor moralistic. The tone of the sermon is serious, though the mood of the service is less formal than in the CDNRCs.

#### 5.1.3.2 Services

There is an atmosphere of joy in the worship services, although there is a conscious effort to keep things reverent and serious. There is also a strong emphasis on prayer, on confession of sins, on acknowledging needs before God, and on having fellowship with God. The worship service is led by the pastor, by an elder, or by another man of the church trained to do so. The sacraments, though, are always administered by an ordained minister.

#### 5.1.3.3 Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is administered once a month in most congregations. It follows the sermon. There is not as yet an *adopted*<sup>16</sup> liturgical form used for the administration of the sacrament in all the churches though there is standardized practice for each church. Usually there are the following parts for the celebration of the Lord's Supper: The words of institution taken directly from scripture, the breaking of the bread and the benediction of the cup, a prayer of thanksgiving, (sometimes the Lord's Prayer or a song), followed by an explanation of the meaning of Lord's Supper. Then there is a warning and an invitation and finally the partaking of the elements.

The invitation is addressed to all who repent and believe in the Gospel of salvation, and who are engrafted into Christ by faith and live accordingly. The Lord's Table, by our understanding, therefore, might be considered to be a rather "open" table. Some people who regularly attend church also participate even though they are not members. Because of their Roman Catholic and/or Anabaptist background these people are not disciplined nor barred from communion, but warmly taught and encouraged to profess the Reformed faith publicly and to more fully live a Christian life in the Body of Christ. Though the Table is "open" to these guests, the pastors do know the people who come to the table because the communities are so small and only those who have been reached by the evangelism and missionary efforts attend the services. The children are not admitted to the Lord's Table until they reach the age of maturity (17-20 years) at which time they are examined by the pastor and elders and profess their faith in church. Adults (members or non-members) who openly deny the fundamental beliefs of the Christian Faith or who live in gross sin are not admitted to the table. They are privately disciplined and

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<sup>16</sup> See below a 5.1.3.8



asked not to participate, being told to repent and to receive God's forgiveness and to turn to a new life of obedience.

When your committee asked about admission to the Lord's Table the l'ERQ committee admitted that there was a growing awareness that the councils needed to "fence the table" more closely. Admission to the table is rather loose at the present time, though the councils of the local churches are beginning to supervise this more closely. One congregation now has a table that is "fenced" closely. The deputies certainly indicated a willingness to discuss this within the context of ecclesiastical fellowship. More and more, especially with growing children and new converts receiving their training in a Reformed context, it seems that the direction may be to admit only the professing members of the church to the Lord's Table. Here again the committee and the deputies saw that ecclesiastical fellowship would benefit discussions about matters of doctrine and praxis. Though this is an important issue, it should not cloud the discussions unnecessarily, nor should this become a barrier to ecclesiastical fellowship. Your committee would recommend that within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship the CDNRCs could urge movement to a more closely fenced table.

#### 5.1.3.4 Baptism

Baptism is administered whenever needed, to the children of the members or to adult believers never baptized before. It may precede or follow the sermon. There is also as yet no adopted liturgical form for this sacrament. On the other hand, there are usually the following parts: the words of institution, an explanation, God's promises and requirements, the parents promises (faith and obedience, education of their child) the congregation's promises, prayer and baptism. A few variations are found in adult baptism.

#### 5.1.3.5 Profession of Faith

Profession of Faith is done in the regular worship services, before or after the sermon. Before someone can profess his faith, he must follow a course in which he receives instruction in the Christian faith and Reformed doctrine as well as in the government and practices of the church. The new members are admitted on the basis of a Trinitarian profession of Faith (The Apostles' Creed) and a good Christian life. Thorough knowledge of the Reformed doctrine is not demanded before the profession of faith of new members, though they must display a teachable spirit. A brief personal testimony of the goodness of the Lord experienced in the life of that person is sometimes presented at that moment, although not required for the profession of faith. Your committee would recommend that within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship the CDNRCs could urge l'ERQ to admit members on the basis of their knowledge and confession of the Reformed doctrine.

#### 5.1.3.6 Prayer / Singing / Special Days

The prayers in church services are led by the conductor of the service and by some people of the assembly. (Prayers can be both prepared in

advance or they may be spontaneous, though all is done in good time and in order.) People of the congregation often make prayer requests after the sermon. Other specific needs are also often presented prior to prayer in order to guide the assembly in their prayers.

The singing of the Psalms comes from *Arc-en-ciel*, [*Rainbow*] containing in its first section a selection of 62 Psalms set to the Genevan tunes. In some churches, however, these tunes are not often used. This Psalter also includes many Reformed hymns but also many other songs, hymns and choruses. Another contemporary collection of hymns and Christian songs, *J'aime l'Eternal* [*I Love the Lord*] is also used. Some churches also supplement these two collections with songs presented on overhead projectors or separate sheets. In some congregations a particular time of praise comes before or after hearing God's law, with 3 to 5 consecutive songs, or songs alternating with readings from scripture. Some churches also have a small choir in order to help the congregation worship the Lord and in learning new songs. The musical instruments vary from church to church: organ, piano, guitar, trumpet, flute, clarinet, electronic organ are all used in the various churches.

Special liturgies are prepared for the celebration of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Thanksgiving and Reformation Sunday. On these occasions there might be alternation of appropriate songs and Bible readings, short meditations, banners, Bible stories for children or by children etc.

#### 5.1.3.7 Ordination / Marriage

The ordination of pastors, elders and deacons is done in the regular worship service of the congregation in which they will serve, and in presence of delegates of the synod.<sup>17</sup>

Marriage are solemnized in special services (Saturday) to which the congregation is invited.

#### 5.1.3.8 Standardized Liturgical Forms

The committee discussed extensively the lack of standard adopted liturgical forms within the various churches. The ministers of the churches (as well as the congregations) come from 3 or 4 ecclesiastical backgrounds and so have their own histories and traditions. This has as result some lack of uniformity of practice. Some of the ministers have worked as missionaries for decades and various congregations existed independently for years prior to the birth of l'ERQ. The lack of uniformity may look chaotic to us, but arises out of historical realities. The churches that joined l'ERQ found a *unity of faith* which bound them together. Their lack of *uniformity in practice* seemed minor to them in their battle against the liberalization in their mother churches. Standardization and uniformity, though desirable, need not become an insurmountable problem to ecclesiastical fellowship. Within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship the CDNRCs could help l'ERQ develop and adopt standardized forms.

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<sup>17</sup> See relevant sections of the ODE.

The discussions with your committee have partially been the cause for the Synod of the ERQ to appointed their Church Order Committee to prepare standard liturgical forms for use in the churches. At present (Oct. 1997) draft versions of forms for Baptism, for Public Profession of Faith and for Lord's Supper have been prepared for use in the churches. Forms for ordination are planned. It will take several years, however, for I'ERQ to come to final versions of these documents as the members of the churches and the office-bearers use and evaluate them. The formal adoption of standard forms means that changes will also need to be made to the ODE.

Though the use of standard liturgical forms is relatively important, the lack of such forms should not be considered to be an insurmountable barrier to ecclesiastical fellowship. Your committee recommends that your assembly recognize that the move toward standardized liturgical forms underlines the commitment of I'ERQ to maintaining a Reformed praxis which is in line with their Reformed confession.

#### 5.1.3.7 Summary

Though the life in the churches as well as the "look and feel" of the services may be different in the eyes of the CDNRCs, there is evidence of a deep love for the Lord and for scripture, as well as for "the Reformed way" in I'ERQ. The commitment of these young churches who are attempting to mount a faithful Reformed witness in a secularized Roman Catholic culture and world must be acknowledged. Their desire for fellowship with the CDNRCs only underlines this.

## 5.2 Relations with other Churches [Mandate 2]

### 5.2.1 "Mother" Churches

At present I'ERQ has no official relationships with any other church federations, nor is it seeking ecclesiastical fellowship (as the CDNRCs understand it) with any others at the present time. They do, however maintain ties with two of the "mother" churches, though not as closely as defined by *The Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship [1992]*.

#### 5.2.1.1 PCC

Over the years one of the "mother" churches, the Presbyterian Church of Canada, has rejected I'ERQ and cut official ties with it. The Presbyterian Church of Canada could not agree to the ODE which barred women from the ruling and teaching offices and never entered into formal relations with I'ERQ after its inception in 1988.

#### 5.2.1.2 CRC (Home Missions Board)

The Christian Reformed Church Home Missions Board continues to fulfill its financial commitment to I'ERQ. This funding is being withdrawn, however. This withdrawal of funding is according to the agreements made with I'ERQ and will cease in the coming year. There is no ecclesiastical fellowship or other official relationship between the assemblies of I'ERQ and the Christian Reformed Church. In fact, I'ERQ Synod, which

convened on September 12 & 13, 1997 dealt with a request from the CRC asking l'ERQ to enter into formal sister church relations. L'ERQ synod rejected this request. The churches rejected this knowing full well that this would preclude applying to the CRC for any financial aid in the future.

#### 5.2.1.3 PCA (Mission to North America)

The Mission to North America [MNA] of the Presbyterian Church of America and l'ERQ have a "ministry partnership agreement." This agreement allows the Presbyterian Church of America missionaries working in Quebec to raise funds privately in the Presbyterian Church of America congregations. The Presbyterian Church of America has "lent" these missionaries to l'ERQ as well as agreeing that it will not mount a separate mission/evangelism project in Quebec. This follows the model of many North American evangelical mission projects where the mission boards are essentially separate from the churches and function as para-church organizations.

#### 5.2.2 Reformed Church of France

L'ERQ has no official contact with the Reformed Church of France though the school at Aix-en-Provence and Institut Farel have close contact. Some of the missionaries/evangelists have studied at Aix-en-Provence, and the seminary in France lends its professors to the Institut Farel on occasion. These two institutions also recognize each others degrees. This relationship is similar to the one between our sister-churches' seminary in Kampen and Aix-en-Provence.

#### 5.2.3 "Mutual Eligibility"

There is no "mutual eligibility" between l'ERQ and the Christian Reformed Church or the Presbyterian Church of America with respect to ministers. Though some of the ministers in l'ERQ find their roots as missionaries sent by these churches, now that l'ERQ is organized as a federation they have reserved the right to submit all ministers who come to work in their congregations to a full ecclesiastical [peremptory] exam. This exam would be of the same rigour as a candidate seeking ordination to the ministry. This rule was recently applied to Rev. R. Kwint who came from the Netherlands,<sup>18</sup> out of the *Gereformeerde Bond*, (through which he receives partial funding.) He was required to be examined by l'ERQ synod to be admitted to the ministry of the churches in Quebec.

#### 5.2.4 Attestations

L'ERQ has no agreement with these churches about membership [attestations]. Neither does it have any mutual agreement with the broadest assemblies of these federation with respect to decisions, confessions or church order.

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<sup>18</sup> Two members of your committee attended the synod at which this candidate minister was examined. They reported favourably concerning the rigour of the exam.



### *5.2.5 Summary*

We can see then that though these churches have relationships with 3rd parties these relationships are of a different character from ecclesiastical fellowship. L'ERQ jealously guards itself from what it would consider to be potential unreformed influences. L'ERQ has been represented by an observer at the Alliance of Reformed Churches and contacts are growing with the United Reformed Churches of North America. This also indicates the direction in which L'ERQ desires to go.

L'ERQ now has a Committee for Inter-Church Relations. This committee is mandated to examine and evaluate the benefits of relationships with other Reformed churches and make recommendations to the Synod.

It is clear that L'ERQ desires to remain faithful to scripture, confession and to the Head of the church in her relationships with other churches.

### **5.3 Federational Unity [Mandate 3]**

Your committee's Mandate 3 reads: "To further investigate whether it is possible to have the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Église Réformée du Québec as part of the same federation." The committee considered two possibilities: a "French classis" and "full integration." Neither of these models seemed to be workable. The vast majority of the members of L'ERQ are unilingually French and the vast majority of CDNRC members are unilingually English. This in itself would cause immense logistical problems in translation and communication. As well, Synod 1992 observed concerning the Free Church of Scotland congregations in Canada that "one must be realistic enough to realize that it is not an easy matter to bring together immigrant churches from two different cultures and with two different ecclesiastical traditions." Synod agreed that merger between the 4 or 5 Free Church of Scotland congregations in English speaking Canada and the CDNRCs would require "careful planning and sensitive implementation." How much more any merger between two church federations, one immigrant, one not; both unilingual, one English, one French; one with the Forms of Unity, one with the WCF; one with a Presbyterian form of government, one with a continental form. Full integration would be unworkable.

When your committee presented L'ERQ committee with the "refugee model" of the 17th century where French and English refugees found a place within the Dutch Reformed churches our French brothers answered, "We are not refugees!"

Your committee cannot recommend that church union or merger would be beneficial or advisable. As well, the CIRC would strongly recommend against such a model to their Synod. It is completely unacceptable to these churches.

In Quebec, Francophones are considered to be Roman Catholic and Anglophones are considered to be Protestant. This dichotomy is so strong



that even English speaking Jews serve on the Protestant school boards. Language is the great divider.<sup>19</sup>

The mission and evangelism projects of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church of America and the Christian Reformed Church were all focused on the Francophone population with the hope of forming an independent French language Reformed church. L'ERQ is the product of those efforts. It is important for the CDNRCs to understand that L'ERQ now needs to maintain this independent "Francophone" identity, all the while recognizing that in their church order they do say in Art 1.5,

All churches which share the Biblical principles of l'ERQ, accept its confessions of faith as well as its ecclesiastical order and discipline, *without taking into account historical, social, cultural, or administrative differences*, may become members of l'ERQ. [Emphasis added]

L'ERQ presents the gospel of Jesus Christ to French-Canadians within a French church with its roots in the great Reformation of the 16th Century. For the first time in Canadian history, it is now possible to be both Francophone and Reformed. This reality was and is one of the driving forces to maintaining an *independent* French speaking Reformed church. In its discussions with CICR your committee has been sensitive to this reality. It will not do to insist that since we are in the same country we must organize and federate under the same ecclesiastical roof. Both l'ERQ and the CDNRCs recognize that the church of Jesus Christ is not "confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world (Belgic Confession 27)." We also need to be sensitive to the fact that language, culture, history, confession, and church order as well as praxis can make complete federative unity impractical. This is not advocating Kuyperian pluriformity nor is it a concession to a doctrine of more or less true churches. Rather this is a recognition that Christ Jesus gathers his church by his Spirit and Word throughout the world and in various ways. There must be an "eye for the work of the Lord in history."<sup>20</sup>

## 6. Ecclesiastical Fellowship

### 6.1 L'ERQ Synod, Sept. 12/13, 1997.

#### 6.1.1 Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship

As noted above, the l'ERQ Synod convened in Sept. 1997. The CICR presented reports and recommendations to this Synod concerning Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship and concerning fellowship with the CDNRCs.

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<sup>19</sup> At the time of writing, the Government of Quebec is seeking a Constitutional Amendment allowing schools to be divided along linguistic and not religious lines.

<sup>20</sup> Acts of General Synod 1995, pg. 73.

## Appendix 7: Committee re ERQ

The CICR recommended that the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (1992) as adopted by the CDNRCs be adopted by l'ERQ. This was done after the addition of one additional rule concerning the missionary mandate of Christ's church and with some other small changes.

The rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship as l'ERQ have adopted them are,<sup>21</sup>

1. The churches shall assist each other in the development and advancement of the mission.
2. The churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defense and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and worship, be watchful for deviations, and encourage each other in the weaker areas.
3. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or Minutes and otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to the respective churches (if possible in translation).
4. The churches shall consult each other when entering into relations with third parties.
5. The churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing.
6. The churches shall in principle, open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches.
7. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or worship, the churches shall be informed in order that as much consultation can take place as possible before final decision is taken.
8. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as much as local regulations permit.

The most dramatic change in the rules comes with the addition of Rule 1. This addition does not present any difficulties, especially since it reflects the "missionary" character of these churches.<sup>22</sup>

Another change which should be noted is the change of "liturgy" to "worship". In French the word *liturgie* refers to "a collection of rules fixing

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<sup>21</sup> These rules (Rules 1997) as well as those of Synod 1992 (Rules 1992) can be found in appendix 2.

<sup>22</sup> In Rule 1 "the mission" could be misleading since it could be read as if it referred to a particular mission project. This is a matter of translation. In the estimation of your committee, the intent is to say: "The churches shall assist each other in the development and advancement of mission." This certainly could be mutual as l'ERQ has much that it could teach us about effective home mission efforts.

the order of worship." Instead the word *culite* was used, which refers to the homage rendered to God. To reflect this change, "worship" was used when the Rules were translated back into English. Your committee considers that this is an accurate interpretation of "liturgy" as used in the English Rules.

L'ERQ also deleted the following clause between (English) rules 5 and 6: "In exercising these relations, the churches shall strive to implement also the following:" (and then follow rules 6 and 7). This deletion only makes rules 6 and 7 much stronger. This strengthening of the last two rules is a useful improvement of the rules when applied to churches living side by side in the same country.

Your committee considers that these and a few other changes do not change the thrust, content or meaning of the Rules and so could recommend that ecclesiastical fellowship could be established under them.

#### *6.1.2 Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CNDRC*

L'ERQ requested formal relations with the CNDRCs at Synod Abbotsford, 1995. The CICR now recommended to their Synod of Sept., 1997 that L'ERQ offer to enter into relations with the CNDRCs under these amended rules. In a letter<sup>23</sup> dated Sept. 25, L'ERQ informed your committee that their Synod, meeting on Sept. 12/13, 1997, adopted a proposal to establish an official relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches according to their newly adopted rules (Rules 1997).

## **6.2 Ecclesiastical Fellowship Proposed**

### *6.2.1 Benefits*

If our two churches would enter into ecclesiastical fellowship there would be mutual benefits. With ongoing financial assistance they could continue to focus on the important work of spreading the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in their communities. The CDNRCs would benefit by drawing on L'ERQ's expertise in modern urban Reformed missions. There would also be a mutual benefit for members of both federations in that they could be issued attestations and so engage in orderly transfer of membership. As more CDNR students study and do study terms in Quebec and ERQ students study in colleges like Redeemer College in Ancaster and Trinity Western University in Langley, as well as in other universities, it would be advantageous to have closer ties.

### *6.2.2 ODE*

We can be thankful that there is a strong desire to follow the Reformed way in church government. Discussions about church order could develop in a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. Improvements could be made to the ODE to make it a stronger and more comprehensive document. The CICR has indicated that L'ERQ recognizes that the ODE

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<sup>23</sup> See Appendix 3.

is not a final document but that it is one which will need to develop as the church in Quebec grows.

#### *6.2.3 Liturgical Forms*

L'ERQ as yet has not adopted standard liturgical forms for use in the churches. As noted above, the lack of uniformity in worship and liturgical forms stems from the birth of l'ERQ as a "union" church. Having come from various backgrounds, the various congregations had already developed their own traditions and formulations. It should be noted, however, that the original congregations formed a union church in order to stem the tide of modernism in the mother churches. In order to do this some lack of uniformity of practice was acceptable. Though this is a matter of some importance, as stated above, your committee believes that this falls within the guidelines of CO Article 50. If a formal relationship were established, your committee believes that the CDNRCs would be in a better position to assist l'ERQ in developing standard forms.<sup>24</sup>

#### *6.2.4 Mission work*

L'ERQ Mission Committee has approached the Toronto Board of Foreign Mission with a proposal to sponsor one of their church planting projects (Trois Rivières). Toronto decided instead to take up the task of mission in PNG instead. It is encouraging, however, to note that l'ERQ is willing to invite the CDNRCs as partners in its work in Quebec. This type of cooperation would be much easier to execute, supervise and maintain within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship. L'ERQ could call candidates from the Theological College in Hamilton and have them work as pastors or evangelists in their missionary churches.

Your committee, however, did discover in our discussions with CICR that without some sort of formal relationship it would be very difficult to send a missionary into Quebec and work together with l'ERQ. Only within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship could this be implemented in an orderly way.

#### *6.2.5 Finances*

There is ongoing financial need. The committee notes with thankfulness that many of the churches have heeded the call to support this work with regular collections or budget allocations. (Jan - Aug '97; between \$25,000 - \$30,000). Within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship, however, the CDNRCs would be able to give solid, consistent, and reliable sources of funding to these mission projects. If a graduate of Hamilton were called perhaps the CDNRCs could assist in the financial aspects.

### **6.3 Committee**

In discussions with the members of the CICR, it has become clear that it would be beneficial to have a separate committee to work with l'ERQ rather than hand the matter over to the Committee on Relations with

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<sup>24</sup> *Rules (1997) 7*



Churches Abroad. A separate committee could work with l'ERQ in various ways and so help to develop a vibrant and living relationship between the two churches.

## 7. Conclusion

The committee believes that the Lord has placed l'ERQ on the path of the Canadian Reformed Churches. They have called out, "Come on over and help us." L'ERQ needs spiritual and financial help and support. She desires to remain true to her French Reformed roots and is asking the CDNRCs to assist her in this. Your committee has studied the history and background of l'ERQ, her doctrinal standards and their maintenance, her church government and its practice, as well as the style of worship in the congregations. It is apparent from these evaluations that l'ERQ is a faithful and true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can see that the Lord Jesus Christ gathers, defends and preserves his church also in Quebec.

The Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad wrote (of the Free Church of Scotland) in their report to General Synod 1992 under "Considerations",

The view that the only proper approach to the FCS congregations in Canada is to demand that a merger take place as a condition for recognition, does not do full justice to the historic roots and ecclesiastical practices of our respective churches. While unity in faith and practice should be an aim that is continually kept in view and worked toward, there must also be an awareness that this will come about only as the result of growing understanding, patient dealing, increased familiarity, and constant prayer.<sup>25</sup>

Your committee concurs with this and considers that this is even more pointed with respect to l'ERQ.

## Recommendations

Your committee recommends that your assembly:

- A. accept the request of *l'église réformée du Québec*, made to Synod '95, and reaffirmed at their Synod of Sept. 12/13, 1997, to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship and to do so under their adopted *Rules (1997)*.
- B. appoint a Committee for Contact with *l'église réformée du Québec* with the following mandate:
  1. to respond if specific requests for assistance and advice are made in matters of confession, church polity and worship;

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<sup>25</sup> *Acts of Synod 1992* (Appendix 1) "Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Canadian Reformed Churches: Report to General Synod Lincoln 1992." (Pgs. 97-122) pg. 111



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2. to initiate and continue discussions with l'ERQ CICR concerning<sup>26</sup>
    - a. the supervision of the Lord's table with a view to admitting only professing members of the church to the table;<sup>27</sup>
    - b. the need for professing members to express agreement with the confessional standards;<sup>28</sup>
    - c. the necessity and desirability of adopting standard liturgical forms;<sup>29</sup>
  3. to respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend Synods of l'ERQ;
  4. to be ready to give assistance in developing mission possibilities in Quebec;
  5. to keep the churches informed about *l'église réformée du Québec* so that we can responded in a positive manner to their financial and other needs as missionary churches;
  6. to serve Synod 2001 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.
- C. inform the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the relationship with *l'église réformée du Québec*.

Respectfully Submitted

J. Boot

W. Oostdyk

J.L. Van Popta

G.H. Visscher

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<sup>26</sup> This would be in accordance with Rule 2 adopted by l'ERQ (see above, p. 19).

<sup>27</sup> (see this report 5.1.3.3)

<sup>28</sup> (see this report 5.1.3.5)

<sup>29</sup> (see this report 5.1.3.8)

## APPENDIX 8:

# Report of the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

### I. DECISIONS OF SYNOD ABBOTSFORD 1995

Synod Abbotsford, 1995 made the following decisions concerning the Committee for Contact with the OPC:

1. Synod decided not to amalgamate the CCOPC with the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad, but "in light of the request of the Committee to conclude matters and for the sake of continuity, it is best to maintain" the CCOPC (*Acts*, p. 70f.)

2. Synod mandated the CCOPC

"1. to work towards formalizing the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the adopted rules by using the statements of Synod Lincoln 1992 (*Acts* 1992, Art. 72, IV.A.1.e.i,ii) as a guideline to arrive at an agreement with the OPC on the matters of the fencing of the Lord's Table and confessional membership;

2. to communicate to the OPC the discomfort in our churches with respect to their continued relationship with the CRCNA;

3. to communicate that there is a need to continue to discuss the differences in confession and church polity in accordance with the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Rule 6);

4. to serve the churches with regular reports of the work of the Committee, and to serve General Synod 1998 with a report, to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod. (*Acts*, p. 75)

3. Synod expressed "the hope that in this way the protracted discussions between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC can be concluded by the establishment of a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship within the next three years so that, the Lord willing, it can be finalized by Synod 1998". (*Acts*, p.75)

4. Synod appointed as members of this committee, Rev. J. DeGelder (convener), Rev. P.G. Feenstra, Dr. N.H. Gootjes, br. G.J. Nordeman, br. G. VanWoudenberg. (*Acts*, p. 86)

## **II. OVERVIEW OF THE COMMITTEE'S ACTIVITIES**

### **1. Meetings**

The CCOPC met 7 times by itself and once with the CEIR. At the first meeting, on Oct. 19, 1995, the functions were distributed as follows: Rev. J. DeGelder, chairman, Dr. N.H. Gootjes, secretary, Br. G.J. Nordeman, treasurer.

At this meeting, the mandate given by Synod was reviewed. Moreover, a letter from the CEIR, dated September 21, 1995, was discussed. In this letter, the charge was repeated that the Canadian Reformed Churches maintain a double standard in their contacts with other church bodies, by continuing to deny to the OPC a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship while at the same entering into that relationship with the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church in Korea. The CEIR requested the CCOPC to provide them with specific proposals for further joint discussions that can move us closer to a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Rather than continuing the discussion on the alleged double standard, our Committee decided to focus on preparing proposals in view of moving toward a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

Since Synod mandated the CCOPC to work toward reaching an agreement on the outstanding issues of fencing of the Lord's Table and confessional membership, the indicated course of action was to provide a statement for that purpose. This 'Proposed Agreement' was finalized at the meeting of February 27, 1996 and sent to the CEIR, with the request to discuss this proposal.

### **2. Discussion on Proposed Agreement**

The CEIR, in a letter dated April 2, 1996 stated that they had considered the 'Proposed Agreement' and were encouraged by it and found it constructive. The committee added that they agreed with the two proposed statements, that the way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches was now open, and that the need to discuss remaining differences in confession and church polity could be addressed within a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. They asked whether a meeting to discuss these statements would still be necessary.

In a letter dated May 8, 1996, our Committee asked for a meeting with the CEIR, to discuss the practical implications of having such a Proposed Agreement, and how to proceed toward establishing ecclesiastical fellowship.

The meeting between the CCOPC and an ad hoc committee of the CEIR took place on October 8, 1996. Several issues were discussed in good harmony. The matter of the so-called double standard was not brought up again. The Proposed Agreement takes into consideration that our customs have developed in a different history and that we must recognize the providence of God in this history. None of the members of the CEIR present

at the meeting had any objection to accepting this statement as basis for establishing a relation of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

The full Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the OPC, in its meeting of October 9, 1996, stated its agreement with the Proposed Agreement.

### **3. Text of the Proposed Agreement for opening the way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship.**

#### *Concerning Fencing the Lord's Table:*

The churches of the Reformation confess that the Lord's supper should not be profaned (1 Cor. 11:27, see Heid. Cat. Lord's Day 30, Q&A 82; Westminster Confession ch. 29,8). This implies that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is to be supervised. In this supervision the Church exercises discipline and manifests itself as true church. This supervision is to be applied to the members of the local church as well as to the guests. The eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord's Supper.

#### *Concerning Confessional Membership:*

The churches of the Reformation believe that they have to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and are called to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned (Rom. 16:17). Anyone who answers the membership vows in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible. The patristic church has summarized this teaching in the Apostles' Creed and the churches of the Reformation have elaborated on this in their confessions. Every confessing member is bound to this doctrine and must be willing to be instructed in it.

It may be added that these statements are not intended to prevent further discussions. Rather, it is agreed that there is need to continue to discuss the differences in confession and church policy which can take place within the relation of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The intention of such discussions will be mutual upbuilding in the faith to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

### **4. The relationship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America**

During the meeting between the members of the CEIR and the CCOPC on October 8, 1996, the relationship between the OPC and the CRCNA was also discussed. The representatives of the OPC reported that the General Assembly of 1996 had decided to suspend the relation with the CRC and "that, unless the 1997 regular general Assembly determines that intervening actions of the Christian Reformed Church in North America warrant a reversal of this action or a continuation of the period of suspension, the

relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America shall be terminated with the close of that assembly" (see *Minutes of the Sixty-Third General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 1996, p. 52). After this, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church declared to be willing to discuss all issues with the OPC. The CEIR felt that it had to pursue this, before breaking off the relationship altogether.

In its report to the General Assembly 1997, the CEIR concluded that the actions of the Christian Reformed Church concerning the women in office issue do not warrant a reversal of the action of the previous General Assembly and recommended to terminate the relationship, effective on July 1, 1997. The advisory committee of the General Assembly proposed to continue the suspended relationship till the year 2001 when a responsible decision could be made. After a lengthy discussion the advisory committee's recommendations were defeated and the proposal to terminate the relationship with the CRCNA was adopted almost unanimously. We are grateful for the clear stand taken by the OPC in this matter, maintaining the absolute authority of the Word of God.

### **5. The Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship**

During the previously mentioned meeting of October 8, 1996, several questions were asked concerning our 'Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship' as decided by Synod Lincoln, 1995, see *Acts* p. 33. These questions concern the following issues:

- a. What is meant by 'the churches', a committee (e.g. the CCOPC) or the synod?
- b. Should 6 and 7 not be 1 and 2 of a separate point?
- c. What is the difference between 6 and 1?
- d. What is meant by 'consultation'? How is that to be done, and on what level?

Our committee gave some clarification but added that these rules are not in our province, but in that of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad. In response to a question, the delegates of the OPC stated that they have no difficulty having the relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches determined by these rules.

### **6. General Assembly 1996 and 1997 of the OPC**

The CCOPC was invited to send a fraternal delegate to the General Assembly of the OPC in 1996 and 1997. In 1996, no delegation was sent. The OPC was congratulated on its 60th Anniversary by letter.

In 1997, Rev. J. De Gelder and Br. G.J. Nordeman were received as fraternal delegates at the 64th General Assembly. Rev. De Gelder addressed the assembly, a copy of his speech is added to this report. From their report we highlight the following items:



- The CEIR reported to the General Assembly that the relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches has taken an important step forward. It reported in full detail the Proposed Agreement for opening the way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The CEIR report further stated:

"We look forward to the next General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches (in 1998) with the expectation that, in view of this agreement it will act to establish a bond of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC in which we can continue to discuss our differences as churches, and so, if God grants, arrive at a more perfect unity in doctrine, polity, and life."

This report was adopted by the General Assembly. Many delegates expressed their joy and thankfulness for these developments.

- The CEIR presented a proposal to expand the single category of interchurch relations they maintained until now (Ecclesiastical Fellowship) into three categories: Ecclesiastical Fellowship, Corresponding Relations, Restricted Relations. The General Assembly adopted the recommendation to submit this proposal to the churches now in Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC for their suggestions, advice and response (see for the full report, *Clarion*, 46, no. 17 (August 22, 1997), pp. 374f.).

### 7. Information received

The CCOPC received the following documents from the churches:

- The decision of Classis Alberta/Manitoba, held on April 25,26, 1995, concerning an appeal of the Church at Coaldale, to which the appeal was appended.
- The correspondence between Classis Alberta/Manitoba and the Presbytery of the Dakotas, of the OPC, and the decision of Classis, on Oct. 17-18/Dec. 18-19, 1995.
- The decision of Classis Alberta/Manitoba concerning a communication from the Presbytery of the Dakotas, of the OPC, dated April 29, 1996.

### 8. Report

A Report of the agreement reached with the OPC was published in Clarion 46,2 (March 21, 1997).

## III. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the positive developments mentioned in this report the Committee recommends that General Synod 1998 of the Canadian Reformed Churches decide:

*Appendix 8: OPC Committee*

- A. To acknowledge gratefully the commitment of the OPC to be faithful to the Scriptures and to defend the reformed heritage.
- B. To acknowledge thankfully that with the statements on the Fencing of the Lord's Table and on Confessional Membership an agreement has been reached on the outstanding issues.
- C. To note with thankfulness that the OPC, by terminating the Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRCNA has taken a clear stand in maintaining the truth and authority of the Word of God, and has removed another obstacle for the Canadian Reformed Churches to come to ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC.
- D. To invite the OPC to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, according to the adopted rules for this relationship.
- E. To discontinue the Committee for Contact with the OPC, making the contact and discussion with the OPC part of the mandate of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA).
- F. To ask the CRCA to consider the comments of the CEIR on the rules of ecclesiastical fellowship.

Respectfully submitted

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Rev. P.G. Feenstra

Dr. N.H. Gootjes

Br. G.J. Nordeman

Br. G. VanWoudenberg

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<sup>1</sup> The category below includes in some cases appeals against relations with these churches.

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