

Report of the CRCA Subcommittee for Contact with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands Liberated (RCN)

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Abbreviations

- BBK – Relations Foreign Churches (Betrekkingen Buitenlandse Kerken)
- CanRC – Canadian Reformed Churches
- CRCA – Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad
- DKE – Deputies for Church Unity (Deputaten Kerkelijke Eenheid)
- EF – Ecclesiastical Fellowship
- FRCA – Free Reformed Churches of Australia
- FRCSA – Free Reformed Churches of South Africa
- NAPARC - North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council
- NRC – Netherlands Reformed Churches (buiten verband)
- OPC – Orthodox Presbyterian Church
- RCN – Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated)
- URCNA – United Reformed Churches of North America
- TUK – Theological University Kampen

A. Mandate

Synod Burlington May 11-26, 2010, having considered the Report of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad concerning the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands Liberated (RCN), decided (Acts of Synod Burlington 2010, Article 86, p. 131):

- 4.1 To continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCN under the adopted rules.
- 4.2 Express our prayerful concern for our brothers and sisters in the Lord that they be committed to the Reformed faith.
- 4.3 To appoint a temporary subcommittee to the CRCA for contact with the RCN.
- 4.4. Mandate the subcommittee to:
 - 4.4.1 Express our grave concerns that:
 - 4.4.1.1 Synod Zwolle of the RCN did not demand that Dr. Harinck, a professor associated with the Theological University in Kampen, retract his controversial remarks;
 - 4.4.1.2 The Theological University did not exercise greater care in the case of the appointment of Dr. Paas as lecturer; and to urge the RCN to deal with these matters as yet.
 - 4.4.2 To express and discuss our grave concerns about a change in how biblical hermeneutics are functioning in the RCN.
 - 4.4.3 To pay special attention to the upcoming report on the role of women in the church.
 - 4.4.4 To pay special attention to the discussions currently taking place between the RCN and the Netherlands Reformed Churches and to request the RCN to provide an authorized translation into English of the decisions taken by Synod Zwolle-Zuid 2008 as recorded in “Hoofdstuk 10 - Binnenlandse betrekkingen.”
 - 4.4.5 To work in consultation with the deputies of the FRCA and the OPC.
 - 4.4.6 To monitor developments regarding the quality or contents of new hymns.
 - 4.4.7 To report to the churches six month prior to General Synod 2013.

Synod appointed the following men to the Subcommittee: J. de Gelder, J. Moesker (convenor), G.J. Nordeman, C. Van Dam. In a letter addressed to the RCN deputies in March 2011 before the foreign delegates week, when we submitted an interim report for discussion with the Dutch brothers, we drew attention to Rule 1 of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship which states: *“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.”* It is with this rule in mind that we approached our task as subcommittee. Our purpose is not simply to be critical. There are many positive things which could be said about the RCN and the work that is being done by many both within and outside those churches. The mandate Synod Burlington 2010 gave the sub-committee, was to raise serious brotherly concerns about a number of developments in the RCN. We did so acknowledging that there are also many good things happening. As well, we are sensitive to the fact that we do not necessarily understand the full

context of what our sister churches are dealing with in a culture which is rapidly becoming secularized to the point that the Christian religion and the Bible hardly play any role in society any longer. And we also realize that our North American society is moving in a similar direction, and that in time we will also find ourselves increasingly dealing with the issues our brothers and sisters in the Netherlands are wrestling with. So we present our report on the Dutch churches with gratitude as well with deep concern for our brothers and sisters in the Netherlands at this time. Some things we say may sound harsh and judgmental, but they are not intended as such. We submit this report with love for the churches from which our churches have originated more than 60 years ago.

B. Activities of the Subcommittee

Since Synod Burlington 2010 the subcommittee met 14 times in Burlington to deal with this mandate as well as the other mandate received from General Synod Burlington 2010 (Acts, Art. 155, p. 243). Minutes of meetings were kept and regularly forwarded to the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CRCA). Regular correspondence was maintained with the deputies *Betrekkingen Buitenlands Kerken (BBK)* of the RCN via official letters and email. In preparation for the visit of members of the subcommittee to Synod Harderwijk, an interim report delving into the concerns as outlined on the mandate of Synod Burlington 2010 was prepared for discussion purposes (Appendix 3).

Two members of the subcommittee, Rev. J. de Gelder and br. G.J. Nordeman, visited Synod Harderwijk 2011 during what is called “*Buitenlandweek*” (foreign delegates week, from March 28 to April 2, 2011). Foreign delegates from churches in fellowship or in the process of coming to fellowship with the RCN are invited to Synod for a few days in order to see how synod is working and to deliver an address to synod on behalf of their churches. On the morning of March 28, brothers de Gelder and Nordeman were able to meet with a section of the BBK of the RCN to share with them the concerns of Synod Burlington (*Acts Synod Burlington 2011*, Article 86, 4. Recommendations). Our committee had given a more detailed evaluation of those concerns in the interim report (Appendix 3).

A frank, open and brotherly discussion ensued about a variety of topics connected to the concerns of Synod Burlington 2010 as worked out in our interim report. BBK had passed this report on to Synod Harderwijk 2011. Although it had arrived past the deadline for incoming mail, Synod had accepted it and handed it to the advisory committee churches abroad to comment on it. All members of Synod had received a copy as well, though no action was taken in regards to the report.

The brothers de Gelder and Nordeman stressed the seriousness of the concerns from Canada, and how this might affect our relationship. The problem in the discussion was that though some brothers perhaps even personally shared similar concerns, as body of deputies they did not really

wish to interact with and comment on the issues we brought forward. This highlights the issue of the task of the BBK and how a foreign church can effectively bring serious concerns to the RCN as federation. The BBK seemed to think that concerns should be addressed by a CanRC synod to an RCN Synod, whereas we see the BBK as the body to discuss those concerns and to pass them on to synod.

The brothers expressed the concern that the developments in the Dutch churches appear to be moving the RCN away from the reliability and authority of God's Word, by more and more placing man and his context and ideas and feelings and expectations in the centre rather than God's revealed will. The deputies of the BBK took issue with this and assured the CanRC delegation that with all the changes and shifts taking place in the Dutch sister churches, these churches do wish to remain faithful to the Scriptures as the full Word of God. They insisted on the Biblical and confessional integrity of the RCN as they seek to give relevant answers to the questions believers are confronted with in this secular, post-Christian society.

Brothers de Gelder and Nordeman also addressed synod on behalf of the churches, greeting the RCN on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches and expressing gratitude as well as concern (Appendix 2). There was also opportunity to attend a conference on hermeneutics at the Theological University Kampen (TUK). The brothers noted that in the meditation at Synod as well as in several presentations at the conference in Kampen, the dominating question was how the truth of God's Word can be presented today in such a way that it is relevant for the contemporary questions people face in the very secular, post-modern and post-Christian culture of the 21st century.

There appears to be a crucial shift in hermeneutics emanating from the TUK. What are the principles that guide us when we read and interpret the Scriptures? The Canadian delegates were not the only ones to note this shift, for several foreign guests who participated in discussions at the conference on hermeneutics raised serious concerns about the use of Scripture at the TUK. As well, numerous fraternal delegates made critical and cautionary comments and questioned developments in the RCN.

Finally, the delegates also noted quite a bit of experimentation in worship and liturgy in the RCN, and this liturgical fragmentation is causing considerable unrest among many. In discussions with some who have left the RCN for other churches this was also mentioned, often as the "straw that broke the camel's back." Subsequent to this visit of the two brothers to Synod Harderwijk, the subcommittee published a report of this visit as well as an abridged edition of its interim report concerning the RCN in *Clarion*, Sept. 2011.

In April, 2012, the full subcommittee travelled to the Netherlands for meetings with representatives of the various Reformed churches included in our mandate, including four members of the BBK of the RCN on April 19th. Open and forthright discussions about our concerns were held. In the afternoon a delegation of the TUK joined the meeting. Again, frank

discussions ensued concerning the setup and the work at the TUK. We were thankful that the BBK was willing to spend a day with us as subcommittee, and we reminded the brothers that our concerns have been expressed out of desire to be true to each other as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ in different countries. As subcommittee we believe that face-to-face meetings were important in order to fulfill our mandate and to respond to the concerns of Synod Burlington 2010 regarding communication with the Dutch churches (*Acts Synod Burlington 2010*, Art. 86, Consideration 3.2).

In the course of our work we also exchanged communications with the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), members of the Interchurch Relations Committee of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), Deputies of the Committee for Relations Churches Abroad of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), and Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA). In November, 2010, brother G. Nordeman travelled to New Jersey to attend a meeting of representatives of the OPC, RCUS, URCNA and Canadian Reformed Churches who were there for a NAPARC meeting. Thoughts were exchanged concerning the following matters in the RCN were discussed: Sunday rest, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, church unity and hermeneutics as well as the functioning of church assemblies. Subsequently, the subcommittee has maintained contact with the brothers of the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA) who attended annual meetings of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). Some members of the Canadian Reformed Churches sent us letters, to which we responded as needed.

C. Work of the Subcommittee to Fulfill Mandate.

The subcommittee divided its work to complete its mandate into three main areas:

- I. Concerns About the View of Scripture in the TUK (Mandate 4.4.1 and 4.4.2).
- II. The Studies Concerning the Role of Women in the Church (Mandate 4.4.3).
- III. Unity discussions RCN and Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC) (Mandate 4.4.4).

I. Concerns About the View of Scripture Mainly at TUK

First some background information. TUK is the school of the churches for the training for the ministry. It is however also a university and as such it needs to be a center for academic research. As an officially recognized institution, it is subject to government regulations dealing with higher education and receives considerable funding (just under half of the budget) from the public purse. If the supporting churches were to decide that this school should only be a seminary to train students for the ministry, it would lose government recognition, its diplomas would not be recognized, and government funding would cease. TUK strives for confessional faithfulness and high academic standards.

We as deputies are concerned that, emanating from TUK, there is evidence of a weakening of the classic Reformed view of Scripture as found in Scripture (e.g., John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21) and confessed in the Belgic Confession Articles 2 to 7. There are several reasons for these concerns. In summary, they are:

- a. Retaining Dr. Paas as lecturer (“universitair docent”) at the Theological University
- b. The dissertation of Dr. Koert van Bekkum approved by the Theological University
- c. Concerns brought to Synod Zwolle-Zuid (2008) and turned down.

a. Retaining Dr. S. Paas as Lecturer at TUK

As deputies we met on April 19, 2012 with BBK and representatives of TUK. We expressed the concerns of the CanRC with respect to Dr. Paas’ appointment in spite of valid protests against his dissertation (*Creation and Judgment*) and the unbiblical views he expounded there, such as the notion that the people Israel arose from migrant and Canaanite population, calling into question the historicity of the Exodus. We also pointed out that Paas never distanced himself from the views defended in his dissertation. In spite of our deep concerns, it was clear that this was a matter which TUK did not want to revisit. We were told that the decisions have been made, Paas is not teaching Old Testament (the area of his dissertation), and this old matter is closed. As far as we know this is the first time that unbiblical views are being tolerated in Kampen. We therefore consider Paas’ appointment to be a watershed moment in the history of this institution. In our view with the setting of this precedent, it will be very difficult for TUK to stop any possible future higher critical thinking in its circles. (See further on Paas, Appendix 5).

b. The dissertation of Dr. K. van Bekkum approved by the Theological University

We also expressed our concerns with Dr. Van Bekkum’s dissertation (*From Conquest to Coexistence*) in which we see the influence of unbiblical critical thinking. His methodology leads to dehistoricizing, for example, the event of the sun standing still (Josh. 10) which according to the plain and traditional reading of Scripture did actually take place, a fact which the text emphasizes. Van Bekkum was at the meeting and argued that the grounds for his views were purely exegetical. Although we are willing to accept that he wants to be confessionally reformed, we are not convinced that the methodology followed in his dissertation reflects this commitment. According to his dissertation, the scholar has to decide what is truly historical in Scripture by comparing and giving equal weight to the relevant biblical as well as extra-biblical archaeological data. In this way the scholar can determine whether what Scripture claims to be true (truth claim) is actually true (truth value). We fear that traditional Reformed hermeneutics are being replaced in some measure with a method of interpreting Scripture that does not do full justice to the nature of God’s Word. The fact that this was a Kampen dissertation and was awarded a cum laude designation augments our concerns. We wonder whether TUK is not being unduly influenced by critical scholars with whom they are now expected to cooperate in

approving doctoral work done in Kampen. (See further on Van Bekkum's dissertation Appendix 5).

c. Concerns brought to Synod Zwolle-Zuid 2008 and turned down

A number of concerns about the teachings of persons associated with TUK were addressed to Synod Zwolle-Zuid. These included Dr. A. L. Th. de Bruijne's views on Scripture which allowed for inaccuracies in the Bible and its use of myth, Dr. J. Douma's framework hypothesis for the creation week and leaving the door open for evolution, and Dr. G. Harinck's controversial statements on Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, homosexuality, the Roman Catholic mass, and women office bearers.

It is very disquieting that Synod Zwolle-Zuid has shown itself incapable of dealing substantively with the concerns from within the churches which were brought to this assembly. This inability or reluctance to deal with valid concerns does not bode well for the future. (see Appendix 5).

In light of the above, it is not surprising that there appears to be a growing disconnect between the churches and their training for the ministry. The perception is that no strong Reformed leadership is forthcoming from the TUK, a perception shared to a certain extent by the TUK (also see J. H. Kuiper, ed., *Handboek 2012*, 506).

II. The Studies Concerning the Role of Women In The Church

Synod Amersfoort-Centrum 2005 appointed deputies and gave the mandate "by means of problem analysis, especially on the basis of empirical research, with co-operation of TUK, to outline which issues and problems the churches note in connection with the theme 'women in the church.'" The deputies submitted a report to General Synod Zwolle 2008 entitled "Man/Vrouw in de Kerk" (Men/Women in the Church) which caused the CanRC Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad quite a bit of concern due to "new hermeneutics" in regards Bible passages about the role of women being placed alongside the traditional Reformed hermeneutics. (see CRCA report to Synod Burlington 2010). This concern was expressed on the floor of Synod Zwolle-Zuid 2008 at the "foreign delegates week" by the CanRC delegates as well as other foreign representatives. Synod Zwolle-Zuid 2008, however, accepted the report and reappointed the deputies with the mandate to promote further reflection and resolution concerning the role of women (and men) in the church. They were instructed to follow a three-track approach to fulfill their mandate:

- a. Theological/Sociological research
- b. Reflection in the churches
- c. Preparation of practical, short term decisions

We as subcommittee reviewed these three parts of the report of the Deputies M/W to Synod Harderwijk 2011.

a. Theological/sociological Research

This part of the mandate was given to TUK which commissioned Drs. Myriam Klinker-De Klerck, a doctoral student in New Testament at TUK to research the theme of the relationship between men and women in the church. This study was published as *Als Vrouwen het Woord Doen* (When Women do the Talking).

We have two main concerns with this study. Our first concern is the notion that our own culture and context are part of God's general revelation and thus necessary elements in the process of understanding Scripture for our time today. This general revelation, along with the working of the Spirit by which God reveals his will in the lives of his people, is to determine the meaning of the text for today. This meaning can vary depending on the cultural context. Our second concern is the tendentious exegesis given to key passages (such as 1 Cor. 11:2-16 and 1 Tim. 2:8-3:1a) by downplaying the place of the creation account when dealing with man-woman relationships. As the study stands, it can be used to promote women in ecclesiastical office. For more on this study, see Appendix 5.

b. Reflection in the Churches

The deputies composed a manual to be used for reflection in the RCN on the role of women (and men) in the church. This manual was presented at 6 regional meetings to which all churches were invited to send delegates who in turn would be able to pursue reflection on the roles of women in the local churches.

This manual caused us considerable disquiet, especially the first chapter which set the perimeters for the discussion about the role of women in the church. Rather than showing Biblical leadership and directing the members to what Scripture says and what has always been the interpretation of the Reformed confessions (Belgic Confession, Article 30), the deputies M/W in the Church questioned whether this interpretation was the only one which is true to the Word. In our view the first chapter of this manual has only ended up creating more confusion in the reflection process by introducing new and tendentious interpretations as real and Bible-respecting alternatives to the current interpretations of Bible directives concerning women and church offices as reflected in the Reformed Confessions and Church Order and Forms.

Other material offered to the churches in the remainder of the manual for reflection on the role of women in the church included an outline on Bible reading with attention to 1 Timothy, an article on the roles of men and women, an article about the offices in the church, an article on shifts in society, and finally a long list of references. Sadly, these writings, in leaving the matter of the roles of women in the church open to opposing interpretations, only added to the confusing signals being given to the churches. In the end, we are afraid that the manual as only gives further impetus to those who wish to see women in office in the RCN.

c. Preparation of Practical Decisions

Synod Zwolle gave the deputies M/W in de Church the mandate to prepare practical answers to a number of questions. The deputies were unable to make any practical recommendations, and found the mandate too intensive. They requested Synod 2011 to grant them a simplified mandate to make recommendations about practical application of their findings. We are thankful that Synod Harderwijk 2011 instead decided to discharge the deputies and appoint all new ones with a specific mandate to see if it is permitted, on the basis of Scripture, to appoint women to the office of deacon or to the offices of elder or minister (*Acta Synode Harderwijk 2011*, Artikel 29, Besluit 1,2, see Appendix 5). This will bring the matter of the reflection concerning the role of women in the church to a final conclusion. However, since these deputies are also mandated to make use of the materials produced by the previous deputies, the direction the deputies appointed in 2011 will take with their report remains very much “up in the air” for us.

III. The Unity Discussions Between the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) and the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC)

The Netherlands Reformed Churches came into existence in the late sixties of the 20th century, as churches that had split off from the RCN. Matters of doctrine and church government played a decisive role in this split. Since 1993 there have been growing contacts between the NRC and the RCN. This happens on the level of the local churches, as well as through committees of Synods.

In the area of church government the NRC has always shown a strong independentism. Their Church Order (called “Akkoord Kerkelijk Samenleven”) states that a refusal to accept this Akkoord cannot be a reason to expel a local church from the federation. The preamble of this document only requests local churches to respect the decisions of major assemblies as much as possible. In the area of doctrine the NRC practice significant tolerance when it comes to deviations from the Reformed confessions. The Akkoord does have an article about subscription to the Three Forms of Unity by office bearers, but those who refuse to sign simply have to give account to their consistory. In practice there is freedom to criticize the confessions in articles and books (e.g. publications of drs. H. de Jong).

General Synod Ommen (1993) was the first synod to instruct the Deputaten Kerkelijke Eenheid (=Deputies Ecclesiastical Unity; further in this report DKE) “to explore if there are possibilities to make contact with the NRC, and if so – in what way” (*Acta Synode Ommen 1993*, Art.66). In their report to the next synod (1996) the DKE concluded with sadness that tolerance of deviation from the Reformed confessions and the lack of clarity in the NRC as to what it means to be bound to these confessions, made it impossible to continue the discussions with the NRC. The next number of synods of the RCN concluded that there was really no basis for unity talks with the NRC because of those two reasons. Subsequent synods, however, instructed DKE to continue the discussions with the CCS on these questions.

At Synod Zwolle-Zuid 2008, however, there were majority and minority reports from the deputies, and synod's decision was a compromise between the two. Synod decided to "take note of" a statement regarding the differences in practice of the binding to the confessions and expressed sadness that the discussion about women in office in the NRC had not taken away the objections mentioned by the previous Synod. Synod gave the specific mandate to discuss with the NRC committee the three topics that keep coming back: (1) the differences in binding to the confession; (2) the differences in dealing with ongoing deviations from the confession; (3) the matter of women in office within the NRC (*Acta Synode Zwolle-Zuid 2008*, Art.112).

The DKE report that was dealt with by Synod Harderwijk 2011 is surprising and confusing. It indicated that the Deputies had discussions with the NRC committee on 3 topics: the doctrine of Baptism, the Holy Spirit and Church & Lord's Supper. They also had general discussions on the hermeneutical principles that are important when we want to apply biblical commands in our time. DKE concluded with thankfulness that on all these topics there is much harmony between the RCN and the NRC (at least between the two committees). They see this as a strong basis to continue with much confidence the discussions about the confession and about women in office. A few observations from this DKE report to Synod Harderwijk.

- i. The discussions of the deputies focussed on topics Synod Zwolle 2008 had not asked for.
- ii. The report does not speak about the issues Synod had mandated DKE to address and seek clarification about.
- iii. The conclusion that there is so much harmony in the way in which the RCN and the NRC bind to the confessions is not supported by the facts in the NRC. Office bearers who reject infant baptism and do not sign a subscription form are still accepted.

General Synod Harderwijk 2011 decided to receive this report of the DKE and its appendices with thankfulness. According to Synod these documents give evidence that the agreement reached on the topics of Baptism, the Holy Spirit, and the Church & Lord's Supper, is an encouraging starting-point for ongoing discussions about dealing with particular deviations from the confession, and about the matter of women in office. In line with that, Synod instructed DKE to continue the discussions with the NRC, with the specification that the discussion should focus on two topics: (1) women in office, and (2) the manner in which local churches handle the binding to the confession. Synod considered that the result of the discussions so far give enough confidence to continue, with the expectation that in the near future the discussion can be focused on ecclesiastical unity.

When we consider the above developments, we as subcommittee can only conclude with concern that the RCN are slowly being drawn into warmer relations with the NRC without real resolution of the original differences concerning toleration of deviation from the confessions and subscription to the confessions. And we also suspect that there will be no real drive for further

discussion of the matter of women in office in the NRC as the RCN is presently in the process of studying this internally.

IV. Other Matters

Synod Burlington 2010 also gave the Subcommittee for Contact with the RCN the mandate “to monitor developments regarding the quality or contents of new hymns.” We have reviewed the decisions made by Synod Harderwijk 2011 concerning the new *Gereformeerd Kerkboek* (*Reformed Churchbook*). Work is still being done by deputies “Kerkmuziek” (deputies Church Music) to assemble songs for the *Reformed Churchbook*. Whether this will include specific songs from the *Liedboek voor de Kerken* (*Songbook for the Churches*) in use among a number of Protestant churches in the Netherlands remains dependent on the number of songs from the *Liedboek* as well as other sources which will be approved in the future. Either the *Liedboek* will remain in use in the churches with only the songs approved by synod being utilized in worship, or the songs from the *Liedboek* will be incorporated in the new *Reformed Churchbook*. This will be decided by the next two synods (2014 and 2017). The Dutch deputies are also in the process of recommending certain songs from a songbook called *Opwekkingsliederen* (*Revival Songs*). These songs will be recommended for use in special services in the churches. Synod Zwolle-Zuid 2008 also opened the way for churches to occasionally use the contemporary songs from the project *Psalmen Voor Nu* (*Psalms for Now*). Synod Harderwijk 2011 gave deputies Church music the task to draw up a manual to explain why the *Psalms for Now* are not suitable for inclusion in the *Reformed Songbook* and how they can be used on occasion in worship services. The result of all this is that the RCN now have many songs from various sources approved or provisionally approved for worship and other songs approved only for special occasions. In addition, some churches simply ignore Article 67 of the RCN Church Order concerning songs to be sung in worship and utilize non-approved songs (*Handboek 2012, Jaaroverzicht 2011, p.487*). All this has resulted in a complex system of many songs which we believe, will only continue to frustrate many in the churches.

The Deputies Church Music have also been instructed to merge with the Deputies “Eeredienst” (Worship) and work together toward the new *Reformed Churchbook*. The Deputies for Worship have completed their revision of the forms for use in worship and after final approval, all the new forms will also be incorporated in such a songbook. Synod Harderwijk 2011 also, in part due to an article in *De Reformatie* in early 2011 questioning the reading of specific forms in worship such as the Form for Baptism of Infants, has instructed the deputies to “conduct research into the use of the liturgical forms in the churches and to bring the role of the church federation (prescriptive, facilitative, advisory, equipping, etc.) into discussion” (*Acta Synod Harderwijk 2011, Artikel Deputaten Eeredienst, Besluit 6*).

The members of the Subcommittee for Contact with the RCN have participated and watched on internet a number of worship services in the RCN and have been struck by the variety in liturgy and worship in the Dutch sister churches. Some services follow liturgies very similar to those

contained in the *Book of Praise* of the CanRC. Others vary greatly from the style of worship accepted in conventional Reformed churches, and include various readings, personal testimonies, contemporary songs, a variety of musical instruments and bands, and slide presentations. These services tend to be more man-centred and simplified.

For quite some time now, there has been work in the RCN on a new church order. The deputies for this work have heard the churches via Synod Zwolle-Zuid 2008 and have issued version 2 of a proposed new church order referred to as “Werkorde.” Reactions to the second proposal have been processed and in June 2012 the third version was issued. This is to be approved for distribution to the churches by September 2012, at which time Synod will finally close.

Finally, in December 2010, members of the Deputies Church Unity (DKE) of the RCN decided to participate in what was termed a “National Synod”. This assembly or forum was convened in the city of Dordrecht, in the same city where the Synod of Dort had been convened in 1618-19. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN) organized this assembly, and invited all protestant churches in the Netherlands to send representatives. More than 50 churches participated. This “National Synod” had as purpose a meeting of as many Dutch protestant churches as possible in order to ascertain what those churches have in common and to present a meaningful and indispensable shared testimony to a society which is becoming ever more de-Christianized. That testimony or “Credo” is a statement about the Triune God and ends as follows:

“The joy of this gospel unites us, we belong together and are given to one another in the body of Christ, His church. It causes us pain that that the unity in Christ is so broken among us, almost invisible. We may not accept this, for the Good Shepherd has one flock. In our nation there is a growing communion of those who, coming out of the worldwide Christianity, enthusiastically express their faith. Together, we want to be church in the Netherlands and encourage one another in faith, hope and love. We pray that this may be a testimony to all with whom we are in discussion, also those who profess a different religion. So we are on the way to the day when Jesus Christ returns. Then God will destroy all evil, give us His peace and justice: a new heaven and a new earth!”

Prof. Dr. B. Kamphuis of the TUK was one of the signatories to this “Credo.”

Two theses were discussed by the representatives: 1. The characteristic of a Christian is not truth, but love, and 2. Church division is no longer of any concern to the youth.

The DKE reported that attending this “National Synod” was a very positive and moving experience. Rev. H. Messelink of the DKE wrote positively about the meeting in the March 2011 issue of *Lux Mundi*, a magazine published by the BBK of the RCN, as follows:

“A National Synod: what are we to think of it? Just like us, many asked themselves that same question beforehand. But when you have been speaking for two days about the heart of the gospel, as it was made visible in Jesus Christ, the thankfulness for all that you have recognized in others dominates. Thankful, because we have a strong signal for the world: that one message of salvation, despite the differences that are most certainly there, is of lifesaving importance. How wonderful it would be if we could spread that message in all unity to the whole country. Let us give meaning to the National Synod on a local level: hold faith discussions with all those with whom we know ourselves to be connected in Christ. If we subsequently – despite our differences – discover what connects us in Christ, we can no longer delay holding high the rescuing message of God’s salvation and mercy to all our fellow countrymen.”

Others in the RCN posited less positive reviews (Prof. Dr. J. VanBruggen in *Nederlands Dagblad*, Dec. 23, 2010) and there were a number of appeals at General Synod Harderwijk 2011 concerning official participation in this body.

Synod, however, was positive in its decision. It turned down the appeals and approved the participation of the deputies and gave them the mandate to monitor the developments surrounding this forum and to send delegates to it, taking into consideration the specific identity and responsibility of the RCN and to bring forward the catholic, Reformed confession according to the Scriptures (*Acta Synode Harderwijk 2011*, Artikel Participatie Nationale Synode en Raad van Kerken, Besluit 1).

Another matter which has come to our attention is the RCN policy to feel free to send a female deputy of the BBK as delegate to synods of church in Ecclesiastical Fellowship (see *Acts of Synod Pretoria 2011* of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, and *Acts of Synod Armadale 2012* of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, Article 90). We have no issue with female deputies in committees, as the CanRC also has appointed females to synod committees. However, our practice is to allow foreign delegates the privilege of the floor as long as they attend synod in the assumption that they are officebearers or were such at the time of appointment.

D. Conclusions of the Subcommittee

The Subcommittee for Contact with the RCN is thankful for the open communications and meetings and discussions which we were able to have with the deputies of the BBK of the RCN. We are also thankful for the desire for faithfulness to the Lord which we encountered in the RCN people we communicated and met with. The Spirit is certainly at work in the Netherlands, as can also be seen in the many organizations and groups which are involved in mutual support in various fields such as politics, science and education as well as in support for the disabled and for homosexuals (see *Handboek 2012 van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, p.344 ff) . Add to this the considerable works of mercy and outreach and what one sees is churches which

are very engaged not only inwardly, but especially outwardly. We remain impressed by the active faith of our brothers and sisters in the Netherlands. Our prayer is that this activity of faith may continue and that the RCN may remain a beacon of faith in action as reflected in the above organizations.

Our contacts, however, have confirmed the concerns brought to Synod Burlington 2010 about the direction the RCN are moving as federation of churches. We were frequently assured in correspondence and in meetings that the RCN is determined to be true to God's Word and the Three Forms of Unity. But the more we busied ourselves with what has been decided and what is accepted in these churches, the more concerned we have become about the direction these churches are slowly but surely moving. We are afraid that this is a direction which is leading them into conflict with the Word as it is confessed and understood in faithful Reformed churches throughout the world.

Our mandate was to focus our attention on certain areas of concern which we have divided into the three parts above. We proffer our conclusions concerning each of those parts.

I. Concerns About the View of Scripture in TUK (Mandate 4.4.1 and 4.4.2).

A. We regret that Dr. Paas' appointment was upheld in spite of valid criticisms. We could expect that any minister who held such views would have been summarily disciplined. These views militate against Scripture and our confessions. We of course make no judgment on Dr. Paas' personal faith. We only judge his writing.

By maintaining this appointment in spite of the valid objections brought against Paas' scholarly work, Kampen will probably no longer be able to call anyone to account concerning higher critical views in the future. It seems to us that this episode will leave Kampen open to future toleration of the teaching of the Scriptures in a critical, man-centered manner which dishonours Scripture and its Author. Not taking disciplinary action has, we believe, made it very difficult to deal biblically with similar cases in the future.

The matter is serious for ultimately we are not simply talking about method here, but of an unbelieving ideology. This ideology controls how one arranges and views the facts. The clear meaning and intent of the Scriptures no longer have the last say, but man does. We fear that this approach will ultimately affect the integrity of TUK and influence the views of students and thus future ministers.

B. We regret the approval of the dissertation of Dr. K. Van Bekkum by TUK. This dissertation displays the influence of critical thinking in the way the biblical text is approached and interpreted. This raises the question whether this approval means that Kampen no longer holds to the Reformed view of Scripture as perspicuous and its own interpreter. If the Old Testament no longer means what it clearly states, where do we end up? As detailed in our report, this issue goes beyond the notion of freedom of exegesis which we defend.

The question arises whether TUK is not unduly being influenced by critical scholars with whom they are now expected to cooperate in approving doctoral work done in Kampen.

C. We are disturbed by the inaction of Synod Zwolle-Zuid. This synod did not deal in any meaningful way with serious concerns brought to its table but put aside for the most part on tenuous technical grounds. The issues brought to Synod were extremely important for maintaining the integrity and authority of the Bible within the RCN. By not dealing with the various appeals, we believe that this Synod has at the very least given the impression that the RCN tolerates views that are not in accordance with the Bible's own testimony and the Reformed confessions.

II. The Studies Concerning the Role of Women in the Church

We found the reports of the Deputies M/W in de Church to Synod Zwolle-Zuid 2008 and Synod Harderwijk 2011 rather disconcerting. Western society has embraced the role equality of women, and this certainly places a great deal of pressure on churches which seek to maintain the directives of God's Word in regards to the role of women in the church. We understand the societal pressures our sister churches are enduring in a secular and progressive Dutch society. But this makes it all the more imperative that we support, encourage and admonish each other as Reformed churches in this world to stay close to the inspired and authoritative Word of God. That is our intent in commenting on the three parts of the work of the Deputies M/W in the Church over the past years.

1. The Theological/sociological Research

We are disappointed with Myriam Klinker-De Klerck's study because of the undue weight given to the current cultural context in understanding Scripture and the downplaying of the creation account when dealing with man-woman relationships.

We are also disappointed that Synod Harderwijk left the place of this book and its ideas up in the air, so to speak. It has neither synodical approval nor disapproval. It is now another publication in the churches with the potential to confuse the members about what the Bible says about the role of women in the church.

2. Reflection in the churches.

This part of the mandate of the Deputies M/W in the Church resulted mainly in the publication of the "Handleiding M/V" (Manual M/W). The contents of this manual as outlined in our detailed report (Appendix 5) lack solid Biblical direction for the churches. By proposing opposing interpretations as valid and on equal footing, we're afraid that the deputies have only contributed to further the confusion about what the Bible really says about the place and role of women in the church in the RCN. We see the report to Synod 2008 and the work of the deputies along the same line in the report to Synod 2011 as a movement away from the Word of God and in line

with a new egalitarian hermeneutic which has infiltrated so many churches over the past half-century or so. Such an approach to the Bible also opens the way to the reinterpretation of what Bible passages state about other issues such as creation/evolution and homosexual relations.

Synod Harderwijk 2011 has appointed a full slate of new deputies to give Scripture-based recommendations concerning whether or not women may serve in church office. Our hope is that the newly-appointed deputies will let a historically tried and tested Reformed interpretation of Scripture determine their direction rather than societal pressures and modern reinterpretations, and that they conclude that that door to the new hermeneutics with respect to the role of women in the church should be closed and the authority of the clear and sufficient Word of God be maintained.

3. Preparation of Practical Decisions

We certainly appreciate that Synod Harderwijk has now focussed the mandate on the real issue and has directed deputies to base their conclusions on Scripture only. It has to be noted that in the grounds given for the decision of Synod Harderwijk there appears to be a certain frustration with the slow pace of the work of Deputies M/W in the Church and the time and toil it was consuming not only on the part of deputies and synod, but also the churches. We are thankful that this matter is finally being directed by a synod to a conclusion in the RCN. However, seeing the materials produced and distributed among the churches in the meantime such as the manual and the book we reviewed above, and taking into consideration the concerns we expressed about the weakening of the authority of Scripture and the opening to new hermeneutics, we have to say that we do not know in which direction this work may lead. It is imperative for our churches to pay attention to the direction the report to the next synod will point the churches.

III. The Discussions Between the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) and The Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC)

Whenever faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ find each other, recognize each other and can come to unity based on submission to God's Word and on a solid commitment to the Reformed confessions, we can only rejoice and praise God. The question is: is this what is happening in the contacts between the RCN and the NRC? We are afraid not.

The committee reports, as well as the decisions of the Synods, at least give the impression that these two federations, RCN and NRC, are coming closer together. They experience growing harmony and better understanding and agreement in many areas. And the remaining questions and obstacles seem to become less and less relevant. Our concern is that the RCN will be more and more influenced by the situation and developments in the NRC. In theory this can also work the other way round, of course, but there is not much evidence that this is happening.

The developments from Synod Ommen 1993 to Synod Harderwijk 2011, as summarized in our detailed report (Appendix 5) give at least the impression that the growing contacts between the

RCN and the NRC have taken on a life of their own. The process that is pictured in DKE reports, in Synod decisions, and in local developments, continues, and it seems that Synods are hardly able to give direction to, or correct these developments, even if they would like to.

Based on the observation that this process of growing closer together is not the result of changes in the NRC, but of shifting attitudes and views (hermeneutical, doctrinal and church political) in the RCN, we are concerned that these developments will in many ways affect the Reformed and confessional identity of our sister churches.

IV. Other Matters

The RCN are still in the process of finalizing a new *Reformed Churchbook*. It is laudable that the RCN have taken on this project, but this process has apparently become quite drawn-out and, at least to us, quite confusing. However, since the *Reformed Churchbook* is a work in process in the RCN and we as subcommittee find it impossible to do real justice to the mandate “to monitor developments regarding the quality or contents of new hymns,” our recommendation is to discontinue this specific mandate at this time.

As to the revision of the church order of the RCN, we acknowledge that such a revision can be beneficial for a church federation. The CanRC and URCNA have been working on a proposed joint church order for a new federation for some years (PJCO). We do not have the latest proposed version of the approved by Synod Harderwijk in Sept. 2012, but would suggest a careful review in the future. Assisting each other as churches is part of functioning of the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Rule 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.”).

As to participation in the “National Synod” in 2010, though it was pointed out by Synod that the “Credo” is not intended to replace the Reformed confessions and that church divisions were not covered over in any way, we still find the participation of the RCN deputies very questionable and naïve. Taking part in this enterprise would seem to us to be expressing a unity which hardly exists and which is not historically or confessionally responsible, a coming together which does more to promote the idea of the pluriformity than the unity of Christ’s one, holy, catholic church (Lord’s Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism). The result, we believe, is a weakening rather than a strengthening of the testimony of the RCN in Dutch society.

As to the matter of churches in EF delegating female deputies to CanRC synods, we believe that in order to avoid misunderstanding beforehand, that Synod Carman 2013 make clear that female delegates to synod will not be given privilege of the floor on matters other than that of relations with their churches.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend synod to decide:

1. To continue at this time the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCN under the adopted rules for this relationship.
2. To express in a letter of concern from this synod to the next RCN synod our brotherly concerns as per the rules for EF (1&6) about the direction we see our sister churches moving in at this time. This letter will express our love for the RCN as church of the Lord and our sincere prayers for our “mother” church in the extreme secular European situation. But it will also describe our disquiet about the following matters:
 - a. The views coming from or tolerated at the TUK which show marks of Scripture criticism and new hermeneutics.
 - b. The work of the Deputies M/W in the Church appointed by Synod Amersfoort-West 2005 and Zwolle 2008 and how Scripture was treated in their reports.
 - c. The growing relationship with the NRC, also on local level, without resolution of crucial differences such as women in office and subscription to the confessions.
 - d. A growing sense of estrangement between the CanRC and the RCN which we hope and pray will not lead to a parting of the ways in the future.
3. To decide that in the case a church sends a female deputy as delegate to a CanRC synod, she not be given synod privilege other than about matters relating to EF with that church.
4. To reappoint a subcommittee to the CRCA for contact with the RCN and to mandate this subcommittee to:
 - a. Maintain contact with the BBK of the RCN and to represent the CanRC at the next synod of the RCN.
 - b. Continue to observe developments at the TUK.
 - c. Follow the work of the Deputies concerning the Role of Women in the Church and to assess its report as well as the decisions of the next Synod of the RCN regarding that report.
 - d. Follow the ongoing unity discussions between the RCN and the NRC and to review the decisions of the next Synod of the RCN regarding unity with the NRC.
 - e. Review the results of the revision of the RCN church order.
 - f. Monitor the results of the RCN’s involvement with the “National Synod.”
 - g. Report to the churches six months prior to General Synod 2016.

Respectfully submitted,

J. De Gelder, J. Moesker (convener), G. J. Nordeman, C. Van Dam

APPENDIX 1

Report of the visit to General Synod Harderwijk 2011 of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKV) from March 28 – April 2, 2011, by G. Nordeman and J. DeGelder

A. Schedule of the visit

Monday, March 28 – This was the arrival day for all the foreign fraternal delegates – about 30 – who came from all over the world to attend what is called the ‘buitenland week’ of Synod. In the course of the day we had the opportunity to meet and interact with many other delegates, as they arrived at the “Parkhotel Bosch & Lommer” in Hierden.

From 9 – 12 we met with a section of Deputies BBK to share with them the concerns of the Canadian Reformed Churches about developments in our Dutch sister churches. Some of this was expressed by Synod Burlington 2010 of the CanRC, while our committee had given a more detailed evaluation in an interim report that had been sent to BBK.

From BBK were present: K. Wezeman (chairman), P.K.Meijer (vice-chairman), M.H. Oosterhuis (general secretary), R. Van Wijnen, W. Kuipers and A.P. Feijen.

We had a frank, open and brotherly discussion about a variety of topics. With our letter of March 9 they had received our interim report that gave a critical evaluation of three topics (hermeneutics as in the writings of Paas and Van Bekkum; the contacts between the GKV and the NGK; and Man/Woman in the church). BBK had passed on this report to Synod. Although it had arrived passed the deadline for incoming mail, Synod had accepted it and handed it to the advisory committee churches abroad to comment on it. All members of Synod had received a copy as well.

We stressed the seriousness of the concerns from Canada, and how this might affect our relationship. The problem in the discussion was that perhaps (some of) the brothers would personally have similar concerns, but as deputyship they did not really want to interact with and comment on these issues. They felt this to be the responsibility of the Synod, whereas they are only appointed as committee to execute synod’s decisions.

We understand that, but we urged them not to brush off or simply take note of the views expressed by the CanRC (and others!). These concerns need to be heard at Synod, but for churches abroad BBK is the address to voice these and the only way to put these matters on the Synod agenda. And the way in which BBK does this, should confront Synod with the seriousness of the objections coming from the sister churches abroad.

We expressed the concern that the developments in the Dutch churches seem to move the churches away from the reliability and authority of God’s Word, by putting more and more man and his ideas and expectations in the centre rather than God’s revealed will. The brothers took issue with this and assured us that, with everything that is going on and shifting in the Dutch churches, the churches want to remain faithful to the Scriptures as the full Word of God. They insisted on the Biblical and confessional integrity of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands as they seek to give relevant answers to the questions believers are confronted with in this secular, post-christian society.

At 4 pm we met for about 1½ hour with the delegates from Australia (FRCA), Rev. A. Veldman & br. W. Spyker, and the delegate from South Africa (FRCSA), br. C. Roose, since we share the same concerns and have the same questions. We also shared with them our experiences in the meeting earlier that day.

Tuesday, March 29 – The morning and the afternoon were filled with a conference in the hotel. The purpose was to have the various committees, appointed by the previous Synod, present the reports that are on the agenda of Synod Harderwijk. This was meant to inform the foreign delegates in English about the various topics and proposals Synod will have to deal with. It was, of course, not a Synod meeting, but the members of Synod had been encouraged to be present, and many of them were.

Opening devotions were done by sr. Elly Urban, member of BBK, who gave a meditation on Exodus 3: 1 – 15. Her message stressed what during the rest of the week turned out to be an important key to understand the developments in our sister churches. Referring to God speaking to Moses from the burning bush, she made the application: *God speaks, but not always where we expect him to speak, or the way wherein we expect him to speak.* And: *Trying to see the relevance of God's Word in our context can produce a certain tension.... modern times ask for new ways of speaking, new ways of interpreting.* And: *It is not always easy to recognize the voice of the living God in our world, or to interpret his words in our context. How does God relate to our culture? How does he speak to people of our times?*

But what about God speaking in the Bible? Her words left us with the impression that there is tension between the Scriptures and the speaking of the living God.

After some introductions, br. Mollema, clerk of Synod, gave an overview of the Synod Agenda and Rev. Oosterhuis, secretary of BBK, gave an overview of the proposals with regard to the relations with churches abroad. One noteworthy matter is here, that the GKV has withdrawn its offer of ecclesiastical fellowship to the OPC. This offer was made by a number of synods, and so far the OPC has kept it under consideration. The 77th GA of the OPC concluded that *the Assembly finds itself unable to affirm, without reservation, that the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands are fully Reformed.*

Then the Deputies for Church Unity introduced their report, in particular the sections about the contacts with the NGK. And the Deputies Man/Woman (M/W) in the church did the same with their report. After every presentation there was an opportunity to ask questions, although the deputies did not want to go into a debate on different views.

It was an informative conference, and as such it was helpful, especially since hard copies of these reports were also available in English.

In the evening we heard an interesting presentation on Mission and Relief work by DVN (De Verre Naasten).

Wednesday, March 30 – Today we were transported to Kampen to attend a conference on 'Hermeneutics' at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches. Obviously the Deputies BBK have sensed that a lot of the things many of the foreign sister churches worry about in the Dutch churches circle around hermeneutical questions: what are the principles that determine how we read and interpret the Bible?

A number of staff members at the TUK (= Theological University Kampen) introduced various topics related to this theme, while after every presentation a lively, and at times critical, discussion took place.

Dr. Erik de Boer chaired the activities. Speakers were: Dr. Barend Kamphuis (history of hermeneutics in Kampen), Dr. Erik de Boer (4th commandment and Sunday observance), Dr. Ad de Bruijne (the Kingdom style in ethics), Drs. Kees Haak (Contextual Reading of the Bible), Dr. Koert van Bekkum (Joshua, historicity and archaeology), Dr. Gert Kwakkel (Creation in Genesis). The conference was wrapped up with a panel discussion with all the speakers.

It was striking that also in several of these presentations the dominating question was how the truth of God's Word can be presented today in a way that it is relevant for the contemporary questions that people are facing in the very secular, post-modern and post-christian culture of the 21st century. Several foreign guests who participated in the discussions expressed serious concerns about the use of Scripture at the TUK.

The day ended with a dinner/buffet on board of "De Veerman van Kampen", as we were touring the river IJssel. Since most staff members of the TUK, as well as the deputies BBK were also on board, we had lots of opportunities to continue discussing the issues of the day.

Thursday, March 31 – This was the first day we spent in Harderwijk at a plenary session of Synod. Usually Synod meets in plenary sessions only on Fridays and Saturdays, but for this week the Thursday was also included, to accommodate the foreigners.

GS Harderwijk was convened and began its meetings in January. The first sessions were used to get things organized. The advisory committees are set up per region, so that they can meet in the various areas where the members are located. For the first few weeks Synod did not meet in plenary sessions, as the advisory committees prepared their reports and recommendations.

Today the report of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (BBK) was on the agenda, together with the report with recommendations from the advisory committee Utrecht. To our pleasant surprise the report of the advisory committee gave a fairly lengthy and accurate summary of the document that our committee had sent in March. The committee also advised also a course of action in reaction to this.

The discussions on the report and the recommendations were kind of tame, and the concerns of OPC, CanRC, FRCA and others were noted, but did not spark much of a debate on the floor of Synod. All the recommendations were adopted.

We were disappointed that no one interacted with our report. When br. Nordeman asked what Synod was going to do with the advice of the advisory committee as reaction to the CanRC document, the response of the chairman was: "it doesn't come with a proposed recommendation, so we can do nothing". This is not just disappointing, it was frustrating: "Thank you for your letter, but we are going to ignore it."

There is one thing in the decisions we should take note of. Synod decided that *Deputies BBK correctly refused to discuss the concerns of the FRCA regarding the GKV in an official meeting of BBK with the FRCA and other concerned sister churches*. This also applies to the CanRC, of course. But the ground given is significant, and may give us direction for future action. It says: *If a sister church has objections against a synod*

decision on doctrine, church-government, discipline and worship, she must present this directly to our general synod.

Spread throughout the agenda items of the day several fraternal delegates were invited to address synod, no longer than 10 minutes each. Rev. DeGelder did so on behalf of the CanRC, using the speech approved by our committee, with one small adjustment. Usually members of BBK gave a reply. In our case the response came from K. Wezeman, who spoke nice words about the relationship with Canada, and expressed the hope that we would grow in mutual understanding and acceptance.

Friday, April 1 – Today Synod Harderwijk met again in plenary session. This time a general discussion was scheduled on the report of the Committee for Church Unity, with the focus on the contacts with the NGK. Two items in the report received special attention: (1) the matter of doctrinal faithfulness and binding to the reformed confession, and (2) the hermeneutical principles behind the VOP report in the NGK, that led to the decision in the NGK to open all offices for women. The overall conclusion of the report was that there is great unanimity and harmony, and that the talks have been helpful in gaining a better understanding of one another as churches.

At this time Synod was only having a preliminary discussion on this. There were no recommendations for decisions on the table yet.

Unfortunately we were only able to be present and participate in the morning. The presentation and the discussions were interesting, but not very lively. The only critical and challenging questions came from some fraternal delegates.

In the afternoon we travelled to Kampen where we had a meeting scheduled with representatives of the GKN (voorlopig verband). We met with the brothers Rev. Van der Wolf, Rev. Hoogendoorn, Odding and Vogel from 2 – 5 pm, and a summary of our discussions can be found in section..... of this report.

We were back in Harderwijk by 6 pm, and were informed that the synod discussion on the 2nd topic (see above) had not been very lively either and was over already. Also on this day several fraternal delegates had addressed Synod. Synod would still meet in the evening to deal with a few housekeeping matters. This would not take much time and was not very interesting for the foreign delegates, so we were all transported back to the hotel. This was the end of the ‘buitenland week’. Some delegates left that same evening, but most departed the next day.

B. Observations

1. Everything was extremely well organized and was run very effectively. The hospitality was great and so were the accommodations.
2. We could spend only two days at Synod meetings, which makes for limited opportunities to interact with the agenda items that are discussed. For instance, in response to our critical letter regarding the influence of new hermeneutics in Kampen we were invited to have our input when Synod would deal with the report of the Deputies for the TUK. That sounds nice, but it means little if this report is on the table when we are not present. That is: outside the ‘buitenland week’.
3. Having said that, the set-up of the week was helpful to get a better understanding and a better picture of what is going on in our Dutch sister churches.

4. Throughout the week a common thread that connected many of the presentations and speeches was the emphasis on the need to present God's Word in a manner that makes us culturally relevant as Reformed churches. How can we make the gospel accessible to people (church members and others) that live in an increasingly secular, as well as post modern and post christian society?
5. At the Theological University the emphasis of the research is also on the need to be academically relevant among the other theological faculties and institutions, not only in The Netherlands, but also international. Most of these other institutions are quite liberal in their theology and very critical in their approach of Scripture.
6. The previous observation implies that at the TUK the focus is changing. It is more and more shifting from training for the ministry to academic theological research. This can be seen in the fact that less and less graduates choose to become ministers, as well as in the fact that more and more the TUK has to compete for students. For young men (and women!) from the GKV, who want to study theology, the TUK is no longer the first choice, but one out of many options.
7. We were no longer there, when Synod was going to decide on the future directions for the ongoing talks with the NGK. But all the signals we received made clear that on the local level the contacts with churches of the NGK are rapidly intensifying and that this will go on, regardless what Synod would decide.
8. In his presentation on Wednesday Dr. Ad de Bruijne gave a clear explanation of the intention of developing and working with the "style of the kingdom" approach in matters of personal ethics. But it did not become clear how this approach relates to God's commandments and instructions in his Word. It gives at least the impression that under this cover every consistory and even every church member can make his/her own personal ethical choices.
9. It is well-known that local churches are experimenting when it comes to worship and liturgy, but also in practical theological thinking. There are healing services, driven by charismatic thinking. Reformed authors speak about infant baptism as optional. A church organizes so-called "Taize-services", with no preaching, just personal meditation. The media like to give much attention to these and more bizarre things that are happening. We were told that it is good to realize that this involves a very limited number out of the 270 local churches in the federation, and that most of these things are not in any way sanctioned or approved by a classis or a synod. As a matter of fact, these activities are quite often frowned upon by many people, and by most ministers. This may be so, but it is also important to note that nothing and no one seems to be able to stop these things. And the result is that more and more the churches of the GKV federation show a fragmented picture.
10. Critical and warning comments were made and concerned questions were raised about the developments in the Dutch churches by the delegates of almost all foreign churches that were present.

C. Conclusions

1. It appears that a shift in hermeneutics is a most crucial issue as it provides the background of many things that are changing in the churches in Holland. This also implies that the leadership that comes from the Theological University plays a crucial

role in the developments in the churches. The urge to be academically relevant and to be accepted in the modern, liberal theological academia is dangerous and leads to research and publications as the ones produced by Dr. Paas and Dr. Van Bekkum. To confront critical scholars on their own turf may be well intended, but if it leads to a more modern critical way of reading, using and interpreting the Bible, things go wrong. If it undermines the clarity and authority of the Scriptures as God's Holy Word, as the Reformed Churches confess in art. 3, 5, 7 of the Belgic Confession, then the price is too high for the churches. After all – this is where the future preachers and teachers will come from.

2. What was mentioned in the 1st conclusion will have major consequences for the churches. To be culturally relevant as Christian believers when we speak and write and relate to people in our post modern and post christian society sounds like a lofty goal. After all, as church members we live in this secular world and are affected by it, and we also want to reach out to unbelievers in a way that speaks to them and that is relevant in their context. But this should not mean that our post-modern culture and context is going to determine how to read Scripture, and what in the Bible is relevant for today and what is not. This would put (modern) man with his ideas and expectations in the centre, rather than God, who reveals himself.

We believe that here things are going off the rails in the Dutch churches. The argument that Paul's writings reflect the culture of his days to the point that the clear teachings and instruction in his letters can no longer be valid for the time in which we live today, undermines the confession that it is God's Word in which the Lord reveals his will. When we are encouraged to listen to the voice of the living God beyond what is written, we cross an important line.

It is good to note that these discussions are not at all new. In the history of church and theology throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th century we see the same arguments appear whenever modernism, rational or emotional criticism attacks the authority of God's revelation.

In the eagerness to be culturally relevant it is easily forgotten that God's Word is often also counter-cultural. As a matter of fact, it has always been counter-cultural since the days of the New Testament, and it will always be counter-cultural.

3. The "style of the kingdom" approach in dealing with ethical issues, as developed and explained by Dr. Ad de Bruijne may be a well-meant effort to find a way as God's people in sometimes thorny ethical discussions. We all know that it is not always easy, simple and straightforward in all situations and circumstances to apply God's commands for holy living. Not everything is always cut-and-dried.

However, we do not believe that this "style-of-the-kingdom" approach will make it any better or easier. In effect it makes more 'fuzzy' and takes away from what God does command in his holy Word. It is going to cloud the distinction between what God wants and what he forbids. In the individualism of our day it will lead people with opposite views to say: "This is my choice and you cannot say it's wrong, because this is what living in God's kingdom means for me."

The effect will be individual ethical confusion, instead of striving for unity in obeying God's Word.

4. What is going on at the TUK and what is reflected in reports, proposals and overtures Synod has been or will be dealing with, that is the urge to accommodate the post-modern and post-christian secular culture, will unavoidably trickle through in the churches. If there is no turn-around it will, humanly speaking, lead to more and more theological and liturgical confusion and fragmentation in and among the churches. The beginning of this can be observed now already.
5. In that light it will be important to pay close attention to the decisions of Synod Harderwijk, especially regarding the matters we have analysed already: the Theological University, the ecclesiastical contacts with the NGK, and the Man/Woman in the church issue. But also when it comes to the new Church Order and the participation in so-called “Synod of Dordrecht” in 2010.
6. We can appreciate that the Deputies BBK have expressed willingness to meet with our sub-committee in the Spring of 2012, to present our evaluations and perhaps our tentative recommendations to our next Synod. We should also use that opportunity to again urge them again to bring the concerns of the CanRC to the attention of the next Synod and the churches in The Netherlands. But it will be good to keep in mind that we may want to choose the route from our Synod directly to the Dutch Synod.

APPENDIX 2

ADDRESS TO SYNOD HARDERWIJK

Canadian Reformed Address to Synod Harderwijk (March 31, 2011) *second draft*

Dear members of Synod Harderwijk

On behalf the Canadian Reformed Churches, I bring you greetings in the name of our risen Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We rejoice that we share the common faith in Christ who died but rose from the dead and who hastens to return to make all things new. We rejoice in our longstanding bond as sister churches and in our common Reformed confessional heritage which we by God's grace may share and on which we may build to face the challenges of the twenty-first century. And challenges there are, also in Canada - the pressures, for example, of individualism, evangelicalism, and secularism.

God in his grace and mercy has sustained us over the past three years since we last met officially in Zwolle. We are very thankful for that. He has blessed us as a federation of 54 congregations (of which 4 are in the United States). We may experience the unity of the faith and the churches continue to benefit from our Theological Seminary in Hamilton. The seminary has gone through quite a transformation with two new professors, Dr. Jannes Smith in Old Testament and Dr. Jason Van Vliet in dogmatics. We are very thankful for the students that the Lord sends us and for the graduates we can present to the churches. We also rejoice in seeing a growing interest in missions and evangelism as churches seek ways to spread and share the gospel of Jesus Christ both at home and abroad. We have mission work in Hamilton's inner city, in greater Vancouver, and among the native people. Abroad our missionaries are active in Brazil, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Asia.

Over the past number of years considerable efforts have been made in seeking unity with the United Reformed Churches. Unfortunately, this process has slowed considerably. A major difficulty is the inability for the two federations to agree on how best to deliver theological education. The Canadian Reformed Churches remain committed to the Secession principle of theological education for the churches and by the churches in a seminary under the control of the churches. Although the heritage of the United Reformed Churches is similar, yet their recent history and the current seminary situation in the United States now makes them hesitant to embrace this principle as it has always been understood. In the meantime local relationships between the United Reformed and Canadian Reformed Churches continue in a positive way and we hope and pray that federative unity will one day become a reality.

All this brings me to Synod Burlington which was held last year. This synod has underlined the deep commitment of the Canadian Reformed Churches to our sister church relationship with you by appointing a committee specifically for this relationship. As you are undoubtedly aware, there is in Canada a growing concern about developments in your churches. This is also reflected in the decisions that Synod Burlington took. This synod decided (and I quote) to "express our prayerful concern for our brothers and sisters in the Lord that they be

committed to the Reformed faith” (Art. 86.4).

The wording of this decision may surprise you since I am sure you all think that you are committed to the Reformed faith and we gladly accept your intentions to be Reformed. So what is the problem? Our synod appointed a special committee:

- to express our grave concerns that no apology was ever issued about controversial and unbiblical comments that have been made by a prominent leader in your churches
- to express our grave concerns that greater care has been not exercised in appointing a teacher to the Theological University and that this controversial appointment, not dealt with satisfactorily until now, still needs to be dealt with.
- to express and discuss our grave concerns about a change in how biblical hermeneutics are functioning in the RCN.

I suppose you could respond and say: well these are old matters. Let’s move on. But brothers, these matters indicate to us a change of direction in you our dear sister churches. In such a case, clarity as to where you stand is of essence and that clarity is now missing.

To give some more explanation of Synod Burlington’s decision, if a dissertation which is clearly written from a critical point of view and makes all sorts of statements that are contrary to Scripture, if such a dissertation is not considered an obstacle to a Kampen appointment, what are we to think of it? Is it not justified to conclude that it means that the so-called higher criticism is now accepted in Kampen? It will at least be very difficult to forbid scholarship which flatly contradicts Scripture in the future, given the history of this appointment. If Kampen goes in this direction, will this not impact negatively on the commitment that future ministers will have to the Scriptures?

The Burlington Synod also charged us a deputies to pay special attention to the upcoming report on the role of women in the church. As we have explained in the past, we fear the role of a new hermeneutic here as well as a giving in to current cultural pressures. Are we not to be guided by a faithful reading of Scripture as reflected in millennia-long understanding of the passages in question?

The Burlington Synod also charged us to pay special attention to the discussions currently taking place between you and the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken. We sense a change in direction over the past several synods. This development is of great concern for us. We have also noticed that the current report on these discussions does not even deal with the issues that Synod Zwolle-Zuid asked them to deal with. We get the impression that what dominates discussion in these two areas is not what the Bible teaches, or what does adherence to the Reformed confessions demand from us, but other factors play a role, such as what do people want.

I do not have the time to delve further into these matters now. We deal with these things in much more detail in our letter of March 9, which is in your possession. With thankfulness I want to mention the meeting we had earlier this week with the Deputies BBK, as well as the discussion and interaction we experienced yesterday at the Theological University. This was helpful and clarifying in many ways. Nevertheless, the Canadian Reformed Churches do wish to

convey to this assembly the seriousness with which we regard these developments in your midst. It grieves us to say these things, but on behalf of your Canadian sister churches we exhort and beseech you to maintain the dominant place that Scripture has always had in coming to decisions. Scripture must always be our norm and not current cultural manifestations. Also adherence to the confessions must remain a big priority, also when we speak with others in ecumenical settings.

We need each other. The pressures of unbelief are growing all the time, also in Canada. May we continue to be partners in contending “for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3) and may we continue to be a blessing to each other. May the Lord our God give this assembly everything it needs to stay true to his Word. Thank you.

Rev. Jan DeGelder and br. Gerry Nordeman, delegates from the Can. Reformed Churches.

APPENDIX 3

INTERIM REPORT SUBCOMMITTEE SUBMITTED TO BBK FOR DISCUSSION MARCH 9, 2011

1. VIEW OF SCRIPTURE IN KAMPEN

We as deputies are concerned that there is evidence of a weakening of the classic Reformed view of Scripture as found in Scripture (e.g., John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21) and confessed in the Belgic Confession Articles 2 to 7. There are several reasons for these concerns.

In summary, they are:

- A. Retaining Dr. Paas as lecturer (“universitair docent”) at the Theological University
- B. The dissertation of Dr. Koert van Bekkum approved by the Theological University
- C. Concerns brought to Synod Zwolle-Zuid (2008) and turned down.

A. Retaining Dr. Paas as Lecturer at the Theological University

Our Observations:

We appreciate good elements in Dr. Stefan Paas’ dissertation which we are using in its revised English form: *Creation and Judgement: Creation Texts in Some Eighth Century Prophets* (Oudtestamentische Studiën 47; Leiden: Brill, 2003). Over against current critical positions, his main thesis is that a belief in creation was found among eighth century prophets. However, we are very disappointed that he completely identifies himself with “a religion-historical approach” (20-31). We would have expected that as a Reformed scholar he would have stated clearly that although he does not adhere to the religion-historical approach, he will use this approach in order to show that even on the basis of those presuppositions one can defend a creation belief in eighth century prophets. As the dissertation now stands there is no hint of the author distancing himself from a critical approach with all the unbiblical presuppositions that go with it.

Within the constraints of this report, let us illustrate the above as briefly as possible.

1. Dr. Paas writes on page 24:

It seems fundamental to the present writer to establish first and foremost that history of religion is a history of religion in its historical manifestation and not a history of God. In other words, to state that YHWH is a derivative of El is not a pronouncement about the theological reality of the divine truth. It is merely establishing that in the early stages of the religious history of Israel His worshippers to a great extent attributed the same qualities to YHWH as were attributed to El, and that the Canaanite El worship was to a great extent the source of the concepts the people of Israel used to give shape to their faith in their God.

We would like to comment on the above as follows:

- To make a distinction between “the theological reality of the divine truth” and the “historical manifestation” (as related in Scripture) is to separate what Scripture relates from actual reality.
- Is the religion of Israel based on revelation from God or is it based on man’s imagination? To say that “the Canaanite El worship was to a great extent the source of the

concepts the people of Israel used to give shape to their faith in their God” is to deny that God through his Mosaic revelation gave shape to their faith in God.

- It is disturbing to see that all of this is qualified as being “fundamental to the present writer” (namely Dr. Paas).

2. Dr. Paas notes that further restrictions to the historical method include that it “does not allow for ‘supernatural’ agencies” (25) and religion is explained “as a *human* [his emphasis] activity” (26). While acknowledging that “for a more profound understanding of the Old Testament and for a theological judgment on the religion of ancient Israel, more than a historical approach is required,” he nevertheless affirms that “for a theological reading of the Old Testament the historical approach to the religion of ancient Israel cannot be neglected” (27-28).

In response we would like to ask how this is possible. If Scripture is God’s revelation and is self-authenticating, what positive role could the investigation of Scripture subjected solely to human rationality, without regard for God’s work, possibly achieve? Any result will be an undermining of Scripture, for once one submits himself to the strictures of the historical critical school, the results will be predictable. Consider the following unbiblical conclusions that Dr. Paas comes to.

- Gen 2:4b-25 is relegated to an author called the Yahwist who possibly wrote during the early or middle period of the monarchy and Gen 1-2:4a said to be a Priestly document dated to the Persian period (post-exilic) (32-34). What Genesis says is, therefore, of minor importance for the history of pre-exilic creation theology (36). In light of all of this, Paas also concludes that “the first Old Testament references to Israel’s faith in YHWH as Creator of the world came from the early monarchic period” (49).

The above is in blatant contradiction to what Scripture affirms to be the case. If one does not want to accept the testimony of Genesis 1 and 2, must one then also deny God’s revelation of the fourth commandment from Mount Sinai? For according to Paas, Israel did not know of creation until the early monarchic period.

- Because of the adoption of the historical-critical method and that of the history of religions school, Paas makes more conclusions that are in open contradiction to Scripture. Such as:

- Israel’s creation belief has Canaanite background and possibly influenced by Egyptian notions (49, 121-132, 437)
- Israel arose from migrant and Canaanite population about 1175 BC. “the tribes which came to be known as ‘Israel’” (113-114)
- the narratives of the Exodus and Entry are “ideological” or “theological” reflections which may have some historical value (120)

- Paas considers creation to be a myth, along with much of Genesis 1-11 (104). For Paas a key element of myth is that it stands outside our time, outside history (102). “Events regulated by God in a time that stands outside of ours are found in particular in the Ur-history (Gen. 1-11). ... We might say that Israel was of Canaanite origins ... and was, therefore, also rooted in a mythic climate of thought. In this way it is possible to think of myth as one of the foundations (and perhaps the foundation par excellence) of Israel’s religion” (104).

Others who Expressed Concerns

As you know, we are not the first ones to raise these type of objections. Similar concerns were raised by an official letter of objection signed by 7 ministers. They point out from the Dutch edition of his dissertation that Dr. Paas adheres to critical theories that do not do justice to

Scripture and its divine authority. In our view, these concerns are justified. But the Theological University of Kampen has rejected demands to review the appointment of Dr. Paas.

Also Prof. J. Douma has protested in an article in *Nederlands Dagblad* published April 3, 2009 and updated April 6, 2009 (see <http://www.nd.nl/artikelen/2009/april/06/dissertatie-stefanpaas-botst-met-godsopenbaring>). His concerns are similar to those raised above. He hoped for a response from the Theological University in Kampen. Kampen responded by means of an article by Prof. Kwakkel who defended Dr. Paas' work. The main arguments are:

work. The main arguments are:

- His work is an Old Testament dissertation and when you write a dissertation you have to work according to the method and principles of the history of religion school. You cannot share your personal faith or assume that the Bible is trustworthy.
- If you wish to know what Paas believes, you should consult his books on evangelism and church planting.
- Paas was able to show that the prophets Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea believed in the LORD as Creator. He concluded that over against scholars who maintain that a belief in creation is later than those prophets.
- The Old Testament teaching in Kampen does not go into a historical-critical direction. However, it was unrealistic for Paas to write his dissertation from a Reformed point of view.
- The difference between myth and history is much smaller with Paas than Douma states and Paas' idea of myth corresponds with what Douma writes, namely that what God and Jesus Christ have done for us in our history is basic for our faith.

Some of the above points were also made by Paas in an interview with *Nederlands Dagblad* (last revised April 6, 2009).

Our Evaluation

The reasons for the refusal of the Theological University to reconsider or rescind the appointment of Dr. Paas are not very convincing. Our response is briefly as follows.

- A Christian, also a Christian scholar, cannot lead two separate lives - one as a believer, the other as a critical scholar basing his research on unbiblical presuppositions. Everything we do must be done to the glory of God (cf. 1 Cor 10:31). Life is one. It is therefore not something to be proud of if for his true views one needs to go to another set of his writings.
- Reading the dissertation of Dr. Paas leaves the very clear impression that he stands behind what he states. We have analyzed some of this earlier. Nowhere to our knowledge does he clearly distinguish himself from his methodology. Rather, he gives the strong impression that he believes in what he writes. Paas identifies himself with the history of religion school's way of thinking.
- Furthermore, contrary to what is suggested in Kampen's response, also Paas' popular writing in the periodical *De Wapenveld* shows something of the same critical presuppositions. He later wrote in *De Wapenveld*, volume 51:5 (2001), in such a way that the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2 is not important for him. But, "perhaps it happened this way" ("En wellicht is het zo gebeurd") as recounted in Genesis. The message and not whether it actually happened is important. But what good would the message be if the event on which it is to be based never occurred? (For the full article, see <http://www.wapenveldonline.nl/viewArt.php?art=424>). So in light of Paas' approach to the historicity of Genesis 1, it is difficult to accept Kampen's explanation that Paas' approach is not just a matter of trying to satisfy academic requirements.

His critical stance is also evident elsewhere.

- Kampen's comment that the difference between myth and history is smaller with Paas than Douma states is not very clear and therefore not very helpful. Paas' use of myth in the Wapenveld article sidesteps the question of history which is of secondary importance to him.
- We gladly accept the fact that the teaching in Kampen does not go into a historicalcritical direction.

Our Conclusions

- We regret that Dr. Paas' appointment was upheld in spite of valid criticisms. We could expect that any minister who held such views would have been summarily disciplined. These views militate against Scripture and our confessions. We of course make no judgment on Dr. Paas' personal faith. We only judge his writing.
- By tolerating Paas' appointment in spite of the objections brought against his scholarly work, Kampen will probably no longer be able to call anyone to account concerning higher critical views in the future. It seems to us that the Paas episode, if left as it is, will leave Kampen open to future toleration of the teaching of the Scriptures in a critical, man-centered manner which dishonours Scripture and its Author. No disciplinary action now would appear to exclude any in the future.
- The matter is serious for ultimately we are not simply talking about method here, but of an unbelieving ideology. The ideology controls how we arrange and view the facts. The clear meaning and intent of the Scriptures no longer have the last say, but man does. See, e.g., Eta Linnemann, *Wissenschaft oder Meinung? Anfragen und Alternativen* (1986) which has been translated into English as *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (1990). We fear that this approach will ultimately affect the integrity of the Theological University and influence the views of students and thus future ministers.

B. The dissertation of Dr. Koert van Bekkum approved by the Theological University

The dissertation of Koert van Bekkum, *From Conquest to Coexistence* was defended on March 18, 2010, and granted a cum laude designation by the senate of the Theological University of Kampen. A published edition of this work is not yet available. This dissertation has generated a lot of controversy and the points raised below are not unique to us. Others have made similar criticisms. We mention especially Dr. J. Douma who as an emeritus professor of the Theological University in Kampen gave considerable serious criticism in his website, as well as Dr. E. de Boer and Dr. R. van Houwelingen (*De Reformatie* 85 [2009-10] 393-394) who both teach at the Theological University in Kampen, and Rev. Joh. de Wolf (*Nader Bekeken* 17 [2010] 246-250). Other critics could be mentioned. Much could be said about this work, also many positive things. However, we restrict ourselves to addressing two key concerns.

1. Methodologically, Van Bekkum considers history writing in the Old Testament as a kind of representational art, a characterization which needs to be factored in along with the community's expectations and beliefs in order to define the nature of its historical truth-claim. The text's truth value can be judged by bringing the results of the above into dialogue with artifactual evidence (31-32). The effect of this is that the straightforward historical claims of Scripture are put aside. For example, 1 Kings 6:1 indicates that the Exodus took place 480 years prior to Solomon's fourth year as king. But to accept this date is according to Van Bekkum a

“lazy man’s solution” (33). According to Van Bekkum it is methodologically incorrect to accept biblical data at face value. “It’s literary artistry and use of genre conventions should be studied first” (33). In the end, the current interpretation of archaeological evidence trumps the biblical testimony and the traditional interpretation is not even discussed. The distinction made by Van Bekkum between truth claim and truth value (32) does not reflect a high view of Scripture and should be rejected.

2. One consequence of his methodology is that the event of the sun standing still (Josh 10:12-14) is interpreted in a metaphorical way (250). This is contrary to the obvious meaning of the text as given to us and as also understood by the earliest interpretations of this passage as seen in Targum Jonathan, the Septuagint, and Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities*, V.61). It is therefore very disappointing that in his intricate critical analysis on the text, the manner in which the text has always been understood is not really dealt with. Only problems which Van Bekkum sees associated with the traditional interpretation are highlighted. Virtually no positive comments in support of the traditional interpretation are given (241). The underlying problem is his methodology by which he subjects the biblical passage (initially only the poetic part) to certain rules of literary criticism and ends up being unable to see what the text is actually saying (237-250). The end result is that according to Van Bekkum the text means that the sun and moon did not actually stand still. Rather “the prolonging of the day to defeat the enemy at one time is understood as a rhetorical strategy, reflecting the common ancient Near Eastern literary technique of contracting a great military victory to a single time span” (250).

Over against this approach which breathes the spirit of critical scholarship, contrast, for example, the treatment which J. H. Kroeze gives in his commentary (*Jozua. Commentaar op het Oude Testament* [1968], 135-136) or M. H. Woudstra (*Joshua. New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1981) 176. The latter correctly notes that “rationalizing attempts for the purpose of satisfying the modern scientific mind should be avoided. ... the biblical view of the world as created by God, who assigned to each heavenly body its place and function (Gen 1:16), permits a rather literal view of the events reported here” (176).

Much more could be said and has been said in the Dutch Reformed press (as noted above). However, our concern as deputies is the fact that the Theological University in Kampen could approve a dissertation with such methodological principles. Does this mean that Kampen no longer holds to the traditional Reformed view of Scripture as perspicuous and its own interpreter. If the Old Testament no longer means what it says, where do we end up?

We do realize that there is freedom of exegesis. We are also aware that Van Bekkum in the Epilogue to his dissertation affirms his acceptance of Article 5 of the Belgic Confession. But it is unclear to us how he can distinguish between accepting the text of Scripture and what the text says (499). Our concern is the pattern that is being set in which the obvious meaning of the text as traditionally and historically understood is no longer maintained, presumably because it does not seem believable anymore. This brings us to our next point.

C. Concerns Brought Before Synod Zwolle-Zuid 2008 and Turned Down

For example:

a. Dr. A. L. Th. de Bruijne has propounded views on Scripture that have met considerable resistance and objections, such as his idea that there are inaccuracies in the Bible and that the Bible makes use of myth (*Woord op Schrift* [2003], 185-193). In spite of the great importance of the issues he raised, his views were not dealt with at the synod on the technical ground that the objections were submitted too late (*Acta Generale Synode-Zwolle-Zuid 2008*, Artikel 105).

b. Dr. J. Douma has written in favour of the framework hypothesis for the creation week which essentially denies the historical character of Genesis 1, and has also argued in favour of leaving room for evolution; see his Genesis [2004] 42f., 45-48, 51). Objections against Dr. J. Douma's views at the synod were also turned down, one of the grounds for this decision being that the objections came too long after the publication of Douma's Genesis. (*Acta Generale Synode-Zwolle-Zuid 2008*, Artikel 105).

c. Dr. G. Harinck in a published interview, made controversial comments that raised questions about his orthodoxy concerning a variety of issues including Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, homosexuality, the Roman Catholic mass, and women office bearers. Although his comments brought protests from the churches, the Synod did not deal with them both on technical grounds and also because he had since backpedaled, modified his comments, and affirmed his desire to continue in subjection to the Word of God and in conformity to the Reformed confession (see *Acta Generale Synode Zwolle-Zuid 2008*, Artikel 10 and 10 and Bijlage 9.2). To our knowledge, no apology for or formal retraction of his comments was made. In our view, the whole episode has not inspired confidence in the integrity and Reformed character of the Theological University.

In summary, the inability to deal with the essence of the objections brought to synod in the above three examples is very unfortunate and can give the impression that the RCN tolerates views that are not in accordance with the Bible's own testimony and the Reformed confessions. This toleration and its possible consequences is obviously of concern to many in the RCN. These concerns also live in the Canadian sister churches.

D. A Question

It struck us that Dr. Van Bekkum in defending his approach in writing his dissertation mentioned the fact that he had to address and appeal to those outside their circles, including critical scholars. He wrote:

Geheel volgens het Kamper wetenschappelijk beleid zoals dat sinds het rapport Oberman in 1989 is gevoerd, heb ik een poging gedaan een eigen gereformeerde bijdrage te leveren aan de oudtestamentische wetenschap. In de netwerksamenleving van vandaag betekent dat: een boek te schrijven dat gehoord kan worden op het podium van de internationale Bijbelwetenschap. Op dat podium spreken atheïsten, agnosten, joden en christenen tegenwoordig met elkaar over de Bijbeltekst. Dat stelt bepaalde eisen aan de presentatie. Je gebruikt argumenten die een ander zouden kunnen overtuigen. Net zoals vele gewone christenen dat doen op hun werk of gereformeerde tieners op een openbare school. Daarbij is het natuurlijk de kunst niet in te leveren op je eigen principiële overtuiging. Die overtuiging mag je ook niet verstoppen. Tegelijk is het op zo'n podium niet verboden andere zaken ter wille van dat ene punt dat je wilt maken even buiten beschouwing te laten, of termen te gebruiken die binnen de eigen geloofsgemeenschap zo niet aan de orde

komen. (www.jochemdouma.nl under “Achtergrond - Reactie van Koert van Bekkum, 22 Juni 2010)

The question arises whether the Theological University in Kampen is not unduly being influenced by critical scholars with whom they are now expected to cooperate in approving doctoral work done in Kampen?

2. THE DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS (RCN) AND THE NETHERLANDS REFORMED CHURCHES (NRC)

1. Introduction

The Netherlands Reformed Churches came into existence in the late sixties of the 20th century, as churches that had split off from the RCN. Matters of doctrine and church government played a decisive role in this split. Since 1993 there has been growing contact between the NRC and the RCN. This happens on the level of the local churches, as well as through committees of Synods.

2. Characteristics

In the area of church government the NRC has always shown a strong independentism. Their Church Order (called Akkoord Kerkelijk Samenleven = AKS) states that a refusal to accept this AKS cannot be a reason to expel a local church from the federation. The pre-ambule of this document only requests local churches to respect as much as possible the decisions of major assemblies. In the area of doctrine the NRC practice significant tolerance when it comes to deviations from the reformed confessions. The AKS does have an article about signing the Three Forms of Unity by office bearers, but those who refuse only have to give account to their consistory. In practice there is freedom to criticize the confessions in articles and books (publications of drs. H. de Jong).

3. Contacts and discussions between the RCN and the NRC

- a. General Synod Ommen (1993) was the first synod to instruct the Deputaten Kerkelijke Eenheid (=Deputies Ecclesiastical Unity; further in this report DKE) “to explore if there are possibilities to make contact with the NRC, and if so – in what way”. (Acts art.66)
- b. In their report to the next synod (1996) the DKE evaluate the six meetings they had with the committee of the NRC (called CCS). They conclude with sadness that the doctrinal tolerance to deviate from the reformed confessions and the lack of clarity in the NRC as to what it means to be bound to these confessions, make it impossible to continue the discussions with the NRC.
- c. General Synod Berkel & Rodenrijs (1996) decided to declare with sadness and with deep disappointment that the exploration of the deputies does not open any hopeful perspective to continue the discussions with the NRC. Synod also decided to write a letter to the NRC to explain what the obstacles are for ongoing contacts. The DKE are authorized to offer to the NRC a verbal explanation of the decision and of the letter from Synod. Synod also declared that the discussions could continue, if the NRC removed the obstacles. (Acts art.82).

- d. The DKE report to the next synod (1999) that the NRC did not really deal with the obstacles for further contact, as mentioned by Synod Berkel & Rodenrijs 1996. There is too much freedom to deviate from sound Scriptural doctrine as summarized in the reformed confession, and they conclude that there are no new openings for discussions with the NRC.
- e. General Synod Leusden 1999 judged that there is no basis for discussions with the NRC to come to unity, since the NRC did not remove the obstacles mentioned by the previous Synod (1996). The deputies were instructed to invite the NRC committee with the purpose to clarify Synod's decisions. (Acts art.84)
- f. The DKE report to the next synod (2002) has a different tone. Deputies report that they had a number of discussions with the committee of the NRC, in which the key-words were "binding" and "room". The RCN emphasize the need to be bound to the reformed confessions, to protect the congregations against false doctrine. The NRC stress the importance of room (or 'space', Dutch: "ruimte") to formulate the doctrine of the gospel in freedom. The DKE express thankfulness for the good discussions and speak about progress and better understanding of each other's positions. Although they acknowledge that the questions as formulated by previous synods have not been answered adequately, they see promising opportunities to continue the discussions with the NRC.
- g. In line with the report and the recommendations of the Deputies, General Synod Zuidhorn 2002 expresses thankfulness for the fruitful discussions with the NRC. Synod states that these discussions have led to a better mutual understanding regarding the role and the place of subscribing to the confession to prevent and refute deviations from Scripture and the reformed doctrine. Synod does acknowledge that not all questions have been answered in a satisfactory manner, and therefore instructs DKE to continue the discussions on these questions. (Acts art.126).
- h. The Deputies report to the next Synod (2005) that they have focussed on how the binding to the confession functions in NRC compared to the RCN, with a discussion on the doctrine of God's election. Although there was a large measure of agreement on the topic – it was also clear that both churches take a different approach when ministers publicly deviate from, and also criticize the reformed doctrine as summarized in the confessions. The DKE report also that in 2004 the NRC adopted the VOP-report. VOP stands for "Vrouwelijke Ouderlingen en Predikanten", which means "Female Elders and Ministers". This decision opens all offices in the NRC for women. The DKE recommend that Synod express thankfulness for the progress in the discussions about the confession, and that the Deputies be instructed to continue these discussions and to include the NRC decisions concerning women in office.
- i. The decisions of General Synod Amersfoort Centrum (2005) are less casual about this new development in the NRC than the recommendations of DKE. Synod expresses appreciation for the helpful progress made in the discussions with the NRC committee about the ecclesiastical way of dealing with deviations from the reformed confession. But Synod also expresses its disappointment with the decision of the NRC to open the offices of elder and minister for women, and calls it a serious barrier for further contacts. The DKE are instructed to continue the discussion about the issue of the place and role of God's Word and the confession as basis for the church community. This discussion must also include the decision of the NRC with regard to women in office. (Acts art.135)
- j. The Deputies present to the next Synod (2008) a majority and a minority report. The majority presents its considerations in a document that they call an *Interim Statement concerning the discussion between DKE and CCS* (this is the NRC committee) *regarding the*

binding to the confession. The conclusion is that much mutual fear has been taken away and that there is a growing mutual trust when it comes to a broad-minded and loyal binding to the confessions. There are still differences in the way this is put into practice, but the issue of the binding to the confession is no longer an obstacle for discussions that focus on ecclesiastical unity of the two federations. The majority report states also that thorough discussions were held about the hermeneutical principles behind the VOP report. These discussions have led to more clarity and brought both committees closer together in better mutual understanding.

The minority of the Deputies is of the opinion that the *Interim Statement* is in conflict with previous synod decisions and that it cannot be said that the matter of the binding to the confession can no longer be considered an obstacle for further and more intense contact, aimed at church unity. The NRC has not really changed its position. The minority also points out that Synod Amersfoort had not asked for “thorough discussions about hermeneutics”. There is still no answer (from the NRC) how the VOP report can be in agreement with Scripture and the confession. The ‘serious barrier’ Synod 2005 mentioned, is still there, and has not been dealt with, while the NRC has made it clear that they won’t turn back the VOP decision. The minority report concludes that DKE did not fulfill their mandate.

- k. The decisions of General Synod Zwolle Zuid (2008) are a compromise between the recommendations of the majority and the minority report of DKE. But the tone is most in line with the minority report. Synod did not decide to “agree with” (as asked by the majority), but to “take note of” the *Interim Statement* regarding the binding to the confession. Synod also expressed sadness (not in the recommendations of the majority) that the discussion about the VOP report had not taken away the objections mentioned by the previous Synod. Synod 2008 did not instruct the Deputies to continue the discussions with the NRC in view of ecclesiastical unity or merger, as recommended by DKE. Synod gave the specific mandate to discuss with the NRC committee the three topics that keep coming back: (1) the differences in binding to the confession; (2) the differences in dealing with ongoing deviations from the confession; (3) the matter of women in office within the NRC. (Acts art.112).
- l. The DKE report that will be dealt with by Synod Harderwijk 2011 is kind of surprising and confusing. It indicates that the Deputies had discussions with the NRC committee on 3 topics: the doctrine of Baptism, the Holy Spirit and Church & Lord’s Supper. They also had general discussions on the hermeneutical principles that are important when we want to apply biblical commands in our time. DKE concluded with thankfulness that on all these topics there is much harmony between the RCN and the NRC (at least between the two committees). They see this as a strong basis to continue with much confidence the discussions about the confession and about women in office.

A few observations from this DKE report.

- i. The discussions of the deputies focused on topics Synod Zwolle 2008 had not asked for.
- ii. The report does not speak about the issues Synod had mandated DKE to address and seek clarification about.
- iii. The conclusion that there is so much harmony in the way in which the RCN and the NRC bind to the confessions is not supported by the facts in the NRC. Office bearers are accepted that don’t sign a subscription form and that reject infant-baptism.

- iv. There also appears to be harmony between the committees of the RCN and the NRC when it comes to criticism of the confessions.

4. Evaluation

- Whenever faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ find each other, recognize each other and can come to unity based on submission to God's Word and on a solid commitment to the reformed confessions, we can only rejoice and praise God. The question is: is this what is happening in the contacts between the RCN and the NRC?

- The point of this evaluation is not to look at the situation in the NRC as such. The NRC are not in ecclesiastical fellowship with the CanRC, and thus we do not focus on the developments in this federation as if these would affect us. Our point is the question how our sister churches are affected or influenced by their contacts with the NRC, especially when they seem to grow closer.

This was also the framework in which the reports of the CRCA to Synod Smithers 2007 and Synod Burlington 2010 mentioned the discussions between the RCN and the NRC, and why Synod Burlington 2010 instructed this sub-committee to pay special attention to these discussions.

- It is remarkable to see how the tone in the DKE reports about the contacts with the RCN becomes more positive since 2002. This is also true for the Synod decisions, although the Synods of 2005 and 2008 are clearly less excited and more reluctant to move forward in the discussions with the RCN than the Deputies are.

- The committee reports, as well as the decisions of the Synods, show – or give at least the impression – that these two federations, RCN and NRC, are growing closer. They experience harmony and better understanding and agreement in many areas. And the remaining questions seem to become less and less relevant. This raises the question: did the NRC change? Are the disappointments and the critical assessments of the earlier Synods no longer correct and no longer relevant? Have the NRC become more accountable with regard to the adherence to the reformed doctrine, and with regard to the manner in which they deal with deviations from this doctrine? Is today the role and place of the subscription form in the NRC more in line with the role and place of this form in the RCN?

It doesn't seem that way. If there is any indication of change in the NRC, it is in a more modern, liberal direction. Evidence for this is the adoption of the VOP report that opened all offices for women. And it is still acceptable in the NRC that not all the office bearers sign the subscription form, and that some office bearers reject infant baptism. On paper they may regret this, but in practice the policy of doing nothing to protect the reformed doctrine and confession is consistent and has not changed.

- What can we conclude in light of the previous paragraph? The fact that the RCN and the NRC are growing closer, that there is growing mutual agreement, harmony and understanding in many areas must be, because our sister churches are changing. They are moving towards the NRC, because they have become more open for new hermeneutics and they have become more tolerant when it comes to doctrinal freedom. The concern is then that through these intensifying contacts this process in the RCN will be reinforced. The RCN will be more and more influenced by the situation and developments in the NRC. In theory it can also work the other way round, of course, but there is not much evidence that this is happening. For instance, we can expect that the ongoing discussion in the RCN about the role of women in the church (see the report on Man/Vrouw in de Kerk) will be heavily influenced by the VOP report and decisions in the NRC.

- There is another aspect. The DKE mention a few times with thankfulness the growing local contacts between RCN and NRC congregations. The decisions of Synods also refer to these local developments. It gives the impression that the excitement about what is happening locally overrides the reluctance and caution expressed by the Synods. There seems to be a great variety in local ecumenical contacts that are moving forward, regardless of the hesitations on the level of the federation. For a growing number of people the questions that Synods want to see addressed are simply irrelevant today.
- When we see this picture of how the contacts and discussions between the RCN and the NRC have developed between 1993 and 2008, the challenge for the General Synod of Harderwijk 2011 will be this: Confronted with this DKE report (see the summary under 3.1) and with the ongoing local developments, will this Synod be able to give direction to a process that seems to have taken on a life of its own?
- And the crucial question is: how will this affect the reformed and confessional identity of our sister churches?

3. WORK DEPUTIES MAN/VROUW IN DE KERK

A. MANDATE OF DEPUTIES

General Synod Zwolle 2008 of the GKv appointed deputies to promote further reflection and resolution concerning the role of women (and men) in the church. They were instructed to follow a three-track approach to fulfill their mandate:

1. Theological/Sociological research
2. Reflection in the churches
3. Preparation of practical, short term decisions

1. Theological/sociological Research

This part of the mandate was given to the Theological University in Kampen. The TU has been busy with a number of research projects around the theme M/V. One of the projects was a hermeneutical undertaking by drs. Myriam Klinker, to be published in the TU series of reflections (beziningsreeks). This booklet has been printed but we have not had opportunity to consider this work as yet.

2. Reflection in the Churches

The deputies composed a manual to be used for reflection on the role of women (and men) in the church. This workbook was presented at 6 regional meetings to which all churches were invited to send delegates. The delegates were equipped to pursue the reflection on M/V in de Kerk making use of the materials developed and collected by the deputies. A short video clip has been developed to introduce the matter for discussion at the local level. This encouragement to reflection and discussion at the local churches will culminate in the convening of a national conference on the issue of the roles of men and women in the church at some time in 2011. A short summary and critique of the manual follows below.

3. Preparation of Practical Decisions in the Short Term

Synod Zwolle gave the deputies M/V in de Kerk the mandate to prepare practical answers to the following questions:

- a. Within which limitations may men and women be active in diaconal activities? What are the consequences thereof for the office of deacon as it functions at present? What does the response to these questions mean for the present practice of the office of deacon?
- b. What role may women have in the worship service (liturgy, prayer, Scripture reading)?
- c. Within which limitations may men and women be active in pastoral activities? What does this mean for the practice of the office of minister and elder?
- d. Is it possible in a practical sense to tackle the issue of allowing women to serve in the office of deacon independently of the issue of allowing women to serve in the office of elder and minister?

In addition Synod 2008 decided to instruct deputies to take the following into consideration when executing the mandate above:

- a. Is there a solid argument that receives sufficiently broad support to take a decision in these matters?
- b. To what extent is it necessary to take a decision in these matters together as churches? Is it possible to give each other freedom in this? Are guidelines desirable, and if so, which?
- c. What are possible implications for church and social practice: which consequences or side-effects could the results of b have, and how should these be dealt with?
- d. At what point is it advisable or even obligated, given existing agreements, to discuss these issues with churches within and outside The Netherlands with whom we have contact?

The deputies M/V were unable to make any practical recommendations, and found them too intensive. They now request Synod 2011 to grant them the following simplified mandate to make recommendations about practical application of their findings. We will have to wait for their report to next synod to see what practical answers will be proposed and to comment on them.

Synod 2011 instruct the Deputies to address the following questions:

- a. What role may women have in the worship service (liturgy, prayer, Scripture reading)?
- b. Within which limitations may men and women be active in diaconal activities? What do their activities in practice mean for the office of deacon?
- c. Within which limitations may men and women be active in pastoral activities? What do their activities in practice mean for the office of elder and minister?
- d. Is it permissible to admit women to the office of minister, elder or deacon?
- e. To what extent is it necessary to take a decision on these four questions together as churches? Is it possible to give each other freedom in this? Are guidelines desirable, and if so, which?

What follows is a summary and critique of the main work of the deputies: a manual for discussion of the issues in the churches.

B. REVIEW OF THE MANUAL M/V PRODUCED BY DEPUTIES

The manual consists of six chapters.

CHAPTER 1 - Report of deputies M/V in the church to Synod Zwolle 2008

Synod Amersfoort 2005 appointed deputies and gave them the mandate to, by means of empirical research and in cooperation with the TU, find out the kind of questions and problems the churches are encountering in connection with the matter of “women in the church.” The results of a survey done in the churches are summarized. Some of those results are:

- Women are involved in the churches in all kinds of ways.
- About half the members are in favour of women deacons.
- A minority are in favour of female elders or ministers.
- The opinions of the church members are affected education and age.
- There is a range of opinions and confusion about what the Bible says about men and women.

The report states that over the past years the role of women in society as well, as church has changed and women are more involved in all kinds of ways than before. The standard view in the RCN is that men and women have different roles. But that is being questioned more and more. Do the roles of men and women differ in principle? If yes, how then and why? They are involved in church, even in tasks only given to men before, such as Catechism instructors, pastoral workers, council secretary, committees, etc. They are allowed to vote for office bearers. But they are not permitted to hold offices in the church in the RCN, though other protestant churches have opened the offices to women. All these changes have brought the RCN to reflect anew on what the Bible teaches about the roles of men and women.

The Report M/V in de Kerk 2008 therefore raises questions about Biblical directives for the position of women in the church. There is assurance that the Bible has the authority in this matter. However, the question of how we are to interpret the relevant Bible passages is raised. In connection with that the report raised questions such as: In which cultural situation were the books of the Bible written, and how do those cultural situations contribute to the formulation of the Bible text? And what do the words of the text mean for us in our time? It is noted that the roles of men and women have not been explicitly established in the confessions of the RCN.

The main lines of argumentation were laid out in the report to Synod 2008.

- A. Some view the role of men as leaders and protectors and women as followers and helpers as a creation ordinance. Sanctified in Christ, men and women balance each other in their separate roles again.
- B. Others don't see a creation ordinance but see men and women created in equal roles with difference only as a result of the fall. We have been redeemed from that by Christ and so men and women are now equal in marriage and in church.

Two other lines of argumentation, both claiming to be faithful to Scripture, were also laid out in the report. The difference here is in taking into account the cultural context at the time of the Bible writers and our present-day culture.

- C. Even though the Spirit made use of the Bible writers along with their cultural background, He is able to make His intentions clear in spite of that cultural background. Though we need to carefully take into account the different situation, the application for today isn't much affected.

- D. God's message for today is hidden under a cultural layer which we need to look through in order to understand it. The prescriptions are so intertwined with the concrete situation in which they were given that they cannot be applied to today and may even be in conflict with what God intended.

CHAPTER 2 - An outline on Bible reading with attention to 1 Timothy by Rev. F. Wisselink

CHAPTER 3 - An article on the roles of men and women by Almatine Leene

CHAPTER 4 - An article about the offices in the church by Rev. R. Heida

CHAPTER 5 - An article on shifts in society by Rev. J. Harmanny

CHAPTER 6 - A list of references

C. OUR CONSIDERATIONS

First, we have concerns about the possible Scripture interpretations presented to Synod 2008 and put forward in the "Manual M/V." The reasoning in argument B above clearly asserts that the whole idea of male headship has been abolished after Christ. Genesis 3:16b, "Your desire will be for your husband, and He will rule over you," is then regarded as a curse on the relationship of men and women which was rendered void by Christ having borne the curse for us, resulting in the principle of Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Accepting this approach would mean that all the offices in the church would be opened to women.

Synod Zwolle's acceptance of this interpretation as a possibly acceptable interpretation, we believe, is a serious deviation from the historical interpretation of the relevant passages. No Reformed commentary for hundreds of years has espoused this abolition of male headship, including the most recent "Commentaar Nieuwe Testament" series. There is no doubt that from creation men and women were equal in worth and dignity. Both were made in God's image. Both were given the task to replenish the earth and subdue it. Both came from one flesh and became one flesh. However, there is also no doubt that man was created before woman and this has lasting impact on their roles as shown by 1 Timothy 2:12-13, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." In addition, woman was given a specific role in Genesis 2:18 & 20 as "helper." Man was also the one given the responsibility of naming the animals, and he named His wife "Eve." Man was also the federal head as shown in the fact that he was given the command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16 & 17) and it is in his disobedience specifically that all mankind sinned as evidenced by Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned." As well, we do not see that Galatians 3:28 supports an egalitarian position in the church. Paul was not doing away with gender-specific roles. (Otherwise we could also use this passage to justify same-sex marriage!) He says that Greeks could remain Greeks and Jews remain Jews. Slaves could remain slaves and free men remain free men. And males could remain males and females remain females. The point the apostle was referring to was spiritual status before God through faith. They are all one in faith, not in roles. We therefore do not see how the reasoning in B could be entertained as a possible interpretation of Scripture. The principle which we find clearly revealed throughout the New Testament is that of male headship in relation to women in marriage as well as church (1 Cor.11:3, Eph.5:23, 1 Timothy 2:8-15).

It is striking that this “eschatological” approach to the roles of men and women was the main argument of Report 26 to Synod 1990 of the Christian Reformed Church: “The overall thrust of the Bible – its eschatological orientation and direction – is toward women’s attaining a place alongside men, rather than under them or separated from them. The Scriptures open with the man and the woman side by side as God’s image bearers, assigned a common task. Very soon, however, we hear of husbands ruling over their wives as the outcome of the fall into sin.... With Jesus restoration begins to take place. In Him the kingdom of God draws near.... In sum, the overall sweep of Scripture is toward Christ’s restoration of the original order of men and women living and working side by side, on a par, mutually supporting and ministering to each other in pursuit of their common task.” (Agenda for Synod 1990, p. 328-329). This sounds very similar to reasoning B above, which is disconcerting to us as churches engaged in unity talks with the United Reformed Churches which have stepped away from the Christian Reformed Church mainly because of the matter of women in office.

While it is true that the RCN have not adopted B as their approach, Synod Zwolle 2008, by giving the deputies M/V in de Kerk the “go-ahead” to research this as a possible approach, have opened a door which cannot easily be shut again. They have cast doubt on the validity of A, the historical view of male headship, and have suggested that the possibility exists that B is a valid interpretation. It will be difficult now to go back to the A only position which the Reformed churches have historically held. We do not see that those in the churches who are in favour of women office bearers (as shown in the survey) will abandon their position now that it was entertained as a possibility.

In reasoning D, the matter of hermeneutics clearly comes to the fore. And sadly, historical Reformed hermeneutics is questioned. The cultural context is brought into the picture as possibly determining what such a passage says about the role of women. This means that also here a door has been opened for the possibility of a “new hermeneutic” which gives more weight to the human element in the text of the Bible. Yes, there are numerous assurances that the Bible is still authoritative (page 4 & 31) and trustworthy (page 5), but these assurances certainly sound hollow if one considers how the human element can now be given so much weight in the relevant passages such as 1 Corinthians 11 & 14 and 1 Timothy 2 & 3 that they can be reinterpreted to teach the opposite of what they have historically been shown to teach in Reformed Bible commentaries for hundreds of years. The meaning of those texts is relativized by appealing to a hermeneutical authority that exists not in the text itself but in the interpreter. We see this as a step away from the actual Word of God and in line with the new hermeneutics which has infiltrated so many churches over the past half-century. Such an approach to the Bible also opens the way to the reinterpretation of what Bible passages state about other issues such as creation/evolution and homosexual relations. Again, we do not say that the RCN have officially adopted this approach, but in accepting the 2008 report, they have opened a door to such a new hermeneutic which will be hard to impossible to close.

Concerning the four articles of the “Handleiding M/V,” we acknowledge that they were written and distributed to stimulate discussion. Therefore they need to be as non-partisan as possible. However, in the questioning one senses a kind of appeal for at least the validity of the “new” approach to the role of women and to the possibility that the Reformed churches may have been on the wrong track all along in the past as far as women in office is concerned.

In conclusion, we empathize with the RCN as they wrestle with the pressures of an ever-more secular, humanistic society on the churches there, especially also with regard to the place and role of the woman. Seeking better ways to serve and praise God is positive. However, such seeking of change should not mean giving up what has been debated and learned from the Bible in the past. The “Handleiding M/V” is a document which places big question marks behind the approach to the role of the woman in the Reformed churches throughout history, and the Biblical interpretation which supported that approach. This questioning has, we would say, at least opened the door to toleration of the new hermeneutics and to the eschatological approach to the effects of the fall which sees believers as, by the power of Christ, redeeming various aspects of life here in anticipation of the coming of the fullness of God’s kingdom. While it is true that the deputies M/V in de Kerk have not fully completed the task assigned by Synod 2008, our hope is that the RCN will let a healthy, Reformed interpretation of Scripture determine their direction rather than societal pressures and ensuing reinterpretations, and that they conclude that women, while they have a significant role in the church, are not called by God to be office bearers.

APPENDIX 4a

Discussion document for the meeting of CRCA Subcom. and Sec. 3 BBK scheduled for April 19, 2012 in the Gbouw in Zwolle April 17, 2012

Some basic reactions to the agenda points which form the basis for the discussion between the Canadian Reformed Churches' CRCA (Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad) Subcom. (hereafter CRCA Subcom.) and Section 3 of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated) (RCN) Deputies BBK (Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad) (hereafter Sec. 3 BBK), scheduled for April 19, 2012

The CRCA Subcom. provided us with the following agenda points (questions and issues), in quotations, followed by the initial response of Sec. 3 BBK.

CRCA Subcom.:

"1. How do you perceive the role of the deputies BBK in view of the comments made in Harderwijk and the qualification of December 5, 2011 that you as deputies are not in a position to speak directly for the General Synod."

Response Sec. 3 BBK:

We perceive the role of BBK as being definite, but also limited. We are called to maintain and strengthen our relations with sister- and contact-churches in the world. This involves clear and open communication about developments in our churches in The Netherlands, including General Synod decisions and discussions. It includes listening to the responses of our sister-churches, clearing up misunderstandings, listening to possible critical questions, and trying to be transparent about our own perceptions of developments.

However, if there is severe criticism of General Synod decisions from the side of our sister-churches, we as deputies BBK are not in the position to "speak directly for the General Synod," in the sense of being competent to defend all decisions made. We must then inform those who come with such criticism that objections are to be made following the "church path," that is, in this case, by official pronouncements of the General Synod of our sister-church, spelling out the criticism and the call for possible reverses of our General Synod decisions, and communicating such pronouncements to the next RCN GS. GS Harderwijk made this explicit.

Substantive objections regarding doctrine and life must be made directly from church to church, that is, from General Synod to General Synod, not from committee to committee by means of subjective and non-binding interim reports (which may not have the support of the General Synod)!

We feel it is important to make clear to our colleagues of committees representing their church federations, that, while complete openness is certainly possible, informally and at the official meetings, some things should remain "off the record" as far as reporting is concerned, for the sake of the peace and harmony of the churches. Committee members' *personal criticisms as a committee should not be publically made until the church federation has made official pronouncements about the issue(s) in question.* Publishing reports or publishing articles in church journals, or on internet, with severe criticism, before their General Synod has made official pronouncements, is potentially very harmful to the name and reputation of church federation receiving the criticism (in this case, the RCN).

CRCA Subcom.:

"2. Discuss concerns regarding Hermeneutics and Theological University Kampen Appointments, Report Man/Vrouw in de Kerk, Report Relations RCN-NRC."

Response Sec. 3 BBK:

Regarding *Hermeneutics and TU Kampen* Appointments, the afternoon of April 19 is set aside for a discussion with a delegation from the TU Kampen about these issues. We can best wait for the afternoon session to discuss them.

With regard to the *Report Man/Vrouw in de Kerk*, this is part of an ongoing, and not yet crystallized process of reflection. The next RCN GS hopes to reflect more definitively about this issue, than was done at the GS Harderwijk. The Burlington GS gave the CRCA Subcom. the task "to pay special attention to the upcoming report on the role of women in the church." If the the CRCA Subcom. feels that the Dutch churches are moving toward the ordination of women as elders or ministers, we (Sec. 3 BBK) feel this would be misreading the situation.

The Burlington GS gave the CRCA Subcom. the task to "*pay special attention to the discussions currently taking place between the RCN and the NRC (Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken).*" The relations between the RCN and the NRC are complex. Several local churches (Zaandam, Deventer) are fully integrated with each other in all aspects of church life (in Deventer, together with the CGK). In other places, congregations have exchange of preaching, celebrate the Lord's Supper together, and share other activities. In still other places, there is recognition of each other as true churches of Christ, but with limited forms of cooperation. At the national level, while there is no official recognition of each other as federations (such as there is between the RCN and the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK)), the GS Harderwijk decided to continue the discussions between deputies for church unity.

The decision of the NRC to open the offices of elder and minister to women has made it more difficult to reach a mutual official recognition as church federations (this is also true for the

relation between the CGK and the NRC). In the places where there is fully integrated church life (Zaandam, Deventer), there are no women in the office of elder or minister.

Another problem which remains is the authority and function of the confessions in church life.

Nevertheless, we in the RCN seek to discover and promote church unity in The Netherlands as much as we can, starting at the local level. As the late Prof. C. Trimp used to say, if there is real unity at the local level, without unity being able to be expressed at the national level, then local churches should seek to bring that unity to expression as much as they can, in spite of the "national" impediments to full federational unity.

CRCA Subcom.:

"3. Confirm with deputies BBK that CanRC deputies' reports on these matters are base on fact, and do not contain inaccuracies."

Response Sec. 3 BBK:

We received the new version of the interim report of the CRCA Subcom. too late to be able to respond to it.

We are responding to the article published in the Clarion of July 29, 2011: "Report on the visit to General Synod Harderwijk 2011... by G. Nordeman and J. DeGelder"

Page 1:

The CRCA Subcom. expresses disappointment that BBK did not take their criticisms seriously, expressed in their interim report. "These concerns need to be heard at Synod, but for churches abroad BBK is the address to voice these and the only way to put these matters on the Synod agenda."

This is not true. The only way to put matters of severe criticism on the Synod agenda is by means of pronouncements of the CanRC GS! An interim report of a committee can never be seen as an official pronouncement of a GS. The Burlington GS spelled out its concerns in the Recommendations 4.1-4.4.7. However, the interim report of the CRCA Subcom. went much farther than this, going into much detail. This extreme detailed criticism was not part of the Burlington GS pronouncements.

Page 3:

"We were disappointed that no one interacted with our report... the chairman..."it doesn't come with a proposed recommendation, so we can do nothing". This is not just disappointing, it was frustrating. "Thank you for your letter, but we are going to ignore it."

Sec. 3 BBK is very disturbed by this last statement, and feels that these words are a false description of the response of the chairman. He indicated, on the basis of the facts, that something was missing in the report. This is not to ignore it!

We ask the CRCA Subcom. to retract these words in a following issue of Clarion, and express regret for them.

Page 5:

"6. The previous observation implies that at the TUK the focus is changing. It is more and more shifting from training for the ministry to academic theological research."

It is to be regretted that this criticism appeared in the Clarion in this way. In the afternoon meeting of April 19, the TU delegation can perhaps respond to this criticism. We (Sec. 3 BBK) are convinced that the TU Kampen wants to maintain its focus on training for the ministry as well as to keep the academic theological research at a high level, as always has been the aim.

"8. In his presentation on Wednesday Dr. Ad de Bruijne gave a clear explanation ... But it did not become clear how this approach relates to God's commandments and instructions in his Word. It gives at least the impression that under this cover every consistory and even every church member can make his/her own personal ethical choices."

In the afternoon session of April 19, the TU delegation can perhaps respond to this criticism. We of Sec. 3 BBK feel it is not an accurate portrayal of his intention, and gives the Clarion readers the impression that this judgment is the judgment of their churches on Dr. De Bruijne.

"9. ... There are healing services, driven by charismatic thinking. Reformed authors speak about infant baptism as optional... The media like to give attention to these and more bizarre things that are happening.... And the result is that more and more the churches of the GKV federation show a fragmented picture. "

We of Sec. 3 BBK do not recognize ourselves in this negative portrait of our church life. A certain amount of diversity is present, yes. But infant baptism, for example, remains a firm conviction in our church life. To say that we are "fragmented" is to choose the language of the separated groups (like that of Dr. Van Gurp), and severely mislead the readers of Clarion.

"C. Conclusions

1. It appears that a shift of hermeneutics is a most crucial issue as it provides the background of many things that are changing in the churches of Holland."

Sec. 3 BBK takes issue with this assessment. We see no "shift of hermeneutics" in our churches.

Page 6:

"2. ... We believe that here things are going off the rails in the Dutch churches. The argument that Paul's writings reflect the culture of his days to the point that the clear teachings and instruction in his letters can no longer be valid for the time in which we live today, undermines the confession that it is God's Word in which the Lord reveals his will."

Sec. 3 BBK is very disturbed about the choice of words here. "Going off the rails" is a very severe indictment of our church federation. There is no one, including Dr. De Bruijne, who says that Paul's writings are "can no longer be valid." To say this verges on a violation of the 9th commandment.

We ask the CRCA Subcom. to retract these words in a following issue of Clarion, and express regret for them.

"4. What is going on at the TUK... will, humanly speaking, lead to more and more theological and liturgical confusion, and fragmentation in and among the churches. The beginning of this can be observed now already."

Sec. 3 BBK feels that this portrayal does not do justice to our churches. In the afternoon meeting of April 19, the TU delegation can hopefully respond to this criticism. To say that our federation has begun to show signs of theological and liturgical confusion and fragmentation is a serious criticism, and is unfounded.

We ask the CRCA Subcom. to retract these words in a following issue of Clarion, and express regret for them.

Page 7:

"6. We can appreciate that the Deputies BBK have expressed willingness to meet with our sub-committee... But it will be good to keep in mind that we may want to choose the route from our Synod directly to the Dutch Synod."

As we have said (see the response to the first point), the proper route for severe criticism is *always from Synod to Synod!*

In the meantime, a sub-committee should be very careful not to confuse personal opinion with the views of all their churches, represented at a General Synod, and should be very careful to not make public such personal opinion in a way which paints a sister-church in a very damaging way.

CRCA Subcom.:

"4. Dialogue on the manner in which deputies CanRC can effectively communicate concerns to the Dutch churches."

Response Sec. 3 BBK:

This is what we are doing at this meeting!

The main point is that discussion is important. We can be very open about what we are thinking in dialoging with each other. However, we should be careful how our personal critical thoughts are made public in the media, and we should recognize what our limits are as committees or deputies of a GS.

Asking questions and expressing concern in a dialogue as committees is one thing, expressing severe criticism is something which belongs to official pronouncements of General Synods.

CRCA Subcom.:

"5. Female delegates to broader assemblies of sister churches."

Response Sec. 3 BBK:

It is our custom to have sisters be appointed as deputies to various committees of our General Synods. That is true of BBK. As such, such sisters have the right to represent our churches in contact with our sister- and contact-churches in the world, and are sometimes sent on such a mission. We are convinced that this is not unbiblical. However, if it is the custom of a sister-church to allow visiting representatives from another sister-church to have an "advising vote" at their General Synod, with the sense of participating in giving spiritual leadership to the church, then it is perhaps best to limit the task of our representatives to participating in the discussion only about our mutual sister-church relationship.

We will be discussing this issue further in the plenary meetings of BBK, and hope to make some decisions which will be communicated to our sister-churches.

APPENDIX 4b

Response to the discussion document presented by Deputies BBK for the meeting with the GKV Subcommittee of the CanRC on April 19, 2012 Adopted and sent to BBK - Sept. 2012

Introduction

In the document mentioned in the heading the deputies BBK presented some basic reactions to the agenda-points put forward by our CanRC Subcommittee for our meeting on April 19, 2012 in Zwolle, NL. The background of these agenda-points was formed mainly by our Interim Report concerning the developments in our Dutch sister churches, as well as the report of the visit by two committee members to GS Harderwijk 2011.

These matters were quite extensively discussed during our meeting, and our committee evaluated this discussion after the meeting. What follows summarizes the response of our committee to the remarks of Deputies BBK, and should be read together with the above mentioned document.

1. Re: the role of deputies BBK

We understand and appreciate that deputies BBK must work with the decisions of their general synod, and are not in the position to either refute or support criticism of these decisions, let alone reverse those decisions. However – we do (or did!) believe that as we exercise our sister church relationship according to the mutually adopted rules for ecclesiastical fellowship, it is within the mandate of deputies BBK not only to listen to the concerns and criticism of the sister churches, but also to bring these matters to the attention of the next synod. The way in which our mandate was worded by Synod Burlington reflects this expectation.

In the meantime GS Harderwijk 2011 decided that *substantive objections regarding doctrine and life must be made directly from church to church, that is from General Synod to General Synod.*

Deputies BBK also state that committees/deputies should refrain from publishing reports and articles with severe criticism before their GS has made official pronouncements on these matters. This could confuse the readers and harm the name of a sister church.

We like to point out that traditionally in the CanRC such reports have been published in *Clarion* to keep the church members informed and involved. It is understood that these publications do not reflect the ‘official’ position of the CanRC, but only the observations and considerations of the committee.

2. Re: Hermeneutics and TUK appointments (a), Man/Vrouw in de Kerk (b) and Relations with the NRC (c)

- a. Our discussion with representatives of the TUK in the afternoon of April 19 did not take away the concerns expressed in the decision of our GS Burlington 2010, and specified in our interim-report. We appreciate the emphatic desire of the faculty of the TUK to maintain and defend the Reformed view of Scripture. And we don’t question the personal integrity and good intention of the brothers. But our reports indicate that we are not convinced that this Reformed view of Scripture is guarded sufficiently in the academic research at the TUK. Our concern is that this will unavoidably have an impact on the training for the ministry.
- b. We have noted with appreciation that the reflection on the issue ‘Man/Vrouw in de Kerk’ is ongoing and that the GS Harderwijk has replaced the entire committee for this ongoing study. Whether we misread the situation when we express concern that the Dutch churches are

moving toward the ordination of women as elders or ministers remains to be seen. Time will tell, and we obviously have to wait for the outcome of the ongoing study. Although - the growing cooperation with the NRC does not give reason for optimism.

- c. The assessment and views expressed by deputies BBK with regard to the developments in the intensifying relationship between the RCN and the NRC do not give us reason to adjust our committee's conclusions that were expressed in the section of our report that evaluates these developments. The deputies BBK seem to downplay the implications of this relationship for how things will develop in the RCN, whereas we see some alarming trends.

3. *Re: The accuracy of our reports as published in CLARION of July 29, 2011, in particular the report on the visit to GS Harderwijk 2011*

In this section of the discussion-document the Deputies BBK express several times that they do not recognize themselves in the negative portrait of the RCN. They feel that some of the conclusions in our report(s) do not do justice to the churches and are even misleading sometimes. They say a few times to be very disturbed by some of the statements, and they ask our committee to retract some of it and to express publicly our regret for some of the things we wrote for the readers of *Clarion*.

Upon reflection and evaluating the discussion on April 19, we do not feel that it is necessary to retract or to re-formulate our observations and conclusions in the report of our visit to GS Harderwijk. It is important to remember that we did not give an over-all and complete evaluation of all the aspects of church-life in our sister churches in The Netherlands. We are thankful for the good things that are happening in our Dutch sister churches. But we focussed on the matters that belong to our mandate from GS Burlington 2010, as we were confronted with those things during the 'Buitenland Week' at Synod. We also ask for a fair reading of what we wrote. We like to interact with the following remarks of Deputies BBK:

- Deputies BBK are very disturbed by the statement: *Thank you for your letter, but we are going to ignore it*. They quote these words from our report, as if we suggest that this was said by the chairman of synod. But that is not a fair presentation, because we don't say or suggest that these were the chairman's words. The point is that what the chairman did say was indeed disappointing and frustrating for us. It felt like 'thank you for your letter, but we are going to ignore it'.
- In our reflection on Dr. De Bruijne's explanation of what is known as the "style-of-the-kingdom" approach in dealing with ethical issues, we did not judge in any way Dr. De Bruijne's integrity or intentions. But we pointed out the possible consequences of this approach for personal ethical choices.
- When Deputies BBK take issue with the picture we give in observation #9 (in the report of the visit to GS Harderwijk, re. local liturgical experiments), they fail to acknowledge that we make very clear that these things are indeed incidental and not characteristic for the federation as a whole. We are grateful for this, as we are for the fact that infant baptism is, for instance, a firm conviction in the RCN. However – the point is that we expressed our concern that there is freedom for those liturgical experiments and for such doctrinal pilot-balloons. This goes beyond an innocent amount of diversity. We therefore deny that by alerting to the danger of growing confusion and fragmentation in the churches, we severely mislead the readers of our report.
- We believe that the Deputies BBK do not give the report of our visit to GS Harderwijk a fair reading when they say to be very disturbed by the severe accusation in the expression

that *things are going off the rails in the Dutch churches* (halfway conclusion #2). They say that *there is no one, including Dr. De Bruijne, who says that Paul's writings are no longer valid*.

But that's a misreading of what we wrote. We do not say that Dr. De Bruijne or anyone else in the RCN has stated that Paul's writings can no longer be valid. That would indeed be a violation of the 9th commandment.

However..... the thought that "things are going off the rails" flows from what is mentioned in conclusion #1 and the first part of conclusion #2. For if this continues it won't take long that someone is going to say that some instructions in Paul's letters do not apply for us today.

An example of how a re-interpretation of Paul's words, based on the argument that what he wrote reflects the culture of his days, can lead to the conclusion that his words are no longer valid in our time, can be found in the discussion about homosexuality.

Does the apostle condemn homosexual relations in Romans 1? Some argue that in this chapter Paul is talking only about homosexual promiscuity or temple prostitution as it happened in the culture of his time. This could lead to the conclusion that our situation today is different. And thus, some would say, the apostle Paul would probably be okay with a loving, monogamous and faithful same-sex relationship.

In Conclusion

1. We find that much of the critical comments made by Deputies BBK has more to do with the wording and the tone of what our subcommittee wrote in its reports, than with the actual content. Deputies BBK and our subcommittee may disagree when it comes to the assessment and evaluation of the developments in The Netherlands, but the Deputies have not given any proof that in our reports we have violated the facts.
2. We are grateful for the willingness of the Deputies to meet with our subcommittee for a full day on April 19, 2012 and we have appreciated the opportunity for a frank and open discussion with our brothers in The Netherlands. We give thanks to God for a brotherly atmosphere during our discussions.

C. van Dam
J. de Gelder
J. Moesker
G. J. Nordeman

APPENDIX 5

DETAILED REPORT (Finalized August 2012) CONCERNS OF SUBCOMMITTEE NETHERLANDS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR RELATIONS CHURCHES ABROAD REGARDING THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland Vrijgemaakt)

Synod Burlington 2010 of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) dealt with relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands liberated (RCN). Besides seeing much to be thankful about in the RCN and deciding to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the RCN, Synod also expressed the prayerful concern of the CanRC for the brothers and sisters in the Lord in the RCN, that they be committed to the Reformed faith. In response to a number of concerns brought forward by the Committee for Relations Churches Abroad (CRCA) as well as by a number of churches regarding the RCN Synod appointed Rev. J. DeGelder, brother G. J. Nordeman, Rev. J. Moesker (convenor), and Dr. C. Van Dam, to this subcommittee. Synod Burlington 2010 gave this committee the mandate (Article 86):

4.4.1 To express our grave concerns that:

4.4.1.1 Synod Zwolle of the RCN did not demand that Dr. Harinck, a professor associated with the Theological University in Kampen, retract his controversial remarks;

4.4.1.2 The Theological University did not exercise greater care in the case of the appointment of Dr. Paas as lecturer; and to urge the RCN to deal with these matters as yet.

4.4.2 To express and discuss our grave concerns about a change in how biblical hermeneutics are functioning in the RCN.

4.4.3 To pay special attention to the upcoming report on the role of women in the church.

In our subcommittee meetings since our appointment by Synod Burlington 2010, we decided to concentrate on three matters which were part of the mandate Synod Burlington 2010 gave this Subcommittee:

1. The view of Scripture at the Theological University in Kampen
2. The work of the deputies Man/Vrouw in de Kerk
3. Unity discussions between RCN and Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC)

In a letter addressed to the RCN deputies in March 2011 before the foreign delegates week, we offered our concerns in an interim report. We did this in a spirit of brotherly concern. After all, Rule 1 of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship states: *“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.”* So it was in keeping with this rule and to promote serious dialogue that we offered the interim report to the Deputies Betrekkings Buitenlandse Kerken (BBK). The contents represented our thoughts at the time.

In the meantime, Synod Harderwijk has almost completed its work, and we have had some time to reflect on its decisions as far as they are available to us. We have made some revisions and additions to the interim report and we present it to the deputies BBK for their perusal and

discussion with us in April in preparation for our report for the next Synod of the CanRC in Carman, Manitoba in 2013.

1. CONCERNS ABOUT VIEW OF SCRIPTURE IN KAMPEN

We as deputies are concerned that there is evidence of a weakening of the classic Reformed view of Scripture as found in Scripture (e.g., John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21) and confessed in the Belgic Confession Articles 2 to 7. There are several reasons for these concerns.

In summary, they are:

- A. Retaining Dr. Paas as lecturer (“universitair docent”) at TUK
- B. The dissertation of Dr. Koert van Bekkum approved by TUK
- C. Concerns brought to Synod Zwolle-Zuid (2008) and turned down.

B. Retaining Dr. S. Paas as Lecturer at TUK

Our Observations:

We appreciate good elements in Dr. Stefan Paas’ dissertation which we are using in its revised English form: *Creation and Judgement: Creation Texts in Some Eighth Century Prophets* (Oudtestamentische Studiën 47; Leiden: Brill, 2003). Over against current critical positions, his main thesis is that a belief in creation was found among eighth century prophets. However, we are very disappointed that he completely identifies himself with “a religion-historical approach” (20-31). We would have expected that as a Reformed scholar he would have stated clearly that although he does not adhere to the religion-historical approach, he will use this approach in order to show that even on the basis of those presuppositions one can defend a creation belief in eighth century prophets. As the dissertation now stands there is no hint of the author distancing himself from a critical approach with all the unbiblical presuppositions that go with it.

Within the constraints of this report, let us illustrate the above as briefly as possible.

1. Dr. Paas writes on page 24:

It seems fundamental to the present writer to establish first and foremost that history of religion is a history of *religion* in its historical manifestation and not a history of God. In other words, to state that YHWH is a derivative of El is not a pronouncement about the theological reality of the divine truth. It is merely establishing that in the early stages of the religious history of Israel His worshippers to a great extent attributed the same qualities to YHWH as were attributed to El, and that the Canaanite El worship was to a great extent the source of the concepts the people of Israel used to give shape to their faith in their God.

We would like to comment on the above as follows:

- To make a distinction between “the theological reality of the divine truth” and the “historical manifestation” (as related in Scripture) is to separate what Scripture relates from actual reality.
- Is the religion of Israel based on revelation from God or is it based on man’s imagination? To say that “the Canaanite El worship was to a great extent the source of the concepts the people of Israel used to give shape to their faith in their God” is to deny that God through his Mosaic revelation gave shape to their faith in God.
- It is disturbing to see that all of this is qualified as being “fundamental to the present

writer” (namely Dr. Paas).

2. Dr. Paas notes that further restrictions to the historical method include that it “does not allow for ‘supernatural’ agencies” (25) and religion is explained “as a *human* [his emphasis] activity” (26). While acknowledging that “for a more profound understanding of the Old Testament and for a theological judgment on the religion of ancient Israel, more than a historical approach is required,” he nevertheless affirms that “for a theological reading of the Old Testament the historical approach to the religion of ancient Israel cannot be neglected” (27-28).

In response we would like to ask how this is possible. If Scripture is God’s revelation and is self-authenticating, what positive role could the investigation of Scripture subjected solely to human rationality, without regard for God’s work, possibly achieve? Any result will be an undermining of Scripture, for once one submits himself to the strictures of the historical critical school, the results will be predictable. Consider the following unbiblical conclusions that Dr. Paas comes to.

- Gen 2:4b-25 is relegated to an author called the Yahwist who possibly wrote during the early or middle period of the monarchy and Gen 1-2:4a is said to be a Priestly document dated to the Persian period (post-exilic) (32-34). What Genesis says is, therefore, of minor importance for the history of pre-exilic creation theology (36). In light of all of this, Paas also concludes that “the first Old Testament references to Israel’s faith in YHWH as Creator of the world came from the early monarchic period” (49).

The above is in blatant contradiction to what Scripture affirms to be the case. If one does not want to accept the testimony of Genesis 1 and 2, must one then also deny God’s revelation of the fourth commandment from Mount Sinai? For according to Paas, Israel did not know of creation until the early monarchic period.

- Because of the adoption of the historical-critical method and of the history of religions school, Paas makes more conclusions that are in open contradiction to Scripture. Such as:
 - Israel’s creation belief has Canaanite background and possibly influenced by Egyptian notions (49, 121-132, 437)
 - Israel arose from migrant and Canaanite population about 1175 BC. “the tribes which came to be known as ‘Israel’” (113-114)
 - the narratives of the Exodus and Entry are “ideological” or “theological” reflections which may have some historical value (120)
- Paas considers creation to be a myth, along with much of Genesis 1-11 (104). For Paas a key element of myth is that it stands outside our time, outside history (102). “Events regulated by God in a time that stands outside of ours are found in particular in the Ur-history (Gen. 1-11). ... We might say that Israel was of Canaanite origins ... and was, therefore, also rooted in a mythic climate of thought. In this way it is possible to think of myth as one of the foundations (and perhaps the foundation par excellence) of Israel’s religion” (104).

Others who Expressed Concerns

We are not the first ones to raise these types of objections. Similar concerns were raised by an official letter of objection signed by 7 ministers. They point out from the Dutch edition of his dissertation that Dr. Paas adheres to critical theories that do not do justice to Scripture and its divine authority. In our view, these concerns are justified. But TUK has rejected demands to review the appointment of Dr. Paas.

Also Prof. J. Douma has protested in an article in *Nederlands Dagblad* published April 3,

2009 and updated April 6, 2009 (see <http://www.nd.nl/artikelen/2009/april/06/dissertatie-stefanpaas-botst-met-godsopenbaring>). His concerns are similar to those raised above. He hoped for a response from the Theological University in Kampen. Kampen responded by means of an article by Prof. Kwakkel who defended Dr. Paas' work. The main arguments are:

- His work is an Old Testament dissertation and when you write a dissertation you have to work according to the method and principles of the history of religion school. You cannot share your personal faith or assume that the Bible is trustworthy.
- If you wish to know what Paas believes, you should consult his books on evangelism and church planting.
- Paas was able to show that the prophets Isaiah, Amos, and Hosea believed in the LORD as Creator. He concluded that over against scholars who maintain that a belief in creation is later than those prophets.
- The Old Testament teaching in Kampen does not go into a historical-critical direction. However, it was unrealistic for Paas to write his dissertation from a Reformed point of view.
- The difference between myth and history is much smaller with Paas than Douma states and Paas' idea of myth corresponds with what Douma writes, namely that what God and Jesus Christ have done for us in our history is basic for our faith.

Some of the above points were also made by Paas in an interview with Nederlands Dagblad (last revised April 6, 2009).

Our Evaluation

The reasons for the refusal of TUK to reconsider or rescind the appointment of Dr. Paas are not very convincing. Our response is briefly as follows.

- A Christian, also a Christian scholar, cannot lead two separate lives - one as a believer, the other as a critical scholar basing his research on unbiblical presuppositions. Everything we do must be done to the glory of God (cf. 1 Cor 10:31). Life is one. It is therefore not something to be proud of if for Paas' true views one needs to go to another set of his writings.
- Reading the dissertation of Dr. Paas leaves the very clear impression that he stands behind what he states. We have analyzed some of this earlier. Nowhere to our knowledge does he clearly distinguish himself from his methodology. Rather, he gives the strong impression that he believes in what he writes. Paas identifies himself with the history of religion school's way of thinking.
- Furthermore, contrary to what is suggested in Kampen's response, also Paas' popular writing in the periodical *De Wapenveld* shows something of the same critical presuppositions. He later wrote in *De Wapenveld*, volume 51:5 (2001), in such a way that the historicity of Genesis 1 and 2 is not important for him. But, "perhaps it happened this way" ("En wellicht is het zo gebeurd") as recounted in Genesis. The message and not whether it actually happened is important. But what good would the message be if the event on which it is to be based never occurred? (For the full article, see <http://www.wapenveldonline.nl/viewArt.php?art=424>). So in light of Paas' approach to the historicity of Genesis 1, it is difficult to accept TUK's explanation that Paas' approach is not just a matter of trying to satisfy academic requirements. His critical stance is also evident elsewhere.
- TUK's comment that the difference between myth and history is smaller with Paas than Douma states is not very clear and therefore not very helpful. Paas' use of myth in the *Wapenveld* article sidesteps the question of history which is of secondary importance to him.

- We accept TUK's assurance that their teaching does not go into a historical critical direction, but our concerns are real.

Our Conclusions

- We regret that Dr. Paas' appointment was upheld in spite of valid criticisms. We could expect that any minister who held such views would have been summarily disciplined. These views militate against Scripture and our confessions. We of course make no judgment on Dr. Paas' personal faith. We only judge his writing.
 - By tolerating Paas' appointment in spite of the objections brought against his scholarly work, TUK will probably no longer be able to call anyone to account concerning higher critical views in the future. It seems to us that the Paas episode, if left as it is, will leave Kampen open to future toleration of the teaching of the Scriptures in a critical, man-centered manner which dishonours Scripture and its Author. No disciplinary action now has made it very difficult to do so in the future.
 - The matter is serious for ultimately we are not simply talking about method here, but of an unbelieving ideology. The ideology controls how we arrange and view the facts. The clear meaning and intent of the Scriptures no longer have the last say, but man does. See, e.g., Eta Linnemann, *Wissenschaft oder Meinung? Anfragen und Alternativen* (1986) which has been translated into English as *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (1990). We fear that this approach will ultimately affect the integrity of the Theological University and influence the views of students and thus future ministers.

B. The dissertation of Dr. K. van Bekkum approved by TUK

The dissertation of Koert van Bekkum, *From Conquest to Coexistence* was defended on March 18, 2010, and granted a cum laude designation by the senate of TUK. This dissertation has generated a lot of controversy and the points raised below are not unique to us. Others have made similar criticisms. We mention especially Dr. J. Douma who as an emeritus professor of the Theological University in Kampen gave considerable serious critique on his website, as well as Dr. E. de Boer and Dr. R. van Houwelingen (*De Reformatie* 85 [2009-10] 393-394) who both teach at TUK and Rev. Joh. de Wolf (*Nader Bekeken* 17 [2010] 246-250). Other critics could be mentioned. Much could be said about this work, also many positive things. However, we restrict ourselves to addressing what we consider to be a central concern, namely the methodology employed in this work. Two aspects can be mentioned.

Van Bekkum brings the biblical text into dialogue with findings of archaeology. This is laudable. However, it appears that the current interpretation of archaeological remains which he selects determines whether Scripture is accurate in historical details. The effect of this is that straightforward historical claims of Scripture are put aside. For example, 1 Kings 6:1 indicates that the Exodus took place 480 years prior to Solomon's fourth year as king. But to accept this date is according to Van Bekkum a "lazy man's solution" (33). It is quite disconcerting that no serious attempt is made to understand the historical data as a plain reading of Scripture would lead one to understand it.

Van Bekkum however does not accept such a plain reading of Scripture for he considers history writing in the Old Testament as a kind of representational art, a characterization which needs to

be factored in along with the community's expectations and beliefs in order to define the nature of its historical truth-claim. The text's truth value can be judged by factoring in the results of the dialogue of the biblical text with the current interpretation of the artifactual evidence (31-32). It is therefore methodologically incorrect, according to Van Bekkum, to accept biblical data at face value. "Its literary artistry and use of genre conventions should be studied first" (33). The distinction made by Van Bekkum between truth claim and truth value (32) does not reflect a high view of Scripture and should be rejected.

One consequence of this approach is that the event of the sun standing still (Josh 10:12-14) is interpreted in a metaphorical way (250). This is however contrary to the obvious meaning of the text as given to us and as also understood by the earliest interpretations of this passage as seen in Targum Jonathan, the Septuagint, and Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities*, V.61). It is therefore very disappointing that in his intricate critical analysis on the text, the manner in which the text has always been understood is not really dealt with. Only problems which Van Bekkum sees associated with the traditional interpretation are highlighted. Virtually no positive comments in support of the traditional interpretation are given (241). The underlying problem is his methodology by which he subjects the biblical passage (initially only the poetic part) to certain rules of literary criticism and ends up being unable to see what the text is actually saying (237-250). The end result is that according to Van Bekkum the text means that the sun and moon did not actually stand still. Rather "the prolonging of the day to defeat the enemy at one time is understood as a rhetorical strategy, reflecting the common ancient Near Eastern literary technique of contracting a great military victory to a single time span" (250).

Over against this approach which breathes the spirit of critical scholarship, contrast, for example, the treatment which J. H. Kroeze gives in his commentary (*Jozua*. Commentaar op het Oude Testament [1968], 135-136) or M. H. Woudstra (*Joshua*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament, [1981] 176). The latter correctly notes that "rationalizing attempts for the purpose of satisfying the modern scientific mind should be avoided. ... the biblical view of the world as created by God, who assigned to each heavenly body its place and function (Gen 1:16), permits a rather literal view of the events reported here" (176).

Much more could be said and has been said in the Dutch Reformed press (as noted above). However, our concern as deputies is the fact that TUK could approve a dissertation with such methodological principles. Does this mean that Kampen no longer holds to the traditional Reformed view of Scripture as perspicuous and its own interpreter. If the Old Testament no longer means what it says, where do we end up?

We do realize that there is freedom of exegesis. We are also aware that Van Bekkum in the Epilogue to his dissertation affirms his acceptance of Article 5 of the Belgic Confession (499). But it is unclear how this commitment can lead him to set aside the obvious meaning of the text as traditionally and historically understood.

C. Concerns Brought Before Synod Zwolle-Zuid 2008 and Turned Down

For example:

a. Dr. A. L. Th. de Bruijne has propounded views on Scripture that have met considerable resistance and objections, such as his idea that there are inaccuracies in the Bible and that the Bible makes use of myth (*Woord op schrift* [2003], 185-193). In spite of the great importance of the issues he raised, his views were not dealt with at the synod on the technical ground that the objections were submitted too late (*Acta Generale Synode-Zwolle-Zuid 2008*, Artikel 105).

b. Dr. J. Douma has written in favour of the framework hypothesis for the creation week which essentially denies the historical character of Genesis 1, and has also argued in favour of leaving room for evolution; see his *Genesis* [2004] 42f., 45-48, 51). Objections against Dr. J. Douma's views at the synod were also turned down, one of the grounds for this decision being that the objections came too long after the publication of Douma's *Genesis*. (*Acta Generale Synode-Zwolle-Zuid 2008*, Artikel 105).

c. Dr. G. Harinck in a published interview, made controversial comments that raised questions about his orthodoxy concerning a variety of issues including Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, homosexuality, the Roman Catholic mass, and women office bearers. Although his comments brought protests from the churches, the Synod did not deal with them both on technical grounds and also because he had since backpedaled, modified his comments, and affirmed his desire to continue in subjection to the Word of God and in conformity to the Reformed confession (see *Acta Zwolle-Zuid 2008*, Artikel 10 and 10 and Bijlage 9.2). To our knowledge, no apology for or formal retraction of his comments was made. In our view, the whole episode has not inspired confidence in the integrity and Reformed character of TUK.

In summary, the inability to deal with the essence of the objections brought to synod in the above three examples is very unfortunate and can give the impression that the RCN tolerates views that are not in accordance with the Bible's own testimony and the Reformed confessions. This toleration and its possible consequences is obviously of concern to many in the RCN. These concerns also live in the Canadian sister churches.

D. A Question

It struck us that Dr. Van Bekkum in defending his approach in writing his dissertation mentioned the fact that he had to address and appeal to those outside their circles, including critical scholars. He wrote:

In complete conformity with Kampen's academic policy as that has been practised since the 1989 Oberman report, I have tried to make my own Reformed contribution to Old Testament scholarship. In today's networking society this means writing a book that can be heard on the podium of international biblical scholarship. On that podium atheists, agnostics, Jews, and Christians speak with each other about the biblical text. That places specific demands on how you present your work. You use arguments that might be able to convince others. Just as many ordinary Christians do at their work or Reformed teenagers do at a public school. The trick is of course not to give up your own principles and convictions. You may not hide your convictions. At the same time, it is not forbidden on such a podium to momentarily leave out certain matters for the sake of the one point

that you want to make or to use terms that would normally not be used within your own faith community.¹

It is of course laudable to address scholarship in general and to make a Reformed contribution. But the question has come up in light of this committee's findings whether the desire to be part of current discussion in critical circles may not lead to being unduly influenced by the mindset of critical scholars with whom one is engaged and, in the case of Kampen, with whom one is now expected to cooperate in approving dissertations.

2. WORK DEPUTIES MEN/WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

D. MANDATE OF DEPUTIES

General Synod Zwolle 2008 of the GKv appointed deputies to promote further reflection and resolution concerning the role of women (and men) in the church. They were instructed to follow a three-track approach to fulfill their mandate:

4. Theological/Sociological research
5. Reflection in the churches
6. Preparation of practical, short term decisions

4. Theological/sociological Research

This part of the mandate was given to the Theological University in Kampen. One of the projects was a hermeneutical undertaking by drs. Myriam Klinker-De Klerck, which was published and distributed in 2011 as book number 9 of the TU-Bezinningsreeks. This book was entitled "Als Vrouwen Het Woord Doen: Over Schriftgezag, Hermeneutiek en Het Waarom van de Apostolische Instructie Aan Vrouwen." This book is reviewed under part C below.

5. Reflection in the Churches

The deputies composed a manual to be used for reflection on the role of women (and men) in the church. This workbook was presented at 6 regional meetings to which all churches were invited to send delegates. The delegates were equipped to pursue the reflection on M/V in de Kerk making use of the materials developed and collected by the deputies. A short video clip has been developed to introduce the matter for discussion at the local level. This encouragement to reflection and discussion at the local churches culminated in the convening of a conference on

1. The original reads: "Geheel volgens het Kamper wetenschappelijk beleid zoals dat sinds het rapport Oberman in 1989 is gevoerd, heb ik een poging gedaan een eigen gereformeerde bijdrage te leveren aan de oudtestamentische wetenschap. In de netwerksamenleving van vandaag betekent dat: een boek te schrijven dat gehoord kan worden op het podium van de internationale Bijbelwetenschap. Op dat podium spreken atheïsten, agnosten, joden en christenen tegenwoordig met elkaar over de Bijbeltekst. Dat stelt bepaalde eisen aan de presentatie. Je gebruikt argumenten die een ander zouden kunnen overtuigen. Net zoals vele gewone christenen dat doen op hun werk of gereformeerde tieners op een openbare school. Daarbij is het natuurlijk de kunst niet in te leveren op je eigen principiële overtuiging. Die overtuiging mag je ook niet verstoppen. Tegelijk is het op zo'n podium niet verboden andere zaken ter wille van dat ene punt dat je wilt maken even buiten beschouwing te laten, of termen te gebruiken die binnen de eigen geloofsgemeenschap zo niet aan de orde komen." See www.jochemdouma.nl under "Achtergrond - Reactie van Koert van Bekkum, 22 Juni 2010."

the issue of the roles of men and women in the church in March, 2011. A short summary and critique of the manual follows in part B below.

6. Preparation of Practical Decisions

Synod Zwolle gave the deputies M/V in de Kerk the mandate to prepare practical answers to the a number of questions. The deputies M/V were unable to make any practical recommendations, and found the mandate too intensive. They requested Synod 2011 to grant them a simplified mandate to make recommendations about practical application of their findings. Synod Harderwijk 2011 decided (Besluit 2) :

- a. To reappoint deputies M/V in de Kerk with the mandate: to answer the following questions:
 1. is it permitted, on the basis of Scripture, to appoint sisters as well as brothers of the congregation to the office of deacon? What effects does the response to this question have for the task and the responsibility of the deacons?
 2. is it permitted, on the basis of Scripture, to appoint sisters as well as brothers of the congregation to the office of elder and minister?
 3. what joint statements and agreements are required, given the answers to the above questions?
- b. Upon request of churches to offer support for reflection on this subject. In this regard the deputies are to:
 1. proceed from the point of view of a Biblically responsible vision of the service of men and women in the church of Christ and to make use of the materials already produced;
 2. take into account the results of the reflection and decision-making by consistories;
 3. give close attention to the pronouncements of kindred churches in this and foreign countries;
 4. take into account church political aspects and issues raised by church plant projects;
 5. gather relevant information and advice for the various parts from the TU and deputies BBK, DKE, GDD, HKO and OOG.

Ground:

The reflection which has been set in motion needs to be concluded as per the mandates given by General Synod Amersfoort-Centrum 2005, and in order to give clear pronouncements which serve life in the local churches.

What follows first is a summary and critique of the manual for discussion of the issues in the churches (B) and the theological study produced by drs. Klinker-De Klerck, "Als Vrouwen Het Woord Doen" (C).

E. REVIEW OF MANUAL M/V PRODUCED BY DEPUTIES FOR CHURCHES

The manual consists of six chapters.

CHAPTER 1 - Report of deputies M/V in the church to Synod Zwolle 2008

Synod Amersfoort 2005 appointed deputies and gave them the mandate to, by means of empirical research and in cooperation with the TU, find out the kind of questions and problems the churches are encountering in connection with the matter of "women in the church." The results of a survey done in the churches are summarized. Some of those results are:

- Women are involved in the churches in all kinds of ways.
- About half the members are in favour of women deacons.
- A minority are in favour of female elders or ministers.

- The opinions of the church members are affected education and age.
- There is a range of opinions and confusion about what the Bible says about men and women.

The report states that over the past years the role of women in society as well, as church has changed and women are more involved in all kinds of ways than before. The standard view in the RCN is that men and women have different roles. But that is being questioned more and more. Do the roles of men and women differ in principle? If yes, how then, and why? They are involved in church, even in tasks only given to men before, such as Catechism instructors, pastoral workers, council secretary, committees, etc. They are allowed to vote for office bearers. But they are not permitted to hold offices in the church in the RCN, though other protestant churches have opened the offices to women. All these changes have brought the RCN to reflect anew on what the Bible teaches about the roles of men and women.

The Report M/V in de Kerk 2008 therefore raises questions about Biblical directives for the position of women in the church. There is assurance that the Bible has the authority in this matter. However, the question of how we are to interpret the relevant Bible passages is raised. In connection with that the report raised questions such as: In which cultural situation were the books of the Bible written, and how do those cultural situations contribute to the formulation of the Bible text? And what do the words of the text mean for us in our time? It is noted that the roles of men and women have not been explicitly established in the confessions of the RCN.

The main lines of argumentation were laid out in the report to Synod 2008.

- E. Some view the role of men as leaders and protectors and women as followers and helpers as a creation ordinance. Sanctified in Christ, men and women balance each other in their separate roles again.
- F. Others don't see a creation ordinance but see men and women created in equal roles with difference only as a result of the fall. We have been redeemed from that by Christ and so men and women are now equal in marriage and in church.

Two other lines of argumentation, both claiming to be faithful to Scripture, were also laid out in the report. The difference here is in taking into account the cultural context at the time of the Bible writers and our present-day culture.

- G. Even though the Spirit made use of the Bible writers along with their cultural background, He is able to make His intentions clear in spite of that cultural background. Though we need to carefully take into account the different situation, the application for today isn't much affected.
- H. God's message for today is hidden under a cultural layer which we need to look through in order to understand it. The prescriptions are so intertwined with the concrete situation in which they were given that they cannot be applied to today and may even be in conflict with what God intended.

Other material offered to the churches for reflection on the role of women in the church was included in following chapters.

CHAPTER 2 - An outline on Bible reading with attention to 1 Timothy by Rev. F. Wisselink

CHAPTER 3 - An article on the roles of men and women by Almatine Leene

CHAPTER 4 - An article about the offices in the church by Rev. R. Heida

CHAPTER 5 - An article on shifts in society by Rev. J. Harmanny

CHAPTER 6 - A list of references

Our Concerns About the Manual

First, we have concerns about the potential Scripture interpretations proffered to Synod 2008 and put forward in the “Manual M/V.” The reasoning in argument B above clearly asserts that male headship has been abolished after Christ. The basis for this is Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Accepting this reasoning would mean all church offices should be opened to women.

Synod Zwolle’s acceptance of this as a possible interpretation, we believe, is a serious deviation from the historical Reformed explanation of the relevant passages. There is no doubt that from creation men and women were equal in worth and dignity. Both were made in God’s image. Both were given the task to replenish the earth and subdue it. Both came from one flesh and became one flesh. However, there is also no doubt that man was created before woman, and this has lasting impact on their roles as shown by 1 Timothy 2:12-13, “For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” In addition, woman was given a specific role in Genesis 2:18 & 20 as “helper.” Man was also the one given the responsibility of naming the animals, and he named His wife “Eve.” Man was also the federal head as shown in the fact that he was given the command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16 & 17) and it is in his disobedience specifically that all mankind sinned (Romans 5:12). We therefore speak of these roles as a creation ordinance with lasting validity.

Therefore we also cannot accept the idea that Galatians 3:28 can be used in support of an egalitarian position for women in the church. Paul was not doing away with gender-specific roles (otherwise we could also use this passage to justify same-sex marriage!). He says that Greeks could remain Greeks and Jews remain Jews. Slaves could remain slaves and free men remain free men. And males could remain males and females remain females. The point the apostle was referring to was spiritual status before God through faith. They are all one in faith, but not in roles. We therefore do not see how the reasoning in B could be entertained as a conceivable interpretation of Scripture. The principle we find clearly revealed throughout the New Testament is that of male headship in relation to women in marriage as well as church (1 Cor.11:3, Eph.5:23, 1 Timothy 2:8-15).

It is striking that this “eschatological” approach to the roles of men and women was the main argument of Report 26 to Synod 1990 of the Christian Reformed Church: “The overall thrust of the Bible – its eschatological orientation and direction – is toward women’s attaining a place alongside men, rather than under them or separated from them. The Scriptures open with the man and the woman side by side as God’s image bearers, assigned a common task. Very soon, however, we hear of husbands ruling over their wives as the outcome of the fall into sin.... With Jesus restoration begins to take place. In Him the kingdom of God draws near.... In sum, the overall sweep of Scripture is toward Christ’s restoration of the original order of men and women living and working side by side, on a par, mutually supporting and ministering to each other in pursuit of their common task.” (Agenda for Synod 1990, p. 328-329). This sounds very similar to reasoning B above, which is disconcerting to us as churches engaged in unity talks with the

United Reformed Churches – churches which have separated from the Christian Reformed Church mainly because of the matter of women in office.

While it is true that the RCN have not actually adopted B as their approach, Synod Zwolle 2008, and Synod Harderwijk 2011, by giving the deputies M/V in de Kerk the “go-ahead” to continue to present this to the churches for reflection as a real alternative to the present view, have cast doubt on the validity of A, the historical view of male headship. It will be difficult now to go back to the A only position which the Reformed churches have historically held. We do not see that those in the churches who are in favour of women office bearers (as shown in the survey) will abandon their position now that it was entertained as a possibility.

It is not surprising that, in light of the provisionality of the interpretation of Galatians 3:28, the classical Reformed hermeneutics is also called into question in reasoning D. The cultural context is brought into the picture as possibly determining what such a passage says about the role of women. This means that also here a door has been opened for the possibility of a “new hermeneutic” which gives more weight to the human element in the text of the Bible. Yes, there are numerous assurances that the Bible is still authoritative (page 4 & 31) and trustworthy (page 5), but these assurances certainly sound hollow if one considers how the human element can now be given so much weight in the relevant passages such as 1 Corinthians 11 & 14 and 1 Timothy 2 & 3 that they can be reinterpreted to teach the opposite of what they have been shown to teach in Reformed Bible commentaries for hundreds of years. The meaning of those texts is relativized by appealing to a hermeneutical authority that exists not in the text itself but in the interpreter. We see this as a step away from the actual Word of God and in line with the new hermeneutics which has infiltrated so many churches over the past half-century or so. Such an approach to the Bible also opens the way to the reinterpretation of what Bible passages state about other issues such as creation/evolution and homosexual relations. Again, we do not say that the RCN have officially adopted this approach, but in not repudiating B and D in the manual to date, they have opened a door to such a new hermeneutic which will be extremely difficult to close, seeing the views many hold in the churches. And our question therefore continues to be, does this study truly arise out of new discoveries in the interpretation of the Bible, or out of the cultural context and the pressure it exerts on the RCN churches?

Concerning the four articles of the “Handleiding M/V,” we acknowledge that they were written and distributed to stimulate discussion. Thus they were intended to be as non-partisan as possible. However, in the questioning one senses a kind of provisionality of interpretation and at least the validity of the “new” approach to the role of women in the church.

We empathize with the RCN as they wrestle with the pressures of an ever-more secular, humanistic society on the churches there, especially also with regard to the place and role of the woman. Seeking better ways to serve and praise God is positive. However, the “Handleiding M/V” is a document which places big question marks behind the approach to the role of the woman in the Reformed churches throughout history, and the Biblical interpretation which supported that approach. This provisionality of interpretation has, we would say, at least opened the door to toleration of a new hermeneutics. While it is true that the deputies M/V in de Kerk have not fully completed the task assigned by Synod 2008, our hope is that the RCN will let a healthy, Reformed interpretation of Scripture determine their direction rather than societal

pressures and ensuing reinterpretations, and that they conclude that that door to the new hermeneutics with respect to the role of women in the church should be closed and the authority of the clear and sufficient Word of God be maintained.

F. RESPONSE TO BOOK “ALS VROUWEN HET WOORD DOEN”

Drs. Myriam Klinker-De Klerck, a doctoral student in New Testament at the Theologische Universiteit in Kampen, was commissioned to research the theme of the relationship between men and women in the church. This commission was motivated by the 2008 General Synod Zwolle-Zuid’s request to Kampen for a scholarly reflection on this subject. The result is a study of about 140 pages with three main sections: the authority of Scripture and hermeneutics, behaviour and motivation, and concluding observations.² The larger context of this study is the ongoing discussions in the Reformed Churches Liberated about women in office. As committee we reviewed this publication because it formed part of the execution of a mandate of General Synod Zwolle-Zuid. But we do so very briefly for it has not been officially accepted for recommendation to the churches by any synodical decision.

It would go beyond the time and resources of our committee to delve into every aspect of this book. What we have done is highlight the two areas from this study that especially concern us with a view to our mandate as synodical committee. The two concerns center on the place assigned to general revelation as interpreted in this study and the tendentious exegesis given to key passages by downplaying the place of the creation account when dealing with man-woman relationships. The numbers in the text refer to pages in Klinker-De Klerck’s study.

General Revelation and Hermeneutics

According to our Reformed understanding of revelation, we confess in the Belgic Confession, Article 2 that God makes himself known to us by two means:

First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most beautiful book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many letters leading us to perceive clearly God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All these things are sufficient to convict men and leave them without excuse. Second, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word as far as is necessary for us in this life, to His glory and our salvation.

With general revelation we therefore understand the creation, preservation, and government of the universe. Through these means God reveals his eternal power and divine nature. Klinker-De Klerck however understands general revelation in a much broader sense. It not only includes creation but also culture and actually everything that exists (17). Klinker-De Klerck uses Bavinck for this understanding.³ Such a broad understanding of general revelation is a key element in her hermeneutical model. However, it should be realized that although Bavinck’s view of general revelation is indeed quite broad and includes culture, he acknowledges that “not

2. Myriam Klinker-de Klerck, *Als vrouwen het Woord doen: over schriftgezag, hermeneutiek en het waarom van de apostolische instructie aan vrouwen*, TU-Bezinningsreeks (Barneveld: Vuurbaak, 2011).

3. Klinker-de Klerck, *Als Vrouwen Het Woord Doen*, 17–19. See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003–8), 1:307-312, 340-342 (§§ 86, 94).

all things are equally revelatory” and he emphasizes that general revelation needs to reveal God in order to function as revelation. There is no indication in Bavinck that general revelation reveals guidelines for applying Scripture in today’s culture as Klinker-De Klerck suggests. Indeed, Bavinck emphasizes the insufficiency of general revelation and the need for special revelation as given in Scripture in order to correctly understand general revelation.⁴

Another factor is the work of the Holy Spirit. We all agree that the working of the Spirit is necessary to discern God’s will as he reveals himself. But the issue is how does God reveal himself? In the somewhat confusing pages that follow, Klinker-De Klerck argues for a broad understanding of a subjective working of the Spirit by which God reveals his will in the lives of his people (19-21). She uses Bavinck in this discussion but does not seem to do justice to him in view of her apparently minimizing the importance of Scripture. She concludes that “it is clear that Scripture forms ‘only’ a subdivision of the whole of God’s revelation. Revelation and Scripture are not interchangeable concepts” (21). According to Klinker-De Klerck, Bavinck “wants to avoid that God’s revelation be *reduced* to Scripture and that this Scripture functions as a ‘hovering authority’ far from daily life” (21). She further opines that Bavinck did not want the testimony of the Holy Spirit to be too closely tied to the authority of Scripture as such (21). However, we do not recognize Bavinck in this.⁵ Bavinck himself underlines the central position of Scripture when it comes to the work of the Holy Spirit.

If we look at the testimony of the Holy Spirit in its totality and briefly sum it up, it proves to be threefold. Included in it, in the first place, is the witness the Holy Spirit offers in Scripture concerning Scripture itself. This witness comes to us indirectly in all the divine characteristics (criteria, marks), which are imprinted on the content and form of Scripture. It also comes to us directly in all those positive pronouncements Scripture contains with respect to its divine origin. Secondly, subsumed under this heading of the testimony of the Holy Spirit is the witness the Spirit has borne to Scripture in the church throughout the centuries; and this witness is indirectly embodied in all the blessings that accrued to the church as church from Scripture (in the existence and continuing existence of the church as church) and directly in the united confession of the believing community throughout the centuries that Scripture is the word of God. Finally, the testimony of the Holy Spirit also includes the witness the Holy Spirit bears in the heart of every believer concerning the divine authority of Scripture.⁶

Bavinck obviously affirms the centrality of Scripture as divine revelation, also in connection with the work of the Spirit.

After Klinker-De Klerck briefly reviewed the work of some professors in Kampen (but remarkably no exegetes, i.e., Old or New Testament professors!), she notes that in every field

4. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* 1:341-342 (§§ 94-95); Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977; 1st publ. 1956), 61–66; Klinker-de Klerck, *Als Vrouwen Het Woord Doen*, 21, 131-36. Also see on the restricted nature of general revelation as revealing God, Nicolaas H. Gootjes, *Teaching and Preaching the Word: Studies in Dogmatics and Homiletics*, ed. and comp. Cornelis Van Dam (Winnipeg, MB: Premier, 2010), 15–19.

5. Klinker-De Klerck uses Bavinck’s § 154 as can be found in the English translation. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:593–95.

6. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:597 (§154).

there is tension between the universal authority of Scripture and the constantly changing contexts (36). When it comes to the process of interpreting, she affirms that we need to listen carefully to Scripture, but also to note that our own context is part of general revelation (38). We see no justification for this assertion, but this concept plays a very important part in Klinker-De Klerck's hermeneutic.

She goes on to say that the Bible as a unified narrative is as it were to be superimposed on one's own life story. The Spirit sees to the biblical narrative and one's own life story being bound together and being compatible. This work of the Spirit begins an interactive process of understanding how the Bible relates to one's life. A living communion with God is necessary for this hermeneutical process. It is important to read God's Word again and again in one's particular circumstance and to keep one's eyes on Jesus Christ crucified. One must continually be united with him, and not just as individuals, but also as congregation. Guided by the Spirit of God the hermeneutical process starts (39). Good things are said here, but if our own context is to function as God's general revelation, what is to save us from subjectivism? It would be easy to emphasize the work of the Spirit in applying our context (general revelation) to the detriment of the written and clear Word of God. Indeed, Klinker-De Klerck acknowledges that the hermeneutical process will turn out differently in each situation (39, 132).

According to Klinker-De Klerck the idea of our own context being part of God's general revelation is a necessary element in the process of understanding Scripture for our time today. It balances off any investigation of Scripture done in the calm of the study. This scholarly investigation cannot by itself determine how we are to be true to Scripture. The general revelation of our context has to be taken into account (132).

The Place of Creation Ordinances

By way of a general preliminary comment, it struck us that when Klinker-De Klerck discussed passages which could be important for the question of whether women should be admitted to ecclesiastical office she did not do adequate justice to the place of creation ordinances with respect to the position of the woman.

Klinker-De Klerck discusses motives for commands or prohibitions when dealing with passages concerned with man-woman relationships. With respect to 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, she lists a number of motives but does not profile the key controlling motive for the command that a woman cover her head in corporate worship. It is found in verses 8-9: "For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man (54-62).

In 1 Corinthians 14:34, the apostle instructs that "women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says." Klinker-De Klerck lists several motivations for this command but fails to explore the possibility that the reference to the law has in view the creation account. Since Paul had appealed to the creation account earlier in 1 Corinthians 11, one could reasonably suppose that this is the case here as well and he therefore did not further elaborate.⁷

7. See, e.g., R. E. Clampa and B. S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 727–28.

When discussing 1 Timothy 2:8-3:1a, Klinker-De Klerck lists several motivations for the prohibition to teach: peace in the congregation, what is befitting a woman who professes godliness, and the reversal of a desired authority relationship. When she comes to the reason from creation (vv. 13-15) she downplays this motivation by claiming that these verses only give an indirect motivation for the command not to teach. The primary motivation is to maintain a certain existing authority structure (95-99). This way of reasoning does not do justice to the structure of the passage and the significance of the creation event for the relationship of men and women in church. It is also troubling that she goes on to suggest somewhat condescendingly that this way of reasoning from creation may have been okay for Paul, possibly implying that it may not be for us.⁸

Later when Klinker-De Klerck pulls some of her research together, she speaks of the creation account supporting the subordinate position of the woman, but, tellingly, she does not say that it justifies it (128). She goes on to note that all the different motives for subordination in the woman-man relationship become clear when seen in the context of subordination in the Greek-Roman world. It was what you would expect the apostle to say given the cultural context (129). Klinker-De Klerck does acknowledge that the Bible traces the ordering of human relationships to God (130). Incongruously, a little later, Klinker-De Klerck then goes on to suggest that Paul interprets the creation of man and woman from the cultural order then current of woman being subordinate (130). But this is an incorrect way of reasoning. It is not a matter of interpreting creation in the light of current mores, but of understanding biblical mores as being mandated by God's work of creation.

Klinker-De Klerck continues by saying that conforming oneself to the existing order of society (female subordination in this case) is profitable for spreading the gospel (130). However this is putting things backwards. The biblical injunctions are not the result of adjusting to society, but are norms mandated by God, in this case according to his creation work.

Klinker-De Klerck's Concluding Observations

Some selections of interest from her final chapter are here presented. With respect to woman in office, Klinker-De Klerck argues that reasoning only from Genesis runs the risk that the hermeneutical process withers to an analytical distinction between commands that have universal validity to commands that needs to be interpreted according to the current culture. The question of universal commands versus the temporary ones is legitimate in itself, but it cannot be the only way. The hermeneutical process, the daily living with Scripture, then starts to look like a computer directed program that with good data input yields an output of good commands. The essential spiritual dimension then gets snowed under. The real confrontation with real people in their own context does not function. However, the hermeneutical process is not at all like a computer directed program. It has a dynamic. Having an insight on the basis of Scripture is always provisional. Modesty is necessary, because access to God is always given within limitations (132-133). The question arises with us whether this approach is not too indeterminate? How can ministers guide congregations with this type of approach? Each can dynamically interpret Scripture as it suits according to Klinker-De Klerck's model. It all depends how you perceive the moving of the Spirit.

8. She writes: "Kennelijk bieden beide gebeurtenissen voor de apostel voldoende historische grond om de man gezag toe te kennen over de vrouw en niet omgekeerd" (99).

When discussing motivations for the commands or prohibitions, Klinker-De Klerck opines that referring to what was fitting given current custom may have weighed heavier for Paul than referring to Genesis (133-134). We ask, if that is so, what has happened to the overriding authority of Scripture? Klinker-De Klerck also asserts that a motive to take into account is the spreading of the gospel. One should not stay with the creation ordinances but move on to the progress of salvation in our current society (134). Again, what has happened here to clear biblical norms?

From her perspective, her study of motivations shows the inconsequentiality of the fact that on the one hand ecclesiastical offices are closed to women but civil offices are open to them (134). In response, we would say that this inconsequentiality is the result of her not taking the creation ordinances properly into account in her exegesis of the relevant passages. The motivations which she isolated in the texts under discussion tended to gravitate around societal conditions and human relationships as such. As a result, she missed the emphasis on the divine norms in the text. For example, Klinker-De Klerck asks why a Reformed woman can become a civil judge but not a minister in a church. A simple reference to the command to be silent in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 will not do. It will not do for her because she sees the motivation for women not teaching to have been only a current cultural need for female subordination in the days of Paul. The implication is that this may have been an issue then, but it is no longer. So, women should be able to teach in church today (134-135). However, if one sees the motivation for women not teaching in the church to be rooted in the creation of man before the woman, as the text says (1 Tim 2:13), her difficulty disappears. This concerns a divine norm rooted in creation and thus applicable for all time.

In Conclusion

Although there is good material in this book, we are disappointed with it. In our view, this study is tendentious, tends to a horizontal reading and interpreting of Scripture, and will be of service to those who wish to see women in ecclesiastical office. We are also disappointed that the TUK's response to Synod Zwolle-Zuid is summed up in only this one publication by a single researcher. According to the preface, this is the result of the scholarly reflection as mandated by Synod. We regret the lack of balance and the fact that more attention was not given to the traditional interpretations of the passages that have served the church for centuries.

3. THE DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS (RCN) AND THE NETHERLANDS REFORMED CHURCHES (NRC)

5. Introduction

The Netherlands Reformed Churches came into existence in the late sixties of the 20th century, as churches that had split off from the RCN. Matters of doctrine and church government played a decisive role in this split. Since 1993 there have been growing contacts

between the NRC and the RCN. This happens on the level of the local churches, as well as through committees of Synods.

6. Characteristics

In the area of church government the NRC has always shown a strong independentism. Their Church Order (called Akkoord Kerkelijk Samenleven = AKS) states that a refusal to accept this AKS cannot be a reason to expel a local church from the federation. The pre-amble of this document, only requests local churches to respect as much as possible the decisions of major assemblies. In the area of doctrine the NRC practice significant tolerance when it comes to deviations from the Reformed confessions. The AKS does have an article about signing the Three Forms of Unity by office bearers, but those who refuse only have to give account to their consistory. In practice there is freedom to criticize the confessions in articles and books (publications of drs. H. de Jong).

7. Contacts and discussions between the RCN and the NRC

- m. *General Synod Ommen 1993* was the first synod to instruct the Deputaten Kerkelijke Eenheid (=Deputies Ecclesiastical Unity; further in this report DKE) “to explore if there are possibilities to make contact with the NRC, and if so – in what way”. (Acts, Art.66)
- n. In their report to the next synod (1996) the DKE evaluate the six meetings they had with the committee of the NRC (called CCS). They conclude with sadness that the doctrinal tolerance to deviate from the Reformed confessions and the lack of clarity in the NRC as to what it means to be bound to these confessions, make it impossible to continue the discussions with the NRC.
- o. *General Synod Berkel & Rodenrijs 1996* decided to declare with sadness and with deep disappointment that the exploration of the deputies does not open any hopeful perspective to continue the discussions with the NRC. Synod also decided to write a letter to the NRC to explain what the obstacles are for ongoing contacts. The DKE are authorized to offer to the NRC a verbal explanation of the decision and of the letter from Synod. Synod also declared that the discussions could continue, if the NRC removed the obstacles. (Acts, Art.82).
- p. The DKE report to the next synod (1999) that the NRC did not really deal with the obstacles for further contact, as mentioned by *Synod Berkel & Rodenrijs 1996*. There is too much freedom to deviate from sound Scriptural doctrine as summarized in the Reformed confession, and they conclude that there are no new openings for discussions with the NRC.
- q. *General Synod Leusden 1999* judged that there is no basis for discussions with the NRC to come to unity, since the NRC did not remove the obstacles mentioned by the previous Synod (1996). The deputies were instructed to meet with the NRC committee with the purpose to clarify Synod’s decisions. (Acts, Art.84)
- r. The report of the DKE to the next synod (2002) has a different tone. Deputies report that they had a number of discussions with the committee of the NRC, in which the key-words were “binding” and “room”. The RCN emphasize the need to be bound to the reformed confessions, to protect the congregations against false doctrine. The NRC stress the importance of room (or ‘space’, Dutch: “ruimte”) to formulate the doctrine of the gospel in freedom. The DKE express thankfulness for the good discussions and speak about progress and better understanding of each other’s positions. Although they

acknowledge that the questions as formulated by previous synods have not been answered adequately, they see promising opportunities to continue the discussions with the NRC.

- s. In line with the report and the recommendations of the Deputies, *General Synod Zuidhorn 2002* expresses thankfulness for the fruitful discussions with the NRC. Synod states that these discussions have led to a better mutual understanding regarding the role and the place of subscribing to the confession to prevent and refute deviations from Scripture and the Reformed doctrine. Synod does acknowledge that not all questions have been answered in a satisfactory manner, and therefore instructs DKE to continue the discussions on these questions. (Acts, Art.126).
- t. The Deputies report to the next Synod (2005) that they have focussed on how the binding to the confession functions in NRC compared to the RCN. They did so with a discussion on the doctrine of God's election. Although there was a large measure of agreement on this topic as such – it was also clear that both churches take a different approach when ministers publicly deviate from, and even criticize the Reformed doctrine as summarized in the confessions. The DKE report also that in 2004 the NRC adopted the VOP-report. VOP stands for “Vrouwelijke Ouderlingen en Predikanten”, which means “Female Elders and Ministers”. This decision opens in principle all offices in the NRC for women. The DKE recommend that Synod express thankfulness for the progress in the discussions about the confession, and that the Deputies be instructed to continue these discussions and to include the NRC decisions concerning women in office.
- u. The decisions of *General Synod Amersfoort Centrum 2005* are less casual about this new development in the NRC than the recommendations of DKE seem to be. Synod expresses appreciation for the helpful progress made in the discussions with the NRC committee about the ecclesiastical way of dealing with deviations from the Reformed confession. But Synod also expresses its disappointment with the decision of the NRC to open the offices of elder and minister for women, and calls it a serious barrier for further contacts. The DKE are instructed to continue the discussion about the issue of the place and role of God's Word and the confession as basis for the church community. This discussion must also include the decision of the NRC with regard to women in office. (Acts, Art.135)
- v. The Deputies present to the next Synod (2008) a majority and a minority report. The majority presents its considerations in a document that they call an *Interim Statement concerning the discussion between DKE and CCS* (this is the NRC committee) *regarding the binding to the confession*. The conclusion is that much mutual fear has been taken away and that there is a growing mutual trust when it comes to a broad-minded and loyal binding to the confessions. There are still differences in the way this is put into practice, but the issue of the binding to the confession is no longer an obstacle for discussions that focus on ecclesiastical unity of the two federations. The majority report states also that thorough discussions were held about the hermeneutical principles behind the VOP report. These discussions have led to more clarity and brought both committees closer together in better mutual understanding.
The minority of the Deputies is of the opinion that the *Interim Statement* is in conflict with previous synod decisions and that it cannot be said that the matter of the binding to the confession can no longer be considered an obstacle for further and more intense contact, aimed at church unity. The NRC has not really changed its position. The minority also points out that Synod Amersfoort had not asked for “thorough discussions

about hermeneutics”. There is still no answer (from the NRC) how the VOP report can be in agreement with Scripture and the confession. The ‘serious barrier’ Synod 2005 mentioned, is still there, and has not been dealt with, while the NRC has made it clear that they won’t turn back the VOP decision. The minority report concludes that DKE did not fulfil their mandate.

- w. The decisions of *General Synod Zwolle Zuid 2008* are a compromise between the recommendations of the majority and the minority report of DKE. But the tone is most in line with the minority report. Synod did not decide to “agree with” (as asked by the majority), but to “take note of” the *Interim Statement* regarding the binding to the confession. Synod also expressed sadness (which was not in the recommendations of the majority) that the discussion about the VOP report had not taken away the objections mentioned by the previous Synod. Synod 2008 did not instruct the Deputies to continue the discussions with the NRC in view of ecclesiastical unity or merger, as recommended by DKE. Synod gave the specific mandate to discuss with the NRC committee the three topics that keep coming back: (1) the differences in binding to the confession; (2) the differences in dealing with ongoing deviations from the confession; (3) the matter of women in office within the NRC. (Acts, Art.112).
- x. The DKE report that was dealt with by *Synod Harderwijk 2011* is kind of surprising and confusing. It indicates that the Deputies had discussions with the NRC committee on 3 topics: the doctrine of Baptism, the Holy Spirit and Church & Lord’s Supper. They also had general discussions on the hermeneutical principles that are important when we want to apply biblical commands in our time. DKE concluded with thankfulness that on all these topics there is much harmony between the RCN and the NRC (at least between the two committees). They see this as a strong basis to continue with much confidence the discussions about the confession and about women in office.
A few observations from this DKE report to Synod Harderwijk.
 - v. The discussions of the deputies focussed on topics *Synod Zwolle 2008* had not asked for.
 - vi. The report does not speak about the issues Synod had mandated DKE to address and seek clarification about.
 - vii. The conclusion that there is so much harmony in the way in which the RCN and the NRC bind to the confessions is not supported by the facts in the NRC. Office bearers are still accepted that don’t sign a subscription form and that reject infant-baptism.
- y. The *General Synod of Harderwijk 2011* decided to receive this report of the DKE and its appendices with thankfulness. According to Synod these documents give evidence that the agreement reached on the topics of Baptism, the Holy Spirit, and the Church & Lord’s Supper, is an encouraging starting-point for ongoing discussions about dealing with particular deviations from the confession, and about the matter of women in office. In line with that, Synod instructed DKE to continue the discussions with the NRC, with the specification that the discussion should focus on two topics: (1) women in office, and (2) the manner in which local churches handle the binding to the confession. Synod considered that the result of the discussions so far give enough confidence to continue, with the expectation that in the near future the discussion can be focused on ecclesiastical unity.

Another consideration is that – although the NRC decision to open all offices for the sisters in the congregation is still an obstacle – good progress has been made in discussing the exegesis and hermeneutics behind this decision. This gives – according to Synod – sufficient confidence to continue the discussion about this obstacle.

At Synod Harderwijk another topic came up also in connection with the contacts between the RCN and the NRC. Synod had received a letter from the National Assembly of the NRC with the invitation to participate in a joint study committee with the task to answer this question: “what is the way God’s Word directs us to go when it comes to calling to the office of elder or deacon members of the congregation that live in a homosexual relationship?”

Synod denied the request to participate in such a study committee. But it is good to have a close look at the grounds for this decision. Here are the three grounds:

1. *The request of the NRC to involve the RCN in a study committee for their National Assembly is valuable. It shows the willingness of the NRC to seek the connection with the RCN.*
2. *After intensive reflection Synod Amersfoort Centrum 2005 has rejected the proposal to establish a study committee ‘homosexuality’. None of the churches has requested to reconsider this decision. Therefore a joint study committee is not on the table at this point in time.*
3. *Synod Amersfoort Centrum 2005 has also urged the churches to utilize the existing possibilities to do their own study and reflection of this matter, as well as to ask and receive advice, for instance within the framework of art.41 CO (question period at classis) and art.44 CO (church visitation). In line with this it is very well possible that individual members of the RCN participate with a personal contribution of study and advice, if requested by the National Assembly of the NRC.*

8. Evaluation

- Whenever faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ find each other, recognize each other and can come to unity based on submission to God’s Word and on a solid commitment to the Reformed confessions, we can only rejoice and praise God. The question is: is this what is happening in the contacts between the RCN and the NRC?
- The point of this evaluation is not to look at the situation in the NRC as such. The NRC are not in ecclesiastical fellowship with the CanRC, and thus we do not focus on the developments in this federation as if these would directly affect us. Our point is the question how our sister churches are affected or influenced by their contacts with the NRC, especially when they seem to grow closer.

This was also the framework in which the reports of the CRCA to *Synod Smithers 2007* and *Synod Burlington 2010* mentioned briefly the discussions between the RCN and the NRC, and why *Synod Burlington 2010* instructed this sub-committee to pay special attention to these discussions.

- It is remarkable to see how the tone in the DKE reports about the contacts with the RCN becomes more positive since 2002. It is a surprising change of direction, after the serious disappointment when the Synods of 1996 and 1999 conclude that there is no basis for discussions to come to unity with the NRC. This is also true for the Synod decisions, although we can observe that the Synods of 2005 and 2008 are

clearly less excited and more reluctant to move forward in the discussions with the RCN than the Deputies are.

- The committee reports, as well as the decisions of the Synods, show – or give at least the impression – that these two federations, RCN and NRC, are coming closer together. They experience growing harmony and better understanding and agreement in many areas. And the remaining questions and obstacles seem to become less and less relevant. This raises the question: did the NRC change? Are the disappointments and the critical assessments of the earlier Synods no longer correct and no longer relevant? Have the NRC become more accountable with regard to the adherence to the Reformed doctrine, and with regard to the manner in which they deal with deviations from this doctrine? Is the role and place of the subscription form in the NRC today more in line with the role and place of this form in the RCN?

It doesn't really seem that way, despite the positive reports. If there is any indication of change in the NRC, it is in a more modern, liberal direction. Evidence for this is the adoption of the VOP report that opened all offices for women. And it is still acceptable in the NRC that not all the office bearers sign the subscription form, and that some office bearers reject infant baptism. On paper they may regret this, but in practice the policy of doing nothing to protect the Reformed doctrine and confession is consistent and has not changed.

- What can we conclude in light of the previous paragraph? The fact that the RCN and the NRC are growing closer, that there is growing mutual agreement, harmony and understanding in many areas must be, because our sister churches are changing. They are moving towards the NRC and not the other way round, because they have become more open for new hermeneutics and they have become more tolerant when it comes to doctrinal freedom. The concern is then that through these intensifying contacts this process in the RCN will be reinforced. The RCN will be more and more influenced by the situation and developments in the NRC. In theory this can also work the other way round, of course, but there is not much evidence that this is happening.
- To illustrate the previous point we like to point at the VOP report and the NRC decisions re. women in office, as well as at the NRC reflection on church members that live in homosexual relationships as possible office bearers.

In the RCN the discussion continues about the role of women in the church (see the report on Man/Vrouw in de Kerk), but the focus is more and more on whether women can serve as office bearers. Synod Harderwijk decided not to participate in a joint study committee on homosexuality, but the grounds are basically only technical ('we cannot do it, because none of our churches asked for it).

This makes clear that we can expect that the future discussions and possible decisions will be heavily influenced by what is happening in the NRC. We can actually anticipate that similar developments in the RCN will be accelerated by what is already happening in the NRC.

- There is another aspect. The DKE mention a few times with thankfulness the growing local contacts between RCN and NRC congregations. The decisions of Synods also refer to these local developments. It gives the impression that the excitement about what is happening locally overrides the reluctance and caution expressed by the Synods. There seems to be a great variety in local ecumenical contacts. But it is clear that these contacts are moving forward, regardless of the hesitations on the level of

- the federation. For a growing number of people the questions that the Synods want to see addressed are simply irrelevant today.
- The developments from *Synod Ommen 1993* to *Synod Harderwijk 2011*, as summarized in this report, give at least the impression that the growing contacts between the RCN and the NRC have taken on a life of their own. The process that is pictured in DKE reports, in Synodical decisions, and in local developments, continues, and it seems that Synods are hardly able to give direction to, or correct these developments, even if they would like to.
 - Based on the observation that this process of growing closer together is not the result of changes in the NRC, but of shifting attitudes and views (hermeneutical, doctrinal and church political) in the RCN, it is to be expected that these developments will in many ways affect the Reformed and confessional identity of our sister churches.