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To the Canadian Reformed Church
c/o Br. R.A. Schouten
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Cc: Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad
c/o Br. G. Nordeman, Secretary
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Lelystad, 1 december 2014
Kenmerk: 141201-CRC

Dear and esteemed brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Warm greetings in the name of our Lord!

The General Synod of Reformed Churches in the Netherlands received a letter from you, our sister-churches in Canada, with admonitions, dated May 20th 2013. We have also received comparable letters from other foreign sister-churches. As a General Synod we regarded all these letters of concern and admonition as certainly legitimate. Our rules for relations with sister-churches abroad specify that sister-churches ought to assist each other, as much as possible, in the maintenance, defense and promotion of the Reformed Confession in doctrine, church government, discipline and liturgy, and according to the stipulation of the last Synod of our churches regarding communication from Synod to Synod (and not between committees).

We appreciate the cordial tone of your letter. Our deep and long-lasting relationship, which you mention, is one we also continue to cherish. Therefore we are definitely receptive to the expressions of worried concerns which you communicate in your letter, which your delegates also communicated to us during the discussion at the Synod in a brotherly way. We would also like to let you know that the same worried concerns are also being expressed by members of our own churches here in The Netherlands.

Therefore we appreciate your letter as an expression of your love and care as sister-churches, genuinely concerned about the well-being and faithfulness of our churches in The Netherlands. It is our hope and prayer as well, that the CanRC and the RCN may stand side by side, remaining faithful to God until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, even when traditions may change and new circumstances may require new answers, we hope and expect that we can help each other to remain faithful to the Lord and His Word, as our common foundation.

You express, in particular, concern about the developments at the Theological University in Kampen, about which you already wrote to the Synod of Harderwijk, 2011. The response you received was, in your opinion, substantially insufficient. The Synod of Ede, 2014, asked the Theological University to provide us with a clear clarification and defense regarding publications about which you express concern. The substance of this clarification and defense was already known to prior Synods.



This had given the Synods confidence, regarding the appointments of brothers Paas and Van Bekkum to their teaching positions at the University, that they would hold to the infallibility, clarity, and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures in their scholarly work. We are glad that now you too have received this clarification and defense from the University (see appendix 4).

We also append a document that clearly outlines the responsibilities concerning the Theological University (see appendix 5 – in Dutch).

We understand from your letter that you do not believe it is legitimate to allow for any discussion about women holding church offices. We, on the other hand, think it is a sound Biblical and Reformed practice to regularly review our traditional positions on different subjects in the light of Scripture. In accord with this principle, we are calling for an examination of our doctrine and practice with respect to church offices, in order to find Biblical guidance regarding the service of women in the church.

You see a direct connection between apostolic instruction and the offices of minister, elder, and deacon as they are practiced in our churches. You characterize the totality of this official ministry as one of giving spiritual leadership, and therefore limited, by Scripture, to men. Our intention is precisely to investigate whether this connection can be drawn that directly, and whether church ‘office’ may be a broader concept than ‘giving authoritative leadership’. We also wish to investigate how we can do justice to the two dimensions taught by Scripture: that of the different responsibilities given by God to man and woman, as well as that of the equivalence of man and woman. We believe that such an investigation is certainly possible in a Reformed church, as long as arguments are based on Scripture.

Finally, you express concern about the ongoing relationship between our churches and the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NRC). In our view, you seem to ignore an increasing confessional development within the NRC, and the intention of the NRC to critically review the hermeneutical basis of their decision to allow female elders and pastors. This is a development which we clearly see, observing local NRC congregations criticizing other NRC congregations for unbiblical practices. This Biblical and Confessional life in NRC congregations has led to unity with RCN congregations at the local level.

Our Synod spent quite some time reading your letters and listening to the explanation of your delegates. According to many foreign delegates, the discussion at the Synod was a reassuring experience, with much recognition of our honest desire to be Reformed churches. We hope that this may also be the testimony of their reports, and the result of our attempt to address your concerns.

In the enclosed appendix you find the text of the reply of the General Synod to your concerns, a reply which was practically unanimously agreed upon. We hope you will carefully consider our reply with the same love and care which we see expressed in your letters.

It is our prayer that this letter and material will help to alleviate your concerns and may contribute to restoring mutual confidence in each other. We hope that we can continue to encourage each other to remain steadfast and faithful in the service of Gods Kingdom, according to the Reformed Standards. Let us trust the Lord, who, while expressing critical admonitions, continued to care for His seven churches in Asia Minor. May He keep your and our churches in his hand!



May the Triune God bless you and keep you as churches, and may He keep us united in a sound sister-church relationship to the glory of His name.

On behalf of the general synod of Ede 2014,

Rev. R.J. Vreugdenhil, second scribe

Appendices:

- nr. 2 Text of the synod's decision about the different admonitions

- nr. 3: Text of the synod's decision about the M/V report
- nr. 4: Account of the TU
- nr. 5: Document on TU, GS and the churches (in Dutch)
- nr. 6: Text of the synod's decision about the Netherlands Reformed Churches (in Dutch)

Minutes the discussion in the synod – see:

<http://www.gkv.nl/organisatie/generale-synode/acta-gs/612/>