

RECOMMENDATIONS

Your committee recommends that Synod decide the following:

- A. To note with gratitude that the ERQ strives to be faithful to the Word of God and to bring the Reformed confessions and church order to expression in its own context.
- B. In order to continue developing closer ties with the ERQ with a view to Ecclesiastical Fellowship, Synod re-appoint the Committee for contact with the following mandate:
 1. To continue discussions in particular regarding the matter of confessional membership and fencing of the Lord's table.
 2. To discontinue discussion on the matter of federative unity and differences in the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
 3. To encourage the churches to continue supporting the ERQ financially when needed.
 4. To respond if specific requests for assistance and advice are made in matters of confession, church polity, liturgy, and mission.
 5. To respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend Synods of the ERQ.
 6. To serve Synod 2004 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.

Respectfully submitted,
 Rev. P.G. Feenstra (chairman)
 Rev. A.J. Pol (secretary)
 J. Boot;
 W. Oostdyk

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR CONTACT WITH THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH TO THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES TO BE HELD IN NEERLANDIA, AB IN 2001

I Introduction

After General Synod Fergus 1998 the task of the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (CCOPC) was limited. In the present situation the contact between our churches consists mainly of communications between the General Assembly of the OPC and the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches. We could do little more than conveying the decisions of Synod Fergus to the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) for consideration by the General Assembly, and returning the response from the Assembly of the OPC to Synod Neerlandia, with some recommendations.

II Decisions of Synod Fergus 1998 re. the contacts with the OPC

Synod appointed Rev. J. DeGelder, Dr. N.H. Gootjes, br. G.J. Nordeman and br. G. VanWoudenberg as members of the CCOPC, which became a subcommittee of the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas. The CCOPC was instructed

to pass on to the CEIR of the OPC the amended 'Proposed Agreement' on Fencing of the Lord's Table and Confessional Membership for adoption by the General Assembly of the OPC (Acts p.157).

to initiate Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC according to the adopted rules, should the General Assembly of the OPC adopt this Agreement (Acts p.158).

to make recommendations to the next General Synod, if the General Assembly of the OPC would not adopt the above mentioned Agreement, in which case the General Synod would have to reconsider the present relationship of ecclesiastical contact with the OPC.

The CCOPC was also confronted with the response of Synod Fergus to an appeal of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic of the OPC re. Rev. B. Hofford's statement declaring the ministers and elders of the OPC false shepherds, and the impact of this decision on our relationship with the OPC.

III Overview of the activities of the CCOPC

The Committee met 5 times by itself, and 3 times with the CCCA. At the first meeting Rev. DeGelder was appointed as chairman, Dr. Gootjes as secretary, and br. Nordeman as treasurer.

The Committee corresponded with the CEIR, and in July 2000 Rev. DeGelder and br. Nordeman attended the 67th General Assembly of the OPC in Tacoma, WA. A copy of their report and of the speech by Rev. DeGelder will be added to this report as an appendix.

The Committee regrets to have to report that it was not possible to arrange a meeting between representatives of the CEIR and the CCOPC, since the CEIR was not mandated to deal with our Committee. The reason will become clear later on in this report.

IV Brief historical survey of the contacts between the OPC and the CanRC

To place the present situation in its historical context, a brief survey of the development in the relationship between the OPC and the CanRC between 1989 and 1998 will be given at this point.

Synod Winnipeg 1989 instructed the CCOPC to continue the discussion on and evaluation of the divergencies between the OPC and the CanRC. They were listed as follows: "the doctrine of the covenant, visible and invisible church, the assurance of faith, the observance of the law, the fencing of the Lord's Table, confessional membership, church-political differences, and the contact with the CRC" (Acts 1989, p.66). The CCOPC had to coordinate the discussion of the divergencies with the discussion concerning the OPC document concerning "Biblical Principles on the Unity of the Church" (Acts 1989, p.67).

The CCOPC, reporting to Synod Lincoln 1992, observed that the divergences between OPC and CanRC over time had received increasing emphasis as a condition for continuous efforts toward full correspondence. It asked Synod for a focussed mandate to make it possible to clearly determine whether progress had been made in the discussions of the divergencies and issues of mutual concern (Acts.1992, p.174).

Synod Lincoln 1992 limited the topics for discussion between the committees. It decided that the divergencies evaluated before, in 1971 and 1986, had been sufficiently discussed to conclude that they are not impediments for ecclesiastical fellowship. The matters that still required resolution were identified as follows:

- a. the matter of confessional membership
- b. the matter of supervision of the Lord's Table
- c. the matter of the relationship with the Christian Reformed Church" (Acts 1992, p.55).

With regard to the second issue Synod considered that "it should be agreed that (also for guests at the Lord's Supper) a general verbal warning alone is insufficient, and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required"(Acts 1992, p.50).

The same Synod decided to enter into a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin) (Acts 1992, p.73), and to offer a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship to the Free Church of Scotland (Acts 1992, p.93).

The CEIR responded particularly to Synod's decisions concerning these presbyterian churches. It argued that these churches have essentially the same position as the OPC on the issues of confessional membership and the supervision of the Lord's Table. The CEIR asked whether the CanRc were dealing fairly and evenhandedly with the OPC. Why are these issues impediments to Ecclesiastical Fellowship in the case of the OPC, and not with the other churches? (Acts 1995, p.152).

Synod Abbotsford 1995 instructed the CCOPC to use the statement of Synod Lincoln as a guideline to arrive at an agreement with the OPC on the matters of fencing the Lord's Table and confessional membership. Synod considered in this respect that the different practices with regard to these issues gave reason to continue the discussion with the OPC, but they cannot in the end be made a condition for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Acts 1995, p.71). Concerning the third outstanding issue, the relationship with the CRC, Synod noted with gratitude the OPC's continued warnings against the unscriptural course taken by the CRCNA. The CCOPC was instructed "to communicate to the OPC the discomfort in our churches with respect to their continued relationship with the CRCNA (Acts 1995, p.74).

In the interval between Synod Abbotsford 1995 and Synod Fergus 1998 two important developments took place. The first was that the CCOPC came to an agreement with the CEIR on the outstanding issues of Fencing the Lord's Table and of Confessional Membership. The second was that the OPC terminated its official relationship with the CRCNA (Acts 1998, p.307).

In its report to Synod Fergus 1998 the CCOPC was able to inform Synod that the above mentioned agreement had been reached. The CCOPC recommended that Synod would acknowledge this agreement, and consequently invite the OPC to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CanRC, according to the adopted rules. However, Synod Fergus amended the agreement, and instructed the CCOPC as mentioned in part II of this report.

This survey of the developments in the relationship between the OPC and CanRC between 1989 and 1998 shows that the number of outstanding issues decreased. Several of the doctrinal issues mentioned in 1989 are no longer seen as impediments. What happened to the two that still needed to be resolved?

V The amended Proposed Agreement

The CCOPC discussed the decisions of Synod Fergus 1998 with regard to the 'proposed agreement'. The first statement, dealing with the fencing of the Lord's Table, was based on the Report of the Committee for Theological Affirmation of the ICRC, a statement we agreed to within the ICRC. It drew on the confessional statements of the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches to emphasize the need for supervision of the Table, and the role of the eldership, which is recognized by both sides. See the *Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, 1993, Zwolle, The Netherlands, 1993*, pp 80f. In the final report to Synod the reference to this ICRC document was omitted to prevent the impression that the Agreement was a technical theological statement.

The statement read:

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

Synod Fergus amended the Proposed Agreement by inserting after the words "as well as to the guests":

This means that a general verbal warning by the officiating minister alone is not sufficient, and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required.

Reference was made to the consideration of Synod Lincoln 1992, mentioned in part IV,C of this report, whereas the consideration of Synod Abbotsford 1995, mentioned in part IV,D of this report was basically ignored.

However, the CCOPC is of the opinion that this addition brings in a specific element from earlier discussions between the OPC and the CanRC, which does not suit the character of this general statement. The original statement was based on the Reformed Confessions, mentioned specifically in the text of the Agreement. The amendment inserted by Synod Fergus goes beyond the wording found in the Reformed Confessions. In its reflection of the confession, the original agreement on the Lord's Supper would provide sufficient opportunity to address specific situations in continued discussions between our churches and the OPC.

Concerning the second change, two sentences were combined by adding the word "as". The original agreement reads:

Anyone who answers the membership vows in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible. The patristic church has summarized this teaching in the Apostles' Creed and the churches of the Reformation have elaborated on this in their confessions.

In the amended version the sentence reads:

*Anyone who answers the membership vows in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible **as** the patristic church has*

summarized this teaching in the Apostles' Creed and the churches of the Reformation have elaborated on this in their confessions.

Regardless of the need for, or the significance of this change, the addition does have the unfortunate result that the mutual agreement was changed one-sidedly.

Although the 'proposed agreement' was no longer a real agreement, as a result of the changes made in this document by Synod Fergus, the CCOPC presented it to the CEIR for their response, according to the instruction given by Synod Fergus.

The CEIR gave its reaction in a letter dated March 31, 1999:

We believe that Synod's revisions have the effect of undoing the understanding reached in our joint discussions, namely, that 1) whether a general verbal warning is sufficient for fencing the Lord's Table, and 2) confessional membership, are issues that could remain unsolved and continue to be discussed within a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

In the report of the CEIR to the General Assembly of the OPC in 1999 a similar statement was made. We have tried to continue the discussion with the CEIR on this matter, but with little success. The CCOPC noted that in this presentation of the amended agreement to the General Assembly of the OPC the formulation was merely negative. For that reason we pointed out to the CEIR in a letter dated February 11, 2000, that the original statement was more comprehensive:

It is our understanding that the original Proposed Agreement contained two positive statements on this issue, one detailing the extent of the supervision: "This supervision is to be applied to the members of the local church as well as to guests", the other emphasizing the responsibility: "the eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord's Supper." Our question is whether your committee still stands behind these positive statements on which we had reached an agreement.

The CEIR answered in a letter dated April 18, 2000:

In view of the current restrictions placed on our contact with you by our General Assembly, we are unable to respond to your questions about the joint Proposed Agreement.

As a result there was no discussion between our committees on the amended agreement.

The restrictions the CEIR is referring to in this letter are found in the Minutes of the 66th General Assembly (1999) of the OPC in its decision to grant an overture from the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic, responding to General Fergus' decision re Rev. Hofford (Acts 1998, Art.136). The General Assembly directed the CEIR to suspend further efforts by the OPC to effect formal unity (with the CanRC that is) until evidence of progress in removing the offense is forthcoming, and to restrict their contact with us to this particular matter.

Our committee greatly regrets that the discussions have been suspended. We hope and pray that the opportunity may be given to us to resume the contact with the CEIR. The gain of the Proposed Agreement should not be lost.

VI The "False Shepherds" issue

The issue that caused the General Assembly of the OPC to put the relationship with the CanRC on hold is the decision of General Synod Fergus 1998, in which Synod dealt with the complaint of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic of the OPC, concerning Rev. B.R. Hofford, who had declared the ministers and elders of this Presbytery 'false shepherds'.

Rev. Hofford's statement can be found in the Acts of Synod Fergus, p.163:

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

Synod Fergus stated in its fifth and final consideration (E):

What Presbytery really wants is for "Rev. Hofford to be reconciled to his brothers and sisters in the Lord". Reconciliation is also what Rev. Hofford desires as he outlined in his letter to Presbytery, dated September 3, 1992. Based on the documents provided, it is evident that a door is open for Presbytery to discuss the "underlying issues" with Rev. Hofford, which as a result should lead to the withdrawal of the charge of "false shepherds".

Synod urges the Presbytery and Rev Hofford to heed the scriptural demand that brothers be reconciled. This will take place when brothers can listen and talk with one another, speaking the truth in love. (Cf. Matt.5:24; Matt. 18:15; 2 Cor 5:18; Ephes 4:15,16)

Synod judged in the end that "it is necessary for the Presbytery and Rev.Hofford to seek reconciliation in the manner outlined above. (Acts 1998, Art.136)

This matter as such was, of course, not part of the mandate we received from Synod Fergus. However - our committee felt that it was unavoidable to look into this, since the G.A. of the OPC had instructed the CEIR to restrict their contact with us to this particular matter. And in its letter of October 7, 1999 the CEIR wrote to us: "Therefore we seek your response as to how that matter may be resolved".

Our committee considered and discussed Rev. Hofford's statement, with its Scripture references, and came to certain conclusions, which we shared with the CEIR. In a letter dated February 11, 2000 we wrote to the CEIR:

In Romans 16:17 Paul speaks of teachers who cause the church people to deviate from the doctrine Paul had taught. They are persons who do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ but their own appetite, In Titus 3:10 he mentions someone who is factious, who is also perverted and sinful. It is unclear how the alleged mishandling and denial of a complaint about the Lord's Supper can lead to such allegations against all ministers and elders of a Presbytery.

Moreover, the expression false shepherds' can only be read against the background of what Scripture says about them in Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel 34, and John 10. False shepherds are people who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture (Jer.23), they eat the fat, clothe themselves with the wool, slaughter the fatlings, but do not feed the sheep (Ezek.34), they are hirelings and do not care for the sheep (John 10).

In the light of this it is our opinion as committee that this accusation should not have been made and that Rev. Hofford should have withdrawn his charge, independent of the concerns he wanted to present. We can assure you that this disqualification of office bearers in the OPC has never been taken over by a Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches. And we do regret that Synod Fergus 1998 did not clearly reject such labeling, and did not state that this accusation should have been withdrawn. We hope to bring this matter up in our report to the upcoming General Synod in 2001, the Lord willing.

Our delegates to the 67th General Assembly of the OPC discussed this issue also with the advisory committee that had dealt with Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations, as well as with some members of the CEIR that were present at the Assembly. They reported on their discussion with these representatives of the OPC as follows:

In the discussion it became clear that there is no need to address again the person, the statements, and the status of Rev. Hofford.

In the meantime it would be helpful and much appreciated if our next General Synod would declare unambiguously to reject the disqualification of office bearers of the OPC as false shepherds, and to distance itself from such labeling (see also the letter from the CCOPC to the CEIR, dated Febr. 11, 2000). This would open the way to jointly move ahead and deal with the situation caused by Synod Fergus' changes in the Proposed Agreement on the 'Fencing of the Lord's Table' and 'Confessional Membership'.

We urge Synod to remove this stumbling block in our relationship with the OPC.

VII Categories of relationships

The OPC distinguishes three kinds of relationship: Ecclesiastical Fellowship, Corresponding Relations, and Limited Contact. These kinds of relationship are carefully worked out.

Limited Contact is the lowest form of contact. It is described as that relationship with another church with which it is desired to maintain some form of mutual contact.

Corresponding Relations are undertaken to become better acquainted with one another with a view towards entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

Ecclesiastical Fellowship is a relationship in which the churches involved are Reformed in their confessional standards, church and life though there may be such differences between them that union is not possible at this time and there might be considerable need for mutual concern and admonition. It is to be implemented by:

Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies

Occasional pulpit fellowship (by local option)

Intercommunion, including ready reception of each other's members at the Lord's Supper but not excluding suitable inquiries upon requested transfer of membership, as regulated by each session (consistory)

Joint action in areas of common responsibility

Consultation on issues of joint concern, particularly before instituting changes in polity, doctrine, or practice that might alter the basis of the fellowship

The exercise of mutual concern and admonition with a view to promoting Christian unity Agreement to respect the procedures of discipline and pastoral concern of one another.

For many years now the Canadian Reformed Churches have been working towards establishing a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC. In the opinion of our committee these rules present a useful summary of the implications of such a relationship.

VIII Conclusion

Since the General Assembly of the OPC did not adopt the two statements of the Agreement on the Fencing of the Lord's Table and Confessional Membership, as these were amended by Synod Fergus '98, the CCOPC is left with only the last part of the instruction given by Synod Fergus '98 (Acts, Art. 130, VI, J).

Synod decided that, if this would be the case, the CCOPC must make recommendations to help the next General Synod to reconsider the present relationship of ecclesiastical contact with the OPC.

Reconsidering the present relationship with the OPC in the light of what has transpired since Synod Fergus, and of the stalemate we find ourselves in, could lead to different conclusions. One option would be to conclude that because of the stubbornness of the OPC it might be better to put an end to this relationship, and to give up the efforts to come to ecclesiastical fellowship. Would this then also imply that we do no longer consider the OPC to be a true church of Christ.....?

The CCOPC is convinced that this would be a bad decision, harmful for the church gathering work of Christ, as well as for the reputation of Him who gathers His church in this world by His Word and Spirit.

Reconsidering the present relationship with the OPC could also lead to some thorough self examination with regard to the question how our actions and decisions as Canadian Reformed Churches may have alienated from us a true and faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

After all, up to Synod Fergus 1998 all our General Synods since 1980 have consistently denied appeals that asked to rescind the decision of Synod Coaldale 1977, and have acknowledged with thankfulness the desire of the OPC to be faithful to the Scriptures and to defend the Reformed heritage. We continue to speak about the OPC as a true church of Jesus Christ, according to the biblical standard, summarized in Art.29 B.C., but have we also treated the OPC as a true church in this sense?

This self examination forces us to have a critical look at the matters that have caused the present stalemate in our relationship with the OPC: the manner in which Synod Fergus dealt with the charge of 'false shepherds', and the amended agreement.

In light of the last part of our instruction our committee was faced with the question what would be the best way to make recommendations that would be helpful for Synod to deal with, and hopefully overcome the stalemate.

IX Recommendations

Although it may be unusual for a committee to critically evaluate decisions made by the previous Synod, given the present situation in our relationship with the OPC, and based on the views expressed especially in the parts V and VI of this report, your committee feels compelled to recommend that Synod decide:

To reject unambiguously a general disqualification of office bearers in the OPC as "false shepherds", as in conflict with the fact that our churches have acknowledged the OPC as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To undo the changes made by General Synod Fergus 1998 in the Proposed Agreement with the OPC on the issues of the Fencing of the Lord's Table and Confessional Membership, and to return to the original document, presented by the CCOPC to Synod Fergus, as sufficiently reflecting the Reformed Confessions.

To use this agreement as a basis for establishing a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC.

To acknowledge that the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, as formulated by the OPC are compatible with our own rules for this relationship, as formulated by General Synod Lincoln 1992 (Acts, Art.50).

To continue the contact with the OPC by the CCOPC as subcommittee of the CCCA, with the mandate to continue the discussions on the existing differences in confession and church polity, including the proper fencing of the Lord's Table, and confessional membership.

Respectfully submitted,
J. DeGelder
N. H. Gootjes
G. J. Nordeman
G. VanWoudenberg

Reaction of the CCCA to the CCOPC report

The majority of the brothers in CCCA do not endorse the recommendation of the CCOPC (or the reasoning that leads up to it) that Synod 2001 decide "to undo the changes made by General Synod Fergus 1998 in the Proposed Agreement with the OPC on the issues of the Fencing of the Lord's Table and Confessional Membership, and to return to the original document, presented by the CCOPC to Synod Fergus, as sufficiently reflecting the Reformed Confessions."

In its treatment of the "amended proposed agreement" the CCOPC Report has basically become an appeal against the decisions of Synod Lincoln 1992, Abbotsford 1995 and Fergus 1998. We believe the CCOPC should have simply stated that they were not able to fulfil their mandate because the decision of the 66th General Assembly re: the "false shepherd" issue. There are three reasons why we cannot endorse the CCOPC's recommendation to return to the "proposed agreement"

The CCOPC Report passes over the fact that Synod Fergus 1998 could not finalize Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC on the basis of the Proposed Agreement because of the many responses of the churches which deemed the agreement was too vague. As stated in the Acts of Synod Fergus Article 130, Consideration C.2 and 3,

"Two divergencies remained which still required resolution before entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Synod Abbotsford mandated the CCOPC to work towards coming to an agreement on these two remaining divergencies and to formalizing a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, hopefully in 1998.

Hence the CCOPC has come to General Synod Fergus 1998 with the text of the Proposed Agreement between the CanRC and the OPC as mentioned above. However, there is considerable concern as outlined above that the agreement is too vague and does not sufficiently address the differences. Proceeding with the relationship under the Proposed Agreement as it is will only add to the unrest in our churches and will not help the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to function in a manner that is suitable to one of the Churches of the Reformation."

The present CCOPC Report gives a one-sided impression of the decision of Synod Abbotsford: "Synod considered in this respect that the different practices with regard to these issues gave reason to continue the discussion with the OPC,

but the cannot in the end be made a condition for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Acts 1995, p.71).” If that is all that can be said, why did Synod Abbotsford not immediately decide to establish a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC? The answer to that question can be found in the mandate Synod 1995 gave to the CCOPC: “to work towards formalizing a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the adopted rules by using the statement of Synod Lincoln 1992 (Acts 1992, Art. 72, IV.A. I.e.i,ii) as a guideline to arrive at an agreement with the OPC on the matters of the fencing of the Lord’s Table and confessional membership.” The CCOPC in its “Proposed Agreement” as submitted to Synod Fergus did not use the statement of Synod Lincoln as it should have. Synod Lincoln expressed the hope that “in time the OPC and the Canadian Reformed Churches may come to a common understanding and unified practice regarding the supervision of the Lord’s Table. This is not to say that an identical practice is required with respect to the supervision of the Lord’s table to come to ecclesiastical fellowship. It should be agreed, however, that a general verbal warning alone is insufficient and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required in the presence of the supervising elders from the guests wishing to attend the Lord’s Supper.” Synod Fergus did not introduce a new element by revising the “Proposed Agreement” when it added the sentence: “This means that a general verbal warning by the officiating minister alone is not sufficient, and that a profession of the Reformed faith is required.” Synod Fergus preserved the continuity with the decision of Synod Lincoln and Synod Abbotsford.

The CCOPC rejects what was decided by Synod Fergus 1998 because, as they suggest, “Regardless of the need for, or the significance of this change, the addition does have the unfortunate result that the mutual agreement was changed one-sidedly.” It should be noted, however that the “Proposed Agreement” departed significantly from the wording suggested in the decision of Synod Lincoln (Considerations IV.A. I.e.ii): “It should be agreed, however, by the Canadian Reformed churches and the OPC that all who profess their faith accept the doctrine of God’s Word. This means that all members are bound by the Word of God in the unity of faith as confessed in the accepted standards.”

Synod Fergus 1998 instructed the CCOPC to pass on the Proposed Agreement as amended to the CEIR for adoption by the General Assembly. The decision of the OPC General Assembly did not allow this to happen. Therefore it is our recommendation that Synod decide:

1. To reject unambiguously a general disqualification of office bearers in the OPC as “false shepherds.”
2. To instruct the CCOPC to as yet fulfill Article 130 recommendations F,G,H,I J of Synod Fergus 1998.
3. To acknowledge that the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, as formulated by the OPC are compatible with our own rules for this relationship, as formulated by General Synod Lincoln 1992 (Acts, Art.50).

Appendix B
Regarding the OPC

**REPORT OF THE DELEGATES OF THE CCOPC TO THE
67th GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

Introduction

The undersigned, Rev. J. DeGelder and br. G.J. Nordeman were delegated by the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to attend the 67th General assembly of the OPC, which was held at the Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, WA, July 5 - 12, 2000.

Wednesday evening, July 5, a worship service was held, led by the Rev. L.G. Mininger, Moderator of the previous General assembly. The next morning the Assembly elected as its Moderator Dr. J.S. Gidley, a ruling elder from the Presbytery of Ohio. We arrived Thursday late afternoon and, and found the Assembly adjourned and working in advisory committee meetings.

Activities in chronological order

Thursday, July 6.

Since many commissioners were still involved in the meetings of the advisory committees, we tried to make use of the possibility to speak to members of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations that were available. We also used our time that evening to familiarize ourselves with the reports of the Standing Committees and other matters on the agenda.

Friday, July 7

Although the advisory committee that dealt with Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations had actually finished its discussions already, we met this morning with this committee, in the presence of some members of the CEIR (Gaffin, Tyson and Peterson) for about 1.5 hour. We had the opportunity to explain our position as CCOPC of the Can. Reformed Churches. We expressed our disappointment with the decision of the 66th G.A. (1999) in response to the overture of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic, to put all further action concerning the relationship between our churches on hold, until the offense, created by our G.S. Fergus 1998 (Acts, Art. 136), had been removed.

In its report to the G.A. the CEIR had expressed the hope that our next G.S. (2001) will act to settle this matter in a satisfactory manner.. Our question was what was meant by "a satisfactory manner". In other words: what do they expect our Synod to do or to say, in order to resolve this problem? In the discussion it became clear that there is no need to address again the person, the statements, and the status of Rev. Hofford. As far as that is concerned there is willingness to drop the matter.

In the meantime it would be helpful and much appreciated if our next G.S. would declare unambiguously to reject the disqualification of officebearers of the OPC as false shepherds, and to distance itself from such labelling (see also the letter from the CCOPC to the CEIR, dated Febr. 11, 2000). This would open the way to jointly

move ahead and deal with the situation caused by Synod Fergus' changes in the Proposed Agreement on the "Fencing of the Lord's Table" and "Confessional Membership".

We did not discuss with the Committee the implications of these changes since neither the CEIR, nor the advisory committee had dealt with the two issues in the Proposed Agreement. We can say that the discussion was open and honest, and that there was definitely a willingness to bring the matters between the OPC and the Can.Ref.Churches to a positive closure.

However, after the decision of last year's G.A. the next move is expected from our next G.S. in 2001. For that reason there was no recommendation regarding the relationship with our churches, neither from the CEIR, nor from the advisory committee.

In the afternoon the Assembly reconvened. Rev. Peterson officially introduced us as fraternal delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches, and on motion we were seated as corresponding members. In this session the Assembly dealt with the reports of the Stated Clerk, the Trustees, and the Statistician. Rev. Donald J. Duff was re-elected as Stated Clerk for the term 2001 - 2004. Some discussion took place on financial matters and on proposed small amendments to the standing rules of the G.A.

The report of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension was then presented, and 3 "organizing pastors" in Home Mission Works were invited to tell about the developments in their particular areas. The OPC is very active in Home Mission and has seen considerable growth over the past decade.

In the evening the Committee on Foreign Missions presented its extensive report (38 pages), introduced and explained by the general secretary of the CFM, Mr. Mark Bube. There were also missionaries present, and two of them gave a personal presentation on the work they are involved in: Rev. Karl Hubenthal, who works in Suriname, and Dr. Anthony Curto, who is active in Uganda.

Much time was spent that evening in an - at times very emotional - debate on a passage of the committee report that spoke about the difficulties between the CFM and Middle East Reformed Fellowship, especially focussed on the position of Rev. Victor Atallah, as the director of MERF. The discussion was complicated by the fact that the content of the problems was not before the Assembly, since these matters are at this time before Rev. Atallah's Presbytery, the Presbytery of the Midwest, in the form of charges against Rev. Atallah, filed by the CFM.

It is not necessary to go into details here, but there appeared to be a deep division in the Assembly on this issue, and that evening it did not come to a satisfactory conclusion.

Saturday, July 8.

The next morning a number of members of the CFM presented a motion to partly delete and re-write, in view of publication in the Minutes of the Assembly, the section in the CFM report that dealt with the MERF issue. This motion evoked another, but much shorter debate, and was adopted.

Much attention was also given this morning to the report of the Committee on Christian Education, introduced by Rev. Thomas E. Tyson, the general secretary of

the committee. In the Fall of this year Rev. Tyson will resign as general secretary, since he has accepted a call from the Presbytery of Philadelphia to serve as its Regional Home Missionary.

There was much appreciation and enthusiasm for the relatively new MTIOPC, which stands for Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC, operated by the Subcommittee on Ministerial Training. This subcommittee is also responsible for the extensive Internship Program for men who desire to be ordained as pastors in the OPC.

Rev. Alan D. Strange presented the activities of Great Commission Publications, a joint venture between the OPC and the PCA to produce Sunday School and Catechism curriculum, as well as other study material for the church.

The Assembly dealt also with the reports of the Committees on Coordination and on Diaconal Ministries, and later on in the afternoon with the report of the Committee on Pensions. These are almost entirely financial matters, which are explained, and sometimes discussed in detail. This is a good thing in view of responsibility and accountability in dealing with church finances, but does not make for much excitement for visitors.

After lunch it was time for fraternal delegates to address the Assembly. Rev. Dale Clark spoke on behalf of the RCUS, and Rev. DeGelder on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. His speech is added to this report as an appendix.

Late afternoon we returned to the Fraser Valley, and after Sunday, July 9, we returned to Ontario.

Observations from some of the reports

Foreign Missions

Through its Committee on Foreign Missions the OPC is conducting mission work in 8 areas in the world (China, Ethiopia, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Middle East, Suriname, and Uganda), employing some 15 workers in the field.

Christian Education

This committee has seven regular subcommittees, each of which is responsible for research and promotion of a particular area of ministry, as they are performed by the members of the church. These areas are: worship, teaching, fellowship, evangelism, Christian schools, equipping ordained officers, website. A variety of publications is available to equip and teach, and to support activities in these areas (among other things the magazine for office bearers, *Ordained Servant*), sometimes produced in cooperation with Great Commission Publications.

A special subcommittee is the Subcommittee on Ministerial Training. Since the OPC does not have its own Theological College or Seminary, this subcommittee has to consult regularly with selected seminaries, and is also responsible for the Internship Program of the OPC. Since 1999 they operate the Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC, which offers various courses in doctrine, church history, church polity, homiletics, liturgics, and catechetics. The hope and expectation is that this may grow into a more permanent institute of theological learning under the direct responsibility of the General Assembly.

The Magazine Subcommittee is responsible for the publication *New Horizons*.

Home Missions and Church Extension.

In the OPC today one of every five congregations is a mission work, which is over 50! This has quite an impact and means that the OPC is now a younger church, as well as a larger one, and therefore different from past decades. 20 % of the congregations were formed within the past five years. The resultant growth has necessitated the establishment of two more presbyteries in the year 2000, which brings their total to 16.

With the support of the Committee on Home Missions the OPC employed in 1999 6 full-time regional home missionaries. The Presbyteries are responsible for home mission and church planting in their areas. The Committee only assists (also financially if necessary), encourages and coordinates.

Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations.

At present the OPC is in ecclesiastical fellowship with 11 churches, which are:

- the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church,
- the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands,
- the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland,
- the Free Church of Scotland,
- the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin),
- the Presbyterian Church in America,
- the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland,
- the Reformed Church in Japan,
- the Reformed Churches of New Zealand,
- the Reformed Church in the United States,
- the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

Churches in Corresponding Relationship are:

- Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church
- Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)
- United Reformed Churches in North America
- Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales.

The Canadian Reformed Churches are not mentioned in either of these lists. We are probably hanging somewhere in between. The report does reflect on the relationship with the Can.Ref.Churches, quoting from correspondence with the CCOPC, and expressing the hope that after our next General Synod (2001) we may move ahead to establishing a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship.

The report gives considerable attention to the split in the F.C.S. and publishes in full the official statements of both groups, the Free Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

The OPC will be the host church for the 2001 ICRC. The plans are to hold the conference at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, June 20 - 29, 2001, using the facilities of Beaver College for billeting.

The Statistician

The OPC grew significantly again in 1999. Total church membership reached 25,302, while the number of local organized churches is 204, plus 63 home mission works, which makes for a total of 267 congregations, compared to 253 a year before. The number of ministers is 397.

Other comments

- We had ample opportunity for personal discussions with many commissioners, and some expressed appreciation for the strong doctrinal stand of our churches, and even on the issue of travel attestations for guests at the Lord's Supper.
- We were approached by Rev. Karl Hubenthal, missionary in Suriname, who is very much in need of more support for his work. Suriname, as a former Dutch colony, has a history and background strongly related to the Netherlands. He was wondering whether there would be resources available in the Canadian Reformed Churches, as English speaking churches with a Dutch background.

Conclusion

Although it is hard to assess the benefit of such a visit, we can say that we were well received and that the discussions we had were clarifying and encouraging.

It is a joy to recognize in the OPC a church with a strong commitment to remain faithful to the Word of God.

Respectfully submitted,

J. DeGelder
G.J. Nordeman

**Speech held by Rev. J. DeGelder at the 67th General Assembly of
the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Tacoma (WA) on July 8, 2000**

Mr. Moderator, brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ,

For us, elder Gerry Nordeman and myself, it is a privilege to be with you again these days, as delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches to the General Assembly 2000 of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is not for the first time that we are in your midst. We were also present at your General Assembly in 1997, and over the years many others have addressed you as well on behalf of our church federation.

And it is the same way the other way round: many of our General Synods have had the privilege of receiving delegates from the OPC, among whom Rev. Jack Peterson stands out as the most frequent visitor. As a matter of fact Jack is so well known among us, that we are all familiar with his nickname.

All this goes to show, brothers, that by now we have a long history together. A history marked by many meetings, discussions, evaluation-papers, and what have you. We had

- and we still have - our arguments and disagreements, but somehow there has always been - and there still is - a sense of unity. We do recognize each other's desire to be faithful to the Word of God, and to defend the heritage of the Reformation.

And so we do consider it a privilege to be here again. We appreciate the possibility to enjoy your company, to speak with you personally, and to address you as Assembly on behalf of our churches. We wish your Assembly the Lord's blessing and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in your discussions and decisions. It is our sincere wish that your work may serve the glory of God, the upbuilding of His church, and the strengthening of the Reformed faith.

You know, brothers, when I got the invitation, and read the name 'Tacoma' as the place-of-meeting for this Assembly, I was right away wondering why the name of this place sounded so familiar to me. I have never been here, and it has been less than 9 years since I left Holland.

But then I remembered. I have read about Tacoma in a book that you probably all know, written by one of your well-known pastors, who went to be with the Lord twenty years ago, Mr. Robert K. Churchill. Under the title *Lest we forget* Mr Churchill shares the memories of his personal experiences in the early years of the OPC.

In the plane from Toronto on my way to this meeting I read it again, and was again struck by the significant, and very relevant message of this little book. And the developments in the Presbyterian Church of Tacoma during the first decades of the 20th century serve as a remarkable example to illustrate this message. The history of the Church is full of those examples - lest we forget!

There is first the warning message. The call to stand firm in the Reformed faith; to hold on to the doctrine of the Holy Word of God, as summarized in the confessions of the Reformation.

But the warning message in Churchill's book is also an encouraging and comforting message. For it speaks about God's faithfulness, about the glorious reign of Jesus Christ Who continues to gather His church, also in the face of apostasy and false teaching; also in times of persecution; also when the numbers are small, and - humanly speaking - become more and more insignificant in our world. Brothers, that stand, that commitment, as described by Mr. Churchill in his book about the past.... that is what we recognize and appreciate in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church - also today!

And as Canadian Reformed Churches it is our commitment to maintain and defend the same truth. Our churches have been present in North America for about 50 years. Our first General Synod was held in 1954 in Carman, Manitoba. Most of our members have their roots in The Netherlands, and have arrived in Canada (some in the U.S.) after the Second World War. We may say with thankfulness that the Lord has blessed us in our church life. At this time we have a little over 15,000 members in 50 congregations, most of them in Ontario and British Columbia.

A few more details: We also recognize the gracious blessing of our God in the fact that almost all of our covenant-children can attend Christian day schools, at least at the elementary level, and many of them also in High School. Teachers for these schools are being trained at our Teacher's College in Hamilton.

As some of you may know, Hamilton is also the location of our Theological College.

It is our conviction that the training for the ministry should be controlled by the church, and because of that we maintain this relatively small College to prepare our future pastors for their important task of shepherding the flock of Jesus Christ. Just recently a significant extension could be added to the building, facilitating especially our growing library.

Foreign Mission is carried out in Brazil and in Papua New Guinea, while besides local Home Mission activities, we also have the privilege of being involved in a new Home Mission work in French speaking Canada, in cooperation with l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec.

Our churches maintain ecclesiastical fellowship with various Reformed and Presbyterian Churches in the world. With you and many others we share membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches, and we rejoice that in many ways we may recognize the ongoing church gathering work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Especially when we recognize this work of the Spirit close by, it confronts us with new challenges. With thankfulness I may mention the positive developments in our discussions with the United Reformed Churches. We recognize how much we have in common in many respects, not only at the level of unity committees, appointed by synods, but also in local congregations. Many of our churches are engaged in intensive discussions with United Reformed congregations, and we see a growing consensus in many areas.

It must be said, brothers, that it is not always easy to value these interchurch relationships. We can say that our ultimate goal is - or should be - to come to complete visible unity. That seems feasible if there are two local congregations, or two denominations in one country, that have a lot in common. But other than that? The other extreme would be to let, what we call 'ecclesiastical fellowship' become an empty formality, an opportunity to send delegates to Assemblies to speak a few friendly words, a reason to send each other the Minutes or Acts of these assemblies to be put in some archives - and that's it.

But brothers, I am convinced that there is more to it than that. How wonderful, how encouraging to recognize the reality of what we confess in our Belgic Confession, as well as in your Westminster Standards about the gathering of the church as the work of our glorified Saviour all over the world - a work that will go on until the very end of the history of our world. And as God's people on our way towards the glorious day of Christ's return we need each other. We'll need each other to encourage each other; but also to warn each other; to support each other in whatever way we can to remain faithful to the Gospel of Salvation in our modern world.

The challenge before us is clear. How do we make use of today's possibilities to make the most of our ecclesiastical relationships to equip God's people for faithful service? There is so much we can share, brothers; there is so much we can learn from each other.

You may ask: that's all fine, but how does the relationship between us - between the OPC and the CANRC - fit into this picture?

When I addressed your G.A. in 1997 I spoke about the approach of a new and historical moment in the long history of our contact. There was hope that we would be able to finalize our protracted discussions and to formalize the unity that we have in Jesus Christ into the format of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

However - the turning-point we were hoping for, and looking forward to, did not come. Not yet, anyway. In the church of Jesus Christ we never give up hope, do we? After all, we are not running our own show, or our own business - we are talking about the work of Christ, and about the power of the Spirit of Christ!

But we must say that after the decisions of our General Synod in Fergus in 1998, and the decisions of your G.A. in 1999 it is hard to speak of real progress. In my address in 1997 I referred to the long history of our contacts with the title of a booklet, written by one of our ministers on this topic, as "one step forward - one step backward". Well, at that time we were all hoping for a major step forward. But it turned into a serious step backward.

Now, to avoid all misunderstanding, the point I want to make is not, who would be to blame for this particular development. But I think that we all should agree that after more than 25 years of contacts this is a disappointing and humbling conclusion. At times it seems to be so difficult to reach out to each other, and to understand each other. Do we not often run into human littleness and stubbornness, also within the church of Christ? We can feel helpless to overcome the brokenness, the lack of understanding and the lack of patience.

And then, brothers - is this all there is to say? There is this stalemate - and that's it? I don't believe it! This can and may not be the last word between churches which both claim to be faithful churches of our Lord, and which recognize each other as such.

Oh yes, we both have our own history, and there are many things we do differently. There are differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. There are differences between your Form of Church Government and our Church Order. But when there is a genuine love for God, and a strong commitment to be true to His Word, as well as the desire to live accordingly - then I believe that these differences will not hinder us to find ways towards each other.

And if not? Brothers, in all this there is one tremendous comfort. Out of all the nations and peoples on earth Jesus Christ gathers His church. And His work will continue - always! He does so, and want to do so through us. That is a huge responsibility for all of us.

But let us not forget - He will also continue to do so in spite of us. In the end His work does not depend on our rules and requirements for ecclesiastical fellowship. Yes - the Holy Spirit wants to use us. He calls us and our churches to be faithful. But He does not depend on us. that keeps us humble, and we can all use that!

But it also comforts. And we can use that too! Remember what I mentioned before, what the name 'Tacoma' in the book of Bob Churchill reminded me of. Remember what the OPC and the CanRC both stand for in this world: the eternal truth and reliability of God's Word. I am convinced that, no matter how things will develop, that is what ultimately unites us in a hostile, postmodern world, in which for more and more people Christianity is just some outdated, or even dangerous, way of thinking.

Brothers, the Canadian Reformed Churches greet you in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is our wish that you may continue to defend and stand up for the truth. That you may rejoice in the goodness of our heavenly Father. And that the peace of Christ may govern your Assembly and your Church.

Thank you.