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ADDENDUM

TO THE

REPORT

of the Committee for the

Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity

to

Synod Neerlandia 2001

of the

Canadian Reformed Churches

February, 2001

Members: Rev. R. Aasman, Dr. J. De Jong, Rev. W. DenHollander,
Rev. W. Slomp, Mr. P. VanWoudenberg, Mr. F. Westrik

COMMITTEE FOR THE PROMOTION OF ECCLESIASTICAL UNITY

Canadian Reformed Churches

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26 February 2001

To: Consistories of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches


Esteemed brothers:

Enclosed please find an addendum to our report sent out to the churches last fall. Added to this are two appendices, numbered as 13 and 14, to be connected with the twelve appendices of the original report. Both appendices concern meetings held with the External Relations Committee of the FRC, one coming before our fall deadline, (but inadvertently misplaced) and the other occurring after the deadline.

I have also including in this mailing a letter from the FRC External Relations Committee explaining their offer of the "limited contact" relationship, (Appendix 15). Knowledge of the contents of this letter may be of assistance in helping the churches to evaluate this request, and the delegates of Synod to come to a responsible judgment on this matter.

We are grateful for the continued progress of the discussions with the FRC, and hope that these may serve the on-going gathering of Christ's church.

With fraternal greetings,



(Dr.) J. De Jong
Secretary/Convener

COMMITTEE FOR THE PROMOTION OF ECCLESIASTICAL UNITY

Canadian Reformed Churches

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27 February 2001

Addendum to the report to General Synod Neerlandia 2001 of the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity.

Under Section 1 (Federative meetings) the following may be added:

E. Other meetings

1. On September 23, 2000 Rev. W.G. Van Hal (Woodstock) as representative of the URCNA attended and addressed Classis Ontario North.
2. On November 17, 2000 Rev. W. Den Hollander attended and addressed the Classis West of the OCRC.
3. On February 21, 2001, Rev. D.J.A Agema, on personal invitation, attended Classis Southern Ontario of the URCNA. Rev. W. Den Hollander will attend the classis scheduled for March 21, 2001.

CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES
AND
FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA

Report of sub-committee meeting held on Thursday September 27, 2000 in the Abbotsford Free Reformed Church.

Present were the Revs. Richard Aasman and Bill Slomp, and brother Peter Vanwoudenberg from the Canadian Reformed Church (CaRC). From the Free Reformed Churches (FRC) were present the Revs. Lawrence Bilkes, Hans Overduin, and Wim Wullschleger. Rev. Kuldip Gangar was absent with notice.

Rev. Aasman chaired the meeting. He opened the meeting by reading from Scripture Ephesians 4:1-16, after which he gave thanks to the Lord for travelling mercies and asked for a blessing upon this meeting. One of the first things we discussed was the request from Rev. Overduin to organize a public meeting every time we meet as delegates. The other brothers supported this suggestion (See the close of this report).

Before we went into the discussion on the topic of this day - "Biblical Principles of Church Unity" - , Rev. Overduin called special attention for the decision of Synod 2000 of the FRC offering to establish a relationship of limited contact with the CaRC. He read the letter he sent to the CaRC Deputies for Promoting Ecclesiastical Unity. Upon this the brothers from the CaRC informed the FRC brothers that they will propose to the committee that delegates from FRC be invited to Synod 2001 of the CaRC. They will also inform synod about the meaningful contact the subcommittees have had so far. The desire is also expressed to continue to seek unity together as federations of churches.

During the morning session we discussed an OPC report, entitled "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church". During the discussion the following points were brought out:

1. It was noted with appreciation that the report distances itself from the idea of pluriformity of the church. This was regarded as the positive part of this report.
2. Concerns were raised about the opening sentence, which states, "In ecclesiastical union two denominations join in submitting to one common form of government." The danger of hierarchy is present in such a statement. We submit to the government of Christ in His church, not to an ecclesiastical ruling body. The duty of the broader assemblies is to oversee minor assemblies in the area of doctrine and discipline. Rev. Bilkes: "We must download a lot more to the local church."
3. A point that was further discussed, was the idea of pluriformity. Do we view the existence of different churches as a positive thing, or rather as the result of sin? There was a common feeling that pluriformity is not a biblical concept. Rev. Overduin suggested replacing the term pluriformity for the word multiformity. The difficulty of this term would be, however, that it does not change the underlying idea of pluriformity. The CaRC have difficulty with the fact that the FRC practically entertain Abraham Kuyper's view of the pluriformity of the church. Should we not listen to the words of Christ, Who prayed for the unity of His Church (John 17:21)? The closer we come together, the more we answer to the command of Christ. Rev. Aasman, "It is easier for us to stay separate. But such an attitude expresses a certain amount of xenophobia and laziness on our part."
4. What do we mean by 'Unity'? Do we mean a federative unity or only a spiritual unity? Are we sure what Scripture means by it? Would it not be sufficient to affirm other churches as true churches of Christ? The CaRC are clear in their answer to these questions. 'Unity' implies not only a spiritual unity, but also a federative unity. The FRC does not have an answer as yet to these questions. The CaRC brothers

challenged the FRC brothers to come up with an answer. Such an answer will be crucial for the future of our meetings. Are we committed to the same principle of unity?

After a well-provided lunch we continued our meeting. During this second round we discussed a paper published by the Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity of the CaRC. Much of what was said in the morning came up again during the afternoon session. New points in the discussion were the following:

1. The brothers of the CaRC noted that part of this paper was criticized within their own circles, i.e. paragraph I A e, where Drs. B. Kamphuis (Professor at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches [Liberated] in The Netherlands) is quoted stating, "As Reformed churches we too have our own specialities (...) like covenantal thinking, view of the church and historic redemptive preaching. Beautiful things, but not beautiful enough to sacrifice the catholicity of the church for them."
2. The suggestion was raised that we draw up a joint statement to spell out the points we agree on. This should facilitate our further discussion. Rev. Wullschleger is asked to make a draft.

The date for our next meeting is February 15, 2001. We will start again at 10:00 a.m. Rev. Overduin will chair that meeting. A public meeting will be held that evening, starting at 8:00 p.m. All this: the Lord willing. The topic for that day will be "The Historical Development of our Churches." Two speeches will be delivered, one by a CaRC minister, the other by a FRC minister. Location will be the Abbotsford Free Reformed Church.

It was past 2:30 when Rev. Overduin closed the meeting with thanksgiving and prayer.

APPENDIX 14

Minutes of the Meeting Between Representatives of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches on February 8, 2001, in the Abbotsford Free Reformed Church building, 10 AM.

Present

From the Canadian Reformed Churches: Rev. R. Aasman, Rev. W.B. Slomp and elder P. VanWoudenberg.

From the Free Reformed Churches: Rev. L.W. Bilkes, Rev. H. Overduin and Rev. J.W. Wullschleger. Rev. K. Gangar could not be present because of inclement weather.

Opening

The chairman of the meeting, Rev. H. Overduin, opened the meeting. He asked that selection 348 of the Psalter be sung (this is a rendition of Psalm 122), he read Psalm 123 and led in prayer. He also gave a short and fitting meditation on Psalm 123 as it concerns our work on this day.

The Two Papers

Two papers had been distributed earlier. The first paper was written by Rev. W. Wullschleger: *Historical Developments of our Churches*. The second paper was written by Rev. W.B. Slomp as a response to the first paper: *Reaction Paper*. Both papers had input by other committee members. At this meeting, Rev. W. Wullschleger presented a shortened version of his paper which was also intended for the public meeting on that day. Some time was taken to read this paper at the meeting. After a good and open discussion, some changes were taken over in order to present this paper as speech to members of the CanRC and FRC that evening. This paper is attached to these minutes.

Lunch and Continuation of the Meeting

During the lunch time, some good discussions were held at the dinner table. There was discussion about the sermon tapes which had been distributed: the Canadian Reformed and the Free Reformed brothers listened to each other's sermons. Good appreciation was given for the sermons. After a hearty lunch, the discussion was continued on the paper of W.B. Slomp. Again there was an open and brotherly discussion. Some changes were proposed and taken over. This paper would also be presented at the meeting of that same day. This paper is attached to these minutes.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Both the Free Reformed brothers and the Canadian Reformed brothers are awaiting decisions by their respective upcoming Synods which will affect the mandates of their respective committees. The Canadian Reformed brothers have already sent a report to their Synod. The Free Reformed brothers still have to write their report. Both committees will have to wait for their mandates in order to see where our discussions will go from here. The hope was expressed that we can involve all of our churches in the discussions. At this point a formal invitation is extended to the Free Reformed brothers to send a delegate to Synod Neerlandia of the CanRC in May of this year.

The Free Reformed brothers asked a question of the Canadian Reformed brothers' report to their Synod. There is a line which reads: "we are convinced that an easy abandonment of the discussions from our side would be out of place, even though our federation may find some valid grounds to do so from a formal and legal point of view." It was made clear that this does not indicate that this report is finding fault with the FRC. Rather, it is an encouragement to Synod Neerlandia to mandate the committee to continue the unity talks.

Next Meeting

It was agreed that a paper would be distributed which was written by Rev. P.

VanderMeyden: *Hendrik de Cock's View on the Church*. It is felt that after reading this paper, some ideas may come forth which will help us to establish the agenda for the next meeting. It was also suggested to discuss the question: who is allowed to attend the Lord's Supper? Behind this question is the issue whether it is enough simply to establish a person's biblical knowledge before permitting him or her to make public profession of faith and so go to the Lord's table. What about the matter of one's heart? It is suggested that we meet on September 20, 2001 in the Abbotsford Free Reformed church building, at 10 AM. This is tentative, also keeping in mind the decisions of the upcoming Synods.

Closing

Appreciation was expressed all around for the wonderful brotherly contact at the meeting. Rev. R. Aasman read Psalm 133 and led in closing prayer.

For the Meeting,

R. Aasman

Free Reformed Churches of North America
Synodical External Relations Committee

September 22, 2000

Dr. J. De Jong, Secretary
Committee for Ecclesiastical Unity
Canadian Reformed Churches
74 Rymal Road East, Hamilton,
Ontario LB9 1C1

Dear Br. J. De Jong,

We wish to inform you (formally) of the decision made at our May 2000 Synod in Hamilton, Ontario to offer limited contact relationship with your churches.

Our definition of limited contact as approved by Synod 2000 is as follows:

1. The attendance of each other's Synods; visiting delegates attending our Synod may be asked for advice;
2. Sending each other copies of the Acts of Synod;
3. Offering spiritual support consisting of:
 - a) calling attention to each other's spiritual and ecclesiastical problems with mutual efforts, toward Scriptural solutions;
 - b) warning each other of spiritual dangers which arise and which spread and begin to dominate the church of Christ;
 - c) correcting each other in love regarding any slackening in connection with the confession or practice of "the faith once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3);
4. Co-operative activity in areas of common responsibility, for example:
offering material support and co-operation or consultation with regard to mission work, theological training, and such like.

In connection with the three levels of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, Synod's understanding is that establishing level "A" of ecclesiastical fellowship with another federation in no way "makes binding" or "expected" or "necessary" moving towards the other two levels. In other words, establishing "limited contact" form of fellowship does not necessarily require moving towards the next level of contact, while it does open the door for such development under God's blessing. Synod sees level "A" primarily as a communicatory level in an official and brotherly manner.

To the best of our knowledge we believe that your churches maintain an unreserved commitment to and agreement with (1) the infallibility and inerrancy of Scriptures as the Word of God and (2) the validity and relevance of our Confessions.

We look forward to ongoing discussions between our respective committees, which we hope will be mutually beneficial and to the glory of God. We trust that your churches will accept our offer thereby establishing an official, albeit limited, ecclesiastical relationship between our denominations.

With brotherly greetings,

Rev. H. Overduin
Corresponding secretary of the
FRC Synodical External Relations Committee
9790 Carleton St.,
Chilliwack, B.C. V 2P 6E3

P.S. See attached definitions of our three levels of ecclesiastical fellowship.

Free Reformed Churches of North America Levels of Ecclesiastical Fellowship

A. Limited Contact including:

1. the attendance of each other's Synods; visiting delegates attending our Synod may be asked for advice;
2. sending each other copies the *Acts of Synod*;
3. offering spiritual support consisting of:
 - a) calling attention to each other's spiritual and ecclesiastical problems with mutual efforts, toward Scriptural solutions;
 - b) warning each other of spiritual dangers which arise and which spread and begin to dominate the church of Christ;
 - c) correcting each other in love regarding any slackening in connection with the confession or practice of "the faith once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3);
4. co-operative activity in areas of common responsibility, for example: offering material support and co-operation or consultation with regard to mission work, theological training. and such like.

B. Limited Correspondence including:

1. opening the Lord's Table to each other;
2. opening the pulpit to each other's visiting ministers.
3. the attendance of each other's Synods; visiting delegates attending our Synod may be asked for advice;
4. sending each other copies of the *Acts of Synod*;
5. offering spiritual Support consisting of:
 - a) calling attention to each other's spiritual and ecclesiastical problems with mutual efforts toward Scriptural solutions;
 - b) warning each other of spiritual dangers which arise and which spread and begin to dominate the church of Christ;
 - c) correcting each other in love regarding any slackening in connection with the confession or practice of "the faith once delivered unto the saints," (Jude 3);
6. co-operative activity in areas of common responsibility, for example: offering material support and co-operation or consultation with regard to mission work, theological training. and such like.

C. Complete Correspondence including:

1. the mutual acceptance of each other's (membership) attestations.
2. opening the Lord's Table to each other:
3. opening the pulpit to each other's visiting ministers.
4. mutually considering each other's ministers eligible for call;
5. mutual consultation with each other regarding significant actions such as, for example, the revision of the confession or of the Church Order, the extension or reduction of a relationship of correspondence. etc.;
6. the attendance of each other's synods; visiting delegates attending our Synod may be asked for advice;
7. sending each other copies of the *Acts of Synod*
8. offering spiritual support consisting of:
 - a) calling attention to each other's spiritual and ecclesiastical problems with mutual efforts toward Scriptural solutions;
 - b) warning each other of spiritual dangers which arise and which spread and begin to dominate the church of Christ;
 - c) correcting each other in love regarding any slackening in connection with the confession or practice of "the faith once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3);
9. co-operative activity in areas of common responsibility, for example: offering material support and cooperation or consultation with regard to mission work, theological training, and such like.