

APPENDIX 7:

Report of the Committee for Contact with L'Église Réformée du Québec

1. Introduction

Esteemed Brothers

The Committee for Contact with *l'église réformée du Québec* [hereafter l'ERQ], appointed by Synod 1995, submits the following report in order to fulfill its mandate.

2. Mandate / Membership

2.1 *Mandate: General Synod Abbotsford 1995*¹

General Synod Abbotsford 1995 gave this committee the following mandate:

1. To discuss with the deputies of the Église Réformée du Québec the differences in Confession, Church Polity and worship which exist between our two federations;
2. To discuss with their deputies their relations with the Christian Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church in America, and evaluate them;
3. To further investigate whether it is possible to have the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Église Réformée du Québec as part of the same federation;
4. To make use of the report submitted by the church at Ottawa and Classis Ontario North;
5. To keep the churches informed about the Église Réformée du Québec so that their financial needs and other needs as missionary churches can be responded to in a positive manner;
6. To serve Synod 1998 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.

2.2 *Membership of the Committee*

¹ *Acts of Synod 1995, Article 73 IV D*

Synod 1995 appointed the following brothers to the Committee: Revs. G.H. Visscher (convener) and J.L. Van Popta, Brs. J. Boot and W. Oostdyk.²

3. Meetings of the Committee

Your committee has met 9 times since Synod 1995; 3 other meetings were held with l'ERQ's Committee for Inter-Church Relations (CICR).³ The four appointed members attended all the meetings. To facilitate our evaluation of the material, one visit was made to Quebec City by the whole committee in May of 1996. Two members of the committee attended an ERQ Synod as well. The committee also assisted the Home Missions Committee of l'ERQ to make contact with the Toronto Board of Foreign Mission to discuss possibilities for mission work in Quebec.

4. Overview of the Committee's Activity

4.1 Mandate 1: Differences in Confessions, Polity and Worship

4.1.1 Confessions

The committee examined the historical position of the Canadian Reformed Churches with respect to the Westminster Standards.⁴ Since the churches have judged that the Westminster Standards in themselves are not a barrier to ecclesiastical fellowship,⁵ the committee examined where there might be deviation from or changes to the Westminster Standards and evaluated these.

4.1.2 Polity

The committee used the Church Order and Discipline (ODE) of l'ERQ as presented to Synod 1995 in the appendices of the overture concerning l'ERQ.⁶ The content and structure of the ODE was compared to the Church Order of Dort (CO) as revised and adopted by the Canadian Reformed Churches [CDNRC].

4.1.3 Worship

The committee evaluated differences in worship, discussing with the CICR the order of worship in various congregations in Quebec.

² *Acts of Synod 1995*, Article 118 VI.

³ This committee was originally the Committee for Contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches but was renamed and given a new and broader mandate in the Spring of 1997.

⁴ *Acta van de Generale Synode Edmonton, 1965. Report on a Possible Approach of the OPC: Historical Section.* (pg. 89-90)

⁵ *Acts of General Synod, 1986*, pg. 146 ff; *Acts of General Synod 1995*, pg. 72.

⁶ The ODE was translated by James Dykstra (Canadian Reformed, Edmonton) and Paulin Bédard the primary author of the original document (and member of the ERQ Committee for Inter-Church Relations). It can be found as "Appendix 1" of this report.

Committee members attended church services in l'ERQ on various occasions.

4.2 Mandate 2: Relations with other Churches

The committee inquired about the extent of l'ERQ's relationships with other federations and evaluated these contacts.

4.3 Mandate 3: Federational Unity

The committee discussed at length the possibility of federational unity between the CNDRCs and l'ERQ.

4.4 Mandate 4: Use of Available Material

The committee has made extensive use of the overture prepared by the Church of Ottawa and submitted to Synod 1995 by Classis Ontario North, Dec. 1994.

4.5 Mandate 5: Communication

Twice, letters to the churches were mailed out informing the consistories of the activities of the committee. As well, a press release was placed in *Clarion* in Jan. 1997 at the midpoint of our mandate. Requests for information by various consistories were answered by the secretary. Other requests by church members concerning l'ERQ were also answered. The committee assisted the *Fund Raising and Newsletter Committee* of l'ERQ to communicate to the CDNRCs concerning the work in Quebec. The committee also explored the possibility of l'ERQ placing regular reports in *Clarion*. This may be implemented in the near future.

4.6 Mandate 6: This Report

This report is submitted in fulfillment of mandate 6.

5. Discussion and Evaluation of Differences

5.1 Differences in Confessions, Polity and Worship [Mandate 1]

5.1.1 Confessions

5.1.1.1 Documents

L'ERQ bases its faith on the revealed word of God as it is found in the Old and New Testaments. It alone is received as the infallible and inspired Word. It officially recognizes the great ecumenical creeds: The Apostles' Creed, The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Athanasian Creed. The Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession of Faith have been officially adopted as confessional statements. All office bearers must subscribe to these confessions. These confessions have been translated into French by a joint Dutch-French project. It did not seem wise to spend many hundreds of dollars purchasing and mailing copies of these French language documents to all the churches but they have been made available by l'ERQ. L'ERQ has adopted French language translations based on the original 16th and 17th century documents.⁷

⁷ Original German and Latin versions of the Heidelberg Catechism can be found in J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink. *De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften*.

Other confessions of the Reformation such as the Confession of La Rochelle, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort are also used by l'ERQ and recognized as faithfully Reformed, though they do not have official status as binding confessional documents.

5.1.1.2 Preamble to the Westminster Confession

The following preamble to the WCF was added by the founding synod of l'ERQ in August 1988.

L'église réformée du Québec subscribes to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (published by Éditions Kerygma, Aix-en-Provence, 1988, also by the Revue, No. 153-1988/1 p. 1-64).

However:

1. We allow freedom of conscience in relation to articles XXIII.3 and XXXI.2 concerning the place of the political government in the life of the church, and in relation to article XXIV.4 concerning marriages with consanguinity.
2. We accept the sections XXX and XXXI as far as they agree with the church order of l'église réformée du Québec.
3. In these times of questioning the traditional rest from commercial activity in our society, we reiterate the value and correctness of consecrating the Sunday to the Lord. However, we allow freedom of conscience in relation to the occupations and duties to be accomplished in section XXI.8.
4. We remember the historical context in which this confession has been originally written as well as the controversies of those times, so that we can attenuate some hurting expressions in parts of articles XXII.7, XXIV.3, XXV.6, XXIX.2, XXIX.6.
5. We consider that in article XVIII.3, "*développer l'assurance*" (develop the assurance) or "*affermir*" (strengthen) would be a better translation of "make sure" than the word "*assurer*" that might imply a salvation by works.
6. We consider that in article XXIV.5, "*fiançailles*" (engagement) would be more appropriate in our context than "promise of marriage."

5.1.1.3 Evaluation of Preamble

It is important to note that l'ERQ has adopted already translated and published documents. They do not have the time, energy or manpower at this time to translate their confessions anew from English and German.⁸ This preamble suffices to address what l'ERQ perceives to be the major

Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1976; The Westminster Confession (without the American changes) can be found in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom. Vol. III, The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*. New York: Harper & Bros, 1919.

⁸ The Canadian Reformed Churches did this as well, adopting the Three Forms of Unity and the liturgical forms of the CRC, while at the same time working on new translations.

weaknesses in the original document and how they function in the North American context. Your committee evaluated each of the points in *The Preamble* and came to the following conclusions.

5.1.1.3.1 Political Government

Article XXIII.3 reads, "The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and Sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven; yet he hath authority, and it is his duty to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God."

Article XXXI.2 reads, "As magistrates may lawfully call a synod of ministers and other fit persons to consult and advise with about matters of religion; so if magistrates be open enemies to the church, the ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office, or they, with other fit persons, upon delegation from their church may meet together in such assemblies."

The Preamble allows freedom of conscience on these matters. In other words, l'ERQ does not hold as confessionally binding the Westminster Confession's statements which allow for state interference in matters of the church. This is similar to the bracketing of a certain part of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession concerning the role of the state in relation to the church. Here where the Westminster Confession allows for the civil magistrate to call synods and attend them, l'ERQ follows the lead of American Presbyterianism. Your committee recommended to l'ERQ that they might want to examine the changes in the American revision that reflect the clearer separation of church and state.

Article XXIV.4, concerning marriages with consanguinity, is left to the regulation of the state.

5.1.1.3.2 Church Government

Articles XXX and XXXI concern *church censures and synods and councils*. These matters are laid out carefully in the ODE. *The Preamble* states that here the church order has priority, especially in the matter of the role of the state in calling synods and councils.

5.1.1.3.3 Sunday Observance

The Westminster Confession in XXI.8 states concerning the Lord's Day:

This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts, about their worldly employments

and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

The Preamble allows freedom of conscience in the matter that "men... are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy." In discussions with the CICR it was made clear that L'ERQ holds to a high view of consecrating the Lord's Day, but that it also allows for Christian freedom in how this consecration might be exercised by church members. L'ERQ allows, as the CDNRCs do, certain freedom concerning words, thoughts and recreations on the Lord's Day.

5.1.1.3.4 Hurting Expressions

The Preamble does not bind the conscience to some of the polemical expressions as found in the Westminster Confession.⁹ This is similar to changes made by the CDNRCs in the Belgic Confession concerning the Anabaptists in Articles 34 and 36.¹⁰

5.1.1.3.5 "Make sure"

The Preamble disputes the translation of a word and would prefer one which would indicate more strongly that the assurance of salvation is not salvation by works. This change only strengthens the Reformed position of *sola gratia*.

5.1.1.3.6 Contract of Marriage

The Preamble brings the matter of pre-nuptial agreements into the modern setting and so makes the confession much more relevant to the lives of church members.

5.1.1.4 Summary

Noting that as early as Synod 1965¹¹ the churches have considered and judged that a church federation maintaining Presbyterian church government and subscribing to and upholding the Westminster Standards would be a product of the Calvinist Reformation and a true church of the Lord, your committee only evaluated mandate 1(a) in reference to *The Preamble*. Since the Canadian Reformed Churches are in ecclesiastical fellowship with various "Westminster" churches already, the committee did not discuss the differences between the Westminster Standards and the Forms of Unity. It should be noted that L'ERQ also adheres to the

⁹ At certain places in the WCF very strong language is used. For example in 24.3 the WCF speaks of "infidels, Papists, or other idolaters..." In the 25.4 Pope is called "the Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition..."

¹⁰ The Belgic Confession previously read in Art 34, "Therefore we detest the error of the Anabaptists..." It now reads, "...for that reason we reject the error of the Anabaptists." In the past we confessed in Art 36, "Wherefore we detest the Anabaptists and other seditious people..." This has now been changed to, "For that reason we condemn the Anabaptists and other rebellious people..."

¹¹ Acts of Synod 1965 pp. 30, 89

Heidelberg Catechism, and in its church order accepts the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort as Reformed confessions.

When the committee examined, discussed and evaluated the disclaimers as presented in *The Preamble* it found nothing that it would consider to be a matter for further discussion. These changes could easily be accepted if and when l'ERQ would translate the WCF into French for use in this modern Canadian setting. The difficulty lies in that they need to use already published documents which were translated outside of their Canadian context and without their input.

The Preamble also clearly shows that l'ERQ wants her adopted confessional standards to function in the life of the churches and its members. The preamble allows for freedom of conscience on certain matters. By inference then, the confessions are binding on all other matters. The care in which the contents are examined for doctrinal fidelity demonstrates that subscription to the Confessions is taken seriously.

Your committee judges that on the basis of her confessional documents and their maintenance, relations with l'ERQ can and should be established.

5.1.2 Church Polity

l'ERQ has written, developed and adopted a church order, based on Biblical principles, called *Ordre et Discipline Ecclesiastiques de l'Église Réformée du Québec* [ODE]. This document has been translated by James Dykstra of the Edmonton Providence CDNRC in cooperation with the deputies of l'ERQ. Every chapter is headed by scripture proof texts displaying the clear understanding that the Lord desires that his church not be lacking in structure and organization and that all things be done decently and in good order. The basic principles that function are these: Jesus Christ alone is Head of the church and no one else has the right to take this position; the Bible is the only rule for the life of the church; other rules established by the church may be useful and important, but must always be evaluated, and if necessary, reformed in the light of scripture.

5.1.2.1 The Offices

l'ERQ recognizes three offices: elder, minister of the Word, and deacon. Elders are called and ordained to guide the local church according to the scripture. They form, with the minister of the Word, the local council. To form this council there must be at least two elders and the pastor.¹² The council supervises the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments as well as Christian education in the congregation. It also administers the church's business. This council has the right and duty to pass judgment and exercise discipline in the name of Jesus Christ. Elders provide pastoral aid and direction to the church members. They are elected by the local church and are ordained after an exam by the Synod and with its approval. Elders in l'ERQ are ordained to serve for life.

¹² The ODE 4.2.2 allows for a council of two in extraordinary circumstances, but only with the approval of synod.

Deacons are called and ordained for service to the local church and to the outside world. As with the elders, deacons also are ordained for life. Through their ministry, Christ's love is shown and made visible particularly to the poor and needy and also to those suffering materially, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Deacons must be examples to the church, stimulating each member to commit themselves faithfully to service in the church. Deacons are chosen and ordained by the local church. The ODE does not specifically forbid the ordination of women to the office of deacon¹³ as it does for the office of elder and of minister of the Word, however, the deacons do not make up part of the ruling council of the church but work in the ministry of mercy under the supervision and direction of the council.

The ministers of the Word are dedicated to studying and teaching God's word and to prayer. The ministers are of two kinds: evangelist and pastor.

An evangelist is a minister of the Word in a local church, called to this task by that church, fulfilling his ministry under the supervision of the synod. The principle task of an evangelist is to form and organize new local churches. He must be able to evangelize by preaching and teaching the Word, to administer the sacraments, to provide basic training in Christian doctrine, also for children, and to carefully and competently manage the affairs of the new church.

The pastor is also a minister of the Word in a local church. His main duty lies in the edification of the already established local church. He must preach and teach the Word of God, administer the sacraments, and lead in public prayer. With the local council, he supervises the doctrine and life of the members of the church and manages the affairs of the church.

Within the present context some of the pastors are engaged in "tent-making ministry" in which they hold down part-time employment besides their congregational work. This is because of financial necessity, not a matter of principle or preference. This financial need has been communicated to the CDNRCs who have in turn generously provided funds for the work in Quebec. The CICR notes this generosity with gratitude to the Lord.

5.1.2.2 Differences

The differences in church polity are complex. L'ERQ has drafted its own church order. However, having examined this church order, your committee concludes that it is one which reflects a deep reverence for the role of the Word of God in prescribing church government. A Reformed church polity shines throughout the ODE.

Though some weaknesses can be pointed out, the ODE admirably displays the principles articulated in par. 3 of the introduction: "In submission to the rule of scripture: 'Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way' (1 Cor. 14: 40) we clearly articulate the Biblical principles for this church and we establish the following ecclesiastical order and

¹³ See 5.1.2.3 below

discipline." Throughout, the ODE presents scripture references to buttress its position. Considering that the ODE is a new work for a new church federation l'ERQ can be commended for its work. We should also note that the ODE says in its *Preamble*

The ecclesiastical order and discipline of the Reformed Church of Quebec are formulated to most effectively serve God in obedience to his will. Their formulation aims to assure a great degree of liberty to the congregations and to their members; liberty which rests on the acceptance of a common discipline. Therefore this formulation is subject to modification in the future if the situation of the Reformed Church of Quebec requires it....¹⁴

5.1.2.3 Deaconesses

As noted above, the ODE does not specifically forbid the ordination of women to the office of deacon as it does for the office of elder and of minister of the Word. The deacons, however, are not part of the ruling council of the church, but work in the ministry of mercy under the supervision and direction of that council.¹⁵

5.1.2.4 Summary

Having examined, discussed and evaluated the differences in church polity, your committee considers that these should be judged to be within the parameters of the "minor points of church order," (CO Article 50) and on the basis of these differences l'ERQ should not be rejected.

5.1.3 Worship / Praxis

As in the CNDRCs, there is no officially adopted order of worship in l'ERQ. The worship service varies from one congregation to another, at the discretion of the pastor and/or elders. The service, however, is seen as a covenant celebration where God gathers his people and speaks to them by his Word. There he reminds them of his law and grace which is also represented and sealed in the sacraments. In the worship services he receives from his people an answer of adoration, confession of sin, thankfulness, dedication and request for help after which God returns them home and to the market places of life everywhere in the world. There is one worship service a week, generally on Sunday morning.

¹⁴ See page 26 of this report.

¹⁵ John Calvin in his *Institutes* at 4.13.19 acknowledges that there were deaconesses in the early church mentioned in 1 Tim 5. These deaconesses were (in Calvin's view) created "to discharge the public ministry of the Church toward the poor and to strive with all zeal, constancy and diligence in the task of love." This is the model followed by the ERQ, not the model prescribed by the Church Order of Dort or the Belgic Confession.

P.Y. De Jong in his book, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today*, (Grand Rapids, Baker: 1952) writes of the development of the office of deaconess in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands in the years 1575 - 1600. Many of the churches and the early Synods allowed for deaconesses. In Amsterdam at one time there were 28 deaconesses. The office of deaconess functioned in the Amsterdam church until the time of the French Revolution 200 years later.

5.1.3.1 Sermon

The sermon is an exposition of a scripture text. Within I'ERQ it is required that he who expounds the Word be ordained or be a student of theology whose sermons are approved by an ordained minister. Occasionally a minister from another church may be invited to preach, at the discretion of the local pastor and elders. The sermon is in depth exposition, not exemplary nor moralistic. The tone of the sermon is serious, though the mood of the service is less formal than in the CDNRCs.

5.1.3.2 Services

There is an atmosphere of joy in the worship services, although there is a conscious effort to keep things reverent and serious. There is also a strong emphasis on prayer, on confession of sins, on acknowledging needs before God, and on having fellowship with God. The worship service is led by the pastor, by an elder, or by another man of the church trained to do so. The sacraments, though, are always administered by an ordained minister.

5.1.3.3 Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is administered once a month in most congregations. It follows the sermon. There is not as yet an *adopted*¹⁸ liturgical form used for the administration of the sacrament in all the churches though there is standardized practice for each church. Usually there are the following parts for the celebration of the Lord's Supper: The words of institution taken directly from scripture, the breaking of the bread and the benediction of the cup, a prayer of thanksgiving, (sometimes the Lord's Prayer or a song), followed by an explanation of the meaning of Lord's Supper. Then there is a warning and an invitation and finally the partaking of the elements.

The invitation is addressed to all who repent and believe in the Gospel of salvation, and who are engrafted into Christ by faith and live accordingly. The Lord's Table, by our understanding, therefore, might be considered to be a rather "open" table. Some people who regularly attend church also participate even though they are not members. Because of their Roman Catholic and/or Anabaptist background these people are not disciplined nor barred from communion, but warmly taught and encouraged to profess the Reformed faith publicly and to more fully live a Christian life in the Body of Christ. Though the Table is "open" to these guests, the pastors do know the people who come to the table because the communities are so small and only those who have been reached by the evangelism and missionary efforts attend the services. The children are not admitted to the Lord's Table until they reach the age of maturity (17-20 years) at which time they are examined by the pastor and elders and profess their faith in church. Adults (members or non-members) who openly deny the fundamental beliefs of the Christian Faith or who live in gross sin are not admitted to the table. They are privately disciplined and

¹⁸ See below a 5.1.3.8

asked not to participate, being told to repent and to receive God's forgiveness and to turn to a new life of obedience.

When your committee asked about admission to the Lord's Table the l'ERQ committee admitted that there was a growing awareness that the councils needed to "fence the table" more closely. Admission to the table is rather loose at the present time, though the councils of the local churches are beginning to supervise this more closely. One congregation now has a table that is "fenced" closely. The deputies certainly indicated a willingness to discuss this within the context of ecclesiastical fellowship. More and more, especially with growing children and new converts receiving their training in a Reformed context, it seems that the direction may be to admit only the professing members of the church to the Lord's Table. Here again the committee and the deputies saw that ecclesiastical fellowship would benefit discussions about matters of doctrine and praxis. Though this is an important issue, it should not cloud the discussions unnecessarily, nor should this become a barrier to ecclesiastical fellowship. Your committee would recommend that within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship the CDNRCs could urge movement to a more closely fenced table.

5.1.3.4 Baptism

Baptism is administered whenever needed, to the children of the members or to adult believers never baptized before. It may precede or follow the sermon. There is also as yet no adopted liturgical form for this sacrament. On the other hand, there are usually the following parts: the words of institution, an explanation, God's promises and requirements, the parents promises (faith and obedience, education of their child) the congregation's promises, prayer and baptism. A few variations are found in adult baptism.

5.1.3.5 Profession of Faith

Profession of Faith is done in the regular worship services, before or after the sermon. Before someone can profess his faith, he must follow a course in which he receives instruction in the Christian faith and Reformed doctrine as well as in the government and practices of the church. The new members are admitted on the basis of a Trinitarian profession of Faith (The Apostles' Creed) and a good Christian life. Thorough knowledge of the Reformed doctrine is not demanded before the profession of faith of new members, though they must display a teachable spirit. A brief personal testimony of the goodness of the Lord experienced in the life of that person is sometimes presented at that moment, although not required for the profession of faith. Your committee would recommend that within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship the CDNRCs could urge l'ERQ to admit members on the basis of their knowledge and confession of the Reformed doctrine.

5.1.3.6 Prayer / Singing / Special Days

The prayers in church services are led by the conductor of the service and by some people of the assembly. (Prayers can be both prepared in

advance or they may be spontaneous, though all is done in good time and in order.) People of the congregation often make prayer requests after the sermon. Other specific needs are also often presented prior to prayer in order to guide the assembly in their prayers.

The singing of the Psalms comes from *Arc-en-ciel*, [*Rainbow*] containing in its first section a selection of 62 Psalms set to the Genevan tunes. In some churches, however, these tunes are not often used. This Psalter also includes many Reformed hymns but also many other songs, hymns and choruses. Another contemporary collection of hymns and Christian songs, *J'aime l'Eternal* [*I Love the Lord*] is also used. Some churches also supplement these two collections with songs presented on overhead projectors or separate sheets. In some congregations a particular time of praise comes before or after hearing God's law, with 3 to 5 consecutive songs, or songs alternating with readings from scripture. Some churches also have a small choir in order to help the congregation worship the Lord and in learning new songs. The musical instruments vary from church to church: organ, piano, guitar, trumpet, flute, clarinet, electronic organ are all used in the various churches.

Special liturgies are prepared for the celebration of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, Thanksgiving and Reformation Sunday. On these occasions there might be alternation of appropriate songs and Bible readings, short meditations, banners, Bible stories for children or by children etc.

5.1.3.7 Ordination / Marriage

The ordination of pastors, elders and deacons is done in the regular worship service of the congregation in which they will serve, and in presence of delegates of the synod.¹⁷

Marriage are solemnized in special services (Saturday) to which the congregation is invited.

5.1.3.8 Standardized Liturgical Forms

The committee discussed extensively the lack of standard adopted liturgical forms within the various churches. The ministers of the churches (as well as the congregations) come from 3 or 4 ecclesiastical backgrounds and so have their own histories and traditions. This has as result some lack of uniformity of practice. Some of the ministers have worked as missionaries for decades and various congregations existed independently for years prior to the birth of l'ERQ. The lack of uniformity may look chaotic to us, but arises out of historical realities. The churches that joined l'ERQ found a *unity of faith* which bound them together. Their lack of *uniformity in practice* seemed minor to them in their battle against the liberalization in their mother churches. Standardization and uniformity, though desirable, need not become an insurmountable problem to ecclesiastical fellowship. Within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship the CDNRCs could help l'ERQ develop and adopt standardized forms.

¹⁷ See relevant sections of the ODE.

The discussions with your committee have partially been the cause for the Synod of the ERQ to appointed their Church Order Committee to prepare standard liturgical forms for use in the churches. At present (Oct. 1997) draft versions of forms for Baptism, for Public Profession of Faith and for Lord's Supper have been prepared for use in the churches. Forms for ordination are planned. It will take several years, however, for l'ERQ to come to final versions of these documents as the members of the churches and the office-bearers use and evaluate them. The formal adoption of standard forms means that changes will also need to be made to the ODE.

Though the use of standard liturgical forms is relatively important, the lack of such forms should not be considered to be an insurmountable barrier to ecclesiastical fellowship. Your committee recommends that your assembly recognize that the move toward standardized liturgical forms underlines the commitment of l'ERQ to maintaining a Reformed praxis which is in line with their Reformed confession.

5.1.3.7 Summary

Though the life in the churches as well as the "look and feel" of the services may be different in the eyes of the CDNRCs, there is evidence of a deep love for the Lord and for scripture, as well as for "the Reformed way" in l'ERQ. The commitment of these young churches who are attempting to mount a faithful Reformed witness in a secularized Roman Catholic culture and world must be acknowledged. Their desire for fellowship with the CDNRCs only underlines this.

5.2 Relations with other Churches [Mandate 2]

5.2.1 "Mother" Churches

At present l'ERQ has no official relationships with any other church federations, nor is it seeking ecclesiastical fellowship (as the CDNRCs understand it) with any others at the present time. They do, however maintain ties with two of the "mother" churches, though not as closely as defined by *The Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship [1992]*.

5.2.1.1 PCC

Over the years one of the "mother" churches, the Presbyterian Church of Canada, has rejected l'ERQ and cut official ties with it. The Presbyterian Church of Canada could not agree to the ODE which barred women from the ruling and teaching offices and never entered into formal relations with l'ERQ after its inception in 1988.

5.2.1.2 CRC (Home Missions Board)

The Christian Reformed Church Home Missions Board continues to fulfill its financial commitment to l'ERQ. This funding is being withdrawn, however. This withdrawal of funding is according to the agreements made with l'ERQ and will cease in the coming year. There is no ecclesiastical fellowship or other official relationship between the assemblies of l'ERQ and the Christian Reformed Church. In fact, l'ERQ Synod, which

convened on September 12 & 13, 1997 dealt with a request from the CRC asking l'ERQ to enter into formal sister church relations. L'ERQ synod rejected this request. The churches rejected this knowing full well that this would preclude applying to the CRC for any financial aid in the future.

5.2.1.3 PCA (Mission to North America)

The Mission to North America [MNA] of the Presbyterian Church of America and l'ERQ have a "ministry partnership agreement." This agreement allows the Presbyterian Church of America missionaries working in Quebec to raise funds privately in the Presbyterian Church of America congregations. The Presbyterian Church of America has "lent" these missionaries to l'ERQ as well as agreeing that it will not mount a separate mission/evangelism project in Quebec. This follows the model of many North American evangelical mission projects where the mission boards are essentially separate from the churches and function as para-church organizations.

5.2.2 Reformed Church of France

L'ERQ has no official contact with the Reformed Church of France though the school at Aix-en-Provence and Institut Farel have close contact. Some of the missionaries/evangelists have studied at Aix-en-Provence, and the seminary in France lends its professors to the Institut Farel on occasion. These two institutions also recognize each others degrees. This relationship is similar to the one between our sister-churches' seminary in Kampen and Aix-en-Provence.

5.2.3 "Mutual Eligibility"

There is no "mutual eligibility" between l'ERQ and the Christian Reformed Church or the Presbyterian Church of America with respect to ministers. Though some of the ministers in l'ERQ find their roots as missionaries sent by these churches, now that l'ERQ is organized as a federation they have reserved the right to submit all ministers who come to work in their congregations to a full ecclesiastical [peremptory] exam. This exam would be of the same rigour as a candidate seeking ordination to the ministry. This rule was recently applied to Rev. R. Kwint who came from the Netherlands,¹⁸ out of the *Gereformeerde Bond*, (through which he receives partial funding) He was required to be examined by l'ERQ synod to be admitted to the ministry of the churches in Quebec.

5.2.4 Attestations

L'ERQ has no agreement with these churches about membership [attestations]. Neither does it have any mutual agreement with the broadest assemblies of these federation with respect to decisions, confessions or church order.

¹⁸ Two members of your committee attended the synod at which this candidate minister was examined. They reported favourably concerning the rigour of the exam.

5.2.5 Summary

We can see then that though these churches have relationships with 3rd parties these relationships are of a different character from ecclesiastical fellowship. L'ERQ jealously guards itself from what it would consider to be potential unreformed influences. L'ERQ has been represented by an observer at the Alliance of Reformed Churches and contacts are growing with the United Reformed Churches of North America. This also indicates the direction in which L'ERQ desires to go.

L'ERQ now has a Committee for Inter-Church Relations. This committee is mandated to examine and evaluate the benefits of relationships with other Reformed churches and make recommendations to the Synod.

It is clear that L'ERQ desires to remain faithful to scripture, confession and to the Head of the church in her relationships with other churches.

5.3 Federational Unity [Mandate 3]

Your committee's Mandate 3 reads: "To further investigate whether it is possible to have the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Église Réformée du Québec as part of the same federation." The committee considered two possibilities: a "French classis" and "full integration." Neither of these models seemed to be workable. The vast majority of the members of L'ERQ are unilingually French and the vast majority of CDNRC members are unilingually English. This in itself would cause immense logistical problems in translation and communication. As well, Synod 1992 observed concerning the Free Church of Scotland congregations in Canada that "one must be realistic enough to realize that it is not an easy matter to bring together immigrant churches from two different cultures and with two different ecclesiastical traditions." Synod agreed that merger between the 4 or 5 Free Church of Scotland congregations in English speaking Canada and the CDNRCs would require "careful planning and sensitive implementation." How much more any merger between two church federations, one immigrant, one not; both unilingual, one English, one French; one with the Forms of Unity, one with the WCF; one with a Presbyterian form of government, one with a continental form. Full integration would be unworkable.

When your committee presented L'ERQ committee with the "refugee model" of the 17th century where French and English refugees found a place within the Dutch Reformed churches our French brothers answered, "We are not refugees!"

Your committee cannot recommend that church union or merger would be beneficial or advisable. As well, the CIRC would strongly recommend against such a model to their Synod. It is completely unacceptable to these churches.

In Quebec, Francophones are considered to be Roman Catholic and Anglophones are considered to be Protestant. This dichotomy is so strong

that even English speaking Jews serve on the Protestant school boards. Language is the great divider.¹⁹

The mission and evangelism projects of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church of America and the Christian Reformed Church were all focused on the Francophone population with the hope of forming an independent French language Reformed church. L'ERQ is the product of those efforts. It is important for the CDNRCs to understand that L'ERQ now needs to maintain this independent "Francophone" identity, all the while recognizing that in their church order they do say in Art 1.5,

All churches which share the Biblical principles of l'ERQ, accept its confessions of faith as well as its ecclesiastical order and discipline, *without taking into account historical, social, cultural, or administrative differences*, may become members of l'ERQ. [Emphasis added]

L'ERQ presents the gospel of Jesus Christ to French-Canadians within a French church with its roots in the great Reformation of the 16th Century. For the first time in Canadian history, it is now possible to be both Francophone and Reformed. This reality was and is one of the driving forces to maintaining an *independent* French speaking Reformed church. In its discussions with CICR your committee has been sensitive to this reality. It will not do to insist that since we are in the same country we must organize and federate under the same ecclesiastical roof. Both l'ERQ and the CDNRCs recognize that the church of Jesus Christ is not "confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world (Belgic Confession 27)." We also need to be sensitive to the fact that language, culture, history, confession, and church order as well as praxis can make complete federative unity impractical. This is not advocating Kuyperian pluriformity nor is it a concession to a doctrine of more or less true churches. Rather this is a recognition that Christ Jesus gathers his church by his Spirit and Word throughout the world and in various ways. There must be an "eye for the work of the Lord in history."²⁰

6. Ecclesiastical Fellowship

6.1 L'ERQ Synod, Sept. 12/13, 1997.

6.1.1 Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship

As noted above, the l'ERQ Synod convened in Sept. 1997. The CICR presented reports and recommendations to this Synod concerning Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship and concerning fellowship with the CDNRCs.

¹⁹ At the time of writing, the Government of Quebec is seeking a Constitutional Amendment allowing schools to be divided along linguistic and not religious lines.

²⁰ Acts of General Synod 1995, pg. 73.

The CICR recommended that the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (1992) as adopted by the CDNRCs be adopted by l'ERQ. This was done after the addition of one additional rule concerning the missionary mandate of Christ's church and with some other small changes.

The rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship as l'ERQ have adopted them are;²¹

1. The churches shall assist each other in the development and advancement of the mission.
2. The churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defense and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and worship, be watchful for deviations, and encourage each other in the weaker areas.
3. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or Minutes and otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to the respective churches (if possible in translation).
4. The churches shall consult each other when entering into relations with third parties.
5. The churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing.
6. The churches shall in principle, open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches.
7. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or worship, the churches shall be informed in order that as much consultation can take place as possible before final decision is taken.
8. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as much as local regulations permit.

The most dramatic change in the rules comes with the addition of Rule 1. This addition does not present any difficulties, especially since it reflects the "missionary" character of these churches.²²

Another change which should be noted is the change of "liturgy" to "worship". In French the word *liturgie* refers to "a collection of rules fixing

²¹ These rules (Rules 1997) as well as those of Synod 1992 (Rules 1992) can be found in appendix 2.

²² In Rule 1 "the mission" could be misleading since it could be read as if it referred to a particular mission project. This is a matter of translation. In the estimation of your committee, the intent is to say: "The churches shall assist each other in the development and advancement of mission." This certainly could be mutual as l'ERQ has much that it could teach us about effective home mission efforts.

the order of worship." Instead the word *culte* was used, which refers to the homage rendered to God. To reflect this change, "worship" was used when the Rules were translated back into English. Your committee considers that this is an accurate interpretation of "liturgy" as used in the English Rules.

L'ERQ also deleted the following clause between (English) rules 5 and 6: "In exercising these relations, the churches shall strive to implement also the following:" (and then follow rules 6 and 7). This deletion only makes rules 6 and 7 much stronger. This strengthening of the last two rules is a useful improvement of the rules when applied to churches living side by side in the same country.

Your committee considers that these and a few other changes do not change the thrust, content or meaning of the Rules and so could recommend that ecclesiastical fellowship could be established under them.

6.1.2 Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CNDRC

L'ERQ requested formal relations with the CNDRCs at Synod Abbotsford, 1995. The CICR now recommended to their Synod of Sept., 1997 that L'ERQ offer to enter into relations with the CNDRCs under these amended rules. In a letter²³ dated Sept. 25, L'ERQ informed your committee that their Synod, meeting on Sept. 12/13, 1997, adopted a proposal to establish an official relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches according to their newly adopted rules (Rules 1997).

6.2 Ecclesiastical Fellowship Proposed

6.2.1 Benefits

If our two churches would enter into ecclesiastical fellowship there would be mutual benefits. With ongoing financial assistance they could continue to focus on the important work of spreading the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in their communities. The CNDRCs would benefit by drawing on L'ERQ's expertise in modern urban Reformed missions. There would also be a mutual benefit for members of both federations in that they could be issued attestations and so engage in orderly transfer of membership. As more CNDRC students study and do study terms in Quebec and ERQ students study in colleges like Redeemer College in Ancaster and Trinity Western University in Langley, as well as in other universities, it would be advantageous to have closer ties.

6.2.2 ODE

We can be thankful that there is a strong desire to follow the Reformed way in church government. Discussions about church order could develop in a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. Improvements could be made to the ODE to make it a stronger and more comprehensive document. The CICR has indicated that L'ERQ recognizes that the ODE

²³ See Appendix 3.

is not a final document but that it is one which will need to develop as the church in Quebec grows.

6.2.3 Liturgical Forms

L'ERQ as yet has not adopted standard liturgical forms for use in the churches. As noted above, the lack of uniformity in worship and liturgical forms stems from the birth of l'ERQ as a "union" church. Having come from various backgrounds, the various congregations had already developed their own traditions and formulations. It should be noted, however, that the original congregations formed a union church in order to stem the tide of modernism in the mother churches. In order to do this some lack of uniformity of practice was acceptable. Though this is a matter of some importance, as stated above, your committee believes that this falls within the guidelines of CO Article 50. If a formal relationship were established, your committee believes that the CDNRCs would be in a better position to assist l'ERQ in developing standard forms.²⁴

6.2.4 Mission work

L'ERQ Mission Committee has approached the Toronto Board of Foreign Mission with a proposal to sponsor one of their church planting projects (Trois Rivières). Toronto decided instead to take up the task of mission in PNG instead. It is encouraging, however, to note that l'ERQ is willing to invite the CDNRCs as partners in its work in Quebec. This type of cooperation would be much easier to execute, supervise and maintain within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship. L'ERQ could call candidates from the Theological College in Hamilton and have them work as pastors or evangelists in their missionary churches.

Your committee, however, did discover in our discussions with CICR that without some sort of formal relationship it would be very difficult to send a missionary into Quebec and work together with l'ERQ. Only within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship could this be implemented in an orderly way.

6.2.5 Finances

There is ongoing financial need. The committee notes with thankfulness that many of the churches have heeded the call to support this work with regular collections or budget allocations. (Jan - Aug '97; between \$25,000 - \$30,000). Within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship, however, the CDNRCs would be able to give solid, consistent, and reliable sources of funding to these mission projects. If a graduate of Hamilton were called perhaps the CDNRCs could assist in the financial aspects.

6.3 Committee

In discussions with the members of the CICR, it has become clear that it would be beneficial to have a separate committee to work with l'ERQ rather than hand the matter over to the Committee on Relations with

²⁴ *Rules (1997) 7*

Churches Abroad. A separate committee could work with l'ERQ in various ways and so help to develop a vibrant and living relationship between the two churches.

7. Conclusion

The committee believes that the Lord has placed l'ERQ on the path of the Canadian Reformed Churches. They have called out, "Come on over and help us." L'ERQ needs spiritual and financial help and support. She desires to remain true to her French Reformed roots and is asking the CDNRCs to assist her in this. Your committee has studied the history and background of l'ERQ, her doctrinal standards and their maintenance, her church government and its practice, as well as the style of worship in the congregations. It is apparent from these evaluations that l'ERQ is a faithful and true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can see that the Lord Jesus Christ gathers, defends and preserves his church also in Quebec.

The Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad wrote (of the Free Church of Scotland) in their report to General Synod 1992 under "Considerations",

The view that the only proper approach to the FCS congregations in Canada is to demand that a merger take place as a condition for recognition, does not do full justice to the historic roots and ecclesiastical practices of our respective churches. While unity in faith and practice should be an aim that is continually kept in view and worked toward, there must also be an awareness that this will come about only as the result of growing understanding, patient dealing, increased familiarity, and constant prayer.²⁵

Your committee concurs with this and considers that this is even more pointed with respect to l'ERQ.

Recommendations

Your committee recommends that your assembly:

- A. accept the request of *l'église réformée du Québec*, made to Synod '95, and reaffirmed at their Synod of Sept. 12/13, 1997, to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship and to do so under their adopted *Rules (1997)*.
- B. appoint a Committee for Contact with *l'église réformée du Québec* with the following mandate:
 1. to respond if specific requests for assistance and advice are made in matters of confession, church polity and worship;

²⁵ *Acts of Synod 1992 (Appendix 1) "Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Canadian Reformed Churches: Report to General Synod Lincoln 1992."* (Pgs. 97-122) pg. 111

Appendix 7: Committee re ERQ

2. to initiate and continue discussions with l'ERQ CICR concerning²⁶
 - a. the supervision of the Lord's table with a view to admitting only professing members of the church to the table;²⁷
 - b. the need for professing members to express agreement with the confessional standards;²⁸
 - c. the necessity and desirability of adopting standard liturgical forms;²⁹
 3. to respond, if possible and feasible, to specific requests made to attend Synods of l'ERQ;
 4. to be ready to give assistance in developing mission possibilities in Quebec;
 5. to keep the churches informed about *l'église réformée du Québec* so that we can responded in a positive manner to their financial and other needs as missionary churches;
 6. to serve Synod 2001 with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.
- C. inform the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the relationship with *l'église réformée du Québec*.

Respectfully Submitted

J. Boot

W. Oostdyk

J.L. Van Popta

G.H. Visscher

²⁶ This would be in accordance with Rule 2 adopted by l'ERQ (see above, p. 19).

²⁷ (see this report 5.1.3.3)

²⁸ (see this report 5.1.3.5)

²⁹ (see this report 5.1.3.8)