

## APPENDIX 8:

# Report of the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

### I. DECISIONS OF SYNOD ABBOTSFORD 1995

Synod Abbotsford, 1995 made the following decisions concerning the Committee for Contact with the OPC:

1. Synod decided not to amalgamate the CCOPC with the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad, but "in light of the request of the Committee to conclude matters and for the sake of continuity, it is best to maintain" the CCOPC (*Acts*, p. 70f.)

2. Synod mandated the CCOPC

"1. to work towards formalizing the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship under the adopted rules by using the statements of Synod Lincoln 1992 (*Acts* 1992, Art. 72, IV.A.1 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;

2. to communicate to the OPC the discomfort in our churches with respect to their continued relationship with the CRCNA;

3. to communicate that there is a need to continue to discuss the differences in confession and church polity in accordance with the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Rule 6);

4. to serve the churches with regular reports of the work of the Committee, and to serve General Synod 1998 with a report, to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod. (*Acts*, p. 75)

3. Synod expressed "the hope that in this way the protracted discussions between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC can be concluded by the establishment of a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship within the next three years so that, the Lord willing, it can be finalized by Synod 1998". (*Acts*, p.75)

4. Synod appointed as members of this committee, Rev. J. DeGelder (convener), Rev. P.G. Feenstra, Dr. N.H. Gootjes, br. G.J. Nordeman, br. G. VanWoudenberg. (*Acts*, p. 86)

## **II. OVERVIEW OF THE COMMITTEE'S ACTIVITIES**

### **1. Meetings**

The CCOPC met 7 times by itself and once with the CEIR. At the first meeting, on Oct. 19, 1995, the functions were distributed as follows: Rev. J. DeGelder, chairman, Dr. N.H. Gootjes, secretary, Br. G.J. Nordeman, treasurer.

At this meeting, the mandate given by Synod was reviewed. Moreover, a letter from the CEIR, dated September 21, 1995, was discussed. In this letter, the charge was repeated that the Canadian Reformed Churches maintain a double standard in their contacts with other church bodies, by continuing to deny to the OPC a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship while at the same entering into that relationship with the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church in Korea. The CEIR requested the CCOPC to provide them with specific proposals for further joint discussions that can move us closer to a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Rather than continuing the discussion on the alleged double standard, our Committee decided to focus on preparing proposals in view of moving toward a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

Since Synod mandated the CCOPC to work toward reaching an agreement on the outstanding issues of fencing of the Lord's Table and confessional membership, the indicated course of action was to provide a statement for that purpose. This 'Proposed Agreement' was finalized at the meeting of February 27, 1996 and sent to the CEIR, with the request to discuss this proposal.

### **2. Discussion on Proposed Agreement**

The CEIR, in a letter dated April 2, 1996 stated that they had considered the 'Proposed Agreement' and were encouraged by it and found it constructive. The committee added that they agreed with the two proposed statements, that the way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches was now open, and that the need to discuss remaining differences in confession and church polity could be addressed within a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. They asked whether a meeting to discuss these statements would still be necessary.

In a letter dated May 8, 1996, our Committee asked for a meeting with the CEIR, to discuss the practical implications of having such a Proposed Agreement, and how to proceed toward establishing ecclesiastical fellowship.

The meeting between the CCOPC and an ad hoc committee of the CEIR took place on October 8, 1996. Several issues were discussed in good harmony. The matter of the so-called double standard was not brought up again. The Proposed Agreement takes into consideration that our customs have developed in a different history and that we must recognize the providence of God in this history. None of the members of the CEIR present

at the meeting had any objection to accepting this statement as basis for establishing a relation of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

The full Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the OPC, in its meeting of October 9, 1996, stated its agreement with the Proposed Agreement.

### **3. Text of the Proposed Agreement for opening the way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship.**

#### *Concerning Fencing the Lord's Table:*

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 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.

#### *Concerning Confessional Membership:*

The churches of the Reformation believe that they have to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and are called to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned (Rom. 16:17). 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. Every confessing member is bound to this doctrine and must be willing to be instructed in it.

It may be added that these statements are not intended to prevent further discussions. Rather, it is agreed that there is need to continue to discuss the differences in confession and church policy which can take place within the relation of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The intention of such discussions will be mutual upbuilding in the faith to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

### **4. The relationship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America**

During the meeting between the members of the CEIR and the CCOPC on October 8, 1996, the relationship between the OPC and the CRCNA was also discussed. The representatives of the OPC reported that the General Assembly of 1996 had decided to suspend the relation with the CRC and "that, unless the 1997 regular general Assembly determines that intervening actions of the Christian Reformed Church in North America warrant a reversal of this action or a continuation of the period of suspension, the

relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America shall be terminated with the close of that assembly" (see *Minutes of the Sixty-Third General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, 1996, p. 52). After this, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church declared to be willing to discuss all issues with the OPC. The CEIR felt that it had to pursue this, before breaking off the relationship altogether.

In its report to the General Assembly 1997, the CEIR concluded that the actions of the Christian Reformed Church concerning the women in office issue do not warrant a reversal of the action of the previous General Assembly and recommended to terminate the relationship, effective on July 1, 1997. The advisory committee of the General Assembly proposed to continue the suspended relationship till the year 2001 when a responsible decision could be made. After a lengthy discussion the advisory committee's recommendations were defeated and the proposal to terminate the relationship with the CRCNA was adopted almost unanimously. We are grateful for the clear stand taken by the OPC in this matter, maintaining the absolute authority of the Word of God.

### **5. The Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship**

During the previously mentioned meeting of October 8, 1996, several questions were asked concerning our 'Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship' as decided by Synod Lincoln, 1995, see *Acts* p. 33. These questions concern the following issues:

- a. What is meant by 'the churches', a committee (e.g. the CCOPC) or the synod?
- b. Should 6 and 7 not be 1 and 2 of a separate point?
- c. What is the difference between 6 and 1?
- d. What is meant by 'consultation'? How is that to be done, and on what level?

Our committee gave some clarification but added that these rules are not in our province, but in that of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad. In response to a question, the delegates of the OPC stated that they have no difficulty having the relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches determined by these rules.

### **6. General Assembly 1996 and 1997 of the OPC**

The CCOPC was invited to send a fraternal delegate to the General Assembly of the OPC in 1996 and 1997. In 1996, no delegation was sent. The OPC was congratulated on its 60th Anniversary by letter.

In 1997, Rev. J. De Gelder and Br. G.J. Nordeman were received as fraternal delegates at the 64th General Assembly. Rev. De Gelder addressed the assembly, a copy of his speech is added to this report. From their report we highlight the following items:

- The CEIR reported to the General Assembly that the relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches has taken an important step forward. It reported in full detail the Proposed Agreement for opening the way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The CEIR report further stated:

"We look forward to the next General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches (in 1998) with the expectation that, in view of this agreement it will act to establish a bond of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC in which we can continue to discuss our differences as churches, and so, if God grants, arrive at a more perfect unity in doctrine, polity, and life."

This report was adopted by the General Assembly. Many delegates expressed their joy and thankfulness for these developments.

- The CEIR presented a proposal to expand the single category of interchurch relations they maintained until now (Ecclesiastical Fellowship) into three categories: Ecclesiastical Fellowship, Corresponding Relations, Restricted Relations. The General Assembly adopted the recommendation to submit this proposal to the churches now in Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC for their suggestions, advice and response (see for the full report, *Clarion*, 46, no. 17 (August 22, 1997), pp. 374f.).

### 7. Information received

The CCOPC received the following documents from the churches:

- The decision of Classis Alberta/Manitoba, held on April 25,26, 1995, concerning an appeal of the Church at Coaldale, to which the appeal was appended.
- The correspondence between Classis Alberta/Manitoba and the Presbytery of the Dakotas, of the OPC, and the decision of Classis, on Oct. 17-18/Dec. 18-19, 1995.
- The decision of Classis Alberta/Manitoba concerning a communication from the Presbytery of the Dakotas, of the OPC, dated April 29, 1996.

### 8. Report

A Report of the agreement reached with the OPC was published in Clarion 46,2 (March 21, 1997).

## III. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the positive developments mentioned in this report the Committee recommends that General Synod 1998 of the Canadian Reformed Churches decide:

*Appendix 8: OPC Committee*

- A. To acknowledge gratefully the commitment of the OPC to be faithful to the Scriptures and to defend the reformed heritage.
- B. To acknowledge thankfully that with the statements on the Fencing of the Lord's Table and on Confessional Membership an agreement has been reached on the outstanding issues.
- C. To note with thankfulness that the OPC, by terminating the Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRCNA has taken a clear stand in maintaining the truth and authority of the Word of God, and has removed another obstacle for the Canadian Reformed Churches to come to ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC.
- D. To invite the OPC to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, according to the adopted rules for this relationship.
- E. To discontinue the Committee for Contact with the OPC, making the contact and discussion with the OPC part of the mandate of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA).
- F. To ask the CRCA to consider the comments of the CEIR on the rules of ecclesiastical fellowship.

Respectfully submitted

Rev. J. DeGelder, convener

Rev. P.G. Feenstra

Dr. N.H. Gootjes

Br. G.J. Nordeman

Br. G. VanWoudenberg