

APPENDIX V

Report of the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to General Synod 1995 of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

I. MANDATE – OVERVIEW OF ACTIVITIES

A. Mandate from Synod Lincoln 1992

General Synod Lincoln 1992 decided to continue the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with the specific mandate as recorded in the Acts, Article 72:

1. to maintain the contact with the OPC, according to the rules for “Ecclesiastical Contact” as determined by Synod Coaldale 1977, and to request comment on the rules of ecclesiastical fellowship to determine whether there are presently acceptable.
2. to continue the discussion of divergencies which are considered to be impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship, and to see whether these divergencies stem from ecclesiological and/or historical differences (as outlined [in the considerations] IV, A3 vi . . .), with the purpose of having these impediments removed.
3. to respond to the question of Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations to the problem of receiving congregations and ministers that have been or are members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as outlined under Considerations IV, A2a, b, and c.
4. to continue to discuss and evaluate the current third party relationships of the OPC.
5. to inform the OPC that the matters which still require resolution for the establishment of full ecclesiastical fellowship are (see [Consideration] IV, A3v):
 - a. the matter of confessional membership
 - b. the matter of supervision of the Lord's table, and
 - c. the matter of the relationship with the Christian Reformed Church,
6. to serve the churches with regular reports of the work of the Committee and to serve General Synod 1995 with a report, to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.

B. Membership of the Committee

Synod Lincoln 1992 appointed the following brothers to the Committee: Revs. D.G.J. Agema (convener) (since 1989), P.G. Feenstra (since 1992), Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes (since 1992), brs. G.J. Nordeman (since 1989), T.M.P. Vanderven (since 1986) (Synod Lincoln 1992, Acts Art. 124).

C. Overview of the Committee's Activities

Since Synod Lincoln 1992 the Committee has met 15 times; two combined meetings were held with the OPC's Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR). All minutes of the meetings of our Committee, outgoing and incoming correspondence, and reports are on file in the archives of the Committee and are available to Synod.

1. Regarding Mandate 1:

The Committee has maintained contact with the OPC by means of correspondence with and a visit to the General Assemblies (see section II.A), and by means of correspondence and meetings with the CEIR (see section II.B). We solicited from the CEIR comments regarding the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship (see section II.B.2.a.).

2. Regarding Mandate 2 & 5:

The Committee informed CEIR about three matters which still require resolution for the establishment of full ecclesiastical fellowship. However, we were not able to complete these mandates with regards to the matters of confessional membership and the supervision of the Lord's Supper (see section II.B.2.b).

The discussions at the joint meetings with the CEIR included questions regarding the relationship of the OPC with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) in its discussions with the CEIR. We noted with gratitude the strong stand taken by the OPC in particular against the CRCNA's view of the offices and homosexuality. This matter will be on the agenda of the 62nd General Assembly (1995) (see section II.B.2.d; II.B.3.d.), and we are awaiting the outcome.

3. Regarding Mandate 3:

The Committee explained to CEIR Synod Lincoln 1992's recommendations regarding the procedure for receiving of congregations and ministers into the federation (see section II.B.2.c.)

4. Regarding Mandate 4:

The current third party relationships of the OPC received some discussion (see section II.B.2.d.), but we were not able to evaluate these relationships any further at this point.

5. Regarding Mandate 6:

A report of the activities of the Committee was published in *Clarion* (see section II.D.). The present report was submitted to the churches during February 1995.

II. ACTIVITIES SINCE SYNOD LINCOLN 1992

A. General Assemblies of the OPC

Between November 1992 and December 1994, two General Assemblies were held. The brs. Rev. P.G. Feenstra and Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes attended the 60th General Assembly (1993) at Geneva College, Pittsburg, PA. We were unable to send a delegation to the 61st General Assembly (1994), held at Harvey Cedars, NJ, and sent a letter of Christian greetings.

We note that over the past number of years we have been able to attend General Assemblies approximately every other year.

B. Meetings and Correspondence with CEIR

The CEIR consists of nine members, and is charged by the OPC's General Assemblies to maintain worldwide ecumenical contacts on its behalf. Contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches is only a part of CEIR's mandate. In order to facilitate matters, CEIR has established a number of subcommittees, although all its members have access to and are involved in all matters before the full committee. Further, the members of the CEIR are drawn from across North America; it is our understanding that they meet as a full committee only twice every year.

Considering these limitations, we are pleased to report that we were able to arrange one full-day meeting and one half-day meeting since Synod Lincoln 1992. A meeting scheduled for January 1994 had to be cancelled due to inclement weather.

Our Committee found it nearly impossible to fulfil its mandate because of the CEIR's reaction to the decision of Synod Lincoln 1992 to extend a relationship

of ecclesiastical fellowship to the PCK and the FCS. The brothers of the OPC considered this of such concern that they could not continue the planned discussions. Much of our efforts were directed towards re-opening communication so that the three divergencies could be discussed and hopefully resolved. Since this matter is of such crucial importance, we include extensive quotations (rather than summaries) from the various letters.

1. Letter from CEIR – March 3, 1993

In this letter, CEIR reacted to our request for a further meeting following Synod Lincoln 1992. In its letter, CEIR commented on the new rules for ecclesiastical fellowship. Further, in the fourth section of CEIR's letter it was noted that the mandate given to our Committee largely concerned the tensions between our two federations and the perceived barriers to a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. The letter continues to make the following observations:

...

4.1. Concerning these points we make the following observations:

- 1) *Synod Lincoln 1992's adoption of recommendation B. (Article 72, pp. 14-15) is a most welcome and constructive action. We understand it to the effect that, in view of the actions of past synods, the only known "divergencies" that remain as "impediments for ecclesiastical fellowship" are the three listed in point 5. of your mandate.*
- 2) *In view of point 3. of your mandate, we believe it proper for us to make our still unresolved concerns about Blue Bell and Laurel a priority in our mutual discussions, particular our concern about the ecclesiastical order (or lack thereof) which makes it possible for these congregations to have been received in the manner they were.*

We agree fully with the observation of Synod in this respect that "the Canadian Reformed Churches have no uniform procedure in place" – that is just the problem. But we fail to see how the reason that Synod appends, "because the present relationship of "ecclesiastical contact" is of a temporary nature" (IV, A, 2, a; p. 8), provides an adequate or even a valid justification, particularly when Synod has reaffirmed its recognition of the OPC as "true church" (IV, A, 2, c; p. 10).

- 3) *Much time at our meeting was spent pondering the actions of Synod concerning the Presbyterian Church in Korea, Kosin (PCK) and the Free Church of Scotland (FCS). If accurately reported in CLARION (p. 561), Synod, in the light of the recommendations of by the CRCA, has accepted an offer of ecclesiastical fellowship with the PCK and has initiated an offer of ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCS.*

These actions have left us thoroughly perplexed. Although we have not inquired officially, we know from informal contacts with ministers in both those churches, whose reliability we have no reason to doubt, that both the PCK and the FCS have essentially the same position as the OPC in matters of confessional membership and supervision of the Lord's table! Additionally (on a past issue in CanRC-OPC discussions), the FCS tolerates among its members and even among special office bearers a small though diminishing number of Freemasons.

Brothers, we are bound to ask you: Are the CanRC dealing fairly and evenhandedly with the OPC? Are you not applying a double standard in your interchurch dealings? Why is the OPC apparently being held to more rigorous and more exacting requirements for a relationship of

ecclesiastical fellowship with the CanRC than other churches are? Why are we being subjected to more searching treatment by you than other churches receive? (Why, for instance, is there a separate committee for contact with us?; why is the CCOPC not a subcommittee of the CRCA?)

Such questions, consequently, have left us with the further question about the appropriateness, much less the usefulness, of continuing joint discussions.

4.2. *In the light of the observations and questions in 4.1 especially, we have reached the following decisions:*

- 1) *We request that the first item on the agenda for our proposed meeting on April 15, 1993 be a discussion of why the CanRC are not now prepared, immediately, to offer to the OPC a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship (as you already have to the PCK and FCS)? Why, supposing that the OPC should seek a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship, are the CanRC not ready to grant that request? In other words, why are the stipulated divergencies (the OPC views on confessional membership and supervision of the Lord's table, and its relationship to the CRCNA) impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship? Why can't these differences be discussed within the bonds of such a relationship, according to point a. of your Rules?*
 - 2) *We request that the issue of ecclesiology, which we had previously agreed upon to take up next in our joint meetings, be discussed only as it bears on request 1). Other than that, we believe that further discussions of this issue, including whatever differences exist between us on it, ought not to be made a precondition for ecclesiastical fellowship but is appropriate within that relationship.*
 - 3) *We request that from now on the situation of Blue Bell and Laurel be discussed as they bear on request 1); in other words, as they may constitute an impediment to a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship.*
5. *Brothers, our discussions have reached a critical point. But we desire that the present impasse be resolved and we hope that our joint discussions can still have a constructive future for both our churches, and so be honoring, in some measure perhaps, to the great Head and King of the church.*

...

2. Rochester – April 15, 1993

This was the first meeting with CEIR after Synod Lincoln 1992. CEIR's letter of March 3 formed the most important part of the agenda. We attempted to structure the discussion as closely as possible to the mandate given to our Committee by Synod Lincoln 1992.

a. *Regarding the proposed rules for ecclesiastical fellowship:*

The term "broadest assemblies" (rule #2) is unknown to the OPC, and they suggested the term "major." Since the reference is to the General Synod and the General Assembly it was suggested that for clarity's sake these terms could well be used.

The use of the phrase "consult . . . when entering" in rule #3 was questioned, suggesting that contact ought to be established *before* entering into a new relation with third parties. The OPC preferred: "inform . . . when contemplating." It was pointed out that this point was discussed at Synod (Article 50, II (Observations, E); III (Considerations, C)).

The CEIR considered the term "in principle" in rule #5 rather vague. In our answer we pointed to Synod's Consideration which led to this formulation: "By a Synod decision the pulpits are "in principle" opened; the actual opening is a matter of an invitation by a local church." (Article 50,III,D).

It was pointed out that the term "church" as used in this set of rules is ambiguous. At times it seems to refer to the whole federation, at other times only to the local congregation. CEIR suggested that this be clarified.

In their letter of March 3, 1993, the CEIR stated: "3.2. It is our understanding that the Rules are bilateral, that is, in the case of the OPC they would apply only to our relationship with your Churches and not to our relationship with other churches." This understanding was confirmed by the CCOPC, although it was noted that ideally speaking churches would use the same set of rules for third party relationships.

- b. *Re Synod Lincoln 1992 Mandate C.2 and C.5.: "To continue the discussion of the divergencies . . . "*

The CEIR raised the question why these divergencies remain impediments with respect to the OPC and why these divergencies do not form impediments with respect to the FCS and the PCK; these two federations have the same practices as the OPC has. Why is the OPC treated in a different way? Are the CanRC dealing fairly and evenhandedly with the OPC?

Our response centred on two points: (a) the current mandate ought to be considered within the historical context of the contact between the OPC and the CanRC; and (b) indeed, the two sets of decisions are not on the same level and this needs to be resolved by Synod. However, there are different backgrounds at play here which should be distinguished, and are not to be used to remove the need for a continued discussion of the issues identified by Synod.

The CEIR's position remained that these issues cannot be discussed without bringing in the seemingly contradictory actions of the CanRC. The question remained – aside from the OPC's relation with the CRCNA – whether the OPC is acceptable to the CanRC and whether our differences can be tolerated and discussable within this relationship. CEIR found it difficult, at this point, to clearly determine what needs to be resolved as a result of a discussion on ecclesiology.

- c. *Regarding Synod Lincoln 1992 Mandate C.3: the receiving of OPC congregations within the Federation of CanRC.*

Appreciation was expressed for the frank comments which Synod Lincoln 1992 made in Article 72. IV (Considerations), A, 2, in particular paragraph vi which speaks of the need for "open discussion with the ecclesiastical assemblies involved." The OPC remained concerned that in a number of instances the relation between our two federations is rather strained. Reference was made to the relation with Blue Bell and Laurel and the situation in Denver. CEIR pointed out that the main thrust of the OPC's concerns in these matters regard good ecclesiastical order.

- d. *Regarding Synod Lincoln 1992 Mandate C.4: third party relations.*

The OPC believes it to be its responsibility to warn and admonish the CRCNA as long as possible, while the CanRC point out that the urgency of the issues which separate us from the CRCNA make fellowship

impossible. In the discussion the differences between the two respective approaches were highlighted. We were informed that the OPC is heading towards an "hour of decision": concerns regarding the CRCNA have been and will be raised before the OPC's General Assembly.

Regarding the PCA, it is noted that the OPC's relationship is at a critical juncture with a possible termination of the contact unless the PCA is willing to discuss concerns raised by the OPC.

It is noted that the OPC has decided to apply for membership with the ICRC and that the CanRC will support this application.

The Rochester meeting resulted in a decision to continue the discussion between our two committees, and to focus on this topic: Does a Biblical ecclesiology require that the differences (as defined in the Acts of Synod Lincoln 1992, Article 72) must be resolved before a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship can be established?

3. An exchange of letters

An exchange of letters followed this meeting which eventually changed the direction determined at the Rochester meeting. Instead of continuing as agreed, the OPC placed before us their grievances in reaction to Synod Lincoln 1992's decisions regarding the PCK and the FCS, and confronted us with a charge of double standards in our ecumenical relationships.

a. From CEIR – July 13, 1993

...

In further reflection, particularly considering the overall situation resulting from actions taken by your General Synod last November, the full committee decided that rather than for us to prepare a position paper at this time, it would be appropriate for us, in light of that situation, to request you to prepare a paper addressing the question formulated at the close of our April 15th meeting . . .

If that paper could be sent to us sufficiently in advance of our next meeting, we could prepare a written response. Otherwise, your paper could be the basis for discussion at that meeting.

...

b. Further correspondence resulted in planning a meeting for January 1994 in Philadelphia. We responded to CEIR's letter of July 13, 1993 as follows (Letter to CEIR, December 2, 1993):

...

We discussed your letters in our meetings of October 13 and November 25 since we were somewhat disappointed by the change you propose. You write on July 13, "On further reflection, particularly considering the overall situation resulting from the actions taken by your General Synod last November, the full committee decided that rather than for us to prepare a position paper at this time, it would be appropriate for us, in the light of that situation, to request you to prepare a paper addressing the question formulated at the close of our April 15 meeting." As far as we are concerned, this is a change to the arrangements which we arrived at on April 15. At that time we were encouraged by your agreement that both of our committees would simultaneously deal with that question so that we may arrive at a good understanding of the respective positions. We do hope that the approach suggested will indeed help us reach the results desired by

our Synod (see Acts of Synod Lincoln 1992, Article 72), that is, the realization of the way to ecclesiastical fellowship.

We have begun to develop a response to the April 15 question and we hope(d) that your efforts would help to complement ours, rather than batting the issue back and forth. It is our sincere desire to resolve the issues that stand yet between us so that the way to ecclesiastical fellowship may be realized. That will require your cooperation so that we can report to our next Synod truly and fully your position on these remaining issues and make recommendations accordingly.

...

We began to study the following topics: church government, confessional membership, Calvin's view of the church, the history of relationships with foreign churches, and the implications of Art. 50 of the CO.

CEIR responded to our letter of December 2, 1993, restating their problem with the direction of the discussions which we desired.

- c. From CEIR – December 16, 1993

...

Apart from other considerations, it will not be possible for us at this late stage to prepare any sort of position paper/statement, other than the fourth paragraph [third paragraph quoted here] of this letter, for our meeting next month.

We do understand the disappointment you express in this letter. Also, we recognize that we (=our full committee) have changed the arrangements arrived at last April. What we must ask you to bear in mind, however, is that, unlike your committee's relationship to your General Synod, we do not have a mandate directly from our General Assembly. Our work is that of a subcommittee, under the oversight of and subject to review by the committee as a whole. We regret if that was not made clear to you at our April 15th meeting.

We believe that it will be best at this point for you to present a response to the April 15 question, keeping in mind that the issues and questions raised in 4.1.3) and 4.2.1) and 2) of our March 3, 1993 letter to you are still unresolved for us. From our side we remain baffled as to how to address the question. Even if we were to be persuaded that a biblical ecclesiology requires that the matter in parentheses have to be resolved as a condition for ecclesiastical fellowship, we would still be at a loss to explain on what ecclesiological principles two of these matters can be a barrier to such a relationship with some churches but not with others.

...

Unfortunately, the meeting at Philadelphia, PA, scheduled for January 1994 did not take place. A severe winter storm forced us to return to Canada before we reached our destination. The CEIR was able to meet, and as part of their agenda discussed the current state of affairs of the relationship with the CanRC. Subsequently, we received further correspondence regarding CEIR's views on the current state of our relationships.

- d. From CEIR – January 21 1994 (another copy of this letter was received February 21 over the signature of Rev. J.R. Hilbelink):

Dear Brothers,

During the course of our meetings, January 18-21, we discussed the relationship between our two Churches. This letter was approved by

the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations at that meeting.

We want to inform you of the result of those deliberations, especially concerning continuing contact between our two committees and how such future contacts may be truly meaningful and productive. We seek your response and any advice you may have for us.

First, we sincerely apologize for backing away from the agreement reached with you by our subcommittee at the April 15, 1993 meeting. We recognize your understandable concern and the disappointment you have expressed about this change of mind on our part. Again we ask your forgiveness for our inconsistency.

Increasingly since last April we have come to recognize that a mistake was made in the agreement reached at the meeting. We believe, however, that an even greater mistake would be made not to recognize that mistake and seek to rectify it. Brothers, please try to see the situation as we see it. Last April's basis for continuing discussions between us is in the form of a general, in these questions (Does a biblical ecclesiology require that these differences [confessional membership, fencing the Lord's table, third-party relationships] have to be resolved before a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship can be established?). But this is a question that, on the first two of the differences specified, the Canadian Reformed Churches currently give two, flatly opposing answers: "yes" to the OPC. "no" to the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin).

How can we continue discussion under these conditions? In the words of our liaison's letter of December 16, 1993,

From our side we remain baffled as to how to address the question . . . [W]e [are] at a loss to explain on what ecclesiological principles two of those matters can be a barrier to such a relationship with some churches but not with others.

It appears to us that the issue that needs to be addressed and resolved, before anything else can be discussed between us, is the Canadian Reformed Churches' use of a double standard in this matter.

Brothers, in the light of the actions of your last General Synod, we have to question the usefulness and even the ecclesiastical appropriateness of continuing ongoing discussion for the present. We believe that your Committee has been put in an impossible situation by your Synod, a situation, we recognize, that can be addressed and rectified only by your next General Synod. But until such action is taken, there seems to be little point to further discussions between us.

On the matter of our relationship with the CRCNA, we can report that we have a subcommittee at work with the mandate "to study the recent history of the CRCNA which would trace doctrinal/ethical developments in that church to serve to draw up grounds that would be appropriate for severing of the relationship with the CRCNA." We hope to report on this matter to our next General Assembly.

We are concerned to express clearly to you our deep regret at the latest turn the relationship between us has taken. We hope that this impasse can be removed so that we may yet proceed as Churches to a harmonious relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship.

We also want to make clear that it is not the case that the OPC is now refusing to talk with the CCOPC. But we need to be shown how we can talk constructively under the shadow of the double standard applied to us.

We are willing to meet with you to discuss the contents of this letter, and we have appointed representatives who would be willing to meet with you for that eventuality.

...

- e. We responded in our letter of May 16, 1994:

...

1. *We have discussed your letter of February 21, 1994, and we understand you to say that at this time there is little point for further discussions between our two committees because in your opinion the Canadian Reformed Churches operate with a "double standard."*
2. *In our Rochester meeting (April 1993) we indicated that we could understand your questions, but we also tried to explain the actions of our most recent Synod which caused your charge against us (see our Press Release attached). Obviously, this explanation did not satisfy you.*
3. *Seeing the seriousness of the charge involved, we would like to receive more clarification on this point. Some of the questions that came to our mind include: Are, indeed, the histories of the FCS, the PCK and the OPC the same? Are their practices the same? Does the fact that we deal differently with different churches necessarily mean that we apply a double standard? Could you provide us with proof that, unjustifiably, we deal differently with the OPC than with the FCS and the PCK?*
4. *Our Synod expressed the desire to come to unity with you – I quote from the Acts of General Synod Lincoln 1992, p. 55: Synod expresses the fervent wish that these matters may be resolved so that the way to ecclesiastical fellowship, in accordance with the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, may be realized. In that spirit, we, from our side, would still like to meet with you to seek for ways to resolve the remaining issues.*

...

As a result of this correspondence, a further meeting between our Committee and a subcommittee of CEIR was scheduled for September 27, 1994 in Grand Island, New York.

4. Grand Island – September 27, 1994

On the agenda were the CEIR letter of January 21, 1994, and the CCOPC letter of May 16. The focal point of the discussion was the OPC's charge of 'double standard' since they feel that the practices of the FCS and the PCK are sufficiently similar to those of the OPC. Consequently, the discussion centred on the question whether this is, indeed, so.

We responded that our contacts with the FCS and the PCK cannot be compared in a simplistic manner to the contacts with the OPC. On the basis of information received by Synod Lincoln 1992 we showed that we have reasons to believe that the practices of the FCS with respect the supervision of the Lord's Supper and confessional membership are dissimilar from those

of the OPC. We found it more difficult to show the same for the PCK. CEIR contested this assertion, and we concluded that more evidence regarding the respective practices of guests at the Lord's Supper should be provided by both sides. Further discussion is necessary to clarify the respective understanding of the role of the confessional statements.

This meeting showed that continued discussions between our respective committees is fruitful and constructive. There is general agreement that we understand each other's position and reactions much better. With thankfulness it is noted that the discussions of that morning took place in good harmony. The brothers of the OPC will report to the full CEIR (probably during the Fall 1994), while the CCOPC will prepare a report for Synod 1995.

C. Communications

1. We received several reports from Classis Alberta-Manitoba regarding their contact with the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC. These have been filed for information.
2. Various reports were received regarding the admission of the American Reformed Church at Denver, CO, following the various appeals at Classes and Regional Synods West.
3. Correspondence was received regarding the discussions between the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic of the OPC and the church at Laurel, MD.
4. Two requests were received for archival materials regarding the relationship between the OPC and the Canadian Reformed Churches.

D. Press Releases and Reports

1. A report of the joint meeting with a subcommittee of CEIR at Rochester, NY (April 15, 1993), as well as of the visit of Rev. P.G. Feenstra and Dr. N.H. Gootjes to the 60th General Assembly of the OPC was published in the *Clarion* 43(2), January 28, 1994.

III. DISCUSSION & EVALUATION

A.1. We need first to evaluate the present state of affairs between the OPC and the CanRC. Synod Coaldale 1977 decided to recognize the OPC as a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ as confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession (*Acts 1977*, Art. 91, II, p. 41). This decision has been appealed over the years, but subsequent Synods have upheld it, including the last Synod Lincoln 1992 (*Acts 1992*, Art. 72, IV, B, 1, p. 53).

On the basis of our contact since 1992, we gratefully acknowledge that the OPC has shown continued commitment to be faithful to the Scriptures and to defend the reformed heritage. We also note the fact that in 1993 the OPC was admitted as a member of the ICRC, and that it continues to warn the CRCNA. We are, therefore, of the opinion that the recognition of the OPC as true church in the confessional sense of BC, Articles 27-29 should be maintained.

During the period since 1977 the relationship between the OPC and the CanRC was never a full sisterchurch relationship. Synod Coaldale 1977 approved a temporary relationship of ecclesiastical contact, as distinct from a relationship of full correspondence (*Acts 1977*, Art. 92, III, p. 42). Within this context a number of divergencies was discussed. Synod Lincoln 1992 concluded that the divergencies evaluated in 1971 and 1986 have been sufficiently discussed to confirm that these are not impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC, but may be discussed within the framework of church unity (*Acts 1992*, Art. 72, V, B, p. 55).

A.2. Synod Lincoln 1992 charged the Committee for Contact with the OPC to continue the discussion of the divergencies which are considered to be impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship, and to see whether these divergencies stem from ecclesiological and/or historical differences, with the purpose of having these impediments removed. We attempted to engage in such discussion, but we did not get very far. The reaction of the CEIR to the decisions of Synod Lincoln 1992 were such that further discussion of the outstanding issues could not proceed. This has been detailed in section II above.

Reflecting on this situation, we note that our discussions now take place within a different framework from what was in place when the contact with the OPC began. Two changes have contributed to this different situation. First, there is a change in our concept of foreign relations. We used to speak of "full correspondence"; now we speak of "ecclesiastical fellowship." The rules determining inter-church relations have been changed by Synod Lincoln 1992 (*Acts 1992*, Art. 50, IV, B, p. 33). We discussed these rules with CEIR (see II.B.2.a. above), and we can report that CEIR received these rules favourably. Second, Synod Lincoln 1992 decided to accept the request for ecclesiastical fellowship from the Presbyterian Church of Korea (*Acts 1992*, Art. 111, IV, p. 73), and to offer this relation also to the Free Church of Scotland (*Acts 1992*, Art. 128, IV, p. 93).

B.1 Within the limited context of the relationship with the OPC we could not come to a definite conclusion regarding the remaining three divergencies: the matters of confessional membership and admission of guests to the Lord's Table, and the relationship of the OPC with the CRCNA. The first two divergencies are to be distinguished from the third.

With respect to the first two divergencies we outline two directions, each of which has received discussion within our committee, and received attention in some form in recent publications as well: (a) to continue the discussions regarding the divergencies as a precondition for ecclesiastical fellowship, and (b) to offer the OPC a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship, and discuss these divergencies within such a relationship.

a. *Re: To continue the discussions with the OPC regarding the divergencies as a precondition for ecclesiastical fellowship.*

This direction proceeds from the premise that the divergencies identified by previous Synods involve confessional matters. Synod Lincoln 1992 considered the following (IV.A.e.i, ii, p. 50).

Gratitude may be expressed for the progress made in the taking away of misunderstandings and achieving clarification of some parts of the discussions regarding (i) "the fencing of the Lord's table" and (ii) "confessional membership."

i. It appears, in view of the OPC's ongoing internal deliberation [...] that there is still reason to continue the discussion on this point. It is hoped 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.

- ii *With respect to "confessional membership" the different situations in the OPC and the Canadian Reformed Churches must be taken into account as resulting in various practices [...]. 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 as summarized in the confessions (standards) of the churches. This means that all members are bound by the Word of God in the unity of faith as confessed in the accepted standards.*

These matters have not been resolved as yet, and no agreement as required by Synod has been achieved. To proceed with establishing a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship without resolving these issues first would not take seriously the view that these are confessional matters; these are not mere differences in emphasis on certain points. In addition, leaving the debated practices unresolved might affect our churches adversely. If these matters cannot be resolved, the relationship between the CanRC and the OPC will have to be reevaluated and possibly terminated.

- b. *Re: To offer the OPC a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship, and discuss any divergencies within such a relationship.*

Apparently two divergencies identified by Synod Lincoln 1992, namely the supervision of the Lord's Supper and confessional membership, formed no impediments for Synod to offer a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship to the PCK and FCS. The OPC claims that their practices are comparable to those of the PCK and the FCS. The OPC has argued that the divergencies could well be discussed within a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. Indeed, the purpose of the relationship with the OPC is not a merger, resulting in one federation of churches, but a fellowship in which both federations maintain their own identity and practices. Within such a relationship there is ample opportunity for mutual admonition and edification. Our continued contact has shown that there is more agreement than disagreement between our two federations.

This direction takes into account that since Synod Lincoln 1992, the nature of our relationships with churches abroad has changed from a "sisterchurch" relationship to a "relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship." The PCK and the FCS could be recognized on the basis of the new Rules of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Up until that time, the CanRC had contact only with those churches who have the same confessions, church order, practices, and history. This perception of a "sister church relation" was the reason for the discussions of identified divergencies in doctrine and practice. To now not extend a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship would isolate our churches from churches of Presbyterian background, and go contrary to our ecumenical calling as churches.

- c. Our Committee is acutely aware that neither one nor the other solution will lay the matter to rest within the churches. Both directions have valid arguments in favour which ought to be taken seriously; yet both solutions have drawbacks which call us to proceed carefully. Further, it is important that we include the third divergency in our deliberations as well.

- B.2 The third divergency, the contact between the CRCNA and the OPC, did not prevent Synod Coaldale 1977 from declaring the OPC a true church. Subsequent synods did not see the continuing contact with the CRCNA as a sufficient reason to rescind the declaration of true church. At the same time, several synods since 1977 have expressed that this contact with the CRCNA remains a great concern, making full ecclesiastical unity impossible. Synod Lincoln 1992 stated:

It is regrettable that the OPC did not sever its relationship with the CRCNA as yet. The relationship becomes an increasing concern in the process of establishing ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC. At the same time, the OPC's warnings directed at the CRCNA must be thankfully noted (Article 72, IV, A, c).

Recent developments in the relationship between the OPC and the CRCNA do perhaps lessen this concern, but do not, as yet, remove it. From the beginning, our churches have maintained that they could not join with the CRCNA; in fact, we may say that the legitimacy of the CanRC is related to this issue. Efforts to establish ecclesiastical contact were thwarted (see the Appeals of 1964 and 1977 sent to the CRCNA). In past discussions with the CEIR (in particular at our meeting in Burlington 1988) we have explained in detail why the CanRC could not (and we believe today: cannot) establish an ecclesiastical relation with the CRCNA. The OPC's own stand in the REC against the GKN, and within the NAPARC against the CRCNA in fact underscore our views.

It must be gratefully acknowledged the OPC has shown an earnest desire to remain faithful in their contacts with the CRCNA. Most recently this was the case at the 1994 General Assembly which discussed at length the relationship of the OPC with the CRCNA. The OPC delegates were instructed to place before representatives of the CRCNA the OPC's concerns in several matters, including its toleration of the ordination of women and "its toleration of the unbiblical aspects of CRCNA statements concerning homosexuality" (*New Horizons*, August/September 1994). Further, the question of severing the fraternal relation with the CRCNA has been placed on the agenda of the 1995 General Assembly. However, these developments do not take away our concerns. We recommend that the severing of this relationship is necessary before the OPC and the CanRC can enter in a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. This recommendation is consistent with our own history and with the present situation.

- B.3** When we consider these things all together, we must come to the conclusion that there is little point in further discussion of divergencies as such. Of the three remaining divergencies, we conclude that both sides have a clear understanding with regards to the respective positions on the matters of confessional membership and the admission of guests to the Lord's Table. We note that at least one of the divergencies (admission of guests to the Lord's Table) was included in the report of the ICRC Committee on Theological Affirmation, presented at its 1993 meeting at Zwolle, the Netherlands. This report concludes under subheading *Intercommunion* that *we can say that members of churches that are recognized as true churches should be allowed to participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, upon valid attestation or certification.* The OPC delegates present at this meeting did not object to this conclusion. We also note that this ICRC report places the discussion of these matters against a background of ecclesiology. This report concluded that there is much agreement between the views of those who adhere to the Westminster Confession and those who adhere to the Belgic Confession.

As reported in section II above, our most recent meeting in Grand Island took place in good harmony and showed that continued discussions between our two committees can, indeed, be fruitful and constructive. We are confident that the full CEIR can endorse the understandings arrived at in this meeting, thus providing us with a starting point for further discussion.

We recommend that Synod Abbotsford 1995 provides a mandate which will allow the protracted discussions between the CanRC and the OPC to be

concluded, as was the desire of Synod Lincoln 1992 (*Acts 1992*, Art. 72, V, p. 55). The focused statements provided by Synod Lincoln 1992 (*Acts 1992*, Art. 72.IV.A.1.e.i, ii, p. 50) form a most useful guideline. We believe that this recommendation is in harmony with our mandate and with the history of the contact with the OPC, and sufficiently takes into account the concerns expressed by CEIR (see section II above).

- C. Our committee has gained some sympathy for the OPC complaint that we are perceived to lack even-handedness in our dealings with Presbyterian churches. Our actions can be explained from the past because our contact with the OPC has a different history from our contact with other Presbyterian churches. The result has been, however, that decisions about contacts with other Presbyterian churches have been made independently from decisions concerning the contact with the OPC. Such confusion could be prevented in the future by combining the work of the Committee for Contact with the OPC and the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad. By combining the two committees, a much more effective platform for discussion and considerations will have been created. Further, the goal of the contact between the CanRC and the OPC is ecclesiastical fellowship according to the adopted rules. This belongs to the mandate of the CRCA.

We recommend that Synod Abbotsford 1995 combine the Committee for Contact with the OPC (CCOPC) and the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA).

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends that General Synod 1995 of the Canadian Reformed Churches decide:

- A. to gratefully acknowledge the commitment of the OPC to be faithful to the Scriptures and to defend the reformed heritage.
- B. to consider the comments of CEIR on the rules of ecclesiastical fellowship.
- C. to use the statement 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.
- D. to note with gratitude the OPC's continued warnings against the unscriptural course taken by the Christian Reformed Church in North America, and to advise the OPC that the severing of this relationship is necessary before we can enter into a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with them.
- E. to combine the work of the Committee for Contact with the OPC with that of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad.

Respectfully submitted,
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