

APPENDIX II

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR CONTACT WITH THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH TO GENERAL SYNOD 1992 OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

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1. MANDATE — COMMITTEE — OVERVIEW

1.1 Mandate from Synod 1989

General Synod 1989 decided to continue the committee for Contact with the OPC, with the specific mandate as recorded in the Acts, Article 94:

- a. to maintain the contact with the OPC, taking into account the rules for Ecclesiastical Contact, with the understanding that the temporary relationship of "ecclesiastical contact" is designed to come to a full sister church relationship in the unity of the true faith and is not intended to continue indefinitely, or become a relationship of permanent status.
- b. to include in the "continued discussions" on "issues of mutual concern" (Synod 1977, Acts, p.42) the statement on Biblical Principles of Church Unity.
- c. to be diligent to continue the discussion on and the evaluation of the divergencies such as the doctrine of the covenant, visible and invisible church, the assurance of faith, the observance of the law, the fencing of the Lord's Table, confessional membership, church-political differences, and the contact with the CRC.
- d. to coordinate the discussion of the divergencies with the discussion concerning the Biblical principles on the unity of the church.
- e. to serve the following General Synod with a report to be sent to the churches at least 6 months before the beginning of this Synod.

- f. to keep the churches informed concerning its activities by means of interim reports and press releases.

1.2 Membership of the Committee

- a. Synod 1989 appointed the following brothers to the committee: Revs. R. Aasman, J. Mulder (convener), D.G.J. Agema; brs. G.J. Nordeman and T.M.P. VanderVen.
- b. Dr. N.H. Gootjes was invited to join the committee in the place of Rev. R. Aasman after the latter moved to Edmonton. Rev. P.G. Feenstra was invited to join the committee in the place of Rev. J. Mulder who was forced to retire due to ill health. The Revs. Aasman and Mulder must be thanked for their labours as members of the committee.

1.3 Overview of the Committee's Activities

Since Synod 1989, the committee has met 26 times; three combined meetings were held with the OPC's Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR); one meeting was held with the Ad Hoc committee appointed by Classis Ontario-South of September 1991. All minutes of the meetings of our committee, outgoing and incoming correspondence, and reports are on file in the archives of our committee and are available to Synod.

Regarding Mandate a:

The committee has maintained contact with the OPC by means of correspondence and visits to two General Assemblies (see section 2.1), and during three meetings with the OPC's CEIR (see section 2.2).

Regarding Mandate b:

The committee did not directly include in the discussions the OPC's statement on Biblical Principles of Church Unity (see section 3.3.a).

Regarding Mandate c:

The committee dealt extensively with the fencing of the Lord's Table and confessional membership (see section 3.1). These discussions related directly to the respective understanding of the doctrine of the church, as well as to church-political differences. Also the contact with the CRC was discussed with the CEIR (see section 3.2.a)

Regarding Mandate d:

In our contact with the CEIR we were unable to coordinate the discussion of the divergencies with the statement concerning Biblical Principles of Church Unity (see section 3.3.a).

Regarding Mandate e:

The present report was submitted to the churches during June 1992.

Regarding Mandate f:

Various reports and press releases were published in Clarion (see section 2.4).

1.4 Definitions

In this report the following acronyms are used:

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| CanRC | Canadian Reformed Churches |
| CEIR | Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations |
| CRC | Christian Reformed Church |
| ICRC | International Conference of Reformed Churches |
| NAPARC | North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council |
| OPC | Orthodox Presbyterian Church |
| PCA | Presbyterian Church of America |

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| REC | Reformed Ecumenical Council (was RES: Reformed Ecumenical Synod) |
| RPCNA | Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America |
| WCF | Westminster Confession of Faith |

2. ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNICATIONS SINCE 1989

2.1 General Assemblies of the OPC

- a. Rev. D.J.G. Agema and br. T.M.P. VanderVen visited the 56th General Assembly of the OPC at Beaverfalls in June 1989. The brothers could bring greetings to the OPC, and speak of the mandate of our committee given by Synod 1989. A report of this visit was published in *Clarion* (Vol. 39, No. 3, 1990).
- b. In 1990, the General Assembly of the OPC was held in California. We were unable to send delegates, but conveyed our Christian greetings by letter.
- c. In June 1991, the brs. Rev. P.G. Feenstra and G.J. Nordeman attended the 58th General Assembly at Beaverfalls. Topics of interest included the ICRC, adding the Three Forms of Unity to the OPC's standards, and the fencing of the Lord's Supper. A report was published in *Clarion* (Vol. 40 No. 19, 1991).
- d. An invitation was received for the 59th General Assembly which was held in June 1992 at Beaver Falls, PA. We were unable to send delegates, but conveyed our Christian greetings by letter.

2.2 Meetings 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, while the CanRC have one committee for contact with the OPC and another committee for relation with churches abroad. 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; consequently, 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 two full-day meetings and one half-day meeting since Synod 1989.

a. *Burlington, ON: February 1990*

On the agenda of this meeting were the topics (a) the Fencing of the Lord's Supper, and (b) The OPC's relationship with the Christian Reformed Church. Our committee had prepared study papers on these topics. The CEIR had requested further explanations about our comments on their statement of Biblical Principles of Church Unity.

Based on this meeting, it was decided to publish a *Progress Report on Relations Between the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Canadian Reformed Churches* drawn up mutually by the two committees. This report was published in *Clarion* (Vol. 40, No. 15/16, 1991).

b. *Pittsburgh, PA: November 1991*

Originally, this meeting was scheduled for March, 1991, but due to the changes in our committee (Rev. Aasman's departure and Rev. Mulder's retirement) we requested a later meeting, which was eventually scheduled for November 1991 in the Pittsburgh area.

We prepared two papers for this meeting: (a) Regarding the Fencing of the Lord's Table (a continuation of the previous discussion), and (b) Regarding Confessional Membership.

The CEIR raised concerns about recent developments with the American Reformed Church in Denver. They wondered whether the CanRC were interfering in local OPC matters. We requested pertinent information from the OPC about this matter, and recommended that this complaint be put to us in writing in order for us to deal with it properly.

c. *Philadelphia, PA: March, 1992*

This full-day meeting was a continuation of the Pittsburgh meeting. The OPC responded in writing to our discussion papers.

Also the Denver matter was discussed, and we received the following request (Letter March 21, 1992), signed by CEIR's chairman, Rev. J.P. Galbraith:

I am writing to you, as you suggested that we might, concerning procedures to deal with the question of your receiving congregations and ministers that have been or are members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. In our meeting, you will recall, we discussed the question of your policy in such matters concerning our church. . . . You are aware that the situation that caused us to raise this with you anew was the recent incident in Denver, CO, which in turn brought to mind the earlier Blue Bell problem. We hope that such problems can be avoided in the future and that we can come to agreement on it as brothers in the Lord.

2.3 Communications

a. *Contact with classes.*

We received several reports from Classis Alberta-Manitoba regarding their contact with Presbytery of the Dakotas. These reports provided us with some insight in the contact between our churches at this level.

b. *Denver.*

The American Reformed Church at Denver, CO, left the PCA, but could not in good conscience join the OPC, and therefore pursued affiliation with the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches. Classis Ontario-South of September 1991 informed our committee about this matter and asked for our input. We received a copy of the report of the classical committee, and met with this committee in January, 1992. Eventually Denver's request was referred to Classis Alberta-Manitoba of March 1992, and we also received a copy of the pertinent decision of this classis. Further communication was received from the consistory of the Church at Coaldale and from the American Reformed Church at Denver, CO.

2.4 Press Releases and Reports

Various reports have been published as mandated by Synod:

- (a) General press release (*Clarion* Vol. 40, No. 15/16, 1991);
- (b) Combined report of the 1990 Burlington meeting (*Clarion* Vol. 40, No. 15/16, 1991);
- (c) Reports of the Fifty-Sixth General Assembly (*Clarion* Vol. 39, No. 3, 1990), and the Fifty-Eighth General Assembly (*Clarion* Vol. 40, No. 19, 1991).

3. ISSUES: CONTACT MAINTAINED — DISCUSSIONS CONTINUED

The contact between the CEIR and our committee has been brotherly and frank. The brothers of the OPC expressed their appreciation for the contact with our churches because in all discussions it was evident that together we wished to submit ourselves in all things to the Scriptures as the final authority; we could, indeed, meet over an open Bible. There was willingness to listen to each other

and understand each other's position and background. The use of discussion papers helped both sides to focus more directly on the issues involved, allowing us to concentrate on the core of some of the differences.

3.1 Divergencies

In our discussions at Burlington, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia, we limited ourselves to the issues of the supervision of the Lord's Supper and confessional membership. These issues were chosen because they came out of the difficulties at Blue Bell and Laurel.

a. *Supervision of the Lord's Supper — Fencing the Table*

Our committee prepared a discussion paper on *The Task of the Elders with Respect to the Supervision of the Lord's Supper*. We outlined the task of the elders to keep the table of the Lord holy. They must do this not only verbally, but also by means of discipline, if necessary by not permitting someone to partake. Supervision is exercised over members as well as guests. This task of the elders does not take away or contradict the calling of each member to examine herself or himself (1 Cor.11). We asked some questions from the CEIR arising from the report that served at the 50th General Assembly which dealt with the appeal of Rev. Barry Hofford cum suis. A key point raised was: May we risk abuse of the Lord's Supper, in order not to deny the Supper to those who are joined to Christ and to His church visible? (See Synod 1986, Acts, p.165 for the context of this question.)

In answer, the CEIR referred to pertinent materials in their subordinate standards which indicate that the Table needs to be supervised. They maintained that the difference is not whether we supervise the Table, but how we do this. They wrote,

Notably, our standards do not stipulate a set procedure to be followed by the session. It seems fair to say that, so far as good order and spiritual welfare are concerned, the Supper is adequately fenced by using the form [found in the Directory of Worship, 4, C-2], or an equivalent. That the Supper is to be fenced is mandatory. How that is to take place is, in large part, an adiaphoron; not even the form provided need be used verbatim.

The point of the discussion is the OPC's practice of admitting guests on the basis of a verbal warning. In answer to the question what the wider implications of this practice are for the doctrine of the church, we received this answer,

It is the conviction of the OPC that there are other churches, including non-Reformed churches, that are true churches, and that members in good standing in such churches do, however defectively, make a credible profession of faith in Christ and so ought to be welcomed to his Table in the OPC congregations. There is, after all, only one Christian church (1 Cor.1:13; Eph.4:4), and to that one church, by implication, comes the command to partake of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor.11:26). A controlling conviction of the OPC is that while the Supper must be rigorously exclusive so far as the world is concerned, for the church – subject to the provisions already noted – it must be as inclusive as possible.

We questioned whether the distinction between members and guests does not leave the Table unprotected from unworthy participation. The OPC brothers asked us: Can we deny the Lord's Supper to one who belongs to the covenant people of God?

In the Fall of 1991, we continued the discussion and focused on the extent of the authority of the elders, the supervision of the table by the consistory and individual responsibility, the fencing of the Table in relation to the doctrine of the church, the administration of the sacrament in the local congregation, and the fact that the same standard ought to be used for members as well as for guests. We pointed out that their practice to admit guests only on the basis of a verbal warning is not in agreement with the requirements of the Westminster Confession:

Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament, yet they receive not the thing signified thereby; but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord to their own damnation. Wherefore all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's Table, and can not without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto (emphasis ours) (WCF XXIX.8).

For the better attaining of these ends, the officers of the Church are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season, and by excommunication from the Church, according to the nature of the crime and demerit of the person (WCF XXX.4; emphasis ours).

The discussion centred on two elements. First, the differences between the OPC and the CanRC regarding the supervision of the Lord's Table are said to arise from differences in ecclesiology: the anomaly in the particular treatment of members and guests results from the OPC's desire to acknowledge the larger unity of the visible church. Second, the importance of the verbal warning was emphasized. The OPC suggested that by emphasizing so strongly the tasks of the elders there may seem to be a depreciation of the power of the Word on the part of the CanRC. We stressed that the consistory has the responsibility to fence the table and in executing its mandate must go by observable data. The practice of using attestations was explained in this context. We also pointed out that profaning the Table will affect the whole congregation (HC LD 30, Q&A 82).

In Philadelphia (March 1992), the CEIR gave a written response to our discussion papers. The OPC does not deny the obligation of the elders to discipline by suspending from the Lord's Supper those who are unworthy. According to the OPC, the issue that divides us is not restricted communion, as if the CanRC protect and restrict the Table, while the OPC does not do so; rather the focal issue is the status and treatment of visitors. They wrote,

You point to what you consider to be an anomaly in our practice, because in coming to the Table in OP churches, members of the local congregation are subject to much more stringent supervision and discipline by that local session than visitors. We feel the weight of your observation; visitors and members are treated differently, so far as the oversight of the session is concerned. But our concern is for what we consider a true anomaly: that the visitors for whom Christ died and who belong to his church (visible as well as invisible) be kept from this gathering of the church around the one Table of the Lord. We believe that the exclusion of one of Christ's flock is at least as serious as the unworthy intrusion of goats who ignore clearly given admonition and warnings.

And,

It could be said that in this matter the CanRC are concerned for the purity of the church, the OPC for its unity. We believe that you would

join with us in rejecting the false polarity in such a statement. The unity and purity of the church are inseparable; they are functions of each other. We continue to believe, in the existing ecclesiastical realities of our time, that the range of practice in the OPC is a defensible, though not the only, way to preserve to the honor of Christ the Head and for the maintenance of God's covenant the bond between the purity and unity of the church.

We showed that both quotations bring out a false dilemma. Their reasoning seems to be that it is a lesser sin to profane the Table than to exclude a child of the Lord from the Table. We objected to this reasoning since it is contrary to the Three Forms of Unity, and also to the Westminster Standards. Similarly, although the OPC rightly warns against a false polarity, their position could lead to sacrificing the purity of the Church for the sake of a perceived unity of the Church. We may not play off the one against the other.

b. *Confessional Membership*

This matter was first discussed during our meeting at Pittsburgh (November 1991), where our committee presented a discussion paper on the topic. We compared the Form for the Public Profession of Faith as published in our *Book of Praise* with that published in the OPC's *Directory of Worship*. We asked questions about some of the differences in formulation and pointed out some of the problems associated with a qualified subscription to the confessions. We stressed that we are bound to our confessions because they are a summary of God's Word. The Reformed faith is not one kind among several equally acceptable faiths, but it is the true and complete doctrine of salvation.

In the discussion, the brothers of the CEIR pointed out that those who make public profession in OPC congregations often come from the outside, whereas usually those who make profession of faith in the CanRC are born in Reformed families and brought up in the Reformed faith from early childhood. In the view of the OPC brothers, someone who desires to become a member yet has problems with parts of the confession should be admitted as a member if he is willing to be instructed.

In Philadelphia (March 1992), we could discuss the OPC's written response. First, the differences in wording between the two Forms were explained as a difference in formulation only and not in substance. The expression "the doctrine of the Word of God" as used by the CanRC is not to be considered different from the OPC's "its [the Bible] doctrine of salvation." Second, the liberty given to ministers to adapt some of the questions, we were assured, did not allow a change in substance of the questions, but permits consideration of circumstances. Third, in the OPC's understanding, the phrase "the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures" does not refer to a system hidden somewhere in the Standards, but is identical to or coextensive with them in their entirety.

The difference in practice is that the CanRC ask explicitly for a profession of the Reformed faith, while the OPC requires a credible profession of faith. The brothers of the OPC formulated this difference as follows: *The CanRC are only for one sort of believers, Reformed believers. The OPC is for all believers who are willing to submit to the Reformed teaching and discipline.* Our committee objected to such a dilemma. We maintained that believers who are willing to submit to the Reformed teaching and discipline are Reformed believers, despite differences in the level of understanding.

In our discussion paper we stated that because we confess our faith with the church of all ages we should bind our members to the confessions. The CEIR stated their position in this way:

Precisely because "when we profess our faith we do so in communion with the confessions of the church of all ages and places" [Ecumenical, Lutheran, and perhaps others, as well as Reformed confessions], "the personal and communal aspects of one's profession of faith" do not lead to an unqualified subscription to the confessions of the church (emphasis original).

The following quotation clearly focuses the difference between the CanRC and the OPC. They wrote,

We affirm what you reject – that the church is competent to determine as valid and credible a confession of the Christian faith for communicant membership that is not also in full accord with the church's confession.

The examples used in the discussion were that of those who refused to accept infant baptism or were Arminian in their thinking. Our committee maintained that though we may vary in depth of understanding, we cannot accept variations in the breadth of what we believe. All communicant members are bound to the confession of the church without qualification.

3.2 Third-Party Relationships

a. *Christian Reformed Church*

During the Burlington meeting (March 1990) we pointed out that in the judgment of Synod 1986 the relationship of the OPC with the CRC remains a stumbling block towards reaching full correspondence. In addition, we mentioned that although the OPC was critical concerning the CRC in their discussions with us this criticism did not always reach the CRC itself. We also warned that pulpit exchange with the CRC leaves the OPC pulpits open for the wrong teachings of the CRC.

The brothers of the OPC admitted that they had not always addressed the CRC as they should have. They explained that due to the intense attention given to the REC (RES) and the PCA, this matter had moved somewhat to the background. They promised to take our points to heart.

We are thankful to be able to report that at the 1991 General Synod of the CRC, the delegate of the OPC was quite critical of the course of the CRC which endangered its Reformed heritage. The CEIR reported to the 58th General Assembly that they initiated within NAPARC a proposal calling upon the CRC to reverse its decision regarding women in office. Yet the OPC and the CRC continue to receive each other's delegates at their assemblies or synods, pulpit exchange continues to take place by local option, and there are voices within the OPC which oppose severing ties with the CRC.

b. *Reformed Presbyterian Church of North-America*

The 56th General Assembly of the OPC decided in principle to work towards organic union with the RPCNA. They have concurring synods/assemblies and joint sessions. There are still discussions about the distinctives of the RPCNA, and some points regarding the OPC which prevent union at this time.

c. *Relationship OPC and PCA*

Although the OPC continues to discuss the procedure of uniting with the Presbyterian Church of America, the interest in organic union has

decreased in recent years. In the meantime, a number of OPC sessions and ministers, feeling more comfortable with the practices and “vision” of the PCA, left the former to realign themselves with the latter.

The PCA continues to insist that union must come about by a process of joining and receiving. The PCA was willing to make some accommodations to this procedure and therefore asked CEIR to prepare a statement of stipulations or conditions that would help unite the two churches. CEIR has informed the ministers, sessions and presbyteries of the PCA's action and has asked for their suggestions.

d. *New Relationships of Ecclesiastical Fellowship*

The 58th General Assembly accepted the CEIR's recommendation to cordially invite the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken), the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Free Church of Scotland, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland to enter into a relationship with the OPC.

e. *International Conference of Reformed Churches*

The 58th General Assembly decided to decline the invitation to send an observer to the REC in Greece (1992). Instead, it decided to send observers to the 1993 meeting of the ICRC at Zwolle, the Netherlands. These observers will serve as delegates if and when the OPC is received as a member church.

f. *NAPARC*

The OPC is a member of NAPARC. We refer to this because the OPC's rules for fraternal relationship are the rules adopted in the NAPARC. Churches that enter into ecclesiastical fellowship implement where possible and desirable the following:

- a. exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies;
- b. occasional pulpit fellowship (by local option);
- c. intercommunion (regulated by each session);
- d. joint action in areas of common responsibility;
- e. communication on issues of joint concern;
- f. the exercise of mutual concern and admonition with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian unity.

3.3 Issues from the General Assemblies

a. *Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church*

Synod 1989 mandated our committee to incorporate this statement of the OPC in our discussions. We found this difficult to do, though the doctrine of the Church was an important part of our discussions.

The statement Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church was prepared by the OPC with a view to their contact with the PCA. The OPC asked for further input, and this was given in the January 1989 meeting in Burlington, and the OPC took note of our comments. Since the prospect of joining and receiving of these two churches is at this moment not very likely, this statement is not as much in the foreground as before. Its value is found in the fact that it summarizes the principles which guide the OPC also in its contact with us. The OPC sees as ultimate goal of all ecclesiastical contact the coming together in one worldwide Reformed/Presbyterian church.

b. *Committees Appointed*

The 58th General Assembly appointed two committees which are of importance for our contact. A committee was appointed to examine the method

of admission of guests to the Lord's Supper; this committee will report to the 60th General Assembly (1993). A second committee was appointed to study the desirability and the feasibility of the OPC adding the Three Forms of Unity to its present confessional standards and of establishing a common Presbyterian and Reformed church order so as to provide a basis for unity into one church body of all those who are committed to one faith.

4. EVALUATION

Thankfully we can conclude that, as a whole, work in this committee has been rewarding. From both sides we want to be faithful to the Scriptures in obedience to the Head of the Church. Both sides want to defend the Reformed heritage, and there is a mutual desire to continue working towards a closer relationship in recognition of the command of our LORD.

This is not to say that the relationship was always smooth. First, there are the geographic distances which hamper easy communication and quick answers to questions. Second, the OPC's approach to the contact differs markedly from that of the CanRC. In our opinion, the OPC seeks to maintain fraternal relations between our churches, and uses the contact to discuss matters of common interest. Our mandate charges us with the continued discussion of issues of mutual concern in the hope of resolving the divergencies which prevent a closer relationship between our churches. Third, the confusion, even contradiction, within our own churches regarding our relationship with the OPC caused tension at our joint meetings with the CEIR.

4.1 Progress of Relationship

Synod 1989 added to the mandate of our committee the following stipulation:

with the understanding that the temporary relationship of "ecclesiastical contact" is designed to come to full sister church relationship in the unity of the true faith and is not intended to continue indefinitely, or become a relationship of permanent status (Synod 1989, Acts, Article 94, a).

The committee has tried to fulfill this part of the mandate in two ways. First, we have conveyed this sentiment to the OPC at the General Assembly level. Second, we have tried to keep this in mind in our discussions. We asked for written answers in the hope that this will bring the mutual discussions further.

a. Doctrinal Divergencies

In the matters discussed – the Fencing of the Lord's Supper and Confessional Membership – some misunderstandings have been taken away, some points have been clarified, but differences remain. Whether these divergencies stem from ecclesiological and/or historical differences continues to be a part of the discussion. Both the CEIR and our committee wish to pursue this.

In terms of the committee's mandate, little progress has been made towards resolving these issues. The OPC remains firm in allowing the practice of admitting guests from non sister churches to partake in the Supper on the basis of an oral warning. They maintain that a credible profession need not be a confession of the Reformed faith. In view of the above, we are, therefore, confronted with the question: Is it our task to continue to explain our position on these points and leave it at that? Does the OPC have to change its position in order to allow us to continue, or should we be satisfied with the progress made? It seems to us, that these are questions which Synod will have to address.

We have not dealt with some of the other divergencies: the doctrine of the covenant, visible and invisible church, the assurance of faith, the obser-

vance of the law, as well as church-political differences. One of the reasons was the lack of time to deal adequately with all these issues included in the committee's mandate. Further, we decided to concentrate on the major issues arising from the Blue Bell and Laurel cases.

b. *Third-Party Relationships*

It can be noted with thankfulness that the OPC was willing to consider our questions regarding their contact with the CRC. We are grateful for their warnings directed towards the CRC voiced by their delegate to the CRC's General Synod 1991. Yet the fact remains that locally pulpits are open to CRC ministers. This has to do with the OPC's involvement in NAPARC. In the committee's opinion, the relationship between the OPC and CRC remains a cause for concern.

With regard to the RPCNA, the OPC is in principle committed to organic union. We understand that the discussions between the OPC and the RPCNA are not in the final stages as yet because there remain major differences. It is this committee's opinion that the relationship between the CanRC and the OPC is not automatically transferrable to the RPCNA (see also Synod 1986, Acts, Article 126, D.1.b).

The relationship with the PCA has changed considerably. Some congregations have left for the PCA. This took some of the impetus out of the OPC's desire to join with the PCA, even though the OPC and the PCA continue to exchange fraternal delegates. We recommend that this receive continued attention.

c. *Practice of Church Life*

With regard to the practices at a local level, our committee offers the following observations. There remains a variety of opinions and practices within the OPC in the manner in which local congregations apply certain principles. For instance, the practice of admitting guests to the Lord's Table varies from congregation to congregation to the point that there is strong disagreement among the members of the OPC themselves. This is evident in our discussions with the CEIR. Some of their members expressed agreement with our concerns.

We have limited knowledge of what really happens in the local congregations. In our discussions, points related to difference in background and milieu are often brought forward by the brothers of CEIR. Local practices may be more varied than comes out in the discussions between our committees.

Finally, we wonder in how far local OPC congregations are aware of the issues discussed. The CEIR reports, included in the Minutes of their General Assemblies, are not as "public" as our reports to Synod. Certainly there is no public debate within the OPC about its relationship with the CanRC.

4.2 Developments

Previous General Synods have dealt with the situations at Blue Bell and Laurel. These two congregations left the OPC because of doctrinal differences and were eventually accepted into our federation. In the past year, a new development has arisen at Denver, when the Christ American Reformed Church requested admission into our federation. Classis Ontario-South of January 1992 referred the Denver request to Classis Alberta-Manitoba. Classis Alberta-Manitoba of March 1992 denied this request.

It will be clear that these developments have significant consequences for our current relationship with the OPC. We have declared each other to be true

churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, but as yet we have been unable to come to pulpit exchange and intercommunion. Synod 1989 considered that certain divergencies are not impediments to recognize each other as true churches, yet they can be impediments to come to a full sister church relationship (Synod 1989, Acts, Article 94, IV, 2). The two lines in this reasoning can lead to a varying appreciation by ecclesiastical assemblies of the relation of the CanRC with the OPC. This is exemplified by the recent decisions of Classis Ontario-South of January 1992 and Classis Alberta-Manitoba of March 1992 in relation to the Denver request for affiliation.

Further, the mandate of our committee as given by Synod 1989 includes a broad array of issues. Within the context of the recent developments, this has led the CEIR to ask our committee whether we still consider the OPC to be a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. We responded to this question on the basis of the decision of Synod 1977 to recognize the OPC as a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. Yet at the same time we are mandated to question the OPC on very important matters such as the fencing of the Lord's Table and confessional membership. These are key issues which to date prevent a closer relationship between our churches. It is this committee's understanding that these discussions have as purpose to come to full correspondence (Synod 1977, Acts, Article 91, 3, c).

In the meantime, the CEIR lodged a formal complaint with us during the Pittsburgh meeting (November 1991) because of perceived Canadian Reformed interference in internal OPC matters. This resulted in CEIR's request to discuss procedures to deal with the question of receiving congregations and ministers that have been or are members of the OPC (see section 2.2.c).

It will be clear that these developments also make the work of our committee, representing our churches, rather difficult. Therefore we place the following questions before Synod:

- a. How shall the CEIR's request regarding procedures to deal with receiving congregations and ministers that have been or are members of the OPC be answered?
- b. What is our committee's role in situations such as these? In this connection we refer to Synod 1986, Acts, Article 137, in which Synod requested a close cooperation between our committee and Classis Ontario-South with respect to the "Hofford" case. This decision seems to imply a role for our committee in cases where churches seek affiliation with our federation, but it is not clear how our committee can legitimately become involved.
- c. At a more general level, how can we continue to speak about and aim for a sister church relationship with the OPC while we accept churches into our federation which used to be part of the OPC? We ask Synod for clarification, since this has a direct bearing on our relationship, and on the nature of the contact which we have with the OPC.

4.3 The Committee's Mandate

In preparation of our report the committee reviewed the mandates given by previous Synods. We noted that originally the contact resulted in a request to the OPC to recognize our churches as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ (Synod 1965). The OPC acknowledged us as such (Synod 1968). At Synod 1977, at the request of the OPC, the CanRC recognized the OPC as a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

From the very first, our churches engaged in a discussion of various divergencies with the OPC. Over time, these divergencies received increased emphasis as a condition for continued efforts towards full correspondence (Synod 1986).

Throughout the contact with the OPC, two elements have been at play: (a) the mutual recognition of each other as true churches, and (b) the discussion of the divergencies which hinder full ecclesiastical correspondence. The changes in emphasis on either one or the other element seem to have led, in our view, to a lack of clarity in the formulation of the mandate given by the various Synods.

We like to make the following observations:

- a. Synod decisions do not always clearly reflect the recommendations of the reports submitted. On a number of occasions, the Acts do not contain a clear judgement on these reports, while the recommendations of Synods are often different from those proposed by the committee. This leaves it unclear whether in these instances the committee dealt appropriately with that particular part of the mandate. Two examples: what is the status of the work done in the report submitted to Synod 1968, (Acts, Supplement V); and what is the status of the report *Evaluation of Divergencies* which was received by Synod 1986 (Acts, Article 126)?
- b. Mandates have been provided which differ in specificity. It is not clear, therefore, whether certain items that are not included in the committee's mandate by a following Synod are to be considered as having been dealt with sufficiently. Some examples: the matter of *He descended into hell* has not been pursued since Synod 1971 for no stated reasons, while items such as *the assurance of faith* and *the observance of the law* resurfaced at Synod 1989, also without reasons given. These items were not included in Synod 1986's mandate which charged this committee in a general manner to *continue the discussion on divergencies, which are an issue of mutual concern*.

We ask Synod for a focused mandate to make it possible to clearly determine whether progress has been made in the discussions of the divergencies and issues of mutual concern.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The committee recommends that General Synod 1992 of the Canadian Reformed Churches decide:

- a. to gratefully acknowledge the commitment of the OPC to be faithful to the Scriptures and defend the Reformed heritage, and to note with gratitude its warnings against the course taken by the Christian Reformed Church.
- b. to encourage the OPC to remain faithful to the Scriptures in their examination of the method of admission of guests to the Lord's Supper, and in their study of the desirability and feasibility of adding the Three Forms of Unity to its present doctrinal standards (see section 3.3.b).
- c. to respond to the question raised by the CEIR with regard to the problem of receiving congregations and ministers that have been or are members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church while maintaining official contact (see section 2.2.c).
- d. to acknowledge that the issues of the fencing of the Lord's Supper and confessional membership have been addressed, and that these discussions have led to clarification and better understanding, but also to a more focused articulation of the differences, preventing at this moment a closer relationship.
- e. to acknowledge that there is a need for patience in our efforts to seek true unity in obedience to Christ's command.
- f. to continue the committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with the following mandate:
 1. to maintain the contact with the OPC, according to the rules for "Ecclesiastical Contact" as determined by Synod 1977.

2. to continue the discussion of divergencies by focusing on the differences in ecclesiology (see 4.1.a).
3. to continue to discuss and evaluate the current third-party relationships of the OPC, and to urge the OPC to break contact with the Christian Reformed Church (see 4.1.b).
4. to serve the churches with regular reports of the work of the committee.
5. to serve General Synod 1995 with a report, to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod.

We wish the General Synod God's blessing and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in its deliberations. It is our prayer that the contact of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church may lead to unity in full obedience to God's Word and to the greater glory of the Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Respectfully submitted,

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