

## APPENDIX II

### REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR CONTACT WITH THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH TO GENERAL SYNOD 1989 OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

#### I. MANDATE

General Synod 1986 decided

1. To continue the Committee with the mandate to continue the contact with the OPC taking into account the rules for ecclesiastical contact which include "continued discussion" on "issues of mutual concern" (p. 57, Recommendation 2).
2. To charge the Committee to continue the discussion on divergencies, which are an issue of mutual concern and to report on this to the next synod (p. 57, Recommendation 3).
3. That the Committee for Contact OPC continue the contacts about the relationships which the OPC entertains with others expressing the following concerns:
  - a. that the relationship of the OPC with the CRC and their membership in the RES remain stumbling-blocks in reaching full correspondence;
  - b. to inform the OPC that in the event that the OPC joins and is received into the PCA, the official contact with the OPC is not transferrable to the PCA.  
The Committee should continue to solicit clear commitments from the OPC concerning these matters (p. 58, Recommendation 1).
4. To pass on the report about the fencing of the Lord's table (including the sections A, B, and C) to the OPC through its Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-Church Relations (CEIR), along with the above considerations of the General Synod of 1986 and invite the CEIR to have meetings about these matters (p. 60, Recommendation 3).
5. To ask the OPC to study this report and to respond to it. This response should pay attention to the related doctrinal subjects which were listed in the section dealing with the controversy at Blue Bell (p. 60, Recommendation 4).
6. To invite their CEIR to have joint meeting(s) about this matter of mutual concern (p. 19, bottom; p. 60, Recommendation 5).

#### II. HISTORICAL SURVEY

##### 1.0 Introductory Remarks

A number of letters and phone calls have been exchanged between our Committee and CEIR: our letters of May 19, 1987; April 18, 1988; April 20, 1988; their letters of March 24, 1987; September 15, 1987; February 17, 1988; May 5, 1988; June, 1988; December 14, 1988. These letters dealt with issues of mutual information, invitations to General Assemblies of the OPC, and attempts to organize an official meeting of the two Committees.

We also maintained contact by sending a delegate to two General Assemblies (the 53rd and 54th General Assemblies).

On January 24, 1989, there was an official meeting of the Committee for Contact of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the CEIR of the OPC in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

There are several reasons why we have not had earlier and more frequent meetings.

The mandate of our Committee required that a number of reports and concerns be sent to CEIR for their study and response. These were sent to CEIR and time was given for them to prepare a response before we had an official meeting between the two Committees. Similarly CEIR sent our Committee matters for our study and advice, namely a report on the OPC's withdrawal

from the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) and a statement on "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church."

In addition, CEIR has been busy, particularly with preparations for the General Assembly's decision regarding the process of possible joining and being received into the PCA (the Presbyterian Church in America).

Further, CEIR has had some changes in its membership which made an earlier meeting virtually impossible because now one member of CEIR is in California and another in Texas.

Finally, since the chairman of CEIR, the Rev. John P. Galbraith, was also heavily involved in the RES and instrumental in the OPC's resignation from the RES, our meeting of January, 1989 was the first time that we could suitably sit down together and have a comprehensive discussion.

## **2.0 Report on Activities and Communications**

The Committee for Contact with the OPC can report on the following items related to the official contact between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

### **2.1 53rd General Assembly of the OPC**

Dr. J. Faber was delegated to the 53rd General Assembly of the OPC, 1986. He reported the following observations.

The proposal of joining the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) was extensively discussed and defeated. A majority report and a minority report on paedocommunion (partaking of the Lord's Supper by children) was referred back to an enlarged Committee for further study. A report on the hermeneutics of women in office concluded that Holy Scripture prohibits women specifically from exercising the teaching and ruling functions reserved to the office of elder; this report was approved, the Committee was continued to complete the work on the section concerning women and the office of deacon.

There was an extensive report on the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC); it was decided to keep observing the ICRC with a view to considering membership. This report also examined the differences among the churches in the ICRC, noting particularly the difference between the European continental churches and Presbyterians; the continental churches (e.g. Canadian Reformed Churches) see only the local congregation as church, whereas Presbyterians recognize the church as existing not only locally, but also regionally, nationally, and universally; thus the continental brothers feel that Presbyterians hold to a form of hierarchicalism, whereas Presbyterians feel that the continental brothers tend to congregationalism. This report also noted that the Liberated churches of 1944 have a highly articulate doctrine of the covenant and demonstrate its far-reaching implications for Christian life and thought; a concern was expressed at the ICRC of the danger of using one doctrine as the architectonic framework for the whole of theology.

In Dr. Faber's address to the General Assembly he tried to show how the doctrine of the covenant is indeed connected with all of life. He also corrected a mistaken allegation that the Canadian Reformed Churches teach "that there can be only one true church in each nation." There is a distinction between "can" and "should": there *should* only be one true church in each nation.

### **2.2 54th General Assembly of the OPC**

The Rev. R. Aasman was delegated to the 54th General Assembly of the OPC, 1987. He reported the following observations.

The Trinity Hymnal Revision Committee introduced some proposed additions to the revised *Trinity Hymnal*; there was some debate about the superficiality and doctrinally weak character of some of the proposed hymns, but the

Assembly accepted the proposed hymnal. The Committee on Christian Education reported that the Reagan administration has been extremely favourable to Christian schools; it was evident from the report and the ensuing discussion that there is a real desire within the OPC for Christian education, preferably within denominational schools. This Committee also presented a recommended Curriculum for seminary students within the OPC; this clarifies for students in various seminaries which subjects are required in order to be ordained as a minister of the Word in the OPC.

CEIR recommended to the Assembly that the OPC continue the investigation into what options are feasible to move to the common goal of union with the PCA; CEIR recently met with the PCA's Committee on Interchurch Relations and proposed to do so again in November 1987; this proposal was adopted.

The Committee on RES Matters presented a report entitled, "Why the Membership of the GKN in the RES Must be Terminated Now"; the Assembly decided to commission this Committee to present its report to the RES, Harare, 1988, demand the termination of the GKN in the RES, and failing that to withdraw the OPC from the RES. A report on paedocommunion was sent back for further study. A report on Hermeneutics of Women in Ordained Office was recommitted for improvement; it was evident from the discussion that the ordination of women received no support, whereas the office of women deacons is still a matter of study.

### **2.3 OPC's Withdrawal from the RES**

The Committee for Contact with the OPC received from the OPC an official statement that the OPC had withdrawn from the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES, now Reformed Ecumenical Council). See Addendum 1: the "News Release" of the OPC, and the "Statement of Resignation of the OPC from the RES," June 10, 1988.

This withdrawal took place at the RES's meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, May 30 - June 10, 1988 after this body refused to request the resignation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN - Synodical). The primary concern with respect to the GKN is its acceptance of homosexuals as members in good standing and eligible for office in the church. However, also of concern was the GKN's membership in the World Council of Churches, the ordaining of women as ministers and elders, the retention of ministers who hold heretical views on basic doctrines and, more recently, a doctrine of Scripture that resulted in the statement that "we know better than (the apostle) Paul." This withdrawal resulted in the termination of almost forty years of OPC membership in the RES. The OPC departed with a sincere plea that the RES recognize "the enormity of what it has done and is doing to churches seeking to be faithful to the Word of God."

### **2.4 OPC's "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church"**

At the instruction of the 54th (1987) General Assembly of the OPC, the Committee for Contact with the OPC was sent a copy of the OPC's "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church." (Please see Addendum 2). It was accompanied by the following remark,

"The Assembly wished it sent to you for your response. We value your counsel, and we shall deeply appreciate any comments you might feel appropriate. Perhaps you might wish to discuss the statement with our Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations, but we shall be glad to receive a response in the way most convenient for you."

Since our Committee felt that this was an important matter and that the OPC sincerely wanted our advice, we took the time to draw up a detailed analysis which was presented and discussed at the meeting of January 24, 1989. (See

Addendum 3, "Some Remarks on the OPC Statement.") As is evident from our analysis, our Committee has much appreciation for the direction of this statement. However, it is also evident that we have some critical remarks. These critical remarks were discussed at the meeting and were well received by the OPC brothers of the CEIR. They promised to keep us informed of whatever changes would be made to this statement, especially with respect to their relationship with the PCA.

## **2.5 Communications from Classis Alberta-Manitoba**

The Committee for Contact with the OPC received two reports from Classis Alberta-Manitoba of classis-observers delegated to the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC. The first report was drafted by the Rev. J.D. Wielenga who attended a meeting of September 23, 24 and 25, 1986; the second was drafted by the Rev. A. de Jager who attended a meeting of March 3, 4 and 5, 1987. Both reports not only presented facts and decisions but also the observer's personal reflections and insights. These reports are much appreciated since they give our Committee insight into ecclesiastical practices at the presbyterial level.

## **2.6 Communications from Classis Ontario-South**

The Committee received d.d. Oct, 15, 1987 a copy of the decision of Classis Ontario-South d.d. March 25, 1987 concerning the admittance of the Tri-County Reformed Church at Laurel, MD, into the federation of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

It also received a copy of the decision of Classis Ontario-South d.d. Dec. 9, 1987 with regard to a request of Mr. T.M.P. VanderVen related to the grounds of this admittance.

## **2.7 Communication from the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands**

The Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of our sister churches in the Netherlands sent in Sept. 1988 a copy of their letter to the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the OPC. They expressed on behalf of their previous Synod a desire, "to look into possibilities with you of a closer relationship in the future."

"The contact practice with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (has) appeared (to be) rather ineffectual so far; we hope and pray that in the years to come a contact practice will (grow) which can be fertile for the case of our Lord Jesus Christ in the world."

Apparently the OPC also sent our sister churches in the Netherlands the statement on "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church" for their letter makes this comment,

"In your letter you give evidence of taking the Biblical dedication to unity of the children of the Lord seriously. We also noted with gladness and approval the 'Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church' which (have) been accepted for that purpose. Much of that is also the basis for our policy concerning the relations with churches abroad. . . ."

They also express appreciation for the OPC's withdrawal from the RES and concluded from that action the following:

"We see in it an evidence of your longing for a unity which is based on the true belief and your refusal of a feigned unity which is at the expense of the only truth."

By way of conclusion the Committee of our sister churches remarked that they would like to deal with the OPC "in close deliberation" with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Consequently we were sent a copy of this letter.

## 2.8 Meeting with CEIR on January 24, 1989

### 2.8.1 Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church

This statement by the OPC has been mentioned earlier in this report. It was clarified by the OPC brethren that this statement was not drawn up only with the PCA in mind, although it certainly will be used in any further discussions between the OPC and the PCA. Our Committee expressed deep appreciation for the fact that the OPC in this statement does not take the easy way out with respect to the church's ecumenical task by fleeing into fantasies about an "invisible church." The OPC understands that two true churches of Jesus Christ may not exist alongside each other without seeking ecclesiastical union, but at the same time acknowledges that *union* of churches can only come about on the basis of *unity* of faith.

### 2.8.2 Fencing the Lord's Supper

According to the mandate of Synod 1986 our Committee conveyed the concerns of the Canadian Reformed Churches with respect to the doctrine of the covenant, confessional membership, ecclesiology and the autonomy of the local church. They did so especially by dealing with the issue of the fencing of the Lord's Table.

The CEIR reminded us again of the clear statements of the Westminster Confession (XXIX.8), the Form of Government (XII.7) and the Directory for Worship (V.4), quoted in our evaluation of the Hofford Complaint Acts 1986, p. 133). They explained that local sessions use different methods to prevent the Lord's Table from being profaned. They stressed that Holy Scripture does not prescribe one specific method. 1 Cor. 11:28 ("Let a man examine *himself*") emphasizes the personal responsibility.

Our Committee covered the areas mentioned in our previous report:

- a. The need for direct supervision of guests by the overseers who should determine who may attend the Lord's Table.
- b. The desirability for using (travel-) attestations.
- c. The need to see to it that certain conditions are met by guests who are to be admitted to the Lord's Table.
- d. The need for corporate responsibility with respect to attendance at the Lord's Supper.

In connection with the last point we asked when and whence the difference between the methods in e.g. the Free Church of Scotland and the OPC came about. One may think of the old system of handing out "tokens" for admission to the Lord's Supper. We also wondered whether the variety in methods within the OPC and the most frequently used method of issuing only a general warning is not due to the influence of American individualism. The personal responsibility, expressed in 1 Cor. 11, does not exclude the corporate responsibility as 1 Cor. 5 shows in agreement with Acts 20:28.

Our Committee was assured that the OPC would study this matter further and discuss it again with us in the near future.

### 2.8.3 "The Blue Bell Situation"

The CEIR asked us for

"any further information about the Blue Bell situation so that we may try to put the matter to rest. Apparently a point of interest is the question of schism on the part of the Blue Bell congregation, whether your classis received them without consultation with our presbytery, and if so, whether your churches thus fostered the alleged schism. We do

not feel that this should be a barrier between us but there seems to be need for final clarification." (letter December 14, 1988)

The CEIR pointed out that, when the Blue Bell congregation had decided to accept the Three Forms of Unity as its secondary standards and the Church Order of Dordt as its form of government, the presbytery of Philadelphia, upon request of the Reformation Church at Blue Bell, could have arranged for an orderly transition to the confederation of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Our Committee received this for information and emphasized the limits of its mandate and furthermore the responsibility of the churches in Classis Ontario-South.

#### 2.8.4 Reformed Ecumenical Synod (See 2.3)

Little needed to be said about this because the OPC had done exactly what we urged them to do with respect to the RES, namely, withdraw from it. We expressed our gratitude and appreciation for the manner in which the OPC withdrew from the RES: on the one hand showing that the OPC cannot have contact with any organization which is still receptive to the GKN (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland - Synodical), and on the other hand calling those in the RES in a pastoral manner to have nothing more to do with the GKN lest the disease which infects the GKN will spread to all in the RES.

#### 2.8.5 Christian Reformed Church

Although the Committee for Contact with the OPC could express real appreciation for what the OPC did with respect to the RES, it could not do so for what the OPC is doing with respect to the CRC. Presently the OPC and the CRC send fraternal delegates to each other's assemblies, work together on certain issues, comment on each other's practices and cautiously exchange pulpits. Our Committee pointed out how the Canadian Reformed Churches have exchanged correspondence with the CRC some years ago and found them unreceptive to the warnings and exhortations which we made to them. Indeed the CRC is showing that it is following in the same direction as the GKN — not nearly at the same level — and yet going in the same direction. Our Committee expressed the concern that the OPC has too optimistic a view of the CRC.

The brothers of the CEIR explained that in reality they do not have too optimistic a view of the CRC. In fact they have experienced the very same thing as our churches, namely, that the CRC is not receptive to warnings and exhortations. If the OPC presently did not have a fraternal relationship with the CRC, they would not start one. But they have such a relationship and are maintaining it for the sake of the many believers who are still in the CRC.

#### 2.8.6 Concluding Remarks of the Meeting

The OPC brothers pleaded that we continue the contact which our churches have together because they, the OPC, feel very much enriched by our Reformed background and they believe that it is the Lord Jesus Christ's command to seek ecclesiastical union where there is a unity of faith. They also expressed regret that they had spent too much time with the PCA to the detriment of our discussions together.

What really encouraged us as Committee was the appreciation of the OPC brethren for our constructive criticism and advice, their plea to keep up the contact, and their commitment to meet and talk together more frequently and regularly in the future.



In order to ensure that there will be such a follow-up to our discussions soon, the next meeting between our respective Committees was scheduled for February 27, 1990 in the Burlington-Hamilton area.

### III. EVALUATION

Evaluating the present situation, our Committee recommends to maintain the ecclesiastical contact of the Canadian Reformed Churches with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

1. The fact that the OPC has the Westminster Standards and a Presbyterian church government can not be a reason for terminating this contact. Reformed churches have always acknowledged faithful Presbyterian churches as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our previous Committee gave an evaluation of the confessional and church political divergencies and came to a similar conclusion. This evaluation was received by the previous synod as the argument for the statement of General Synod 1977 that these divergencies "do not form an impediment to recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ."

This decision of 1977 has never been revoked and still governs our present relation with the OPC.

2. The previous Committee considered that the General Assembly "has not allowed deviation from their standards, nor has it sanctified heresy such as would require to break off our relations with the OPC" (*Acts* 1986, p. 136).

The present Committee is of the same opinion after the 53rd and 54th General Assemblies.

3. Our membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches and the recognition of its basis leads to the same conclusion. Divergencies between Reformed confessions and church orders of the European continent and those of Great Britain do not form an impediment for their Council either. Therefore, it is consistent to maintain ecclesiastical contact with the OPC in April 1989 and to act as host of delegates of e.g. the Free Church of Scotland and of observers of the OPC in June 1989.

4. Although modest, the ecclesiastical contact with the OPC reminds us of the greatness of the ongoing church gathering work of our Lord Jesus Christ. We need these contacts: they may keep us free from sectarianism. Termination of the ecclesiastical contact with the OPC (and of the membership of the ICRC for that matter) would impoverish the Canadian Reformed Churches.

5. Our Committee speaks of *modest* contacts with the OPC. Their confederation and ours are small in number and sparsely spread over the vast North American continent. Moreover, our contacts are limited. We should not expect too much from the mutual influence on the life of the churches of Christ in these two confederations, neither do we have to be overly afraid of some imperfect expressions or practices.

In this context the Committee also reminds the churches of Art. 50 of our Church Order: "With foreign Churches of Reformed confession a sister-Church relationship shall be maintained as much as possible. On minor points of Church Order and ecclesiastical practice Churches abroad shall not be rejected."

While Art. 50 speaks of sister-Church relationship, we are here still dealing with a more limited relationship of ecclesiastical contact as defined by Synod 1977.

6. As far as the membership of the OPC in the RES is concerned, our Committee recommends that our General Synod 1989 gratefully acknowledges the Scriptural witness that the OPC delegates have given within the RES — especially with respect to the apostasy in the synodical Reformed Churches in the Netherlands—, the exemplary way in which they have spoken the truth in love (Eph. 4) and the clear manner in which they finally terminated their membership in the RES.

The Canadian Reformed delegates should convey this acknowledgement to the ICRC in Vancouver 1989 and recommend to receive the OPC wholeheartedly, if they would apply for membership after the Vancouver meeting.

As far as the relationship with the CRC is concerned, the CEIR repeated the statement that there are no plans to strengthen this historic bond, while our Committee again declared that it is a stumbling-block on the road to full correspondence. We urged the brothers at least to use their limited contact for a stronger testimony against the tendency within the CRC of following the lead of the (synodical) GKN.

In regard to the relationship with the PCA the following remarks can be made: The CEIR understood that our official contact with the OPC is not transferable to another body. It is clear that this relation to the PCA is one of the most important issues for the OPC at the moment. It was especially with a view to this relationship that the 1987 General Assembly affirmed the statement "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church." At present the PCA has stipulated that certain principles of ecumenical relations be approved by both churches before further action on union may be taken. In the meantime some sessions and ministers have chosen locally or individually to realign with the PCA.

On the other hand there is the relationship of the OPC with the Reformed Presbyterians (the "Covenanters"). Some brothers in the OPC would rather strengthen the bond with the Reformed Presbyterians than with the PCA.

Our General Synod could again advise the Canadian Reformed Churches to remember the OPC in their prayers as they struggle to come to a decision in these matters. In this time of trial for the OPC the Canadian Reformed Churches should use the opportunities given to support and assist the OPC in their search for ecclesiastical union in the unity of faith, wherever and whenever possible.

7. The Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations requested a discussion and critique of the OPC statement "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church." Our Committee complied with this request. In the combined meeting of January 1989 both papers were discussed. The CEIR would like to continue this discussion. They promised to give a response to our remarks and to consider changing some expressions in their statement. This response would be one of the agenda items in the meeting planned for February 1990. In this discussion several issues of mutual concern, mentioned in the decisions of our 1986 General Synod will again play a role. The Canadian Reformed Churches first requested this discussion, then entered into it and may not abandon it prematurely now that the CEIR is eager to pursue it.
8. Our Committee would like to urge our Canadian Reformed Churches to be patient. Some may be inclined to break off ecclesiastical contact, if within a few years and after some discussions it does not lead to "the sister-Church relationship" of Art. 50 C.O. or the "full correspondence" of which the rules for ecclesiastical contact speak. Should we not be aware of the fact that these rules for ecclesiastical contact also speak of "continued discussions" as the means to reach full correspondence?

Further, we may remind the churches of the fact that since 1965, when the Canadian Reformed Churches requested the OPC to start discussions with them, we could thankfully note that some major barriers for establishing such a sister church relationship have been removed. In 1973 the OPC decided to terminate the sister church relationship with the GKN (the synodical churches in the Netherlands). In 1975 an invitation from the same churches to enter into the relationship of "churches in ecclesiastical fellowship" was declined "in view of the fact that the reasons leading to the decision of 1973 are still valid" (*Minutes* 42nd General Assembly). In 1988 the OPC terminated its longstanding membership in the RES.



In our last meeting the CEIR was receptive to our plea to use their contact with the Christian Reformed Church for a stronger testimony against the tendency of following the unscriptural lead of the (synodical) GKN.

Finally, should we not also remember the fact that discussions between e.g. our sister churches in the Netherlands and the "Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken" have taken decades? These are confederations of churches with the same three Forms of Unity and the same Church Order of Dordt. Even if we would entertain similar discussions with the Free Reformed Churches of North America, we would have to exercise similar patience. How much more is this requirement of patience and endurance needed in a relationship as that of the Canadian Reformed Churches to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The gathering of God's Church is not a matter of a few years.

#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of this evaluation the Committee recommends that General Synod 1989 of the Canadian Reformed Churches decide

1. to acknowledge gratefully the Scriptural witness that the OPC delegates have given within the RES — especially with respect to the apostasy in the synodical Reformed Churches in the Netherlands—, the exemplary way in which they have spoken the truth in love (Eph. 4) and the clear manner in which they finally terminated the membership of the OPC in the Reformed Ecumenical Council.
2. to convey this acknowledgement to the International Conference of Reformed Churches in Vancouver 1989 and to recommend that it receive the OPC wholeheartedly, if they apply for membership.
3. to receive the statement on "Biblical Principles of Church Unity," affirmed by the 1987 General Assembly of the OPC, and the written remarks made by the Committee.
4. to continue the Committee with the mandate
  - a. to maintain the contact with the OPC taking into account the rules for "Ecclesiastical Contact";
  - b. to include in the "continued discussions" on "issues of mutual concern" (Synod 1977, p. 42) the statement on "Biblical Principles of Church Unity";
  - c. to send the report 1989 of the Committee and the decision of Synod to the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the OPC and to the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of "De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland";
  - d. to serve the following General Synod with a report, to be sent to the churches at least three months before the beginning of this Synod.
5. to advise the churches to remember the OPC in prayer that God may give insight with respect to the principles and practice of the unity of His Church.

We wish the General Synod God's blessing and the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in its deliberations.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. R. Aasman, secretary  
J. Boot, treasurer  
Dr. J. Faber  
Rev. J. Mulder, convener  
T.M.P. VanderVen

## **Addendum 1**

### **NEWS RELEASE**

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) has resigned its 39-year membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES). The action followed the refusal of that body to request the resignation of a member denomination that accepts homosexuals as in good standing and eligible for office in the church. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) have held steadfastly to their homosexual position since 1980 when it first came to the attention of the RES. Although the RES protested the church's position at its quadrennial meetings in 1980 and 1984 it failed to take definitive action at its recently-concluded 1988 meeting after the GKN had refused to rescind their policy. Three other denominations, from the Netherlands, New Zealand, and South Africa, also announced their intention to withdraw. That will bring to nine the number of churches that have withdrawn from the RES in the past 10 years.

The RES is an international body of churches that are committed to maintaining the Reformed creeds, including the Westminster Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Belgic Confession, based on the infallible Scriptures. It was founded in 1946 and is composed of some 30 denominations in all the continents. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church was one of its early members, joining at the second assembly, in 1949. There are now two other North American denominations remaining in the RES.

The withdrawal of the OPC was taken at the RES's meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, May 30-June 10, 1988, after years of struggle to bring about the reform of the Netherlands church or its expulsion. During that time the Netherlands church had been allowed to remain in the RES even though it differed with the RES not only on the homosexual question but also on such other matters joining the World Council of Churches, starting to ordain women as ministers and elders, retaining ministers who had held heretical views on basic doctrines and, more recently, a doctrine of Scripture that resulted in their stating that "we know better than (the apostle) Paul."

The withdrawal of the OPC came on the final day of the meetings, after the previous day's decision to retain the Reformed Churches as a member. The quick response was due to the fruitlessness of the many years of seeking reform. It was made possible by the General Assembly giving full authority to its four-man delegation to withdraw the denomination from the RES. In their resignation statement the delegation said that "until yesterday we could not leave the RES because of conscience; today we cannot remain because of conscience."

The statement also asked the RES to recognize what is called "the enormity of what it has done and is doing to churches seeking to be faithful to the Word of God" as the RES "has forced" such churches to withdraw. The statement also claimed that those decisions are keeping other churches from joining. The delegates also pled with the RES "to keep the disease that infects the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands from spreading to other member churches."

The OPC has long had fellowship with other Reformed denominations both in the U.S. and abroad and will seek other fellowship to replace that of the RES.

*(See attached Statement of Resignation)*

Ref.: Orthodox Presbyterian Church  
John P. Galbraith, Stated Clerk  
2345 Willow Brook Dr.  
Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006  
215/657-1778  
June 17, 1988

**Statement of Resignation of the OPC from the RES**  
**June 10, 1988**

Mr. Moderator,

The General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has given its delegation to this Synod full authority to act on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church at this meeting of the RES. We therefore speak on behalf of our denomination.

First of all, we wish to express our deep appreciation for the blessings that God has given us over a period of nearly 40 years, as members of the RES. We have experienced a wonderfully enriching fellowship with believers from all parts of the world. Our horizon has been increased, and we have learned much. Relationships have been established over these years, and we hope that we may continue some of them in the years ahead. So much have we valued this fellowship that nothing could bring us to relinquish it but the strong conviction that we must do so in order to be faithful to the Word of God.

We leave because of the persistence of the GKN in holding positions well known to the RES over a period of 25 years, that the RES has judged to be out of accord with Scripture and because the RES is unwilling to enforce its own qualifications for membership. We leave also because for us to remain in an organization that harbors a church in such a condition as the GKN so implicates our church in its sin that we have no choice but to separate ourselves from it.

We now have become *another* church that feels itself forced out of the RES by the Synod's decision to continue the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN) in the RES membership, and we hereby resign the membership of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church from the RES, effective immediately. Until yesterday we could not leave the RES because of conscience; today we cannot remain because of conscience.

But we assure you, Mr. Moderator, that we do not leave this organization in pride or bitterness. We are too sinful ourselves to be proud, and because God is sovereign we cannot be bitter. We are all losers because of the decision yesterday. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church loses because we shall not have the benefit of the close fellowship with many of you who want to be faithful to the gospel and the Reformed Confessions. The GKN loses because it has been deprived of the blessing of much needed correction. And the RES loses because it has again demonstrated its unwillingness to maintain the Basis which requires member churches to "profess and maintain" the Reformed faith, has lost its credibility as a Reformed body, and thus becomes more akin to such organizations as the WARC and the WCC. Yet we know that though we lose, Christ the king of the church, will triumph.

We wish you to know that we do not depart with an inward-looking focus. Our zeal for international ecumenicity among Reformed churches worthy of the name is stronger than ever. And we can assure you that we will seek, now, in some other way to have such fellowship. If the RES should, in future days, return to a credible maintenance of its Basis we would certainly feel obliged to consider returning.

We close with some pastoral advice which we hope the RES will be willing to receive. The RES must face up to the enormity of what it has done and is doing to churches seeking to be faithful to the Word of God as the *RES* by its decisions, *not* the GKN, has forced nine or ten churches, *so far*, out of the RES and has kept other faithful churches from joining. And you must face up to your responsibility to member churches to keep the disease that infects the GKN from spreading to those churches. Some of them live in fear of that spread, and we plead with you to help protect them from it.

Mr. Moderator, we shall continue to pray for all the churches that remain with sincere love in our hearts. We hope that you will understand that we cannot participate further in the schedule of this Assembly. As others have already said, we bid you farewell, may God help you—and us.

## **Addendum 2**

### **BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH**

#### **I The 1961 Statement, the Biblical Basis for Ecclesiastical Union**

In ecclesiastical union two denominations join in submitting to one common form of government. Since ecclesiastical jurisdiction includes the maintenance of spiritual discipline, unity in polity requires agreement in the standards of faith and worship which such discipline maintains. Hence unification in polity, when properly sought and achieved, involves also unity in faith, discipline, and worship.

As we take account of the diversity that exists between denominations arising from differences of ethnic identity, cultural background, and historical circumstance the most conclusive evidence derived from Scripture is required to support the position that the obliteration of denominational separateness is an obligation resting upon these Churches of Christ. The differences that exist often manifest the diversity which the church of Christ ought to exemplify and make for the enrichment of the church's total witness. If ecclesiastical union impairs this diversity, then it may be achieved at too great an expense and tends to an impoverishment inconsistent with the witness to Christ which the church must bear.

Though the diversity which manifests itself in differentiating historical development might appear to make ecclesiastical union inadvisable or even perilous in certain cases, yet the biblical evidence in support of union is so plain that any argument to the contrary, however plausible, must be false.

#### **A. The Ethnic Universalism of the Gospel**

In Christ there is now no longer Jew or Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free (cf. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). The New Testament does not suppose that the differences natural to individuals nor those arising from ethnic identity, cultural background, and historical circumstance are to be obliterated by the gospel. But it does mean that the unity of Christ transcends all diversity arising from language, race, culture, history. What is more, this unity embraces and utilizes all the diversity that is proper and this is created by God's providence. If we should maintain that the diversity is in any way incompatible with the unity of which the church is the expression, then we should be denying THAT unity which the ethnic universalism of the gospel implies. Implicit in the universalism of the gospel is the same kind of universalism in that which the gospel designs, the building up of Christ's church.

#### **B. The Universalism of the Apostolic Church**

The church of the apostolic days embraces all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues. There is no evidence in the New Testament for the diversification of distinct denominations and anything tending to such diversification was condemned (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-13). The emphasis falls upon the oneness of faith (cf. Eph. 4:5) and the oneness of the fellowship of the saints (cf. Eph. 4:2-4; 11-16; Phil. 2:2,3; 4:2).

#### **C. Jesus' Prayer for Unity (John 17:20,21)**

It is a travesty of this text, as of all others bearing upon the unity of the church, to think of the unity for which Christ prayed apart from the unity of the bond of truth. Verse 21 must not be dissociated from verse 20. To divorce the unity for which Christ prayed from all that is involved in believing upon Him through the apostolic witness is to sunder what Christ placed together. Furthermore, the pattern Jesus provides in this prayer — "as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee" — makes mockery of the application of the text when unity is divorced from the characteri-

zation which finds its analogy in trinitarian unity and harmony.

But while these and other distortions of this text are to be shunned, the prayer of Jesus does bear upon our question in two respects.

1. The fragmentation and consequent lack of fellowship, harmony, and cooperation which appear on the ecclesiastical scene are a patent contradiction of unity exemplified in that to which Jesus referred when he said, "as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee."
2. The purpose stated in Jesus' prayer — "that the world may believe that thou has sent me" — implies a manifestation observable by the world. Jesus prays for a visible unity that will bear witness to the world. The mysterious unity of believers with one another must come to visible expression so as to be instrumental in bringing conviction to the world.

#### **D. The Unity of the Body of Christ**

The church is the body of Christ and there is no schism in the body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:25). As in the human body, there is diversity in unity and unity in diversity (cf. 1 Cor. 12). The point to be stressed, however, is the unity. If there is unity it follows that this unity must express itself in all the functions which belong to the church. Since government in the church is an institution of Christ (cf. Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7, 1 Pet. 5:1,2), this unity must be expressed in government. The necessary inference to be drawn is that the government should manifest the unity and be as embracing in respect of its functioning as the unity of which it is an expression. A concrete illustration of this principle is the decree of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:28,29; 16:4).

#### **E. The Kingdom of Christ, etc.**

1. Christ is the head of the church. So ultimately there is the most concentrated unity of government in the church of Christ. He alone is King. Any infringement upon this sovereignty belonging to Christ is a violation of what is basic and central in the government of the church. It follows that all government in the church must adhere to the pattern of a cone which has its apex in Christ.
2. Christ also instituted the apostolate with authority delegated from him (Matt. 16:18,19; cf. Jn. 20:21,23; Eph. 2:19-22). This apostolic authority is exercised now only through the inscripturated Word. But in the sphere of delegated authority the apostolate is supreme and will continue to be so to the end of time. This is the way the Holy Spirit, as the vicar of Christ, abiding in and with the church, exercises his function in accordance with Christ's promise. He seals the apostolic witness by his own testimony and illumines the people of God in the interpretation and application of the same.
3. Subordinately, however, in terms of Matt. 16:19, the hegemony of the apostolate is undeniable and it exemplifies the descending hierarchy which Christ has established.
4. There is also in the New Testament institution the delegated authority of the presbyterate, always subject to the apostolic institution, to the Holy Spirit who inspired the apostles (Jn. 16:13; 20:22), and ultimately to Christ as King and Head of the church, but nevertheless supreme in this sphere of government.
5. Since all office in the church of Christ can be filled only by the gifts of the Spirit, this structural subordination of the government of the church to the rule of Christ functions in living reality as a fellowship of the one Spirit. Everyone who has the Spirit of Christ is thereby called as a good steward of the manifold grace of God to minister his spiritual gifts to all the saints, so far as he is given opportunity. In particular, those whose gifts are for rule in

the church must exercise such gifts in the communion of Christ and his church.

When these principles of gradation and communion are appreciated, and when coordinated with other considerations already established, especially that of the unity of the body of Christ, we appear to be provided with a pattern that points to the necessity of making the presbyterate as inclusive as is consistent with loyalty to Christ and the faith of the gospel. In a word, we are pointed to the necessity of unity in government, a unity that is violated when churches of Christ adhering to the faith in its purity and integrity are not thus united. (End of report to the 28th General Assembly).

That statement has provided the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with principles that have guided us in the exercise of our ecumenical calling in the years since. Your Committee commends that statement to the church.

## **II A Further Statement, Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church**

### **A. The Nature of the Church**

1. The church is the covenant people of God — the body of people to whom God has made the promise to be their God and they to be his people and he to dwell with them. The church is the covenant people of God in all ages and among all nations.
2. All those who believe the promise of God and their children and have had the promise sealed to them in baptism are to be recognized and treated as God's people, as members of the organized church.
3. The church belongs to her covenant head Jesus Christ and "there is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ" (Confession of Faith XXV, 6).
4. The work of the church, in fellowship with and in obedience to Christ, is divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness (Form of Government II,4), under the teaching and rule of elders.
5. The Lord governs his church also through the application of his Word to the people by the Spirit as the Word is expounded and applied by the officers of the church (Ephesians 4:11-16).

### **B. The Unity of the Church**

1. The church finds its unifying principle in the covenant promise "my dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Ezekiel 37:27; Leviticus 26:12). This finds fulfillment in Jesus as Emmanuel ("God with us," Matthew 1:23, John 1:14), who came as the mediator of the covenant of grace to redeem and purchase this people for his dwelling by his blood. The ultimate consummation of the promise is the new Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ (Revelation 21:3).
2. The church must recognize, appreciate, and confess this fundamental unity of the covenant people of God, the body of Christ; which is a God-given creation and not a human achievement.
3. The church, the visible organization, is described in the Bible as one church. God has given only one covenant of love (Deuteronomy 7:6-12) and has only one people of the covenant.
4. In the New Testament this teaching of the unity of the people of God is sustained (see Ephesians 2:11-22 and 4:1-16). Yet the situation is different. No longer are the people of God circumscribed by ethnic, political, or geographical boundaries. All nations are to be discipled.
5. This unity includes those people of God in past ages and also looks to the future and includes the people of God who will believe on His name (John



17:20-21).

6. The gospel proclaimed by the apostles as the foundation of the church resulted in establishing churches as covenant communities in various locations, churches which were ruled by elders. These churches and these elders were not independent, but were one body united by Christ their head, by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, and by the covenant promise of God. The elders at Antioch and Jerusalem resolve a problem, under God, and their decision is binding on the churches (Acts 15, 16:4).
7. The unity of the church is attained unto by growing in spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:13). Unity and maturity are the result of mutual, loving admonition and joint submission to Scripture. Such maturity is manifested by speaking and acting the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
8. Each member is essential to the body, and the growth of the body depends on the active participation of each part (Ephesians 4:13,16). The work of the officers of the church is to prepare the members for, and assist them in this work (Ephesians 4:11-12).

### **C. Toward Perfecting Biblical Unity**

1. The unity of the church is in Christ and it is both a given reality and also a requirement. The unity of the faith is both gift and mandate.
2. The church is compelled to give expression to this reality and requirement, this gift and mandate, by actively seeking the promised goal, namely, that of being one body which serves the Lord in perfect peace, purity, and unity.
3. The ultimate goal of the unity of the church is nothing less than one worldwide presbyterian/reformed church.
4. The unity of the church is unity in Christ, unity in the gospel of Christ, "unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Ephesians 4:13). This Christ, this gospel, this faith and knowledge, the church must confess. It is summarized for us in our Confession of Faith.
5. The present division into separate denominations is because of unfaithfulness to God as expressed in beliefs, teaching, and living, on the part of both individuals in the church and the churches that are contrary to the Word of God.
6. We find ourselves in this sinful situation as we undertake to pursue the mandate to unity. There exists between us and all other churches a sinful disunity that demands reconciliation in a biblical way. This sin must be faced and removed so that true and full unity and fellowship of the church may be reached.
7. In seeking actively the unity of the church, we must recognize several levels of separateness (i.e., degrees of purity) among the churches. There are Presbyterian and Reformed churches that are more or less faithful. There are non-Reformed churches that are more or less faithful. There are also churches that have apostatized, and no longer have the right to be called church.
8. In seeking unity with faithful Presbyterian and Reformed churches:
  - a. There should be mutual agreement on what the gospel is. The churches must confess in their official documents of faith and life the same gospel.
  - b. There should be a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship established in which official interchange may take place including the exchange of delegates at the meetings of the ruling bodies of the church.
  - c. There will be fellowship and cooperation in organizations, both domestic and international, which give expression to oneness of faith and life.
  - d. There then may take place the actual steps toward uniting. These include:

1. The recognition of each other as true churches of Christ, more or less pure (Confession of Faith XXV,4), in which the marks of the church are found.
2. Reconciliation between the bodies (the sin that is involved in the separate existence must be faced and resolved: this may be only the sin of separate existence; or a sin which has historical roots; or doctrinal error; or error in the life of the church).
3. Self-examination on the part of each church.
4. Agreement that the confession of the united church must be apparent in the life of the church.
5. The offering of each church to the other for examination; willingness to give, receive and respond to reproof (2 Timothy 3:16-17); speaking and acting the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).
6. Agreement on the same ecclesiology and government of the church.
7. Maintaining the peace, purity and unity of the churches.
8. There would then be the actual uniting into one organization.
9. There is also responsibility to call all churches, including our own, to faithfulness in order to seek the unity of the whole church.

Submitted to the 53rd (1986) General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations  
 Affirmed by the 54th (1987) General Assembly

### **Addendum 3**

#### **SOME REMARKS ON THE OPC STATEMENT "BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH"**

The statement consists of two parts, a 1961 and a 1987 statement.

- I. The 1961 statement rightly argues that diversity arising from differences of ethnic identity, cultural background and historical circumstance does not make ecclesiastical unity unnecessary, if churches are united in faith, discipline, and worship. The unity of Christ transcends all diversity and there is no evidence in the N.T. for diversification of distinct denominations. The purpose stated in the prayer of the Lord Jesus in John 17:20,21 implies a manifestation observable by the world. It is laudable that this statement does not flee into fantasies about an "invisible church" in order to escape the Scriptural demand for ecclesiastical union. Christ as Head and King of the church instituted the apostolate. The Holy Spirit is the Vicar of Christ and apostolic authority is exercised now only through the inscripturated Word. But then follows in I E 3 and 4 these statements:
  3. Subordinately, however, in terms of Matt. 16:19, the hegemony of the apostolate is undeniable and it exemplifies the descending hierarchy which Christ has established.
  4. There is also in the New Testament the delegated authority of the presbyterate, . . . , supreme in this sphere of government.

One could ask two questions.

First, what is meant by the term "hierarchy?" Is this term not infelicitous, since the apostle Peter "as a fellow elder" exhorts the elders not to domineer over the flock of God (1 Peter 5:1,2)? Second, could there not be some difference between "the presbyterate" of which this statement speaks and "the elders" in 1 Tim. 4:14?

Section I E 5 expresses the necessity of making the presbyterate as inclusive as is consistent with loyalty to Christ and the faith of the gospel. This is fine as far as

the striving for union is concerned, but does "the presbyterate" here not presuppose a structural form which as such is not (yet) present in the New Testament? Is there no difference between an elder in the New Testament and a member of a presbytery in the O.P.C.? Is there not a difference between *presbyterian* and *presbyteria*? And is viewing the elder in a *presbyterian* manner necessary for church union?

- II. The 1987 statement begins with a section about the nature of the church: "The church is the covenant people of God."

Although it is no dogmatic treatise, the statement could have spoken about the nature of the church in a more trinitarian manner: The church is the assembly of the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. The communion or fellowship of the Holy Spirit, e.g., is fundamental for church unity.

When the statement calls the church "the covenant people of God," it could refine its description by adding the word "assembly" or "congregation": the church is the *assembly* or *congregation* of God's covenant people. Both the O.T. words for assembly and congregation and the N.T. secular usage of the word "assembly" (Acts 19:39, 41, the same word as "church") point into this direction. The statement rightly upholds the necessity of the manifestation of the unity of true faith in "the visible organization" (B3).

This emphasis could be strengthened by introducing words as "assembly" or "congregation" in the description of the church.

The covenant is a gracious relation of God and His people in the mediator Jesus Christ. The Westminster Confession beautifully maintains that "there is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ" (XXV,6). But why does the statement call Him "her covenant head" (II A 3)? The church is a body, the covenant is a relationship. One may speak of the head of a body and the mediator of a relationship. Christ is the head of the church and the mediator of God's covenant. Would it not be good to keep this distinction in order to prevent confusion?

Section II B 6 describes the N.T. churches as covenant communities in various locations, churches which were ruled by elders. "These churches and these elders were not independent, but were one body. . . . The elders at Antioch and Jerusalem resolve a problem, under God, and their decision is binding on the churches (Acts 15, 16:4)."

Some questions arise.

The churches were indeed one body but can the same be stated of the elders?

In Acts 15 we read of "the church (at Jerusalem) and the apostles and the elders" (15:4), and of a meeting of "the apostles and the elders" (15:6). There was a decision of "the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem" (16:4). It was a meeting of the church at Jerusalem under the leadership of the apostles and the elders of Jerusalem. The statement, "The elders at Antioch and Jerusalem resolve a problem" (underlining ours) goes further than the data from Holy Scripture warrant.

A following remark regards the place and function of the confession. The statement later speaks of the confession of faith (C 4, C 8 a), but should it not have been mentioned under B, "The Unity of the Church?" It should be emphasized that the unity we seek is a unity of *faith*.

One should applaud the covenantal flavour of the description of the church and of the biblical unity as both gift and mandate (C 1). There is a remarkably broad sweep in setting the ultimate goal as "nothing less than one world-wide presbyterian/reformed church." The division into separate denominations is because of unfaithfulness to God, and sinful disunity demands reconciliation in a biblical way.

The 1987 statement escapes from two dangers here: denominationalism (or false pluriformity of the church) on the one hand and false ecumenicity on the other hand.

However, in section C 7 it is stated that "we must recognize several levels of separateness (i.e. degrees of purity) among the churches." Is this meant in the sense of the differences between the churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 1-3)? The distinction "more or less pure" should never obliterate the basic contrast between "true and false."

The statement had set as goal "one worldwide presbyterian/reformed church." Would it then not be better to leave out the sentence: "There are *non-Reformed* churches that are more or less faithful" (C 7)?

We thankfully notice that in section C 8 d (1) is spoken of "true churches of Christ, in which the marks of the church are found." It reminds us of the language of the Scotch Confession (1560) and of the Belgic Confession (1561).

In this section on the actual steps toward uniting the statement not only mentions the recognition of each other as true churches of Christ but also e.g. "reconciliation between the bodies" and "agreement in the same ecclesiology and government of the church." The O.P.C. statement shows a Scriptural depth here which is sadly lacking in many twentieth-century ecumenical declarations.