

## APPENDIX II A

### COMMITTEE ON ECUMENICITY AND INTERCHURCH RELATIONS ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH REV. JACK J. PETERSON, SECRETARY 3334 N.W. LOOP 410, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS 78213, OCTOBER 25, 1983

The Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church  
Reverend Wietse Huizinga, Secretary  
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Hamilton, Ontario L9B 1B1  
Canada

Dear Brothers,

We apologize to you for taking so long to respond to your letter of October 13, 1978. One reason, as you know, is that we were engaged in merger negotiations which led to the invitation of the Presbyterian Church in America for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to join their Church, which invitation was not ratified by their Presbyteries, and now there may be a renewal of that invitation.

However, we ask your forgiveness in not responding sooner. We rejoice that the Synod Coaldale 1977 recognized "The Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ as confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession" and that we together have entered into the temporary relationship called "ecclesiastical contact." We have enjoyed the presence of Brothers Faber and Huizinga at recent meetings of our General Assemblies. We pray that our contacts may develop into a closer walk together in the ways of our Lord.

Before we attempt to answer the specific points of your letter, let us set before you some background material. The OPC began its separate existence in 1936 to continue the witness of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. In the formation of our Church and in the formation of Westminster Theological Seminary (7 years earlier) there was significant Dutch influence. The teaching of Professors Van Til, Kuiper, and Stonehouse enriched the Church by introducing us to the continental tradition. They were able to make the transition from subscription to the Three Forms of Unity to our Confession of Faith and Catechisms. Professor John Murray, steeped in the Scottish Presbyterian tradition, but also deeply influenced by Geerhardus Vos, instructed more than one generation of OP ministers in careful exegesis including insights from the Biblical theological perspective.

Another factor that is significant in our background is that many of our people have come out of non-Reformed background including even paganism to a Confession of the Reformed faith. We have only begun to reap the harvest of men reared in our Church who are entering office in the Church. There are those who struggle with their past. Our responses to many of the issues we face have been shaped by our reaction to theological liberalism and Arminian evangelicalism.

It is the blending of American Presbyterianism, Scottish Presbyterianism and continental Reformed traditions that have enriched the Church and makes the OPC unique. It also means that there is not the uniformity in our Church that there is in your Churches, for various traditions are found in varying degrees and with varying effects. You will find those whom you would call scholastic, and you will also find those who share your covenantal approach. Yet, we all sincerely live under our Confession and Catechisms, Reformed and reforming, submitting to the authority of the Lord and His Word.

Let us now look at your points A-1 through 5, B-1 through 3, and Inter-Church relations.

#### **A. 1. Visible and Invisible Church**

Many, if not most, in our Church are uncomfortable with our confessional statements on visible and invisible Church because of the modern developments in the doctrine of the Church particularly in dispensationalism. We also have been taught by Professor Murray whom you quote. If the Confession were being written

today, against the contemporary false teachings, the language would be different. In fact, some in the Church feel that the confessional statements should be changed.

However, the confessional documents antedate the modern errors. Your own W. Pouwelse has commented on that (*Clarion*, May 6 and 20, 1983). Of special interest to us was the reference to Professor Schilder's Commentary on the Belgic Confession and the use of the words *congregatio* and *coetus* which seem to parallel the usage of visible and invisible in our Confession.

Your fear that this will lead us to the theory of pluriformity of the Church has not come to the surface in the OPC, at least with any strength. Our Church believes strongly in the unity of the Church of our Lord, and the history of our Church demonstrates that. As early as 1961 a report was presented to our Twenty-eighth General Assembly called "the Biblical Basis for Ecclesiastical Union" (see *minutes*, 28th GA. pp. 90-92, cf. also, John Murray: *Collected Writings*, Vol. 1, pp. 269-272). This report has been a guide in our relations to other Churches and our pursuing the goal of Church union. From another perspective, we do not have difficulty with the study of the GKN (Liberated) called *For the Sake of True Ecumenicity*, point I, Fundamental Considerations, which addresses the same point. To put it in still a different way, there are some of us who wonder if your Churches are not practicing a form of international pluriformity. Why should not the Liberated Churches of Canada and in The Netherlands, for example, be one Church?

Having said all that, we must answer your question: "Do the Westminster Confession Art. 25 and the Larger Catechism Ques. and Ans. 64-66 not need correction?" The answer is that the Church is divided on the question of confessional revision. One group says that we are not a creed-writing age, and that to tamper with the wording of the Confession would make it easier for error to enter the Church. Others say that the Confession should be the living Confession of the Church, reflecting the principle that the Church is Reformed and reforming.

A further consideration in this regard is the matter of subscription to the Confession of the Church. In the second ordination vow of the OPC the question is asked: "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?" This vow and an affirmative answer to it, has never been interpreted by us as involving an *ipsissima verba* understanding of subscription. What is demanded is a sincere receiving and adopting as our own the confessional documents as containing the system of doctrine set forth in the Scriptures.

#### A. 2. Assurance of Faith

We feel that the two sets of confessional traditions do not basically differ. There is stress on the assurance that a believer has in both, and a realization that "believers in this life . . . do not always feel this full assurance of faith" (C.D., Article 11), in both.

From our perspective, in working with people of evangelical training, we find an easy believism ('just trust in Jesus') coupled with a false doctrine of eternal security making such people resistant to the warnings of Scripture and the commands of Scripture to persevere. This is not to deny that the focus of faith is the Lord and His promises.

#### A. 3. Covenant of Grace

Let us speak honestly to you, the questions related to the covenant of grace are a matter of difference within our Church. This was true also, as you told us in the meeting of November 6, 1981, in the GKN which led to the pacification formula of 1905. There are two lines of the covenant in our Church's confessional standards. There are those in our Church who emphasize the line that the covenant is made with the elect, and there are others who feel that the covenant is made with believers and their seed, and there are those who try to combine

the two. This is an unsettled issue in our Church. That is why at that November 6, 1981 meeting it could be said that the concept that prevails is that the covenant was made with the elect and their seed, and also that the ten points about the covenant in the booklet *For the Sake of True Ecumenicity* (pp. 10-11) by the GKN (Liberated), could also be affirmed.

Because of this situation it is difficult to answer the questions you ask, and the questions of Professor Faber in his *Clarion* editorial of February 26, 1982, the last paragraph. To date all the above positions are held in the Church.

In this area especially, because of your historical perspective, you can be of help to us in grappling with these problems.

The rest of the items have been discussed with you so that the issues are before us. On the matter of the descent into hell we are in basic agreement. On the Sabbath we are strict on paper but you are less strict; in practice the reverse seems to be true — perhaps that is a caricature, but there is some truth there too.

On matters of polity you correctly state that there is "no ready made solution" available. It will take further discussions.

This letter has been very frank with you concerning ourselves. We are undergoing some deep testings at the hand of the Lord. We find that we must commit ourselves again and again to the Word of the Lord as we seek to live before Him in obedience to that Word.

We rejoice in your stand for the truth. We rejoice in that covenant that binds us together under our Mediator the Lord Jesus. Our prayer is that we may walk together in that fellowship of the Spirit, in the Love of God, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We would as a Committee like to hear from you further, as we seek to draw closer together in our ecclesiastical contact, looking for fuller correspondence.

With brotherly greetings,  
Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-Church Relations  
Jack J. Peterson, Secretary

**APPENDIX II B**  
**EVALUATION OF DIVERGENCIES**

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**Mandate**

The General Synod of Cloverdale 1983 charged the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church "to publish, for the benefit of our Churches, a detailed evaluation of the confessional and Church-political divergencies, showing proof that these divergencies do not form an impediment in recognizing the OPC as true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ," *Acts*, Art. 55.

According to Article 29 of the Confession of Faith the true and the false Church are easily recognized and distinguished from each other. The true Church is to be recognized by the following marks: it practices the pure preaching of the gospel; it maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; and it exercises Church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head.

**Prehistory**

The Synod of Coaldale 1977 recognized with thankfulness the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ as confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession.

This recognition was in line with statements of several previous Synods. Already in 1965 Synod Edmonton declared that the OPC as a Presbyterian Church is a fruit of the Calvinist Reformation. It has Confessions and a Church Polity which are of a Calvinist character. In this century it has decidedly chosen for orthodoxy and against modernism.

In 1967 the General Synod of our Netherlands sister Churches accepted the statement of the Regional Synod of Groningen that the Westminster Confession of Faith is a completely Reformed Confession ("een voluit Gereformeerd belijdenisgeschrift"). Synod Orangeville 1968 of our Canadian Reformed Churches expressed its gratitude that it is evident that in many respects the good fight of the faith is being fought in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Synod New Westminster 1971 gratefully acknowledged that the OPC is a group of Churches that commit themselves to the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God and that wish to maintain the Creeds, based on this Word of God. The OPC desires to regulate and order the government of the Church in accordance with the Scriptural Confession, namely, that in accordance with the Form of Government, Chapter 1, 7 all its decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God.

But what about the divergencies in Confession and Church Polity?

Synod Coaldale 1977 considered that these divergencies, notwithstanding the fact that continued discussion of them is desirable, are to be explained from the different origins of the Confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Westminster Confession of Faith with its related Doctrinal Standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

This Synod of Coaldale, that recognized the OPC as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, had access to a letter of the OPC Committee of Ecumenicity and Inter-Church Relations of April 14, 1976. This letter confirmed that the OPC wholeheartedly adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith and maintains the rules for Church Polity as laid down in the Form of Government. It also confirmed — according to a consideration of our Synod — that the divergencies having been discussed in this letter do not form an impediment to recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. Among others, this consideration led Synod Coaldale 1977 to its recognition of the OPC.

Although Synod 1980 upheld this recognition of the OPC as a true Church, it expressed regret that the evaluation of the divergencies, as discussed in the letter of April 1976, was not explained in detail. It mandated our Committee to perform what Synod 1977 should have done. Synod 1983 renewed this mandate.

### **General Remarks**

Before we now enter into a detailed evaluation of the confessional and Church political divergencies, we make some general remarks about the application of Article 29 of our Confession of Faith.

Although there are differences between a person and a community, it is remarkable that Article 29 speaks not only of the true Church but also of those who are of the Church. True Christians are not perfect in this life — “great weakness remains in them” — but they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life. By way of parallel one might say that the Confession does not state that a true Church is perfect. It rather presupposes that great weakness remains in a true Church as it remains in true Christians of whom it is a congregation or Assembly (Art. 27). Our Confession is not only directed against Roman Catholicism but also against Anabaptism which revived the schismatic tendencies of Donatism.

In this context we may also mention the fact that the Confession acknowledges that hypocrites are mixed in the Church along with the good. They are not part of the Church, although they are outwardly in it.

In Book IV of his *Institutes* Calvin, who had great influence upon the formulation of our Confession of Faith, writes as follows:

The pure ministry of the Word and pure mode of celebrating the sacraments are, as we say, sufficient pledge and guarantee that we may safely embrace as Church any society in which both these marks exist. The principle extends to the point that we must not reject it so long as it retains them, even if it otherwise swarms with many faults. What is more, some fault may creep into the administration of either doctrine or sacraments, but this ought not to estrange us from communion with the Church (IV.1.12).

There are articles of doctrine disputed among the Churches which still do not break the unity of faith. Calvin reminds us of the apostle's words, “Let us therefore, as many are perfect, be of the same mind; and if you be differently minded in anything, God shall reveal this also to you” (Phil.3:15), when he writes,

But since all men are somewhat beclouded with ignorance, either we must leave no Church remaining, or we must condone delusion in those matters which can go unknown without harm to the sum of religion and without loss of salvation.

In agreement with our Confession and in the line of Calvin's instruction concerning the Holy, Catholic Church Synod 1980 rightly considered the fact that a Church may be called a true Church according to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, while this does not mean that it is a “pure” or “perfect” Church (cf. Revelation 2 and 3). A true Church can still have weaknesses but yet fight the good fight of faith and listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd.

In the context of these general remarks about doctrinal and Church political divergencies we also refer to Article 50 of our Church Order that states, “With foreign Churches of Reformed Confession a sister Church relationship shall be maintained as much as possible. On minor points of the Church Order and ecclesiastical practice Churches abroad shall not be rejected.” Although there may be a difference of opinion about the question what constitutes “minor points” (or “non essentials” in the old text of Art. 85), it is clear that also with respect to Church Order and ecclesiastical practice the Reformed Churches never adopted an absolutist or rigoristic approach which would prevent us from acknowledging that the grace of God has also been given to others.

## II. DOCTRINAL DIVERGENCIES

### 1. Visible and Invisible Church

The Westminster Confession Ch. 25 par. 1,2 speaks about the catholic or universal Church which is invisible and about the visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (cf. Larger Catechism, Q. and A. 64-66).

In their report to Synod 1971 our Deputies made the remark that the terms visible and invisible Church, used in these articles, are not derived from the Scriptures but they give expression to a Scriptural distinction, namely, the distinction between the whole number of the elect *and* all those who profess the true religion with their children. This distinction is rooted in the Scriptures, Eph. 1:4, Acts 13:48, John 15:2, I Cor. 1:2 and is in agreement with the contents of Heidelberg Catechism Answer 54 and Belgic Confession Article 29. The former confesses that the Son of God gathers a Church chosen to everlasting life of which I am a living member, and the latter distinguishes the true believers from the hypocrites who are mixed in the Church with the good, yet are not of the Church.

Our Deputies concluded already in 1971 that this divergency in Confession is not of such a nature that it should prevent the Canadian Reformed Churches from recognizing the OPC as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition to this examination and evaluation we may remark that the use of the term "invisible" goes back to Augustine. In his work *On Baptism, against the Donatists* he speaks about false Christians who are enemies of the brotherly love, whether they are openly without, or appear to be within. "While they seem to be within, they are severed from that invisible bond of love." (NPNF IV, 445) Augustine refers in this context to I John 2:19 and II Tim. 2:16-21.

In the Middle Ages similar expressions were used by Wycliffe and Hus and this led to the use of the terms "visible and invisible" with respect to the Church in Luther, Zwingli and Calvin.

As far as Calvin is concerned, he makes a distinction between the visible Church and all God's elect (IV. 1.2) and says that the article of the Creed also applies to some extent to the outward Church (3). This is "the Church visible, which falls within our knowledge." He writes,

For we have said that Holy Scripture speaks of the Church in two ways. Sometimes by the term "Church" it means that which is actually in God's presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit. Then, indeed, the Church includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world. Often, however, the name "Church" designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ (IV. 1.7).

Calvin makes thus a distinction between that which is invisible to us and visible to the eyes of God alone, and that which is called "Church" in respect to men. He explains,

Just as we must believe, therefore, that the former Church, invisible to us, is visible to the eyes of God alone, so we are commanded to revere and keep communion with the latter, which is called "Church" in respect to men (7).

Our Deputies have rightly warned against a *polarization* of the visible and invisible Church. It results in a low esteem for what is called the visible Church, a weakening of Church-consciousness, a lack of understanding of the seriousness of the calling to separate from the false Church, and the rise of the "theologoumenon" of the pluriformity of the Church which is neither taught by the Scriptures nor by the Reformed Confessions and which proved to be an undermining factor in the fight against the sins of the Church and for the Reformation of the Church.

This warning against a polarization, however, should not blind us for the fact that

the Westminster Confession does not show a low esteem for what is called the visible Church. It is called "the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation." In the following section (Art. 25.3) the Westminster Confession declares:

Unto this catholic visible Church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual thereunto.

The following Articles 26-31 all deal with the Church: the communion of saints, the sacraments, baptism, the Lord's Supper, Church censures, Synods and councils.

In Art. 25.4 the expression is found, "This Catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible." It reminds us of what we confess in Art. 27 Belgic Confession: the Holy Catholic Church sometimes for a while may look very small, and as extinct in the eyes of man. Although the terminology "visible — invisible" is not used in our Belgic Confession — for which we may be thankful, the distinction between the Church in the eyes of God and the Church in the eyes of men, as stressed by Calvin, is certainly present. It shows that in this respect there is no real contrast in the doctrine about the Church between the Westminster Confession and our Confession of Faith.

Further, it must not escape our attention that the Westminster Confession knows of the dreadful possibility that Churches "have so degenerated, as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan" (Art. 25.5). The letter of the OPC Committee d.d. April 14, 1976, pointed out that the Westminster Confession does distinguish between the true and the false Church.

Finally, this letter spoke about the distinction between "the Church visible and the Church invisible" as "the covenantal understanding of Church with its focus on the Church as visible" and "viewing the Church from the perspective of election." The Orthodox Presbyterian brothers tried to make clear that they do not think of two separate Churches but of two aspects of the one, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. When they defined the Church "in part, in terms of election," they wrote, "Since the identity of the elect is known only to God, this Church is, to the human eye, invisible."

Undoubtedly our General Synod 1977 must have recognized in this description the reference of Augustine to II Tim. 2:19 ("The Lord knows those who are His") and the manner in which Calvin spoke about the Church *coram Deo*, "in God's presence." This must have led this Synod to the consideration that the divergencies, "notwithstanding the fact that continued discussion of them is desirable, are to be explained from the different origins of the Confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Westminster Confession of Faith with its related Doctrinal Standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," and to join our Deputies in their 1971 conclusion that the divergencies in Confession are not of such a nature that they should prevent the Canadian Reformed Churches from recognizing the OPC as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In concluding this part of the evaluation of the doctrinal divergencies we may add that our Synod of Edmonton 1965 already declared that in this century the OPC had decidedly chosen for orthodoxy and against modernism. This choice with its accompanying Church struggle was not impeded by the Westminster Confession but stimulated by it, e.g. by what it states concerning the purity of particular Churches which are members of the catholic visible Church. The OPC itself is fruit of Church Reformation in the twentieth century, not in spite of the Westminster Standards but because of faithful adherence to them.

## 2. The Covenant

The 1971 Report of Deputies drew attention to an ambiguity in the Westminster Standards with respect to the question with whom the covenant of grace was made.

The Larger Catechism, Answer 31 states that it was made with Christ as the second Adam and in Him with all the elect as His seed.

Our Deputies rightly remarked that the texts to which Answer 31 refers — I Cor. 15:22, 45; Eph. 1:4; II Tim. 1:9 — do not speak of the people with whom the covenant was made, but of them who become partakers of the covenant-goods.

The Larger Catechism itself, however, confesses in Answer 166 that "infants descending from parents either both or one of them professing faith in Christ and obedience to Him, are in that respect within the covenant, and are to be baptized." Our 1971 Deputies were of the opinion that in distinction from Answer 31, this Answer 166 agrees with the Scriptures which teach that the covenant was made with the believers and their seed, Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39; I Cor. 7:14.

The OPC Committee in its letter of April 1976 acknowledged that there is dual emphasis in the Westminster Standards regarding the covenant, parallel to the distinction between the Church as visible and the Church as invisible. They pointed out, however, that there is no doctrine of the covenant in the Three Forms of Unity except by implication.

One could take this remark as to remind us that, although the Reformed Churches (Liberated) have rejected the binding to the Kuyperian doctrinal pronouncements of Synod Sneek-Utrecht 1942 concerning covenant and baptism, they have not denied that within the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches there has been freedom of different approaches with respect to the relation between God's election and His covenant.

The OPC Committee rejected "the error of a doctrine of presumptive regeneration of the children of the covenant" and assured us, "Together with you, we would seek to avoid this misappropriation of the doctrine of election by proper attention to the doctrine of the covenant of grace which is made with believers and their seed."

We may add some quotations from the 1975 edition of *The Standards of government and worship of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. In the Form of Holy Baptism (pp. 74ff.) we do not read of a covenant with the elect, but we encounter these expressions: "It (baptism) is a sign and seal of the inclusion of the person who is baptized in the covenant of grace . . . (B)aptized persons are called upon to assume the obligations of the covenant . . . (T)he promise of the covenant is made to believers and to their seed, as God declared unto Abraham . . . In the new dispensation no less than in the old, the seed of the faithful, born within the Church, have, by virtue of their birth, interest in the covenant and right to the seal of it and to the outward privileges of the Church."

In the principles of public worship it is stated: "Public worship differs from private worship in that in public worship God is served by His saints unitedly as His covenant people, the body of Christ. For this reason the covenant children should be present so far as possible as well as adults." (68).

The directory for public profession of faith speaks about "classes in Christian doctrine for the covenant youth" and the form begins with the words:

Beloved in the Lord Jesus, we thank our God for the grace which was given you, in that having come to years of discretion, you have accepted God's covenant promise which was signified and sealed unto you in your infancy by holy baptism (81).

One may conclude from the Directory for Worship that in practice in the OPC the doctrine of the Larger Catechism Answer 166 functions as an acknowledgement of the covenant of grace that God made with the believers and their seed.

Although also in this respect continued discussion is desirable (as Synod Coaldale 1977 stated) since weaknesses and imperfections in the Westminster Standards could benefit from a careful emendation, the divergency now discussed was not an impediment to recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.



### 3. Assurance of Faith

The Westminster Confession Ch. 14.2 gives a description of faith, while Ch. 18.3 speaks about the personal assurance of grace and salvation in these words, "This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be a partaker of it." Also Answer 81 of the Larger Catechism states, "Assurance of grace and salvation not being of the essence of faith, true believers may wait long before they obtain it."

The 1971 report of our Deputies aired the opinion that this Confession regarding the lack of full assurance in the believer agrees with Article 16 of Ch. 1 of the Canons of Dort which speaks of "those in whom a living faith in Christ, an assured confidence of soul, peace of conscience, an earnest endeavor after filial obedience, a glorifying in God through Christ, is not as yet strongly felt."

The OPC Committee in its 1976 letter referred also to the Canons of Dort, Fifth Head, Article 11 which says "that believers in this life have to struggle with various doubts, and that under grievous temptations they are not always sensible of this full assurance of faith and certainty of persevering." The OPC Committee recognized the dangers of subjectivism and mysticism, but pointed out that they are also found among Reformed people in The Netherlands and on the North American continent oriented to the Three Forms of Unity. They appreciated our testimony to the fact that the hope and joy of the believer is rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ and His promises, and not in his own personal experience.

Although the expression about "the essence of faith" could be amended, Synod 1977 could also in this point not deny that a Church that adheres to the Westminster Standards can be called a true Church.

### 4. The Observance of the Law

Chapter 21 of the Westminster Confession declares: "As it is the law of nature that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages. He hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath . . ." It speaks about the Lord's Day as the Christian Sabbath.

The 1971 Report of our Deputies stated that the Larger Catechism spelled out the meaning of the Ten Commandments in great detail and that the correctness of some words and expressions could be questioned. But although deputies preferred the interpretation of the commandments as given in the Heidelberg Catechism, they did not feel free to declare that the explanation presented in the Larger Catechism deviates from the contents of Scripture and Confession.

Later they brought forward the question whether in the explanation of the fourth commandment full justice is done to the progress in the history of salvation. The OPC Committee referred to the word "Sabbath" in our Heidelberg Catechism and answered that they do not regard the redemptive significance attached to the fourth commandment as exhausting its significance, or the mediatorial accomplishment of Christ as bringing to an end its redemptive significance. "The recurring Sabbath teaches us to look forward to the consummation of redemption and the inauguration of the eternal Sabbath of which the people of God have a foretaste in this life but which is yet in its fullness outstanding. The shift from the seventh day to a first day Sabbath is accounted for in terms of the progress of the history of redemption."

One could add that, although the Westminster Standards by way of comparison refer to "the law of nature," which is infelicitous, the institution of the Sabbath is clearly described as one by God's Word.

Although there is a difference in approach with respect to the fourth commandment between the continental Reformed Confessions and the Westminster Standards which were influenced by Puritanism, one should certainly not make this an impediment for acknowledging a Presbyterian Church that adheres to these Standards as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

### III. CHURCH — POLITICAL DIVERGENCIES

When we enter upon a discussion of the Church-political divergencies that exist between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, we may again refer to the 1971 report and the 1978 letter of our Deputies (*Acts New Westminster* pp. 66-68 and *Acts Smithville* pp. 199-201).

The 1971 report spoke about a considerable difference. The Form of Government of the OPC is based on the principle that the local Churches are branches of the Church universal, while our Church Order proceeds from the completeness and the autonomy of the local Churches as Churches of Christ. This difference makes itself felt in the description of the nature of major Assemblies and their authority.

In 1978 the OPC adopted a new Form of Government and as could be expected, it remained a typically Presbyterian one: "In accordance with the teaching of Scripture, the many members of this Church universal are to be organized in local and regional Churches . . ." (II.3). This Form of Government speaks of the local Church and its Session, the regional Church and its Presbytery, and the whole Church and its General Assembly. There are, therefore, three governing bodies or Assemblies which have the same kinds of rights and powers. "Each governing Assembly exercises exclusive original jurisdiction over all matters belonging to it . . . The lower Assemblies are subject to the review and control of higher Assemblies, in regular graduation" (XII.2).

Church government is described as a valid and authentic jurisdiction to which Christians are commanded to submit themselves. The Westminster Confession is quoted, when it is stated that the decision of Church officers, when properly rendered and if in accord with the Word of God, "are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in His Word" (III.5). Deliverances of the General Assembly, if declarative of the Word of God, are to be received with deference and submission not only because of their fidelity to the Word of God but also because of the nature of the General Assembly as the supreme judicatory of the Church (XV.8).

In our 1978 letter our Deputies wrote to the OPC Committee that we keep having difficulty with the structure of the OPC Church government. The regional Church with its Presbytery dominates the local congregation and Session, while in our Church Order local Churches are not under the care of, nor subject to the review and control of a broader Assembly. It cannot be denied that there are considerable divergencies in Church Polity between the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches.

Nevertheless, the underlying unity also in Church government should never be forgotten. In a beautiful manner the new Form of Government begins with a chapter, entitled, *Christ, the King and Head of the Church*. It quotes Isaiah 9:6,7; Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-23 and Ephesians 4:10-12, concluding that Jesus Christ gave offices necessary for the building of His Church, for making disciples of all nations and perfecting His saints.

There is therefore but one King and Head of the Church, the only Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, who rules in His Church by His Word and Spirit. His mediatorial office includes all the offices in the Church . . . The authority of all such mediatorial office rests upon His appointment, who has ordained government in His Church, revealed its nature to us in His Word, and promised His presence in the midst of His Church as this government is exercised in His Name.

Christ as the King and Head orders His Church by the rule of His Word; the pattern of officers, ordinances, government, and discipline is set forth in Scripture and is to be observed as the instruction of the Lord. "Church government must conform to the Scriptural pattern and follow the specific provisions revealed in the New Testament." The new Form of Government of the OPC is not only remarkable because

of this Christological and Scriptural approach to Church government but also because of its emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, as is evident in these words:

Jesus Christ, having ascended into heaven, abides in His Church by the Holy Spirit whom He has sent. Through His Spirit He has given His Word revealing His ordinances; through the Spirit also He exerts His saving and governing power in the teaching of His Word and the administration of His ordinances. Only by the gifts and calling of the Spirit are men endowed and qualified for office in Christ's Church (Chapter 1.4).

In this confessional first chapter it is stated that the Presbyterian Form of Government seeks to fulfill the Scriptural requirements for the glory of Christ, the edification of the Church, and the enlargement of that spiritual liberty in which Christ has set us free. In the last expression we recognize the usage of Galatians 5 in a Reformed and anti-hierarchical manner.

These Scriptural principles are recognizable in the chapters that follow in the Form of Government. Chapter III, e.g., about the nature and exercise of Church power begins with this anti-hierarchical statement.

The power which Christ committed to His Church is not vested in the special officers alone, but in the whole body . . . . The power of believers in their general office includes the right to acknowledge and desire the exercise of the gifts and calling of the special offices. The regular exercise of oversight in a particular congregation is discharged by those who have been called to such work by vote of the people.

The general office of all believers is thus clearly acknowledged.

The supreme rule of Christ by His Spirit and Word and the spiritual liberty of all believers are safeguarded in the following clause,

All Church power is only ministerial and declarative, for the holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice. No Church judicatory may presume to bind the conscience by making laws on the basis of its own authority; all its decisions should be founded upon the Word of God (III.3).

This statement reminds us not only of the Westminster Confession, Article XX.2, but also of our Belgic Confession, Article 7 and Article 32. It is repeated in an important chapter (XV.8) of the Form of Government, dealing with the whole Church and its General Assembly: "the General Assembly is not invested with power, by virtue of its own authority, to make pronouncements which bind the conscience of the members of the Church." We have already indicated that we have difficulty with the description of the nature of ecclesiastical authority, especially when Chapter XV.8 states that the deliverances of the General Assembly are to be received with difference and submission *also* because of the nature of the General Assembly as the supreme judicatory of the Church. Nevertheless, we must not overlook the restrictions in Chapter III and Chapter XV. The decisions of Church officers are to be received "*when properly rendered and if in accord with the Word of God.*" It reminds us of the important Article 31 of our Church Order, "Whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, *unless* it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order."

A similar restriction is found in Article XV of the Form of Government when it defines the reception of deliverances of the General Assembly by the words: "*if declarative of the Word of God*" and when it grounds this reception with submission in "*their fidelity to the Word of God.*"

On the basis of these or similar expressions our deputies concluded already in 1971 that, although considerable divergencies exist, there is no difference in the essential truth of Christ's Headship over His Church and of the absolute authority which His Word should have in the government of the Church.

If we now scan the new Form of Government, we see other anti-hierarchical elements. Chapter XVI is a new chapter dealing with congregational meetings. A stated meeting

shall be held at least once annually to consider the affairs of the congregation. Other meetings shall be called when the Session deems it to be for the best interests of the congregation or when requested in writing to do so by one-fourth of the communicant members. It is remarkable that the Form of Government gives regulations for the transaction of specific matters of business and for the procedure of voting in these congregational meetings. Minutes have to be approved by the congregation before the close of the meeting. The Form of Government even states:

A congregation may withdraw from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church only by an affirmative vote of the congregation at two successive meetings of the congregation . . . .

Although one could ask whether these regulations for congregational meetings do full justice to the office of overseers and whether they do not lead into the direction of congregationalism, one may certainly not allege that hierarchism in the OPC has taken away the rights of Christ's congregation and its members.

The Session, which is called, "the governing body of the local Church," consists of its pastor, its other ministers, and its ruling elders. Chapter XIII.4 mentions that the Session shall choose its own moderator annually from among its members. This new regulation (the old form had the pastor always as the moderator of the Session) certainly diminishes "the special place of the ministers among the office-bearers of the Church," against which our report 1971 protested.

The form has, as far as we can see, a new clause about the final authority over the use of Church property. It describes the task of the Session as follows:

The Session is charged with maintaining the government of all the congregation. It shall oversee all matters concerning the conduct of public worship; it shall concert the best measures for promoting the spiritual growth and evangelistic witness of the congregation. It shall receive, dismiss and exercise discipline over the members of the Church, supervise the activities of the diaconate, the board of trustees and all other organizations of the congregation, and have final authority over the use of the Church property (XIII.7).

Sure, the following sentence mentions that the Session also shall appoint ruling elder commissioners to higher Assemblies and the expression shows again that Presbyterianism describes the Presbytery and General Assembly as higher courts or judicatories. But we must not forget that in the case of appeals our Reformed broader Assemblies *also* acts as "courts." Moreover, the description of the authority and task of the Session resembles that of the Consistories in Reformed Church government and clearly acknowledges the final authority of the Session over the use of the Church property.

In the past our Deputies rightly brought forward their objections against the special place of the Presbytery among the Church Assemblies, e.g. in the concept that "the Presbytery has the power to order whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare of the Churches under its care" (XIV.5). Nevertheless, we should not forget the function of Church visitors authorized by Classis according to Article 46 of our Church Order, and we should not forget that the Form of Government of the OPC specifically states, "always respecting the liberties guaranteed to the individual congregation under the Constitution." Those liberties of the congregational Assemblies have been spelled out in the chapters we quoted about the Session and the congregational meeting.

As far as the General Assembly is concerned, Chapter XV regulates that it "shall consist of not more than one hundred and fifty-five voting commissioners." This number may seem small to Presbyterians in the U.S.A. but it is large for us who are used to a delegation of sixteen brothers via Classis and Regional Synods. In the event that the General Assembly fails to establish such proportions, "the next General Assembly shall consist of every minister and of one ruling elder from every local Church" (XV.2). As far as representation is concerned, one must conclude that the local congregations in Presbyterianism are certainly not far removed from their General Assembly.

In this context another regulation must have our attention.

Deliverances, resolutions, overtures, and other actions which have the effect of amending or adding to the subordinate standards shall not be binding unless they have been approved by the General Assembly and Presbyteries in the manner provided in this Form of Government for the amendment of the Constitution (XV.8).

It shows that even the General Assembly itself — however broadly composed of ministers and ruling elders commissioned by the Presbyteries — cannot immediately amend or add to the Confessions, the Form of Government, the Book of Discipline and the Directory for the Public Worship. It requires consideration and decision by the Presbyteries. The reports about voting by Presbyteries e.g., concerning proposals of merger, have made clear to us that we cannot condemn the Presbyterian Church Polity as mere hierarchism. The many safeguards which have been built into the system caution against such a generalizing statement.

The 1971 report of our Deputies concluded that although the differences in Church Polity should remain a point of serious discussions, they need not prevent the Canadian Reformed Churches from recognizing the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ and from entering into correspondence with this Church.

We hope that our evaluation has underlined this conclusion that truly Presbyterian Churches acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Head of the Church and accept His Word as the only rule for faith and order. A true Church governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head. Presbyterian Church government as such does not prevent recognition of a Church as a true Church, according to Article 29 of our Belgic Confession.

#### **IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In conclusion we would like to add a historical note. Last year we commemorated the sesquicentennial of the Secession in The Netherlands of 1834 (the "Afscheiding"). During this commemoration it was mentioned that the Synod of Leiden 1857 sought ecclesiastical contact or fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland and that Deputies of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland visited Kampen. The Rev. A. Brummelkamp and the Rev. S. Van Velzen were delegated to Scotland. At the Synod of Hoogeveen in 1860 the Churches of the Secession received official delegates of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Brummelkamp Jr. writes that the Seceded Church in The Netherlands then and later owed much to its correspondence with the Scottish brethren and to their rich experience. In 1877 Brummelkamp and Van Velzen participated in the Pan Presbyterian Council which intended to establish communion or fellowship between Presbyterian Churches.

It shows that the fathers of the Secession, who firmly adhered to Articles 27-32 of the Belgic Confession, recognized faithful Presbyterian Churches as true Churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Canadian Reformed Churches are in the line of the tradition of Reformed Churches on the continent of Europe, when they in their contacts not only with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church but also within the International Conference of Reformed Churches recognize in Presbyterianism a fruit of the Reformation that God graciously gave to His Church in the sixteenth century.

Permanent contact in the unity of true faith and continual discussion of divergencies may express the catholicity of the Church of God and enrich the body of Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit, until we all attain to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

The Committee for Contact with the OPC

## APPENDIX II C

### REPORT OF THE FIFTY-FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HELD MAY 31 - JUNE 7, 1984, GENEVA COLLEGE, BEAVER FALLS, PA U.S.A.

The undersigned attended the 51st General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) from Monday, June 4, 1984 - Wednesday, June 6, 1984, as delegate of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

He hereby submits the following report:

1. Your delegate was well received and he was introduced to the Assembly by the stated clerk, the Rev. John P. Galbraith. On motion he was enrolled as corresponding member. As such he addressed the Assembly once to thank the Assembly for the cordial reception and to convey our brotherly greetings.

He assured the Assembly of a keen interest within the Canadian Reformed Churches as to the life and activities within the OPC.

He informed them about the completion of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter, the *Book of Praise*, and the appointment of Dr. K. Deddens as the fourth professor at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

He further mentioned that in the coming years the OPC may be undergoing some deep testings in view of the invitation issued to the OPC by the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and also as to determining the position of the OPC in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES).

He expressed the expectation that in these matters which are also important for the Canadian Reformed Churches, the OPC would seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in obedience to the Word of God. He also requested them seriously to consider what effect decisions to be made in these matters may have on the already accepted relationships with the Canadian Reformed Churches and others.

2. a. The 51st General Assembly (GA) received a letter from *the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)* which officially extended the invitation to the OPC to join the PCA under the same plan agreed upon by the Churches in 1981.  
b. Little attention was given to this matter by this 51st GA, since it was agreed that this invitation of the PCA will be brought before the 52nd GA in 1985.  
c. The GA did instruct the Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-Church Relations (CEIR) "to inform the Church regarding the principles, procedures and issues entailed in the question of responding to the invitation to join the PCA, and any other material that would be considered relevant, during the year preceding the 52nd GA."

The Assembly allowed the editor to devote an entire issue of *New Horizons*, if needed to this matter.

- d. In the meantime it can be reported from a letter dated December 28, 1984 sent by CEIR to all Sessions of the OPC, that much time has been devoted to the study of Biblical principles of Church unity and that the CEIR has recognized certain areas of importance for considering the invitation as:

The Book of Church Order of the PCA; Organizational structure; Method of supporting denominational benevolences; Faith and Life Character of the PCA; Deacons and Trustees functions; Presbytery boundaries.

In meetings of representatives of both Churches the following matters of concern were inquired about and discussed:

Principles and practices of foreign Mission work; Principles and practices of Home Mission work; Methods of supporting Missions; Free Masonry; Particular sections of the Book of Church Order; Church discipline; Charismatic issues; Status of baptized children, etc.

- e. Although the CEIR has endeavored to make a recommendation to the next GA (1985) it has found it impossible to assemble, distill, and publish the information concerning the invitation to join the PCA, needed by the Churches and the Presbyteries, to consider this invitation responsibly. CEIR is continuing its work and plans to submit a report to the 1985 GA. However, it will present a recommendation for action by the 1985 Assembly only if this report can be in the hands of the Churches by February 1, 1985. Therefore it is highly unlikely that CEIR will submit a specific recommendation to the 1985 GA.
- f. It is noteworthy, according to your reporter, that the Presbytery of Northern California sent an overture to the 51st GA to the effect that, in the event both Churches approve of the invitation of the PCA, the OPC does so with the following provisions:
- that arrangements be made by the GA for a continuing Church to be known as "The Orthodox Presbyterian Church";
  - that a fair and equitable distribution of the assets be allocated to the continuing Church;
  - that the GA make whatever provisions and arrangements are necessary to insure the continuing of a Church known as "The OPC" for those who for consciences' sake are unable to join with the PCA.
- The GA referred this overture to the CEIR to report to the 52nd GA (1985) concerning the matters raised.
- g. It appears that the OPC is seriously considering the invitation to join the PCA but wants to make sure that all Sessions have the opportunity to evaluate fully and carefully the invitation of the PCA before a decision is made.
3. a. The Committee on *Reformed Ecumenical Synod Matters* (CRES) reported to the 51st GA that it had carried out the instruction of the 49th GA (1982). Since the RES Interim Committee did not recommend that the membership of "De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland" (GKN) in the RES be terminated, the CRES sent (February 28, 1984) to the RES Chicago 1984 the OPC Assembly's request that the RES "declare the GKN . . . to be not eligible for continued membership in the RES."
- The CRES told the RES in this letter that this drastic conclusion was not reached hastily nor on the basis of one or two issues. Some of those issues are:
- membership in the World Council of Churches;
  - women in teaching and ruling office;
  - retention in teaching office of men who openly deny the central doctrines of the Reformed Confessions;
  - the admission of homosexuals to the Lord's Supper and to ecclesiastical office;
  - the report on Scripture ("God with us") that in spite of stated intentions, undermines the inspiration and authority of Scripture;
  - the coming reunion with the Hervormde Kerk.
- In this letter to the RES the CRES emphasized that these departures from Scripture of the GKN are occurring in an unbroken line year after year, in spite of the extended advice of member Churches. The OPC therefore pleads for "firm action" of the RES Chicago 1984 in order to preserve the RES' Reformed character.
- b. The same Committee sent also a letter (dated February 28, 1984) to all the Churches that are a member of the RES, pleading with them to support the OPC at the RES 1984 in its endeavor to prevent the RES and its member Churches of losing their Reformed character. They write, ". . . Obviously a course has been set in the GKN . . . that diverges from the Word of God, from the Reformed standards . . . If the GKN will not change its course — and they have proved they will not — then the RES must. In a way the choice is very simple: will the RES be a Reformed body, or will it not . . . ? All the evidence shows that the GKN will not go the RES' way. The RES cannot go the GKN's way."

- c. Earlier already (September 20, 1982) the CRES had sent a letter to the GKN to tell them "how gravely it felt about . . . your deviations, over a number of years, from Reformed (i.e. Biblical) teachings . . . We plead that you will, by God's grace, come back to the faithfulness to the Word of God from which your Reformed brethren of the RES believe that you have departed on so many occasions . . . As long as you follow the course that you have begun and, at this juncture seem determined to continue, you are destroying the existence of the RES as a Reformed body . . ."
- d. The 51st GA dealing with this part of the report decided to request the RES 1984 to place consideration of the membership of the GKN in the RES as the first order of business of the Synod.
- One of the grounds for this request was: "the GKN's continued membership in the RES is of such prominence and importance to the future of the RES that it will hang over all the other business of the Synod until that question has been settled."
- e. In the meantime it can be reported that the RES Chicago 1984 (to which the GKN sent two women as part of their delegation) did not grant the OPC's request to "declare the GKN not eligible for continued membership in the RES." A minority advisory report asked the RES to request the GKN:
- to withdraw its so-called pastoral advice on homosexual practice, or else
  - to withdraw from the RES by December 31, 1986.
- This recommendation failed by one vote (28 - 28, with one abstention).
- The RES decided to request the GKN to withdraw its pastoral advice concerning homosexual practice, or
- "If it is unable to comply with this request to seriously consider the fact that several Churches would find it difficult to stay in the RES with the GKN."
- f.
- i The RES membership of the OPC has been a point of discussion and an obstacle to full unity since the beginning of the contact between OPC and the Canadian Reformed Churches.
  - ii However, according to your reporter, it must be stated that the OPC has taken its membership very seriously and for instance has warned the GKN and other member Churches in a Scriptural way, and called upon them to return to faithfulness to the Word of God.
  - iii Since the RES Chicago 1984 did not take the "firm action" the OPC considered necessary to preserve its Reformed character, the OPC would seriously jeopardize its own Reformed witness by continuing its membership in the RES.
4. a. The Committee on Reformed Ecumenical Synod matters as well as the CEIR informed the 51st GA in their reports about *the International Conference of Reformed Churches*. The main items of the tentative constitution concerning the basis, membership, and purpose, were passed on to the GA.
- It was noted:
- i that an invitation had not been issued to the OPC to participate in the first Constituent Assembly of the ICRC in 1982;
  - ii that the Canadian Reformed Churches in their Synod 1983 declined to propose that the OPC be invited to the meeting of the ICRC Edinburgh 1985, although such action was proposed to their 1983 Synod by one of their Committees;
  - iii that not enough was known at this moment about the ICRC to make a recommendation either to apply or not to apply for membership;
  - iv that the OPC should continue to observe the development of the ICRC and report at a later GA about it;
  - v that observers should be sent to the meeting of the ICRC in Edinburgh, Scotland.



- b. The 51st GA decided indeed to authorize the CRES, in consultation with the CEIR, to appoint two persons to attend the next meeting of the ICRC, to be held September 3 - 13, 1985, in Edinburgh, Scotland. They will be sent as observers or some other non-delegate status acceptable to the ICRC.
- One of the grounds for this decision was that if at the time of the 1985 GA the sending of observers seems unnecessary or undesirable the Assembly could cancel the authorization without harm or prejudice to the persons involved.
5. a. In its report to the 51st GA the CEIR informed the GA about the continuing contact with the *Canadian Reformed Churches*. The decisions of Synod Cloverdale 1983 concerning this contact were reported in full to the Assembly.
- Also the subjects regarding their standards of faith presently under discussion were mentioned and the GA was informed that these subjects and others will be further discussed in future meetings of the CEIR and our Committee for Contact with the OPC.
- b. The CEIR also reported that it has correspondence with several Churches abroad for the purpose of exploring the possibility of a relationship of some nature. These include the Free Church of Scotland, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland; also "the Netherlands Reformed Church, which separated some years ago from the "Article 31" Reformed Churches, and with which we have had contact through their observers at the meetings of the RES, and through members associated with our Missionary work in Ethiopia and now in Kenya."
6. a. Another matter of interest for our Churches was the report of a Committee appointed by a previous GA (1980) to study "*the Scriptural principles of the diaconal ministry of the Church.*"
- This was the third year that the OPC discussed the extent of the Church's diaconal concerns.
- The Study Committee presented a majority and minority report.
- b. The majority report, "Scriptural Principles Relevant To World Diaconal Involvement," defends the position that also non-Christian individuals should receive help, encouragement and if necessary the direct assistance of the Church's deacons.
- c. The minority report recognizes that the Bible focusses diaconal aid on Church or covenant members (with whom we are in covenant relationship) and it upholds that the family and individual in the Church is first in line to exercise care and assistance.
- Although under certain circumstances also "non-covenantal" persons should receive diaconal help, cf. Gal. 6:10. This report cautions the Church to use this aid as a major evangelistic tool "since neither Jesus nor the Early Church did this, Mark 1:37-38; John 5:3, 5-9."
- d. The result of the lengthy discussion was that the GA decided to refer both reports to the Churches for their study.
- A motion to continue the study was voted down thereby disbanding the Study Committee.
- The GA decided further to inform the RES Chicago 1984 that the Assembly has given diligent study to the principles of diaconal ministry, but that it is unable to send conclusions to the RES at this time.
7. The 51st GA decided that the 52nd GA will convene Thursday, May 30, 1985, on the campus of Eastern College, St. Davids, PA.
8. In conclusion your delegate may report that especially during intermissions there was ample opportunity for personal conversations; several commissioners requested

clarification concerning some decisions of General Synod Cloverdale 1983 regarding our contact with the OPC, our position with regard to the supervision of the Lord's Supper, the involvement in the so-called "Hofford-case" and related matters. This personal contact was most enjoyable and instructive.

Humbly submitted by your delegate,  
J. Mulder

## APPENDIX II D

### DELEGATES REPORT ON THE FIFTY-SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, MAY 30 TO JUNE 6, 1985 EASTERN COLLEGE ST. DAVIS, PENNSYLVANIA

#### 1. Attendance

The total attendance of voting commissioners was about 130 out of an allotted 153 (about 88 of 93 teaching elder commissioners and about 42 of 60 ruling elder commissioners. Commissioners represent Presbyteries).

Your delegate attended the Assembly from Tuesday, June 3 through Thursday June 6 to the close of this 52nd General Assembly at about 3:50 p.m.

#### 2. Introduction and Addresses to the General Assembly

Soon after arrival your delegate, together with others, was introduced to the Assembly by the Rev. J.P. Galbraith, stated clerk of the Assembly and chairman of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-Church Relations. On motion he was received as corresponding member. It was your delegate's turn to address the Assembly after Rev. Dr. Smith of the PCA and Rev. Compton of the Free Church of Scotland had spoken. As could be expected, Dr. Smith, stated clerk of the PCA, focused the attention of the Assembly on the invitation issued to the OPC to join the Presbyterian Church in America. But an unexpected remark was made by the Rev. D. Compton of the Free Church of Scotland in his speech. Having informed the Assembly of a recent development of Free Reformed Churches of Scotland established in Canada, Rev. Compton added that joining the Canadian Reformed Churches was not considered feasible because of the different cultural background — the Canadian Reformed Churches showed too much of a Dutch cultural background.

The import of the speeches of the two former speakers and the upcoming bi-centennial celebration of the OPC gave substance and form to your delegate's address. In his address your delegate started by referring to the remark of the previous speaker, Rev. D. Compton, and told the Assembly that your delegate had a Frisian cultural background and belonged to the American Reformed Church at Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A., which is affiliated with the Canadian Reformed Churches. All this illustrated that these Churches could not simply be traced back to a Dutch cultural background.

He continued by making the assertion that Christ's Church is not marked by any cultural background but by the Confession and teaching of the truth of the Word of God. The attention of the Assembly was first drawn to Matthew 28:19 and 20 where the risen Lord, having assured His apostles that He had received universal authority, gives them a mandate which emphasizes two aspects: 1) "initial teaching" (matheteuoo — to make disciples), and 2) a "continued teaching" (didaskoo — to impart instruction, to instill doctrine into, to explain, to expound) to preserve all things whatsoever the Lord had commanded them. This mandate was explained as to imply the gathering and preservation among all nations of Churches marked by holding on to "the traditions which you were taught" (II Thess. 2:15). This led your delegate to refer to the history of the OPC, the invitation to join the PCA and the planned bi-centennial celebration of its existence as the true continuation of the Presbyterian Church of America, whereby the OPC has claimed to hold on to "the traditions" of the apostolic teaching and to obey the apostolic admonition to "withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us," II Thess. 3:6.

With a view to considering a merger with the Presbyterian Church in America and the celebration of their 50th anniversary as OPC the Assembly was recommended to be faithful to the Head of the Church and to be guided by His Spirit and Word, rightly to honour Christ in true remembrance of His historical deed of Reformation.

The Canadian Reformed Churches would thereby know what the Orthodox Presbyterian Church holds to doctrinally and confessionally.

In conclusion, brotherly greetings were conveyed to the Assembly.

### 3. Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-Church Relations

The following recommendations were adopted:

- a. "That the GA indicate to North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council and the member Churches that it approves a study of procedures concerning the reception of fugitives from the discipline of member Churches, and authorize the Committee of Ecumenicity and Inter-Church Relations to appoint a representative to serve on a joint NAPARC study Committee on that subject."
- b. "That the GA approve the Golden Rule Comity Agreement proposed by NAPARC, and commend it to the Sessions, Presbyteries, and the Foreign and Home Missions Committees of the OPC for their adoption and implementations."

The Golden Rule Comity Agreement is as follows:

Comity has meant different things to different people. We representatives of the Home Missions Agencies and Committees or Boards of our denominations resist territorial statements on comity in light of the social and cultural complexity of North American society and the great spiritual need of our countrymen who are apart from Jesus Christ. Out of a concern to build the Church of Jesus Christ rather than our own denominations and to avoid the appearance of competition, we affirm the following courteous code of behavior to guide our Church planting ministries in North America:

1. We will be sensitive to the presence of existing Churches and Missions ministries of other NAPARC Churches and will refrain from enlisting members of these enlisting ministries.
  2. We will communicate with the equivalent or appropriate agency (denominational Mission Committee or Board, Presbytery Missions or Church extension Committee, or Session) before initiating Church planting activities in a community where NAPARC Churches or Missions ministries exist.
  3. We will provide information on at least an annual basis describing progress in our ministries and future plans.
  4. We will encourage our Regional Home Missions leadership to develop good working relationships.
- c. "That Overture 4 to the 51st GA (from Northern California re: a continuing Church in the event that the OPC joins and be received by the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) be placed on the docket of the 53rd GA at a point in the docket after the decision of that Assembly re the invitation of the PCA to join and be received."

The Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-Church Relations reports extensively on the invitation from the Presbyterian Church in America and mentions that it was extremely difficult to produce a report due to new developments which are:

1. The PCA has, since 1981, decided very definitely that for the foreseeable future they will have a large General Assembly with virtually no meaningful debate on the floor of the Assembly. In 1981 it was expected that they would go to a smaller representative Assembly soon.
2. Dependence on permanent Committees seems to have grown significantly since 1981 — decisions formerly in the hands of judicatories have been put into the hands of commissions, and steps are being taken that may result in greater power for agencies and their staffs.
3. Our counterpart Committee is completely new from the Ad Interim Committee with which we had previously worked, and they did not have the same understanding of the "Joint Statement" that we had had originally.
4. Questions that were raised in 1981 concerning the faith and life of the PCA

have had to be examined to see what has taken place in such matters in the ensuing years.

"Because of these differences, and not willing either to act as if they do not exist nor to simply shut the door on the invitation, we have had to work through the effect of the changes."

The Committee regrets that it could not meet either its own goal nor the hopes of last year's General Assembly, and believes that the Church has the right to be given adequate time to study and discuss the matter fully before it is asked to vote on the question. "Nothing may be hidden; no one may be forced to vote before he has had the opportunity to examine the information that has been given. The consequences of the response that our Church makes to this invitation are so immense that our whole Church — members and Sessions, as well as your Committee — must do no less than try to give it our very best effort."

#### **4. Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES)**

- a. That the Committee on RES matters be requested to prepare a plan for the future response of the OPC to the RES in view of the failure of RES Chicago 1984 to deal adequately with the crisis created by the continued membership of the GKN in the RES, and report to the 54th GA (1987).
- b. That the Committee on RES matters be instructed to write a letter to the Interim Committee of the RES to express the alarm of the OPC that the failure of RES Chicago 1984 to confront the GKN with a clear ultimatum concerning their membership in the RES has severely compromised the integrity of the RES, and that a copy of this letter be sent to each of the member Churches of the RES.

#### **5. Committee on the Hermeneutics of Women in Ordained Office**

After lengthy debate the following motion was adopted:

That the pending matter be recommended to the Committee on the Hermeneutics of Women in Ordained Office; and that the Committee be enlarged by the election of two members and two alternates.

#### **6. Committee on Overtures and Communications**

Regarding 2 from the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic concerning paedocommunion, the recommendation was adopted to elect a Committee of three to study the issue of paedocommunion in the light of God's Word, our Standards, and traditions, and that a budget of \$400 be established.

#### **7. Date and Place of the Next Assembly**

The 53rd GA is scheduled to begin Tuesday, June 10, 1986 at 10:00 a.m. at Eastern College, St. Davis, Pennsylvania.

#### **8. Report CEIR on Canadian Reformed Churches**

"Matters that have not progressed as much as we wish include a review of the "Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship," our discussions with the Canadian Reformed Churches, and further development of fellowship with Churches abroad."

#### **9. Concluding Remarks**

Many favourable comments have been received from commissioners about the address of your delegate, resulting in personal contacts during intermissions and afterwards by letters received. It appeared that there is a need for a brief explanation of the history of our Churches which could be handed out to people interested. There was a keen interest with some people in Reformed literature from "our side."

The opportunity given to your delegate was used to make contact with many. And these contacts were rewarding. Not once the desire was expressed to have our Churches join the OPC, but rather the impression was given: what you have we are missing.

Respectfully submitted, P. Kingma

## APPENDIX II E

### COMPLAINT

#### Complaint 1

From Barry R. Hofford, *et al.*  
*Letter of Transmittal*  
April 22, 1983  
The Stated Clerk  
The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Esteemed Brother:

We the undersigned filed the attached complaint against the Session of Covenant Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Burtonsville, MD, on October 15, 1982. The Session denied our complaint, and we took the complaint to the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic. At its meeting of April 15, 16, 1983, the Presbytery also denied the complaint. Having notified both the Session and the Presbytery, we now bring our complaint to be heard by you, the Fiftieth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

There are five reasons for our complaining against the denial of the Presbytery:

1. The Presbytery failed to show from Scripture that the arguments of the complainants for close communion ("close communion" as defined in the Minority Report of the Committee of Presbytery to study the matter) are wrong.
2. The Presbytery failed to show from Scripture that the arguments of the complainants against the practice of the Burtonsville Session are wrong.
3. The Presbytery failed to show from Scripture that the practice of the Burtonsville Session in administering the Lord's Supper is correct.
4. The Presbytery failed to disprove the arguments of the complainants that the practice of the Burtonsville Session is contrary to the subordinate standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.
5. The Presbytery failed to show that the practice of the Burtonsville Session is supported by the subordinate standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Please note that the complaint itself represents only a summary of the various views held by the complainants, and therefore, it is necessary to consider the writings of the various complainants which express differing perspectives on this matter. We point this out because we have discovered from our experience with the Burtonsville Session and the Presbytery that these differing perspectives are not always clearly understood and given due consideration.

For your convenience we are including the following list of the major documents produced in the controversy:

1. "Report of the Special Committee on Restricted Communion," April 15, 1972; 4 pages (result of Burtonsville Session's request for advice from the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic)
2. "Some Remarks concerning the Lord's Supper," by Anton van der Jagt, November 1, 1982; 11 pages
3. "Session's Response to the Complaint," November 17, 1982; 7 pages
4. "Explanation of the Complaint of October 15, 1982," by Barry R. Hofford, December 1982; 48 pages
5. "Critical Review of the Reply of the Session of the OPC in Burtonsville to the Complaint," by A. van der Jagt, December 22, 1982; 7 pages
6. Letter of Elder Stephen Brown to the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic setting forth his view of the complaint, December 27, 1982; 3 pages
7. "Majority Report of the Special Committee of Five to Deal with the Complaint against the Burtonsville Session," April 1983; 10 pages

8. "Minority Report of the Special Committee of Five to Deal with the Complaint against the Burtonsville Session," April 1983; 39 pages
9. "A Critical Analysis of the Majority Report of the Special Committee of Five," B. Hofford, April 1983; 12 pages
10. "Review of the Report of the Special Committee of Five," A. van der Jagt, April 9, 1983; 9 pages
11. Letter of Elder Stephen Brown to the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic responding to the Majority Report, April 15, 1983; 9 pages

(p. 20)

In addition to the above materials, we are in the process of writing a synopsis of the issues involved in this complaint based on the resources outlined above. We hope to have this new material in the hands of all the commissioners to the Assembly prior to its commencement in June.

We realize that this is not only a complex question but also one which has broad implications for the entire Church. For these reasons, we would like to respectfully suggest that the Assembly give this issue to a Committee for study and a report to the Fifty-first General Assembly rather than come to a hasty and premature conclusion. Although we as complainants find ourselves in an unhappy position, we are more interested in having the concerns and issues voiced in the complaint fully and properly addressed from Scripture than in having an immediate response.

Since it is likely that some of us may not be able to be present when this matter comes up for discussion at the Assembly, those of us not able to attend request that the Rev. Barry R. Hofford represent us and our complaint at the Assembly. Please notify us through him when the complaint will be heard, and please address all correspondence to us through him.

Please be assured of our prayers for you as you seek to follow Christ in all things.

Sincerely,  
 /s/ Barry R. Hofford  
 Maureen E. Hofford  
 Cristine E. Brown  
 Stephen W. Brown  
 Russell L. Yeager  
 Denise Aline Yeager  
 A. van der Jagt  
 Eliz. P. van der Jagt  
 Michel R. Dumas  
 Richard C. Baybutt

### **Body of the Complaint**

And now, this 15th day of October, A.D. 1982, come Barry R. Hofford, *et al.*, and complaint against the decision of the Session of Covenant Orthodox Presbyterian Church on September 30, 1982 to cease use of an interim method of administering the Lord's Supper (in which the Session exercised the final judgment as to who should be admitted to the Lord's Supper) and reverted to a formerly approved (March 20, 1982) method (in which visitors were allowed to exercise final judgment as to their eligibility for admission to the Lord's Supper). In support of said complaint we set forth the following reasons:

1. This decision to revert to a method in which visitors are allowed to exercise the final judgment as their eligibility for admission to the Lord's Supper is contrary to the teaching of Scripture that the elders as representatives of Christ who have been given the keys of the kingdom must exercise the final judgment as to who should be admitted to the Lord's Supper. (Matthew 16:17-19; WCF XXX; XIX, 8.)
2. Because of the current ecclesiastical confusion over the identification of the true and false Churches, this decision will allow visitors to decide to participate in the sacrament who may be members of false Churches. (FOG IV, 3.)

3. Because this decision leaves the final judgment in the hands of visitors, and because this method of administering the sacrament does not provide for the elders to always know in advance those who qualify for the sacrament, it allows those who make no profession of faith, those who may be living in public sin, and those who may be under censure from other Churches to participate in the sacrament and thereby desecrate that which is holy. (Matthew 7:6; I Corinthians 11:27; 5:11; DFW V, 4; WCF XIX, 8.)
4. This decision establishes a double standard for admission to the Lord's Supper: members of Covenant Church are admitted or excluded on the basis of final sessional judgment as to their standing in the Church, but visitors from other Churches are allowed to attend without any evidence from their overseers confirming their standing in the Church. (Proverbs 20:10.)
5. This decision implicitly contradicts the subordinate standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (DFW V, 1-4) which teach that the Session must make the final judgment for admission to the Church, and thereby the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, on the basis both of public profession and a consistent public life.
6. This decision implicitly contradicts the subordinate standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (FOG XIII, 9) which speaks of receiving and dismissing members of the Church on letters of commendation or certificates of standing.
7. This decision violates the second great commandment, that is, to love my neighbor as myself, because it fails to provide proper protection against eating and drinking judgment for those who do not qualify for this sacrament. (Matthew 22:37-40.)
8. This decision prevents members of the congregation of Covenant Orthodox Presbyterian Church from participating in the Lord's Supper lest they share in the responsibility for the sin and consequent judgment that will come to those who partake unworthily of the sacrament. (Matthew 22:27-40; Romans 14:15; Genesis 4:9, 10; Nehemiah 13:15-18.)
9. This decision, because of its relegation of responsibility and resultant consequences, prevents Pastor Barry R. Hofford from administering the sacrament and thereby fulfilling his duties as an ordained minister of the Word. (FOG VI, 2; FOG XXIII, 8, nos. 3, 6, 7, 8.)

(p. 22)

## **REPORT OF ADVISORY COMMITTEE #5**

### **The Complaint of Barry R. Hofford *et al.* against the Session of Covenant OPC (October 15, 1982)**

#### **A. The Committee finds this complaint to be in order and properly before this Assembly**

The complainants present a complaint that was first filed against the Session of Covenant OPC, Burtonsville, MD, on October 15, 1982. The Session denied the complaint and it was taken to the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic, which also denied it at its meeting of April 15, 16, 1983. The complaint is now brought to be heard by this Assembly. The complainants also complain against the action of Presbytery in denying their complaint. This secondary complaint is supported by alleging that the Presbytery failed to show from Scripture and the subordinate standards that the complainants were wrong.

The Committee in this report has dealt with the original complaint and has not sought to evaluate the merits of the complainants' grievance against the reasons adduced by Presbytery for denying the complaint.

Further, the Committee holds that the complainants cannot legitimately attach to their complaint all the writings of the various complainants "which express differing perspectives on this matter" as their letter of April 22, 1983, to the stated clerk seeks



to do. While the Committee has examined a large file of these writings and has consulted with Mr. Hofford, it bases its report on the complaint of October 15, 1982. We have sought to evaluate the complaint in the context of the writings, but we hold that these are not properly part of the complaint.

**B. The Committee recommends that the complaint be denied on the following grounds:**

1. The action complained against was within the proper authority of the Session of Covenant Church in the ordering of public worship and the administration of the Lord's Supper.

The complaint is against the action of the Session of Covenant OPC on September 30, 1982, to "cease the use of the interim method of administering the Lord's Supper at Covenant Church on October 1, 1982." The "interim method" referred to was defined at a special meeting of the Session on March 20, 1982. This method provided that: "(a) All communicant members in good standing of Covenant will be invited to participate, and (b) All communicant members in good standing of other congregations of the OPC will be invited to participate upon certification in advance by our Session. (Ordinarily, this certification will require a letter of standing from the Church of which they are members.)"

The interim method was adopted because the pastor, the Rev. Barry R. Hofford, informed the Session that he could not otherwise administer the Lord's Supper since he did not believe that without such restriction the Biblical requirements would be met.

The termination of the interim method restored a policy adopted by the Session on October 31, 1973, formulated as follows: "The Table will be verbally fenced but open to members in good standing with their Churches. It will be requested that those who partake will sign communion cards. The visitors' home Churches will be notified of their participation. Continued eligibility of adherents of Covenant Church will be considered by Session on an individual basis."

In determining those who would be invited to participate according to the more restrictive or the less restrictive policy, the Session was properly discharging its responsibility to order the administration of the Supper as part of the public worship of God.

(p. 121)

2. This action of the Session was taken after seeking and securing advice from the Presbytery of Mid-Atlantic on this specific issue. The action was in harmony with the advice provided in a report to the Presbytery of a special Committee on which Mr. Hofford served. (The report, dated April 15, 1972, accompanies the report of this Committee.)
3. As the report of the Presbytery shows, the practice of Presbyterian Churches has allowed for the procedure adopted by the Session. Further, Presbyterian government has always respected the authority of the Session of the particular Church to order the worship of the congregation in a manner that takes account of the circumstances of the Church.
4. The formulation of the issue in the complaint misconceives the actual question. The issue is not whether the individual or the Session is responsible for determining who shall be admitted to the Table. The sessional action complained against does not abdicate, deny, or nullify the Session's prerogative of admitting to the sacrament. Rather, it states the rule as to who shall be admitted, invites those who meet this qualification to partake, and provides a means of determining if this invitation has been abused. The issue, therefore, is whether the rule adopted by the Session and the means chosen to apply it are adequate to be a responsible exercise of sessional obligation.
5. The reasons set forth in support of the complaint do not validate it. The reasons

do affirm the responsibility of the Session to determine, on Scriptural grounds, eligibility for admission to the Lord's Supper. The action of the Session does not deny this responsibility, but rather assumes it. On the other hand, the complainants in their reasons assert, but do not establish, that the Session must require formal certification of standing from an individual's Session before admitting him or her to the Lord's Supper; that the individual's own testimony as to his Church membership and standing cannot be accepted; and, further, that failure to conform to this requirement is sinful, a violation of the law of love on the part of the Session. Still further, it is alleged that to participate in the Supper with those who partake unworthily involves sharing responsibility for their sin. This chain of argument is not established in its particular affirmations nor in their necessary connections.

**C. In response to the reasons adduced in the complaint, the Committee recommends that the Assembly refer to the complainants the following observations in answer:**

1. The exercise of the keys of the kingdom in Church discipline does indeed include the authority to exclude from the Lord's Supper those who do not confess Christ before men or whose lives contradict their profession. This authority is committed to the Church as a whole (I Cor. 5:4,11; cf. Matt. 18:17-20), and in particular to those who are called to govern in the Church in the Name of Christ (I Cor. 5:3-5; Heb. 13:17). Since individuals may be excluded from the Supper, and from the fellowship of the community, it is evident that the power to exclude implies the power to admit and to welcome in Christ's Name.

Yet in the action complained against, the Session has not abandoned its authority in discipline, but has determined that only professing Christians who are members in good standing of evangelical Churches may be admitted to the Table. Christ's requirement of confessing His Name before men is maintained and the discipline of His Church is respected. Since only Christians in good standing are admitted, the government of their particular congregation is acknowledged. Further, the limitation to evangelical Churches indicates concern that the individual's profession of faith be in the fellowship of a Church that corporately makes a credible Confession.

To be sure, the action of the Session complained against substituted a different method by which the Session exercised its supervision. The "interim" method that was expanded was a method that would admit to the Supper only Orthodox Presbyterians whose good standing was officially certified. The action of the Session therefore extended eligibility to the Supper beyond the OPC, an action that is in conformity with the FOG, Chapter IV;4.

Further, the action included a change in how those who met the Session's requirements for admission would be identified. Under the "interim" procedure

(p. 122) the Session would require identification and certification for each individual not personally known by the Session to be members in good standing of Covenant Church. The mechanics by which this would be enforced are not at issue. Separate seating arrangements may have been made (or planned), or verbal instructions may have been relied upon. Under the procedure that was resumed by sessional action, individuals were permitted to identify themselves as being in that class of persons admitted by the Session to the Table. Verbal instructions were relied upon, but they were presented in the Church bulletin as well as spoken in the administration of the Supper. The Session also made further provision to guard against ignorant or willful violation of the Session's instructions in the administration of the Supper. The Session registered those who partook of the Supper and thereby secured the names of the Churches to which the participants belonged. They then notified the home Church of visitors who partook. This responsible action provided a double safeguard. First, if a person

who had been suspended from the Table by his home Church partook of the Supper, his Church would be in a position to deal with this breach of discipline. Second, if the Church named on the registry card was not an evangelical Church, the Session would have various possible courses of action to follow in instructing or remonstrating with the participant.

Permitting those who seek admission to the Supper to identify themselves as meeting the qualifications established by the Session cannot be said to be contrary to the teaching of Scripture regarding the keys of the kingdom. Christian love "believeth all things" (I Cor. 13:7), is ready to credit the world of a brother or sister, and cannot be charged with sin for failing to demand, as the condition of Table fellowship, official certification. The spiritual hospitality of welcoming love may be imposed upon or abused, and the complainants are properly sensitive to the judgment that may be incurred. But there are other dangers that the complaint does not recognize: dangers of a denominational exclusivism in practice if not in principle, an exclusivism that may compromise our witness to the Table as the Lord's

2. It is true that there are false Churches in the world, both Churches that were once true and have become apostate (e.g., Unitarian) and Churches that never have been Churches of Christ, although claiming the name (e.g., Mormon). It is also true that we must apply the marks of the Church to distinguish between the true and the false. Yet this necessity does not require the conclusion that the only judges competent to apply the marks of the Church are the highest courts of denominational communions. Denominational division introduces many irregularities in Church Order; congregational independency adds more. But the Form of Government of our denomination recognizes this problem and the existence of many true Churches, however imperfect they may be in doctrine or practice (FOG, IV:4). The Session did not err in allowing for the recognition of Churches as true Churches of Christ even though our denomination has taken no official position as to their status. To sustain the complaint would be to reduce the Churches recognized as true, at least for the present, to our own communion. It may also be acknowledged that, as Reason Two of the complaint alleges, the Session's action increases the possibility that a member of a false Church may participate in the sacrament. To the degree that this is the case, the Session's action restores an administration of the sacrament that is less desirable than an arrangement that would restrict participation more narrowly. Yet this consideration, taken alone, cannot be determinative. It must be weighed in relation to the comparative advantages and disadvantages of other arrangements. This may be compared to provisions for admission to Church membership. More stringent requirements would presumably decrease the number of persons admitted who are unworthy and insincere. But we cannot argue from this that more stringent requirements are always to be preferred.

Just as we risk abuse by limiting our requirements for Church membership so as not to deny baptism to the weak who make a creditable profession of faith, so we may risk abuse of the Supper in limiting our requirements for visitors to members of evangelical Churches, but we may do so in order not to deny the Supper to those who are joined to Christ and to His Church visible.

The privilege of offering to visitors the sacrament of the Supper is not simply a gracious extension of Christian communion on the part of the government of

(p. 123)

a particular Church. Far less is it an irregular or unauthorized assumption of spiritual jurisdiction. It is rather a proper and requisite expression of the catholicity of the Church and of the character of Church government presented in the New Testament. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a bond and pledge of our communion with Christ first of all, and then with each other, as members of His mystical body (WCF, XXIX:1). Ministers who declare the words of institution are

ministers of Christ, and the other ruling elders share with them in ministering the ordinances of the Lord. They govern in Christ's Name because they have received gifts of Christ for rule (Rom. 12:3-8). These gifts must be recognized in an orderly way by a local Assembly, but they are Christ's gifts to His universal Church and not simply to one particular congregation (I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11-16). It is for this reason that Paul can commend those with special gifts for ministry among congregations in other areas (Rom 16:1, 2; I Cor. 16:12; Eph. 6:21, 22; Phil. 2:19-23). So, too, the Church is described as "those who call upon the Name of the Lord" in a particular place (I Cor. 1:2). Presbyterian government emphasizes the universal communion of the saints (WCF, XXVI). This communion "as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who in every place call upon the Name of the Lord Jesus" (WCF, XXVI:2; cf. the proof texts: Acts 2:44, 45; I John 3:17; II Cor. 8:9; Acts 11:29, 30). The government of the Church is therefore manifested at different levels: the house-Church, the city or regional Church, the Church universal (cf. FOG, Ch. IV). Christians visiting in another area can claim the ministry of those gifted and recognized as Church officers, and Church officers ought to recognize in turn their obligation to minister to those who come within the practical scope of their ministry and who respect their calling. While letters of reference can appropriately be given to attest Church membership as well as Church office, they cannot be made so essential that a Session be held to err for not regularly requiring them.

3. The third reason of the complaint emphasizes again that the less restrictive policy of admission to the Supper runs the risk of having unqualified people take the Supper. It heightens this concern by declaring that the holy may be desecrated. Of course the desecration cannot properly be said to affect the sacrament as such. As the Confession says, ignorant and wicked men may "receive the outward elements in this sacrament; yet, they receive not the thing signified thereby" (XXIX:8). The "great sin against Christ" of the ignorant and ungodly when they partake is to their own condemnation. The complainants properly point out that the Confession adds, "or be admitted thereto." Since we cannot judge the secrets of the heart, there is no way that a Session can avoid admitting some who may be ignorant or ungodly. Sessions may seek different means of identifying the unworthy and of instructing those who are ignorant and confronting those who are ungodly. Yet we cannot support the contention of the complainants that only by knowing in advance each participant, and receiving credentials in some way, can the Session escape responsibility for desecrating the sacrament.
4. The fourth reason of the complaint alleges a double standard for admission to the Lord's Supper. Members of the Covenant Church, it is said, are admitted by one standard and visitors by another. But the complainants cannot actually contend that the standards are different. In both cases what is required is good standing in a true Church. The alleged difference is therefore not in the *requirement* as to standing but rather in the *attestation* of standing. The difference presented in the fourth reason really reduces to this: the Session can attest the good standing of the members of Covenant Church but in its admission policy lacks confirming evidence from the overseers of the visitors. As has been pointed out, sessional procedures may differ as to the attestation that is requested or required, but a Session may not be censured for determining to honor self-testimony expressed by voluntary participation in the sacrament in response to clear and sufficient instruction and warning.
5. The fifth reason alleges that the decision of the Session implicitly contradicts the Director for Worship (V:1-4), which teaches that the Session admits to the Church on the basis of both public profession and consistent public life. The directory does require a public profession of faith and a week of notice to allow  
(p. 124)  
for allegations of facts regarding the person that might appear to be irreconcilable with a sincere profession.

Since the qualification required by the Session's policy for admission to the Supper includes good standing in a Church that requires a credible Confession, an uncontracted profession is indeed being required. The issue concerns only the manner in which this qualification is required.

6. The sixth reason alleges another implicit contradiction of our subordinate standards. Since the Form of Government (XIII:9) speaks of receiving and dismissing members of the Church on letters of commendation or certificates of standing, it is argued that letters or certificates are similarly required for admission to the Supper. The analogy is reasonable, but the very fact that the standards require certificates or letters for admission to the membership of the Church but not for the sacrament of the Supper tells against it. To call it an implicit contradiction is much too strong. There may be merit in a proposal for Churches to issue annual wallet-sized certificates of standing. Such a letter not only certifies standing but commits the person concerned to the care of another Session. A proper dismissal of a Church member naturally requires a letter since it must not merely affirm membership but communicate an action of dismissal to the receiving Church. A greater formality accompanying receiving people into permanent Church membership is understandable in view of the responsibilities and privileges of full membership in contrast to the privileges of a visitor.
7. The seventh reason applies the law of love (Matt. 22:37-40) to the situation of a less restrictive policy of admission. In repetition of what has been said, it may be observed that the law of love is directed not only to the unworthy, to seek to deter him from participation to his own judgment, but also to the worthy to encourage him to participate for his own blessing. The action of the Session aims to secure both of these ends in the difficult circumstances that surround the observing of the Supper in the present fragmentation of Christ's Church.
8. In the eighth reason, the complainants allege that all who partake of the Supper as administered by the Session of Covenant Church would share in the responsibility for the sin and judgment of those who partake unworthily. They have therefore refused to partake of the Supper and have urged the members of the Church not to partake.

It cannot be the case that the complainants know in advance that unworthy individuals will be present and will partake at a given celebration of the sacrament. It is the possibility of this occurring that constitutes their grievance.

Two related questions are at issue. First: does the participation of one who is unworthy invalidate the sacrament or involve others in sin? Calvin's answer to this question is unequivocal: "Let these two points, then be considered as decided: first, that he who voluntarily deserts the external communion of the Church where the Word of God is preached, and the sacraments are administered, is without any excuse; secondly, that the faults either of a few persons or of many, form no obstacles to a due profession of our faith in the use of the ceremonies instituted by God; because the pious conscience is not wounded by the unworthiness of any other individual, whether he be a pastor or a private person; nor are the mysteries less pure and salutary to a holy and upright man, because they are received at the same time by the impure" (Institutes IV:1:19).

In I Corinthians 11:29 the scope and character of the Lord's chastening for an unworthy manner of participating in the Supper is said to be condemnation of the guilty individual. There is no indication that the Supper itself is polluted so as to be made invalid nor that others who partake with the offender are also brought under condemnation. This is the more striking in view of the fact that the unworthy manner that Paul has been speaking of is outward, publicly observable behavior.

The second question is: does the alleged laxness of the Session's administration of the Supper constitute a sin that all who participate in the Supper necessarily

share? There may be many faults or irregularities in connection with the administration of the Supper as all will acknowledge. But what sin in administration would require abstinence from the Table of the Lord? Since the Supper is a sacrament ordained by the Lord and since He commands us to observe it till He come, no error or impropriety in its administration can excuse our rejection of the Table unless the nature and meaning of the sacrament itself is altered. If the sacrament is presented on an altar as an unbloody sacrifice, it is the character of the Supper itself that has been changed, and participation becomes wrong in conscience. (p. 125)

But no such change in the character of the sacrament has been brought about by the action of the Session complained against. The Assembly does not wish to usurp the responsibility of the Session in determining the best method of exercising its administration of the Supper. There may be wiser ways in the given situation. But the Supper is being responsibly administered; it is the Lord's Table. To refuse to partake and to seek to dissuade others from partaking is to break the communion of Christ's Church by an action that denies a mark of the true Church to Covenant OPC. Despite the glaring laxity and abuse of the Lord's Table at Corinth, Paul never counsels withdrawal from the Supper. Rather, he continues to advocate eating and drinking with self-examination (I Cor. 11:28) and improved corporate direction: divisions are to be corrected, and orderly procedure followed (I Cor. 11:18, 19, 33, 34).

9. The ninth reason of the complainants alleges that the action of the Session prevents Pastor Barry R. Hofford from administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This is an extension to the pastor of the principle stated in reason eight, and the same answer can be given. The fact that he favored a more restrictive method of administering the Supper should not have prevented the pastor from discharging his ministry at the Table of the Lord. Respecting the fact that the pastor conceived of the issue as one of conscience, the Session did not insist that he preside, but was willing to secure the services of another minister. While such an arrangement should not continue indefinitely, it did offer the pastor as a complainant relief from the greater involvement in the method of administration to which he objected.

**D. The Committee recommends that the Fiftieth General Assembly commend to the Church for its study the report of the Special Committee on Restricted Communion (April 15, 1972) from the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic.**

**Grounds:**

1. This report contains guidelines based upon relevant Biblical and confessional support.
2. It does not attempt to legislate but rather encourages Sessions to give careful attention to exercise care, charity, and faithfulness in the administration of the Lord's Supper.
3. Its potential for usefulness is found in its concise, clear, and practical contents. The report is four pages in length.

**REPORT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON RESTRICTED COMMUNION  
April 15, 1972**

This special Committee was erected by the Presbytery at its December 11, 1971 meeting to comply with the request of the Session of Covenant Church, Burtonsville, for advice "as to the proper practice of discipline at the Lord's Table and to provide an explanation of the Scriptural basis for that practice." The special Committee consisting of Messrs. Doepke, Hofford, and Vail, met twice for discussion, elected the undersigned as chairman, and requested him to write the report of the Committee.

**A. The Scriptures teach that the Church Session is responsible for the administration of the sacraments. This teaching is set forth in the following manner:**

1. The keys of the kingdom of heaven, implying stewardship over the household of God, authority to admit or exclude from membership in the visible Church, and participation in its ordinances, were committed to the apostles by the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Church (Matt. 16:19, 18:18-20; John 20:20-23; Eph. 2:19, 20; I Tim. 3:15).

(p. 126)

2. This administrative jurisdiction of the apostles included the oversight of the sacraments (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:42; I Cor. 4:1; 10:16, 17; 11:17-34).
3. The Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit and the apostles, appointed elders to continue to govern the Church and to administer His ordinances in it (Acts 14:23; 20:17; 28; I Tim. 5:17).
4. Therefore it is now the duty and prerogative of the Church Session to determine who is eligible to participate in the sacraments. The OPC recognizes this and clearly states in the Form of Government IX, 6, [XIII, 7]. "The Church Session is charged with maintaining the spiritual government of the congregation . . . to receive members into the Church . . . to suspend and exclude from the sacraments."

**B. Now the question arises, what Scriptural guidance does the Session have in determining eligibility for participation in the Lord's Supper?**

1. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself admitted to the Supper those who were His disciples (Matt. 26:20, 26; see also Lk. 22:14, 19, 20).
2. The apostles admitted those who publicly professed faith in Jesus Christ, were baptized, and continued in the fellowship of the Church (Acts 2:38-42; I Cor. 1:2; 10:16, 17; 11:23, 26).
3. The apostles excluded those from participation who though they professed to be Christians were nevertheless living ungodly and immoral lives (I Cor. 5:1-13, note especially vs. 11; II Cor. 6:14-16; II Thess. 3:6, 14, 15).

In this connection, the statement of the Confession of Faith, XX, 8 is pertinent: "All ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with Him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's Table; and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto."

4. Therefore we conclude that the Church Session should admit to the Lord's Table those who make a credible profession of faith in Christ, that is, a profession that shows a competent knowledge of the gospel and understanding of the spiritual significance of the Lord's Supper, coupled with a life of obedient discipleship.

**C. Next there is the question of how the Session should determine the eligibility of participants in the Lord's Supper, that is, how these Scriptural principles should be applied.**

1. In the case of the congregation of the local Church, the Session determines eligibility for participation through the regular procedures for instructing, examining and receiving candidates into communicant membership of the Church. (See Directory for Worship, Chapter V, of public profession of faith in Christ. Note especially section 4, "No one shall be allowed to take part in the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper who has not first made public profession of faith in Jesus Christ as His Savior and Lord.")
2. In addition to the regular procedure for receiving communicant members, the Session also has the responsibility to admit to the Lord's Table only those who are able to participate in a worthy manner. Such worthy participation requires "competent instruction in the gospel doctrine, knowledge to discern the Lord's body; faith to feed upon Him, repentance, love and new obedience." (Charles

Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, pp. 623ff; see Hodge for a full discussion on this point). The Session, however, is not able to examine the hearts of men, and so must limit itself at this point to the declaration the minister gives at the time of administration concerning who may come to the Lord's Table and who are excluded according to the Word of God (Directory for Worship, IV, C, 2).

3. Since the Lord Jesus Christ commanded all of His disciples to partake of the Supper, and offers Himself in communion to all true believers, the Session should not exclude from participation in the Lord's Supper any brethren who are visiting from other evangelical Churches. That the Presbyterian Church has regularly included such may be seen from the following citations:

"It is customary to invite all Christians present to unite in the service who are in good and regular standing in other evangelical Churches. But it is not in accordance with the spirit and usage of the Presbyterian Church to ex-

(p. 127)

tend such invitations to persons who are not members of any evangelical Church" (J.A. Hodge, *What Is Presbyterian Law*, p. 91).

"He, (the minister), shall invite to partake of the sacrament all those who, repenting of their sins, and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, desire to live as becometh followers of Christ. Since by the Lord's appointment, this sacrament sets forth the communion of believers, the minister, before the celebration begins, should invite all those who are communicants in good standing in any evangelical Church, to participate in the sacrament" (Directory for Worship, Presbyterian Church in the U.S., 1950).

4. Two methods are commonly used to determine whether visitors to the service are qualified to participate in the Lord's Supper. The first, and most common in the OPC, as well as in other Presbyterian Churches, is to have the minister make a statement at the beginning of the service, clearly setting forth the Scriptural qualifications for worthy participation, and then inviting those who meet these qualifications to participate, and then in warning those who are not qualified of the consequences of partaking if not qualified, but leaving it to the individual to decide whether or not he is eligible. The second, and most common in the Reformed Churches, is to require visitors who wish to participate to meet with the Session before the service for questioning concerning eligibility. The Session then either approves or disapproves the person for participation.
5. Which of these methods should be followed by our Churches? It appears from the teaching of the Scriptures and the provisions of the subordinate standards of the Church that either method is permitted. It is not specified in Scripture or in the subordinate standards what particular method of restriction must be used. That a form of restriction is required is evident, but what form is not. It would not be proper for the Presbytery therefore to require the Churches to follow one particular method to the exclusion of the other without first obtaining an amendment to the Directory for Worship which now permits either method to be used. It appears that the Session of Covenant Church desires the Presbytery to make such a determination for the Churches of the Presbytery. But in the final analysis it is the prerogative of the Church Session to determine which method shall be used.

#### **D. Some further considerations:**

1. In addition to the difference in procedure for determining the eligibility of visitors to participate in the Lord's Supper, there also appears to be two methods of distributing the elements which differ somewhat from each other. According to the first, which appears to be the common practice of the OPC, the elders pass the elements along each row of the congregation and permit the individual to decide at that point whether to participate or not, after being instructed concerning the requirements for worthy partaking, and being warned against unworthy participation. The second method is for the elder to present the elements only



to those whom the elder himself judges to have met the outward qualifications for worthy participation, not of course, presuming to judge the state of the heart. Again we would say that the Church Session itself must decide which of these procedures to follow.

2. Some have interpreted the words "or be admitted thereunto" in the Confession of Faith, XXIX, 8 (see above B, 3) as requiring the Session to examine visitors to determine their eligibility to participate before they are allowed to do so. It has been the understanding of the Presbyterian Church that these words refer to the Session's responsibility for exercising discipline over the members of the local congregation, a procedure which is carried out in distinction from its invitation to visiting brethren from other evangelical Churches to participate. In support of this view, the following considerations are offered:
  - a. An examination of that whole paragraph in the Confession reveals that it is dealing primarily with those who are living ungodly lives, a matter which the Session is unable to judge in the case of visitors to the services, but is able to judge in the case of the congregation. The proof texts that are offered also refer either to the process of self-examination, or to the discipline of members (p. 128) for those matters which require direction observation of their lives.
  - b. Charles Hodge in an article, entitled "The Lord's Table for the Lord's People," in his book, *Church Polity*, p. 218 says, "as to the knowledge and deportment of persons applying, the Session must judge, save in the case of persons invited to sit from other Churches." This would imply that the Confession of Faith was being interpreted as above.
3. Finally, the appeal is made by some to the present ecclesiastical situation in our nation as requiring an examination of visiting brethren before they are admitted to the Lord's Table. It is noted that the great diversity in belief and practice among the various denominations and Churches, the alarming increase in apostasy, and the general failure to exercise Church discipline all demand that the Church Session follow the more restrictive methods of admitting applicants to the Lord's Table. This argument has merit. It would be well for Church Sessions, which must assess local conditions and decide which procedures should be followed in their particular circumstances, to give serious attention to these trends in the Church, and determine whether the practice being followed at present truly meets the situation in accordance with the requirement of the Lord, that all things be done decently and in order, and not to give that which is holy to the dogs.

Respectfully submitted,  
Laurence N. Vail, chairman

The Assembly recessed at 12:10 p.m. the following prayer led by Mr. George.

**Wednesday Afternoon, June 8**

Consideration of the Complaint was continued.

It was moved to adopt the recommendation in part B of the report of Advisory Committee #5.

During the course of debate, Mr. Hofford was granted one additional speech. Mr. Woolard requested that his negative vote be recorded.

On a lost motion that would have referred to the Committee on Revisions to the Book of Discipline and the Directory for Worship the documents relevant to the Complaint as well as the issue of the proper fencing of the Lord's Table, Mr. D.W. Keister requested that his affirmative vote be recorded.

During the course of debate, Mr. Hofford was granted an additional five minutes to speak to the question.

The pending question (the recommendation in part B of the report of Advisory Committee #5) was carried.

On separate motions the recommendations in parts C and D were adopted.

The moderator requested Mr. D.E. Johnson to lead the Assembly in prayer in regard to our pastoral concerns in the matter just completed.