

APPENDIX VIII
REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR CONTACT
WITH THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
TO GENERAL SYNOD 1983

- I. MANDATE.** The General Synod 1980 gave the following mandate: To continue the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, with the mandate:
- a. to continue contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, while taking into account the rules for "Ecclesiastical Contact";
 - b. to publish, for the benefit of our Churches, a detailed evaluation of the confessional and church-political divergencies as decided by this Synod (see *Acts* 1980, Article 97, 11. C. 3);
 - c. to evaluate the reaction of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church regarding the divergencies, and to come to the next Synod with recommendations (cf. Consideration 5);
 - d. to complete the discussion and evaluation of the relationships which the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has with other parties, especially the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church — Evangelical Synod, and the Presbyterian Church of America;
 - e. to inform the Churches about the progress made by means of press releases;
 - f. to report on its activities and findings to the next General Synod.
- (*Acts*, 1980, Art. 152, II, D)

- II. Re: "a)** to continue contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, while taking into account the rules for "Ecclesiastical Contact."

This Contact has indeed been continued according to the rules for "Ecclesiastical Contact." These rules are as follows:

- a. to invite delegates to each other's General Assemblies or General Synods and to accord such delegates privileges of the floor in the Assembly or Synod, but no vote;
- b. to exchange Minutes and Acts of each other's General Assemblies and General Synods as well as communications on major issues of mutual concern, and to solicit comments on these documents;
- c. to be diligent by means of continued discussions to use the contact for the purpose of reaching full correspondence.

(*Acts*, 1977, Art. 91, III)

Besides the meetings of the Committee itself, there has been a combined meeting with the Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) on Nov. 6, 1981, in Philadelphia, Pa.

Owing to the preoccupation of the OPC with the invitation of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) to the OPC to apply to join the PCA, the OPC did not have as much time as it would have liked to the pursuit of ecclesiastical contacts with us. However, since the application to join the PCA was not approved by the presbyteries of the PCA, we may expect that the OPC will find more time and motivation for developing stronger ties with the American/Canadian Reformed Churches.

Delegates have been sent to the General Assemblies of the OPC in 1981 (Rev. W. Huizinga) and in 1983 (Rev. J. Mulder). In 1982 a letter was sent to the General Assembly of the OPC, since we were unable to send a delegate.

We have invited the OPC to send a delegate to General Synod 1983 of the American/Canadian Reformed Churches.

Acts of our 1980 General Synod have been sent to the CEIR of the OPC.

They have sent to us a communication on the major issue of applying to join the PCA (entitled "Actions of the 48th General Assembly of the OPC in joining the PCA").

We have used the combined meeting on Nov. 6, 1981, in Philadelphia to discuss

divergencies, relationships of the OPC with other parties and the Formation of the International Conference of Reformed Churches. The goal of these discussions was to work towards the fuller relationship of Church Correspondence.

III. **Re "b)** to publish, for the benefit of our Churches, a detailed evaluation of the confessional and church political divergencies as decided by this Synod (see *Acts* 1980, Art. 97, II, C, 3)." The Committee has some objections to this part of its mandate, namely:

1. This detailed evaluation should not be issued by a synodical committee but, if necessary, by the General Synod which took the decision to recognize the OPC as a true Church, or by the following General Synod which upheld the decision.
2. The Churches received an evaluation of the so-called divergencies in the Committee report of 1971 (*Acts*, 1971, Supplement V, pp. 64ff.), in the letter of the CEIR of the OPC of April 14, 1976, and in our Committee's letter of October 13, 1978. That these explanations did not satisfy everyone is evident, but we should not endlessly pursue the matter, since it has been decided already in 1977 that these divergencies, having been discussed in the letter of April 14, 1976 (from CEIR), do not form an impediment to recognize the OPC as Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ (*Acts*, 1977, Art. 91, II, Consideration H).

We would therefore like to see this part of our mandate eliminated. Hopefully, the next committee, D.V., can finalize its report to Synod re the divergencies. This report and the decision of General Synod could then, D.V., serve all the Churches, since the reports and decisions, included in the *Acts*, are available for all members of the Churches.

IV. **Re "c)** to evaluate the reaction of the CEIR of the OPC regarding the divergencies, and to come to the next Synod with recommendations."

The letter of Oct. 13, 1978, in which our Committee presented the confessional and church governmental divergencies, was discussed at a combined meeting of Oct. 25, 1978, in a preliminary way (there was not enough time between these dates for them to deal with our letter properly), and it was discussed further in a combined meeting held on Nov. 6, 1981. Their preoccupation at that time with the invitation to apply to join the PCA prevented them from offering an official reply on paper. What we were able to agree on was a set of minutes of that combined meeting. Since that time they have not been successful in forwarding the promised official reply to us so that our Committee could use it to fulfill its mandate. It seems as though they miss the presence of Prof. N. Shepherd who often drafted letters and replies in their correspondence with us.

Consequently we cannot offer a finalized report for this part of our mandate. We would like to await their promised official reply. Therefore, we are awaiting an official reply from the CEIR of the OPC re the divergencies. We attach a copy of the minutes of our combined meeting to show that we have tried from our side to fulfill our mandate.

Our recommendation is to renew this part of our mandate for the next committee.

V. **Re "d)** to complete the discussion and evaluation of the relationships which the OPC has with other parties, especially the RES, CRC, RPCES and the PCA."

As far as working towards Church Correspondence is concerned, we remind General Synod that our previous Committee directed to the 1980 General Synod correspondence from CEIR of the OPC and an inquiry from them concerning the rules for Church Correspondence (cf. *Acts* 1980, Appendix V, pp. 191-192). They inquired about giving account to each other concerning correspondence with third parties and asked what our stance was concerning their membership in the RES. General Synod did not give a reply to these inquiries as we had hoped.

Since we have not finalized our discussions about the divergencies, nor have we investigated all the ramifications of Church Correspondence, we have not pressed the discussion about Church Correspondence, also since the last General Synod

1980 declined to answer the inquiries of the OPC about Church Correspondence. As for the relationships of the OPC with others we note the following:

A. The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)

"The Actions of the 48th General Assembly of the OPC in rejoining the PCA," an official document from the 1981 General Assembly of the OPC, gave the decision of that body in applying to join the PCA. As a Committee we therefore tried to follow these developments closely. We obtained copies of the Book of Church Order, minutes of the General Assemblies, a Yearbook — all of the PCA. Also, we studied a report evaluating and examining the three Churches (OPC, PCA, and RPCES). However, all our study became academic when in the fall of 1981 the required ¾ number of PCA presbyteries did not approve the application by the OPC to join the PCA.

There are no proposals from either the OPC or the PCA to come to an eventual union. The dismissal of Prof. N. Shepherd from Westminster Theological Seminary, and his departure from the OPC was seen by some as a removal of an obstacle for the PCA to invite the OPC to join them. However, no invitations to join or requests for union have thus far been entertained by either side.

This should make the OPC more inclined to intensify its contacts and relationship with the American/Canadian Reformed Churches.

B. Reformed Presbyterian Church — Evangelical Synod (RPCES)

This Church has now joined the PCA, and therefore as RPCES does not exist anymore.

C. Christian Reformed Church (CRC)

A report and evaluation were given to Synod 1980. Some further information is given in the minutes of the combined meeting of Nov. 6, 1981. We see the relationship of the OPC to the CRC as "cool and cooling," and as understandable in the light of history.

D. Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES)

The membership of the OPC in the RES was discussed thoroughly. A report was made to Synod 1980 about this already. In our combined meeting of Nov. 6, 1981 it was brought up again (cf. minutes). The leadership of the OPC within the RES and its desire to await the 1984 RES for its decision on the membership of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland — Synodaal in the RES has kept it reluctantly in the RES. All present indications are that the upcoming 1984 RES decisions will force the OPC to withdraw.

Members of the CEIR of the OPC were very disappointed both that a constitutive meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches was held before the 1984 RES and that the OPC was not invited to this meeting. Their expertise in and knowledge of the international Reformed community could have been utilized well.

We recommend that we await further developments of the 1984 RES and the OPC reactions to it. Also, we recommend that if the Canadian Reformed Churches decide to participate in the 1985 ICRC, they propose that the OPC be invited to the meetings of the ICRC also.

VI. Recommendation to inform the Churches about the progress made by means of press releases"
Two press releases were given:

1. Report of the delegate to the 48th General Assembly of the OPC, May 29-June 4, 1981, at Beaver Falls, Pa., by Rev. W. Huizinga, *Clarion*, Vol. 30, 1981, no. 21, p. 411ff.

2. Actions of the 48th General Assembly of the OPC in Re Joining the PCA, by John P. Galbraith, *Clarion*, Vol. 30, (1981), no. 21, p. 410ff

VII. Re "f) to report on its activities and findings to the next General Synod" We hereby have fulfilled this part of our mandate.

However, we would like to include one "finding" which received much publicity, also in our Church press, namely, the dismissal of Prof. N. Shepherd from the Westminster Theological Seminary and his departure from the OPC. Since the Westminster Theological Seminary is not Church-operated, but independent of the OPC, it is outside the jurisdiction of this Committee to comment on his dismissal. We regret that Prof. N. Shepherd is no longer a member of the OPC and its CEIR, for he was a valuable contact person for us, as well as a real Reformed witness within the OPC.

With this we conclude our report, and wish the Synod much strength and wisdom from the Lord, the Head of the Churches.

Humbly submitted,
Rev. J. Mulder, Convener
Br. J. Boot, Treasurer
Prof. Dr. J. Faber
Rev. W. Huizinga, Secretary

P.S. Rev. J. Mulder was unable to attend the 1983 OPC General Assembly, due to pastoral obligations. A letter was sent instead.

APPENDIX VIII (I)

REPORT OF DELEGATE TO THE FORTY-EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, HELD MAY 29 — JUNE 4, 1981, AT BEAVER FALLS, PA.

The undersigned attended the 48th General Assembly of the OPC, from June 1 to June 3. He was well received. He offers the following report:

1. Your delegate was introduced to the General Assembly, and on motion duly made and seconded, and approved, was accepted as a corresponding member of the assembly. He addressed the assembly once to bring our brotherly greetings, to assure them of our hearty prayers and to express the hope that the Spirit of the ascended King and Head of the Church would direct all their deliberations and discussions. Your delegate addressed the assembly in the midst of its discussions whether or not to apply to join the Presbyterian Church in America. Consequently, he not only expressed our keen interest in this whole matter, but also briefly sketched from our Reformed Church history the Union of 1892, in order to impress on the assembly our understanding of the difficulties of the decision which it faced.
2.
 - a. In its report to the 48th General Assembly the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) gave a full report on their contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches as well as a report of their delegate to our 1980 General Synod.
 - b. The report of the CEIR also included a section about the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated — RCN[lib.]) who have corresponded with the CEIR. The CEIR recommended "to continue correspondence with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated) and to take steps that may lead toward full correspondence." This recommendation was mentioned because our Committee suggested to the Deputies for Correspondence with Churches Abroad of the RCN(lib.) that they open contact with the OPC, but that they do not proceed more quickly than our Churches.
3. The revision of the Book of Discipline came up for discussion. Chapter II, B, 2d was

an interesting new addition. It states that someone who desires to become a communicant member of the OPC must first undergo a thorough examination by the session (local Church), after which he/she would publicly profess the faith before the congregation. Owing to the number of revisions, the whole process will need more time.

4. The overriding matter at this general assembly was the recommendation of the CEIR to accept the invitation of the PCA to apply to join the PCA. This matter received a full and balanced discussion even though about 135 commissioners attended the general assembly. Matters such as the determination of like faith and practice, the call to unity, the boundaries for the various presbyteries, the amalgamation of the various Church-bodies, the theological question of justification by faith in the Philadelphian Presbytery of the OPC, the issue of masonry in the PCA, the presence of charismatic gifts in the PCA, differences between the Form of Government of the OPC and the Book of Church Order of the PCA, and the method of achieving unity, had all been covered in the extensive report of the Committee on Ecumenicity.

The final vote on this recommendation was 93 in favour and 41 against (about 70 per cent). A two-third majority was necessary, so there is now an application by the OPC to join the PCA. Now two-thirds of the presbyteries of the OPC must approve and the next (49th) General Assembly must again approve it by at least a two-third majority vote. It could be mentioned that the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, also decided by a vote of 73 percent in favour of applying to join the PCA. These rapid developments in favour of unity (Ephesians 4 is often cited) add a whole new dimension to our ecclesiastical contacts with the OPC.

5. Your delegate appreciated the privilege of attending this important General Assembly of the OPC. Not only he himself, but especially the Canadian Reformed Churches are warmly received. Time and again commissioners requested more information about the history of the Reformed heritage of our Churches. This is due probably in part to the increasing attention paid to our Churches at their General Assemblies. Moreover, the Church magazine of the OPC, *New Horizons*, in the May/81 issue, included an excellent introduction to our Churches.
6. Your delegate conveyed the assurance that we do pray and will pray for the OPC Churches while they deliberate further on the application to accept the invitation of the PCA and to be received by the PCA. Since we as Churches have recognized the OPC as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, it would be good that prayer, to the effect that the Spirit of our Lord direct them by His revealed will, be made in all our Churches.

Your appointed delegate,
Rev. W. Huizinga

APPENDIX VIII (II)

MINUTES OF THE COMBINED MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE FOR ECUMENICITY AND INTERCHURCH RELATIONS OF THE OPC (CEIR) AND THE COMMITTEE FOR CONTACT WITH THE OPC (CCOPC) FROM THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES, HELD ON NOVEMBER 6, 1981, AT WESTMINSTER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN PHILADELPHIA.

1. Opening

The Rev. John P. Galbraith opened the meeting by reading Col. 1:1-18 and by prayer.

2. Attendance

The following attended the meeting:

From the CEIR: Rev. John P. Galbraith
Rev. Leroy B. Oliver
Prof. N. Shepherd

From the CCOPC: Elder John Boot
Prof. J. Faber
Rev. W. Huizinga
Rev. J. Mulder

3. Agenda

After some discussion it was decided to deal with the following matters (in this order):

- a. The relations of the OPC with other Churches, especially with the PCA and the Christian Reformed Church.
- b. The membership of the OPC in the RES and happenings within the RES.
- c. The membership of the OPC in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council.
- d. The discussion and evaluation of the apparent divergencies in Confession and Church government between the OPC and the Canadian Reformed Churches.
- e. Church Correspondence.

4. Relations of the OPC with Other Churches

a. Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)

This Church in 1980 invited the OPC to join them on the basis of their standards (Westminster Confession and Catechism) and the Book of Church Order of the PCA. In 1981, the OPC General Assembly accepted this invitation by more than a two-thirds vote.

Three-quarters of the 25 PCA presbyteries (at least 18) had to vote affirmatively to confirm this invitation. So far 15 presbyteries voted in favour and 8 voted against. As it stands, the PCA presbyteries have defeated the invitation to the OPC. Interestingly enough, all PCA presbyteries thus far have voted in favour of extending the invitation to the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES). In answer to the question why so many PCA Presbyterians defeated the invitation, the following were offered as possible reasons:

1. Men from the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC said the invitation would bring division within the OPC;
2. The difficulties and differences within the OPC concerning the teachings of Prof. N. Shepherd are influential;
3. Some in the PCA who may have "Arminian" tendencies find that the OPC is too rigid and that the OPC doctrines would inhibit their evangelistic endeavours;
4. To invite both the RPCES and the OPC was too costly;
5. Some objected to the method of joining together; and
6. The PCA is strongly regional (southern) and therefore there may be some prejudice against the OPC.

With regard to this possible reception into the PCA it was remarked by the Canadian Reformed brothers that we defend organic unity of Churches which live in one country and which share the same standards and church polity. However, we know the OPC but not the PCA. Since the PCA is only of recent origin, is there not a problem of blending diverse thoughts and groups into one consistent and positive direction? This was seen to be a problem, and many thought the experience and doctrinal maturity of the OPC would therefore be welcomed!

The question was asked why the PCA did not join the RES. Apparently the PCA distrusted and disliked the membership and dominating influence of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN-synodaal) in the RES.

b. Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN - liberated)

Since the Canadian Reformed brothers knew that the GKN(lib.) had tried to make contacts with the OPC, it was asked how far this contact had come. Apparently, the letter of the GKN(lib.) had not been dealt with. Meanwhile, the OPC had received brochures introducing the GKN(lib.). The Can. Ref. brothers warned the OPC

against opening contacts with the Reformed Churches outside the federation (buitenverbanders) of the GKN(lib.) since these Churches tend to independentism and are anti-confessional, and also since they have not shown in which direction they will go.

c. **Christian Reformed Church (CRC)**

The OPC has contact with them through NAPARC.

At one time the OPC Committee for contact with the CRC was ready to propose union with the CRC. Then Stonehouse died and the CRC raised new issues and started to change. When the OPC Committee put out a paper on trends within the CRC, the CRC took this ill of the OPC and all union talks came to an end.

The OPC is considered a "Church in Ecclesiastical Fellowship" by the CRC. Some OPC Churches use and identify with the "Back to God" radio program of the CRC. Generally speaking, the OPC, with regret, views the trends in the CRC with concern and alarm. Pulpit exchanges are infrequent.

5. **Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES)**

The membership of the GKN(syn.) within the RES, while the GKN(syn.) is a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and while doctrinal deviations go unchecked and undisciplined, has caused much concern for the OPC which is a member of the RES too.

The recent decision of the GKN(syn.) on homosexuality caused a long debate in the 1980 RES (the word *beleving* was the focus of the debate).

The membership of the GKN(syn.) will be resolved one way or another at the 1984 RES.

Meanwhile the GKN(syn.) has asked the Interim Committee of the RES to change the structure of the RES from a synod which makes decisions and judgments to a conference which only holds discussions and consultations. This change would allow the GKN(syn.) to remain in the RES and also would prevent judgments being passed on the GKN(syn.).

Dr. J. Faber argued that 1984 is too late. The GKN(syn.) has consistently deceived the RES, and is not able to give a Reformed witness to the world. He also mentioned that the GKN(lib.) is planning a Reformed International Synod. (RIS)

Rev. J.P. Galbraith argued that 1984 is not too late. He related his own personal dilemma in the RES Executive Committee. He pleaded for time and asked that the plans for a RIS wait till after 1984.

6. **North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)**

NAPARC has approved reception of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Korean American Presbyterian Church (mostly originating from the Hapdong Churches in Korea) within the council. The various member Churches must confirm this reception. NAPARC has been helpful in bringing the OPC, RPCES and PCA closer together and it has been helpful for mutual consultation.

7. **Divergencies in Confession and Church Polity between OPC and Can. Ref. Churches**

The CEIR asked a general question about the apparent differences. In 1976, in their letter, the CEIR tried to explain the "differences" in such a way that the differences were not unnecessarily maximized but rather that the "gap was narrowed" between us. In 1978 the CCOPC seemed to maximize the differences again. How must the OPC view our intentions? In answer it was pointed out that 1977 General Synod did not deem the so-called divergencies to be an impediment for recognizing the OPC as a true Church. Having said that, the 1977 General Synod still considered

the divergencies of such a serious character that they warrant further mutual discussion.

The following points were discussed:

a. **The Visible and Invisible Church** — the distinction between the two does live in the OPC and it could be fostered by the Westminster Confession (W.C.). However, Prof. J. Murray, for example, criticized it and was not charged for it, though the potential was there. The CEIR would discuss this issue and try to formulate a statement that this distinction does not impede nor undermine the Biblical imperative for organic unity of the (visible) Church.

b. **The Assurance of Faith** — at issue is whether assurance belongs to the essence of faith. W.C. XVIII, 3 ("This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith . . .") seems to deny this. Rev. J. Galbraith argued that the accent here fell on *full* or *infallible* assurance which is not always characteristic of faith. At the same time the W.C. confesses:

"such as truly believe . . . may in this life be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace . . ." (XVIII, 1)

Moreover the Canons of Dordt (C.D.), V, Art. 11, also states "that believers in this life . . . do not always feel this full assurance of faith . . ." The answer of the CEIR will be awaited.

c. **The Covenant of Grace** — the two lines of the covenant (with believers and their seed on one hand and with the elect on the other hand) in the Westminster standards seems to correspond to the distinction between the invisible (with the elect) and the visible (with believers) Church. How does this distinction function within the OPC? The impression one receives, it was answered, is that the covenant is seen as made with the elect and their seed. This concept prevails.

However, this concept of the covenant with the elect does not exclude the truth that the covenant is made with believers and their seed. The CCOPC explained how the Reformed Churches in Holland in 1905 made a pacification formula about the covenant along the above-mentioned two lines. Both were tolerated within the Churches. However, in 1942, only the one concept of an inward covenant with the elect was allowed. The CCOPC would not like to see this repeated. Again, the CEIR was left to formulate a response, though it was suggested that the ten points in the booklet *For the Sake of True Ecumenicity*, issued by the GKN(lib.), about the covenant could be affirmed.

d. **The Sabbath** — since the OPC feels strongly about this issue and has made a strong statement about it, to the effect that the Sabbath is a creational ordinance, would this cause problems for us?

It was answered that while the OPC is very specific on paper, practice does not always match the strict stance on paper, and that while the Confessions of the Can. Ref. Churches are not too specific on Sunday worship, yet our practice is very strict.

e. **Church Polity** — the basic difference is that the OPC starts from the Church universal while the Can. Ref. Churches begin with the local Church. In the Can. Ref. Churches the local Church and consistory is basic, while in the OPC it is the presbytery.

Though the differences should not be over-accentuated, since in practice the two systems are closer than might appear on paper, yet they remain and no ready-made solution was available. Both systems honour Christ as the only Head of the Church.

8 Church Correspondence

The members of the CEIR remarked that there was a growing understanding and

appreciation for the rules of Church Correspondence. The CCOPC reiterated that its mandate included the need and desire to work towards full Church Correspondence. This will have the attention of the CEIR.

It was asked whether there is an awareness in the OPC that Church Correspondence with the Can. Ref. Churches would add to the Reformed character of the OPC. In answering it was replied that the awareness of the Can. Ref. Churches has no deep roots in the OPC.

9 Other Business

The CEIR would meet to make an official reply to the letter of 1978 from the CCOPC. No subsequent meeting was arranged, but any eventual combined meeting would be hosted by CCOPC in Canada.

10. Closing

Rev. J. Mulder closed the meeting in prayer. The Rev. J.P. Galbraith thanked the CCOPC for its willingness to come to meet with them. The CEIR was thanked for their hospitality and the delicious meal we enjoyed together.

For the combined meeting,
W. Huizinga, Secretary
of the Committee for Contact
with the OPC