

APPENDIX V

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR CONTACT WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH TO GENERAL SYNOD, 1980.

I. MANDATE

Synod decide

To offer to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church a temporary relationship called "ecclesiastical contact" with the following rules:

- 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. ADOPTED

Synod decide

To continue the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with the mandate:

- a) to inform the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the decisions of Synod regarding the Orthodox Presbyterian Church;
 - b) to continue the contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church while taking into account the rules for "Ecclesiastical Contact";
 - c) to respond to the letter of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church dated April 14, 1976;
 - d) to discuss and evaluate the relationships of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with other Churches, as the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and the Christian Reformed Church;
 - e) to inform the Churches from time to time about the progress made (e.g., by press releases of combined Committee meetings);
 - f) to report on its activities to the next General Synod. ADOPTED
- Article 91, III and IV, Recommendations, ACTS, General Synod, 1977.

II. AD "f. to report on its activities to the next General Synod"

A. MEETINGS

Meetings of the committee were held on February 15, 1978; May 24, 1978; June 5, 1978; October 7, 1978; April 18, 1980; and June 3, 1980.

All the appointed brothers accepted their appointments. Rev. J. Mulder acted as chairman, br. W. Wildeboer as secretary/treasurer and Rev. W. Huizinga as press reporter.

On February 15, 1980 the LORD took to Himself br. W. Wildeboer. This was a great loss for our committee. Br. W. Wildeboer had served continuously from the start on the committees for contact with the OPC. His diligence as secretary/treasurer was highly appreciated.

After br. W. Wildeboer's death, br. J. Boot became treasurer and Rev. W. Huizinga the secretary.

B. CORRESPONDENCE

1. Much correspondence took place between the Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) of the OPC and our committee. We received good cooperation from the side of CEIR of the OPC.

2. The Committee for Correspondence with Churches Abroad of the Canadian Reformed Churches wrote on July 7, 1978 to us asking us to discuss the relations of the OPC with Presbyterian Church in Korea, namely, the Koryu-Pa

(also called Kosin-group) and the Hap Dong. Our sister-churches in Holland have church correspondence exclusively with the Koryu-Pa. The OPC has fraternal relations with both the Koryu-Pa and the Hap Dong. We were asked if the relations of the OPC with these two churches is the same or different.

In our discussions with the CEIR of the OPC we learned that the relations with the Korean churches are exercised solely through the OPC missionaries who serve both groups of churches (Koryu-Pa and Hap Dong). There are no gifts of money donated to these churches, since their missionary policy is strictly one of no monetary gifts. So the relation of the OPC towards these two churches is the same.

3. The same Committee for Correspondence with Churches Abroad wrote on September 11, 1979 concerning a question of the "Deputaatschap voor Correspondentie met Buitenlandse Kerken, The Netherlands." The latter asked "whether or not your committee is in favour of our getting in touch with the OPC right now." This letter and question were passed on to us. However, we felt that all correspondence with churches abroad should go through the committee for that purpose. Therefore we gave the Committee for Correspondence with Churches Abroad our draft answer, including what has transpired in our contacts with the OPC. We recommended that they, our Dutch sister-churches, could contact the OPC directly, and if they wished that they engage in a seminar contact as our "Ecclesiastical Contact." However, we urged them not to proceed faster than we do.

4. The Committee on Interchurch Correspondence and Study of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) wrote to us about our *Book of Praise*. The RPCNA and the OPC are holding talks to promote organic unity. However, one major difference is that the RPCNA still sings the Psalms exclusively without instrumental accompaniment. They invited us to a study conference on Psalmody and asked us for some copies of our *Book of Praise*. The latter were sent along with an explanatory letter, and the invitation and the letter were passed on to our Committee on the Church Book (Psalm and Hymn Section).

III. AD "a. to inform the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the decisions of Synod regarding the Orthodox Presbyterian Church."

On February 23, 1978 our committee officially informed the CEIR of the OPC by letter of all the decisions of General Synod, 1977 regarding the OPC.

Concerning Article 91, III, Recommendation of ACTS of General Synod 1977 re: the offer to the OPC for "Ecclesiastical Contact," we may inform you that the 1979 General Assembly of the OPC has accepted the synod's offer of the relation called "Ecclesiastical Contact," as defined in three rules (cf. Minutes of the 46th General Assembly of the OPC, pp. 137, 144).

IV. AD "b. to continue the contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church while taking into account the rules for 'Ecclesiastical Contact.'"

A. GENERAL INFORMATION

The contact with the OPC has been both lively and personal. Much correspondence has been exchanged. Besides, we have also had combined meetings with them.

B. COMBINED MEETINGS

1. On June 14, 1978 a combined meeting of subcommittees was held since it was impossible to arrange a meeting of both complete committees. Dr. J. Faber and Rev. W. Huizinga met with Prof. N. Shepherd and Rev. J. Petersen in the church building of the American Reformed Church at Grand Rapids. At that meeting we explained our preference for "Ecclesiastical Contact" above "Fraternal Relations." It was stressed that this is a temporary step and should lead to

church correspondence. Some misgivings on the part of the OPC about our rules for church correspondence were answered and hopefully removed. Our offer of Ecclesiastical Contact could not be dealt with at the 1978 General Assembly and we would have to wait until 1979 for an answer. Meanwhile the matter of delegates at each other's synod/assembly was discussed. They explained that from their side they accept a delegate as a "corresponding member" of their General Assembly on recommendation by the CEIR and by a majority vote of the assembly. Such a delegate or member could attend advisory meetings and offer advice (if asked) but he had no vote. Also, for their own delegates who are sent to major assemblies of other churches, they have adopted a set of rules of propriety which such delegates should follow. From these rules we gather that we do not need to fear that an OPC delegate would dominate the floor at one of our General Synods. A copy of this set of rules is attached as an appendix.

2. On October 25-26, 1978 our complete committee travelled to Philadelphia, PA, for a combined meeting with the CEIR of the OPC. Before this meeting took place we had drawn up a formal response to the letter dated April 14, 1976 of the CEIR of the OPC. Items discussed were:

- a) The synod's proposal of "Ecclesiastical Contact" was tabled. They agreed to recommend this offer to the General Assembly, 1979 of the OPC.
- b) By means of a thorough discussion of our concept of church correspondence a greater understanding and appreciation developed on the part of the CEIR members for its usage.
- c) Since our response, dated October 13, 1978, to their letter of April 14, 1976 came at a late date for this meeting (October 25, 1978), they did not have time to study our submission and to reply officially. However, preliminary discussions on confessional points such as the pluriformity of the church and the assurance of faith as an essential part of faith took place. Rev. Galbraith introduced their new Form of Government (adopted by the 1978 General Assembly) and explained the differences between the new and the old form. (cf. Minutes of the 46th General Assembly of the OPC, p. 137.)
- d) The other issues will be covered in other parts of this report.

The CEIR expressed thankfulness for the meeting, for our interest and friendship. It was a fruitful meeting for all.

3. A combined meeting of both committees will be held, D.V., in the Fall of 1980 to discuss the divergencies in confession and church polity.

C. DELEGATES TO EACH OTHER'S SYNODS/ASSEMBLIES

Since the OPC accepted our offer of "Ecclesiastical Contact," delegates could now also be invited and sent to one another's major assemblies. They invited a delegate from our churches to attend their 1980, the 47th General Assembly of the OPC in Beaver Falls, PA, held in May, 1980. Dr. J. Faber went as our delegate. He introduced our churches to the General Assembly and attended three days of the said assembly.

We have invited the OPC to send a delegate to the General Synod 1980 of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

V. AD "c. to respond to the letter of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church dated April 14, 1976."

As was reported, this was done officially by letter. This reply, dated October 13, 1978, which was published in *Clarion*, November 18, 1978, December 2, 1978, is attached to this report as an appendix. This letter has been translated and published in *Woord en Wetenschap*, February, 1979, 11e Jaargang, no. 1.

VI. AD "d. to discuss and evaluate the relationships of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with other Churches, as the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and the Christian Reformed Church."

A. As was known, the OPC is a member of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) which consists of these founding churches — Christian Reformed Church; Orthodox Presbyterian Church; Presbyterian Church in America; Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod; Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. Its basis is the infallible Word of God as confessed in the Reformed standards. As a fellowship it "enables the constituent churches to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another and hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice" (from the Constitution of NAPARC). The relations of the OPC with these churches are (partly) exercised through this council and by means of the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship which they have adopted.

At this point we asked the CEIR (in our combined meeting) a question which many of our people also raise. It concerns the OPC and its relation to the Christian Reformed Church. As churches we have sent our "Appeal" to the Christian Reformed community. Contacts with the deforming Christian Reformed Churches came to a halt. Yet are we not renewing them by our relation with the OPC? The fear for a chain reaction was thus voiced. Added to this fear is the fact that their rules for ecclesiastical fellowship with the NAPARC churches include

- "b. occasional pulpit fellowship (by local option)
- c. intercommunion (regulated by each session)."

To these concerns the members of CEIR answered that their relationship with the Christian Reformed Church differed from ours. When they were a very small and young group of churches struggling to remain orthodox, having just left the big presbyterian church, then the Christian Reformed Church offered them help and support. Some Christian Reformed Church ministers became professors at the Westminster Seminary. The OPC received much help from such men as Prof. Kuiper and Stonehouse, not to forget Prof. VanTil who was originally a Christian Reformed minister too. Seeing the closeness of the past relationship, it is difficult to undo that relationship quickly. However, it is indicative that the OPC entertains merger talks with the other churches of NAPARC but not with the Christian Reformed Church.

B. In addition to these relationships they have fraternal relations with the Reformed Church of America (Eureka Classis), the Korean Presbyterian Churches, both Hap Dong and Koryu-Pa or Kosin; the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland; the Reformed Churches of New Zealand; the Reformed Churches of Japan; and the Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. The contact with the churches in New Zealand is made through the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES).

C. RES. Our committee made clear our historical reasons for not joining the RES — the objection to the term "synod" and to the fact that the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN synodaal) were members. In 1946 the synodical GKN laid before the RES their decisions about the covenant of grace and baptism. The RES approved them and thereby prevented the liberated GKN from joining. Meanwhile the decision is revoked but the synodical GKN still remain as member. The OPC committee responded that they had not been aware of the implications of the 1946 decision at the time when the OPC joined the RES in 1949. Also, they have seriously considered on numerous occasions to leave the RES, but have decided to remain as member in order to have their voice heard in a positive, Reformed manner.

D. Merger talks. The new merger talks with the RPCES were also discussed in our combined meeting of October 25, 1978. The issues dividing these churches, e.g., eschatology or the ideas of premillennialism as well as abstinence, were clari-

fied. The OPC also had union talks with the PCA and the RPCNA. None of these merger talks had come to a conclusion. Our reaction to such merger talks was solicited. The report of our delegate to the 47th General Assembly of the OPC of May, 1980 will bring the churches up to date on these merger talks. These discussions have kept the CEIR occupied.

VII. AD "a. to inform the Churches from time to time about the progress made (e.g., by press releases of combined Committee meetings)."

We have attempted to keep the churches informed by means of press releases.

1. Press Release in *Clarion* of October 7, 1978 about the meeting of subcommittees held June 14, 1978.

2. Publication of our reply to the letter of CEIR, OPC dated April 14, 1976 in *Clarion* of November 18 and December 2, 1978.

3. Press Release of the combined meeting of our committee with the CEIR on October 25-26, 1978 in *Clarion* of January 13, 1979.

4. Press Release of the report of our delegate, Dr. J. Faber, to the 47th General Assembly of the OPC, held May, 1980. This report is attached as an appendix.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The contact with the OPC has been brisk from both sides. Progress has been made in that the offer for "Ecclesiastical Contact" has been accepted by the OPC. In addition, misgivings about our rules for church correspondence have been removed, hopefully, so that progress towards church correspondence is evident.

Since the discussion of the divergencies in confession and church polity has not been completed, mainly because of the preoccupation of the CEIR of the OPC with merger talks with the RPCES, RPCNA, and PCA, and since we have not come to full church correspondence, the committee recommends that the General Synod renew this part of our mandate as well as the general continuation of the contacts with the OPC.

This concludes our report. Hopefully we have covered all aspects of the synodical mandate.

We would like to make one request to General Synod 1980, namely, that one of the committee receive the privilege of the floor to speak and to answer questions regarding the OPC.

Humbly submitted,
J. Boot, J. Faber,
J. Muider, and W. Huizinga

**THE COMMITTEE FOR CONTACT WITH THE
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

The General Synod of the
Canadian Reformed Churches,
Smithville, Ontario.

October 22, 1980

Esteemed brothers:

In addition to our report the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church would like to direct a question and to make a clarification.

1. In our correspondence with the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) of the OPC we received the following correspondence:

"I think we are obligated to move toward full correspondence between our churches if at all possible. As we discussed the matter some time ago in our committee there seemed to be sympathy for doing this in the not too distant future but several questions arose in our minds. Perhaps you could comment on them informally. Or if you prefer, they could be raised at some meeting of our committees in the future. We were wondering whether you could give us a fuller definition of what would be involved in giving account to each other regarding correspondence with third parties. In particular we were concerned to know what would happen if we established full correspondence with the Canadian Reformed Churches and continued to maintain our membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. Perhaps I can put the question in another way. If the Orthodox Presbyterian Church announced that it was ready to enter into full correspondence on the basis of the five rules as you have them would the Canadian Reformed Churches be ready to accept us on that basis as we now are?" (An excerpt from a letter received, dated August 12, 1980.)

We answered this inquiry as follows:

"Generally speaking, churches who maintain such correspondence with one another keep each other informed about third parties by means of appointed committees. It is not necessary to receive prior approval from other corresponding churches for opening correspondence with a third party, although it is of course ideal that all corresponding churches would maintain the same international, ecclesiastical relationships.

Concerning your specific question regarding the membership of the OPC in the RES, it is difficult to answer on behalf of all the churches. Since our General Synod will be held soon, we would prefer to address your question to this meeting of all the churches in common" (from a letter dated August 28, 1980).

In reply, Prof. N. Shepherd, a member of the CEIR of the OPC, wrote:

"I appreciate the fact that you cannot speak on behalf of the denomination concerning the membership of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. By now you will have had some reports concerning the actions of the (Reformed Ecumenical) Synod and will realize that at least two denominations have withdrawn. These denominations were closely associated with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the stance that it has taken. You will also notice that the RES will most likely reach a final conclusion concerning the place of the synodical churches in the Synod at its next meeting in 1984. It will be interesting to see what our General Assembly does with these actions at its meeting next spring" (from a letter dated October 13, 1980).

We give you the full benefit of this correspondence so that you can have as much information as possible. Our mandate includes that ecclesiastical contact must be viewed as a temporary step and must be used to come to church correspondence as defined in the present five rules. So our committee can of course answer that it is our sincere desire to reach the said full correspondence. However, the crucial matter concerns giving account to each other about correspondence with third parties. Specifically, what do our churches say about the (continued) membership of the OPC in the RES?

We would ask the General Synod to instruct us how to answer this specific inquiry from the letter dated August 12, 1980.

2. Prof. N. Shepherd, in the same letter dated October 13, 1980 offered the following correction of our report to the General Synod:

"There is a slight correction that you might want to make in your committee's report to the Synod concerning relationships with other churches which the OPC sustains. I have reference to paragraph B, toward the top of page 5, in your report. There you state that the OPC maintains fraternal relations with

the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Actually there are two denominations in Scotland that are closely related historically but nevertheless have to be distinguished from one another. The one is the Free Church of Scotland and the other is the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. These denominations are often confused by people who are not familiar with the ecclesiastical situation in Scotland, but to confuse them would be comparable to confusing the Liberated Reformed Churches with the Synodical Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. As you are well aware, that is often done by people not familiar with the ecclesiastical situation in Holland. The Free Presbyterian Church had its origin toward the end of the nineteenth century as a result of the developing liberalism in the Free Church. At a later point the Free Church was able to purge this liberalism from its body but the Free Church and the Free Presbyterian Church were never able to find one another. The Free Presbyterian Church is very small and does not have a theological seminary of its own. Its ministry is trained by pastors who serve as tutors. The Free Church on the other hand maintains a theological college in Edinburgh. The OPC has fraternal relations with the Free Church of Scotland but not with the Free Presbyterian Church.”

We thank Prof. N. Shepherd very much for this correction and information and ask General Synod to take note of it.

May the Head of the Churches grant you His Spirit of wisdom to deal with all these important matters.

From the Committee for Contact with
The Orthodox Presbyterian Church,
Rev. J. Mulder, Convener
Rev. W. Hulzinga, Secretary

**COMMITTEE FOR CONTACT WITH THE
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
c/o W. Wildeboer, 296 Gardenview Drive, Burlington, Ontario L7T 1K6

Committee on Ecumenicity and
Interchurch Relations
7401 Old York Road,
Philadelphia, Pa. 19126

October 13th, 1978

Esteemed brothers:

General Synod 1977 of the Canadian Reformed Churches commissioned its appointed committee for contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to respond to your letter dated April 14, 1976.

First of all, we thank you for your willingness to clarify your viewpoint on the differences in doctrine and church government. We also appreciate the positive, Christian tone of your letter.

As you may have noticed from the decision of General Synod 1977, our committee does not need to discuss and evaluate the points of difference in order to ascertain whether such divergencies constitute an impediment towards recognizing the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches as true churches of our Lord. Indeed, an important consideration leading to the decision "with thankfulness to recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ as confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession" was:

"The letter of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of April 14, 1976, confirms that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church wholeheartedly adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith and maintains the rules for church polity as laid down in the Form of Government, and also that the divergencies having been discussed in this letter do not form an impediment to recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as Churches of the Lord Jesus Christ." (ACTS 1977, Article 91, II, h)

However, the same synod still considered "further discussion on divergencies in confession and church polity . . . desirable" and therefore also asked us to respond to your letter.

Our response is divided according to the points of difference regarding doctrine (A) and church government (B) as dealt with in your letter.

For convenience we list them as follows:

- A-1: Visible and Invisible Church
 - A-2: Assurance of Faith
 - A-3: Covenant of Grace
 - A-4: Descended into Hell
 - A-5: Explanation of the Law
 - B-1: Presbyterian and Reformed Systems of Church Government
 - B-2: Office-Bearers
 - B-3: Authority of Church Assemblies
- Interchurch Relations

A-1: Visible and Invisible Church

In answer to our letter of March 1972 you answered d.d. April 14, 1976:

"A-1 does not question the legitimacy of a distinction between the church visible and the church invisible as such . . ."

Our letter did not want to sound too aggressive. Our deputies stated, ". . . we live in a time in which the invisible Church, as manifested in its institutional form is set in sharp contrast to the invisible Church . . . which is gathered together out of all institutes." They did not simply call attention to the dangers inherent in the distinction, but meant to reject the distinction itself.

This rejection is in agreement with the teaching of one of your "own prophets," Dr. John Murray, in his essay "The Church: Its Definition in Terms of 'Visible' and 'Invisible' Invalid," in *Collected Writings I*, 1976, pp. 231-236. "The distinction between the church visible and the church invisible is not well-grounded in terms of Scripture, and the abuses to which the distinction has been subjected require correction" (p. 232). Also: ". . . there are those aspects pertaining to the Church that may be characterized as invisible. But it is to 'the church' those aspects pertain, and 'the church' in the New Testament never appears as an invisible entity and therefore may never be *defined* in terms of invisibility" (p. 234).

Dr. Murray shows the deep practical significance of this thesis for the fulfillment of the obligation incumbent upon us to foster unity and fellowship in the Church of God.

You refer to our Three Forms of Unity, e.g., to the fact that the Heidelberg Catechism speaks of a church chosen to everlasting life. This expression, however, is to be distinguished from the description in the Westminster Confession "the catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect." Question and Answer 54 speaks about the chosen *Church*, but this expression is different from "the church of the *elect*." Instead of your reference to Question and Answer 52, and your statement, "this chosen church appears to be composed of chosen individuals," we like to remark that in Question and Answer 74 of the Heidelberg Catechism we confess that infants, as well as adults, are included in the Church of God. There is no indication whatsoever, that our Heidelberg Catechism in this context refers to *elect* infants only.

Apart from the question whether we can discern in the Heidelberg Catechism "the beginning of a definition of the church in terms of the doctrine of election," it is clear that the Heidelberg Catechism does not speak of the invisible Church and the visible Church.

You also refer to the Canons of Dordt, First Head, Article 7 where is spoken of "a certain number of persons" as the object of God's sovereign and merciful election. You write that the Canons "present, in effect, a more elaborate description of this Church," the church in terms of the doctrine of election, or the invisible Church.

We would answer that the Rejection of Errors, Paragraph 1, makes it clear that the Canons object against the Arminian thesis that the will of God to save those who believe is the whole and entire decree of election unto salvation. We confess that God has from eternity chosen "certain particular persons." We cannot read in Article 7 a more elaborate description of the *church* in terms of the doctrine of election, or the invisible Church. On the contrary, the way in which, e.g., Article 14 states that the doctrine of divine election "is still to be published in due time and place in the Church of God," makes it clear that the Canons of Dordt do not know of the Church as an invisible entity.

We are thankful that you have shown sensitivity to our concern that viewing the Church from the perspective of election does tend to depreciate the authentic churchly character of the congregation of Christ, and may even lead to complacency with the existence of a diversity of geographically overlapping denominations within the one church of Jesus Christ.

Nevertheless, we cannot accept your suggestion that the covenantal understanding of church in the Canadian Reformed Churches today, reflects more precisely the perspective of the Heidelberg Catechism than the Canons of Dordt, while the Westminster formulation would reflect both Dordt (church as invisible) and the earlier Reformation (church as visible).

As we indicated above, the Canons of Dordt do not speak of the invisible Church and there is no difference in perspective between the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons while the Westminster formulation cannot be characterized as the balanced combination of the fruits of Dordt and the earlier Reformation. The question rather arises whether the Westminster formulation

does not betray a retrogression into a scholastic distinction, which is "liable to be loaded with the misconceptions inherent in the concept 'invisible church' and tends to support the abuses incident thereto." (J. Murray, *Collected Writings* I, p. 235) Do the Westminster Confession Article 25 and the Larger Catechism Question and Answer 64-66 not need correction?

We gratefully acknowledge that the Westminster Confession mentions the possibility of degeneration: these degenerated churches are no churches of Christ anymore, but synagogues of Satan. We thank you for the reference to the special attention for church discipline in Chapter 30 of your confession. However, your letter did not answer our question what, according to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the "particular Churches" are of which Chapter 25, IV of the Westminster Confession states that they are members of the catholic Church. This question was brought up because the Westminster Confession does not clearly mention the marks of the true and the false Church. It might be debatable whether neither the Belgic Confession nor the Scottish Confession of 1560 faced the ecclesiastical complexity to which, according to your letter, the Westminster Confession addresses itself in terms of degrees of purity. Our Belgic Confession states in Article 29 that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true Church, "since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the Church."

In the meantime, we noted with gratitude that you are of the opinion that the Westminster Confession does not propound a doctrine of the pluriformity of the church. The question remains whether or not the manner in which the Westminster Standards (we think also of Larger Catechism, Question and Answer 62-65, 82-83) speak of the invisible church and the visible church is Scriptural and whether or not it easily leads to the acceptance of the theory of the pluriformity of the church.

A-2: Assurance of Faith

The question raised by us was: do the Westminster Confession (Chapter 18, III) and the Larger Catechism (Answer 81) not teach two kinds of faith: one including the assurance of faith and the other not including this assurance? The Larger Catechism states very clearly that assurance does not belong to the essence of faith. "Assurance of grace and salvation not being of the essence of faith, true believers may wait long before they obtain it" We note that, to our knowledge, only the Westminster Confession and Larger Catechism state that assurance is not an essential element in faith. Calvin's Geneva Catechism, 1541, the Heidelberg Catechism, 1563, Craig's Catechism, 1581, the New Catechism of Scotland, 1644, all speak of faith in terms of assurance. This is in agreement with the Scriptures, Hebrews 11:1, Romans 4:18-21, Ephesians 3:12.

It seems that you have not really answered our objection in this respect and that your reference to the Canons of Dordt (Chapter V, Article 11) is not to the point here. Chapter V, Article 5 states that those who are converted can fall into serious sins, by which they "interrupt the exercise of faith." This is not the same as having faith but not having the assurance of faith. In Chapter V, Article 9 we confess that "true believers may and do obtain assurance according to the measure of their faith." This implies that assurance is essential in faith. Note in Chapter V, Article 4 also the expression "full assurance of faith." This indicates again that assurance is essential in faith.

Subjectivism and Mysticism have no confessional basis in the Canons of Dordt, but are in Reformed circles the outcome of misinterpretation of the doctrine of God's predestination or the result of Pietism. To separate faith and assurance in essence and chronological order — "true believers may wait long before they attain it" — is dangerous.

Nevertheless, we are thankful that you agree with our testimony that the hope and joy of the believer is rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ and His promises, and not in his own experience.

A-3: Covenant of Grace

Our letter of March 1972 expressed the opinion of our Committee that the Larger Catechism implies "the confessing of . . . two covenants, one with the elect and one with the believers and their children." The response was: There is dual emphasis, which dual emphasis runs parallel to the distinction between the church as visible and the church as invisible. However, this does not meet our objections, brothers. The first half of that "dual emphasis," the "conception of the covenant as made with believers and their children" is not very clear in the Westminster standards (Larger Catechism, Answer 166). As far as the second half is concerned, Scripture does not say, as the Larger Catechism does (Answer 31), that "the covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in Him with all the elect as His seed." Scripture calls Christ the Mediator of the covenant (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), and says that He has confirmed the New Covenant in His blood (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 11:25), which is different. Unfortunately, there is not only a parallel between the dual conception of the visible and the invisible church on the one hand and on the other the "dual emphasis" regarding the covenant, but there is even a close relation between the conceptions of the church and of the covenant in the Westminster writings. This becomes clear from Westminster Confession, Chapter 28, I, where baptism is first of all called "a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ . . . for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the *visible* Church." Fundamentally the same is said in the Larger Catechism when the question: "What is the visible Church?" in 62 is answered: "The visible Church is a society made up of all those in all ages and places of the world who profess the true religion, and their children." Answer 64 reads thus: "What is the invisible Church? The invisible Church is the whole number of the elect, who have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the Head."

Are we not to draw the conclusion that the conception of the covenant as including the children of believers can be identified with the visible church, and the conception of the covenant as limited to the elect with the invisible Church?

Are the Westminster standards not close to the well-known theological distinction between an external and an internal covenant? The same distinction played a prominent role in the defense of the doctrinal statements issued by the Synod Sneek-Utrecht 1942 of "De Gereformeerde Kerken" in The Netherlands which our churches have rejected and do reject. As far as your comparison with the (lack of) doctrine of the covenant in the Three Forms of Unity is concerned, we like to remind you of the fact that the matter was not whether the Westminster Standards or the Three Forms of Unity gave a complete doctrine of the covenant, but the question was: Who belong to the covenant? With whom is the Covenant established? It should further be considered that:

I. The doctrine of the covenant was not under attack when the Belgic Confession was written, but only the position of the children had to be defended against the Anabaptists, and the concept of the covenant with the believers and their children becomes operative in this context (Article 34).

II. The Heidelberg Catechism has a covenantal structure (e.g., in Lord's Day 5 and 6). In the Church Order of Heidelberg it was placed between the Form for Baptism and the Forms for Public Confession of Faith and the Celebration of the Lord's Supper, which clearly speak about the covenant of grace. Further, our Heidelberg Catechism's leading idea is that of the "only comfort." It is no wonder, therefore, that the Larger Catechism of the main author of the Heidelberg, Zacharias Ursinus, started with the question: "Which firm comfort do you possess?" and which was answered by: "That . . . God . . . has taken me up into His covenant of grace." The covenantal structure becomes operative in the well-known statement that infants, as well as adults, are included in the covenant and Church of God and that by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, they must be grafted into the Christian Church (Answer 74).

III. The Canons of Dordt were limited to the five points of the Arminians and consequently cannot be expected to include a complete doctrine of the covenant — though they clearly state that the children of believers belong to the covenant (I, 17).

You find in the Westminster Confession “a perspective on the covenant, again arising from the impetus given by the forms of the Canons of Dordt on the doctrine of election, which defines the covenant as made with Christ and in him with the elect.” We humbly respond that according to us, the Canons speak a language that differs from the Westminster Larger Catechism Answer 31. They do not say that the covenant was made with Christ, but that Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant and that He confirmed it with His blood (Chapter II, Rejection of Errors, Paragraph 2).

The difference in approach between “Dordt” and “Westminster” may be clear from what they confess concerning children who die in their infancy. The Canons state in the First Head of Doctrine, the chapter dealing with Divine Election: Since these children are “holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they together with the parents are comprehended, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom it pleases God to call out of this life in their infancy (Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:39; I Corinthians 7:14).” The Westminster Confession, Chapter 10, III, speaking of effectual calling, says: “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth” The Canons offer consolation to the parents of such children by referring them to the covenant of grace, established with the believers and their seed, while the Westminster Confession in this context is silent about God’s Covenant.

A-4: Descended into Hell

In respect to the point raised in Section A-4, there seems to be no conflict between the positions taken by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Canadian Reformed Churches. The different interpretation of the clause in the Apostles’ Creed “descended into hell” should not become a point of disunity.

A-5: Explanation of the Law

We appreciate that you can understand from the perspective of the Heidelberg Catechism, the difficulty we experience with the explanation of the Fourth Commandment in the Westminster standards. Our previous Committee wondered whether full justice is done to the progress in the history of salvation. We thank you for your enlightening remarks and your reference to our common observance of the Lord’s Day. However, when we, e.g., read in Westminster Confession Chapter 21, VII that “it is of the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God,” we still like to be informed about the binding character of such details of the interpretation of the commandments. As for the fact that it is not readily apparent to you “how the necessity for maintaining schools or for contribution to the relief of the poor can be inferred or deduced from the Fourth Commandment,” we may point to the following:

The proof texts that are added to the text of the Heidelberg Catechism (II Timothy 2:2; 3:15) may show that those schools are meant that teach the future leaders of the church, in particular the ministers of the Word of God. There is a direct line here with the Fourth Commandment because the preaching usually takes place on the Lord’s Day.

I Corinthians 16:2 is the proof text for the line that says giving Christian alms is one of the purposes for which we diligently attend the Church of God. There is even an apostolic command that regards “the first day of the week.”

In both cases the progress in the history of salvation made since the Fourth Commandment was issued at Sinai, is clearly shown.

B-1: Presbyterian and Reformed Systems of Church Government

With respect to the differences in church government you ask us (p. 4, par. 5) to consider the Proposed Form of Government (referred to as the New Form). We will comply with this request though we do not know as yet whether it has been officially adopted. You suggest that the local church in our conception corresponds more nearly to the regional church in the new Form of Government. The consistory would then correspond to the presbytery and the local church in your Form of Government to a "wijkgemeente" in our conception. However, as you undoubtedly know, our Church Order does not know of such a "wijkgemeente." That indeed in some larger congregations (in Holland) this concept is still functioning, cannot be denied. But the trend is to divide larger city congregations into smaller ones with their own consistory. Therefore, according to us, this example of the "wijkgemeente" does not fit and it tends to minimize the difference between your Form of Government and our Church Order.

We keep having difficulty, not so much with the terminology, as with the structure of your concept of church government in this respect. That difficulty is not so much that you in the new Form of Government wish to recognize that the church comes to expression also on the regional level, since in a certain way we do the same in our Church Order with our classical assemblies. Our difficulty is that in your Form of Government this regional church with its presbytery, dominates the local congregation or session. According to us this conflicts with the biblical evidence that the local church is not just a part or a branch of a regional church, but is in its own right a complete church of the Lord (I Corinthians 1:2; Revelation 1:20). This difference in structure with respect to the relation between the presbytery and the local congregations (sessions) shows up, e.g., when the new Form of Government states:

"The presbytery has the power to order whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare of the churches under its care

The presbytery shall examine and approve or censure the records of church sessions.

Further, the presbytery has power . . . to ordain, install, remove, and judge ministers." (Chapter XIV, 5)

We realize that the presbytery always must respect "the liberties guaranteed to the individual congregations under the constitution" (Chapter XIV, 5), but this does not cancel out the rule that the local church with its session as a "lower assembly" is "subject to the review and control" of the presbytery as a "higher assembly" (Chapter XII, 2). In our judgment this is not only a matter of your "characteristically vertical dimension" in distinction from our "characteristically horizontal dimension" but tends indeed to a "hierarchical ordering" and an infringement upon the completeness of the local congregation as a church of the Lord, which is under the care and supervision of local elders, appointed thereto by Christ as Head of the church.

When you therefore state that the kind of supervision authorized, does not differ materially from the supervision exercised by the broader assemblies among our churches, this is according to us, incorrect. Looking at the difference between the relation "local church — classis" in our Church Order and the relation "presbytery — local congregation" in your Form of Government, there is not only a difference in terminology, but also a *material* difference, i.e., that in the Church Order, local churches are not under the care of, nor subject to the review and control of a broader assembly as in your Form of Government.

In this response to your letter of April 1976, we made it our main task to pay attention to some areas where divergencies still do exist. This, however, does not take away the fact that there are many more areas of whole-hearted agreement. Besides, we have also noticed some substantial differences in the New Form of Government compared to the (Old) Form of Government with respect to the matter under discussion.

Under the heading "Of the Church" the old Form of Government, e.g., stated (Chapter II, 2, 3) "The universal church . . . should be divided into many particular churches." Under the heading "Of the Presbytery" the old Form read (Chapter X, 1), "The church consisting, as it does, of many separate congregations . . ." That these statements do not appear in this form in the new Form of Government, is an improvement, according to us. We also noticed that where the old Form of Government stated (Chapter XIV, 2) that the presbytery "consists of all the ministers . . . and *one* ruling elder," the New Form reads (Chapter XIV, 2), the presbytery "consists of all the ministers and *all* the ruling elders of the congregations . . ." We are of the opinion that this does more justice to the office of the elder in the church and diminishes the special place of the minister among the office-bearers. This is also the reason, we presume, that the statement in the old Form of Government (Chapter IV) — "The office of the minister is the first in the church, both for dignity and usefulness . . ." — is eliminated in the new Form of Government, which speaks of "ministers or teaching elders" (Chapter VI).

B-2: Office-Bearers

You further write (p. 5, par. 4) that it is not clear to you that the rule exercised by the elders in your higher judicatories differs in *principle* from the rule exercised by the elders in our classes and synods.

We agree with the principle that the elders do not derive their authority from the governed but from the Head and King of the church. But the point is that, according to us, Christ authorized the elders to be overseers and rulers in a specific local church and that consequently they exercise that specific charge to be overseers and to feed the flock only there (Acts 20:28). When elders are delegated to a classis, they do not rule and supervise the church on a regional level the same way as they are authorized to do in their local congregation, but they are authorized and charged as *delegates* of their consistories to help decide all matters properly placed before a classis, where only matters which pertain to the churches in common or which could not be finished in a minor assembly (consistory) are dealt with.

With respect to the membership of the pastors in the local congregations (p. 5, par. 5), we realize that it is hard to break with a historic Presbyterian practice. We also feel that this matter is closely related to the way in which the presbytery is structured and functioning in your Form of Government. However, we still find the following rule of Chapter VI, 4 hard to reconcile with the principle of Acts 20:28-30: "a minister shall be a member of a regional church and has communicant fellowship in any local congregation of the regional church. The presbytery . . . may request a session . . . to exercise pastoral care over him in its behalf."

According to us, the local consistory (session) has been entrusted by the Lord with the pastoral care and supervision also of the minister, while the classis may serve to prevent injustices. In your Form of Government it is actually the other way around in that the presbytery, for example, has the major and ultimate authority in determining the placing of the call extended to a minister by a local congregation (Chapter XXII, 10) and the presbytery has the power to ordain, install, remove and judge ministers (Chapter XIV, 5).

B-3: Authority of Church Assemblies

We agree with you (p. 6, par. 2) that the concern expressed under B-3 in our Committee's letter of March 1972 indeed failed to take into account that decisions must be in harmony with the Word of God, if they are to be binding (Westminster Confession, Chapter XXXI, 2). From Chapter III, 5 of the new Form of Government on "The Nature and Exercise of Church Power" we learned that this principle is also clearly expressed where it states that "decisions when properly rendered and *if in accord with the Word of God* are to be received with reverence and submission' . . ." We noticed that in the Chapter on the General Assembly, a

similar provision is made, when it reads (Chapter XV, 8) that "deliverances of the General Assembly, if declarative of the Word of God, are to be received with deference and submission" We are thankful to note that the principle of our Article 31, Church Order is treasured in your and our form of church government alike and that the Word of God is acknowledged as the only rule for faith and order.

Interchurch Relations

With respect to the last part of your letter in which you deal with the significance of interchurch relations in terms of a broad perspective on the church, these comments are, according to us, more suitable for an oral discussion. This is also in accordance with the mandate which our General Synod 1977 gave our committee, namely, to discuss with you and to evaluate the relationships of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with other churches. Only permit us to make the following observations:

1. When on page 6, paragraph 4 of your letter you write that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church does acknowledge the existence of geographically overlapping true churches, we can accept this but we stress that they may not *continue* to exist separately. If they are true churches of Christ, then they must and will strive towards "organic visible unity." You also acknowledge this by stating that fraternal relations are not to be regarded as an end in themselves.

2. In reference to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession and the Westminster Confession, you write (p. 7, par. 2) that "as a simple distinction between membership in good standing and excommunication does not adequately meet the needs of judicial discipline, so also a simple distinction between the true and the false church does not meet the needs of a complex ecclesiastical situation." May we in this context remind you of John Calvin's words: "There is, however, a slight difference in the mode of judging of individuals and of churches" (*Institutes*, Book IV, chapter I, 9).

Further we agree with you that deformation is a process which generally takes place through the years and in various measures. The one "denomination" may give more evidence of deformation than the other. However, this does not take away the fact that the *marks* of the church are clear also "in a complex ecclesiastical situation." This is also acknowledged by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church when today in a complex situation it states (Chapter IV, 3): "There are organizations which falsely call themselves churches of God, and others which once were churches, but have become synagogues of Satan. Communion with such is spiritual adultery and an offense against Christ and His saints."

3. With regard to your preference for "fraternal relations" over "ecclesiastical correspondence" (p. 7, par. 2), we recognize that this preference is related to your views of the church as discussed in the first part of this letter (A-1). We also realize that your "fraternal relations" must be regarded as a first step towards organic unity. We also thankfully note that you do regard these relations very seriously, as is evidenced in your terminating these relations with "De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Synodaal)."

When you call our rules for correspondence impractical because "nationally distinct churches cannot conveniently act as one denomination," you presume that churches adopting these rules for their correspondence are to act "as one denomination." This is in our judgment a wrong presumption which leads to wrong conclusions. There is a significant difference between a *merger* and *correspondence* between churches. Churches which maintain ecclesiastical correspondence did not merge and they did and do not act as one denomination. This would be inconsistent with the concept of church correspondence as such.

4. As you will understand from the above, it is not clear to us from your letter that Scripture or the Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church prevent you from adopting our rules for correspondence for maintaining correspondence with The Canadian Reformed Churches. The more so, since it is clear

from the (old) Form of Government that the idea of ecclesiastical correspondence is not foreign to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. For, your (old) Form of Government states (Chapter XI, 5): "To the general assembly also belongs the power . . . of corresponding with foreign churches, on such terms as may be agreed upon by the assembly and the corresponding body" We did notice that also the new Form of Government has a similar (although not identical) provision in Chapter XV, 6: "The general assembly . . . shall seek to promote the unity of the church of Christ through correspondence with other churches."

As stated above, our General Synod 1977 commissioned us "to discuss and evaluate the relationships of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with other Churches, as the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, and the Christian Reformed Church" (Article 91, IV, Recommendation d, Acts 1977). We would like to place this matter on the agenda for our combined meeting.

Besides, our Committee for Correspondence with Churches Abroad asked us to ask you what relationship(s) the OPC has with the Korean Presbyterian Churches (Koryu-Pa and Hap Dong).

We hope and pray that also this letter and our continued discussions under the rules for "the ecclesiastical contact" offered to you, may lead to full ecclesiastical correspondence.

With brotherly greetings,
From Committee for Contact with the OPC,
J. Mulder, Covener
J. Boot
J. Faber
W. Huizinga
W. Wildeboer

**REPORT OF THE FORTY-SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HELD ON MAY 15-22, 1980
AT BEAVER FALLS, PA.**

The undersigned delegate of the Canadian Reformed Churches attended the 47th General Assembly of the OPC from Monday, May 19, until Thursday, May 22. He would like to report the following points:

1. He was well received, and introduced to the assembly. On motion he was enrolled as a corresponding member. He used this privilege only to address the assembly once in order to introduce the Canadian Reformed Churches, to sketch our present relationship, and to wish the assembly obedience to the exalted Christ as Head of the Church.
2. The first point of the report of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations dealt with the conversations with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES) and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). The committee recommended that the assembly inform the PCA that it would be receptive to an invitation to join the PCA. The assembly, however, followed a more cautious course of action. As proposed by its advisory committee, it opted for a meeting of representatives, including the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), in order to draw up a statement that exhibits the representatives' joint understanding of the compatibility of the participating churches.
3. The report also mentioned conversations with the RPCNA, dealings of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), and reports from fraternal delegates, but did not make any mention of the Canadian Reformed Churches, since there had been no action in the period between May 1979 to May 1980.
4. The report of the Committee on Reformed Ecumenical Synod Matters evaluated the RES reports on the World Council of Churches in a right manner, and it counterbalances the influence of the synodical churches in The Netherlands (RCN) within the RES. It judges the RCN report to the 1976 RES to be substantially without merit as a justification for their membership in the WCC.

The assembly decided to withdraw its request to the RES Nimes, 1980, concerning consultation of the RES Interim Committee with the RCN and to call for more prompt and forthright action concerning

- a) the doctrinal views of office-holders in the RCN, and
- b) the membership of the RCN in the RES.

Both the committee and the assembly were very concerned about a recent statement of RCN policy with respect to active homosexuals.

The 47th General Assembly requests the RES Nimes of 1980 to advise the RCN to report to the Interim Committee at least once each year, beginning in March, 1981 as to the response being made, with the understanding that if the exhortations are not heeded, the Interim Committee will recommend to the 1984 RES that the membership of the RCN in the RES be terminated.

The OPC also wants the Indonesian Churches to be exhorted to withdraw from the WCC prior to one year before the next RES.

5. The last report of interest for our churches was an analysis of the principles and policies of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC). The full-scale joint diaconal ministry proposed by the CRWRC within the framework of NAPARC was rejected as it involves principle policies with which the OPC cannot concur. A second supplementary report of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries was entitled, "*Covenantal Benevolence*" — *The Theology of World Diaconal Involvement*. The conclusion is that the covenant community (organized church) is *obligated* to help covenant members but that there is no

responsibility here to relieve all the material (social) ills of the world. Those outside the covenantal community in dire need and those within the immediate proximity of that community may be temporarily objects of mercy (cf. Galatians 6:10). Copies of these reports are sent to the Christian Reformed Church for their information and a special committee will prepare a report that will present principles grounded on the exegesis of Scripture, leading to positive attitudes and actions on which the church may base its diaconal ministry, for the following General Assembly.

6. To conclude this short report your delegate may make the remark that although he observed the divergency especially in church government between the OPC and the Canadian Reformed Churches, and although he would have preferred a stronger decision with respect to the membership of the RCN (syn.) in the RES, namely, to terminate its membership already in 1980, the sincere appeal to Holy Scripture, the clear desire to be obedient to Christ as the Head of the Church so apparent in this 47th General Assembly, and the direction and contents of its decisions, convinced him again of the fact that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church is a true church of our Lord Jesus Christ as confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession.

J. FABER