

APPEAL CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

**To the General Synod of the
Christian Reformed Church
To the Consistories of the
Christian Reformed Church
To the Members of the
Christian Reformed Church**

This letter comes to you on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. It is a letter which is intended to be an appeal to you to return from the way in which you are going and to remove the leaven which threatens to permeate the whole Christian Reformed Church and can only result in a total loss of the truly Reformed identity.

It is not the first time that we address ourselves to you. Our General Synod of Hamilton, 1962, decided to direct an Appeal to your 1963 Synod and also instructed its committee to send copies of that Appeal to all Consistories of the Christian Reformed Church. As a result of that Appeal, contact was established between a committee of the Christian Reformed Church and a committee appointed by the 1965 General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

When the Synod of Hamilton 1962 decided to send such an Appeal, it fulfilled a pledge made at the first Classis Canada of the Canadian Reformed Churches, held in Lethbridge, Alberta, November 15, 1950. This pledge was to be fulfilled, Classis stated, when the Churches would deem the proper moment for it to have come. It was not until 1962 that the decision of 1950 was executed.

And now the Canadian Reformed Churches address themselves again to the Christian Reformed Church. We can understand it if one asks, "What, then, is going on, and what is the reason why we get these 'Appeals' from the Canadian Reformed Churches?"

In answer to that question we shall relate some of the history.

From the outset strong ties have existed between the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands and the Christian Reformed Church. Does not the latter owe its existence to the faithfulness to the Reformed heritage of members of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands who emigrated to the United States and who were instrumental in the institution of what was then called the **Holland Reformed Church**? Those who were instrumental in instituting the Canadian Reformed Churches came from these same Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, be it that they came some one hundred years after the settlers in the 1800's.

Why did those who arrived in Canada in the 1940's and 1950's not join the Christian Reformed Church, which, by then, had expanded into Canada?

Some did, but came to the conclusion that it was impossible for them to continue as members of the Christian Reformed Church; others, coming from The Netherlands, and being aware of the situation in Canada and the United States, did not take the step of joining the Christian Reformed Church because of the latter's stand regarding the developments in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, for something had happened in The Netherlands during the dark years of the Second World War. And the Christian Reformed Church refused to honour its obligations with regard to the Church correspondence with the Netherlands Churches which it had maintained from its early days on.

What, then, had happened in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands?

In this Appeal we cannot give an extensive description of what led to the events of 1942 and following years or of all the issues involved. May it suffice to state that the General Synod of Sneek-Utrecht of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands adopted some doctrinal pronouncements which imposed a yoke

upon the believers beyond the yoke of Christ, and that a Church polity was introduced and followed which was totally in conflict with the Reformed polity as it was so strongly and ably defended by, among others, Dr. Abraham Kuyper Sr., Dr. F.L. Rutgers, and Dr. J. Van Lonkhuyzen, who for many years was a minister in the Christian Reformed Church.

When the Second World War had come to a close, contact between The Netherlands and the United States was again possible. The Christian Reformed Church then found that now there were two federations of Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, each claiming to be the legitimate continuation of the Churches with which the Christian Reformed Church had maintained Church correspondence. The fact that the one group was approximately ten times as large as the other group should not make any difference. Serious students of the history of Christ's Church are aware of it that in most cases by far it was a minority that returned to the path of the old, catholic Church when a choice was to be made. Such was the case with the Church when the Lord Jesus was on earth and when the large majority of the people rejected Him; such was the case when Luther, Calvin, and others called the Church back to the obedience to God's Word in the age of the Great Reformation; such was also the case when Hendrick de Cock and others urged the Church to return to the faithfulness of the Scriptures, and when Dr. Abraham Kuyper and others during the Doleantie showed the way back to the true freedom in Christ and the total submission to Him. And although the truth is not of necessity with the minority, yet the events in The Netherlands, seen in the light of the whole history of the Church, should have rendered the Christian Reformed Church extremely careful. Besides, the rules for Church correspondence obliged it to take serious note of the events in The Netherlands and to come to a conclusion as to whether the accusations brought in were justified or not, for those accusations were very serious and concerned the very character of the Church!

These rules for Church correspondence as they were in force in 1945 and 1946 contain the promise that the corresponding Churches shall "take heed mutually lest there be deviation from the Reformed principles in doctrine, worship, or discipline." This rule can be found on page 15 of the Acts of Synod 1914.

Synod 1944 received an extensive report regarding the Church correspondence in which a historical review was given and in which the principles which should govern such a correspondence were discussed. The committee which submitted this report quoted from the Acts 1898 that such correspondence "ought not to consist merely in an exchange of greetings and courtesy-visits; but also in: . . . b. the exercise of mutual watchfulness against departures from the Reformed principles in doctrine, worship, and discipline;" and that this might also prepare the way for "a General Council of Reformed Churches." When discussing the Scriptural principles governing the relation of the Christian Reformed Church to other Christian Churches, the committee remarked, "The ideal is denominational unity, for apart from adverse circumstances there would be no reason to dwell apart. But seeing the ideal is unattainable, we should contrive the next best. But the next best is more than our present practice presents. We should feel as did the particular Synods of the Dutch church after Dort, that we are virtually one Church and not two or more churches" (Acts 1944, p.345).

When speaking of "the churches of America that are historically and professedly Reformed" but "are in the estimation of the Christian Reformed Church not now actually Reformed," the committee asked, "What, we inquire, should be the attitude of the Christian Reformed Church toward these so-called Reformed churches that have waxed untrue to their glorious past and to their excellent heritage?" The answer given by the committee reads, "To begin with, it can not properly correspond with them in the sense attached to that term in the foregoing. For the implication of correspondence, as used heretofore, is ec-

clesiastical parity and equivalence, and it bases on physical inability to sustain synodical connections" (p. 347).

Suggestions were also made for the immediate future. Although Synod expressed agreement with the substance of the proposals set forth in that report, no change was made either by this Synod or by the ones of 1945 and 1946, so that the 1914 rules still applied when communication with The Netherlands was restored after the war. Yet, when the Christian Reformed Church learned of accusations that the larger part of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands had become untrue to the very nature of Reformed Churches, it acted as if these accusations did not exist, ignoring thereby the warning contained in the above-mentioned report that "the official stand of a church is a far from reliable index of its true condition" (p. 350). And as the Christian Reformed Church ignored that warning in 1945/1946, so it has ignored it in practice until this very day.

When in 1946 an invitation was received to send delegates to an "extraordinary Synod in Utrecht," which invitation was signed by Prof. G.Ch. Aalders, the Synodical Committee appointed Prof. L. Berkhof and Prof. S. Volbeda to represent the Christian Reformed Church there; but when a telegram was received from the (liberated) Reformed Church at Groningen, signed by the Rev. D. Van Dijk, inviting the Christian Reformed Church to send delegates to a Synod to be held in Groningen, the Committee replied, "The Christian Reformed Church does not at the present time maintain Church correspondence with the Reformed Church of The Netherlands maintaining Art. 31 of the Church Order." The Committee informed the Church at Groningen that for that reason it was not authorized to send delegates.

Synod approved of this action by its Committee; it also decided to go ahead and to convene an Ecumenical Synod together with the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid Afrika and the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, the same ones whose invitation to send delegates was accepted. And all this without examining the serious developments and grave accusations of which the Christian Reformed Church as a whole and its Synod in particular were well aware. One has only to browse through the 1945 and 1946 volumes of *The Banner* to see that sufficient attention was paid to the situation in The Netherlands to render it inexcusable to proceed as if nothing serious had occurred and as if the only thing that had happened was that a certain group of people just broke with the Church for trivial and personal reasons.

We shall not describe the history in great detail. In our *Appeal 1963* we related some of the decisions which respective Synods of the Christian Reformed Church made in which the initially chosen course was continued and by which the Christian Reformed Church persevered in its refusal to go into the matter.

Our *Appeal 1963* occasioned the 1963 Synod to refer the matter to "Synod's Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-Church Correspondence, for appropriate reply" (Acts 1963, Article 1521). The 1964 synod appointed a special committee to communicate with the Canadian Reformed Churches "with a view to establishing a closer relationship with these churches." However, this committee could report no more to the 1965 Synod than that they met twice, corresponded with the minister of the convening Church for the 1965 Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and that they were addressing a letter to the latter Synod.

The reason for this delay in establishing contact was that the Canadian Reformed Churches have a General Synod only once every three years, so that no Synod could react before the fall of 1965.

The Synod of Edmonton 1965 of the Canadian Reformed Churches dealt with the letter of the Christian Reformed Committee and also with overtures received. We insert the relevant decision here as it was presented by the Contact Committee to your 1967 Synod (Acts of Synod 1967, pp. 178/179). Synod Edmonton decided to appoint a committee with the mandate:

To examine, together with the Contact Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, how their and our Churches are to enter into and to maintain together the unity of the Church in the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God on the foundation of the Apostles of the Lamb, and therefore to examine, together with the said Committee, the concrete situation, as it is also determined by the differences regarding the following points:

a. The Christian Reformed Church and our Churches have adopted the same confessional forms as Forms of Unity: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort.

b. Besides the Christian Reformed Church has adopted: The Conclusions of Utrecht (1905-1908) and an official interpretation of them (1962); The Three Points of Kalamazoo (1924) and an official interpretation of them (1959-1960).

Our Churches have not adopted any other declarations concerning the doctrine of the Church besides the Three Forms of Unity.

c. The Christian Reformed Church maintains correspondence with the "synodical" Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands. Our Churches maintain correspondence with the "liberated" Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands.

d. The Christian Reformed Church has adopted a new Church Order; our Churches do still abide by the Church Order of Dort (Utrecht 1619-1905).

The Edmonton Synod charged its Committee to examine the concrete situation on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity.

In the course of several years, the above points were dealt with by both committees. The result was that ultimately one point was left which the Christian Reformed Church has not solved until the present day. That is the point mentioned under c., the matter of Church correspondence.

The reason why this was the last point left is that "by mutual consent the order of discussion on the points b,c,d, was changed as follows: b,d, c," as your Committee reported to Synod 1968 (*Agenda for Synod 1968*, p. 244).

We remind you of this to take away any impression as if, the other points having been "solved" to such an extent that no **insurmountable** obstacles remained, the Canadian Reformed Churches all of a sudden brought up the point of Church correspondence as a sort of excuse by which they tried to hide their **unwillingness** to come to closer contact.

As a result of the contact between the two Committees and the discussions held, and in accordance with reports submitted and proposals made, the Synod 1968 declared that the Conclusions of Utrecht, as adopted in 1908, no longer have the status of binding doctrinal deliverances within the Christian Reformed Church. Thereby the first point of "b." was removed as an obstacle.

The same Synod 1968 deleted the regulation that "The consistory shall inform the pastor-elect that acceptance of the call implies his promise to abide by . . . the doctrinal deliverances on common grace of 1924 and 1959-1960." From that Synod on, these doctrinal deliverances were no longer binding on the Christian Reformed Church and thereby the second part of "b." was removed as an obstacle.

As for point "d.," the new Church Order as adopted by the 1965 Synod, the Synod of Orangeville 1968 of the Canadian Reformed Churches stated that this Church Order was not an **insurmountable** obstacle for further and closer contact, and eventual unity of both Churches (Acts, Article 134, IV). The very word "insurmountable" shows that the 1965 Church Order was still considered to be an obstacle but also that, if, so to speak, an eventual unity would depend only on acceptance or rejection of that Church Order, such a unity should not for that reason alone be deemed impossible.

While recognizing with gratitude the progress made by the committee in

their mutual contact and conclusions, Synod Orangeville 1968 charged the committee to continue the contact with the Christian Reformed Church. Synod stated that, especially in the light of recent developments in the Christian Reformed Church, the part of the mandate which had not yet been completed had now become the most important item of that mandate. Synod decided the following:

2. Deputies shall point out that the contact on the part of the Canadian Reformed Churches started with the "Appeal 1962," in which the reasons for our separate existence were given and the Christian Reformed Church was earnestly warned not to proceed with the course of recognizing the Synodical "Gereformeerde Kerken" as faithful Reformed Churches.
3. They shall then inform the Contact Committee that the Canadian Reformed Churches can continue the contact only when this matter of correspondence (with related matters) is put in the centre of the deliberations. They shall, therefore, insist that a clear answer be given by the Christian Reformed Church to the three questions formulated by the previous Deputies
4. Deputies shall then wait till the next Synod of the Christian Reformed Church has expressed its willingness to enter into the discussion on this main obstacle. If the contrary should happen, Deputies shall discontinue the contact with the Contact Committee. Deputies shall then send an urgent, Christian appeal to the Christian Reformed community in the same vein as (the first part of) the "Appeal 1962."
5. If, however, our urgent request is heeded, Deputies shall be diligent in discussing all the matters that are found to be related to this main obstacle to the establishment of unity between the two Churches. Due attention shall be given to "the principles of Church correspondence adopted in 1944" . . . and their implementation, the Reformed Creeds being the Standards for such a discussion. (Acts of Synod Orangeville 1968, Article 134.)

The three questions to which Synod refers are mentioned in the report of the Contact Committee to your Synod 1969, Acts, p. 349:

- a. Did not the decision of 1962 imply the factual condemnation of the acts of the (synodaal) Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, which suspended and deposed those who refused to submit to the demand not to teach anything that was not in full agreement with the doctrinal declarations on presupposed regeneration?
- b. How must we see the relation between the decision of 1962 (no test for membership of incoming ministers) with the decision of 1949 (no change in doctrinal position or ecclesiastical conduct which would warrant a change in our relation), on the basis of which the Christian Reformed Church still maintains the relation of sister-churches with the (synodaal) Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland?
- c. Is it not true, therefore, that Synod of 1949 gave an unsatisfactory and unjustified answer to Mr. Joh. De Haas by not acceding to his request to appoint, at least, a committee to study the matter?

In this same report to Synod 1969, the Contact Committee quoted extensively from communications received from the Canadian Reformed Committee. We insert the following passage.

And further in their communication they state: "The Christian Reformed Church can no longer stay aloof of the change in her Dutch sister-churches. We mention here only a few instances:

- the decision of Assen 1926 in defence of Scripture is removed;
- decision in principle: no objections against joining W.C.C.;
- women admitted to special offices in church;

- professors in official, ecclesiastical positions who openly attack the doctrine of infallibility of the Bible, are not disciplined;
- the Reformed foundation under the Free University removed.

The Christian Reformed Church, which we assume wants to honour her obligations (rules for correspondence), cannot act as though these things do not exist and happen.

In their recommendations to Synod, the Committee asked "that Synod acknowledge that our church in her decisions of 1946, 1949, and 1950 did make a judgment by implication concerning the actions of its sister-church, the Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands, which actions resulted in a division within those churches, even though it was said that it was "not in our province to sit in judgment over these churches" (Acts Synod 1950, Article 144, III, A).

And from the fact that there have been changes in official decisions, e.g., W.C.C., Women in Office, the Committee drew an argument to recommend to Synod "that synod instruct the Inter-Church Relations Committee to consider whether any changes have occurred in the Gereformeerde Kerken (Synodical) which could warrant a change in our relationship to these churches." The committee was convinced that "our present rules for church correspondence require this" (Acts Synod 1969, p. 353).

Synod 1969 did acknowledge that a "judgment-by-implication" was made by the synods of 1946, 1949, and 1950. Synod further instructed its Inter-Church Relations Committee to follow the course recommended by the Contact Committee. However, Synod also adopted the following:

3. Synod take grateful note of the changed attitude of the Gereformeerde Kerken (Synodical) toward the "Gereformeerde Kerken" (Liberated) by repealing their decisions against them and offering their sincere apologies to them.

4. Synod instruct its Contact Committee with the Canadian Reformed Churches to urge the Canadian Reformed Churches to consider establishing correspondence with the Gereformeerde Kerken (Synodical) in the light of the changed attitude of the latter and to verify whether the changes in the Gereformeerde Kerken (Synodical) represent a deviation from true Reformed faith and polity (Acts of Synod 1969, Article 76, IV).

After the above decision had been discussed at a meeting of the Contact Committee, our Committee wrote, among other things, the following:

We can draw no other conclusion than that Synod 1969 did exactly the opposite of what we see as the only safe course for the Christian Reformed Church. We are convinced that FOR HER OWN SAKE the Christian Reformed Church should discontinue the correspondence with the Gereformeerde Kerken (Synodical). But Synod 1969 refused even to discuss that . . . to put it bluntly, gave us a slap in the face and said, in fact, "You suggest that we break off the correspondence, but due to the changes we have noted with gratitude, you had better establish correspondence."

As for the changes that were to be examined to see whether those represented a deviation from the true Reformed faith and polity, our committee wrote to your committee:

We also note that there is a strong indication that Synod 1969 did not refer to the changes during the years 1942 and following, but only to more recent changes, which are the fruits of the deviation during those years, namely those mentioned under V, B, 3: Extent of Biblical Authority, Women in Office, Attitude towards World Council of Churches, "Revised Church Order and its Alleged hierarchical character," Acts 1969, p. 53.

That is not what you recommended by implication in your report to Synod 1969, and it also darkens our joy about the admission of Synod 1969

that previous Synods did make a judgment-by-implication, for now we must come to the conclusion that the judgment-by-implication still stands, that it is not even subject to discussion. What is going to be investigated is whether subsequent changes warrant a change in relationship.

Our Committee also explained that Church correspondence is to us exactly what we, in the beginning of this Appeal, quoted from your Synod 1944. Further, our committee remarked, what we are concerned about is not what happens in the Synodical Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland.

What we are concerned about is not correspondence which the Christian Reformed Church has with "a Church" somewhere in the world.

But what we are concerned about is: the influences which, via the correspondence with those particular Netherlands Churches, have entered and are entering the Christian Reformed Church.

If we had nothing to do with the Christian Reformed Church, and if we did not care what happens to her and within her, we might never have bothered you.

But the contact which we have sought and the Appeal which we sent you in 1963 and our subsequent actions were the fulfilment of a promise made when the Canadian Reformed Churches were instituted and when their first major assembly was held. Humanly speaking, if the Christian Reformed Church had judged correctly and openly, and not wrongly and by implication, there would have been no Canadian Reformed Churches.

Fulfilling a promise made many years ago, we have contacted you and we ask, "Is there a possibility that the Christian Reformed Church change its attitude? Is there a possibility that the injustice be undone and that at least those obstacles be taken away? Are you willing to reconsider that?"

If the answer should be negative . . . then we have no other course of action left to us but to conclude that the judgment-by-implication has become an express judgment and that we still stand condemned.

We hope that we have succeeded in making clear to you once more why we have to speak about that correspondence: it has occasioned the institution of the Canadian Reformed Churches and it still is the gate through which many impurities enter the Christian Reformed Church. We wish to see that gate closed for your sakes, and also in order that our contact can be continued and — we hope — bear rich fruit.

The committee then stated that there is a growing uneasiness among our membership about the influences and impurities mentioned above:

Although we understand that an applause, given to a speaker, may be no more than an act of politeness and does not necessarily imply approval of what he said, we also wish to state that the reaction to the address by Dr. D. Van Swighem to Synod 1969 was not very helpful in allaying that uneasiness. In his address Dr. Van Swighem promoted the modernistic view of the Holy Scriptures, the inspired Word of God, and undermined their very authority, Acts 1969, p. 478ff.

We have quoted extensively from this communication in order to show that it is not just the point of "formal correspondence" which is brought up time and again, but that it is a whole complex which cannot be "solved" by changing the relationship into a shallower (and much broader!) form of fellowship, as your 1974 Synod did.

It is not our intention to mention all the decisions which your Synod made in the matter of contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Just a few more quotations may suffice:

Synod 1970 instructed its Contact Committee to convey to our Deputies

- a. That Synod shares the concern with the Canadian Reformed Churches about certain developments in the Gereformeerde Kerken (Synodical), which concern has recently been expressed in a letter to that denomination (see Acts, 1970, Article 99, C.2).
- b. That Synod intends to exercise its influence for the good of the Gereformeerde Kerken (Synodical) as long as possible.
- c. That the decision of the Synod of 1969 (Acts 1969, Article 76, IV, B.4) must be seen in this light, that synod wanted to urge the Canadian Reformed Churches to use their influence for the preservation of the Reformed faith in the Gereformeerde Kerken (Synodical) even though the Canadian Reformed Churches do not have official correspondence with that denomination (Acts of Synod, 1971, Article 66, V, 3).

At this point we wish to draw your attention to the fact that the Synods of the Christian Reformed Church were still ignoring the very point at issue and refused to deal with it! The Canadian Reformed Churches have claimed from the very beginning that what happened in the Netherlands Churches in 1942 and following years was a deviation from the truly Reformed path; that in those years the switch was thrown which brought the Churches on the wrong track; that the liberated Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland returned to the catholic path; and that the Christian Reformed Church continued its correspondence with those who continued on the wrong track, via which correspondence the evil fruits of the deviation would be introduced into the Christian Reformed Church.

But instead of going into the basic issue of the deviation from the Reformed doctrine and Church polity in 1942 and following years, the Christian Reformed Church dealt only with the effects which were seen in the Netherlands Churches (Synodical) as they appeared some twenty-five to thirty years later, although she admits having made a judgment-by-implication! And thus the Christian Reformed Church acts as a physician who, although he has been told expressly what the cause is, is willing to treat only the symptoms he finds with a person, persistently refusing to look for the cause in order to treat that cause in the first place. And because of his unwillingness to treat the cause and in spite of his declaration that he "intends to exercise his influence for the good of the patient," he becomes infected himself and begins to suffer the very same symptoms because he caught the same illness.

You will understand that some feeling of dissatisfaction became evident in the midst of the Canadian Reformed Churches and that voices were heard advocating a breaking off of the contact, seeing that no progress appeared possible. Yet, the Synod of New Westminster 1971 decided to:

continue the Committee on Contact with the Christian Reformed Church with the mandate to discuss the matter of Church correspondence with the (Synodical) Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, until the position of the Christian Reformed Church has become clear and the mandate, as formulated and given by Synod 1968, Acts Article 134, sub VIII, has been completed.

As a result of the development of the discussions, the Synod 1972 of the Christian Reformed Church decided to discontinue the special Contact Committee with the Canadian Reformed Churches. It reasoned that the main item remaining on the agenda was the correspondence with the Gereformeerde Kerken (Synodical), and stated "Our denomination's present relationship with the Gereformeerde Kerken is in the province of Synod and its Inter-Church Relations Committee, and the special committee for contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches is not involved in determining that relationship." Communications were, from then on, to be directed either to Synod or to the Inter-Church Relations Committee.

Your Synod 1973 dealt with the Church correspondence and its implications. In Article 53 of the Acts of Synod we read,

In considering this question over the past three years, the committee faced the more fundamental question of the definition of a Sister-Church relationship in general, and whether that relationship as defined by the Synod of 1944 can be applied to any church with which we are in correspondence. That relationship was defined as a unity which, if it were not for the barriers of geography and language, would result in union.

The Inter-Church Relations Committee recognizes that, given our present definition, it is likely that the demands of integrity will compel us to discontinue our Sister-Church relationship with the Gereformeerde Kerken. Your advisory committee concurs in this. At the same time, however, we believe it is both important and necessary to maintain fruitful contact and correspondence with the Gereformeerde Kerken (emphasis ours).

What did Synod do? Did Synod, after 27 years, finally fulfill its obligation by examining the decisions and actions of 1942 and following years?

No: upon recommendation by its advisory committee, Synod decided that the matter of correspondence with other Churches should be investigated in order to come to a re-definition. Thus the whole issue was evaded!

The Synod 1974, Acts, Article 62. C., decided:

1. In place of the existing "sister-church" and "corresponding church" relationships in denominational inter-church relations, synod establishes one relationship to be designated "Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship."

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- a. This relationship provides a realistic way of facing the complexities of contemporary inter-church relations.
- b. This relationship can and should be employed to strengthen rather than weaken inter-church bonds wherever this is warranted by Reformed ecumenical principles.
- c. This relationship protects the Church's integrity in inter-church fellowship.
2. Synod declares that the receiving of churches into ecclesiastical fellowship shall imply, and where possible and desirable shall involve:
 - a. exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies,
 - b. occasional pulpit fellowship,
 - c. intercommunion (i. e. fellowship at the table of the Lord),
 - d. joint action in areas of common responsibility,
 - e. communication on major issues of joint concern,
 - f. the exercise of mutual concern and admonition with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian unity.
3. Synod declares that all churches presently recognized as "sister-churches" shall be considered churches in ecclesiastical fellowship.
4. Synod mandates its Inter-Church Relations Committee to recommend which additional churches are to be received into ecclesiastical fellowship.
7. With regard to the GKN, synod encourages its ICRC to pursue appropriate avenues of increased contact.

We hardly know how to express the great disappointment at those decisions of the 1974 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church. Is that, then, the end of the long road? Is that the fruit of the efforts made to convince the Christian Reformed Church that she should at least investigate what happened in 1942 and following years; that she should close the door through which errors and heresies enter in; that she should honour her obligations in accordance with the rules for correspondence?

The rules for correspondence have been changed so that the obligation to

make a judgment is eliminated. By abandoning the 1944 principles, the "integrity" is protected, Synod stated. But it is a strange method of protecting integrity, for, in order to achieve that, the circle of "Churches in ecclesiastical fellowship" is made wider than the circle of "sister-churches" or "corresponding churches" (see point 4 above). And instead of heeding the warnings against continuation of the special relationship with the (Synodical) Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, Synod encouraged its Inter-Church Relations Committee to pursue appropriate avenues of increased contact. The wider the circle is made of "Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship," the shallower the basis must become. Thus the above change is no improvement and return but a further straying away and a deterioration. The Inter-Church Relations Committee admitted frankly that it was very reluctant to follow its mandate to inquire into and to evaluate "recent theological trends in our sister church in The Netherlands and to advise the next synod whether or not such trends warrant a change in our relationship to these churches," to which was added in 1971 the instruction "to include in its inquiry the letter received from the Gereformeerde Kerken, and official pronouncements and decisions of the Synods of the Gereformeerde Kerken." And from the report which the Committee submitted to the 1974 Synod it became very clear and evident that there was a reluctance to go into the matters which were at stake, for fear that the correspondence with those Netherlands Churches would have to be discontinued. That was to be prevented, and therefore, instead of living up to the rules and the "principles" which had governed the correspondence for all those years and instead of drawing the consequences of that, the Christian Reformed Church had to change the rules and the "principles" so that contact could be continued and even increased.

Here we see a false ecumenism, and an emptying of the meaning of the name "Church." Here we find the enervation of the meaning of true correspondence and a weakening of the confession regarding the nature and character of the Church.

It is difficult to determine whether the apparent unwillingness to face reality and to decide about the real issue is the result of the bonds with those Netherlands Churches, or whether it is the fruit of a general weakening of the awareness of the Reformed and Scriptural heritage, or both.

It is a fact which cannot be denied that the relations with the (Synodical) Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands did have ruinous influences upon the Christian Reformed Church and its decisions regarding not a few doctrinal points and points of Church Polity.

As for the latter, our General Synod of Orangeville 1968 did declare that "the new Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church as adopted by Synod 1966 is not an insurmountable obstacle for further and closer contact, and eventual unity of both Churches." However, the fact that this new Church Order has been declared to be no "insurmountable" obstacle does not mean that it is no obstacle or that the Canadian Reformed Churches and their membership have no serious objections to it.

Besides, this Church Order should not be judged apart from the whole influence which those (Synodical) Gereformeerde Kerken have had and still are exercising upon the Christian Reformed Church.

It is about these influences that we wish to write the following part of this appeal and testimony.

First of all, we think of the seven interrelated points concerning the nature and extent of biblical authority adopted by Synod 1972 as pastoral advice to the churches in the light of Report 44. Synod submitted this study report to the churches as providing guidelines for the interpretation and further discussion of the nature and extent of biblical authority, and even instructed the Board of Publications to make available to the denomination, in a popular form, the con-

tents of Report 44, for the purpose of reaching also the general membership of the churches (Acts 1972, Article 52).

The confession of the authority of Holy Scripture is of uttermost importance for the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, not in the last place in our day and age. Allow us therefore to elaborate on the pastoral advice of Synod 1972 and the report entitled "The Nature and Extent of Biblical Authority."

The title and its history are already significant.

If a Reformed confessor is asked what he believes concerning the authority of the Bible, he would answer that this authority is divine and unlimited. He would even be a little surprised to be asked specifically about the nature and extent of Biblical authority. The Report itself observes that the terms "nature and extent" are not ordinarily applied to the authority of Scripture (Acts 1972, p. 505).

Where did those terms come from? They were taken from the letter of the Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod in 1963, in which letter they judged that the RES declarations of 1958 failed to make sufficient distinctions in dealing with the nature and extent of the authority of Scripture, and in particular failed to discuss the "connection between the content and purpose of Scripture as the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the consequent and deducible authority of Scripture" ("het daarmee gegeven en daaruit af te leiden gezag der Schrift").

The expression "the nature and extent of the authority of Scripture," unknown in the Christian Reformed Church until 1972, was taken up as title of a pastoral recommendation of your Synod and brought under the special attention of the general membership of your churches. But is it not a well-known fact that if in our time someone wants to attack an article of our Christian faith, he often will begin to speak about the nature (Dutch: "de aard") or the mode or the extent of that which we confess in order to relativize our confession? Should Synod 1972 not have been very cautious and should it not have pointed out that it did not want to take over the expression introduced by "De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland" (Synodical)? Did it now not follow a wrong Dutch example and is this title as such not already a symptom of the influence of "De Gereformeerde Kerken" (Synodical) on the life of the Christian Reformed Church?

The first point of the pastoral instruction reads as follows: "Synod calls the churches to a wholehearted recognition that Scripture, which is the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ, addresses us with full divine authority and that this authority applies to Scripture in its total extent and in all its parts."

Thankfully we noted that Synod 1972 spoke about "full divine authority" of Holy Writ; but is it Biblical and Reformed to state that Scripture is the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ? The Report states that general revelation is a non-redemptive revelation while Scripture is a redemptive saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ. "All Scripture is redemptive in character; it is addressed to fallen man in order to redeem him totally by redirecting him in faith to God, his Creator-Redeemer." Now, no Reformed confessor shall deny that Scripture reveals what God has done for man's salvation, but is this the complete contents of Scripture and may we express this in the way Synod 1972 did, namely that Scripture is the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ? Do the Scriptures (Moses) also not accuse (John 5:45)? The Lord Jesus Christ warned us: "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings has a judge: the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority . . ." (John 12:48, 49). Should this warning not have been heeded in pastoral instruction about Biblical authority?

The apostle Paul writes about his preaching: "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life" (II Corinthians 2:15, 16). Is it then, to say the least, not one-sided to

declare that Scripture is the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ?

If we ask the question where this confessional statement came from, the answer is again: from "De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland" (Synodical). They used it in their letter to the RES in 1963 when they spoke about the connection between the content and purpose of "Scripture as the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ" and the concomitant and deducible authority of Scripture. It is another illustration of the influence in doctrine exercised by these Dutch deviating churches upon the Christian Reformed Church. Small wonder then, that an author declared in *The Banner*: "The 1972 Synod's view of the Bible and its message is basically that which has long been advocated by Prof. G.C. Berkouwer and lies at the heart of what has come to be called by those who reject it the 'new theology' of the Gereformeerde Kerken" (*The Banner*, November 10, 1972).

The Report engaged in a critical evaluation of certain methods of interpreting the Bible as presently employed by some Reformed scholars. It remarked: "Most of the views examined in this report have been propounded by scholars from one of our sister churches, the Gereformeerde Kerken of The Netherlands. Because of the close ties between us these views have found their way into our circles" (Acts 1972, p. 534).

Needless to say, the change in the name of the relationship does not prevent these views from finding their way into the Christian Reformed Church. We as Reformed confessors appreciate that your Synod called the churches to maintain the clear witness of the creeds to the authority of Scripture as inseparably bound up with the historical reality of the events recorded in Scripture. But again, we hear non-confessional language when "Synod urges the churches to remember that . . . they should recognize that these events are presented and interpreted in terms of their revelational meaning" (Article 52, C3c.).

Apart from the question whether the general membership of the churches understands this theological language of a pastoral exhortation, the question arises whether the proclamation by the Holy Spirit of God's acts of redemption in Scripture may be described as "interpretation." Does this term, which is also used in reports of "Faith and Order" of the World Council of Churches (e.g. the Leuven report, 1971), do justice to the testimony of the Holy Spirit in Holy Writ? Does it not open the door to faulty dichotomies which the Report itself rightly rejects, among others the dualism of history versus proclamation?

Report 44 declared that it is clear that the denial of the historicity of the fall of our first parents at the beginning of human history cannot be harmonized with the confessions. The advisory committee mentioned the name of Prof. H.M. Kuitert, and said that his position is also rejected where we read, "The contention that these chapters (Genesis 1-11) do not present events that really happened is certainly in conflict with our Reformed Confessions and in conflict with Scripture itself."

Later, in the same year, 1972, however, the Synod of "De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland" (Synodical) decided that the views of Prof. H.M. Kuitert do not deviate from the confessions to such a degree that special measures have to be taken. Does the Christian Reformed Church now also follow the example of the Dutch churches by stating that certain contentions are in conflict with our Reformed Confessions and even in conflict with Scripture itself, but that they are to be taken so lightly that no special measures are warranted?

We ask this question because of our fear that the Christian Reformed Church, be it at a slower pace, is taking the same route as her former sister churches in The Netherlands do. We would like to illustrate this by the very important case of Dr. H. Wiersinga who denies that Christ bore the judgment of God in our place.

Your last held Synod 1976 requested the Stated Clerk "to write the Synod of the GKN expressing joy and appreciation for its significant action, upholding

the confession of the churches and the unity of the church in the confession, along the lines of the letter written by our IRC to the IRC of the GKN" (Acts 1976, Article 43, VI,C).

Your Inter-Church Relations Committee had written that the decision in the case-Wiersinga "will have a very positive effect in the relationship of our two churches and of the Reformed churches generally."

Now, from the Dutch decision, to be found in translation in your Acts 1976, pp. 336ff., it is clear that the Synod of Maastricht (1975-1976) made a doctrinal statement which upholds the truth that the Crucified, in the suffering and death which He underwent, bore in our stead the divine judgment on human guilt. This "element of the confession of the church" is "of such an essential nature that a doing injustice to it and a contradiction of it is not admissible for the church, also because in this way the unity of the faith and the oneness of the church is brought into peril." This is a theoretical statement. It remains that because Synod only "expects that the Consistory of Amsterdam will see to it that such 'a doing injustice to it and a contradiction of it' not occur, that it be opposed, in the same way as she expects this of all other church assemblies." When Synod Maastricht uttered this expectation, this assembly and all who followed the development of the case-Wiersinga knew that this expectation would not be fulfilled. The Consistory of Amsterdam refused to take measures against the heresy of Dr. H. Wiersinga. The denial that the Crucified Lord Jesus Christ bore in our stead the divine judgment on human guilt, will remain unchecked as far as church discipline is concerned.

Your Inter-Church Relations Committee wrote to The Netherlands that they did not wish to offer specific comment with respect to the decision itself "since that would be to enter into matters that are not rightfully ours to enter." Your Synod 1976 considered it sufficient to express "joy and appreciation." Have you forgotten your own conviction of 1944 that "the official stand of a church is a far from reliable index of its true condition"? Does the change in official relationship from sister churches to churches in ecclesiastical fellowship mean that in this important case you do not want to urge that church discipline be exercised? If a decision is weak with respect to church discipline in matter of the doctrine of the truth of Christ's suffering and death in our stead, is only a cause of joy and appreciation and is supposed to have a very positive effect in the relationship of your two churches, we fear that there will be a lack of doctrinal church discipline in your own church too. In this context we would wish to remind you of the admission of Dr. A. Verhey into the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church.

In the Report 1976, your Inter-Church Relations Committee calls the problem of The Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands well-known and difficult to solve. "Living close to and intimately with the schism in its ranks in 1944 (the Schilder controversy) the GKN has become inordinately fearful . . . of schism and the loss of younger members of the church who are largely sympathetic to a freer and more open stance to doctrine and life such as advocated by some of its leaders."

You will understand that it is painful for us that your Committee still speaks about "the Schism in 1944" and "the Schilder controversy," where you never investigated the doctrinal struggle of 1942 and following years.

Because of the fact that the GKN then exercised false church discipline and did so in a hierarchical manner, they are today unable to employ the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. And because of the fact that after the Second World War you did not want to investigate the matter, although it was your duty according to your rules for correspondence with sister churches abroad, you have now officially enervated the relationship and you do not want "to enter into matters that are not rightfully ours to enter."

In the meantime, your own church will be infested with the deadly illness of

the relativizing of the authority of God's Word and of the attack on the contents thereof, even on the truth of the gospel, Jesus Christ Crucified.

Brothers, we do not write these things with pleasure. Therefore, we did not try to bring together all things in which we sense in your church a wrong development in doctrinal respect. We restricted ourselves to the basic issue of the authority of Holy Scripture and of the atoning work of Christ our Substitute.

In the report 1976, your Inter-Church Relations Committee mentioned about the contact with the Gereformeerde Kerken of The Netherlands (Vrij-gemaakt): "... the relationship of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship is an unacceptable category for their church which has only one category, that of 'correspondence church' in the sense of near identity in all confessional and church order matters."

The stance of our sister churches is the same as ours, and is the stance you took for decades in the past. Brothers, return to the Reformed church polity in which the unity of true faith is decisive for the bond between sister churches, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Let us no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him Who is the head, into Christ (Ephesians 4).

Yours in Him,
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