

SUPPLEMENT V — (Acts, Art. 92)

**REPORT OF DEPUTIES OF THE
GENERAL SYNOD OF ORANGEVILLE, 1968
FOR CONTACT WITH DEPUTIES OF THE
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

General Synod Orangeville, 1968 instructed deputies:

1. to examine the divergencies in confession, church polity and principles of church correspondence which exist between the Canadian Reformed Churches (C.R.C.) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (O.P.C.).
2. to compare these divergencies with the Word of God and to evaluate them as to the question whether they are of such a nature that they would prevent the C.R.C. from recognizing the O.P.C. as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ and from entering into correspondence with this church.

**I. THE EXAMINATION AND EVALUATION OF THE DIVERGENCIES IN
CONFESSION BETWEEN THE C.R.C. AND THE O.P.C. LED TO THE
FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.**

a. Ad Westminster Confession (W.C.) Ch. 25, par. 1, 2 and Larger Catechism (L.C.) Q. and A. 64-66.

W.C. 25, 1: "The catholic or universal Church which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, and fulness of Him that filleth all in all."

W.C. 25, 2: "The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation."

L.C. Q. 64: "What is the invisible church?"

A. The invisible church is the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one under Christ the Head.

Q. 65: What special benefits do the members of the invisible church enjoy by Christ?

A. The members of the invisible church, by Christ, enjoy union and communion with Him in grace and glory.

Q. 66: What is that union which the elect have with Christ?

A. The union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God's grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their Head and Husband; which is done in their effectual calling."

The terms: visible and invisible church, used in these articles, are not derived from the Scriptures.

The distinction however between the whole number of the elect and all those who profess the true religion with their children on which the

terminology of visible and invisible church is based and of which it gives expression is rooted in the Scriptures, Eph. 1: 4; Acts 13: 48; John 15: 2, 1 Cor. 1: 2. and is in agreement with the contents of Heid. Cat. A. 54 and Belgic Confession Art. 29, the former of which confesses that the Son of God gathers a church chosen to everlasting life of which I am a living member, and the latter of which distinguishes the true believers from the hypocrites who are mixed in the church with the good, yet are not of the church.

b. Ad W.C. Ch. 25, 4: "This catholic Church has been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular Churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them."

This article makes a distinction between more and less pure churches. It does so with respect to the particular churches which are members of the catholic Church, i.e. the true Church of Christ.

The seven letters found in Revelation 2 and 3 testify to it that no valid objection can be brought against this distinction of more or less pure churches within the true Church.

The W.C. confesses in Ch. 25, 5: "The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error and some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless there shall be always a Church on earth, to worship God according to His will". The W.C., as appears from this paragraph, does not deny the existence of the false church — the synagogue of Satan — beside the true church and does for that reason not teach the pluriformity of the church, but a pluriformity in the church.

It is regrettable that although the W.C. mentions the teaching and embracing of the gospel, the administration of ordinances and the performance of public worship in its confession concerning the church, W.C. XXV, IV, it does not clearly state the marks of the true and false church. The absence of a separate confession concerning the marks of the church makes it hard to determine where the borderline lies between the true and the false church and may in practice lead to the acceptance of the pluriformity of the church.

c. Ad W.C. Ch. 18, 3. This article confesses in its first atinea: "This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it;"

Compare A. 81 L.C. which states among other things, "Assurance of grace and salvation both being of the essence of faith, true believers may wait long before they obtain it".

In Ch. 14: 2 the W.C. gives a description of faith. It reads, "By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God Himself speaking therein, and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life, and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace."

Compare Shorter Catechism Q. and A. 86; "What is faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel".

However, Ch. 18: 3 of the W.C., different from Ch. 14: 2, the W.C. and from A. 86 of the Shorter Catechism does not give a description of faith, but speaks of the personal assurance of grace and salvation of the believers. This appears from Ch. 18: 4, which begins: "True believers may have the assurance of their salvation divers ways shaken.

diminished, and intermitted"; And from Ch. 14: 3 which confesses: "This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong;"

This confession regarding the lack of full assurance in the believer agrees with article 16 of Ch. 1 of the Canons of Dort which speaks of "those in whom a living faith in Christ, an assured confidence of soul, peace of conscience, an earnest endeavor after filial obedience, a glorying in God through Christ, is not as yet strongly felt,"

d. Ad L.C. Q. and A. 31: "With whom was the covenant of grace made?"

A. "The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in Him with all the elect as His seed".

This Catechism confesses in A. 166 that "infants descending from parents either both or but one of them professing faith in Christ and obedience to Him, are in that respect within the covenant, and are to be baptized". The texts to which A. 31 refers — 1 Cor. 15: 22, 45; Eph. 1: 4; 2 Tim. 1: 9 — do not speak of the people with whom the covenant was made, but of them who become partakers of the covenant-goods. Deputies are therefore of the opinion that, in distinction from A. 31, A. 166 agrees with the Scriptures which teach that the covenant was made with the believers and their seed, Gen. 17: 7; Acts 2: 39; 1 Cor. 7: 14; Compare: The Directory for Worship in the Administration of Baptism: "For the promise of the covenant is made to believers and to their seed".

e. Ad L.C. A. 50. This answer interprets the confession of Jesus' descent into hell as His stay "in the state of death and under the power of death". This interpretation, though different from the one given in A. 44 of the Heid. Cat. cannot be considered to be contrary with the Word of God, and is therefore not rejectable.

f. Ad L.C. A. 99. This answer contains a number of eight rules to be heeded in order to receive a right understanding of the ten commandments. Although it is questionable whether such a set of rules should be inserted into a Catechism, it may be said that the rules themselves do not contain anything which is in conflict with the teaching of the Scriptures. The Catechism is therefore not unacceptable on account of these rules of interpretation.

g. Ad L.C. A. 102-148. These answers spell out the meaning of the ten commandments. This is done in such a detailed fashion that for the trees the wood is hardly visible. The great detail to which the Catechism goes raises also questions as to the correctness of some words and expressions. Although deputies prefer the interpretation of the commandments as given in the Heid. Cat. they do not feel free to state that the explanation presented by the L.C. deviates from the contents of Scripture and Confession.

DEPUTIES CONCLUDE ON THE GROUND OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS THAT THE DIVERGENCIES IN CONFESSION BETWEEN THE C.R.C. AND THE O.P.C. ARE NOT OF SUCH A NATURE THAT THEY SHOULD PREVENT THE C.R.C. FROM RECOGNIZING THE O.P.C. AS A TRUE CHURCH OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND FROM ENTERING INTO CORRESPONDENCE WITH THIS CHURCH.

II. THE EXAMINATION AND EVALUATION OF THE DIVERGENCIES IN CHURCH POLITY BETWEEN THE C.R.C. AND THE O.P.C. LED TO THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.

A considerable difference exists between the Form of Government (F.O.G.) of the O.P.C. and the Church Order (C.O.) of the C.R.C.

The F.O.G. is based on the principle that the local churches are branches of the Church universal.

Ch. 2, 3: "As this immense multitude cannot meet together in one place to hold communion or to worship God, it is reasonable, and warranted by Scripture example, that they should be divided into many particular churches".

Ch. 10, 1: "The church consisting, as it does, of many separate congregations . . .". Compare W.C. Ch. 25, 4. The C.O. however proceeds from the principle of the completeness and the 'independence' of the local churches, which on account of the confession that each of them is Church of Christ, enter nationally into a confederation of churches.

This difference in principle of church polity makes itself felt in divergencies in the authority of major assemblies, which in the O.P.C. become higher assemblies. F.O.G. Ch. 9, 6 which says among other things that the church session is charged "to appoint delegates to the higher judicatories of the church".

It shows up in the consideration of the major assemblies as meetings of church officers and thus as meetings of the Church itself, instead of as meetings of delegates of the churches, classis and synods and thus as ecclesiastical assemblies. F.O.G. Ch. 11, 7: "The general assembly shall meet at least once in every year. On the day appointed for that purpose the moderator of the last assembly, if present, shall open the meeting with a sermon . . ." 8: ". . . and pronounce on those present the apostolic benediction."

It is evident in the distinction between lower and higher judicatories. F.O.G. Ch. 11, 1: "The general assembly is the highest judicatory of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church".

It manifests itself in the special place of the presbytery among the Church assemblies and in the special place of the ministers among the office bearers of the church.

F.O.G. Ch. 10, 2: "A presbytery consists of all the ministers, in number not less than four, and one ruling elder from each congregation . . .".

7: "The presbytery has power . . . to ordain, install, remove and judge ministers; to examine and approve or censure the records of church sessions; . . . and in general to order whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare of the churches under its care, always respecting the liberties guaranteed to the individual congregations under the constitution".

F.O.G. Ch. 4: "The office of the minister is the first in the church, both for dignity and usefulness." . . .

The F.O.G. states however in Ch. 1, 7 "that all church power, whether exercised by the body in general, or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative, that is to say that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of its own authority; and that all its decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God".

The F.O.G. states accordingly in Ch. 11, 6: "Although the deliverances, resolutions, overtures and other actions of the general assembly are to be accorded the weight which is proper in view of the character of the body as representing all of the particular churches, yet, whenever such deliverances, resolutions, overtures and other actions are additional to the specific provisions of the constitution, they shall not be regarded as binding unless they have been approved by the general assembly and presbyteries in the manner provided in this Form of Government for the amendment of the constitution".

The O.P.C., as appears from these statements, acknowledges the Lord

Jesus as the only Head of the Church and accepts His Word as the only rule for faith and order.

DEPUTIES CONCLUDE ON THE GROUND OF THIS CONSIDERATION THAT, ALTHOUGH CONSIDERABLE DIVERGENCIES EXIST IN CHURCH POLITY AND IN THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT, THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE IN THE ESSENTIAL TRUTH OF CHRIST'S HEADSHIP OVER HIS CHURCH AND OF THE ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY WHICH HIS WORD SHOULD HAVE IN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH. ALTHOUGH THE DIFFERENCES SHOULD REMAIN A POINT OF SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS, THEY NEED NOT PREVENT THE C.R.C. FROM RECOGNIZING THE O.P.C. AS A TRUE CHURCH OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND FROM ENTERING INTO CORRESPONDENCE WITH THIS CHURCH.

III. THE EXAMINATION AND EVALUATION OF THE ISSUE OF CHURCH CORRESPONDENCE LED TO THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATION AND CONCLUSIONS.

The O.P.C. does not have specific rules for correspondence with churches abroad. The correspondence with the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (synodical) -- which the O.P.C. intends to terminate, in agreement with the decision of the 36th Assembly of the O.P.C. (Minutes 36th Ass. page 112) -- the correspondence with the Reformed Churches of Australia and with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand was entered upon by the O.P.C. under the rules which were in force in these Reformed Churches.

The reason why the O.P.C. does not have rules for correspondence and why actually the whole idea of correspondence as we know it is foreign to the O.P.C., originates, according to deputies of the O.P.C., in the different historical background between the O.P.C. and the Reformed Churches. The ban on the convening of a general synod issued by the Staten of Holland in the last part of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century led at first to correspondence between various provincial synods in the country and when churches were established abroad, to correspondence with churches abroad.

The situation on the American continent was that the churches, established in North America, first remained part of the mother church in Europe. At the time when these churches became independent, they entered into fraternal relations with such churches on the American continent with which a unity of faith was experienced but with which no unity of organization could be realized on account of language barriers or of differences in customs. The Committee of the O.P.C. feels that if these differences do not present an insurmountable obstacle any longer, union should be sought between two denominations.

The first one of the Rules for Correspondence with foreign Churches of the C.R.C. reads: "To see to it that there are no deviations from the Reformed Confession in doctrine, liturgy, church government and discipline".

The last one reads: "To render account to each other in case of correspondence with a third party".

The Committee of the O.P.C. considers this first and last rule an infringement on the freedom of the church and senses a danger in these rules that the one church will lord it over the other church. The Committee has for that reason objection to enter into correspondence with the C.R.C. according to the rules of correspondence adopted by the C.R.C.

The suggestion was made on the part of the Committee that it might be more feasible to establish a fraternal relationship which would render it possible for the respective churches to benefit each other and which would not make it imperative that complete agreement in all matters was found.

Deputies are convinced that the disadvantages of a fraternal relationship outweigh the advantages and that the churches should not adopt the figure of such a relationship which the C.O. does not know.

The exercise of fraternal relationship is usually restricted to representation at mutual synods and to the deliverances of fraternal speeches which tend to confuse the issues between the churches more than they solve them.

DEPUTIES CONCLUDE THAT ALTHOUGH THE ISSUE OF CHURCH CORRESPONDENCE NEED NOT PREVENT THE C.R.C. FROM RECOGNIZING THE O.P.C. AS A TRUE CHURCH OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, IT DOES CONSTITUTE AN OBSTACLE ON THE WAY TO UNITY WITH THE O.P.C.

IV. Point 3 of the mandate given to deputies reads: "to investigate how the Creeds, the Form of Government and the Book of Discipline function in the O.P.C. and whether they are actually maintained".

THE FOLLOWING MAY BE OBSERVED

The contact with the Committee of the O.P.C. over a number of years has convinced deputies that the O.P.C. is wholeheartedly committed to the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God and that the O.P.C. wants to maintain the Creeds based on this Word.

The thoroughness which characterized the examination of candidates for the ministry, as witnessed by one of the deputies; the seriousness with which the matter of a union with the Reformed Presbyterian Church (Evangelical Synod) is treated according to the reports of the discussions; the testimonies of the O.P.C. against the acceptance of membership in the World Council of Christian Churches (W.C.C.C.) by the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (synodical) and against the admission of women to the special offices by these churches and the intention to terminate the correspondence with the Gereformeerde Kerken (synodical) after the latter did away with the decisions of Assen '26, are many evidences of this commitment.

Divergencies between the O.P.C. and the C.R.C. may originate in a different understanding of Scripture passages, as e.g. Acts 15, which is basic for the church polity of the O.P.C., these divergencies never concern the submission to the Scriptures themselves.

Deputies know from the discussions with the Committee that the O.P.C. has the sincere desire that the Creeds, the Form of Government and the Book of Discipline function in the internal life of the churches and are maintained. From what they learned from the Acts and official publications of the General Assembly deputies are aware that Creeds and Forms do function and are maintained in the church assemblies. Deputies are however not sufficiently acquainted with the local churches to be able to report on the life within them. It is known that several of the local churches are planted as a result of home mission work. This implies that these congregations are given milk to drink and not solid food yet. It causes the O.P.C., according to the testimony of the Committee, to see the sharper to it that faithful men are called to the ministry who are able to teach others also.

Deputies learned on inquiry that the Communion Table in the O.P.C. is neither "open" in the sense that everyone who presents himself as a believer is admitted to the Lord's Table, nor "closed" in the sense that exclusively communicant members of the O.P.C. are allowed to partake

in the Lord's Supper. The officers of each local church decide whether or not one who is not a member of the O.P.C. on his request is to be admitted to the Table of the Lord. In many O.P. Churches admission is granted on the basis of a public statement by the minister or by the session without an appearance of the person concerned before the session.

The O.P.C. appointed a committee to study the issue of membership of secret orders. The report of the committee was received by an Assembly of the O.P.C. and commended to the sessions and pastors for study. The General Assembly left it, as it does in all cases which do not directly concern the Scriptures or the Constitution, to the sessions to act on the report and to adopt its recommendation as a binding decision. The one session is sooner inclined to do so than the other one so that, even though church discipline is maintained in the O.P.C. the exercise of it in cases not directly in conflict with the Scriptures and the Constitution is more readily discharged in the one church than in the other.

DEPUTIES CONCLUDE THAT ALTHOUGH THEY ARE NOT SUFFICIENTLY ACQUAINTED WITH THE LIFE OF THE LOCAL CHURCHES TO BE ABLE TO SPEAK OF THEM, THE ACTS AND THE DECISIONS IN ITS RELATIONS TO OTHER DENOMINATIONS TESTIFY TO IT THAT THE CREEDS, THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT AND THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE DO FUNCTION IN THE O.P.C. AND FOR THAT REASON CORRESPONDENCE NEED NOT BE AVOIDED.

V. As to point 4 of the mandate of deputies, the sister relationship of the O.P.C. with the Gereformeerde Kerken (synodical), it was already mentioned under IV that correspondence with these churches will be terminated. The serious difference between the two churches and the impossibility to deal with these differences in a reasonable way led to this decision.

The O.P.C. is still a member, although not without concern, of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (R.E.S.). The Committee defended this membership with the arguments that the R.E.S. is not an ecclesiastical assembly, that the O.P.C. is not to the slightest degree bound by its decisions and that its membership gives the O.P.C. the opportunity to give a reformed testimony in the many points which come up for discussion within the R.E.S.

The Committee suggested that an emotional element might be involved in our objections against the R.E.S. because of the struggle of our dutch sister churches in the past. Deputies made it clear that fear for a false ecumenicity was our main concern. The O.P.C., the Committee assured, does not want to have anything to do with that kind of ecumenicity either.

DEPUTIES CONCLUDE THAT THE DECISION TO TERMINATE THE SISTER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN (SYNODICAL) WILL REMOVE AN OBSTACLE ON THE ROAD TO CORRESPONDENCE BUT THAT THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE O.P.C. IN THE R.E.S., WHICH LEAVES ROOM IN ITS MIDST FOR CHURCHES WHO BELONG TO THE W.C.C. IS STILL AN IMPEDIMENT TO ENTER INTO A CORRESPONDENCE WHICH IS TRULY ECUMENICAL IN NATURE.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS.

DEPUTIES RECOMMEND ON THE GROUND OF THE PRECEDING CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS TO OFFER THE O.P.C. CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT

1. this correspondence is established and conducted according to the rules adopted by the C.R.C.
2. the O.P.C. terminates correspondence with churches that maintain a sister relationship with the Gereformeerde Kerken (synodical). These dutch churches do not show the marks of the true but of the false church. No fellowship should consequently be entertained with them.
3. the O.P.C. withdraws from the R.E.S. The name "synod" gives the impression that it wants to be an ecclesiastical assembly; its toleration of churches which joined the W.C.C.C., and its decisions in connection with the conflict in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands show that the R.E.S. is neither reformed nor ecumenical.
4. the divergencies in church polity remain the object of continual study and discussion which under the blessing of the Lord may lead to a form of government which both in essence and in governing principles agrees.

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