

RAPPORT VAN DEPUTATEN BETREKKINGEN BUITENLANDSE KERKEN AAN DE GENERALE SYNODE LUTTEN SEPTEMBER 2021

Bleiswijk, mei 2021

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1. INLEIDING

De deputaten doen hierbij verslag van hun werkzaamheden, die na het sluiten van de GS Lansingerland (2017-2018) zijn gedaan.

1.1 INSTRUCTIES

De opdracht van de GS Lansingerland 2017-2018 heeft het deputaatschap BBK met de volgende instructies belast:

1. Zij zullen ten aanzien van de LRCA de zusterkerkrelatie voortzetten volgens de aangenomen regels voor zusterkerkrelaties. Daarbij rekening houdend met het besluit van de GS t.a.v. het verzoek van DGK Dalfsen.
2. Zij zullen, uitgaande van de hartelijke bereidheid om de kerkelijke eenheid te zoeken met allen, die op de grondslag van Schrift, belijdenis (waaronder wordt verstaan de Drie Formulieren van eenheid en/of de Westminster Confessie) en Dordtse kerkorde willen leven, contact zoeken, c.q. contact onderhouden met kerken in het buitenland, die bij instructie nr. 1 en 4 worden genoemd. Dit in overeenstemming met de regels voor het aangaan en onderhouden van zusterkerkrelaties met kerken in het buitenland. Op ondergeschikte punten inzake belijden, liturgie, kerkorde of kerkelijke praktijk zullen buitenlandse kerken niet veroordeeld worden.
3. Het doel van deze contacten is om de wettigheid van de recente vrijmaking en van het kerkverband van De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland aan deze kerken over te brengen en hen te verzoeken deze wettigheid te erkennen als voortvloeiende uit de gehoorzaamheid aan Gods Woord en de binding aan de belijdenis van de kerk en de Dordtse kerkorde van De Gereformeerde Kerken.
4. Zij zullen contacten onderhouden, blijven zoeken, of zo mogelijk intensiveren met de volgende kerken omdat God ons roept tot eenheid op grond van Schrift en belijdenis: de Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid Afrika (VGKSA ofwel de FRCSA, Zuid-Afrika), de Evangelical Presbyterian Church North-Ireland (EPC NI, Noord Ierland), de Evangelical Presbyterian Church England and Wales (EPC EW), de Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCS(c)), de Reformed Churches in Korea (RCK, Korea), de kerk van ds. Song in Korea, de Bekenkende Evangelisch-Reformierte Gemeinde in Giessen (BERG Giessen in Duitsland) en de Evangelical Reformed Church (ERE, Zuid-West-Oekraïne).
5. Zij zullen in het contact met de onder punt 4 genoemde kerken waar nodig deze blijven waarschuwen op grond van Gods Woord dat het contact dat die kerken wensen te behouden met de GKv, niet verenigbaar is met contact met De Gereformeerde Kerken.
6. Zij zullen ten aanzien van de Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) het volgende doen:
 1. het contact met de CanRC voortzetten;
 2. doorspreken over de situatie rond de LRCA waar DGK een zusterkerkrelatie mee heeft, waarbij tevens de interne kerkelijke ontwikkelingen, die samenhangen met de vrijmaking van de LRCA, aan de orde gesteld zullen worden.

3. Zij krijgen de mogelijkheid tot meerdere meetings met de CanRC deputaten, daarbij rekening houdend met het besluit van de GS ten aanzien van het verzoek van DGK Dalfsen.
7. Zij zullen ten aanzien van de VGKSA/FRCSA het volgende doen:
 1. Zij spreken hun teleurstelling erover uit dat het ontstaan en bestaan van DGK nog steeds als prematuur en onwettig wordt gezien, zonder dat de VGKSA een deugdelijke onderbouwing voor haar standpunt geeft en ondanks hun bezwaren richting de GKv.
 2. zij zullen ook erkennen de gemeenschappelijke zorgen die DGK en VGKSA hebben met betrekking tot ontwikkelingen in de GKv;
 3. zij spreken verder over contacten die de VGKSA en de GKSA op lokaal niveau met elkaar hebben. Daarbij rekening houdend met het besluit van de GS t.a.v. het verzoek van DGK Dalfsen.
8. Zij zullen ten aanzien van de FRCA het volgende doen: het contact met de FRCA voortzetten om te komen tot herstel van een zusterkerkrelatie. Deputaten kunnen toelichting geven over de zusterkerkrelatie met de LRCA en de verhouding tot de CanRC. Daarbij rekening houdend met het besluit van de GS t.a.v. het verzoek van DGK Dalfsen.
9. Zij zullen ten aanzien van de EPC-NI het volgende doen:
 1. door middel van verdere gesprekken onderzoeken of het kan komen tot herstel van een zusterkerkrelatie.
 2. De rapporten met betrekking tot de WS kunnen als studierapporten worden gebruikt bij deze contacten.
10. Zij zullen ten aanzien van de EPC-EW het volgende doen:
 1. Het contact met hen voort te zetten en door middel van verdere gesprekken onderzoeken of we op dezelfde grondslag staan. Op grond van de ingewonnen informatie kan de volgende synode besluiten al dan niet het contact voort te zetten.
 2. De rapporten met betrekking tot de WS kunnen als studierapporten worden gebruikt bij deze contacten.
11. Zij zullen ten aanzien van de FCS(c) het volgende doen:
 1. Door middel van verdere gesprekken onderzoeken of het kan komen tot herstel een zusterkerkrelatie.
 2. Op grond van de ingewonnen informatie kan de volgende synode besluiten al dan niet het contact voort te zetten.
 3. De rapporten met betrekking tot de WS kunnen als studierapporten worden gebruikt bij deze contacten.
12. Zij zullen ten aanzien van de RCK en ds. Song het volgende doen:
 1. de contacten met zowel RCK als ook ds. Song voorlopig aan te houden.
 2. nader onderzoek te doen om zo mogelijk meer duidelijkheid te krijgen over de situatie tussen RCK en ds. Song. Daarbij ook overleg te hebben met de FRCA en de CanRC.
 3. Door middel van verdere gesprekken onderzoeken of we op dezelfde grondslag staan. Op grond van de ingewonnen informatie kan de volgende synode besluiten al dan niet het contact voort te zetten.
13. Zij zullen ten aanzien van de BERG Giessen het volgende doen:
 1. Het contact (in eerste instantie schriftelijk) met hen voort te zetten en door verdere correspondentie te onderzoeken of we op dezelfde grondslag staan. Op grond van deze contacten kan de volgende synode verdere besluiten nemen.

2. In deze (schriftelijke) contacten zal aan de orde komen de visie van BERG Giessen op het avondmaal in samenhang met hun visie op de toelating tot het avondmaal;
 3. Hierbij tevens te corresponderen met BERG Giessen over verbond en verkiezing om meer duidelijkheid te krijgen over hun visie in het licht van Schrift en belijdenis en met het oog op de praktische consequenties daarvan voor het kerkelijk leven.
14. Zij zullen ten aanzien van de Evangelical Reformed Church (ERE) het volgende doen:
1. door middel van verdere gesprekken onderzoeken of we op dezelfde grondslag staan.
 2. Op grond van de ingewonnen informatie kan de volgende synode besluiten al dan niet het contact voort te zetten.
 3. Bij deze contacten met ERE waar nodig DGK Opeinde te betrekken, vanwege de betrokkenheid die deze gemeente al heeft bij ERE.
15. Zij zullen ten aanzien van het Web Magazine het volgende doen:
1. Het webmagazine minimaal 2x per jaar uitbrengen.
 2. informatie verstrekken over onze kerken en ontwikkelingen in en buiten onze kerken.
 3. Deze informatie dient erop gericht te zijn dat Engelstalige kerken goed geïnformeerd worden over de kerkelijke situatie in met name Nederland.
 4. Informatie verstrekken, indien nodig, over contacten met andere buitenlandse kerken.
16. Zij zullen in hun contacten o.a. gebruik maken van Engelstalige documenten waarin de gronden voor de Vrijmaking 2003 en de wettigheid van De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland worden uiteengezet, en waarin dient uit te komen dat De Gereformeerde Kerken zoals bijeen in Emmen 2009, de begeerte hebben de eenheid te onderhouden met de bovengenoemde zusterkerken. Daarin zal gebruik gemaakt worden van vertalingen van de synodebesluiten van GS Mariënborg 2005, GS Zwolle 2007, GS Emmen 2009, en GS Hasselt 2011 aangaande oude synodebesluiten 1993-2003. Zo nodig kan tevens nog gebruik gemaakt worden van één of meerdere van de volgende documenten: a. de brochure 'Do not take Words away from this Book of Prophecy' (verweerschrift tegen de GKv brochure 'Not beyond what is written' en antwoord op het appel van de GKv d.d. 2006), b. 'Deed of Liberation or Return' (Akte van Vrijmaking of Wederkeer) d.d. september 2003, c. de brochure 'Let us repent' (Laten wij ons bekeren) d.d. februari 2003, de 'Call to Reformation' d.d. februari 2003.
17. Zij zullen antwoorden op reacties van de kant van buitenlandse kerken die betrekking hebben op de zusterkerkrelatie met onze kerken. Zij zullen kerkleden die tijdelijk in het buitenland verblijven, op hun verzoek dienen met adviezen m.b.t. kerkgang en deelname aan het kerkelijk leven ter plaatse.
18. Zij stellen aan het begin van hun activiteiten een conceptbegroting op van de te verwachten uitgaven en dienen die in bij Deputaten Financieel Beheer.
19. Zij kunnen voor het uitvoeren van de opdrachten beschikken over de nodige financiële middelen die worden verstrekt door Deputaten Financieel Beheer.
20. Zij zullen van hun werk rapport uitbrengen aan de eerstkomende Generale Synode van De Gereformeerde Kerken, en dit rapport, eventueel aangevuld met voorstellen, vier maanden voor aanvang van de synode aan de roepende kerk en tevens aan de archivaris van de Generale Synode doen toekomen.

21. Zij zullen hun archief zowel in papieren- als ook in digitale vorm (PDF-format) uiterlijk na zes jaar overdragen aan de archivaris van de Generale Synode.
22. Zij zullen, met het oog op het meeleven van de kerkleden, geregeld publiek informatie verstrekken over de voortgang van hun arbeid. Zij kunnen bijvoorbeeld weergeven teksten van de toespraken bij bezoek aan buitenlandse kerken of indrukken van het kerkelijk leven in andere kerken. Minstens eenmaal per jaar zal er informatie worden verstrekt.

1.2 UITVOERING

In opdracht van de synode hebben deputaten zich vooral met de volgende zaken beziggehouden. Tussen haakjes is met nummers aangegeven met welke instructies deze zaken samenhangen.

1. Voortzetting van de zusterkerkrelatie met de LRCA en de daaruit voortvloeiende schriftelijke contacten, daarbij rekening houdend met het besluit van de GS t.a.v. het verzoek van DGK Dalfsen. (1)
2. Contacten onderhouden met de FRCA (7 en 8)
3. Contacten met de FRCSA (7)
4. Contacten onderhouden met de deputaten CanRC (6)
5. Correspondentie gevoerd met de EPC-NI en de EPC-EW en de Free Church of Scotland (continuing) (9, 10 en 11)
6. Correspondentie gevoerd met Rev. DongSup Song uit Korea (12)
7. Contact voortgezet met de ERE (14)

1.3 DEPUTAATSCHAP

Het deputaatschap telde zeven leden. Br. Joh. Houweling (voorzitter), ds. C. Koster (secretaris), ds. M.A. Snee, ds. H.G. Gunnink, br. D.J. Bolt, br. P. Dijkstra, zr. H.G. Sollië-Sleijster en adviseur dr. P. van Gurp.

Deputaten hebben op de volgende data vergaderd: 25-07-2018 (ontmoeting met ds. Z. Toth); 02-09-2018; 06-12-2018; 18-03-2019; 29-04-2019; 14-06-2019; 29-10-2019; 09-01-2020 (ontmoeting met afgevaardigden van FRCA, FRCSA, CanRC); 08-09-2020; 07-10-2020 (digitale ontmoeting met deputaten van FRCA); 24-10-2020 (digitale ontmoeting met de kerkenraad van LRCA, inhoudelijk gesprek mbt synodeopdracht); 18-02-21 (digitale ontmoeting met deputaten van CanRC); 23-02-2021 (digitale ontmoeting met LRCA, soort kerkvisitatie); 28-04-2021.

2. LIBERATED REFORMED CHURCH ABBOTSFORD (LRCA)

2.1. INSTRUCTIE

Voor de instructie, zie hierboven onder 1.1.

2.2. BESLUITEN VORIGE SYNODE M.B.T. DE ZUSTERKERKRELATIE

De GS Lansingerland heeft op 21 april 2018 besloten:

1. De GS erkent dat de GS van Emmen en de GS van Groningen ten onrechte hebben gesteld dat de mogelijkheid om met bezwaren voort te gaan in de kerkelijke weg aan leden van de CanRC ontnomen is.
2. Om met de zusterkerk te Abbotstford het gesprek aan te gaan over de katholiciteit van de kerk met betrekking tot de rechtmatigheid van haar afscheiding en haar kerkelijke positie van nu.
3. Om met de Canadese deputaten verder door te spreken over het ontstaan en bestaan van de LRCA.

Met als gronden bij dit besluit:

1. Uitspraken van de LRCA over kerken die de Westminster Standards als belijdenisgeschriften hebben roepen de nodige vragen op over hun visie op de katholiciteit van de kerk.
2. In het kader van een zusterkerkrelatie kun je, als er redenen zijn voor zorgen, dat bespreekbaar maken met de zusterkerk.
3. In de uitspraken van de GS Emmen en de GS Groningen zijn wel beschuldigingen van de LRCA aan het adres van de CanRC over het verval geuit en overgenomen, maar deze zijn nog niet allemaal bewezen of onderbouwd.
4. Bij het onderzoek naar de beweegredenen van de LRCA om tot afscheiding van de CanRC te komen zijn de CanRC niet voldoende gehoord. (Acta blz. 23, 24)

Deze besluiten zijn vertaald en aan de LRCA bekend gemaakt. Graag willen we in dit verband ook wijzen op de volgende synodebesluiten inzake de studierapporten. De synode van Groningen die bij besluit 6.01 uitsprak dat

beide rapporten over de Westminster Standards als studierapporten konden worden gebruikt bij contacten met buitenlandse kerken die deze geloofsbelijdenissen hebben.

Hierbij werden de volgende gronden genoemd:

3. In de geschiedenis van contactoefening van De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland met buitenlandse kerken is het hebben van de Westminster Standards als belijdenisgeschriften nooit als een onoverkomelijk bezwaar gezien.

4. In contacten met buitenlandse kerken die de Westminster Standards als belijdenisgeschriften hebben zal eerst en vooral duidelijk moeten worden of de kerkelijke praktijk overeenkomstig Gods Woord is. Bij positieve constatering hiervan is verder gesprek mogelijk over inhoudelijke verschillen tussen de onderscheiden belijdenissen. Van kerken die Gods Woord als Waarheid belijden mag immers verwacht worden dat zij aanspreekbaar zijn op wat zij in hun belijdenisgeschriften als samenvatting van Gods Woord uitspreken.

En de synode Lansingerland 2018 sprak uit (besluit 6.01 en grond 5):

niet te voldoen aan het verzoek van LRCA om het minderheidsrapport te verwerpen en alleen het meerderheidsrapport aan te nemen om in contacten met Presbyterianen te gebruiken.

Grond 4 bij besluit 6.01 GS Groningen spreekt voor zich en wijst een goede weg inzake contacten met kerken die de WS als belijdenisgeschrift hebben.

2.3. CORRESPONDENTIE

In opdracht van de synode hebben deputaten uitgebreid gecorrespondeerd met LRCA. Eerst is er een uitgebreide schriftelijke communicatie geweest. Daarna is er een gesprek geweest via de digitale weg over de katholiciteit van de kerk. Verder vond, zoals gebruikelijk sinds de synode van Groningen, een soort kerkvisitatiegesprek plaats. Een fysiek bezoek is tot heden niet mogelijk geweest, vanwege de corona-maatregelen. Ook is er een adviesvraag van LRCA gekomen richting BBK, maar deputaten hebben LRCA aangegeven dat ze voor deze adviesvraag bij de Classis Zuid-West terecht konden.

Hieronder volgt een overzicht van het contact. De brieven kunt u vinden in bijlage 1 van dit rapport en de notulen van het gesprek met LRCA in bijlage 2.

2018-12-11, BRIEF VAN BBK AAN LRCA

In de eerste brief van BBK aan LRCA hebben deputaten een zevental vragen gesteld aan LRCA over de onderwerpen die passen binnen de opdracht van de synode. In een bijlage bij deze brief hebben deputaten de mening van LRCA letterlijk weergegeven, zoals dat te vinden is in publiek toegankelijke documenten. De voorlopige conclusie van deputaten op grond van de uitingen van LRCA zelf is in die brief aan LRCA als volgt geformuleerd: "Op grond van al het bovenstaande stellen wij vast dat u de Westminster Confession als geheel veroordeelt als een document waarin (naast veel goeds) ook dwaalleer wordt geleerd. En dat u kerken die de Westminster Confession bewust ongewijzigd en onweersproken als belijdenis hanteren niet kunt erkennen als kerken van Christus, louter en alleen al om het feit dat zij de Westminster Confession belijden."

2019-02-28, BRIEF VAN LRCA AAN BBK

LRCA geeft in zijn schrijven aan dat ze door het schrijven van deputaten perplex zijn, omdat zoveel jaren na het besluit van de synode van Emmen in 2010 nog steeds vragen leven over de afscheiding in Abbotsford.

Ze geven aan dat ze het niet eens zijn met de vergaande uitspraken en conclusies, zoals de deputaten die hebben verwoord in hun vragen en bijlage. Ze wijzen er met name op dat ze nooit een presbyteriaanse kerk (die de WC of WS als belijdenis heeft) bij voorbaat

willen veroordelen. LRCA verwijst naar NGB art. 29 en zegt dat je alleen een kerk een valse kerk mag noemen, nadat ze een tijdlang een Schriftuurlijk getuigenis hebben verworpen. Verder wijst LRCA er op dat de OPC (waarmee de CanRC een zusterkerkrelatie heeft) baptisten als lid van hun kerk en aan het Avondmaal toelaat, terwijl dit in strijd is met de WC. Daaruit concludeert LRCA dat deze handelwijze een relativering is van de hele gereformeerde leer.

De LRCA wijst deputaten erop dat er in DGK twee tegenstrijdige studierapporten liggen, die gebruikt worden in contact met presbyteriaanse kerken. Echter, zegt LRCA, wordt door deze twee tegenstrijdige studierapporten het getuigenis van DGK ondermijnd. Waarbij LRCA verwijst naar 1 Kor. 14:8 "Want ook als de bazuin een onherkenbaar geluid geeft, wie zal zich gereedmaken voor de strijd?"

LRCA geeft aan dat er in de WC ruimte is voor een aantal dwalingen die strijdig zijn met Schrift en de Drie Formulieren van Enigheid, zoals ook het meerderheidsrapport heeft aangewezen. En LRCA geeft aan dat er zonder het oplossen van de verschillen tussen de DFE en WC (zoals de zekerheid van het geloof, twee verbonden, onzichtbare kerk en de pluriformiteit van de kerk) het onmogelijk is om het eens te worden met kerken die de WC hebben als belijdenis.

Verder wijst LRCA erop dat de Presbyteriaanse kerken in Noord-Amerika hun leden niet binden aan hun eigen belijdenis.

Over de kerkelijke weg die LRCA gegaan is zegt LRCA dat deputaten de gang van zaken niet goed begrijpen. Het appelproces begon na de synode van CanRC in 2001. Twee leden hadden een appelschrift voorbereid, welke de kerkenraad van CanRC in Abbotsford overnam en zond aan de synode van CanRC in 2004. Die synode verwierp het appel. Er was geen nieuwe grond voor een nieuw appel, naar art. 33 van de KO. In een brief van 4 oktober 2005 hebben leden van de CanRC de kerkenraad aangeschreven als laatste stap in hun appelproces, omdat de kerkenraad het hoogste gezag heeft in de kerken. Maar, zo geeft LRCA aan, omdat de kerkenraad van CanRC Abbotsford de onschriftuurlijke besluiten heeft geaccepteerd kwamen de bezwaarde gemeenteleden in gewetensnood. Bovendien ging de kerkenraad de synodebesluiten ook uitvoeren, door kanselruil met predikanten van kerken uit deze nieuwe zusterkerkrelatie en door gasten toe te laten aan het avondmaal zonder attestatie. Toen hiertegen geprotesteerd werd reageerde de kerkenraad door een verkozen ouderling niet te bevestigen, die niet met een goed geweten aan het avondmaal kon met zo'n gast. Ook werd een lid onder censuur gezet als reactie op zijn Schriftuurlijk getuigenis met betrekking tot de consequenties van de onschriftuurlijke synode besluiten.

In 2006 doen de broeders tweemaal een appel op de Classis Pacific East tegen de kerkenraad omdat deze in hun ogen 'ontoereikend' (inadequate) reageert op hun bezwaren.

Tot slot stelt de LRCA negen vragen aan BBK.

2019-03-23, BRIEF VAN BBK AAN LRCA

Een korte brief van deputaten, waarin ze aangeven dat ze zich voorbereiden op een antwoord op de brief van LRCA en dat een reis naar LRCA wordt uitgesteld, omdat nu blijkt dat het gesprek eerst verder voorbereid moet worden via schriftelijke communicatie.

2019-05-03, BRIEF VAN BBK AAN LRCA

In deze brief leggen deputaten er de vinger bij dat de synode van Groningen 2014-2015 duidelijk stelling koos ten opzichte van de WS door de WS niet te veroordelen als een confessie die niet in alle delen gereformeerd is. Een zusterkerkrelatie met een kerk die de WS heeft is dus mogelijk. En ook verwijzen deputaten naar de synode van Lansingerland 2017-2018. Toen werd een voorstel van LRCA besproken, waarin LRCA voorstelde om het meerderheidsrapport (van het studierapport van de meerderheid van deputaten, dat gediend heeft op de synode van Groningen) te aanvaarden en het minderheidsrapport te verworpen. Dat voorstel van LRCA is duidelijk door de synode verworpen.

Deputaten geven aan dat het antwoord van LRCA van 28 februari 2019 laat zien dat het standpunt van LRCA en de synode van Lansingerland tegenover elkaar staan. Immers, DGK geeft aan dat het feit dat kerken de WC als belijdenis hebben geen obstakel is om een zusterkerkrelatie aan te gaan. Terwijl LRCA het feit dat kerken de WC als belijdenis hebben wel als een obstakel ziet om een zusterkerkrelatie aan te gaan. Want de LRCA geeft zelf aan dat de WC eerst veranderd moet worden, voordat een zusterkerkrelatie aangegaan kan worden.

Verder stellen deputaten vijf aanvullende vragen aan LRCA. Ook heeft de brief opnieuw een bijlage, dit is een iets aangevulde versie van de bijlage zoals die werd verzonden bij de eerste brief van deputaten, met een ongewijzigde conclusie van deputaten.

Met dit schrijven wilden de deputaten vooral aangeven dat DGK niet een onduidelijk getuigenis heeft, als het gaat over de Westminster Standards en het contact met presbyteriaanse kerken. En de vijf vervolgvragen hebben de bedoeling om de discussie verder tot de kern te brengen.

2019-05-23, BRIEF VAN LRCA AAN BBK

LRCA geeft aan dat de conclusie van deputaten 'completely false' is, omdat ze niet een kerk met de WC veroordelen zonder een degelijke en eerlijke discussie te hebben over de afwijking in leer en praktijk. Ook is LRCA perplex dat de WC wordt verdedigd door deputaten als een volledig gereformeerde belijdenis, zonder dat is ingegaan op het boekje van ds. Hofferd over deze materie.

Als reactie op de vragen van deputaten geeft LRCA aan dat de OPC een open avondmaal heeft, wat strijdig is met de Schrift en de gereformeerde leer. De LRCA verdedigt de kerkelijke weg die gegaan is in de CanRC. Er is door leden van CanRC Abbotsford inderdaad geen tweede keer in appel gegaan bij de synode. Maar dit was kerkrechtelijk niet mogelijk, stelt de LRCA. Omdat individuele leden met hun appel naar de classis moeten gaan, terwijl een zusterkerkrelatie geen zaak is van de classis, maar van de synode. LRCA houdt dit vol, ook al is aan te tonen dat individuele leden in de CanRC wel de mogelijkheid hebben de volledige kerkelijke weg via de classis te gaan.

En verder zegt LRCA onder andere dat de CanRC kerken van Lincoln en Attercliffe wel in appel zijn gegaan bij de synode van 2007, maar hun (ontvankelijk) appel inhoudelijk is afgewezen.

Op de vraag of dan nu alle plaatselijke kerken van CanRC valse kerken zijn geworden, omdat ze de oproep van LRCA hebben verworpen, zegt LRCA als reactie: daar lijkt het wel op (Engels: "To these questions we answer that it appears that way").

Er worden enkele zaken genoemd om het verval in de CanRC in het jaar 2007 te bewijzen.

2019-09-05, BRIEF VAN LRCA AAN BBK

Eerst corrigeren ze een uitspraak uit de brief van 28 februari 2019 en geven aan dat het mogelijk is volgens LRCA om een zusterkerkrelatie aan te gaan met kerken die het inhoudelijk eens zijn met de DFE, hun leden binden aan de confessie en op goede wijze toezien op het Avondmaal, ondanks dat ze de WS als belijdenis hebben.

Verder gaat LRCA in dit schrijven uitgebreid in op voorbeelden uit de CanRC, die duidelijk moeten maken dat de CanRC in verval is. Ze noemen onder andere het onontvankelijk verklaren van de brief van LRCA aan de synode, het beperken van het recht van appel, het aangaan van een zusterkerkrelatie met RCNZ, ERQ, enz. en het lidmaatschap van NAPARC, het niet aangaan van zusterkerkrelatie met DGK, toestaan van het actieve vrouwenstemrecht, het toelaten van gasten aan het Avondmaal zonder dat ze lid zijn van een zusterkerk.

2019-11-08, BRIEF VAN BBK AAN LRCA

Deputaten geven de gevraagde informatie over het contact tussen DGK en GKN. Verder geven deputaten aan dat de manier waarop OPC het avondmaal viert niet te omschrijven valt als een open avondmaal, wel dat het anders is dan hoe wij het doen met het gebruik van attestaties. Verder dat de deputaten van mening zijn dat de LRCA niet de volledige kerkelijke weg is gegaan bij hun afscheiding, dit wordt uitgewerkt in de bijlage van die brief. Dat deputaten concluderen dat LRCA alle CanRC kerken als valse kerken beschouwt. Dat de argumenten voor het verval in de CanRC kerken in 2007 niet bewezen zijn uit officiële synodestukken, naast het reeds bekende punt van de zusterkerkrelaties. Datzelfde geldt voor het verval van de CanRC kerken op dit moment, de deputaten zijn niet overtuigd door de bewijzen van LRCA.

Deputaten hebben geprobeerd antwoord te geven op de vragen van LRCA, maar dat hebben ze gedaan in het besef dat ze slechts namens de kerken kunnen spreken. Daarom moesten ze erg beperkt blijven in hun antwoorden.

De brief sluit af met de conclusies van deputaten, waarin ze aangeven dat DGK bereid is om contact te zoeken en onderhouden met kerken die de DFE hebben als wel met kerken die de WS hebben, omdat Jezus Christus zijn kerk vergadert uit verschillende naties met verschil in geschiedenis en cultuur en dat ze daarom niet veroordeeld worden op ondergeschikte punten inzake wijze van belijden, liturgie, kerkorde en praktijk.

Ook geven deputaten aan dat het niet zo is dat de deputaten geheel geen zorgen hebben over de ontwikkelingen in de CanRC en de contacten met derden. Maar als er bij zusterkerken van CanRC dwalingen blijken te zijn, dan is het niet perse zo dat die dwalingen ook in de CanRC aanwezig zijn, noch dat de CanRC daardoor in diep verval zijn geraakt. Onze kerken hebben immers de regel dat "wanneer er sprake is van relaties met derden, zorgvuldig dient te worden nagegaan, wat deze relaties voor de desbetreffende kerk betekenen om zo de waarde, de zin en eventueel de wijze van aangaan en/of oefening van een zusterkerkrelatie te beoordelen."

Deputaten sluiten hun brief af met de volgende conclusies. Wat betreft de katholiciteit van de kerk: de LRCA veroordeelt de WC als geheel als een document waarin (naast veel goeds ook) dwaalleer wordt geleerd. En kerken die de WC bewust ongewijzigd en onweersproken

als belijdenis hanteren kan de LRCA niet erkennen als kerken van Christus, louter en alleen al om het feit dat zij de WC belijden. Op dit punt staat de visie van LRCA lijnrecht tegenover wat het kerkverband van DGK hierover heeft uitgesproken.

Wat betreft de kerkelijke weg: de LRCA is de kerkelijke weg niet ten einde toe gegaan. De afscheiding in 2007 van de CanRC is daarom in kerkrechtelijk opzicht onwettig geweest.

Na deze brief wachten deputaten nog op een antwoord van LRCA, daarna beschouwen deputaten de briefwisseling als afgerond en zal er een mondeling gesprek plaatsvinden.

2020-03-26, BRIEF VAN LRCA AAN BBK

De LRCA gaat uitgebreid in op de brief van deputaten. Hun brief mondt uit in drie conclusies, waarin ze ten eerste aangeven dat de OPC zijn eigen leden niet bindt aan de WC. Ten tweede dat deputaten niet zorgvuldig genoeg het besluit van de synodes van Hasselt 2012 en Groningen 2014/2015 hebben overwogen inzake de studierapporten, omdat de synode het meerderheidsrapport niet veroordeelt, terwijl LRCA het juist eens is met het meerderheidsrapport. En ten derde dat LRCA wel de kerkelijke weg is gegaan en dat het standpunt van deputaten volgens LRCA strijdt met de synodes van Emmen 2010 en Groningen 2015.

2020-09-14, UPDATE VAN BBK, TER INFORMATIE VAN DE KERKEN

De deputaten voelden zich geroepen om nu de kerken te informeren over de huidige stand van zaken, conform hun instructie (zie hierboven, instructie nr. 22). Daarom is er een update verschenen van deputaten met de conclusie, zoals die in november 2019 al aan LRCA is toegestuurd. Deze update is ook ter informatie aan LRCA toegestuurd.

2020-10-01, BRIEF VAN LRCA AAN BBK

LRCA geeft ten eerste aan dat ze het handelen van deputaten niet begrijpen, zowel in het afronden van de schriftelijke communicatie als het versturen van de update. Ten tweede dat ze het oneens zijn met de conclusie van deputaten inzake het standpunt van LRCA over de WC en ten derde over de kerkelijke weg die ze gegaan zijn.

2020-10-24, DIGITALE ONTMOETING LRCA EN BBK

In het gesprek komen in hoofdzaak drie onderwerpen aan bod. Allereerst geven deputaten een uitleg waarom de update is verstuurd en waarom ze niet op alle argumenten van LRCA inhoudelijk hebben gereageerd. Deputaten geven aan dat niet alle inbreng van LRCA relevant is voor deputaten en dat deputaten aan een beperkte opdracht van de synode zijn gebonden en dus niet in alles hun oordeel of reactie kunnen geven, bijvoorbeeld over de opvattingen van ds. Hofferding m.b.t. de WS.

Vervolgens de visie van LRCA op de katholiciteit van de kerk. Daarin komt met name naar voren dat LRCA niet zozeer moeite heeft met de WC, maar met het feit dat presbyteriaanse kerken meestal hun leden niet binden aan hun belijdenis. En dat er een open avondmaalstafel is. Echter geven deputaten aan dat de moeite van LRCA wel degelijk zit in de WC, omdat volgens LRCA de dwalingen en verkeerde praktijken voortkomen uit de WC. LRCA geeft aan: wat je bij je zusterkerk toestaat, dat doe je zelf, daar ben je dus ook zelf volledig verantwoordelijk voor. Dit hebben deputaten bestreden, omdat CanRC niet de regels of praktijk officieel heeft overgenomen van OPC. Pas als de officiële regels veranderd

zijn en er bijvoorbeeld werkelijk een open avondmaal is in CanRC, dan kan je daar eventueel conclusies aan verbinden, maar niet eerder.

En als laatste is doorgesproken over de kerkelijke weg van LRCA. Hierin komt onder andere naar voren dat LRCA zegt dat de kerkelijke weg hen niet open stond, ook al zegt CanRC van wel. En dat je nergens in de kerkorde de eis ziet staan dat je tweemaal in appel moet gaan, voordat je jezelf mag afscheiden van de kerk.

2.4. BESPREKING INZAKE KATHOLICITEIT VAN DE KERK

De LRCA veroordeelt elke kerk die de WS als belijdenis heeft als valse kerk, als zo'n kerk na waarschuwing de WS niet wil vervangen door of aanpassen aan de DFE. Ook de CanRC zijn in hun visie tot valse kerken geworden, omdat deze kerken een zusterkerkrelatie met o.a. de OPC zijn aangegaan, hun appels met vermaan onontvankelijk hebben verklaard en geen enkele CanRC kerk zich sinds 2007 heeft willen aansluiten bij de afscheiding van de LRCA.

De LRCA heeft de DGK synode Lansingerland verzocht het meerderheidsrapport inzake de WS aan te nemen en het minderheidsrapport af te wijzen. Meerderheids- en minderheidsrapport waren als studierapporten aangenomen door de synode Groningen en konden gebruikt worden bij contacten met buitenlandse kerken met de WS. De synode Lansingerland heeft het verzoek van LRCA afgewezen. Beide rapporten kunnen nog steeds als studierapporten worden gebruikt. Dit acht LRCA onjuist en zij blijven bij hun standpunt dat de WCF geen gereformeerde confessie is.

Deputaten hebben hen voorgehouden dat de gereformeerde kerken altijd de WC als gereformeerde confessie hebben beoordeeld. Ook de eerste synode van DGK (Mariënborg 2005) heeft zich in die zin uitgesproken. Door de jaren heen werd en wordt contact gezocht met kerken die de DFE en/of de WS als confessie hebben. GS van Lansingerland sprak dit opnieuw uit, in lijn met uitspraken van de synode Groningen van DGK: "buitenlandse kerken zullen niet veroordeeld worden op ondergeschikte punten inzake belijden, liturgie, kerkorde of kerkelijke praktijk" (zie instructie 2). Met dit besluit van de synode Lansingerland is de LRCA het niet eens en zij wijzen dit besluit dan ook af.

Bovendien verwijt de LRCA DGK beide studierapporten niet te hebben geëvalueerd. Als dat wel was gebeurd, dan zou dat naar hun mening zijn uitgemond in afwijzing van het minderheidsrapport en aanneming van het meerderheidsrapport. Zij achten het meerderheidsrapport met de sterke veroordeling van de WS juist. Vandaar ook hun veroordeling van kerken met de WS als belijdenis en van kerken die met zulke kerken relaties aangaan.

In lijn met de uitspraken van de synode Mariënborg, Groningen en Lansingerland achten deputaten deze veroordeling van de WS, van kerken met de WS als belijdenis en van kerken die met deze kerken een relatie aangaan, in strijd met de katholiciteit van de kerk.

Deputaten constateren dat LRCA het algeheel verval in verleden en heden binnen de CanRC niet bewezen noch onderbouwd heeft. In het verleden heeft DGK teveel door de ogen van LRCA naar de CanRC gekeken. Uiteraard zijn er, zoals in elk kerkverband, zaken die reden geven tot zorg en waar je graag met elkaar over wilt doorspreken. Maar LRCA heeft geen besluiten van de GS van CanRC aangedragen, waarin zichtbaar is dat het kerkverband de Schrift loslaat.

Wat deputaten verder constateren, is dat LRCA zich op dit standpunt stelt: alles wat je accepteert bij je zusterkerk, dat accepteer je ook in je eigen kerkverband. Dat is de reden dat de LRCA niet alleen de OPC veroordeelt om een praktijk waar LRCA principiële moeite mee heeft, maar één op één ook de CanRC op grond van diezelfde praktijk in OPC veroordeelt alleen vanwege de zusterkerkrelatie. Terwijl die praktijk niet getolereerd wordt door de synodes van de CanRC in het eigen kerkverband.

Bijvoorbeeld, de OPC laat gelovigen aan het Avondmaal uit een andere gemeente zonder een belijdenisattestatie, maar alleen met een woordelijke waarschuwing vanaf de kansel. Dit is in de ogen van LRCA een verkeerde, onschriftuurlijke praktijk. LRCA noemt dit zelfs een 'open avondmaal.' Echter, de LRCA veroordeelt de CanRC vanwege deze praktijk in OPC. Terwijl de CanRC nog steeds Avondmaalsbriefjes gebruikt om mensen toe te laten aan het Avondmaal. Hierin zie je dat deze redenering van LRCA onjuist is. Want wat de OPC (hun zusterkerk) doet, dat accepteert en bespreekt de CanRC wel binnen de zusterkerkrelatie, maar zij maken daar zelf als kerkverband andere keuzes in.

LRCA wijst er op dat presbyteriaanse kerken hun leden niet binden aan hun belijdenis. Ook de OPC vraagt slechts om instemming met de 'system of doctrine' en niet met de woordelijke inhoud van de WC. Op grond hiervan verwijt LRCA dat de OPC (en daarmee dus ook de CanRC) een gebrek heeft aan confessioneel lidmaatschap. Echter wreekt zich hier dat LRCA te weinig oog heeft voor de geschiedenis die Christus is gegaan met presbyteriaanse kerken. Presbyteriaanse kerken vragen geen instemming met de woordelijke inhoud van de WS met een reden. De reden is, dat de WS zeer uitgebreid zijn verwoord. Veel uitgebreider dan de Drie Formulieren van Enigheid. En dat het onjuist is om te vragen om letterlijk in te stemmen met alles wat in de WS staat. Dat zou feitelijk betekenen een boven Schriftuurlijke binding. Daarom is de praktijk altijd dat ze instemming vragen met een 'system of doctrine'. Echter betekent instemming met een 'system of doctrine' niet automatisch dat er een ongebreidelde leervrijheid is. Dat kan wel, maar dat hangt erg af van de geschiedenis. Net zoals je in Nederland wel kerken hebt die de DFE als hun belijdenis hebben, maar wel leervrijheid kennen. De OPC is een presbyteriaanse kerk die instemming vraagt met de 'system of doctrine', maar is een zeer behoudend kerkverband. Als bewijs hiervan verwijzen deputaten naar de ICRC, waar juist de OPC heeft geïnitieerd om de GKV te schorsen als lid vanwege vrouwelijke ambtsdragers in de GKV. En daarbij benadrukken de deputaten nogmaals dat je ook in dit onderwerp niet meteen mag zeggen: wat OPC doet, doet CanRC ook. De OPC heeft wel de WS, waarbij instemming wordt gevraagd met een 'system of doctrine', maar de CanRC heeft de DFE als belijdenis en vraagt dáár instemming mee (en niet met een 'system of doctrine').

Deputaten concluderen dat de LRCA de katholiciteit van de kerk uit het oog heeft verloren. Daarmee wijkt de LRCA af van de gereformeerde leer en is in sektarisch vaarwater terechtgekomen. De LRCA veroordeelt kerken die trouw zijn in het bewaren van het Woord van God en het gereformeerd belijden, maar die niet de DFE als belijdenis hebben. Er is geen oog voor het historisch gegroeide onderscheid in confessies met weliswaar verschil in bewoordingen, maar eenheid in belijden. Onze kerken hebben terecht altijd gezegd, zoals ook is opgenomen in de regels voor het aangaan en onderhouden van zusterkerkrelaties: "Daarbij zal er rekening mee moeten worden gehouden, dat de Here Christus zijn kerk onder verschillende volken, die elk door hun bijzondere geografische ligging, historie en cultuur zijn bepaald, vergadert, zodat

buitenlandse kerken om verschillen op ondergeschikte punten inzake wijze van belijden, liturgie, kerkorde en praktijk niet veroordeeld zullen worden; en dat wanneer er sprake is

van relaties met derden, zorgvuldig dient te worden nagegaan, wat deze relaties voor de desbetreffende kerk betekenen om zo de waarde, de zin en eventueel de wijze van aangaan en/of oefening van een zusterkerkrelatie te beoordelen;”

Het besluit van de synode van Emmen tot het aangaan van een zusterkerkrelatie met LRCA (een gemeente die elke kerk die de Westminster Standards als belijdenis had valse kerk noemde) was, zo zijn deputaten van mening, achteraf gezien te snel genomen. En dat dit niet eerder aan de kaak is gesteld is te betreuren. Dit had voorkomen kunnen worden door de plaatselijke CanRC in Abbotsford of de landelijke deputaten van CanRC te horen. Ook was het beter geweest meer oog te hebben voor de geschiedenis van de Gereformeerde Kerken vanaf de afscheiding in 1834, toen er zusterkerkrelaties werden onderhouden met kerken die de Westminster Standards als belijdenis hadden. En ook voor het besluit van de synode van Mariënborg, waarin zij deputaten betrekkingen buitenlandse kerken opdroeg te streven naar het aangaan van een zusterkerkrelatie met kerken die de Westminster Standards als belijdenis hebben.

Deputaten blijven bij hun conclusies inzake de katholiciteit van de kerk, zoals ze dat eerder gecommuniceerd hebben aan LRCA. Namelijk, de LRCA veroordeelt de WC als geheel als een document waarin (naast veel goeds ook) dwaalleer wordt geleerd. En kerken die de WC bewust ongewijzigd en onweersproken als belijdenis hanteren kan de LRCA niet erkennen als kerken van Christus, louter en alleen al om het feit dat zij de WC belijden. Op dit punt staat de visie van LRCA lijnrecht tegenover wat het kerkverband van DGK hierover heeft uitgesproken.

2.5. BESPREKING INZAKE KERKELIJKE WEG

Hier volgt een onderbouwing van onze conclusie inzake de kerkelijke weg.

De synode van Neerlandia 2001 (acta art. 45) besloot een zusterkerkrelatie aan te gaan met de Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). De CanRC kerkenraad van Abbotsford had een appelverzoek ingediend bij de CanRC synode Chatham 2004 dat een extra zin (i.v.m. toelating tot het HA) in de overeenkomst met de OPC opgenomen diende te worden. De synode Chatham besloot dat dit niet gewenst was (ging boven de confessie uit). Dit appelschrift van de CanRC Abbotsford werd daarom afgewezen (art. 86 van de betreffende acta) en de kerkenraad van CanRC Abbotsford legde zich bij dit besluit neer. Ook bevestigde Chatham het besluit van Neerlandia dat individuele kerkleden bezwaren niet meer *rechtstreeks* bij een generale synode kunnen indienen maar daarvoor de weg kerkenraad-classis-regionale synode moeten volgen (Acta art. 20).

De kerkenraad van CanRC Abbotsford ratificeerde ook dit synodebesluit van Chatham.

Enkele leden, die zich later hebben onttrokken, vroegen de kerkenraad zich niet neer te leggen bij dit synodebesluit van Chatham en verzochten alsnog als kerkenraad hiertegen bij de volgende synode (de GS van Smithers 2007) in beroep te gaan. Dit verzoek werd door de kerkenraad van CanRC Abbotsford afgewezen. Vervolgens zijn deze latere LRCA leden met bezwaar tegen de behandeling van hun verzoek aan hun kerkenraad naar de classis gegaan. Dit werd tweemaal gedaan en tweemaal afgewezen (in 2006 door de classis Pacific East). De kerkenraad van CanRC Abbotsford beëindigde de uitgebreide briefwisseling met de bezwaarden op 31 mei 2007.

Hierna hebben deze bezwaarde leden zich niet met hun bezwaren tot een regionale synode gewend. De afwijzing van hun verzoek door de kerkenraad beschouwden zij als beslissend, immers de kerkenraad is de hoogste verantwoordelijke instantie. Tevens waren de bezwaarde leden ervan overtuigd dat zij niet bij de synode zelf in beroep konden gaan, omdat het aan individuele leden was ontzegd om rechtstreeks naar de synode in beroep te gaan. Via de kerkelijke weg de inhoud van hun zaak aankaarten achten ze kerkordelijk niet juist, omdat het een zaak betreft die niet op de classis of regionale synode thuishoort, maar alleen op de generale synode behandeld mag worden (art. 47 KO). De broeders zagen zich ook geconfronteerd met plaatselijke effectuering in Abbotsford van het besluit van de synode van Chatham en, volgens hun zienswijze, als gevolg daarvan ook met kerkelijke censuur. De hele situatie bracht de bezwaarde broeders tot de overtuiging dat ze nu geroepen waren om tot afscheiding over te gaan.

De LRCA wenst zich niet neer te leggen bij het besluit van de CanRC, dat individuele leden niet rechtstreeks, maar wel via classis en regionale synode met hun bezwaren naar de synode kunnen. LRCA vindt dat zij rechtstreeks naar de synode moeten kunnen gaan.

De indirecte weg (via classis etc.) achten zij onjuist, ook al was dit wel de afgesproken weg in CanRC. Echter, ook tegen het feit dat de kerkelijke weg toen zo ingericht was zijn de verontruste gemeenteleden niet de kerkelijke weg gegaan om bezwaren te maken daartegen.

Daarom hebben bezwaarden zich afgescheiden van hun plaatselijke CanRC en stichtten zij op 17 juli 2007 de LRCA. Zij waren van oordeel dat zij nu gedwongen werden tot onschriftuurlijke praktijken en dat door hen de kerkelijke weg geheel was afgelopen.

Sinds hun afscheiding stuurt LRCA wel appels aan de generale synodes van CanRC, maar die worden onontvankelijk verklaard. LRCA vindt dat de CanRC synodes hun appels wel in behandeling moeten nemen, ook al zijn zij al jaren geen lid meer van de CanRC. Zij roepen bovendien nog steeds de CanRC kerken op zich af te scheiden van het CanRC kerkverband.

LRCA wijst de constatering van de synode Lansingerland af dat hun afscheiding vroegtijdig was, omdat zij van mening zijn destijds de kerkelijke weg volledig bewandeld te hebben. De commissie heeft zich beijverd de onjuistheid daarvan aan te tonen, maar de LRCA wijst alle bewijs af.

Deputaten constateren dat de LRCA de volgende opvattingen heeft.

- a. De kerkelijke weg met appels is al gegaan sinds 1977 toen de synode de OPC als ware kerk erkende.
- b. De bezwaarden oordeelden dat een *ontvankelijk* appel door de kerkenraad van Abbotsford op de synode Smithers 2007 mogelijk moest zijn omdat de oorspronkelijke bezwaren van de kerkenraad van Abbotsford niet-wezenlijk (not substantiated) waren behandeld door Chatham 2004.
- c. Nadat de kerkenraad van Abbotsford de besluiten van de synode Chatham had geratificeerd en vervolgens weigerde in appel te gaan bij Smithers was de kerkelijke weg ten einde toe gelopen, zo overeenkomstig art. 31 en 50 KO: art. 50 KO: The relation with churches abroad shall be regulated by general synod (In de Nederlandse art. 47 KO: Over de relatie met buitenlandse kerken beslist de generale synode.).

- d. Het besluit van Chatham om *rechtstreekse* appels aan de generale synode door individuele kerkleden niet meer toe te staan (Acta art. 20) is ongereformeerd, het toont dat art. 31 KO wordt misverstaan.
- e. In appel gaan bij Smithers tegen de wijziging van de appelweg werd niet gevraagd van de bezwaarden.
- f. Starten door de bezwaarden van een nieuwe appelprocedure tegen Chatham zou in strijd zijn met art. 33 KO dat zegt: *Matters once decided upon may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds.*¹
- g. Kerkelijke relaties zijn *generale synodezaken*, art. 50 KO (ons art. 47KO). Maar *Chatham* bepaalde dat individuele kerkleden bezwaren alleen nog via kerkenraad, classis en regionale synode bij de generale synode aanhangig konden maken. Een kerkelijk individu kan dus geen appel t.a.v. zulke zaken doen omdat mindere vergaderingen daar niet over gaan.
- h. Door in lijn met de aanvaarde besluiten van Neerlandia en Chatham een gast toe te laten aan het Avondmaal die geen schriftelijke attestatie had werden de bezwaarden gedwongen deze praktijk te aanvaarden. Daarmee forceerde de kerkenraad de breuk.
- i. De wijziging van de kerkelijke appelweg door Chatham (Acta art. 20) maakt overigens niets uit voor de gang van de kerkelijke weg: toen de kerkenraad van Abbotsford besloot geen appel op Smithers te doen was de kerkelijke weg volledig afgelopen.
- j. Art. 31 KO geeft het recht om tegen besluiten van kerkelijke vergaderingen in te gaan maar het verplicht niet daartoe. Dat de bezwaarden persoonlijk niet appelleerden bij Smithers was dus niet tegen de KO.

Analyse

De bezwaarden/afgescheidenen stellen met nadruk dat door de aanvaarding door de kerkenraad van Abbotsford van het besluit van de synode Chatham en de weigering alsnog daartegen in appel te gaan bij de synode Smithers, de kerkelijk weg *voor de bezwaarden* geheel was afgelopen. Zij voeren daar argumenten voor aan die nader worden gewogen.

1 - Onontvankelijk naar art. 33 KO

De bezwaarden stellen dat na de beslissing van de kerkenraad van Abbotsford door hen een appel op de synode van Smithers niet meer kon omdat art. 33 zegt: *Matters once decided upon may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds.*

Echter, de broeders stelden *zelf* in hun concept appel dat zij de kerkenraad aanboden, dat de argumenten in het oorspronkelijke appel *niet wezenlijk* (*'not substantively'*) waren behandeld door Chatham. Het was dus alleszins zinvol en noodzakelijk om een appel te doen op Smithers om alsnog de argumentatie (verder) te laten behandelen en zo mogelijk het besluit van Chatham te herzien. Zo drongen de broeders bij de kerkenraad er op aan in beroep te gaan bij Smithers! Art. 33 is dus niet van toepassing in deze situatie.

Conclusie 1: Het beroep op art. 33 KO is onterecht.

¹ Nederlandse versie art. 33 KO: Wat eenmaal afgehandeld is, moet niet opnieuw aan de orde worden gesteld, tenzij men van oordeel is dat wijziging noodzakelijk is.

2 - Onontvankelijk naar art. 50

De kerkorde schrijft voor in art. 50: The relation with churches abroad shall be regulated by general synod. Volgens de bezwaarden was het dus niet mogelijk via de appelweg Kerkenraad-classis-regionale synode-generale synode te appelleren. Immers, de zaak van kerkelijke relaties regardeert niet de mindere vergaderingen, alleen de generale synode. Op het moment dat Chatham de appelweg veranderde (individuele kerkleden kunnen alleen via mindere vergaderingen naar de synode) was voor hen geen appel meer mogelijk: een classis bijvoorbeeld heeft niets van doen met zaken die op de generale synode thuishoren.

Echter, dit is een onjuiste voorstelling van zaken. Inderdaad, gaat het niet aan dat een classis bijvoorbeeld besluit of er een kerkelijke relatie wel of niet wordt aangegaan met een ander kerkverband, dat ligt op het niveau van de kerken in het algemeen, dus van de generale synode waar alle kerken bijeen zijn. Maar individuele kerken kunnen wel *bezwaar* aantekenen tegen synodebesluiten op dit gebied, zij kunnen aantonen dat verkeerde argumenten zijn gebruikt. Daarmee gaan ze niet zitten op de stoel van de generale synode maar oefenen hun kerkrecht naar art. 31 KO uit.

Dat geldt ook voor bezwaarde kerkleden. Weliswaar kunnen zij niet meer *direct* appelleren bij een volgende synode maar wel via de door Neerlandia/Chatham aangegeven *indirecte* appelweg². Daarbij kunnen de mindere vergaderingen wel of niet instemmen met het appel. In het laatste geval kunnen de bezwaarden in 'hoger beroep' gaan bij de naast-hogere meerdere vergadering ('if *anyone*', in art. 31 KO).

Dat dit ook de praktijk is in de CanRC bewijzen appels van individuele kerkleden in de zaak van actief vrouwenkiesrecht.

Conclusie 2: Het beroep op art. 50 KO is onterecht.

3 - Onontvankelijk volgens de geschiedenis

De broeders menen dat hun bezwaren, als ze die wél hadden ingediend, onontvankelijk zouden zijn verklaard. Zij concluderen dat uit de onontvankelijk-verklaringen door de latere synoden (2010, 2013) van vergelijkbare appels.

Echter, deze argumentatie snijdt geen hout. Verzuim om de kerkelijke weg tot het einde toe te gaan kan niet worden gerechtvaardigd met het *achteraf* constateren uit synodaal gedrag dat de bezwaren onontvankelijk zouden zijn verklaard.

Bovendien waren de bezwaarden er in oktober 2005 nog van overtuigd dat ontvankelijkheid bij Smithers mocht worden verwacht, gezien het feit dat, zoals zij menen, hun bezwaren niet wezenlijk ('not substantively') door Chatham waren behandeld. Overigens, de geschiedenis heeft dat ook bewezen want soortgelijke bezwaren als van de bezwaarden (kerken van Lynden en Attercliffe) waren ontvankelijk bij Smithers.

Niemand kan weten wat het appel van de bezwaarden zou hebben uitgewerkt. Bovendien, eigen tekortkoming nu kan nooit worden gerechtvaardigd met handelen van anderen later.

² Vermeldenswaard is dat de situatie in de GKv vergelijkbaar lijkt, ook daar kunnen kerkleden alleen de indirecte appelweg gaan. Maar er is een fundamenteel verschil: in de GKv kan een mindere vergadering het appel *blokkeren* als de vergadering er niet mee instemt. Hetgeen ook de praktijk is.

Conclusie 3: Het achterwege laten van een appel op Smithers kan niet worden gerechtvaardigd met onontvankelijk-verklaringen door synodes na Smithers.

4 – Geen appelplicht volgens art. 31 KO

De bezwaarden menen dat na de aanvaarding van de Chatham-besluiten door de kerkenraad van Abbotsford, de kerkelijke weg volledig was afgelopen, *ook voor hen*. Er is naar hun overtuiging volgens art. 31 KO wel een *appelrecht* maar geen *appelplicht*. En dus waren de bezwaarden ook niet verplicht zelf met hun bezwaren naar Smithers te gaan.

Echter, hier is sprake van een misverstaan. Art. 31 KO zegt inderdaad niet dat er bij elk bezwaar appel *moet* worden aangetekend. Als een kerkenraad of een individueel kerklid zijn bezwaar houdt maar tegelijk het besluit *met behoud van gevoelens* kan aanvaarden is hij niet verplicht om in beroep te gaan.

Maar het ligt anders bij genomen besluiten die bewijsbaar (art. 31!) in strijd zijn met de Schrift. Dan is het de *christelijke plicht* om de stem te verheffen en gebruik te maken van de legale kerkordelijke beroepsmogelijkheid. Waarschuwen tegen afwijken van de Schrift in leer en leven van mensen en kerken is voor ieder binnen zijn of haar mogelijkheden, geboden.

Dat klemmt te meer als besluiten directe gevolgen hebben voor de praktijk. In het bijzonder zoals in Abbotsford waar de broeders naar hun oordeel *werden gedwongen* tot verkeerde praktijken en zich dus wel moesten afscheiden. Dan behoort alles in het werk te worden gesteld om de kerk van haar verkeerde weg terug te brengen.

De bezwaarden hebben dat niet gedaan. Zij hebben het bij een appel op de classis gelaten en zijn niet via de verdere kerkelijke weg naar de generale synode van Smithers gegaan.

Conclusie 4: In de situatie waarin de bezwaarden ervan overtuigd waren dat besluiten niet naar de Schrift waren hadden zij de kerkelijke weg niet moeten verlaten met een afscheiding maar deze verder vervolgen.

5 – Afscheidingsdwang

De bezwaarden beschuldigen de kerkenraad van Abbotsford ervan dat hij hen *gedwongen* heeft de kerk te verlaten, waarmee ook de kerkelijke weg (zo zij daarop al wilden gaan) voor hen zou zijn opgebroken.

Echter, een onschriftuurlijk besluit dat in de praktijk *dus* ook verkeerde gevolgen heeft, hoeft en mag niet onmiddellijk tot een afscheiding te leiden zolang er nog mogelijkheden zijn deze binnen de kerken en volgens het kerkrecht te bestrijden.

De moeite van de bezwaarden hoeft niet te worden gebagatelliseerd, maar zolang niet alle middelen waren uitgeput om verkeerde besluiten uit het midden van de kerken weg te nemen was een afscheiding voorbarig en in strijd met gereformeerd kerkelijk samenleven.

Conclusie 5: Ook in de situatie waarin de kerkenraad handelde naar de besluiten van de synode Chatham hadden de bezwaarden de kerkelijke weg kunnen gaan door niet alleen tegen de in hun ogen onvoldoende synodale behandeling van de bezwaren te appelleren maar ook tegen de gevolgen daarvan in de praktijk.

Besluiten DGK

De synode van Emmen 2009-2010 besloot met algemene stemmen de LRCA te erkennen als ware kerk en met haar een zusterkerkrelatie aan te gaan. Een van de gronden luidt:

'De leden van de CanRC hebben volgens het kerkrecht hun bezwaren, appèls en revisie verzoeken op de wettige manier ingediend. De mogelijkheid om met bezwaren voort te gaan in de kerkelijke weg is hen ontnomen door een nieuw synodebesluit binnen de CanRC m.b.t. het indienen van bezwaarschriften aan de synode door kerkleden.'

Op basis van de voorgaande paragrafen moet het volgende worden overwogen. In de grond wordt gesproken van 'de leden van de CanRC', dat zijn de bezwaarde broeders, gezien de tekst, de bezwaarde broeders die de kerkenraad van Abbotsford probeerden te bewegen in appel te gaan bij de synode van Smithers.

De grond stelt dat deze leden 'volgens het kerkrecht hun bezwaren, appèls en revisie verzoeken op de wettige manier hebben ingediend. Echter, zij hebben dat als bezwaarden *juist niet gedaan en bewust niet willen doen*.

De grond stelt verder dat de bezwaarden 'de mogelijkheid ontnomen is om met bezwaren voort te gaan in de kerkelijke weg door een nieuw synodebesluit'. Dit is een volstrekte mistekening van de werkelijke situatie zoals hierboven al werd aangetoond. De broeders hebben steeds het recht gehad te appelleren tegen de in hun ogen onschriftuurlijke besluiten en praktijken. Alleen moesten zij het via de nieuwe afgesproken appelweg – via mindere vergaderingen – doen. Maar zij hebben dat *niet gewild*:

- a. omdat zij de 'indirecte' appelweg veroordeelden als niet gereformeerd;
- b. omdat zij vonden dat niet zij maar hun kerkenraad behoorde te appelleren;
- c. omdat zij meenden als bezwaarden niet verplicht te zijn te appelleren tegen het hun inziens onschriftuurlijk besluit van Chatham noch tegen de 'ongereformeerde' appelweg.

Conclusies

- A. De bezwaarden van de kerk van Abbotsford hebben ten onrechte niet de kerkelijke weg tot het einde gevolgd.
- B. De DGK synode van Emmen 2009-2010 heeft haar besluit een zusterkerkrelatie met de LRCA aan te gaan, ten onrechte onderbouwd met een grond waarin wordt gesteld dat de bezwaarden vóór hun afscheiding hun bezwaren, appels en revisieverzoeken op wettige manier hebben ingediend en dat hun de voortgang op de kerkelijke weg zou zijn ontnomen.
- C. Het besluit om een zusterkerkrelatie aan te gaan met de LRCA moet op het punt van de door LRCA gevolgde kerkelijke weg worden heroverwogen.

2.6. CONCLUSIE

Wij als deputaten hadden de opdracht om met LRCA het gesprek aan te gaan over de katholiciteit van de kerk met betrekking tot de rechtmatigheid van haar afscheiding en haar kerkelijke positie van nu.

De synode van Lansingerland had al uitgesproken dat de GS van Emmen en de GS van Groningen ten onrechte hebben gesteld dat de mogelijkheid om met bezwaren voort te gaan in de kerkelijke weg aan leden van de CanRC ontnomen is. En dat in de uitspraken van de GS Emmen en de GS Groningen wel beschuldigingen van de LRCA aan het adres van de CanRC over het verval zijn geuit en overgenomen, maar deze zijn nog niet allemaal bewezen of onderbouwd.

Nu dit gesprek gevoerd is kunnen wij als deputaten concluderen dat de afscheiding van LRCA voortijdig is geweest. LRCA heeft niet duidelijk kunnen maken dat beroep niet meer mogelijk was. Ook na uitgebreide uitwisseling van gedachten blijft LRCA bij het standpunt dat hun afscheiding niet voortijdig was. Volgens hen was beroep niet meer mogelijk.

Deputaten concluderen daarnaast dat het algeheel verval in verleden en heden binnen de CanRC ook na dit gesprek van deputaten met LRCA niet bewezen noch onderbouwd is door LRCA.

Verder heeft de synode van Lansingerland al gezegd dat uitspraken van de LRCA over kerken die de Westminster Standards als belijdenisgeschriften hebben de nodige vragen oproepen over hun visie op de katholiciteit van de kerk.

Na het gesprek van deputaten met LRCA zijn de zorgen over de visie van de LRCA op de katholiciteit van de kerk wat de deputaten betreft alleen maar toegenomen. Want de LRCA blijft bij haar afwijzende en veroordelende houding t.a.v. de WS en kerken met de WS als belijdenis. Daarbij veroordelen zij de CanRC vanwege het aangaan van banden met WS kerken. Ook een besluit van de synode van DGK met betrekking tot de Westminster Standards wordt door hen veroordeeld, want DGK heeft naar hun mening onjuist gehandeld door niet het meerderheidsrapport over de WS aan te nemen en tegelijk het minderheidsrapport af te wijzen.

Ook het gesprek met de deputaten van de CanRC hebben het bovenstaande beeld van deputaten op de LRCA bevestigd, zie hiervoor de paragraaf over de CanRC.

De deputaten zijn van oordeel dat zij hiermee aan hun opdracht hebben voldaan om het gesprek met de LRCA aan te gaan over hun visie op de katholiciteit van de kerk met betrekking tot de rechtmatigheid van haar afscheiding en haar kerkelijke positie van nu. En dat deputaten wat deze opdracht betreft decharge kan worden verleend

2.7 AANBEVELING

Als deputaten zijn we tegelijk ook van oordeel dat het niet goed zou zijn om het bij deze conclusies te laten. We zien het als onze verantwoordelijkheid om meer te zeggen naar aanleiding van het contact dat er geweest is met de LRCA. Zoals de synode van Lansingerland al gezegd had in één van de gronden bij het besluit: in het kader van een zusterkerkrelatie kan, als er redenen zijn voor zorgen, die bespreekbaar gemaakt worden

met de zusterkerk. Deze zorgen zijn, zoals genoemd, alleen maar bevestigd en toegenomen. Daarom willen deputaten een aanbeveling doen aan de synode.

Het besluit van de synode van Emmen tot het aangaan van een zusterkerkrelatie met LRCA (een gemeente die elke kerk die de Westminster Standards als belijdenis had valse kerk noemde) was in strijd niet alleen met de geschiedenis van de Gereformeerde Kerken vanaf de afscheiding in 1834, toen er zusterkerkrelaties werden onderhouden met kerken die de Westminster Standards als belijdenis hadden, maar ook met het besluit van de synode van Mariënborg, waarin zij deputaten betrekkingen buitenlandse kerken opdroeg te streven naar het aangaan van een zusterkerkrelatie met kerken die de Westminster Standards als belijdenis hebben.

Gezien de bovenstaande conclusies achten deputaten een ongewijzigde voortzetting van de zusterkerkrelatie met de LRCA in strijd met de regels voor de beoefening van de zusterkerkrelatie. Als wij die wel op ongewijzigde manier voortzetten, dan zouden wij als DGK het gevaar lopen eveneens op een sektarisch spoor terecht te komen.

Deputaten zijn tot de conclusie gekomen dat de LRCA geen enkele stap in de richting van verzoening met de CanRC wil zetten. LRCA houdt tot nu toe hardnekkig vast aan eigen gelijk en staat niet open voor argumenten die het tegendeel naar voren brengen. Dit brengt LRCA in een wereldwijd isolement en zo in strijd met de belijdenis van de katholiciteit van de kerk die Christus door de eeuwen heen vergadert, beschermt en onderhoudt.

Deputaten achten een onveranderde voortzetting van de zusterkerkrelatie met de LRCA onjuist en onverantwoord. Immers, de LRCA heeft in haar ontstaan en voortbestaan geen Schriftuurlijke grond en doet bovendien afbreuk aan het gereformeerd belijden inzake de katholiciteit van de kerk. Daarom is het onjuist om onveranderd elkaars attestaties te aanvaarden of mee te werken aan de geestelijke opbouw van deze gemeente.

Tegelijk zijn deputaten ook van mening dat wij nu geroepen zijn om in een houding van christelijk geduld en liefde niet per direct de zusterkerkrelatie te beëindigen. Op 14 november 2009 heeft de GS van Emmen besloten om een zusterkerkrelatie aan te gaan met LRCA. Sindsdien hebben DGK actief bijgedragen aan hun kerkelijk leven en vanwege de zusterkerkrelatie ook verantwoordelijkheid gedragen voor het bestaan van deze kerk. Als nu achteraf blijkt dat dat besluit in 2009 niet goed geweest was, zou het van ongepaste ijver getuigen om per direct alle kerkelijke banden met LRCA te verbreken. Nu heeft DGK ook de verantwoordelijkheid om LRCA verder te waarschuwen om niet op dit sektarische pad verder te gaan en hen te helpen om de weg terug te vinden op het katholieke pad van eenheid in de waarheid.

Het is daarom goed om de zusterkerkrelatie met LRCA op dit moment te handhaven, maar de relatie wel op een ingrijpende manier te wijzigen, namelijk door regel 4 en 5 van de zusterkerkrelatie op te schorten. Daardoor wordt DGK aan de ene kant beschermd voor de sektarische weg die LRCA gaat, terwijl aan de andere kant er wel ruimte wordt gecreëerd voor gebed voor en gesprek met LRCA, in de hoop dat de LRCA zich bekeert en terugkeert tot de CanRC.

De regels 4 en 5 van de zusterkerkrelatie luiden als volgt:

4. De kerken zullen elkaars attestaties aanvaarden, wat ook betekent het toelaten van de leden van de desbetreffende kerken tot de sacramenten op vertoon van die attestaties.

5. De kerken stellen in principe de kansels voor elkaars predikanten open met inachtneming van de bepalingen, voor het eigen kerkverband aanvaard

Deputaten doen de volgende aanbeveling aan de synode.

De synode constateert

1. dat uit het contact met LRCA is gebleken dat de LRCA in haar visie afwijkt van de gereformeerde leer over de katholiciteit van de kerk, waar het gaat om kerken die de Westminster Standards als belijdenis hebben.
2. dat er geen grond was en is om zich af te scheiden van de CanRC

De synode besluit

1. de zusterkerkrelatie met LRCA op dit moment nog te handhaven, maar de regels 4 en 5 voor het onderhouden van een zusterkerkrelatie op te schorten.
2. de LRCA op te roepen terug te keren tot het onderhouden van de gereformeerde belijdenis ten aanzien van de katholiciteit van de kerk
3. De LRCA op te roepen de gereformeerde kerkorde te aanvaarden, zoals die van toepassing is in de CanRC
4. De LRCA op te roepen zonder voorwaarden terug te keren naar de CanRC.

Gronden

1. LRCA wijkt af van de gereformeerde leer als het gaat om de belijdenis van de katholiciteit van de kerk. Binnen een zusterkerkrelatie heeft DGK dan roeping om de LRCA daarop aan te spreken en op te roepen tot bekering.
2. Er is niet aangetoond dat in de CanRC de gereformeerde leer niet meer werd of wordt bewaard, beleden of verdedigd
3. Er was en is geen sprake van een algemeen en breed verval in de CanRC
4. De gemeenteleden hadden geen grond om zich af te scheiden van de CanRC
5. Het vermeende afval is door LRCA onvoldoende via de kerkelijke weg aan de orde gebracht toen men nog lid was van de CanRC
6. In overeenstemming met art. 27, 28 en 29 NGB zullen de gelovigen zich bij de kerk moeten voegen op iedere plaats waar God haar gesteld heeft.

3. DE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA (FRCA)

Met de FRCA is contact geweest op 9 januari 2020 in Mennorode, op één van de buitenlandse dagen van de GKv. Dit gesprek vond plaats samen met afgevaardigden van de CanRC en de VGKSA. Het verslag van dit gesprek treft u in bijlage 8 aan.

De afscheiding van de LRCA en onze zusterkerkrelatie met LRCA is voor de FRCA een blokkade om tot een zusterkerkrelatie met DGK te komen.

Met twee deputaten is ook digitaal contact geweest door middel van videobellen, om over en weer elkaar te informeren over de ontwikkelingen binnen beider kerkverbanden. Van deze ontmoeting zijn geen notulen gemaakt.

RAPPORT VAN DEPUTATEN FRCA AAN HUN SYNODE

In juni 2021 heeft FRCA de synode in Albany, West Australië. Als onze synode zal beginnen dan zal meer bekend zijn over wat de synode van FRCA besloten heeft. Voor dit moment willen we enkele dingen uit het deputatenrapport voor het voetlicht brengen.

FRCA werkt aan een nieuwe, moderne website van hun landelijk kerkverband.

Eén vraag waar deputaten van FRCA mee worstelen is: Hoe handelen we met meerdere zusterkerkrelaties als deze kerken zich in relatieve geografische nabijheid van elkaar bevinden (bijv. in hetzelfde land of dezelfde regio)? Na een achttal overwegingen komen deputaten met het volgende voorstel.

Deputaten opdracht te geven om richtlijnen te ontwikkelen en aan de volgende synode voor te stellen, welke richtlijnen in lijn met Artikel 46 van de Kerkorde zijn, en daarbij besluiten en leidende principes van vorige synodes in overweging te nemen, en de vraag te behandelen met wie, hoe en wanneer een zusterkerkrelatie aan te gaan. Dit vraagt om input vanuit de kerken.

In het contact met de GKv viel het de FRCA deputaten op

dat er op de synode van de GKv, in tegenstelling tot de vorige synode van de GKv, duidelijk een unaniem koor klonk dat dit besluit [m/v] wenst te handhaven. Opgemerkt moet worden dat twee vrouwelijke ouderlingen ook als afgevaardigden aanwezig waren. De deputaten waren dankbaar om te zien dat zij een verenigd front konden laten zien samen met de afgevaardigden van de Canadian Reformed Churches, de Free Reformed Churches van Zuid Afrika, de Orthodox Presbyterian Church en de GKSA (Doppers) van Zuid-Afrika.

De rapportage van FRCA deputaten over hun contact met DGK en GKN geven we hieronder integraal weer in het Nederlands.

Twee afgevaardigden werden naar de Buitenlandweek van de GKv-synode gezonden, te weten ds. R.D. Anderson en br. B. Veenendaal. Deze week werd gehouden van dinsdag, 7 januari 2020 tot zaterdag 11 januari 2020. Tijdens deze week hebben de afgevaardigden afzonderlijk met de DGK en de GKN deputaten gesproken, samen met de afgevaardigden van Zuid Afrika en Canada. Deze bijeenkomsten verliepen erg positief. Vooral die met de DGK liet zien dat dit

kerkverband productief gesprekken met de GKN zocht en tegelijkertijd ook kritische gesprekken aanging met de LRCA (Abbotsford).

In oktober 2020 hebben ds. Anderson en br. Veenendaal afzonderlijke zoomgesprekken gevoerd met de DGK en de GKN. Bij deze vergaderingen werd het duidelijk dat zowel de DGK als de GKN heel serieus waren en samen bezig waren met gesprekken die tot eenheid van de twee kerkverbanden moeten leiden. Op hun laatste synodes in 2019 hebben beide verbanden elkaar als ware kerken herkend en vastgelegd dat er geen principiële verschillen tussen hun respectievelijke kerkverbanden bestaan. In verschillende plaatselijke gemeenten moet nog een aantal onderwerpen worden besproken voordat eenwording plaats kan vinden. De deputaten van beide kerkverbanden nemen contact op met deze plaatselijke gemeenten, zodat deze onderwerpen behandeld of opgelost kunnen worden. De deputaten zijn van mening dat niet alle onderwerpen volledig moeten zijn opgelost om eenheid tot stand te laten komen, maar wijsheid vereist om wel ruimte voor enige discussie open te laten. De ernstiger onderwerpen betreffen plaatsen waar leden van het ene kerkverband zijn vertrokken òf door excommunicatie, òf door het zich onttrekken aan het andere na ernstige onenigheid.

Wat de LRCA betreft heeft de DGK een publieke verklaring afgegeven, waarin zij [DGK] afstand neemt van hun [LRCA] overtuiging aangaande de Westminster Standards als niet-gereformeerd. De verklaring stelt ook vragen bij hun [LRCA] standpunt ten aanzien van de katholiciteit van de kerk en hun rechtvaardiging om de CanRC te verlaten. De LRCA verkeert momenteel in een positie waarin zij zich verdedigen tegen wat zij zien als ongegronde beschuldigingen door de DGK. De gesprekken tussen beide zijn op dit ogenblik nog aan de gang.

Deputaten achten de hun gegeven opdracht als afgerond, aangezien de synode Bunbury 2018 besloot de kerken in de gelegenheid te stellen voorstellen te doen over hoe met deze relatie verder te gaan.

Deputaten merken op dat mocht een kerk een voorstel indienen om het contact voort te zetten met het oog op het ontwikkelen van een zusterkerkrelatie, daar positief naar gekeken kan worden. Hoewel deze Nederlandse kerkverbanden geografisch niet dichtbij liggen, merken we op dat de DGK doorgaat met gebruik te maken van het werk van ds. Gunnink onder onze Indonesische zusterkerken en de GKN heeft aangegeven dat zij hulp van de FRCA in de toekomst zeer op prijs zouden stellen voor wat betreft hun theologische opleiding van toekomstige predikanten van het Evangelie.

Aanbevolen besluit

2. Om dank aan God uit te spreken voor de positieve ontwikkelingen richting eenheid van de DGK en de GKN en hen aan te moedigen voort te gaan met het toewerken naar een verenigd kerkverband.

Gronden

Beide kerken verklaren in alle opzichten trouwe kerken met de gereformeerde leer te zijn en beide kerken hebben elkaar herkend als ware kerken en werken naar eenwording toe.

Over de ontwikkelingen in de CanRC merken de deputaten van FRCA het volgende op in hun conclusies:

Bij het volgen van de zorgen die naar voren waren gebracht ten aanzien van de Blessings Christian Church werd het deputaten duidelijk dat deze ontwikkelingen onderdeel vormen van een grotere dynamiek binnen de CanRC waarin verschillende zaken van kerkregering en liturgie diepgaand worden besproken en dat het daarom niet nodig noch gepast is in een nieuw mandaat te refereren aan een specifieke enkele kerk binnen de CanRC.

Het is bemoedigend te zien dat binnen onze Canadian Reformed zusterkerken een wens bestaat om in discussie zijnde zaken op een gepaste en kerkordelijke wijze te behandelen. Hoewel sommige van deze zaken nog steeds intern worden besproken en behandeld in mindere vergaderingen, overwegen deputaten dat vanuit het perspectief van de FRCA dit proces gerespecteerd moet worden. Onze bestaande regels voor zusterkerkrelaties bevatten evenwel de bepaling: "De kerken zullen wederzijds op elkaar toezien dat zij niet afwijken van het gereformeerde geloof in leer, kerkregering, tucht en liturgie" (Regel 2),. Daarom overwegen deputaten dat een algemener mandaat waardevol is om er zeker van te zijn dat de FRCA goed op de hoogte blijft van eventuele veranderingen binnen de CanRC wat de bestaande praktijken inzake kerkregering en liturgie betreft.

De Canadian Reformed Churches blijven grote trouw aan de Schrift vertonen en een wens om de Heere op een wijze te dienen die Hem behaagt. De relatie die wij met dit kerkverband hebben is op heel veel verschillende terreinen een rijke zegen voor de FRCA en we mogen dankbaar zijn voor het krachtig functioneren van deze zusterkerkrelatie.

Ook is goed om kennis te nemen van wat de deputaten FRCA opmerken met betrekking tot de OPC, naar aanleiding van brede bespreking in hun rapport met betrekking tot de OPC.

1. Dank aan God uit te spreken voor het gereformeerd getuigenis waarvan de OPC in de loop van haar geschiedenis blijk heeft gegeven, voor haar voortdurende afwijzing van theologische vrijzinnigheid, voor haar toewijding en trouw om confessioneel gereformeerd te zijn en haar toewijding en trouw aan het gezag en de waarheid van de heilige Schriften.
2. Op dit moment geen zusterkerkrelatie met de OPC na te streven.
3. Aanbevelingen van de kerken af te wachten over de waarde van het nastreven van kerkelijke contacten met de OPC los van de context van een zusterkerkrelatie:
 - a. die wederzijdse hulp, bemoediging en vermaan mogelijk maken om als Gods kerken in deze wereld te leven;
 - b. die het gereformeerde geloof bevorderen en elkaar bij te staan in het niet daarvan afwijken in leer, kerkregering, tucht en liturgie;
 - c. die rekening houden met de geografische afstand en beperkte gelegenheden om elkaar persoonlijk te ontmoeten, met de verschillende omgangswijzen van kerkregering en met een verantwoord gebruik van tijd en beschikbaar budget.

VOORSTEL VOOR INSTRUCTIE

Deputaten stellen de volgende instructie voor:

Zij zullen het contact met de FRCA voortzetten om te komen tot herstel van een zusterkerkrelatie. Deputaten kunnen toelichting geven over de zusterkerkrelatie met de LRCA en de verhouding tot de CanRC.

4. FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF SOUTH AFRICA (FRCSA, ZUID-AFRIKA)

Met de FRCSA is contact geweest op 9 januari 2020 in Mennorode, op één van de buitenlanddagen van de GKv. Dit gesprek vond plaats samen met afgevaardigden van de FRCA en de CanRC. Het verslag van dit gesprek treft u in bijlage 8 aan.

Met dankbaarheid merken deputaten op dat de toon van FRSCA richting GKv en daarmee ook richting DGK is veranderd, vanwege de diepe zorg die er leeft over de onschriftuurlijke koers van de GKv.

VOORSTEL VOOR INSTRUCTIE

Deputaten stellen de volgende instructie voor:

Zij zullen contacten onderhouden en zo mogelijk intensiveren met de FRSCA en verder spreken over contacten die de FRCSA en de GKSA op lokaal niveau met elkaar hebben.

CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES (CANRC)

Met de CanRC is contact geweest op 9 januari 2020 in Mennorode, op één van de buitenlanddagen van de GKv. Dit gesprek vond plaats samen met afgevaardigden van de FRCA en de VGKSA. Het verslag van dit gesprek treft u in bijlage 8 aan.

De afscheiding van de LRCA en onze zusterkerkrelatie met LRCA blijft voor de CanRC een blokkade om tot een zusterkerkrelatie met DGK te komen.

Verder hadden deputaten ten aanzien van deputaten CanRC de volgende opdracht:

4. Om met de Canadese deputaten verder door te spreken over het ontstaan en bestaan van de LRCA.
5. Bij het onderzoek naar de beweegredenen van de LRCA om tot afscheiding van de CanRC te komen zijn de CanRC niet voldoende gehoord. (Acta blz. 23, 24)

Dit gesprek heeft, vanwege de pandemie, plaatsgevonden via een videomeeting. De notulen van deze ontmoeting vindt u in bijlage 7, en zijn in het Engels en Nederlands te lezen. De CanRC ziet de LRCA niet als een valse kerk, maar de LRCA ziet de CanRC wel als een valse kerk. De synodes van de CanRC verklaren de brieven van LRCA onontvankelijk, vanwege de kerkrechtelijke afspraak dat deze brieven niet afkomstig zijn vanuit de CanRC zelf. Met betrekking tot de kerkelijke weg geven deputaten van CanRC aan dat de kerkelijke weg voor kerkleden wel open staat, maar dan via hun eigen kerkenraad of, als hun eigen

kerkenraad hun bezwaar niet overneemt, via de classis en particuliere synode naar de generale synode.

Wat betreft de viering van het Avondmaal. Met een attestatie Avondmaal vieren in een gemeente waar je te gast bent komt in de praktijk niet voor, omdat mensen over het algemeen in hun eigen gemeente het Avondmaal vieren. Volgens KO-artikel 61 zal de kerkenraad alleen degenen toelaten die openbare belijdenis van het gereformeerde geloof hebben afgelegd en een godvruchtig leven leiden. Hoe de kerkenraad dit bepaalt, is aan de kerkenraad. Zo zullen zij die met een goed attest van een zusterkerk komen, worden toegelaten. Met anderen hebben twee ouderlingen van de kerkenraad een gesprek. Een kerkenraad kan ook gebruik maken van een "omgekeerd attest": waarbij een persoon zijn geloofsovertuiging bevestigt door een document te ondertekenen dat vervolgens naar zijn eigen kerk wordt gestuurd (getuigenis van leer en leven wordt ontvangen van gemeenteleden die de persoon kennen).

De kwestie van kanselruil met niet-zusterkerken is een discussiepunt in de Canadese kerken. Momenteel is het niet toegestaan, zoals blijkt uit een recent besluit van Regionale Synode Oost, waartegen waarschijnlijk beroep zal worden aangetekend bij de Generale Synode. De kwestie zal ook aan de orde komen in een rapport aan de generale synode over het beoefenen van interkerkelijke betrekkingen.

VOORSTEL VOOR INSTRUCTIE

Deputaten stellen de volgende instructie voor:

Zij zullen het contact met de Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) voortzetten en zo mogelijk intensiveren.

EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH NORTHERN-IRELAND (EPC NI, NOORD IERLAND)

Aan dit kerkverband hebben wij in december 2018 een eerste brief gestuurd met informatie over de nieuwe samenstelling van ons als deputaten. Daar is echter nooit meer reactie op gekomen. Verder hebben wij ook geen initiatieven ontplooit om met hen verder in contact te komen.

Het zou goed zijn als dit contact in de komende tijd wel wordt opgepakt. Deputaten stellen daarom voor om een algemene instructie te geven om het contact voort te zetten. Om nog steeds te blijven spreken van het 'herstel van een zusterkerkrelatie' doet wat oneigenlijk aan, omdat het onderhand zo'n twintig jaren geleden is dat we voor het laatst een zusterkerkrelatie met hen hadden.

VOORSTEL VOOR INSTRUCTIE

Deputaten stellen de volgende instructie voor:

Zij zullen het contact met de EPC NI voortzetten.

EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ENGLAND AND WALES (EPC EW)

Deputaten zijn uitgenodigd om een tweejaarlijkse vergadering van dit kerkverband bij te wonen in Cardiff. Deze zou plaatsvinden op 21 maart 2020 en als deputaten waren we aan het kijken of we praktische mogelijkheden hadden om op deze uitnodiging in te gaan en ter vergadering aanwezig te zijn. Maar vanwege het coronavirus is deze vergadering niet doorgegaan.

Verder is er wel door middel van email contact onderhouden met enkele afgevaardigden van dit kerkverband. Deze contacten beperkten zich tot het wederzijds informeren omtrent de ontwikkelingen in het eigen kerkverband.

Het zou goed zijn om in de komende tijd dit contact verder uit te diepen en, indien het mogelijk is en deputaten daartoe worden uitgenodigd, dat deputaten als gast bij een biannual meeting van de EPC EW aanwezig te zijn om te zien hoe het er in deze kerken aan toe gaat.

VOORSTEL VOOR INSTRUCTIE

Deputaten stellen de volgende instructie voor:

Zij zullen het contact met EPC EW voortzetten en door middel van verdere gesprekken onderzoeken of we op dezelfde grondslag staan. Op grond van de ingewonnen informatie kan de volgende synode besluiten al dan niet het contact voort te zetten.

DE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND (CONTINUING) (FCS(C))

Aan dit kerkverband hebben wij in december 2018 een eerste brief gestuurd met informatie over de nieuwe samenstelling van ons als deputaten. Daar is wel een eerste reactie op gekomen, waarin werd aangegeven dat onze brief besproken zou worden op hun vergadering. Maar daarna hebben we niets meer vernomen. Wij hebben verder ook geen initiatieven ontplooid om dit contact uit te bouwen.

Het zou goed zijn als dit contact in de komende tijd wel wordt opgepakt. Deputaten stellen daarom voor om een algemene instructie te geven om het contact voort te zetten. Om nog steeds te blijven spreken van het 'herstel van een zusterkerkrelatie' doet wat oneigenlijk aan, omdat het onderhand zo'n twintig jaren geleden is dat we voor het laatst een zusterkerkrelatie met hen hadden.

VOORSTEL VOOR INSTRUCTIE

Deputaten stellen de volgende instructie voor:

Zij zullen het contact met de FCS(c) voortzetten.

DE REFORMED CHURCHES IN KOREA (RCK, KOREA)

De deputaten hebben zich bezonnen op de contacten met de kerken in Korea. In de huidige situatie zou je moeten onderzoeken wat er aan de hand is in de scheuring tussen de kerk van ds. Song en de RCK. Met beide kerken heeft DGK momenteel contact, maar de kerk van ds. Song is een afsplitsing van de RCK.

De deputaten ervaren een kloof tussen ons als kerken in Nederland en de kerken in Korea. Geen geestelijke kloof, maar wel een kloof als het gaat om taal, cultuur en geografische afstand. Helaas zorgt deze kloof ervoor dat normale communicatie met hen enorm lastig is. Tegelijk moeten we ons ook realiseren dat ons kerkverband klein is en onze krachten zeer beperkt. Daarom lijkt het de deputaten juist om deze contacten vanwege bovenstaande redenen niet voor te zetten.

Mogelijk dat de FRCA, die al langere tijd contacten hebben met de RCK en ook geografisch dichterbij hen zijn, van betekenis kunnen zijn voor deze kerken.

Deputaten hebben hun voornemen reeds schriftelijk kenbaar gemaakt aan RCK, daar is van hun kant een reactie op gekomen waarin de mogelijkheid wordt geboden met iemand te communiceren die beter Engels spreekt dan rev. Park (zie bijlage 5). Echter blijven deputaten bij hun voorstel, omdat het goed of beter spreken van de Engelse taal door enkelingen uit hun kerkelijke gemeenschap de kloof tussen taal, cultuur en geografische afstand niet voldoende wegneemt om op dit moment, met de huidige mogelijkheden en krachten, het contact op goede wijze voort te zetten.

VOORSTEL

Deputaten stellen voor dat de synode een brief schrijft aan de RCK, waarin bevestigd wordt dat de synode het voorstel van de deputaten heeft overgenomen. Dat betekent dat het contact niet wordt voortgezet vanwege genoemde redenen. En dat we deze kerken opdragen aan de zorg van onze Heere Jezus Christus.

DE KERK VAN DS. SONG IN KOREA

Voor deze kerk geldt hetzelfde als voor de voorstellen voor de RCK in Korea. Ds. Song heeft nog gereageerd op ons schrijven (zie bijlage 4), waarbij hij ook een schrijven doorstuurt dat hij ontvangen heeft van DGK Mariëenberg (de Ark).

BERG GIESSEN

Met dit kerkverband is geen contact geweest in de afgelopen jaren. BERG Giessen heeft geen contact met ons gezocht en deputaten hebben dat ook niet zelf actief gelegd. Deputaten stellen voor de komende tijd te gebruiken om, mogelijk samen met deputaten van GKN, af te tasten of dit contact kan worden voortgezet.

VOORSTEL VOOR INSTRUCTIE

Deputaten stellen de volgende instructie voor:

Zij zullen aftasten, zo mogelijk samen met deputaten van GKN, of het contact met de BERG Giessen kan worden voortgezet.

DE EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCH (ERE, WEST-OEKRAÏNE)

In de Acta van de synode van Lansingerland is op pagina 264 de volgende opdracht aan BBK met betrekking tot (o.a) de Evangeliumi Reformatus Egyház (ERE) vermeld:

Zij zullen contacten onderhouden, blijven zoeken, of zo mogelijk intensiveren met de volgende kerken omdat God ons roept tot eenheid op grond van Schrift en belijdenis: ... de Evangelical Reformed Church (ERE), West-Oekraïne).

Br. D.J. Bolt en P. Dijkstra hebben deze kerken in Oekraïne bezocht. In bijlage 6 is verslag gedaan van de BBK-activiteiten m.b.t. tot deze kerken. Op grond van hun bevindingen bevelen de deputaten het volgende aan:

1. Het contact met de ERE kerken zo mogelijk intensiveren om hen (nog) beter te leren kennen zodat een verantwoord kerkelijk contact kan worden aangegaan. Daartoe wordt verder onderzoek gedaan naar de praktijk t.a.v. kerkelijke contacten en hun vormgeving zoals dat gebeurt de CanRC en FRCA.
2. De kerkelijke situatie van gereformeerden en presbyterianen en hun relaties daar verder in kaart brengen.
3. Binnen de DGK kerken deze kerken plaatselijk/landelijk voor het voetlicht halen zodat zij gesteund kunnen worden in gebed en met activiteiten.

MAGAZINE REFORMED CONTINUA

De deputaten zijn er niet aan toegekomen om een magazine te publiceren.

KERKELIJKE CONTACTEN

Deputaten brengen onder de aandacht van de synode dat sommige van de huidige contacten met buitenlandse kerken niet via de kerkelijke weg op de tafel van de synode zijn gebracht en zo als opdracht aan deputaten zijn toevertrouwd. Dat geldt voor het contact met BERG Giessen, EPC EW, de kerk van ds. Song, ERE en LRCA. Dit kan als gevolg hebben dat deputaten teveel op zichzelf gaan functioneren buiten de plaatselijke kerken om. Bovendien vragen de deputaten zich af of deze praktijk wel in overeenstemming is met artikel 30 van de kerkorde.

VOORSTEL

Deputaten stellen de volgende instructie voor:

Zij zullen zich bezinnen op de vraag wat de juiste manier is om een nieuw contact met een kerk of kerkverband in het buitenland te zoeken, aan te gaan of uit te breiden. En welke rol daarin weggelegd is voor de plaatselijke kerken en de kerkelijke weg, mede gelet op artikel 30 van de kerkorde.

Zij zullen van deze bezinning tijdig rapport uit brengen aan de synode.

ALGEMENE OPMERKINGEN

Tot slot een algemene opmerking over de instructie van deputaten betrekkingen buitenlandse kerken. Gezien de ontwikkeling van de laatste jaren en het inzicht dat ook bij buitenlandse kerken aanwezig is over de ontwikkelingen bij de GKV, lijkt het deputaten onnodig om nog langer punt 5 en punt 16 in de instructie op te nemen. Ook zou punt 4 kunnen vervallen, omdat dit punt overbodig is. En punt 3 zou ook herzien kunnen worden, zodat de nadruk niet komt te liggen op de wettigheid van de vrijmaking uit GKV in het verleden, maar meer op het gereformeerde karakter van DGK in het heden.

Deputaten zijn verder van mening dat de vermelding van de studierapporten inzake de Westminster Standards achterwege kan blijven. Niet alleen omdat de studierapporten geen andere status hebben dan ander studiemateriaal dat ter beschikking is, maar ook omdat het in de contacten niet zozeer moet gaan over de Westminster Standards, maar over de vraag hoe de kerken hun confessie in de praktijk van vandaag uitwerken en handhaven in de kerken.

Deputaten hebben driemaal een update laten verschijnen (bijlage 3), in overeenstemming met instructie 22. Naar aanleiding van de derde persbericht dd. 14 september 2020 met informatie over het contact met LRCA kregen we reactie van een kerklid en een kerkenraad, waarop deputaten geantwoord hebben en verwezen naar dit deputatenrapport, voor de verantwoording van het gesprek en de conclusies van deputaten.

SLOT

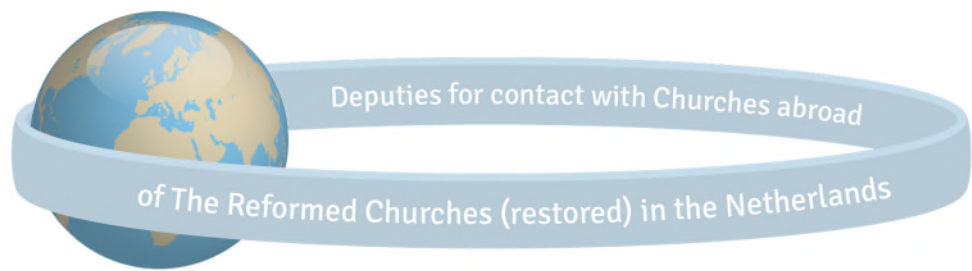
Deputaten vonden het een voorrecht om bezig te zijn met contacten met kerken over de hele wereld. Door de pandemie heeft ons werk er anders uitgezien dan wij gedacht hadden. Maar dankzij de moderne middelen van communicatie kon het werk toch goede voortgang vinden. Met deze dankbaarheid dragen deputaten ons rapport aan de synode voor in de voortdurende bede dat Jezus Christus, de Koning van hemel en aarde, het Hoofd van zijn kerk, dat Hij met kracht voortgaat om zijn volk te vergaderen uit alle volk, land, taal en natie. Totdat uiteindelijk met zijn komst alles tot voleinding gebracht zal worden. Zijn koninkrijk kome!

BIJLAGEN

1. Briefwisseling DGK en LRCA vanaf december 2018 t/m oktober 2020, blz. 33
2. Notulen gesprek LRCA dd. 24 oktober 2020, blz. 142
3. Drie updates / persberichten, dd. 11 februari 2019, februari 2020 en 14 september 2020, blz. 146
4. Briefwisseling met ds. Song, blz. 149
5. Brief aan RCK, blz. 156
6. Rapportage bezoek ERE door brs. D.J. Bolt en P. Dijkstra, blz. 159
7. Notulen van de videovergadering met deputaten van de CanRC, dd. 18 februari 2021, blz. 173
8. Notulen van de vergadering met deputaten van CanRC, FRCA en FRCSA, dd. 9 januari 2020, blz. 180

Inhoudsopgave bijlage 1

2018-12-11	Brief van BBK aan LRCA	Eerste vragen
2019-02-28	Brief van LRCA aan BBK	Eerste antwoorden en vragen aan BBK
2019-03-23	Brief van BBK aan LRCA	Melding dat er een antwoordbrief komt
2019-05-03	Brief van BBK aan LRCA	Brief met vijf vervolgvragen aan LRCA
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2019-05-17	Brief van BBK aan LRCA	
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2020-09-14	Brief van BBK aan LRCA	Ter informatie de 'update van BBK' toegestuurd
2020-09-14	Update van BBK, ter informatie van de kerken (Engelse versie verstuurd)	
2020-10-01	Brief van LRCA aan BBK	Reactie op de 'update van BBK'



To: Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford
c/o R.T. van Laar, clerk
1595 Fadden Rd.
Abbotsford, BC, V3G 1T9, Canada
rtvanlaar@gmail.com

From: Deputies contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
c/o Rev. C. Koster
Duindigtstraat 7
2665 HS Bleiswijk
The Netherlands
dsckoster@gmail.com

11 December 2018

Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

As you know synod Lansingerland has decided on the matter of our sister church relation with you as our sister church in Abbotsford and instructed us as deputies for Contact with Churches Abroad to start talks with you about the catholicity of the church in relation with the legitimacy of your secession and your present ecclesiastical position.

To execute this mandate we are planning a visit to you by three deputies in May 2019 so as to discuss the above mentioned decision with you as consistory. In preparation of this visit we would like you to answer the following questions beforehand in order to get more clarity in these matters.

The questions which we wish you to consider and answer are:

1. We observe, based on the documentation in the supplement (app. 1), that you condemn all churches, which don't comply with your secession, as false churches. And that you condemn all churches that don't have the Three Forms of Unity. And we observe that you condemn all churches, which regarding the admission to the Lord's Supper follow a different road from the one described in the Dort Church Order. How do you reconcile this with the catholic character of the church?
2. We observe that you are convinced that a church is only catholic, if that church has the Three Forms of Unity (TFU). How do you reconcile this with the catholic character of the church?
3. Is the rule for fencing the Lord's Table, as it is used by us, the only possible way according to Scripture and confession? And in connection with this, do you see no possibility of a justified difference between the practice in our own church federation and the one practised by a sister church?

4. Our synod has rejected your request to pronounce that the minority report on the Westminster Confession should be rejected. This decision means that the simple fact of having the Westminster confession is not an obstacle for DGK to engage in a sister church relationship. Do you agree with this decision? If not, why not?
5. The instruction of our deputation has been expanded so that we'll seek ecclesiastical unity with all who wish to live according to and based on Scripture and confession (i.e. the Three Forms of Unity and/or the Westminster Confession). Do you agree with this decision? If not, why not?
6. From the churchly documents it is clear that, after your appeal to Classis Pacific, you could have continued with your appeal to the broader assemblies. Why haven't you followed that path?
7. Your call to reform has been rejected by all local CanRC churches. Do you now see all CanRC churches as false churches?

It is our prayer that our faithful God may hold us close and keep us faithful in a world that has become more and more ungodly. May He continue to watch over you and give you His grace and blessings.

With brotherly greetings on behalf of the Committee for Churches Abroad of the DGK,
Rev. C. Koster, Secretary

Appendix

- LRCA concerning false churches

Letter 10-12-2018 from BBK DGK to LRCA – appendix 1.

LRCA concerning false churches

From report BBK to GS Emmen 2009

Questions from DGK for LRCA with answers from LRCA

Supplement 2: Questions for the consistory of the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford

General, regarding the confession.

4. Are the different denominations you mentioned in the 'Act of secession and return', that use the Westminster Confession false churches?

(-) If a church consistently promotes and maintains the Westminster Confession in its doctrine and practices, despite admonitions, we would have to consider this church to be a false church.

5. Is the CANRC a false church because it has a sister-church relation with e.g. the OPC?

When we speak of a false church do we speak of an entire federation as a whole or do we speak about individual local churches? We believe that based on the second-last paragraph of Article 29 of the Belgic Confession we need to speak about individual local churches, in accordance with Reformed church polity. Then on the basis of this paragraph we believe that a number of Canadian Reformed Churches are false churches, but not based on their sister church relationship with the OPC and others, but based on their rejection of our testimony (the appeals and subsequent letters concerning the OPC and others).

Therefore we believe that each local church stands or falls based on its acceptance or rejection of biblical testimony. Even though a period of time may be required to determine the attitude of each local church, in the end *"by their fruits you shall know them"* (Matthew 7:20).

As we are still in contact with some Canadian Reformed Churches we do not, at this time, make a general declaration that *all* the Canadian Reformed Churches are false.

From Acts of Synod Groningen 2015, first round of discussion report (Art. 7.05)

The question whether all Westminster churches are false churches is not elaborated by Abbotsford, but also it is asserted that these churches do not maintain the Three Forms of Unity. Moreover that a church, which does not acknowledge the legitimacy of the secession at Abbotsford thereby has become a false church.

From Act of Secession and return (9-12-2007 – app. C: Some Critical Questions and Answers)

Q. 11.

One of the reasons cited for secession in Abbotsford is the refusal of the Abbotsford consistory to recognize the secession in Lynden. When you ask this do you not imply that the American Reformed Church of Lynden is a false church and that the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches is a federation of false churches?

On the basis of Article 28 B.C., those who seceded from the American Reformed Church of Lynden, after having fully completed the avenue of appeal, may rightly consider the American Reformed Church of Lynden to be a false church. At the same time we must remember that under Canadian Reformed church polity the consistory is the highest authority in the church. Therefore we believe

that it is premature to consider any other Canadian Reformed church false if there is no clear evidence of rejection of the scriptural and confessional principles at stake. The explicit and repeated refusal of the Canadian Reformed Church of Abbotsford to consider and interact with these scriptural and confessional issues renders it a false church also, and has therefore made secession *an act of obedience to God's revealed will*. (-)

Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford

C/O 2043 Jordan Place, Abbotsford, B.C., V3G 2C3

February 28, 2019

Deputies Contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
C/O Rev. C. Koster
Duindigtstraat 7
2665 HS Bleiswijk
The Netherlands

Esteemed brothers in the Lord:

We are writing in response to your letter dated December 11, 2018.

We are thankful that Synod Lansingerland has decided to continue our sister church relationship that was originally entered into by Synod Emmen in 2010 and maintained by Synod Groningen in 2015.

Despite the above decisions by your Synods, you make a number of observations and ask a number of questions relating to the circumstances surrounding the secession in Abbotsford which occurred in 2007. In addition you inquire about our ecclesiastical position relating to the catholicity of the church.

As your sister in Christ we appreciate the importance of holding each other accountable to the standards of God's Word, and it is good that the rules for our sister church relationship make provision for this.

We are, however, perplexed that so many years after the decision of Synod Emmen in 2010, questions are still being raised about the secession in Abbotsford, especially after two of your Synods have declared our secession to be legitimate. Before we answer your questions it would be good for us to state, at the outset of this discussion, that all members of the consistory of the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford have, by their signatures under the Form of Subscription (see Article 26 of the Church Order), indicated the following:

We, the undersigned, Ministers, Elders and Deacons of the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford, do hereby, sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare by this our subscription that we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine, contained in the doctrinal standards of the Liberated Reformed

Churches: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, do fully agree with the Word of God.

We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by our public teaching or writing. We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these and to exert ourselves in keeping the Church free from such errors. And if hereafter any difficulties or different sentiments respecting the aforesaid doctrine should arise in our minds, we promise that we will neither publicly nor privately propose, teach or defend the same, either by teaching or writing, until we have first revealed such sentiments to the Consistory, Classis and Synod, that the same may be examined by them, being ready always cheerfully to submit to their judgment under penalty in case of refusal, because of that very fact, to be suspended from our office.

And further, if at any time the Consistory, Classis or Synod, upon sufficient grounds of suspicion and to preserve the uniformity and purity of doctrine, may deem it proper to require of us a further explanation of our sentiments respecting any particular article of the above-mentioned doctrinal standards, we do hereby promise to be always willing and ready to comply with such request, under the penalty mentioned above, reserving for ourselves, however, the right of appeal in case we should believe ourselves aggrieved by the sentence and until such a decision is made upon such an appeal we will acquiesce in the determination and judgment already passed.

At the same time we understand that all office bearers in the DGK enter into a similar undertaking in accordance with the Church Order of Dort. Together with you we believe Article 27 of the Belgic Confession and Lord's Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Thus, on this basis we believe that our view of catholicity is identical. Therefore we may cheerfully make our defense to you as follows:

- 1a) You state, *"We observe, based on the documentation in the supplement, that you condemn all churches which don't comply with your secession, as false churches."*

This is a far reaching statement for which you have not supplied any evidence. If a church is listening to and interacting with faithful testimony we would have no reason to call them a false church. In our answer to question 4, which you partially quoted in your Appendix, we referred to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, which describes the false church as one which *"assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God. It does not want to submit itself to the yoke of Christ. It does not administer the sacraments as Christ commanded in His Word,*

but adds to them and subtracts from them as it pleases. It bases itself more on men than on Jesus Christ. It persecutes those who live holy lives according to the Word of God and who rebuke the false church for its sins, greed and idolatries.” Based on this Article a church could only be considered a false church if after a period of faithful testimony it has become apparent that this faithful testimony has been rejected. This is what we meant when we said that *“original testimony that was good has since been corrupted and watered down by the Canadian Reformed Churches.”*

- 1b) You also state, *“And that you condemn all churches that do not have the Three Forms of Unity.”*

This is also a far reaching statement for which you have not supplied any evidence. We do not believe that we have ever said this. If we have indeed made this statement we would appreciate your explanation of how or where we might have said this, so that we can make the appropriate clarification. At the same time we believe that it is appropriate to make use of the Three Forms of Unity to assist in judging the adherence to Scripture of other churches (see for example Rev. J. van Bruggen in The Church Says Amen, page 10, where he writes about the purpose of the confessions).

- 1c) You state, *“And we observe that you condemn all churches, which regarding the admission to the Lord’s Supper follow a different road from the one described in the Dort Church Order.”*

You have not proven this statement. We do believe, however, that biblical principles require the use of some form of attestation for the admission of guests to the Lord’s Supper (see Deuteronomy 19:15, Matthew 18:16, John 17:17-23, Acts 18:27, Romans 16:1-2, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, 16:3, 2 Corinthians 13:1, Philippians 2:2). These biblical principles need to be respected so that only those are admitted to the Lord’s Supper who have made profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life.

There are some who have suggested that our original appeal to General Synod 2004 was only about the admission of guests to the Lord’s Supper. However a closer examination of the material we sent Deputies explaining the basis for the secession in Abbotsford will show that there was much more at stake. The correspondence will show that the matter of **confessional membership** was also very much in focus. The evidence for this can be found in the original appeal of the CanRC at Abbotsford to General Synod 2004.

It was stated in Consideration 4 of this original appeal that the Acts of General Synod 1998, Article 130, Considerations C.2 and C.3, outline a

number of reasons for amending the proposed agreement with the OPC which had been presented by the CanRC committee to General Synod, namely:

- a) the agreement is too vague;
- b) the agreement does not sufficiently address the differences;
- c) the statement by Rev. J.J. Peterson to Synod 1998 that the OPC has the right to “*admit to membership and to the Lord’s table **those who do not make profession of the Reformed faith,***” is a contradiction of the OPC standard as contained in the Westminster Larger Catechism (Q & A 173) and to our standard as contained in the Heidelberg Catechism (Q & A 82), and therefore requires clarification by the OPC; and
- d) the statement by the OPC Committee to the CCOPC that, “*We (OPC) affirm what you (CanRC) reject – that the church is competent to judge as valid and credible a confession of the Christian faith for communicant membership that is **not also in accord with the church’s confession***” is not consistent with the statements made by Synod 2001 (see Article 45, Consideration 4.12) and therefore requires clarification by the OPC.

The above four reasons were not interacted with by either General Synod 2001 or General Synod 2004.

General Synod 1998 had one more reason that we neglected to quote (Acts of Synod 1998, Article 130, Consideration C.2). Synod stated that the CCOPC Proposed Agreement (which eventually was entered into by General Synod 2001) “***will not help the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to function in a manner that is suitable to one of the churches of the Reformation.***”

The reason the above concerns were expressed is that the OPCs were admitting Baptists as members into the church and to the Lord’s Supper, **contrary to the Westminster Confession**. As is stated in Consideration C.3 of this same Article, “*Rev. G.I. Williamson [minister in the OPC] reflects also the concerns of the CanRC [at that time] when he says about this same point, ‘In the OPC ... persons are commonly admitted of whom the session [= OPC consistory] know nothing. I have never been able to see how this common practice can be reconciled which the clearly stated requirement of our confession [referring to W.C. Chapter 29, Section 8].’*” Consequently it seems to us that the admission to membership and to the Lord’s Supper of those who do not make profession of the Reformed faith **is nothing less than a relativization of the entire Reformed doctrine!**

In fact the decisions of the General Synods since 1998 show that they have become less and less concerned about the matters of fencing the Lord's Supper and confessional membership, as seen at General Synods 2007 (Article 131), 2010 (Article 34), 2013 (Article 43) and 2016 (Article 61). The most recent General Synod 2016 (Acts, Article 61, Consideration 3.5) states, *"When we enter EF we accept each other as faithful churches without qualifications. Differences that were noted and discussed prior to EF, but which did not hinder entering EF, do not require resolution. It is incorrect to speak of "outstanding differences." The word "outstanding" implies a need for resolution. Bringing up these issues repeatedly, without proper proof of necessity, is potentially damaging to sister church relationships. Discussion of these issues may take place naturally in the course of EF, but a specific mandate, identifying particular issues, need not be given."*

We are not aware of any change in practice on the part of the OPC as a result of the discussions that have taken place. Instead it is the CanRC that has changed.

- 1d) You ask, *"How do you reconcile this with the catholic character of the church?"*

As is evident from our signatures under the Form of Subscription we believe that the Three Forms of Unity do fully agree with the Word of God. At the same time we do admit the possibility that there are other confessions which also fully agree with the Word of God. We maintain Article 27 of the Belgic Confession which states that *"this holy church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. **However it is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.**"*

- 2) You write, *"We observe that you are convinced that a church is only catholic, if that church has the Three Forms of Unity (TFU). How do you reconcile this with the catholic character of the church?"*

We do not understand the basis for this observation. As we have written in our answers to the various parts of your question 1, you have not supplied any evidence for this observation. We would appreciate your explanation of how you came to this observation.

- 3a) You ask, *"Is the rule for fencing the Lord's Table, as it is used by us, the only possible way according to Scripture and confession?"*

We don't know. We are open to the possibility that there are other ways, provided that the biblical principle that the eldership must supervise the Lord's Supper is respected (see our answer to 1c above).

- 3b) You also ask, *"And in connection with this, do you see no possibility of a justified difference between the practice in our own church federation and the one practiced by a sister church?"*

If the difference in practice does not negate the Scriptural requirement that the Lord's Supper be supervised by the eldership (see answer to 1c above), we would be prepared to accept it.

- 4) You write, *"Our synod has rejected your request to pronounce that the minority report on the Westminster confession should be rejected. This means that the simple fact of having the Westminster confession is not an obstacle for DGK to engage in a sister church relationship. Do you agree with this decision? If not, why not?"*

When we consider the contents of the two reports on the Westminster Confession that Synod Groningen has decided to use *"as study reports for contacts with foreign churches that have these confessions"* (Decision 3 of this Synod), we have difficulty understanding how these reports can function together in your discussions with churches that have the Westminster Confession.

Please recognize that we encourage contacts and discussions with churches that have the Westminster Confession. If however, in your contacts and discussions with these churches you make use of contradictory reports which say different things, your witness to these churches is undermined. *"For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?"* (1 Corinthians 14:8).

While we must admit that there is much in the Westminster Confession that is reformed, there are a number of doctrines taught in the Westminster Confession which, as believed and practiced in North America, are in conflict with Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. A number of these divergencies are brought forward and discussed in the Majority Report.

This is why we believe that it is important that we engage in discussions with every federation of churches that maintains the Westminster Standards concerning the divergencies between the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity. For example, Rev. Moesker of the CanRC has written, ***"I wonder how compatible the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Belgic Confession of Faith really are concerning the confession of the church"*** (see page 15 of his

unpublished article dated August 21, 1991). More recently, Rev. P.K.A. de Boer from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia has written in the Australian magazine *Una Sancta* about the difficulties with using the Westminster Standards as a basis for church unity. It is only through a thorough and honest discussion of these divergencies that we may become truly united in doctrine and practice and thus promote the catholicity of the church. You must understand that this is the LRCA consistory's motivation for their overture to adopt only the Majority Report on the Westminster Standards.

- 5) You write, *"The instruction of our deputation has been expanded so that we'll seek ecclesiastical unity with all who live according to and based on Scripture and confession (ie. the Three Forms of Unity and/or the Westminster Confession). Do you agree with this decision? If not, why not?"*

As we have stated in our Act of Secession and Return, *"we wish to exercise fellowship with all true Reformed believers and that we wish to unite with every assembly that is founded on God's infallible Word at whatever place God has brought them together."* It is on the basis of what we believe and confess that we judge other churches.

If the majority study report has been accepted *"for contacts with foreign churches that have these confessions,"* it is within your mandate to make use of it. It is important to recognize the difficulties highlighted in this report regarding "the assurance of faith," the concept of a "double covenant," "the invisible church" and the "pluriformity of the church" as taught in the Westminster Standards. For without a resolution of these divergencies between the two sets of confessions it is impossible to come to an agreement with churches that have these confessions on what we believe and confess as the truth of God's Word.

More importantly, you should be aware that on the North American continent Presbyterian churches do not bind their members to their confessional documents as Reformed churches have historically done. This fact needs to be taken into account in your discussions with Presbyterian churches.

- 6) You write, *"From the churchly documents it is clear that, after your appeal to Classis Pacific, you could have continued with your appeal to the broader assemblies. Why haven't you followed that path?"*

Your question misunderstands the process of appeal that was followed. The process of appeal did not begin after 2004. It began after 2001. In 2002 two of our members prepared an appeal of the decision of General Synod 2001 which established ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC.

This appeal was presented to the CanRC at Abbotsford, adopted by the consistory there, and sent by the consistory directly to General Synod 2004. The consistory's acceptance and adoption of our appeal meant that this appeal could be sent directly to General Synod 2004, without first having to go to Classis or Regional Synod.

Once General Synod 2004 had denied our appeal it became clear that we had no new grounds for another appeal, because, in accordance with Article 33 of the Church Order, *"Matters once decided upon may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds."*

Our letter to the consistory of the CanRC at Abbotsford dated October 4, 2005, which was an encouragement to continue in the line of its Appeal to Synod 2004, was actually the last step of the appeal process, for the consistory is the highest authority in the church.

The acceptance of the unscriptural decisions of General Synods 2001 and 2004 by the CanRC at Abbotsford in February 2006 placed us into an ethical dilemma. The decisions which the CanRC consistory had previously appealed as unscriptural had now been accepted. At the same time this consistory began to implement these unscriptural decisions by permitting pulpit exchanges with ministers from these new sister churches and admitting guests to the Lord's Supper without an attestation. When protests against these decisions were made the consistory responded by withdrawing the appointment of an elder who could not, in good conscience, participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper when such a guest was admitted to the Lord's Supper, and by placing a member under church discipline in response to his faithful testimony concerning the consequences of these unscriptural General Synod decisions.

The period of time from the rejection of our letter by this consistory in February 2006 to the time of the secession in 2007 was spent in making every effort to help the CanRC consistory at Abbotsford understand the implications of the decision it made when it changed its original position and rejected our letter. You will understand that we wanted to do all that was in our power to avoid the necessity of having to secede.

The above information was brought to deputies BBK in our letter dated July 30, 2009 – see the section entitled *"Timeline of Appeal Process under Article 31 C.O."* This information, together with copies of the supporting correspondence, should be available to you in your archives.

The appeals that were sent to Classis Pacific East in 2006 were not about the substance of the material that had previously been sent to General Synod. The reason these appeals were sent to Classis was to help the

consistory of the CanRC at Abbotsford to honestly interact with the material that was presented to it in our October 4, 2005 letter. This is evident from the text of the appeals themselves.

The first appeal to Classis dated February 13, 2006 was about the fact that the CanRC consistory at Abbotsford was seriously deficient in its interaction with our material. In its denial of our appeal the Classis stated that we had to complain about the lack of interaction to the consistory first. After an extensive series of correspondence with the consistory in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade them to honestly deal with the original material we had sent in our October 4, 2005 letter, we sent a second appeal about the lack of interaction to Classis dated August 9, 2006. However this time the denial of the appeal was accompanied by support for the consistory's responses and the claim that we were being unreasonable in our replies.

The text of these appeals and the related responses can be found on the internet at www.calltoreform.com.

It should be emphasized that at no time did we ask Classis for a judgment on the material itself. **The reason these appeals were not mentioned in our July 30, 2009 letter is that they did not function as part of the appeal process that was followed.**

- 7) You write, *"Your call to reform has been rejected by all local CanRC churches. Do you now see all CanRC churches as false churches?"*

We are unable to establish the truth of your observation. In October 2009 we sent packages of information to all the CanRCs in existence at that time. Out of more than 50 churches we have received approximately 10 responses, one of which made the claim that they had appealed the same matter on the same basis we did, but were hoping for a favourable result when they appealed to the next general synod. In the meantime the next general synod rejected their appeal and no further appeals were presented, yet they continued in the CanRC federation.

As the remaining churches in the federation did not respond to us we are not able make a conclusion about our call to reform to these churches.

Since that time we also sent letters to General Synods 2013 and 2016, however both of these letters were declared inadmissible. The Lord willing, we will write once more to General Synod 2019 and possibly also once more to all the CanRCs.

Referring back to our original appeal regarding the OPC, we stand with the CanRC Classis Ontario South in 1987 that Rev. Hofford and the Tri-

County Reformed Church have *"rightfully separated from the OPC."* If we continue to accept this witness of Classis Ontario South, the refusal of the OPC to repent and change their practices would make them a false church. However the history of the CanRC contact with the OPC shows that the CanRC has sent mixed signals to the OPC, so that their testimony to the OPC has proven to be confusing and ineffective. As stated earlier, **the CanRC did not *"help the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to function in a manner that is suitable to one of the churches of the Reformation."***

In the meantime the deformation in the CanRCs has continued, unabated. The claim that there are no practical consequences taking place in the CanRC as a result of the general synod decisions we appealed is not true. OPC ministers are not bound to the confessions in the same manner that the CanRC ministers are, for they are only bound to the "system of doctrine" found in the Westminster Standards. We are not aware of any discussion of these divergent doctrines prior to these ministers preaching on CanRC pulpits. To our knowledge there are no restrictions on visiting OPC ministers preaching a doctrine of "covenant with the elect" or an "invisible church" or the "pluriformity of the church" as found in the Westminster Standards. However we are aware that OPC ministers have preached on CanRC pulpits. As a result the membership of the CanRC is becoming increasingly confused concerning the doctrine of the church due to the influence of church pluriformity – so much so that it does not understand its own confession. Regarding the practices in the CanRC, as time goes on we are aware that more CanRC churches are abandoning the requirement for presentation of an attestation as contained in Article 61 of the Church Order prior to admission to the Lord's Supper.

Brothers, it gives us no pleasure to label a church or a federation of churches "false." We care for our former CanRC brothers and sisters and we long for the unity we once had with them. We pray constantly for repentance on their part, so that they may realize the place and function of the reformed confessions in the life of the churches and how this unity, based on the reformed confessions is expressed at the Lord's Supper.

Thus far our responses to your questions. Should further elaboration be required or objections be raised to the content of our answers please let us know.

At the same time there are a number of matters about which we would also like to enquire.

1. When we wrote the church at Zwolle and Deputies BBK about the secession in Abbotsford, we supplied detailed evidence, including copies of general synod decisions and related correspondence to the general synod and with the consistory of the CanRC at Abbotsford to explain why

this secession was necessary. In the process you followed to determine your questions above, did you refer to this evidence, which we believe would be in your archives, and can you tell us what is lacking?

2. We observed that as Deputies you had sent a letter dated March 13, 2013 to the CanRC General Synod Carman 2013 as published in Volume 11 of your online magazine Reformed Continua. Do you still stand behind the contents of this letter and are you still seeking responses to this letter from the CanRC and CanRC deputies? If not why not?
3. We sent copies of our letters to the CanRC General Synods 2013 and 2016 to you at the time of writing (you should be able to find copies of these letters in your archives). While the CanRC general synods declared our letters inadmissible, we note that the GKV admitted your letter calling them to repent. Do you believe that it was appropriate for the CanRC Synods to declare our letters inadmissible? If so, why? If not, would you be willing to bring this matter to the CanRC deputies?
4. Based on the evidence we have provided in our original submissions to you in 2008 and 2009, the copies of our letters to the CanRC General Synods 2013 and 2016 (which should be in your archives) as well as the lack of response by CanRC Synod 2013 to the evidence you presented in your letter, would you not agree that the CanRC general synods have assigned more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God? If not, why not?
5. Do you not find it unreasonable that the CanRC General Synods have labeled you "schismatic" in 2007 and 2010 because they believed you were premature in your secession in 2003, but now maintain this label because you now have a relationship with us? If not, please explain.
6. We observe that at the first meeting of the I.C.R.C. in 1982 Dr. van Gulp presented a paper on the topic of "*The Unity of Faith as Gift and Mandate and Its Significance For the Reflection On Contacts and Rules With Other Churches.*" In this speech Rev. van Gulp was quoted as saying that, "when there are two true churches in the same land they must unite (so as to be under one Synod) within a given period of time. Do you believe that Rev van Gulp is correct here? If not, why not? Do you agree with the North American situation where a number of churches which recognize each other as true within the umbrella of NAPARC remain in separate federations? If you do, please explain. In addition, do you agree with the CanRC's practice of having sister churches in the same country but not uniting as one? How does the North American situation reflect the catholicity of the church?

7. We observe that Synod Groningen has accepted the majority report on the Westminster Confession "*as study report for contacts with foreign churches that have these confessions.*" On the basis of this acceptance how can you reconcile the difficulties highlighted in this report regarding "the assurance of faith," the concept of a "double covenant," "the invisible church" and the "pluriformity of the church" with the statement that the Westminster Confession is a "fully reformed confession"? Is it your intention to discuss these divergencies in your contacts with Presbyterian churches?
8. Do you approve of an open Lord's Supper with only a verbal warning? Do you approve of your sister churches having an open Lord's Supper with only a verbal warning? See for reference the attached OPC "*Report of the Committee to Study the Method of Admission to the Lord's Supper.*" If either of the above answers is yes how will you witness to the CanRC on this matter?
9. Do you believe that all members of the church should be bound to the church's confessions? If not, please explain why? Can you have a sister relationship with a church that does not bind its members to the church's confession? If so, please explain why.

Can we receive your written response at least four weeks before your visit?

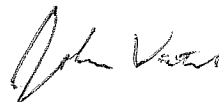
We pray that our Lord will grant you the needed clarity of mind and wisdom to deal with the above responses and questions, and provide continued strength for all your work.

We look forward to meeting with you.

Yours in Christ,



J. van Laar,
President
Email: vanlaarfarms@gmail.com



J. Vantil,
Clerk
Email: johnvantil@shaw.ca

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TO STUDY THE METHOD OF ADMISSION TO THE LORD'S SUPPER

I BACKGROUND AND ACTIVITY

The Committee was erected and its members (Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Robert D. Knudsen, and Thomas E. Tyson) elected by the 58th GA, on recommendation by the Committee On Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (Minutes, pp. 37-38,48-49). This recommendation came as a result of challenges to the prevailing method(s) of admission to the Lord's supper in the OPC by the Committee on Contact with the OPC of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CCOPC) and was in the interests of reaching unity on this matter.

From the outset the Committee has been uncertain as to how it ought to proceed, in particular as to how its work might advance and not simply repeat what is already being done by the CEIR in its discussions with the CCOPC. (Two members of the Committee, Gaffin and Tyson, are also members of the subcommittee of the CEIR consulting with the CCOPC.) Eventually we have decided that under the existing circumstances our work would be redundant. In our judgment, OPC responsibility to the Canadian Reformed Churches and their concerns is already being adequately discharged by the CEIR. As our report, then, we offer as information the following brief statement prepared for CEIR discussions with the CCOPC, slightly modified:

THE OPC AND SUPERVISION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER A BRIEF STATEMENT

1. Pertinent materials in the subordinate standards

1.1 Confession of Faith. In chapter 29, "Of the Lord's Supper," section 7 refers to "worthy receivers." Such persons are those who partake "inwardly by faith"; they are "true believers" (sec. 1).

In contrast, section 8 says that "ignorant and wicked men" ("all ignorant and ungodly persons") are "unworthy of the Lord's table" and "cannot, without great sin against Christ,... be admitted thereunto."

Beyond this proviso for exclusion, the only explicit administrative prohibition in this chapter, with respect to recipients, concerns private communion; those who minister the Supper are to do so "to none who are not then present in the congregation" (sec. 3).

Chapter 30, "Of Church Censures," stipulates among the disciplinary actions at the disposal of church officers, "suspension from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season" (sec. 4).

1.2 Larger Catechism. Q. & A. 168-177 deal with the meaning of, administration of, and participation in the Lord's Supper. Explicit reference to those "that worthily communicate" is found in A. 168 and in Q. & A. 170, and much of what is found in these nine answers explains what worthy communication involves, particularly the self-examination and discernment requisite for such communication.

Q. 173 asks, "May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, be kept from it?" The answer is that "Such as are found to be ignorant or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, by the power which Christ hath left in his church,..."

1.3 Shorter Catechism. Q. and A. 96-97 deal with the Lord's Supper. Q. 97 asks "What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's supper?" The answer focuses on the requirement "that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, . . ." and then warns against the danger of "coming unworthily,..."

1.4 Form of Government. Chapter 13, "The Local Church and Its Session," section 7 states: "The session is charged with maintaining the government of the congregation. It shall oversee all matters concerning the conduct of public worship; . . ."

1.5 Directory for Public Worship. Chapter 4, "The Celebration of the Sacraments," section 3 stipulates: "Since the sacraments are ordinances of the visible church, they are not to be administered except under the oversight of the government of the church. Moreover, in ordinary circumstances they are properly administered only in a gathering of the congregation for the public worship of God, . . ."

Section C-2, the form to be read by the minister before the distribution of the elements in administering the Lord's Supper, declares:

It is my solemn duty to warn the uninstructed, the profane, the scandalous, and those who secretly and impenitently live in any sin, not to approach the holy table lest they partake unworthily, not discerning the Lord's body, and so eat and drink condemnation to themselves. (The form then goes on in detail to assure that "this warning is not designed to keep the humble and contrite from the table of the Lord, as if the supper were for those who might be free from sin..." and concludes as follows:) Let us therefore, in accordance with the admonition of the apostle Paul, examine our minds and hearts to determine whether such discernment is ours, to the end that we may partake to the glory of God and to our own growth in the grace of Christ.

Earlier, Section A-5 states that the minister "is not required to use the exact language of the indented forms, which are suggested as appropriate. He may employ these or similar forms, using his own liberty and godly wisdom as the edification of the people shall require."

2. Observations and Commentary

2.1 Our subordinate standards have a manifest and sustained concern for worthy participation in the Lord's Supper, a concern defined, in part, by antithesis to unworthy participation. This two-sided, antithetical concern—to promote worthy and to prevent unworthy receiving, that is, to "fence" the Supper—is evidently based on the apostolic /covenantal concern expressed most explicitly in I Corinthians 11:27-34.

2.2 Administering the Supper, including fencing, is ordinarily the responsibility of the local session.

2.3 The most explicit directive concerning fencing, on its negative side, appears to be LC, A.173, which states that the "ignorant or scandalous,..., may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, by the power which Christ hath left in his church, —"

Crucial is the notion of ecclesiastical power expressed here. What is such authority? In brief, it is the exercise of "the keys of the kingdom," entrusted by the risen Christ to the church through his apostles, and ministered subsequently by those set apart to ruling office. Specifically—as the Reformation has made perennially clear, especially in opposing the clericalism of Rome — the authority of office is the authority of the (inscripturated) Word, no more, no less; church authority, in that sense, is ministerial or declarative.

Fencing the Supper, then, is a particular exercise of this declarative power.

2.4 How, specifically, is that power to be exercised? Notably, our standards do not stipulate a set procedure to be followed by the session. It seems fair to say that, so far as good order and spiritual welfare are concerned, the Supper is adequately fenced by using the form quoted above (DW 4.C.2), or an equivalent. That the Supper is to be fenced is mandatory. How that is to take place is, in large part, an *adiaphoron*; not even the form provided need be used verbatim. Each session has a measure of discretionary freedom and flexibility.

2.4.1 In fact, there is no uniform procedure for fencing the Supper in the OPC. A very few congregations may practice a form of "closed" communion, requiring visitors who wish to participate to be examined by the session in advance. Fairly typical is the practice where the minister supplements the reading of the form (1) by inviting to the Table those who (a) have been baptized, (b) have publicly professed their faith before the church, and (c) are currently members in good standing of an "evangelical" church, and (2) by warning those who do not meet these requirements not to participate. (There is a growing perception in some quarters of the church that (c) is less and less useful in view of the devaluation of the term *evangelical* in recent years.)

2.4.2 The OPC practice falls within the spectrum of fencing procedure that, historically, has been present in the mainstreams of the Reformed tradition; in both Continental and British-American churches, some have followed a more regulated (e.g., use of tokens, attestation letters, consistorial/sessional examination of visitors), others a less regulated policy (instruction and warning from the pulpit to both congregation and visitors). This spectrum, we believe, is legitimate and reflects the latitude allowed by Scripture. Again, that the Supper must be fenced is plain; how that is to be done is a matter of (biblically informed) judgment with room for differences.

2.5 What are the wider implications of the OPC position and practice for the doctrine of the church?

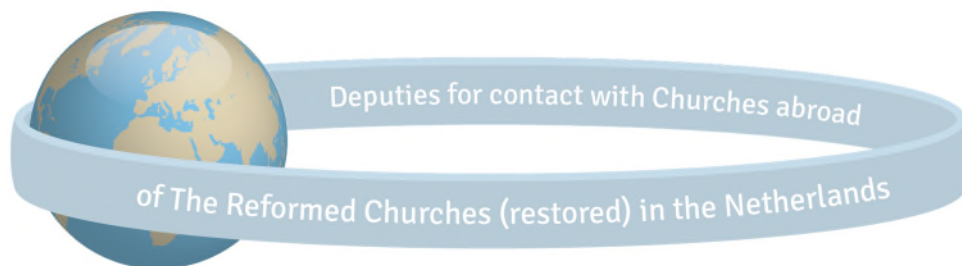
2.5.1 Does this approach reflect an "individualism," presumably bound up somehow with the invisible-visible church distinction? We think not. Admittedly, an unbiblical individualism is a real and pervasive threat to the life and integrity of the church, particularly in North America, and is not to be dismissed lightly. But, at the same time, it needs to be appreciated that in the most directly pertinent biblical passage (I Cor. 11:27ff.)—a passage, it should be noted, marked by

the apostle's concern to provide quite specific directives—the focus, so far as worthy participation is concerned, is not on those who administer and their responsibility to safeguard the Supper, but on the recipients and their need, individually, for self-examination; the accent here is on "individual" responsibility.

On a more general note, surely we must guard against polarizing or forcing a choice between the individual and the corporate (an unbiblical "corporatism," by the way, is by no means an imaginary danger, as church history makes plain). In God's covenant, surely, that choice represents a false dichotomy; only covenantal religion is able to hold the two considerations in balance and give each its due.

2.5.2 It is the conviction of the OPC that there are other churches, including non-Reformed churches, that are true churches, and that members in good standing in such churches do, however defectively, make a credible profession of faith in Christ and so ought to be welcomed to his Table in OPC congregations. There is, after all, only one Christian church (I Cor. 1:13; Eph. 4:4), and to that one church, by implication, comes the command to partake of the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:26). A controlling conviction of the OPC is that while the Supper must be rigorously exclusive so far as the world is concerned, for the church—subject to the provisions already noted—it must be as inclusive as possible.

II Recommendation: That the committee be dissolved.



To: Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford
c/o J. Vantil
JohnVantil@shaw.ca

From: Deputies contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
c/o Rev. C. Koster
Duindigtstraat 7
2665 HS Bleiswijk
The Netherlands
dsckoster@gmail.com

March 23rd, 2019

Dear brothers,

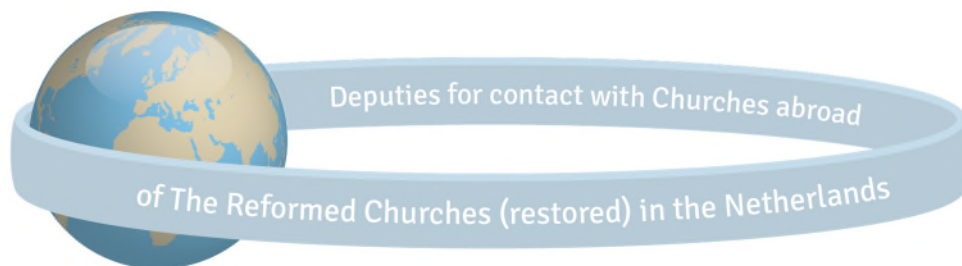
Thank you for your letter of March 4th, 2019, with your answers to the questions which we asked in our letter of December 11th, 2018. We have discussed your letter in our meeting of March 18th.

As a result of this discussion we have decided to send you another letter with supplementary questions regarding your opinions, so as to get a really clear picture of your views. In this way we want to prepare our meeting with you.

Because time flies and it is already the second half of March, we suppose that it would be good to postpone our visit to you, possibly to next autumn. We as deputies are meeting again at the end of April and we'll send you our next letter as soon as possible after that meeting.

As you'll understand the time of our visit also depends on the speed of our mutual communication.

With brotherly greetings on behalf of the Committee for Churches Abroad of the DGK,
Rev. C. Koster,
Secretary



To: Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford
c/o J. Vantil
JohnVantil@shaw.ca

From: Deputies contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
c/o Rev. C. Koster
Duindigtstraat 7
2665 HS Bleiswijk
The Netherlands
dsckoster@gmail.com

May 3rd, 2019

Dear brothers in the Lord,

Thank you for your letter (dated February 28, 2019, received on March 5, 2019) in which you answer the questions we asked you. These answers give us reason to ask your attention for the following.

We asked you a.o. the next two fundamental questions

4. Our synod has rejected your request to pronounce that the minority report on the Westminster Confession should be rejected. This decision means that the simple fact of having the Westminster confession is not an obstacle for DGK to engage in a sister church relationship. Do you agree with this decision? If not, why not?

5. The instruction of our deputation has been expanded so that we'll seek ecclesiastical unity with all who wish to live according to and based on Scripture and confession (i.e. the Three Forms of Unity and/or the Westminster Confession). Do you agree with this decision? If not, why not?

GS Groningen 2014-2015

At this synod two reports on the Westminster confession were dealt with, viz. the majority report and the minority report.

The committee proposed not to pronounce on these reports, but to give them to deputies BBK as study reports for their discussions with presbyterian churches. The majority report led to the conclusion that first the Westminster confession has to be adapted before a sister church relation can be attained. That became clear from the counter proposal:

Synod declares that the Westminster Standards are not in all parts a reformed confession.

Grounds

1. The ecclesiastical foundation of churches which enter into a relationship with each other, should in all parts be in full agreement with Holy Scripture.
2. The confession of churches which enter into a relation with each other, should in all parts be in full agreement with Holy Scripture (subscription form of pastors).
3. The study of the Westminster Standards has tested and compared parts of these confessions with Scripture and the three forms of unity (Acts p. 44).

Note the radical language: full agreement – in all parts. *That is certainly not the case with the Westminster confession, so the majority report says, but should certainly be the case. And therefore it is against Scripture and confession, when nevertheless a sister church relation is attained with a presbyterian church.*

That was clearly contrary to the proposal of the committee (Acts p. 45). The committee proposed for synod to decide to use both reports as study reports in contacts with foreign churches which have the Westminster confession. It gave a.o. the following grounds:

3. In the history of contacts of Reformed churches in the Netherlands with foreign churches it has never been seen as an insurmountable objection that they have the Westminster Standards as a confession.
4. In contacts with foreign churches which have the Westminster Standards as a confession, it should primarily become clear whether the churchly practice is in agreement with God's Word. When this is positively established, further talks can be opened about the differences in content between the respective confessions.

Synod adopted the proposal of the committee with 9-2 votes.

GS Lansingerland 2018

At this synod you submitted a request to adopt the majority report and to reject the minority report. Synod decided against your request with 10-1 votes, considering

that to have or not to have the WS as a confession is as such not a good reason to make or not to make contacts for engaging in a sister church relation.

In the grounds synod refers to the decision of synod Groningen, ground 4 (see above) as a good way regarding contacts with churches which have the WS as a confession.

The questions which we asked you

So therefore our questions in our letter to you of December 11, 2018.

Your answer to them is clear. You inform us that indeed your opinion in judging a church is that the simple fact of having the WS as a confession, is obviously in contrast with what you see as a clear condition for entering a sister church relation, viz. that the confession must be in full agreement with Holy Scripture. And so your conclusion is that such a church cannot be considered as a true church, so that entering a sister church relation is in conflict with Scripture and confession.

This conclusion clearly clashes with the decision of our synod Lansingerland on your request to adopt the majority report as a pronouncement and to reject the minority report.

Synod Groningen pronounced itself against the above mentioned counter proposal (Acts Groningen, p. 44).

The decision of synod Lansingerland not to comply with your request, implies therefore that the simple fact of having the Westminster confession is not an obstacle for entering a sister church relation.

Synod charged us to seek sister church relations with churches which have the foundation of Scripture and confession (Three Forms of Unity and/or Westminster confession).

We asked you for a simple answer upon these two above mentioned questions, whether you agree with them.

Although you answer with a multitude of remarks, it is clear that your answer to both questions is a no. For you inform us that you have indeed the opinion that when judging a church the simple fact that this church has the Westminster confession as its confession, conflicts so much with the required full unity that such a church cannot be considered to be a true church of Christ and that entering a sister church relation is contrary to Scripture and confession.

You write:

“It is only through a thorough and honest discussion of these divergencies that we may become truly united in doctrine and practice and thus promote the catholicity of the church.

You must understand that this is the LRCA consistory's motivation for their overture to adopt only the Majority Report of the Westminster Standards.”

What your aim is with such a discussion is obvious from your answer, in which you state:

"For without a resolution of these divergencies between the two sets of confessions it is impossible to come to an agreement with churches that have these confessions on what we believe and confess as the truth of God's Word."

That means that in your view a sister church relation is only possible if the Westminster confession has been changed on the points mentioned by you. In the attachment to this letter you will find still more quotes from which we can establish the above mentioned.

Furthermore we would like to ask you a few more questions, before engaging in talks with you.

Question 1

It is Scriptural and necessary to guard the holiness of the Lord's Supper. Nowadays presbyterian churches don't use attestations, they guard the holiness of the Lord's Supper differently. The attachment to your letter describes how the Lord's Supper is guarded in the OPC, i.e. back in 1993. As churches we have never made a statement on this concrete instance, but in the history of our churches such a practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper has always been accepted and it was not judged as in conflict with Scripture. Indeed our instruction says: "On minor points concerning the way of confessing, liturgy, church order or ecclesiastical practice, foreign churches will not be judged." And we also must point out that this method of the OPC is certainly not to be described as an 'open communion', as said by you and also by our deputies in 2010.

Our question is: Is the method of celebrating the Lord's Supper in the OPC, as described in the OPC account of 1993, in your view in conflict or not in conflict with Scripture and the reformed confession?

Question 2

We understand the actual appeal procedure and conclude that there has only been one appeal on the denounced synod decision regarding the sister church relation with OPC, viz. at synod CanRC in 2004.

We establish that some members of the congregation in CanRC Abbotsford asked their consistory to request a revision of the in 2004 denied appeal of the CanRC consistory. From that we conclude that at that time the members in CanRC Abbotsford did indeed see the necessity of a revision request at the next synod in 2007. Therefore your argument, that it was no use asking for a revision, because of art. 33 CO, is not sustainable. However, when consistory did not want to ask synod for a revision, not a single member of the congregation asked for a revision, while it was certainly possible for individual members. For they had the possibility to go the ecclesiastical way from classis to regional synod to general synod of 2007.

In line with art. 31 CO those who are denied, but think that a decision is in conflict with God's Word or the CO, should appeal. And even more so, when it concerns the very far-reaching break with the church.

And later LRCA could not repair this omission in the ecclesiastical way, because you were no longer members of the CanRC and letters from LRCA to synod CanRC were justly declared inadmissible.

Our question is: Should not you yourselves as members primarily have gone the legal ecclesiastical way (classis, regional and general synod) before you liberated yourselves from the CanRC?

Question 3

We understand that you only condemn those churches in the CanRC with which you have been in contact and which have rejected your secession. Your answer on our first and seventh question is about the same answer you gave in 2010, at the time of synod Emmen 2009-2010 (see attachment of acts GS Emmen, p. 116):

“When we speak of a false church do we speak of an entire federation as a whole or do we speak about individual local churches? We believe that based on the second-last paragraph of Art. 29 of the Belgic Confession we need to speak about individual local churches, in accordance with Reformed church polity. Then on the basis of this paragraph we believe that a number of Canadian Reformed Churches are false churches, but not based on their rejection of our testimony (the appeals and subsequent letters concerning the OPC and others). Therefore we believe that each local church stands or falls based on the acceptance or rejection of biblical testimony. Even though a period of time may be required to determine the attitude of each local church, in the end “by their fruits you shall know them” (Matthew 7:20). As we are still in contact with some Canadian Reformed Churches we do not, at this time, make a general declaration that all the Canadian Reformed Churches are false.”

Now we are nine years further. Therefore our question to you is: the churches which have not reacted upon your call, have they now become false churches? And if so, has the entire CanRC as a whole become a false federation for you?

Question 4

The attachment to the report in our acts of GS Emmen 2009-2010 says the following (p. 105):

“The matter of the sister church relation with both the OPC and the URC has big consequences for the CanRC. On the one hand the notion of pluriformity and an open Lord’s Table are introduced in the church and on the other hand the struggle around covenant and baptism in 1944 is denied. Its practical results are already visible: 1. pulpit exchange; 2. exchange of church members with or without attestations; 3. open communion and 4. pastors and elders function without having signed the subscription form. The big consequences of these two matters are that false teachings are admitted in the pulpits; the administration of the sacraments happens without discipline and that also the discipline on preaching and life of the congregation can hardly be applied.”

These are very far-reaching conclusions of our deputies at that time. However what misses in this deputy report as a whole is *proof* on which these conclusions are based. The only proof is the fact that preachers of sister churches are welcome in the pulpits of CanRC, as they should be in a sister church relation. But it is not known to us – beside the decision to enter into a sister church relation with the OPC and the URC and other church federations – that there is proof in which it becomes visible that at that time the CanRC itself erred on one of the above mentioned points. In this local instances are not convincing for us, but we are looking for concrete information, in which errors become visible in synod decisions, in the theological training of the CanRC or e.g. in official publications of CanRC pastors.

Since this was a fundamental point in your liberation, we ask you: can you as yet give us proof of the above mentioned matters in the CanRC in those days (2007)?

Question 5

In your last letter to us you contend further:

1. The deformation in the CanRC has continued unabated.
2. The doctrine about the church has become increasingly confusing in the CanRC.
3. Their own confession concerning the church is no longer understood.
4. More CanRC churches drop the attestation requirement.
5. The original testimony has been corrupted and watered down by the CanRC.

Can you give us proof that these matters occur today in the CanRC?

In conclusion

Our next meeting is planned for DV June 3, 2019. That is why we'd like you to react before May 20.

We wish you the wisdom and strength of the Lord in your ministry and in answering our questions.

With brotherly greetings on behalf of the Committee for Churches Abroad of the DGK,
Rev. C. Koster,
Secretary

Attachment

- LRCA on Westminster Confession and on churches with the Westminster Confession as foundation.

Attachment to letter BBK of DGK to LRCA – May 2019

LRCA on Westminster Confession and on churches with the Westminster Confession as foundation

You write in your letter (LRCA to deputies BBK of DGK, February 28, 2019, p. 6):

“While we must admit that there is much in the Westminster Confession that is reformed, there are a number of doctrines taught in the Westminster Confession which, as believed and practiced in North America, are in conflict with Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.

A number of these divergencies are brought forward and discussed in the Majority Report.”

This is in agreement with your answer in the attachment to the Acts of GS Emmen 2009-2010 to the question if the Westminster Confession is a reformed confession (Acts Synod Emmen, att. p. 114):

“Though this confession contains many good things, by our signature on the subscription form we are forced to consider the implied errors as contrary to God’s Word and the Three Forms of Unity.”

—

In the Acts of Synod Emmen 2009-2010 we read the question (Acts Synod Emmen, att. p. 115):

“4. Are the different denominations you mentioned in the ‘Act of secession and return’, that use the Westminster Confession false churches?” Your answer is then a.o. (Acts synod Emmen, att. p. 116):

“[...] If a church consistently promotes and maintains the Westminster Confession in its doctrine and practices, despite admonitions, we would have to consider this church to be a false church.”

At the same page (p.116) you speak about

“the unscriptural doctrine in the WMC (Westminster Confession).”

And when question 8a asks: “Where in Canada and the US can we find true churches?”, you answer:

“Firstly we mention the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford, BC. We’d like to believe that there are more churches that base themselves on the Three Forms of Unity.”

In reply to the question: "Do you have any proof that the pastors in e.g. the OPC are not preaching the pure gospel?", you say a.o.:

"How can we expect pure preaching if the OPC maintains the Westminster Standards?" (Acts Synod Emmen 2009-2010, att. p. 117).

In the acts of GS Hasselt 2011-2012 we read (art. 2.02, p. 128):

"from the contacts with the LRC Abbotsford it has become clear that this confession (the Westminster Confession) has been the cause of many problems in the CANRC"

In the acts of GS Groningen 2014-2015 we read that a delegate of the LRCA gives the following advice to synod (art. 6.01, p. 44):

"The evaluation of the Westminster Standards, as described in the majority report, should be the foundation of talks with presbyterian churches that have the Westminster Standards."

And it is clear what the conclusion of the majority report is on the Westminster Confession and the Larger Catechism (p. 291):

"We consider the way in which the WS elaborated matters of faith, like covenant and church, incompatible with the way in which the Three Forms of Unity reflect Scripture in these matters. Therefore these doctrines form a not to be underestimated danger for the church."

No wonder the majority report logically results in the next two decision proposals (p. 216-217):

Decision 1: "General Synod Groningen 2014 decides not to accept the Westminster Standards in an unchanged form as a common ground for entering foreign relations. This implies that the decision of Amersfoort 1967 art. 241 has been declared to be disposed of.

Decision 2: "General Synod Groningen 2014 decides only to continue existing contacts with foreign churches with the Westminster Standards as foundation, if these churches after talks are prepared to adopt instead of the Westminster Standards the Three Forms of Unity or to adapt the Westminster Standards by..." and then follow some possibilities.

On January 5, 2018, you sent a letter to synod Lansingerland with regard to the study reports on the Westminster Confession, in which you requested this synod:

“we therefore overture General Synod Lansingerland to reject the minority report and to adopt only the majority report to be used in contact with Presbyterian churches.”

As arguments you say a.o.:

“The Westminster Standards do not teach the Scriptural understanding of the covenant. [...] If we accept the Westminster Confession as a credible reformed confession while not disputing the wrong doctrine contained therein we inevitably undermine our own confession. Where the Westminster Confession contradicts the Three Forms of Unity (extensively covered in the majority report) we will not be able to teach the doctrine taught in this church properly. There will be inevitable conflict which will lead to an incorrect understanding of the church and of God’s covenant. In this way we will not only fail to win over Presbyterians but also lose our own members.”

In the same letter you continue:

“It should be noted that the decision at Synod Emmen has already in principle decided against the minority report when it accepted the Report of the deputies concerning the LRC Abbotsford. It also accepted the attachment “An Unscriptural Binding” by Br. J. Vantil which exposes the incorrect doctrines contained in the Westminster Standards.”

After discussion of the Westminster Confession this article of br. J. Vantil says:

“When the CANRC consistories allow pastors of the above mentioned federations to preach in their pulpits, they allow doctrines of the above mentioned unscriptural doctrines in the CANRC, just like it happened back in 1905. Allowing such doctrines is in conflict with their assignment which in art. 55 CO states the following: “[...] Each consistory that accepts these decisions of synod [concerning sister church relations with various church federations, deputies], inclusive allowing the above mentioned unscriptural doctrine in their congregation, deceives the members. The Three Forms of Unity no longer function as forms of unity.”

You continue in your answering letter to us (LRCA to deputies DGK, February 28, 2019, p. 7):

“It is important to recognize the difficulties highlighted in this report regarding “the Assurance of Faith”, the concept of a “double covenant”, “the invisible church” and the “pluriformity of the church” as taught in the Westminster Standards. For without a resolution of these divergencies between the two sets of confessions it is impossible to come to an agreement with churches that have these confessions on what we believe and confess as the truth of God’s Word.”

Conclusion

Based on the above mentioned, we establish that you condemn the Westminster Confession in full as a document in which (along with many good things) false doctrine is taught.

And that you cannot acknowledge churches that consciously use the Westminster Confession unchanged and uncontradicted as their confession, as churches of Christ, simply and solely because of the fact that they confess their faith through the Westminster Confession.

Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford

C/O 2043 Jordan Place, Abbotsford, B.C., V3G 2C3

May 9, 2019

Deputies Contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
C/O Rev. C. Koster
Duindigtstraat 7
2665 HS Bleiswijk
The Netherlands

Esteemed brothers in the Lord:

We are writing an initial response to your letter dated May 3, 2019.

In your letter you make a number of assertions and ask a number of additional questions to which you ask for a response by May 20, 2019. While we will do our utmost to provide a detailed response to you as soon as possible, we regret that it will not be possible to prepare this response by that date.

At the same time you will recall that we included nine questions at the end of our previous letter to you dated February 20, 2019 with the request that we receive your written response at least four weeks before your visit. We made this request on the understanding that you would visit us in May.

Considering that you have now delayed your visit, and to give us also an opportunity to ask supplemental questions as a result of your answers, we request that you supply us with answers to our questions by June 10, 2019.

In addition, we noticed that your letter to us was not signed. On the basis that this was an oversight we have admitted your letter. We therefore request that from now on, for all correspondence of this nature, you send us signed letters.

We wish you continued strength and the Lord's blessing on your work.

Yours in Christ,



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To Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford
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From Deputies contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
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May 17, 2019

Dear brothers in the Lord,

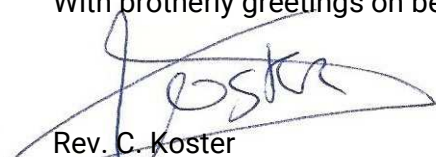
Thank you for your initial response of May 9 to our letter of May 3, 2019. Although it is a provisional answer, we'd like to react briefly.

It is not our intention that you are going to give us an extensive detailed account of already well known matters. You already did this extensively in the past. The aim of our letter of May 3rd is that you give short answers to our questions. We wish to proceed and go-ahead with our synod's charge to ask you questions and communicate with you.

As to your questions to us, at our last meeting we did not have enough time to discuss them. We'll put them on the agenda for our next meeting. If your answers to our questions arrive in time, then we'll meet on June 3rd, or else it will be postponed to a later date.

We are looking forward to your answer, which we'd like to receive at short notice, so that we can discuss it at our meeting of June 3, 2019.

With brotherly greetings on behalf of the Committee for Churches Abroad of the DGK,



Rev. C. Koster
Secretary

Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford

C/O 2043 Jordan Place, Abbotsford, B.C., V3G 2C3

May 23, 2019

Deputies Contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
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Esteemed brothers in the Lord:

Thank you for your letter dated May 3, 2019 responding to our letter dated February 28, 2019 containing additional explanations and questions. We appreciate your providing us with additional background detail in relation to your questions, for this assists us in formulating meaningful answers.

However your letter dated May 17, 2019 has us perplexed. You claim that it is not your intention for us to give you "*an extensive detailed account of already well known matters.*" Please be assured that we would not have done so if it had been evident from your questions that you have interacted with previously submitted material.

We note that in your response to our February 28, 2019 letter you start with the discussion surrounding the Westminster Confession and the fact that we see difficulties with certain formulations in the Westminster Confession, consistent with the majority report. At both Synod Groningen 2014-15 and Synod Lansingerland 2018 consistory has expressed its concern about the acceptance of two apparently contradictory study reports on the Westminster Standards. You have not explained how the presence of two apparently contradictory reports can serve the churches unless you make use of one and ignore the other.

In addition, we are alarmed that you have incorrectly characterized our position as stating that a church that has the Westminster confession cannot be a true church. This characterization is completely false. For at the same time you accurately quote us as saying, "*It is only through a thorough and honest discussion of these divergencies that we may become truly united in doctrine and practice and thus promote the catholicity of the church.*"

Do you not see what is wrong with your characterization? We cannot apply a syllogistic true/false distinction to a church that has the Westminster Confession (or any other confession for that matter) without having a thorough and honest discussion of divergencies in doctrine and practice to see what accords with God's Word.

As we have shown to the Deputies who reported to Synod Emmen in 2010, our history of contact with Presbyterian churches in North America is significantly different from yours in continental Europe. Our concerns over the Westminster Confession originate from the information presented in Rev. Hofford's little booklet entitled Open Communion in the OPC, a copy of which has been placed on the website of Reformed Continua. As Rev. Hofford had been a minister in the OPC for many years he is directly acquainted with the practices of the OPC. These concerns led Rev. Hofford and those with him to exchange the Westminster Confession for the Three Forms of Unity.

You will then understand that it is perplexing for us to hear a defence of the Westminster Confession as "a fully reformed confession" without receiving an interaction with the contents of Rev. Hofford's booklet.

Therefore we appreciate that you start your questions with the matter of the Lord's Supper.

Question 1

In this question you ask:

Is the method of celebrating the Lord's Supper in the OPC, as described in the OPC account of 1993, in your view in conflict or not in conflict with Scripture and the reformed confession?

We agree with your statement that, *"It is Scriptural and necessary to guard the holiness of the Lord's Supper."* However at the same time we assert that the method of celebration of the Lord's Supper in the OPC, as described in the above referenced account, does not guard the holiness of the Lord's Supper, for what it describes is indeed "open communion" and in conflict with Scripture and the reformed confession.

We base this assertion on the following evidence:

A) Evidence from the document itself

- 1) At the end of paragraph 1.5 there is a reference to Section A-5 of the Directory for Public Worship, which states that the minister *"is not required to use the exact language of the indented forms, which are suggested as appropriate. He may use these or similar forms, using his own liberty and godly wisdom as the edification of the people shall require."*
- 2) The OPC admits (see 2.4.1) that, *"In fact there is no uniform procedure for fencing the Supper in the OPC."* This admission indicates the presence of a double standard or measure in the OPC, which is not pleasing in the eyes of the Lord (see Deuteronomy 25:13-16, Proverbs 20:23 and James 2:1-10).

- 3) In this same paragraph the OPC outlines a "typical" practice where the minister first invites to the Lord's Supper *"those who (a) have been baptized, (b) have publicly professed their faith before the church, and (c) are currently members in good standing of an 'evangelical' church,"* and secondly *"by warning those who do not meet these requirements not to participate."* As we have explained to you in our letter dated February 28, 2019 the public profession of faith referred to in (b) above need not include profession of the Reformed faith and need not accord with the church's confession (see our answer to 1c). The OPC itself admits that its use of the term 'evangelical' is *"less and less useful"* as it has knowingly admitted baptists to the Lord's Supper, as members in the church, and even permitted them to preach on the pulpit (see evidence provided in Appendix A of our submission to the CanRC General synod 2019). The "warning" referred to in this paragraph removes responsibility for the decision on whether to admit a guest to the Lord's Supper from the eldership to the guest. This practice is what we define as "open communion," which is contrary to what we believe and confess in Lord's Day 30.
- 4) The OPC gives reasons for this practice by setting forth its own vision of catholicity in paragraph 2.5.2. As you can see the OPC starts from the "conviction" that members in non-reformed church can make a *"credible profession of faith in Christ."* This is expressed in the statement, *"There is, after all, only one Christian church, and to that one church, by implication, comes the command to partake of the Lord's Supper."* It is clear from this statement that the OPC views the catholic church as pluriform, for there is no testing of the spirits to see whether they are of God (1 John 4). In this regard it is instructive to note that the Westminster Confession does not define the marks of the false church.
- 5) This 1993 document does not make any change in the OPC's Lord's Supper practice from the time of secession from the OPC of Rev. B.R. Hofford and those with him in 1983.
- 6) Paragraph 2.4.1 states, *"A very few congregations may practice a form of 'closed communion,' requiring visitors to be examined by the session in advance."* It logically follows that if the OPC, in general, does not practice closed communion, then what it does practice must necessarily be considered to be open communion.

B. Evidence provided from CanRC major assemblies

- 1) The text of the "Complaint" by Rev. B.R. Hofford to the 50th General Assembly of the OPC in 1983 is available from the Synod archive on the website of the CanRCs - see Appendix IIE on pages 160 to 172 of the Acts of CanRC General Synod 1986.

- 2) General Synod 1986 set forth the following consideration which states that *"Although 'the committee considers that the GA has not allowed deviation from their standards, nor has it sanctioned heresy such as would require us to break off our relations with the OPC,' its recommendation that 'the Canadian Reformed Churches should use their ecclesiastical contact to address the OPC on this issue of fencing the Lord's table' indicates that the matter of fencing of the Lord's Supper is, indeed, a serious confessional divergency, which is a major issue of mutual concern"* (see Article 132, consideration b - emphasis added).
- 3) Your statement that *"As churches we have never made a statement on this concrete instance ..."* is reflected in what the Committee for Contact with the OPC itself stated (see Article 132, Observation 5). However this observation, that *"concerning our own practice of admission to the Lord's Supper, the committee concludes 'that our churches never adopted a general rule (in the Church Order) for admission of guests to the Lord's Supper, and that we therefore cannot ask this from the OPC either'"* was not accepted by Synod 1986.
- 4) For after detailing the practice in the CanRCs with respect to the admission to the Lord's Supper as regulated in Article 61 of the Church Order, General Synod 1986 also considered that, *"Although guests are not specifically mentioned in Article 61, C.O., the conclusion of the committee, Observation 5, cannot mean that Article 61, C.O. has no bearing on the admission of guests to the Lord's Supper. Synod considers that Article 61, C.O., is the rule which governs the admission of all those who seek to partake in the Lord's Supper"* (see Article 132, consideration d). Synod stated further that, *"The Canadian Reformed Churches have from the beginning of contact with the OPC considered the admission to the Lord's Supper as an essential matter of discipline"* (see Article 132, consideration e).
- 5) The failure of the CanRCs to follow up these major confessional divergencies at subsequent major assemblies provides evidence of how the CanRCs have regressed in their process of deformation by not maintaining their own confession. We ask you to consider the following:
 - a) As stated above Synod 1986 considered that *"the matter of fencing of the Lord's Supper is, indeed, a serious confessional divergency, which is a major issue of mutual concern."*
 - b) Synod 1992 made the statement that, *"It should be agreed, however, that a general verbal warning alone is insufficient and that a profession of the reformed faith is required in the presence of the supervising elders from the guests wishing to attend the Lord's Supper"* (Acts, Article 72, Consideration A.1.e.i).
 - c) As we have indicated in our previous correspondence Synod 1998 amended a proposed agreement with the OPC to include the above

- statement from Synod 1992 and to require “confirmation of a godly life” (*Acts*, Article 130, Considerations C.3 and 4).
- d) Synod 2001 abandoned the above amendment of Synod 1998 and went back to the original proposed agreement, and thereby entered into ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC. At the same time Synod stated that, “*there is reason to continue to discuss these practices, but they cannot in the end be made a condition for ecclesiastical fellowship.*” Synod also stated that, “*According to our respective confessions, the implication of the principle is that supervision of the Lord’s table involves more than a verbal warning for unrepentant sinners to abstain from the table (see Westminster Confession, Chapter 29, section 8; Larger Catechism q & a 173 and Heidelberg Catechism q & a 82) (Acts, Article 45, Considerations 4.11 and 4.12).*”
 - e) Synod 2004 stated that, “*The important point is that we continue to engage in a brotherly and forthright discussion with the OPC concerning how the Lord’s Table ought to be supervised, along with the matter of confessional membership (Acts, Article 86, Consideration 4.7).*”
 - f) Synod 2007 considered that the above mandate “*cannot be repeated because it does not take into account the decision of Synod Neerlandia to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC.*” Instead “*the outstanding matters of confessional membership and supervision of the Lord’s table are to be raised where appropriate (Acts, Article 131, Consideration 3.5 and Recommendation 4.3).*”
 - g) Synod 2010 considered that it would “*not be proper to belabor these issues in discussions with the OPC.*” At the same time Synod considered that “*working toward a more unified position on these significant matters ought to be one of the goals of being churches in EF (Acts, Article 34, Consideration 3.4).*”
 - h) Synod 2016 considered that “*When we enter EF we accept each other as faithful churches without qualifications. Differences that were noted and discussed prior to EF, but which did not hinder entering EF, do not require resolution. It is incorrect to speak of “outstanding differences.” The word “outstanding” implies a need for resolution. Bringing up these issues repeatedly, without proper proof of necessity, is potentially damaging to sister-church relationships. Discussion of these issues may take place naturally in the course of EF, but a specific mandate, identifying particular issues, need not be given (Acts, Article 61, Consideration 3.5).*”
 - i) As can be seen from the above digression it was not the OPC that changed, but the CanRCs. Over a span of 30 years the open communion in the OPC went from “*a serious confessional divergency, which is a major issue of mutual concern*” to no issue at all!

C. Evidence previously presented to you as Deputies BBK

We previously presented evidence to you on the place and function of the confessions in the OPC in relation to the admission to the Lord's Supper from the Acts of CanRC General Synod 1998, however thus far we have not seen an interaction with this evidence.

D. Evidence from your own history

In a speech to your Synod Groningen our delegates referred to an article by Rev. Heres regarding the reasons for the liberation of the DGK church at Dalfsen (see Volume 17, December 2014 issue of Reformed Continua, especially pages 6 and 7). Rev. Heres writes, *"However, what I do emphatically wish to mention, is the admission to the Lord's Supper of those who are not members of the Reformed Churches (liberated). The decisions of Synod Amersfoort-C, 2005 and Synod Zwolle-South 2008 on this matter, have been proposed as implementing decisions. It was, so it has been said, a compromise, thus worse could be prevented. But in reality, because of this regulation, there was no way of stopping things anymore. That has also become evident in practice: In many congregations one no longer asked or asks for the lawful attestation for the Lord's Supper. Members from different church denominations, such as the PKN (Protestant Church of the Netherlands), are welcomed to the Lord's Supper tables without any problems. One can in actual fact, speak of an open Lord's Supper. Does this concern a matter of minor importance? No it does not. Here the being-the-Reformed-Church is being disputed. Here the foundation of ecclesiastical unity is being disputed."*

Rev. Heres then goes on to show how the three marks of the true church are being affected by these decisions and practices. He then states, *"The decisions concerning the Table of the Lord's Supper can only be explained by the fact that the doctrine of the pluriformity of the church is again being strongly defended and applied. In practice that means that everyone who calls himself a Christian, is to be considered as belonging to the large body of Christ and is authorized to take part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It doesn't really matter anymore to which church or denomination you belong. But those who speak and make decisions in this way, are no longer in accordance with Scripture and the Reformed confessions."*

In light of the above, how is the above referenced practice of the GKV any different from that of the OPC? If you now accept this practice of the OPC, what happens to the validity of your own liberation?

Question 2

In this question you ask:

Should not you yourselves as members primarily have gone the legal ecclesiastical way (classis, regional and general synod) before you liberated yourselves from the CanRC?

As members of the consistory of the CanRC at Abbotsford we did send an appeal of the decision of Synod 2001 to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC, as this decision was taken on a basis that was opposite to the decision of the previous Synod 1998. It should be noted here that Article 86 of General Synod 2004 admits that Synod 2001 did not interact with the decision of the previous Synod in taking this decision (see Acts of Synod 2004, Article 86, consideration 4.2). At the same time this Synod claims that it did not need to, for it asserts that the question of how the OPC supervises guests at the Lord's Table "*cannot in the end be made a condition for Ecclesiastical Fellowship*" (consideration 4.7). We therefore maintain that we did follow the legal ecclesiastical way and we are still doing so, in accordance with the Church Order.

We respond to the remarks that you have made as a preamble to your question as follows:

- a) First of all, you should be aware that neither the CanRC nor the adopted Church Order knows of a "revision request." We do not understand the basis for your statement that "*the members in CanRC Abbotsford did indeed see the necessity for a revision request at the next synod in 2007.*" If the CanRC at Abbotsford had made the decision to appeal to Synod 2007, matters may have been delayed however the consistory did not make this decision.
- b) At the same time you should be aware that the CanRC churches at Lincoln and Attercliffe appealed this very same decision to Synod 2007, but were not successful (see Acts, Synod 2007, Articles 55 and 83).
- c) In the meantime Synod 2004 had rejected appeals against decisions of Synod 2001 which had restricted the right of individuals to address general synod. Yet you claim that members still "*had the possibility to go the ecclesiastical way from classis to regional synod to general synod of 2007.*" Your claim that this possibility existed is not valid, for we submit that the use of this possibility for the matter at hand is contrary to the Church Order.
- d) Article 30 of the Church Order states that, "*A major assembly shall deal with those matters only ... which belong to its churches in common.*" As the matter under appeal involves all of the churches in common, the Church Order indicates that this appeal is inadmissible at classis or regional synod.
- e) Article 50 of the Church Order states that, "*The relation with churches abroad shall be regulated by general synod.*" As the matter under appeal involves

relations with churches abroad, the Church Order indicates that this appeal is inadmissible at classis or regional synod.

- f) Article 31 of the Church Order states that, "*If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to the major assembly;*" The Church Order gives the right of appeal and, based on the subject matter, directs which assembly has to deal with it. We need to read what the Church Order says – not what synods or others have tried to read into it.
- g) The consistory, as the only permanent ecclesiastical assembly, is indeed the highest authority in the church. When the consistory accepted and began to implement general synod decisions which it had previously judged to be contrary to the Word of God or the Church Order, we were placed into the same position as the churches were in 1944 when the Synod imposed decisions on covenant and baptism which were contrary to the Word of God.
- h) Your claim that our letters to subsequent general synods were justly declared inadmissible does not make any sense for the following reasons:
 - 1) Article 31 of the Church Order specifically states "*If anyone complains ... he shall have the right to appeal*" The Church Order explicitly gives anyone, who has been touched by the decision of an ecclesiastical assembly, the right of appeal. This procedure was no longer followed by the CanRCs after Synod 1998.
 - 2) When the DGK Synod 2005 sent an appeal to GKV Synod 2007 it was still admissible, even though it was not properly answered.
 - 3) The CanRC synods' persistent refusal to receive letters and appeals of this nature shows the depth of the deformation that has occurred in this federation - in this respect it is worse than the GKV.
- i) You are correct that the matter concerned a "*far reaching break.*" You will have noticed that we supplied much more information to the Abbotsford CanRC consistory in the hope of convincing it of the seriousness of the changes that had occurred in the federation of CanRCs and the need for standing fast on the basis of its original appeal. Much of this information had been presented to general synods in the past and was therefore inadmissible on the basis of Article 33 of the Church Order.
- j) If consistory had continued in the line of its original appeal we would have stayed with the consistory. However when the consistory changed its position, admitted a guest to the Lord's supper without a lawful attestation, withdrew the appointment to office of a lawfully elected elder when he refused to participate in the consequences of this admission, and placed a member under church discipline for his faithful testimony, all of this based on these unscriptural general synod decisions, many of which had been appealed over and over, it became a matter of conscience for us. How could we not follow the words of Revelation

18:4 *"Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues"* once the consistory responded in its May 31, 2007 letter, *"We consider the matter finished."*

- k) The fact that a "break" had to occur is supported by Prof. K. Deddens and Rev. G. van Rongen where they say, *"After one has gone the full 'ecclesiastical way' ... one has to accept the latest decision as yet – which does not create any insurmountable difficulties whenever it is not a matter of conscience – or he has to 'liberate' himself from the binding decision* (see their book Decently and in Good Order, page 63).

Question 3

You ask whether:

The churches which have not reacted upon your call, have they now become false churches? And if so, has the entire CanRC federation as a whole become a false federation for you?

To these questions we answer that it appears that way. We have difficulty seeing how a true church can continue to exist within a federation which insists on holding onto unscriptural general synod decisions, even after countless appeals from within its own circles. After nearly twelve years the CanRCs certainly know of our existence for it has even been written about in their magazine, Clarion.

Three successive general synods (2013, 2016 and 2019) have now refused to admit our material, contrary to the Church Order. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession defines the attributes of the false church where it states that it *"assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God. It does not want to submit itself to the yoke of Christ. It does not administer the sacraments as Christ has commanded in His Word It bases itself more on men than on Jesus Christ."*

Even so, we believe it is now incumbent for us to write the churches once more.

Question 4

You ask for proof that the *notion of pluriformity*, the introduction of an *open Lord's Supper table*, the denial of the struggle around *covenant and baptism*, *false teachings permitted* on the pulpits, and *lack of discipline* on preaching and in the life of the congregation has affected the CanRC's in 2007.

- a) The struggle against pluriformity

This struggle began when Synod 1977 made the decision to call the OPC a true church without resolving outstanding divergencies in doctrine and practice. While the CanRCs did not, at this time, practice pluriformity, the decision to call

the OPC a true church did result in acceptance of the concept. For how else can two true churches exist side by side and yet not be one in faith?

This decision paved the way for the CanRC to get involved as a member of the ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches) in the 1980's. The resulting struggle over the meaning of "unity of faith" resulting in the Free Reformed Churches of Australia ending their membership in that organization.

The struggle deepened when the CanRCs entered into ecclesiastical fellowship with the PCK (Presbyterian Church of Korea) and the FCS (Free Church of Scotland) at Synod 1992. These churches, which were sister churches of the OPC, have identical practices as the OPC on the open Lord's Supper table and on confessional membership. The OPC complained about these decisions to the CanRCs at Synods 1995 and 1998, claiming that the CanRC was judging Presbyterian churches with a double standard – one for churches in North American and another for churches elsewhere in the world.

The acceptance of relationships of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with churches that live side by side without entering into full ecclesiastical unity represents the official acceptance and practice of church pluriformity. The GKV did this with the Christelijk Gereformeerd Kerken (CGK) and the Netherlands Gereformeerde Kerken (buiten verband). Following the GKV, by 2007 the CanRC had done this with the OPC, the United Reformed Churches (the URC), the Reformed Church in the U.S.A. (the RCUS) and l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (the ERQ).

We were encouraged by the decision of Synod Hasselt in 2012 which, instead of entering into such a relationship with the church at Dalfsen, worked, under the Lord's blessing, for full ecclesiastical unity with the church at Dalfsen.

b) Covenant and baptism

None of the above sister churches have acknowledged the legitimacy of the Liberation in 1944 from unscriptural decisions regarding covenant and baptism. While the fact that the 1944 history is relatively unknown in these churches should not, by itself, prevent ecclesiastical unity, this history becomes important when evaluating the reactions of the OPC and the URC to the Federal Vision movement.

The URC Synod Schererville in 2007 gave a pastoral advice to reject the errors of those (among others) "who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC Q&A21, 60; BC 29) (*Acts*, Article 72, Recommendations 1(f)). Not only does this statement from the URC Synod condemn sound doctrine as heresy, but it also

takes as starting point the same distinction that was identified in the Westminster Standards and by the General Synods in the Netherlands in 1942 and 1943.

For similar thinking can be found in the OPC. Answer 31 of the Westminster Larger Catechism states that *"The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed."* At the same time answer 166 of this same Catechism states that *"Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but 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 to be baptized."*

The Westminster Standards incorrectly distinguish between a covenant of grace and a covenant of promise. They incorrectly take their starting point in a covenant of grace established with the elect and neglect the fact that the covenant of grace was established with believers and their seed (see Genesis 17:1-7, Acts 2:38-39, etc.).

c) False teachings permitted on the pulpits

The simple fact that ministers of these sister churches of the CanRCs are permitted on CanRC pulpits shows that the doctrines that are tolerated in these churches are permitted in the CanRCs as well. The presence of these ministers on CanRC pulpits, in the absence of full ecclesiastical unity, shows the acceptance of the notion of the pluriformity of the church in the CanRCs.

In discussions over unity with the URC, CanRC Synod 2007 also decided to relax the requirement for a seminary that is controlled by the churches (see Acts, Article 104). This step, together with the readiness of the CanRCs to call ministers from outside their federation will only accelerate the deformation. We will come back to this when we answer your last question.

d) Lack of discipline in the life of the CanRC congregations

Nowhere does this lack of discipline show itself more clearly than in the way the CanRC's have reacted to members' withdrawal from the church. Members who have left the church to join, for example, the Christian Reformed Church or a church upholding baptist doctrine are wished the Lord's blessing in their new church home. This problem began in the 1980's and only intensified in certain churches in the 1990's and the 2000's.

The CanRC decision to become a member of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) has meant the acceptance, as true churches, of all the members of this organization, including those who believe in open communion, paedocommunion, women deacons, the framework hypothesis (interpretation of Genesis), etc.

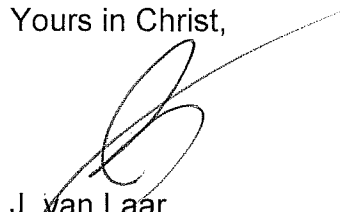
As a result, the withdrawal of members from the CanRC to join any NAPARC church is no longer seen as a problem.

Question 5

You ask us for proof of the continuing deformation persisting in the CanRC. In consideration of your request to respond to you as soon as possible, and to give us an opportunity to evaluate the decisions of the latest CanRC General Synod 2019 which has just completed, we will send you our response to this question at a future date.

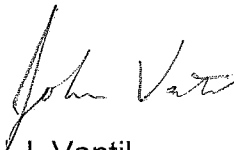
We wish you continued strength and the Lord's blessing on all your work.

Yours in Christ,



J. van Laar,
President

Email: vanlaarfarms@gmail.com



J. Vantil,
Clerk

Email: johnvantil@shaw.ca

Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford

C/O 2043 Jordan Place, Abbotsford, B.C., V3G 2C3

September 5, 2019

Deputies Contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
C/O Rev. C. Koster
Duindigtstraat 7
2665 HS Bleiswijk
The Netherlands

Esteemed brothers in the Lord:

We acknowledge receipt of your letter dated June 24, 2019 responding to our letter dated May 23, 2019. You will recall that in the interest of expediting our response to you and to give us an opportunity to evaluate the decisions of the latest CanRC General Synod 2019, we reserved our answer to your Question #5 for a later date.

Before we address this question there are a number of matters about which we would like to obtain and give clarification.

Convening of Extra-Ordinary Synod

It has come to our attention that an extra-ordinary Synod was convened to clarify certain matters concerning potential unity with the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN) which were originally established as a provisional federation.

Under the Rules for Sister Church Relations which we have mutually adopted we note Rule 3.3 "*The churches shall give account to each other regarding correspondence with third parties,*" and Rule 3.7 "*The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or Minutes and, otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to the respective churches (if possible in translation).*"

May we still expect some information regarding the agenda and the Acts of this extra-ordinary Synod?

Discussions with the CanRCs

We understand that as Deputies you have been in contact with the Subcommittee for Relations with the Netherlands of the CanRCs. We are therefore most disturbed at the following statement in the Acts of General Synod Edmonton 2019 of the CanRCs, Article 124, Observation 2.2, which reads:

"The DGK had attempted to set up a three-way meeting between themselves, the LRCA and the SRN, but the LRCA declined to participate."

We are not aware of any attempt to set up a three-way meeting with the participants indicated above, therefore the claim that the LRCA declined to participate is completely unfounded. It is possible that the CanRC Acts contain an error - therefore it may be necessary to obtain the necessary clarification from the CanRC. We would appreciate your attention to and clarification of this matter.

The CanRCs also show that they are confused about the reason for the existence of the existence of the LRCA, for Consideration 3.2 of this same Article reads:

"The relation the DGK have with the LRCA continues to be an impediment to increased relations between the CanRC and the DGK because the LRCA broke away from the CanRC precisely because of their opposition to our sister relationships with churches of Presbyterian identity."

This consideration is based on an observation by Synod 2013, (Acts, Article 190, Observation 3.2.5), that:

"Synod Emmen 2009-2010 of the RCR [DGK] decided to recognize the LRCA as a true church and enter into a sister church relationship. The grounds for this decision relate to the LRCA being a faithful church, the CanRC having entered into sister relations with the OPC and the URC and the fact that CanRC synods have made it impossible to appeal matters of ecclesiastical contact."

As we have previously communicated to you, these statements are not an honest description of what occurred. The liberation occurred in Abbotsford because the CanRC in Abbotsford refused to maintain the biblical principles set forth in its own appeal against CanRC decisions to establish ecclesiastical relationship with churches which do not maintain the reformed confessions and permit the practice of an open Lord's Supper table. We therefore would appreciate your attention to and clarification of this matter as well.

Clarification to answer given in our February 28, 2019 letter

Upon reflection, we revisit our answer to question #5 of your December 11, 2018 letter as contained in our February 28, 2019 letter.

In the middle paragraph of our answer to your question #5 we wrote:

"If the majority study report has been accepted "for contacts with foreign churches that have these confessions," it is within your mandate to make use of it. It is important to recognize the difficulties highlighted in this report regarding "the assurance of faith," the concept of a "double covenant," "the invisible church" and the "pluriformity of the church" as taught in the Westminster Standards. For

without a resolution of these divergencies between the two sets of confessions it is impossible to come to an agreement with churches that have these confessions on what we believe and confess as the truth of God's Word."

We must admit that a portion of our answer may have been too strong. Instead of referring to doctrines highlighted in the majority report such as the "pluriformity of the church", etc., as taught in the Westminster Standards, we should have said that these doctrines such as the "pluriformity of the church", etc., are doctrines to which the Westminster Standards give room, as it is the presence of these doctrines which have opened the door for the practices of non-confessional membership and the open Lord's Supper in the OPC.

It is therefore possible to have a relationship with a federation of churches which gives evidence of an understanding of the aforementioned doctrines in accordance with the Three Forms of Unity, maintains confessional membership and administers a properly supervised Lord's Supper table, even though it may have the Westminster Standards as its confession.

We therefore amend the phrase in the above paragraph which reads, "as taught in the Westminster Standards" to "to which the Westminster Standards give room."

Additions to answers given in our May 23, 2019 letter

In connection with Question #1 of your May 3, 2019 letter we neglected to mention two important documents under Part D "Evidence from your own history" on page 6 of our May 23, 2019 letter.

In the first place we refer you to the decision of your Synod Marienberg 2005 in Acta, Article 25J, regarding the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA). In rescinding this decision Synod Marienberg cited the grounds of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia for not entering into a sister church relationship, namely, (i) that the PCEA admits ministers from outside their federation (such as Baptists) to the pulpit; and (ii) that people from outside the PCEA are admitted to the Lord's Supper on the basis of their own testimony.

In North America the practices of the OPC and the URC are identical to those described by the Free Reformed Churches of Australia as occurring in the PCEA, however the CanRCs have not taken the same position as the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have on this issue.

In the second place, in regard to concerns expressed over developments in North America, we refer you to an article by Dr. P. van Gorp in the March 8, 1995 issue of Reformanda, entitled, "*Ondergeschikte zaken*." You will recall that in our previous letter we discussed our concerns about the Westminster Confession which came about as a result of the experience of Rev. Hofford. We are pleased to see an echo of these concerns in this article of Dr. van Gorp and we attach, for your information, a copy of the

letter by Sutton Bogedain which was referred to by Dr. van Gurp in “*Ondergeschikte zaken*” (see Appendix A).

Question 5 of your letter dated May 3, 2019

In this question you point to our contention that (1) the deformation in the CanRC has continued unabated, (2) the doctrine of the church has become increasingly confusing in the CanRC, (3) their own confession concerning the church is no longer understood, (4) more CanRC churches drop the attestation requirement, and (5) the original testimony has been corrupted and watered down by the CanRC, and then you ask us for proof that these matters occur today in the CanRC.

For evidence of continuing deformation in the CanRCs we draw your attention to the following:

- a) We have previously supplied you with a copy of our letter to the CanRC General Synod Edmonton 2019 dated March 14, 2019 via email on April 15, 2019. You will note that even though we provided General Synod with extensive considerations to take this letter seriously, Synod persisted in declaring this letter inadmissible.
- b) You will notice that in consideration (5) of the above letter we cited a number of examples of deformation in the CanRCs which had occurred since 2001 (see paragraphs (a) to (g) of this consideration) as follows:
 - i) Limitation of the right of appeal (see *Acts* of Synod 2004, Article 20). This limitation is not only a symptom of deformation but a catalyst to further deformation in the CanRCs. This limitation undermines what we confess in Article 7 of the Belgic Confession and also what we maintain in Article 31 of the Church Order, that the authority of God's Word always stands above synod decisions. As we have indicated in our May 23, 2019 letter (see answer to question 2, paragraph d) this limitation forces individual members to act contrary to Scripture and to the Church Order, and thus contrary to their own conscience. The result of this decision is that the membership of the church is increasingly unaware of and disconnected to general synod decisions. Instead they are told to “leave it to the delegates – they are the ones who are responsible.” Unless requested, members do not receive printed copies of the Acts of Synod anymore. While this is indeed a more subtle form of hierarchy, it is no less dangerous to the churches than that which was practiced by the synodical churches in 1944. The acceptance and implementation of unscriptural general synod decisions undermines the member's commitment that was made in his answer to the first question of the Form for the Public Profession of Faith “*steadfastly to continue in this doctrine, rejecting all heresies and errors conflicting with God's Word.*”

- ii) Entering into ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Church of New Zealand (RCNZ) (see Acts of Synod 2007, Article 66). This decision was taken despite the fact that the RCNZ has a sister church relationship with the Christian Reformed Church of Australia, which relationship was an obstacle at that time for the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to have a sister relationship with the RCNZ.
- iii) Entering into ecclesiastical fellowship with l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ) (see Acts of Synod 2007, Article 75). This decision was taken despite the fact that the ERQs have an open Lord's supper, do not practice confessional membership, and do not restrict access to the pulpit (see Observation 2.4 of the above Article). In addition this decision runs counter to the prayer of Christ in John 17:21 "*that they all may be one*" and represents an obstruction to the goal of having unity within one federation of churches in the same country. Consequently this decision also promotes an unscriptural pluriformity of the church.
- iv) Membership in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) (see Acts of Synod 2007, Article 140). This decision was taken despite the fact that not all the member churches in NAPARC (for example, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)), have been recognized by the CanRC as true churches. In addition, no true unity of faith exists in this organization for there is an implicit acceptance of doctrine and practices which are contrary to Scripture and the Reformed confessions and, as a result, this organization promotes an unscriptural pluriformity of the church.
- v) Denial of request for sister church relations with the DGK (see Acts of Synod 2007, Article 143). Instead Synod endorsed the conclusion of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad that the GKV had remained faithful (see Consideration 4.1). Even though much later Synod 2013 (see Acts, Article 190, Observation 3.2.4) admitted that the "*extensive information*" "*had not been fully studied ... in detail*" and also (see Consideration 4.8) that they "*did not take their expressions of concern seriously enough*" they continued to consider the DGK as "*schismatic*" due to their relationship with the LRCA (see Considerations 4.9 and 4.10). Yet nowhere do the CanRC synods explain how entering into a relationship with a foreign sister church can be considered schismatic.
- vi) Decisions to permit the practice of women voting (see Acts of Synod 2010, Article 176, Synod 2016, Article 87 and Synod 2019, Article 63). We do not deem it necessary to write any more about this decision since you yourselves have rescinded this practice in accordance with the decision of your Synod Marienberg 2005, Acta, Article 25A. It is, however of interest to note that as Deputies you yourselves wrote the CanRC Synod 2013, "*In the RCNlib [GKV], we saw the first public signs of decline in the*

acceptance of women's voting (Synod Ommen 1993) and the introduction of hymns with unscriptural texts (Synod Berkel and Rodenrijs 1996). We see these same issues now reappearing in your churches. This is another indication of your being on the wrong path" (see Reformed Continua, Volume 11 - April 2013, page 9).

- vii) Bypassing of the ecclesiastical assemblies as described in Consideration 5 (g) of our letter to the CanRC General Synod Edmonton 2019. Instead of following a process of appeal to deal with the deformation in the church that was brought about by a failure to maintain the reformed confessions and follow the Church Order, these failures are now being debated in a public forum. What has become clear from this discussion in the magazine Clarion is that the practices endorsed by Blessings Christian Church (a CanRC in Hamilton, Ontario), and evidently accepted by Classis Central Ontario (see Article 44 of the Church Order), have their origin in the CanRC's sister churches, the OPC and the URCs.
- c) In addition to matters noted above, the Acts of CanRC Synod Edmonton 2019 show further evidence of deformation as follows:
 - i) Synod continues to maintain previous synods' decisions to end the discussions concerning confessional membership and the supervision of the Lord's Supper with sister churches which do not maintain confessional membership or properly supervise the Lord's Supper (see also part B.5.h on page 5 of our May 23, 2019 letter to you). This position is expressed in Articles 22, 60, and 86 of the Acts of Synod Edmonton 2019.
 - ii) In ending the relationship with the GKV, Synod Edmonton (see Acts, Article 41) observed that the ordination of females to office is the major reason for the termination of the sister church relationship with the GKV by other sister churches and the suspension of the GKV's membership in the ICRC (see Observation 2.2.8). At the same time Synod made a nuanced statement by considering that *"the marks of the true church cannot with confidence be said to be consistently present in these churches"* (Consideration 3.3). In its letter to the congregations and to their Synod 2021 (see Acts, Article 104) consistories and congregations are not exhorted to urgently "liberate" themselves from these unscriptural decisions (see Revelation 18:4) but instead to contend for the faith *"by calling your next synod to repent and return to the Scriptures...."* As Synod could just as easily have said that the marks of the true church could be said to be inconsistently present in the GKV, the decision to sever the relationship looks more like an act of abandoning what faithful remnant may remain in the GKV rather than of promoting true reformation. No mention was made of the 2003 liberation from unscriptural decisions of the GKV which resulted in the formation of the DGK and their call to the

members of the GKV to join this church in accordance with Article 28 of the Belgic Confession.

- iii) In its denial of an appeal against condoning the remarriage of divorcees (see Matthew 5:32) in public worship services (see Acts, Article 93) Synod Edmonton considered that *"In this matter we can leave room for exegetical freedom and agree to disagree as brothers and sisters in the Lord"* (Consideration 3.4).
 - iv) In its acceptance of an overture to increase the number of Hymns (from 85 to 100 for now) without biblical warrant (see Acts, Article 142), Synod Edmonton gave a mandate to the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise to make recommendations on additional hymns using the Trinity Psalter Hymnal (jointly produced by the OPC and the URC) as a primary source. In connection with this Synods 2010 and 2013 had just added 19 new hymns to come to total of 85.
- d) Other matters which show deformation in the CanRCs include the following:
- i) Blessings given to members who depart to non-sister churches such as the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA). These blessings, in conflict with Article 28 of the Belgic Confession, started occurring in many CanRCs in the 1990's and have intensified to the present day.
 - ii) Dropping of the attestation requirement for attendance at the Lord's Supper (see evidence provided by Rev. Wes Bredenhof regarding the CanRCs in Langley and St. Albert in Appendix B). As we have since discovered, the evidence for this dates back to 2006, and is broader than our experience in the CanRC at Abbotsford. We also refer you to a letter dated January 17, 2010 and the use of a "Visitor Declaration Form" from Hamilton – Cornerstone CanRC to its congregation regarding the admission of members from non sister churches to the Lord's Supper in Hamilton (see Appendix C).
 - iii) Permission has been given to lecturers having dubious reformed credentials to lecture at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. For example, Dr. Joel Beeke from Puritan Theological Seminary, who is a member of the Heritage Reformed Church (a non-sister church with its roots in the Gereformeerde Gemeenten), in his book Parenting by God's Power: How to Raise Children in the Covenant of Grace (see attached pages 17-22 in Appendix D, especially page 21) promotes a "double covenant" view by presupposing that not all children who have been baptized by believing parents are truly in the *"inner essence"* of the covenant of grace established by Christ with believers and their seed. The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, in its Heidelberg Catechism website, makes use of extensive contributions from Dr. Beeke

in its sermon archive, even though Dr. Beeke is not a member of a sister church. By the use of material from Dr. Beeke, the doctrinal errors which were exposed as unscriptural doctrine and rejected in 1944 are again taking root in the CanRCs.

- iv) As previously mentioned at (b) (vii), recent discussion in the magazine *Clarion* about the practice of Blessings Christian Church lends legitimacy to the practice of having the pulpit open to baptist preachers and having the Lord's Supper open to guests from baptist churches. The extensive discussion in this CanRC magazine shows the considerable degree of support for this practice within the CanRCs (see sampling of articles attached in Appendix E).
- v) A new perspective is emerging in the CanRCs on the timing of profession of faith. A minister in the CanRC, Rev. B. de Jong advocates paedocommunion from the age of 10 years old. Proof of this can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNP9HbW8hjE&feature=youtu.be> (see the 32nd through 36th minutes of this presentation). This is a link to a video from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary conference in February 2019.
- vi) In a speech sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, Dr. Eric Watkins from the OPC discusses the wide perspectives within American Presbyterianism. In his speech he discusses the practice of paedocommunion in the OPC and the PCA. This speech can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8-ax7xZSQc&feature=youtu.be> (while we recommend your listening to the entire speech, see especially the 26th minute through the 31st minute of this presentation). From the survey he took of 10 PCA churches and 10 OPC churches, he discovered that some have paedocommunion as early as ages 4 and 7.
- vii) Doctrinal errors promoted in the CanRC are unchallenged. On the following website <https://blessingshamilton.ca/sermon/romans-12-v3-8-the-church-of-christ.html>, on June 11, 2017, Rev. Hilmer Jagersma had a sermon about the church. In this sermon (see the 8th to the 13th minutes) he states that, *"entrance to the church of Christ is not based on our particular church, our particular denomination and it is not even based on our particular doctrine" "unity does not mean uniformity" "doctrinal and confessional unity does not necessarily mean that you have unity in Christ" "There are people that gather in other churches, in different places, have different worship services and they hold to different confessional and doctrinal statements, people we have never met, people we have never worshipped with, and yet we have unity in Christ"* He says that the more we have this view, the understanding of this *"one body of Christ the more it will impact our view of other churches and other Christians."* While he does not use the word "pluriformity" he defends it by saying that we need

to focus on the things we do agree on, the things that are fundamental, and that the things that we disagree on are secondary. He goes on to justify other Christians who pursue the same call in other churches.

Based on the above sampling of evidence it is clear that the doctrine of the church is no longer understood or maintained in the CanRCs, and that the original testimony (see our answer to 1a in our February 28, 2019 letter) has been corrupted and watered down by the CanRCs.

We are disappointed that you have not yet responded to the questions we had included in our February 28, 2019 letter. We are concerned that as Deputies you have accepted and worked with erroneous and incomplete information from the CanRC subcommittee without confirming with us the accuracy and validity of this information.

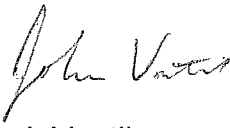
We hope and pray that the above concern will prove to be unfounded and we look forward to your reply.

We wish you continued strength and the Lord's blessing on all your work.

Yours in Christ,



J. van Laar,
President
Email: vanlaarfarms@gmail.com



J. Vantil,
Clerk
Email: johnvantil@shaw.ca

Clarion

Vol. 44 No. 2

January 27, 1995

Dear Editor:

In all of the discussions about the relationship between the CanAmRC and the OPC we have struggled with the similarities and divergencies between the two. I suggest that the struggle will always be difficult because the divergences are not solely about a lot of the *content* but about its *structure*. It is about the covenant and the covenantal union of our (Three Forms) confessional documents.

Three comments keep buzzing around in my head. One comes from one of my professors at Westminster Seminary, the others are from close friends who are an elder and a minister in the OPC. The professor used to say that he could teach and prove Reformed doctrine from either set of documents, it was just easier from the Three Forms. The OPC minister is always ask-

ing me why a federation (he means the CanAmRC) so committed to 'Reformed and always reforming' has no specific confessional article about the covenant. These two comments point to the single solution and the diversity between the two communions.

As I see it the Westminster documents are structured on a scholastic, logic model that uses a building block method to build a confession. One doctrine is laid upon another as so many bricks laid upon each other to build a house. Each brick can be singled out, examined in isolation from the others. Hence the third buzzing comment (from the OPC elder), "The dearest doctrine of the Bible to me is. . . ." I've heard this remark often with regard to a hymn or passage of Scripture. Yet to me it seems an awkward statement at best.

Is Scripture not a unity, a whole? How can you isolate one passage or doctrine and say it is more or less to you than any other? To isolate any from the rest is like cutting out a piece from a tapestry, hanging it alone and saying, "This is my favorite piece, so I'll hang it here."

This also begins to explain why my OPC friend/pastor wants to see a confessional article about the covenant. Both men (most capable too) are trained to think in that systematic, brick by brick model. They know about historical-redemptive preaching and have read Schilder, et. al. But the systematic style is an infection which is systemic. It is as integrated into their thinking as the covenant is for us.

For most of them the covenant is one more doctrine to be added to the list. How it affects other doctrines can be set aside if necessary.

This is why the OPC can organize a summertime chapel with Baptists, Episcopalians, and Methodists (check the preaching schedule for the last few years of the Chapel, Ocean City, NJ) most of whom are former WTS students or associated in some adjunct way with WTS. It is also why they can continue relations with the PCA despite its views on baptism and the children of believers à la Charles Hodge and the Southern Presbyterian preachers Thornwell and Dabney of the last century (the one liner at WTS when I was there was 'little bitty vipers in covenant diapers').

But our Christian faith is not a brick house, but rather a tapestry. The reason we CanAmRC people do not require a "covenant" confessional article is be-

cause it is already woven into every article of our confession. Just as our preaching strives at every point to be redemptive-historical, our confession was written in the same manner. The confessional weave of our documents (even our Church Order forms) is essential to the warp and woof of our churches. It is the defining difference between our churches and their denomination.

Hence the reason why some so quickly point to the activities of the OPC and WTS which are a rejection of our understanding of the covenant, i.e., the trial and dismissal of the Rev. Norman Shepherd, the debacles at Blue Bell and Laurel. Each instance is inextricably connected to an incipient reformation that was founded on a Biblical understanding of the covenant. Were the reformers in each of those situations perfectly clear on this? Not always. But a careful examination of the facts will bear out the conclusion. (For a fuller study, consider the history of Princeton Seminary and the discussion about "Biblical theology," Charles Hodge, B.B. Warfield, and Geerhardus Vos; consider the vast number of times that Presbyterian and Reformed have tried to come to unity and could not. If you are perplexed why we cannot simply unify or work with the OPC, understand that the problem has been addressed for over three hundred years by each succeeding generation. (It has intensified for our churches because of 20th century advances in travel and communication technology.)

Now before anyone says I have a Dutch-honoring traditionalism, let me say this: I was born and baptized Presbyterian. I have been a member of four different Presbyterian denominations in both the North and South; I studied history under a Van Tillian, PCA professor; and attended WTS. This is no proof of my "great learning" but of my historical bias.

Logically I should prefer the Westminster Standards. But I have been persuaded by Scripture, Confession and other studies that without a proper grasp of the covenant you cannot come to a healthy future. And the future is what this is all about.

Does this mean that there is not a lot within the WCF and OPC that is worthwhile? No. It means that we are, historically, cousins. But our relationship is not a historical accident. It is the clear

historical choice of the Scots, British, et. al., and their heirs to choose the WCF and reject the Three Forms, even as the Anglo-American Pilgrims rejected them. Just as we would write to the CRC for decades and ask them about 1944, so we must ask the Presbyterians, in a current way, What about the WCF? Both historical situations are questions about the covenant.

Brethren, our seventeen years of contact have not born the fruit of unity. It is not a lack of faithfulness on our part to follow Christ's call to unity. The structural integrity of the WCF as well as some of its "facts" are the stumbling block. Discussion about these are continually thwarted by the OPC in favor of discussions about church political and territorial questions. Until this is recognized and confessed, there can be no unity.

In this anniversary year of the Liberation let each household and each church decide how precious a Biblical understanding of the covenant is. Let each Consistory discuss its centrality to our faith. If you find you can occasionally put it aside and live Biblically, then unity with the OPC is not far off. But at what cost?

Your servant,
Sutton Bogedain

[Home](#)

What's the relationship between the PCA and the CanRC?

Submitted by David on Sun, 2006-07-02 16:36

This morning I finally managed to find the North Ridge Presbyterian Church (PCA). It was a little hard to find, as it does not have a building of its own, has no outside sign (this apparently is also a restriction of their rental agreement as in the St. Albert CanRC), and is not a massive congregation.

I've had a little trouble finding anything official regarding the relationship between the PCA and the CanRC other than one rather ambiguous comment. However, the PCA is a member of NAPARC, an organization which includes as members the RCUS, the OPC, and the ERQ (which the CanRC considers sister churches). Apparently, through NAPARC there is a membership transfer agreement in place between these churches. I also heard when talking to people after the service that the pastor of the other PCA in town would be preaching at the local URC this evening, so the relationship between the URC and PCA also appears good (at least locally).

As far as names that you might recognize, according to Wikipedia the denomination's membership includes such individuals as R.C. Sproul, Ligon Duncan (president of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals), Marvin Olasky as well as (musically) Steven Curtis Chapman and at least one member of the group Caedmon's Call. These are just a few, though, of the denomination's 330000 members in around 1500 churches.

I've seen some churches in which there is modern music but no little to no theological depth, yet in this church modern instrumentation was using while still singing songs with meaning to them. This was also a church unafraid of modern technology. While hymnals were still distributed and lyrics to any songs outside the hymnals were printing in the liturgy sheet, an LCD projector was used to project lyrics.



Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS 

Be the first to comment.

ALSO ON ROTUNDUS.COM

Chrome is getting cranky

2 comments • 2 years ago



Dave — Weird ... and now the page is rendering correctly again

What do you call your pastor?

1 comment • 4 years ago



Peter R — Surely the abbreviation for "Doctorandus" is "Drs", not "Ds", isn't it?

Michael Munger on Slavery and Racism

2 comments • 3 years ago



Dave — I wasn't intending to suggest you (or Russ) were - merely that Democrats are highly overrepresented amongst professional historians. Or would you prefer that I'd noted that economists

What's with all the time-travel TV shows lately?

1 comment • 2 years ago



Dave — And to think I missed a fourth time travel show - Travelers - albeit no time machine involved, only travelers from the future arriving.

 [Subscribe](#)  [Add Disqus to your site](#) [Add Disqus](#)  [Disqus' Privacy Policy](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Privacy Policy](#) Wes BredenhofMon, 2006-07-03
00:52[Permalink](#)**PCA and CanRC**

There is no official relationship of any sort between the PCA and CanRC. The closest we've come to having contact is through our observers at NAPARC. Some of our people have ended up in PCA churches here and there, both in Canada and the US.

David

Mon,
2006-07-
03 13:27[Permalink](#)**Hmn. So if there's no**

Hmn. So if there's no official relationship is there any way that some visitors from the PCA might be permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper in the CanRC? I know that the Langley CanRC has given away books by people like R.C. Sproul before, so suppose that he decided to visit the church. Is this only available to members of other CanRCs or those the CanRCs has formally declared sister churches? Does it extend to churches that a sister church of the CanRC might consider a sister church? Would it possibly extend to a member of some non-denominational reformed church?

 Wes BredenhofMon, 2006-07-03
14:56[Permalink](#)**PCA and Lord's Supper**

I can only speak for the Langley church. We have a policy on admission to the Lord's Supper that does allow for the admission of guests who do not belong to a sister church. So long as there is no local PCA church (as far as I know, there is not anymore), somebody like R.C. Sproul would be welcome once he has been interviewed by the elders. And even if there is a local PCA church, we would still consider his request. In the past, Langley has admitted visitors from the

92/183
Bijlage 1: Briefwisseling PSK en LPCA, dec-2018 tm okt-2020.pdf
Netherlands who were members of Reformed churches that have no ties with the CanRC and have no churches in Canada.

David
Mon,
2006-07-
03 14:58
[Permalink](#)

So long as there is no local

So long as there is no local PCA church (as far as I know, there is not anymore)

There's Christ the King in Surrey, and two additional PCAs in Vancouver.

Wes Bredenhof
Mon, 2006-07-03
15:31
[Permalink](#)

PCA in Surrey

I'd heard that Christ the King folded. Maybe that was just a rumour. Whatever the case may be, we'd still consider a request.

→ Scott
Tue,
2006-07-
04 15:17
[Permalink](#)

St. Albert has the same

St. Albert has the same interview policy.

Appendix C

CORNERSTONE

Canadian Reformed Church



P.O. Box 99025 Heritage Green Postal Outlet • Stoney Creek • Ontario • L8J 1P0 • clerk@cornerstonecanrc.org

January 17, 2010

Dear Members of the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church,

Recently the consistory has received some letters in which members expressed concern about two recent decisions of the Consistory, i.e. the preaching of the Belgic Confession during the afternoon worship services, and the admittance of non-sister-church members to the Lord's Supper table at Cornerstone.

Members specifically questioned whether these decisions are in harmony with the Church Order. We would like to address this issue to the entire congregation to assure you that we believe that we are upholding the Church Order and we are pleased to offer the following explanations and clarifications.

Concerning the preaching from the Belgic Confession, reference is made to Article 52 of the Church Order.

The consistory shall call the congregation together for worship twice on the Lord's Day.

The consistory shall ensure that, as a rule, once every Sunday the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism is proclaimed.

The phrase, "as a rule", indicates that exceptions may be made. The normal course of events would be regular preaching from the Catechism, but exceptions to include other confessions may also be allowed. The wording of the proposed Joint Church Order, which will be considered by Synod 2010, makes the distinction more clearly by stating, "At one of the services each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word of God as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism by treating the Lord's Days in sequence, and may give such attention also to the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort."

Please be reminded also that guest ministers who conduct afternoon services at Cornerstone will continue to preach from the Heidelberg Catechism.

Concerning the admittance of non-sister-church members to the Lord's Table at Cornerstone, reference is made to Article 61 of the Church Order, which reads as follows:

The consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life.

Members of sister churches shall be admitted on the ground of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct.

We understand the first paragraph to be the general policy with regard to members of our local congregation. The consistory would have examined these members upon public profession of faith, and by means of regular elder visits could determine that they continue to lead a godly life. The second paragraph indicates that if you are a

member of a sister church, then there is a different rule or expectation. Such members are admitted to the table "on the ground of a good attestation..." They are not examined, but are accepted on the basis of our respect amongst one another as sister churches.

Let me quote excerpts from an informative article written by Rev. George Van Popta in 1993. The full article is available at http://spindleworks.com/library/vanpopta/LS_attend.htm.

As churches we have agreed upon two things by way of this article. First, baptized members of the congregation or new members are admitted to the table only upon having made a public profession of the Reformed faith and who show a godly walk of life. Second, members of sister churches are admitted by way of a good attestation from their consistory about their doctrine and conduct. We simply admit them on the basis of that testimony, no questions asked, no interview held. We honour the word of the elders of the sister church.

There are no difficulties here. As churches we have agreed how we, in our local churches, will open the table to non-communicant or new members of the congregation, and to communicant members of sister-churches.

The questions arise when we consider the admission of a guest from a non-sister-church. Understandably, the Church Order does not address this. The Church Order is a series of agreements between sister-churches living in a federation. We do not expect the Church Order to say things about members from other churches nor about other church groups.

However, this does not automatically exclude guests from non - sister - churches. The freedom exists within the CanRC to admit such guests according to local arrangement. They can be admitted as long as a basic principle is guarded.

This basic principle is that the elders as representatives of Jesus Christ who have been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 16:17-19), as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1; cf. art. 30, 31 B.C.) must be the ones who exercise final judgment on who shall be admitted to the Lord's supper. The elders are obliged to guard the sanctity of the table (Form for the Ordination of Elders). As long as this basic principle is upheld it would seem good to admit a guest under the following conditions:

- 1. He makes request to the consistory at the earliest possible opportunity, preferably some time during the week preceding communion, so that the consistory or a delegation of it may be able properly to investigate the faith and conduct of the petitioner. This condition stresses the responsibility of the elders to exercise final judgment in opening and closing the table and enables them to do this task.*
- 2. The consistory is satisfied that the petitioner meets the criteria explained in the three parts of self-examination. This condition will satisfy what our confessions in Lord's days 28-30 and article 35 of the Belgic Confession as well as the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper teach about partaking in a worthy manner.*

This is the approach that Reformed churches have always taken in the matter of admitting guests from other church federations to the table. To verify this, let the reader consult H. Bouwman, Gereformeerde Kerkrecht, vol. 2 (Kampen: Kok, 1934) pp 390-392; F.L. Rutgers, Kerkelijke Advies, vol. 2 (Kampen: Kok, 1922) p. 156f (advice # 126), pp 159-166 (advice # 130).

Other Reformed scholars echo the same sentiments.

In his Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordening (Brief Explanation or Commentary of the Church Order) (Kampen: Kok, 1923, pp.270ff.) J. Jansen addresses the question, "*May attestations be accepted from churches that do not belong to the church federation, e.g., from Lutheran, Baptist, independent Reformed churches, Hervormde Kerk?*" He answers that: (a) ordinarily only attestations are received from churches within the federation; (b) attestations from churches which are not Reformed should not be accepted and; (c) attestations from Reformed churches unaffiliated with the federation should not necessarily be accepted, but may indicate "*that such persons only need to be examined if they agree with the Reformed confession.*"

Similarly, W.W.J. Van Oene in With Common Consent (Winnipeg: Premier, 1980) argues that an attestation issued by a non-sister church is "*not sufficient*" by itself to grant one permission to partake of the Lord's supper. Van Oene goes on to argue, "*We consider it quite well possible and certainly permissible that the consistory appoints a few brothers to examine the man and to see whether there is any impediment to his being permitted to partake of the holy Supper.*" To admit such guests after a satisfactory interview "*does not violate the provision made in Art.61*" (p.280).

Similarly, Clarence Bouwman in Spiritual Order for the Church (Winnipeg: Premier, 2000) argues that anyone who is not a member of the local church or one of its sister churches cannot attend the table of the Lord unless he has been "*examined by the consistory*" (p.151). Likewise, in Decently and in Good Order (The Reformed Guardian, No.21) G. Van Rongen argues in relation to those from "*another church that is not one of our sister-churches*" that the consistory shall "*investigate whether they 'confess that the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation'*" (p.77).

There is similar advice given by F. Rutgers in Kerkelijk Adviezen (Kampen: Kok, 1922; pp.159-163).

Cornerstone Consistory has formulated specific procedures for members of NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches) and ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches) because, although they are not formally "sister churches," the Canadian Reformed churches are members of both of these bodies, recognizing their members as faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you for expressing your concerns and for your conviction that matters must be attended to in good order in our church. We hope that this clarifies our decisions and we welcome any further comments or questions.

On behalf of the Cornerstone Consistory,

Ben Harsevoort
Vice-Chair

CORNERSTONE

Canadian Reformed Church



P.O. Box 99025 Heritage Green Postal Outlet • Stoney Creek • Ontario • L8J 1P0 • clerk@cornerstonecanrc.org

Visitor's Declaration¹

for participation in the Lord's Supper at the
Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church

Since you are our guest and not a communicant member of this congregation, you are not under the supervision of the elders of this church. It is, however, our duty to supervise the Lord's table lest anyone partake of the body and blood of Christ in an unworthy manner and thereby incur God's covenant anger (see 1 Cor.11:33ff). Because you have requested admission to our celebration of the Lord's Supper (and are a member of a non-sister church belonging to NAPARC or the ICRC), we ask you in the name of the Lord, humbly and sincerely, to declare the following before you partake:

1. *I am displeased with myself because of my sin (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 81).*
2. *I trust that my sins are forgiven and that my remaining weaknesses are covered by the suffering and death of Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 81).*
3. *I desire more and more to strengthen my faith and amend my life (Heidelberg Catechism Answer 81).*
4. *I live a godly life (Church Order, Article 61).*
5. *I have made a public profession of the Reformed faith and believe all that is promised in the gospel which the articles of the Apostles Creed teach us in a summary (Church Order, Article 61; Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 22).*
6. *I am a member of a church belonging to NAPARC or the ICRC.*
7. *I understand that by participating in the Lord's Supper here I am expressing unity with the Cornerstone congregation through the crucified body and shed blood of Christ (1 Cor.11).*

Date

Your signature

Your name(s)

Your signature

¹ The signing of this declaration must be accompanied by the presentation of an attestation (or an acceptable equivalent) from the church of which the signatory is a member.

Appendix D

CHILDREN OF THE COVENANT

We must see that both we and our children are depraved. The Dutch Reformed Form for the Administration of Baptism says, "We with our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, insomuch that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God except we are born again." As a washing with water, baptism teaches us that we are unclean, and as the ordinance of Christ, baptism admonishes us to humble ourselves before God and seek our purification and salvation in Him alone, apart from ourselves and our own efforts.⁴

All this means that we are sinners trying to rear sinners. The sinless God entrusts sinful children to sinful parents. It is amazing that He would entrust us with such an assignment.

However, the Word of God gives us clear guidelines for the upbringing of our children and provides us with the necessary element of hope. God promises to bless and assist us in bringing up our children in the fear of the Lord, to the honor of His holy name (Ps. 128). Because our children are born to believing parents who are confessing members of the visible church, they are holy (i.e., set apart), although depraved by nature. Genesis 17 tells us that children of believers in the Old Testament were set apart by circumcision. We believe that under the New Testament, our children are set apart by baptism; therefore, the same promises made to children in the old covenant belong to our children in the new covenant: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

What exactly does God promise to us and to our children? How does *He* view our children today, under the gospel?

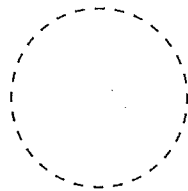
The Promise of the Covenant

In 1 Corinthians 7:14 we read, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." In a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, the unbelieving partner is sanctified by the faith of the believing partner, and the children of such a marriage are not unclean but

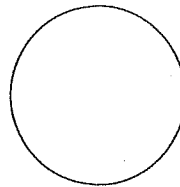
PARENTING BY GOD'S PROMISES

holy. The same is true, of course, of the children of a marriage in which both husband and wife are believers.

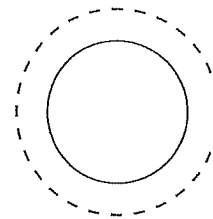
What do these words *sanctified* and *holy* mean with respect to the children of believers? In the course of church history, there have been different answers. Let me present three of them, which represent different views of the covenant of grace.



Internal and Saving



External,
not Covenantal



External
and Covenantal

1. Internal and saving. First, there is the view that the holiness of our children is *internal and saving*. In other words, this view holds that when children are born, we may assume that they will be saved, and it is God's normal way to save them in infancy. The internal and saving holiness view teaches that most covenant children are born in a regenerate state, or are regenerated in infancy, because they are children of the covenant. Those who espouse this view say these baptized children do not need to be born again because they already are; hence, they no doubt will come to faith in due time, if piously and religiously educated—unless they later reject the covenant and abandon the church.

Picture this view like a circle drawn with a dotted line. The circle represents both the covenant and salvation. Children born to believers are inside the circle from the womb. They are in the covenant, in the church, and assumed to be saved, and baptism is regarded as a sign and seal of their salvation.

This view, or similar versions of it, was held by Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), who was widely regarded as the most advanced theological leader of the Dutch Further Reformation—a position similar to John Owen, who was regarded as the theological prince of the Puritans, which was the English

CHILDREN OF THE COVENANT

parallel to the Dutch movement. Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), the famous Dutch Reformed theologian who became prime minister in a coalition government (1901–1905), was influenced by Voetius in developing his own view, known as “presumptive regeneration,” that is, that believing parents may presume their children are already regenerate or will become so as they grow up within the nurturing, covenant pale of the church. A similar view was set forth in the “Conclusions of Utrecht” by the synod of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (GKN) in 1905 and confirmed by the Christian Reformed Church in North America in 1908.⁵

The fruits of this view can be quite tragic. Children are not taught that they must be born again. Instead, they are treated as part of the family of God from the beginning. As a result, many grow up as nominal members of the church, thinking they are saved. They believe Reformed church doctrines and perform their duties as church members, but often appear to be strangers to the experiential inner life of grace. Knowing God personally is sometimes replaced with the “kingdom activities” of family, church, school, and community life. So much stress is laid on the privilege of inclusion in the covenant that it obviates the need for regeneration, true conversion, or any other part of personal Christian experience. As William Young points out, “Doctrinal knowledge and ethical conduct according to the Word of God are [then] sufficient for the Christian life without any specific religious experience of conviction of sin and conversion, or any need for self-examination as to the possession of distinguishing marks of saving grace.”⁶

This raises serious questions about the perseverance of the saints. Some baptized young people, presumed to be regenerated, are religiously educated and make professions of faith, but end up leaving the church and falling away. They become covenant-breakers. Therefore, the circle must be drawn with a dotted line, not a solid line, because some slip out of the circle and are lost.

2. *External, not covenantal.* Second, some view the holiness of our children as *external and not covenantal*. In other words, this view holds that Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:14 was not saying children of believers have an internal holiness but only an external sanctity or legitimacy as the offspring and

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heirs of their parents. In this view, the holiness of the children of believers has no connection with the covenant of grace. This view sees the covenant as a solid circle of salvation. The children of the church are born outside the circle and are excluded from the covenant until they are born again and profess faith in Christ.

Historically, this has been the Baptist view. They draw their understanding of baptism not from the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17) but almost exclusively from the New Testament. They believe that while children were included in the Old Testament covenant, they are excluded from the New Testament covenant. My challenge to them is to show where the New Testament reveals such a change. The earliest churches of the New Testament included the children of believing parents in the fellowship in their assemblies, after the pattern of the church of the Old Testament (Eph. 6:1-4). Whole families were received into the church by baptism (Acts 16:31-33), as they had been formerly by circumcision (Gen. 17:23-27). It is difficult to believe that in the fullness of the gospel era, children of the New Testament church would have less place in the covenant than the children of Old Testament Israel.

One might think that this second view would tend to lead parents to regard their children as heathens, cut off from God and excluded from His church. The good news is that many Baptists, despite their weak view of the covenant, raise their children as if they were covenant children. In fact, sometimes they do a better job than those in Reformed churches. They bring their children to church, pray for and with them, talk to them about their souls, teach them the doctrines of grace, and train them well, offering them all the advantages of covenant nurture (except, of course, for the sacrament of baptism, which the Reformers taught is one of the primary means of grace). I admire the way many Reformed Baptists rear their children, even though I disagree with them at this point in their theology. I believe that they underestimate the power and scope of the covenant.

3. External and covenantal. The third view, the view I believe to be most biblical, is that our children have a holiness that is *external and covenantal*. Paul is not saying that all children of believers have an internal,

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personal holiness. He is asserting that they are set apart from the world around them, and therefore they are included in the community of the covenant. As the biological offspring of believers, they have a physical and external relationship to the covenant from birth. God has extended His promises to them as well as to their parents, but these promises must be embraced with believing hearts. Covenant children cannot experience the truth and power of these promises so long as they are unregenerate, unbelieving, and impenitent.

This external and covenantal view maintains a balance between the first two views, thereby neither overestimating nor underestimating the covenant. Picture two circles, one inside the other. The inner circle is solid and represents salvation, the inner essence of the covenant. The outer circle is drawn with a dotted line and represents the covenant in an external way, as a visible community in the world. Our children are born into the outer circle but move into the inner circle only when they are born again. The outer circle is dotted because some do fall away. But the inner circle is solid because the truly saved persevere with Christ to the end. This accounts for the fact that some biblical texts describe the covenant as breakable (Ezek. 17:15–16; Zech. 11:10), and other passages present it as unbreakable (Ps. 89:34; Jer. 33:20–21).

This third view is held by many Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The Heidelberg Catechism declares that our children are “included in the covenant and church of God” (LD 27, Q. 74); and yet, like all fallen men, they are “wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all wickedness” unless they are regenerated by the Spirit of God (LD 3, Q. 8). To be saved by Christ, they must be “ingrafted into Him and receive all His benefits, by a true faith,” worked by the Holy Ghost in their hearts by the gospel (LD 7, Q. 20, 21). According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, “the visible church consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children” (25.2). Therefore, “not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized” (28.4). Even so, the Westminster Shorter Catechism declares that “the sacraments become effectual

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means of salvation . . . only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them" (Q. 91).

What are the practical implications of this external and covenantal view of the sanctity or holiness of our children?

The Practical Implications of the Covenant

It is one thing for a parent to believe the right things and another to put them into practice.⁷ Some parents affirm the right doctrines but do not properly evangelize their children. They relegate that responsibility to church and school. Instead of putting the entire load on the church and school, we must accept responsibility for bringing up our children in the faith. We must engage in the thoughtful teaching and spiritual training of our children in our daily lives so they do not get the impression that true religion is something taught or practiced only at church for a few hours each week.

Another extreme is evidenced by parents who so badly want to see their children saved that they look for a shortcut to that end, so they can declare their work to be done. They lead their children through a few simple forms of prayer, obtain their "commitment," and assure them of their salvation without seeing its biblical fruits for a period of time, instead of offering them continued thoughtful, spiritual guidance toward it as a goal in life. It is so easy to fall into easy believism and premature professions of faith with children. These parents mean well, but this view can be profoundly damaging.

Other parents ignore the spiritual needs of their children altogether. Much to their shame, they even sidestep times when their children ask questions that offer precious opportunities to unfold spiritual truths. They don't say a thing. It is tragic to be everything else to one's child but not a guide in the way that leads to eternal life.

Parents also misrepresent the Lord when they do not expect Him to convert their children. They fall into the error of presumptive *un*regeneration, as if God does not normally convert the children of His people. Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813–1843) said: "Let us pray for the children. Let us labour for the children. Let us hope for the children."⁸ We must not stifle our children's

Editorial Comment

As our readers will know there has been some interaction recently in this magazine between the Rev. Dr. Bill DeJong and Prof. Dr. Jason Van Vliet. After some discussion both brothers were of the opinion that some more in-depth attention should be given to the matter. As a result, they agreed to an article exchange with the topics being: "Pulpit and Table: Promoting Holiness and Hospitality" and "Pulpit and Table: The Limits of Exclusion and Embrace." Here follows the first instalment.

The Editor

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The Door to the Pulpit

Jealousy for the pulpit is no vice. The pulpit, after all, is the space where the Word of God is opened and where the Son of God is preached, and if the Word of God is misunderstood and misapplied and if the Son of God is misrepresented, the mission of the church is compromised and, worse, the name of Christ is publicly tarnished. The church ought to exercise no charity to those who peddle a false gospel.

In the tradition of the Canadian Reformed churches, godly jealousy for the pulpit is apparent in the strictures on access to the pulpit. No one can obtain a license to preach in the federation of churches apart from classical permission, and no one can be ordained to ministry without undergoing a series of intensive classical examinations. If the bar is set high for those who wish to practice law or medicine, why should it not be set high for those desirous of being officially ordained ambassadors for Christ?

An exceptional story

Many readers of *Clarion* know that Blessings Christian Church (hereafter, BCC), where I serve as a pastor, permitted the retiring pastor of the Stanley Avenue Baptist church (hereafter, SABC) to preach in one of its services. This decision has been misinterpreted by some to imply that BCC permits Baptists to preach from its pulpit. BCC has made no such decision, and therefore I'm happy to use this space not simply to reaffirm that point, but to retell the wonderful story.

In its quest to locate a suitable venue for worship, BCC entered into a dialogue with SABC about the prospect of renting its beautiful facilities. That dialogue progressed so well that SABC, in a display of exceptional hospitality and generosity, offered its building to BCC for its worship services and expressed a desire and intent to join BCC for worship. This is precisely what happened and, in one Sunday, our gathering for Sunday morning worship grew considerably by the addition of delightful, mostly elderly Baptist saints.

One reason the relationship between the two churches formed as well as it did is because of the warm and thick collegiality between the retiring pastor of SABC and the pastors of BCC. Our numerous dialogues not only generated mutual respect, but revealed a common commitment to the gospel, to the mission of the church, and to the so-called "doctrines of grace."

Given the fact that the SABC pastor was soon to retire and relocate elsewhere and that his congregation would no longer have opportunity to hear him preach again, BCC decided to open the door to the pulpit and invite him to preach to the congregation he loved and had served for years and to us, his newfound brothers and sisters in Christ. Before reaching this decision we at BCC studied the Church Order carefully and discovered, as many others have now, that there is nothing in the church order preventing a church

from granting a local (rather than federational) license to preach. We are thankful we made that decision and we were amply blessed by the preaching of SABC's now retired pastor!

Learning to love the Baptists

Will BCC invite a Baptist, godly in life and Reformed in doctrine, to preach again? There are presently no plans, but if the opportunity arises, I hope we will give it serious consideration. This might puzzle the reader. Aren't the Anabaptists guilty of heresy for denying the incarnation (BC, Art 18), erroneous for insisting on rebaptizing those baptized as infants (BC, Art 34), and condemnable for their seditious rejection of human government (BC, Art 36)?

Here we must follow the sage advice of the Heidelberg Catechism "in not condemning or joining in condemning anyone rashly and unheard" (LD 43, Q/A 112). The Anabaptists today (often compliant citizens and eager adherents of the doctrine of the incarnation) are unlike the Anabaptists then and the Baptists are significantly unlike both. If one studies the history of Baptist churches, one discovers that they were often founded not by those in the Anabaptistic tradition but by disenfranchised Presbyterians, for instance, or by Anglicans.

By the grace of God, there is today an entire demographic of Christian believers for which there is no exact parallel at the time of the Reformation – namely, gospel-oriented, faithful Baptists who agree with us on just about every single doctrinal issue except infant baptism (and the hermeneutics infant baptism implies). This claim, once suspect, is now so widely embraced in the Canadian Reformed churches today that for many it sounds platitudinous. It is not insignificant that a considerable percentage of textbooks used and recommended at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary are authored by Baptists (e.g., Norman Geisler, Andreas Köstenberger, Thomas Schreiner, etc.). Moreover, it is meaningful that so many members in Canadian Reformed churches are fed and encouraged by sound Baptist pastors whose teaching and preaching are sought and valued. Whereas Canadian Reformed folk in the past would limit their diet to Klaas Schilder, Benne Holwerda, and then Jelle Faber and Clarence Stam, many today are being fed by Alistair Begg, John MacArthur, John Piper, and Matt Chandler.

Is something being lost?

Some will attribute this trend, i.e., the reception of (Reformed) Baptist preachers into our hearts and homes, to the demise of doctrinal commitment within the Reformed churches. Critics will allege that the doctrine of infant bap-

tism, once prized as a non-negotiable doctrine, is now relegated to the periphery, so much so that he who denies it is no longer denied by us.

But is there another way of seeing this? What really is being lost? The fact that Baptist preachers have elicited interest from those catechized in Reformed churches underscores a remarkable movement among many such preachers to an increasingly Reformed worldview. What is being lost is what is being shed by these Baptist preachers – namely, the Arminianism, the individualism, the culture-denying pietism, the Zwinglian view of sacraments, and the moralistic preaching that once characterized many Baptist churches.

What is being gained by these beloved Baptist preachers is a Reformed hermeneutic in which continuity between old and new covenant is increasingly affirmed and in which Christ is seen and preached, even from Old Testament narratives. What is being gained by these Baptist preachers is a Reformed worldview in which the world is being embraced not simply as the damned realm from which sinners must be rescued, but as God's creation which he intends to renovate and as an orbit in which political involvement and cultural participation are encouraged.

Given the popularity of these (Reformed) Baptist preachers, what is being lost among us? What is being lost is the unwarranted suspicion towards Christians that defies the trust that ought to be embedded in sincere Christian love (1 Cor 13:7) and the sectarianism with which Reformed Christians have sometimes misjudged others and secluded themselves. What is being lost is the sometimes abstract and purely doctrinal view of the Christian life, and the occasional devaluing of personal conversion and a personal relationship with Christ.

But what about infant baptism?

Growing in respect for, and admiration of, godly and sound Baptists is one thing, but isn't infant baptism still a distinguishing mark of the Reformed church? My roommate for four years was a Baptist (now a faithful Baptist pastor in Cambridge, ON) and I've read a fair amount of literature by Baptists. As much as I love the Baptists and have learned from them, I remain stubbornly convinced of infant baptism. Moreover, my conviction about infant baptism over the years has grown, not shrunk.

Is it possible, however, to fraternize and collaborate with Christians with whom we disagree about something substantial? I'm grateful John Calvin did not close the door on Lutherans for their distorted view of the sacraments. I'm grateful Klaas Schilder did not close the door on the

Kuyperians for their view of presumptive regeneration. For that matter, I'm glad that the apostle Paul did not close the door on Peter for his distorted view of table fellowship (see Gal 2:11ff.). "The most excellent teachers of the Church," the Second Helvetic Confession wisely teaches, "have differed among themselves about important matters without meanwhile the Church ceasing to be the Church because of these contentions. For thus it pleases God to use the dissensions that arise in the Church to the glory of his name, to illustrate the truth, and in order that those who are in the right might be manifest" (Ch 17).

Showing Baptist preachers the door

Jealousy for the pulpit is no vice. A sectarian refusal to recognize faithful believers as brothers and sisters in Christ, however, is. I think we in our federation should consider, much like our brothers and sisters in the Free Reformed and United Reformed churches have, whether there's a place for having sound and godly (Reformed) Baptists preach on occasion. Personally, I favour showing (Reformed) Baptists the door, and saying, "Here, let me open that for you. I'm eager to hear you preach the gospel to me."



Response to Dr. Bill De Jong

I express my appreciation that Dr. De Jong clearly explains his view on this topic. Allow me to respond briefly.

Anabaptists and Baptists

There are historical and doctrinal differences between European Anabaptists of the sixteenth century and North American Baptists in the twentieth century. For example, some, but not all, Anabaptists denied the incarnation (BC, Art 18). Most, if not all, Baptists today will fervently defend the incarnation.

But all of this does not change the main issue we're discussing. Both Anabaptists and Baptists "condemn the baptism of the little children of believers" (BC, Art 34). In our Belgic Confession we agree that this is a doctrinal "error." And office bearers in the Canadian Reformed churches have solemnly subscribed to "oppose, refute and help prevent such errors" (Form of Subscription).

Other topics, such as what can we learn from Baptists, are worthy of discussion, but we need to focus on the main issue.

Books, speeches, and the pulpit

The thrust of Dr. De Jong's argument seems to be this: if we can profit from books and conference speeches by Baptist preachers, why can't we have such a man on our pulpit, at least occasionally, and be edified in that way also? The answer lies in the opening paragraphs of his article. In the pulpit a man stands not as an author and not merely as a public speaker, but as an officially ordained *ambassador* of God. Therefore, if this man's doctrinal views deviate from the Word of this God in such a serious way that we,

as churches, feel compelled to speak up publicly in our confession and call his views an "error," then out of respect for the God of all truth, we say, "You are most welcome to listen from the pew but not to preach from the pulpit."

URCNA & FRCNA

Dr. De Jong reports that, on occasion, Baptist preachers have preached on URC and FRC pulpits. He then suggests, if they can do it, why can't the CanRC? The URC church order speaks of "occasional pulpit exchanges" (Art 34). Similarly, the FRC church order refers to "visiting ministers" on a "one-time basis" (Art 5.J.4). Strikingly, though, in these articles their respective church orders speak about "faithful allegiance" or "fully subscribing" to the "Three Forms of Unity" for this to take place. *That* is the point: these churches agree to use the *same confessional standard* for an occasional preacher as they would for their own regular preachers.

Dr. De Jong concludes by saying he personally favours showing (Reformed) Baptist preachers the door to the pulpit and saying, "Here, let me open that for you." I respectfully submit that as local consistories we are obliged to use a *consistent confessional standard* for all preachers in our pulpits. If a man cannot, in good conscience, agree to the biblical truths we confess together in Lord's Day 27 and Belgic Confession Article 34, then we must say, "Please understand that we do this out of love for our Lord and for you, but we cannot open the door of the pulpit for you. Instead, if you would like, we would certainly be willing to help you understand how integral and beautiful household baptism is within God's sovereignly gracious work of redemption."

Jason Van Vliet 



Promoting Holiness and Hospitality: The Pulpit

Back in the November 2, 2018 issue of *Clarion*, Dr. Bill De Jong and I exchanged questions and comments about the fact that the Blessings congregation in Hamilton, of which he is a co-pastor, opened their pulpit to a Baptist minister. Dr. De Jong voiced his concern that I may be failing to distinguish sufficiently between error and heresy. In my understanding he was saying that if this particular minister held to a *heresy*, he would not have been admitted to Blessings' pulpit; however, since he held to an *error*, and also understood that he should not speak about this error from the pulpit, it was acceptable for the consistory to welcome him to the pulpit. This topic certainly seems worthy of further discussion.

Defining the issue

So, what exactly are we speaking about? Theologians do sometimes distinguish between points of doctrine that are closer to the core of our faith and those that are not so central. Different words are used to describe this distinction: essential and non-essential articles of faith, fundamental and non-fundamental articles, or even first-order and second-order doctrines. It is commonly said that the essential articles of faith refer to truths such as our Triune God, the incarnation, and salvation by grace alone, while non-essential articles include doctrines such as the sacraments or the last things, also called eschatology. To deny a fundamental article of the faith is heresy; to reject a non-fundamental one is error.

Theologians may speak like this, but how do Scripture and our confessions refer to heresy and error? How should we deal with heresy and error, especially regarding admission to the pulpit? And how do we combine our calling, as church, to uphold the entire truth of Scripture and to be a welcoming community of believers?

Scripture

Error is a common word in Scripture. It can refer to moral error (Rom 1:27), ceremonial error (2 Sam 6:7), or doctrinal error (1 John 4:6). Closely related to this, the Holy Spirit also speaks about teachers, prophets, and apostles who promoted false doctrines (e.g., Matt 7:15; 2 Cor 11:13; 2 Pet 2:1). In other words, *error* is a broad category that covers a lot of different falsehoods and transgressions.

Yet what makes an error so wrong? It's not just that someone makes a theological mistake, like getting a problem wrong on a math test. No, there is something more at stake: either in whole or part, the God of all truth is being misrepresented by the one committing the error. *That* is what makes it serious. Error stands opposed not only to the truth but also to the Spirit of God, who reveals that truth (1 John 4:1-6).

The word *heresy* is far less common in the Bible. In fact, in our English translations we only find it in one place, 2 Peter 2:1, where we read about false teachers who secretly bring in "destructive heresies." It refers to a particular group of people who hold to a distinctive set of teachings that are not in agreement with God's Word.

Simply put, Scripture does not speak of two clear categories: heresies and errors. Moreover, we certainly do not find any lists suggesting which falsehoods belong in which category. Neither do we find an indication that *heresy*, which is only used once, is a more serious kind of error. So, in certain contexts theologians may find it helpful to use a heresy-error distinction, but let's be clear that such a distinction is not explicitly found in, nor required by, God's own Word.

Confessions

Looking through our Three Forms of Unity we find that *heresy* is used to describe those who deny the Trinity, like

Marcion (BC, Art 9), the incarnation, like some Anabaptists (BC, Art 18), and original sin, like Pelagius (CD, III/IV 10).

Next, *errors* include those who deny the creation of angels and demons, like the Sadducees and Manichees (BC, Art 12), the providence of God, like Epicureans (BC, Art 13), infant baptism, like the Anabaptists (BC, Art 34), unconditional election, insuperable grace, and perseverance of the saints, like the Arminians (CD, Rejection of Errors), and original sin, like Pelagius (CD, II, RE 3).

We do well to note that our confessions label Pelagianism as both a heresy and an error. At a minimum, then, we should not be too rigid about placing wrong teachings in one category or another. Furthermore, while *heresy* is used to describe false teachings that are at the core of our faith, such as the Trinity and the incarnation, so does the word *error*. Denying that God upholds and governs all things, like Epicureans did in centuries past and open theists do today, is definitely not a minor theological blunder. It strikes at the very heart of who our God is. All this to say that by using the word *error*, our confessions are not suggesting that the wrong teaching is, by definition, some kind of lesser fault.

Dealing with heresy and error

Still, when we are speaking to people it can be helpful to distinguish between *heresy* and *error*, as some theologians do. Obviously, we are going to have a different kind of conversation with a Jehovah's Witness, who denies the divinity of our Saviour, than we will with a Reformed Baptist, who cherishes the sovereignty of God's grace.

Yet whatever differences filter into our conversations, every communicant member in our churches has still made exactly the same vow to reject "*all heresies and errors conflicting with God's Word*" (Form for Public Profession of Faith; emphasis mine).

In addition, office bearers have taken an additional vow to "*reject all errors conflicting with the doctrine expressed in these confessions [referring to the Three Forms of Unity] and . . . to oppose, refute and help prevent such errors*" (Form for Subscription; emphasis mine). Again, even though the Belgic Confession labels believers-only baptism as an *error*, not a heresy, that does not change the bottom line that we have vowed before our God – and office bearers even doubly so – to reject this error. And do we really reject this error by opening our pulpit to someone who is publicly known to hold such an error? No, that would be a contradiction.

Differing weights and measures

However, what if a guest preacher, who is Baptist, fully understands that, while he is on a Reformed pulpit, he will not say anything to undermine the teaching of infant baptism? Wouldn't that be sufficient, especially since he's only a guest?

At first glance we might be inclined to agree with that line of thinking. After all, such a preacher may well deliver a great, scripturally-sound, gospel-centred sermon, and everyone goes home very edified. However, there are some verses in the Bible that compel us to give this a sober, second thought. In Proverbs 20:10 the Holy Spirit reminds us, "Unequal weights and unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord" (see also 16:11; 20:23).

In our federation of churches, whenever we admit a man to the pulpit we specifically ask him whether he agrees, from the heart, with "the whole doctrine" contained in our confessions, the Three Forms of Unity, as a faithful summary of God's Word. Time and again, we use this standard, or measure, in our local congregations and our broader assemblies (CO, Art 26). Following due process, if the preacher agrees from the heart, the pulpit is open; if he does not, the pulpit is not open.

Now, if we start using a different measure for guest preachers, we might suppose that any negative consequences will be minor because they are just guests, preaching a time or two, and not even preaching about the errors in question. However, *coram Deo* outweighs consequences. Before God we must do our utmost to be consistent in the measurers we use, above all for the pulpit that proclaims his holy Word.

A welcoming community

Still, isn't there another side to all of this? We can be so careful to uphold the doctrinal purity of our pulpit, but what about extending a hand of Christian love, warmth, and fellowship, also to those who may not have the correct view on baptism but who nevertheless love the Lord and strive with all their heart and soul to serve him according to his Word?

Yes, hospitality is important. In fact, it is a divine command (Rom 12:13; 1 Pet 4:9) and a particular responsibility of office bearers (1 Tim 3:2). However, two things are important here. First of all, although hospitality can take on many different forms, the key way to show hospitality is by opening the front door of your home to someone, not

the “door” to your pulpit. The pulpit is the place where the primary key of the kingdom is administered, not the place where hospitality is exercised.

Secondly, in Scripture being hospitable means showing friendship or love to a stranger. If someone holds to a teaching that contradicts God’s Word, true love compels us to work kindly and sincerely with that person to correct his misunderstanding, not to usher him up to the pulpit while he still holds to that error. True hospitality runs deep.

Summing up, yes, our churches must be welcoming, but the Lord has also given us the high calling to be “a pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). In this respect, perhaps the voice of John Calvin, a man who knew that “not all articles of doctrine are of the same sort” (*Institutes* 4.1.12), can guide us. He did not hesitate to declare that a denial of infant baptism is an “assault” on “the fortress of our faith” (4.16.22). May the Holy Spirit grant us all the same clarity and courage.



Response to Dr. Jason Van Vliet

I’m grateful for Dr. Van Vliet’s willingness to engage me in this important discussion and for the diplomacy with which he does so. In this short rejoinder, I would like to respond to the points Dr. Van Vliet raises.

When it comes to terms such as “error” and “heresy,” first of all, I think we’re best helped by thinking of levels of discourse and then specifically biblical, confessional, and theological levels. Terms need not mean the same thing at each level and, in fact, there are many terms that mean something different at each level (e.g., regeneration).

When I in a previous exchange deployed the distinction between “heresy” and “error” I was thinking of these terms on the theological level. It is simply a fact, and I think Dr. Van Vliet grants this point, that a distinction must be made between wrong doctrine that *does not* jeopardize the authenticity of one’s Christian profession and wrong doctrine that *does*. I think it is significant that the rejection of infant baptism *per se* belongs to the former category.

Dr. Van Vliet argues, secondly, that even if one were to concede that the rejection of infant baptism is in a category distinct from the rejection of divine sovereignty, church members have vowed to reject “all heresies and errors” as have office-bearers who have also promised to “oppose, refute, and help prevent such errors.” For Dr. Van Vliet this implies that pulpit hospitality should not be shown to Baptist preachers.

I’m not convinced by the logic. I fail to see why “opposing, refuting, and helping prevent such errors” requires

excluding godly and faithful (Reformed) Baptist preachers from Reformed pulpits. In fact, I think that if one were fully to embrace Dr. Van Vliet’s logic, office-bearers ought to chastise members who read Baptist literature, listen to Baptist preachers, attend Ligonier and Banner of Truth conferences (which nearly always feature Baptist preachers), etc. Office-bearers should chastise the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary professors for recommending Baptist books.

For years the late Dr. R.C. Sproul invited Baptists preachers to speak at the Ligonier conferences he organized. He even invited a Baptist preacher (John MacArthur) to speak at his funeral. Must we conclude from these invitations that Dr. Sproul was negligent in opposing, refuting, and helping prevent the error of the rejection of infant baptism? The more reasonable conclusion is that Dr. Sproul was so convinced of infant baptism, he wasn’t threatened by Baptist preachers and that he was so fond of those godly and faithful Baptist colleagues that he wasn’t afraid to provide them with a platform to speak to those seeking instruction in Reformed theology.

Perhaps local consistories are, as we claim in our church polity, sufficiently astute theologically to supervise the “doctrine and conduct” of the pastors (CO, Art 22) and in this vein able to make prudent judgements about pulpit access for their respective congregations.

Bill De Jong 



Promoting Holiness and Hospitality: The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a high point in the life of a congregation. We celebrate a holy feast, hosted by our Saviour and providing much-needed nourishment for our souls. What could be better?

Sadly, controversy rather than joy sometimes permeates our discussions about this sacrament. Especially in connection with guests at the Lord's table, various questions arise. Are we required to use the time-honoured convention of travel attestations or is there room to admit guests after an interview by elders? Is there any place for self-attestation? If you are hoping to find definitive answers to all these questions in this article, I am afraid I will disappoint you.

This article has a specific focus. In the November 2, 2018 issue of *Clarion*, I asked why the Blessings consistory admitted a Baptist to their pulpit when we agree in Article 61 of our Church Order that to be admitted to the Lord's Supper someone must publicly profess "the Reformed faith." My question, then, was this: if we've agreed not to admit a Baptist to the Lord's table, how can we open the pulpit to a Baptist?

In his response, Dr. DeJong implied that my understanding of Article 61 may be questionable. Furthermore, he sensed that I had failed "to grapple with the apostle Paul's argument in Galatians 2 that to establish a bar of admission higher than faith in Christ is to deny the doctrine of justification by faith." Our goal is to take a closer look at these two matters.

Galatians 2

For now, my comments on Galatians 2 will be brief since I am not sure how Dr. DeJong wants to connect this chapter to the question at hand. So, I'll first listen to him and save further interaction for my response.

Allow me, though, to explain why I do not readily see the relevance of this passage to the matter we're discussing. In this chapter the apostle Paul admonishes his fellow

apostle, Peter, who was caving into pressure from "the circumcision party" and shrinking back from "eating with the Gentiles" (v. 12). Here *eating* could simply refer to regular, household meals (Luke 15:2), but it could also include the Lord's Supper (as 1 Cor 5:11 implies).

If the Lord's Supper is in view, what exactly is happening? Peter is withholding *himself* for the wrong reason. Of all people, Peter should be fully convinced that in the new covenant Jews and Gentiles can eat together in regular meals and at the Lord's table. After all, the Lord gave *Peter* a vision, repeated three times (Acts 10:10-12, 16), that clearly demonstrates that the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, including food laws and circumcision, had been fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, they were no longer in use (BC, Art 25).

Obviously, then, Peter should not withhold himself from eating with Gentiles. But how does this apply to the question of whether Baptists should be admitted to the Lord's table in a Reformed congregation? Peter is withholding *himself*; according to Article 61, the *consistory* should not admit someone who does not profess the Reformed faith. Those are two different things.

Also, the point is really that Peter and his fellow Gentile believers held to *the same belief*, even though Peter was *not acting* according to his better, God-given knowledge about Old Testament food laws. But how does this apply to the admission of Baptists to the Lord's Supper? That's a different question: is it proper before God for two parties, who are diametrically opposed on a major point of doctrine, to sit together at the Lord's table and celebrate unity?

Having said this, let me refrain from further comment until I've first heard Dr. De Jong's point of view.

1 Corinthians 11

One passage that speaks clearly about celebrating the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner is 1 Corinthians 11. What was the problem? According to verse 18, it revolved

AVAILABLE FOR CALL

The Council of the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church wishes to inform the churches that

Rev. Ken Wieske

is available for call among the churches. Rev. Wieske can be reached at ken.wieske@gmail.com

CALLED

The Legana Free Reformed Church has extended a call to:

Rev. Calvin Vanderlinde

of the Barrhead Canadian Reformed Church, Barrhead, Alberta

CHURCH NEWS

around “divisions.” There were divisions between poor and rich because some went hungry and others became drunk (vv. 19-21). Back in chapter 1 we learn that this congregation was also plagued by “divisions” (v. 10) among groups who preferred one church leader over another. One cheered for Cephas while the other was loyal to Apollos.

The apostle Paul did not lightly shrug off these divisions over income levels or pastoral preferences. Instead, these differences had the potential to de-sacramentalize the Lord's Supper – “When you come together, it is *not* the Lord's supper that you eat” (11:20) – and turn it into a regular meal, albeit a rather unpleasant, fractured one.

If the apostle warned so strongly about socio-economic disparities and pastoral partialities at the Lord's table, what about disagreement on a major point of doctrine? Surely, it is more serious to disagree on whether the children of believers actually belong to God's covenant than it is to dispute about which pastor is preferable. Consequently, the way forward is *first* to resolve the doctrinal division and then one day, under the Lord's blessing, celebrate the sacrament together – something we should long for and work towards.

Article 61

The Canadian Reformed churches have agreed to a simple statement concerning admission to the Lord's Supper. “The consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper *only* those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life” (CO, Art 61; emphasis mine). This article is not a CanRC peculiarity. For example, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Free Reformed Churches of North America have similar articles in their church orders (Articles 57 and 61, respectively). In fact, the wording of our Church Order goes back to the decades before the Synod of Dort. It's been around for more than 400 years now!

Of course, we can discuss *the exact procedure* by which a consistory will determine whether someone has met the two basic criteria: public profession of the Reformed faith and a godly walk of life. On that point, one consistory may do it in a slightly different way than the next. However, concerning *the standard* used, we have made a clear agreement and we must all honour it. After all, the Holy Spirit teaches us that our “yes” should be “yes” (James 5:12).

Some Baptists are adopting parts of the Reformed faith, especially a greater emphasis on God's sovereignty and the

covenant, but it is not accurate to say that they publicly profess the Reformed faith. Baptism of covenant children is an integral part of the Reformed faith. Therefore, abiding by our church order, a consistory should not admit them to the Lord's Supper.

Hospitality

We are still left with a challenge, though. Sometimes guests arrive when the Lord's Supper is celebrated, and we run into awkward situations. If they have a travel attestation, it's all straightforward. But what if they come from some other church background? What if they sincerely believe in Christ and wish to participate but simply don't understand how we supervise the Lord's table? Our congregations might even offend some visitors.

Yes, these are valid concerns. Here are some things to consider. First of all, since hospitality is a divine command (Rom 12:13; 1 Pet 4:9), we should make a concerted effort to invite visitors into our homes on Sundays, and even pay special attention to this on Lord's Supper Sundays. At the same time, we should remember that our living rooms and kitchen tables are the normal venue for showing hospitality (compare Hebr 13:2 with Gen 18:1-8). The Lord's table, as a sacrament, has a different purpose: to refocus and strengthen our faith (LD 25).

Secondly, on Lord's Supper Sundays some congregations now include a well-worded paragraph for guests in their bulletin or liturgy sheet. This explains why and how the sacrament is supervised and assures guests that this does not imply any judgment on the sincerity of their faith. Such notifications are hospitable and commendable. This could be complemented with an effort to speak in person, as much as possible, with guests about this explanation. We may well discover that some of them appreciate the care taken to supervise the sacrament.

Thirdly, by definition sacraments are “holy, *visible* signs and seals” (LD 25). To be sure, there are added elements of touch and taste. The value of these additional aspects

should not be diminished; they are very strengthening. At the same time, we should not forget that the Holy Spirit uses the *visible* aspect of the sacrament to fortify our faith. When baptism is administered, only one person receives the sacrament by touch, but the Spirit uses the visible sign of water to strengthen the entire congregation, including any guests who receive the sign with a believing heart. Similarly, with Lord's Supper only the communicant members (plus admitted guests) receive the sacrament, eating the crucified body of

Christ and drinking his shed blood by faith (LD 28). But the Spirit also uses the visible signs of bread and wine to strengthen the faith of non-communicant members and any guests who are not admitted to the table. These guests are still greatly blessed by the sacrament just like our own children are.

If we think along these lines, we can responsibly maintain the holiness of the Lord's table, consistently uphold our own Church Order, and charitably extend hospitality to guests in our worship services.

Response to Dr. Jason Van Vliet

Once again, I'm grateful to Dr. Van Vliet for a clear presentation of his views and for his interest in this exchange. Regarding Galatians 2, Dr. Van Vliet misses the implications of Peter's refusal to have table fellowship with Gentiles. It isn't simply a failure to recognize that the ceremonial laws have been fulfilled in Christ; it is the implicit establishment of a prerequisite for table fellowship that transcends faith in Christ itself. By refusing to have table fellowship with Gentiles, Peter was communicating the message that only those who believed *and were circumcised* (and followed other Jewish customs) could be welcomed to the table. Paul regards the establishment of any prerequisite for table fellowship beyond faith in Christ to amount to a denial of justification only by faith (see vv. 15-16). It seems that this is precisely what is being done when professing Christians guests are barred from the Lord's table in Canadian Reformed churches either for not belonging to a Reformed church or for not holding to Reformed doctrine.

It's interesting to me that Dr. Van Vliet would appeal to 1 Corinthians 11 to support his claim that Baptists should not be welcomed to the Lord's table. What disturbed Paul about the Corinthians was not that rich and poor were eating together with unresolved differences, but that rich and poor were eating apart. In other words, socio-economic divisions did not need to be resolved before the Lord's Supper could be celebrated; rather, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated together *in spite of* socio-economic divisions. In short, resolution to socio-economic differences isn't required for a proper celebration of the Lord's supper; unity

in socio-economic diversity is. Analogously, resolution to all doctrinal differences (among which there were many in Corinth) isn't required for a proper participation in the Lord's Supper; unity in theological diversity is.

I think I make the case in my article that the use of "Reformed" in Article 61 of the Church Order need not imply the exclusion of non-Reformed guests and I provide some historical examples in support of this claim. Perhaps I can conclude with some comments on hospitality. Dr. Van Vliet argues that hospitality should be shown to Baptists in our homes and not at the Lord's table. I would argue rather that the bounds of home hospitality should not exclude the unchurched and that the bounds of table hospitality should not exclude professing Christian believers. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of Christian unity (or catholicity), not a sacrament of Christian parochialism (or sectarianism). "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many," Paul writes, "are one body, for we all share the one loaf" (1 Cor 10:17; NIV). Is that one body the Reformed church? Not only is that an unlikely conclusion; it is an impossible one, anachronistic as it is.

In conclusion, I'm extremely grateful to the editors of *Clarion* for creating space for this exchange and to Dr. Van Vliet in particular for his interest and feedback. It's clear that we think about things quite differently and I'm delighted that we can debate our differences on important matters with mutual respect and without rancor.

Bill DeJong 

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The Invitation to the Table

Cultural anthropologists have long recognized the power of meals. Unless we are eating alone, we never leave a meal the same way we came. It's not simply that we walk away with a different chemical constitution, and perhaps a little more weight. When food is enjoyed around a table, relationships are forged, friendships are renewed, and sometimes enemies are disarmed. Given its social power, it's not surprising that Jesus prescribed a meal to function as a confirming ritual for believers.

In the history of the Canadian Reformed churches, the Lord's Supper was often celebrated at tables. In the discipline of liturgical studies this is sometimes called "the Scottish rite" because it was also the longstanding practice of the Scottish Presbyterians to be seated at tables in their celebrations of the Lord's Supper (a position some wanted codified in the Westminster Directory of Worship). Personally, I favour this way of celebrating the Lord's Supper (provided it's possible to include the whole congregation at one such table) because it reminds the congregation that this sacrament is a meal, a banquet.

But for whom is this banquet? In this article I will argue that the Lord's Supper should *not* be restricted to members of the Canadian Reformed churches and sister churches or even to those who are confessionally Reformed. The Lord's Supper is a banquet for God's family and therefore should be open to all of its members.

The biblical data

It's clear from many places in Scripture that the Lord's Supper is for the brothers and sisters of Christ in God's family. We ought not to show "table" hospitality to those who promote a false gospel (see 2 John 10). Those who pervert the grace of God are "blemishes" at the love feasts of the church (Jude 4), and those who stubbornly persist in sin should be barred from the Lord's table (1 Cor 5:8).

On the other hand, we ought to offer "table" hospitality to those who dedicate their lives to Christ (see 3 John 8). To

fail to do so is reprehensible in the eyes of the apostles. The apostle John, for example, is disturbed by Diotrephes who, in wanting to occupy a position of privilege, "will not welcome us" and "refuses to welcome other believers" (3 John 9-10). Loving one another within the church is a key mark of the church (see 1 Thess 4:9-10). To hate a brother or sister, while claiming to be in the light, is to live in darkness (1 John 2:9-11), to forgo one's status as God's child (1 John 2:10), to be a murderer (1 John 2:15), and to prove that one does not know God (1 John 4:20).

One can now understand why the apostle Paul upbraided Peter in Antioch to his face. Out of fear for the circumcision group (who regarded circumcision as a boundary marker of God's people), Peter withdrew from eating with Gentile believers. It was as if Peter believed that to be accepted by God one needed something more than simply faith in Christ. This move on Peter's part was, for the apostle Paul, not simply an act of inexcusable hypocrisy (Gal 2:13); it was an implicit denial of justification only by faith (Gal 2:16).

"Doctrinal boundaries around the Lord's Supper are necessary," Peter Leithart writes, "for we are not permitted to welcome Buddhists or Mormons to the Lord's table." These boundaries are those of the Christian faith itself. "Paul taught," Leithart continues, "that Peter's practice of denying table fellowship to Gentiles cut to the heart of the gospel because it set up a test of membership other than faith in Jesus and it was a fool's bargain in which the gospel was exchanged for something that was no gospel."¹

What precisely is being communicated to a professed Christian guest when he or she is denied admission to the Lord's table? It seems as if the church is suspicious of the sincerity of the guest's profession or, worse, believes that a Christian profession is insufficient for admission to the Lord's table and that one must in fact be Reformed. The love required of Christians in Scriptures, however, is one that "always trusts" (1 Cor 13:7). Apart from evidence to the contrary, Christians

should take each other's words at face value and not to fall prey to the hermeneutics of suspicion (à la Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx, the forbears of postmodernism).

When non-Reformed Christians are barred from the table in Canadian Reformed churches they are sometimes told, "We don't doubt your Christian testimony." To bar someone from the Lord's table, however, is to judge him or her, biblically speaking, to be outside of God's family, in spite of whatever is said in connection with doing so.

The Reformed confessions

I was delighted recently to hear my friend Eric Watkins, a pastor in the OPC, speak at the CRTS conferences in January. In one of the Q & A sessions in Langley, BC, Watkins rehearsed this wonderful line, "The doorway to the church should not be more narrow than the doorway to heaven." This is precisely what is taught in the Belgic Confession, which alleges of the church that "there is no salvation outside of it" (Art 28).² If one claims that Baptists, for instance, are true believers (which, hopefully, no one denies), then it follows that they are members of the church because there is no salvation outside of it.³

I do not want to belabour this point except to say that it is deeply problematic to me that we should refuse at the Lord's table those the Lord himself embraces. How can we deny the cup to those for whom the Lord has shed his blood? How can we deny the broken bread to those for whom the Lord's body was broken? There is a confessional truth here that is being contradicted by excluding from the Lord's table sincere Christians who perhaps are not confessionally Reformed.

The Church Order

But does the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed churches permit non-Reformed guests? At first glance, Article 61 of the Church Order seems to forbid the admission of guests to the Lord's table who are not members of the Canadian Reformed churches or sister churches. I believe this is a facile reading and therefore I want to use some space to parse this article.

The article begins by saying that "the consistory shall admit to the Lord's supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith." This sentence applies specifically, it seems, to those within a particular Canadian Reformed congregation who would like to partake. If they are catechumens, for instance, whether baptized members or neophytes, the route to the Lord's table is through public profession of the Reformed faith. Catechumens are to be

instructed in Reformed doctrine and it is the expectation that they will affirm Reformed doctrine.⁴

The language of "Reformed doctrine" (*Gereformeerde religie*) goes all the way back to the Synod of Dort.⁵ It should be noted here that the adjective "Reformed" was used in distinction from especially Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Anabaptist. The plethora of evangelical denominations in the world today simply did not exist then. But this descriptor was not meant necessarily to exclude from the Lord's table those who weren't Reformed.

The Dutch church polity scholar Harm Bouwman (1863-1933) indicates that guests from non-Reformed churches could be admitted to the Lord's table provided their confession "sufficiently agreed" (*genoegzaam overeenstemde*) with that of the Reformed church. He argues, for example, that if there were no Lutheran church in town, a Lutheran could be welcomed to the Lord's table.⁶ Professor Jacob Kamphuis (1921-2011), furthermore, points out that in the context of the Remonstrant controversy, the regional synod of Gouda (1620) argued that churches should not necessarily discipline those who could not fully agree with the five points adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-19) but be patient with them (Art 78).⁷

One might argue, however, that the Church Order permits consistories to admit to the Lord's table only guests with attestations. This would be a misreading, however. The Church Order indicates that "members of sister-churches shall be admitted on the ground of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct." Here is the policy for welcoming guests from sister-churches. Nothing will be demanded of them but an attestation. The Church Order makes no prescriptions, however, for welcoming to the Lord's table guests from non-sister churches, and so consistories are presumably free to devise them.

I believe, in summary, that there is ample proof, in terms of the history of Reformed church polity, that consistories have discretionary power to admit to the Lord's table, both within and without of their respective congregations, those who don't necessarily agree with all Reformed doctrine.

The Lord's Supper is a banquet for God's children, for all those who are in Christ, for all members of his holy catholic church. We should embrace at the Lord's table all those Jesus embraces and serve bread and wine to all those for whom Jesus died. To refuse to do so is perhaps to fall prey to the sin of the apostle Peter – namely, establishing a prerequisite for table fellowship higher than faith in Christ itself.

Response to Dr. Bill DeJong

I thank Dr. DeJong for making his position much clearer. Allow me three comments.

Galatians 2

Dr. De Jong is correct that if the apostle Peter continued to give in to the circumcision party, then he could lead people into believing that justification is a matter of faith *plus* works of the law. Galatians 3:1-9 makes that abundantly clear. However, he is incorrect to suggest that Reformed consistories that do not admit non-Reformed Christians to the Lord's Supper might end up "deny[ing] the doctrine of justification by faith" (*Clarion*, Nov. 2, 2018). Such a consistory is *not adding*, in any way, the requirement of "works of the law" to faith. Instead, it is simply and rightly ascertaining that the *content* of someone's faith is in line with God's revealed Word. Together we confess that true faith includes a sure knowledge whereby we "accept as true all that God has revealed to us in his Word" (LD 7). When consistories apply this definition of faith in the context of admission to the Lord's table, they will need to use pastoral wisdom. But if someone publicly denies an integral part of God's Word, such as the baptism of covenant children, then the consistory has every right to say, "There is something here that needs to be addressed and corrected *before* this person can be admitted to the Lord's table." Such a consistory is not denying justification by faith; rather, it is exercising due diligence in its God-given responsibility to supervise the Lord's Supper.

Applying Article 61

In this article we agree that "the consistory shall admit to the Lord's supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life." Dr. DeJong feels that "this sentence applies, it seems, to those within a particular Canadian Reformed congregation who would like to partake." We should be clear, though, that nothing in this article restricts this sentence *only* to regular members within the local congregation. These same principles apply to guests, otherwise we end up with a double standard.

Dr. DeJong also refers to an article (*Clarion*, Oct. 8, 1993) by Rev. G. van Popta, who mentions the possibility of admitting a "member of the Greek Evangelical Church on a temporary work or study term *attending the services at our church regularly and functioning as part of the congregation*" (emphasis mine). By way of context, the Greek Evan-

gelical Church is a Presbyterian Reformed federation that affirms infant baptism. This situation is very different from what Dr. DeJong is envisioning, namely, that guests who deny baptism to covenant children not only could be, but indeed should be, admitted to the Lord's table, so long as they "dedicate their lives to Christ" and do not "stubbornly persist in sin." What is more, Rev. van Popta affirmed that to open the table in a CanRC congregation to a member of a local Lutheran or Christian Reformed Church would be "disorderly and dishonest." He continues, "Why should the barriers and 'the denominational distinctives' which we insist upon and stubbornly refuse to remove suddenly fall away when we prepare the communion table?" Again, this is profoundly different from what Dr. DeJong is saying in his article.

Similarly, Dr. DeJong cites Dr. H. Bouwman, who comments that a Lutheran might be admitted to the Lord's table in a Reformed congregation if he happens to be living for some time in a place where there was no Lutheran church. For one thing, Lutherans affirm the baptism of covenant children. More than that, Dr. Bouwman maintains that before admitting someone like this to the Lord's table the consistory must have clear evidence that: "1) he has been admitted to the Lord's Supper in his own congregation...; 2) his walk of life is irreproachable; 3) *his personal faith conviction concurs with the confession of our [that is, Reformed] church.*"⁸ Once again, this is fundamentally at odds with Dr. DeJong's proposal that Reformed, Baptists, Arminians, Lutherans, and anyone else who dedicates his life to Christ should all sit together, celebrating the Lord's Supper, despite deep doctrinal differences and divisions into different church federations.

Other significant concerns

As far as I can see, Dr. DeJong sets up a double standard for admission to the table. For baptized members and new converts within the congregation there is "the expectation that they will affirm Reformed doctrine," but for guests there is no such expectation; in fact, they can even publicly affirm teachings that explicitly *deny* key parts of Reformed doctrine, but they would still be most welcome at the table. Our Lord strongly disapproves of double standards (Prov 20:10, 23); so should we.

Next, he latches on to this quote: "The doorway to the church should not be more narrow than the doorway to heaven." One-liners are interesting but there is more to be said. The width of heaven's doorway is measured by the con-

tents of God's book of life (Rev 21:27). We don't have access to that book (Deut 29:29). Instead, God has given us elders who have a duty to supervise the table according to God's Word, as summarized in our confessions, and in full agreement with our church order.

Based on Article 28, Dr. DeJong argues that so long as someone is a true believer then, confessionally speaking, we are obliged to serve this person the Lord's Supper. Actually, our confession presents a different emphasis. *This person* is obliged to submit to the "instruction and discipline" of a faithful church (Art 28), which can be identified by the three familiar marks (Art 29).

Conclusion

Our federation of churches has never embraced such an open view of the Lord's Supper as the one Dr. DeJong is now promoting. Everyone should consider his proposal carefully. Compare what he writes not only with Articles 27 and 28, but also Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. Re-read the straightforward language of Article 61 in our church order and evaluate his proposal. I cannot help but conclude that his proposal goes against both of them.

In his initial article (*Clarion*, Sept. 21, 2018) Dr. DeJong advocated for more "intentional outreach" in our federation. I sincerely agree with that particular point. But we do not need to open our pulpits to Baptist ministers in order to do intentional outreach. We do not need to admit to the Lord's table guests who publicly deny integral doctrines in God's Word in order to do intentional outreach. So, let's unreservedly steer away from those practices, diligently keep the peace in Jerusalem, and earnestly focus together on becoming more intentional about outreach.

Jason Van Vliet

¹ Leithart, *Blessed are the Hungry: Meditations on the Lord's Supper* (Moscow: Canon, 2000) 145–46.

² The Latin slogan (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) behind this phrase, which originated with Cyprian, the third century bishop of Carthage, was frequently invoked by, *inter alia*, Augustine and Calvin.

³ See a wonderful article on this subject by C. Trimp where he argues, in reference to Articles 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession, that the word "true" does not add anything to the word "church" ("True and False Church," *Clarion* 43:24 [December 2, 1994] 564–565).

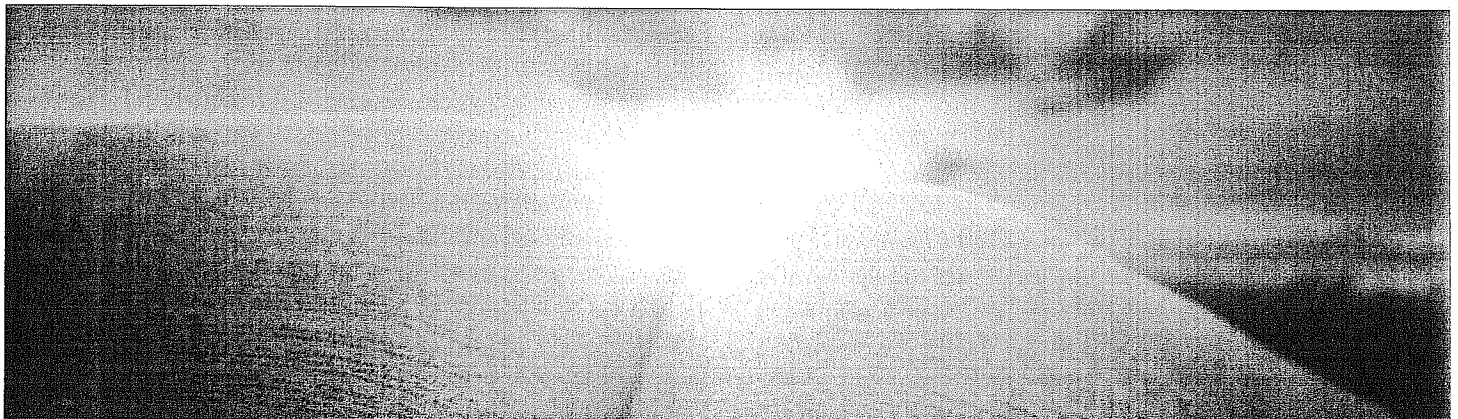
⁴ That this line applies to those within the congregation (whether catechumens or neophytes) is argued also by George van Popta (see *Clarion* 42:20 [October 8, 1993] 423).

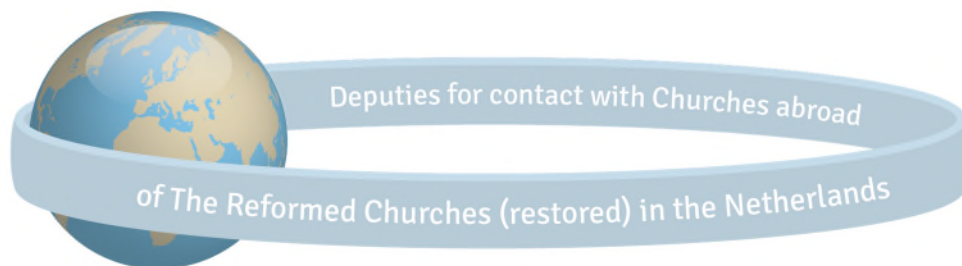
⁵ The famous Convent of Wezel (1571; ch.6, art.7) simply had the language, "profession of faith" (*fidei confessionem*).

⁶ H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht II* (Kampen: Kok, 1934) 390–91. George van Popta argues something similar when he suggests that if an individual from the "Greek Evangelical Church" were visiting Canada, attending a local congregation, and "showed by his faith and conduct that he was an heir of the grace of God in Christ," it would "be orderly and honest for the elders, in the name of Jesus Christ, to open the Lord's table to this guest" (*Clarion* 42:20 [October 8, 1993] 424). Similarly, F.L. Rutgers argues that Reformed churches must not simply deny (or outright admit) non-Reformed guests to the Lord's table, especially when they are known to members of the council (see *Kerkelijke Adviezen II* [Kampen: Kok, 1905] 162).

⁷ Kamphuis, *Om de Heiligheid van de Gemeente* (Kampen: Kok, 1982) 121. Cf. F.L. Rutgers, *Kerkelijke Adviezen II* (Kampen: Kok, 1905) 157. Moreover, in previous submissions to *Clarion*, I've drawn attention to the (GKN) General Synod in the Hague (1914) where it was judged that an objection to the doctrine of infant baptism *per se* need not be a barrier to admission to the Lord's table.

⁸ Bouwman, H. *Gereformeerde Kerkrecht*, 2.391; emphasis added. 





To Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford
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From Deputies contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
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November 8th, 2019

Dear brothers in the Lord,

Thank you for your letters dated May 23, 2019 and September 5, 2019 with your answers to the five questions we asked you in our letter of May 3, 2019. We discussed the contents of your answers in our meeting of October 29, 2019.

In this letter we'll first pay attention to the questions and remarks in your last letter. Then we'll react on your answers to the five questions we asked you, after which we'll answer your questions to us.

At the end of this letter we are looking back and offer our conclusions.

Your questions and remarks in your letter of September 5th, 2019

In this letter you ask for information about our special *synod Lutten*. At this synod our churches decided on the relation with the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN). See app. 1 for the decisions and grounds.

Regarding your remarks on the *Acts of synod Edmonton* (CanRC): We've read these Acts, but we don't understand why Observation 2.2 states that you didn't wish to enter talks, for you were indeed prepared to do so. We'll mention this to the deputies of the CanRC.

And regarding Consideration 3.2: We duly noted this.

You continue with an elucidation and correction on your own response in your letter of February 28, 2019 to question 5 in our letter of December 11, 2018. Your previous answer "the doctrines as taught in the WS" should have been "the doctrines to which the WS give room". We consider this an improvement. However you don't pursue this textual change any further. Moreover all other quotes remain unchanged, which quotes we sent you in our last letter as an enclosure. Grounded on those quotes our conclusion was: "Based on the above mentioned, we establish that you condemn the Westminster Confession in full as a document in which (along with many good things) false doctrine is taught. And that you cannot acknowledge churches that consciously use the Westminster Confession unchanged and uncontradicted as their confession, as churches of Christ, simply and solely because of the fact that they confess their faith through the Westminster Confession." Our conclusion of this still remains unchanged after your last letter.

You add a few remarks to your answer to question 1 in our letter of May 23, 2019. In these remarks you ask about the *FRCA* and the *PCEA*. The Australian churches weighed things

concerning the PCEA differently from the way the CanRC weighed things concerning the OPC. The circumstances in Australia apparently led to their own decisions. Whether these circumstances are comparable with those in Canada has not been established. The talks they had conducted, led to different results. But we can't say that because of that the relation of the CanRC with the OPC was not justified.

Questions of DGK to LRCA - our responses to your answers

1. The Lord's Supper – Is the method of celebrating the Lord's Supper in the OPC in conflict with Scripture?
 2. The ecclesiastical way – Has the ecclesiastical way been completely followed?
 3. CanRC – Warned churches have become false churches after so many years.
 4. CanRC – The deterioration in 2007: pluriformity/covenant & baptism/ false doctrine by pulpit exchange/lack of discipline.
 5. CanRC – the present deterioration.
1. From your answers it is clear that you call the way of celebrating the Lord's Supper in the OPC in conflict with Scripture. You see it as an 'open Lord's Supper'. Because there is supervision by the consistory, we can't consider their way of celebrating the Lord's Supper, though somewhat different from our way of celebrating, as an 'open Lord's Supper'.
 2. As we already wrote we don't think the ecclesiastical way had been followed to the end, so that your secession in 2007 was not justified. In enclosure 2 you'll find an explanation with our vision about this.
 3. You warned the CanRC and pointed out that not one of the churches has acted on this warning. As you state yourself this is evidence that they have become false churches.
 4. The deterioration which you meant to see in the CanRC federation in 2007 has in our view not been substantiated by you with official church pronouncements in which errors were ecclesiastically legitimated or tolerated.
 5. The present deterioration which you mean to see in the CanRC federation is in our view not yet sufficiently grounded by you with official church pronouncements in which errors were ecclesiastically legitimated or tolerated.

Questions from LRCA to DGK

Below you'll find answers to the questions which you asked us in your letter of February 28, 2019. We repeat your question and our answer follows.

1. *When we wrote the church at Zwolle and Deputies BBK about the secession in Abbotsford, we supplied detailed evidence, including copies of general synod decisions and related correspondence to the general synod and with the consistory of the CanRC at Abbotsford to explain why this secession was necessary. In the process you followed to determine your questions above, did you refer to this evidence, which we believe would be in your archives, and can you tell us what is lacking?*

Mandated by our synod we studied everything with the help of the available material. Our study has resulted in the various questions we asked you.

2. *We observed that as Deputies you had sent a letter dated March 13, 2013 to the CanRC General Synod Carman 2013 as published in Volume 11 of your online magazine Reformed Continua. Do you still stand behind the contents of this letter and are you still seeking responses to this letter from the CanRC and CanRC deputies? If not why not?*

As deputies we represent our churches. We have been mandated by our last synod and we have to execute that mandate. Today we wouldn't have sent the letter of March 13, 2013 of the deputies of those days in the same way, because that wouldn't fit within our present instruction. Our present mandate concerning the CanRC is: "to continue contact with the CanRC; 2. to continue talks about the situation concerning LRCA, with whom DGK has a sister church relation, in which discussions also will be talked about the domestic churchly developments, which are connected with the liberation of the LRCA. 3. They (deputies) get the possibility for several meetings with the CanRC deputies and they will bear in mind the decision of GS regarding the request of DGK Dalfsen."

3. *We sent copies of our letters to the CanRC General Synods 2013 and 2016 to you at the time of writing (you should be able to find copies of these letters in your archives). While the CanRC general synods declared our letters inadmissible, we note that the GKV admitted your letter calling them to repent. Do you believe that it was appropriate for the CanRC Synods to declare our letters inadmissible? If so, why? If not, would you be willing to bring this matter to the CanRC deputies?*

We can't answer you for the churches, because the churches haven't pronounced on this. Our churches themselves have the practice not to declare appeals or letters from 'outside' admissible, unless there might be an urgent reason for it. The domestic rules of the synod have some stipulations for this.

4. *Based on the evidence we have provided in our original submissions to you in 2008 and 2009, the copies of our letters to the CanRC General Synods 2013 and 2016 (which should be in your archives) as well as the lack of response by CanRC Synod 2013 to the evidence you presented in your letter, would you not agree that the CanRC general synods have assigned more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God? If not, why not?*

As deputies we cannot and may not pronounce this judgement on the CanRC, because our churches haven't made any pronouncement on this.

5. *Do you not find it unreasonable that the CanRC General Synods have labeled you "schismatic" in 2007 and 2010 because they believed you were premature in your secession in 2003, but now maintain this label because you now have a relationship with us? If not, please explain.*

We are sad that in the past the CanRC judged us as "schismatic", because in our view it is not a just judgement about our ecclesiastical situation in the Netherlands.

6. *We observe that at the first meeting of the I.C.R.C. in 1982 Dr. van Gulp presented a paper on the topic of "The Unity of Faith as Gift and Mandate and Its Significance For the Reflection On Contacts and Rules With Other Churches." In this speech Rev. van Gulp was quoted as saying that, "when there are two true churches in the same land they must unite (so as to be under one Synod) within a given period of time. Do you believe that*

Rev. van Gulp is correct here? If not, why not? Do you agree with the North American situation where a number of churches which recognize each other as true within the umbrella of NAPARC remain in separate federations? If you do, please explain. In addition, do you agree with the CanRC's practice of having sister churches in the same country but not uniting as one? How does the North American situation reflect the catholicity of the church?

The guide-line which rev. Van Gulp gave according to your quote, is a guide-line our churches also follow. How the concrete situation in North America today is judged by our churches, we can't say now, because there haven't been any pronouncements of synod on this item.

7. *We observe that Synod Groningen has accepted the majority report on the Westminster Confession "as study report for contacts with foreign churches that have these confessions." On the basis of this acceptance how can you reconcile the difficulties highlighted in this report regarding "the assurance of faith," the concept of a "double covenant," "the invisible church" and the "pluriformity of the church" with the statement that the Westminster Confession is a "fully reformed confession"? Is it your intention to discuss these divergencies in your contacts with Presbyterian churches?*

In the past our churches acknowledged the Westminster Confession as a reformed confession. Our churches judged that the differences between the TFU and the WCF are not of such a nature that one of them has to be judged as unscriptural. Our present practice is that we are accessible for a sister church relation with a presbyterian church. The policy of our churches is that differences in minor matters of doctrine and practice can and may not be church dividing.

8. *Do you approve of an open Lord's Supper with only a verbal warning? Do you approve of your sister churches having an open Lord's Supper with only a verbal warning? See for reference the attached OPC "Report of the Committee to Study the Method of Admission to the Lord's Supper." If either of the above answers is yes how will you witness to the CanRC on this matter?*

As yet our churches haven't pronounced on this concrete matter, so we can't answer your question. Indeed in the past our churches had sister church relations with presbyterian churches where this verbal warning was also practice when celebrating the Lord's Supper. And in 2005 our churches also requested presbyterian churches with this practice to consider us as a justified continuation of the GKV and therefore to continue the sister church relation with us.

9. *Do you believe that all members of the church should be bound to the church's confessions? If not, please explain why? Can you have a sister relationship with a church that does not bind its members to the church's confession? If so, please explain why.*

In our churches we ask believers, when they are professing their faith: "Do you confess the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, which is summarized in the Apostles' Creed and is taught here in the Christian church, to be the true and sufficient doctrine of redemption? And do you promise to stay with the confession of this doctrine by God's grace in life and death?" Hereby each communicant member says that he is bound to the confession of the churches. We can't generally answer your second question, but also in such a situation the fact remains that in the past our churches used to have sister church relations with presbyterian churches with a similar practice in dealing with the confessions as now in the OPC. And in 2005 our churches also requested presbyterian churches with this practice to consider us as a justified continuation of the GKV and therefore to continue the sister church relation with us.

Looking back

Our churches have always had the conviction that the WS is a reformed confession and so in the past have maintained relations with presbyterian churches.

Our instruction was also adapted by the last synod, so that now our instruction also states (just like the one at our first synod Mariënborg 2005) that contact can be sought and maintained with churches which have the WS and/or the TFU. And our churches have indeed always realised that the Lord Christ gathers His church among various nations (each of them with their particular geographical position, history and culture), so that foreign churches will not be condemned on minor points regarding the way of confessing their faith, liturgy, church order and practice.

Apart from that, it isn't that we don't or didn't have any worries about the developments of the CanRC and their contacts with third parties. But if there appear to be errors or misconceptions in a sister church of the CanRC, this doesn't yet prove that those errors or misconceptions are also apparent in the CanRC. And it is also not yet proof that the CanRC themselves have deeply deteriorated. Our churches have always had the firm rule in entering and maintaining a sister church relation with churches abroad (see Acts GS Groningen 2014/15, Art. 6.04): "that when there are (in our sister church) relations with third parties, we should carefully check what these relations mean for the concerned church and in that way judge the value, the meaning and eventually the way of entering and/or maintaining such a sister church relation."

Conclusions

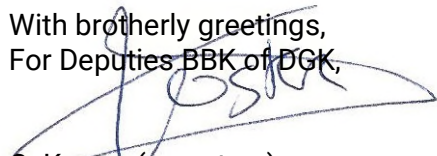
At present our conclusions are as follows:

With regard to the catholicity of the church: you condemn the WCF in full as a document in which (along with many good things) false doctrine is taught. And you cannot acknowledge churches that consciously use the WC unchanged and uncontradicted as their confession, as churches of Christ, simply and solely because of the fact that they confess their faith in the WCF. In this your vision is diametrically opposed to what our churches pronounced on this.

With regard to the ecclesiastical way: you didn't follow the ecclesiastical way to the end. Your secession in 2007 from the CanRC was not in accordance with the church order and has therefore not been justified.

We would like to talk to you personally about these issues after having received your answer to this letter.

With brotherly greetings,
For Deputies BBK of DGK,



C. Koster (secretary)

Attachment

1. Decisions GS Lutten 2019
2. The ecclesiastical way

Attachment 1**Decisions of the special General Synod Lutten of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (DGK), d.d. July 6th, 2019, regarding the GKN****Decision 1**

The Reformed Churches (restored) recognize the Reformed Churches the Netherlands (GKN) as churches of Christ, based on the foundation of apostles and prophets.

Grounds re decision 1

The discussions which were held between deputies DGK and deputies GKN made it clear that there is

1. unity in the way the authority of Scripture is dealt with
2. unity in the binding to the reformed confession
3. unity in view of the church order and the functioning of the church federation.

This decision is adopted with 12 votes in favour and the meeting thus unanimously agrees with decision 1 and its accompanying grounds.

Decision 2

Thankfully to inform the synod of the Reformed Churches The Netherlands (GKN) of this decision with the urgent request to keep following the road to realising church unity as well.

This decision is adopted with 12 votes in favour and the meeting thus unanimously agrees with this decision.

Decision 3

To mandate deputies ACOBB to continue talks with the GKN; to give the next instruction to deputies, this replaces instruction 17 of GS Lansingerland:

- a. In consultation with deputies GKN to discuss the route by which church unity in all carefulness as fast as possible can be given shape and in connection with this to discuss closer local relations. The moment this route is clear deputies will inform the local churches as soon as possible.
- b. To raise in the discussions all matters which may place impediments and to remove these if possible.
- c. To inform local churches as much as possible about the developments. And local churches may also put forward matters to deputies ACOBB.
- d. To be available for advice and offer help to local churches in their getting closer to the GKN churches, if local churches should ask this.
- e. When results are positive and if needed, to propose to deputies ad art. 49 CO whether there is reason to convene a special or advanced Synod with a term of 2 months for submitting the report.

Grounds re decision 3

1. As there are no basic grounds which justify the being ecclesiastically separated of both church federations, obstacles, if any, have to be removed as soon as possible because of Christ's mandate to church unity.
2. Removing local impediments, which form an obstacle for unity, are primarily a matter of the local community.
3. Deputies ACOBB are considered to be the best persons to answer any questions and to offer help where it is needed.

The meeting adopts this decision with 11 votes in favour and 1 vote against.

Attachment 2

The ecclesiastical way

One of our questions (question 3) was:

Should not you yourselves as members primarily have gone the legal ecclesiastical way (classis, regional and general synod) before you liberated yourselves from the CanRC?

Considerations

We considerate the answer you sent us on (May 23, 2019). In this response we follow the letters with brackets that you used in your answer.

- a) In your letter of February 28, 2019 (section 6) to us you mention your letter of October 4, 2005 to the consistory of CanRC Abbotsford. In this letter to the consistory you urge them to appeal against the decisions of synod 2004. You call that "actually the last step of the appeal process". So the consistory still had the opportunity to appeal to the synod of 2007. So Art. 33 of the CO was (still) not applicable.
- b) Other churches did appeal to synod 2007 (Lincoln and Attercliffe). The fact that these appeals were without success (as we knew afterwards) doesn't mean that therefore your own negligence to go the ecclesiastical way can be justified. We observe that their appeals were indeed admissible.
- c) The right of individuals to address a general synod is indeed restricted. But you did have the possibility to go the ecclesiastical way from classis to regional synod to general synod of 2007. This is covered by the CO. We have proof that in an in all respects comparable case (active voting rights of women) brothers went this way and their appeals were not declared inadmissible at any major meeting (incl. GS). On the contrary: their contents were dealt with.

The consistory rejected your objections as they were presented in your letter of October 4, 2005. Now that the consistory rejected your objections you yourselves could have appealed to synod via classis and regional synod. But you didn't do this.

- d) Your case indeed concerns all churches. But, as stated under c), you as individuals do have the church orderly possibility to appeal to GS in nationwide matters, although via the longer road of classis and regional synod. And, see under c), there is proof that such appeals are not declared inadmissible.
- e) Matters connected with foreign churches are justly ruled on a general-synodical level. But that doesn't mean that from within the churches no well-grounded objections may be and can be submitted. The ratification policy provides exactly for that (art. 31).
- f) Article 31 CO says: "If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to the major assembly;". So you had the right and duty to go against the decision of your consistory ('minor assembly'). And if they rejected your objections in an in your view unjust judgement, you could subsequently have appealed to classis and regional synod. And again, if they also rejected your objections, you should have submitted your objections to GS. This is not only theory, but also works this way in practice in the CanRC.

- g) Your comparison with the Liberation of 1944 is unjustified, because at the time the situation was different from your situation. At your liberation nobody was forced to execute decisions which were in your view in contrast with God's Word. No preachers were suspended. Nobody was required to sign a certain doctrine, as cand. H.J. Schilder. As shown above you still had the possibility to submit your objections in the ecclesiastical way.
- h) You now still send your objections to the synods of the CanRC while you seceded years ago. Your letters to these meetings are justly inadmissible:
1. You are no longer members of these churches.
 2. Even if you were members and you would send your objections directly to synods, in doing so you go against the CO, as you yourselves stated in c). Your direct appeals to the general synods are justly declared inadmissible.
 3. Article 31 gives all church members the right to appeal. But you didn't appeal, when you were still members and the possibility existed to do so.
 4. Only ecclesiastical matters which are submitted in a legal way (as described above) by church members are admissible and have a right to be dealt with. That is the golden rule of reformed church policy. It is in this way that it is also mentioned in the domestic rules of the synod of DGK.
- i) You appeal to art. 33: "Matters once decided upon may not be proposed again, unless they are substantiated by new grounds." If objections remain, new arguments have to be presented why adopted decisions go against Scripture.
- Now you yourselves mention: "that you supplied much more information to the Abbotsford CanRC consistory" and that "much of this information had been presented to general synods in the past". "Much of", so "not all" information. So the possibility still remained to submit additional objections, based on new information which hadn't been dealt with before. You even urged the consistory of Abbotsford to send this "much more information" as objection to synod (your letter of October 4, 2005)!
- j) Conscience isn't settling in this church orderly matter. What settles the matter is whether you went the ecclesiastical way with your objections. Maintaining your feelings, you could have submitted your objections through that ecclesiastical way, thus trying to preserve the reformed character of the CanRC, which in your view was in danger.
- k) What you quote of prof. K. Deddens and rev. G. van Rongen condemns your own acting. You didn't go the full ecclesiastical way, as outlined above.

You yourselves didn't follow the ecclesiastical way via classis, regional synod to GS after the consistory of CanRC Abbotsford rejected your request to appeal directly to GS as consistory against the decisions of synod 2004.

And you also didn't continue in the ecclesiastical way after classis rejected your appeals against consistory's way of reacting on your appeals to consistory. At the time you still could have appealed to regional synod and subsequently to general synod.

Conclusions

Based on the above mentioned considerations our conclusions are:

1. You didn't follow the ecclesiastical way to the end.
2. Therefore your secession from the CanRC in 2007 was illegal in the church orderly way.

Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford

C/O 2043 Jordan Place, Abbotsford, B.C., V3G 2C3

March 26, 2020

Deputies Contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
C/O Rev. C. Koster
Duindigtstraat 7
2665 HS Bleiswijk
The Netherlands

Esteemed brothers in the Lord:

We acknowledge receipt of your letter dated November 8, 2019 which was written in response to our letters dated May 23, 2019 and September 5, 2019. We appreciate your sending us a copy of decisions and grounds enacted by your extra-ordinary Synod Lutten. We also appreciate your willingness to share our objection to CanRC Synod 2019, Article 124, Observation 2.2, to the CanRC deputies.

However from the contents of your letter it has become evident that there are serious disagreements between us, both in the determination of the facts and in the subsequent analysis of these facts. At the same time it has become apparent that much of the material we have sent to you has not been considered in your response.

We therefore ask that you give further consideration to these matters as follows:

1. Regarding your discussions with the CanRCs

- a) Regarding our objection to CanRC Synod 2019, Article 124, Consideration 3.2, your response is, "*We duly noted this.*"

This shows that you do not take this objection seriously. Not only is the statement made in this Consideration not correct, but this statement is a complete misrepresentation of the reason for the existence of the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford. Proof of this fact can be found in the copy of the original Appeal to CanRC Synod 2004 which was submitted at the time of our request for sister church relations. The correction of this error, and the sharing of this objection to the CanRC deputies, is a vital part of the mandate you have been given by Synod Lansingerland (see Article 1.05 (6.2)) and no less important than that which you have undertaken to do regarding the above Observation 2.2.

- b) Regarding our question #2 about the letter the Committee wrote the CanRC Synod 2013, you write that the letter of March 13, 2013 "*wouldn't fit within our present instruction.*" We are confused by this answer, since at the same time you

write that your mandate includes that *"discussions will also be talked about the domestic churchly developments, which are connected with the liberation of the LRCA."* Why would the contents of the March 13, 2013 letter, which testify to the *"churchly developments,"* not fit within the contents of this mandate?

- c) Regarding our question #3 we are disappointed at your reluctance to answer. Do your churches not work with the contents of Article 31 of the Church Order just as we do? Does your church order not read, *"If anyone complains that he has been wronged ... he shall have the right to appeal to the major assembly"*? With their acceptance of Article 31 C.O. have not the churches already spoken on this matter? Your answer refers to the possibility that there might be *"an urgent reason for it."* Would not the fact that a number of members had seceded from the church be an urgent reason? We draw your attention to considerations 12 to 18 of our February 25, 2016 letter which we sent to the CanRC General Synod 2016. Does not their refusal to admit our material show a lack of desire for reconciliation?
- d) We are confounded by your answer to question #4. Is it not normal, in the context of seeking ecclesiastical relationships, that a Committee that has this as its mandate be prepared to search out and validate evidence found in previous Committee Reports as well as evidence from its sister church before coming to any conclusions? Do not the pronouncements of Synods Emmen and Groningen, which have maintained that the LRCA had good grounds for liberation and are still binding in the DGK, have implications for your attitude to the CanRCs?
- e) Regarding our question #5 you missed the second part. Was it schismatic (as the CanRC claims) for you to have a relationship with your sister church in Abbotsford? The decision to have a sister church relationship with the LRCA was made after 2 CanRC General Synods (2007 and 2010) had judged your Liberation in 2003 as schismatic. Despite this double rejection by the CanRC synods, before Abbotsford even came into the picture, do you now accept as credible the CanRC's claim that you are schismatic because of your sister relationship with us?
- f) We are perplexed at your answer to question #6. We are thankful that your churches follow the guide line given by Dr. Van Gurp. We therefore don't understand how you cannot see your task to advise Synod on this matter. How can you propose to have a relationship with churches in North America who are members of NAPARC and therefore, instead of reflecting the catholicity of the church by uniting in one federation, have accepted a denominational theory of the church? Based on the CanRC's stated position vis-à-vis NAPARC how is it possible to judge the CanRC without addressing this question? Former deputies have expressed concerns about NAPARC. Is your approach different? If so why?

- g) Your answer to question #8 contradicts the decision of Synod Marienberg in Article 25J. At Synod Marienberg 2005 your churches have dealt with the GKV's decision to have a sister relationship with the PCEA and have rejected it. The principles underlying this rejection are no less relevant when assessing the relationships with churches that have practices that are identical to the PCEA.

The relevant decision is as follows:

J3) Decision

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled at Marienberg on the 15th October 2005, declares that the above mentioned decisions of the General Synod of Ommen 1993, Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002/2003 regarding a sister-church relation with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia have been cancelled and the churches are not bound to these decisions anymore.

J4) Grounds

J.4.1. Our sister-churches in Australia (FRCA) had urgently requested the Reformed Churches to postpone a sister-church relation with the PCEA. The reason given by the FRCA was that the PCEA deviates on three points of the Word of God and the confession, in which differences of opinion and church practice have been observed:

- The PCEA admits ministers from outside their bond of churches (such as Baptists) to the pulpit.*
- People from outside the PCEA are admitted to the Lord's Table on account of their own testimony.*
- Because of the above mentioned reasons, our sister-churches cannot as yet start a sister church relationship with the PCEA.*

J.4.2. Scripture teaches that God's whole counsel must be proclaimed (Acts 20:27; Revelation 22:18,19).

A Baptist can certainly not do so when speaking about the covenant. The confession says that the pureness of the preaching is a mark of the church of Christ (Article 29 B.C.) This pureness not only concerns the contents but also the preacher. The Church Order emphasizes, with great care, how the office bearer ought to be recognized and accepted, Article 3.9. The legality of the calling to office is at stake.

J.4.3. Furthermore Scripture teaches us that God's wrath will come to the congregation when discipline is neglected (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Regarding the untenable participation on the basis of their own testimony, see John 5:31.

J.4.4. The church confesses that the Lord's Table must be kept holy. Also the administering of the sacraments is a mark of the church of Christ (Article 29 B.C.).

J.4.5. An appeal to Article 50 with regard to "minor" cases is not under discussion: in this case it is not a matter of minor importance.

J.4.6. It does not concern differences which in the past did not stop a sister-church relationship with Presbyterian churches. Entering a sister-church relationship ought to occur on the basis of current information and the testing in subordination to God's Word, and not only on the basis of decisions made by synods in the past about the status of a denomination.

- h) We are thankful for your answer to the first part of question #9. However we disagree with your answer to the second part. As churches, do you not maintain the equivalent of our Article 61 of the Church Order where we agree that, *"The consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life"*? In earlier times the CanRC had expressed the opinion that in the conduct of its ecclesiastical relationships (see *Acts of Synod 1965*, Article 141, II), *"Correspondence with Churches abroad should not be entered into, until upon a conscientious and serious investigation, it has become apparent that these Churches not only officially embrace the Reformed confession and church polity but also in fact maintain them."* As reformed churches are we not right to hold onto and maintain this standard of admission to the Lord's Supper and should you not hold the CanRCs to the same standard? Are double standards fitting in the house of the Lord? A review of Acts of GKV General Synods from 1948 to 1993 will show that the practices of Presbyterian churches were not discussed. However they were known at your Synod Marienberg 2005. Can deputies BBK prove to us that these practices of Presbyterian churches were known before the GKV general synods entered into sister church relationships with them?

2. Regarding the legitimacy of the liberation in Abbotsford

Your interaction with our answers on this issue in your "Attachment 2" gives us an opportunity to more fully explain our position.

- a) In paragraph (a) of your attachment you take issue with the fact that we have stated that our October 4, 2005 letter was *"actually the last step of the appeal process."* You use this statement as "evidence" of admission on our part that the process of appeal was not completed and that Article 33 of the Church Order was not applicable. In paragraph (b) you also point to the fact that the churches at Lincoln and Attercliffe did appeal to Synod 2007 as "evidence" that we should have done the same. However the assertions you make in this regard are not valid for the following reasons:
- i) you do not interact with the process of appeal which began after Synod 2001 or the reasons we continued to address consistory as we described in section 6 of our February 28, 2019 letter (see pages 7 to 9);

- ii) you have not proven, nor have you attempted to prove, that the steps in the process of appeal we have taken were not in accordance with the Church Order;
 - iii) your assertion that Article 33 of the Church Order was not applicable, is disproven by the fact that we addressed consistory on the very same matters that consistory (on our instigation) addressed Synod 2004. The reason for our submission to consistory after 2004 was not (in the first place) to start another appeal process, but to liberate the congregation from the binding character of ecclesiastical decisions which the CanRC consistory itself had shown (in its Appeal to Synod 2004) to be contrary to the Word of God and the Church Order;
 - iv) the purpose of our October 4, 2005 letter, together with all of the material which was sent afterward, was to show the CanRC consistory at Abbotsford that, for the sake of obedience to God's Word, it was necessary to follow through on its Appeal to Synod 2004 and liberate itself from the binding character of these decisions, the background of which had been appealed to every general synod since 1977 (see Appendix to our Act of Liberation and Return). We did not want to liberate ourselves from the CanRC at Abbotsford. We wanted the CanRC at Abbotsford to maintain the position it had taken in its Appeal to General Synod 2004. We wanted to do all we could to preserve the true church in Abbotsford, but in the end all argumentation to the CanRC consistory was exhausted.
- b) In paragraphs (c) and (d) you claim that we, as individuals, still had the right (even the duty – although you do not explicitly say this) to address classis, regional synod and the general synod. We disagree with this claim for the following reasons:
- i) It is contrary to the Church Order, since Article 50 of the Church Order stipulates that, "*The relation with churches abroad shall be regulated by general synod.*" Consequently the subject matter of our appeal would not lawfully be admissible at a classis or a regional synod. We are not responsible if classes or regional synods act in an unchurch-orderly manner;
 - ii) prior to the decisions of Synods 2001 and 2004 restricting the right of individuals to appeal to general synod, the CanRCs had always permitted individuals to address general synod. The decisions of Synod 2001 and 2004 on this matter have inverted the process of appeal, contrary to Article 31 of the Church Order, by forcing individuals to appeal decisions of major assemblies to the minor assemblies. Again, we are not responsible if classes or regional synods act in an unchurch-orderly manner;
 - iii) the fact that other individuals may have participated in such an unchurch-orderly process does not in itself prove its legitimacy. In connection with this it is also clear that the churches at Attercliffe and Lincoln were not properly answered by the CanRC General Synod 2007. A close examination of the Acts of the CanRC general synods from 2004 to 2019

- will show that all appeals or overtures regarding this matter were dealt with in the same manner;
- iv) you have not proven a Scriptural or church orderly requirement to undertake a second appeal process in the event that the initial appeal proves unsuccessful;
 - v) your claim that the liberation in Abbotsford is not legitimate because an avenue of appeal was still open is invalid, since you also liberated in 2003 when, as subsequent events have shown, avenues of appeal were still open. Therefore you are judging Abbotsford with a different set of standards than those with which you judge your own liberation;
 - vi) you have not interacted with paragraphs (d), (e) and (f) of our response to your question 2 in our May 23, 2019 letter; and
 - vii) you have not provided any evidence that CanRC deputies are dealing with the matters that both we and the churches of Attercliffe and Lincoln raised at the general synods. In fact, as we have previously stated, the last two general synods of the CanRC's considered it "harmful" to the sister relationship to raise these matters.
- c) In paragraphs (e) and (f) you claim to understand the practice in the CanRCs after Synod 2004. In response we assert:
- i) that the decisions of the general synods restricting the right of individuals to appeal are contrary to the Church Order;
 - ii) that the highest authority in the church is not the general synod, but the consistory;
 - iii) the appeal to Synod 2004 by the Abbotsford CanRC consistory, of which we were a part, shows that we had indeed gone "the full ecclesiastical way." Even if this was not a matter for the churches in common, the consistory's adoption and sending of this appeal to Synod 2004 exempted us from any further requirement to address classis or regional synod.
- d) Your statements in paragraph (g) show that you do not understand the seriousness of what had taken place in the CanRC at Abbotsford. Your claim that "*nobody was forced to execute decisions which were ... in contrast to God's Word*" is disproven by the following facts:
- i) the appointment of an elder was withdrawn after it became evident that this elder could not and would not attend the Lord's Supper when guests were present who had not met the requirements of Article 61 of the Church Order;
 - ii) a member was placed under church discipline for maintaining a website containing material that defended a secession from a neighbouring church which was based on the same principles as our own;
 - iii) members were forced into participation in the consequences of these unscriptural ecclesiastical decisions by celebrating the Lord's Supper in conditions where true unity of faith, in accordance with the Scriptures, was not present, while at the same time the consistory refused to maintain the

- objections it had raised earlier against the synodical decisions which had broken this true unity of faith; and
- iv) this assertion places deputies BBK in conflict with the decision of Synod Groningen regarding the Liberation in Abbotsford (see *Acts*, Article 7.05, quoted below, and the Report of Committee 3 which was accepted by Synod).

Decision:

The General Synod of Groningen of the Reformed Churches meeting in Zwolle on April 18, 2015 decides not to comply with the request of the church council of DGK Dalfsen to pronounce that GS Emmen 2009/2010 had insufficient grounds to have a sister church relationship with the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford.

Grounds:

- 1. The reports of deputies BBK to GS Emmen 2009/2010, the answer by the LRC at Abbotsford to the questions put to it by this synod and the Acts of the Synod sufficiently demonstrate the legality of the Liberation at Abbotsford.*
- 2. Dalfsen wrongly argues that the decisive starting point for the Abbotsford Liberation would be the mere fact that CanRC entered into sister-church relationships with Presbyterian churches that have the Westminster Standards as a confession. It is clear from the documents that the decisive starting point for the Abbotsford Liberation was a number of interrelated unscriptural ecclesiastical practices and the refusal of the churches to repent of them. That Dalfsen is wrong to state this is also evident from the fact that [the Liberated Reformed Church at] Abbotsford rejected the sister church relationship that the CanRC entered into with the URC, which do not have the WS as confessions.*
- 3. GS Emmen 2009/2010 considered that further research into the Westminster Standards was not a precondition for establishing whether the Abbotsford Declaration was legal.*
- 4. On behalf of GS Emmen 2009/2010, a delegation investigated whether the LRC Abbotsford lived out of its confession and whether it was possible to enter into a sister-church relationship. Following the report of the delegation, Synod has established that the LRC at Abbotsford is faithful in teaching, service, and discipline to our God. The decision on recognition was taken unanimously in a public session.*

Br. W. Snippe and Rev. S. de Marie abstained from the vote as they took part in the decision-making on the LRCA during GS Emmen 2009. The committee report was adopted by 6 votes to 4.

- e) In paragraph (h) you claim that the objections we have recently sent to the synods of the CanRCs were justly declared inadmissible. Your claim directly contradicts the stated wording of Article 31 of the Church Order which reads, "*If anyone complains that he has been wronged*" We refer you to the above paragraph 1(c) regarding your discussions with the CanRCs.
- f) In paragraph (i) you show that you do not understand the reference we made to Article 33 of the Church Order. We referred to this Article in paragraph (i) of our response to your question 2 in our May 23, 2019 letter. In the end we did not present any "new" material to the consistory at Abbotsford. The problem was that the general synods, from 1977 on, did not properly deal with the material that they had received. As we have previously stated in subparagraph a(iv) above, the additional material we had submitted to the consistory on and after October 4, 2005 concerned matters which had previously been appealed to many general synods but denied, resulting in increasing deformation in the CanRCs. By submitting this additional material we had hoped to show the consistory the process of deformation which had taken root in the CanRCs and thereby encourage the consistory to take a stand against the deformation which had resulted from the decisions of Synod 2001. You do not prove a requirement to appeal these matters (which had already been appealed many times in the past) once more. You have not interacted with the evidence of deformation in the CanRC contained in their Acts of Synod that we referred to on pages 3 to 5 of our May 23, 2019 letter.
- g) The fact that this was a "finished matter" which had gone the "full ecclesiastical way" is proven by the Abbotsford CanRC's letter to one of us dated May 31, 2007 claiming that "*As consistory has accepted the decisions of Synod 2004, we consider the matter finished unless new matters are brought forward.*"
- h) In paragraph (j) you try to define "*what settles the matter.*" As stated earlier, we maintain that we did indeed go the "*full ecclesiastical way.*" However, what truly settles the matter is contained in the "*unless*" of Article 31 of the Church Order; whether "*it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order.*" It is this that is the parallel between the secession in Abbotsford and the Liberation of 1944.

3. Regarding the open Lord's Supper and the lack of confessional membership in the OPC

We are astonished to find so little interaction with the material we sent you. We interact with your responses as follows:

- a) In your response to our answer regarding the open Lord's Supper in the OPC you claim "*there is supervision by the consistory*" and therefore you cannot "*consider their way of celebrating the Lord's Supper as an 'open Lord's Supper.'*" At the same time you provide no support for this assertion. You have not

interacted with the evidence we provided on pages 2 to 6 of our May 23, 2019 letter.

- b) As we have previously stated, a minister in the OPC, Rev. G.I. Williamson, has stated similar concerns when he says, *"In the Orthodox Presbyterian Church ... persons are commonly admitted of whom the Session know nothing. I have never been able to see how this common practice can be reconciled with the clearly stated requirement of our confession which says "Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in the sacrament, yet they receive not the thing signified thereby; but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. Wherefore all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table, and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto."* (quotation from Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 29, section 8 in CanRC Acts, Synod 1998, Article 130, Considerations C.3, page 155). In other words, this practice of the OPC is even contrary to the Westminster Standards. You have not interacted with this quotation.
- c) Can you define what you mean by "supervision?"
- d) You have not interacted with the point that a "self-attestation" or "self-testimony" is not a legitimate attestation (see for reference Lord's Day 30, question and answer 82 and the decision of Synod Marienberg in Article 25J quoted above).
- e) You have not proven that the above decision of Synod Marienberg 2005, regarding the general verbal warning that is practiced in the PCEA, is not relevant to this issue.
- f) You do not interact with our points regarding confessional membership as we explained on pages 1 to 5 of our February 28, 2019 letter.
- g) You do not react to the implications caused by the failure of the OPC to maintain confessional membership. The OPC does not bind their members to the Westminster Standards in the same way that we bind our members to the Three Forms of Unity. Therefore, even if we could say that the Westminster Standards were the ecclesiastical equivalent of the Three Forms of Unity, it would still be impossible to conclude that there is unity of faith between the CanRC and OPC! In connection with this we refer you to an article by Rev. K. Kok entitled *"Presbyterian or Reformed"* available at <http://www.spindleworks.com/library/kok/presorref.htm>. We also refer you to an editorial by Dr. J. Visscher in April 27, 2007 issue of Clarion entitled "Confessional membership?" which can be found at http://www.clarionmagazine.ca/archives/2007/205-232_v56n9.pdf, a response by Rev. B. Hofford entitled *"Confessional Membership Revisited"* on http://www.calltoreform.com/Articles/ed_confessionalmemberrevisited.html and

pages 157 to 159 of the 2015 edition of the OPC Book of Church Order on https://opc.org/BCO/BCO_2015.pdf which proves that there is no requirement to profess the reformed faith in the OPC.

4. Regarding the Westminster Standards

You have challenged our position on the Westminster Standards as stating that we “*condemn the Westminster Confession in full*” We find this statement to be completely inconsistent, since in the same breath you acknowledge that we find “*many good things*” in this confession. We note that you have not interacted with our points on the first 2 pages of our May 23, 2019 letter. In addition we ask your attention for the following:

- a) The Westminster Standards comprise the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Westminster Longer Catechism. As discussed below, no general synod has made a complete and objective evaluation of the Westminster Standards to determine whether they are indeed in accordance with the truth of God’s Word.
 - i) In connection with this GKV Synod Amersfoort 1948 expressed doubts about the reformed character of this confession, especially as regarding the doctrine of the church.
 - ii) The GKV Synod Rotterdam-Delfshaven 1967 took over a conclusion from Particular Synod Groningen without interacting with its contents. A closer examination of the Report that was produced by this Particular Synod shows that only the Westminster Confession of Faith was considered. In this respect we must maintain that this decision of Synod 1967 regarding the Westminster Standards is invalid, since it was made on the basis of an incomplete report.
 - iii) The CanRC Synod 1986 “received” a Report on the “Evaluation of Divergencies” (between the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity) but did not evaluate it. As a result this Report has no ecclesiastical status in the CanRCs. As the stated purpose of this Report was to supply a basis for Synod 1977’s decision to call the OPC a “true church” this Report also lacks objectivity and credibility.
 - iv) The OPC does not recognize the Westminster Standards as “Forms for Unity.” As we have stated earlier, members of the OPC are not bound to their confessional standards and office bearers are only bound to the “system of doctrine” as contained in the Westminster Standards. In other words, deviations are allowed.
- b) In response to evidence provided to deputies, your Synod Hasselt 2011-12 mandated deputies to study the Westminster Standards. By implication this Synod decided that the Report which justified the conclusion of the GKV synod 1967 was inadequate. The results of these studies were reported to Synod Groningen 2014-15. No appeal or revision request was sent to a subsequent Synod regarding Synod Hasselt’s decision to study the Westminster Standards.

- c) Neither Synod Groningen 2014-15 nor Synod Lansingerland 2018 have evaluated the contents of the Study Reports that were submitted to Synod Groningen. Therefore in the absence of such evaluations it is not appropriate for Deputies BBK to fault us for pointing out perceived deficiencies in the Westminster Standards when two General Synods have not completed the evaluation of the Study Reports that were prepared by their own lawfully appointed deputies. The failure of the General Synods to complete the evaluation of these Study Reports has hamstrung deputies BBK in their mandate to properly evaluate Presbyterian churches in the same way that CanRC deputies were hamstrung by the decision of Synod 1977 to call the OPC a "true church."
- d) Synod Lansingerland 2018 (See Article 6.02) had indicated in its decision regarding Dalfsen's request that *"the Westminster Standards do evoke questions and therefore it is important to discuss these matters with Abbotsford."* Why then do deputies not inquire regarding these questions and seek to understand our concerns about the Westminster Standards in the light of Scripture and confession?

5. Conclusions

Brothers, we object to your conclusions as follows:

- a) You write that we *"condemn the WCF in full"* and that we *"cannot acknowledge churches that consciously use the WC unchanged and uncontradicted as their confession"* We respond that the OPC, as well as many other Presbyterian churches, do not maintain this confession since, as we have repeatedly tried to explain to you, the OPC does not bind its own members to it!
- b) You write that *"your vision is diametrically opposed to what our churches pronounced on this."* We are afraid that as Deputies you have not carefully considered the decisions of Synod Hasselt 2012 to do a further study on the Westminster Standards or the decision of Synod Groningen 2015 to receive the two reports *"to be used as study reports in contacts with foreign churches that have these confessions"* (*Acts*, Article 6.01). You do not explain to us how you can condemn our views in this matter when the General Synod has not condemned the views of the Majority Report on the Westminster Standards, with which, as you well know, we are in agreement.
- c) You claim that *"you didn't follow the ecclesiastical way to the end,"* that our secession *"was not in accordance with the Church Order,"* and *"has therefore not been justified."* This claim is made in clear contradiction of the decisions of Synods Emmen 2010 and Groningen 2015. We refer you to the very clear Report of Committee 3 to Synod Groningen which was adopted by Synod in support of these decisions. Are these decisions not settled and binding? We

therefore believe that you do not abide by Article 31 of the Church Order when you come to us with conclusions that are not even supported by your own Synods!

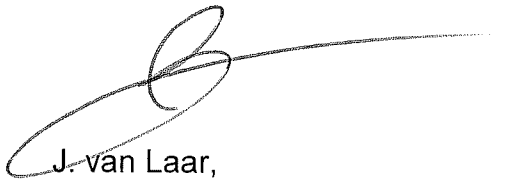
Brothers, we are concerned about the lack of interaction with a substantial portion of the material we have sent you. We are concerned that our discussion has not been as honest or as open as it should be. This is to be lamented.

As we read in Philippians 3:16, *"let us be of the same mind."* We hope and pray that at the conclusion of our discussions this will become an accomplished fact.

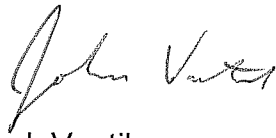
We therefore beseech you to seriously and conscientiously interact, in a brotherly fashion, with the material we have sent you in your response to this and to our previous letters. We ask that you reserve your conclusions until you have spoken with us and interacted with all of the material we have provided you.

We wish you continued strength and the Lord's blessing on all your work.

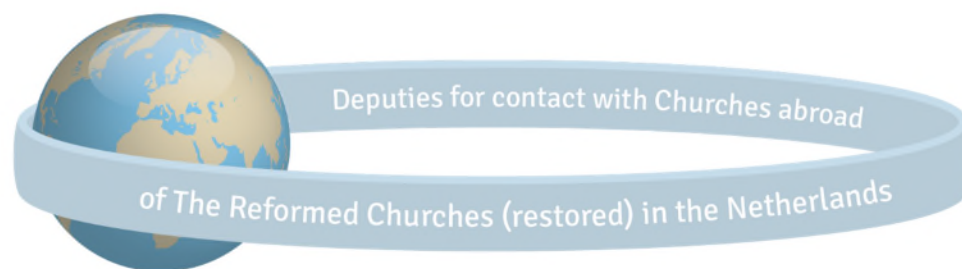
Yours in Christ,



J. van Laar,
President
Email: vanlaarfarms@gmail.com



J. Vantil,
Clerk
Email: johnvantil@shaw.ca



To Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford
c/o J. Vantil
JohnVantil@shaw.ca

From Deputies contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
c/o Rev. C. Koster
Duindigtstraat 7, 2665 HS Bleiswijk, The Netherlands
dsckoster@gmail.com

September 14th, 2020

Esteemed brothers in the Lord,

On Wednesday, April 1st 2020, we received your letter of March 26th, 2020. Unfortunately discussing your letter had to be postponed due to the Sars-CoV-2 virus. Only on Tuesday, September 8th, could we convene again face-to-face and discuss your letter.

We discussed and evaluated your reaction and concluded that we maintain our former provisional conclusions. Hereby we also inform you that we consider the written communication as regards content completed. As to the content of our written exchange we'd like to continue talks, not in writing but orally.

We'd prefer to visit you and meet each other in order to continue discussing matters with you, but at present that appears to be impossible because of the Coronavirus and the accompanying governmental restrictions which prevent us to travel to Canada.

So that's why we have decided not to visit you, but to convene a digital meeting with you in the near future. This is different from a face-to-face meeting, but nevertheless it is better than no meeting at all. As deputies we intend to convene somewhere and three of our deputies will speak with you, while our other deputies will be present nearby and listen in. Our talks could e.g. be conducted through Skype or Microsoft Teams.

As dates and time we propose:

Monday, 26 October 2020

Tuesday, 27 October 2020

Wednesday, 28 October 2020.

If none of these three dates might be possible for you, we have one extra date:

Saturday, 24 October 2020.

For each of these dates the time will be the same, namely:

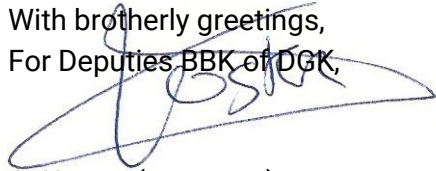
Dutch time from 18.30 to 21.00 o'clock

Your time from 9.30 to 12.00 o'clock.

Hoping to hear from you, we remain,

With brotherly greetings,

For Deputies BBK of DGK,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Koster', is written over the text 'For Deputies BBK of DGK,'.

C. Koster (secretary)

Persbericht BBK september 2020

Vanwege het coronavirus heeft het vergaderwerk van deputaten Betrekkingen Buitenlandse Kerken (BBK) helaas enige tijd stilgelegen. Maar in september zijn we als deputaten weer bij elkaar gekomen. Onze aandacht is in het bijzonder uitgegaan naar de zusterkerk van De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in Abbotsford, de Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford (LRCA). Want als deputaatschap hebben we een opdracht van de synode meegekregen om met LRCA in gesprek te gaan.

De generale synode (GS) van Lansingerland heeft in april 2018 drie dingen besloten: 1. De GS erkent dat de GS van Emmen en de GS van Groningen ten onrechte hebben gesteld dat de mogelijkheid om met bezwaren voort te gaan in de kerkelijke weg aan leden van de Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) ontnomen is. 2. Om met de zusterkerk te Abbotsford het gesprek aan te gaan over de katholiciteit van de kerk met betrekking tot de rechtmatigheid van haar afscheiding en haar kerkelijke positie van nu. 3. Om met de Canadese deputaten verder door te spreken over het ontstaan en bestaan van de LRCA.

Als gronden voor deze besluiten werden aangevoerd: 1. Uitspraken van de LRCA over kerken die de Westminster Standards als belijdenisgeschriften hebben roepen de nodige vragen op over hun visie op de katholiciteit van de kerk. 2. In het kader van een zusterkerkrelatie kun je, als er redenen zijn voor zorgen, dat bespreekbaar maken met de zusterkerk. 3. In de uitspraken van de GS Emmen en de GS Groningen zijn wel beschuldigingen van de LRCA aan het adres van de CanRC over het verval geuit en overgenomen, maar deze zijn nog niet allemaal bewezen of onderbouwd. 4. Bij het onderzoek naar de beweegredenen van de LRCA om tot afscheiding van de CanRC te komen zijn de CanRC niet voldoende gehoord.

Op grond van deze opdracht is een uitvoerige, schriftelijke correspondentie tot stand gekomen tussen het deputaatschap en de kerkenraad van de LRCA. Het deputaatschap is voor dit moment tot de volgende conclusies gekomen, welke ook met de kerkenraad van LRCA zijn gedeeld.

Wat betreft de katholiciteit van de kerk: de LRCA veroordeelt de WC als geheel als een document waarin (naast veel goeds ook) dwaalleer wordt geleerd. En kerken die de WC bewust ongewijzigd en onweersproken als belijdenis hanteren kan de LRCA niet erkennen als kerken van Christus, louter en alleen al om het feit dat zij de WC belijden. Op dit punt staat de visie van LRCA lijnrecht tegenover wat het kerkverband van DGK hierover heeft uitgesproken.

Wat betreft de kerkelijke weg: de LRCA is de kerkelijke weg niet ten einde toe gegaan. De afscheiding in 2007 van de CanRC is daarom in kerkrechtelijk opzicht onwettig geweest.

Volgens de instructies zal het deputaatschap van BBK nu het mondelinge gesprek aangaan met de kerkenraad van de LRCA. Omdat het niet mogelijk is om naar Canada te gaan vanwege de corona-maatregelen is het onze bedoeling om deze ontmoeting op korte termijn op een andere manier te laten plaatsvinden om verder met de kerkenraad van de LRCA door te spreken over de katholiciteit van de kerk en de rechtmatigheid van de afscheiding, mede aan de hand van de briefwisseling.

Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford

C/O 2043 Jordan Place, Abbotsford, B.C., V3G 2C3

October 1, 2020

Deputies Contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
C/O Rev. C. Koster
Duindigtstraat 7
2665 HS Bleiswijk
The Netherlands

Esteemed brothers in the Lord:

We are writing in response to your letter dated September 14, 2020 and your published update which was posted on the Reformed Continua website.

It is incumbent upon us to express our very serious concerns over this correspondence:

1) Your public communication

We are concerned that you have taken the trouble to make public a communication about us without informing us of your intention to do so and without interacting with the material we have sent to you. In our previous letter to you we asked that *"you reserve your conclusions until you have spoken with us and interacted with all of the material we have provided you."* At the same time you indicate that you would *"like to continue talks, not in writing but orally."* Why could you not honour our request? Is this an honest way of dealing with matters? Is this a just and equitable way to treat a sister church? If you *"consider the written communication as content completed"* the question must be asked, if you cannot interact with written material, what will be the value of our oral communication?

2) Your conclusions regarding our views on the Westminster Confession

- a) You incorrectly conclude that we reject the Westminster Confession in full. In this you go beyond the decision of Synod Groningen which has adopted the Report of Committee 3. Committee 3 stated, in response to a statement by the church at Dalfsen, that the LRC Abbotsford does not have a verdict on the whole of the Westminster Confession. Committee 3 and Synod Groningen made this statement in full knowledge of our support of the Majority Report, which also has good things to say about the Westminster Confession.

- b) You incorrectly conclude that we *"cannot acknowledge churches that use the WCF ... simply and solely because of the fact that they confess their faith in the WCF."* As we have written to you in our letter dated September 5, 2019, *"It is therefore possible to have a relationship with a federation of churches which gives evidence of an understanding of the aforementioned doctrines in accordance with the Three Forms of Unity, maintains confessional membership and administers a properly supervised Lord's Supper table, even though it may have the Westminster Standards as its confession."* This position is consistent with the decision of Synod Groningen, Article 6.01, Ground 4, which reads (English translation), *"In contacts with foreign churches that have the Westminster Standards as confessions, it must first and foremost become clear whether the ecclesiastical practice is in accordance with God's Word. If this is positive, further discussion is possible about substantive differences between the various confessions. After all it may be expected of churches that profess God's Word as Truth that they are accountable for what they say in their confessions as a summary of God's Word."* We can live with and work with this decision.
- 3) Your conclusions regarding the ecclesiastical way followed by the LRCA
- a) You incorrectly conclude that we didn't follow the ecclesiastical way to the end. You do not consider the fact that we appealed the decision of CanRC General Synod 2001 to General Synod 2004 through the Abbotsford CanRC consistory. The denial of this Appeal, along with a number of other appeals on the same matter, was the end of the ecclesiastical way in accordance with Articles 31 and 50 of the Church Order. You also ignore the fact that the relationship with the OPC has been the subject of appeals at every general synod since General Synod 1977 declared the OPC to be a true church!
- b) Because of the above incorrect conclusion, you also misinterpret our actions in appealing to the consistory and to the Classis after General Synod 2004 denied our Appeal. We were not seeking to start another process of appeal (which would have been contrary to Article 33 of the Church Order) and neither were we obligated to do so. Instead we were seeking to maintain the Scriptural and Confessional integrity of the local church of which we were a part by urging the consistory to liberate itself from the unscriptural General Synod decisions. When the consistory refused to do so, appeals to Classis were made in an attempt to persuade consistory to seriously deal with the underlying issues and return to its original position which it had adopted in the Appeal.
- c) Proof that the decision of General Synod 2001 became a settled matter in the CanRCs after the decision of Synod 2004 can be found in Articles 27 of the Acts of Synod Burlington 2010 and Article 47 of the Acts of Synod

Carman West, where we read that appeals of the CanRC church at Attercliffe on this same matter were declared inadmissible on the basis of Article 33 of the Church Order. In fact there was no obligation to present new grounds, since Synods 2001 and 2004 had already ignored and/or rejected the Scriptural grounds which had been presented to them and to previous synods.

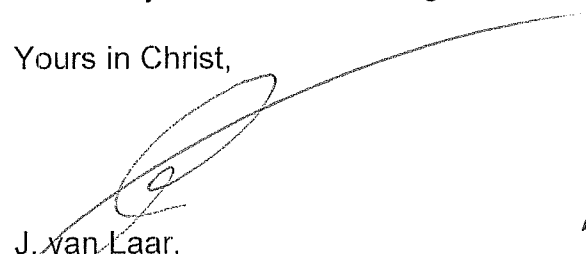
- d) The Church Order which has been adopted for use in Canada does not speak about a requirement to address consistory after the denial of an appeal by the general synod. This proves that our actions, after the denial of the Appeal by General Synod 2004, were separate actions that were not essential for liberation.
- e) At the same time it was incumbent upon us, as concerned members, to undertake these separate actions in order to bear witness, to the CanRC membership in Abbotsford and elsewhere, of these unscriptural general synod decisions, and then to liberate from this unscriptural compromise in accordance with Revelation 18:4.

You also write to us to indicate your willingness to participate in a digital meeting with us to further discuss these outstanding issues (thereby acknowledging that your aforementioned conclusions were premature) and, presumably, to ask questions about church life in Abbotsford.

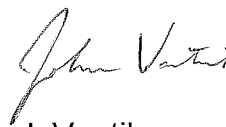
In the past we have organized such meetings as special consistory meetings, presided over by our president, with the difference that now you will be digitally present as guests. Considering that the members of the consistory are involved in their daily occupations during the week, the only day that appears feasible is Saturday October 24, 2020.

We wish you continued strength and wisdom, and the Lord's blessing on your work.

Yours in Christ,



J. van Laar,
President
Email: vanlaarfarms@gmail.com



J. Vantil,
Clerk
Email: johnvantil@shaw.ca

Notulen gesprek BBK van DGK met LRCA 24-10-2020

Aanwezig via Skype: kerkenraad van LRCA, gesprek wordt gevoerd door brs. Van Til en Van Laar, en namens BBK wordt het gesprek gevoerd door DJB, CK en MS, terwijl PD ook aanwezig is.

In aansluiting op de gevoerde correspondentie tussen DGK en LRCA wordt dit gesprek gevoerd om zo eventueel nog bestaande onduidelijkheden verder op te helderen.

Agenda:

1. Opening
2. Vaststellen agenda
3. De kerkelijke weg
4. Vragen BBK aan LRCA
5. Algemene vragen
6. Broederlijke censuur
7. Afsluitend gebed

De agenda is door LRCA opgesteld en wat ons betreft akkoord. De leiding ligt bij LRCA en bij punt 4 heeft BBK de leiding met CK en MAS als woordvoerders. Bij punt 3 is DJB woordvoerder.

Na introductie en opening wordt overgegaan tot de bespreking.

Geen kerkvisitatie

LRCA vraagt of dit meteen een kerkvisitatie is, omdat LRCA in Canada geen zusterkerk heeft.

BBK: Neen, dat is niet de bedoeling. Visitatie kan eventueel op een later tijdstip plaatsvinden.

Press release van dit gesprek

LRCA vraagt of er een press release van dit gesprek komt.

Overeengekomen wordt dat notulen voor eigen gebruik zullen worden gemaakt.

LRCA wil ook een samenvatting van het gesprek voor de gemeente maken.

BBK zal eventueel later nog een press release geven voor de kerken.

Punt 3 – de kerkelijke weg

Dit punt komt na de pauze in bespreking.

Punt 4 – bespreking vragen

We volgen de punten via de **LRCA-brief van 1 oktober 2020**.

BRIEF PUNT 1 - PUBLIEKE COMMUNICATIE

LRCA heeft moeite met onze recente update/press release.

BBK: deze is gepubliceerd in overeenstemming met de synodeopdracht om minstens 1 maal per jaar de kerken op de hoogte te stellen van de stand van zaken.

LRCA: waarom niet gewacht tot dit gesprek had plaatsgevonden en dan pas conclusies getrokken?

BBK: onze **voorlopige conclusies** met argumenten zijn al **in onze brief van november 2019** aan u bekend gemaakt en u heeft ruim gelegenheid gekregen om daarop te reageren. In uw antwoordbrief van maart 2020 heeft u **uw argumenten** naar voren gebracht, maar die **hebben ons niet overtuigd**.

LRCA: u beschouwt de **schriftelijke communicatie** als afgerond, maar u reageert niet op al onze punten in onze brief van maart 2020.

BBK: Nee, **niet alle punten zijn relevant.**

Het is lastig vooraf te bepalen welke punten wel en niet relevant zijn. BBK is gebonden aan de **beperkte opdracht** van de synode en kan dus niet voor de kerken over andere zaken een oordeel geven namens de kerken.

BRIEF PUNT 2 – CONCLUSIES T.A.V. LRCA'S VISIE OP DE WS

LRCA: waarom ligt de focus zo op de WS? Onze bezwaren hadden als focus confessioneel membership en een open Lord's Supper.

BBK: Dit heeft te maken met onze **instructie**, waarin de **WS, de kerkelijke weg en de relatie met de OPC** een rol spelen. **De CanRC waren voor u niet langer kerken van Christus** en één van onze kerken heeft hier vraagtekens bij gezet. **Wat is uw positie inzake de WCF, is het een gereformeerde confessie of niet.**

LRCA: wij hadden hetzelfde probleem met de URCNA, hoewel zij wel de DFE hebben en niet de WS.

BBK: maar de OPC staat wel centraal in alle stukken.

LRCA: In 2006 werd een lid van de URCNA toegelaten tot het HA. Dat was het begin.

BBK: Maar the struggle begon in 2001 (zie uw website). U had zorgen over dingen in de WCF die niet Schriftuurlijk waren.

LRCA: Ja, daarover zijn we in beroep gegaan bij Chatham 2004. De focus lag op fencing HA en conf.membership.

De studierapporten liggen er.

BBK: Voor u is de **WS geen reformed and biblical confession** because it gives room to unbiblical practices. Voor DGK is het wel een gereformeerde en Schriftuurlijke belijdenis.

De studierapporten hebben geen officiële status binnen DGK.

Wij kunnen een **zusterkerkrelatie aangaan met een presbyteriaanse kerk.**

LRCA: **Wij kunnen dat ook, als er maar binding is aan de confessie en geen open HA, maar zulke presbyteriaanse kerken kennen wij niet.**

LRCA vindt dat de verschillen **vooraf** moeten worden besproken, dat sprak GS Fergus 1998 uit, Neerlandia 2001 overturned that.

BBK: Chatham 2004 sprak uit dat de verschillen **na** het aangaan van een zusterkerkrelatie nog **verder besproken** konden en moesten worden.

U heeft deze punten, **conf. Membership en open HA, verbonden met de WS op GS Emmen**, waar u stelde: hoe kunnen we goede prediking verwachten, zij hebben immers de WS?

LRCA: Het was rev. Hofford die wees op het verband tussen de WS en de praktijken in de OPC en daar baseren wij ons op.

BBK: **Chatham** besloot dat het **nog steeds onderwerp van gesprek** moest zijn.

LRCA: Ja, maar tegelijk mochten hun leden aan ons HA.

BBK: Maar was dat voldoende reden om tot **afscheiding** over te gaan? Chatham nam geen praktijken over.

LRCA: Wij moesten een compromis sluiten. Wij vinden: Wat je je zusters toestaat te doen, doe je zelf.

BBK: Nee, want de standards van de CanRC zijn: geen open HA. Alleen leden van zusterkerken worden tot het HA toegelaten, anderen niet. De regels zijn anders dan in de OPC. **CanRC heeft geen regels overgenomen van de OPC.**

BBK: wanneer mag je je **afschieden? Pas als officieel de regels zo zijn veranderd dat er een open HA is en je aan dat besluit wordt gebonden.** Maar dat is niet gebeurd.

Chatham besloot dat een algemene mondelinge waarschuwing niet voldoende is om aan het HA deel te nemen. Dus geen open avondmaal in de CanRC.

LRCA: maar Abb. implemented de onscriptuurlijke besluiten van Chatham en wij mogen daar niet aan deelnemen. Wij hadden geen andere keus dan ons af te scheiden.

Bovendien was er een lid onder tucht gezet en de kerkenraad deelde ons mee dat ze klaar waren met ons.

BBK: wat is een **open HA** en wat betekent dat voor het hebben van een **zusterkerkrelatie**?

LRCA acht een zusterkerkrelatie met een kerk die mensen toelaat zonder 'the proper paperwork' niet mogelijk. Voor LRCA zijn dit geen ware kerken van Christus en de CanRC zijn door hun relatie met deze kerken ook geen ware kerken meer.

Bovendien is voor LRCA een zusterkerkrelatie met presbyteriaanse kerken niet mogelijk zo lang de binding aan de confessie niet strikter vorm wordt gegeven.

Wij zijn van mening dat een relatie wel kan worden aangegaan, ook met wat andere regels bij de fencing of the Lord's Table en een iets minder strikte binding aan het geheel van de WS.

Hier geldt: Different practices, but based on Scripture (vgl. GS 1967 GKv).

Het conf. membership is minder strikt in presbyteriaanse kerken, omdat de WS zeer uitgebreid en gedetailleerd is en je daarom niet alle leden aan alles kunt binden. De WS is ontstaan in een andere tijd en cultuur.

BBK gaat nog even door op de kritische houding van LRCA t.o.v. de WS en geeft daar een paar voorbeelden van.

LRCA acht eenheid met WS kerken niet mogelijk, omdat zij zelf geen eenheid vertonen.

De DFE zijn geheel in overeenstemming met de Schrift, maar de WS zijn dat niet in alles.

BBK: is de WS een gereformeerde confessie?

LRCA: niet in zijn geheel.

BBK: Wat moet er dan aangepast worden aan de DFE?

LRCA: Het moet aan de Schrift worden aangepast en dat betekent dan ook aan de DFE.

Het meerderheidsrapport geeft de te bespreken zaken aan, zoals pluriformiteit, zekerheid van het geloof, enz. De OPC is sinds 1977 niet veranderd. Wij moeten tegen hen zeggen: de WS, 'fix it'.

BRIEF PUNT 3 – DE KERKELIJKE WEG

BBK: we volgen hier de 5 punten a t/m e onder punt 3 van de brief van LRCA van 1-10-2020.

a. BBK: u stelt dat de kerkelijke weg was afgelopen, maar na de weigering van de kerkenraad om bij Smithers 2007 tegen de besluiten van Chatham 2004 in beroep te gaan, had u als gemeenteleden zelf in beroep kunnen gaan. Chatham besloot dat die weg open lag via classis en reg. synode.

LRCA: wij accepteren art. 20 van GS Chatham niet, omdat dit een inperking inhoudt van art. 31. Individuen moeten zich rechtstreeks tot de GS kunnen wenden waar het gaat over uitspraken van de GS en over buitenlandse kerken (waaronder de OPC).

Daarnaast: Wij zijn niet in beroep gegaan tegen dit besluit van Chatham, het was een 'side issue', onze zorg lag bij de besluiten van Neerlandia 2001.

b. BBK: Waarom bent u niet bij GS 2007 Smithers in beroep gegaan als individuen, nadat de kerkenraad weigerde in beroep te gaan? U heeft zelfs een 'draft' (concept) om in beroep te gaan bij de kerkenraad neergelegd, omdat Chatham 'did not interact substantially with all concerns'. U zag dus nog ruimte voor beroep.

LRCA: de kerkenraad moest in beroep gaan. Maar zij legden zich neer bij de besluiten van Chatham en gaven ons te kennen: 'you were done' ('einde verhaal voor jullie'), en 'accept the decisions of GS and consistory' ('aanvaard de besluiten van GS en kerkenraad').

De kerkenraad weigerde in beroep te gaan en dwong ons zo tot afscheiding.

BBK: u ging na de weigering door de kerkenraad wel twee keer naar de classis. Maar de classis wees uw beroepen af. De eerste keer met terug verwijzing naar de kerkenraad om het gesprek daar breder te voeren en de tweede maal met: 'u bent onredelijk'.

De gemeenten van Lynden en Attercliffe gingen wel naar de GS Smithers 2007 en hun beroep werd ontvankelijk verklaard.

LRCA: ja, maar Smithers 'did not really answer their appeal' ('heeft hun beroep niet werkelijk beantwoord'), wat een eufemisme is voor: 'not dealing with it' ('heeft het niet behandeld').

c. d. e. BBK: u kunt uitspraken van latere synodes niet gebruiken als bewijs voor afwijzing van bezwaren door eerdere synodes (2001 en 2004).

LRCA: wij werden tot een compromis gedwongen.

BBK: u stopte na afwijzing door kerkenraad en classis, maar u had als leden door kunnen gaan met bezwaar.

LRCA: niet Chatham was het probleem, maar Neerlandia. Beroepszaken buitenlandse kerken horen rechtstreeks naar de GS te gaan. De classis is voor 'minor cases' (geen algemene, het kerkverband als geheel betreffende zaken, maar 'kleinere' zaken).

BBK: u ging naar de classis tegen de kerkenraad. U had door kunnen gaan naar de regionale Synode en de GS om hulp te krijgen tegen de raad.

LRCA: maar wij werden tot onschriftuurlijke praktijken gedwongen door de kerkenraad doordat iemand van de URCNA tot het avondmaal in Abbotsford werd toegelaten.

BBK: u accepteerde niet art. 50 van Chatham, dat moest dus eerst worden opgelost, daartegen had u in beroep moeten gaan, ook al werd dat doorkruist met de praktijk bij het HA.

LRCA: dat hadden we kunnen doen, maar Neerlandia ging voor, OPC was het belangrijkste.

BBK: wij begrijpen uw argumenten, maar wij hebben hier een andere mening over (u had nog in beroep kunnen gaan).

LRCA: voor ons was de kerkelijke weg afgelopen ('completed') na Chatham. Toen de kerkenraad onschriftuurlijke praktijken accepteerde, waren wij 'finished'.

Afsluiting met gebed door br. VanTil.

BBK-update 1

Buitenlandse contacten – Februari 2019

"Wij geloven en belijden één katholieke of algemene kerk. Dat is de kerk van Jezus Christus, die haar Hoofd en Koning is. Deze kerk is niet gevestigd in, gebonden aan of beperkt tot een bepaalde plaats, of gebonden aan bepaalde personen. Zij is verbreid en verstrooid over heel de wereld. Toch is zij met hart en wil samengevoegd en verenigd in eenzelfde Geest door de kracht van het geloof." (NGB art. 27).

Dit geloven en belijden wij niet alleen, we geven dit ook concreet gestalte door als kerkverband contacten met kerken over heel de wereld te onderhouden. Dit werk wordt door het deputaatschap Betrekkingen Buitenlandse Kerken gedaan (BBK).

Dit betekent dat deputaten contact onderhouden met onze zusterkerk in Abbotsford (LRCA) in Canada. Hieronder en in de volgende update geven wij u meer informatie hierover.

Verder zijn er contacten met andere kerkgenootschappen. Dit betreft kerken in Canada (CanRC), Australië (FRCA) en Zuid-Afrika (FRCSA). Daarnaast zijn er beginnende contacten gelegd met kerken in Engeland/Wales, Schotland en Ierland, Zuid-Korea, Oekraïne en Duitsland.

Het onderhouden van contact gebeurt vooral schriftelijk. Maar ook zijn er persoonlijke ontmoetingen, bijvoorbeeld als afgevaardigden van andere kerkverbanden in Nederland zijn, of als onze deputaten de zusterkerk bezoeken of synodes van andere kerkverbanden bijwonen. Zo zijn onze deputaten in juni 2017 naar onze zusterkerk in Abbotsford geweest en in juni 2018 hebben twee afgevaardigden de synode van de FRCA bijgewoond.

Met het oog op de hoeveelheid werk die dit alles met zich meebrengt, heeft de synode Lansingerland ons deputaatschap uitgebreid en de volgende broeders en zuster als deputaten benoemd: br. D.J. Bolt, br. P. Dijkstra, ds. H.G. Gunnink, br. Joh. Houweling (voorzitter), ds. C. Koster (secretaris), ds. M.A. Snee en zr. H.G. Sollie-Sleijster. Ds. dr. P. van Gorp werd opnieuw als adviseur van het deputaatschap benoemd.

Intussen konden we het werk volgens onze instructies opstarten.

Een belangrijk onderdeel van deze instructies is de opdracht tot het stellen van een aantal specifieke vragen aan onze zusterkerk in Abbotsford. Dit om zo meer duidelijkheid over hun huidige kerkelijke positie te krijgen met betrekking tot de katholiciteit van de kerk en de wettigheid van hun afscheiding. Deze opdracht geven we prioriteit.

In Subcarpathia (Oekraïne) hebben we contact met de Evangelische Gereformeerde Kerken (ERE). Een klein kerkverband van vijf gemeenten met vier predikanten. Het voornemen is deze kerken het komende voorjaar een bezoek te brengen om nader kennis te maken met hun kerkelijke leven, en onderzoek te doen naar de mogelijkheden van een kerkelijke relatie. De gemeente van Opeinde ondersteunt een van de gemeenten namelijk die waarvan ds. Z. Tóth predikant is. Een commissie is bezig om daar verder structuur aan te geven.

Zoals u ziet is dit onze eerste update. Onze bedoeling is u regelmatig over ons werk voor de kerken te informeren. We vinden dit belangrijk, want contact onderhouden met andere kerken is geen hobby voor enkelen, maar een roeping voor de kerk van Christus. Belangrijk vanwege de katholiciteit van Zijn kerk, die Hij zich wereldwijd vergadert en verenigt.

We proberen u op de hoogte te houden.

Namens het deputaatschap,
C. Koster (secretaris)

Persbericht BBK, februari 2020

Donderdagavond 9 januari 2020 hebben deputaten Betrekkingen Buitenlandse kerken in Elspeet gesproken met afgevaardigden van drie kerkverbanden. Graag willen we via deze weg iets delen van deze ontmoeting, zodat u op de hoogte bent van de contacten die DGK hebben met kerken in het Buitenland.

Het gesprek vond plaats met afgevaardigden van de Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), de Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) en de Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA). Zij waren allen in Nederland vanwege de 'buitenlanddagen' van de synode van de Gereformeerde kerken (vrijgemaakt). De CanRC en de FRCA hebben de zusterkerkrelatie met de GKV verbroken, de FRCSA nog niet, maar heeft wel grote moeite met de koers en de besluiten van de GKV.

Vanuit DGK wordt aangegeven hoe de huidige stand van zaken is wat betreft de toenadering tussen DGK en GKN. Tevens wordt het synodebesluit van DGK genoemd, namelijk om met de Liberated reformed Church in Abbotsford (LRCA) in gesprek te gaan over de katholiciteit van de kerk met betrekking tot de rechtmatigheid van haar afscheiding en haar kerkelijke positie nu, omdat er uitspraken zijn geweest van de LRCA over kerken die de Westminster Standards als belijdenisgeschriften hebben, welke de nodige vragen oproepen.

Door de deputaten van de Australische kerken wordt onder andere aangegeven dat zij (en ook de Canadese kerken) werkzaam zijn in Indonesië. Ds. H.G. Gunnink is ook zeer betrokken bij deze kerken, in het bijzonder bij die op Kalimantan Barat. Aangegeven wordt dat het heel goed zou zijn om meer gezamenlijk op te trekken richting de kerken in Indonesië.

Binnen de kerken in Canada is er gesprek over de vraag welke gezangen zij zullen toevoegen aan hun kerkboek, omdat in 2004 het besluit is genomen om de gezangenbundel uit te breiden tot maximaal 100 gezangen, 85 zijn daarvan reeds ingevuld. Een bijzondere ontwikkeling is dat veel kerken in Canada de mogelijkheid hebben om predikanten te beroepen om in Canada zelf werkzaam te zijn in het kader van evangelisatie en kerkplanting.

Het kerkverband in Zuid-Afrika is klein. Momenteel hebben zij moeite om predikanten te beroepen, omdat de beschikbare predikanten vooral uit het buitenland moeten komen, maar het tegelijk lastig is om een geldig Afrikaans paspoort voor hen te verkrijgen.

Zo heeft u een indruk van deze bijzondere ontmoeting met een aantal kerken waar DGK contact mee heeft. Laten we het werk van Jezus Christus over de hele wereld blijven gedenken in onze gebeden: 'uw koninkrijk kome'!

Persbericht BBK september 2020

Vanwege het coronavirus heeft het vergaderwerk van deputaten Betrekkingen Buitenlandse Kerken (BBK) helaas enige tijd stilgelegen. Maar in september zijn we als deputaten weer bij elkaar gekomen. Onze aandacht is in het bijzonder uitgegaan naar de zusterkerk van De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in Abbotsford, de Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford (LRCA). Want als deputaatschap hebben we een opdracht van de synode meegekregen om met LRCA in gesprek te gaan.

De generale synode (GS) van Lansingerland heeft in april 2018 drie dingen besloten: 1. De GS erkent dat de GS van Emmen en de GS van Groningen ten onrechte hebben gesteld dat de mogelijkheid om met bezwaren voort te gaan in de kerkelijke weg aan leden van de Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) ontnomen is. 2. Om met de zusterkerk te Abbotsford het gesprek aan te gaan over de katholiciteit van de kerk met betrekking tot de rechtmatigheid van haar afscheiding en haar kerkelijke positie van nu. 3. Om met de Canadese deputaten verder door te spreken over het ontstaan en bestaan van de LRCA.

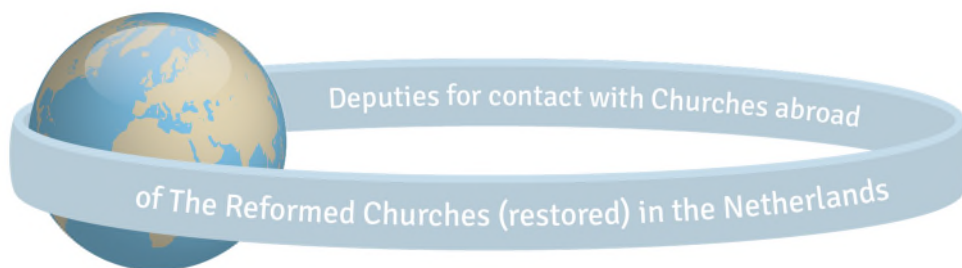
Als gronden voor deze besluiten werden aangevoerd: 1. Uitspraken van de LRCA over kerken die de Westminster Standards als belijdenisgeschriften hebben roepen de nodige vragen op over hun visie op de katholiciteit van de kerk. 2. In het kader van een zusterkerkrelatie kun je, als er redenen zijn voor zorgen, dat bespreekbaar maken met de zusterkerk. 3. In de uitspraken van de GS Emmen en de GS Groningen zijn wel beschuldigingen van de LRCA aan het adres van de CanRC over het verval geuit en overgenomen, maar deze zijn nog niet allemaal bewezen of onderbouwd. 4. Bij het onderzoek naar de beweegredenen van de LRCA om tot afscheiding van de CanRC te komen zijn de CanRC niet voldoende gehoord.

Op grond van deze opdracht is een uitvoerige, schriftelijke correspondentie tot stand gekomen tussen het deputaatschap en de kerkenraad van de LRCA. Het deputaatschap is voor dit moment tot de volgende conclusies gekomen, welke ook met de kerkenraad van LRCA zijn gedeeld.

Wat betreft de katholiciteit van de kerk: de LRCA veroordeelt de WC als geheel als een document waarin (naast veel goeds ook) dwaalleer wordt geleerd. En kerken die de WC bewust ongewijzigd en onweersproken als belijdenis hanteren kan de LRCA niet erkennen als kerken van Christus, louter en alleen al om het feit dat zij de WC belijden. Op dit punt staat de visie van LRCA lijnrecht tegenover wat het kerkverband van DGK hierover heeft uitgesproken.

Wat betreft de kerkelijke weg: de LRCA is de kerkelijke weg niet ten einde toe gegaan. De afscheiding in 2007 van de CanRC is daarom in kerkrechtelijk opzicht onwettig geweest.

Volgens de instructies zal het deputaatschap van BBK nu het mondelinge gesprek aangaan met de kerkenraad van de LRCA. Omdat het niet mogelijk is om naar Canada te gaan vanwege de corona-maatregelen is het onze bedoeling om deze ontmoeting op korte termijn op een andere manier te laten plaatsvinden om verder met de kerkenraad van de LRCA door te spreken over de katholiciteit van de kerk en de rechtmatigheid van de afscheiding, mede aan de hand van de briefwisseling.



To: Jayoo Reformed Church in Jeonju
c/o Rev. DongSup Song
dongsupsong79@gmail.com

From: Deputies contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
c/o Rev. C. Koster
Duindigtstraat 7
2665 HS Bleiswijk
The Netherlands
dsckoster@gmail.com

March 23rd, 2019

Dear rev. Dongsup Song,

As deputies for relations with churches abroad (BBK) of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (DGK) we have considered our contacts with your churches.

There is gap between your churches and our churches. This it is not a spiritual gap, for our past contacts have been good and pleasant, nevertheless there remains a gap regarding language, culture and distance. Unfortunately this gap makes a normal communication between us a difficult matter. This is why we deem it right to propose to our next synod to discontinue contacts with your churches.

We hope this information will be sufficient for you. Be assured we continue to pray for you and your churches. May the Lord give you his blessings and make you faithful in serving Him in your country in agreement with his holy Word.

With brotherly greetings,
Corneel Koster (secretary)

dongsup song

di 2 apr. 07:17

aan ik

To: Deputies contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) c/o Rev. C. Koster Duindigtstraat 7 2665 HS Bleiswijk The Netherlands dsckoster@gmail.com

From: Jayoo Reformed Church in Jeonju c/o Rev. DongSup Song dongsupsong79@gmail.com

Dear Rev. C. Koster

Thank you for your best considerations.

Yesterday evening (2019.4.1) our consistory recognized your decision fully.

While our confronting a dilemma in RCK nowadays, you gave a good opportunity to make our minds.

We appreciated that you did your best and good job in relationship with RCK.

We recognize that some of the things of RCK we have written may sound harsh and judgmental, and perhaps not always clearly articulated. We trust that even though this letter may have its shortcomings, that you hear in it our earnest appeal for you to be faithful to our God and His Word, and that you also see behind it the sincere love that we have for you as our ecclesiastical contact, and are fully assured of our brotherly affection and concern that underlies and motivates this serious decision.

We will overcome all kinds of difficulties and hindrances for our confessions on one holy catholic Christian church as well an ecclesiastical fellowship with **De Gereformeerde kerk Mariëenberg e.o.**

May our Lord continue to bless your churches of DGK!

With our warmest Christian love

P.S.

De Gereformeerde kerk Mariëenberg e.o.

De Gereformeerde Kerk Mariëenberg and environs

C/O M.R. Vermeer, clerk

Kon. Wilhelminalaan 27C

7711 KJ Nieuwleusen

The Netherlands

scriba@dgkmarienberg.nl

February 18, 2019

Jayoo Reformed Church in Jeonju

c/o Rev. DongSup Song

Letter sent via email only

Esteemed consistory:

By way of this letter, De Gereformeerde Kerk Mariënborg e.o. (The Reformed Church of Mariënborg and environs) would like to introduce itself and make a request for ecclesiastical contact.

Who We Are

The Reformed Church of Mariënborg and environs knows itself bound to Holy Scripture as the only and infallible measure of faith. We recognize the three Ecumenical Creeds (the Apostolic Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed) as faithful summaries of our faith. In addition, as Reformed church with roots in the Reformation of the 16th century, we subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort). In our church life we desire to adhere to the Reformed church order (a modified version of the so-called 'Church Order of Dort' which was adopted in 1618/1619). At the moment, the church of Mariënborg is not part of a federation and therefore not all church order articles are applicable or executable. The congregation consists of about 160 members with relatively many youth. Every Sunday two worship services are held, and as a rule the doctrine of God's Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism is proclaimed in the afternoon services. A part of the congregation (approximately 40 members) has, due to geographical distance, recently began meeting at another location. In addition to the Sunday worship services, there is a flourishing Bible study society for both youth and adults. The congregation finds itself in a strongly secularized society and among the members of the church there is a strong desire to hold onto and encourage one another in the faith.

Our History

How did we, as Reformed church, come to existence? Here we see God's special leading and providence. In the 19th century the Dutch Reformed Church (the state church) became liberal, under the influence of the so-called Enlightenment. In 1834 the Reformed churches were continued by a *Secession* from the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1886 a new church split in the Dutch Reformed Church took place (the so-called *Doleantie*). The churches of the *Secession* and the *Doleantie* joined together in 1892 whereby a united church federation was formed under the name *The Reformed Churches*. Our roots in this church federation can still be found in the name of 'our' church, and also in the fact that the decisions of synods since 1892 are, in principle, to this day still in effect! In the 1940's serious problems arose in the churches when the doctrine of 'presumptive regeneration' (the doctrine that infant baptism may take place based on the presumption of the child being regenerate) was made binding by a hierarchal church government. In 1944 a *Liberation* from this doctrine and church government took place and the Reformed Churches (liberated) were formed. In recent decades, doctrinal errors have crept into the Reformed Churches (liberated). The deformation in this federation became especially apparent in the decisions regarding: a) the Sunday was no longer seen as a day of rest commanded by God; b) the allowance for Scripture criticism through unity with church federations where this is permitted, and; c) a Songbook with unscriptural hymns. In September 2003 God graciously took care of His church and a new liberation took place, whereby the church federation The Reformed Churches (restored) came into existence. In the past, deputies of the Reformed Churches (restored) probably sent you the pamphlet 'Do not take words away from this book of prophecy' (September 2006) in which the Liberation of 2003 is explained. If desired, we are most willing to send you this pamphlet again.

Recent Developments

To our sadness, serious deformation has recently occurred in the Reformed Churches (restored), specifically in its church government. The classis which the Reformed Church of Mariënborg and environs belonged to, put the ecclesiastical relationship under serious pressure, among others by sending a letter directly to all the members of the church of Mariënborg with accusations *against* the consistory. The classis also went as far as to

place the church of Mariënborg outside the federation, against the explicit desire of the consistory and before the church of Mariënborg could complete the appeal process. The general synod of the church federation (GS Langsingerland 2017/2018) has approved that aforementioned hierarchy. The synod also made public several accusations (i.a. 'independentism', 'sectarian', 'erroneous brothers') against the church of Mariënborg, without providing any grounds for these accusations. In all of this we are thankful to the Lord our God that a large majority of the congregation has remained united. In appendix I you will find a short summary of the events in the church federation.

Request for Ecclesiastical Contact

The church of Mariënborg would like to maintain contact with you, since the Lord our God has called us to seek unity in truth (Joh. 17:21). The catholicity of the church urges us to seek contact, as the church "is not confined or limited to one particular place or certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world" (Belgic Confession, art. 27). We would be pleased to come into further written or verbal contact.

Yours in His service,

A.H. Ramaker (chairman) M.R. Vermeer (clerk)

Appendix I: Timeline of Events

Appendix I: Timeline of Events

In this appendix a short overview is presented of events in the federation.

A. Proceedings of Classis North-East

December 9, 2016

1. Classis North-East, held on December 9, 2016, deals with matters concerning the church of Mariënborg which were not on the adopted agenda, and without receiving an appeal or request in the agreed upon church-orderly route.¹ In doing so, the classis deals contrary to the reformed Church Order, in which is stated that a matter "may be put on the agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it" (art. 30 C.O. [Book of Praise 1984, art. 30]).

2. The (former) minister of DGK Mariënborg e.o. requests that the consistory of Mariënborg discloses a matter of silent censure, and postpones the Lord's Supper. Classis decides, without proper preparation and without hearing the consistory², that the church of Mariënborg cannot celebrate the Lord's Supper. *December 22, 2016*

3. Classis North-East, held on December 9, 2016, decides in a continued session, without proper preparation and without hearing the consistory, that a matter of silent censure has to be disclosed.³ *January 19, 2017*

4. The chairman and clerk of classis North-East, held on December 9, 2016, unlawfully call together a new session.⁴ Classis continues itself by adding a new agenda item, which is contrary to the Reformed church polity (art. 30 C.O. [Book of Praise 1984, art. 30]). Classis asserts, without proper preparation and without hearing the consistory⁵, that there are 'grave difficulties' within the church of Mariënborg. Classis decides that the minister will temporarily receive an inactive

1 The (former) minister of DGK Mariënborg e.o. submitted these matters during a question period, while he was delegated by DGK Emmen/Assen e.o. (of which he also was a minister). The chairman and clerk of the classis were informed of this prior to the classis meeting, the vice-chairman (who was delegated by DGK Mariënborg e.o.) was not informed.

2 Out of the ten delegates, only the chairman, the clerk and the delegate of DGK Emmen/Assen e.o. (see footnote above) could prepare. Seven delegates had to read the material which was presented by the delegate of DGK Emmen/Assen e.o. during the classis meeting. The consistory and/or delegates of DGK Mariënborg e.o. had not been informed or heard.

3 The (former) minister of DGK Mariënborg e.o. sends an elaborate letter to classis North-East on December 20, 2016 (i.e. one day prior to the continued session) with regards to this matter. The consistory of DGK Mariënborg e.o. was not informed beforehand and thus not provided with the opportunity to respond. Most delegates had

been unable to prepare themselves adequately. The consistory or delegates from DGK Marienberg e.o. had not been informed or heard.

4 In the former session (of December 22, 2016) it was decided that in February 2017 a next session would be held. The chairman and clerk called together the session of January 19, 2017 without informing the vicechairman (who was delegated by DGK Marienberg e.o.).

5 Classis' Deputies for Appeals submit a 'Plan of Action' which had been discussed beforehand only with the minister of DGK Marienberg e.o. The consistory of DGK Marienberg e.o. had not been informed or heard beforehand. Appendix I: Timeline of Events 2 status, and that the Lord's Supper cannot be held in the church of Marienberg (as so-called 'Plan of Action').⁶

5. In the church of Marienberg there are, apart from the functioning of the minister and a single (already concluded) matter of silent censure, no 'grave difficulties'. Classis North-East, by making decision concerning the (inactive) status of the minister and the administration of the sacraments, intruded into the local congregation to do 'what belongs to the offices'. This is contrary to the Reformed Church Order, which states that "no church shall in any way lord it over other churches..." (art. 83 C.O. [Book of Praise 1984, art. 74]). *February 27, 2017*

6. Classis North-East, held on December 9, 2016, assembles in a continued session and decides, without proper preparation and without hearing the consistory⁷, that and 'extraordinary church visitation' will be held. Classis states that consistory's refusal of this visitation would "gravely violate the communion in the federation". *March 6, 2017*

7. Classis North-East holds an 'extraordinary visitation' with confessing members of the church of Marienberg, in which delegates reveal confidential matters which belong to consistory and/or classis. The (implementation of) the extraordinary church visitation does not prevent, but *causes* unrest in the congregation.

B. Expulsion out of the Federation

March-June 2017

8. The consistory of DGK Marienberg e.o. appeals at the classis South-West, the appointed body of appeal within the federation. Classis South-West refuses to accept the appeals, contrary to their church political duty. *July 17, 2017*

9. Classis North-East, held on June 9, 2017, decides, in a continued session on July 13 2017, to address the members of the church of Marienberg directly. In a letter dated July 17, 2017, the consistory is accused of persistently speaking untruths and thus publicly called out as 'liar'. Classis threatens that an unchanged attitude of consistory will lead to "grave ecclesiastical consequences".⁶ This decision is contrary to an earlier decision of the same classis (in a session of December 9, 2016) that only deputies of Synod (as per art. 49 CO [Book of Praise 1984, art. 48]) would deal with matters in the church of Marienberg. ⁷ The classis concludes without hearing the consistory that there are 'parties' within the church of Marienberg, based on one-sided information of one deputy for appeals and the (former) minister. Appendix I: Timeline of Events 3 *August 31, 2017*

10. The consistory of DGK Marienberg e.o. request classis North-East to take back the public accusations, noticing that classis puts a blockage for cooperation. The consistory clearly indicates that it will follow the church orderly route of appeal. Classis, held on June 9, 2017, decides in a continued session on August 31, 2017, to maintain its accusations and places the church of Marienberg outside the federation. *September 1, 2017*

11. The (former) minister and some other members split the church of Marienberg, calling its members to separate church services, starting from September 3, 2017 onwards. A small part of

the congregation withdraws from the church of Marienberg. *September 2, 2017*

12. The consistory of DGK Marienberg e.o. suspends its minister. *September 10, 2017*

13. Classis North-East communicates to all churches and members of federation De Gereformeerde Kerken (hersteld) that a group of church members, led by the (former)

minister of DGK Marienberg e.o., has been acknowledged as the 'lawful church' of Marienberg. *September 16, 2017*

14. The consistory of DGK Marienberg e.o. has to depose its minister.

C. Proceedings of General Synod

December 16, 2017 15. General Synod Lansingerland 2017/2018, in a session on December 17, 2017, places the church of Marienberg definitely outside the federation. In a press release, synod spreads several accusations towards the consistory of the church of DGK Marienberg e.o., e.g. 'independentism', 'sectarianism', and 'erring brothers'. In doing so, synod violates, among others, the 9th commandment ('to defend and promote my neighbour's honour and reputation', Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 43).

D. Continuation of the Church

February 2018 – present day 16. Local churches in the federation ratify the decisions and proceedings of GS Lansingerland 2017/2018, which at several places leads to a liberation.

Reactie BBK aan rev. Song dd. 3 mei 2019

Dear rev. Dongsup Song,

Thank you for your reaction and the understanding you show for our proposal to our synod.

We cordially wish you the indispensable blessing of the Lord, in your country and for your churches.

With brotherly greetings,

For deputies for contact with churches abroad of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands,

Corneel Koster



To: Reformed Churches Korea
c/o Rev. EunHan Yon and rev. SangHyun Park
yeh9869@hanmail.net and reformed1536@daum.net

From: Deputies contact Churches Abroad of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)
c/o Rev. C. Koster
Duindigtstraat 7
2665 HS Bleiswijk
The Netherlands
dsckoster@gmail.com

March 23rd, 2019

Dear brothers,

As deputies for relations with churches abroad (BBK) of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (DGK) we have considered our contacts with your churches.

There is a gap between your churches and our churches. This is not a spiritual gap, but nevertheless there is a gap regarding language, culture and distance. Unfortunately this gap makes a normal communication between us a difficult matter. This is why we deem it right to propose to our next synod to discontinue contacts with your churches.

We hope this information will be sufficient for you. Be assured we continue to pray for you and your churches. May the Lord give you his blessings and make you faithful in serving Him in your country in agreement with his holy Word.

With brotherly greetings,
C. Koster (secretary)

----- Forwarded message -----

Van: 박상현 <reformed1536@hanmail.net>

Date: ma 25 mrt. 2019 om 07:55

Subject: RE: Letter DGK to RCK

To: C. Koster <dsckoster@gmail.com>

Greetings in Christ.

I receive your letter and sincerely apologize.

I feel sorry for your letter. Anyway, the reason is entirely my responsibility.

As you said, I, also, think the barrier of language sometimes interferes with the communion of the saints.

The newly pastor who are appointed to our federation last year, graduated from the CANRC Hamilton seminary in 2018.

He is good at English.

If necessary, please write to my fellow pastor.

Then he will answer your question sincerely.

His email address is ysw5057@naver.com.

I pray that the Lord will give you abundant grace to your church.

Park Sanghyun.

Antwoord BBK aan RCK, dd. 3 mei 2019

Dear Rev. Park Sanghyun,

Thank you for your reply to our letter.

We also regret having to make this proposal. Yet circumstances of our small church federation and the small number of available manpower make it necessary for us to make choices.

We thank you for the email address of a pastor who finished his studies in Hamilton and we can point out to you our good contacts with the Free Reformed Churches in Australia (FRCA). These churches may be closer to you, so you may contact them or strengthen already existing ties.

We wish you the indispensable blessings of the Lord, in your country and for your churches.

With brotherly greetings,

For deputies for contact with churches abroad of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands,
Corneel Koster

Rapport bezoek aan ERE

In opdracht van het deputaatschap BBK is van 24 september tot 1 oktober 2019 een bezoek gebracht aan de *Evangéliumi Református Egyház (ERE)* Subcarpathia, Oekraïne. In dit rapport wordt daarvan verslag gedaan, alsmede conclusies getrokken en aanbevelingen gedaan.

D.J. Bolt
P. Dijkstra

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Voorgeschiedenis

Als verslaggever voor *eeninwaarheid.info* woonde br. Bolt de synode Ede 2014 van de GKv bij. Hij ontmoette daar ds. Tóth en raakte met hem in gesprek. Ds. Tóth is een predikant van een evangelisch-gereformeerde kerk te Beregufalu die behoort tot het kerkverband *Evangéliumi Református Egyház* (ERE) Subcarpathia, Oekraïne.

Sindsdien is het contact gebleven en is er veel gecommuniceerd m.n. via internet. Ook verbleef ds. Tóth, al of niet vergezeld van zijn vrouw, enkele malen in Nederland. BBK heeft onder leiding van ds. S. de Marie een goed gesprek gehad met ds. Zóth op 02-10-17. Daarbij waren ook kerkenraadsleden van DGK Opeinde vertegenwoordigd.

Het contact intensiverde toen in 2018 de gemeente DGK Opeinde gezin Tóth een vakantie aanbood in Nederland en er gelegenheid was over en weer de relatie te verdiepen. Voorjaar 2019 bezochten twee leden van DGK Opeinde de gemeente in Beregufalu voor een verdere kennismaking en zo mogelijk hulp. Al langere tijd werd er financiële hulp vanuit Nederland geboden.

Binnen BBK kwam de vraag aan de orde of er een officiële kerkelijke relatie met dit kerkverband mogelijk is. Daarvoor werd nader onderzoek nodig geacht. Dit rapport is een weerslag van het bezoek dat in dit kader aan de kerken daar werd gebracht.

Evangéliumi Református Egyház

Dit kerkverband is in 2006 ontstaan uit een afscheiding van de grote *Reformed Church of Hungary* (RCH). Deze kerken zijn wat karakter betreft te vergelijken met de in de PKN opgegane syn. gereformeerde kerken in Nederland.

Een aantal predikanten probeerde binnen de kerk tot reformatie te komen. Maar dat lukte niet, in tegendeel er was veel weerstand ook onder het 'gewone' kerkvolk. De zaak escaleerde doordat de vrouw in het ambt werd toegelaten. Verzet hiertegen mocht niet baten. Predikanten werden voor het blok gezet: een 'statement' ondertekenen, dus mond houden, en anders afscheid nemen.

Zes predikanten konden om hun geweten zo niet verder en scheidden zich in 2006 af. Overigens in aantal veel minder dan was verwacht. Zij leidden vijf gemeenten die samen het ERE kerkverband vormen.

Maar er ontstonden moeiten in de federatie. Een van de predikanten nam afscheid werd baptist. Een andere moest worden gecensureerd, zodat er nu nog vier predikanten dienst doen:

Plaats	Predikant	Belijdende leden	Kinderen/Bezoekers
Beregdéda	Attila Pál	7	7/1
Beregufalu	Zoltán Tóth	33	60
Mezőgecse Nagybakta	Gyula Kopasz	44	25
Visk	Gyula Sütő	8	10
	Samen	92	103

De predikanten Pál en Tóth spreken goed Engels, Kopasz (vroegere dean in de RCH) in het geheel níet. Ds. Pál heeft gestudeerd in Duitsland. Hij heeft in Nederland rondgereisd. Zijn gemeente is een huisgemeente.

Behalve Kopasz moeten alle predikanten (en vaak hun vrouwen, ook full-time), bijbanen hebben om het financiële hoofd boven water te houden.

Het kerkverband is in 2007 geregistreerd door de Oekraïense staat .
Official website: www.ereformatus.com.

Geografisch positie

Zie onderstaande figuren om een indruk te krijgen van de geografische ligging van de gemeenten.



De plaatsen waarin de gemeenten zich bevinden zijn rood omcirkeld. Om een idee te geven, de afstand Beregdéda–Visk is ongeveer 60 km hemelsbreed, Beregújfalú tot de Hongaarse grens 25 km. Maar de afstanden daar worden in uren gerekend...

Opdracht

In de Acta van de synode van Lansingerland is op pagina 173 een uitvoerig verslag gepubliceerd van de kennismaking BBK en ds. Z. Tóth op 02-10-17. Daarin bevelen deputaten BBK n.a.v. deze ontmoeting aan:

1. Door middel van verdere gesprekken onderzoeken of we op dezelfde grondslag staan. Op grond van de ingewonnen informatie kan de volgende synode besluiten al dan niet het contact voort te zetten.
2. Bij deze contacten met ERE waar nodig DGK Opeinde te betrekken, vanwege de betrokkenheid die deze gemeente al heeft bij ERE.

Besloten werd dat de deputaten Europa een bezoek brengen aan de ERE-kerken om nadere informatie in te winnen m.b.t

1. De grondslag van deze kerken en het functioneren daarvan.

2. Inrichting van erediensten.
3. De wijze waarop het kerkordelijk samenleven is geregeld.
4. De bediening van de sacramenten en toelating daartoe.
5. Handhaving van tucht in leer en leven.
6. Methoden van evangelisatie en gemeenteopbouw.
7. Eventuele relaties met andere kerken.

Het oorspronkelijke plan om in maart/april 2019, samen met afgevaardigden van de commissie CERE van DGK Opeinde de ERE kerken te bezoeken heeft om praktische redenen geen doorgang gevonden. Wel heeft een afvaardiging van CERE begin april, en BBK deputaten in september, een bezoek gebracht.

Programma

Een uitgangspunt voor ons bezoek was zoveel mogelijk kennismaken met het 'gewone' kerkelijke, maatschappelijk en sociale en leven. Daarom hebben we als ook als 'gewone' kerkleden de diensten bijgewoond en aangeboden sightseeing tot een minimum beperkt. Ds. Tóth organiseerde het als volgt:

- We are going to visit our congregations when you are here. They are nearby, apart from one.
- Midweek services will be visited in other villages.
- On Sunday morning service we are going to attend in Beregújfalu.
- Also some families of Beregújfalu, especially our co-servants in children mission will be visited.
- There will be one official meeting with pastors to talk over our sister church relationship.
- Free time will be sorted together as you would like.
- Fishing, shopping, visiting mountains, or historical places, bear reserve, anything you would like.

Uitvoering

Zr. Bolt is (op eigen kosten) meegegaan. Dat is waardevol gebleken voor het totaalbeeld van het leven daar.

Activiteitenlijst dinsdag 24-09-19 tot en met dinsdag 01-10-19

Dag	Activiteit	Opmerkingen
Dinsdag	Reis naar Beregújfalu 08.00 – 23.00 uur	Drachten/Dalfsen naar Eindhoven airport - auto Eindhoven naar Debrecen - vliegen Debrecen naar grens Oekraïne (Beregsurány) - minibus Van grens naar Beregújfalu - auto ds. Tóth
Woensdag	Bezoek aan pastorie Bezoek aan ouders ds. Tóth	Rustdag, wel bezoeken.
Donderdag	Gesprek met predikanten 09.00 – 15.30 uur	Ds. Tóth, ds. Kopasz, ds. Pál. Ds. Sütő afwezig (ziek).
	Diner bij Tünde en Zsolt Biro	Planner/calculator bouwbedrijf Actief in jeugdwerk.
	Prayermeeting Beregújfalu	Voorganger ds Tóth.
Vrijdag	Bezoek aan Beregszász I	Indruk van leven in Oekraïens stadje.
	Bezoek aan oudste zuster en gezin in Beregújfalu (84)	Bedlegerig. Bidt regelmatig voor DGK Opeinde (!)
	Bezoek ds. Sütő, hij was in Mezőgecse	Heeft CLL, chemo's. Geeft grote moeite.
	Prayermeeting in Mezőgecse	Voorganger ds Kopasz.

		Ongeveer 100 personen. Preek over Hand. 23. Parallel vertaald. Br. Bolt toespraak gehouden over DGK en n.a.v. 2 Joh. 12,13.
	Diner bij ds Kopasz	
Zaterdag	Bezoek zr Bolt aan moeder ds. Tóth	
	Pannenkoeken eten met oudere jeugd.	Over ons leven vroeger als jongen/meisje, de rol de kerk en kerkleer in hun jeugd. Doorgepraat over seksualiteit toen en nu.
	Gesprek over niet deelnemen HA met ds. Tóth	
Zondag	Eredienst om 10.30 uur	Voorganger ds Tóth. Hand. 24. Kern: Schaam je niet voor het evangelie. Na de dienst br Bolt toespraak gehouden over DGK en n.a.v. Hand. 28:15. Br/zr Bolt en br. Dijkstra de gemeente Ps. 134 toegezongen.
	Heilig Avondmaal	Gasten en niet-belijdende leden/kinderen vertrokken. Ongeveer 25 personen namen deel.
	Bezoek aan gezin van wijngaardenier.	
	Diner met gezin ds. Tóth en zijn ouders.	
	Presentatie voor gemeente/bijbelstudieclub	Brs. Bolt en Dijkstra geven indruk van DGK kerkelijk en persoonlijk leven.
Maandag	Bezoek aan Beregszász II	Rondleiding synagoge. Universitair/cultureel centrum bezocht.
	Bezoek aan openbare school/bibliotheek	School waar zr. Tóth werkt.
	Diner met familie Tóth en ds. en mevr. Pál	
	Afscheid gemeenteleden.	
	Diner bij fam. Bela met ds. en mevr. Tóth	
Dinsdag	Terugreis naar Nederland	06.15 – 21.15

Enige opmerkingen bij dit programma.

De taalbarrière barrière is groot. Van het Hongaars valt geen syllabe te verstaan. Vele kerkleden kennen geen Engels. Vrijwel alles moet worden vertaald.

De mensen zijn als zeer gastvrij en vriendelijk ervaren. Sommigen gaven aan dat ze zich verbaasden dat wij er zo'n lange reis voor over hadden om hen te ontmoeten. Zij voelden zich bemoedigd door de aandacht die er voor hen is. Er worden ook duidelijke parallellen gezien in het ontstaan van hun en onze kerken en achterliggende oorzaken.

Ondanks veel armoede deden zij hun best ons van al het nodige, en meer dan dat, te voorzien.

We werden ondergebracht in het dormitorium van de gemeente in Beregújfalu. Het gezin Tóth bivakkeerde daar ook zolang wij er waren.

Het Avondmaal werd gevierd en wij werden er voor uitgenodigd. We hebben de predikant uitgelegd dat we gezien onze officiële missie dat nu moeilijk konden doen. Hij gaf aan dat te begrijpen en heeft dat vooraf aan de viering ook de gemeente meegedeeld.

Het voelde nogal ongemakkelijk, temeer omdat gemeenteleden juist ons wilden meenemen naar de viering.

Samenleving

We maken enkele opmerkingen over politieke en economische aspecten van het leven in Subcarpathia. Dat kan niet anders dan heel beperkt en fragmentarisch zijn. In een week, hoe intensief ook, is slechts een beperkte waarneming mogelijk, zwaar bemoeilijkt door de gevolgen van de Babylonische torenbouw. Maar deze waarnemingen vormen toch een belangrijke achtergrond van het kerkelijk en geestelijk leven hoewel we nog niet in staat zijn (ook) een algemeen religieus klimaat te schetsen. We beperken het daarom tot enkele opmerkingen over de politieke en economische situatie.

Politieke situatie

Hongaren in Subcarpathia voelen zich geen Oekraïners. Het liefst zouden zij weer onderdeel van Hongarije uitmaken. De spreektaal is dus ook Hongaars, hoewel dat bestreden wordt. Men moet wel Oekraïens leren maar veel verder dan verstaan komt men vaak niet. Uit de communistische tijd stamt ook de communicatie in het Russisch. Overigens is het beleid om zoveel mogelijk Russische woorden uit de landstaal te verwijderen.

Er is geen actieve politieke beweging om Subcarpathia los te maken. Men ziet dat ook niet als een taak voor christenen. Liever wacht men op het uiteenvallen van de Ukraine.

Hongarije steunt Subcarpathia actief met financiële middelen. Zo wordt veel geld in het onderwijs gestoken, en bijvoorbeeld ook in het wegennet. Daar zit, zo hoorden we, een etnisch als wel een economisch belang achter. Hongarije krijgt graag veel goed opgeleide werkkrachten uit Subcarpathia. Die uitstroom is groot door de (veel) hogere lonen in Hongarije. Het is daarom geen wonder dat men positief over de door het Westen verguisde Hongaarse premier Victor Orbán spreekt.

Men is actief bezig met het Joodse verleden, is de indruk. Zo wordt de markante door de communisten weg gepleisterde voorgevel van de centrale Joodse synagoge in Beregszász weer hersteld.

Economische situatie

De algemene indruk is die van armoede en verval. Waar je ook kijkt, overal zie je fors achterstallig onderhoud. Of in Westerse ogen volstrekt verouderd materiaal. Soms geeft dat associaties met de situatie vlak na de Tweede Wereldoorlog in Nederland.

De lonen zijn zeer laag. Voorbeeld: een bibliothecaris/onderwijsassistent die 5 dagen per week full time werkt verdient 120 euro netto in de maand.

Weliswaar zijn de prijzen gemiddeld lager dan in het Westen maar die van bijvoorbeeld vlees en energie stijgen, en komen in de buurt van het westerse niveau.

Allerwegen wordt voorzien in levensonderhoud door een eigen 'kleine boerderij'. Men verbouwt groenten, aardappelen, kweekt fruit. Daarnaast worden kippen, konijnen, ganzen, geiten voor de slacht gehouden. Oude beelden van kelders vol met 'weckflessen' kwamen weer tot leven.

Het land heeft verschrikkelijk te lijden onder criminaliteit, corruptie en (sigaretten)smokkel. Het is te zien aan soms kapitale woningen met afgesloten hoge hekken, en gênant dure auto's. Het gevolg is dat heel veel geld bestemd voor verbetering van de levensstandaard en infrastructuur in bodemloze zakken van geboefte verdwijnt.

Een zichtbaar gevolg is de afschuwelijk staat van de wegen, vooral op het platteland. De werkelijk ontelbare soms diepe gaten in het plaveisel leveren, zeker in Westerse ogen, een volstrekt onveilige verkeerssituatie op. Duur van autoritten rekent men in uren, niet in kilometers. Maar, denkt men, er daagt misschien licht aan het eind van de tunnel door

m.n. de Hongaarse steun aan verbetering van de infrastructuur waardoor ook het toerisme (Karpaten!) wordt bevorderd.

Een groot probleem is wel het eerder genoemde wegvloeien van waardevolle arbeidskrachten naar Hongarije, of zelfs naar Duitsland voor een hoger inkomen. Het zorgt ook voor ontwrichting van gezinnen, scheidingen, seksuele ontsporing, en heeft ook zijn invloed op het kerkelijke leven.

ERE

We willen proberen een beeld van de ERE te schetsen door de weergave van een aantal aspecten.

Belijdenis

Deze kerken onderschrijven de drie oecumenische belijdenissen, de Tweede Helvetische Confessie, de Heidelbergse Catechismus en de Westminster Confessie. Belijden the five points of Calvinism (TULIP): Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistable Grace, Perseverance of Saints.

Kerkverband

Elk halfjaar komen de kerken in synode bijeen voor evaluatie en planning van de volgende periode. Ds. Tóth is scriba.

Tweemaal per jaar is er een soort conferentie met presbyteriaanse kerken. Er zijn geen studenten theologie.

De kerken kennen de drie ambten van predikant, ouderling en diaken. In de ERE is de roeping tot het ambt voor het hele leven.

Liturgie

In de drie diensten die wij hebben bijgewoond, herkenden we veel van de standaard liturgie zoals we die ook in onze kerken hebben: zegengroet, Schriftlezing, liederen zingen, bidden, preek en zegen.

Verschillen zijn er ook. 's Zondags is er één dienst. Er wordt geen wet of geloofsbelijdenis gelezen. De laatste wel bij de avondmaalsviering. Ook kent men niet de systematische catechismusprediking zoals bij ons.

Men zingt uit een Hongaarse liedbundel met ruim 500 liederen waarvan het eerste deel de 150 Psalmen omvat.

De diensten duren vergelijkbaar lang als bij ons.

Activiteiten

Elke twee maanden er is een kerkdag voor de vijf gemeenten. Alle jeugd komt 4 tot 6 keer bijeen per jaar. Er zijn 4 weekenden voor kinderen. In de zomer zijn er Bijbelkampen voor jeugd en kinderen, soms samen met presbyterianen.

Kerkelijke relaties

Reformed Church of Hungary (RCH)

Zoals boven al aangegeven braken de predikanten van ERE met deze kerk. Voornaamste redenen waren: ontbrekend Schriftgezag, vrijzinnigheid, oecumenisme en vrouwen in de ambten. In de dorpen en steden, ook in Beregufalu, zijn nog steeds grote kerkgebouwen. Het geestelijk klimaat in die kerken is vergelijkbaar met de PKN in Nederland.

Opmerkelijk is dat de GKv vroeger veelal afstand heeft gehouden van deze kerk – vaak door onze gesprekspartners als 'the liberal church' aangeduid – maar nu toenadering zoekt. En dat is gezien de ontwikkeling in de GKv natuurlijk niet verwonderlijk. Op de synode van Meppel was al te horen dat weliswaar het MV-besluit relaties met kerken in het buitenland zou doen verliezen, maar het gecompenseerd zou worden door banden met andere.

GKv

ERE had een vorm van kerkelijk contact met de GKv, geen officiële zusterkerkrelatie. Zo waren de predikanten Tóth en Pál op de synode van Ede, zie bijlage. Ook nam ds. Tóth deel aan een conferentie van De Verre Naasten enkele jaren terug en ging in dat kader voor in een kerkdienst van de GKv Dalfsen-Oost.

De relatie met de GKv is evenwel officieel door ERE op synodaal niveau definitief verbroken. De ontwikkelingen van de laatste jaren in de GKv, en m.n. de openstelling van de ambten hebben daartoe aanleiding gegeven.

Oekraïne zending

Er is wel contact (geweest) met de Oekraïne-zending van de GKv en hun predikant(en). Kiev/GKv heeft 8 gemeenten in de Oekraïne waarvan één in Subcarpathia.

Maar de afstanden zijn groot, niet alleen geografisch maar ook hier speelt de taalbarrière een hele grote rol. Het Hongaars is geheel anders dan het Oekraïens/Russisch.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe - RPCCEE

Dit kerkverband is in begin jaren 90 in de vorige eeuw ontstaan uit activiteiten van de Westminster Biblical Missions (later Westminster Biblical World Missions, WBWM) in Hongarije. Zij stichten het Karolyi Gaspar Institute of Theology and Missions. De afgestudeerden werden echter niet geaccepteerd in de Reformed Church of Hungary.

De studenten uit Hongarije, Roemenië en Oekraïne zwermde na hun studie daarom uit over genoemde landen en stichten gemeenten, waarvan twee in Subcarpathia (Berehovo, Uzghorod). Langzaam maar zeker worden deze met hulp van de WBWM zelfstandig. Op dit moment telt het kerkverband 15 gemeenten en heeft 16 predikanten.

Het kerkverband onderhoudt relaties met Amerikaanse presbyteriaanse kerken. Maar op dit moment is dat beeld ons niet helder nog.

Opmerkelijk is de aandacht die deze kerken aan christelijk onderwijs geven. Zij promoten bijvoorbeeld *'homeschooling'*.

De relatie van ERE met dit kerkverband heeft veel stof tot discussie gegeven. Kern daarvan is de visie op de kerkregering. Heeft de RPCCEE een centralistisch hiërarchisch vorm van kerkregering? Het is in elk geval opvallend dat de kerknaam in het enkelvoud wordt weergegeven.

De indruk is dat er vanuit de RPCCEE grote druk wordt uitgeoefend om ERE te integreren. Echter twee van de vier ERE predikanten zijn daar om genoemde vorm van kerkregering tegen. Zij vrezen ook dat het moeizaam en met grote inspanning gerealiseerde 'conferentiecentrum', c.q. de missiefaciliteiten in Beregújfalu, dan zal moeten worden overgedragen aan het RPCCEE kerkverband.

Dit jaar lijkt een (voorlopig?) compromis te zijn bereikt door het aangaan van een *zusterkerkrelatie* tussen ERE en RPCCEE. Maar het is de vraag of dit op termijn toch niet leidt tot een fusie.

Deze betrekkelijk jonge kerk lijken hard te werken aan vervulling van de ambten. Zo is er een training van kandidaat-ouderlingen en zijn er enkele bevestigd. Hetzelfde geldt t.a.v. het diakenambt.

De RPCCEE schijnt een relatie met Brazil Presbyterian Church of Brazil (Robert Rapp?) te hebben. Deze bieden ook ondersteuning. Maar op dit moment zijn ons nog geen verdere details bekend.

Inmiddels is er een persoonlijk contact van leden van DGK Opeinde ontstaan met br. en zr. G. Hof die lid zijn van de Balatonalmádi gemeente. Br. en zr. Bolt hebben hen ontmoet en gesproken in Nederland, ook in voorjaar 2021 is er nog weer contact geweest. Inmiddels hebben ook leden van DGK Opeinde deze broeder en zuster bezocht in

Hongarije. Wellicht kan dit leiden tot verdere kennismaking en inzicht. Een lid van DGK Opeinde werkt in Hongarije en is gastlid van de kerk in Budapest geworden.

ERE - Beregufalu

Om het beeld van de ERE kerkengemeenschap verder in te vullen geven we wat weer van het kerkelijk/geestelijk leven dat we in de gemeente te Beregufalu hebben meegemaakt en ervaren. Uiteraard is ook dat maar weer beperkt. Echt weten wat er leeft en hoe geleefd wordt, kan alleen worden ervaren als er langere tijd wordt verkeerd en de taal beheerst wordt. Dus hier alleen enkele indrukken.

Algemene religieuze situatie

Het leven in Beregufalu tussen een grote Orthodoxe kerk en de eveneens markante Hongaars Gereformeerde kerk (RCH), *'the liberal church'*, is niet altijd gemakkelijk. Beide kerken hebben weliswaar weinig actieve leden maar 'er niet bij horen' betekent wel een achtergestelde positie in het dorp. Typisch voorbeeld: het luiden van klok bij een begrafenis van een lid van de ERE gemeente is problematisch en met voorwaarden omgeven.

Zeker in het begin van het bestaan van de ERE was er veel vijandschap, werden zelfs ramen ingegooid en moest de politie er aan te pas komen. Nu nóg wordt de ERE kerk gezien als een sekte.

De gemeente

De gemeente lijkt een hechte gemeenschap. We zagen veel gemoedelijke en vriendschappelijke omgang met elkaar. Voor zover wij kunnen nagaan zijn er weinig 'rijken en edelen', hoewel enkele kerkleden het maatschappelijk duidelijk beter hebben dan anderen.



Men beschikt over een eigen kerkgebouw, een verbouwde vroegere boerderij. Het heeft een aangebouwde keuken, ontmoetingsruimte en eetgelegenheid.

Leiding

De gemeente wordt geleid door predikant Tóth samen met een ouderling en een diaken. De ambtsdragers worden voor hun leven benoemd. We werden uitgedaagd om vanuit de Schrift te motiveren waarom de roeping slechts tijdelijk zou zijn...

Diensten

We hebben drie diensten meegemaakt: een eredienst op zondag en twee prayer meetings, op donderdag- resp. vrijdagavond (in een andere gemeente). De prayer meetings zijn liturgisch niet (voor ons niet waarneembaar) verschillend van de zondagse kerkdienst. De diensten hebben een vergelijkbare liturgische opzet als bij ons.

Er is één dienst op zondag. Dat zou te maken hebben met de behoefte aan rust en familiebezoek. Wel is er zondagsavonds Bijbelstudie waaraan een behoorlijk deel van de gemeente deelneemt.

Er is voor de jongsten een crèche met Bijbelverhaal, zingen, werkjes maken.

Diensten worden in de Hongaarse taal gehouden. Ds. Tóth kan Russische en Oekraïens verstaan maar onvoldoende spreken. Om toch ook Oekraïense mensen - uitgenodigd via vrienden en relaties - te bereiken met het Woord nodigt hij af en toe een Oekraïense dominee uit, een van 8 gemeenten van de Oekraïense gereformeerde kerken gesticht door Gkv (tot nu toe 2 keer gebeurd).

De predikant draagt een toga. Vrouwen hebben hoeden op in de dienst naar 1 Kor. 11. Het is niet verplicht, maar men wil wel graag uniformiteit.

We hebben goede preken gehoord. Uiteraard worden door vertaling veel details gemist maar de hoofdlijn was goed te volgen. Thema's waren n.a.v. de gebeurtenissen rond Paulus als beschreven aan het eind van Handelingen: 'Hebt u vijanden lief', 'De poging tot moord op Paulus verijdeld', 'Niet schamen voor het evangelie'. Met samenvattend vertalen duurden de preken zeker drie kwartier.

De dienst wordt begeleid (althans in de bijeenkomsten die wij bijwoonden) op een oud harmonium, met 1 vinger. Men werkt aan meer vingers.

Heilig Avondmaal

Het Heilig Avondmaal wordt elke maand gevierd en vindt plaats ná de kerkdienst (zoals Augustinus al voorstond). Tussen de kerkdienst en de viering hebben bezoekers en kinderen(!) gelegenheid de kerkzaal te verlaten. Kinderen zijn er dus niet bij. Deze 'pauze' schijnt m.n. ingegeven te zijn de gelegenheid tot vertrek van bezoekers. N.a.v. ons gesprek daarover wil de predikant er over nadenken of dit anders zou moeten.

Er wordt gebruik gemaakt van een formulier. Brood en wijn worden klaargezet terwijl (hele) psalmen en gezangen werden gezongen. De predikant zet in en iedereen zingt uit het hoofd mee. De helft van de aanwezigen loopt naar voren en staat in een kring en ontvangt persoonlijk brood en wijn van de predikant. Er is een korte gelegenheid om in stilte te bidden/danken.

Vervolgens gaat de andere helft aan.

De viering duurt ongeveer 50 minuten en verloopt eerbiedig en aandachtig.

Kerkelijke onderwijs

Kinderen en jongeren krijgen kerkelijk onderwijs van de predikant en zijn echtgenote. Dat ziet er als volgt uit:

9-13 jaar	Jongere jeugd
13-14 jaar	Uit hoofd leren van de catechismus.

	Kinderen moeten het geleerde in/na een kerkdienst kunnen opzeggen.
15-16 jaar	Kerkgeschiedenis
17- -- jaar	Belijdeniscatechisatie

Het catechetisch onderwijs wordt afgesloten met een openbare belijdenis. Daarbij moet getuigd worden van een persoonlijk geloof.

De jonge jeugd (9-13 jaar) komt voor Bijbelonderwijs bijeen onder leiding van zr. Tóth. Elke 14 dagen moet een psalm of lied uit het hoofd worden geleerd. Elke maand een christelijke film om ook over maatschappelijk onderwerp te praten. Oudere jeugd (14-20 jaar) wordt door ds. Tóth onderwezen.

Jongeren komen bij elkaar op zaterdagavond. Wij hebben deze Bijbelclub tijdens ons bezoek bijgewoond en op hun verzoek gesproken over hoe wij als jongeren elkaar gevonden hebben. En welke relatie wij als jeugd hadden met leer van de kerk. Ook had men vragen over seksualiteit toen en nu.

Missionair werk

De kerken zijn duidelijk gericht op missionair werk. In Beregújfalu wordt intensief gepoogd om jongeren naar de kerk te 'lokken' met allerlei jeugdactiviteiten. Via de jongeren probeert men in contact te komen met ouderen.

De gemeente heeft in de afgelopen jaren een soort missionair centrum gebouwd. Naast een dormitorium (voorlopig nog op de grond slapen) met douches, toiletten heeft men deze zomer een overdekte halfopen ruimte gemaakt voor ontmoeting, gesprek en spel. Daarvoor heeft men ook zowel financiële als fysieke ondersteuning gehad van de stichting *Samarita*, een hulporganisatie van de Gereformeerde Gemeente die gesponsorde jongeren uitzendt naar het buitenland voor incidentele hulpverlening.

Financiën

Als regel worden tienden als 'VVB' voor de kerk gegeven. Maar de bijdrage is wel afhankelijk van situatie en geen voorwaarde of eis. Deze tienden zijn voor de vaste lasten als kerkdiensten, diaconie en traktement predikant. Verder staat er een offerbus in de kerk. De inhoud daarvan is voor additionele zaken als bijvoorbeeld de uitbreiding van het centrum.

Bedreigingen

Sinds enige tijd is er een baptisten-gemeente gesticht in Beregújfalu op korte afstand van de ERE gemeente. De charismatische dominee ervan probeert zielen te winnen en is daar voor een deel in geslaagd (8), en nog bezig. Het vormt een bedreiging en een last voor de gemeente.

Daarbij komt ook dat de gemeente te maken heeft met het eerder genoemde verschijnsel dat (jonge) mensen werk zoeken in Hongarije of andere EU-landen waar ze (veel) meer kunnen verdienen. Ook dat bevordert niet de instandhouding van het kerkelijk leven.

Persoonlijke situatie gezin Tóth

De levensstandaard is laag, zeker vergeleken met die in het Westen/Nederland. Naast het traktement moet er zowel door de predikant als zijn vrouw inkomsten worden verworven. De predikantsvrouw werkt full time als bibliothecaresse en onderwijsassistent in een openbare school in Beregszász, 15 km verderop. Tegelijk doet ze een universitaire studie wiskunde. Overigens is deze situatie niet uniek: ook ds. Pál moet met zijn vrouw fulltime maatschappelijk werken om het hoofd boven water te houden. De huisvesting laat ook te wensen over. De predikant heeft geen eigen studeerkamer bijvoorbeeld.

Om in voldoende levensonderhoud te voorzien worden een uitgebreide lap grond bij de pastorie bebouwd en dieren als kippen, konijnen enzovoort, gehouden. Overigens mislukte de oogst in het jaar van bezoek grotendeels door langdurige regen gevolgd door een lange periode van droogte.

Ondanks dat er een openbare school in de eigen woonplaats is, gaan de kinderen Tóth gaan naar de eerder genoemde school in Beregszász. De reden is dat het openbare onderwijs nogal problematisch is voor de christelijke levensstijl. Dat probeert het predikantsechtpaar te compenseren met *homeschooling*. Omdat de lokale schooldirectie dat niet accepteert is het gezin uitgeweken naar Beregszász voor partime onderwijs. Maar het brengt natuurlijk wel de nodig (reis)kosten mee. Vermeldenswaard is dat zr. Tóth op de school de gelegenheid te baat neemt een christelijke invloed uit te oefenen!

Conclusies

We proberen enkele voorlopige conclusies te trekken.

1. We herkennen op basis van wat we hebben meegemaakt een kerkelijk leven dat op veel punten als gereformeerd kan worden herkend.
Wel zijn er als aangegeven, verschillen met onze kerkelijke praktijk.
2. De kerken van de ERE hebben het niet gemakkelijk. En dat niet alleen economisch maar ook kerkelijk als kleine gemeenten in een grote seculiere samenleving die hen veelal als een sekte beschouwt.
3. Er is een sterk missionair bewustzijn dat leidt tot het organiseren van tal van activiteiten om kinderen en daardoor ook ouders met het evangelie te bereiken.
4. Er is een sterke stroming die aansluiting/fusie zoekt met de presbyteriaanse kerk, de RPCCEE. Daarnaast is er een grote behoefte om interkerkelijke/internationale contacten te onderhouden en aanvaardt men gemakkelijk buitenlandse hulp.

Aanbevelingen

We bevelen het volgende aan:

1. Het contact met de ERE kerken zo mogelijk intensiveren om hen (nog) beter te leren kennen zodat een verantwoord kerkelijk contact kan worden aangegaan.
Daartoe wordt een onderzoek gedaan naar de praktijk t.a.v. kerkelijke contacten en hun vormgeving zoals dat gebeurt de CanRC en FRCA.
2. De kerkelijke situatie van gereformeerden en presbyterianen en hun relaties daar verder in kaart brengen.
3. Binnen de DGK kerken deze kerken plaatselijk/landelijk voor het voetlicht halen zodat zij gesteund kunnen worden in gebed en met activiteiten.

Aanvulling

Het lijkt ons zinvol bovenstaand relaas aan te vullen met een weergave van ontwikkelingen sinds ons bezoek september/oktober 2019 en tot nu (voorjaar 2021).

Contact

Het afgelopen jaar heeft zich gekenmerkt door een zeer intensief contact van ds Tóth met de commissie ERE-kerken (CERE) van de gemeente DGK Opeinde waarvan ook deputaat BBK-lid Bolt deel uitmaakt. Helaas moest het contact door de corona-ellende beperkt blijven tot communicatie via internet.

De focus van het contact heeft gelegen op ondersteuning van missionaire activiteiten en barmhartigheidswerk. De pandemie die ook grote gevolgen heeft voor de gemeente van ds. Tóth en zijn woonplaats, vergde veel extra inspanning. De economische situatie lijkt ook gaandeweg te verslechteren, met alle gevolgen van dien.

Evangelisatie

Toch gaan de predikant c.s. onverdroten verder met evangeliserende activiteiten. Mede door hun toedoen kon de eerder vermelde school blijven bestaan en de mogelijkheden kinderen in contact te brengen met het Evangelie worden vergroot.

Ook is een contact met Gypsies (Zigeuners) die woonachtig zijn in een nabijgelegen kamp tot stand gekomen. Een aantal kinderen daarvan bezoekt het onderwijs aan de school van zr. Tóth en komt zo in aanraking met de Bijbel. De predikant geeft muzieklessen aan een aantal kinderen ervan en er wordt ook gezorgd voor materiële ondersteuning in de zin van lunches op school.

Afstemming

Het vraagt nogal aandacht van CERE om op een gestructureerde en verantwoorde wijze hulpvragen en ondersteuning op elkaar af te stemmen. Maar daarin wordt goede voortgang geboekt. Naast bijdragen aan de missionaire activiteiten wordt ook barmhartigheidswerk, o.a. in de vorm van een Medical Fund, ondersteund.

Onderzoek

Afgelopen jaar zijn we helaas nog niet verder gekomen met onderzoek naar de kerken en kerkelijke verhouding in Subcarpatia/Hongarije. Dat heeft ook te maken met het ontbreken van elk persoonlijk contact door de pandemie alsmede de intensieve inspanning die het ook daar kost om 'het hoofd boven water te houden'.

Voorlichting

Voorlichting is gegeven met een artikel in De Bazuin januari 2019. Ook is er in de Evangelisatie & Zending special van dit blad een artikel gewijd aan de missionaire activiteiten van de gemeenten in Beregújfalu en Budapest (RPCCEE).

Bijlage

Uit verslag synode Ede (GKv) 2014

Besluit 9 abc

Als afgevaardigden van de buitenlandse kerken
ERE Evangéliumi Református Egyház Oekraïne zijn aanwezig:
ds. Attila Pál
ds. Lajos Szilágyi

BESPREKING

Ds. Van Wijnen

De contacten met de Reformed Presbyterian Church in Central en Eastern Europe (RPCCEE) hebben weinig inhoud gekregen. Wel hebben we de afgelopen dagen gemerkt dat broeders van de Oekraïense kerken contact met hen hebben.

Buitenlandse afgevaardigden – Rev. T. Zolthan (Oekraïne)

Er is geen officieel contact met hen maar we benutten wel elk mogelijkheid om hen te ontmoeten. Ze zijn serieus gereformeerd maar te serieus m.b.t. de kerkorde. Deze kerken hebben een Amerikaanse achtergrond.

Preses

Het is positief dat u wel contact met hen kunt krijgen.

Deputaten BBK – ds. A.P. Feijen

Het gaat niet om een kritische houding jegens GKv. Maar het contact krijgt geen inhoud door hen. Daarom zien we geen verdere mogelijkheden voor contact en benadrukken regionalisering.

STEMMING

Met algemene stemmen aangenomen.

Verslag Ontmoeting CanRC - DGK

Report Meeting CanRC - DGK

Datum Donderdag 18 februari 2021
 Locatie Digitaal / Video conference
 Aanvang NL 19.00 / 10:00am PST / 12:00 CST / 1:00pm EST

1. Opening (DGK)

The meeting was opened in a Christian manner by Rev. C. Koster with the reading of Matthew 21:1-11 and prayer.

2. Aanwezigheid en bedoeling van ontmoeting

Roll call and purpose of the meeting

Introduction of all those present at the meeting.

DGK: C. Koster, M.A. Sneep, D.J. Bolt, J. Houweling, H.G. Gunnink (P. van Gorp absent)

CanRC: K. Janssen, H. deBoer, O. Bouwman, H. Schouten, A.J. Pol, S.C. VanDam, A. Witten, J. Moesker

DGK explained that the expectation for the meeting is to have a brotherly conversation and to get information regarding the Canadian situation.

Instruction for BBK-DGK: to speak with the LRCA as sister church about:

Catholicity of the church. DGK has sent materials on this to the CanRC. The LRCA condemns the WS and cannot acknowledge churches that use the WS unchanged. This is diametrically opposed to what the DGK decided.

The alleged path of appeal which LRCA members did not follow

DGK-BBK also has an instruction to speak with the CanRC to talk about the formation of the LRCA.

3. Bespreking verschillende onderwerpen

Discussion of various topics

a. LRCA nu

Liberated Reformed Church (Abbotsford) now

CanRC explained that the LRCA was formed by people who withdrew from the CanRC or had been excommunicated and formed their own church. The CanRC do not consider them a false church, the issue with the LRCA is that it sees the CanRC as a false church. The LRCA has sent letters to CanRC synods but these were declared inadmissible as not coming from a CanRC; technically the concerns of the LRC could be placed on a CanRC synod by a CanRC. The reason for concern with respect to the CanRC included fencing of the Lord's Supper and individual cups at the Lord's Supper. In general, the LRCA is a group of people who are disgruntled with the CanRC and kind of group together. Sometimes those who join also leave the LRCA again.

b. De kerkelijke weg voor individuele leden in CanRC mbt zaken die het kerkverband aangaan (zoals een zusterkerkrelatie)

The ecclesiastical route for individual members in the CanRC with a view to matters that pertain to the church federation (such as a sister church relation)

The CanRC explain: Until the mid 1990s individual members could write in to synods. Mindful that ecclesiastical assemblies are assemblies of churches, and not of church members, the approach changed then. Now a member can approach a synod either via the local consistory/council or via the pathway of appeal if their consistory/council does not take up their concerns and they feel wronged by this.

c. Toelating tot het Avondmaal

Admission to the Lord's Supper

The CanRC explain: For the most part CanRC members will celebrate the Lord's Supper in their own congregation, a practice of "avondmaalsbriefjes"

(Lord's Supper letters) as in the GKv in the past does not exist. As per CO article 61, the consistory shall admit only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. How the consistory determines this is up to the consistory, though it should be noted that those who come with a good attestation from a sister church shall be admitted. It means that on occasion a consistory will conduct an interview by two elders, or make use of a "reverse attestation": where a person attests to their faith convictions by signing a document which is then mailed to their own church (testimony to walk of life is received from members of the congregation who know the individual). There is discussion about what "professing the Reformed faith" exactly includes (e.g. what about a "Reformed Baptist"); that is going the ecclesiastical route.

Katholiciteit van de kerk mbt zusterkerkrelaties met presbyteriaanse kerken
Catholicity of the church with a view to sister church relations with Presbyterian churches

DGK noted that in 1977 the OPC was recognized as true church, and ecclesiastical fellowship was established in 2001. What was the development here?

CanRC explained: there have been many inconsistencies from 1997 – 2001. Currently there is a study mandate for the interchurch relations committees to reflect on the exercise of interchurch relations to give more clarity in processes. One of the issues with the OPC was confessional membership, the reason is that the ways in which CanRC and OPC practice this differ from each other. Admission to the Lord's Supper is an ongoing point of discussion. It should also be noted that confessional subscription between the Dort and Westminster traditions is different. In practice the OPC's approach has a similar outcome to that of the CanRC, the PCA is more tolerant.

d. **NAPARC**

The CanRC explained: NAPARC is functionally similar to the COGG, though more structured and confessionally shaped, as is the ICRC. For example, the CRCNA's membership in NAPARC was terminated for doctrinal unfaithfulness, and the membership of the GKv in the ICRC was suspended for doctrinal unfaithfulness.

Note: GS 1986 (art. 150, 175) made clear that membership in the ICRC does not make all other member churches EF or "true and faithful church".

DGK asked for some explanation of "Golden Rule Comity Agreement" and "Transfer of Members Agreement". CanRC explained that both are morally binding agreements, they are not binding decisions as NAPARC is not an ecclesiastical assembly. The GRCA means that before a NAPARC member church decides to start a church plant in an area, it will first consult with other NAPARC members. The TMA means that a church cannot simply be dismissive when a member seeks to transfer from one NAPARC member to another.

e. **Pulpit exchange**

The CanRC explained: The matter of pulpit exchange with non sister-churches is a point in discussion in our churches. Currently it is not permitted, as per a recent decision by Regional Synod East, which will likely be appealed to General Synod. The matter will also be addressed in a report to general synod on exercising interchurch relations.

f. **Maintaining the Church Order**

The CanRC explained: The questions about abiding by the Church Order would be asked during church visitation and during classis. There are some aspects of the CO that are less strictly stuck too (e.g. chairmanship of consistory by the minister). There are concerns that the odd church might not be abiding by the CO as strictly as most feel they should, those matters are dealt with via the broader assemblies (e.g. concerns of Orangeville with respect to Blessings).

g. **Overig**

Other: the CanRC had requested an update on the relationship DGK-GKN and an update on plans for the upcoming DGK synod

DGK explained: DGK synod: preparations were made for a meeting in April. It has been postponed because of covid (which has also hampered deputy work). The opening session is now to be in September, meeting on Saturdays. The reports are to be in by May, 2021.

DGK explained: DGK-GKN: since January 2020, we have come closer to each other, and we have worked out a route to follow to be closer as federations but especially as local churches, because there have been issues locally when churches split (which has made for hard feelings). Each church (GKN or DGK) has received a letter from deputies to see if there are outstanding issues, do these need resolution prior to merging, and do you need help with resolution, and some have said yes to all three questions. Federationally, we are speaking to each other, and discussing some subjects: differing practices within the churches (do we go DGK, GKN, or allow both: e.g. women voting, hymns).

There is a positive move in our churches, as people from the GKv are joining us who do not have the history of the DGK since 2003.

The CanRC noted a request for ecclesiastical fellowship has been received from the GKN, but not from the DGK. It will be awkward to have a relationship with one and not the other. DGK responded with the hope that the CanRC would indeed not choose one over the other.

4. Sluiting (CanRC)

Close: CanRC

Rev. K. Janssen closed the meeting with the reading of Ephesians 3:14-21 and prayer.

Notulen virtuele bijeenkomst CanRC – DGK 18-02-2021 (Nederlandse vertaling)

1. Opening (DGK)

De bijeenkomst wordt op christelijke wijze geopend door ds. C. Koster met het voorlezen van Mattheüs 21: 1-11 en gebed.

2. Aanwezigheid en bedoeling van ontmoeting

Introductie van alle aanwezigen op de bijeenkomst.

DGK: C. Koster, M.A. Sneep, D.J. Bolt, J. Houweling, H.G. Gunnink (afmelding door P. Van Gulp, adviseur)

CanRC: K. Janssen, H. deBoer, O. Bouwman, H. Schouten, A. Pol, C. VanDam, A. Witten, J. Moesker

DGK legt uit dat de verwachting voor de bijeenkomst is om een broederlijk gesprek te voeren en informatie te krijgen over de Canadese situatie.

Instructie voor BBK-DGK: om als zusterkerk met de LRCA te spreken over:

- Katholiciteit van de kerk. DGK heeft hierover materiaal naar de CanRC gestuurd. De LRCA veroordeelt de WS en kan geen kerken erkennen die de WS ongewijzigd gebruiken. Dit staat lijnrecht tegenover wat de DGK heeft besloten.

- De vermeende weg van beroep die LRCA-leden niet hebben gevolgd

DGK-BBK heeft ook een instructie om het gesprek met de CanRC aan te gaan om te spreken over het ontstaan van de LRCA.

3. Bespreking van verschillende onderwerpen

a. Liberated Reformed Church (Abbotsford) (LRCA) – de huidige situatie

CanRC legt uit dat de LRCA werd gevormd door mensen die zich hebben onttrokken aan de CanRC of geëxcommuniceerd waren en hun eigen kerk vormden. De CanRC beschouwt hen niet als een valse kerk; het probleem met de LRCA is dat zij de CanRC als een valse kerk ziet. De LRCA heeft brieven naar CanRC-synodes gestuurd, maar deze werden niet-ontvankelijk verklaard omdat ze niet afkomstig waren van een CanRC; technisch gezien zouden de zorgen van de LRCA door een CanRC op een CanRC-synode kunnen worden geplaatst. De reden voor bezorgdheid met betrekking tot de CanRC waren onder meer de toelating tot het avondmaal en het gebruik van individuele bekertjes tijdens het avondmaal. Over het algemeen bestaat de LRCA uit een groep mensen die ontevreden zijn over de CanRC en elkaar zo als groep gevonden hebben. Soms verlaten degenen die toetreden ook weer de LRCA.

b. De kerkelijke weg voor individuele leden in CanRC mbt zaken die het kerkverband aangaan (zoals een zusterkerkrelatie)

De CanRC legt uit: Tot het midden van de jaren negentig konden individuele leden synodes aanschrijven. Gezien het feit dat kerkelijke vergaderingen bijeenkomsten van kerken zijn, en niet van kerkleden, is de benadering toen veranderd. Nu kan een lid een synode benaderen via de plaatselijke kerkenraad of via de weg van beroep als hun kerkenraad hun zorgen niet overneemt en zij zich hierdoor onterecht behandeld voelen.

c. Toelating tot het Heilig Avondmaal

De CanRC legt uit: De CanRC-leden zullen voor het grootste deel het avondmaal in hun eigen gemeente vieren; een praktijk van 'avondmaalsbriefjes' zoals in het verleden in de GKv bestaat niet. Volgens KO-artikel 61 zal de kerkenraad alleen degenen toelaten die openbare belijdenis van het gereformeerde geloof hebben afgelegd en een godvruchtig leven leiden. Hoe de kerkenraad dit bepaalt, is aan de kerkenraad, al moet worden opgemerkt dat degenen die met een goed attest van een zusterkerk komen, zullen worden toegelaten. Het betekent dat twee ouderlingen van een kerkenraad af en toe een gesprek zullen hebben, of dat de kerkenraad gebruik zal maken van een "omgekeerd attest": waarbij een persoon zijn geloofsovertuiging bevestigt door een document te ondertekenen dat vervolgens naar zijn eigen kerk wordt gestuurd (getuigenis van leer en leven wordt ontvangen van gemeenteleden die de persoon kennen). Er is discussie over wat "het belijden van het gereformeerde geloof" precies inhoudt (bijv. Hoe zit het met een "gereformeerde baptist"); dat gaat de kerkelijke weg.

Katholiciteit van de kerk mbt zusterkerkrelaties met presbyteriaanse kerken

DGK merkt op dat in 1977 de OPC als ware kerk werd erkend en dat in 2001 een zusterkerkrelatie werd aangegaan. Hoe heeft dit zich ontwikkeld?

CanRC legt uit: er zijn veel inconsistenties geweest tussen 1997 en 2001. Momenteel ligt er een studieopdracht voor de commissies voor interkerkelijke betrekkingen om zich te bezinnen op de uitoefening van interkerkelijke betrekkingen om meer duidelijkheid te scheppen in processen. Eén van de problemen met de OPC was het confessioneel lidmaatschap; de reden is dat de manieren waarop CanRC en OPC dit beoefenen van elkaar verschillen. Toelating tot het avondmaal is een voortdurend punt van discussie. Er moet ook worden opgemerkt dat de er verschil is tussen de wijze van binding aan de belijdenis in de Dortse traditie en die in de Westminster-traditie. In de praktijk heeft de aanpak van de OPC een vergelijkbaar resultaat als die van de CanRC, de PCA is toleranter.

d. NAPARC

De CanRC legt uit: NAPARC is functioneel vergelijkbaar met de COGG, maar meer gestructureerd en confessioneler, net als de ICRC. Het CRCNA-lidmaatschap van NAPARC werd bijvoorbeeld beëindigd vanwege leerstellige ontrouw, en het GKv-lidmaatschap van de ICRC werd opgeschort vanwege leerstellige ontrouw.

Opmerking: GS 1986 (art. 150, 175) maakte duidelijk dat lidmaatschap van de ICRC niet alle andere lidkerken tot zusterkerken of tot "ware en trouwe kerk" maakt.

DGK vraagt enige uitleg over de "Golden Rule Comity Agreement" (GRCA) en de "Transfer of Members Agreement" (TMA). CanRC legt uit dat beide moreel bindende overeenkomsten zijn; het zijn geen bindende overeenkomsten, aangezien NAPARC geen kerkelijke vergadering is. De GRCA houdt in dat voordat een NAPARC-lidkerk besluit om een gemeentestichting in een gebied te starten, zij eerst overleg zal hebben met andere NAPARC-leden. De TMA betekent dat een kerk niet simpelweg afwijzend kan zijn wanneer een lid probeert over te stappen van het ene NAPARC-lid naar het andere.

e. Kanselruil

De CanRC legt uit: De kwestie van kanselruil met niet-zusterkerken is een discussiepunt in onze kerken. Momenteel is het niet toegestaan, zoals blijkt uit een recent besluit van Regionale Synode Oost, waartegen waarschijnlijk beroep zal worden aangetekend bij de Generale Synode. De kwestie zal ook aan de orde komen in een rapport aan de generale synode over het beoefenen van interkerkelijke betrekkingen.

f. Handhaving van de kerkorde

De CanRC legt uit: De vragen over het zich houden aan de kerkorde worden gewoonlijk tijdens kerkelijke visitatiebezoeken en op de classis gesteld. Er zijn ook enkele aspecten van de KO waar minder strikt aan wordt vastgehouden (bijv. voorzitterschap van de kerkenraad door de predikant). Er zijn zorgen dat hier of daar een kerk zich misschien niet zo strikt aan de KO houdt als de meesten denken dat ze zouden moeten; die zaken worden via de meerdere vergaderingen behandeld (bijv. zorgen van Orangeville met betrekking tot Blessings).

g. Overig

De CanRC had verzocht om een update over de relatie DGK-GKN en om een update over de plannen voor de komende DGK-synode

DGK licht toe: DGK-synode: voorbereidingen waren getroffen voor een bijeenkomst in april. Het is uitgesteld vanwege covid (wat ook het werk van deputaten heeft opgehouden). De openingssessie is nu in september, vergaderingen op zaterdag. De rapporten moeten in mei 2021 binnen zijn.

DGK legt uit: DGK-GKN: sinds januari 2020 zijn we dichterbij elkaar gekomen, en hebben we een te volgen route uitgestippeld om als federaties dichterbij elkaar te komen, maar vooral als lokale kerken, omdat er lokaal problemen waren toen kerken opsplitsten (problemen die tot negatieve gevoelens hebben geleid). Elke kerk (GKN of DGK) heeft een brief ontvangen van afgevaardigden om te zien of er nog openstaande kwesties zijn, of deze opgelost moeten worden voordat ze worden samengevoegd, en of ze hulp nodig hebben bij het oplossen, en sommigen hebben ja gezegd op alle drie de vragen. Federaal spreken we met elkaar en bespreken we enkele onderwerpen: verschillende praktijken binnen de kerken

(volgen we de gewoontes binnen de DGK, of die gebruikelijk zijn binnen de GKN, of laten we beide toe: bijvoorbeeld vrouwenstemrecht, gezangen).

Er is een positieve beweging in onze kerken, aangezien mensen van de GKv zich bij ons voegen. Zij hebben de geschiedenis van de DGK sinds 2003 niet meegemaakt.

De CanRC merkt op dat er een verzoek is ontvangen van de GKN om tot een zusterkerkrelatie te komen, maar niet van de DGK. Het zal lastig zijn om een relatie met de een te hebben en niet met de ander. DGK reageert met het uitspreken van de hoop dat de CanRC inderdaad niet het ene kerkverband boven het andere zal kiezen.

4. Sluiting (CanRC)

Ds. K. Janssen sluit de bijeenkomst af met het voorlezen van Efeziërs 3: 14-21 en gebed.

Bijeenkomst FRCA-CanRC-VGKSA-DGK

9 januari 2020

Aanwezig:

CanRC: ds. Karlo Janssen, br. Gerry Nordeman

DGK: ds. Michiel Snee (BBK), br. Durk Jan Bolt (BBK), br. Piet Dijkstra (BBK), ds. Hilbert Gunnink¹ (BBK), ds. Piet van Gurp (BBK adviseur), ds. Corneel Koster (BBK), zr. Riet Solлие-Sleijster (BBK)

FRCA: ds. Dean Anderson, br. Bert Veenendaal

FRCSA: ds. Ferdinand Bijzet

MS opent met het lezen van 1 Thess. 5:1-11 en gebed. Hij heet ons hartelijk welkom. We besluiten Nederlands als voertaal te gebruiken.

Er volgt een kennismakingsronde waarin iedereen zich voorstelt.

Op verzoek van MS geeft elke kerk een algemene indruk van eigen kerken en geeft punten aan die van belang zijn voor onze betrekkingen.

DGK:

(CK) We komen dicht bij de GKN. In 2019 hield DGK een buitengewone synode die besloot dat de GKN herkend worden als kerken van Jezus Christus. We zijn nu in gesprek, zowel landelijk als, waar dat relevant is, plaatselijk. We hebben elkaar nodig. Er liggen verschillende onderwerpen die gesprek eisen, maar geen ervan worden als kerkscheidend beoordeeld. Er is contact met predikanten binnen de GKv, meestal informeel en rechtstreeks van persoon tot persoon. Namen die genoemd werden waren o.a.: ds. Wiersma, ds. Storm. Er is ook contact met andere ambtsdragers en kerken (bijv. Ten Boer). De periodiek *De Bazuin* is een zelfstandig maandblad geworden. DGK organiseert af en toe bijeenkomsten voor verontrusten in de GKv, maar het blijkt niet erg effectief te zijn. Voor wat de kerken in het buitenland betreft: er is contact met CanRC, FRCA en FRCSA. De zusterkerkrelatie met de LRCA is voortgezet, maar er worden vragen gesteld over hun kijk op de katholiciteit van de kerk. We voeren schriftelijke gesprekken met hen over hoe zij de Westminster Standards zien en hoe zij zich van de CanRC hebben afgescheiden. Onze voorlopige conclusies (als deputaten) zijn met hen gedeeld. Wat hun afscheiding betreft, deze was naar onze mening kerkrechtelijk gezien niet wettig. De DGK ziet de Westminster Standards als een gereformeerde confessie. We zien dat zij de Westminster Standards als niet-gereformeerd veroordelen. Er is nog geen officiële reactie vanuit de LRCA geweest. De indruk is dat zij niet overtuigd zullen worden. We erkennen dat de LRCA niet veranderd is, waar wij ons denken hierover wel hebben veranderd.

DJB geeft aan dat dit niet betekent dat er van onze kant geen zorgen zijn ten aanzien van de CanRC (bijv. zaken rond Blessings). GN licht toe dat er in de CanRC sinds haar instituering in de jaren vijftig geen splitsingen zijn geweest en dat er daarom veel variëteit is binnen de CanRC.

FRCA:

(DA) Onze deputaatschappen zijn in één grote commissie samengevoegd. (MS) Onze ervaringen op de Australische synode waren heel positief. Hoe zijn de besluiten binnen de kerken gevallen? (DA) Er is zorg, vooral wat betreft de wijze waarop de besluiten werden genomen, bijv. de zaak van de ontvankelijkheid (kunnen individuele leden zich tot een meerdere vergadering richten inzake een synodebesluit of niet). De laatste zusterkerkrelatie

¹ Ds. Gunnink is zendeling geweest in Kalimantan Barat (Indonesië). Tijdens zijn emeritaat is hij van plan (als privé persoon) in de GGRI-KB les te geven. Hij geeft aan dat ds. Waang veel belangstelling heeft voor wat in de GKv aan de gang is, anderen zijn minder geïnteresseerd.

die we zijn aangegaan is met de First Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. (HG) Hoe gaat het met de betrekkingen betreffende Indonesië en de overdracht vanuit de GKv? (DA) Litendo wordt overgenomen door de kerk van Mundijong. Wat betreft de steun voor de zendingskerken, dat is niet helemaal duidelijk, maar ondersteuning is bezig over te gaan van Nederland naar Australië (Rockingham). (HG) Realiseert Australië zich dat het bijeenvoegen van de drie kerkverbanden in Indonesië iets is wat tenminste de komende honderd jaar niet goed gaat werken? (DA) Onze ds. Van Delden is op dat werk gefocust. (HG) Van Delden heeft contact met mij gehad. (MS) We hebben nog geen besluiten over Indonesië. Moeten we officieel niet meer samenwerken? (GN) Smithville CanRC heeft een zending in Timor, Indonesië.

CanRC:

(KJ)² Legt de relaties met de GGRI, GGRC en de GKv uit, waarop discussie volgt over de Indonesische situatie. Geeft uitleg over church plant situaties in de CanRC (bijv. Chinese Reformed Church) en over externe relaties die de CanRC hebben.

FRCSA:

(FB) Zuid Afrika heeft 10 gemeenten, waarvan 4 blank en 6 gekleurd. Het lastige voor Zuid Afrika is dat het geen predikanten kan beroepen die geen Zuid-Afrikaans paspoort hebben. Beschrijving van het werk van Jopie Vanderlinde. Eric van Alten is naar Pretoria gekomen. De theologische opleiding wordt nu door Hamilton gedaan en wordt ook door Australië gesteund. Er zijn 'governors' (consulenten? Opzichters van de overheid, dus gouverneurs?) in Zuid Afrika. Zending in Zuid Afrika is geheel intern. Er bestaat een nauwer contact met de Dopperkerken (dit begon in Pretoria, maar nu ook in Kaapstad – hier vindt kanselruil plaats tussen VGKSA en GKSA). De relatie met de GKv is geschorst en de komende synode van 2020 zal besluiten hoe verder te gaan. In het verleden heeft de FRCSA intensief contact met drie kerken gehad (Canada, Australië en Nederland). De overige relaties zijn contact vanwege de beperkte mankracht.

MS: Geeft een half uur gelegenheid voor algemeen gesprek.

DJB: wij zoeken contact met een klein kerkverband ten westen van de Karpaten in de Oekraïne. Zij hebben een zusterkerkrelatie met de RPCCEE. Onze zorg is dat de RPCCEE centraal wordt gerund. Hoe kijkt u aan tegen relaties met derden van een mogelijke zusterkerk waar u moeite mee heeft? (KJ) Als de relatie ons zorgen baart, zetten we het contact misschien voort, maar we gaan geen zusterkerkrelatie aan – zoals het geval is bij de DGK, omdat de DGK een zusterkerkrelatie heeft met de LRCA.

GN: Hoe is de relatie met de GKN? Wij waren blij te horen dat u een buitengewone synode bijeengeroepen had. Wat als DGK en GKN niet snel verenigen, moeten we dan een zusterkerkrelatie met slechts één kerkverband aangaan of met beide, liever dan wachten tot zij verenigd zijn? We realiseren ons dat het wat tijd kan kosten om daadwerkelijk tot vereniging te komen. (MS): Ik zit zelf, samen met CK, in de commissie voor deze eenwording. We zijn enthousiast over vereniging. We hopen eind januari weer samen te komen en dan te bepalen wat we moeten bespreken. We weten nog niet precies hoe dit aangepakt moet worden (met name waar het gaat om scheuringen en schorsingen). (CK): We hebben elkaar nodig, we kunnen niet apart blijven. (RSS): Ik behoor tot de gemeente van Zwolle waar een breuk is geweest; de zaken moeten doorgesproken worden, vooral met de jeugd. (MS): Dit vraagt tijd om plaatselijk vorm te geven. (RSS): We zullen ook de veranderingen ten aanzien van de LRCA moeten uitleggen. (MS): We kunnen de gemeenten ook vragen wat zij nodig denken te hebben. (GN): Zou er iets kunnen zijn dat blijvende verdeeldheid kan veroorzaken

² Het is voor mij heel moeilijk om tegelijk aantekeningen te maken en te praten.

(bijv. vrouwenstemrecht, wat sommige GKN gemeenten hebben)? (MS): Er zijn belangrijke verschillen, maar geen ervan wordt als kerkscheidend beschouwd. (CK): De situatie is soms complex, we hebben mensen van DGK naar GKN zien gaan en omgekeerd. Er bestaan ook karikaturen. (HG): Zouden de CanRC en de FRCA bereid zijn ons bij deze dingen te helpen, als het tot een breuk mocht komen? (Concensus): dat zou binnen de gegeven mandaten vallen en is zeker een verantwoordelijkheid.

KJ: Hoe moeten de CanRC met het verzoek van DGK Mariënberg omgaan? (DJB): Ik was betrokken als deputaat appelzaken. We hebben alles geprobeerd wat we maar konden om de problemen op te lossen, maar de houding van Mariënberg is niet goed, zij vertellen pure leugens. Er is een perceptie van een zeker radicalisme in de DGK, die ik zeker heb gezien als het om Mariënberg gaat. (HG): "Eén ding dat ik van de DGK heb gewaardeerd is hoe zij dit op een vredelievende wijze op hun synode hebben besproken.

DJB: Het zou niet helpen als u een zusterkerkrelatie met één van ons (GKN of DGK) aan zou gaan zonder het ook met de ander te doen, want dat zou het proces van eenwording kunnen vertragen.

CK: We waren blij met het besluit van Australië om het werken richting eenwording als een voorwaarde te stellen voor samenwerking met ons.

PvG: Let er wel op dat er besluiten van beide synodes zijn geweest om eenwording te zoeken. Dat moet genoeg zijn.

KJ: Wat u dus zegt is dat op een gegeven moment òf met beide òf met geen van beide een zusterkerkrelatie moet worden aangegaan, nooit de één zonder de ander.

Een misverstand betreffende het CRCA-SRN rapport werd opgehelderd.

PvG: Zouden we een soort persverslag voor de kerkleden kunnen krijgen? Zij moeten weten dat er beweging in de ontwikkelingen zit. (Consensus): Als we de notulen hebben, kan een persverslag worden gemaakt.

Er volgt discussie over wat gedeeld kan worden over de gesprekken tussen DGK en LRCA. Een punt is dat de LRCA nog niet officieel (op de laatste brief) heeft geantwoord. Als die reactie er is, kan die met de FRCA, FRCSA en de CanRC worden gedeeld; maar zelfs dan alleen voor vertrouwelijk gebruik.

HG: Is het waar dat KJ zondag een eredienst in de GKN zal leiden? (KJ): Ja. (Discussie ontstaat, waarbij wat opgetrokken wenkbrauwen zijn te zien: Kan dit wel? Tenslotte geeft HG toe dat hij ook in Indonesië preekt).

GN: Dit is een goede vergadering, ik voel me opgelucht hoe deze vergadering is gegaan.

Enige slotwoorden van dankbaarheid en erkenning worden gesproken voor alle inzet en energie die de buitenlandse zusterkerken het afgelopen decennium hebben laten zien in het vermanen van de GKV. Zij worden bemoedigd in de taak die nog voor hen ligt met betrekking tot de GKV-synode.

KJ³ gaat voor in slotgebed.

Aanvulling op notulen (KJ) van de bespreking van BBK DGK met buitenlandse kerken CanRC, FRCA en FRCSA (9-1-2020 Mennorode)

³ Ik ben vergeten te noteren wie het was. Ik denk dat ik het zelf was, maar weet het niet meer 100% zeker.

Deze aanvulling is na input op bijgaande Nederlandse vertaling van uw notulen.

Mededeling van deputaten BBK:

Volgens opdracht van de synode hebben wij onderzoek gedaan inzake de kerkelijke rechtsgang van de LRCA. De conclusie van ons als deputaten op dit moment hebben we aan de LRCA meegedeeld in onze brief van 5 november 2019 en luidt als volgt:

‘Wat betreft de katholiciteit van de kerk: u veroordeelt de Westminster Confessie als geheel als een document, waarin (naast veel goeds, ook) dwaalleer wordt geleerd. En kerken die de WC bewust ongewijzigd en onweersproken als belijdenis hanteren, kunt u niet erkennen als kerken van Christus, louter en alleen al om het feit dat zij de WC belijden. Op dit punt staat uw visie lijnrecht tegenover wat onze kerken hierover hebben uitgesproken.

Wat betreft de kerkelijke weg: u bent de kerkelijke weg niet ten einde toe gegaan. Uw afscheiding in 2007 van de CanRC is daarom in kerkrechtelijk opzicht onwettig geweest.’

Deputaten buitenland verzoeken dit aan hun kerken te mogen rapporteren.

Wij geven aan dat de correspondentie met LRCA nog vertrouwelijk is totdat het antwoord van de LRCA binnen is. De tot heden ontvangen antwoorden van LRCA zijn teleurstellend en hebben tot deze conclusie geleid. Omdat de leden van DGK nog niet in kennis zijn gesteld van de ontwikkelingen t.a.v. LRCA, wordt verzocht deze gegevens voorlopig nog slechts intern te gebruiken in de verslaglegging. Pas na ontvangst van een antwoord op onze laatste brief van 5-11-2019 aan LRCA kan opening van zaken in binnen- en buitenland worden gegeven.

En aanvulling meer aan het slot van de voorlopige notulen:

KJ geeft aan zondag op verzoek voor te gaan in de GKN Zwolle. Dit met toestemming van zijn kerkenraad en BBK commissie. Leidt tot wat gefronste wenkbrauwen en ook in Australië zal hier met opgetrokken wenkbrauwen op worden gereageerd, zo verwacht DA.

HG vraagt of KJ dan ook bereid is in een dienst van DGK voor te gaan. Hierop wordt niet met ja of nee geantwoord. Het is min of meer een retorische vraag, omdat DGK een dergelijk verzoek niet heeft gedaan en wellicht ook niet zal doen. We hebben immers (nog) geen zusterkerkrelatie.

GN geeft aan dat hij bij deze samenkomst van deputaten CanRC en DGK voor het eerst het gevoel heeft zijn woorden niet op een goudschaaltje te hoeven wegen. Hij ervaart deze bijeenkomst als goed en positief (de vorige bijeenkomsten waren in 2012, 2014 en 2017).

Door RS wordt veel dank en waardering uitgesproken richting Australische en Canadese kerken voor alle inzet en energie die door hen de afgelopen jaren zijn gestoken in het vermanen van de GKv.

RS, januari 2020, namens BBK DGK