

Deed of liberation or return

During the past ten years the Gereformeerde Kerken have had to deal with a variety of objections lodged by church members against all kinds of developments that are taking place in the churches.

These objections concluded on the basis of Scriptural and Confessional grounds that general church-life is experiencing broad and deep-seated deformation, and that the churches are moving away from God's Word. That is why the churches and church meetings were emphatically urged to turn back from this path of deformation. This has been done locally as well as federatively.

The General Synod of 2002/2003 at Zuidhorn in particular received many requests for revision of previous decisions. It was in that assembly that the lines of deformation and deviation from God's Word converged in decisions that are in direct conflict with that Word of our God.

But instead of arresting the process of deformation and returning to the path of reformation, this Synod rejected almost all the requests for revision and continued on the way that must be condemned as being in conflict with Scripture and the Confessions. The deformation is therefore progressing unhindered on its destructive course.

We mention here the most important Synod decisions that show the deformation and deviation from God's Word:

Synod sanctioned the false teaching that there is no longer the divine commandment to rest on the day of the LORD. It was even decided that it is not permissible to hold the congregation to the truth¹, that in accordance with the fourth commandment God still commands the Sunday rest. These Synod decisions have effectively muzzled the Scriptural preaching, and severely restrict church discipline over sin against the fourth commandment. This abrogation of the fourth commandment has damaging consequences for all the commandments.

As a by-product of its decisions regarding the growing unity with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken and Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken Synod accepted the false doctrine of Bible criticism which those churches tolerate.²

Rejecting the objections that were placed on its table, Synod authorised for use in the churches many songs from the 'Liedboek voor de Kerken' that deviate from Scripture and the Confessions. This decision will lead to congregational singing which has lost the unity in praising and glorifying the LORD.³

¹ Matthew 5:17,18; Mark 2:27; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Hebrews 4:8,9; Revelation 1:10; Genesis 2:2,3; Exodus 16:22-30; Exodus 20:11; Exodus 31:14,15; Nehemiah 13:17; Isaiah 58:13,14; Jeremiah 17:21-27; Ezekiel 20:18-26; Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Days 33, 34, 38; The National Synod of Dordrecht 1618-1619 – Post Acta 164th Session.

² 1 Peter 1:20, 21; 1 John 4:1; 2 John:10.

³ Romans 15:4-6; Galatians 1:8; Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 4:11.

Appendix 3

The present reality is that the foregoing issues have now been finalised by two successive Synods. Further appeal in the church-orderly way is no longer possible.

With regard to the application of the seventh commandment, the recently held Synod did indeed point to the need for obedience to God's commandment. The urgency of that call was, however, undermined again by making allowance for the hardness of the heart, the abilities of the married couple, the fairness in the prevailing circumstances, the limitation of the seventh commandment in relation to the style of the kingdom of heaven, and the prevailing opinion within the local congregation.⁴

In this situation a number of church members sent a written 'Oproep tot reformatie en bekering'⁵ to the local churches and church members. Together with the brochure 'Laten wij ons bekeren'⁶, the two documents present an evaluation and summary of what we regard as a sorry state of affairs in our churches. All kinds of trends and developments as well as many hard decisions justify no other judgment than that the church is being deprived of her glorious position as true church and is developing into a pluralistic church. It is turning into a church in which yes and no – pure and unscriptural doctrine – have their legal place beside each other. The 'Oproep tot reformatie en bekering' was addressed to the church councils – the supreme ecclesiastical authority – who have the duty, in accordance with Article 31 of the Church Order and Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, to reject Synod decisions that conflict with God's Word.

To our great sorrow, this call to reformation has suffered a large-scale outright rejection by the churches and in the church press.

This applies also to you, the church council of our congregation, who have rejected the call and are showing no willingness to go the way of return to God's Word.

We must therefore conclude that in spite of the intense and widely distributed warnings there is no indication of a beginning of repentance. The false doctrine that was pointed out is being defended; some of those who submitted this 'Oproep tot reformatie en bekering' have been accused of sin against the ninth commandment and are being admonished to withdraw it with acknowledgement of regret; and some of them have even been subjected to church discipline.

These reactions are evidence that the Gereformeerde Kerken are no longer pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15) They have abandoned the duty to teach their children to keep God's commandments without compromise.⁷ And to our great sorrow we have to draw the conclusion that the Gereformeerde Kerken can no longer be seen to be true church (Article 29 of the Belgic Confession).

⁴ Matthew 19:9; Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Days 41, 44.

⁵ Call to Reformation and Return

⁶ Let us Repent

⁷ John 14:15; James 2:10; 1 John 2:3; Revelation 12:17, 14:12.

Appendix 3

We believe that in these circumstances the LORD asks from us to face the reality that this rejection of the call to reformation has broken the communion of Word and Sacrament; and that we should obey His Word in which He commands not to have communion with sin (Revelation 18:4). We declare therefore that it is no longer justified for us to continue our membership of a community which, in spite of repeated calls to reformation and repentance, has confirmed its acceptance of deviation from Scripture and the Confessions.

It follows that, as long as you are unwilling to turn back from your way of deformation, we are unable for the LORD's sake, to assemble with you under your pastoral supervision and to accept your discipline as being exercised in the name of the LORD. We reject, in accordance with Article 31 of the Church Order, the unscriptural Synod decisions and liberate ourselves from this corruption of the doctrine. Furthermore, we liberate ourselves from the unscriptural⁸ curtailment of the preaching in respect of the divinely commanded Sunday rest, as well as from the adoption of songs that oppose God's covenant Word.

This act of liberation and repentance is one of obedience to the Word of God, which commands us not to share in sins and doctrinal errors, and not to follow the majority to do evil⁹: the truth being above all.

We desire to follow the LORD's calling in obedience. He requires the church to govern itself according to the pure Word of God, and to reject all things contrary to it (Article 29 of the Belgic Confession). We will, moreover, follow only that which serves unity (Article 32 of the Belgic Confession). We acknowledge our own guilt and sin, and we ask our heavenly Father's forgiveness – which we may expect in the way of continuing faithfulness to the promises we made at our public profession and eventually on the occasion of our ordination in an ecclesiastical office.

Our strength lies in God's promise to His church that He will grant the restoration of damaged relationships and will work the unity of the true faith, if only we keep His commandments.

We urge you most earnestly for the sake of the LORD, the holiness of His house, and the gathering of His sheep, to pay heed to this final call, in order that you may be 'an ark of salvation' in the gathering storm of temptation.

We write this in all sincerity and with great sorrow.

We beseech our heavenly Father to give you the wisdom and faith to come back from the wrong way so that the broken unity between us may be restored.

We conclude with the assurance that we are heartily willing to pursue ecclesiastical unity with all who are willing to live on the basis of Scripture, the Confessions, and the Church Order of Dordrecht.

⁸ Deuteronomy 12:32; Matthew 28:19; Revelation 22:19.

⁹ Exodus 23:2; Ephesians 5:6,7; 2 John :10; Article 7 of the Belgic Confession.

Appendix 3