

Deputies for contact with Churches abroad of the Gereformeerde Kerken
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To:
Free Reformed Churches of Australia
Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad
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Esteemed brothers in our Lord,

As Deputies for contact with Churches abroad of the Gereformeerde Kerken we want to continue contact with you as sister churches. The Gereformeerde Kerken originate from the recent Liberation of the Gereformeerde Kerken (Vrijgemaakt) 2003/2004.

In continuing this contact we, first of all, want to point to our grief, which accompanies this request. This grief is because it had to come so far that we could no longer remain members of the GKV and be one with them. Since the Liberation of 1944 our Lord Jesus Christ bestowed the GKV with many covenant-riches. The ongoing reformation in all areas of life has rightly been experienced as gain from the Liberation of 1944.

However, an ongoing process of deterioration has caused decay in the life of faith and a departure from the pure doctrine. Finally, after the Synod of Zuidhorn one no longer can speak of the GKV as governing "itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it" (Belgic Confession Art. 29). After the closure of this Synod an appeal was sent to all church members and consistories calling them to reform. The appeal asked for a return to the faithful obedience required by the Word of God in all areas of life and to reject the many unscriptural Synod-decisions. This "*Call to Reformation*" (appendix 1) was accompanied by a brochure named "*Let us repent*" (appendix 2). The vast majority of the churches and church members rejected this call to reform. In order to do justice to the claim of the Lord on His church there remained no other way than to exhort the people to Liberate themselves from the Synod decisions ratified by their consistories, according to art. 31 of the C.O. and Art. 28 of the B.C.

At the same time there also may be the joy and gratitude that the Lord remains to be gracious to His children in the Netherlands. He has not taken his lamp-stand away from

this country, but continued in the way of reformation and liberation. We can only write this acknowledging our own many weaknesses and dependence on our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Church. We also confess guilt in relation to the deformation and desertion of the covenant within the GKV.

May the Lord sanctify and bless us on the road of ongoing reformation in being faithful to His Word.

In this letter, along with the attached information, we want to prove our legitimacy as being the lawful continuation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

The point of departure for the latest Liberation has been the examination of the official texts from the Acts of the GKV Synods comparing these with the Word of God, the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order of Dort. On the following pages you will find a brief evaluation of the most important decisions made by the General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002, which directly caused the necessity of the recent Liberation.

On the 20th of September 2003 a national meeting was held. At this meeting the deed of Liberation (Appendix 3) was handed to the church members as an example. From this deed it will become clear that the call to return is inextricably connected to our act of Liberation. In doing so we followed the example of past reformations of the Church of our Lord.

We are also called to seek unity with those who wholeheartedly want to place themselves under the authority of Christ Jesus and the Word of God. Thus it is our duty to turn to you and to ask you to acknowledge us as being the lawful continuation of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. We will be happy to provide you with the information needed to come to a just assessment of the official ecclesiastical documents on the basis of the Word of God, the Reformed Confessions and the Reformed Church Order.

It should be noted that in our deliberations we did not dwell on matters within the GKV since or in addition to the General Synod of Zuidhorn. We do however state that since the Liberation there has been no sign of any form of repentance. On the contrary, in our opinion the tolerated straying from Scripture is spreading widely at a vast speed. The stated desire by the Canadian Reformed Churches for us to speedily come to renewed unity with the GKV, therefore, seems to be a receding possibility. Nonetheless we as churches and church members ought to continually pray for a return within the GKV.

On following pages you will find the most important grounds for the recent Liberation including:

- 1. Fourth Commandment**
- 2. Ecclesiastical unity and biblical criticism**
- 3. 'Liedboek' songs**
- 4. Seventh Commandment**
- 5. Unity with the PCEA**
- 6. Lords Supper and the army**
- 7. Blessing by a non-elder**

1. The Fourth Commandment

Much has been written about the issue of the fourth commandment. We, however, want to represent the information as succinct as possible.

The issue of the fourth Commandment came about because of a sermon by Rev. D. Ophoff. By means of the ecclesiastical way a brother appealed against some of the content of a sermon on LD 38 by the hand of Rev. Ophoff. This appeal was tabled at the 'Particuliere' Synod of Utrecht¹. This assembly stated that Rev. Ophoff erred². Rev. Ophoff and his consistory appealed against this decision of Utrecht thus the issue was tabled at the Synod of Leusden 1999.

Among other things Rev. Ophoff preached "Let other people know how much this day [the Sunday] is of value to you. Even if it isn't on the basis of an absolute divine command, as far as I am concerned"³. The brother who first appealed as well as the 'Particuliere' Synod of Utrecht believed that this teaching doesn't do justice to the command of the Lord to rest on the Sunday, which is the Sabbath of the new dispensation. In this way we will only have to rest on the Sunday on the basis of a good human institution⁴, which should be maintained as good as possible⁵. This brings us to the core of the matter, the fundamental difference: Either the Sunday as a day of rest is **based on the fourth commandment from the Lord** or it is a **good human institution**⁶.

The Synod of Leusden 1999 decided the following: "the opinion of rev. Ophoff (being: that the Sunday as a day of rest isn't based on a divine commandment.) cannot be condemned"⁷. And under point 4 of the same decision: that "there is no reason to assume that rev. Ophoff ... departs from the **doctrine** of the church with regard to the fourth commandment of the law of the Lord"⁸. These decisions are substantiated by different grounds. One of them is: "Within the Reformed churches in the Netherlands there has always been room to think differently about the Scriptural foundation regarding the Sunday as a day of rest"⁹.

¹ Particuliere Synode of Utrecht, date: 27th of November 1998

² Utrecht decided: *Even if rev. Ophoff is of the opinion that the Word of God is on his side he shouldn't have addressed his views that differ from LD 38 HC in a sermon. He should have dealt with this matter in the way prescribed by the form for the ordination of Ministers of the Word. Further: In its confession the church in LD 38 (where it calls the sabbath the day of rest) takes its starting point in the command to rest as the Lord Himself literally gave it in the fourth commandment. The deeper and spiritual meaning given by this command does not interfere with the command to rest on this day.* See Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/03 p. 27 Art. 25

³ See: Acts of Synod Leusden 1999 p. 26 Art. 25 materiaal 1.a.

⁴ Very recently (since the Synod of Zuidhorn) the deputies, in their report, changed 'human institution' into 'ecclesiastical institution' this, however, does not alter the situation as an 'ecclesiastical institution' is quite different from a command based on Scripture.

⁵ See: Acts of Synod Leusden 1999 p. 26 Art. 25 materiaal 1.b.

⁶ For the phrase: 'a good human institution' see: See: Acts of Synod Leusden 1999 p. 26 Art. 25 materiaal 1.b; and also: Grond. 4. on p. 29

⁷ See: Acts of Synod Leusden 1999 p. 28 Art. 25 Besluit 4.3.

⁸ See: Acts of Synod Leusden 1999 p. 28 Art. 25 Besluit 4. 4.

⁹ See: Acts of Synod Leusden 1999 p. 29 Art. 25 Grond 3.

These decisions caused much turmoil. Many people appealed against these Synod decisions with all kinds of proof from Scripture, Confession and history. These appeals were tabled at the next Synod held in Zuidhorn 2002/03¹⁰. Thirty-nine appeals were declared inadmissible¹¹ as they did not come with new arguments. Towards the other (398) appellants they decided not to honor their requests¹². This because synod, amongst other things, was not convinced that the appeals gave the indisputable evidence on the basis of Scripture and confession that the opinion (of rev. Ophoff) scrutinized by the Synod of Leusden contradicts Scripture and confession.¹³ Furthermore Synod decided: “to summon the churches, especially the people that appealed, to keep the peace and unity that has **always** existed, within the churches, between the supporters of the different opinions regarding the fourth commandment¹⁴. This because: 1. it serves the peace and unity of the churches when, in case of differences of opinion, people do not bind each other to that which goes further than the accepted doctrine also regarding the 4th commandment. 2. Besides all the differences of opinion there is the similarity about the meaning of the Sunday as a gift from the Lord, a day on which the congregation of Christ should assemble and should delight in Gods works of creation and deliverance.¹⁵ In all this the Synod held in Zuidhorn maintained that they have made no doctrinal judgment but they prefer to say that they merely affirmed the rejection of Leusden against one appeal against one sermon¹⁶. This is rather strange as they placed this issue in chapter 2 of the Acts named **Doctrine**¹⁷. Secondly, the issue is all about doctrine, it clearly deals with the way in which we may and must explain the Word of God as summarized in Lords Day 38: the doctrine of the Church.

Both Synods have by their decisions allowed for a different explanation of the doctrine of LD 38. At the same time they both have invalidated the fourth commandment. The Old Testament command to rest from (unnecessary) labor is not necessarily applicable today. They, now, have **allowed** for the fourth commandment to be explained in a different way. By doing so they have reduced the doctrine of the Holy Scripture and the confession, on this point, to, merely, a ‘point of view’. In this matter Synod definitely made a doctrinal judgment.

Both Synods decided not to listen to the manifold arguments from Scripture and created room for two contradicting points of view. On the one side the Sunday as a day of rest is **based on the fourth commandment from the Lord**, on the other side the Sunday as a **good human institution**. The fundamental difference should not be down played. In first case a minister of the Word can in His sermon no longer address the congregation of the

¹⁰ Appeals from the church councils of Emmeloord, Spakenburg-Zuid, Urk and 65 individual appeals from church members together with 400 declarations of approval. Also the Free Reformed Churches of Australia tabled a letter expressing their concerns regarding this issue.

¹¹ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 90 Art 52 Besluit 1

¹² See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 90 Art 52 Besluit 2 and gronden.

¹³ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 90 Art 52 Grond 1.

¹⁴ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 91 Art 52 Besluit 3

¹⁵ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 91 Art 52 Gronden 1 & 2

¹⁶ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 90 Art 52 Besluit 2 Grond 2

¹⁷ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 22: Hoofdstuk 2 – leer (Chapter 2 – Doctrine)

Lord and say ‘Thus says the Lord’. Yes, as far as Zuidhorn is concerned, a minister is still allowed to say that the rest of the Sunday is based on the fourth commandment. However, as shown above, Synod also decided: **one may no longer bind each other on this matter**. This, according to us, is impossible as the preaching is the binding proclamation of the Word of God. In the preaching the minister administers the keys of heaven, there he binds and looses. The practical consequences of these decisions are clear. Even if a minister or a consistory, when confronted with people that do unnecessary labor on the day of rest, would say: ‘thus says the Lord regarding the day of rest’, it is of no value to address this matter. This also became clear at the Synod of Zuidhorn in a different matter. A brother tabled his appeal re. a brother that was placed on the list and elected to be an elder in a congregation (recently he has been ordained). This brother, however, has his factory open on Sunday and lets people work for him on that day for financial reasons - not for the reasons of necessity or mercy. When people objected to this with arguments based on Scripture at the consistory and later at different major assemblies their appeals were continually turned down. Thus this matter was tabled at the Synod of Zuidhorn¹⁸. This appeal, in line with the above mentioned appeals, was rejected by the Synod of Zuidhorn with the words: that one cannot “bindingly proof from Scripture that there is a direct command from the Lord to the New Testament church to keep the Sunday as a day of rest”¹⁹

Instead of making the above-mentioned decisions the GKV should have studied the matters of Leusden concerning the fourth commandment on the basis of Scripture and confession. Yet, Synod was not willing to further study the matter whether the Sunday as a day of rest is a divine command or not. In fact, the Synod Zuidhorn was officially asked to install deputies that should examine the exegesis from Scripture and the history of the church concerning the fourth commandment and the Sunday as a day of rest²⁰. However, this proposal as well as the proposal to ‘pronounce that resting on the Sunday is based on a divine commandment’ has been rejected²¹. Synod Zuidhorn decided instead to install deputies that should “create a handout in which a positive stand is taken regarding the ethics of how believers and churches of the 21st century should act in regards to celebrating the Sunday as a day of the Lord in light of the fourth commandment”²². In light of the above-mentioned decisions, one will understand that this decision is very deceiving. How very good it all may sound, it is all based on the ‘shifting sand’ of their decisions allowing for two viewpoints regarding the basis of the rest on the day of the Lord. In all this the GKV won’t take a stand on whether the Sunday as a day of rest is based on the fourth commandment or whether the rest is based on a good human or ecclesiastical institution.

Conclusion

¹⁸ See: Acts of Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 107 Art. 60

¹⁹ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 109 besluit & grond 1

²⁰ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 22 Art 13 Materiaal 1 en p. 24, 1st paragraph.

²¹ Proposal by Synod member br. S. Jonker, See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 Art 13 p. 24

²² See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 23 Art 13 besluit 1

The obstruction to be able to bindingly preach and the space created within the GKV for the false doctrine regarding the day of the LORD and the fourth commandment come forth from a different approach to Scripture. They no longer want to use the line throughout Scripture but look at different bible texts on an individual basis. However with the unity of Scripture as a starting point we must conclude that the Lord still commands us to rest on the Sunday. We base this on, among others, the following texts from Scripture: Gen. 2: 2,3; Ex. 20: 11; Ex. 31: 14,15; Neh. 13: 17; Isa. 58: 13,14; Jer. 17: 21-27; Ezek. 20: 18-26; Matt. 5: 17, 18; Mark 2: 27; Acts 20: 7; I Cor. 16: 2; Hebr. 4: 8,9ff; Rev. 1:10 as well as on the Heidelberg Catechism LD 33, 34 and 38. We further refer to the Postacts of the National Synod of Dordrecht 1618-1619, 164th session.

The GKV states that there ‘has always been room to think differently about the Scriptural foundation regarding the Sunday as a day of rest’ and ‘to keep the peace that has always existed, within the churches’. We have to defeat these statements as history teaches us that there has been no space or peace in the churches regarding this subject. On the contrary throughout history there has always been struggle regarding the fourth commandment. For reading about this subject we would like to point you to the brochure of the LWVKO: ‘*Sabbath en Zondag*’ by W. Dijkstra 2003. Besides: to us history has never been a basis to come to a Synod decision – only Scripture is (Art. 7 B.C.).

We must therefore sadly conclude, that the GKV made definite unscriptural decisions as to the issue of Sabbath and the fourth commandment while rejecting the many requests for revision. Their deviations regard the following:

- Scripture: neglecting the unity of Scripture and persistent validity of the Ten Commandments, thereby altering the exegesis of certain texts,
- Confession: altering the explanation of LD 38,
- Church History: altering historical facts and making them a basis for their decision.

Their approach has immediate consequences to:

- Preaching: disallowing ministers (or anyone for that matter) to bind and administer the keys of the Kingdom of heaven on this issue,
- Church discipline: obstructing discipline to those who willingly do unnecessary labor on the day of rest.

2. Ecclesiastical unity (a) and biblical criticism (b)

2. a

Ecclesiastical unity of the GKV with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK) and the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK)

Soon after the Liberation of 1944, the GKV recognized the CGK as having the same foundation of Gods Word and the confessions, and approached them for the purpose of establishing church unity in accordance with the command of the Lord. But despite repeated invitations, these churches persisted over time in refusing to consider this unity. Later, in the 1970's, Prof. B. J. Oosterhoff from the CGK published his doctrine on Genesis 2 and 3, in which he considered this part of Biblical history to be of a symbolic nature instead of literal occurrence observable by sense. Another professor from the CGK, prof. Versteeg supported these ideas. Therefore, the **Synod of Arnhem 1981** (GKV), called upon the CGK to reject this Bible-criticism, which was related to the ideas of dr. Geelkerken (condemned by the Synod of Assen, 1926). Although prof. Oosterhoff openly persisted in his doctrine, deputies of the CGK declared the problem solved, this happened "behind closed doors". The CGK, however, never took disciplinary steps against these two professors.

In the mean time, far-reaching adaptations of God's Word to man's contemporary perception and experience became evident in 3 books of dr. B. Loonstra from the CGK, published in 1994, 1999, 2000. In his view, the Bible should be made 'credible' and acceptable to the post-modern man. This should be achieved by taking Scripture no longer literally when cultural differences, scientific findings, and 'demonstrated' contradictions in Scripture obstruct the understanding of Bible passages. These passages, then, should be taken metaphorically or symbolically. It is up to the congregation to create its own contemporary interpretation and validity of God's commandments. These opinions are a gross subversion of the authority of Scripture. Although the CGK discussed this matter with Loonstra resulting in a toned-down version of some of his earlier statements, yet his Bible-critical conviction in his original writings remained unchanged. We must, therefore, judge that the CGK persist in their unscriptural tolerance.

Another evidence of tolerance towards heresies is the local unity which many congregations of the CGK have with congregations of the NGK. Since their very existence, the latter churches tolerate false doctrines (the teaching of Rev Telder, adult baptism, open Lord's Supper Table, Bible criticism, independency, and female office-bearers), and do not insist on a 'binding' Confession.

Other objections against unity with the CGK include tolerance of the practice of the so-called "perforated church boundaries". This unscriptural practice facilitates people to suit their favored modality within this church, rather than to obey the call of the local consistory to attend the local congregation in their Sunday worship.

However, the **Synod of Leusden, 1999** (GKV), decided to continue on the way of ecclesiastical unity with the CGK in “thankfulness for the growth in mutual approach”²³, even though in 1998 the Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity declared about the Bible-criticism of Loonstra that that “evil must be resisted from the beginning” So, what once was considered on the grounds of the Scripture as a major obstacles to real unity in truth, merely became matters requiring attention. Close local co-operation with a CGK congregation was approved including the communion of Word and Sacraments.

The **Synod of Zuidhorn 2002**, subsequently rejected all of the requests to revise the decisions of Leusden 1999 and Berkel 1996²⁴. Despite the existence of the binding decision of Arnhem 1981, the Bible-critical heresies within the CGK were once again ignored. The decision of Zuidhorn in response to the objections, literally states: “there are no indications that Bible-criticism is allowed within the CGK”²⁵.

Local unity with the NGK was not allowed to be sought for the time being, because the Synod of Zuidhorn recognized internal contradictions within the present general rules of strategy²⁶. Nevertheless, the Synod expressed its thankfulness towards the NGK for the “progress made in respect to the mutual understanding” and for their decision “to conduct an internal study on how to view God’s Word and the Confessions, and in particular regarding the question of how the churches can take care of the required unity in doctrine”²⁷. However, in the decisions and their grounds absolutely no concern was raised regarding the aforementioned heresies within the NGK, and no sign of repentance was mentioned whatsoever²⁸.

The CGK and NGK have not changed, sadly the GKV made serious and unacceptable compromises. This makes them (co-)accountable for the deviation from Scripture and the Confessions within these churches.

2. b.

Bible-criticism in accepted methods for evangelization and allowed at the Theological University of Kampen

The Synod of Zuidhorn 2002 agreed to the introduction and development of the **Emmaüs-course**²⁹. This method for evangelization considers the chapters 1-11 of Genesis to be “pre-historic” (“oergeschiedenis”). This denies the clarity, transparency, and therefore reliability of God’s Word in the historical facts of God’s Creation, the fall into sin, and Gods beginning of the history of salvation. This method considers literal facts as “themes”. Although the responsible deputies later declared that this phrase had “escaped their attention”, nothing is done so far to warn seriously against the unscriptural

²³ See: Acts of Synod Leusden 1999 p. 215 Art. 82, besluit 1

²⁴ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 228 /246 Art.125, 131

²⁵ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 247 Art. 131 grond 1

²⁶ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 247 Art. 132

²⁷ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 237 Art. 126, besluit 4

²⁸ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 234 /247 Art. 126, 132

²⁹ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p. 190 Art. 103

basis of this course. On the contrary, the course is still warmly recommended at the site of the deputies³⁰.

The same trend can be found in the book: *Woord op Schrift, a* publication from Kampen³¹. Drs. J.J.T. Doedens placed the historicity of (the sequence of) the days of Creation, up for discussion. He provides a figurative approach to creation as a “theme” introduced by the ‘institution of the Israelite Sabbath week’ at the Sinai³². By these writings, however, Gods own ‘report’ of Creation is distorted. In this way the essence of the blessed and sanctified Sabbath, which followed the six days of creation, has been defaced.

Lecturer drs. A.L. Th. de Bruijne of the theological university in Kampen pleads in the same book that the Scriptures should be understood within the context of the time of their origin. He judges that many passages in Scripture are to be understood in a metaphorical way. Metaphoric or symbolic matter can - even without specific textual indication – have been woven into historical passages of the Scripture. Passages such as Genesis chapters 1-3 should rather be read as literary texts, or as stories (supporting the view of drs. Doedens), while keeping in mind that the facts mentioned in these stories could in reality have been quite different.

A consequence of this approach is that whatever the historical writers wrote in Scripture has in reality not always happened. In this view also God’s commandments will lose their literal meaning. Drs. De Bruijne alters the function of the commandments of the Lord into guidelines and examples rather than regarding them as literal norms³³.

The radical essence of following Christ and living according to the ‘style of the kingdom’ is seriously impaired, when the normative nature of the covenant commandments of the Lord are compromised.

Drs de Bruijne defends the idea that a variety of human factors, such as folklore traditions, mythological material, and imperfect historical sources contributed in establishing the final text of some passages of Scripture. According to him, Godly direction becomes clear in the fact that the authors worked with “as much integrity as possible”. With as much integrity as possible!³⁴ And regarding the direct speech of God in Biblical historical writings, he states “It cannot be denied that this apparently has not always meant to be so. The author with his imaginative capacity has an independent input into this”³⁵.

In this doctrine of ‘inspiration’ the human factor dominates. Such reasoning comes into conflict with Holy Scriptures itself when it speaks about the authorship and authority of the Scriptures. Namely, that it is the work of the Holy Spirit and that Holy Scriptures are infallible (e.g. 2 Peter 1: 21, Belgic Confession art. 3-7).

³⁰ www.gkv.nl

³¹ Trimp, C. ed. 2002, *Woord op Schrift*; Kok Kampen

³² Trimp, C. ed. 2002, *Woord op Schrift*; Kok Kampen p. 95 - 106

³³ Trimp, C. ed. 2002, *Woord op Schrift*; Kok Kampen p. 212 - 218

³⁴ Trimp, C. ed. 2002, *Woord op Schrift*; Kok Kampen p. 188

³⁵ Trimp, C. ed. 2002, *Woord op Schrift*; Kok Kampen p. 184

In 2003 and 2004 the **deputies curators**³⁶ repeatedly rejected all letters of objection against the above mentioned Bible-criticism in writings from people connected to the university of Kampen. On the contrary, their unanimous conclusion in their official published press release is that the starting points of Drs. De Bruijne are of real interest and that support should be provided towards work that is continued along these lines. They ask for the blessing of God on such work. By way of the deputies the churches are co-responsible for their encouragement to the abovementioned errors and bible-criticism within the GKV and in the education of upcoming ministers of the Word.

To illustrate the thinking of both the Theological University and deputies of the GKV about the role of the Church of the living God as pillar and bulwark of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15), one has to visit the website of **GKV**, especially www.missionair.nl. On this web page, the church is characterized and promoted as a so called ‘open market square’. This in contrasts to a church/ city with walls. In this view all efforts should be taken to maximize the facilities for relationship with people outside the church and to minimize the need for defensive actions. This view completely denies the notion that Christ is gathering and defending his Church by the offices and by discipline. This view is also in line with the ideas of the lecturer C. Haak at Kampen, as described in his book ***Kerk in the 21e eeuw*** (*Church in the 21st Century*).

In conclusion, all these developments testify of the destructing consequences of accepting a Bible-critical view and tempering with the unconditional authority of the Word of God.

Embarrassingly, all warnings and objections from concerned church members have been systematically rejected by all major assemblies and by the deputies curators.

³⁶ The by the churches appointed overseers of the Gereformeerde universiteit in Kampen

3. 'Liedboek' songs

Synod Leusden 1999

Deputies installed by the Synod of Berkel and Rodenrijs 1996 served Synod with a list of 255 songs, taken from the "Liedboek voor de Kerken"³⁷. Synod decided to approve 121 of the 255 songs and make them available for use in the churches³⁸. A majority of the committee, which prepared this decision, was in favour and a minority was against this proposal. The latter maintained that a number of the songs are open to the heresy that eternal life would be for all mankind³⁹. During the discussion one or more delegates had Scriptural objections to 17 songs.⁴⁰

The churches were asked by Synod Leusden to try out the 121 songs. The final decision would than be taken by the next Synod. One congregation in the Netherlands, the sister churches in Australia and two brothers and sisters reminded Synod that at the time the "Liedboek" was first published dr. K. Deddens had warned in a number of articles in the church magazine "Reformatie"⁴¹ that the "Liedboek" songs could not be accepted for use in worship services (he called them ecumenical love songs)⁴². There also were objections to the large number of songs: At that time there were 41 hymns, while the aim now was to expand to 255 songs via the number of 121 songs, perhaps ending up with 400 songs⁴³. Synod decided to reject objections to the "Liedboek" that referred to the refusal of the "Liedboek" in the past⁴⁴.

Synod Zuidhorn 2002-2003.

Synod Zuidhorn was faced with objections to the 121 songs from the "Liedboek". These objections came from 58 consistories and 280 church members. There were also 242 'statements of adhesion' to the objections regarding the 121 songs. The criticism in these objections regarding many of the songs is found in one or more of the following doctrinal errors: the doctrine of common grace, horizontalism, unscriptural magical re-living of occurrences in the history of salvation, liberation theology, and omission/ confusion/ minimizing of (1) election / covenant / living out of the covenant promises, (2) the good fight of faith, (3) sin / covenant- unfaithfulness / antithesis, and (4) atonement through satisfaction. Further objections dealt with unscriptural magical elements in the sacraments, names for God that can not be found in His Word, false poetic images and connections that can not be referenced to Scripture, and mystical poetic language that does not fit with the original Scriptural text. Omissions in the rhyming of Scripture

³⁷ An ecumenical hymnal used by many church denominations

³⁸ See: Acts of Synod Leusden 1999 p. 141 Art. 59 besluit 2.

³⁹ See: Acts of Synod Leusden 1999 p. 142 Art. 59 besluit 3 grond

⁴⁰ As above.

⁴¹ *De Reformatie* Volume 48 pages 37- 43 and Volume 49 pages 14 - 16

⁴² See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/ 2003 p. 152 Art. 84, Materiaal 7 see also: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/ 2003 p. 522 Deputaten Rapport IV 4

⁴³ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/ 2003 p. 152 Art. 84, Materiaal

⁴⁴ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/ 2003 p. 152 Art. 84, Besluit

passages of words that are essential, which thereby diminish the message of the Word of God, were reported in many songs⁴⁵.

Synod agreed with the objections to four of the 121 songs. These songs were not made available for use in worship services⁴⁶. Synod, however, decided to reject all objections to the remainder of the 121 songs. These songs were (after second reading) made available for use during worship services.⁴⁷

Synod decided to make a further 90 songs available to the churches⁴⁸. It must be stated that these 90 songs, which presently are being tried out in worship services, are by no means songs which should be used as such. Most of them were made to be used in primary schools. They are thus 'childish' songs. At the coming Synod 2005 these songs will be discussed and perhaps added to those already permanently in use.

Conclusion.

Most of the songs taken from the "Liedboek" are unscriptural, and therefore unacceptable as songs that should be pure and pleasant before the face of our holy God (Philippians 2:12-18; 4: 8, 9, 18; Romans 15:16-19; Hebrews 12: 28; 13:15; 1 Peter 4:11).

In addition, the proposed additional songs, mainly meant for children, are unacceptable to be used in worship services.

⁴⁵ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/ 2003 p. 533 – 571 Deputaten Rapport IV 4

⁴⁶ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/ 2003 p. 152 Art. 86, Besluit 1

⁴⁷ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/ 2003 p. 152 Art. 86, Besluit 2

⁴⁸ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/ 2003 p. 152 Art 87, Besluit 2.

4. The seventh commandment and the new marriage form

The third mark of the Church of Jesus Christ is church discipline⁴⁹. This discipline is meant to save sinners, to save the congregation from the possibility that the evil may conquer the hearts of all, and to keep the name of the Lord holy. According to the command of Christ, the church should admonish the sinner and lead to repentance, while punishing sin. What is the situation in the GKV with regard to this key to the Kingdom of Heaven?

In many congregations there is no, or hardly any, evidence of the Scriptural exercise of discipline. Discipline is frequently seen in the church-press as ‘placing someone under the law’ and as ‘handling disproportionately’⁵⁰.

The report of these Deputies begins with pleading for radical obedience to the Word of God regarding the seventh commandment, and the once spoken “I do”. In the same report, however, there is also a veering off from this Scriptural direction by:

- a) Situational ethics (proportionalism): human circumstances such as ‘the hardness of heart’ and the ‘spiritual ability to bear’ are permitted to determine whether one can be released from the seventh commandment. In this way, however, God’s command is rendered powerless.
- b) Congregational ethics: The congregation, in Christian freedom, is permitted to establish new rules that are different than the commandments of God and Christ. In this way human opinions are placed above the Word of God. This is based on an analogy of 1 Corinthians 7:15.
- c) Making the commandments of God relative to the context of Christ’s teaching and the ‘style of the kingdom’.
- d) Undermining Scriptural discipline in matters relating to sin against the seventh commandment by referring to church discipline as ‘placing under the law’.

In this way deputies act against God’s Word (Ex. 20: 14; Deut. 5: 18; Matth. 5: 17-32; 19: 1-12; James 2: 11), the confessions (B.C. art. 7, 29, 30, 32; H.C. q.a. 91, 92, 108, 109, 115), the Church Order (art. 72 & 76) and the statements of Synod of Hoogetveen 1969, Acts, Art. 314, pp. 330-340.

Synod Zuidhorn-2002 should have, wholeheartedly, rejected this report that deviates from the obedience to all the commandments of the Lord (Art. 7, BC). In stead, Synod continued with the report. It decided to mandate the deputies to establish a broader awareness of it among the churches and to popularise the discussion so that the matter could be ‘negotiated’ at the following Synod⁵¹.

⁴⁹ Belgic Confession Art. 29

⁵⁰ See the official report of the Deputies of Divorce and remarriage:
<http://www.gkv.nl/main.asp?intTreeviewID=271>

⁵¹ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 Art. 79 p. 140

Another example of how GKV is dealing with discipline regarding the seventh commandment, is given by the tolerant way of judging the practice of homosexuality within the congregations. A Reformed ministers participating in 'The Working party for homosexuals and lesbian within the GKV' states: *'I can accept it when two homosexual brothers or sisters are living in a relationship together. I do not approve, but I also do not condemn it. (...) In what way does a homosexual damage God or his neighbor in having a relationship with another homosexual?'*⁵² .

The marriage form

The Synod of Leusden-1999 established a new 'Marriage Form' as a modification of a proposal supplied to the congregations by the Synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs-1996. A number of appeals requesting revision were sent to the Synod of Zuidhorn-2002⁵³ The objections of these appeals included the following: Instead of 'ecclesiastical solemnization' of marriage the new marriage-form states that 'marriage' will be 'dedicated' to God.

The new marriage form pays insufficient attention to what the Bible says about the relationships within marriage. The Bible clearly states *'wives submit to your husbands'* (Ef 5: 24, Col. 3: 18, 1 Pet. 3: 1, 5). The new form weakens this biblical teaching by not speaking of *'obey and submit'*, as in the old marriage form, but, rather, replaces it by: *'accept as head... and follow'*. Also the role of the husband is viewed in a different way as the new form speaks of 'preceding' instead of 'leading'.

Neither does this form speak of the husbands obligation to work faithfully in his daily calling and in this support his family. The form, furthermore, does not pay attention to the task of the wife in her family and household, neglecting what the Bible says in 1 Tim. 5: 14 and Prov. 31.

The new form recommends the wedding-couple to do their family duties together, without pointing to the different tasks for husband and wife as are indicated in the Scripture (Gen. 3: 15, 19; Prov. 14: 1; Prov. 31; Ruth 4: 11, 12; Eph. Chap. 5; 1 Pet. 3: 7). The old form stated that by their marriage they have to co-operate to extend the human race, in the new form this is weakened where it states 'when the Lord provides the possibility thereto' this can be interpreted in a way to please people who have secular views about 'having' children.

Conclusion

This new form weakens the Creational ordinance, instituted by God Himself, regarding the relationship between husband and wife and their mutual tasks. It facilitates a lifestyle that ignores the Godly ordinance and commandments regarding a marriage in the Lord. Synod of Zuidhorn-2002 rejected all requests for revision against the new marriage form.⁵⁴

⁵² <http://www.contrario.nl/docs/navolgingvanchristus.doc>

⁵³ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 Art. 79 p. 140

⁵⁴ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 Art. 79 p. 140

5. Unity with the PCEA

The Synod of Leusden-1999⁵⁵ decided to establish a sister relation with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA).

In spite of many objections from the churches, the synod of Zuidhorn-2002 stated that: “this sister relationship needs to be further developed”⁵⁶.

However, our sister churches, The Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) made it clear that they themselves in Australia are not able to establish such a relation.

Reasons for this being:

- the PCEA admits ministers from other churches (e.g. Baptist) to the pulpit, meaning that the complete council of God cannot be preached. Just think only of the covenant.
- the PCEA admits non-members to the celebration of the Holy Supper, on basis the of their own testimony, this making the exercise of discipline by the elders impossible.

These two practices of the PCEA are in conflict with Article 29 of the Belgic Confession.

Since our sister churches in Australia, being nearby to the PCEA, are of the conviction that, a sister relationship cannot be established, the churches in the Netherlands should have accepted this, as being proper judgement.

Establishing a sister relation with the PCEA, brings the GKV in conflict with the three marks of the true church, outlined in article 29 of the Belgic Confession.

⁵⁵ See: Acts of Synod Leusden 1999 p.12 Art 89 Besluit and Gronden.

⁵⁶ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 p.20, 21 Art. 143 Besluit.

6. Lords Supper and the army⁵⁷

The General Synods of Leusden-1999⁵⁸ and Zuidhorn-2002⁵⁹) have decided that a serving army-chaplain may administer the Lord's Supper in exceptional circumstances in areas of war, to military personal entrusted to his pastoral care, provided that:

- in the meeting the character of a Christian congregation is maintained;
- he invites only those who are eligible to attend in their own congregation;
- he reminds them of their personal responsibility regarding doctrine and lifestyle.
- they are prepared to submit to one another's oversight and discipline.

To this decision many objections arose.

1. Most of them in relation to articles 60 and 61 of the Church Order, mentioning that in area's of crisis and war, there is no consistory to exercise oversight over its members, as it is the task of the elders to guard the holiness of the Lord's Supper.

2. Another objection was mentioned; soldiers in danger may use this holy sacrament as a magical aid serving for extra protection and safety or as an easy means to eternal salvation.

3. Finally, we are of the opinion that this decision fits to the idea for a more open Lord's Supper celebration, as this is already started to be practiced within the Reformed Church (Liberated) GKV of Franeker.

(see <http://www.franekerk.nl/kerkdienst.html>).

Finally we conclude that the Synods decisions are contrary to Scripture (eg. I Corinthians 11: 23-29) and are therefore unacceptable.

⁵⁷ See: Let us repent 2003 p. 27-29

⁵⁸ See: Acts of Synod Leusen 1999 p.16-18 Art. 70 last pages.

⁵⁹ See: Acts of synod Zuidhorn2003 p.10 Art.100 Besluit 1 and Grond.

7. Blessing by a non-elder

The General Synod of Leusden-1999⁶⁰ again determined that the blessing, the salutation and the benediction, can be spoken and applied in an unaltered manner, along with raising of hands, even by a non-elder, (an ordinary congregation member).

The Synod of Zuidhorn-2002⁶¹. decided not to alter this decision, though many churches objected.

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia, belonging to those churches objecting, stating “The blessing is given by God in the assembly of His people and is an important part of the liturgy; we must be careful not to diminish its significance. The blessing is spoken by the minister or elder (those called to the office) on behalf of God using the words of Scripture”⁶²;

However, all requests for revision were refused, this one included.

At present, as new Reformed Churches, we feel that the changes to theory and practices are the result from:

1. Devaluation of the character of the preaching.
2. Not seeing the connection between the blessing and the preaching.
3. Devaluation of the doctrine of the three-offices.

This Synods decision makes G.K.V deviate from Scriptures, as preaching is of unique importance, being the “service of reconciliation” (II Cor. 5: 18-20), performed by the office bearers. Between the preaching and the blessing, there is a direct link.

It makes Churches also move away from the Confession (B.C. art. 30).

Further more, the importance of the offices in the church cannot be overestimated, as they are gifts of the Ascended Lord (Eph. 4:8-11, I Cor. 12: 27,28).

⁶⁰ See: Acts of Synod Leusden 1999 p.9 Art. 48 Besluit.

⁶¹ See: Acts of Synod Zuidhorn 2003 p.63 Art. 47 Besluit 1

⁶² See: Acts of Synod FRCA July 2003 Art.

Brothers, we expect that you will agree with us that it is the calling from the Lord, 'that the Church governs itself according to the pure Word of God and rejects all things contrary to it' (art. 29 B.C.). We, therefore, hope and pray that you will see the act of Liberation and repentance as an act of obedience to the Word of God. As this Word forbids us to have communion with sins and heresies and tells us not to follow a crowd to do evil (Ex 23: 2, Eph. 5: 6, 7, II John : 10, Art 7 B.C.)

We trust that you can agree on the lawfulness of the recent Liberation and thus agree that we are the lawful continuation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. At the same time we ask of you to once again exhort the GKV to repentance. If this exhortation is not heeded we ask that you end sister-church relations with them.

May in all this the unity-in-the-truth be continued under the blessing of the Lord.

We derive our hope and strength from the promises of the LORD, which He links to keeping His commandments. His promise is that He will restore His Church from damaged relations and work the unity of the true faith.

Since the Liberation 8 Reformed churches could already be instituted. In 6 other places churches are being established, some of those will be instituted soon. The Lord has blessed these churches with a growing number of about 1100 members. The churches have formed two classes. Later this year, the Lord Willing, the churches will assemble a General Synod.

Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ we ask of you to seek all wisdom from the Word of God and we pray for you as deputies and for your major assemblies that you may receive the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

In our prayers we remember you before our Lord Jesus Christ and ask Him that you, as foreign churches may, in everything, remain faithful to your Lord and King.
Joined in Christ,

Deputies for contact Churches abroad:

W. Boot

H. Bos (secretary)

H. Griffioen

Joh. W. van der Jagt

S. de Marie (convener)