

Reports by Deputies for Relations with Sister Churches

as submitted to

SYNOD 2006

of the

***FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF
AUSTRALIA***

West Kelmscott, Western Australia

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1. GENERAL REPORT

1.1 Deputies

Synod FRCA 2003 (Article 101) appointed as Deputies:

Rev C Bouwman, Br AC Breen, Br AMC Bruning, Br HJ Dekker, Rev W Huizinga (convenor), Br GB Veenendaal with br N Louw as alternate.

During this term Rev C Bouwman accepted a call to Canada. Br N Louw was willing to take his place.

In general we divided our duties as follows:

Br AC Breen – RCN+PCK; Br AMC Bruning – PCK, Br HJ Dekker – RCN, Rev W Huizinga –CanRC+RCN; Br GB Veenendaal – FRCSA+CanRC.

1.2 Meetings

The Deputies for Sister Relations have met on twenty one occasions as deputies. One meeting will be held as yet to discuss and finalise the final report and/or any supplementary report.

1.3 Declarations

Ministerial Declarations were received by deputies from the following ministers:

- Rev RC Janssen from the GKN
- Rev C.J. Breen from the GKN
- Rev G.Wieske from the CanRC
- Prof J. Geertsema from the CanRC
- Rev. R.J. Eikelboom from CanRC
- Rev. E.Rupke from the GKN

Ministerial Declarations were issued by deputies to:

- Rev I Wildeboer to CanRC
- Rev PK de Boer to CanRC
- Rev W Huizinga to GKN
- Rev C. Bouwman to CanRC
- Rev. E Rupke to GKN
- Rev. A. Veldman to GKN

Delegate Declarations were issued to:

- Br GB Veenendaal to CRC Synod Chatham
- Br AMC Bruning to PCK General Assembly
- Rev W Huizinga to RCN Synod Amersfoort
- Br A C Breen to RCN Synod Amersfoort
- Br B Veenendaal to FRCSA Synod Pretoria

Delegate Declarations were received for:

- Br W. Pleiter from the CanRC.

1.4 Invitations from Sister Churches

Deputies of the FRCA received invitations to attend the synods of our following Sister Churches -

1. Canadian Reformed Churches, Chatham 2004. Visited by Br GB Veenendaal
2. Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Amersfoort 2005. Rev W. Huizinga and Br A.C. Breen attended
3. Free Reformed Churches in South Africa, Pretoria 2005. Br GB Veenendaal attended
4. Presbyterian Church of Korea (G.A.) Br AMC Bruning attended in 2004 and a further letter of greeting sent.

1.5 Invitations sent to Sister Churches

Deputies have sent out invitations for the FRCA Synod 2006 – West Kelmscott, to the four Sister Churches, RCN, FRCSCA, CRC and PCK. Responses were received from South Africa, Korea and The Netherlands, who will send delegates to our synod, and we are awaiting a response yet from CanRC.

1.6 Jumbo meetings.

Only one jumbo meeting was held on 24th March 2006 to discuss the prepared reports to Synod West Kelmscott

2. DEPUTIES REPORT TO SYNOD WEST KELMSCOTT 2006 – CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

2.1 Mandate

Synod Rockingham 2003 Article 28 made the following decision regarding our sister Canadian Reformed Churches:

Decisions:

1. To continue sister relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches according to established rules.
2. To monitor developments with the CanRC for mutual benefit, according to our rules.
3. To authorise the deputies to send one delegate to the 2004 General Synod of Chatham

III. Grounds:

1. The Canadian Reformed Churches give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
2. Some developments with the CanRC parallel those in our Dutch Sister Churches. We should stay informed, monitor these developments and be of help to each other. In this way there is also consistency in the way we deal with our Sister Churches.
3. We value our bond with our American/Canadian Sister Churches; we can learn from each other; and should keep in good contact with them. Personal contact at synodical level reinforces this.

2.2 Activities

As deputies, we have maintained contact with the deputies in Canada in a number of ways. We have exchanged acts of our respective synods. In 2003 we received correspondence from the Canadian deputies requesting further information about the Reformed Churches in New Zealand as well as about the GGRI-NTT churches in Indonesia. We passed these requests onto the relevant deputies.

We received an invitation to attend Synod Chatham which was held on 10-24 February 2004. Rev Huizinga, as primary delegate, was unable to attend, and as a result br B. Veenendaal, as alternate delegate, attended this synod. The report of this Synod is attached as Appendix A and was published in the *Una Sancta*. The address of our deputies to this synod is attached in Appendix B and was likewise published in *Una Sancta*.

We were able to hold an informal meeting with one of the Canadian deputies who travelled to Australia to visit family in July 2005. Our deputies to the recent synod in Holland could also meet up with two delegates/deputies from Canada.

It is evident that we have many issues and concerns in common and can share that and support each other in dealing with them. For example, the maintenance of the Theological College in Hamilton and the Book of Praise remain two common ventures. We also share some sister relations, e.g. those with our common sister

in The Netherlands. We have shared our work with them. It was a pity that their deputies had not been able to prepare themselves for GS 2005 in Amersfoort in interacting with the deputies of our sister churches in The Netherlands. We do share some common concerns which is evident in the decisions of the Synod of Chatham and in our contact with their deputies. It is important that we encourage and support each other by standing together on the foundation of God's Word.

At the same time there are also developments in our Canadian sister churches, e.g. re the URCNA, the OPC, the RCUS, new hymns, and the ICRC that do not parallel those in our churches. We should also continue to learn from each other in these areas.

2.3 Recommendations

Deputies recommend the following to synod:

Recommendations:

1. To continue sister relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches according to the established rules.
2. To monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to our rules.
3. To authorise deputies to send one delegate to their next general synod (2007 in Smithers).

Grounds:

1. The Canadian Reformed Churches give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
2. We value our bond with the Canadian Reformed Churches and personal contact at the synodical level reinforces our contact with them.

APPENDIX A – REPORT OF VISIT TO SYNOD CHATHAM 2004

The 2004 Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) was held in Chatham on 10-24 February. Chatham is a large town (small city) over 200 kilometres west of Toronto and is nestled very close to the border with the United States. During this month, Chatham was carpeted with a layer of snow and ice with temperature ranges from above freezing point to well below -10 degrees Celsius. That was the scene for Synod Chatham 2004. Rev Versteeg of the convening church opened the synod. The elected officers were:

Chairman – Rev. C. VanSpronsen

Vice-Chairman – Rev. J. DeGelder

First Clerk – Rev. J. Van Vliet

Second Clerk – Rev. D. Agema

The agenda of synod dealt with a number of matters including Theological College, Bible translations, liturgy, Book of Praise, how to deal with appeals from individuals, a number of appeals, etc. The items that occupied by far the majority of Synod's agenda and efforts were relations with churches at home and abroad. An overview of some of the issues of interest to the Australian churches is provided in this report. Additional information and acts of synod can be obtained from the website of the CanRC at www.canrc.org.

Churches with whom the CanRC have Ecclesiastical Unity (sister church relations) include: Free Reformed Churches of Australia, Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (lib), Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, Free Church of Scotland, Reformed Church in the United States, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Igreja Reformadas do Brasil. The CanRC churches have contact with the Free Reformed Churches of North America, L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec, and Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvinis (GGRC). With the United Reformed Churches of North America, the CanRC are not simply exercising sister church relations, but are moving towards federative unity within one bond of churches.

The CanRC have received correspondence from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand as well as the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Indonesia (GGRI) with the request to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The Synod decided to seek further information, including from us as Australian churches that have close contact with both federations. They will also consult our bond of churches regarding their existing contacts with the GGRC.

Theological College

Due to the illness of Professor J DeJong, he has been granted an indefinite leave of absence. To fill this vacancy, Synod appointed Rev AJ DeVisser as Professor of Diaconology and Ecclesiology. He is currently a missionary/evangelist in the mission posts of Soshanguve Central and Soshanguve South of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (our sister churches).

Synod also expressed heartfelt thankfulness to our Australian churches for the support they continue to receive from us.

Bible translations

A number of churches requested Synod to investigate the suitability of the English Standard Version (ESV) which is a Bible translation released within the couple of years. Synod did ask deputies to do a preliminary investigation as well as continue to monitor developments with the NIV. This latter translation is the official one used by the majority of churches in their church federation while some churches do use the NKJV. The intention, however, is not to replace the NIV since many churches have finally only just begun to use it.

Book of Praise

The CanRC Book of Praise is, of course, the one we use in our churches in Australia. Synod Chatham recognised this and encouraged their committee to seek input from our churches. Further, Synod decided to mandate the committee to investigate how to incorporate the Apostles Creed into the Baptism Form, to prepare the prose section (not Psalms/Hymns section) with NIV Bible references, to identify and correct deficiencies/weaknesses in the Hymns section, select suitable Hymns as requested by some of the churches, and to publish a revised Hymn section proposed for testing by the churches. Note that Synod also set a limit of 100 Hymns since they recognised that “Psalms must have a predominant place in the liturgy of the Reformed churches”.

Appeals of Individuals to Synod

The previous synod decided to not admit appeals from individuals to synod, but rather to direct them to use the means available via their consistory. Although there were a number of appeals from churches to this decision, Synod upheld this decision. They indicated that “individual members must follow the way of the Church Order by addressing their concerns to their local consistory who, should they concur with the concerns, direct an appeal to a general synod. Consistory, unlike individual members, has the right to deal directly with the matters that belong to the churches in common. Consistory may do so because these decisions are to be considered settled and binding by the consistory” (Acts Article 20, Consideration 4.4).

United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)

The Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) at their last synod in Neerlandia in 2001 offered the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) a relationship with the goal of federative unity. The URCNA at their Synod Escondido 2001 responded in like manner. The CanRC synod has appointed deputies as a Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity. This committee has three subcommittees that work together with their counterparts in the URCNA:

Theological Education Committee – The task is to evaluate the situation as to theological education within the CanRC and the URCNA. Synod has mandated them to develop a common proposal ensuring that the new federation will retain at least one theological school at which the board of governors, the professors and teaching staff are appointed by synod.

Church Order Committee – Has as a task to propose a common church order in the line of the Church Order of Dort. Considerable work has already been done and much agreement has already been reached among the two federations. The committee is also to formulate a draft proposal of regulations for General Synod.

Songbook Committee – Their mandate is to produce a songbook that contains the complete Anglo-Genevan Psalter Hymnal and other suitable metrical versions of the Psalms, including hymns that also meet the standard of faithfulness to the Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. The idea is to start with the Psalter Hymnal and the 150 Anglo-Genevan psalms and work together from there in a spirit of cooperation.

The process towards federative unity was agreed upon at the previous synod in 1998 and involves 3 stages:

- 1) Recognition and exploration – discussions should be exploratory and should concern a mutually agreed understanding of the confessional heritage of the church, specifically Articles 27 to 32 of the Belgic Confession. This stage should also identify areas where differences of approaches exist and come to some agreement in which these differences can be overcome.
- 2) Acceptance and cooperation – a mutual acceptance by the 2 participating consistories (at the local levels) of each other’s faithfulness to God’s Word and the confessions. This phase

includes some initial mutually agreeable provisions regarding theological education, song books, liturgical forms and customs, and Bible translations.

- 3) Advanced recognition to union – consistories should come to an agreement on the form of merger they wish to pursue. This will be done with assistance from the deputies for ecclesiastical unity.

At the moment, the contact is essentially in Phase 2 at the synodical level, with quite some variation in the level of contact at the local church level across the regions in Canada and the United States. In his address to synod, Rev H Zekveld did indicate that there is some hesitation among the URCNA churches to federatively unite with the CanRC. This is due to them needing to know more about the CanRC and the fact that they are yet quite a young bond and still uneasy about their own identity. The bond comprises some 80 churches throughout Canada and the United States, most of whom previously left the Christian Reformed Churches in the struggle to remain faithful to God's Word.

Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

At their previous synod, the Canadian sister churches decided to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCUS. Their deputies were instructed to continue dialogue regarding the issues that, although they were not a hindrance to ecclesiastical relations, did warrant further discussion. These issues included the way the Sunday observance is practised (they have one official worship service followed by Bible studies classes in the afternoon or evening), the administration of the sacraments to "shut-ins" (the practise of a minister and at least one elder celebrating the Lord's Supper with individual congregation members who are "shut-in" and cannot attend the services) and the inconsistency between a paper on Church Unity and the Three Forms of Unity to which they subscribe. CanRC deputies did address these issues with them. Synod recognised that there is growing contact and considered that these issues warrant further attention. Deputies were encouraged to continue the discussions.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

The OPC is a bond of 237 churches and 58 home mission works, with 425 ministers among more than 26,000 members. As with the RCUS, the Canadian Reformed Churches decided at their previous synod to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church which is located in the United States, apart from a couple of small congregations in Canada. In fact, the CanRC of Toronto is working together with the OPC to establish a mission among the Portugese-speaking community of Toronto. A number of churches wrote to Synod Chatham regarding their disappointment with progress made in mutual discussions. Synod decided to continue the relations with the OPC and to continue discussions with them on existing differences in confession and church polity. In particular, the matter of supervision of the Lord's Supper and confessional membership should receive priority, in addition to other matters. Synod expressly considered that "the goal of these discussions should be to determine whether this unity of the faith regarding the church, the covenant and the sacraments is adequately and faithfully expressed". Rev J Fergusson, in his address to synod, did indicate that in the struggle to remain faithful, the OPC does face concerns such as the nature of preaching, the doctrine of creation, and revisions to their Directory for Public Worship.

Korean Presbyterian Churches of North America (KPCNA)

The Korean Presbyterian Churches of North America are a group of over 71 churches in North America that are part of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (CanRC and our sister churches). The CanRC deputies have attempted to contact them, but to no avail thus far. Synod encouraged deputies to use the contacts with the PCK to contact these churches.

Igreja Reformadas do Brasil (IRB)

Synod Neerlandia 2001 offered the IRB churches a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. The Canadian churches have close ties with the IRB through mission work conducted in Brasil. Synod decided to continue relations with these churches.

Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)

Synod decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FRCSA. They also encouraged the churches to aid the FRCSA with their mission work and their labours among the concerned (ie. Disenchanted; referred to as National Reformation work).

Free Church of Scotland (FCS)

For a number of years now, there has been a rift within this bond of churches which has not yet been resolved. One group now meets as the Free Church of Scotland (continuing). Synod considered that due to the lack of clarity in this situation it could not judge the division between the FCS and FCS(c) at this time. Synod decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the FCS and FCS(c) under the adopted rules. The deputies were encouraged to continue the discussion on the existing differences in confession and church polity regarding the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity.

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) (GKN)

As instructed by the previous synod, deputies investigated a number of concerns with regards to developments in the Dutch sister churches, particularly in relation to: the Form for Solemnisation of Marriage, the large increase in the number of Hymns being recommended, the Fourth Commandment, the development of the Theological University as a “Knowledge Center” (as opposed to simply a training school for future Ministers of the Word), and the changing role of the Dutch deputies (ie. Passing on discussion papers from deputies directly to Synod as formal objections from a sister church). Synod decided to instruct deputies to: continue the discussion on the Marriage Form, study the results of the new Dutch deputyship on the Fourth Commandment and the Sunday, and express concern regarding the proportion of Psalms and Hymns. Regarding the recent Call to Reformation and “Vrijmaking” in The Netherlands, Synod decided to seek clarity on its legitimacy and in the meantime to inform both the GKN and these separated churches that they both have the prayerful support of the churches in the hope that they will, by God’s grace, come to reconciliation.

Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK)

Synod was thankful for the improved lines of communication between deputies and the PCK since there were previously concerns regarding little or no communication. Since this has also been a concern among us in Australia, we are encouraged by the progress that our Canadian sisters have made. Synod also mandated deputies to continue to discuss differences between the Westminster Confession and the Three Forms of Unity, and to pay particular attention to the fencing of the Lord’s Supper table.

Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA)

The CanRC also have contact with the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA). Many of the FRCNA churches are in geographic proximity to the CanRC churches and many discussions have taken place at the local level, particularly in western Canada. The contact is good but is encountering some difficulties because of the FRCNA focus on experiential preaching (which they say is not generally done in the CanRC) and the FRCNA reluctance to enter federative unity. One of their delegates who addressed Synod Chatham pleaded for the CanRC to review the Scriptural requirement for federative unity. They do want unity, but not necessarily the “federative” unity that the CanRC have embarked on with the URCNA. Synod Chatham decided to continue meeting with the FRCNA to discuss the matter of federative unity.

L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec

The L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec is a small reformed bond of French-speaking churches located in the province of Quebec, Canada. They have been supported by some of the CanRC churches in nearby Ontario. Deputies are in discussion with them regarding fencing of the Lord's Supper, confessional accountability and pulpit supervision.

Conclusions

There was good evidence at Synod in the discussions as well as in the decisions made that the Canadian Reformed Churches want to remain faithful to God's Word and the Confessions. In their contacts with other churches, they maintain the desire to continue dialogue and discussions after building relationships of Ecclesiastical Unity (sister church relations). With churches of Presbyterian origin, Synod wanted to continue to discuss differences between the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity as well as other divergences, even after Ecclesiastical Unity was achieved. In some cases, Synod considered that deputies could have been even more diligent in their contacts and further encouraged them in that vein. May God bless the work done by the churches in Canada, and may we together be able to mutually encourage and support each other by prayer and via the means of our close ties.

On behalf of the Deputies for Sister Churches
B Veenendaal

APPENDIX B – ADDRESS OF DEPUTIES TO SYNOD CHATHAM 2004

Esteemed chairman and brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

It is a great privilege for me to be here in your midst. In the first place, I was the alternate delegate (you know, the one that usually gets put on the waiting list but nothing comes of it?) but, Rev Huizinga as primary delegate was unfortunately unable to attend because of his pastoral commitments. Secondly, there is a law of gravity that says “what goes up, must come down”, or as we who are “down-under” might say “what goes down must come up”. Yes these ex-Canadians seem to rebound back once in a while. If it’s not the one, then it is the other. And this time it is my privilege to rebound back on Canadian soil. Yes it is good to be back here, although I must say it requires a dramatic climactic readjustment of over 50 degrees! I left Perth last week Thursday at 39 degrees Celsius!

I would first of all like to extend, on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, our sincere and heartfelt greetings. We would like to thank you for the invitation and opportunity to be here. The hospitality that you have shown is no less than excellent. We pray that the Lord will guide and bless your endeavours at this meeting of synod and among the churches when the decisions are studied and implemented.

It is true that the Canadian soil and Australian soil have much in common. We have similarities in the founding and establishment of our churches as immigrants after the events of Europe in the middle of the century. We have had many common joys and struggles as the churches grew and schools were established. We share a similar language and culture. We have a common heritage and confessions. Many of our church members and even students and Ministers of the Word have moved between Australia and Canada/America over the years. Yes, we continue to face many of the same issues and challenges in our church and daily life today. That is what makes a bond between church federations so important, so valuable, and yes even necessary. Our last synod, Synod Rockingham 2003, recognised this as part of its decision regarding our relations with you, by saying: *“We value our bond with our American/Canadian Sister Churches; we can learn from each other; and should keep in good contact with them. Personal contact at synodical level reinforces this.”*. Hence our decision to send a delegate to your synod here.

Let me first fill you in on where our bond of churches is at. We are presently a bond of 12 churches comprising over 3500 members. This represents a 20% growth in the number of churches in just a few years, with Bunbury being instituted in November 2001 and Darling Downs in July 2003. Since our Synod West Albany 2000, we operate as two Classes: Classis North comprising 3 churches in the Perth metropolitan area together with the 2 churches some 4000 km away to the east in Tasmania, and Classis South comprising 4 churches of the metropolitan area together with Bunbury 150 km south and 2 churches in Albany 400 km south. A result is that our synod now meets once every 3 years instead of every 2 years.

At the moment, we have 3 vacant churches: Launceston, Albany and Darling Downs. Among these churches a number of calls to Ministers of the Word have been made, including several Canadian ones, but so far we have not been able to lure any away from the cold and snowy Canadian climate to the warm and rugged sub-Mediterranean climate of the southern coast of Australia. Bunbury has recently been blessed with the arrival of a new minister, Rev Rupke, from Holland (in fact, he arrived two weeks ago!). His colloquium doctum will be held, the Lord willing, next week.

We continue to support and make use of your Theological College in Hamilton for the training of our students for the ministry. We are thankful for the opportunities that the Lord has provided through your college. Our last synod has instructed deputies to keep in contact with your college and to continue investigating possible avenues for training as well as for establishing our own theological library. We have further benefited from your college by the recent visit of Professor and Mrs Geertsema in our midst, which we very much appreciated. This gave us an opportunity to hear

more of your work and to bring it closer to home for us. We hope to continue to invite guest lecturers from your college on a regular basis.

As a bond of churches, we continue to exercise sister church relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, the Presbyterian Church in Korea, and the Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Indonesia (GGRI) churches in Indonesia. We have contacts with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, the Reformed Free Churches of the Philippines, the Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Calvin (GGRC) churches in Indonesia, and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

Because your deputies enquired specifically about our contacts with the churches in Indonesia and New Zealand, I will mention some more detail about them. In particular, I will quote from our Synod Rockingham 2003 decisions. With regards to the churches in Indonesia, our synod decided:

1. To continue the sister relations with the GGRI in accordance with the adopted rules,
2. To continue contacts with the GGRC, and
3. To thank deputies for their work and to appoint new deputies and give them the following mandate:
 - a. To continue to visit the conference/synods of the GGRI and the GGRC subject to available finance;
 - b. To support the GGRI and GGRC in a well-considered and responsible way with the intention of building up the reformed character of these churches. This will include giving instructions through yearly seminars if finances are available.
 - c. To financially support br Pila Njuka (along with his family) to complete his studies at Hamilton, monitor his progress, and prepare for his return to Indonesia. To invite him to Australia on his way back to Indonesia. To ask the Indonesian churches how he could best be utilised in their midst, and to support him in the mean time. Where necessary to support his reintegration into Indonesia and among the churches.
 - d. To monitor and determine the best possibilities to train Indonesian theological students – by either supporting and helping in setting up a college for theological training (for eg., in Kupang) or sending another student overseas to study.
 - e. To monitor and report developments on the unity of GGRI with the GGRC. Where possible, to encourage these churches to fully put into practice the unity which they already recognise.
 - f. To provide limited support to ensure that effective communication continues.
 - g. To financially support Rev Yawan Bunda of the GGRC and in a different year Rev Yan Pariamalinya of the GGRI to study English for three months in Australia. In the case of Rev Yan Pariamalinya his is subject to an expected request from the GGRI deputies. Both requests are subject to financial arrangements with the Dutch deputies and subject to the availability of funding from the churches.
 - h. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the activities of deputies as mentioned in c,d,f, and g above.

[Article 73, Acts of Synod Rockingham 2003]

With regards to the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, the synod decided:

1. Not to proceed with the decision in principle to offer fraternal relations
2. To confirm what the 2000 Synod said in principle, namely, to recognise that the RCNZ are true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ,

3. To ask the RCNZ for time and patience so that we can discuss the matter of third parties and the implications of an offer of sister relations with them, and that we can offer sister relations with unity and joy,
4. To recognise that the only remaining difficulty with entering into a relationship with the RCNZ is the relationship of the RCNZ with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia,
5. To assess the situation with respect to this relation at an upcoming synod to see if this remains a difficulty to entering into full sister-church relations or not, and
6. To appoint deputies with the following mandate:
 - a. To convey these decisions to the RCNZ
 - b. To assess to what extent the triangular relationship needs to be an impediment for entering into full sister-church relations and to report back to the churches on this six months before the next synod
 - c. To intensify dialogue with the RCNZ on matters of common concern and interest, also by inter-synodical visits, if the synodical budget allows
 - d. To invite the RCNZ to send delegate(s) to our next synod, and to authorise deputies to send two delegates to the next synod of the RCNZ
 - e. To keep the churches informed of any developments in the RCNZ and to encourage the churches to become better acquainted with the RCNZ by way of literature and visits

[Article 72, Acts of Synod Rockingham 2003]

Further information is available in the Acts of Synod Rockingham 2003. The printed acts are still in press and your deputies for sister church relations only recently received the electronic version of the Acts. The synod did require two sessions to complete its work, one in July and the other in October. The last session was necessary in order to do justice to a number of appeals from churches and individuals. Thankfully, synod could complete its task in good harmony.

A glance over the agenda of your synod shows that you too have many items to deal with: relations with churches at home and abroad, Bible translations, hymns and liturgy, procedures for appeals, the Theological College, etc. In all of that, you too want to be faithful to God's Word and the Confessions and that is evident in the way you conduct your deliberations and business here at synod.

Last week you made an announcement regarding the appointment of Dr A. DeVisser as professor for your theological college. On behalf of the Australian churches, I would like to congratulate you as churches with this appointment! We pray that Dr DeVisser may see his way clear to take up the appointment in your midst. May the college receive in this new appointment, the blessings and guidance of our Heavenly Father in preparing men who are able to lead and teach the flock of Christ. We pray that your churches as well as ours may continue to benefit from the teaching and guidance of those at the college who have been entrusted with this beautiful task.

At the same time, we are reminded and saddened by the deterioration of the health of Professor DeJong. As I already mentioned, as churches we have greatly benefited from the college, and this includes the writings and support of Professor DeJong. The Lord has given us many riches through this servant of His, in the unveiling of the mysteries of His Word. May He continue to bless that work both here in Canada and beyond. We also trust that the way for our brother is the Lord's path and that he is safe in God's hands. We have the comfort of Lord's Day 1 of our Heidelberg Catechism, that we belong to Christ our Saviour. May our Heavenly Father surround br DeJong and his family with His steadfast love and care, and may that comfort of Lord's Day 1 continue to give us all hope and joy.

May the Lord also guide you in your relations and contacts with other bonds of churches. You have a number of relatively new, in addition to the continuing, sister church relations that are occupying

some of your time and concerns. May you continue to develop and nurture these relationships so that Christ's church may continue to be gathered, defended and preserved in this country. With regards to the sister churches in the Netherlands, we share some of the same concerns as you. May you be given God's wisdom and understanding to deal with these issues in a brotherly and caring, and yet forthright manner that pleases the Lord and that may be used to encourage and direct your sister churches in the paths of righteousness.

Continue to be guided by God's Word and Spirit and stand fast in the faith. Continue to be vigilant and withstand the attacks of Satan on the church. Continue to work with joy in the unity of the faith that has been entrusted to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. When we view it in that light, then the awesome work which the Lord places before us becomes a beautiful work that praises and honors our Heavenly Creator and the Head of the Church.

As your sister churches in Australia, we wish you God's indispensable blessing on your deliberations here at synod, and on your bond of churches in the struggle of faith. May our mutual contacts be used to edify each other to God's honour and glory.

May I end with the words of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:13-16:

"But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work."

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Thank you.

3. DEPUTIES REPORT TO SYNOD WEST KELMSCOTT 2006 – PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN KOREA

3.1 Mandate (Article 30, Acts of Synod 2003)

Decision:

1. That the FRCA continue Sister Church Relations with the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK) according to the established rules.
2. That deputies are mandated to use the opportunity to improve contact with the PCK by direct dialogue with Dr S.G. Hur and the Fraternal Relations Committee.
3. In an endeavour to strengthen ties and communications with the PCK, that if we are invited, we accept the invitation to the next General Assembly of the PCK.
4. That deputies include in their report to next synod, an assessment about the viability of continued relations with the PCK on the basis of the adopted rules for sister relations, together with recommendations.

Grounds:

1. No evidence has arisen suggesting that the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Koshin) has departed from the Word of God, the Reformed Confessions or the Church Order.
2. Dr. S. G. Hur has offered to assist in the contact and dialogue with PCK and sees that it is important to continue with this work.
3. The PCK has received the least amount of attention over the years and deputies have not been to the General Assembly of the PCK to pursue the task under the Rules for Sister Church Relations.
4. As Mt Nasura and Armadale rightly note, a sister relation that does not function should be recognised as such.

3.2 Activities by Deputies

Correspondence

Materials Sent

1. Deputies sent hard copies of the FRCA Synod Acts of the Synod at Rockingham 2003 to the Fraternal Relations Committee of the PCK.
2. Letter outlining a detailed request for dialogue and meaningful relationship, and a request for G.A. #54 information and or English summary of decisions; e-mail 08.03.2005
3. Various e-mails to establish and request contact and information
4. 06.06.2005; Letter of greeting to the PCK Fraternal Relations Committee for the 2005 General Assembly and a notification of invitation for the forthcoming FRCA Synod at West Kelmscott (sent in time for the 55th G.A. so that the G.A. could provide their Fraternal Relations Committee with a mandate if required).

5. Invitation to the Fraternal Relations Committee to the FRCA synod at West Kelmscott in 2006

Material Received

1. During the year 2004 an invitation was received from the Fraternal Relations Committee of the PCK. to attend the 54th General Assembly.
2. Various e-mail responses to requests for information for contact details,
3. Publications and information booklet of the Kosin Church
4. Letter by e-mail from Professor Yoo with a request from Fraternal Relations Committee inviting the FRCA to send a delegate to the 55th PCK G.A. in September 2005.

Actions

1. Several meetings were held with Dr S.G Hur to discuss the contact with the PCK, and the possibility to receive support to translate the address to the G.A.
2. Br AMC Bruning was nominated as delegate to attend the 54th General Assembly (G.A.) of the PCK.

Address to the G.A. is appended to this report as Appendix 1

The address was translated by Dr S.G. Hur and displayed on screen in the G.A.

During the visit as delegate to the G.A. a meeting was held with the new Fraternal Relations committee and a copy of the FRCA 2003 Synod acts and Deputies report (inadvertently omitted from the acts) was handed to the Fraternal relations Committee.

3. Report on the visit to South Korea and the G.A. was published in the *Una Sancta*
Report is appended as Appendix 2.
4. Br AC Breen visited Korea on invitation by the reformed schools of the Independent Reformed Churches of Korea in his capacity as Support Officer for our Schools. Opportunity was taken to arrange a meeting with the Fraternal Relations Committee of our sister churches (PCK) which occurred in January 2006. See report as Appendix 3

Observations

1. The contact with the PCK during the visit to the G.A. in 2004 was initially very good. Contact and discussion with the general secretary (Dr Ho Jin Jun) of the General Assembly was excellent and initially looked promising in the intent of strengthening ties with the FRCA.
Hospitality, discussions and interest was intense with some initial ideas of closer working together being evident. However, once the general assembly started and after the general secretary (Dr Ho Jin Jun) was voted out of his position the contact had to be re-established.
Owing to internal difficulties at the G.A. many opportunities were lost for any discussion with the new Fraternal Relations Committee. A new committee is appointed at each annual general assembly.

2. Professor Haemoo Yoo at their Seminary in Chon-an is the most readily available and most responsive to our communications. Professor Yoo has a strong reformed stance and a strong supporter for the reformed doctrine.
3. The difficulty in communication between the Deputies for Sister Churches of the FRCA and the Fraternal Relations Committee of the PCK has been overcome by the appointment of Professor Haemoo Yoo following the last G.A. of the PCK. He has been appointed to the committee as the continuing contact person with us. Also, the FRC of the PCK has delegated him and chairman Rev Jeon to visit our next synod.

Recommendations

1. To continue sister relations with the PCK in accordance with the established rules.
2. To express thanks that visits to the PCK have resulted in improved lines of communications as well as a visit from a delegation of our Korean sisters.
3. To accept the assessment of deputies that since there is agreement for better communications, there is also reason to be more optimistic about the viability of continued sister relations.

Grounds

1. No evidence has arisen suggesting that the PCK departs from the Word of God, the reformed confessions or their Church Order.
2. Visits to Korea in the past three years have helped to build better lines of communication.
3. For the first time in our history we may be able to welcome a delegation from our Korean sisters to our synod.
4. Pledges have been given for a good line of communication as well as regular English summaries concerning their annual general assemblies.

APPENDIX 1
ADDRESS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN KOREA
21 September 2004

Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour

It is with much thankfulness, gratitude and pleasure that I am able to be here to address so great a gathering. In my capacity as elder of the Free Reformed Church in Armadale I have frequently addressed congregational meetings, or led the worship services to read a sermon in our Minister's absence, but never before to an assembly as large as this.

As a member of the Deputies for Sister Church Relations (You have the Fraternal Relations Committee) of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia, I wish to thank your Fraternal Relations Committee and also Rev. Dr. Ho Jin Jun, secretary of the PCK for the invitation to address your 54th General Assembly.

My first duty is to pass on to your General Assembly the greetings from the Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia which we as deputies were delegated to do. It is our hope and prayer that this contact today, and message of greeting from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia may strengthen our Church Relations and so also lead to the increase of the great Church gathering work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please allow me present to you a brief explanation of our Australian Churches' life, it's history and also the contact with your PCK.

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia came into existence approximately 50 years ago. Our churches have a similar history to the Canadian Reformed Churches which some of you know really well. Migrants from Holland, escaping the ruins of war and wanting to migrate to countries which had better prospects for family life, and work, arrived on Australian soils in the early 1950s. They gathered in the West in Armadale, some in Albany and others some 3,500km to the East in Tasmania. All started gathering together as migrant members of the Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands and soon established their own congregations and churches. The Free Reformed Churches of Armadale, Albany and Launceston (Tasmania) all celebrated their 50 year anniversary in the past three years, as you did in 2000.

From small migrant family beginnings, the Churches have grown to a total of 12 Churches with between 3500 to 3800 members. The 12 churches are in one bond and currently function with 2 classes and meet at Synod every 3rd year.

The early migrants had at a very early stage of church life concluded that a very important task in the communion of saints and the survival and growth of the Church is the Christian teaching and education of their children in the ways of the Lord. The task of catechetical teaching belongs to the church, but the task of raising children is the task of parents. Parents, indeed, virtually all the members of the FRCA worked together and in 1957 established our own John Calvin Christian School/Colleges to educate their children. From Kindergarten to Year 12 (prior to tertiary education) some seven primary and three high schools exist. This working together has also kept our churches together in a close group in and around Armadale, Albany and Launceston, with a recent church and school starting in Bunbury.

Yes, indeed, the upbringing of our Covenant children in Reformed Schools is a very rich and important element in our responsibility and service to God, not controlled by the churches, but by the faithful working of the Communion of Saints. Separate, yet integral, on the basis of God's word, commandments and Christian mandate.

The 12 congregations of the FRCA all function in a similar way, and activities in bible study clubs, (younger youth, older youth, men's and women's clubs), associations namely, for disabled/handicapped persons, retirement village and hostel, political party, emergency relief foundations are all examples of work being done by church people of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia

The FRCA has always been active in it's Mission mandate. In the past work amongst the indigenous people of Australia occurred which had been very difficult with very few results, and currently various of the churches support mission work, with some churches collectively and others individually active, in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia (various places) and India. Evangelism via radio broadcast segments is also done on a local basis.

Brothers, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia has a very rich Reformed heritage which has it's roots via the Reformed Churches in Holland in the Church reformation of Calvin and Luther. Due to the migrant population, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia members are mostly of Dutch origin, now into it's fourth generation for some families. This means of course that our ties with Holland are still quite strong, and with the opportunities of travel these days there is an increasing of ties with Canada and also South Africa. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia has much in common with Canada and Holland and is currently served by 9 ministers, of which 5 come from our Canadian Sister Churches, and 3 from our sister churches in Holland. From within our churches we have had young men study for the Ministry, and some 5 are serving as ministers in our Canadian Churches and 1 in Holland. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia supports the Theological College in Hamilton, Canada and the students that study there. Many families have relations in the 3 countries, and just as I did myself in 1978, many young people find their spouses in or from these "sister" countries.

The contact with your PCK has not been at that level of intensity. Our historical development and the national differences between Australia and Korea having a lot to do with that. The first ecclesiastical contact came in the early 1970s with Sister Church status being reached in 1976. The congregation of Armadale, the only church in that area at that time had grown to over 600 members and extended a call to Dr S G Hur in 1977 to assist the late Rev K Bruning. Dr Hur and his family arrived in Australia in 1978 and became the minister of the second church established in the next suburb to Armadale, namely Kelmscott. He has as you know, retired and has now settled in Australia and has been of assistance to translate my address to you, for which I thank him wholeheartedly.

Brothers, if I am correctly informed, this is the first time that the The Free Reformed Churches of Australia has officially sent a delegate to your General Assembly, for that I feel honoured and thankful. However, it is a fact – and you may glean that from our last 2 to 3 Synod Acts – that I am here to re-establish contact, and to discuss with your Fraternal Relations Committee the feasibility, viability, and value of continuing meaningful Sister Church Relations. We as deputies have sent you the Synod Acts of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and received English summaries of your General Assembly decisions in the past, however, in recent years we have had very little contact at all. From our side we have not had many discussions with you on issues or activities we have in common and from your side we understand that you have dealt with some significant difficulties relating to the operation and management of your University, Theological College and hospital. For this we wish you much wisdom and patience.

Dr Ho Jin Jun has corresponded with us in the past year, and provided us with good and useful information and it is our hope and prayer that this can bear much fruit. It would be most beneficial for your Fraternal Relations committee to maintain continuity in it's secretary appointment so that a period of relationship building can be developed.

What we do share with you, and no border, culture or nationality can cut thru that, is the Word, the Son of God, and the worldwide mandate to spread His Church to the ends of the earth. We also share the attacks of Satan, individually as persons, within our families and indeed in our Churches.

We struggle with sin, and yet we know, that if we persevere in our work, then that struggle will end in Triumph for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brother delegates, we wish you God's Blessings in your work here at your General Assembly, in your Church life, in the raising and education of covenant children and in your struggles over the modern attacks on our Godly heritage, and His Church.

Thank you.

APPENDIX 2

PRESS RELEASE DEPUTIES SISTER CHURCH RELATIONS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF KOREA

Mandate

The Synod of the Free Reformed Churches held at Rockingham decided to continue Sister Church relations with the PCK, and had given Deputies for Sister Church Relations the mandate to improve contact with the PCK Fraternal Relations Committee by way of direct contact with them and with the help of Dr S.G. Hur.

In an endeavour to strengthen ties with the PCK deputies were mandated to attend the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea if invited.

Following an exchange of letters of correspondence and receipt of general information on the Presbyterian Church of Korea and copy of an English summary of the 53rd General Assembly's major decisions and other information from Dr Ho Jin Jun, the then General Secretary of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea, Deputies received an invitation to the 54th General Assembly beginning on Monday, 20 September 2004, to be held in the Seminary Complex at Chon-an, approximately 120km south of Seoul.

Brother A.M.C. Bruning was delegated to visit the General Assembly. His trip to Korea was over a 1 week period, starting on Saturday 18th September 2004.

His report includes as follows,...

... "that the 11-hour flight was quite relaxing and with the benefit of flying on virtually the same time line, I arrived quite refreshed and keen to "explore" the surroundings and make acquaintances that evening.

The hospitality and organisational skills of the Koreans was immediately evident upon my arrival, and despite the major language obstacles (on my part obviously) I found my personal car driver who was waiting for me at the Incheon Airport, which was some 100km from Seoul. This was to be my first place of stay for 2 nights.

My first impressions of Korea while travelling to Seoul, was the huge residential developments (all high rise villages) each easily seen in the dark by the lighting. And in particular, the numerous red crosses illuminated on church spires. (More about that later)

On arrival at the Presbyterian Church of Korea's head office building in Banpo-dong, Sheocho-gu (a suburb of Seoul, now swallowed up in the greater metropolitan area, where over 12/14 million people live), I was immediately placed in the care of an English speaking (Welsh) Minister who came to teach English at the School of Missiology in the same building.

In the seven storey building which houses a church in the basement, function rooms, accommodation, libraries, printing shop, and a School of Missiology I also met Pastor No of that congregation, with whom I detected a Dutch accent. He (like many other Professors and Pastors I met had studied in Holland.

SUNDAY 19th

Sunday morning breakfast was in the School Canteen where I met more visiting "English teachers". Two were Australian (eating vegemite on toast!!) and one originally from Holland. These people are volunteers who can work up to three months at a time in Korea. These volunteers come from various different backgrounds and denominations, and respond to appeals for volunteers via agency advertisements. (Maybe this is an area we can explore for future assistance).

Sunday morning I was invited to worship at the 11am Church service, and with the aid of some interpretation by Dr Ho Jin Jun and a Korean/English songbook I could follow the general thrust of

the service. This congregation had an active choir, which sang prior to and after the worship service and also led some of the singing during the worship service.

A number of interesting practices occur in their Sunday worship, (at least in this Congregation). Early morning prayer and study sessions are arranged for young people, infants to early teens, and another group of older youth. (Similar to our Youth Club and Catechism rolled into one). Their meetings are led by student pastors, who provide a very energetic leadership, and have a very attentive audience. (Perhaps my sitting in with the older youth made them more attentive! Sound familiar?) With the aid of a young student who could speak English I could provide them with a brief explanation of my visit.

Following these sessions, the Church worship service was held at 11:00am. After the worship service the whole congregation shared a hot cooked meal, and then the majority of the Church adults attended Bible study clubs, including singing and discussions.

The balance of the rest day was taken up by a city tour by a few ladies of the Congregation, who also arranged a Korean spread for dinner together with one of the Aussie teachers.

MONDAY 20th

On Monday morning we awoke to a drizzling, humid day. Dr Ho Jin Jun invited a few of us “foreigners” to a sumptuous breakfast in a local Hotel restaurant and then we travelled by car to the Seminary in Chon-an where the General Assembly would be held. Chon-an is located approximately 120 km South of Seoul. On arrival it was established that I could not stay at the Seminary as the Korean delegates occupied the student accommodation. (No mention was made of the fact that there were no beds, but floor mats to sleep on!!) A local Motel a few km’s away (which did have beds) was arranged, and a student from the Seminary doing assistance work to the General Assembly became my taxi driver.

The 54th General Assembly of the PCK was scheduled to open at 3:00pm that afternoon.

However a protest at the G.A. caused quite a delay to proceedings, which did not get under way till the following morning.

Professor YOO

On the evening of Monday 20th, whilst waiting for the outcome of the sit in protest, I spent over an hour with the professor of Dogmatics, Dr. Yoo (whom you will recollect from the visit/report of Br A Breen). I was invited to his office/study and could recognise the study as one of a reformed minister, including many German and Dutch Theological books and even a portrait of K. Schilder. Amid the many topics we discussed we touched on the worldwide Reformed Theology and the diminishing effect in the world churches, even in Korea. (Albeit the history of the PCK is not from a Reformed background but has a strong Methodist influence). Dr Yoo did express a desire for more effective penetration of the Reformed faith, and pleaded for support for this. He provided me with a paper on the Reformed tradition in the Korean Churches.

Dr Yoo had, prior to my visit already made arrangements to show me around the Chon-an district.

TUESDAY 21st

The General Assembly was eventually opened at approximately 10:30 on Tuesday morning, after a settlement of the protest issue. I was seated next to a Rev. Yu Ryang, Lee who is president of a Korean church Seminary in the USA whom could translate the important items and comments. The first agenda item was the election of President, General Secretary and other officers in the General Assembly. An eye opener for me was the method of electronic voting whereby 500+ delegates cast their vote. As the result was being calculated by the computer, it was displayed on a large screen. Within 20 mins all votes were cast and results known, (perhaps we can use this in our elections for office bearers!) A result of the elections was the non return of Dr Ho Jin Jun to General Secretary and thus loss of our contact which we had established over the past 12 months.

Due to the loss of time at the start of the G.A., I was informed at first that I would not be given opportunity to deliver my prepared address, however, after the Voting for the positions in the General Assembly, I could address the meeting. With the aid of modern technology my prepared address, already translated by Dr Hur prior to me leaving for Korea, was displayed in Korean on a huge overhead screen for all to read. My verbal address (interpreted by Dr Yoo) could therefore be limited to a greeting and word of appreciation, thanks and encouragement for the circumstances they found themselves in. For the rest of the time I had at the General Assembly the agenda was taken up on greetings by other foreign delegates, (mostly Koreans), from other countries, e.g. USA, Australia, N. Zealand, Kazakhstan, and the Japanese Reformed Church. Other business that day involved the adoption of financial and management reports.

WEDNESDAY 22nd

On the morning of 22 September I was met at the Auditorium by Rev. Yu Ryang, Lee who advised me that there was a change in plan in returning to the Airport at Incheon.

Being 150 – 200 km from the airport meant I would need to leave Chon-an before 6 am on the Thursday, to reach the international airport in time for my 11:30am flight departure. However it was felt that due to a festival long weekend commencing on Friday 24th, that the traffic on Thursday would already be very congested and hinder my return on time for my flight departure.

They had therefore arranged that Rev. Yu Ryang, Lee would accompany me back to Seoul and act as tour guide and interpreter, taking me to the Seoul markets and then on to a motel closer to the International Airport.

So instead of attending further sessions of the G.A., which would not have been of any value, I did manage to get the opportunity of a face-to-face meeting with the Fraternal Relations committee, now with Pastor Jun Tae as Chairman. This meeting was brief due to the changed travel plans, and their shortened G.A. due to lost time at the start. Our meeting was limited to an exchange of greetings and a formal request for good contact and discussing the background of the FRCA synod decisions and questions relating to Sister Church Relations. I left with them a copy of our 2003 Synod Acts and the separate deputies report.

Dr Ho Jun Jin advised me by e-mail after my visit that he would remain on the committee of Fraternal Relations as correspondent secretary for the foreign Churches.

My journey back to Seoul meant that I would not be spending any more time with Professor Yoo, with whom I wished to spend more time. Further contact with him direct has been planned.

The train journey back to Seoul took almost 2 hours and made it's way thru rural Korea although major cities every so often gave me the distinct impression that if their wasn't any rice being grown, it was due to high rise accommodation, industry or infrastructure.

Besides experiencing more Korean food, crowds and the excellent transport system in Seoul, I had an uneventful return to my motel that evening and the airport the following morning....

Further contact

Communication has been taken up with the Fraternal Relations Committee, and with the aid of face to face contact and English speaking members on their Fraternal Relations committee, deputies are now awaiting responses to questions and requests for information and G.A. reports.

Discussions within the FRCA deputies meetings will continue once replies are received and visits to other synods have taken place.

Deputies are thankful for the help Dr S.G. Hur could contribute so far.

APPENDIX 3

REPORT OF THE MEETING 18TH JANUARY 2006 KOSIN'S FRATERNAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE – FRCA DEPUTY AC BREEN

Present:

chairman FRC: Rev Jeon
secretary FRC: Rev Shin
treasurer FRC: presbyter Kim
contact person: prof dr Yoo
deputy FRCA: AC Breen

The main Agenda point was the difficulty in communication between FRCA deputies and the Kosin FRC. I told them what sister church relation means to us: to know each other; to be a hand and a foot to each other; to encourage and if necessary to admonish each other. If we don't know each other we don't know how to support each other, how to pray for each other, how to help each other. Sister relation shouldn't be keeping up a static but a dynamic contact.

In the past the relation / contact went via dr Hur who spoke both Korean and English. He also understood the cultural and ecclesiastical differences between Korea and Australia very well. But at the moment there is a lack of communication. Our e-mails simply don't seem to have been passed on or received any attention. And there is no Kosin contact person. What do we propose our General Synod West Kelmscott 2006? To stop relations because of the lack of communication?

Their response was crystal clear: "First of all, we feel so sorry for not answering your e-mails. We feel very sorry about this, although there are reasons for: a) there are all new FRC members with all new duties; b) there were difficulties with sending your e-mails to the right persons; c) within the FRC there are serious problems with the English language at the moment." "We really esteem relationship with FRCA, and we have decided to appoint prof dr Yoo officially as contact person between Kosin and the FRCA. Further we have decided to visit FRCA Synod 2006 with two delegates: FRC chairman Rev Jeon, and contact person prof dr Yoo."

During the meeting we decided that DV coming July we will speak with each other about the translation of their Newsletter and the Proceedings of their General Assemblies; their relations with the HapDong churches; mission work in China; and what we can do together for the Christians in North-Korea (e.g. supporting North Korean refugees at the border of China and North Korea).

At the end of the meeting I promised them to send prof Yoo asap an invitation for our coming Synod. They asked me to finish in prayer.

AC Breen

4. DEPUTIES REPORT TO SYNOD WEST KELMSCOTT 2006 – FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF SOUTH AFRICA

4.1 Mandate

Synod Rockingham 2003 Article 59 made the following decision regarding our sister Free Reformed Churches of South Africa:

II. Recommendations:

1. To continue sister relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa according to the established rules.
2. To instruct deputies to continue to visit alternate synods of the FRCSA.

III. Grounds:

1. The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
2. Our visits to South Africa and their visits to us have proven very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.

4.2 Activities

Deputies have continued their contact with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) via their deputies. We do this via exchange of acts of synods, church magazines (ie. we receive the monthly Kompas via email), email and visits to synods. An extraordinary synod was held in March 2005 to address urgent issues related to the theological training. The regularly scheduled synod was held in Pretoria in May 2005. We received a delegate from the FRCSA to our previous synod, and they have decided to send a delegate to our forthcoming synod as well.

We received an invitation to attend Synod Pretoria-Maranata which was held on 23-26 May 2005. Arrangements were made with the South Africa Support Committee (SASC) to send a delegate to represent both them and us, and Br B Veenendaal was subsequently delegated to attend. Financial arrangements were shared with the SASC. The report of this Synod as well as the address delivered to synod were published in the Una Sancta in 2005. This report is attached as Appendix A, and the address as Appendix B. Br Veenendaal was also invited to address the congregation of the church at Capetown right after the afternoon worship service and to pass on the greetings from the Australian sister churches.

As a very small bond of churches, the South African sisters have a large task before them, as is evident from the report of synod. Consider for example the growth in the mission work and increasing number of mission posts, the national reformation work, the relations with churches and in particular the Dopperkerken, not to mention the challenge of integrating the newly-established (two) black churches, the Afrikaner churches, and the Dutch-background churches in one federation. Thankfully, as churches and coordinated via the SASC, we were able to support these churches in a very small way with the National Reformation work. May the Lord bless this bond of churches and our contact with them.

4.3 Recommendations

Deputies recommend the following to synod:

Recommendations:

1. To continue sister relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa according to the established rules.
2. To instruct deputies to send one delegate to their next synod (2008).

Grounds:

1. The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
2. Our visits to South Africa and their visits to us have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.

APPENDIX A – REPORT OF VISIT TO SYNOD PRETORIA 2005 HELD 23-26 MAY 2005 AT PRETORIA-MARANATA

South Africa is a country of contrasts and variations, a country of beauty and danger, a country of mountains and plains, a country of cultures and languages. Towards the southeast corner of South Africa, Table Mountain in the center of Capetown slopes to the flats where many of the townships lie (including the mission work being done in Belhar and Wesbank) following by the beautiful Drakenstein and Hottentot Mountains towards Stellenbosch. About 1500 to 2000 kilometers to the northeast are the huge metropoli of Johannesburg and Pretoria surrounded by vast townships on the rolling highlands far above sea level. Travelling east across the Highveld, where Bethal is situated, you come across the beautiful Drakensburg Mountains and majestic valleys and canyons that give way to the Lowveld in which the internationally renowned Kruger Park together with all its beautiful wildlife is situated.

Across that vast topographic landscape you find languages and cultures ranging from English and Afrikaans to Northern Suthu in the northeast, to Zulu in the east, to Xhosa (to which Nelson Mandela belongs) in the south, back to Afrikaans in the west, not to mention the others of the 11 official languages of South Africa. The history and developments in South Africa have unfolded among the Africans (truly black population among numerous tribes), the Afrikaaners (those descended from the Dutch settlers), English-speaking population descended from the British settlers (I asked someone on the bus if they were an Afrikaaner and they politely corrected me by saying they were an English-speaking South African!), and the colored peoples (descended from the intermarriage of blacks and whites). Amidst that diverse culture you see the dangers of theft and burglary, insecurity and instability, extreme poverty and extreme wealth, and of course the killer disease AIDS of which South Africa has the highest rate (40% of blacks in South Africa are believed to be HIV positive!).

This is the environment in which our sister churches, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) held their synod hosted by the church at Pretoria-Maranata. The beautiful country and the rich diversity of cultures presents a challenge for the churches as they strive to serve their Heavenly Master, work among the mission fields at their own doorstep, and seek to reach out to those in other churches of reformed origin (the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk – NGK, the Nederduits Hervormde Kerk - NHK, and the Reformed Church of South Africa – RCSA; also referred to as the Gereformeerde Kerk in Zuid-Afrika – Dopperkerk). Among the high security fencing and homes, next to the townships and squatter settlements, in the midst of job losses to the whites as blacks expand their control of the country, the churches are aware of the fact that every day is a blessing from the Lord, and that they depend on Him for their daily needs and care. From visiting these churches, it is evident that they desire to glorify and serve the Lord in obedience and humbleness. Amongst the challenges of living for God, is the joy and happiness in the promises of God. The following sections highlight some of the topics and decisions of synod of interest to our churches.

Synod opening

A prayer service prior to the commencement of synod was held on Monday 23rd May 2005. While most other parts of the service were held in Afrikaans, the sermon was proclaimed in English for the benefit of the black brothers and sisters from the churches at Mamelodi and Soshanguve North, and the associated mission fields in that area. In his sermon, Rev P Nel, well-known to us in Australia, focussed on how Christ is the salt that must season each one of us, so that it forms the basis of our work and so that we can have peace with one another (Mark 9:49,50).

After the prayer service, synod commenced with opening words from elder br VanDyk of the church at Pretoria-Maranata. Chosen as moderator were Rev C Kleyn as chairman, Rev P Nel as vice-chairman and Elder Paul Bouwman as clerk. The synod matters were discussed over three days. On Thursday evening, synod was adjourned, and will meet again in a second session in

January 2006, to give deputies for theological training sufficient time to do some work before a further decision can be made.

Theological training

The issue of theological training was the most controversial topic on the synod agenda. At the moment, the theological training occurs in three distinct ways: an own Theological Training for Afrikaans students in the Pretoria region, the use of Mukhanyo Theological College (MTC) for black Suthu-speaking students, and theological training for the colored students in the Capetown region organised by the church at Bellville. The 3-year MTC program is followed by a 4th year which is taught by the FRCSCA ministers and is known as Mukhanyo Plus.

Some of the issues and difficulties facing the churches are the fact that there are fewer ministers to do the teaching (given that Prof DeVisser , Rev Boersema and Rev Visser have departed over the last few years), MTC is not of their churches (although they make use of the FRCSCA ministers and have an FRCSCA representative on their board) and has a lower standard in terms of the languages instruction, the Capetown student ministers have different requirements and are geographically distant from the Pretoria region, and currently there are no Afrikaans students for their own college.

Synod decided to appoint deputies with the mandate to develop plans and details for establishing a ministerial training institute (MTI) with a full-time director under the responsibility of a board appointed by synod. In the meantime, the Suthu-speaking students (there are currently 3 of them) will continue to use Mukhanyo followed by the 1 year Mukhanyo Plus program. White Afrikaans students will be advised to make use of theological training institutes overseas (ie. Canada, etc.). For the students in the Cape (three of them also) the mission church at Bellville will be asked to accept responsibility for the existing colored students until they are ready for a final year which will be organised by the MTI. The deputies will report back to the following session of synod in D.V. January 2006.

Mission work

Since attending the previous synod in 2002, there have been quite some developments in the mission fields. Two of the mission churches, Mamelodi and Soshanguve North, were instituted as churches and contribute together with the white churches in the same classes and ecclesiastical assemblies. The two black student ministers examined at the previous synod were also called and ordained to these two congregations, Rev T. Mogale to Mamelodi and Rev P. Magagula to Soshanguve North.

The church at Pretoria-Marana still oversees the mission work at Soshanguve-Central, Soshanguve-South and Soshanguve-Southeast. Having successfully passed his classis examination in 2004, Rev Jerry Mhlunga works as missionary in Soshanguve-South. Rev Peter Boon, who is originally from South Africa and previously served two congregations in The Netherlands, was called as missionary for the mission posts at Soshanguve-Central and Southeast, and was ordained for this work on the Sunday prior to the commencement of synod. Soshanguve-Southeast is also the location of a hospice for terminally-ill HIV/AIDS patients and occupies much time and effort by a number of ladies of the sister churches. In fact, every Sunday morning after the worship service, the members of the mission church in Soshanguve-Southeast go to the hospice, and after a short encouraging message given by the minister/theological student, they sing for the patients.

One of the newly instituted churches, Mamelodi, has taken over responsibility from the church at Pretoria-Marana since 2004 for the mission work in Nellmapius, also near Pretoria. This mission post started about 3 years ago in a small shack in the backyard of someone's place, and has grown quite rapidly so that approximately 80 persons attend the worship services each Sunday.

The deputies responsible for mission coordinate the strategic planning and directions of the mission work, while the sending churches are responsible for carrying out that strategy in the mission work.

The deputies are responsible for the strategic vision as well as for coordinating the work among the mission churches and managing the mission funds.

The financial responsibility for the newly-instituted churches as a result of mission work needs to be phased out to become the responsibility of the Deputies for Needy Churches. This creates a different need, not just one for mission work, but also for needy churches. With such a small bond, the churches need to look overseas for financial assistance to supplement their own resources.

Springs

Synod was informed by a Classis of some sad developments. The church at Springs was dissolved because of a lack of numbers. This church had joined the federation less than 10 years ago after leaving the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) because of disenchantment with their unscriptural directions, and after having remained independent for some 10 years. When the church entered the bond of our sister churches, they were just under 100 in membership.

Sadly, many of the members retained much of their past heritage and erroneous views. For example, they wanted to make sure that no blacks could be part of the church (ie. remnants of Apartheid), a view still held by members of the Afrikaans Protestantie Kerk (APK). This view became apparent when a black person attended a service in Springs. When the Springs consistory did not go along with their anti-black view, and tried to encourage and teach the congregation how the Lord gathers peoples from ALL nations and cultures, over half of the congregation withdrew themselves, including members of consistory. Some went to the APK and others back to the NGK or elsewhere.

Even with the hard work and efforts of Rev Mendel Retief, the congregation eventually dwindled to less than 10 persons so that a decision was made to dissolve it. The remaining members decided to join our sister church at Johannesburg, about 45 minutes drive from Springs. With advice from classis, Rev Retief was freed of his responsibility in Springs and is available for call.

It is sad to see such developments, but it reminds us of our dependence on the Lord in everything. Much work can be done in His service, but we realise that we are only tools in God's hands and only He can cause the growth. It appears that there was initial great joy from children of the Lord who were seeking the truth among a bond of churches that shows evidence of faithfulness. But the seed appears to be sown among rocky or thorny ground, so that when confronted with a decision, many of these people chose to remain blinded in their old sinful ways, rather than seek the truth of Scripture and the Lord's command of obedience and humbleness.

Liturgical music

Among the churches there is some variation in the music used in the church services. The churches with dutch background at the moment utilise the psalms and a small selection of scriptural rhymings (hymns).

The churches with Afrikaans background have been used to a much broader selection of hymns, but have grown to appreciate the psalms and hymns and have moved towards using them in their church services. For example, the church at Bethal, having used the NGK hymnbook not even three years ago, now use the same psalmbook as the rest of the churches. In fact, they have a chart posted at the back of the church that shows 3 columns: the psalms they don't know, the psalms they are presently learning, and the psalms they already know. The latter column contained 75% of the psalms – probably exceeds many of our congregations in Australia!

The black churches have a very different background, and utilise a wide range of hymns (very few psalms) which have historically been obtained via Lutheran missionaries and translated into Suthu, the language of their church services. These churches would love to have more psalms and have them translated into their own Suthu language, and this plea was expressed at synod.

At the same time, the churches are wary of opening up to large numbers of hymns, although extending their current number of hymns is desired by some. Synod renewed the mandate of

deputies to do a thorough study on the songs in the worship service and to select songs according to the criteria stipulated by a previous synod.

What is interesting to note is that, among the churches that have come from a broad liberal or evangelical background and have become more reformed, there is a trend towards focussing more and more on the Psalms and moving away from a wide selection of Hymns. This is in sharp contrast to many churches with a traditional reformed heritage (and I think not only of churches in South Africa) that are trending towards a greater selection of hymns (and hence less focus on the Psalms)!

Church relations

The synod of the FRC SA decided to continue sister relations with the Canadian/American Reformed Churches, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKV), and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Regarding the GKV, synod mandated their deputies to accurately record and keep an eye on developments, since there is cause for concern regarding the developments there. With respect to the newly liberated GKV-continuing (GKVC) churches in The Netherlands, synod decided to decline their request for sister relations and call on them to reconsider their withdrawal since their request is “based on an erroneous presentation of the situation and an incorrect interpretation of synod decisions”.

They decided to continue limited contact with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and to remain informed regarding developments in the churches in North America, namely the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) and the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS) – both sister churches of our sister Canadian Reformed Churches.

With regards to churches in Africa, the decision was to only maintain contact primarily via the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). This includes the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, two churches in Kenya, and one church in Nigeria. The FRC SA continues to be a member of the ICRC and is hosting the next conference to be held in October 2005. They will also attend the next ICRC mission conference to be held in Kenya in 2007.

The Free Church of South Africa is a result of the mission work done by the Free Church of Scotland, and they exist in South Africa in geographic proximity to the FRC SA. They have bonds with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA). Synod decided to continue contacts with them and to attend each others ecclesiastical assemblies.

The PCEA asked the FRC SA if they were interested in establishing a more formal relationship with them. Synod Pretoria decided to decline their request and simply remain informed regarding developments in these churches.

The synod decided to intensify contact with the Johannesburg Korean Church (JKC) which maintains a bond in South Africa and whose ministers (1 minister and 2 missionaries) are under the supervision and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin).

Two delegates from the Reformed Churches of South Africa (RCSA- Dopperkerk) were present at Synod Pretoria. Rev Ben Fourier addressed the synod and spoke about their churches and the importance of contacts and relations. Presently, there is a link via the theological training in Potchefstroom and Mukhanyo which have trained ministers from both bonds. The RCSA have decided at their synod to allow women in the office of Deacon. One of the RCSA delegates at the synod confirmed that this indeed did refer to the full office of Deacon which was contrary to what their own deputies (RCSA) had previously officially stated. The RCSA delegates perceived that the approach of the FRC SA was negative with a view to separation rather than unity. However, the synod indicated that the intention of the FRC SA is positively to seek clarification on matters of concern in order to understand the RCSA better. In particular, they would like to seek further clarification on the views of the RCSA with respect to whether they view the NGK and the NHK churches as true or false churches, their view on the doctrine of the church, their stance on the

socio-historical hermeneutic applied by professors at their theological college, the nature of their commitment to the reformed confessions, and their decision to admit women to the office of Deacon.

Important to note is that, on the Saturday following the synod, the sister churches in Holland extended a sister-church relationship to the RCSA, much to the disappointment of the FRCSA, who at their synod were expecting such a decision. The FRCSA deputies, realising that the intention of the GKV was to extend a sister-relation to the RCSA, had already indicated that they had difficulties with such a decision, but wanted to be kept informed and be part of the process.

Work among the disenchanted

The work that is being done among the disenchanted (ie. the national reformation work) has shifted somewhat to focus less on members in the NGK and more on members in the RCSA. Synod decided not to reappoint deputies specifically for this task, but to leave the contact with the RCSA members to the Deputies for Contact with National Churches (who have already been dealing with the RCSA). They also recommended the work to consistories who see opportunities and are willing to take up a task in working among the disenchanted.

As you are aware, many of our Australian churches support this work which is coordinated via the South Africa Support Committee (SASC) appointed by the church at Kelmscott. In practical terms, this means that any cooperation regarding this work will continue in conjunction with local consistories rather than with deputies. Finalisation of the “deputies” work including finances will be completed by the church at Bethal. Presently, the SASC is working with the church at Bethal to consider possibilities to progress this work.

Financial model

It is interesting to note the new financial model that was adopted for cost-sharing of synod expenses among the churches. Deputies were given the mandate to develop a financial model which is based on the budgeted income of the churches rather than just a fixed amount per church member. The latter does not take into consideration the huge differences between the poor and the well-off that exist among the various congregations of different cultures: those with dutch background, Afrikaners and blacks. This way, churches that are less able to contribute will not be overly burdened, and those that are better off, will be able to contribute more.

Synod will reconvene in late January 2006 in order to finalise the decision on theological training. The next synod will be held D.V. end of May 2008 in Capetown.

What a privilege it was to be able to experience the Lord’s church gathering and preservation work among the sisters in South Africa! Seeing the work there adds perspective to the fact that Christ redeems His Church “...out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev 5:9). May God bless our sister in South Africa and so also encourage us in obedience and humbleness before Him.

B Veenendaal
On behalf of Deputies for Relations with Sister Churches

APPENDIX B – ADDRESS OF DEPUTIES TO SYNOD PRETORIA 2005

Esteemed Chairman and Brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

It was a short three years ago that we, as the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, were present in person at your synod Jo-burg 2002, and an even shorter less-than two years ago that Rev Nel represented your churches at our Synod Rockingham 2003. Even though the time between your synods since 2002, and our own synods since 2000, has lengthened from 2 to 3 years, yet the amount of contact between our bonds of churches has increased, and thankfully so! It is a pleasure to be here and to represent our churches here at your assembly once again. Your invitation, the warm welcome and the hospitality is very much appreciated.

And that is a very rich blessing, the fact that we can have contact and that we can support and encourage each other. After all, we don't have many sister churches entirely in the southern hemisphere, and who share the same seasons at the same time – all our other sister churches are different. And yes, we also share many people who fly across the Indian Ocean to share their expertise and experiences between us.

But more importantly, we face many of the same struggles and challenges. We live in a post-modern era in which “man” has taken center stage, yes, in fact has attempted to displace God, push God aside and become the supreme ruler. And when such acts of secularisation, yes even revolution, take place in the world, then we in the church need to be very much on guard in fighting these attacks. That means we are engaged in warfare. As Paul says to the Ephesians in chapter 6:17: *“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;...”*. Yes we have the armour, the means by which we can triumph, namely: the Word and the Spirit. Paul then continues in verse 18, *“...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints...”*, yes for ALL the saints, that includes you here in South Africa, and us in Australia, and those wherever the Lord gathers His church.

However, just having you here, and we back home, and others in this world, to give each other support and encouragement, is not, in itself, going to give success to the struggle of faith in the church; rather, it is the fact that we have a Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the same Head for you in South Africa as well as for us in Australia. That is our hope, the fact, that (as we confess in Lord's Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism) *“...the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life...”*. What a rich confession that is! We are part of Christ's church-gathering work. And we know that this work continues, despite the attacks on the church, despite the shortcomings of the church...yes this work continues here in South Africa, and at home in Australia, and beyond. And together, we may confess that! Together, we may stand beneath our Head, waging the warfare against all those who oppose God, and fighting the good fight of faith.

In that light, I may, on behalf of our churches, extend our greetings to you as our sisters in South Africa. We thank you for the support and encouragement that you have offered to our churches and which Rev Nel, on behalf of your churches, extended to us at our last synod. It is assuring to know that we do not stand alone, but do receive the prayers and encouragement from you as our sister. It is comforting to know that the Lord also uses you as instruments to encourage us also in the way of faithfulness and obedience to His Word.

Your churches here in South Africa certainly are on the radar screen of our churches in Australia. Many of our churches actively support the work among the disenchanted, or National Reformation work as you chose to call it. We have a South Africa Support Committee appointed by the church at Kelmscott that enlists and coordinates the support received by our churches. Many of our churches hold regular collections and you will also, as a result, quite regularly hear the work here in South

Africa being mentioned in the prayers from the pulpits! Yes, you yourselves, and God's work among you as churches, receive regular exposure and are alive in our thoughts and prayers.

The Lord has indeed blessed you in many ways. The mission work that you have been busy with for so many years has born rich fruits in the institution of two new churches, that at Mamelodi and at Soshunguve-North. Not only that, but the Lord has blessed them with shepherds of the Word through Rev Mogale and Rev Magagula. And that mission work and outreach continues to grow! We stand in awe at how the Lord works in your midst. May He continue to bless the work that continues among your churches, in this region here as well as in Capetown. At the same time, we understand that a number of your ministers and missionaries have departed overseas, leaving some vacancies, most of which have also subsequently been filled. We pray that the Lord will bless your efforts as you continue to proclaim God's Word among the churches and the preaching points that you have. At the same time, you also have experienced difficulties with the dissolving of the church at Springs. We are reminded of our weaknesses and can only humble ourselves before God's sovereign good will. May the Lord work in the hearts of those that have left and cause them to seek His Will in complete obedience and humbleness. May He also continue to be near to those who remain, that they may continue to be a blessing and willing instruments in God's church gathering work.

And so, we encourage you as churches to stand strong in the faith and be faithful and obedient in the calling and commands that the Lord has set out before us. You have particular issues and challenges that you face, many of which you are dealing with at this synod. I think of the challenges that you face in the work of training for the ministry, the efforts to reach out to those in other churches who recognise deformation in their church, your relations with churches in this country as well as abroad, and even working together effectively and fruitfully, yourselves, as churches with different backgrounds and cultures.

As you deliberate and come to decisions and actions, continue to be mindful of the fact that this is the Lord's work that you are busy with, that beautiful task of church-gathering which God continues in and through us. What is impossible with us, is possible with God. Let us never underestimate the fact that this is His work, and that He is pleased to use us as stewards in His service. His work will continue.

In Australia, your sister churches have also experienced the Lord's blessings and guiding hand in church life. Since our last visit to you, we have grown by one church to 12 churches. Our newest arrival is the church at Darling Downs, instituted on 6 July 2003 and located between Armadale and Byford. She has, on numerous occasions, been affectionately called our little "Darling"(!). A quick scan of our Yearbook, reveals that our total membership has increased from 3480 in 2002 to 3650, an increase of almost 5%.

The last three years has also seen some movement among the ministers of the Word in our midst. Our church in Launceston sadly experienced difficulties when Rev Zuiddam withdrew from the Free Reformed churches in September 2002. However, thankfully, Launceston has just received a new minister of the Word in the person of Rev Eikelboom who was ordained only just two months ago. Rev Eikelboom came from Calgary, Canada, but originally hails from Western Australia, and so it is good to get one of the Aussie ministers back again! Bunbury received a minister just over a year ago, Rev Rupke who came to Australia from The Netherlands. Rev Bouwman, who, you may recall, visited you at your Synod Bethal in the year 2000, accepted a call to Yarrow in Canada, and he and his family departed just this past April. The church at Albany, after being vacant for quite some time, will now, the Lord willing, receive a shepherd in the person of Candidate Smith from Canada, who hopes to arrive next month with the installation expected shortly after. That leaves vacancies in the churches of Darling Downs and Kelmscott. However, we are very thankful for those who labour in the ministry, so that almost all of our churches have their own pastor and teacher. Yes, every one of our churches is blessed with the proclamation of the gospel twice every Sunday!

On the mission scene, our churches are busy on a number of fronts. The work in Papua New Guinea, in particular in Lae, is organised by the church at Armadale with a number of cooperating churches including Byford, Darling Downs and West Albany, and a further number of supporting churches. We have been able to call a minister for this work, Rev Wildeboer, who graduated last year from the theological college in Canada, was installed last year November, and is currently undergoing a training program in Canada in preparation for commencing his duties in Lae. In addition we have br Justin Bolhuis who is currently the mission worker there, and br Andrew VanderHeide who is undergoing training presently. You may be interested to know that the two brothers currently being trained are under the tutelage of Professor de Visser who is no stranger to you! Further mission activities include the work of Mount Nasura in supporting mission work in India, and the work by Rockingham in supporting a number of indigenous evangelists among the churches in Indonesia.

As churches, we continue to maintain sister church relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Reformed Churches (liberated) in the Netherlands, the (Kosin) Presbyterian Churches of Korea, the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Indonesia, and, of course, yourselves. Although we recognise the Reformed Churches of New Zealand as true and faithful churches, we have not yet recognised them formally as sister churches because of their third party sister relations with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. Our contact with the Presbyterian Churches of Eastern Australia had stalled over the past years, so our last synod made an extra effort to “re-engage the PCEA in effective discussions about the matters of concern using the statements of [prepared by our synod of] 1998...” regarding the fencing of the Lord’s table, the supervision of the pulpit and the place of children in the covenant. We also continue to have contacts with the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvin churches in East Timor, and the Reformed Free Churches of the Philippines. As you can see, we too have many things to be busy with. God has indeed richly blessed us and given us much to be thankful for, and at the same time has also given us many challenges. Continue to pray for us that we too may be faithful and obedient in our God-given task and may continue to be a blessing in His service and for His church-preservation work.

In conclusion, may the Lord bless your endeavours and deliberations here at your synod, that the decisions you make may be according to God’s revealed Word, to the praise of His honour and glory, and a blessing to the churches here and abroad. May the Lord continue to be with you as churches and may His Word continue to be proclaimed and witnessed in this part of God’s world.

Thankyou.

On behalf of the Australian Deputies for Sister Church Relations
Bert Veenendaal

5. DEPUTIES REPORT TO SYNOD WEST KELMSCOTT 2006 – THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS

5.1 Mandate

In Article 41 the 2003 Acts Synod decided:

1. To continue sister-relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands according to the adopted Rules for Sister-Relations;
2. To discharge deputies and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a) Exercise sister-relations with the GKV according to the adopted rules;
 - b) According to the rules, discuss and to continue to discuss with the GKV Deputies the concerns as to the developments within the GKV, and as outlined and recommended in the report of the deputies;
 - c) Report to next Synod
 - d) To instruct deputies to send two delegates to the next general Synod of the GKV.

Grounds:

1. The GKV gives evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, their Reformed Confessions and the Church Order.
2. Deputies have pointed out and given some evidence about some specific concerns. These should continue to be addressed, according to the rules.

5.2 Progress Report

Since our last synod and the publication of the Acts of the 2002 General Synod of Zuidhorn, another general synod has been held in Amersfoort by our Dutch sister churches. This means that your deputies interacted with material from the General Synod of Zuidhorn but also had input into the discussions of the General Synod of Amersfoort. Thus it will be good to report on both at the same time. Yet for the sake of clarity we will report on the 2005 General Synod of Amersfoort, referring back to that of Zuidhorn in 2002.

After this general section we report about specific concerns and issues relating to our relations with our Dutch sisters.

We do append a report on the visit made to our Dutch sisters at the time of their 2005 GS.

As well, we also include a report about the continuing GKV (GKVC) which has officially sent letters asking for sister relations. A report on a visit made to their delegates is included in that report.

We did receive a visit from Rev J Plug, one of their deputies assigned to exercise relations with us. We could exchange information and give updates.

5.3 The Blessing by a non-Elder

Deputies were asked to ascertain whether or not our concerns were alleviated and to relay their findings to the Dutch deputies.

Our concerns were handed over to the Dutch deputies.

In brief, our concern was that the blessing, unaltered from the biblical texts, can now be pronounced not only by elders, but also by anyone appointed by the consistory.

The Dutch deputies were not able to do more than repeat the last decision (of the GS Leusden of 1999). GS Zuidhorn (2002) did not uphold appeals against the previous decisions and this issue has not surfaced again either address this matter further by responding as follows:

General Synod Leusden 1999 decided not to grant any requests appealing against previous synod decisions that allow an elder to lay the unaltered blessing, with the raising of hands, upon the congregation. In addition, GS Leusden went farther and extended this authorisation to pronounce the blessing to every brother, irrespective of whether they are an elder or not, who is appointed by consistory to lead a worship service.

Deputies examined this decision and concluded that since the blessing given by God in the assembly of His people is an important part of the liturgy, we must be careful not to diminish its significance. The blessing is to be spoken only by the minister or elder (those called to the office) on behalf of God using the words of Scripture. We outlined our concerns in a paper that was sent to the Dutch deputies and was subsequently tabled at General Synod Zuidhorn 2002.

GS Zuidhorn also received submissions from within their own bond, but decided not to accede to the requests. They made this decision on the grounds that no new aspects were raised which were not already considered by previous synods. They also decided to plead with the churches to let this discussion rest in peace. They stressed that the final decision as to who leads the church service and who can pronounce the blessing is left to the local church council.

It is obvious that Synod Zuidhorn wants to put this matter to rest. It would be difficult to bring up any new information that has not already been considered by a past synod. In the end, synod makes clear that the ultimate decision is left up to the local church council.

Although we understand and appreciate synod's decision we want you to consider appointing deputies Office and Liturgy who will study on the relation between the special office and the office of all believers in relation to the church service and all its elements. This is different from the request for a deputyship considering the relation between the office and the benediction. We conclude from the Acts (art 47, Materials nr 5, fourth dot point) that the synod was not in favour of such a deputyship. Neither are we. What we have in mind is a deputyship concentrating on questions like:

- *What is the task of the special office bearers in the church service?*
- *What is the meaning of the office of all believers, that is of all men and women, in the church service?*
- *How do we express the meaning of the office of all believers in the church service?*

- *Which liturgical elements are required in every church service, and what is the relation with the office? (cf our section B and C-re 2)*
- *What is the task of the special office bearer in war zones in relation to a local church?*
- *What is the relation between the special office and the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper? (cf our questions regarding your synod's decisions in art 101)*

We did not pursue this matter any further. Other more pressing issues demanded our time.

We recommend that this concern, which was not finished satisfactorily, be shelved for the time being.

5.4 Report On The General Synod Of Amersfoort (2005)

Work-method of the general synod

The Dutch too have opted to discuss many of the reports of their deputies directly, without using the intermediary of a synodical advisory committee. They continued to use internet connections to work on the agenda from Monday to Thursday. This allowed them to work through a very extensive agenda. Synod met in open, full sessions on Fridays and Saturdays.

Discussions held during synod.

Before synod your deputies sent a number of letters/submissions to their Dutch counterparts. These concerned decisions of the 2002 GS of Zuidhorn as well as the reports of deputies to the 2005 GS of Amersfoort. These letters were acknowledged, passed on to the appropriate deputies and many of them were included in the agenda of the 2005 GS of Amersfoort. They will be appended to the reports on these specific matters.

Our two delegates held a number of discussions during synod. They included:

1. With the BBK (sections 1+3) along with other delegates; with deputies re marriage and divorce; and with GS Amersfoort about the report concerning marriage and divorce.
2. With the BBK (section 1 alone).
3. With deputies re the Fourth Commandment.
4. With ministers who signed the *Manifest*.
5. With deputies of the newly liberated GKVC
6. With ministers who signed the *Manifest*.
7. With deputies of the newly liberated GKVC

The reports about these meetings will be included in the various sections dealing with these specific matters. The report of the delegates to the 2005 GS Amersfoort is appended.

Decisions on other matters of interest

Synod dealt with many issues in church life. Some of the major decisions have been translated into English and made available on their synodical website (<http://synode.gkv.nl/>). We have used these translations as well as the decisions

as published on their website. For your information, a number of our members have been busy in doing this translating work, not only for our benefit but also for other English-speaking churches

Relations with churches abroad

The GKV deputies submitted a large report (83 pages) on relations with churches abroad, including a report about us. They informed synod of their visit to our 2003 Synod of Rockingham. They explained how they had encouraged us to rejoin the ICRC, to avoid isolationism, to engender better contacts with the PCEA and to make progress with the GKZ.

GS dealt with the reports from their deputies in the various sections with in a quick, efficient manner. Little discussion took place. Most of the contacts or relations were dealt with on the one day our delegates attended synod. The issue of entering sister relations with the GKSA did not cause discussion this time.

New sister relations

The General Synod Amersfoort entered sister relations with five more bonds of churches:

1. Gereformeerde Kerken in Suid Afrika (GKSA) or the 'dopper-kerken'.
2. The Presbyterian Free Church Council (PFCC) in northern India.
3. The Gereja Gereja Reformasi Indonesia (GGRI) in Kalimantan Barat.
4. The United Reformed Churches of North America (UGKVA).
5. Nongu u Kristu u ken Sudan hen Tiv (NKST) in Nigeria.

Our appended report about the visit to the 2005 GS of Amersfoort gives more information.

The newly liberated Reformed Churches (GKVC)

The report of our delegates who visited The Netherlands in 2005 included discussions with the Dutch deputies about the GKVC. The visit to the regional (high) school in Rotterdam also addressed this question, namely, whether the students of families of the GKVC were allowed to attend, and whether they do. Also, the two delegates met with ministers who started the web-forum of *Manifest* (<http://www.gereformeerdlijven.nl/>). Since these ministers do not officially represent the GKV, they asked that the meeting remain unofficial and unreported. We have honoured their request. Yet our delegates tried to understand the situation, the climate, and asked about any efforts at reconciliation.

It was gratifying to hear that the GS Amersfoort decided to approve a letter of appeal to the GKVC. This appeal has been printed in our church magazine and is appended to this report. Thus our sister churches have taken the initiative in opening contacts with these former members.

In our report re the GKVC it is recommended that we encourage them to open contacts with the GKV. We should continue to do the same with our sister churches, and in the attempt try to build an understanding of the concerns of the GKVC. A proposal to this effect is found in the overall recommendations.

Overall recommendations concerning the GKV

General

- 1) To continue sister-relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands according to the adopted Rules for Sister-Relations;
- 2) To discharge Deputies and to appoint new Deputies with the mandate to:
 - a) To exercise sister-relations with the GKV according to the adopted rules;
 - b) According to the rules, to discuss and to continue to discuss with the GKV Deputies the concerns as to the developments within the GKV, and as outlined and recommended in the report of deputies (see below);
 - c) To urge the GKV to continue to engage in meaningful dialogue with the “new liberated” Reformed Churches, having an understanding of their concerns and grievances, and addressing these concerns Scripturally and confessionally in truth and love;
 - d) To instruct deputies to send two delegates to the next general synod of the GKV;
 - e) To report to next Synod.

Grounds:

- i. The GKV gives evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, their Reformed Confessions and the Church Order.
- ii. Deputies have pointed out and given evidence about some specific concerns. These should (continue to) be addressed, according to the rules.
- iii. The 2005 GS Amersfoort sent an appeal to the newly liberated Reformed Churches (GKVC) and has thus initiated contact with these churches. This contact should be encouraged to continue, from both sides.
- iv. Personal visits to synods is often more helpful than correspondence from a distance. As deputies have shown, it improves relations. Delegates should use the opportunity to visit the GKVC as well.

Two deputies could not accept these overall recommendations and asked that their alternate set of recommendations be passed on to synod as a minority proposal. They see the need to take a stronger stance, specifically to have synod address the GKV directly and to indicate that unless things change our sister relations may come under strain.

Your deputies struggled with this because we would have liked to present one set of recommendations. In the end the meeting approved the request to send the alternate set, which now follows.

Alternate set of overall recommendations re GKV

1. Express our thankfulness to the GKV churches regarding the openness and frankness in which their deputies and ours could be engaged in concerns and discussions.
2. Express our concerns regarding the directions being taken, particularly in regards to the manner in which Scripture and the commandments are interpreted and applied to today's circumstances. These concerns involve

especially the matters that we have already raised with the GKV, and include:

- a) The 4th commandment and the reluctance to acknowledge that the rest on the Sabbath is indeed a command of God as required by this commandment and the fulfilling work of Christ,
- b) 7th commandment and the directions of deputies towards the approval of divorces for reasons beyond the Scriptural reasons of adultery and willful desertion, which, although not endorsed by synod were not explicitly rejected
- c) The administration of the sacraments in military situations to persons who are not members of the church or its sister churches, and goes beyond the common consent of the Church Order (eg. not under supervision of consistory),
- d) The proliferation and content of the new hymns being adopted, and
- e) The decision to allow non-officebearers to give the blessing, unaltered, in the church services.

We are thankful where GS Amersfoort has accepted and adopted some changes and suggestions, however, these do not address the core of our concerns.

3. Urge the GKV to engage in meaningful dialogue with the GKV(continuing) churches, having a greater understanding of their concerns and grievances, and Scripturally and confessionally addressing these concerns in humility and love.
4. To continue sister-relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands according to the adopted Rules for Sister-Relations.
5. To discharge Deputies and to appoint new Deputies with the mandate to:
 - a) Exercise sister-relations with the GKV according to the adopted rules
 - b) To discuss with the GKV the nature and cause underlying the directions being taken by their churches
 - c) Discuss and to continue to discuss with the GKV Deputies the concerns as to the developments within the GKV, including:
 - i. Those that deputies have already been busy with, and
 - ii. Additional concerns such as, supervision of the Lord's Supper, entering into sister relations with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (Dopperkerk) and their continuing discussions with the NGK in spite of these churches opening all the special offices to women,
 - d) Report to next Synod
 - e) To instruct deputies to send two delegates to the next Synod of the GKV.

Grounds:

1. Our deputies have been able to correspond with Dutch deputies in a good and brotherly way, and their deputies have brought our concerns to their Synod table. This is in the spirit of the rules for sister church relations to which both our church bonds have committed themselves.

2. Our deputies have already written to Dutch deputies expressing our concerns with respect to the 4th and 7th commandments, military chaplains, new hymns and blessing by non-officebearer. Some of these concerns have been the subject of discussion between deputies over quite some time, and have been expressed in multiple correspondences over the last number of synods.
3. There is an increasing trend in the GKV to administer the sacraments (Lord's Supper table as well as Baptism) to those who are not members of the church or of sister churches. This is evidenced, for example, by synods decisions on the celebration of the Lord's Supper by military personnel and asylum seekers whereby they have deviated from the Church Order (Art 57 of Australian) by giving a broader interpretation to it than it was meant to have.
4. GS Amersfoort has extended a sister church relationship to the Reformed Churches of South Africa (dopperkerken) who, at their synodical level, have allowed women into the office of deacon.
5. In order to pave the way towards reconciliation, it is important that the GKV be urged to work towards reconciliation with the GKV(continuing) on the basis of truth, love and humility.
6. The GKV strives to remain faithful to the Word of God, their Reformed Confessions and the Church Order and we need to encourage them in this regard with respect to the concerns that we do have.
7. Deputies need to continue to address the concerns in accordance with the rules.

5.5 General report on the visit to our Dutch sister, GKV, in 2005

General matters

Rev J Plug, a member of Section 1 of the Dutch deputies for relations with churches abroad (BBK), picked us up at Schiphol airport and took us to Kontakt der Kontinenten (KdK Conference Hotel) in Soesterberg. This is right next to Amersfoort, where the general synod is being held. At this beautiful conference centre we were each given a room. All meals were provided by BBK.

Approximately 22 delegates from other countries came here to meet with the various sections of the BBK. It might be interesting to list the delegates (besides ourselves) to depict the international flavour:

Rev S Abraham	SIRC (India)
Rev MH Subba	PFCK
Br Henk Hoogstra	CanRC
Rev J Huijgen	CanRC
Br John Heerema	RCUS
Rev Fritz Harms	UGKVA
Rev Mark T Bube	OPC
Rev Jack J Peterson	OPC
Rev Andrew J Lucas	EPCI (Ireland)
Rev Richard Holst	EPCEW (England/Wales)
Rev Peter Naylor	EPCEW
Rev (Prof) Dr John R McIntosh	FCS

Rev Donald N Macleod	FCS(continuing)
Rev Kishimba N Kasantika	ERCC (Congo)
Rev Illubnga N a Kuibondo	ERCC
Br Yumba Musoya	ERCC
Rev Dr Mbanonghon K Antiev	NKST (Nigeria)
Rev Jacob T Orkuma	NKST
Rev Cesar Rodriguez	IRV (Venezuela)
Rev Anthony Torres	IRC (Curaçao)
Rev José de Segovia Barron	IRE (Spain)
Rev Alexander Makeev	ERCUR (Russia)

During our time at the KdK we enjoyed the opportunity to meet with these delegates at meals and over coffee. We learned more about these churches. We collected material about the churches of the Tiv in Nigeria (NKST), about the ERCC (Congo), about the churches in Spain and about the churches in India for whom the DVN asked us for assistance.

On Wednesday afternoon the DVN (De Verre Naasten or The Distant Neighbour) gave a presentation, which was very helpful in gaining more insight into their work and setup. They gave us a packet of information, one piece of which was The Candlestand Statement. This is a joint statement by 14 church leaders made on Pentecost 2004. These leaders were concerned about *the growing influence of the Charismatic Movement around the world, and the unpreparedness of our churches to meet its impact*. Copies were given. It can also be found on the web: (<http://www.candlestand.nl/index.php?eng>). In the evening of the same day the BBK made a presentation for all the delegates.

The BBK hosted an outing to Dordrecht. BBK members and wives along with us, their guests, were taken in a bus to this historical city. We enjoyed a speech by Mr A Kamsteeg about the significance of Dordrecht, and we heard Rev D DeJong introduce the Canons of Dort. We were able to tour the historical sites, especially De Grote Kerk. This was a memorable visit. A packet of information about Dordrecht and the Synod of Dort will keep this visit memorable. On the way home we travelled via Kinderdijk (the canals with all the windmills) and the high roads on the dykes along the canals. It was a very full and enjoyable day.

Meetings

We had meetings with Section 1 of the BBK (Rev R TerBeek-chair, Rev JA Boersema-convenor, Rev J Plug, Rev JPD Groen, and Mrs E Ensing-Maatkamp). One meeting was combined with Section 3 (English speaking churches), since some of these churches shared our concerns and asked to be included.

All in all we had the following meetings:

1. With the BBK (sections 1+3) along with other delegates.
2. With the BBK (section 1 alone).
3. With deputies re marriage and divorce.
4. With GS Amersfoort re marriage and divorce.
5. With deputies re the Fourth Commandment.
6. With ministers who signed the *Manifest*.
7. With deputies of the newly liberated GKVC

We will report separately about these meetings.

North East India

We had a mandate to investigate whether the assistance requested for Indian churches was still applicable. We made inquiries and found that Ben Bolt, who works and travels for DVN, and who had been there in India, and who was present at KdK, could give the required information.

- Re NE India emergency case. One unchristian tribe attacked another tribe made up of Christians, many of whom belong to sister churches of GKV. It was that bad that the Christians had to flee and start all over. All their homes, their churches and infrastructure had been pillaged and burned. After the hostilities settled and the refugees were able to return home, all the infrastructure needed to be rebuilt. It would take 900,000 euros!
- Since DVN does not really address emergencies such as these but leaves it to other organizations, they appealed to sister churches. DVN itself has 50,000 euros per year for such emergencies in which churches involved in their mission projects or sister churches are involved. Thus they collected the 50,000 euros. 'Redt een Kind' (Help a Child) offered 250,000 euros; relief organizations within the churches helped and in total 600,000 euros were collected. At present most of the emergency seems to have disappeared. However, further help would be appreciated.
- For their information, I told them of our relief organization, e.g. for the areas stricken by the tsunamis. They will remember this.
- Ben Bolt would follow up on our conversation and ask the secretary to send a detailed report. This letter is attached to this report (appendix 1).

Recommended action

- Send the request to our relief organisation and ask them to collect funds for this area where ethnic clashes have brought so much devastation to brothers and sisters in the faith.
- Ben Bolt also gave information about volunteers who wish to work on mission sites. They received more and more requests and thus have spent some time to organise this. He asked whom they might pass this information on to. Since we do have some members who volunteer for such projects and who do so for interdenominational mission agencies, it might be worthwhile to print this in a press release about our visit.
 - Young persons can apply to DVN if they wish to volunteer out on mission fields in certain areas of service, e.g. teaching, nursing. They never paid much attention to this in the past, but since there is a call for it, they have started to coordinate such requests.
 - The idea is that young persons serve in areas of reformed missions instead of having such volunteers go to various interdenominational efforts, no matter how helpful that may be. For a variety of reasons, e.g. being in reformed churches and helping our own projects that offer from a scarcity of manpower, it is much more advantageous to have such willing persons serve reformed missions.

GS Amersfoort

On Friday and Saturday, 27-28 May, we attended open sessions of the synod. These two days were devoted to reports from the BBK about relations with

churches abroad. The reports of the various sections, one by one, were dealt with. But before the report from each section was dealt with, delegates from churches in that section were given the opportunity to address synod. We are in section 1 and thus were the first to address synod. We distributed to members of the synod, BBK, press, and others the 100 copies of our booklets which included the address and the summary of concerns, in both Dutch and English. No copies were left! Br Breen delivered the address in Dutch. It was well received, as was evident from the response. We submit our address and the summary of concerns as an appendix.

In addition, we also attach as appendices, the addresses by the br Henk Hoogstra of the CanRC and Rev Fritz Harms of the UGKVA (a real model of a good address).

The reports of the deputies were tabled (directly and not via advisory committees), discussed, answered by the relevant section of BBK, and then decided on during those two days.

Five offers of sister relations were made by the synod. They were to:

1. Gereformeerde Kerken in Suid Afrika (GKSA) or the 'dopper-kerken'. Our Dutch sisters have worked towards sister relations with the GKSA for many years. At the 2002 GS Zuidhorn our South African sister churches pleaded strongly and at length to postpone entering sister relations with the GKSA at that time. Since then tripartite discussions among the GKV, GKSA + FRC SA in South Africa have seen some progress made. The Dutch deputies asked the sister churches in South Africa (FRC SA) how they would react to sister relations between the GKV and the GKSA. The FRC SA appreciated being asked, and they understood the ongoing desire of the GKV to enter a sister relation with the GKSA, and understood the pressures on the GKV because of the passage of time and because good progress in discussions among the three churches. However, the FRC SA still see problems in the GKSA. One problem related to the decision of the GKSA to introduce women deacons. At the above-mentioned tripartite meeting the delegates of the GKSA assured the meeting in writing that female deacons were not part of the consistory. Owing to this the deputies of the FRC SA wrote to the GKV that they had misrepresented the GKSA on this point and had reacted improperly (in the GKSA women deacons have no place in the consistory and thus do not have a ruling office).¹ But the FRC SA see other problems as well (e.g. lack of discipline) that in their view prevent (federative) unity with the GKSA at this point. Sister relations would not be the choice of the FRC SA, but they certainly would not

¹ However, later on at the 2005 Synod of Pretoria and elsewhere (at the 2005 Synod of the GKVZ) the same delegates of the GKSA said the opposite, namely, that female deacons were normal and full deacons who also had a place in the consistory. This was confirmed by one of the delegates of our SA sister church at the tripartite meetings. Your deputies found out about this afterwards (after some research), and have had discussions with Rev J Plug when he visited here and are sending our findings to our Dutch counterparts for their information. Our Dutch sisters of course acted on good faith according to the information supplied and verified.

As a further update we can report that the most recent 2006 National Synod of the GKSA (Dopperkerken) at Potchefstroom decided (art 258) to annul their previous decision on procedural grounds. Many ministers in a combined submission had voiced their displeasure at the previous decision. A deputyship has been appointed to investigate this whole matter and to report to next synod. But for the time being the decision is annulled.

terminate their sister relations with the GKV, if the GKV entered sister relations with the GKSA. They would much rather appreciate being kept informed and involved in the actual exercising of the sister relation, especially as this relation between the GKV and GKSA would help to promote the truth of the Gospel in South Africa. In the end, on the basis of a full report, this proposal for sister relations was adopted unanimously.

2. The Presbyterian Free Church Council (PFCC) in northern India.
3. The Gereja Gereja Reformasi Indonesia (GGRI) in Kalimantan Barat. These are churches borne from mission efforts of our Dutch sisters. Help is still given to these churches (e.g. by Rev Jonkman who goes there regularly). We should pass this information on to our deputies who deal with Indonesia. Since it may take quite some time before the three bonds of reformed churches in Indonesia unite, it might be good for us to do the same as the Dutch sisters have done. However, we as deputies cannot recommend this to synod. It needs to come from the churches. Thus we should put it on the agenda of a jumbo meeting, and have that meeting send it to the churches.
4. The United Reformed Churches of North America (UGKVA). The delegate from these churches informed synod that they have a detailed protocol for entering sister relations, and that it might take some time before they can accept this offer of sister relations.
5. Nongu u Kristu u ken Sudan hen Tiv (NKST) in Nigeria. We received the report about these churches, which are very numerous and large, extending over a wide territory.

Delegates from all these churches came forward, received the handshake of brotherhood, after which we sang the Apostles' Creed and prayed.

On Friday evening, from 7-9:30 p.m., a general discussion was held on the report about marriage and divorce. The foreign delegates, seated as advisory members (we had to stand to indicate our agreement with our reformed confessions), were invited to speak first. A separate report is submitted about this.

Second Week

The BBK had only allotted accommodation for the foreign delegates for the first week. They offered accommodation in Amersfoort, if we wished. We appreciated that. However, Rev JA Boersema, convenor of deputies of section 1, offered us accommodation at his home in Apeldoorn. This was much appreciated.

With him and Rev CJ Breen (our guest for that day) we made a trip to Amsterdam, the following day we went via train to Rotterdam (see below); the following day to Ede (via Boersema's van) for a meeting with the GKVC; and the following day to Utrecht via train for a meeting with deputies for the Fourth Commandment. Three ministers who signed the *Manifest* travelled quite some distances to meet with us in Apeldoorn.

We travelled via train early on Friday morning back to Schiphol. The costs for transport have been submitted to the synodical treasurer.

Rotterdam

We were invited to visit Rotterdam, the Gereformeerde Scholengemeenschap Randstad (GSR), the local GKV and the inner city mission projects. This allowed us to visit important parts of church life.

Br Huib van Leeuwen, who has visited Australia, gave us a tour of the GSR in Rotterdam. One delegate kept wandering away!!

He gave an oversight of reformed education in the GKV in The Netherlands. He introduced the various streams with reformed education in the upper levels.

In a discussion he informed us that in that area a number of church members had separated and formed the newly liberated GKVC. What impact does this have on the schools? He answered that teachers need to be members of the GKV (or CGK). Teachers who join the GKVC thus know that their employment will be terminated. Students who come from families who are not members of the GKV (or CGK) have their applications processed individually and if parents wish reformed education, this is accepted. However, the parents cannot become members of the association.

This year some students from the GKVC do attend, but next year the parents have decided not to send them to the GSR. Instead, they will send them to other Christian schools or even public (openbare) schools. He lamented this. The association has not at all discouraged these parents from sending them, and indeed encourages the parents to send their children to the GSR.

We also toured the neighbourhood of the inner city church. In the evening Rev M deVries, who has a ministry among the Moslems in that area of Rotterdam, took us along with him to a meeting with Moslems from the neighbourhood. Some church members of the GKV (Rotterdam Stad) met in a hall where Moslems meet to discuss issues. Many of these Moslems had attended the special church service of the previous Sunday when young people had professed the faith. They were asked for their impressions of the church service. The replies were very positive and polite. Many would attend again.

Then a member of the GKV introduced how reformed churches view the relation between church and state. It was a very good and practical introduction. Then a professor at the Islamic University told how Moslems view the relation between the faith and the state. It was hard to follow, since his Dutch was not great. After this an interval with coffee and tea, and abundant cakes baked by Moslem ladies, went down well during the many discussions. At this point we had to leave in order to get back to Apeldoorn on time (it was very late when we arrived home!). The two papers were then to be discussed by the whole group. The approach is to get to know the Moslems and for the Moslems to get to know the church people and their faith. This leads to invitations to attend church. It is not a confrontational approach but rather the approach of exercising friendly, christian relations so that doors open to present the gospel.

This opened the eyes of at least one delegate as to how The Netherlands have changed, i.e. its multicultural citizenship with the result that we were in the minority in that suburb!, and how our sister churches respond to that challenge.

Conclusion

Your delegates enjoyed a full, intensive but satisfying visit. Much was learned, much was discussed and much was accomplished. We were thankful that as deputies we had done so much preparation. It paid dividends. In the future the same amount of preparation will have to be made to make such a trip worthwhile.

Our Dutch sisters respect and esteem us. They know we watch them carefully, if not critically. Yet they also experience how we value our sister relation. We from our side could experience that they value and respect us. As a result we received

invitations to learn more about them. They welcome us, not in spite of our sympathetic criticisms, but indeed also because of them. As Rev LE Leeftink wrote in *De Reformatie*, 4 juni 2005, blz 643:

“De zusterkerk die ons het meest kritisch volgt, zijn de *Free Reformed Churches of Australia*. Zij hadden de synode al een brief gestuurd op 17 februari 2005. Daarin lieten ze weten zich bezorgd te maken over ‘een zekere subjectieve geneigdheid in sommige rapporten en beslissingen’ en dat toonden ze ook met acht concrete voorbeelden. Maar in zijn toespraak maakte br AC Breen duidelijk, dat het sympathetisch kritisch commentaar voortkomt vanuit een bewogen hart, namelijk als kerk die van haar grote zuster houdt.”

(The sister church which follows us most critically is the FRCA. They had already sent a letter to the GS on 17 Feb/05. In it they let us know how they are concerned about a certain subjective tendency in some reports and decisions. They illustrated this with eight concrete examples. But in his address AC Breen made clear that the sympathetic/critical commentary arises from out of a heart that is stirred with love and care for its big sister.)

We see a large bond of churches living in a very secularised country, one of the most ‘progressive’ countries in the world. Their country has really become multi-cultural, with all its attendant problems.

We see them struggling to remain thankfully reformed. There are streams in the church that cause considerable concern, as our reports make clear. But the bond of churches as a whole indeed cherishes the Scriptures and the reformed confessions.

It is thus sad to see brothers and sisters separating from our sister churches and forming new, ‘continuing’ reformed churches. Was this really necessary? Our report addresses that, and concludes that we would prefer to see these members strengthen our sister churches in the struggle to remain reformed.

We can learn much and receive much from our bigger and older sister. Yet at the same time a younger and smaller sister can hopefully also contribute to their life as reformed churches.

We will have to see what decisions the GS Amersfoort makes, and weigh them in the scales of Scripture and the reformed confessions.

May the LORD use this visit to keep our sister relations fruitful and to keep us both faithful! May these reports serve the truth, the unity and the love we share in our Lord Jesus Christ!

It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.

I am not writing you a new command, but one we have had from the beginning.

I ask that we love one another.

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands.

It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

(from 2 + 3 John)

AC Breen

W Huizinga (reporter)

LETTER FROM DVN (DE VERRE NAASTEN OR THE DISTANT NEIGHBOURS) RE REQUEST FOR AID FOR NORTH EAST INDIA.

9 June, 2005

Mr. Ben Bolt told me that you had approached him with some questions and one was about the situation in North East India. I am working as regional coordinator for DVN and am maintaining the contacts with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of NE India, concerning all cooperation. Among others the rehabilitation after the ethnic clashes in 2003. In 2004 a rehabilitation programme was carried out. As not enough funds were available it could not be carried out fully as planned. I understood from Ben Bolt that you were wondering whether support is still needed. Indeed extra financial support would be very helpful.

Especially in the beginning of the rehabilitation programme, there was a lack of funds and priority was given to direct aid (food). Despite problems however the main purpose was reached and people did resettle back in the villages. However taking up again their agricultural activities for livelihood could not be done as hoped for. Partly due to lack of enough seeds and materials, and also because last year there was heavy rain and the newly planted fields were partly washed away.

This means that their harvest was not enough to survive the next season until the next harvest. For this year 2005, food aid is very necessary to enable the people to stay in their villages, continue to work at the fields and ensure future livelihood possibilities. If no assistance is given, many farmers will have to leave their families temporarily or even leave their places as a family and migrate to nearby towns, to look for work, to earn some daily income. As they can't feed the families at this moment.

So we saw the need of organising a follow-up on the rehab-programme and have planned on giving out food assistance in the months June-September. This is seen as so urgent, that we decided to give this priority. Any contribution from your side will be very much appreciated and be very welcome.

Now other work had to be postponed, until money is available again, as this activity must be done.

Besides that some families still live in temporary shelters and will need better housing. Also the component of water and sanitation was not carried out as hoped for because of lack of money.

As you see assistance is most welcome and I can assure you it will be used for the needy.

If you have any questions, please let me know. I hope your churches can make a contribution for this work and look forward to your reply,

Yours sincerely,

Janneke de Vries-Wiersma
Regional coordination DVN

Copy of this mail is sent to:

Mr. Ben Bolt, deputee BBK, Headoffice RPCNEI for their information

MEETING WITH SECTION 1 OF BBK (GENERAL)

General

It should be reported that during the discussions with sections 1+3 of BBK (with other delegates) that the Canadian delegates requested that the protocol for making submissions on major items before general synods needs to be clarified.

Also, we stressed that we would like to be proactive right at the start on these important issues, instead of being reactive later on. In the past many things that are decided in The Netherlands end up later on in the Book of Praise in Canada. Later on we need to review these changes whether we can adopt them too. We would like to be more proactive.

We reiterated our desire to see more possibility for our delegates to interact with important issues on the floor of general synod. At present, only matters of the BBK's reports are dealt with while delegates attend a general synod. We would like to see this expanded. We have recommended that in a second week gs meet more often and that there be opportunity for delegates to attend and to participate at gs on some of these issues.

BBK (section 1)

After the meeting with section 3 and other delegates we met in an afternoon about general matters re our sister relations. We wanted to use this time for regular matters such as updating each other about our relations.

Korea

We gave a brief outline of our experiences and goals with the Kosin PCK and our recent visits by AMC Bruning and AC Breen to Korea. A Breen related his experiences in Korea. There is a need for catechetical instruction. Some professors encourage it, but it is not a practice in the PCK. The Independent Reformed Church has introduced it with good benefits. We especially pointed to the various streams inside our Korean sister churches and the dangers that we should be alerted to. We informed them of our attempts to have Prof Dr Yoo come to visit us and to speak to us. Also what we learned from Dr SG Hur about the finances and troubles in the PCK re their university and associated hospital were highlighted. The BBK appreciated this information.

Dick VanderZwaag will visit Korea on behalf of the GKV in Aug/Sept/05.

Australia And New Zealand

Rev J Plug will be in August in Australia. A delegate from CGK will come along with him. They would like to meet with us possibly in August.

The delegate from the CGK will visit the CRCA (a sister church of the CGK) and then he and Rev J Plug will go to GKVZ.

They asked us if there was any progress in our contacts with the PCEA. Fortunately, before our departure Rev Veldman informed us that deputies from the PCEA had met with our deputies in Launceston, Tasmania in a face to face meeting. That in itself is progress.

They also asked about progress with the GKVZ and we informed them that two of our deputies just visited the GKVZ (an acquaintance visit, not a visit to their synod). The GKV deputies informed us that the GKVZ will visit Burma re mission work.

Indonesia

They informed us that their deputies, including Rev J A Boersema (he travels there four times per year for church support work and especially theological training), visited Indonesia. They attended the synod of the GGRI. BBK has good relations with GGRI.

The GGRC (on West Timor) has had a split and they were not able to go to their synod, but they knew that our delegates from FRCA did. This is still a matter of concern to them.

Sri Lanka

Wietse Tolsma, on behalf of GKV, gives help to reformed churches in Sri Lanka. They inquired about what we do in Sri Lanka and also in India. We told them about the mission work of FRC Mt Nasura near Chennai, India (not via deputies but done by the local church of Mt Nasura). Also we related how Rev PKA deBoer in his travels to India also frequently came to Sri Lanka and how he became acquainted with reformed churches there. He has written a report, but this matter has not come on the table of our synods.

Continuing GKV

We asked what if anything the GKV has done to renew contacts, discussions, etc with the GKVC. We were told that officially such contacts can only be at local and personal levels since this matter has not been dealt with by one of their general synods.

We then asked if they could give some information about local initiatives to have contact..

Rev Ruurd ter Beek explained how he tried endlessly to approach Rev P van Gurp on issues discussed in *Reformanda*. These initiatives were thwarted and not answered.

The organization, *Reformanda*, took the stand that members from GKV and GKVC could not be together in an interdenominational venture. Thus they brought the organization, *Reformanda*, to an end. The BBK informed us that all the persons working for the magazine, *Reformanda*, must be from the GKVC.

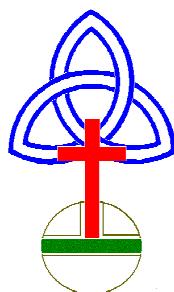
Then the BBK asked us how they could help us with GKVC?

We encouraged them to rewrite the booklet, NOT BEYOND WHAT IS WRITTEN, in certain sections, e.g. liturgy, and, e.g. make the quotes their own instead of quoting various leaders in the GKV. They replied that the booklet was intended for the Dutch situation and not outside its boundaries. Yet they have distributed it, also to us, and thus we asked them to re-write certain sections. This had also been said to them by delegates from Canada and from UGKVA. Make the booklet more informative rather than too polemical and especially redo the section about liturgy.

We ended in prayer and committed our relations to the Head of the churches who gathers, defends and preserves, by his Word and Spirit, his chosen congregation from all over the world in the unity of true faith.

AC Breen

W Huizinga (reporter)



Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia for Relations with Sister Churches

27 May 2005

Address to General Synod of Amersfoort, 2005

Esteemed members of synod, deputies, delegates from all over the world, fellow brothers and sisters,

Calvin – Reformation

You couldn't have chosen a better day to give the floor to international deputies. 27th of May is a historical day, and 2005 is a historical year. It was *27 May 1564*, exactly 441 years ago today, that the LORD took to Himself a man who had devoted himself to keep God's Word because of the *sanctity* of God's church, and to spread the Word because of the *unity* of God's church. We speak about John Calvin, the man of the true ecumene. No, not Calvin Klein (Dutch word for "little"), but Calvin the Great. Neither the Kelvin of the absolute zero, but the Calvin of the absolute "zenith": the Reformed Academy in Geneva, the cradle of Reformed preachers for all of Europe and from there for America, Africa, Asia and Australia. "Where are the countries where Calvin was never known?"¹⁾ And if we talk about Geneva anyway, this year it's exactly 400 years ago that Theodore Beza passed away: the successor of Calvin in Geneva.

Yet it's not Calvin who binds us together today. "According to Calvin's own wish no stone marks his final resting place. No one knows where the great reformer has been buried."²⁾ It's the Lord of the church who brings His children together by the Spirit of the Word, around the Word of the Spirit. The Reformation worldwide can be characterized by obedience to the Word for which Tyndale had to burn, and by binding to the Reformed confessions for which De Bres had to hang. And worldwide Reformation should always be obedience to God's inspired Word, which we *love* so much, and thus also binding to the dynamic confessions which love to keep us to the Word. That's what brings us together at this anniversary.

Schilder – Una Sancta

We already told you that you couldn't have chosen a better day to let deputies from all over the world speak to you. For isn't it striking that exactly 70 years ago today, statements about the church³⁾ were published in the magazine *De Reformatie*. They were written by a man whose gravestone *has* been preserved, but then because of the beautiful words of the King of the church: "that they all may be one...". It was Klaas Schilder who explained this prayer of Christ as a *commandment* for Christians.

And because we will talk with you about Australia anyway, we are not able to get around his Bible meditation "*Una Sancta*". You should know that our fortnightly family journal for the edification of the Scriptural way of life is called: *Una Sancta*, the first two words of "*one holy catholic church*". That's what we believe. Under the title of "*Una Sancta*" Schilder wrote about the tragedy of the two armies, each attacking the other. The one army proclaims a holy *war* in order to protect the sanctity, the *sancta*, of the church. The other army proclaims a holy *peace* in order to promote the unity, the *una*, of the church. But Christ links "*una*" to "*sancta*". Jesus says, *whoever does the will of My Father* – here you see the sanctity, the obedience – *is My brother, My mother, My sister* – here you

see the unity, the community.⁴⁾ Useful words from the past, warning words for today, for you and for those who have seceded from you, and, yes, for all of us.

FRCA

Australia. We don't need to introduce ourselves. We live Down Under your floor. It means we follow your footsteps carefully! And we did not let you forget it. We responded in some detail to the work of your past synod and to the work of your present deputyships. In that we resemble each other; but you don't expect something else from sisters, do you? We down under just don't want to miss a thing, but want to be informed about everything. We hope from the heart that you take our sympathetic-critical responses to heart. Attached to this speech you find a written summary of our concerns. Instead of taking your and our valuable time repeating what we said in our letters to you, we have summarized our concerns. May this assist you, esteemed delegates. We want to see you and us sail on the compass of God's Word and the confession of sola and tota Scriptura. Yes, safely between the Scylla of absolutist sectarianism, which wants us to run onto the rock of the smallest differences, and the Charybdis of relativistic ecumenism with its attraction to the largest numbers.

Speaking about numbers, *The Free Reformed Churches of Australia* (FRCA) are small. Yes, we are humble before God when we realize how great His blessings were during the last 50 years of the FRCA in Australia. The not more than 50 members in the early fifties could grow to 3650 today, of which about 50% are communicant members. The two churches could grow to 12, divided into two classes, with a general synod every three years. Our last General Synod 2003 was held in Rockingham, where we welcomed your deputies the Rev Boersema and Rev Plug. We support the rapidly growing Reformed Church in Madras, India, where Rev Jacob shepherds a missionary congregation. We also stand beside our South African sister churches in their National Reformation project among the disenchanted people in their country. Further, last year Rev Wildeboer was ordained as a missionary for the work in Lae, Papua New Guinea, north of Port Moresby, where Rev S 't Hart preaches the Gospel in service of the Canadian sister churches.

Regarding our contacts with the *Presbyterian Churches of Eastern Australia* (PCEA), our last General Synod Rockingham 2003 declared that, on the basis that we believe the PCEA to be true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, the FRCA will make a sincere effort to re-engage the PCEA in effective discussions about guarding the pulpit and the Lord's Supper table (GS 2003, art 81). Rockingham 2003 also recognized that the *Reformed Churches of New Zealand* (GKVZ) are true churches of Christ and declared that the only remaining difficulty with entering into a sister relation with the GKVZ is their relation with the *Christian Reformed Churches of Australia*, with whom we don't stand on the same foundation at the moment (GS 2003, art 72).

Regarding our task in education, already half a century the LORD has blessed us with Reformed schools. Starting with a few primary schools, today we have increased. Today there are about 7 schools including both primary and secondary schools/colleges. The John Calvin – here he is again – the John Calvin primary schools in the metro Perth go from pre-school to Year 6, middle school includes Years 7-9, and senior high school the Years 10-12. The John Calvin Schools in Albany and Tasmania go from pre-school to Year 10. The Support Office of the John Calvin schools works on two main tasks, namely, curriculum development and teacher training. Concerning the latter, the two-year REDC course (Reformed Education Diploma Course), academically accredited by University of Notre Dame, Fremantle, is growing into a CORE (College of Reformed Education). Further, we support the Theological College in Hamilton, Canada, and are also working towards a library for a possible Theological College of our own in the future. But you will understand that this is not to boast about our activities, because it's Jesus Christ, the King of the church and the Lord of the world, who gathers, defends and preserves His church in His world. That dominates our evangelism, *The outreach*, and our radio work *The Voice of the Church*.

Concerns

Brothers, we want to come back for a moment to our sympathetic-critical responses to your deputies' reports and synod's decisions. We thank you for accepting our submissions as part of your agenda and we hope that our summary of concerns as part of this speech will not be forgotten. In it we have given you an overview of our concerns related to what we believe are subjective inclinations in some of the reports and decisions. For instance in the Report *Marriage and Divorce* your deputies leave too much room for a subjective approach by which we *add* permissible reasons to divorce to the Bible, instead of to *apply* what is revealed in the Bible (by Jesus and Paul). We are of the opinion that the church which *in line* of Scripture makes ethical pronouncements doesn't *shift* the track to extra-Biblical grounds for divorce, but *follows* this track on Biblical grounds so that it doesn't lose the track. Let's hold on to what is represented *within* the canon, not paving the way for an official divorce which hasn't been caused by adultery or the willful departure by an unbeliever. Against what the same deputies say about the Sunday rest and worship as a *further specification* of an existing rule, we insist that the Sunday rest and worship are the *inevitable application* of the whole of the Bible. Further we have expressed our concern regarding the multiplication of hymns which inevitably comes at the cost of the psalms.

But, as said, we do not repeat what we have already said in what you have in front of you. Also time is precious today. On the other hand, you will gladly agree with us that we have to explain a bit to our treasurer if we report that we needed the two tickets for two times 20 hours of flying each for just one speech of not more than 10 minutes. Therefore still a few words about 1905, and if your chairman allows me, also about how the church has been *Protected* and has *Continued* since 1925. Yes, you hear the title of his thorough study about Assen-1926 and the sixties. Ten to one that he will not silence me.

1905

One hundred years ago, in 1905, the General Synod of the United Reformed Churches met nearby in Utrecht. And what happened there still means a lot to us today. Particularly in the light of the Liberation 1944 and the new Liberation today. The pacification-declaration of 1905 gave room to the then so-called A- and B- understanding of baptism. "A" considered the baptized child as sanctified in Christ, whereas "B" presumed the baptized child to be regenerated. Eventually it became "the seed of the covenant by virtue of the promise of God is to be held to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ." B Holwerda, in 1944, considered the 1905-declaration as a "B-formula with an A-foundation."⁵) "1905 could be very broad," he said, "because the churches remained standing on the basis of the confession; then the necessary theological freedom occurred automatically."⁶) The problem arose when, again in Utrecht, the General Synod 1943 took sides with the B-view, and showed the A-partners the door.

Let's learn from it by not unbiblically chopping off what doesn't fit our theology, because then the church becomes a sectarian group which puts at risk its unity – the *una*. But let us not, on the rebound, embrace theologically what doesn't fit Scripture, because the church then becomes a ecumenical movement which puts at risk its sanctity – the *sancta*. We in Australia pray that the Liberated and New Liberated people may find and bind each other on the foundation of the not-bound Scriptures which the Liberated brothers and sisters would keep in 1944 over against unscriptural restraint of conscience (1 Cor 4:6,7). What the Word has to say has the first and last say, and the truth requires precision. The concern of those who have left you should still be a source of concern to you. And this we pray "that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent" (Phil 1:9,10).

What really matters is our answer ("ans-word") to the Word, in particular where the Bible doesn't give the answer directly. What matters is the Scriptural application of Scripture, including what it teaches us about the position and duty of men and women in the church. With their dismaying decision to open the special office of supervision and discipline for women, the *Nederlands*

Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK) have firmly locked the door of dialogue. In this situation it really comes down to an application of what the universally applicable Scriptures teach us about the unique office of women. And that is something else than having women in the special offices. May the stranded NGK-ship convince you all the more of the need today for a Reformed hermeneutics-lighthouse, a lighthouse which also sends out the light of Assen-26!

27 May 1925

It is today, 27 May, exactly 80 years ago that classis Amsterdam questioned dr Geelkerken with regard to his sermon about Lord's Day 3, which he had held a year before⁷). Geelkerken's answers to the classis, in June and September 1925, proved how he expressed his doubts about the actual reality of Gen 2-3 by asking himself whether Gen 2-3 describes facts which have happened in reality, or, God's revelation *about* these facts. He didn't justify his answers to these questions from the text, context and the whole of Scripture. On 4 March 1926 the General Synod of Assen condemned this hermeneutic.

Assen-26 is popular again today, not least because of church unity with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK) who along the rails of their church history don't have a railway station Assen-26. As far as church polity is concerned, they are to be congratulated with that, because a switch has shifted towards hierarchy, has it not? But the train stayed on the hermeneutical rails. Therefore keep on studying Assen-26 together with the CGK, as long as you do not ask too much. For Assen didn't come with a fixed exegesis of Gen 1-3, but rejected an un-reformed hermeneutic which in advance doubted a Scriptural exegesis of Gen 1-3 by leaving room for the possibility that continued scientific understanding would overthrow such an exegesis.

Esteemed delegates, national and international deputies, brothers and sisters present,

Speratus

We really must stop. Our ten minutes are long gone. But that was already the case even before I started, because we are hours ahead of you there in Australia! Aren't we? Anyway, we round off with a few beautiful lines of poetry from our Canadian / Australian Book of Praise, namely from Hymn 24. The poet was condemned as a heretic to die by fire, by the bishop of Olmutz, Germany, but got the opportunity to flee to Wittenberg. This Paul Hoffer, who latinised his German name to Speratus (what also means "hoffer" or "he who hopes") 470 years ago in Wittenberg, where he was allowed to live and work, wrote his famous hymn: *Es ist das Heil uns kommen her von Gnad' und lauter Güte*. Or, as in our Book of Praise: *Salvation unto us has come by God's free grace and favour*. Luther shed tears of joy when he heard it sung by a street singer outside his window in Wittenberg. It was extremely dangerous in those days to sing this hymn! And it's still dangerous in so many countries in the world where millions of people are picked up and finished off because they have in their house the Word of grace in Jesus Christ. But the Word of God is not bound.

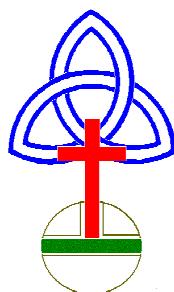
Why do we single out this hymn for attention? To highlight that many hymns in the *Liedboek* have become translated or changed in such a manner as to make them unsuitable for use in church. We suggest to you to concentrate on biblical cantica or to take up our request to make new rhymings of the Psalms that are more Christological, with tunes other than Genevan ones. In this case unfortunately the original German hymn has been changed by Ad den Besten in the Dutch *Liedboek voor de kerken* in such a way that you really couldn't select this song (344). But in German and English it lives on, and hopefully also in Dutch as soon as possible, if a Dutch poet does his or her best. It lives on in the hearts of all those who, together with you, praise the Triune God for His grace in Christ.

All blessing, honour, thanks, and praise
To Father, Son, and Spirit,
The God who saved us by His grace;
All glory to His merit!
O Triune God in heaven above,
Who hast revealed Thy saving love,
Thy blessed Name be hallowed.

Thank you so much!
On behalf of the Australian deputies sister church relations
AC Breen

NOTEN

- 1) K Schilder, "Calvijn als profeet". In: *K Schilder (1890-1952) – Een keuze uit zijn werk* (ingeleid door G Harinck). Kampen 1989, blz 151.
- 2) W.F. Dankbaar, *Calvijn zijn weg en werk*. Nijkerk 1982, blz 210.
- 3) K Schilder, "Stellingen inzake de kerk". In: *K Schilder (1890-1952) – Een keuze uit zijn werk* (ingeleid door G. Harinck). Kampen 1989, blz 63.
- 4) K Schilder, "'Una Sancta'". In: *K Schilder – Schrifttoverdenkingen II*. Goes 1957, blz 127-128.
- 5) RJ Dam, B Holwerda, C Veenhof, *Rondom "1905" – Een Historische Schets*. Terneuzen 1944, blz 102.
- 6) aw blz 138
- 7) see P Niemeijer, *Bewaard en voortgegaan – '1926' en 'jaren zestig': om de helderheid van de Schrift en de binding aan de belijdenis*. Uitgeverij Woord en Wereld 2002 (cahier nr 53).



Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia for Relations with Sister Churches

11 February 2005

Written Response of the Australian deputies to the delegates of General Synod Amersfoort 2005 regarding Dutch Deputies' Reports and Synod's Decisions

Esteemed brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,
members of the General Synod Amersfoort 2005,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you via this writing on matters we feel need to address. At our General Synod Rockingham 2003 we decided to continue sister church relations with you and to continue to discuss matters of concern with your deputies. With thankfulness we declared that you have given evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, the Reformed confessions and the Church Order. It's on the basis of this conviction that we raise some concerns. Please receive our comments in the knowledge that we are in the same mind and mood to praise God's name, to celebrate His day and to promote a Christian lifestyle in which we follow Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. And, please, also see to it that we remain your faithful sister. We too need your ongoing support.

To your deputies we have sent several responses to deputies' reports and previous General Synod's decisions. Please read this written Address in the context of our responses which will be on your Agenda anyway. We grew more and more convinced that you and we need Scriptural principles for Scripture explanation in order to use the freedom of exegesis normatively rather than subjectively. Our experience with the Bible may never substitute our obedience to the Bible. No *sola fide* without *tota Scriptura*. But because of the different redemptive historical layers in Scripture and the difficult application of Scripture we need Reformed hermeneutics (rules for explanation) which guide us to explain and apply Scripture according to Scriptural norms. Otherwise we are inclined to follow our hearts too subjectively. To follow Christ is not the same as to follow our heart.

While studying your deputies' reports and previous General Synod's decisions we found what we believe are subjective inclinations in some of the reports and decisions. We will raise these issues here in order to alert you and ourselves to the inclination to be led too much by our subjective feelings.

1. Regarding the "willful desertion" as possible ground for divorce deputies *Marriage and Divorce* state in their final report to General Synod Amersfoort that Paul indicated in a new situation, arisen in Corinth, how to deal with marriage and divorce. "From that, we may infer that we, as congregation of Christ in a new situation (that is one which is unforeseen in the Bible, or at least not mentioned), may need to determine our position in regard to divorce. There are, therefore, situations in which the church may acquiesce in or approve of a divorce. It happens that you may be placed before a similar choice as is mentioned here: you must choose between one evil and another. In our view, there is no Biblical argument to suggest that such a choice between two evils can only occur in case of adultery or desertion." (p 16)

We find that deputies leave too much room for a subjective approach by which we do not *apply* what is revealed in the Bible (by Jesus and Paul) but *add* permissible reasons to divorce to the Bible.

2. Regarding the foundations of their argument the same deputies *Marriage and Divorce* state that, under the guidance of God's Spirit, the church has come to realize that the day of rest ought no longer to be the seventh day, but the *first* day of the week. There is no such command of God to be found in the Bible. We can say that the church made this decision, in which the honour of God (Christ, who rose from the dead) came first. In a new situation, it sometimes becomes necessary to further specify an existing rule." (p 18)

Again, we find this too subjective an explanation. We believe that the Sunday rest and worship is not a further specification of an existing rule, but the inevitable application of the whole of Scripture. The question of Lord's Day 38 is not "How did the church further specify the fourth commandment?", but "What does God require in the fourth commandment?"

3. Regarding the proposal of Committee Fryslân that a hymn should be in harmony with Scripture and confession (see GS Zuidhorn, art 83) General Synod stated that "the pronouncement that a hymn should not be in conflict with Scripture and the confessions is an invitation to submit objections. Echo Scripture frankly and you are not in conflict with the confession."

We find it hard to understand this because we use our confessions precisely to avoid subjectivism. If the confessions are the virus scan on our computer of hymns, then deletion of it will only be to our hurt. We agree that the confessions do not add to Scripture, but as an alarm bell, they alert us when the Bible is being broken into. Scripture is important. Therefore we are thankful for the confessions, even as we are happy with the alarm in our car. To remove that alarm, reasoning that our car is sufficiently safe, doesn't make sense. Therefore we asked deputies to bring forward our conviction that a good hymn ought not to be in conflict with Scripture and the confessions.

4. Regarding the new 121 hymns from *The Liedboek* GS Zuidhorn made 117 available for use in worship services. After thorough study Synod decided to reject the objections to these hymns (GS Zuidhorn, art 86).

We ask you to consider the effects of singing incomprehensible language. The more obscure the language, the more subjective reading takes place. Which adolescent in the year 2005 understands "Mijn Verlosser hangt aan't kruis, hangt ten spot van snode smaders, hangt er mijnen twegen"? (Hymn 189). First of all my Redeemer doesn't hang on the cross but rules the whole kingdom from heaven. We don't re-live subjectively Christ crucifixion, do we? Further "snode smaders" and "mijnen twegen" are as obscure as "deel ons zelf de voorsmaak mee van der zaalgen sabbatsvree" (Hymn 221).

And please stick to Zuidhorn's decision not to release the proposed *Ordinarium* for publication. It doesn't apply the historical line of salvation in understanding Scripture, but instead often chooses to re-enact the redemptive historical facts, explaining it in an exemplaric, subjective, sometimes mystical manner (think of Cyril of Jerusalem).

Further realise that the translators of the original hymns often have changed the contents. According to translator WJ van der Molen is "de hel teniet gedaan nu onze Heer is opgestaan" (Hymn 200). This suits better our subjective feelings, but the poet Nikolaus Herman (1500-1561) wrote different: Jesus Christ has "überwunden" (defeated) the hell, not nullified it. Hell still exists.

We ask you, in line with Calvin, to put to rhyme Bible texts and passages. It is better to spend time and energy in composing hymns directly derived from Scriptures than in dealing with appeal upon appeal to unbiblical, subjective, thoughts and feelings that have crept in into the hymns. We know that some *Liedboek* hymns can be sung if the congregations, by singing, every time translate the ambiguous sentences in a Reformed way, but always those hymns shall be found inferior to the faithful Cantica which are directly derived from God's own reliable Word.

5. Regarding the second worship service deputies came with a proposed order of worship for the “leerdienst” to the GS Zuidhorn (art 74).

In this proposal we do not find the four main elements (*objective criteria*) around which all the other liturgical elements should be grouped. Based on Scripture (e.g. Acts 2:40-47) and confessions (e.g. Lord's Day 38) the four main elements are:

- ✓ God's Word: reading and preaching
- ✓ two sacraments: baptism and Lord's Supper
- ✓ calling upon the LORD: praise and prayer
- ✓ charity: offertory.

6. Regarding Lord's Supper in crisis and war areas GS Zuidhorn decided to allow military chaplains to conduct the celebration of the Lord's Supper in exceptional circumstances under certain conditions (GS Zuidhorn, art 101).

We are afraid that this decision is prompted more by subjective feelings rather than by earlier made decisions like: “only those who have professed the Reformed faith and are godly in conduct are invited to the Lord's table”. Along the same subjective reasoning we can ask why military personnel would have such a need of the sacrament of Lord's Supper, while the chronically ill or imprisoned do not have such opportunity.

7. Regarding the new Form for Marriage we appreciate the Scriptural teaching about marriage.

But we are afraid that the subjectively uncomfortable feeling with the word “submission” or even the feelings of risk for brute dominion and slavish submission have caused this word to disappear in the Form. We are of the opinion that the new Form could have used the biblical word “submission” with the biblical explanation.

8. Regarding the report on the “HEERlijke dag” we would like to express our appreciation for the good biblical survey of the subject of Sabbath/Sunday.

But we ask you to guard more adequately against the opinion that the Lord's Day is only a gift for which we should express our feelings of thankfulness. We urge you to copy the following words of the deputies' report into the main paragraph 1.1:

- “Lasting *and* new in relation to the fourth commandment is () to *rest* from own work and performance by enjoying God's gifts of grace in His creation and care of His world, as well in redemption and sanctification of His people. It is Christ Who is the way to the rest (Mat 11:28).” (par 11.6, p 54)
- “Out of the question is the “vrijblijvendheid” in relation to spending the Sunday. The two pillars of Sunday celebration remain standing: the assemblies and the rest in order to rejoice in God's great deeds.” (par 18.6, p 90)

These sentences easily fit in par 1.1, third section on *Rest and Celebration*, after the second sentence “That is how the fourth commandment has been applied within the Reformed tradition.” Then we get:

De Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) in Nederland hebben de vrije zondag, zoals die onder Gods voorzienigheid in Europa tot ons is gekomen, steeds met dank aan God aanvaard. Zo is het vierde gebod in de gereformeerde traditie toegepast. Blijvend èn nieuw in relatie tot het vierde gebod is het rusten van eigen werk en prestatie door te genieten van Gods genadegaven zowel in schepping en verzorging van zijn wereld, als in verlossing en heiligmaking van zijn volk. Christus is het die de weg naar de rust is (Mat. 11:28). Er is geen sprake van vrijblijvendheid met betrekking tot de besteding van de zondag. De twee pijlers van de zondagsviering blijven recht overeind: de samenkomsten en de rust om je te verheugen in Gods grote daden.

Nu op zondag door de wetgever meer ruimte wordt geboden om te werken en die dag daardoor als dag van de Heer minder beschermd wordt, willen wij publiek en eensgezind, met woord en daad, getuigen:

(the new part is underlined)

Finally, if we may, we fully support the proposal of the *Particuliere Synode* of Gelderland that General Synod Amersfoort declares the following (see *De Reformatie*, Jan 29, p 300):

In obedience to Scripture, in a faithful response to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in communion with the instruction of the church concerning the meaning of the Sabbath according to the fourth commandment as expressed in Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Reformed churches ascribe the special value of a day of rest to the Sunday.

Esteemed brothers,

Again, we raise these matters from the heart in order to support you in your church work in God’s kingdom, and to challenge you to make decisions which are fully based on Scripture and confessions. We hope that this modest contribution of ours may convince you that we too are eager to follow Christ in trust and obedience. And this we pray that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the *diapheronta*, the things that really matter (Phil 1:9), and that you may apply them in a life of thankfulness. May the God of peace be with you all (Phil 4:8,9).

With Christian greetings,
on behalf of the FRCA Deputies for Sister Churches

W Huizinga, Convener
AMC Bruning, Secretary

TEXT OF THE APPEAL OF THE GENERAL SYNOD OF DE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN (VRIJGEMAAKT) IN NEDERLAND, HELD AT AMERSFOORT, 2005, TO THE “NEWLY LIBERATED” AS RECORDED IN THE ACTS, ARTICLE 01.03.02

Official Translation

To:

The general synod of the churches who will assemble around October 15 in Marienberg,

Clerk of the Reformed Church Marienberg

G. H. Plaggenmars

Hesselinkkamp 11

7692 AS Marienberg

Esteemed sirs and brothers,

We, as General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands – Amersfoort-Centrum 2005, kindly request your attention.

Our Synod was the first after the division of ecclesiastical ways between you and us in 2003 and the following years. You will understand that from the very beginning of our meeting, this break in our fellowship has been in view. During the time we met it has been directly discussed more than once.

For years we have broken bread together and drunk from one cup, the cup of the new covenant in Christ’s blood. Together we have been heartily encouraged by the gospel and by God’s covenant. We stood shoulder to shoulder in all activities in God’s kingdom. Together we have shared the joy of return to God’s Word and have wanted to build God’s spiritual house together. Together we have recognised heresy and sin and fought against it. The LORD had given us to each other. That was how it was and that was how we experienced it. One in kneeling before God’s Word and in commitment to the confession; one in looking forward to the Marriage feast of the Lamb. For this reason it feels even worse than an amputation that we are no longer united around pulpit, baptism font and at the Lord’s table. It is a disunity which grieves the LORD and which damages our witness to the world. This motivates us as synod to address you.

In recent times, reactions to your withdrawal have taken place in many ways and on many levels. Frequently it became obvious how difficult it is to express feelings adequately and to keep demonstrating the mind of Christ. This was not always done successfully. In this, our appeal as synod, we seek your hearts. But we realise that it will not be easy to reach each other. On both sides interference and resistance can disturb the exercise of contact. And yet we write you this letter. For our heart goes out to you and we are grieved about our damaged family relationships and personal friendships. Above all we see a calling from God to restore brotherly unity. We are writing our letter in dependence on and in trust in the Lord as the only One who is able to conquer our powerlessness and to restore unity between you and us.

Attacked and vulnerable

We are of the opinion that there is much within the Reformed Churches for which the apostles taught us to thank the Lord (see e.g. 1 Cor. 1:4-9). We think of what Christ and His Spirit are bringing about in the churches in terms of faith and obedience, in love for the Lord and dedication to his kingdom, in willingness to make sacrifices and to show hospitality to our neighbours.

This in no way allows us to think we ‘have arrived’. We realise all too well who we are in ourselves. And then we are not looking at a few people or at tendencies in our midst. We then refer to all of us together and each one personally. Humiliation does not suit us merely because of certain sins but because of our sinful nature. We see how Satan aims arrows at the heart of us all and at that of our children. We confess that none of us are immune to sin and heresy. We are all, more than we would wish, children of our age and have to fight against the urge for autonomy which nestles deep within us. We discover in ourselves our Western desires for rest and ease and enjoyment, desires which undermine our readiness to offer and to serve. Insights confront us and rise up within us which we find difficult to assess in the light of Scripture. In a society with so much secularisation, emptiness, and lust for pleasure, we see ourselves facing challenges, questions and dangers, which we as mere human beings are not strong enough to withstand. There is absolutely no reason to be self assured. We are nothing without the blood of Christ and the power of his Spirit.

Catholic Reformed

In the last years, besides you, others have also left us, be it individually, because we were ‘too reformed’ and we have allegedly ‘regulated too much’. In your case, in the joint and public ‘Act of Liberation or Return’, expressed as a complaint in our direction, we talk about a quite different of grievance.

In your judgment we have become a pluralistic church, and reformed doctrine is no longer safe in our midst. Your ‘Act of Liberation or Return’ is a call for us to repent and return. In answer to this we feel the need to make clear what we stand for.

1. We confess the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures. For this reason it affects us deeply when in your ‘Act of Liberation or Return’ you speak about synodical decisions made by our churches which are ‘directly contrary to the Word of our God’. In the requests for revision which we were given to deal with, we have not been able to find evidence of inconsistency with God’s Word or with the confessions of the church in any synod-decision. Nor have we as Reformed Churches declared that we no longer want to submit ourselves to the Holy Scriptures nor want to be bound to the reformed confession any more. On the contrary, God’s Word and the confessions of the church are continually confessed as norm and maintained as our concrete standard in all our decisions.
2. We want to discover what God’s will is in all sorts of circumstances. We are out to do maximum justice to God’s Word. However, we do not want to clothe all our conclusions about various issues with divine authority or with the authority of Scripture. In the way in which we humans work out and make concrete what the whole of Scripture offers us, we cannot deny cultural limitations and factors. Hence, reformation is for us not always ‘proceeding further’ in absolutising certain conclusions, which drawn from God’s Word, conclusions which are always limited, but rather it means ‘turning back’ to God’s Word in all its breadth. The treasure and the strength of the church does not lie in drawing more and more conclusions and applications which we attribute to God’s Word (which conclusions and applications can be merely human and one-sided), but in the Word of God itself.
3. We are churches of the Reformation. Typical of the Reformation was that it bound itself only to the Word of God (arts. 7 and 32, Belgic Confession). Alongside the Word of God – and the confession which echoes and summarises this Word – we have all sorts of agreements, regulations and church pronouncements. Just as you, we see the importance of these. They serve to help build up and govern the church. God is after all not a God of disorder. He calls for peace by means of justice and by clarity and by faithfulness. But no matter how important these specific statements and agreements may be, they are not of the same order as God’s Word and the confessions of the church. They are not

indispensable assurances upon which our salvation depends. This salvation is fixed in Christ and in His Spirit.

4. Commitment to the reformed confessions is, according to our conviction, fully a catholic issue. We want to measure our church life against this standard. We therefore take it seriously that in our commitment to the reformed doctrine, we have to do with our 'common, undoubted Christian faith', the faith of the church of all places and all ages. But in no way do we want to make our boundaries of our foundations narrower than this catholic, reformed commitment (cf. the title of the brochure which our deputies for sister relations wrote: *Not beyond what is written*, referring to 1 Cor. 4:6, an important text in the days of the Liberation). In this way we hold on to what belongs to the breadth and height and depth of the love of Christ.

5. Throughout the centuries God's people have always been an attacked and sinful people. This has never been a justification for the servants of God to leave the flock of the LORD. On the contrary, someone like Elijah was sent back to fulfil his task in the Israel of Ahab. Especially in the struggle against sin and heresy, do we in the church prove that we are each other's shepherds. Life in the church does not only take in days of sunshine when there is no danger or struggle. The Lord Jesus did not write off the people amongst whom He did His work, but went to battle with the devil for 'the lost sheep of the house of Israel'. He who is the Good Shepherd, came to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance. Only when we should be cast out or forced to sin, is there a limit: obey God more than man.

6. In the struggle for reformation and church recovery, we as reformed people, under the claim of the Word of God, have always emphasised the need to exercise patience. Reformed people have always pointed to God's patience with the 'bruised reed' and the 'smoking flax' (Is. 42:3), and have always placed their trust in the living Christ and the work of his gospel. Not in order to justify sin but in order to conquer it in the power and way of the Spirit (cf. the fourth in the row of decisions from our synod following the recommendations of the deputies for 'marriage and divorce'). This gave us mercy, decisiveness and trust despite all weakness of faith and all the evil desires of the flesh which are left in us.

7. Our ideal has never been in the peace of the 'conventicle' (the small group of true believers in the church) nor in a corps d'élite of like-minded people. The church of Christ exists thanks to God's grace to sinners, recognises a variety of gifts, is characterised by love and care for all called by Christ, and commits itself to reformation and restoration of the church where necessary. That is how we want to be church. We refuse to change into a mere group or conventicle.

Appeal

We hope in this way to have indicated how we want to be and to remain catholic and reformed. We appeal to you to accept us in these reformed intentions and to be prepared to speak with us openly from heart to heart. Out of love for the catholic character of the faith of the church. Out of love for the Lord of the church, our good Shepherd who is a Redeemer of sinners and Protector of a people who in and of themselves are vulnerable, sinful and unwilling.

What a gift it would be if we could meet each other again in the unity of true faith. We believe that words of Scripture such as 1 Corinthians 3 (about the temple of God), 1 Corinthians 12 (about the body of Christ), and Ephesians 4 (about the unity and mutual building of the church) obligate us to this.

In the world

We do not appeal to you on the basis of the conviction that everything in our church is good, and that there is ‘peace without danger’. For that is not so. We do not want to appear better than we are. In ourselves we are vulnerable. Many submissions and deputies’ reports tabled at synod witnessed to the spiritual struggle against more than flesh and blood. We received requests for clear statements on the subject of marriage and divorce, of pastoral dealings with brothers and sisters who are sexually attracted to the same sex, and of observance of the Sunday. The report from the deputies for marriage and divorce, against the current way of living to which we also are exposed, wrote emphasising the need for a style of living which is characterised across the whole breadth by maximal dedication to God, on the basis of the rich mercy in Christ, and by readiness to carry a cross and to serve from the perspective of the coming kingdom of God. It was pointed out how the spirit of individualism and relativism, of materialism and desire for pleasure also has its influence amongst us. In discussions and reports about issues surrounding church polity and church order, it became clear how careful we have to be of the dangers ,on the one side, of anxiously desiring to regulate things, and on the other hand, of the danger of indifference to ecclesiastical agreements.

Via the deputies for ‘mission, ecumenical help and training’ we received a document (*The Candlestand Statement*) containing ‘reformed considerations over the charismatic movement’, which, according to the writers, also has direct relevance for current discussions in The Netherlands. In our letter to the *Christelijke Gereformeerde* churches we wrote: ‘we know, above all, if we talk of the developments in our churches, that you and other reformed churches are anxiously watching to see how we, as churches, approach and deal with the issues which face us in these days, on the basis of the Word of God. We see it as important not to walk away from these issues, but we do realise that we find ourselves in a process which knows countless risks and dangers, and that, despite robust words sometimes, we have little strength. We understand in this situation that we cannot always ask you and others for a blank cheque expressing your support’.

But in all this we also know our Saviour. He prayed that his Father would not take us out of the world but, in the midst of that world, would keep us in his holy name (John 17). We know that we are compelled by Him to be reformed in the midst of the world which is His, and in a time which is not removed from his authority and care. We do not call 2005 and years that may yet come ‘annus Domini’ for nothing. We cannot withdraw ourselves from the challenges, questions and dangers which confront us today, nor do we want to. We want to confront ourselves with these things honestly and openly. Our discussions about the so called missionary deputyships, about the relationship with our government and about the room we want to give to the work of spiritual care in the armed services, penitentiary institutions and institutes for care, made us deeply aware of our place in society and of the public nature of our confession. Not only in our worship services, but throughout our entire lives, we want to serve the Lord and follow our Redeemer.

We believe that you cannot avoid the questions of our time either. You too, want to be reformed in a world which is de-christianised, and in many ways empty. What a gift it would be if we could support each other in this - you with your gifts and we with ours. The Word of God has, after all, not only reached you or us and will not stop with you or us. It is the Word that is also intended for the 21st century, for the people of today, for the people who sit in your and our church pews.

Appendices

Examining our agenda, we found various items which touched on and referred back to the issues which, according to your ‘Act of Liberation or Return’ and according to the brochure *Let us repent*, were the reasons for you to break church fellowship with us.

We are sending you the decisions which we took about issues which you mention or are referred to in your 'Act of Liberation or Return': those concerning the fourth and seventh commandments and about church unity.

We also are adding the decision about the administration of sacraments in the armed services, mentioned on pages 84f. of the brochure *Let us repent*. We have to say that we do not recognise ourselves in the image you painted of us in the press concerning how our decision was taken. We hope that it will be clear from our decisions that we wanted to make them on the basis of Scripture.

In your 'Act of Liberation or Return' and on page 84 of the brochure *Let us repent*, various liturgical decisions are also mentioned. Of these we are sending you the decisions pertaining to the 'ordinarium' church service. As far as receiving the blessing from the ruling elder who leads a church service is concerned, we note that since the Synod of Heemse 1984-85 it has been assumed that there is no evidence to support the idea that the giving of the blessing must be reserved for the minister of the Word (*Acta*, art. 70, decision 2, ground a).

The Synod of Zuidhorn 2002-2003 indicated that liturgical decisions in particular have been the reason for much concern. We realise this and we are sad about this too. But no matter how important it is, we do not see it as reason to justify church division. In this too we ask you to do us justice. There are differences of opinion about new hymns and about concrete liturgical considerations amongst us, but we are convinced that the procedure as such to make a new selection of hymns cannot be called careless or contrary to God's Word. The authority of God's Word is explicitly expressed in the criteria for church hymns. From the standpoint of carefulness, hymns have to have a qualified majority support in order to be released for use after the first reading. The possibility of 'appeal' in line with the 'unless' of Church Order article 31 has not been diminished in any way.

Also, with regard to the other points of liturgy, the teaching of Scripture is sought and a way is sought that the church of today can use the heritage of the church of all ages. The various synod decisions and deputy reports witness, in our judgment, to this intention.

As appendices we also send:

- a. the brochure *Not beyond what is written. Do the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands not hold to Scripture and Confession?*; our deputies for sister relations reported to us that the churches abroad with whom we have relations have been informed of the church developments via this brochure. By means of this letter, we want to avoid that our deputies in overseas relations speak about you, without we ourselves addressing you.
- b. the appeal to you from our sister churches in Sumba (de Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia di Nusa Tenggara Timur).

Request

We ask of you and your ecclesiastical assemblies to consider this appeal before the face of God. We are prepared to explain our appeal to your synod at any time. We have given authority to our deputies for church unity (assisted by the moderamen of the General Synod of Amersfoort Centre) to do this.

We would be grateful if you would be prepared to talk with us. To do this, you can make contact with our deputies for church unity (address: Mr. K. Mulder, De Meesterproef 22, 3813 GL Amersfoort). They have been authorised to speak with you by means of an agenda which, of course, would be drawn up mutually, in order to make recommendations to our next synod. If necessary, they can request the assembling of an extraordinary synod.

In all sincerity, we express the hope that our separation shall not turn out to be permanent, but that we will search for and find each other as Christians and as churches.

We sincerely pray for God's blessing over you and the wisdom of His Spirit in your considerations and decisions.

With sincere brotherly greetings,

On behalf of the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, Amersfoort Centre 2005,

P. Niemeijer, chairman; H. Pathuis, 2nd clerk.

P.S. This appeal is being sent by us to all brothers and sisters who have left us. We do so via their consistories. Also, we send it to the upcoming general synod that will assemble on October 15.

5.6 Deputies Report on Dutch decisions regarding Fourth Commandment and Sunday to Synod West Kelmscott 2006 DV

5.6.1 Mandate

Synod Rockingham 2003 Article 41 made the following decision regarding our sister Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland in relation to the fourth commandment:

Decision:

To instruct deputies to:

1. Stay informed about the developments and decisions in the RCN with respect to the 4th commandment re the Sunday.
2. To interact with the Dutch deputies on the matter.

Grounds:

1. Our correspondence and discussions with the RCN on this matter have resulted in some progress. Thus the discussions, according to the rules, should be continued, especially with a view to the Dutch deputyship studying this matter.

5.6.2 Short history

On June 2 1996 Rev. D. Ophoff of Nieuwegein (Utrecht) preached on the fourth commandment (LD 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism). A church member expressed concern about certain elements in the sermon. The church council, however, did not share these concerns. The member then appealed to Classis Utrecht. Classis Utrecht turned down the appeal. The matter was then appealed to Particular Synod Utrecht and it upheld the appeal. The matter was then appealed by the church of Nieuwegein to General Synod Leusden which upheld the decisions of the church council of Nieuwegein and Classis Utrecht and rejected the decision of PS Utrecht.

Synod Leusden 1999 stated in its decisions, amongst others, that:

- in the sermon of Rev. Ophoff on LD 38 the importance of the worship services and the space which should be kept for these clearly came to the fore;
- that, however, in the sermon it is insufficiently clear that LD 38 speaks of a command, namely especially on the day of rest to diligently attend the worship services;
- that the view of Rev. Ophoff (that the Sunday as day of rest is not founded on a Divine command) is not condemnable.

In Ground 4 Leusden regrets that Rev. Ophoff's sermon has lead to the understanding that the Sunday is merely a human institution. Leusden states:

- "The sermon-passage referred to can, however, also be understood in the sense that the Christian church in her believing answer to the guidance of God's Spirit has given the Sunday the special value of day of rest, following the example of the Israelite Sabbath. There always has been room for this approach (namely that the Sunday as day of rest is founded upon a responsible choice of the Christian Church) in the Reformed tradition (cf J Douma, The Ten Commandments, 1996 (1992), esp p 145)."

General Synod Zuidhorn 2002 decided not to revise Leusden's decision 'that it is not condemnable to say that the Sunday as day of rest is not founded upon a (direct) Divine commandment'. Synod emphasized (in Ground 4 of its decision):

- "the express command to devote the day to worship in such a way 'that on it men rest from all servile labour (except those required by charity and present necessities), and likewise from all such recreations as to prevent the worship of God'."

Therefore Synod Zuidhorn also decided to establish a deputy-ship 'Fourth Commandment and Lord's Day' (Acts art. 13) and to instruct deputies:

- to serve the churches with a study in which a positive point of view is offered in regards to ethical behaviour as believers and churches in the 21st century in regards to celebrating the Sunday as Day of the Lord in the light of the 4th commandment.

In the grounds for this decision Synod states:

- The Christian church learned, under God's providence, already centuries ago to value and to celebrate the Lord's Day as a complete day of rest. The recognition of the value of this precious gift is diminishing, now that government and society in the Netherlands have lost the Christian label they carried for many centuries. As a consequence the general acceptance of the Sunday as a day of rest has suffered. The erosion of the Sunday-rest is also among Christians increasingly apparent, leading to a decline in the heartfelt motivation and room for the worship service. Renewing and developing the churches' conviction on this point is therefore of utmost importance, so that the churches, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the light of God's Word can address these developments, now and in the future, and can so assist and guide the believers.
- It became apparent that certain centuries-old differences of opinion about the doctrine re the 4th commandment and the Lord's Day could not be resolved yet. It is good that the churches do not just draw that conclusion and leave it at that. Overcoming these unresolved dilemmas will improve the reflection on and the power of the Christian life in the churches. To that end the churches must cooperate in the development, formulation and promotion of a positive Scriptural viewpoint regarding the Sunday-rest in the 21st century in the light of the 4th commandment.

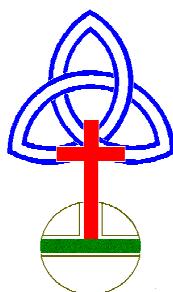
It is clear that Synod Zuidhorn did not allow the opinion that the Lord's Day is no longer a day of rest. It may be so that there are those who wished that Synod Zuidhorn had decided to choose for one approach to the 4th commandment (Sunday as day of rest is based on a direct Divine command), rejecting the other approach (Sunday as day of rest is founded upon the responsible choice of Christ's church based on the Scriptures). At this stage Synod decided not to do this, but to install a deputy-ship to study and discuss these matters in order to serve the churches with advice based on Scripture and Confessions.

5.6.3 Dutch deputies Fourth Commandment and the Sunday

In October 2004 the Dutch deputies *Fourth Commandment and the Sunday* came with a substantial Report: *Zondag, HEERlijke dag*. Chapter 1 contains an Instructional section (1.1) and practically ethical guidelines (1.3). Chapters 2-10 give a Biblical-theological explanation, chapters 11-13 is an ethical section and chapters 14-18 a historical section.

5.6.4 Australian Response to the Dutch Report

The FRCA deputies for Relations with Sister Churches submitted the following Response to the Report *Zondag, HEERlijke dag*.



Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia for Relations with Sister Churches

17 February 2005

Response to the Report of the Dutch deputies Fourth Commandment and the Sunday, titled “Zondag, HEERlijke dag”

Esteemed brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

We fully agree with what you have written on page 89 and 90: “The conclusion is univocal: in the Reformed Churches the Sunday applies as day of rest.” And: “No matter how you approach Sunday rest, both lines take their starting point in a *commandment* to rest on Sundays.” We like to express our appreciation for the good biblical survey of the subject of Sabbath/Sunday. The biblical-theological description compels admiration because of its good explanation of Scripture and the fourth commandment. Please receive our constructive criticism within the context of this recognition.

Response to chapter 1

The Instruction section (1.1) of the deputies’ report should guard more adequately against the opinion that the Lord’s Day is only a gift (not a requirement) to be thankfully accepted, and also counteract the opinion that it is merely a choice of Christ’s church. The Lord’s Day as day of rest is founded upon God’s teaching in His Word which the NT church understood when it set apart the first day of the week. The rest on Sunday is based on the Christological application of the 4th commandment. Lord’s Day 38 asks “What does God *require* in the 4th commandment?” To celebrate the Feast-day as God’s gift is required. The deputies’ report even refers to this as a commandment of God (for example, in sections 1.3.2-1.3.4 and 1.3.9). The church, comparing Scripture with Scripture, understood that what Leviticus 23:3 says about the solemn rest and holy convocation today applies to the Sunday in a Christological way (Acts 20:7ff; 1 Cor 16:2). We ask deputies to stress this more explicitly in the Instruction section (1.1) and the Practical Help section (1.3) of their report.

The Christian church in its believing answer to the guidance of the Holy Spirit has given the Sunday the special value of a complete day of rest following the example of the Israelite Sabbath. Deputies write in par 18.4 that ‘Leusden explained that there was always room in the church for brothers and sisters who defended the generally acknowledged and defended Sunday rest c.q. prohibition of labour on *slightly different grounds* than directly from the 4th commandment.’ There are two lines: 1) Sunday as day of rest is based on a direct Divine command; 2) Sunday as day of rest is founded upon the responsible choice of Christ’s church based on the Scriptures. Deputies write in par 18.5 and 18.6: “No matter how you approach Sunday rest, both lines take their starting point in a *commandment* to rest on Sundays. () The two pillars of Sunday celebration remain standing: the assemblies and the rest in order to rejoice in God’s great deeds”. In paragraph 3 of our next section

we will quote from sections in your deputies' report which more adequately stress this element of commandment. We suggest to deputies to use these quotations in their paragraphs 1.1 and 1.3.

Recognising the deterioration of the Sabbath day in today's world (see, for example what is mentioned in 1.2.3.3 of the deputies' report) deputies would do well to emphasise more "the express command to devote the day to worship in such a way that on it men rest from all servile labour (except those required by charity and present necessities), and likewise from all such recreations as to prevent the worship of God" (GS Zuidhorn's decision, art 52, ground 4).

The following statements leave room for more Sunday work:

- "Hence we urge each other to keep this day as free as possible from labour and other activities which will prevent us from worshipping the Lord and assembling as congregation." (1.1)
 - *What is meant with "as free as possible"? The impression should be avoided that Sunday rest functions as the means to create room for the worship service (see GS Zuidhorn, art 52, ground 4).*
- "When due to economic and societal pressure Sunday-labour increases, it is good that the congregation supports those who, on account of their labour, must work." (1.3.10)
 - *We miss further explanation of "economic and societal pressure" and we find "on account of their labour" unnecessarily vague.*
- "Our homes need the support of household rules to find rest and peace on the day of the Lord. () Household rules are agreements which are taught to children as a way of personally giving form to the Sunday-rest. Thus the younger generation can learn how to give shape to Sunday-rest in a responsible way.
 - *We miss the link between household rules as agreements and the express command to devote the day to worship in such a way that we rest.*

We ask deputies to stress more explicitly what we read in Matthew 12:1-4 regarding works permitted on the Day of rest and worship, i.e. works of necessity, of worship and of mercy. Works of *necessity*: David, the anointed king of the LORD, ate the showbread in time of emergency when Saul tried to kill him (verse 3ff). Works of *worship*: the priests couldn't keep the Sabbath rest (verse 5ff) because of temple service duties (cf Numbers 28:9), but they were blameless. Works of *mercy*: healing (verse 9ff), because it's always lawful to do well on the Sabbath.

Response to chapter 2-13

We like to express our appreciation for the good biblical survey of the subject of Sabbath/Sunday. The biblical-theological description is admirable because it gives a good explanation of the strong biblical line from the Sabbath to the Lord's Day. Please receive our criticism within the context of this recognition.

1. We find that not enough attention is paid to the whole sabbatical system. Obviously, the weekly Sabbath would receive central attention, but it needs to be understood in the context of the whole system of Sabbaths. This system really characterised the economic and social fabric of Israel. When Jesus came He called attention to this sabbatical system, crowned by the Year of Jubilee or *the acceptable year of the Lord* (Luke 4:16-21). This is what Jesus proclaimed to the people. The Scriptures, e.g. Isaiah 61:1,2, became fulfilled in their hearing. Jesus brings the fulfilment. Jesus brought the setting free, the healings, and the release from the effects of sin and Satan. So this system of Sabbaths, all based on the number 7, was a system which proclaimed and produced freedom (see also James 1:25 – the perfect law of *liberty*): freedom from debts; freedom from slavery; freedom for the land; freedom for the original owners of land.

By following this line in its biblical explanation the report would also add in its ethical section significant contributions about Sunday being a celebration of our freedom in

Christ (12.2 for example). With this the report would follow what itself says in section 3.1 about the word *Sabbath*. JP Lettinga (1999), in line with JL Koole (1983), explained that the word which we translate with *Sabbath* derives from the Akkadian word *šabpattu* which indicated the 15th day, that is the day of full moon. The celebration of this 15th day, which was the day of the exodus from Egypt was the celebration of the liberation of the house of bondage. Your report rightly parallels “*Pascha – sabbat*” with “*Pasen – zondag*”. The Sabbath refers to the day of the exodus (“*Pascha*”); the Sunday refers to the day of Christ’s resurrection (“*Pasen*”). Sabbath was the celebration of God’s deliverance from the slavery of Egypt; Sunday is the celebration of God’s deliverance from the slavery of sin.

2. There is a refrain that we do not like so much. It is this refrain: the NT does not state that assemblies on the first day of the week are connected to the fourth commandment (8.0, 8.5, 10.5, 14.4); and the NT does not mention the fourth commandment directly (8.0, 10.2-10.4, 10.6). We could also say that the NT does not say explicitly that the animal sacrifices are to be stopped. Hebrews makes it clear that the sacrifice of Jesus has fulfilled these OT sacrifices. Well, in the same way does the work of Jesus not fulfil the rest and freedom God gave in the OT? Do we need a chapter and verse for that? Does Paul not adequately teach it in his letter to the Galatians, for instance?

We think that the above-mentioned refrain sets the scene in which the conclusion can be reached that *the church* and not *the Lord* chose the first day of the week as the day for assembling in worship. This is said explicitly at the bottom of p 59 in section 13.1 (The congregation chooses the Sunday). We believe that the church saw the fulfilment of Scripture (as Jesus taught them to see such fulfilment of Scripture after he rose from the dead for instance – Luke 24). It was not the choice of the church, since we never read that. No proof is offered. Instead, we would claim God’s fulfilling in Jesus Christ of the rest men need, and long for, determined this transition. Even as the believers had to learn gradually that the gospel would go to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews, so also the transition from Sabbath to Sunday was gradual since the church had to learn to see how God gives us rest in Christ crucified but risen. The report does acknowledge that this was gradual, as a result of Christ’s resurrection and under the leading of the Holy Spirit, but in the end it is the church that decides. We find this is not a correct characterisation. God sends his Son, not to destroy the law, the fourth word, but to fulfil it. As a result the day of worship changes. This should be attributed to God and his fulfilling work, rather than to the choice of the church. Of course the church must respond in faith to what Jesus and his inspired apostles taught, and learn to adjust from Sabbath to Sunday. But please do not attribute the change to people. Of course, this refrain will justify Leusden’s conclusion that *there has always been room in the reformed tradition for the idea that the Sunday as a rest-day is founded on a responsible choice of the Christian Church*. Yet it is founded on statements without proof, and it bypasses the obvious point of how the church learned to accept that we enjoy on Sunday, the LORDly day, the fulfilled rest we have in Christ.

3. We ask deputies to integrate essential parts of the following quotations of their report, cp 2-13, in its foundational part, sections 1.1 and 1.3. We stress that we agree with the following statements and we are of the opinion that the foundational part will be more balanced if it contains these crucial elements.

- “Jesus reminds his listeners of the creation of man, and calls Himself the Son of Man. This encompasses a reference to Adam. The Sabbath is for the benefit of man. When Jesus compares Himself with Adam, and moreover calls Himself Lord of the Sabbath, then it cannot be so that the Day of Rest as such would disappear.” (8.2.c; p 35)

- “When Jesus calls Himself Lord also over the Sabbath, then it is not expected that the day of the LORD and the day of rest – the purpose of the 4th commandment – will disappear.” (8.5.2; p 38)
- “The shadow of the Old Testament has been replaced by the reality of Christ. Paul’s instruction corresponds with the Gospel in which Christ manifested Himself to be the heart of the Sabbath.” (9.2.3; p 41)
- “The commandment to love God, in which also the 4th is summarised, will continue to exist. The new covenant cannot be poorer than the old. Resting from daily labour and doing Christ’s work should receive room, also in the new covenant.” (10.4.4; p 46)
- “What remains in the 4th commandment of Sinai is the portrayal of God’s rest which we may enter through faith in Christ and the expectation of His kingdom, and which we may celebrate in the assembly of the congregation.” (10.4.5; p 46)
- “Lasting *and* new in relation to the 4th commandment is () to rest from own work and performance by enjoying God’s gifts of grace in His creation and care of His world, as well in redemption and sanctification of His people. It is Christ Who is the way to the rest (Mat 11:28).” (11.6; p 54)
- “For only the miracle of Easter, the resurrection of Christ, Who broke the ban of our sin and the doom of death, can explain why not the seventh day, but the first day of the week became so important for the following of Christ.” (11.6; p 53)
- “No matter how you approach Sunday rest, both lines take their starting point in a *commandment* to rest on Sundays.” (18.5; p 90)
- “Out of the question is the “vrijblijvendheid” in relation to how we spend the Sunday. The two pillars of Sunday celebration remain standing: the assemblies and the rest in order to rejoice in God’s great deeds.” (18.6; p 90)

We suggest that you copy the following quotations in the main paragraph 1.1:

- ✓ “Lasting *and* new in relation to the fourth commandment is () to *rest* from own work and performance by enjoying God’s gifts of grace in His creation and care of His world, as well in redemption and sanctification of His people. It is Christ Who is the way to the rest (Mat 11:28).” (par 11.6, p 54)
- ✓ “Out of the question is the “vrijblijvendheid” in relation to spending the Sunday. The two pillars of Sunday celebration remain standing: the assemblies and the rest in order to rejoice in God’s great deeds.” (par 18.6, p 90)

These sentences easily fit in par 1.1, third section on *Rest and Celebration*, after the second sentence “That is how the fourth commandment has been applied within the Reformed tradition.” Then we get:

De Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) in Nederland hebben de vrije zondag, zoals die onder Gods voorzienigheid in Europa tot ons is gekomen, steeds met dank aan God aanvaard. Zo is het vierde gebod in de gereformeerde traditie toegepast. Blijvend èn nieuw in relatie tot het vierde gebod is het rusten van eigen werk en prestatie door te genieten van Gods genadegaven zowel in schepping en verzorging van zijn wereld, als in verlossing en heiligmaking van zijn volk. Christus is het die de weg naar de rust is (Mat. 11:28). Er is geen sprake van vrijblijvendheid met betrekking tot de besteding van de zondag. De twee pijlers van de zondagsviering blijven recht overeind: de samenkomsten en de rust om je te verheugen in Gods grote daden.

Nu op zondag door de wetgever meer ruimte wordt geboden om te werken en die dag daardoor als dag van de Heer minder beschermd wordt, willen wij publiek en eensgezind, met woord en daad, getuigen:

(the new part is underlined)

Esteemed brothers,

Receive our comments in the knowledge that we want to maintain sister relations on the same basis of God's Word and our Reformed confessions. We wish you all God's indispensable blessing to fulfill your task in His kingdom. Let the LORD work in you through His Holy Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath. May every Sunday be a *HEERlijke dag* of God's deliverance in Jesus Christ!

With brotherly greetings,

On behalf of the deputies of the FRCA,
Rev W Huizinga, Convener,
AMC Bruning, Secretary

5.6.5 General Synod Amersfoort 2005 about the Fourth Commandment and Sunday

GS Amersfoort decided:

1. To disallow the objections against GS Zuidhorn which disallowed the objections against a phrase in a sermon, because no new arguments were brought forward.

Having said that, Synod pronounced to move on in order to come with positive statements about the Lord's Day and decided:

2. To commend the statement of pastoral guidance "Sunday, *LORDly Day*" (attached below), to the attention of the churches with the aim:
 - a. to give it a place in their instruction within the congregation, and in their witness to the neighbour and to society;
 - b. to endeavour, while looking upward in prayer to God, to come to renewed conviction regarding the celebration of the Sunday and its place within a Christian style of life as a whole.

Grounds:

1. Synod Zuidhorn explicitly instructed the Deputies to serve the churches with pastoral guidance in which a positive statement of position is offered regarding ethical action as believers and churches in the 21st century, especially in relation to the celebration of the Sunday as the Lord's Day, in the light of the fourth commandment.
2. This statement of pastoral guidance does not have the ecclesiastical authority of a confession, but it aims to offer a testimony as to how the observance of the fourth commandment may be put into effect in our present time.
3. This statement relates to a *specific moment*, i.e. a time in which the churches have finished dealing with this matter at the General Synods of Leusden and Zuidhorn, including appeals and requests for review, and in which deputies were appointed because the dissatisfaction and confusion which arose through this matter had not been taken away. Once this

appeals process had been formally concluded, the way was clear for a positive study, without the church-procedural complications of an earlier consideration. Now that the Deputies have presented their work to the churches, convened at the Synod, the time is ripe to offer the instruction of Scripture, in the form of a statement of pastoral guidance, to the churches.

4. This statement relates to *one special, clearly defined theme*, that is the interpretation of the fourth commandment in the light of the New Testament, in Christ Jesus, and the celebration of the Sunday by the church of the new covenant within the concrete circumstances of the Netherlands in the 21st century.
5. This statement relates to *extraordinary circumstances*, specifically: a. the elimination of references to the commands of God in civil legislation; b. The complexity of present-day society, with its multiplicity of roles and occupations; c. An increasing superficiality in Christian living, including the way in which the Sunday is observed, d. The pressures of work and forced expectations of achievement under which young people and adults are burdened, or in which they participate.
6. The form of a short text is suitable to summarize and render accessible the broad range of material relating to the fourth commandment, the Sabbath and the Sunday. The text of this statement is useful for the churches, and may be incorporated in the preaching, in instruction and in public witness.
7. In the decision to appoint the Deputies the statement is made that "...it is high time and of great importance that the churches renew and develop their conviction on this point, so that they may, in the light of God's Word, and searching for the purpose of God's Spirit, respond to present and future circumstances, and support believers in this." (Acts, Synod of Zuidhorn, art 13, decision 1, ground 2.)

Below you can see how the Deputies 4th Commandment took on board all of our comments:

1. Emphasise more that the Lord's Day as day of rest is not only a gift, but that it is also based on God's commandments. Which they did as you can see in ***ARIAL font italicised***.
2. Be more explicit about what you mean with "to keep the Lord's Day 'as free as possible'". Which they did as you can see in ***COURIER NEW font italicised***.
3. Integrate essential parts of the report in the Instruction, such as statements about what's lasting and new in relation to the 4th commandment. Which they did as you can see in **ARIAL font underlined**.
4. Be more clear about the economic and social pressure of society and what it means for work on Sunday, and integrate the message of Jesus' instruction in Matt 12:1-9. Which they did as you can see in **COURIER NEW font underlined**.

SUNDAY, LORDLY DAY. A PASTORAL GUIDELINE.

Translator's Note: In the original, this document is called "een Handreiking". I have not been able to find an adequate English equivalent. The original conveys a document that is given as a helping hand, a guide or support, and in this context the word has a particularly

pastoral connotation. The expression “pastoral guideline” doesn’t really do justice to that, but it’s the least unsatisfactory term I could come up with. A Plug

The Reason for this Document

This pastoral guideline has been put together for two reasons. The first is that, as has happened so often since the time of the Reformation, a dispute has arisen within the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands concerning the relationship between the fourth commandment and the Sunday, and the consequences that this has for the hallowing of the Sunday.

The second reason is the actual background which gave rise to this dispute, namely the changing spiritual climate in our country, leading to a secularised and multi-religious society. Economic and societal developments (internationalisation, globalisation and technology) exert great influence on our national culture. This pastoral guideline aims to help the churches in renewing our Christian conviction in relation to rest on and celebration of the Sunday in the Netherlands in the 21st century.

Introduction

As Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, we acknowledge that we *stand under the authority of the fourth commandment, within the whole of the Ten Commandments and the instruction of Scripture. It is partly because of this commandment that we celebrate the Sunday as the day of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.* It is our desire to grow in our understanding of how the Sunday has been given to us in Him, to the redemption and sanctification of all the days of our lives.

1. Instruction from Scripture

1 From Sabbath to Sunday

Just as Israel, through the centuries, celebrated the Sabbath, so the Christian church has received the Sunday as the Lord’s Day. Jesus Christ called Himself “Lord, also of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28). He has completed all righteousness before God, and the sacrifice for our sins. On the first day of the week, He rose from the dead. The great deeds of God, in the completion of creation and in the liberation of His people from slavery were the motives for the celebration of the Sabbath. In Christ, God has brought the history of His salvation decisively further. The additional motive for the celebration of the Sunday is now God’s great work in the resurrection of His Son from the dead.

In the New Testament, the first day of the week is seen in the light of Christ’s appearances to His disciples. (John 20:19,26). The first Christian congregation gathered every day in the temple and in their homes (Acts 2:46). The first day of the week is received its accent in their assembling to hear the instruction of the apostles and to break bread (Acts 20:7), and in the setting aside of gifts (I Cor 16:2). Later, this day is called “the Lord’s Day” (Rev 1:10), and this is the day which the Christian church subsequently gave to the Sunday. That is also why we call the Sunday the LORDly day.

2 The day and the days of the Lord.

In the New Testament, the celebration of the Sunday is not explicitly connected to the fourth commandment of the law of God. Every day and all of life is hallowed in Christ. Whoever celebrates one day as special, does so to the Lord (Rom 14:6). At first, in the New Testament world, the Sunday was a normal working day. This day quickly received its special colour in the gatherings of Christ’s congregation in the morning and towards evening.

Christ is the fulfilment of the whole law (Matt 5:17), and He incorporates God’s commandments into His instruction concerning the Kingdom. The great commandment of

love and perfection give strength to a life of following the Master. The Gospel recounts how He observed the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment, and participated in the assemblies in the synagogue. In the progress of the Gospel, you will not expect that the celebration of the seventh day would change, until Jesus dies, and His body rests, on the Sabbath, in the grave.

Just as all the other commandments, the fourth commandment comes to us in Christ. In His person, and in the unity of the Scriptures, the church wants to understand what it means to remember, hallow and rest on the Lord's Day. In the freedom of the Spirit, we want to do justice to what is temporary, what is continuing and what is new in the will of God concerning the fourth commandment.

3 The temporary, the continuing, and the new

God wants to bring his creatures rest, and give them opportunity to catch their breath (Ex 23:12). He wants to set them free from the rigour of labouring under the curse. The creation motif (Gen 2:2-3; Ex 20:11) is reinforced with the motif of liberation (Deut 5:15). Man, animal and land may share in the rest which God gives them to enjoy.

- 3.1 That which is **temporary** in the fourth commandment we see in the seventh day, in the opportunities afforded in the Promised Land, in the claim of the law of God on Israelite society, and in the regulations which God laid upon His people with regard to the Sabbath. In this too, the law led Israel to the Redeemer. Scripture calls the Sabbath a shadow of the things that were to come, while the reality is found in Christ (Col 2:17). The one promised land gave a temporary expression to that rest. Now, the Christian church is as stranger in the world. Christians are not always and everywhere in the position to be able to have the day of rest coincide with the Sunday.
- 3.2 *There are also **continuing** aspects to the fourth commandment. We see this first in the alternation of work and rest. Then also in the gathering before the Lord on the day of rest and on feast days. And in this way learning to take a distance from reliance on one's own efforts, and living from the generous hand of God. Already at the completion of the world, we hear how God rested from His work of creation in six days (Gen 2:2-3; Ex. 20:11). The Lord Jesus add to this that the Sabbath is made for man (Mark 2:27). He makes this clear Himself in His proclamation of the Gospel. He also demonstrates it in the way He heals children of Israel, and sets them free, also on the Sabbath. It is especially those things that belong to the rest that is to be found in Him, and to which He invites the people of God (Matt 11:28-12:21).*
- 3.3 *The **new** in Christ's resurrection means that henceforth not the seventh, but the first day of the week is highlighted. The real rest is to be found in Him (Matt 11:28-30). He is our Sabbath. He sets free all the days of sinners' lives from the burden of sin and guilt. Light now shines over all the days of the week, and over all the peoples of the world. The coming of His Kingdom will bring us the eternal Sabbath peace (Heb 4:9). That is why we pray: Come, Lord Jesus (Rev 22:20).*

4 Sunday, day for the Church.

From that which is new in Christ, that which is continuing in the fourth commandment also is also given form. The command to rest from our own labour and effort requires a concrete response. It is especially on the Sunday that learn to find rest in the completed work of our Creator, and in the completed suffering of our Redeemer. Proceeding from the resurrection of our Saviour, the first day of the week is accented in Scripture. On that day,

the living Lord assembles His congregation around Himself. From that day, He sends His people into the life of everyday, to let His light shine.

The assembly of the congregation follows in the line of the “sacred assemblies” of the Old Testament. We are exhorted “not to give up meeting together”, all the more as we see the coming judgement of the Day of the Lord approaching (Heb 10:25). The “today” of god’s voice, which calls us to repentance, counts for every day that the Word is heard (Heb 4:1-13). In a special way, His voice is heard as often as the Holy Scriptures are read and proclaimed in the assemblies. Christ is the Lord of the church, and He gathers it in one body.

We wish to do justice to the actuality of rest and to the **remembrance** of God’s works. We do this when we celebrate the Sunday and if it devote ourselves to the assembly of the congregation. As Christian church, we know ourselves *bound to receive this gift thankfully, and to use it, as optimally as we can, to the honour of God. If this freedom should be taken away from us, then the Sunday would remain as a token of our longing to serve our Lord in full freedom.*

We exhort one another to keep this day, as much as possible, from occupational labour, and from any activities *which would keep us from* worship of the Lord, from meeting with His congregation, *and from the rest which typifies this day.* Justice is done to the fourth commandment when God’s people rejoice in the Lord’s day by taking a step back from our usual everyday busyness (Isaiah 58:13).

5 The congregation as body of Christ

The twofold command of love is the summary of the law and the golden thread that runs through all commandments (Matt 22:27-40 and Rom 13:8-10). Our love for God as the first and greatest commandment is expressed in the gathering of the congregation with its Lord. In the assemblies, the congregation presents itself before Him, who is its Head.

Love towards the neighbour is expressed in the desire to gather as congregation which is called the body of Christ. This commandment exhort us not to give up meeting together, but to encourage one another (Heb 10:25). In the whole of the body, no member can be missed (I Cor 12:12-31). The celebration of the Sunday binds the members together as one body, in which we have been baptised by one Spirit (I Cor 12:12-13).

6 Sunday and society

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands have always received, with thankfulness to God, the free Sunday as it has come to us in Europe by His providence. The Dutch people, however, have in great numbers left the way of faith in God, and now value the Sunday primarily as a day off.

Now that the governing authorities have given more room to work on that day, and thus this day, as day of the Lord, receives less protection, we wish to testify, publicly and of one mind, in word and deed, of the Gospel of Christ. This includes:

- Pointing to the Creator of all that lives, who has given the rhythm of working and resting to man, created in His image;
- Witnessing of the Deliverer, who redeems lost people from the power of sin, and who call us together in His congregation
- Praising the Spirit, who wants to renew damaged people after the image of Christ, and lead us to the renewal of heaven and earth.

We wish to uphold the Sunday to the honour of the living Lord, and as the day of the Christian congregation. We also wish to stand for the upholding of the Sunday as a day of

communal rest. From the beginning, God included the servant, the stranger and the livestock in the day of rest (Ex 20:10, Deut 5:14). We too desire to give such a form to the celebration of the Sunday that it gives an attractive representation of the rest that God gives, and our joint communion. Our prayer is that this example and witness will also draw our neighbour to Christ.

In our daily work, in our leisure time and on the Sunday, we want to witness of Christ, by finding rest in Him ourselves. *In this way, united upon the confession of Lord's Day 38 of the Catechism, and in our time and circumstances, we wish to do justice to God's purpose in regard to the fourth commandment and the Sunday.*

2. Practical-Ethical Assistance

- 2.1 In a society with mobile phones, laptops, documents, television, email and internet, many people are constantly on the run. Work and leisure times overlap, in spite of a shorter working week. It's high time to go back and learn from the Creator, who made both **time of work and time of rest**. Christ is Lord of redeemed slaves, and of the day of rest.
- 2.2 Life and work are still subject to the curse of the fall into sin (Gen 3:15-19). For many, work is toil (Eccl 1:3), also in a highly developed economy and society. Education and training put great pressure on younger and older workers. That's why it's so beneficial that the Creator has placed a **day of rest** in the rhythm of the week (Gen 2:2,3; Ex 20:8-11; 23:12). Following God's example and command, we may find rest, and learn to look back on and enjoy the work that was done. In this way, God is honoured as the One who completes all our work. Everything depends, not on our achievement, but on His blessing.
- 2.3 **The rest** (the laying down of work) **comes first**, then the celebration. God finished His work of creation, and so laid the foundation for the Sabbath. He creates time to find rest in His presence. His commandments, also to rest, are not burdensome (I John 5:3; Matt 11:30). In this way we learn to long for the perfect rest (Heb 4).
- 2.4 The Lord commanded rest on His day so that people, animals and the land would share in His rest. This rest has meaning for the Dutch people, its society and its economy. Recreation serves re-creation. In word and deed, the church will witness of the rest which is found with the Creator, Deliverer and Renewer of all that lives.
- 2.5 By resting, we show that we realize we have been set free from slavery, also the slavery to our own sins, our achievements and economic laws. By celebrating the Sunday, we give expression to our acknowledgement of **Christ as Lord**, also of the day of rest (Mark 2:28). When He says: "Do not worry about tomorrow" (Matt 6:34), that is all the more true for the Sunday. On the Sunday, we learn to enjoy His care, just as Israel learned it in the gift of the manna.
- 2.6 While there are few direct prescriptions for the Old Testament form of worship, **celebration** is highlighted. For instance, in the presence of the "tent of meeting", in the sacrifices, in the "solemn assemblies" of the people, and later in the synagogue. As was his custom, Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). In the New Testament, Christ appears after His resurrection to His disciples and the women. They assemble on the first day of the week (John 20; Acts 20), the day which the congregation calls "the Lord's day" (Rev 1:10).
- 2.7 Christ calls us to His **congregation**, which is His body. This congregation does not consist of individuals, but is the body of Christ, comprised by the power of the Spirit

of many members (parts of the body). When our Saviour calls us to His congregation, there is no more room for individualism.

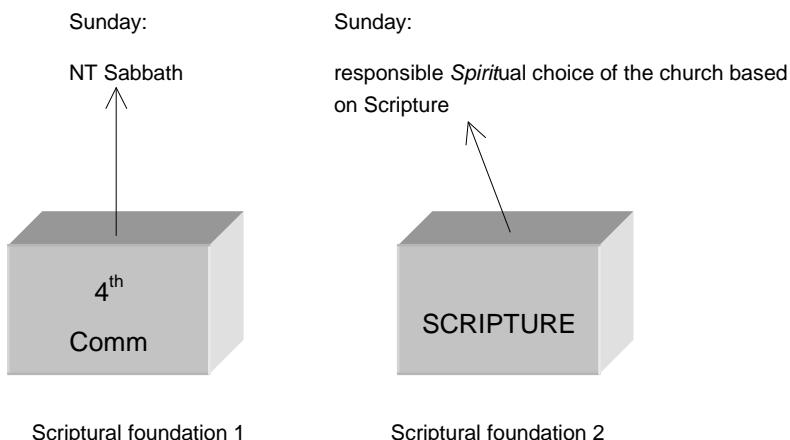
- 2.8 In its assembly, the congregation presents itself as the body that places itself in the service of Christ. In the worship service, the congregation places itself before God as His people, making every effort to enter His rest (Hebrews 4). Following the example of the early Christian church, we need the second worship service as well, in order to enjoy the Sunday in its entirety and as a congregation. Where attendance of the afternoon or evening services should decline, the congregation will need to be instructed and motivated to take part.
- 2.9 In all forms of **education** within the church, it is necessary to learn how the following hold together:
 - God's command and a willing observance of it;
 - The congregation that assembles and one's own living membership of it;
 - Choice of career and personal responsibilityWe need the proclamation of the Word and the exercise of the communion of saints to develop a Christian style of living.
- 2.10 When, as a result of economic and societal pressures, work on Sundays increases, it is necessary to remind each other of the need to rest from one's own labours, and of our total dependence on the blessing of God. Work in the service of the Gospel (Matt12:4-5) and works of mercy (Matt 12:6-7) may be necessary. This kind of work will, in itself, create opportunities to give expression to our following of Christ. The circumstances under which occupational labour is necessary must be determined in Christian freedom. Such a determination should include listening to the Word of God, prayer for wisdom, and the asking of advice. Isaiah 58:13 may give practical direction and support.
- 2.11 The danger of regular work on Sunday is that you fall out of the rhythm of Sunday rest, that you lose the energy to attend at least one worship service, and that you become isolated from the congregation. Then, a life of prayer is even more necessary, so that you will be given the right devotion to the Lord of life and His congregation. It will also be good if the congregation surrounds its members who have to work on Sundays with its support. This can be done through prayer and personal attention for each other. In determining times of worship, wherever possible their needs should be kept in mind.
- 2.12 Work on Sundays which is undertaken **for financial gain** is to be rejected, as is all love of money (I Tim 6:9). “No-one can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and Mammon”, says Jesus, our Lord (Matt 6:24).
- 2.13 The law of the Lord is the rule of **thankfulness** for our redemption in Christ. The fourth commandment helps us – in our work as in our rest – to receive the sanctification of the whole of our lives. The Holy Spirit fills the congregation as a temple. There, sinners receive the power to live to the honour of God all the days of their lives.
- 2.14 Christ liberated the Sabbath from human regulations that laid a burden on the day of rest. The development of a pattern of hallowing the Sunday requires **creativity**: to discover the good, pleasing and perfect will of God (Romans 12:2). It requires **love**, to be a hand and a foot to one another.

- 2.15 In judging and speaking about one another, it is good to use a “**patient and compassionate style of living**”. Not the external expressions of Sunday work are determinative. What counts is the evaluation of the motives by which working on Sundays are weighed. Within this framework, the words of the Lord Jesus are salutary: “If you had known what these words mean: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice’, you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” (Matt 12:7,8)
- 2.16 In the nurturing of faith the development of a personal and communal style of living is important. **House rules** can be helpful to find rest and peace on the Lord's day. House rules are agreements between adults, which afford clarity about lifestyle choices concerning attendance of worship, the use of media (computer, internet, TV, music), the kind of travel on Sunday, etc. *The room which the Holy Spirit wishes to make in our hearts may not be restricted by our busyness. At the same time, God gives a day of rest to enjoy free time, relaxation and recreation.* House rules are agreements which are taught to the children to give personal shaping to their Sunday rest. In this way, the younger generation can be taught to take responsibility themselves for the way they shape their rest.
- 2.17 One aspect of the Sunday celebration is to lay aside all reliance upon ourselves or our own efforts. Christ alone has the power to set us free from slavery to the curse and the power of sin. **Repentance** from dead works is a return to the living God.
- 2.18 An ineffectual and joyless observance of the Sunday goes together with a smallness of faith that does not find its strength in Christ as Lord. Over against that, a living faith in Christ leads to an inspired and joyful **celebration** of the day of His resurrection.
- 2.19 A focus on the finished work of Christ and the renewing power of the Holy Spirit means for the day of rest: to whatever serves a festive celebration of the Lord's day, and to **abstain from** whatever might hinder this.
- 2.20 The society in which we live is estranged from the Sunday as a day of rest. The Sunday, as the day of worship is largely confined to the congregation and the homes. The congregation of Jesus Christ will look for ways to **make contact** with their neighbours, and to invite them to share in a taste of the true rest. *To those who come to faith in Christ, we want to explain why we value this day so highly, and show how we celebrate it with joy (see 2.15, above).*

Translated by Aart Plug

5.6.6 Conclusion

Leusden and Zuidhorn have upheld that in the course of history there has always been difference of opinion in the Dutch Reformed Churches regarding the question whether Scripture compellingly states that there is for the New Testament church a direct command from God to keep the Sunday as the day of rest. Both Synods stated that within their churches there always has been room for difference of opinion about the Scriptural foundation of the Sunday as day of rest.



Synods Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002 didn't condemn the opinion that the Sunday as day of rest is not based on a Divine Commandment, because such a decision could easily upset the balance of Dort:

- ceremonial was the rest of the seventh day; moral is a specific day meant for religion with the necessary rest
- on Sunday one should rest from all servile labour.

But Synod Zuidhorn didn't condemn the opinion that the Sunday as day of rest is based on a Divine Commandment either, because such a decision would also restrict the room for difference in opinion (see Zuidhorn, art 60).

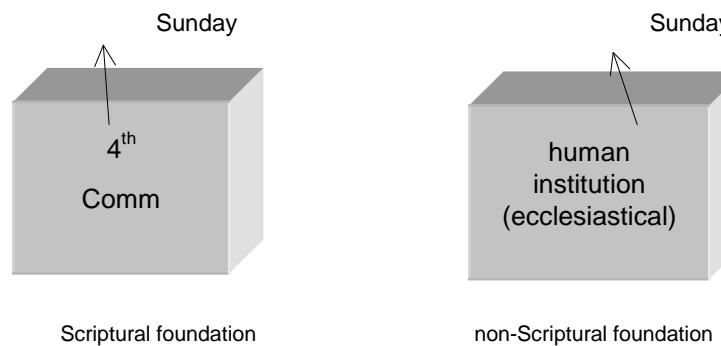
Further, Leusden already explained that during the course of justice the passage from Rev D Ophoff's sermon has been coloured by the expression that the Sunday is a good human institution (although not used in his sermon) and has created undue misunderstanding as if the Sunday is merely a human institution. "The passage referred to from the sermon can, however, also be understood in the sense that the Christian church in her believing answer to the guidance of God's Spirit has given the Sunday the special value of day of rest, following the example of the Israelite Sabbath." (Leusden art 25). That means that the Christian church on the basis of Scripture and guided by the Spirit started to celebrate the day of rest and worship on the Sunday. As Calvin puts it:

"It being expedient to overthrow superstition, the Jewish holy day was abolished; and as a thing necessary to retain decency, orders and peace, in the Church, another day was appointed for that purpose."

It was not, however, without a reason that the early Christians substituted what we call the Lord's Day for the Sabbath. The resurrection of our Lord being the end and accomplishment of that true rest which the ancient Sabbath typified, this day, by which types were abolished serves to warn Christians against adhering to a shadowy ceremony."

(Institutes, book II, ch 8, sections 33,34)

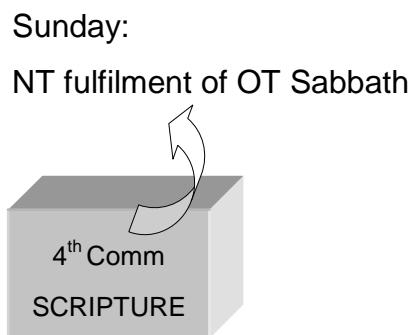
Because of the misunderstanding as if the Sunday is merely a human institution instead of a responsible Spiritual choice of the church based on Scripture Leusden's ground that there has always been room to think differently about the Scriptural foundation sometimes has been explained as: there is a Scriptural foundation and a non-Scriptural foundation. Like this:



Synod Amersfoort 2005 decided:

- As Reformed Churches in the Netherlands we know ourselves to stand under the authority of the fourth Commandment in the whole of the Ten Commandments and of the instruction of Holy Scripture. It's also by virtue of this Commandment [*het is mede krachtens dit gebod*] that we celebrate the Sunday as the day of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Decisions re fourth comm.: *Introduction [I.]*)
- Just like the other Commandments the fourth Commandment comes to us in Christ. In His Person and in the unity of the Scriptures the church wants to understand what the celebration, observance and rest on the Lord's Day means. (*I,2*)

That means that Amersfoort bridged the different Scriptural foundations and drew a depth contour instead of a linear line, like this:



5.6.7 Recommendations

1. To acknowledge with thanks that the mandates to stay informed about developments and decisions in the GKV about the Sabbath/Sunday issue and to continue the discussions with the GKV on this matter have been amply fulfilled.
2. To acknowledge with thanks the progress made in our Dutch sister churches on this pressing issue, and to accept this definitive decision as a satisfactory answer to our concerns.
3. To make the English translation of the report of the Dutch deputies along with the synodical decision available for our churches on our church website.

Grounds:

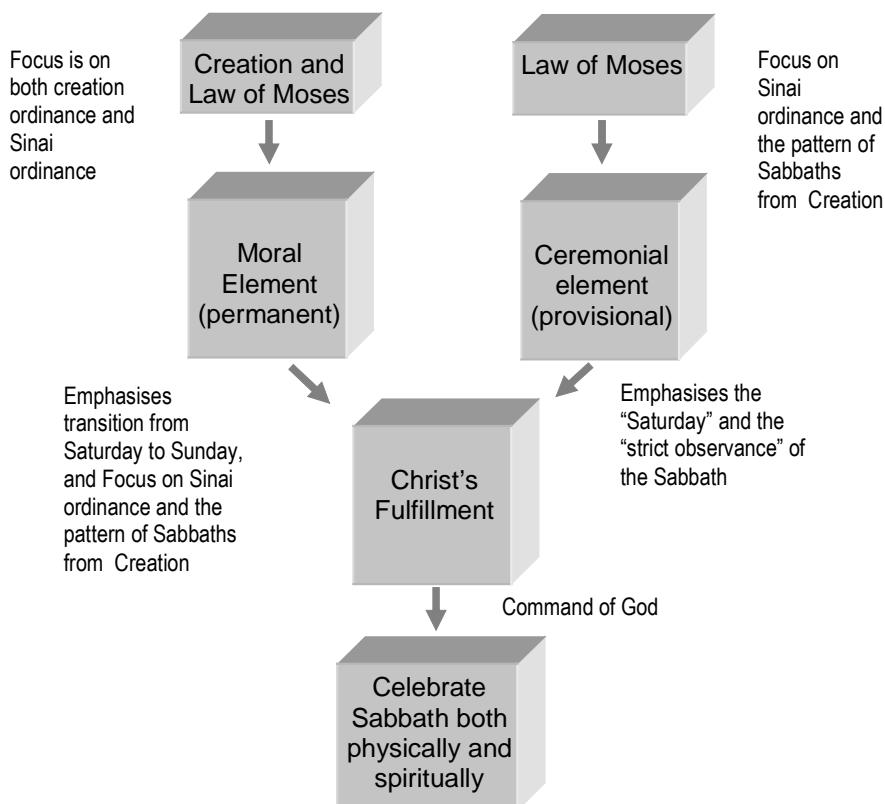
- a. The deputies have had to study long reports from the Dutch deputies and interacted with intensive discussions, both by letters and by personal meetings, with our Dutch sister churches on this issue.

- b. The decision adheres to the Scripture and our reformed confessions, especially LD 38, H. C.
- c. This decision brings together the various views by stressing the authority of Scripture, by following our reformed confessions, by applying the hermeneutic of following the line of fulfilment in the history of redemption, and by applying the doctrine in a practical way for our time so that Sunday can indeed be a glorious day of rest and worship.
- d. Our churches can benefit from such a comprehensive study of this important matter. It seems prudent to use our FRCA/deputies website for this.

After ample discussion two deputies still couldn't accept these recommendations and asked that their alternate analysis and recommendations be passed on to synod as a minority proposal. The meeting approved the request to send the alternate set, which now follows.

The Sabbath: Two views or one?

The debate about “two views” on the Sabbath is centered on whether or not it is a creation ordinance, or a Mosaic law, and hence whether or not the Sabbath rest is a moral element that abides permanently in the New Testament church, or a ceremonial element that was provisional until Christ’s (first) coming. The question then is what implications this has for why we the Sabbath and how we keep it. The Synod of Dordt brought together these views and clearly indicated, via its “Six Rules” that the Sabbath rest is a command of God and must be kept by the church of God, albeit on a Sunday. Figure 1 depicts this debate.



No matter which line of thought was taken regarding the historicity of the Sabbath command, the practical outcome was essentially the same, as evidenced by the decision of the Synod of Dordrecht 1618/1619.

Figure 1: The one practical application of the two historical views of the Sabbath

Jesus resisted the pharisaical perversion of the Sabbath, but He did not turn against the fourth commandment. He came to fulfill the law, and not to destroy it (Matt 5:17). The Ten Commandments remain for us today, including the 4th commandment, and will remain until the return of Christ and the final fulfilment of the eternal Sabbath (Heb 4).

Calvin emphasised the spiritual character of the eternal Sabbath rest. He focussed on the rest from “evil” and lamented the fact that not every day was a Sabbath. But, according to Calvin, anyone who claims that the Sabbath has passed away, does not have a full grasp of the matter.

Ursinus in his commentary on Lord’s Day 38 indicates the practical application of the Sabbath rest. Concerning Christ’s teachings about the Sabbath, Ursinus says that *“these declarations teach, that such works as do not hinder or interfere with the proper use of the Sabbath, but which, on the other hand, rather carry out its true intention and so establish it, as all those works do which so pertain to the worship of God or religious ceremonies, or to the duty of love towards the neighbour, or to the saving of our own, or the life of another, as that necessity will not allow them to be deferred to another time, do not violate the Sabbath, but are especially required in order that we may properly observe it.”* (p. 559).

The Synod of Dordrecht brought together the two historical views of the origins of the Sabbath into one practical application of the Sabbath for today (quoted from Acts of GS Leusden):

“The National Synod of Dordrecht of 1618/19 made a statement with six rules about the question of sabbath and Sunday. These rules enjoy moral authority among us. They are as follows:

1. In the fourth commandment there is a ceremonial and a moral element.
2. The rest on the seventh day after the Creation, and the strict observance of this day assigned to the Jewish nation in particular were ceremonial.
3. That a definite and appointed day is set aside for worship, and along with it as much rest as is necessary for worship and for holy meditation, belongs to the moral element.
4. Now that the Sabbath of the Jews is set aside, christians are duty bound to hallow the day of Sunday solemnly.
5. This day has always been kept since the time of the apostles in the early church.
6. This day must be so consecrated to worship that on it men rest from all servile labor (except those required by charity and present necessities), and likewise from all such recreations as prevent the worship of God.”

Note from these six rules that:

- a. The rest of today is grounded in the fourth commandment. “...as much rest as is necessary...belongs to the moral element” (ie. permanent).
- b. The “as much rest as is necessary for worship and for holy meditation” refers to the Westminster Larger Catechism which says “and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God’s worship...” In other words, the “rest” must not just take place for part of the day when you “worship” and “meditate”, but for the whole day which is to be taken up by the “public and private exercises of God’s worship”.
- c. Strong language, eg. “duty bound” and “consecrated...that on it men rest” shows that this is not just a decision of the church, but a command of God.

- d. The exceptions to resting from work on the Sunday are very explicit and related to those of “charity and present necessities”. No servile labour and recreations.

In his book *The Ten Commandments: Manual for Christian Life*, Prof. Douma indicates that “...ecclesiastical divisions were avoided, in large part because the various viewpoints approached one another more closely than would appear from the discussion, especially when it came to the *practice* of Sunday observance.” (Douma, p. 144). “That the fourth commandment has retained its validity is the correct confessional starting point.” (Douma, p. 146).

Given that there was one line put forward in the history of the reformed churches regarding the practical application of the Sunday rest, why has this issue resurfaced in the churches in The Netherlands? Here we need to consider the context of the church in today’s world.

The Context

The Context today in which this “Sabbath” issue arises is one of an attack on the Sunday as a rest day. This is very evident in the world in which we live today, and was also acknowledged by the synods in Holland.

Synod Zuidhorn recognises that the keeping of the Sabbath is deteriorating, not just in the world, but also in the church.

“The Christian church learned, under God’s providence, already centuries ago to value and to celebrate the Lord’s Day as a complete day of rest. The recognition of the value of this precious gift is diminishing, now that government and society in the Netherlands have lost the Christian label they carried for many centuries. As a consequence the general acceptance of the Sunday as a day of rest has suffered. The erosion of the Sunday-rest is also among Christians increasingly apparent, leading to a decline in the heartfelt motivation and room for the worship service. Renewing and developing the churches’ conviction on this point is therefore of utmost importance, so that the churches, seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in the light of God’s Word can address these developments, now and in the future, and can so assist and guide the believers.” (Synod Zuidhorn, Acts Art 13)

The statement produced by Synod Amersfoort shows how strong the pressure is in today’s climate to work on Sundays.

“This statement relates to *extraordinary circumstances*, specifically: a. the elimination of references to the commands of God in civil legislation; b. The complexity of present-day society, with its multiplicity of roles and occupations; c. An increasing superficiality in Christian living, including the way in which the Sunday is observed, d. The pressures of work and forced expectations of achievement under which young people and adults are burdened, or in which they participate.” (Synod Amersfoort, Decision 2, Grounds 5)

Given the strong attack of the world on the Sunday rest, and its infiltration into the church, what should we expect from synods? Should we not expect a stronger focus AWAY from man and TOWARDS God who gave the commandment and the eternal Sabbath in the first place? Should we not expect an emphasis on God’s commands and how we must stand up AGAINST these worldly attacks, and say NO to them, on the basis of the Old and New Testaments? If we understand well the attacks of our threefold enemy (LD 51) and acknowledge man’s depravity, then we will do well to recognise that, not man (not even the church), but God decides what the Sabbath and Sunday rest means for us. He has already done that in His Word, through the unity of the Old and New Testaments.

The Direction of Synods

So what did the synods Leusden, Zuidhorn and Amersfoort really decide? What directions are they going in and what is the practical effect on the churches and church life?

The synods have emphasised that there are two historical views, and have, in essence, extended them beyond the Six Rules of Dordt. In fact, the practical application, as evidenced by the decisions and grounds in all three synods, is to open the way for more “necessary” work to take place on Sunday, leave it in the “Christian freedom” of man, and minimise the fact that it is a COMMAND of God. At the same time, those who see it as a “command of God” (a divine command) may continue to do so.

Hence, these synods have extended the two views to, not just refer to the historical basis of the Sabbath, but also to include the practical application of the Sabbath rest in today’s modern world. So, in essence, there are now also *two views of the practical application* of the Sunday rest. Figure 2 depicts this.

Synods have said that two historical views have always been allowed. So why broaden these two views to give two practical applications as well, rather than simply stick to the one practical application of the six rules of Dordt? The pressure on the church in today’s world is towards more work on the Sunday. It is true that synods do not explicitly state that professional/occupational work can be performed on Sundays. However, they also do not explicitly state that no such work may be performed on Sunday (other than works of necessity and charity), which the Synod of Dordt did do. Rather, synods have kept open the possibility of regular daily work on Sunday by using language such as keeping the day free from work “as much as possible”, and to “distance” oneself from ordinary everyday work on the Sunday.

For example, Synod Amersfoort in Section 4 of its report *Sunday: a Lordly Glorious Day*, says that we must “encourage each other to keep this day free from professional labour as much as possible and from any other activity which keeps us from the worship service for the Lord, from the meeting as a congregation and from the rest which characterizes this day. The fourth commandment is done justice when God’s people enjoy this day of the Lord by distancing themselves from the ordinary activities (Isa. 58:13)”.

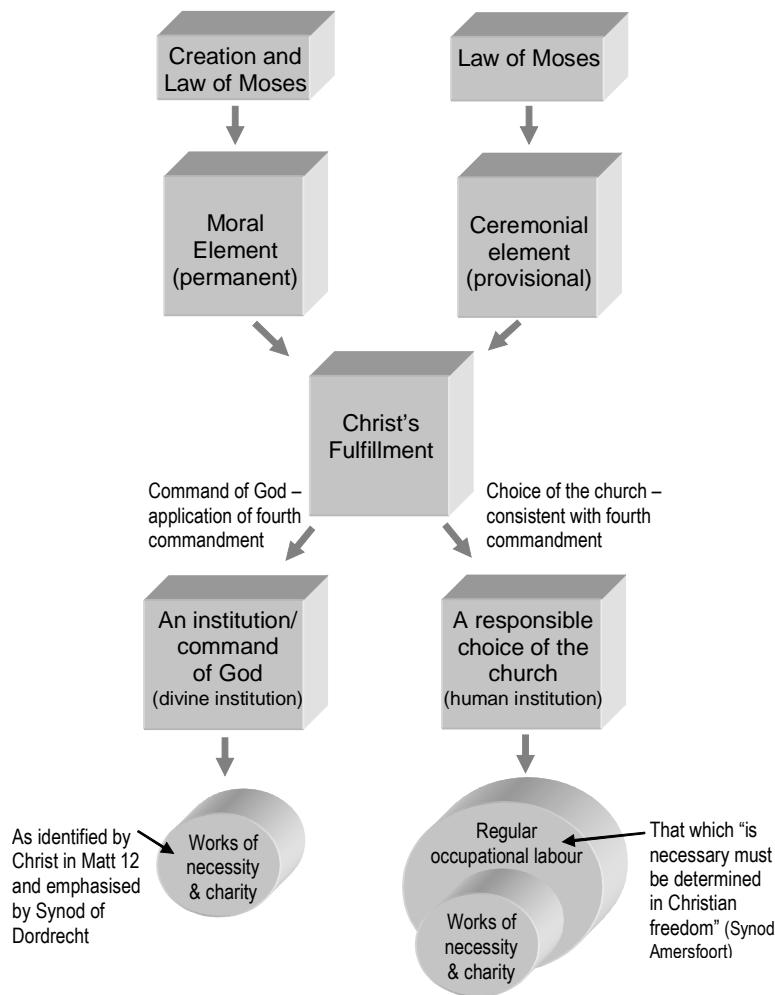


Figure 2: The one practical application of the two historical views of the Sabbath

Further examples from *Section 2 Practical-ethical section* of this report of Synod Amersfoort include:

- "...Under what circumstances (professional-)labour is necessary shall be determined in Christian liberty" (Section 2.10)
- "The danger of regular Sunday-labour is that one is no longer used to the rhythm of Sunday-rest, that one does not have the energy to attend even one worship service... It is also good that the congregation supports those who, on account of their labour, have to work...In determining the moment of worship, times when they are able to attend are taken as much as possible into account" (Section 2.11)
- "Sunday-labour which is accepted for increased returns, is to be rejected, as is all love for money" (Section 2.12)
- "...Not the outer marks of Sunday-labour are determinative. One must judge the motives, on account of which one decides with respect to Sunday-labour." (Section 2.15)

Such statements certainly are not the strong and clear language of the Synod of Dordrecht, but rather, a softening of it and opening the door to more work and less rest. In fact, according to Synod Amersfoort, what is "rest" and what is "necessary work" is determined by man's "Christian freedom", rather than by what God commands and

requires of us. This then becomes very dangerous for depraved and sinful man in a fallen world that puts the pressure on for increasing Sunday work.

Synod Amersfoort has taken heed to some of our requests and suggestions. This is reason for thankfulness. For example, Synod has strengthened the link of Sabbath rest to the fourth commandment by saying "It is in part because of this commandment that we celebrate the Sunday as the day of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Introduction to *Sunday: a Lordly Glorious Day*, Synod Amersfoort) and "From the new aspect which came in Christ, the lasting aspects of the fourth commandment can take shape. The command to rest from one's own work and exertion requires being made concrete. Especially on Sunday we learn to find rest" (Section 4 of *Sunday: a Lordly Glorious Day*, Synod Amersfoort).

However, in heeding our suggestions, they have only addressed them in a limited technical way and not in a wholesome substantial manner. Synod appears to be very reluctant to say that our keeping the Sunday rest is a command of God based on the fourth commandment and on Christ's fulfilment through His resurrection (Christ's first coming) and through the eternal sabbath, the promise of eternal rest (Christ's second coming). Synod does not take the clear and direct line of Synod of Dordt in Rule 6, "This day must be so consecrated to worship that on it men rest from all servile labor (except those required by charity and present necessities), and likewise from all such recreations as prevent the worship of God". In fact, Synod is obscure and does not explicitly state the fact that God forbids normal daily work on the rest day, with only the exception of works of necessity and charity.

Given the pressures on the Church in today's world and given the sinfulness of man, the practical result of these synod decisions is the danger of more and more daily work infiltrating the Sunday rest day.

Alternate set of recommendations (of two brothers)

Deputies recommend that Synod decides:

1. To thank the GKV for the contact that we could have with them at both the deputies and synodical levels, in expressing our concerns regarding the fourth commandment and Sunday rest.
2. To thankfully acknowledge that Synod Amersfoort has taken on board some of the suggestions put forward by our deputies.
3. To express our concern to the GKV that they are reluctant to express that the Sunday rest is indeed a command of God to rest from all our work (with the exception of works of necessity and charity) according to Scripture and the confessions.
4. To express our concern to the GKV that they do not close the door to professional/occupational work on the Sunday that goes beyond works of necessity and charity.

Grounds:

1. Our deputies have been able to openly discuss issues and concerns regarding the 4th commandment with Dutch deputies, and to have them tabled and expressed at synod.
2. Synod Amersfoort has incorporated some of our suggestions, such as strengthening the connection between the Sunday rest and the fourth commandment, into their report.

3. No matter which historical view of the foundation of the Sabbath is taken, the practical effect is that the Sunday rest is a command of God, as recognised by the Synod of Dordt. Synod needs to give strong Scriptural guidance on this.
4. The decision of Synod Amersfoort in its report *Sunday: A Lordly Glorious Day* leaves room for the possibility that professional/occupational labour (other than works of necessity and charity) can be performed on the Sunday. This is against Scripture and the Confessions (Lev 23:25, Ex 34:21, Matt 12, Luke 13:15, 14:5, Lord's Day 38) and is not in line with the Six Rules of the Synod of Dordt.

5.7 Deputies Report on Dutch decisions regarding Marriage and Divorce to Synod West Kelmscott 2006 DV

5.7.1 Mandate

Synod Rockingham 2003 Article 41 made the following decision regarding our sister Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland:

Decision:

1. To continue sister-relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands according to the adopted Rules for Sister-Relations
2. According to the rules, discuss and to continue to discuss with the RCN Deputies the concerns as to the developments within the RCN, and as outlined and recommended in the report of deputies.

In the past your deputies have reported on the subject of the new Marriage Form, which our Dutch sisters have adopted. That matter was amply dealt with. This other issue about marriage and divorce continued to be on the agenda of their general synods. Though the 2003 Synod gave no specific mandate concerning this issue about marriage and divorce, the general mandate for deputies was *according to the rules, to discuss and to continue to discuss with the GKV deputies the concerns as to the developments with the GKV*. Since this was a major issue which was coming to a definitive phase, your deputies studied it thoroughly and also discussed it with our Dutch counterparts in an intensive manner, both by letters and in our personal visits with them, as well as in our participation in the discussion on this on the floor of the GS Amersfoort of 2005.

5.7.2 Short history

Since the General Synod of Ommen (1993) several sets of Deputies have been busy with questions in relation to marriage and divorce. A new study Report was presented to the General Synod of Zuidhorn (2002). In this Report, attention was asked for a broad approach to this matter, proceeding from the totality of the Biblical message about life in the Kingdom of Christ.

At the Synod of Zuidhorn this Report was intensively discussed. As well as agreement, questions were also expressed about the approach of the Deputies and the way they worked this out. A decision was made not to limit the discussion concerning marriage and divorce to the Synod table, but to stimulate it further within the churches as a whole. The Deputies were given the role of kick-starting this process of reflection. They were asked to support the churches by providing them with an abridged version of their report, and by giving further information.

In their report *Divorce and remarriage?* (January 2004) Deputies gave an account of this process of reflection within the churches, and of their activities. The point of departure for this period of activity was the decisions made by Synod Zuidhorn. They were given the following mandate:

- a) To begin and stimulate a broad reflection regarding marriage, divorce, the single state, preparation for marriage, and the solemnization of marriage, in part by publishing an abridged and popularly accessible version of the Report, which incorporates the discussion at Synod (Decision 1).
- b) To call the churches to common humility in this matter, and in connection with this, to draft a letter to the churches (Decision 2a and 2b)
- c) To set up an Advisory Council to serve the churches in matters relating to marriage and divorce (Decision 3a and 3b).
- d) To examine, together with the Deputies for Church Order and Church Polity, whether additional forms of admonition and discipline are possible and desirable (Decision 4b).
- e) To give attention to questions relating to the solemnization of a second marriage after divorce, and in connection with this to review the meaning and status of marriage solemnization (Decision 5).
- f) In addition, the churches were already given the freedom to publicly express judgement in the midst of the congregation, about situations which may occur.

5.7.3 Australian Response to the Dutch Report

On 30th March 2004 the Australian deputies sister churches responded to the Dutch deputies' Report *Divorce and remarriage?*

Response from the Australian deputies sister-churches to the Dutch Report Divorce and remarriage?

30th March 2004

Esteemed brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

1. We express our appreciation for your report's impulse towards an approach which will drive back the problems regarding divorce and remarriage, and which will stimulate a life in the style of the kingdom in which our yes is yes. Therefore we agree with your report's statement on page 15 that an allowable divorce is not choosing for what is good (because it is justified), but for the 'lesser evil'.
2. We further welcome your fight against divorce by emphasising that divorce does not fit in the style of the kingdom, and that the voice of the whole of Scripture should be heard in considering how to follow Christ by a Christian lifestyle (p 2). As J van Bruggen already said in his *Het huwelijk gewogen*: Not marriage but our calling for God's kingdom weighs most heavily (p 5-7). Jesus highlighted, in e.g. Matthew 19, the new perspective of His kingdom, the new dimension God gives to those who seek first His kingdom. Instead of stating, "divorce is allowed if...." followed by one or more concessions, your report correctly reasons along another line of thinking. It states that divorce is not an option for those who follow Christ. And if there are situations in which divorce, instead of separation, is the only way (out), then, according to your report, remarriage in the church is

not allowed. We agree that this can be a signal that the church does not find the ending of marriage and the remarriage normal, even if such a position is contrary to the current trends in society (cf. p 21)

3. However, we have problems with the report's conclusion k on page 30: "The churches must, as a general rule, consider that a second marriage after divorce cannot be solemnised in the church."

We recommend the following:

- If a divorce is against God's commandment, then the church must discipline in order to protect itself against the evil of divorce, to save the sinner, and to honour God's name.
- The church cannot approve remarriage after a divorce which was against God's commandment. It therefore cannot give room for its solemnisation in the church. Instead, the sinful act of remarriage should be publicly admonished, i.e. the consistory should inform the congregation publicly. If there is hardening of heart, then the consistory continues with church discipline.
- However, if we cannot say that the divorce was against God's commandment, and the church therefore accepts the marriage in a civil ceremony, then it does not make sense to bar the way to the kneeling-bench in the church to ask God's blessing over it. If, as the report states, the believing partner, who is left by the unbelieving one, is not bound (cf. 1 Cor. 7:15), namely "not a slave to the rule that divorce is not allowed" (p 7), then it does not make sense to start a remarriage in the Lord outside the church. A marriage in the Lord starts in the house of the Lord.

Your report does not prove from Scripture that, after a permissible divorce, the decision not to remarry is more fitting in the style of the kingdom than the decision to remarry in the Lord, and that bypassing the church in case of a remarriage after a lawful divorce is better evidence of a Christian lifestyle than kneeling before God in His church.

4. We have also problems with section 5 of the report.

a. Re 5.1:

This section would be strengthened if references could be made to the Old Testament also. It is a distinct lack that not a single Old Testament text is mentioned in 5.1.1 – 5.1.4. Old Testament children of God as Joseph and David lived (with much brokenness!) in "the style of the kingdom", and were driven by more than 'cold' commands but by love for God and the neighbour (cf Ps 35). Cf Lev 19:17f. Our point is: Jesus' instruction is not really something new, but draws out the heart of the Old Testament instruction and builds on the renewing work of the Holy Spirit as exemplified already in the Old Testament.

b. Re 5.2.3:

- We have problems with the proposed "new analogy". Under the heading "Analogous to 1 Corinthians 7" your report states in section a on page 15: "We perceive what Paul said, not as an inbuilt exception, but as an *incidental* exemption from adherence to the rule" ('ontslag van de binding aan de regel'). We believe that what Paul said is not an *exemption* (ontslag) from Jesus' rule, but a, by the Holy Spirit inspired, *implementation* of His rule in a specific situation. Therefore we do not agree with your statement: "The analogy then is that, just like Paul, we

ought not (to) apply the rule which emerges from the Lord's teaching." We are bound to both Jesus' words and Paul's specific implementation, and we do not agree with the suggestion that Paul releases us from Christ's rule about the indissolubility of marriage and that we by analogy can do the same in situations which in Jesus' time were unforeseeable.

- Your report addresses the evil of infidelity in marriage. Adultery is so great an evil, that it is the main allowable reason for divorce. Infidelity breaks wedlock and both husband and wife should realise this very well. We think that you do not address the evil of unfaithfulness adequately by speaking about "commit adultery once" (p 14). The word once and also the phrase that a marriage must be continued "in any way possible, even after adultery" (p 14), underestimates the evil of adultery.
5. We do not agree with the second measure mentioned in par 9.3 (p 27). For, if the divorce is against God's commandment, then it is the consistory's responsibility to do more than to announce disapproval and to leave the sinners to their own responsibility. The first measure in par 9.3 is better, because in doing so the consistory takes the aim of church discipline seriously (see also our point 3).

Esteemed brothers, we hope you will receive our sincere appreciation and constructive criticism in the knowledge that we are of the same opinion and in the same mood to resist the evil of divorce and to promote a Christian lifestyle in which we follow Christ by the power of His Holy Spirit. We wish you the indispensable blessings of our God and Father in this task.

5.7.4 Final Dutch Report Marriage and Divorce

In October 2004 the Dutch deputies came with the final Report *Marriage and Divorce* in which they integrated the comments of more than 60 churches and persons, including the FRCA. To this final Report two Australian deputies sister churches (Rev W Huizinga and AC Breen) responded in Amersfoort during their stay in May 2005. In the next paragraph you find their Report on the meetings in the Netherlands.

5.7.5 Report on meetings re Marriage and Divorce

We were able to have meetings and speak about the Report on Marriage and Divorce.

1. A meeting was held with the Dutch deputies (BBK) on Wednesday, 25 May.
2. On the next day (May 26) a meeting was held with the deputies appointed for this subject of Marriage and Divorce. Among others we met with Drs A.L.Th. de Bruijne, Rev H.J. Siegers, and Rev H.J. Smit.
3. On Friday evening (7-9:30 p.m.) the report was discussed on the floor of synod. This was arranged specifically for the benefit of the overseas delegates. We were the ones who instigated this request. It was a pity that we were the only delegates from a sister church who as advisory members of synod took the opportunity to speak that evening to offer advice.

At the meeting with the BBK deputies (sections 1+3) it had been arranged that the churches who correspond with section 3 (Canada and other English speaking sister churches) would also be present. They had not made extensive studies on this matter but were interested. It seemed most economical in terms of time and

talents. Rev P Niemeijer, the chairman of the synod, attended. The deputies for this subject were not in attendance. We read the letter of the moderator of synod in which they agreed to have meetings with the respective deputies and deputies BBK on this and other subjects on the days before synod met in full sessions. Apparently through misunderstanding this was not arranged (each thought the other would arrange it!). Thus we made new arrangements and the chairman said he would try his best to have the matter of Marriage and Divorce discussed on Friday evening, if time allowed. This item had been placed on the agenda for the week already (it was on our agenda as given by BBK), and seeing the situation, the chairman would do his best to ensure it was done.

Only the FRCA deputies had finished studying the reports (the first version and the later version) and had submitted letters about them. We were thus given the floor outlined the main concern we had with the report. We advised that p 16 be rewritten because it is not guarded enough and these lines bypass the norms given by the Lord in Mat 19:9 and 1 Cor 7:10-15.

It concerns the following sentences:

There are thus situations in which the church approvesⁱ divorce and acquiescesⁱⁱ in it. It happens that you come face to face with the same sort of choice as is mentioned here (1 Cor 7:10-15).

ⁱ The English verb approve is the translation of the Dutch verb billijken = je stemt er mee in; je kunt het voor rechtmatig houden; het is acceptabel (“betaalbaar”, denk aan “billich”: ik kan de prijs betalen); het is redelijk (denk aan “billijke” prijs).

ⁱⁱ The English verb acquiesce is the translation of the Dutch verb berusten = zich schikken met behoud van gevoelens; je stemt er eigenlijk niet mee in, maar je maakt er verder geen werk van.

This means that a divorce may be approved in other cases than those mentioned in Mt 19 or 1 Cor 7. To defend this approach the report on p19 uses an example of a psychopath who terrorises the life of his wife. According to the report, in such a situation, you should use the whole Scripture (not just a part of it). One relevant part of Scripture in this case is that one needs to come to the defence and salvation of one's neighbour. If there is no other way out, then you may say as Paul did, *you are not bound* in order to save and to defend the life of your neighbour (the wife and her family).

Our advice in such a case was to apply 1 Cor 7:10-11 to the example of the psychopath who terrorised his wife. She may separate from him (*from table and bed* as they say in Dutch) for security reasons, but she may not divorce, since it does not include sexual immorality or deliberate desertion by an unbelieving partner. She should continue to pray and seek ways of reconciliation.

In the last version of their report, “Marriage and Divorce (Oct/2004)”, the deputies do not speak any more of grounds for divorce and they describe each divorce as an evil. The church may approve divorces in certain situations, e.g. adultery and deliberate desertion by an unbeliever *and other situations which are not mentioned in the Bible*.

Both in our response on Friday, 27 May, during the mealtime with the deputies for Marriage and Divorce, as well as in our advice given on the floor of synod on Friday evening (7-9:30 p.m.) we stressed that divorce may be approved on the basis of Scripture only in two situations: sexual immorality (Mt 19) and deliberate desertion by an unbelieving partner (see 1 Cor 7). In other cases a separation of table and bed may be acquiesced in for a time during emergencies, but no official divorce can be allowed. We stressed the application of these norms of Scripture, of course in connection with the whole Bible, especially with other relevant directives of Scripture.

Further, we found the examples which the report gave (namely, Mt 5, 12, 18 and the Fourth Commandment) to legitimise the third category (unforeseen situations) not at all clear and convincing. The examples are not exceptions to and departures from the Biblical rule, but they make clear how the Biblical rules are applied.

From the reactions (14 in total!; ranging from total agreement to total disagreement) of the members of synod (on Friday evening) and the replies given by Drs AL Th de Bruijne it became clear to us that the discussions at synod will focus on:

- to approve or not approve divorce ‘in situation which the Bible has not foreseen’;
- to confirm a marriage in the church or not, after a divorce has been approved;
- whether or not the marriage oath/vow remains valid even after one or both of the partners has broken their oath and a divorce takes place because of it.

We were very thankful for all these meetings and discussions, even on the floor of synod! It allowed us to interact. We told our BBK counterparts that reports of this kind often serve our larger Dutch sister first. Then it finds its way across the oceans and may end up in our common Book of Praise. Thus we preferred to act pro-actively rather than reactively. We thanked them heartily for the opportunities given and for all the arrangements made to accommodate our requests. The synod asked Rev W Huizinga to close the evening with a meditation and prayer. Thus we were included as much as possible.

Rev W Huizinga / AC Breen

5.7.6 General Synod Amersfoort 2005 about Marriage and Divorce

GS Amersfoort decided (summary):

1. to deal with the objections against the Report of the previous deputies *Divorce to GS Zuidhorn 2002/3* [de bezwaren als inhoudelijke bijdrage mee te nemen] when Synod discusses the Report of their deputies *Marriage and Divorce*;
Ground 2: GS Zuidhorn in its decisions did not adopt the Report of deputies *Divorce*.
2. to endorse the main lines [in te stemmen met de hoofdlijnen] of the deputies' approach regarding marriage and divorce that focuses on [waarin wordt ingezet op] maximal devotion to God and His will, on following Christ and on a lifestyle which does justice to the coming kingdom.
Ground 1: This endorsement doesn't mean that Synod agrees with all the insights of the Report. With appreciation synod took note of the broad lines of the study of the deputies [heeft in grote lijnen met waardering kennis genomen van de studie], but left responsibility for their Report to themselves [laat hun rapportage voor hun eigen rekening].
3. to pronounce that, as a rule, new marriages won't be solemnized in the Reformed churches after a divorce.
Ground 1: A promise once made continues [blijft gelden] and still resounds also after a divorce.
Ground 4: Consistories keep their own responsibility regarding the question whether a second marriage after a divorce is acceptable and can be solemnized in the church.

4. to pronounce that it is advisable that every consistory structurally introduces premarital counseling, and strongly encourages those who prepare themselves for a marriage to attend it.
Ground 1: Divorce is a grave evil that should be prevented as much as possible.
5. to replace the principles and guidelines as adopted by GS Leusden 1999 with the following principles and guidelines:
principles:
 - i. Marriage has been instituted by the Lord. This close bond between husband and wife should not to be dissolved by men (Gen 2:24; Mal 2:14-16; Matt 19:3-9; 1 Cor 7:10-11). Divorce is a grave evil that should be prevented and combated as much as possible. To live according to the style of the kingdom of Christ means that in every marriage problem we concentrate all energies on [inzetten op] reconciliation and on the restoration of the relation.
 - ii. If a marriage has been harmed [aangetast] because of sin or the effects of the fall, then restoration of the bond of marriage should be pursued and/or that bond should be kept as much as possible in the way of self-denial, following Christ by means of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.
 - iii. In case of the actual break of the bond of marriage it fits the style of Christ's kingdom the best to maintain the marriage formally and to chose for a solution by which both partners enter into mutual agreements which they (let) record, or for the solution of separation from bed and table.
 - iv. Also in the above-mentioned situations the marriage vows once have been given remain valid as long as both partners are alive. Therefore remarriage after a divorce doesn't fit in principle the style of the kingdom of Christ.
 - v. Solemnisation of a next marriage is not possible as a rule if the previous marriage has been dissolved by a divorce.

5.7.7 In a summary

The Dutch deputies *Marriage and Divorce* took on board many comments of many churches and persons, including the FRCA. The two Australian deputies sent to the Netherlands explained at the General Synod Amersfoort why they did not agree with what the Dutch Report said about the approval (*het billijken*) of divorce in other situations than those mentioned in Matt 19 and 1 Cor 7. Further they explained why they could not agree with the examples of Matt 5, 12 and 18 which were used in the Dutch Report to approve (*billijken*) divorce in unforeseen situations. The two FRCA deputies explained that those examples are not exceptions to the Biblical rule, but applications of the Biblical rule.

General Synod Amersfoort 2005 did not fall in the pit of Anabaptist perfectionism which strives for the controllability of watertight rules and exceptions, but endorsed the main lines of the deputies' Report focusing on maximal devotion to God and His will, on following Christ and on a lifestyle which does justice to the coming kingdom in fullness. One of the grounds for their decisions is: "Divorce is a grave evil that should be prevented as much as possible."

General Synod Amersfoort 2005 did not endorse the Report itself, because there are still thoughts in the Report which should be further discussed and crystallized,

for instance, how to apply the message of the Bible regarding divorce in situations which are not described in the Bible. We would have liked synod to give more explicit direction in this, rather than leaving it open to the churches as to how to apply it. This then would have been in line with the strong Scriptural stance taken by the synod regarding the evil of divorce and subsequent remarriage.

5.7.8 Recommendations

1. To express thankfulness that our Dutch sister churches could take a strong Scriptural stance regarding God's teachings against divorce and remarriage.
2. To express regret that, while the issue regarding the approval of divorces for reasons beyond the Scriptural reasons of adultery and willful desertion was not endorsed by synod and thus implicitly excluded, synod did not explicitly state this.

Grounds

- a. Synod Amersfoort in the "Principles and Guidelines" that it approved, gives strong Scriptural guidance showing how divorce and subsequent remarriage are a serious evil and must be so dealt with by consistories.
- b. Synod Amersfoort gave no explicit guidance regarding the danger of moving in a direction that allows divorce for reasons beyond adultery and willful desertion (Matt 19 and 1 Cor 7).

5.8 Report on Liturgy

5.8.1 Mandate

Synod Rockingham 2003 decided regarding Liturgy in general and Hymns in particular:

1. To keep monitoring these decisions in accordance with our Rule b (to mutually care for each other that they do not depart from the reformed faith in ... liturgy) and to become more acquainted, in a selective manner, with the hymns that are approved and are being approved.
2. To investigate the principles and criteria for selecting and approving these new hymns.
3. Meanwhile in general to continue to express our concern toward the GKV about the proliferation of new hymns.

Grounds:

1. It is unrealistic to ask the deputies to study all these newly approved hymns. Yet in order to mutually care for the GKV with conclusions about these hymns we would need to do exactly that, i.e., study all the new hymns, even as the GKV has done. Thus to monitor them in a selective manner would be the best way.
2. The need to be specific in our selective monitoring is born out by the decision of our Canadian sisters. They have decided (art.97, Acts of the 2001 GS of Neerlandia) to receive submissions and proposals for additional hymns from the churches with the reasons for their suitability. One consideration (4.1) was that though this synod was cautious with

respect to the additional 120 hymns in the GKV, their own Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) did not give evidence to show that the changes taking place in the GKN(v) are wrong (Art 80, Cons. 4.7). In the same consideration it added, while there are concerns about adding a large number of hymns, it cannot be said without further investigation that the increase of hymns in the GKN comes at the expense of singing Psalms.

3. In this process it is important to study the principles and criteria used to select and to approve new hymns. This will also be helpful for us in time to come.
4. At the same time the great multiplication of these new hymns, just by their great numbers as well as other factors mentioned in the deputies' letters to the RCN, continues to concern us.

The FRCA deputies for sister-relations in three letters sent to the Dutch deputies their responses to Zuidhorn's decisions regarding Liturgy, including new Hymns.

I. Responses dd 10th July and 9th August 2004

Esteemed brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

As deputies sister churches we examined the decisions of the 2002 General Synod Zuidhorn, regarding *Liturgy*. We were able to assemble some comments and would like to pass these on to you as deputies, to assist you in your work. In section A below please find our summary in English of the most important articles. In section B we explain which criteria we use in order to evaluate the synod's decision. Our response to the decisions is written in section C.

A. Zuidhorn's decisions

1. Article 73: *Ordinarium* liturgy, decision 3:

to instruct deputies to collect responses to and experiences with the *ordinarium* from the churches, and, if possible, to propose a new order of worship to the next synod.

2. Article 74: *The second worship service*

- a. decision 1:

for the time being not to release for publication the order for the instructional worship service (*leerdienst*) as presented by deputies.

Ground:

in their report deputies themselves have already indicated that there are several non-liturgical problems and possible objections attached to the proposed order on which people differ in opinion or which are not discussed sufficiently within the churches.

- b. decision 2:

to call the churches to examine chapter 10 of the deputies' report and to send their responses to the deputies *worship service*, who will report to the next synod.

Ground:

the responses may show how the churches want to act in the future regarding the afternoon service.

3. Article 77: *Form for public profession of faith*, decision 2:
to instruct deputies to present the proposed Form for public profession of faith to the churches and to incorporate the responses in a final version.
4. Article 79: *Form for marriage*, decision:
to reject the objections raised against the marriage form, adopted by General Synod Leusden 1999.

Grounds:

1. The objection against the disappearance of the term 'confirmation of marriage' will be dealt with at the first synod, when deputies Marriage and Divorce and deputies Church Polity and Church Order have in co-operation brought out advice on the meaning and status of an ecclesiastical marriage-confirmation and whether art. 70 CO should be changed.
2. The phrase 'until Christ returns or death separates you' does not imply that it is impossible for marriage to have continued value for eternity. On this point the church has not made a confessional statement. The two parts of this phrase point to the same matter in line with Rom 7:2-3, namely that the promise of marital faithfulness only ends when this earthly life ends. With Christian frankness one may reference, also for husband and wife, the joyous expectation of Christ's return, which will remove sin and death, as indication of death; [tr.: the Dutch for the last sentence reads: De blijde verwachting van Christus wederkomst, ook voor man en vrouw, die ook zonde en dood zal wegnemen, mag in christelijke vrijmoedigheid voor het benoemen van de dood gesteld worden.]
3. The fact that a *marital* form speaks of *marital* love need not be explicitly stated.
4. It is good to indicate that those who are married should *above all* live in communion with Christ and not, in the first place, in communion with each other, so too that they live *above all* in love to the Lord and not to each other.
5. It has not been proven that in the whole of Scripture the diversity between husband and wife takes precedence over their unity.
6. The form sufficiently makes clear that the husband is the head of the wife. In addition it is to be noted that the form should be judged on its own merits, and not in comparison with its forerunner.
7. It is no less wrong for the bridal couple to kneel during a worship service as it is for anyone to kneel.
8. It is not contradictory to Scripture to state that husband and wife are to be a help to each other.
9. From the context it is clear that God does not want husband and wife to desert each other.
10. When a bridal couple promise fidelity to each other, this takes place before the LORD in the midst of His congregation.
Reference to such an act as a personal matter [tr.: in Dutch 'onderonsje'] is irrelevant.

11. The term ‘relation’ need not have a modern and unbiblical connotation but is used in the Dutch language in a neutral way to indicate the relationship between people in all manner of contexts. The form first of all states that in the sealing of a marriage “the bond between both becomes legal before God and man”. Then it is said “If they desire to be one, they are obliged to this covenant by God and each other.” Only then and in the light of these statements is the term ‘relation’ used, and thus sufficiently qualified.
12. The mandate to form a family is sufficiently and clearly articulated in the form.
13. The reference “LORD” for our God is not wrong, confer the NBV* and various stanzas in our Psalms and Hymns.
14. The tone of the form is such that it avoids superficiality.
15. The liturg has every freedom to bless the couple. There is no reason as to why this should only be possible after the prayer.

This decision was taken with 33 votes in favour, 1 against and 2 abstentions.

* tr.: the NBV is a new Dutch translation in the making. During the course of 2001 an interchurch debate raged on how translators should translate the Hebrew YHWH. This debate is more complex in Dutch than in English since it not only concerns a choice between writing out the Name or substituting ‘LORD’ in all capitals, it also concerns the spelling of the Dutch word for ‘LORD’: does one use modern or old Dutch (HEER or HERE respectively) and if the latter does one use 20th century or earlier spelling (HERE or HEERE). The NBV translators have for the moment chosen for the translation ‘HEER’.

5. Article 83: *Criteria for selecting new hymns*, decision 1:

- a. to agree that a hymn may not be in conflict with the Reformed confessions;
- b. to pronounce that the criteria of the General Synod Leusden 1999 doesn’t require alteration on that point, because in it was stated that a hymn should be in harmony with Scripture.

Note

Leusden’s criteria:

- i. a good hymn should be appropriate to serve in a liturgical context in which God’s words and deeds stand in the centre;
- ii. a good hymn should be in harmony with Scripture concerning its contents;
- iii. a good hymn is characterised by style and quality regarding linguistic and musical form; it gives proof of a good word-tone-relation; it is usable and accessible to present-day people.

B. Preceding our response

Our word liturgy comes from the Greek word *leitourgia* which is used in the NT of “sacred (priestly) ministrations”. Jesus Christ has obtained a more excellent *leitourgia* (Hebrew 8:6), putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. The Greek

word *leitourgia* is akin to *leitourgos* denoting “a public servant, minister” (see Vine’s Dictionary 1996). Jesus Christ at the right hand of the throne is a *Leitourgos* of the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrew 8:2), protecting His people as Priest-King. In the OT the LORD met His people via mediators, where He met His people today through the Mediator of the new covenant. As a Christian royal priesthood which belongs to the Priest-King Christ we may proclaim the praises of Him who obtained mercy for us (1 Peter 2:9,10). In Him we have entrance to God’s throne. The word *liturgy* became in the NT church an indication of the meeting between God and His people through Jesus Christ Who gathers, protects and defends His church. The reformer Valerandus Pollanus (Poullain), minister of the French refugee congregation in Strasbourg from 1544, used the word *liturgy* to indicate the order of worship, and today we use the word in that way (see further G van Rongen, *Met al de heiligen – Liturgie in hemel en op aarde*. Barneveld 1990).

We confess in Lord’s Day 38 of the HC that especially on the Feast day we diligently attend the church of God to hear God’s Word, to use the sacraments, to call publicly upon the LORD, and to give Christian offerings for the poor (from original German and Latin editions). With this a basic pattern of liturgy has been given for our church services, namely, preaching (including teaching or instruction), sacraments, prayer, and charity. This is based on e.g. Acts 2:40-47 where we read that in the first Christian church those who gladly received the apostles’ word were baptised, and that the church continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers, having all things in common so that no one was in need, praising God and having favour with all the people. The same pattern of doctrine (*didache*), fellowship of faith (*koinonia*), sacraments, prayer and charity. In our church liturgy these four elements are easily recognised.

The centrality of God’s Word in our church services can also be learned from Romans 10:14-17:

How then shall they call on Him (the LORD) in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: *How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!* But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, *LORD, who has believed our report?* So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

In our liturgical consideration we should maintain the four main elements which are based on Scripture and the reformed confessions. All other liturgical elements should be grouped around these four main ones. Therefore we do not neglect the liturgical tradition which is based on, e.g., Acts 2 and Lords Day 38. But we do not canonise the liturgical tradition either as if all the other elements should be maintained in the same way or same order as the church has proposed in the past. “Let our liturgy not become a dead service. ... “No liturgical forms, just because of tradition.” And also: “The Word of life demands living words” (K.Schilder, *Tolle Lege I*, p 76). “Dead forms can lead to the situation in which a congregation is preached to death or, at least, gets tired. But the LORD wants to have a living congregation, living people of His covenant, which is taught by the living proclamation of His Word!” (K Deddens, *Fulfill your ministry*, 1990, chapter IV, p 70,71).

Conclusion

We will evaluate Zuidhorn’s liturgical decisions in the light of the following criteria:

1. the liturgical renewals and refreshments, including the order of worship, the worship itself, the liturgical Forms, and the new hymns, should not be in conflict with Scripture and the reformed confessions;
2. the liturgical elements should be grouped around the four main elements which are based on Scripture and the reformed confessions, namely:
 - ✓ God's Word: reading and preaching
 - ✓ Two sacraments: baptism and Lord's Supper
 - ✓ Calling upon the LORD: praise and prayer
 - ✓ Charity: offertory.

C. Our response

Re 1: Ordinarij

The proposed order of worship contains elements of the *Ordinarij* of the early church, including the Kyrie, Gloria, Nicene Creed, Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei. We will follow the proposed order as we can read this in the deputies' report, chapter 7.8 and 7.9., while we make comments on it.

7.8.1: Votum and Salutation

We find the "casting" artificial. The words of Psalm 124:8 are a unity, and the word Amen here doesn't mean an acceptance by the congregation, but is a confirmation. We suggest:

Congregation: Votum + Amen

Pastor: Salutation + Amen

7.8.2: Kyrie and Gloria

The text of Willem Barnard is obscure. Which advent does he mean? The rhyme is ragged and the language is not accessible, especially for the youth. We suggest deleting this text.

7.8.3: Prayer for the Spirit's illumination

We suggest that this prayer is only an example, and that the pastor may use his own words.

7.8.9: Lord's Supper

a. invitation

According to 1 Corinthians 11 the self-examination is an indispensable element of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. 1 Cor 11:26: "you proclaim the Lord's death": know what you confess. 11:28: "let a man examine himself": know what you confess. 11:29: judgement by "not discerning the Lord's body": know what you confess. We find a Form without a self-examination unthinkable.

b. prayer

We find it hard to take the first part seriously:

v (minister): De Heer zij met u (The LORD be with you)

g (congregation: Ook met u zij de Heer (The LORD be with you too)

This dialogue is not functional in the liturgy for the Lord's Supper celebration. We like the quotation from Philippians 2. We have difficulties with the last hymn of the Benedictus. We do not eat and drink life, and the

breaking of the bread is not a symbol of the scattering of the believers over the earth. We suggest deleting this song.

7.9.1: Christmas Proprium prayers

7.9.1.3: prayer for illumination

Speaking about Jesus Christ as “uw geliefde Zoon als mens tussen hemel en aarde” (Your beloved Son as man between heaven and earth) is at least obscure. We also find the indication of Jesus as “kribbe-kind” (manger-child) inadequate. We suggest speaking about Jesus Who “via de kribbe en het kruis de weg heeft geopend naar het Vaderhuis.”

7.9.1.9: celebration of the Lord’s Supper

See what we said under 7.8.9. Further, we reject the mystical archaisms in the following words:

“Wij aanschouwen uw welbehagen om vrede eer aan te doen;
Wij volgen uw lichtende ster in een duistere wereldnacht.
Christus die mensen licht en richting geeft,
Ondoorgondelijk wonderbaar zijn uw heilgeheimen o God”

And also:

“Hem roemen wij, Jezus van Nazaret,
die het levenslicht zag om de doodsnacht in te gaan.”

Also the following words are, although poetical, obscure for young people:

U die “Hem geboren deed worden uit een vrouw:
De Zoon des mensen, arm en naakt;
Uw Heil, gebakerd in een voederbak.”

We cannot say that Christ’s resurrection was a birth or rebirth as in :

“opnieuw geboren uit de schoot der aarde”

Beautiful are the words:

“Wiens komst wij vieren en verwachten”,

but we do not speak about our life on earth as a “tussen-tijd” (interim). This is an underestimation of our life on earth as God’s image: His child and steward.

7.9.2: Pentecost Proprium prayers

7.9.2.3: prayer for illumination

It is unclear what is meant with “Jeruzalem” in this prayer.

7.9.2.9: celebration of the Lord’s Supper

The following metaphors are obscure:

“Uw gemeente, als levende Pinksterbruid,
die zich voegt bij het gezang van alles wat ademt
en bezielt (sic) uw grote Naam wil loven en danken.”
U wilt dat uw kinderen
“herschapen worden tot een levend dankoffer.”

We don’t think that people understand the meaning of the presbyters and the living creatures from Revelation 4 and 5 in the following words:

“wij loven U om Hem – uw Geest – die...

oudsten en dieren een lofzang op de lippen legt."

Further, it is too poetical to call the Holy Spirit "de Schepper van den beginne, toen engelen juichten". The triune God is the Creator, and there were no angels when God started his creation work. Finally, speaking about Jesus Christ who "*nu eeuwig leeft*" gives rise to misunderstanding, because He is God the Son *from* eternity. Strictly speaking it is not correct to say: "Uw dood waarin ons leven ligt". Our life lies in the death *and resurrection* of Jesus our Lord.

Conclusion

We noticed the influence of the early church of the 4th century and following which was prone not to apply a redemptive and historical line in understanding Scripture, but instead often chose to re-enact it, explaining it in an exemplaric manner and often in a manner not free from mysticism (think of Cyril of Jerusalem), spiritualising or allegory. We agree with Zuidhorn's decision not to release the proposed *Ordinarium* for publication, because there are too many shortcomings attached to it. We hope that our comments will serve you to revise the proposed *Ordinarium* drastically. We urge you to study further on the re-enactment influence on the *Ordinarium*, especially on the *Propriums*.

Re 2: The second worship service

The General Synod Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996 instructed deputies "to investigate the possible specific character of the second Sunday service and the consequences of it for the organisation of this service." Concerning the first aspect, the specific character, the 1999 General Synod of Leusden concluded that, on the basis of information from Scripture and church history,

- the Sunday afternoon / evening service may indeed have a specific (*eigen*) character according to Bible and history;
- the teaching of the church may be emphasised, and this is why one may call this service an "instructional service" (*leerdienst*).

Concerning the second part, the consequences for the organisation, synod Leusden asked the deputies to serve the churches with a proposal for the organisation of the second church service.

In chapter 10 of their report to 2002 General Synod of Zuidhorn deputies came with the following proposed order of worship for the second service:

- Opening singing
- Salutation (e.g. 2 Tes 1:2 or 1 Tim 1:2 or Titus 1:4), answered with "Amen" by the congregation
- Prayer for God's blessing over the service
- Possibly: administering of baptism
- Short introduction to the theme
- Reading(s) from Scripture, followed by readings from the Catechism or other confessions
- Instruction in the doctrine
- Hymn and/or contributions in relation to the theme from the congregation, or discussion (in groups), with a concluding word
- Prayer or thanksgiving
- Encouragement, closed with the blessing (e.g. Fil 4:7)
- Closing Song

If we evaluate this proposed order for the doctrinal service in the light of the criteria mentioned above in section B, then we do not find all the four main elements around which the other liturgical elements are grouped. We do read about “instruction in the doctrine” and “concluding word”, which is quite different from the preaching of the Word. Preaching includes teaching, but this instruction should also be preaching! There is a possibility for baptism, but not for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper. And we miss the offertory.

As deputies we like to serve you with the following alterations in which the four main elements are restored:

- Votum, salutation, singing
- Prayer for God’s blessing over the service
- Sacraments
- Introduction to the theme
- Readings: Scripture and confessions
- Singing
- Preaching, with emphasis on teaching, part 1
- Response
- Preaching, with emphasis on teaching, part 2
- Singing
- Prayer of thanksgiving
- Offertory, singing
- Encouragement
- Benediction

Finally, we’d like to say that not every worship service is a *leerdienst*, but that every *leerdienst* is a worship service.

Re 3: Form for Public Profession of Faith

The 1999 General Synod of Leusden instructed deputies to continue revising the form taking into account that the connection between baptism, profession of faith and the Lord’s Supper should be clear. Our response to the new form is that the connection is not clear enough. We suggest making this more obvious with help of the first four letters of the alphabet. That means in Dutch:

Doop: God zegt ja tegen jou: de verbondsgemeenschap gaat van God uit

Catechisatie: leren geloven in die verbondsgemeenschap

Blijdenis: jij zegt ja tegen God: je wilt niet onder die verbondsgemeenschap uit

Avondmaal: vieren van die verbondsgemeenschap

Finally, we suggest to put some words of Paul’s letter to the Philippians in before or instead of the concluding words of 1 Peter 5:10,11. We think of:

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, and the God of peace will be with you!” (1:9-11; 2:15b; 4:9c)

Re 4: Form for Marriage

One of the main objections against the new marriage Form was the omission of the words *obey and submit*. GS Zuidhorn rejected this objection stating that “the form sufficiently makes clear that the husband is the head of the wife.” We read in the new Form:

- (in the section on Relationships) “In following Christ the husband shall be the head of his wife in love and self denial. As the one with first responsibility he shall lead her in their life with the Lord (*moet hij haar voorgaan in het leven met de Here*).”
- (in the section on Relationships) “As the church entrusts itself to Christ and lets itself be guided by Him (*zich aan Christus toevertrouwt en zich door Hem laat leiden*), so the wife shall entrust herself to her husband and follow him in serving the Lord (*zich toevertrouwen aan haar man en hem volgen in het dienen van de Here*).”
- (section on Mutual commitments) To the bridegroom: “Lead her in a life with the Lord. Care for her and give her a sense of security (*geborgenheid*). Accept her loving support as help which Christ gives you.”
- (section on Mutual commitments) To the bride: “Help him by seeking his good in everything. Accept him as head and receive his loving care as the security (*geborgenheid*) that Christ gives to you.”
- (section on Vows) To the bridegroom: “Do you promise to lead her in all things which are according to God’s will?”
- (section on Vows) To the bride: “Do you promise to help him and to follow him in all things which are according to God’s will?”

If we compare the quoted passages with a proposed previous version of the Form for Marriage, on which we responded dd 25th March 1999, then we are thankful for the changes which have been made in the sections “Mutual commitments” and “Marriage vows”. Key concepts in the new form are: the husband as head should lead his wife in their life with the Lord, and the wife as supporter should follow her husband in their life with the Lord. He should give evidence of responsible leadership, and she should entrust herself to his responsible leadership and accept him as head. Although the verb *submit* is not used, the meaning of the word is everywhere present. It is there just like the *unity* in marriage is present everywhere in the apostolic statement, *neither man without woman, nor woman without man, in the Lord; for as the woman of the man, so also the man through the woman* (literal translation of 1 Cor 11:11,12).

That the verb *obey* is not used has to do with the fact that Ephesians 5 and 6 do not characterise the relation between wife and husband with that verb. The verb, which is used in Eph 5:22, Col 3:18, Titus 2:5, 1 Peter 3:1,5 to indicate this relation between wife and husband, is *hypotasso*, which means to *submit*. The explanation of this verb can be found in the new form where it instructs the bride to entrust herself to his responsible leadership. The verb *hupakouo* (to obey) is used to indicate the relation between children and parents in Eph 6:1 and Col 3:21,22. From 1 Peter 3:1 we learn that the norm is that wives are submissive to their own husbands. In former times (verse 5ff) Sarah used to respect (*hupekouse*: aorist of *hupakouoo*, indicating that it is a reference to one event, otherwise we may have expected the imperfect tense) Abraham’s position as head of the household, speaking about him as *my lord*. Note that this is a quotation of Genesis 18:12. This is an indirect reference, not a direct address, to Abraham as the master of the household. At this point Sarah laughed at the promise of a son. Abraham too had

laughed in unbelief (cf 17:17-22). Obviously the two of them afterwards spoke together. Abraham helped Sarah. Abraham himself, *contrary to hope, in hope believed...being fully convinced that what God had promised He was also able to perform* (Rom 4:17-22). He helped Sarah believe the same. Sarah became a mother of many nations and kings came forth from her (Gen 17:16). Thus they were a godly team. Both had important positions. Sarah respected Abraham's position and learned from him. Yet at the same time Sarah received authority to bring Hagar into line to respect the position of Sarah. This may not have pleased Abraham, but note that he complies (Gen 16:6). Their relationship was a healthy yoke or team. Sarah did not have to bow and scrape before him, calling him master. Abraham respected her position too. This expression of respect with which Sarah spoke of Abraham is an example of submission. Following Sarah (being her daughters), is, according to verse 6, doing good and not being afraid. That means in the context of verse 1+2 being submissive and not being afraid in dealing with unbelieving husbands. That was often a daunting task in that time.

Our conclusion is that the new Form could have used the biblical word *submission* with a biblical explanation. We refer to dr Floor's *Commentary on Ephesians*. Husband and wife are co-heirs of the grace of life. It means they must serve each other in love, as Christ did. This two-sided love and service (Eph 5:21) take place within a marriage where the husband is given responsibility for his wife and where the wife submits to her husband. This structure can be degraded to brute dominion or slavish submission, but Christ's ministry must shine through so that submission and mutual care reflect what Christ did for his people (Floor 1995, p 188ff).

We agree with the following consideration (4.5) of the 2004 General Synod of Chatham of our Canadian sister churches:

Re: the new Marriage Form. The CRCA is to be commended for the extensive work done. Synod Neerlandia had asked the CRCA to study whether the omission of the words "obey and submit" indeed means that the Scriptural teaching about marriage in this new Form is flawed (*Acts of Synod Neerlandia 2001*, Art. 80). The CRCA now reports that this new Form weakens the scriptural teaching about marriage. To prove this the committee refers to the husband/wife relationship. Synod considers that, in some aspects, the new Form strengthens the Biblical teaching about marriage, for example, in explaining what true, Christ-like headship is. At the same time, it is also true that the words "obey and submit" are replaced by "accept as head... and follow." It can be regretted that the new Form does not use the word "submit" (Eph. 5:22), but this does not in itself mean that the Biblical basis of marriage is weakened.

Re 5: Criteria for selecting new hymns

1. Second criterion Kampen 1975

GS Leusden 1999 has cancelled the second criterion of GS Kampen 1975: "the hymn should be a valuable addition to the Psalms and should not lead to undervaluation of the Psalms." GS Zuidhorn 2002 pronounced that Leusden did this correctly.

Grounds:

- it is unclear if this criterion concerned the contents of the separate hymns which are to be selected, or also the number of hymns which the church adopts beside the psalms;

- concerning this criterion it is still unclear in what way a hymn could lead to undervaluation of the psalms.

So, the second criterion of Kampen says something about *the number* of new hymns, but cannot function as a criterion to test *the contents* of separate new hymns. Zuidhorn stated: "Therefore GS Leusden cancelled this criterion while not making a statement about the place of the Psalms in the worship service."

In art 89, decision 11 Zuidhorn decided:

"The synod will underline that in art 67 of the Church Order the psalms take precedence. The psalms in the rhymed versions always have had a place of honour in the reformed liturgical tradition as hymns which the LORD has given to His people in His Word. Also hymns which are based on and drew on other parts of the Old and New Testament belong in principle to the reformational liturgical tradition, although the collection has been small. Now that the churches are busy to add new hymns to it, it is good to pronounce that it is not our intention that the hymns supersede the psalms in the worship services and in the hearts of the believers."

We agree with the decision of Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002 concerning this second criterion of Kampen 1975.

2. Scripture and confession

Zuidhorn decided that a hymn may not be in conflict with the Reformed confession. But why didn't the synod pronounce this in its second criterion: "a good hymn should be in harmony with Scripture concerning its contents?" Synod said the following:

"Should a hymn be in harmony with Scripture and the confessions as committee Fryslan wants to add to the criteria of Leusden, or is it sufficient to state that a hymn should be in harmony with Scripture? A discussion began. Of course a hymn ought not to be in conflict with the confession. But it does not need to contain everything what can be confessed about a certain topic. We are thankful with the confession which, among other things, functions as a virus scan against errors. But the pronouncement that a hymn should not be in conflict with Scripture and the confessions is an invitation to submit objections. Echo Scripture frankly and you are not in conflict with the confession."

If the criterion "a hymn should be in harmony with the confessions" means "it should contain everything what can be confessed about a certain topic" then we understand that it is almost impractical to test new hymns by this criterion. But if you explain "in harmony with the confession" as "not in conflict with the confession," then you can state frankly that a new hymn should not be in conflict with Scripture and the confessions. We do not understand that this is an invitation to submit objections. If the confessions are the virus scan on our computer of hymns, then deletion of it will only be to our hurt. We agree that the confessions do not add to Scripture, but as an alarm bell, they alert us when the Bible is being broken into. Scripture is important. Therefore we are thankful for the confessions, even as we are happy with the alarm in our car. To remove that alarm, reasoning that our car is sufficient safe, doesn't make sense.

We ask the Dutch sister churches to change Leusden's second criterion as follows:

"a good hymn should not be in conflict with Scripture and our adopted confessions."

3. New hymns

3.1 Number

As said in Re 5 point 1 (see our Response dd July 10, 2004), we agree with the decision of Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002 concerning the second criterion of Kampen 1975. Indeed, one cannot use the *number* criterion to evaluate the *contents* of hymns. But having said that, we want to emphasise Zuidhorn's words in art 89, decision 11, that it is not their intention that the hymns supersede the Psalms in the worship services and in the hearts of the believers. We welcome that statement, but one of the first things you can do to live up to that intention is to prevent the Psalms from being exceeded by hymns in number. If there are more hymns than Psalms and, as you said, hymns shouldn't supersede the Psalms, then the congregations don't have time to learn the hymns and absorb their tune, rhyming and contents.

We ask the Dutch sister churches to prevent the Psalms from being exceeded by hymns in number.

3.2 Language

In considering the 117 new hymns from *The Liedboek* which has been published by 'De Interkerkelijke Stichting voor het Kerklied' one is somewhat surprised. The reason for this surprise is that the new Psalm book which was accepted by synod Heemse in 1985 was modernised due to the 'archaic' wording of the psalms. The youth had to know what they were singing. And rightly so. That is also the reason why we have accepted a new Bible translation and in Holland an interdenominational committee is also working on a new one. But now synods seem to accept hymns from all sort of sources, and many of which are 300 to 400 years old (Hymn 7, 9 etc.). We are sure that there are many children that would have no idea what they are singing when these hymns appear on the psalm board in church service. They simply don't understand: "Mijn Verlosser hangt aan 't kruis (not true, He is the risen King!), *hangt ten spot van snode smaders, hangt er mijnen twegen*" (189). They haven't a clue what it means: "*deel ons zelf de voorsmaak mee van der zaalgen sabbatsvree*" (221). Or: *Leer ons daaglijs, leer ons duizendwerven in uw kruisdood meegekruisigd sterven*" (221). There are many more we would have trouble understanding and we cannot understand that so many of them have been accepted when every effort is made in Holland to accommodate the youth and to stop them from leaving the church.

We ask the Dutch sister churches to re-evaluate the hymns especially regarding incomprehensible language.

3.3 Contents

Which hymns are in accordance with God's revealed Word and which are not? At synod Zuidhorn there were many objections from churches and church members. Some of the criticism leveled against the 121 hymns was based on the claim that a lot of hymns breathe the teaching of reconciliation for everyone (Karl Barth) and the Remonstrant thinking that salvation partly depends on our faith. There was also criticism against the hymns which would let us re-experience the facts of salvation which happened in the past.

We note that your synod went through all the hymns consciously. Though, there are a few outstanding things we want to address. We ask the Dutch sister churches to re-evaluate the hymns especially regarding the following two aspects:

- Remonstrant offer of salvation theory
- Barthian salvation universalism (incl Israelism)

Regarding these aspects we have problems with hymns 20, 41, 87, 90, 106, 114, 200.

Examples:

Hymn 20

Text:

“Moet iemand onrecht lijden,/ de Heer staat aan zijn kant./ Hij doet te allen tijde aan elk zijn woord gestand.”

Comment:

The line of demarcation is not between all those who suffer injustice and those who don't, but between those who listen to God's Word and those who don't. To those God keeps His word.

Text:

“Maar omdat Gij mijn leven/ duldt voor uw aangezicht...”

Comment:

In Jesus Christ Whom we embrace we are close to Father's heart. Those who belong with body and soul to Jesus Christ are not *endured* but fully *redeemed* (niet verdragen, maar gedragen).

Hymn 41

Text:

“... Israel, Israel,/ eens zal u de wereld aanvaarden/ ... Eens zullen de volken u eren.”

Comment:

The message of Zech 8:20-23 is that Pentecost will cause people “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Rev 5:9) to seek the LORD and to pray before Him. Then His people will honour God because of Jesus Christ. And only if Israel does not continue in unbelief it will be grafted in into the tree of God's covenant (Rom 11:23).

Hymn 87

Text:

“... want wij zijn voor de zonde dood/ ... De mensheid der verloren tijden deed Christus sterven aan zijn kruis.”

Comment:

How different is our confessional speaking: CD, V,1: “Those whom God according to His purpose calls into the fellowship of His Son our Lord Jesus Christ (*hoezo de mensheid stierf met Christus?*) and regenerates by His Holy Spirit, He certainly sets free from the dominion and slavery of sin (Rom 6:17), but not entirely in this life from the flesh and the body of sin (Rom 7:21-24).” (*hoezo dood voor de zonde?*)

Hymn 90

Text:

“ik heb voor heel mijn leven/ in God mijn bondgenoot./ ... dat Hij mijn Vader is, mijn vriend,”

Comment:

God our ally and friend. What a poor language comparing with our Reformed Forms: “When we are baptised into the Name of the Father, God the Father testifies and seals to us that *He establishes* an eternal covenant of grace with us. *He adopts us...*” (Form for baptism). “For if *while we were enemies* we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life.” (Form for Lord’s Supper).

Hymn 106

Text:

“liefde dekt alle ongerechtigheden.”

Comment:

1 Peter 4:8 reads that love will cover a multitude of sins. Peter didn’t say that love covers all iniquities. Love keeps no record of wrongs but forgives if God also can forgive them.

Hymn 114

Text:

“Een stem roept in het rond: nu gaat beginnen/ de koninklijke tijd,”/ ... De Koning die zijn troon heeft in den hoge, houdt bij de mensen hof/”

Comment:

We cannot find, in Rev 21:1-4, the words of the voice calling around. Of course not, because Jesus Christ already is King. There will be no royal time (of 1000 years) *after* His (first) coming. Jesus Christ resides (houdt hof) over His world *already today*, and once, through Jesus Christ (already) Emmanuel, God Himself will be the Tabernacle with us eternally. Then there will be that eternal Feast of Tabernacles (cf Rev 7).

Hymn 200

Text:

“De nacht, de zonde en de dood,/ de hel, het leed, de angst, de nood,/ dit alles is teniet gedaan,/ nu onze Heer is opgestaan./ ... Heel d’arde, al het schepsel zal opstaan in ’t zonlicht overal”

Comment:

Christ’s resurrection doesn’t mean that sin, death and hell have been annulled for all creatures. There is salvation and eternal life for all who are Christ’s, but eternal punishment for those who belong to Satan (Mat 25:46). And the last enemy death isn’t yet destroyed (1Cor 15:26). Further, that we are freed from the tyranny of the devil doesn’t mean that sin has been nullified. The original text by Nikolaus Herman (1500-1561) is different. There we read: “Die alte Schlange, Sünd und Tod,/ die Höll, all Jammer, Angst und Not/ hat überwunden Jesus Christ” (the serpent of old, sin and death, hell and all sorrow have been defeated by Jesus Christ). VanderMolen’s translation doesn’t mention the serpent of old and

incorrectly changes defeated in *nullified*. And concerning the resurrection of all creatures, this is what N Herman wrote: "Die Son, die Erd, all Kreatur,/ alles was betrübet war zuvor,/ dat freut sich heut an diesem Tag" (the sun, the earth, all creatures, all that was sad before *are pleased* today).

3.4 Psalms

Rhyming and tunes

Brothers, in our letter about the new hymns, dd November 16, 2001, a letter we wrote to you before the General Synod of Zuidhorn we suggested:

Moreover, we want to encourage you to consider paying more attention to the retention of the psalms. If it is true that the desire for more hymns arises out of some dissatisfaction with the psalms with their Genevan tunes, then it is time to consider this. The Genevan tunes are not sacrosanct nor inspired. However, their biblical content as well as the weight and majesty of the tunes, though hard to get used to by outsiders, mean that one never tires of them. The same cannot be said of many modern hymns! However, the Psalms in the *Book of Praise* are rhymings and not the literal text of the psalms themselves. There have been other rhymings and new ones are possible as well. Also, other tunes are possible and this might be something to work on (especially for mission fields and for other cultures where the Genevan tunes do not suit). We are not suggesting the elimination and replacement of the present Psalms with their Genevan tunes, but the possible *addition* of alternate rhymings and tunes. You would do the reformed faith a great service if this problem was addressed so that the psalms could remain the focal point of our singing in the worship services.

This suggestion was not followed up. That is a pity. Allow us to expand on this. We here in Australia do not have the expertise, the manpower and the time at the moment to develop this project. Yet we see much benefit in it for all the Reformed churches in this world. We love the psalms and wish to see them remain central and important in our church services. You in The Netherlands have manpower and expertise for such a project.

Thus we again earnestly encourage you to explore this suggestion of new, modern tunes for the psalms, tunes which display dignity, and which help bring out the meaning of the psalms. At the same time, we suggest that new rhymings be made of the psalms, rhymings that show the work and person of our Lord Jesus Christ in a greater fashion. We state this because the present rhymings already do this to an extent.

Of course, we in the English speaking world would still need to translate this into our own language. It would still entail much work. Yet the groundbreaking work of having a basic text to work from, and of having appropriate tunes to bring out its meaning, would already be done. That is why we turn to you.

Christological

At the same time we raise a related matter. Often psalms are not sung in their entirety. A minister chooses only one or two stanzas of a psalm. This makes it difficult for a church member to follow that psalm as they sing.

Moreover, we also want to respect what Christ taught us (Luke 24:27,44-45), namely, to see the things concerning Himself in the Writings/the Psalms (the third section of the Jewish Bible). Much work is presently being done on seeing the Christ in the Psalms. A Christological psalter, with rhymings that show how the Psalms also speak of the Messiah and his wonderful ministry, would tremendously help our churches understand, appreciate and heartily sing the psalms. This Christological approach to the psalms should not be forced, of course. It should be natural, as our Lord explained. Christ's congregation in the NT will be able much more to identify with such a psalter.

Biblical Psalter

We know that Calvin was not against hymns as long as they were clearly *Songs from Scripture* based on Bible texts and passages. He therefore included in his Reformed Psalm book also Hymns (Cantica) such as the Songs of Mary, Zechariah and Simeon, the Ten Commandments and the Apostles' Creed. It was Calvin's wish that many other parts of Scripture would be put to rhyme for the congregation to sing in the worship service (see further Dr T Brienen, *De liturgie bij Johannes Calvijn*. Kampen 1987, p 198ff).

We ask the Dutch sister churches, in line with Calvin, to put to rhyme Bible texts and passages. It is better to spend time and energy in composing hymns directly derived from Scriptures than in dealing with appeal upon appeal to unbiblical thoughts that have crept in into the hymns. And probably those hymns can be sung if the congregations, by singing, every time translate the ambiguous sentences in a Reformed way, but always those hymns shall be found inferior to the faithful Cantica which are based on God's own reliable Word.

II. Response dd 19th August 2004

Esteemed brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

As deputies sister churches we examined the decisions of the 2002 General Synod Zuidhorn regarding Liturgy. We have sent you responses to Zuidhorn's decisions on the Ordinarium liturgy, the second worship service, the Form for Public Profession of Faith, the Form for Marriage and to the criteria for selecting new hymns. A month later, 9th August 2004, we sent you our response to the new hymns. And within a few weeks you will receive our response to Zuidhorn's decisions regarding the blessing in church service and the celebration of the Lord's Supper by military chaplain.

While we went through your General Synod's Acts we sensed that there is a common thread, and that is the unanswered matters relating office and liturgy. Liturgy is related to the bibliological, ecclesiastical, dogmatological, ethical and diaconiological aspects of theology. We think there are unsolved issues on the interface between liturgy and, so to speak, some studies on the offices (see diagram on the next page).

We suggest that you report this to your churches and the next synod, and in whatever proper way it can be tabled, that as soon as your churches ask for deputies *Office and Liturgy*, you will support that. There are many questions regarding the relation between:

- Liturgy and the office of all believers (common office)

- Liturgy and the office of minister, elder, deacon (special office)
 - The common office and the special offices.

In the past, general synods discussed issues related to Liturgy and Bible Studies, and Liturgy and Church Studies. We think the churches would benefit from a thorough study on all the liturgical issues with are related to the offices. Or, in other words, an overall study on the relation between the special office and the office of all believers in relation to the church service and all its elements.

Think of questions like:

- What is the task of the special office bearers in the church service? For example, should only those called to office as representatives of God pronounce the blessing in the church services, or can this be done by the office of all believers?
 - What is the meaning of the office of all believers, that is of all men and women, in the church service?
 - How do we express the meaning of the office of all believers in the church service?
 - Which liturgical elements are required in every church service, and what is their relation with the offices?
 - What is the task of the special office bearer in war zones in relation to a local church?
 - What is the relation between the special office and the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper?

The discussion on “Woman and Office” can be integrated in the study on *Office and Liturgy*.

Esteemed brothers,

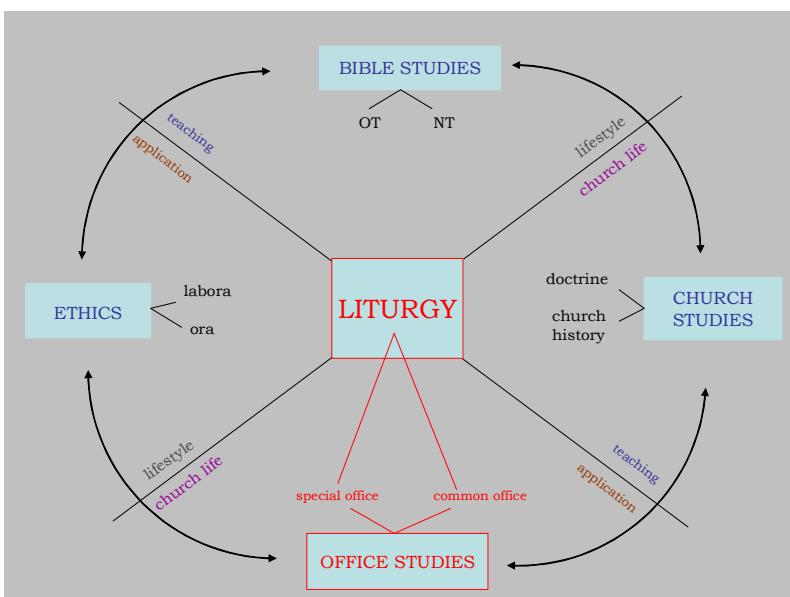
We hope you will receive our comments as a challenge to study further these important issues regarding the church service, and the common and special offices in Christ's church.

With brotherly greetings,

On behalf of the deputies of the FRCA,

Rev W Huizinga, Convener

AMC Bruning, Secretary



III. Decisions General Synod Amersfoort 2005

A. In relation to Liturgy in general

1. not to develop a separate order of worship on the basis of the *Ordinarium* texts (11-06; decision 2)
2. not to release for use in the churches the order of worship for the “leerdienst” as presented by the deputies (16-09; decision 1)
3. to approve and release for use in the churches the proposed Form for the public profession of faith hereby replacing the present Form

new in the Form:

- ✓ “Since you have now come here before God and His holy congregation to say yes to your baptism, to profess your faith and hereby to receive admission to the supper of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- ✓ “Do you promise to commit yourself to the edification of the congregation, to use Word and sacrament faithfully, and.....”

B. In relation to New Hymns

1. not to revise Leusden’s criterium that the contents of the hymns should be in harmony with Scripture
Ground: GS Zuidhorn has added to it that a hymn should not be in conflict with the Reformed Confessions
2. to charge deputies “Kerkmuziek” to make an inventory of the opinion and vision of churches and church members in relation to the released hymns in order to find out which hymns should be in the final Hymn Book
 - Note: at the moment there are 117 (Leusden and Zuidhorn) plus 55 (Amersfoort) new hymns from the “Liedboek voor de kerken” plus 49 new hymns from other sources plus the “90 Hymns” (Zuidhorn), besides the 41 already in the *Gereformeerde Kerkboek*.
3. to charge deputies “Kerkmuziek” to finish their selection between 2005 and 2008 with another 120 hymns
4. to determine that General Synod 2008 should decide which hymns, selected before 2005, and which hymns, proposed at GS 2008, can be released for use in the churches
5. to determine that General Synod 2011 decides which hymns should be in the Hymn Book
6. not to comply with the request from Rijnsburg still to delete 14 hymns from the list, but to answer Rijnsburg, and also Hardenberg-Centrum, Vroomshoop and Kornhorn in a letter in which would be explained why GS Amersfoort didn’t comply with the request.
 - Note: in the letter the conclusion is reached more than once that we can explain the hymn in a Scriptural way, or that we can sing it in a Scriptural way if we give a good explanation

Recommendations

1. to express appreciation for not developing a separate order of worship on the basis of the *Ordinarium* texts;

2. to express appreciation for not releasing for use in the churches the order of worship for the “leerdienst” (teaching-service) as presented by the deputies;
3. to express concerns about the continuing proliferation and the contents of the hymns from the “liedboek voor de kerken;” and to continue to suggest more time be spent on the Psalms and on songs based directly on Scripture.
4. to keep monitoring GKV’s decisions in accordance with our Rule b (to mutually care for each other that they do not depart from the reformed faith in ... liturgy) and to become more acquainted, in a selective manner, with the hymns that are approved and are being approved.

Grounds for our concerns

1. Although GS Amersfoort stated that GS Zuidhorn has added to GS Leusden that a hymn shouldn’t be in conflict with the Reformed Confession, GS Zuidhorn decided not to change Leusden’s criterium into “a good hymn should not be in conflict with Scripture and Confession”.
2. The contents of hymns should be unambiguously biblical and reformed. There are too many hymns in “Liedboek voor de kerken” which are not unambiguously biblical and reformed.
3. We have asked that the Psalms, the Book of Praise in the Bible, receive more attention. Without replacing the present rhymings and tunes of the Psalms, to work on new rhymings which are more Christ-centered and on tunes other than Genevan ones. Thus more attention can be given to the Psalms.
4. More than once we have asked the GKV, in line with John Calvin, to put to rhyme Bible texts and passages. It is better to spend time and energy in composing hymns directly derived from Scriptures than in dealing with appeal upon appeal to unbiblical thoughts that have crept into the hymns. And probably those hymns can be sung if the congregations, by singing, every time translate the ambiguous sentences in a reformed way, but always those hymns shall be found inferior to the faithful Cantica which are based on God’s own reliable Word.

5.9 Deputies Report to Synod West Kelmscott 2006 Sacraments and Military Chaplains

5.9.1 Mandate

Synod Rockingham 2003 Article 41 made the following decision regarding the issue of military chaplains in our sister churches in The Netherlands:

V. Military Chaplains and the Lord’s Supper

Decision:

1. Deputies should further examine the decision of GS Zuidhorn to ascertain whether or not our concerns were alleviated and relay their findings to the Dutch Deputies.

Grounds:

1. Further study is required of the GS Zuidhorn decision to determine if it is in accordance with Scripture and the Confessions.
2. Because our concerns were relayed to the Dutch Deputies, they deserve a response.

5.9.2 Activities

Deputies examined the decision of GS Zuidhorn. This synod decision is provided in Appendix A and included the previous letter of our deputies that was sent to them prior to GS Zuidhorn as material for this decision. The decision can be summarised as:

1. The appeals to the previous decision by GS Leusden were rejected on the basis that they did not contradict Scripture, the confession or the Church Order.
2. Scripture, confession and Church Order speak about the Lord's Supper in reference to a "normal situation", but this decision is about an "extraordinary" situation.
3. The conditions for such a celebration of the Lord's Supper as specified by GS Leusden were changed to highlight the fact that in the gathering, the character of the Christian congregation is honoured; the military chaplain may only invite those are communicant members who agree with the 'foundational matters' of the Christian religion and are blameless in their walk of life; and that mutual supervision and discipline is required by participants of the Lord's Supper.

Our continuing concerns were explained in a letter to Deputies of our sister churches in The Netherlands. This letter is attached as Appendix B and highlights three concerns which are summarised as:

1. Synod should not be making rules for "exceptions" in "exceptional circumstances". The decision of GS Zuidhorn relates only to military situations where military chaplains may conduct the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Exceptions need to take into account individual circumstances for which "rules" cannot be made.
2. The Synod decision sets aside a Church Orderly rule in a military situation and is in danger of going in the direction of interdenominational celebrations of the Lord's Supper. GS Zuidhorn indicates that this situation is an "exception" from the norm.
3. The decision appears to elevate the sacrament of Holy Supper to the extent that military personnel cannot do without it over an extended period of time, whereas there are other situations, such as for chronically ill persons, where church members do go without.

Dutch deputies responded to our concerns by continuing to defend their position. They argue that since military personnel are deployed for periods of six months to war zones, they miss the comfort and strengthening of the celebration of the Holy Supper, and therefore it is good to have the military chaplain administer Holy Supper with "sincere Christian service personnel". They raise an additional point, which is of potential concern to us, that the celebration of Holy Supper already occurs in hospitals, but no detailed information was provided. As regards the

relationship between the sacraments and the Church Order, they indicate that there is a difference of view between our and their deputies. Their correspondence to us is attached as Appendix C.

GS Amersfoort rejected all the appeals, including the submission of our deputies, and amended the decision of GS Zuidhorn to allow military chaplains to administer also Holy Baptism in addition to Lord's Supper. In addition to the previously decided conditions for administering and celebrating Holy Supper, Synod expanded on these by specifying that the celebration takes place using the relevant forms adopted by the churches. The decision of GS Amersfoort is provided in Appendix D. Synod stipulated that this decision applies only to military chaplains and that it is undesirable that this decision begins to function as a point of departure for the administration of the sacraments in other situations. Other situations require decisions to suit the circumstances.

In addition to the concerns we already identified, this decision highlights additional concerns as follows:

1. The same concerns that apply to the administration of Holy Supper in military situations now also applies to the administration of Holy Baptism.
2. The following anomaly arises. A non-baptised military serviceman who professes the reformed faith can be baptised and then become a member of the GKV (together with his children who at the same time will be baptised). But children of believing servicemen, who have been admitted to the Holy Supper in the Christian congregation to which they belong, can be baptised and then will enter in the register of the (possibly non-GKV) congregation to which the servicemen belong. Here we miss the appeal of Art 28 of Belgic Confession that it is everyone's duty to join the church and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church.
3. The terms "war zones" and "areas of crisis" that were previously used to define "exceptional circumstances" have now been retracted since they "do not cover all situations to which military personnel are sent out". This opens the doors for celebrating the Lord's Supper in almost all military environments where members are away from church for extended periods. This leads to the danger that these situations are not "exceptional" anymore but become commonplace.

5.9.3 Recommendations

Deputies recommend the following to synod:

Recommendations:

1. To express our concerns to the Dutch sister churches that GS Amersfoort's decision regarding the administration of both sacraments for military personnel goes beyond the common consent of the Church Order and leads to the danger of interdenominational (against Art 28, B.C.) administration of sacraments.

Grounds:

1. GS Amersfoort has not alleviated our concerns that were sent to deputies. We are still not convinced that there is no danger in making exceptions to the commonly agreed regulations of the Church Order and then apply them in exceptional circumstances within the military environment.

2. GS Amersfoort should have referred to Belgic Confession, Art 28, where we confess that it is everyone's duty to join the church and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church.
3. The possibility of administering the Lord's Supper, under certain conditions, to those who are not members of the GKV (or sister churches) has been expanded to the sacrament of baptism (again under certain conditions). Baptising children of believing servicemen who are not members of the GKV (or sister churches) is now also possible.
4. The exceptional situations, which previously referred to "war zones" and "areas of crisis" have now been broadened to include all military zones where the GKV servicemen are isolated for lengthy periods of time.

APPENDIX A

DECISION OF GENERAL SYNOD ZUIDHORN 2002

Requests to revise the decision concerning administration of the Lord's Supper by Military Chaplains

Material: objections from various churches and members of the GKN(v), as well as a letter from the FRCA.

Decision 1: to declare that the decision of GS Leusden 1999, Acts art. 70 decision 3, does not contradict Scripture, the confession or the Church Order

Ground

Objectors have made various noteworthy remarks on the basis of Scripture, confession and Church Order with reference to the celebration of the Lord's Supper in a normal situation, namely the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the congregation of the Lord which assembles under the leadership and supervision of the church council. This does not prove that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is impossible in the most extraordinary situation to which the decision refers, namely, in a situation of war or crisis where there is an assembly of believers not under the leadership and supervision of a church council but where a responsible preacher is present.

Decision 2: to declare that the afore-mentioned decision is not a concession to the Senior Military Chaplain and thus is not the result of an enforced prescription of the authorities, nor that this does violence to the separation between church and state.

Ground

The agreement to administer the Lord's Supper in a situation of war or crisis is not a mandate from the Senior Military Chaplain but the result of agreements made within the CIO-M by Protestant Churches.

Decision 3: to declare that the regulation for such an extremely extraordinary situation gives no ground for thought that within our church federation one may speak of or there might be an open Lord's Supper Table.

Ground:

The decision has clearly been taken for situations of war or crisis within which members of the armed forces assemble as extraordinary community to hear God's Word and use the sacraments. The regulation for this exception thus does not create a new rule for those situations in which one cannot speak of war or crisis. It wants to translate the basic criteria for the celebration of the Lord's Supper in general as well as is possible to this extraordinary situation.

Decision 4: to declare that the afore-mentioned decision does not contradict decisions of previous general synods as referred to by objectors.

Grounds:

1. GS Leeuwarden 1920 (art. 170), GS Utrecht 1923 (art. 163), and GS Kampen 1951 (art. 141) all refer to the Lord's Supper celebrated under normal circumstances and have been maintained with the decision of GS Leusden 1999, which only refers to the extraordinary circumstance of a situation of war or crisis
2. GS Groningen 1946 (art. 224B) indeed states that it does not advocate the institution of 'emergency' or 'field' congregations, but when it comes to the incidental celebration of the Lord's Supper in a situation of war or crisis no institution of a 'field' or 'emergency' congregation as referred to by GS Groningen 1946 is in view.

Decision 5: to change the decision of GS Leusden 1999, Acts art. 70 decision 3 as follows: "to mandate deputies to guide and advise a serving military chaplain with respect to exceptional

situations of crisis and war so that he, as the person bearing final responsibility in this matter, is able to celebrate and administer the Lord's Supper when this is desired and the opportunity arises, as long as:

1. in the gathering the character of the christian congregation is honoured, namely, that it is a communion on the basis of God's Word which gives form to mutual supervision and discipline;
2. he only invites those of whom he is convinced
 - that they are admitted to the Lord's Supper in the Christian congregation to which they belong
 - that they agree with us in the 'foundational matters' of the Christian religion;
 - that they are blameless in their walk of life;
 - that they with a view to participation in the Lord's Supper are prepared to submit themselves to each other's supervision and discipline."

Grounds:

1. Christ has commanded that the Lord's Supper be celebrated when He said: "Do this in remembrance of Me."
2. It should be taken into account that in the extreme circumstances of war or crisis there would be a special need for the powerful sealing of God's grace.
3. Participation in the institute of military chaplains implies that a military chaplain of the GKV also has a calling with respect to those who are not member of a GKV.
4. The aforementioned decision wrongly limited the decision with respect to the administration of the Lord's Supper to an army chaplain while a military chaplain was intended.
5. It was a mistake to introduce into the discussion at GS Leusden the concept emergency congregation and subsequently name the concept 'emergency congregation' in ground 2, Acts art. 70 decision 3, a concept that was not further defined and that gives rise to confusion in view of the decision of GS Groningen 1946, Acts art. 224b on this matter.
6. It was in error that ground 3 of the afore-mentioned decision lacked the element of mutual supervision and discipline.
7. In a striking way this situation is comparable to that of Christians for whom GS Leeuwarden 1920, Acts art. 170, drew up its stipulations, namely that "there is for them no opportunity to use the Lord's Supper in the church of which they are member." Hence that stipulation, suited to this concrete situation, is also applicable here.
8. Placing the matter of mutual supervision and discipline in the whole of the community that celebrates the Lord's Supper prevents the administration of the Lord's Supper from being only the responsibility of the preacher or dependent on how well the preacher knows his men. With respect to the celebration of the Lord's Supper and admission thereto the preacher does have the last word.
9. In this way the holiness of the Lord's Table is sufficiently guarded.

Decision 6: To declare that

- the procedure, as described in GS Leusden 1999, Acts art. 70 decision 4, for this situation does not injure the holiness of the celebration of the Lord's Supper;
- based on the now revised decision it is not necessary for deputies to draw up a further instruction.

Ground:

This revised decision creates a sufficiently clear framework for military chaplains, under the guidance and advice of deputies, to act as they see fit and afterwards give account to deputies in view of the fact that he is accountable to them.

Adopted with 28 votes in favour, 2 against and 4 abstentions.

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO DEPUTIES OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES OF THE NETHERLANDS

c/ AMC Bruning, Corresponding Clerk
20 Wallangara Drive
Bedfordale, WA 6112

To the Deputies of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands
Secretariaat BBK
Postbus 499
8000 AL Zwolle
bbk@gbouw.nl

14 September 2004

Esteemed Brothers Deputies,

General Synod Leusden 1999 decided to allow military chaplains to conduct the celebration of the Lord's Supper in exceptional circumstances such as in crisis and war areas and under certain conditions.

We, as deputies for sister churches, indicated in a letter to you, the Dutch deputies, our concerns with this decision. Since then, Synod Zuidhorn 2002 has revised the Leusden decision somewhat. Our abiding concerns can be listed in three points:

First of all, we continue to be mystified as to the need of this exceptional ruling. Why make '*exceptions*' to the commonly agreed regulations of our Church Order, and apply them in '*exceptional circumstances*' within the military environment? Could you please explain the need for the Lord's Supper to be celebrated in these '*crises*' and '*war zones*'? Could you give some details of when and where this is actually taking place? Can such soldiers not wait till they return home or return on furlough to celebrate the Lord's Supper? It could be that their home congregations could arrange such celebrations to coincide with such dates. Why the need for such special celebrations away from the congregation? In prisons and in hospitals, where persons could be detained for extensive periods of time, it has been customary to preach the gospel, but not to celebrate the Lord's Supper. As people profess the reformed faith, arrangements are made, if at all practical, for them to use the sacraments as administered in a church service according to our agreed Church Order. Even on the mission field a missionary accepts the preaching. If people profess the reformed faith and are godly, then a celebration of the Lord's Supper is arranged with them, but with them only. Even then, in situations where there is (yet) no missionary, there could be quite some time between celebrations, depending on the availability of a minister. In the early days of our churches here in Australia, we also at times experienced a long delay between celebrations when there was no minister available. In fact, we also did make an exceptional circumstance, but we did not make "*rulings*" to do so. So could we ask and challenge you to give information about the special need for this ruling?

In the second place, the churches have made agreements in Articles 60 and 61 of your Church Order (Arts 51/56/57 of ours) regarding administration, frequency and admission to Lord's Supper. This regulation serves the churches at home and also serves as a norm on the mission field (where only an ordained missionary is present to supervise the table) as well. Only those who have professed the reformed faith and are godly in conduct are invited to the Lord's table. To set such a rule aside in

one situation makes this rule of relative value. If the revealed word of God (as 'caught' in Art 60) can be placed aside in one circumstance (military), it can also be placed aside in other circumstances (eg. prison, hospital or even a congregation member in crisis of depression, etc). As it is, we believe that the rule in Art 60 upholds the sacred deposit, the pattern of sound teachings (2 Tim.1:13) as entrusted to us in Scripture and faithfully confessed over the centuries by the church of Jesus Christ. If we make exceptions we are in danger of going in the direction of interdenominational celebrations of the Lord's Supper.

Thirdly, it is true that the Lord wants His people at His table (see Lord's Day 28). But let us not elevate the sacraments as if they are so necessary that they must be imported to the barracks. Let us keep things in proportion. The primary means of grace is the preaching of the gospel (Rom 10:14ff; Lord's Day 25) and not the sacraments. We do not understand why military personnel would have such need of the sacrament of Lord's Supper, while the chronically ill or imprisoned do not have such need (and therefore opportunity).

Putting it all together, we conclude that perhaps you should have declined participation with the CIO-M as long as the CIO-M required of your chaplains to administer the sacrament contrary to what you have agreed with common consent in the Church Order.

We pray that this contribution of ours may help you as deputies, together with your bond of churches, to see the danger of the direction that you are going.

With Christian greetings,

On behalf of the FRCA Deputies for Sister Churches

Rev W Huizinga, Convener
AMC Bruning, Secretary

APPENDIX C

Reformed Churches in the Netherlands
Deputies for Spiritual Care of Military Personnel
c/- Rev GF de Kimpe,
Gramsbergerweg 63,
7772CV Hardenberg, the Netherlands

Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia
for Relations with Sister Churches
c/- AMC Bruning, Corresponding Clerk
20 Wallangarra Drive
Bedfordale WA 6112, Australia

Re: Your letter of 14 September 2004

Amersfoort, 12 November 2004

Esteemed brothers, Deputies.

As Deputies for the Spiritual Care of Military Personnel (*Geestelijke Verzorging Militairen – GVM*), we have taken note of your letter, in which you express your concern about the decision of General Synod Zuidhorn in relation to the celebration of the Holy Supper by military personnel in war or crisis zones.

You ask a number of questions around the theme: is it necessary for our military chaplains (Dutch: *legerpredikanten – tr*) to celebrate the Holy Supper? Most pressing is the question: is it good to take decisions in this matter that conflict with the Church Order as it is currently in force?

As Deputies, we appear to note a difference of view between yourselves and us in relation to the sacraments and the Church Order. Only, we do not consider ourselves, as Deputies GVM, to be called upon to exchange thoughts with you about that. We see this more as the task of our Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad.

To begin with, a short reaction to what you wrote:

“Why make ‘exceptions’ to the commonly agreed regulations of our Church Order, and apply them in ‘exceptional circumstances’ within the military environment? Could you please explain the need for the Lord’s Supper to be celebrated in these ‘crises’ and ‘war zones’? Could you give some details of when and where this is actually taking place? Can such soldiers not wait till they return home or return on furlough to celebrate the Lord’s Supper? It could be that their home congregations could arrange such celebrations to coincide with such dates. Why the need for such special celebrations away from the congregation? In prisons and in hospitals, where persons could be detained for extensive periods of time, it has been customary to preach the gospel, but not to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.”

Regularly, our military personnel are deployed for periods of six months to war zones like Iraq. “A quick trip home” to join in there with the celebration of the Holy Supper is clearly not possible. In such places they are completely separated from normal church life. In addition, there is the constant threat of death: military personnel are often killed; and for Dutch servicemen also, there is no assurance that they will return home safely. In such situations, the military chaplain attempts to support them; he will encourage Christian servicemen especially with the Word. In such circumstances, believing service personnel often strongly miss the comfort and strengthening that

the celebration of the Holy Supper can give: especially there, where your own death can be so close, it is good to seek comfort in the death of your Saviour for the salvation of His own. That is how sincere Christian servicemen experience that, also within our own Deputyship. Within the Reformed Churches we have searched for ways to give this spiritual support to our brothers – and possibly also sisters – who serve in the military forces. In doing so, we have taken especial care to ensure that only sincere Christian service personnel take part in the celebrations.

As regards the examples of prisons and hospitals, it should be known that the Reformed Churches actually have created possibilities to celebrate the Holy Supper in hospitals: not separately from the local congregations, but still separately from its normal worship services. There is a parallel here, because the military chaplain is not separate, but has been sent into the military *for and on behalf of the churches*. He represents more than just himself.

We would also like to respond to another part of your letter:

You conclude that the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) perhaps should have declined to participate in the CIO-M, as long as the CIO-M requires military chaplains to administer the sacraments, in conflict with the agreed rules of the Church Order.

In reply to this, we ask your attention for the following:

- A. The General Synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs (1996) decided to request membership of the CIO-M, within the framework of their mandate to the Deputies:
 - a. To monitor as closely as possible the development of spiritual care within the military forces, to evaluate this, and where possible to respond to it.
 - b. To maintain contact with the Chief Military Chaplain, in order to exert a positive influence, wherever possible.

As ground for this was given:

- 3. Participation in the CIO renders membership of the CIO-M desirable.

In the period that the Reformed Churches were members of the CIO-M, the churches have collaborated positively for the improvement of the quality of Protestant Spiritual Care within the armed forces. Part of this decision was that the churches would appoint as military chaplains only such ministers as were fully available (*Dutch: volledig inzetbaar – tr*).

- B. “Fully available” means, that in relevant situations these ministers may also administer the sacraments. In the first place, this is intended for Christian service personnel who for extended periods are unable to take part in church life within their home congregation. Long-term deployments abroad, or participation in peace-keeping missions.
- C. At that time, the Reformed churches recognized that this could only be implemented for our ministers, if a special decision was taken to that effect. It had to be recognized that the current Church Order did not provide for such a special situation.
- D. The conclusion must be, then, that the Reformed churches have not set aside or weakened the current church-orderly stipulations, but have made a specific decision to deal with a specific situation.

We hope that with this answer we have been able to take away some of your concerns. Please be assured that we, in our considerations and proposals to Synod, comprehensively confront ourselves with the Word of God, the Confessions which are based on it, and the agreements which we as churches have laid down in the Church Order. Our expectation is that the Lord God will bless the decisions that have been taken, so that His children who serve in the armed forces may receive support and strengthening of their faith.

With Christian greetings,
For the Deputies,
GF de Kimpe, chairman.

APPENDIX D DECISION OF GS AMERSFOORT

Revisieverzoeken avondmaalsviering door militairen in oorlogs- of crisisgebied.

Voorstel : commissie Overijssel

Materiaal :

1. Acta GS Zuidhorn, art 101, besluiten 1 - 5, inzake avondmaalsbediening door de krijgsmachtpredikant;
2. brief van br. C. Boekholt en anderen te Hoogeveen d.d. 10 februari 2005, waarin verzoekt wordt de besluiten 1, 3, 4, 5, genoemd in Materiaal 1, weg te nemen uit het midden van de kerken. In de brief worden vragen gesteld bij de besluiten, wordt gesteld dat deze besluiten een eerste stap zijn op weg naar een open avondmaalstafel en wordt aangegeven dat het avondmaal alleen onder kerkelijk toezicht in een wettige gemeente gevierd kan worden (art. 60 en 61 KO);
3. rapport van de Free Reformed Churches of Australia aan de synode van Amersfoort 2005 m.b.t de Nederlandse deputatenrapporten en de synodebeslissingen d.d. 17 februari 2005. In dit rapport wordt gesteld dat het besluit genoemd in materiaal 1 meer is ingegeven door subjectieve gevoelens dan door wat staat in art. 60 KO. Gevraagd wordt waarom militair personeel behoeft aan dit sacrament en chronisch zieken of gevangenen van de viering worden uitgesloten;
4. brief van ds. E. Heres te Dalfsen dd. 17 februari 2005, waarin hij verzoekt de besluiten, genoemd in Materiaal 1, uit het midden van de kerken weg te nemen. Zijn bezwaren zijn:
 - a. de groep militairen die samenkomt, is niet de christelijke gemeente;
 - b. de voorwaarde dat genodigden in de eigen kerk tot het avondmaal zijn toegelaten heeft maar geringe betekenis, omdat in veel kerken de tucht niet meer in ere is;
 - c. gevraagd wordt wat de grondstukken van de christelijke leer zijn, zoals genoemd in besluit 5, punt 2, en hoe in een oorlogs- of crisissituatie uitgemaakt kan worden wie overeenstemt in deze grondstukken;
 - d. het is een niet waar te maken opdracht voor de krijgsmachtpredikant om vast te stellen dat de genodigde militairen onberispelijk van levenswandel zijn;
 - e. gevraagd wordt wat concreet verwacht mag worden van de bereidheid zich te onderwerpen aan elkaar's opzicht en tucht als het gaat om mensen van verschillende kerkgenootschappen;
 - f. bij de adviseurs van de synode van Leeuwarden 1920 leefde kennelijk de leer van de pluriformiteit van de kerk, dit is een opvatting die niet overeenkomt met art. 29 NGB;
 - g. het besluit van de synode van Leeuwarden 1920 kan het besluit, genoemd in Materiaal 1, niet legitimeren en de regeling die deze synode trof kan niet van toepassing zijn voor de situatie waarvoor onze krijgsmachtpredikanten kunnen worden geplaatst.

Besluit:

aan de verzoeken om de besluiten uit het midden van de kerken weg te nemen niet te voldoen.

Gronden:

- 1.a. in de revisieverzoeken worden veelal dezelfde argumenten aangevoerd die de Generale Synode van Zuidhorn al gewogen heeft bij de verzoeken om revisie van het besluit van de Generale Synode van Leusden, Acta art. 70 besluit 3 m.b.t de avondmaalsviering in crisis- en oorlogsgebieden. De Generale Synode van Zuidhorn sprak uit dat genoemd besluit van de Generale Synode van Leusden niet in strijd is met de Schrift, de belijdenis en de kerkorde (Acta art 101 besluit 1);

1.b. in de brieven worden wel allerlei vragen gesteld bij de besluiten en de regeling, maar het stellen van vragen is niet het aantonen dat de besluiten ten onrechte genomen zijn;

2. de Generale Synode van Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996 besloot aan het verzoek om revisie van het besluit van de Generale Synode van Leeuwarden 1920, Acta art. 25, niet te voldoen. Als argument voor dit verzoek werd o.a. aangevoerd dat dit besluit gebaseerd zou zijn op de pluriformiteitsgedachte. De synode van Berkel en Rodenrijs wees het verzoek af met onder andere als grond: het besluit van de Generale Synode van Leeuwarden 1920 is wel tot stand gekomen onder invloed van een advies van een commissie onder leiding van dr. H.H. Kuyper, maar dit betekent nog niet dat de pluriformiteitsgedachte in het besluit is terug te vinden (Generale Synode Berkel en Rodenrijs, Acta art. 41 besluit 1 grond 1);

3. de Generale Synode van Zuidhorn legitimeerde haar besluit niet alleen met de uitspraak van de Generale Synode van Leeuwarden 1920, en sprak niet uit dat de regeling van deze synode van toepassing is voor de situatie waarin de krijgsmachtpredikant kan worden geplaatst, maar zij sprak uit dat op een markant punt deze situatie overeenkomt met die van de christenen voor wie deze synode haar bepalingen opstelde namelijk, dat “er voor hen geen gelegenheid bestaat om in de kerk, waarvan ze zelf lid zijn, het avondmaal te gebruiken”, en dat daarom de regeling van Leeuwarden, aangepast aan deze concrete situatie, van toepassing kan zijn (Acta art. 101 besluit 5 grond 7).

Decision regarding the administration of the Sacraments for military personnel in remote areas.

Decision 3-A:

To amend the decision of synod Zuidhorn 2002-2003 (Acts, art. 101, decision 5) and to declare that ministers of the armed forces are authorized to administer the sacraments

- In worship services, in exceptional circumstances where military personnel are isolated for lengthy periods from regular church life
- When the desire is there, and opportunity exists
- Under the oversight and guidance of the *Deputies for the Spiritual Care of Military Personnel*
- And where the final responsibility rests with the relevant minister.

The following conditions must be satisfied:

1. They may administer and celebrate the Holy Supper, provided:
 - a. That in the worship service the special character of the Christian congregation is honoured, i.e. that this communion is based on the Word of God and that it upholds a form of mutual oversight and discipline.
 - b. That he only invites those to participate of whom he is satisfied that:
 - i. they have been admitted to the Holy Supper in the Christian congregation to which they belong
 - ii. they agree with us on the basic doctrines (Dutch: *grondstukken*) of the Christian faith
 - iii. they are blameless in a Christian walk of life.
 - iv. they are willing, in view of their participation in the Holy Supper, to subject themselves to mutual oversight and discipline.
 - c. The celebration of the Holy Supper takes place using the relevant forms adopted for this purpose by the Gereformeerde Kerken

2. They may administer Holy Baptism to military personnel, provided:
 - a. they allow themselves to be instructed in the Christian faith, as summarized in the Apostles' Creed
 - b. they profess the Reformed faith, including its doctrine concerning baptism
 - c. the administration of Holy Baptism takes place using the relevant forms adopted for this purpose by the Gereformeerde Kerken
 - d. the *Deputies for the Spiritual Care of Military Personnel* have given concurring advice
 - e. the military serviceman so baptized is registered as a member of one of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, or one of their sister churches.
 3. They may administer Holy Baptism to children born within families of believing military personnel, provided:
 - a. The parents requesting Holy Baptism allow themselves to be instructed in the doctrine of Baptism, as set out in the relevant forms adopted by the Gereformeerde Kerken.
 - b. The administration of Holy Baptism takes place using the Form for the Baptism of Infants
 - c. The parents have been admitted to the Holy Supper in the Christian congregation to which they belong
 - d. The child so baptized is entered in the register of that congregation
 4. Holy Baptism and Holy Supper may also be administered to civilians who are part of the Dutch military forces, and who live in the same isolated circumstances as the military personnel referred to above, provided they satisfy the conditions outlined in Points 1, 2 and 3, above.
- Grounds:
1. The Deputies have demonstrated that the terms “war zones” and “areas of crisis” in the decisions of the General Synod of Zuidhorn do not cover all situations to which military personnel are sent out.
 2. The General Synod of Zuidhorn judged that the situation of military personnel in war zones and areas of crisis is in significant respects similar to that of Christians for which the Synod of Leeuwarden 1920 (Acts, art. 25) made stipulations, i.e. *“There is no opportunity for them to celebrate the Lord’s Supper in the congregation to which they belong.”* This also applies to military personnel who find themselves in an ecclesiastically isolated position. Accordingly, the stipulations of the Synod Leeuwarden may also be applicable to the situations of military personnel.
 3. For military personnel, a lengthy period of service outside the Netherlands, and contact with a minister of the armed forces may lead to a desire to be baptized.
 4. It is evidence of proper procedural care that the advice of Deputies is obtained before someone is ingrafted into the Christian church through the sacrament of Holy Baptism
 5. The Synod of Zuidhorn judged that the right to participate in the Holy Supper is concurrent with the right to the use of the other sacrament, Holy Baptism. (See

Art 50 and 60 of the Church Order, and Acts of Zuidhorn, Art 36, decision 1, ground 3)

Decision 3-B:

To declare that the provisions outlined above – decision 3-A – apply exclusively to ministers of the armed forces, and to the military and civilian personnel entrusted to their spiritual care.

Ground:

It is undesirable that Decision 3-A begins to function as a point of departure for the administration of the sacraments in other situations than those of military personnel and those who give them spiritual care. In other situations, a line of argument must be found which suits their specific circumstances.

At the conclusion of the discussion of the report of the Deputies for the Spiritual Care of Military Personnel, the president of the Synod addresses the meeting as follows:

We have just made a decision regarding the administration of sacraments by our ministers in the armed forces in exceptional situations, in which military personnel are isolated for lengthy periods from regular church life. When you take into account the correspondence received, you don't have to be an arch-pessimist to presume that not everyone in the churches will applaud this decision.

Because the decision of Synod Zuidhorn concerning this matter has evoked criticism from our sister churches abroad, and because it became one of the reasons why brothers and sisters have left our churches in recent years, I would like, as president, to say something at this point. It is not my intention to defend the decision. The decision will speak for itself, and the churches will have to judge it on its merits.

There is one important matter at stake here: the administration and celebration of the sacraments. Then, the greatest of care is required. But we are dealing with – and I have the need to point this out – exceptional circumstances. We have not made a new rule. We have not tried to hollow out the existing rule; rather, we wish to confirm it in an exceptional circumstance.

In exceptional circumstances, different factors must be weighed. These factors should not cause us to panic, as long as in the original rule is confirmed in the exception in question. In his advice, Prof Dr B Kamphuis has pointed out how, in his view, confessional points of departure can be recognized in this decision. I am happy to agree with that. In order to demonstrate that it was not the intention of Synod to create room for an open or unecclesiastical celebration of the Holy Supper, but to give the greatest possible effect to our existing rule.

1. It is of first importance that our Synod takes **the forms for Baptism and Holy Supper**, as adopted in our churches, as points of departure. In these forms, the force of Scripture itself is applied to explain what Baptism and Holy Supper are really about. In these forms, it is clearly expressed how Christ Himself has instituted the sacraments, how they speak of Him and His benefits, and how they seal His promises. These forms also express, with the greatest seriousness, what is meant with the holiness of the sacraments, and the responsibility everyone has in honouring them. A heavier judgement is proclaimed to everyone who uses the Holy Supper without faith.
2. According to the doctrine of Scripture, the sacrament is a sign and seal of the promise of the Gospel. This **connection between Word and Sacrament** is reinforced in this decision, in that the sacrament is to be administered in a proper worship service, which, within the existing situation, honours to the greatest possible extent the character of the Christian congregation, i.e that it is a community based on the Word of God. The prescribed forms, also, clearly express that the sacraments are signs and seals of the Gospel. Baptism and

Holy Supper belong with the Gospel! In this way, the unity of Word and sacrament is safeguarded.

3. In this decision, care is taken for **the holiness of the sacrament** by means of criteria relating to doctrine (agreement with the chief points of the Christian faith, as summarized in the Apostles' Creed) and life (a blameless walk of life), which apply to the adult to be baptized, the parents requesting baptism for their child, and the participant in the Holy Supper. Responsibility for a holy use of the Lord's Supper rests with the participants, but not only with them! Also with the minister, and with other participants. In this way, and within the limitations of the situation, justice is done to the exercise of self-discipline, mutual discipline, and ecclesiastical discipline. In the event of baptism, in addition to the judgement of the minister, the concurring advice of the Deputies and/or the decision of the home congregation to register the baptism act as further safeguards.
4. The **confessional character** of the administration of the sacraments is evident in that the requirements in force since 1920 are maintained: communicant membership in a Christian congregation, and agreement with the basic doctrines of the Christian church, as summarized in the Apostles' Creed. The forms to be used themselves explicitly point to a confession of Christ. This confession may not be hindered by an unchristian walk of life: hence the requirement of a blameless life, and the exercise of mutual discipline.
5. The **ecclesiastical character** of the sacraments is also honoured, to the extent that this is possible in the given situations. This is necessary, for Christ gave His sacraments to His **church**. Justice to this principle is done by ensuring that the sacraments are administered, not by a minister appointed by the military forces, but by a minister appointed by the churches. In the exercise of his task, he is supported and overseen by the churches, and his consistory supervises his doctrine and life. In this respect, his situation is similar to that of a missionary, and he has a similar mandate to preach the Word and administer the sacraments.

In such situations, regular church life does not exist. And still, in those situations the administration of the sacraments is explicitly connected, not to an informal gathering, but to a formally constituted worship service, in which, within the existing limitations of the situation, the special character of the Christian congregation is honoured, i.e. that it is a communion based on the Word of God, which exercises mutual oversight and discipline.

The ecclesiastical character of this communion at the Lord's table is further reinforced by the criterion that the membership status of the participants in their own home congregation must be observed.

6. The element of **shared communion** at the Lord's table finds expression in the willingness of participants to submit to mutual oversight and discipline.

Even those who are unable to agree with the decision taken, who would have given different weight in their consideration, would do well to realize that Synod, in this exceptional case, has striven to do justice to confessional points of departure concerning the sacraments, in line with synodical stipulations that have already been in force for 85 years (Synod Leeuwarden, 1920).

Those who do not agree with this decision, might ask themselves what other ways there would be for military personnel to observe Christ's command to proclaim His death, or what kind of celebration of Baptism and Holy Supper might even be possible, in extreme situations and during lengthy periods of isolation.

Or is it so that the administration of the sacraments is completely bound up with the normal conditions of our ordered church life, and that as a serviceman you are by definition withheld from the sacraments if you are isolated for a long time from normal church life?

For us here in the Netherlands this might be a theoretical question; but for military personnel in situations of deadly danger or lengthy isolation, this is a matter of direct spiritual importance. May no-one ever take **us** to task that we did not have sufficient eye or empathy for the significance of Christ's own institution of signs and seals of the Gospel, for brothers and sisters in such situations.

5.10 NGK and CGK

Report Contact GKV with the CGK

Synod Rockingham 2003 decided:

1. To encourage our sister-churches in their pursuit of unity with the CGK on the proven basis of God's Word as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity and as practiced by the Church Order of Dort.
2. To monitor developments and to report to the next synod.

Grounds:

1. These churches have the same basis. The Union of 1892 should have seen both within one federation. Though this did not occur then, the mandate of our Lord and His prayer to be one obliges us to seek this unity.
2. Since these developments are ongoing, it is good to keep the churches posted.

General Synod Amersfoort-Centrum 2005 decided (in summary):

1. to follow the road of church union in thankfulness for the growing closeness to the CGK
2. to agree with the evaluation of deputies that there are no differences with regard to content between the texts of the confessions as used in the CGK and in the GKV
3. not to comply with the requests in relation to dr B Loonstra because the CGK have showed to subscribe fully to the confession regarding the Holy Scriptures (BC, art 2-7) in officially dealing with his publication, which resulted in a further explanation (in which he publicly distanced himself from controversial passages, ND, 22/08/2005) in relation to the clarity of Scripture, and the historicity of the Lord's Ascension and Pentecost

(Note: In the meantime dr Loonstra has written a book about homosexuality from which he - after different church appeals - has publicly distanced himself ordering the printer to stop distribution. Further he has withdrawn himself as curator of the Theological University of Apeldoorn, see RD, 21/10/2005)

Report Contact GKV with the NGK

Synod Rockingham 2003 decided:

1. To encourage the GKV in their contacts with the NGK and to encourage the GKV to continue to insist on the need within the NGK for binding to God's Word as confessed in The Three Forms of Unity, and also to insist on the proper place of the Church order to counteract independentism.
2. To encourage the GKV to assess carefully the events of the split in the 1960s.
3. To keep in close contact with the Dutch Deputies and to report to the next synod.

Grounds:

1. The binding to the Scriptures and confessions as well as the proper place of the Church Order for the bond of churches are the crucial points of division. We should encourage our Sister Churches in these matters.
2. The subject of the split will be investigated. It should be done carefully.

General Synod Zuidhorn 2002/3 decided, in summary (24/01/2003; art 129):

1. not to comply with the request of the Provincial Synod Holland-North 2002 to appoint deputies to advise the next General Synod whether and how the decisions of General Synod Amersfoort-West 1967 and Hoogeveen 1969/70 should be reconsidered. This is in connection with br HG van der Weijden's request, suggesting that the decision not to welcome Rev BJF Schoep as member of the synod was insufficiently grounded because of its misinterpretation of "The Open Brief"

Ground:

The request has not given evidence of compelling reasons to reconsider the decisions of the above-mentioned synods.

2. to forward Decision 1 to the NGK Committee for Contact, and informing them that the moderator of Synod is very willing to explain this decision

Ground:

The existence of the NGK is closely connected to the condemnation of "The Open Brief" by Amersfoort-West 1967. Because of the relation with the NGK it's important to explain the decision directly to them.

This is what the FRCA deputies Sister Church Relations told General Synod Amersfoort-Centrum 2005 in their Address:

"What really matters is our answer ("ans-word") to *the Word*, in particular where the Bible doesn't give the answer directly. What matters is the Scriptural application of Scripture, including what it teaches us about the position and duty of men and women in the church. With their dismaying decision to open the special office of supervision and discipline for women, the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken* (NGK) have firmly locked the door of dialogue ("de samensprekingsdeur"). In this situation it really comes down to an application of what the universally applicable Scriptures teach us about the unique office of women. And that is something else than having women in the special offices. May the stranded NGK-ship convince you all the more of the need today for a Reformed hermeneutics-lighthouse, a lighthouse which also sends out the light of Assen-26!"

General Synod Amersfoort-Centrum 2005 decided (in summary):

1. to note with appreciation that the meeting between deputies of both GKV and NGK has led to a useful discussion, especially about God's election.
2. to note with appreciation the declaration of the National Assembly of the NGK that giving a natural place for reflection and discussion on issues of doctrine and life at ecclesiastical assemblies is desirable, even though it may not yet be clear how effect can be given to doctrinal binding.
3. to note with disappointment the declaration of the National Assembly of the NGK stating that it is Biblically justified to open the special offices of

elder and minister to the sisters of the congregation also; this declaration forms a serious barrier for mutual contact

4. to instruct deputies to take the declaration referred to in Point 3 into consideration in its discussion with the NGK about the binding to Scripture and confession

Ground for decision 4:

The questions which successive General Synods of the GKV have sent explicitly via their deputies to the NGK in relation to this binding have not been sufficiently answered till now, and they should play a key role in further discussions before restoration of church unity can be taken place.

APPENDIX

General Synod Amersfoort-Centrum 2005 decided on the following Regulations for local contact and cooperation with the CGK (in summary):

1. Starting point is the “federative growth model” which was adopted by GS Zuidhorn 2002/3.
2. This model includes the following aspects:
 - a. in principle, it is open to all local churches to arrange pulpit exchange with the local CGK, and to accept each others’ members and discipline
 - b. the aim of joint activities is to grow closer to each other on the basis of spiritual unity
3. Where the consistory is of the opinion that the time for pulpit exchange, joint church services or Lord’s Supper celebrations is ripe, it should ask for the assent of the congregation and the approval of classis.
4. Where the consistory wishes to extend cooperation beyond the “growth model”, it should first request the advice of the General Synod’s Deputies for Church Unity, and receive the assent of the congregation and the approval of classis.
5. In all the situations local cooperation will be limited and incomplete, should not lead to forming of one congregation, and will only have local validity.
6. Far-reaching forms of local church cooperation, while national unity is still lacking, should remain an extra stimulus to desire full spiritual national unity of both bonds of churches.

General Synod Amersfoort-Centrum 2005 decided on the following Regulation for local contact and cooperation with bonds of churches other than the CGK, where there is no national agreement (in summary):

1. The consistory sees to it that the contacts and activities take place on the basis of Holy Scripture and bound to the Reformed confessions in order that the truth doesn’t suffer in the striving for unity.
2. Where the consistory is of the opinion that church cooperation is possible in the local situation to the point of accepting each others’ members at the Lord’s Supper, pulpit exchange and joint church services, it should request written advice from the General Synod’s Deputies for Church Unity, inform the congregation and the classis of this advice, and ask for the assent of the congregation and the approval of classis.
3. In making a request as outlined in Point 2, the consistory shall declare and show that there is actual unity in the submission to God’s Word and the Confessions of the churches, and that the objections to further unity which exist at a national level do not apply in the local situation.
4. see further point 5 and 6 of the Regulations for relations with CGK.

Recommendations:

Re CGK

1. To encourage our sister-churches in their pursuit of unity with the CGK to do so on the proven basis of God’s Word as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity and as practiced by the Church Order of Dort.

2. To monitor further developments and to report to the next synod.

Grounds:

1. These churches have the same basis. The Union of 1892 should have seen both within one federation. Though this did not occur then, the mandate of our Lord and His prayer to be one obliges us to seek this unity.
2. Since these developments are ongoing, it is good to keep the churches posted.

Re NGK

1. To encourage the GKV in their contacts with the NGK to continue to insist on the need within the NGK for binding to God's Word as confessed in The Three Forms of Unity, and also to insist on the proper place of the Church Order to counteract independentism.
2. To express thanks that the GKV carefully assessed the request to reconsider the decisions of GS Amersfoort-West (1967) and Hoogeveen (1969/70)
3. To encourage the GKV to pursue the recent developments in the NGK for justifying women as elders and ministers, since this is a barrier to unity.
4. To keep in close contact with the Dutch Deputies and to report to the next synod.

Grounds:

1. The binding to the Scriptures and confessions as well as the proper place of the Church Order for the bond of churches are the crucial points of division. We should encourage our Sister Churches in these matters.
2. The subject of the split in the 1960s has been carefully investigated. It was decided that it's not necessary to change the decisions of previous General Synods.
3. The declaration of the NGK to justify women in the offices of minister and elder indeed sets a barrier to unity. Our sisters need to address this with the NGK.

5.11 The Newly Liberated Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (GKVC)

During the course of the inter-synodical term we received official correspondence from the continuing Reformed Churches of The Netherlands (GKVC). This correspondence included the following documents:

1. An official letter requesting to continue sister relations.
2. Call to Reformation
3. Deed of Liberation or Return
4. Let Us Repent.

All these documents have been uploaded on to the FRCA website/deputies. The last three documents were already available and tabled at our last Synod of 2003. Thus they are not new. The official letter is new and it is attached. It states that they in 2003 have officially separated from the GKV, our sister churches, since they cannot recognise them any longer as true churches. Several charges are pressed to confirm that conclusion. At the end of the letter they state that since they claim to be the continuing GKV (GKVC), they view us as sister churches and request to continue sister relations with us.

It is clear that we as deputies can not make a decision on this official request. It in actual fact involved condemning our sister churches as no longer true and faithful churches, approving their conclusions about the general synods of the GKV, and approving their claim to be the continuing GKV, as well as entering sister relations with the GKVC. These decisions should be made by our synod, not by deputies.

Yet we as deputies have a mandate to continue to discuss the developments within the GKV. Thus we saw our responsibility to help the upcoming synod in its work.

Since we had planned to visit the 2005 GS Amersfoort, your deputies requested the two delegates to arrange a meeting with delegates from the GKVC during the same visit. This was done.

At the same time we informed our sister churches about this correspondence, so that they would be officially informed. They thanked us for this and also sent their booklet in which they respond to the GKVC.

Upon return home the two delegates prepared a report on their visit with the GKVC. Since they followed the seven points of the official letter, it seemed best to draft a response at the same time, a response which our 2006 Synod could use in their discussions and deliberations about this request.

Below is the report of the meeting with the GKVC². After that a more comprehensive report, including questions and answers, and analyses of the latter are given. At the end an overall conclusion is offered, along with recommendations.

² A set of minutes of the meeting was received much later on from the deputies of the GKVC as well. These minutes are not translated, have not passed our meeting, and have not been checked for accuracy. Two of our deputies wanted them included in this report and thus we also append them to this report just after the summary of concerns of the GKVC.

It might be worth mentioning that the GS Amersfoort, after its decision re the fourth commandment, decided to forward this decision to the GKVC along with a covering letter. In that letter they invite and urge the GKVC to hold discussions together. Since this matter of the fourth commandment was probably the main issue that caused the separation, GS Amersfoort decided to use the decision on this matter to be the catalyst for common discussions. The GKVC were to hold its synod in Nov/05, D.V. Thus at this time of writing our report we are not able as yet to relay their response.

Much discussion took place among your deputies on this matter. We did not all agree on all things. As a result there was some amalgamation of views, especially in the recommendations and grounds. We tried to use the route of consensus. Even after that was done, two deputies still could not accept the analyses of the delegates as well as the second recommendation³. We did not want to send two reports to you. We have tried to avoid majority and minority reports as much as possible, since that route did not serve synods well in the past. Instead, we choose for this one report where consensus was achieved as much as possible.

MEETING WITH DEPUTIES OF THE NEWLY LIBERATED CHURCHES (GKVC)

On Wednesday evening, 1 June, 2005, at the home of br H Bos in Ede, your delegates met with four deputies of the newly liberated churches (GKVC). They were br HC de Marie, br J (Hans) VanderJagt, br H Bos, and br H Griffioen

Br de Marie opened by reading 1 Tim 6:3-22 after which we sang together Ps 66:3. He welcomed your delegates and expressed the hope that we could have a fruitful evening together.

Br AC Breen explained how we had received their correspondence, their request to continue sister relations with them, and how we had informed our Dutch sister churches (GKV) of this. He also said we have only had one preliminary meeting as deputies about their letter. It means we do not come with judgments of deputies or finalised evaluations. Instead, our deputies asked us to meet with the newly liberated churches. This will be one step in our process of evaluating their official request.

³ We footnote the Alternate Recommendation 2 which the two deputies favoured:

2. To maintain official contact with the GKVC and request deputies to investigate whether or not the decision to "liberate" was lawful.
Grounds:
 - a. Although we understand that the GKVC have concerns with decisions and directions of the GKV, the information provided to us by the GKVC does not adequately explain why the liberation had to occur at this time (ie. 2003) and in the manner that it did.
 - b. Even though the liberation took place in 2003, subsequent events including that of Synod Amersfoort 2005 need to be discussed with the GKVC to ascertain whether or not their liberation is lawful.
 - c. It is a serious matter to allow deformation to go unchallenged, but it is also a serious matter to separate when it is not warranted. The injunctions to remain one in the Lord (e.g. John 17 and Eph 4) sometimes even when serious problems arose, as in Corinth, can be read repetitively in the Bible (cf Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians). The letters of Paul and the other apostles constantly remind us of this.
 - d. There is also the need for diligence in our sister relations with the GKV. Deputies in their submissions to the GS of Zuidhorn and Amersfoort have specified their concerns as they related to the reports about the fourth commandment, reports about marriage and divorce, the decision re the blessing as given by a non-elder, the liturgical changes and proposals about the same, including the proliferation of new hymns, as well as the decisions re the chaplaincy and celebration of the Lord's Supper in war zones. We thus have registered our concerns as well. Such diligence will need to continue, in accordance with the rules for sister relations.
 - e. Deputies have shown that diligence in discussing developments and trends in the GKV churches has led to some good results. This should be continued. For there continue to be some trends within our Dutch sister churches that do cause concern.

For this evening we took their official letter which came via our deputies to our churches, the letter in which they officially make their request for sister relations on the basis of their statements in the letter. We compared their claim to being the continuation of the true church, along with their serious charges against our Dutch sisters (GKV) in this letter, with the Acts of synods and with the response from our Dutch sister churches. From all this we formulated questions so that we could understand them clearly and also evaluate 1) their claims to continue the GKV, 2) their claim that our sister church is no longer a true church, and 3) their request for sister relations.

We also passed on the letter of the GGRI (our sister in Sumba) addressed to the GKVC¹. The GGRI had hoped delegates from the GKVC would be at the GS Amersfoort and that they could address them there, but this did not eventuate. We were asked to deliver the section of their letter personally. This we did.

At the end of the evening br H Griffioen closed in prayer.

SUMMARY OF THE LETTER OF THE GKVC

So that we do full justice to the brothers of the GKVC we offer below a summary of their letter.

1. The GKVC acknowledge that they too share in the “*guilt in relation to the deformation and desertion of the covenant within the GKV*”.⁴
 2. The GKVC state that the desire to come to “*renewed unity with the GKV...seems to be a receding possibility. Nonetheless we as churches and church members ought to continually pray for a return within the GKV*”.⁵
 3. Regarding the Fourth Commandment, the GKVC believe that the fundamental difference is “*Either the Sunday as a day of rest is based on the fourth commandment from the Lord or it is a good human institution.*” [emphasis is theirs]⁶
 4. The GKVC contend that “*both synods [Leusden and Zuidhorn] have...allowed for a different explanation of the doctrine of LD 38...have invalidated the fourth commandment...have allowed for the fourth commandment to be explained in a different way...decided not to listen to the manifold arguments from Scripture and create room for two contradicting points of view.*”⁷
 5. The GKVC concludes “*that the GKV made definite unscriptural decisions as to the issue of Sabbath and the fourth commandments 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,*

⁴ DepGKVC (2005) Letter from Deputies of GKV-continuing, 4 February 2005, p. 2.

⁵ DepGKVC, p. 2.

⁶ DepGKVC, p. 2.

⁷ DepGKVC, p. 4.

- *Church History: altering historical facts and making them a basis for their decision.”⁸*
6. Regarding ecclesiastical unity with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK) and the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK), the GKVC contend that the GKV, by expressing thankfulness “*for the growth in mutual approach*” towards the CGK and “*progress made in respect to mutual understanding*” towards the NGK, have “*made serious and unacceptable compromises. This makes them (co-)accountable for the deviation from Scripture and the Confessions within these churches.*”⁹
 7. The GKVC points to the fact that the GKV and their deputies have not rejected the Emmaus-course and the teachings of drs. A. L. Th. De Bruijne of the Theological University in Kampen regarding the historicity of the days of Creation, understanding Scripture in the context of the time of their origin, altering the function of the commandments of the Lord into guidelines and examples rather than regarding them as literal norms, etc.
 8. The GKVC indicate that the GKV synods are proposing songs from the “*Liedboek*” that are “*unscriptural, and therefore unacceptable as songs that should be pure and pleasant before the face of our holy God*”.¹⁰
 9. The GKVC indicate that Deputies’ report regarding the seventh commandment veers away from Scripture and Synod Zuidhorn should have rejected this report.
 10. The GKVC contend that the new Marriage Form of the GKV weakens the biblical teaching of marriage.
 11. The GKVC state that the GKV, by “*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.*”¹¹
 12. Regarding the decision of the GKV synods to allow military chaplains to “*administer the Lord’s Supper in exceptional circumstances in areas of war...fits to the idea for a more open Lord’s Supper celebration*” and “*that the Synods decisions are contrary to Scripture (eg. 1 Cor 11:23-29)*”.¹²
 13. Regarding the decision of Synod Leusden to allow a non-elder to speak the blessing using the words of Scripture along with the raising of hands, the GKVC say the this “*decision makes GKV deviate from Scriptures, as preaching ois of unique importance, being the ‘service of reconciliation’ (2 Cor 5:18-20)...It makes Churches also move away from the Confession (BC Art. 30)*”.¹³

⁸ DepGKVC, p. 6.

⁹ DepGKVC, p. 8.

¹⁰ DepGKVC, p. 12.

¹¹ DepGKVC, p. 15.

¹² DepGKVC, p. 16.

¹³ DepGKVC, p. 17.

14. The GKVC conclude that they see their “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, 2 John 10, Art 7 B.C.).”¹⁴
15. The GKVC contend that “The present reality is that the foregoing issues have now been finalised by two successive Synods [Leusden and Zuidhorn]. Further appeal in the church-orderly way is no longer possible... To our great sorrow, this call to reformation has suffered a large-scale outright rejection by the [GKV] churches and in the church press...the Gereformeerde Kerken are no longer pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:15)... And to our great sorrow we have to draw the conclusion that the Gereformeerde Kerken can no longer be seen to be true church...”.¹⁵
16. The GKVC declares “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...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 unscriptural 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 evil: the truth being above all.”¹⁶
17. The GKVC does indicate 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.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Dep GKVC, p. 18.

¹⁵ Deed of Liberation or Return.

¹⁶ Deed of Liberation or Return.

¹⁷ Deed of Liberation or Return.

APPENDIX - RECORD OF THE MEETING OF DELEGATES WITH THE GKVC

Verslag van de vergadering van de Deputaten voor Betrekkingen met Buitenlandse zusterkerken van de Gereformeerde Kerken met de afgevaardigden van de Deputaten van de Free Reformed Church of Australia, gehouden op 01-06-2005 te Ede.

Aanwezig namens de Australische kerken ds. W. Huizinga en br. A. Breen; namens de Gereformeerde kerken: br. H. Bos, br. H. Griffioen, br Joh. W. van der Jagt en dr. S. de Marie (voorzitter). Br. W.J. Boot was met kennisgeving afwezig.

Na het lezen van Tim. 6: 2b – 21 gaat br. de Marie voor in gebed, we zingen Psalm 66: 3. De Australische afgevaardigden worden welkom geheten. Br. De Marie geeft hen de gelegenheid om vragen te stellen m.b.t. de brief verzonden op 4 Februari j.l., gericht aan de Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

Br. Breen neemt het woord. Hij zal fungeren als ‘hoofd’-woordvoerder i.v.m. het feit dat hij de Nederlandse taal beter beheerst dan ds. Huizinga. Ds. Huizinga neemt het gesprek digitaal op via een microfoon verbonden aan zijn laptop. Br. Van der Jagt vraagt of dit op een CD-rom gebrand kan worden en of hij een exemplaar kan krijgen.

Br Breen geeft aan dat hij vragen zal stellen m.b.t. de 7 punten die in de brief dd. 4-2-05 genoemd worden op p. 2. Hij zal deze stellen in de informatieve sfeer zodat zij, als deputaten een rapport kunnen schrijven voor hun Synode. De vragen zullen vergelijkenderwijs gesteld worden. Zij zijn, volgens br. Breen, niet blanco naar de vergadering gekomen, ze hebben zelf veel gelezen van beide kanten. De GKV enerzijds en de GK anderzijds. ‘Wij hebben alles bestudeerd en zorgpunten geformuleerd’.

Br. Breen begint met een vraag over het 4e gebod. Wat opviel volgens br. Breen is de tegenstelling die tweemaal vet gedrukt is weergegeven in de brief. Namelijk dat: “Either the Sunday as a day of rest is based on the fourth commandment from the Lord or it is a good human institution”. In verband hier mee stelt br. Breen de vraag hoe wij staan tegen over de 6 punten van de Synode van Dordrecht 1618/1619 en of wij die accepteren.

Br. De Marie antwoord hierop dat het in de 6 punten van Dordt gaat over het vierde gebod. In regel 2 wordt met het ceremoniële gedoeld op het rusten op de **zevende** dag (de nadruk valt op zevende) in het OT, in het NT is dat verschoven naar de eerste dag. De andere regels geven heel duidelijk aan dat werken op de rustdag NIET toegestaan is¹⁸. Ds. Huizinga wijst in verband hiermee op het verschil tussen Voetsius en Gomarus in dezen.

Br. Breen leest een pagina voor uit het boek van G.P. van Itteren (1929) over Gomarus. Hieruit blijkt hoe Gomarus over het vierde gebod dacht. Hij zag de sabbat als instelling vanaf Mozes en niet vanaf de schepping; volgens hem was het vooral een gewoonte van de kerk om op de zondag samen te komen. Br. Breen vraagt hoe wij dit citaat zien in verhouding tot de 6 regels van Dordrecht (die met name samengesteld zijn vanwege een meningsverschil tussen Gomarus en afgevaardigden uit Zeeland en Engeland).

Br. Van der Jagt merkt op dat hij het betreurt dat Gomarus bij de zondagsrust niet uitgaat van het vierde gebod en dat hij via een andere weg komt tot het rusten op de zondag. Het is teleurstellend dat hij de nieuw testamentische bijbelteksten die de verandering van de zaterdag naar de zondag aangeven niet voldoende acht. Br. De Marie merkt op dat belangrijk is wat de belijdenis zegt over

¹⁸ Regel 6 zegt bijvoorbeeld: ‘Deselve dach moet alsoo den gootdsdienst toegeeygent worden, datmen op den selven moet rusten van alle slaeffwerken (uytgesondert diegenen, die de lyeffde (liefde), ende de teghenwoordige noodsaeckelickheden vereyschen), mitsgaders van alle sodaniche recreatiën (ontspanning) die den Gootdsdienst verhinderen.

de wekelijkse rustdag, de zondag; daar staat duidelijk dat de dag van samenkomst de sabbat (de rustdag) op basis van het 4e gebod is.

Ds. Huizinga verwijst naar het besluit van de Synode in 1905. Toen werd eenzogenaamde pacificatie formule vastgesteld.

Ter sprake komt zondag 38 van de Heidelbergse catechismus. Hierin wordt het rusten op de zondag gebaseerd het vierde gebod. Ds. Huizinga beaamt dit: ja, daar wordt gevraagd: wat **gebiedt** God in het vierde gebod. Het gaat om gebieden.

Br. Bos. Legt uit dat men dit in de GKV anders uitlegt. Er staat namelijk. ‘dat ik op de sabbat, dat is de rustdag ...’ In de orginele Duitse test staat er voor het woord ‘rustdag’ het woord ‘feiertag’, en de GKV zegt dat dit woord in onze Catechismus eigenlijk niet goed vertaald is met ‘rustdag’. Feiertag zou veel meer ‘feestdag’ betekenen en niet ‘rustdag’. Een blik in het “dikke” Van Dale woordenboek leert echter dat Feiertag gewoon ‘vrije dag, rustdag’ betekent.

Br. Breen vraagt of het voor ons -de deputaten van de Gereformeerde Kerken - noodzakelijk is dat het rusten op de zondag gekoppeld is aan het 4e gebod.

Br. de Marie benadrukt dat het niet slechts om één passage in één preek gaat. Ds. J. Ophoff te Nieuwegein vertolkt in zijn preek de mening van vele anderen. Volgens hen is het rusten op de zondag niet persé gebaseerd op een goddelijk gebod. Wij willen echter graag de geboden van de Heere in vreugde onderhouden.

Br. Bos wijst er op dat het niet ‘slechts’ om een theoretisch verschil gaat. Het gaat er ook om dat dit leidt to het ontheiligen van de zondag, doordat mensen op die dag niet noodzakelijk werk doen. Hij wijst hier op de zaak die in Berkel gespeeld heeft. Waar een bakker om economische / financiële redenen zijn bedrijf openstelt en anderen voor zich laat werken. Dat hij zich zo niet houdt aan wat de Heere in het 4e gebod vraagt namelijk om te rusten en je dienstknechten etc. niet te laten werken op die dag. Dit alles wordt nog eens duidelijker wanneer je in acht neemt dat de betreffende directeur van het bakkersconcern in het ND stelt dat “hij er geen moment over heeft gepiekerd om zijn bedrijf op zondag niet open te stellen”. Br. de Marie wijst de Australische deputaten erop dat de classis Rotterdam in deze zaak mocht stellen dat de tekst van het 4e gebod slechts geldig was voor het Oude Testament; niet meer voor vandaag. De synode heeft bezwaren hiertegen afgewezen, en deze classisuitspraak dus niet afgekeurd.

Br. Griffioen haalt Genesis 2: 2 en 3 aan: “Toen God op de zevende dag het werk voltooid had, dat hij gemaakt had, ruste Hij op de zevende dag van al het werk, dat Hij gemaakt had. En God zegende de zevende dag en heiligde die, omdat hij daarop gerust heeft van al het werk, dat God scheppende tot stand had gebracht”. Die heiligeing van de rustdag gebeurde niet pas bij de Sinaï maar vond al bij de schepping plaats. Genesis 2: 2 en 3 overstijgt zo het Oude en het Nieuwe Testament. Het vierde gebod grijpt ook rechtstreeks op die scheppingsorde terug.

Br. Breen gaat voort: ik hoop niet dat u het erg vindt als we nu standpunten in nemen? Ziet u de zondag als Nieuw Testamentische Sabbat of als de heilshistorische voortzetting van de Sabbat. Kun je, volgens u ook zeggen: de zondag is niet gebaseerd op het 4e gebod maar op de vervulling van het 4e gebod.

Br. De Marie wijst op Hebreeën 4 waar het daar gaat over het meerdere van de zondag. Zo is er wel voortgang te zien in de Heilshistorie.

Br. van der Jagt zegt dat wij nu vanuit de rust mogen leven, we starten met een rustdag, dit in tegenstelling tot het Oude Testament, waar men de week beëindigde met een rustdag. Wij mogen nu, vanwege het offer van Christus vanuit de rust leven.

Br. Breen vraagt: is het ook mogelijk dat de zondagsrust niet gebaseerd wordt op het 4e gebod?

Ds. Huizinga gaat terug naar de Dordtse kwestie. Volgens hem geeft het commentaar van Ursinus op de HC een andere uitleg evenals Calvijn. Daarnaast stond Datheen, die ideeën uit Engeland (de puriteinen) overbracht naar zondag. Deze twee lijnen kwamen samen op Dordt.

Br. Griffioen merkt op dat het zo frappant is dat als je Schilder leest dat hij de volwaardigheid van de Sabbat zo naar voren brengt.

Ds. Huizinga merkt op dat er altijd al twee lijnen geweest zijn.

Br. Breen haalt uit artikel 52, het materiaal bij het revisie verzoek aan. Er zijn verschillende manieren om die zin te lezen. Als jullie dat lezen waar leggen jullie dan de nadruk op?

Br. De Marie merkt op dat je de uitspraken van de Synode toetst, en niet zozeer het materiaal hoewel je dat ook meeneemt.

In reactie op de opmerking van de Australische deputaten dat er toch altijd ruimte geweest is voor de twee lijnen binnen de kerken, merkt br. De Marie op dat er geen sprake is geweest van ruimte binnen de kerken maar dat er juist altijd strijd geweest is rond dit punt. Dat is wat anders dan ruimte.

Er wordt gesproken over de Synode van Hoogeveen 1969 over Visee dat hij het gebod ziet als iets van de Sinaï en dat het niet rechtstreeks op de Schepping terug gaat. Br. Griffioen merkt op dat wij juist vanuit de Schrift zien, dat het vierde gebod terug gaat tot de scheppingsorde.

Br. Breen zegt: Stel je nu eens voor dat de GKV uitspreekt dat de Here nog beveelt om te rusten op de zondag; hoe staan jullie daar dan tegenover? Zou dat voor jullie reden zijn om weer samen te spreken met de GKV.

Br. De Marie spreekt uit dat het er van afhangt hoe daartoe besloten wordt. Als het een diplomatieke wijze is om de mensen vast te houden, is het heel wat anders dan wanneer het een hartelijk gehoorzamen naar de Schriften is. Br. Van der Jagt merkt op dat hij er weinig hoop op heeft dat dit werkelijk zal gebeuren omdat de vele schriftuurlijke bezwaren die ingediend zijn om aan te tonen dat het rusten op de zondag wel degelijk alleen gekoppeld is aan het 4e gebod van de Here, al deze bezwaren zijn tot nu toe zonder er op in te gaan van de tafel geveegd. Hierin heeft men niet naar de Schrift willen luisteren. Daarnaast zou een zodanig besluit ook consequenties moeten hebben: de oude besluiten die in strijd zijn met de Schrift, moeten dan herroepen worden.

De Australische deputaten merken op dat er toch juist een studiedeputaatschap is ingesteld om deze zaken te onderzoeken?

Br. De Marie antwoord dat door dit deputaatschap, geen onderzoek meer zal gedaan worden naar de grond voor de zondagsrust, maar zal uitgaan van beide meningen. Het principe zelf stond niet meer ter discussie. Br. Van der Jagt verhaalt dat hij het betreurt dat het voorstel van ds. P.L. Voorberg indertijd is afgewezen. Hij stelde voor om een studiedeputaatschap in te stellen die de fundering van de zondag nader zou bestuderen. Dit voorstel is nu juist afgewezen. Men heeft al besloten dat er twee meningen over de zondag naast elkaar kunnen bestaan in de kerken. Op deze basis – met overkoepeling van beide meningen - heeft men een deputaatschap ingesteld die moet komen met een praktische handreiking aangaande de zondag voor deze tijd.

Br. Breen stelt een vraag m.b.t. de drie punten die onderaan op pagina 6 van onze brief staan. Kunnen jullie daar bewijzen van geven?

Br. Van der Jagt antwoordt dat de GKV de historische feiten verdraait en zegt dat er altijd ruimte geweest is binnen de kerken voor twee meningen. Dit is echter niet waar.

Vande belijdenis verandert men de uitleg van zondag 38 HC door te zeggen, dat daar niet gesproken wordt over de zondag als rustdag.

Van de Schrift verandert men de teksten die wijzen op het gebod van de Here om te rusten op de zondag, men negeert de doorgaande lijn in de Schriften.

Vervolgens komt het tweede punt uit de brief aan de orde nl. De kerkelijke eenheid met de Christelijk Gereformeerden en schriftkritiek.

Br. Breen vraagt: maakt u de volgende (simplistische)gevolg trekking: De CGK pakt Loonstra niet aan à de GKV werkt naar eenheid met de CGK dus... de GKV is ook schuldig aan schriftkritiek?

Br. de Marie antwoordt: Loonstra heeft inderdaad wat bijgesteld, maar daarbij de essentie van zijn Schriftkritische leer niet weggenomen. Hoe kan men nu stellen dat er in de CGK geen schriftkritiek te vinden is?

Br. Breen vraagt: De CGK zegt Loonstra te hebben aangepakt. Zij doen dat misschien op een andere manier als wij gewend zijn. Maar is het samengaan met de CGK ook persé een aannemen van Loonstra? Br. Breen noemt hier grond 1 van besluit 131.

Br. Van der Jagt merkt op: ik vindt het heel vreemd dat men dat nu kan zeggen. De essentie van Loonstra's dwaalleer is niet weggenomen. We hebben ook de uitspraak van Arnhem 1981 die de CGK opriep om de Schriftkritiek te verwerpen.

Br. De Marie voegt hier aan toe: Het betreft niet alleen Loonstra het gaat ook om andere christelijk gereformeerde voorgangers zoals dr. S. Paas, en prof. dr. Oosterhof. Bovendien, en dat maakt de zaak nog ernstiger, heeft de GKV in samenwerking met de CGK de evangelisatiecursus "Emmaüs" bewerkt en uitgegeven. Deze interkerkelijke Emmaüscursus wordt inmiddels ook binnen de GKV gebruikt. Hierin wordt keihard beweerd dat Genesis 1-11 oergeschiedenis is en géén historische betrouwbare geschiedenis. Wij moeten dit alles in een breder verband zien, waarbij ook het boek uit Kampen dat onder redactie van prof. Trimp is uitgekomen 'Woord op Schrift' moet worden betrokken. Hierin komt ook Schriftkritiek naar buiten. Met name in de hoofdstukken van drs. De Bruine.

Br. Bos noemt in dit verband ook de praktische consequenties van deze Schriftkritiek. Hij wijst op de werkgroep Contrario binnen de GKV. Waar homoseksuelen elkaar ontmoeten.(www.contrario.nl/docs/navolgingvanchristus.doc) Homoseksueel samenleven wordt niet langer veroordeeld, zo blijkt uit deze site.

Br. Breen zegt dat hij en ds. Huizinga de uitgebreide discussies erg goed gevuld hebben m.b.t. de stukken van De Bruine (zoals o.a. in het blad Ministerio gepubliceerd). De Bruine vindt dat hij veelal verkeerd begrepen is en dat hij niet bewust Schriftkritisch bezig is geweest. Br. Breen stelt daarom de vraag: vindt u niet dat hij dingen heeft terug genomen?

Br. De Marie vertelt dat hij met drs. De Bruine om tafel gezeten heeft om de zaken door te spreken. In dat gesprek is wel het een en ander duidelijker geworden, maar er werd niet teruggenomen van de verkeerde ideeën.. Deze betreffen m.n. de Inspiratie van de Heilige Schrift. In zijn geschriften gebruikt hij veel van prof. Hays, een mennonitisch gevormd theoloog, die de Christus van de Schriften niet kent. Hoe kan De Bruine de ethiek van zo iemand overnemen?

Ds. Huizinga merkt op dat bij zijn eerste lezing van "Woord op schrift" hij ook zijn wenkbauwen gefronst heeft. Maar dat bij tweede lezing de dingen toch niet zo erg waren als ze misschien wel leken. De Bruine probeert bijvoorbeeld niet de geboden opzij te zetten, maar hij wil het breder zien: je kunt voor de praktijk ook veel halen uit en leren van de verhalen van de bijbel.

Br. de Marie merkt op dat zo het gevaar bestaat dat het verhaal het gebod fundeert. En dat De Bruine de historische context teveel bepalend laat zijn bij de uitleg van de Schrift.

Br. Breen zegt: Er is meer in de Bijbel als verbod en gebod, in de lijn van Douma zie ik het als volgt: In het verhaal komt naar je toe wat de Heere van jou in je leven wil. De context hoeft niet rigide te zijn.

Br. De Marie zegt: Het gevaar bestaat dat je dan overgaat tot het metaforisch lezen van de geboden. De Australische deputaten vragen of wij ook bewijs kunnen leveren voor het gedeelte op pagina 9 van de brief waar wij zeggen dat de Bruine 'alters de function of the commandments of the Lord

into guidelines and example rather than regarding them as litteral norms.’ Br. De Marie pakt het boek er bij en gaat op zoek naar voorbeelden. Vanwege het doorgaande gesprek kan hij die voorbeelden niet zo even opzoeken, maar is bereid daar later op terug te komen.*)

Ds. Huizinga geeft aan dat hij ook moeite heeft met Genesis 6. Hij zegt: ‘Genesis 6 you hid your head on’.

Vervolgens wordt gesproken over de Liedboekliederen.

Br. Breen vraagt: Hebben jullie je wel gerealiseerd dat K. Deddens bij zijn kritiek op het Liedboek ervan uitging dat het niet mogelijk was om een selectie over te nemen maar dat het liedboek als geheel moest worden genomen?

Br. De Marie geeft aan dat de volgorde in de huidige beoordeling van deze liederen anders is geweest. Eerst hebben we de liederen getoetst. Omdat ze al direct vrijgegeven waren moest dit veelal door “leken” gebeuren. Dit bracht ook vervelende praktische consequenties. Ineens werd je geconfronteerd tijdens een kerkdienst met liederen die je moest zingen maar die je niet kon zingen vanwege de inhoud, met als gevolg: de één zong wel de ander niet. Daar komt bij dat de samenstelling en inhoud van het Liedboek is afgestemd op 7 verschillende kerkgenootschappen. Dit is duidelijk te zien in de inhoud van de liederen. Vanuit de GKV werd wel gezegd dat je ze toch wel op een gereformeerde manier kon zingen. Maar veel liederen geven een goed gevoel, maar laten Gods eis en oordeel eruit weg. De Liederden zijn onder andere beïnvloed door de leer van Karl Barth, het pacifisme en de bevrijdingstheologie. Het is het resultaat van Hervormde, Lutherse en andere vrijzinnige dichters.

Br. Breen vraagt: Als het alleen om het Liedboek zou zijn geweest, zou u zich dan hebben Vrijgemaakt?

Br. De Marie antwoordt: U moet het zien in het verband met de geest die er heerst binnen de GKV. Br. Breen merkt op dat dat inderdaad moeilijk te pijlen is voor hun als “buitenstaanders”. Br. De Marie vindt dat de geest die er binnen de GKV heerst, toch ook op te merken moet zijn door buitenstaanders. Hij noemt enkele voorbeelden: het verdwijnen of openstellen van G-organisaties en scholen, het veranderen van het ND van een gereformeerde naar Algemeen Christelijke krant, de eenheid die gezocht wordt met andere kerkverbanden, waaronder ook de NGK: In alles zie je een lijn terug. Het is allemaal aan elkaar verbonden.

We gaan over op het onderwerp huwelijk en echtscheiding.

Br. Breen merkt op: Het rapport over huwelijk en echtscheiding is toch niet ongewijzigd geaccepteerd door de Synode? Ook de Australische bezwaren wil men meenemen.

Br. De Marie antwoordt: Toch is de populaire versie de gemeenten ingegaan en heeft daar zijn uitwerking. Men heeft dit nooit terug getrokken, maar juist aanbevolen, het is niet herroepen.

Men heeft het over de ‘stijl van het Koninkrijk’, dat is een diffuus geheel. Men heeft het over de gebrokenheid van de wereld, in plaats van in zo’n situatie vergeving en steun bij de Here te zoeken.

We gaan over op het onderwerp Huwelijks formulier. Br Breen vraagt hoe het zit dat met de vertaling van ‘Je vrouw voorgan en haar leiden’. Volgens de Nederlandse deputaten zit er wel verschil tussen je vrouw leiden en haar voorgan. Br. Van der Jagt die deze termen heeft vertaald in ‘preceeding and leading’ geeft toe dat hij het moeilijk vond om dit ook zo in de engelse taal over te brengen. Toch is het wel jammer dat het afgezwakt is uit de bestaande tekst. Br. Breen geeft aan dat het Griekse woord als het gaat om de vrouw gebruikt in Efeziërs niet is ‘gehoorzamen’.

Ds. Huizinga zegt dat hij zich niet kan vinden in wat in de brief staat m.b.t. de ruimte voor ‘secular view about having children’ Het formulier verwijst hier juist naar 1 Tim. 2: 15. Wij stemmen graag toe dat vanuit dit Schriftgedeelte gelezen hert genoemde bezwaar weggenomen wordt. Toch zou een explicietere omschrijving beter geweest zijn met het oog op de praktijk van veel ‘secular viewws’ m.b.t. het krijgen van kinderen. Br. Breen kan zich dat goed voorstellen.

Het onderwerp PCEA.

Br Breen vraagt en citeert uit de Acta van de Australische kerken: dat de FRCA “to re-engage With the PCEA”. Hoe kan het dan dat er in de brief gesteld wordt: “that this brings the GKV in conflict with the three marks of the true church, outlined in article 29 of the Belgic confession”?

Br. van der Jagt merkt op dat als de GKV de PCEA erkennen dat zij daarmee aangeven dat zij geen moeite hebben met een open avondmaalstafel en een open kansel. In de GKV is een open avondmaalstafel overigens ook al praktijk in bijvoorbeeld de GKV te Franeker en in de avondmaalsbediening in crisisgebieden.

Br. Breen vraagt: wat verstaat u dan onder een open avondmaalstafel;?

Br de Marie antwoordt: Het aangaan zonder opzicht en tucht van een kerkenraad of van een zusterkerk, door personen die geen lid van deze kerk of zusterkerk zijn.

Ds. Huizinga stelt dat het in crisisgebied toch niet anders is dan op het zendingsveld waar er ook geen kerkenraad toeziet? Br. Van der Jagt merkt op dat dit wezenlijk anders is omdat op het zendingsveld gaat om leden van één kerk – het avondmaal is toch van de Here en Zijn gemeente?!- en dat er in oorlogsgebied mensen aangaan uit verschillende kerken.

Br. Breen haalt aan wat er gezegd wordt in de 6 punten die de synode van de GKV heeft opgesteld om de zuiverheid van het avondmaal in oorlogsgebieden te waarborgen. Br. van der Jagt merkt op dat deze punten geen duidelijke waarborg geven dat alleen leden aangaan die daartoe gerechtigd zijn. Het gevaar is dat er mensen aankunnen gaan als ze Jezus maar lief hebben. Ook is er het gevaar dat men het avondmaal in crisisgebied gebruikt als een magische kracht, waar je niet zonder kunt.

We gaan over tot het laatste punt: de zegen door een niet-ouderlingr.

Br Breen vraagt hoe wij het verband zien tussen de Prediking en de zegen.

Br. De Marie legt uit dat de zegen gekoppeld is aan de bediening van de verzoening.

Br. Breen wil nog twee algemene vragen stellen.

Br. Breen vraagt over de boodschap van Genesis 3: 15: Ziet u het niet meer spreken over de antithese als de alles samenvattende oorzaak voor het verval binnen de GKV?

Br. Griffioen antwoordt dat het verval vooral ontstaan is doordat het kerkbegrip is verdwenen.. Br. De Marie vult aan dat het ook te maken heeft met het verzwijgen van het verbond. En dat alles hangt daarom ook weer samen met de antithese.

Br. Breen vraagt: Stel dat de Australische kerken het model van de GKV mbt de Schotse kerken hanteert tav de GKV en de GK, waarbij voorlopig beide kerken als zusterkerk worden erkend. Hoe kijken jullie daar tegenaan.

Br. De Marie zegt dat de Schotse kerken beide hebben uitgesproken dat zij spoedig weer één hopen te worden.

Br. Van der Jagt merkt op dat hij zich kan voorstellen dat de Australische kerken voor dit model als een tijdelijke oplossing zouden kiezen, terwijl zij de zaken nog aan het bestuderen zijn. Dan zou hij daar geen moeite mee hebben.

Br. De Marie voegt daar aan toe dat dit kan als de Australische kerken tegelijkertijd de GKV ernstig waarschuwen – ze hebben toch een bepaalde verantwoordelijkheid tegenover hen.

Br. Breen spreekt de bede uit dat de broeders er alles aan zullen doen om elkaar weer te vinden op de basis van de waarheid.

Ds. Huizinga heeft nog een laatste vraag: Voor hem is het vier [OF DRIE??]voudigsnoer uit Prediker 4: 12 erg belangrijk. Hoe kijken jullie aan tegen de verhouding: kerk gezin en school?

Br. Bos geeft aan dat er initiatieven worden ondernomen om tot eigen Gereformeerde onderwijs te komen.

Br. Griffioen gaat voor in gebed, waarna de voorzitter de vergadering sluit.

*) Nadere toelichting: Het betreft hier een samenvattend oordeel van de inhoud van deze bladzijden.

QUESTIONS FOR THE GKVC (CONTINUING) CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS AND ANALYSIS

We have used four columns with an analysis at the end of each section. Each section is numbered for easy reference.

The quotes in the first column are from the official letter of the GKVC which is the document we had to go by. Their other documents may elaborate on this letter, but the letter itself is the official document we had to go by. The quotes in the second column are from the Acts of the general synods of our Dutch sisters or from the response of the BBK of our Dutch sisters, NOT BEYOND WHAT IS WRITTEN – (NB). The third column records the questions we prepared for the meeting. Not all could be asked (it was very late when we left). In the fourth column the answers to our questions are recorded. At the end of each section an analysis is offered. A final conclusion is offered at the end of all sections.

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
1	<p>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. 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.” 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.” 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.”</p>	<p>Decision 4 (of art 25) of GS Leusden: To judge that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the sermon ...about LD 38, HC, the importance of the worship services and the time made available for them clearly came to the fore; 2. In spite of this, in this sermon it is not sufficiently stressed that LD 38 speaks of a command, namely, on the day of rest diligently to attend the church services; 3. The view, that the Sunday as day of rest is not based on a divine command, is not to be condemned; <p>GS Zuidhorn decided:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. to call upon the churches in general and the appellants in particular to preserve the peace and unity which has always existed in the churches between the different adherents of differing views on the significance of the fourth commandment. <p><i>Grounds:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It serves the peace and unity of the churches when in a situation of differing opinions we do not bind each other beyond binding each other to the adopted doctrine, also with respect to the fourth 	<p>Do you accept the six rules of Dort (1618/19) on this matter of the fourth commandment? ⁱⁱ</p> <p>How do you understand those 6 rules of Dort?</p> <p>To see how the reformed churches over the centuries have dealt with the fourth word of the covenant, it might be useful to go back into history, back to the time of the synod of Dort. How do you respond to Gomarus' views? [We read a piece out of the dissertation of GP van Itterzon about Gomarus ('s-Gravenhage 1929, p 307/8). ⁱⁱⁱ</p> <p>Where has GS Zuidhorn stated that the Sunday rest is based solely on a human institution?</p> <p>Do you believe that the Sunday is the NT Sabbath? Or do you believe that the Sunday is the redemptive historical fulfilment of the OT Sabbath?</p>	<p>See last page re 6 statements of Dort.</p> <p>The GKVC accepts them but accent that the ceremonial part was the <u>seventh</u> day, and not the <u>rest</u> on that day.</p> <p>De Marie answered, <i>I am disappointed in Gomarus. Gomarus must have provoked the decision and it must be directed against him!</i></p> <p>We corrected this wrong explanation (for the views of Gomarus were the same as those of Calvin and Ursinus who co-wrote the HC), but then he made reference to LD 38 and “op Zondag, <u>de Sabbat</u>...(on Sunday, the Sabbath...)”</p> <p>The GKVC starts with the premise that the Lord instituted the sabbath at creation. Calvin had also said this in his commentary on Genesis.</p> <p>What Rev Ophoff said represented many ministers' view about this. If the GKVC concludes that resting on Sunday is a church rule based on their understanding of Scripture, then we are very close to each other.</p>

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
		<p>commandment;</p> <p>2. though there are varying opinions there is agreement on the significance of the Sunday as a gift from the Lord, as a day on which the congregation of Christ should assemble to celebrate the great deeds of God in creation and redemption.</p> <p>The synod saw no reason to condemn this opinion. In support of this it was stated, among other things, that in the history of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, there has always been difference of opinion on this point. From this it can be deduced that this statement in no way censures those who do want to speak of Sunday rest as a command of God (NB).</p>		<p>The GKVC does not wish iron clad rules but wants to keep the commands out of thanks.</p> <p>Must we rest on Sunday or not? This is a practical and serious matter for many church members.</p> <p>The GKVC sees the line of the Bible, the line of the fulfilment indeed.</p> <p>In their view it would be very odd if one could say we rest on Sunday, on the basis of the whole Scripture but not directly on the 4th commandment.</p> <p>They deny there ever was room for founding the rest on Sunday on various Scriptural understandings (either direct or via fulfilment). In history the reformed churches could have only one view.</p>

1. Analysis.

There was very little discernment and understanding of the background of LD 38, namely, that it represented the views of Calvin as in his Institutes where the Ten Commandments are dealt with at length, and as Ursinus commented on them in his Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism. Gomarus had the same views as Calvin and Ursinus. Dort did not oppose him. Hardly! At the great, international Synod of Dort Gomarus was the leading Dutch theologian to oppose the views of the Remonstrants. His views were respected and certainly followed. Gomarus repeats the views of Calvin and Ursinus. The synod of Dort tried to bring peace when the new view, come from the British isles, found strong entrance in the reformed churches in The Netherlands. So Dort actually brought peace between the two views. That decision has guided and united the reformed churches right up to today.

This means that they (GKVC) failed to realise that it is true that two views have been tolerated in the churches from the time of Dort and before. One should not try to condemn Calvin and Ursinus (one of the main writers of our Heidelberg Catechism!) or Gomarus, the leading defender of the faith at Dort. The GS of Leusden and Zuidhorn did nothing more or less than accept what has always been accepted in the churches. They thus did not introduce a new doctrinal statement when handling the appeal about the sermon on LD 38.

Though they subscribe to the view that one needs to follow the redemptive historical line in explaining the Scriptures, for them this only means that the seventh day has changed to the first day. That Jesus fulfilled the whole content of the Fourth Commandment, as elaborated on in the sabbatical system of seventh year and seven times seventh year, did not seem the important issue. That the Fourth Commandment is still valid today, and still calls for physical Sunday rest is the important

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
<p>topic. They see a <u>direct</u> command to rest, though the Fourth Commandment says, <u>the seventh day</u> is the Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall do no work... The term <i>Sabbath</i> refers both to <i>rest</i> and <i>seventh</i> and is thus strongly related to rest on the seventh day (seventh year and seven times seventh year). Both these ideas are ceremonial, pointing ahead to the reality in Christ (cf Col 2:16-17). Thus it is almost impossible to see a direct command, for one has to do violence to Scripture to arrive at the conclusion from the Fourth Commandment to rest on the first day of the week. Yet the concept of following the line of fulfilment in Christ, and thereby coming to the conclusion that still today the Lord asks us to rest on one specific day, that is, the Lord's Day, seems foreign and not understandable to the newly liberated brothers. They say that the Fourth Commandment still stands today and this means we too must rest from all work on the Sunday. How one comes to that conclusion is rather simple for them – directly from the Fourth Commandment! That others follow the line of redemptive history, the line of fulfilment in Christ, to the same conclusion seems strange to them.</p>				
<p>One applauds their strong stance of keeping the Lord's Day as the day for the Lord and not for man. One also respects their simple view that the Lord commands rest on the first day of the week. Yet some discernment and thorough study of Scripture would stop them from making charges against the GKV that cannot be substantiated.</p>				
<p>The conclusion must be that they have either not understood or not appreciated the redemptive historical explanation of the fourth commandment. In the process they have not done justice to the GKV and its decisions on this matter. Rather they have wrongly accused the GKV of deviating from Scripture, and so wrongly defamed the reputation of the GKV.</p>				
2	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 the first place a minister of the Word can in His sermon no longer address the congregation of the Lord and say 'Thus says the Lord'.	GS Zuidhorn decided: 1. To declare inadmissible the letters received and listed in (2). Ground: the letters do not raise new issues or do not address the contents of the issue. 2. Not to accede to the requests contained in the letters received and listed in (3) and (4). Synod acknowledges that criticism of some of the grounds is in place and will send the committee report to the appellants.	Is it necessary to connect the Sunday <u>directly</u> to the fourth commandment, and otherwise you cannot say, "thus says the LORD?" If the GS of Amersfoort decides that the LORD still commands us to rest on the Sunday, would that give an opening and calling for you to have talks with the GKV (for reunion)?	See above. If you can base it on Scripture, not directly on the Fourth Commandment, they would find that a bit of theological acrobatics, but they are happy with the end conclusion. Yes, then the GKVC would be happy. At the same time they quickly add that then the GKV would have to retract their earlier decision re the sermon of Rev Ophoff.
<p>2. Analysis.</p> <p>See above. Also, it is to be hoped that the GS Amersfoort will make a clear statement that even today the Lord commands his people to rest on the Lord's Day. This should cause the newly Liberated people to open up contacts with the GKV and to seek a way back together.</p> <p>At the same time they fail to realise that the appeal about a sermon was handled on the basis of what the reformed churches in the past have decided (i.e. the decision of Dort). One does not need to retract that decision of Dort, nor decisions on appeals based on it.</p>				
3	Instead of making the above-mentioned	GS Zuidhorn decided:	Does the big report (a 100 pages)	They (GKVC) see the new

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
	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 study further the matter whether the Sunday as a day of rest is a divine command or not.	To appoint a deputyship (Fourth Command and Sunday) and to give deputies a mandate to serve the churches with guidelines in which a positive stand and direction are given concerning the ethics of believers and churches in the 21st Century with respect to the celebration of the Sunday as the Day of the LORD in the light of the fourth commandment. Nevertheless, the Synod itself was not completely satisfied by this result: two not completely harmonious outlooks, while, above all, the legitimacy of one of both was contested in the churches. Therefore, she agreed to set up a committee which should serve the churches with a document "in which a positive position with regard to the celebration of Sunday as the day of the Lord in the light of the fourth commandment would be offered" to help believers and churches in the 21st century act in an ethically sound way (NB).	of the Deputies for the Fourth Commandment (which has a large portion devoted to the biblical explanation of the matter) not show that the whole matter could still be discussed and settled?	deputyship as an attempt to legitimise the two views, also for ethical direction for Sunday observance, <u>without defeating either view</u> . Both views are sacrosanct, non-negotiable, and the report must justify both positions and sanction their right in the churches. They do not consider that the mandate of this deputyship includes an attempt to bridge the two views.
3. Analysis. Their contention that this matter of the Fourth Commandment was a finished item which could not be discussed further is incorrect. Also, their contention that the GS only wants to justify the two views in the new deputyship has not proved to be correct, since the report of deputies clearly wants to bridge the two views and overcome the impasse that existed for some centuries. This means that they did not need to separate and liberate for this reason.				
4	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.		Has there not been room since the great Synod of Dort for both ideas?	There has always been strife about this point, but not room for two views. This common statement was said more than once during the evening meeting.

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
			Does the lesson of 1905 and 1942 not teach us that elevating one view as law and condemning the other breaks the unity in the churches?	The GKVC could not understand our reference to 1905 and 1942, where 1905 brought peace. 1942 saw the elevation of one view as binding, and the condemnation of the other view brought the strife.
4. Analysis				
<p>Again, the options offered – either a direct command or a human institution – are a caricature. The report that serves GS Amersfoort at the moment uses the redemptive-historical method and explains Scripture in a Christological manner. This means the church concluded, on the basis of the fulfilment of Scripture, that still today God commands the church to rest physically, especially on the Lord's Day so that the church can worship the LORD, and also to rest spiritually from our evil works all the days of our life. Thus Sunday rest is not a human or ecclesiastical institution but grounded on Scripture. If GS Amersfoort adopts this conclusion, it will help to show that this charge against the GKV is wrong, and that this reason for the new liberation was unnecessary.</p> <p>Also, the lesson from church history is decisive. Dort made a type of pacifying decision re the Sunday and it brought peace. 1905 saw a Pacification Formula (non-binding) about varying views, and it brought peace. In 1942 this peace was broken and strife broke out when GS elevated one view as binding in the churches and condemned the other view. Thus one cannot blame the GS Leusden and Zuidhorn for allowing what was always allowed in the churches. Peace is destroyed and strife introduced when one party wants one view elevated as the binding rule in the churches to the exclusion and condemnation of the other view.</p>				
5	Preaching: disallowing ministers (or anyone for that matter) to bind and administer the keys of the Kingdom of heaven on this issue.	The GS of Zuidhorn, in agreement with the Regional Synod of Holland-South, corrected a decision of the classis of Rotterdam. This classis had rejected the opinion that for the New Testament church a command not to work on Sunday, could directly be derived from the text of the fourth commandment. ‘This opinion has never been rejected in the Reformed Churches and the classis with her rejection has unjustly limited the existing room, regarding the case in question’ (Acta GS Zuidhorn, 2002, art. 60).	Did GS Zuidhorn not give you room to say, <i>Thus says the LORD</i> , with art 60?	Yes, but the GKVC finds that the next minister can say the opposite. Also, they refer to local examples of consistories allowing people to work on Sunday or to open shops on Sunday. One example from their letter was repeated (about the bakery business).
5. Analysis				
<p>It is clear that the GS of Leusden/Zuidhorn never removed the right and privilege of any minister or consistory to see a direct command from the LORD to rest on the Sunday, and it did not impede any consistory in supervising and exercising discipline on the basis of this belief. In fact the decision quoted (art.60) shows that the GS</p>				

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
upheld this right! Thus this charge is unsubstantiated.				
6	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.		<p>Why do you want to defeat the statement that <i>there has always been room to think differently about the Scriptural foundation</i>, since there has always been room?</p> <p>Can we compare this with 1905 where two points of view were allowed, and so keeping the peace; and with 1942 where one point of view was exalted and the other condemned, so destroying the peace in the churches?</p> <p>(Think of what Prof Gomarus and B. Holwerda said.)</p>	<p>See above. Allowing the two views in the church has not been allowed, and making room for two views only brings grief and not peace.</p> <p>See above in #5.</p>
<p>6. Analysis</p> <p>The contention that the reformed churches (see the 6 statements of the international Synod of Dort where the English delegates, who were dismayed at the lack of church attendance in some places in The Netherlands also took part) never allowed two views, is incorrect. See above.</p> <p>That the 'pacification formula' of Dort only brought grief is historically incorrect. It has kept peace in the churches over the many decades and centuries. Very little discussion has taken place about it since then. See analysis in #5.</p> <p>Historically, their contention is incorrect and their insistence on only the one view breaks the peace and unity in the churches. It would have been wiser to await the outcome of what GS Amersfoort would say and work towards one view as is presently being attempted at GS Amersfoort. The complaints that allowing two views on this subject only leads to a pluri-form church, where both truth and the lie may live together, only aggravates the situation. There is a history to consult, and important issues to decide before these views can be bridged.</p>				
7	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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scripture: neglecting the unity of Scripture and persistent validity of 		<p>Can you tell us where the explanations of certain texts and of LD 38 were altered?</p> <p>How were historical facts altered?</p>	<p>The only reference is to the Lord's Day, the Sabbath. (Yet these were not altered)</p> <p>No other texts were quoted.</p> <p>The GKVC were very fuzzy about the historical facts of the Synod of</p>

No.	Letter of GKv(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKv	Questions	Answers
	<p>the Ten Commandments, thereby altering the exegesis of certain texts,</p> <p>-Confession: altering the explanation of LD 38,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Church History: altering historical facts and making them a basis for their decision. 			Dort and the origin of LD 38.
7. Analysis				
<p>GS Leusden + Zuidhorn had to deal with appeals. They had to decide about these appeals on the basis of what the reformed churches had taught up to that point. This they did, without condemning either view. But they certainly did not alter the Scriptures or the confessions.</p> <p>As shown above, the two GS did not deny in any way the validity of all ten commandments. The new deputyship (serving GS Amersfoort) interprets the Fourth Commandment specifically, as all ten, in a Christological way and following the redemptive-historical method.</p> <p>As shown above, these GS did not alter the text of LD 38, but kept to it and probably did so even more closely than those who recently liberated themselves.</p> <p>Also, these GS did not alter historical facts. The people of the new Liberation need to study church history more closely on this matter.</p> <p>As a result, the GKvC has again wrongly accused the GKv.</p> <p>In conclusion, these are not grounds for demanding repentance and separation from the GKv. Instead, the GKvC needs to study this complex, ethical issue more closely and with more discernment. This would also temper the accusations they aim at the GKv.</p>				
8	<p>Ecclesiastical Unity - CGK</p> <p>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.</p> <p>However, the Synod of Leusden, 1999 (GKv), decided to continue on the way of ecclesiastical unity with the CGK.</p> <p>(This is) evidence of tolerance towards heresies.</p>	<p>About the CGK the GKv has said that they stand with them on the basis of God's Word and the reformed confessions; that there is no evidence of Scripture-criticism in the CGK, and about the procedures for ecclesiastical supervision of publications which concern the authority of Scripture, the deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity shall discuss these with the deputies of the CGK, in agreement with the instructions given by this synod (grounds, Art 131 GS Zuidhorn).</p>	<p>Do you accept the difference between how the CGK + GKv deal with supervision of the publications of ministers in their midst?</p>	<p>Loonstra now says the ascension is factual. But in other things there is no retraction. Then how can we accept that?</p> <p>They (GKvC) say the CGK accepts Scripture criticism but do not acknowledge it.</p> <p>E.g. in Zwolle in a CGK two practising homos are allowed to attend the Lord's Supper. Classis, with the advice of Loonstra, endorsed this.</p> <p>This is also allowed in the GKv (p.15, note 52 of their letter).</p>

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
	The CGK have not changed, (and thus) sadly the GKV made serious and unacceptable compromises. This makes them (co-)accountable for the deviation from Scripture and the Confessions within these churches.			

8. Analysis

It is true that the CGK deals with the supervision of the publications of ministers/professors differently than the GKV. Yet they have dealt with Loonstra.

The local examples cited do indeed disturb us, but what can one do with such local examples? They in the end are really not persuasive and convincing. If these matters were followed up in the ecclesiastical manner, namely, by taking them to classis/regional synod/ and general synod, with the whole bond of churches taking a stand on the issue, then one could use this to make the charge against the bond of CGK (and thus the GKV by implication) stick. However, this has not been done. Other information received (your delegates inquired from deputies and ministers who subscribed to the *Manifest*) suggests that consistories and classes have corrected this local acceptance of homos. In a bond of churches some disturbing things do happen, but one then needs to see what is done about them. For example, Paul found seriously disturbing practices and beliefs in Corinth, but he worked to correct them. At the same time he did not hesitate to address them *to the church of God...to those who are sanctified...called to be saints...*(1 Cor.1:2).

If the brothers were as concerned as this letters says, then one would expect a follow up. This has not happened to our knowledge.

Thus the charge against the CGK, and the GKV by implication, cannot be substantiated.

9	Supervision of Doctrine - GKV (Re Drs AL Th de Bruijne) 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 norms. In conclusion , all these developments testify of the destructing consequences of accepting a Bible-critical view and		Can you give proof from his writings that he alters the commandments into guidelines and examples rather than literal norms?	De Marie spoke with him for a whole evening. He did not note a step backwards, as being too unguarded, e.g. about inspiration of the Bible. De Bruijne takes over the ethics of Hays. Again, the example of justifying homos (in Heemse), is presented as being due to the ideas of Drs AL Th de Bruijne. De Marie kept flipping through the book but did not come up with any examples.
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No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
	tampering with the unconditional authority of the Word of God.			
9. Analysis				
Though proof was asked from the writings of Drs AL Th de Bruijne, none was forthcoming (though time was given to De Marie to search through the book, which he did).				
10	<p>Liedboek songs – Worship</p> <p>The churches were asked by Synod Leusden to try out the 121 songs. The final decision would then 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" that the "Liedboek" songs could not be accepted for use in worship services (he called them ecumenical love songs).</p> <p>Most of the songs taken from the "Liedboek" are unscriptural, and therefore unacceptable as songs that</p>	<p>GS Leusden's criteria (for new hymns):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. a good hymn should be appropriate to serve in a liturgical context in which God's words and deeds stand in the centre; ii. a good hymn should be in harmony with the Scripture concerning its contents; iii. a good hymn is characterised by style and quality regarding linguistic and musical form; it gives proof of a good word and tone relation; it is usable and accessible to present-day people. <p>GS Zuidhorn (Article 83) decided: <i>Criteria for selecting new hymn:</i></p>	<p>Do you realise that K Deddens could not recommend the Liedbook (Song-Book or Hymnal) songs as a whole, because at that time it was not allowed to make a selection?</p> <p>If all other arguments for liberating yourself from the GKVC would fall away, is this reason still sufficient</p>	<p>This reference was added later on, and it may need correction.</p> <p>The testing of the new hymns has been done by lay people.</p> <p>The Liedboek or Songbook had to serve 7 bonds of churches. The composers had a variety of backgrounds.</p> <p>Yet the GS said one could sing them.</p> <p>(Thus the GKVC brothers did not answer the question).</p> <p>If the spirit in the church was good, and we could address each other on the Word, then this would not</p>

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
	<p>should be pure and pleasant before the face of our holy God.</p> <p>Synod decided to make a further 90 songs available to the churches. 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.</p> <p>The proposed additional songs, mainly meant for children, are unacceptable to be used in worship services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. to agree that a hymn may not be in conflict with the Reformed confessions; ii. to pronounce that the criteria of the General Synod Leusden 1999 doesn't require alteration on that point, because in it was stated that a hymn should be in harmony with Scripture. 	<p>on its own to break with the GKV? If 'childish' songs are Scriptural, do you still refuse to sing them?</p>	<p>have been allowed to be reason for liberation (De Marie's own view).</p> <p>However, there is a line in the church life of the GKV, in its reformed organisations, which tells us that such a spirit on the basis of the reformed confessions is not possible.</p> <p>No time to discuss this.</p>

10. Analysis

Your deputies share the concerns about the Liedboek (Songbook). Our submission to the GS Amersfoort about liturgy and worship, as well as our address to GS Amersfoort stated this point very clearly. Specifically, we voiced concern about the introduction of so many new hymns, about the unsuitability of some hymns in the Songbook (we only tested a selection), concerns about the Ordinarium, concerns about some new forms, and we proposed that they work on new rhymings and tunes for the psalms. Thus we share some of these concerns.

Liturgy and worship concern church members each Sunday, and thus it receives much attention, and deserves it.

However, it should be made clear that originally the Songbook could only be adopted if it was adopted as a whole. Adopting individual selections from the Songbook was not allowed. That made its endorsement (by K Deddens whose name is used in the letter to substantiate this charge) impossible. That has now changed and individual selections are possible.

In order to put all these concerns into perspective we asked the second question (for this section). The answer from the brothers of the new Liberation indicates that they see this (important) matter of new hymns, in itself, as insufficient reason to separate and form new churches.

11	7th Commandment 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	GS Zuidhorn did not adopt the report but gave deputies the following mandate: a) To begin and stimulate a broad reflection regarding marriage, divorce, the single state,	Can you give proof that the synod decided to allow members to be released from the 7 th commandment on the basis of certain situations?	No answer. The synod did send it to the churches without trying to stop or correct it. In the churches the reports are used to justify divorce on grounds not found in the 7 th word
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No.	Letter of GKv(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKv	Questions	Answers
	<p>is also a veering off from this Scriptural direction by:</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Synod Zuidhorn-2002 should have, wholeheartedly, rejected this report that deviates from the obedience to all the commandments of the Lord (Art. 7, BC). Instead, Synod continued with the report.</p>	<p>preparation for marriage, and the solemnization of marriage, in part by publishing an abridged and popularly accessible version of the report, which incorporates the discussion at Synod (Decision 1).</p> <p>b) To call the churches to common humility in this matter, and in connection with this, to draft a letter to the churches (Decision 2a and 2b)</p> <p>c) To set up an Advisory Council to serve the churches in matters relating to marriage and divorce (Decision 3a and 3b).</p> <p>d) To examine, together with the Deputies for Church Order and Church Polity, whether additional forms of admonition and discipline are possible and desirable (Decision 4b).</p> <p>e) To give attention to questions relating to the solemnization of a second marriage after divorce, and in connection with this to review the meaning and status of marriage solemnization (Decision 5).</p> <p>f) In addition, the churches were already given the freedom publicly to express judgment in the midst of the congregation, about situations which may occur.</p>	<p>Can you explain why you say that the synod continued with the report, since the synod did not accept it? (We have been at synod and taken part in a discussion about this very matter. No decision has been accepted).</p>	<p>or in Jesus' teachings.</p> <p>We updated them on the progress of this matter at GS Amersfoort. But they still did not accept that this matter has not been decided, and that it is still at this time open for discussion and for decision at synod.</p>
11. Analysis				

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
	<p>It is clear that they are incorrect. No GS has made a decision as yet.</p> <p>In fact it needs to be said that the present report before GS Amersfoort protects marriage even more, discourages the use of a checklist mentality to see if divorce is allowable, strives to prevent divorce, and uses the style of the kingdom to engender a Christian spirit which seeks to reconcile instead of to divorce. One should applaud such efforts to unite the bond of churches to fight against divorce in the very secularised world of The Netherlands.</p> <p>Again, this cannot be a ground for separation.</p>			
12	<p>Marriage Form</p> <p>The new marriage form pays insufficient attention to what the Bible says about the relationships within marriage. The Bible clearly states '<i>wives submit to your husbands</i>' (Ef 5: 24, Col. 3: 18, 1 Pet. 3: 1, 5). The new form weakens this biblical teaching by not speaking of '<i>obey and submit</i>', as in the old marriage form, but, rather, replaces it by: '<i>accept as head... and follow</i>'. Also the role of the husband is viewed in a different way as the new form speaks of '<i>preceding</i>' instead of '<i>leading</i>'.</p> <p>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 '<i>when the Lord provides the possibility thereto</i>'. This can be interpreted in a way to please people who have secular views about '<i>having</i>' children.</p>	<p>(New Marriage Form)</p> <p>Bridegroom, love your wife, as Christ loves the Church (Eph 5:25-33) Fear the Lord! Live sensibly with your wife and show her respect, for together you share in God's grace, both in this life and in the life to come. Then you will be able to pray to God without hindrance and receive what you have requested. (I Pet 3:7) Lead her in a life with the Lord. Care for her and give her security. Accept her loving support as the help which Christ is giving you.</p> <p>Bride, love your husband and assist him by seeking his welfare in everything. (1 Tim 2:8-15) Accept him as head and receive his loving care as the security which Christ is giving you. (Eph. 5:22-24,33). Fear the Lord! Do not be focused upon outward appearance but let your good works adorn you (1 Peter 3:1-5) within the family and beyond it.</p> <p>Purpose</p> <p>God's Word also teaches us about the purpose of marriage. Man and wife may belong to each other in love and enjoy that which God gives them</p>	<p>Why do you translate 'voorgaan' with 'precede' since 'voorgaan' means guiding and leading?</p> <p>Does 'accept him as head' not include the concept of authority and leadership as in the Greek word, <i>kephale</i>?</p> <p>Does Paul in Ephesians in 5-6 not use different terms for the relations between parents and children (obey, honor and submit), workers and bosses (obey, honor and submit), than for the relation between the husband and the wife where she is to love and submit?</p> <p>Could the old form not be abused by those who did not want children on their terms?</p> <p>Does the new form not call and command couples to be fruitful (become parents)?</p> <p>Does the new form not stress that the Lord has to open the possibility</p>	<p>Yes, it is a matter of translation. Hans VanderJagt accepts responsibility.</p> <p>Yes, but we find the authority of the man needs more attention.</p> <p>They (GKVC) accept our view that their arguments are not strong.</p> <p>Yes, indeed, one could read the new form in that way.</p> <p>Yes, it could be read in that way.</p>

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
		<p>therein. The love between man and woman is exuberantly celebrated in the Song of Solomon. Love is more sparkling than wine and sweeter than honey (SoS. 5:1). Many waters cannot quench the vehement fire of love (SoS. 8:6,7). Because love is not self seeking, (1Cor. 13:5) those in love will seek the interests of the other. In this way, the lives of both can blossom. Above all together they are to dedicate their lives to God (Josh 24.:15b), and assist each other on the way to eternal life.</p> <p>In addition, it is the will of the Lord to build future generation through marriage with a view to the coming of His kingdom. (Gen 17:7). In Paradise He said to the man and woman : <i>be fruitful and multiply: fill the earth</i> (Gen.1:28).</p> <p>Also today, spouses are called to become parents (1 Tim 2:15), when the Lord provides the possibility for it (<i>Ook nu worden echtgenoten geroepen tot het ouderschap wanneer de Here de mogelijkheden daarvoor geeft</i>). When they are given children by God, they receive a priceless gift indeed (Ps 127 :3; Prov. 1:7-9). As father and mother they are to portray the image of God in the care and love for their children.</p>	<p>to have children; instead of giving couples the possibility to have secular views?</p>	
12. Analysis				

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
The questions and answers show that they have not read the new Marriage Form very charitably.				
The deputies have studied the whole new marriage form and have concluded with the Canadian sister churches that though one may wish that the term 'submit' was maintained, with a Scriptural explanation, the new form does maintain the ideas of the loving headship of the husband and that the wife willingly entrusts herself to his leadership and protection. Indeed, the new form often expresses these biblical concepts in new and fresh ways.				
'Voorgaan' is leadership and not 'preceding' as though the husband walks ten steps ahead of his wife!				
Any form can be misused. The old form could be misused as well. That does not make it wrong. The new form calls couples to become parents, i.e. to have children. In a secularised world in which man wants to play God, the new form accents <i>when the LORD opens the possibility to have children</i> . This in no way allows people to adopt secular views and try to take God's role in having or preventing children. That is not only an uncharitable misreading of the text, but simply wrong. The quotation of 1 Tim 2:15 is very telling. Other texts, which come readily to mind (Gen 1:28 and 9:1), are used elsewhere, but here this text focuses on and stresses a woman's role as child-bearer. It is not the most favourite text among those advocating birth-control!				
Again, this accusation does not substantiate but undermines their conclusion that separation was necessary.				
13	Sister churches - PCEA 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.	On the basis of the assurance that we only engage in discussion regarding church unity with churches that we believe to be true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, to make a sincere effort to re-engage the PCEA in effective discussions (Art 81 of 2003 Synod of Rockingham)	Since the GKV has its own responsibility, since it decided on the basis of art 29, BC to recognize the PCEA, and since the FRCA views the PCEA as true churches, why do you make this conclusion?	They (GKVC) agree the FRCA has stated this and the GKV has its own responsibility. However, they maintain their contention. Hans VanderJagt says there were more issues. E.g. that the PCEA has an open Lord's table shows this matter is confessional and thus no decision should have been made.
13. Analysis We would have liked the GKV to wait till we decided on the PCEA. However, we must concede that we have been very slow in this and also been internally divided on it. The GKV could not wait any longer. That is unfortunate. One wonders why this criticism is said only of the PCEA and not of other Presbyterian churches. The GKV made its decision on the basis of the reformed confessions, including art 29, B.C. They have stated that in the exercise of sister relations they wish to discuss any leftover areas of concern. Our other sister churches do the same thing. Thus we cannot accept this charge.				
14	Lord's Supper and the army Finally we conclude that the Synods' (Zuidhorn) decisions:	(The GS Zuidhorn decided re chaplains) 1. in the meetings to honor the	Please explain why the decision about military chaplains is contrary to Scripture?	This leads to an un reformed practice of interdenominational communion, in their view. They repeat their comments in the letter

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
	<p>1. Most of them in relation to articles 60 and 61 of the Church Order, mentioning that in areas 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>are contrary to Scripture (eg. I Corinthians 11: 23-29) and are therefore unacceptable.</p>	<p>character of the Christian congregation, i.e. that it is a fellowship on the basis of God's Word which expresses mutual supervision and discipline.</p> <p>2. that the chaplain invites only those of whom he is convinced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. that in their local churches they are admitted to the LS; b. they agree with us about the doctrinal 'fundamentals' of the Christian religion; c. they are blameless in conduct; and d. with a view to taking part in the LS they are ready to submit to each other's supervision and discipline. 	<p>That there is no consistory on site to supervise does not mean it is wrong, does it? On the mission field only the missionary is there to supervise, and we approve it.</p> <p>Please give proof that such celebrations of the LS are used in magical and unscriptural ways?</p>	<p>and again refer to Franeker, a local example.</p> <p>Br H Griffioen, who worked out on the mission field, corroborated this and said only the missionary (with approval of the home consistory) supervised. They had to agree.</p> <p>It is a proposition or a supposition that it could be used for magical purposes, etc. So they only presupposed it. It is not based on fact.</p>
14. Analysis				
<p>We share some of the concerns about chaplaincy and the celebration of the Lord's Supper in areas of crisis and war. However, we have not said that it is impossible, in a mission-type situation, to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a war zone. Our focal point was more that our church order (art 57) requires that all those who attend must have professed the reformed faith and be godly in their walk of life.</p> <p>Citing the possible objection that the sacrament could be used in a magical manner to gain protection in a war (even as Israel did with the ark, for example), is really grasping at straws. The same objection could be made of any proper Lord's Supper celebration.</p> <p>GS Zuidhorn was at pains to state that this decision was not an introduction of an open Lord's table. Yet they contradict this statement of synod and cite a local example to substantiate their objection. One must repeat what is said in #8+9. It does become a very subjective charge.</p> <p>This incorrect charge (#1) and the supposition(#2), as well as the unproven charge (#3) cannot lead to the necessity to separate and liberate.</p>				
15	Blessing by a non-elder The General Synod of Leusden-1999 again determined that the blessing, the	GS Leusden (art 48) decided: In place of the previous decisions about this to declare that each brother	Both preaching and blessing belong to the ministry of reconciliation. We agree that only those in office	

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
	<p>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).</p> <p>The Synod of Zuidhorn-2002 decided not to alter this decision, though many churches objected.</p> <p>At present, as new Reformed Churches, we feel that the changes to theory and practices are the result from:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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. <p>This Synod's decision makes GKV 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.</p>	<p>appointed by the consistory to lead a worship service is entitled thereby to pronounce unaltered the blessing, also with the raising of hands.</p> <p>Grounds:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To pronounce the blessed greetings and the blessing in God's name no specific requirements apply to this aspect of the worship service that do not apply to his ability to conduct the other aspects, such as the reading of the law, the declaration of grace or leading in prayer. 2. When the consistory appoints someone to lead a service, it pays attention to the conditions for this, namely, his capacity to do this work and his reception in the congregation. 	<p>should fill these functions.</p> <p>But if a non-elder gives the blessing, does this mean that preaching is at risk too? Is there evidence that preaching too is done by someone not a minister, or not in office?</p> <p>How does this decision devalue the character of the preaching? Do you have evidence that preaching is no longer seen as the ministry of reconciliation?</p> <p>Is this subject that serious that it should, on its own, lead to separation and liberation?</p>	<p>No, they (GKVC) do not think that preaching will be given to non office bearers.</p> <p>No.</p>

15. Analysis

Your deputies share the concern about the blessing being laid on the congregation by a non-elder. We have conveyed that to GS Zuidhorn. One needs to respect the office which the Lord bestows on ordained men in the congregation. We wrote to GS Amersfoort that we have left this matter lie, and gone on to more important issues.

However, to say as the GKVC does, that hereby the office of preaching is undervalued goes too far. Though it is a matter of concern, this matter should, on its own, not lead to separation and liberation.

16			General questions	
			1. How are you reaching out to the	1. If one sees that none of the

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
			<p>GKV churches and bond in an effort to "seek unity in Christ"?</p> <p>2. How are you responding to those in the GKV churches, who sympathise with your concerns but do not consider that withdrawing is an option for them (or at this time)?</p> <p>3. Do you think that one reason for the separation has to do with the growing disregard of the antithesis?</p> <p>4. Do you think there is a correlation between synod's decisions and increasing secular trends in the church (ie. Sunday work, divorce, etc.)?</p> <p>5. Do you think the message of the enmity in Gen 3:15 in this time and age has a relation to your decision to break with the GKV?</p> <p>6. Can you prove that the GKV is a pluralistic church in which the truth and the lie both have a lawful place?</p> <p>7. Do you accept that the FRCA in</p>	<p>appeals was upheld, then one needs to realise that they are not eager to seek contact at this point.</p> <p>2. These members need to call their consistory to repentance; if no reformation occurs, they should follow and join the GKVC</p> <p>3-6. Kerkbegrip disappears in GKV. There in GKV the church is present all over, it is claimed.</p> <p>The church is an open market place instead of a building with walls.</p> <p>Watchers on the wall need to be active, and this is lacking in the GKV, in their view.</p> <p>The idea that in the GKV that we need to be more outgoing means the need for defence of the truth, for godliness, etc take a backward seat.</p> <p>The use of discipline (all levels) is not strong in the GKV.</p> <p>Evangelisation is not the task of the church, br J (Hans) vdJ says. But others correct him and say it is not the first task of the church, in their view.</p> <p>They (GKV-c) do not stand on the same foundation as the GKV and thus they cannot come together at this point.</p>

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
			2006 would decide to have sister relations both with the GKV and with yourselves? We think in this respect to the decision of the GKV to have sister relations with both the FCS and the FCS continuing.	7. They give us time to admonish the GKV, and to find out how things are. Thus they would not be surprised if we accept both. They would go back together, if they could stand on one basis.
16. Analysis				
The separation is still very fresh and painful, on both sides. Movement toward each other seems very difficult at this point in time. Your delegates queried these brothers and the answer shows that they are not inclined to seek contact and reconciliation, at this time.				
From ministers (of the GKV), whom we interviewed, the response came that the contact is impossible because the members of the new Liberation do not make themselves available. Attempts to talk have been frustrated. Attempts to send articles and letters to <i>Reformanda</i> have been blockaded repeatedly. No discussion seems possible. They have tried but hit a brick wall.				
It seems too early to start pressing the need for reconciliation. The newly Liberated want to see some tangible changes; the other side would like contact and find that walls have gone up high to thwart it. May the LORD use the GS Amersfoort and other means to show to the newly Liberated that (some of their) charges are unsubstantiated and that the GKV wishes to remain fully reformed!				
Official contact should be maintained at the very least with the newly Liberated so that we can continue to speak with them and to urge them to seek the path of reconciliation, on the basis of Christ's prayer for unity.				
17	Reformed instruction.		What are you doing with respect to reformed instruction. (an added question by WH)	To start up reformed schools again. Meanwhile compromises must be made due to small nos. An e.g. is given of sending their children to the Hervormde school instead of the GKV school.
17. Analysis				
It is to be deplored that the newly liberated parents withdraw their children from the reformed schools across the land. At the GSR in Rotterdam we were informed that next year no children from the newly Liberated churches would attend any more. They would go to other Christian schools from other denominations (Gereformeerde Gemeenten and the NHK) or to the public schools instead. This is done in spite of the fact that they are welcomed at the reformed schools and are not blocked at all from attending.				
In the reformed schools teachers must be either from the GKV or the CGK. Teachers who withdraw from the GKV are thus prevented from teaching in the reformed schools. Parents who are not from the GKV or CGK may have their children attend (an interview is held and a board decides on each individual application) but the parents are not members of the school association.				

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
	<p>One wonders how parents can justify withdrawing their children from reformed schools and sending their children to schools of the Gereformeerde Gemeenten which they have branded as unscriptural and as advocating Scripture-criticism, or to the NHK with all its unreformed teachings.</p> <p>To start up new reformed schools seems such a waste of manpower and resources. Also, it indicates that instead of attempting reconciliation, the gap between the GKV + GKVC is widening. That is a real pity.</p> <p>This is an important aspect of church life and your deputies thus asked for information.</p>			

OVERALL CONCLUSIONS

The GKVC asks us to accept their charges of Scriptural deviation against the GKV. After testing their arguments, we find them wanting.

The letter from the GKVC has not substantiated their claim that the GKV has no right any more to the title of true church. Though we in the past too have concerns about trends in the GKV, our synods did not decide to stop sister relations or to put them under strain. And though we sent letters with our concerns (as well as appreciation) to deputies and the GS Amersfoort, we are heartened by the strong decisions of GS Amersfoort. We cannot come to the same conclusion to separate. Some of the objections are incorrect, some are uncharitable, and not one leads to the necessity of separation and liberation.

Since the GKVC asks us to accept their claim to be the true, continuing GKV, we must answer that this is impossible. Instead we must urge them to re-consider their argumentation and their accusations. This should lead them to seek reconciliation with the GKV, and so restore the unity for which Christ earnestly prayed just before his unique, atoning sacrifice unto death on the cross. The apostles consistently urged the churches to remain united (see the strong argument in Paul's letter to the Ephesians).

Having stated this, it would be unjust to enter into a sister relation with the GKVC.

Yet we hear in the voice of these brothers a strong desire to remain reformed. One cannot but appreciate this. Thus we need to continue to have contacts with them so that we can speak to them and continue to urge them, as well as our Dutch sister church, to work for reconciliation on the basis of truth and love.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To express grief that some members separated from the GKV and formed the GKVC.

Grounds:

- a. Such a separation always causes much grief as it divides believers who used to sit around the same Lord's table. It especially grieves our Lord who prayed fervently that the apostolic witness would build one, apostolic church.
 - b. It also means that brothers who all want to keep the church on a strongly reformed basis now stand divided. Some are in the GKVC and some in the GKV. This is both a pity and a grievous hurt.
2. Not to accept the accusations against our sister churches, the GKV, but to defend the honor and reputation of our Dutch sisters. At the same time to remain diligent in monitoring the trends in our Dutch sister churches (GKV).

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
<i>Grounds:</i>				
	<p>a. The letter from the GKVC has not substantiated their charges against the GKV.</p> <p>b. Though we share some of the concerns (e.g. about the number of new hymns and some aspects of liturgical changes), we cannot come to the same strong conclusions. Some of the objections are incorrect or unsubstantiated. This is seen in their charges re the fourth and seventh commandments, and those re toleration of false doctrine by theological colleges. Some are uncharitable, as in the cases of their charges re the new marriage form, and some of their charges re the celebration of the Lord's Supper in a military zone, as well as in some charges re the PCEA.</p> <p>c. The members of the GKVC had not exhausted the avenues of appeal before they separated and formed the GKVC. Matters such as those relating to the fourth and seventh commandments had not been finished when the GKVC was formed. The matters re new hymns remain unfinished.</p> <p>d. Though we too have concerns about trends in the GKV, we cannot come to the same conclusion, namely, that they warranted separation.</p> <p>e. It is a serious matter to allow deformation to go unchallenged, but it is also a serious matter to separate when it is not warranted. The injunctions to remain one in the Lord (e.g. John 17 and Eph 4), sometimes even when serious problems arose as in Corinth, can be read repetitively in the Bible (cf Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians). The letters of Paul and the other apostles constantly remind us of this. Unwarranted separation then becomes schism.</p> <p>f. The command to <i>defend and promote the honour and reputation</i> of our (unbelieving) neighbours (LD 43) applies not only to us as individuals but also to our sister relations.</p> <p>g. Yet there is the need for diligence in our sister relations with the GKV. Deputies in their submissions to the GS of Zuidhorn and Amersfoort have specified their concerns as they related to the reports about the fourth commandment, reports about marriage and divorce, the decision re the blessing as given by a non-elder, the liturgical changes and proposals about the same, including the proliferation of new hymns, as well as the decisions re the chaplaincy and celebration of the Lord's Supper in war zones. We thus have registered our concerns as well. Such diligence will need to continue, in accordance with the rules for sister relations.</p> <p>h. On the other hand, deputies have shown that diligence in discussing developments and trends in our Dutch sister churches has led to good results. This should be continued. For there continue to be some trends within our Dutch sister churches that do cause concern.</p> <p>3. We cannot at this time positively respond to the request of the GKVC to acknowledge them as "<i>the lawful continuation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.</i>"</p>			

Grounds:

- a. As decided at Synod Rockingham 2003, we as FRCA acknowledge the GKV as giving "evidence of continuing faithfulness." At the same time the FRCA want to "discuss and to continue to discuss with the GKV deputies the concerns as to the development within the GKV and as outlined and recommended in the report of deputies".¹⁹

¹⁹ Acts of Synod Rockingham 2003, Article 41.

No.	Letter of GKV(continuing)	Acts, Response of BBK of GKV	Questions	Answers
	<p>b. From the information received we conclude that their charges lacked substance, or were not convincing enough to warrant separation. Thus it is impossible to accept their claim to be the continuing GKV.</p> <p>4. Not to accede to the request to enter sister relations with the GKVC.</p> <p><i>Ground:</i> Not being able to recognise them as the continuing GKV means that we cannot enter sister relations with them.</p> <p>5. To maintain official contact with the GKVC so that we can work for reconciliation between them and the GKV, on the basis of truth and love.</p> <p><i>Grounds:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. We hear in the voice of the brothers of the GKVC a strong desire to remain reformed. One cannot but appreciate this desire to remain reformed. Thus we need to continue to have contacts with them so that we can speak to them and continue to urge them, as well as our Dutch sister church, to work for reconciliation on the basis of truth and love. b. Indeed, unwarranted separation is against Christ's prayer for unity, and we need to address this in these contacts. c. Visits can be made to the GKVC at the same time as those to the general synods of our sister churches. d. There are those in the GKV who share similar concerns and have openly and publicly indicated their concerns. e. The GKVC seceded in 2003. Much has occurred since then. There is a need for up-to-date contacts, especially after the GS of Amersfoort and its decisions, including its attempts to re-open official contacts. Also, we must take into consideration the synod which the GKVC will hold (as yet) in 2005, D.V. <p>6. To have synod respond to the letter of the GKVC.</p> <p><i>Ground:</i> After a decision is made by synod, only then can an official response be sent. Synod should send such an official answer to the GKVC in accordance with this decision.</p>			

ⁱ Their address reads:

Bring the warm and genuine greetings from the GGRI-NTT to our brothers and sisters who at this moment have separated themselves from the GKV. The prayer, expectation, the call and the desire from us, as your fellow-believers is: turn back to the fellowship of the GKV, do not separate, dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus. We do not in the least wish to mingle in the problems. What we want to pass on to you are only words to stimulate you. Your attitude of criticism and dissatisfaction with the decisions of the GS Zuidhorn may not be reason to separate yourself from the ecclesiastical fellowship. Travel the ecclesiastical route. Discuss further the decisions taken. Put in your official proposal or your appeal for reconsideration of the decisions which you consider non-Scriptural. Is your right not guaranteed in Art 31, C.O.? Thus you have opportunity to consider together and to listen to each other, and to talk about all the problem which exist, in a spirit of brotherly love and unity. You are undoubtedly of the same mind as us that our Lord Jesus Christ does not want his church to be racked with divisions. To separate (to withdraw from the fellowship: to walk out) is not the only way which remains for solving the problems, as long as the best way is still open. Give the Holy Spirit the room to work. The Lord Jesus Christ is sad when He sees the GKV experience a schism. Think of the prayer of our Lord: I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in

Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me (John 17:20-21). Consider, brothers and sisters, that the Lord Jesus as our only Mediator and Intercessor still pleads for us with this prayer. The GGRI-NTT, as part of the history of the GKV, are really saddened to hear of this serious struggle taking place in the fellowship of the GKV, and which already has as consequence that brothers and sisters have separated themselves. While we examine ourselves, we, your fellow-believers, yet ask you: will we continue to give expression to the practise of “separate yourself” in our church life and church history? Let’s learn to become more mature and more wise in our resolution of problems and differences. May the LORD help you all! Amen.

ⁱⁱ The National Synod of Dordrecht of 1618/19 made a statement with six rules about the question of sabbath and Sunday. These rules enjoy moral authority among us. They are as follows:

1. In the fourth commandment there is a ceremonial and a moral element.
2. The rest on the seventh day after the Creation, and the strict observance of this day assigned to the Jewish nation in particular were ceremonial.
3. That a definite and appointed day is set aside for worship, and along with it as much rest as is necessary for worship and for holy meditation, belongs to the moral element.
4. Now that the Sabbath of the Jews is set aside, christians are duty bound to hallow the day of Sunday solemnly.
5. This day has always been kept since the time of the apostles in the early church.
6. This day must be so consecrated to worship that on it men rest from all servile labor (except those required by charity and present necessities), and likewise from all such recreations as prevent the worship of God.

ⁱⁱⁱ Is the seventh day instituted already from the creation of the world as a day of rest for people and for the worship of God? And, must, according to the Fourth Commandment, a day which is repeated periodically be appointed for the service of God?

With most of the fathers Gomarus answers the first question in the negative. He does not consider it in agreement with Scripture that the seventh day found its origin at the creation of the world (*Opera*, III, p 327, no.2). As evidence he refers to Gen 2:2,3 (*Opera*, III, p.327/8, no.4-10); to the time of the patriarchs when there is no mention of a sabbath (*Opera*, III p 328, no 11,12); to Gen 8:10,12 (*Opera*, III pag 328, no 13); Ex 16:23 and 25 (*Opera*, III page 328, no 16), where he considers that the maintaining of the sabbath was not necessary in order to keep the distinction of time in weeks (*Opera*, III pag 329, no 20), and that the heathens, if they celebrated the seventh day, did not do so on the strength of a creational command (*Opera*, III pag 331, no 44), and Gomarus points to the fact that God punished the Jews for violation of the sabbath but never the gentiles (*Opera*, III pag 331, no 53).

All these considerations lead Gomarus to the conclusion that the sabbath is an institution from the time of Moses (*Opera*, III pag 332, no 57). Men as Calvin, Hieronymus Zanchius, Josiah Simler and Cornelius Bertram (*Opera*, III pag 332, no 58-61) posited the opposite view (the sabbath as a creational institution) but never viewed this as an absolutely definite truth but always presented it as a probable proposition (*Opera*, III pag 332, no 57). The testimony of other writers is given as evidence of his stance (*Opera*, III pag 332, no 62).

Gomarus also answers in the negative the question whether a certain day is set aside for the the worship of the LORD. The arguments in favour of this view never convinced him (*Opera*, III pag 334, no 1). Many theologians distinguish between the ceremonial and the temporal from the moral and abiding in their explanation of the Fourth Commandment. They draw a line between the outward aspect and the moral aspect of the seventh day (*Opera*, III pag 335, no 9). Gomarus considers that proof for the view that the apostles appointed the Lord’s Day in the place of the sabbath is not delivered by referring to Acts 20:7 (*Opera*, III pag 335, no 2), 1 Cor 16:1,2 (*Opera*, III pag 337, no 22) and Rev 1:10 (*Opera*, III pag 338, no 32).

One may speak of the custom of the church of the apostles, but not of their command (*Opera*, III pag 339, no 40). This is made clear by quotations from Bullinger, Ursinus, Aretius, Zanchius, Simler, Paraeus, Joh Cuchlinus and Thomas Aquinas (*Opera*, III pag 339, no 40-48).

After considering all these things Gomarus deems that it clear that it is not certain the Lord's Day or the first day of the week was instituted by the apostles for the worship of the God. Nevertheless he must defend the public worship of the Lord, in agreement with the general sense of the Fourth Commandment and this cannot be violated without shortchanging or injuring the public worship. God has so directed things that we all should celebrate the spiritual sabbath and the keep the public day of worship holy, without injury to it or without superstition (*Opera*, III pag 340, no 49). [G.P. van Itterzon, Franciscus Gomarus. 's-Gravenhage 1929 (diss)]