

APPENDIX B

Deputies Reports and Supplementary Reports

for relations with other churches

1. Sister Churches

a. Canada

I. Mandate:

Synod Bedfordale (1992) decided (a.o.) to:

- appoint new deputies with instructions to continue the sister relations under the adopted rules
- to urge deputies to try to give more content to the contact, in particular as regards matters mentioned in the rules for sister relations.

II. Correspondence

Deputies:

- a. supplied the Canadian Sister Churches with copies of Acts of Synod Bedfordale, 1992
- b. corresponded with the (Canadian) Comm. on Relations with Churches Abroad, (CCRCA) drawing their attention to various decisions of Synod Bedfordale.
- c. sent three letters of credentials to the CCRCA in connection with FRCA ministers visiting Canada and being asked to lead worship services there.
- d. received copies of (Canadian) Deputies' Reports (as well as Supplementary Reports) to Synod Lincoln 1992.
- e. received three copies of the Acts of Synod Lincoln 1992.

General Synod Lincoln (1992) decided:

- a. to continue Ecclesiastical fellowship with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.
- b. to revise the existing Rules of Correspondence, deciding to call them "Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship." The revised rules read as follows:
 - "1. The churches shall assist each other in the maintenance defence, and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations.
 2. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or Minutes and otherwise at least be sending the decisions relevant to their respective churches if possible in translation.
 3. The churches shall consult each other when entering into relations with third parties.
 4. The churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate.
 5. The churches shall open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in their respective churches.In exercising these relations the churches shall strive to implement also the following:
 6. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or liturgy, the churches shall be informed in order that as much consultation can take place as possible before a final decision is taken.

7. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as much as local regulations permit."

The CCRCA informed us that it would "henceforth maintain our relationship with you on the basis of the above-mentioned Rules. Should that meet with difficulties, or a need for clarification on your part, please contact us."

c. to convey the thanks of the Canadian Reformed Churches to the Free Reformed Churches of Australia for the financial support given to the Theological College of Hamilton.

d. to re-appoint the committee on Bible Translations and to give it a mandate to do a comparative study of the NASB, the NIV and the NKJV.

e. to continue its membership in the ICRC and to meet with delegates of the FRCA to discuss our concerns about the ICRC.

Other decisions of Synod Lincoln:

1. to continue relations with the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

2. to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Presbyterian Church in Korea, and to offer the same relationship to the Free Church of Scotland;

3. to charge the CCRCA to take up contact with the Reformed Church in the United States with a view to entering into Ecclesiastical fellowship with this church.

4. to investigate the Eglise Reformee Confessante au Zaire and the Reformed Churches in South Africa.

5. to continue the Committee for Contact with the OPC. Synod decided "to conclude from previous synods' decisions that the divergencies evaluated in 1971 and in 1986 have been sufficiently discussed to confirm that these are not impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC, but may be discussed in the framework of church unity."

Synod decided however to continue the discussion with respect to divergencies which "are considered to be impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship, and to see whether these divergencies stem for ecclesiological and/or historical differences."

The OPC was to be informed that the matters which still require resolutions for the establishment of full ecclesiastical fellowship are:

a. the matter of confessional membership

b. the matter of supervision of the Lord's table

c. the matter of relationship with the Christian Reformed Church.

Regarding the Theological College Synod expressed gratitude that the work of the college could continue without interruption and that "all instruction given is in harmony with the Word of God and in agreement with the confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches."

Prof. J. Geertsema was appointed Principal of the College for the period Sept. 1993 to Aug. 1996, while Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes was designated as Principal for the period 1996-1999.

III. Conclusions:

1. The Canadian Reformed Churches give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed confessions and Church Order.

2. While there are some differences between our respective rules for correspondence these are not major. Though it would be ideal to have identical rules this may be too much to expect.

IV. Recommendations:

To continue sister relations under the adopted rules.

b. The Netherlands

1. Mandate

to continue the sister relations under the adopted rules

2. Correspondence

1. Deputies supplied the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands with two copies of the Acts of Synod Bedfordale 1992.

2. Deputies received a letter from the Dutch deputies dated 26 March 1993 in which they commented on the following:

a. As regards the provisional adoption of a revised Church Order "we recognize with thankfulness that the FRCA want to maintain a Reformed form of Church Government;

b. As regards the contact of the FRCA with the PCEA deputies express their disappointment about the apparent impasse of these contacts. They also write, "In our discussions with the brothers of the PCEA we sensed disappointment and even rancour about remarks concerning the PCEA as made during your last synod, as well as the conduct and speeches of your delegates to the (1991) synod of the PCEA. In our estimation appreciable damage has been done in the mutual relations, and we hope that the relations may be restored. Our delegates have urged the PCEA to continue the contacts and they stated that the concerns formulated by the FRCA are also points of discussion for the GKN. They explained that the GKN and the FRCA stand on the same basis, theologically and ecclesiastically. There is this exception, that the GKN does not see these concerns as stumbling blocks for mutual recognition." Deputies convey that they see no hindrance for the GKN to offer to the PCEA a sister relation and have also recommended this to the Synod of Ommen. On the one hand they realize that this place the FRCA in an embarrassing position. On the other hand they point out that the GKN has its own responsibility with respect to its ecclesiastical contacts.

c. As regards the contacts between the GKN and RCNZ deputies write that they propose to the Synod of Ommen to continue and strengthen these contacts in view of a possible sister relation. They promise to stay in close contact with the FRCA with respect to future developments.

Attached to the abovementioned letter was a summary of the report of the visit made by Revs. A. DeJager and H. VanVeen to the PCEA and RCNZ in Sept./Oct. 1992.

NB This letter of 26 March 1993 was discussed with some representatives of the deputies for relations with Presbyterian Churches. They expressed their disappointment in the lack of consultation regarding the contacts with the PCEA, in light of their written commitment to do so. In this meeting it was decided that the delegates attending the ICRC should try to arrange an address to Synod Ommen including:

a) greetings - given that they were already sent by letter;

b) give an account of FRCA position in relation to PCEA up to Synod 1992 and not to pre-empt any subsequent discussion, decisions, etc. that will be presented to FRCA Synod 1994;

c) express disappointment and regret to the publicising of the Netherlands' viewpoint without consulting the Australian Deputies; explain that no complaint or problems have been expressed by PCEA to FRCA deputies; d) remind the GKN of consultation in line with the rules and their written commitment to the same. The address has been added as an appendix (appendix 1)

4. In a letter dated 25 November 1993 deputies conveyed some of the decisions taken by Synod Ommen 1992:

a) to continue sister relations with the FRCA under the adopted rules;

N.B. A copy a newly adopted rules was included (see appendix 2). Synod Ommen decided that the rules are in force by the GKN. Sister churches may have their

own rules as long as they do not come in conflict with the rules adopted by the GKN.

b) to strive for a sister relation with the PCEA and in view of this to continue contact. Grounds:

- in doctrine, worship, and church government the PCEA must be considered as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ;
- in view of the sister relation with the FRCA it is not prudent to offer a sister relation to the PCEA at this stage.

c) to continue and strengthen the contacts with the RCNZ.

d) to inform the FRCA of these decisions and to discuss further developments in the abovementioned contacts.

Some discussion took place during a fraternal conversation with the Revs. C. Bouwman and C. Kleyn during the meeting of the ICRC in Zwolle in September 1993. In this meeting the report of the Revs. A. DeJager and H. Van Veen was discussed. In the letter of 25 November 1993 the GKN deputies write about this meeting, "We have understood that especially the passage (in the report of the visit to the PCEA) which speaks about resentment from the side of the PCEA about arrogance and being treated in a condescending way by the deputies of the FRCA, has caused some annoyance. Deputies admit that this accusation should have been discussed with the FRCA first, before publicising in a report to synod. In hindsight they regret that this has happened. Nevertheless they are still concerned about the apparent impasse in the contacts between the FRCA and PCEA.

Finally they express the desire to stay in close contact with the FRCA about matters that concern our churches mutually, specifically the further developments in the contacts with PCEA and RCNZ. In view of this close contact two delegates of the GKN will visit Synod Byford 1994. 5. Deputies have not yet received a copy of the Acts of Synod Ommen 1992. In the event they will arrive before May 1993 a summary of these Acts will be given in a supplementary report.

3. Recommendations

to continue the sister relations under the adopted rules.

APPENDIX I

Address for Synod of the Churches in the Netherlands

It is our pleasure that we, Rev Kleyn and myself, are permitted to be in your midst this evening. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia had not initially thought it possible to be able to send delegates —be it even for one evening only— to your assembly, and so have already passed on to you, via a letter, our brotherly greetings and our earnest wish that the Lord bestow His gracious blessing on your meeting and on your churches. But the fact that your agenda has taken longer for you to digest than you had hoped makes it possible for us to speak with you face to face. We had, after all, to be in Holland at this time to attend the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

Neither of the two Australian travellers in your midst this evening are deputies on the Committee for Relations with Sister Churches. (Both of us are deputies on the Committee for Relations with non-sister Presbyterian Churches.) Before our departure from Australia two weeks ago, the Committee for Relations with Sister Churches requested us to find time while we were in the Netherlands to address this Synod. Besides passing on verbal greetings to you, we received the mandate to mention three items, all of which have to do with the decision your assembly took some weeks ago concerning the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA). Our information

is that you have recognized this church as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ, but have withheld offering sister church relations to the PCEA out of the deference to your sister churches in Australia, the FRCA.

a. We were asked in the first place to give to you an account of our relations with the PCEA. Hereby we comply.

Our contact with the PCEA stems from 1978. In that year our churches in their Synod appointed a committee to investigate these churches (Art 24; Appendix II). A report on these churches was tabled at Synod 1983, with the recommendation that "some years of testing the waters would be best" before a formal recognition be extended to the PCEA. Consequently, our churches in Synod 1983 instructed deputies

"to further investigate whether those churches can be acknowledged as true and faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (Art 96).

In response to the investigation carried out by new deputies, our churches in Synod 1985 indicated that

"the available information is not sufficient for the responsible recognition of the true marks according to Art 29 of the Belgic Confession" (Art 68).

Of particular concern to Synod '85 was the observation that the PCEA had "three types of communicants". New deputies had to uncover what this meant with regards to the proper administration of the Lord's supper.

Synod 1987 received a lengthy report from deputies. This report concluded with the recommendation that

"Synod decide to recognize the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia as a true church according to articles 27 to 29 of the Belgic Confession" (App B, pg 10).

Our churches, though, could not adopt for themselves the recommendation of the deputies. Rather, the information put together by deputies in their report brought to light "areas of concern." These areas of concern included the following items:

- a. fencing of the Lord's table
- b. pulpit exchanges
- c. children in the covenant
- d. the problem of adherents

Deputies were instructed "to continue for the mutual benefit of both federations of churches, the discussion about [these] areas of concern" (Art 115, Rec 4).

New deputies did so. They continued the discussions on these areas, with as result that in their report to the churches in Synod 1990, deputies could indicate that "greater understanding of each other's position" had been achieved. But, the brothers added,

"greater understanding does not necessarily mean greater unanimity. In fact, the greater understanding we have achieved has pointed up that the concerns expressed by previous Synod about the fencing of the Lord's table and pulpit exchanges were most warranted" (Acts, App C, pg 183).

In response to this report, Synod 1990 instructed deputies

"to continue to study and discuss further with the PCEA the remaining areas of concern specified by Synod 1987, viz, the supervision of the Lord's table, the practice of pulpit exchanges and the position of children in the covenant."

(The matter of adherents was clarified so that this item was dropped from the list.) To this instruction to deputies to continue to study and discuss the remaining areas of concern, our churches in Synod 1990 added this:

"In this discussion about the areas of concern the confession of the doctrine of the church should be addressed when applicable. Due attention must be given to our concern about possible unscriptural concepts regarding the 'pluriformity of the church'..." (Acts, Art 77, Rec 5a).

To give an understanding of why Synod instructed deputies to give attention to "possible unscriptural concepts regarding the 'pluriformity of the church'", I quote from a document submitted by deputies to our 1990 Synod. The content of this document was judged as accurate by deputies from the PCEA. The relevant part of the document reads as follows:

"Much of the position of the PCEA re church revolves around the concept of

"pure/less pure" church. That is: there are degrees from "most pure" 'down' to the point where a 'church' ceases to be a church of Jesus Christ and becomes a synagogue of Satan (WCF 25.5).

Because of this position, the PCEA will not deny the title 'church' to any 'denomination' holding the central truth of Jesus Christ crucified (justification by faith) even though that church may stray on various other points. Any 'denomination' is 'church' if it confesses this central doctrine of the Bible and is more or less pure depending on the extent to which it holds correctly to the various other dogmas revealed in Scripture. The PCEA sees in each such 'relatively pure' church a manifestation of the one church of Jesus Christ.

The PCEA is aware of the desire expressed by the Lord Jesus in Jn 17 that "they may all be one." For that reason the PCEA is disturbed by the fact that there are some 15 'denominations' in Australia of a reformed slant, each going their separate way.

The separateness of the various churches is a result of the presence of sin. Although all churches who confess the heart of the Scripture (justification by faith in Christ) ought to be one, the sad reality is that they are divided. Yet all have a unity in Christ, each being a manifestation of the one church. That inherent unity can receive expression by pulpit exchanges and receiving Christians (ie, members in good standing) from other evangelical churches at one's Lord's Supper table.

As such, the PCEA does not mind its ministers preaching in pulpits of other 'relatively pure' churches and inviting their ministers onto PCEA pulpits. Not that this happens regularly; yet the PCEA recognizes that such can happen and so occasionally it does. Similarly, the table is not closed to people who belong to God by faith in Jesus Christ and demonstrate their faith in God by belonging to a church which preaches justification through faith in Christ alone (ie, another evangelical church which would be rather pure). Not that the PCEA would permit such a person to the table without speaking to him; the elders and/or minister do speak to prospective attendees and/or utter a warning from the pulpit not to eat and drink unworthily. It should be noted, however, that this speaking is not done in each congregation, ie, not in every church is each visitor intercepted on the days when Lord's Supper is celebrated. In those congregations where a visitor is not intercepted, there is a stronger emphasis from the pulpit re the qualifications for attendance at the Table" (Acts 1990, App C, pg 189).

So far the document submitted by deputies to Synod 1990 judged as accurate by deputies from the PCEA. It was this account of what the brethren of the PCEA thought about the church that prompted our churches in Synod 1990 to state that

"...it is disconcerting to read (...) that the opinion of the PCEA delegates appears to go in the direction of embracing a 'pluriformity theory' about the church" (Acts, Art 77, Cons 13).

More:

"...we learn from Scripture (and it is confirmed in the history of the church) that when the demands of Christ for a true, faithful, pure and holy church are neglected a false ecumenism and interdenominationalism often results. It is because of the high demands of our Lord Jesus Christ that we must continue to maintain the whole of our true Confession" (Cons 14).

And again:

"In our discussions with the PCEA we must on the one hand strive to honour God's command that the church of Christ avoid all error. If we are to be one in faith and hope, all things which are contrary to God's Word must be rejected. On the other hand we must take note of Article 46 CO and not demand more of the PCEA than of ourselves..." (Cons 16).

Deputies appointed by Synod 1990 endeavoured to "discuss further with the PCEA" the remaining areas of concern, addressing the doctrine concerning the church when applicable. In the two years between that Synod and Synod 1992, despite much work done, very little progress was made. The result is that our churches in our most recent Synod simply repeated the mandate to deputies to study and discuss further the mentioned areas of concern (Art 72).

It all, dear brothers, come down to this: for a number of years now the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have had intensive contact with this Presbyterian Church in our country. Given what we know of the PCEA, the FRCA has not been able to conclude, in good conscience before the Lord, that the PCEA stands with us "on the foundations as expressed in Articles 27 to 32 of the Belgic Confession" (cf Acts 1985, Art 67).

b. Beyond giving an account of our relations with the PCEA, deputies for Relations with Sister Churches instructed us to draw to your attention what was undoubtedly an oversight on your part. We refer to the matter of consultation with your sister churches in Australia before a decision be made concerning another church in Australia.

The Rules governing the sister-relationship between your churches and our's stipulate the following:

"e. to be responsible to each other concerning correspondence with third parties."

In accordance with this rule, you have in the past kept us abreast—and we you—of contacts with the PCEA. Now, we are aware that in your Synod of Leeuwarden you have adopted new rules for inter-church relations, rules which replace the old stipulation with this new one:

"The churches have to inform each other regarding relations with third parties."

Two comments need to be made here. In the first place, we consider that the old rules remain in force until the new rules have been adopted by both parties (cf Acts 1992, Art 79, Obs 1 & 5, Cons 2). Forgive our tardiness in the land-down-under, but we have not yet come that far. In fact, from our side (according to our churches in Synod 1992), our cherished sister relation with you continues "under the adopted rules" (Art 79, Rec 2). Secondly, in a letter to us dated 9 April 1992, you wrote the following:

"Voor wat het contact aan gaat met kerken in een land waar de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland een zuster kerk hebben, wordt altijd de regel gehanteerd dat overleg met de zuster kerk moet plaats vinden."¹

You add that this is the reason why you follow our discussions with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia with such great interest.

We draw to your attention that we have heard nothing of the visit from your deputies to the PCEA in September 1992 until we received the "Aanvullende Rapporten" of your Deputies for relations with churches abroad, dated Feb 1993. At about the same time we received a letter dated 26 March 1993 containing information of your delegates' visit to the PCEA and the recommendation of your deputies to this Synod about the PCEA. Undoubtedly it was but an oversight from your side, but we thought it proper to bring the matter to your attention. This is the more so since we now find ourselves—as you can understand—in a somewhat awkward situation. While our sister churches far off have recognized the PCEA, we who live next door to the PCEA have not been able to do so.

c. The final matter on which Deputies for Relations with Sister Churches mandated us to speak concerns the more sensitive matter of something printed in the "Aanvullende Rapporten", a document, we understand, that has been distributed to each of your churches in this land (cf pg 3). In Appendix 5 (the summarized report of your delegates who visited the PCEA last year), we read the following:

"In gesprekken met de broeders van de PCEA kwam uit, dat men het optreden van sommige deputaten van onze Australische zusterkerken ervaart als arrogant en belerend."

Brothers, we think it important that you know that deputies from the PCEA have never complained to us about our "optreden". You can imagine our surprise, then, and our hurt, to read this material in a public document from overseas. It is not that we wish to insist that what our deputies said to the PCEA and how they said it was without fault. But we do raise for your consideration the need to abstain from "condemning anyone rashly and unheard" (LD 43).

Finally, brethren, please be assured that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia treasure the sister relation we are allowed to have with you. We have one blood (to large degree), one history (till but four decades ago), one confession, one Lord, one

faith. It is our hope and prayer that the spiritual treasures we share in Jesus Christ may continue to be of mutual blessing. God bless your churches; God bless your work in this Synod.

FOOTNOTES

1. The Acts of Synod 1992 give the following English translation of this sentence:
"As far as contact with churches in a country where the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands have a sisterchurch, there is always the rule applied that consultation with the sisterchurch takes place" (cf pg 220).

APPENDIX 2

Rules for Sister Church Relations

Having entered into a sister church relationship with a foreign church a few rules regarding this relationship shall apply. The goal of these rules shall be that as Reformed Churches we remain faithful to the Word of God, assisting, encouraging and stimulating each other mutually to bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ in this world by word and deed.

From the side of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the following rules shall apply:

1. The churches shall as much as possible assist each other in the maintenance, defence, and promotion of the Reformed Standards according to the Scriptures in doctrine, church polity, disciple and liturgy.
 2. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts (or Minutes) and otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to the respective churches (if possible, in translation).
 3. The churches shall inform each other when entering into a sister church relationship with third parties.
 4. The churches shall accept one another's attestation or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate.
 5. The churches shall in principle open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches.
- In exercising these relations, the churches shall strive to implement also the following:
6. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or liturgy, the sister churches shall be requested to take due notice in order that as much consultation can take place as possible before a final decision is taken.
 7. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as advisors, as much as local regulations permit.

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands state that in case a foreign church has its own rules for ecclesiastical relations, the fact does not necessarily preclude the entering into and entertaining of a sister church relationship, provided that there is no conflict between the rules of this foreign church and the rules of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

c. The Free Reformed Churches in South Africa

1. MANDATE

To continue the sister relations under the adopted rules (Acts 1992 Art 44 Recommendation 2).

2. CORRESPONDENCE

2.1 Deputies supplied the South African Sister Churches

a) copies of Acts of Synod Bedfordale 1992

- b) advised the churches of the various decisions made affecting the FRCSA
- c) requested deputies of the FRCSA to arrange copies of the church magazine "COMPASS" to be sent to Australian deputies to further acquaint us of the life of the FRCSA.

2.2 Received a reply from South African deputies that our request for copies of "COMPASS" has been passed on to the Editor. In the meantime several copies have been received.

2.3 Received letter dated 29 March 1993 in reply to 2.1 with views on ICRC. This letter was passed on to the relevant deputies.

2.4 Acts of Ad hoc synod held 22 March 1991 dealing with examination of Rev M de Vries for missionary work.

2.5 Received copies of the Acts of the Synod of Pretoria together with an English summary.

2.6 Letter to FRCSA advising date of Synod 1994.

3. ACTS OF SYNOD PRETORIA 1992

Synod decided:

3.1 Churches Abroad

3.1.1 To continue a sister church relationship with the FCRA, CRC and the RCN in accordance with the accepted rules of correspondence.

3.1.2 To continue brotherly relationship with the RC of Sumba/Savu the PCK and the Free Church in South Africa by exchanging church details and information as well as regularly encouraging them by means of letters.

3.1.3 To allocate funds followed by annual visits to the Free Church in Ciskei.

3.1.4 To empower deputies to send 2 representatives of the churches to the 1993 meeting of the ICRC in the Netherlands.

3.1.5 To write to and answer questions raised by the OPC.

3.1.6 Deputies were instructed to exchange thoughts with the sister churches re the consequences of recognition of other churches in the same country as "true churches".

3.2 Contact With Churches Within

3.2.1 Contact with the Gereformeerde Kerke in South Africa (GKSA). This was extensively discussed.

Synod decided that, as in 1987, the FRCSA and the GKSA agree on a number of issues.

- (a) Both agree that the Holy Scripture is the infallible word of God
- (b) Both recognise the Apostolic Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed as articles of faith
- (c) Both accept the Three Forms of Unity as the basis of church unity
- (d) The Church Orders of both churches are similar.
- (e) Subscription forms for office bearers are similar.

Deputies are instructed to contact the relevant deputies of the GKSA as soon as possible. The aim is the mutual recognition of each other as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3.3 Afrikaans Bible Translation

After many years of perusal of the new Afrikaans Bible Translation deputies have concluded that it is an acceptable translation and recommended its use in the churches as a secondary translation.

Although the method of translation (d.e) was initially regarded as questionable, deputies conclude that this has not affected the reliability of the translation.

As the NAB has used other manuscripts as its basic text then the old 1933/53 deputies deplore that.

The NAB is already in use by many families and study groups.

It was decided:

- (1) To adhere for the time being to the 1933/53 translation because of its reliability as official translation.
- (2) To use the NAB as a secondary translation in the churches and engender a

critical appraisal amongst the members of the churches towards Bible translations in general.

(3) To appoint new deputies to:

- (a) continue contact with the South African Bible Society concerning the manuscript question,
- (b) to submit proposals for a more reliable translation of text to them.

3.4 Training Theological Students

Deputies are appointed to investigate the possibility of Theological students from the local churches to study at Potscherfstroom, the Theological school of the Gereformeerde Kerke in South Africa.

3.5 Blessing In Reading Services

An extensive report was tabled to Synod concerning the pronouncing of the blessing in the church service by someone other than the Minister.

Synod ascertains:

- (1) That Synod 1988 Johannesburg decided to recommend to the churches that where a person other than the minister, but one that is authorised by the consistory, conducts the service, the Votum and Salutation as well as the Blessing is pronounced in exactly the same way.
- (2) That this decision by Synod Johannesburg 1988 was not limited to just the elders.
- (3) That the churches at Johannesburg and Pretoria have brought forward objections to the above decision, based on the fact that the decision was taken without sufficient information. In addition to that it was felt that the consequences of this decision were not examined with respect to the limitations placed on various offices.
- (4) That Synod 1990 appointed new deputies with a fresh mandate which encompassed these objections. The mandate read as follows:
"Deputies for closer investigation of material surrounding the pronouncement of the blessing in reading services.
- (5) That deputies present an extensive report which attempts to clarify on biblical grounds that Christ's blessing may not be withheld from the congregation despite there being no minister.

Synod considers:

- (1) That the blessing given at the beginning and completion of the service is indicative of reconciliation, given in concentrated measure, using words taken directly from the Scriptures.
- (2) That this remains an integral part of the communion between God and his people.
- (3) That the responsibility of delivering the message of reconciliation was given by Jesus Christ to the apostles and then to the eldest (elders) in the congregation.
- (4) That the exegesis applied to 1 Timothy 5:17 which has been generally accepted in the reformed tradition since John Calvin, offers insufficient grounds for the sharp distinction between ministers and elders, when preaching the Word. The distinction does not allow for the fact that ministers and elders are jointly responsible for conveying the message of reconciliation.
- (5) That the role distinction currently in use has been outlined in the Church Order but that this description does not limit solely the minister to the administration of the full message of reconciliation nor the elders to one of government. It does allow the minister because of his training to deliver his own sermon, which an elder cannot do.
- (6) That in the Church Order the laying on of the blessing has not been restricted to a specific office.
- (7) That the administration of the sacraments is clearly depicted in the Church Order as being the responsibility of the minister alone.
- (8) That the Church council in discharging her responsibility of administering

reconciliation must ensure that Christ's blessing for his congregation is not withheld.

(9) That it would be desirable to give expression to the fact that the preaching of the Word is an official deed, entrusted according to the Scriptures to the elders in the church.

(10) The gesture of hands underlines the laying on of the blessing and therefore it is not correct to separate the two. Elders should, like ministers, combine the gesture with the words.

(11) That because the report noted that the administration of the blessing was an integral part of the reconciliation with God which was entrusted to the eldest in the congregation, Synod 1988 incorrectly permitted deacons, candidate ministers or church members authorised by the consistory, to administer the blessing.

The Synod states as her conclusion and decision:

(1) That when authorised by the consistory to conduct a service, the elders deliver the blessing unchanged from the Bible text.

(2) That the decision taken by Synod 1988; namely that also other persons apart from elders can be authorised by the consistory to pronounce the blessing, be rescinded.

(3) That the elders comply in the use of the hand gesture.

(4) That in case a brother who does not fill any specific office in the church conducts a service, one of the elders should open and close the church service.

3.6 Official Duties In Mission Congregations

The church at Cape Town proposes that a feasibility study is done relating to the institution of the office of an evangelist. This proposal stems from a practical situation in Cape Town, namely that in the mission area of Belhar a salaried worker is functioning, but because he is not a minister he does not have any official church status. Pretoria experiences a similar problem.

A combined effort by Cape Town and Pretoria in the study of this matter is requested. In the ensuing discussion individual missionaries express some hesitancy regarding this request. They feel that this study would demand a lot of work, which may not produce the desired results. A search for practical solutions, effective in diverse situations, is preferred by the missionaries. The latter would also avoid changes to the Church order.

The Dutch advisors think along the same line.

The meeting recognises that this topic is currently under discussion in the Netherlands and thinks it would be beneficial to contribute by conveying our experiences and solutions.

Deputies will be appointed with the following mandate:

(1) To examine the various activities undertaken by and necessary for the mission congregations.

(2) To estimate whether or not the official structure as set out in the Church Order is appropriate for use in the mission congregations and the work done there.

(3) To make proposals re the form an additional office should take.

(4) To report and make recommendations to the following Synod.

3.7 Supplementary Hymn Book

Synod decides to adopt selected hymns from the Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Hymn Book. A vacuum has been experienced in regard to suitable hymns to reflect joy in the Christian deliverance and expectations of the future. It is recognised that hymns should not be allowed to substitute psalms. The number of hymns have for the time being been limited to 50.

3.8 Liturgical Issues

Deputies appointed by previous synods to investigate melodies of Psalms and Hymns are of the opinion that their task is not completed. There are constantly new issues that demand attention. In these times church music does not enjoy the interest it once had amongst church members. To prevent the decline of liturgical traditions it

remains relevant and important that deputies continue to study church music in all its facets.

Synod agrees with this view and therefore appoints new deputies with the following broader mandate.

- (1) To give attention to all aspects of our current liturgical music e.g rests, rhythm, a sung "Amen".
- (2) To publicise the above and make this available to the consistories, organists, reformed schools, and then to stimulate feedback.
- (3) To contact relevant deputies of the Reformed Churches of South Africa regarding church music and singing.
- (4) To select 50 hymns from the Afrikaans NG Church Hymn Book.
- (5) To be responsible for the printing and distributing of melodies approved by Synod, but which differ from those printed in our psalm book.

3 RECOMMENDATION

to continue sister relations under the adopted rules.

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF SOUTH AFRICA

Since the report already sent to the churches, the deputies have received the report of the South African deputies to their Synod Johannesburg 1994.

The following is a loose translation of some of the conclusions of those deputies.

1. AUSTRALIA

Deputies conclude (from our Acts Synod Bedfordale 1992 and further correspondence) that:

- a. the FRCA needs active support of the sister churches to gain clarity about the meaning of membership of the ICRC;
- b. it is beneficial to take note of Australia's investigations and discussions of the churches. The South African brothers are not often in a position and do not have the manpower to instigate a simple investigation, certainly not in Australasia;
- c. with thankfulness it is noted that the FRCA has remained faithful to the Word of God, the Confessions and the Church Order.

2. PCEA

Deputies received copies of Acts of Synod and greetings expressing the desire to have informal discussions during the meeting of the ICRC in the Netherlands. The English summary of Acts Synod Pretoria was sent to the PCEA. Deputies conclude it is beneficial to have contact with the PCEA also following the common membership of the ICRC.

3. ICRC

Deputies are positive in their evaluation of this body and make the following conclusions:

"The meeting of the ICRC was a good conference. There was a brotherly atmosphere. The readings (papers) were instructive. The discussion was constructive although there were differences of opinion caused in part by the difference between the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions.

Mutual contacts were important. The ICRC is encouraging particularly for the small churches which often live in isolation or in politically volatile areas.

There was a growth in the unity of faith. This does not mean that the differences between the Reformed and Presbyterian backgrounds have been resolved. It is therefore difficult (for the South African churches) to enter into a sister church relationship with a Presbyterian church. Benefits are seen in cooperation in

mission activities. The final conclusion is that the ICRC is precisely what it is, a conference of churches seeking unity in faith (or that truly seek unity)."

A general summation is given at the end of the Deputy's report:

1. Deputies propose with thankfulness to continue sister relations with the FRCA, CanRC and RCN.
2. Deputies express the wish that the Reverend van Hulst, having experienced first hand the South African difficulties in accepting membership of the ICRC may be able to assist the Australian churches in this regard.
3. Deputies wonder if by replacing the requirement of mutual discipline between sister churches by mutual encouragement (that is in the rules for correspondence adopted by the Dutch and Canadian sister churches) this may perhaps give a different content to the character of the sister church relationship.
4. There is no essential difference in the relationship the South African churches have with the sister churches as there is with the contact it has with the PCK.
5. Deputies propose that correspondence with ERZ is not appropriate.
6. Deputies are impressed by Christ's church gathering work as became evident in the meeting of the ICRC in 1993. The South African churches being only a small bond of churches can benefit greatly from membership.

L't Hart

for and on behalf of the Deputies for Relations with Sister Churches
2 June 1994

d. Korea

I. Mandate:

Synod Bedfordale (1992) decided to:

- a. continue efforts to improve the exchange of information between the Churches;
- b. continue the sister relations under the adopted rules.

II. Correspondence:

Deputies:

- a. Supplied The Presbyterian Church in Korea with copies of Acts of Synod Bedfordale, 1992.
 - b. Arranged a meeting with Dr. S.G. Hur during his visit to Australia in 1993, to discuss ways to improve our exchange of information. See appendix A.
 - c. Corresponded with Dr. S.G. Hur requesting copy of reports on Marriage and Divorce.
 - d. Received from the Fraternal Relations Committee, a letter of appreciation for our greetings, and greetings from the 43rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Korea, which also gave a summary of their important decisions.
- 43rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Korea decided:
- a. A Summer Theological School is organised for the continuing education of Ministers of the Word.
 - b. That the "Standard New Translation" Bible published by the Bible Society should NOT be used in Church because of translation errors and it being theologically unsound.
 - c. That the Presbyterian Church in Korea gives financial assistance in establishing a Theological Institute in Halbin, China. And to promote fellowship with the Churches in the province.
 - d. The Assembly and the Presbyterian Churches in Korea embrace the Canadian Reformed Churches' decision to accept the Sister Church Relationship, offered by the Presbyterian Churches in Korea.
 - e. The Assembly accept the report and recommendation to enter into a

relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

f. The Assembly accept "Rules of Cooperation for Mission" with the Reformed Church of Japan.

Also of interest, we were informed that in the 1993, 31 new Congregations were established and 8 congregations joined the Federation of The Presbyterian Church in Korea. That 46 Ministers are currently working as Chaplain in the Army and there are about 40 Missionary families who are working in almost 20 countries.

III. Recommendation

To continue sister relations under the adopted rules.

Appendix A

REPORT ON DISCUSSIONS WITH DR. S.G. HUR

The Deputies for Relations with Sister Churches Abroad met with Dr. S.G. Hur during his holiday in Australia in January 1993.

Part of the Deputies mandate from Synod 1992 was to continue, and seek to improve contact with our sister Churches Abroad.

The Deputies saw the opportunity to arrange a face to face discussion with Dr. S.G. Hur thus fulfilling their task in respect of the Presbyterian Churches in Korea.

The Deputies Rev. A. Veldman, Rev. C. Bosch and Br. M. Bruning met on 2 February 1993 with Dr. S. G. Hur, at the Kelmscott Manse.

Reference was made by the Chairman, Rev. Veldman to Article 43 of Synod Acts 1992, in his word of welcome to Dr. Hur, and to open the discussion asked for Dr. Hur's suggestion on improving the communications between the Korean and Australian Churches.

In response Dr. Hur thanked the Chairman for the invitation to meet, and passed on Greetings from the Korean Churches. Dr. Hur expressed thankfulness to the increased support of Theological Students; namely, Byford and Legana, bringing the number of the Australian Churches to four.

In reply to various questions, Dr. Hur touched on a number of areas which we detail below.

KOREAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Currently some 400 - 450 students attend the Theological College with numbers increasing each year. Of these students over 100 need support. All students seeking support are fully investigated after a means test before financial assistance is given. Amongst those receiving support are students who have come to faith and no longer receive family support because of their belief. Besides living costs, which will include rent, food, clothing, etc., the students need to pay approximately A\$1200 per semester (2x per year). Dr. Hur confirmed that all donated collections from various countries were paid for assistance of needy students.

Some students are involved with mission work on the University Campus and others in their final years of study will work as assistants in local congregations. On completion of their studies, students will work together with a Minister (hulp predikers) in a Church congregation for two years, before becoming eligible for a call.

LOCAL CHURCHES

Dr. Hur explained that the number of congregations in Korea totalled 1,300 although some are Evangelism posts (similar to what we know as House Congregations). The congregation sizes vary from small to large with numbers up to 1,000. Total adherents are approximately 300,000 with over 30% confessing members.

MISSION / EVANGELISM

The Korean Churches are active both within and outside Korea.

Local: As the Korean cities swell also due to influx of country people, mission posts are established and thus a church is in place to receive the growing population.

The Korean Churches are planning for the opening of the North Korean border which is expected to occur in 5 - 10 years. The focus is on training of Ministers to meet those new demands.

China: The (Red) Chinese government does not allow visiting ministers thus restricting active mission work. Other people do visit and bearing the Word of God into China.

Russia: Quite a number of Koreans are living in Russia (since the war) and have even married and established families. Currently a Korean Minister has set up a Mission Post in Moscow and has some 600 people gathering each Sunday.

Thailand: Some 15 Korean families are living in Thailand working and coming together there.

Phillippines: A number congregations exist there. Also a small college for training of Ministers has been established.

OTHER ITEMS

Korean Sister Church Relations: The Korean Churches has a 9 member committee but due to difficulties with work load, language, working methods and distance apart, find it difficult to meet. The 1992 Synod (Korean) Acts have not been issued yet, however a copy will be sent to us as soon as possible

Practical Arrangements: A few suggestions were made to improve the cross flow of information which will be pursued by the Deputies.

Mission Cooperation: The question was raised by us whether it would be possible to cooperate on any of the Mission work Korea is active with, however after a brief discussion the question remained unanswered, perhaps to be followed up by correspondence in the future.

After the above discussion, Rev. S.G. Hur again passed on his greetings to all Australian Churches and was himself wished a safe journey back to Korea with our Greetings for the Korean Churches.

Rev A Veldman (convenor)

Rev C Bosch

AMC Bruning

L't Hart

for relations with other churches:

2. Other churches (Reformed)

a. INDONESIA

1 **Mandate:**

- i. to approve deputies action to invite student Yonson Dethan from the Musyafir Churches in Timor and Reverend Doko from the RCSTS to visit Australia for orientation and training;
- ii. to continue sister relations with the RCSTS in accordance with the adopted rules;
- iii. to continue contact with the Musayfir churches by visits if possible;
- iv. to instruct deputies to continue their search for information regarding the Musyafir Churches in Timor to see if we can recognise them as true and faithful churches according to our confessions;
- v. to instruct deputies to gather information about the Lembaga Reformed Injili Indonesia;
- vi. to authorise deputies to give further support to student Yonson, enabling him to pursue his studies in Hamilton, provided deputies can recommend this after further investigation.
- vii. to authorise deputies to encourage the individual churches to provide the financial and other support which may be required for deputies to carry out Recommendations 1 and 6.

2 **Activities:**

2.1 Yonson Dethan

Yonson Dethan was able to complete his stay in Australia. He received English training from Sr. Elsin ten Haaf with some training continuing by correspondence. Rev. Huizinga gave him tuition in Greek, also maintaining a correspondence program. Yonson spent much time at the John Calvin School during the day and in the evenings fully participated in many facets of church life. We believe his theological orientation was successful.

Deputies wrote to Rev Pol regarding progress made with Yonson Dethan and asked his advice on recommendations that he undertake a two year program of theological studies at Hamilton from 1993 to 1995.

Rev Pol responded that the two year program leading to a Diploma of Theological Studies was not entirely suitable for Yonson. He pointed out that for the future development of the churches in Indonesia it was very important that they have ministers with official degrees. He proposed that deputies consider ways to enable Yonson to take part in the regular program at Hamilton, possibly after further preparatory studies. An alternative suggested was study at the Reformed Evangelical Seminary in Jakarta.

Deputies requested Rev. Huizinga to discuss with the Faculty at Hamilton whether indeed Yonson could enroll in the regular program. The following official response was received from the Theological College:

"With gladness I advise you that the Senate decided in principle to admit Mr Yonson Dethan to the studies at our College and to enter into the three theological years, waiving the requirement of the freshman year on the basis of the theological training received already"

Deputies could then recommend to the churches the following:

- i) Yonson Dethan travel to Canada to undertake further English training at the Columbia International College in Hamilton. This college provides an intensive English language course for foreign students intending to study at university. The suggested length of the course is 18 weeks and commences early 1994.

ii) Yonson Dethan enroll at the Hamilton Theological College in the second year of the M.Div. program commencing September 1994. This has the added advantage that D.V. he will be in the same year as the three Australian students who intend to commence studies at Hamilton in 1993.

iii) Ongoing support for Yonson Dethan would depend on satisfactory periodic reports of his progress.

Deputies advised the Australian churches that Synod "authorized deputies to encourage the individual churches to provide the financial and other support required to carry out recommendations 1 and 6" (being Yonson Dethan's visit to Australia as well as a proposed visit by Rev. Doko and the recommendation for Yonson Dethan to study at Hamilton).

Most of the churches responded positively and consequently deputies began the long process to enable Yonson to commence his study in Canada. We can with thankfulness report that Yonson arrived in Canada on the 27th January and is studying English at Columbia College until July/94. After that he will, D.V., begin his theological studies.

All of the Australian churches apart from Rockingham are supporting the initiative regarding Yonson financially. Our treasurer Br. J. van Dyk has prepared a financial report which is attached (Addendum A).

Deputies will monitor Yonson's progress and report regularly to the churches.

2.2 Rev. Doko

Deputies have invited Rev. Doko to visit Australia for theological orientation and English studies. He has accepted the invitation and plans to arrive in June this year and stay for three months. This means he will be available to visit our 1994 Synod, D.V. A visa application has been made and deputies do not expect any difficulties. Rev Doko as a member of our sister churches in Indonesia, will be able to add much to our knowledge of church life in Indonesia. According to the rules of correspondence between our sister churches, Rev Doko will be entitled to lead a church service in the Free Reformed Churches, if requested by a consistory.

2.3 Visit to the Indonesian Churches

Brs. J. Bosveld and C. de Man visited the Indonesian Churches on behalf of deputies as instructed by Synod. Their report on the visit to Indonesia was printed in "Una Sancta" and is attached to this report (appendix B). Considerable detail regarding the churches in Indonesia was included. The delegates reported on assistance that could be provided to the GMMI (Musayfir or Pilgrim Churches on Timor) to support their desire to become truly reformed. A significant action, as may be remembered, was the introduction of the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order of Dordt into their federation of churches. However, this decision has to be implemented in the life of the churches. An urgent need, supported by a letter from the Deputies of the GMMI is for:

- a) provision of Heidelberg Catechism book with other books including Calvin's Institutes in the Indonesian language
- b) provision of Free Reformed Churches books to be used in the GMMI
- c) Bibles and Hymn books for congregations in remote villages who cannot afford to buy them
- d) support of the catechism preaching which will commence soon in several congregations. Plans are in hand to translate into Indonesian Rev. Stam's book of catechism sermons "Living in the Joy of Faith"

A later letter from Rev. Pol outlined some of the urgent needs of the students at the Theological College and he described ways in which the Australian Churches could give practical help. As this is outside the scope of our mandate, deputies have passed on the requests to members of the Free Reformed Churches via the "una Sancta" (March 5th, 1994). One of our deputies. Br. J. van Dyk has agreed to coordinate this support.

2.4 Reformed Churches of Sumba Savu Timor (GRRI or RCSTS)

Most of the information regarding these Indonesian sister churches can be gleaned from the report by the visitors. Deputies did not receive copies of the Acts of their 1992 Synod which was delayed thus making it impossible for the visitors to attend. It is not known if the Acts are printed already, but deputies will repeat their request for a copy.

Deputies have learned that the 1992 Synod decided to establish sister relations with the Musyafir Churches (GMMI).

2.5 Musyafir Churches in Timor (GMMI)

Information regarding the GMMI can be found in the visitor's reports. Correspondence between the two churches was mainly regarding Yonson Dethan. Deputies suggested to the GMMI that they also contribute, even in a limited way to the costs of Yonson's study. They have agreed to do this.

At the latest Synod, the GMMI adopted the Three Forms of Unity as their confessional standard and also the Church Order as used by our Indonesian sister churches, the GRRI.

Deputies recommend further contact with the GMMI be maintained, with the aim to help them grow in the reformed doctrine and practices. This will facilitate the wider aim to move towards sister-relations. It is premature to come with any recommendation regarding official recognition. As stated above, their decision to implement the reformed confessions and Church Order of Dort needs time to be implemented. Our Dutch sister churches have sent Rev. Knigge to work amongst the churches in Timor and we would be advised to await the results of cooperative work.

2.6 The Reformed Movement in Indonesia

An introductory report was given about this in the report to the 1990 Synod (see p 248 of those Acts). Since our sister-churches have joint talks with this movement to see if they can cooperate together for their required contacts with the government, since this movement has other contacts with our sister-churches, also those in Korea, and since they operate a reformed seminary in Jakarata, synod decided to ask for more information, and to keep in contact with them. A letter was recently sent to Rev Stephen Tong to make more inquiries.

Meanwhile br C DeMan has visited one church associated with this reformed movement. Br. C. de Man was able to provide us with the following report:

As requested by deputies I travelled to Surabaya to visit the Evangelical Reformed Church there. On Sunday we attended the church service. About 50 persons were present, almost all of them adults. The children usually follow Sunday school, as is common practice in the Indonesian churches but not the GGRI. Also attending the church service was the brother of Rev. Hawu (the deputy for relations churches abroad of the GGRI).

The service was not much different than other evangelical churches in Indonesia except that in this church also elders are on the pulpit. One of them was playing the guitar. There was a lot of singing. I knew none of the tune. Usually if you go to other Indonesian churches there are tunes known to us because of the influence of the Dutch churches. There was also a lot of praying, and a couple of times everyone prayed. It was disturbing but it all seemed very sincere. The sermon was preached by Rev. E. Siauw and took about half an hour.

The other church is situated in Jakarta. According to Rev. Alserda who has been in Jakarta to investigate this church on behalf of the GGRI. There is no Church Council as yet. According to Rev. Stephen Tong that could take about another 5 years. The churches use the 12 Articles of Faith exactly as we hear every Sunday. They have their own Theological School in Jakarta, and currently there are 18 students. The full course takes 5 years followed by 2 years practical.

During the week there are many activities including prayer meetings, seminars, meditation etc. We hope to visit the churches in Kalimantan next year (1994), the Lord Willing.

C. de Man

3 Recommendations:

Synod instruct deputies:

1. to continue to encourage the churches to support the theological training undertaken by Yonson Dethan
2. to coordinate the support offered to the Indonesian churches in the way of visits, literature and other aids in order to build up the reformed character of the reformed churches in Indonesia. Deputies are authorised to encourage the churches and their members to offer such support.
3. to visit the Indonesian churches before our next synod, preferably during the time of the Synod of the GGRI.
4. to continue to gather information regarding the Reformed Movement in Indonesia.
5. to maintain contacts with the GMMI to assist them in their desire to remain reformed and to report on progress towards an eventual recommendation to recognise the GMMI as sister churches.
6. to continue sister relations with the GGRI in accordance with the adopted rules.

b. EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCHES OF SINGAPORE

1 MANDATE

1. To express apologies via a letter from the FRCA to the ERCS for permitting the printing of a report which contained information not edifying to the ERCS;
2. To appoint deputies who shall:
 - a. further discuss the letter in a face to face meeting if the ERCS consider such a meeting desirable;
 - b. continue the contact so that the FRCA and the ERCS can come to know each other better.
3. To send a copy of the this Article to the PRCA as answer to their letter.

2 REPORT ON CONTACTS

The 1992 Synod decided to express apologies via a letter to the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore (ERCS) for printing sensitive and damaging information in its 1990 Acts about the ERCS (cf Appendix Q, p.348 in the 1992 Acts). That letter and the decision (Art 98, p.57 of the 1992 Acts) re the ERCS read that the appointed deputies shall "further discuss the letter in a face to face meeting if the ERCS consider such a meeting desirable."

A meeting took place (see attached report, appendix C) at which our apology was quickly and fully accepted.

At the same time various aspects of a working relation were discussed with the Contact Committee (CC) of the ERCS (see attached report). Two official visits were brought to the ERCS, one by Rev A Veldman, on request of your deputies, and one by Rev W Huizinga. In both cases the stay with the church members and the attendance of the church services were positive experiences. As the attached report of W Huizinga's visit states, the CC prizes our contacts, though some still view them with some reservation.

Instead of working towards sister-relations, which seemed a distant possibility at this point of time, efforts were made to establish a working relationship. As promised, we sent much literature and information. However, in spite of repeated, even personal, pleas for the same from them, your deputies have not received the promised materials. The ERCS seems to value personal contacts much more than relations via correspondence and exchange of materials.

While their sister-relations with the PRCA continues, the door seems shut to us to enter sister-relations with the ERCS.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Discharge the deputies for the work done;
2. Continue the contacts with the ERCS.

c. REFORMED CHURCHES OF NEW ZEALAND

1 MANDATE

The 1992 Synod gave deputies the following mandate:

1. To express its appreciation for the manner in which the RCNZ deputies have responded to the issues raised by our deputies and for the invitation to be represented at their forthcoming synod.
2. To appoint new deputies with the following mandate:
 - a. to maintain contact at the present level and to assess the RCNZ'S commitment towards resolving the issues that have kept us apart (cf Acts 1990, Article 53, recommendation 5);
 - b. to liaise with the deputies of the RCN, especially with regards to third parties;
 - c. to keep the churches informed about any progress.
 - d. to report to the next synod.

2 REPORT ON CONTACTS

The deputies did send a delegate to the 1992 Synod of Bishopdale of the RCNZ. A full report of that visit is attached (appendix D). Also, the address delivered at the synod is attached. These documents speak for themselves and show the progress made thus far.

Also, deputies liaised with the deputies of our sister-churches, the RCN, especially about the visit to the 1992 Synod of the RCNZ. At the synod there was ample opportunity to discuss a common approach to the contacts with the RCNZ, as well as the same towards others. It should be reported that our sister churches, the RCN-lib, have received and adopted a very positive report concerning the RCNZ, and have decided to intensify their contacts with them.

The churches were kept fully informed of this progress by means of the publication of the report concerning the whole visit to the RCNZ as well as the publication of the address to the 1992 Synod of the RCNZ.

Copies of the magazine, FAITH IN FOCUS, are received by all the deputies, keeping us informed of developments in the RCNZ. Conversely, the RCNZ's deputies receive copies of the UNA SANCTA and they are kept informed of developments in the the FRCA.

As stated in the report to the 1992 Synod of the RCNZ, one must await the outcome of the 1994 RCA Synod and the 1995 RCNZ Synod before assessing how far we have come together. For then we can assess how far "the rift has been healed" with the RCA, and then we can monitor the direction the RCNZ will take with the RCA and especially with the CRCNA. Thus far the RCNZ takes an independent (from the RCA) stand and adopts a biblical and confessional accent in the exercise of its sister-relations. Also, the stand toward the CGKN (Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland) is very realistic. The RCNZ are very cautious towards the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK), in spite of bad propaganda from the NGK about our sister churches, the GKN (Lib). For this the deputies are thankful.

On the whole, the report of the visit and the synod of the RCNZ was quite favourable, demonstrating a wholesome reformed direction in the RCNZ. The impression that the RCNZ is a divided house is thus not accurate. They take the slogan, 'reformata reformanda' - reformed and always reforming oneself, seriously. No major issues, outside of relations with third parties, gave cause for concern.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To discharge deputies for their work done.
2. To continue contacts with the RCNZ at the present level.
3. To work towards a resolution about third parties, so that the way can be opened towards sister-relations.
4. To liaise with our sister-churches about the RCNZ.
5. To keep the churches informed about any progress.
6. To report to the next synod.

d. ZAIRE

1 Mandate

Synod mandated deputies to return greetings to the Reformed Church of Zaire (RCZ) and to explain that the synod cannot accede to their request to establish relations. Synod requested deputies to translate information about the RCZ and send it to the churches.

2 Activities

Deputies have sent a letter to the Reformed Church in Zaire (Eglise Reformee Au Zaire) as instructed by Synod.

Deputies note that previous deputies confused the Eglise Reformee Au Zaire (ERZA) with the Eglise Reformee Confessante au Zaire (ERCZ). The latter is a sister church of the GKN (Lib), the former is not. It was the ERZA which sent the original letter of request and greeting. Deputies have requested ERZA to explain their relationship with the ERCZ.

Information about the ERCZ is contained in Article 124 of the Acts, Leeuwarden, 1990. As this does not refer to the ERZA, deputies have not included the translation with this report.

Your deputies find that having to translate material, pass it on to the churches and then wait to see it any church will bring it to the synod is cumbersome. Most church councils are extremely busy; the deputies know the contacts, addresses, etc. In order to gain information about churches so that a synod can decide whether to open official contacts can, in the opinion of deputies, be best done by deputies.

3 Recommendation

Synod decide to instruct deputies to monitor information received regarding the churches in Zaire and report pertinent information to the churches and the next synod.

e. PHILIPPINES

1 Mandate

Synod instructed deputies to return greetings to the Free Reformed Churches in the Philippines and advise that Synod cannot accede to their request for establishing relations. Deputies were requested to translate information and send it to the Churches.

2 Activities

Deputies sent a letter of greetings to the Free Reformed Churches of the Philippines as per synod-instructions.

The relevant section of deputies report to Synod Leeuwarden, 1990 has been translated and is attached as Appendix E.

The words in the report about Zaire apply here as well. Indeed, since these churches are geographically close to us, we might see a task to fulfill towards them.

3 Recommendations

Synod decide to instruct deputies to continue to gather information regarding the Free Reformed Churches of the Philippines, e.g.s. received via Acts of Synod of our sister churches or correspondence received, with the aim of seeing whether official contacts should be opened with them.

f. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

To the Consistory of

Deputies for the contact with the Reformed Churches of Indonesia.

Esteemed Brothers

We would like to present the following Statement and Budget 1994 of the Fund for the Support of the Reformed Churches of Indonesia.

Fund for the support of the Reformed Churches of Indonesia January 1993 to January 1994

Income		Expenditure	
Contributions from the Free Reformed Churches of:			
Albany	995.30	1992 Visit: Yon-son Dethan and Rev Fangidae	
Armadaale	4 045.31	Paid by Treasurer Synod	4 168.68
Bedfordale	2 211.77	Eng Language Course Columbia College	7 741.11
Byford	2 500.00	Tuition Fees Hamilton Theological College	1 947.79
Kelmscott	2 000.00	Travel & Visa expenses via Rev Pol	214.27
Launceston	2 000.00	Plane Ticket & Travel Cheqs	
Legana	547.80	via Rev Fangidae	4 117.00
Br & Sr Anniversary Collection	227.40	Living Costs via Prof. Faber	2 209.21
Loan Mission Armadaale	12 000.00	Visa Application Fees via Singapore	121.30
Interest at Bank	31.38	Government Charges	17.45
		Bank Charges	5.00
		Balance	6 017.15
Total	26 558.96		26 558.96

BUDGET 1994

In view of our loan "Mission Armadaale" we have a deficit of	\$ 5 982.85
Estimated costs on proposed visit Rev Doko June/July 1994	2 500.00
Future costs for student Yon-son Dethan per annum	10 000.00
Total required for 1994	\$18 482.85

A cost sharing based on the number of communicant members give the following figures:

Armadaale	17%	3 511.00
Albany	18%	3 326.00
Bedfordale	10%	1 848.00
Byford	11%	2 033.00
Kelmscott	14%	2 587.00
Launceston	14%	2 587.00
Legana	7%	1 294.00
Rockingham	7%	1 294.00

\$18 480.00

We sincerely hope that our churches will be able to live up to the promises made at Synod 1992.

Report of Deputies' Visit to Sumba-Savu-Timor

J.Bosveld 14-8-92

5-9-92 C.De Man

A. THE VISIT TO TIMOR

The plan to fly from Bali to Sumba did not eventuate so we decided to go to Timor first of all. We arrived on Saturday, 15 August, 1992 and stayed with Rev Fangidae in his hotel. We could have a long talk to him about the Gereja Masehi Musyafir Churches in Timor (GMMT) or Evangelical Pilgrim Reformed Churches of Timor (EPRT) also known as the Musyafir (Pilgrim) churches.

We learned a lot about the situation in these churches. There is a struggle to be faithful to God's Word. The Musyafir churches separated from a very liberal church group (the Dutch 'Hervormde' churches) on account of heresy, doctrine and walk of life. This struggle continues amongst them as was the case at their last synod in July. There was unrest because some had great difficulty in letting go of the hierarchical system and adopting the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order. Rev Fangidae stressed the point that people need to be instructed in the right biblical way. For that to take place they in the first place need faithful ministers who know the right way and who can give a good example. This prompted us to talk about the position of ministers - the biblical principles and their application. That a minister should be a good shepherd of the flock is made difficult for some of them there because they have other tasks in daily life. We must learn to understand that the situation in Indonesia is completely different than in Australia. Rev Fangidae pointed out that the apostle Paul also worked with his own hands so he would not burden anybody. We stressed the privilege that the congregation has to support a minister. This principle is fully endorsed, but at times hard to realize.

On Saturday afternoon we visited Rev M Biha, a minister of the one sister church (the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Di Indonesia - GGRI) located on Timor in Bakunase, a suburb of Kupang, the capitol city. Their way of life is very simple. The lounge consisted of a few beach chairs with a small table, a concrete floor and a sort of bamboo ceiling. We had a very warm welcome and they really appreciated the visit. Rev Biha knows a bit of English and with br De Man as interpreter we could have quite a discussion about church life. The following day, Sunday afternoon, we attended their church service. There were very few people and to our surprise we had the entertainment of a choir.

On Saturday night we went with Rev Fangidae to his church where all the elders were gathered together to receive biblical instruction on the text of the sermon which would be preached upon the following Sunday. In this way the elders can prepare the congregation in the house meetings for the sermons and relate any questions back for further discussion. This is done to instruct the members of the congregation because of the lack of suitable study material.

The fact that there were women elders was a strange experience to us. In a discussion with Rev Fangidae about the women elders, he explained that only the brothers are allowed to teach and the sisters are only passive in their office.

On Sunday morning we attended the Musyafir church where Rev Fangidae is minister. Before the church service started, the minister, elders and deacons joined hands and prayed together while the organ was playing and the congregation was singing quietly.

After the service we were brought to the place where Yonson Dethan was with his family. They had just finished church but every one was called back inside and we were introduced to those present. I was asked to address them (which I did on Mt 7:21) while Yonson translated it. It was a nice experience to address a people of another

nation with completely different background and yet having the same foundation, the same rock by whom we all must be saved. This Sunday experience was in a completely different style than that at home in Australia. Late in the afternoon we revisited the reformed church in Bakunasi. Rev Biha had gone to another congregation for the day so another minister preached. After the service we had a talk to him. He told us that it was difficult to spread the gospel because of the lack of literature and the people do not have much initiative themselves.

During the evening meal with Rev Fangidae we talked about the way in which we as churches could support them and how a relationship could be established. One suggestion was that we could support them in spreading the newly accepted Three Forms of Unity, the Church Order and the Liturgical Forms. We also talked about the relationship with the GGRI, our sister churches. The Musyafir churches have asked to be acknowledged as sister churches. This matter will be discussed at the forthcoming synod of the GGRI to be held in Savu from 2 - 4 September, 1992*. Concerning Yonson, the Musayfir churches would appreciate very much our support for his further studies.

B. THE VISIT TO SUMBA

On Monday morning we left for Waingapu, the capitol of Sumba, where we met up with Rev Pol. We discussed at length the situation concerning Yonson. Rev Pol's idea was to have a long term study plan, four years or so, with a trial period of about four to six months to see how Yonson would cope with the situation. Yonson should start at the beginning of 1994, if at all possible, and have a six month period of English lessons in combination with his further studies. It would be good to look into the status he would have in Indonesia once he has finished his studies in Canada. Another point was raised that as Rev Knigge would be in Timor at that time, we could also seek his advice concerning Yonson's progress in English, etc.

We also discussed the situation between the GGRI, our sister-churches, and the GMMT (Musyafir churches on Timor). According to the Revs Pol, Doko and Radja, the synod should accept sister-relations with the GMMT*. Both churches should help each other to fight the good fight of faith. There may be opposition against this from a few but no one has brought any principled objection forward yet. According to these three ministers, the weakness of the one is the strength of the other and vice versa. Where one is strong in refusing to have anything to do with the 'Adat' (cultural customs not based on the Bible), e.g. the ceremonies at a wedding feast or a burial, the other is stronger in keeping the reformed confessions. Where one is weak towards worldly trends, the other maintains the antithesis.

Tuesday night we had dinner at Rev Doko's place. Rev Doko, a teacher at their theological training center, had been invited to Australia in 1992 but was unable to come because of commitments at the theological college. Instead, deputies invited Yonson Dethan. We hope that Rev Doko will be able to make it to Australia in 1993. He speaks a bit of English and apparently he reads it quite well.

The next three days we spent visiting people, including Rev Banggu who expressed concern about apostasy creeping into the churches. We were able to give Rev Banggu 750000 rupias from the youth of the Australian churches to purchase 100 Bibles.

On Saturday-morning Br. J. Bosveld was invited to address the students of the theological college. He spoke about the position of ministers, their task as ambassadors of Christ. After this address, we talked about church life in Australia. This was all done through the interpretation of Rev Doko and br C DeMan. On Saturday night we visited the Rudolf de Vries family. Br de Vries is in Wai Marangu as agriculturalist, sent out by MEZOS. We watched some slides about his work, how he helps the farmers to improve on productivity, etc.

The following Sunday we attended a few church services. In the morning we listened to a sermon on Ps. 87 - 'Glorious is the city of God'. It was in the Sumbanese language. Edward, the brother of Yonson, explained it to us afterwards. In the afternoon we went to a church service just outside of Melolo. The minister had a sermon on Lord's Day 33, the second commandment. Samuel, the minister to whom we listened in the morning, came along and helped to find the Bible passages and to explain them. He

also has a fair knowledge of the English language and likes to keep it up. We gave him 50000 rupias to buy some catechism books for his students. This money was also from that raised by our youth. On Sunday night we were invited to a sing-along at the student quarters.

On Monday we went to Kataka which is about 15 km. southwest of Melolo. We met Rev Mitting, an elderly and caring minister. Kataka is the church that Mission Aid, Armadale, assisted with a pipeline a few years ago. We had a look at it. According to Rev Mitting, the pipeline, which is made from 20 mm pipe, is too small for the distance of about 2 1/2 km. We promised that we would bring it to the attention of Mission Aid.

On Tuesday we had a meeting with Rev Radja about the needs of the congregations other than their personal needs. We financially assisted the following from funds supplied by the youth of the FRCA: Church Melolo 280000 rupias for electricity in the church building and manse; Rev Doko and Rev Radja both 100000 rupias and Amos 50000 rupias, all for their libraries so that the congregations can benefit. In the afternoon we had a talk to Mrs Hawu who cares for a kindergarten school. We gave her 500,000 rupias to support this work. We pointed out our responsibility to those who gave the money for a particular purpose and that the money should not be used for anything else than for what it is given. Here also comes to mind our prayer that we should not fall into temptations. On our next visit we should be able to see where the money is spent.

On Wednesday morning we had to say goodbye, to go back to Timor. After a stay of 10 days in Sumba we had established a bond and this is really noticeable the moment you say goodbye.

C. SECOND VISIT TO TIMOR

On Thursday afternoon we were back in Kupang at the hotel of Rev Fangidae and had a lengthy discussion concerning Yonson. Rev Fangidae concurred with the plan of Rev Pol and saw no problem with starting this program in the beginning of 1993. Already the elders have given Yonson study leave for his English and have placed him in Kupang, where he can do some work in the church, e.g. catechism instructions and familiarising the congregation with the singing of psalms, etc.

Rev Fangidae had just read the book of Rev Stam Living in the Joy of Faith. He asked us if we would be able to get permission from Rev Stam to translate this book into the Indonesian language to assist the churches in implementing 'catechism preaching'. Rev Fangidae was given a gift to help get started. If approval to translate was received from Rev Stam, Rev Fangidae would get in contact with us to explore the possibility to promote this book on a wider scale. Some financial assistance would be needed which should be done privately as it is not an ecclesiastical matter.

With Rev Fangidae we traveled to the island of Roti, which is about a 4 hour trip with the ferry, to meet some people of the Musyafir churches. We spent a Sunday there.

On Sunday after the church service Br J. Bosveld was invited to address the congregation. Warm greetings from Australia were given. He told them the Australian churches are very happy that the Musyafir churches have accepted the Three Forms of Unity. The importance of the sufficiency of Scripture for our salvation (cf Art 7 in Belgic Confession) was stressed. These forms should be studied carefully. According to Rev Fangidae church life in Roti is not very organized but for that reason he sees great profit in having some of their students studying in Wai Marangu, Sumba, and then coming back to Roti with their experience and knowledge.

On Sunday night, when we came back to the hotel, there was a telegram from Sumba that the Synod of our sister-churches, slated for 2-4 Sept/92 was postponed again for a week. We decided not to wait again, because of the doubtful factor that the people from Sumba would be able to get to Savu. Br De Man decided to go Surabaya as was his original plan, while Br Bosveld would try to get a earlier flight home.

On Tuesday afternoon we went with Rev Fangidae and Yonson to a meeting of elders in Bolok, one of their churches. Seven elders were present. The topics for discussion were: 1. our relationship; 2. books; 3. liturgy; 4. catechism instruction and preaching; and 5. Psalm and Hymn singing. One of the elders who attended a seminar a few

years ago in Wai Marangu about Liturgy and Catechism said it was very beneficial but it was so difficult to implement a new thing (in connection with the catechism preaching and psalm singing). Rev Fangidae urged him to be steadfast but with understanding.

The church building there was crumbling somewhat and they are trying to restore and at the same time expand it. No mention was made at any time of the great financial need of these people. Not a word about material needs; only the need for assistance in obtaining good reformed literature. They seem to be a very active church group.

We had a meeting with Deputies for Relations with Foreign Churches on Wednesday morning, Sept 2/92. There were seven deputies. Rev Fangidae chaired the meeting. He then read out (in Indonesian) the speech which J. Bosveld had written in English for this meeting. The first issue we raised was about women in office. The Musyafir churches have come from a liberal background and it takes time to educate people. If they all of a sudden would implement these changes they would create division. If it would be a hindrance to us to acknowledge them as sister churches they also would understand, but they would also ask us to understand their position that they, through the preaching, must instruct the people in the truth of God's Word. In some churches they do not have women in office because they have come from a different background. They totally reject that a woman has any role in teaching. The question about deacons in their situation would be quite tolerable. Again they stressed that they are in a transitional period. The question about Genesis 1 and 2 was discussed, especially since churches all around us disregard these first chapters of the Bible because they see that God's Word is in the Bible and not that the Bible is God's Word. One reaction was: "Yes, brother, because they are clever and we are dumb; we are still dumb enough to believe Genesis 1-3 and may God guard us that we stay that way, for He has hidden it from the wise and revealed it to the babes." They fully accept God's Word as His revealed will from Genesis to Revelation.

We acknowledged we must love each other not only in words but also in deeds. How then can we as reformed churches help each other? Their reaction was that the best way is through reformed literature, for example, the Church Book, John Calvin's Institutes and other reformed literature.

We also raised the proposal regarding Yonson, to help him in his studies, reviewing it after every six months. Deputies must see to it that he performs properly and does his studies. We then handed over 350000 rupias from the FRCA youth to spread the Church Book among their churches.

Quite a few expressed their appreciation for the meeting and the help the Australian churches have shown. Rev Fangidae was asked if, as closing song, we could sing Ps 133. He first read it from the Bible and then we sang it together. One of the deputies led in prayer and the meeting was closed. It was good and moving to have a meeting like this.

On Wednesday evening we talked to Rev Fangidae about the Indonesian Reformed Movement. Some background information might be helpful. The Indonesian government requires of every church group that they are under an umbrella of churches. There are quite a few umbrellas, for instance, Pentecostal, Liberal, Roman Catholics as well as the P.I.I. "Indonesian Evangelical Fellowship" to which the GGRI (our sister-churches) and the Musyafir churches on Timor belong. The Musyafir churches are not happy with it, because quite a few other so-called reformed churches (which are in reality false churches) also belong to this group. For this reason the GGRI only belong to it passively; however, the Musyafir churches take an active part. This is where the Indonesian Reformed Movement comes in. Rev Fangidae is planning to go to Jakarta to meet up with Rev Steven Tbng, who promotes this movement and who has set up a reformed theological seminary in Jakarta, to see if they can join forces and make a Federation of Reformed Churches in Indonesia including churches from Irian Jaya, Kalimantan Barat, and Celebes.

Generally our experience in Indonesia was great. Also in this part of God's creation we see that the Creator cares for all his creatures in providing food and drink albeit

in a different way than we are use to here in the West. What also is very noticeable is that God's name is praised in singing. You can hear it from the houses and the gatherings together at night.

Although we could not attend the synod of our sister-churches, our trip has still been a profitable experience. May our Heavenly Father bless these activities. May we as Australian churches help these people to understand the reformed doctrine, for which they are craving. Our recommendation is that we support them in providing strong reformed leadership for both federations of churches, specifically supporting Yonson Dethan in further theological studies and Rev Doko in visiting Australia, as well as in the distribution of reformed literature such as the "Buku Gereja" (Church Book). Our time was fully taken up in fulfilling our mandate. There have not been many moments for ourselves. It is marvelous how appreciative people are to meet and discuss the issues of church life. There is no begging for material help but only a cry to help them to live in the reformed way.

With brotherly greetings
J. Bosveld C.DeMan

*The GGRI synod did offer the GMMT sister- relations.

APPENDIX C

Report on the visit to the EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCHES OF SINGAPORE

March 12-14

The 1992 Synod decided to express apologies via a letter to the Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore (ERCS) for printing sensitive and damaging information in its 1990 Acts about the ERCS (cf Appendix Q, p.348 in the 1992 Acts). That letter and the decision (Art 98, p.57 of the 1992 Acts) re the ERCS read that the appointed deputies shall "further discuss the letter in a face to face meeting if the ERCS consider such a meeting desirable."

After some correspondence with the ERCS and after some personal discussions with one of their members, Johnson See, who was vacationing in Western Australia, the ERCS sent an invitation to us to meet with their Contact Committee (CC). One of the deputies, the undersigned, was travelling through Singapore on his return from an overseas trip, and was available for such a meeting.

A. THE MEETING

The aim of the meeting, as expressed in the letter from their CC, was as follows:

1. to clear (if any) misunderstanding between the two denominations which arises from your Synod, 1990 Report.
2. to establish the various aspects of a working relationship (exchange of information, etc.)
3. to explore ways we can help one another.

This meeting took place at the home of Br. Johnson See, a former elder and present member of the First ERCS. At that meeting three members of the CC, Pastor Lau (an advisor to the CC), Rev Kortering (a Protestant Reformed Church minister on loan to the Covenant ERCS) and Johnson See as well as the undersigned were present. Jimmy Teo, their chairman, led the meeting.

First of all, the ERCS fully accepts our letter of apology. Your representative was able to explain that the sensitive information was included at the eleventh hour into the

reports appended to the 1990 Acts. Though it was done hastily and without care, the synod took responsibility for it and offered a full apology. Again, this was fully accepted and the matter was finished quickly.

Then came the matter of good contacts and a good exchange of information. We had asked the following:

1. Bulletins or newsletters from both the First and Covenant ERCS
2. Names, addresses and telephone numbers of the persons with whom we should conduct our contacts.
3. Addresses and telephone numbers of the two churches and of the ministers and consistories. We often have people who travel to Singapore ask for this, so it would be good to have it.
4. Magazines in which you write more theological articles.
5. Any other worthwhile information for us.

This was promised. From our side we promised to send UNA SANCTA, copies of other periodicals used in church life, book lists from Pro Ecclesia Bookshop, and copies of church yearbooks.

At this point a comment was interjected that caused some discussion. It was stated that the introduction of such literature from the FRCA might confuse the church membership, as though everything from the FRCA was acceptable and on a par with the information from the PRCA, their sister churches. Indeed, the FRCA might hereby become a third party who brings division with their sister churches. It was recommended that the FRCA "fix up their differences" with the PRCA and then come back to the ERCS.

Your delegate responded by saying that this exchange of literature is not meant to stir up controversy. We would not be sending information solely or even mainly about the "covenant" about which doctrine there are some differences with the PRCA. No, we wish to help build up one united, reformed testimony on the island of Singapore. Secondly, if the FRCA was viewed as an interfering third-party, then we would rather desist from any further contact with the ERCS, until such time as they requested it. This point was made rather forcefully. Thirdly, the prospect of "settling differences" with the PRCA about their "Declaration of Principles" does not seem very likely. Your delegate had recently (a few days prior) spoken to Dr C VanDam in Canada about their contacts, including those with the PRCA, and there had been little if no progress. For the FRCA to think that it could quickly resolve those doctrinal "divergencies" seems unrealistic.

At this point the CC itself openly stated that the CC heartily desired further contacts with the FRCA and a working relation for mutual edification. The ERCS is not (yet) prepared to adopt the doctrinal position of the PRCA; the ERCS wants to be normally reformed in accordance with the adopted Three Forms of Unity. They appreciate the help from the PRCA very much, but they do not see the need at this point for entering theological debate about deeper issues which many leaders and members cannot (yet) follow.

The matter of training for the ministry was discussed. The ERCS monitors students in their pre-seminary training in Singapore. They sponsor such students and send them to the PR seminary in Grand Rapids, USA. One such student was going there this year. Outreach to other areas in Malaysia was also discussed. The dream of having theological training (a seminary) developed in Singapore, seeing the possibilities there and its strategic location, was clearly expressed.

The training of reformed leaders for their two churches received considerable attention, and they asked for copies of DIAKONIA.

Commitments did not allow the CC and others to pursue any other topics at this meeting.

On the whole one notices that the CC is very keen to have closer contacts with us, and to receive help to build up the reformed faith and testimony in Singapore. However, some are very cautious toward us, even to the point of seeing these contacts as potential interference. Their CC did not share this viewpoint. We should thus proceed in our contacts, but proceed carefully.

B. VISIT TO THE CHURCH SERVICES

On Sunday, 14 March, the two ERCS were visited. In the morning (9 a.m.) the Covenant ERCS was visited (21 Tessensohn Road, Singapore 0921). This is a small congregation of about 60-70 members. Its previous minister, Rev Mahtani, was dismissed as minister of this congregation, as you may recall. He was still there and worshiped there that morning, giving an opportunity to speak to him. He has accepted a call from the Trinity PRC in Houston, Texas. On 14 April he will be classically interviewed and his call approved, D.V. He and his family hope to leave for there in June/93, D.V. Once more, one sees how strong the sister relation with the PRC is.

Rev Kortering led the 9 a.m. service. His prayer was very pastoral and covered all the main elements of church life, mentioning the detailed problems of individual members. The sermon dealt with Lord's Day 28. The theme was "The communion of body and blood." A two page outline of the sermon, passed out before the service, allowed one to follow well and it gave the youth club a good basis for its discussion after the service. The sermon had a strong pastoral note of self-examination which was appreciated by the undersigned. Seeing the need for the supper and seeing one's own sins were the dominant themes throughout. Need for growth by recognising one's sins came across repeatedly - all in a rather somber and negative light. One could call all this biblical but the stress on the sacrament as assurance (the keynote of the Catechism) was certainly transferred into a call for self-examination. The service lasted two hours.

After the service we were able to meet all those who attended. Special mention should be made of Rev Mahtani. He was more than willing to speak to me. There seemed no rancour toward us, and he had a positive attitude toward the future.

At 2 p.m. the First ERCS held their (one) church service at the Regional Language Center where the government leases out its many lecture rooms and other rooms to the various 'churches'. Seeing that space is at a premium and seeing the government's desire to 'curtail' religious activities, the congregation has to be satisfied with leasing rooms in this building. Seeing that it is not their own building nothing can be stored there. So they use an overhead projector to show the songs to be sung. An electric keyboard is used for accompaniment. The cushioned seats made one comfortable. Pastor Lau preached a sermon on Matth 16:24 (the verses 13-28 were read) on "True Discipleship." The sermon lasted over an hour and fifteen minutes and the whole service lasted over two hours. That is quite different from our services! The sermon was biblical, practical and pastorally oriented. The practical nature of the text certainly allowed the minister to exploit it in a pastoral manner. Your delegate was edified by it. After the service church activities were announced and arranged for the week. We received ample opportunity to meet the members after the service.

The undersigned tried his best to promote reformed unity among the reformed believers in Singapore. He also tried to promote an atmosphere of mutual trust so that future contacts may be fruitful.

Your delegate, Rev W Huizinga.

REPORT ON THE VISIT TO THE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NEW ZEALAND FROM SEPTEMBER 24 TO OCTOBER 5, 1992

A. VISITS TO LOCAL CHURCHES OF THE RCNZ

Your delegate was able to make travel arrangements (by an airpass) which, in an economic manner, allowed four extra stops within NZ. Accordingly, visits were brought to the following reformed churches:

1. **PUKEKOHE** , where the Rev M A Flinn and family were my hosts from 25-26 Sept. Rev Flinn is the secretary of their Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC). Pukekohe is in the larger Auckland area where there are a number of RCNZ churches. Time allowed for a visit to the christian dayschool located in the church-wing. Though only having 20-30 students and two teachers, the dedication was very visible. A family having two children attend (fees are based on the number of children attending) could expect to pay nearly \$800-1000 per month. Time also allowed discussions with Rev Flinn and with members of the session (consistory). An introduction of the FRCA was given and many questions about the past and present contacts were discussed.
2. **HASTINGS** . Here Rev J Sawyer, who visited our 1990 Synod, picked me up from the airport in Napier and gave me an excellent tour to familiarise me with the area. I was guest (along with two touring teachers from our Canadian sister churches!) of the Sawyers. On 27 Sept. your delegate attended both church services in RCNZ, Hastings. The text in the morning service was on James 4:11,12 on the "Spirit of Backbiting" in which a thorough exegesis and practical application was given. In the afternoon the Word of God as confessed in Lord's Day 19 was proclaimed. The exaltation of Christ - his dominion, benevolence and tribunal - were preached in a biblical and reformed manner. The claims of Christ on the totality of life received good stress. In the evening the elders and deacons, with their wives, visited the manse. An introduction of the FRCA was again given and a lively discussion ensued. At that evening br. G VanderPyl, a longstanding leader who acted as stated clerk for years for the RCNZ, was present and this made for an interesting discussion. He explained how in the early 1950s the NZ government wanted young, male migrants under 25 years of age. Consequently few reformed families came; most migrants were young and unmarried. This fact put a stamp on the churches. For instance, most knew little or nothing about the Liberation of 1944, and he and others were finding out about the facts only now. He felt he was "liberated." That sentiment from a leader who had been there from the beginning was not unique. It was heard time and again. Others pointed out how members from the RCNZ come from a wide-ranging variety of backgrounds - e.g. synodical reformed, christian reformed, state reformed, free reformed, baptist, presbyterian, brethren and anglican. Recent information, as in the booklet, **THE BROKEN STAFF CALLED UNION**, has helped explain why there was division in the past. All in all, the evening was informative.
3. **CHRISTCHURCH** . Here I could be the guest of the K DeRuiters, members of the Bishopdale congregation, which is one of the two RCNZ congregations in Christchurch. They were excellent hosts. Since br K DeRuiter is session- clerk, he knew much and he and his wife followed the synod closely. The synod took place in the new and very functional church-building of the Bishopdale congregation. A church service was held on Monday evening, 28 Sept., to ask the Lord's blessing in prayer on the Synod. The previous moderator, Rev W Wiersma, preached the sermon on 1 John 1:6,7. The synod had been convened that Monday afternoon already. It continued throughout the week and was closed at noon, Saturday, 3 Oct. The synod itself will be covered in a separate section of this report.
4. **WELLINGTON** . Here Rev and Mrs B James served as hosts from 3-4 Oct. Rev

James is pastor of the Silverstream congregation where a number of "liberated" members settled. On Sunday morning the Rev E Rademaker, on an 'exchange', led the service in Silverstream and preached a strong sermon on 1 Cor 4:7 on the theme of "Who dares to boast?" After the service your delegates was allowed to bring greetings and briefly to introduce the FRCA. A coffee social after the service allowed for much discussion. In the afternoon Rev James took me along to Wainuiomata, a neighbouring congregation, where he preached on Mark 1. At Wainuiomata elder Wim Stolte from the RCNZ of Masterton welcomed me (he and his wife have visited our churches in WA). After the service he took me to Masterton.

5. MASTERTON. After a very scenic trip over the mountains and steep pass to Masterton, the Stolte family welcomed us home. The next day (elder) Stolte took your delegate for a tour of the reformed, christian school and the church complex in Masterton. Both are under the one roof of a mammoth three-storey building. Though the congregation is again smaller (about a 140 members, with double that number attending Sunday services), the school is fully funded by them. The government offers no subsidy. That means high costs per family, especially for families with a number of children attending (the cost is per child). Later a discussion with elders, a deacon and the minister, Rev B Hoyt, who is also a member of the IRC, was held. We discussed what our practical expectations were and what our objectives should be in our mutual contacts. Knowing our careful and principled approach to interchurch relations, they did not envisage having sister relations with us in the immediate future. Yet they very much looked forward to having such sister relations.

These visits allowed one to become acquainted with the local churches where the main activity happens. As well, one becomes oriented with locations, people and local problems. A synod affords a good overview of the bond, but visits with the local congregations and its members add a dimension often not seen at a synod.

B. REPORT ON THE SYNOD HELD IN BISHOPDALE, CHRIST-CHURCH.

All the reports and proposals were sent to your delegate before the synod. Two days after the synod the clerk presented me with a computer printout of the actual acts of synod! That makes it easy in reporting to you.

1. THE WORK-METHOD OF THE SYNOD

As stated above, the synod was convened on Monday afternoon, 28 Sept., and was closed at noon on Saturday, 3 Oct. That in itself is an interesting fact which deserves some comment. How could a synod finish its agenda in such short time? Was there a large agenda or were there only few items? Did the matters receive ample attention? Those were questions in my mind, and maybe arise in yours as well.

This subject intrigued me. A week before departure the whole provisional agenda including all the documentation was sent to me beforehand, and it looked quite similar to the ones which our previous synods have handled. How could they expect to finish such an agenda within a week. I was curious to find out.

The method used at the synod of the RCNZ is quite simple. All the reports of committees appointed by the previous synod are set up so that each section of the report ends with specific recommendations. These reports, as well as proposals and appeals, are dealt with by the synod as a whole. That meant 34 delegates could address the report as a whole or each specific recommendation. One might think that this would be cumbersome, yet it was not. It allowed the synod (in full session) much time to deal with the reports and to discuss (or debate) the subject. Nothing was pushed through; the pace allowed for extensive discussion; and the set up of the reports themselves made for orderly passage of the material. When compared to our system one notices that our system involves extensive reports by synodical deputies, extensive study by advisory committees and extensive coverage of the deputies' report in the proposals of the advisory committees of synod, and then more study and discussion in the full sessions of synod. Comparatively speaking, I concluded that our system was in some ways more cumbersome. For some items advisory committees are a definite advantage. The RCNZ synod used them as well for some items. But it

did not seem necessary and advantageous to do so for all items. Your delegate passes on this information for the benefit of the churches.

Your delegate was welcomed and officially received as an observer delegate representing the FRCA. He received a seat in the synod, was extended the privilege of the floor to address synod to convey a message from our churches and he could request to speak when he deemed it beneficial to the deliberations (a privilege he was reluctant to abuse), and was invited to join in the meals and fellowship.

2. INTERCHURCH RELATIONS

This subject always generates much interest. It was no different at this synod. An extensive list of sister-relations and contacts are worthy of attention.

a. Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. A sister-relation has existed with these churches from its earliest years. The RCNZ understand (some of) the problems and divisions within these churches. The decision reflects this. It reads,

- 1) To continue the sister relation with the CRC Netherlands.
- 2) To pray that the theological differences within the CRC would be resolved in a godly, biblical manner and that unnecessary schism would be avoided.
- 3) To continue to share information, especially regarding relations with churches in the Netherlands and the ICRC.

The delegates of our Dutch sister-churches took along an issue of LUX MUNDI in which there is an article assessing the history of contacts between our Dutch sister-churches and the CRC(Neth). Your delegate also made reference to these contacts, which have been fruitless up till now, in his address to synod. Thus the RCNZ has been supplied with ample and accurate information.

b. Christian Reformed Churches of North America (CRCNA). The IRC of the RCNZ had recommended to synod "to suspend our sister-relation with the CRCNA" on the grounds that women were allowed to hold the offices of elder and deacon as well as "the ambiguous decisions re the teaching of evolution, decisions which in fact exonerated professors who teach evolution and allow them to continue to teach their errors." The IRC had responded to a letter from the CRCNA. This letter was endorsed by synod. While the synod, seeing that the sister-relations have existed only for one intersynodical period and since the correspondence has not been finalised, did not decide to suspend the sister-relations but continue them, specifying "for the intersynodical period 1992-95," it did commission the IRC "to convey to the IRC of the CRCNA our grave concern about the direction taken in recent decisions." On the floor of synod it was stated more than once that the RCNZ wanted to encourage the concerned and faithful members and churches in the CRCNA by addressing a rebuke so stern to the CRCNA that it could not ignore or bypass it. Your delegate made clear to members of the IRC that the central issue is not the recent decisions but the watershed decision of some years ago concerning the nature and extent of biblical authority.

c. Reformed Churches of Australia. The RCNZ have close sister relations with these churches. They cooperate together in the training for the ministry (Reformed Theological College in Geelong) and in other ventures. One thus expects a close bond. At the same time the RCNZ takes a sober and realistic view of these sister relations. The decisions reflect this careful and independent attitude:

- 1) To continue our sister relations with the RCA.
- 2) To acquiesce with regret in the RCA's decision not to hold a colloquium doctum with ministers from other denominations in full ecclesiastical fellowship.
- 3) To agree to the proposed meeting between our respective committees responsible for interchurch relations, on the understanding that a full report of this meeting will be sent to all of our sessions.
- 4) To express our concern to the RCA's SIC/CER (Synodical Interim Committee/Committee on Ecumenical Relations) regarding the (RCA) synod's decisions on the matters of Word and Spirit and women in office and to report to our sessions on the effect of these decisions upon the RCA as a denomination.
- 5) In view of the RCA's tabled motion to reconsider their membership in the

REC, to urge on our sister church the reasons for which we withdrew from the REC.

6) To send one fraternal delegate to the next synod of the RCA.

One notices how the RCNZ does not hesitate to bring up sensitive issues such as the reports on "Word and Spirit" and women in office from the RCA. They also want to gauge the impact such decisions have. They thus use the sister relation in a healthy, critical manner. There was quite some unrest about these decisions of the RCA and the RCNZ would not like to see the same unrest introduced into their own ranks. Thus they will express their genuine concern about these decisions.

d. Orthodox Presbyterian Church, USA. The sister relation was continued, although the OPC seems unsure of its relation to the RCNZ!

e. International Conference of Reformed Churches. They decided to send one (two, if there is no cost to synod) observer to the next ICRC in the Netherlands in 1993, requiring the observer(s) to present a full report to the sessions and members (via their magazine, FAITH IN FOCUS).

f. Free Church of Scotland. The RCNZ have contacts with these churches. The Rev J Graham of the FCS (serving a PCEA church in Sydney under the auspices of "Christian Witness to Israel" and involved in outreach to the most orthodox of Jews) represented these churches at the synod. The RCNZ decided it wanted to become better acquainted with the FCS, addressing in particular any hindrances to closer relations.

g. Netherlands Reformed Churches. These are the churches which left the federation of our sister churches in 1967 and afterwards. The basic causes for this disruption were the protest against the confession of the church regarding Lord's Day 22 about the state of the soul after death as well as the dislike for a binding form of church government. It was good that the two delegates from our Dutch sister-churches came prepared, taking along a special issue of LUX MUNDI in which the sole article is about "WHY DISUNITY between the NRC and RCN (lib)?" This was necessary because the NRC had sent a letter to the RCNZ entitled "Comments on accusations by GKN (lib) against our NR Churches." The RCNZ had politely thanked the NRC for the letter but included their serious concerns about some local churches in the NRC deciding to admit female members to the office of deacon and elders. They expressed the hope that the conclusion will be drawn that women elders and deacons are "contrary to Scripture." The synod endorsed this letter of the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) and encouraged the NRC to resolve the issue of women in office. They will inquire why their sister-church, the CRC (Neth) is reluctant to enter full sister-relations with the NRC. The 1995 synod will have to evaluate whether or not to have sister-relations with the NRC. It was good to see the RCNZ treading carefully. One very disconcerting piece of news (at least for this delegate) was that the last RCA synod decided to enter full sister-relations with the NRC.

h. Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated) (RCN-lib). It was decided to continue contact and exchange of information with view to closer relations, to seek information from their sister-church, the CRC(Neth), as to "their present reluctance to enter into a full sister-relation with the RCN-lib." This was a positive development and hopefully will help relations abroad and within the Netherlands. The presence of the Dutch delegates was a real benefit. Personal contact speaks. Rev H VanVeen also gave a brief but profound reply to the question on the floor of synod why the Liberation of 1944 was always raised as a precondition for sister-relations. He said that the RCN-Lib highly valued the Liberation of 1944 but do not regard it as a precondition for sister-relations. Many delegates expressed their joyful surprise at that answer.

i. Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. Contacts will be continued and the RCA will be consulted as to the state of their relations with the PCEA.

j. Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA). Synod decided "to continue dialogue, in consultation with the RCA, with the FRCA with a view to closer

relations. Moreover, it authorised the Synodical Interim Committee "to accredit an observer to the next synod of the FRCA if this can be done without cost to synod."

3. CATECHISM PREACHING

In Article 56 of its Church Order the RCNZ agree together that "ordinarily at one of the services on each Lord's Day the Word shall be expounded as summarised in the Confessional Standards." The previous synod had decided to appoint a committee to prepare an historical account of the practice of catechism preaching, as well as an explanation of, and historical and biblical defense of this practise as stipulated in Art 56 of the C.O." A substantial report, worthy of consideration, was thus presented to synod. It recommended "that Art.56, C.O. be maintained as is." A minority report recommending that this article "be deleted or its compulsory nature be removed" was also presented. Synod overwhelmingly adopted the majority report and recommendation, retaining this valuable tradition of biblical and instructional preaching following the confessions. Indeed some ministers hold series of sermons following not just the Heidelberg Catechism, but at times also the Canons of Dort, Belgic Confession or the Westminster Confession. It was good to see this hearty defense of this reformed custom, as well as to hear it in the local churches.

4. DISCIPLINE OF THOSE WHO RESIGN FROM THE CHURCH

This matter had caused concern in the churches. Should churches merely accept such resignations or even present transfer of membership letters, especially if the member(s) leave for another (evangelical) church? The church at Wellington wanted to see this matter resolved uniformly. They requested a study committee and submitted the draft guidelines for this matter as used in the Wellington Presbytery. From discussions your delegate learned that some local churches were loath to accept resignations, but instead pursued discipline; other local churches had too readily accepted resignations and done so unbiblically. Synod decided to appoint the requested study committee to formulate guidelines (with biblical and confessional support).

5. GUESTS AT THE LORD'S SUPPER

A study committee appointed to study the participation of guests not belonging to the RCNZ or sister-churches reported lengthily (a 23 page report). They came with the following firm conclusions about guidelines for supervising guests at the Lord's supper:

- a. it is the responsibility of the session to identify guests in order to supervise properly the Lord's supper.
- b. it is the responsibility of the session to inform guests as to the requirements for participation in the Lord's supper and as to the consequence of partaking in an unworthy manner (1 Cor 11:27- 29).
- c. It is the Scriptural responsibility of the session to ascertain the following before it grants permission to guests and visitors to participate in the Lord's supper:
 - i. that they are communicant members in good standing in their own church.
 - ii. that they live upright and godly lives.
 - iii. that their personal faith conviction is compatible with the Reformed Confessions (for example: the Inerrancy and Sufficiency of Scripture; the Doctrines of Grace and Covenant Baptism).

Synod adopted points a,b and c.i and c.ii. But c.iii caused much discussion and debate. This point would preclude baptists, even reformed baptists, and others. Here one could really discern that the RCNZ have FOUR Forms of Unity and members coming from the continental, reformed tradition as well as from the Westminster tradition. Yet when the discussion turned heated and became potentially divisive, the brothers paused to reflect, to read the Bible, to pray together and then continued their frank discussion the next day. They agreed to appoint another study committee to finish setting the guidelines, asking the study committee to present a working paper for the sessions before their final report is sent to the next synod.

This particular discussion provided good insight into the makeup of the churches.

One could also see their commitment to the reformed confessions as well as their genuine brotherly desire to maintain harmony and unity in the bond of peace. That all four ministers who formed the study committee all unanimously signed the report to synod was heartening.

6. HYMNODY

The visits to the local churches highlighted the differences among the local churches as to the choices of songs used in the church services. Some sing only psalms, others prefer psalms but use the occasional hymn as well and still others use hymnals which prefer hymns. An older edition of the Psalter Hymnal is used by most local churches. Additional psalms, hymns and songs have been approved. This synod added a few more. Also, it grant provisional use of the RCA's BOOK OF WORSHIP. A committee will study this new psalter and hymnal. So there will be more choice and variety. One feels that the RCNZ needs to take a close, hard look at this subject, because this endless variety can only cause confusion and division. That some churches sing only psalms causes friction because other members in these churches feel constricted. Also, these churches bitterly lament the (provisional) use of still another hymnal. Others applaud the variety, preferring the newer books of praise. A biblical and reformational attitude is needed to bring these two views together.

7. DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

As in other bonds of churches, this matter unfortunately will not go away, especially if the churches reach out into its neighbourhoods where divorces are rife. A committee drafted a statement on divorce and remarriage, a statement which the synod provisionally adopted. The statement is not elaborate but brief, quotes Scripture texts and is confessionally formulated and defensible.

C. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE 1992 SYNOD

There is always a note of subjectivity when assessing something as big and complex as a synod. However, an attempt must be made.

1. A TEST CASE

Allow me to describe the RCNZ's synod as an "experiment in working with four confessional standards." In addition to the Three Forms of Unity the RCNZ has adopted (with some conditions) the Westminster Confession. That in itself makes the RCNZ unique and interesting. For do we in the FRCA not struggle to come to terms with the confessional standards and practises of churches from the 'Westminster' tradition? Do we not have concerns and even serious reservations about these churches? Do we not ask how we would ever be able to work together with such churches? Well, in NZ they are together and they are at work together.

Your delegate could thankfully come to no other conclusion than that the experiment was truly working well. Oh yes, there were frictions, for example, when the subject of guests at the Lord's table or catechism preaching came up for discussion. But these tensions did not flare up into open division. On the contrary, a brotherly spirit prevailed in which a hearty desire to come to greater unity was very evident. The actual decisions showed a reformed direction. Thus it is possible to work together; it is possible to blend the two 'traditions,' allowing both reformed 'traditions' to cross-fertilise each other. There is an inner unity in the two sets of confessions, a unity which brings the two traditions closer rather than further apart.

2. HURDLES LEFT STANDING

Our synods have pointed to the sister-churches the RCNZ has and which we do not have. These still stand as hurdles to overcome before sister- relations can be entertained. Let's just review the outstanding hurdles.

The RCNZ have terminated their sister- relations with the RCN-syn and have also withdrawn their association with the same churches in the RES. That meant two hurdles disappeared for us. That the RCNZ have sister-relations with the RCA who still had sister-relations with the RCN-syn formed an impediment to us. Thankfully

the RCA has terminated its sister-relations with the RCN-syn too. The past rift is in the process of being healed. Present trends in the RCA cause concern.

"But what about their attitude towards the Liberation of 1944?" some may ask. The brief answer of Rev H VanVeen at the synod should, in my view, suffice. We treasure the Liberation as a reforming work of the Holy Spirit. However, it does not and may not act as another "mark of the true church." It may not be a precondition for sister-relations. At the same time we should not hesitate in speaking about the Liberation and the benefits which it had. On several occasions this topic came up at synod, on the floor of synod and at meal times.

On the floor of synod one member, an 'old-timer' whose exuberant joy allows him privileges others dare not take, stepped inside the 'triangle' and proceeded to speak about something very heavy on his heart. When he and others had come from the 'old country' they had thrown the 'baggage' of the ecclesiastical divisions there overboard. They were going to a new country, facing new challenges. They hung on to the reformed faith, but forgot the divisions. (Please remember what is written elsewhere in this report that these immigrants were almost exclusively single males under 25 years old). Why were we in the FRCA not able to do the same? In reply your delegate pointed out that the 'baggage' which we threw overboard, just like they did, were the doctrinal pronouncements of 1942, the imposition of extra-biblical and anti-confessional doctrines and that in an hierarchical manner. It was the latter that caused the suspensions and depositions from office and the expulsion of churches from the federation. They brought about the Liberation of 1944. Yet if churches and members return to the old basis without human additions we are prepared to seek unity with them. The ACT OF LIBERATION AND RETURN makes clear that further we are willing to maintain fellowship as quickly as possible with all believers, wheresoever the Son of God has gathered them or ever will again gather them. This includes all those who avoid the ungodly path of sectarian and uncatholic independence and isolation on which these (synodical) churches have now set out, and who will be prepared with us to stand on or come to stand on the foundation of the adopted Forms of Unity alone (without human additions by a synod, WH.).

As sons of the Liberation we maintain that stance. We too will not add requirements such as recognition of the Liberation or adherence to the 'redemptive-historical approach' to Scripture as prerequisites for sister-relations. As dear as these treasures are to us (and we spoke of them often), we must not present them as preconditions for sister-relations. These remarks found a hearty response. One had detected an underlying current of reserve and even of some hostility toward 'liberated' brothers/churches. The presence and responses of the 'liberated' delegates seemed to help in defusing that tension.

What then are the remaining hurdles? The sister-relations which the RCNZ has with the RCA & CRCNA are problematic for us. On the one hand, it is thankfully true that the RCNZ exercises these sister-relations in a very faithful and proper manner. The decisions showed that. On the other hand, the direction in the CRCNA and the current direction of the RCA are alarming. Unless there is reformation and reversal of these trends, action will need to be taken. What happens at the 1995 RCNZ Synod will be crucial. For by then it will be clear which direction the RCA is headed; and by then the admonitions to the CRCNA will either have been heeded or bypassed. We must wait at least till then.

D. OVERALL CONCLUSIONS FROM THE VISIT

A short appraisal of both the visit to the local churches as well as the observance of the synod should wrap up this report.

1. THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

The preaching which was heard on five occasions was sound, biblical and very applicable. There was a solid explanation and application of Scripture. Catechism-preaching offered good biblical instruction and showed how the reformed faith applies to all areas of life. The Four Forms of Unity, instead of being a showpiece, are indeed operative, promoting and ensuring, by the oath of office, that the preaching is biblical.

Discipline is exercised, as was heard on more than one occasion. That some local churches do not accept resignations (to other churches) but continue with discipline, because leaving a faithful church is "contrary to the ordinance of God," demonstrates their strong, confessional stance. One might argue against the legitimacy of the continued discipline, but one applauds the doctrinal stance.

That the churches take the matter of guests at the Lord's supper seriously enough to have another study committee finalise guidelines shows that they are serious in administering the sacraments as instituted by Christ. Everyone is not left free to do as they see fit, but there is a hearty desire for unity on such issues. Again, their confessions and Church Order ensure that the sacraments are administered properly.

2. CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

In all the local churches visited there were christian schools. One could see the real struggle to build and maintain such schools. For the churches are smaller, usually not more than 150 members, and they are too far apart to cooperate together. No subsidy is received from the governments. Normally parents pay a set fee per child. The communal system of supporting reformed education, as we know it, is not used there, though many voiced their desire to see the same system used there. The upshot of all this is that they struggle to finance these schools, struggle to build a solid reformed basis for them (some christian schools started up as cooperative ventures), and struggle for reformed teachers and reformed curricula. Yet one could not but be impressed with the small (sometimes cramped and rustic) beginnings in some locales and the more advanced stages in other locales. The help from Canada was appreciated. During my visits two teachers from Canada were offering help to these schools as they toured NZ.

3. EVANGELISM

At synod and in the local churches one hears about the zeal for reaching NZ with the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. Much work is done in this area. The churches, locally and together, commit themselves to it financially and by means of publications and programs. Consequently, in some churches there are as many visitors as members in the church services. Also, one notices the presence of members from a variety of religious and national backgrounds.

4. SPIRITUALITY

One last matter that deserves mention was the biblical spirituality in the family life, the prayers, the singing, the communication and the resolution of tensions and problems areas. One often measures maturity by the ability to solve problems together. That maturity certainly is discernible in the RCNZ. Mind you, this conclusion is no more than an impression, for not all churches were visited and one can only gather impressions on a short visit. Yet the visits to local churches and to the synod left the imprint of a godly spirituality.

As far as this delegate can assess the situation, the FRCA & RCNZ should be actively getting to know each other, 'courting' if you wish. This encouraging visit should promote that. However, we are not ready yet for sister-relations, for 'marriage', if you wish. At the same time, we must seriously ask ourselves whether we pursue these contacts just to give an appearance of true catholicity or whether we truly desire to enter sister-relations with the RCNZ. If it is the former, we will attempt to bring up more and more objections so that sister-relations are avoided. If it is the latter, then the outstanding hindrances will be zealously addressed so that the road to ecclesiastical fellowship is opened. Your delegate gave assurances to the RCNZ that our synods were sincerely interested in sister-relations. This report, as is evident from the contents, is delivered in the same spirit.

Humbly submitted by your appointed delegate,

Rev W Huizinga.

FREE REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE PHILIPPINES

Translation of Deputies report to Synod of the GKN (LIB) at Leeuwarden, 1990.

Deputies received instructions to keep themselves informed about developments in the church community 'The Christian Brethren' c/- Rev. Joy Vingno on the island of Negros in the Philippines.

The support committee JOY of which Rev. H. van Veen and H. van Dijken were members, had regular contact together. Through gifts they could also give a little support to the work of Christian Brethren.

On 28th Nov. 1987 a detailed report was published in "Nederlands Dagblad" about a visit paid there by Mr Kamsteeg. Br van Dijken wh•ws first to take up contact with Rev. Vingno, supplied deputies with a detailed report of his visit of 28th January 1988 to 24 February 1988.

From this we learn that the Heidelberg Catechism is used and that the Reformed Confessions are studied. Be van Wijnen mentions several examples of discipline, where people were withheld from the Lord's Supper.

The Christian Brethren also organise several socio-educational 'kindergartens', which are christian preschool organisations. In this way, they also come into contact with parents. The congregations are small and ministers have to support themselves. "There is no money to buy good literature, the books which belong to Rev. Vingno are circulated amongst his colleagues. There is an urgent need for good literature, especially about church organisation and the Confessions.

There are also two ministers who would like to study further at a Reformed University. Because of the language problem, they are thinking of Korea or Canada.' Partially supported by 'De Verre Naasten', Br van Dijken went to work for a year in the Philippines. From his May 1989 report we quote the following:

'the ministers are convinced of the fact that a certain uniformity is desirable. they are trying to introduce an 'umbrella' name. However it is not easy to find a suitable name. They would prefer one which gives an indication of their Reformed character. they chose "Reformed Free Church of the Philippines". 'Reformed' because of their great love for Calvin and the Reformation. 'Free' because of their separation from the mainstream Baptists and because of their bond with the Dutch Free (Liberated) churches.'

Registration has been requested. Because of the presence of the Christian Reformed Church, the registration of the chosen name is still unsure. Br van Dijken also noted some sympathy among the disturbed Baptists. The ministers are prevented from leaving the mainstream Baptists by the thought of losing their congregations and the resulting financial consequences. However they do ask Rev. Vingno for Bible study sessions, or to preach.

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

The Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia
Byford

Esteemed Brethren,

The following items not able to be included in our report are brought to your attention.

1. Reverend Doko of the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Di Indonesia will be at Synod each afternoon and evening. In the mornings he is attending an English course. Reverend Doko's credentials as representative of the GGRIS are still in the mail however deputies have a letter from the deputies GGRIS which we believe sufficient to establish Reverend Doko's credentials.

2. Following Reverend Huizinga's visit to the synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, that synod decided to send an observer to the synod of the FRCA. Reverend MA Flinn, a member of the Interchurch Relations Committee has accepted our invitation to attend our synod. He intends to visit synod for a few days between 15th and 25th June. Reverend Flinn has an official letter of accreditation.

3. Reverend E Fangidae of the Gereja Masehi Musyafir di Timor (GMMT) has indicated his desire to attend synod. His attendance will depend on obtaining a visa in time.

4. Deputies have received an invitation from the Reformed Churches of Australia inviting observers from the FRCA to their synod to be held DV August 16th to 25th, 1994 at the Reformed Church of Canning, WA. A copy of the letter is attached. Deputies have replied that synod will deal with this request.

SIGNED by: Reverend W Huizinga (chairman)

SIGNED by: JL van Burgel (secretary)

REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA

Synodical Interim Committee, Stated Clerk, R Hoekzema

15 Kempsey Street

BLACKTOWN NSE 2148

AUSTRALIA

Ph: (02) 622 1863

Free Reformed Churches of Australia, Deputies for Dialogue with the RCA

C/- Reverend W Huizinga

74 Lowanna Way

Armadale WA 6112

15th April 1994

Dear Reverend Huizinga,

Warm Christian greetings from the Reformed Churches of Australia!

It is my privilege and pleasure as stated clerk of the Reformed Churches of Australia to invite your denomination being in dialogue with our Church to send an observer to attend the meetings of our synod which will be held DV in the city of Perth (Western Australia) from August 16 to 25, 1994. The synod will be preceded by a Prayer Service on Monday evening 15th August.

The Reformed Church of Perth is the Convening Church but the meetings will be held in the buildings of the Reformed Church of Canning (a suburb of Perth), 55 Mills Road Gosnells, WA.

The usual courtesies are extended to your observer, in that we will provide meals and of course your observer will have the opportunity to bring the greetings of your church. Please advise me of name and address of your observer and I will arrange for him to receive an appropriate welcome and a time slot on the agenda of Synod. We would love it if your church could be represented in person but should that not be possible on this occasion, we would be honoured by a written communion. Looking forward to receiving your response, we pray the Lord to bless you and your churches.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

SIGNED by: Ray Hoekzema (Stated Clerk)

for relations with other churches:

3. Other churches (Presbyterian)

Introduction

Synod Bedfordale gave to deputies responsible for contact with Presbyterian Churches mandates concerning the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and the Free Church of Scotland (cf Acts, Art 165, Point 6.3). Our report contains a section on each of these four churches successively, with each section in turn detailing the mandate received, the work we did, our analysis of the situation, and recommendations.

It should be noted that the twelve meetings we held were conducted in an atmosphere of brotherly cooperation. We state this specifically because at our last meeting one of our members indicated his inability to concur with the direction our other members felt compelled to take. Consequently, there are two reports on your table.

It pains us that we as deputies could not come with united recommendations to your assembly. The brokenness characteristic of this life is evident in our labours too. Nevertheless, it is our consolation and fervent prayer that the Lord of the Church will use our broken labours for the coming of His kingdom — even as He has promised.

a. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA

1.0 MANDATE

Synod 1992 gave to deputies the following mandate:

To work towards a mutual recognition of each other as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the light of this goal:

- a. to continue to study and discuss further with the PCEA the remaining areas of concern specified by Synod 1987, viz, the supervision of the Lord's table, the practice of pulpit exchanges and the position of children in the covenant. In this discussion about the areas of concern the confession of the doctrine of the church should be addressed when applicable. Due attention must be given to our concern about possible unscriptural concepts regarding interdenominationalism. All this should be done in the light of God's Word giving heed to the complete doctrine of salvation;
- b. to continue these discussions with the PCEA mindful of the considerations of Synod 1990 (Acts, Article 77);
- c. to exchange visitors at deputy and synodical level;
- d. to use the current rules for sister churches in the discussions leading toward mutual recognition as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- e. to inform the RCN (through the deputies for correspondence with churches abroad) of our decision concerning the PCEA (cf. Consideration 6).

2.0 BACKGROUND

In order to place in context the work done by current deputies the following summary of recent contact with the PCEA until Synod 1992 is submitted:

1990 - FRCA Synod mandates deputies inter alia to study and discuss further the remaining areas of concern specified by Synod 1987 viz the supervision of the Lord's table, the practice of pulpit exchanges and the position of children in the covenant.

March 1991 - FRCA deputies finalise a position paper on the supervision of the Lord's table and the practice of pulpit exchange as well as a discussion paper on the position of children in the covenant. (See page 131 of Acts of Synod 1992.)

April 1991 - FRCA delegates visit the PCEA Synod. One of the delegates, on

invitation, addressed the Synod in which he mentions also the areas of concern. (See page 134 of Acts 1992.) The two above papers are also left with the PCEA deputies.

May 1991 - FRCA delegates report on visit to PCEA Synod (See page 138 of Acts 1992.)

December 1991 - PCEA deputies respond to the first of the above papers by means of a letter. (Page 144 of Acts 1992.)

March 1992 - FRCA reply to the PCEA letter stating that they were disappointed with the reply in that the response did not interact with the substance of what was in the position paper. The PCEA deputies were urged to treat the position paper seriously. (See page 146 of Acts 1992.)

May 1992 - FRCA Synod considers the above and gives new deputies the mandate detailed above.

- FRCA deputies meet with Rev Gadsby who was visiting the FRCA Synod. Rev Gadsby undertook to provide a fuller response to the position paper by the end of 1992 and a response to the discussion paper (Children in the covenant) by mid 1993. At this meeting Rev Gadsby also invited FRCA representatives to attend their 1993 Synod.

3.0 WORK DONE

As required by the mandate the deputies have continued the work of previous deputies. Deputies met 11 times. Our work was done as follows.

3.1 Position Paper on Pulpit Exchange and Fencing of the Lord's Table

In relation to clause 2 (a and b) of the mandate, deputies continued to study and discuss further with the PCEA the remaining areas of concern. As a response to our papers was not forthcoming, we gently reminded our PCEA counterparts of their undertaking several times in 1992.

In April 1993 two FRCA delegates, Rev C Kleyn and br J Bruning, attended the PCEA Synod in Taree. They meet with PCEA deputies for contact. PCEA deputies acknowledged that no further work had been done on the papers and undertook to give it attention.

In December 1993 FRCA deputies received a response from the PCEA (dated 1 December 1993) to our position paper on pulpit exchange and fencing of the Lord's table. The PCEA response has not been studied in depth by the FRCA deputies at the time of writing this report. FRCA deputies' initial re-action however is that the response is basically a restatement of the current practices of the PCEA and points they have made previously. It is evident that we have not convinced them that the concerns expressed by several FRCA Synods are indeed scripturally based. As a result no real progress on this issue can be reported. More work needs to be done with the PCEA on these matters.

3.2 Discussion Paper on the Position of Children in the Covenant

No progress can be reported on this matter as the PCEA deputies have not responded to this paper as yet.

3.3 Paper on Denominationalism

In the address delivered to the PCEA Synod 1991 the matter of denominationalism or pluriformity was raised. During subsequent discussions it became clear that we had not been altogether clear regarding exactly what we meant by denominationalism or pluriformity. As a result FRCA deputies prepared a paper which gave a clear exposition of what we understood by this issue. This report was sent to the PCEA and is attached as Appendix 1.

3.4 Visit to PCEA Synod

In accordance with clause 2(c) of the deputies' mandate two deputies attended the 1993 PCEA Synod at Taree. Rev Kleyn addressed Synod with a speech agreed to by deputies beforehand. See Appendix 2 for copy of FRCA delegates' report on visit to

PCEA Synod and copy of address. There was joy and thankfulness amongst FRCA deputies for the positive note of the report and the apparent fruits of progress in discussions between PCEA and FRCA.

3.5 Rules for relations with sister-churches

As our time has been fully occupied in attending to matters required by clauses 2 (a, b, c, and e) of the mandate there has not been opportunity to attend to clause 2 (d) of the mandate. Attention is however drawn to the 1993 PCEA Synod decision regarding rules for fraternal relations. (See Appendix 2.)

3.6 Discussion paper on Church

PCEA deputies had charged that our previous deputies had a novel approach to the question of what is the true church. FRCA deputies responded to this charge by a paper defending the previous deputies' position and forwarded this to PCEA deputies. The paper concluded that previous deputies were not novel in their approach to the concept of church. The paper is attached as Appendix 3.

3.7 Recognition as a true Church

As

- a. there has not been adequate progress in the areas of concern identified by two previous FRCA Synods, and
- b. there are some other matters still outstanding

deputies, having regard to Article 67 of FRCA Synod Acts 1985, are not in a position to recommend to Synod that the PCEA should be recognised as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ at this point but consider that the areas of concern should be further studied and discussed.

3.9 Publication of Deputies' activities

Deputies have published a number of reports of their activities in the *Una Sancta* to keep the members of the FRCA informed of developments.

3.10 Correspondence

Attached at Appendix 4 are copies of relevant correspondence between deputies.

APPENDIX 1

Discussion paper on Pluriformity or Denominationalism

The Inter-Church Relations Committee from the PCEA had asked deputies from the FRCA to explain what we understood by "pluriformity". Deputies answered the question with the following response.

C Bouwman (on behalf of deputies)

1. What is "Pluriformity of the Church" or "Denominationalism"?

In the contact between the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Presbyterian Churches of Eastern Australia, the expression "Pluriformity of the Church" has been used on various occasions. Deputies of the FRCA regret that the FRCA did not serve the PCEA with a paper on this subject at a much earlier stage.

This paper will try to indicate what we mean by the term and what our objections are against it. We leave it to the deputies of the PCEA to judge for themselves whether the term applies to the PCEA and, if so, to what degree. Hopefully this paper can help us get a better understanding of each other.

First then the question: What do we mean by Pluriformity of the Church?

In general the expression is understood to mean that the Church is to be found in all churches. The one Church, which is basically seen as an invisible ideal, manifests itself in a plurality of visible forms. Seeing that the various visible churches do not

reflect that invisible ideal to the same degree, they are consequently distinguished as more or less pure churches.

In the latter half of the last century A. Kuyper strongly defended this theory in the Dutch churches. He considered pluriformity to be a developmental phase which the visible church of Christ had to enter. New distinctions arise which can separate you from many in your own country.

"All these differences do not impoverish the Church but enrich her, just as in the whole creation and in history this pluriformity constantly brings out the full revelation of the manifold wisdom of God. The infinite cannot adequately be expressed in one finite form. It does this in a plurality of forms. They supplement each other. Only in that totality is the fullness present" (De Gemene Gratie, III, 238).

Thus Kuyper defended the pluriformity of the church with the argument that God's truth is so rich that no single church can be found which does full justice to that full truth. One church emphasises this element, another that. They complement each other. In the thirties V. Hepp and others applauded the doctrine of pluriformity as the apex of Calvinism.

There were others who lamented this pluriformity. They stated: sadly enough we have to accept the pluriformity. It is a reality we cannot deny. It is a necessary evil, a result of sin.

In the English speaking world the doctrine of Pluriformity is more commonly known as the doctrine of denominationalism. The following quotes show that there is very little difference between the two.

Winthrop S Hudson wrote the following on the subject:

"The use of the word 'denomination' to describe a religious group came into vogue during the early years of the Evangelical revival.

Typical of the mood which gave currency to the new term are John Wesley's oft-quoted words: 'I ... refuse to be distinguished from other men by any but the common principles of Christianity I renounce and detest all other marks of distinction. But from real Christians, of whatever denomination, I earnestly desire not to be distinguished at all.... Dost thou love and fear God? It is enough! I give thee the right hand of fellowship'. The word denomination was adopted by the leaders of the Evangelical Revival, both in England and America, because it was a neutral term which carried with it no implications of a negative judgment. Denominationalism is the opposite of sectarianism. The word 'denomination' implies that the group referred to is but one member of a larger group, called or denominated by a particular name. The basic contention of the denominational theory of the church is that the true church is not to be identified in any exclusive sense with any particular ecclesiastical institution. The outward forms of worship and organisation are at best but differing attempts to give visible expression to the life of the church in the life of the world. No denomination claims to represent the whole church of Christ. No denomination claims that all other churches are false churches. No denomination claims that all members of society should be incorporated within its own membership.

No denomination claims that the whole of society and the state should submit to its ecclesiastical regulations. Yet all denominations recognise their responsibility for the whole of society and they expect to cooperate in freedom and mutual respect with other denominations in discharging that responsibility". (Church History. Edited by JH Nichols and LJ Trinterud, Vol XXIV, p32).

Rev C Stam summarises denominationalism as follows:

"Denominationalism is the practice of American Christians to organise into various 'denominations' of purer or less pure stature, whereby mutual recognition as Church of Christ and a fitting cooperation is mandatory. Every visible and instituted church is merely a 'manifestation' of the great invisible Church of Christ, and since the visible church is quite pluriform, it does not really matter so much of which church one is a member. Outward forms of worship are, at best, only 'attempts', and one may seek that form which he/she is most comfortable.

For many Christians, the issue is not at all one of church membership, but of personal salvation". (Clarion, Vol 27, No 5).

2. Objections against "Pluriformity" and "Denominationalism"

2.1. It takes as starting point man's experience instead of God's Word. We should not be guided by what we see of the church, but by what God says about the church. Facts (the existence of various different churches) should not be presented as norms. Scripture tells us, for instance, that the church has one Head (Eph 1:22), one Spirit (I Cor 12:13), one foundation (I Cor 3:11), one faith and one baptism (Eph 4:5) and that it is one body (I Cor 12:12).

2.2. It does not agree with our confession. Even A Kuyper acknowledged that Scripture and the confessions do not teach a pluriformity of the church. With Art 27 of the Belgic Confession, we believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is to be distinguished by the marks of the true Church (Art 29) and which everyone is obliged to join (Art 28).

2.3. The theory glosses over the sin of ecclesiastical disunity and thus deprives the call for church unity of its force. If the separate church bodies are all manifestations of the one church, why should they take the trouble of trying to unite? Here the incentive to do something about the existing disunity is taken away. Scripture says that we should be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). Christ prayed for the visible unity of the Church (Jn 17).

2.4. It weakens the call for continued reformation. It tends to relativate the truth and thus sanction heresy and deformation. We must contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Christ prayed: "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is the truth." (John 17:17). Scripture warns against false prophets who come in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15, cf Acts 20:29,30; II Pet 2, Jude). Those who pervert the gospel of Christ and thus come with a different gospel are to be rejected (Gal 1:6-9). We are called to separate from the assembly of those who do not belong to Christ (Acts 2:20; II Cor 6:14-18; Rev 18:4). In this we should not let ourselves be misled by impressive acts "in God's service". Obedience is demanded (Mt 7:21-23). Christ Himself says that the sheep will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers (Jn 10:4,5). Scripture calls the church a pillar and bulwark of the truth (I Tim 3:15), which is to protect against "every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4:14).

2.5. It is inaccurate to speak of a local church as a "manifestation" of the one (invisible) church of Christ. In the Scriptures the word "church" can denote the whole or a part. The church which locally displays the marks is fully the church of Christ, as is the church of all ages, and not just the manifestation of something invisible.

2.6. Here the voluntary decision of the individual —just as when one joins an association or a society— takes the place of maintaining the unity of the church as an act of obedience of faith (Eph 4:1-3; Art 28 BC).

2.7. The organisation of the visible, instituted church is not just a human attempt. The church is "Christ's workmanship" (cf Mt 16:18), the "household of God" (Eph 2:19-22) in which the divine directives are the norm and not human preferences.

That we object against the doctrine of pluriformity does imply that we deny the existence of a plurality of churches. Through human weakness and sin there can be separate churches which should in fact be one. Let us not call that plurality of the churches pluriformity. Then we would be using a beautiful word for an ugly matter. The term pluriformity tends to cover up a sinful reality and make it acceptable. It also tends to brush aside the Scriptural distinction between true and false. God keeps demanding from us obedience to his revealed norms.

Deputies for Contact with the PCEA
J Bruning, J Eikelboom, C Kleyn P Posthuma

Visit to the PCEA

Last April two of the deputies responsible for contact with Presbyterian Churches (non-sister churches) travelled to Taree (in NSW) to attend the synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. These delegates submitted a report to the entire deputyship of their visit. For the sake of the membership, this report is printed below.

TO: Free Reformed Deputies for Contact with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA).

FROM: Rev C Kleyn and J Bruning

RE: Visit to the PCEA Synod held from 19 to 22 April 1993

DATE OF REPORT: 22 May 1993

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report describes and makes comment on a number of matters which were dealt with by the above synod. The authors have selected matters which are considered to be pertinent to the FRCA deputies in fulfilling their mandate. For a comprehensive and official coverage of the proceedings see the Standing Committee Reports to the Synod and the 1993 Synod Minutes.

In addition to recording some of the Synod's decisions, this report also contains accounts of what individual delegates said on the Synod floor. This was done to give an indication and "feel" for what was discussed, how it was debated and what lived among the delegates. These individuals' views do not of course necessarily represent the official position of the PCEA or Synod.

2.0 SYNOD OPENING, DEVOTIONS AND PRAYERS

The opening of synod itself, as well as every subsequent session, was opened by a period of devotion. Each devotion comprised:

1.1 Prayer for God's blessing over synod

1.2 Psalm singing

1.3 Reading of a portion of Scriptures

1.4 A meditation on that portion of Scriptures, given by one of the ministers.

1.5 Further prayers

This calling upon the name of God and meditation on His Word set a firm basis from which each day's strength was drawn. The FRCA delegates considered this a very positive and upbuilding element of synod.

The synod was opened by the (retiring) Moderator, Rev Jim Cromarty, whose meditation was on Revelation 12. He spoke about the dangers of worldliness, pointing out that Satan, by the waters of temptation, tries to flush the church out of her isolation, her wilderness position, in order to destroy her by worldliness. Rev Cromarty warned against false ecumenism and doctrines and encouraged the hearers to guard against Satan's attacks. He also spoke of the protection given to the church by Jesus Christ who embraces His beloved bride.

The Moderator elect, Rev W M MacKay, was then confirmed as Moderator. In his Moderator's address, *The Lordship of Christ in the Church*, he explored Christ's Kingship and how He gathers, feeds and saves His flock. He also pointed to Christ's teaching on the authority of Scriptures (Luke 24) and the need to bring all things under Christ's rule. The church must not only be but also seen to be Christ's body.

3.0 SELF EXAMINATION

The Youth and fellowship report was discussed and it was clear from both the report and the discussion at Synod that there was real concern for the spiritual welfare of the church and in particular the youth of the church. The Youth and Fellowship convener, in presenting the report, stated that Synod in spending a lot of time on

material and administrative matters, ran the danger of neglecting the much more important matter of the spiritual well being of the church. In a passionate way he reminded Synod that the care for the youth is very much more important than material matters since the church members and office bearers are their spiritual trustees. Other members supported him in this.

He expressed concern about young people drifting away from the PCEA and urged the members to go on the "offensive" to keep them in the church. Several members supported him in this, one of them commenting that young people lose their way even if they attend other denominations. Some reservations were also expressed about inviting speakers from outside the PCEA at youth (study) camps and organisers were urged to use PCEA ministers at these camps. One speaker reminded Synod that in some denominations "outside" speakers would not be invited to teach the youth.

This matter was indirectly raised in the discussion on the Church Extension and Supply report. In submitting his report to Synod, the convener reiterated the need to understand that church extension is not in the first place out-reach, but is firstly the evangelisation of those in the pews. He considered that the conversion of the non-believers in "our own midst must be our first priority". This is also important in the homes and is related to the loss of young people from the church; the church members cannot evangelise their neighbours unless they "have first brought their children to the Lord". The preaching in the church must be evangelistic preaching.

The Church and Nation report also made a very strong plea for greater efforts to bring up the young people in the fear of the Lord and to keep them in the church. In the light of the above comments it was heartening to see the wording of the Synod's decision: "That concerted effort be made by church ministry and parental oversight to bring up our young people in the knowledge of scripture and with a clear understanding and appreciation of the distinctive principles of our church. And that to this end, greater use be made of repetition work set by the church each year." (Synod Minutes para 93.44 [4]). The reference to the need to teach the young people "the distinctive principles" perhaps suggests that there is increasing awareness of the "denominationalism" issue that the FRCA have raised with the PCEA.

The Church and Nation Report also called the PCEA members to continuing self examination, as the PCEA too is "affected by apathy, complacency, materialism and worldliness". During the presentation of his report the convener urged church members to be watchful and alert and to speak out publicly against the sin, thereby letting the light of Scriptures shine in society. The recent Sydney Mardi Grass (an internationally reknown homosexual festival) and the potential for promiscuity to be shown on paid TV were cited as examples of the need to be alarmed about our nation as well as the church. Appropriately Synod resolved "that the ministry of the church give appropriate warning and direction to congregations re: moral trends, and the use of television and literature." (Synod Minutes para 93.44 [3]).

3.4 Presbyterian Banner

The Editor of the Presbyterian Banner reported that there was a considerable "slide" in subscribers within the PCEA; he urged Synod delegates to encourage church members to reverse this trend. Some delegates considered that many articles in the Banner were too difficult and controversial, and as a result some church members tended to read other material, such as "Fellowship".

4.0 PCEA AND RELATIONS WITH OTHER CHURCHES

4.1 Greetings from other churches

On Wednesday afternoon there was opportunity for delegates from other churches to address synod. Professor Graham brought greetings from the Free Church of Scotland; Rev W Myers from the Westminster Presbyterian Church (WPC) and Rev D Baird from the Reformed Churches of Australia (RCA). J Bruning gave brief greetings from the FRCA whilst Rev C Kleyn addressed the synod at a later session.

4.2 Inter Church Relations Committee

The committee presented its report which was received by Synod.

4.3 International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

It appears from the committee's report and Synod discussion on this point that the PCEA sees the ICRC as becoming increasingly important by becoming the main vehicle for relations with churches abroad. As one delegate put it at Synod: "Our relations with other churches will be through the ICRC rather than directly with these churches. We will work through the ICRC on the issues." The committee recommended that Synod determine who should be delegated to the third ICRC meeting. The Synod valued contact with other churches through the ICRC and resolved to appoint Revs Gadsby and Ward to the ICRC as delegates for the PCEA. The paper prepared by the ICRC Committee on Theological Affirmation was referred to in the committee's report which concludes as follows:

"The thrust of the report is that an agreed statement is not needed. In a sense this is true since it is only the more extreme aspect expressed chiefly by some of the FRCA brothers that was the basis for our desire for such a statement. It may be that there has been sufficient change overall that one can happily not insist on a statement, the more so as it may give opportunity for divisiveness. At this point we ought not anticipate what the coming (ICRC,JB) meeting decides when it debates the report." The Synod made no resolution regarding this point other than to send delegates. The PCEA delegates to the ICRC did not receive a mandate from this Synod. Presumably the ICR Committee (whose report Synod "received") will do further work in this area.

4.4 ICRC membership application

Synod resolved to support its sister church, the Free Church of Central India, in its application for membership of the ICRC.

4.5 Korea

In relation to the Kosin Church of Korea it was mentioned that the PCEA would like to maintain good relations but nothing formal. (See also under 4.8 which may affect this relationship in due time).

4.6 Relations with churches in Australia

The PCEA maintains low level relations with a number of churches in Australia; relations are expressed through correspondence, reciprocal synod visits and greetings, and contacts through joint committees (for example via the RCA Committee on Contact with the Government). There is also pulpit exchange with some of these churches. This is specifically mentioned in relation to the Southern Presbyterian Church of Australia; Rev Hill (Ulverstone) has close contact with some of its congregations. The PCEA does however have concerns about some developments in other churches and makes these known.

4.7 Relations with the FRCA

On Wednesday evening the FRCA deputies met for some 45 minutes with their PCEA counterparts. At this meeting some PCEA delegates expressed displeasure and disappointment at the tone and manner of the FRCA delegate's address at the PCEA's 1991 synod. One committee member felt that the address came across as arrogant and in a lecture like manner. He considered that if this was the feeling of the FRCA then there would be little point in continuing any relations. Others considered that the problem may be due to "cultural difference" and that more understanding and patience was required. (It is felt by the FRCA delegates that this issue may be related to the reluctance of the PCEA ICR Committee to delve into the papers we have sent.) It became clear in the discussion that the FRCA deputies' papers were not distributed to all the PCEA committee members and therefore not discussed by them. There was an admission that this was not right and it was agreed that the papers should be properly studied and that a considered response would be given. In a later discussion the report by the Dutch deputies (which included comments about FRCA/PCEA relations) to the Dutch GKN Synod was raised and this has since resulted in correspondence between FRCA and PCEA deputies.

The relations between the FRCA and PCEA was discussed at synod on Thursday

morning. The convener of the ICR Committee stated to Synod that he saw many reasons for the PCEA continuing contact with the FRCA. He stated that the energy that the PCEA had put into discussing the various issues with the FRCA had not been wasted and the discussions should not be stopped. He said that there was more to the issues than was first thought and considered that more attention should be given to them. He stated that the PCEA owes it to the FRCA brethren that the issues be further discussed. Another delegate mentioned that the forthcoming ICRC meeting is likely to have a major impact on the PCEA/FRCA relations.

At this point in the proceedings Rev C Kleyn was invited to address the synod from a prepared speech. (This speech was agreed to by all the FRCA deputies and was published in an earlier issue of *Una Sancta*). The speech was very well received and several members of synod voiced their appreciation for what was conveyed. Rev Gadsby said he believed the FRCA was sincere in its pursuit of relations with the PCEA; he said that as the PCEA had not given much response to the FRCA requests for discussion, the FRCA would have had reason to have terminated discussion but they had persisted. He said that there are real problem areas which need to be addressed but the PCEA does not elevate these to a great height. More time is needed to look at the issues. He expressed the hope that there would be real progress. Synod did not make a resolution regarding contact with the FRCA. The Synod did, however "receive" the Committee's report. This report describes, *inter alia*, the Committee's future plans and concludes: "We have learned and profited from our contacts (with the FRCA,JB) and hope for more substantial progress in the next year or two especially in the aftermath of the ICRC meeting. (See Appendix 1 for full text of ICR Committee's report on the FRCA.)

Rev Kleyn's speech was also published in "The Presbyterian Banner" of May 1993.

4.8 Rules for Fraternal Relations between Churches

The Inter Church Relations Committee made a recommendation to synod to adopt a set of rules governing fraternal relations between churches. The rules it recommended are the same as those already adopted by the Free Church of Scotland. This recommendation caused considerable debate at Synod, one which gave FRCA delegates deeper insight into the PCEA view of inter-church relations.

One speaker said that the proposal was simplistic and unnecessary; he said that the PCEA did not need to be bound to things which are obvious. The proposed rules were inadequate and ambiguous. If something was necessary then Scriptures must be consulted in much more detail. He did not agree with the proposal. Two speakers did not want a minister's freedom to be constrained, for example a minister's authority to invite another minister into the pulpit or accepting an invitation to preach in another (denomination's) pulpit. A third speaker claimed that the rules were superfluous because the matters addressed in them were done by the PCEA anyway. Other speakers, in supporting the proposal, said that current ministers' privileges would not be taken away; the proposal was a response to problems and differences that surfaced during discussions with churches of Reformed origin such as the GKN. These churches are much more structured and formal in their approach to fraternal relations than the Presbyterians. It was for the sake of the "Dutch" churches that the FCS adopted these rules and they are now recommended to the PCEA for the same reason. The proposal was adopted by the Synod. This decision was obviously not easily made. It is seen as a significant change to the PCEA's approach to fraternal relations in that such relations need to be subject to formal rules as distinct from leaving these matters more informal, even though the things expressed in the rules are common place.

5.0 OTHER MATTERS

Synod decisions and hierarchy

A member of one of the Sydney congregations was permitted to put a petition before Synod. His complaint was that the Administration Committee had decided not to put a certain petition to synod. Synod was divided on whether to uphold his complaint and make a determination on his appeal. Some members considered that synod was empowered to make a determination on the appeal. Synod resolved, however, to

receive the petition but upheld the Administration Committee's decision not to transmit the original petition to synod and advised the petitioner to take the matter up in the lower courts in the appropriate manner. It was evident that the synod wanted to avoid upsetting the proper decision making process within the church; that is, that synod should not make a decision unless the appeal process through the lower courts had been properly carried out. This obviously avoids hierarchical tendencies. In another decision regarding a proposed amendment to the New South Wales Property Act 1918 a similar trend at the synod was observed. The Act, which governs the PCEA's land administration, stipulates that all decisions regarding land and property must be dealt with by Synod or its trustees. The 1918 Act affords no official recognition to any church court other than the Synod. (This was exemplified in another decision by Synod regarding property. Synod was requested to empower local deacon courts to execute (property) lease documents on behalf of (Synod) trustees. This request was not granted.) A motion was moved that a fresh amendment to the Act should be drafted. After considerable debate, with some members strongly opposing the motion, synod decided to instruct the appropriate committee to prepare a fresh draft amendment to the Act. From personal discussions we understand that support for the amendment was related to the fear that the rights of the local deacons courts, regarding local church property, were not sufficiently safeguarded.

In a third area of discussion and decision making it was evident that the synod guarded against "rule by committee". The Committee for Administration, having received Rev Gadsby's resignation as Clerk of Synod, decided some months prior to Synod to appoint someone else as Acting Clerk; at Synod the committee recommended that he be appointed Synod Clerk. There was criticism that the committee had appointed an acting Clerk without consulting the churches. Contrary to the committee's recommendation, Synod appointed Rev Dr Wes Hanna as Clerk of Synod effective from the rising of Synod.

6.0 COMMEMORATION OF THE DISRUPTION

Wednesday was largely set aside for a commemorative conference. During the day and evening the following series of papers were delivered to the meeting;

6.1 *The Teaching of the Westminster Confession on the Relationship between Church and State and The Headship of Christ in a Pluralistic Society* by Professor Graham Clement of the FCS. These papers gave a very clear description of these two subjects.

6.2 An in-depth book review was presented by Rev P. Hill (from Ulverstone) on Kenneth Ross's book *Church and Creed in Scotland: The Free Church Case 1900-04 and its Origins*. This was a very informative paper, particularly as the book raises some matters which are very pertinent to some of the areas of concern which the FRCA has raised with the PCEA. Two examples of the matters examined in the book (which is a PhD dissertation) are firstly the church's attitude to what is the true church and how other churches (denominations) should be viewed and, secondly what ought to be the church's relationship to its creeds. Over against the position of the United Free Church which claimed that spiritual independence made the church truly free, also regarding the creed, the Free Church of Scotland maintained a constitutional position, that is, free within the well defined bounds of its constitution. This book deserves the attention of the FRCA deputies as it will possibly throw more light on these important subjects.

6.3 Mr W Mackay delivered a paper headed *Dr Duff and the Principles of Missionary Education*.

(The papers referred to in 6.1 and 6.3 were reprinted in the "Banner")

It was evident from these papers and discussion that the PCEA desire to remain faithful to their Reformed heritage. They are concerned for the spiritual welfare of their churches. They are obviously willing to examine their own beliefs and habits in the light of Scriptures, history and their confessions. As one delegate put it: we must dust off what we may have neglected and (referring to Prof Graham's paper and

possible intrusion into church affairs by the governments) we may need to re-assert our church's independence.

7.0 PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

The FRCA delegates were very well received and had personal discussions probably with all the Synod delegates. During personal discussions we found the delegates very willing to speak about the issues which have been raised by the FRCA and found that there was more awareness of and thinking about the issues that we initially thought. Some find substance in our concerns, whilst others are more determined to maintain the PCEA's position on these matters.

It was disappointing that the papers prepared by the FRCA deputies were not dealt with by the whole ICR Committee.

The addresses given by the FRCA delegates to the Synod and the personal contact has, in the delegates' estimation, had a positive effect and has clarified a number of matters. It has again shown the value of personal contact. It is hoped that the visit has given some stimulation to the PCEA to more seriously study the matters raised by the FRCA.

The FRCA delegates, having observed the Synod and spoken to Synod delegates, consider that the PCEA does indeed wish to remain faithful to Scriptures and its own confessions. It does, however, have its problems some of which have been alluded to in this report. The PCEA is a small church (605 confessing members overall), with relatively few young families and a small youth group. These problems will not disappear in the short term.

Lastly, but not leastly, we are very thankful for the hospitality we received from the church, and in particular from K and T Longworth of Taree in whose house we lodged.

Appendix (to APPENDIX 2)

(EXTRACT FROM STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS TO P.C.E.A. SYNOD 1993)

3.6 Free Reformed Churches of Australia

3.6.1 Delegates to Synod 1993

As authorised by Synod 1992, Mr Gadsby represented our church at the Synod of the FRCA held at Bedforddale, WA in May 1992 and his address is included on pages 325-327 of the Acts of the FRCA Synod and an abbreviated report appeared in our church magazine. Mr Gadsby undertook that we would respond to the position papers on Fencing the tables and Pulpit Exchanges provided by the FRCA in 1991 (however this response seems to have already been made 10.12.91), and they would respond to two areas of criticism raised by us (see below). A request was received in late February 1993 that we receive two visitors at Synod - Rev Keith Kleyn of Tasmania and Mr John Bruning of Western Australia. We readily agreed, undertaking to meet accommodation and hospitality for these brothers. We think listening to them will help in gaining a balanced understanding of the FRCA.

3.6.2 Papers on the Church

The FRCA furnished us two papers at the end of December. The first is entitled "*The Doctrine of the Church: Is the FRCA Ahistorical?*" and aims to rebut the charge we made in late 1988 that their view of the church lacks adequate historical basis in the Reformed fathers. The paper shows the difficulties of the struggle for Reformed church life in The Netherlands in the 16th century and the anxiety of the Reformed to maintain unity among themselves. But it does not properly address the broad principles of the Reformers' doctrine of the church as for example in Ursinus' Commentary on the Catechism LD22. Significantly, it concludes: "Even de Bres' own conviction concerning what the church might be is not determinative for what the churches are to believe. What is determinative is only the holy Word of God itself." This sounds good at first glance but could cover a modification from the grammatical-historical meaning of the Belgic Confession which, of course, is the only proper

manner of understanding the teaching of the Confession and what adherence to it means. This seems to echo what was actually expressed to us in 1988, namely, that their view may well be new but it is Scriptural. Our response was that a *gravamen* must be brought against the teaching of the Confession and amendment made before we could regard these views as having proper status.

The second and quite short paper is called "*Discussion Paper on Pluriformity or Denominationalism*." It is marred by its confusion of our recognition of the reality of the existence of difference denominations with the view credited to Abraham Kuyper which justified the existence of different denominations because they embraced complementary aspects of the truth. We are ready to acknowledge that denominationalism as described on page 2 of the paper is unscriptural and productive of many evils. It is precisely because we believe we are obliged to adhere to the whole counsel of God that we maintain our distinct position. But the paper seems to play with words, and in its last paragraphs states: "That we object against the doctrine of pluriformity does not imply that we deny the existence of a plurality of churches. Through weakness and sin there can be separate churches which should in fact be one. Let us not call that plurality of the churches pluriformity. Then we would be using a beautiful word for an ugly matter."

We consider that those who have written these papers need to stop looking for reasons to create or maintain divisions. We are encouraged by the more open and informed approach of the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands, and we are aware that the FRCA is divided on the subject. We are ready to continue dialogue with these brothers because their history is such that we can expect them to be cautious. We have learned and profited from our contacts and hope for more substantial progress in the next year or two especially in the aftermath of the ICRC meeting.

APPENDIX 2.1

Greetings from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia

Following is the text of the address to Synod by the Rev. C.Kleyn, minister of the Free Reformed Church of Legana.

Esteemed brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

May I begin by thanking you for the opportunity to address your Synod. Thank you also for the privileges you afforded us as delegates from the FRCA.

During the last few days it became clear once again that we have much in common as churches. In a way you can say that we are both 'liberated' churches.

References to the Disruption at this Synod reminded us of God's care in the history of your churches. He is the one who freed your 'mother' churches in Scotland from outside interference. He kept those churches under the sole Headship of Jesus Christ so that the spiritual independence of the church under Christ could be maintained. What happened in the mother country had repercussions here in Australia. A choice had to be made here as well. When the Presbyterian Church in Australia chose in favour of ties with the Established Church of Scotland and thus failed to support the spiritual principles which led to the Disruption it was a matter of conscience for you to constitute the PCEA. We see this as an act of God in preserving His Church. To him be given all glory while you commemorate the Disruption of 1843 and its aftermath here in Australia.

As FRCA we went through similar experiences during the forties and fifties of this century. This time it wasn't the State we had to free ourselves from. It was the Synod which was lording over the churches. In 1942 the Synod of the RCN required all office bearers to subscribe to doctrinal pronouncements which could not be proved from Scripture and in fact went beyond Scripture. Conscientious objectors were told that they could appeal to Synod but meanwhile would have to submit to synodical decisions and to comply with any future synodical decisions. An hierarchical spirit had entered the churches in which the Synod ruled the churches from above. No redress was forthcoming. Instead, all objections were overruled and all 'schismatics' suspended and/or deposed, with even whole churches being expelled from the federa-

tion. This led to the Liberation of 1944. Through the grace of God churches freed themselves from synodical hierarchy and from unscriptural pronouncements. God brought churches back under the sole Headship of Jesus Christ. This Liberation also had repercussions in Australia. When the Reformed Churches of Australia entered sister relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Synodical) migrants from the RCN (Liberated) were forced for conscience's sake to establish the separate Free Reformed Churches of Australia. With your own background you will be able to understand how painful it was to make such a decision.

Since the PCEA was formed in 1846 you have shown that you want to hold on to the Word of God and the Reformed Confession. Your history is marked by the continuous refusal to go along with unions where unity was sought at the cost of the truth. The termination of your membership of the RES in 1981 showed that you reject a false ecumenism. We praise God for the faithfulness He has given you. It was with joy that the 1987 Synod of the FRCA acknowledged that between the FRCA and the PCEA there is a oneness in desire to serve the Lord according to his Word. This was confirmed by our 1990 Synod. On the basis of this oneness in desire to serve the Lord our deputies were mandated to work towards a mutual recognition of each other as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the light of this goal to continue to discuss further with the PCEA the remaining areas of concern.

The teasing question is: why hasn't the FRCA recognised the PCEA as true churches yet? Already in 1983 the FRCA gave that recognition to the Free Church of Scotland (FCS). Why that different treatment? In his address to our recent Synod, Rev. Gadsby rightly so focused on that inconsistency. It is an inconsistency which does no credit to our churches. Worse still it does no credit to the Lord of the Church. This puts the FRCA under a serious obligation to solve this matter.

Allow me to mention a few things which might explain that inconsistency.

1. RECOGNITION OF THE FREE CHURCH

Regarding the recognition of the FCS in 1983, it must be noted that this Synod did not feel free to join the ICRC without first recognising as true and faithful each of the churches present at its Constituent Assembly. For that reason, the FRCA in Synod 1983, on the basis of oral reports presented by the FRCA delegates who were present at the Constituent Assembly, decided to recognise as true churches of the Lord the FCS, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan. In Synod 85, however, the FRCA declared that these decisions of 1983 were taken 'with undue haste and without due consideration'. Synod therefore instructed deputies to thoroughly investigate these churches, and report to the next Synod. Special attention was to be given to the marks of the true church and the question of church government (Article 43). On the basis of a report from deputies, Synod 1987 reaffirmed the statement made by the 1983 Synod that the FCS is a faithful church of the Lord.

After the experience of 1983 one might expect a far greater caution in recognising other churches.

2. POTENTIAL EFFECTS

In the midst of its discussions on the PCEA, Synod 85 paused to consider what the practical effects of recognition involved. The following statement was adopted:

'our recognition of another Church as being 'true and faithful Church of our Lord Jesus Christ'

1. means that both churches, and that recognised church stand on the foundations as expressed in Article 27 to 32 of the Belgic Confession;
2. has as a direct consequence that a sister-church relationship can be established, without disregarding the fact that historical developments may well give cause to several stumbling blocks still living on the road to a practical realisation of unity; and
3. that our church members must join that church, and vice versa, in the case that such church is their nearest church, in accordance with Article 20 of the Belgic Confession.'

Synod 1987 confirmed that decision and considered the following: 'In order to decide whether the synod was ready to recognise the PCEA as true and faithful churches, it first considered the practical results of such a possible recognition of the PCEA.' It is clear that the FRCA take the recognition of other churches very seriously. Recognition means that we see the other churches as bride of Christ, as a mother to whom we can confidently entrust our people. The FRCA are convinced from Scripture that recognition should ultimately lead to total and visible unity. Christ's body is not divided. As J. Murray writes (I quote via Rev. Ward's recent commentary on the Westminster Confession): 'But while spurious unity is to be condemned, the lack of unity among churches of Christ which profess the faith in its purity is a patent violation of the unity of the body of Christ, and of that unity which the prayer of our Lord requires us to promote... The unity which our Lord prayed for was one that would bear witness to the world, and therefore belonged to the realm of the observable. The implications for visible confession and witness are unavoidable.' (J. Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:335)

3. CONTINUING CONCERNS

Finally, the 1992 Synod of the FRCA was apparently not yet satisfied with the progress of the discussion on the remaining areas of concern. Synod considered 'That only one response has come from the deputies of the PCEA to the position paper of our deputies would indicate that the discussion on these points is unfinished and needs more time.'

We would therefore like to plead with you to take the matters we have raised in our contacts with you seriously. Synod 1992 reiterated the mandate given to previous deputies 'to work towards a mutual recognition of each other as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the light of this goal: to continue to study and discuss further with the PCEA the remaining areas of concern specified by Synod 1987, viz., the supervision of the Lord's table, the practice of pulpit exchanges and the position of children of the covenant. In this discussion about the areas of concern the confession of the doctrine of the church should be addressed when applicable. Due attention must be given to our concern about possible unscriptural concepts regarding interdenominationalism. All this should be done in the light of God's Word giving heed to the complete doctrine of salvation.' Please accept from us that those matters are raised out of concern for the Lord's honour. Also because your churches and your youth are dear to our heart. Our very presence here shows how much we value our contact with your churches.

It must be disappointing to you, as it is to us, that we don't seem to be making much progress in the discussion of those concerns. Maybe we have not understood each other properly yet. Maybe we have been unfair in our comments. Please do not let that hinder you in seriously considering those concerns. Search the Scriptures with us to see what God would want us to do. Correct us where we are mistaken. We too need correction and help. The Word of the Lord has not started with us, nor has it come to us only. May we convince each other on the basis of that Word.

On the basis of our oneness in desire to service the Lord according to His Word Synod indicated that there is every reason to continue our contacts. Even though our confessional standards are not identical we do share a great reformed heritage in those confessions. We both acknowledge Jesus Christ as the only Head of the church and reject hierarchy. We live in the same country. We are both members of the ICRC. We both have the same goal in view: the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers, let the expectation of Christ's coming press us to move ahead together. We will need a lot of patience and understanding. But it is worth the effort. Satan, the great opponent of the church, knows that his days are numbered. He will do anything to entice the faithful ones away from Christ. In this so-called post-Christian era he seems to be having his way. In this struggle we need each others support.

Brothers, once again I thank you for the opportunity to address you. May the Lord bless you here at Synod and in the various congregations you may serve. May the Lord bless our contacts so that on the basis of mutual trust we may build each other up in the Lord. Thank you.

Rules for Fraternal Relations

There should be one simple rule to the following effect.

Fraternal Relations should exist between Churches that openly and practically profess the true faith of Christ as summarised in one or more of the classical Reformed symbols - ie the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgian Confession, the Canons of the Synod of Dort.

Certain duties and courtesies devolve upon Churches sustaining fraternal relations.

1. There should be a spirit of cordial love and trust as becomes brothers in faith.

2. There should be an attitude of mutual helpfulness. Each should be willing to share problems and difficulties with the others. By the same token each should be allowed to exhort to more exact obedience any who appeared to relax in faithfulness to their avowed confession. This should not invite to inquisitorial interference but to strengthening one another in love for Christ.

3. There should be willingness to accept certificates of communicant membership, normally without personal examination.

4. There should be in the highest courts of the Churches a cordial welcome to visiting delegates from other Churches recognised as in fraternal relationship. This need not amount to according membership in the court to the visiting delegate.

5. There should be willingness to allow ministers of one Church access to the pulpits of fraternal Churches as a matter of courtesy.

6. Churches should exchange copies of the Acts and Proceedings of their highest courts or at least inform one another of major decisions.

APPENDIX 3

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IS THE FRCA AHISTORICAL?

A. INTRODUCTION: The Problem

In the course of discussions between deputies from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, it became apparent to both parties that a difference existed between the two churches relating to the doctrine of the church. From the side of the PCEA it was maintained that numerous of the churches of Australia are to be considered "churches", be it that the one church is "more pure" than the other. Certainly as far as the more conservative churches in Australia are concerned, then, one ought not to hesitate to give to these denominations the label "true church". The discussion between deputies from the FRCA and the PCEA in Western Australia in November 1988 produced the following characterization of PCEA thought on the matter:

"...the PCEA will not deny the title 'church' to any 'denomination' holding the central truth of Jesus Christ crucified (justification by faith) even though that church may stray on various other points. Any 'denomination' is 'church' if it confesses this central doctrine of the Bible and is more or less pure depending on the extent to which it holds correctly to the various other dogmas revealed in Scripture. The PCEA sees in each such 'relatively pure' church a manifestation of the one church of Jesus Christ."¹

This characterization of the PCEA understanding of 'church' is underlined by the report of deputies from the PCEA to their 1991 Synod:

"We do not unchurch the local baptist reformed church, but regard it as impure and in fact, unscriptural and unreformed, in its doctrine of the church."²

It is this willingness to consider other (conservative) churches as true churches of Jesus Christ (be it more impure than themselves) that leads to the opening of pulpits to ministers from these other true churches and allowing guests from other evangelical churches at their Lord's Supper table.³

In discussions with the PCEA on this point of where the church is, deputies from the FRCA have in the past maintained⁴ that the Scriptures teach a doctrine concerning the church that disallows the PCEA habit of considering other (less pure) churches to be true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. This stance on the part of the FRCA deputies was characterized by deputies from the PCEA as being ahistorical and narrow-minded. In a letter dated three months after the November 1988 meeting, the PCEA Inter-Church Relations Committee wrote a letter to FRCA deputies. With reference to the November meeting, they write:

"We also expressed the view that the FRCA deputies seemed to be promoting a novel interpretation of the Belgic Confession's teaching on the Church, one which was not that prevailing in Reformed orthodoxy in the 16th and 17th centuries."⁵

The letter drew attention to two books from recognized scholars,⁶ both of whom—the letter continues— provide historical data supporting the practice of the PCEA to recognize other (less pure) churches as true churches of Christ. To quote the letter:

"Heppe (p.669) and De Jong (p.268ff) provide ample evidence that the general position of the Reformed was to recognize the Lutherans, to the extent of permitting them access to the Lord's Supper even without transfer of membership, since they agreed with the Reformed in "the fundamental points of true religion, and because there was neither superstition nor idolatry in their worship" (Synod of Charenton, France, 1631). And this despite the Reformed's regarding the Lutheran Church as schismatic, ie, preserving faith's foundation but departing from some doctrine. De Jong gives only one case of a Reformed writer who regarded the Lutheran Church as no longer a true Church, and then it was chiefly in reference to the Church at Frankfurt which had persecuted the Reformed."⁷

Here, then, say the deputies from the PCEA Inter-Church Relations Committee, is evidence that the (deputies from) the FRCA tender a novel and ahistorical interpretation of the Belgic Confession's doctrine of the Church. This will not do, deputies from the PCEA add, for

"...the only view we can regard as official is that originally intended by the framer of the Belgic Confession...."

Accordingly, it shall need to be demonstrated whether the stance taken by the FRCA is novel, or whether it is in fact historical. In pursuit of an answer to the question posed, we propose to examine first what various Dutch ecclesiastical bodies have decided in the 16th century. These data together will give us a rather adequate perception of what the framer of the Belgic Confession had in mind. In the second place, we consider whether the material brought up by Heppe and deJong indeed demonstrates that the general position of the Reformed was to recognize the Lutherans. We append some concluding remarks.

B. ECCLESIASTICAL DECISIONS re LORD'S SUPPER ATTENDANCE

In their Synods in the later part of the sixteenth century, the Dutch churches made various decisions that demonstrate how they viewed other churches. In particular, their decisions on the matter of who could attend the Lord's Supper table, and upon what conditions, is instructive.⁸

In 1568, seven years after deBres wrote his Confession, a number of leading figures of the churches in the Netherlands came together in order to lay some groundwork for the establishment of a bond of churches. Their meeting—known as the Convent of Wesel— produced a number of Articles for a potential Church Order, including some on the Sacraments.⁹ We read the following:

"No one shall be admitted to the Table of the Lord, unless he has first made

profession of his faith, and has submitted himself to the discipline of the church."¹⁰

Once a bond of churches was established, the churches met together to discuss issues of mutual concern. The national Synod of Dordrecht of 1578 concluded as follows about admission to the table of the Lord (Art 12):

"No one shall be received into the congregation unless they have first been interrogated by the consistory or by a minister and an elder regarding the summary of the Christian doctrine. And before they attend the Lord's Supper they shall, either in the consistory or in (the) church (service), after the sermon which is delivered immediately preceeding the administration of the Lord's Supper, publically profess that they hold for good [=true] the doctrine received in the congregation and briefly explained by the minister, and that they desire to persevere in the same with the help of the Lord, and that they submit themselves to Christian admonition."¹¹

This same Synod was asked whether it was permissible to allow to the Table of the Lord those who recognized the Bible alone to be God's Word but declined to answer those questions which were normally asked of those who were to go to the Table. The reply was as follows:

"The churches shall continue to insist upon the common manner of professing the faith, and everyone is bound to give account of his faith according to the teaching of Peter..."¹²

The Synod of Middelburg 1581 decided the following:

"One shall not admit anyone to the Lord's supper except him who, according to the custom of the congregation to which he joins himself, has made profession of the Reformed religion,¹³ together with a testimony of a pious life, without which also those from other churches shall not be admitted."¹⁴

This finding of the Synod of Middelburg was repeated verbatim¹⁵ by the subsequent Synods of 1586 and of 1618/19.¹⁶

The decisions recorded above were made by the churches who lived in the shadow of deBres. These same churches had gladly received deBres' confession and in the Synods officially adopted it. Yet these churches maintained high standards for Lord's supper attendance, insisting upon profession of "the (pure) Reformed religion" and submission to the discipline of the overseers. Striking is that no allowance for attendance was made for those who refused to profess the Reformed religion.

C. RECOGNITION OF THE LUTHERANS? The Synod of Emden

At a provincial synod held in Bedburg in June 1571, Holland's political leader (and supporter of the Reformed faith) requested the churches to consider what might be the best way to obtain unity with those churches who hold the Augsburg Confession.¹⁷ This provincial synod declined to pursue the received request, opting instead to leave the matter to the forthcoming general Synod in Emden.¹⁸

In this Synod in turn (held later in the same year), the churches went their own way, despite pressure from the authorities. The Augsburg Confession is not so much as mentioned in the Acts of the Synod of Emden. As one author put it: this synod caused "her Reformed position to be distinctly expressed."¹⁹ The point was not that the Reformed churches were parochial, for they readily subscribed not only to the Belgic Confession but also to the Gallic Confession embraced by the Reformed churches of France.²⁰ Rather, the churches in the Synod of Emden desired a bond of churches bound by the truth alone.

D. RECOGNITION OF THE LUTHERANS? Frankfurt

In the communication which FRCA deputies received from the PCEA Inter-Church Relations Committee,²¹ it is contended that "the general position of the Reformed was to recognize the Lutherans." This contention is supported by a reference to a decision of the French Synod of Charenton in 1631. It needs to be kept in mind, however, that a decision of a Synod made a full 60 years—two generations—after deBres authored the Belgic Confession cannot be adduced as evidence of whether deBres would have recognized non-Reformed churches as true. To discover whether

deBres (as well as the churches who adopted his confession) recognized the Lutherans, one needs to produce evidence from the time of deBres. As it turns out, there appears to be no evidence from deBres himself concerning his personal sentiments re the Lutheran churches.²² Yet that turns out to be explainable, for at the time deBres wrote his confession the contours of the various bonds of churches had not yet developed.²³

Nevertheless, the charge quoted above—that “the general position of the Reformed was to recognize the Lutherans”—can be shown to be incorrect for the time of deBres.²⁴ This can be done with reference to none else than John Calvin and Peter Dathenus.²⁵

Because of the persecutions raging in the Netherlands in the 1550's, various Reformed people from the Netherlands sought refuge in Germany (as well as England). In the German city of Frankfort²⁶ the (Dutch) Reformed refugees had their own place for worship; they did not worship with the (German) locals. The moment came, however, when the authorities—it happened in 1561—closed the Reformed church building in a bid to encourage the refugees to worship with the locals. This put pressure on the Dutch, particularly in as much as their children could be not be baptized except in the local church. Peter Dathenus, one of the ministers in the Reformed refugee community, considered that baptism might be possible in the church of the locals as long as the parents explained that they could not support the Lutheran teaching concerning baptism. A fellow minister, Casper vanderHeyden, disagreed, arguing that the Lutherans were enemies of the Gospel. The resulting tension²⁷ in the Reformed refugee community prompted Dathenus to seek advice from John Calvin in Geneva. In a letter dated 28 April 1562, Dathenus writes a.o. the following:

“After a decision of the Council deprived us of the administration, most of our countrymen presented their children for baptism to the ministers of the German churches. For we have never had a struggle with those ministers concerning the doctrine of baptism.... [Despite some local ideosyncracies], a denial of the doctrine is demanded of no one, but we have always steadfastly and most freely confessed the truth and challenged the error. However, this letting-be-baptized-by-the-Germans caused offense to our countrymen in Brabant and in Flanders, and later also to those living in exile in Sandwich and in London, so that they accuse us of who knows what apostacy.... We, however, maintain firmly that we know ourselves to be guilty of no sin in this matter. For we say that we use baptism in a true church of Christ.... They, however, insist that where the pure doctrine is thus rejected, there is no church either....”

In his answer (dated 18 June),²⁸ Calvin indicated that he did not consider it acceptable to receive baptism in a church that preached erring sentiments concerning the doctrine of Lord's Supper unless one was willing to express publicly that he objected to that Lutheran doctrine. Calvin straightaway added his conviction that the Lutherans would not be willing to baptize children presented to them on this condition. Hence Calvin considered it best to that the “well-meaning and godly prepare themselves to seek another place of refuge.” Meanwhile, Calvin did not—in the correspondenced cited—roundly agree with the conviction taken by vanderHeyden to the effect that the local church of Frankfort was no church of Jesus Christ.

On the surface of things, then, it would appear that Calvin recognized the Lutheran church. What one must observe, though, is how Dathenus refers to the local church. In his communications Dathenus does not describe the local church with the label “Lutheran”; he describes it rather with the label “German”. Why that was? Because there was at this time not yet an established bond of Lutheran churches, of which the native church of Frankfort was one. Rather, at the time when the Dutch refugees found haven in Frankfort, the local church was neither distinctly Lutheran nor distinctly Reformed; it allowed room for both groups. So it was that Dathenus could write that “a denial of the doctrine is demanded of no one, but we have always steadfastly and most freely confessed the truth and challenged the error.” So it was too that in the years just prior to the closing of the Reformed place of worship, the

local church had on staff two (weak and aged) Calvinist ministers.²⁹ It was not until the Lutherans in the local church allowed no room for Reformed sentiment—which Calvin expected; witness how he predicted that the Lutheran ministers would reject the demand of the Reformed to state publicly their views re Lord's Supper—that Calvin counselled no further participation in this church. It was Calvin's firm conviction that where the sacrament of Lord's Supper was erroneously proclaimed, one was not to use the sacraments.³⁰ What else is this than a rejection of a hard-nosed Lutheran group as true church?³¹

Heppe and deJong had made reference to one instance to demonstrate their contention that the Reformed community (of the sixteenth century) generally recognized the Lutherans as a church of Jesus Christ. This one instance, however, does not demonstrate what Heppe and deJong contend. Instead, the actual evidence of the sixteenth century—witness both the decisions of the major assemblies re Lord's Supper attendance and the unwillingness of the Synod of Emden (though under political pressure) to recognize the Augsburg Confession, as well as the fact that the matter was an issue in the Reformed community in Frankfurt—point in the opposite direction.

That the FRCA, then, refuses to recognize as true other churches which do not govern themselves according to the pure Word of God, is in keeping with the thinking and practice of the fathers at the time when the Belgic Confession was drawn up and adopted by the churches. Unless deBres thought differently than did the churches who adopted his confession (and there is no evidence to support such a difference), it must be said that the FRCA follows in the line of the Confession's framer.

With regards to the seventeenth century, thinking on the matter was different, as is evidenced (in France) by the decision of the French Synod of Charenton in 1631. To investigate the extent of and the reasons for this difference is, however, not necessary with a view to the purpose of this paper.

E. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The evidence accumulated in this paper gives reassurance to deputies from the FRCA that their stand on the doctrine of the church as defended in the November 1988 meeting was not ahistorical. Yet we shall do well to bear in mind that no doctrine is to be embraced as true simply because "custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes"³² have defended a particular doctrine. All men, after all, "are of themselves liars."³³ So it is that even deBres' own conviction concerning what the church might be is not determinative for what the churches are to believe. What is determinative is only the holy Word of God itself.

C Bouwman

December 8, 1992

FOOTNOTES

1. The "Summary" from which this quote is taken has been printed in its entirety in the 1990 Acts of the FRCA, pg 189f. The document was considered by all in attendance to be an accurate presentation of what was defended at the meeting as the understanding common in the PCEA on this aspect of the doctrine of the church.

2. of "Inter-church Relations Report", in Committee Reports to synod 1991, pg 77.

3. See again the "Summary" mentioned earlier.

4. See, for example, the so-called "Excursus" as included in the Report of Deputies to the 1990 Synod of the FRCA, Acts, pg 179ff. The matter has received further attention in the Position Paper relating to Pulpit Exchange and Fencing of the Lord's Table, to which a response from the PCEA is awaited.

5. The letter is dated 31 January 1989. It is available from deputies' archives.

6. The two books mentioned are: "H. Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics (first published in German in 1861, and translated into English in 1950, with reprint by Baker Book House, 1978). This includes a careful compilation of quotations from Reformed theologians" and "P.Y. deJong, The Church's Witness to the World, Paideia Press, 1980."

7. In the report of the PCEA Inter-Church Relations Committee to their 1991 Synod, reference is made to the letter of 31 January 1989. The following comment is added:

"It is notable that the FRCA Deputies did not respond to the Committee's letter of 31.01.89 by

- way of showing that their stated position is consistent with the historic understanding of their own subordinate standards."
- Their report to the 1992 Synod mentions the matter again with these words:
- "...we still await their paper on this matter."
- These two references could give the impression that FRCA deputies were reluctant to research the matter for fear of finding that their position might indeed be ahistorical. This impression, however, would be incorrect. When FRCA deputies received the letter of 31.01.89, they satisfied themselves that their position was historical. Time constraints prevented deputies from finalizing a paper on the matter at this time. The project was shelved when deputies received a letter from the PCEA Inter-Church Relations Committee dated 3 July 1990 in which reference was made to the various papers that were to be written by persons from both deputyships. That letter included the following question:
- "Perhaps we should leave these unwritten papers in the past, and set ourselves a new agenda for the next few years?"
- Deputies from the FRCA assented.
- The reference to such a paper in the 1991 Report to the PCEA Synod prompted deputies to decide as yet to produce such a paper (cf Minutes of Deputies meeting dated 10 May 1991). However, circumstances have prevented deputies from carrying out this undertaking until the present time.
8. cf Acta van de Nederlandsche Synoden der Zestiende Eeuw (English: Acts of the Dutch Synods of the Sixteenth Century), edited by FL Rutgers. The edition consulted was the second unaltered print, published by JP vandenTol, Dordrecht, 1980. Further, grateful use has been made of the material collated and translated by Rev G vanRongen, as it appeared in the 14 March 1992 issue of Una Sancta.
9. As this meeting was not official in the sense that it was a proper ecclesiastical meeting composed of brothers delegated by the churches (for there was not yet a bond of churches; a bond was not established until the Synod of 1571), the resulting Articles had no official status in the churches. Yet in as much as the conclusions of this Convent give us insight into the thinking of the times, these Articles are relevant for our purpose today. Furthermore, they form the basis for the Church Order developed in the following years.
10. Acta, pg 29.
11. Ibid, pg 250.
12. Ibid, pg 271f, Question 35.
13. The latin text includes the word 'pure': "nisi puram seu reformatam religionem...professus"
14. Art 43, Acta, pg 392.
15. Except for some changes of spelling and grammar.
16. Hence our own Church Order, rooted as it is in the Order adopted by the Synod of Dort, reads as follows (in the formulation provisionally adopted by Synod 1992):
- "The consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only they who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Members of sister-churches shall be admitted on the ground of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct."
17. for details the reader is referred to J Kamphuis, Zo Vonden wij Elkaar (Groningen: de Vuurbaak, n.d.), pg 49f.
18. cf "De Acta van de Provinciale Synode der verstooide Kerken..., d.d. 3 en 4 Jule 1571", reprinted in F L Rutgers, De Geldigheid van de Oude Kerkenordening der Nederlandsche Gereformeerde Kerken (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1971), pg 52ff.
19. FL Rutgers, De Geldigheid der oude Kerkordening der Nederlandsche Gereformeerde Kerken (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1971 reprint), pg 14: Zij heeft "juist integendeel haar Gereformeerd standpunt zeer beslist doen uitkomen."
20. "De Acta der Emdensche Synode van 1571, Art 2, printed in Acta van de Nederlandsche Synoden der Zestiende Eeuw (Dordrecht: JP vandenTol, 1980), pg 56.
21. See the relevant quote on page 3 above. Reference was made to works by H Heppe and P Y deJong as evidence that the FRCA was ahistorical. It should be noted that Heppe's book serves the reader with a compilation of what numerous authors wrote on various points of doctrine. As to P Y deJong, let it be kept in mind that deJong is a disciple of Abraham Kuyper, and as such what he writes about the church ought to be read with that perspective in mind.
22. See further L Doekes, "De Reformatorische Onderscheiding van de Ware en Valse Kerk" (English: The Reformational Distinction between the True and the False Church), Lucerna, 5 (1965), pg 265.
23. See note 3 on page 6. See also Schilder, De Kerk, III, 46ff.
24. This paper does not seek to sort out what each leader of significance in the Reformed churches said concerning the Lutherans in the sixteenth century. DeJong mentions variations between Farel, Bude, Beza and a Lasco on the one hand, and Bullinger, Peter Martyr and Haller on the other (pg 269). DeJong may be correct. Yet that there be differences need surprise no one; there is always room for personal opinion. The point we need to consider is what the actual practice in the

churches as a whole was. Is there evidence that the churches as a whole recognized the Lutheran churches as true churches of Jesus Christ?

25. This is the same man who had such a profound influence on the liturgical developments in the Dutch churches.

26. For the information in what follows, use has been made of the dissertation by Th. Ruys jr, entitled *Petrus Dathenus* (Utrecht: GJA Ruys, 1919), pg 36ff. See further K Schilder, *De Kerk*, III, pg 41ff, 64ff. Deputies were not able to obtain copies of the original correspondence, and so had to be satisfied with quotes from the above mentioned sources.

27. It should be observed that the very fact that an issue as this generated tension implies that the (reformed) refugee community had no shallow understanding of the boundaries of the church.

28. Dathenus requested more clarity in a letter dated 18 September 1562, to which Calvin replied on 17 October.

29. cf Ruys, 19.

30. This conviction on Calvin's part came out even stronger in his second letter to Dathenus, dated 27 October 1562.

31. One notices that with Calvin's judgment about the local church in Frankfort, one of the marks of the church is no longer considered to be present. That 'church' instead insists on alterations to the sacraments God has given, and so makes life intolerable for those who wish to remain faithful to God's revelation.

32. *Belgic Confession*, Art 7.

33. *Ibid*.

APPENDIX 4

Letter to PCEA (20-3-92) and their reply (1-12-93)

20 March 1992

Reverend W P Gadsby
Convener, Interchurch Relations Committee
Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
9 Craiglea Close
Taree NSW 2430

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the name of our sovereign Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

This letter is in reply to your writing dated 10.12.91 in which you gave your reply to our Position Paper on Pulpit Exchange and the Fencing of the Lord's Table. We thank you for your response and would ask you to carefully consider this reply.

Brothers, we are disappointed if not dismayed at your response to our Position Paper. While we tried to convince you with Scriptural and confessional arguments you appear to have by-passed these. You leave us guessing why this is so. If we are truly desirous of heeding Christ's prayer for the unity of His church must we not weigh each other's arguments carefully and in good faith? Could it be that you consider us to have been unfair or judgmental in our appraisal of your position? If so please point out our error.

We asked you in all seriousness if the practice of allowing a Reformed Baptist on one of your pulpits is not in conflict with the truth expressed in art. 1 of the Westminster Confession. In reply you appear to place a denial of infant baptism in the same category as an understanding of the fourth commandment which is nuanced from that expressed in WCF ch 21. Surely you ought to be more discerning here. While the first is a matter of substance involving an error or deviation from the truth the latter is a difference of approach. While the stress of WCF ch 21 may be somewhat different than that (e.g.) of HC LD 38, yet these confessional statements cannot be said to be in conflict. May the same be said of a Reformed Baptist's view of the covenant and that stated in, (e.g.), WCF ch 28 (4) or HC LD 27?

The point we have tried to make is that we are afraid that you leave room for confusion and for relativising the truth by failing to insist that a preacher must be committed to the whole counsel of God. We agree that a congregation ought not to believe what the preacher says "simply because he says it". Yet the congregation has a right to expect that the minister's confession is in wholehearted conformity with the truth!

We believe that you are on slippery ground in suggesting that a man may be found "faithful, gifted, a man of God endowed with the Holy Spirit" even if he is committed to a deviation from the true and complete doctrine of salvation. In this reasoning we detect a lack of discernment between a concrete, confessional commitment to the whole of God's revelation and what amounts to personal piety and a godly walk of life. No one will deny that there are many sincere Christians in other denominations. Yet we would maintain that there is an inherent conflict between what you confess in ch 21.5 of the WC on the one hand and your stand on pulpit exchange on the other. Brothers surely the doctrine of the covenant may not be divorced from the whole counsel of God? Surely this may not be left up to one's private opinion? We are aware that when you invite a Reformed baptist to your pulpit there is an understanding that this is a "privilege not to be abused." Yet it is conceivable that a pious and godly priest of Rome might be found as obliging. Where do you draw the line? Is there then a hierarchy of doctrines that would make some more, some less expendable?

We live in a climate of false ecumenism in which we see more and more deviation from the truth. How are God's people to be protected if you blur the distinction between truth and error? God's Holy Word calls us to be faithful watchmen who must "hold fast" the good confession. (Heb.4:14) Are we being judgemental or sectarian here? Brothers be assured we do not judge the individual but we are surely called to evaluate and judge the truth. We are not fighting for a viewpoint but for the maintenance of the norms of God's Word.

We continue to have similar difficulty with your position regarding the fencing of the Lord's Table. You suggest that our position (requiring a wholehearted, confessional commitment to the full doctrine of salvation) is "an extreme position" and one which is not characteristic of those churches which adhere to the Westminster Standards. Once again you make reference to Hepp and De Jong whose review of history indicates that such an "extreme position" was not taken by the Reformed many years ago.

Brothers we have pointed out that history may never be the norm for our actions and positions today. Though history can be instructive, God's Word is our only directive. Recently Rev. G. Van Rongen has shown (Una Sancta vol.39,# 10) that synods of continental Reformed churches in the late 16th and early 17th centuries consistently required agreement with the confessions as a pre-requisite for attending the Lord's Table.

You state that, "If Christ accepts people who believe in him, then they cannot be refused in spite of which church they attend." Yet Christ does not accept people irrespective of their confession. The same Christ who opened His arms to repentant sinners expects His people not to deviate from the truth. (John 8:31,32; Eph. 4:14; II Tim. 3:14) The warnings issued to the churches in Asia minor (Rev.2&3) bear testimony of the unfathomable love of Christ, a love and care which includes His solemn insistence on purity of doctrine and conduct.

Brothers we are disappointed in that you appear to devalue a person's "church affiliation". Though we are aware that Christ knows those who are His are we not to be obedient to God's concrete demand that His children "depart from evil and do good" and "touch no unclean thing"? (Ps. 34:14; Isa.52:11) We are thankful that you do "point out and denounce" the errors of other churches from time to time. If then through errors God's people are often led astray ought you not to insist that those who sit down at the Lord's table break with such errors? If you do not do so we fear you leave the impression that Christ's body is divided and that truth and error do in fact mix.

Concerning the Doctrine of the Church we are sorry that you see us as the villain out to "brand" you with the 'iron' of pluriformity. It is not our intention to brand or label you at all. If the term "pluriformity" is offensive to you and we have failed to define it accurately the fault may be ours and we will seek to correct it. We do not want to use the term as a "slogan or catch-cry" at all. We understand it to indicate that view of the church- gathering work of Christ which does not do sufficient justice to Christ's call for true unity in faith and doctrine. (Eph.4)

Please remember that in discussing those areas which were of concern to Synod

Armada 1990 we were mandated to address the "confession of the doctrine of the church...when applicable". In this connection Synod stated that Due attention must be given to our concern about possible unscriptural concepts regarding the 'pluriformity of the church'. (ACTS Art.77, RECOM.5a)

By using this expression we do not at all imply that amongst you there is an "undiscriminating acceptance of all the errors of other denominations." We do question however, whether in your view of the church you pay sufficient heed to Christ's concrete call for faithfulness to the "true and complete doctrine of salvation". (Form For The Baptism Of Infants, Book Of Praise, p.587)

You consider our stated position re. the church to be "an interesting -if unbalanced view of the biblical data." May we ask you as yet to serve us with what you may consider to be a more balanced view? If we are to "work towards a mutual recognition of each other as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ" do we not owe it to each other to discuss this crucial matter as soon as possible. Why do you desire a "formal declaration by the FRCA of its interpretation of the Three Forms"? Does this not betray a lack of trust in us? Let us address the issues in a forthright, biblical manner. We do not say that we have the last word on these things but we will make no progress unless you respond with substance.

Brothers in closing, please be assured that we desire to sit down with you so that we may discuss these matters face to face. Though we are unable to visit you at this time we hope you will be able to answer our recent invitation to you in a positive manner.

With brotherly greetings;
faithfully yours
C Bouwman J Eikelboom
(convener) (secretary)

REPLY 1-12-93

Pulpit and Communion Table

This paper is a response approved by the PCEA Inter-Church Relations Committee to a Position Paper approved by the FRCA Deputies in March 1991, and provided to members of the Synod of Eastern Australia at their meeting in April 1991.

A response to the FRCA Paper was made by this Committee in a letter of 10 December 1991. This covered the points of Pulpit Exchange, Fencing of the Lord's Table, and the Doctrine of the Church. On 25 March 1992 the PCEA CVommittee received the FRCA Deputies' comments on this response, stating that they were 'disappointed if not dismayed' with it, and giving some comments upon it.

When then Convener of this Committee visited WA in May 1992, he was able to meet with the FRCA Deputies and discuss some of these matters. He undertook that the PCEA would furnish a fuller response to the FRCA Position Paper, including the Excursus on the Doctrine of the Church, by the end of 1992, and a response to the Discussion Paper on the 'Position of Children in the Covenant' by June 1993.

In the event, the Convenership of the PCEA Committee changed 1 August 1993, and it appears that nothing was done to fulfil the commitment given in May. At the 1993 PCEA Synod it was merely reported that 'this response seems to have already been made 10.12.91.' However at a meeting on 21 April 93 between FRCA Deputies and some members of the PCEA 1992/93-ICR Committee (with Mr Gadsby not in attendance) a fresh commitment was given by the PCEA to study the papers again and provide a considered response. This was repeated yet again by Messrs Gadsby and Ward when they met with delegates Kleyn and Bouwman during the ICRC meeting in Zwolle in September.

With this background, we may now proceed to address the issues raised by the FRCA.

2. Generalities

First, we believe it is necessary again to put the matters being discussed into a wider context.

The issues which have been raised by the FRCA with the PCEA relate to concerns about how the PCRA conducts her internal church business; how she applies in practice what she believes is God's will for His Church. They do not, apparently, relate to the PCEA's confessional commitment to the teaching of Scripture as summarised in the 'whole doctrine' of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF).

The FRCA should understand that, while there may be reasonable questions about how the PCEA interprets God's Word by her Confession, the PCEA for her part is increasingly dubious of what is seen as an inquisitorial probing into her domestic affairs. Such a probing does not appear to have been conducted with respect to the Free Church of Scotland, or the Presbyterian Church in Korea, with which the FRCA enjoy sister-church relations.

We must again reiterate the model for inter-church relations with which the PCEA operates:

1. We are prepared to recognise as true churches those congregations or federations of congregations which in their stated confessions 'profess the true religion' (WCF 25.2). We agree with the statement of the Belgic Confession that 'this holy Church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world.'

While committed to the great goal of true and complete unity in accordance with Christ's high priestly prayer (John 17), we recognise that the limitations imposed by sin and its effects, as well as the barriers of distance, will mean that this goal will not finally be realised until our Lord's return.

2. We will extend formal recognition to those churches where it is wise and practical to do so, but we do not readily brand any Christian church as 'false', ie. as having 'so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan.'

We are pleased to note the comment of the FRCA Deputies in their discussion paper on 'Pluriformity' (2 Nov.92) that they do not 'deny the existence of a plurality of churches. Through human weakness and sin there can be separate churches which should in fact be one.' This seems to be an admirable statement of the real position as we see it.

3. In the case of those churches which we do recognise as true churches, we consider how congruent are the beliefs and practices of themselves and the PCEA, and the level of our relationship is based upon that degree of congruency. In the case of the Free Church of Scotland, we share the same constitutional basis, and there exists between us mutual eligibility of office-bearers and members by virtue of Federal Relations Acts adopted by both churches some 30 years ago.

We have formally recognised the FRCA as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, but it is clear to us that differences between us would not yet permit full 'sister-church' relations. However, we look forward, in the wake of the FRCA's according a similar recognition to the PCEA, to the establishment of closer formal relations which could facilitate the further discussion of the matters of difference between us, and our walking closer in cooperation to extend the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Issues

3.1 Pulpit Exchange

The original FRCA Position Paper spent about 150 words on this subject, pointing out that the WCF states that the ordinary religious worship of God includes 'the sound preaching'. The paper also cites LC, Ans.159 which mentions that the duties of those who labour in the ministry include 'making known the whole counsel of God.' The FRCA paper maintained this should exclude a 'Reformed Baptist.' (The PCEA has openly indicated in the past that such a person would not necessarily be excluded from preaching to a PCEA congregation.)

In our response of 10 Dec. 1991, we pointed out first that the FRCA position here proves too much: it would entail an absolute, 100% adherence to a particular set of interpretations of Scripture as a condition to be permitted to preach. This is a test which the FRCA itself would not apply to its own ministers and elders, who differ among themselves on various points of doctrine. The point is that nothing will be taught which is contrary to our shared confession of faith. The opening of our pulpits to visiting preachers does not entail an endorsement of their entire system of theology. That is not the issue. Why then does the PCEA have this policy?

We would draw attention to our Confessional statement regarding the communion of saints (ch.26). This says that all the saints are 'obliged to the performance of such duties, *public and private*, as do conduce to their mutual good, *both in the inward and outward man*' (26.1). We continue by confessing that all saints are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification'... 'which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus' (26.2). We note with appreciation the similar statement in the Heidelberg Catechism, Ans. 55:

First, that believers, all and everyone, as members of Christ have communion with Him and share in all His treasures and gifts.

Second, that everyone is duty-bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members.

Our practice of occasionally and cautiously opening the pulpit to men from outside our own denomination reflects our desire to fulfil what we confess in these words of WCF 26. We affirm that the Spirit of God has gifted men so that they can edify the Lord's people, and we believe it is not inappropriate for our churches to have communion in these gifts, even if these men could not necessarily subscribe the 'whole doctrine' of the WCF. The implementation of this is left to the wise discretion of the local minister, who is also answerable to his Presbytery for his exercise of this liberty.

3.2 Fencing of the Lord's Table

In just over 400 words, the FRCA Position Paper of March 1991 suggests that the PCEA's practice of receiving visitors at the Lord's Table is contrary to its own standards. The upper appears to say that the PCEA's standards require her office-bearers to exclude from the Lord's Table those who do not embrace all the 'truth' that she confesses.

Such has never been the position of the PCEA, as we pointed out in our letter of 10 December 1991, and it does not represent a correct exegesis of our confessional standards. The pre-requisite for communicant membership of the PCEA is a credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our church practice states clearly (2.15): 'Whilst the importance of correct doctrine is not to be underestimated, members are not required to subscribe the Confession of Faith as are office-bearers.'

Again, we would direct you to our confessional statement about the Communion of Saints, as expressing the principles behind our policy of admitting visitors to the Lord's Table. At every celebration of the Lord's Supper, the qualifications for partaking are carefully spelled out to discourage unworthy partakers, but not to exclude those believers who may be visiting from other churches. But we are careful to maintain our own principle that such 'communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus' (WCF 26.2). We believe this to be the biblical position.

According to the Heidelberg Catechism those who are to come to the table of the Lord are 'those who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life' (Ans.81). This is a good summary of the things set before a congregation by PCEA ministers in their fencing of the table. What right does any church have to exclude those who fulfil these prerequisites? According to the HC (Ans.82), they are to be excluded 'who by their confession and life show that they are unbelieving and ungodly.' The sincere believer in our Lord Jesus, visiting

from another church, does not fall into this category, so what right have we to exclude him from obeying the Lord's command, 'Do this in remembrance of me'?

It seems to us that a continued refusal by the FRCA to permit PCEA members to share with them at the Lord's Table is tantamount to condemning us as unbelieving and ungodly. If the FRCA is, as we believe, unwilling to issue such a condemnation, then it is time for them to acknowledge the PCEA as a true church, and work through with us the consequences of such acknowledgement. (It may be of interest to note that Messrs Gadsby and Ward were delighted to partake the Lord's Supper with the brothers and sisters of the Berkum Congregation of the RCNL) when they visited there in September. This was explained as an implication of the recognition of the PCEA to be a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ.)

3.3 Doctrine of the Church

As we have repeatedly stated, we do not believe there to be any substantial difference in the doctrine of the church taught by the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. There may be differences of degree in which particular aspects of the doctrine are stated, not only between the two families of symbols, but also within them.

The Appendix 1 of the FRCA Position Paper (pp.4-5) provides an interesting overview of the Scriptural teaching that the concept 'church' (*QaHaL / ekklesia*) is strongly weighted with the idea of gathering, or assembly. It is asked whether the WCF does sufficient justice to this undoubted emphasis of Scripture.

It is notable that in 25.1, the WCF actually describes the church as God's gathered elect: 'The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that *have been, are, or shall be gathered into one*, under Christ the head thereof...' With this we may compare the Belgic Confession: 'We believe and profess one catholic or Universal church which is a *holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers*, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by his blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.' The WCF describes the church in terms of her *election*, while the BC describes her in terms of the correlative concept of *regeneration*. These characterisations are equivalent, and define the church in terms of her *essential* nature rather than in phenomenological terms. Yet both BC and WCF recognise that the 'visible' church comprises those who are non-elect, or unregenerate.

The BC goes on also to state: 'Moreover, this holy Church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. However, it is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.' This latter description obviously widens the concept of 'church' beyond simple gathering in a visible congregation, since the gathering of this holy Church will not take place until our Lord returns.

We may compare here the statement of Calvin (ICR, 4.1.7.) in which he also distinguishes the church as 'invisible' - 'that which is actually in God's presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit'; and 'visible' - in this church are mingled many hypocrites who have nothing of Christ but the name and the outward appearance.'

Clearly, both the BC and the WCF recognise 'gathering' or 'assembly' as an inherent aspect of the church's being, and both recognise that this gathering is distributive, in local congregations, as well as eschatologically associative and comprehensive. And it is the election/regeneration of her members, as will be revealed in the eschaton, which gives Christ's church her true essence in union with him.

4. Conclusion

It seems to us, therefore, that although there may be differences in emphasis between our respective confessions, they are not disparate in their teaching on the church. It is helpful to emphasise the church's character as 'gathered' in this present age, lest we minimise the significance of her face to the world, but we must remember that the gathering of any particular local church is a foretaste of that great gathering of

the elect before God's throne at the coming of Christ, and that it is a foretaste shared by all those everywhere who call on the name of the Lord. It is to this latter truth that the PCEA tries to do justice in her policies with respect to the occasional opening of her pulpit and communion table to those who are from outside her federation, but whom one day we expect to share with us in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

b. EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF IRELAND

Mandate

The Free Reformed Churches in Synod 1992 gave to deputies the following mandate regarding the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland (cf Acts, Art 138):

"...use the existing Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact to improve the quantity of discussions and exchange of information so that the two churches might get to know each other better. In the discussions with the EPCI, the items mentioned for discussion with the PCEA are not to be overlooked."

Your deputies have noted the rules for "the existing Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact" with the EPCI:

"a. to invite delegates to each other's General Assemblies/Synods and to accord such delegates privileges of the floor in the assembly or synod but no vote.

b. to exchange Minutes and Acts of each other's broadest assemblies as well as communications on major issues of mutual concern, and to solicit comments on these documents.

c. to be diligent by means of discussions to use the contact for the purpose of reaching full correspondence" (Acts 1987, Art 79).

Concerning "the items mentioned for discussion with the PCEA", we read in Art 72 of the 1992 Acts the following:

"to continue to study and discuss further with the PCEA the remaining areas of concern specified by Synod 1987, viz, the supervision of the Lord's table, the practice of pulpit exchanges and the position of children in the covenant. In this discussion about the areas of concern the confession of the doctrine of the church should be addressed when applicable. Due attention must be given to our concern about possible unscriptural concepts regarding interdenominationalism. All this should be done in the light of God's Word giving heed to the complete doctrine of salvation."

Work Done

In an effort to carry out our mandate, we sent a letter to the EPCI dd 16 October 1992, outlining what contact there had been between our two churches, mentioning the wish of our churches in Synod 1992 for increased discussions and contact, and drawing attention to the material used in the discussions with the PCEA as a possible starting point for correspondence. A copy of this letter is appended to this report as Appendix 1.

In their response dd 8 January 1993, the EPCI politely declined our request for more discussions on the ground that "the amount of time and effort involved in entering such discussions over such a distance would outweigh their practical usefulness." Instead of such a discussion, they propose to "maintain our current relationship" (see Appendix 2). At the ICRC a delegate from the EPCI reiterated that limited resources and distance would prevent them from delving into the issues we had raised. In June 1993 we received a copy of the Annual Reports presented to the 1993 meeting of their Presbytery.

Analysis

In light of the above, we considered the following options:

a. leave the contact with the EPCI as is, exchanging greetings and synod/presby-

tery material. This possibility accords with the suggestion of the EPCI, but is contrary to the line drawn by the churches in previous synods:

- to leave the contact as is would imply that TEC would in fact become permanent. This is contrary to the decision of Synod 1985, Art 74.11: "as there should be only one form of permanent ecclesiastical fellowship between sister-churches and this under the mutually accepted rules for correspondence, any rules for temporary ecclesiastical contact should make clear that the contact has as its ultimate aim the establishment of sister-relations."

b. Proceed with offering sister relations, on mutually accepted rules. This possibility is also contrary to the line drawn by the churches in previous synods:

- Synod 1990 saw need "to continue discussions and exchange of information [with the EPCI] with the purpose of improving understanding of each other." This recommendation was based on the consideration that "more and personal contact is desirable before a sister-relation is offered" (Art 147).

- Synod 1992 noted that "earlier Australian Synods have expressed that 'in order to practise relations as sister churches according to the adopted rules it is imperative that there be good and understandable correspondence'. At the same time, this Synod was disappointed that in the time since Synod 1990 'the contact [with the EPCI] has been negligible.' Consequently, deputies were instructed 'to improve the quantity of discussions and exchange of information' (Art 138).

c. The third possibility deputies considered is that Synod phase out contact with the EPCI. In the current situation, deputies find this course of action consistent with the decisions of previous Synods.

- previous contacts with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, the Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka, the Reformed Church of Japan and the Presbyterian Church of Uganda have ceased (cf Acts 1987, Art 92; Acts 1990, Art 135), all due to the difficulty of sustaining good communication.

- the churches in Synod 1990 decided "to phase out contact with Churches with whom we appear to be making no progress" (Acts Art 58). Instead, the FRCA should "concentrate on relations and contacts with churches who are geographically closer to us and for whom we have a greater responsibility." Since discussions with the PCEA have been found to be very time consuming, deputies also wonder whether insisting on further discussions with the EPCI would not present deputies with a mandate well and truly beyond the "manageable level" desired in the above mentioned decision.

- it is true that the EPCI is with us a member of the ICRC, a reality which in turn, by the Constitution of the ICRC, obliges us to seek fullest ecclesiastical fellowship with the EPCI. We note, though, that the contacts of the FRCA with other churches is to be determined by Synod, and not by decisions of the ICRC (cf Art 46, CO).

Recommendation

Deputies for Contact with Presbyterian Churches be instructed to write to the EPCI to explain why the FRCA has phased out contact with the EPCI.

APPENDIX 1 - EPCI Report

Letter to Inter-Church Relations Committee

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland
C/ Rev GN Burke
33 Onslow Gardens
Belfast BT6 0AQ, Ireland

16 October 1992

Esteemed Committee,

1. The recent Synod of our churches, which met in May-June 1992, considered the Report from Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad concerning the contact exercised with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and decided to appoint new Deputies with the mandate to use the existing Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact to improve the quantity of discussions and exchange of information so that the two churches might get to know each other better. The mandate also states that in the discussions with the EPCI the items mentioned for discussion with the PCEA are not to be overlooked.

The full text of Synod's decision is recorded in Article 138 of Synod's Acts (page 76), of which one copy was airmailed to you on 1 October. The Report of Deputies referred to above may be found in the same Acts, on pages 169 and 221.

The reference to the PCEA concerns recent discussions on supervision of the Lord's table, the practice of pulpit exchanges and the position of children in the covenant. The full picture may be obtained from the Acts of Synod 1990 Article 77 (page 38) and the Report of Deputies (page 177); and the Acts of Synod 1992 Article 72 (page 36) and the Report of Deputies (page 129).

2. It may be useful to first explain the changes Synod made to the particular deputyship of Relations with Churches Aboard. This was split it into four, viz: (1) Deputies for sister churches, (2) for other churches (Reformed), (3) for other churches (Presbyterian) and (4) for the ICRC.

3. Synod gave Deputies for contact with Presbyterian Churches instructions regarding the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Free Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

4. Further particulars of these Deputyships may be found in Article 165 of Synod's Acts, on page 97, which also makes reference to the various mandates.

5. To begin with, we thank you for your letter of 12 February 1992, and the four Presbytery Reports (1987-1990).

6. Reading through the files to get acquainted with the history of the FRCA-EPCI contact, the following brief summary was prepared. It is included here in the interest of promoting progress, and does not claim to be complete, or accurate in every detail; any correction found necessary will be gladly made.

1983 - FRCA Synod confirms that the EPCI is a faithful church. Correspondence is to be intensified with the aim to establish full sister- relations.

The EPCI clerk replies (11-10-83) to our deputies' letter, expressing pleasure about this decision; asks clarification whether we recognise the PCEA as a faithful church, and what contacts we have; mentions that the EPCI has close contacts with the Free Church of Scotland, but not with the PCEA; and asks whether an official EPCI-FCS relationship would complicate FRCA-EPCI relationship, given that the FCS has an official relationship with the PCEA.

Our deputies reply (13-3-84) that complications would only arise if both PCEA and FRCA were to develop sister relations with EPCI, but not with each other.

The EPCI response (20-6-84) appreciates our explanation, refers to the FRCA decision on PCEA (Acts 1983, Article 96), and asks to be kept informed on developments in the FRCA-PCEA relationship.

1987 - FRCA Synod decides to offer Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact (TEC) under a

set of specified Rules. New deputies are authorised to send delegates to EPCI. (This resulted in a visit by Revs Veldman and Huizinga.)

EPCI responds (22-7-88) to the Report of the visit by Revs Veldman and Huizinga; accepts the offer of Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact (TEC), and looks forward to closer cooperation in the days ahead.

Synod 1990 considered that "... more and personal contact is desirable before a sister-relation is offered. Within our churches we must leave time for a better understanding to develop concerning the EPCI". (Consideration 7 on page 113.)

Synod 1992 in noting the scarcity of correspondence spoke of "negligible contact", and considered that "it would be both meaningless and inconsistent with the decision of 1990 to move towards becoming sisterchurches with the EPCI" (Considerations 6,7 on page 77).

7. From these considerations it may be clear that our Synods see an intensified FRCA-EPCI correspondence on matters of substance as a pre-requisite for progress on the road to a closer relationship.

In this regard, the matters of most immediate interest to us, on which we would like to have an in-depth discussion with you, are those that have arisen over the years of contacts with Presbyterian Churches, and in particular from our contact with the PCEA.

We assume that these matters will have your interest, not only because they are of concern to us, but also in light of your earlier request (20-6-1984) to be kept informed about the developing contacts between our churches and the PCEA, and our earlier correspondence about third-party relationships (11-10-1983 and 13-3-1984).

8. In the belief that it is in matters such as these that churches need to gain a better understanding of each other, we suggest that the material used in the discussion with the PCEA could be a useful starting point for an exchange of views. Most of this material is printed in the Acts of 1990 and 1992 Synods. The earlier Acts of Synods were not as extensive as these.

May we hear from you soon whether this is an acceptable programme for discussion over the period of the next 12 to 18 months? We would also welcome any other suggestion that could promote the effectiveness of such discussion.

9. It is our churches' sincere desire to promote the unity of true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. May our mutual correspondence be instrumental in this.

For the Deputies:

C Bouwman (chairman)

J Eikelboom (secretary)

APPENDIX 2 - EPCI Report

Letter from TRINITY EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Rev. Mark G Johnston BA, M.Div.

1 Moss Green, Richhill,

Co. Armagh BT61 9JX

8 January 1993

Dear Mr Bouwman,

Many thanks for your letter of 16th October. We apologise for the delay in replying, but since then there has been a change in convenership of our Inter-Church Relations Committee and the committee itself did not meet until this week. I trust you will understand.

We appreciate your proposals regarding a framework for discussions between our two Churches, but feel after having considered them that we must decline. We do so, not because do not value the link with your Churches, but because we believe that the amount of time and effort involved in entering such discussions over such a distance

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would outweigh their practical usefulness. We are a small denomination with limited manpower and with heavy responsibilities closer to home. We would be quite happy to maintain our current relationship through an annual exchange of reports and greetings and in the context of the ICRC. We shall continue to follow with interest the development of your relationships with the PCEA. Please convey to your Churches our continued prayerful support and good wishes. On behalf of the Inter-Church Relations Committee.

Yours sincerely,
Mark G. Johnston

c. REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF IRELAND

Mandate

The Free Reformed Churches in Synod 1992 gave to deputies the following mandate regarding the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (cf Acts, Art 157):

- "a. to maintain contact with the RPCI at a low level until such time as we can conclude an investigation of the RPCA;
- b. to advise the RPCI of this decision;
- c. to study the matters of covenanting and purity of worship in line with Considerations 3,4 and 5;
- d. for the sake of consistency, the items mentioned for discussion with the PCEA ought not to be overlooked in any contact with the RPCI."

Concerning "the items mentioned for discussion with the PCEA", we read in Art 72 of the 1992 Acts the following:

"to continue to study and discuss further with the PCEA the remaining areas of concern specified by Synod 1987, viz, the supervision of the Lord's table, the practice of pulpit exchanges and the position of children in the covenant. In this discussion about the areas of concern the confession of the doctrine of the church should be addressed when applicable. Due attention must be given to our concern about possible unscriptural concepts regarding interdenominationalism. All this should be done in the light of God's Word giving heed to the complete doctrine of salvation."

Work Done

In an effort to carry out our mandate, we sent a letter to the RPCI dd 11 February 1993, outlining the mandate we had received and soliciting their response. A copy of this letter is appended to this report as Appendix 1. To this letter we have received no written response. At the ICRC it was verbally communicated to one of our committee members that the RPCI did not feel obliged to address the matters we raised. In February of 1994 we sent a second letter to the RPCI requesting a (written) reaction to our letter of 1993.

Meanwhile, we did receive from the RPCI a reaction to the article in the Acts of 1992 about the RPCI (dd Nov 20, 1992). Concerning the practice of "covenanting", the article mentioned that this practice could "impact...future sister relations...in as much as ministers accepting a call to that church will be bound beyond the Free Forms of Unity or the Westminster Standards" (Cons 3). In this context the term "supra-confessional binding" was used. On this point the RPCI responded as follows:

- "In the practice of covenanting there is no 'supra-confessional binding'. Covenanting binds to nothing additional, but it does bind additionally. In other words, it is the strongest possible way of binding oneself to the doctrines of grace set forth in the Confession and catechisms and particularly of pledging one's loyalty to Christ our King."

As we were busy with other matters relating to our mandate, we thought to leave the

matter of covenanting (as well as our mandate re purity of worship) until we had received a response from the RPCI to our letter of February 1993. As no response has been received, we did not delve into this aspect of our mandate at all.

In the course of the months we did receive a copy of the Minutes of the RPCI 1992 Annual Meeting. We still await a response to our letter of February 1993 (as repeated in February 1994), but anticipate that its contents will be in line with what was said at the ICRC. Accordingly, we offer the following analysis. (We hope yet to be able to present the reply to our letter to your assembly in a Supplementary Report.)

Analysis

In light of the above, we considered the following options with respect to the RPCI.

a. leave the contact with the RPCI at its current low level.

-in itself, this possibility would agree with part "a" of the mandate we received from the churches in Synod 1992. However, we are informed that the church of Byford, on the basis of its contact with the RPCA, cannot prepare a case for Synod to take up contact with these churches.

-further, this possibility is contrary to the line drawn by the churches in Synod 1990, when it was decided "to phase out contact with Churches with whom we appear to be making no progress" (Acts Art 58).

b. Proceed to sister relations. Under this scenario, responsibility for discussing points of difference could be left to the sister churches geographically closer to the RPCI (cf Acts 1990, Art 58, Rec b). However,

-there has been no contact, and hence there are no grounds to strengthen the bond between the FRCA and the RPCI.

-Synod 1992 noted that "given that we have (had) no contact at all with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia, it is not prudent to recognise the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland at this time (Acts, Art 157, Cons 2).

c. The third possibility deputies considered is that our contact with the RPCI cease. In the current situation, deputies find this course of action consistent with the decisions of previous Synods.

-previous contacts with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, the Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka, the Reformed Church of Japan and the Presbyterian Church of Uganda have ceased (cf Acts 1987, Art 92; Acts 1990, Art 135), all due to the difficulty of sustaining good communication.

-the churches in Synod 1990 decided "to phase out contact with Churches with whom we appear to be making no progress" (Acts Art 58). Instead, the FRCA should "concentrate on relations and contacts with churches who are geographically closer to us and for whom we have a greater responsibility." Since discussions with the PCEA have been found to be very time consuming, deputies also wonder whether insisting on further discussions with the RPCI would not present deputies with a mandate well and truly beyond the "manageable level" desired in the above mentioned decision.

-it is true that the RPCI is with us a member of the ICRC, a reality which in turn, by the Constitution of the ICRC, obliges us to seek fullest ecclesiastical fellowship with the RPCI. We note, though, that the contacts of the FRCA with other churches is to be determined by Synod, and not by decisions of the ICRC (cf Art 46, CO).

Recommendation

Deputies for Contact with Presbyterian Churches be instructed to write to the RPCI to explain why the FRCA has phased out contact with the RPCI.

APPENDIX 1 - RPCI report

Letter to Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

C/ Prof FS Leahy
27 Manor Drive, Lisburn, CO Antrim BT28 1JH, UK
11th February, 1993

Esteemed Prof Leahy,

1. The recent Synod of our churches, which met in May-June 1992, considered the Report from Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad concerning the contact exercised with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and decided to appoint new Deputies with the mandate as recorded in Article 157 of its Acts (page 95). The full text of Synod's decision, which needs to be read for a good understanding of this mandate, is recorded in the same Article. The Report of Deputies referred to above may be found on pages 170-172 and 221. A copy of the Acts was airmailed to you on 9 November.

2. It may be useful to explain the changes Synod made to the particular deputyship of Relations with Churches Abroad. This was split into four, viz: (1) Deputies for sister churches, (2) for other churches (Reformed), (3) for other churches (Presbyterian) and (4) for the ICRC.

3. Synod gave Deputies for contact with Presbyterian Churches instructions regarding the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Free Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

4. Further particulars of these Deputyships may be found in Article 165 of Synod's Acts, on page 97, which also makes reference to the various mandates.

5. We thank you for your letter of 29 April 1992. The material in this letter was used to Deputies' Supplementary Report to Synod. Considerations 3, 4 and 5 of the decision make reference to it. More recently we received a copy of the Minutes of your Church's 1992 Annual Meeting, and we thank you for that too. A summary of these Minutes will be provided to individual members of our Committee.

6. We offer some further comment on our mandate.

6.1 As regards 2.a, it is worth mentioning that one of our local Churches has taken the initiative to establish contact with the RPCA.

6.2 Consideration 2 on page 95 mentions an anomaly we're in with respect to FCS and PCEA. This anomaly concerns our Churches' recognition of the FCS back in 1983 and our failure to date to recognise its 'sisterchurch' in this country, the PCEA. A study of relevant material in the Acts of our 1990 and 1992 Synods is recommended for a more complete appreciation of the situation (in particular Articles 77 and 127 of 1990, and Rev WP Gadsby's address to Synod 1992, on P 325 of its Acts).

6.3 From what is mentioned in 6.2, it may be clear what Synod means with its mandate in 2.d. The reference to the PCEA concerns recent discussions on supervision of the Lord's table, the practice of pulpit exchanges and the position of children in the covenant. The full picture may be obtained from the Acts of Synod 1990 Article 77 (page 38) and the Report of Deputies (page 177); and the Acts of Synod 1992 Article 72 (page 36) and the Report of Deputies (page 129).

7. As it is our churches' sincere desire to promote the unity of true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, Deputies would welcome your views on these matters.

For the Deputies:

C Bouwman (chairman)

J Eikelboom (secretary)

d. FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

Mandate

The Free Reformed Churches in Synod 1992 gave to undersigned deputies the following mandate regarding the Free Church of Scotland (cf Acts, Art 150):

- a. to ascertain whether or not the FCS has indeed accepted our offer of TEC;
- b. to use the rules for TEC to improve our contacts, especially in the discussions about mutual areas of major concern and our concerns with the FCS (pulpit exchanges and certain views of the FCS regarding the ICRC), so that we can expect eventual sister relations to be fruitful; the rules for TEC are as follows:

- “1. to invite delegates to each other's assemblies/Synods and to accord such delegates privilege of the floor, to convey greetings and allow them to briefly address the assembly/Synod;
- 2. to exchange minutes and acts of each other's broadest assemblies as well as communications on major issues of mutual concern, and to solicit comments on these documents;
- 3. to be diligent by means of discussions to use the contact for the purpose of reaching a relation as sister churches, specifically, to work out a set of mutually acceptable rules for relations as sister churches.

- c. if and when the above has been finished, to discuss with the FCS our decision to phase out TEC and to move in the direction of one relation between churches, ie, sister relations on the basis of our (revised and amended) rules.”

Further, Synod 1992 wished “keen disappointment” to be expressed to the FCS “about the lack of communication from the FCS concerning the letter of our deputies” (Rec 2).

Work Done

On 8 October 1992, we sent a letter to the FCS in which we expressed the “keen disappointment” of the FRCA and urged improvement of the contact. We also drew attention to the matters we were to discuss with the FCS. A copy of this letter is appended to this report as Appendix 1.

We received an answer to our letter, dd 4 February 1993. From this letter (see Appendix 2), it appears that our offer of TEC has been accepted. As deputies, however, we were somewhat mystified as to whether the FCS considers our mutual relation to be regulated by our Rules for TEC or their rules for Inter-Church relations (a copy of which is attached as Appendix 3). Certainly we do not detect the Scottish brethren operating under stipulation 3 of our rules: “to be diligent by means of discussions to use the contact for the purpose of reaching a relation as sister churches....” We were also disappointed with the answer we received in this letter to the concerns we raised. Accordingly, we responded in turn in a letter dd 8 April 1993, in which we outlined our reaction to their letter and stated our case on one of the points of concern (pulpit exchange) in —we hoped— clear terms (see Appendix 4). To this letter we have received a reply dd 3 February 1994 indicating that the Committee responsible for Ecumenical Relations “did not see fit to engage in any inquisitorial discussions with you” (see attached Appendix 5).

Analysis

In light of the above, we considered the following options:

- a. be content with the level of contact we currently have with the FCS. This would imply that greetings be exchanged from time to time, as well as synod/presbytery material, but that there be no in-depth discussions on the issues mentioned by our churches. Deputies consider this possibility to be contrary to the line drawn by the churches in previous synods:

- Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact is to be temporary (cf Acts 1985, Art 74.II).
- TEC was offered in order to provide a framework through which sister-relations could be established. As there is currently no prospect of progress toward

sister-relations, the sense is lost of maintaining the vehicle by which sister-relations is to be reached.

b. Proceed with offering sister relations, on mutually accepted rules. This possibility is also contrary to the line drawn by the churches in previous synods:

-Acts 1992, Art 150 mentions that "discussing issues of mutual concern seems difficult, almost impossible. These matters need to be addressed frankly before deputies engage in discussions about sister relations" and "No response has been received from the FCS about our concern concerning their practice of pulpit exchanges with Reformed Baptists. Lack of progress on this concern will impede progress towards sister relations and phasing out TEC" (Cons 5,6).

-Synod 1987 indicated that "in order to practise relations as sister churches according to the adopted rules it is imperative that there be good and understandable correspondence" (Acts, Art 52, Cons 2).

c. The third possibility deputies considered is that Synod phase out contact with the FCS. In the current situation, deputies find this course of action consistent with the decisions of previous Synods.

-previous contacts with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, the Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka, the Reformed Church of Japan and the Presbyterian Church of Uganda have ceased (cf Acts 1987, Art 92; Acts 1990, Art 135), all due to the difficulty of sustaining good communication.

-the churches in Synod 1990 decided "to phase out contact with Churches with whom we appear to be making no progress" (Acts Art 58). Instead, the FRCA should "concentrate on relations and contacts with churches who are geographically closer to us and for whom we have a greater responsibility." Since discussions with the PCEA have been found to be very time consuming, deputies also wonder whether insisting on further discussions with the FCS would not present deputies with a mandate well and truly beyond the "manageable level" desired in the above mentioned decision.

-it is true that the FCS is with us a member of the ICRC, a reality which in turn, by the Constitution of the ICRC, obliges us to seek fullest ecclesiastical fellowship with the EPCI. We note, though, that the contacts of the FRCA with other churches is to be determined by Synod, and not by decisions of the ICRC (cf Art 46, CO).

Recommendation

Deputies to Contact with Presbyterian Churches be instructed to write to the FCS to explain why the FRCA has phased out contact with the FCS.

APPENDIX 1 - FCS Report

Letter to Ecumenical Relations Committee

Free Church of Scotland
15 North Bank Street
Edinburgh EH1 2LS, Scotland

8 October 1992

Esteemed Committee,

1. The recent Synod of our churches, which met in May-June 1992, considered the Report from Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad concerning the contact exercised with the Free Church of Scotland, and decided to instruct new Deputies to continue the correspondence with a view to progress the matter of a sister relation on the basis of our revised and amended Rules.

The full text of this decision is recorded in Article 150 of Synod's Acts, of which tone

copy was airmailed to you on 30 September. The Report of Deputies referred to above may be found in the same Acts, on pages 173-175.

2. Perhaps it is useful to first explain the changes Synod made to the particular deputyship of Relations with Churches Abroad. This was split it into four, viz: (1) Deputies for sister churches, (2) for other churches (Reformed), (3) for other churches (Presbyterian) and (4) for the ICRC.

3. Synod gave Deputies for contact with Presbyterian Churches instructions regarding the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Free Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

4. Further particulars of these Deputyships may be found in Article 165 of Synod's Acts, on page 97, which also makes reference to the various mandates.

5. Our first duty is to thank you for the Acts of your 1990 and 1991 General Assemblies. More recently we received your communication dated 27 May 1992, conveying the text of your 1992 General Assembly's statement on Inter-Church Relations and in particular the basis of fraternal relations between churches, for which we also thank you. You will understand that this statement came too late to be placed on Synod's agenda.

6. Next we must express Synod's keen disappointment about the lack of communication concerning our 1987 offer of Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact. Deputies asked you several times about this matter, however to date no reply has been received. We propose to come back to this point later on in this letter.

7. Reading through the files to get acquainted with the history of the FRCA-FCS contact, the following brief summary was prepared. It is included here in the interest of promoting progress, and does not claim to be complete, or accurate in every detail; any correction found necessary will be gladly made.

1983 - FRCA Synod confirms that the FCS is a faithful church. Correspondence is to be intensified with the aim to establish full sister- relations. The FCS clerk replies to our deputies' letter, welcoming closer ties and suggesting the FRCA seek closer contact with the PCEA (with whom FCS has a federal relations agreement).

1985 - FRCA Synod instructs deputies to thoroughly investigate the FCS and submit comprehensive reports to next Synod, paying particular attention to the marks of the true church and the question of church government.

1987 - FRCA Synod receives an extensive and favourable report from deputies. Synod decides to offer Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact (TEC) under a set of specified Rules. New deputies are authorised to send delegates to Scotland, to help implement this decision.

1990 - FRCA Synod receives the report of deputies' visit to the FCS. This report is generally favourable but signals the pulpit exchange with Reformed Baptists as a matter of concern that should be addressed in our contacts with the FCS. The report from the ICRC delegates raises the same matter, as well as fencing of the Lord's table, and the FCS understanding of the Church. A clear answer to our 1987 offer of TEC was not received. Synod decides to seek clarification on the offer of TEC; to ask what FCS means with 'fraternal association'; and to use the Rules of TEC to discuss the issues of concern mentioned in Deputies' reports; further, to move in the direction of sister relations while giving due heed to the concerns outstanding.

1992 - FRCA Synod hears that deputies wrote to the FCS in 1990, but received no reply. Synod expresses keen disappointment about the lack of communication from the FCS in the matter of TEC. Deputies are instructed to pursue this matter; to use the TEC Rules to improve contact, especially in the discussions about mutual areas of major concern and our concerns with the FCS (pulpit exchanges and certain views of the FCS regarding the ICRC). If and when these are finished, to discuss with the FCS our decision to phase out TEC and to move in the direction of one relation between churches, ie sister relations on the basis of our revised and amended rules.

8. An examination of the available correspondence reveals that during almost ten years of contact there has been virtually no mutual exchange and discussion of views

and convictions. We believe that this has seriously impeded progress in the direction of closer ties.

9. As our mandate indicates, Synod seeks to improve the contact, and has given instructions that particular matters be discussed.

10. As these discussions are to be conducted under the Rules for Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact, it needs to be clear that the FCS has indeed dealt with our 1987 offer of Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact, and whether or not that offer was accepted.

11. You will understand that an early, and positive reply is needed if we are to have any chance of carrying out the remainder of the mandate in the relatively short time span available to us.

It is our prayer that the way may be opened to a fruitful correspondence, and the Head of the Church be honoured by our mutual obedience to His commandments.

For the Deputies:

C Bouwman (chairman)

J Eikelboom (secretary)

APPENDIX 2 - FCS Report

Letter from FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

The Mound

Edinburgh, EH1 2LS

4th February 1993

Dear Mr Eikelboom

The letter from Mr Bowman and yourself outlining the story of relations between our two Churches was duly considered at a meeting of our Committee on Ecumenical Relations on 28 January 1993.

I am instructed to respond as follows:

1. It is greatly regretted that there appears to have been some breakdown in the correspondence between this Committee and the Australian deputies. In so far as blame for this may attach to this Committee sincere apology is tendered.

2. The Free Church of Scotland has no difficulty in accepting a relationship described by you as one of Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact. We thought this was implicit in our communication of 1983 to which you refer.

3. The Act of the General Assembly of 1992 which has already been communicated to you - though not in time for your Synod - sets forth the views of the Free Church of Scotland with regard to inter-Church relations. The term sister Church is not common in our tradition, nor do we deem it necessary to codify inter-Church relations more rigidly than is done in the Act of Assembly to which I have referred.

4. Regarding your observations about Reformed Baptists and Free Church ministers' relations with them two things have to be said.

4.1 Free Church ministers have liberty to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ anywhere, where they may do so with a good conscience - ie where they have unfettered liberty to proclaim God's word.

4.2 Free Church ministers have, by long tradition, the right to invite to their pulpits men who will preach the gospel according to the Reformed interpretation.

5. Regarding Fencing the Lord's Table. We have difficulty in appreciating how this causes concern. Perhaps the origin of the word "fencing" is not appreciated or understood by you. It is an ancient Scottish legal term which describes the reading of the sovereign's proclamation convening a court and indicating who may sit in the Court. We cannot be persuaded that we are wrong to indicate by whose authority the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is observed, and for whom it has been ordained. This is what the apostle Paul does in 1 Cor. XI 22ff. We make no apology for following his example.

6. As to the Free Church doctrine of the Church I direct you to the relevant chapters

of the Westminster Confession of Faith which we hold to be a fine exposition of the doctrine of Scripture.

I hope these observations are of some help.

Yours sincerely

C Graham, Clerk to the Committee

APPENDIX 3 - FCS Report

Statement from FCS

At Edinburgh and within the Free Assembly Hall there on Tuesday 19th day of May 1992 which day the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland being met and constituted.

The General Assembly called for the Report of the Select Committee on Assembly Arrangements and Ecumenical Relations (B) Ecumenical Relations.

It was moved, seconded and agreed that:

4. The General Assembly approve and adopt the following statement regarding Inter-Church Relations:

FRATERNAL RELATIONS BETWEEN CHURCHES

There should be one simple rule to the following effect.

Fraternal Relations should exist between Churches that openly and practically profess the true faith of Christ as summarised in one or more of the classical Reformed symbols - ie the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgian Confession, the Canons of the Synod of Dort.

Certain duties and courtesies devolve upon Churches sustaining fraternal relations.

1. There should be a spirit of cordial love and trust as becomes brothers in faith.

2. There should be an attitude of mutual helpfulness. Each should be willing to share problems and difficulties with the others. By the same token each should be allowed to exhort to more exact obedience any who appeared to relax in faithfulness to their avowed confession. This should not invite to inquisitorial interference but to strengthening one another in love for Christ.

3. There should be willingness to accept certificates of communicant membership, normally without personal examination.

4. There should be in the highest courts of the Churches a cordial welcome to visiting delegates from other Churches recognised as in fraternal relationship. This need not amount to according membership in the court to the visiting delegate.

5. There should be willingness to allow ministers of one Church access to the pulpits of fraternal Churches as a matter of courtesy.

6. Churches should exchange copies of the Acts and Proceedings of their highest courts or at least inform one another of major decisions.

Extracted from the Records of the General Assembly by the Clerk of Assembly.

APPENDIX 4 - FCS Report

Letter to Ecumenical Relations Committee

Free Church of Scotland
15 North Bank Street
Edinburgh EH1 2LS, Scotland

8 April 1993

Esteemed Committee,

Deputies thank you for your letter dated 4 February 1993, which replies to our earlier correspondence, and in particular to matters raised in our letter dated 12 October 1990, ie pulpit exchange and fencing of the Lord's Table. Deputies regret to say

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however, that they were disappointed with the nature of these replies, and decided to write to you again inviting you to participate in an in-depth discussion on these important practices.

First however there is the matter of the relationship, about which you make some remarks in paragraphs 2 and 3 of your letter. In paragraph 2 you write that the Free Church of Scotland has no difficulty in accepting a relationship described by us as one of Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact.

This Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact (TEC) is the relationship which our 1987 Synod sought to establish, with the following Rules:

1. to invite delegates to each others General Assemblies/Synods and to accord such delegates privileges of the floor in the Assembly or Synod but no vote;
2. to exchange Minutes and Acts of each others broadest assemblies as well as communications on major issues of mutual concern, specifically, the problem about adherents, and to solicit comments on these documents;
3. to be diligent by means of discussions to use the contact for the purpose of reaching a relation as sister churches, specifically, to work out a set of mutually acceptable rules for relations as sister churches.

(Acts 1987, Art 82)

We understand that this is the relationship presently in existence.

Coming to paragraph 3 of your letter, you make reference to the Act of the General Assembly of 1992 which sets forth the views of the Free Church of Scotland with regard to inter-Church relations (which Act was conveyed to us in earlier correspondence).

We understand that the provisions of this Act impact on what is stated in Rule 3 of TEC (you mention the term sister Church and the rules for sister relations). There is however some uncertainty as to what it is exactly that your letter in this paragraph intends to convey. Do you envision our mutual relationship to be governed by our rules for TEC or by your Fraternal Relations rules? You might please clarify this.

Returning now to the last sentence of our opening paragraph, we ask you to further discuss with us the practices of 'pulpit exchange' and 'who may be admitted to the Lord's Table'. (It is quite possible that we do not correctly understand the term 'fencing', but that's what we mean by it.) It is perhaps best if we start with one topic only. In this letter we will therefore limit ourselves to present some observations and questions on pulpit exchange.

Our letter of 12 October 1990 asks how you view this pulpit exchange with churches one has no formal relations with, especially in light of Chapter 25 of the Westminster Confession. Your reply does not answer this specific question but justifies the practice in two statements, i.e. (paragraph 4.1) where a Free Church minister preaches in another church he may do so where he has "unfettered liberty to proclaim God's word", and (paragraph 4.2) where a man preaches in a Free Church pulpit, if he "will preach the gospel according to the Reformed interpretation."

At this time (1990), our churches had contact also with the PCEA, with whom we have been discussing similar questions. That contact has in recent years been intensified further by way of correspondence and personal visits, and in April 1991 we presented the PCEA with a Position paper on Pulpit Exchange and Fencing of the Lord's Table, in which these practices are tested against the Westminster Standards; and which concludes with a discussion of what we see as the underlying problem, the doctrine of the church.

We think that the part of this Position Paper which deals with pulpit exchanges is suitable as a starting point for a discussion, and therefore re-printed it here. If you are of the same opinion, you might please let us have your comments on it.

Quoting from that Position Paper:

Ch 21.5 of the Westminster Confession states that the "ordinary religious worship of God" includes i.a. "the sound preaching." Ans 159 LC discusses how "the word of God is to be preached by those that are called thereunto": "they that are called to labour in the ministry of the word, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season ...; faithfully, making know the whole counsel of God..."

It is most gratifying to read in the Westminster Confession these references to the need for "sound preaching" and "making known the whole council counsel of God." Yet one wonders how a Reformed Baptist (1) is able to make known the whole counsel of God. Though that Reformed Baptist may be 'reformed' in that he rejects the error of Arminius, it remains fact that his entire dogmatic system does not reflect "the whole counsel of God" (for rejection of infant baptism cannot be separated from one's entire system of doctrine). Is it then not inconsistent with Art 21 of the Westminster Confession to invite a Reformed Baptist onto the pulpit?

Similarly, according to Ch 1.2, all the books of Old and New Testament alike "are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life." To these Scriptures "nothing at any time is to be added..." (Ch 1.6; cf also A 3, LC), and, surely, none taken away (Rev 22). Again, we rejoice at finding such Scriptural truths echoes in the Westminster Standards. But the Reformed Baptist will insist on a discontinuity between Old and New Testaments such that the New is far more "the rule of faith and life" than is the Old. Does permitting a Reformed Baptist onto the pulpit then not undermine the seriousness of the truth confessed in Art 1 of the Westminster Confession?

footnote (1) We mention Reformed baptists because consideration of their distinctive view on baptism and covenant helps clarify our argument.

The full text of the Position Paper, as well as that of subsequent correspondence, is printed commencing on page 131 of the Acts of Synod 1992, copy of which was mailed to you on 30 September 1992. There (p144) you can read the PCEA's response, which alas could not satisfy us, since it "by-passed our Scriptural and Confessional arguments" (see our letter in reply, p146).

Brothers, it is with some degree of urgency that we ask you to examine this material against the norms which God gives in His infallible Word, and which have been summarised in the Confessions.

It is our sincere prayer that in the way of our obedience His Name receive honour, and His Kingdom be established.

For the deputies:

C Bouwman (Convener)

J Eikelboom (Secretary)

APPENDIX 5 - FCS Report

Letter from FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

The Mound

Edinburgh, EH1 2LS

3th February 1994

Mr J Eikelboom

3160 Albany Highway

Armadale 6112 Western Australia

Dear Mr Eikelboom

In the welter of business in which I have been engaged this past year I find that your most recent (undated) letter has, as yet, not received a response.

For this I apologise as the letter was considered by our Committee on Ecumenical Relations as long ago as last October.

Apart from the unintended discourtesy of the delay I don't think any great harm has been done as the Committee did not see fit to engage in any inquisitorial discussions with you. The doctrine and practice of the Free Church of Scotland are publicly exhibited in our subordinate standards - the Westminster Confession being chief among them. The Church does not claim to have achieved perfection but does claim

to be diligent and alert in maintaining the doctrine and the consonant practice to which it is committed. By God's grace we know ourselves to be part of the universal Church of Jesus Christ, and we endeavour to advance His cause and Kingdom. We stand, not by the judgment of men, but by the judgment of our God and Saviour.

Yours sincerely,
C Graham

Respectfully submitted,
C Bouwman (convener)
J Bruning
J Eikelboom
P O Posthuma

LETTER AND RECOMMENDATION FROM A DEPUTY FOR CONTACT WITH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES

To the Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, c/o Free Reformed Church of Byford, PO Box 24, Byford, WA, 6201.

Legana, 1 March 1994

Esteemed brothers,

It is much to my regret that I address myself to you separately. However, my conscience compels me to do this. As noted in the report from deputies for contact with Presbyterian Churches we have done all the work together in a brotherly atmosphere. Thus it is not necessary for me to write a (minority) report in the strict sense of the word. For a report of our activities I can refer you to the above-mentioned report. Via this letter I wish to clarify my position and to make a recommendation regarding the contact with the FCS, EPCI and RPCI.

The reason why I could not endorse the report was that I felt unhappy with the reasoning and the conclusions of the report.

Regarding the PCEA, personal study of all the material involved (see for example my paper on "Unity of faith in Scripture and Confession", included in the ICRC report) and contacts with the sister churches have convinced me that the concerns we have with the PCEA should not be treated as impediments for recognition. I am convinced that we may not leave the PCEA at the doorstep any longer but that we should recognise God's work of preservation by giving the PCEA official recognition and on that basis continue the study and discussion of the remaining concerns. Seeing I only formulated a concrete proposal to that effect at a very late stage, as an alternative to the deputies report, my fellow deputies did not have sufficient time to digest my reasoning. It would therefore not have been fair to demand from them a definite choice between their own proposal and mine, especially considering the fact that my proposal went in a different direction than they considered to be the direction of our previous Synods. That is why I have refrained from pursuing this matter as deputy. Upon advice of fellow deputies I will now try to bring this matter on the table of Synod via my Consistory.

Regarding the contacts with the FCS, EPCI and RPCI the situation is different. Here the deputies are proposing a course of action which I feel is contrary to the direction our churches have gone up till now. The recommendation to phase out all those contacts would wipe out all the work done during the past decade to build up a relationship with those churches. This is not how we should treat each other as churches. To break the contacts that have been built up would require far more solid and pressing reasons.

I present to you the following considerations

1. The contacts with the FCS, EPCI and RPCI are not to be compared with the contacts we had with the churches in Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Japan and Uganda. These contacts have been more intensive. The language is no barrier for good communication.

Those churches have expressed that they appreciate contact with us and there have been contacts with those churches since the last Synod.

2. It may seem that there is no real progress in the contact with these churches, especially not if you read their response to our letters. Should such a response from the FCS and from the EPCI not give us reason to examine ourselves to see whether we are fair in the way we approach those churches? Are we perhaps demanding too much from them?

3. Synod 1990 has recognised the importance of limiting the requirements of the mandates to a manageable level (Acts Art 58). Present deputies wonder whether insisting on further discussions with those churches would not present deputies with a mandate well and truly beyond the "manageable level" desired in the above mentioned decision. Does this not give reason to reflect upon the mandates we give to deputies for contact with those churches?

4. Synod 1990 also decided to limit present contacts and relations with churches which are geographically close to our sister churches abroad and with churches which we have recognised as true and faithful to the minimum level necessary for us to maintain acquainted with their situation and to fulfil our obligations made to them (Acts Art 58). Seeing we cannot be "all things to all people" it is important to define more clearly what is needed to fulfil our obligations towards churches geographically far away. What level of contact is required and responsible in the various situations? Before sister church relations are offered it is important to be clear on how we are going to give content to such a relationship.

On the basis of the above I propose that Synod

1. leave the contacts with the FCS, EPCI and RPCI at the present level;
2. appoint new deputies with the mandate to study the matter of contacts with churches abroad and to work out mandates which are both manageable and responsible.

Your deputy, C.Kleyn

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

May 23, 1994

To the Synod of the FRCA, 1994

Further to the report we had earlier submitted to you, we received two items of correspondence which we wish to draw to your attention.

1. From the PCEA we received a letter containing a.o. the following request:

"Would you please convey to the brothers assembled in Synod the warm fraternal greetings of your brethren of the Synod of Eastern Australia. We hope that your Synod will be marked by that mutual love and submission to the Lord which transforms business into communion, and procedures into pleasure!"

2. From the RPCI we received the letter we mentioned in our initial report. This letter, dd 8 March 1994, is appended for your information. As the letter did not respond to the questions we had asked in our letter of 11 February 1993, we wrote once more (25 March 1994), urging a response. A second letter came to us dd 25 April 1994. We have included this letter as a second appendix to this supplementary report.

With brotherly greetings,

C Bouwman (convenor)

J Bruning, J Eikelboom, C Kleyn, PO Posthuma

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27 Manor Drive,
Lisburn, Co. Antrim, BT28 1JH.
N. Ireland.

8th March, 1994

J Eikelboom
3160 Albany Highway, Armadale 6112, Western Australia

Dear Mr Eikelboom,

Thank you for your letter of 21st February. I did reply in full to your letter of a year ago and I safely received the Acts of your 1992 Synod.

I note that your Synod decided to maintain contact with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland "at a low level" page 95 of Acts. We fully respect your right to do this. We, too, are careful with whom we have close contacts.

I am not quite sure at the moment what precise information or response you now require from us, but if you could be more explicit I will do my best to answer your questions.

Regarding our covenanting position, we do not regard that as extra-confessional, the Westminster Confession being clearly set in a covenanting context, being "agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, with the assistance of Commissioners from the Church of Scotland, as a part of the Covenanted Uniformity in religion betwixt the Churches of Christ in the Kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland." See the Acts of the Scottish Assembly, August 27, 1647, usually bound in same volume as the Confession, where the same covenanting context is stressed.

I am sorry if my last letter did not reach you. Please do not hesitate to ask for any further elucidation you may require.

With warm greetings,

Yours sincerely,

SIGNED by: Reverend Professor FS Leahy

From FRC Bedfordale
To Synod 1994

15 March 1994

Report on ARCHIVES and LIBRARY of Synod

Esteemed brothers,

We present to synod 1994 our report on Synod's Archives. It was prepared for us by sr J. VanderPlas who was so kind to take over the day-to-day duties from br J Numan at our request.

In her report she mentions that a microfilm record of the archives could not as yet be made Synod instruction b.) for the reason given.

This delay presents us with the opportunity to seek reconsideration, and confirmation or ariation as the case may be, of this instruction, since a close look at the contents of many documents has convinced us that they do not warrant the effort and expense associated with microfilming.

We therefore request your authorisation to apply this instruction on a selective basis, whereby each individual document is to be examined on its merits by a committee of three appointed by the Archivist. A detailed report can then be presented to next synod.

Respectfully submitted:

A VanDelden (chairman)

J Eikelboom (secretary)

8 March 1994.

Consistory of the Free Reformed Church of Bedfordale

ARCHIVES AND LIBRARY OF SYNOD

Esteemed brothers,

As archivist and librarian of synod I hereby submit my report.

INSPECTION

Last week representatives of Byford inspected the archives and found them to be in order. They discovered some items in the filing cabinet which had not been included in previously published lists of items. These have been added to the list shown hereunder.

SYNOD 1992 INSTRUCTIONS

Synod 1992 instructed deputies to:

- a. preserve all faint and flimsy documents by photocopying;
- b. make and maintain a microfiche record of the archives;
- c. acquire all correspondence and other relevant material from past deputies;
- d. ensure that borrowers of documents are given photocopies, so that the originals remain in the archives.

Re item a. Quite a few items have been photocopied by J. Numan. However, this is a time consuming task and, because I am still 'coming to grips' with my new position, I haven't been able to continue this work yet.

Re item b. Microfiche records cannot be made until item a. is completed

Re item c. A considerable amount of correspondence etc has been received from deputies and this has been stored in the archives.

Re item d. This instruction is being implemented.

ITEMS FROM 1992 SYNOD

SYNOD 1992 Correspondence inward

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 92.1.1 | Byford - proposal on the rules for correspondence to Synod |
| 92.1.2 | Kelmscott - proposal to change Rules for Synods regarding frequency of Synod meetings |
| 92.1.3 | Byford - proposal regarding presence of consistories, via delegates, at meetings of Classis |
| 92.1.4 | Bedfordale - proposal on the revision of the Church Order |
| 92.1.5 | Byford - proposal regarding Article 19 Church Order |
| 92.1.6 | Bedfordale - proposal on the financial support for needy theological students |
| 92.1.7 | P't Hart - Bible translation |
| 92.1.8 | Byford - regarding the choice of Bible translation for use in the churches |
| 92.1.9 | Launceston - proposal that Hobart be declared a 'house congregation' |
| 92.1.10 | Reverend G van Rongen - request to use text of Acts of Synod |
| 92.1.11 | Reverend G van Rongen - request for permission to use the text of revised Church Order |
| 92.1.12 | Reverend G van Rongen - regarding an omission in the text of Certificate of release of ministers |
| 92.1.13 | Reverend G van Rongen - some notes regarding: Report B on the ICRC by some of the deputies for contact with church abroad |

- 92.1.14 Reverend G van Rongen - some notes regarding: Report of deputies for revision of the Church Order
- 92.1.15 Bedfordale - proposal regarding ICRC
- 92.1.16 Bedfordale - appeal regarding ICRC
- 92.1.17 PW Dekker - submission regarding the recognition of other churches
- 92.1.18 Byford - proposal regarding Article 25 of the Church Order
- 92.1.19 K Heerema - regarding relationships/ contacts with churches and ICRC
- 92.1.20 Organ committee/organists of Armadale - singing of Genevan tunes
- 92.1.21 R Eikelboom - regarding the ICRC
- 92.1.22 Armadale - proposal regarding adoption of the Church Order
- 92.1.23 W & AC Amoraal - regarding the ICRC
- 92.1.24 A & M Schiebaan and M & W Eikelboom - contacts with churches and ICRC
- 92.1.25 Armadale - proposal on Bible translations
- 92.1.26 KA Wieske - notes responding to Reverend G van Rongen's notes on ICRC Report
- 92.1.27 M Vermeulen - request to receive Acts of Synod.
- 92.1.28 Draft Budget for Synod 1992.

SYNOD 1993 Deputies Reports

- 92.3.1 Archives and library of Synod
- 92.3.2 Inspection of archives and library
- 92.3.3 Treasurer of Synod
- 92.3.4 Auditors for synodical treasury
- 92.3.5 Relations with churches abroad
- 92.3.6 Contact with the PCEA
- 92.3.7 Bible translations
- 92.3.8 Training for the ministry (ad Articles 18,19 Church Order) and possibility for theological library
- 92.3.9 Pulpit exchanges
- 92.3.10 Revision of Church Order
- 92.3.11 Church visits
- 92.3.12 Ad Article 66 Church Order
- 92.3.13 Auditing the books ad Articles 18,19 Church Order
- 92.3.14 Examining sections of the Book of Praise (Ecumenical Creeds, Canons of Dort, Revision of Liturgical Forms, Hymn 1A) and ICRC Report on Ecumenical Creeds
- 92.3.15 Correspondence with the EPCA
- 92.3.16 Dialogue with the RCA
- 92.3.17 Supplementary - PCEA
- 92.3.18 Supplementary - Revision of the Church Order (3 pages)
- 92.3.19 Supplementary - Relations with churches abroad

SYNOD 1992

- 92.4.1 Attendance List
- 92.4.2 Credentials Kelmscott
- 92.4.3 Credentials Legana
- 92.4.4 Credentials Byford
- 92.4.5 Credentials Armadale
- 92.4.6 Credentials Launceston
- 92.4.7 Credentials Bedfordale
- 92.4.8 Credentials Albany
- 92.4.9 Credentials The Netherlands
- 92.4.10 Legana, reappointment of Rev Kleyn as counsellor for Launceston

Acts of closed session 1992.

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OTHER ITEMS

These items were not previously published in the Acts as being in the archives or library:

Acts of closed session 1987.

Acts of Australian synod 1990.

ITEMS OBTAINED FOR THE LIBRARY OF SYNOD SINCE 1992

Acts of Synod (Canada: Winnipeg) 1989

Acts of Synod (Australia: Bedfordale) 1992

Yours faithfully

J van der Plas

Byford, 090394

From: Deputies for inspection of archives and library of synod FRCA
To: Synod FRCA '94

Dear brothers,

On the 2nd of March the brothers P. Kleyn and J. de Vos, on behalf of the church council, carried out an inspection of archives and library of synod FRCA. The brothers reported that all but one of the items on the index list were present; the missing item (concerning a closed session in 1964) having disappeared some years ago. It was felt, however, that in a number of cases items kept under one heading were not sufficiently itemised on the index list as individual letters. The brothers were informed that a qualified librarian would undertake to rectify this last matter.

With brotherly greetings, on behalf of the church council,

Rev. C. Bouwman
chairman

G.J.G. van der Linde
secretary

REPORT TO SYNOD 1994

DEPUTIES BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

1. GENERAL

A. Mandate

Synod 1992 gave your deputies this mandate (Acts, art 141):

- a. to continue studies of the NKJV, in comparison with the NIV, to determine whether the NKJV can be endorsed as a final recommendation to the churches.

The areas of study should include:

- whether Old Testament textual sources are properly used;
- the extent and seriousness of the loss of reliability resulting from the chosen method of translation;
- b. to solicit from the churches comments on possible improvements in this translation for a conceivable reprint and send these comments to the publishers;
- c. to keep the churches posted as to further possible editions of the NKJV;
- d. to communicate this decision, together with reports of deputies serving Synod 1990 and 1992, to deputies from the Canadian Reformed Churches prior to their Synod in November 1992, urging the brotherhood to reach a similar decision;
- e. to maintain the archives;
- f. to monitor how the NKJV is received in the churches with a view to whether this version is worthy of final endorsement;
- g. to report to the next Synod.

B. Activities

Deputies held eight meetings during the past eighteen months.

Contact was made with, and information was received from:

1. The Committee on Bible translations of the Canadian Reformed Churches.
2. The Rev K Stebbins, Brisbane.
3. The Rev Prof Allan M. Harman, Melbourne.
4. Dr Arthur L Farstad, Executive Editor, NKJV, Nashville, Tennessee.

Following our requests for submissions through the Una Sancta of 24/10/92 and 17/4/93, we thankfully received some input from within the bond of the churches:

1. from the Church of Byford - report from Byford's committee for a comparison study between NIV and NKJV.
2. from sr F Roorda, Armadale - comparing Psalms in both translations.

2. INFORMATION RECEIVED

A. Byford Committee (June 1993)

After a comparative study of eight Bible chapters, the following conclusions are tabulated:

	NIV	NKJV
Ambiguity	less ambiguous on 17 occasions	less ambiguous on 12 occasions
Clarity	clearer on 40 occasions	clearer on 19
Missing Texts	misses text on 3 occasions	
Text Power Loss	text power loss on 5 occasions	
Questionable translation	questionable on 3 occasions	

The Rev C Bouwman, commenting on the report, adds his own conclusion: "the NKJV is definitely more faithful to the words of the original. The NIV adds explanations or interpretations. This makes the NIV clearer for the reader, but at the same time more misleading in terms of what the Lord has really put in His Word."

B. Sr F Roorda (Oct 1993)

After comparing a number of Psalms in both the NKJV and the NIV, also employing Reports - 182

a German and a Dutch translation, she concludes that "the NIV did excel in readability and clarity, using more contemporary language. Using the German and Dutch translations as well, I did not find that accuracy and reliability had really suffered."

C. The Rev K Stebbins

This minister of the Presbyterian Reformed Church had written an extensive review of the NKJV in The Protestant Review of July 1983. We asked him specifically to comment on the varying versions of the NKJV (reference was made to British usage and American usage editions). He replied that the differences between the so-called British and American editions seem to be disappearing in favour of a single standard edition, homing in on the more conservative renderings of the two. In his view, any editing now will be minimal. On the capitalization issue, he considers this largely a matter of usage. He had no difficulty with it being employed in a translation of Scripture. Pressed further on the matter of varying versions, he told us that his comments were based on his congregation's and his own regular use of the NKJV, not on hard evidence from the publishers or the review committee.

D. The Rev Prof Allan M Harman

We turned to Prof Harman - one of the O.T. translators of the NKJV - for advice re the NKJV's use of OT textual sources. He replied that "the translation took a very conservative view of the OT text, and in the main departed very rarely from the Masoretic text. In the NT the translation took a much higher view of the majority text than is common today." He was unable to throw further light on the matter of differing editions.

E. Dr Arthur L Farstad

Replying in May 1993 to a letter sent to the publishers in October 1991, he supplied comment on "readability" issues as listed in the Report to Synod 1990:

1. linguistic soundness: the words mentioned in the report are still being used in literature and in many other quarters. Some words are more widely used in different countries of the world. The theological terms he believes to be indispensable (terms like justification, predestined, etc).
2. verse divisions: there are editions of the NKJV that are paragraphed in the same way as the RSV, for those readers who object to having each verse treated as a separate unit.
3. pronouns and capitalization: the relative pronouns have not been capitalized. Dr Farstad states that where the person speaking to the Lord is unfriendly or unbelieving the capitalization reflects the view of the author of the book.
4. dispensationalism: there is no "submission" to dispensational or any other school of theology in the NKJV, says Dr Farstad. He refers to "a broad spectrum of people from various camps but who all have a high view of inspiration and hold to conservative theology."

Valuable information could be gained from Dr Farstad's book *The NKJV: In the great tradition*, 1993, Thomas Nelson Inc., Nashville. One subject discussed in the book and relevant to our mandate is the completeness of Old Testament data. We offer the following summary from the chapter concerned:

Chapter 9: Complete Old Testament Textual Data

In this chapter, Dr. Farstad traces the preservation of the Word of God in the Old Testament text.

Copying the OT books by hand, the ancient Jewish scholars showed meticulous care in their labours. The number of copyist errors is very small. By the sixth century A.D. the work of those scribes was continued by the Masoretes who preserved the sacred text in a form now known as the Masoretic Text. The officially recognised text of the Hebrew Bible came into being some 400 years later.

The translators of the King James Version used two printed Hebrew Bibles for their work, as well as some other manuscripts. One Bible was the Complutensian Polygot (1514 - 17), the other the second Blomberg edition of 1525. Both of these had been edited from the best representative text of the Masoretic Bible. Besides these, the translators also used the Masoretic notes (annotations in the margins), the ancient versions (eg. the Vulgate, the Aramaic Targums, the Greek Septuagint), Jewish tradition (commentaries of Jewish scholars) and English translation tradition (the repository of Bible scholarship from Tyndale to the Douai translation).

The 1611 translators made 232 textual recommendations in the OT. In a paper presented by Dr. James D. Price in 1986, he claims that 82 of those are justifiable, 146 not justifiable. He admits that "not everyone will agree on the classification of individual recommendations as justifiable and unjustifiable. In the less certain cases, differences in scholarly judgment are bound to arise."

Most recommendations, however, are spelling variations and trivial details. They actually help to counter the excessive veneration of the KJV which lives in some circles. Farstad writes: "While the recommendations of the KJV scholars seldom have serious effect on doctrine, they do show that the KJV, in its 'unjustifiable recommendations', is not infallible. The NKJV corrects these minor flaws."

Finally, Farstad mentions the significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The text of the Isaiah scroll shows how close it is to the text from which the KJV was translated. The main differences are in the spelling of certain kinds of words. As the dust around the Qumran finds is settling, it appears that the Masoretic Text of the OT has been preserved very well indeed.

As for the NKJV, the Masoretic readings are still to be found in its text. However, important variant readings from the Dead Sea Scrolls are given in the notes.

A final chapter in Dr Farstad's book deals with the translation method, under the heading "Complete equivalence in Translation". It presents a brief and lucid overview of the literal method, the paraphrase and the dynamic equivalence method, and then proceeds to the concept of "complete equivalence", a term coined by the NKJV's Old Testament editor, Dr James D Price.

Complete equivalence is presented as "the literal method updated to include scientific insights from linguistic analysis". Quoting Dr Price: "Modern research in structural linguistics has revealed the importance of syntactic structures. A great deal of the information contained in a phrase, clause or paragraph is encoded in its syntax. Translations that do not produce structural equivalence as well as semantic equivalence have failed to reproduce important information."

Illustrating the difference in renderings with the way the NT connectives "kai" and "de" are treated in the NASB, NKJV and NIV, Dr Farstad stresses that a basically literal translation method, assisted by the findings of modern linguistics, will yield the optimum version."

3. CONTACT WITH CANADA

Considering the importance of the churches in Canada, the USA and Australia acting in unison towards a commonly used Bible translation, we have pursued this contact consistently.

Copies of the previous deputies' report serving our Synod 1992 and of the decision taken by that Synod were sent to Dr J Visscher for publication in *Diakonia*.

The Synod Bedfordale 1992 decision was also made available to Synod Lincoln 1992 of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Although that Synod did not specifically mention the contact with Australia in the mandate to the new committee on Bible translations, the committee displayed a lively interest in such contact through its correspondence.

The committee was given the mandate "to do a comparative study of the NASB, NIV and NKJV, making use of past studies, in order to determine which one translation can be positively recommended for use by the churches, whereby the criteria are: faithfulness to the original text and linguistic character of the translation".

By last July, the committee was still in the beginning stages of its work. Because the next Synod of the CRC will not be held until May 1995, it is obvious that any exchanges of study materials and/or results will be severely limited in scope. In fact, by November 30 the committee informed us that as yet there was nothing to share. However, for our information we did receive a helpful five-page study paper by Prof J Geertsema entitled "Which Text-type of the New Testament Greek is the best?" In turn, we had nothing to offer the committee as our studies on the NKJV were still in progress until shortly before the finalization of this report.

It is regrettable in this case that the short time span between our Australian Synods has precluded the possibility of a determined search for common ground together with the brothers across the Pacific.

4. STUDIES ON THE NKJV

A. Ruth: The NIV and NKJV compared

Deputies compared the NKJV with the NIV as far as the book of Ruth is concerned. Despite some deficiencies in the NIV, its translation of Ruth was deemed to be better than the one provided by the NKJV. Deputies reached this conclusion, having considered the following:

1. Considerations favouring the NIV:

- a. The NIV provides a narrative which is very readable. This aspect of the translation makes it far superior to the NKJV. The NIV features clear, precise language, both in word usage and in sentence construction. The language used is current and flows well.
- b. Some passages in the NKJV are unclear (particularly after one reading only) or unnecessarily elaborate, either because of outdated (archaic) language use or clumsy, literal translations. As a result the language style has become stilted in places. The NKJV language does not always flow well. Also, some expressions seem ambiguous.

Some examples which underpin these considerations are listed below:

- a. In Ruth 1:6 the NKJV has "visited" which is not clear. The NIV has "has come to the aid of", which is clear.
- b. "Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands?" (1:13) is unnecessarily elaborate (NIV: "Would you remain unmarried?").
- c. "Entreat" (1:16) is an example of outdated language.
- d. "Excited" (1:19) with its connotation of happiness/joy is not the correct word to describe the reaction of the people when Naomi returned from Moab.
- e. "...the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me" (1:20) is ambiguous (NIV "...has made my life bitter").
- f. "Let your eyes be on the field" (2:9) is a rather clumsy way of translating that which could be precisely rendered with "watch" (NIV).
- g. The NKJV's translation of Ruth 2:10 does not make sense; one can not bow down after having fallen on one's face!
- h. "... stopped showing his kindness ..." (2:20) is clearer than "... forsaken ...".
- i. The NKJV's "concluded the matter" (3:18) is a rather awkward way of saying "settled the matter" (NIV).
- j. The NIV has "gave birth" whereas the NKJV renders "bore" (4:13).
- k. "...was the father of ..." is so much better than "begot" (4:18ff).
- l. Ruth 1:13 is incorrectly translated in the NKJV. The rendering "for your sakes" creates a far too positive impression about Naomi. The NIV is more realistic here.

2. Considerations not favouring the NIV:

- a. One inconsistency in the NIV was noted; in 2:2 the NIV translates "picked up" but one verse later it renders "glean".
- b. There are some sections in the NIV which feature additions or interpretations which may not be warranted. Examples are: Ruth 2:3 ("working"), 2:4 ("Just then"), 2:7 ("shelter") and 4:7b).

c. In some places the NIV has weakened links between clauses within sentences or between separate sentences (3:11b, 4:8b).

B. Zephaniah: the NIV and NKJV compared

1. General

In accordance with recommendation 10A, Article 141, Acts of Synod 1992, a comparative study was undertaken in relation to the book of Zephaniah. Not only was the extent and seriousness of the loss of reliability resulting from the chosen method of translation assessed, but a detailed examination of the language of both versions was also made, in respect to clarity, suitability and dignity because these two areas are interconnected.

The study gave some support to earlier findings that "the strength of the one is the weakness of the other and vice versa", though with this qualification that the NIV is often more faithful to the original than has previously been claimed, more so in several cases than the NKJV.

On the whole, the NIV proved to be the superior translation in respect to clarity, readability and style. Its language is fluent, clear, elegant, sober and generally contemporary, allowing the reader to focus on the message rather than on the meaning of the words. However, its practice of paraphrasing and interpreting, without indicating to the reader where it has done this, is also evident here. Another feature of the NIV is its internal consistency in using the exact terms and words in quotes - even of only phrases and expressions - from elsewhere in Scripture.

The NKJV's translation of Zephaniah is very disappointing indeed. On almost all counts it is inferior to the NIV. Its language and style are often stilted, ponderous and obscure. In attempting to retain the lofty and majestic style and sonority of the AV, it repeatedly falls into the trap of using pseudo-Jacobean vocabulary and style to produce the desired hallowed flavour. This practice makes the language of the NKJV here largely artificial; it uses a language no-one speaks and no-one has ever spoken. It has failed to update its vocabulary sufficiently for it to qualify as a reasonably contemporary translation, accessible to the general reader. By adhering too closely to the vocabulary and style of the AV, and by not recognizing that many words and expressions have acquired different values and connotations since 1611, it has in several places unnecessarily and unjustifiably obscured the meaning of the original.

The NKJV's claim that it is accurate and faithful to the original is often not borne out in the book of Zephaniah. In several instances it undoubtedly adheres more closely to the form of the original. But in other instances, the NIV is more faithful to the Hebrew text and is clearer as well. In later editions, the NKJV editors have added improvements in the line of the NIV as footnotes, but have not incorporated them into the text.

The NKJV's most serious shortcoming in its translation of Zephaniah is its general lack of clarity. As a result of its translation method (FE approach), its use of outdated words and expressions and its close adherence to the AV, the NKJV is frequently unjustifiably ambiguous, confusing, obscure and sometimes almost unintelligible.

2. Supporting material - Zephaniah

a. NIV style, language and vocabulary superior / NKJV obscure ambiguous and/or outdated

1:2 "face of the earth"(NIV) "face of the land (NKJV). "Land" in Hebrew may mean both land and earth. It is obvious from the context that more than just Judah/Israel is meant.

1:3 "animals" (NIV) "beast" (NKJV). "Animal" today means the same as beast in 17th century English. "Beast" has acquired other connotations since.

1:3 "air" (NIV) "heavens" (NKJV). In modern English "heaven/s" is understood almost exclusively as the realm of God and the angels.

1:5 "the starry host"(NIV) "the host of heaven" (NKJV). See 1:3 above. NKJV confusing - closely reminiscent of "heavenly host" of Luke 2 and elsewhere.

1:8 "clothes"(NIV) "apparel"(NKJV). Another instance of outdated vocabulary.

1:11 "all your merchants will be wiped out"(NIV) "all the merchant people are cut down"(NKJV). NKJV awkward. NKJV confusing because of present tense. NKJV also misleading as "cut down" suggests the agency of the sword, which is not necessarily the case.

1:12 "the Lord will nothing, either good or bad" (NIV) "the Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil" (NKJV). NKJV implies that the complacent dismiss the Lord as morally neutral, while the NIV stresses inaction on the Lord's part.

1:13 "their wealth will be plundered"(NIV) "their goods shall become booty" (NKJV). NKJV pompous in attempt to retain Jacobean flavour.

1:13 "their houses will be demolished"(NIV) "their houses a desolation" (NKJV). NKJV follows AV literally. NIV much clearer. What does "desolation" mean?

1:14 "coming quickly" (NIV) "hastens quickly" (NKJV). How can one hasten any way other than quickly? Even AV has "hastens greatly".

1:14 "the cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter"(NIV) "the noise of the day of the Lord is bitter" (NKJV). NKJV confusing.

1:15 "will be" (NIV) "is"(NKJV). NIV's use of tense more logical and less confusing.

1:16 "battle cry" (NIV) "alarm" (NKJV). "Alarm" in the sense of rousing to battle is no longer used. "Alarm" here easily conveys the wrong impression of "panic".

1:17 "entrails like filth" (NIV) "flesh like refuse" (NKJV). NIV clearer and more graphic here.

1:18 "save" (NIV) "deliver"(NKJV). Though "deliver" is a common word in our circles, it is confusing, as the generally understood meaning is to take charge of something and deposit it safely at its destination.

1:18 "he will make a sudden end" (NIV) "he will make speedy riddance" (NKJV). NKJV is clumsy and far less direct and clear.

2:3 "perhaps you will be sheltered" (NIV) "It may be that you will be hidden" (NKJV). NIV more direct and clear.

2:4 "At midday" (NIV) "at noonday" (NKJV). "Noonday" serves no purpose here other than to impart Jacobean flavour.

2:4 "Ashdod will be emptied" (NIV) "They shall drive out Ashdod" (NKJV). NKJV unclear - who will drive out Ashdod? Gaza and Ashkelon? - there is no-one else "they" can refer to. However, the Hebrew has "they". NIV has attempted to overcome the difficulty by using the passive voice.

2:5 "and none will be left" (NIV) "so there shall be no inhabitant" (NKJV). NIV clearer and less clumsy.

2:6 "pens" (NIV) "folds" (NKJV). NKJV uses an outdated term.

2:8 "I have heard the insults of Moab" (NIV) "...the reproach of Moab" (NKJV). "Reproach" no longer primarily conveys the idea of shame, opprobrium, disgrace etc that it did in the time of the AV, but now has more the sense of mild upbraiding or rebuke. NIV is therefore stronger and closer to the original meaning. The whole verse is clumsy in the NKJV.

2:9 "As surely as I live" (NIV) "as I live" (NKJV). NIV is clearer and more forceful because it uses an expression which is currently used and understood. NIV sticks to the AV, without, incidentally, italicizing "as".

2:9 "a wasteland forever" (NIV) "a perpetual desolation" (NKJV). NIV clearer and more sober.

2:10 Whole verse in NIV is clearer and more fluent.

2:11 "The nations on every shore will worship him, every one in its own land" (NIV) "people shall worship him, each one from his place, indeed all the shores of the nations" (NKJV). NKJV is so awkward as to be almost unintelligible.

2:13 "dry as the desert" (NIV) "dry as the wilderness". In our environment-conscious age, wilderness is no longer synonymous with desert.

2:14 "rubble will be in the doorways" (NIV) "desolation shall be at the threshold" (NKJV). In attempting to update the AV, NKJV has obscured the meaning of this phrase (AV: "In the thresholds"); now the reader is not sure if desolation is just around the corner (at the threshold) or if the threshold has been made desolate.

2:15 "what a ruin she has become...!" (NIV) "How has she become a desolation...!" (NKJV). NKJV confusing because, in using an outmoded form of exclamation, suggests a question. The meaning of this whole verse in the NKJV is unclear.

3:1 "defiled (NIV) "polluted" (NKJV). "Polluted" has acquired connotations it did not have in 17th century England (or in the time of Zephaniah!).

3:2 "she accepts no correction" (NIV) "she has not received correction" (NKJV). NKJV, following AV, is misleading - "receiving" in the sense of accepting is no longer used, giving modern readers the impression that Jerusalem was never GIVEN correction, whereas surely the meaning is that she REJECTED it.

3:5 "the LORD within her is righteous" (NIV) "The Lord is righteous in her midst" (NKJV). NKJV is clumsy and ambiguous so this phrase may mean "the LORD who is righteous, is in her midst" or "the LORD does righteousness in her midst".

3:7 "you will ... accept correction" (NIV) "you will ... receive instruction" (NKJV). NKJV misleading. See 3:2 above.

3:7 "But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did" (NIV) "But they rose early and corrupted all their deeds" (NKJV). NKJV (following AV) almost nonsensical.

3:9 "Then will I purify the lips of the peoples" (NIV) "then I will restore to the peoples a pure language" (NKJV). Hebrew: lips (as in NIV). NKJV follows AV and is misleading (implying that Hebrew is not good enough for the purpose). However, NIV uses inverted sentence form.

3:11 "you will not be put to shame" (NIV) "you shall not be shamed" (NKJV). "Be shamed" is an unnecessary archaism.

3:11 "never again will you be haughty on my holy hill" (NIV) "you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain" (NKJV). NKJV unclear and clumsy (esp "in").

3:13 "they will eat and lie down" (NIV) "they shall feed their flocks and lie down" (NKJV). Surely it is the remnant ("they") that shall feed and lie down (like sheep) and not, as NKJV suggests, the remnant lying down while their flocks feed. No other translation mentions "flocks".

3:15 "The Lord has taken away your punishment" (NIV) "The Lord has taken away your judgments" (NKJV). NKJV is ambiguous, and could be taken to mean "your ability to judge" or "the things you have judged" as well as "your punishment".

3:15 "never again will you fear any harm" (NIV) "you shall see disaster no more" (NKJV). Textual variants here, but the NKJV is somewhat ambiguous all the same - "see" here suggests "to witness" or "to observe" rather than the intended "to experience".

3:19 "all who oppressed you" (NIV) "all who afflict you" (NKJV). "Afflict" is not current language, and no translation other than AV has it.

3:19 "I will give them praise" (NIV) "I will appoint then for praise" (NKJV). Hebr: "I will set them for a praise". NKJV is both pompous and unclear - even the AV does not use this obscure term.

b. NIV is more faithful to the original and clearer than the NKJV.

1:2,3 "I will sweep away" (NIV) "I will (utterly) consume" (NKJV). Hebr: "by taking away I will make an end".

1:7 "he has consecrated those he has invited" (NIV) "he has invited his guests" (NKJV). NIV has more closely followed the original here to include the idea of the Hebrew "sanctified or prepared". NKJV has added the literal Hebrew in a footnote.

1:12 "complacent ... like wine left on its dregs" (NIV) "...settled in complacency" (NKJV). Hebr: "men that are curded" or "thickened" ie "thickened on their lees". NKJV has lost the allusion to wine left undisturbed (cf Jer 48:11, where NIV translates consistently but the NKJV does not, though NKJV adds literal Hebrew meaning in a footnote).

2:3 "humble" (NIV) "meek" (NKJV). "Humble is a better word for ANAW than "meek", as it denotes a devout attitude to God rather than a lowly one towards men." (Carson)

2:15 "I am, and there is none besides me" (NIV) "I am it, and there is none besides me" (NKJV). NIV is closer to the Hebrew and makes more sense.

3:5 "morning by morning" (NIV) "every morning" (NKJV). NIV's literal translation is readily understood, though it is not an expression in current use.

3:9 "then I will purify the lips of the peoples" (NIV) "then I will restore to the peoples a pure language" (NKJV). Hebr: "lips".

3:9 "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (NIV) "serve him with one accord" (NKJV). Hebr: "shoulder". NIV is perfectly clear, although the NKJV rendering is more current English. NKJV follows AV with update.

In both instances in verse 9, NIV is clearer and more faithful to the original; NKJV is more faithful to AV.

c. NKJV has followed AV, with loss of clarity

1:2 "I will utterly consume all things from off the land" (AV)

"I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land" (NKJV)

"I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," (NIV).

1:3 "I will consume the fowls of the heaven" (AV)

"I will consume the birds of the heavens" (NKJV)

"I will sweep away the birds of the air" (NIV).

1:5 "them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops" (AV)

"those who worship the host of heaven on the housetops" (NKJV)

"those who bow down on the housetops to worship the starry host" (NIV).

1:8 "all such as are clothed with strange apparel" (AV)

"all such as are clothed with foreign apparel" (NKJV)

"all those clad in foreign clothes" (NIV).

1:12 "the LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil" (AV)

"the LORD will not do good, nor will he do evil" (NKJV)

"the LORD will do nothing, either good or bad" (NIV).

1:13 "their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation" (AV)

"their goods shall become booty, and their houses a desolation" (NKJV).

"their wealth will be plundered, their houses demolished" (NIV).

1:15 "that day is a day of wrath" (AV)

"that day is a day of wrath" (NKJV)

"that day will be a day of wrath" (NIV).

2:3 "seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth" (AV)

"seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth" (NKJV)

"seek the LORD, all you humble of the land" (NIV).

2:4 "they shall drive out Ashdod at the noon day" (AV)

"they shall drive out Ashdod at noonday" (NKJV)

"at midday Ashdod will be emptied" (NIV).

2:9 "therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts" (AV)

"therefore, as I live, says the LORD of hosts" (NKJV)

"therefore, as surely as I live, declares the LORD Almighty" (NIV).

2:14 "desolation shall be in the thresholds" (AV)
 "desolation shall be at the threshold" (NKJV)
 "rubble will be in the doorways" (NIV).
 2:15 "how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in!" (AV)
 "how has she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down!" (NKJV)
 "what a ruin she has become, a lair for wild beasts!" (NIV).
 3:2 "she received not correction" (AV)
 "she has not received correction" (NKJV)
 "she accepts no correction" (NIV).
 3:2 AV, NKJV use past tense, implying that the matters mentioned happened in the past and were not part of an ongoing condition. NIV uses present tense.
 3:7 "but they rose early, and corrupted all their doings" (AV)
 "but they rose early and corrupted all their deeds" (NKJV)
 "but they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did" (NIV).
 3:9 "for then will I turn to the people a pure language" (AV)
 "for then I will restore to the peoples a pure language" (NKJV)
 "then will I purify the lips of the peoples" (NIV).

d. NKJV gives clearer and/or more accurate translation than NIV

1:3 "the wicked will have only heaps of rubble" (NIV) "and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked" (NKJV). NIV can be clearly understood in its context, adding in a footnote that the Hebrew meaning is uncertain. However, the NIV rendering of this sentence is very doubtful, whereas the NKJV follows the Hebrew more closely and can be clearly understood if read in conjunction with, eg, Matthew 13:41.

1:9 "leap over the threshold" (NKJV) "avoid stepping on the threshold" (NIV). NIV connects this verse to 1 Samuel 5:5 and uses the same terms with no apparent justification.

1:9 "their masters' houses" (NKJV) "the temple of their gods" (NIV). NIV continues the unwarranted allusion to 1 Samuel 5:5.

2:2 "before the decree is issued" (NKJV) "before the appointed time arrives" (NIV). NKJV is more specific here: an order for action (decree) is issued by a king; far more direct than "the appointed time arrives".

2:11 "he will reduce to nothing all the gods of the earth" (NKJV) "he destroys all the gods of the land" (NIV). Hebr: "to make lean". NKJV captures the meaning slightly better.

2:14 "he will lay bare the cedar work" (NKJV) "the beams of cedar will be exposed" (NIV). In leaving out the agency of God, NIV paraphrases unnecessarily freely here.

2:15 "this is the rejoicing city" (NKJV) "this is the carefree city" (NIV). NKJV's use of "rejoicing" is somewhat confusing - the reader looks back to find what the city is rejoicing at. NIV makes more sense, but does not convey the exultation and arrogant self-confidence of the original.

3:3 "wolves that leave not a bone" (NKJV) "wolves that leave nothing" (NIV). NIV interpreting here unnecessarily - Hebr imagery as rendered by the NKJV is easily understood in the context.

3:13 "Israel shall do no unrighteousness" (NKJV) "Israel will do no wrong" (NIV). NKJV is awkward, but richer.

3:16 "In that day it shall be said" (NKJV) "On that day they will say" (NIV). NIV less clear - who are "they"?

e. NIV gives evidence of greater internal consistency

1:12 "complacent ...like wine left on its dregs" (NIV) "settled in complacency" (NKJV). NKJV has lost the allusion to wine left undisturbed (implicit in Hebr) cf Jer 48:11, where NIV translated consistently, but NKJV does not.

2:15 "I am, and there is none besides me" (NIV) "I am it, and there is none besides me" (NKJV). This is a quotation from Is 47:8. NIV quotes verbatim, NKJV does not.

3:13 NIV consistently translates "remnant", but NKJV appears not to recog-

nize the connection, translating variously as "trace", "remnant" and "residue". AV as in NIV.

f. NKJV retains Hebraisms

a. use of "and" to begin sentences: 1:8, 10, 12 etc.

b. use of "and it shall come to pass". NKJV has made some effort, though not a consistent one, to avoid this (eg in 1:8, 10, but used for no purpose in 1:12).

c. use of "behold" in 3:19. In fairness it must be said that, while the NKJV uses this outmoded "Behold", the NIV does not account for the Hebrew in this at all.

[One of the four signatories to this report has been unable to endorse the above section on Zephaniah.]

C. Lewis on the NKJV

Even though this author was already referred to in previous deputies' reports, it was deemed helpful to include a brief summary of the main points raised by him about the NKJV in his book *The English Bible: from KJV to NIV, a history and evaluation*, published by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. It has to be born in mind that Lewis undoubtedly has written with a certain amount of bias since he was a NIV translator himself.

Briefly Lewis makes the following positive points regarding the NKJV:

1. The NKJV sought to maintain the lyrical quality of the KJV.
2. A great effort was made to update the language presented in the KJV;
 - a. It did much to update the spelling of many words.
 - b. Its vocabulary was modified to a great extent

In what follows below Lewis's criticisms of the NKJV are summarized:

1. The rules for the definite article in Hebrew and English do not correspond; Like the KJV, the NKJV did not know when to insert or omit the definite article.
2. Why stop with new old English? The NKJV is a curious mixture of Elizabethan style with glosses of 20th century vocabulary and grammar.
3. The processes of modernization have been inconsistently carried out: The OT promises "descendants" (Gen. 12,13,24) but this is rendered by "seed" in NT citations of these promises; "seed" is old-English usage as well.
4. The NKJV kept much of that which is no longer current usage eg.: "espousals", "befitting", "eventide", "frontlets", "offscouring", "outgoings of the morning", "paramours".

The vocabulary is often unknown, not understood. Archaisms: "with child", "lay with" and "know" (dealing with sexual intercourse), "conceive".

5. The Bible's NT was written in Koine Greek, the common vernacular; it is therefore suitable to be translated into current English.

6. The NKJV claims to have aimed for "complete equivalence", eg. "Only begotten" Son. Why not translate that in the passages dealing with the widow's son, Jairus's daughter and the epileptic child, since the same Greek term meaning "only begotten" occurs in each of these cases?

To the NKJV, loyalty to tradition and theological concern might be more important than achieving complete equivalence.

7. Some people religiously claim that certain terms should not be changed or replaced, eg. "propitiation", "justification", "sanctification".

These words might sound familiar to churchmen, but not to all English speaking people.

8. The NKJV's capitalization of pronouns, particularly those in the OT referring to the coming Christ, amounts to interpretation.

9. Italicization: its usefulness is questionable, because it is employed inconsistently. Its use gives a false sense of security to the reader who might conclude that, if something is not italicized, it must be in the original. This, however, is not always the case.

10. The capitalization of the first word of every verse and of every line of poetry leads to the fragmentation of the material; the reader may perceive things separately where they should be taken together.

11. Only scant attention has been paid to male-oriented language.

12. In spite of the NKJV's intention to revise, the old inverted English style has been retained in some verses; "But all their works they do" (Matt.23:5).

13. The capitalization of pronouns used in some psalms (2 and 45) obscures the fact that these made reference to an earthly king and in the second place to the Messiah.

14. Some inconsistencies: Christ is referred to as an "overseer" (1 Peter 2:25). In Acts 20 the elders of Ephesus are referred to as "overseers." However, the word "bishop" is used when the same original Greek word occurs in the context of church organisation. (Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim 3:1,2); the old "bishopric" becomes "office" in the NKJV (Acts 1:20).

Having read Lewis on the NKJV, deputies conclude:

1. Lewis acknowledges the many improvements made by the NKJV on the old KJV;

2. He regrets that the NKJV has not gone far enough in language modernization; he concentrates on archaic words, outdated terms and language usage.

Lewis also attacks the NKJV's use of capitalization as confusing, interpretative and therefore incorrect. He basically does the same with regards to the NKJV's use of italics. He also denounces the use of italics in some cases where to an uninformed reader an italicized word seems to receive an emphasis when it really should not.

If we accept this from Lewis, it will confirm our conviction that, indeed, the method of translation has had a negative impact on the Bible version's reliability.

5. CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

a. Deputies wish to repeat that there is no such thing as a perfect translation. Both the NIV and the NKJV have their strengths and weaknesses.

b. The NIV is valuable as a clear translation in contemporary English. Its drawback is that it is too free and too interpretive at times.

c. The NKJV is valuable as a more literal translation which in the NT follows the Majority text in most instances or otherwise indicates the Majority text in a footnote. Its major drawback is its lack of clarity.

d. Regarding the underlying text, Synod 1990 decided to accept the premise that there is room for a careful eclectic method. It considered that a choice for a specific translation can not be made merely on the basis of the underlying text.

e. All things being equal, the loss through simplification or paraphrastic interpretation is more serious than the loss through lack of clarity. Generally, in the case of lack of clarity the original words in the text can still be traced back.

f. On the basis of the material studied it appears that the losses in the NKJV due to lack of clarity are more frequent than the losses in the NIV due to simplification or paraphrastic interpretation. This implies that the NIV is not necessarily less reliable than the NKJV. In fact in many instances the NIV is more reliable than the NKJV.

g. Both an interpretive translation and an unclear translation are misleading. People are led to believe that the Word of God says something which it in fact does not say.

h. Because of the importance of having a clear translation in contemporary English - the NKJV is weak in this regard -, the NIV remains a translation worthy of serious consideration for use in the churches, homes and schools.

i. Synod need not be concerned about the fact that the NIV or the NKJV already have a place in the families. Both translations have their value. What should be of concern to Synod is that people ought not to use those translations in an uncritical manner. Thus it is important to make the members aware of the pros and the cons of both translations.

j. Seeing that, generally speaking, the strength of the NIV is the weakness of the NKJV, and vice versa, it would indeed be ideal if the members would be acquainted with both translations and use them side by side.

k. In view of our close relationship with the CanRC and our common church book

it is important to aim at a common approach with the CanRC as much as possible. The CanRC have appointed a committee "... to do a comparative study of the NASB, NIV and NKJV ... in order to determine which one translation can be positively recommended for use by the churches ..." It would be unwise of the FRSA to make a definite choice of translation before it is clear what direction the CanRC will be taking. With the expertise available to them they may certainly help us come to a final conclusion.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Synod decide

1. to thank deputies for the work done and discharge them;
2. to retain the archives;
3. to recommend to the churches that either the NIV or the NKJV be used for study, instruction and family purposes or that both translations be used side by side;
4. to remind the church membership of the strengths and weaknesses of the NIV and the NKJV as mentioned in the reports of deputies to this and previous Synods;
5. to defer a definite decision regarding the translation to be used in the church services until it is clear what direction the CanRC will be going;
6. to appoint new deputies with the mandate
 - a. to communicate this decision to deputies from the CanRC, to maintain contact with those deputies and to evaluate the report they are to compile for their forthcoming Synod;
 - b. to monitor developments in both the NIV and NKJV
 - c. to solicit from the churches comments on possible improvements in these translations for a possible reprint and send these comments to the publishers;
 - d. to monitor how these translations are received in the churches;
 - e. to maintain the archives;
 - f. to report to the next Synod with recommendations.

Deputies for Bible Translations

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February 1994

DEPUTIES FOR THE STUDY OF THE ECUMENICAL CREEDS

Mandate: Acts of Synod, 1993, Article 103: To study the proposed texts (of the ecumenical creeds) as proposed by the ICET (cf Proceedings of ICRC, 1989, pp. 151ff.). The deputies wish to point out to Synod that although it was not included in their mandate, deputies provide Synod with information concerning the texts of the ecumenical creeds as adopted by the Canadian Reformed Churches and found in the Book of Praise, or which will be proposed to the next Synod.

ANALYSIS OF THE CREEDS

A. Apostles' Creed

PRESENT TEXT OF THE BOOK OF PRAISE	THE INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATION TEXT	DEPUTIES' RECOMMENDED TEXT
1. I believe in God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.	1. I believe in God, the Father almighty, 2. creator of heaven and earth.	1. I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.
2. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord;	3. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.	2. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only (-begotten) Son, our Lord.
3. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary;	4. He was conceived by (the power of) the Holy Spirit 5. and born of the Virgin Mary.	3. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary;
4. suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell.	6. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, 7. was crucified, died, and was buried. 8. He descended to the dead.	4. suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell.
5. On the third day He arose from the dead;	9. On the third day he rose again.	5. On the third day He arose from the dead;
6. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty;	10. He ascended into heaven, 11. and is seated at the right hand of the Father.	6. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
7. from there He will come to judge the living and the dead.	12. He will come to judge the living and the dead.	7. from there He will come to judge the living and the dead.
8. I believe in the Holy Spirit.	13. I believe in the Holy Spirit,	8. I believe in the Holy Spirit.
9. I believe a holy catholic Christian church, the communion of saints	14. the holy catholic Church 15. the communion of saints,	9. I believe a holy catholic church, the communion of saints,
10. the forgiveness of sins;	16. the forgiveness of sins	10. the forgiveness of sins;
11. the resurrection of the body;	17. the resurrection of the body,	11. the resurrection of the body;
12. and the life everlasting.	18. and the life everlasting.	12. and the life everlasting

MAJOR CHANGES	RECOMMENDATION	GROUND
There are 18 articles instead of the tradition 12.	To retain the numbering as twelve articles.	There are no good grounds to warrant any change.
Capitalisation lacking for <i>creator</i> .	To capitalise <i>creator</i>	<i>Creator</i> is used as a name for God, not as an adjective and should be capitalised.
Although the ICET text does not alter the words, <i>I believe in Jesus Christ</i> , the ICRC committee suggests an alteration: <i>And in</i> instead of <i>I believe in</i>	Not to accept alteration.	The alteration is a more correct translation of the Received Text, but harmony with the Creed as it is printed in the Book of Praise would favour retaining the present reading, <i>I believe in</i>
<i>only Son</i> instead of <i>only begotten Son</i> .	No recommendation given.	The alteration is a more correct translation of Received Text (<i>unicum</i>). The word <i>begotten</i> seems to have been borrowed from the Nicene Creed prior to the Reformation when liberty was taken of "mixing" the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds. <i>Begotten</i> is found in both the creed as quoted in both the German and the Latin versions of the Heidelberg Catechism, but <i>begotten</i> is not found in the Apostles' Creed quoted in Calvin's Genevan Catechism.
<i>conceived by (the power of) the Holy Spirit</i> instead of <i>conceived by the Holy Spirit</i> .	Not to accept alteration.	The alteration is not an accurate translation of the Received Text.
<i>He descended to the dead</i> instead of <i>He descended into hell</i> .	Not to accept alteration	The alteration is not an accurate translation of the Received Text (although an acceptable interpretation). Furthermore, this alteration does not harmonise with the Heidelberg Catechism's interpretation of this article.
<i>He rose again</i> instead of <i>He arose from the dead</i> .	Not to accept alteration.	The alteration is not an accurate translation of the Received Text.
<i>right hand of the Father</i> instead of <i>right hand of God the Father Almighty</i> .	Not to accept alteration	The alteration is not an accurate translation of the Received Text.
<i>He will come to judge</i> instead of <i>From there He will come to judge</i>	Not to accept alteration	The alteration is not an accurate translation of the Received Text.
the holy catholic Church instead of <i>I believe a holy catholic church</i> .	Not to accept the deletion of the words <i>I believe</i> .	The alteration is a more accurate translation of the Received Text. Nevertheless, these words are included under the previous <i>I believe</i> , and their addition promotes better understanding.
<i>the holy catholic Church</i> instead of <i>a holy catholic church</i>	Not to accept alterations.	Regarding the article, both our present reading and the alteration are acceptable. There is no advantage to change, therefore retain the traditional reading. Regarding the capitalisation of <i>Church</i> , this appears to be a favour to the Church of Rome. The church should not be elevated above the communion of saints or the forgiveness of sins, etc..

B. NICENE CREED

PRESENT TEXT IN THE BOOK OF PRAISE	THE INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATION TEXT	PROPOSED REVISION OF THE BOOK OF PRAISE	DEPUTIES' RECOMMENDED TEXT
I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.	We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen,	We believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.	We believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.	We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.	We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father. Through Him all things were made.	We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; God of God, light of light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father. Through Him all things were made;
Who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end	For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.	For us men and for our salvation, He came down from heaven; by the Holy Spirit He became incarnate of the virgin Mary and was made man. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried. On the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; He ascend-ed into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.	For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; On the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; He ascend-ed into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His Kingdom will have no
And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.	We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.	We believe in the Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of life. who proceeds from the Father and the Son. He with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets.	We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets.
And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.	We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.	And we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.	And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and to the life of the world to come. Amen.

MAJOR CHANGES	RECOMMENDATION	GROUND
Plural <i>We believe</i> instead of singular <i>I believe</i> .	Adopt alteration	This alteration is a more correct translation of the Received Text.
<i>of all that is, seen and unseen.</i>	Not to adopt alteration.	This is a free translation of the Received Text, which does not add anything to the understanding of the phrase.
<i>of all things visible ... instead of and of all things visible...</i>	Adopt alteration.	The copulative incorrectly makes it appear that <i>all things visible and invisible</i> are not included in <i>heaven and earth</i> .
<i>We believe in one Lord ... instead of And in one Lord</i>	Adopt alteration.	The addition of <i>We believe in</i> is not in the Received Text. Nevertheless, its addition highlights more clearly the trinitarian character of the creed.
<i>the only Son ... instead of the only-begotten Son.</i>	Not to adopt alteration.	The important word <i>begotten</i> , which is present in the Received Text, was wrongly regarded as an unnecessary repetition of a word that is used three times in close succession.
<i>eternally begotten</i> instead of <i>begotten... before all worlds.</i>	Not to adopt alteration.	This is a free translation of the Received Text, which adds nothing to the understanding of the phrase, and is open to possible misinterpretation.
<i>before all ages</i> instead of <i>before all worlds.</i>	Adopt alteration.	This is a better translation of the word <i>saecula</i> .
<i>of one Being with the Father</i> instead of <i>of one substance with the Father.</i>	Not to adopt alteration.	The word <i>substance</i> is a closer translation of the Latin <i>consubstantialem</i> as is used by many theologians.
<i>Through Him</i> instead of <i>by Whom.</i>	Adopt alteration.	The Received Text has only one sentence, containing more than one thought. Since a new thought begins (the work of the Son in creation in contrast to the preceding thought concerning the being of the Son) it seems appropriate to begin a new sentence.
<i>For us men ...</i> instead of <i>Who for us men</i>	Adopt alteration (and other alterations where the long sentences of the present text are made into shorter sentences).	As above, a new thought begins, which warrants a new sentence.
<i>By the power of the Holy Spirit He became incarnate</i> instead of <i>He was incarnate by the Holy Spirit.</i>	Not to adopt alteration.	The alteration is proposed in order to prevent any thoughts of carnal activity in the operation of the Holy Spirit. This alteration, while laudable in itself, should be rejected because it deviates too much from the Received Text.

<i>suffered death</i> instead of <i>suffered</i> .	Not to accept alteration.	Although it is undisputed that Christ's death is included in His suffering, yet this addition departs from the Received Text and might tend to focus only upon the suffering of Christ at the end of His life.
<i>Is seated</i> instead of <i>sits</i>	Not to accept alteration.	Either is defensible, (The active verb can have causal force, as it does in Eph 1:20, which requires a passive interpretation. Or the verb can simply be translated actively, as in Mt 25:31). It would seem that <i>sits</i> would be a better reflection of <i>sedet</i> of the Received Text.
<i>I believe in one holy catholic church</i> instead of <i>I believe one holy catholic church</i> .	Not to accept alteration.	Traditionally, we have distinguished between believing <i>in</i> God, but believing <i>a</i> church. The word <i>in</i> is not found in the Latin ¹ text, and there is good reason not to add it to the English text.

C. Athanasian Creed

1. Present Text	1. The Recommended (ICRC) Text	Canadian (Revised) Text	Deputies' Recommended Text
1. Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith;	1. Whosoever desires to be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith.	1. Whoever desires to be saved must above all things hold to the catholic faith.	1. Whoever desires to be saved must above all things hold to the catholic faith.
2. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.	2. Except anyone keeps it whole and unharmed, he will without doubt perish everlastingly.	2. Unless a man keeps it in its entirety inviolate, he will surely perish eternally.	2. Unless a man keeps it in its entirety inviolate, he will surely perish eternally.
3. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;	3. The catholic faith, then is this, that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity.	3. Now this is the catholic faith, that we worship one God in trinity and trinity in unity.	3. Now this is the catholic faith, that we worship one God in trinity and trinity in unity.
4. Neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance.	4. neither confusing the persons not dividing the substance.	4. without either confusing the persons, or dividing the substance.	4. without either confusing the persons, or dividing the substance.

¹ cf. Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, Baker, 1983, Vol. 2, pg. 58.

5. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.	5. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Spirit,	5. For the Father's person is one, the Son's another, the Holy Spirit another;	5. For the Father's person is one, the Son's another, the Holy Spirit another;
6. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal	6. but the Godhead of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is one and the same, their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal.	6. But the Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one, the glory is equal, their majesty is co-eternal.	6. But the Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one, the glory is equal, their majesty is co-eternal
7. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit.	7. Such as the Father, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit:	7. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, such is also the Holy Spirit.	7. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, such is also the Holy Spirit.
8. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Spirit uncreate.	8. uncreated is the Father, uncreated is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit;	8. The Father is uncreate, the Son uncreate, the Holy Spirit uncreate.	8. The Father is uncreate, the Son uncreate, the Holy Spirit uncreate.
9. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.	9. infinite is the Father, infinite is the Son, infinite the Holy Spirit;	9. The Father is infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite	9. The Father is infinite, the Son infinite, the Holy Spirit infinite.
10. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal.	10. eternal is the Father; eternal is the Son, eternal the Holy Spirit;	10. The Father is eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal.	10. The Father is eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Spirit eternal.
11. And yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal.	11. and yet they are not three Eternals, but there is one Eternal.	11. Yet there are not three eternal, but one eternal;	11. Yet there are not three eternal, but one eternal;
12. As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensibles but one uncreated and one incomprehensible.	12. Just as they are not three Uncreated, nor three Infinities, but there is one Uncreated and one Infinite.	12. just as there are not three uncreates or three infinities, but one uncreate and one infinite.	12. just as there are not three uncreates or three infinities, but one uncreate and one infinite.
13. So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty;	13. In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty;	13. In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty;	13. In the same way the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit almighty;
14. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty,	14. and yet they are not three Almighties, but there is one Almighty.	14. yet there are not three almighties, but one almighty.	14. yet there are not three almighties, but one almighty.
15. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God;	15. Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God;	15. Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God;	15. Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God;
16. And yet there are not three Gods, but one God.	16. and yet they are not three Gods, but there is one God.	16. and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God.	16. and yet there are not three Gods, but there is one God.

17. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, and the Holy Spirit is Lord;	17. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord;	17. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit Lord;	17. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit Lord;
18. And yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord.	18. and yet they are not three Lords, but there is one Lord;	18. and yet there are not three Lords, but there is one Lord.	18. and yet there are not three Lords, but there is one Lord.
19. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every person by himself to be God and the Lord;	19. Because, just as we are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge each Person singly to be both God and Lord,	19. Because just as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge each person separately to be both God and Lord,	19. Because just as we are compelled by Christian truth to acknowledge each person separately to be both God and Lord,
20. So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say: There are three Gods or three Lords.	20. so we are by the catholic religion forbidden to say that there are three Gods and three Lords.	20. so we are forbidden by the catholic religion to speak of three Gods or Lords.	20. so we are forbidden by the catholic religion to speak of three Gods or Lords.
21. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.	21. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten;	21. The Father is from none, not made nor created nor begotten.	21. The Father is from none, not made nor created nor begotten.
22. The Son is of the Father alone, not made nor created, but begotten.	22. The Son is from the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten;	22. The Son is from the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten.	22. The Son is from the Father alone, not made nor created but begotten.
23. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son: neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.	23. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.	23. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made, nor created nor begotten but proceeding.	23. The Holy Spirit is from the Father and the Son, not made, nor created nor begotten but proceeding.
24. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.	24. So there is one Father, not three Fathers, one Son, not three Sons, one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.	24. So there is one Father, nor three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.	24. So there is one Father, nor three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.
25. And in this trinity none is afore, or after another; none is greater or less than another.	25. And in this Trinity there is no one before or after, no greater or minor.	25. And in this trinity there is nothing before or after, nothing greater or less,	25. And in this trinity there is none before or after, none greater or less,
26. But the whole three persons are co-eternal, and co-equal.	26. But all three Persons are fully co-eternal with each other and co-equal.	26. but all three persons are co-eternal with each other and co-equal.	26. but all three persons are co-eternal with each other and co-equal.
27. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped,	27. So that in all things, as has already been said, the Trinity in Unity, as well as the Unity in Trinity is to be worshipped.	27. Thus in all things, as has been stated above, both trinity in unity and unity in trinity must be worshipped.	27. Thus in all things, as has been stated above, both trinity in unity and unity in trinity must be worshipped.
28. He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.	28. Therefore, who desires to be saved, he should thus think of the Trinity.	28. So he who desires to be saved should think thus of the Trinity.	28. So he who desires to be saved should think thus of the Trinity.

29. Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.	29. Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation, that he also should faithfully believe the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.	29. It is necessary, however, to eternal salvation that he should also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.	29. It is necessary, however, to eternal salvation that he should also faithfully believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
30. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, is God and man.	30. Now, the right faith is that we should believe and acknowledge that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is both God and man equally.	30. Now the right faith is that we should believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is equally both God and man.	30. Now the right faith is that we should believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is equally both God and man.
31. God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of the substance of His mother, born in the world.	31. He is God from the substance of the Father, begotten before all ages, and he is man from the substance of His mother, born in this age.	31. He is God from the Father's substance, begotten before time; and He is man from His mother's substance, born in time.	31. He is God from the Father's substance, begotten before time; and He is man from His mother's substance, born in time.
32. Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.	32. perfect God, and perfect man of a rational soul and human flesh subsisting;	32. Perfect God, perfect man composed of a human soul and human flesh,	32. Perfect God, perfect man composed of a human soul and human flesh,
33. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood.	33. equal to the Father as regards His divinity, and inferior to the Father as regards His humanity;	33. equal to the Father in respect of His divinity, less than the Father in respect of His humanity.	33. equal to the Father in respect of His divinity, less than the Father in respect of His humanity.
34. Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ.	34. Who, although He is God and Man, yet is not two, but one Christ,	34. Who although He is God and man, is nevertheless not two, but one Christ.	34. Who although He is God and man, is nevertheless not two, but one Christ.
35. One, not be conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God.	35. one however, not by the conversion of His divinity into flesh, but by taking up the humanity into God;	35. He is one, however, not by the transformation of His divinity into flesh but by the taking up of His humanity into God;	35. He is one, however, not by the transformation of His divinity into flesh but by the taking up of His humanity into God;
36. One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.	36. one, definitely not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person;	36. one certainly not by confusion of substance, but by oneness of person.	36. one certainly not by confusion of substance, but by oneness of person.
37. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ;	37. for just as the rational soul and the flesh are one man, so God and man are one Christ;	37. For just as soul and flesh are one man, so God and man are one Christ.	37. For just as soul and flesh are one man, so God and man are one Christ.
38. Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again on the third day from the dead;	38. Who has suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, arose from the dead.	38. Who suffered for our salvation, descended to hell, rose from the dead,	38. Who suffered for our salvation, descended to hell, rose from the dead,

39. He ascended into heaven, He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty;	39. ascended into the heavens, is seated at the right hand of the Father,	39. ascended to heaven, sat down at the Father's right hand, from where He will come to judge the living and the dead;	39. ascended to heaven, sits at the Father's right hand, from where He will come to judge the living and the dead;
40. From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. 41. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; 42. And shall give account of their works.	40. from where he will come to judge the living and the dead, at whose coming all people will arise with their bodies and will give an account of their own works;	40. at whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies, and will render an account of their deeds;	40. at whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies, and will render an account of their deeds;
43. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.	41. and those who have done good will go into everlasting life, but those who have done evil into everlasting fire.	41. and those who have done good will go to eternal life, those who have done evil to eternal fire.	41. and those who have done good will go to eternal life, those who have done evil to eternal fire.
44. This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.	42. this is the catholic faith. Unless someone has faithfully and firmly believed it, he cannot be saved.	42. This is the catholic faith. Unless a man believes it faithfully and steadfastly, he cannot be saved.	42. This is the catholic faith. Unless a man believes it faithfully and steadfastly, he cannot be saved.

Major Changes	Recommendations:	Grounds:
25. The present text speaks about <i>none</i> , while the ICRC text speaks about <i>no one</i> and the Can. rev. text refers to <i>nothing</i> .	Adopt the text of the ICRC	Since the Persons of the Trinity are spoken of here, it seems more appropriate to translate <i>nihil</i> as <i>no one</i> rather than <i>nothing</i> .
29. The present text read, <i>believe rightly</i> , while the ICRC reads <i>believe faithfully</i> , and the Canadian revised text reads <i>believe</i> .	Adopt the text of the ICRC	The Canadian revised text seems to have inadvertently omitted the word <i>faithfully</i> , which certainly belongs in the text.
39. The present text reads <i>He sitteth on the right hand</i> . The ICRC suggests <i>is seated at the right hand</i> . The Canadian revised text has <i>sat down at the Father's right hand</i> .	Retain the present text without the archaic ending.	There is no good reason to alter the same phrase which in the adopted revision of the Apostles' Creed reads <i>sits at the right hand</i>

Considerations:

1. It would be preferable for us to adopt a text for the ecumenical creeds as close to those found in the Book of Praise, which we use in our worship services. Although we may not wish to adopt them verbatim (even as we have decided not to add the word *Christian* in the ninth article of the Apostles' Creed) the deputies have endeavoured to keep changes to a minimum.
2. The Canadian Reformed Churches have adopted the revision of the Apostles' and the Athanasian Creeds. The revision of the Nicene Creed is to be submitted to the following Synod of the Can. Ref. Churches.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To adopt the texts for the Apostle's and Athanasian Creeds as they have been recommended to the churches by the deputies above.
2. To discharge the deputies from their mandate.
3. To appoint new deputies to study the forthcoming revision of the Nicene Creed of the Book of Praise in light of the ICET texts (cf Proceedings of the ICRC, 1989, pg. 151ff.) and present Synod with final recommendations.

Respectfully submitted,

C. Bosch

A. van Delden

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of REFORMED CHURCHES (ICRC)

Report of Deputies to Synod 1994

A. MANDATE

Synod 1992 gave to deputies for the ICRC the following mandate (Art 124):

“2. ...to finish the study of the concerns of the 1990 Synod about our (continuing) membership of the ICRC.

3. to send the two reports about the mentioned concerns as well as the proposed amendment to the Constitution to the sister churches and consult with them.

5. ...two delegates...to [attend] the 1993 meeting of the ICRC....

6. to convene a meeting of sister churches prior [to] or coinciding with the next meeting of the ICRC to discuss the concerns signalled by Synod 1990 and in deputies' report to Synod 1992.

7. ...publish the results of their study for the interest of the churches.

8. ...delegates to the next meeting of the ICRC furnish a report of this meeting for the deputies so that a report can be published for all the churches and for the next Synod.

9. ...submit a report with their recommendations to the next Synod.”

In carrying out our mandate, we have met a total of 14 times (mostly by telephone, conference call hook- up), plus we exchanged pages upon pages of thoughts and counter-thoughts. The work involved in our mandate has been very demanding for each of us, to the point that one of the delegates appointed by previous Synod to attend the 1993 ICRC had to bow out in favour of his alternate. As deputies we then opted to include br L vanBurgel (the alternate designated by Synod 1992) in our discussion so that he could if necessary be available to attend the ICRC. Because of the demands of the deputyship since the ICRC, we chose to continue involving br vanBurgel in our work as a stand-by in case one of us had to drop out. Because one of ourselves could not prepare a paper on the meaning of “Unity of Faith as understood and applied in the course of history”, we requested Rev G vanRongen to come to our assistance. His paper has been appended to this report as an Appendix. For our part, we ran out of time to digest and discuss the paper satisfactorily.

With regret we inform your assembly that we as deputies have not been able to come to agreement on the future participation of the FRCA in the ICRC. This reality pains us the more because we are the third deputyship in a row that could not find agreement on the matter of the ICRC.

Our report, consequently, is made up of two parts. The first (section B below) comes from united deputies and contains the report of our delegates to the 1993 meeting of the ICRC (as submitted to deputies and published in *Una Sancta*) as well as the report of the meeting with the sister churches. This section covers points 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8 of the mandate we received. The second part of our report (section C below) contains the thoughts of different deputies relating to the other aspects of our mandate. Section C.1 relates the thoughts of Revs Kleyn and Veldman; section C.2 relates the thoughts of Rev Bouwman.

B. REPORT TO DEPUTIES re ICRC 1993

Introduction

Synod Bedfordale decided to send two delegates to the 1993 meeting of the ICRC. The mandate given to these delegates is as follows (see Acts 1992, Art 124):

A. they must attend the next meeting of the ICRC.

B. they must meet with representatives from the sister churches at the time of the ICRC.

C. they must report to the churches on the next ICRC.

The report that follows contains two parts. The first deals with the ICRC itself, and the second with the meeting with the sister churches.

A. Report re: ICRC

The International Conference of Reformed Churches met from September 1 to September 9, 1993, in Zwolle, The Netherlands. Revs C Kleyn and C Bouwman attended as delegates on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. In the report that follows on the meeting, the undersigned have not tried to give a complete account of all that was said and transpired at the ICRC. The reader is referred to the Minutes of the meeting as printed in the Proceedings. We have instead lifted out what we considered to be relevant to the position of the FRCA on the Conference.

I. Prayer Service

On the evening before the Conference was to open, Rev OJ Douma opened the Word of God for the assembled at Hebr 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." He used the opportunity to encourage persons from all over the world to hold up with humility the banner of Christ in this apostate world. Though we come from all over the world, Rev Douma said, we nevertheless have one language, namely, the language of Father in His inspired Word and the language of Mother in the confessions. He pressed upon his hearers the need to speak and to act according to this one language.

II. Atmosphere

With thankfulness we note that on the whole the atmosphere at the Conference was very brotherly in the proper sense of the word. It cannot be disputed that all delegates (observers included) displayed a love for the Lord and gratitude for His saving work in Jesus Christ. All in attendance had something in common, viz, faith in Christ Jesus and a love for the reformed (=Scriptural) truth. The evidence for this love for the Lord and His Word came out particularly in the discussions on the seven papers, where the willingness to learn the will of the Lord came clearly to the surface (see below). The phrase "unity of faith" comes to mind as a possible descriptive label for the bond in Christ which obviously existed among the participants.

III. Papers

In all, seven papers were delivered and discussed, of greater or lesser interest and value depending on the subject raised and the approach taken. What came through very clearly in both papers and discussions was the desire of one and all to listen humbly to the Word of the Lord God. In a world of apostacy and an age of Scripture criticism, it was invigorating to note this general willingness to bow before the authority of God's spoken Word. Areas of disagreement tended to be more on practical matters than on doctrinal areas (eg, for or against Catechism preaching, the strengths and weaknesses of redemptive historical preaching vs experiential preaching, the manner of bringing the gospel to unbelievers, etc). To give a sense of the nature and value of the discussions, we lift out some of the papers for extra consideration.

a. Rev C Haak of the Theological University in Kampen spoke on the subject of "Mission and the Wrath of God." It is unpopular today, both in liberal and in evangelical circles, to speak of the wrath of God. Nevertheless br Haak insisted that missionaries are to cause the heathens to know that the wrath of God rests on them as long as they do not repent of their sins. Of course, the missionary is to explain also how the Lord Himself has provided escape from His wrath by granting His Son. But the truth of LD 4 remains, and the missionary must not down-play it: "He is terribly displeased with our original sin as well as our actual sins. Therefore He will punish them by a just judgment both now and eternally...."

What was delightfully striking was that nobody in the meeting objected to this stress on wrath and judgment. Despite the trends of today (even in evangelical circles), the Scriptural correctness of this emphasis was challenged by none.

b. Prof N Wilson of Ireland spoke on the subject of "Prophecy Today". He was emphatic that the canon is closed, that there comes from the Lord today no new revelations. In as much as one hears voices¹ to the effect that the Holy Spirit can

today give new insights into God's will (perchance even different in application to what God's will was in another era), it was invigorating to note that there was no opposition to Prof Wilson's position. The meeting was content with the age old doctrine that the Lord in the Spirit may give deeper illumination into what has been revealed, but does not give new revelation.

c. Rev RS Ward's paper on "Recent Criticisms of the Westminster Confession" opened up a discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of various formulations in that Confession. From Reformed brethren questions were asked and criticisms voiced on the Scriptural correctness of some expressions. The discussion showed that the Presbyterian brethren, though certainly acknowledging the human character of the Westminster Confession, were less than willing to hear criticism of (the faith of) the Confession for which their fathers had given their blood. Nevertheless, even here there was an evident willingness to bow before what the Lord had revealed in His Word.

With regards to the discussion resulting from Rev Ward's paper, it should be mentioned that the paper provided opportunity for discussion on the doctrine of the church as formulated in this Confession. However, the format of the discussion was organized in such a way that little time remained for discussion about this subject (it being the last of the subjects Rev Ward brought up in his paper). What little was said on the matter was not very helpful, neither to a better understanding of the doctrine of the church in the ICRC in general, nor to the discussions underway between the FRCA and the PCEA.

d. Prof N Gootjes' contribution on "Catechism Preaching" reminded the Presbyterians of how important it is to have a systematic instruction in the doctrine of the church, while the Reformed were stimulated to remember that catechism preaching must truly be preaching of the Word of God (and not of the Catechism itself). Here was one very clear instance where we could learn from each other for mutual benefit.

e. Prof HM Ohmann's paper on "Redemptive Historical Preaching" also provided opportunity for distinct cross-fertilization amongst the churches represented at the ICRC. Through this topic representatives of Presbyterian churches and others still heavily under the influence of the "Nadere Reformatie" (eg, the FRCNA) were reminded that in the application of a sermon one must to justice to the redemptive historical element. At the same time, those who cherish the redemptive historical style of preaching were reminded not to let the sermon become a "lecture" which neglects the experiential element. Here again was illustrated the benefits that can arise from discussions with brethren of different historical backgrounds.

IV. Theological Affirmation Report

The only point of the report that received attention was the fact that the Scots Confession was used instead of the Westminster Confession. What the report said about fencing of the Lord's table and pulpit exchange received no opposition at all. From this (lack of) reaction one could conclude that there was a general agreement on this point. Your delegates note this with thankfulness. This should form a good springboard for our further discussions with Presbyterian churches. The point of difference that remains is that the one will call a church "true" sooner than another will. As is noted in the Proceedings: "The report [was] referred to the member churches for their consideration."

We used the opportunity to raise a question about a statement in the Theological Affirmation Report, viz,

"if a church is admitted..., it implies that at least two thirds of the member churches acknowledge it as true church."

We queried whether it is true that receiving a new church as member in the ICRC implies that we see that church as true. The convener of the Theological Affirmation Committee, Dr J Faber, responded with the rhetorical question that if we are not able to acknowledge others in the ICRC as true churches, "what are you doing here?" There was no further discussion of the point from the floor.

V. Suggestions

In the course of the Conference, a couple of suggestions for future action were floated that we wish to bring to your attention.

a. The first suggestion (emanating from the old Interim Committee) revolved around admission requirements to the ICRC. The Interim Committee felt that it would be beneficial to reword the Constitution so that it states clearly that two sponsors are needed (the Constitution was considered to be ambiguous on this point, see Secretary's report in the Proceedings).

In the course of the meeting, this suggestion was expanded and adopted, with the delegates from the PCEA receiving the mandate to propose to the next meeting of the Conference a new wording for particular articles of the Constitution (cf Minutes 71.1). Not only will they have to deal with the requirement of two sponsors; they will also have to address the ambiguity of the present Art IV of the Constitution so that the basis in the Reformed religion is maintained while room is generated for churches who adhere to reformed confessions other than the two groups currently listed in the Constitution.

b. The second suggestion we draw to your attention concerns the matter of how to protect the reformed integrity and character of the ICRC. The question was raised by the delegate of the RCUS because of his obvious delight at the brotherly harmony he noticed at the Conference, as well as the general willingness to acknowledge the final authority of Holy Scripture. He mentioned that it's easy enough to admit new members, but much harder to expel deviant members. Since the matter was judged to be a new matter, it could not be discussed unless a two-thirds majority judged that the matter was "important and urgent" (cf Art 7.4 of Conference Regulations). The required majority did not think the matter so urgent as to require this exceptional treatment, and so it was not discussed. The fact that the matter was raised, though, will surely prompt member churches to give consideration to how to preserve the reformed integrity and character of the ICRC.

c. The third suggestion concerns the thought of Regional ICRC Conferences, to be held, say, annually or semi-annually. This notion was tabled by the past Interim Committee as a means to increase the relevance of the Conference. After discussion of the matter, the Conference decided to instruct the new Interim Committee to investigate whether there was need for such Regional ICRC Conferences. This Interim Committee will contact all the member churches to ask for input. Your deputies think it proper that our churches in Synod 1994 establish a fixed position on this suggestion.

The argument mentioned in favour of this suggestion is that such Regional Conferences will increase contact and cooperation between the member churches who live in relative proximity, thus encouraging the realization of the second Purpose of the ICRC: "to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches." As argument against the suggestion was mentioned the fact that regional conferences should not be imposed on the churches whether there is an agenda or not; rather, if churches in a given geographic area see need for a meeting, they should feel free to organize it themselves (as happened already amongst the member churches of Great Britain). Your delegates feel that the ICRC should not impose regional conferences; to give the ICRC this power encourages it to develop into a super-body. Besides, if we multiply meetings, we have less time available for our actual work in the congregations.

In connection with the suggested Regional Conferences, it should be noted that the ICRC did adopt the proposal of the Missions Committee "to ask the respective member Churches to organize four different mission conferences, two years after each ICRC, one in the West (Curacao, Surinam, Brasil, Peru), one in Africa (South-Africa, Ghana, Zaire), one in the Far East (Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan, India, Papua New Guinea), and one in Europe (including Eastern Europe)." Your delegates voted against the proposal for the same reasons as mentioned above re Regional Conferences. We note that already a mission conference is held periodically in South America, without ICRC sponsorship.

VI. New Members

Four churches had applied for membership into the ICRC, and were admitted. On this point we draw the following aspects to your attention.

a. Prepared Statement

When the application of the first church was tabled for discussion, your delegates read the statement deputies had collectively prepared. For the record we include it here:

"Delegates from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia would like to comment on the requests for membership in the ICRC from the FCCI, FRCNA, OPC and the RCUS. It should be understood that in principle the FRCA are encouraged by the fact that more churches are taking an interest in an organization which desires to be faithful to the Word of God (Acts 1990, Art 145, Cons 7) — we wish to state this first of all. At the same time, we wish it to be clear to our co-member churches of the ICRC that our 1990 Synod considered "concerns" put forward regarding perceived inconsistencies with our membership in the ICRC. Our churches have not come out of the matter yet, and so studies on whether these concerns are Scripturally legitimate are continuing, but our Synod has already expressed

"that our concerns may affect our continuing membership in the ICRC" (Acts, Art 145, Rec 3).

At this point in the Proceedings, as we consider applications for new members, we deem it proper to lay this matter before you.

One of the concerns leading up to Synod's statement about our continuing membership in the ICRC is the matter of whether there actually is "unity of faith" in the ICRC (Cons 14). The argument behind the concern is this: Art III of the Constitution mentions the "unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ." If it's to be understood —so goes the reasoning behind this concern— that the member churches have unity of faith in Christ, does consistent logic not demand that member churches acknowledge each other as true and faithful churches of our Lord, and so recognize each other's membership, ministry and sacraments? Our Synod was aware that a proposal connecting membership in the ICRC to recognition of each other's membership, ministry and sacraments was rejected by the 1989 meeting of the Conference. Nevertheless, our churches in Synod 1990 could not throw away this concern; there was instead some understanding for the notion that the wording of the current constitution demands as natural consequence of membership in the ICRC that the membership, ministry, and sacraments be recognized.

Over the years, the FRCA has actively sought contact with other Reformed and Presbyterian churches, especially those who are members with us of the ICRC. In our dealings with the churches of Presbyterian background, we have noted different practices regarding the opening of the pulpit and the fencing of the Lord's table. Various members of the ICRC see these differences as simply the result of tradition, and detect no doctrinal variations in these customs. But within the confines of the ICRC, it is to the Free Reformed Churches of Australia still an open question as to whether the different practices are to be explained in terms of different doctrine or in terms of different history. Up till now this matter has prevented the FRCA from recognizing or offering sister-church relationships to some of the fellow members of the ICRC. We hope that the study committee in our midst mentioned earlier can serve our churches with adequate answers. Meanwhile, it's still to be seen what the FRCA will conclude regarding these differences. It is also still to be seen what the FRCA will conclude regarding the matter of unity of faith in general. That is why we as delegates from the FRCA feel rather uncomfortable having to deal with applications of churches for membership in the ICRC. While our churches are still in the process of grappling with the above mentioned issues, we judge it to be correct for us to abstain from voting.

With some of the member churches of the ICRC —and this is true of the new

applicants as well— we have no contact, other than at the ICRC. With others we have contact, but find differences that prevent us (at least for now) from recognizing them as churches of Jesus Christ. Hence the question that is asked in our midst: if we cannot recognize some member churches of the ICRC as true and faithful, is there then unity of faith between us and these churches? If we cannot express the unity on the local scene, can we maintain that there is unity on the Conference level?

Please be assured, for us these are genuine questions. For that reason we ask you also to assist us with answers. Can we honestly say before the Lord that there is unity of faith between us and churches we cannot yet recognize?"

The reaction of the Chairman was: "your concern is noted." He further indicated that in the ICRC all would be glad to help one another, but he could allow no discussion of the matter now. In fact, at no time in the Conference did our concerns come up for direct discussion.

This is not to say, however, that members of the Conference did not interact with us privately on the point. Our concerns received attention in the hallways and in the meeting with sister churches. In fact, Prof Kamphuis' paper also addressed the question, be it indirectly.

b. Advisory Committees

To process the applications from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church of the United States, the Free Reformed Churches of North America and the Free Church of Central India, the delegates of member churches were divided into a number of committees, each of which was mandated to deal with one application. (As the Minutes indicate, there were also committees for other purposes.) These committees had to prepare for the Conference a recommendation on whether the church it was to investigate should be received into the ICRC.

To carry out their mandate, each Committee had to ascertain whether the applying church indeed had two sponsors from amongst the member churches. They also had to peruse the documentation mentioned in the Constitution (Art IV.1.b). To find out whether the applying church did/would adhere to the Basis and Purpose of the Constitution, a conversation with the delegates of the applying church was held. Given the requirements mentioned in the Constitution, all committees were able to recommend for membership the particular church they had to examine.

c. Application RCUS

The Reformed Church of the United States has as its confessional basis only the Heidelberg Catechism. From what the delegate of these churches said, it's abundantly clear that the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort are not shunned or forgotten in the RCUS; on the contrary, these two Forms have so much a place in the RCUS that they are used extensively for instruction purposes and the RCUS is in the process of adopting them.

Nevertheless, one of your delegates was unhappy with the intent of the Conference to accept the RCUS as a member. He read the existing Constitution to imply that (prospective) members have as their confessions either the three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Standards. He was of the opinion that as long as the Constitution is worded as it is, there can be no room for a church that officially adheres to less than either the three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Standards (cf discussion recorded in Proceedings of 1989, pg 24f). From the Conference, however, there was no support for this argument.

d. Application FRCNA

One of your delegates voiced disquiet about the application of the Free Reformed Churches of North America² to join the ICRC. He saw a problem in the fact that these churches live on the doorstep of churches who are already members of the ICRC (the Canadian Reformed Churches), and yet between the two churches there is no official (=at the level of their broadest assemblies) contact. He found it wrong that a

new church on joining pledges to seek "fullest ecclesiastical fellowship" with another church while in the past no such effort had been displayed.

A second point of disquiet concerning the application of the FRCNA related to the observation that the Canadian Reformed Churches had functioned as a sponsor for the FRCNA. The Canadian deputies had prepared a letter of commendation, indicating that the CanRC consider the FRCNA to be a true church of the Lord. Your delegate reminded the meeting, though, that no Synod of the CanRC had ever expressed an evaluation of the FRCNA. Officially, the two churches have kept a distance from each other.

On the question of whether the Canadian deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad had the authority to prepare such a letter (with this evaluation of the FRCNA), the convener of Canadian deputies mentioned that the request for sponsorship arrived after the last Canadian Synod, and so advice from Synod could not be obtained. Given the fact that there were local contacts between the two churches, he felt the commendation was in place. He added that if deputies had acted improperly, the next Synod would undoubtedly give the necessary reprimand. The chairman ruled that the correctness of the letter of recommendation was a matter internal to the CanRC, and hence not for the ICRC to unravel.

No support arose from the floor for either of these points. The FRCNA was received as member with no one voting against.

B. Meeting with the Sister Churches

I. Attendance

Previous Synod had instructed the brothers who were to attend the 1993 ICRC to "meet with representatives from the sister churches at the time of the ICRC" (Acts 1992, Art 124, Rec 6). Of the five churches in the world with which we have sister relations, two declined our invitation to attend. In a letter dd 19 January, 1993, the Dutch gave as basic reason for declining our request the following (our translation): "The Dutch deputies are of the opinion that it would be less correct to meet separately at the time of the Conference with a group of member churches (Canada, South-Africa, Australia and The Netherlands). Forming groups in the ICRC is to be avoided, as well as the appearance of discrimination in relations."

The South Africans essentially agreed with the Dutch position. The other three sister churches (Canada, Korea and Indonesia) agreed to join the meeting. (It should be noted that time was actually set aside in the Conference for meetings between or amongst churches.)

At the ICRC we endeavoured to persuade the Dutch and South African delegates to join the meeting. Neither delegation felt free to alter the decision of their deputies on their own authority. Consequently, they did not attend the meeting. As it turned out, the Indonesian delegate, Rev Doko, did not attend either. He pleaded difficulty with the English language and tiredness.

II. Agenda

To facilitate discussions, we distributed at the Conference, to the delegates (and advisers) of the sister churches who would meet with us, an agenda of the points we wished to talk about. Your delegates had prepared this agenda just prior to departure from Australia. For the record we include it here.

Agenda for the Meeting with Sister Churches of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia

Introduction

In their 1990 Synod, the FRCA grappled with a number of concerns regarding our membership in the ICRC. The existence of these concerns prompted the churches in Synod to instruct deputies to study these concerns. Part of the mandate included consultation with the sister churches. Deputies subsequently

sent letters to the sister churches asking for comment on the concerns mentioned in the Acts of Synod 1990. Some of the sister churches supplied deputies with comments on the concerns, for which we thank you. It should be noted that the concerns signalled by Synod 1990 were of such weight to the FRCA that these churches saw continuing membership in the ICRC not guaranteed:

“...Synod expresses that our concerns may affect our continuing membership in the ICRC (Acts, Art 145, rec 3).

The deputies appointed by Synod 1990 submitted an incomplete report to Synod 1992. This Synod in turn appointed new deputies with the mandate to “finish the study of the concerns of the 1990 Synod about our (continuing) membership of the ICRC.” On the ground that “it can only be fruitful to discuss our ongoing studies with the sister churches, new deputies were also instructed to “convene a meeting of sister churches...to discuss the concerns signalled by Synod 1990 and in deputies’ report to Synod 1992” (Acts, Art 124, cons 6, rec 6). We wish, then, to go beyond the opportunities of written communication to speak with you face to face about the concerns we have regarding the ICRC. We lay our concerns before you both so that you know well what they are and so that we may benefit from your responses. In what follows below, then, we endeavour to explain briefly the actual concerns we wish to discuss with you.

Questions

1. The FRCA have questions about whether there is truly unity of faith in the ICRC. The Constitution of the ICRC states that the Conference expresses and promotes the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ (Art 3.1). We understand the words “expresses...the unity of faith that the member churches have” to mean that unity of faith is considered to be a present reality amongst member churches.

In contacts with other member churches of the ICRC, it can happen —and from our experience does happen— that differences become apparent which hinder us from recognizing a member church as a true church per Art 29, Belg Conf.

In the ICRC, we say: there is unity of faith, we believe the same things. In practice we discover that there are differences in what we believe. Here is our problem: is it not unethical to state on the one hand that there is unity of faith, while on the other hand we detect differences in what we believe, differences hindering official recognition of unity of faith? Are we wrong in this?

You will have noticed that Report A (one of two submissions by deputies on the matter to our previous Synod) tried to come out of the matter by arguing that there are two types of unity, namely unity by mutual recognition of each other as true and faithful churches and unity on the basis of the constitution of the conference, ie, a confessional unity involving recognition of certain reformed confessions to which the member churches are reputed to adhere. Is it correct to distinguish between these two types of unity? Does unity of faith not indicate a unity in what we believe? Would that in turn not imply that there is only one type of unity of faith, and that it either exists or does not exist? Or may we distinguish between different degrees of unity or between different degrees of recognition and expression of unity? Yes, what circumstance needs to exist before one can say with regards to another church that “unity of faith” exists?

In a letter dated 21 December 1991, the South African brethren wrote as follows on this point:

“It would indeed be a hard task to prove that unity of faith does not exist between member churches. Time and again it has been proved that the Three Forms of Unity are as reformed as the Westminster Standards....

This does not mean to say that there are no differences between member churches. One cannot ignore the different historical backgrounds and cultural/political environments which moulded the churches of Christ over time....

We in South Africa experience the same difficulties as you seem to encounter with ICRC members in your country. Our approach might be different in that

we realize that the differences between Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika and the Free Church of Southern Africa are so vast that physical unity is, if any, at least generations away. Nonetheless, we acknowledge the FCSA as a true church of Christ and encourage mutual fellowship on both official and personal levels....

2. Membership of the ICRC obliges the churches to seek the "fullest ecclesiastical fellowship" with other member churches (Art III.2) What is to happen if churches do not make that effort, or if the differences which hinder the recognition of other churches as faithful churches of the Lord cannot be overcome? Would it be right for both churches to remain members of the ICRC (and so continue to insist that there is unity of faith with each other while on the local scene the one cannot recognize the other)? Or are we then to insist on a parting of ways at the ICRC level? How long can we permit this perceived "tension" to continue?

The Dutch churches, in a letter dd ??, wrote as follows:

"Such endeavors [to establish sister church relations] can take a lot of time, to be spent on investigations, visits and correspondence. We should also take into account that many Presbyterian churches have not given these matters much thought in the past.... In our opinion it is much too early at this moment in time to envisage a situation in which establishing such relations has proven to be impossible. And even a failure to realise such a relationship need not necessarily mean a breaking off of relations within the ICRC."

3. In the FRCA there exists some uncertainty as to whether the Lord calls His churches to membership in an international conferences of churches. We are aware of the opportunity given in the ICRC to share wealth, experiences and manpower. The responsibility to share is the greater given the wealth the Lord has given to us over the centuries. Our problem arises from the observation that sharing does not require membership. Please recall that we see membership in the ICRC to imply some sort of recognition of other member churches as faithful, including those not recognized on the local scene as true churches of Jesus Christ, and hence constituting an anomaly. Given the anomaly we perceive in being members with churches we haven't yet been able to recognize, questions arise about whether the Lord calls us to be members of the ICRC. So we would like to hear from you why you think it is God's wish for us to be 'members of the Conference.

The Dutch churches, in the above mentioned letter, wrote as follows concerning this point:

"Positive grounds for joining the ICRC are given in art III of the Constitution."

The South Africans wrote:

"The ICRC serves as a platform where differences should be discussed openly."

"...the benefits of membership of the ICRC are not clear at this point in time but potentially available." (They mention shared ministry/mission training resources, as well as the opportunity to offer and receive assistance.)

We trust that placing our questions in this format will assist us in having a good discussion. May the Lord our God bless our broken labours.

III. Meeting

On the third day of the Conference, we met with representatives from our sister churches. The delegates (and advisers) of the sister churches could not appreciate our concerns. The reason is that all in attendance at the meeting were convinced that "unity of faith" was present amongst the various member churches of the ICRC. We were told that it all depends on how one defines the phrase "unity of faith". The fact that the RCUS has only the Heidelberg Catechism, and the fact that the PCK had for a long time only the Apostles' Creed, does not deny the existence of "unity of faith"; these churches nevertheless are united in one faith in Jesus Christ. Another brother reminded us that the Conference is based on "the reformed religion", and so if a Hungarian church sought membership and had confessions comparable to those listed in the basis (but not those very confessions themselves), they should not on

that ground be rejected. Indeed, it was suggested to us that in the FRCA there is a wrong perception of what a true church is, viz, a church cannot be true until it is just like we are. We need, we were told, to broaden our understanding of what a true church is and hence recognize the PCEA. Alternatively, if we can't see the ICRC as made up of true churches, we'd have to leave the ICRC.

Another speaker questioned whether it is correct to speak of differences being either practical or doctrinal. He found this a false dilemma since, he argued, all differences of practice somewhere have a root in doctrinal differences. But, he asked, what is the status of the particular doctrine in question? He drew our attention to the Synod of Dort, where delegates disagreed on the doctrine of predestination: some were infralapsarians while others were supralapsarians. Yet in their condemnation of the Arminian error they were wholeheartedly united. This speaker opined that the importance of which doctrinal position one took (be it infralapsarian or supralapsarian) was minimal, and so the fathers at the Synod of Dort were able to work together despite this (rather insignificant) disagreement. He reminded us that if we insist on full agreement on all things, we shall get nowhere; even the ministers of any bond of churches do not agree on every point.

A fourth speaker indicated that he used to consider it necessary that there be agreement on all points before recognition can be offered to another church, but in the course of the years has concluded that this position is untenable. He recognizes that the differences existing between reformed and presbyterian churches must be discussed, but has come to the conclusion that this is possible only within the framework of mutual acceptance as true churches. He indicated further that one must distinguish between "divergencies" and "impediments". He suggested that his churches (CanRC) had never seen the differences we in Australia are discussing with other churches as impediments to seeing the other as a true church. For there is, he said, a unity of faith in Christ and in the Confessions of Scripture. Presbyterian and Reformed churches have different histories, and it takes time for the two to grow together.

On the matter of whether we may speak of two kinds of "unity of faith" (as in the Report A which served our previous Synod), one speaker captured the apparent consensus of the meeting by cautioning against it.

C. Conclusion

Herewith the undersigned consider that they have fulfilled the mandate contained in the assignment to attend the 1993 meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches. It is our prayer that this report may serve deputies so that they in turn may be able to make responsible recommendations to the churches about the ICRC and the continuing membership of the Free Reformed Churches in this organization.

November 2, 1993

C Kleyn

C Bouwman

C.1.1

Continued Membership Justified

1. Unity of faith in Scripture and Confession

Introduction

Within the FRCA the views differ greatly on the issue of "unity of faith". Whereas delegates to the 1985 ICRC spoke of unity of faith at the Conference in spite of the difference in tradition between reformed and presbyterian churches (Acts, Article

110, B.13), delegates to the 1989 ICRC complained of the lack of unity. They reported: "Contrary to the provision in its Constitution, the ICRC is demonstrating to be an organisation where unity of faith' between most of the member churches does not exist" (Deputies Report B1, C,2)." One of the major concerns deputies for the ICRC are mandated to study is the concern about this "unity of faith". What is "unity of faith" and when may one speak of "unity of faith" between churches? They are the questions which need to be addressed.

In dealing with this issue the danger of falling into extreme positions is very real. On the one hand there is the danger of wanting to be too broad and open-minded, at the cost of the truth. You then throw overboard all distinctions and try to make the church boundaries as wide as possible. On the other hand there is the danger of being too narrow-minded, at the cost of the catholicity of the church. You then preserve the own tradition so carefully that that tradition becomes the test of truth. This paper attempts to steer away from both extremes. We may only be as broad as the King of the Church indicates in Scripture. It must be a broadness in the truth.

With our church background we all value greatly the lesson to be learnt from that Liberation. But what was the issue at the time of the Liberation? Was it that differences existed within the church, namely the Kuyperian view on the covenant overagainst what we have learnt to see as the Scriptural view? Those differences already existed since the Union of 1892 and officially since 1905. The issue was therefore not those differences as such. The issue was that the Synod bound the consciences to the one point of view whereas that view could not be proved from Scripture and in fact even went beyond Scripture and the Confessions. The Lord of the Church freed us from that new slavery so that we could remain Reformed, so that we could continue on that one foundation of the church of old. In light of that history it is all the more a joy for us to delve into the Scriptures to see what God teaches us on the issue in question. We have again learnt to see that the Word of God is the only norm by which to judge the truth. We will only be able to convince each other if we together humbly bow to Scripture and read our Confessions in the light of Scripture. At the same time we will be all the more careful not to bind others where Scripture does not bind. Let us then examine what Scripture and Confessions have to teach us on the matter of "unity of faith".

Catholicity

In the context of our discussions it would seem good to start off with the wonderful reality of the catholicity of the church. From the start God had his world-wide church in view. When He called Abram He promised that by him all the families of the earth shall bless themselves (Gen. 12:3). Catholicity belongs to Israel's future glory. The Psalmists and the Prophets keep mentioning it (eg. Ps. 22:27; Ps. 67; Ps. 87; Is. 2:2.3 [=Micha 4:1,2]; Zech. 2:11; Zech. 8:20-23).

In the New Testament we see these glorious promises becoming reality. The small church of Pentecost manifests its catholic character in the converts from the Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia. The Ephesians are reminded of the mystery of Christ who has made us both - Jews and Gentiles - one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility (2:14). The Gentiles are fellow heirs and members of the same body (3:6).

The New Testament ends with those wonderful hymns of the church ransomed by the blood of the Lamb from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev. 5:9). There is the vision of the great multitude, which no man can number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb (7:9). (cf J. Faber's address on "The catholic character of the church" in *Essays in Reformed Doctrine* p.86ff).

After mentioning the scriptural data on the catholic character of the church Dr. J. Faber concludes: "If we drink in these words of Holy Scripture about the catholicity of the church, we understand why ... Herman Bavinck in his principal's address, *De Katholiceit van Christendom en Kerk* (The Catholicity of Christendom and Church), spoke of its **captivating beauty** (aangrijpende schoonheid). One who isolates himself within the narrow circle of a small congregation or conventicle does not know

the true catholicity and will never experience its power and consolation in his own life. He who by faith knows himself one with the church, gathered out of the whole human race from the beginning of the world to its end, cannot be narrow of heart or mind with respect to God's people" (p.88,89.).

Unity

What is it that unites those people from all over the world? Christ gathers his catholic church in the unity of the true faith. This is already evident in the Old Testament. In his prophesy of Zion's future glory Isaiah pictures the nations coming to Jerusalem and saying: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.(Is. 2:3). How will all the families of the earth bless themselves by Abram (cf Gen. 12:3)? By sharing the faith of Abraham (cf Rom. 4:16). "So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith." (Gal. 3:9). The sheep of Christ's flock are said to hear or heed His voice (Jn 10:3,4,16). When Christ pleads for the unity of his disciples in John 17 He asks the Father "keep them in Thy name" and "sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth" (17:11, 16). "Thy name" refers to God's selfrevelation. Jesus Christ is the "chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption" (cf Jn 1:18; Jn 17:6; H.C. LD 12). After his prayer for his disciples Christ continues to pray for "those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one" (17:20). It is clear that the unity for which Christ is praying is directly connected to the acceptance of God's revelation through Jesus Christ, passed on by the apostles. It is a unity in the truth. Christ builds his church upon the testimony of the apostles and prophets (Mt 16:18; Eph 2:20). Both witnessed to the Christ. That is why Christ Himself is also called the foundation of the church in 1 Cor. 3:11. Combining those two we could say that Christ as He is revealed in the complete Scriptures is the only foundation of the church. Through faith the Holy Spirit unites us with Christ so that we form one body, the body of Christ. Thus there is one Lord (whom we serve), one faith (which we confess), one baptism (by which we are engrafted into the Christian Church), one God and Father of us all (Eph 4:5,6). Our confessions repeat what we have seen from Scripture that real unity only exists in the truth, in Christ, on the one foundation of the apostolic doctrine. In answer to the question "Are all men, then, saved by Christ just as they perished through Adam?" the HC formulates: "No, only those who by a true faith are grafted into Christ and accept all His benefits." Through true faith we become one with Christ and one with the other members of Christ (cf LD 21 Q&A 55). Art 22 BC states that the true faith "embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, makes Him our own, and does not seek anything besides Him." The HC defines true faith as "a sure knowledge whereby I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in His Word" plus a "firm confidence" (Q&A 21). The HC adds that a Christian must believe "all that is promised us in the gospel" (Q&A 22). The norm is clear: one must accept all that God has revealed in His Word. That determines the unity of faith. In his commentary on LD 21 Ursinus defines the unity of the true faith as "agreement in the true faith", "possessing the same faith". He writes: "The visible church is ... an assembly of those who agree in the doctrine.... The New Testament church ... is an assembly which embraces the doctrine of the gospel, accepts the sacraments instituted by Christ and believes in Him who appeared as in the true Messiah." (Commentary, LD 21 Q54, I,II). That unity in the truth is also defended by the BC when it mentions the marks of the true and the false church in art 29.

Gift of God

That unity of faith is a gift of God. It is not dependent on our human action. We do not create it. It is brought about by God in answer to Christ's prayer, as a result of His work of preservation (John 17). When God keeps His people in his name, keeps them from the evil one and sanctifies them in the truth, then that means that they are one (cf John 17:11,15,17), irrespective of the question whether there is an organisational unity or not. That unity is worked by the Holy Spirit. Thus it is called

"the unity of the Spirit" in Eph. 4:3. Because of their relationship to Christ and the apostolic doctrine various local churches - which may not even know each other - are one in faith. The seven independent churches in Asia Minor are bound together by Christ, Who walks in the midst of the seven lampstands and has the seven stars in His right hand (Rev. 1).

This unity as a sovereign work of God is beautifully expressed in Art 27 Belgic Confession: "This holy Church is preserved by God against the fury of the whole world, although for a while it may look very small and as extinct in the eyes of man. Thus during the perilous reign of Ahab, the Lord kept for Himself seven thousand persons who had not bowed their knees to Baal. Moreover, this holy Church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. However, it is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith." LD 21, answer 54 emphasises the same when it says that the Son of God gathers, defends and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life.

Human responsibility

That unity as sovereign work of God brings about our human responsibility. We are called to express and manifest that given unity. Christ's plea for unity in John 17 evokes our calling to hold fast to the truth and thus to show that we are one. Many obstacles can hinder the expression of unity. That is why the Ephesians are called to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph 4:3). They are to spare no effort to guard the unity, which God has created, by living together in true brotherly love (cf 4:25-32). This calling is expressed in Art 28 BC and LD 21 Q&A 55 HC.

The calling to express and manifest the unity of faith locally also applies beyond the local situation. The N.T. shows that the local churches recognised their common bond and unity in Christ. They joined hands to cooperate together and to support one another. There was even regionally defined cooperation (Rom. 15:26). (cf JD Wielenga's speech on "Federation of Confessionally united churches" in Clarion Vol 42, No 10. He refers to J Kamphuis' excellent essay "Roeping en Recht to Oefening van Kerkverband," in Verkenningen III). Recognising the unity in Christ the local churches should consider it to be an honour to help other faithful churches and to be helped by them. The expression of the unity will vary according to circumstances. Thus the practice has grown that churches within the same country form a federation of churches while churches far away are offered a sister-church relationship.

Growth

The unity of faith is not a static reality. It is a present progressive reality. Christ is still busy gathering, defending and preserving for Himself a church. And believers daily have to contend with the weakness of their faith and the evil desires of their flesh. The fact that unity of faith is recognised as being present does not mean that it will always remain present. People and churches can depart from the faith (1 Tim 4:1; 6:10). Thus we are called to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). In the letter to the angel of the church in Ephesus Christ warns that He will remove the lampstand from its place if repentance does not take place (Rev 2:5).

Because the believers are still imperfect during this life the unity of faith will **not** be full and perfect yet. That full and perfect unity is the **goal** and cannot be the starting-point. That is why Paul writes in Eph 4:13 that the same believers who already enjoy the unity of the Spirit (4:3) must still "all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." The believers at Ephesus already **have** the one faith and the one baptism (cf 1:15; 2:8,19,20; 4:3-6). The fact that Paul urges them to "maintain the unity" implies that Paul considers unity to be present at the moment of his writing. These people have been born again by the working of the one Spirit. They have all embraced the same gospel in true faith. This does not mean, however,

that the existing unity is already perfect. The oneness of the body is not fully apparent nor is it so that every member of the body knows Jesus Christ equally well. The believers must still **grow** towards full maturity. This is why Christ gives office-bearers to his church. The believers must grow in faith (2 Cor 10:15; 2 Thess 1:3) and in knowledge (1 Cor 13:12). In his commentary on Eph 4:13 Greijdanus writes "With church and believers the unity of faith must also develop into and reveal itself in **full** unity of firm, right knowledge." Hodge writes: "The unity of faith is now confined to the first principles; the unity of faith contemplated in this place is that perfect unity which implies perfect knowledge and perfect holiness." The difference between Eph 4:3-6 and Eph 4:13 can be described as a difference between "now" and "not yet". It is a difference between initial unity and full(er) unity. Note the latter words of vers 13 where the "perfect" man is mentioned and the measure of the stature of the **fullness** of Christ. Note also the emphasis on growth in the verses 14-16. Through faith the believers are one with Christ, yet at the same time they need "to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4:15).

In Phil 3 Paul mentions as aim of his striving "that I may gain Christ and be found in him ...; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection" (3:8-11). He adds "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." (3:12). Thus the apostle Paul says of himself that he has not yet attained the full knowledge of Christ or full sanctification. This is not something to acquiesce in. There must be that striving after it (cf Eph 4, Phil 3).

Our confessions have recognised this process in various places. In answer to the question "Who are to come to the table of the Lord?" the HC says "Those who ... also desire **more and more** to strengthen their faith and amend their life." (Q&A 81). LD 33 says that the dying of the old man includes that we **more and more** hate sin and flee from it. The holiest are said to have "only a small beginning of this obedience. Nevertheless, with earnest purpose they do begin to live not only according to some but to all the commandments of God" (A 114). Q&A 115 is very clear in this regard. "If in this life no one can keep the ten commandments perfectly, why does God have them preached so strictly? First, That throughout our life we may **more** and more become aware of our sinful nature, and therefore seek **more eagerly** the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness in Christ. Second, that we may be zealous for good deeds and constantly pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that He may **more and more** renew us after God's image, until after this life we reach the goal of perfection.

The great commission of Mat 28:19,20 also indicates that the believers go through a process of growth. The initial acceptance of the apostolic doctrine (=becoming disciples, coming to faith) is followed by baptism (a sign of being engrafted into Christ and His Christian Church), after which the disciples must continue to teach them to observe all that Christ had commanded them. Thus you are not there yet when you come to faith, even though that faith makes you one with Christ. You still need further instruction and growth.

It is striking that the two texts our fathers quoted to support the confession that Christ gathers His church "in the unity of the true faith" (Acts 2:46; Eph 4:3-6) refer to this initial **unity of faith on the basis of the mutual acceptance of the apostolic testimony**. The three thousand souls that were added during the day of Pentecost could hardly have had a complete and perfect knowledge and understanding of the full revelation of God. What characterized them was that they received the apostles' word, were baptised and that they then "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:41,42). These saints clung to the apostles' teaching and were continually busy with it. Thus "continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart" (2:46 NKJV). Eph 4:3-6 also indicates the (initial) unity of faith on the basis of the mutual acceptance of the apostolic doctrine (cf Eph 1:15; 2:19,20). It should strike us that our fathers did not refer to Eph 4:13 for the expression "in the unity of the true faith",

whereas that is the only place in the Bible where that expression literally occurs. Instead they referred to Eph 4:3-6 where mention is made of the given reality of the one faith. Thus they did not refer to a future goal (Eph 4:13) but to a present reality.

Differences

Even though the believers do mutually accept the apostolic doctrine, there can still be differences of opinion and practice. This is related to the fact that all believers go through a process of growth in faith and knowledge. In the church at Rome there was a difference of opinion as to the observance of particular days and the abstinence from meat (Rom 14:1 - 15:13). In Corinth there was a difference of opinion regarding the eating of meat offered to idols (1 Cor 8 - 11:1). Regarding this matter ND Kloosterman writes (in *Scandalum Infirmorum et Communio Sanctorum* p.85,86): "In Corinth and Rome the strong and the weak share a common bond in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the important starting point. Both belong to Christ and each will give account to God (1 Cor 8:11; Rom 14:4,9-10,12). But equally important is the fact that the strong and weak applied the gospel's permissions differently. The weak eat with consciousness of the reality of the idol-god (1 Cor 8:7) or with conviction that certain foods were unclean (Rom 14:2,14). How is it possible, one may ask, that believers enjoy a united allegiance without uniform moral convictions? The seed of the gospel, planted in chosen hearts by the Spirit through preaching (1 Pet 1:23,25b) and bearing faith's fruit (Gal 5:22), does not grow within each believer at a uniform rate or in an identical arrangement of stem, leaves and fruit. This is due not to the gospel, but to the soil and climate conditions. What is more, believers are not thereby rendered culpable, except where these differences in growth develop into a difference of direction. To prevent exactly this development and to protect their common direction, Paul repeatedly emphasizes the duty of both strong and weak to live to the Lord (1 Cor 8:6,8; 10:31; Rom 14:4,6-12,18; 15:5-7), and the obligation of the strong to succor the weak (1 Cor 8:9,11-13,24,32,33; Rom 14:1,3,10,13,15,19-21; 15:1-2,7). And precisely because this development had not yet taken place in the Roman congregation, Paul emphatically warns the weak not to judge the strong as if they had abandoned that common allegiance and direction (Rom 14:3-4,10,13; 15:17)."

Elsewhere Kloosterman writes: "at issue is not the foundation, but the lifestyle based on the commonly held foundation." ... "Not the **existence** of weaker and stronger in the church, but their **relationship** - the fraternal carelessness of the strong (Corinth) and the mutual recrimination of both parties (Rome) - drew the criticism of the apostle." (p. 81).

Summarizing his findings Kloosterman concludes that "the weakness involved in scandalum infirmorum consists in the incapacity for a particular moral undertaking caused by a knowledge deficient in applying certain elements of the Christian faith to life" (p.81). Here I would like to emphasize the words "caused by a **knowledge** deficient". Believers do not all have the same knowledge and understanding yet.

Paul also mentions the possibility of a difference of opinion in Phil 3:15 when he writes: "Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you." Paul speaks of being mature (literally: perfect) in the sense of having attained a thorough understanding of the Christian doctrine. In the context it is clear that Paul is referring to a difference of opinion in the doctrine of justification (vers 9) and sanctification (vers 11). If the readers fail to agree in some lesser point of the doctrine expressed in the preceding verses, then God will clarify the matter to them. As long as they put into practice the truth they have already comprehended (vers 16) and they are willing to move forward. In connection with this text J Calvin writes:

"Does he (Paul) not sufficiently intimate that a difference of opinion as to these matters which are not absolutely necessary, ought not to be a ground of dissension among Christians? The best thing, indeed, is to be perfectly agreed, but seeing there is no man who is not involved in some mist of ignorance, we must either have no church at all, or pardon delusion in those things of which one may be ignorant, without violating the substance of religion and forfeiting salvation.

Here, however, I have no wish to patronise even the minutest of errors, as if I thought it right to foster them by flattery or connivance; what I say is, that we are not on account of every minute difference to abandon a church, provided it retain sound and unimpaired that doctrine in which the safety of piety consists, and keep the use of the sacraments instituted by the Lord." (Institutes IV 1.12). What should our attitude be regarding those differences of opinion and practice? In general one can say that the Lord teaches us in Scripture to pay good heed to the unity in the true faith but that we should be broad-minded when it regards certain practices, grown through the years and connected with the way the Lord has gone with his people. See J. Kamphuis' "Remarks on Church and Tolerance".

When Judaistic Christians wish to impose the circumcision on the churches Paul relentlessly draws the line (Gal 5:1-11; Phil 3:1-11). In that light it is all the more striking how wise and broad-minded Paul is when the gospel is not at stake. The meeting of Acts 15 was called together because some taught: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." (cf Acts 15:1,5). Paul and Barnabas strongly reject that position (15:2; cf also Paul's opposition against Peter as it is described in Gal 2:11 ff). Yet once it has been decided to recognize Barnabas and Paul in the service of the gospel, you notice Paul's flexibility. Paul took Timothy and circumcised him (Acts 16:1ff) "because of the Jews", whereas Titus was **not** circumcised "because of false brethren secretly brought in" (Gal 2:3). Apparently Paul also considers and respects the practice which still prevails among the Jewish Christians. We even see that he apparently still observed the practice of the vow (Acts 18:18). Paul also has no objection against meeting the wishes of the brethren at Jerusalem regarding the clearly Jewish Christian practice of purification (Acts 21:23ff), while at the same time respecting the liberty of the Gentile Christians. Their Christian liberty may not be challenged by practices resulting from a **different** history. What applies for them is what the meeting of Acts 15 decided (cf Acts 21:25). In the historical context it is obvious that the practices mentioned above also have doctrinal implications for the Jewish Christians. Yet Paul is prepared to tolerate it among them as long as they do not deny the gospel of grace alone.

Paul shows the same attitude when he writes about the way the believers are to go around with each other **within** the one congregation (Rom 14,15). "In Rom 14 and 15 the Holy Spirit teaches us to deal with differences among members of the same household: He teaches strong and weak to live with each other" (G Gunnink in "Wat is christelijke vrijheid?" p.26). The believers with differences, which do not put the foundation at stake but which relate to practices based on the commonly held foundation, should not live in moral isolation, but rather improve the moral quality of their conduct and relationship (cf Kloosterman p.81). "This diversity must be practiced without mutual recrimination or scorn, each welcoming the other for the building up of the church. For the strong to impose their convictions upon the weak would lead the latter astray (...). And to impose the view of the weak on the strong would be to destroy the latter's Christian liberty." (Kloosterman p.43). Even though Paul, the inspired apostle, is convinced (with the strong) that nothing is unclean (14:14) he does not force the issue but pastorally shows how the weak and strong are to deal with each other. At the same time Paul indicates by his clear (doctrinal!) stand, by calling the weak weak, and by his prayer that one must not resign to the situation of divergency. He urges us to pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding and prays that the existing differences will not be a permanent thing (14:19; 15:5,6 NASB. cf Gunnink p.26,27). Note that also these differences are not merely differences in practice. They are in fact rooted in a difference in doctrine. Paul's doctrinal position is that of the strong (14:14), yet he tolerates that divergency because it does not put the foundation of the church at stake. (cf also the difference in doctrine in the matter of eating meat offered to idols in I Cor 8:4-7).

What is true regarding the relationship within the congregation also applies with regard to **inter-church** relationships. When a unity of faith is present, as mentioned in Eph 4 for example, then a great deal of mutual respect and patience is necessary. Respect because of the Lord who leads the life of one differently than that of the other,

yet is the Lord of both. Much patience is also needed in the common service, also in the mutual encouragement. Then it can happen that we are of the opinion that we must admonish sister churches to overcome certain weaknesses (although great modesty is required and accurate knowledge of the situation), but that will then always be done in a spirit of meekness, while at the same time there is the willingness to learn from others. Just look at how Paul honors the saints at Rome by speaking of a mutual encouragement "by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (Rom 1:12), even though he knows that he comes to them as apostle of the Lord.

Conclusion

What can we learn from all this? Allow me to mention a few things.

1. The confession that Christ gathers his catholic church in the unity of the true faith should not make us nervous but joyful. It is a wonderful reality brought about by God in this fallen world.
2. We can only speak of unity of faith between churches when they accept all that God has revealed in His Word and thus contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. This unity is not dependent on our official recognition. It is there due to God's work of preservation.
3. When we discover churches which God has preserved in the truth, on that one foundation of the apostles and prophets, then we should experience and express that joy of recognition. It is a matter of honouring God. Letting the joy be snowed under by our real or perceived concerns would be an insult to God.
4. In our contacts we must take into account that faith and thus also unity of faith is not something static but something that develops. Just as our understanding and expression of the truth is imperfect so it is also the case with others. As long as there is that striving for the goal of perfection. This would mean that there is as such nothing contradictory in the wording of the ICRC Constitution "to express and promote the unity of faith member churches have in Christ". It is fully Scriptural to **promote** the unity you already **have**.
5. When differences of practice and/or doctrine arise one must consider the status of such differences. Do they put the foundation at stake or is it a question of drawing different conclusions from the commonly held foundation? If the foundation itself is not at stake then the differences should be tolerated, which does not mean that you should not discuss them and try to make progress together.
6. The history of Rom 14 and 15 teaches us that you can be right in your position and yet be wrong if you force it upon others against their consciences. It is therefore very important to know why others have their practices. If it is a matter of faith to them, "to the Lord", we must treat it with great care.
7. In light of our different history under the providence of God and our own imperfect state we must be very careful not to force our distinctives upon others. We accept each other on the basis of God's Word and not on the basis of practices which have grown over the years and views or insights which have become normal among us. We must not bind the consciences where Scripture does not bind. Once there is that recognition of working on the same basis, let us welcome each other and see it as an honour to help each other and to be helped by each other.
8. If the ICRC, with sufficient care, convinces itself that the member churches do not only have good confessions but also adhere to them then we should have no problem recognising that the member churches have a unity of faith in Christ.
9. Because the unity of faith is a dynamic reality we should not be afraid of possible future obstacles which may disturb that unity. Choosing to remain member now means that we recognise a unity of faith as a reality today and thus accept present responsibilities. It does not say anything about the future. Future membership will be decided upon on the basis of future developments and experiences.

C.1.2. "Unity of Faith" in the ICRC

a. According to the ICRC Constitution only those churches shall be admitted as members which "adhere and are faithful to the confessional standards stated in the

Basis." To ascertain whether that is the case regarding the churches applying for membership the ICRC requests that those churches have two sponsors and appoints an advisory committee to deal with the application and scrutinize the required documents. The report of the advisory committee is then dealt with and the Conference votes on the admittance of the new member. To be admitted as member a church must receive a two-thirds majority vote. This means that no church is admitted unless at least two thirds of the member churches acknowledge that it adheres to and is faithful to the confessional standards stated in the Basis.

b. As the confessional standards stated in the ICRC Basis have been accepted as Reformed and thus true to Scripture, the recognition at the ICRC that a church adheres to and is faithful to those confessional standards must imply recognition of that church as true and faithful. The Report of the Theological Affirmation Committee therefore correctly stated: "The first and most important condition for a church to be admitted as member of the ICRC is that it adheres and is faithful to the confessional standards stated in the Basis (art. IV.1.a). If a church is admitted on this condition, it implies that at least two thirds of the member churches acknowledge it as true church."

c. That recognition in the context of the ICRC must be distinguished from the formal recognition at home by Synod. The former refers to an informal judgement of charity within the context of the ICRC (after an initial investigation). The latter refers to an official recognition by Synod. The Report of the Theological Affirmation Committee correctly distinguished between what happens at the ICRC and what a church does at its Synod. Following the words quoted above (under 2) we read: "On the other hand the ICRC is a conference of Reformed Churches and not a Synod and therefore its decisions are advisory in character (art. V). Admission to the ICRC, then, does not take away the right of the member churches to determine their sister church relationships. At the same time, membership of the ICRC should be a stimulus to seek fraternal relations or ecclesiastical fellowship with the other members." Thus fraternal relations or ecclesiastical fellowship are not automatically implied by that informal recognition as true church at the ICRC. Fraternal relations are determined by Synod and not by the ICRC. Yet at the same time that informal recognition at the ICRC should stimulate the churches to formalize the relationships.

d. That sitting together at the ICRC does not imply a formalization of the fellowship is confirmed by the wording of the ICRC Constitution. The first purpose of the Conference is not only to express the unity of faith, but also to **promote** it. The second purpose mentioned is: "to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among member churches".(Art. III). Thus sister church relations is not seen as an implication of ICRC membership but as a goal to be strived for.

e. At the Langley Conference 1989 the proposal by the FCS that "the Constitution should involve all member churches in a commitment to recognize the membership, ministry and sacraments of the other member churches" was not adopted. This demonstrates that the official position of the ICRC does not equate the informal recognition at the Conference with the formal recognition by Synods. The delegates from the RCN correctly stated (and it was endorsed by the meeting) "Member churches should strive to achieve the above mentioned goal, but this situation does not automatically arise from being a member of the ICRC. Before a sister church relation can be established time should be taken for the necessary contacts and discussions.". The meeting took into account the different phases in contacts. It takes time to move from the initial and informal recognition of unity at the Conference to the full and formal expression of that unity. Even Rev van Gorp's speech at the Constituent Assembly allows for this dynamic element in the unity of faith. He writes "Because of this (given CK) unity of true faith, the churches are bound to find each other in the true fellowship..."

f. It would appear that failure to distinguish clearly between the informal recognition at the Conference and the formal recognition at Synod level caused much confusion in our churches. Delegates from the FRCA to the Constituent Assembly had no problem recognizing the churches present as true churches. They also wrote: "This

spiritual background and unity were the most prominent and stimulating motivations to seek closer contact with each other and to promote unity and co-operation as much as possible...". Note how they spoke of unity present and of closer contact to be sought. Yet "with undue haste" Synod proceeded to offer formal recognition to the FCS, the EPCI and the RPCT before it decided to join the ICRC. Via the press release and an article in *Una Sancta* the impression was given that formal recognition of those churches was a condition for joining the ICRC, thus obliterating the distinction between the (initial) informal recognition as a judgement of charity in the context of the ICRC and formal recognition by Synod after more intensive contacts and evaluation.

Even though Synod 1985 indicated that "the decision to join the ICRC was based on our acceptance of the constitutional BASIS and PURPOSE, and not on the evaluation of potential member Churches" (Art 88, Ground 10) the failure to clearly distinguish between the informal recognition of unity at the ICRC on the basis of reputed adherence to the confessional standards mentioned in the Basis and formal recognition by Synod on the basis of further contacts and evaluation, left many people confused. Many considered that there was only one form of recognition of unity, namely the full and formal recognition at Synod. That can explain in part why the delegates to the Langley ICRC complained of a lack of unity. They considered that unity of faith must be clearly established back at home via formal recognition before it can be expressed at the ICRC.

Regarding the reports A and B presented to Synod 1992 one can say that they both run into difficulties because of their failure to distinguish sharply and clearly between informal recognition in the context of the ICRC on the basis of reputed adherence to the Reformed Standards and formal recognition by the Synod. Because of the loading "recognition as true churches" has received in our churches report A shyed away from using the term "recognition" altogether in the context of the ICRC and spoke only of a Confessional unity. This led to confusion and the misconception that report A's 'confessional unity' would involve no more than a recognition of certain confessions as reformed. Because Report B seemed to have had only one degree of unity in focus, namely the full unity via formal recognition, it supported the "conclusions of the 1989 delegates that a "unity of faith" between all ICRC member churches does not or cannot exist at this point of time." (Report B.11.2.). The only way we can get out of the dilemma of Report A and B is by being more flexible in the use of the phrase "recognition as true church" and distinguishing between degrees of recognition.

C.1.3. Evaluation

Is the distinction mentioned above legitimate? Let us consider the following:

a. In light of the dynamic aspect of unity of faith it would seem logical that there are phases in contacts with other churches. One must start somewhere, on some sort of basis. We do not just start talks with every church, but only with churches which we recognize as churches that wish to serve the same Lord. Thus with regard to the PCEA we have given a degree of 'recognition' by declaring "that there is indeed a mutual desire to serve God according to his Word." (Acts 1987, Art. 115, Rec. D2). There must be a basis of mutual trust and acceptance to build upon towards a closer and more official relationship. Time is needed to grow from an initial 'recognition' (as a judgement of charity) to full and formal recognition. Time is needed to grow in the expression of the unity given in Christ. The ICRC Constitution highlights this dynamic element when it states that the purpose of the Conference shall be : "1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ; 2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches..." (Art. III). Acknowledging different phases in our contacts shows respect for God's providence in the lives of the various churches.

b. Is it necessary to make a judgement at all within the confines of the ICRC? Even a Conference needs a certain basis which gives direction. We are not happy with merely a meeting of minds, without a clear commitment of the participants. We want to have a Reformed Conference. To safeguard the reformed character of the conference it is not sufficient to have a good basis. One must also make sure that the participants

live up to that basis. Thus a certain judgement (of charity) is necessary. Otherwise the basis would become no more than an ornament as is the case with the REC. We should be happy with the fact that care is taken to allow the Conference to be and remain a truly reformed conference. At the same time we must realise that not making a judgement of charity at the ICRC, after the ICRC has convinced itself that the member churches adhere and are faithful to the Reformed standards, is in itself a judgement. If we are not prepared to accept the others as reformed we in fact undermine the very existence of the ICRC as a Reformed Conference with as basis a unity of faith. It is in this light that we must understand the remark made by the convener of the Theological Affirmation Committee at the 1993 Conference: "If you are not able to acknowledge others in the ICRC as true churches what are you doing here?" Were we to insist that there is not a unity of faith at the ICRC, then the basis for our membership would have disappeared and we would be showing distrust in each other.

c. In his paper at the ICRC Kamphuis mentioned this matter of mutual trust (p 10,11). Kamphuis posed the question: how do we meet each other? "In an atmosphere of mistrust? Or in gladness, because, in spite of all the variety of ways we do see that God goes the one way of His pleasure and His grace? Then we can also learn the determination and the patience of belief from each other, and encourage and urge each other to Scriptural tolerance in not bearing error. For decisiveness in belief and decisiveness towards error go hand in hand with tolerance within the one community of belief, a patience that we want to exercise mutually in a spirit of gentleness." Note the italics. Despite the differences in history and practice J. Kamphuis sees the ICRC as a community of faith in which we must show Scriptural tolerance and build each other up on the basis of mutual trust. Elsewhere he writes: "Within the context of the ICRC we as christian churches can help and support and encourage each other in a rich sense..."

d. Is our distinction unscriptural or unconfessional? Neither Scripture nor Confession define the process of recognition. On the basis of what is written in the "Unity of faith" paper we feel that our distinction does more justice to Scripture than the position of "everything or nothing". Art 29 BC indicates that "we ought to discern diligently and very carefully from the Word of God what is the true Church...". An initial judgement of charity in the context of the ICRC on the basis of a careful initial investigation does not contradict those words. The fact that we move carefully from that initial judgement of charity to the formal recognition shows how serious we take those words of our Confession.

e. What about the calling of all believers according to Art 28? Must we direct our people to those churches which have received that initial recognition in the context of the ICRC when they move to the locality of those churches? Seeing the relationship has not yet been formalized we will not be able to exchange attestations yet. Where relations are formalized there the situation is completely clear. In other situations we will have to act in wisdom according to the knowledge we have available, taking into account the judgement of charity given at the ICRC. That all situations are not a 100% clear should not surprise us. It has to do with the dynamics of relationships. There is growth in knowledge and recognition of each other and thus also growth in the expression of the unity of faith. One must take into account the time needed to turn that judgement of charity into a formal recognition.

f. Is our distinction new? The terms may be new to us but the concept has been there at least since the Constituent Assembly of the ICRC and further back in history at the time of the Reformation.(cf Calvin's desire to bring the churches of Zurich and Geneva together in one synod on the basis of the unity of faith he considered to be present). The very wording of the ICRC Constitution shows that from the start the distinction has been made between a unity of faith that is acknowledged as being present among the member churches and the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among them (cf Art III). Our delegates to the Constituent Assembly made the same distinction between accepting each other as faithful churches of the Lord at the ICRC and striving to increase the unity and fellowship (Acts 1993 p. 94-96).

Synod 1973 accepted Art III.1 of the ICRC Constitution and rejected a proposed amendment which considered a.o. "that the Bond of Churches do not have official correspondence with some of the proposed member churches" and that "this article gives the impression that the member churches have already accepted one another fully as official sister churches.". By doing so Synod 1973 showed that it too accepted a distinction between "the unity of faith that member churches have in Christ" and the full acceptance of each other as official sister churches.

Future Synods implicitly accepted the fact that various churches could have unity of faith with other members of the ICRC without the one having officially recognized the other as true and faithful. This is evident from the fact that we decided to continue membership in the ICRC irrespective of the fact that we had not yet recognised all other member churches as true and faithful. In fact, Synod 1985 stated that "the decision to join the ICRC was based on our acceptance of the constitutional BASIS and PURPOSE, and not on any evaluation of potential member churches" (Art. 88, Ground 6). The very fact that the FRCA proposed to add to Art IV of the Constitution that member churches must "show willingness to strive for unity with member churches of the Conference in their own country" indicates that they saw sister relationships as an aim and not as a prerequisite for membership. Thus Synods of the FRCA have accepted the distinction between a unity of faith at the Conference and official sister church relationships.

C.1.4. Considerations and Conclusions

a. The paper titled "Unity of faith in Scripture and Confession" indicates that 'unity of faith' refers to unity in Christ on the basis of the acceptance of the apostolic doctrine. When, after an initial investigation at the ICRC, we discover that member churches truly stand on that same basis, we should joyfully recognise that there is a unity of faith among the member churches in Christ. Such recognition is a matter of praising God for his work of preservation.

b. As the FRCA have accepted the Constitution and Regulations of the ICRC, they must also be prepared (through their delegates at the ICRC) to express some sort of judgment over those who would join the ICRC (ie, either recognise them as being faithful to their confessions and so being worthy of joining, or recognising them as not being faithful to their confessions and so being unworthy of membership).

c. This recognition in the context of the ICRC must be distinguished from the formal recognition at home by Synod. The former refers to a judgement of charity within the context of the ICRC (after initial investigation). The latter refers to an official recognition by Synod after further contacts and investigation. One must remember that it takes time to grow in the understanding and acceptance of each other. Because of the full loading the phrase 'recognition as faithful' has received in our circle, it might be wise to use a different phrase to define that initial and informal recognition in the context of the ICRC. Maybe we can speak of 'accepting each other as faithful'. The word 'recognition' seems to denote a more formal action.

d. Acknowledging that there is a unity of faith among the member churches does not imply that there is full agreement on each and every point of doctrine, but means that there is a fundamental agreement in the Reformed faith. That shared foundation forms the basis for brotherly discussion of the differences. (cf the 'Unity of Faith' paper on 'Differences'). Accepting each other as true does not mean, therefore, that we accept all views and practices of the other member churches. Consider the differences of opinion and practices between the Jerusalem church and the churches in Asia Minor. Those differences did not take away the unity and its expression. What is tolerable in one church in the light of its history is not necessarily tolerable in another church.

e. In light of the requirements for receiving members into the ICRC and in light of fact that unity of faith is something that develops there is no reason to question the validity of the present reading of Art. III (1) of the ICRC Constitution: "to express and promote the unity of faith member churches have in Christ".

f. The concern expressed by Synod 1990 (Art 145, Consideration 15) as to what to do if member churches are found to maintain practices which are in conflict with the Standards mentioned in the Basis, is adequately answered in the report of deputies

to Synod 1992. Indeed there would have to be clear information and evidence to conclude that a church "is no longer in agreement with the Basis." On the basis of what is written in the paper on 'Unity of faith in Scripture and Confession' we ought to be very careful in coming to such a judgement. Nevertheless the possibility exists and this is adequately covered by Art. IV.2 of the ICRC Constitution. Should the conference fail to terminate the membership of such a member church or fail to live up to its Constitution and Basis, then we would have to withdraw our membership. It must be remembered that our membership of the ICRC is open to review from synod to synod.

g. In addressing the question of what is to happen if sister relations prove impossible between member churches of the ICRC (Consideration 18) deputies refer to the Acts of Synod 1985 (Art 67) which clearly states the consequence of recognising churches as true and faithful. We have recognised however that the process of establishing sister relations could be a lengthy one. It could even be that there are obstacles which would prevent sister relations from being established. This however, does not necessarily preclude us from continuing to meet with non-sister churches at the ICRC. Only in the case of heresy would the unity of faith be broken and would we have to follow the course explained under 6.

h. There is good reason for our continued membership in the ICRC. Our "calling" in this regard has been questioned by some. It is correct to say we do not have an explicit calling with regard to the ICRC as such. Yet if the ICRC can assist us in the exercise of our true ecumenical calling in the world we must gratefully acknowledge that and continue as active and responsible members.

i. It is true that unity of faith in the body of Christ is a **given** and as such does not depend on our actions. It is equally true that we are not called to pursue an organizational unity with whomever we may recognise to be true church of Christ. We are indeed often limited by time, circumstance and opportunity. We have limited resources so that we cannot be "all things to people." We should also not think that the ICRC **compels** us to seek full ecclesiastical fellowship with all the member churches. It only **"encourages"** us to do so in the realization that the manner and extent to which churches seek to fulfil this purpose is **their** responsibility.

j. Nevertheless if we take the existing unity of faith (cf 1 Cor. 1:2 - "called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.") seriously we will spare no effort to "maintain (i.e. keep, observe, fulfil) the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:3) The recognition and realization that it is Christ's desire to gather His catholic church "from every tribe and nation...in the unity of true faith" should be a fundamental governing principle for our involvement in the ICRC.

k. We may also note that it is this ecumenical imperative which motivated truly reformed churches in the past to declare that they were willing to:

unite themselves with every assembly based on God's infallible Word at whatsoever place God has unified the same. (Act of Secession 1834 - The Act of Liberation and Return contains similar words).

These truly ecumenical words and deeds by reformed churches in the past may not be ignored. Though we may not consider "antiquity...councils decrees or statutes as of equal value with the word of God" (Belgic Confession Art. 8) yet when these words and deeds are in conformity with that Word we may take examples from them. It has been noted that:

The synod of Leiden, 1857, sought ecclesiastical fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland and with the reformed confessors in the Republic of Transvaal.... In 1868 three Christelijke Gereformeerde (the churches of the Secession) ministers attended the International Theological Conference in Wezel. In 1877 Brummelkamp and Van Velzen (ministers of the Secession churches and lecturers at the Theological School in Kampen) participated in the Pan Presbyterian Council. (Dr. J. Faber, "The Significance of the Secession of 1834" in **Secession and Liberation for Today** I.L.P.B., 1836)

Led by Christ's ecumenical imperative the true catholic Synod of Dort invited

delegates from foreign churches, (including the Church of England) to participate in their ecclesiastical assembly as members with full rights.

l. The deputies of our sister church in the Netherlands reported:

Amazement for the world-wide work of Christ makes us seek unity with the councils (of the early Church), the Synod of Dort of 1618/19 with its international character and with the reformed practise of the 19th and first half of the 20th century.

In their letter to the FRCA the South African deputies express that while they do appreciate our concerns about the ICRC, they see no reason for suspension or cancellation of membership. On the contrary they recognise that it would be beneficial to remain members.

m. Synod 1990 considered:

Concerning the recent meeting of the conference held in Langley, Canada, it gives reason for gratitude that churches who desire to serve the Lord according to His Word met together in an effort to satisfy the stated purpose of the ICRC. It is also encouraging to note that more churches are taking an interest in this organisation which desire to be faithful to the Word of God. (Acts, Art.145, Consideration 7).

n. Report "A" (presented to Synod 1992 by previous deputies) outlines the positive purposes of the ICRC (as expressed in Article III of its Constitution) and makes reference to the benefits we have, and that the ICRC has been a positive instrument in encouraging "fullest ecclesiastical fellowship". Besides the benefits of involvement in workshops and discussions the conference provides valuable opportunity to discuss important matters of common concern. It allows us to meet representatives from other member churches from around the globe. This must enhance our awareness of Christ's ecumenical church gathering work and it should enable us to be a "hand and foot" to each other in a concrete fashion.

o. Topics to be discussed at the ICRC should be relevant and in line with the Purpose(s) expressed in Article III. As Australian churches we can and ought to make positive contributions to the agendas of the ICRC. Time should be given to discuss the matters included in our rules for sister relations. In this way "part of our commitment in the exercise of ecclesiastical relations could be meaningfully fulfilled at the conference." (Report A.p.44)

p. All our sister churches urge us to stay in the ICRC. They are convinced that there is indeed a unity of faith among the member churches. See the letters we received from the RCN and from the FRCSA and the report of the meeting with sister churches during the 1993 Conference. Should we not give heed to such unanimous advice according to the lesson of Proverbs 11:14 : "Where there is no guidance a people falls; but in an abundance of counselors there is safety."

q. Synod 1990 expressed that the concerns may affect our continuing membership in the ICRC. Past Synods have acknowledged "unity of faith in Christ" among member churches. On that basis o.a. they decided to join the ICRC. No appeals have overturned this. (cf Acts 1985, Art.88). To cease membership of the ICRC would mean a change. Such a change in direction would require good grounds. Further studies on these concerns (recorded in this report) have, however, confirmed the validity of those previous decisions and shown that there is no reason for ceasing membership in the ICRC. On the contrary.

r. Ceasing membership in the ICRC would unnecessarily isolate the FRCA more and more and would deprive us of a valuable opportunity to share our riches and to be enriched by others. In light of our imperfect state we too need to grow in knowledge and in faith.

C.1.5. Recommendations

1. to discharge deputies of their mandate and to thank them for all the work done.
2. to consider the study of the concerns of the 1990 Synod about our (continuing) membership of the ICRC complete.
3. to continue our membership in the ICRC.

ICRC Deputies C. Kleyn A. Veldman*

*Rev. A Veldman subscribed to this report with the following proviso: "Though I can fully subscribe to this report, seeing that at present a decision to continue our membership in the ICRC will cause contention within the federation of churches, I wish to reserve the right to myself to initiate, via other channels, a proposal to suspend our membership till more unity has been reached on the issue of recognising churches with a different confession."

C.2

Continued Membership not Justified

The outline of this part of the report is as follows (it covers points 2 and 9 of the mandate received):

- I. the understanding of "unity of faith" in the ICRC.
- II. the understanding of "unity of faith" in Scripture and Confession.
- III. Conclusions

I. "Unity of Faith" in the ICRC

Introduction

Synod 1990 (Acts, Art 145) signalled particular concerns about the (continuing) membership of the FRCA in the ICRC (cf Considerations 14,15,18,19). Deputies instructed by Synod 1990 to study these concerns zeroed in on the concept of "unity of faith" as the key to these concerns. We are agreed that the notion of "unity of faith" constitutes a fundamental concept in the question of whether the FRCA ought to continue her membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches. That makes critical the question: what does "unity of faith" mean in the circle of the ICRC?

Accordingly, an investigation was undertaken to determine what the concept "unity of faith" originally meant and still means within the ICRC and its member churches. This investigation appears below. One may have reservations about particular evidences raised, but collectively the arguments compell one to a clear conclusion: the phrase "unity of faith" as printed in the Constitution denotes that the member churches perceive each other to be true churches of Jesus Christ.

Evidence that 'Unity of Faith' means 'True Church'

a. The Constituent Assembly of the ICRC was served by a number of speakers mandated to lay the necessary ground work for getting an international conference off the ground. Of these speakers, two had to speak on "The Unity of Faith".³ What these speakers understood by the phrase "unity of faith" is exemplified by what Rev vanGurp wrote in his paper under the heading "Unity of true faith":

"We now wish to point out that a true fellowship is possible only in the fellowship of true faith. We believe that the Son of God out of the whole human race, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a Church chosen to everlasting life; and that I am, and forever shall remain, a living member thereof, Heid. Catechism Q 54.

This unity is a spiritual unity, given with and in the calling with which they who have been given to Christ by the Father, are called, Eph 4:4-6, I Cor 12: 13,27. They have to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, for there is one body and one Spirit, Eph 4:3.

This unity exists only when the truth binds together.... Because of this unity of true faith, the churches are bound to find each other in the true fellowship...."⁴

It is readily apparent that this background paper fully understands the term "unity of faith" to be confessional language rooted in Scripture, denoting the unity for which the Saviour prayed in Jn 17, a unity reflecting the oneness between the Father and

the Son. Given that this paper arises from the circle of our brethren in the Netherlands, we can understand what is meant by "in the true fellowship"; to minds conditioned by reformed ecclesiology as the Liberated churches were allowed to rediscover it, this is a reference to sister relations according to accepted rules.

b. The "COMMUNIQUE of the Constituent Assembly for the International Conference of Reformed Churches" says in Point 5 that

"The confessional unity that exists among the participating churches was reaffirmed and promoted."

The phrase "confessional unity" in this quote does not refer simply to a recognition of certain confessions as reformed, but rather to the unity mentioned in Scripture. That is to say, what is meant in the COMMUNIQUE is not simply that the Confessions involved all belonged to the same reformed family and confessed the same truths, but rather that the churches present at the Constituent Assembly recognized that they all lived according to their respective Confessions. This is apparent from the next sentence of the COMMUNIQUE:

"Gratitude is expressed to the Lord Who has established His worldwide church and is faithful in the ingathering, the defence and the preservation of His people until the end of the ages" (emphasis added).

When these two sentences from the COMMUNIQUE are read one after the other (as they appeared in the COMMUNIQUE), it is apparent that the phrase "confessional unity" meant in the minds of those present that participants in the Constituent Assembly mutually recognized each other as true and faithful churches.

c. The report to Synod 1983 of the Australian brothers who attended the Constituent Assembly reveals what these brothers understood the Constituent Assembly to mean by the phrase "unity of faith":

"...the delegates of the Reformed Churches with the Three Forms of Unity, and of the Presbyterian Churches with the Westminster Standards, had no problem to recognize each other as true and faithful Churches of the Lord."⁵

And later:

"This spiritual background and unity were the most prominent and stimulating motivations to seek closer contact with each other and to promote unity and co-operation as much as possible, in accordance with the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament."⁶

And again:

"Minor differences concerning doctrinal and ecclesiastical matters were no impediment to accept each other as faithful churches."⁷

We recognize that the Free Reformed Churches in Synod 1985 indicated that "the decision to join the ICRC was based on our acceptance of the constitutional BASIS and PURPOSE, and not on any evaluation of potential member Churches" (Art 88, Ground 12). We submit, however, that this "ground" does not alter the fact that our deputies in attendance at the Constituent Assembly did evaluate other churches in attendance, found them faithful, and joined in capturing that notion in the phrase "unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ" as is found in the Constitution.

d. That the Free Reformed Churches of Australia in Synod 1983 themselves understood the unity mentioned in the Constitution to refer to recognition of each other as true churches of the Lord is apparent from the fact that discussions on the ICRC (Arts 59-65, 79-87) were interrupted to deal with relations with other churches (66-78). Of particular relevance is the fact that three churches with whom there had not been any official contact in the past were now recognized as true and faithful churches of the Lord (Arts 72 & 75). Why specifically these three (instead of some others) were recognized may be explained by the fact that these three were represented at the Constituent Assembly of the ICRC. The result is that all the churches represented at the Constituent Assembly were recognized as faithful churches of the Lord before the FRCA decided to join the ICRC (Art 87).

The Press Release from this same Synod strengthens this argument:⁸

"After having acknowledged that the participating member churches of the

Constituent Assembly for the ICRC are true and faithful churches..., Synod decides to join this conference."⁹

Shortly thereafter one of the brothers in attendance at this Synod explained for the church membership the connection between the recognition offered to the FCS, the EPCI, and the RPCT and the decision to join the ICRC:

"If the above-mentioned churches would not have been recognized as true churches, Synod could not have come to the decision to join the International Conference of Reformed and Presbyterian churches to be held in Scotland in 1985."¹⁰

From this material it follows that the FRCA in 1983 understood the phrase "unity of faith" in the Constitution of the ICRC to denote recognition of fellow members as true churches of the Lord.

e. After the Constituent Assembly of the ICRC, Reformed Perspective printed an interview with Rev J Visscher, one of the delegates from the Canadian sister churches. Rev Visscher was asked what the purpose of this conference was. His answer began as follows:

"Initially the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated) had set out three purposes for the conference. The first was to promote and express the unity in Christ of the Churches which adhere to the Reformed faith. That unity is recognized in accepting that there are true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ around the world in both the Reformed and the Presbyterian traditions. Bringing these churches together in such a conference gives them an opportunity to further express and promote the unity they already have in Christ...."¹¹

Certainly this implies that this Canadian delegate came away from the Constituent Assembly with the thought that "unity of faith" with other churches implies a recognition of those other churches as true.

f. The Inter-Church Relations committee of the PCEA reported to their 1986 Synod on the 1985 Conference and the fact that PCEA was received as member into the ICRC. In this context we read the following:

"It is a matter for some regret that although we accorded that FRCA official 'recognition' last Synod, their Synod meeting on 7 June 1985 refrained from reciprocating on the ground that they had insufficient information to come to a decision. And yet, the two denominations now participate in the ICRC!"¹²

This lament is comprehensible only on the premise that the PCEA sees membership in the ICRC to imply that member churches recognize each other as true.

It's this same premise that makes sense of a question asked of deputies in the FRCA by the PCEA Inter-Church Relations Committee:

"In relation to the matter of true/false churches, we would be interested to know what is your Churches' current attitude to the International Conference of Reformed Churches. The PCEA joined in 1985, and the FRCA was a founding member. How do you view your relationship with churches in the ICRC which, so far, you have not recognized as being 'true'?"¹³

g. In his report on the 1985 ICRC, Prof D MacLeod of the FCS (one the delegates to that Conference) wrote as follows:

"A way must be found, too, to force member-Churches to face up to the practical realities of inter-denominational relations.... All the delegates would have been welcome in Free Church pulpits and at the Free Church communion-table. But in many instances that welcome could not have been reciprocated. We would not be allowed into their pulpits or admitted to their Communion. On a personal level, that gives no offence. But it does highlight a problem. If we cannot sit together at the Lord's Table, how can we be one in Christ? And if we are one in Christ, why can we not sit together at the Table?.... ICRC 1989 should end with a Communion Service."¹⁴

This plea for members of ICRC member churches sitting at one Communion table is understandable only if member churches are seen as true churches of the Lord.

What Prof MacLeod said on personal title in 1985 was crystalized in the FCS proposal to the 1989 Conference, that "the Constitution should involve all member churches

in a commitment to recognize the membership, ministry and sacraments of the other member churches."¹⁵ The fact that the 1989 ICRC did not grant the request of the FCS does not take away from the fact that this member church understands membership in the ICRC to imply recognition of each other as true churches.

h. The decision of the Conference in 1989 not to adopt the proposal of the FCS that "the Constitution should involve all member churches in a commitment to recognize the membership, ministry and sacraments of the other member churches" does not mean that the Conference as a whole rejected the notion that fellow members are true; on the contrary. The Proceedings record the observation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands that

"the matter is sufficiently covered by Art. III.2 of the Constitution.... Member churches should strive to achieve the above mentioned goal, but this situation does not automatically arise from being a member of the ICRC. Before a sister church relation can be established time should be taken for the necessary contacts and discussions."¹⁶

The Dutch do not argue that the member churches are not one in Christ; they rather argue that time is required before the existing unity can receive the desired expression. The ad hoc Committee charged with advising the Conference on the Scottish proposal "agreed" with the observation of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, and advised the Conference accordingly. After discussion, "the Committee's recommendation was adopted."¹⁷

i. The report of the Canadian deputies for relations with churches abroad wrote the following to the 1992 Synod concerning the ICRC:

"It is a forum in which faithful churches of our Lord from around the world can meet together and discuss matters of mutual concern and explore ways to assist each other."¹⁸

j. The Report of the Theological Affirmation Committee (appointed by the 1989 Conference) stated the following:

"If a church is admitted..., it implies that at least two thirds of the member churches acknowledge it as true church."

This statement from the Theological Affirmation Committee is based on the stipulation of the adopted Constitution that

"those churches shall be admitted as members which... c. are accepted by a two-thirds majority vote of the member churches..." (Art IV.1).

As noted in the Report of our delegates to the 1993 ICRC, our delegates queried the accuracy of this statement. The public response of the convener of the Committee was a rhetorical question to the effect that if the FRCA could not acknowledge others in the ICRC as true churches, "what were you doing here?" That this understanding of membership in the ICRC was the consensus of the meeting was evident from the fact that no one took the floor to challenge the rhetorical question. According to the delegates report, a similar sentiment was expressed in the meeting with the sister churches.

On the basis of these data, one concludes that the common understanding of the phrase "unity of faith" historically was and still is that member churches see each other as true churches of the Lord.

Further, since it is necessary for good communication that the words and phrases used be loaded with meanings living in the minds of the hearers, it would be unethical for the FRCA to hold to a different understanding of the phrase 'unity of faith' than lives in the minds of our fellow ICRC members. At this stage, our options are either i) agree that all member churches are true churches of Jesus Christ, or ii) disagree that all member churches are true churches of Jesus Christ. In the latter case, one must either seek to change the common understanding of "unity in faith" in the ICRC or withdraw from the organization.

To assist in determining which of the two options the FRCA should follow, it will be good to consider what the Lord has told us in Scriptures about "unity of faith". The question is, then: does the existence of "unity of faith" imply that all member churches

in the ICRC are (to consider each as) true churches of Jesus Christ on the ground of their being received as members in the ICRC?

II. "Unity of Faith" in Scripture and Confession

Introduction

The catholicity of Christ's church gathering work is something we believe. In this life, limited as we are, we cannot see the extent of this church gathering work. This reality, however, does not take away from the fact that one catholic church gathered by Christ from every tribe and tongue and nation is united in one faith. This, too, is an item one believes.

In this life, the Lord sovereignly gives to churches of one country or culture a different history than He gives to churches of another country or culture. Also, due to the limitations of this broken life, not every believer—and hence not every church of the Lord—has an equally developed or mature understanding of the Lord and His will. These two factors together dictate that no two churches of the Lord will be equally alike. Always the one can encourage the other in some matter; each can learn from the other.

The corollary of this reality is that other churches need not be a carbon copy of ourselves before we can recognize them as true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. The other church need not embrace the same confessional document as we do, nor need the other church treasure identical practices as we have. In this broken life, every church of the Lord—the FRCA included—needs to grow more and more in the ways of the Lord.

What is required of another church for it to be recognized as a church of Jesus Christ is that it answers to the marks of the church as confessed in Art 29, Belgic Confession. A 'church' is not a legitimate gathering of those redeemed in the blood of Christ unless the Word of God, the voice of the Good Shepherd, is clearly heard in that gathering and acknowledged. Despite many abiding weaknesses (which will remain until Jesus Christ returns in glory), such a church is obedient ("it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it") and hence truly "church" of the Lord. The FRCA must reckon with both these factors—the limitations of this imperfect life even while one strives for obedience—in her relation with other churches.

The above is stated emphatically to discourage anyone from concluding that the point of view defended in this section of the report would somehow deny that Christ's church is catholic or insist that a church cannot be true unless it is identical to the FRCA.

Unity of Faith

What has been said in the Introduction above will make clear that I can definitely concur with the drift¹⁹ of Rev Kleyn's paper on "Unity of Faith in Scripture and Confession" (printed in Section C.1 of this report). So I do not consider it necessary to produce here a second paper on the subject.²⁰ Instead, I consider the better approach to be a brief interaction with his paper.

Rev Kleyn is correct in his finding that "unity of faith" involves unity in the truth. The norm of God's Word is that all God's own are to embrace in faith all that the Lord has revealed in His Word (as we also confess in LD 7: "What, then, must a Christian believe? All that is promised us in the gospel..."). Rev Kleyn is correct also when he notes that this unity of faith "is not a static reality"; one grows in faith. So it is that not every believer has an equally developed or mature understanding of the Lord and His will, nor has every believer equal resolve in carrying out the will of the Lord. And as this is true of every believer, so must this (therefore) be true of every "congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers" (as the Church is circumscribed in Art 27 of the Belgic Confession). In this broken life, no church has yet arrived at the goal of perfection.

Do these conclusions about "unity of faith" mean, however, that every assembly of growing believers is true? That's the point at issue: in the ICRC, sharing "unity of faith" in Christ implies that the churches involved are true churches. But is the

equation correct? It should be noted that Rev Kleyn's paper does not demonstrate that Scripture insists "unity of faith" to imply "true church".

In fact, one cannot insist on a necessary connection between the existence of "unity of faith" and being a "true church". That "unity of faith" makes individuals to be brothers in Christ is the teaching of Scripture. That believers—and therefore also assemblies of believers (ie, churches)—continue to grow in faith even while they are already united in faith is also the teaching of Scripture. But the fact that believers share one true faith (growing as they are) does not make the church to which they belong legitimate. One knows whether a church is true by observing whether the marks are present. So the assembly of Korah in the days of Moses was illegitimate not because Korah and his followers were not united in faith to the Son of God and the children of Israel (Scripture is silent about the faith and eternal destiny of Korah, Dathan, Abiram and their households); the assembly of Korah was false because that assembly did not "govern itself according to the pure Word of God..." (Art 29). In this world of sin, there may very well be clusters/assemblies of disobedient sheep of the Lord God, true believers who gather in a place where the voice heard is not of the Good Shepherd but of the great Pretender.

May one speak of "unity of faith" in the context of the ICRC? Given what the Scriptures say on the matter, one could do so. As delegates to the ICRC write in their report:

"It cannot be disputed that all delegates (observers included) displayed a love for the Lord and gratitude for His saving work in Jesus Christ. all in attendance had something in common, viz, faith in Christ Jesus and a love for the reformed (=Scriptural) truth.... The phrase 'unity of faith' comes to mind as a possible descriptive label for the bond in Christ which obviously existed among the participants."

Here is a recognition of "unity of faith" in the Scriptural sense of the concept. This, however, is not the way the phrase is commonly used in the ICRC.

I conclude from the studies done over the previous months on the concept "unity of faith" that there is room for the phrase in the context of the ICRC (as above), but not to denote that the member churches are true churches of Jesus Christ. The understanding of the phrase "unity of faith" as it lives in the ICRC is Scripturally not justifiable.

We turn now to a consideration of what we confess in the Belgic Confession concerning the church. IF the concept "unity of faith" denotes "true church", what is this "true church"? And what are the implications of recognizing another as "true church"? In this subsection, then, we look at the second component of the supposed equation "unity of faith=true church".

The Confession concerning the Church

The Belgic Confession describes in simple terms "what is the true Church". That "holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit" (Art 27) is "true" if "it practises the pure preaching of the gospel, ...maintains the pure administration of the sacraments..., [and] exercises Church discipline for correcting and punishing sins" (Art 29). The designation "true" does not belong to any conservative, evangelical church (if it did, why did the Synod of Dort not invite the Lutherans to their assembly?), but to that body of believers where the marks of the church are found.

To such a legitimate gathering of God's people, this true church, the individual believer is bound to join himself (Art 28). Under no circumstance is the believer permitted to remain separated, since the Holy Spirit works and strengthens faith "by the preaching of the gospel" (LD 25), and this preaching (together with the sacraments and church discipline) marks an assembly as true or counterfeit. Here, then, the Belgic Confession lays a direct connection between recognition of a gathering of believers as a "true church of Jesus Christ" and the obligation to join it. To separate "recognition" and "joining" is contrary to the church's understanding of God's revelation. The principle connecting "recognition" to "joining" is based on the given of

Scripture that Jesus Christ is amongst His churches (Rev 1:12ff). Since there is no other name given under heaven by which men can be saved, one must be where Jesus is (cf also Jn 10:27).

On the "inter-church" level, the corollary of what Scripture teaches concerning the "local" level is that it is incorrect for a bond of churches to recognize another church as true, as a legitimate church of Jesus Christ, and at the same time not give the membership the right, in essence, to join that recognized church. To say it with the ecclesiastical language we're familiar with: it is contrary to what we confess in Articles 28 and 29 to consider a church true, and then decline in principle to establish "sister relations" with that church (and so to regulate reception of attestations, Lord's supper attendance, pulpit exchanges, etc). This necessary link between recognizing a church as true and opening the way for one's members to join it was documented by the Committee for Theological Affirmation in its Report to the ICRC in 1993. The Committee's conclusion reads (in part):

"Recognizing one another as true churches has consequences with respect to admission to the pulpit, admission to the celebration of the Lord's Supper and acceptance of attestations or certificates of consistories or sessions."²¹

Of more authority in our midst is the finding of the FRCA Synod in 1985 (and upheld against appeals by Synods 1987 and 1990):

Synod declare[s] that our recognition of another Church as being 'true and faithful Church of the Lord Jesus Christ'... 2. has as a direct consequence that a sister-Church relationship can be established...; 3. and that our church members must join that church, and vice versa, in the case that such church is their nearest church, in accordance with Article 28 of the Belgic Confession" (Art 67).

In fact, the decision of the FRCA in 1985 went further than the conclusions of the Theological Affirmation Committee in as much as the 1985 decision realized that

"historical developments may well give cause to several stumbling blocks still lying on the road to a practical realization of unity".

That is: while recognition of a church means that Jesus Christ is seen to be walking in the midst of that church (and so no Consistory can in principle discourage any one from joining this recognized church; on the contrary), it may very well take time before relations can be formalized with mutually acceptable rules. Meanwhile, in principle, recognition of another as true church implies that officebearers can responsibly permit believers in their charge to join that other church. But note: one can join that recognized church not because there is 'unity of faith' (ie, the members of the two churches are joined in one faith to Jesus Christ), but rather because the gospel necessary to salvation is purely proclaimed in that other church.

Differences among Member Churches

In light of the Confession's insistence that in the true church all things are done according to the Word of God, it is striking that among member churches of the ICRC there is distinct doctrinal difference. It is true that the Report of the Theological Affirmation Committee could note that there is no basic difference between what the confessions of the Presbyterian churches teach on "true church" and what the confessions of the (continental) Reformed churches teach.²² Yet in practice there is distinct difference between member churches when it comes to attaching the designation "true church" to another church/denomination. By way of example, it may be known that the PCEA—in their language—does not "unchurch" any conservative, evangelical denomination; each conservative, evangelical church is considered "true church", with as consequence that pulpit exchange and inter-communion is possible. The FRCA, on the other hand (equally member of the ICRC), attaches the label "true church" to no other church in Australia, and so pulpit exchanges and inter-communion are possible with no other church in our land. Why is there this difference in readiness to apply the designation "true church" to another? The "Summary" emanating from the 1988 Byford meeting between deputies from the PCEA and the FRCA gives indication:

"Much of the position of the PCEA re church revolves around the concept of 'pure/less pure' church. I.e: there are degrees from "most pure" 'down' to the point

where a 'church' ceases to be a church of Jesus Christ and becomes a synagogue of Satan (WCF 25.5).

Because of this position, the PCEA will not deny the title 'church' to any 'denomination' holding the central truth of Jesus Christ crucified (justification by faith) even though that church may stray on various other points. Any 'denomination' is 'church' if it confesses this central doctrine of the Bible and is more or less pure depending on the extent to which it holds correctly to the various other dogmas revealed in Scripture. The PCEA sees in each such 'relatively pure' church a manifestation of the one church of Jesus Christ.²³

One recognizes here a broad understanding of what the church is: their Confession notwithstanding, the brethren of the PCEA think in terms of the Church being one massive entity, with each local church being a more or less pure manifestation of that one church. With such a concept of church in mind, it is understandable that these brethren readily attach the designation "true church" to any conservative, evangelical denomination.

Here, however, is a view on church distinctly different from the view living in the midst of the FRCA. Indeed, here language is used that finds no echo in the Three Forms of Unity — Confessions we cherish as Scripturally correct. Instead, the Belgic Confession maintains that the designation "true church" belongs rightly only to that assembly which "practices the pure preaching of the gospel" (to mention just this point). How a church can "stray on various other points" and yet be considered "true" is not possible according to the Confession. In a word, here is a difference in an aspect of ecclesiology.

This would not be so disconcerting if the church concerned showed eagerness to bow over God's Word, study the Scriptures, and grow (as, for example, the Reformed Church of Papua New Guinea is, weaknesses notwithstanding). As it is, though, deputies for contact with the PCEA have not detected great eagerness on the part of the PCEA to grapple seriously with concerns raised with them (even though these concerns were put forward as being Scripturally justified); on the contrary.²⁴ Then one hesitates to conclude that in these member churches of the ICRC all things are done according to the Word of God and so advise our membership that the PCEA is a true church of Jesus Christ (cf Acts 1990, Art 77; Acts 1992, Art 72). Nevertheless, in the ICRC we are understood to be saying that Yes, the PCEA is a true church, while on the home front (ie, at Synod) we do not recognize the PCEA as a true church. This state of affairs is unethical, in as much as the Lord Jesus told us to let our Yes be Yes and our No be No (Mt 5:37).

Two Levels of Recognition?

As indicated above, some members of the ICRC are willing to attach the designation "true church" to another sooner than are other member churches. In broad terms it can be said that churches of presbyterian heritage²⁵ have a lower threshold for recognizing another 'body' as "church" than do churches of reformed, continental heritage (specifically Liberated). The churches of Presbyterian heritage recognize as "church" all conservative, evangelical denominations, and establish formal ties only with those with whom it is expedient and beneficial.²⁶ Historically, the Reformed (Liberated) churches do not attach the designation "true church" unless formal relations can be established.

Within our deputyship it has been argued that the FRCA ought to adopt two levels of recognition, the one being the "informal" level of recognition (say, in the context of the ICRC), the other being the "official" level of recognition when Synod has finished the necessary investigations, is satisfied with the results, and now proceeds to establish a sister church relationship. In practice, this "two levels" comes down to combining the presbyterian approach to recognizing other churches and the reformed. Under this scenario, the FRCA would retain its "narrow" approach of recognizing other churches as true and establishing sister relations with these churches, and at the same time would take on board the presbyterian practice of applying the designation "true church" on a "broad(er)" scale.

This distinction is unacceptable. Mention has already been made of the difference

in ecclesiology between the Reformed churches and the Presbyterian. To take on board the “presbyterian model” of recognizing other churches requires that we take on board also the underlying ecclesiology that gave birth to this ready willingness to apply the term “true church” so broadly. Certainly, one could argue that the FRCA would not need to take on board this broader ecclesiology. But does reality not demonstrate that one’s principles determine one’s practices, and one’s practices affect one’s principles? Here is need for great caution! What we believe the Lord God to have revealed concerning the Church will undergo a change (if it hasn’t already) if we adopt the “two levels” model. At stake is what we received in our Confessions, what we confessed to be Scripturally true (when we made public profession of faith and signed our Subscription Forms), and what we taught our children and our congregations over the years. Because something so central as the Confession is at stake, it is imperative that adequate Scriptural grounds be given to explain how the “older” view was deficient and the new approach is required. It would also be prudent—given the strong feelings that live in the churches on the subject—to give the churches time to come to grips with the evidence.

It should be concluded, then, that the new²⁷ distinction into two levels of recognition is scholastic, is engineered to justify the position in which the FRCA currently finds itself. In the course of our church history over the last century, we have learned enough about the sad consequences of making distinctions not found in Scripture and Confession. It is for the church instead to keep things simple, letting our Yes to another church be Yes, and our No be No. In a word, this distinction does not satisfy the criteria required to remain member of the ICRC. We can’t have it both ways; we can’t recognize a church in the ICRC and not on the homefront.

Further Arguments Pleading Withdrawal

a. With the exception of Synod 1983, the FRCA has not been prepared to see fellow member churches as true. The recognition extended in 1983 to the Free Church of Scotland, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (Acts, Art 72,75) was judged in 1985 to have been made “with undue haste and without due consideration” (Acts, Art 43). One may think also of the explicit decisions of our churches in Synod to decline to recognize the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia—though fellow member in the ICRC—as a true church of the Lord (cf Acts 1987, Art 115; 1990, Art 77; 1992, Art 72). Both of these items point up that the FRCA does not consider all fellow members of the ICRC, on the basis of their membership, to be true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. Continued membership gives then a confusing signal to our members and a false impression to other member churches of the ICRC.

b. The fact that our churches, through membership in the ICRC, are understood to recognize the other member churches as true, leads to awkward positions. Since both the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches of North America are members of the ICRC, both churches are entitled to conclude that we see them as true churches of the Lord. As such, both may conclude that we in Australia—faithful as we’re understood to be to Art 28 of the Belgic Confession—would direct potential migrants to Canada to join either one of these two churches. Yet in reality we do not so much as consider advising our members to join the FRCNA instead of the CRC. The reason is not simply that we have a sister relation with the CRC and not with the FRCNA. The reason is deeper; we do not have a relation with the FRCNA because our churches do not acknowledge that church as a church of the Lord per Art 29. Yet in the ICRC it’s understood that we recognize both as true. Here an anomaly is touched: the relation we have with the FRCNA due our common membership with them in the ICRC receives no echo on the home front.

c. Officebearers (ie, the churches in Synod) attach the label “true” to another church not (from a human point of view) to be polite to that church, but rather to indicate to the sheep in the charge of those officebearers that here is a church one can join (must, if one moves to that area) and still be nourished to salvation. Because of the great responsibility shepherds have toward their sheep (cf Ezek 33), Art 29 of the Belgic Confession summarizes Scripture to require that one is “to discern diligently and

very carefully from the Word of God what is the true Church." From this it follows that one cannot rest satisfied with recognizing another as true simply because the other has been accepted as member of the ICRC; according to the Confession, one needs—for the sake of the people in one's charge—to make proper investigation.

d. A team of two delegates to the ICRC must consider, on behalf of the FRCA, whether a church seeking membership should be admitted. Given that membership implies true church, these two brothers implicitly make a judgment on that applying church as to whether it is true. This scarcely does justice to the requirement of Art 29 to "discern diligently". Further, if the delegates cannot concur with a majority vote to admit the applying church, and synod agrees, the implications of "true church" are that one leave the ICRC.

e. If all those who are received into the ICRC are indeed "true churches", the number of our contacts with foreign churches must increase dramatically. For with true churches we should strive to enter a sister relation. In other words, our "external affairs" are in large measure dictated to us by the ICRC. This does not accord with Art 46 of the CO, where we have agreed that "the relation with churches abroad shall be regulated by Synod".

f. Any investigation of whether a fellow member church is "true" is prejudiced from the beginning, since membership in the ICRC already implies "true church".

III. Conclusions

The Lord requires His people (and hence His church too) to be honest and straight forward in our speech (cf Mt 5:37; Prov 24:26). We are to say what we mean and mean what we say. As long as it is understood in the circle of the ICRC that the Constitutional phrase "unity of faith" means that member churches recognize each other as true churches of the Lord, and as long as the term "true church" is taught and understood in our midst to mean what we confess it in the Belgic Confession to mean, our options in the FRCA are two-fold:

- A. recognize all fellow member churches as true churches of Jesus Christ, with all that such recognition entails according to Scripture (as summarized in the Confession).
- B. cease membership of the ICRC.

Comment on the Options

The following comments should be made on these two options:

RE option A.

i. To recognize all fellow member churches as true churches of Jesus Christ (according to the meaning of "true churches" common in our midst) would involve a distinct change of direction from the course plotted by the churches in previous Synods. Involved in this recognition would be, eg, that the FRCA embrace the PCEA as a true church of the Lord (decisions of previous Synods notwithstanding) OR seek its expulsion from the ICRC.

ii. To follow option A above would imply too that the FRCA participate enthusiastically in the ICRC. Involved also would be a principle recognition of the five member churches with which we have no contact at the moment (ie, the Free Church of South Africa, the Free Church of Central India, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Church of the United States and the Free Reformed Churches of North America). This would be true in years to come of all new members too as they join. Further, since the Constitution encourages "the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches" (Art III.2), the FRCA should feel obliged (as opportunity presents itself) to pursue this fullest ecclesiastical fellowship with these churches. Again, in light of Purpose 3 of the ICRC Constitution ("to encourage cooperation among the member churches in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates"), our decision about participating in mission work with non-sister churches will need to be undone (cf Acts 1985, Art 88, Ground 9).

iii. On the local level, those in our area associated with member churches of the ICRC²⁸ can in principle not be denied use of the school of our members. Nor have

officebearers the right to discourage courtships with (local) persons associated with a member church. Similarly, the Constitution of the political party initiated among members of the FRCA would need to be changed to allow for outside members. In a word, our identity as Free Reformed Churches would undergo a change.

iv. We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully from the Word of God what is the true Church (Art 29). If we follow option A, the task of "discerning diligently and very carefully" is given to the ICRC. This is an abrogation of the responsibility officebearers have to their members.

v. The above points each in turn constitute a change of direction for the FRCA. Such a change of direction is in itself certainly possible. To do so, however, Synod shall need to make clear to the churches from the Word of God that the new direction is required. It will need to be demonstrated too why previous Synods were incorrect in the course they plotted.

RE option B.

i. Both in their correspondence on the matter and in their conversation with our delegates in Zwolle, deputies from sister churches made clear that they hoped the FRCA would not withdraw from the ICRC. None of the sister churches indicated that a decision on our part to sever bonds with the ICRC would place some strain on our relation with these sister churches. Nevertheless, it may be expected that such a move will not improve relations.

ii. There is reason to believe that in the event that the FRCA would sever ties with the ICRC, the PCEA would lose enthusiasm to continue contact with the FRCA. Deputies opine, though, that if uprightness before the Lord and man demands that we sever ties with the ICRC, we shall need to let consequences be consequences. A full explanation as to why we cease our membership (ie, because we do not accept all other member churches as "true", while membership is commonly understood to have this meaning) will certainly assist in keeping contact with the PCEA alive.

iii. Ceasing membership in the ICRC does not necessarily mean that the FRCA can no longer participate in the ICRC. The option exists for the FRCA to send observers who in turn can participate in discussion of papers as well as use the opportunity to meet with delegations from other churches. It should be said, though, that ceasing membership on grounds that we cannot recognize all ICRC members as true churches will not be kindly received. This will make future participation as observers awkward. Further, unless one's delegate is exceptionally gifted, an observer church has but little influence on the direction of the ICRC.

iv. The dynamic aspect of Christ's church gathering work is not forgotten or ignored with the option of ceasing membership in the ICRC. This aspect is rather applied at a different level than at the ICRC. That is: the FRCA should apply this dynamic aspect in her relation with various churches individually, on the synod to synod level, and not at the ICRC.

No Isolation!

Ceasing membership in the ICRC could potentially mean that the FRCA becomes ecclesiastically isolated. This isolation, however, will not occur unless the FRCA becomes introvert. Introversion, however, is definitely not what the Lord requires of us. The immensely rich heritage we have received from the Lord is for us to pass on to others (as it is for us also to learn from what others have received). In this regard, the ICRC has a distinct redeeming factor; as a meeting of reformed minds, it is a workable vehicle for encouraging each other in the ways of the Lord. As the Report of delegates to the Conference indicates, the sharing of different views on various questions was found to be most worthwhile. The discussions resulting from the two papers on preaching (cf B.I.A.III.d,e) serve as clear evidence. In this light two aspects come to mind.

i. In the first place, since it remains the Lord's will that all His people believe all He has revealed and serve Him only as He has commanded, a meeting of reformed

minds (as the ICRC) must continue to discuss areas where there are differences in understanding between the two principle streams of reformed churches across the globe today, viz, the Presbyterian world historically rooted in the Free Church of Scotland and the continental Reformed world historically rooted in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated). One may think here specifically of aspects of the doctrines of church and covenant.

ii. In the second place, it is important to note that in the last few decades the centre of Christian populations has shifted from the western world (particularly Europe and North America) to Africa and Asia. These third-world churches, though, have but little history of their own, and so haven't (yet) the depth of insight and understanding which the Lord has afforded to, say, ourselves in the FRCA. A meeting of reformed minds provides a wonderful opportunity for persons of first world origin to pass on to brothers and sisters of the third world the riches which the Lord has been pleased to entrust to them.

In our day of increased feelings against the reformed faith, this "conference" aspect (=meeting of minds) should continue. In this context, reference may be made to the International Theological Congress, to be held, D.V., in the Netherlands in June 1994. As to the options open to us in the FRCA (taking into account our limited size and hence manpower), attendance at conferences (=meeting of reformed minds) is scarcely possible (if indeed ecclesiastical). More in keeping with our ability (and with Art 58 of Acts 1990) is that we continue to cast about amongst the lands and peoples of South-East Asia for opportunities to share the wealth God has entrusted to us. As examples of what is possible, one may think of what deputies for contact with the Indonesian sister churches have in mind re inviting Rev Doko to Australia. One may think also of the decision of the churches in 1992 to give support to Johnson Dethan to follow studies in Hamilton. The options are as many as our imagination is large. Such efforts should be multiplied at the local level, thus also involving the church membership at large in passing on the riches we have received. In fact, channeling our resources into such avenues will surely be more productive for God's kingdom than participating in the ICRC.

C Bouwman

FOOTNOTES

1. cf, for example, the "Word and Spirit" decision of the 1991 RCA Synod (see *Una Sancta*, 23 November 1991).
2. These are the sister churches of the Dutch Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken.
3. Dr D Deddens on "The Unity of Faith as Gift and Mandate, and its Significance for Having Various Forms of Church Government" and Rev P vanGurp on "The Unity of Faith as Gift and Mandate, and its Significance for the Reflection on Contacts and Rules with Other Churches".
4. vanGurp, "The Unity of Faith as Gift and Mandate...", pg 5f.
5. *Acts*, 1983, pg 95.
6. *Ibid*.
7. *Ibid*, 96.
8. Art 122 of the Acts of 1983 reads as follows: "Press Report: The Press Release is read and adopted."
9. *Una Sancta*, Vol 30, No. 17 (11-6-1983), pg 5.
10. Rev LJ Joosse in *Una Sancta*, Vol 31, No 6 (10-12-83), pg 3.
11. Vol 2, No 2, pg 22.
12. The Synod of Eastern Australia, 1986 Committee Reports, pg 34.
13. Letter dd 11.11.87.
14. "After the Conference", Monthly Record, October 1985, pg 221.
15. Proceedings, Session 3, Item 2.2, pg 12ff.
16. *Ibid*.
17. *Ibid*.
18. *Acts* 1992, pg 119.
19. I cannot agree with all he writes. Particularly troublesome is the fact that throughout his paper Rev Kleyn works with the assumption that the differences between member churches of the ICRC is tradition, not doctrine. The current discussions in the FRCA would have been much better served if the paper had at least given the benefit of the doubt to the argument that the differences in

practice have doctrinal roots. As it now stands, the paper in our current circumstances is misleading.

20. In the course of our work as deputies I prepared a paper on the subject which could, with alterations, be printed here.

21. Proceedings, 1993, pg 82.

22. cf Proceedings, 1993, pg 74ff.

23. This quote from the "Summary" of the meeting held in Byford 1988 between deputies from both the FRCA and the PCEA is printed in the Acts of our 1990 Synod, pg 189f, with this superscription: "This document has been approved as accurate by all delegates present."

24. cf Reports of deputies to Synod 1992 (Acts, pg 130) and 1994.

25. This is true also of those churches influenced by Kuyperian ecclesiology.

26. cf Letter received from PCEA dd 1 December 1993:

"1. We are prepared to recognize as true churches those congregations or federations of congregations which in their stated confessions 'profess the true religion' (WCF 25.2)....

2. We will extend formal recognition to those churches where it is wise and practical to do so, but we do not readily brand any Christian church as 'false,' ie. as having 'so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan'..."

27. I say "new" despite appeals made to decisions of previous Synods that seemingly support the "two levels" concept. If the churches in the past decade had thought in terms of two levels of recognition, the Acts would surely have said so clearly. As it is, the FRCA has, since its decision to join the ICRC, been undecided as to whether to stay or to leave. To distill out of this indecision evidence stating that the churches basically favoured the two level concept is to read too much into the Acts.

28. One may think, eg, of a feature not uncommon in Presbyterian circles to send ministers to any part of the world to establish a church. Such men may also retire where they will and retain their ministerial status in their church. I think, eg, of Rev McClure of the FCS, living in Chesley, Canada, a town next to Chatsworth.

D. CONCLUSION

Herewith your deputies consider that we have fulfilled the mandate received. We remind you of what we reported earlier, viz, that the work concerned has been very demanding on each of us. We also wish to give public recognition to the patience and understanding our respective congregations displayed while we devoted ourselves to this heavy (be it necessary) task. Now we look forward eagerly to focusing our energies to the congregations in our respective charges.

May the Lord of the catholic church bless your meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Deputies re ICRC,

C Bouwman (convener)
C Kleyn
A Veldman

APPENDIX 1

UNITY OF FAITH AND CHURCH UNITY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

G.VAN RONGEN

INTRODUCTION

1. The questions surrounding unity of faith and Church unity play a **significant** role in the life of our own Churches as well as in that of some of our sister Churches overseas.

It may be useful to put them into historical perspective. This may teach us the

fundamentals for the answers to be given to these questions, e.g. how to read and apply what we confess in the Articles 27 to 29 of our Belgic Confession of Faith.

2. This paper is **limited** to a few main points only. Many more details could be produced, but space does not allow this.

The same applies to the illustrations of the 'principles' mentioned below: they could easily be multiplied.

3. The absence of a theological reference library necessitated the use of various **translations and summaries** of the original documents which we have studied. These originals were not available to us.

4. Regarding the **structure** of this paper, we first of all pass on a number of 'principles', which presented themselves during our study of the writings of the Church Fathers, Apologists and other ancient authors.

Turning to the Reformed Confessions of the 16th century, we should not be surprised to find them being clearly based on these ancient documents, for several of its authors or co-authors were thoroughly familiar with these documents, as e.g. John Calvin and Guido de Bres.

We will give some illustrations of the way that the principles were applied in the various situations in which Church life found itself in the course of Church history. Finally we will formulate a few observations and conclusions regarding the issues with which our Churches are confronted.

PRINCIPLES

1. Both groups of documents, dating from the first few centuries and the century of the Reformation, place a strong emphasis on the **catholic character** of the Church. The first one to do this was Irenaeus of Lyons (approx. 135-202). In his work *Adversus Haereses* he wrote: "The Church, though scattered throughout the whole world to the ends of the earth, has received the Faith from the apostles and their disciples".

To his version of what would be known later on as the Apostles' Creed he added: "The Church, having received this preaching and this faith, as before said, though scattered throughout the whole world, zealously preserves it as one household".

The term "catholic" has prominent use in a large number of documents as follows: the letter to the Church at Smyrna, written by Ignatius of Antioch, the Martyrium Polycarpi, the Muratorian Canon, Hippolytus' *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*, Cyprian's *De Catholicae Ecclesiae Unitate*, the Catecheses of Cyril of Jerusalem, Augustine's writings, even in letters written by Emperor Constantine, and - not to be neglected - already as found in an old Italian version of the Apostles' Creed of 350, as also in the Received Text of this Creed and that of the Nicene Creed.

The ancient Church made its beginning in this catholic character. It called itself 'the Catholic Church', and was acknowledged under that name in documents written by secular officials.

As for the Reformed Confessions of the 16th century, the same applies.

The Belgic Confession opens its exposition on the Church with a reference to its catholic character: "We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church" (Article 27). At the end of the article this is repeated and further explained when we read there: "Moreover, this holy Church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world".

When the next articles refer back to "this Church", they have the same catholic or universal Church in mind. It is no wonder therefore that this Confession speaks of "the true Church" in the singular, as it does also when it deals with "the false church". When the Heidelberg Catechism confesses that Christ gathers the "holy catholic Church" "out of the whole human race", this also points to its universal, world-wide character.

Other Confessions do the same: Martin Luther's *Shorter Catechism* (1529), the *Augsburg Confession* (1530; even in spite of Luther's dislike of the word "catholic"), the *Formula Concordiae* (1576), Ulrich Zwingli's *Sixty-seven Articles or Conclusions* (1523), the *First Helvetic Confession* (1533), the *Second Helvetic Confession* (1562), the *French Confession of Faith* (1559), and the *Scots Confession of Faith* (1560).

From the Augsburg Confession we quote the following opening lines of Article 22 in its first section: "This is about the sum of doctrine among us, in which can be seen that there is nothing which is discrepant with the Scriptures, or with the Church Catholic, or even with the Roman Church, so far as that Church is known from writers (the writings of the Fathers)." In other words, the Lutheran princes who had this Confession compiled claimed that their Churches simply had abolished the "abuses" that had crept in, and maintained the Scriptural doctrine of the catholic Church, even of the original Church of Rome.

The Second Helvetic Confession emphasises that "there is but one Church, which we therefore call catholic because it is universal, spread abroad through all the parts and quarters of the world, and reaches unto all times, and is not limited within the compass either of time or place". The Church on earth "has evermore had many particular Churches, which must all, notwithstanding, be referred to the unity of the catholic Church", for the Church among the patriarchs, under Moses, the Church of Christ, consisting of Jews and Gentiles "have had and still have, one fellowship, one salvation, in one and the same Messiah".

NOTE: As we have already mentioned, the Reformed Confessions of the 16th century often quote from or refer to the above mentioned ancient documents.

This occurs for example in the Augsburg Confession (1530). When it sums up the "abuses" that have crept into the life of the Church, it refers to the writings of Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine.

When the Second Helvetic Confession (1562) deals with the unity of the Church, it states: "we read in the ancient writers that there were manifold diversities of ceremonies, but that those were always free; neither did any man think that the unity of the Church was thereby broken or dissolved".

Several terms and even sentences in the Belgic Confession rest on these documents. The phrase in Article 27, "dispersed throughout the entire world", is a strong reminder of Irenaeus' "scattered throughout the whole world". In both documents the unity of this worldwide Church is found in the common faith.

At a later stage we will learn that the distinction between the true Church and the false church, made in Article 29, is based on some ancient writings in which we can already find the same terms.

This consensus between these two groups of documents may explain why the same 'principles' can be traced in either of them, one of them being that the Church is of a catholic character.

2. There is also a common emphasis on the unity of faith - and consequently on Church unity - , which is explained as being **unity in Christ**.

Clement of Rome wrote in his letter to the Church at Corinth (approx.96 A.D.): "In Christ Jesus, then, let this corporate body of ours be likewise maintained intact..."

Ignatius (69-107) wrote: "where Christ Jesus appears, there is the catholic Church". Tertullian (appr.160-220) reminded his readers of the fact that the apostles went out into the world and preached to the nations "the faith of Jesus Christ", and founded Churches.

Hilarius of Poitiers (4th century) stated: The Church is built on the rock of Peter's confession: "Thou art the Son of God".

Augustine (354-430) gave an improved interpretation of Matthew 18 when he wrote that the apostle Peter, who confessed his faith in the Christ and was entrusted with the keys of the

Kingdom of heaven as a representative of all the other apostles, was himself also built on the Rock, which is Christ.

In the Reformed Confessions we find the same principle. Article 27 B.C. emphasises in its first pericope that the Church is the gathering of believers in Christ, repeating this when, in Article 29, it sums up "the marks of Christians".

When the Heidelberg Catechism explains the Article of the Apostles' Creed on the Church, doing so under the heading "God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification", it has Christ as the Subject of the sentence: He gathers, defends and preserves the Church.

It further emphasises that the Church is the communion of saints, interpreting this first of all as a communion of all and every one with Christ.

In the 'Preface' of the Augsburg Confession (1530) it says: "we are subjects and soldiers of the one Christ, so also, in unity and concord, we may live in the one Christian Church".

Martin Luther wrote in his Shorter Catechism (1529): "The Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith".

Zwingli in his Articles or Conclusions (1523) stated: "all who live in the Head are members and children of God, and this is the Church or communion of saints, Christ's household, *ecclesia catholica*".

In Article 26 of the French Confession (1559) the unity of the Church of sought in submission "to the public teaching, and the yoke of Christ, wherever God shall have established a true order of the Church".

Since the Belgic Confession has borrowed several terms from the French Confession, the phrase "the yoke of Christ" in Articles 28 and 29 must be understood as: the public teaching, so the preaching, and also an orderly Church life.

3. In the third place, by studying these documents we discover the principle that unity of faith and Church unity means **common adherence to the teachings of Christ, of the apostles, and of the holy Scriptures.**

In the context of the succession of bishops, in particular those of the Church of Rome, who are said to be appointed by the apostles and their successors, Irenaeus wrote: "those that wish to discern the truth may observe the apostolic tradition made manifest in every Church throughout the world", by this "apostolic tradition" understanding the contents of their preaching.

We have already learned how Tertullian demonstrated that Churches came into being as a fruit of the apostolic gospel preaching, characterising their work as the preaching of "the faith of Christ Jesus".

A Letter to Diognetus, written in the second half of the 2nd century by an unknown author who calls himself "a pupil of the apostles", emphasises as a mark of the Christian Church that it has preserved the teachings of the apostles. In a small poem it has this line: "The tradition of the apostles is secured".

As for the 16th century, the Belgic Confession of Faith (1561) is said to follow the structure of the Apostles' Creed. However, this is preceded by, for example, Articles 4 and 5 in which adherence to the Scriptures is confessed.

As regards the doctrine of the holy Trinity Article 9 states that it has "always been maintained and preserved in the true Church since the time of the apostles to this very day".

In Article 35 it is stated that, with rejection of the "deseccations or additions and damnable inventions" regarding the Lord's Supper, "we declare that we should be content with the ordinance taught by Christ and His apostles and should speak about it as they have spoken".

It is quite striking that the Canons of Dort (1618/19) provide so many proof texts, references being made to sayings of Christ (I Rejection of Errors 1,4,7,9; II 1, etcetera), to the apostles (I Rejection of Errors 3,4,7, etcetera; II/IV 15,17, Rejection of Errors 1,2,3,9; V 2,3,4,5,6,8,9), and to the Scriptures (I Rejection of Errors 1,2,3,5,6, etcetera).

Other Confessions also stress the essential adherence to the teachings of Christ, the apostles, or the Scriptures.

In the French Confession of Faith the Church of Rome is charged with having broken the unity of faith with the ancient Christian Church by no longer maintaining the apostolic tradition.

The Scots Confession (1560) emphasises that unity of the Church is in the Holy Spirit, Who as their only perfect Interpreter "uniformly speaks within the body of the Scriptures" (Article 18).

4. The unity of faith is expressed in the commonly received '**ecumenical creeds**'. Ignatius confessed this faith over against the adherents of Docetism and other

heresies in words which suggest that the process of confessing common faith in fixed forms was well advanced in his days.

In a letter to the Trallians he wrote: "Christ was of David's line. He was the Son of Mary; He was verily and indeed born, and ate and drank; He was verily persecuted in the days of Pontius Pilate, and verily and indeed crucified, and gave up the ghost in the sight of all heaven and earth and the powers of the nether world. He was also verily raised up again from the dead, for His Father raised Him; and in Jesus Christ will His Father similarly raise us who believe in Him, since apart from Him there is no true life for us".

In another letter written by him to Magnus (Letter 69) about a heretic like Novatian who claimed he held - as Cyprian (-258) called it - "the same law as the Catholic Church", so the same faith: "whoso thinks this is a good objection, let him know first that we and the schismatics have neither one law of the Creed nor the same questioning"; they had nothing in common.

In his Letter to Januarius and other Numidian bishops (Letter 70) he referred to the following credal formula: "I believe in God the Father, in His Son Christ, in the Holy Spirit. I believe the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, through the holy Church".

The Catecheses of bishop Cyril of Jerusalem, written in 348 on what he asserted to be "the holy and apostolic faith", included an extensive explanation of the baptismal Creed used in Jerusalem. It has these lines: "We believe (...) one baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins; and one holy catholic Church" - as in the Nicene Creed, but in the reverse order.

In their baptismal confession the *Constitutiones Apostolicae* (about 380) have: "I am baptised also into the Holy Spirit, Who (...) was sent to the apostles, (...) and after the apostles to all believers within the holy catholic and apostolic Church".

In the year 374 Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis on Cyprus, formulated two Creeds, both speaking of "one catholic and apostolic Church".

To the longer Creed it is added: "But those who say, 'There was a time when the Son or the Holy Spirit was not', or, 'He was made of nothing', or 'of a different substance or essence', saying 'the Son of God or the Holy Spirit is changeable or variable,' these the catholic and apostolic Church, your and our mother, anathematizes".

At the end of Article 9 the Belgic Confession states: "The doctrine of the holy Trinity has always been maintained and preserved in the true Church since the time of the apostles to this very day, over against Jews, Muslims, and against false Christians and heretics such as Marcion, Mani, Praxeas, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Arius, and such like, who have been justly condemned by the orthodox fathers. In this doctrine, therefore, we willingly receive the three Creeds, of the Apostles, of Nicea, and of Athanasius; likewise that which in accordance with them is agreed upon by the early fathers".

In some of the other Confessions even stronger references to these Creeds can be observed. They stress that the dividing line between 'true' and 'false' lies in the faithful adherence to these Creeds or in deviation from them.

The Formula Concordiae says in its opening statement: "And inasmuch as immediately after the times of the apostles, nay, even while they were yet alive, false teachers and heretics arose, against whom in the primitive Church symbols were composed, that is to say, brief and explicit confessions, which contained the unanimous consent of the catholic Christian faith, and the confession of the orthodox and true Church (such as are the Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds): we publicly profess that we embrace them, and reject all heresies and all dogmas which have ever been brought into the Church of God contrary to their decision".

The Second Helvetic Confession (1562) is preceded by some ancient documents. One of them is the Imperial Edict of 380 from the Justinian Code, in which the dividing line between the true doctrine and heresy is drawn - all that departs from the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed is rejected as heretical - ; and also the so-called Trinitarian Creed, ascribed to Pope Damasus, considered to be a standard of orthodoxy.

The purpose of inserting these ancient documents may be clear: the Reformed

Churches of Switzerland intended to make it perfectly clear that the Reformed faith is the same as the catholic doctrines of the ancient Church.

5. On the ground of what we have found so far, it is not strange that both groups of documents clearly state that the **criticon for determining 'true' or 'false'** lies in the adherence to or deviation from the teachings of Christ and His apostles, as preserved for us in the Scriptures, and summarized in the ecumenical Creeds.

The difference between the true Church and the false church is determined by the contrast between the Scriptural doctrine and heresy.

This is how the ancient documents already used the names "true Church" and "false church" and similar terms.

The distinction between "true" and "false" is not an invention of the reformers. They adopted it from the ancient Christian Church.

Ignatius expresses himself in very strong terms when he calls Docetists and other false teachers: people "who deny God" and "who have no faith".

According to Irenaeus, heretics like Valentinus and Marcion were "outside the Church" because they did not adhere to the apostolic teachings.

Tertullian, characterising Valentinus as a Platonist, and Marcion as a follower of Stoicism and Epicurians and other gentile philosophers, asked: "What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem? What between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians?"

Hippolytus (-253), writing about people who had "been deceived by two females, Priscilla and Maximilla by name, whom they hold to be prophetesses asserting that into them the Paraclete Spirit entered", makes a distinction between "these people" and "the Church".

Cyprian wrote: "The spouse of Christ cannot be made an adulteress; she is undefiled and chaste". Whoso stands aloof from the Church, and is joined to an adulteress, is cut off from "the promises given to the Church". "He cannot have God for his father who has not the Church for his mother".

Though without the familiar terms of Article 29 B.C., Cyprian made a clear distinction between what he saw as the true Church and as the false church.

Chrysostom of Antioch (347-407) used the term "the true Church". He stated: The Scriptures "let us know where the true Church can be found. If we look at other things we will not understand what that means: the true Church. Then we will stumble and perish. The deceivers too have their churches. They too read the divine Scriptures, seem to have the same sacraments, honour the apostles and martyrs, just as the antichrist, although partly, is doing the works of Christ and fulfils all the duties of the Christians, satan transforming himself into an angel of light".

These lines, taken from one of Chrysostom's sermons are important because of the use of the term "the true Church" and its reference to the main mark of the true Church, the adherence to the Scriptures.

Augustine wrote about the Church: "She did commence with Abel, as Babylon began with Cain". 'False' and 'true' have been there from shortly after the Fall.

As for the false church, Augustine must have the Donatists in mind, for he denies them to have the Scriptures in common with the faithful believers. We must not seek the Church in our own words but in the words spoken by our Head, Jesus Christ, Who is the truth, and Who knows His body.

As for the Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 9 already mentions the name "the true Church", and does so - as we have already seen - in a context which makes it clear that the crucial point is: adherence to or deviation from the faith as it was taught by Christ and His apostles, preserved for us in the Scriptures, and expressed and confessed in the ecumenical Creeds.

This may shed some light on the marks of the true Church, summed up in Article 29: "The true Church is to be recognized by the following marks: It practises the pure preaching of the gospel. It maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them. It exercises Church discipline for correcting and punishing sins".

What we have learned so far determines in particular the word "pure" in "the pure

preaching" and "the pure Word of God", and shows us how we must understand it when it is stated: "Hereby the true Church can certainly be known", and: "These two churches are easily recognized and distinguished from each other".

The great National Synod of Dordrecht 1618/19 confirmed this when it adopted the Canons of Dort, which mention the marks of the true Church in chapters II/IV 17 and V 14 in the context of the rejection of false doctrine. In this document this rejection of false doctrine is strongly based on the teachings of Christ, the apostles, and the Scriptures, as we saw earlier.

That the gap between the true Church and the false church consists of adherence to or deviation from the apostolic tradition, as deposited in the Scriptures and summarized in the ecumenical Creeds, is also expressed in other Confessions from the era of the Reformation.

The Augsburg Confession clearly states that the Lutheran Churches of those days maintained the doctrine of the ancient catholic Church, and rejected the "abuses" which had been introduced since then.

The Formula Concordiae (1576) says in its opening statement that regarding "the confession of the orthodox and true Church (such as are the Apostles, the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds): we publicly profess that we embrace them, and reject all heresies and all dogmas which have ever been brought into the Church of God contrary to their decision".

It calls the leaders and adherents of the Church of Rome "our adversaries" and "our enemies", even "enemies of the gospel".

The difference between the true Church and the false church is determined by the gap between the gospel as confessed in the ecumenical Creeds and heresy.

The Second Helvetic Confession (1562) deals rather extensively with 'true' and 'false'.

It says about the true Church: "we teach that to be the true Church indeed in which the marks and tokens of the true Church are to be found; firstly and chiefly, the lawful and sincere preaching of the Word of God".

Later on in this Confession the other marks are mentioned. On the other hand it is stated: "we condemn all such churches, as strangers from the true Church of Christ, which are not such as we have heard they ought to be, howsoever, in the meantime, they brag of the succession of bishops, of unity, and of antiquity".

Just as the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) refers to the Apostles' Creed as a summary of "all that God has revealed to us in His Word" or "all that is promised us in the gospel", calling it "the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith", so, together with many other documents, does the Second Helvetic Confession.

The French Confession (1559) states in Article 27 that the title of the true Church "has been much abused". "There can be no Church where the Word of God is not received, nor profession made of subjection to it, nor use of the sacraments". All this is the case in "the papal assemblies". There the people "separate and cut themselves off from the body of Christ".

As for the Scots Confession (1560), Article 18 says that from the beginning "Satan has laboured to cover his pestilent synagogues with the title of the Church of God". 'False' and 'true' have been there all the time: Cain - Abel, Ishmael - Jacob, Esau - Jacob, the Jewish priests - Christ Jesus and the apostles. However, the true Church can be distinguished from the filthy synagogues by some clear notes.

These notes, or signs, or assured tokens, are not: antiquity, multitude, or things like that, for Cain was older and stronger than Abel, and the followers of the priests, scribes and pharisees were more than the followers of Christ and His apostles.

"Whosoever then these notes are seen (...) there without any doubt is the true Church of Christ, Who, according to His promise is in their midst".

All these quotations may prove that the Church of the Reformation returned to the doctrine and practice of the ancient Christian Church, which characterised 'true' and 'false' respectively as those who were faithful to the apostolic teachings and those who deviated in any respect from them, and maintained that unity of faith and Church unity is there wherever this faithfulness is there.

6. Several documents express themselves on the fact that the true Church shows some **weaknesses and impurities**.

Of some special importance in this respect is the First Letter to the Church at Corinth, written by Clement on behalf of the congregation at Rome (96 A.D.).

The reason why this Church sent this letter to its sister Church was that in the congregation at Corinth the internal peace had been damaged because some younger members had deposed the local office-bearers. The Corinthians were urged to restore unity.

It is really striking that there are some clear parallel lines between this letter and the canonical letter known as 'First Corinthians'. After a brief introduction in which the reason for sending this letter is mentioned, '1 Clement' begins in the same way in which the apostle Paul began some of his epistles, the 'first' one to the Corinthians included: with a "laudatio", a word of praise and thanksgiving for the faith shown by the congregation.

Even their serious 'weakness' was no reason for Clement to reject this congregation - just as was the case with this Church in the days of the apostle Paul.

As for Cyprian, he realised that not every office-bearer is faithful to his commission. After having referred in Epistle 67 to Numbers 16:26, he wrote: "on which account a people obedient to the Lord's precepts, and fearing God, ought to separate themselves from a sinful prelate, and not to associate themselves with the sacrifices of a sacrilegious priest".

Here the principle of separation is defended.

On the other hand, concerning observation of festive days and other issues which were different in the respective congregations Cyprian was very lenient. He was of the opinion: "And yet on this account there is no departure at all from the peace and unity of the catholic Church". This means once again: 'pluriformity within the true Church'!

Augustine also was well aware of the fact that the catholic Church is not an entirely pure Church.

He calls the Church God's threshing-floor. Grain and chaff will be mixed in her until the end of the world; the wicked also use the sacraments. However, this does not mean that we should withdraw from the Church; it may stimulate us to be grain.

The same is expressed in the Belgic Confession of Faith when in Article 29 it says that there are "hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church along with the good", and about the Christians: "Although great weakness remains in them, they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life. They appeal constantly to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of Jesus Christ, in Whom they have forgiveness of their sins through faith in Him".

The Second Helvetic Confession states that there have always been strifes and dissensions in this Church. This was already the case in the days of the apostle Paul, for example in the Corinthian congregation. "Yet may we not deny that God was in that Church, planted by the apostle; and that the Apostolic Church was a true Church, howsoever there were strifes and dissensions in it"; "the Church ceased not to be the Church for all these contentions".

7. Regarding **tolerance** we hear Cyprian mention a kind of 'pluriformity within the true Church', when he says: "The Church is a unity; yet by her fruitful increase she is extended far and wide to form a plurality; even as the sun has many rays, but one light; and a tree many boughs but one trunk, whose foundation is the deep-seated root; and as when many streams flow down from one source, though a multitude seems to be poured out from the abundance of the copious supply, yet in the source itself unity is preserved".

It seems as if Abraham Kuyper borrowed these sentences in defence of his theory of pluriformity, in this case doing injustice to Cyprian, who taught this pluriformity as being restricted to within the true Church.

As we have already seen Cyprian was very lenient as far as the observation of festive days and other issues were concerned, as these were different in the respective congregations.

The Belgic Confession does not express itself on the issue of tolerance.

The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands provided for this in their Church Order (Synod of Emden 1571 Art.19; Synod of Dordrecht 1578 Art.20; Synod of Middelburg 1581 Art.46; Synod of The Hague 1586 Art.78; Synod of Dordrecht 1618/19 Art.47). Our own Churches followed their example (Article 46 C.O.).

It may be interesting to read how the Formula Concordiae deals with the so-called adiaphora.

In Article 10 it virtually condemns the stand taken by Philip Melancthon regarding the so-called Leipzig Interim.

He was of the opinion that in days of persecution a firm stand should be taken in doctrinal issues, but that as far as ceremonies of human origin are concerned conformity to them could be required, as for example to the Roman ritual, including Confirmation, episcopal ordination, extreme unction, even the greater part of the Canon - the long prayer in the Mass -, fasts, processions, and the use of images in Church buildings.

The Formula Concordia rejected this view. It said: "in such a state of things it is no longer a question of adiaphora, but of the restoration and maintenance of the truth of the gospel and of Christian liberty, and of how care may be taken lest idolatry be manifestly strengthened and the weak in the faith be caused to stumble. In matters of this sort it is certainly not our part to concede any thing to our adversaries, but our duty requires that we should show forth a Godly and frank confession, and patiently bear those things which the Lord may have laid upon us to bear, and may have suffered our enemies to do against us".

It may be known that Melancthon took a firm stand in doctrinal matters but under difficult circumstances was considered to be too lenient in other matters.

On the other hand, Article 5 rules: "We believe, teach, and confess that one Church ought not to condemn another because it observes more or less of external ceremonies, which the Lord has not instituted, provided only there be consent between them in doctrine and all the articles thereof, and in the true use of the sacraments. For so runneth the old and true saying: 'Dissimilarity of fasting does not destroy similarity of faith'".

HISTORY

1. It may be superfluous to elaborate on the development which led to the **adoption of the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed**.

From what we have learned so far it may be clear that the Apostles' Creed grew from a number of early forms in which the Church expressed her faith and unity.

This process was strongly influenced by the necessity to have a fixed formula with which baptismal candidates, converts from among the Jews and the gentiles, would be able to confess their faith.

Such a fixed and commonly accepted formula was at the same time an instrument to express the unity of faith and Church unity - the catholicity of the Church! -, which was based on the teachings of Christ, the apostles, and the Scriptures.

As far as the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed are concerned the emphasis was on the defence of the catholic faith against all sorts of heresies in the 'Christological' and 'Trinitarian controversies' and other false teachings. However, in the meantime the Church did not only express her common faith with the help of these Creeds, but also showed where the dividing line lies between faithful teachers and false teachers, let us say: between the true Church and the false church.

2. In the days of the Reformation and after, the Church was once again of necessity to take a **strong stand against false doctrine** - and false practices based on it. The main front lines were that of the struggle against the Church of Rome, and that of the controversy with the Anabaptists.

In the Confessions compiled in this era a strong appeal was made to the teachings of Christ, the apostles, and the Scriptures, and also - for obvious reasons - to the writings of the Church Fathers, Apologists, and suchlike.

3. The relationships between the Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Calvinist Churches requires our special attention.

3.1 In the **first decades** of the Reformation era these relationships were rather cordial.

In the year 1533, at Basel, the First Helvetic Confession was compiled by a number of Swiss theologians, among whom Martin Bucer of Strasbourg, and Leo Judae and Henry Bullinger of Zurich. It was the fruit of an effort undertaken to bring together the Lutheran and Swiss Churches.

When a copy reached him, Martin Luther stated that he was satisfied with its Christian character. He promised to do all he could to promote union and harmony with the Swiss.

As for the Second Helvetic Confession, in the year 1562 written by Henry Bullinger, Zwingli's successor, it was published four years later, at the request of Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate, who wanted to have at hand a clear exposition of the Reformed faith when he had to attend the Diet of Augsburg and defend himself again the accusation of apostasy.

Also the Swiss Churches felt that such a Confession could bind them closer together. Theodore Beza, John Calvin's successor, came from Geneva to Zurich to take part in the work of revising the original manuscript. He also made a French translation.

The Churches at Geneva, Berne, Zurich, and others - so the 'Calvinist' as well as the 'Zwinglian' Churches - expressed their agreement, as did the Church at Basel soon afterwards.

Using it at the Augsburg Diet Elector Frederick's defence of his faith with the help of this Confession so deeply impressed the Lutherans that they no longer accused him of being a heretic.

Recent studies have shown that on a personal level the relations between Martin Luther and John Calvin, though not always 'warm', can be called good.

Although Luther was afraid that Calvin would adopt Zwingli's ideas on the Lord's Supper, he stated that with some pleasure and satisfaction he had read Calvin's reply to Sadolet.

In its first edition the structure of Calvin's great work, Institutes of the Christian Religion, and also some details of it, show a remarkable resemblance with Luther's Shorter Catechism. In a letter dated 25 November 1544 Calvin wrote: "Even if he (Martin Luther) would call me a devil, I would honour him as a servant of the Lord." Another interesting detail is the advice given by Philip Melancthon to the compilers of the Church Order of the Palatinate regarding the formula of distribution in the original version of the Form for the Lord's Supper.

The use of Christ's words, "This is My body" and "This cup is the new covenant in My blood", would undoubtedly have reminded all who heard them of the controversy between Lutherans and Calvinists, and therefore damage the unity of believers which was expressed by their common participation in this sacred meal.

3.2 This situation **changed dramatically** when, as a result of efforts undertaken to solve a number of controversies among the Lutherans and to restore their doctrinal unity and peace, the Formula Concordiae was compiled. This happened in the year 1576.

The Lutherans differed widely among themselves on topics such as: original sin, justification, antinomianism, predestination, and the communicatio ideomatum or Christ's ubiquity - the latter issue being at the background of Lord's Day 18 Question and Answer 48 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

The Reformers, led by Zacharias Ursinus, strongly opposed the new dogma of ubiquity, because it was contrary the Scriptures and the ecumenical Creeds.

Their refutation of the Formula at this point was at the same time a form of Reformed defence against the charge of a Nestorian separation of the two natures of Christ.

At an earlier stage the Reformed had undersigned the Augsburg Confession (1530), which was compiled and read at the Diet of Augsburg, convened by Emperor Charles V, who wanted to solve the 'controversy' between 'Rome' and the Lutherans, and to unite them in a war against their common enemies, the Turks.

It was written by Philip Melancthon at the request of the assembled Lutheran princes, electors, and other authorities. It had Martin Luther's full approval. Its second version of 1540 was undersigned by John Calvin when he was ministering the Church at Strasbourg and as a delegate attended the Conference at Ratisborn 1541.

Also William Farel, Theodore Beza, Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate, and others undersigned it.

The Confession expressed itself on the Lord's Supper in a way that enabled them all to undersign it. Article 10 reads as follows (having the additions of 1540 printed within brackets): "Of the Supper of the Lord they teach that the (true) body and blood of Christ are truly present (under the form of bread and wine), and are (there) communicated to those that eat in the Lord's Supper (and received). And they disapprove of those that teach otherwise (wherefore also the opposite doctrine is rejected)".

However, the relationship between Reformed and Lutherans underwent a radical change as a result of the official and formal introduction and adoption of what the Reformed rejected as a false doctrine in the Formula Concordiae, the doctrine of ubiquity.

Whether therewith the Reformed characterised the Lutheran Churches as 'false' could not be confirmed from the available literature. The same must be said on the question whether or not the Lutheran view was considered to be subject to 'tolerance'.

3.3 It is a well known fact that Petrus Dathenus had to cut short his stay in **Frankfort** when he had to leave the Londoncongregation of Reformed refugees.

The Lutherans of that city were extremists, who, under the protection of the Lutheran authorities, prevented the Reformed from establishing their own independent Church life.

In the intolerance of the Franfortian Lutherans may be seen a prelude of what after the introduction of the dogma of Christ's ubiquity would become more or less general - although it must be added that some Lutherans were not happy at all with the Formula Concordiae!

3.4 In The Netherlands some difficulties arose around the Church at **Woerden**.

This congregation was led by an extremist Lutheran minister. A letter written by this minister and filled with slander was discussed at the provincial Synod of Dordrecht 1574. Arrangements were made to involve Prince William of Orange, who was a peace-loving person in religious matters also.

Besides, someone would be sent to Woerden to try to lead this Church to "reformation". The Synods of Middelburg 1581 and The Hague of 1586 had also to deal with the situation at Woerden. The latter observed that this congregation had a Confession which differed from that of the other Churches in the United Provinces.

All this happened at the same time as the Formula Concordiae came into being, and, to say the least, the relationship between Reformed and Lutherans worsened, the cause being serious doctrinal differences.

3.5 The same issue presented itself from a different angle.

The National Synod of Dordrecht 1578 decided to ask the Churches of the Palatinate to send them an authorized copy of what delegates from many countries had discussed and decided at a conference held at Neustadt. There the relationship between Reformed and Lutherans was discussed.

At the Synod of Middelburg 1581 this issue was again on the agenda.

The congregations at Utrecht, Wesel, and in England asked for a translation of the 'colloquium of Maulbronn'. Classis Amsterdam was commissioned to present a translation of a "book written by the theologians of Neustadt 'contra formulam concordiae ab ubiquitatis editam'".

The adoption of the dogma of ubiquity in the Lutheran Churches was responsible for the question of relationship between Reformed and Lutheran being taken into discussion.

This was put into an even wider context.

The French Churches invited the Dutch to send delegates to their Synod, to be held

in the same year. The latter sent an apology, accompanied by "our prayers that they would promote a common Confession of all nations". At the Synod of The Hague it appeared that the book of the Neustadt theologians had not been translated.

This seems to be the end of the matter, but it may be clear that the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands were anxious to learn more about what had been discussed and decided across the borders in Germany.

The agenda of the Synod of The Hague included also a letter from the Church at Amsterdam, recommending the sending of the Rev. Libertus Fraxino of The Hague to their city.

They preferred this minister because "he was able to discourage the enemies of the truth as Anabaptists, Libertines, and Martinists".

Here the Lutherans (called Martinists after Luther's Christian name) were put on a level with Anabaptists and Libertines.

The issue at stake was: the doctrine of the Church, faithfulness to the teachings of Christ, the apostles, and the Scriptures!

4. At the National Synod of Dordrecht 1618/19 there was good harmony and co-operation between the Reformed delegates from various countries and the English delegates.

The episcopal system of the Church of England appeared to be no obstacle, and was apparently not considered to be based on false doctrine.

That there were no fundamental differences in doctrine was proven when the English delegates wholeheartedly contributed to the compiling of the Canons of Dort, which they too undersigned.

5. The name which we use for our confessional standards, "The Three Forms of Unity", proves that the unity of our Churches is based on unity of faith as expressed in the acceptance of the same summaries and expositions of the teachings of Christ, His apostles, and the Scriptures.

It is really striking that in each of these Three Forms the Scriptural doctrine is preserved and protected against all sorts of heresies.

This shows us that the Reformed Churches of the 16th as well as the beginning of the 17th century - and since then until today - considered this to be the criterion for the distinction between 'true' and 'false'.

The Canons of Dort, e.g., were compiled in order to protect the Churches against the heresy of the Arminians which would make them show the marks of the false church, in particular in the preaching of God's Word.

The criterion was not sought in other matters, as e.g. the ceremonial of other Churches, in as much that this was not clearly based on false doctrine.

6. The Deed of Secession (1834) typified the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk as a false church because this church tolerated the propagation of false doctrines.

Here too the criterion was: heresy.

7. Soon after the Secession formal ties were established with some **Presbyterian** Churches in Scotland, in spite of differences in Church government and other issues. Unity of faith was found in the acceptance of and adherence to corresponding Confessions.

8. In the Deed of Liberation or Return (1944) reference was made to "the corruption within The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, both in the mutilation or denial of the order and discipline of the Church which is founded on the spiritual polity of the Word of God, and in the adulteration of the doctrine on which the administration of the holy sacraments according to the ordinance of Christ in His Word is based; as well as in the present well-established misuse of the ecclesiastical discipline, which matters, according to our **Belgic Confession (Article 29)**, all concern the marks of the true Church".

In all these various aspects reference is made to the Word of God, the doctrine of the Scriptures.

This document does not speak of The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands being 'false', because it was intended to be signed by concerned members and sent to their

local Consistory, urging this body to keep the local Church on the Scriptural foundation of the Three Forms of Unity and the adopted Church Order.

Yet it warned against the danger of the Churches showing the marks of the false church by deviating from the Scriptures in doctrinal matters as well as in Church discipline.

Here too the crucial point was: adherence to or deviation from the teachings of Christ, the apostles, and the Scriptures.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Unity of faith and Church unity is a matter of being **one in Christ**.

Our Catechism is in full harmony with the ancient documents and the Confessions from the Reformation era when it states that the communion of saints first of all is that believers, all and everyone, "have communion with Christ, and share in all His treasures and gifts".

2. The documents written by the Church Fathers, Apologists and others in the ancient Christian Church, as well as the Confessions adopted by various Churches in the century of the Reformation, all strongly emphasise **the catholic nature of the Church**.

3. This then should not be ignored when we are confronted with problems regarding unity of faith and Church unity.

With our 'Liberation background' we are used to taking the local Church as our **starting point**. This is correct in matters pertaining to Church order and Church government. However, it is not correct in the use and application of the distinction between the true Church and the false church when we are confronted with other churches. The question is - to say it with Chrysostom's words - whether or not the true Church can be found in them.

4. In harmony with the ancient documents and other Reformed Confessions the Belgic Confession of Faith correctly speaks of "the true Church", even of "the false church", both in **the singular**.

5. Consequently we should rectify our '**confessional parlance**', no longer speaking of a local Church or a federation of Churches as being "a true Church", or "a false church".

6. The **criterion** for distinguishing between 'true' and 'false' is either faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the apostolic tradition deposited in the Scriptures.

7. Church-historically we can formulate this criterion as: either faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the ecumenical creeds.

8. The **Confessions of the Reformation era** sometimes clearly refer to these Creeds, in particular to the Apostles' Creed.

They claim to further explain and interpret the contents of the Creeds in view of the situation of the days of the Reformation and after.

9. It is therefore to be regretted that in some of our **Liturgical Forms**, as printed in the latest edition of the Book of Praise, the reference to the Apostles' Creed, further substantiated by the sentence "as taught here in this Christian Church", has, without explanation, been omitted and replaced by "summarized in the confessions". Here the ties with the Church of previous centuries are no longer clearly expressed.

10. When in **our contacts with other Churches** it becomes clear that these Churches maintain a Scriptural Confession, we are obliged to receive them as belonging to the 'catholic Church'. The true Church is manifesting herself in them!

11. If, in spite of the fact that these Churches maintain a Scriptural Confession, there are **any matters of concern**, these should be discussed with these Churches after recognizing them as faithful Churches.

12. By acting in accordance with their confessional standards and in harmony with the Church of the ages, our churches will promote internal peace and unity.

Written at the request of the 'Study Committee', appointed by Synod 1992 (Acts Article 165, 6.4).

Launceston, August 23, 1993, Kelmscott, February 14, 1994

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

DEPUTIES FOR RELATIONS WITH OTHER CHURCHES - ICRC

May 23, 1994

To the Synod of the FRCA, 1994

Further to the report we had earlier submitted to you, we draw to your attention the following item of correspondence recently received from the Missions Committee of the ICRC. In light of what our delegates to the 1993 ICRC wrote about missions conferences (cf their report as included in our Report, B.A.V.c). We thought it proper to submit this communication to you in an attempt to give as complete a picture as possible.

May the Lord bless your meeting, for the good of the churches.

C Bouwman (convenor)

C Kleyn

A Veldman

ICRC Missions Committee
c/-Dr K Deddens VDM
Hoogstraat 4
4521 BK Biervliet
The Netherlands
ICRC Missions Committee

March 21, 1994

Dear Mr Bube,

On January 5 of this year I faxed you about a summary of the O.P.C. Missions activities, to be placed in the first issue of the news letter coming April. I like to send this first news letter regarding Missions in the ICRC to the churches when I am in Canada. Maybe you can still send this summary. If not, I am also able to do it, so I will still wait for a couple of weeks. Please, send your letter to the above address in Canada. But the main reason for this very letter to you is the matter of the regional Missions conference in the far East in 1995, according to our mandate, article 75 of the Proceedings of the ICRC-1993, Zwolle.

I contact the other members of the Missions Committee (see my letter of Jan 28, 1994) and also the Interim Committee, and the result is the proposal that the O.P.C. is requested to organise the regional Missions Conference in the course of 1995 in Taipeh (Taiwan), if possible in consult with the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Kosin). The "Far East" is very extensive, and the situation is not safe everywhere. My question is now: are you willing and able to discuss this matter with your staff? I send a copy of this letter to the churches which are involved and which are to be invited by the O.P.C. to this conference. Maybe the sending churches can invite their own missionaries. I mention with respect to this the churches in Indonesia (Sumba Irian Jaya), the Canadian Ref. Churches (Irian Jaya), the Evang. Presb. Church of Ireland (India), the Free Church of Scotland (India), the Free Ref. Churches of Australia (Papua New Guinea), the Presb. Church of East Australia (India, also Fiji), the Presb. Church of Korea (Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines), the Ref. Churches in the Netherlands (Indonesia, Irian Jaya), the Free Church of Central

India, and finally as far as your own O.P.C. is concerned, as far as I know you are working in Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and the Philippines.

As far as the region Africa is concerned: the Free Church in Southern Africa is willing to organise a regional conference from 15-19 December 1995 in Bellville or Dumisani. I advised to invite also your church c.q. missionaries because of your mission work in Kenya.

As for Latin America: the sending church of Rijnsburg (The Netherlands) is willing to organise a regional conference in Curacao (Neth. Antilles) next year. I advised to invite also your church and/or the missionary of Surinam. I was also in contact with the "Interim Committee" regarding some points regarding these regional conferences, and ai pass ed on to the churches:

1. The emphais should be on the regional character of these conferences. The main purpose is to encourage discussion of common regional problems and to investigate the possibilities of coordinating certain activities.
2. The best is, not to invite several speakers from outside the regions, but to restrict the conferences as much as possible to workers of the own region.
3. There is no mandate to spend money from the general ICRC fund on the regional conferences; so the costs are for these conferences themselves or for the (sending) churches.

I hope that you can give me any response. May the LORD bless our work.

With cordial greetings, yours

SIGNED by K Deddens

REPORT from DEPUTIES FOR PULPIT EXCHANGE FREE REFORMED CHURCH AT ALBANY (WA)

Secretary:
PO Box 825
ALBANY WA 6330
Phone (098) 42 2267
18-04-1994, Albany

To Synod 1994,

Dear Brothers in Christ,

In accordance with Article 51, Acts of Synod Bedfordale 1992, consistory FRC Albany has coordinated and monitored the roster of pulpit exchange. It can report the following:

- a. According to schedule in Nov. 1992 Rev. A. Veldman visited the churches in Tasmania, participating also in the annual church visits.
- b. In Jan. 1993 Rev. C. Kleyn visited the churches in West Australia.
- c. Due to pressure of work and a variety of other reasons no minister from West Australia was available to bring a visit to Tasmania towards the end of 1993. We asked Rev. G. van Rongen and Rev. K. Bruning who temporarily served the church of Launceston to participate in the annual church visits.
- d. For the period 1994-1996 we propose the following roster:

Minister of	1994	1995	1996
Kelmscott	Tasmania		
Bedfordale		Tasmania	
Armadale			Tasmania
Launceston	Metro	Albany/Metro	
Legana	Metro		Albany/Metro

Comments:

1. The visits of the ministers from Launceston and Legana during 1994 will coincide with Syndo 1994.
2. Seeing that there are now two ministers in Tasmania the need for two visits a year to Western Australia is no longer there.
3. Seeing that pulpit exchanges between Albany and the metro area are no longer included in the roster set by Synod, this should no longer be part of the synod budget either. Each individual minister should claim the traveling cost with his own local consistory.

Yours in Christ,

SIGNED by: A. Veldman, chairman
SIGNED by: M. Vermeulen, clerk

Deputies for Revision of the Church Order, appointed by Synod 1992 of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia

REPORT TO SYNOD 1994

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In accordance with the mandate of Synod (Acts 1992, Article 113, page 67) Deputies have considered submissions received on the provisionally adopted (1992) Church Order. The notes and suggestions referred by Synod 1992 (1992 Acts, pages 346, 347) were also included in the review process.

In accordance with the same mandate this report was completed and despatched to the churches and to the convening church of Byford in November 1993.

1.2 Submissions received by the closing date of 1 June 1993:

FRC of Legana (8-12-92), FRC of Launceston (19-4-1993), FRC of Bedfordale (17-5-1993), Rev G Van Rongen (19-5-1993).

Late submissions, but still in time to be taken into consideration, were received from the churches of Albany (14-6-1993) and Byford (21-6-1993). The submission from FRC Kelmscott (received mid-October 1993) was too late to be considered by Deputies.

1.3 This report refers to 2 classes of material:

1.3.1 The notes and suggestions of Synod (Acts 1992, pages 346, 347). These are marked (Syn).

1.3.2 The submissions received. These are marked (Sub).

Submissions of a minor nature (linguistic etc) are not individually reported.

Deputies responses are marked (Dep).

1.4 As regards proposed changes to the provisionally adopted (1992) text, Synod's mandate to Deputies is (paragraph 3):

f. propose amendments to the provisionally adopted Church Order to incorporate the results of the above mentioned studies;

g. alert the churches to proposed changes that constitute 'new matters' that must be submitted according to article 30 of the Church Order (1985 version);

Deputies have incorporated all proposed amendments in the recommended text appended to this Report (Section 4).

Section 3 of this report draws the churches' attention to those proposed changes which constitute "new matters".

2 REPORT

ARTICLE 1

(Syn) : consider retention of the words "In the Church of Christ all things should be done in good order".

(Dep) : These words were lost when, in accordance with our 1990 mandate, the Canadian formulation was recommended. If however the churches prefer the words concerned, a return to the Australian formulation is possible. Deputies see no satisfactory way of including both the Australian and Canadian texts.

(Sub) : asks that the words "regulations in respect of" be re-inserted.

(Dep) : these words, which came from the original Australian Church Order (ACO), were deleted by Synod 1992 from the then recommended text.

ARTICLE 6

(Syn) : is it 'synod' or 'classis church'?

(Dep) : reference to Acts 1985, art 81, page 52 and Acts 1987, art 65, page 30 shows that it should be 'synod'.

(Dep) : recommend a revision of this article, removing the phrases "has approved the call" and "shall approve the call", on the basis that "the call" itself and the acceptance of "the call" are already history when the major assembly becomes involved. Rather than 'approve the call' the major assembly gives approval for the ordination of the candidate, or installation of the minister, as the case may be.

ARTICLE 14

(Sub) : that the text of CCO Article 11 be used up to and including the words "regional synod", amended where necessary to fit the Australian situation.

(Dep) : A change of this nature needs a proposal from one of the churches. Deputies are not in favour of this change, since the pre-conditions of "approval and concurring advice ..." should apply in every situation where a consistory wants to dismiss a minister.

(Sub) : Change the word "service" to "bond".

(Dep) : The possibility and desirability of this change were considered for our 1992 report. Deputies' recommendation to retain the ACO wording was adopted by Synod.

ARTICLE 16

(Syn) : Review the order "lead in prayer, preach the Word and administer the sacraments".

(Dep) : The Form for ordination has the order "preach, sacraments, prayer". The original CO of Dordt has the order we have now. In accordance with the mandate to strengthen the show of uniformity with Dordt, Deputies recommend to leave the Article as it is.

ARTICLE 19

(Sub) : return to the ACO wording of "shall encourage members ...", which reflects better the original Dutch text which uses the word "arbeiden" (i.e. work, labour).

(Dep) : Deputies do not agree with this claim. What the churches have to do is more than just 'encourage members'. The CO of Dordt has (somewhat literally translated): The churches shall labour, as much as is necessary, that there will be students of theology who are supported by them (the churches). Deputies re- submit their 1992 recommended text (slightly amended), on the grounds that it is a better match with Dordt.

ARTICLE 30

(Syn) : requests an improved formulation of the first sentence of the original ACO; and review the Article's title.

(Dep) : After re-consideration of various sentence structures, Deputies prefer and re-recommend their 1992 recommended text, under a changed heading.

ARTICLE 33

(Sub) : change "unless they are substantiated by new grounds", to "unless it is considered that amendment is essential".

(Dep) : do not favour this suggestion, on the grounds that the proposed wording is both ambiguous and illogical. *By whom* must 'amendment be considered essential'? Surely *not by the ecclesiastical assembly*, for a decision that 'amendment is essential' can not be made prior to a matter having been proposed. *Neither* can it mean *by the proposer*, for that would make nonsense of the whole clause (every proposer will consider amendment essential).

In essence, the proposed wording renders the Article powerless since it makes the decision as to what may be proposed a subjective one.

Moreover, the present wording does not stop anyone from "again proposing a matter once decided upon". All he has to do is advance the new ground that the weight (value, importance etc) of the "old" material has changed to the degree that (to use the same formulation) 'amendment is essential'.

ARTICLE 35

(Syn) : review the use of "authority" in this Article (see also Article 30)

(Sub) : The heading "Jurisdiction" does not describe the contents of this Article, which deals with the extent of the authority of the assemblies. Article 30, although closely related, describes the content of the assemblies' authority. Therefore the heading of this Article should be changed to "Limitation of Authority of the Assemblies".

(Dep) : The present text duplicates what is already in Article 31 (major assemblies make binding decisions). Deputies recommend, in accordance with the mandate, a return to Dordt, which says that the jurisdiction of the different assemblies is "the same" (over against some who believe that the 'higher' the assembly, the more say it has). A return to Dordt will satisfy also our previous mandate of moving towards the Canadian text, - which can be adopted without change, as shown in Section 3 of this report.

This change requires a proposal from one of the churches.

Grounds that could be advanced are, (other than those of 1985):

(a) the present Article is not needed, since it duplicates what is provided elsewhere in the CO;

(b) the change conforms with Synod decisions that the revised CO should adopt the Canadian text where possible, and that the show of uniformity with Dordt should be strengthened;

(c) Synod 1980's decision (Acts, Article 25.a) to retrospectively authorise the use of the revised (1978) Dutch Church Order as basis for the revision of the (our) Church Order was placed on Synod's table by Deputies' initiative (see attached copy of the 1980 Deputies' Report), and not by the churches. As only the churches may place such matters on Synod's table, that decision was illegal.

On that basis Synod could be asked to restore the text of this Article (and others if requested by one of the churches, for example the similarly illegal change in Article 46, and the inclusion of Article 61) to that of the original ACO.

This would bring the text closer to both the Canadian Church Order and Dordt, as shown.

It is worth noting that the churches were not made aware of the nature and extent of the changes which the 1980 decision would 'import' into their Church Order. Deputies' report does not tell synod (their revision work until then covering only the first 15 Articles of the Church Order), neither is there any evidence that synod gave that aspect consideration. The churches did in fact not know until 1983, when deputies presented their completed revision to synod. Even then it is doubtful that the churches were made aware what changes had been made.

ARTICLE 46

(Dep) : recommend deletion of the words "Church Order", on the grounds that these do not appear in Dordt, which speaks of (in Article 85, translated) "... non-essential things", and "... whose practice is different from ours". Meulink and DeWolff comment (p 127): "in Confession and Church Order they're one with us". See also Deputies' comment under Article 35, regarding the 1980 decision to change this Article.

(Dep) : the text of this Article has been further revised to cover also the relationship with churches within Australia.

ARTICLE 50

(Syn) : Review the claim that the second sentence is essential. The obligation to observe provisions of the Church Order applies to every Article and needs therefore not be stated.

(Dep) : believe that it is essential to keep these words, since mission work happens away from the normal operation of church life within the bond of churches, and is in this respect more vulnerable to outside influences.

ARTICLE 51

(Sub) : replace "church services" with "worship services". (Gives the example of the Samaritan woman).

(Dep) : do not support this proposed change. Apart from the decision by Synod 1985, the term "Church service" is more descriptive of what goes on there. It draws attention to what Christ does (gather His Church), whereas "worship service" focusses attention more on what the believer does (practise thankfulness in worship). It is not until Christ has gathered, and distributes His gifts of Word and Sacrament that the believer can "worship" God.

Another good reason why we should avoid the term "worship service" is its connotation with "prayer service" (Dutch: gebedsdienst), which is certainly not correct.

As to the Samaritan woman, she merely uses Old Testament language.

ARTICLE 54

(Sub) : suggests deletion of the words "on their motivation and knowledge of that doctrine", on the grounds (a) that historically the Reformed churches considered the "motivation" to be included in the reproduction of the "knowledge", and (b) the opening sentence "have come to an understanding and acceptance of the doctrine of God's Word" covers it all, making the words in question unnecessary.

(Dep) : One of the major functions of this Article is to stipulate that the consistory shall examine candidates for public profession of faith in matters regarding their 'doctrine and life'. As such, the words concerned are an accurate reproduction of what is standard terminology in the churches. Their inclusion in the Article is very necessary and functional, providing an accurate description of the procedure which the churches practise and wish to maintain. Moreover, to end at "... examined by consistory" leaves the sentence unfinished, and the reader guessing about the nature of the examination.

ARTICLE 58

(Syn) : asks about the merits of the addition of "... arrival and departure or death ..."

(Dep) : recommend to leave the words out, as there is no need to regulate every detail.

ARTICLE 59

(Syn) : review use of the term "communicant members"

(Dep) : recommend to leave as is, since the term is well understood. It is not easy to find acceptable alternative terms for Articles 59 and 60 (and Articles 74, 79 ?)

Syn) : consider the alternative "by two of its members"

(Dep) : recommend "by two elders" (the minister also being an elder)

ARTICLE 61

(Dep) : this Article appears for the first time in the 1983 revision. For comment see above under Article 35.

ARTICLE 63

(Syn) : consider replacing "as a rule" with "preferable" or similar.

(Sub) : the wording "as a rule" is supported here (the Dutch has "als regel"). The word "preferable" would not be wise and is therefore not favoured.

(Dep) : "as a rule" should remain since there is an essential difference with "preferable". As a rule means, the churches agree to do it that way, but there may be special circumstances making it difficult or impossible (for example, the minister is away). Preference means, it is a matter of choice; do what you like best.

ARTICLE 65

(Syn) : consider replacing "Christmas" with "on the day of Christ's birth"; and review the term "sacred events"

(Dep) : recommend to add "Day" to "Christmas". There is no need to change further since the name as amended is commonly used and well understood. Deputies see no need to change the word "sacred".

Note : "the day of Christ's birth" was some 2000 years ago. To be precise the formulation should be: "on the anniversary of the day of Christ's birth", or "on the day when we remember (commemorate) Christ's birth".

ARTICLE 67

(Syn) : review use of the expression "private ceremony".

(Dep) : recommend no change. The formulation is an accurate description of current practice in the churches.

ARTICLE 71

(Syn) : consider merit of replacing "one or two witnesses" with "one or two other witnesses".

(Sub) : should this not read 2 or 3 witnesses in accordance with Matt 18:16?

(Dep) : recommend no change. Other Church Orders have the same (Dordt, CCO, the previous ACO). It is clear from the text of the Article ("... *admonitions* in the presence of ...") that there are at least three people present - the accused person, the accuser who speaks the admonitions, and the "one or two" Jesus mentions in Matt 18. Counting the accuser as one of the witnesses, the requirement of Deut 19:15 is satisfied.

ARTICLE 72

(Sub) : As a sinner's repentance is cause for joy in the church, the formulation of this article should have a positive ring to it. Suggest return to the original ACO version.

(Dep) : in their 1990 Report deputies considered the two formulations as being of the same value. As a(n expected) result the Canadian version was recommended (and provisionally adopted). Further consideration leads us to recommend no change. Deputies reject the notion that the present formulation has a negative ring. The question of joy in the church simply does not enter into the picture, neither in the one nor in the other formulation. The article merely stipulates a condition, agreed to by the churches, that the consistory shall exercise caution in this matter.

ARTICLE 74

(Syn) : Make a recommendation regarding use of advice/consent, giving due consideration to the submission of Rev G VanRongen. The term "concurring advice" may be a possible alternative.

(Dep) : maintain their 1992 recommendation, on the grounds advanced in their 1992 Report.

The following comment is offered on Rev VanRongen's submission (all references to that submission are indicated by their paragraph numbers shown in brackets).

1. Rev VanRongen's submission writes in paragraph (8.5) that "*consent*" in the Church Order "does not have the non-ecclesiastical, popular, modern meaning of 'permission granted by a higher authority'".

Paragraph (8.7) makes similar comments about the meaning of the term "*advice*". The submission writes that the two *must be understood as ecclesiastical language of the 16th and 17th century where they have "the same 'weight and meaning'" (8.2) and (8.8).*

Apparently confident that today's user of the Church Order will continue to read it through 16th and 17th century glasses, the submission recommends "consent" (10).

Following that line of reasoning, one might expect that "advice" would be equally acceptable to the submission, since people wearing 16th and 17th century glasses will detect no difference between the two.

Taking the argument yet a step further, the choice must necessarily favour "advice", for that is the term used by the original (Dordt) Church Order.

What's more, that choice will also bring the text in line with the Canadian Church Order - and satisfy a previous Synod's mandate still in force.

But the choice is apparently not that simple. When the submission removes its 16th and 17th century glasses to look again at "advice", it finds that the word will not do, because now it suddenly takes on a "meaning which could cause the articles of our Church Order to be used for the defence of **independentist** ideas and practices" (8.9). The submission's conclusion is that the Church Order must use "consent" and not "advice".

To know the exact meaning of the term "consent" the user of the Church Order should realise that it doesn't mean what everyone thinks it means, but that it has its own "specific- ecclesiastical meaning".

2. Deputies reject this argumentation for the following reasons:

a. *It is selectively applied*, (namely, to "advice" only, and not to "consent") *and therefore misleading and invalid*. The same fear of misuse of the Church Order can be expressed regarding "consent".

When that term is given today's meaning - which the submission defines in (8.5) - it "could cause the articles of our Church Order to be used for the defence of hierarchical ideas and practices".

b. *It is based on conjecture* - things that "could" happen -, *and motivated by suspicion and mistrust* - a local church could misuse the Church Order.

The Church Order is a document whose contents is based on mutual trust. The process of text revision should therefore be dominated by a positive outlook, and not let itself be guided or influenced by fears and suspicion about what possible misuse someone could make of a particular term or formulation which as normal everyday language is entirely satisfactory.

There is absolutely no justification for the idea that the local church might interpret "advice" as "someone else's opinion which one is free to accept or to ignore" (8.7), and thus treat the advice it asks from classis accordingly. There are many situations in life where asked advice is treated seriously and with the respect it commands. When the local church asks classis for advice it means that it asks classis to carefully scrutinise the procedure followed thus far, in order that the discipline is applied in accordance with the norms of Scripture.

Neither is there a need or justification to recommend "consent" out of fear for "advice" and possible consequent independentism. The mere fact that a local church belongs to the bond of churches on the basis of the Church Order constitutes the undertaking that it will submit voluntarily to the minutest scrutiny of the major assembly. This is not the 'independentist' way.

3. Deputies reject the submission's recommendation for the following reasons:

a. *It is based on fallacious reasoning*, as shown above;

b. *It conflicts with the aim of the revision process*. Keeping in mind that our Synods wanted a revision of the Church Order because they saw the need for a document that says in clear language what it means, Deputies quote (and they couldn't agree more with) the submission (last sentence of 8.9): "In its terminology a Church Order must be clear and not subject to being explained in various ways".

Application of that laudable principle rules out the recommendation to use "consent", since, as shown in the submission itself, that word is subject to various interpretations.

c. *It is based on the unrealistic assumption that the user will read "consent" with its "specific-ecclesiastical meaning" in mind*.

If Article 74 has "consent", it will mean (what the submission says in (8.5), and what every church member will say), that the classis (church) as higher authority must first grant permission before discipline can proceed.

As that is not the intention of the Church Order, words like "consent", "concurring advice", "approval", "agreement", etc should not be used here.

d. The submission makes several comments about the use of a "dictionary description" of terms, as compared with their "specific-ecclesiastical meaning". Deputies do not apologise for having used the modern english dictionary. On the contrary, they are doing so in the belief that that's what the churches want, and what the Church Order needs. To keep in the historical line, it is immensely valuable to use 'specific-ecclesiastical' terms in our church documents. However, *as a minimum requirement, these 'specific- ecclesiastical' terms must be unambiguous, and well understood by today's users.*

Summing it up, we again quote the submission (8.9): *"In its terminology a Church Order must be clear and not subject to being explained in various ways"*.

e. Finally, what follows is a quotation of Meulink and DeWolff, from their commentary on this article (p118).

"Elke plaatselijke kerk heeft het recht iemand af te snijden, zonder advies van de classis, maar naar onderling overleg beperken de kerken hun macht tot meerdere waarborg van rechte tuchtoefening, en leggen zich de verplichting op het advies der classis te vragen"; which in translation reads:

"Every local church has the right to excommunicate someone without advice from the classis, but in order to better ensure correct (true) discipline the churches mutually agree to restrict their power, taking the obligation upon themselves to ask the classis for advice". Deputies submit that this comment indicates the use of "advice".

f. It is *contrary to our mandates* which direct us to get closer to the Church Order of Dordrecht, and that of our Canadian sister churches.

ARTICLE 76

(Sub) : recommends to change "a neighbouring congregation" (at the end of first line) to "the neighbouring congregation"; and delete the sentence "In the case of a minister ..."; on the grounds that in a normally functioning church federation with classes and synods the neighbouring congregations are always appointed by classes.

In the small print section change "a neighbouring congregation" to "the classis church"; and delete the sentence "In the case of a minister ..."; on the grounds that the reference to the second- appeal church would seem to indicate that the neighbouring church is seen to be the same as the classis church. That impression is also given by synod 1985, art 81 regarding article 76 of the Church Order.

(Dep) : Agree with these recommendations. They also move the text further towards the original CO of Dordt.

Deputies have further revised the text of the Article in that direction.

ARTICLE 79

(Syn) : consider the possible effects of abandonment of the old ACO provisions.

(Dep) : to abandon these provisions would require a proposal from the churches.

The result would be that the churches would no longer have to deal uniformly with non-communicant members; and neither would the churches be answerable to each other in that respect. The churches might, and probably would, finish up with 'adherents', a situation we have rightly criticised in other churches. Deputies recommend to leave these provisions in.

3 PROPOSED CHANGES WHICH REQUIRE A PROPOSAL FROM ONE OF THE CHURCHES

Apart from the *changes of greater substance* recommended in Section 2 of this report, *minor changes* to clarify the intent, improve the language, or correct a printing error were made to Articles 1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 15, 26, 31, 32, 34, 43, 48, 53, 54, 57, 76 and 77.

Of all the changes made, there is only one that needs a proposal from one of the churches, and that is Article 35. All other changes are in line with Deputies' mandates to get closer to both the Canadian Church Order, and the original Church Order of Dordt.

Respectfully submitted:

J Eikelboom

J Numan

SH Terpstra

Armada, 18 November 1993

Copy of 1980 Deputies Report

(Ref discussion on Article 35)

The Secretary
Free Reformed Church
ARMADALE W.A. 6112

6 June '80

Dear Br. Berkelaar,

Report from the Deputies appointed under Article 41 of Acts of the Synod 1978 to revise the Church Order.

The deputies, in carrying out the Synod's request have perused, inter alia, the following:

- 1) The Church Order as translated into English and as provisionally adopted by the Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, 1959,
- 2) The draft report on the Church Order prepared by the deputies of the Canadian Synod of Coaldale 1977, and
- 3) The Kerkorde (and the report of the deputies) as adopted by the Synod of Groningen-Zuid, The Netherlands, 1978.

After deliberation, the deputies recommend that the Church Order as adopted by the Groningen-Zuid Synod be used as the basis for a revised Church Order for the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Appropriate changes to this Church Order may need to be made to suit the Australian situation. The Deputies recommend this course of action for two reasons:

- 1) This Church Order has recently been revised, is complete and has been adopted.
- 2) This Church Order appears to be closest to the original Church Order.

Based on the above, 15 Articles have been prepared to date; initial drafts of which are attached.

Notes have been added to each article where necessary. Time did not permit the deputies to complete their task.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:-

- 1) The deputies' actions to date be endorsed, and
- 2) that the task of revising the Church Order be continued so that a future Synod can be presented with a complete revised Church Order for consideration.

(was signed by deputies)

RECOMMENDED (1994) TEXT OF CHURCH ORDER

Articles in italic print are in force until classes have been formed

ARTICLE 1

For the maintenance of good order in the church of Christ it is necessary to have:

- I offices and supervision of doctrine;
- II assemblies;
- III worship, sacraments and ceremonies, and
- IV discipline.

I OFFICES AND SUPERVISION OF DOCTRINE

ARTICLE 2 - The offices

The offices are those of the minister of the Word, of the elder, and of the deacon.

ARTICLE 3 - The calling to office

A. All office bearers

No one shall take any office upon himself without having been lawfully called thereto. The calling to office shall take place by the consistory with the deacons, with the cooperation of the congregation, after prayer, and in accordance with the local regulations adopted for that purpose. Prior to the ordination or installation the names of the appointed brothers shall be publicly announced to the congregation for its approval on at least two consecutive Sundays. If no lawful objection is brought forward the ordination or installation shall take place with the use of the adopted Form.

B. Elders and deacons

The consistory with the deacons shall give the congregation the opportunity to draw the attention of the consistory to brothers deemed suitable for the respective offices. The consistory with the deacons shall present to the congregation at the most twice as many candidates as there are vacancies to be filled. From this number the congregation shall choose as many office-bearers as are needed. Those elected shall be appointed by the consistory with the deacons.

If necessary the consistory and the deacons may present to the congregation the same number of candidates as there are vacancies.

C. Ministers

Before a vacant church extends a call the advice of the counsellor shall be sought. The approval of classis shall be required for a repeated call to the same minister for the same vacancy.

C. Ministers

Before a vacant church extends a call the advice of the counsellor shall be sought. The approval of the classis church shall be required for a repeated call to the same minister for the same vacancy.

ARTICLE 4 - Bound to a church

No one shall serve in the ministry unless he is bound to a certain church.

ARTICLE 5 - Eligibility for the ministry

A. Eligibility

Only those shall be called to the office of minister of the Word who

- (1) have been declared eligible for call by the churches; or
- (2) are already serving in that capacity in one of the churches; or
- (3) have been declared eligible or are serving in one of the churches with which the Free Reformed Churches of Australia maintain a sister relationship. The churches shall observe the general ecclesiastical ordinances for the eligibility of those ministers who have served in these sister churches.

B. Declared eligible

Only those shall be declared eligible for call within the churches who

- (1) have passed a preparatory examination by the classis in which they live, which examination shall not take place unless those presenting themselves for it submit the necessary documents to prove that they are members in good standing of one of the churches and have successfully completed a course of study as required by the churches; or

(1) have passed a preparatory examination by the synod, which examination shall not take place unless those presenting themselves for it submit the necessary documents to prove that they are members in good standing of one of the churches and have successfully completed a course of study as required by the churches; or

- (2) have satisfied the requirements of Article 8; or
- (3) have satisfied the requirements of Article 9.

ARTICLE 6 - Ordination and installation of ministers of the Word Deputies' recommended text

A. Regarding those who have not served in the ministry before, the following shall be observed:

1. A candidate shall be ordained only after

- a. he has furnished classis with good testimonials from the consistory of the church to which he belongs concerning the soundness of his doctrine and conduct; and

a. he has furnished synod with good testimonials from the consistory of the church to which he belongs concerning the soundness of his doctrine and conduct; and

- b. he has passed a peremptory examination, which shall be conducted by classis together with the cooperation and concurring advice of deputies of synod.

b. he has passed a peremptory examination, which shall be conducted by synod together with the cooperation and concurring advice of deputies of synod.

2. Before his ordination the candidate shall also show to the consistory good testimonials from the church(es) to which he has belonged since his preparatory examination, concerning his doctrine and conduct.

B. Regarding those who are serving in the ministry the following shall be observed:

A minister shall be installed only after he has furnished classis with good testimonials concerning his doctrine and conduct, together with a declaration from the consistory with the deacons and from classis, that he has been honourably discharged from his service in that church and classis, or from the church only if he remains within the same classis.

A minister shall be installed only after he has furnished the classis church with good testimonials concerning his doctrine and conduct, together with a declaration of honourable discharge from the consistory with the deacons and from the classis church.

In the case of a minister who is serving in one of the churches with which the Free Reformed Churches of Australia maintain a sister relationship a colloquium shall be

required which will deal especially with the doctrine and polity of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

C. Before approving the ordination or installation, the major assembly shall require written certification by the calling church that the necessary announcements were made and that the congregation has approved the call.

ARTICLE 6 - Ordination and installation of ministers of the Word If the above revised text is not accepted, Deputies recommend

A. Regarding those who have not served in the ministry before, the following shall be observed:

1. They shall be ordained only after classis has approved the call.

1. They shall be ordained only after synod has approved the call.

Classis shall approve the call

Synod shall approve the call

a. upon satisfactory testimony concerning the soundness of doctrine and conduct of the candidate, attested by the consistory of the church to which he belongs; and

b. following a peremptory examination of the candidate with satisfactory results. This Classis examination shall take place with the cooperation and concurring advice of deputies of synod.

b. following a peremptory examination of the candidate with satisfactory results. This Synod examination shall take place with the cooperation and concurring advice of deputies of synod.

2. For the ordination they shall also show to the consistory good testimonials concerning their doctrine and conduct from the church(es) to which they have belonged since their preparatory examination.

B. Regarding those who are serving in the ministry the following shall be observed: They shall be installed after classis has approved the call.

They shall be installed after the classis church has approved the call.

1. For this approval as well as for the installation the minister shall show good testimonials concerning his doctrine and conduct, together with a declaration from the consistory with the deacons and from classis that he has been honourably discharged from his service in that church and classis, or from the church only in case he remains within the same classis.

1. For this approval as well as for the installation the minister shall show good testimonials concerning his doctrine and conduct, together with a declaration of honourable discharge from the consistory with the deacons and from the classis church.

2. For the approval of a call of those who are serving in one of the churches with which the Free Reformed Churches of Australia maintain a sister relationship a colloquium shall be required which will deal especially with the doctrine and polity of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

C. The approval of a call shall require written certification by the calling church that the required announcements were made and that the congregation has approved the call.

ARTICLE 7 - From one church to another

A minister once lawfully called shall not leave the church to which he is bound to take up the ministry elsewhere without the consent of his consistory with the deacons and the approval of classis. Likewise, no church shall receive him unless he has presented a proper certificate of release from the church and the classis where he served, or from the church only if he remains within the same classis.

A minister once lawfully called shall not leave the church to which he is bound to take up the ministry elsewhere without the consent of his consistory with the deacons and the approval of the classis church. Likewise, no church shall

receive him unless he has presented a proper certificate of release from the church he served.

ARTICLE 8 - Exceptional gifts

Persons who have not pursued the regular course of theological study shall not be admitted to the ministry unless there is convincing evidence of their exceptional gifts of godliness, humility, modesty, good intellect, and discretion, as well as the gift of public speech. When any such person presents himself for the ministry, classis shall (with Synod's prior approval) examine him and upon a favourable outcome allow him as candidate to speak an edifying word in the churches of the classis for a set period of time. Thereafter the classis shall further deal with him as it shall deem edifying, observing the ecclesiastical regulations adopted for this purpose.

Persons who have not pursued the regular course of theological study shall not be admitted to the ministry unless there is convincing evidence of their exceptional gifts of godliness, humility, modesty, good intellect, and discretion, as well as the gift of public speech. When any such person presents himself for the ministry the classis church shall seek to obtain this evidence by way of inquiry from the church to which he belongs, and from elsewhere if necessary. The examination shall take place in a synod (extraordinary if necessary). This synod shall set a period during which the person may, as candidate speak an edifying word in the churches of the classis area. Thereafter the classis church, with the advice of deputies of synod, shall further deal with him as it shall deem edifying, observing the ecclesiastical regulations adopted for this purpose.

ARTICLE 9 - Admission of ministers who have recently joined the church

A minister of the Word who has recently joined one of the churches and originates from a church with which the churches do not maintain a sister relationship shall only be admitted to the ministry with great caution. He shall not be declared eligible for call within the churches unless he has been well tested for a reasonable period of time, and carefully examined by the classis in whose area he lives. This classis examination shall be conducted with the cooperation of the deputies of synod.

A minister of the Word who has recently joined one of the churches and originates from a church with which the churches do not maintain a sister relationship shall only be admitted to the ministry with great caution. He shall not be declared eligible for call within the churches unless he has been well tested for a reasonable period of time, and carefully examined by synod (extraordinary if necessary).

ARTICLE 10 - Officiating in another church

No one shall preach the Word or administer the sacraments in another church without the permission of the consistory of that church.

ARTICLE 11 - Proper support

The consistory, as representing the congregation, shall provide for the proper support of its minister(s).

ARTICLE 12 - Call to an extraordinary task

If a minister accepts a call to an extraordinary task the nature of the relationship between him and the church to which he is bound must be arranged with the consent of the classis. Some ministers may be called for the training of students for the ministry, others for mission work.

If a minister accepts a call to an extraordinary task the nature of the relationship between him and the church to which he is bound must be arranged with the consent of the classis church. Some ministers may be called for the training of students for the ministry, others for mission work.

ARTICLE 13 - Retirement of ministers

If a minister of the Word; by reason of age, sickness or otherwise, is rendered incapable of performing the duties of his office he shall retain the honour and title of minister of the Word. He shall also retain his official bond with the church which he served last, and this church shall provide honourably for his support. The same obligation exists towards a minister's widow and orphans.

ARTICLE 14 - Dismissal

The consistory shall not dismiss a minister from his bond with the congregation without approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of synod.

The consistory shall not dismiss a minister from his bond with the congregation without approval of the classis church and the concurring advice of the deputies of synod.

ARTICLE 15 - Bound for life

A minister of the Word, once lawfully called, is bound to the service of the church for life and therefore not allowed to enter upon another vocation unless it be for exceptional and substantial reasons. The decision of his consistory to relieve him of his office in order to enter upon another vocation shall receive the approval of classis, with the concurring advice of deputies of synod.

A minister of the Word, once lawfully called, is bound to the service of the church for life and therefore not allowed to enter upon another vocation unless it be for exceptional and substantial reasons. The decision of his consistory to relieve him of his office in order to enter upon another vocation shall receive the approval of the classis church, with the concurring advice of deputies of synod.

ARTICLE 16 - Task of ministers

The task of ministers is to faithfully lead in prayer, preach the Word and administer the sacraments. They shall watch over their fellow office-bearers and over the congregation. Together with the elders they shall exercise church discipline and see to it that everything is done decently and in good order.

ARTICLE 17 - Equality among office-bearers

When two or more ministers are bound to the same congregation equality shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their office and in other matters as much as possible, according to the judgment of the consistory and if necessary of classis. This rule also applies to elders and deacons.

When two or more ministers are bound to the same congregation equality shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their office and in other matters as much as possible, according to the judgment of the consistory and if necessary of synod. This rule also applies to elders and deacons.

ARTICLE 18 - Training for the ministry

The churches shall support or, if possible, maintain an institution for the training for the ministry. The task of the professors of theology is to expound the Holy Scriptures and to defend the sound doctrine against heresies and errors, so that the churches may be provided with ministers of the Word who are able to fulfil the duties of their office as these have been described above. The churches together are obliged to provide properly for the professors of theology and for their widows and orphans.

ARTICLE 19 - Students of theology

The churches shall take care that there are sufficient students of theology, extending financial aid where necessary.

ARTICLE 20 - Task of Missionaries

When ministers of the Word are sent out as missionaries they shall in the specific region assigned to them proclaim the Word of God, administer the sacraments to

those who have come to the profession of their faith, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded his church, and ordain elders and deacons when this appears feasible, according to the rules given in the Word of God.

ARTICLE 21 - Task of elders

The elders shall govern the congregation with pastoral care and discipline. For the upbuilding of the congregation they shall make homevisits as often as is profitable but at least once a year. They shall watch that their fellow office-bearers are faithful in carrying out their duties and ensure that in the congregation everything is done decently and in good order.

ARTICLE 22 - Task of deacons

The deacons shall perform the ministry of mercy. They shall acquaint themselves with difficulties; visit, help and encourage where there is need; and urge church members to render assistance where necessary. They shall collect and manage the gifts of the congregation, and after mutual consultation distribute them where there is need. The deacons shall give account of their policies and management to the consistory.

ARTICLE 23 - Term of office

The elders and deacons shall serve two or more years according to local regulations, and a proportionate number shall retire each year. The places of the retiring office-bearers shall be taken by others unless the consistory with the deacons judges that the circumstances and the well-being of the church render it advisable to call them into office again. In that case the rule of Article 3 shall be observed.

ARTICLE 24 - Subscription to the Confession by ministers and teaching staff

All ministers of the Word and all teaching staff at the theological seminary shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia by signing the Form(s) adopted for that purpose. Anyone refusing to subscribe in that manner shall not be ordained or installed in office. Anyone who, being in office, refuses to do so shall because of that very fact be immediately suspended from office by the consistory, and classis shall not receive him. If he obstinately persists in his refusal he shall be deposed from office.

ARTICLE 25 - Subscription to the Confession by elders and deacons

Elders and deacons shall also subscribe to these Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form adopted for that purpose. Anyone being in office who refuses to do so shall because of that very fact be immediately suspended from office by the consistory. If he obstinately persists in his refusal he shall be deposed from office.

ARTICLE 26 - False doctrine

To ward off false doctrines and errors the ministers and elders shall use the means of instruction, of refutation, of warning and of admonition, in the ministry of the Word as well as in christian teaching and family visiting.

ARTICLE 27 - Office-bearers and the government.

The office-bearers shall impress upon the congregation its obligation to be obedient and show respect to the government, because God has instituted it. They must set a good example in this regard and by means of proper communication invoke the government to protect the ministry of the church.

II ASSEMBLIES

ARTICLE 28 - The ecclesiastical assemblies

Three kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies shall meet regularly : the consistory, the classis, and the synod.

ARTICLE 29 - Proceedings

The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer.

ARTICLE 30 - Ecclesiastical matters

These assemblies shall only deal with ecclesiastical matters, observing the provisions of this Church Order. A major assembly shall deal only with matters which could not be resolved in the minor assembly or which belong to its churches in common. A new matter may be put on its agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it.

ARTICLE 31 - Appeals

If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly he shall have the right of appeal to the major assembly; and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order.

Synod 1985 decided (Acts Article 81, page 57):

- 1. to maintain the decision of Synod 1959, Acts Article 16, concerning appeals whereby the "classis" is replaced by the "classis church", and a second-appeal church is appointed;*
- 2. to appoint classis churches;*
- 3. to appoint second-appeal churches;*
- 4. to state that the second-appeal churches shall not function when an appeal is made within two months prior to a synod.*

Synod 1959 decided (Acts Article 16, page 7): (free translation): As long as there are no classes, appeals under Article 31 CO shall be conducted as follows:

- a. stage 1, to the appointed sister church; which shall have the weight of a classis decision;*
- b. stage 2, to the second sister church; which shall have the weight of a decision of a regional synod;*
- c. stage 3, to the synod.*

ARTICLE 32 - Credentials and voting

Delegates to a major assembly shall bring with them their credentials, signed by the minor assembly. They shall have a vote in all matters except those in which either they themselves or their churches are directly involved.

ARTICLE 33 - Proposals

Matters once decided upon may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds.

ARTICLE 34- Chairman and clerk

In all assemblies there shall be a chairman and a clerk. The chairman's task is to present and explain clearly the matters to be dealt with and ensure that every one observes due order in speaking; he shall deny the floor to those who argue about minor things or who let themselves be carried away and cannot control their emotions, and discipline those who refuse to listen. His task shall cease when the assembly ends. The clerk shall keep an accurate record of all things worthy of being recorded.

ARTICLE 35 - Jurisdiction (Deputies' recommended text)

The classis has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the regional synod has over the classis, and the general synod over the regional synod.

The classis church has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the second-appeal church has over the classis church, and the synod over the second-appeal church or - if the latter is not involved - the classis church.

ARTICLE 35 - Jurisdiction

The classis has the authority to make judicial pronouncements in respect of the consistory. This applies also to the synod in respect of the classis.

The classis church has the authority to make judicial pronouncements in respect of the consistory. The second-appeal church has this authority in respect of the classis church. This applies also to the synod in respect of the second-appeal church or - if the latter is not involved - of the classis church.

ARTICLE 36 - Consistory

In all churches there shall be a consistory composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders. It shall meet regularly and be chaired by the minister. If a church is served by more than one minister they shall chair in turn. The consistory shall also meet regularly with the deacons to deal with those matters as described for that purpose by the Church Order, and further with all things which the consistory considers necessary for general management, including the material affairs of the church.

ARTICLE 37 - Consistory and the deacons

Where the number of elders and deacons is small the deacons may be added to the consistory by local arrangement. This shall invariably be done where there are less than three elders and less than three deacons. In these circumstances matters pertaining to supervision and discipline shall be handled with the advice of the deacons and matters pertaining to the office of deacons with the advice of the elders.

ARTICLE 38 - Constitution of a consistory

If a consistory is to be constituted for the first time or anew, the advice of classis shall be sought.

If a consistory is to be constituted for the first time or anew, the advice of the classis church shall be sought.

ARTICLE 39 - Places without a consistory

Places where as yet no consistory can be constituted shall be assigned by classis to the care of a neighbouring consistory.

Places where as yet no consistory can be constituted shall be assigned by synod to the care of a neighbouring consistory.

ARTICLE 40 - Meetings of deacons

The deacons shall meet regularly to deal with the matters pertaining to their office. Their meetings shall begin and end with prayer.

ARTICLE 41 - Classis

Neighbouring churches shall come together in a classis by delegating a minister and an elder, or if a church has no minister, two elders. Classes shall be held at least once every three months. The ministers shall be chairman in rotation, or one shall be chosen to be chairman; however the same minister shall not be chairman twice in succession. The chairman shall ask whether the ministry of the office bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured and whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the judgment and help of classis for the proper government of their churches. Every classis shall determine where and when the churches shall meet again. The last classis before synod shall choose delegates to that synod.

The sentence: "The chairman shall...." must be read in the light of the decision taken by Synod 1985, Acts, Article 81.

ARTICLE 42 - Ministers who are not delegated to a classis

If two or more ministers are serving the same church, those who have not been delegated shall have the right to attend classis in an advisory capacity.

ARTICLE 43 - Counsellors

Each vacant church shall choose a minister to serve as its counsellor and ask classis to appoint him. He shall assist the consistory in maintaining good order by giving advice, especially in the matter of calling a minister. Letters of call shall be counter-signed by him.

Each vacant church shall choose a minister to serve as its counsellor and ask synod to appoint him. He shall assist the consistory in maintaining good order by giving advice, especially in the matter of calling a minister. Letters of call shall be counter-signed by him. When a vacancy arises more than two months prior to synod the classis church shall appoint a counsellor and report to synod.

ARTICLE 44- Church visitors

Each year classis shall authorise at least two of the more experienced and able ministers to visit the churches in that year. If necessary the classis may authorise a capable elder to carry out this task together with a minister. It shall be the task of these visitors to inquire whether all things are regulated and done in full harmony with the Word of God, whether the office-bearers fulfil the duties of their office faithfully as they have promised, and whether the Church Order is being observed and maintained in every respect, in order that they may in good time fraternally admonish those who are found negligent in anything, and that by their good counsel and advice all things may be directed towards the edification and preservation of Christ's church. They shall submit written reports of their visits to classis.

The synod shall appoint some of the most experienced and capable ministers to visit the churches. If necessary synod may appoint a capable elder to carry out this task together with a minister. It shall be the task of these visitors to inquire whether all things are regulated and done in full harmony with the Word of God, whether the office-bearers fulfil the duties of their office faithfully as they have promised, and whether the Church Order is being observed and maintained in every respect, in order that they may in good time fraternally admonish those who are found negligent in anything, and that by their good counsel and advice all things may be directed towards the edification and preservation of Christ's church. They shall submit written reports of their visits to synod, with copies to the consistories concerned.

ARTICLE 45 - Synod

The synod shall be held once every three years. Each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders to synod. At the close of synod the time and place for the next synod shall be determined and a church shall be appointed to convene it. A synod shall be convened before the appointed time if according to the judgment of at least two classes this appears necessary. Its time and place shall be decided by the church appointed as convening church for the next regular synod, subject to the approval of its classis.

The synod shall be held once every two years. Each consistory shall delegate one minister and one elder to synod. At the close of synod the time and place for the next synod shall be determined and a church shall be appointed to convene it. A synod shall be convened before the appointed time if according to the judgment of at least two churches this appears necessary. Its time and place shall be decided by the church appointed as convening church for the next regular synod, subject to the approval of its classis church.

ARTICLE 46 - Relationship with other churches

The relationship with other churches shall be regulated by synod. With churches of

Reformed confession sister relations shall be maintained as much as possible. On non-essential points of ecclesiastical practice other churches shall not be rejected.

ARTICLE 47 - Censure in classis and synod

At the close of the major assemblies censure shall be exercised over those who in the meeting have done something worthy of reproof.

ARTICLE 48 - Deputies of major assemblies

Each synod shall appoint deputies who are to assist the classes in all matters provided for in the Church Order. A classis may request these deputies to assist in cases of special difficulties. Each synod shall also appoint deputies to carry out its own decisions. Different deputies shall be appointed, as much as possible, for separate matters. All deputies shall keep proper record of their work and submit a written report.

ARTICLE 49 - Archives

The assemblies shall ensure that proper care is taken of the archives.

ARTICLE 50- Mission

The churches shall endeavour to fulfil their missionary task. In doing so they shall observe the provisions of this Church Order. When churches cooperate in mission work they shall as much as possible observe the division into classes.

III WORSHIP, SACRAMENTS AND CEREMONIES

ARTICLE 51 - Administration of sacraments

The sacraments shall be administered only in a church service by a minister of the Word with the use of the adopted Forms, and under the supervision of the elders.

ARTICLE 52 - Baptism of infants

The consistory shall ensure that the covenant of God is sealed by baptism to the children of believers as soon as feasible.

ARTICLE 53 - Baptismal promise and education

The consistory shall ensure that parents honour their promise made at baptism to provide for their children education which is in harmony with the Word of God as the churches have summarised it in their Confessions.

ARTICLE 54 - Public profession of faith

Those who have come to an understanding and acceptance of the doctrine of God's Word and desire to publicly profess their faith shall be examined by the consistory on their motivation and knowledge of that doctrine. The public profession shall take place in a church service, with the use of the adopted Form.

ARTICLE 55 - Baptism of adults

Adults who have not been baptised shall be grafted into the christian church by holy baptism upon their public profession of faith.

ARTICLE 56 - Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated at least once every three months.

ARTICLE 57 - Admission to the Lord's Supper

The consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Members of sister churches shall be admitted on the basis of an attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct.

ARTICLE 58 - Church records

The consistory shall maintain church records in which the names of the members

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and the dates of their birth, baptism, public profession of faith and marriage are properly recorded.

ARTICLE 59 - Attestations for communicant members

Communicant members who move to another congregation shall be given, following appropriate announcements to the congregation, an attestation regarding their doctrine and conduct, signed on behalf of the consistory by two elders. This attestation shall also record their children who have not yet made public profession of faith. The consistory of the congregation concerned shall be notified in due time.

ARTICLE 60 - Attestations for non-communicant members

An attestation for a non-communicant member shall be sent directly to the consistory of the church concerned with the request to take the member under its supervision and discipline.

ARTICLE 61 Support after departure

When members depart to another congregation where they will be cared for in institutions, aged persons homes or nursing homes, they shall in respect of deacon support remain under the care of the church they are leaving. If this is not possible support will be arranged by consultation between the consistories and deacons concerned.

ARTICLE 62 - Church services

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

ARTICLE 63 - Catechism preaching

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

ARTICLE 64 - Psalms and hymns

In the church services only the psalms and hymns approved by synod shall be sung.

ARTICLE 65 - Ecclesiastical feast days

On Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Ascension Day and at Pentecost the consistory shall call the congregation together for church services. The sacred events which the congregation commemorates in particular on these days shall therein be proclaimed.

ARTICLE 66 - Days of prayer

In times of war, general calamities and other great afflictions a day of prayer shall be proclaimed by the church appointed for that purpose by synod.

ARTICLE 67 - Marriage

The consistory shall ensure that the members of the congregation marry only in the Lord, and that the ministers - as authorised by the consistory - solemnise only such marriages as are in accordance with the Word of God. The solemnisation of a marriage shall take place in a private ceremony, with the use of the adopted Form.

ARTICLE 68 - Funerals

Church services shall not be conducted for funerals.

IV CHURCH DISCIPLINE

ARTICLE 69 - Aim of discipline

Church discipline shall be exercised in accordance with the Word of God and to His honour. Its aim is to reconcile the sinner with God and the neighbour, and to remove the offence from the church of Christ.

ARTICLE 70 - Mutual responsibility

If anyone departs from the pure doctrine or is delinquent in conduct and this is a secret matter which does not give rise to public offence, the rule which Christ clearly prescribes in Matthew 18 shall be observed.

ARTICLE 71 - Consistory involvement

The consistory shall not deal with any report of sin unless it has first ascertained that both private admonitions and admonitions in the presence of one or two witnesses have remained fruitless or the sin committed is of a public character.

ARTICLE 72 - Repentance

When someone repents of a public sin or of a sin which had to be reported to the consistory, the latter shall not accept his confession of sin unless the member concerned has shown real amendment. The consistory shall determine whether the congregation shall be informed afterwards.

ARTICLE 73 - Discipline in respect of communicant members

A communicant member who obstinately rejects the admonition by the consistory or who has committed a public or some other serious sin shall be suspended from the Lord's Supper. If he continues to harden himself in sin, the consistory shall publicly announce this to the congregation so that the congregation may be engaged in prayer and admonition and the excommunication may not take place without its cooperation.

ARTICLE 74 - Announcements during the procedure

In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned. In the second public announcement, which shall be made only after the advice of classis has been obtained, the name and address of the sinner shall be mentioned. In the third public announcement a date shall be set at which the excommunication of the sinner shall take place in accordance with the adopted Form. The time interval between the various announcements shall be determined by the consistory.

In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned. In the second public announcement, which shall be made only after the advice of the classis church has been obtained, the name and address of the sinner shall be mentioned. In the third public announcement a date shall be set at which the excommunication of the sinner shall take place in accordance with the adopted Form. The time interval between the various announcements shall be determined by the consistory.

ARTICLE 75 - Re-admission

When someone who has been excommunicated repents and desires to be again received into the communion of the church, the congregation shall be informed of this desire in order to see whether there are any lawful objections. The time between the public announcement and the readmission of the sinner shall be not less than one month. If no lawful objection is raised the readmission shall take place with the use of the adopted Form.

ARTICLE 76 - Suspension and removal of office-bearers

If an elder or deacon has committed a public gross sin he shall be immediately removed from office by the judgment of his own consistory and of the consistory of the neighbouring church. If a minister has committed a public gross sin, he shall be immediately suspended from office by the judgment of the same two consistories.

Whether the minister ought to be altogether removed from office shall be judged by classis, with advice of the deputies of synod.

If an elder or deacon has committed a public gross sin he shall be immediately removed from office by the judgment of his own consistory and that of the classis church. If a minister has committed a public gross sin, he shall be immediately suspended from office by the judgment of the same two consistories. Whether the minister ought to be altogether removed from office shall be judged by the second-appeal church, with advice of the deputies of synod.

ARTICLE 77 - Serious and gross sins on the part of office-bearers

As serious and gross sins which are grounds for the suspension or deposition of office-bearers the following are to be mentioned particularly: False doctrine or heresy, public schisms, blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, unjustly enriching oneself; and further all such sins and serious misdemeanours that rate as grounds for excommunication with respect to other members of the church.

ARTICLE 78 - Christian censure

The ministers, elders, and deacons shall mutually exercise christian censure and shall exhort and kindly admonish one another with regard to the execution of their office.

ARTICLE 79 - Discipline in respect of non-communicant members

A baptised member shall be admonished by the consistory when he as an adult fails to make public profession of faith or where in other respects he is not loyal to the calling to new obedience in God's covenant. If he obstinately rejects the admonition of the consistory and thereby clearly demonstrates that he is indifferent and averse to the covenant or is even hostile to the service of the Lord, the matter shall be made known to the congregation without mentioning the name of the sinner, and the congregation shall be urged to pray for him. If the member continues in sin and is unwilling to listen to the admonitions, then with the advice of the classis the consistory shall make a second public announcement, mentioning the name of the sinner and the term after which the excommunication shall take place. If he does not in the said term show any real repentance the consistory shall in a church service exclude him from the communion of the church, using the adopted Form. If he, after this excommunication, comes to repentance and desires to rejoin the communion of the church, he shall be admitted by way of his public profession of faith after the consistory has made his repentance known to the congregation.

A baptised member shall be admonished by the consistory when he as an adult fails to make public profession of faith or where in other respects he is not loyal to the calling to new obedience in God's covenant. If he obstinately rejects the admonition of the consistory and thereby clearly demonstrates to be indifferent and averse to the covenant or is even hostile to the service of the Lord, the matter shall be made known to the congregation without mentioning the name of the sinner; and the congregation shall be urged to pray for him. If the member continues in sin and is unwilling to listen to the admonitions, then with the advice of the classis church the consistory shall make a second public announcement, mentioning the name of the sinner and the date at which the excommunication shall take place. If he does not in the said term show any real repentance, the consistory shall in a church service exclude him from the communion of the church; with the use of the adopted Form. If he, after this excommunication, comes to repentance and desires to rejoin the communion of the church, he shall be admitted by way of his public profession of faith after the consistory has made his repentance known to the congregation.

CONCLUDING ARTICLES

ARTICLE 80 - No lording over others

No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no office-bearer over other office-bearers.

ARTICLE 81 - Observance and revision of the Church Order

These articles, which regard the lawful order of the church, have been adopted with common accord. If the interest of the churches demands such, they may and ought to be changed, augmented or diminished. However no consistory or classis shall be permitted to do so, but they shall endeavour diligently to observe the provisions of this Church Order as long as they have not been changed by synod.

FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA SYNOD TREASURY

c/o 24 Chamberlain Way,
ARMADALE, W.A. 6112
Telephone (09) 3993305

February 26, 1994

Esteemed brothers,

Synod Treasurer's report to Synod 1994

Attached is a **STATEMENT OF EXPENDITURE AND RECEIPTS FOR THE PERIOD 1 FEBRUARY 1992 TO 22 FEBRUARY 1994.**

The books were audited by the Free Reformed Church of Kelmscott on February 26, 1994.

Expenses for Rev Fangedae and Johnson Dethan are included in the expenses for **Deputies Contact with other Churches** under the items fares, books and incidentals. The total expenditure of \$4146.68 which includes \$1950.85 from the pre-1992 Synod period has now been refunded to Synod Treasury by the Deputies as arranged.

A draft budget will be prepared and forwarded to Synod via the convening Church, when an estimate expenses has been received from all the Churches, to assist Synod in formulating the next budget.

Synod is also requested to remind delegates that **Rules for Synod Treasury** were adopted at Synod 1990 (Article 48 and Appendix K) and that all delegates should make themselves aware of the rules. Although there have been no real problems, it is noted that sometimes the rules were overlooked.

With Christian Greetings,

A. Hordyk
Synod Treasurer

FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA SYNOD TREASURY

STATEMENT OF EXPENDITURE AND RECEIPTS FOR THE PERIOD 1 FEBRUARY 1992 TO 22 FEBRUARY 1994

EXPENDITURE	BUDGET	ACTUAL
1 SYNOD COSTS		
TYPIST	\$1,500.00	\$1523.73
PHOTOCOPIER HIRE	\$500.00	\$348.30
COPY PAPER	\$100.00	\$166.00
STATIONERY ETC	\$100.00	\$0.00
EQUIPMENT INSURANCE	\$100.00	\$0.00
COMPUTER SUPPLIES	\$300.00	\$107.14
SCREEN HIRE	\$100.00	\$133.00
MEALS ETC	\$1,200.00	\$1,180.00
PRESENTATIONS	\$200.00	\$240.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$100.00	\$695.20
POSTAGE AND TELEPHONE	\$300.00	\$281.76
	\$4,500.00	\$4,675.13
2 LOSS OF INCOME		
SYNOD DELEGATES	\$3,500.00	\$3,097.00
3 TRAVEL TO SYNOD		
FROM TASMANIA	\$3,000.00	\$2,970.00
FROM ALBANY	\$160.00	\$0.00
	\$3,160.00	\$2,970.00
4 PRINTING ACTS OF SYNOD		
PRINTING	\$1,500.00	\$1,305.00
5 DEPUTIES BIBLE TRANSLATION		
BOOKS AND INCIDENTALS	\$300.00	\$211.53
6 DEPUTIES CONTACT PCEA		
BOOKS AND INCIDENTALS	\$200.00	\$228.91
TRAVEL	\$1,600.00	\$1,381.71
LOSS OF INCOME	\$1,000.00	\$0.00
	\$2,800.00	\$1,610.62
7 DEPUTIES BOOKS OF PRAISE	\$100.00	\$0.00
8 DEPUTIES CONTACT OTHER CHURCHES		
BOOKS ETC	\$200.00	\$294.07
TRAVEL COSTS PERTH/ALBANY	\$1,600.00	\$560.00
TRAVEL COSTS OVERSEAS	\$6,500.00	\$4,690.65
LOSS OF INCOME DEP OVERSEAS	\$1,000.00	\$0.00
UNA SANCTA SUBS	\$500.00	\$430.00
INCIDENTALS	\$1,200.00	\$1,338.03
ICRC COSTS	\$700.00	\$816.16
ICRC TRAVEL COSTS	\$5,000.00	\$5,038.00
ICRC LOSS INCOME DELEGATES	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
JOHNSON DETHAN FARES ADVANCE	\$1,000.00	\$1,146.95
REV FANGEDAE FARES ADVANCE	\$550.00	\$532.91
	\$20,250.00	\$14,846.77
9 DEPUTIES REVISION CHURCH ORDER		
BOOKS AND INCIDENTALS	\$100.00	\$50.00

10	DEPUTIES TRAINING MINISTRY		
	INCIDENTALS	\$100.00	\$57.65
11	CHURCH VISITS & PULPIT EXCHANGE		
	TASMANIA 4X	\$3,200.00	\$1,348.00
	ALBANY 4X	\$640.00	\$880.00
		\$3,840.00	\$2,228.00
12	TREASURY ADMINISTRATION COSTS	\$100.00	\$51.85
13	PRINTING REPORTS 92 SYNOD	\$1,000.00	\$976.60
14	SYNOD ARCHIVES		
	INCIDENTALS	\$1,500.00	\$49.20
15	DEPUTIES DIALOGUE RCA PRE 92	\$70.00	\$70.00
16	DEPUTIES CORRES EPCA PRE 92	\$100.00	\$99.90
	TOTAL EXPENDITURE	\$42,920.00	\$32,299.25
17	TREASURY OPERATING FUNDS	\$7,080.00	\$7,080.00
	TOTAL	\$50,000.00	\$39,379.25

RECEIPTS

BUDGET	ACTUAL	
FRC ALBANY	\$5,499.00	\$5,499.17
FRC ARMADALE	\$5,702.00	\$5,701.49
FRC BEDFORDALE	\$2,790.00	\$2,790.33
FRC BYFORD	\$4,235.00	\$4,234.67
FRC KELMSCOTT	\$3,875.00	\$3,874.99
FRC LAUNCESTON	\$4,015.00	\$4,015.49
FRC LEGANA	\$1,984.00	\$1,983.86
REFUNDS	\$3,800.00	\$4,578.93
INTEREST	\$500.00	\$874.36
TOTAL RECEIPTS	\$32,400.00	\$33,553.29

FUNDS STATEMENT

BALANCE AT 31 JANUARY 1992	\$17,687.70
PLUS RECEIPTS	\$33,553.29
	\$51,240.99
LESS EXPENDITURE	\$32,299.25
BALANCE AT 22 FEBRUARY 1994	\$18,941.74

FROM: FREE REFORMED CHURCH OF KELMSCOTT

TO: FRC of Byford as Calling Church for Synod 1994

28.2.1994

Dear Brothers,

As requested, we have audited the books of the Synod Treasurer. The Brother GGH Scholz and PSM VanderLecq carried out this audit on our behalf. They found everything to be correct and in good order.

With brotherly greetings,

On behalf of consistory,

Was signed: J Byl (Chairman) and PO Posthuma (Secretary)

DEPUTIES TRAINING FOR THE MINISTRY

Appointed by Synod 1992 of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia REPORT TO SYNOD 1994

Esteemed Brothers

1.0 MANDATE

Synod 1992 gave your Deputies the following mandate (Acts, Art 50):

- A. Continue our combined support for the Theological College at Hamilton, and to request the churches to forward \$ 37.50 per communicant member annually for this cause, starting the first July 1992.
- B. To collect funds for "Hamilton" and forward them to the College
- C. To encourage the churches to hold regular collections for the Theological Seminary in Pusan.
- D. To continue correspondence with both "Hamilton" and "Kampen", in order to maintain contact and to obtain information.
- E. Publish relevant information about the training for the ministry, so that the churches understand the need to support the colleges and the training of the students.
- F. Continue to arrange the support of theological students whenever required in accordance with art 19 CO.
- G. To monitor the need for theological training in Australia.
- H. To try to house theological books in a central, accessible place, where they meanwhile can be put to maximum use; also to make efforts to assemble theological books, eg. by asking for donations.

2.0 CONTACT WITH HAMILTON THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE

2.1 In compliance with Synod 1992 decision, the Deputies requested the Churches to contribute \$ 37.50 annually per confessing member towards the maintenance of the College, starting at the first of July 1992. Refer to 7.0 Finance.

2.2 On the occasion of the 1992 and 1993 Convocation, Deputies, on behalf of our Churches sent Fraternal greetings, congratulations and well wishes.

2.3 Information received via annual report 1992-93:

Some of the highlights reported on were as follows:

2.3.1 1992-93 saw the enrolment of four new students while the Master of Divinity degree could be conferred upon no less than five graduates.

Five more students were enrolled for the current academic year of which three from W.A., bringing the total number of students this year to fourteen.

2.3.2 Synod '92 of our Canadian Sister Churches appointed a number of new Governors to serve on the Board, a new Principal, Prof Geertsema for the period 1993 to 1996 and the approval of a Sabbatical policy for Professors, in an effort to provide them with opportunity and a stimulus to publish.

2.3.3 On the fourth of March 1993, the Lord took to Himself Prof L Selles, Prof of NT at the College when its doors were first opened in Sept. 1969.

3.0 CONTACT WITH THEOLOGISCHE UNIVERSITEIT KAMPEN

During the past term contact with "Kampen" remained limited to receipt of its 1993 Yearbook.

4.0 FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN PUSAN

In compliance with mandate item no 10b, the Churches were requested to hold regular collections for the Seminary in Pusan.

5.0 FINANCIAL AID TO STUDENTS

5.1 Synod 1992 decided to attribute secondary responsibility to the home church of the eligible student, meaning that the church of which the student was a member at the commencement of his theological studies becomes responsible for his financial support after the family but before the Federation of Churches.

Consequently, despite the fact that three new students entered the training for the ministry, no new applications were received by your Deputies during the past term. We did however receive renewed applications from Br Johan Plug for the academic years 1992-93 and 1993-94. As Synod 1992 spoke of the Church federation as a whole as being responsible for the financial support of this student and his family (refer Acts 92 recommendation 8), Deputies deemed these applications appropriate and decided not to retrospectively apply the above mentioned synod decision to Br Plug, but to approve both applications and assess the Churches accordingly. As with previous applications, we based assessments on church membership figures, as the Churches were already committed to Br Plug's support prior to 1992. It was and is our conviction that following Synod 1992 any local Church in considering an application from a student for support at secondary level, should bear (or have borne) in mind its prior commitment to Br Plug. This approach in our opinion by no means contravenes the accepted recommendation 5 Acts Synod 1992. "Albany", after having considered and granted support for a new student at secondary level, registered its objection to Deputies' assessment for 1993-94. Appealing to the above mentioned recommendation 5 Albany's Consistory reasoned that, as it now had a student to support at secondary level, the Church at Albany ought no longer to be burdened with any assessment in aid of Br Plug. Consequently, at the time of this writing, additional funds are being sought from the remaining Churches, in order to honour our obligation to Br Plug.

Financial aid rendered to Br Plug and his family remained at \$ 23,000.00 (Aust) both for the academic year 1992-93 and 1994-95, comprising \$11,000.00 for the student and 12,000.00 for his family.

5.2 Following Synod 92, Deputies wrote to the various aspiring students, explaining the practical consequences of its decisions. Subsequently, meetings were requested by several young Brothers in order to seek further clarification on several points. These meetings served to highlight certain inadequacies and inconsistencies in the regulations for financial support, and in the acts of Synod 1992. Allow us to briefly spell these out for your consideration.

1. It would appear that an inconsistency exists between consideration 7a and the accepted recommendations (Acts 92). Whilst the consideration appears to speak favourably concerning support for a married couple under "normal" circumstances, the recommendation limits this support to exceptional cases only. We would recommend that Synod delete Art. 7 of the Regulations for the financial aid of Students. This will in turn allow local Churches as well as Deputies if necessary to put into practice Synod 92's intention as expressed in its consideration 7a, namely to lend support also to the wife of a married student.

2. In connection with the terms for financial support and the conditions for repayment thereof, we propose that Synod amend Art. 19c of the Regulations for the financial aid of students, to read as follows:

"c. The student, after having completed the course of his studies, does not within 2 years make himself available for call by one of the Churches mentioned in Art.1."

This will allow especially very young graduates, to further prepare for the ministry in a practical way (eg. by teaching at a school, by additional studies, or simply by obtaining some life experience through holding any job in the workforce).

6.0 PUBLICITY

Appropriate information received from "Hamilton" was passed on to the membership via an article in Una Sancta volxxxx no 23 p 433.

7.0 FINANCE

7.1 Support Theological College Hamilton

Refer appendix A

7.2 Support Br J Plug

Refer appendix B

8.0 THEOLOGICAL TRAINING AND LIBRARY IN AUSTRALIA

In monitoring the need for Australian based theological training, we have had to come to the same conclusion as that recorded in our report to Synod 1992, namely that the status quo has remained unaltered. Therefore at present there exists no need to establish theological training in Australia. We do not envisage any change in circumstances for the foreseeable future. Concerning the establishing of a Theological Library, Synod 1992, in its considerations spoke of housing books in a central accessible place like the Armadale JC Senior High School Library. Deputies during their previous term already pursued this option. However their request was not granted. On account of this reason and because Australian based theological training is not likely to become reality in the foreseeable future, Deputies admit to not having concentrated their efforts on initiating a Theological Library.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Deputies recommend that:

1 Synod delete Art.7 of the Regulations for the financial aid of students

2 Synod amend Art.19c of the same Regulations to read as follows: "The Student, after having completed the course of his studies, does not within 2 years make himself available for call by one of the Churches mentioned in Art.1."

3 Synod decide to assess the churches \$ 38.00 per communicant member per annum for the maintenance of the Theological College in Hamilton as from the first of July 1994.

4 Synod decide to discharge Deputies and to appoint new Deputies with the mandate to:

A. Collect funds for "Hamilton" and forward them to the college.

B. Encourage the Churches to hold regular collections for the Theological Seminary in Pusan.

C. Continue correspondence with both "Hamilton" and "Kampen" in order to maintain contact and to obtain information.

D. Publish relevant information about the training for the ministry, so that the Churches understand the need to support the Colleges and the training of the students.

E. Continue to arrange the support of Theological Students whenever required in accordance with Art. 19 CO.

With Brotherly greetings

The Deputies: Rev A Van Delden J A Bolhuis A VanLeeuwen A T Schiebaan

APPENDIX A**THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE****STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS
March '92 to March '94**

Opening Balance	\$21295.07
Receipts	
Albany	25700.00
Armada	20532.50
Bedford	10963.75
Byford	15581.50
Kelmscott	15208.75
Launceston	13826.25
Legana	5707.25
Rockingham	2512.50
Interest	1453.53
Total Receipts	\$132781.10
Payments	
College	131525.00
PBS Loss	894.81
Bank Charges	96.62
Total payments	\$132516.43
BALANCE	\$264.67

APPENDIX B

As indicated to Synod 1992, a loss was anticipated with the collapse of the Permanent Building Society wherein the funds for the Theological College had been deposited. All but \$894.81 of the \$20,478.58 was retrieved.

DEPUTIES TRAINING FOR THE MINISTRY

Chairman: Rev A VanDelden, 62 Henrietta Ave, Armadale, WA, 6112

Secretary: A Schiebaan, 8 Haslemere Drive, Armadale, WA, 6112

Treasurer for Hamilton College: A Van Delden, 62 Henrietta Ave, Armadale, WA, 6112

Treasurer for Needy Students: J A Bolhuis, 12 Bedfordale Hill Road, Armadale, 6112

Member: A Van Leeuwen, 48 Henrietta Ave, Armadale, WA, 6112

Financial Statement regarding Needy Students Fund

	Asssed	Received	Amount Due/Credit
F.R.C. of Albany 1992/1993	4,501.10	5,001.10	500.00 (credit)
F.R.C. of Armadale 1992/1993	4,666.70	4,666.70	0.00
F.R.C. of Bedfordale 1992/1993	2,283.90	2,283.90	0.00
F.R.C. of Byford 1992/1993	3,466.10	3,466.22	20.12 (credit)
F.R.C. of Kelmscott 1992/1993	3,171.70	3,171.70	0.00
F.R.C. of Launceston 1992/1993	3,286.70	3,286.70	0.00
F.R.C. of Legana 1992/1993	1,623.80	1,623.80	0.00

Special payments were requested because of the frozen funds held in the Perth Building Society Account.

	Requested	Received	Date
F.R.C. of Albany	1,750	1,750	28.8.92
F.R.C. of Armadale	2,170	2,170	6.4.92
F.R.C. of Bedfordale	1,120	1,120	15.4.92
F.R.C. of Byford	1,350	1,350	30.6.92
F.R.C. of Kelmscott	1,490	1,490	1.4.92
F.R.C. of Launceston	1,610	1,610	20.7.92
F.R.C. of Legana	510	510	22.4.92

	Assessed	ReceivedAmount	Due/Credit
F.R.C. of Albany 1993/1994	3,117.40	Nil	
F.R.C. of Armadale 1993/1994	2,728.50	2,728.50	0.00
F.R.C. of Bedfordale 1993/1994	1,677.90	1,375.50	302.40 (due)
F.R.C. of Byford 1993/1994	1,486.00	1,081.10	404.90 (due)
F.R.C. of Kelmscott 1993/1994	2,407.00	1,960.00	447.00 (due)
F.R.C. of Launceston 1993/1994	1,950.40	2,000.00	49.60 (credit)
F.R.C. of Legana 1993/1994	1,412.50	1,274.80	137.70 (due)
F.R.C. of Rockingham 1993/1994	1,058.00	1,058.00	0.00

Note 1: Discrepancy between amounts assessed and received due to impression given that 100% of frozen funds had been returned, amounting to a full credit of special payments. However, only 73% was returned.

Note 2: F.R.C. of Albany advised us that they were unable to pay assessed amount as they had assumed secondary responsibility for a student from their midst. We were advised that they were not going to request a refund of the \$500 credit, neither of the 73% of special payment.

Account Register with A.N.Z.

Date	Description	Receipts	Disbursements	Balance
05.02.92	Balance brought forward	2,627.16		2,627.16
25.02.92	Outstanding Legana 1991/1992	561.00		3,188.16
02.04.92	Interest	13.38		3,201.54
02.04.92	State Duty		4.92	3,196.62
06.04.92	Special payment Armadale	2,170.00		6,856.62
15.04.92	Special payment Bedfordale	1,120.00		7,976.62
22.04.92	Special payment Legana	510.00		8,486.62
08.05.92	Payment to J Plug		5,000.00	3,486.62
08.05.92	Transaction Fees		25.00	3,461.62
30.06.92	Interest	56.34		3,517.96
30.06.92	State Duty		3.20	3,514.76
30.06.92	Special payment Byford	1,350.00		4,864.76
20.07.92	Special payment Launceston	1,610.00		6,474.76
20.07.92	Payment Byford	3,692.50		10,167.26
31.07.92	Payment to J Plug		7,000.00	3,167.26
31.07.92	Transaction Fees		25.00	3,142.26
03.08.92	Payment Bedfordale	2,283.90		5,426.16
19.08.92	Payment Kelmscott	3,171.70		8,597.86
25.08.92	Payment Legana	811.90		9,409.76
28.08.92	Special payment Albany	1,750.00		11,159.76
21.09.92	Interest	49.94		11,209.70
21.09.92	State Duty		11.40	11,198.30
21.09.92	Payment Armadale	2,500.00		13,698.30
22.09.92	Payment Armadale	2,501.10		16,199.40
23.09.92	Payment Byford	1,734.05		17,933.45
14.10.92	Payment Launceston	3,286.70		21,220.15
16.12.92	Interest	186.03		21,406.18
16.12.92	State Duty		9.79	21,396.39
16.12.92	Payment Albany	2,500.00		23,896.39
22.12.92	Payment from PBS	7,587.21		31,483.60
24.12.92	Payment to J Plug		23,000.00	8,483.60
24.12.92	Transaction fees		25.00	8,458.60
05.01.93	Payment Legana	811.90		9,270.50
25.01.93	Payment Byford	1,752.17		11,022.67
15.03.93	Interest	132.25		11,154.92
15.03.93	State Duty		7.78	11,147.14
15.03.93	Payment Armadale	2,166.70		13,313.84
07.05.93	Payment from Byford of 20-7-92 credited to Hamilton account		3,692.50	9,621.34
10.09.93	Interest	95.22		9,716.56
10.09.93	State Duty		1.34	9,715.22
10.09.93	Interest	32.93		9,748.15
10.09.93	State Duty		0.01	9,748.14
10.09.93	Interest	11.02		9,759.16
10.09.93	State Duty		0.01	9,759.15
10.09.93	Payment to J Plug		8,000.00	1,759.15
10.09.93	Transaction fees		27.00	1,732.15
17.09.93	Payment Bedfordale	1,375.50		3,107.65
27.09.93	Payment Rockingham	1,058.00		4,165.65
27.09.93	Payment Armadale	2,728.50		6,894.15
19.10.93	Payment Kelmscott	1,960.00		8,854.15
19.10.93	Payment Byford	1,081.10		9,935.25
05.11.93	Payment Legana	1,274.80		11,210.05
05.11.93	State Duty		4.95	11,205.10

05.11.93	Interest	52.63		11,257.73
21.01.94	Payment to J Plug		10,000.00	1,257.73
21.01.94	Transaction Fees		27.00	1,230.73
16.03.94	State Duty		0.81	1,229.92
16.03.94	Interest	69.66		1,299.58
16.03.94	Payment Launceston	2,000.00		3,299.58

Respectfully submitted,
J A Bolhuis

To Synod 1994

15 March 1994

Report on audit of the books of Deputies for Training for the Ministry.

An audit was carried out on these books, extending over the period 1 July 1993 to 9 March 1994, with satisfactory results.

Respectfully submitted:

A VanDelden (chairman)

J Eikelboom (secretary)

APPENDIX C

Letter from the Free Reformed Church of Legana re: Presbyterian Churches

Outreach Drive
c/o P O Legana 7277
AUSTRALIA

To Synod 1994 of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia
c/o Free Reformed Church of Byford
P O Box 24, BYFORD WA 6201

5 May 1994

Subject: Recognition of the PCEA

Dear brothers

The Consistory of the Free Reformed Church of Legana observes that the deputies for contact with the PCEA state that they, having regard to Article 67 of the FRCA Synod Acts 1985, are not in a position to recommend to Synod that the PCEA should be recognised as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ at this point but consider that the areas of concern should be further studied and discussed.

The consistory considers the following:

1. Synod 1990 considered that "it is clear that the four areas (of concern) as listed by Synod 1987 (Article 115, Consideration 8) were the primary areas which needed to be cleared up before the PCEA could be recognised as a true and faithful church." (Article 77, Consideration 5). Those areas of concern were: the fencing of the Lord's table, pulpit exchanges, children in the covenant and the problem of adherents.
2. Since Synod 1990 the subject of adherents is no longer considered a problem in our contacts with the PCEA. Further clarification from the side of the PCEA has cleared up the matter (cf Acts 1990 Synod Page 182).
3. The FRCA have never stated, as a foregone conclusion, that practices and views of the PCEA regarding the remaining areas of concern are impediments for recognition. The last two Synods instructed their deputies to "continue to study and discuss further with the PCEA the remaining areas of concern..." Further study and discussion would have to clear up the issues.
4. Further discussion on pulpit exchange and fencing of the Lord's table have shown that the PCEA seeks to do justice to the biblical teaching on the communion of saints. They are convinced that their practices proceed from the Word of God. In their recent reply (dated 1.12.1993) the deputies from the PCEA state as their conviction that the issues which have been raised by the FRCA with the PCEA "do not relate to the PCEA's confessional commitment to the teaching of Scripture as summarised in the 'whole doctrine' of the Westminster Confession of Faith" but only to her application in practice of what she believes is God's will for his church.
5. Serious study and consideration of the PCEA practices do show the following:
 - a. The PCEA does take great care to guard the purity of the doctrine. This is shown in the way the PCEA receives, supervises and licenses students of theology, in the subscription formula for all licensees and office-bearers (cf The Handbook of Practice & Procedure of the PCEA). When occasionally the pulpit is opened to men from outside the own church, this is done with caution at the discretion of the local minister, who is answerable to his Presbytery for his exercise of this liberty.

b. The PCEA also guards the holiness of the table of the Lord. At every celebration of the Lord's Supper, the qualifications for partaking are carefully spelled out to discourage unworthy partakers. Visitors from other churches are not admitted unless the pastor or session has spoken to them.

6. The PCEA deputies have as yet not responded to our discussion paper on the position of children in the covenant. From the Standing Committee Reports to Synod Taree 1993 and from the decisions of that Synod it became clear, however, that the PCEA is conscious of its responsibility towards the children of the church. Synod decided "That concerted effort be made by church ministry and parental oversight to bring up our young people in the knowledge of scripture and with a clear understanding and appreciation of the distinctive principles of our church. And that to this end, greater use be made of repetition work set by the church each year." (Synod Minutes 93.44[4]).

In the latest commentary on the Westminster Confession Rowland S Ward (at 25.II) stresses that the children of the faithful are also members of the church. He quotes the Westminster Directory for Public Worship (January 1645): "The promise is made to believers and their seed, and the seed and posterity of the faithful, born within the church, have by birth, interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it." Rev Ward comments: "Presbyterians, possibly because of a certain application of the visible/invisible church distinction, have usually only reckoned church membership by communicants. However, the baptised but not yet professing members of the church should also be recorded on the church membership roll as is the practice of Reformed churches in Europe."

From the above it is clear that the position of the children in the covenant is receiving attention within the PCEA. Further discussion between the FRCA and the PCEA on this matter could certainly be beneficial, especially in the light of the heritage of the FRCA in this regard.

7. Synod 1992 instructed deputies: "In this discussion about the areas of concern the confession of the doctrine of the church should be addressed when applicable. Due attention must be given to our concern about possible unscriptural concepts regarding interdenominationalism."

a. In response to the discussion paper on Pluriformity and Denominationalism the PCEA Inter Church Relations Committee reported to its 1993 Synod: "We are ready to acknowledge that denominationalism as described on page 2 of the paper is unscriptural and productive of many evils. It is precisely because we are obliged to adhere to the whole counsel of God that we maintain our distinct position."

b. Earlier writings from the side of the PCEA indicate that it was not fair of previous deputies to report to Synod 1992 that the PCEA is 'sick with the ailment of pluriformity'. Already in 1987 the PCEA indicated that it agreed with Prof. J. Murray's objection to defining the church in terms of invisible/visible. In its report to its 1991 Synod the PCEA Inter Church Relations Committee wrote: "we do not embrace 'pluriformity' as a biblical concept, if by this is meant that the church exists in the world in a static way, distributed among the many 'impure' churches. The call of Christ to be visibly one is a call we must continually hear and obey." Going by Rev Gadsby's letter to the FRCA deputies dated 6 November 1990 the PCEA does recognise that the true church of Christ may take on a variety of outward 'forms' depending on cultural, and theological factors. This 'pluriformity' is therefore a 'pluriformity' within the true church. It is considered to be a result of sin and imperfection and not an applaudable development as A Kuyper saw it. It should also be noted that the PCEA does not wish to sanction heresy or deformation. Its history and documents clearly witness to this. The PCEA wishes to take Christ's call to be holy seriously. It continues to exist as a separate 'denomination' because of its commitment to the whole doctrine of salvation as summarised in its subordinate standards. When called upon or when appropriate it will point out and denounce the errors of other churches. (cf Rev Gadsby's letter dated 10 December 1991).

c. The main difference between the FRCA and the PCEA on the doctrine of the

church is not the matter of 'pluriformity' or 'denominationalism'. It is the question when - at what point of time - one may call a church false. It is striking that the PCEA representatives continually stress that they are not prepared to 'write off' or to 'unchurch' other evangelical churches as synagogues of Satan, even while they point out and denounce their errors. This is reiterated in the recent letter deputies received from the PCEA Inter-Church Relations Committee. They write: "We will extend formal recognition to those churches where it is wise and practical to do so, but we do not readily brand any Christian church as 'false', ie. as having 'so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan.'"

d. The difference between the FRCA and the PCEA on the doctrine of the church appears to be a matter of application of the biblical norms, as the PCEA deputies themselves have again indicated in their recent letter (cf above under 4). At the Melbourne meeting of 3-4 March 1987 that conclusion was already drawn. The FRCA deputies reported to Synod 1987 as follows: "It was clearly stated by PCEA delegates, meanwhile, that they stick to the wellknown three marks of the true church for the evaluation of other churches. Our conclusion was that at this point there are no fundamental differences between both churches, though the moment at which we adjudge the 'impurity' to make a church a false church may vary." Further study and discussion on this matter would certainly be appropriate.

8. Even though the study and discussion of the remaining areas of concern have not been finalised and the PCEA has not been convinced by our argumentation, we need to apply the marks of the church as mentioned in Art 29 BC to see whether we can recognise the PCEA as true church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9. From previous deputies reports, from the report from our Dutch deputies and from own experience it is clear that the preaching is Scriptural. Even though the experiential element receives more attention than we are used to, the redemptive historical element is not forgotten. Because of the presence of many who come from outside the preaching does seem to emphasise more strongly the call to repentance.

10. The issue of the occasional pulpit exchange with ministers from other 'evangelical' churches should remain a matter of discussion but should not be elevated to an impediment to recognition. Under 5 it has been shown that the PCEA does take great care to guard the purity of the doctrine. One must remember that such pulpit exchanges are not the rule but the exception and that caution is taken. It is true that we would like to see them act with even more caution in this regard but one cannot conclude from this practice that the PCEA would be unscriptural and thus unfaithful.

11. The Holy Baptism is administered in a scriptural manner. Even though the position of children in the covenant doesn't seem to have been thought through as intensively as occurred in the struggle of the Dutch churches during the first half of this century, the Confession and the questions asked at the baptism of infants indicate that they do believe that the children belong to the covenant and that those children need to be instructed in the Christian doctrine. At this point the FRCA could certainly help the PCEA to come to a further understanding and application of this doctrine. This further understanding and application must, however, not be treated as a prerequisite for recognition. Just as true believers all must go through a process of growth in knowledge and faith so all true churches are involved in such a process. (cf Eph 4:13- 16). Faithfulness to Scripture does not imply a perfect knowledge and understanding of Scripture.

12. The Lord's Supper is celebrated in a scriptural manner. Regarding the practice of admitting visitors from other evangelical churches we would indeed like to see the PCEA act more cautiously in exercising the collective responsibility for the holiness of the Lord's table. One cannot say, however, that their practice is unscriptural. They do take care that no person known to be delinquent in doctrine or life be permitted to the table and the qualifications for partaking are carefully spelled out to discourage unworthy partakers. This is their application of Scriptural principles. At the same time we must realise that the application of those principles in the FRCA is not perfect either. Our system of attestations can also be misused so that those who should not partake still do partake.

13. The PCEA does exercise church discipline in order to correct and punish sins. See the general principles and practices in the Handbook of Practice & Procedure of the PCEA.

14. Recognition must take place on the basis of God's Word and not on the basis of practices or further insights which have grown in the history of a particular federation of churches. We must not bind beyond Scripture. The history of the Liberation of 1944 has brought home this lesson to us in a painful way. One must take into account that God goes his own way with his churches in the different countries. Each church has its own history. Richer insights at certain points should not become obstacles but should stimulate us to humbly and cheerfully share those riches.

15. Tolerating certain practices within the PCEA has nothing to do with humanist tolerance. It is clear that the PCEA sincerely wishes to maintain the Christian doctrine and to reject all things contrary to it. Prof J Kamphuis writes: "True tolerance does not aim at making human margins as wide as possible, but it aims at the good progress of the Word of God and of Christian doctrine, both in the life of the church as a community and in the life of the individual believers. And here is the blessed work of the Holy Spirit. Christian tolerance is only possible through confidence in the progress of this work." (Remarks on Church and Tolerance, p.9).

16. It is clear that the PCEA is convinced that its practices proceed from the Word of God. It is a matter of faith to them. Therefore we must treat the PCEA practices with respect and sensitivity.

17. The practices of pulpit exchange and admission to the Lord's Supper do seem to be related to a different emphasis in and application of the doctrine of the church (cf 7 above). This matter still needs further study and discussion both within the FRCA and with the PCEA. At the same time one must keep the difference in its right perspective.

a. In 1892 the churches from the 'Afscheiding' and from the 'Doleantie' united on the basis of Scripture and Confession despite the fact that there was a different emphasis and application of the doctrine of the church between those two church groups. Prof K Schilder remarked that he could live in one church together with for instance adherents to the concept of pluriformity of the church (although he opposed such ideas all his life), but the problem was that they could not do that with him (In a 1952 article reprinted in K Schilder, *De Kerk*, III (1965), pp. 486, 491). If such differences are tolerable within the one bond of churches surely we should be prepared to tolerate the differences with the PCEA in the light of their history. Prof M te Velde writes that church-unity may only be refused on issues for which one would also be allowed to break the unity of the church (*De Reformatie*, Vol 68.3, Oct 17, 1992).

b. Regarding the matter of 'unchurching' other evangelical churches' it is good to remind ourselves of what Synod 1990 stated in Art 77, consideration 12:

In maintaining the confession concerning the distinction between a "true and false church" we may not overlook the fact that true churches can often be guilty of grave errors. We may remember God's chosen people Israel in the old dispensation. Though they often grieved the Lord with their corporate sins He nevertheless continued to call them after His name for a long time. Though Paul writes to "the church of God which is at Corinth" God had many things to allege against them. It was far from being the kind of holy church with which the Lord was pleased, yet Christ does not condemn here as a "synagogue of Satan", i.e. a false church.

Among the "seven churches that are in Asia" (Revelation 1-3) there were varying degrees of shortcomings and errors. Some were diligent in maintaining one or more of the 'marks of the church' yet were guilty of grievous faults. It was not only a matter of individual sins but of collective culpability.

Of all these churches it must be said however that they would have become false churches if they did not listen to the admonitions of Paul and Jesus Christ."

18. Proverbs 11:14 teaches us: "Where there is no guidance a people falls; but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety." It is striking that all our sister churches

and the churches with whom we have contact advise us not to treat the differences with the PCEA as impediments but to discuss those issues on the basis of mutual recognition as true churches. Should we not give heed to that advice?

19. Recognition of the PCEA would be consistent with previous Synod decisions to recognise the FCS and the EPCI. Those churches have similar practices, yet the FRCA have continually confirmed their decision to recognise them. Reformed churches have never demanded full agreement on all points before recognition could take place.

20. In the Church Order the Reformed Churches have always indicated that they will not reject other churches on minor points of Church Order and ecclesiastical practice. (cf art 46 of the provisionally adopted text of the Church Order).

21. One must not forget that the PCEA also has its concerns about practices which are common in the FRCA. Those practices relate to liturgy (the singing of hymns and the use of musical instruments) and lifestyle. Yet they do not consider them as impediments to recognition of the FRCA.

22. Synod 1985 declared: that our recognition of another Church as being "true and faithful Church of the Lord Jesus Christ"

1. means that both our churches, and that recognised church, stand on the foundations as expressed in Articles 27 to 32 of the Belgic Confession;

Seeing the WCF, to which the PCEA adheres, and the PCEA form of church government have been recognised as Reformed, one can say that the PCEA stands on the same foundation as expressed in articles 27 to 32 of the Belgic Confession. (cf Acts 1990, art 77, consid 17-22).

23. Synod 1985 also recognised "that historical developments may well give cause to several stumbling blocks still lying on the road to a practical realisation of unity." In light of the different history and culture of the PCEA and the FRCA much patience and sensitivity will be required in working towards closer unity. Striving at this point of time already for full unity would be destructive and cause much unrest in both bonds of churches. Wisdom requires that we maintain the two bonds of churches and build up a constructive relationship on the basis of mutual recognition. "Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual up building." (Romans 14:19).

24. Recognition of a church does not mean that we accept all the views and practices of that church. What is tolerable in one church in the light of its history is not necessarily tolerable in another church. Think of the differences of opinion and practice between the Jerusalem church and the churches in Asia Minor. Besides we may not just ignore the insights into Scripture we gained through history but we are obliged to joyfully share them with others in a relationship of mutual trust and acceptance.

25. Even though the study and discussion of the remaining areas of concern has not been finalised further study and discussion has cleared up the issues to the degree that it has become clear that the remaining concerns should not be treated as impediments to recognition. On the basis of the above there is every reason to proceed with the recognition of the PCEA and to continue the study and discussion on that basis.

The Consistory of the Free Reformed Church of Legana therefore proposes:

1. With thanks to the Lord for his work of preservation Synod recognises that the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia is a true and faithful church.
2. Synod instructs new deputies to use the current rules for sister churches in the discussions leading to the establishment of sister relations.
3. Synod instructs deputies to continue, for the mutual benefit of both federations of churches, to study and discuss the remaining areas of concern.

With brotherly greetings,
on behalf of the consistory,

SIGNED by: C Kleyn, chairman

SIGNED by: P VanderBurgh, secretary

FROM: CONSISTORY FREE REFORMED CHURCH LEGANA

TO: CONSISTORY FREE REFORMED CHURCH BYFORD
(calling church Synod 1994)

**Minutes of special meeting called by the consistory
FREE REFORMED CHURCH LEGANA,
acting as classis church.**

DATE: Tuesday 28th December 1993

TIME: 8 pm

PLACE: Legana church building.

PURPOSE: approbation of call extended to the Rev. F.J. van Hulst by the Free Reformed Church at Launceston.

OPENING: Chairman Rev. C. Kleyn reads from scripture 1 Timothy chapter 4, requests the singing of Psalm 111:1,5 and leads in prayer.

Chairman speaks a word of welcome. Present are the consistory of the Free Reformed Church, Legana, the Rev.'s G. van Rongen and F.J. van Hulst and five members of the Launceston consistory.

Examination of the required documents takes place. The brothers M. Mol and S. Reitsema are appointed.

1. the letter of call
2. the letter of acceptance of the call
3. the certificate of dismissal from the church last served by the minister, Rev. F.J. van Hulst.
4. the certificate of dismissal from the classis to which the church last served by the minister Rev. F.J. van Hulst, belongs
5. a certificate from the calling church that the necessary public announcements were made.

All documents are present and are verified.

Colloquium: The Rev.'s C. Kleyn and G. van Rongen engage in a discussion on doctrine and church government with the Rev. F.J. van Hulst.

Others are given the opportunity to participate in this discussion.

Evaluation takes place by the consistory of Legana, during which the Rev. van Hulst is requested to leave the meeting.

After the evaluation the Rev. C. Kleyn makes a public announcement on the outcome. He expresses thankfulness for the positive result and wishes the Rev. van Hulst strength and wisdom and refers to parts of earlier scripture reading.

The Rev. van Hulst is then asked to sign the subscription form for minister so the Word.

A brief report of the meeting are read and adopted. (A copy to be sent to Synod Byford 1994).

After signing Hymn 64:1,2 brother M. Mol leads in prayer and thanksgiving. Chairman Rev. C. Kleyn closes the meeting at 9.35pm.

for the consistory:

SIGNED by: Rev. C. Kleyn, chairman

SIGNED by: S. Reitsema, clerk

Classis - 292

APPENDIX D

Church Order of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia

AS ADOPTED AT THE 1994 SYNOD OF BYFORD

Articles in italic print are in force until classis have been formed

INTRODUCTION

ARTICLE 1 - Purpose and Division

For the maintenance of good order in the church of Christ it is necessary to have:
I offices and supervision of doctrine;

II assemblies;

III worship, sacraments and ceremonies, and

IV discipline.

I. OFFICES AND SUPERVISION OF DOCTRINE

ARTICLE 2 - The offices

The offices are those of the minister of the Word, of the elder, and of the deacon.

ARTICLE 3 - The calling to office

A. All office bearers

No one shall take any office upon himself without having been lawfully called thereto. The calling to office shall take place by the consistory with the deacons, with the cooperation of the congregation, after prayer, and in accordance with the local regulations adopted for that purpose. Prior to the ordination or installation the names of the appointed brothers shall be publicly announced to the congregation for its approval on at least two consecutive Sundays. If no lawful objection is brought forward the ordination or installation shall take place with the use of the adopted Form.

B. Elders and deacons

The consistory with the deacons shall give the congregation the opportunity to draw the attention of the consistory to brothers deemed suitable for the respective offices. The consistory with the deacons shall present to the congregation at the most twice as many candidates as there are vacancies to be filled. From this number the congregation shall choose as many office-bearers as are needed. Those elected shall be appointed by the consistory with the deacons.

If necessary the consistory and the deacons may present to the congregation the same number of candidates as there are vacancies.

C. Ministers

Before a vacant church extends a call the advice of the counsellor shall be sought. The approval of classis shall be required for a repeated call to the same minister for the same vacancy.

C. Ministers

Before a vacant church extends a call the advice of the counsellor shall be sought. The approval of the classis church shall be required for a repeated call to the same minister for the same vacancy.

ARTICLE 4 - Bound to a church

No one shall serve in the ministry unless he is bound to a certain church.

ARTICLE 5 - Eligibility for the ministry

A. Eligibility

Only those shall be called to the office of minister of the Word who

- (1) have been declared eligible for call by the churches; or
- (2) are already serving in that capacity in one of the churches; or
- (3) have been declared eligible or are serving in one of the churches with which the Free Reformed Churches of Australia maintain a sister relationship. The churches shall observe the general ecclesiastical ordinances for the eligibility of those ministers who have served in these sister-churches.

B. Declared eligible

Only those shall be declared eligible for call within the churches who

- (1) have passed a preparatory examination by the classis in which they live, which examination shall not take place unless those presenting themselves for it submit the necessary documents to prove that they are members in good standing of one of the churches and have successfully completed a course of study as required by the churches; or

(1) have passed a preparatory examination by the synod, which examination shall not take place unless those presenting themselves for it submit the necessary documents to prove that they are members in good standing of one of the churches and have successfully completed a course of study as required by the churches; or

- (2) have satisfied the requirements of Article 8; or
- (3) have satisfied the requirements of Article 9.

ARTICLE 6 - Ordination and installation of ministers of the Word

A. Regarding those who have not served in the ministry before, the following shall be observed:

1. They shall be ordained only after classis has approved the call.

1. They shall be ordained only after synod has approved the call.

Classis shall approve the call

Synod shall approve the call

- a. upon satisfactory testimony concerning the soundness of doctrine and conduct of the candidate, attested by the consistory of the church to which he belongs; and
- b. following a peremptory examination of the candidate with satisfactory results. This classis examination shall take place with the cooperation and concurring advice of deputies of synod.

b. following a peremptory examination of the candidate by Synod with satisfactory results.

2. For the ordination they shall also show to the consistory good testimonials concerning their doctrine and conduct from the church(es) to which they have belonged since their preparatory examination.

B. Regarding those who are serving in the ministry the following shall be observed: They shall be installed after classis has approved the call.

They shall be installed after the classis church has approved the call.

1. For this approval as well as for the installation the minister shall show good testimonials concerning his doctrine and conduct, together with a declaration from the consistory with the deacons and from classis that he has been honourably discharged from his service in that church and classis, or from the church only in case he remains within the same classis.

1. For this approval as well as for the installation the minister shall show good testimonials concerning his doctrine and conduct, together with a declaration of honourable discharge from the consistory with the deacons and from the classis church.

2. For the approval of a call of those who are serving in one of the churches with which the Free Reformed Churches of Australia maintain a sister relationship a colloquium shall be required which will deal especially with the doctrine and polity of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

C. The approval of a call shall require written certification by the calling church that the required announcements were made and that the congregation has approved the call.

ARTICLE 7 - From one church to another

A minister once lawfully called shall not leave the church to which he is bound to take up the ministry elsewhere without the consent of his consistory with the deacons and the approval of classis. Likewise, no church shall receive him unless he has presented a proper certificate of release from the church and the classis where he served, or from the church only if he remains within the same classis.

A minister once lawfully called shall not leave the church to which he is bound to take up the ministry elsewhere without the consent of his consistory with the deacons and the approval of the classis church. Likewise, no church shall receive him unless he has presented a proper certificate of release from the church he served.

ARTICLE 8 - Exceptional gifts

Persons who have not pursued the regular course of theological study shall not be admitted to the ministry unless there is convincing evidence of their exceptional gifts of godliness, humility, modesty, good intellect, and discretion, as well as the gift of public speech. When any such person presents himself for the ministry, classis shall (with synod's prior approval) examine him, and upon a favourable outcome allow him as candidate to speak an edifying word in the churches of the classis for a set period of time. Thereafter the classis shall further deal with him as it shall deem edifying, observing the ecclesiastical regulations adopted for this purpose.

Persons who have not pursued the regular course of theological study shall not be admitted to the ministry unless there is convincing evidence of their exceptional gifts of godliness, humility, modesty, good intellect, and discretion, as well as the gift of public speech. When any such person presents himself for the ministry the classis church shall seek to obtain this evidence by way of inquiry from the church to which he belongs, and from elsewhere if necessary. The examination shall take place in a synod (extraordinary if necessary). This synod shall set a period during which the person may, as candidate speak an edifying word in the churches of the classis area. Thereafter the classis church, with the advice of deputies of synod, shall further deal with him as it shall deem edifying, observing of the ecclesiastical regulations adopted for this purpose.

ARTICLE 9 - Admission of ministers who have recently joined the church

A minister of the Word who has recently joined one of the churches and originates from a church with which the churches do not maintain a sister relationship shall only be admitted to the ministry with great caution. He shall not be declared eligible for call within the churches unless he has been well tested for a reasonable period of time and carefully examined by the classis in whose area he lives. This classis examination shall be conducted with the cooperation of the deputies of synod.

A minister of the Word who has recently joined one of the churches and originates from a church with which the churches do not maintain a sister relationship shall only be admitted to the ministry with great caution. He shall not be declared eligible for call within the churches unless he has been well tested for a reasonable period of time and carefully examined by synod (extraordinary if necessary).

ARTICLE 10 - Officiating in another church

No one shall preach the Word or administer the sacraments in another church without the permission of the consistory of that church.

ARTICLE 11 - Proper support

The consistory, with the deacons, on behalf of the congregation which it represents in this matter, shall provide for the proper support of its minister(s).

ARTICLE 12 - Call to an extraordinary task

If a minister accepts a call or an appointment to an extraordinary task the nature of the relationship between him and the church to which he is bound must be arranged with the consent of the classis. Some ministers may be appointed for the training of students for the ministry, others may be called for mission work.

If a minister accepts a call or an appointment to an extraordinary task the nature of the relationship between him and the church to which he is bound must be arranged with the consent of the classis church. Some ministers may be appointed for the training of students for the ministry, others may be called for mission work.

ARTICLE 13 - Retirement of ministers

If a minister of the Word, by reason of age, sickness or otherwise, is rendered incapable of performing the duties of his office he shall retain the honour and title of minister of the Word. He shall also retain his official bond with the church which he served last, and this church shall provide honourably for his support. The same obligation exists towards a minister's widow and orphans.

ARTICLE 14 - Dismissal

The consistory with the deacons shall not dismiss a minister from his bond with the congregation without approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of synod.

The consistory with the deacons shall not dismiss a minister from his bond with the congregation without approval of the classis church and the concurring advice of the deputies of synod.

ARTICLE 15 - Bound for life

A minister of the Word, once lawfully called, is bound to the service of the church for life and therefore not allowed to enter upon another vocation unless it be for exceptional and substantial reasons. The decision of his consistory to relieve him of his office in order to enter upon another vocation shall receive the approval of classis, with the concurring advice of deputies of synod.

A minister of the Word, once lawfully called, is bound to the service of the church for life and therefore not allowed to enter upon another vocation unless it be for exceptional and substantial reasons. The decision of his consistory to relieve him of his office in order to enter upon another vocation shall receive the approval of the classis church, with the concurring advice of deputies of synod.

ARTICLE 16 - Task of ministers

The task of ministers is to faithfully lead in prayer, preach the Word and administer the Sacraments. They shall watch over their fellow office-bearers and over the congregation. Together with the elders they shall exercise church discipline and see to it that everything is done decently and in good order.

ARTICLE 17 - Training for the ministry

The churches shall support or, if possible, maintain an institution for the training for the ministry. The task of the professors of theology is to expound the Holy Scriptures and to defend the sound doctrine against heresies and errors, so that the churches may be provided with ministers of the Word who are able to fulfil the duties of their office as these have been described above. The churches together are obliged to provide properly for the professors of theology and for their widows and orphans.

ARTICLE 18 - Students of theology

The churches shall strive to ensure that there are students of theology, extending financial aid where necessary.

ARTICLE 19 - Task of Missionaries

When ministers of the Word are sent out as missionaries, they shall in the specific region assigned to them proclaim the Word of God, administer the sacraments to those who have come to the profession of their faith, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded His church, and ordain elders and deacons when this appears feasible, according to the rules given in the Word of God.

ARTICLE 20 - Task of elders

The elders shall together with the ministers of the Word govern the congregation with pastoral care and discipline. For the upbuilding of the congregation they shall make homevisits as often as is profitable but at least once a year. They shall watch that their fellow office-bearers are faithful in carrying out their duties and ensure that in the congregation everything is done decently and in good order.

ARTICLE 21 - Task of deacons

The deacons shall perform the ministry of mercy. They shall acquaint themselves with difficulties; visit, help and encourage where there is need; and urge church members to render assistance where necessary. They shall collect and manage the gifts of the congregation, and after mutual consultation distribute them where there

is need. The deacons shall give account of their policies and management to the consistory.

ARTICLE 22 - Equality of respective duties

In the local congregation equality shall be maintained among the ministers, among the elders, and among the deacons, regarding their respective duties, and in other matters, as much as possible.

ARTICLE 23 - Term of office

The elders and deacons shall serve two or more years according to local regulations, and a proportionate number shall retire each year. The places of the retiring office-bearers shall be taken by others unless the consistory with the deacons judges that the circumstances and the well-being of the church render it advisable to call them into office again. In that case the rule of Article 3 shall be observed.

ARTICLE 24 - Subscription to the Confession by ministers and teaching staff

All ministers of the Word and all teaching staff at the theological seminary shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia by signing the Form(s) adopted for that purpose. Anyone refusing to subscribe in that manner shall not be ordained or installed in office. Anyone who, being in office, refuses to do so shall because of that very fact be immediately suspended from office by the consistory, and classis shall not receive him. If he obstinately persists in his refusal he shall be deposed from office.

ARTICLE 25 - Subscription to the Confession by elders and deacons

Elders and deacons shall also subscribe to these Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form adopted for that purpose. Anyone being in office who refuses to do so shall because of that very fact be immediately suspended from office by the consistory. If he obstinately persists in his refusal he shall be deposed from office.

ARTICLE 26 - False doctrine

To ward off false doctrines and errors the ministers and elders shall use the means of instruction, of refutation, of warning and of admonition, in the ministry of the Word as well as in christian teaching and family visiting.

ARTICLE 27 - Office-bearers and the government

The office-bearers shall impress upon the congregation its obligation to be obedient and show respect to the government, because God has instituted it. They must set a good example in this regard and by means of proper communication invoke the government to protect the ministry of the church.

II. ASSEMBLIES

ARTICLE 28 - The ecclesiastical assemblies

Three kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be maintained: the consistory, the classis, and the synod.

Three kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be maintained: the consistory, the classis-church, and the synod.

ARTICLE 29 - Proceedings

The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer.

ARTICLE 30 - Authority of the assemblies

These assemblies shall only deal with ecclesiastical matters and in an ecclesiastical manner. A major assembly shall deal only with matters which could not be finished in the minor assembly or which belong to its churches in common. A new matter may be put on its agenda only when the minor assembly has dealt with it.

ARTICLE 31 - Appeals

If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly he shall have the right of appeal to the major assembly; and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order.

As long as there are no classis, appeals under Article 31 CO shall be conducted as follows:

a.stage 1: to the appointed classis church

b.stage 2: to the appointed second appeal church

c.stage 3: to the synod".

NOTE: Stage 2 will not function when an appeal is made within two months prior to a synod.

ARTICLE 32 - Credentials and voting

Delegates to a major assembly shall bring with them their credentials, signed by the minor assembly. They shall have a vote in all matters except those in which either they themselves or their churches are directly involved.

ARTICLE 33 - Proposals

Matters once decided upon may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds.

ARTICLE 34 Chairman and clerk

In all assemblies there shall be a chairman and a clerk. The chairman's task is to present and explain clearly the matters to be dealt with and ensure that every one observes due order in speaking; he shall deny the floor to those who argue about minor things or who let themselves be carried away and cannot control their emotions, and discipline those who refuse to listen. His task shall cease when the assembly ends. The clerk shall keep an accurate record of all things worthy of being recorded.

ARTICLE 35 - Jurisdiction

The classis has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the synod has over the classis.

The classis church has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the synod has over the classis church.

ARTICLE 36 - Consistory

In all churches there shall be a consistory composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders. It shall meet regularly and be chaired by the minister. If a church is served by more than one minister they shall chair in turn. The consistory shall also meet regularly with the deacons to deal with those matters as described for that purpose by the Church Order, and further with all things which the consistory considers necessary for general management, including the material affairs of the church.

ARTICLE 37 - Consistory and the deacons

Where the number of elders and deacons is small the deacons may be added to the consistory by local arrangement. This shall invariably be done where there are less than three elders and less than three deacons. In these circumstances matters pertaining to supervision and discipline shall be handled with the advice of the deacons and matters pertaining to the office of deacons with the advice of the elders.

ARTICLE 38 - Constitution of a consistory

If a consistory is to be constituted for the first time or anew, the advice of classis shall be sought.

If a consistory is to be constituted for the first time or anew, the advice of the classis church shall be sought.

ARTICLE 39 - Places without a consistory

Places where as yet no consistory can be constituted shall be assigned by classis to the care of a neighbouring consistory.

Places where as yet no consistory can be constituted shall be assigned by synod to the care of a neighbouring consistory.

ARTICLE 40 - Meetings of deacons

The deacons shall meet regularly to deal with the matters pertaining to their office. Their meetings shall begin and end with prayer.

ARTICLE 41 - Classis

Neighbouring churches shall come together in a classis by delegating a minister and an elder, or if a church has no minister, two elders. Classes shall be held at least once every three months. The ministers shall be chairman in rotation, or one shall be chosen to be chairman; however the same minister shall not be chairman twice in succession. The chairman shall ask whether the ministry of the office bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured and whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the judgment and help of classis for the proper government of their church. Every classis shall determine where and when the churches shall meet again. The last classis before synod shall choose delegates to that synod.

The sentence: The chairman shall.... must be read in the light of the decision taken by Synod 1985, Acts Article 81.

ARTICLE 42 - Ministers who are not delegated to a classis

If two or more ministers are serving the same church, those who have not been delegated shall have the right to attend classis in an advisory capacity.

ARTICLE 43 - Counsellors

Each vacant church shall request classis to appoint as counsellor the minister it desires as such, to the end that he may assist the consistory in maintaining good order and especially may lend his aid in the matter of the calling of a minister; he shall also sign the letter of call.

Each vacant church shall request classis to appoint as counsellor the minister it desires as such, to the end that he may assist the consistory in maintaining good order and especially may lend his aid in the matter of the calling of a minister; he shall also sign the letter of call. When a vacancy arises less than two months prior to a synod meeting, the synod shall appoint a counsellor.

ARTICLE 44 - Church visitors

Each year classis shall authorise at least two of the more experienced and able ministers to visit the churches in that year. If necessary the classis may authorise a capable elder to carry out this task together with a minister. It shall be the task of these visitors to inquire whether all things are regulated and done in full harmony with the Word of God, whether the office-bearers fulfil the duties of their office faithfully as they have promised, and whether the church order is being observed and maintained in every respect, in order that they may in good time fraternally admonish those who are found negligent in any thing, and that by their good counsel and advice all things may be directed towards the edification and preservation of Christ's church. They shall submit written reports of their visits to classis

The synod shall appoint some of the most experienced and capable ministers to visit the churches each year. If necessary synod may appoint a capable elder to carry out this task together with a minister. It shall be the task of these visitors to inquire whether all things are regulated and done in full harmony with the Word of God, whether the office-bearers fulfil the duties of their office faithfully as they have promised, and whether the church order is being observed and maintained in every respect, in order that they may in good time fraternally admonish those who are found negligent in any thing, and that by their good counsel and advice all things may be directed towards the edification and preservation of Christ's church. They shall submit written report of their visits to synod, with copies to the consistories concerned.

ARTICLE 45 - Synod

The synod shall be held once every three years. Each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders to synod. At the close of synod the time and place for the next synod shall be determined and a church shall be appointed to convene it. A synod shall be convened before the appointed time if according to the judgment of at least two classis this appears necessary. Its time and place shall be decided by the church appointed as convening church for the next regular synod, subject to the approval of its classis .

The synod shall be held once every two years. Each consistory shall delegate one minister and one elder to synod. At the close of synod the time and place for the next synod shall be determined and a church shall be appointed to convene it. A synod shall be convened before the appointed time if according to the judgment of at least two churches this appears necessary. Its time and place shall be decided by the church appointed as convening church for the next regular synod, subject to the approval of its classis church.

ARTICLE 46 - Relationship with other churches

The relationship with other churches shall be regulated by synod. With churches of

Reformed confession sister relations shall be maintained as much as possible. On non-essential points of ecclesiastical practice other churches shall not be rejected.

ARTICLE 47 - Censure in classis and synod

At the close of the major assemblies censure shall be exercised over those who in the meeting have done something worthy of reproof.

ARTICLE 48 - Deputies of major assemblies

Each synod shall appoint deputies who are to assist the classis in all matters provided for in the Church Order. A classis may request these deputies to assist in cases of special difficulties. Each synod shall also appoint deputies to carry out its own decisions. Different deputies shall be appointed as much as possible for separate matters. All deputies shall keep proper record of their work and submit a written report.

ARTICLE 49 - Archives

The assemblies shall ensure that proper care is taken of the archives.

ARTICLE 50- Mission

The churches shall endeavour to fulfil their missionary task. In doing so they shall observe the provisions of this Church Order. When churches cooperate in mission work they shall as much as possible observe the division into classis.

III. WORSHIP, SACRAMENTS AND CEREMONIES

ARTICLE 51 - Administration of sacraments

The sacraments shall be administered only in a church service by a minister of the Word with the use of the adopted Forms, and under the supervision of the elders.

ARTICLE 52 - Baptism of infants

The consistory shall ensure that the covenant of God is sealed by baptism to the children of believers as soon as feasible.

ARTICLE 53 - Baptismal promise and education

The consistory shall make sure that the parents honour their vows to instruct their children, to the utmost of their power, in the doctrine of the Scriptures as summarised in the confession, and to have them instructed in the same by the instruction provided by the consistory.

In accordance with the same vow, the consistory shall see to it that the parents, to the best of their ability, and with the cooperation of the communion of saints, give their children education (as stipulated by the civil government) which is based on Scripture and Confession.

ARTICLE 54 - Public profession of faith

Those who desire to publicly profess their faith shall be examined by the consistory on their motivation and knowledge of the doctrine of God's Word. The public profession shall take place in a church service, with the use of the adopted Form.

ARTICLE 55 - Baptism of adults

Adults who have not been baptised shall be grafted into the christian church by holy baptism upon their public profession of faith.

ARTICLE 56 - Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper shall be celebrated at least once every three months.

ARTICLE 57 - Admission to the Lord's Supper

The consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Members of sister churches shall be admitted on the basis of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct.

ARTICLE 58 - Church records

The consistory shall maintain Church records in which the names of the members and the dates of their birth, baptism, public profession of faith, marriage, and departure or death are properly recorded.

ARTICLE 59 - Attestations for communicant members

Communicant members who move to another congregation shall be given, following appropriate announcements to the congregation, an attestation regarding their doctrine and conduct, signed on behalf of the consistory by two authorised office-bearers. This attestation shall also record their children who have not yet made public profession of faith. The consistory of the congregation concerned shall be notified in due time.

ARTICLE 60 - Attestations for non-communicant members

An attestation for a non-communicant member shall be sent directly to the consistory of the church concerned with the request to take the member under its supervision and discipline.

ARTICLE 61 Support after departure

When members depart to another congregation where they will be cared for in institutions, aged persons homes or nursing homes, they shall in respect of deacon support remain under the care of the church they are leaving. If this is not possible support will be arranged by consultation between the consistories and deacons concerned.

ARTICLE 62 - Church services

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

ARTICLE 63 - Catechism preaching

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

ARTICLE 64 - Psalms and hymns

In the church services only the psalms and hymns approved by synod shall be sung.

ARTICLE 65 - Ecclesiastical feast days

On Christmas day, Good Friday, Easter Sunday, Ascension Day and at Pentecost the consistory shall call the congregation together for church services. The sacred events which the congregation commemorates in particular on these days shall therein be proclaimed.

ARTICLE 66 - Days of prayer

In times of war, general calamities and other great afflictions the presence of which is felt throughout the churches a day of prayer may be proclaimed by the church appointed for that purpose by synod.

ARTICLE 67 - Marriage

The consistory shall ensure that the members of the congregation marry only in the Lord, and that the ministers - as authorised by the consistory - solemnise only such marriages as are in accordance with the Word of God. The solemnisation of a marriage shall take place in a private ceremony, with the use of the adopted Form.

ARTICLE 68 - Funerals

Church services shall not be conducted for funerals.

IV. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

ARTICLE 69 - Aim of discipline

Church discipline shall be exercised in accordance with the Word of God and to His honour. Its aim is to reconcile the sinner with God and the neighbour, and to remove the offence from the church of Christ.

ARTICLE 70 - Mutual responsibility

If anyone departs from the pure doctrine or is delinquent in conduct and this is a secret matter which does not give rise to public offence, the rule which Christ clearly prescribes in Matthew 18 shall be observed.

ARTICLE 71 - Consistory involvement

The consistory shall not deal with any report of sin unless it has first ascertained that both private admonitions and admonitions in the presence of one or two witnesses have remained fruitless, or the sin committed is of a public character.

ARTICLE 72 - Repentance

When someone repents of a public sin or of a sin which had to be reported to the consistory, the latter shall not accept his confession of sin unless the member concerned has shown real amendment. The consistory shall determine whether the congregation shall be informed afterwards.

ARTICLE 73 - Discipline in respect of communicant members

A communicant member who obstinately rejects the admonition by the consistory or who has committed a public or some other serious sin shall be suspended from the Lord's Supper. If he continues to harden himself in sin, the consistory shall publicly

announce this to the congregation so that the congregation may be engaged in prayer and admonition and the excommunication may not take place without its cooperation.

ARTICLE 74 - Announcements during the procedure

In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned. In the second public announcement, which shall be made only after the advice of classis has been obtained, the name and address of the sinner shall be mentioned. In the third public announcement a date shall be set at which the excommunication of the sinner shall take place in accordance with the adopted Form. The time interval between the various announcements shall be determined by the consistory.

In the first public announcement the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned. In the second public announcement, which shall be made only after the advice of the classis church has been obtained, the name and address of the sinner shall be mentioned. In the third public announcement a date shall be set at which the excommunication of the sinner shall take place in accordance with the adopted Form. The time interval between the various announcements shall be determined by the consistory.

ARTICLE 75 - Re-admission

When someone who has been excommunicated repents and desires to be again received into the communion of the church, the congregation shall be informed of this desire in order to see whether there are any lawful objections. The time between the public announcement and the readmission of the sinner shall be not less than one month. If no lawful objection is raised the readmission shall take place, with the use of the adopted Form.

ARTICLE 76 - Suspension and deposition of office-bearers

If a minister, elder or deacon has committed a public or otherwise gross sin, or refuses to heed the admonitions by the consistory, he shall be suspended from office by the judgment of his own consistory and of the consistory of a neighbouring congregation. In the case of a minister this neighbouring congregation shall be appointed by the classis. If he hardens himself in the sin, or if the sin committed is of such a nature that he can not continue in office, an elder or a deacon shall be deposed by the judgment of the above-mentioned consistories. Classis, with the advice of the deputies of synod, shall judge whether a minister is to be deposed.

If a minister, elder or deacon has committed a public or otherwise gross sin, or refuses to heed the admonitions by the consistory, he shall be suspended from office by the judgment of his own consistory and of the classis church. If he hardens himself in the sin, or if the sin committed is of such a nature that he can not continue in office, an elder or a deacon shall be deposed by the judgment of the above-mentioned consistories. The second-appeal church, with the advice of the deputies of synod, shall judge whether a minister is to be deposed.

ARTICLE 77 - Serious and gross sins on the part of office-bearers

As serious and gross sins which are grounds for the suspension or deposition of office-bearers the following are to be mentioned particularly: False doctrine or heresy, public schisms, blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, unjustly enriching oneself; and further all such sins and serious misdemeanours that rate as ground for excommunication with respect to other members of the church.

ARTICLE 78 - Christian censure

The ministers, elders, and deacons shall mutually exercise christian censure and shall exhort and kindly admonish one another with regard to the execution of their office.

ARTICLE 79 - Discipline in respect of non-communicant members

A baptised member shall be admonished by the consistory when he as an adult fails to make public profession of faith or where in other respects he is not loyal to the calling to new obedience in God's covenant. If he obstinately rejects the admonition of the consistory and thereby clearly demonstrates that he is indifferent and averse to the covenant or is even hostile to the service of the Lord, the matter shall be made known to the congregation without mentioning the name of the sinner; and the congregation shall be urged to pray for him. If the member continues in sin and is unwilling to listen to the admonitions, then with the advice of the classis the consistory shall make a second public announcement, mentioning the name of the sinner and the term after which the excommunication shall take place. If he does not in the said term show any real repentance, the consistory shall in a church service exclude him from the communion of the church, using the adopted Form. If he, after this excommunication, comes to repentance and desires to rejoin the communion of the church, he shall be admitted by way of his public profession of faith after the consistory has made his repentance known to the congregation.

A baptised member shall be admonished by the consistory when he as an adult fails to make public profession of faith or where in other respects he is not loyal to the calling to new obedience in God's covenant. If he obstinately rejects the admonition of the consistory and thereby clearly demonstrates to be indifferent and averse to the covenant or is even hostile to the service of the Lord, the matter shall be made known to the congregation without mentioning the name of the sinner; and the congregation shall be urged to pray for him. If the member continues in sin and is unwilling to listen to the admonitions, then with the advice of the classis church the consistory shall make a second public announcement, mentioning the name of the sinner and the date at which the excommunication shall take place. If he does not in the said term show any real repentance, the consistory shall in a church service exclude him from the communion of the church, with the use of the adopted Form. If he, after this excommunication, comes to repentance and desires to rejoin the communion of the church, he shall be admitted by way of his public profession of faith after the consistory has made his repentance known to the congregation.

CONCLUDING ARTICLES

ARTICLE 80 - No lording over others

No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no office-bearer over other office-bearers.

ARTICLE 81 - Observance and revision of the Church Order

These articles, which regard the lawful order of the church, have been adopted with common accord. If the interest of the churches demands such, they may and ought to be changed, augmented or diminished. However no consistory or classis shall be permitted to do so, but they shall endeavour diligently to observe the provisions of this Church Order as long as they have not been changed by synod.

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