

Acts General Synod of Mariënberg 2005
Art 25 **Report synod decisions from 1990.**

Material:

Report of committee Synod decision with attachments

Decision: I

To completely accept and adopt the contents of the report of the committee Synod-decisions (after some minor amendments) as well as accepting the considerations with these decisions

Decision: II

A. Church-government: women's voting rights

A.1. Material:

General Synod of Ommen 1993, Acts chapter 2 church-government, art. 24.

General Synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, Acts chapter 2 church-government, art. 29.

General Synod of Leusden 1999, Acts chapter 2 church-government, art. 26.

A.2. Considerations:

A.2.1 The General Synod of Ommen 1993 terminated the decision of the General Synod of Groningen-Zuid 1978 regarding voting rights for sisters in the congregation. It decided that sisters should no longer be denied the right to vote. The General Synod of Ommen 1993 was of the opinion that women's voting during the election of office bearers carried limited weight. Considering the background of the whole election and appointment procedure it felt that one could not speak of voting as an exercising of authority, or as a way in which individuals contribute to decision-making, let alone join in governing the congregation. The General Synod considered the so-called command for women to be silent as not applicable. It considered that Groningen-Zuid did not sufficiently take into account the equal position men and women received in Christ. The General Synod stressed the right of the congregation to be involved in the election of office bearers. Sisters are joined with the brothers in forming the congregation and, like the brothers, share in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It felt that churches should not be afraid of being influenced by the spirit of the age in this matter since even constantly used regulations had been influenced by the spirit of the age. It considered that to exclude sisters any longer from voting, while Scripture did not command such exclusion, brought the churches into unnecessary isolation and would lead to estrangement, both within as well as outside the church.

A.2.2. The General Synod of Berkel and Rodenrijs 1996 had to deal with 35 requests for revision, of which 6 were from church-councils and 29 from brothers and sister from the churches. Most letters contained a request to remove the decision of the General Synod of Ommen from the churches. Some appellants (namely some church councils) requested revision of one or more grounds for this decision. Objections were lodged against virtually every aspect of the grounds. In some letters new formulations were proposed.

A.2.3. The above-mentioned decisions are contrary to articles 30, 31 and 33 of the C.O. With regard to the content no new arguments were presented. The decisions were accented differently and the issue of women's voting rights was approached from a different angle. We also see a different exegesis of various passages of Scripture. The voting by sisters is no longer seen as a decision-making act and as partaking in the exercising of authority. Hereby the fact that the election result is binding for the church-council is minimised.

A.2.4. The above-mentioned decisions do not do justice to what Scripture teaches us. Already at Creation it pleased God to make the woman subject to the man. In 1 Cor. 11:3, too, we see

the same line being taken. With regard to the relation between man and woman the Lord structured the relationship in such a way that the man is the head of the woman. In 1 Pet 3:5 we see the same rule applied. It states that holy women who trusted in God adorned themselves by being submissive to their own husbands. This has significance for the way women act in the congregation of Christ. We must note the active verb that indicates the subordination. This verb stresses the willingness and own choice of the woman. Her subordination is not a case of compulsion but of her own desire. She wants to submit because the Word of God requires this (1 Cor. 14:34). The question is whether by participating in the voting-process the woman acts in keeping with this voluntary subordination, as also the law requires. If we consider the nature and character of voting we must conclude that it is a decision-making act and that by participating, women are not acting in line with the place and task God gives to the sisters of the congregation. It does not agree with the requirement that women in the congregation must be subordinate. In the congregation a woman does not project herself. She exercises her own, quiet influence in the background.

A.3. Decision:

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, convened on October 15th 2005 at Mariënberg, declares that the above-mentioned decisions of the General Synod of Ommen 1993 and the General Synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996 regarding the right of women to vote have been cancelled and that the churches are no longer bound to these decisions. It further declares that the churches maintain the decision of Groningen-Zuid 1978, art. 287.

A.4. Grounds

A.4.1 In decision 1 of art. 24 the General Synod of Ommen 1993 did not do justice to art. 30, 31 and 33 C.O. The matter of women's voting rights was concluded by the General Synod of Groningen-Zuid 1978. An appeal against a decision of an ecclesiastical assembly must be submitted prior to the next meeting of the major assembly to which the appeal is lodged (art. 31 C.O.). As for a request for revision, new grounds must be submitted (art. 30 C.O.).

A matter that is finished cannot be proposed again, unless changes are considered essential (art. 33 C.O.) When a matter is again proposed the rules of Kampen 1975 (art. 110) apply.

A.4.2. God's Word teaches that in the congregation a woman may not exercise authority; she may not rule over a man (1 Tim . 2:12). In the congregation she must remain subordinate, submitting to the God-ordained order (1 Cor. 14:34-36, 40; 1 Tim. 2:11-15). Granting her a share in the decision-making role by voting at the election of office-bearers is not in accordance with the place and task God granted sisters in the congregation. Sisters willingly prepare to abide by the majority-decision arrived at by brothers voting in the election of office bearers.

A.4.3. Over against decision 2, ground 2 and ground 3a, we declare that the voting in the whole election has a decision-making function. This does not apply to drawing the attention of Church Council to the names of suitable brothers . Nor does it apply to the approbation (silent approval) or to submitting to the Church Council objections to elected brothers. In such situations the Church Council will pass judgement on the validity of the objection. However, through elections the Church Council is bound to the input of the congregation. It must appoint those elected by the majority of the congregation (art. 20 C.O.).

The synod of Groningen 1978 correctly judged voting to be a form of governing. This synod merely drew conclusions from Scriptural passages which speak about the subordinate position of women (1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11,12,14,15; 1 Pet. 3:5).

A.4.4. Over against decision 2, ground 3b, we declare that the General Synod of Ommen 1993 stresses what Scripture says about the equal worthiness of man and woman, at the expense of what Scripture says about the subordinate position of the woman. It devalues the order of creation whereby man is appointed to be the head of the woman. The texts used by Synod

prove nothing about this because these texts are about the fact that man and woman share equally in the blessings of Christ. Eph. 5:21 is not about the subordinate relationship between men and women but it is a general rule which is worked out in what follows (namely the relationships between women and men, children and parents, and slaves and masters). And in this passage the woman is called to subject herself to her husband and not the other way round.

A.4.5. We declare over against decision 2, ground 3d, that the reference in Acts 2:17, 18 etc. to women speaking is quite different to women 'speaking' by sharing in the decision-making process through the election of office bearers. The voice of the congregation is the sum total of all the individual votes. Hence the vote of an individual sister would contribute to the decision-making vote of the congregation.

A.4.6. With regard to decision 3, ground 1, we declare that there is a contrast between the decision not to withhold voting rights to sisters and the acknowledgment that Scripture gives no direct answer to the question of whether they may vote. The General Synod should have demonstrated that there is a divine command giving sisters the right to vote. From the texts used as references one cannot draw the conclusion that women should participate in the election of office bearers.

A.4.7. Over against decision 3, ground 2, we declare that not all that the congregation is obligated and authorised to do necessarily applies to each and every individual congregational member. (The General Synod of Ommen would surely not want all baptised members to participate in elections.) Just because there are texts which speak about the Holy Spirit dwelling in the congregation it does not follow that therefore sisters have a right to vote. In Acts 1:23, 24 and 6:2, 3 it is the brothers in the congregation who are addressed.

A.4.8. We declare over against decision 3, ground 4, that this ground contains no argument for, but at best a defence of, women's voting rights. The decisions insufficiently resist the influence of the spirit of the age which is characterised by a strong drive for individualism and unbiblical emancipation notions. The threshold for women in office can be lowered through these decisions. The texts of Scripture which are now used in favour of women's voting rights are being used elsewhere to defend women in office.

A.4.9. This decision will harm the unity between man and woman in marriage. The General Synod of Ommen has paid insufficient attention to the way a marriage relationship according to Scripture serves to function in the congregation of Christ. Allowing both husband and wife to vote is more likely to promote disunity than unity.

A.4.10. In view of the above-mentioned arguments, the rejection by the General Synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996 of the requests for revision is unjustified.

B. Worship service: New Bible Translation

B.1. Material

General Synod of Ommen 1993, chapter 3 worship-service, art. 38.

General Synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, acta chapter 3 worship-service, art. 48.

General Synod of Leusden 1999, acta chapter 3 worship-service, art. 45.

General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002, acta chapter 4 worship-service, art. 63.

B.2. Consideration

B.2.1. Already in 1993 deputies were authorised by the General Synod of Ommen to submit names to the Dutch Bible Society (NBG) and then to the Catholic Bible Society—bodies responsible for implementing the New Bible Translation (NBV)—of persons considered suitable to supervise the evaluation of the NBV. During the discussion at the General Synod Prof. Dr. J. van Bruggen remarked that supervisors sent their comments about the translation to a supervising committee which would review whether the comments were relevant. The translation committee evaluated the comments of the supervisors in terms of content. He also

noted that the translation principles used by the NBV were very general but that this did not need to be objectionable. According to him it is more important to focus on how these translation principles will be interpreted and applied. At this synod already a letter of concern was tabled in which great concern was expressed about the new translation. Although the General Synod does no more than carefully follow the developments of the NBV, it also makes use of the opportunity to appoint supervisors. This appears to be the first indication that the applied translation principles are not to be rejected.

The General Synod of Berkel and Rodenrijs 1996 decided to continue the path that was taken by the synod of Ommen. Only this time more objections from the churches were tabled, in which warnings were uttered that the churches will be unfaithful to God if they continue to cooperate with the NBG. This synod answered that there is no cooperation with the NBG, that the developments will be followed carefully and that the churches can decide whether or not to choose this translation for use in the churches after the project is completed. For the first time this General Synod itself makes a declaration about the principles of translation.

In decision 2, ground 3, it says that the established principles and rules of translation make it possible for the NBV to provide a reliable rendition of the original/basic text.

The General Synod of Leusden 1999 has to deal with more objections against the NBV. One of the churches asked the synod to inform the churches about the different versions available from the NBV. This synod rejected the request on the ground that deputies regularly informed the churches about the main lines of this project and that if someone wanted more information he could send his request straight to the NBV. At the same time this synod accepted the translation principles and basis of the NBV. Thus we see that in the process more objections were lodged but were all rejected, while the synods did not deal with the substance of the objections. Warnings were ignored. Meanwhile euphoria regarding the NBV steadily increased. The principles of translation were made explicit and adopted without much discussion. Information about important decisions was withheld from the churches.

B.2.2. At the General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002/2003 there were discussions about the testing of the NBV. Deputies pointed out that it would be impossible to determine a translation in an ecclesiastical way. Testing as was done with the church-book would, according to deputies, not be advisable. A proposal at the synod to give deputies the explicit assignment to find out what the bible society has done with the criticism that was brought forward and to test the translation was rejected.

B.2.3. It is clear that the translation project to create the NBV carries an interdenominational and ecumenical character. The translation teams are guided by a supervising committee of experts from more than twenty churches and religious communities in the Netherlands and Flanders. All these churches have their say about the content of the NBV. The NBV is intended for all these churches. Hence it is interdenominational! The experts from these churches do not all confess that the Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God, as we confess in articles 2-7 of the Belgic Confession. Co-workers of the NBV include Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews and atheists. All members of the supervising committee represent churches which must agree with the NBV. However, the prerequisite of faith is missing. It is thus unlike the 'Statenvertaling' in which pious men were employed, men who carried out the work prayerfully to God and who had deep reverence for God and his Word.

B.2.4. Furthermore the choice of manuscript used for the translation is important. The 'Statenvertaling' used the Byzantine manuscripts amongst which there is little difference. The NBV uses the Alexandrine manuscripts amongst which there are many differences. This means that the NBV is based on unreliable manuscripts.

B.2.5. The NBV uses the dynamic-equivalent method of translation. This means that on the one hand they try to remain as close as possible to the original texts. But on the other hand they also try to do justice to the functionality of the text. They believe a chosen Bible passage

must have the same function as the original text. The focus then is not on the original meaning but on the original function. And that relies on the vision and interpretation of the translators.

B.3. Decision

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, gathered on October 15th 2005 at Mariënberg, declared that the above mentioned decisions of the General Synod of Ommen 1993, Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002/2003 with respect to the new Bible translation have been cancelled and that the churches are no longer bound to these decisions.

B.4. Grounds

B.4.1. The General Synods of Berkel en Rodenrijs, Leusden and Zuidhorn have done too little with objections the churches tabled regarding the content, and they paid too little attention to the grave concerns which lived within the churches.

B.4.2. The General Synod of Berkel and Rodenrijs explicitly embraced the dynamic-equivalent translation principles used to produce the NBV and declared that these principles made it possible to produce a reliable edition of the basic text in the NBV. The application of these translation principles means that the subjective vision and interpretation of the translators will play an important role in developing the translation.

B.4.3. Through the involvement and the influence of people from many different denominations, including those from remonstrant and Jewish sides, the NBV is fully an interdenominational product. Considering also the subjective translation principles being applied, we must conclude that the NBV does not satisfy what is confessed in the articles 2-7 of the Belgic Confession.

B.4.4. The General Synod of Leusden wrongly refused a request that the churches be informed about the different choices in the NBV. She wrongly instructed the churches to direct their questions and remarks directly to the NBV, while it is fully the responsibility of deputies to inform churches and church members. And surely churches and church members must be involved in choosing a new Bible translation and in the principles applied in coming to such a translation.

B.4.5 The General Synod again chose, without consulting the churches, the translation principles and rules as used by the NBV,

B.4.6. The General Synod of Zuidhorn refused, wrongly, the right and duty of the churches to test the NBV on the basis of criteria decided by the General Synod of Leeuwarden(1990), criteria which was in line with what Scripture teaches (Joh. 10:4,8; Matt. 7:15, 16; Thess.5:21; Rom. 16:17,18; Col. 2:4,8; 1 John. 4:1).

B.4.7. By choosing to be involved and to follow closely the work of the NBV, the choice for the Alexandrine manuscripts, which in comparison to the Byzantine manuscripts are less reliable, were implicitly accepted as suitable.

C. Worship service ‘Groot Nieuws Bijbel’

C.1. Material

General Synod of Leusden 1999, chapter 3 Worship service, art. 46,

General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002, acta chapter 4 Worship service, art. 65.

C.2. Consideration

C.2.1. In the traditional Bible translations the original Hebrew and Greek text were followed very closely as much as possible, even in the sentence structure and the rendition of words. Changes in the language necessitated to have a Bible in every day language. That led to the Groot Nieuws Bijbel (GNB) translation. This Bible translation was not produced for use in the worship service to replace the existing translation. For worship services and preaching the need for a translation that is closely related to the idiom of the basic texts of the Old and New testament was still preferred (preface of the GNB).

The GNB is surely a translation in more modern Dutch. However this translation was produced on the basis of wrong translation principles. The dynamic-equivalent translation method was used. This means that the target language (modern Dutch) and the source language (original language) don't have to be the same but they should be equivalent. Today's reader should understand the same as the reader at the time about which the Bible speaks. Further the reader should react in the same way. The intention of the original text must be transmitted in the vision of this translation method. During translation it is important to find the intention of the original writer and how to reproduce that in our language of today. The view of the translator becomes very important, because his view finds its way into the translation. Subjective interpretations and modern criticism of the Bible have a great influence on the final Dutch text when using this translation method. The dynamic-equivalent translation method is therefore more than translating.

C.2.2. It is also important to know that the GNB is a product of cooperation between the Catholic Bible Society and the Dutch Bible society (protestant). The supervising committee, the translation team and the advisors have very different ecclesiastical backgrounds.

C.3. Decision

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, gathered on October 15th 2005 at Mariënberg, declares that the decision of the General Synod of Leusden 1999 with respect to the Groot Nieuws Bijbel has been cancelled and that the churches are not bound to this decision anymore.

C.4. Grounds

C.4.1. The use of a reliable Bible translation is of fundamental importance for all churches in the federation. The approval of a Bible translation for use in the churches is a matter for the churches in common. The approval of a new Bible translation can only be decided upon after all churches have tested the relevant translation.

C.4.2. The decisions of the General Synod of Leusden 1999 with respect to the GNB are inwardly contradictory. When it is stated that the churches have not done systematic research concerning the quality of the content and reliability of this translation and therefore this translation can not be released for "normal worship services", then of course this can also not be released for use in "special situations" in local churches.

C.4.3. The GNB itself points out that this translation is not intended for worship services and for preaching, and that for that purpose a translation is needed that is very closely related to the idiom of the original texts.

C.4.4. The GNB is an interdenominational cooperation product made by experts of whom not is known if they all approve the content of art. 2-7 of the Belgic Confession. Therefore it is not established that this product is reliable. This gives us enough reason to be extra alert and test this translation before it is released for use in the churches.

C.4.5. The used translation principles do not only mean a break with the history of the Reformed Churches but also lead to a subjective way of translation through which the reliability again is doubtful.

D. Worship service: Salutation and Benediction

D.1. Material

General Synod of Ommen 1993, chapter 3 Worship service, art. 40.

General Synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, acts chapter 3 Worship service, art. 50,51.

General Synod of Leusden 1999, acts chapter 3 Worship service, art. 48.

General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002, acts chapter 3 Church government, part a - regulations, art. 47,

D.2. Consideration

D.2.1. The General Synod of Ommen 1993 decided to declare the proposal of the regional synod of Zeeland, Noord-Brabant and Limburg admissible, through which the matter of salutation and benediction again could be discussed. The General Synod of Ommen decided further that salutation and benediction might be spoken unchanged and conferred in worship services in which no minister officiated.

After the General Synod of Ommen three successive synods had to deal with objections of proponents and opponents regarding the decision of General Synod of Ommen. General Synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996 restricted the decision of the General Synod of Ommen that only elders could confer the unaltered salutation and benediction. They also declared that salutation and benediction are only regarded as a liturgical rule.

The General Synod of Leusden 1999 changed this again by stating that every brother of the congregation could say and confer salutation and benediction. The church council should pay attention to the brother's ability and his acceptance by the congregation.

The General Synod of Zuidhorn maintained the decision of the General Synod of Leusden and ended the discussion by the deciding to summon to let this matter rest.

D.2.2. In this whole discussion we notice that the difference between the distinctive offices were taken into account insufficiently. And that the discussion and decision-making was reduced to a liturgical matter instead of a case of doctrine and office. The opinion of the deputies for liturgy that the Word of God is not the centre of the worship service is not only not denied by the General Synods of Berkel en Rodenrijs, Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002/2003 but is still in effect. Preaching is the ministry of reconciliation and this is entrusted to shepherds (pastors) and teachers called by God. The conferring of the Lord's salutation happens in the name of God and is part of the ministry of reconciliation. This conviction has not been refuted by various synods.

D.2.3. Decisions and discussions of previous synods were also insufficiently taken into account in this matter (GS Sneek-Utrecht 1939, Kampen 1975, Heemse 1984). Furthermore the salutation (and benediction) were narrowed down to the reading of the words of the salutation, however words and gestures belong together in the salutation (and benediction) conferred in the name of our Lord. The decisions with respect to the salutation (and benediction) are contrary to the reformed confession regarding the three offices (B.C. art. 30 and 31) and regarding the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20; Rom. 10:14, 15, Canons of Dordt ch.1, art. 3). It is also contrary to the decisions of the General Synod of Kampen 1975.

D.3. Decision:

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, gathered on October 15th 2005 at Mariënberg, declares that the decisions of the General Synod of Ommen 1993, Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002/2003 with respect to the salutation (and benediction) in the worship services have been cancelled and that the churches are not bound to these decisions anymore.

D.4. Grounds

D.4.1. The proposal of the regional synod of Zeeland, Noord-Brabant and Limburg to the General Synod of Ommen 1993 was inadmissible. Although the regional synod looked at this matter from a different angle (art. 65 C.O.) the case was the same as discussed at the General Synod of Heemse 1984. The regional synod did not advance new arguments.

D.4.2. The regional synod did not confront itself with decisions with regard to decisions made by previous synods. This is necessary for requests of revision (art. 33 C.O. and Acts Kampen 1975, art. 110).

D.4.3. This decision restricts itself not only to offices but includes also non office bearers; this is in violation of the decision of the General Synod of Sneek-Utrecht 1939 about assistance-

preachers (Acts art. 346) and contrary to the quoted Bible texts on the grounds of this decision which speaks about the blessing by priests, Christ Himself and the apostles.

D.4.4. A reading service is a worship service but already the General Synod of Kampen 1975 added: but in a different way ('zij het op een andere manier'.) This approach from the presence of Christ means a break with 2000 years of church history and opens the way to the administration of the sacraments by a lay person (niet-predikant).

D.4.5. The decisions do not allow for the difference between mandate to bless and the practise thereof; it does not take into account the differences between the offices (see Eph. 4; Rev. 1:20; 2 Cor; 5:18-20; Rom. 10:14 en 15; Canons of Dordt Ch.1, art. 3 and what has been stated in the confession (B.C. art. 30 and 31), Church order (art. 1, 2, 3, 4, 16, 21) and the forms of ordination.

D.4.6. Blessing is the ministry of reconciliation in a concentrated form and belongs to the task of a minister. Preaching is the ministry of reconciliation. This ministry is entrusted to shepherds and teachers who are called by the Lord. To confer salutation (and benediction) occurs in the name of the Lord and is part of the ministry of reconciliation. The relevant synods have not refuted this.

D.4.7. The conferring of the blessing has been typified as just a liturgical rule, but liturgical rules are also subjected to Scripture and confession (Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, art. 51, decision 2.2. and 4).

D.4.8. It becomes clear that in various decisions another view is brought to light regarding the worship service and the offices. At the same time the unity and peace in the churches and church federation is not served in the way in which these relevant synods have taken decisions.

Ea. Liturgy: Ordinarium

Ea.1. Material

General Synod Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, art. 63

General Synod Leusden 1999, art. 49.4

General Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003, art. 73

Ea.2. Consideration

Ea.2.1 The ordinarium originates from the Roman Catholic Mass in which fixed items are incorporated that are the same every Sunday. Calvin did not want to make the move to introduce the ordinarium. Actually, the ordinarium is a serie(s) of phrases, texts and songs used every Sunday in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, as highlight of the worship service. Instead of the Word of God, the Lord's Supper becomes the central part in the worship service. On the other hand the church is called to proclaim the grace of Jesus Christ by the clear preaching of His Word.

Ea.2.2 The liturgy of the ordinarium breaks the tie between Word and sacrament. The sacrament assumes an (almost) mystical life of its own. This form of liturgy fits in the Roman Catholic worship service where the Mass has also received a holy and sanctifying value of its own.

Ea.2.3 The Lord's Supper, as well as Baptism, has been instituted by Christ himself, to seal the Word. The Lord's Supper is therefore not an independent part of the liturgy, but it is closely related to the preaching of God's Word. The Lord's Supper has no power in itself but receives value through the ties with the Gospel. Through the sealing of the promises of God in Christ.

Ea.2.4. The General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002/2003 rejected all appeals against the ordinarium.

Ea.3. Decision

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled on the 15th of October 2005 at Mariënberg, pronounces that the decision of the General Synod of Berkel and Rodenrijs, Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002/2003 with regard to the implementation of the ordinarium has been cancelled and that therefore the churches are not bound to this decision anymore.

Ea.4. Grounds

Ea.4.1 The liturgy of the ordinarium destroys the character of the worship service as 'covenant-talk' ('verbondsgesprek') in which first God speaks and his people listens reverently and is then followed by the faithful answer of the congregation. God's Word must take the central place in the worship service and not the Lord's Supper.

Ea.4.2. The Lord's Supper is a sealing of the promises of God which come to the congregation through the Word of God. The Lord's Supper has no power in itself but receives value through the ties with the Gospel. The ordinarium breaks the tie between Word and sacrament. This obstructs the Scriptural celebration of Lord's Supper.

Eb Liturgy: Marriage-form

Eb.1. Materiaal

General Synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, art. 67

General Synod of Leusden 1999, art. 52

General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002/2003, art. 79

Eb.2. Considerations

Eb.2.1. The GS Berkel 1996 decided to submit a new marriage-form to the churches for testing. Among other things, this new form does not speak about God's punishment on adultery anymore. The reference to Genesis 1:28 is absent in the text and terms like authority, leading and obedient commitment are omitted.

Eb.2.2. The GS Leusden 1999 decides on a definitive marriage-form, after accepting some amendments introduced by deputies. The big evil of divorce is much better illustrated than in the proposal of Berkel. In this form much emphasis is placed on the equality of man and wife in marriage with Christ and on the justification to each other's position when dealing with man being the head of his wife as Christ is head of his congregation.

Eb.2.3. The GS Zuidhorn considers it not proven that the diversity of man and woman in their marriage is the main point in the whole of Scripture.

Eb.3 Decisions

Eb.3.1. Decision 1:

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled at Mariënberg on the 15th October 2005, declares that the above mentioned decisions of the General Synod of Ommen 1993, Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002/2003 regarding the marriage-form have been cancelled and the churches are not bound to these decisions anymore.

Eb.3.2. Decision 2:

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled at Mariënberg on the 15th October 2005, declares that the churches are bound by the marriage-form as incorporated in the Reformed Church-book, as decided on by Synod Heemse 1984/1985.

Eb.4. Grounds

Eb.4.1. In the proposal for a new form by the Synod of Berkel 1996 insufficient justice is done to what Scripture teaches about

- the second purpose of the marriage (Gen. 1:28),
- the wrath of God about violating his commandments (divorce) (Gen 2:23; Mal. 2:13-16; Matt 5: 32; Matt 19:6b; John. 20:7; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 7:2; Hebr. 4:8-10) and
- the relation between man and wife that was already determined by God in the Creation, and the different tasks deriving from this. (Prov. 31; 1 Cor. 11:7-10; 1 Cor. 14:34; Eph. 5:22-33; 1.Tim 2:13-15; Titus 2:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7).

Eb.4.2. Although the text of the marriage-form of the GS of Leusden 1999 shows improvements on some points, and the inseparability of marriage is emphasised more strongly, yet the Biblical instruction on the important point of the relation between man and wife and their different tasks is not correct.

In a community in which the equality between man and woman is an unscriptural ambition, there is no guarding against secularisation of church-members on this point.

Eb.4.3. The GS of Zuidhorn moves away even more clearly from the teaching of Scripture regarding the diversity between man and wife in their marriage.

Ec. Liturgy: Hymns from “Het Liedboek” and other sources.

Ec.1. Material

General Synod of Ommen 1993, art. 46

General Synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, art. 64

General Synod of Leusden 1999, art. 54-62

General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002/2003, art. 82-89

Ec.2. Consideration

Ec.2.1. Already at GS Ommen 1993 the reporter of the majority-report pointed out that when new deputies investigate and make an inventory (art.46) the danger exists that this will stir up more than what the churches have asked for.

Ec.2.2. The GS of Berkel 1996 received an example of a book of praise with 106 songs including 65 songs from the *Liedboek*. Yet this GS gave no instructions to use the ‘Liedboek’ as starting point for further expansion. Deputies of church-music did that on their own accord. They write in appendix 16 GS of Leusden under 4b: “The report of Study-deputies Worship-service pointed us in this direction to include a selection of songs from the ‘Liedboek’ (see appendix A of their report: Table of Contents of the example book of praise ‘106 hymns’). Also our assignment to link up, if possible, to the work that was done for *Het Liedboek-2000* pointed us in the direction of the *Liedboek* (LvK).

This explains why deputies presented an enormous selection of 255 songs from the *Liedboek voor de kerken* (art. 59, 60, decision 1) at GS Leusden 1999, something that the General Synod had not explicitly ask for.

This collection had an interdenominational basis and comes from a false ecumenism, and was already rejected as such by GS Kampen 1975.

Ec.2.3. The choice for this book of praise was particularly defended by deputies by stating that the *Liedboek* “represents the mainstream of the history of church-songs”. This mainstream actually runs in the “Hervormde Kerk”, the church with doctrinal liberty in a inter-church cooperation with other denominations that are not recognized by us as true churches, because they do not endorse the confession of the church and they accept the liberty of false doctrine. It is incomprehensible that this was not pointed out in the first stage. Here too this mainstream as the broad path, is precisely the path of false prophecy (Matt. 7:13-16).

Ec.2.4. The GS of Leusden 1999 stated in art 60 with regard to the testing of the proposed songs that church members could only give response to deputies and then mainly on the outlines. With this decision they restricted the right and duty to test, while this is characteristic

of the true reformed church, that is founded on the Word of God as distinguishing feature of the office of all believers. (Joh. 10:4, Matt. 7:15,16, Thess. 5:21, Rom. 16:17,18, Col. 2:4,8, 1 Joh. 4:1).

Moreover, it appears that this General Synod (in art. 59, decision 2) approved and released for use in the worship service 121 selected songs (in first reading), while only a few of these songs were tested on its contents. For the sake of the broad support that was needed a voting was held, but possible objections against the contents were not tabled.

In spite of this these songs were released to the churches.

The GS Zuidhorn also used the criteria of broad support by only releasing songs (from *Liedboek* and other sources) that gain 75% of the votes (art. 80). This support replaces, for an important part, the Scriptural reliability. See also art 89, decision 8, in which deputies are requested to take into account the feelings and the support within the churches with regard to new hymns.

Ec.2.5. By introducing so many songs to the churches without preceding thorough testing GS Leusden failed in her duty regarding their assignment with relation to art 67 C.O.

Ec.2.6. Through this the use of Psalms in the worship service will come under pressure.

The GS Kampen 1975 decided with regard to the acceptance of new hymns that: 'the song must be a valuable addition to the Psalms and must not lead to underestimation of the Psalms.' This pronouncement must be seen in the light of GS pronouncements from the past wherein it pointed to the danger that Psalms can be outstripped by hymns. In reformation church-singing (1578) only a few songs were accepted beside the Psalms. These songs concerned mainly rhymes of Scripture passages or rhymes based on summarizations from the Bible, such as the 12 Articles of Faith (Apostles' Creed).

The General Synod of Dordrecht of 1618-1819 stated in art. 69 of the Church Order: "In the churches only the 150 Psalms of David, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the songs of Mary, Zacharia and Simeon will be sung. The song "O Godt, die onze Vader bist etc." will be left to the liberty of the churches whether they use it or not. All other songs should be refused and where these already are accepted they should be phased out by the use of appropriate means." Over the centuries only the 150 Psalms and 7 hymns were sung in the churches. A morning- and evening-song were added by the printers. Thus a total of 9 songs.

It was not until the General Synod of Arnhem (1930) that the decision was made: "To increase the existing collection (...) with some rhymed and non-rhymed parts of Scripture or songs, that are closely connected to the Holy Scripture, to be given to the churches for use especially on Christian commemoration-days, for days that are intended to remember Christ's suffering and death, for the administration of the sacraments, for the ordination of office bearers and the solemnization of marriage."

At the GS Middelburg (1933) it was again emphatically stated: "That for the normal worship-service we have enough in the Psalms, these convey in an unparalleled manner what lives in the soul of those that fear the Lord."

In ground 4.1 decision 1 of art. 56 of GS Leusden, without any warning, says: that the abovementioned guideline of Kampen does not put a limit to the total amount of hymns in the collection.

Church history however teaches that the appreciation of the Psalms as God-given has been restricted with the continuous increase of hymns. The GSs give no convincing arguments as to why this should be different for us now.

GS Leusden 1999 declared the abovementioned pronouncement of Kampen as cancelled and this was ratified by Zuidhorn 2002/2003 (art. 83, decision2).

Art. 89, decision 11, of GS Zuidhorn, in which this GS wants to state that the Psalms must continue to

come first, is not in accordance with the reality of many local liturgies. Furthermore this GS and the preceding synods have in fact, by very actively participating in the acceptance of an overwhelming and ever increasing number of hymns, driven back the use of Psalms in worship-services and religious life.

Ec.2.7 GS Leusden art. 58, decision 3 proposed new general criteria for selection by deputies and judgement of this selection by the General Synod. These new criteria replace the currently used guidelines of Kampen 1975 and the criteria of Berkel & Rodenrijs 1996 (deputies will serve the next General Synod with an evaluation of practical use of this criteria):

1. a good church-song is suitable to function in a liturgical context, in which God's words and deeds form the central part;
2. a good church-song will correspond with Scripture regarding the content;
3. a good church-song will be characterized with respect to linguistic and musical form by style and quality. It has a good word-tone-relation. It is usable and accessible for people of the present time and culture,...

Ad.1. In the first criterion a view regarding the worship service becomes visible, wherein not the preaching of the Word of God, but His words (without capital letter) and deeds form the centre. In the study-report of the deputies of Berkel 1996 it is said: "The song can function as an amen to the reading (therefore: a confessing function). However, it can also function as a sort of singing of Bible reading and for this rhymed Psalms and other rhymed passages of Scripture can be considered."

In this way the Word of God is replaced by the sung and paraphrased Word or even by a "free" song that can contain false doctrine.

Ad. 2. The criterion that a good church song must correspond with Scripture is weakened by the General Synod and deputies through subjective interpretation and sympathy towards the poet. The GS of Zuidhorn (art. 83, decision 1) indeed agreed that a song must also be in accordance with the confession of the church, but considers it not necessary to add this as a criterion. This binding is obviously too much to ask for. In this way, however, the path leads to subjectivism: he who reads or sings the church song decides whether something is Scriptural.

Ad. 3. In a song a criterion for clarity and unambiguousness it is very important to avoid double meanings especially when these are brought in because of the various denominations (Philip. 1:9, 1 Tim 6:5, Is. 32:4, Ps. 12, Prov. 8: 8,9). This criterion is sadly lacking, but the criterion "usefulness for people in the current time and culture" is brought forward.

General Synod Zuidhorn has rejected all these objections (ad 1-3) (Art. 83)

Ec.2.8. A large number of songs from the *Liedboek* selected by the General Synod of Leusden concerns rhymes of, or according to, passages from Scripture. However, with a selection of these songs, the criterion of GS Hattem 1972 (Acts Hattem 1972: art. 171), with regard to the rhyming of passages of Scripture, is lacking in the guidelines of Leusden (Art. 58 decision 3). This guideline reads: "In rhymed passages of Scripture, a true interpretation of the text must not be interpreted as: letting the elements of the text follow in exactly the same order, but on the whole, must also be examined if in the text the complete contents come through in a responsible manner."

The General Synod Zuidhorn decides in Art. 83 decision 2, to reject a proposal to include this criterion on the grounds: the text is "not a supplement of the criterion with respect to its contents."

Ec.3. Decision.

Many appeals against the text of the 121 songs from the *Liedboek*, released by GS Leusden, were submitted to the General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002/2003. Many of the objections that were pointed out concerned ambiguous passages, or passages in which Gods Word was clearly done short.

The following are a large number of the songs of the *Liedboek* against which founded objections were brought forward.

1. **The doctrine of general atonement** (all people will be saved; there is no place for divine election and reprobation) was discovered in the following songs:
1, 6, 23, 34, 63, 90, 91, 106, 119, 225, 301, 319, 393, 408, 434.
2. **The idea of a kingdom of peace or paradise that is expected on this earth** (instead of after the day of Gods judgment, in the heaven and on the new earth) was found in the texts of the following songs: 23, 42, 281, 284, 285, 287, 294, 380, 444.
3. **The idea of a liberation-theology** (solidarity with the oppresses instead of the antithesis between the seed of the woman/church and the seed of the serpent/world) was found in:9, 23, 28, 39, 43, 300.
4. **The omission, disguising, weakening of**
 - the offer of Christ as satisfaction through atonement in: 75, 147, 148, 152, 203, 221, 225, 402, 435, 460, 473, 481.
 - sin, faithfulness to the covenant, antithesis and godless people were founding:
6, 9, 14, 34, 43, 90, 113, 115.
 - the judgment as second death, pool of fire in: 6, 34, 39, 62, 78, 113, 115, 169, 288, 300.
 - election, covenant, living out of the promises: 15,20, 21, 90, 107, 271, 287, 320, 325, 336, 434.
 - the good fight of faith in: 78, 87, 188,300,335,336,429, 442.
5. **Poetic freedom, that we consider illicit:**
 - mystical language or strange poetry that is not in agreement with Scriptural facts, in:
6, 106, 114, 119, 122, 135, 189, 201, 221, 234, 252, 253, 368, 387, 442, 448, 473.
 - own views or connections of the poet that does not lead back to the Scriptures in:
1, 6, 30, 34, 43, 92, 103, 114, 126, 147, 148, 169, 264, 290, 320, 382, 457, 459, 479.
 - other names for God, that are not given to us in His word, in: 75, 125, 240, 241, 253, 294, 319, 408, 444, 456, 457, 477.
6. **Magical thinking without Scriptural basis:**
 - magical elements indicated in sacraments occur in: 87, 119,335, 356, 358, 360.
 - magical re-living of the facts from salvation of the past, in: 6, 122, 124, 126, 127, 135, 139, 140, 147, 189, 240.
7. **Omission of parts of Scripture that has been put to rhyme which does short to the message of Gods Word was found in:** 20, 21, 34, 39, 63, 78, 87, 92, 107, 113, 397.

These objections were listed by the General Synod of Zuidhorn and were evaluated.

Practically all objections were rejected. Only the objections against the songs: 113, 147,264 and 301 were granted. (Acts Zuidhorn, Art. 86)

The manner with which the General Synod Zuidhorn dealt with the evaluation according to Scripture immediately raises serious objections with the report in the Acts with regard to Song 1: “Objection was raised against Song 1 because here it sings the praises of the doctrine of general atonement. One is also of the opinion that it clearly in line with the doctrine of Karl Barth. Against this was said that one has to read this song in the light of Psalm 104. It would be a pity if this opening song of the *Liedboek* was not listed. The proposal of the committee to delete this song was rejected by 8 votes.”

Ec.2.10. With the choice of songs General Synod Zuidhorn also started out from the desired interdenominational unity with the CGK (Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken), the NGK (Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken) and the Reformed Bond within the ‘Nederlands Hervormde Kerk’. Art. 89 decision 7 points, with that purpose, to the importance of linking up with the songs that have been accepted in these churches.

Ec.2.11. Also with the selection of songs from sources other than from the *Liedboek* there was a lack of a good examination and the same criteria were used as with the songs from the *Liedboek* (GS Zuidhorn, art 80, 89).

Ec.3. Decision

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled on the 15th October 2005 at Mariënberg, pronounced that the mentioned decisions of the GS's Ommen 1993, Berkel & Rodenrijs 1996, Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002/2003 with regard to hymns and church music have been cancelled and that therefore the churches are not bound by them anymore.

Ec.4. Grounds

Ec.4.1. Many hymns from the *Liedboek voor de kerken* that deviate from Scripture and confession, have been given free for use in the worship services in spite of the objections that were brought forward.

Ec.4.2. In the church we sing before Gods countenance, the words that we take into our mouths must be pleasing for the Lord (Philip. 4:8, 9, 18; Rom. 15:16-19; Hebr. 12:28).

Also our spiritual songs must have words that are fit for the holiness of the Lord, those same words with which we can reprimand and admonish each other with the sound doctrine (Col, 3:16, 17; 1 Peter 4:11). Each offering, also the offertory in our songs must be pure and above reproach (Philip. 2:12-18). The song also, as offertory is the fruit from our lips, that we, as with our confessions, wish to keep free of impurity and depravity (Hebr. 13:15).

Ec.4.3. Songs, in which it has been shown that they are not unambiguous according to Gods Word, but contain false doctrine, are not allowed to be sung by us, says the Word of God (Rom. 14:23; Titus 2:7, 7).

Ec. 4.4. The consequence of this is that it is a congregational singing in which the harmony of praising and glorifying the Lord is broken (Rom. 15:4-6; Gal. 1:8; Hebr. 13:15; 1 peter 4:11).

Ec.4.5. Justified objections in many revision-requests against the choice of the *Liedboek* that contains false doctrine from the original churches, against the used criteria of selection, the specific contents of these songs and the enormous number whereby the Psalms were pushed aside, were practically all rejected.

With this the case has been definitely decided upon by two consecutive general synods and imposed upon the churches.

Further appeal along the formal church avenues has now been made impossible.

F. Article 65 and 67 of the Church Order.

F.1. Material:

General Synod of Ommen 1993, art. 41

General Synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, art. 43

General Synod of Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, art. 63

General Synod of Leusden 1999, art 41.1

General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002/2003, art. 38

F.2. Consideration:

F.2.1 The Church Order is specified in general context by and for the churches to promote and maintain the good order in and between churches based on Christian and biblical way and to strengthen the mutual unity. The love of Christ presses us to a service of love to each other of which the specified rules give a good repercussion.

F.2.2. The churches have obliged themselves to keep up the specified order in art. 84 of the C.O. Compliance with the specified order promotes mutual peace in the congregation and between churches because arbitrariness will be prevented. Nothing will be imposed on the churches from above (“as a straitjacket”) because together the churches themselves have, in good consultation, specified these rules to make coexistence possible.

F.2.3. Keeping the specified order prevents independentism on the one hand and on the other hand prevents a domineering attitude of persons and church-councils. Selective compliance with the specified order causes mutual conflicts in the congregation and in the bond of churches.

F.2.4. With regard to art. 65 and 67 (the filling in of the public worship service) a determination of direction (and explanation) has been formulated which will have repercussion on the use of the whole Church Order. There are orders for worship services but these definitely do not apply as a script. Decisions are taken about the liturgy but one is very careful not to impose something on the local churches, because every church has his own responsibility to the filling in of the worship service in compliance with contemporary lifestyle, of local contexts and of the character of the local church. Hymns too are selected which are linked to desires that live in the breadth of the church. With this, art. 65 and 67 (and - if we interpret all the articles of the Church Order in this way, - in fact the whole Church Order), have become meaningless, because the local church will decide how things will happen. Exceptions are possible (see the Determination of direction point 4) but the church council will be called to account for it. With an appeal on the local context, which must also be accounted for, many things are possible. Also things which are not agreed upon at synodical level.

F.3. Decision.

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled at Mariënberg on the 15th October 2005, declares that the above mentioned decisions of the General Synod of Ommen 1993, Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002/2003 with respect to art. 65 and 67 have been cancelled and the churches are not anymore bound to these decisions.

F.4. Grounds

F.4.1. Article 1 of the C.O. states why it is important that the churches together have a Church order.

This is based on 1 Cor.14:40 “Let all things be done decently and in order” and Col 2:5 “...I am with you in spirit to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith...” and 1 Cor. 14:33 “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.” The rules of the C.O. are based on what Scripture teaches us about church-government and mutual contact, although most rules are not found directly in Scripture.

F.4.2. By cancellation of the strict binding to the church order, the concerning articles have become meaningless. Through the chosen approach the binding to the rest of the articles of the church order are also disputable.

F.4.3 The decisions do not promote a good order and therefore not the unity of the churches. They sooner lead to independentism, proliferation and decay of the bond of churches.

G. Relationship Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK)

G.1. Material

General Synod Ommen 1993, article 64

General Synod Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, article 80

General Synod Leusden 1999, article 82.1

General Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003, article 125

General Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003, article 131

G.2. Considerations

G.2.1. Scriptures are clear where it concerns the pointing to and the rejection of heresies, and how the Lord wants us to deal with those who persist in heresy in Christ's Church..

Obedience on this point is not at odds with true brotherly love. (Ex.23:2; 2 Pet.2:1; Matt. 18:15-17; 2 Cor. 13:2; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:4-13; 2 Thess. 3:6; 2 Thess 3:14; 1 Tim. 5:20-22; 2 Tim. 3:5; 2 John 1:10)

G.2.2. Already since 1946, Synods of the Reformed Churches have continuously sought unity with the CGK, but the GS Arnhem 1981 widely rejected the Scripture criticism coming from the ministers of these churches. Up until the GS Ommen 1993 the churches continuously urged them not to tolerate Scripture criticism but to banish it and to choose for the truth and not the error. GS Ommen expresses her disappointment concerning the fact that the CRC did not want to respond to the concrete complaint that the Reformed Churches raised since the GS Arnhem 1981 concerning the dealing of the opinions of Prof. Dr. B.J. Oosterhoff and Prof. Dr. J.P. Versteeg.

The CGK Churches never disciplined these two professors.

G.2.3. Since 1994, Dr. B. Loonstra also published a number of books touching on the authority of Scripture. These are the *Geloofwaardigheid van de Bijbel* 1994 (Credibility of the Bible), *de Bijbel rechtdoen* 1999 (doing justice to the Bible), *Zo goed en zo kwaad* 2000 (Whether good or bad). To make the Bible 'credible' and therefore acceptable for post-modern man, the bible should not be taken literally in all cases anymore.

Wherever cultural differences, scientific insight and 'proven' contradictions stand in the way of the understanding of bible texts, they should be taken figuratively or symbolically. Not the entire biblical message need be considered valid for our times, see for example in the epistles of Paul about the role of women. It is up to the congregation of today to deliver a contemporary translation of the commandments of God: is it useful for the congregation and is there a demonstrable relation with 'love'?

It is in all a radical adaptation of the Word of God to the world of experience and perception of man. The authority of Scripture has been radically undermined by the opinions of Dr. Loonstra's criticism of Scripture.

G.2.4. At a meeting on the 22nd of May 1997 at Bunschoten, the Deputies for 'Church Unity' of the Reformed and of the CGK discussed a report on the points where Loonstra's publications touch on the confession (report deputies Church Unity, Leusden 1999):

"The Christian Reformed deputies can accept this report", but want a personal approach to avoid polarisation.

"From Reformed side it is pointed out, that an article or a book is a public matter. Evil has to be opposed from the start. Good care is necessary for the sheep of the flock.

The weight of the matter is also an important issue: it is not about the placing of accents, but it has to do with the confession itself. It is a matter of acknowledging the authority of the Holy Scripture".

G.2.5. GS Zuidhorn however, pronounces that in the CGK "there are no signs that sounds of criticism of Scripture is permitted", though deputies have to discuss in the near future the way the churches deal with publications that have to do with the 'authority of Scripture'.

G.2.6. The decision that local churches have the right to have an 'open pulpit', combined church services and Holy Supper celebrations with local CGK, before there is a national church-unity, obstructs a correct mutual responsibility of the bond of churches. It obscures the pure thoughts on the call for 'unity in truth'. This is also at odds with the church-order and the confession concerning the church.

G.3. Decision

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled on the 15th of October 2005 at Mariënberg pronounces that the mentioned decisions of GS Ommen 1993,

GS Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, GS Leusden 1999 and GS Zuidhorn 2002/2003 concerning the relationship towards the CGK have been cancelled and that therefore the churches are not bound to them anymore.

G.4. Grounds

G.4.1. The CGK never publicly rejected the false teachings of Scripture criticism, as they have been propagated and defended by Prof. Dr. B.J. Oosterhof and Prof. Dr. J.P. Versteeg. In doing so, they have, in fact, never really accepted the appeal of GS Arnhem 1981 to choose for the truth and to reject the error.

G.4.2. GS Ommen 1933 indicates that, following the final statements of the Canons of Dordt, judgement must be made on the grounds of writings of the public confession and the pronouncement of the churches themselves. But this is no excuse for a bond of churches to allow criticism of Scripture to be continued. (Matt. 7:6; Acts 5:17, 15:5; Titus 3:10; 1 Cor. 11:9; 2 John 1:10; art. 7 BC).

G.4.3. GS Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996 and Leusden 1999, express their thankfulness about the growing approaches, without showing that sounds of criticism of Scripture and/or different views, have been opposed. In doing so, these synods have neglected to show the CGK, what Scripture teaches on this point.

G.4.4. Despite that the criticism of Scripture was allowed to continue in which discipline was not exercised in the correct manner (which is in conflict with BC art. 29), an even closer approach has arisen between the RCN (lib) and the CGK. These decisions have made each church member and every church responsible for the criticism of Scripture, that is tolerated within the CGK.

G.4.5. Perforation of the church borders which is tolerated in the CGK, is in conflict with the obedience that is asked in order to follow the call of Christ on behalf of His servants, to give form locally to the Communion of Saints (art. 28 BC).

With this the true unity of the church is at stake and also the authority of Christ as Lord of the Church.

G.4.6. Also the relationship with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken, who tolerate false teachings, is in conflict with Word of God and the Confession of the church (art. 29 BC).

G.4.7. Local unity without national unity leads to conflict with Church Order and Confession concerning the church (art. 29, 31).

H. Relationship Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK)

H.1. Material

General Synod Ommen 1993, article 66

General Synod Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, article 82

General Synod Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, article 84

General Synod Leusden 1999, article 84.1

General Synod Leusden 1999, article 84.2

General Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003, article 126

General Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003, article 132

H.2. Consideration

H.2.1. Until GS Leusden 1999 synods have maintained that within the NGK there is too much freedom in dealing with teaching of Scripture as it has been defined by confession (Leusden, acts art. 84.1).

GS Zuidhorn 2002/2003 however expresses her gratitude for a growing mutual understanding (decision 4), it also expresses, that present contacts are a research for forming a basis to come to church-unity (decision 3, ground 2). It is stated that one has to be willing to learn from the

NGK (decision 3, ground 5). Nevertheless it has not been clearly shown, that the earlier objections have been taken away.

H.2.2. The NGK uses a Consent of Church Alliance, of which the preamble states “that whether the Consent of the Churches is accepted or not, it is not allowed to be a reason for a split or estrangement between congregations who are one in belief and confession” (art.2) Therein is also written: “The churches invite all congregations who have objections to the acceptance of the (a) church Consent, that they should, as much as possible, aim at that which has been agreed upon by a majority of votes”.

With this, each congregation can determine and do whatever is good in their own eyes. The scriptural calling, to be a bond of churches (according to Eph. 3:17,18) is, by doing so, being neglected.

H.2.3. Since 1995 a non-compulsory signing-form for ministers is being used, whereby the minister does not (also) formally bind himself to Scripture and the confession based on it. However, it is stated that a “ prospective minister will place his signature under” but this is not absolutely compulsory. This regulation is also valid for other office bearers (see also Consent for the Churches, AKS art. 17). In this way, the binding to Scripture and Confession becomes unstable.

H.2.4. In the NGK it is permitted that local churches open the office for women, and children are allowed to attend the Holy Supper.

Furthermore the NGK have, since 1969, not turned back from the false teachings of Rev. B. Telder concerning the so-called ‘transitional period’ (tussentoeestand) which is in conflict with Lords-day 22, question and answer 57.

Furthermore Scripture-criticism is being tolerated; (Rev. H. de Jong, especially concerning Genesis 1-11) and deviation regarding the Canons of Dordt (Rev. H. de Jong).

H.2.5. On the grounds of these facts, there is – contrary to the statements of GS Zuidhorn 2002/2003 – no reason at all to be thankful for closer relations, or to seek a ground for church-unity.

With the decisions taken at the different National Meetings (Landelijke Vergaderingen), the NGK turns away more and more from scriptural teachings.

H.2.6. The argument, that it would be non-ethical to break with a now already existing relationship, is wrong (GS Zuidhorn 2002/2003, decision 2). We must be obedient to the Word of God in everything and when it appears that the relationship was established on wrong grounds, then this relationship cannot be continued.

H.3. Decisions

H.3.1. Decision 1

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled on 15 October 2005 at Mariënberg pronounces that the mentioned decisions of GS Ommen 1993, GS Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996 (article 82 only), GS Leusden 1999 and GS Zuidhorn 2002/2003 concerning the relationship with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK) have been cancelled and therefore churches are not bound to them anymore.

H.3.2. Besluit 2

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled on 15 October 2005 at Mariënberg pronounces that the decision of GS Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996 in article 84, concerning the revision of decisions GS Amersfoort-West 1967, will be maintained.

H.4. Grounds

H.4.1. The Nederlands Gereformeerde kerken (NGK) up until now, have in no way made known that they are willing to alter their unscriptural course.

H.4.2. The Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken use a 'Consent for the Churches' which promotes independentism. No strict binding to the confession of the church is demanded from ministers and other office-bearers.

H.4.3. Several local Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken continue to open the Holy Supper table for children (Matt. 10:32; Matt. 16:15; Rom. 10:9,10; 1 Cor. 11:28; Phil. 2:11; Heb. 13:15; 1Tim. 6:12). Other local churches have opened the offices for women (compare 1 Cor. 14:34, 1 Tim. 2:11, Eph. 5:21,22 and 1 Cor. 11)
Scripture criticism and deviation from the Canons of Dordt are tolerated.

H.4.4. A local Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk is jointly responsible for the unreformed course of this bond of churches. Therefore, there is no room to acknowledge the Netherlands Reformed Churches as church of Christ on a local level.

H.4.5. The ground for decision 2 is similar to the ground belonging to the decision of GS Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, article 84.

J. Relations with churches abroad – Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA)

J.1. Materials:

Generale Synode Ommen 1993, artikel 69, Besluit 4:
Generale Synode Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, artikel 87
Generale Synode Leusden 1999, artikel 91
Generale Synode Zuidhorn 2002/2003, artikel 142
Generale Synode Zuidhorn 2002/2003, artikel 143

J.2. Considerations

J.2.1. The General Synod of Amersfoort 1967 has drawn up rules for the relations with churches abroad in her article 167 (repeating what GS Amersfoort 1948 already had decided),
a. to pay attention to each other that there will be no deviation from the reformed confession regarding the doctrine, the worship-service, the church-government and the church-discipline;
b. to sent to each other the agenda and decisions (Acts) of major meetings and to receive each others delegates at the meetings as advisors;
c.. to confer on a preceding matter regarding possible modifications or supplements of the confession, church order and liturgical forms;
d. to accept each other attestations and admit each others ministers to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments in compliance with the stipulation of the synod of Dordrecht 1892 in art. 165 and which was worked out at the synod of Groningen 1927 in art. 161 (including the further stipulation of Amsterdam 1936, art. 122, decision 1,4);
e. to account to each other for correspondence with a third party;

J.2.2. In art 139, the General Synod of Groningen-Zuid 1978 has, amongst others, pronounced with regard to art. 47 CO in which is spoken of the relations with churches abroad:
“It is also the calling of the true believers and churches to distinguish with diligence and good care from the Word of God as to what a true church is, to practise communion with the true church and to reject communion with churches which openly turn away from the doctrine and ordinances of the Word of God or which have been schismatically separated from the true church”.

J.3. Decision

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled at Mariëberg on the 15th October 2005, declares that the above mentioned decisions of the General Synod of Ommen 1993, Berkel en Rodenrijs 1996, Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002/2003 regarding a sister-church relation with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia have been cancelled and the churches are not bound to these decisions anymore.

J.4. Grounds

J.4.1. Our sister-churches in Australia (FRCA) had urgently requested the Reformed Churches to postpone a sister-church relation with the PCEA. The reason given by the FRCA was that the PCEA deviates on three points of the Word of God and the confession, in which differences of opinion and church practise have been observed:

- The PCEA admits ministers from outside their bond of churches (such as Baptists) to the pulpit.
- People from outside the PCEA are admitted to the Lords Table on account of their own testimony.
- Because of the above mentioned reasons, our sister-churches cannot as yet start a sister-church relationship with the PCEA.

J.4.2. Scripture teaches that Gods whole counsel must be proclaimed (Acts. 20:27; Rev. 22:18,19).

A Baptist can certainly not do so when speaking about the covenant. The confession says that the pureness of the preaching is a mark of the church of Christ (art. 29 B.C.) This pureness not only concerns the contents but also the preacher. The Church Order emphasizes great care with which the office bearers ought to be recognized and accepted, art. 3.9. The legality of the calling to office is at stake.

J.4.3. Furthermore Scripture teaches us that Gods wrath will come to the congregation when discipline is neglected (1 Cor. 11:17-34). With regard to the unsubstantial participation account of their own testimony, see John 5:31.

J.4.4. The church confesses that Lords Table must be kept holy.

Also the administering of the sacraments is a mark of the church of Christ (art. 29 BG).

J.4.5. An appeal to art. 50 with regard to ‘minor’ cases is not under discussion: in this case it is not a matter of minor importance,

J.4.6. It does not concern differences which in the past did not stop a sister-church relationship with Presbyterian churches. Entering a sister-church relationship ought to occur on the basis of current information and the testing in subordination to Gods Word, and not only on the basis of decisions made by synods in the past about status of a denomination.

M. Divorce

M.1. Material

General Synod Berkel & Rodenrijs 1996, article 45

General Synod Berkel & Rodenrijs 1996, article 46

General Synod Berkel & Rodenrijs 1996, article 47

General Synod Leusden 1999, article 72

General Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003, article 41

M.2 Considerations

M.2.1. The GS Berkel & Rodenrijs 1996 decides that two appeals regarding the question of pronouncing wrongful desertion as ground for divorce be rejected and to refrain from pronouncing that the question of wrongful desertion is a ground for divorce in the eyes of the Lord. (art. 46 and 47). For this the synod refers, amongst others, to the GS of Middelburg 1933: “granting of the request would implicate, that a pronouncement would be made over the already long existing difference of insight within the reformed churches with regard to the

wrongful desertion as ground for divorce”. Because of the impotency of being able to convince each other from the Scriptures, GS Middelburg made the following pronouncement: “The synod decides not to make a pronouncement about the question whether (excepting adultery) wrongful desertion is a legitimate reason for divorce before God”.

The synod also indicates that the consistory therefore, is not allowed to bind the consciences in this.

In addition to this, the synod approves of the deputy-report with regard to divorce. (art. 47). In this report it is assumed that divorce is an irreversible fact and points in the direction of adjustment of the rules to the practise.

M.2.2. The GS Leusden 1999 does not satisfy the requests from the churches to revise the decision of Berkel & Rodenrijs but give a further explanation and a different formulation. One of the new formulated starting points reads:

“There are also other serious forms of sin against one of Gods commandments by which marriage is fundamentally affected. No general rule can be given to judge in how far such sins become a ground to resign to a divorce.”

The synod does not reject the deputy-report but appoints new deputies to do further investigation in agreement with GS Berkel.

M.2.3. The GS Zuidhorn 2002/2003 makes a decision (art. 41) to make a new deputy-report in a shortened version to serve the churches for reflection and “absorption”. In this report an analogical reasoning with regard to 1 Cor. 7:12-16 is suggested, through which the congregation receives the authority to make rules that deviate from the commandments of God and of Christ.

This report assumes that for life in the “style of the Kingdom” and the distinction between right and wrong, the teachings of Christ teach more than the 10 commandments. Besides that, it is emphasised that the unreasonableness of the consequences of divorce is a reason for the non-annulment of marriage according to the rules of Christ, and is declared non-applicable.

Divorce can be a “lesser evil” according to the report.

In decision 4a the GS gives the possibility to refrain from using church discipline in some cases of non-permissible divorce.

It is striking that the mentioning of joint-unwillingness, powerlessness, general weakness, difficulties and problems is a reason for a call for church-wide humbleness with regard to divorce (decision 2a) instead of pointing to the sin being done on a large scale against the Lord.

M.3. Decision.

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled in a meeting on the 15th October 2005 at Mariënborg, declares that the decisions of GS Berkel & Rodenrijs 1996, GS Leusden 1999 and GS Zuidhorn 2002/2003 with regard to divorce have been cancelled and thus the churches are no longer bound to them.

M.4. Grounds

M.4.1. From the Scriptures we know that the Lord hates all divorce (Mal. 2:16; Matth. 5:32; Matth. 19:6; Mark 10:6-9, 1 Cor. 6:6-19; Hebr. 13:4).

Scripture however does recognise one situation in which divorce is permitted:

GS Hooegeven 1969/1970 refers to that in its considerations (ad a, 2 p. 133) in art. 134:

“The synod considers, among others, that from the antithesis that the Lord makes in Matth. 5:31 and 32, between that what is said regarding the certificate of divorce and that what He Himself says, follows that only adultery is mentioned as ground for divorce.”

In this the GS Hooegeven places itself up against an opinion wherein the concept sexual abuse is stretched to other situations. Only in the case of adultery, marriage is broken by the adulterous party and the divorce is permitted by the Lord. (Matth. 19:9)

Of course, one must always point to the path of reconciliation, but there is no duty with the affected party to always come to a restored marriage relationship.

In the case of wrongful desertion because of the faith of the man or woman, he or she is no longer bound to the unbeliever, who has left him or her (1 Cor. 7:15,16).

This is no new rule of Paul, but an application in an unusual situation of what Christ says in Matth. 10:35-37.

“For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.”

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

The Synod of Middelburg 1933, with regard to the allowing of divorce, made the following decision (Acts art. 130).

“The synod decides not to make a pronouncement about the question if (except adultery) wrongful desertion is a legitimate reason to come to divorce before God.

Any other reason for divorce is not allowed according to God’s Word.

M.4.2. The pronouncement of GS Berkel & Rodenrijs, who goes further than GS Middelburg (no binding of consciences) and the serving deputy-report that is influenced by the situation-ethics and congregation-ethics and for the unscriptural forms of ethics, that opens the doors in the churches, weakens the teaching from Scriptures with regard to marriage and divorce.

M.4.3. The unscriptural line that was started by Berkel & Rodenrijs, was not rectified by GS Leusden, but was confirmed and continued. With this, GS Leusden opens the way further for congregation- and situation-ethics, conflicting with God’s Word.

M.4.4. GS Zuidhorn neglected to defend the continuing validity of God commandments (Matth. 5:17-20) by sending a report to the churches stating that the brokenness of this world allows it to be a reason for not having to be bound to Gods commandments. Reference be made to what Scripture and the confession of the church teaches about this. (John 15:9,10; 1 Cor. 10:13; Phil. 3:12-14; Hebr. 12:4; 1 John 5:3,4; Rev. 12:17; HC. Lord’s Day 44, Q&A 115).

M.4.5. In the decision of GS Zuidhorn, the authority of the 7th commandment and all commandments of God are blemished and the church discipline is undermined (art. 7 BC), on the basis of the unscriptural exegesis of 1 Cor. 7 concerning the Christian freedom.

With this the holiness of the congregation is at stake.

N. Fourth commandment and Sunday’s rest

N.1. Material

General Synod Leusden 1999, article 25

General Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003, article 52

N.2. Considerations

N.2.1. On the agenda of GS Leusden 1999 there is one case of appeal with regard to a sermon of Rev. Ophoff at Nieuwegein about Lord’s Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism in which he states that there is no divine command of the Lord to rest on the Sunday anymore, but that now the Sunday is a good human institution (a responsible choice of the Christian church) that we have to uphold as much as possible. Many appeal were lodged against this at numerous major meetings.

N.2.2. In the grounds for the decision made by GS Leusden it is stated that two thoughts have always existed in the Reformed churches.

N.2.3. However, the churches have, over centuries, made pronouncements of the same tenor: maintaining the Sunday as a Christian Sabbath, based on the fourth commandment of God.

The repeatedly cropping up of opinions that deviate from God's Word made this necessary. Likewise, the struggles over Sabbath is also characterized in the seventeenth century: H.G. Visser concludes in his "De geschiedenis van de Sabbats-strijd onder de Gereformeerden in de zeventiende eeuw" (= The history of the Sabbath-struggles amongst the Reformed people in the seventeenth century):

"The practise of the celebration of the Sunday and the history, to which this study is devoted, proves that the celebration of the Sunday slackens when it is made loose from God's Word. Therefore it is important that through this struggle it is established that, according to Reformed interpretation, the Sunday must be celebrated in Christian liberty according to the law of God; not the Law of God taken generally, but the law of God as it is found in the Decalogue where this law prescribes rest and sanctification of the Sabbath." (p. 397)

N.2.4. The following church decisions should be considered:

1. the rules of the National General Synod Dordrecht 1618-19 (Post-acta 164th session) knows the following introduction and text:

The rules, regarding the maintaining of the Sabbath, or the Day of the Lord, formulated by the Professors and with permission of the brothers of Zeeland, were read and approved, are the following:

1. The fourth commandment has ceremonial and moral elements
2. The rest on the seventh day after creation and the strict maintaining of that day, which was, in particular, imposed upon the Jewish people, was ceremonial.
3. It is moral that a certain fixed day is intended for religion (godsdienst), with in it as much rest as is necessary for worship and holy meditation.
4. After the Sabbath of the Jews is done away with, the Christians must solemnly hallow the Sunday.
5. This day has always been maintained in the old Christian church since the time of the apostles.
6. This day must be consecrated to religion (godsdienst) in such a way, that one rests from all servile work (excepting works of charity and those works that are necessary) and also of all relaxation that obstructs religion (godsdienst).

In the introduction it is evident that these rules primarily concern the maintaining of the N.T. Sabbath, the Day of the Lord, that is, the Sunday and that these rules assume that the Sunday is the same as the Sabbath.

It is also evident from rule 1 that this maintaining is based on the fourth commandment (in the original text it even says divine fourth commandment).

In rules 3-6 it is determined what the moral is of the permanence of the divine fourth commandment. The ceremonial element, that has been done away with, was particularly related to the seventh day (Saturday) of the Jewish Sabbath, and the strict additional regulations (death penalty, etc.).

Lasting validity has however:

1. that there is one day in the week that is consecrated to religion (godsdienst) (rule 3).
2. that for Christians this is the Sunday.
3. that on this day man must rest from all daily work and recreation that does not fit in the service to God (rules 3,6).

These rules give form to the Sunday as N.T. Sabbath.

In its summary of the rules of Sunday rest, GS Leusden gives a completely deviating interpretation concerning both content and norm:

-The GS does not speak of religion (godsdienst) but only of worship service. Dordrecht speaks differently and more broadly of religion (godsdienst) and meditation, of resting from all servile work (excepting works of...), also resting from all relaxation that obstructs religion.

The rest does not limit itself to the public worship services – although it being the climax of the day – but also applies to delighting in the works of the Lord on the remainder of the day and in particular the personal and family meditation!

- In her conclusion the GS also speaks of the possibility to limit the time of rest because she has placed other accents than is written in the rules. Rule 6 speaks of a day that is to be consecrated to worship, not part of the day in which the worship service is held and considered.

- The GS speaks about resting as a ‘means’ and ‘making room’. The **amount** of rest is in fact changed into the **time** of rest. The **amount** of rest however, indicates the nature of effort given on the Sabbath, they must be focussed on religion (godsdiens) (compare what the Lord Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath says about this in Matth. 12:1-8, 9-14 etc.). Relaxation can also obstruct religion, says rule 3. It is not about ‘making room’ but about a hearty focussing on the rest that is qualified through religion (godsdiens).

Extra emphasis must be put on that what is stated in rules 3-6, also with regard to the resting, concerning the durability of the fourth commandment! Herewith it is very clearly confessed by the church that the Sunday and Sunday rest is founded on the divine fourth commandment. Yet the GS does not seem to emanate from the normative. Whereas rules 4 and 6 state that the Christians must solemnly consecrate and hallow this day, Leusden speaks about an optimal situation that arises when the Sunday is a day of rest. In fact Leusden turns round what is said in the rules of Dordrecht. Dordrecht teaches that the Sunday rest is based on the divine commandment: GS Leusden makes something humane of it, namely the optimal. This optimal has no divine authority.

That the GS Dordrecht really did see this hallowing of the Sunday as a consequence of the fourth commandment can be even more emphasized by two more pronouncements that the same GS made at the time (163rd session, 5):

“Dat men de Hoog Mog. Heeren Staten Generaal zal verzoeken, dat de veelvuldige en dagelijks overal in deze Provincie, toenemende schending des Sabbats, door nieuwe en scherpe plakaten moge worden geweerd en voorkomen. Bij gelegenheid van de orde op het weren van de schendingen des Sabbats, is overwogen de kwestie van de noodzakelijkheid der onderhouding van den Dag des Heeren, die men in de Kerken van Zeeland begonnen is rijpelijk te onderzoeken, en zijn de Heeren Professoren verzocht, in het bijzonder met de broederen van Zeeland over de kwestie eene vriendelijke conferentie aan te stellen, en meteen te overwegen, of niet eenige zekere algemeene regelen met gemeene toestemming zouden kunnen begrepen en gesteld worden binnen welker grenzen beide de partijen, in het verhandelen van deze kwestie, zich zolang zouden houden, totdat, in de naaste Nationale GS, over deze kwestie nader zoude onderzoek worden gedaan.”

(177th session: XIV.):

“Dat die gruwelijke en menigvuldige ontheiligingen van den Sabbat, die dagelijks voorvallen door marktdagen, kermessen, maaltijden van gildenwachten, buurten, bruiloften, door wapenoefeningen, jagen, visschen, vogelvangen, balslaan, door het spelen van comediën, door dansen, boelhuizen, gelagen, en allerhande weinig noodzakelijke slaafsche werken, en zeer vele diergelijke andere, die in deze landen met groote ergernis, en tot oneer van den Gereformeerden Godsdiens, en groote vermindering van den Godsdiens, doorgaans aangroeien, zeer scherp mogen worden verboden en verhinderd”.

These rules of Dordrecht have, even though they were drawn up as a temporary formula, through the centuries, functioned as a binding pronouncement.

N.2.5. After a period of decline in the churches, came the Separation as reformation of the church. From the many pronouncements it became clear on the one hand that observing (practising) the fourth commandment in that time gave a lot of problems, but that the church

continuously wanted to unambiguously preserve the truth of Gods Word. This is clear in the following pronouncements:

2. Synod of Amsterdam 1836 (Acts art. 62): The congregations must be seriously admonished to faithful hallowing of the Day of rest of the new covenant, the Day of the Lord. Violators of the Sabbath command in the congregation must be admonished and in resistance, must be censured and in the case of hardening, must be excommunicated. Those who experience difficulties and suffer loss because of work or trade, must be shown Gods promises and the purpose that the Lord has with poverty and need, namely humiliation, purification and sanctification.

3. *Synod of Amsterdam 1840 (Acts VI art 9.): "Dewijl er sommige beroepen of kostwinnigen zijn, welke ook op den Rustdag worden uitgeoefend, bij voorbeeld het houden van veerschepen, het tol-gaaren, het verkopen van melk en dergelijke, werd gevraagd: hoedanig met degenen, die zulke dingen doen behoort gehandeld te worden? Dat ten dezen aanzien moet verwezen worden naar den 38^{ste} Zondag van den Catechismus, en naar de 164^{ste} sessie, der post-acta van de GS te Dordrecht, anno 1618 en 1619, met sterke afmaning van alle werken die niet tot de Godsdienst, noodzakelijkheid en liefdadigheid behooren. En, indien al ergens de uitoefening van zoodanige werkzaamheden in de gemeente-leden geduld wordt, is zulks nochtans in de opzieners en diakenen niet te verdragen, dewijl deze daardoor een kwaad voorbeeld aan de leden geven.*

4. Synod of Zwolle 1854 (Acts 22nd session, art. 7) is of the opinion that she must stay with the decision of Amsterdam 1840.

5. GS Franeker 1863 (Acts art. 91): "Not to make any other decision than that which already exists and assigns this and similar cases to the church council in order that the fourth commandment of the holy law of God be maintained."

6. GS Middelburg 1869 (Acts art 55): Referred back to the GS 1840 art. 9 with the addition: "The GS urges in all earnestness the teachers and members of our churches to be conscientious about travelling by public transport on the day of the Lord."

It is true that these pronouncements, made by General Synods between 1834 and 1892 according to the agreements of 1892, are not binding for the churches anymore, yet they are illustrative of how the official doctrine of the church in the course of history is maintained and rejecting errors in doctrine and life.

N.2.6. After the liberation follows the struggles in the 1960's.

7. GS Hoogeveen 1969-1970, who has, amongst others, to deal with the teachings of the ministers J.O.Mulder and G.Visee about the legality of the ten commandments (acts, art 249 I B, p 214, 215), in its considerations states:

"-that neither the teachings of Christ, who gave the understanding of the law in its true depth, nor does it mean the end of the law when taking away the use of many stipulations of the law, especially that of the ten commandments as positive and thus also for the time of the new testament, binding law. This also includes the law of the Sabbath, the seventh, the eighth, the ninth and tenth commandment (with reference to Rom. 7:7, 13:8-10; Eph. 6:2,3 and James 2:11)"

"-that the speaking of the New Testament about the freedom of the law, and of the curse of the law does not have any relation to the change in the validity of the law, but to a change in the position of the believer, who, through Christ has been freed from the curse of the law; this also makes it clear that the law as rule of thankfulness confronts us no less distinctly and strongly as under the old covenant (referring to Matth. 5:17; Hebr. 8:10; James 2:8-12)."

N.2.7. GS Zuidhorn rejects all appeals directed to her that came as comprehensive well-founded revision requests.

In these requests the validity of the divine Sabbath commandment until the second coming of Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, was defended; the validity of the ordinance of creation of

working six days and resting one day until the end of time; hallowing the Sunday, the day of the Lord, in a respectful and obedient manner as new testament form of the Sabbath according to the divine fourth commandment; the Sunday rest with in it the exalting in the great works of the Lord in Creation, redemption and Re-creation; the diligently coming to the public worship services on Sunday as often as Christ calls together his congregation; refraining from professional labour, other activities and relaxation (excepting works of necessity, such as health care, charity and law and order) that is in conflict with the purpose of this day in which the Lord is the centre; the great meaning of scriptural hallowing of the Sabbath for the world in which we live.

Reference was made in the argumentation to Scriptural passages, Lord's days 32, 34, 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism, Ursinus' commentary of the HC, Pronouncements for the GS Dordrecht 1618-1619, the Westminster Confession and to many specific passages in published texts of commentaries and sermons of Reformed ministers of the 20th century with regard to the fourth commandment.

N.2.8. The GS Zuidhorn appoints deputies to realize church agreements about the point of Sunday rest by means of a hand-out (handreiking) to get over any unsolved dilemmas.

N.3. Decision

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled on the 15th October 2005 at Mariënberg, pronounces that the mentioned decisions of the GS Leusden 1999 and of GS Zuidhorn 2002/2003, with regard to the fourth commandment have been cancelled and that therefore the churches are not bound by them.

N.4. Grounds

N.4.1. The Holy Scripture clearly teaches us that the fourth commandment and in it the mentioned Sabbath-rest remains valid until Christ's return; it also becomes clear from the Scriptures that in the new-testament time the Christian Sabbath is held on the day of the Lord, that is the first day of the week. (Gen. 2:2,3; Ex. 16:22-30; Ex. 20:18-26; Ex. 20:11; Ex. 31:14,15; Neh. 13:17; Is. 58:13,14; Jer. 17:21-27; Matth. 5:17,18; Mark 2:27; John 20:19; Acts 2:1; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Col. 2:16,17; Hebr. 4:4-10; Rev. 1:10). This was summarized in the past by the church and defended in her confession and General Synod decisions (Lord's Days 33,34,38 of the HC; National General Synod Dordrecht 1618-1619, Postacts 164th session).

N.4.2. The opinion of Rev. Ophoff, that the Sunday rest is not based on a divine command, but that it is a good human institution, is contrary to the teaching of Scripture with regard to the Sabbath rest in the fourth commandment.

N.4.3. The holding of the Sunday as day of rest on the grounds of the fourth commandment is reduced by the GS Leusden and the GS Zuidhorn, to a human opinion that has right of existence next to an opinion as taught by Rev. Ophoff. However, an opinion is not allowed to become binding (GS Zuidhorn, decision 3). In this way the teachings of Scripture with regard to the Sunday rest cannot be taught with divine authority in the Reformed Churches (liberated) anymore.

N.4.4. This has serious consequences, not only for the preaching with regard to the fourth commandment but also to the whole of the Law of God (Matth. 5:17-19; James 2.10).

N.4.5. It also has serious consequences for Christian life and particularly the hallowing of the Sunday and Sunday labour. For this church discipline cannot be practised any more. God Word is made powerless. The Church is affected in her foundations and is not a pillar and foundation of the Truth anymore (1 Tim. 3:15).

N.4.6. It is not correct to say, as GS Leusden and GS Zuidhorn stated, that there have always been two opinions next to each other that have had a right of existence; the churches have never ecclesiastically accepted two opinions about the Sunday. On the contrary, through the

centuries there has been a constant struggle against the opinion that the Sunday rest is not commanded by God

(S.D. van Veen, 'Zondagsrust en zondagsheiliging in de zeventiende eeuw', Callanbach, Nijkerk, 1889; H.B. Visser, 'De geschiedenis van den sabbatsstrijd onder de Gereformeerden in de 17^{de} eeuw', Kemink, Utrecht 1939).

N.4.7. GS Zuidhorn did not give Deputies 'Fourth Commandment and the Sunday' the task to determine whether or not that the Sunday rest is based on the divine fourth commandment. Instead it was assigned to giving a hand-out (handreiking) to the churches, wherein it was concluded that two opinions are allowed to exist next to each other.

In this way the ecclesiastical path for the concerned members was permanently closed.

III. Decision:

Regarding the proposal concerning the criticism of Scripture in the evangelisation method Emmaüs

- a. not to make any pronouncement;
- b. to assign to newly appointed Deputies Synod-decisions to study this proposal and to report at the following synod.

Grounds:

- a. the mentioned subject was not part of the original deputies report and was not part of the assignment of the committee
- b. It is important, however, that the synod-decision about the 'Emmaüscursus' (course) is tested and rejected if necessary.

IV. Decision:

to also assign to newly appointed Deputies Synod-decisions to study the subject of celebration of the Lord's Supper in crisis areas, to broaden the foundation of the rejection and to report at the following synod.

Grounds:

- a. in the original deputies report it is suggested that the synod-decisions concerning this subject be rejected.
- b. the assembly is also of the opinion that the mentioned decisions should be rejected, but finds that the wording of this rejection is not well-founded enough.
- c. broader foundation of the mentioned decisions was part of the assignment of the committee, but through circumstances the committee did not succeed in this.

V. Decision:

That the committee-report and the supplement with this report be published as a complete edition with the Acts of the Synod.

Grounds:

- a. the synod considers the report with considerations and decisions to be of significant importance for the churches seeing as it records in the most extensive and complete manner the grounds for our liberation and the rights of and the calling to liberation and that the right of existence of De Gereformeerde Kerken is well-founded and can be accounted for;
- b. it is important that for everyone the call for liberation can be accountable.

VI. Decision:

- a. that the committee is assigned to check the report for the following session and to correct any spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, wording and uniformity of the language;
- b. that at the following session of the general synod the report be fixed in its final text.

VII. Decision:

- a. that new deputies shall be installed who will be assigned to the follow-up task with regard to the synod decisions since 1990;
- b. that the 'moderamen' proposes an instruction for this committee to be determined at the last session of the synod.