

**EXCERPTS OF REPORT OF
DEPUTIES FOR FOREIGN RELATIONS
TO GENERAL SYNOD EMMEN 2009
OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES (RESTORED)
(Completed November 2009)**

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4.2 Regarding Abbotsford

1. Mandate.

Synod Zwolle 2007 gave the Deputies for Relations with Foreign Churches the task of determining the legitimacy of the liberation/secession of the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford.

2. Reason for Secession

The Canadian Reformed Churches have, since 1992, established sister church relations¹ with the following churches:

1. PCK Presbyterian Church of Korea
2. FCS Free Church of Scotland
3. OPC Orthodox Presbyterian Church
4. RCUS Reformed Church in the United States
5. URC United Reformed Church
6. RCNZ Reformed Church of New Zealand
7. ERQ l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec

3. Concerns of the Liberated Reformed Church

What applies to all of the churches listed above, and especially to the first three that have a Presbyterian background, is that they have departed from Reformed teaching in the following points:

1. They do not know how to carefully supervise the admission to the Lord's supper table;
2. They believe the pluriformity of the church.
3. They diminish the authority of the office-bearers.
4. They also accept as confessed members those who confess something that differs from the Reformed doctrine.

Although these concerns apply to all seven of the above-named churches, the church struggle dealt specifically with the relationship with the OPC.

4. Sentiments in the Canadian Reformed Churches

Already in 1977 they acknowledged the OPC as a true church.

But in 1983 a congregation, together with its minister, Rev. B.R. Hofford, separated from the OPC and was received into the Canadian Reformed Churches with approval.

¹ A sister church relationship is known in Canada as Ecclesiastical Fellowship, EF (see Rev. P.K.A. de Boer, *Reformed Polemics*, October 24, 2001, p.5).

This secession took place on account of the lack of supervision of the admission to the Lord's supper table, as is the custom in the OPC. This secession was considered legitimate and respected in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Even the classis dealing with this issue determined that a following synod needs to agree with this matter, so that unless the OPC repents, the present relationship must be broken.

5. Point of View of the OPC

The OPC has been continually questioned about their unreformed Lord's supper practice. However on different occasions they declared that they were not prepared to change this practice.

Two examples of this:

- a) In 1998 their delegate, Rev. J.J. Petersen, explained to the Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches that the OPC has the right to admit those to membership and thereby to the Lord's supper those who do not make profession of the Reformed faith.
- b) Afterwards OPC deputies explained that "*We believe that the church is competent to determine as valid and credible a confession of the Christian faith for communicant membership that is not also in accord with the confession of the church.*"

6. The Church at Abbotsford in the beginning

Even in 2004 the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford sent an appeal to the Synod regarding the decision of Synod 2001 to go forward with the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC.

In the local congregation of Abbotsford people observed the rule

that members of sister churches and of those churches in a relationship of E.F. are only allowed to participate in the Lord's supper on presentation of a travel attestation.

This attestation must be submitted on paper, on official letterhead of the church, and is to be signed by two office-bearers. No oral or personal attestations will be accepted.

This local regulation is fully in agreement with Article 60 of the Church Order. *The consistory shall admit to the Lord's supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life.*

7. The Church at Abbotsford later on

In correspondence of a later date the consistory makes no further mention of Article 60 C.O. In defence of the open Lord's supper in the OPC reference is only made to question 82 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which speaks of those who should be restrained because they "*show that they are unbelieving and ungodly.*"

Now that only the practice of life is mentioned, Reformed doctrine is no longer being considered.

When the consistory gives up its resistance against the ecumenical contacts, the concerned brothers continue the struggle.

8. The church orderly way

On February 20, 2004, Synod Chatham 2004 of the Canadian Reformed Churches denied all appeals, including the objections of Abbotsford, regarding the continuation of ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC.

On October 4, 2005 the concerned brothers requested the consistory of Abbotsford to send a new appeal to Synod 2007.

On February 4, 2006 the response of the consistory shows that the church's relationship with the OPC is no longer seen as objectionable.

On April 12, 2006 the brothers outlined their objections concerning the consistory's change in attitude. The consistory sent an unsatisfactory response.

On June 7, 2006 the brothers provided additional information concerning their objections to the letter of consistory dated February 4, 2006.

On July 14, 2006, after receiving an unsatisfactory response from the consistory, an appeal was sent to Classis Pacific East (CanRC). The appeal was denied.

On November 19, 2006, after the celebration of the Lord's supper, the consistory released a document into the congregation with the title "Ecumenical Relations." In this letter the consistory defended the Synod decisions of 2001 and 2004. Note that the consistory had earlier appealed against these decisions.

On December 11, 2006 the brothers outlined their objections against the view of the consistory.

On January 22, 2007 an unsatisfactory response was received from the consistory.

On March 9, 2007 a draft appeal was sent to the consistory for Synod 2007 so that the relationship with the OPC could still be discontinued.

On May 31, 2007 the above request to the consistory was rejected.

In the opinion of the concerned brothers they had reached the end of the church orderly way, and the only option left was to liberate.

9. Secession

In a letter dated July 17, 2007, the concerned brothers called upon the congregation at Abbotsford to liberate themselves from the Synod decisions of 1992 to 2004 with regard to the ecclesiastical relationships (EF) and the acceptance and implementation of these decisions by the consistory. They called the people to attend separate worship services, which were held from July 22, 2007 and following.

It should be noted that in Lynden, 20 kilometres away from Abbotsford, a secession took place already on June 13, 2006. Here Rev. Hofford, named earlier, took the lead in submitting objections to the establishment of these ecclesiastical relationships.

10. Institution

On Sunday December 9, 2007 the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford was instituted. At the time of formation the congregation had 8 professing members and 7 baptized members. Since then, as at August 2009, there are 13 professing members and 8 non-professing members, with two families being regular visitors of the worship services. The total church attendance is about 40 people.

11. Assessment of the Liberation

A study of the documentation shows the faithfulness of the concerned brothers. When the consistory changed its course and gave in to the pressure from the federation they held onto and defended Article 29 of the Belgic Confession and Article 60 of the Church Order without wanting to give any ground. In order to judge the legitimacy of the liberation, we must in the first place ask ourselves whether the deviations from Scripture and confessions in the OPC and therefore also in the CanRC are of great importance.

Are these ingrained habits, or are the errors and deviations of a structural nature?

Regarding the relationship between the Liberated and Presbyterian churches (OPC) in Canada, Rev. P.K.A. de Boer² wrote an extensive article³. On page 7 of this article he posed the question how it could be that in the OPC open communion is held.

He brings forward two issues:

a) The doctrine of the church.

This issue is only mentioned here and later he elaborates on it.

b) The binding to the confession.

He explains that in the reformed churches, especially the officebearers are bound to the Three Forms of Unity. They must do everything in their power to promote and defend the reformed teachings therein, even in the details.

This is not so in the Presbyterian churches. The binding of their officebearers to the confession is not strong, they may deviate on small points of their confession as long as they remain under the system of doctrine⁴. This has dire consequences. They may deviate on portions of doctrinal teaching⁵.

Opinions, for example, on infant or adult baptism are not resolved before celebrating communion together. Baptists are admitted to this sacrament in the midst of the congregation.

How is it than possible that Reformed churches, in recent church history, have come to accept the Presbyterian churches as true churches⁶?

As the brothers in Abbotsford say, there was a failure to “test the spirits, if they are of God.” They then point to the Westminster Confession, chapter 25, where they consider that an unreformed view of the church is put forth.

² Rev. P.K.A. deBoer is a liberated minister in Australia (FRCA).

³ Found in *Reformed Polemics*, October 24, 2001.

⁴ The office-bearers in the Presbyterian Churches are required to agree that the adopted confessions contain the *system of doctrine in the Holy Scriptures*.

⁵ The practical difference is that in Presbyterian Churches office-bearers may accept some deviation from the literal meaning of their adopted confessions so long as they adhere to the *system of doctrine* that is contained in them.

⁶ Professor van Dam in the Clarion (1992): Rather we should recognize our error and admit our double standard and perhaps revise our relationship with Korea and Scotland to that of ecclesiastical contact (See first volume of Reformed Polemics, Vol. 1, No. 7, www.spindleworks.com/rp/VOL1_RP/Vol1_No7.pdf).

We read there in Article 4:

And particular churches, ... are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.

Thus far the confession of Westminster, to which all the Presbyterian churches listed under section 2 above adhere.

In addition, they say that if people continue to ask of the Presbyterian churches, that they should repent, see the last line under point 4, then that will ask too much of them. They teach and act in accordance with their confession and their tradition.

Up to the present there has been no sign of repentance in these churches. Throughout the entire time there has been no openness to the call to the Reformed position, even after more than 30 years of discussions. See the decisions of the OPC under section 5.

12. Final Evaluation of the Liberation

In order to come to a final evaluation of the legitimacy of the Liberation in Abbotsford we list a number of factors to be considered.

1. Are Scripture and confession at stake?
2. Was the church orderly way completely followed?
3. Does it involve a broad range of objections?
4. Is the church struggle broadly based in the churches?
5. Is the church completely corrupted?
6. Are there no positive reactions?

12.1 Are Scripture and confession at stake?

Under section 11 it is described how Article 29 of the Belgic Confession is pushed aside. The Presbyterian brethren do not speak about the true and the false church. Article 60 of the Church Order is not being maintained: also those who do not profess the reformed faith are admitted to holy communion. Thus it is in the Presbyterian sister churches, but visitors from these churches are also welcome at the liberated churches (CanRC). The latter has also repeatedly occurred in the congregation at Abbotsford. We can therefore say that there is a departure from Scripture, the confession and the Church Order.

12.2 Was the church orderly way completely followed?

Under section 8 there is an enumeration of the church orderly way that was followed.

We can summarize this as follows:

- In 2004 General Synod Chatham denied the appeal of the church at Abbotsford.
- In 2006 Classis Pacific East rejected the concerned brothers' case over against their consistory and their appeal was denied.
- Since the Synod in 2004⁷ church members could no longer turn to the Synod, as it is only through the consistories that they could lodge an appeal.

Revision requests could only be made if new arguments were presented. However there were not any. In this way it was shown that the church orderly way was completely followed and exhausted.

12.3 Does it involve a broad range of objections?

The brothers dealt with ecclesiastical relationships that led to open communion. That is the major point of their concern and of their church struggle.

⁷ See Article 20 of the Acts of Synod 2004.

But with the Presbyterian doctrine of the church⁸ there comes a relativization of the entire reformed doctrine.

If one can celebrate communion with, for example, Baptists, how strong is the weight on the confession of the covenant? This ecumenism to which people entrust themselves forms an entry point for a variety of false doctrine.

We may say that the struggle that took place exposed a broad opening for heresies.

12.4 Is the church struggle broadly based in the churches?

We hear from the brothers in Abbotsford that they do not possess the means of widely presenting their concerns. If no attention to their concerns can be published in *Clarion*⁹, then their struggle will remain hidden from the ordinary church members.

Unfortunately many church members do not read reports from Synod or Classis.

A similar struggle to Abbotsford was also held in Lynden (U.S.A.), and in neighbouring congregations to Abbotsford. No further information is known about this.

12.5 Is the church completely corrupted?

As deputies we have no clear picture of the situation in the Canadian churches. According to Br. VanTil, when the merger with the United Reformed Churches will occur a completely new hymnbook will be introduced. The extent to which the Scripture criticism found in Kampen has found an echo in Canada, still has to be researched.

12.6 Are there no positive reactions?

We do not know the extent of the deformation and for that reason we do not know if there is a turning for the better.

13. Summary of Final Evaluation

There are indications that argue for the legitimacy of the liberation in Abbotsford in 2007. It was about serious issues concerning Scripture, the confessions and the Church Order. The brothers have carried on their struggle in faith, walking the church orderly way to the end.

However there are still unanswered questions. Has the ‘church view’ of the OPC indeed penetrated and changed the spirit in general? And does this ‘doctrine of the church’ indeed relativize reformed doctrine? And to what extent has this thinking affected the overall deformation of the Canadian churches?

4.2a Report Findings

The Deputies for Relations with Foreign Churches report to Synod Emmen that the legitimacy of the Liberation of the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford in 2007 is not clear yet.

Grounds:

1. More study is needed to determine how the confession concerning the more-or-less-pure churches functions in the Presbyterian churches (especially in the OPC).
2. More study of the Westminster Confession is needed.
3. There is still no clarity on the influence of the interdenominational thinking and actions of the OPC in the minds of the Canadian churches.

⁸ Chapter 25 of the Westminster Confession.

⁹ Official church magazine of the Canadian churches.

4. There is still no clarity on how far Reformed teachings have been relativized in the Canadian churches.
5. There is still no clarity on how far the Canadian churches are actually corrupted.

**REPORT OF DEPUTIES TO GENERAL SYNOD EMMEN
REGARDING FURTHER INVESTIGATION OF THE
LIBERATED REFORMED CHURCH AT ABBOTSFORD
(Completed May 2010)**

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Introduction

During their investigation of the Secession of the Liberated Reformed Church (LRC) at Abbotsford, the deputies Contact Churches Abroad gave attention to the Westminster Confession (WMC) and the Presbyterian Churches. This investigation of the WMC and the Presbyterian churches could not be completed in time. The deputies therefore asked the General Synod not to deal with the request from the LRC at Abbotsford as yet, but to give deputies the task to make an extensive study of the confessional contents of the WMC and the ecclesiastical viewpoint of the Presbyterian Churches. The synod was of the opinion that they should not postpone a decision about the LRC at Abbotsford, but to give the deputies the task to ask a series of questions, compiled by the synod, during a visit to this Canadian Church and to report back to the synod so that, still during this session, synod can come to a decision. The questions for the LRC were sent to the church council of the LRC at Abbotsford in advance. The visit to this church took place between 21st April and 3rd May 2010.

Congregation at Abbotsford

The LRC at Abbotsford is situated in the Fraser Valley that stretches from Vancouver to Chilliwack, along the border with the USA. The CANRC's of Chilliwack, Yarrow, Abbotsford, Aldergrove and Vernon are all situated in this agricultural area (the churches of classis Pacific East). The church members of the LRC have seceded from these CANRC's (see *Act of Secession and Return*, **supplement 1, including appendix**). The American Reformed Church at Lynden in the USA is situated just outside the Fraser Valley area. At present there are 28 members in the LRC of which 15 are confessing members. There are 3 elders and as yet no deacons. The elders take on the tasks of the deacons.

Visits and meetings

Meetings were held with the church council of Abbotsford on 22nd, 24th, 26th April and 1st May. The men's society meeting was also visited on 22nd April.

The following day, 23rd April, a congregational meeting was held. Deputies delivered an address on the ecclesiastical situation in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The members were then given the opportunity to ask questions. Good use was made of this opportunity. Prior to this a meal was had with the congregation.

All congregation members (except one sister who was away) were visited and a regular visitor to the church services was also visited. The church council members were also personally visited.

Discussions (see attachment 2 & 2a)

1st Meeting (22-4)

The brothers had answered the questions in writing (**supplement 2**). During the meeting general information was exchanged with the brothers about the situation in Abbotsford and in the Netherlands. A time schedule was made for the set questions for the church council of Abbotsford and the deputies.

2nd Meeting (24-4)

The questions and answers were discussed systematically according to the schedule: general – concerning confessions, doctrine, sacraments, discipline and Church Order. Also general – concerning the Liberation of The Reformed Churches (DGK), Presbyterian churches, the blessing by an elder and sister-church relationships.

3rd Meeting (26-4)

Discussion of some of the visitation questions concerning the congregation, the offices, the preaching, the teaching, the sacraments, the Church Order, liturgy and congregational life.

4th Meeting (01-5)

During this meeting the questions that the church council of the LRC at Abbotsford had asked the deputies were discussed (see **supplement 2a**).

Ecclesiastical difficulties

It is clear that also in the CANRC all kinds of changes have taken place over the last years. These changes have led to all kinds of letters of objections being written to church councils, classes and synods. The greatest difficulty lies in the sister-church relationships. Over the last decade the CANRC have entered into sister-church relationships with a number of Presbyterian churches and churches that call themselves Reformed. The objections mainly concern the sister-church relationships with the OPC (Orthodox Presbyterian Church)¹⁰ (see **also supplement 3**) and the ‘Reformed Church’ URC (United Reformed Church). In the relationship with the OPC the ‘Westminster Standards’ (Westminster Confession, Larger and Shorter Catechism) play a decisive role. In the relationship with the URC it especially concerns the covenant and pluriformity, comparable with the situation before 1944¹¹.

The “Westminster Standards”

Two important groups were involved when the Westminster Confession (1643-1648) was formulated.¹² These two groups, the Presbyterians and the “Independents”, were each other’s opposites where it concerns the government of the church. The Presbyterians strive for a national church with clear hierarchical traits, while the Independents assumed independent

¹⁰ The following quotation supports Rev. Hafford regarding the OPC and allowing Baptists to the Holy Supper. Rev. N. Hegeman expresses concern that the current URC practice “separates us from the practice of churches we have ecclesiastical fellowship with **that allow for Baptists to be members (OPC)** (bold by Deputies). This is an interesting point. It is interesting because the OPC by her practice is in flagrant contradiction to what her Confessional standards teach. The Westminster Confession (28.5) states: **It be a great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance**”. This is not an example the URC should imitate. In fact, we need to call the OPC to repentance for this. The Reformed churches have always required more than a vague “visible profession of belief in the Gospel.” **It is Presbyterian polity which makes this the single qualification necessary to become a member** (bold by Deputies). We are not Presbyterian. We are Reformed. (Christian Renewal April 14, 2010)

¹¹ Question 11: How will CanRC ministers relate to those URCNA ministers and churches who not only hold to and preach the distinction between those internally/externally in the covenant but for whom it is of the essence of Reformed covenant theology since these two views would seem to be mutually exclusive? Could a congregation have a minister one year who preached the distinction and the next year who preached that all baptized members are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way, without distinction?
Answer: It is theoretically possible that some ministers preach an internal/external distinction within the covenant, and that this would be tolerated within the Canadian Reformed federation. But that is rare and when it happens, it is not because the Can. Ref. seminary had taught them in that way.

(Christian Renewal 10 March 2010, 16 Questions - by Dr. G.H.Visscher and Dr. Jason Van Vliet of the CANRC).

¹² Bouwman, C. *The Doctrine of the Church in Reformed/Presbyterian Contacts*. 1991.

local churches. As far as the contents of doctrine was concerned, there was little difference between the two groups.

Regarding these contents, we can state that the WMC wanted to closely associate with the Reformed tradition, especially that of Calvin.

Yet, objections were voiced against the “Standard” a number of times. Rev. P. Kingma has, on a number of occasions in the past, issued publications about this.

The criticism on the WMS is also expressed in the Acts of the GS CANRC of 1983, in the report of the deputies for contact with the OPC.

The criticism is directed especially at the wrong ideas about the covenant and the church, and the relationship between these two. The WMS speaks of an invisible and a visible church. The covenant with the elect corresponds with the invisible church and the covenant with the believers and their seed corresponds with the visible church.¹³

Rev. B. Hofford has written a summary of the comparison he makes between the Three Forms of Unity and the WMS in his brochure *Open Communion in the OPC*. Because of its clarity we will include the summary in this report.

Westminster Standards	vs	Three Forms of Unity
secret-will viewpoint		revealed viewpoint
covenant with elect		covenant with believers
invisible church		visible church
pluriformity of the church		uniformity of the church
more or less pure		true or false
open communion		closed communion

Summary

Doctrine:

- A. There is a visible church
- B. There is an invisible church (only in the sense that we can conceive of all the elect past, present, and future as one day being in heaven with God).

Practice:

A. Right

- 1. We only consider, address, and treat members of the true visible church as the elect.
- 2. We don't consider, address, and treat non-members of the true visible church as either elect or reprobate.

B. Wrong (OPC,WMC)

- 1. They consider, address, and treat certain members of true and false church as elect.
- 2. They don't always consider, address, and treat all members of the true visible church as elect (especially in the WCF).

¹³ Hofford, B.R. *Open Communion in the OPC*. 1990

The Doctrinal Pronouncements of the URC

Already in the foregoing, mention was made of the covenant with regard to the *Westminster Standards* and the OPC. We will now examine how this is taught in the URC. We will take the pronouncement of the URC Synod (Schererville, 2007) as basic principle.

The URC synod of Schererville (2007) rejected the ‘errors’ of *those who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way, such that there is no distinction between those that only have an outward relationship to the covenant of grace through baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone, through grace alone.* (Acts, URC Synod 2007, Art. 72).

It must be clear that this decision calls up memories of the struggle during the Liberation in 1944. To make things clear we will summarize this struggle in a short outline.¹⁴

1. God establishes a covenant with the elect only.

Refutation: God establishes His covenant with the believers and their children (Gen. 17:7).

2. Baptism is a sign and seal of the presumptive regeneration.

Refutation: Baptism is a sign and seal of God’s covenant (Matt. 29:19)

3. Baptism is based on internal grace, present in the heart of the child.

Refutation: Baptism is based on the commandment and promise of God (Mark 16:16)

4. We must presume that the child that is baptized is elected and regenerated.

Refutation: We may confess that our children belong to God’s covenant and congregation (Acts 2:39, 3:25 and H.C., Q. and A. 74).

5. We must presume that the child is sanctified in Christ.

Refutation: We may confess that our children are sanctified in Christ (1 Cor. 7:14).

6. Being sanctified in Christ is the same as regeneration.

Refutation: Being sanctified in Christ means being different from the world, included in God’s covenant and member of Christ’s congregation (Form for baptism of Infants, Q. 1).

7. Only the elected children have the full and unconditional promise of salvation.

Refutation: All the children of God’s covenant receive the same promise of God and they are bound to honour and praise Him (Hebr. 12:16, Canons of Dordt II,5).

8. Only the baptism of elected children is complete and true.

Refutation: Each lawfully administered baptism is a true and complete baptism (1 Cor. 10:1).

9. The true covenant does not know covenant-breakers and does not suggest covenantal vengeance.

Refutation: There is not only covenantal blessing but also covenantal vengeance, namely for those who do not keep God’s covenant (Ps. 103:18, 1 Cor. 10:5, Hebr. 4:2).

The discussion by the URC synod (Schererville 2007) starts with the doctrine of election instead of with the promises of the covenant and takes as starting point the same covenant view that we recognize in the WMS and at the General Synods in 1943 and 1944 in the Netherlands.

Conclusion

The matter of the sister-church relationship with both the OPC and the URC has great consequences for the CANRC. On the one hand, the pluriformity idea and an open Holy

¹⁴ *The liberation: Causes and Consequences*, edited by Dr. Van Dam, Appendix III, pages 123-124

Supper table are introduced into the church and on the other hand the struggle concerning covenant and baptism in 1944 is denied.

The practical consequences are already visible: 1. Pulpit exchange; 2. Exchange of church members with or without attestations; 3. The open Lord's Supper table; 4. Ministers and elders performing without having signed the forms for the subscription to the Confessions. The major consequences of these two matters are that false doctrine is permitted on the pulpits, the administration of the sacraments takes place without any form of discipline and that also the discipline **regarding** the preaching and the life of the congregation cannot easily be practiced.

Advice

On the grounds of our investigations we are of the opinion that the request by the LRC at Abbotsford to come to a sister-church relationship should be honoured.

Grounds:

1. The members have, according to the Church Order, submitted their objections, appeals and second appeals in a lawful manner.
2. The CANRC, in not honouring the submitted objections, have indicated that they place the peace in the church above the justice of Christ.
3. The entering into a sister-church relationship with both the OPC and the URC has brought errors (relating to the doctrine of the church, and the covenant, resulting in problems with the preaching) into the church that the office bearers did not see, or did not want to see.
4. These errors affect the heart of the Gospel and the whole life in the congregation.

P. Drijfhout
A. van der Net

Supplement 1: ACT OF SECESSION AND RETURN, together with APPENDIX – GENERAL SYNOD DECISIONS REGARDING ECCLESIASTICAL RELATIONSHIPS

ACT OF SECESSION AND RETURN

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED, as members of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford, B.C., Canada, have observed for a considerable period of time the increasing corruption within the Canadian Reformed Churches. This corruption resulted from general synods' establishment of relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship with the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK), the Free Church of Scotland (FCS), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), and the United Reformed Churches of North America (URC). This was explained in letters to our fellow members dated January 19, 2007 and July 17, 2007, and can be summarized as follows (for a listing of general synod decisions regarding ecclesiastical relationships see the Appendix):

FEDERATIVE CORRUPTION

- a) In the preaching - by an implicit acceptance of the doctrine of the pluriformity of the church, which has its roots in the concept of the "more or less pure church" as explained in Chapter 25:4 of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The permission of pulpit exchange with ministers who hold to this and similar confessions, without resolution of this and other confessional divergencies, make legitimate the preaching of unscriptural doctrine in the Canadian Reformed Churches, contrary to the Subscription Form.
- b) In the administration of the sacraments - by the admission of people to the Lord's Supper, of whom it cannot be known whether they profess the Reformed faith. The acceptance of attestations from churches who do not require adherence to their confessional standards, and whose confessional standards diverge from those of the Canadian Reformed Churches, give evidence to an unscriptural unity, and therefore corrupts the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ has instituted them.
- c) In the exercise of church discipline - by the admission to the Lord's Supper of people about whom the proper information regarding their doctrine and life has not been determined. This is in conflict with Scripture and the confession, and Article 61 of the Church Order. In this way the work of the consistories in maintaining order and discipline in the church is undermined.
- d) In the government of the church - by the failure of the general synods to maintain the requirement for confessional membership as indicated in the first question of the Form for the Public Profession of Faith. In this way the scriptural unity of faith, that is essential to the pure administration of the Lord's Supper, is not maintained.
- e) In the integrity of the process of appeal under Article 31 of the Church Order - by the failure of the general synods to properly consider the scriptural, confessional and church orderly basis for numerous appeals which have been submitted to them by churches and church members. Although the full ecclesiastical way under Article 31 of the Church Order has been followed, decisions have been made and maintained, as described above, which have been proven to be in conflict with the Word of God or

with the Church Order.

LOCAL CORRUPTION

- a) In its acceptance of the general synod decisions which fostered the above federative corruption as settled and binding - the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford has now made itself responsible for all of the corruption referred to above. This consistory's appeal to General Synod 2004 on the basis of its commitment to uphold Scripture, the confessions and the Church Order is not maintained, despite the fact that the original concerns in this appeal were not properly addressed by General Synod 2004.
- b) In the response to letters concerning these matters from members of the congregation the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford has consistently refused to interact with the scriptural, confessional and church orderly material it had received, even though the consistory itself had used this very same material to support its appeal to General Synod 2004. As described in Appendix A of the letter calling the secession dated July 17, 2007, concerned members had repeatedly and persistently addressed consistory regarding these matters, but to no avail.
- c) In the implementation of pulpit exchange with ministers from the above mentioned churches - of whom it has not been ascertained that their preaching is fully in accordance with the confessions of the church.
- d) In the admission of guests to the Lord's Supper - of whom it cannot be verified that these guests confess the Reformed faith in accordance with Article 61 of the Church Order. If the guest were to provide an attestation, this attestation would give no assurance that the guest actually professes the Reformed faith in accordance with the confessions of the church.
- e) In the consistory's withdrawal of appointment as elder of a lawfully elected brother without a charge of delinquency in doctrine or life. He was prevented from serving in office because of his inability, on the basis of Article 31 of the Church Order, to accept the binding of his conscience to these unscriptural general synod decisions.
- f) In the issue of a public letter supporting the above unscriptural decisions - which included a public call to repent to these who were faithfully testifying against these unscriptural general synod decisions. This public call was issued in conflict with Article 66 of the Church Order.
- g) In the consistory's withholding of a brother from the Lord's Supper - for faithfully testifying against these unscriptural general synod decisions and supporting these who made a similar stand against these general synod decisions. Although consistory placed only one brother under church discipline, it threatened all those who were involved in this faithful testimony with church discipline.

THEREFORE, in consideration of the fact that the above corruption concerns the marks of the true church as described in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, and that Article 28 of the Belgic Confession indicates that "*it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate from those who do not belong to the church,*" and, in accordance with Article 32 of the Belgic Confession. "*We believe that, although it is useful and good for those who govern the church to establish a certain order to maintain the body of the church, they must at all times watch that they do not deviate from what Christ, our only Master, has commanded. Therefore we reject all human inventions end laws introduced into the worship of God which bind end compel the consciences in any way. We accept only what is proper to preserve end promote harmony end unity end to keep all in obedience to God. To that end, discipline end*

excommunication ought to be exercised in agreement with the Word of God."

AND, in consideration of the fact that we are called to "*contend for the faith that was once entrusted to the saints*" (Jude 3), "*holding on to faith and a good conscience*" (1 Timothy 1:19a) and that we cannot consider "*settled and binding*" matters that are "*proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order*" (Article 7 of the Belgic Confession, Article 31, C.O.),

AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR PROFESSION OF FAITH, WE DECLARE THAT

- a) Submission to the above ecclesiastical decisions of the Canadian Reformed Churches brings us into conflict with what God teaches us in His Word concerning the basis of the unity of the church (Psalm 119:63, John 4:24, John 17:17, Acts 4:32a, Ephesians 4:4,5), and as we confess it in Articles 27/ 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession and Lord's Day 21, Q.&A. 54 of the Heidelberg Catechism.
- b) Submission to the above ecclesiastical decisions of the Canadian Reformed Churches brings us into conflict with what God teaches us in His Word concerning the admission to the Lord's Supper (2 Chronicles 30:18-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:17-20,26-32,) and as we confess it in Lord's Days 30 and 31 of the Heidelberg Catechism.
- c) Submission to the above ecclesiastical decisions of the Canadian Reformed Churches brings us into conflict with what God teaches us in His Word concerning the use of church discipline (Joshua 7:10-15; Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 2 Corinthians 13:1/ 5; 2 Thess. 3:14-15) and as we confess it in Lord's Day 31, Q.&A. 85 of the Heidelberg Catechism.
- d) Submission to the above ecclesiastical decisions of the Canadian Reformed Churches brings us into conflict with what the churches have agreed to concerning the order of the Church (Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:8-9; 16:19; 18:15-18; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 14:33a; Galatians 5:1; 1 Timothy 3:15; Article 32 of the Belgic Confession and Articles 31, 61, 66, and 76 of the Church Order).

AND WE ALSO DECLARE THAT we wish to exercise fellowship with all true Reformed believers and that we wish to unite with every assembly that is founded on God's infallible Word at whatever place God has brought them together. We testify with these that we maintain the Three Forms of Unity, that is, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. Our public worship services will conform to the time-honoured liturgy of the Church as regards worship and church government by upholding the Church Order of Dort. We do this in the prayer that by casting off the yoke of the above mentioned synodical and consistory decisions it may be possible for us together to exercise the full restored communion of Word and sacraments in the fear of the Lord. We urge you most earnestly for the sake of the Lord, the holiness of His house, and the gathering of His sheep, to respond to this testimony. We beseech our heavenly Father to give you the wisdom and faith to come back from the wrong way so that the broken unity between us may be restored.

MADE EFFECTIVE IN ABBOTSFORD ON DECEMBER 9, 2007

<original document signed by communicant members of the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford>

APPENDIX - GENERAL SYNOD DECISIONS REGARDING ECCLESIASTICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The following Acts of General Synods have established and maintained relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship (EF), in conflict with the following consideration of Synod 1965: "Correspondence with Churches abroad should not be entered into, until upon a conscientious and serious investigation, it has become apparent that these Churches not only officially embrace the Reformed confession and church polity but also in fact maintain them." (Article 141, II). This consideration has never been appealed nor has it been officially set aside by any subsequent general synod.

Name of church	Year EF established	Years EF maintained on appeal
Presbyterian Church of Korea	Synod 1992 (Article 111)	Synod 1995 (Article 106) Synod 1998 (Article 108)
Free Church of Scotland	Synod 1992 (Article 128)	Synod 1995 (Article 106) Synod 1998 (Article 119)
Orthodox Presbyterian Church	Synod 2001 (Article 45)	Synod 2004 (Article 86)
		Synod 2007 (Articles 55 and 83)*
Reformed Church in the United States	Synod 2001 (Article 59)	Not appealed - however the same principles apply
United Reformed Church	Synod 2001 (Article 73)	Synod 2004 (Articles 96 and 97)
Reformed Church of New Zealand	Synod 2007 (Article 66)*	
l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec	Synod 2007 (Article 75)*	

* Please note that no correspondence had been submitted regarding decisions of Synod 2007. References to decisions made by Synod 2007 are provided for information purposes only.

At the root of the above decisions lies the decision of Synod 1977 (Article 91) to declare the Orthodox Presbyterian Church a "true church." No general synod since 1977 has adequately dealt with appeals against this decision. Appeals were brought against this decision to Synod 1980 (Articles 97 and 152), Synod 1983 (Article 55), Synod 1986 (Articles 126,128,132,136 and 137), Synod 1989 (Articles 94 and 143), Synod 1992 (Article 72), Synod 1995 (Articles 106 and 121) and Synod 1998 (Article 130).

At the same-time no general synod since 1986 has taken account of the decision of Classis Ontario South in March 1987 (further elaborated on in December 1987), "*that Rev. B.R. Hofford c.s. brought their complaint concerning the fencing of the Lord's supper to the 50th General Assembly of the OPC. They were unjustifiably denied their complaint; and therefore the TriCounty Reformed Church has rightfully separated herself from the OPC*"

In addition Synod 2007 (Article 143)* has rejected as "schism," the liberation from unscriptural decisions that resulted in the formation of a new federation of churches in The

Netherlands in 2003 (the Gereformeerde Kerken Hersteld). It came to this decision without interacting with the Acts of Synod of these new churches, even though it had received and declared them admissible.

* see note above

Supplement 2: Questions for the consistory of the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford

General, regarding the confession.

1. Is the Westminster Confession a reformed confession?

We do not consider the Westminster Confession to be a fully reformed confession. We do not believe that the doctrine taught therein is in complete agreement with the Word of God. Even though there may be much that is good in this confession, we would be compelled as a result of our signatures under the Subscription Form to reject the heresies contained therein as conflicting with God's Word and the Three Forms of Unity.

2. Is it correct to say that the Westminster Confession preaches pluriformity?

Although the original writers of this confession may not have had pluriformity in mind at the time of writing, we believe that the churches that have this confession do practice and maintain the doctrine of pluriformity based on the wording of this confession. To support this point we refer to the booklet by Rev. B. Hofford entitled "Open Communion in the OPC" and Rev. C. Bouwman's booklet "The Doctrine of the Church in Presbyterian/Reformed Contacts."

We also believe that the doctrine of pluriformity is inextricably linked to the doctrine of the visible/invisible church that is also found in the Westminster Confession.

3. What do the churches with the Westminster Confession understand by the term "more or less pure"?

Their understanding of the term "more or less pure" is determined by their ecclesiastical actions in accepting requests for membership and admitting guests to the Lord's Supper. These actions are not based on any confessional standard. Proof of this can be found in the *Acts* of General Synod 1998, Article 130 (decision regarding the OPC – see statement by the OPC Committee to the CanRC committee).

Even though the OPC may consider a church to be less pure (that way they don't offend anybody) they always stop short of calling a church impure.

See also chapter 23:3 of the Westminster Confession entitled "*Of the Civil Magistrate*" as referred to by Rev. B. Hofford in his book Open Communion in the OPC, pages 9-12.

4. Are the different denominations you mentioned in the 'Act of secession and return', that use the Westminster Confession, false churches?

This is a leading question. The description of the false church is found in the second-last paragraph of Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. We do not believe that churches that have the Westminster Confession have been properly testified to by the Canadian Reformed

Churches. In fact, original testimony that was good has since been corrupted and watered down by the Canadian Reformed Churches. We think here of the statement by Classis Ontario South that Tri-County Reformed Church has *rightfully separated* from the OPC. This statement was neither honoured nor appealed in the Canadian Reformed Churches. As a result of this corrupted witness by the Canadian Reformed Churches we do not believe that we can close the door to contact with these churches. At the same time we believe that those members who have rightfully separated from the OPC can correctly consider the OPC to be a false church.

If a church consistently promotes and maintains the Westminster Confession in its doctrine and practices, despite admonitions, we would have to consider this church to be a false church.

5. Is the CANRC a false church because it has a sister-church relation with e.g. the OPC?

When we speak of a false church do we speak of an entire federation as a whole or do we speak about individual local churches? We believe that based on the second-last paragraph of Article 29 of the Belgic Confession we need to speak about individual local churches, in accordance with Reformed church polity. Then on the basis of this paragraph we believe that a number of Canadian Reformed Churches are false churches, but not based on their sister church relationship with the OPC and others, but based on their rejection of our testimony (the appeals and subsequent letters concerning the OPC and others).

Therefore we believe that each local church stands or falls based on its acceptance or rejection of biblical testimony. Even though a period of time may be required to determine the attitude of each local church, in the end *“by their fruits you shall know them”* (Matthew 7:20).

As we are still in contact with some Canadian Reformed Churches we do not, at this time, make a general declaration that all the Canadian Reformed Churches are false.

6. Do they mean pulpit exchange with ministers who are not sister churches (e.g. Baptist, Congregational, Church of Christ)? If so, can the seceded church provide evidence of this?

This question is not clear. However we do have evidence that both the URC and the OPC admit Baptists (those who reject infant baptism) to the Lord's Supper and to membership in the church. We refer you to an article in *Christian Renewal* entitled *“On Baptists and URC Membership”* (January 27, 2010 issue). We have evidence that this was an issue in the URC already in 1998 (see October 1998 URC news regarding Admission of Baptists).

We also have concerns about pulpit exchanges with ministers of the churches in question who promote the unscriptural doctrine in the Westminster Confessions and the unscriptural doctrines that led to the Liberation of 1944 in the Netherlands (see editorial by J. Vantil entitled *“An unscriptural binding”*). Further evidence for this was recently published in *Clarion* (see April 9, 2010 issue – an article entitled *“URCNA Questions about the CanRC”* which is a response by 2 CanRC professors to 16 questions posed by a URC classis).

7. Have the CANRC's pointed out to the churches using the Westminster Confession that pulpit exchange is/was wrong, also in the past? And if the CANRC did so, how did these churches respond?

We are not aware of any evidence that there was discussion of pulpit exchange between the CanRC and OPC committees.

8. Where can you find the true church of Christ in Canada/USA? Are there believers outside this church/these churches? What duty have the members of the church towards believers outside the church? In what way are you trying to fulfil this duty?

- a) Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford, B.C., to begin with. We would like to believe that there are more based on the Three Forms of Unity.
- b) Yes there are believers outside of true churches.
- c) We have to call them to join the true church or establish the true church in their area.
- d) We are testifying by way of letters to all Canadian Reformed Churches, using the www.calltoreform.com website, and through the use of personal contacts. It is our intention to address the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, and possibly others in the future.

Maintaining the pure preaching of the gospel.

1. Does the acceptance of e.g. the OPC as sister-church influence the preaching of the gospel in the CANRC or is that at this moment a theoretical chance?

Yes. In many places a distinction is made between withdrawing from the local congregation and withdrawing from the church of Christ. This is, in effect a denial of Article 28 of the Belgic Confession, even though it is consistent with Chapter 25 of the Westminster Confession. The recent admission of the Canadian Reformed Churches to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) is an example of this (see letter of Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton regarding the admission of members of NAPARC churches to the Lord's Supper).

2. Is there already an exchange of preachers (CANRC) with e.g. the OPC?

Yes, in particular the URC but also in some places with the OPC. The covenant views in the URC and OPC are now permitted to be taught in the CanRC (see "16 Questions" in the March 10 and 24, 2010 issues of *Christian Renewal*).

3. Do you have proof that the preachers in e.g. the OPC do not maintain the pure preaching of the Gospel? Can you elaborate on that?

Yes. Rev. K. Kok was not accepted as a candidate for the ministry in the OPC because of his views on confessional membership.

Due to the fact that the OPC has the Westminster Standards how can we expect pure preaching in the OPC by an OPC minister? Some of these problems are discussed in more detail in the editorial "*An Unscriptural binding.*"

Similarly in the URC the ministers are permitted to preach in baptist churches, only they do not offend them by preaching infant baptism (see Rev. Neal Hegeman in "On Baptists and URC Membership" in the January 27, 2010 issue of *Christian Renewal* as well as the response by Mark Brooks in the April 14, 2010 issue of *Christian Renewal*).

Maintaining the pure administration of the sacraments

1. Is there evidence that the churches (OPC and others) have an 'open' Supper table? Have the CANRC pointed out that this practice is wrong?

Yes and this concern was brought forward time and again by the CanRC Synods and Committees until after Synod 1998. Since 1998 the CanRCs themselves have started to accept these unscriptural practices.

2. Has the acceptance of OPC as sister churches changed, in practical sense, the admittance of members of other “denominations” (e.g. OPC) to the table of the Lord in churches of the CANRC? What about the admittance of members of other “denominations” other than sister churches?
 - a) Yes – see example in Abbotsford resulting in the withdrawal of appointment by an elder.
 - b) Yes – see evidence from the CanRC in Hamilton re members of NAPARC churches being admitted to the Lord’s Supper.
3. Does the church council in the CANRC examine these people beforehand about their belief? How is that done?

It is claimed that an interview is done (shortly before the church service by a small percentage of the consistory).
4. Does the OPC or other mentioned denominations hand out attestations to members who want to participate in the administration of the sacraments in the CANRC?

No.
5. Are there members of the CANRC who participate in the administration of the sacraments in one of the mentioned denominations? Do they receive an attestation?
 - a) Yes.
 - b) Sometimes.

Exercising church discipline.

1. Is there a possibility that the church council in the CANRC can refuse people of sister churches to the administration of the sacraments? On what grounds?
 - a) Some CanRCs will refuse people if they do not come with an attestation. There are, however, less and less CanRCs that are willing to do this (see also the proposed new Church Order).
 - b) It is a possibility, if the attestation is not clean or if they are aware of an ungodly lifestyle. We have not heard of this ever happening in the CanRC.
2. How is church discipline exercised in the CANRC regarding work on Sunday, divorce, etc.?

It depends on local circumstances. There is no uniform approach in the CanRC. None of these matters have been brought to General Synod by way of appeal.
3. You mentioned the consistory's withdrawal of appointment of a brother who was legally elected to the church council because, on the basis of Article 31 of the Church Order, he was not able to accept the binding of his conscience to these unscriptural general synod decisions. Was this case brought to classis?

Yes. The brother was denied his right under Article 31 of the Church Order and the appeal was denied.
4. You also mentioned the consistory's withholding of a brother from the Lord's Supper - for faithfully testifying against these unscriptural decisions of the general synod and supporting those who made a similar stand against these general synod decisions. Was this case brought to classis? Have any (other) attempts been made to bring this case in the ecclesiastical way of appeal (art. 31 CO)?

This case was not brought to classis and no further appeal was contemplated because the underlying issue was the acceptance of general synod decisions that improperly extended ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC, URC and others.

The general synod decisions that were accepted by Abbotsford were completely opposed to Abbotsford's appeal which was denied by Synod 2004. It was this change of position of the Abbotsford CanRC consistory which was the central issue of concern. We had no new grounds to bring another appeal (see Article 33 of the Church Order). The imposition of discipline was indicative of a hardening in consistory's position. It was not proper to put only one member under discipline when there are others who maintain the same position.

The consistory's use of discipline here brings in view the characteristics of the false church as described in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. By refusing to honour its own appeal to Synod 2004, or prove from Scripture that this appeal was in error, the Abbotsford CanRC consistory "*assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God.*" It shows thereby that "*it does not want to submit to the yoke of Christ.*" It is clear from both the decisions on the original appeal, and on the discipline, that the Abbotsford CanRC "*does not administer the sacraments as Christ commanded in His Word,*" but that it "*persecutes those who live holy lives according to the Word of God and who rebuke the false church*"

Church Order

1. You mentioned that a new rule forbids members to file their complaints at synod. They can only do that through their church council. Can you elaborate on that? Does that only refer to proposals for revision of synodical decisions?

The new rule referred to here is Article 20 of the Acts of Synod 2004 where individuals were denied the right to address General Synods if they have not first addressed their own consistory, classis and regional synod. Individuals have not yet been denied the right to address general synods if they have otherwise completed the full ecclesiastical process. This restriction refers to all matters that are dealt with by a general synod. The proposed new Church Order imposes even more restrictions.

Some general questions

1. Why did you not ask the Reformed Churches (lib) in the Netherlands to continue the existing sister-church relation?

As consistory we could acknowledge the deformation in the GKV and support the fact of your testimony on the GKV (see for example your papers "Call to Reformation," "Let Us Repent" and "Act of Liberation or Return"). Based on these documents we could not consider a relationship with the GKV.

As we have considered that the Hersteld churches are the legitimate continuation of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, we would consider a warning letter to the GKV concerning their wrong direction once a sister church relationship has been established with the Gereformeerde Kerken Hersteld.

2. You mentioned different churches: OPC, PCK, FCS, RCUS, URC. Are there no differences between these churches? Are all these churches false churches, denominations. Can you elaborate on that?

There are differences between the above churches. What is common to the above churches is that none of them properly uphold and maintain the Three Forms of Unity. In addition none of the above churches properly supervise the Lord's Supper.

Consistent with the answer under #4 of the first section entitled "*General, regarding the Confession,*" without completing the process of testimony to the above churches we cannot determine whether these churches are false churches.

3. What is your position regarding the blessing by an elder?

We believe that the raising of hands should remain within the duties of a minister. This matter will continue to be studied.

4. Do you have any ecclesiastical contacts within Canada or USA or elsewhere in the world?

No. We are considering addressing the Free Reformed Churches in Australia concerning the secession in Abbotsford.

Other questions to Abbotsford (church-visitation questions).

What is the total membership of the congregation?

There are currently 28 members.

How many are admitted to the Lord's Supper?

There are currently 15 communicant members.

What is the total membership of the Council (Consistory)? How many elders? How many deacons?

There are 3 elders and no deacons at this time.

Is this number sufficient for the size of the congregation?

There are currently 7 male communicant members. Three represents the minimum size for a consistory to properly govern the church. When there is a need deacons will be added. For the time being the elders also serve as deacons when the need arises. In the meantime the consistory has organised the establishment of a Deacon Fund.

What is their term of office? re. Art. 24 Church Order.

The normal term of office is three years.

Do you have rules for election to office?

Regulations for the election of officebearers have been taken over from the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford.

Is equality maintained? re. Art. 25 & 73 Church Order

Yes.

How often do you meet as per Art. 38 Church Order and as per Art. 39 Church Order?

Consistory meets on average about once per month.

You read sermons of preachers in the church services. Do you have any standards regarding the use of these sermons?

Brothers who read sermons are concerned that all sermons read are consistent with the Three Form of Unity. Discretion is given to the brothers in the actual process of selection.

Whose sermons are read and by whom?

A listing of sermons read from the first Sunday after secession (July 22, 2007) can be provided. In general sermons are read from deceased professors, ministers from the Free Reformed Churches in Australia, and ministers from the CanRC when they faithfully preached (sermons used with discretion).

Is there regular catechism preaching? cf. Art. 52 Church Order.

Yes.

Who teaches the catechism classes? Are they supervised?

Br. J. Vantil instructs his own children and does receive an occasional visit from the other elders.

What about the actual need for serving Lord's Supper (and Holy Baptism) within your congregation?

There are presently two young children who are members of the congregation who need to be baptized. In addition there is an expectant mother who is also a member of the congregation.

There is also a requirement that we celebrate the Lord's Supper, which we hope to do as soon as we receive the services of a minister.

Does Council (Consistory) consider the decisions of the ecclesiastical assemblies as "settled, and binding" (Re Art. 31 Church Order)?

Yes, unless they are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order.

In the Act of Secession you will see reference to a number of General Synod decisions regarding ecclesiastical relationships of the Canadian Reformed Churches that we have set aside as unscriptural.

We are currently in the process of reviewing the decision of Synod 1995 on bible translations which recommended the use of the New International Version.

Are the Psalms and Hymns adopted by General Synod used in the worship services? See Art. 55 C.O.

Yes.

Do the elders see to it that no strange doctrines are taught in the Church?

Yes.

Do they promote the need for parental Christian schools (see Art. 58 C.O.)?

Yes it is the ideal that we have to work towards, and the need is becoming more and more evident.

Do they actively promote Bible Study? How?

Yes, all of the elders regularly attend Men's Society.

Do the elders promote the cause of Mission and Evangelism? For example:

Is there a Evangelism Committee with a proper mandate?

Is the work for Evangelism supported as per yearly Budget?

Are any provisions made to equip the congregation for active outreach with the gospel?

The bulk of the congregation's efforts have been directed towards the membership of the CanRC. For a further discussion on evangelism see Rev. D. VanDijk in his book My Path to Liberation, pages 125-128.

The consistory recognizes its responsibility to be involved in mission work. In future consistory hopes to support a mission project based on the Three Forms of Unity.

Do the elders visit all the families annually? Do they report to the Consistory?

Are special visits arranged when necessary?

Yes to all of the above.

Do they see to it that all communicant members partake in the Lord's Supper and do they visit those who refuse to participate?

We look forward to the day when we can celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

Do the deacons recognize that "our daily bread" includes the necessary finances so that all covenant children may receive a Christian education?

Are the deacons fully aware that they are God's comforters in the congregation? For example, do they visit the sick, and lonely, and bereaved, etc.?

Do the deacons set a good example of godliness in their personal and home life, and with their fellowmen?

Due to the size of the congregation the elders also carry on the task of deacons. As the congregation increases in size, this matter will be revisited.

Supplement 2a: Questions from the consistory of the Liberated Reformed Church to deputies DGK

1. **What is the Hersteld definition of a false church?**
Doctrine and practice not based on Gods Word, but contrary. See art. 27-29 Belgic confession.
2. **What is the degree of binding to the Three Forms of Unity in the Hersteld churches?** Total binding.
3. **Do the Hersteld churches have a policy on admission to the Lord's Supper? Do they require the use of attestations?**
Our policy is in accordance with our Church Order, which means that we only accept an attestation.
4. **What is your view on paedocommunion?**
Non-professed members including children are not allowed to participate.
5. **Does the Hersteld impose church discipline on those who work on Sundays?** Nobody is allowed to work on Sundays according to Gods commandment except those people who do works of compassion.
6. **Does the Hersteld impose church discipline on those who divorce and remarry?** Yes, we do in accordance with Gods commandment. The marriage is a bond that cannot be broken. Even if it is not avoidable the bond still remains.
7. **Do the Hersteld have any relationships with churches that uphold the Westminster or Scots Confessions?** No, but we are studying the Westminster Confession and its consequences.
8. **What is the nature of the relationship with the GGRI in Indonesia?** We have no relation, but we have contact via correspondence.
9. **What is the nature of the relationship with the Free Reformed Churches in Australia? Should we take up contact?** We withdrew our request for sister-church relationship, because after two synods they are still asking us to unite with the GKv. We will keep contact. Yes, the Liberated Church in Abbotsford should have contact.
10. **How does Article 31 of the Church Order function in the Hersteld churches? Do members have the right of appeal? Does this right of appeal include the right to an answer?** We uphold this article en members have the right to appeal. Anybody who appeals is entitled to an answer.
11. **What is the Hersteld's view of the Westminster Standards? (see copy of article by T. Bruinius)**
As said before we are studying this confession. Bruinius' article will be included in our study.

12. **Can we obtain a copy of your Form of Subscription?** Yes.
13. **What is the translated wording of your Form for the Public Profession of Faith?** We will send you a translated copy.
14. **Do you have contact with any other churches anywhere in the world?** GGRI, FRCA.
15. **Have you addressed all of the individual churches in the GKV regarding the secession in the Netherlands? Have you officially addressed all of the sister churches of the GKV regarding this secession?** A) Yes B) Yes.
16. **Do you have any pulpit exchanges with churches outside of the Hersteld?** No!
17. **Why is there a restriction to the reading of sermons to only from "dead ministers?"** To avoid the appearance of evil.
18. **Can we get an English translation of the Hersteld church order?** Yes, we will work on that.

Supplement 3: The cause of the different practices (chapter 2 of The Doctrine of the Church in Reformed/Presbyterian Contacts) by Rev C. Bouwman¹⁵

The cause of the different practices

Practices and the doctrine of the Church

Practices come from somewhere. The two practices of fencing of the Lord's table and pulpit exchange undoubtedly have their causes also. In my considered opinion, these two practices as found in various Presbyterian churches¹⁶ have a common root in a particular understanding of what the church is. To demonstrate the connection between the practices and one's understanding of church, we need but observe what the deputies from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have learned in their contact with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.

Pure vs Less Pure

I take the liberty to quote from the conclusions of a meeting between representatives from the FRCA and the PCEA in November 1988. This Summary of the discussions of the meeting was approved by all present as an accurate summary of the discussions of the meeting. The part relevant to the subject of 'church' fellows:

¹⁵ C. Bouwman *The Doctrine of the Church in Reformed/Presbyterian Contacts*. A presentation to the Committee on Theological Affirmation appointed by the International Conference of Reformed Churches, 1989.

¹⁶ Pulpit exchange and intercommunion is found also in churches of Reformed signature, cf PKA de Boer, "Contact with the Reformed Church in the United States", *Clarion*; Vol 40, No. 1. This church participated in the 1989 ICRC as an Observer Church. In so far as 'Reformed' churches have a different history than 'Presbyterian' churches, I leave this matter to one side in this booklet.

"Much of the position of the PCEA re church revolves around the concept of "pure/less pure" church, ie: there are degrees from "most pure" 'down' to the point where a 'church' ceases to be a church of Jesus Christ and becomes a synagogue of Satan (WCF 25.5).

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

The PCEA is aware of the desire expressed by the Lord Jesus in John 17 that "they may all be one." For that reason the PCEA is disturbed by the fact that there are some 15 'denominations' in Australia of a reformed slant, each going their separate way. The separateness of the various churches is a result of the presence of sin. Although all churches who confess the heart of the Scripture (justification by faith in Christ) ought to be one, the sad reality is that they are divided. Yet all have a unity in Christ, each being a manifestation of the one church. That inherent unity can receive expression by pulpit exchanges and receiving Christians (ie, members in good standing) from other evangelical churches at one's Lord's Supper table.

As such, the PCEA does not mind its ministers preaching in pulpits of other 'relatively pure' churches and inviting their ministers onto PCEA pulpits. Not that this happens regularly; yet the PCEA recognises that such can happen and so occasionally it does. Similarly, the table is not closed to people who belong to God by faith in Jesus Christ and demonstrate their faith in God by belonging to a church which preaches justification through faith in Christ alone (ie, another evangelical church which would be rather pure)."¹⁷

The flow of thought from a particular doctrine of 'church' to the practices of pulpit exchange and fencing of the Lord's Table is obvious, 'Church' includes any denomination that holds the Bible's central truth of Jesus Christ crucified, even though that denomination may stray on various other points (and so be more or less pure depending on the extent to which it is faithful to the truth of Scripture). The inherent unity of faith existing among these churches can -until perfection arrives- receive expression by pulpit exchanges and receiving Christians from other evangelical churches to one's Lord's Supper table, 'Church', then, is understood as something broader than the "holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers."¹⁸ 'Church' is rather the totality of the true Christian believers (with, we understand, their children), irrespective of where in one's land -or on this earth- - those believers might gather.

Gathering vs Sum Total of the Elect

On the assumption that the understanding of 'church' found in the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia is not unique to this 'denomination', but is rather relatively representative of what is generally believed in the Presbyterian world¹⁹, it is in place to consider what the

¹⁷ The entire text of the *Summary* is printed in the *Acts of Synod Armadale 1990*, pg 189f.

¹⁸ *Belgic Confession*, Art 27.

¹⁹ The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia adopted in 1954 a "Federal Relations Act" (it was subsequently corrected by Synod 1984). This Act reads in part: "... there shall be established between this Church and the Free Church of Scotland such a relationship as shall maintain and manifest the unity of the Churches their separate and independent jurisdiction being

Scriptures themselves might say about the church, Would the Scriptures have us understand the church as a gathering of the believers OR would the Scriptures teach us to view the church more as the sum-total of the elect?

Supplement 4: An unscriptural binding by J. Vantil

An unscriptural binding

In recent years General Synods of the Canadian Reformed Churches have made decisions to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with a number of federations that either do not have or do not consistently maintain the Three Forms of Unity. Specifically, in 1992 ecclesiastical fellowship was entered into with the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) and the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK). In 2001 ecclesiastical fellowship was entered into with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) and the United Reformed Church of North America (URC). Finally, in 2007 ecclesiastical fellowship was entered into with the Reformed Church of New Zealand (RCNZ) and the L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ).

The Presbyterian churches (the OPC, PCK and FCS) do not have the Three Forms of Unity, since they profess to adhere to the Westminster Standards. In addition the others (the URC, RCUS, RCNZ and ERQ) do not bind their members to adhere to the Three Forms of Unity, but, as we shall see, permit teachings similar in content to the above Presbyterian churches.

A history lesson from 1944

We do not have to go too far back in history to see the consequences of a permission to teach and a binding to adhere to doctrine that is not taught in the Scriptures or the confessions of the church. Over 65 years ago the Lord delivered His church in the Netherlands from bondage to unscriptural teachings on the covenant and baptism that were imposed upon the churches by the General Synods of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in 1942 and 1943.

In summary, these General Synods taught false doctrines that were refuted by concerned reformed people as follows (see The Liberation: Causes and Consequences, edited by Dr. C. Van Dam, Appendix III, pages 123-124):

always preserved." The unity between the two Churches was to be expressed, i.a., as follows: "(a) This Church shall henceforth recognise the status of the office-bearers and members of the Free Church of Scotland as if they were its own " This note, combined with the fact that the PCEA has not adopted any statement suggesting that they would embrace a doctrine of 'church' different in any way from that of the 'mother' church in Scotland, indicates that indeed the view of church embraced in the PCEA is not intended to be unique to this one denomination.

- 1) God establishes his covenant proper with the elect only.
Refutation: *God establishes His covenant with the believers and all their children (Genesis 17:7).*
- 2) Baptism is a sign and seal of presumed regeneration.
Refutation: *Baptism is a sign and seal of God's covenant (Matthew 28:19).*
- 3) Baptism is based on internal grace, present in the heart of the elect child.
Refutation: *Baptism is based on the command and promise of God (Mark 16:16).*
- 4) We ought to **presume** that the child to be baptized has been elected and regenerated.
Refutation: *We may **confess** that our children are included in God's covenant and church (Acts 2:39, 3:25, and Heidelberg Catechism Answer 74).*
- 5) We ought to **presume** that the child is sanctified in Christ.
Refutation: *We may **confess** that our children are sanctified in Christ (1 Corinthians 7:14).*
- 6) Sanctified in Christ means the same as regenerated.
Refutation: *Sanctified in Christ means distinct from the world, included in God's covenant and member of Christ's church (Form for Baptism, First Question).*
- 7) Only the elect children possess the full and unconditional promise of salvation.
Refutation: *All of the children of God's covenant receive the same promise of God and are obliged to love and serve Him (Hebrews 12:16, Canons of Dort II.5).*
- 8) Only the baptism of elect children is a full and true baptism.
Refutation: *Every legitimately administered baptism is a true and full baptism (1 Corinthians 10:1).*
- 9) The covenant proper does not have covenant breakers and does not imply covenant wrath.
Refutation: *There is not only the blessing of the covenant but there is also the curse, namely for those who do not keep God's covenant (Psalm 103:18, 1 Corinthians 10:5, Hebrews 4:2).*

The real problem in the Reformed Churches prior to 1942 was that the above wrong doctrines were permitted as a result of the decisions of General Synod 1905. For example, Synod 1905 decided “*that it is, however, **less correct** [my emphasis] to say that baptism is administered to the children of believers on the ground of their presumed regeneration, since the ground of baptism is found in the command and the promise of God*” (see *Patrimony Profile*, by Rev. W.W.J. VanOene, p. 230).

The term “*less correct*” gave some measure of legitimacy to these unscriptural doctrines (please note that “*less correct*” does not mean “*incorrect*”). Prior to the imposition of the above General Synod decisions in 1942 and 1943, both the true and the false doctrines **were permitted to be taught** in the churches. In this respect the Synod of 1905 sowed the seed for what happened in 1944 (see also [My Path to Liberation](#), by Rev. D. Van Dijk, pages 82 and 83).

Binding or doctrine?

Some scholars have argued that the Liberation in 1944 was only liberation from the **binding** that was imposed upon the churches in 1942 and 1943. Dr. N. Gootjes asserts that, “*The Liberation became necessary when the wrong doctrine was made binding*” (see [The Liberation: Causes and Consequences](#), edited by Dr. C. Van Dam, page 76). However, Professor Geertsema writes later in the same book, “*As far as I can see, our conclusion must*

*be that in 1944 the churches liberated themselves not just from the synodical **binding** to wrong decisions containing a wrong doctrine but also from the **wrong doctrine itself***” (page 93).

After all, who would have a problem being bound to Scriptural doctrine? And if the problem was merely the binding, why did the synodical and the liberated churches not reunite in 1959 when the binding was officially removed? The reason was that the General Synod still clung to the legitimacy of these **incorrect doctrinal pronouncements** (see Schilder’s Struggle for the Unity of the Church, by Rudolph van Reest, page 360).

Some argue that Dr. Schilder and others who agreed with him could live with the unscriptural doctrine that was taught in the churches. They even went so far as to state that those who promote this unscriptural doctrine do not deviate from Scripture or the Three Forms of Unity. However from the history lesson above we can see that this is not the truth.

We should note that it was not so clear to people in 1905 or in the 1920’s or 1930’s, how serious this unscriptural doctrine was. The overriding concern at Synod 1905 was the peace and unity of the churches, and we need to realize that this peace was achieved at the cost of a more serious split forty years later. Where are the synodical churches today? And what happened to their members, and the offspring of these members who number in the hundreds of thousands? Were not more than 90% of the church members lost to heretical teachings?

The history lesson applied to today

Have we learned anything in 65 years? Or are we repeating the mistakes that were made 105 years ago? It is a common saying that those who forget their history are doomed to relive it. In the haste to establish “sister church” relationships with Presbyterian churches and other “Reformed” churches, the following “doctrinal divergencies” have been swept aside as “matters that can be discussed within the framework of ecclesiastical fellowship.”

1) *Regarding the covenant of grace*

Answer 31 of the Westminster Larger Catechism states that *“The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.”* At the same time answer 166 of this same Catechism states that *“Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, but infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant, and to be baptized.”*

The Westminster Standards incorrectly distinguish between a covenant of grace and a covenant of promise. They incorrectly take their starting point in a covenant of grace established with the elect and neglect the fact that the covenant of grace was established with believers and their seed (see Genesis 17:1-7, Acts 2:38-39, etc.).

The URC Synod Schererville 2007 also rejected the “errors” of those *“who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace only through faith alone”* (Acts, URC Synod 2007, Article 72). Not only does this statement from the URC Synod condemn sound doctrine as heresy, but it also takes as starting point the same distinction that was identified above in the Westminster Standards and by the General Synods in 1942 and 1943.

As we maintain in the Form for Infant Baptism “*baptism is a seal and trustworthy testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God.*” And also, “*Just as they share without their knowledge in the condemnation of Adam, so are they, without their knowledge, received into grace in Christ.*”

Dr. Faber writes, “*If one lets the doctrine of election dominate the doctrine of God’s covenant, then the real or proper covenant is established with the elect. One can then not speak about **breakers** of God’s covenant and one can then also not fully proclaim the threat of eternal damnation for children of the covenant. If the unconditional promise of eternal salvation is only for the elect, one can not proclaim that the good news has to meet with faith in the hearers and that the Israelites were unable to enter the promised land because of unbelief. One can also not warn for an evil heart of unbelief (Hebrews 3:12 and 19ff)*” (see The Liberation: Causes and Consequences, edited by Dr. C. Van Dam, page 19).

2) **Regarding the assurance of faith**

Chapter 18.3 of the Westminster Confession of faith disconnects assurance and faith by stating that “*This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be a partaker of it.*” Answer 81 of the Westminster Larger Catechism also mirrors this by stating that “*Assurance of grace and salvation not being of the essence of faith, true believers may wait long before they obtain it.*”

The above statements contradict the Heidelberg Catechism, which gives us so much assurance in Lord’s Day 1, and also states in Lord’s Day 7, answer 21, that “*True faith is a sure knowledge whereby I accept as true all that God has revealed in His Word. At the same time it is also a firm confidence that not only to others, but also to me, God has granted forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, out of mere grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits. This faith the Holy Spirit works in my heart by the gospel.*”

3) **Regarding the visible and invisible church**

The terminology used in Chapter 25 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, referring to both an invisible and visible church, is consistent with its covenant terminology. However as Reformed believers we confess the existence of a catholic or universal church that “*has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end*” “*although for a while it may look very small and as extinct in the eyes of man.*” There can be no practical application of the doctrine of the “invisible church” since “*all and everyone are obliged to join it and unite with it*” (Articles 27 and 28 of the Belgic Confession).

When we consider what we confess in articles 27 through 29 of the Belgic Confession, can we find support for the doctrine of the “invisible church”? Does such a church have office-bearers and show the marks of the true church as we confess them in Article 29? Who has supervision over the members of the “invisible church”? If the covenant of grace is established with members of the “invisible church,” how does this covenant function in the life of the believer here on earth? How can we speak of the fulfillment of covenant promises and covenant obligations in the context of an “invisible church?”

It’s impossible. Just as the doctrine of a “covenant of grace established with the elect” cannot function in the life of the believer on earth, neither can the doctrine of an “invisible church.” As Professor J.M. Batteau writes, “*For Schilder in his mature*

*thinking, God makes His covenant with believers and their children. There are not two sides of this covenant, in the sense of a substance and a form, but rather two **reactions** to the single covenant of grace, one of obedience and another of disobedience. Children of believers are not merely to be regarded as in the (inner, substantial) covenant, but they are genuinely and really in the (nondualistic) covenant.” He also writes, “Fearing the use of an invisible church theory construed in terms of all the elect, Schilder received stimulus from various sources to see the covenant in a different way. In a polemical address criticizing the Dutch Reformed Church in 1935, Schilder lays emphasis on ‘covenant faithfulness’ as constituent to the ‘church as mother.’ Over against the ‘quietism’ in the Dutch Reformed Church, Schilder says that covenant faithfulness leads to institutional **church** faithfulness. This is no passive thing but part of our responsibility as believers” (Always Obedient, Essays on the Teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder, Edited by Professor J. Geertsema, pages 80 and 79).*

4) Regarding the pluriformity of the church

This same Chapter 25 of the Westminster Confession of Faith also advocates the doctrine of the more or less pure church. In fact, all of the above churches adhere to a “denominational theory of the church.” This theory permits thinking about more or less pure churches that goes beyond the strictures of the Three Forms of Unity. Under this theory churches that do not maintain infant baptism, for example, would be considered less pure churches, however their members could still be admitted to the Lord’s Supper as guests.

Already in the 1930’s and 1940’s this was an issue. As Rev. D. Van Dijk wrote, “*The doctrine of pluriformity is nowhere to be found in our confessions; on the contrary the confessions leave no room for such a notion. Yet preaching the doctrine of pluriformity was permitted: whoever did so had no reason to fear official disapproval from our ecclesiastical assemblies*” (My Path to Liberation, page 224).

After all, who is required to separate from a less pure church? And on what basis can one call a less pure church to repentance? Instead this doctrine undermines the call to separate from the false church and to unite with the true church as we confess it in Article 28 of the Belgic Confession (see also Revelation 18:4).

The implication of this history

When Canadian Reformed consistories permit ministers of the above federations to preach on their pulpits, they permit the teaching of the above unscriptural doctrines in the Canadian Reformed Churches, just as was done in 1905. The permission of such teaching is contrary to their task, which is indicated in Article 27 of the Church Order as follows:

To ward off false doctrines and errors which could enter the congregation and constitute a danger to its purity of doctrine or conduct, the ministers and elders shall use the means of instruction, of refutation, of warning, and of admonition, in the ministry of the Word as well as in Christian teaching and family visiting.

To all appearances, just as in 1905, the Three Forms of Unity continue to constitute the Reformed faith that is professed by the members of the Canadian Reformed Churches. It

seems that the elders continue to use the above means to safeguard the purity of doctrine. After all, formal confessional subscription continues to be maintained.

But don't be deceived. This deception also occurred in 1905, which is why the 1905 decision was called a "**pacification formula**." Later, in 1942, the deception was taken away. Then the general synod made a blatant doctrinal pronouncement relating to presumptive regeneration that was binding upon all the members. All could read it and all could see it. But what is now happening in the Canadian Reformed Churches? Wherever consistories accept these general synod decisions, which include permission of the teaching of the above unscriptural doctrines in their congregations, the members are deceived. The Three Forms of Unity are not functioning any more as "forms for unity."

In 1944 there was a clear liberation from bondage to these unscriptural doctrines. Then the Lord delivered His church from the unscriptural binding to wrong doctrines. However in 1977, when the OPC was declared to be a true church, and in 1992, 2001 and 2007, when sister church relationships were established with the above federations, this liberation was quietly pushed aside and undermined, little by little. Just as in 1905, there came again a return to the bondage of unscriptural doctrines. The Word is no longer being proclaimed in all its purity. The deliverance from these unscriptural doctrines that was gained in 1944 has now been completely surrendered.

The result is a return to an unscriptural binding to doctrine that is not taught either in the Word of God or in the Three Forms of Unity. And such a binding is not acceptable for those who wish to be obedient to His Word.

I pray that the Lord may yet grant liberation to those who have been deceived by these unscriptural general synod decisions, and that we all together may "*worship in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24).

J. Vantil