

REFORMED CONTINUA

Magazine of The Reformed Churches (restored) of The Netherlands

Proverbs 8:32

- Volume 9 - December 2012 -

From the editor

December 2012

This is the 9th issue of the magazine Reformed Continua you now have in front of you. We are thankful to the Lord who made this possible. This time in December. The issue is also not as voluminous and hopefully it increases the readability.

In January we had decided that, instead of putting out a Magazine twice yearly, we would increase that to four times, but as you have noticed, we did not succeed. It was not possible to get the June and September issues done, due to lack of time (among other things, the visit to the synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia). We hope to have more time for it in the coming year.

It is clear every time, even in deputies' reports, that

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the Magazine is well-read and clearly meets a need.

This edition contains:

An initial article by Rev. S. de Marie titled: In Spirit and in Truth; an article about our latest Synod and a separate article about Dalfsen as published earlier in 'De Bazuin'.

The congregation at Hasselt introduces itself to you this time.

Then: From the churches.

So far about the articles in this Magazine.

In all this we know that the Lord Himself preserves His Church to the end. It is the merit of the Lord that the Church still exists and that there are still lots of possibilities. We have been richly blessed, also by the many rich and beautiful sermons.

Finally, we hope and pray that this edition may again be well-received and will open the eyes to the right insight on the Church, as we confess every Sunday, and so may contribute towards God's church-gathering work, to the honour of His holy Name.

Joh. Houweling, Bleiswijk

Click on this line to find information on internet about all the local churches

REFORMED CONTINUA

Magazine of The Reformed Churches (restored) of The Netherlands

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In Spirit and in Truth

The true liturgy

John 4:23, 24:

23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

Living water

The words that the Lord Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman in John 4 have much to say to us concerning the honouring of our God and the nature of our worship services. On one of His journeys the Lord sought out this woman who still found herself outside the covenant. He came to tell her that He is the living water, Giver of the eternal life that is in Him. He pointed to the well of Jacob as an example to make clear to her the importance of His Person. Just as your body cannot do without the living, healthy water from the well, so you also cannot do without the gift of Christ and His eternal salvation. For that He gives His Spirit that makes alive. Everyone who accepts Christ in faith receives not only living water to drink, but will, through His Spirit, become a fountain of living water that springs up to eternal life (John 4:14).

Only later did the woman understand who Jesus really was. That happened when He let her see that He knew her totally (verse 16-19). She then saw that He was a prophet Who could tell her the Truth of God.

The ceremonies abolished

From John 4:21 on, the Lord Jesus made clear that with His coming there would be a fundamental change in the worship service and in the position of the Samaritans and heathens in respect to the people of Israel, who then still knew a privileged position. The Samaritans, being of heathen origin, did not serve God at the proper place nor in the proper manner. The Jews in principle did do so. But, Jesus said: it will happen now that I have come, that also God the Father in Heaven shall be worshipped in a different place and in a different manner. It was because the Messiah had to come forth from the Jews that the ceremonial worship service had, for centuries, been assigned only for them, but that would soon end, just as the privileged position of the Jews would end.

The Old Testament worship service was to pass away to make way for the New Testament worship service. That worship service is then freed from all its shadowy characteristics, freed from formalism. This worship service will no longer be confined to the one place, Jerusalem, but may be found wherever the Lord will gather His own, that is - the true believers. True worshippers will then be the true believers who, worldwide, will honour God the Father uprightly and in the right manner, that is - according to His Word.

Those true worshippers will do it differently from now on. That is, not according to the ancient temple rules given by Moses, but 'in spirit and in truth'.

Christ

From now on it will be about God's Truth that has been revealed, unveiled and brought to light by Christ. He Himself is the truth, the reality that the centuries-old ceremonial service pointed to. Only through Him God can now be known. The Spirit of Christ will ensure that the Father will be known and served in 'spirit and truth' through the Word of truth.

So communion may be possible with Christ and He may be proclaimed in the worship services. Every true worship service can now only find place in the name of this Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the covenant, the High Priest who is Head of the church. The proclamation of Him as the substance of the Word of Truth is henceforth the requisite for every true worship service. There Christ Himself must come to stand as reality in the full light.

All ceremonial proceedings that are meant as sincere worship service by sinful man, can easily develop into mere formalism. Also in the Old Testament human falsification and manipulation was seen. Through these sinful influences the worship service received already then a human and therefore often an idolatrous character. Then too it was already deprived of real spirituality. We can see this for example in the swearing at the temple (Matthew 23:22), in the superstitious handling of the ark by the sons of Eli (1 Sam. 4:3), in the worship of the bronze serpent (2 Kings 18:4), in the trading of the money changers (Matthew 21:12;

John 2:15), in the bringing of hypocritical sacrifices (Isaiah 1:10-14). How often didn't the prophets have to fight against formalism?

The great danger in that is that those forms turn into idols. That images, used in the teachings of God by the use of shadows, will be revered in an idolatrous manner, that man will seek himself in them and that they draw away from the truth.

Set your mind on things above

With Christ the purpose of the shadowy worship has ceased. Now Christ, the great prophet, our chief prophet and teacher, may speak.

As Moses said (Deut. 18:15):

'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from your midst, - him you shall hear.'

(Deut. 18:15; John 4:19)

'Hear Him', the Father said to the disciples from heaven (Matt. 17: 5).

We read about this worship in spirit and in truth further in John 4:24:

'God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.'

So another reason is stated here why the worship service has to undergo change now that Christ has come. The ceremonial elements disappear, but along with that, Christ Himself, as the truth, will not always remain bodily present either. He will not remain on earth. He will be in heaven with His Father. But as from Pentecost, He will always be with His church in His Spirit.

Therefore it says in Colossians 3:1:

'Seek those things which are above where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.'

In our true worship service we should not be directed by earthly forms, on the inventions and precepts of men.

'Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.' (Col. 3:2).

We can only worship the Lord spiritually. Christ as man is in Heaven. That means we can only worship in faith, with a heart that looks up to our Saviour in heaven, Who, as our Priest-King is seated on the right hand of God the Father.

In our serving and worshipping we will not direct our attention to earthly, cultural, impressive, human matters or human talk, even if they should have the appearance of all wisdom (Colossians 2:23), even if you come under the impression of the wit or the catchy content. These things, according to Colossians 2:22, will perish with the using, as

it happens with the commandments and teachings made by man. In fact they are without any value and serve only to the indulgence of the flesh. You can be overawed by them. It can all feel good, it might excite you into a higher sphere but they remain earthly matters. The worship service can then even turn into a form of self satisfaction without any value. Without eternal worth!

God is Spirit!

How is this to be avoided? Only if we let ourselves be led by the Spirit of Christ. That Spirit works by means of the Word of Christ that is the Word of the Father. John 4 verse 23 says:

'But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.'

The word 'worship' literally means: to reverently bring homage by kneeling. It concerns a reverent honouring of the Lord God, of God the Father, with veneration. This honouring has to be true and therefore faithful to God's Word. This worshipping should not happen at one's own discretion.

That is because God is spirit, says verse 24. In the previous verses God is addressed with the name Father, very trustworthy and familiar, but it has to become clear now that this Father is God. God who establishes His own Godly demands. Therefore it continues in verse 24:

'those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.'

'Must worship', it is an order! The Lord wants a worship service according to His will. A service not tailored for the outsider or the religious person. A service that has the high level of God the Father, that answers to His essence. God is spirit and therefore the service for Him must be in spirit and in truth, that is, in a manner that is pleasing to Him. Therefore do away with all fleshly and idolatrous elements in the worship service, they are not pleasing to the LORD God.

On the contrary, God wants us to direct ourselves to His Godly being, to praise Him for His majesty and omnipotence, for His goodness and mercy, His faithfulness and steadfastness. To worship Him for whom He is, as our God, as He has revealed Himself in His Word, in the Word of Truth.

The Lord wants to be served in spirit and in truth. The worship service must be arranged for that purpose, so that God's Truth comes into the full light. That the holy majesty of God is acknowledged and He

can, in Christ, be approached in all humility. The way to the Father will be unlocked in the worship service and we may go to Him in one Spirit and gain real communion (Ephesians 2:18). Thus eternal life is given (Ps. 133:3).

How this contradicts with the course in some church federations such as the GkV to give churches room to allow their own ideas into the worship service, introducing all types of man-centered things: art, new hymns with untruths, bands and choirs, dance and mime, cabaret and films. In this way the worship service increasingly received a character of entertainment. At the same time the pulpit, in many places, was even done away with, sermons were tailored to hearers with little knowledge. Easily accessible services had to drag outsiders over the threshold and fashionable youth services had to hold the youth. For many of us it was a thorn in the flesh, a source of irritation.

True worshippers

What is really going on here? What did we have to be really irritated about in the worship services before our liberation? Was it that these things were new, that we were not used to them?

That there was nothing traditional in it? That we as church members had no say in these things? No, not in the first place.

The real vexation against such practices must come from the fact that the justice and the honour of the Lord God are violated; of God the Father and of Christ. God wants to see true worship services where homage, prayer and praise are brought to Him in a reverent way. He gave His Son to unlock the way to Him, for the benefit of that meeting with Him and for the sake of His glorification.

Real worshippers, true believers will worship the Father on the command of Christ, in spirit and truth (verse 23, 24), without human rituals, ceremonies, dance, excitable cult, art or entertainment. Without wanting to put the religious man and his experience in the centre.

True worshippers want nothing else than to listen to the Gospel of preservation, the genuine and unabridged Word of Truth, praying for the working of the Spirit. Also in response to the Lord in prayer and song, the congregation shall speak words as of God (1 Peter 4:11). All human input that does not fit there, impedes the working of Word and Spirit. It obscures the Truth, exalts the flesh and brings the Spirit down.

The worship service is very near to God the Father's heart. It is His meeting with His covenant children. The meeting where He wants to be present in Spirit, but only at that sacred level that He lays down. He wants to meet us only in a manner that is pleasing to Him, with reverence and awe, because our God is a devouring fire (Heb. 12:28, 29).
'Be holy for I am holy.' (1 Peter 1:16).

In verse 23 it says that the Father 'is seeking' such worshippers. God will only accept those in His house who want to serve Him in true faith. Those who will arrange worship services according to His will. He Himself calls for this. He seeks true worshippers, He seeks in love, but also in holiness. Doesn't He have the right to do so?

Let us then always remember:

*'God of salvation is His name /
this glorious Name shall we proclaim'*
(Ps. 68:8 - rhymed version).

S. de Marie

(Edited speech given at opening of the General Synod at Hasselt on 9th June 2012

From DE BAZUIN, Volume 6, Number 30)





Introducing you to ...

the congregation of De Gereformeerde Kerk Hasselt and environs

The congregation of Hasselt was allowed to liberate itself in May 2004 from the unscriptural decisions that the consistory of the church of Hasselt (GKV) had declared as being settled and binding.

From that moment on it was allowed to call itself Church of Jesus Christ again and the calling came to its members, unimpaired and with strength. The calling to obediently follow the voice of the Good Shepherd and to give Him all the honour in ones whole life.

For this purpose two worship services are held every Sunday. These are held in the building of the Cultural Centre 'Het Teeuwland' in Hasselt.

Once again the congregation was allowed to experience the undeserved blessings of the Lord through Scriptural preaching and the communion of saints.

God's grace was and is great and therefore there is every reason to be thankful to Him.

The Lord still allowed the lamp to shine in Hasselt. His lamp was still allowed to shine in the darkness of our hearts.

With that there is a call to those with whom we still feel a bond in doctrine and life.

May the Lord incline the hearts of many to again, according to Articles 27-29 of the Belgic Confession, join the true church of our forefathers, that is governed by our Lord Jesus Christ.

The congregation of Hasselt at present has 34 members, 25 are communicant members and 9 are baptized members.

We were very recently able to witness the baptism of two infants, two covenant children. After quite a number of years the baptismal font could again be used. A huge blessing and again every reason to thank and praise our Heavenly Father.

Because of an increase in membership, the Bible study evenings are now also held fortnightly in 'Het Teeuwland'. Up to now they had been held in the homes of various members.

Two young (baptized) members attend the weekly catechism classes in Zwolle.

The Lord still graciously grants us to independently function as His Church within the bond of churches. It is governed by a local consistory in which we may see the miracle of His grace. He reigns to all eternity. All praise and honour is to Him, a praise

and honour that as yet is imperfect, but will be perfect after the Day of Judgment. So we may, led by His grace, be on the way towards this 'day of all days'.

May the Lord give us the strength and wisdom to remain steadfast, to serve Him faithfully in truth in all our ways.

Also in Hasselt a lamp still remains that is fed by His Holy Word and that may shine in this world, for as long as the Lord will give this to us and we continue to seek His countenance in uprightness.

For this reason God has placed us in a bond of churches to also, no matter how limited, be instrumental.

This also applies in the bond we have with our Canadian sister-church at Abbotsford.

Faith bridges all oceans.

A. Admiraal



Hasselt, on the banks of the river Zwartewater

The General Synod of The Reformed Churches (r) at Hasselt 2011-2012

This general synod, which covered 16 sessions, was completed in a period of 11 months.

We started on 26 November, 2011, after a prayer meeting in which we asked for the help and the blessing of the Lord. In thankfulness to the Lord we were able to conclude our work on 13 October, 2012. At this final meeting we looked back on the work done for the benefit of the churches. It can be divided into three main themes: internal up-building, church contacts at home and church contacts abroad.

I – Internal up-building

In recent years, after the liberation and the re-forming of a bond of churches, a good foundation for a large number of common issues, has been laid by successive synods

Old synod decisions of the Reformed Churches liberated (GKv)

That concerns the reassessment of all synod decisions of the general synods of Ommen 1993, Berkel and Rodenrijs 1996, Leusden 1999 and Zuidhorn 2002-2003.

This comprehensive work was completed in Hasselt. Spread over 4 synods, 374 relevant synod decisions from the past were re-examined: 279 (75%!) of these had to be rejected because they were found to contravene with Scripture, Confession or Church Order.

This fact indicates how the Lord, through our liberation, has kept us from error. Our prayer is that we will remain faithful and that the Lord will keep us by the purity of His Word.

Theological Training for the Ministry

Thankfully we may ascertain that, despite our own minimal expertise, the Lord gave possibilities to start our own training. A start was made after the decisions of the G.S. Emmen 2009, but at this synod it was further developed to virtually the whole curriculum of 5 years. Only a few subjects will be procured externally. The preparatory work was achieved by fruitful cooperation between deputies and the Board of Education. This requires great commitment of all persons involved, it also demands larger financial sacrifices and spiritual support from the church and church members.

Above all, it requires the continual blessing of the Lord.

Library and financial support students

Two related issues have also called for attention. The first is that of the take-over of the book collection from the Stichting Theologisch Boek (Theological Book Foundation). As a result of two second appeals and new information, the synod reversed the decision made by the synod of Emmen.

After intensive deliberation, good arrangements were made to take over the library. A new location for the library and for the theological training was also found, namely the church building 'De Hoeksteen' in Zwolle. The synod is pleased and grateful that the Foundation is prepared to hand over the collection of 13.000 books and the accompanying inventory to the churches. In the meantime an implementation committee has been appointed that will arrange the move to and the installation at the new location.

Furthermore separate deputies for financial aid for needy students are appointed, ad. Art. 19, Church Order (Art. 20, Church Order; Art 18, Church Order Australian Churches). Here we read:

The churches shall endeavor that there be students of theology, extending financial aid to those who are in need of it.

Because we now have our own training which is not recognized by the State, we no longer have the right for financial support from the government. That therefore demands much greater sacrifices from us all.

To be able to pay extra attention to that and to avoid entanglement with the more principle work of the Deputies for Training for the Ministry, the synod again appointed deputies ad. Art. 19 (Art. 20 / Art. 18) Church Order. They will be charged with raising funds and making it available in a responsible manner. We hope that the Lord will also bless this so important work of the Training.

Sermons for reading and Bible translation

A third common issue that has had our attention from the very beginning since the liberation directly concerns the Sunday worship services. It concerns liturgical facilities, availability of sermons for reading and the Bible translation. To stay church, this is also of utmost importance. As

from the GS Zwolle 2007-2008, there are Deputies Liturgical Facilities, who have a serving task. With so few ministers and so very many ministers that stayed behind in the GKv (Reformed Church liberated), there is a great need for availability of written sermons. Besides that, the contents of the available sermons, must be dealt with critically. Previous synods have given advice for this. From one of the churches there was a question, whether, in spite of the advice, the consistories still have the freedom to choose their own reading sermons. That question affects, besides the own responsibility of the consistory, also the unity of the churches. The synod wanted to give a clear answer to this, with as key principles, to ensure the Scriptural reliability of the sermons and the unity of the churches. Over the years though, a lot of practical work has been done for selecting sermons and transferring sound-recordings into written text. In the meantime there are in all, over 1700 sermons available.

The revised King James Version (Statenvertaling) has already been examined for reliability and readability from GS. Mariënberg 2005 onwards. The question to the deputies was whether they could already give advice about this Bible translation as replacement for the Bible translation of the N.B.G. (Dutch Bible Society) of 1951. The deputies who have done a lot of work, considered that the time had not yet come to make such a major decision. The synod adopted this advice and hopes that at the next synod, which will be, the Lord willing, in Groningen in 2014, a final decision can be made. May the Lord give His strength and talents to the deputies for the large amount of research that is still necessary.

Frequency of the synod and jurisdiction

After four synods, it looks as though the main common issues have been developed thus far, that a quieter time may dawn. Therefore it was decided to return to the normal frequency that the church order indicates, namely a synod once in every three instead of every two years, which was temporarily set by the GS of Mariënberg. That gives more rest for the churches, the consistories and the deputies. Even so, a different regulation was necessary for dealing with possible cases of appeals against one of the classes. It was decided that, because of the lack of a regional synod which meets once a year, in future, the one classis will be body of appeal for the other classis, instead of the general synod being the appellate body.

We hope that all this will serve the peace and the justice in our churches.

Other deputies too gave us encouraging reports. On the basis of the reports of Deputies-curators National Church Magazine and Websites, a healthy situation could be ascertained in the edition of the church magazine, not only substantively, but also financially. We are thankful to the Lord for this.

The Deputies Financial Management too had a positive message: it seems that in time to come they will ask to reduce the quota, because in the meantime the necessary reserves have been sufficiently built up. That too makes us thankful.

II – Contacts at home

The Lord Christ, who is the head of the Church, commands us to look out at all times for other church communities who stand on the same foundation of Word and Confession.

That command counts for the churches at home, for which we have the Church Order as outline for ecclesiastical relationship, and for the churches abroad where we have the sister-church relationship. As regards the churches at home, we have had correspondence with three churches.

Reformed Church (lib.) (GKv) and Reformed Church Kampen-North

Our General Synod of Emmen sent an extensive substantiated letter to the GKv with a friendly appeal to them, to turn back from their erroneous ways. The reply we received from the Synod of Hardewijk 2010 was very disappointing. It appears that this synod did not wish to go into any of the issues that were brought forward. They described our letter of appeal as a sign of rejection. This makes us very sad. We answered them in a shorter letter and urged them as yet to go into the contents of the letter from the GS of Emmen.

Also as a continuation of existing correspondence, another letter was sent to the Reformed Church Kampen-North (Ichtus) in which again an appeal was made to them, this time to also point out to them the partaking of independentism and the tolerance of false doctrine.

The request to them was, to come back from that so that contact would be possible again. Unfortunately the response was negative and Kampen considered that further correspondence was meaningless.

Reformed Church (dissenting) Dalfsen

Most of the time and energy was spent on the contact with the Reformed Church (dissenting) Dalfsen. The official contact with this congregation started during the synod of Emmen 2009-2010. That synod sent an inviting letter to Dalfsen with the request that, besides their own liberation of 2010, to also see the liberation of 2003 as the work of the Lord and so unite with us.

Some time after sending this letter there was contact again with our deputies. This took place after some of the members left the congregation of Dalfsen and joined the provisional bond of churches. In the discussions they had then, deputies again pleaded for ecclesiastical unity. But Dalfsen had difficulty to take the step of uniting with our church federation, to fully live with us, according the church order. They came with a suggestion to have an in-between stage which they called a course of approach, in the form of a sister-church relationship as we know it from Art. 47 (Art. 50 / Art. 46) of the Reformed Church Order, regarding the churches abroad. They gave as reason the internal obstacles with regard to the difference in climate. Also at the last meeting with the synod committee in July 2012, the consistory of Dalfsen said that they would run internal risks when joining The Reformed Churches (r).

At the end of March 2012, the synod decided not to adopt the proposal of Dalfsen, but instead to speak out a warm intention, with every effort from both parties, to remove all obstacles so that union can be realized within one year.

The synod's request to Dalfsen was that from their side, they would speak out the same intention. (See for the text about these decisions elsewhere in this issue of the Reformed Continua).

The consistory of Dalfsen let us know in its last letters that it would have to consider this proposal for unity in consultation with the congregation.

The last letter that the synod wanted to send to Dalfsen was stipulated on the morning of the closing meeting and at the end of this letter, it contains the following passage:

In this context we would again like to bring our request to your attention, to together speak out a hearty intention to come to an ecclesiastical unity on basis of the Church Order within a period of one year, and that in that period we will both, after our combined statement, do our utmost to remove all obstacles for this ecclesiastical unity as soon as possible (our decision 3, made on 31 March and sent to you on 5 April).

Brothers, it would be such a blessing of the Lord if you, with the whole congregation, would come to unity with our churches. It is our prayer, our hope and desire, that you will accept our request to come to ecclesiastical unity as soon as possible. We hope that from your side you understand that it disappoints us that we have not yet received a reaction from you.

Please do not see this as a reproach, but as an expression of longing for serving the Lord together as one body.

We, the General Synod, therefore invite you to as yet respond to our request. The Reformed Churches (r) wish to do everything possible to attain unity with those who should be one (Art. 27 and 28, BC).

We hope and pray that Dalfsen may receive the strength- and courage of faith to respond to this invitation.

III – Contacts abroad

Finally something about our contacts abroad. This mainly concerns Canada and Australia.

Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford

Since GSEmmen 2010 we have had a good relationship with our sister-church, the LRC at Abbotsford. For this we thank the Lord. In the meantime Rev. S. de Marie has paid four visits to the congregation, to preach and to administer the sacraments. A warm mutual bond of faith was experienced. There is further correspondence going on with regard to the interpretation of supervision of each other, and the offering of an appellate body for this Canadian sister- church.

Abbotsford has also sympathized with us during this synod.

Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)

Regarding the ecclesiastical unity of the CanRC, it was decided to instruct the Deputies Contact Churches Abroad, that in the contacts they still have with these churches, to also bring to their attention the causes of the liberation at Abbotsford. These causes relate to church-wide developments within the Canadian churches, to all sorts of church relationships with other churches in North-America where the Holy Supper table and the pulpit have been opened for others, with the continuation of differing opinions which concern the doctrine of the church, the covenant and the binding to the confession. This has been raised somewhat at a

recent meeting of deputies Contact Churches Abroad with the deputies of the Canadian churches. A reporting of this will take place at the Canadian synod of 2013.

Free Reformed Churches of Australia

At the synod session of 30 September 2012, two deputies reported on their recent visit to the synod of Armadale, West. Australia.

The positive news was that in Australia, there is now a better understanding of the developments in the GKv. They now want to seriously call them to account for this.

It is important, that in the future our deputies, if possible, offer them further support.

It remains disappointing that these churches have not or not yet, recognized us. One reason that is mentioned for the first time is our relationship with our sister-church at Abbotsford in Canada. In our opinion it all has to do with the close ties between the Australian and the Canadian churches. It is decided to maintain the contacts with the Australian churches, because of the observed developments, with regard to the GKv. We shall

also give information on the background of the liberation of the LRC Abbotsford from the Canadian Reformed Churches.

There has also been contact with a delegation from the South African churches, the VGKSA.

This also will be followed up, in addition to correspondence with more churches abroad.

Surveying everything, we may thankfully establish that a broad spectrum of important issues has been settled at this synod. Regarding the internal up-building of the church, a certain stabilization has been achieved for the nourishment of the churches, namely the ongoing preaching of the Word of God and the training for the ministry. Also stabilization for the bond of the churches, namely the binding synod decisions from the past. Furthermore there are ongoing attempts for more church relationships at home and abroad. We hope and pray that the decisions made may be conducive for the up-building and the unity of the churches.

S. de Marie



All photo's in this issue of Reformed Continua by H. van der Net-Visser, Hasselt

Decisions regarding the Gereformeerde Kerk (dolerend) Dalfsen (Reformed Church (dissenting) Dalfsen), made by the General Synod of Hasselt on 17 and 31 March 2012

Decision 1.

The General Synod of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands (The Reformed Churches restored = RCN(r)), convened at Hasselt on 26 November 2011, expresses a hearty desire towards complete church unity with the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen.

Grounds:

1. The General Synod of Emmen 2009 stated with thankfulness that in Dalfsen a liberation from the Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt (Reformed Church lib.)) had taken place. Considering the grounds of this Liberation, the synod stated also with thankfulness that the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen is based on the same foundation of Scripture and Confession.

They expressed the fervent wish that it may come to unity in truth with this congregation, in accordance with John 17:11^b,21,22 and also with what the church echoes in Art. 28 BC (GS Emmen 2009/2010, Acts, art.92).

2. Following that, the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen made known their desire to come to a union with the RCN. The synod thankfully took cognizance of this.

3. The Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen clearly stated in its letter dated 7 March 2012 that 'We declare heartily to fully and unconditionally agree with the Holy Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity'.

Consideration 1: Starting point.

Ecclesiastical fellowship

According to God's Word and the Confession, it is the calling of the true believers and of the churches in each place and in every country to strive for ecclesiastical fellowship with all who confess with them the same faith and maintain it in preaching and church service, church government and discipline, in ecclesiastical unity in each place and in every country.

Where this is not possible due to geographical distances, language barriers or other reasons, ecclesiastical fellowship is to be practiced by correspondence (GS Groningen 1978, art. 139).

True Church

At the same time it is the calling of the true believers and of the churches to carefully and diligently distinguish from God's Word what is the true Church, to exercise ecclesiastical fellowship with that true Church and to refuse ecclesiastical fellowship with those churches who openly deviate from the doctrine and the regulations of God's Word, or who have schismatically separated themselves from the true Church (GS Groningen 1978, art. 139).

Bond of churches

The command of Christ, as summarized in Art. 28 BC, to unite with the one catholic Church, also applies to the local church and to the bond of true churches. (See GS Hoogeveen 1969, art. 350; GS Zwolle 2007/2008, art. 22).

With regard to the calling (a), the will (b) and the striving (c) for unity, GS Hoogeveen considered the following, in reference to the contacts with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (Christian Reformed Churches) in the period 1946 - 1969:

1a. That according to God's Word (such as John 17:11,17,20,21; Phil.1:27-2:4; Eph. 3:14-4:16; 1 Tim. 3:15,16) and the confession based on that Word (such as Art.28 BC and Q&A 55 H.C.) it is the calling of true believers and of the churches to strive for ecclesiastical union with all those who, with them, confess the same faith, and keep the doctrine that is according to the Word of God and that is confessed in the accepted Forms of Unity accepted by the Reformed Churches (lib.) in this country;

1b. that, according to the 'Act of Separation or Return' of October 1834, the churches that had returned to this confession based on God's Word had also desired this true catholicity of the church, when they declared that it was their desire to seek

fellowship with all true reformed members and to unite with every gathering based on God's Word.

1c. that directly after the Liberation the General Synod of Groningen 1946 and also the following general synods of the Reformed Churches (lib.) of the Netherlands stated that the Christian Reformed Churches similarly "stand on the same basis of God's Word and the Three Forms of Unity" and that therefore one must strive to come together ecclesiastically under the strong emphasis of God's Word and promises, named sub a and b; (GS Hooegeven 1969, art. 350).

Actual union

The true catholicity of the church is apparent in the actual union, instead of living alongside each other in a good relationship.

The committee report, added as supplement to art. 350, describes this as follows:

The truthfulness of being church must be proved by uniting without delay. May God protect us from living alongside one another in a good brotherly spirit, in more extensive correspondence; only one thing is permitted: together bow down under the dominion of Christ, to let us be gathered by Him in unity of faith. (...)

To serve that true catholicity of the Church in the Netherlands by striving towards union of churches based on this catholic foundation, our churches have, since the liberation, persistently sought to come to ecclesiastical unity with the Christian Reformed Churches. Seven synods with their deputies have continually appealed to the Christian Reformed synods, as representing its churches, under the emphasis of the command of Christ as confessed in Art. 28 BC.

(GS Hooegeven 1969, supplement to Art. 350: Acts p. 620, 621, 640).

Ecclesiastical unity according to the Church Order

The Reformed Churches (r), as worded in consideration 1-4, have given shape to the calling for seeking ecclesiastical unity in its instructions for the deputies ecclesiastical relations at home (DACOBB: Deputies Adresvoering / Contacten Overheid / Binnenlandse Betrekkingen = general contact address / contact government / relations for churches at home).

The General Synod of Zwolle 2007/2008 has especially recorded the criterion of ecclesiastical unity according to the Reformed Church Order, in a decision for the purpose of the instructions for the named deputies (GS Zwolle 2007/2008, Acts art. 69, decision 3).

Consideration 2: Relations with the Reformed Church (dissenting) Dalfsen

Desire for unity

The General Synod of Emmen 2009/2010 has given a pronouncement on the Liberation of 2003 and 2010, where it considers these to be the work of the Lord, as answer to the question directed to synod by the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen. It has, with respect to a forthcoming union with the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen, expressed, in art. 92, the fervent desire *that a unity in truth may come about with this congregation in accordance with John 17:11b,21,22 and as the church echoes in Art. 28, Belgic Confession. (GS Emmen 2009/2010, art. 92).*

Brotherly invitation

In a letter to the consistory of the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen, the GS Emmen sent a brotherly invitation, with an appeal to Psalm 133, to come to ecclesiastical unity. In it the consistory was referred to the secretary of the neighbouring congregation, which is the congregation of Zwolle e.o., should it wish to speak about unity, and referred to deputies ecclesiastical relations at home if it does not wish to make a decision for unity yet (GS Emmen 2009/2010).

Request for working together

The consistory of the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen, after receiving the letter mentioned in Consideration 2.2, has had contact with the deputies of the RCN_r for further discussion. Following a number of discussions it decided

'to request the bond of churches of the RCN_r to come to a relationship of working together with the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen in the form of a sister-church relationship analogous to the sister-church relationship with churches abroad, as described in Art. 47 (Dutch) Church Order'.

This proposal, besides an alteration of the rules set by the GS Leeuwarden 1990 (art. 93), concerning the sending of deputies to ecclesiastical meetings,

contained conditions with regard to church boundaries. The consistory thereby stated that there must be growth towards complete ecclesiastical unity (letter dated 10 Nov. 2011).

Liberation 2003/2004 and 2010

In its letter dated 10 November 2011 the consistory of Dalfsen further states to have no difficulty in also seeing the hand of the Lord in the Liberation of 2003. For the consistory that is, together with the statement of GS Emmen 2009/2010 to see the hand of the Lord in the Liberation of 2010 in Dalfsen, a good basis to continue together.

Impediments

As impediments that still stand in the way towards a complete ecclesiastical union, the consistory mentions:

- a) the questions that exist in the congregation of Dalfsen, namely the 'difference in climate';
- b) the synod decisions made by the RCN_r in the period up to 2010, these decisions have yet to be tested;
- c) the synod decisions of the Reformed Churches (lib.), such as the decision on active voting rights for sisters, made before February 2010, and which have not been renounced by the consistory. These decisions have yet to be reviewed.

With regard to the suggested relationship, the consistory, for the time being, has in mind a period of about one year, 'depending on how soon the above mentioned matters can be finalized'.

Difference of opinion

The above mentioned request (sub 2.3) did not, when asked, receive approval from the deputies, but it was sent to the General Synod by the consistory of Dalfsen, with approval from those same deputies.

Route of gradualism

The consistory of Dalfsen sees the suggested sister-church relationship as a route of gradualism towards complete ecclesiastical unity and not as an attempt to avoid ecclesiastical union.

Impediments exist

In a writing dated 7 March 2012, the consistory of Dalfsen gave answers to the questions asked by the General Synod at Hasselt, with reference to the ACOBB deputies' report. From this it appears that in the opinion of Dalfsen, the impediments

mentioned in Consideration 2.5 still exist, whereby ecclesiastical unity is not yet possible.

Threat for the peace

When feelings of 'difference in climate' and 'hesitation' form an obstacle to heartily fully accepting each other in love, they are a threat for the peace where it concerns pulpit exchange and celebration of the Lord's Supper (Rom. 15:2-7; 1 Cor. 10:16).

One true church in one place

The suggested church relationship analogous to a sister-church relationship abroad, results in the formalizing of a situation that there is more than one church of Christ in the same place, whilst the calling of Christ is to locally form the communion of saints in one body (Art. 28 BC).

Decision 2:

The General Synod of the RCN_r, convened at Hasselt on 26 November 2011, rejects the request from the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen in following a route of gradualism towards complete ecclesiastical unity by working together in a relationship analogous to a sister-church relationship abroad, as is written in Art. 47 (Dutch) Church Order.

Grounds:

1. The RCN_r have accepted the Reformed Church Order (of Dordt) for living together in a bond of churches, to the norm of Scripture and Confession. In accordance with the Act of Separation or Return of 1834, and the Acts of Liberation or Return 1944 and 2003, the churches seek other gatherings who stand on the same foundation of Scripture and confession and who, for their unity, wish to observe the accepted Church Order (see also GS Groningen 1946, art.88; GS Groningen-Zuid 1978, art. 139; GS Zwolle 2007/2008, art. 69, decision 3).

2. Communion of Word and sacraments, manifesting itself in mutual opening of pulpit and Holy Supper table, requires an ecclesiastical unity with complete recognition of offices and unimpeded communion of saints. Therefore in 1869 and 1892 it was postponed until complete ecclesiastical unity was established. (Acts of Synod of the Christelijke Afscheiden Gereformeerde Kerk, Middelburg 1869, art. 25; Acts of Synod of the Christelijke Gereformeerde

Kerk, Leeuwarden 1891, 19th session, art. 184; Acts of the 3rd provisional synod of the Nederduitsche Gereformeerde Kerken, 's-Gravenhage, 1891, art. 55, page 82; see also GS Mariënberg 2005, art. 25. G.1.9. and G.2.6).

3. The temporary ecclesiastical relationship analogous to a sister-church relationship abroad of Art. 47 CO, where there is no mention of geographical distance or language barrier, suggested by the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen, is not in accordance with the Church Order (Art. 1, 31, 84 - Dutch Church Order) and recent valid pronouncements of the general synods (GS Groningen-Zuid 1978, art. 139; GS Leeuwarden 1990, art. 93; GS Zwolle 2007/2008, art. 69, decision 3).

4. The existence of human factors, that impede acceptance of each other hinder a united Holy Supper communion (Acts 2:42; Rom. 15:2-7; 1 Cor. 10:16; 1 Cor. 11:28, 29; Eph. 4:1-6; Phil. 2:1-5; Col.3:12-15; Q.& A. 55, 76 HC; Art. 28, 35 BC); these impediments therefore need to be removed before complete ecclesiastical unity can be ascertained.

5. Formalizing the situation that there is more than one church of Christ in the same place is not in accordance with the calling to locally give shape to the communion of saints (Art. 28 BC). The true unity of the church is at stake here and also the authority of Christ as Lord of the Church.

Considerations:

1. The consistory of the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen indicated that it still needs time to be able to come to complete ecclesiastical unity with the RCN and living in the one bond of churches.

2. The most important issues that still requiring time, are mentioned by the consistory of Dalfsen. These are:

- The questions that exist in the congregation, among others, with regard to a 'difference in climate'.
- The synod decisions made by the RCN which still have to be tested substantively.
- The synod decisions of the Reformed Churches (lib.) that are valid for Dalfsen but not for the RCN; with regard to these decisions, Dalfsen wishes to go into discussion with the RCN.

3. It promotes clarity on the path to unity if the impediments on that path to full unity, are made concretely known in such a manner, that discussions about these are possible, so that these impediments can be eliminated.

4. It is important to show willingness from our side towards the consistory of Dalfsen, if they request it, to speak about the so-called difference in climate and the validity of the synod decisions of the Reformed Church (lib.) that are not valid in the RCN.

5. Ambiguities still remain after the consistory of Dalfsen, in a letter dated 7 March 2012, answered questions asked by the general synod of the RCN. At the same time questions asked by the church of Dalfsen are included in this letter.

Decision 3

The General Synod of the RCN, convened at Hasselt on 26 November 2011, decides to request the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen to agree with the following declaration of intent:

The Reformed Churches (restored), convened as General Synod at Hasselt on 26 November 2011, and the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen mutually express a hearty intention, within a period of one year following this declaration of intent, to proceed to complete ecclesiastical unity on the basis of the Reformed Church Order; they will, in this period, do everything to the best of their ability to clear up all impediments towards this ecclesiastical unity as quickly as possible.

Grounds:

1. It is a command of the Lord, which the church may fulfill with joy, to come to complete ecclesiastical unity as soon as possible, when, with thankfulness to the Lord, it can be mutually concluded, that as church, they both stand on the same foundation and live accordingly. (Art. 28, BC).

2. It remains a duty to carefully question each other on the marks of the true church (Art.29 BC).

3. Non-confessional factors as such, may not form a legitimate impediment for complete ecclesiastical unity, when in thankfulness it may be ascertained that the marks of the true church are shown and

that no differences in fundamental matters of doctrine, service and discipline exist (Rom. 15:2-7; Eph. 4:1-6; Phil. 2:1-5; Art. 27-29, 32 BC).

4. Everything possible shall have to be done to remove the impediments, that are still being mentioned by the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen, and the still existing matters that are unclear for the RCN_r, regarding statements made by the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen, are to be removed as soon as possible, according to God's Word, the Confession of the church and the Church Order. At the same time the necessary patience must also be exercised.

Considerations:

1. The Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen writes in its letter dated 10 November 2011 that the synod decisions, made as from Synod Mariënberg 2005 have not yet been reviewed. This also includes the synod decisions that concern revision requests of old Reformed Church (lib.) synod decisions taken by GS Ommen 1993, GS Berkel & Rodenrijs 1996, GS Leusden 1999 and GS Zuidhorn 2002/2003.

2. The church at Dalfsen has publicly distanced itself from a number of the Reformed Church (lib.) synod decisions at its Liberation in Dalfsen in 2010. They are still bound to other decisions of the Reformed Church (lib.) (letter dated 7 March 2012).

3. The Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen has indicated that it wishes to go into discussion with the RCN_r regarding the above mentioned decisions, such as the one concerning the active voting rights for sisters. Apart from that they do not see 'un-surmountable obstacles' with regard to the decisions made as from the GS Mariënberg 2005 (letters dated 10 November 2011 and 7 March 2012).

Decision 4:

The General Synod of the RCN_r, convened at Hasselt on 26 November 2011, expresses that at complete ecclesiastical unity, the congregation at Dalfsen has, for a period of three years after the ecclesiastical union, the right to request, at the next synod, the revision of decisions made by the RCN_r synods in the period prior to the union, as from GS Mariënberg 2005.

Grounds:

1. The Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen was not part of the bond of churches of the RCN_r at the time the mentioned synod decisions were made.

2. It does not serve the unity in truth if man is bound by Art. 31 of the Church Order, to decisions made by the major assemblies, if fundamental objections against those decisions exist, but are not presented.

3. When, in testing the decisions that were made, according to the Holy Scripture, the Confession of the church or the Church Order, deviations in those decisions are discovered, the unity is served by making revision possible according to Art. 31, CO.

Decision 5:

The General Synod of the RCN_r, convened at Hasselt on 26 November 2011, decides to inform the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen of the decisions made with regard to their suggestions, as answer to the letters of 10 and 11 November 2011 and 7 March 2012 that were received by synod. To that end a letter with considerations, decisions and grounds shall be sent to the consistory of the Reformed Church (dissenting) at Dalfsen and with a request to have this letter explained to them verbally by a committee.



From the Churches

1. Candidate br. C. Koster

Br. C. Koster, studying for the ministry, is at present busy with his thesis. He hopes to complete his studies at the beginning of 2013 and will then be eligible to be called by the churches.

He has received permission to lead the worship services in various churches to speak an edifying word.

2. Synod

The Synod of The Reformed Churches (r) commenced on 26 November 2011 and finished on 13 October 2012, just under a year after the opening.

It was a long Synod. A lot of work was done and the request from the church at Dalfsen gave a lot of difficulties because it was not a request that could be answered with a hearty 'yes'. More about that in this issue of Reformed Continua.

3. Youth

The youth hopes to start the new year 2013 again with a national meeting "Good Beginning" where various topic will be dealt with, by means of Workshops.

4. Zwolle

The Reformed Church (r) Zwolle was able to move into a large and beautiful church building in May 2012.

5. Opeinde

The Reformed Church (r) Opeinde (formerly Olterterp) have, just before Zwolle, purchased and moved into an own church building.

6. Berkel & Rodenrijs / Bergschenhoek

The Reformed Church (r) Berkel & Rodenrijs / Bergschenhoek have commenced preparation for building a church at Bleiswijk. The finances are in order and at present they are negotiating with the civil council for the purchase of land.

7. League Day

On 25 May 2013 we again hope to hold a League Day, this time in Hasselt.

8. Church Day

The Church Day held in Zwolle on 22 September 2012 was well-attended.

9. Virtute Dei

The Students Society Virtute Dei meets regularly and has a good attendance.

10. 65th jubilee Reverend Van Gulp

Reverend Van Gulp, at the age of 91, celebrated his 65th jubilee as minister in Emmen.

The Lord still gives him strength to lead worship services and each time we look forward to his preaching. The youth also enjoy his refreshing clarification and the effect for daily life. His spirit is still young! We hope that the Lord may continue to give him strength, so that he, at his advanced age, is able to lead church services and teach the students.

11. Reprint

At present commentaries of the Bible and study brochures are being reprinted by the League committee so that they can again be used at the Bible study societies.

12. Training

At present the Training for the Ministry has 3 students.

Joh. Houweling

