

REFORMED CONTINUA

Magazine of The Reformed Churches (restored) of The Netherlands

Proverbs 8:32

- Volume 19 - March 2016 -

From the editor

March 2016

Dear readers,

We are happy to present to you the 19th edition of the magazine 'Reformed Continua'.

We are thankful to the Lord that He gave and gives us the strength to be able to continue with this work.

We are also thankful that the magazine is well-received, at home and abroad. In this way we can give you information about our Churches in the English language, of which there is a great shortage.

We hope and pray that also this edition may firstly

be to the honour of God and also to the up-building of the Churches world-wide.

Joh. Houweling, Bleiswijk

NOTE:

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General Synod Groningen 2014-2015

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In this article we would like to inform you about several matters that were discussed and decided upon at the General Synod Groningen 2014-2015. This article is a summary of the synod reports that appeared in the church magazine 'De Bazuin'.

Opening

On Saturday, November 15, 2014 Synod Groningen of the Reformed Churches (restored)(DGK) in the Netherlands is opened. The chairman of the convening church (DGK Groningen), br. A. Hofman, opens the meeting. Under his leadership the meeting is opened in a Christian manner and the moderamen officers are elected. These are the following brothers: Rev. E. Heres as Chairman, Rev. S. de Marie as Vice Chairman, elder B. Lourens as Clerk and Rev. C. Koster as Second Clerk.

The Training for the Ministry of the Word

During the second synod session the report from deputies for the Training for the Ministry of the Word is discussed. These deputies have done a lot of work in the past three years. They have kept themselves busy with various practical and substantive issues in and around the Training. The Lord has richly blessed His churches through the Training. At the moment of writing there are three students that have completed their training and have begun in their congregations.

It is discussed what the task of the Training is if there are no students. Various possibilities are discussed. A synod committee is put to work with this. During the seventh synod session the committee's proposal is discussed. Possibly the Training will not remain without students for long. The Board of the Training indicates that a period of rest could be well used to develop study material. Deputies therefore advise to continue the contracts with the instructors. The training should be ready to commence when necessary. Also, the succession of instructors is discussed. The deputies for Training for the Ministry of the Word indicate that it would be good if the Training would provide a form of education, so that young ministers could specialize in certain subjects.

The draft decisions need to be adapted. In the eighth synod session decisions are ultimately made regarding the training. The synod decides to continue with the existing contracts. The working hours can be used to prepare for lectures to be given and if necessary to document them. Due to lack of time during the training, there was little time for this in the past. The Training will also structuralize refresher courses for ministers, especially with a view to a possible task as lecturer in the future. The meeting also decides to look out for ministers who can succeed Rev. Van Gulp to teach various subjects. During the time without students further work will be done on the library. For that purpose a plan of action is presented and this is adopted.

In the tenth synod session it is decided to appoint Rev. M. Dijkstra and Rev. C. Koster as candidate lecturers for the Training for the Ministry of the Word. In the time that no students are studying at the Training, both ministers can prepare themselves for a task as lecturer. Rev. Van Gulp will help to orient them in the various subjects. This shall occur in consultation with the consistories of the churches to which these ministers are bound.

Contact with the Reformed Churches Liberated

Our synod received a letter from the synod of the Reformed Churches Liberated (RCN) wherein, among other things, it read the following:

We must note that in the past years no progress has been made in our mutual contacts. Your meeting and our synod each have our own convictions and both believe that we let ourselves be guided in that by the Lord of the church and His authoritative Word. It is painful to acknowledge this, but it is honest to express this to each other. The synod has, with sadness, decided to accept this letter as notification and to no longer respond. We will not continue this discussion on a synodical level. May there be the continual recognition in faith and love for our God and Savior in local and personal contacts.

The synod of the RCN sees a 'dismissive attitude' in our correspondence. This does indeed hurt. Because we cannot reach them with God's Word. The synod decides to resign to the fact that General Synod of

Ede has notified us that they will not respond to the letter from General Synod Hasselt 2011. Because our heart still goes out to the RCN, the deputies who are responsible for contact with churches at home are asked to stay alert for opportunities to again come into contact.

Relations with Churches at Home

During the third synod session the report from the deputies for ACOBB (Adresvoering / Contacten Overheid / Binnenlandse Betrekkingen (General Contact Address / Contacts with Government / Contact for Relations with Churches at Home)) is discussed. The most important item regarding the contacts at home is the request from two DGK congregations to try to come to dialogue with all who stand on the same foundation. In particular the General Synod is requested to pronounce if and how ecclesiastical unity can be brought about between DGK and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN). In the meeting it appears that there is a hearty willingness to work on this request. After the committee presented its report to the meeting during the fourth synod session, the meeting comes to the conclusion to seek contact with the GKN. The deputies for Contacts for Relations at Home are given the instructions to see if there is a possibility, at church-bond level, to come to unity with the GKN. It must, thereby, be determined whether DGK and GKN stand on the same foundation and are building at the same structure.

Relations with churches abroad

In the fifth synod session delegates from our sister church, the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford are present. These are the brothers VanTil and Kruyswijk.

In this session the Westminster Standards is discussed. Synod Hasselt had given the deputies for Contacts with Churches Abroad the instruction to research the Scriptural character of this confession. This has led to a majority as well as a minority report. The majority report, written by four deputies, has tested the Scriptural character of four parts of the WS. These four parts concern the confession on the covenant, on the church, on the assurance of faith and on the church government. Based on their research the deputies come to the conclusion that these four parts do not agree with Scripture and confession. The deputies of this majority report therefore propose not to accept the Westminster Confession as a common foundation in the contact

with foreign churches. They consider it necessary that the WS is adapted in these parts. A foreign church could also accept the Three Forms of Unity.

Own History of the WS

The fifth deputy, in his minority report, points out however, that the Lord follows an own path with His church among various nations. The history of the church in the Netherlands differs from that of the church in Korea. The Dutch Confessions originated in the Dutch church history (e.g. the Belgic Confession by Guido de Brès). In this way the church struggle in another part of the world has other confessional documents as a result. This deputy writes that it is a denial of history when churches with the Westminster Confession must adopt the Three Forms of Unity. The four mentioned parts of the majority report certainly have to be subject of discussion in contacts with Presbyterian churches (that have the WS as foundation). Possibly something may then be carefully emended. The minority report especially appeals for more study of way the WS is explained by Presbyterians themselves.

Decisions on the WS

In response to these reports the delegates exchange their thoughts. They refer back to the history of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Having the Westminster Confession as a foundation has never been a hindrance for a sister-church relationship. Since the Liberation of 1944 writers have always pointed out vague, unfortunate formulations and to parts that are not reformed. A thorough study such as now has never been done. In 1948 the Synod of Groningen had to judge whether it could partake in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. One of the seven reasons to not participate was because they then had to bind themselves to the Westminster Confession. They did not want to do that because some parts were contrary to the Three Forms of Unity. In 1967 the Synod of Amersfoort cited approvingly that the WS was 'fully reformed'. It is noted that this is a major contradiction in judgment by both these synods. A delegate notes that this decision in foreign countries is used as though the Netherlands have no difficulty at all with the WS.

It is decided that none of the given proposals in the majority and minority reports are to be adopted and that both reports can function as "study reports". In its contact with foreign churches Deputies for Contact Churches Abroad can use the material included in both reports.

Canada

In the afternoon of the fifth synod session the sister-church relationship with Abbotsford is discussed. The CanRC have entered into sister-church relationships with Presbyterian churches that have the WS as confessions. Thereby, according to Abbotsford, all kinds of errors gained a foothold in the CanRC, such as pluriformity of the church and an open Lord's Supper table with those who are not bound to the Reformed confessions. In 2007 this led to a liberation in Canada. At the DGK-synod of Emmen a sister-church relationship with the congregation of Abbotsford was established. The consistory of DGK Dalfsen has now requested a revision on this decision. It wants to reconsider the sister-church relationship. It questions whether the grounds on which the sister-church relationship was decided upon, were correct. There is also a proposal to as yet hear the CanRC side of the issue.

Legitimacy of the liberation by the LRCA defended

During the seventh synod session the discussion of the revision request from the church at Dalfsen is continued. During the meeting the serious situation in which the reformed churches in Canada, the CanRC, find themselves is pointed out. In 1977 the CanRC recognized the OPC (Orthodox Presbyterian Church) as a true church and in 2001 entered into a sister-church relationship with them. From the beginning objections were raised against this. Since 1980 there are over 30 appeals that have been answered by various synods. Why? Because in the OPC there is no binding to the confession. Members who make profession of faith are not bound to the confessions. They do agree on certain matters (the Bible is God's Word, God is Triune, Jesus is my Savior, etc.), but those are matters which many Evangelicals and Baptists also can agree with. Further, objections were raised against the relationship with the OPC because of the practice of an open Holy Supper in their churches. People are not admitted to the table on the basis of their attestation given by their consistory, but on the basis of a conversation that they had with the consistory prior to the worship service. On the basis of self-testimony. Finally, objections were made against the sister-church relationship with the OPC because the pluriformity of the church is being taught in those churches. Various church denominations are all a branch of the church. As an explainer of the Larger Westminster Catechism wrote: The visible church has many branches (...).

If a certain denomination claims to be the true visible church, it means that others are false. Such a claim is overbearing and sinful. That this unscriptural doctrine also has influence on the CanRC is apparent in the following. The CanRC is member of the interdenominational NAPARC, an interdenominational council with 13 denominations. The members of these denominations may, upon self testimony, also partake of the Holy Supper, since the NAPARC churches recognize each other as true churches. An appeal against this is denied at the Canadian synod in 2013. These matters do not only play a role with the OPC, but also with other sister-churches of the CanRC.

Because of the practices in the OPC, two ministers, with their congregations, seceded from the OPC and joined the CanRC. A classis of the CanRC declared that this secession was legitimate, but a synod of the CanRC has not given a ruling on this.

The consistory of Abbotsford (CanRC) raised their objections at the major assemblies as well. However, after 2004 the standpoint of the consistory turned around. Instead of the full agreement with the objections, one church member was put under discipline. The ecclesiastical path was closed for individual church members by a synod decision. Only consistories were still able to bring issues to the synod table. All in all the brothers and sisters became stuck. They could no longer follow the ecclesiastical path.

Legitimacy of the liberation by the LRCA contested

The delegates agree that the churches in Canada find themselves in a crisis. The sister-church relationship with the OPC is a bad thing. This also goes for the open Lord's Supper table in the CanRC. The marks of the church are at stake. However, there is a difference of opinion among the brothers regarding the question whether the congregation of Abbotsford was called by Christ to liberate itself from the CanRC in 2007. Are the facts that brought Abbotsford into a crisis, church-separating? A delegate points out that the situation in the Netherlands was different and that the situation was different for the congregation at Dalfsen. That was about fundamental issues that the major assemblies had decided upon. Finally a minister was dismissed and deposed. The delegate questions if this was also the situation in Canada? Was there a deposition? Is there no appeal possible

anymore, 'on the seats of judgment'? Were wrong decisions taken by synod? Several delegates see that in Canada there is a positive struggle against the unscriptural decisions in the GKv.

Decision regarding the LRCA

After a long discussion at the eighth synod session it is decided to deny Dalfsen's proposal for revision regarding the sister-church relationship with Abbotsford. The sister-church relationship with the LRCA therefore remains unchanged and is maintained.

Other decisions regarding the church at Abbotsford are also taken. This church has no possibility for right of appeal. Therefore synod appoints Classis South-West as the body of appeal for Abbotsford.

Further, the Deputies for Contact Churches Abroad receive the instruction to as yet hear the Abbotsford CanRC side on the issue of the liberation of the LRCA. A number of brothers are of the opinion that this is not necessary, because it concerns a federative issue and not a conflict with the consistory at Abbotsford. The meeting decides to as yet hear the other side.

With regard to the churches in Australia, Canada and South Africa the synod gives deputies the instruction to further speak with and to inform them about our sister-church relationship with Abbotsford.

Reformed Continua

The Synod takes quite a number of decisions concerning Contact Churches Abroad. Firstly they decide that Reformed Continua should continue to be published. In this English magazine articles are published that give information about the developments in and outside our churches for the English-speaking churches. There are positive reactions to this magazine.

FRCSA

The Free Reformed Church of South Africa (FRCSA) sees the liberation 2003/2004 as premature and unlawful. Deputies receive the instruction to further discuss this. They will then also mention how we, in the Netherlands, dealt with the different liberations of 2003 and 2010. Both the liberation of 2003 and of 2010 are recognized by both sides as work of the Lord. In this manner it is perhaps possible that also the FRCSA can recognize the liberation in the Netherlands as God's work.

Ireland, Scotland and Korea

The deputies shall by way of further talks investigate if sister-church relationships are possible with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (Ireland), the Free Church of Scotland (continuing) and the Reformed Churches in Korea.

BERG, Giessen

After these decisions were taken Rev. P. Van Gorp tells about a conversation that he, together with Rev. E. Heres, had with Dr. Klautke. He is the only minister of the Bekenende Evangelisch-Reformierte Gemeinde (BERG) at Giessen. He is a lecturer and works at a theological institute. This congregation has four confessions. Besides the Heidelberg Catechism, it has three confessions that were drafted against the Pentecostal movement (1909), against Scripture criticism (1978) and against modern theology (2000). Dr. Klautke would like to keep in contact. The Deputies for Contact Churches Abroad are instructed to further speak with the BERG at Giessen and research the possibilities for further contact.

Herziene Statenvertaling (Revised State Bible Translation)

In the sixth synod session the report and proposals of the Deputies Herziene Statenvertaling (HSV) are discussed. The delegates express their appreciation for all the work that has been done. The deputies have been busy for almost ten years testing and examining the HSV. This is the fourth synod where they deliver a report. During that time there have been all kinds of studies. A number of Bible passages from the HSV were seriously examined and compared. Deputies have compared the reliability of the HSV with the NGB '51. It showed that the work for the HSV was done with more reliable manuscripts. An exception is the book of Revelation. That Bible book is more reliable in the NGB '51. In addition to this, the entirety of the Bible is not taken into account in the NGB '51. There are more things that can be mentioned in which the HSV is more reliable than the NGB '51. From various sides there has also been criticism of the HSV. These criticisms have been examined by deputies. Research has been done into the readability of the HSV in the churches. Church members and consistories have been involved in the testing of the HSV. More Bible passages were examined. At two previous synods it was declared that the HSV was a reliable and better readable translation. Therefore the deputies propose to decide that the HSV can be used in the worship services.

A reliable and understandable translation of the Bible is important, because God uses reading and meditation of His Word as a means of upbuilding and maintaining the faith. Because the HSV is a reliable translation and for many an easier translation to understand, the meeting decides that

the HSV, after ten years of research, can be used in the worship services and meetings. Alongside the HSV, the NBG '51 and the original State Translation (Statenvertaling) can still be used. The consistories themselves will make a decision when the HSV will be introduced into the congregation.



The delegates and adviser of General Synod Groningen 2014-2015

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From the churches

by Joh. Houweling

1. The Synod of Groningen

The Acts of GS Groningen 2014-2015 are now available, both in book-form and digitally via internet.

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The next General Synod will be held DV early in 2018.

The convening church for this synod will be DGK Berkel & Rodenrijs / Bergschenhoek.

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2. On Saturday 30 January 2016, br. M.A. Sneep was ordained by Rev. P. van Gorp as Minister of the Word in De Gereformeerde Kerk (DGK) at Groningen.

On Sunday 31 January he held his first sermon as minister.

3. The next League Day will be, DV, on 21 May 2016. This will be held in Dalfsen.

4. The students' society continues to meet on a regular basis and the attendance is good.

5. We would like to again make mention of the recently published brochure 'Marriage in the Lord', written by Rev. S. de Marie. This translation of 'Het huwelijk in de Here' is based on a series of articles that were published in 'De Bazuin' in 2008 and emanated from a marriage course given by the author in Zwolle.

6. We would also like to again mention that a second outline on church history is being written, titled 'Terug naar het Woord' ('Back to the Word') by br. T.L. Bruinius, which describes the church history from 1944 to 2003, recent church history that is educational for young and old.

7. News about the new church building at Berkel & Rodenrijs / Bergschenhoek.

The building of the church commenced in June 2015. After the building company went bankrupt in October 2015, a new start was made in February 2016 and we hope that the building will be completed in September 2016.

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



Picture taken during the session of Synod Groningen 2014-2015 held on 16 May at Zwolle