

REFORMED CONTINUA

Magazine of The Reformed Churches (restored) of The Netherlands

Proverbs 8:32

- Volume 2 - May 2009 -

Editorial

Joh. Houweling

With gratitude we may again present you with yet another issue of Reformed Continua. We are thankful to the Lord the strength He gave to produce this work. We were also encouraged by the many positive responses we received on the first issue. Responses that came from abroad and 'closer to home'. From these reactions it became clear that there is a want for information with regard to the Reformed churches in the Netherlands.



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“One almost needs a PHD in order to understand and distinguish between all the different ‘churches’ and ‘so called churches’ in the Netherlands.”

Editorial

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Soon after the first issue was launched there were already 250 different IP-addresses that ‘visited’ the web site.

The article *‘The Canadian Reformed Churches Responds’* turned out to be the most read article over the past period. It is my estimate that at the time this second issue arrives the ‘score’ will have exceeded 950. By the way: you can see this for yourself. The rating (how often an article has been viewed) can be seen on the web-site. This can be found on the top left hand corner after selecting and opening an article on the web site. This ‘scoring-ability’ is just another gimmick of our web master, yet it also gives us some insight about the frequency by which the articles are read. Also when some articles are less popular...

Looking at this we can conclude that the articles *‘A New Reformed Magazine’*, *‘Worship Services’*, *‘Church Locations’* and the article about the congregation of *‘Amersfoort’* were viewed more than 700 times. The article *‘The Acts of the Synod of Mariënberg’* however, was only viewed about 100 times. Too bad! Especially as it has such rich content. We are to blame ourselves: the title chosen was not very inviting. Somehow some people ‘shudder’ upon reading the word *‘Acts’*. However, this article is not about some ‘dry and boring’ Acts. It is, in fact, a very rich and insightful article. The article delves somewhat deeper into different subjects that led to the *Liberation* of 2003/04. So maybe you will

change your mind and revisit our web site to have another good look at this article. It will be worth your while!

For those that want to delve even deeper we placed a translated section of ‘those Acts’ (article 25) on the Internet. They can be found under the button *‘Documents’* on the top left hand corner. We are sure you won’t find them boring.

Compiling the various articles for this number was much easier than for the first edition. The ‘first time round’ we had to ‘find our way’ (start up-procedures, finding authors, finding and coordinating various translators, organizing the layout of the Magazine, the Web site). Thanks to your feedback we now know that the site looks tidy and functions well.

This time we didn’t have to ‘reinvent the wheel’ (or as we would say in Dutch: ‘reinvent the gunpowder’)...

Some articles were selected on the basis of some overseas ‘requests’, e.g.: *‘can you write about the timing of your Liberation’*; *‘was your liberation not too early?’* Or, *‘can you write more about the things that go on within your churches’*; *‘who are you as the reformed churches?’*.

Thus also an article about ‘reformed education’ was included, as the need for setting up Reformed education is becoming more and more an issue. ↘

On from the previous issue we included: 'The CANRC response part 2', and 'The Acts of the Synod of Mariënberg part 2', This last article deals with the issue of 'marriage and divorce'. We also asked some people to write about some church activities that are being organized; hence the first one could be included. Last but not least: this time the *Reformed Church of Assen e.o.* will be introduced.

Under the blessing of the Lord we were able to work toward the realization of this second issue

of *Reformed Continua*. As you may have noticed, the work 'went off' well. Thus this issue could be published much sooner than anticipated: *May 2009*, well before the school holidays. We hope that also this second issue may be received well; that it may work as a blessing for the churches. Above all we pray that it may contribute to Church-gathering-work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Joh. Houweling,
Bleiswijk

One almost needs a PHD in order to understand and distinguish between all the different 'churches' and 'so called churches' in the Netherlands. It is quite a jumble of names! In chronological order I'll try to assist as over the different articles authors have used differing names or abbreviations. First a quick lesson: 'Kerk' means 'Church'; 'Gereformeerd' means 'Reformed'; 'Hervormed' means 'Reformed, yet leans towards 'Restored'

First I'll mention the church that was instituted in 1571 after the Great Reformation. Up until recently this church was called the 'Nederlands Hervormde' Church (Dutch Reformed Church); this name recently changed into *PKN* as it merged with two other churches...

Over time the Hervormde church more or less turned into a 'state church'. This led to the Secession in 1834. Some people separated later in 1886, this event was called

the Doleantie. In 1892 these two churches united, their name was to be: 'Gereformeerde' (Reformed) Churches.

There was a large group that did not want to unite in 1892, they became the 'Christelijk Gereformeerde' Churches [CGK].

A separation in 1944 in the Gereformeerde Kerken, known as the *Liberation*, was called for in order to remain Reformed. The people that continued to be Reformed became known by the name of Gereformeerde churches (vrijgemaakt) (=Liberated) [GKV or RCL].

The people that continued under the guidance of the Synod became known as the (synodaal) Gereformeerde Churches. Most of them recently merged into the PKN.

In 1967-69 a group of people in the RCL placed themselves outside of the bond of churches. They were first known as the 'Buiten Verband' churches; later they officially

adopted the name: 'Nederlands Gereformeerde' churches. [NGK]

In 2003 another Liberation 'came about' this resulted in the continuation of the Reformed church, later officially named 'Gereformeerde Churches (hersteld)' (= restored) [GKH]

With regard to the churches outside of The Netherlands, that are mentioned in this magazine, the following names and abbreviations are used:

The Canadian Reformed Churches [CANRC]

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia [FRCA]

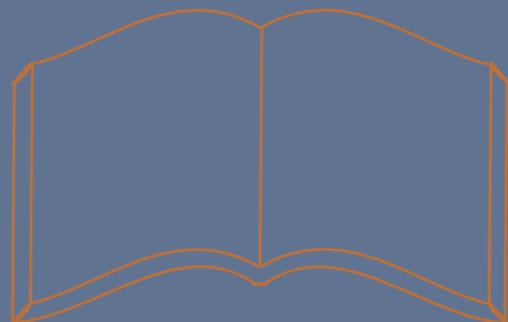
The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia [CRCA]- (in the past these were known as the *Reformed Churches of Australia*).

This is not meant as a complete list of all Dutch Churches and denominations. Yet, I think this is sufficient in order to understand the situation with regards to Dutch Churches a little easier.

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www.reformedcontinua.nl



Reformation or Schism?

Response to the Liberation

Up until now none of the overseas sister churches responded positively to our liberation. From this we understand that our liberation is not being seen as a *Church Reformation*. By some the *Liberation* was even condemned. In the most favourable case a judgment was postponed.

Rejection this Liberation people went as far as condemning it as a 'schism'. Hence, we were seriously requested to retrace our steps and go down the path of 'reconciliation'.

Sure, the sister churches do have objections with regard to the situation, and the developments within the Reformed Churches (liberated) [RCL]. This being so they, however, do not consider the Liberation as justified, or, at least, that it was too early. 'Our' liberation would be schismatic or even '*violating the temple of God*', as the chairman of a synod dared to put it. An accusation which he still has not generously retracted. It is more than necessary to defend ourselves against such accusations and false claims.

Excuses - objections

Through all ages we can see that various arguments were invented to be used against 'calls to reform'. We can already find this in the books of the Prophets in the Old Testament. Their appeals for repentance were often rejected with pious words. This was also the case when God's people were allowed to return from exile. Even so, most of church members stayed behind. The same occurred during the days of the Lord Jesus. Also then then only a small group remained faithful.

At Pentecost again the call by the apostles to repent was rejected. This happened later again in the struggle against the Judaists whilst the apostles maintained the truth of the Gospel that our reward is by grace alone and not through works.

It is remarkable that the struggle was the same in the time of the great reformation of Calvin. One of the arguments against the reformation at that time was, that as a result of the reformation, all kinds of sects were formed among those who separated themselves from the Roman Catholic

Church. As it is today: we are being blamed for the fact that in the Reformed Churches (restored) it becomes visible that opinions are divided. Calvin's answer to this reproach was that the devil could peacefully leave the Roman Catholic Church to linger in deep darkness for many centuries. But when the Reformation came, the devil shook off his apparent laziness, seized the weapons and tried to disguise the truth and smother its light. Still today Satan constantly busies himself in the same manner. He can let the developments in the RCL take their course: the ministers will ensure that in this *pluralistic church* truth and deceit are tolerated alongside each other. Ultimately this means that the false doctrine shall win!

But if the truth is being preached and the Church returns to its mandate to condemn everything that is not in accordance with the word of God, the devil will, according to Calvin, behave in the same way as he has always done: "*He exerts himself to choke the good seed with all weeds available, so that it cannot grow and bear fruit.*"

We keep this in mind when we judge what is being said against the appeal to distinguish diligently and carefully from the Word, of God which the true Church is (art. 29, Belgic Confession [B.C.]). We will then also see what actually is being done to the faithful utterance that no one may separate from that church. Each and everyone is obliged to join and unite with it.

Local matters?

While judging their sister churches, the churches use the argument, that they cannot judge local issues or false doctrines. They can, they say, only deal with official synod decisions.

In the first place we want to remark that it is not only the synod decisions that determine whether a bond of churches can be marked as true church. It can also be the absence of synod decisions that can establish this.

After all, when the true Church according to art. 29 B.C., can be recognised by its active rejection of false doctrine, it is odd that all sorts of un-reformed developments in a local church cannot be condemned and banned by those church

assemblies. Besides that, there were a lot of unscriptural synod decisions that led to the liberation.

The call to Liberate was based on the conviction that a lot of revision-requests were rejected by two successive synods. Thus, that in that manner, false doctrine was legalised. In the brochure '*Laten we ons bekeren - een oproep tot reformatie*' [see the RC website] we clearly pointed out that it does not concern local problems. It is the bond of churches that was engulfed by decay and deformation. The church, as pillar and foundation of the truth, became a *pluralistic fellowship*, where 'yes' and 'no' were accepted to co-exist without any resistance from the churches. That is why the Liberation was not something we called for: it was a work of the Lord!

We believe, on the basis of God's Word, that also the sister churches are called to carefully distinguish where the true Church is to be found. Consequently, no matter how difficult or painful, the Reformed Churches (restored) ought to be recognised as true and faithful. This may include that existing ties with the RCL have to be broken.

After all, this is your calling as sister churches according to the longstanding *rules for engaging in sister church relations*. This means that care ought to be taken not to deviate from Reformed practices and doctrine, duty and discipline.

We still reject (just as during the first years after the Liberation of 1944) the view that sister churches cannot and may not deal with the 'internal' affairs of the RCL. Still today, as the evidence of decay increases, we continue to call them to seriously consider whether the Liberation of 2003 was 'out of God or out of people'.

That is of crucial importance and that should be decisive. Not only for the position of The Reformed Church (restored), but especially for the sister churches abroad.

Forced to sin?

An other argument would be, that it cannot be substantiated that within the RCL one is being forced to sin. Hence, it should, as yet, not be the right time to Liberate. To the oversees sister churches this is far from happening as yet. In other words, with this kind of argumentation: the liberation of 2003 was too early.

What can we say to this?

The whole point in the church is, whether or not we obediently follow the way of God requires of us in accordance with art. 28 and art. 29 *B.C.*. Unwillingness and delay to follow this pathway must, according to Scripture, be condemned as being sinful. If that is the case, there is only one thing to say: *do not sin*.

Disobedience is sin; this is the Biblical truth still today., That Truth is guideline in our lives. Moreover, no one who remains a member of the RCL may shrug off their responsibility towards the deformation of the church. This responsibility does not go away by saying: '*because I will continue to fight against the deformation, I therefore have no part in it*'. That is not possible. As a member of the church, everyone, in his or her own position within the bond of churches, is co-responsible for the deviation from Gods Word and the Confession of the Church.

In the Old Testament we can read that 'a man of God' from Judah was sent by the Lord to the illegitimate place of worship in Bethel to protest against the self-willed religion. He had to call the people to repentance, to Liberate themselves, to return to Jerusalem, to the temple. The Lord not only commanded him to go to them with *words* only, but also to show through *deeds* that communion between Jerusalem and Bethel is not possible. He not only had to fulfil his testimony in words but also by deeds. He was to have no communication with anyone, but had to go straight back to Jerusalem.



In 1945, in the first year after the Liberation, prof. K. Schilder explained this passage in a meditation in '*De Reformatie*' (a church magazine). He wrote that one should not just appeal for rejection of the false doctrine, not words only (today by way of brochures, lectures and websites) but also by plain obedience to the law of God; to follow the path that the Lord Jesus Christ points out to the assembly of the church, through the Liberation (published in *Schrift-overdenking; volume III p. 20/23*).

The title of this meditation was: '*De bezwaarde, die maar niet gehoorzaam werd.*' (transl.: The concerned person who could not come to be obedient...).

That is how he applied Scripture to the situation just after the Liberation of 1944, when in the (synodical) Reformed Churches a large group of concerned members also reflected that the Liberation had come too soon. They kept up their 'fight' in the magazine *"Eenheid en waarheid"* (transl.: 'Unity and Truth') against the deformation in the (synodical) Reformed Church.

The hasty departure of the man of God was part of his preaching. This departure in great haste contains a strong message: that a concerned person cannot afford to linger any longer. His concern must lead to faithful obedience. When *the man of God* disobeyed the command of the Lord, he himself made his prophecy powerless.

Prof. Schilder ends the meditation as follows: *"This is one of those entries in Scripture which impels those concerned members that do not come to obedience; those protesting members that do not come to liberate from the sins that drag them along; those who hold on, in order to keep up the numbers, also hold onto sin. Do not depend on 'bit and bridle'. Liberation constructs true unity and saves the bond."*

The direction from Scripture applies always: *'have no communion with the works of darkness'*. The parable of the good Shepherd also speaks of bad shepherds, they are called 'strangers' (John 10). What do the sheep do? They know the voice of the good Shepherd and that is why they follow Him. *'Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him!'* This is 'loud and clear' from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Head of His Church! His command for all ages.

The Scriptural Preaching

Furthermore we often hear that in the RCL Scriptural preaching is still possible. To that we will give a few answers.

First of all, it is obvious that this fits in a pluralistic church community, both true and false doctrine are allowed to be propagated. In the RCL one minister may preach the Word of God instil on the congregation that by the fourth commandment, the Lord still demands of us to refrain from all unnecessary work. Another minister, with the same rights, in his preaching uses the Word of God as the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to proclaim and enforce that the fourth commandment no longer applies. The

preaching has been 'set free' from the 'confines' of Scripture and Confession.

Don't people understand that this



argument re the possibility of sound preaching that can still be found, denies all church history?! It goes right against all the reformations of the church of the past, in and outside our country. If this argument can be used to remain in such a bond of churches where false doctrine is tolerated, the Secession (1834), the Doleantie (1886) and the Liberation (1944) are being denied.

Even today in the Protestant Church, (*PKN* = a recent merger of the Dutch Reformed Church, the (synodical) Reformed Church and the Lutheran Church) modern preaching goes unpunished, while other ministers still preach according to Scripture. This is our first answer.

The next point is: *what is Scriptural preaching?* Is it right to entitle a sermon '*Scriptural preaching*' when the demand to repent is omitted? When we called on the RCL members to repent and join the true church, we did so with a brochure with the title: *'Let us repent'*. To repent means to turn away from sin and to return to obedience required in the law of the Lord.

When a minister, no matter how concerned he may be the ongoing deformation, does not summon his listeners to obey the law of the God and to join the true church, we cannot say that he is preaching according to Scripture. Besides; how can he ask the congregation to join the true church when he does not Liberate himself. Neither does the argument of *still being able* to preach according to Scripture justify anyone remaining in a *pluralistic church*.

Division

After what is mentioned above, about the reproach with regard to division in the Reformed Church (restored) it is good to take church history into account. At the first synods after the Separation of 1834 serious divisions came to light which resulted in a separation. Two different church communities came about that

had no communion with each other. This lasted for almost twenty years. One of the main issues was disagreement on the *Church Order*. At stake were the points: should the old *Church Order of Dordt* be reinstated and should article 31 be maintained? To put it differently: whether the major assemblies of the bond of churches have the authority to make decisions and whether these decisions were to be accepted as binding.

After the Liberation of 1944, differences, which over the years had become contrasting opinions, also became visible.

Already in 1948 some church members left the church and returned to the (synodical) Reformed Church. In the following years, there were a lot of differences of opinions about the so called ‘ongoing Reformation’ and about the possibility of dialogue with the (synodical) Reformed Churches in some places where conflicts led ministers to withdraw and return to the (synodical) Reformed Churches.

It finally ended in the founding of the ‘*buiten verband*’ churches (transl.: ‘outside the bond’), now known as the Netherlands Reformed Churches. This was a case of wilful *independentism*, as it was during the period soon after the Secession of 1834. Also today in the Reformed Church (restored) the issue at stake is whether art. 31 of the Church Order can be upheld. Whether decisions made at major church assemblies are accepted as settled and binding. Taking into consideration, of course, the well-known ‘*tenzij*’ (‘unless’).

This is why the classis that has to judge in a local matter, must warn against the sin of independency and emphasis this.

From own experience or the Word of God?

We want to emphasize the point, that the *Church* comes down to a matter of *faith*. We need to discern from the Word of God which the true Church is not from the things that are visible before our eyes. Prof. K. Schilder continuously emphasised this point during the many years of struggled for the truth. In 1934, at the centennial commemoration of the Secession, he delivered a number of important speeches. In these he also commented on arguments used by the ‘*Hervormden*’ (the old Dutch State Church) in their ‘memorial speeches of the Secession. Particularly important were the words spoken by

dr. Woelderink. He was a representative of the ‘*Gereformeerde Bond*’ (= a group of concerned members in the Dutch Reformed Church) those that had an affinity with struggling for the truth in the church. Affinity with the way the ‘fathers’ struggled in the time of the Secession. Yet it is typically ‘*Dutch Reformed*’ in that they distance themselves very clearly from the Secession – the ‘stumbling block’ until this day.

What arguments did Woelderink have against the Secession? First of all this: the small number of church members that went along with the Secession, thus breaking the unity of the body of Christ. Another argument was that a lot of discord became apparent among the Seceded Churches. These arguments were adequately countered by Prof. K. Schilder in a speech with the title: ‘*Ons aller moeder*’ (= ‘Our mother’) The sub-title was: ‘*een roepstem beantwoord*’ (transl.: ‘*answering the call of conscience*’). This call was extended to those that left the ‘Dutch Reformed state Church) and formed the Reformed Churches. They called for them to: ‘*come together fellow covenant children to remember the reconciling suffering and death of the Lord. Assemble to unite around the one Holy Supper table*’ (p. 10). In answering Schilder emphatically pointed out that the Church is a matter of faith, and that it is incomprehensible that they constantly want to judge based on the things they see, base on what they experience, whilst at the same time, ‘suspending’ one of the twelve articles, namely: “*I believe a holy catholic Christian Church*”.

Still

Surely there are *still* Reformed preachers in the RCL today?! Surely there are *still* congregations where the false doctrine is not introduced but where the people honour the reformed preaching and liturgy. ‘*STILL*’ - this word characterises *judging on the bases of experience*, as opposed to judging on the the criteria of God’s Word.

Prof. Schilder once illustrated this by an example. When in a married situation the woman continually commits adultery; she is breaking down her marriage. Then no one will even think of saying: ‘there is *still* a lot about her that is good’; ‘she *still* looks after her husband and children’; or ‘she *still* cares for the household’ etc. concluding: ‘therefore it is not *that bad*, and ‘their marriage is *still* holding out’. This is just

not how it goes. It is all about being faithful and obedient to the revealed standards. How can they continue to say that the Reformed Churches (liberated) are true churches!?

In article 29 B.C. the church confesses that *the true church* can be recognised when the church governs itself by the pure Word of God and rejects all things contrary to it and regards Jesus Christ as the only Head. This means that one must not merely complain and be concerned, or turn a blind eye, but actively reject all things contrary!

It is also emphasized that the church must actively uphold the pure preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments and exercising church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. It is beyond doubt that this can still be said about the Reformed Churches (liberated).

To be or not to be: 'cast out'

Another argument, which is being used to oppose our call to Liberate is: as long as the church does not actively cast people out, until then it is not necessary to liberate. To this we say: this saying is a deceptive human invention. An invention in the line with Eccl. 7: 29: '*they have sought out many schemes*'.

After all, does the Dutch Reformed Church (Hervormd) throw out people ?!

Will a *pluralistic church* ever throw out ministers or church members? A church in which true and false doctrine can both be tolerated and where heresy is legalized will never cast out people.

That is the trend these days: the so-called personal liberty must be respected more and more. When a PKN minister or professor is mad enough to cry out or write that God does not exist he is not even put under church discipline. Of course, it is not that bad in the RCL, such blatant heresies are not taught and tolerated there. But Satan is a master when it comes to 'seduction'! He knows that he has to introduce the errors very slowly, step by step. To reach his goal he starts at the source: the *training for the Ministry*. He always starts by sowing seeds of doubt. For us to start to doubt the infallible Word of God, Satan starts by rattling at its protective 'shield'. That shield are our 'Confessions' and the way we uphold them.

When this protective layer is torn open, the sheep will go astray. For the sake of the so-called unity

and peace within the churches, the bond of churches refuses to banish false doctrine, hence the borders of the Confession need to be stretched.

Do not break the unity

The last argument against the call to liberate is the Christ's demand to form one body. This indeed is an important reason not to break with brothers and sisters. We must therefore always seek that unity as long as we can do so without becoming an accomplice to sin.

In this regard a reference is frequently made to Colossians 3: 15. There the apostle urges us to seek after the peace of Christ. After all, the church members are called to maintain this peace in the one body. To achieve this we must ask ourselves: '*How does the peace of Christ enter the church?*' '*In which way does the peace of Christ work towards the unity of his body?*' This peace can only come by way of *obedience*. *Obedience* to the revealed Will of God.

This unity is described in more detail in Ephesians chapter 4. There we are called to '*endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*' The Lord points out that He Himself will bring this about by way of the office bearers. Through their 'office' the body of Christ is build, it works towards the unity of faith. This means that this peaceful union will only be achieved when the office bearers carryout their task faithfully, in obedience to the revealed ordinances. This may include struggle and hardship. After all the church must exercise church discipline, as well as the pure preaching of the gospel and the pure administration of the sacraments. Only in this way the unity of the church can be preserved!

The unity of the preaching brings about the unity of the Holy Supper table. Absence of this unity in the preaching brings about absence of unity at the table of the Lord.

Through pluralism the Church degenerates to an hotel church, a place where freedom of opinion and speaking receives priority above the subordination of Scripture and the Confessions. This is the sad and sinful situation in the Reformed Churches (liberated). Our liberation therefore is not a schism, even less a 'violation of the temple of God' – an accusation against us that has never been retracted.

But it was and still is the restoration of unity and therefore we receive that unity of His body out of the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. That is the reason why being obedient to the commandments of God will inevitably lead to a Liberation. Also in light of that daunting prospect we uphold the confession: *'His burden is light!'*

We do not just extend our call *to obey* to 'those that are concerned', including the 'concerned ministers'; we extend this call to all members of the *Reformed Churches (liberated)*. This call is also extended to the Churches abroad. We call and urge them to acknowledge the Liberation as a work of God.

Work of *God* or of men?!

A few years after World War II and the Liberation of 1944 the first emigrants arrived in Australia. The foremost activity of those that remained Reformed after 1944 was investigating whether there was a true church could be found in their vicinity. Sadly there were non to be found. There was however a church community that called itself '*reformed*'. (today called the *Christian Reformed Churches of Aus.*) This church was instituted by Dutch immigrants from various denominations: the (synodical) Reformed Churches, the Christian Reformed Churches, and the Dutch Reformed Churches. They maintained close contact with their overseas 'mother' churches.

They were keen to incorporate the members coming from the Dutch *RCL*. These people, however, informed the *Christian Reformed Churches of Australia [CRCA]*, that they first wanted to hear from them what they confessed with regard to the Liberation (1944). *Is this work of men or of God?*

These 'early settlers' viewed it to be their task to find an answer to this question.

When the *CRCA* refused to answer to this question, the brothers and sisters saw no other possibility than to institute a Church on the basis of the Word of God, according to their Confession and the Church Order of Dordt.

These are now known by the name '*Free Reformed Churches of Australia*'. They immediately sought contact with the Reformed Churches (liberated) in the Netherlands to request a sister church relationship.

The history of the *CRCA* makes clear that because they maintained a sister church relationship with the churches in the Netherlands they also suffered from the decay and rapid decline that took place in those churches in the Netherlands. Decline and deformation infiltrated also the churches all the way on the otherside of the globe; it had a disastrous effect on the developments of the *CRCA*. '*Obedience is worth more than sacrifices*' is also applicable with regard to this issue.

Despite the persistent refusal of the *CRCA* to acknowledge the Liberation as work of God, and despite their continual urge to unite with the *Free Reformed Church of Australia*, they maintained that uniting with these churches is in conflict with the holy Scriptures and the Confessions. In the *RCL* in the Netherlands today this conviction, that the Liberation of 1944 was a work of the Lord, has been subject to much criticism. It has now come as far as that many of its own members deny this fact. The view that this Liberation was just 'a quarrel amongst brothers of one household' is widely accepted.

Them to deny this part of church history as the work of the Lord has great consequences for present developments within the *RCL*. These consequences become rapidly visible today. This will consequently influence the developments within the sister churches abroad!

The question remains: '*is this work of God or men?*'; '*Reformation or schism?*'. This question is in line with the question to which the brothers and sisters arriving in Australia responded to in obedience. Answering that question can no longer be postponed with regards to the Churches in the Netherlands; whether one remains in Australia, Canada, or South Africa this question must be 'tackled' and answered. Not only answering this question but also refraining from answering is of vital importance for the future of the Reformed Churches abroad.

Rev. P. van Gulp,
Dalfsen

Marriage and Divorce

The Acts of Synod Mariënberg 2005 (part 2)

In the first part of the series '*The Acts of Synod Mariënberg*', we discussed the topic 'worship services' and corresponding *synod decisions*. In this article we intend to dwell on the decisions with regard to the issue of '*marriage and divorce*'. We will highlight how consecutive synods 'deprived' the 7th commandment of its content and meaning with their so-called '*new insights*'.

Within the Reformed Churches (*restored*) we are grateful that this issue, which affects our lives so fundamentally, was restored at the *Synod of Mariënberg* (2005). It is a blessing that in *Mariënberg* the *Word of God* was honored and the commandments of the Lord could be restored to former glory.

Marriage and the Marriage bond.

While studying the *Acts* and looking at the process of how the relating decision came about at the *Synod of Berkel* (1996) we see that the right starting point was repeatedly taken. Many reports start by stating: '*Marriage is instituted by God. This solid bond between man and woman may not be broken by mankind*'.

Most reports start by referring to Malachi 2: 14-16: '*Because the Lord has been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did he not make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he may seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to the spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel, says that He hates putting away: for one covers violence with his garment, says the Lord of hosts: Therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously*'. Thus: God hates divorce.

At each new Synod this refrain 'pops up'. But, have the *men* at these Synods given sufficient thought to these words? Have they honoured the *Word of God*, and indeed maintained Gods commandment?

one ground for divorce?

At the *Synod of Middelburg* (1933) only one ground permitting divorce was deemed Scriptural. At that Synod they referred to the words of the Lord Jesus which we find in *Matthew* 5 verse 32:

'But I say unto you, that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causes her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced commits adultery'.

There is only one ground in relation to divorce: *fornication*, adultery. We can easily agree to this *ground* as when adultery is committed, one breaks his or her own marriage.

In this delicate matter we find the valuable words of our Saviour; commandment spoken by the Lord Jesus, applicable for all centuries. This teaching of the highest *Prophet* and *Teacher* corresponds with the 7th commandment of the Law of God the Father. This command simply states: '*Thou shalt not commit adultery*'. In our days, where there is so much adultery, this teaching of Scripture is clear and cannot be misinterpreted. It is the only way to life; to life everlasting!

Another ground for Divorce?

In *Middelburg* (1933) a second 'ground' for divorce was brought forward but not accepted.

It was concerning the words of Paul in 1st Corinthians 7: 12-16. In part of these verses we read: '*But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases*'. Here is spoken of a heathen spouse disapproving the *Christian faith* the other spouse converted to, while demanding: '*give up your faith, or else...*'. This is called: '*desertion for reason of faith*'.

The man at the *Synod of Middelburg* were not convinced that this example concerned the issue of 'divorce'. Besides the fact that '*desertion for reason of faith*' never or rarely occurs in our society. This mainly occurs on the mission fields.

There one can still encounter a situation where one spouse *converts*, while the other holds on to heathen practices. Therefore, we may say that there is only one ground to divorce: *adultery*. If one acts contrary he/ she permits too much freedom and takes life into his/ her own hands. He or she chooses rather to enjoy passing 'pleasures' than a life of obedience while being reconciled with God.

A third ground for divorce?

The *General Synod of Berkel* (1996) did not want to understand that *Middelburg* went as far as to say that there is only one Scriptural ground to divorce. Thus *Berkel* stated: '*desertion for reason of faith is a reason to end a marriage*'.

At the same time '*Berkel*' gave room to consider yet another, a third 'ground' for divorce. At this synod they said (in analogy to) where Paul speaks of 'desertion' by an heathen spouse, this can be more or less compared to 'deserting' from a *sinful* partner in our days. It doesn't really matter which sin lies at the basis, they argue.

Divorce by a sinful partner is called '*willful desertion*'. With regards to this so called 'willful desertion' the civil authorities (in most countries) allow for divorce; for example when a partner disappears for years for whatever reason, a divorce on the 'ground of desertion' is a legal option. To 'stay in line' with this the church seeks room to legalize divorce on this (and other) grounds within the churches.



For, so they argued, there seems to be a similarity between the 'willful desertion' today, and the 'desertion for the reason of faith' in the days of Paul...

To indicate this *similarity* the word '*analogy*' is used. They would then say: On the *analogy* of Paul's reasoning 'desertion for the reason faith' we can today permit divorce in cases of '*willful desertion*'. This '*analogy-reasoning*' has no bounds. This became evident in the 'everyday' church life. Every desertion was now placed

under the 'header' '*willful desertion*' and hence an 'ecclesiastical' ground for divorce.

A different approach

Due to this '*analogy-reasoning*' church councils became quite confused. Therefore, the *Synod of Leusden* (1999) appointed deputies to delve in to this whole matter of '*marriage and divorce*' once more. This committee had to examine the subject thoroughly and at length to prepare a discussion.

These deputies have been very active indeed. A *survey* was held among the churches; a study was made of all the *points of view*; and '*solutions*' from the past and today were listed. All this information was compiled into a lengthy report which was dealt with at the synod. After reading the first half of the 70 page report a 'turning point' can be noticed. At this point the report finished *listing* and *analyzing* all the imaginable (historic) viewpoints. Then, the 'reporters' 'out of the blue' introduce a *new element*. Where they started quoting the text of Malachi 2 the report all of a sudden makes mention of '*the*' '*different approach*' for dealing with the problem of divorce.

A 'different approach'?... Yes, they reason as follows: as the interpretation of Scripture is an ongoing process(!) there is *progress* in this process. We recognize this kind of reasoning from a book called '*Woord op Schrift*' (published under auspices of the theological college at Kampen). From the remaining pages of the report it becomes clear that the new 'insights' gained at '*Kampen*' 'take root' and hence receive a prominent place in this deputies report.

A New way to interpret Scripture?

If one begins to read and explain Scripture in a *different way* 'marriage problems' can also be dealt with differently. The whole issue can be looked at in an other way and new possible solutions can be explored.

This 'new' way of reasoning 'works' as follows; they say: up until now we held on to the exact wording of Scripture. Also the part where the Lord Jesus spoke the words of *Matthew* 5 verse 32. Yet, in the future, we can't just leave it at that. We must consider '*the underlying thoughts of His teaching*'. Not just: 'His words', but the 'total package of His teachings' are to *direct* us when interpreting Scripture. 

So, what did they discover and introduce at *Kampen*?! The gospels speaks of a certain '*life-style according to the Kingdom of Heaven*'. That sounds very reformed; no-one will deny the fact that this is Scriptural. They, however, continue: '*the words*', '*the suffering and the death of our Lord*' together form a series of ongoing *self denial*. Thus, they conclude, *the '(life-) style of the Kingdom' is to be: 'endless self denial'*. That this is in accordance with Scripture, on its own, cannot be denied. However, pay attention! What did they, subsequently, do with this phrase '*(life) style of the kingdom*'? They elevate it above all else. This '*style*' all of a sudden receives *more emphasis* than e.g. the commandments of God. These commands *all of a sudden* become inferior to this, so called, '*Kingdom Style*'.

This misleading way of reasoning includes that *we* need to judge our actions. We judge them by a 'comparison we make to the *overall view* of all teachings: 'the words and works' of our Lord... As if the conclusion reached from this 'process' could be different to what the O.T. Commandments prescribe!

The consequence is that it is of less importance whether, in the end, there will be room for the command '*thou shalt not commit adultery*', or for the words '*desert for another reason than adultery*'. By following this new 'line of thought' it may very well be the case that a Divine commandment or rule given at some point in time is set aside.

Life Style according to the Kingdom

In this process grotesque utterances were made. Utterances, which on their own, one cannot but agree with: e.g.: unconditional love is in accord with the 'style of the kingdom'.

Yet, that changes when one sees what step is taken next: Unconditional love and complete self-denial result therein that divorce no longer occurs. Thus, divorce is no longer a point of discussion. The first step of this 'new approach' was made. *No more divorce*. Astounding! We no longer need 'grounds for divorce'! That is peculiar; *too good to be true*. We wonder: what about the words of the Lord in *Matthew 5* verse 22? This passage, so they defend, now received a complete different meaning: *Take the whole of the teachings of the Lord and you will find that divorce is not an issue*. All that matters is living

life in accordance to the '*Style of the Kingdom*'. This will bring about people with such a strong faith that they can love unconditionally. To them adultery will no longer be reason for divorce. 'This can be overcome by love'.

Such a fallacy!

Exceptions

There are sadly, however, still people in the congregation that do not have such a strong faith. Their faith is weak. They have not (yet) arrived at the (high) level of the '*style of the kingdom*'.

When the love, within a marriage, over a period of time disappears from the equation, then *high demands should not be required* (as they cannot be met anyway, which in turn is not loving and does not *fit in* with the 'Style of the Kingdom). In these cases the question needs to be answered: what response (*to this sad occurrence*) comes closest to the 'style of the kingdom'. To them *divorce* is an obvious answer and will in many cases readily be accepted.

In cases of 'weak faith', 'psychological hardship', it would be unreasonable, even harsh, to 'refuse' divorce. '*Hardness of heart*' is also mentioned in this *list* of exceptions. It is as if we have returned to the times of the Old Testament, the time of Moses!

Thus they *regress* as they accept divorce for to all kinds of *reasons* and *weaknesses*. Church discipline is not applied. Church councils and congregations are satisfied by such a solution. Quite often it is even honestly believed that these cases the best solution has definitely been found. The Consequence, however, is that sin is no longer recognized within the congregation. 'Sin' has become something *to be shrugged at*, something *to be met with indifference*. Thus sin 'receives' a permanent position within the congregation. We can by now say that this 'new approach', which was invented with the best of intentions, has in the meantime found its place within the congregations and has settled there permanently. As a result *sin* is tolerated and accepted.

New revelation

In the deputies-report prepared for the *Synod of Zuidhorn* (2002/2003), the above mentioned exceptions seem to be taken for granted. A

sentence from Paul in 1st *Corinthians* 7 verse 12 is used to substantiate these exceptions. We came across this way of reasoning earlier in the section about ‘*desertion for the reason of faith*’. Then we saw people ‘searching’ for ‘*analogies*’. This report conducts the same, now based on the situation in *Corinth*. ‘Zuidhorn’ took another look at 1st *Corinthians* 7 verse 12. They argue: ‘Paul was allowed to come up with a new rule. The situation he encountered in *Corinth* during his journeys was totally different to the situation in *Israel* in the days of *Jesus Christ*. Paul worked among the heathens, and the Lord Jesus worked among the Jews. From Scripture we thus ‘*analyze*’ that the differences in *time* and *culture* encountered by Jesus and Paul ‘called’ for a new rule/approach. Our situations are entirely different to the ones in Paul’s and Jesus’ days. Apply our deduction method! and find out how different the rules and approach will be for our days. Quite different to the the ones of Paul! The 21st century congregation, thus, has the right to review the age old biblical rules in order to make contemporary rules. These new rules will safeguard us against the ‘*inequality*’ that will occur when *old, biblical rules* are applied in *our* day and age.

Is it not true that the Word of God must be heard in the ‘midst of the congregation’? Well, thus it is clear: the *congregation* received the authority and responsibility to come up with *modern solutions* when encountering contemporary issues. They are ‘endowed’ to take into account modern insights (from the area of ‘psychology’ and other behavioral sciences). Maybe it is the ‘*personality disorder*’ of one of the partners that is cause for the difficulties they encounter in their marriage... Consequently this can be decided upon as a legitimate ground for divorce.’

When someone questions the legitimacy of this reasoning they will be replied by the question: ‘*isn’t it unreasonable and even harsh to ‘bind’ the healthy spouse for the remainder of his or her natural life?*’

The *Synod of Mariënberg* didn’t need many words to do away with these fallacies and ‘*exegetic liberties*’. On page 95 of the *Acts* we read: ‘Paul did not make a new rule for living at all. As apostle of the Lord, Paul merely emphasized the rule of Matthew 10 verse 35. When reading this

verse in context one will find what our Saviour says in the following verse: ‘*He that loves father and mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me*’.

That is the point in question for the woman that came to faith among the heathens. If her husband demands of her to ‘ditch’ her faith than her love for the Lord must receive priority to the demands of her husband. The *Acts of Mariënberg* further state: ‘*Paul makes no new law, neither shall we*’. Scripture is complete: we can and may not add to it nor take from it, or try and make it *fit* to ‘suit’ our lives. Scripture is *complete* and *sufficient* for our salvation. There is no room for so-called ‘*congregational-theology*’. A ‘theology’ in which the Holy Spirit uses the congregation to ‘bring to light’ the will of God in certain ethical issues. The *Acts of Mariënberg* refer to Art. 7 of the *Belgic Confession*, which speaks of the ‘sufficiency’ of Holy Scripture; it also makes reference to Psalm 116 verse 11: ‘*all men are liars*’. Indeed mankind is more vain than *vanity* itself. That which is taught in Scripture is *perfect* and in all aspects *sufficient*.

Mariënberg

With joy, we can *establish* that the *Synod of Mariënberg* returned to the only rule for life that applies in all circumstances. With regards to this issue it means that there is *only* one possible ground that could lead to divorce.

Is the so called ‘*style of the kingdom*’ the total of all the teachings of the Lord Jesus? Sure, ‘*love*’ and ‘*living according to the style of the Kingdom*’ must be ingredients for a life of thankfulness that is in accordance with the commandments. Yet, *let’s be honest*, we cannot bring forth unconditional love. Even so, our life, also our married life, can be restored! It can be restored thanks to the unconditional love our Saviour and Lord *Jesus Christ!* By giving up *His* life, He paid for all our debts. That is the *basis* and *source* for our love and forgiveness towards others. Thus we may only make use of the ground He Himself gave in Scripture, .

We do not need some ‘*new approach*’; not even when this is phrased in lofty words! As these words, in the meantime, create room for- and ‘*whitewash*’ sinful practices.

God’s commandments alone will lead to life. Therefore, the *Acts*, on page 95, direct our

attention to *Lords Day 44* of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. There, in Question 115, it speaks of the ‘*strict preaching*’ of the Ten Commandments. We are taught that we are *in need* of this to become more aware of our sinful nature. Only then we will eagerly *seek* the forgiveness of our sins and our righteousness in Christ. That, while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God’s image, until after this life we reach the goal of perfection. More reason can be found in the comfort given in 1 John 5 verse 3: ‘*His commandments are not grievous*’. The Lord will give strength in our afflictions. By ‘*taking up our cross, and deny ourselves*’ we follow after our Saviour. This alone is the right understanding of ‘*life in accordance with the Kingdom of Heaven*’! In this way justice is done to both: the *commandments of the Lord*, and the *testimony of Jesus Christ*. As if they would ever be inconsistent with each other!

His love for us is *unconditional*; His love and care for us is *sufficient*.

Further developments in the RCL

Have the people in the *Reformed Churches (Liberated)* since turned away from this heresy? The *Synod of Amersfoort 2005*, sadly, continued down the path of the so called ‘*different approach*’. Only some reservations were made with regard to two aspects: (a.) synod takes no responsibility for the theological ground of the ‘*different approach*’; [the recommendations of the report were nonetheless accepted!] (b.) The

synod advises against the ‘*solemnization in church*’ of marriages in case of a ‘*remarriage after divorce*’.

The RCL *Synod of Zwolle-Zuid* (2008) rejected all requests for revision with regard to this ‘*different approach*’. Thus, there is no *return* to the one ‘*ground*’ for divorce given by Scripture. Without hesitation they continue down the path of their ‘*new insights*’. It is remarkable(!) that this Synod decided that in the future the churches will be permitted again to solemnize ‘*marriages after divorce*’. In this way they turn away from the ‘*reservation*’ Amersfoort 2005 still had. They decide contrary.

This last measure is yet another ‘*step*’ that is in line with their ‘*liberal*’ and ‘*self-willed*’ teachings regarding the ‘*marriage and divorce*’ issue. 

H. Griffioen,
Assen

‘Classes’ for married couples

Some time ago I was asked to write an article for the magazine ‘*Reformed Continua*’. The idea was to inform about the ‘*classes*’ for married couples that take place in Berkel. Besides that I was asked to expand a little on the discussions during these evenings.

At first I was somewhat sceptical about joining these study evenings because my wife and I have already been married for 10 years. On top of that we definitely found it important that these evenings would not replace the regular Bible Study meetings. However the ‘*classes*’ were to be held once every six weeks. Thus that was not an excuse not to go... In order to ‘*make up our mind*’ we decided that it was worthwhile to give it a chance. So we ‘*signed up*’ for the classes for young married couples. 



Every time we meet an average of about twenty people attend. The individual situations of these people are quite diverse. Some couples attending have been married for over 10 years, other couples attend that have 'only' been married for two years, as well as 'couples' that are engaged and hope to marry soon.

The classes have been going on for about a year now. We continue to find it very pleasant to be able to discuss various topics with each other. The topics are chosen from a book written by rev. Grutter. The evenings are opened with prayer and the singing of a psalm. Then the topic, is introduced by the 'tutor' (mr. Joh Houweling). The topic we discuss further has been decided on in advance. In that way we can do 'prep study', and if possible come up with some questions that can be brought up for discussion.

At the last meeting we spoke about *the upbringing of children*. With such a topic it 'comes in handy' that there is such diversity among the couples attending. They are all happy about sharing their 'experiences'. It also happens that there are young couples that are not yet married and have certain specific questions. At these evenings they can talk about them openly in a friendly and secure atmosphere. At the same time there are also many opportunities for a good laugh.

Some of the topics we discussed are: *choice of schools for our children, how can we bring up our children in faith, how can we help our children in listening to the sometimes difficult sermons, and how do we spend the time between church services*. Soon one discovers that other parents face similar problems, and in no time we find ourselves entangled in a lively discussion. Specific problems that one or more couples encounter can be placed on the agenda and can be dealt with at a following meeting.

It is good to see that through these evenings, other social events 'come about'. Twice a year we organize something 'sociable'. Anyone that is interested can come and join for a 'potluck dinner'. The last 'potluck dinner' had 'Greece' as theme. Everyone had to bring a Greek dish. In this way we can all enjoy a meal as well as each other's company. This results in lots of conversing and, even more important it strengthens the contacts within the 'communion of saints'.

Even though at first we were a little apprehensive we discovered that, even though our own children are six and ten years of age, we gain lots of valuable and practical information from other couples. It is very helpful to us that the topics covered are of a practical nature. In this way we are strengthened in the awareness of living our everyday life to the glory of God. 

J. Wubben,
Berkel

Introducing the congregation of:

ASSEN

Liberation and restoration

On Friday evening, the 16th of January 2004, brothers and sisters from the north part of the Netherlands, gathered together at the '*Hamerslanden*' in Assen. These brothers and sisters came from Assen, Smilde, Leek, Zuidhorn, Oldehove, Groningen, Schildwolde, 2e Exloërmond and Zuidlaren. All had the desire to establish a Reformed Church in the area as soon as possible.

The meeting was opened with the reading of Ezra 4 and 5. This part deals with the restoration of the temple. During the evening the people gathered elected a committee of 5 brothers; a list of members was compiled; and a venue for the church services was chosen. It was decided that we would rent the old *Hervormde* church building at Midwolde, commencing Sunday the 24th of January. A 'provisional congregation' was established that evening was given the name '*The Reformed Church of North Netherlands*'.

from 'far and wide'

There was a great interest for this first church service. People came to *Midwolde* from all directions, also from *Friesland*. One of them was rev. *P. van Gulp* who was to lead both services that day.

He opened the Scriptures for some 80 church goers with Hebrew 11:10 as text in the morning and Lord's Day 1 from the *Heidelberg Catechism* in the afternoon. All present were comforted by the promise of the forthcoming city with its strong foundation of which God is the 'Author and Finisher'.

In the afternoon the well-known words from the confession about the 'only comfort in life and death' were heard as if they were new to the ears of those listening.

After 5 months of being 'guided' by a committee, a *church council* could now be ordained and installed. Thereby this church was now officially instituted. During this same worship service the three months 'old' *Hendrik ter Veer* could be baptized. Administering the sacraments was possible, once again, as the *office bearers* were now installed.

The congregation, under the guidance of their own church council, would now officially be known as *The Reformed Church of Mildwolde (e.o.)* ['e.o.' transl. : *and surrounding area*]. This change of name was necessary as '*Friesland*' began to meet separately and '*Groningen*' had plans to start their 'own' church services also. The members that remained in *Midwolde* were the ones that would finally become the congregation of *Assen e.o.* (=and surrounding area). In this way three congregations were formed in the northern parts of the Netherlands. Once again the *Gospel* found fixed places for the *Truth* to be proclaimed.

settling for Assen

For about a year the members of '*Assen e.o.*' were able to conduct worship services in *Midwolde*, yet at regular intervals we had to switch to *Tolbert* and *Lettelbert*. It is a miracle that there has always been a *church building* at hand in order for the *Preaching* to continue unhindered.

There was, however, the constant desire to conduct worship services in the neighborhood of *Assen*. This came about on the 8th of January 2006 when we relocated to the small and beautiful *Hervormde* church building in *Hooghalen*, about 8 kilometers from the township of *Assen*. At last,

after many 'wanderings', we were now able to *settle*. Here we still come together every week to hear the rich preaching of the Gospel of the Lord *Jesus Christ*.

installed

The congregation is quite small as it consists of 26 *confessing* members and 12 *baptized* members. The church council consists of two *elders* and one *deacon*. In order to 'relieve' these brother we receive *assistance* from neighboring churches. They help out by the *reading of sermons*. Right from the start a *bible study club* was formed and was given the name '*Meister Albert*', a local '*patriarch*'. Over the past years we were able to make study of the letter to the Hebrews, 1st and 2nd Peter, the *Church Order* and Zechariah. We are now dealing with Church History and the Psalms. The youth has combined meetings with the youth of the Reformed Church of *Groningen*. They are now studying the *Belgic Confession* and the *book of Daniel*.

As members of The Reformed Church of Assen and surrounding areas we are ever so thankful to the Lord for bestowing upon us the possibility to weekly listen without hindrance to the pure preaching of *His Word*.

W. Snippe
Assen



* *Albert Hilberts Kok*: (Diever 1760 – Eemster 1853 †) one of the leading persons alive around the time of the *Secession* of 1834. He was a man of great authority, renown in the Southwestern parts of the Dutch province *Drenthe*. He was known for being a wise and godly man, hence the people called him: '*Meister Albert*' (meister= teacher).

He was gifted and studied to become a teacher; quite something in His days. He worked eight years as the village-teacher in Diever. Because of the French Revolution he return to his roots as farmer in order to gain the office of captain in the vigilante patrol (a right to landowners). From this position he could be of influence to minimize the control of the French dominion). As farmer he became one of the pioneers in breaking new ground turning it into farming land. He was further installed as an elder in the *Hervormde Church* (state church at that time) of Dwingeloo as well as assessor. During the years that the *French* dominated the Netherlands he was given the 'power of attorney'. As *lay preacher* he replaced the minister when absent. In March 1835 a Seceded congregation was founded in the barn attached to his farmhouse. His sons *Frederik* and *Wolter Kok* became leaders and ministers in the Seceded churches after 1834.



Bankruptcy !

Most of us know what bankruptcy is. A business or organisation is in financial difficulties.

There is not enough money to continue. The only possibility is to wind up the business. Usually the creditors – people who are owed money – are left in the lurch. End of story.

We can say it a little more accurately. For bankruptcy isn't always about money. Being broke means that a person, an organisation, a business, is unable to meet their obligations. It can also mean that promised products or services can no longer be supplied.

Bankruptcy as a result of market changes or a worsening economy is a frequent occurrence. Incompetent management and unrealistic optimism are also common causes.

But sometimes a business consciously sets out to go broke. Promises are deliberately broken in order to wind up the business and start all over again, freed from debt.

We will not talk about this further, also because we don't know enough about it. Our point of interest is that a bankruptcy means the end of the "old" business. It leaves room, or room is being made, for something else.

The church-membership condition

On the front page of *Nederlands Dagblad* (ND) of Saturday 22 November 2008 we read a shocking story. Shocking? Attentive observers have seen it coming for a long time. Nonetheless it is still shocking news. Because it concerns a far-reaching matter. Because it means the end of Reformed education. Because we still had faint hope that it would not happen.

What was the issue? *The ND* headlined: '*Liberated (Vrijgemaakte) Schools drops church-membership condition*', with as subheading '*Final demolition liberated organisations*'.

The news item explained that *LVGS* (the national organisation of Reformed School Associations) is proposing that from now on individual schools be

allowed to decide whether teachers must still be a member of a specific church (a list of selected churches being provided).

According to the proposal, schools no longer need to apply a uniform rule. Each school should now be allowed to decide for itself. Everyone may do what is good in his own eyes. It is a proposal that acknowledges the developments in church and society.

We should understand well what this means. While up to now only members of the GKV and CGK were allowed to teach in reformed schools, the schools may now decide for themselves. This opens the door for Baptists, members of Pentecostal churches, of the HHV, or the PKN...

Final stage

This proposal can be seen as the final stage in an evolution. An evolution that did not just happen, but was desired and driven.

As a first step, the organisation of the schools, and specifically of the primary schools, was changed so that the members of the local school associations lost control over matters. This resulted in significantly weakening the school's affiliation with the church, which in turn led to a looser relationship between the schools and local churches. For the next step, agreement was reached on a more liberal student admission policy. Many reformed schools have by now a large percentage of students from other than GKV churches. This caused a second fracture in the relationship between school and church, one that has quite an impact on a school (which, incidentally, was often denied.) The identity of the school (it was said) does not depend on the students but on the staff. The school's staff carry the identity. And regarding that staff, we will continue with the requirement of membership of a GKV church.

But a third step was the admission of CGK staff to the reformed schools. This was done on the view that in the meantime GKV and CGK had mutually recognised each other as true churches. And when churches recognise each other in the faith, their members should not remain separated

in the staffroom. We may have questions about the actual validity of that opinion, but in day-to-day life that was the point of departure. It meant another tear in that former strong bond. After the adoption of the inter-church student admission policy, there was now also an inter-church staffing policy.

And today, as the final stage, we have the proposal to leave it completely up to the schools to decide from which church they may attract staff.

Identity document

LVGS is still prepared to maintain a relationship with the GKv. The Constitutions of the school associations will, in one way or another, still have to make reference to those churches. But in the presence of both a liberal student admission policy and a liberal staff employment policy, that constitutional reference is an empty gesture. Words without meaning.

The bitter side of it all is that LVGS has for several years kept a review of the identity of reformed education going. For the intention is to strengthen that identity! But those who think that in that review a strong wall will be built to close the breaches, so that reformed education still survives, are deluding themselves.

During recent years a totally new vision on reformed education was developed. Some time ago we saw a draft, a concept of that kind of identity document. And on the LVGS website we find a 'Foundation plan reformed education'. Both of them say very christian and biblical things. But especially those points that characterised our reformed education are omitted. We read much about God's grace and daily conversion. But we read nothing about the covenant, about the significance of baptism, about the significance of the church.

It is gone. It is left out. The reality is that this identity review supports the process of turning these schools into inter-church schools. Guarantees for identity? On the contrary. Demolition of identity. And anyone trying to turn that development around, as a board member or member of a joint-management committee, is fighting an exceptionally lonely rearguard battle.

Bankrupt!

We can therefore draw no other conclusion than that reformed education has announced its own bankruptcy. In reality it was no longer reformed education. The reformed character of many schools had already been irreversibly affected by the student admission policy, by ecclesiastical developments and by evangelical influences. If the LVGS proposal would be accepted, yes, then our judgment must be: bankrupt! Spiritually bankrupt. Then the 'old' has been left to rot in order to make room for something new. Then reformed education no longer exists.

Yes, the name does. But under that name an essentially different kind of education is hiding

. Education divorced from church and covenant. Education that can no longer teach under the banner 'thus says the LORD' – assuming that that was still happening. Education that has no possibility for teaching about a substantial part of the history of God's church. Education that provides teaching opportunities to people who deny infant baptism and the office in the church. Education in which not *living in the covenant*, but *a personal relationship with God* comes first whatever its content may be. It is a school system from which education in a reformed setting has disappeared.



But perhaps this proposal will be rejected? We'd better not count on it. This evolution started already years ago. And LVGS is a professional organisation that does not fire blanks. Undoubtedly research has been conducted as to the expected support for this proposal; and such support has undoubtedly been encouraged.

Reformed education is bankrupt! Consciously driven to bankruptcy. Making room in that way



for something quite different. Something that will closely resemble evangelical education and that of the more conservative wing of general Christianity. We still want to express it in a different way. After having first laid aside the glorious gift which our parents and grandparents in thankfulness received from the LORD – the gift for which in sincere faith they struggled and sacrificed – it has now been thrown away for good. We don't need it any more, LORD, we will ourselves put something better together.

Bankruptcy has to do with failure to honour commitments. We are of the opinion that reformed education fails to honour its commitment of thankfulness toward the LORD.

We are bystanders and onlookers, and we observe it with pain and sorrow in our heart.

Injustice?

There's still another matter that caught our attention. Schools in future are no longer required to insist on specific church membership. They are allowed to decide themselves which kind of church membership is mandatory. The LVGS director mentions a few churches on his web site. Among them are also our churches. He indicates that during recent years teachers in good standing had to be sacked because they joined one of those churches or church federations. A pity! It is one of the reasons for dropping this church-membership condition.

We read in the same, very extensive, *ND* news item that an important and prominent expert in the field of education law has been saying for years that this is not necessary. But LVGS believed that it was. At the time we liberated

ourselves again, in 2003, a comprehensive study dealing with the matter was published. That study became the basis for a number of dismissals of reformed teachers. Those who joined the 'new liberation' had to go. A pity ... but there was no choice. Also when members of the school association asked for postponement and re-consideration, the answer remained: No, it is not possible. For juridical reasons. If we continue to employ staff belonging to churches other than GKv and CGK, we may lose our certification as an independent school system.

But this expert has been saying for years that we need not worry about it. The man is a member of the supreme Law Council in the Netherlands, the Council of State. And between 2003/04 and today the situation in this regard has not changed.

Does this mean that perhaps an injustice has been done? Not only in spiritual (we knew that already) but also in juridical respect? Have the schools perhaps been too quick about it? Was perhaps the desire father to their view on the matter?

We are curious to find out whether all sacked teachers will be given an opportunity to come back to the reformed schools.

In a following article we hope to write more about this *ND* news item - what it means for us, as well as about the wider framework of the total demolition of all Reformed organisations.



T.L. Bruinius,
Hooghalen

A Response from the Canadian Reformed Churches (part 2)

Deputies report Synod Smithers 2007

The report of the Canadian deputies consists of two parts. Part one deals with the Reformed Churches Liberated (RCL= GKV) and the work of the General Synod held at Amersfoort in 2005. The second part deals with the Reformed Churches (restored) [RCR=GK(h)].

A new trend within the RCL

The Canadian deputies noticed that within the past decade new trends developed within the RCL. Hereby they refer to the large amount of deputyships. The 'modus operandi' of the Dutch major assemblies has changed over time. This is undoubtedly cause for some feeling of alienation among the church people.

The rules that were made for dealing with matters at synod level have been altered. A total of 28(!) deputyships now prepare and advise an upcoming Synod. The emphasis thus appears to be on drawing on the strength of specialists rather than on grassroots involvement.

Local churches and individual members have the opportunity for input into proposals of the deputies; their suggestions and criticisms will be weighed, and may or may not be incorporated into the final submission to a major assembly. It is the deputies who decide if these objection are included in the final recommendations tabled at Synod. Various committees with Synod delegates will at the start of Synod advice whether to accept or turn down these objections.

This information may be given to the deputyship to incorporate this into the final proposal which also includes the suggestions and amendments from the 'floor'. On the other hand, the deputies make mention of the method common to the Canadian churches. This was the same method which was used in the RCL in the past. Then it was common practice that deputies would send their report to all local churches half a year before a Synod commences. Church councils

and church members could then submit their objections or support directly to Synod.

At Synod committees could be formed consisting of Synod delegates. These committees would then make a study of the recommendations of the deputies as well as the reactions from the churches they received. These committees would in turn present their suggestions at Synod. After various rounds of discussion Synod would make necessary adjustments and come to a final recommendation and decision.

We expected the Canadian churches to object to



this new method adopted by the RCL synods. The reason being that this new method curtails the right to appeal or object by local churches as well as individual church members.

With this new method the objections are now evaluated by the deputies. However a Synod committee should receive all submitted objections along with the deputies report. This suggests that they believe the following: the 'lay-committee-member' at synod is not capable to give expert advice or is able to the answer sufficiently.

The RCR thankfully decided to return to the original method. The one also in use in Canada, whereby the Deputies do not evaluate the objections and do not give their comments to the Synod members prior to the onset. As there were no objections to this practice from the Canadian churches we assume they are comfortable with this.

The number of hymns

'The concerns of the CANRC are not justified, that was the response of the RCL towards the objections expressed by the CANRC concerning the large amount of hymns accepted for use by the RCL. The outcome by the Synod of Zuidhorn is not as Canada suggests. There they decided that the Psalms will not be pushed aside by the hymns used for the worship services.

This decision made at Synod Zuidhorn *'gave definite certainty of a safe place of the Psalms in the worship service'*. 'in fact, a decision was made at Synod Zuidhorn to protect the priority of place of psalms in the worship service' (report to GS Smithers 2007 vol. 1 p. 46).

The Canadian deputies accepted this explanation. Not the number of acceptable hymns is the criteria but, rather, the actual *use* of the Psalms and hymns within the worship service.

They however, did mention that with increasing the number of acceptable hymns, there would probably also be an increase in the number of objections.

It is remarkable (if not beyond believe!) that no mention was made about the actual content of the hymns. Many RCL Synods have had to deal with that point as there were many objections and appeals submitted. (See Acts of Synod Zuidhorn art. 86 and the deputies report.)

The new form for marriage

The Canadian deputies asked the RCL to explain what they understand by the following sentence from the form for the solemnization of marriage: *'also now married couples are called to parenthood when the Lord provides the means there to.'* Does this sentence refer to *not being able to bear children* or does this sentence lean towards the modern view of receiving children i.e. family planning?

The answer provided by the RCL deputies was: 'this sentence was included in the new form for marriage because there are situations where bringing forth children in the natural way is not possible. The 'call to parenthood' includes the assumption that there is no way to avoid this mandate. Being married means that man

receives the calling to parenthood. But this always depends on God providing the means for parenthood.

As to the question what the task of the wife is within the family and household, the RCL deputies summarize it as follows: *"What was previously considered to be the task of the wife within her family and household the new form considered this to be the task of both spouses. Hence this sentence has been transferred to the section listing the duties of both spouses: 'share the responsibility and care for your family'."*

A revision of the form was necessary in order to remove the impression that the task of the wife is primarily that of mother and that all the work done outside the home is to be reserved for the husband only. To support this, the RCL deputies refer to the manner in which



Adam and Eve worked together, and to Proverbs 31. Husband and wife are in charge together and should responsibly share of the duties within the family. Apparently the Canadian deputies were assured by this explanation. In the report to Synod Chatham some objections were still raised to this new interpretation concerning the role of the husband; taking out him being the head of the family. There is however, no further mention of that in the Smithers report.

The fourth commandment

The deputies made study of the report 'Sunday, The Lord's Day' (Zondag, HEERlijke Dag). Synod Zuidhorn had ordered the deputies to write this report. They in turn referred in their report, made for the Canadian Synod Smithers, specifically to the last chapter of this report. This chapter analysis the decisions made at Synod Leusden (1999) and Synod Zuidhorn (2002).

Leusden decided: *the view 'the Sunday as a day of rest is not based on a God-given commandment', is not to be refuted.*

But, in the RCL report they claim: *it was not the intention of Leusden to imply that it doesn't matter if one works on the Sunday, but that there are different views in interpreting the Sunday being a day of rest.*

According to 'Leusden' we must accept the view of brothers and sisters that say: the Sunday as a day of rest is not directly based on a God-given commandment. By analogy they reason: through the Holy Spirit, the Christian church adopted the Sunday as a day of rest following the example of the Israelite Sabbath. Hence, the Sunday as a day of rest is based on a 'responsible choice' made by the Christian church. They continue to say that as with *Baptism* the same can be applied to the Sunday: the New Testament does not directly commandment us to hold a day of rest on the first day of the week. With both interpretations, they conclude, the Sunday is seen as a day of rest. 'Leusden' did not want not specify the Sunday but rather it wanted to outline the fact that in the New Testament we cannot find a clear commandment from God that we must rest. According to the report, both Synods (Leusden and Zuidhorn) claim that the Sunday is a day of rest and worship.

The deputies continue by paying attention to the short document that was published (2005) by Synod Amersfoort – Sunday, The Lord's Day ; a guide (Zondag, HEERlijke dag; een handreiking).

The Canadian deputies conclude that *Synod Amersfoort speaks clearly of the Sunday as day of rest and worship.* Due to these two voluminous publications they see this issue as being sufficiently dealt with.

We, however, cannot find the CANRC deputies referring to the section of the decisions of Synod Leusden that speaks of resting on the Sunday as being either one of *both* (!) a 'commandment' and a 'good-human institution'.

It was this part that raised the objections of so many people. This part brought to light the fact

that the decision of Leusden concerning *the Sunday as a day of rest* undermines the fact that it is a God-given commandment. It sees that the Canadian deputies overlooked this part of the decision of Leusden. Neither do they make mention of the *status* of the report. It was declared to be of *guidance and advice*, that is not a binding document. By means of this guide the RCL did not give a clear signal. Keeping the peace within the churches seemed to be of more importance than the pure Word of God. It seems that the Canadian deputies underestimated this point.

Marriage and divorce

In dealing with the issue of Marriage and divorce the deputies directed the attention towards the fact that certain marriage problems are very complex. Instead of upholding the law of the Lord they turn to their 'latest invention' the '*style of the kingdom of heaven*', while on the other hand there is the lack of reference to the 'grounds' for divorce. This too easily leads to accept divorce as a solution when marriage problems are encountered.

Synod Amersfoort responded to this by accommodating for objections raised at the vagueness of this all by declaring: '*the style of the kingdom of heaven* does not take the place of God's commandments or the words in Scripture. It is only meant to serve as a framework.'

The Canadian deputies still find this answer of Synod Amersfoort to be very vague and can



easily lead to a ambiguous attitude towards divorce and remarriage. The deputies also express concern with regard to the way 1st Corinthians 7 was interpreted. Their concerns increase due to the fact that Synod Amersfoort mandated their deputies to revise the church order. They made this request in order to make the Church Order to become more dynamic in order to be able to be more lexible in using (or refraining from!) disciplinary actions in issues of divorce and remarriage. When discussing this issue, however, the CANRC deputies only come as far as expressing their concern.

In the CANRC report we expected to find a thorough opposition against the content of the RCL brochure '*Do not take words away from this Book of prophecy*'. This, however, was not the case. These new way of *exegesis* allows for existing unscriptural practices within the churches while, 'legalizing' them at the same time.

Other issues

The Canadian deputies further mention several issues that were brought up at Synod Amersfoort (2005). They just mention the neutrally without commenting on them – neither positively or negatively. They are only listed to serve as announcement or information. No mention was made at all of the objections submitted against the *final* and *definite* decisions made at Synod Zuidhorn 2002/2003 concerning these following issues:

- The introduction of new Bible translation;
- 'Guests' from other denominations attending the Lord's Supper;
- Issues at the Theological college in Kampen;
- Soldiers and the Lords Supper while out on a mission;
- Asylum seekers and the Sacraments;



- The revision of the Church Order;
- The integration of people with a handicap- (special church services etc);
- Homosexual relationships;
- Women in the church;
- The liturgy alterations;
- The afternoon worship service;
- New form for baptism and public profession of faith;
- Ecclesiastical unity;
- Christelijk Gereformeerde churches;
- Nederlands Gereformeerde churches;
- Evangelization and mission work;
- Acceptance of the *Emmaus* evangelization method;
- Extending sister church relations;

Under the heading '*observations*' that can be found in the report, we notice something that is worth mentioning. We read the following:

“the change made in procedure and vision and the additional allowances for liturgical modifications are considered to be in line with the Biblical command by some. Yet these same matters rattle the confidence of others, those who feel more comfortable with a prescribed order and the tried-and-true proven set of rules and regulations. These changes are threats to

the ways in which things have always been done. The speed at which some of these are perceived to have been foisted on congregations have become unsettling for many. They feel that their objections do not receive a proper hearing. Yet, several members seem quite content to leave the decisions and the ratification of synodical decisions up to the one-in-the-know.

a shift in Canada?

We now come to our conclusions concerning the CANRC deputies' report about the RCL. By now it must be clear that these deputies in their report have been very selective. Even though, they were not requested to carry out a thorough investigation of the situation in the RCL, they did not make mention of all issues requested of them by the Synod that installed them.

Time and again substantial considerations and material are lacking. i.e. referring to the report from the RCL about the Sunday, and noticing, that it does not deal with past Synod decisions, yet still accepting it as satisfactory. The concern about divorce and remarriage remain! Yet no arguments were brought forward by the deputies. They do voice some concerns about the issue of the '*lifestyle according the kingdom*' and the interpretation of 1st Corinthians 7, yet a substantial confrontation based on Scripture is lacking.

Many other examples can be given, these will suffice.

We will yet highlight the matter of the decisions with regard to allowing 'guests' to participate in the Lords Supper. With regard to this very point Synod Neerlandia (2001) warned the Dutch sister churches to abide to the articles 60 and 61 of the Church Order. Further they said: *We must not ignore what Scripture teaches about Holy Supper as summarized in the Belgic Confession (Art.35). Lord's Day 28-30 of the Heidelberg Catechism clearly teach us that Holy Supper must be celebrated with the congregation during the worship service. The consistory must strictly see to it who attends Holy Supper.'*

On the basis of these grounds provided at Neerlandia we expected the deputies to have raised the alarm concerning this issue. Also the decision to revise the Church Order should have led to requests for clarifications, if not, objections. Had not Synod Neerlandia made it clear that such revisions cannot be made without considering the sister churches?!

Observing the 'observations' we notice that mention is made of the fact that some church members expressed concerns while at the same time other church members express satisfaction with the decision to leave decision making and ratification up to the 'professional' deputies... How can this so easily be accepted by a sister church that first stated that these kind of alterations are to be made in consultation with the sister churches. We wonder how it is possible that concerning this only and observation is being made without raising any comments.

It seems that the sister churches in Canada are not really bothered by this. It leaves us with the impression that the deputies are afraid to cause division and therefore refrain from making comments on many of the issues.

Or, must we conclude that the Canadian churches are still making up their minds on these issues? Or even, dare I ask, leaning towards these ideas and practices themselves? Or are the deputies, by not 'digging deeper', trying to maintain the peace within their own churches?

Next issue we hope to continue.

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