

## **SYNODICAL STRUGGLES**

In a previous editorial we noted that “General Synods are the place where the federation, as a whole, makes decisions...Contact, and especially Ecclesiastical Fellowship, with other federations is [also] dealt with at Synods.”<sup>1</sup> Thereafter we touched on the matter of discipline. We asked, rhetorically, “Do we recognize a people of God, locally, federatively, and even world wide, that lives within the boundaries God has so carefully and expressly placed in His Word and has so diligently led His church to recognize and confess? Or, do we observe a broadening of those boundaries beyond the limits God has established?”<sup>2</sup>

Now that we, for a second time, address some matters of various Synods, we may pull these two issues together. Synodical decisions must be made in the spirit of discipleship to Jesus Christ and His Word. The directions that Synods take impact largely on the discipline that is exercised in the local church. Not only must a Synod, at time, confirm local discipline that has been exercised in a case of sinful lifestyle, but it also gives direction in doctrinal discipline. The Liberated Churches in the Netherlands recently agreed at their Synod that women ought to vote at congregational meetings in the election of office bearers for the church. In Canada much focus was placed on Ecclesiastical Fellowship with a number of federations around the globe, and in Australia the Synod was interrupted by the need to review the teachings of one of its delegates.

All of these matters are addressed in this issue of Reformed Polemics. They are important for the life of each local church. No one can say that the issues dealt with in any of the aforementioned Synods do not affect them in their local congregations. The fact that the issue of women voting and ecclesiastical fellowship so often dominate the agendas of Synods indicates a struggle in the churches. The fact that a minister who is delegated by a church must be questioned about his doctrinal beliefs and is found wanting indicates difficulties in dealing with doctrinal discipline.

Synodical struggles, decisions one way that are redirected at a following Synod, give evidence of federations in turmoil. We remain under the influence of the evil one. He does not always attack the church in the same manner. At times he uses physical persecution, at other times he allows affluence to steer the church astray. In our time it seems that compromise and laxity in the name of compassion and understanding are the main arsenal of the great tempter. These characteristics are surely at work in the matters that have come before the major assemblies we already mentioned.

History has taught us that Synods are often pivotal in the life of the church. Sometimes they lead God’s people on a path of truth and obedience (the Synod of Dordt), and sometimes they force God’s people to make choices contrary to their direction (as in the Liberation). Even though God uses people to further His work in this world, to further His pre-ordained plan, He also demands that they do so in obedience to His inspired Word. People as well as Synods may not direct the churches according to their own ideas of how God’s purpose should be worked out, but rather they must obediently follow His written and inspired direction and watch in awe as He ensures the fulfillment of His purpose.

In our discussion(s) about the various issues that have become before recent Synods we hope to help each other in dealing with them. As we have noted in a previous editorial the Acts of the Synods are not merely for theologians to contemplate and debate, but they are there to inform the

members, the believers, of the decisions and the deliberations that have taken place. When reading and reacting to these Acts we must behave in the same manner as we expect the delegates to behave when they are meeting. We must react in obedience to the Word of God.

If we find that the major assemblies have erred we must bring this to the attention of our consistories. We may not neglect to do so. Sometimes the idea that there is too much fighting or debating going on in the churches can be heard as a critical remark. But to refrain from pointing out error shows a blatant disregard for the truth and the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters. Even a quick perusal of the Acts of General Synod Fergus of the Canadian Reformed Churches will show a large number of submissions from the churches to Synod expressing concern about previous decisions. Although this is an indication of a struggling church federation, it is also an indication of a living church federation.

Submissions to consistories about decisions of major assemblies should be Scripture based. Therefore we are driven to read God's Word all the more to determine what direction it gives with regard to the various issues.

It is our prayer that the discussions that continue to fill our pages are an implement to drive our readers to God's Word in order to test the opinions and decisions that are generated by recent Synods. May our heavenly Father grant us receptive eyes and ears. May He open our hearts to His instruction.

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1. Reformed Polemics, Vol. 5, No.4
2. Reformed Polemics, Vol. 5, No.6

## **VOTING RIGHTS - AND WRONGS**

### *INTRODUCTION*

Recently the Cloverdale Church council decided "that all communicant members will be eligible to vote on whether or not to call this minister" [1] and allowed the sisters to vote in the election of Rev. Huijgen. This violates the policy of our churches, upheld by various synods, that women should not vote in any election of office-bearers.

Why did this council feel so strongly so as to defy synodical rulings? [2]

Since there will, no doubt, be further repercussions in our churches, it may be helpful to reflect on the issues at stake. Background material can be found in the 1980 Report of "The Committee on Women's Voting Rights" [3], which opposed women voting, and the 1993 Acts of the Dutch Synod Ommen [4], which supported it.

### *THE TRADITIONAL POSITION*

Central to the discussion is the Biblical principle that the woman is to be subordinate to the headship of man. Pertinent texts include:

I Cor. 11:7-9: “For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”

I Cor.14:33-36: “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as even the law says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.”

I Tim.2:12: “I permit no woman to teach or have authority over man; she is to keep silent”.

Eph.5:23-24: “The husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church...As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be subject to their husbands in everything”.

Historically, this has been seen to affect woman voting as follows:

1. Since the outcome of the election is binding, voting is an act of governing over the consistory and the candidates. But women may not have authority over men (I Tim.2:12). Hence women may not vote.
2. For women to vote independently and on an equal footing with men is inconsistent with the principle of male headship (I.Cor.11, Eph.5:23-24). For example, a man’s vote could be cancelled by the contrary vote of his wife; the men’s vote could be reversed by that of the women.
3. Since voting is an effective means of voicing an opinion, the right to vote implies the right to speak. But women may not speak in church (I Cor.14:33-36, I Tim.2). Thus they may not vote.

A number of objections have been raised against these considerations.

### *THE STATUS OF VOTING*

#### Is Voting Merely Advising?

It has been argued that an election is not an act of governing, but merely advice, to which the consistory is ultimately not bound [5].

This notion is plainly contradicted by the following sources:

- (a) Acts 6:1-6:”And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said “...Brethren, pick out from among you seven men...whom we may appoint”...and they chose...” [Note: “brethren” already implies that, even if there were women present, which seems unlikely, they were subordinate to the men].
- (b) Belgic Confession (Art.31): “Ministers, elders, and deacons ought to be chosen...by lawful election of the church”.
- (c) Church Order (Art.3): “Those elected shall be appointed by the consistory...”

(d) Ordination Forms: All office bearers are asked “Do you feel in your heart that God Himself, through His congregation, has called you?”

In short, the congregation is to choose the officers by a lawful election; God calls through the congregation. The consistory is bound by the outcome of the election (assuming, of course, that the election was properly conducted and that there were no lawful objections). The consistory has no right to appoint anyone not lawfully elected by the congregation. Clearly, then, the election is not merely advice but, rather, a binding decision.

Is voting an act of governing? My dictionary defines “governing” as “exercising authority over, controlling, determining”. Thus making a binding decision is surely an act of governing. Hence, in choosing office bearers, the congregation partakes in an act of governing. Although this is the only act of governing assigned to the congregation, it is a significant one. This act of governing is not granted as a concession by the consistory but is prescribed by Scripture, Confessions, and Church Order, as cited above.

Synod Ommen asserts that the electing is not governing because it takes place under the leadership of the consistory, which also makes the actual appointment. But these factors do not detract from the binding nature of the election. In its appointments the consistory is merely carrying out the decision of the congregation. One could as well affirm that Canada is not a democracy, since those elected must be appointed by the Governor-General; and that MP’s have no authority, since laws must be signed by the G-G before becoming effective. The G-G may have a nominal authority, but the effective authority is certainly in the hands of the electorate and MP’s.

Synod Ommen contends that the issue in election is not the individual voice, but the voice of the whole congregation. Yet the voice of the congregation consists of a sum total of individual voices, each with its own equal share of authority and responsibility. As in consistory decisions, each participant has a precise fraction of the deciding power.

### *Is Voting Merely Calling?*

According to Synod Ommen, voting is not governing because God uses the calling to indicate who are to serve; the voting is not free since the choices are bound by the norms of Christ and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

However, since voting outcomes are rarely unanimous, individual responsibility and choice clearly do play a role. Else we would have to conclude that those who voted for candidates who failed to get elected transgressed the norms of Christ and rejected the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

If the above argument were valid, consider one implication: since the consistory, too, is presumably bound by the norms of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, its decisions are not acts of governing, hence women may serve in consistory. Further, the fact that God uses the vote to indicate who are to serve actually enhances the authoritative nature of the vote. The consistory may surely not devalue God’s call to more advice.

### *Consistency*

Synod Ommen asserted that, since women may partake in suggesting names and raising objections, it is inconsistent not to let them vote.

There is, however, a difference. The suggestion of names is just advice, which the consistory need not follow. Nor is the consistory bound by any objection raised, since it is up to the consistory to decide whether the objection is valid. Unlike voting, these actions are not binding; they involve no decisive voice.

Further, arguments from inconsistency cut both ways. If such involvement of women really does contravene female submission in the church, any inconsistency is better resolved by excluding women from the entire election process.

The 1980 Report found it inconsistent not to allow women to be officers but to permit them to vote for officers. It is clear, then, that nominating, voting, and ruling are all closely linked. Redefining terms such as “authority”, “submission” and “silence” in order to allow women to vote will inevitably lead to further word games. It opens the door to women in office. Half-way positions are inherently unstable. There are only two logically consistent positions: apply the Biblical norm either fully or not at all.

### *MALE HEADSHIP*

A Uni-sex congregation?

Synod Ommen further contended for women voting by stressing the equality of man and woman while minimizing any distinctions. It claimed that since women may pray and prophesy (I Cor.11), their silence (I Cor.14, I Tim.2) concerns only speaking with authority, which is primarily the task of the male elders.

Now I Cor.11, stressing the covering as a sign of submission to man, reproves women for praying and prophesying uncovered. A few chapters later (I Cor.14:34-37) women are forbidden to speak at all in church. The silence referred to here is clearly much broader than only speaking with authority, since it includes also the mere asking of questions (I. Cor.14:35). Any tension between these two texts is removed by noting, (a), that I Cor.11 does not explicitly permit women to pray or prophesy even if covered, and, (b), that I Cor.14, unlike I Cor.11, specifically states “in church”. Either way, I Cor.11 does not allow women to pray or prophesy in church (see Calvin’s Commentary). This concurs with I Tim.2, where men are to pray, whereas women are to be silent.

In our churches the distinction between women and non-office holding men has already eroded to the point that the last remaining difference is that of the male vote. Now that, too, is being challenged. If “silence” refers only to speaking with the authority of an elder then such silence applies equally to non-office holding men, implying full equality in the church between women and non-office holding men. Yet the above-mentioned texts distinguish between women versus men, rather than the congregation versus the consistory. The decision of Synod Ommen empties these divinely appointed norms of much of their content.

### *Women's gifts*

Synod Ommen asserts that women also have received gifts of the spirit and the office of all believers, share in Christ's work of salvation, in the spreading of the gospel and in the upbuilding of the congregation. Since the gifts of the spirit should be used optimally, also women's voices should be heard in the election of officers.

Others have used the same reasoning (the optimal usage of women's gifts) to argue for women in office. However, the fact that God has blessed our women with many gifts does not negate the Biblical teaching regarding male/female roles. Women are to use their gifts in proper submission to men.

### *Representing Single women.*

It is sometimes argued that in male-only voting single women are not represented.

This mistakenly assumes that men, when voting, represent their families. If that were true then single men still living with their family should not vote either. The Bible (cf. I Cor.11 & 14, I Tim.2) indicates that submission is not just of a wife to her husband, but more generally: in church the men are to lead, women to follow. Together the men provide the leadership in the church.

### *CONCLUSIONS*

1. The arguments for women voting rights downplay the binding nature of voting and distort the Biblical teaching regarding male/female roles.
2. Since women voting is consistent with the egalitarianism that permeates our worldly culture, we should pause to consider whether the push for women voting is not unduly influenced by worldly norms, Synod Ommen's profuse protests to the contrary notwithstanding.
3. Although women voting may seem to be a minor issue, it has major implications. As we have seen, much of the reasoning of Synod Ommen can easily be extended to argue for women in office, particularly the office of deacon. As is well documented by recent developments in the CRC and other denominations, semantic games and exegetical gymnastics, once introduced, are readily expanded.
4. The RCUS is to be applauded for protesting the decision of Synod Ommen. Regretfully, not a murmur of concern has been expressed by our own synods, particularly not by the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad, nor, as far as I am aware and with the notable exception of the church at Fergus [6], by any of our ministers or seminary professors. An ominous silence.

### *Notes:*

1. Church News (Sept.6,1998 Vol.40, No.16, p.9)
2. One wonders how the Cloverdale delegates could truthfully answer "yes" when Classis BC West (Oct.6, 1998) asked "Are the churches abiding by synodical decisions?" (Church Order Art.44). Why did classis not admonish Cloverdale?
3. Appendix VI, Acts of Synod 1980. See also further discussions elsewhere in Acts 1980 and 1983.
4. As reported in Information (Oct.9, 1993) and in "Women's Voting Right in the Church" by F.H. Folkerts in Diakonia (Dec.1995, 44-49).

5. With Common Consent, Rev. W.W.J. van Oene (Premier Pub, 1990): "ultimately the consistory is not bound by this advice, although it must have very good and compelling reasons to deviate from it." (p.19) Further, "If such deviation is considered necessary, the congregation is to trust that the consistory had sufficient reasons for doing this, and these reasons should not be divulged." (!)(p.348)

6. Acts of Synod 1998, p.32.

John Byl

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Concerning Wayne Pleiter's "Raising the bar too high?" (Reformed Polemics, 5:4, p.5) I would like to make a few comments.

Br. Pleiter writes, "While the assertions of Rev. VanPopta and Mulder is that these matters (supervision of the Lord's table) are merely of a church order nature, Synod 98 sufficiently establishes that they are of a scriptural and confessional nature.

1. Nowhere in my article, A Conditional Offer (Clarion, 47:14, p. 338) did I even mention the church order, let alone that the supervision of the Lord's table is merely of a church order nature. I did not write that for I know too well that the question how you supervise the table of the Lord has everything to do with what you believe and confess the Lord's Table to be. (By the way, neither did Rev. Van Popta write that supervision of the Lord's Table is merely a church order matter! He never used the word merely! Br. Pleiter added that! One word can make quite a difference!)

2. Br. Pleiter also writes about what he calls the practical/theoretical argument and says that this is in some way a deceptive one and may create a false dilemma. I wholeheartedly agree. But br. Pleiter should admit that I did not introduce this argument (nor did Rev. Van Popta); rather, Synod Abbotsford 1995 did. This General Synod considered that the question how to admit guests to the Lord's Table "deals with certain practices in the OPC and not its confessional documents." (Acts Synod 1995, Art. 106 B.3). According to Synod 95, this practice does not undermine the OPC's confessional integrity as a true Church. Synod Fergus 98 upheld these statements. The church at Watford asked Synod 98 to declare that Synod 95 erred in stating this (Acts Synod 1998. Art.130.E.4.d). The church at Attercliffe pointed out to Synod 98 that these practices deal with matters about which our confessions speak (Acts Synod 1998. Art.130.E.4.e.iv). Also the church of London was of the opinion that Synod 95 was wrong in making these statements and this church rejects this "confessional-practical distinction" (Acts Synod 1998. Art.130.E.4.f.v)

It was not me (nor Rev. VanPopta) who made this distinction which, according to br. Pleiter is "in some ways deceptive".

My point was and is that in spite of what these churches asked and without refuting what Abbotsford 1995 stated, Synod 98 did make this OPC practice of how guests are admitted to the Lord's Table a condition for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. If the OPC does not change this practice, and the next General Assembly does not declare that in admitting guests to the Lord's Table a general verbal warning is not sufficient, then there will be no Ecclesiastical Fellowship between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC. Then also the present relationship of ecclesiastical contact with the OPC has to be reconsidered by our next general synod. (Synod 1998, Acts. Art. 133. VI. G. J.)

3. Br. Pleiter continues to speak about an "agreement" we have with the OPC. But br. Pleiter should realize that after Synod Fergus 1998 there is no agreement with the OPC anymore. Our Committee for Contact with the OPC reached indeed an agreement with the brothers of the OPC. A common basis for Ecclesiastical Fellowship between these two churches was agreed upon. Synod 1998 was asked to decide accordingly and take over this agreement

reached by both Committees. However, Synod decided not to do this but to add to it. The addition may be only a few lines - to be exact only thirty one (31!) words - but it is definitely not an unimportant addition. Br. Pleiter calls it a "modest but significant" one. Synod 98 did this change without consulting the brothers of the OPC. It was a one-sided alteration.

Consequently there is of course no agreement anymore. We better state this openly and clearly.

The decision of Synod 98 first has to be discussed with the brothers of the OPC and if they can agree with the addition Synod 98 made, they are to pass this (new) agreement on for adoption by their General Assembly. Everyone who knows a bit about the history of our contact with the OPC, also knows that this will be quite a process again! If that process is clearly demanded by the LORD, then we must do it! But is it?

4. In conclusion: my point still is the question whether this conditional offer is warranted on the basis of Scripture and Confession.

I know that br. Pleiter and others will say: but we don't ask an unscriptural thing. Synod 1998 has made this sufficiently clear!

That might be true. You may even add that according to the OPC's own Westminster standards they should be stricter when admitting guests to the Lord's Table. True again! But let's not forget that every OPC congregation and session has presently the freedom and the right to break with the practice of a verbal warning only. No General Assembly has demanded or does demand this particular practice of a local session. Therefore I can see that it will be very hard for the next General Assembly of the OPC now to demand of all local congregations and sessions to admit guests the same way we typically do.

Also after all what br. P. wrote to defend Synod 98's decision it is not clear at all why, on the one hand, the discussion regarding differences in confession and church polity can take place within the relation of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, but on the other hand, that this matter of a verbal warning had to be made a condition before such fellowship can be established. After all, these differences in confession and church polity are also weighty matters! You will remember that they concern topics as "visible and invisible church," "the covenant," "assurance of faith," "observance of the law," and "the authority of ecclesiastical assemblies". If these matters can be discussed within the frame work of a sister church relationship, this issue of a verbal warning could also have been a fine topic of discussion to serve the mutual upbuilding in the faith and to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. For don't forget, allowing the present practice in the OPC does not, according to Synod Abbotsford 1995 and Synod Fergus 1998, undermine the OPC's confessional integrity as a true Church.

Rev. J. Mulder, Burlington, ON

## **Press Release of Synod 1998 of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia Launceston, Tasmania**

On Tuesday September 8, Synod Launceston 1998 reconvened after a ten week recess. The chairman, Rev C Bouwman, welcomed the delegates, especially the delegates who were at Synod for the first time (br J Everts of Launceston; br N Louw of Legana; br F Postmus of Launceston). The vice-chairman, Rev C Kleyn departed to Pretoria, South Africa. Rev A van Delden was appointed as vice-chairman in his place. Rev FJ van Hulst was sadly missed as a delegate of this Synod. Synod was informed that the consistory of the church of Launceston had completed its study on the judgement of Synod with respect to the teachings of Rev FJ van Hulst. Consistory agreed with Synod and found that certain teachings of Rev van Hulst are at variance with Scripture and our confessions. The church of Launceston has asked Rev van Hulst to retract the writings that contain these erroneous teachings. These have been painful times for all concerned, and many prayers have been offered that the Word and Spirit may so guide Rev van Hulst that he may continue to work fruitfully in Christ's church in Launceston.

During the course of Synod, we were privileged to welcome Rev E Viljoen, who is the successor of Rev van Hulst as minister in the Free Reformed Church of Cape Town, South Africa. He came to encourage and assist us in the difficulties that we currently face in the church. He also described certain notable events in the churches in South Africa. Over the past years, all the immigrant ministers left South Africa. Yet the Lord provided for these vacancies with indigenous ministers who have left other churches in South Africa and joined with the Free Reformed Churches. The South African churches have recently established their own theological university. They are also very active in mission work in townships that are springing up in matters of months around the major cities. This gives them the opportunity to preach the gospel to many who have never heard it before.

By way of his visit, Rev Viljoen has brought what was a somewhat distant relationship very close. Synod expressed its appreciation for the fact that the South African Churches have sent a delegate, the first time in the history of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

As far as the decisions which were made at Synod, we may mention the following: Three churches corresponded with Synod regarding the fact that Synod 1996 did not answer the appeals submitted by two churches which asked Synod to discontinue membership in the ICRC on Scriptural grounds. Upon the appeal of West Albany, Synod decided that Synod 1996 did not complete its task as agreed upon in Art 31 of the Church Order when it did not answer the appeals of Bedfordale and Byford. The church of Byford informed Synod that it will lodge its appeal again if the Free Reformed Churches of Australia enter into the ICRC again.

Synod dealt with the Rules and Procedures of Synod which govern the way by which Synod is organized and conducts its business. Synod 1996 gave deputies the mandate to simplify the rules. Synod 1998 adopted these revised rules. The Church Order (Art 44) stipulates that "some of the most experienced and capable ministers are to visit the churches each year." In order to assist these church visitors, past Synods formulated Guidelines for Church Visitation. Deputies appointed by Synod 1996 revised the Guidelines which Synod 1998 adopted.

Free Reformed Churches in Australia enjoy sister-church relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin), the Canadian Reformed Churches, and with the Reformed Churches of Sumba / Savu / Timor. Synod decided to continue sister church relations with these churches. (Synod also enjoys sister-church relations with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. Synod will deal with our relations with this sister-church after we have dealt with our contacts with the Presbyterian Churches of Eastern Australia.) The Free Reformed Churches of Australia also have contacts with other Reformed Churches. Synod decided that the Reformed Churches of Timor/Savu (Musyafir) need to be stabilized before recommendations regarding sister relationships can progress. Synod 1996 gave deputies the mandate to send a letter of appeal to the Reformed Churches of Australia. Unfortunately, the appeal reached their Synod too late. Furthermore, the RCA require such submissions be channeled through the deputies they have appointed for this. Upon request from the RCA deputies, Synod decided to convey our appeal to the RCA through a few face-to-face meetings with their deputies.

The fourth week of Synod was a very busy one and some important decisions were made with respect to relations with other churches. With thankfulness, these decisions could be made with much unanimity. Synod reaffirmed its gratitude for the faithfulness which deputies have found in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Deputies were given the mandate to express our appreciation for the principled approach which they have shown in dealing with their sister church, the Reformed Churches of Australia. At the same time, deputies were given the mandate to explain to them that, as past synods have stated, "the relationship of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and the Reformed Churches of Australia is an impediment for us to enter official relations with the Reformed Church of New Zealand." Synod also stated that "journey towards this goal for a mutually acceptable close relationship is going to be a long one where much patience and understanding is required." Synod also came to a decision with respect to the areas of concern which thus far prevented us from offering sister church relations with the PCEA. Following the method which the Canadian Reformed Church Synod 1998 implemented with respect to the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches, our deputies proposed and Synod adopted the idea of presenting the PCEA with three position papers regarding the fencing of the Lord's Table, the supervision of the pulpit and children in the covenant. In these statements, our concerns were addressed. Synod decided to offer the PCEA sister church relations as a first step toward full unity if they can agree to the above mentioned statements. This decision to enter into sister church relations is to be confirmed by a subsequent synod upon agreement and implementation of the above mentioned statements.

The FRCA has temporary ecclesiastical relations with the Free Church of Scotland (whom the Canadian Reformed Churches now have sister church relations), and with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland. We also have contact with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland. Deputies have been given the mandate to see how in a manageable way the FRCA can fulfill this obligation to these churches since they are geographically distant from us also decided to initiate contact with the Free Reformed Churches in the Philippines, which our Dutch sister churches have recognized as a true church. These churches are young in the Reformed faith. Deputies are given the mandate to see whether we can be of spiritual assistance to them.

For many years the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have modified the Church Order of Dort as far as ecclesiastical assemblies is concerned. Because of the small number of churches, we have not been able to form Classes. But over the years the churches have increased in number. Soon there will be ten congregations. Synod decided, therefore, that in the year 2000 a single classis or two classes will be established. Since Synod could not decide which is better (one classis or two), it has given deputies the mandate to provide the churches and next synod with all the pertinent information needed to come to a decision. Since it made the decision to form Classis or Classes in the year 2000, Synod did not grant the request of the church of Launceston to initiate yearly church conferences.

The church of Launceston requested Synod to decide in favour of allowing women to vote for office-bearers. They submitted an abbreviated report from the Dutch churches which decided in 1993 that the right to vote cannot be withheld from women. Synod did not grant Launceston's request. It decided that insufficient material and scriptural analysis was provided to decide on such a complex issue. Synod also took into consideration that the matter of women's voting for office-bearers does not live in the churches, and would cause great concern and even division.

During the first session, Synod had made a judgment concerning some of Rev van Hulst's teachings. Synod decided that there was one area with which the investigating committee did not deal adequately, namely, concerning Rev van Hulst's teachings about the law. Therefore Synod appointed a committee to study Rev van Hulst's teachings about the law, to be presented to the second session of Synod. During this second session, much time was given to this matter, and great care was taken to come to a well-founded decision. Synod came to the conclusion that Rev van Hulst's teachings about regeneration and conversion distorted his teaching on the law so that they did not reflect the full biblical message. Synod's findings would be presented to both Rev van Hulst and his consistory, so that they might work together with this material and correct the distortions, that Rev van Hulst might be received at the next synod which is scheduled for West Albany, 2000.

Many other decisions were made on minor matters, which the interested reader will find back in the Acts of Synod Launceston, 1998. It has been thirteen years since a synod was last convened in Tasmania. The many years and the thousands of kilometers that separate East from West do place a distance between the brotherhood. It was a good that we could become familiar with each other again. It was an added blessing of providence that Synod was hosted by the church that was experiencing heart-rending difficulties. Together we could pray to the King of the Church that He would preserve the churches in the unity of the holy, catholic faith. It was with this prayer that Synod was closed.

Rev. A. VanDelden