

THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN UNITY *

We live in an ecumenical age. Unity has become the topic of the day. Nowhere is this more evident than in the realm of Christendom. In response to many divisions and schisms in the churches there is now an urgent appeal for greater unity among Christians, particularly among those of Reformed persuasion. Appeals for unity have been voiced at international conferences (ICRC), ecclesiastical assemblies, Reformation rallies, unity symposiums, church union gatherings, etc. When we hear these appeals for unity, and note a desire to strive for unity among Christians we could consider this to be a good development.

We must, however, judge this striving for unity by the Word of God. Many of the incentives to unity proposed today cannot stand the scrutiny of Scripture. For that reason there is the need to test the spirits of the age and compare them with what the Word tells us should form the basis of Christian unity.

In a booklet entitled 'The Basis of Christian Unity', Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones has some important and relevant things to say to the church in our day. He states that unity must never be isolated or regarded in and of itself and it must never be the foremost consideration. This is stated so clearly in Acts 2:42 where fellowship follows doctrine; "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (KJV). That is a precise order in which things are placed; also in John 17 and Ephesians 4.

The present tendency to discount and to depreciate doctrine in the interest of unity is simply a denial and violation of plain New Testament teaching. We must never start with the church or with an institution, but rather with the truth, which alone creates unity. Failure to realize this point was the main trouble with the Jews at the time when our Lord was in this world. The fatal assumption was that because they were Jews they would be guaranteed salvation. They believed that membership of the nation meant that they were truly children of God. The same mistake of starting with the institution rather than with the truth was also made before the Great Reformation. Luther refused to be bound by that mighty institution, the Roman Catholic church, with her century long history. Having been liberated by the truth of justification by faith he saw clearly that truth must always come first. It must come before institution and traditions. Everything must be judged by the Word of truth.

The starting point in considering the question of unity must always be regeneration and belief of the truth. Nothing else produces unity, and it is impossible apart from this. An appearance or a facade based on anything else is clearly a fraud and a lie. People are not "one" nor in a state of unity when they disagree about the fundamentals of faith. To give the impression that they are "one" simply because of a common outward organization is misleading. To do anything which supports or encourages such an impression or appearance of unity is dishonest and sinful. Truth and untruth cannot be reconciled, and the difference between them cannot be patched over. Error is always to be exposed and denounced for truth's sake.

Furthermore, unity must neither be thought of primarily in numerical terms. Nothing is so opposed to the biblical teaching as the modern idea that numbers and a powerful organization are the things that count. Such thinking is the very opposite of the great biblical doctrine of the “remnant”.

Finally, Dr. Lloyd-Jones states that the ultimate question facing us these days is whether our faith is in men and their power to organize, or in the truth of God in Christ Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Are we primarily concerned about the size of the Church or the purity of the Church? Such purity must of course be in evidence both in doctrine and in life-style. God’s Word must remain the norm for our ecumenical thinking and acting. We must know what we believe and tenaciously hold on to the truth. If we compromise that truth in our desire for Christian unity then what remains is neither truth nor unity.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones is not the only one who has expressed concern about “the present tendency to discount and to depreciate doctrine in the interest of unity.” Francis Schaeffer warned nearly thirty years ago in *The God Who Is There* that “the church is following the irrationality of secular philosophy... Many are discarding doctrine in favour of personal experience. Others are willing to disregard crucial biblical distinctives in order to achieve external unity among all professing Christians.” (a)

J.F. MacArthur expressed similar sentiments. He writes: “True unity is rooted in truth. Jesus prayed: ‘Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth... For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one.’ (John 17:17-21, emphasis added). The unity for which He prayed is preceded by and grows out of sanctification in the truth. Fellowship that ignores or glosses over the crucial doctrines of the faith is not Christian unity; it is ungodly compromise.

Anyone today who is bold enough to suggest that someone else’s ideas or doctrines are unsound or unbiblical is dismissed at once as contentious, divisive, unloving, or unchristian. It is all right to espouse any view you wish, but it is not all right to criticize another persons views - no matter how patently unbiblical those views may be... Even to suggest that a sorting between lies and truth is necessary is viewed by many as perilously intolerant. There is a notion abroad that any dispute over doctrine is inherently evil. Concern for orthodoxy is regarded as incompatible with Christian unity. Doctrine itself is labelled divisive and those who make doctrine an issue are branded uncharitable. No one is permitted to criticize anyone else’s beliefs, no matter how unbiblical those beliefs seem to be... In the name of unity, such matters of doctrine are expressly not supposed to be contested.” (b)

The words penned by Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, Francis Schaeffer, and John F. MacArthur are, of course, very meaningful for the Reformed churches. As Reformed churches we stand, generally speaking, on the same confessional basis, yet it is apparent that also within the Reformed churches there is increasingly more tolerance to deviations from the Reformed confession of Scripture. And we know that when tolerance is valued over truth, the cause of truth always suffers. “A lasting union can only be achieved if it is built on a solid confessional basis. This requires a statement of

unequivocal allegiance to Scripture, the confessions, and a stated willingness to abide by a common Reformed church order.” (c)

“Lasting union can only be achieved if there is a sincere and active commitment to true ecumenicity. True ecumenicity represents the desire for and pursuit of full ecclesiastical unity with all Reformed believers according to the prayer of Christ in John 17:22. The pursuit of true ecumenicity must be seen not as a option, but as a duty and obligation given by God Himself. The ultimate key to lasting union is true obedience to the norms of Scripture and to the call of Christ. This is required of the church at all times, and therefore all believers must be persistent in serving the cause of unity in the truth and truth in unity.” (d)

Dr. Lloyd-Jones echoed these sentiments when he said: “God’s Word must remain the norm for our ecumenical thinking and acting. We must know what we believe and tenaciously hold on to the truth. If we compromise that truth in our desire for Christian unity then what remains is neither truth nor unity.” Therefore there is the constant need to test the spirits of the age and compare them with what the Word of God tells us should form the basis of Christian unity. There is the perpetual requirement for a return to discernment. We must “incline our hearts to understanding” and our minds to the unchanging Word of God; to the truth that endures forever. Let us then manifest our unity in Christ with a unanimous and faithful confession of the truth.

Ron Dykstra

* This editorial first appeared in the January 17, 1998 issue of Reformed Polemics. Since we are currently in the midst of discussions about church unity, this editorial about the basis of Christian unity is considered worth repeating.

a), b) Reckless Faith, John F. MacArthur

c), d) The Challenge of Church Union, Rev. J. De Jong, The Burlington Reformed Study Centre.

Why Must People Leave “Good” Churches?

By Rev. S. Kang

According to the Nederlands Dagblad dated on May 12, 2000, five hundred thirty members of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken disappeared in the year 1999. The paper says they withdrew from the churches and did not join another. My experience here in Vancouver is similar. Many members of so-called conservative Presbyterian churches, which adopt the Westminster Standards, have disappeared after immigrating to Canada from Korea. They did not stop being Christians or stop going to churches. The Korean conservative Presbyterian believers (including Kosin members - Churches with whom the Canadian Reformed Churches have Ecclesiastical Fellowship) have joined other evangelical or liberal churches. A man, who served in a Kosin church in Pusan, Korea as an elder, is now a member of a United church after coming to Canada. Another man who served in a Kosin church as a deacon has also chosen a liberal church. Why did they choose such churches? The answer to this question is very easily found. They do not have any necessity and reason to join a Reformed church. Why do they think it is not necessary and biblical to join a Reformed church? The answer is again very simple: They do not know the differences between the Reformed and the evangelicals.

As a pastor in a Korean Reformed church it is one of my duties to explain the reason why our members should come to our worship services. They pass by some evangelical churches near their houses to take part in our worship. Is it not allowed for them to go to those other churches for worship? In those churches they also believe in God. They confess salvation in Jesus Christ. They believe in the Trinity. They want to be kind and loving Christians. They mention regeneration, power of the Holy Spirit, inerrancy of the Scriptures and so on. They hear "good" sermons. They sing "good" Christian songs. They pray fervently. They are good Christian neighbors. Our members ask me: Is it really not good to attend worship services in such "good" churches? If there is no correct answer to this question, the sad and painful experience of the CGK and the Korean immigrant churches will continue.

According to our Reformed teaching the first commandment teaches about the object of our worship. Only God must be the object of our worship. The second commandment, which has frequently and easily been neglected, is given to inform us about the method of worship. We may not worship our God by human imaginations and inventions but only by His revealed Words and prescriptions. We should refuse testimony of human religious experience - even though it is interesting and can be learned from - in place of the expounding of the Words of God in our worship. We should refuse singing religious songs invented by men. We should refuse Sunday school which is widely given to children, in place of worship. By neglecting and breaking the second commandment the people of God are confused. That is the beginning of deformation. In the history of the Church deformation did not come suddenly but gradually and in a subtle way. The deformation begins not with the first commandment but with the second. That is why Moses refused the suggestion of Pharaoh in Exod. 8:25 and 10:7-11, but insisted that the people would worship their God as He had commanded. Generally the believers think that all will be fine if they believe in the Lord Jesus and worship God in any way. For our Reformed people not only the first but also the second commandment is important. For us not only to believe in God but also in what manner we are to serve Him is important.

God, our Lord, takes a very serious view of this second commandment, because He attached to this commandment: "for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me..." It is necessary also for our children to know the importance of this commandment and to give attention to it. Otherwise there is a great potential that they join an "easy-going", "feeling-good", and "everything-OK" church or stop being Christians altogether. Otherwise our religion will be not a God-centered but a man-oriented institution. We know very well that the Pharisaic religion in the time of Jesus was humanistic. It was a religion that placed the show of human piety and good works in the centre of their life. The religion seemed very strong and popular like the beautiful golden decoration and strong stone building of the Temple at the time of Jesus. They worshipped God. But they did not do it in the manner which God wanted. Therefore even though the Jewish religion and the temple in Jerusalem seemed very solid and strong, they had to be destroyed.

Why did many churches, which once had been faithfully strong and doctrinally sound churches, go astray? One of the reasons could be that they neglected the second commandment. Serious problems will not appear immediately after abandoning this commandment. But in the next generations the deadly problems will soon surface: unbelief and de-Christianization. Even though

the evangelicals wrongly say that our Reformed worship style is dry, we should be alert for the prescriptions contained in the second commandment. We should not be attracted by external beauty of human devices, but by the things of God. We have the concrete promises of blessings and prosperity which are given to only those who want to keep not only the first but also the second commandment. Through keeping this commandment we should preserve the Reformed distinctiveness continually, so that we remain true Christian churches. That is the only basis for us to ask people to come and join us.

(Rev. Kang is minister of the First Korean Presbyterian Church in Vancouver. He is missionary, at large, of the Presbyterian Church of Korea - Kosin.)

PERSONAL REPORT OF VISITS AND CONTACTS WITH THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE UNITED STATES (RCUS) OVER 1999 AND 2000 by Rev. J. Moesker
SYNOD HAMBURG, MINNESOTA – MAY 2000

On May 8th to the 10th br. W. Gortemaker, Rev. Jonker and I made a visit to the 254th Synod of the Reformed Church in the US. We set out at just after three on the morning of May 8th for the town of Hamburg, near Minneapolis, as we wanted to be there in time for a meeting with their Committee for Inter-church Relations scheduled for 1:00 - 5:00 PM that day. We made it in time, and were warmly received at St. Paul's Evangelical Reformed Church. This church returned to the RCUS fold some years before, after going along with the 1934 union into the Evangelical Reformed Church and the 1957 union into the United Church of Christ. One of the "left-overs" from that time away from the RCUS was an altar at the front of the church (see history of RCUS above).

We had intense and frank but also brotherly discussions with their committee about some matters which we were still not definite about (e.g. the authority of their classes and synods, Sunday as day of rest and reading of the law in the worship service, instruction of youth). After our meeting, we enjoyed supper with their committee. Then we prepared for the evening worship service before Synod, which started at 7:30 PM.

Again, the liturgy in this service was similar to ours. The service commenced with the ringing of the church bells. It included recitation of the Apostles Creed and reading of the law. There was also responsive reading of Psalms 121-122, and the congregational choir sang a couple of selections. The text for the sermon was the first few verses of Psalm 85, and was about the Lord reviving His church. After the doxology and a moment of silent prayer, the service ends with the ringing of the bells again. After the service there was roll call for synod. Ministers introduced elders who had not been delegated to Synod before. Synod is an annual event, and has a good social aspect to it too. Many ministers from distant churches also brought their wives and some of their children.

In the RCUS all the churches delegate, with credentials, a minister and an elder to Synod. The Synod acts as a senate of the whole church. Every day Synod was opened with devotions and with roll call. At the initial roll call there were 35 ministers and 27 elders present. The "bar" is then defined as consisting of those who may take part in the deliberations, namely delegates and

fraternal delegates from other churches. There was a fraternal delegate of the OPC present. Visitors are not in the “bar” of Synod. We were seated as visitors along with two United Reformed brothers and an Associate Reformed Presbyterian representative.

The president, vice-president and clerk of synod were chosen by ballot. Rev. Vernon Pollema of Shafter, California was President, Rev. Robert Grossmann of Garner, Iowa, was chosen Vice President, Rev. Frank Walker of Bakersfield, California was chosen as Stated Clerk, and Mr. Clayton Greiman of Garner, Iowa, was elected Treasurer of the churches for the coming year. The President, Vice President, Stated Clerk and a ruling elder are constituted as an “Executive Committee,” which carries out certain routine business enacted by Synod during the ensuing year. Synods of the RCUS also choose standing committees to carry out Synod actions in home and foreign missions, publishing, interchurch relations and several other functions.

Two new ministers and one new church (Minneapolis) were welcomed into the RCUS. During the course of Synod, standing committee chairmen introduced their reports and recommendations, and the latter were voted on by oral “yea” and “nay” votes. Everything is done according to parliamentary procedure. A number of overtures were dealt with in this fashion, including ministerial aid for retired ministers and their wives or for the widows of ministers. This aid comes from a common church fund administered by synods. Another overture concerned the searching for a more suitable hymnal for the RCUS. Unfortunately we were not present for the discussion of that one anymore.

One interesting matter that was dealt with while we were present were the status of position papers on certain topics such as 6-day creation and women’s voting at congregational meetings. Do these position papers have the authority of creeds and is assent required to become a member or especially a minister in the RCUS? Or do they have a lesser degree of authority? The body agreed that they are not to be sort of fourth Form of Unity or carry the authority of creeds, though they do have some judicial weight. This interested us since our churches originated from statements made by Synod in 1944 in the Netherlands about the covenant which were made binding on all the members as kind of “Fourth Form of Unity.” We were glad that the RCUS brothers recognized the dangers of that sort of binding to those documents, as became apparent in the lively discussion about this matter. A motion was introduced which stated, “That the recommendations of position papers adopted by a judicatory of the RCUS are authoritative advice to the members under the authority of that judicatory and serve as its witness to the world of its understanding of Holy Scripture and our subordinate ordinances.” An additional explanatory statement from the Committee’s report was also adopted, stating

“That a position paper is intended to enlighten and instruct the Church on matters not spelled out in the ordinances of the Church, with the goal of promoting unity within the Church. Those position papers are not judicial decisions, nor can they be used as a charge in an accusation.

Nevertheless, the expectation should be that when a matter relating to a position taken comes to the judicatory, the adjudication will be consistent with the position taken. Should the RCUS desire to make a position strictly binding, it must use the process spelled out in Article 104 (of the RCUS Constitution).”

Another matter of interest was the proposal of the Christian Education Committee to no longer consider Westminster Seminaries in Philadelphia and California as approved seminaries, due to the promotion in those institutions of questionable ideas about for example, the origin of the world and about liturgy. These teachings were confirmed by committee members who visited these institutions and spoke with their senates. It was a heated and emotional debate. Some wanted to give Westminster another chance, while others said that enough time had already been given. We noted that there has been a long history of contact with both Westminster Seminaries, and a number of RCUS ministers are graduates. However, it was ultimately decided not to continue support for Westminster West (California), but to continue to investigate Westminster East (Philadelphia) and as yet maintain it as approved institution.

The interesting thing about seminaries is also that the RCUS draws its candidates for ministry from a number of different seminaries, including Mid-American Reformed Seminary near Chicago and New Geneva Seminary in Pennsylvania. These institutions all had representatives who spoke at length at synod to “advertise” their seminaries as good institutions of learning. It made us all the more thankful for the Theological College in Hamilton which belongs to the churches themselves. Some years ago the RCUS had entertained the idea of an own college, but that didn’t get off the ground. It leaves them to send their students for the ministry to a variety of seminaries with all the dangers associated with that. We did notice, however, also a growing appreciation for MARS as seminary.

As one of the observers from the Canadian Reformed Churches, I was given the opportunity to introduce our churches as well as the college in Hamilton at Synod. It seems that this address was appreciated by the men at Synod. It is included here below.

We had many informal discussions with RCUS as well as the URCNA men over the good meals provided there at St. Paul’s Evangelical Reformed Church in Hamburg. It was good to get to know more of the people in the RCUS, and we had a definite and growing sense that they very much want to be Reformed in doctrine and practice. May God bless also the contact we had at these meetings for His church-gathering work. After all, we don’t look for the work of people in these contacts, but for His work.

ADDRESS TO 254TH SYNOD OF REFORMED CHURCH IN THE US, MAY 8-10 2000

Esteemed brothers, officers of Synod;

I consider it a great honour to be able to bring you and the churches of the RCUS sincere greetings on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Rev. Jonker, elder Gortemaker and I are three quarters of the Subcommittee for Relations with the RCUS. Our other member, elder Art Poppe, who is a farmer, was unable to attend because of fieldwork. We thank you for the hospitality and kindness which we again experience being among you.

Last year, Rev. Syms made a quick visit to Carman, Manitoba and met with our committee to sort of introduce us to your churches, as we are a new subcommittee appointed by Synod Fergus 1998. It was a good beginning, which made us all the more eager to get to know the RCUS better. Near the end of last year, then, three of us on the way to a Regional Synod West meeting in Taber, Alberta, drove in a loop and made a Sunday visit to South Dakota and attended worship in Eureka

and Herried. We enjoyed this worship and were privileged to enjoy supper and some good conversation with Rev. Robert Davis. Then, in March all four of us were able to worship at Salem-Ebenezer Reformed Church in Manitowoc and meet extensively with your Committee for Interchurch Relations. We were well-received and had very warm and frank discussions with them, not only in our meetings, but also over some excellent meals provided by the ladies of that church. I think we went home with expanded girths as well as hearts.

We again took the opportunity provided by the occasion of this Synod to continue discussions with your committee. We also wanted to see your Synod in action. And again, I must say we have been well-received and also well-fed. It is a real joy to get to know you and to see for ourselves the evidence of the Lord's work among you.

Compared with the RCUS the Can. Ref. Churches are just infants in diapers yet on the North American continent. Over the past month or so two of our churches celebrated 50th anniversaries, having been instituted in 1950. Immigrants from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands Liberated tried to join the Christian Reformed Church as well as the Protestant Reformed Church first, but found they could not do so. The Christian Reformed Churches continued relations with the Synodical Churches in the Netherlands, the same churches which had bound its membership beyond Scripture in 1945 and thrown those immigrants out in the old country. The Protestant Reformed Churches adopted a Declaration of Principles in 1950 which bound its members to a doctrine of the covenant which was basically the same as adopted by the Synodical churches in the Netherlands. So in 1950 those immigrants instituted churches which they called the Canadian Reformed Churches. They did so because they wanted to remain Reformed in doctrine and in church government. In other words, Biblical in doctrine and non-hierarchical in church government.

From those couple of churches in 1950, the Canadian Reformed Churches have grown into 48 churches and 3 small home congregations. Four of those churches and one home congregation are in the US. The initial growth in the 1950's was through immigration from the Netherlands, but that is now a trickle. Some of the growth is through others joining these churches. More and more names of non-Dutch origin appear in the membership lists. A number of churches now have local home mission efforts. A new one is just underway in Vancouver, where a minister of Chinese descent is about to begin urban mission in the large Chinese community there. Most of the growth by far, however, has been internal growth, through the birth of covenant children. Canadian Reformed people in general are convinced that the Lord desires covenant children, godly offspring as He says in Malachi 2:15. So the families are larger than the average Canadian family, and there is much emphasis on Reformed instruction and education. Most of the youth attend catechism classes for six or seven years before profession of faith, or confirmation as you call it in the RCUS. And almost all Canadian Reformed youth attend Reformed elementary and high schools or are home schooled. Covenant education and instruction one of the strengths of the Canadian Reformed Churches. However, no matter how strenuous our own efforts, its still the Lord who works faith, and we see the Lord's blessing in that strong internal growth. We have to do our best, but it is the Lord alone who gives blessing on what we do.

The Canadian Reformed Churches convene a Synod normally once every three years. Our next Synod will be convened DV by the church of Neerlandia, Alberta, in May 2001. The last Synod, Synod Fergus dealt very much with relations with other churches. One of the more difficult matter which that Synod had to deal with was the matter of our relations with the OPC.

In our relations with the OPC there were still two outstanding issues which previous Synods wanted dealt with, namely confessional membership (holding of all members to the confessional standards) and fencing of the Lord's Table (mainly about supervision of the Lord's Supper for guests as well as members). Synod proposed an agreement on these two matters to General Assembly of the OPC. Unfortunately, however, contact has in the meantime been terminated by the OPC because of statements made in the past about OPC ministers by someone who is now minister in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Hopefully this matter can be resolves and the Proposed Agreement on Fencing of the Lord's Table and Confessional Membership can be tabled again.

The Canadian Reformed Churches are also in the midst of talks with the Eglisee Reformee du Quebec (Reformed Church of Quebec). We are excited that in predominantly Roman Catholic Quebec there are churches of distinctly Reformed character. They wish to carry on the heritage of the French Huguenots, and though they are very small, they are aggressive in outreach. We hope that our relations with these churches may blossom into close fellowship and cooperation. One of their churches is presently actively exchanging information and visits with the church of Owen Sound in order to learn more about each other.

Relations with the United Reformed Churches were also dealt with by Synod 1998. The so-called Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity (with those who have left the Christian Reformed Church) were given the mandate to continue fraternal dialogue with the United Reformed Churches in North America with a view towards establishing federative unity, and to continue exploring possibilities of federative unity with the Orthodox Reformed Churches. I might add that there appears to be a growing towards each other especially of the United Reformed and Canadian Reformed Churches. This is also due to local talks between churches taking place in numerous locations.

As the RCUS has taken a strong stand contra women's participation in election of officebearers, I might mention yet that Synod Fergus 1998 also had to deal with some appeals and overtures regarding that. They were all denied on the ground that the proper route for these matters to come to Synod, namely via the minor assemblies, had not been followed.

With regard to relations with the Reformed Churches in the US, Synod 1998 recieved letters from various churches in the federation with questions about some views and practices in your churches. Synod acknowledged with gratitude the commitment of the RCUS to the Word of God and the Reformed heritage, but declined your invitation to enter into a fraternal relationship at this time. Our committee was mandated to continue pursuing a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship, and to look into some of the questions from some of our churches concerning supervision of the Lord's Supper, the doctrine of the church, Sunday observance, the concept of erasure, and membership in NAPARC.

We are trying to fulfill this mandate, and we have found your committee and our visits most helpful in that. We have to draw up a report after this meeting for a September meeting of the full

Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad, and that report will then be finalized for next Synod to be convened in May 2001.

Brothers, we are delighted to be among you here, among people who by God's grace cherish the Reformed faith and want to continue in that. This is a great encouragement to us, and its our hope and prayer that it may come to a close relationship with each other as churches who want to "keep the pattern of sound teaching" as the apostle Paul says 2 Timothy 1. God bless you in your work here, and may it all lead to the glory of the Saviour who is our Chief Shepherd.

(This address was followed by a short introduction to the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches)

CHURCH NEWS

Reply to Dutch delegates at Synod West Albany – 2000

Esteemed brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ!

Our Lord, we confess, gathers His church all over the globe. This church is holy in His sight, its members washed in Jesus' blood and renewed by Jesus' Spirit.

You have been in our midst for five days, and seen something of His work in our midst. You have seen fruits of the Spirit among us; you have seen also that works of the flesh remain. You have seen us before the face of our Lord and Saviour, seeking His way; you have also seen us speak to each other, struggle together to find the way the Lord wants us to go. You for your part have provided us with your good counsel in an effort to help us find the will of the Lord for us. In the midst of our struggles, we thank you for your presence and your counsel. More, we thank the Lord that He has sent brothers from afar to stand beside and encourage us in the discussions of the last three days. In truth, the Lord gathers a catholic church, and we are privileged to experience something of that in the fellowship we could enjoy with you these brief five days.

You have heard the decision we made in relation to the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. With gratitude and unanimity we could decide "to continue the sister-relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands according to the adopted rules", on the explicit ground that "the RCN gives evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, their Reformed Confessions and the Church Order." We thank the Lord for His church-gathering and church-preserving work in your midst.

We realise that you in your corner of the world –just like we in ours- "wrestle against ... principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). That is why we are delighted and grateful to hear from you that "the churches in the Netherlands are alive and kicking" –your words, br terBeek!- and it's a "life given by the Holy Spirit." We rejoice that "there is a lot of spiritual and material investment in the missionary task of the church in the Netherlands as well as abroad." We rejoice that in your congregations "there is faithful preaching and there is an attentive hearing [of] the Word of God. Classes, regional synods and the general synod earnestly seek to submit themselves

in their thoughts and decisions to the guidance of the Spirit by the Word.” Yes, we rejoice at the work of the Lord in your midst.

Satan attacks. And we are weak. It pleases the Lord to preserve His church (amongst other means) through the care of brothers – be they close by or farther away. You have seen need to address us on particular points so that we may serve our God and Master more fully according to His revealed Word. We thank you for your input, and you may be assured that we will not simply push your words to one side. At the same time, we for our part have today adopted a decision that mandates deputies to “discuss” with your deputies “some concerns as to developments in the RCN.” Deputies in their report (says the decision made today) “have pointed out and given some evidence about some specific concerns.” In your address to us last night, you expressed “serious objections” to deputies’ report, in part because you heard in the report criticism of your recent Synod without adequate evidence. You have since heard that deputies were not wishing to be judgmental, but – within the limits of the time available to them since they received your Acts- were seeking to alert Synod’s attention to areas which they felt needed further investigation. Please be assured, then, that neither deputies nor the Australian churches question your integrity. Meanwhile, deputies have a mandate to do homework in relation to the concerns raised in the report. The Lord willing, we can speak further about these concerns when delegates from our midst attend your next Synod in the year 2002.

Satan attacks. In that same passage of his letter to the Ephesians where Paul speaks about wrestling against the principalities and powers, he also gives a word of instruction and encouragement to the saints of Ephesus – an encouragement that remains so true for us in the year of our Lord 2000. For the Spirit of God moves the apostle to instruct the Ephesian saints in their daily struggles to “stand” (vs. 14). “Stand therefore,” he says, and that’s to say that you in the Netherlands and we in Australia do not have to duck and to find trenches and go on the defensive in the face of Satan’s attacks. For our Lord Jesus Christ has triumphed and Satan is defeated. “Stand therefore,” and that’s also to say that you in the Netherlands and we in Australia do not have to go on the offensive (as if there is enemy terrain that we still have to conquer), for –again- our Lord Jesus Christ has triumphed, is today Lord of all. All you need to do –and we too- is to “stand”, all six foot of you, stand tall in a world that is Christ’s. And, as Israel repeatedly witnessed in the Old Testament, the Lord will fight the battle and preserve His Church. That’s His promise.

Brothers, you are about to return to your churches and your homes. We thank you for coming, we pray that the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ go with you. Please pass on to our sisters in the Netherlands sincere greetings from your sisters in Australia.

Good bye and God bless.