

SYNODILIZING

On the inside pages of this issue you will find the details of Synod 1995 in Abbotsford. There are highlights of the speeches that were made and the decisions taken. There are also some other things that this Synod brought to mind. Some reflection may lead to insight from others.

Without too much doubt almost everyone knows that a Synod is the broadest assembly of our church federation. It is the body where matters that could not be finished at a minor assembly form the agenda.

Article 30 of the Church Order states, in part: "A major assembly shall deal with those matters only which could not be finished in the minor assembly or which belong to its Churches in common."

With this in mind we can understand subjects such as the Book of Praise, Bible Translations, and contact with other federations as proper agenda items for a Synod. But how do these matters reach a Synod? According to Rev. W. van Oene's "With Common Consent" matters for Synod can only come from Regional Synod. Matters for Reg. Synod can only come from Classis and matters for Classis can only come from Consistories. This appears to be a logical conclusion from Article 30 of the Church Order.

Yet it appears that at times jumps are made. Recently the Church at Ottawa asked Classis to state that the Reformed Church in Quebec (ERQ) was a true church and to ask Synod to also do so. In this sequence of events Reg. Synod has been bypassed.

The churches of Langley and Aldergrove asked Synod to appoint a committee for contact, with the Free Reformed Churches. They were told by Synod that they had not (properly) passed the matter through Classis; but what about Reg. Synod?

Another procedural matter that was dealt with was the submission of individual overtures or letters, or even appeals. Much discussion was held about the admissibility of these submissions.

Previous Synods have set precedent by admitting such submissions. Yet this time there were many such submissions, and some delegates were inclined to declare them all inadmissible.

The correct procedure is still not so clear. If one feels an urgent need to address a Synod about an upcoming agenda item, or if one disagrees with a previous decision, or if one wishes to advise about a Committee report that has circulated the churches for input, what procedure must be followed? Must every submission pass from individual to Consistory to Classis to Reg. Synod and finally (if everyone agrees) to Synod? Or may matters once on the agenda be addressed by churches (only) directly to Synod? Is it correct that access to Synods by individuals should be forbidden?

These are matters that need discussion within the churches.

With the precedents having been set it will be difficult to deny access until the matter is raised via the proper route.

Technology has also raised its head at the Abbotsford Synod. The information highway, in the form of the internet, sending electronic mail around the globe, was not always viewed with appreciation by many of the delegates.

The fact of this technology can not be denied, nor the openness of the plenary sessions. Some years ago br. John de Vos attended a Synod with press credentials to report to a Dutch newspaper about happenings at Synod. Interested church members have at times had to wait three, four, or six months for the Acts. Hopefully the computer age will significantly reduce the lag this time.

Interest in the matters concerning the churches in common is to be appreciated; while, on the other hand, the comfort of the delegates to openly and frankly discuss matters may be hampered by an audience around the world.

Although the Acts of Synod will have to remain the task of the clerk, possibly official credentials can be given for press coverage, so that responsible reporting can provide eager church members with accurate decisions. A reporter who has access to accurate material will make a far better report than if he must rely on what he can hear in plenary session. PdB

SYNOD ABBOTSFORD -1995

WARNING!

Before another word is said let us be absolutely clear about the fact that the following is gleaned from plenary sessions, without the aid of discussion reports or copies of final decisions. Much of the information used in this article comes from reports forwarded by e-mail (electronic mail in the internet) by br and sr. P. Vander Gugten. The decisions have also been verified by others who attended the plenary sessions. But we wish to stress that the purpose of the report is to give a general idea of what was decided and not to give definitive detail. Readers who wish to question or understand more fully the decisions are urged to be patient and wait for the Acts.

Guests

In addition to the guests we reported about in our last issue Synod was also visited Rev. Jack Peterson from the OPC and Rev. Stewart from the Free Reformed Church of Scotland. Rev. Peterson had been at Synod before in 1983 and 1989. In his remarks to Synod he explained that the OPC will celebrate its 60th anniversary next year. He also explained that one of the reasons that the OPC is still related to the Christian Reformed Churches is that they were the only federation that sent encouragement to the OPC General Assembly when it was struggling for right and truth in the 1930's and 40's. He further explained that the OPC had ecclesiastical fellowship with eleven churches from Ireland to Korea. They also perform Mission work in Uganda, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Bulgaria, China, Moscow, Burma, N. Korea, Peru and the Philippines. He remarked favourably about their involvement in the ICRC and their fraternal relations with Presbyterian and Reformed churches in Australia and New Zealand.

Rev. Peterson expressed the conviction in the OPC that the Church must be one, and rejoiced that there were only three divergences left between us. He also noted the thankfulness within the OPC for being able to learn from the Reformed Churches such things as the redemptive historical

approach to preaching. Many libraries among the OPC have grown with titles such as the Schilder Trilogy and Promise and Deliverance.

Speaking further about the divergences, Rev. Peterson noted that the OPC places much emphasis on mission work and explained the difficulty they would have in sending those reached by mission work to five years of catechism before allowing them to celebrate the sacraments. They are convinced that when faith is visible the Holy Spirit is at work and will complete it through the Word. He believes that we know one another by now and that it's time to make a decision. The OPC wants to enter into full unity with the Can. Ref. Churches.

In his response to Rev. Peterson, elder G. Nordeman noted the irony in the help the Chr. Ref. Churches extended to the OPC while having no room for the Liberated churches that came from Holland. He again reminds everyone that the Committee for Contact with the OPC recognizes that the OPC continues to be committed to Scripture and to the defense of the Reformed heritage.

Elder Nordeman also reminded Rev. Peterson and others that the matter of the OPC is the most sensitive on Synod's agenda and that it has the potential of affecting the unity of the Canadian Ref. Church federation. In this regard he asks the OPC to be patient and understanding.

Rev. Stewart of the FCS rejoiced in the fact that he could address the assembly from a sister church. He reviewed some of the history of the FCS. He explained how higher criticism and liberalism in the early 1900's convinced a small group that they could no longer stay in the mother church. When relating that the FCS has 5000 communicant members and 20,000 non-communicants he explained that many live under the conviction that they are unworthy of partaking from the Lord's Supper.

There are 160 FCS congregations with 150 ministers. They have their own church controlled theological college in Edinburgh with an average of 30 students and five full time professors. Their federation emphasizes unity among Reformed churches, honour for the Lord's Day, family worship, personal holiness, and the covenant. They have a strong Calvinist influence. Their instruction of the youth is thorough. They must all learn the catechism from front to finish.

Rev. Stewart wished to impress on the assembly that his greetings were sincerely meant. The FCS admires the Three Forms of Unity. With regard to the admission to the Lord's Supper the FCS does not work with attestations. However the elders do examine each guest before they are admitted to the Lord's Table. There is no laxity with regard to this matter.

There are three concerns that the FCS still has, although they do not want them to affect the ecclesiastical fellowship. These concerns are the fact that they maintain exclusive Psalm singing, no accompaniment with the singing, and life long terms for elders. On the other side of the scale they wish to learn from the Reformed churches how they are able to maintain such a large group of young people.

Elder H. A. Berends responded to Rev. Stewart. He confirmed that there are some differences but also many similarities. He also rejoiced at this first opportunity to receive a representative from a new sister in Scotland at our Synod. He expressed the hope that the bonds may grow between the FCS congregations in Ontario and the churches of Ontario North. Elder Berends asked Rev.

Stewart to pass on greetings to the General Assembly in Edinburgh, where, differing from our practice, they show approval for motions by stamping their feet.

The Issues and Decisions

With regard to the Book of Praise, Synod could not agree with the proposal of the Book of Praise Committee's language update of the Nicene Creed. It made some alternate recommendations to the Committee for analysis and approval at the next Synod. It also made a special point about not speaking about believing "in" the Church.

There was further a strong feeling at Synod for an alternate melody for Hymn 1. By previous Synods the Committee had been instructed to find an alternate melody that would include the phrase "a holy catholic church". Although a melody composed by br. Zwart in the Netherlands has circulated in the churches no concrete proposal has come from the Committee. Synod decided that some more work should be done by the Committee as yet.

A grade 4 class from Yarrow elementary (Teacher, Mr. J. Siebenga) asked Synod to change Hymn 46:2 from "it" to "her" when referring to the Church. They were advised to direct their remarks to the Committee for the Book of Praise.

Synod was requested to address the matter of women voting again because some deemed that the fact that the churches in the Netherlands had gone this route would be new grounds for Canada to consider. Synod decided, with a vote of 9-7, that this was not so.

The matter of contact with the Free Reformed Churches was on the Synod table by way of a request for a Synodical Committee to initiate contact with the FRC on a federal level. Some of the brothers felt that this matter should have gone via the minor assemblies before it could rightly be dealt with on a Synod agenda. Others felt that it was a request that had already been made to a Synod as 1974, thus it could not be considered a new matter. After some discussion this request was declared inadmissible (9-7).

A request by the Church at Winnipeg to clarify that concurring advice of Deputies of Reg. Synod is needed when admitting churches to the federation was denied.

The matter of Bible Translations led to a decision to recommend the NIV for use in the Churches; to leave it in the freedom of the Churches if they feel compelled to use another translation; to mandate the Committee for Bible Translations to study and pass on comments and concerns submitted to Synod about passages to the NIV Translation Centre (15-1).

The request from the Church of Ottawa to declare the Reformed Churches in Quebec (ERQ) a true church was responded to by appointing deputies for contact. They will be mandated to discuss differences in confession, relationship with the Presbyterian Church of America, the Chr. Ref. Church, and to report to the next Synod. This was a unanimous decision.

The recommendations that were adopted by Synod regarding the matter of relations with the OPC have been reported as follows;

- a) to thank the Committee for Contact with the OPC for the work done

- b) to acknowledge with gratitude the commitment of the OPC to be faithful to the Scriptures and to defend the Reformed heritage
- c) to note with gratitude the OPC's continued warnings against unscriptural course taken by the Christian Reformed Church
- d) to continue the CCOPC with the mandate:
- 1. To work towards formalizing a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship taking into account the rules of 1992 [72 IV.A 1.e.i.ii.] to arrive at an agreement regarding fencing of the Lord's Supper and Confessional Membership
 - 2. To show that we as churches have a great discomfort with the relationship with Chr. Ref. Church
 - 3. To continue discussions about the differences between the two federations using the rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship
 - 4. To give regular reports
 - 5. To express the hope that in this way the protracted discussions can be concluded by the establishment of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the next three years and be finalized at Synod 1998

e) to deny the request for full Ecclesiastical Fellowship at this time

f) to deny the various requests to break relationships with the OPC, and Scotland and Korea.

{The reader is reminded that this is not the definitive wording. It can only be found in the official Acts.}

A number of churches and individuals appealed decisions of Reg. Synod regarding the admission of the Church at Denver, Colorado and her minister, Rev. M. Pollock, to the American - Canadian Reformed federation. Synod denied these appeals.

STUDYING ON THE MAY LONG WEEKEND

A report on two speeches by Bernice Vandenbos

Making Choices as a Covenant Child

By Rev. W. Wielenga

Rev. Wielenga defined the meaning of his topic as the need to decide between various possibilities. To do so one needs options. He explained that the object of the choosing was our way of life, and that we as covenant children, were the subject. The means by which we choose is our human will, either consciously or automatically, our will initiates action.

God created us so that we could do as we wanted. He gave us a will. It was created to do His will. We need to will His will, it is authoritative. It is our will that is functioning, but it is only functioning properly when it is limited to our Father's will.

One could ask how this is freedom, but we should think of freedom in Scriptural terms. If we do not follow God's will we become enslaved to sin.

At first our parents make decisions for us. As we grow older they also explain why they make these decisions for us. Later we start to have options while still remaining protected by the parental home from making wrong choices. We learn as we go along that our will must be ruled and formed by God's will.

Along with growing up come more independence, more responsibility, and more choice. There are several ways in which we can react to these. We could panic in the conviction that we are not ready for all this, we could run scared. On the other hand we could jump for joy and with reckless abandon go forward, showing no sense of responsibility. This is a sign of someone who is not ready but takes the plunge anyway. A third option would be to go in confidence but with care. Such a person looks back from time to time to remember the lessons of the past. He/she is ready for the challenge, puts their skills into practice and is willing to ask for help and guidance.

Of course a mixture of these responses can also be found in many individuals. As we grow up maturity levels vary. Our parental instruction also plays a role, but don't fall into the trap of blaming your parents as a matter of course! Rather have a good look at your self and work at your weaknesses.

A particular point of interest is the period of adolescence. Normally it is a transition stage between the child and the adult. It is the time between immaturity and maturity. But in our present time it appears to be a "staying period" for many. People don't want to grow up. They don't want to face or accept the responsibility and commitment of adulthood. In this state there is plenty of instant ratification without responsibility for the consequences (e.g. Financial, sexual, etc.). People want to postpone commitment. When commitments have to be made or consequences of choice appear, freedom seems to be limited. The media, and especially advertisements, encourage us to dream for more, for better. But ADULTHOOD is the goal, not adolescence.

How do we make the right choices? We must establish what our basic goal for life is. Is it power or pleasure? Is it the earthly kingdom or is it God's kingdom? Then we must also consider our abilities, our circumstances, the advice of others and most of all the consequences of our choice to God's glory.

The world teaches that everything is at our fingertips. We are sovereign. We can do what we want and society will take care of the consequences. See how they want us to choose about abortions, how we should use condoms rather than consider the consequences for ourselves, others, and especially God.

But remember that we are covenant children. God has a claim on us and we have an obligation to Him. The coming of His kingdom is to be our aim. That is what He has taught us. But we are sinful.

We are unable to conform to His will. By our sinful nature we choose the easiest way. But Ps.14 reminds us that only a fool counts God out. We must consider the eternal value of making choices, but we are comforted in the fact that He remains sovereign. We are not left to our own devices.

Why Believe? The Practical Impact

By Rev. de Gelder

Someone once said that he would like to be a Christian if the other Christian would look happy. How happy are we about our faith, our Christianity? It should be visible in our Words and Deeds. (Col.3)

We should talk about our faith. Not just as a religious discussion, but rather in everyday activities. Too often we separate these two.

Sometimes the Christian school appears too safe for us. There appears to be no need to defend our faith like there would be in a public school. But we need to learn, also at our Christian schools, to speak about our faith in daily activities.

And what about our deeds! We must check our own lives to see if faith is evident in what we do. Sure Sundays are different, but what about the rest of the week? Are we afraid to be too conspicuous? There are many nice non-Christian people, so how are we different?

Sometimes it appears that we are different because we have added religion to an otherwise completely normal life. This is wrong. Life without faith is not life. Eph 4:17ff, and Gal. 5. How we are must come out of our faith life.

We are free and unbelievers are not free, they are slaves. When we study God's Word we will recognize this. Our freedom is that we are able to say "No" to wrong things Col.3.

We need to work on our personal relationship with our Saviour, and then faith will become a living thing in our life. Then we will have no need to create a separation in our lives. Then we will be able show, in word and deed, the joy our faith.