

CALL TO REFORMATION

The undersigned members of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland¹ extend to *all fellow church-members* an urgent call to reform the church by returning to the reverent obedience to God's Word and faithfulness to the Confessions. We extend this call now that the General Synod of Zuidhorn is closed and her decisions are binding. We are not motivated by conservatism or the desire to pick a fight, but by our great concern and profound sorrow about the decline in our churches.

The LORD has richly blessed the Gereformeerde Kerken and caused them to be a blessing. As pillar and foundation of the truth they functioned through God's grace also as a salting salt in society, and as a powerhouse for community and national life. But now we have to see how the same churches are in decline, yes subject even to deformation and corruption.

The need for reformation: general decline in the churches

This decline is not equally noticeable in every respect in all the congregations. But that fact does not lessen our mutual responsibility in true brotherly love!

We mention the following²:

- many congregations are becoming increasingly tolerant of disobedience to the LORD's commandments. This is caused by the growing worldliness³ in every respect. As church members decide for themselves how to spend the Sunday, its observation as *the day of rest and of remembering His great deeds* is becoming less and less a matter of obedience to God's fourth commandment. We are reducing our service to Him and thereby dishonour His Name.
- The *holiness of marriage* is under great pressure. It is not only alarming that the number of divorces in the churches is increasing, but especially that several Church Councils no longer exercise church discipline in cases of divorce (or re-marriage after divorce) that are forbidden by God's Word. This failure to discipline is in direct conflict with Christ's express commandment.
- *the confession about the church* according to Scripture and the Confessions is also becoming a victim of the growing worldliness. Church members are letting themselves increasingly be guided by personal spiritual needs and emotions rather than by the requirements of the Lord Jesus Christ who gathers His bride, His church. This lack of understanding about the church is also showing up in the devaluation and even denial of the LORD's work in the reformation of His churches throughout the ages - lastly in the Liberation and in keeping His churches faithful to Scripture and the Confessions in the nineteen-sixties.
- *Life is a unity*. The LORD used the Liberation to bless the Gereformeerde Kerken again with the benefits of the real meaning of Articles 27-32 of the Belgic Confession.
- That reformation bore rich fruits. The conviction that the church is the powerhouse of life was put into practice by the establishment of a diversity of Reformed organisations. The relationship with the church took on renewed meaning, especially in the field of education when widespread generous financial support by church-

¹ These are the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland who met in Synod Zuidhorn 2002/03

² More information can be found in LWVKO Brochure 2, *Let us repent – a call to reformation*, available by request from LWVKO@aanvulling.nl or from The Treasurer of LWVKO, c/o Dr van Dalelaan 42, 3851 JB Ermelo (phone 0341-550090) or by downloading from www.aanvulling.nl or www.reformanda.nl. A model letter to the Church Council is available by request from The Secretary of Reformanda, c/o Gaykingastraat 20, 9791 CH Ten Boer, or from wwildeboer@scarlet.nl

³ The Dutch has 'secularisatie' (= 'secularisation'); the process that makes a religious person or organisation more worldly. Since 'secular' here means 'worldly', a literal English equivalent of 'secularisation' would be 'worldly-isation' (= 'turning worldly').

members made it possible to open many reformed schools.

But today there is waning appreciation for those benefits, and the *continuing reformation* is rejected. This is happening because the simple and scriptural confession about the church is being exchanged again for the old heresies of the pluriformity of the church and the invisible church. The results can be seen in all kinds of inter-church cooperation and in the blurring of the scriptural church boundaries. Those developments in turn have further strengthened the grip of secularisation on reformed life.

- The many hymns from *the Liedboek voor de kerken* were accepted in silence owing to the false notion that in the worship service not the glory of God but the believer's personal thinking and feeling stand central. Ambiguous texts hiding false doctrine are taken for granted in the process. Some of the rhymed versions of Bible texts misrepresent God's Word through the omission of references to the antithesis and the demand and wrath of the covenant. The use of the Psalms as Songbook of the covenant is consequently coming under more and more pressure.
- *The liturgy* is undergoing sweeping changes owing to the desire to satisfy personal initiatives in creativity. Excesses are no longer reined in, and the situation is getting worse in several congregations.
- *The preaching* is exploring new directions. The catch-cry 'The hearer must come more in focus' is threatening to make the hearer himself more and more the subject of the preaching. The scriptural characterisation of the preaching as the administration of reconciliation is freely thrown into doubt.
- Most alarming is that *far-reaching bible-critical views* (for example on the inspiration and authority of Scripture) in the recent publication 'Woord op Schrift' originating from within the Theological University at Kampen received approval by deputies-curators. The author was even encouraged to proceed in the chosen direction. The contacts with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken are becoming more and more intensive even though these churches have tolerated bible-critical ideas in publications of their ministers for more than 25 years.

This is how bible-criticism, which historically has always been opposed and rejected by the Gereformeerde Kerken (General Synod of Assen 1926), has worked its way into the churches. This decline is by itself already sufficient reason for reformation.

The need for reformation: Synod's decisions

But the trouble in the churches has increased further through the decisions of the General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002/03. One might justifiably expect that this assembly would turn around the decline. For the LORD requires His Church to reject heresy, not only out of respect for Him but also for the purpose of protecting His people.

Synod instead joined ranks with the developments in the churches and even legitimised these to a large degree. That can be seen in the decisions with respect to the Sunday's rest and the Fourth Commandment, the promotion of ecclesiastical unity with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken and with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken, the blessing church-member, the official representation in church services of non-Gereformeerde churches, the uncontrolled celebration of Holy Supper in crisis areas, the approval of the *Groot Nieuws* (1996) bible translation, the introduction of unscriptural hymns, the erosion of Articles 65 and 67 of the Church Order, the revised Marriage Form, the new Forms for the Celebration of Holy Supper, the introduction of the ordinarium, the superficial establishment of sister relations with a foreign church (PCEA in Australia), and the report and the decisions about divorce.

In the process the lie was given a lawful place at the cost of the truth; and personal opinion on how to serve the LORD was allowed to prevail in order to accommodate human religious feelings.

Conclusion

In view of these developments and decisions it is no longer possible to say of the Gereformeerde Kerken what we confess about the true Church: "In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God and rejects all things contrary to it." (Article 29 of the Belgic Confession). We write this with profound sadness that the church has sunk this low, and add that we ourselves share in the guilt of these developments. We need to examine ourselves whether we sounded timely warnings against the wrongs or even joined in with them.

Appeal

We have come to the conclusion that the LORD requires *all the members* of the Gereformeerde Kerken to call *the Church Councils* to *reject* the unscriptural decisions of the General Synod of Zuidhorn and to *return* to the respectful obedience of God's Word in all areas of doctrine and life. So we ask you, as co-responsible brothers and sisters, to raise these matters in your congregation and with your Church Council. Our motivation is three-fold: our love for you, our desire to keep Christ's Church faithful to Scripture and the Confessions, and in particular our respect for the integrity and honour of the King of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask you also to urge your Church Council to call also the sister churches to this act of reformation and return. This can then be followed up by consulting with those churches who react positively on how this reformation is to be put into effect.

We are allowed to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ as Head of His church will Himself look after its preservation. But He does want to use us, ordinary church members, for that purpose. It is our sincere hope and prayer to the Lord that He make you willing to heed this call to reformation.

Yours in Christ,