

## **Trouble Ahead for the Reformed Ecumenical Synod**

*Will the Reformed Ecumenical Synod survive its next meeting scheduled for May 25-June 10, 1988 in Harare, Zimbabwe? The Interchurch Relations Committee (ICR) of the CRC has reported that the RES is facing a crisis that threatens its very existence. One of its major threats is the developments within the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands (GKN).*

In 1984 six denominations terminated their membership in the RES, five because they were dissatisfied with the GKN's continued membership. Widespread concern was expressed about that church's position on notably-homosexuality, attitudes towards Scripture and membership in the World Council of Churches. The ICR of the CRC reported to Synod 1987 that the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland and the Reformed Churches in New Zealand officially requested that the membership of the GKN in the RES be terminated. And this year the 54th General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) also asked the Interim of the RES to recommend the membership of the GKN be terminated. This church believes that further dialogue with the GKN will get nowhere. But the RES interim committee that met this past summer in Geneva did not agree. It will not recommend to the Harare meeting the ouster of GKN from the RES. Once again it has chosen for postponement, new study committees and more dialogue. One member of the RES interim committee, Dr. John P. Galbraith of the OPC, does not agree. He wants a decision in 1988. He explained his position in a minority report. If the RES does not terminate the membership of the GKN, the OPC Committee of RES matters has been given the authority to withdraw their denomination from the RES, at whatever time and for whatever reason it deems wise.

### **What About the CRC?**

At this time the membership of the CRC is not in question, though it too has expressed its disapproval of the trends within the GKN. One of the latest major developments is the reunion with The Netherlands Reformed Church (Nederlands Hervormde Kerk). The 1987 CRC synod was informed that "the consequence of this reunion is of grave significance for the status of the ecclesiastical relationship of the CRC with the GKN."

I believe that the CRC should reconsider its present stance and support the recommendation of the OPC. The GKN has become an open and a turbulent church. Dr. H. Kuitert is still in office, despite the unbiblical position he is holding. A dominant cause of friction remains the GKN's view of homosexuality. The 1980 RES in Nimes, and the 1984 RES in Chicago, declared that "all homosexual practice is sin." In a letter to the RES interim committee, June 12, 1986, the GKN insisted that "many sincere believers (homosexuals) are not perverted." Will the GKN ever return to its once orthodox position on faith and practice?

Two GKN leaders were quoted in the *Nederlands Dagblad* on July 28, 1984, as saying:

We are 20 to 30 years ahead of most of the members of the RES. We form a large *church* in a modern society and matters that we have already handled have yet to be discussed by the RES churches . . . Perhaps in the future we can still help them to reach a responsible position. And ... I probably don't miss the mark by much when I say that various members of the (GKN) synod could have had the *thought*: we can certainly turn our backs on the RES, but then we will no longer be able to exercise influence on the other *churches* in the RES. Naturally you don't say something like that out loud. That sounds so conceited and is therefore expressed softly.

It does sound conceited! Our response should be, "We don't want your help." Look at the decline in membership in your own churches! And these sentiments reported in the *Nederlands Dagblad* have been expressed before. In 1980 Dr. J. Plomp discussed in the *Gereformeerd Weekblad (Reformed Weekly)* the meeting of the RES in Nimes. He also believes that the Dutch churches are more progressive. But he points out that the main difference we have is the view of Scripture. In his words, "I know my own Dutch customers. They walk somewhat faster than many foreign Reformed; they are somewhat more progressive, or whatever one may want to call it. But I think this specially because an enormous difference has arisen between them and most other Reformed in the RES. That is a difference in the view of Scripture (*Schriftbeschouwing*)."

Dr. Plomp puts his finger on the real problem the GKN has with the RES. He says that Scripture and most likely the confessions, are treated by most in the RES in a manner to which we were once accustomed in Holland. But many Reformed scholars no longer treat them so, and neither does Synod. He claims that they now have a feeling for the whole of the hermeneutical problem; what it is that the Lord wants to say to us in these old texts which originated in a totally different world and in a historical situation completely different from ours.

### **No Common Basis**

In his minority report to the interim committee of the RES Dr. Galbraith wrote, "Meaningful discussion of differences, discussion that holds hope for a resolution of differences, presupposes a common basis for discussion. We regret to have to express our conviction that such a common basis no longer exists between the GKN and the RES itself, as measured by its constitutional basis."

Why should the GKN want to remain within the RES? Their departure from the Scripture and the Reformed confessions is obvious. Why don't they say: "Your view of Scripture is no longer ours; we are not on the same wave-length." With Dr. Galbraith I believe that we compromise our witness through continued association with the GKN. We have been told that the Dutch have progressed too far to ever return to the orthodox

Reformed position; the position once held by such giants of the Reformed faith as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. We must say this with deep regret, with pain in our hearts as we owe so much to the work done by Dutch Reformed scholars of the past. But do we have any other choice? I don't think so.

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