

July 17, 2007

To all Members of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford, B.C.

Dear Brothers and Sisters of our Lord and Saviour,

Out of our obligation to remain faithful to the scriptural and confessional norms under which the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford was instituted, we address you again as concerned members of His church. Our public letter of January 19, 2007 brought to your attention the very serious problems associated with General Synod decisions that were accepted and implemented by the Abbotsford consistory. The decisions in question were the establishment of relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship with the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK), the Free Church of Scotland (FCS), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), and the United Reformed Churches of North America (URC). As described in our public letter these concerns include the acceptance of an improperly supervised Lord's Supper, the promotion of the false doctrine of the pluriformity of the church, the impairment of the authority of the office-bearers in maintaining discipline, and the failure to require confessional membership.

Maintaining our confessional principles

In accordance with our task to reject "*all heresies and errors conflicting with God's Word*" (Form for the Public Profession of Faith), we have repeatedly addressed consistory regarding these matters. The attached Appendix A outlines the process of appeal which was followed by concerned brothers in Abbotsford, in accordance with Article 31 of the Church Order. The correspondence referred to in this Appendix has been placed on the website www.calltoreform.com.

We asked Abbotsford consistory to maintain the same Scriptural and confessional principles outlined in its original Appeal to Synod 2004 of the decision of Synod 2001 to extend a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC. We also asked consistory to acknowledge that the recognition of the OPC as a true church by Synod 1977 should not have happened, and to recognize the legitimacy of the recent secession that had occurred in Lynden, WA. However, to our deep sorrow, and despite repeated requests to address these concerns, Abbotsford consistory has refused to do so. This refusal has closed the door to further discussion of these issues and has consequently ended the appeal process.

Synod 1965 (*Acts*, Article 141, II) considered that "*Correspondence with Churches abroad should not be entered into, until upon a conscientious and serious investigation, it has become apparent that these Churches not only officially embrace the Reformed confession and church polity but also in fact maintain them.*" (our emphasis). Since that time every General Synod has received evidence of serious confessional divergencies in doctrine and practice, thereby supporting the assertion that scriptural unity with the OPC does not exist. At a minimum, every Synod from 1986 to 1998 required a resolution of divergencies regarding the fencing of the Lord's Supper and maintaining of confessional membership, as a prerequisite to the establishment of ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC.

Abbotsford consistory's original decision to appeal the decision of Synod 2001 to Synod 2004 was based on its commitment to uphold the church's confessions and church order. Now consistory accepts the decision of Synod 2001 even though the original concerns have not been dealt with by Synod 2004. Consistory's response dated January 22, 2007 expresses the hope that "*we may in due time come to scriptural unity,*" thereby implying that we do not currently have scriptural unity. How can we have ecclesiastical fellowship with churches without scriptural unity?

Neither Abbotsford consistory nor the General Synods maintain our confessional principles when they continue to uphold the above Synod decisions in the face of the above evidence. The recent Synod 2007 not only continued the above relationships, but with its establishment of ecclesiastical fellowship (EF) with the Reformed Church of New Zealand and the l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec, has continued down this wide road of unfaithful compromise.

The Lynden secession

The Abbotsford consistory also rejects the path of obedience taken by our brothers in Lynden, WA, who, after a lengthy series of correspondence from 2001 to 2005, liberated themselves from binding to unscriptural decisions of the consistory of the American Reformed Church. Without interacting with the evidence that what was done in Lynden was in faithful obedience to the Lord, the Abbotsford consistory, in its response dated November 13, 2006 labels this secession "*a self-willed act of schism*" and a "*breaking of fellowship.*" However it is the Abbotsford consistory's response that constitutes the act of "*schism*" and the "*breaking of fellowship.*" Article 29 of the Belgic Confession identifies the marks of the true church. "*It practices the pure preaching of the gospel. It maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them. It exercises church discipline for the correcting and punishing of sins. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head.*"

The responsibility of the Abbotsford consistory

The attached Appendix B outlines some of the consequences of acceptance of the above General Synod decisions. As the highest authority in the church it is the responsibility of the consistory "to have supervision over Christ's church" (Articles 22 and 27 C.O.). However the correspondence and the consequences we allude to above, confirms that the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church of Abbotsford has now repeatedly and deliberately refused to fulfil these responsibilities. Instead it insists in reserving for itself the right to admit to the Lord's Supper those who have not publicly professed the Reformed faith in accordance with Article 61 C.O. It permits pulpit exchanges with and the issue of attestations to sister churches without resolution of the confessional divergencies. We can only conclude therefore that this consistory no longer practices the pure preaching of the gospel, it no longer maintains the pure administration of the sacraments, no longer exercises proper church discipline, and no longer governs itself according to the pure Word of God.

Although it is not feasible to send copies of all our correspondence to each of you, hard copies of our correspondence with the consistory are available upon request (these documents have also been posted on www.calltoreform.com). In the face of repeated warnings and admonitions, the consistory persists in upholding and implementing general synod decisions that we have shown above and in our public letter dated January 19, 2007, to be contrary to Scripture, the confessions and the Church Order. A selection of critical questions and answers can be found in the attached Appendix C.

Call to Liberation

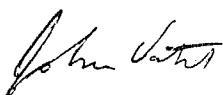
Prof. S. Greijdanus writes in *Bound Yet Free*, edited by Prof. J. De Jong (pages 63-64), that "The apostle Paul, for instance, did not write to the Galatians that they should continue to entrust themselves, for the time being, to the false teachers and their preaching, until he himself could come to them and straighten everything out again. Without any attempt to mollify them, without any compromise or postponement he said, as sharply as possible, 'But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one which you received, let him be accursed,' Galatians 1:8. When? Later? In a little while? After this or that? May or should matters continue for the time being? No, now, immediately. 'As we have said before, so now I say again, If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed,' Galatians 1:9. The apostle knows nothing of temporarily permitting and acquiescing in what conflicts with the Word of God, until others too will share your insight, and will admit, that this or that preaching, that this or that synodical decision, conflicts with the gospel of God, the Holy Scriptures. Everyone has his own responsibility, which cannot be passed off to others. Everyone must judge for himself, must decide now, when something does not conform to God's Word, to reject it and to break with it, not continuing with others in the wrong. No synod, no church federation affords you any excuse. People are not the lords of the church. Christ is its absolute owner and commander." For further reference see also Article 7 of the Belgic Confession.

Therefore, in humble obedience to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, we are duty bound to call all members of the Canadian Reformed Church of Abbotsford to do the following:

- (1) To liberate yourselves from the unscriptural decisions of General Synods 1992 through 2004 to establish and maintain ecclesiastical fellowship with the PCK, FCS, OPC, RCUS, and the URC;
- (2) To liberate yourselves from the unscriptural acceptance and implementation of these decisions by this consistory, and return to the authority of Jesus Christ as Lord and King of His church;
- (3) To recognize the legitimacy of the secession that has occurred in Lynden; and
- (4) To join with us in restoring the Church of Christ here in Abbotsford in accordance with Article 28 B.C. and gathering for worship beginning July 22, 2007 at 10AM and 2PM at the premises of The Coast Hotel, 2020 Sumas Way, Abbotsford, B.C.

We pray that this consistory may repent from the hardening in this position, and that in this way of repentance it may restore the unity of the church here in Abbotsford. We continue to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Head of His church, will Himself ensure its preservation, and that He will use us, ordinary church members, for that purpose. As the lawful continuation of the Canadian Reformed Church in Abbotsford, we fully adhere to the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order of Dort. We are willing to unite on this basis with all Reformed believers. In light of all this we call you in the Name of Christ to join us in liberating ourselves from the unscriptural decisions and practices of the present consistory and to return to the faithful application of Scripture, confessions and Church Order.

Yours in Christ,



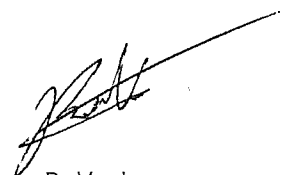
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Appendix A - Chronology of correspondence

The following chronology refers specifically to a process of appeal of decisions regarding the OPC, however the issues involved apply similarly to the PCK, FCS, RCUS and URC. The process of appeal in Abbotsford began with the decision of General Synod Neerlandia 2001 (*Acts*, Article 45) to extend a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC. This decision set in motion the following chronology of correspondence:

- (1) On May 22, 2003 Abbotsford consistory sent an Appeal of the above decision of Synod 2001 to Synod 2004. As is evident from the Appeal, the consistory gave a number of reasons for its submission, however at this point we mention two. In the first place, grounds were provided by Synod 1998 to amend a proposed agreement presented by the Committee for Contact with the OPC to enter into a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC. These grounds were based on the OPC's claim of the right to "*admit to membership and to the Lord's table those who do not make profession of the Reformed faith*" and the OPC's claim that "*the church is competent to determine as valid and credible a confession of the Christian faith for communicant membership that is not also in accordance with the church's confession.*" In the second place the amendments by Synod 1998 are consistent with what the churches have agreed to in Article 61 of the Church Order, that "*The consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life.*" These grounds were ignored and the amendments were deleted by Synod 2001.
- (2) On February 20, 2004 Synod 2004 (*Acts*, Article 86) denied all appeals against the above decision of Synod 2001.
- (3) On October 4, 2005 four concerned brothers, who were part of the Abbotsford consistory at the time of formulation of its Appeal to Synod 2004, and had supported its submission to General Synod, addressed consistory regarding the decision of Synod 2004. These four brothers requested consistory to appeal this decision to Synod 2007 on the basis that Synod 2004 did not interact with the above material that was sent to it. Consistent with the consistory's original Appeal, the brothers had included with their submission a Draft Appeal, which they proposed that consistory send to Synod 2007.
- (4) On February 4, 2006 Abbotsford consistory responded to the above submission. However this response is seriously deficient in that it did not address the failure of Synod 2004 to interact with the material that was sent to it. The Abbotsford consistory now accepts as settled and binding the unscriptural decision to enter into and maintain a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC.
- (5) On February 13, 2006 the four concerned brothers appealed to Classis the inadequacy of the consistory response, however Classis indicated that correspondence relating to the inadequacy of the consistory response needed to go to consistory first. When this was done via a letter dated April 12, 2006 the consistory refused to acknowledge the inadequacy of its response.
- (6) On June 7, 2006 the four concerned brothers again addressed the Abbotsford consistory regarding the inadequacy of its February 4, 2006 response. They challenged the validity of the assertion made by consistory that the OPC is a "true church." A copy of the press release of Classis Ontario South held December 9, 1987 was included, which provided grounds for the statement of a previous Classis that "*the Tri-County Reformed Church had rightfully separated herself from the OPC*" (see for reference Articles 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession). The concerned brothers had hoped that when the recognition of the OPC as a "true church" was called into question in this way, the consistory would reconsider its February 4, 2006 response.
- (7) However the July 14, 2006 response by consistory ignored the interaction that was made with the February 4, 2006 response as well as all the additional material that was submitted with the June 7, 2006 letter. When this failure to respond was appealed to Classis, the appeal was denied.
- (8) In the meantime, on June 13, 2006, two brothers in the American Reformed Church of Lynden issued a call to secession to members in that congregation, on the basis that the Lynden consistory had upheld and implemented the unscriptural decisions of Synod 2001. The two brothers repeatedly admonished the Lynden consistory in the period from 2001 through 2005, yet this consistory hardened itself against admonitions, ignored material submitted to it, and even unjustly placed under church discipline those who called it to repent. This secession led to the formation of the Liberated Reformed Church.
- (9) On August 30, 2006 the Liberated Reformed Church addressed every consistory of the Canadian Reformed Churches, informing them of the secession that had taken place in Lynden. In these letters the Liberated

Reformed Church requested the churches to recognize the legitimacy of this secession and to join in returning to the historic foundation of the Canadian Reformed Churches. There is no evidence that the Abbotsford consistory ever dealt with this letter.

- (10) On October 11, 2006 the four concerned brothers again addressed the Abbotsford consistory, this time concerning the secession that had occurred in Lynden. It was hoped that the evidence presented by the secession of the Liberated Reformed Church (which corroborated that of the secession of Tri-County Reformed Church which was accepted by Classis Ontario South 19 years earlier), would convince the Abbotsford consistory to reconsider its responses. This did not occur as is evident from consistory's response dated November 13, 2006. In its refusal to recognize the secession that had occurred in Lynden, the Abbotsford consistory stood behind its position that the concerned brothers had to provide a substantive response to its letter dated February 4, 2006 before it would interact any further with the points that were raised.
- (11) The Abbotsford consistory also distributed a public letter to the congregation immediately after the celebration of the Lord's Supper on November 19, 2006, entitled "*Ecumenical Relationships*." In this letter consistory gave public support to the unscriptural decisions of Synods 2001 and 2004.
- (12) Consequently, in their letter dated December 11, 2006 the four concerned brothers provided consistory with a detailed point-by-point response to the consistory's letter dated February 4, 2006. In this letter the requests to consistory regarding Article 86 of the *Acts* of Synod 2004, regarding the recognition of the OPC as a true church, and regarding the recognition of the Lynden secession, were maintained and supported with detailed references. The consistory's response to this letter, dated January 22, 2007, did not interact with the scriptural, confessional and church orderly evidence that had been presented to it.
- (13) On January 19, 2007 we issued a public letter to the Abbotsford consistory and congregation in response to the public letter of Abbotsford consistory issued on November 19, 2006. On March 9 and April 5, 2007 one of us sent additional letters to the Abbotsford consistory pleading with them to acknowledge inconsistencies in their January 22, 2007 response and to send the draft appeal to Synod 2007. In their responses dated May 31, and 30, 2007 these requests were also rejected by Abbotsford consistory.
- (14) In their book *Decently and in Good Order*, (see page 63) Prof. K. Deddens and Rev. G. VanRongen state that "*After one has gone the full 'ecclesiastical way' ... one has either to except the latest decision as yet - which does not create any insurmountable difficulties **whenever it is not a matter of conscience** - or he has to 'liberate' himself from the binding decision.*" We have now completed the appeal process under Article 31 C.O.

Appendix B - Consequences of acceptance of General Synod decisions establishing EF

On May 19, 2006 the Abbotsford consistory admitted a guest, announced as coming from the URC, to the Lord's Supper. As a result of this admission a brother who had been lawfully elected and appointed to the office of elder was unable to participate in the Lord's Supper. Due to the fact that this brother was unable to accept the unscriptural Synod decisions establishing EF with the above named churches, the appointment of this brother was withdrawn by consistory.

The November 19, 2006 public letter issued by Abbotsford consistory did more than give public support of the unscriptural decisions of Synods 2001 and 2004. It issued a public call to those who were testifying against these unscriptural decisions to "*repent of their divisive ways*." Although consistory had not taken disciplinary action, consistory gave public evidence that they considered those involved in this faithful testimony to be worthy of church discipline.

On January 17, 2007 Abbotsford consistory withheld a brother from the Lord's Supper for testifying against the above mentioned Synod decisions, the acceptance and implementation of these decisions, and for supporting the 2006 secession in Lynden, WA, which was based on these very same decisions. Although Abbotsford consistory placed only one brother under church discipline, its responses to other brothers dated November 13, 2006 and January 22, 2007 show that they consider all of those involved in this faithful testimony to be worthy of church discipline.

In the March 25, 2007 local bulletin, the Abbotsford consistory outlined its policy on admission to the Lord's Supper. However, as indicated in a letter dated April 5, 2007, this policy solves nothing, since it leaves open the possibility of admitting a guest when it cannot be determined, even from the attestation, that the guest has made profession of the Reformed faith. This is a consequence of the unscriptural General Synod decisions establishing ecclesiastical fellowship with the PCK, FCS, OPC, RCUS and URC (Note: Synod 2007 added to this list the Reformed Church of New Zealand – even though the Australian sister churches would not, and the l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec).

Appendix C – Some Critical Questions and Answers

Q1. *Abbotsford consistory insists that it is "committed to uphold the church's confession and church order." Why can't we continue to stay here on the basis of this commitment?*

The consistory's acceptance and implementation of these General Synod decisions is contrary to this commitment. When consistory accepts and implements these decisions, it no longer fulfils its responsibility to ensure that all those it admits to the Lord's Supper in Abbotsford have made profession of the Reformed faith. This practice is contrary to Article 61 of the Church Order and the preamble of the Form for the Public Profession of Faith, therefore Consistory fails in its commitment to uphold the confessions and the Church Order.

Q2. *What are the specific General Synod decisions that we believe cannot be accepted by consistories?*

The following Acts of General Synod incorrectly established and maintained relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship (EF):

<u>Name of church</u>	<u>Year EF established</u>	<u>Years EF maintained on appeal</u>
PCK	Synod 1992 (Article 111)	Synods 1995 (Article 106) & 1998 (Article 108)
FCS	Synod 1992 (Article 128)	Synods 1995 (Article 106) & 1998 (Article 119)
OPC	Synod 2001 (Article 45)	Synod 2004 (Article 86)
RCUS	Synod 2001 (Article 59)	Not appealed - however same principles apply
URC	Synod 2001 (Article 73)	Synod 2004 (Articles 96 and 97).

Q3. *Are we saying that the PCK, FCS, OPC, RCUS, and the URC are false churches?*

We do **not** say this. On the contrary we believe that the Canadian Reformed Churches have not completed the process of testing the spirits in accordance with I John 4. We believe that the Canadian Reformed Churches have established relationships with these churches before coming to agreement on serious confessional divergencies. In the context of this ongoing discussion it was premature for Synod 1977 to declare the OPC a true church.

Q4. *If we are not saying that the PCK, FCS, OPC, RCUS, and the URC are false churches, what is so bad about having a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with them?*

A relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship can only be established with those with whom we are truly one in doctrine (confession) and life (practice). When serious confessional divergencies still remain to be discussed and resolved it is hypocritical to act as if these issues don't exist. After all, in the first question of the Form for the Public Profession of Faith we promise to reject "*all heresies and errors conflicting with God's Word.*" The minimization and acceptance of such confessional divergencies puts us into conflict with the obligations we undertook when we made profession of faith.

Q5. *What are these outstanding confessional divergencies that are so serious as to require the drastic step of secession from the Canadian Reformed Church of Abbotsford?*

As described in our public letter these serious confessional divergencies include the acceptance of an improperly supervised Lord's Supper, the promotion of the false doctrine of the pluriformity of the church, the impairment of the authority of the office-bearers in maintaining church discipline, and the failure to require confessional membership. The acceptance of the General Synod decisions without resolving these serious confessional divergencies compromises the confessional integrity of the Canadian Reformed Church of Abbotsford.

Q6. *How is the promotion of pluriformity of the church a serious confessional divergency?*

The doctrine of the pluriformity of the church has its roots in the concept of the "more or less pure church" as explained in Chapter 25:4 of the Westminster Confession of Faith. This doctrine is contrary to that which we confess in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession where it states that the true and the false church "are easily recognized and distinguished from each other."

Q7. *What are the practical consequences of holding to the doctrine of the pluriformity of the church for an ordinary church member?*

According to Article 29 B.C. the first mark of the true church is that "It practices the pure preaching of the gospel." A pluriform church does not uphold this since it permits pulpit exchange with those with whom they do not have formal ecclesiastical relations. This has been known to happen in the above churches. A pluriform church also does not have a scriptural concept of church membership, as members may be considered to have withdrawn from the congregation, without being considered to have withdrawn from the church. This not only occurs in the above churches but also, despite warnings, has repeatedly occurred in the Canadian Reformed Church of Abbotsford.

Q8. *How is the acceptance of an improperly supervised Lord's Supper a serious confessional divergency?*

According to Article 29 B.C. the second mark of the true church is that "It maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them." The admission of people to the Lord's Supper, of whom it cannot be known whether they profess the Reformed faith, indicates a conflict with this mark. The Abbotsford consistory has focused on the responsibility of the church to determine that those who are known to be unbelieving and ungodly are not admitted to the Lord's Table. This narrower focus permits the admission of guests to the Lord's Supper who have not made public profession of the Reformed faith, including children (as is permitted in some of the above churches) and those about whom the consistory has not secured any confirmation about their doctrine and life. This is contrary to Scripture (see Matthew 18:16 and II Corinthians 13:1) and to Article 61 C.O.

Q9. *How does a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship result in the impairment of the authority of the office-bearers in maintaining church discipline?*

According to Article 29 B.C. the third mark of the true church is that "It exercises church discipline for correcting and punishing sins." The admission to the Lord's Supper of people about whom the proper information regarding their doctrine and life has not been determined circumvents Q & A 85 of the Heidelberg Catechism and conflicts with Article 61 C.O.

Q10. *How is the failure to require confessional membership a serious confessional divergency?*

Confessional membership encompasses all the marks of the true church which, according to Article 29 B.C., must "govern itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head." It simply follows that the members of the local church are, by the first question in the Form for the Public Profession of Faith, bound to God's revealed will, otherwise the local church would lose its legitimacy.

Q11. *One of the reasons cited for secession in Abbotsford is the refusal of the Abbotsford consistory to recognize the secession in Lynden. When you ask this do you not imply that the American Reformed Church of Lynden is a false church and that the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches is a federation of false churches?*

On the basis of Article 28 B.C., those who seceded from the American Reformed Church of Lynden, after having fully completed the avenue of appeal, may rightly consider the American Reformed Church of Lynden to be a false church. At the same time we must remember that under Canadian Reformed church polity the consistory is the highest authority in the church. Therefore we believe that it is premature to consider any other Canadian Reformed church false if there is no clear evidence of rejection of the scriptural and confessional principles at stake. The explicit and repeated refusal of the Canadian Reformed Church of Abbotsford to consider and interact with these scriptural and confessional issues renders it a false church also, and has therefore made secession an act of obedience to God's revealed will. Although we must judge whether deeds are in accordance with the Word of God, we may not judge persons who stay behind. We continue to seek their welfare in prayer before our Lord.

Q12. *Has not General Synod 2007 dealt with any of the confessional divergencies referred to above?*

Two churches sent appeals of the decision of Synod 2004 to Synod 2007 regarding the relationship with the OPC, however the answers given (see Articles 55 and 83 of the draft Acts) do not interact with these divergencies. In addition, Synod's decisions to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with the Reformed Church of New Zealand and the l'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (see Articles 66 and 75 of the draft Acts) involve the churches in compromise due to the same serious confessional divergencies. At the same time Synod 2007 has rejected as "schism," liberation from unscriptural decisions that resulted in the formation of a new federation of churches in The Netherlands. It came to this decision without interacting with the Acts of Synod of these new churches, even though it had received and declared them admissible (see Article 143 of the draft Acts).