

21.7 PETITION OF PROTEST BY AH KLOPPER, AP KRUGER, AH STAVAST AND RL VORSTER REGARDING SYNOD 2003 DECISION ABOUT WOMEN IN OFFICE (Artt 17, 25, 258)

- A. Rev AH Stavast tables the petition of protest.
- B. **Decision:** The petition of protest is referred to Commission for Petitions of Protest 9.
- C. **Order motion:** Dr WC Opperman tables the order motion.
- D. **Decision:** Order motion approved with recommendations.
- E. With the approving of the order motion the petitions of protest in regard to women in the particular services are only adjudicated upon at a next Synod since there are matters that require urgent attention before these petitions of protest can be dealt with to the edification of the churches (see Petition of Protest 2.13 in Acta 2012).

F. PETITION OF PROTEST

1. The Synod decision which is protested

The protest is made against the following decision of **National Synod 2003** (Acta 2003:591, E. Commission Report, 4 and p593. Decision: as modified in "Errata Acta" as provided by the Administrative Bureau):

"E. COMMISSION REPORT

"Summarized recommendations of the Commission Report.

"Synod decides in view of the protracted study the following about the place of women in church:

"4. Synod approves in light of Scripture that women have the necessary gifts at their disposal to be appointed and confirmed as deacons in the GKSA. Synod is furthermore of the opinion that certain pericopes such as Rom 16:2, 1 Tim 3:11 and 5:9-15 have long since in Reformed Churches in ecumenical respect an important supporting role for women in a given office, although there does not exist clear certainty on the one hand, and on the other hand no prohibition is placed on women bearing the office of deacon" (Acta 2003:591, 4).

"DECISION:

1. Approved.

2. "The Deputee Reports (3) as well as the Commission Report are referred to the Deputies for further study."

2. Grounds for the protest

2.1 *Ground 1 for protest*

Believers cannot believe wholeheartedly that **women** can be confirmed in the office of deacon.

2.1.1 Argument

2.1.1.1 The offices (services) of the Church are matters of faith

The true Church of Jesus Christ is not something that was conceived by humans, but is a creation of Jesus Christ himself through his Word and Spirit (Math 16:18). As far as humans go, the Church is the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27) therefore also a matter of faith (NGB, art 27). The offices (services) of or in the Church are institutions of God (Rom 1:1; Eph 4:11,12 and 1 Tim 3:1,10), and therefore matters of principle.

All matters of principle with regard to the being and well-being of the Church must be credible on the basis of the Word of God.

The offices (services) of the Church is a matter of principle in this manner (NGB, art 31) that must be believed by the Church. "All particular services are equal, because all serve Christ's authority. There are however directions of the different services. For the governing elder service is directed at service to Christ's kingship, for the

deacon at the service of his priesthood, and for the teaching elder at the service of his prophetic nature” (cf Acta 2009:598, 4.4, penultimate paragraph).

2.1.1.2 The Church can however believe without doubt that Christ calls upon **male** office bearers (servants)

God’s Word puts it in no uncertain terms that there has to be elders, deacons and reverends in a congregation:

Jesus Christ, the Head of his Church (Eph 1:22), initially guided the apostles and prophets to act (Eph 2:19-22; Heb 1:1; 2 Pet 1:16-19). They appointed elders, deacons and evangelists or reverends (Acts 6:2-6; 14:23; 1 Tim 1:18; 1 Tim 3; 1 Tim 4:6-16). In each case men are mentioned who were appointed in these particular offices or services.

It is therefore not true that gender has no bearing on the particular offices (services) (cf Acta 2009:533, 6.4.4, interpretation 2).

The Church can therefore believe in all frankness that Jesus Christ calls and uses male elders, deacons and reverends in his service (Rom 1:1).

2.1.1.3 Faith rests on certainty

2.1.1.3.1 The Heidelberg Catechism, Son 7:21, clearly states that faith rests on certainty:

“We believe with our hearts and confess with our mouths that true faith is not only certain knowledge based on which we accept all that God reveals to us in his Word as the truth, but also a certain trust worked by the Holy Spirit in my heart through the Gospel”... (HC, 7:21).

2.1.1.3.2 The Holy Spirit instills true faith in my heart only when I dispose of a solid, certain knowledge of a matter in terms of God’s Word (Rom 10:17). He does not instill faith in my heart by means of uncertainties, because he is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17).

2.1.1.3.3 The LORD GOD cannot be exalted by acts of faith that rest on uncertainty (Heb 11:6).

2.1.1.4 The Decision by Synod about **female** deacons rests on **uncertainty**

2.1.1.4.1 Synod 2003 is itself of the opinion that “clear certainty does not exist” (that is, in God’s Word) that women can be appointed in the office of deacon (cf Acta 2003:591, E. Commission Report, 4 as well as p574, 3.6.2.1 to 3.6.2.3).

2.1.1.4.2 In light of the certainty from God’s Word on which faith is based, how can Synod expect that something of which it is not certain itself has to be believed wholeheartedly? It is simply impossible – the Holy Spirit does not work in this manner. He works and teaches his believers on the basis of the assured truth of the Word (John 14:26; 16:13; 17:17). The LORD’s blessing cannot be expected upon a matter that is not credible in terms of the Word.

2.1.1.4.2.1 This uncertainty with regard to female deacons is accentuated further by the fact that the mentioned Report (2.1.1.2 above) uses the concept of two or more “interpretations” (cf Acta 2009:515, 517, 518, 519, 522, 532 and 533). Among other things it says: “The different interpretations are the result of our ability to understand Scripture clearly. The Deputies consequently present two sets of recommendations to Synod with recommendations” (Acta 2009:533, 7, summarizing comment).

Clearly this is acknowledgement that uncertainty exists whether women may indeed be appointed in the deacon-service!

2.1.1.4.2.2 The same uncertainties occur in the book “Male and Female in the Church. Gender and the particular services” (Breed, DG, JvRensburg, Fika, Jordaan, GJC. 2008). After the exegesis and hermeneutics of the particular Scriptural details different “interpretative possibilities” are recommended throughout (e.g. p130-131). The book concludes as follows: “In terms of this the particular Scriptural sections do not necessarily involve different possibilities of meaning, but rather multiple interpretative possibilities” (Douw G Breed, Fika J van

Rensburg and Gert JC Jordaan 2008:204, par 17.3.2.2 Taking decision, first col). If a matter can possibly be this, that, or the other, then surely that does not amount to certainty!

If we are therefore uncertain about what God's Word reveals with regard to women in the particular services, why do we not stick to that which is certain – as found for example in Acts 6:3 and 1 Tim 3:2 which clearly speak of “men” as deacons?

- 2.1.1.4.3 The uncertainty of **female** deacons is further accentuated by the decision of Synod 1988: “It is not possible adequately to prove without contradiction that female members (married or unmarried) serve in the service of deaconship. DECISION: Approved” (Acta 1988:522, 3.7.3). (This decision still stands!)
- 2.1.1.5 The implication of the **uncertainty** when it comes to believing that **women** can be chosen for and confirmed in the office (service) of deacon
 - 2.1.1.5.1 In the Formulary of Confirmation for deacons the question is asked: “Are you convinced in your heart that you have been rightly called by the congregation of God, and therefore by God Himself, to this calling?” A person who answers affirmatively to this before God must be sure that he (or she) can believe that he (or she) has been called by God on the basis of his Word.
 - 2.1.1.5.2 If two national Synods of the GKSA (1988 and 2003) decided that there is uncertainty as to whether women should be confirmed in the office (service) of deacon, how can it be expected of a woman to say she is convinced, that is to say, she believes and trusts that she has been called by God to act as deacon?
 - 2.1.1.5.3 The implication is that a false call is coming to women, since calling cannot be separated from what the Word says. To accept an uncertain calling boils down to a bondage of conscience (NGB, 32).
 - 2.1.1.5.4 It is furthermore a bondage of conscience on those (the Church Council and the congregation) who allow the external calling to go out.

2.2 *Ground for protest 2*

The decision of Synod 2003 about female deacons implies an incorrect view of Scriptural authority

2.2.1 Argument

- 2.2.1.1 Synod “is of the opinion that important verses such as Rom 16:2; 1 Tim 3:11 and 5:9-11 have long since played an important and supporting role for women in a particular office in Reformed Churches in ecumenical context...” (cf Acta 2003:591, E. Commission Report, 4).
- 2.2.1.2 Synod contradicts itself when this “opinion” as decision turns into the notion that: “It cannot be said with absolute certainty on the basis of Rom 16:1-2 whether Phoebe served in the particular service of deacon or not” (Acta 2003:574, 3.6.2.1) and: “It is not possible to say whether “the women” here refers to female deacons or to the wives of deacons or to women who rendered deacon’s service along with deacons” (Acta 2003:577, 3.8.4.3), but then still insists that these verses (Rom 16:1-2; 1 Tim 3:11 and 5:9-11) play an important supportive role.
- 2.2.1.3 It can further be asked: What do these verses support?
 - 2.2.1.3.1 The logical answer should be: “there are other verses which support the matter irrefutably.” But these do not exist!
 - 2.2.1.3.2 The implication is therefore: it is “The Church” (in other words the “Reformed Churches in ecumenical context”) who decides that there should be female deacons, and that the mentioned verses support this decision.
 - 2.2.1.3.3 But this is a wrong view of the authority of Scripture. Here the initiative goes out from “The Church”, while the Word merely plays a supporting role. Actually, it should be the other way around: on the authority of what the Word says, “The Church” decides!

2.3 *Ground for protest 3*

The decision that female deacons are to be chosen is destroying the unity of faith in the GKSA.

2.3.1 Argument

- 2.3.1.1 In HC, 21:54 the GKSA confesses that Jesus Christ chose a congregation for Himself in the unity of the true faith. That is to say, the entire GKSA believes exactly the same about the principles of the true faith on the basis of God's Word. It should not be the case that some believe in this way about a given matter, and others in that way.
- 2.3.1.2 This unity and homogeneity in the true faith should be protected.
- 2.3.1.3 When prof PJ de Bruyn asks in his book, "*The Gesonde Leer*" (1998:13): Why are the Confession essential, the answer is: "In order to protect unity between the different churches and believers, in order that anyone can not simply pronounce what he wants which would lead to confusion".
- 2.3.1.4 Also the entire Church Order aims to promote unity among believers. Compare KO See KO, artt 1, 3-5, 9, 15-17, 22-25, 31, 35, 43, 44, 53-55, 61-62, 71-81, 82-85, 86. For the sake of unity among churches the KO concludes with art 86 which states that there should be "common voices" (common agreement) when the KO is altered. This points to the fact that we as believers should seek and protect the unity of faith. The Lord indeed implemented the services/offices (KO, artt 1, 2) in order to equip, to build unity, "in order that we would no longer be children that are thrown about like waves by every wind of teaching" (cf Eph 4:11-16).
- 2.3.1.5 The decision of Synod 2003 that women can be confirmed in the office of deacon, however, results in serious damage to the unity of faith in the GKSA. And even contains the seeds of the destruction of this unity. Some members are of the opinion that women can serve as deacons, others don't believe it. And then they look for another home in a different congregation where they find the habit that suits them. Many church-judiciary unsavoury matters and divides have arisen as a result. For these matters the Reformed Churches of the Classis Ventersburg can vouch in particular. This sad state of affairs of division can be noticed in the entire GKSA as it were.
- 2.3.1.6 Synod decided: women "can" be chosen and confirmed as deacons in the GKSA – that is to say it can be done, or it can be left as it is. How confusing this is! Does unity of faith look like this? Is this the way in which the LORD God works with his believers? No, He does not force them to straddle two thoughts in his service (1 Kings 18:21, Eph 4:11-16).
- 2.3.1.7 The said decision threatens the unity in faith in that the impression is given that the offices in the Church amount to an average matter about which there might be agreement to disagree, or that can willingly be left to its own devices in accordance with circumstances. In the meantime the offices are a matter of principle (NGB, 31).
- 2.3.1.8 The said decision is therefore also in conflict with NGB, 32 where it is confessed, among other things: "We therefore accept only that which can serve to protect and promote unity and cohesion and to sustain everything in obedience to God."

2.4 *Ground for protest 4*

Synod 2003 unconsciously misleads the Church populace in its pronouncement about women as deacons when "the Reformed Churches in ecumenical context" is used as motivation why it is after all justified that women may indeed be deacons.

2.4.1 Argument

- 2.4.1.1 Synod states the following on p591, 4, second sentence: "Synod is further of the opinion that certain verses such as Rom 16:2, 1 Tim 3:11 and 5:9-15 have long since been playing an important supporting role for women in particular offices in the Reformed Churches in ecumenical context, although on the one hand no clear

certainty exists, but on the other also no prohibition is placed on women in the office of deacon.” (Our emphasis.)

2.4.1.2 The implication of this statement is

2.4.1.2.1 that all the Reformed Churches in ecumenical context have had clarity for a long time that certain verses such as Rom 16:2, 1 Tim 3:11 and 5:9–15 support women in particular offices. It is actually a mere formality that GKSA should also decide this formally. Why wait any further?! The whole Reformed world does it – why not we, too!? Actually there is no uncertainty about the given verses about women as deacons. It is so for example that the entire Reformed ecumenical world agrees that these verses support women in the particular offices (services).

2.4.1.2.2 that all Reformed Churches support this worldwide;

2.4.1.2.3 that all Reformed Churches have supported this for a long time – only GKSA has not caught up yet. We are therefore far behind. We should join the other churches!

2.4.1.2.4 that non-Biblical grounds have more force than Biblical argument, because there is “on the one hand no clear certainty,” but because all the Reformed Churches in ecumenical context actually have been supporting this and do indeed approve of it, Synod 2003 will merely follow suit by approving it, too.

2.4.1.3 The undersigned are, however, of the opinion that it is not true that all the Reformed Churches in ecumenical context actually have been enjoying certainty for a long time that certain verses such as Rom 16:2, 1 Tim 3:11 and 5:9–15 support women in the particular offices!

For example:

2.4.1.3.1 Synod Middelburg (the Netherlands) of 1581 (as described by GKSA Synod 1988, Acta:517, 3.5.3) as well as the Synod of Dordrecht (the Netherlands) of 1618-1619 (as described by GKSA Synod 1988, Acta:517, 3.5.3) did not support the idea of women as deacons.

2.4.1.3.2 So, too, Synod GKSA of 1988 (Acta:507–523) and Synod 2003 (Acta:545-556; and 559-590 – the entire 3) decided upon the opposite!

2.4.1.3.2.1 See for example Synod 1988, Acta 507-523.

2.4.1.3.2.2 See for example Synod 2003, Acta:545-556: for example 5.1.1.7 and 5.2.1.4.

2.4.1.3.2.3 Synod 2003, Acta:559-590 – the entire 3, cf for example 3.2.3.5.2, 3.2.3.5.3, 3.2.3.5.3, 3.2.3.6.4, 3.2.3.6.5, 3.2.3.9, 3.2.3.10 and 3.3.1.6.

2.4.1.3.2.4 Synod 2003, Acta:559-590: for example p574, 3.6.2 (in particular of Rom 16:1-2) and p577, 3.8.4 (in particular of 1 Tim 3:11) and p579, 3.9.2 (in particular of Rom 1 Tim 5:9-15) and also p580-590, 3.10.2, 3.11.4, 3.12.2, 3.13.5 and p590, 3.14.2 again and again confirms that Synod 2003 did not support the notion of women as deacons.

2.4.1.3.2.5 See for example Acta 2003:561, 3.2.1.1.1; p568, 3.2.3.10.6; p569, 3.3.2; p574, 3.6.2; p576, 3.8.3.3; p577, 3.8.4; p578, 3.9.1.4 and 3.9.1.5; p579, 3.9.2; p585, 3.11.4; p587, 3.13.2.4; p589, 3.13.4.2 and 3.13.5 and p590, 3.14.2.

2.4.1.3.3 Synod Middellande decided in 2004 (as cited in *Die Kerkblad*, April 2005:23) that:

2.4.1.3.3.1 “a letter should have been directed at Synod GKSA in which the distrust of Middellande was expressed, because they have not been asked for advice about this. And that Synod GKSA should in future acknowledge everyone in matters that impact on the Church as a whole ...”.

2.4.1.3.3.2 “Synod decided that churches who had already confirmed women as deacons should discontinue this practice until advice from deputies would have served at the next meeting of Synod”.

2.4.1.3.4 Ecumenical churches

2.4.1.3.4.1 If the statement contained in Acta 2003:591, 4 merely implies other churches with which GKSA are in correspondence or discussion, it is also not true that “all the Reformed Churches in ecumenical context actually reached clarity long ago

that certain verses such as Rom 16:2, 1 Tim 3:11 and 5:9–15 support women in the particular offices”!

- 2.4.1.3.4.2 The book by Douw G Breed, Fika J of Rensburg and Gert JC Jordaan (2008: Male and Female in the Church. Gender and the particular services) shows on pages 33-35 that the GKSA enjoys ties with 13 church communities, namely: Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland; Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken; Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (Vrijgemaakte); Gereformeerde Church Botswana; Eglise Reformee Confessante au Congo; Christian Reformed Church in North America; Orthodox Presbyterian Church; Free Church of Scotland; Free Church of Scotland (Continuing); Christian Reformed Churches of Australia; Reformed Churches of New Zealand; The Reformed Church in Japan; The Presbyterian Church in Korea.
- 2.4.1.3.4.3 Only the following among these decided that women can be allowed in the particular services, namely: the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (Breed, *et al.* 2008:34).
- 2.4.1.3.4.4 The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia decided to allow women in the office of deacon (Breed, *et al.* 2008:34).
- 2.4.1.3.4.5 The Presbyterian Church in Korea “uses women as deaconesses in the manner in which Calvin arranged it” (Breed, *et al.* 2008:34). In other words women are allowed to work alongside deacons to comfort and care for the poor and the sick (Breed, *et al.* 2008:32 and 34).
- 2.4.1.3.4.6 Therefore: only 3 of the mentioned communities accept that women can act as deacons and 1 as deaconesses. Breed (*et al.* 2008:34 and 35) further report that by the time of the Dordtse Synod 1618/1619 the convention of employing deaconesses had expired.
- 2.4.1.3.4.7 The following examples of Reformed Churches in ecumenical context, do not use Rom 16:1,2; 1 Tim 3:11 and 5:9-15 as supporting verses in favour of women in the particular offices:
- 2.4.1.3.4.7.1 Reformed Churches of New Zealand: Rev John Rogers was the delegate of this Church at GKSA Synod 2003.
- 2.4.1.3.4.7.1.1 He responded as follows about the decision regarding women in the office of deacon at Synod (quoted from a letter, p1, 2 of Rev John Rogers to ds AH Stavast, dd 17 June 2005):
“I quote from my report to our Ecumenical Relations Committee;
“... *Let me express my concerns at this point only very briefly. Perhaps the Church has been wrong for many 100s of years regarding the office of deacon as having the same status as an office holding a ruling authority in the church altho exercising a different ministry than that of the elder and deacon. And we would have no problem discussing that & if in fact we have been wrong, then opening up the office as a non-authority bearing office.*
“*But up until now that is what we have all believed. You have today opened the office of deacon to women without first discussing two aspects of the question that concern me and I think would concern the RCNZ:*
(i) *You have not thought about your theology of ordination. If ordination confers an authority derived from the apostles, the question of the relative authority of the offices needs to be settled first.*
(ii) *In your present CO you allow for deacons to be co-opted onto the session when a session has only three members or fewer. That infers that you see the office of deacon as an authority-bearing*

office. There must be a biblical rationale behind that. But you have made your decision today without first studying whether that rationale was a correct understanding of Scripture or not.

"In short bro chairman you have put the cart before the horse and that will concern us. I may also say that these are also the sentiments of bro Sikkema of the URCNA."

2.4.1.3.4.7.1.2 With regard to a question about the official viewpoint of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) about this matter he answered (p3, 5.2):

"As a matter of fact, we have never, as a Synod, studied the whole question, so you could say, on paper, we don't have an official position. Yet, is most definitely our practice and position since the beginning of our Churches; it was one of the stated reasons we broke relations with the CRCNA and we discussed the whole question of our relationship with the CRCNA for fifteen years and sympathy for their position did not gain traction within our Churches right through that time; it is one of the points of controversy between us and the CRCA (Australia) at the present time."

2.4.1.3.4.7.2 United Reformed Churches of North America: they, too, were not persuaded in favour of the the decision taken during GKSA Synod 2003 (thus confirms Rev John Rogers in the letter of 17 June 2005):

"In short bro chairman you have put the cart before the horse and that will concern us. I may also say that these are also the sentiments of bro Sikkema of the URCNA." (p2, punt 2).

And:

"I showed Ray Sikkema (United Ref Chs NA) before I spoke and he agreed with me. He was very upset." (p3, 5.3).

2.4.1.3.4.7.3 The Presbyterian Church in Korea: according to Acta 2000 (416, 417, 2.2.4; 3.1.1.2.2) two types of deacon services are maintained. The one is for a limited period of time and for certain duties that have nothing to do with management of the deacons, but with caring for the congregation. They function without being confirmed as deacons.

2.4.1.3.4.7.4 Reformed Church of Australia: according to Acta 2000 (416, 417, 2.2.4; 3.1.1.2.1) female members are implemented in deaconal services, but without confirming them. They are part of the deaconal team, but function separately from the Church Council.

2.4.1.3.4.7.5 The opinion of prof GJC Jordaan in an article in *The Kerkblad* (29 January 2003:5, 6) further confirms that there are even more churches in ecumenical context that do not use these verses in support of the given view: "But simultaneously this is a direction which separates the GKSA further from a significant part of the Reformed world such as the *Reformed Church of New Zealand*, the *United Reformed Church of North America*, the *Christelik Gereformeerde Kerken* and *Christelik Gereformeerde Kerken (Vrijgemaakt)* in the Netherlands."

2.4.1.4 It is therefore clear that unanimity among Reformed Churches in ecumenical context does not exist about the so-called supporting role that the given churches play in the argument. The statement of Synod 2003 can therefore confuse and mislead church members.

2.4.1.5 Can women and the Church Council and the congregation believe with conviction and with approbation allow the chosen or present women in the office to be confirmed if it is clear from these testimonies that all the Reformed Churches in ecumenical context do NOT use these verses to support women in the service of deaconship? This leaves the female member appointed as deacon no certainty of faith that she may indeed be confirmed in this office.

3. On the whole

How can members receive a female deacon as a messenger of the LORD in their homes if there is no certainty that she has indeed been justifiably chosen and confirmed to the office (service), or if there is no certainty that God's Word allows women as deacons?

4. Request

Synod 2012 is therefore requested irrevocably to revoke the decision of the National Synod 2003 (Acta 2003:591. E. Commission report, 4 and p593. Decision. As modified by "Errata Acta" as provided by the Administrative Bureau), namely that women can serve in the office of deacon, and to acknowledge that this is not the way in which God's Word teaches one.