

II.

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) recognise that our denomination is part of the wider Christian Church. The task of the Ecumenical Relations Committee is to maintain and foster appropriate relations with other parts of the Christian Church.

This is rarely a simple task.

Clearly it would be inappropriate for us to have any relationship with bodies which deny core elements of the Christian faith.

Our standpoint is defined by the Scriptures and by the Westminster Confession of Faith. Churches which have come from different historical and geographical backgrounds from our own may have different statements of faith and differ in their understanding of the application of Scripture but still be true parts of Christ's Church. They may also differ in details of their form of worship and in their practice.

These differences will determine the sort of relationship that is appropriate for us to have with each Church.

This is not a new situation. It was thus in other eras too and it is worth remembering that John Knox ministered in very different environments in England, France, Germany and Switzerland, as well as in Scotland.

The most prominent focus of the ecumenical contacts of the Committee is that afforded by our membership of the International Conference of Reformed Churches which arranges a major conference every four years. This affords a practical opportunity for face-to-face contact with representatives from a large number of Reformed Churches worldwide: it is this face-to-face contact which is the most valuable aspect of having representatives at such conferences. It is also much more economical financially than attempting to build up relationships on a one-by-one basis.

The Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) is also a member of Affinity, formerly the British Evangelical Council, a body of which the Free Church of Scotland was a founder member in 1953.

The contacts of the Committee, however, are not restricted to Churches which are members of the ICRC or Affinity and contacts are maintained, with varying degrees of formality and varying closeness of contact, with many Churches and Christian groupings worldwide.

It is clearly important that we should have an accurate understanding, in relation to bodies with which we have contact, with regard of their doctrine, their worship, their practice, their history and their ethos. In the end the Committee have commenced the production of a brief outline covering these matters in respect of a wide range of Churches worldwide, both those with whom we have active contact and those with whom we might potentially develop such contact.

An exercise on paper cannot, of course, be a substitute for personal contact, but the Committee hope that this exercise will prove helpful in providing guidance as to the extent of the relationship appropriate with other parts of the wider Christian Church.

Reports of former years have frequently detailed the contacts we have had with other Churches. Although this report does not do that, the Committee have continued their practice of consideration of those contacts, Church by Church, on each occasion the Committee meets, three times a year.

We are conscious of the support we, as a denomination, had, in the difficult days of 2000, from other parts of the Christian Church. The Committee believe that it is vitally important that we maintain active contact with like-minded Churches beyond Scotland.

We live in a world in which many of those who grow up within our denomination are likely to travel, work and indeed settle in parts of the world in which our denomination has no witness. Where are they to worship? Where are they to find fellowship? It is through the sort of contacts that the Ecumenical Relations Committee fosters that we can provide something of an answer to those questions.

There is also much to be learned from the experiences of other Churches and to be shared with them from our own experience of God's dealings with us and the Committee are conscious of the privilege they have in facilitating these things.

WILLIAM MACLEOD, *Convener*
DONALD ROBERTSON, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations and thank the Committee, especially the Convener, Vice-convener and Clerk;
2. The General Assembly acknowledge that the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), as part of Christ's Church, has a duty to recognise other true Churches worldwide and thank the Committee on Ecumenical Relations for their work to that end;
3. The General Assembly note the work being done by the Committee on Ecumenical Relations in identifying the distinctives of other Churches with a view to ensuring that contact and relations with each Church is of an appropriate nature;
4. The General Assembly acknowledge the value of the International Conference of Reformed Churches and pray that the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) will both benefit from, and be a blessing to, that body;
5. The General Assembly acknowledge the value of Affinity and pray that the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) will both benefit from, and be a blessing to, that body.