



THE LIBERAL CATHOLIC CHURCH
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDING BISHOP
AND ORDINARY EX OFFICIO
PROVINCE OF THE NETHERLANDS

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TO ALL CLERGY AND CONGREGATIONS OF THE LIBERAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

Dear Friends

From discussions with colleagues in some of our larger provinces, it has become apparent that as a Church community we are suffering quite seriously from our people not having received sufficient information to understand clearly the conflict between the General Episcopal Synod and the former Netherlands Province. As a consequence, some individuals and congregations are experiencing anxiety and a measure of confusion. I have occasionally asked Bishops to share circulars more widely, but I now realize this has not been sufficient. This conflict is impinging quite seriously upon some of our churches. It is my intention, therefore, to place before you all a careful account of events since September 2002, in the hope that it will enable you to arrive at a more informed and reassuring view of this very distressing conflict. This account must be fairly brief. For further details please address your queries to your Regionary Bishops who have been kept informed as the situation unfolded. Before listing the sequence of events in the conflict, however, I must first make it very clear that *those who now make up the membership of the schismatic Church in the Netherlands left us, we did not exclude them*. To put it very clearly, they were not pushed, they followed leaders who encouraged them to leave the LCC. *It must also be made clear that we still have a Netherlands Province*. It is still small as yet, but keen, loyal, united, and ably led by its Vicar General, the Very Revd Dr Willem (Wim) van Vledder.

1: Purpose of GES 13. GES 13 (Dec 7-9, 2002) was convened to meet in Camberley in the UK, to consider the policies and actions of the Bishops of the Netherlands Province, who had declared (Sept 2002) that they would ordain women at least to Minor Orders. Their decision was taken in the full knowledge that it was the settled policy of the General Episcopal Synod that the LCC does not ordain women. The Founding Bishops, who believed that in this, as in every other major feature of the new Church, they had been inspired and guided by Our Lord Himself, had instituted this policy. Successive Synods have re-affirmed this policy. It has always been the view of the Synod that women and men are absolutely equal, but have differing functions.

2: GES 13 Pre-empted. Despite the agreement of Bp den Outer and Bp Degenaaars to attend the Emergency Synod - Bishops from around the world having agreed to meet to seek a solution to this conflict - the Dutch Bishops went ahead with the ordination of women to Minor Orders (Nov 17, 2002), only three weeks before the Synod was due to convene (Dec 7, 2002). Many Bishops saw this as a studied insult, and as a challenge to the authority of the GES. It should be noted that my repeated requests to the then Regionary (Bp Draaisma), to postpone this action until the emergency Synod could meet, were not heeded.

3: The Order of Our Lady. Earlier (GES 12, 2000), the Synod had agreed by a large majority to introduce an Order of Mary for women wishing to serve in the Sanctuary or in the pastoral field. Its stages were to be equivalent to Minor Orders, but different, in that the admissions were to be carried out in the name, and in the power, of the Holy Lady Mary. The Office of Deaconess was to become the sixth stage of the Order of Mary (later, the Order of Our Lady). By mid 2002 the earlier stages had been written and trialed, and those involved had testified to their having been powerful and atmospheric. The Dutch, however, declined to introduce the new rituals, insisting on Minor Orders - *in the first instance* - for women, thus putting themselves on a collision course with the General Episcopal Synod.

4: Outcomes of GES 13. At GES 13 the decision was taken by a two-thirds majority of Bishops present and represented by proxy, to dismiss Bishop Draaisma as a Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church. Bishop den Outer, who had carried out the illicit ordinations on the orders of Bishop Draaisma, thereby breaking his Oath of Canonical Obedience to the GES, was given the opportunity to renew his oath. He declined, instead choosing to resign as a Bishop of our Church. A further consequence was that, in the absence of a Regionary Bishop, authority in the Province passed to the Presiding Bishop as Ordinary ex Officio (*General Constitution, Para 12*).

5: Wisdom Tradition and Apostolic Succession Disregarded. One of the most revealing and disturbing insights to emerge from GES 13 arose from a document addressed to the Synod from the Netherlands Clerical Synod. In this document, fluently written in very good English, the Chairman of the Netherlands Clerical Synod explained why the Dutch clergy considered it imperative that the LCC should ordain women. The arguments were all justified on social and political grounds. There was no consideration whatever of insights deriving from the Wisdom Tradition underpinning the principles and doctrine of the LCC, no reference to the all-important Apostolic Succession by which sacramental power is transmitted from Bishop to Bishop, no reference to any other sacramental considerations, and no knowledge shown of the Canon Law of the LCC. The Dutch Clergy in their own document, recommended to us by their Chairman as representing the consensus of Clergy views, demonstrated that their demand for the ordination of women was simply their attempt to adapt the Church to a current socio-political trend.

6: Declaration of Intention to Leave. At GES 13 the two Netherlands Bishops present affirmed that if any disciplinary measures were taken against any Dutch Bishop, the whole Province would at once leave the LCC. This did not happen. Instead the Clergy and Lay officials insisted that they wished to stay and negotiate a solution, and issued an invitation to the Presiding Bishop to visit the Netherlands for this purpose.

7: A Concealed Limit of Six Months. Shortly after GES 13, probably in January 2003, the Netherlands Clergy (with Lay officials?) met to plan their future. They decided that they would give the GES no more than 6 months to concede their demands; namely the restoration of Bishop Draaisma and Bishop den Outer, and approval to proceed with the ordination of women. The Report of the Meeting was written only in Dutch. Loyal members of Clergy informed me of some of its main points. At this stage, we did not know how seriously to take the proposed limit. The Dutch did not refer to it in any conversation, then or later.

8: Ideal Solution Rejected. On the weekend of March 29-30, 2003, accompanied by Bishop Ruben Cabigting, I met twice with the Netherlands Policy Group - a group combining representatives of Lay officials and of Clergy. From the start their approach was legalistic. The Chairman began, "*Do you recognize the authority of this Policy Group?*" to which the reply was, "*No, it has no constitutional basis, but we can talk informally*". Lengthy exchanges

produced no basis for agreement. The Dutch insisted that that they must have their Bishops back and be allowed to ordain women, and I advised them that the Synod had only recently re-affirmed its policy on these issues, and would not budge. In the late afternoon, during a coffee break, I retreated to the nearby chapel. Before returning, I was surprised to find words forming in my head: "*Stay with us for two years. During that time do not ordain women. Allow the Order of Our Lady to spread in your province. If your people are happy with it, stay with us. If not, leave with our blessing.*" Grateful to Our Lord for this guidance, I passed on the proposal, without comment, to the meeting. At once the gathering became more positive and hopeful. We dispersed shortly afterwards, to return and consider the proposal the next day.

The next day's meeting was a total disappointment. The Chairman made no reference to the proposition, "*Stay with us for two years ...*". Instead, he began by telling the meeting that the one, all-important, consideration was the reinstatement of the Netherlands Bishops. Everything else was secondary. It was then clear that they were unlikely to accept any compromise at all. They would continue trying to force the acceptance of their demands.

9: Meeting Clerical Synod. At a meeting with Clerical Synod a few days later, Bishop Ruben and I were met with a barrage of what sounded like well rehearsed expressions of loyalty - *this is our Church - we will never leave - no-one can force us out - I was born into this Church, it is my home - we will stay and see that the Church changes with the times - and on and on, then - you are now our bishop, so you must present our case to the Synod - it is your duty to persuade the Synod to approve our demands...* ***While all the time they had decided to give the pursuit of their goals from within the LCC no more than six months.***

10: Policy Group Strategy Implemented. At a further meeting with the Policy Group, it was announced that because the Presiding Bishop would not press their demands upon the Synod, the Province would no longer recognize him nor deal with him. Instead, they would approach the Synod directly. It had become apparent by this time that the officials with whom we had been endeavouring to negotiate had been following a carefully formulated plan proceeding by measured steps intended to persuade or pressure the Presiding Bishop into backing their cause, and, failing that, to discard and discredit him. This, we suspected at the time, involved outside legal guidance. On the day the secession was announced (June 9th, 2003), the Chairperson of the Netherlands Central Church Board (CKB) issued a communique, later translated for us by Bp Boudewijn Goudriaan, which included the statement: "*The CKB has endeavoured to observe the uttermost thoroughness in taking this far-reaching decision. A legal observer has continuously been consulted for the required advice*". ***Instead of engaging in open and free negotiations, the Netherlands officials had employed a pre-arranged strategy, planned in consultation with a high-priced lawyer, very experienced in church disputes.*** Moreover, we must note that that the secession took place on June 9th, exactly six months to the day from the closing of GES 13 (Dec 9th, 2002).

11: Already Independent. Believing that most of the lay members were being kept misinformed by their officials, I sought in early May to communicate by mail with all members. On the instruction of an unnamed official, the secretary of the Church Board refused to disclose addresses. Only one viewpoint was to be heard in the Netherlands. In effect, they were already acting as an independent church, simply keeping to a preset timetable. There was a month to wait and pretend, before the six months had passed.

12: Refusal to Honour Pledges. Liberal Catholic Bishops are all pledged to return their Episcopal regalia to the GES should they ever leave the Church (Canon 65). With the exception of a ring and cross which I insisted Bishop den Outer relinquish on the day of his resignation, no regalia has been returned by any of the Bishops associated with the breakaway Church, including Bp Warnon. At GES 13, Bishop Degenaaars agreed to be the

custodian of the regalia of Bishop Draaisma and Bishop den Outer. In the Netherlands I twice (March 28 and May 31) reminded Bp Degenaaars that the regalia of the two former Bishops must be returned. On both occasions he assured me that the regalia was safe. Now we know that he meant, "*safe for our new Church*". The Netherlands breakaway Church is also holding a set of regalia forwarded from Denmark for safekeeping. Their failure to honour their obligation to return regalia is yet another way in which a sacred trust has been violated.

13: Secession under False Pretences. After secession, all members of the schismatic Church were sent ballot papers asking whether they agreed or disagreed with the action of their Church Board. "*By way of this form you may indicate your opinion regarding the decision of the Central Church Board, dd. 9 June, 2003, to secede - temporarily, till the conclusion of the General Episcopal Synod meeting of 2004 - from the Liberal Catholic Church.*" We have no way of knowing how many people accepted secession because of the assurance of an early return to the mother Church. It must be apparent to all, however, that the Netherlands officials had no right whatsoever to promise something which was not theirs to give, and which they could not and cannot deliver.

14: Subversion a Real Threat. Sadly, agents of the breakaway Church are seeking to secure the allegiance of individuals and congregations outside the Netherlands. We now understand why the then Chairman of the Netherlands Clerical Synod made a visit to Australia late in 2002. Bishop Warnon, recently admitted as a member of the breakaway Synod, resigned as a Bishop of the LCC when his dismissal for disloyalty was imminent. He has endeavoured, with partial success, to carry the Belgian and Canadian Provinces with him into the new Church. I have correspondence in my files that show him to have been encouraging a Canadian priest to leave the LCC with him when he was ready to leave - this correspondence having been sent while he was still, outwardly, a loyal bishop of the LCC. This behaviour, continuing in the US Province, motivated the American bishops to propose his dismissal. More recently, in the US, there have been efforts to detach a whole congregation from the mother Church. A smokescreen of talk about "the wider Liberal Catholic Tradition" disguises these subversive tactics.

In the UK a young priest has resigned after making intrusive efforts to persuade his colleagues to adopt the platform of the schismatic Church. He went so far as to describe Bishops Draaisma, den Outer and Degenaaars as "Adepts". He further suggested that the present Bishops of the GES should retire to make way for "*those who know the will of Christ*". These flights of fancy followed a number of visits to the Netherlands. Had it been realized how susceptible he was to brainwashing, he would not have been ordained.

Conclusion: In these difficult times we are all custodians of a precious heritage. Please share this information widely in the interests of safeguarding our unique Church, so that it can move forward strongly to achieve the destiny Our Lord has ordained for it.

May His blessing rest upon you all,

+ Ian Hooker

