

THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

FEBRUARY 1987



What is Reformed?

RES and the Pope

The Fourth Day

Will the Church Turn Corporate?

A Review of the Report on Church Structure — VISION 21

Gerard Berghoef

A. Background

Synod of 1983 agreed with Classis Hudson that it would be in order to "study the organizational structure of the Christian Reformed Church, including all denominational boards and agencies."

Synod referred the matter to the Synodical Interim Committee. This body appointed a special "structure committee." Late in 1986, a copy of this committee's report was sent to all CRC consistories. They are encouraged to submit their reactions to the Synodical Interim Committee by January 10, 1987, with opportunity to submit overtures to synod by March 15.

B. An Attractive Proposal?

A cursory reading of this report could make one an enthusiastic supporter of Vision 21. Some "with-it" managerial language is used; and the structure proposed for the denomination would bring some genuine corporate concepts into our "ancient" standards for church authority and leadership.

Even a non-business person would be impressed by concepts like: Unified programs — Unified long-range planning — Coordination requires authority — Minimal administrative structures — Delegation of responsibility — Evaluation of Board/staff members — Creativity within boundaries — Cost savings projections, and the like.

Many of these are reasonable, some admirable, but many are already in place.

And what price would the CRC pay for all this business-like efficiency?

We will reflect on that question after first outlining briefly what is being proposed by Vision 21.

C. The Plan

The structure committee proposes:

1. "Creation of an Executive Board of Synod as a

church-wide executive administrative arm of synod, directly accountable to synod" (17 members).

2. "Assignment of all denominational agencies, committees and programs to one of four operating boards:
 - a. Financial Affairs/Support Services (14 members)
 - b. Publication/Church Education (14 members)
 - c. Ministries (44 members)
 - d. Higher Education (44 members)

Mandate: Executive Board

Here is a somewhat abbreviated outline of the mandate to be given the Executive Board:

1. Supervision of:
 - the implementation of policies and programs
 - the Boards and General Secretary (Stated Clerk)
2. Appointment of:
 - college and seminary professors
 - Banner editor
 - financial coordinator
 - study committees
3. In addition:
 - provide synods with issues affecting the life of the CRC
 - provide synod with five-year denominational plan
 - evaluate all agency budgets
 - propose nominations for General Secretary and agency heads

Membership of the Executive Board

- 17 members, eight clergy and nine non-clergy representation to be regional, recommendation by Executive Board, synodical appointment
- Compensation: all members serve without compensation

Tasks: Operating Boards

1. Financial affairs/support services: responsible for a variety of services — loan fund, pension fund, etc.
2. Publication/Church Education: all CRC publications
3. Ministries: Chaplains Committee; Home Missions; World Mission; Back to God Hour; CRWRC; Ministerial Information Service; Pastor-Church Relations; SCORR; Education Assistance to Churches Abroad.
4. Higher Education: Calvin College and Seminary

D. Evaluation

How shall we estimate the worth of this venturesome proposal?

We have already alluded to its recommendation of apparently more efficient procedures for the CRC. It lays claim, also, to saving denominational funds through such efficiencies.

Certain problems, however, arise.

E. Some Principle Problems

One serious objection to the structure proposal is its violation of a fundamental principle of Reformed Church polity.

As reflected in the Church Order, our polity provides for a finely tuned balance, developed over many centuries of experience, between local consistories and broader assemblies. "Original" authority is vested in the local consistory; "delegated" authority is conferred upon broader bodies (classes and synods). This delicate balance of authority is the cornerstone of our Reformed polity, and has serious implications for those structural changes which Vision 21 has in view.

What happens to that balance in Vision 21?

The structure committee makes a gesture toward the principle by saying, "The local congregation possesses 'original' authority."

In the provisions of the proposed structure this concept is practically dismantled. It therefore does not matter a great deal, except to the integrity of the report, that this statement is erroneous. But, for the record: original authority is vested in the local **consistory**, not **congregation**!

Just how does this report dismantle the Reformed concept of a balanced authority?

Notice, first, that the Reformed polity guarantees a balance of authority in two ways:

1. The delegated authority of the major assemblies is conveyed from the local consistory by way of properly credentialed delegates. Without delegates, no broader assemblies are possible; and upon final adjournment of these assemblies, this delegated authority returns again to the local consistories. This has always been the hedge against hierarchical tyranny in the Reformed churches.

Therefore, when Vision 21 proposes a permanently functioning Executive Board, acting for the denomination, the concept of a

THE OUTLOOK

(USPS 633-980)



Published Monthly

July-August Issue Combined

"And the three companies blew the trumpets . . . and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . . and they cried, The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon" (Judges 7:20).

JOURNAL OF REFORMED FELLOWSHIP, INC.

Send all copy to Managing Editor, Rev. Peter De Jong, 4985 Sequoia Dr., S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508. Phone (616) 698-6267.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES: Edward Knott, President; Jay Wesseling, Vice President; Arthur Bestman, Secretary; Peter Wobbema, Treasurer; John Velthouse, Ass't Secretary Treasurer; John Engbers, Henry Hoeksema, Randal Lankheet, John Piersma, Berton Sevensma, Harlan Vanden Einde, Henry Vanden Heuvel, John Vander Aa, Syburn Voortman, Peter Yonker.

Production Manager: Peter Wobbema.

Business Manager: Mrs. Mary Kaiser.

This periodical is owned and published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc., a religious and strictly non-profit organization composed of a group of Christian believers who hold to the Reformed Faith. Its purpose is to give sharpened expression to this Faith, to stimulate the doctrinal sensitivities of those who profess this Faith, to promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Christian Reformed Church particularly and also of other Reformed churches, and as far as possible to further the interests of all Christian action and institutions of Reformed character.

The publishers of this journal express their adherence to the Calvinistic creeds as formulated in the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

All contributions represent the personal views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Subscription Policy: Subscription price, \$7.50 per year, \$13.50 for 2 years (Canada rates \$11.50 per year, \$21.00 for 2 years). Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Include your Zip Code.

Registered as Second Class mail under permit #9489 at Norwich, Ontario.

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THE OUTLOOK

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Contents

February 1987 Volume XXXVII No. 2

Will the Church Turn Corporate? 2
by Gerald Bergnoef

An Answer With the Seventh Prayer 5
by John Blankespoor

The Curran Case and Creedal Subscription 7
by Marten H. Woudstra

What Does It Mean to be a Reformed Christian? 10
by Peter De Jong

The RES and the Pope's Vigil 13
by Richard E. Knodel

Misusing Matthew 18 14
by J. Tuininga

A Look at Books
The Fourth Day
R.B. — A Prophet in the Land 15

limited delegated authority is destroyed. The authority remains lodged in the Executive Committee rather than returning to the local consistories.

2. By the concept of "original" authority, Reformed polity locates the right to originate issues for synodical agendas in the local consistory by way of overture.

But, Vision 21 stipulates that this right is to be shared (and in practice will be taken over by) the proposed Executive Board.

From both points of view, it is clear that the new structure would violate a basic principle of Reformed polity. It may be asked if Vision 21 can be called truly "Reformed" at all.

F. Responsibility and Authority

Guideline number seven of the report reads as follows:

"Synod should delegate responsibility and authority."

This again betrays an insensitivity to Reformed polity.

It is not possible for a synod to delegate its responsibilities. Being responsible is a non-transferrable state. What responsibilities a synod has, these it retains in terms of the "delegated" authority derived from local consistories.

Therefore, our Church Order makes this carefully worded stipulation: "The assemblies may delegate to committees the execution of their decisions. . . . They shall give every committee a well defined mandate, and shall require of them regular and complete reports of their work" (Art. 33a).

This is far removed from the proposed assignment to the Executive Board of authority to supervise and operate almost all denominational Boards and Committees, as well as to a great extent replacing the work of the advisory committees.

It is to be assumed, of course, that the Church Order can be changed to fit the structure proposals. Probably the committee has this in mind. But if so, we should be provided with a well-founded theological and ecclesiological rationale to justify such fundamental changes in the system which has served the Reformed churches for four centuries.

G. Practical Objections

Certain important practical effects of the committee proposals should be kept in mind:

1. While Vision 21 claims to provide unification and coordination of denominational effort, it would destroy the modest beginnings decided upon by Synods '85 and '86 for coordinating and unifying World Mission and World Relief into World Ministries. Giving this decision time to work would be an excellent opportunity to see if we can walk before we attempt to run.
2. The committee's objections to synodical overload can easily be projected for the

proposed Board of Ministries which is assigned five major agencies and five synodical committees.

3. Nowhere in Vision 21 is there sufficient provision for administrative staff to implement the extensive coordination prescribed in the proposal.
4. The contemplated concentration of power in an Executive Board of seventeen is an idea which even in non-ecclesiastical structures has been tried and found wanting.
5. The enormous claims for savings appear unrealistic, in light of the fact that:
 - a. Our present agency staff are usually quite lean and productive.
 - b. The data provided are too soft; for example, on page 21 it is said that the Board of Ministries will meet three times per year, which in computing financial outlays the Board is scheduled to meet once per year.

G. Alternatives

This entire proposal arose out of the notion that "many boards and many agencies have grown without benefit of a coordinated plan." This growth could be considered an unmitigated blessing. At issue should be the question of how effective our ministries are, and how faithfully they are performing their tasks in the light of God's Word and our Confessions and Church Order.

A five-year plan could be a futile exercise in dealing with a living organism like the Church.

If our synods are truly overloaded, a Board of Miscellaneous Ministries might be the answer to the proliferation of agencies and committees directly responsible to synod.

If we wish more continuity in synodical decision making, why not urge consistories and classes to appoint standing committees for major assembly matters and then delegate these members to more than one assembly meeting?

If we become burdened with too many agencies and committees, we should assign a "sun set" for each of these bodies as called into being, so that they would automatically expire unless clear justification for their reappointment is evident.

If more coordination is needed, the way will be shown by the creation of the Board of World Ministries which will be evaluated in 1988/89. If found satisfactory, then this is the approach to follow. If found wanting, then is the time to draw from the experience directions in which to proceed.

Finally, local consistories must take greater interest in the affairs of the denomination, or we will risk losing our tradition of church government to some such proposal as this.

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An Answer With the Seventh Prayer

John Blankespoor

"Elijah climbed to the top of Mt. Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. 'Go and look towards the sea' he said. Seven times Elijah said, 'Go back.' The seventh time the servant reported, 'A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea'" (I Kings 12:42-44). He prayed earnestly that it would not rain and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed and the heavens gave rain" (James 5:17).

• • •

Elijah, the man of God, prophet of judgment, had preached repentance to the people of Israel. But they refused. Thereupon the prophet prayed **that it would not rain**. And it didn't rain. Now, after the great demonstration of fire on Mt. Carmel, and the people responding saying, "the Lord is God," Elijah prayed for rain. He instructed his servant to look towards the west for signs of rain in the sky. But there wasn't a cloud to be seen. Elijah told him to go back and look again. The servant came back with the same negative answer. This was repeated six times. After the seventh prayer the servant saw a cloud as small as a man's hand. Soon the sky became dark and it poured rain.

Why did Elijah keep on praying? Why didn't Elijah give up in despair after the third or fourth prayer? And why did the Lord answer only after the seventh prayer?

The number seven has a symbolic meaning in the Bible, as do also other numbers. Ten, for example, symbolizes a fulness. Ten plagues in Egypt are the fulness of God's wrath. Ten commandments are the fulness of the Lord's will. The number seven as the number of the covenant, is often used in the Old Testament. The heart of the covenant is God's faithfulness and His promises of unending love. Elijah knew this. He persevered in his prayer for rain, trusting that God in His faithfulness would answer.

We, too, must persevere in prayer. He **will** answer. This doesn't mean that He will answer us immediately, or that He **will** give us what we

want. It does mean that He, the eternally faithful One, promises that He will give His dear children what they need, accompanied with His grace and Holy Spirit.

Let's take another example of this same truth. Consider the story of Naaman, the "five star" general of the Syrian army. The great man was a leper. In his hopeless condition he went to Elisha in Israel for healing. Elisha instructed him to dip himself in the Jordan river **seven times**. Although he at first resented this instruction, he finally did what the prophet told him to do. And on the seventh immersion he was miraculously healed. I can imagine Naaman questioning on the third or fourth dipping, "Does this make any sense?" But he persevered, and healing came with the seventh immersion.

He, with his limited knowledge of the Lord, had to learn that simple faith in the instruction of this faithful God through Elisha did marvelous things for him.

For us this means, not that we must always pray seven times, but that in our prayer life we must continue praying, being assured that we have a faithful God who **always** answers true prayers. Do not doubt, therefore, but keep on praying.

• • •

You may have pleaded with God for years. Do not give up in unbelief. Remember the seven prayers. We are encouraged to plead fervently with the ever faithful God. Although we may want an answer immediately, we must learn to wait for God's time. Because we have to wait, our faith often becomes weak. As Elijah's prayers were answered, will not yours and mine also be answered? Our heavenly Father always gives good gifts and rich blessings upon **persevering** prayers. Elijah knew the Lord in His faithfulness and trusted in Him. The Lord may answer in a way completely different from what we expect, and at a different time, **but answer He will**. Who knows why the Lord delays in answering prayers? In His infinite wisdom and love, He may have good

reasons to answer in a different way or have us wait. He is the majestic God and Father who loves His children with an indescribable love, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Remember, there are three answers to our prayers, "yes," "no," and "wait." Often we have to wait. Sometimes "no" and "wait" go together. Even when we have to wait we know that all true prayers are first of all answered by the Lord giving us grace to wait. No earthly father would give to his son, when he asks, a snake instead of a fish, a scorpion instead of an egg, or a stone instead of a loaf of bread. Our heavenly Father surely will not treat His **pleading** children that way.

The Scriptures tell us that the Lord "inclines His ears" to our cries. Picture a grown-up reaching over to hear what his child is saying to him. What a thought. . . that the heavenly Father so inclines His ears to our cries, even though these may be only faint whispers from a weak patient in a bed.

When he waits, there is a divine purpose in that. Tears may be shed during that time of waiting. But He remembers them, "puts them in a bottle," says Psalm 56:8.

Knowing all this, we pray

Teach me to feel that Thou art always nigh;
Teach me the struggles of the soul to bear;
To check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh;
Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer.

Does this mean that the Lord answers all prayers of all people who pray? Of course not. He does not hear the cries of the wicked, nor of His people when they live in sin.

Thinking Christians also ask, "For what may we pray?" This is a difficult question for many people. The Heidelberg Catechism says that we may and should pray for all things we need for body and soul. It is possible that what we think we need is different from what the Lord considers to be our need. He gives us what we really need and He will answer. "Seek and you shall find, knock and it will be opened unto you, ask and you shall receive."

James says that in the end the Lord, who is full of compassion and mercy, blessed Job. Job, too, had to wait. James speaks of the perseverance of Job. Who knows how long he suffered before this blessing came upon him?

The Scripture contains more examples of a saint who persevered in prayer. Think of Joseph. At 17 he was sold as a slave. Later he was unjustly jailed by Potiphar. We know how he was released. But he didn't know that when he was imprisoned, and the hope of being released was very dim. Joseph, a godly man, had to wait.

Think also of Abraham. A son had been promised. But time went on, Abraham and Sarah grew older, and soon they were beyond the

normal age of having children. They had to wait 25 years. But they persevered in prayer and faith.

Another example is that of Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist. He was an old man when Gabriel appeared to him and said that his prayers had been heard. Assuming that this couple was married at a normal age, think how long they prayed for the birth of a child or children. But now, when they are old their prayers are heard. How they, too, had to persevere and wait in prayer.

"The true suppliant gathers force as he proceeds and grows more fervent when God delays to answer. The longer the gate is closed, the more vehemently does he use the knocker, and the longer the angel lingers the more resolved he is that he will never let go without the blessing. Beautiful in God's sight is the fearful, agonizing, unconquerable perseverance of the saints. It means praying humbly for the Spirit. We shall never sing *Gloria in Excelsis* except we first pray to God *de profundis*." (Charles Spurgeon).

Another requirement is that we pray regularly. Daniel did, three times per day. Think of the regular prayer life of our Lord Jesus.

"Would you know the secret of always abiding in a state of prayerfulness? The answer is clear. Realize first that God is near you, and within you; then you will feel how natural it is to talk with Him, each moment about your needs and desires. For the true Christian, life is a constant abiding with the Father. . . The intercourse between the Father and His child should be continuous. Prayer must be a daily activity, like breathing or sleeping, instead of something that is brought into use only once per day. The principle of complete dependence on the unseen God and the holy habit of claiming His presence with us each moment of the day — is the secret of a life of true godliness" (Andrew Murray).

Elijah is saying to us here, "God will answer. Be patient and persevere".

God's word again and again encourages us to persist in praying:

"Pray without ceasing" (I. Thess. 4:17).

"With prayers and supplications praying at all seasons in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:16).

"Continue in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

"Night and day praying exceedingly" (I Thess. 3:10)

"Crying unto Him, day and night" (Luke 18:7)

"They continued steadfastly in fellowship and prayers" (Acts 2:42).

Persevering prayer has unbelievable power with our heavenly Father when it comes from our hearts that are yielded to Him in faith and obedience.

This Elijah also knew when he continued to pray and received an answer upon the **seventh** prayer.

The Curran Case and Creedal Subscription

Marten H. Woudstra

Some time last August the long arm of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, headed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, reached across the Atlantic and tapped on the shoulder of a professor in Moral Theology at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. The professor in question, Charles Curran, an ordained priest in the Roman Catholic Church, had his license to teach as a theologian of Roman Catholic doctrine revoked by the powers that be.

This latest manifestation of the Vatican's resolve to keep the Roman Catholic Church true to its authentic teaching hardly came as a surprise. Not only had a similar penalty been applied some years ago to Professor Hans Kung at the University of Tübingen, Professor Curran's opinion on sexual morality — the specific point of difference between him and the church to whose teachings he is committed by virtue of his priestly vows of obedience — had been subjected to lengthy investigations, spanning several years. Professor Curran was fully aware of what was awaiting him should he decide to abide by his opinions concerning abortion, divorce, premarital sex, and other similar sensitive subjects. He had even made a compromise proposal to the Vatican — namely that he keep his position, but not teach sexual ethics courses. It was all to no avail. The Vatican conceded that it was the "length and breadth" of Curran's dissent that caused the disciplinary action against him — the first of its

kind in the circles of North American Catholic educational institutions.

As could be expected, some Roman Catholic educators viewed this recent Vatican insistence that the Roman Catholic Church be what its name indicates with utter dismay. Strict adherence to precisely formulated doctrines has long been deemed a hindrance to "academic freedom." Insisting upon doctrinal loyalty on the part of officially licensed and commissioned ministers and professors of theology is easily decried as having a chilling effect upon the wholesome exchange of scholarly opinion which one likes to associate with the educational enterprise. It is also usually pointed out by the opponents of this type of Vatican discipline that the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was at one time called the Holy Office of the Inquisition. In an article I read, printed in the *New York Times* of August 29, 1986, p. A27, the charge was also made that Cardinal Ratzinger had "sidestepped canonical legal processes" and that there had been no charge that Curran's teachings transgressed against papal pronouncements.

It is not our purpose to dwell at length upon the internal Roman Catholic aspects of this case. For non-Roman Catholics and Catholics alike the case raises anew the question of what constitutes the Roman Catholic Church's "authentic" teachings. This church has its unique dogmas, such as that of transubstantiation, the immaculate conception of the virgin Mary, her bodily assumption, and the dogma of papal infallibility. Besides, there are of course the "decrees" of various councils, such as Trent, Vatican I and II. Rome also knows the phenomenon of the so-called papal encyclicals. An encyclical is a letter sent by a given pope to all the Roman Catholic bishops in

the world. Such encyclicals usually are considered to have a certain force as expressions of the ever ongoing Roman Catholic "magisterial" teaching. For the non-Roman Catholic onlooker the charge that the recent Vatican action might possibly smack of "creeping infallibilism" does indeed seem to have a certain plausibility.

From a formal point of view, however, a Reformed person in a creedally committed church such as the Christian Reformed Church, the pope's desire to keep the church, which he heads as the alleged, but non-real, "vicar of Christ," true to what the church teaches, is to be applauded. Honest is honest. Priests who solemnly vow obedience to the hierarchy and what it teaches, should be held responsible for their vows. The present writer considers the church of Rome in error on many important points of doctrine. Though Vatican II may have changed the posture of that church in some significant ways, the church's fundamental teachings regarding the mass as an unbloody sacrifice, the validity of indulgences as a means to release the sinner from temporal penalties, the use of saintly intercessions, and the special place accorded to Mary within the scheme of redemption — to name just these few — all these have not undergone any basic change in recent Roman Catholic doctrinal pronouncements. The present pope is an ardent Mariologist. Only a few years ago he sovereignly dedicated the whole world to Mary. This same pope and his lesser hierarchy can, upon a simple fiat, open the treasury of merit to release a certain amount of the surplus of good works stored up there and provide indulgence.

Faithful to Its Teachings

As concerns the Curran case itself, I doubt if many of the readers of this journal would care to be as strict as the church of Rome is in matters of artificial birth control, allowing no other means than the so-called rhythm method. So it is the formal rather than the material aspect that we wish to emphasize here. The Roman Catholic church does not appear to have anything comparable to our type of creedal subscription. To have creeds, and to insist that they be maintained and taught in full accord with Holy Scripture, is a characteristically Protestant and Reformed phenomenon. Yet, I believe all men and women of good will, i.e. of Reformed good will, can rejoice that a church insist on careful adherence to its own teachings. Much as one may deplore the errors of Roman doctrine, much as one may wish that the Roman Catholic Church would not insist upon the teaching of those erroneous doctrines, the fact that in this late twentieth century, with its often seemingly unlimited license in doctrine and morals, there is a church body that dares to maintain the teachings it considers authentic and divine, such a fact is indeed a source of satisfaction to all who would like to see that same thing happening in churches that do not teach

false doctrine but adhere, by God's grace, to the whole counsel of God.

As was stated repeatedly, the point of comparison is a formal one. Yet it appears to be worth making. The present writer was heartened by the remarks made in *The Banner* a few weeks ago by the Rev. Jacob Eppinga, president of the 1986 synod of the Christian Reformed Church. He observed that the synod had given evidence of its willingness to adhere to the Three Forms of Unity. What is also heartening is that the new Contemporary Testimony was adopted with the stipulation that this Testimony should be considered "subordinate to the Creeds." None of us wants to raise the creeds to the level of infallibility. In fact, the creeds themselves explicitly warn against any such procedure. Yet, in those creeds we have, by common and voluntary consent, learned to accept the doctrine of salvation contained in Holy Scripture. Though in their relative emphasis upon the doctrines which were in dispute in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the creeds do show the marks of their times of origin, they are not by any means outmoded or lacking in contemporaneity.

Benefits of the Subscription Formula

This is why standing guard by the unabridged enforcement of the Formula of Subscription is such a vital concern for all of us. The teachings of our creeds are worth enforcing in a way that the teachings of the Church of Rome are not, or at least not always and not fully.

To speak about the great usefulness of the Formula of Subscription is not a vain and superfluous matter. For it sometimes appears that what we as a church give with one hand we are taking away with the other. While it is gratifying to note that the church wishes to be faithful to the Three Forms of Unity, we continue to hear voices that insist that the Formula of Subscription, by its strictness, is somehow hampering theological discussion. Such allegation was made a few years ago at the retirement of Dr. John Kromminga as president of Calvin Seminary. The one who made it was the Rev. Clarence Boomsma, a man widely respected in the church and a past president of several CRC synods. The almost complete silence in the church in response to Rev. Boomsma's suggestion, a suggestion which has many ominous overtones, was eloquent, not to say deafening.

Ties with the RCA?

And what about the church's ever closer cooperation with the Reformed Church in America? That denomination does not have a creedal subscription formula in the specific sense of the word. One can find the exact words of the formula used by the RCA on p. 559 of the Acts of the 1976 CRC synod. The study committee reporting to the synod at that point rightly points out that the RCA formula — not required of its elders and deacons, but only of ministers and

professors — has “changed its character as a form of subscription to the standards extensively.” At stake is the word “standards” here.

Not only that, the RCA has since adopted “Our Song of Faith,” a contemporary formulation of what it believes is a fourth standard. Yet, that Song of Faith has been criticized in another study report of the CRC as containing questionable formulations of the doctrine of Scripture. This criticism was made by the New Confession Committee, the predecessor of the Contemporary Testimony Committee. Still, in spite of such confessional weaknesses the CRC has entered into a status of “ecclesiastical fellowship” with the RCA. This status involves recognition of the fact that the other denomination is Reformed in faith and practice. Significantly, a declaration that the Reformed Church in America is Reformed in *actual fact* was omitted from the decision of the synod of 1976 which regulated the new relationship. All that that synod had the courage to say, and all that could be said in view of the circumstances, was that the two denominations had already been doing the things which belong to the status of ecclesiastical fellowship.

. . . at stake is one issue, that of confessional loyalty.

Repeated attempts to set forth publicly where the RCA stands on the all-important question of confessional loyalty have been thwarted, the last one by the recent CRC synod of 1986. Instead, the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) assures us, almost petulantly, that it is fully aware of all the “differences” between the RCA and the CRC, and that it is making every effort to address these differences. I cannot help thinking that the choice of the word “difference” instead of “issue” is deliberate. At stake between the RCA and us are not umpteen differences — the IRC has an imposing list of no less than eighteen of them — at stake is one issue, that of confessional loyalty. And this not just in a certain segment of the church, let us say the Midwest region, but the whole of it, also the older Eastern part of the RCA.

So of what practical use is it being assured of how greatly minded the 1986 synod was to give pride of place to the confessions? When that synod had the chance to show that it meant business, in voting on the matter concerning the RCA, it let the Interchurch Relations Committee have its way (Acts 1986, p. 614).

The CRC and WARC

Another glaring inconsistency in our professed stance with and under the confessions is the recent attempt to make the CRC join the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC). This organization, as organization (!), is neither Reformed nor is it confessional. To be sure, it

makes a polite gesture in the direction of the Reformed confessions and it insists that there must be “general agreement” with these as a condition of membership. But immediately it adds that the Reformed “tradition” — a rather horrendous word in this context — is a “biblical and doctrinal ethos, rather than any narrow and exclusive definition of faith and order.”

I ask in all candor, place this vague and vacillating formulation next to the clearcut words of the CRC Formula of Subscription and notice the vast difference. Is it any wonder that one of the chief spokesmen of the Interchurch Relations Committee, the Rev. Boomsma, has difficulty with the Formula? How else could he possibly, together with his fellow committee members, advocate membership in the WARC?

As to WARC’s stated aims, these are, as far as Reformed faith and practice are concerned, equally as vague as its reference to the confessions. This world-wide organization of Reformed churches does not pledge itself to the defense and propagation of the Reformed faith, something which one would certainly expect an organization of this kind to pursue with vigor. No indeed, all the WARC pledges itself to do is to “examine together the traditions (!) of faith and practice within the Reformed family.” Is that all we as Reformed churches are to do with the Reformed faith in this day and age? Does one have to join a doctrinally and confessional [SIC] weak “alliance” to do this “examining”? An alliance is not a forum. This is what its proponents try to make of it. An alliance is what the word says: a solemn league and covenant. The word “covenant” is used in the language of the WARC’s own “Act of Union.” See Acts 1985, p. 230ff. It is a fallacy to make the WARC over into what by its own admission it is not, and to do so in order to make membership in this organization palatable to the CRC.

The things I have just touched upon are worthy of further elaboration. I shall attempt to give such at a future point. Ever closer cooperation with the RCA, and proposed membership in WARC, were only cited here as illustrations of glaring inconsistencies within a church which, thanks be to God, still says it wishes to adhere to the Three Forms without compromise.

So let us guard by the Formula by which we all pledge our adherence to the creeds. These creeds are both inclusive of the whole gospel, and yet narrowly exclusive of everything that militates therewith. I assure the potential Currans among us that to teach within a strict confessional context is a glorious thing, not hampering, not prohibiting the comparison with views of others, but liberating in the sense that the truth shall make us free.

Marten Woudstra is a professor emeritus of Old Testament at Calvin Seminary where he taught from 1955 to 1985.

Reprinted, with permission, from the Oct. 6, 1986 Christian Renewal.

What Does It Mean to be a Reformed Christian?

Although most of us have lived in communities that used the name "Christian Reformed" for almost a century, our very familiarity with it is evidently helping to make us uncertain enough about what it is supposed to mean to suggest that we take a fresh look at its meaning.* The recent publication of two rather scholarly books also reveals that kind of uncertainty. James D. Bratt's *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America* is much more clearly focused on the Dutchness than on the Calvinism of the movement (Review in the June, 1985 *Outlook*). An even more surprising evidence of confusion is the failure of John Bolt's *Christian and Reformed Today* to treat its Biblical foundation as a fundamental characteristic of the movement (Review in the November, 1985 *Outlook*).

The 16th Century Biblical Reformation

October's ending with Halloween (the ancient pagan festival which the church tried, with doubtful success, to Christianize as "All Saints' Day") has also come to be remembered as the day on which Martin Luther in 1517 nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenburg's castle church. That public protest became a kind of "birthday" of the great Protestant Reformation.

Luther's action was a result of an extended spiritual struggle. Young Luther, who seems to have been a typical child of his time, was studying to become a lawyer. After being shocked by the death of a friend and being himself struck to the ground by a bolt of lightning, he resolved to leave his law study and become a monk to seek salvation for his soul. Driven more urgently to face the question, "How may I get right with God?" he found the church giving him no clear, satisfying answer, but only increasing his sense of guilt and depression. As a student, monk, priest, preacher and professor, he was led more and more to study the Bible until, by the Holy Spirit's guidance, he found especially through study of such books as the Psalms, Romans and Galatians, the truth and assurance of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. The Biblical "righteousness of God",

which at first frightened and baffled him because he thought of it only as condemning the sinner, he now saw as the "righteousness" which God gave the sinner through faith in Christ (Rom. 3:21ff). This tremendous discovery, as it gave comfort, hope and joy to his own soul, became the theme of his preaching and teaching.

Believing, preaching and teaching this message of the Bible brought him into collision with the teaching and practices of the church, especially when Tetzel, the high-pressure salesman of indulgences, began peddling his promises of God's mercy by money payments in the vicinity. Dr. A. Skevington Wood, in the fascinating biography of Luther entitled, *Captive to the Word*, traced Luther's religious experience and becoming a reformer to his increasing guidance by and dependence on the Bible. His "discovery of the Scriptures" was "the decisive turning point in his career, and destined him to become a reformer" (p. 11). Dr. Wood showed how, in one development of the conflict after another, he was driven to take his stand on the Bible as his authority, to find that his opponents who tried to base their opposition on mere church tradition were unable to answer him. "It was the Bible that made him a reformer" (p. 61). Thus he came to the three "sola's" ("only's") of the Reformation: "only the Bible," "only grace" and "only faith."

Luther, in his rediscovery of the gospel of salvation through the Scriptures, was also following (and influenced by) the great founder of his order of monks some 1100 years earlier, St. Augustine. Although Augustine's mother was a Christian, his father and he were pagans. Early becoming dissatisfied with paganism, he joined the Manichean heretics, and was eventually converted to Christ at about 32 years old. A.D.R. Polman, in a fascinating book entitled *The Word of God According to St. Augustine*, divides the story of Augustine's conversion and career generally into two stages. While he at first saw Christ as Example and the Bible as "no more than a starting point," presently "his deeper understanding of man's sinfulness and blindness

caused him to shift the stress to the role of Christ as Savior and to His great acts of salvation" (p. 13). His deepening appreciation of Christ as the Savior was accompanied by a deepening appreciation of the Bible, no longer as a mere introduction to Christ, but as the guide through the Christian's whole pilgrimage through life to the heavenly city. Luther, in his being led by the Bible into the Christian faith and growth in that faith, was following the same road as the church father, Augustine.

John Calvin, who was born about 25 years after Luther, was led into the faith of the gospel under Luther's influence and considered himself in a large measure, a faithful follower of Luther. The errors and corruption of the old church had become only too obvious and many voices were now being raised in revolt against it. As a result, religious and social life was in a state of great confusion and was threatened with total anarchy by the excesses of some of them. Excesses and violence such as those of the communist polygamists who seized Munster and cohorts in Amsterdam (some of whom were even nudists) were giving occasion for slander of the whole reform movement and providing excuses for persecution by Roman Catholic authorities. This threatening situation moved the young Calvin to write his first edition of *Institutes* to state clearly and simply in an address to the French King Francis, what the reformers who sought to be guided by God's Word really believed. This work, which Calvin continued repeatedly to revise and enlarge, became the greatest and most influential textbook of the Protestant Reformation and helped to establish Calvin and his school as its leading teacher. Benjamin Warfield, in a remarkable essay on "John Calvin the Theologian" (in the appendix to his volume on *Calvin and Augustine*, pp. 481f.) wrote of Calvin, "In one word, he was distinctly a Biblical theologian... the Biblical theologian of his age. Whither the Bible took him, thither he went: where scriptural declarations failed him, there he stopped short. It is this which imparts to Calvin's theological teaching the quality which is its prime characteristic and its real offence in the eyes of his critics — I mean its positiveness.

*To be "Reformed" properly
means to believe, teach and
practice neither more nor less
than what God's Word says.*

There is no mistaking the note of confidence in his teaching, and it is perhaps not surprising that this note of confidence irritates his critics. They resent the air of finality he gives to his declarations, not staying to consider that he gives them this air of finality because he presents them, not as his teachings, but as the teachings of the Holy Spirit in His inspired Word... And it was

just because he refused to go one step beyond what is written that he felt so sure of his steps. He could not present the dictates of the Holy Ghost as a series of debatable propositions." In other words, it is just because Calvin labored so diligently to say neither more nor less than his careful study found the Word of God saying that he became and remains to this day probably the Reformation's greatest and most influential teacher.

The Bible's Own Claim

This dependence and emphasis on the Bible was not a mere peculiarity of the personal experience and reaction of the Reformers, but an explicit claim and requirement of the Bible itself. God's dealing with His people is not only a personal revelation, but one expressed, defined and secured by words in a Book. The Bible is the Book of the Covenant — The "Old" and "New Testaments" may be just as accurately translated "Old" and "New Covenants." Examples of this principle, which are far too numerous to list, include the stress on God's spoken and written commandments in Deuteronomy 4, and the insistence that Joshua (1:8) must live by the Book of the Law, to successfully lead his people. Isaiah (8:20) must lay down the principle of God's revelation in opposition to false religions: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light..." Our Lord constantly grounded His work and gospel on "It is written" and "that the Scriptures might be fulfilled." Especially startling is His proof of His resurrection first by the Scriptures and then by His own appearance (Luke 24:25ff., cf. 37ff.). For deliverance from the coming demoralization of life and society, the Apostle Paul directs Timothy to "the holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." These inspired Scriptures are given to "thoroughly equip" God's people "for every good work" (2 Tim. 3). These, as not the product of man's "interpretations," but of the Holy Spirit, are the remedy for all kinds of false human opinions (2 Peter 1:20, 21 ff.). Our Lord will judge all men according to what they have done with the "words of the prophecy of this book," and their tampering with these will exclude them from His kingdom (Rev. 22:7, 18, 19). The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Thess. 2:14 that he thanks God "that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."

The Return to Traditionalism

Many of the present problems in our own churches and others are rather clearly traceable to the fact that this basic characteristic of the Reformation as neither more nor less than a return to the Word of God is being lost from sight even by most of those who still claim the name "Reformed." In the over 4 centuries since the

Reformation, its Biblical teachings, where they are still known, have come to be regarded and even taught as a tradition of the fathers, often in much the same way as the Roman church had come to continue its traditions! The problem is not really being introduced only by those who are revolting against the traditions. It was already often present in those who had considered themselves faithful preservers of the traditions. In a ministers' conference discussion of the need, especially in missionary efforts, to show **from the Bible** what we must believe, an elderly minister and home missionary interjected that we didn't have to go to that trouble; professors did that for us in the seminary! When we let the gospel teachings be reduced from God's Word to mere human traditions we repeat the very errors from which our forefathers were delivered in the Reformation. If we are satisfied with doing that, we should not be surprised if our message loses its conviction and appeal and our churches, deprived of the spiritual food of God's Word (1 Peter 2:2ff.), sicken and die, as the church before the Reformation was doing.

Holding God's Word for What It is

To be "Reformed" properly means to believe, teach and practice neither more nor less than what God's Word says. If we are going to understand, experience and share that faith, we must learn, like the Reformers, to put that fact up front and give it all possible emphasis.

Personal experience has perhaps made me more sensitive to that fact than some others might be. The son of a minister, I attended no Christian school until the second year of college. And most of my education was in the very "progressive" or Liberal California public school system. Of the many teachers encountered during those years I recall only one who gave clear indications of being an evangelical Christian. I recall an interesting English teacher, also a teacher in the Congregational church Sunday school, who remarked that he sometimes envied the Catholics. They knew what they believed, while he didn't. Another said that she used to think she would develop some philosophy of life, but now, although she was becoming an old woman, she had none. Another, who later became the principal, told us that we did not have the moral standards of right and wrong that our parents did, and that our children would not have ours. We were taught that the mark of a real education was to learn to question everything and to accept nothing on mere authority. Growing up with the home and church trying to teach me the Christian faith and the schools teaching the opposite for a dozen years, whom was I to believe? (It is, perhaps, not surprising that my father observed that I was his strongest reason for trying to get a Christian school — and those early educational experiences were later my own reasons for doing the same.) Early being inundated by this kind of skepticism and relativism (as our churches today

are being threatened by them), I was forced to face the fact that mere tradition is not an adequate reason for believing anything. We either receive God's revelation as what it claims to be and is, or we stay in the dark. (Especially Paul's argument in 1 Cor. 1 and 2 highlights these alternatives. And our Lord in John 7:17 assures us that he confirms in the life of His people what He says: "If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God. . .") If, or as we, by the grace of God, receive His Word for what it is, we must frankly build on that and not build on something other or less than that — some mere human opinion or tradition among a multitude of others.

In early experiences in the ministry in a struggling little congregation far removed from most of our churches and their traditions, I learned to work through our Heidelberg Catechism with the question whether and to what degree it expressed the Bible's teaching. That study then and later proved extremely valuable in preparing one to preach and teach the Biblical doctrines as neither more nor less than God's Word. Later it proved even more so when I faced the extraordinary need and opportunity to serve as the only evangelical navy chaplain on an island in the Philippines among up to ten thousand men. Previously serving in a church next to a navy base, I had few illusions about what to expect as a minister in the chaplaincy. To my surprise, confronting the extraordinary opportunity to try to bring the Word of God to the most diverse group of people imaginable, as not a mere "ethnic" or church tradition, "but as it is in truth the Word of God, which also effectually works in you who believe" (1 Thess. 2:13) brought some of the most moving experiences of a lifetime. I recall 5 of that diverse group of sailors who envisioned going into the ministry when the time of service was over. Regardless of who is bringing God's Word, God confirms His Word when it is brought for what it is.

Later experiences, whether one were facing the missionary outreach of the gospel (as we did for a time in mainland China) or those in the neighborhoods of our churches, again and again simply confirmed that God honors His Word when we seek to bring it as His. And that principle which has to characterize our missionary effort is just as foundational to our effort to give our children the kind of Christian education to which the Lord has committed us. Our guide and message has to be neither less nor more than the Word of God and we must like Paul seek to be faithful in bringing all of it as "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). God has honored and confirmed His Word and He always will. Prayerfully seeking to know, live by, and share His Word is what it means to be a Reformed Christian.

PDJ

**The substance of this article was presented as a Reformation Day talk to a group of young Christian parents at the Dutton, Mich. church on Oct. 26, 1986.*

The RES & the Pope's Vigil

Richard E. Knodel

The following will not win Journey any friends in some quarters. They will say that it is bad enough to publicize such events, much less to make light of them. On the other hand, we wonder when such people are going to be more concerned about the "dirt" than the discoverer! We're under no illusions. It could be a good while!

• • •

In a surprising but telling development, the workings of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) have been further complicated. This time, the parties involved are not so much those of Europe. (The RES has been embroiled in a question over the orthodoxy of the Dutch GKN church, which has welcomed unrepentant homosexuals into its churches in varying capacities) as of America.

The Grand Rapids Press (11-15-86) ran a story entitled "The Bright Side to South Africa." But South Africa was not the "Story," but the mere context of the story. It appears that somehow the RES, and the Rev. Paul Schrotenboer in particular (its General Secretary), received an invitation from the Pope to join in the interfaith service in Assisi, Italy, during late October. This was the "World Day of Prayer for Peace" which caught the world media's attention a month ago. Involved were: "Christians, Moslems, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Zoroastrians, African animists, Sikhs, Japanese Shintoists, Jains, Baha'is, and an American Indian."

The plot thickens when Schrotenboer does not go because of a prior engagement in South Africa. So what to do? Answer? **Send Mrs. Schrotenboer!** And so Mrs. Bernice Schrotenboer attended the world day of prayer! She is reported to have said to GRP, "I went for him, as I have in the past. He couldn't be in Italy at that time and I could."

For those with scruples against the implications of such an event, it is evident that Mrs. Schrotenboer was not an "official" representative of the RES. She was an unofficial official. . . . But lest anyone think that *Journey* is being overly

critical here, let us relate some of Mrs. Schrotenboer's conversation with the GRP.

One of our immediate questions was, "Did the dear woman actually pray at this sordidly syncretistic affair?" What was her posture in the midst of the two-hundred or so participants? How did she carry herself as the Dali Lama, the exiled Buddhist "king-god" of Tibet, and Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie, along with the Pope, petitioned their various deities?

The answer comes back loud and clear. "We were all praying, each in our own way, for a more peaceful world," said Mrs. Schrotenboer.

We thought, perhaps, Mrs. Schrotenboer was there as a secret critic. Perhaps, upon returning stateside, she would tell the reformed community all the gory details. Perhaps she would contrast such nonsense with the reformed world and life view, or with the exclusivities of covenant theology. Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps. . .

Mrs. Schrotenboer related, in a way—the words sound as if they are bundled together in a kind of joyful naivete — that, "I thought it was a very worthwhile experience. We tried to focus the attention of the whole world on prayer. As St. Paul says in Scripture, more things are wrought by prayer than anything else." Yes Bernice...but the Dali Lama???

It would appear that Mrs. Schrotenboer was far from an unwilling participant. At Assisi, the paper reports, "(S)he and the other religious representatives fasted (emphasis ours — REK) for an afternoon and said prayers in their native languages. In a gesture of solidarity and support for the gathering, several of the world's warring governments and insurgent groups set down their arms for the day."

"It was a wonderful and moving experience," Schrotenboer is reported to have told the paper. "I'm glad I had a chance to attend. . . . At the end of the service, we were all given olive branches and asked to wave them in the air as a sign of peace. That was quite a thing to see."

Was this a moment of unwary candor? Just what exactly does it represent? At least one gets an

insider's view of what passes for reformed thinking, at the "highest" levels today. And especially what passes for "good, reformed ecumenical thinking today!" We think it is downright astounding.

The Schrotenboer's are not numbered amongst the "raving-liberal-part" of the Christian Reformed Church. Yet the Rev. Schrotenboer has certainly not identified with the conservative side of the church either. He's, I suppose, a "progressive," of one sort or another. And undoubtedly a kindly man. But the heart of the reformed faith used to be truth, and not humanistic "nice."

Many questions remain: Who financed the trip? The RES? Does the RES find it suitable that a woman, even a godly woman (can we say), would represent them. . . unofficially-officially anywhere

(?), much less at the beckoning of the Pope? And what of the address that Mrs. Schrotenboer gave at Rome's "Christian World Communion" before going to Assisi? Could this be considered "preaching on her husband's behalf?"

Yes, many questions remain. But unfortunately this one doesn't. The RES, of which such churches as the OPC and CRC are members, has a female globetrotter-delegate doing something on its behalf in Assisi. She's got a plaque (from the Pope) to prove it. And it was great fun.

Reprinted by permission from the November-December Journey magazine. Rev. Richard E. Knodel, its editor, is the pastor of the Grace Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Lynchburg, Virginia. He has written previous articles for us: "A Calvinist in 'Falwell-land'" (Oct., 1984), and "A Tale of Two Preachers" (Nov., 1985).

Misusing Matthew 18

J. Tuininga

Matthew 18, like Galatians 3:28, is a passage that is often appealed to, but in more cases than not, the appeal is misplaced because the text is misapplied. Strange how this continues to take place even though the fallacy has been pointed out time and again. When we want to use the Bible for our own purposes, sin lies at the door.

You know Matthew 18, of course: If your brother sins against you, go to him by yourself. If that does not have the desired effect, take two or three witnesses along. If even that fails, tell it to the church. In the latter step, a sin that was private becomes public. But the point is that private sins ought to remain private. Only if there is no repentance will it eventually become public. Matthew 18 spells out the procedure for private sins. It does not apply to public sins. That is so obvious that one wonders why it seems to be misunderstood by so many.

Example: The Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary appoints Dr. H. De Moor as lecturer in the Dept. of practical theology. The views of De Moor regarding women in office, etc., have been widely publicized and are well known. A consistory or individual protests this appointment to the Board. A board member responds: you must first correspond with De Moor himself and with his consistory. And then you must go to your own classis before taking it

further. Grounds: Matthew 18 (believe it or not!).

Example two: A professor at one of our institutions writes an article in *The Banner* to which several object. They take their objection to the institution at which he teaches and to the governing board. Response: You must go to the individual and his consistory. Ground: *Ibid*.

As everyone can see, this is patent nonsense and everybody knows it is. It is simply a way to silence a protest by giving one the run-around. Hopefully that will discourage the objector.

Consistories and individuals should not be side-stepped by such arguments, but should proceed to deal with the matter as a **public** sin, to which the rules of Matthew 18 do not apply. And our Boards and executive committees should have the integrity to stop using spurious arguments to avoid dealing with proper protests. Matthew 18 applies to private sins and personal grievances. It does not apply to ecclesiastical decisions of a public nature nor to writings in the church press which are by their very nature public. Then one may and must protest to the body which is responsible for the action, and to the institution which employs him. Here we can follow the example of Paul who rebuked Peter "in front of them all" (Gal. 2:14). Public sins call for a public rebuke and a public apology.

A Look at Books

The Fourth Day and R.B.—A Prophet in the Land

THE FOURTH DAY, By Howard J. Van Till.
Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1986, 286
pages, paperbound. Reviewed by Lester DeKoster.

• • •

The Fourth Day is an exercise in short-changing the Bible — and in covering up the biblical accounts which contradict the fraud.

This book proclaims that the whole cosmos began with a “big bang” occurring fifteen billion years ago.

This book declares that cosmic history from the “bang” to the present follows a pattern of evolutionary development: “Cosmic history is like a magnificent tapestry woven from different strands of temporal development to form the intricately designed pattern of cosmic evolution. Spatial evolution, galactic evolution, elemental evolution, stellar evolution, planetary evolution, and biological evolution are coherently integrated and intertwining processes that serve as the individual threads in the tapestry: the dynamic order of patterned development marks the whole of cosmic history” (p. 254).

The author is even led to compose his own version of Psalm 19 to extol his evolutionary theories: “With David, for example, we sing ‘The heavens declare the glory of God, the vault of heaven proclaims his handiwork’ (Ps. 19:1), but I suspect that few of us have sung, ‘The expanding universe declares the glory of God, and cosmic evolution proclaims his handiwork.’”

[Interruption to say that no doubt this “suspicion” is correct. It’s a version of Psalm 19 that has not even occurred, yet, to a Psalter Hymnal revision committee — but who knows?]

Back to the text: “The sentiment, however, is precisely the same. Employing concepts and vocabulary appropriate to our respective cultures, both we and the psalmist are praising God as the sovereign Creator by whose design all things function as they do and by whose purposeful decision all things have come to be as they are. As David was responsible for giving praise to God for all the divine works of which he had knowledge, so we are called to return praise to our Creator-Redeemer for all of his activities, even for that which we have discovered by scientific investigation of his Creation — even for cosmic evolution” (p. 253).

It appears that sincere enquirers who, in good faith, write to ask if evolution is espoused on the

Calvin Campus have a right to answers more forthright than some that have appeared.

This book further proposes a strategy for getting these theories taught in the Christian schools.

And finally, this book purports to merge its evolutionary theories with the teaching of Scripture into what is called the “creationomic perspective” — by evading the biblical accounts of creation, all the while paying excessive lip service to taking the Bible “seriously.”

This “synthesis” of the words of natural scientists and the Word of God is promoted through the use of various hermeneutical devices designed to make the Bible “say” what the author wants to hear. And he dismisses parts of the sacred text as “incidental” and other parts as “not revelation at all” with an indifference to the Word matched only by his arrogance.

In fact Professor Van Till takes neither natural science nor the Bible nearly “seriously” enough, or better perhaps, not honestly enough. And because this is so, he foolishly divorces God from immediate and active involvement in His world, and recklessly proposes that evolutionary theories be intruded upon Christian school curricula. This makes his book not a voice but only an echo — at a time when Christian education needs most of all a strong and courageous enunciation of total commitment to the divine Word upon which alone it can prosper. If ever a true synthesis is to be forged between biblical and natural scientific perspectives, at the expense of neither, this book does not show the way.

Let it be plainly said that in this reviewer’s judgment, this book is so flagrantly and deceptively at odds with the Bible that if it be allowed to stand as representative of teaching on the Calvin Campus, the Board of Trustees has reason to wonder what claim it has left on the trust of its constituency.

R.B. — A PROPHET IN THE LAND, by Edward Heerema. Published by Paideia Press, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, 1986. 223 pp., paper, Review by the editor.

• • •

This is an extraordinary little book. The photograph on the covers, the copyright page

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informs us, shows its subject, Rienk Bouke Kuiper, "descending muleback in the Grand Canyon in 1923." The account by his son-in-law, acquaints us with one of the most colorful and extraordinarily influential characters in our churches' history. His career spanned the enormous gap from Dutch beginnings in a family deeply committed to the early secession and later Abraham Kuyper reformation in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, to the developments and problems of that Biblical faith in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches of our own time. The biographer has selected and outlined in brief, clear and interesting chapters, the family history, the move to the United States, the early language struggles and education of the children well beyond the provincial limits that characterized most of the immigrants.

Equipped with the names "Rienk Bouke," it is not surprising that the gifted student became sometimes "Robert" and later widely known as "R.B." Becoming an unusually able and popular preacher, he served a number of prominent churches in the Christian Reformed denomination. His university education and his prominent positions early confronted him with one of the most serious problems and threats to the Biblical faith in the rise of "higher criticism." In his case the conflict came in a peculiarly complicated, intimate and painful form, because Professor Ralph Janssen, who became the center of a seminary controversy about such views, was his brother-in-law. The book's account of this affair is illuminating.

R.B. served for a time as pastor of a Reformed Church in Kalamazoo which sought his kind of vigorous Reformed preaching, but, repelled by the denominational laxity regarding the Reformed confessions, soon returned to a Christian Reformed charge.

The book details his work as president of Calvin College, his long-time service as professor and faculty chairman of Westminster Theological Seminary, and his transfer to and influential role in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church until retirement. After retirement he was persuaded to

become the president of Calvin Theological Seminary after the controversy which devastated its faculty. Of special interest to us was his early and enthusiastic part in many contributions to the Reformed Fellowship and its paper, then called *Torch and Trumpet*.

Heerema's account makes fascinating and easy reading. Brief, spiced with personal detail, it sheds light on many of the developments in our churches and communities in these years of change. Especially in the increasing confusion of our time, R.B.'s staunch and militant commitment to the Bible and its Lord, his broad personal and evangelically ecumenical sympathies and down-to-earth common sense, his suggestions about proper preaching and service of the gospel, and many other expressions of his Christian convictions may be helpful as well as interesting to many readers. Early free from narrow provincialisms of the immigrant communities, he tried to show (and still shows) how we should be Biblically Reformed. This book has continuing historical and practical value far beyond many bigger, more imposing volumes. The Lord enjoins us to "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:7,8). A tribute is due to Rev. E. Heerema who has retrieved this valuable life story and made it available in this book. Thanks to the Paideia Press, we can offer it to our readers for a price of \$3.00 postpaid, if it is ordered with a subscription to the *Outlook* (new or renewal).

We are offering this book to all fellowship members and all new subscribers to the *Outlook* for \$3.00 including cost of mailing. We're able to make this offer as the result of a very special price from the publisher, Paideia Press, Ltd. Please address your orders to the offices of the Reformed Fellowship, 4855 Starr St., S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan.

INDEX

VOLUME XXXVI (1986)

by Rev. Jerome Julien

AUTHORS

- ARRICK STEPHEN M.
The order of the Lord's church:
offices of the church 9:9; 10:10; 11:10
Women and the M. Div. program at Calvin 5:2
- BESTEMAN, ARTHUR
1986 Mid-America Reformed Seminary
Board Meeting and Seminary Festival 10:9
- BLANKESPOOR, JOHN
Abounding in the work of the Lord 4:4
Carrying each other's burdens 6:2
The church that is near death 9:6
Confidence in God's complete work 7:2
Faithful stewards 10:6
The Lord is my shepherd 1:4
Peace and the sword 11:4
Peter's denial of his Lord 3:14
When the king could not sleep 2:8
Witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ 5:4
- DE JONG, PETER
Antichristian ethnic theology 5:16
Biblical unity and separation 3:24
Christian Reformed Synod agenda 6:8
Constructive Christians in a collapsing
world and church 10:4; 11:8
DeKoster on Report 44 1:14
For such a time as this 11:13
A German Reformed voice at Mid-America 4:2
God's calling: the office of the Christian
believer 1:11; 2:20; 3:20; 4:16
Luther and Calvin 6:6
New missions for the Gospel 9:14
Now a sexist catechism 4:21
Our concerned brothers 8:14
Our heritage, predicament and future
(Conference of Concerned) 7:19
Reformed Ecumenical Synod on political
"heresies" 5:20
Revivals and altar-calls 10:7
"Surprised by joy" 4:22
Unworshipful worship 1:23
What is Lynwood saying to the C.R.C.? 10:2
- DE JONG, PETER Y.
J. Larry Roberts: 1917-1986 5:13
- DE KOEKKOEK, JOHN M.
Seminary students evaluate Contemporary
Testimony 1:20
- DE KOSTER, LESTER
Adam and evolution 4:18; 5:10
Bureaucracy in the church: its cause,
its cure 6:4; 7:8; 8:4
- GROSSMANN, ROBERT
The problem is the Bible 9:10
- HEGEMAN, NEAL
Highlights from the Lowlands: church
reformation models 5:21
- JONES, NORMAN L.
What about euthanasia and living wills? 5:8
- KAMMINGA, GEORGE
The Synod's pastoral letter 1:24
- KLOOSTERMAN, DAVID A.
Biblical headship and the Board of
Publications 8:6
Needed: a creation creed 3:6
- KLOOSTERMAN, NELSON D.
Can two walk together...? 8:11
- KNOTT, EDWARD J.
Synod 1986 7:4
- KOERNER, MAYNARD
Update on the Reformed Confessing Church
of Zaire 11:6
- KWANTES, HARRY J.
New chapter of concerned members organized 10:2
- LANNING, RAY B.
Preaching in America today 10:13
- MADANY, BASSAM M.
Rethinking missions today 1:6; 2:2; 3:2
- MENNEGA, AALDERT
Absence of evidence 3:5
Human tails 1:2
"Not older than fifteen billion years" 9:15
Peppered moths 11:12
Polystratic trees 7:12
- MONSMA, TIMOTHY
Preparing for Christ's return 6:16
- MULDER, IVAN
S.W.I.M., 25 years later, is the church
better off? 1:19
- MURRAY, IAIN H.
Translations of the Bible 9:8
- OOSTENDORP, ELCO H.
An open letter to the editor of *The Banner* 4:10
- PALMER, GLENN P.
Who Am I? 1:24; 2:11; 3:13; 4:5; 5:15; 6:17; 7:11;
9:7; 10:14
- PASTINE, STUART C.
Consistorial conference 11:16
- PETROLJE, ALLEN
"You are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13) 9:5
- PIERSMA, JOHN H.
Comment and opinion 5:17; 6:18; 8:15; 10:15; 11:2
- PONTIER, RALPH A.
Training women ministers 8:2
- PRONK, FREDERIKA
Women deacons: church polity and
hermeneutics 2:5; 3:11; 4:6
- SCHLISSEL, STEVE M.
S.O.S. or abandon ship? 7:17
- TUININGA, CECIL
Rethinking congregationalism 1:22
Tensions in the churches 2:10
- TUININGA, JELLE
Children at the Lord's Supper 6:20
Church dishonesty 1:23
Joining a common apostasy (sic) 10:11
Lapsing memberships 5:20
Mid-America Reformed Seminary 4:24
1985 in review 6:21
No "denominational differences"? 4:10
Rethinking congregationalism 4:22
A threat of fundamentalism 9:16
Today's hypocrisies (Matt. 23:24) 2:23
- TURNGREN, TIMOTHY
The Contemporary Testimony 6:14

VANDEN HEUVEL, HENRY	
Fellowship anniversary meeting:	
"filling the gap"	11:13
VANDER GOOT, HENRY	
The Bible in the C.R.C. today	1:8
VANDER KAM, HENRY	
The Acts	1:16, 2:16, 3:16, 4:12
Whither the Christian Reformed Church?	3:8
VENEMA, RICHARD J.	
The inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture	2:12
VISS, SIMON	
In memoriam: Harry Van Dyken, 1917-1985	3:23
WEEKS, NOEL	
Living on the lunatic fringe	5:6
WILLIAMS, C.J.	
The necessity of Christian education	7:12
WILSON, LARRY E.	
Needed: whole Christianity	5:19
YONKER, KEN	
God's hand at work in the winter	11:11

ARTICLES

Abounding in the work of the Lord, J. Blankespoor	4:4
Absence of evidence, A. Mennega	3:5
The Acts, H. Vander Kam	1:16; 2:16; 3:16; 4:12
Adam and evolution, L. DeKoster	4:18; 5:10
Anglicans and Scripture	10:12
Antichristian ethnic theology, P. DeJong	5:16
The Bible in the C.R.C. today, H. Vander Goot	1:8
Biblical headship and the Board of Publications,	
D.A. Kloosterman	8:8
Biblical unity and separation, P. DeJong	3:24
Bureaucracy in the church: its cause, its cure,	
L. DeKoster	6:4; 7:8; 8:4
Can two walk together . . . ? N.D. Kloosterman	6:11
Carrying each other's burdens, J. Blankespoor	6:2
Children at the Lord's Snpper, J. Tuininga	6:20
Christian Reformed Synod agenda, P. DeJong	6:8
Church dishonesty, J. Tuininga	1:23
The church that is near death, J. Blankespoor	9:6
Comment and opinion, J.H. Piersma	5:17; 6:18; 8:15;
	10:15; 11:2
Confidence in God's complete work, J. Blankespoor	7:2
Consistorial conference, S.C. Pastine	11:16
Constructive Christians in a collapsing world	
and church, P. DeJong	10:4; 11:8
The Contemporary Testimony, T. Turngren	6:14
DeKoster on Report 44, P. DeJong	1:14
Faithful stewards, J. Blankespoor	10:6
Fellowship anniversary meeting: "Filling the gap,"	
H. Vanden Heuvel	11:13
For such a time as this, P. DeJong	11:13
A German Reformed voice at Mid-America,	
P. DeJong	4:2
God's calling: the office of the Christian believer,	
P. DeJong	1:11; 2:20; 3:20; 4:16
God's hand at work in the winter, K. Yonker	11:11
A good king became better	6:24
Highlights from the Lowlands: church reformation	
models, N. Hegeman	5:21
Human tails, A. Mennega	1:2
In memoriam: Harry Van Dyken, 1917-1985, S. Viss	3:23
The inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, R.J. Venema	2:12
J. Larry Roberts: 1917-1986, P.Y. DeJong	5:13
Joining a common apostacy (sic), J. Tuininga	10:31
Lapsing memberships, J. Tuininga	5:20
Living on the lunatic fringe, N. Weeks	5:6
The Lord is my shepherd, J. Blankespoor	1:4
Luther and Calvin, P. DeJong	6:6
Mid-America Reformed Seminary, J. Tuininga	4:24

The necessity for Christian education, C.J. Williams	7:12
Needed: a creation creed, D.A. Kloosterman	3:6
Needed: whole Christianity, L.E. Wilson	5:19
New chapter of Concerned Members organized,	
H.J. Kwantes	10:2
New missions for the Gospel, P. DeJong	9:14
1985 in review, J. Tuininga	6:21
1986 Mid-America Reformed Seminary Board Meeting	
and Seminary Festival, A. Besteman	10:9
No "denominational differences"? J. Tuininga	4:10
"Not older than fifteen billion years," A. Mennega	9:15
Now a sexist catechism, P. DeJong	4:21
An open letter to the editor of The Banner,	
E.H. Oostendorp	4:10
The order of the Lord's church: offices of the church,	
S.M. Arrick	9:9; 10:10; 11:10
Organization and plans of the concerned	3:19
Our concerned brethren, P. DeJong	8:14
Our heritage, predicament and future (Conference of	
Concerned), P. DeJong	7:19
Peace and the sword, J. Blankespoor	11:4
Peppered moths, A. Mennega	11:12
Peter's denial of his Lord, J. Blankespoor	3:14
Polystratic trees, A. Mennega	7:12
Preaching in America today, R.B. Lanning	10:13
Preparing for Christ's return, T. Monsma	6:16
The problem is the Bible, R. Grossmann	9:10
Reformed Ecumenical Synod on political "heresies,"	
P. DeJong	5:20
Rethinking congregationalism, C. Tuininga	1:22
Rethinking congregationalism, J. Tuininga	4:22
Rethinking missions today, B.M. Madany	1:6; 2:2; 3:2
Revivals and altar-calls, P. DeJong	10:7
Seminary students evaluate Contemporary Testimony,	
J.M. DeKoekkoek	1:20
S.O.S. or abandon ship? S.M. Schlissel	7:17
"Surprised by joy," P. DeJong	4:22
S.W.I.M., 25 years later, is the church better off?	
I. Mulder	1:19
Synod 1986, E.J. Knott	7:4
The Synod's pastoral letter, G. Kamminga	1:24
Tensions in the churches, C. Tuininga	2:10
A threat of fundamentalism, J. Tuininga	9:16
Today's hypocrisies (Matt. 23:24), J. Tuininga	2:23
Training women ministers, R.A. Pontier	8:2
Translations of the Bible, I.H. Murray	9:8
Unworshipful worship, P. DeJong	1:23
Update on the Reformed Confessing Church of Zaire,	
M. Koerner	11:6
What about euthanasia and living wills? N.L. Jones	5:8
What is Lynwood saying to the C.R.C.? P. DeJong	10:2
When the king could not sleep, J. Blankespoor	2:8
Whither the Christian Reformed Church? H. Vander Kam	3:8
Who am I? G.P. Palmer	1:24; 2:11; 3:13; 4:5; 5:15; 6:17;
	7:11; 9:7; 10:14
Witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ, J. Blankespoor	5:4
Women and M. Div. program at Calvin, S.M. Arrick	5:2
Women deacons: church polity and hermeneutics,	
F. Pronk	2:5; 3:11; 4:6
"You are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13), A. Petrolje	9:5

SUBJECTS

ADAM — HISTORICITY	
Adam and evolution, L. DeKoster	4:18; 5:10
BIBLE	
Anglicanism and Scripture	10:12
The Bible in the C.R.C. today, H. Vander Goot	1:8
DeKoster on Report 44, P. DeJong	1:14
Fellowship anniversary meeting: "Filling the gap,"	
H. Vanden Heuvel	11:13
The inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture,	
R.J. Venema	2:12
The problem is the Bible, R. Grossmann	9:10
Translations of the Bible, I.H. Murray	9:8

CALVIN COLLEGE AND SEMINARY	
Training women ministers, R.A. Pontier	8:2
Women and the M. Div. program at Calvin, S.M. Arrick	5:2
CALVIN, JOHN	
Luther and Calvin, P. DeJong	6:6
CANONS OF THE SYNOD OF DORDT	
An open letter to the editor of <i>The Banner</i> , E.H. Oostendorp	4:10
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION	
The necessity of Christian education, C.J. Williams	7:12
CHRISTIAN LIVING	
Constructive Christians in a collapsing world and church, P. DeJong	10:4; 11:8
Living on the lunatic fringe, N. Weeks	5:6
Needed: whole Christianity, L.E. Wilson	5:19
"Surprised by joy," P. DeJong	4:22
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH	
The Bible in the C.R.C. today, H. Vander Goot	1:8
Biblical headship and the Board of Publications, D.A. Kloosterman	8:8
Bureaucracy in the church: its cause, its cure, L. DeKoster	6:4; 7:8; 8:4
Can two walk together...? N.D. Kloosterman	8:11
Church dishonesty, J. Tuininga	1:23
Consistorial conference, S.C. Pastine	11:16
For such a time as this, P. DeJong	11:13
Joining a common apostacy (sic), J. Tuininga	10:11
New chapter of Concerned Members organized, H.J. Kwantes	10:3
1985 in review, J. Tuininga	6:21
No "denominational differences"? J. Tuininga	4:10
Now a sexist catechism, P. DeJong	4:21
Organization and plans of the concerned	3:19
Our heritage, predicament and future (Conference of Concerned), P. DeJong	7:19
Rethinking congregationalism, C. Tuininga	1:22
Rethinking congregationalism, J. Tuininga	4:22
S.O.S. or abandon ship? S.M. Schlissel	7:17
Synod 1986, E.J. Knott	7:4
Tensions in the churches, C. Tuininga	2:10
Today's hypocrisies (Matt. 23:24), J. Tuininga	2:23
What is Lynwood saying to the C.R.C.? P. DeJong	10:2
Whither the Christian Reformed Church? H. Vander Kam	3:8
CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH SYNOD	
Christian Reformed Synod agenda, P. DeJong	6:8
The Synod's pastoral letter, G. Kamminga	1:24
CHURCH MUSIC	
A threat of fundamentalism, J. Tuininga	9:16
CHURCH — NETHERLANDS	
Highlights from the Lowlands: church reformation models, N. Hegeman	5:21
Joining a common apostacy (sic), J. Tuininga	10:11
CHURCH ORDER/POLITY	
Bureaucracy in the church: its cause, its cure, L. DeKoster	6:4; 7:8; 8:4
Lapsing memberships, J. Tuininga	5:20
The order of the Lord's church: offices of the church, S.M. Arrick	9:9; 10:10; 11:10
Women deacons: church polity and hermeneutics, F. Pronk	2:5; 3:11; 4:6
CHURCH UNITY	
Biblical unity and separation, P. DeJong	3:24
CONTEMPORARY TESTIMONY	
The Contemporary Testimony, T. Turngren	6:14
Seminary students evaluate Contemporary Testimony, J.M. DeKoekkoek	1:20
CREATION	
Needed: a creation creed, D.A. Kloosterman	3:6
"Not older than fifteen billion years," A. Mennega	9:15
EUTHANASIA	
What about euthanasia and living wills? N.L. Jones	5:8
EVANGELISM	
Revivals and altar-calls, P. DeJong	10:7
EVOLUTION	
Adam and evolution, L. De Koster	4:18; 5:10
FUNDAMENTALISM	
A threat of fundamentalism, J. Tuininga	9:16
HEADSHIP ISSUES	
Biblical headship and the Board of Publications, D.A. Kloosterman	8:8
HEIDELBERG CATECHISM	
Now a sexist catechism, P. DeJong	4:21
HERMENEUTICS — see BIBLE	
LORD'S SUPPER	
Children at the Lord's Supper, J. Tuininga	6:20
LUTHER, MARTIN	
Luther and Calvin, P. DeJong	6:6
MEDITATIONS	
Abounding in the work of the Lord (I Cor. 15:58), J. Blankespoor	4:4
Carrying each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2), J. Blankespoor	6:2
The church that is near death (Rev. 3:1-6), J. Blankespoor	9:6
Confidence in God's complete work (Phil. 1:6), J. Blankespoor	7:2
Faithful stewards (I Cor. 4:2), J. Blankespoor	10:6
The Lord is my shepherd (Ps. 23:1), J. Blankespoor	1:4
Peace and the sword (Luke 2:14; Matt. 10:34), J. Blankespoor	11:4
Peter's denial of his Lord (Matt. 28:74,75), J. Blankespoor	3:14
When the king could not sleep (Esther 6:1), J. Blankespoor	2:8
Witnesses of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8), J. Blankespoor	5:4
"You are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13), A. Petrolje	9:5
MID-AMERICA REFORMED SEMINARY	
A German Reformed voice at Mid-America, P. DeJong	4:2
Mid-America Reformed Seminary, J. Tuininga	4:24
1986 Mid-America Reformed Seminary Board Meeting and Festival, A. Besteman	10:9
MISSIONS	
New missions for the Gospel, P. DeJong	9:14
Preparing for Christ's return, T. Monsma	6:16
Rethinking missions today, B.M. Madany	1:6; 2:2; 3:2
OFFICE OF BELIEVER	
God's calling: the office of the Christian believer, P. DeJong	1:11; 2:20; 3:20; 4:16
PREACHING	
Preaching in America today, R.B. Lanning	10:13
REFORMED ECUMENICAL SYNOD	
Reformed Ecumenical Synod on political "heresies" P. DeJong	5:20
REFORMED FELLOWSHIP	
Fellowship anniversary meeting: "filling the gap," H. Vanden Heuvel	11:13
For such a time as this, P. DeJong	11:13

ROBERTS, J. LARRY

J. Larry Roberts: 1917-1986, P.Y. DeJong 5:13

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

Absence of evidence, A. Mennega 3:5
God's hand at work in the winter, K. Yonker 11:11
Human tails, A. Mennega 1:2
"Not older than fifteen billion years," A. Mennega 9:15
Peppered moths, A. Mennega 11:12
Polystratic trees, A. Mennega 7:12

STUDY OUTLINES

The Acts, H. Vander Kam 1:16, 2:16; 3:16; 4:12

S.W.I.M.

S.W.I.M., 25 years later, is the church better off?
I. Mulder 1:19

THEOLOGY — TRENDS IN

Antichristian ethnic theology, R DeJong 5:16

VAN DYKEN, HARRY

In memoriam: Harry Van Dyken, 1917-1985, S. Viss 3:23

WOMEN IN ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE

Training women ministers, R.A. Pontier 8:2
Women deacons: church polity and hermeneutics,
F. Pronk 2:5; 3:11; 4:6

WORSHIP

Unworshipful worship, P. DeJong 1:23

ZAIRE — REFORMED CHURCH

Update on the Reformed Confessing Church
of Zaire, M. Koerner 11:6

BOOK REVIEWS

Antonides, Harry. Stones for bread (the social gospel
and its contemporary legacy), (J. Tuininga) 10:16
Henry, Carl F.H. Confessions of a theologian,
(P. DeJong) 9:2
Jones, Norman L. Study helps on the Heidelberg
Catechism, (R.J. Blauw) 9:14
Murray, John. Collected writings of John Murray,
Vol. 4, (P. DeJong) 2:24

Please note:

- # 7 is July/August*
- # 8 is September
- # 9 is October
- #10 is November
- #11 is December

*This is due to the fact that July & August is a combined issue.