



THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

december 1987

**Symbolism in
Worship**

**The World
Alliance**

**Our Economic
Collapse**

HIS NAME SHALL BE JESUS

John Blankespoor

"And you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).



Joseph has a problem, a big one. The young girl who

was to be his wife is pregnant. He knows that he has never been sexually intimate with her and therefore can draw only one conclusion: she has been unfaithful to him. What shall he do? He makes some plans. But an angel of the Lord comes to him in a dream and tells him how Mary has become pregnant. It was by the Holy Spirit that this child is to be born. Wouldn't it take a lot of faith to believe a statement like this? If we have doubts at times, surely Joseph had more reason to doubt this word. But we do not read of any doubt. The Lord gives him instruction about how this baby is to be born. He must be called Jesus. No other name would be appropriate.

Ordinarily parents give names to their children. The choice of this child's name is not left to Joseph, for he is under a far higher Father, who Himself attends to this important task. Here the heavenly Father gives the name. His name is to be Jesus.

This takes on added meaning when we remember that in the work of the Lord in the history of the Old Testament, names had meaning. Often the name expressed something about the history or character of the children named. Adam was given the task of naming the animals. This likely means that Adam had intuitive knowledge about the animals which he was to name. Moses was given his name because he was drawn from the water. Saul means, "asked of God." That's exactly what his mother had done. The baby which Mary is to bring into the world must be called "Jesus." All of His work would be expressed in this name. No other name would fit.



The meaning of this name is given in the same breath. He "will save His people from their sins." Jesus means "savior." To be saved means to be freed from the greatest evil, (a) the guilt, pollution, power and punishment of sin; and (b) to be placed in possession of the highest good, in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. One cannot be saved from something without also being saved for or unto something. Here only the negative aspect is mentioned. Jesus is to save from sin, but also to give to people righteousness, new birth, faith, sanctification, with all the blessed gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as peace, love, joy, and finally everlasting life in heaven.

This deliverance from sin is often forgotten or disregarded. People generally speak much more about Jesus

delivering us from the *results* of sin, such as sickness, suffering and pain, than about being saved from sin itself. Without a doubt, most of the prayers of church people have to do with desires to be relieved from the results of sin. But then we are still very selfish. Surely we may offer such prayers, if in the right way. But we must also recognize sin itself, what it is, what it does to us and how it rejects the living God. Sin is an ugly word in our vocabulary. Jesus will save His people from the results of sin, but first of all, from sin itself.

To do this He came into our world, motivated only by Divine love. He had no obligation to come to us. To save His people He came as prophet, priest and king. As prophet He taught us about God for more than three years of ministry, as priest He came to make payment, atonement, on the cross, and as king He came to conquer the devil and deliver us from the power of sin. On Good Friday He died on Calvary's cross, on Easter day He arose from the grave, on Pentecost He gave us His Holy Spirit to make us partakers of all He had earned for us. In our lives God, through Him, causes everything to work together for our good. Even all of what the devil does to us, He controls for our good. When we die, our souls are taken into glory, but our bodies are left in the grave where they will rot away until nothing is left. But they can't stay that way, for then the devil would still have victory in some sense. Christ will return in the final day, to bring a grand resurrection unto life for all His people in a new heaven and earth. With us the victor often also loses much. In time of war the victor loses many lives, properties and other things. Not so with Jesus. He will give a complete victory, so that nothing of sin and evil will ultimately have harmed us. All effects of sin will also be used for our good (Romans 8:28). In the end there will be no trace left of sin and the devil and his works (1 John 3:8). Death and the devil will be cast into the lake of burning sulfur. And the former things will be no more. The Savior's name shall be Jesus — Savior in the fullest sense of the word.

Thank you, Lord!



Literally, the name Jesus means, "Jehovah is Salvation." (Sometimes it is put "Jahweh-Salvation.") Jehovah is God's covenant name. As the covenant God He saves. This is what God is in His very being. As the infinitely great God, He is salvation. To save is His pleasure, with all of His attributes of love, wisdom, power and faithfulness. This God comes to us here on earth in Jesus.

To even begin to appreciate the meaning of this great work of salvation we must remember that man is a slave of sin — in bondage to sin, the Bible says. We can do ab-

olutely nothing to deliver ourselves. We are doomed to everlasting destruction. This is what we deserve because of sin.

People trust in their physical strength, knowledge, reputation, position, or in great and able leaders, but none of these is able to deliver from the dreadful power of sin that is slowly and surely destroying them.

But here is Jesus, whose name is, "Jehovah-Salvation."

Even after we have become Christians sin still clings to us, and we can't do one thing that is free from sin and perfect. But this Jesus will separate His people from all sin and, positively, give them a glory in heaven that no human mind can even begin to imagine.

Hallelujah, what a Savior!



He will save *His people* from their sins. He will save all His people from the whole world who have lived at different times throughout the ages. In this statement we see God's elect or chosen people. He will make atonement for them; in history this has been called "limited atonement." They will receive it only through faith in Him. But even that faith is a gift of God, (Eph. 2:8). He will be savior in the fullest sense of the term. Salvation will be all His work.

But we must see in this expression, "His people," more than the doctrine. The term is possessive. These people whom He will save belong to Him. They will be His possession. In John 10 the Lord speaks of them as His "sheep," whom He will never let go. What He begins He will finish. Let no one who believes in Him, even though that faith be very weak, be discouraged and despondent regarding his (or her) future salvation.

He *will* save. There is no *if* or *and*, or *but* about it. And because we belong to Him it will be impossible that this whole "history" of falling into sin and living in sin can ever be repeated. Never again can this happen. We belong to Him. Adam was created "fall-able." But that will never be true of those who belong to Jesus. No one will ever be able to "snatch them out of His hand" (John 10:28).

These, His people, the Lord exhorts to live in faith, and persevere in the way of godliness.

He also encourages them. He knows our weaknesses and frailties. To the young man with palsy, carried on a stretcher He said, "Be of good cheer." When the sea was stormy and the disciples were dreadfully afraid He said, "Be of good cheer, it is I." Later when Paul was in prison and in great need of spiritual strength the Lord came to Him and said, "Be of good cheer."

Daily, through His Word, He says the same to us, especially in times of difficulty, anxiety and fear. He will not be "satisfied" until all of His own, to the very last one, will be at home in heaven with Him and the Father.

That's the comfort and future of all His people, all who believe in Him.

His name shall be Jesus.

How we should celebrate His coming!

His name is Wonderful, His name is Wonderful, His name is Wonderful, Jesus my Lord.

He's the great Shepherd, Rock of all ages, Almighty God is He;

Bow down before Him, love and adore Him,

His name is Wonderful, Jesus my Lord.

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"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).

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SYMBOLISM IN WORSHIP

Myron D. Rau

Over the past quarter of a century the CRC publications have portrayed what is commonly referred to as the picture of Christ, particularly in the children's educational materials. During that same period of time, its church buildings have become adorned inside and out with crosses as well as with other symbols.

In more recent years the so-called Christmas advent wreath, accompanied with an assortment of rituals, has become popular among some of our churches. An example of yet other displays of symbolism also found among our churches, is draping the sanctuary cross in purple for the Good Friday worship service. Meanwhile, modern educators insist that in this T.V. age, it is necessary to teach by means of visual aids even in the church. As a result, some have begun the practice of presenting the sermon with the aid of an overhead projector.

Historically, in the Reformed churches all such things were viewed not only as sheer foolishness, but as flagrant disobedience to God's Word.

All these innovations in our churches have virtually found no strong opposition, while catechism preaching ignores, or at best only feeds on the surfaces without getting into the real meat of Heidelberg Catechism Question 98.

Were our forefathers unnecessarily cautious on these matters; or must we continue to view such things as a violation of God's Word?

The Second Commandment forbids the worship of graven images or idols. It is argued that we do not actually worship or place our trust in these things which have been allowed in many twentieth century Reformed churches. But, on the basis of Scripture, the Reformers made no great distinction between the actual worship of images and the use of objects in worship.

Question 98 of the Heidelberg Catechism asks; "But may not images be tolerated in the churches as books for the people?" The response is a resounding, "NO, for we must not be wiser than God, who will not have his people taught by dumb images, but by lively preaching of his Word."

Perhaps, a basic error in modern day misconceptions

concerning graven images and idols, is the argument that Scripture always *only warns against worshipping* such. However, in speaking of the Second Commandment, John Calvin points out; "This commandment consists of two parts. The former curbs the licentious daring which would subject the incomprehensible God to our senses, or represent Him under any visible shape. The latter forbids the worship of images, on any religious ground" (Calvin's *Institutes*; Book 2, Chapter 8, Section 17). The first part of the Second Commandment states; Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images. Having declared that, it then goes on to also forbid bowing down or serving any graven images.

This also appears to be the division of Habakkuk 2:18-19, "Of what value is an idol since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, come to life! or to lifeless stone, wake up! Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it."

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: Book 1, Chapter 6, John Calvin dwells at length on this issue. In Section 1, he states: "But God makes no comparison between images, as if one were more, and another less befitting; He rejects without exception, all shapes and pictures, and other symbols by which the superstitious imagine they can bring him near them."

As was already noted, symbolisms are justified in the church with the argument that we do not actually place our trust in them or worship them. Against this apparent age-old compromise, Calvin argues in Section 9; "Nor were the Jews so utterly thoughtless as not to remember that there was a God whose hand led them out of Egypt before they made the calf. Indeed, Aaron saying that these were the gods which had brought them out of Egypt, they intimated, in no ambiguous terms, that they wished to retain God, their deliverer, provided they saw him going before them in the calf.... Not contented with spiritual understanding, they thought that images would give them a surer and nearer impression."

Calvin goes on in Section 10; "They say, we do not call them our gods. Nor did either the Jews or Gentiles of old so call them; and yet the prophets never ceased to charge them with their adulteries with wood and stone for the very acts which are daily done by those who would be deemed Christians, namely for worshipping God carnally in wood and stone."

In Section 9, Calvin observes; "It makes no difference whether they worship the idol simply, or God in the idol; It is always idolatry when divine honors are paid to an idol, be the colour what it may. And because God wills not to be worshipped superstitiously, whatever is bestowed upon idols is so much robbed from him."

Jeremiah, in Chapter 10:8, declares; "They are all senseless and foolish: they are taught by worthless wooden idols." And continues in verse 15a; "They are worthless, the objects of mockery."

Worship, of course, is not confined to the church sanctuary, or to individual or group devotions. For the child of God, even the very thought or mention of the persons of the Trinity evokes a natural response of awe and devotion from the heart. This too is worship. So in that sense, there is an element of worship in observing a so-called picture of Christ.

"God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:24). Aside from the fact that we should not attempt to minimize the holiness of the deity into mere imagery, it is preposterous to attempt depicting a spirit, even of Christ in His human nature. The only real picture of Christ which we have, is found in Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2, and that picture is far from what is commonly portrayed.

Again, quoting Calvin, from Section 4; "And it is to be observed, that the thing forbidden is LIKENESS, whether sculptured or otherwise. This disposes of the frivolous precaution taken by the Greek church. They think they do admirably, because they have no sculptured shape of deity, while none go greater lengths in the licentious use of pictures. The Lord, however, not only forbids any image of himself to be erected by a statuary, but to be formed by any artist whatever, because every such image is sinful and insulting to his majesty."

There is however, symbolism which we are instructed in Scripture to use in worship, namely the visible elements of the sacraments. In Section 7, Calvin notes; "But even then we shall answer, that this is not the method in which the christian people should be taught in sacred places. Very different from these follies is the doctrine in which God would have them instructed. His injunction is, that the doctrine common to all should there be set forth by the preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments, a doctrine to which little heed can be given by those whose eyes are carried to and fro gazing at idols.... Paul declares, that by the true preaching of the gospel Christ is portrayed and in a manner crucified before our eyes (Gal. 3:1). Of what use then, were the erection in churches of so many crosses of wood and stone, silver and gold, if this doctrine were faithfully and honestly preached...?"

Ending Section 13, Calvin states; "...When I consider the proper end for which churches are erected, it appears to me more unbecoming their sacredness than I well can

tell, to admit any other images than those living symbols which the Lord has consecrated by his own word: I mean baptism and the Lord's Supper, with the other ceremonies. By these our eyes ought to be more steadfastly fixed, and more vividly impressed, than to require the aid of any images which the wit of man may devise."

In Section 12, Calvin clarifies his arguments; "I am not, however, so superstitious as to think that all visible representations of every kind is unlawful. But as sculpture and painting are gifts of God, what I insist for is, that both shall be used purely and lawfully."

As Reformed churches, we have a rich heritage even on this matter, based on an entire chapter from the great Reformer from whom we derive our Biblical understanding. It is quite clear from these writings, that they are not entirely derived due to the wholesale worship of idols in the writer's day. Yet, some of our churches appear to be enamored by the philosophy of the world, that "seeing is believing;" or that "a picture is worth a thousand words." But Scripture declares, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

In Section 13, Calvin makes a very interesting observation. "...For five hundred years, during which religion was in a more prosperous condition, and a purer doctrine flourished, Christian churches were completely free from visible representation. Hence, their first admission as an ornament to churches took place after the purity of the ministry had somewhat degenerated...."

Quoting Augustine, in Section 6, Calvin further observes, "At the outset, indeed he declares that the first errors into which men fell concerning God did not originate with images, but increased with them, as if new fuel had been added. Afterwards, he explains how the fear of God was thereby extinguished or impaired, his presence being brought into contempt by foolish, and childish, and absurd representations."

In Book 4, Chapter 9, Section 9; we find that it was nine hundred years since the Council of Constantinople had determined that the images set up in temples were to be thrown down and broken to pieces. But shortly afterwards, the Council of Nice decreed that images were to be restored. "But Augustine maintains that this could not be done without the greatest danger of idolatry. Epiphanius, at a later period speaks more harshly. For he says, it is an unspeakable abomination to see images in a christian temple."

It is not a mere coincidence then that pictures and other visible objects of symbolism have been introduced into some of our churches during the same period of time that numerous other foreign ideas and practices were introduced which presently are the cause of much division and concern. Can we not learn from the errors of the past to avoid them. Must we also follow the same erring and destructive paths which others have trod?

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EVOLUTION IN THE CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

David A. Kloosterman

In recent years Arkansas and Louisiana laws requiring balanced treatment of creation science whenever the theory of evolution is taught in public school classrooms have been struck down in the courts¹. When such laws have been overturned, those who work to establish the religion of evolutionism in the public schools have been quick to caution their followers that the war is not yet over — that at the local level those Christian fundamentalists will be at work to challenge the exclusive teaching of evolutionary theory. The evolutionist crusaders warn that successes in the big court cases will mean little if there are losses in the classroom.

There is much for us to learn from the evolutionists. As we express our concerns regarding the theistic evolutionary views of such men as Howard Van Til, Clarence Meninga, Davis Young, John Stek, and others who teach or have taught at our college and seminary, we may be tempted to think that if only we can win these "big court cases" that the war is won. Far from it.

The proponents of unbridled theistic evolution have already taken long strides toward accomplishing their expressed goal of introducing the teaching of theistic evolution (including man) into the Christian high school classroom.

This fact has recently been made painfully clear to me and to others who support Christian education in the city of Kalamazoo, Michigan. Readers of the science page of the June 2, 1987 *Kalamazoo Gazette* had their attention drawn by a two-column photo bearing the caption "Kalamazoo Christian Principal Roger Sikkenga and biology teacher Colleen Bode teach that mankind evolves under divine control." Moving to the article itself one read such statements as the following:

There's no uniform approach to teaching creation science among parochial schools. The treatments range from fundamentalism, in which the Bible's version in the Book of Genesis is interpreted literally, to the versions taught at Kalamazoo Christian and Hackett Catholic Central — versions in which man evolves in an orderly way under the intimate care of God.

"Creationism versus evolution really isn't the issue at Kalamazoo Christian High School," says Bode. Sikkenga adds the issue is not so much the details of

man's biological journey, but the author of that journey.

Kalamazoo Christian uses the same textbooks that the public high schools do, showing development of the species, genetic theory and the evidence for evolution through fossils. "But in none of these texts does it ever actually relate the human species to apes," Sikkenga points out. "The actual jump as to man from the fossilized remains is left up to the readers." The creation of man is "completely separate" from the evolution of the rest of the world, they believe. "We are evolving, but it is in an orderly way," designed and controlled by God, Bode said.

Nowhere in the article was there a testimony to a belief in an historical Adam and Eve, and nowhere was there any affirmation of the historical-event character of Genesis 1-11. Rather, man is evolving, the details of man's "biological journey" are not at issue, and the secular texts used present evidence for evolution.

A local CRC consistory was concerned enough about the article to send a representative to discuss the matter with the KCHS principal. In a separate action, I personally urged the principal, both verbally and by letter, to make his and the school's teaching on this topic clear to both constituents and the public at large, charging that the article at best was unclear and misleading. The fact that CRC Synods have repeatedly affirmed (*Acts of Synod*, 1982, p. 107; 1972, pp. 68-69; 1959, p. 68) the historical factuality of the events recorded in Genesis 1-3 as the teaching of both the Bible and our creeds (Belg. Conf. Art.s XIV, XV; Heid. Cat. L.D. 3; Canons of Dort I, 1 and III, 2) was pointed out. Despite all this, no public clarification was made.

I and at least one other individual wrote the KCHS school board. The board was urged to publicly affirm its commitment to 1) belief in an historical Adam and Eve, miraculously created by Almighty God as the first two human beings, from whom all of mankind is descended; 2) belief in the historical-event character of Genesis 1-11; 3) belief in an historical Fall. The board was further urged that if it could not affirm these unqualifiedly, to make clear precisely what the position of the school was with regards to man — specifically, whether it viewed the origin of man via evolutionary processes as being consis-

tent with the Biblical testimony.

In a personal letter dated August 26, 1987, the board replied. The board offered this partial disclaimer: "The article that appeared certainly did not clearly state the school's position nor that of our principal or science teacher." This assurance: "Please rest assured that Kalamazoo Christian High's position on creation/evolution is in no wise different than the one with which you are historically familiar." And these affirmations: "We all stand firmly on the position that the universe was created by God and that the first man and woman were given an immortal soul upon creation. We further affirm that man fell into sin and that all of creation has been affected by this fall from perfection. Further, we affirm that Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of the Creator, has been sent to redeem the creation from sin, and we place our faith firmly in this risen Lord and Savior." The board took no action to publicly clarify the school's stance.

And, to my mind, the personal letter which I received does not really clear things up either. If the position of the school was not well-represented in the *Gazette* article, why the reluctance of staff and board to publicly set the record straight? The statement affirming "that the first man and woman were given an immortal soul upon creation" clearly leaves room for the position that man's physical nature evolved from the apes and falls short of affirming the historical Adam and Eve. Nor is the historical-event character of Genesis 1-11 affirmed.

The assurance of the board that their "position" on creation/evolution has not changed does not give me rest. I wrote the KCHS board a second letter indicating my dissatisfaction with their responses and asking "has KCHS ever had a specific and detailed policy regarding creation/evolution? If the school has such a policy, please send me a copy." I have yet to see any such policy. The board replied a month later. "We reaffirm the position outlined in our August 26 letter to you." The policy has not changed, but has the teaching in the classroom changed? This is where the rubber hits the road. When I took Reformed Doctrine at KCHS as a student in '72-'73 our textbook was *Manual of Christian Doctrine* by Louis Berkhof, a text which was used at KCHS as recently as two years ago. I quote from page 109 of that text:

...some Christian scholars take refuge in what is called "theistic" or "creative evolution." This postulates God as the almighty Worker back of the whole process of evolution, a process of natural development, in which God does not miraculously intervene, except when this is absolutely necessary, as in the origin of life and of man. The very fact that it has a certain religious appeal makes this theory a dangerous hybrid. As a matter of fact it is no more in harmony with Scripture than naturalistic evolution. It, too, teaches that ... man at least on his physical side descended from the brute, and that there was no fall in the biblical sense of the word.

As I indicated to the board, the teaching at KCHS with which I am historically familiar, agreed with Berkhof's rejection of theistic evolution at least as far as his analysis applied itself to the origin of man. Nor was there a pedagogic schizophrenia between the Reformed Doctrine and Biology classes on this matter. If this is still the teach-

ing at KCHS, why cannot the board say so clearly and publicly?

So why do I write about this? To hurt Kalamazoo Christian High School? Assuredly not. I have had correspondence with staff and board over a period of more than four months in the hope that they would clarify their position and give their constituents who affirm the importance of maintaining the historical-event character of Genesis 1-11 better reason to hold full confidence in the school. Nothing would make me happier than if they would do so even now. Certainly I do not write because I think KCHS is worse than most other Christian high schools supported by Reformed people. No, I write precisely because I believe the teaching and testimony of KCHS is typical of many, if not most of our Christian high schools. We do our schools no good, but rather harm, if we adopt an apathetic "ignorance is bliss" attitude towards the doctrinal soundness of their teaching.

It is ironic that whereas the public schools claim to be neutral, liberal (committed to the free exchange of ideas), and undogmatic, in the area of origins they are in fact one-sided and doctrinaire. As Justices Scalia and Rehnquist stated in their dissent to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Louisiana Creation Law Case: "...the Court's position is the repressive one. The people of Louisiana, including those who are Christian fundamentalists, are quite entitled, as a secular matter, to have whatever scientific evidence there may be against evolution presented in their schools, just as Mr. Scopes [in the famous "Scopes Monkey Trial"] was entitled to present whatever scientific evidence there was for it.... Yet that illiberal judgment, the Scopes-in-reverse, is ultimately the basis on which the Court's facile rejection of the Louisiana Legislature's purpose must rest."

It is doubly ironic that whereas our Christian schools rightly hold that neutrality is impossible, and rightly claim to be dogmatic (that is, to teach in accordance with Biblical doctrine), that there is in them more and more a watering down of doctrine, particularly in the area of origins, to accommodate a more pluralistic (read main-stream) liberal Christianity.

There is even the danger that the evolutionistic dogma promulgated in the public schools will be adopted by the Christian high school (christened with the moniker *Theistic*, of course). Already the same secular texts are being used, and we may be sure that these texts show "development of the species, genetic theory and the evidence FOR evolution through fossils." Can we be sure the evidence AGAINST evolution will also be presented — even in the Christian classroom? Will the systematic absence of transitional forms in the fossil record be pointed out? Will the inadequacies of present "scientific" speculations concerning chemical evolution and the origin of life be brought to light? Will there be an examination of the presuppositions which secular evolutionists operate with when looking at genetic similarities between species? Even secular scientists who are hostile with regards to creation science are pointing out these problems² while the teachers at our colleges and schools in the main seem to be ignoring them!

Dare we complain about the teaching at Calvin College and Seminary when we do not demand an accounting at our local Christian high school? Winning the "big court

cases" will mean little if the battle is lost at the level of the local Christian high school.

Notes:

1. In the Arkansas case the American Civil Liberties Union was aided in its challenge of the law by testimony given by (at that time) Calvin College History professor George Marsden.

2. For example, Steven M. Stanley, professor of Paleobiology at John Hopkins University and a prominent punctuational evolutionist, writes in his 1981 book *The New Evolutionary Timetable*: "Since the time of Darwin, paleontologists have found themselves confronted with

evidence that conflicts with gradualism, yet the message of the fossil record has been ignored (p. 101)." Professor of Chemistry at New York University Robert Shapiro, a scientist who has directed a research group in nucleic acid chemistry for 25 years concludes in his 1986 book *Origins: A Skeptic's Guide to the Creation of Life on Earth* that all current scientific theories regarding the origin of life must be discarded as unsatisfactory or unfounded, and that scientists must at the present time admit that they do not know how life began.

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"THE MORNING AFTER"

PDJ

Last Friday morning, a week ago, we saw some of the damage of London's worst storm in 300 years. Overnight, an unpredicted hurricane with wind gusts of over 100 miles per hour had paralyzed much of southern Britain in the first power black-out since World War II. The next day, in the 8-hour flight across the North Atlantic, Greenland and Hudson Bay to Chicago I spent much of the time (in between attempts to catch glimpses of the Arctic landscapes) poring over an extraordinary 20-page article by Peter G. Peterson in the October 1987 *Atlantic Monthly* entitled "The Morning After." On the magazine's front cover the author predicted that "America is about to wake up to a painful new economic reality, following the biggest binge of borrowing and spending in the history of the nation," and continued, in introducing his article, to announce that "America has let its infrastructure crumble, its foreign markets decline, its productivity dwindle, its savings evaporate, and its budget and borrowing burgeon. And now the day of reckoning is at hand." During our return to Grand Rapids we listened to the stock market's "Black Monday" report of its worst collapse since 1929 suggesting that Mr. Peterson's grim prediction might be fulfilled much sooner than anyone could have expected. Let's review a few of his observations about the horrendous crisis of our economy.

Despite the recent apparent prosperity under Reaganomics, "Americans are about to wake up to reality" as "the foundations of their economic future have been insidiously weakening." Our policy through several administrations, has had as its "root malady" a "national preference for consumption over investment." By buying

more than we produce, during the 1980s "we have transformed ourselves from the world's largest creditor into the world's largest debtor." "The incredible speed of America's transformation from creditor to debtor can hardly be exaggerated." "Over the past six years...the United States has burned up more than \$500 billion, net, by liquidating its foreign assets and by borrowing from abroad."

The author foresees the recession or depression that must result from this "disastrous financial mismanagement." "If we simply proceed with the 'business as usual' approach to the world's growing imbalance, America's foreign creditors will ultimately become aware that the situation is untenable. At that point anything...could cause investors around the world to decide to rid themselves of dollar-denominated assets. If the resulting plunge in the dollar's exchange rate persuades ever larger numbers of investors to follow suit," the result might be "an avalanche pouring down on the dollar's financial capitals, from London to San Francisco" and "could easily become our most severe economic crisis since the 1930s." Thus he sees us following "the British route to second-class economic status" much more rapidly than they did.

While "opinion polls...show that the American public overwhelmingly favors, in theory, a balanced budget," serious attempts to reduce the deficit continue to encounter, in practice, enormous bipartisan resistance," as Congress and the Administration invent countless reasons" for minimizing the problem and postponing corrective action.

Responsibility for our current predicament lies with

both Congress and Administration. Congressional financial irresponsibility has long been notorious. While President Reagan is given credit for a number of his corrective efforts, he is also faulted for acquiescing "in some of the worst, future-averting choices America has ever made."

The author sees especially two big obstacles to correcting our government overspending. One is the problem of "entitlements" — enormous and protected payments to individuals. 85% of these are "not means-tested...not targeted to people living in poverty," but to people "least likely to be poor." The other obstacle to correcting the deficit is "the two most generous pension systems in America: civil service and military retirement programs," most of whose recipients "are not 'retired' at all but working at another job and earning a second pension."

The sweeping survey, far more extensive and illuminating than I can begin to detail, finally leads to some suggestions as to what must be done in effort to forestall the impending disaster. The deficit-spending must be stopped, the excessive "entitlements" and pension programs must be brought under control, health care costs must be curtailed, and revenues must be increased.

Will the shock of the stock market collapse and its aftermath of disturbing fluctuations be sufficient to prod Congress and the Administration to some real correction? The news of the moment seems to indicate that it might. But the long record of financial irresponsibility may make one sceptical.

Near the beginning of these disastrous 80s which saw our precipitous slide from creditor to debtor nation, I called attention in an *Outlook* article to the observations of business executive William M. Werber and noted analyst Herman Kahn that "Inflation is a Moral Problem" (May, 1981 *Outlook*, pp. 6, 7, reprinted from March, 1975 issue, p. 13, 14). Mr. Werber said, "Inflation is more a basic moral issue than one of economics. And it all begins with the moral corruption of government." And Mr. Kahn had prescribed "first and foremost" "that the Government doesn't spend more than it has available. Any government that does so - except in very special circumstances - ought to be thought of as immoral. We've got to turn this whole fight against easy deficits and inflation into a moral issue, not just a matter of some economists' or politicians' calculations. The economists think it's dumb to look at such things in terms of moral issues - as a matter of theology - but it's the only realistic way to balance the many pressures and inducements to lax behavior and unrealistic estimates." That article went on to recall how the French nobility's insistence on continued government borrowing instead of raising taxes had pushed that nation into the bankruptcy that precipitated its revolution. It recalled too, how the financial collapse of Nationalist China as its yuan's value dropped to 12 million to \$1 U.S. contributed to its defeat. That article cited a Dutch politician's observation of how current problems were literally paralleling Our Lord's story of the Prodigal Son. Having "wasted his substance with riotous living," he "began to be in want!"

These are, indeed, economic matters, and we need to listen to and learn from the experts in that subject. But when the world's politicians, economists and newspeople insist that these problems are *only* economic and therefore have nothing to do with religion or even morals, they only

show their own blindness. Refusal to pay honest bills is stealing, even if governments do it. We need to be guided by the light that the gospel is shedding on our common as well as individual predicaments.

Several mystifying current developments become intelligible when we see them as God's judgments on the rejection of His commandments. Politicians, judges, news people and academics were commonly priding themselves on our new social "freedoms" and "rights" as the old moral laws were dismissed as completely out of date. Now we suddenly find ourselves confronted with the problem, appropriately arising out of the very conduct being promoted, of an AIDS epidemic. That new plague could wipe out a large percentage of our population, just as similar conduct long ago destroyed Canaanites. The repeal of the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," by our society has not worked very well. Now the stock market crash threatens to teach us that the similar repeal of the eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," however attractive it might seem to our politicians and public, is fairing no better.*

Isn't the gospel message of Christ's coming good news for all people? And don't we have to declare and show the Lord's compassion for the victims of disasters such as aids and depressions? The gospel is good news and we have to show the Lord's compassion, but what is the good news? It is that Christ came, as His name even indicates, to save us from sin and its consequences. That is a message that must be brought to all. But while it promises salvation to all who repent and believe, it, at the same time, assures the destruction of all who do not. The Messiah, whose coming we traditionally celebrate does indeed shed His blessing on all who receive him, but He is at the same time the one who comes, as Handel's *Messiah* taught us to sing in the words of Scripture, to rule the hostile nations "with a rod of iron" and to "dash them in pieces as a potter's vessel" (Psalm 2)! This Christmas season with its traditional lavish celebration arrives amid increasing signs in our creaking economy that "God is not mocked!" PDJ

* It is intriguing to notice how each of the Lord's commandments is in one way and another being given the same kind of treatment. Regarding the fifth, we see a growing number of irresponsible parents (and schools) producing an increasing percentage of undisciplined and delinquent children. Regarding the sixth, "Thou shalt not kill," Congress and courts show their determination to maintain the newly discovered "civil right" to murder the unborn, applauded by "progressive" religious leaders. Regarding the ninth commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness," lying has become the accepted policy of politicians and newspeople under the illusion that "it is only the image that counts," and even our theologians and educators are telling us that "truth" is no longer defined as "conformity to fact," but as only "relational" (or "covenantal")! And the tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," becomes unthinkable since encouraging and promoting covetousness has become the engine that must power our economy! The public rejection of God's commandments is in each case, provoking judgments that, more or less obviously, threaten our survival.

WEEK-END AT L'ABRI

PDJ

An auto tour across Switzerland had brought us on Saturday to the Interlaken area. After spending the forenoon in the glorious scenery north of the Jungfrau, we headed west across a couple of mountain passes to locate, if possible, the little village of Huemoz, a part of which had been made familiar through the work of Francis Schaeffer as "L'Abri." Descending the mountain from Villars, we found the village and, on driving through it a second time, located a sign that indicated that we had found our destination. Although a European evangelism conference was concluding, we were guided to accommodations, and thus had opportunity to get a little first-hand acquaintance with this influential work. An evening discussion led by Ellis Potter, a former Buddhist monk, on evangelism to Muslims, gave an impression of both the substantial material of the conference and the variety of mostly young people involved.*

The next morning's church service was led by one of the featured speakers, Professor Paul Wells, Systematics professor at the Reformed Theological Seminary at Aix-en-Provence, France. The message, based on Amos 7:10-17, was a stirring encouragement to faithful gospel testimony in a hostile environment. In the best tradition of Reformed preaching, it revealed both solid Biblical study and a keen sense of the hard realities of such Christian testimony. As a prophet sent from Judah to hostile Israel, Amos was far from welcome. What was he doing here anyway—like an Iraqi in Iran?—a not unusual condition of Christians in this world. What is our mission and encouragement?

The demand of the Christian calling—the Christian ministry may seem glamorous, but it is very difficult. We are never promised a trip to heaven "on flowery beds of ease." Difficulty arises because the gospel requires opposition to the abuse of error. Amos was in Jeroboam's rival shrine and worship and had to oppose the political annexing and misuse of Christian truth. We are forced to oppose such abuses in our surroundings. Amos had to op-

pose a religious abuse, for beside Jeroboam was Amaziah, self-serving religious authority, abusing God's truth in the church. Amos had to attack the false worship. Amaziah objected to the king, in a perversion of the Word of God, charging Amos with saying, "Jeroboam shall die by the sword...." Amaziah had horizontalized the word of God, making it only a human word to use for one's own ends—exactly our situation today when the Word of God is made into only another human option. Amaziah told the king only what he wanted to hear. Amos had work to do. He must not only oppose this abuse, but also *condemn* it! The judgment against Amaziah was the Word of God, on His authority—notice that this was the only personal condemnation in the book! We don't like to condemn error or people! Amos had to put his own life on the line to do it, and it brought a crisis in his work. Amaziah was crafty—he didn't want a martyr, but he wanted to drive out the offensive prophet. And so Amos was kicked out—much as J. G. Machen was kicked out of the big Presbyterian Church. We face a temptation to compromise Christian truth. There may be no compromise, and that may entail a struggle with others, ourselves and God.

Isn't this a gloomy and depressing message? Notice the positive encouragement in it. Amos' Divine calling encouraged him. He was not a prophet, or prophet's son, but the Lord took him. The calling came not from himself, but God—as it did in the case of David. This was God's work, and knowing he was doing the will of God brought assurance. The Lord gave the message—"Hear the Word of the Lord!" Therefore he was obliged to preach—although that is away beyond our human capacity "Woe to me if I preach not the gospel!" The people too are the Lord's—they do not belong to Jeroboam or Amaziah. Here is the assurance that God has His people and will always have His "remnant," not called by men but God. We must learn that this calling to "full-time Christian service" is not merely for pastors, but for all Christians. No matter how disturbing the surroundings, God reigns and is working

His purposes. He will, in His time, triumph over the forces of evil. In seeming hopeless situations, He is still in control. We must look to and cry to Him. Christians should pray in and about the world situation. Are Christians praying that God may break the power of the Soviet Union from within? Are we praying for the overthrow of God's enemies? God uses weak Amos as a missionary, just as he uses "not many mighty" or "noble" (1 Cor. 1). The character of the God of the Bible is to break down the "strong" with His "weak." Why must the Christian sometimes labor long with no apparent result? Amos must proclaim judgment, but through it also blessing. After the condemnation comes the promise. He must return to Judah with the messianic message of the restoration of David's fallen tent (9:11) in the New Testament church. So too we must oppose the forces of evil around us, and trust in God's salvation. Though Amos' short work (perhaps 2 months?) might seem a failure; not success, but obedience and

courage count for more than apparent success with God. Amos was faithful in his calling only because of Who and What Christ was (1 Peter 1:11). Only through Christ, who came to do God's will, who stood before the high priest and Pilate and who was crucified, as the true Prophet, Priest and King, can we out of weakness be made strong. Thus Paul could say, "Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). May the continuing Christian testimony at L'Abri and that being taught to the lonely evangelical students in France, as well as that which we share with them, continue to reflect the same unflinching faithfulness and assured triumph so gloriously exhibited in the Word of God and in the lives of those who believe and serve it.

* The activity, once concentrated here, is now going on in several branches in various parts of the world.

PROFESSOR M. WOULDSTRA ON JOINING THE WORLD ALLIANCE

Editor's Note: A most important issue expected to confront the next synod of the Christian Reformed Churches is the recommendation of its Interchurch Relations Committee that the denomination officially join the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, which includes some of the most liberal churches in the country. Professor M.H. Woudstra, retired professor of Calvin Theological Seminary has made available to us his presentation of the case against this move, which we hope will alert our readers to its seriousness.

Esteemed members of the IRC:

This letter is written partly pertaining to the proposed Ecumenical Charter, but mostly about your 1985 proposal that the CRC affiliate with the churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and about the reasoning that prompted you to make such proposal. You are stating in your report to the 1987 Synod that you are now assessing and reassessing this report and its recommendations. Among other things in this process of reassessment you look for reactions from the churches. Here is one.

As to the Ecumenical Charter, which has now been accepted by the 1987 synod, I continue to consider it to be a weak and contradictory document. While toward the end it sounds the familiar note of cooperation with and rapprochement to Reformed churches, and such in the ever widening circle as specified in the 1944 report, in the beginning, under I,D, 1-3, it goes a long way toward relativizing all distinctions between Christian churches, whether it be in worship, confessional formulas or church order. If all of these are just due to history, traditions, customs etc. why bother being so concerned about carefully

maintaining a list of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship? Moreover, one of our own confessional formulas, the Canons of Dort, arose from a purely national conflict, with Dutch protagonists, having the same language, customs, history, way of life and mode of thinking, on either side of the conflict. The confessional formula that resulted from the Synod of Dordrecht, however, was not just the product of provincial thought. Rather, it came about by the collaboration of theologians from diverse backgrounds, one of which was Giovanni Diodati, a Genevan theologian of an Italian noble family.

I am also sorry that you did not define your word "ecumenical" more precisely than you did. I had alerted you to the need of saying something about Judaism. Increasingly one finds the word "ecumenical" used to describe all sorts of inter-faith contacts, especially with those of the Jewish religion, a religion which does not accept Jesus as the divine Savior from sin. The things the Charter says about the "unique and definitive" way in which God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, though they should be sufficient to ward off such false inter-faith ecumenism, in actual fact have not proved sufficient in the broader "ecumenical" context of our day. It seems to me the church passed up a significant opportunity to speak clearly not just to ourselves and within our own circles, but to the larger community of churches and even to those without. The latest news bulletin of the RES devotes close to one whole page to statements made by the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Church of Christ respectively devoted to Jewish-Christian relations. These statements are of very dubious quality. How good it would have

been if our church, for once, had been ahead of things and had spoken with greater precision about these matters. After all, it is these other churches that your committee thinks we should now be "allying" ourselves with, in a common purpose "to proclaim the Word of God faithfully," (WARC, Const. III,1). It seems to me that you passed up the very first opportunity to "witness" to the non-Reformed churches as you say you want to do within the WARC.

In addition to the statements made by the two above mentioned denominations, I refer for further proof of the need to speak on Judaism to the practice of some churches in the Reformed family to invite a Jewish rabbi to bring the message, as was done in one of the "Collegiate," i.e. RCA, churches in New York some time ago. Rev. Marchienne Rienstra, of Hope Reformed Church in Holland, had a rabbi participate in her installation service. The RCA director of the Grand Rapids Center of Ecumenism, the Rev. Baak, regularly lists the dates of Jewish festivals, such as Passover, Yom Kippur, on the monthly published calendar of events. Just as if Christ "our Passover" had not been sacrificed more than 1900 years ago as St. Paul informs us (1 Cor. 5:7) and just as if Christ had not brought about the "kippur" (atonement) by the shedding of His blood, as is clear from the Epistle to the Hebrews.

There would have been every reason, therefore, to set off our brand of ecumenicity from this other kind, which is inclusivistic and compromises the gospel. I shall not repeat what I wrote about the Vancouver Assembly's vacillating stand toward other religions and its inclusion of a piece of Indian (Native Canadian) creation lore in its liturgies. A document which claims to be an ecumenical charter should have addressed this syncretistic spirit head-on. We are living in 1987, not 1948. Why wait till this spirit catches up with our church?

As to your committee's recommendation that the CRC affiliate itself with the churches that are organized in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches I will present a few opinions and considerations, more or less chosen at random, which, in my opinion, strongly argue against accepting this recommendation.

1. Your report suggests that the WARC is a forum within which the CRC can enter into dialogue with Reformed churches of Circle 2, i.e. churches that are "Reformed" in name, but less so in practice, to use the language of the 1944 report. On this the following:

a. I know of no dictionary definition that includes the notion of a forum for dialogue as a description of the word "alliance."

b. The WARC itself speaks of itself as a "covenant," and in that connection refers to the sharing of common purposes and the ordering of its common life by God's grace alone (p. 231, point 4, end). This is far more than engaging in discussion and dialogue.

c. Art. III of the Constitution spells out the various "purposes" of the WARC and these again extend greatly beyond a mere forum structure. They involve the furthering of all endeavors to proclaim God's Word faithfully, the furthering of the work of evangelism, the widening and deepening of understanding and fellowship among its member churches, and many more such activities.

d. If the WARC churches belong to the circle 2 churches,

i.e. if they are not all of them fully Reformed in practice, the Christian Reformed Church should clearly state that this is so in its communications to WARC and should make a return to Reformed practice a condition for membership of the CRC. The Ecumenical Charter does so in so many words when describing the church's "ecumenical task" under III, 2. Why not lay down the same condition for entrance into WARC affiliation?

e. Some churches participating in WARC are known as being anything but Reformed; one of them, the United Church of Christ, is constantly mentioned in the news media as the prime example of a Liberal church in North America, as was done in an article in the *GR Press* last September, when the Rev. Avery Post, the denomination's president was in town. The Rev. Post made it very clear that his church did not wish to be evangelical and he stated that there was a place for liberal churches. He also expressed an opinion about the woman's right to an abortion when she desired it, which is out of accord with the Bible's insistence upon the sanctity of human life. I also refer to the scornful manner in which the Rev. S. Van Dyken, upon retirement, spoke of his former church, the CRC, when alleging that the CRC had a literalistic understanding of Scripture and that it believed that the Holy Spirit had ceased speaking to the church since the 17th century. Rev. Van Dyken is a minister in good standing in the UCC. His remarks were justly countered by a letter to the editor written by Dr. John Bratt, former head of the department of Religion and Theology of Calvin College. Do you mean to say that the CRC should henceforth stand shoulder to shoulder with that kind of church in the "furthering" of the faithful proclamation of the Word, of evangelism and of mutual fellowship? How self-deluding can we become?

f. Another church with which we will ally ourselves will be the Remonstrant Brotherhood of the Netherlands. This church was present at the recently held meetings of WARC in Vienna, Austria and hence takes an active part in WARC's affairs. The confessions of our denomination contain one creedal formula specifically devoted to the rejection of the errors of the Remonstrants. How then can we ally ourselves with that kind of church in the furthering of the faithful proclamation of the Word? The same may be said of the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk, a church which has in its midst a well organized and openly recognized "Association of Liberal Reformed." But is not Liberalism the very opposite of all that the gospel message stands for?

g. Your committee has the good intention to "witness" to the Reformed faith once the CRC is a full participant in the Alliance. Permit me to say the following about this intention.

(1) Joining an alliance ordinarily does not involve the intention to "witness" to one's allies. Instead, it means to make common cause with these allies against some common foe, or to achieve some commonly perceived goals. I consider the idea of joining an alliance in order to witness within its own ranks a contradiction in terms.

(2) If we join with the other churches in a common alliance we will first have to admit that the Reformed "tradition" so-called, is an "ethos, rather than any narrow and exclusive definition of faith and order." (Constitution, art.

II). This admission at the outset will circumscribe the nature of our "witness" and rob it of its truly Reformed nature. The confessions to which each office bearer in the CRC subscribes are both inclusive of the gospel and exclusive of many and various errors that have arisen in the history of the church. The Confession of Faith, also the Belgic Confession *excludes* Jews and Muslims since they do not believe in the Trinity, and it also excludes the teachings of six other teachers of the early Christian church. These teachings have a strange way of resurfacing again in modern garb. (See art. IX of the B.C.). The B.C. also excludes the apocryphal books from the biblical canon even though these books are received by other Christians (art. VI). Other exclusions of the confession involve Pelagianism (art. XV), and the error of those who insist that only adults and not infants can be baptized in the Christian church. Furthermore, the Three Forms of Unity also exclude the invocation of saints, the existence of a purgatory where the souls of the believing departed must endure some suffering before they are united with Christ their Savior, the meritoriousness of good works, and all human inventions that have been introduced into some churches in matters of order and discipline or of the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion (Art. XXXII). In addition, office bearers in the CRC solemnly vow not only to teach faithfully the biblical doctrines as embodied in the creeds, but also to "reject all errors that militate against this doctrine" and "to exert ourselves in keeping the Church free from such errors." (Formula of Subscription). The 1987 Synod has just stated that the Formula of Subscription should not be altered or reduced as had been proposed for this would "minimize the Reformed confessional nature of the CRC" (Acts, p. 613). Entering into an alliance that demands of its members the statement about the Reformed confessions to which I made reference above would not just minimize, but flatly contradict this Reformed confessional nature. Or are we suggesting that what holds for officebearers within the CRC does not in the same manner apply to what these officebearers do in interchurch councils?

(3) Other churches, such as the GKN in the Netherlands, have used the argument of "witnessing" to the Reformed faith to defend entrance in the WCC. Professor Herman Ridderbos in an interview he gave to *Centraal Weekblad* some years ago stated that if there ever had been such a "witness" he had not noticed it. Is not this an illustration of the way in which wrongly conceived good intentions are thwarted by the concessions one makes by entering into these broader ecumenical associations? To do so means that one has to become like them, that one will be circumscribed in what one does and says by exactly the context with which one has consented to cooperate wholeheartedly and without holding back.

(4) Earlier I have stated that your committee has already passed up an outstanding opportunity to "witness" in a broader ecumenical context by failing to exclude any false ecumenism from your Charter.

(5) I am aware of the encouraging report which Dr. James De Jong brought back from his visit to Geneva. What counts most of all, in my opinion, is not the ever changing impressions one receives from ongoing WARC discussions, but rather the written declaration which those

who have set up WARC have made and which they expect any further participants or allies to agree to. Integrity demands that this be so. And it is integrity in our interchurch relations that I am looking for. If we cannot be admitted to the WARC with our confessions which are both inclusive and exclusive, and with our similar Formula of Subscription we should not pretend that we can.

2. Your committee states in the 1987 Agenda that it will do its assessing and reassessing among other things in the light of the Ecumenical Charter. I am sorry to say, but I feel I must do so in all Christian candor, I believe that in adopting the charter which your committee prepared while the WARC matter was pending, the CRC has virtually changed the law while a matter was before its "courts." The 1944 approach, as you yourself admit in your report on WARC, differs from the approach you have developed in the charter in that "1944" insisted upon correction and dialogue with non-Reformed churches without making common cause with them first. The Charter, on the other hand, states that "the Christian Reformed Church should seek to pursue its ecumenical task by means of ecumenical organizations that enable it to carry out its ecumenical responsibilities more efficiently than is possible in interchurch relations" (III, A, 4). This definition of the CRC's ecumenical responsibility is broad enough to embrace affiliation with the churches of WARC. It directly contradicts what the synod of 1924 said when it decided not to affiliate since this "would mean ecclesiastical alliance and cooperation with churches in which representative liberal forces are in good and regular standing." Thus by changing the "law" while the case was pending you have effectively removed previous barriers to your proposed action. What this means in terms of plain old fashioned jurisprudence is not hard to perceive. I shall leave out of consideration the question of Christian ethics, though I have also some opinions about that. You will probably have another and better explanation of what has transpired and, if so, it might be helpful if I were told about it so that I may be enlightened in my Christian walk before God.

3. You have also been instructed by the 1985 synod to examine WARC's position papers, presumably as to their biblical, confessional and theological soundness. This will involve a thorough acquaintance with all the intricacies of modern biblical and systematic theology. As I look over your nominations for membership in IRC in recent years I wonder whether you have always put theological expertise first on your list of qualifications? Here I am speaking partly out of ignorance so I must be forgiven if I am in error, but it seems now that four out of the nine regular members of the present IRC have no theological training on the graduate seminary level. I might also say that the historical sciences are rather prominently represented on the committee, with three of its members having special expertise in that area.

In articles I have written I already have pointed out what I consider serious errors in some of the WARC sponsored publications. One of our own long term observers and participants in WARC committees has also stated that there will be "considerable content" in WARC publications that "we would find objectionable." The question comes down to this: what does it mean that a church of

Jesus Christ such as the CRC affiliates with other churches if prior to such affiliation this church knows that the things published under auspices of the new alliance will partly be in error, that they will impugn the gospel rather than clarifying or promoting it? Professor Raymond Zorn of the Seminary in Geelong writes a review of the book *The Church Speaks*, a book which contains various papers by the RCA Commission on Theology and presented to RCA synods for action. Though calling some papers "helpful" Prof. Zorn ends by saying that he is left with the feeling "that the writers of these papers, in seeking to be progressively Reformed, oftentimes more nearly reflect the answers afforded by sociology, psychology, and medicine, rather than those which full commitment to the Word of God would give" (*Vox Reformata*, 47, Nov. 1986, 49). Your report of 1985 has its hopes set, among other things, upon cooperation with RCA theologians to steer clear of error. This might well prove to be the staff that pierces the hand. Along with points I have mentioned in articles in periodicals I herewith alert you to the writing of the director of the Asian branch of WARC who at a given point in his argument on Asian theology assumes the erroneous premise that the biblical creation account of Gen. 1 was written by Israel sometime during the exile and who then draws his would-be theological conclusions from this wrong assumption, one which reflects a Higher Critical reading of the Bible.

4. I may send you some further reflections on your

report regarding the NAE and our possible affiliation with it. I must say that the report is a model of clarity and succinctness, although I find its reasoning in favor of affiliation with NAE similar to that concerning the WARC. I do think we as a church indirectly owe a lot to the existence of so many millions of Evangelicals in the United States and Canada and I wish there were a way we could somehow cooperate more closely without entangling ourselves in some sort of corporate commitment. The NAE's statement of faith, although not complete as a confession of Biblical truth, nevertheless does not curtail the expression of Reformed doctrine, as the WARC statement does when it eliminates anything that is "narrow or exclusive" (WARC's words, not mine).

5. I will be much in prayer for the committee's work. I pray that the Spirit may as yet work a miracle so that you will withdraw your recommendation that our Christian Reformed Church, with its strict creedal commitment, ally itself with churches that work together in an un-Reformed World Alliance of Reformed Churches.

6. A week prior to the writing of this letter I prepared an article for *Christian Renewal* and sent it to the editors for possible placement. I also contemplate using the contents of this letter for wider dissemination. These are public matters and I assume you want public discussion of the issues.

Fraternalty yours,
Marten H. Woudstra

WHY ARE YOU DROPPING YOUR MIDDLE NAME?

Glenn P. Palmer

Dear Christian Reformed Church, Why do you forsake your middle name?

You were my mother church, the church I grew up in, and I have tremendous loyalty to you, for you nurtured me and cared for me. I learned the catechism in church and catechism classes. I was trained in Christian schools that were financed by hard working and sacrificially giving

parents who put their money where their mouths were. I have argued against Independent Baptists and told them of the advantages of a denomination. For example,

1.) Church discipline: If a church began to deny the faith, other churches through classis or synod would corral the errant church and correct the situation. In a congregational church there is no means for such correction, as

each church is the highest authority.

2.) Training of ministers: With a denominationally controlled seminary, the church can guarantee a Reformed education. In an independent church what guarantee is there that the next "dominie" will be trained in the Bible and the Reformed faith?

3.) Denominational projects: Numerous projects can be undertaken that would otherwise be impossible for a single church. How could a single church by itself support a Christian radio program? Examples of many churches making light work are foreign missionaries, radio and TV broadcasts such as the Back-to-God Hour, denominational publications such as the *Psalter Hymnal*, catechetical and Sunday school materials.

Being in an area where the nearest CRC is over an hour's drive away, I decided to go to a Reformed Baptist church. I was impressed with the solid Biblical preaching in the style of Rev. Al Martin and the deep commitment to some Reformed doctrines. Even the average pew sitter knew the doctrines of total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Not only were these topics being boldly proclaimed from the pulpit, but they were also believed in the pew. The average church goer would mention at least one of them every Lord's Day in prayer or praise.

But after a honeymoon, I realized that although they were Reformed, they also were Baptists. Thus there is a conflict in their thinking. While they were Calvinists in the Five Points, they deny the covenant and the Calvinistic world and life view and are weak in several other areas.

Because they deny the covenant, they deny infant baptism. The children are viewed as objects of evangelism. In fact one parent told me that his child was the "son of the devil" because he did not yet believe. There is no infant dedication, and they are hostile to the idea of a Christian school. The children as a general rule are less well behaved than should be expected of Christian parents. There is no concept of family worship and the children's church is a little church trying to win souls to Christ.

Secondly, they are not totally convinced that the Lord is the Lord of all of life. Dr. Vernon McGee said that if Christ is king now, He is not doing a very good job. While the Reformed Baptists do not entirely subscribe to such a view, they do not view the world as a Calvinist does. Thus, there is no impetus for Christian schools, no reason to claim all of life for Christ.

Thirdly, they do not have an evening service. They do not preach from the Heidelberg Catechism. In their desire to be Biblical, they refuse to consider any man-made documents as part of the church. In fact when I mentioned they should study the catechism, they feared it was a Catholic document. They do not say the 10 commandments or the Apostles Creeds. One minister (or elder as they prefer to say) has been taught at a seminary. The other two elders who have served have not had seminary training. Thus there is no knowledge of Hebrew and limited knowledge of Greek (the languages in which the Bible was written). They are unsure of church history. The hymnal was a man-centered hymnal with many repetitions.

These criticisms leveled against the Reformed Baptist church do not distinguish the true or false church.

Whether the church uses the Psalter or another hymnal that is more man-centered and trite, will not cause the members of the church to go to heaven or hell. Yet the Psalter is a far superior hymnal. After not hearing the Psalms sung, it is a great joy to sing them when I do attend a CRC congregation. My wife who grew up outside the CRC now prefers the psalms to the sentimental slush of "And he walked with me, and he talked with me...." The Psalms are Biblical and God-centered.

The 10 Commandments clearly state God's desire for our lives and give us a goal in which we can do good works. By not saying the 10 Commandments, the weekly call to examine ourselves and renew our commitment to serve God as He desires us to do is lost.

The second service is also not necessary for salvation. But after going to church in the evenings for years, a deep void has been formed with no evening service. I like to eat and my wife feeds me at least twice a day. But on Sundays I can only get one serving of God's Word.

I can go on, but do you understand my point? The Reformed Baptist church, while good, is not as good as you once were, because you were a more complete church. You understood the whole counsel of God and acted on it.

I used the past tense, because you are now denying your middle name in word and deed. Errant churches are not corrected and disciplined. Professors at your colleges deny the authority of the Bible and ridicule those who believe in Creation. They twist the Bible to say things it does not say, and ignore things the Bible clearly teaches. I thought you would correct yourself, as I had argued with my Baptist friends you would do. But I do not see that. The training of your ministers has become suspect. And the denominational projects are not always Reformed. Thus instead of the Board of Publications defending and proclaiming the Reformed faith and increasing the amount of Psalms in the Psalter (hymnal), it makes our Reformed heritage like genealogy: great to have such a distinguished line of ancestors but having no impact on the day-to-day operation of life.

You deny your middle name? Why? Having worshipped in the Protestant churches in Belgium and now with a Reformed Baptist Church, I appreciate what a great heritage you have. But don't deny your middle name. Preach the Word of God TWICE EVERY Sunday. Preach the Heidelberg Catechism. Establish Christian schools. Ensure the covenant is practiced. Discipline the church. Excommunicate those who do not believe. Believe and act on the truths of our heritage as written in the three Doctrinal Standards. Train *all* ministers in Greek, Hebrew, and the Reformed faith. Don't give up the faith.

In Christ,
Glenn P. Palmer

Note: The writer is an officer in the U.S. Navy, the son of the late Dr. Edwin H. Palmer, (a CR minister and editor of the NIV Bible) and he has long provided us with the column, "What is my name?" He lives at 453 Wayley St., Portsmouth, RI 02871.

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REFORMED FELLOWSHIP MEETING

Arthur Besteman

The annual meeting of Reformed Fellowship was held on October 1, 1987 — once again at the convenient facilities of the Kelloggsville Christian Reformed Church and the neighboring Christian School.

The afternoon business meeting was highlighted by the beautifully developed address of Mrs. Frederika Pronk, a Christian homemaker, wife of a Free Reformed Church minister and a recent graduate of Calvin Seminary with a Master of Church Education degree.

Mrs. Pronk's subject was "Being a Biblically Reformed Woman Today." She emphasized the fact that if we are to know what it means to be a Reformed woman in the world today, we must go to the Scriptures. After developing the historic Reformed position in regard to the inspiration and authority of the Bible, the speaker went on to lay down the following principles: 1) Woman's place is determined by the creation order; 2) By virtue of the creation order man is the head of the woman; 3) Women are to submit and be in subjection to their husbands; 4) Woman is to be man's helper; and 5) Church offices are closed to women.

Women are to use their gifts in a biblically ordered way. The speaker pointed out that women were not inhibited in their service in the early church because of lack of ordination, nor did they seek ordination in an attempt to achieve status in the church. Women along with men pray "Thy kingdom come" and therefore have a kingdom task. Woman's task may vary from age to age and from one place to another. Mores and traditions change, but not biblical principles. One such principle that does not change is that women may not exercise authority over a man.

Following the fellowship banquet which was held at the Kelloggsville Christian School, a large audience gathered at the Kelloggsville Church for the evening mass meeting at which the speaker was Dr. Cornel Venema of Ontario, California.

Dr. Venema's theme "Why Must We Contend for the Faith?" based on II Timothy 3:10-4:8 was developed masterfully. The speaker first asked the question "Why is it not popular to contend for the faith?" He gave a four-

fold answer. Contending for the faith is said to be divisive and those who do so are accused of being arrogant. Furthermore we are told that it is neither essential nor nice to contend for the faith. This fourfold argument said the speaker has just about won the day in the Christian Reformed Church.

The speaker went on, secondly, to answer the question "Why we must contend for the faith?" First of all the Lord demands it. Secondly, the truth is essential to the church's life and ministry. It is not a matter of indifference whether the truth is upheld or not, for the church is "the pillar and ground of the truth." Thirdly the church will ever face error within its ranks. In the church's history the most dangerous enemy did not enter the church from without but arose from within the church itself. There is a powerful complacency in our church today on the part of people who hear no evil, who see no evil and who cannot conceive that there is even the possibility of error.

Dr. Venema then went on to expound what it means to contend for the faith. We must keep (exert ourselves and even agonize to keep) the faith entrusted to us. We must do all we can to refute error and we must exercise ourselves to keep the church free of error.

In conclusion, Dr. Venema reminded us that to contend for the faith will not win us plaudits or praise and surely not denominational advancement. It will be discouraging, difficult and even agonizing, but the apostle Paul says we should be glad for there is laid up for every faithful footsoldier a crown of righteousness that does not fade away. That should be enough for us.

It was reported that balloting for board members had resulted in the election of the following to a three-year term: Rev. John Engbers, Rev. E.J. Knott, Rev. T. Vanden Heuvel, Mr. Gerrit Sterk and Mr. Peter Wobbema.

It was a day rich in instruction, inspiration and encouragement. The offering of \$1100.00 showed the interest and support which the Reformed Fellowship continues to enjoy. May its work be prospered as it enters the thirty-seventh year of working for the preservation and propagation of the Reformed Faith.