

## Fighting Communism – A Walk with the Lord<sup>1</sup>

In the *Calvinist Contact* issue of July 16, 1982, Bernie Dokter, Latin America Secretary for the Christian Reformed Board of World Missions (CRWM) in Grand Rapids, MI, USA, attempted to shed some light on the strife currently taking place in Central America. Though he fully recognizes the role of Communism in the area, he correctly argues that Communism is not the *basic* problem. Rather, the root cause is poverty and oppression. Communism only tries to make hay in that situation. So far, so good.

Dokter goes on to assert that poverty, illiteracy, and related problems are increasing in the area so that the people are becoming more desperate. Western governments – I suspect he means mainly the American government – step into this situation by supplying money and weapons to the governments of the troubled region, governments that seek to suppress the mounting unrest without solving the basic problems of injustice. Dokter rightly criticizes this approach as unchristian.

The writer is a missionary, one of many CRC missionaries daily involved in Latin American life on a very practical level. As such he sees that the CRC cannot remain aloof from developments in that part of the world. We must help seek a solution and work towards it. Such thinking is good missionary thinking. Our solution, he suggests, must take the form of a “Biblical alternative.” It is to his alternative that I would like to devote the rest of this article.

First of all, I cannot suppress the question where my colleagues in Central America have been the last fifteen years or so, the period during which the factors causing these problems were developing. Why is it that these factors were not recognized at an earlier stage? I think I know. As a missionary community and, indeed, as a denomination we have been Evangelical rather than Reformed. We have shared with our Evangelical counterparts a dualism that led us to a church-centric mission programme that largely ignored the political, social and economic

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to the Editor, *CC*, 7 Oct/1982. *Every Square Inch*, vol. 2, pp. 255-256.

realities within which we did our mission work. We have been so busy building churches that we thought we lacked the time and resources to analyze the structural context. It was not until the effects became *clearly* oppressive that we began to wake up – just at the time when it had become fashionable to be concerned about such issues, some years after so-called “liberal” churches had already been doing a lot of spadework in this area of concern.

Too bad we have been so Evangelical. We have examples within our tradition of people who were able to foretell developments such as these, not because they had special charismatic gifts, but because they paid attention to social trends of their day and analyzed them by Biblical standards. They recognized the assumptions underlying current developments and where these would or could lead. I refer to men like Groen Van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper. They were prophets; they were in the forefront of Christian thinking. We are mere followers, followers of fashion and of post-facto developments. We are typically Evangelical more than Reformed.

Unfortunately, Dokter fails to explain the reasons his government supports oppressive regimes in Central America. I do not pretend to know them all, of course, but there is no doubt that one major reason is the pressure of the American multinationals. These multinationals have huge investments in some Latin American countries. Endless arrays of studies have indicated beyond doubt that many of these corporations have contributed much to the problems now causing such upheavals. In order to protect their investments, they engage in extensive lobbying in Washington. And, of course, Washington must protect the interests of her citizens. Corporations, to achieve their aims, need law and order and these, Washington reasons, can best be obtained by supporting regimes emphasizing law and order rather than justice. The demands of justice would require far-reaching changes that could well jeopardize the interests of these corporations.

We need to go one step further. Who are these multinationals? They are corporations comprising employees, managers, directors and stockholders. They are very complicated structures that require more than this short article to

describe fully. But it can be said without much doubt that among the stockholders of these multinationals are a considerable number of members of the CRC, most of whom seldom ask questions as to how they get their dividends. In fact, all members of the CRC are involved as stockholders through our denominational pension funds. These pension funds are invested in many corporations, some of which contribute to the problems Dokter describes and which encourage the US government to pursue the policies Dokter rightly considers unchristian. This situation leads me to the necessary conclusion that *the entire CRC must accept its share of the responsibility for the situation in which Latin America finds itself*. We are part of the problem. Dokter's analysis leaves us too free; it does not go far enough. Put in a better way, his analysis goes too far; it should come closer to home!

Dokter's alternative is a call to the Evangelical community to reject affiliation with both right and left and, instead to "walk with the Lord." It's too bad that such a call comes so late in the game, but that is water over the dam. But I cannot help wonder why he wishes to affiliate with the Evangelical community in this matter. Within the Christian community, Evangelicals have not been the most acute in their understanding of economic and political events. I do not hesitate to assert bluntly that their participation in these areas has been almost mindless, at least, from a Christian perspective. They may be strong in their insistence on a personal commitment to Christ, but in the areas of economics and politics most of them have been very worldly. The so-called "liberal" or "mainline" churches have tended to be more Biblically sensitive to the effect of these multinationals and the responsibility of the shareholders. One can say that in this area of concern Evangelicals are liberal where liberals are more Evangelical.

Both in Canada and in the USA there are ecumenical organizations as well as denominational offices that deal seriously and competently with the issues with which Dokter is concerned. Their efforts represent a real challenge to the CRC with our boast in the universal lordship of Christ. I am greatly encouraged by the fact that the Council of the CRC in Canada now has a loose relationship at least with the Toronto-based Taskforce on the Churches and Corporate Responsibility. I similarly rejoice in the letter of CRWM, both Dokter's and my employer, to

Washington protesting the very policies of which Dokter writes. But such a letter should also have been sent to those corporations in which the CRC invests and which are partly responsible for the problems.

The point of the last two paragraphs has been that we had better not align ourselves with Evangelicals in this issue for they have little or nothing to offer here. They will only serve to slow us down in the process of building our own awareness. Historically, Evangelicals have been characterized more by Pietism than by genuine Biblical piety with its universal concerns.

Indeed, we are to walk with the Lord, not with either right or left. But what does that mean? What would be the consequences of this principle for our missionaries in Central America? Recent publications of CRWM indicate deep awareness of the social context in which our missionaries there work, but they do not tell us how these missionaries are expected to relate to these realities or what they are to do about them.

Brother Dokter, *how* are we to walk with the Lord in that context? I would like to know and, I suspect, so would CRC supporters of CRWM.