

A Tiger in Your Tank –

The Anatomy of Christian Reformed Missiology

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I. Introduction

The subtitle of this article may immediately raise the question: Is there an identifiable and somewhat consistent Christian Reformed missiology, enough so that one can speak of its anatomy? My answer to that is a very definite affirmative. Though I was not so sure of that a few months ago, I have discovered that there is a very definite body of theoretical materials that can legitimately be described as Christian Reformed missiology and it's a tiger. It consists of official ecclesiastical documents and of the writings of a number of CRC missiologists, all of whom have also been deeply involved in the Christian Reformed missionary programme. Besides my own writings, I refer to those of Eugene Rubingh, Timothy Monsma, Roger Greenway, Robert Recker and Rich De Ridder. Those reports and publications indicate that there exists among us as a Christian Reformed community what I regard as quite a remarkably homogeneous body of missiological material.

Our concern for this morning is very simple: to describe this tiger or to outline the basic elements of the more or less official missiological perspective of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). This perspective is found in many documents, but I concentrate on three sources:

- Report 42, "Mission Principles" accepted by Synod 1977.
- Report 43, "Joint Commission RCA/CRC for Study of Theology of Evangelism" accepted by Synod 1977.

- Reports of Christian Reformed World Mission (CRWM) to Synod from 1977 to 1987.

I had originally hoped to cover all the outreach agencies of the CRC. Unfortunately, the materials at hand are simply too much for the limited time available. So, for now we limit ourselves to these two reports of 1977 and to those submitted by CRWM. Had there been time to study the documents produced by those other agencies, we might have found cracks in the wall.

Time imposed many limitations on me, including the need to restrict myself basically to the missiological theory. There is no time to discuss the matter of implementation, its success and the obstacles along the way. Without this question of implementation, a discussion of the theoretical perspective may not be as useful or interesting. So, I promise to follow up this lecture with a discussion of the obstacles in some of the classes in missiology in which I will be involved within the next few days. I also promise that I will expand this lecture to include the implementation of the official vision I am about to describe and to seek publication of the whole in *Calvin Theological Journal*. So, Editor, prepare yourself! (The history of this attempt is lost in the fog of history and too many moves and travels.)

The reason for my interest in these official missiological statements and reports is my long-standing involvement in the CRC mission programme in Nigeria – since 1965. Though I had, of course, done some reading in CRC missiology, for many years I was so distraught over CRC mission practice that I would have never guessed to have a tiger in our tank, a mission perspective that, if it were applied systematically and thoroughly, would have had the potential of changing itself dramatically. We have a real tiger in our tank, but, I am afraid the tiger too often has its tail between its legs. However, this morning I am going to concentrate on the tiger himself. Perhaps we can check out the tail some other time.

II. CRC Missiology

A. Report 42, 1977 “Mission Principles”

True to classic Reformed and, indeed, Christian motif, Report 42, asserts that “the goal of God’s mission is the glory of God.” That glory is to be demonstrated “in the establishment and acknowledgment of his rule over all creation in our present age and for eternity.”

1. **Liberation**

There are several interesting and significant components to this statement regarding goal and kingdom. There is the question: how does that kingdom come? “In our own day,” we are told, it comes “whenever and wherever men acknowledge his rule and experience the deliverance he comes to bring: release for the captives, sight for the blind, liberty for the oppressed, good news to the poor.” This answer appears to me to be eminently Biblical. It echoes Jesus’ self-introduction to His townsmen in Luke 4:18 as well as his response to the query sent to him by John the Baptist as to whether or not Jesus was the expected Messiah. Jesus answered to the effect, “Look, where you see these things happening, you know that I am there with My rule” (Matthew 11:4-5).

The report’s emphasis is not only Biblical, it is also surprising, at least to me. Some years ago, when I first became aware not only of *what* Jesus said in Luke 4:18 but also of the strategic importance of the time and place of that statement, I asked myself why I would not have expected such a statement at that occasion. The reason is that Jesus emphasizes that which is largely ignored in the CRC tradition. It is an emphasis in the gospels that was already recognized by both opponents of colonialism, such as African Christian nationalists at the beginning of the 20th century and by supporters of colonialism alike (Boer, 1979, p. 107; 1984, p. 104). Likewise, it was already an important theme in the work of our own Abraham Kuyper during the 19th century. Note for example, his lecture to the Christian Social Congress in 1891, published under the title, *Christianity and the Class Struggle*. But this emphasis has not been prominent in the CRC. As a member of the CRC, I would have expected him to say that he came to bring salvation to sinners, or forgiveness or grace or eternal life. But, no, when the evangelist summarized Jesus’ self-introduction, he mentioned none of these. Instead he picked up on a theme that today one hardly dares raise in a CRC pulpit for the

danger of being attacked as a liberation theologian. The time has come that we should ask why this emphasis, so obviously central to Christ's ministry, has been so ignored in the CRC. I suggest that the answer lies in the fact that our tiger has its tail between its legs: we suffer from a spiritual complex that often draws back from the obvious implications of our own vision.

And, of course, the statement under discussion is a very *radical* one in the sense that it could potentially and probably should lead us to a much greater interest in and practical emphasis on a Reformed kind of liberation missiology. This statement would certainly provide CRWM and its missionaries with the right, if not obligation, to attempt to open the eyes of the constituency, the partially blind, to break the chains that prevent the CRC from recognizing our own involvement in oppression. That CRWM and Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) have been doing that to some degree is without question. Whether they have done so with the required courage and thoroughness is another.

But there the statement stands. The authors picked it up – and Synod accepted it with all its potential for a more radical missionary stand as a basic component of missiology. I, for one, am surprised that it was allowed to stand. And very happy!

The statement does not stand isolated in the document: it serves as foundation for the entire report. The “triune God” is the author of mission and His plan is “to unite all things in Christ” (Ephesians 1:10; Colossians 1:20). The report asserts:

The entire Bible movingly pictures God at work in history accomplishing His will in establishing His rule over all of His creation, building His kingdom and destroying every power that exalts itself against Him. God manifests His glory in the establishment of His kingdom. We continually pray as our Lord taught us: “Thy kingdom come.” We carry on our mission in the context of the last days (p. 618).

2. **Cultural Mandate**

Though the Cultural Mandate of Genesis 1 is fairly prominent in the minds of Reformed social theorists, one does not frequently come across references to it in CRC missiology. I am glad to note that the study committee recognized its

missiological significance. Often the Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission are discussed in such separate contexts that one would almost conclude that they are totally unrelated to each other. It often seems as if the one refers to our cultural labours and the other to the different world of mission (Boer, 1979, p. 491; 1984, pp. 149ff, 155, 159).

Without using the term, the Report definitely incorporates the Cultural Mandate in its kingdom missiology. It affirms that

our redemption enables us to fulfill the purpose of our creation and as covenant people to be His appointed co-laborers to lay the world, subjugated to God in Christ, at His feet, re-aligned to its Lord's will and experiencing the blessing of a life lived in stewardship to Him (I Corinthians 9:16; 3:9).

The reference is clear and so is the purpose of mission, this time expressed in different terms from what we heard before, but definitely in harmony with the kingdom vision. The purpose of our redemption is, among other things, to enable us to fulfill our original task laid upon us at creation. Thus our redemption and our original task are intricately related: the former enables us to carry out the latter. Redemption is not only other worldly; it is also very much this worldly. I recall Dr. E. Runner in his philosophy classes at Calvin College chiding Evangelical missions for their one-sided other-worldly emphasis. Though the criticism is well taken and has held for much missionary work, you will not find it in the official CRC document. Here redemption and, therefore, mission are intimately tied to creation and Cultural Mandate. We need to be enabled for this task because we have been disabled by sin; we are handicapped to such an extent that we *cannot* carry out the Cultural Mandate without ending up with warped and twisted societies, cultures and structures. Redemption thus becomes a necessity for an orderly world, and a creative, just world. It is the privilege of the church, of "God's covenant people," to have been appointed the agent which carries this "redemptive plan for mankind," to be sent and equipped for this mission.

Why is all this necessary? I have already said it: we are disabled, handicapped. Though there is the kingdom of God, the fall into sin has introduced radical disintegration. As the report puts it:

Because of the rebellion of his creatures an altered situation has been brought about in this world. Mankind's sinful revolt brought all under the rule of sin and the influence of Satan and the powers of darkness. Apart from God, mankind lives in bondage and slavery.

It is the familiar Reformed emphasis on total depravity, depravity that extends to all of life, including human emotions, ambitions and reason.

3. **Wholistic Approach**

The above classical Reformed emphases have their implications for mission. They lead to a very comprehensive, total or wholistic missionary task. The report repeats it time and again: people must be addressed in their totality. "God's claim calls mankind to a total response ..." "The church in its mission must minister to the whole person ..." "Because God's royal claim upon mankind involves His claim to the total life of man, the church must also minister in mission to the whole person."

The church is often compelled to engage in a comprehensive approach. This means that it often addresses the gospel to men on a number of levels: social, economic, agricultural, health, life-style, etc. The gospel touches all areas of life.

The theme, I trust, is a familiar one to most of us.

4. **Word and Deed**

This emphasis on wholeness leads to a rejection of the *word-deed dichotomy*, a dichotomy very alien to the genius of Reformed theology, but that has nevertheless been a sore point between CRWM and CRWRC. The report under discussion makes no allowance for such a dichotomy, especially not for separating the two. "The message," the report insists, "is proclaimed by word and is

demonstrated by deeds.” We can carry out our missionary responsibility only when these two function together.

5. Structures

The report also briefly addresses the issue of *structures*. Though it does not express itself very clearly on this point, it leaves no doubt that wholistic mission demands that attention be paid not only to individuals but also the structures humans build up in their various societies. As they stand, these structures are often “perverted” and inspired by Satan. As such, they “challenge the will of God in regard to righteousness, justice, love and mercy, humaneness and goodness,” a statement backed up by various Scriptural references (Isaiah 5:7-11; Revelation 18; Galatians 5:19-21).

B. Report No. 43, Acts of Synod, 1977 – Kingdom Emphasis

Report No. 43 is a document drawn up by representatives of the CRC and the Reformed Church of America (RCA) in order to arrive at a common theology of evangelism. There is no need to discuss this document at length, for in so far as it goes it is almost a replica of Report 42. Evangelism is to testify to the coming of the kingdom. The term “kingdom” in this report refers “not primarily to the divine sovereignty in a general sense, but to the active, saving reign of the triune God in history.” The good news is the victory

over all the powers of darkness that have enslaved mankind and made His good creation subject to bondage (Romans 8:19-25; Colossians 1:13, 14). It is to tell of what God has done to bring forgiveness to the guilty, help to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, deliverance to the oppressed. It is to announce to the whole creation a divine reign of justice and peace (Luke 2:14; Acts 10:36; Ephesians 2:17).

There is a strong emphasis that the gospel and the kingdom consist not of words or talk, but of power.

Serious questions are asked regarding preaching. Does it reflect full kingdom perspective? Are the issues of the day dealt with in a relevant way? Are we living up to our prophetic roles in society?

No more needs to be said. The two reports, though written in very different styles, are virtually identical missiological twins. And both were adopted by Synod 1977.

c. **Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) 1977-1987**

When we turn to CRWM's annual reports to the CRC synod, for the period under discussion, 1977-1987, we are basically talking about the period during which Eugene Rubingh was the Executive Secretary. William Van Tol took over during the last year.

The structure of CRWM's reports consists of an introduction by Rubingh, followed by the reports from the Area Secretaries, while Rubingh would provide the closing comments. Rubingh's introduction and conclusion would remind readers of the large vision of the entire enterprise, while the Area Secretaries would supply the nitty-gritty of the working out of that vision, detailing what missionaries actually do. Since I am dealing with the missiology rather than the practice at this point, what follows deals more with Rubingh's sections of the reports than with those of the Area Secretaries, though not exclusively so.

For a number of years I was surprised that Synod accepted Rubingh's missiological statements, for his missiology has a potential streak of radicalism that the CRC generally avoids. However, his missiology is largely that expressed in Reports 42 and 43 of 1977 and as such it is within the ballpark of official missiology.

1. **Sovereignty of God**

A central theme important to Rubingh is the Reformed doctrine of the *sovereignty of God* over all of life (253/77; 195/82). This forms the basis of mission: "The earth is the Lord's ... and all who live in it.' That lordship impels us to go to the farthest regions of the world to present there the claim of his Kingdom" (92/84). Rubingh affirms:

Our missionary enterprise stems most fundamentally from the fact that God is the sovereign of the earth and the peoples who live upon it. Missionaries who are Reformed in their commitment regard the world as the Lord's possession, and they go into that world to claim it in His name. They are not aliens entering the enemy camp, nor infiltrators into the domain of the devil, but agents of God Himself as He manifests His kingdom throughout the world (181/78).

In a day when missionaries often feel like unwanted strangers, this doctrine can provide them with a sense of belonging. It may be that the host government or even people do not desire their presence or ministry, but they can claim legitimacy from the sovereign of all of them. They do have the right to be there, for it is part of God's kingdom.

2. The Purpose of Mission

As to the purpose or goal of CRWM's mission, we are taken back to the initial statement of purpose of what used to be called the Board of Heathen Missions, a purpose that is re-affirmed in 1977:

- The announcing and glorifying of the name of the Lord.
- The proclamation of the precious Gospel of salvation where hitherto this has not been done.
- Also to cooperate in the gathering to the church ... of lost sinners who will be saved, and to the extension of Jesus' kingdom in the world (225/77).

Synod 1986 was requested to approve a statement of purpose that basically contains the same elements:

- The glory of God through salvation of sinners
- The building of the church
- The coming and extension of the kingdom (127/86)

During the period of re-organization a new constitution emerged in which it is put this way:

It shall be the primary task of the World Missions Committee and Agency to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God and call people of all the world to repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, and obedience to God in their personal lives and their societal relations, and to build the church of Christ (81/87).

When you compare this last statement with the other two,

- It will be noticed that the glory of God is no longer included in the statement. I am not sure of the significance of this change, assuming it was dropped consciously. It could signal a reduced consciousness of concern for his glory.
- The order of kingdom and church has also been reversed. The statement has expanded on the desired response to the gospel: repentance, faith and obedience.

3. **Structures**

Another significant change in the 1987 statement is more intense interest in structural concerns: people are to obey not only in their personal lives but also in their societal relations (81/87). This last change would seem to indicate an enlargement of vision and task, a healthy move away from individualism towards recognition that people and the structures in which they are enmeshed are so closely related that change in the one demands a change in the other. We have here a rejection of the false assumption held by many evangelicals, namely that when an individual is converted to Christ, she will inevitably work at changing societal relations as well. Modern history is replete with born-again Christians who enthusiastically participate in structures that cannot always be defended from a Christian perspective. CRWM now recognizes that the assumption is wrong. Social obedience does not come automatically, but it must be consciously fostered. It is now officially part of the missionary task to do so. That new

recognition and prominence – after all, inclusion of it in a statement of *primary* task does accord it great prominence – is a great step forward. The change takes structural concerns out of the realm of personal predilection on the part of individual missionaries and makes it the official concern of the entire organization.

4. Church Growth

Sometimes the goal of CRWM is expressed more in church-growth terminology. In 1980, the Board adopted the following:

The goal of CRWM outreach is the planting and/or development of a significant number of churches and a Christian community ..., so that these churches may fellowship together and so that they can consolidate their forces in order to most effectively engage in outreach, Christian education, doctrinal development, leadership training, and the development of a distinct identity and self-concept (162/80).

In 1983, we read, “In its simplest form, a statement of the goal of World Missions is ‘the planting and development of the church.’” Again: “World Mission is dedicated to the growth and development of the church” (43-44/83). In 1984 we are told that CRWM is committed to the “priority of church development” (p. 114). In more than one field, where CRWM and CRWRC are both present, CRWM’s function is basically church development.

However, such arrangements are not expressions of “church growth” philosophy identified with the School of World Mission in Pasadena, California. In situations where church growth is the dominant task, the team has usually been enlarged to include CRWRC staff who address the other aspects of planting the kingdom – at least, in theory. CRWM missiology is too kingdom oriented and too wholistic for it to fall into the reductionist approach of our Church Growth friends. Church development is integrated in a wholistic approach and as such plays a very legitimate, if not most dominant, part in the entire programme of CRWM. And so it comes about that in the midst of very aggressive assertions about the kingdom, synod is assured that “church-planting goals have not been set aside” (181/78).

5. **Verbal Witness**

Closely related to the CRWM's concept of church growth is their insistence on the priority or centrality of the "verbal witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ" even in the face of terrible problems faced by the host population (175/80). It is a constant theme in these reports. CRWM supports the "carefully articulated position" of World Missions and Relief Committee (WMARC), the body that was assigned to work out new relationships between CRWM and CRWRC, "on the centrality of preaching and the priority of church development. We urge WMARC to maintain this fundamental and historic commitment of the CRC" (118/85). WMARC, in fact, was under synodical instruction to ensure the "centrality of the official proclamation of the Word" (126/86).

The fear that in a wholistic mission programme the preaching of gospel will be pushed aside appears endemic in the CRC. These official and regular reassurances serve to put the church at ease, for two unstated reasons. The first is the continued fear and suspicion among the constituency of the lingering effects of a one-sided social gospel of yesteryear. The second is a mentality that harbours a residual dualism, in spite of the fact that the flag of the kingdom remains hoisted high. However, this verbal witness, as in the case with church development, is preaching the word of the kingdom and its Lord and Saviour, not of a one-sided other-worldly spiritualized saviour.

6. **Wholistic Approach**

As in the case of Reports 42 and 43 above, so is there a great emphasis in these reports on the need for a wholistic approach in mission. In the face of social and political turmoil in Latin America, "the mission wrestles with the need for a gospel that speaks to the whole man. This is an ever-present topic at mission meetings and conferences" (175/80). The next year we are reminded again that Latin America, because of its problems, continues to "need the holistic gospel of Jesus Christ touching both men's need for spiritual salvation and for a world and life view here and now" (174/81).

Please observe that the motive for a wholistic or comprehensive approach to mission here is found in local conditions: where people are in trouble, they require a wholistic approach. Same for the Dominican Republic: the great physical needs make a wholistic approach necessary (134/85; 122/86). Similarly, conditions in Africa which call for a wholistic gospel include the presence of Islam, secularism, traditional religions, nationalism and the “truncated gospel of many for independent churches” (201/79). A comprehensive approach is also required because “the holism of the Third World peoples should be respected” (195/82).

However, a more fundamental reason for a wholistic approach lies in the sovereignty of God and the all-embracing scope of His kingdom. Salvation being a “body/soul totality,” “mission should be designed comprehensively to address this totality” (195/82). In the context of his struggles with CRWRC, Rubingh rejects the dualism associated with Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologies, both of which separate nature and grace. Over against such dualism, the Reformed proclaim that “the earth and its fullness are the Lord’s and that the salvation which God proffers is total and comprehensive” (230/77). This rejection of scholastic dualism is expressed more than once (193/82) and, for Rubingh, it has very practical implications in terms of wholistic mission policy as well as for the relationship between CRWM and CRWRC.

7. Word and Deed

The all-embracing scope of the sovereignty and kingdom of God also demands the unity of word and deed in mission. The issue comes up repeatedly, especially in the context of the long-standing feud between CRWM and CRWRC. In fact, CRWM identified this issue as the central theological concern at stake. We read:

The validation of long-termed programmed relief not integrated with comprehensive word and deed missionary approach raises questions which call for serious consideration.

CRWM continues to feel that the ... assistance of the CRC should address man as a totality in a ministry which combines word and deed and should, therefore, be carried out by means of a unified mission strategy. When

synod originally approved the CRWRC Constitution, it took great care to insist on the coordination of the relief and missionary ministries. It is this coordination indeed that manifests a theme central to our Reformed heritage, namely the sovereignty of God over all of life. (CRWM) therefore asks synod not to adopt a suggestion to revise the CRWRC Constitution in such a manner as to validate any separation between word and deed ... (253/77).

During the succeeding year, the two organizations came up with a mutually satisfying consensus. CRWM reports:

We are pleased to report that ongoing dialogue with CRWRC has resulted in a mutual determination to achieve a joint word/deed ministry overseas. The alarming tendency to separate word and deed into distinct and unrelated programs has been thoroughly evaluated and we join with CRWRC in an effort to achieve a common focus ... for our joint efforts. We believe that the field council is the appropriate body to show this word and deed unity which is theologically essential for Reformed missionary activity (185/78).

Nevertheless, disputes and disagreements between the two bodies continued to rear their heads in specific countries where the two sought to work together. With respect to the hunger project in Sierra Leone, CRWM reported that “extended and fruitful discussions have taken place with the CRWRC regarding the joint word-and-deed ministry ...” (163/80). CRWM disagreed with CRWRC about the implication of word-and-deed concepts for practical administration: “The disparity of CRWRC and CRWM with regard to on-field administration continued to provide an obstacle for integration of the joint word/deed outreach” (216/82). CRWM insisted that unity of word and deed requires that the two organizations create a single administrative machinery where they work jointly and they urged WMARC to “confirm the unification of word and deed ministry in a consistent organizational structure with a single executive director” (118/85. Cf. also 230/77, 192-193, 195/82).

A missiology with such a strong and consistent wholistic kingdom orientation must necessarily work itself out in a missionary programme that is wide in scope. The above references are all located in the section of the reports written largely by Eugene Rubingh, the Executive Secretary, but Area Secretaries confirm that the missionaries do indeed proclaim the gospel in word and deed. In Latin America, we are told, they bring the gospel “by word and deed.” In Argentina “the church is working with other groups in a word-deed mission program,” while the same claim is made regarding work in Dominican Republic (133, 134/85). Indeed, the thrust of many CRWM reports is to indicate a wholistic word-and-deed program. However, it is also clear that the general sections of the reports, the introductory and concluding sections written mostly by Rubingh show a much greater emphasis on this feature than do the area reports. Though it may not be correct to speak of a discrepancy here, there definitely is a considerable difference in the degree of emphasis.

What are the issues and concerns addressed by this mission with such a wholistic emphasis? Though our present aim is to restrict ourselves to theory rather than practice, it may be useful to provide a summary glimpse of the extent of the desired wholistic approach. Without going into details and bypassing all church development efforts and related training programmes, I provide you with the range of activities or areas in which CRWM ministers to its hosts – and they are many indeed. Medical work has taken many aspects, including the following: two large hospitals with wide-ranging services; various types of health care: preventive, primary and wholistic; two large rural health programmes; maternity centres; leprosy treatment and rehabilitation; dentistry; training of nurses and midwives, both modern and traditional, laboratory technicians, dispensary attendants, first aid attendants. In education, there have been primary, secondary and teachers training schools as well as adult literacy. Still other concerns include gambling, prostitution, corruption and bribery, family crises, rehabilitation of various types of handicapped, music, nutrition, sanitation, science, politics, business, literature production and distribution. Indeed, the range of activities is nothing short of impressive. Wholism is more than mere propaganda.

8. Injustice and Oppression

A more recent concern that has caught primary attention of CRWM is that of injustice and oppression. In addition to the missiological pressure, there is the situational pressure, the fact that many missionaries serve in areas with acute oppression of the poor, a fact that missionaries cannot possibly ignore. The 1977 report reads: "From the oppressed poor of Latin America a call for justice and liberation gain momentum. The crisis for evangelical church and mission is to determine the biblical manner of response to demonstrate that 'the truth shall make you free'" (225/77). In 1978, it is reported that there is "an awakening of social concern among all Latin American churches, Catholic, Pentecostal and mainline Protestant alike" (196/78). The status of the issue is well described by Rubingh:

Synod of 1978, "requires each denominational agency to include in its annual report what has been accomplished in alerting the church to the issues of social justice" (Acts 64/78). The issue of social justice has become a matter of crucial significance in several of the countries where CRWM missionaries are at work, particularly from Latin America. National Christians and missionaries united in pointing to cases of political oppression and tyranny. Missionaries are required to exercise both tact as guests in foreign countries and also forthrightness as representatives of God's justice. Hence, these issues become existential ones in the missionary community. Through deputation, speeches, publication and audio-visual presentations, the churches have been alerted time and again to the crying injustice which is faced in our world today.

Not only is injustice discernable in the political arena, but economic structures often bleed the poor in many societies and force them into ongoing dependency. In pulpits, classrooms, hospitals, and countless conversations, people are encouraged to speak and act Christianly and so work for justice. National leaders are trained who may give direction to overseas Christians in the context of their own societies and cultures.

CRWM is committed to continuing communication with the churches in alerting us all to these issues (217/79).

It is significant that interest in the issue is not confined to CRWM. All CRC boards are placed under obligation by synod to report to the constituency what they are doing to alert that constituency to issues of social justice. Synod 1978 turned it into an official and important issue no longer to be left to the interest of a particular agency or missionary.

It is good, therefore, to note that CRC missionaries are not indifferent to the situation: it constitutes a challenge for them. The Argentine seminary with which some CRC missionaries are associated was calling for Christian social involvement. The subject "is an ever-present topic at mission meetings and conferences," according to the 1980 report (p. 175). Rubingh points out the difficulties and confusing situations missionaries face in this regard, but in spite of these,

It may be forthrightly said that in general our missionaries identified themselves with the cause of those who have been victimized by the rich and powerful elite. As is so often the case, it is among the poor and struggling ones that the gospel finds entrance. This gospel is by no means simply a call to quietude in the postponement of the blessings of salvation into the future (179/81).

The point of all of this is not that missionaries must become social activists. Rather, they are to teach and model these concerns before their hosts. Rubingh feels secure that "the churches so planted become yeast and ferment and are enabled to address the injustices of their societies in the name of Christ" (179/81).

In 1982, we are told that in the Dominican Republic CRWM was happy with the arrival of CRWRC staff and hoped "to work closely with them in seeking solutions to some of these problems," the problem being that of the "seemingly insurmountable social and economic problems and much social injustice" which "are facts of life in this small country" (213/82).

9. Domestic Role of the CRC

All along the line, Rubingh refuses to lay the sole or even main burden for these difficult and controversial tasks only on missionaries, though they often become the focus of this responsibility. "Each agency, each congregation, and the church in solemn assembly must speak. We are faced with the drama of the coming of God's kingdom and must all be hammered into more effective instruments of mission" (179/81).

In response to a communication from Classis Toronto to CRWM about issues of injustice and oppression and their effect on the spread of the gospel, a fine and forthright discussion appears in 188-190/82 that I cannot all reproduce or even summarize in its totality here. The precarious predicament of missionaries under these circumstances is pointed out along with the fact that, though they do not represent their own national governments, their host people often do so regard them. The danger of ignorance and simplistic answers is pointed out. But the most important and radical aspect of the statement is the need for the CRC to address the home governments of Canada and the USA: "We may not salve our consciences by speaking about injustice in far countries, while avoiding the activities of our own nations" Rubingh continues:

Our primary focus in this matter ought to be on our own responsibilities to address our own countries. The political and economic decisions made in our capitals have a powerful effect overseas. Our business community makes decisions that affect living conditions around the world. Political and economic decisions made here in North America may cause harm to people in other nations and may hinder our Christian witness. Or, our two nations may give sympathetic support to government which perpetuate unrighteousness. We are responsible for the decisions and programs of our nations and their international effect. We have the right, duty, and privilege to address our own governments when injustice demands our testimony (189/82).

I largely agree with this statement. However, I draw your attention to a shift of focus here. The issue has come home to roost. Though the causes for injustice are

many and, in my estimation, primarily are located in the countries where it exists, there is also a very dominant role of the USA and, to a lesser extent, of Canada, where especially the business communities deeply affect those situations, often negatively. Rubingh is not giving any examples here and confines himself to general terms. However, he is telling the CRC constituency bluntly that *our missionary efforts cannot stand in isolation of our economic and political behavior at home*. They are closely related to each other. *If we are serious about our outreach at home or abroad, we have also to be sure that our business and political ventures are in basic agreement with our missionary programme*. Rubingh is so emphatic about this relationship that he insists that with respect to this issue, the “primary focus” lies in our home countries, not in the host countries.

I, for one, am extremely grateful for the recognition of the need to struggle to bring our domestic economic and political practices at home in line with our missionary thrust. The need for this arises not only out of the missionary situation, but also from the Bible itself. The Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission are not two separate injunctions: they aim at the same realities and call for obedience to the same Lord, who has only one standard for all his creatures, a standard that applies to all aspects of life.

However, when we are told that the “primary focus” lies in the home countries, it seems to me that Rubingh, in his eagerness to make his point, is over-reacting. The issue needs to be faced at both fronts with equal vigour and seriousness. Though North American economic and political affairs do have very significant impact on our hosts, both positive and negative, I judge the basic problems of oppression to reside in the cultures of our hosts. The CRC community shares in the responsibility of our domestic politics and economics and we must focus on that seriously. Our missionary responsibility abroad lies in undercutting or helping to undercut the spirit amongst our hosts that either encourages or allows injustice to prevail.

CRWM does not leave it with words; these statements are backed up by decisions to act in significant ways. Missionaries are encouraged

to forthrightly and discreetly inform the home office on these issues when this is possible. Furthermore, they are urged to address these issues while on home service in order to keep the churches informed and to challenge them to exercise Christian responsibility. In turn, members of the staff were encouraged to write timely articles on this subject and to initiate appropriate action.

The board also lays before synod the following request: that synod be requested to call on our church and its leaders to be prophetic in responding to injustice, oppression, and unrighteousness, being aware of the sin of silence. We must speak clearly as Christians locally, nationally, and among the nations. We must pay special attention to the oppression which exists in societies which receive support from the governments and corporations of North America.

When the board thus calls upon synod to identify itself and our congregations with the poor and oppressed in those lands where injustice rules, it calls us to introspection and courageous leadership in an area which may be painful, and may subject those who speak out ... to criticism and derision (190/82).

10. Committee on Oppression

In order to help missionaries in this aspect of their task, CRWM established a committee that would focus on these issues with a view to advise missionaries about their response to injustice in specific locations. The second aim of that committee was to provide the constituency with information (190/82).

The next year, Rubingh reports on progress made by this committee:

The events of the past year, correspondence with missionaries, and specific occurrences on various fields have provided a great deal of practical experience regarding the nature and extent of formal and informal

expression which may be made in matters of injustice which directly affect the mission of the church.

... a letter was sent to all missionaries advising them of their responsibilities in informing the sending churches of situations in which injustice and exploitation occur. The difficulties, risks, and complexities involved are apparent to those who carry the gospel to other lands, and to the board. The need for honesty and courage, as well as discretion and prudence has been enjoined (47/83).

That same year, the report on Central America explains some of the reasons for the turmoil of that area. Among them are found two causes that have their roots at least partially in North America. First, there is the “presence of outside influence,” namely those of the USA and Cuba. The former contributes to this instability by the fact that it “pours ... vast amounts of arms into the area.” The other problem is economic: “the low prices given for goods these countries have to sell, mostly agricultural products, and the high prices they must pay in manufactured goods and petroleum products” (61/83). These causes are only reported and no further implication is pointed out or action proposed.

In spite of this official push towards issues of social justice as a very important missiological ingredient, there has been no strong unanimity about it. At both missionary and board level there has been resistance and suspicion. Some missionaries warned against “being diverted from the central issue of spiritual degradation into endless social concerns.” The reporter, the regional Secretary for Latin America, wrote, “The tension has been creative on almost all fronts and has driven our missionaries to the Bible to seek for answers to perplexing questions ... as they seek to be models for the emerging churches” (209/79). That tension continues to exist right into 1987. When the present Director of CRWM, William Van Tol, recently returned from Latin America, he told me that missionaries are still at odds with each other on this issue, a situation he found “very interesting.” As to the committee that was established, it never really got off the ground. I have corresponded with members of the committee as well as other office staff, and

they all told me there was too much resistance within the Executive Committee, even though it had been officially established in response to synodical pressures.

III. IMPLEMENTATION AND ITS OBSTACLES

These last remarks bring us to an important problem: the question of implementation of all this wholistic kingdom missiology. I quite admire this missiology. It is indeed expressive of classic Reformed theology. However, Reformed theology is not the only force or spirit at work in the CRC. There are other factors in the church that impede the working out of that vision as wholistically as one would like or expect. The tiger is there with its potential strength – but its tail is in the wrong place. It is afraid of something that is keeping it back from taking the plunge. Time does not allow us to enlarge upon the obstacles. I can only mention those I recognize without enlarging upon them. They include: traditionalism and conservatism, residual pietism and dualism; diversity in life-and-world views, individualism, lack of professional missionary training, vested class interests, secularism, fear of radicalism, pragmatism, shortage of vision, influence of church growth theories. A more recent obstacle may well prove to be the corporate spirit that has made its inroads into CRWM policies. The influence of “successful” business models and businessmen who carry the spirit and methods of American business into the denominational offices and committees is expected by many missionaries to undercut the official vision. We are served a recipe of out-dated managerial models or Reformed church polity. By means of this lecture I am serving you and the rest of the denomination a warning lest this fear of many of us be realized.

If the mission vision as outlined is not always carried out, it is not because it is not a serious or viable one; it is because of these other forces within the CRC that are very powerful and that undercut the vision. These forces frighten the tiger.

At the same time, though the vision is not fully implemented because of the obstacles, I disagree with the cynics who regard the whole vision as mere rhetoric that serves as a smokescreen between boards and the constituency. The vision

has solid ground in our theological tradition and it has been gaining ground over the last few decades. I sense that slowly the obstacles have been on the retreat – except the more recent potential obstacle of corporatism. If that is not defeated, the vision may well be nipped in the bud just before it is allowed to flower.

Well, there it is, a wholistic kingdom perspective on world mission, enjoying official status. Powerful. Potentially very radical – and, in my judgement, a perspective that has inherent relevance for the wholistic cultures of the south, for the all-embracing religion of Islam, for increasingly powerful agents of secularism. For World Mission but just as much for Home Mission. That's the tiger in your Christian Reformed tank. Christian Reformed Church, let's go for it! --- but without the tail between the legs.