

THE STANDARD BEARER

A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine



Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.

Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

I Timothy 4:15, 16

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In This Issue . . .

Rev. Charles Terpstra has been assigned the rubric "Guided Into All Truth," the pages of which have so long and so well been filled by Rev. Thomas Miersma. In it Rev. Terpstra plans, he says, to lift some of the church fathers "off the pages of history and set them before our mind's eyes." He begins with Tertullian . . . and the Gnostics.

That's not an easy place at which to begin. For Gnosticism was a rationalistic, highly speculative, deeply mystical philosophical system which was extremely difficult to understand. The heresy was, however, a serious threat to the orthodoxy of the church, and the battle which the church waged with it was long and bitter (over two centuries), reaching a climax in the first part of the third century — when the Lord raised up Tertullian, one of the "giants" in church history.

In two short articles, Rev. Terpstra presents the key elements of Gnosticism, and ably demonstrates how the Lord used also that heresy to "guide the church into the truth." Not always, perhaps, will we find it "easy" reading; but if the short series on Tertullian is any indication of what lies ahead for us, we'll certainly find it to be worthwhile reading. The rich heritage which is ours has become what it is today, often in the way of heated controversy. And men have often, too, paid with their lives for their defense and development of the truth which we so easily take for granted. We do well therefore to follow the lead of Rev. Terpstra as he opens for us the pages of church history in "Guided Into All Truth."

Cover Picture: Rev. Barry Gritters in new Byron Center study.

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Meditation
Rev. James Slopsema

The Greatness of God's Mercy

*He hath not dealt with us after
our sins; nor rewarded us accord-
ing to our iniquities.*

*For as the heaven is high
above the earth, so great is his
mercy toward them that fear him.*

*As far as east is from the west,
so far hath he removed our trans-
gressions from us.*

Psalm 103:10-12

Psalm 103 is a most beautiful
Psalm.

It is a Psalm that speaks
especially of God's mercy
towards His people.

The Psalm opens with a song
of praise to God for the wonder-
ful blessings of His mercies. In
mercy God forgives all our iniq-
uities, heals all our diseases,
redeems our life from destruc-
tion.

*Bless the Lord, O My soul, and
forget not all His benefits!*

And now the Psalmist speaks
of the greatness of God's mercy.

*As the heaven is high above
the earth, so great is His mercy
toward them that fear Him.*

The Psalmist also speaks of
how God shows His great mercy
to us, His people.

*God has not dealt with us after
our sins; nor rewarded us accord-
ing to our iniquities. As far as
east is from the west, so far has
He removed our transgressions
from us.*

How beautiful and comforting
this is, especially to the wretched
soul that carries a heavy burden
of sin and guilt.

* * * * *

Mercy presupposes two things.

It presupposes that you love
someone and that in that love
you seek the welfare of that per-
son. This latter, after all, is the
very essence of love. Whatever
doesn't seek the welfare of
another is not love.

Mercy also presupposes that
this loved one is in distress.
Troubles have come upon him.
He is in misery and woe.

Now what happens when a
loved one of yours is in distress?

Your heart goes out to him.
You feel sorry for him. You are
overwhelmed with pity and com-
passion. Perhaps you are so deep-
ly affected by his plight that your
stomach aches, your head
pounds, and you can not sleep.
You will do everything in your
power to help this loved one out
of his trouble.

That's mercy. Mercy is the
compassion we have for those in
distress, so that we seek to
deliver them from their woe.

God also has mercy for His
people. From all eternity God has
chosen unto Himself a people. In
Jesus Christ God loves this people.
They are the apple of His eye.
When therefore God's people
are in trouble and distress, as
they often are, God is filled with
pity and compassion toward
them. His divine heart goes out
to them. And in His almighty
power God is quick to rescue
them from their woe.

This is God's mercy.

The Psalmist wishes to em-
phasize especially the greatness
of this mercy God has for His
people. To do this the Psalmist
compares the mercy of God to
the height of the heavens above
the earth. As the heaven is high
above the earth, so great is God's
mercy toward them that fear
Him.

In this instance modern science
helps us to understand the Scrip-
tures. The distance of the stars
from the earth is measured today
in terms of the speed of light.
Light travels at the phenomenal
speed of 186,000 miles per sec-
ond. Traveling at that incompre-
hensible speed, it takes more
than 8 minutes for the light of
the sun to reach earth. And the
sun is the closest star to us in
God's universe! Some stars are so
far removed from the earth that
it takes years and years for their
light to travel to the earth.

*Rev. Slopsema is pastor of the Prot-
estant Reformed Church of Walker,
Michigan.*

For all practical purposes, therefore, the heavens are endless. God has created the heavens this way, no doubt, to give us some idea of what it means to be infinite, without limits.

And that's the point of comparing the mercy of God to the height of heaven. As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is God's mercy toward them that fear Him. God's mercy toward His people is infinite, boundless, knowing no limits.

That's not the case, however, of the mercy we show to others. The mercy we have for others is often limited. There always comes a time when our mercy for others fails.

Take for example a situation in which a friend or relative repeatedly gets himself into trouble due to his own foolishness. At first we may feel sorry for him and try to help him. But after a while we are inclined to become disgusted with his foolishness and no longer seek to answer his pleas for help. There is an end to our mercy.

And what about the situation in which helping those in need requires a great deal of sacrifice on our part? Require someone to sacrifice to help another and you will find just how limited his mercy can be.

Yes, indeed, our mercy for others is often very limited.

But not so the mercy of God for His people. No matter what they have done, no matter how foolish they have been, no matter if they have in foolishness fallen again and again into the same pit, God always pities them in their distresses and delivers them. God's patience with His people never runs out. God never turns away from His people in disgust, leaving them to flounder in their own folly. Always His heart goes out to them in their distresses and He delivers them

from their woe. And He does this no matter what the cost!

Such is God's mercy for His people.

As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is God's mercy toward them that fear Him.

* * * * *

God shows this great mercy to us, His people, in that He does not deal with us after our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquity.

Oh, our sins are abominable! The essence of our sin is hatred against God. This hatred for God is deeply rooted in our sinful nature. It manifests itself in our life again and again in a refusal to serve God to the glory of His name. Again and again we trample under foot His good and holy law for the sake of our own selfish interests.

We see the greatness of God's mercy in that He does not deal with us after these sins, nor reward us according to these iniquities.

What a horrible thing should God deal with us after our sins. For then we would be destroyed forever. Notice that the Psalmist speaks of the possibility of God rewarding us for our iniquities. A reward is simply the payment of what we deserve. And the proper reward of our sin is eternal death in hell. What we deserve is for God to destroy us forever on account of our sins!

But because of His great mercy God doesn't deal with us after our sins, nor reward us according to our iniquity.

It's a matter of mercy when a criminal is shown leniency by the court and is not punished for his crimes. In like manner it is an act of great mercy on God's part when we appear in God's courtroom with all our spiritual crimes against Him, and God simply pardons our sins. Instead of punishing us as we deserve, He embraces us in love. Instead of

casting us forever to the fires of hell, He reserves for us a place in heaven.

As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him!

God also shows this great mercy to us, His people, in that He removes our transgressions from us, as far as the east is from the west.

This is necessary if God will not deal with us after our sin, nor reward us according to our iniquity. For God is a God of justice. And God's justice demands that we can receive God's blessing only if we are able to stand before God without sin. Should we appear before the presence of God with even the least of our sins, God's justice would require that we be destroyed forever.

Hence, if God will spare us from the wrath to come, He must remove our sins from us. He must remove them from us as far as the east is from the west so that all connection between us and our sin is forever severed.

This God has done in Jesus Christ, His Son. He sent His only begotten Son into the world to assume the guilt of our sin. Shouldering this heavy burden of sin, Christ was then sent of the Father to the cross to bear all the punishment of hell. Through His perfect obedience Christ fully paid for all our sins and forever removed them from us.

This great work of God in Jesus Christ all arises out of God's mercy for us.

And how great that mercy of God for us is. He sent His only begotten Son . . .

As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him!

* * * * *

This great mercy of God is shown to them that fear Him.

To fear God is to stand before God with loving awe and reverence. According to the

Psalmist, those who so fear the Lord are such as keep His covenant and remember His commandments to do them. This means that they strive from day to day to keep the will of God in love. And when they fail because of the weakness of their flesh, they come to God with grieving

hearts, seeking forgiveness of their sins only on the basis of Christ and His cross.

This fear is a distinguishing characteristic of God's people. For it is the result of the grace of God that operates irresistibly in their hearts.

To them God shows this great mercy.

Let us in fear strive to do the will of God, coming to God only in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him! □

Editorially Speaking

We would like to introduce a column in *The Standard Bearer* as a regular feature consisting of comment by our readers on articles that have appeared, or on issues that have been raised, in the magazine. Because brevity is the soul of wit and because space is limited, we ask that our correspondents keep their letters short. Like our regular writers,

you are expected to exercise judgment and charity, using the power of the pen "to edification, and not to destruction," as the apostle puts it in II Corinthians 13:10. The decision of the editorial committee whether a piece should be published will be final. Letters may be edited for publication. The Editor will not

feel himself constrained to respond to every letter, whether he agrees or disagrees, since the purpose of the column is not public debate, but to hear from our people. Letters should be sent to the Editor, c/o the Protestant Reformed Seminary, 4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418. □

-DJE

Editorial

Clear Scripture and Diligent Study

In the covenant mercy of God, there is among us Protestant Reformed Christians a sound doctrine of Holy Scripture. With creedal fidelity, we all confess

the 66 books of the Bible to be "holy and divine writings" (Belgic Confession, Art. 3); we all receive these books as the only, infallible rule of faith (Articles 5, 7); with

child-like humility, we believe all things contained in the Scriptures, without doubt or criticism (Art. 5); and we hold that the doctrine of Scripture is perfect

and complete in all respects (Art. 7).

Of special importance at the present time is our conviction that the Bible is clear, so that every believer is able to take Scripture in hand and understand it. The subtlest, and therefore most dangerous, attack on Scripture today takes the form of the denial of Scripture's clarity. It is freely acknowledged that Scripture is inspired. The difficulty with Scripture — and a very serious difficulty it is — is that Scripture cannot be understood. It cannot be understood by the church-member; but neither can it be understood by the ordinary pastor. The problem is not in the believing reader, but in Scripture itself. The Bible is an obscure book. To figure it out requires new, exotic tools of interpretation, accessible to only a few. Only a few scholars truly understand the Bible; and their explanations are tentative, not certain. This is to attack Scripture in respect to that particular, essential quality of Scripture which Reformed theology has called "the perspicuity of Scripture."

It is the clarity, or perspicuity, of Scripture that is challenged by the new methods of interpreting Scripture. If Genesis 2 and 3 (and Romans 5:12ff.) do not, in fact, teach a historical Adam and Eve, unrelated genetically and biologically to the brutes, but formed directly by the hand of God, in the one case from the dust, and in the other case from a rib of her husband, the Bible is not clear, but dark and confused. Invariably, if you pursue the question, why Scripture is unclear, so that its mysteries can be unlocked only by the new methods of interpretation, you will discover that the reason is that Scripture is not totally the Word of God, but is, in part, the words of men. Denial of Scripture's clarity is the denial of inspiration!

Scripture, however, does not suppose itself unclear. It is striking that in those outstanding passages in which the Bible describes itself, Scripture stresses its clarity. Scripture thinks that its meaning is plain to every believer, apart from — and long before! — the new methods of interpretation. Timothy could, and did, know the Scriptures "from a child" (II Timothy 3:15). This was not an exception due to Timothy's genius, but the rule for covenant children on account of their upbringing, the work of the Spirit, and the clarity of Scripture. The apostle Peter describes the prophetic word of Scripture as "a light that shineth in a dark place," as it must be if the elect saints are to take heed to it (II Peter 1:19ff.). Already in the Old Testament, God praised His Word as a lamp and a light (Psalm 119:105). When God speaks to His dear children in the darkness of this ignorant and depraved age the Word that is necessary for salvation, the Word of eternal life, He does not speak obscurely, but clearly and distinctly, so that, by the Holy Spirit illuminating their minds to the plain sense of Scripture, they readily and certainly understand Father's Word.

This, we confess! Scripture is clear! And if you trace this confession to its source, you will discover the heart-felt belief that Scripture is, in its entirety, the written Word of God, and not at all the words of man.

God makes Himself "more clearly and fully known to us" in the written Word (Belgic Confession, Articles 2, 3). Such is the brilliance of Scripture's light that "the very blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling" (Art. 5). God may stutter in the Bible, as Calvin wrote, with reference to God's condescension to our childish comprehension; but He does not mumble, much less

deceive us with mythical tales purporting to be history.

Our good confession concerning Scripture is a wonder. It is increasingly a rarity, even among the churches that profess the doctrine of Scripture found in the Belgic Confession, or in the Westminster Confession of Faith. That an entire denomination of churches maintains this confession, that it is the unquestioned basis of the preaching and pastoral work of all the ministers, that it is not undermined in the Seminary, that it is the foundation of the instruction of the children in the homes and Christian schools — this is a rare and wonderful thing in 1988.

The importance of our confession of Scripture cannot be overestimated. On the basis of this confession, we preach Scripture's message, "the pure doctrine of the Gospel," as the Belgic Confession calls it in Article 29, administer the sacraments as instituted by Christ, and exercise church discipline in dealing with sin. Thus, and only thus, is Jesus Christ acknowledged as the Head of our churches; and thus, and only thus, are we clearly identified as true churches of Jesus Christ in the world. Likewise, on the basis of this confession, the members direct their lives according to Scripture as their rule, or standard, believing on Jesus for salvation and walking in obedience to His will. Thus, and thus only, are we clearly identified as true Christians.

Their confession of Scripture binds God's people to their only Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Always, criticism of the Word of God, from the "Yea, hath God said . . . ?" in Eden, to the "Yes, has God written . . . ?" in Amsterdam or Grand Rapids, is the assault by the gates of hell on the foundation of the Kingdom of

God, and the seduction of God's people from the God Who is their life.

To call attention to this good confession is not to boast. For one thing, confessing Scripture to be the Word of God is the church's basic duty. What child brags because he recognizes and acknowledges his parent's voice? Besides, our confession is itself the gift of God to us. The confession of Scripture is the conviction and expression of faith; and faith is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). Grace empowers the churches to stand defiantly against the spirit of our age and faithfully towards Him Who said, "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Grace enables our young people to see the arrogance of the human wisdom that presumes to sit in judgment over God's Word and the folly of evolutionary science that would have them interpret "in the beginning, God" as "from endless ages, time and chance." Grace causes men and women who are foolish, proud, doubtful, and blind to be wise, humble, trusting, and seeing, so that they receive Scripture as Divine. "Because it is given unto you to know . . . but to them it is not given."

Nor may the fact of our faithful confession of the doctrine of Scripture become the occasion for complacency. On the contrary! Exactly because we know the Bible to be inspired and exactly because we confess Scripture to be clear, we are required to be diligent students of the Scriptures, more than others. The great passages in the New Testament on the doctrine of Scripture appear in the practical setting of the necessity of the believer's reading the Scripture. Because Scripture is inspired, it is useful and profitable for the man of God, thoroughly equipping him for every good work (II Timothy 3:16, 17). Peter assures us that

Scripture is God's own light shining into our dark world, so that we will take heed to it (II Peter 1:19ff.).

If the Bible is the Word of God, and clear to us all, children and adults alike, we ought to be like the Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). There is a practical denial of Scripture, as well as a doctrinal denial: neglect of Scripture.

The Bible must be an open book among us.

Chiefly, this must continue to be the case in our worship services and catechism classes. Every sermon and every lesson in the catechism class must be the explanation of Scripture. I learned from one of the books of Jan Waterink that the teacher should bring this home especially to the little children in catechism by saying, at the beginning of the class, "Today, I am going to teach you God's Word from this passage of the Bible," and by opening the Bible at the same time before their eyes and laying it on the lectern. As it is the pastor's calling to teach Scripture, so is it the people's duty to be present and to learn.

The Bible must also be the light that actually shines in our homes and personal lives by being opened there. How often is it not the case that we stumble in the darkness of our own fears and self-will, because the only rule of faith and life is left closed on the shelf?

But my special concern is for the "societies" and other classes of Bible-study that have recently resumed meeting as part of the educational ministry of the churches. Because the Scriptures are studied in these meetings, they have, and ought to be thought to have, an important place in our church-life. Our societies should

be well taught. The leader need not always be the pastor.

Especially if the church is large and if there are many classes, requiring the pastor to lead all the societies may put too heavy a burden upon him. Besides, there are others who have the gift of teaching; and opportunity ought to be given to them to use their gift. But the teacher (leader) must be a member who is knowledgeable and sound in the Faith. He should always be well prepared, ready to guide the discussion in the track of the passage that is to be studied. He should allow for, and encourage, discussion by the group; an hour's lecture by the leader is detrimental to the purpose of the societies among us. Gently but firmly, he must insist that the group make progress in their study; it becomes wearisome, if the society as a rule spends the whole evening on one verse. At the end of the discussion, he should be able to bring the study to a satisfactory conclusion, summing up the consensus, or giving his own interpretation, especially if there has been difference of opinion. Most members dislike going home with everything left up in the air.

Our people should attend, if this is at all possible. Society can be the occasion for a more careful, more systematic, and deeper study of the Word than is usual. In the discussion, the saints, prophets and prophetesses all, exercise their office, instructing each other and sharpening the countenance of their friends, as iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17). Questions about the Faith, and about the Christian life, can be raised here, with the expectation of good, sound answers. Friends and relatives can be invited to these meetings, to introduce them to our doctrine and fellowship. This says nothing of the communion such meetings afford, communion that is delight-

ful exactly because it is grounded in the Word, communion that is also experienced in the prayers and singing that are part of these meetings.

It is disquieting that interest in these mid-week meetings lags among us.

It is discouraging to the church when few attend.

It is doubly discouraging, if members shun the classes provided by their own church, but frequent the "interfaith" classes that are springing up today.

Do we need an incentive to meet with like-minded believers for the study and discussion of God's Word? God Himself takes note of all such meetings and

keeps record of the attendance! "Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name" (Malachi 3:16). □ -DJE

Correspondence

(Note: This letter from the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore was received by the Contact Committee. We are passing it along to our people, via *The Standard Bearer* partly because it was meant for all our people, and partly because it has to do with the help which the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church requested from us in connection with their new building project.)

Dearly beloved brethren in the Lord,

Greetings to you in the precious and glorious Name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We thank God for His wonderful providence in giving to us a place of worship in Singapore. The Lord willing, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church can move to its new premises before the end of the year. If everything goes according to our plans, we will be worshipping in our new premises by October.

We received your letter dated 6/27/88 with great joy and

thanksgiving to God. Your earlier letter had informed us of your decision to bring a recommendation to Synod to make a call to the churches and people to help us in this project. Thank you for your kind consideration and hearty recommendation to Synod. Now you have informed us that Synod eagerly and willingly acceded to this request. We are filled with thanksgiving to God that this desire to help us is clearly evident even in the decision of Synod.

The surveys conducted here have been most exciting and wonderful. We have now received love gifts as well as pledges for interest-free loans from members of the CERC and FERC which will enable us to buy and renovate the property. This also we see as the wonderful providence of God. The sacrificial giving of the saints is the evidence of God's mighty work in the hearts of His people. Thank you for your encouraging word in this regard.

With this progress, we are nevertheless most thankful that

we have heard good news from you. It is not so much the money, but the evidence of your desire to help that fills us with thanksgiving. Now it will not matter how much comes to us by way of love gifts and collections; what is more important is the fact that the saints in your midst heed the call for help and willingly help their sister churches in a faraway land. This is the expression of our unity in the body of Christ. Thanks be to God!

Since half of the entire project (approximately \$300,000) is being financed by free-interest loans from members of the FERC and CERC, whatever assistance from your people we receive will lighten the burden sufficiently so that the church need not be in debt for such a long time and for such a big amount. Our intention is also to borrow as little as possible from the members of the FERC (or pay them back as soon as possible) so that they can fully support their own building project when the time comes for them to get a new place of worship.

Do convey our sincere greetings to your churches and people when you send them the request for help.

The Lord has been good to us, and we trust that His grace and His blessing will continue to lead

us in this difficult but exciting project.

May the Lord bless you also with every spiritual blessing from above, and may the Protestant Reformed Churches continue to be used of God for the defense of the gospel.

Let us remember to pray earnestly for each other.

Yours in His Love,
w/s Pastor J. Mahtani,
Chairman of Session
Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church ☐

The Strength of Youth

Rev. Barrett Gritters

Hard Questions for Young People:

"How Do I Handle a Sinning Friend?"

THE PROBLEM IS REAL.

Suppose you have a close friend with whom you do just about everything. Melody, we'll call her, doesn't have much money because she has to pay a big part of her own school tuition and because she's not able to take a job during the school months, since her parents want her to spend all her time concentrating on school. At first, Melody begins to take a few things at the store without paying for them. After a while, even though you don't do the same yourself and even though she knows you are uncomfortable with what she is doing, she steals more and more, without getting caught. Should you approach Melody? How? And what do you do if she laughs it off?

Or suppose your good friend, Vince, begins to smoke marijuana, or do another drug. He tells you that you ought to try it.

Dear Christian parents and young people,

This section of the Standard Bearer has always been written for the Young People. The Title "The Strength of Youth" emphasizes the unique strength that young people have in their teens and later.

Although there is a unique strength that young people have, in their lives there are many difficult questions to face and answer. My purpose in this rubric is to address some of those questions and try to give guidelines for answering them, so that their strengths may be used to the fullest.

If you have questions you would like to see addressed here, please write to me at 8360 Clyde Park, Byron Center, MI 49315.

God lead you and bless you as you face your many "hard questions."

"It's no big deal; it's not addictive; it won't hurt your mind." For one reason or another, you don't do it with him. Vince knows you don't like what he does, but keeps on smoking. How would you handle this?

Perhaps your friend confides in you that she has lost her virginity, is not ashamed of it, and intends to continue in her untoward ways. What would be the Christian way to deal with this?

More difficult yet it is when you are doing precisely the same things that your friends are now

doing, but have promised yourself you are going to stop the practice. You were shoplifting, or drinking, or doing drugs, or committing fornication, or whatever, with them. But now, by the grace of God, your conscience has bothered you much and you have decided to stop. But your friends have continued in the ungodly walk. This problem is probably more common, but also more difficult, because as soon as you would do or say anything about their sin, they would look at you like . . .

Rev. Gritters is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan.

Has this happened to you? Some of us are bothered quite badly when a good friend begins to walk this kind of life, but because we would not want to make waves or lose the friend, we don't do anything about it. Some of us have no little turmoil in our soul and would like to do something for our friend, but don't know what would be both proper and good for them. So, because of our uncertainty about what to do, we do nothing, and pretty soon our feeling of responsibility fades away.

* * * * *

WHAT NOT TO DO. Knowing what *not* to do in these circumstances is helpful.

We could tell some of our other friends, if they don't know already, and spread the story. Probably the most common thing done when a friend sins, this is also the most damaging both for our own life and for our friend whom we ought to be helping. At the very least, when our friend sins, don't make things worse by telling others about the mess or letting them know that you have quit but your friend hasn't. Remember this too: when you confide in one person and ask them not to tell anyone else, you can be sure that most of the time that person will tell *their* friend and add the "Just don't tell anyone else." It spreads quite quickly. We might call this the "law of the leak." Don't spread the story.

Or, we could change friends. This happens to. Because either our lifestyle or the lifestyle of our friend has changed, we decide that we can find new friends. Yet this is no help for your friend either.

Easier yet would be to ignore the problem, acting as though nothing were wrong. Then we keep our friend, content ourselves by saying that we haven't violated the ninth com-

mandment by slandering our friend, and we won't hurt ourselves by sticking our nose into the business. But we must do something. The problem is, What should I do?

Don't think I do not sympathize with you in your dilemma. Who wants a friend to continue living in a way that could have serious, permanent consequences? But who wants to take the chance of having a friend look at you as if you think you're a messenger sent straight from God? Who wants to be a "narc"? Who wants to risk the reputation of having turned on a friend? Living as a Christian young person is not simple. The only way you can is by grace. Pray for grace!

* * * * *

NOW, HOW SHOULD I PROCEED?

First, it is imperative that you *talk to your friend*. I'm going to tell a little story at the end to illustrate how valuable this is, but let me just make the point here. With a prayer in your heart that you'll be able to speak carefully, *talk to your friend*. If you are friends, you know how to talk; and you know how to talk seriously. Don't shout it to the world; don't act as though you are sinless; but go to the friend and talk. Patiently, humbly, kindly, but not condescendingly, talk.

You don't need to take out the Bible and quote passages to them. You don't need to be angry. Simply tell them how you feel. Tell them of the fear in your heart about getting caught. Tell them about what could happen if they continued. In your own way, tell them that you fear *God*. (Talk to your parents or pastor about what exactly you should say.) Then go home and pray that the Lord will use what you've said. That's all you can do up to that point. When the Lord gives you another opportunity (and He will), talk again. Pray

that the Spirit will convict of sin in your friend's heart as He did in yours — because that's the only reason you have (or have changed) your attitudes toward that sin. Even if you haven't walked in that sin yourself, it's still important that you come as a sinner.

Second, if that brings no result — and it just may not — you may *bring another friend* with you to try to persuade your impenitent friend of his sin. (This should be a *mutual* friend.) Don't threaten with anything. Don't accuse or slander. Only show your friend you *care*. And let me emphasize here that if you don't care about your friend, then pray to God until you do care, because if there is no deep concern for the spiritual welfare of your friend, you'll blow every step of the way.

The difficulty comes if you see no results in your friend's life. Now what? Here is where, I believe, the path you follow must be different from the path that an adult follows when his friend walks in sin. If my friend — even my closest — walks in sin and will not repent, even after I have taken one or two "witnesses" with me (Matthew 18), my duty is to "tell it to the church", that is, tell it to the elders. But in your situation, it may be that your duty is not to follow the way of Matthew 18.

Why not? Because I believe that your responsibility is rather (Third) *to tell the parents of your friend*. Your friend, let's suppose, is not a confessing member of the church. Your friend is still living at home with his or her parents. Your friend, therefore, is still under the discipline and rule of his parents. Because he has not committed himself to the supervision of the elders by confession of faith, he is subject first of all to his parents. Even a confessing member, still living with

his or her parents, lives under the supervision of the parents, and the age and circumstances (I believe) would determine whether the parents or elders should be informed first. If your friend continues in sin, your responsibility is to the parents.

But please, don't do this unless you forewarn your friend about it. Tell them, "Look, we love you enough (we're concerned about you enough) that we are going to talk to your parents about this. We realize that you may be angry with us for this, but also realize that if things keep on the way they are now, our friendship will be ruined permanently." And then go. This may not be a threat to scare them into changing; it's a *promise*. "We're going to your parents."

Do you *love* your friend? Then this is the way you must walk. Tell the parents how much you care for their son or daughter. If you were, admit to them that you were involved in the same activity. Then explain to them the steps that you took to try to convince their child of his error. And I believe that all godly parents will thank you for coming and, with your help, will be

used by God to bring their son or daughter to repentance.

If I may speak to parents for a moment, doesn't this point out the importance of knowing your children's friends, of inviting them into your home once in a while, of sitting down with them in the den to chat now and then, or shooting a game of pool with them just to show them that you care? How else will they ever dare approach you with a problem if there has never even been any communication with them before, much less if the contact they have had with you showed that you were a stern, untalkative old brute? And then doesn't this all the more underscore the importance of being able to talk with your own children?

* * * * *

If this does not work, privately tell your pastor or an elder in whom you can confide and they will be able to counsel you regarding what to do next, or begin the work that then belongs to the church.

* * * * *

DON'T WAIT, PLEASE.

To emphasize this, let me tell you the story that I promised earlier. When I was in high school, one Friday afternoon my friend and I were cruising around in his nice '66 Chevelle (what else do high school students do to kill time?) waiting for our soccer game to start. We weren't part of the "radical" and "rowdy" group, but neither did we have the kind of reputation that would make a mother proud. While we were driving around (and I don't remember what we were talking about) my friend said, "Barry, we should quit . . . sometime, don't you think?" As shocked as I was that he would dare say something like that, it was exactly how I had felt but never dared say. That little comment he dared make brought out in the open how we both felt, but were so afraid to talk about.

Three months later, my friend died next to me on the soccer field (from myo-carditis — an unusual constriction of a heart muscle). If there is ever anything that I remember about our friendship, it was that short, spontaneous conversation. What is it that you would like to remember about your friend? □

The Day of Shadows

Rev. John Heys

A Small Shadow of a Mountain of Sin

Rev. Heys is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The tremendously small disease germs that are invisible to the naked eye of man can produce in man a dangerously high fever, severe pain, and as far as

some of them are concerned, the realization of certain death. The length, breadth, shape, and weight of such creatures do not count.

Likewise a small spark of electricity, or a small match that has been lit near an explosive gas can cause a powerful explosion, great devastation, and fire. Therefore men are warned not to smoke while filling their automobiles with gasoline (by some called petrol). That is also why some laborers must wear rubber shoes, so that no spark is created in places where there are explosive gases.

Let us then hold before our eyes the fact that although Satan brought to Adam and Eve what seemed to be such a little, harmless deed of eating of a piece of fruit, which God had forbidden them to eat, it caused a tremendous spiritual explosion that is raging today and increasing in its intensity every year, so that soon the antichrist with all his devilishness and awesome wickedness will fill the earth. It was a powerful spark that is going to blow the human race into the lake of fire, which Scripture calls hell! And Adam's and Eve's eating of that fruit, although a very small shadow, was the shadow of the tremendously great devilry that lies ahead of us, and is boldly advocated and encouraged today.

As already suggested, a small shadow of a jumbo jet airplane is cast upon the ground when the huge jet is at a certain altitude; and as it comes down to land, the shadow becomes bigger and bigger, until when it lands the shadow is as great as the plane. So in the day in which we live, that little shadow in Adam's and Eve's sin is becoming bigger and bigger; and we ought to recognize it, and recognize it as a shadow of what lies ahead; and not deceive ourselves into thinking and saying that the world is getting better.

Paul informs us in II Thessalonians 2:3 that the man of sin, not the child, teenager or novice of sin, is coming. And more and more the world is not only practicing sin but is defending it in more violent and astounding ways. Many states have withdrawn the death penalty for murderers, and not only defend but even give financial support for the murder of unborn babies! Sabbath desecration has reached frightening proportions even in the church world. God's name is boldly taken in vain. And whereas in the past cursing was presented by simply printing the first letter of the word which was then followed by a dash, now boldly and openly God's name is taken in vain; and those who claim not to believe in hell will shout out unashamedly, and print boldly, the cry that one go to hell! The grossest of sins, that is, what men used to call gross sins, are now that which entertains millions on their TV sets. The sins because of which Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by brimstone and fire entertain the world; and what Paul wrote in Romans 1:32 is also true in the church world today. Members of the churches, as well as avowed unbelievers, "have pleasure in them that do them," that is, them that do the kinds of sins that Satan has caused man to develop and boldly commit. Do church members not turn on their TV sets because they have *pleasure* in watching sins, rather than being made spiritually sick to see such God-hating acts?

And the more devices man invents, the more he becomes capable of using them to show his hatred against God. The more deeply he finds the powers which God created in this earth, the more intensely he will use this, which is God's world, for the sinful satisfaction of his godless flesh. Adam's and Eve's sin,

which seemed so little and such a small shadow of sin, was by no means a little, harmless departure from what they had been told that they should do. All the devilry in the world today, and all the greater, more fully developed sin that is just ahead of us, comes out of that deed Satan got Adam and Eve to perform. He was not interested in a little act of hatred against God. Oh, no, he wanted man to hate God with all his being; and that is what he also succeeded in bringing down upon this earth. Adam's and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit was a small shadow of the humanly immeasurable devilry that Satan brought to this earth.

Adam and Eve did not themselves see the awfulness of their sin, and that it would bring forth all the violence, brutality, godlessness, and immorality, all the filth and bold enmity against God that we see today. They were color blind in the sense that they called what is white to be black, and what is black they considered white. Satan succeeded in getting them to call what is good to be evil, and what is evil to be good. That was his intention. That is why he approached them through that serpent. He wanted them to hate God; and he succeeded in getting their hearts turned completely from God. That is what their deed produced. Eating that fruit, they swallowed Satan's lie that good is evil and evil is good for them. He got them to disagree with God, Who said that obedience was good and disobedience was evil. He did not succeed in getting them to go part way, to make a little departure from God. He succeeded in getting them to turn completely around and have their backs turned to God. And God's word was proven to be true. They died spiritually that day. They became totally de-

praved, that is, one hundred percent spiritually dead!

Let us not call this anything but a fact. It is not to any degree fiction. All the sin in the world today is undeniable proof that Adam and Eve died spiritually. Even though their sin was a small shadow, it pointed to the tremendously great hatred against God that we now see in the world here below. And what Adam and Eve did that very day, and only an hour or two later, shows that of which their first sin was this small shadow. It was the damaging and dangerous spark that will bring forth the man of sin who claims to be God. And remember that every sin, no matter what kind it is, no matter which of the ten commandments it breaks, comes forth from a heart that says that there is no God, and that man is his own god, with the right to do as he pleases. Every sin is an act of one hundred percent hatred toward God.

And because they died the day that they ate, Adam and Eve could not turn back to God and confess their sin with tears. They could not even seek forgiveness. Having decided that evil is good and good is evil, they were going to continue seeking the evil and leave their backs turned from what is good. They made no attempt to tell Satan that his words were evil. They made no prayer to God that He would bring them back from Satan's lie and remove him from off this earth.

No, having died spiritually the moment that they ate of that forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve tried to cover up their sin rather than to get rid of it. Yes, they wanted to get away from the punishment of sin. That is why they covered themselves with fig leaf aprons. But that reveals no spiritual life. You may be sure that Satan and all the fallen angels and unconverted human beings want to

be delivered from the punishment of sin. That does not make one a believer. That does not show that man has a spark of spiritual life left in him. It shows that he is no different from the devil who also is one hundred percent spiritually dead. No, the evidence of a spark of spiritual life, which man gets when he is born again, is the desire to be delivered from the *power* of sin, to get completely from under the dominion of Satan, and to want to and be able to do only what is pleasing in God's sight.

Adam's and Eve's act of making fig leaf aprons to cover them is undeniable evidence that they still held on to Satan's lie, and had lost all their knowledge that God is God and must be obeyed every moment in every act that man performs. Satan got them to believe that God lied to them when He warned them of what would happen if they disobeyed Him. Foolishly, and revealing that they were spiritually dead, having no love for God, and unwilling to walk in a way of love to Him, they even tried to get away from that punishment by their own deeds of hiding themselves among the trees of the garden.

They ran farther away from God instead of running to Him with tears of sorrow for their sins, and without showing one spark of love for Him. They showed clearly that they had died spiritually. You cannot find one deed on their part that gave evidence of any spiritual life in them, no hatred of their sin, no desire to be pleasing in God's sight. You will not find even the trace of any hatred of Adam and Eve toward Satan for what he had caused them to do. Instead you find how fully they were now under his spiritual power. The shadow is growing bigger and bigger even the day that sin entered upon this earth.

Do not overlook the fact that Adam and Eve, instead of crying out for salvation from Satan's God-hating power, accuse God of sin! Surely they lost all their spiritual life. When God asks Adam where he is, Adam admits that he hid himself because he was naked. In no way and to no degree does he confess that he sinned and broke God's commandment. Not one bad word does he utter about the devil. But he does have words which he should not have addressed to God. When God asked him who told him that he was naked, and whether he had eaten of the tree which He had commanded him that of it he should not eat, Adam was bold enough to accuse God of sin. He said, "The woman Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Imagine that! It is God's fault. He gave Adam the wrong woman for a wife. He speaks not one word about Satan who came to him through that serpent. He does not confess, "Yes, I did sinfully eat, should not have done so, deserve everlasting punishment, and plead for Thy mercy and grace." No, God is blamed for giving him this wife. God is to blame for not giving him a good wife. And Eve repeats this evil speech. When God asks her what she had done, she tries to lay the blame upon the serpent, not upon herself. She does not confess having listened to the serpent. She does not fall on her face and confess that she should not have listened to that speech of the serpent that was so contrary to God's word to them.

And it is only because God has chosen them before the foundation of the world in Christ that He did not cast them at once into the torments of hell. They were spiritually dead and deserved to die physically, and to have their souls cast into the lake of fire.

And we do have a shadow here of the grace that God will be showing to His elect children. But at the moment we had better see the awfulness of Adam's and Eve's sin. They confessed no sin, even though they did admit that they had eaten of that fruit. Sorrow for sin was not revealed to the slightest degree; but more sin was committed to try to protect themselves from the punishment they knew they deserved, because they did not forget that God had predicted that they

would die if they disobeyed Him. Their sin of eating brought forth more sins the very day that they committed that first sin.

Clearly Satan planted a potent and very damaging seed. He got into man's mind, but also into his heart, with a very powerful spiritual germ that killed him spiritually. And that seed did not simply bring forth all the violence and cruelty that man heaps upon mankind today. It also brought forth, and is powerfully bringing forth today, the

many false doctrines that grow and develop in the church. And let us not go along with the lie that man did not die spiritually that day. Let us insist upon total, one hundred percent depravity of man; and that Adam's and Eve's actions immediately after eating of the forbidden fruit reveal that God spoke the truth; and that we must not go along with Satan's lie that fallen man is still able to get his eyes opened to what is good and what is evil by listening to him rather than to God. □

"Bold Enough to Go Against Scripture" The Synod of the Reformed Church in America

All Around Us

Rev. Gise VanBaren

"Bold Enough to Go Against Scripture"

The *Christian News*, June 20, 1988, presents reports from several magazines and newspapers about a new book, *Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality*, by Bishop John Shelby Spong of the Episcopal Church. One report stated:

Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong's outspokenness on sexuality, particularly his call for the blessing of gay and lesbian unions, so vexed church conservatives earlier this year that they demanded his ouster from the House of Bishops. Now the controversial bishop from the Diocese of

Newark has written a book that sets forth the theological underpinnings of his sexual ethic — a book that seems destined to rile church traditionalists even more. "Living in Sin? A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality," which is now being published by Harper & Row, after the United Methodist-related Abingdon Press abandoned it because it found the manuscript so potentially divisive, highlights what the bishop contends are some of the contradictions and prejudices in the Bible, focusing on sexuality. He suggests that the church "be bold enough" to go against the Scripture if it feels so led by the Holy Spirit," and argues that "the debate in the church about issues of human sexuality is a debate over the authority of Scripture and over the role of both Scripture and the church in sustaining the ignorance that is the basis of much prejudice."

From this same paper comes another quote which elaborates on the above:

Much of the prejudice in contemporary Christianity, a New Jersey prelate maintains, can be blamed on literal interpretation of Scripture as practiced in the fundamentalist camp.

Said the bishop, "I hate to see the Bible co-opted by mindless fundamentalist people who want to impose their view of the Bible on everybody else."

Particularly distressing to Bishop Spong are "Bible-believing Christians" who are "quite convinced that they correctly know what the Bible says on the issue of homosexuality Homosexuality is wrong. It is a crime against nature. It is the most heinous sin."

"If the Bible has nothing more than the letter of literalism to offer to our understanding of human sex-

Rev. VanBaren is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

uality today," Bishop Spong writes, "then I must say that I stand ready to reject the Bible in favor of something that is more human, more humane, more life-giving and, dare I say, more godlike."

Analyzing passages in Romans and I Corinthians, Bishop Spong concludes — while leaving room for debate on this point — that the Apostle Paul in all probability did not approve of homosexual activity.

But Paul's position, the bishop suggests in his book, should not be viewed as any more absolute than other "antiquated, culturally conditioned ideas" of his — Paul's anti-Semitism, for example, or his admonition for women to wear veils.

So much has changed since the authors of the Old and New Testaments were written — the bishop cites growing scientific evidence that homosexuality is not a chosen orientation but a biologically determined trait — that a reassessment of biblical biases against homosexuality is warranted, the bishop argues.

"I wonder why people think first century people (like Paul) had sufficient knowledge of homosexuality so that their views of it should continue?" Bishop Spong mused during an interview here.

Despite his criticism of the biblical texts, the bishop said, "My crusade is to be able to save the Bible."

Shocking it is when one who is a leader in the Episcopal Church would make some of the above claims. Imagine: one is supposedly led by the Spirit at times to deny parts of the Bible! Imagine: Paul must not be regarded as speaking authoritatively on some issues since his were "antiquated, culturally conditioned ideas." One might ask, "Where is the guidance of the Spirit? What does this view do to the truth of the inspiration of Scripture?"

One can not help but wonder whether this must not, necessarily, be the conclusion to which the theories of Van Till ("The Fourth Day") lead? Van Till would distinguish between the packaging and the content of the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

But Spong, above, uses essentially the same argument with respect to Scripture's teaching on homosexuality, pre-marital sex, or even its "anti-Semitism."

Spong too would reject what he would identify as "packaging" while maintaining certain of the moral teachings of Scripture. Error, like a sled going downhill in the snow, goes faster and faster until it reaches the very bottom. Spong appears to have reached that bottom. □

The Synod of the Reformed Church in America

The Banner, September 5, 1988, reports on the Reformed Church of America's Synodical meeting of 1988. The items of note are:

By a very close vote (139 to 132) the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, meeting in June, approved a motion "to include baptized children at the Lord's Table."

The admission of children to the Lord's Supper remains a local option

After a heated debate the synod rejected (154 to 101) a proposal that the RCA become a full participant in the Consultation on Church Union (COCU). In COCU nine denominations in the United States are moving toward full recognition of each other's functions

The synodical delegates were willing to change the RCA church order so that each of the church's six particular synods sends three elders or ministers — two of whom should be women — to the general synod. This new rule will have to be approved by two-thirds of the classes.

The other synodical delegates (altogether an RCA general synod has 290 delegates) will be sent by the classes. The number of delegates is related to the number of church members within the classis.

The RCA is going to make another study on the role and authority of women in church, which will include a summary of all previous RCA studies on this issue. The report

should be ready for the General Synod of 1990.

The assembly also passed motions on genetic engineering, acts of terrorism, and AIDS ("We reject the perception that AIDS . . . is in any . . . discernible sense the judgment of God").

In 1973 the RCA stated that abortion for reasons of personal convenience is not permissible. This year it appointed a task force to study the effects of abortion "with equal emphases on both the mother and the developing child."

. . . RCA membership is still suffering a slow decline: the number of active communicants dropped from 211,890 at the 1987 general synod to 207,474 this year. Total RCA baptized membership stands at 344,836.

The above report indicates how far the RCA has drifted from its original mooring. Its statement that they "reject the perception that AIDS . . . is in any . . . discernible sense the judgment of God" reminds one of a blind person rejecting the perception that a sunset is of indescribable beauty. One might ask also if there is any relationship between the declining membership and the continuing drift of the RCA into more liberal channels. It is sad but true that there appears to be very little emphasis any more on anything that is truly Reformed. □

WE LIE DOWN IN OUR SHAME

"Weary with my load of sin,
All diseased and faint within,
See me, Lord, Thy grace entreat,
See me prostrate at Thy feet;
Here before Thy cross I lie,
Here I live, or here I die.

"I have tried and tried in vain
Many ways to ease my pain;
Now all other hope is past,
Only this is left at last;
Here before Thy cross I lie;
Here I live, or here I die."

Guest Article

Rev. Rodney Miersma

News From New Zealand

(Correction: This is probably as good a place as any to call the attention of our readers to a correction received from "down under" relative to an article in the October 15 issue of this magazine. Professor Hoeksema, in his article entitled "Some Impressions from 'Down Under,'" noted that, when we in the U.S. change to "slow time," and they in Tasmania change to "fast time," there will be a "12-hour difference" between us and them. In a telephone call to the seminary recently, Professor Hoeksema admitted to having been mistaken about that. If you've ever tried to calculate time differences between places on different sides of the International Dateline, you'll know what we mean when we say it can become confusing. It seems to us that, before the change from slow to fast time (or vice versa), the difference between Michigan time and Tasmania time was 14 hours, and that after the change it has become 16 hours. Professor Hoeksema, at any rate, suggested that we try to make the correction — perhaps in order to avoid receiving calls made unwittingly in the dead of the Tasmanian night. We hope that this will help. And now, we turn to Rev. R. Miersma, a "near" neighbor of the Hoeksemas down-under.)

Rev. Miersma is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of New Zealand.

Greetings from down-under to all our fellow-saints wherever the pages of *The Standard Bearer* bring these greetings! It is a blessed privilege to be able to come to you this way, for in doing so we are drawn closer together in the love of Christ unto the strengthening of our walk together as pilgrims and strangers. In this newsletter various items of interest will be given that will help you to know us in our congregational life.

After waiting nine months to receive permission to enter New Zealand, my family and I arrived in Wellington on January 15 after a thirty-eight hour journey, and were greeted by the members of the congregation, who could hardly contain themselves in the joy of receiving their own pastor. We were brought to Wainuiomata, where two of our families live, a city about 12 miles northeast of Wellington, where we now live at 21 Main Road. After attending Victoria University for one term our son Eric has returned to Holland, MI where he is presently attending Hope College.

Installation of the undersigned as the congregation's first pastor took place on the fourteenth of February with Rev. J.A. Heys officiating. We had the welcome privilege of having a number of visitors present that day, both

from the community and from several sister churches in the U.S. (Hudsonville PRC, Grandville PRC, Lynden PRC, and a week later South Holland PRC). As congregation we heartily welcome all visitors. We remind all those in the northern hemisphere that while you are experiencing winter weather it is summer here in New Zealand, which is in the southern hemisphere. As this article is being written in September we are being greeted with spring. For those who can only come during your summer months (winter here) be comforted to know that our winter temperatures average in the 50's.

As congregation we number seven families. Five families meet twice a Sunday in a small rented church, St. Michael's Lutheran Church, in nearby Naenae. The two other families live too far away to worship with us regularly, one a hundred miles north near Palmerston North, the other on the south island near Christchurch. It is our prayer that some day the Lord will open the way for them to live near the church. During the week two Bible Studies and two catechism classes are conducted. Each Monday evening my wife and I travel forty miles north along the shoreline of the Tasman Sea to the Otaki area to conduct both Bible Study and catechism in the home

of the Inskeeps from our church. Catechism is first taught to their daughter and also to three other children not of our church. After catechism, Bible Study is held, presently in the book of Matthew, with the Inskeeps and other interested families in the area. On Wednesday evening the Essentials of Reformed Doctrine are taught to two young men of the congregation. On Thursday evening Bible Study is held with the four families who live nearest the church. We meet in each other's homes by turns, the head of the home also serving as Bible leader for that time. Presently we are studying Hosea.

In our efforts for church extension we maintain a complete supply of all the RFPA publications and advertise them, have established an extensive Tape Library, and send out *The Standard Bearer* to over twenty subscribers. Recently the under-

signed gave three lectures on the theme of *The Coming of Christ*. These three lectures were also given in Palmerston North. In August we were privileged to hear Prof. H. Hanko lecture to us on *Marriage: A Divine Institution*. Prof. Hanko and his wife stopped here on the way to the Synod of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia in Australia which is our nearest neighbor, twelve hundred miles across the Tasman Sea. Prof. Hoeksema will be laboring for one year in one of the churches of this denomination. In addition to his lecture, which was well received, Prof. Hanko also preached for us twice on the Lord's Day. A voice so familiar from years of listening to tape recorded sermons was now heard from him in person.

In seeking closer relationships with other churches of like faith we are working out ways to be able to send delegates to the USA and Australia. Visits from fellow-saints also help to establish the

bond that we have in Jesus Christ our Lord. This year one of our young men, Brendan Kane, was able to attend the Young People's Convention in Holland, Michigan, and he enjoyed himself very much. Next year, the Lord willing, another of our young men, Theo de Klerk, plans to attend.

It is our prayer that this bit of news concerning us will help to acquaint you with us. We are very grateful to our covenant God for His goodness to us as shown by the generous support given to us by the Protestant Reformed Churches in America so that we have the blessed opportunity of having the lively preaching of the Word each Lord's Day from our own pastor. We covet your prayers as we continue as a small congregation in the strength of our Lord, awaiting the day when we can be gathered together with all the saints as an innumerable host in heavenly glory. □

Guided Into All Truth

Rev. Charles Terpstra

Tertullian and the Gnostic Heresy

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth . . ." Nothing better proves the veracity of this promise of Christ recorded in John 16:13 than the history of the labors of the Christian church in clarifying, setting forth, and developing the truth of Scripture. If we are the least bit acquainted with the development of the

truth of God's Word throughout the ages, then we have some idea how often this promise has been specifically fulfilled.

In leading the church into the truth, the Spirit used and still does use men. This is clear from the lives of the disciples to whom the promise of John 16:13 was first made. The subsequent history of the church has also

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made this clear. In every age of the church there have been men who stand out on the pages of history, because the Spirit raised up these men and so guided them that they developed the true faith once delivered to the saints. These men we call the "church fathers," and it is well for us, the church of our Lord in the twentieth century, to know these men and the truths they developed. In this rubric we hope to lift some of these men off the pages of history and set them before our mind's eye, in order that we might become familiar with a few of the more important "fathers."

In considering these fathers of the church, it is equally important that we understand that the Spirit of truth has used heresy to guide the church into the truth. Every age of the church has equally shown the fulfillment of the Word of God in II Peter 2:1, 2, namely, "... There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of."

But the sovereign Spirit has used these heretics with their false doctrines to stir up and strengthen the church to develop the faith. Through their battles with apostasy and error the Spirit made the church fathers "defenders of the faith" and "valiant for the truth." By means of departures from the faith the Spirit made these men sharpen the two-edged sword of the Word, so that with the one edge they cut away the Lie and with the other edge they cut into the Word to make the truth more clear and concise. Development of the truth always comes in the way of the defense of the truth against error.

In this rubric, besides becoming familiar with some of the church fathers, we will also be introduced to a sampling of the heresies the church has had to confront in her history. And so it is our purpose in this series of articles to be re-introduced to the cardinal truths of our Christian and distinctively Reformed faith.

For our first topic we want to consider our first "defender (and developer) of the faith," the church father Tertullian, and the heresy which he was called to battle, Gnosticism. This will take us back in time to the second century A.D. For Gnosticism, though it was a heresy that arose already in the first century, really developed and became the potent force of evil that it was in the 2nd century. And Tertullian, whom the Spirit raised up to fight this deadly error, dates from the late 2nd century to the early 3rd century (c. 160/70 to c. 215/20).

Gnosticism was a strange and deadly deviation from the truth of Scripture. With regard to the character of this heresy, it may be remarked in the first place that Gnosticism was a mixture or synthesis of elements taken from many different sources. For their ideas the Gnostic teachers drew from Judaism, from the Greek philosophical systems of Platonism and Stoicism, and from the Eastern, mystic cults of Persia and India. These ideas they attempted to combine with the Christian faith. L. Berkhof comments on this in his *History of Christian Doctrines*: "It may be said that Gnosticism mistakenly sought to elevate Christianity to its rightful position, that of universal religion, by adapting it to the needs of all, and by interpreting it in harmony with the wisdom of the world" (p. 46). Gnosticism was, as Berkhof writes, quoting another source, "a stealing of some christian rags to cover heathen nakedness" (p. 47).

In the second place, with regard to its character, Gnosticism claimed to be a religion for the spiritual elite, for the intellectuals and sophisticated. Reacting against the simplicity and straightforwardness of the Christian faith, Gnosticism was designed to satisfy the philosophical, speculative bent of the Greek and Eastern mind. For those who loved to delve into and dabble with the deeply mysterious matters of religion and philosophy, Gnosticism sought to provide satisfaction. This is why it drew so much from pagan and philosophical sources.

It is in fact from this trait that Gnosticism derives its name. In contrast with the simple faith of the "ordinary believer," which they termed mere *pistis* (the Greek word for faith), the Gnostics claimed there was a higher, secret knowledge for the most spiritual class of Christians, which they termed *gnosis*, after the Greek word for knowledge. It is by means of this higher knowledge that the true Gnostic claims the richest experience of salvation. For this reason Gnosticism has been termed "the Pelagianism of the intellect" (cf. G.P. Fisher, *History of Christian Doctrine*, p. 53).

If this description of Gnosticism has a familiar ring to it, it is not merely coincidental. Heresy is never new; it is simply old lies in new garb. Thus the Pentecostalism, cults, and liberal theology of our present day bear these same traits.

What were the teachings of Gnosticism and at what points were they heretical? In answering this, we can only summarize in brief. Fisher, in his above-mentioned work, points out that Gnostic thought was directed to two main points: the absolute Being (God) and the origin of evil (p. 53). It was at these two fundamental points that Gnosticism

went astray; and because they went wrong at these two points, they deviated from many other cardinal truths.

First of all, the Gnostics were heretical in their conception of God. The "absolute Being," as they called God, was to them the "Father Unknown." He is so transcendent that He is not only unfathomable but also unknowable. From this error they went on to deny the biblical doctrine of God as Creator (modern day theistic evolutionists are not new in their heresy). According to them this supreme, all-good God did not create the world. Rather is the universe the product of a subordinate, inferior being, whom they called the "Demiurge" (after the Greek word for artisan). This "Demiurge" is the God revealed in Genesis 1 and throughout the Old Testament, whom they considered to be weak, limited, hateful, and vengeful, and not the God who sends Christ.

The Gnostics arrived at this because of their peculiar view that there was a whole series of middle beings emanating from the "absolute God" to the material world, which beings they termed "aeons" (like so many rungs on a ladder). The farther down the "ladder" these beings were, the less good and more evil they became. To them the Demiurge was a being far down on this "ladder."

Secondly, and closely related to their heresy concerning the doctrine of God, the Gnostics fell into error with regard to the origin of evil. Rejecting the biblical doctrine of the Fall, they held that evil has its source in the Demiurge, the Creator. Because the Demiurge was such a low and therefore evil being, the world he made is evil. Consequently, the Gnostics fell into dualism. For them, what is spiritual is good, but what is

material is evil. This they applied also to man. Because his body is material, it is evil; but because his soul is spiritual, it is good.

This dualism was bound to affect their conception of salvation and the work of Christ in saving man. Accordingly, Gnosticism taught that man's misery lies in the fact that his good soul is imprisoned in his evil body and thus alienated from the good God. Salvation consists in the soul being set free from the prison of the body and the material world in order to ascend into the pure realm of the spiritual. For this purpose of rescuing men's souls the supreme God sent Christ.

However, to the Gnostics Christ was not the only begotten Son of God but another of those subordinate beings ("aeons"). He was simply an emissary of the spirit world, sent by the good God to rescue man. Moreover, though the Gnostics spoke of Christ's coming into the world and suffering and dying as the man Jesus, they denied that He could have assumed a real human body, since the body, being material, is evil. Thus did they fall into the error of "Docetism," that Christ has merely the appearance of a human body.

We can see from this that the Gnostics were not only heretical in denying the Person and deity of Christ, but also in denying His Incarnation. It ought to be clear that this early heresy attacked the most basic of Christian doctrines. It was a real, dangerous threat, therefore, to the church and the truth delivered to her by the Spirit of Christ.

But for the battle against this heresy the Spirit of truth raised up the man of God, Tertullian; and he battled long and hard during his lifetime against it. To this man and his work we will turn in our next article. □

SENT BY A FRIEND NOT KNOWING

*I know not what will befall me!
God hangs a mist o'er my eyes;
And o'er each step of my onward
path
He makes new scenes arise,
And every joy he sends me comes,
As a sweet and glad surprise.
I see not a step before me,
As I tread the days of the year,
But the past is still in God's
keeping,
The future His mercy shall clear,
And what looks dark in the
distance
May brighten as I draw near.
For perhaps the dreaded future,
Has less bitterness than I think;
The Lord may sweeten the water,
Before I stoop to drink;
Or, if the Marah must be Marah,
He will stand besides its brink.
It may be there is waiting
For the coming of my feet,
Some gift of such rare blessedness
Some joy so strangely sweet,
That my lips can only tremble
With the thanks I cannot speak.
Oh restful, blissful ignorance!
'Tis blessed not to know,
It keeps me quiet in those arms
Which will not let me go,
And hushes my soul to rest
On the bosom which loves me so.
So I go on not knowing!
I would not if I might,
I'd rather walk in the dark with
God
Than go alone in the light,
I would rather walk with Christ by
faith
Than walk alone by sight.
My heart shrinks back from trials
Which the future may disclose,
Yet I never had a sorrow
But what the dear Lord chose;
So I send the coming tears back,
With the whispered "He knows."*

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Ronald Hanko

The Two Natures of Christ: The Union of the Human and Divine Natures

4. The Definition of Chalcedon (continued)

We have already quoted the Creed of Chalcedon's statement regarding the union of Christ's two natures. This creed was written in response to various errors that had arisen in the church as a result of the church's efforts to understand how Christ could be in one person and at one and the same time both true God and true man. Chalcedon's statement is the clearest and most succinct statement in the creeds of the church on this matter and involves in essence just four words, "inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably."

The more modern creeds of the church really do not say any more than these four words say, and in many cases these modern creeds simply adopt the language of Chalcedon in their definition of this doctrine. The Belgic Confession, for example, uses two of Chalcedon's terms, speaking of the fact that the two natures are united without change and without separation. The Westminster Confession really uses all four when it says that, "two whole, perfect, and distinct

natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were *inseparably* joined together in one person, without conversion (unchangeably), composition (indivisibly), or confusion (inconfusedly)" (VIII, ii).

Thus, though this creed has not found the general favor that has been accorded the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, and though it is not included among the evangelical creeds to which we subscribe via Article IX of the Belgic Confession, its statement regarding the union of Christ's two natures is a statement to which we subscribe at least indirectly by way of Article XIX, which uses its language.

These four words used in the Creed of Chalcedon pretty well say all that can be said on the matter of the union of Christ's two natures, and stand against the various errors that detract from this doctrine.

a. Inconfusedly.

The first word states that Christ's two natures are joined without *confusion*, or "inconfusedly." The error that gave rise to this statement was the error of Eutychianism (named after the man who first taught it, Eutychius of Constantinople). He taught that Christ was the *Theanthropos* or "God-man," meaning that the two natures of Christ were so fused and intermingled

with one another that a third new nature was formed which was no longer truly human or truly divine, but a third new substance. Thus, he denied any distinction between the two natures, or to put it another way, he stressed the union of the two natures at the expense of the distinction between them.

There was another later form of this error called Monophysitism (the doctrine of one nature), which taught that Christ had only one nature, neither human nor divine, but something half-way between. The analogy in both the case of Eutychianism and Monophysitism would be that of mixing the metal, sodium, with the gas, chlorine, to form a third new substance, sodium chloride, or table salt, which is neither metal nor gas.

Another form of this heresy which focused on just one aspect of Christ's natures was the error of Monothelitism (the doctrine of one will). The proponents of this error taught that Christ had only one will, and so denied that Christ was both real God and real man, at least as far as His will was concerned.

That Scripture rejects the error of Monothelitism is clear from a comparison of those passages in which Jesus identifies His will with that of the Father, and those

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in which He distinguishes His will from the Father's. An example of the former is John 5:21 where Christ's own will to quicken the dead is identified with the Father's. An example of the latter is Christ's prayer in Gethsemane in which He clearly distinguishes His own (human) will from the Father's, when He prays "not *my will*, but *thine*, be done" (Lk. 22:42).

Actually, to prove that Christ is both real man and real God is to disprove all of these errors, since they all deny both the reality and completeness of His humanity and His divinity.

These heresies also obliterate the distinction between God and man, and are, therefore, refined forms of pantheism, the old heathen doctrine that taught that God is the creation and the creation and all creatures in it are God. If we see this, then we will also see that these errors have not really disappeared from the church. It is probably true that no one today teaches actual Eutychianism or Monophysitism; but the rather vague pantheism, which makes no real distinction between God and man, also in the case of Christ, underlies very much of the teaching of the modern sects and also of modern, liberal Protestantism.

It is found, for example, in the following statement from the *Outline of the Principle, Level 4*, a handbook of the Unification Church:

As already mentioned, a true person is one who fulfills the Purpose of the Creation, is the incarnation of God, and is perfect as God is perfect, possessing divine value. A perfect person is also a unique, non-duplicable individual who is the lord of the cosmos and has cosmic value. Jesus is a true man, and thus is a person of such value (p. 140).

That the sects teach such doctrines is neither surprising nor particularly upsetting. It is to be expected. The frightening thing is

that so much of modern Protestantism teaches very much the same thing. In the late 1800's men like Swedenborg, Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher, and even Isaac Watts, the author of many popular hymns, had a profound influence on the history of the Christian Church, teaching that Christ, the great god-man, is nothing more than example for our emulation, that we also may become divine. Men like Robert Schuller and Norman Vincent Peale teach much the same thing today insofar as they teach that salvation consists not in the incarnation of Christ, but in "growth" to a kind of perfect humanity, which in their theology is the only kind of divinity they know. Nor is it surprising, then, that one hears from them so little about the union and distinction of Christ's two natures.

In his study of the two natures of Christ, H. Hoeksema, in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, warns of these dangerous teachings and their results:

According to this proud philosophy, the incarnation is only the natural development of the human race. In Christ God reached self-consciousness. Hence He could identify Himself with the Father. He was divine because He was truly human. This pantheistic view, which in the course of history frequently lifted its proud head in one form or another, is the destruction of all true religion. If the divine Essence is not distinct from the essence of the creature, if the personality of God and that of man are merged, if my life, my thoughts and my desires, are nothing but little ripples on the swelling tide of the universal spirit-ocean, then there is neither religion nor morality. Then God is one universal subject in all, and there is no fellowship between Him and us, no responsibility, no sin, and no redemption. Then He does not exist, has no being in distinction from us; we cannot speak to Him, believe in Him, trust in Him, enter into His covenant fellowship (p. 360).

Arminianism and free-willism, with their emphasis on man's ability to contribute to his own salvation, and to thwart the purposes of God, also blur the distinction between creature and Creator and really go in this same direction. What is especially distressing is that many evangelicals are guilty to some degree of this same vague "pantheism," in that even while they confess both the humanity and divinity of Christ, they never teach plainly the distinction between them.

Lutheranism also blurs this distinction, though in a slightly different way, by teaching that at the time of His resurrection and ascension, Christ became everywhere-present in His human nature. We will examine this teaching more closely in another connection, but it, along with all these other errors, shows that the statement of Chalcedon is still significant today.

The Belgic Confession maintains this distinction by insisting that "each nature retains its own distinct properties." This is explained thus:

As then the divine nature hath always remained uncreated, without beginning of days or end of life, filling heaven and earth: so also hath the human nature not lost its properties, but remained a creature, having beginning of days, being a finite nature, and retaining all the properties of a real body.

The Athanasian Creed expresses this most beautifully with the confession that:

... our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and man. God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of the substance of His mother, born in the world. Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father as touching His manhood. Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ (30-34).

We maintain this distinction by speaking of Christ according to one or the other nature. It is impossible to say, for example, that God suffered on the cross, for the divine nature cannot suffer or die. It must be *according to the human nature* that Christ suffered.

Scripture itself supports us here as in Romans 9:5, which says that Christ is come of the Jews "according to the flesh." This is a good example of how we may deal with the distinction between His two natures in speaking of Him. We must be careful, however, that we do not distinguish between the two natures to the point of teaching two Christs. Then we contradict the fourth part of Chalcedon's definition, that the union of the two natures is "inseparable."

We must, therefore, maintain that Christ, our Lord, has two intelligences, two wills, and that He is at the same time and in one Person eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, the Creator of heaven and earth, and also finite, weak,

limited, visible, and corporeal, a creature. This is the wonder of the incarnation, the great mystery of godliness, and the hope of our salvation. We can understand the mixing of two substances to produce a third. That is neither in itself a miracle nor beyond our comprehension. But to understand how the two natures of Christ can be united in one Person and yet remain forever distinct is beyond our ken, and testifies of the work of God in the coming of Christ. □

TIME

*The moving finger writes; and,
having writ,
Moves on; nor all thy piety nor wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a
line,
Nor all thy tears wash out a word
of it.
Tomorrow's fate, though thou be
wise,
Thou canst not tell nor yet surmise;
Pass, therefore, not today in vain,
For it will never come again.*

ENOCH

*Hast thou not seen at break of day
One only star the east adorning,
That never set or paled its ray,
But seemed to sing at once away
Into the light of morning?
From it the sage no portent drew,
It came to light no meteor fires,
But silver shone the whole night
through,
On hawthorn hedges steeped in
dew,
And quiet village spires.
Like him of old who dwelt beneath
The tents of patriarchal story,
Who passed without the touch of
death,
Without dim eye or failing breath,
At once into God's glory.
The patriarch of one simple spot,
The sire of sons and daughters
lowly,
And this the record of his lot,
"He walked with God, and he was
not,"
For God He took him wholly.*

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

October 15, 1988

BYRON CENTER'S DEDICATION

Both our Byron Center Church in Byron Center, Michigan and the Southwest Church in Grandville, Michigan chose the evening of September 16 as the dedication of their new church sanctuaries. Can anyone ever

remember that happening in our churches before? Southwest moved their dedication back one week to avoid any conflict.

What a joy it was to attend the dedication of Byron Center. As has been the history of our churches in the past, Byron Center was erected with much

volunteer help from their congregation. One could feel the excitement of the congregation as the thought of finally having a place to call their own began to sink in.

The sanctuary is all on one floor and includes a spacious auditorium connected to a roomy all-purpose room. Between these two main rooms are restrooms, a kitchen, a pastor's study (shown on the front cover) which will double as a consistory room, and a nursery. It looks as if the entire building will serve Byron's needs for some years to come.

At the dedication program that night, Rev. Barry Gritters, Byron's pastor, spoke of dedicating the sanctuary to the honor and glory of God, to the maintenance of the truth, the promotion of unity, the preaching of the gospel, and the obedience of God's Word.

The program also included a nice variety of special numbers

from the congregation. Lunch followed in the all-purpose room, at which time visitors could look around.

One week later, Southwest held the dedication of their new sanctuary and organ. I have been promised information on their dedication, along with a history of Southwest, which hopefully will be included in the "News" at the same time. Let me just add that, having been at Southwest once in August, I can say that I really liked the looks of their new auditorium. I am sure that if you are in the area of either of these churches some day soon, you will be very welcome to stop in and have a look. Both are very nicely done.

CONGREGATION HIGHLIGHTS

Once again a six-week course, especially designed for visitors from the community to our church in Randolph, Wisconsin, is being planned. This course, the subject of which is "The Signs of

the Return of our Lord," was scheduled to begin October 11.

A special Singspiration to celebrate the new organ of the Randolph congregation was held on September 22. An hour of fellowship followed.

By now catechism has started in all our churches. I couldn't help but notice an announcement which was in the bulletin of our Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church. "Catechism begins tomorrow evening. All students are asked to wait (sic) outside and away from the classrooms, or quietly in the narthex before their class begins." Sounds as if Byron Center's new church might include a waiting wall.

A committee has been appointed by the consistory of our church in Doon, Iowa to begin investigating the possibility of a new organ for their sanctuary.

It is possible that the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Wyckoff, New Jersey may also be completed this year. They recently received a portion of a will, amounting to nearly \$12,000.00, from the Council of the Southeast Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. This money was left to Southeast to be given to a needy church. May this encourage them to continue building the house of our Lord.

New Subscribers! You can receive the Standard Bearer for the first year for half price, \$6.00!



Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church

CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Rev. Kuiper, pastor of the Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, Canada, gave two lectures during the month of August. August 10 he spoke on "The Biblical Doctrine of Infallibility" and on August 30 he spoke on "As in Adam All Die."

September 27, Prof. Decker spoke at the Mr. and Mrs. and Adult Bible Society Fall League Meeting at Hope Church in Walker, Michigan on the subject "Ministering to our Ministers."

The Evangelism Committee of Southeast Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan sponsored a lecture in the Fine Arts Building on the Calvin College campus on September 22. Prof. Herman Hanko spoke on "I Believe in God the Creator."

On September 28, Prof. Hanko spoke also at the Seminary Convocation, held this year in our Southwest Church in Grandville, Michigan.

MINISTERIAL CALLS

Rev. Wayne Bekkering declined the call he received from Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Isabel, South Dakota.

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, missionary to Jamaica, is considering a call to serve as pastor of our church in Holland, Michigan.

From a trio which included also the Revs. Russell Dykstra and Carl Haak, First Church of Grand Rapids called Rev. Kenneth Koole to serve as second missionary to Jamaica.

South Holland Protestant Reformed Church (Illinois) has called Rev. Kortering, from a trio

which included also Revs. Gritters and Dykstra.

Rev. Kortering is also considering a call from Faith Church, in Jenison, Michigan. □

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Men's Society of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church (Walker, MI) extends its sincere sympathy to one of its members, Mr. Dick Kooienga in the recent death of his brother, MR. WILBUR KOOIENGA.

May comfort be found in the words of I Corinthians 15:22 — "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."

John Kalsbeek, Pres.
Leon Garvelink, Sec'y.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Senior Mr. and Mrs. Society of Hope Protestant Reformed Church (Walker, MI) expresses its Christian sympathy to its members, Mr. and Mrs. Harry Langerak and Mr. and Mrs. James Langerak and their families, in the passing of their father, MR. ANTHONY LANGERAK on October 10, 1988.

"My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth." (Psalm 121:2)

Rev. J. Slopsema, Pres.
Carol Tanis, Sec'y.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to God, on Nov. 17, 1988, the Lord willing, our parents, MENNO AND SADIE SMITS will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary.

"From everlasting to

everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear Him, and His righteousness with their children's children." (Psalm 103:17)

Children:

Richard and Frieda Smits
Carl and Trudy Smits
Clyde and Beth Rinsema
11 grandchildren
4 great grandchildren

INSTRUCTION FOR ELDERS

The Protestant Reformed Seminary will sponsor four meetings in January 1989. Purpose of these meetings is to give instruction regarding the office of the Elder in the Church. Invited to attend are: Elders — past and present, Deacons — past and present, plus other men who are interested in this instruction.

RESERVE THESE MONDAY EVENINGS • JANUARY 9TH, 16TH, 23RD AND 30TH.

NOTICE!!!

God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace by Prof. Herman Hanko is the R.F.P.A.'s newest publication. This attractive 236-page paperback is a worthwhile addition to your library, or it will make a thoughtful gift for Christmas. Order it at \$9.95 plus \$1.75 postage from:

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Book club members will receive one copy automatically. Additional copies may be ordered at \$7.00 plus postage.

Watch the November 15 issue for special Christmas prices on some of our books.