



**A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine**

The Standard Bearer

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A Name Above All Names

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:9-11

Christ humbled Himself. The Son of God, who is the only, eternal, holy, righteous, ever blessed, glorious, adorable God, chose for Himself an earthly mother. She was an ordinary, lowly virgin from the small city of Nazareth in despised Galilee. For His birthplace He did not prepare Himself an attractive room in a palace or in some high estate; but rather He chose for Himself a cattle stall, possibly a vacant stall and

straw-filled manger in the shelter behind the inn, where the donkeys of the guests were kept.

Even as a child of twelve Jesus spoke with the theologians of His day, yet they did not consider Him a smart aleck, a show-off, but rather were amazed at His humble, yet profound questions and His sound answers. He grew up like any other child among His brothers and sisters, yet without ever committing a single sin. It must have filled them with amazement that He could live among sinners and never make Himself guilty of sin. He was subject to His parents and increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor both with God and men.

Our Lord knew no luxury. During His public ministry He did not as much as own a home or a donkey. Even the clothing He wore was donated to Him. He surrounded Himself with disciples, not from the elite of the people, but twelve men who were taken from their daily occupations. They spent as much time as possible away from their families to follow and be taught by Him.

He wore no halo over His head, nor did He come with a dignified bearing that kept people aloof from Him. The common people enjoyed listening to Him, for He spoke to them with authority, yet in a manner which they could readily understand. He took babies on His

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lap, and little children readily clung to Him.

He healed the sick. He caused the blind to see and the deaf to hear. He touched and cleansed lepers and raised the dead. Devils were forced to obey Him. Sinners came to Him to weep at His feet and to find solace for their souls. Yes, He rested at times in the rather spacious home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, since He needed a place like that to find shelter and food for Himself and His twelve disciples. As much as He disliked doing so, He did accept an invitation to be a guest of Simon the Pharisee, who looked at Him with suspicion throughout the entire meal.

He became very angry with the self-righteous Pharisees, accused them of being whitewashed sepulchers, but did not use His divine power to punish them. No, even when He in anger drove the buyers and sellers out of the house of God He did not call fire from heaven, but used a whip to assert His authority.

He was so completely the Servant who came to do the Father's will that He emptied Himself, as it were, of His divine power, as far as His own person was concerned. In all His ministry He never used His divine power for His personal advantage. At the beginning of His ministry when He hungered in the wilderness He could have changed stones into bread to satisfy His craving hunger, and at the same time to show the devil His divine power, but He refused. He could have leaped from the temple tower, and angels would have come at His beck and call to save Him before the eyes of an amazed audience. But He had no intention of using His divine power to His own advantage.

In fact, when the time came for Him to die, He gave Himself into the hands of His enemies, allowed Himself to be bound and led away. God ... bound and led away like a criminal. He allowed Himself to

be examined by Annas and by Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. He forced them to admit that the only charge they could find against Him was that He confessed the truth, that He was indeed the Son of God. And there upon He allowed them to heap insults upon Him and to condemn Him to death.

He stood in majestic silence before Pontius Pilate, so that Pilate feared Him. He forced the governor to admit that he was delivering an innocent man into the hands of His enemies to be crucified, but He allowed the soldiers to spit upon Him, buffet, and mock Him.

The sinless Jesus surrendered Himself to be led out and to be nailed to the cross, to be suspended between heaven and earth as one not worthy of heaven or even fit to be among the inhabitants of the earth. He gave Himself unto death, to the horrible darkness and isolation of separation from His God. Up to this time He was able to suffer in anticipation of the glory that would follow, but in the agony of hellish torment He could not even see the goal, the purpose of it all. He could but cry out: "My God, My God, why, where to, hast Thou forsaken Me?"

God heard His cry and delivered Him. The obedient Son in our flesh surrendered Himself to physical death and the grave to rise again on the third day as Victor of Satan, sin, death, hell, and the grave! That was the mind of Christ!

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Wherefore....

God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name above all names. Because He was the obedient Servant, who surrendered

Himself unto death to bear our curse, God raised Him from the dead and brought Him to glory! He was wounded for our transgressions. He was raised for our righteousness.

He received a name above all names. Jesus, who humbled Himself as the poorest of the poor and the lowliest of the lowly, who bore the reproach and hatred of sinful men, who faced all the onslaughts of Satan, and suffered the wrath of

God in torments of hell, is exalted as Lord over all. The Son of God in our flesh was raised from the dead and exalted with a name above all names. Well may we cry out, "Truly, what is man or the son of man that Thou God dost regard him? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor!"

Even as a name expresses power or authority, so Christ received a name far above every power and authority in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.

The Christ, our Redeemer, Savior, and Lord, arose from the grave, and forty days later, accompanied by myriads of angels, ascended to the highest heavens. As a reward on His accomplished work, all power is entrusted to Him in heaven and on earth.

He is Lord over the angels. The angelic host that had been disrupted through the fall and the casting out of Satan and his followers is united with Christ as their Lord, a perfectly organized angel host. All the angels await the bidding and carry out the orders of Lord Jesus both in heaven and on earth. They are more involved in our lives than we can ever realize.

Christ is Lord over the devil and demons of hell. Although these powers of darkness vainly at-

*Jesus, who
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over all.*

tempt to wipe out God's cause from the face of the earth, they, in spite of themselves, must carry out the counsel of God with the power allotted to them by the exalted Christ for the welfare of God's church.

The Lord of glory carries out His supreme authority over all the vast creation. The sun in its rising and setting, the stars of heaven in their courses, rain and sunshine, springtime and harvest, fruitful and unfruitful years, sickness and health—all are the work of God in Christ Jesus. Nothing befalls us in this vale of tears but that which promotes the salvation of our souls because Jesus is Lord over all.

Even the counsels of wicked men are directed by the Lord of glory to serve for the salvation of the church. Wars and rumors of war, the rise and fall of rulers and empires. The persecution of the saints, and even the heresies and evils that arise within the church must serve their eternally appointed purpose.

All things have been created by Him, and also all things were created *for Him*, and He is the Head of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ!

We hear the sweet singer of Israel saying: "Beautiful for situa-

tion, the joy of the whole earth is mount Zion, the city of the great King! Glorious things of thee are spoken, city blessed of God the Lord! For all things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's!"

For Christ reigns out of Zion for the welfare of the saints, the gathering of God's church, the coming of His kingdom and the glory of God's name!

O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is Thy name over all the earth!

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Every knee must bow and every tongue must confess that He is Lord to the glory of the Father!

The powers of darkness have but a little while before they will be cast into the lake of fire. There while gnashing their teeth and gnawing their tongues they will be forced to admit, even reluctantly, that Christ is Lord, the Lord whom they rejected.

We expect a new heaven and a new earth in which that grand multitude that no man can number will live and reign with Christ, each devoting his or her life according to each one's unique name and place to the glory of the Father. As one

with Christ Jesus they will all live in intimate communion of life with God to reflect His glory with their whole being!

There the myriads of angels will serve them in their worship and adoration, and the entire new creation will be united in perfect harmony to show forth the glory of our God.

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The time draws near. Two millennia ago the world cast out the Christ of God. Since that time the measure of iniquity is steadily, now even rapidly, filling up.

God is not in all their thoughts. His laws are violently and deliberately trodden under foot. The church is despised. Heresy abounds. Corruption fills the high places, the holy marriage state is made a mockery, abortions, murders, rapes, robberies, drug addictions, drinking, horrible crimes committed even among children are reported by the news media.

The measure is nearly full. The world destroys itself with its own corruption. The church is being gathered, purged, preserved, and prepared for glory! Our salvation draws near. Christ is coming to the glory of the Father! □

Editorial

Marriage, a Calling

As to its nature—what it essentially is—marriage is a lifelong, unbreakable bond established by God the Creator between one man and one woman (see "Marriage: a Lifelong Bond," in the *Standard Bearer*, April 15, 1998).

As to how the people of God are to regard marriage, and their life in it, marriage is a calling. It is not an institution and way of life that is intended primarily for their pleasure, comfort, happiness, and fulfillment. Marriage is intended for the glory of God. Believing men and women are privileged and

commanded to serve God in married life. Their happiness and fulfillment are secondary. The only happiness and fulfillment that are of real importance are the happiness and fulfillment that believers have from serving God acceptably in marriage. This happiness and fulfillment they can—and *must*—

have, regardless of their happiness, or lack of it, with their marriage companion.

That marriage is an earthly ordinance in which the Christian works out his salvation by serving God as God requires in His Word is the teaching of the apostle in I Corinthians 7. This is one of the outstanding passages in Scripture on marriage. The instruction is practical. But underlying the passage and its practical instruction is the truth that marriage is a calling. At a crucial juncture in his teaching on marriage, the apostle declares, *concerning marriage*, "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches" (v. 17). A little later, with reference to one's race and nationality, one's occupation, and one's social status, as well as one's marital state, he says, "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God" (v. 24).

Marriage for Christians is a "vocation." The effectual, saving call of the gospel not only gives elect believers salvation, but also commands and empowers most of them to be servants of God in His holy institution of marriage.

This is what professing Christians ignore today. This is what their supposedly Reformed and evangelical churches allow them to ignore. They view marriage as merely an arrangement of human life for their pleasure and convenience. When it suits them, they get married, and only because it suits them. When they find that their marriage does not please and satisfy, they divorce and remarry. They are sure to leave, if they should have to suffer in their marriage.

When a believer regards his or her marriage as a divine calling, the earthly circumstances of the marriage are of no ultimate importance, whether her husband is a good man or a fool like Nabal; whether his wife is a lovely woman

or a shrew; whether the marriage is a delightful life that is ended all too quickly, or a burden heavy to be borne until God finally grants relief in death. The circumstances of marriage are unimportant, just as it is not important whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, slave or free, rich or poor, weeping or rejoicing (I Cor. 7:18ff.).

The one important thing about marriage is "the keeping of the commandments of God" (v. 19).

For believing young people, regarding marriage as a calling will mean that they marry. God commands them to marry, and sooner rather than later. Unless they have the gift of continence and have resolved to remain single in order more devotedly to serve the Lord, they are to marry, in order to avoid fornication (I Cor. 7:1ff.). Since the young men must take the initiative, they must consider themselves duty-bound to seek wives among the young women in the church, thus providing their spiritual sisters with the husbands whom they are commanded to marry. There should be more of this seriousness in dating and deciding to marry, and less of the quest for an emotional "falling in love."

When the young people marry, they must enter marriage as a distinct, divine calling. Parents and church must have taught them this from childhood. The minister who marries them must give them this counsel. In the solemn setting of the Reformed marriage ceremony, the traditional, biblical vow must hold the calling before the couple. It is inexcusable that ministers allow the couple to create their own vows, especially when those vows fail to reflect the fundamental biblical duties of love on the part of the husband, submission on the part of the wife, and mutual faithfulness until death parts them.

A December, 1997 editorial in

the *Chicago Tribune* ("Promise tweekers: Why today's wedding vows are meaningless") complained about this very thing.

To understand why the United States has the highest divorce rate in the world, go to some weddings and listen to the vows. ... A growing number of couples—perhaps most—compose their own vows. It would be hard to exaggerate the symbolic importance of this shift. The old vows were created by society and presented to the couple, signifying the goal of conforming the couple to marriage. The new vows are created by the couple and presented to society, signifying the goal of conforming marriage to the couple.

The editorialist correctly observes that by thus trivializing the marriage vow society is disparaging marriage and exalting the couple. He asks, "Who is to blame for this transformation of the vow?" His answer is:

I suggest that we blame the clergy. Many pastors have become little more than entertainers, bit players, in the weddings they officiate and in the marriages they launch.... What matters most about the wedding is increasingly overshadowed. The party gets bigger; the embrace of the marital promise gets smaller. What is to be done? First, pastors should reclaim the historic responsibility to promulgate and maintain the integrity of the marriage vows exchanged in their churches. Central to this reclamation would be the revival of the vow of marital permanence.

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Our ministers must insist on the traditional vow. If the couple resist, the minister should tell them to find someone else to marry them.

Then the message at the wedding ceremony must not center on the couple's happiness, their love

for each other as no two have ever loved each other before, and a (mythical) life of uninterrupted bliss before them. The message must be the Word of God setting before them and before all in the audience the all-important reality, that marriage is a calling. This includes the recognition that there will be troubles in married life. Wisely, the Reformed marriage form begins by assuring the couple of God's assistance of them in their afflictions. This is based squarely on the apostle's teaching that all married saints "shall have trouble in the flesh" (I Cor. 7:28). To leave this out at a marriage ceremony, probably because this "gloomy note" does not harmonize with the pretty flowers, lovely dresses, and sentimental mood, is foolish.

Because marriage is a calling, believers stick it out in a bad marriage. They do more than stick it out. They exert themselves, on their part, to live as Christ commands them to live in marriage, regardless of their miserable wife or husband. There are bad marriages in the church. One cannot be a pastor in the church for many years and remain ignorant of this. There are husbands who are unloving toward their wife. It breaks your heart to see their coldness, unkindness, and harshness toward their own body. There are wives who are little or no help to their husband. Brawling, sharp-tongued women, they make you cringe when they contradict, criticize, and demean their head. The believer in such a marriage does not, *may* not, cut and run. It lives in his or her soul, "Abide in the calling in which you are called."

So much is it the case that believers are cheerfully to remain in a bad marriage that the believer is commanded to maintain a marriage with an unbeliever (I Cor. 7:13, 14).

The sense of calling will in many cases move the husband or wife whose marriage companion has committed fornication to receive the unfaithful party back, if

she or he repents. Even though the sin has so deeply and painfully hurt them that they are inclined to divorce (as they have a right to do), knowledge that their marriage is above all a calling directs them along the way of reconciliation.

The truth that marriage is a calling, however, does not only function practically in circumstances of marital distress. Its main effect is not that believers decline to divorce. Rather, it produces the fruit that married believers live together daily in the right way. Living in marriage as a calling, the husband exerts himself to love his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her (Eph. 5:25-29). Love for the wife is a command from Christ Jesus his Lord. The loveliness of the woman may make it easier to obey the command in some cases than in others, but the command has nothing to do with her loveliness. Neither does it have anything to do with the husband's feelings of love, or lack thereof.

Love for the wife is a command. It has everything to do with marriage's being a calling. There is simply no place in the Christian life or in the church, therefore, for the mournful words, "I no longer love my wife." Usually the man who utters them supposes that they express a ground for divorce that cannot be challenged. But his words are irrelevant. The proper response to them is, "So what?" If they mean anything at all, they are a confession of sin, as though one would say, "I robbed a bank yesterday." The man must be urged to repent of his damnable sin and to start loving his wife again. The grace of God will enable him to do it, if only he will seek it.

The godly wife is similarly commanded to reverence and submit to her husband, as a help to him (Eph. 5:22-24, 33). This has

nothing to do with the power and pride of the male, as it has nothing to do with her own natural inclination or disinclination. Her marriage is a calling, and in this calling the God whom she serves wills her submission.

Carrying out these basic commands for God's sake, Christian husbands and wives will experience a great deal of bliss in marriage—bliss *in their own relationship*—as God blesses those who fear and serve Him.

For some in the church, God prevents and prohibits marriage.

By governing the circumstances of their lives, God makes marriage impossible for some who would like to marry. Others He forbids to marry, e.g., the woman who is divorced because her husband is guilty of fornication (I Cor. 7:10, 11). Such are to receive their single life from God as a calling. Willingly, joyfully, they are to serve God as single persons. They must guard against resentment and bitterness. Discontent in single life is rebellion against God whose calling this is for the single person.

It is also foolish. For marriage itself or single life is of no ultimate importance. That is why married people are to have their wife or husband as though they did not have them (I Cor. 7:29). Only one thing matters: living obediently in our calling.

This is the only thing that will matter one day when each of us gives account of his or her life in marriage to Christ the judge. How much or how little happiness we had will not even come up. The question from the tribunal will be, "Did you fulfill your calling?"

With eternal consequences. □

—DJE

The loveliness of the woman may make it easier to obey the command in some cases than in others, but the command has nothing to do with her loveliness.

When a Soul Waits*

As the clock struck midnight, all the couples at the New Year's Eve party kissed, except Greg and me. Finally, my friend said, "Come on, Greg, give your wife a kiss." So Greg gave me a token peck. I trembled at this first physical contact in years but I tried to act as if it were nothing. After all, it was nothing but a socially conventional behavior forced by circumstances.

Three years before, my husband Greg told me that he hated me and planned to leave. I sat quietly as he listed for me the offenses I had committed. At one point, he produced a list of 10 criticisms I'd launched on him within one hour before work one morning. I couldn't defend myself. He was right.

I asked Greg to forgive me and I worked very hard to change. I read self-help books, held in my anger till my eyes crossed, and finally landed in a support group. There I talked about the rage that

had grown within me since childhood and I became accountable for my critical behavior.

During the next two years, I changed dramatically. Still, Greg's heart did not change, except that he felt nothing instead of hatred. I felt even more alone. I could imagine how I looked from miles out in the atmosphere: one person completely alone casting a long shadow behind myself. It was just God and me now. I berated myself; I cried many times a day; I stared at oncoming trains at railroad crossings and imagined pulling out in front of the engine.

Greg didn't have the energy to leave, he said. He thought I would, but I couldn't because I wanted to stand before God on judgment day with my marriage intact. Part of that was a desire to obey God and another part was pride. I felt like such a second-class Christian for having a dead marriage. I also wanted to save my kids from the pain of divorce—and I stayed because I loved Greg. I didn't realize until the day he confronted me what a patient, generous person he was, and I was charmed by him.

Fearing abandonment

My darkest reason for staying was that I feared abandonment. Having someone who didn't notice me was better than having no one at all. I wasn't sure I could get up in the morning without someone to lean on. I felt jealous of other couples who argued a lot, but still loved each other. We never argued, we never loved. What was I

going to do about me now that no one loved me?

One by one, avenues of God's love made Him more real to me. My support demonstrated God's unrelenting love each time I confessed my fierce anger to the group. I looked up expecting to see condemning faces, but instead I saw gentle smiles and nodding heads accepting me and my rage. Their faces became the loving face of God for me so that I muttered Romans 5:3 many times a day: "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." I began to believe that God loved me as much on the days I hated myself as He did on the days when I was cheery and sweet.

In solitude, I cried out to God. I walked in a nearby cemetery, screaming out those painful, unexplainable Psalms in which David groaned in the night and drowned his bed with tears. I lay down next to tombstones and grieved for God to come inside me and convince every cell in my body that He loved me. I cried in the shower leaning against the wall tiles, asking God to rescue me from my regret, self-pity, and self-hate. Little by little, I began to believe that God loved me in my ugliest moments and walked with me each minute.

Surrendering dreams

In the safety of these moments, I faced the fact that Greg's heart might never change. Over and over I surrendered my dreams of reconciliation. With God's love as the only basis for my self-worth, I

* One need not agree with every sentiment in this article, "When a Soul Waits," to appreciate that it illustrates the conviction that marriage is a calling. The power of the article is that it demonstrates that this conviction can be, and was, lived, in adverse circumstances. The article first appeared in the June 27, 1997 issue of Christian Courier. It is reprinted here with permission. —Ed.

decided I could face living the rest of my life in a relationship where I was not loved. I could be obedient to God and stay in that marriage with no guarantee that anything would ever improve. Occasionally I got on my high horse ("I deserved something better!"), but one day I wrote, "I have changed to please you, God, not Greg. Even if he never changes, I'll still be glad you changed me."

As I sensed God's companionship, I took delight in giving to Greg without trying to change his mind or make him like me again. It was a grand experience to try to love someone and leave their freedom intact.

In this waiting room of surrender we sat for several years. Some

would say they were wasted years, but even marriages that offer little to brag about can be of great value. We helped and respected each other like brother and sister. We loved our children. We reached out to friends and neighbors. My imperfect marriage did not make me a hopeless and unworthy Christian.

Imperceptible road to reconciliation

Those years of dry desert gave Greg room to work through his feelings so he could learn to enjoy the person I had become. We eased into reconciliation so slowly that I didn't know it was happening. Finally, one day on the telephone Greg said, "I love you," just before he hung up. Stunned, I almost

said, "Are you sure?"

My story cannot be reduced to a formula. I never viewed my willingness to wait as a way of earning Greg's love back. It could have gone the other way. We were both ripe for affairs and that's what usually happens in these cases.

Only by God's grace did I understand that I had expected Greg to meet the inner needs only God could meet. Greg couldn't give me the unrelenting attention I needed; he couldn't assure me that I was a valuable person; he couldn't wash away my mistakes. Only God can do those things. In the rawest edges of life, I find the courage to face each day as I believe in my heart that God loves me no matter what. □

Marking Zion's Bulwarks

Prof. Herman Hanko

Gnosticism and Synthesis Religion

Introduction

There was a heresy in the early church which was so serious, so deadly, and yet so attractive that the church was engaged in a life or death struggle to overcome it.

That heresy was known as Gnosticism.

It was a heresy which had many variations and was taught by many different heretics in the church. It was more like a move-

ment than a departure from the truth on one specific point. It never resulted in a split of any significance in the church, nor were those who held this error of one united party. As a movement it could, perhaps, be compared with the "feminist movement," which is found in many denominations, which has its own theory about the place of women in society, and which presses its own agenda. But one would never call "feminism" a separate church. So with Gnosticism.

Early forms of its teaching can be found in the apostolic church. It seems as if it was present especially in the churches of western Asia Minor. Paul warns against some early forms of Gnosticism in

his epistle to the Colossians; and the apostle John apparently had some early form of Gnosticism in mind in his first epistle.

Its teachings are difficult to understand and do not make much sense to our more modern minds. But the devilry which it set about doing is easy to understand. Gnosticism was interested in a synthesis religion. That is, Gnosticism vigorously promoted the idea that the one true religion is a religion which takes the best elements out of Christianity, the old Judaism, Greek philosophy, and Oriental mystical religions and puts them all together into one religion which everyone is able to accept.

So, while Gnosticism is a very old heresy, it is also very new. In

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a book recently published (*The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*, by Peter Jones) the New Age Movement of our modern times is compared to the ancient Gnostic movement. In fact, the title of the book indicates this, and the sub-title reads: "An Old Heresy for the New Age." It is short, but worth reading. And it is only one among many.

Leaders

Because Gnosticism was a movement and not a heresy promoted by just one man or by a few men who worked together, the heresy also had many different proponents. And they differed widely from each other in their views. Their differences were, in fact, so great that they represented different kinds of Gnosticism. Those, e.g., who emphasized Judaistic ideas were called Jewish Gnostics; those who were more under the influence of pagan and Oriental religions were called Pagan Gnostics; and those who tended to stress the truths of Christianity were called Christian Gnostics.

For this reason it is impossible in this sketch to offer biographies of all the leaders; and, as a matter of fact, not much is known of any of them.

Valentinus was perhaps the best known and most famous of all the Gnostics. But even his birthplace and origin are lost in the murky past. What is known of him is learned from others and cannot, therefore, always be proved. But these facts concerning his life seem to emerge.

He was an Egyptian and had been trained in Alexandria, Egypt's most important city.

This in itself is significant, for Alexandria was, by virtue of its location, one of the most important trading centers in all the Mediterranean world. It was the place where East and West met and where trading routes from the Orient crossed the trading routes from the distant parts of the Roman Empire. It was a busy, bustling city;

noisy with the babble of many languages spoken by its traders; a meeting place of different cultures, religions, and races; and a bubbling cauldron of clashing ideas and philosophies. It was the one place where one would expect a heresy like Gnosticism to emerge.

Among the inhabitants of Alexandria were Jews. In fact, the LXX (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) had been prepared there before the birth of Christ. Christians were also present in the city, and the great Athanasius, the defender of the divinity of our Lord, was bishop of the church there some 150 years later.

Valentinus went to Rome around A.D. 140 and may have stayed there till 165. He was in Rome for some time, but went from Rome to Cyprus. Up to this point no one had had any reason to question his orthodoxy, but while in Cyprus he revealed his hatred of the church and became the leader of a heretical sect.

He was a man of great intellectual ability and vast oratorical powers. In fact, one story of an early church father says that his path to heresy was paved by disappointed ambition, for he had hoped to be chosen bishop of the church in Rome, but had been passed over in favor of a confessor.

Nothing more is known of him, and even these scraps are more than is known of most men who assumed leadership in the Gnostic movement.

Teachings

It is not possible nor is it necessary to give a complete sketch of the teachings of Gnosticism in such a short article. Nor would we be all that interested in these teachings, for they strike our ears as strange, esoteric, hardly credible; and we may very well wonder how it was that such a peculiar conglomeration of ideas could constitute a very real threat to the church.

But such was nevertheless the case.

In general, Gnosticism was "a stealing of some Christian rags to cover the nakedness of the heathen." It taught that God was the great unknowable One, more like the Mohammedan Allah than the triune God of the Scriptures: cold, impersonal, pure being.

The great question of Gnosticism was how the creation came into existence. This was indeed a puzzling question because Gnosticism taught that the "matter" of which the creation was made was inherently evil, was, in fact, itself evil. To overcome this problem, Gnosticism taught that from God proceeded a long chain of emanating aeons which themselves were divine creatures (sometimes identified with God's virtues), each proceeding from another, each weaker than its parent.

The church father Irenaeus, who fought fiercely against Gnosticism, says that "the thirtieth and last of the aeons, wisdom, fell from the perfection of the pleroma (God) through an excess of passion, finally giving birth to a shapeless mass. Hence, [creation] had its beginning from [wisdom's] ignorance and grief, and fear and bewilderment."

The last aeon, therefore, was one "who, while powerful enough to create, was silly enough not to see that creation was wrong." This aeon was sometimes called the demiurge, and was identified either with the "logos" of John 1 or the God of the Old Testament. In any case, this demiurge, responsible for creation, was, because of its own foolishness, imprisoned in the creation and needed redemption.

So in the entire creation, but especially in man, was this "spark" of divinity which, if freed, would flow back to God to be eventually absorbed into the divine being.

How was this escape to be accomplished?

The way was through

"gnosis"—the Greek word for "knowledge"; hence, the name Gnosticism.

There are three kinds of people in this world: material people who are beyond salvation; psychical people who are capable of being saved, although they lack the true "gnosis"; and spiritual people who are the "inner circle," the "elite," those who possess true "gnosis," and are therefore on the road to the liberation of the divine spark in them which will fly heavenward to be absorbed in the being of God.

What role did Christ play in all this?

Obviously, Christ's human nature could not be real because that which is material is inherently evil, and Christ was sinless. And so, Christ's human nature was only an illusion; a ghost-like wraith, it only seemed to be real. Thus, out of Gnosticism rose Docetism, a heresy which denies the reality of our Lord's human nature, and an error perhaps referred to in I John 1:1-3.

But neither was Christ our redeemer. Most thought of Him in terms of that divine spark which, while having created the world, through some misstep became imprisoned in the world; and which divine spark was to be found in all men and which could and would be liberated through the mystery of "gnosis."

This whole theory appealed to many people and, in fact, laid its claim on the masses for many years. But it did so with the seductive promise of a mysterious knowledge through which redemption would come, and it made use of ceremonies, rituals, and appeals to be able to open the door to heaven and union with God.

Partly, the secret knowledge which was the key to salvation involved how to free the divine spark in man. This liberation of the divine could come about only by a denial and suppression of the body. But how to suppress the body, that was the question. To that question two answers were given—depend-

ing on what form of Gnosticism was adopted. The one way was that of asceticism, i.e., a mortification of the body through denying it food and drink, making it suffer, and thus "crucifying the flesh." This later was carried over into monasticism in the Romish Church.

The other way, more appealing to many, was the way of giving one's body over completely and totally to an indulgence of all the lusts and pleasures of the flesh. The more such total licentiousness was practiced, the more the body was denied. And so some branches of Gnosticism became wickedly evil. It was the ultimate expression of "Let us sin that grace may abound."

Gnosticism's Main Characteristic

If one is at all acquainted with ancient Greek philosophy, one can easily detect the remnants of it preserved and modified in this system. If one knows even a bit about the mysticism from India, China, and other parts of the Orient, one can easily see that such religions influenced Gnostic thinkers. When one recognizes that one of the ways in which the leaders appealed to Christians was by preaching the teachings of Jesus, one can see that Christianity was intended to be a part of the system.

And so Gnosticism wanted a worldwide, eclectic religion to which everyone could agree, and under the umbrella of which everyone could find a congenial religious shelter. Why war over particulars and minute points? Here is a religion which takes the best from every religion and makes one universal religion palatable to all.

How could something like this appeal to so many?

Well, we ought to consider two things.

One: many (if not most) of the members of the church had come from heathenism and paganism, and had not yet been fully taught in the Christian faith. Indeed, this was true even of some of the

church fathers who were reluctant to give up everything the philosophers had taught and which they had learned in the schools before their conversion. The inclination was to find good in all these things.

Two: Gnosticism had some things about it which are always appealing to people, even members of the church. It spoke of secret knowledge which one could attain and which would let one in on mysteries, esoteric things known only to a few, "inner circle" secrets. People are attracted to that sort of thing by virtue of its mysterious character.

It also made skillful use of rituals and ceremonies which always appeal to man's baser instincts because it is spiritually difficult to worship God "in spirit and in truth." This is the abiding attraction of Rome's way of worship over against the simplicity advocated by the Reformers.

And it gave credence and support to the idea of tolerance in the area of religion. There is really no need to insist on the unique character of the Christian faith, since truth can be found in all religions and it is possible to "get along" with many others whose faith differs from ours, for all have certain good points. In modern language it is the siren song that, though Arminianism may be defective theologically, it surely has this good which we Calvinists lack: its enthusiasm and emphasis on godliness.

That sort of a thing was so appealing to the early church because it opened the door to the possibility of assuming a more tolerant position over against the culture of the day and in this way offered escape from the persecution which was the lot of the church at that time.

And there may be one more element. The system called Gnosticism, with its doctrine of aeons and its idea of salvation through the release in us of the divine spark, was clearly Pantheistic. That is, it

taught that all is God, and we too (at least, the divine in us) are God. Pantheism, in all the ages in which it has been taught, including today's New Age Movement, is a direct lie of the devil which was first uttered in Paradise and which continues to be the lie by which Satan deceives many: Ye shall be as God. Eve and, a bit later, Adam were deceived. Countless throngs today are deceived in a similar fashion.

So the church had a fierce battle on its hands, and it took over a century before the battle was won.

The Church's Response

Why did God so govern in the affairs of men and saints that such an evil as Gnosticism entered the church and threatened her very existence as the church of Christ? What was God's purpose? How did the church react and finally overcome the threat of Gnosticism?

The first positive fruit of this great and terrible controversy in the church was this: the church was forced to give clear definition to her faith, i.e., to the truth which was her confession.

This had not yet happened. In the early life of the post-apostolic church, by virtue of the circumstances in which the church found herself, all the emphasis of her life fell upon her calling to live a holy and godly life in the corruption of Roman civilization. That is, all the emphasis fell on the need to live antithetically in the world, and all the thinking of the church was absorbed in the question: How does the Christianity which we have now embraced make our lives in every detail different from the wickedness of Roman culture? What is a Christian husband? May we be Roman soldiers after our conversion? How do we treat children? May we attend Roman shows? These and similar questions were on the top of the church's agenda.

But Gnosticism, while certainly

being an ethical system also, was primarily an intellectual system. One had to put on his thinking cap to understand the intricacies of its thought.

If Christianity was to defeat Gnosticism on the battlefield of faith, Christianity had to turn now from ethical and moral questions to more basic questions involving the truth. What is the truth of God's Word. What is the truth concerning God over against this cold and impersonal God of the Gnostics? Who is Christ in distinction from this Christ of the Gnostics whose human nature is only an illusion?

The Christian faith is exactly that: a *faith*. And that means that it is a system of doctrine, of doctrinal propositions which have to be believed in order for a man to be saved. Faith is more than a way of life. It is a way of life; but that unique way of life which is "Christian" is the necessary implication of what a Christian believes.

Gnosticism forced the church to begin thinking doctrinally.

And, secondly, in thinking doctrinally, the church came to realize that the only possible defense it had against Gnosticism, and the real claim which the Scriptures were making, was *the absolutely unique character of the Christian faith*.

Gnosticism said: there is good in all religions. Gnosticism said: every religion is a way to God. Gnosticism said: the greatest religion is that religion which unites all religions in some sort of spiritual hybrid under which all men can find a theological roof. Then the world will also be at peace.

But more and more it dawned on the church fathers who fought against Gnosticism that the Christian religion was not like that. An absolute antithesis existed between the Christian faith and all other religions. Not only was the Christian faith the *only* true religion, but every other religion was totally false. If one believes the Christian religion, one will be saved, be-

cause, so very simply put, he believes the truth. If one believes anything else but the Christian faith, one will go to hell, because, simply put, one believes the lie. Not a mixture of lie and truth—the lie.

The reasons are clear why this vast and unbridgeable chasm exists between the Christian faith and all pagan thought and religion. Every pagan religion and every pagan philosophy is *man's invention*. It has its origin in man's sinful mind. It has in it no elements of truth, because there is no common grace to enlighten the wicked mind. It has no good about it because there is no operation of the Logos (of John 1) or of the Spirit operative in every man. It is flat-out the lie.

And it is the lie, not because wicked men who live far away from the gospel do not know about the truth, and in their ignorance make mistakes. It is the lie because these men, thinking themselves to be wise, and nevertheless becoming fools, *change* the glory of the incorruptible God into images of their own imagination.

The Christian religion, on the other hand, has its origin in God, in God's mind and will. It is *revealed* and cannot be known apart from divine revelation. It is made known sovereignly by the Spirit in the hearts of God's elect because God hides His truth from the wise and prudent and reveals it unto babes; and this is His good pleasure. That truth, sovereignly made known, is the truth which saves.

The Christian is finally compelled, in faithfulness to God, to stand in the world and say: What I believe is the only truth; what you believe is the lie. What I believe opens the doors of heaven; what you believe is from hell and carries its confessors into that dark place.

That takes a courage which few men have. But it is the courage of faith.

What the Battle Against Gnosticism Means

The battle which the church fought against Gnosticism is never over in this life. Today we have the same thing. The main Reformed body in the Netherlands shuts down its mission work to the Jews because Judaism is an acceptable religion. Reformed Ecumenical bodies openly approve of Buddhism, Hinduism, and pagan wor-

ship. "Reformed" teachers openly teach that God has provided many ways to Himself, and each is entitled to his own way to God. And, indeed, the way of the fetish worshiper may be better than ours.

The New Age Movement tells all the world exactly what Gnosticism said. That movement creeps into churches, seminaries, and Christian schools; and weak and wishy-washy teachers, often scared half to death by the accusation of

being intolerant, openly espouse New Age ideas.

There can be no question about it, that for us to take the stand which the church took against Gnosticism is to invite persecution. But let it be, then. Anything else is the destruction of the church. If you will, the salvation of the church lies in her intolerance—intolerance of all that is contrary to God's truth in Christ. □

Day of Shadows

Homer Hoeksema

Chapter 8 The Setting of the Stage of History (cont.)

Exiled From Paradise

We may well conclude this phase of sacred history where Scripture concludes it, with the narrative of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise, in Genesis 3:21-24: "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them. And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

We will not take the time to refute various foolish denials of the literal character of the historical record of this passage, except to remark that they all have in common that they greatly impoverish the Word of God and deprive it of any real spiritual significance. Even as we have conceived of this entire section of God's Word as being the literal and historical record of real events, so we must consider this passage also in the same light. Then we must try to get from the passage some conception of the facts as they are narrated here, and of their spiritual significance.

In the first place, we should notice that it is implied in this passage that Paradise remained. The garden, the tree of life, and the tree

of the knowledge of good and evil—these all remained for a time. They were not destroyed, but Adam and Eve were driven from the garden. Precisely how long these things remained is not told us by Scripture. But it is more than likely that Paradise continued as long as the first world continued, that is, until the Flood, and that then the same waters which destroyed the first world (what the Bible calls "the world that then was") also wiped out Paradise.

We may observe in connection with this fact that there must have been a reason for this also. It would have been a simple matter, if man might no longer eat of the tree of life, to destroy the garden and its special trees. Hence, if the Lord does not do this, but instead drives man out and takes pains to place Cherubim and a flaming sword to keep the way of the tree of life, there must be a reason for

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this. Nor is it difficult to discover this reason. On the one hand, the garden and its tree of life—and we may note that the emphasis falls here on the tree of life—constituted a reminder of the past. Even the very presence of the Cherubim and the flaming sword stood as a stark reminder of what had been and of what was now no longer possible. At the same time, on the other hand, Paradise stood as a promise of the future. After all, the first Paradise was but a picture of a better Paradise to come, the heavenly Paradise of God with its heavenly tree of life. That picture must for a time remain as a gospel, pointing forward to better things to come.

To understand this, let us also take note for a moment of *how* Paradise remained.

In the first place, we must observe that the very heart of Paradise was now gone, and, as far as that earthly Paradise was concerned, *gone forever*. Remember that the idea of Paradise consisted in the fact that it was God's tabernacle with man—God's covenant dwelling with His friend-servant—and man's dwelling with God in covenant communion. In the midst of the garden, and especially through the tree of life, God dwelt. There He would have communion with His friend. In the garden proper was man's house with God, where man, made after God's image, dwelt as the friend-servant of the living God, walking with Him and talking with Him and blessed in God's communion. This very heart of Paradise from now on would be no more, and could be no more. Man is expelled from Paradise, to be sure. But neither does God remain any longer in the midst of the garden, in that earthly sanctuary. He leaves for heaven, that is, as far as His covenant dwelling and friendship are concerned. Not only does this follow from the very nature of things, from the fact that God had made His presence known in the garden

as man's covenant-Friend-Sovereign, and from the fact that this relation had now ceased. But this is also the presentation of Scripture from this point forward in history. God is in heaven, and from heaven He looks down on the doings of the children of men.

Nevertheless, the form, the shell of that earthly dwelling of God with man remained. The garden as such was still there. The trees were there. The tree of life is specifically mentioned in this passage as remaining there, so that it was necessary that the way of the tree of life be guarded. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was also still there. All these things stood there as a solemn reminder of what had been, of a Paradise lost.

It was much like the case of a person who has been absent from his parental home for some time, and who returns there when he receives word that his parents have died. The old homestead is still there. As he enters the house, all the old familiar furnishings are in their accustomed places. But father and mother are there no longer, and all those furnishings are silent reminders of a family fellowship which had been, but which has ceased.

Thus it was also with respect to Paradise. The house, the shell, of God's dwelling with man still stood as a solemn reminder of the past that had been, of what had been spoiled and lost through sin and disobedience. But there was another element also. For otherwise Paradise could only serve to arouse remorse and regret. In the light of the revelation of God's grace after the fall, in the light of the promise of the gospel, Paradise silently but eloquently preached a gospel: it spoke mightily of the promise of better and heavenly things to come.

But though Paradise remained, Adam and Eve were expelled from it. You will recall that Scripture makes a distinction between the

garden itself and the country of Eden. The former constituted, as it were, a holy place, a sanctuary. The latter, the land of Eden, may be compared to the outer court of that tabernacle. From that garden, the holy place, man is now expelled. Never again may he return there. But he remains in Eden. He is sent forth to the east in Eden, as is evident from the fact that the Cherubim, guarding the way of the tree of life, are stationed at the east. But he is not expelled from the country of Eden. This is plain also from the subsequent history of Cain in Genesis 4. Cain becomes a vagabond, and he leaves Eden and dwells in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. Adam and Eve therefore, expelled from the garden, now lived in the country of Eden, in the proximity of the garden, their former home. This is also significant. Figuratively speaking, they stood with their noses against the fence, peering in. That is, they were in a constant position to look upon Paradise, the old dwelling of God with man, the place from which they had been driven.

It is evident that the essence of their being expelled from the garden consisted in the fact that they were barred from the tree of life. This is clear from the passage when it tells us that the Lord said: "...and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever." It is also clear from the fact that the Cherubim were "to keep the way of the tree of life."

The question is: why are Adam and Eve barred from the tree of life?

This question can be answered only in the light of the meaning and the purpose of that tree.

Man, according to the passage, now "knew" good and evil. This is certainly not to be understood as if the devil's words had actually been realized, and as if man knew good and evil in the sense in which Satan had promised this. But neither is the language of verse

22, where the Lord says, "Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil," to be understood as irony. Such irony would have been worthy of the devil, not of God. God does not mock with the condition of Adam and Eve. Especially in the light of the promise it is inconceivable that the Lord would employ irony in connection with their misery. Rather is this knowledge to be understood in the sense of *determining*, as meaning that man had sinfully assumed the prerogative of knowing for himself what was good and what was evil. God had determined that for man, and had revealed it in the command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. That was a divine prerogative. No mere creature may determine sovereignly what is good and what is evil. But this was exactly what man had proposed to do for himself. He assumed the right to know for himself, in separation from God, what would be good and evil. In his sinful imagination and presumption he had become like God.

That was exactly his misery, however. He could not live by bread alone, but only by the Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. From that Word of God, and therefore from the communion of God, he had willfully separated himself. He had gone down into death, spiritually. He lived apart from God. In himself he became dead in sin and misery. In that condition he must now live forever.

Hence, he must be separated from the tree of life. Remember that the tree of life, as we explained in connection with Genesis 2, had the power to perpetuate the earthly existence of man. This is plain especially from this passage, which would otherwise be inexplicable. The text presupposes that the tree of life had the power by its fruit to perpetuate the earthly, physical existence of man, even after he had sinned. The text also presupposes that man would be inclined to partake of this tree and to perpetuate

his earthly life. In fact it is exactly this striving that is still evident in all the attempts of the sinful world. It is fear of death, fear of the end of this temporal existence. It fills man. It pursues him. He clings to his sin. He does not seek after God. Yet he will avoid the consequence of his sin and strive to perpetuate his present state.

Hence, God must send man out and bar him from this tree.

At the same time God's people are reminded by this act of God not to cling to the things below. It is wrong, and it is also vain. They must seek the things above.

All this stands in connection, of course, with the fact that man had forfeited God's friendship through his sin. That tree of life was also the symbol of God's covenant communion. To eat of that tree was closely connected with entrance into that covenant fellowship. But this, man had forfeited by his sin. God is holy and righteous. He can, therefore, have no fellowship with sin. He that is unholy and unrighteous cannot approach Him. Yet, the sinful nature does not understand this, will not recognize it. Cain presently reveals this plainly. All modern Christianity reveals this same spiritual ignorance. With works of their own, with the righteousness of works that cannot possibly stand before God, they will approach God. But this is impossible.

Hence, the way is barred by God Himself. Cherubim are placed at the entrance, to keep the way of the tree of life. We cannot take the time now to study these Cherubim in detail. Suffice it to say that they are spirits, angels, whose particular service is to guard the holiness of God's covenant. Thus also they appear above the ark, later, in the tabernacle. Thus it is that Scripture speaks of God as dwelling between the Cherubim. These Cherubim signify, therefore, that God is jealous of His holiness, and that He will avenge every attempt of the unholy to approach Him. Thus we

can also understand the significance of the flaming sword, which was perhaps in the hands of these Cherubim, turning every way, to warn that approach to the tree of life was impossible, that it could be attempted only at the cost of being slain by the consuming fire of God's holiness. Indeed, the way to life for Adam, and for us, is barred. Man cannot enter! He chose, in effect, to till the ground, because he proposed to live by bread alone. Now he must go to till the ground from whence he was taken, and to die, returning to the dust.

How miserable Adam and Eve must have been! Paradise was still there. They could see it, even though they could not enter. And you may imagine that as they tilled the ground, wresting a bare subsistence from it in the sweat of their face, they often must have pressed their face, so to speak, against the fence of the garden, to see it. Banished they were from God's presence. God's friends they had been, and they remembered it. They had been blessed with life, and they could still recall it. Now they were exiles. God's wrath was upon them as they were in themselves; children of wrath they were by nature. The Cherubim and the flaming sword reminded them continually of their misery. They had been happy in their earthly life. King and queen they had been, and Paradise yielded to them its fruit in abundance without toil and sweat on their part. Rich they had been. Now they were banished! The Cherubim and flaming sword reminded them of it all. How they must have felt sorely their misery, and known the nature of it.

Yet their position was also hopeful.

For Paradise was still there. The tree of life remained; it was not destroyed, but only waiting for its higher fulfillment. The way to the tree was barred, but it was also kept. The way was there—if only those Cherubim and that sword

could be removed. Or if only they could somehow pass the Cherubim without the sword slaying them! The continued presence of the tree of life and the way to it were therefore elements of hope for better things to come.

This we can understand in the light of the promise they had received, the promise of victory. God had promised them a seed. Their faith in the promise was reflected in the name Adam had given his wife. She was Eve, the mother of the living, or the mother of life. Surely, they had died. Yet life would come out of death. Eve was, by reason of the promise, the mother of life.

Moreover, as they were sent forth from the garden, they were garbed in clothes of skins. The Lord God had made them these coats of skins. Do not say that this is impossible, for that is foolish. The Bible does not tell us exactly how God made this provision. But this is certain, that the Lord who calls the animals and gave them

their skins could also deprive them of those skins to make coats for His people. But notice that this implies, in the first place, that the Lord taught Adam and Eve that their self-made coverings were not sufficient. In the second place, it means that God would provide them a covering sufficient in His sight. In the third place, it signifies that this covering could be provided only in the way of death, the punishment of sin. God would exact that punishment and death from another, in order to cover His people. The Lord clothed them. Is that not just exactly the way it still is? The Lord provides the sacrifice. And the Lord makes us partakers of it. The clothes provided are clothes of grace, pure grace. In the light of the cross we today can see this in reality, even as Adam and Eve could see it only dimly in the far off.

Hence, there was hope.

In Paradise the sun went down. God's tabernacle was there. But God's tabernacle there disappeared, and it was no more with

men. There were wrath and fire and Cherubim and a sword instead. The way was barred.

But another way is also opened. That is the way of sacrifice, the way of atonement. Presently, the sons of God will build altars, little spots where God will have communion with His people from heaven. Then the earthly tabernacle and temple will follow, where God dwells typically and symbolically, though still in heaven. Then Christ comes, Emmanuel, God with us, the tabernacle of God with men in higher reality. He returns to heaven. But He comes again, in the Spirit. And in the hearts of His people the heavenly tabernacle of God is with man. At the end, He comes again, in order to make all things new. Then the tree of life will be in the midst of the Paradise of God.

Toward that goal all history, with its ongoing conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, now begins to move. □

Search the Scriptures

Rev. Mitchell Dick

The Secret of the Spirit

(John 14:15-31)

Intimate discourse, this last one of Jesus to His disciples. It is the night before Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus continues to reveal covenant secrets to His friends. So much to say! Who would say: but the sermon is too long?

The main concern of Jesus in

this last discourse of John 14-17 is to comfort the people of God. God had told the prophets long ago that to comfort the people of God is *the* calling of the prophets (Is. 40:1). Here is *the prophets*: all in Jesus, fulfilled in Jesus the Prophet!

"Let not your heart be troubled," the Prophet cries. "Hear of heaven," He goes on to say. "What mansions of glory in Father's house! And a place there I go to prepare for you!" And "I am the way," this Prophet declares! "I am the way to heaven and to

Father up there. So be not troubled, sorrowing ones! My blood is the way, grace is the way. Your works are not the way, and My work is not partially the way. I am the only way, and the whole way of salvation! Believe this, My way, the accomplishing of your warfare. Trust My way, and your hearts will certainly not be troubled, but rejoice!"

Comfort, Jesus gives, by preaching the future thing, heaven, and by preaching the eternal weight of glory. But He will give

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something of heaven *for now*. He Himself came down to be with His own. Now, in His going away, He will send the Holy Spirit. He sends Him, for He will never leave us but be with us always in this Spirit. He sends Him in His great love for us.

This is the further secret of Jehovah of which Jesus discourses now. It is the secret of the covenant God with us ... in the Spirit! He speaks to the heart. With love the words come. Reaching now across thou-

sands of years, and over mountains and seas, and from one culture to the next. Drawing us into the sanctuary of the upper room to hear the great Preacher. Love. And the Word. And the Spirit working love. Come. Listen....

For Study, Meditation, & Discussion

1. The Spirit

John 14-16 is a golden cup filled with the truth of the Spirit. May we drink deeply!

Who is the Spirit? Find proof here and in the rest of Scripture that He is God. What in this passage tells us that the Spirit is a person, and not just a "force," or an "it"?

When Jesus refers in this passage to the Spirit being sent He is referring, of course, to Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out upon the church (read Acts 2!). John 7:39, referring to the time before Jesus was glorified (which would be the entire Old Testament period until Jesus' ascension and work of sending the Spirit!), says that the Spirit *was not* yet at that time. Does this mean that there was no Spirit or influence of the Spirit in the Old Testament? What difference has Pentecost made between the Old Testament and New Testament age?

In verse 16 the Spirit is called "another Comforter" whom the Father will give. The Greek word is *paraklete*. It means literally "one who is called to one's side," and that, especially to aid another. From the lexicons we learn that the *paraklete* might be called to one's side in court, as a lawyer or advocate. He may plead one's cause also in prayer, as an intercessor. Or the *paraklete* may offer other kinds of help and encouragement. How is the Spirit such a *paraklete*? Find other passages which teach that the

Spirit is the Comforter. In light of the truth of the Comforter, is it ever good and pious to doubt one's salvation? What are some spiritual means God gives whereby we can be comforted and assured of salvation?

Verse 17 tells us that this Spirit-Comforter is the Spirit of truth. Among other things this means that He is the *source* of truth. The Spirit's work is establishing and promoting truth. How did He do this in the writing of the Bible (cf. II Tim. 3:16, 17; II Pet. 1:19-21)? What does the Spirit of God being the Spirit of truth say about the following: How we "try the spirits" whether they are of God (I John 4:1)? Truly holy living? The church's fruit of the Spirit in her ministry and worship? The Charismatic movement? A spirit that prompts one to say: "I felt led to bark in church the other day"?

Verse 26 tells us another name of this Spirit. He is the Holy Spirit. Why is the Spirit called this? What does this say of His work in our lives?

2. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

We believe that the persons of the Trinity are essentially one, and yet personally distinct. How are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit personally distinct from one another?

In the Middle Ages the church split over a doctrinal issue called the "procession" of the Spirit. The western half of Christendom de-

cided for the biblical truth of the "double procession" of the Spirit, while the eastern half denied this. Where in the passage (cf. also John 15:26) is the truth taught of the "double procession," that is, the truth that the Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*? What creeds teach this? What difference does this doctrine make?

Matthew 28:20 records the promise of Jesus that He would be with the disciples always. In what verses in John 14 does Jesus indicate that He will keep His promise so that when the Spirit comes He Himself will still be with the disciples after He has gone away?

How, according to verse 26, is the Spirit-Teacher's subject matter the Son (cf. also John 15:26)?

3. The Fruits of the Spirit

Besides comfort, truth, and holiness the Spirit bears many fruits in the lives of the believer.

One main work of the Spirit is to be a "homemaker." He establishes covenant homes! He does this in the first place by taking us, who are by nature children of the devil, and adopting us into the family-life of the Father. For this reason He is called the "Spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:15). This Spirit of adoption sent from heaven is why, when Jesus goes away, the disciples are not left "comfortless" (v. 18) or literally "orphans"! The Spirit is the "homemaker" in the economy of salvation in the second place in that, through His work es-

tablishing us as "temples" of the Holy Ghost (cf. I Cor. 6:19), the Father and the Son themselves come and make their abode the hearts of the people of God (John 14:23).

Wonderful covenant homes! Reflect on this, adopted child of God! How is this a great comfort to us? How do we show in all our lives, in all the activities of body and soul, that we *welcome* such divine family members?

Besides establishing covenant homes, the Spirit is our life (v. 19), our peace (v. 27), and our joy (v. 28). How are our life, peace, and joy different from this world's life, peace, and joy?

4. The Spirit and the World

Jesus sends the Spirit whom the world cannot receive (v. 17). This is exactly because the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, and the world cannot receive Christ in His Spirit sent

forth! According to verse 30, why cannot the world receive Christ's Spirit? How does a passage such as I Corinthians 2 bear on this truth that the world cannot receive the Spirit?

Some contend that the Spirit wants to be received, but is frustrated in His efforts by the sinful resistance of men. Why is such a contention erroneous?

How does this world show enmity against the Spirit as He manifests Himself and His work in believers? In the church?

5. Perspective (John 20:31)

John is inspired to write so that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through His name.

Great covenant Savior and giver of the Spirit revealed here! Jesus, from heaven, continues to be the only Mediator! From heaven

now, through the Spirit poured out, He continues to reveal truth, to comfort, to sanctify, and to make our hearts a home for the living God!

Crucial for our appropriation and enjoyment of the Spirit is love in our hearts. Jesus speaks of this often in this passage: John 14:15, 21, 23, 24, 28. What, according to Jesus, is the fruit of this love? How do we show this, and increase in our spiritual fruit-bearing?

Thankfully, we being naturally void of love, the Holy Spirit is given to shed abroad the love of God in our hearts (Rom. 5:5). Thankfully, it is Jesus' love, and His work of love, by which we are saved and kept (cf. v. 19, 31).

Yes, this is the secret of the Spirit: the love of God! Take note. Jesus is sharing secrets of Jehovah. Covenant secrets. Secret of the Spirit. Love. Listen.... □

Taking Heed to the Doctrine

Rev. Steven Key

Christ, Our Priest (2)

There is another aspect of Christ's priestly office that deserves special mention. I refer to His lasting intercession for us.

His Lasting Intercession

This aspect of Christ's priestly function was also typified in the Old Testament. We read of that in Leviticus 16:12-14, where we read of the high priest entering into the

holy place with the blood of the sacrifice and the sweet incense. "And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil: And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not: And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward; and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times."

Christ's offering Himself on the cross answered to the killing of the

sacrifice outside the veil in the Old Testament typology. His entering into heaven, there to intercede on behalf of His people, is that which answered to the priest's going with blood, and his hands full of incense, within the veil, into the holy of holies.

So we read in Hebrews 9:24, "For Christ is not entered into the holy place made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

And in comparison to those Old Testament priests, we read of Jesus in Hebrews 10:12: "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God."

Rev. Key is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Randolph, Wisconsin.

What does it mean that Christ is our Intercessor, and what is included in that continual intercession with the Father?

That Christ is our Intercessor means that He appears before God to make requests for us. He does so as an act of that office which God has given Him. We may therefore say that in a very real sense Jesus Christ is in heaven as our attorney before God, appearing for us and making continual peace and friendship with God on our behalf. Though Satan would accuse us before God, as we read in Zechariah 3, and though he would demand that God release us to him because of all our sins, Jesus Christ appears in our defense, perfectly prepared to seek our acquittal before God the righteous Judge. How comforting are those words recorded in I John 2:1: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." He is the Righteous One, who appears on our behalf. And Jesus Christ is the only One in whom we may approach unto God. For He alone is the One appointed by God for that office.

The Robbery by Rome

What a terrible robbery of Christ's glory it is on Rome's part to request people to pray to saints. While Scripture defines as saints all those who belong to Christ, the Roman Catholic Church has a different definition. Saints among the Romish are those who have been recognized as such by the pope, and therefore those in whose name people may pray and who supposedly serve as advocates and intercessors before God.

A few years ago, an American news magazine¹ gave coverage to the attempts on the part of some church members to secure sainthood from the Vatican for a black man who died in New York City back in 1853. It was a fascinating

article which demonstrated very clearly that Rome has not changed one iota in the essence of their Romish theology. The article described the tremendously complicated process of securing sainthood, part of which is the necessity of one verifiable miracle, such as the healing of a person who has prayed to the prospective saint. And according to the article, in the case of this particular man long dead, Cardinal O'Connor suggested that his skeleton be dug up from its current grave and be reburied at the heavily trafficked St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City because—and this was a quote—"you can't get people to pray to someone unless they know about him."

Rome continues to rob Christ of His peculiar glory, and desecrate His peculiar office as our only High Priest before God. Blessed be any who have been brought by God out of the bondage and corruption and idolatry of Roman Catholicism. And thank God for the great Reformation of the sixteenth century which freed the church from that bondage.

To make intercession is the peculiar prerogative of Christ, which He cannot give to another. None but He can go in His own name to God. For that reason also He says in John 16:23: "Whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he will give it you."

Christ's Blessed Work

The continual intercession of Christ with the Father consists of two things in particular according to the Bible.

In the first place, He appears in the presence of God as our Advocate, presenting His blood and all His sufferings to God as a moving plea on our account. All the wrath that Jesus bore for our sakes and the wounds that He received still bleed fresh, as it were, in heaven—a moving and prevailing argument with the Father, to give out the mercies that Christ pleads

for on our behalf. The very sight of our High Priest prevails with God, and causes Him to turn His wrath from us.

And secondly, Jesus Christ our Intercessor presents our prayers and the prayers of all saints to God *with His merits*, and desires that those prayers may be granted for His sake according to the will of the Father. We may safely bring all our concerns to the Father through Him. "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:15, 16).

What a tremendous blessing for us is found in this intercessory work of our High Priest!

God has revealed to us this truth that we might glorify Him, being encouraged against all the causes of our own misery and troubles. Many are the sins which cleave to us. Those sins grieve the Holy Spirit, trouble our own consciences, and shame the Holy One and His church. But because we have such a High Priest in heaven, our sins cannot be our ruin. "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1).

Oh, make no mistake. This promise, as with all the promises of Scripture, is particular. He who is the Intercessor for some, will be an Accuser of others. Therein is the necessity of faith. Christ is active in His intercessory work for those who are members of Him by faith.

How sad is the case of those who have no interest in the blood of Christ, but trample it under their feet. Instead of pleading for them, that blood of Christ cries to God against them, as the despisers and abusers of it!

1. *Insight*, October 22, 1990.

But how precious is His intercession on behalf of you who are saints in Christ Jesus.

Christ says to God the Father, "O My Father, give me Thy Spirit, that I may apply the forgiveness of sins to the consciences of Mine elect."

Christ does not need to persuade God. But He understands the need that we have, to be persuaded in our own minds and to hear the testimony of His Spirit with our spirits that we are the children of God. Do you hear that testimony? Are you assured that your sins are forgiven forever? That is the effect of intercessory prayer of Christ on your behalf.

May we, therefore, draw encouragement also in our own prayer life and in our daily walk as Christians. That also is emphasized in Hebrews 10:21-23: "And having an high priest over the whole house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full as-

urance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)."

Our prayers, however weak, when offered in faith, are lifted up to God by Christ, and are purified by His Spirit, that they might be presented to the glory of the blessed triune God. And He answers those prayers with His presence, with the fellowship of His grace, and the assurance worked by His Holy Spirit.

Christ our Intercessor is the Author and Finisher of our faith, ever begging for us new and fresh mercies from heaven.

Our Christian Priesthood

When we understand and confess the perfect priesthood of Christ, the Son of God, then we also will spontaneously know the place

of our own Christian priesthood. Our priesthood is not one of making payment for sin. Christ has made that payment once in full for all God's elect. Our priesthood is enjoyed and experienced in the freedom which we have to serve the living God. When we are partakers of Christ's anointing and beneficiaries of His priestly office, we are compelled by the Spirit within us to present ourselves living sacrifices of thankfulness to God.

What a blessed place we have, by faith in Christ!

When we live by faith, acknowledging what God has given us in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, then we say, "Blessed be God!" We say that as His prophets. But we also confess that as His priests. For that is the living sacrifice of praise we offer to Him, looking forward to the day when we can begin to offer ourselves perfectly, even forevermore. □

Bring the Books

John Calvin on Singing Psalms in Church*

As to public prayers, there are two kinds: the one consists of words alone; the other includes music. And this is no recent invention. For since the very beginning of the church it has been this way, as we may learn from history books. Nor does St. Paul himself speak only of prayer by word of mouth, but also of singing. And in truth, we know from experience that song has a great power and strength to move and

inflame the hearts of men to invoke and praise God with a heart more vehement and ardent. One must always watch lest the song be light and frivolous; rather, it should have weight and majesty, as St. Augustine says. And thus there is a great difference between the music that is made to entertain people at home and at table, and the Psalms which are sung in church, in the presence of God and His angels. Therefore, if any wish rightly to judge the kind of music presented here, we hope he will find it to be holy and pure, seeing that it is simply made in keeping with the edification of which we have spoken, whatever further use it

may be put to. For even in our homes and out of doors let it be a spur to us and a means of praising God and lifting up our hearts to Him, so that we may be consoled by meditating on His virtue, His bounty, His wisdom, and His justice. For this is more necessary than one can ever tell.

Among all the other things that are proper for the recreation of man and for giving him pleasure, music, if not the first, is among the most important; and we must consider it a gift from God expressly made for that purpose. And for this reason we must be all the more careful not to abuse it, for fear of defiling or contaminating it, con-

* Calvin's preface to the Geneva Psalter of 1543.

verting to our damnation what is intended for our profit and salvation. If even for this reason alone, we might well be moved to restrict the use of music to make it serve only what is respectable and never use it for unbridled dissipations or for emasculating ourselves with immoderate pleasure. Nor should it lead us to lasciviousness or shamelessness.

But more than this, there is hardly anything in the world that has greater power to bend the morals of men this way or that, as Plato has wisely observed. And in fact we find from experience that it has an insidious and well-nigh incredible power to move us whither it will. And for this reason we must be all the more diligent to control music in such a way that it will serve us for good and in no way harm us. This is why the early doctors of the church used to complain that the people of their time were addicted to illicit and shameless songs, which they were right to call a mortal, world-corrupting poison of Satan's.

Now in treating music I recognize two parts, to wit, the word, that is the subject and text, and the song, or melody. It is true, as St. Paul says, that all evil words will pervert good morals. But when

melody goes with them, they will pierce the heart much more strongly and enter within. Just as wine is funneled into a barrel, so are venom and corruption distilled to the very depths of the heart by melody.

So what are we to do? We should have songs that are not only upright but holy, that will spur us to pray to God and praise Him, to meditate on His works so as to love Him, to fear Him, to honor Him, and glorify Him. For what St. Augustine said is true, that one can sing nothing worthy of God save what one has received from Him. Wherefore though we look far and wide we will find no better songs nor songs more suitable to that purpose than the Psalms of David, which the Holy Spirit made and imparted to him. Thus, singing them we may be sure that our words come from God just as if He were to sing in us for His own exaltation. Wherefore Chrysostom exhorts men, women, and children alike to get used to singing them, so as through this act of meditation to become as one with the choir of angels.

Then, too, we must keep in mind what St. Paul says, that devotional songs can be sung well

only by the heart. Now the heart implies intelligence, which, says St. Augustine, is the difference between the singing of men and that of birds. For though a linnet, a nightingale, or a parrot sing ever so well, it will be without understanding. Now it is man's gift to be able to sing and to know what it is he is singing. After intelligence, the heart and the emotions must follow, and this can happen only if we have the hymn engraved in our memory so that it will never cease.

And therefore the present book needs little recommendation from me, seeing that in and of itself it possesses its own value and sings its own praise. Only let the world have the good sense henceforth to leave off singing those songs—in part vain and frivolous, in part stupid and dull, in part foul and vile and in consequence evil and destructive—which it has availed itself of up to now, and to use these divine and heavenly canticles with good King David. As for the melody, it has seemed best to moderate it in the way we have done, so as to lend it the gravity and majesty that befits its subject, and as might even be suitable for singing in church, according to what has been said. ■

Basil the Great (c. A.D. 330-c. A.D. 379) on Psalm Singing

When, indeed, the Holy Spirit saw that the human race was guided only with difficulty toward virtue, and that, because of our inclination toward pleasure, we were neglectful of an upright life, what did He do? The delight of melody He mingled with the doctrines so that by the pleasantness and softness of

the sound heard we might receive without perceiving it the benefit of the words, just as wise physicians who, when giving the fastidious rather bitter drugs to drink, frequently smear the cup with honey. Therefore, He devised for us these harmonious melodies of the psalms, that they who are children in age or even those who are youthful in disposition might to all appearances chant but, in reality, become trained in soul. For, never

has any one of the many indifferent persons gone away easily holding in mind either an apostolic or prophetic message, but they do chant the words of the psalms even in the home, and they spread them around in the market place, and if perchance someone becomes exceedingly wrathful, when he begins to be soothed by the psalm, he departs with the wrath of his soul immediately lulled to sleep by means of the melody.

A psalm implies serenity of soul; it is the author of peace, which calms bewildering and seething thoughts. For it softens the wrath of the soul, and what is unbridled it chastens. A psalm forms friendships, unites those separated, conciliates those at enmity. Who, indeed, can still consider him an enemy with whom he has uttered the same prayer to God? So that psalmody, bringing about choral singing, a bond, as it were, toward unity, and joining the people into a harmonious union of one choir, produces also the greatest of blessings, charity. A psalm is a city of refuge from the demons, a means of inducing help from the angels, a weapon in fears by night, a rest from toils by day, a safeguard for infants, an adornment for

those at the height of their vigor, a consolation for the elders, a most fitting ornament for women. It peoples the solitudes; it rids the market place of excesses; it is the elementary exposition of beginners, the improvement of those advancing, the solid support of the perfect, the voice of the church. It brightens the feast days; it creates a sorrow which is in accordance with God. For a psalm calls forth a tear even from a heart of stone. A psalm is the work of angels, a heavenly institution, the spiritual incense.

Oh! the wise invention of the teacher who contrived that while we were singing we should at the same time learn something useful; by this means, too, the teachings are in a certain way impressed

more deeply on our minds. Even a forceful lesson does not always endure, but what enters the mind with joy and pleasure somehow becomes more firmly impressed upon it. What, in fact, can you not learn from the psalms? Can you not learn the grandeur of courage? The exactness of justice? The nobility of self-control? The perfection of prudence? A manner of penance? The measure of patience? And whatever other good things you might mention? Therein is perfect theology, a prediction of the coming of Christ in the flesh, a threat of judgment, a hope of resurrection, a fear of punishment, promises of glory, an unveiling of mysteries; all things, as if in some great public treasury, are stored up in the Book of Psalms. □

Ministering to the Saints

Prof. Robert Decker

The Reconciliation of Excommunicated Sinners

Though it happens only occasionally, it is possible that a person who had been excommunicated from the church repents and desires to be reconciled with the Lord and His church. Article 78 of the *Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* makes provision for this when it states:

Whenever anyone who has been excommunicated desires to become reconciled to the church in the way of repentance, it shall be announced to the congregation, ei-

ther before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, or at some other opportune time, in order that (in as far as no one can mention anything against him to the contrary) he may with profession of his conversion be publicly reinstated, according to the form for that purpose.

Van Dellen and Monsma call attention to a rather serious omission from the English translation of this Article. The original Dutch version of Article 78 reads, "... in order that (in as far as no one can mention anything against him to the contrary) he may with profession of his conversion be publicly reinstated, at the next celebration of the Lord's Supper..."* The words, "at the next celebration of the

Lord's Supper" were omitted. They should have been retained. The announcement of the Form of Readmitting Excommunicated Persons informs the congregation that the consistory intends to loose the excommunicated person from the bond of excommunication (in other words, reinstate the person) "the next time when by the grace of God we celebrate the Supper of the Lord, and receive him again into the communion of the Church...."

* Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary: A Brief Explanation of the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), p. 323.

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It should also be noted in this connection that censure begins with suspension from the Lord's Supper. This being the case, it is fitting that reconciliation take place when the sacrament is celebrated. The reason the phrase was omitted is probably because the first part of Article 78 stipulates that the announcement that an excommunicated person wishes to become reconciled shall be made "either before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, or at some other opportune time...." The "or at some other opportune time" allows for exceptions to the rule that the reconciliation take place before the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The Form of Excommunication speaks of excommunication as "the last remedy." The Church Order likewise calls excommunication "the extreme remedy" (Art. 76). The reason for this is that one of the purposes for which the church applies excommunication is to save the sinner. After all other means have failed, the church hopes and prays that it may please the Lord to use the final and extreme step in the process of discipline to bring the transgressor to sincere repentance before God.

The churches, therefore, welcomed repentant sinners even though such sinners may have been excommunicated. At first consistories and classes regulated the reinstatement of banned members without a regulating rule in the Church Order. It was soon found, however, that uniformity was desirable. Thus Article 78 was formulated and added to the Church Order by the Dutch synod of 1586.

The procedure to be followed for the reconciliation of excommunicated sinners is carefully laid out in the article. Two conditions must be met. First, the one who has been excommunicated must desire to be reconciled to the church. The sinner himself must desire this and make this known to the elders of the church. It must not be some-

one else's desire to which the sinner assents, but it must be his own heartfelt desire and request to be reconciled. Second, the excommunicated one must desire reconciliation "in the way of repentance." The church must be willing to forgive "till seventy times seven," but only and always when the sinner repents. Repentance involves godly sorrow on account of the sin, the desire to be forgiven by the Lord and one's fellow saints, and a leaving of the sin.

Before reconciliation may take place, the elders must be certain that the sinner has sincerely repented. There must be no doubt about this. All reservations must be removed. This does not mean that the elders simply impose a time of probation during which the sinner is given opportunity to demonstrate that he has indeed left the sin, but during which the elders ignore him. This would be wrong indeed! When one who has been excommunicated expresses the desire to be reconciled with the Lord and His church, the elders ought to designate a time of probation, but then work with the person and encourage him and bring him the Word of God which alone can save him.

It ought to be noted that often, when discipline is applied, the sinner will ask for his dismissal papers. Rarely will an impenitent sinner allow the process to be completed with the application of the "last, extreme remedy." When the sinner resigns his membership and is granted dismissal papers he in effect excommunicates himself from the church of Christ. Therefore, when such a one desires to be reconciled with the Lord and His church, this should take place only upon sufficient evidence of sincere repentance. In most instances, if not in all, readmittance of such penitent sinners should take place in public.

When the elders have determined that the repentance of the sinner is genuine, they must take a

decision to reinstate the sinner to the fellowship of the saints in the church. An announcement must be made to the congregation to this effect. This announcement is found at the beginning of the Form of Re-admitting Excommunicated Persons and reads as follows:

Beloved in the Lord, it is known to you, that some time ago our fellow member, ____, was cut off from the church of Christ; we cannot now conceal from you, that he, by the above mentioned remedy, as also by the means of good admonitions and your Christian prayers, is come so far, that he is ashamed of his sins, praying us to be readmitted into the communion of the church....

The announcement continues by informing the congregation that the sinner will be reinstated the next time the Lord's Supper is celebrated. The announcement also admonishes those who have lawful objections to the reconciliation to inform the elders in due time.

The reason why this announcement must be made to the congregation is so that the congregation may give its tacit approbation or approval of the sinner's being reinstated. Because the congregation approved of the excommunication, she must also approve of the readmission. Still more, if reconciliation is to be accomplished, the repentant sinner must be received into the fellowship of the church and restored to the communion of the faithful. The congregation must receive him when he seeks her fellowship once again.

Thus the form asks the penitent to "declare here with all thine heart before God and his church; that thou art sincerely sorry for the sin and stubbornness for which thou hast been justly cut off from the church?" Further, the penitent is asked whether he believes God has forgiven him and whether he truly desires to be readmitted into the church of Christ and whether he promises to live in all godliness

according to the command of God. When the penitent answers to these questions, "Yes, verily," the minister declares him to be "absolved from the bonds of excommunication."

At this point the congregation is exhorted to:

receive this your brother, with hearty affection; be glad that he was dead and is alive, he was lost and is found; rejoice with the angels of heaven, over this sinner who repenteth: count him no longer as a stranger, but as a fel-

low-citizen with the saints, and of the household of God.

The form concludes with a prayer of thanksgiving to our "gracious God and Father."

It is a blessed day indeed for that congregation of Jesus Christ when an excommunicated sinner is thus reconciled with them and the Lord.

It is possible that the person who was excommunicated has moved away from the church which excommunicated him and thus seeks admission into a differ-

ent congregation. This is permissible, but only if such reconciliation takes place in close cooperation with the consistory which excommunicated him, and with its consent.

May God grant in His mercy that the elders and consistories of the Protestant Reformed Churches continue faithfully to exercise the keys of the kingdom of heaven. They must not hesitate to apply discipline when that is called for. Only in this way is the church kept pure, and only in this way is God's name praised. □

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Young Adults Activities

Again this year we pass along our thanks to the Young Adult Society of the Loveland, CO PRC for the fine work they did in serving as hosts for their annual Spring Retreat. This year's retreat was held March 23-26 at Covenant Heights in Estes Park, CO and had for its theme, "Putting on the Whole Armor of God"—Ephesians 6:1-20.

For the most part, all 38 young adults (from 17 of our congregations) arrived the weekend before the retreat and stayed in homes of the members of the congregation. Saturday, many of them went skiing, though some stayed behind to recover from a long car ride. Sunday was busy in worship, ending with a singspiration for all, followed by activities in the church basement for the young adults. Monday brought them together for breakfast at a Loveland restaurant, registration, and the ride to the camp at the foot of Long's Peak, one of the highest mountains in Colorado.

The Young Adults spent the time together enjoying each other's company and showing their desire

for spiritual fellowship and growth. Discussion groups centered in how and when to defend our faith, and debates looked at the questions of Sweepstakes, Drawings, etc., and "Which Do I Sacrifice First, Family or Church?" Reportedly they even managed to sing "How Great Thou Art" at the top of one of the "Twin Sisters" mountain peaks, even though the wind was so strong one could hardly stand up.

Rev. G. VanBaren, Loveland's pastor, spoke about our enemy, the devil, explaining that his attacks are centered on God's Word and God's Cross. Rev. B. Gritters, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, whom I thank for giving me all these details about the retreat, spoke on the battle and the armor God gives us to use. We heartily echo Rev. Gritters' comment that he would encourage all our young adults to start making plans for 1999's retreat. The Lord willing, it will be another great time.

Congregational Activities

From a March 29 bulletin from the First PRC in Holland, MI, we find an update concerning their church building project. On the inside, the drywall has been completed and the ceilings have been sprayed (textured). The interior

walls are also about ready for wallpaper and paint. On the outside, block work has begun.

First is also looking at a couple of changes that they could possibly incorporate when they move, the Lord willing, into their new church home this spring. One would be a change of their evening start time, from 6:30 to 6:00 PM; and the other would be a change in the name for their church, from First PRC of Holland to Holland PRC.

On March 26 the congregation of the Bethel PRC in Itasca, IL met and approved a proposal to begin construction of their own church building. Their council also appointed a committee to investigate various methods of loans, including personal notes. You might also be interested to note that on March 29 Bethel celebrated their ninth anniversary since organization, and, the Lord willing, they could quite possibly celebrate their tenth in their own church home. What a date to remember!

The Choral Society of the Hudsonville, MI PRC presented their annual Spring Concert for their congregation on March 29.

Minister Activities

Rev. B. Gritters has declined the recall he had been considering from the South Holland, IL PRC.

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

Evangelism Activities

Rev. M. DeVries, pastor of the First PRC in Edmonton, Alberta, CN, was able to speak to a recent Senior High Religious Studies Class at Parkland Immanuel Chr. School on the subject of the King James Version of the Bible.

The Evangelism Society of the Randolph, WI PRC recently sponsored their annual Spring Lecture. Rev. A. Spriensma, pastor of the Grandville, MI PRC, spoke on "God's Covenant of Grace: Agreement or Relationship?" Rev. Spriensma spoke from his own per-

sonal experience in coming to a clearer understanding of this truth.

Food For Thought

"Be not wiser than God; train your children as He trains His."

-J.C. Ryle □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands expresses their Christian sympathy to fellow members Jeanne Jabaay, Janine Meelker, and Laurie Jabaay and their families in the death of their mother and grandmother,

MRS. HATTIE VER HEY.

May they find comfort in the words of John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The congregation and council of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church expresses their sincerest sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Roger Veldman and family, in the loss of Mr. Veldman's mother,

MRS. MARTHA VELDMAN.

May our gracious God comfort them by His Word. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, 'Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them' (Revelation 14:13).

Rev. A. Spriensma, Pres.
Mr. David Harbach, clerk

NOTICE!!

The PR Scholarship Committee is offering scholarships for the 1998-1999 school year for students studying for education or the ministry. Please contact Joyce Holstege (616) 662-5018 for application forms and essay topics. Entries are due by June 15th.

CALL TO SYNOD!!

Synod 1997 appointed Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI the calling church for the 1998 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 1998 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 9, 1998 at 9:00 A.M. in the Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 8, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. Koole, president of the 1997 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Harry Langerak, O-356 Begole St. S.W., Grand Rapids, MI, 49544. Phone: (616) 453-7317.

Consistory of
Hope PRC, Walker, MI
Harry Langerak, Clerk.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Immanuel PRC extend their Christian sympathy to Rev. and Mrs. Rodney Miersma, in the death of Rev. Miersma's grandmother, at the age of 99,

HATTIE VERHEY.

May the family find comfort in the words of Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Elder Clayton DeGroot, Vice-pres.
Elder Wilbur Linker, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory and congregation of the Immanuel PRC express their Christian sympathy to Rev. Rodney and Mrs. Sharon Miersma in the death of Sharon's father,

PETER VAN DYKE.

May they experience the grace and mercy of our God, with the words from Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Elder Clayton DeGroot, Vice-pres.
Elder Wilbur Linker, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The consistory of Southeast PRC expresses Christian sympathy to the friends and loved ones of

GERLOF VANDER BAAN,

whom the Lord recently took to glory.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. Dale Kuiper, Pres.
Tim Pipe, Clerk

NOTICE!!

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