Imagine with me a treasury. Many kingdoms had vast treasuries. Rooms were filled with the money and valuables the kingdom had obtained through conquests and taxation. The church has a treasury as well. But this is no ordinary treasury. It is not filled with silver and gold. It has not changed hands as does the treasure of a kingdom when it falls. Rather, it is a treasury that never has stopped growing since the creation of man. Through the ages rooms have been added to accommodate the vast wealth the church has accumulated.

Imagine walking through this treasury. What kinds of things do we see? The first thing we notice even before entering the treasury is the inscription above the main entry door: “I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly” (Gen. 17:2). Continuing through the doorway, we walk down a long hallway. The hallway opens up into a large atrium that is at the very heart of the treasury. From the atrium we can access all the rooms of the treasury. Every room is connected to the atrium. Every room must be connected to the atrium because at the center of the atrium is what connects all the rooms together. All the rooms have it in common. The cross! The architect of this treasury designed it so that no matter which room we are in, we can always look out the door and see the cross standing in the center of the atrium. It’s in view no matter where we are.

Now let’s explore some of the treasure rooms. There are several stories in this treasury, each one built on top of the other as the history of the church unfolded through time. The frame of this great building was always there, it just was not completed yet.
From eternity the architect knew every level and every room that would be fitted to be filled with treasure. Let’s start on the first level of the treasury. Think of it as the foundation of the history to follow. There are many rooms to walk through. The first room we enter contains the creation of Adam and Eve, the first members of the church. We see their fall into sin and God’s clothing their nakedness with coats of skins. Immediately we notice the cross again through the doorway as we realize what those skins point to. As the blood of animals was shed to provide the skins to cover the nakedness of our first parents, so Christ’s blood was shed on the cross to cover our sins. We walk into another room and see Noah and his family aboard the ark, delivered from the wicked world as it was destroyed by God. The church had dwindled down to eight righteous souls, but God preserved his church. Again we look out the door and behold the cross and realize God’s deliverance through the ark as pointing to that cross. We walk into a different room and see Israel in bondage in Egypt and God’s gracious guiding of his people out of that land and delivering them from their enemies through the Red Sea. Again we behold the cross and the deliverance it signifies. We step outside this room and continue to find room after room full of events like these: God preserving his church! We now reach a staircase and climb up it to the next level of the treasury. We enter a room and see the disciples preaching the gospel of salvation in Christ alone. In another room we see Peter laboring with the Jews. In yet another room we see Paul and his work with the Gentiles. We see Augustine and his great conversion from a life of sin. We see Luther and Calvin and their work in the Reformation. We see Ursinus and Olevianus writing the Catechism. We see Guido de Bres and his work on the Belgic Confession. We see the great Synod of Dordrecht with its formulating of the Canons. Then we move closer to home and see our own history with Hoeksema and Ophoff. Throughout this entire level of the treasury we behold rooms of the work of the early church and on through the rest of the New Testament until now. The cross is still in view through it all. This second level of the treasury is still being built. We now return to the atrium. But we are not done yet. Looking up, we realize this treasury has a pinnacle. We see our part as the church in glory, but only faintly, because we are not there yet. We realize that as long as we are “at home in the body” (2 Cor. 5:6) we cannot clearly behold our heavenly home. And so we walk by faith and not by sight.

This treasury is so immense that we cannot possibly take it all in at once. We need to come back again and again to view it. Its vastness almost overwhelms us, but it all makes sense when we step back into the atrium and behold the cross. This treasury is so vast that people throughout all time cannot help but notice it. This treasury is the history of the church. This treasury is our inheritance! The lessons we learn from this treasury are countless.

When we study history, we see two sides involved: God and man. We see God in his infinite wisdom with a plan. We see man, elect or reprobate, directed by the providential hand of God. Man cannot take so much as one step without the appointment of God. Paul describes God and his relationship to man in his sermon on Mars Hill: “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation:…For in him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:24–26, 28). God in his eternal counsel planned what nation would rise up at what time, where it would be located, and what its relationship to its neighbors would be. He planned for certain individuals to be born at certain times within that nation to have influence on events. He also planned the end of many nations. Article 13 of the Belgic Confession addresses God’s control of his creation throughout history: “We believe that the same God, after He had created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will, so that nothing happens in this world without His appointment.”

Throughout all of God’s plan for history he has a goal, namely, the glorification of himself through his son, Jesus Christ. Through the saving work of his Son, he preserved unto himself a church. His church is the golden unbreakable thread he wove through the fabric of history, and his Son is the needle leading his church through it all. Article 13 goes farther and confirms that God uses even the ungodly and their wicked deeds in his sovereign plan, which includes the preservation of his church: “Nevertheless, God
neither is the author of, nor can be charged with, the sins which are committed. For His power and goodness are so great and incomprehensible, that He orders and executes His work in the most excellent and just manner, even then when devils and wicked men act unjustly."

The central aim of God’s plan in history is his glorification of himself through his son Jesus Christ. Christ is at the center of it all. The history of the church will end in this world when Christ comes again on the clouds of glory to judge the wicked and deliver his church militant from this wicked world and bring his church to heaven as the church triumphant. The church will remain in the new heavens and earth into eternity.

All of the history that God ordained from eternity to happen—the glorification of himself through his son and the preservation of his church—is our inheritance. The victories of Israel over their enemies are our inheritance. The defeats suffered by Israel are our inheritance. The great struggles suffered over doctrine over the ages are events that God used to shape and purify his church. These too are our inheritance. The history of his church—a church we belong to—is ours to value. Do we value it? Does church history interest us? Do we really appreciate church history? Do we read about church history? Through reading church history we come to a better understanding of the struggles and battles the church has fought over the years. This in turn will give us a greater appreciation for the church of which we are a part.

Maybe reading church history seems like more of a task to us rather than enjoyment. But have we even tried? Church history isn’t dry. It’s not boring. It describes the origin and development of the many beliefs, practices, and realities—good or bad—that we see today. Many errors found in the church of today are just the same old heresies, just in different clothing. It would be extremely valuable for us to be well-versed in this history so that we are awake and ready to defend.

In our progressive age church history and history in general are devalued greatly. The reigning thought is, forget the past and move forward! Forget history and all the lessons we can take from it. We finally have got it right. We are redefining history. After all the years of the church’s wallowing in controversy over this doctrine or that practice, our generation finally has it right! This is nonsense. Yes, the church must always be reforming. It must constantly be sharpening its understanding of doctrines and events in order to guard from error.

The Lord has given us our portion in the church of all ages. By treasuring the history of this church that has preceded us, we learn to cherish even more our own portion in the church. The history of the church is as that golden thread woven through the fabric of the history of the world with Christ as the needle leading his bride. Just as one pulls the entire thread end to end through the fabric, the thread is the unbroken line of church history that connects us, who are at the end, to the very beginning.

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Editor’s Notes

While Beacon Lights does not publish a special Christmas issue, we cannot allow the holiday to pass completely unnoticed. As we did last year, we are reprinting a Christmas article from the past. This year’s is taken from the December 1941 issue. This makes it the first Christmas article published in the magazine, since Beacon Lights came into existence in January of 1941. The emphasis on true peace is appropriate, since these were the days of World War II. The article was an editorial by Rev. Cornelius Hanko, a minister who served long and faithfully in the churches.

In this issue we say farewell to Chester (Skip) Hunter, who for many years has been the author of the Devotionals rubric. Skip has done an excellent job, as is clear from the popularity of his column. His farewell message appears in this issue. Beacon Lights thanks Skip for his long and faithful service for readers of all ages.

As Skip takes his leave, Beacon Lights welcomes a new Devotional writer. She is Sarah Mowery. Sarah attended Dordt College and is a member
Christian Living

Abraham Kuyper

Implications of Public Confession

VI
REPENTANCE AND TURNING TO GOD

“Repentance...not to be repented of.”
2 Corinthians 7:10

Yes, you must study for confession. But you must also repent and turn to God. How can an unconverted person make a sincere confession of his Lord?

It is unfortunate that Methodism has worked havoc in our Reformed churches in this respect. It was the influence of Methodism, was it not, that in an evil hour led some of our churches to suppose that regeneration and conversion are identical? The implications of that false distinction are these: that the act of God by which regeneration and conversion suddenly and simultaneously occur is experienced by only a numbered few, and is usually experienced by these few at a very advanced age.

Naturally the more thoughtful of those who accepted this notion of the matter felt themselves placed before a choice between two alternatives. Either they could insist upon conversion as a condition for confession, and accordingly refuse to accept into the church those who could not testify that this sudden act of God had accrued to them; or they could accept others also by insisting less rigorously upon “repentance” as an unconditional prerequisite for confession.

Each of these alternatives presented serious difficulties. Suppose they chose the first and granted admission to those only who in the Methodist fashion could speak of a sudden, striking, right-about-face conversion. That would mean that very few individuals could be accepted, and that all instruction in the Christian religion was really superfluous. Suppose that they chose the other alternative, and as a general rule accepted all those who had reached the age of eighteen or twenty. Conversion then would no longer be a prerequisite for confession. “Making confession” would become a kind of examination in what had been learned, would have no real spiritual significance, and would have no import for the future life.

In favor of saving the status of education in religious things, they chose the second alternative, with the result that the “making of confession” was emasculated of its very essence.

This precarious condition can be avoided and remedied only by a reaffirmation of Reformed principles. Persons of truly Reformed persuasion acknowledge and confess that neither parental admonishment nor the preaching of the word, nor the instruction of catechism or Sunday school classes, can avail anything against an unregenerated person who, because he is unregenerated, lives in a state of elemental enmity against his God. Reformed people acknowledge and confess that if such means of grace are to be effective, an act of God must take place within the soul beforehand. In other words, they maintain that conversion and repentance are
not identical, and that regeneration, an act of God accomplished in the soul, must take place before that soul can repent and turn to God.

Conversion can be expected only from a person who has been regenerated, and can be expected from him only as a fulfillment of regeneration. That is the Reformed view of the matter.

Almost half of the children who are baptized die before they have reached the years of discretion. Perhaps no one would care to maintain that all who die in infancy are lost. In view of that, and because entrance into the kingdom of God without regeneration is inconceivable, the Reformed churches confess that this act of God as a general rule accrues to the elect person while he is an infant. They do not mean to suggest that because regeneration occurs at an early age, the seed then planted immediately bursts into blossom. Sometimes that seed lies dormant until the person has reached an advanced age. Nevertheless, the glorious assumption that that secret regeneration does take place is the sole and conclusive ground upon which the Reformed churches base their demand that every baptized person must repent and turn to God if he would sit at the Lord’s holy table. If they accepted that the baptized are not reborn, they could not insist upon this prerequisite, for only regeneration enables a sinner to repent and turn to God.

If baptism therefore is to be a baptism of repentance, the church must cling to the conception of regeneration. That conception gives you a founded hope in God when it pleases him to take your children from you in their infancy. It gives you a sharp goad with which relentlessly to urge your children to study God’s word. It prevents you from ascribing such early manifestations of piety as you sometimes observe in your children to their natural guilelessness, but compels you to think of these as the effects of their regeneration. It makes the desire in you eventually to lead your children to the holy supper a holy desire. Above all, the conception of regeneration gives you the freedom and the right always to insist that your children shall repent and turn to God.

In the age of spiritual prosperity our fathers clung to this conception. Because of it, God’s Zion flourished, and thousands upon thousands of souls enjoyed a more beautiful assurance of faith. Hence no one in those days spoke of “being received” by the church; no one thought that a kind of examination in what had been learned had to be successfully passed. They came as soon as possible to confess the Christian religion and to take their places with other believers at the Lord’s table.

But things have changed for the worse since then. Churches insist upon study, study, and more study. Then they demand that an examination be passed in the matter studied. After that, confirmation takes place. Sometimes it seems that then one can attend the holy supper or one can ignore it. Irrespective, however, of whether one attends it or not, of conversion as a prerequisite for confession many seldom think.

Perhaps they do ponder about it sometimes, but in a way that conceives of conversion as a kind of final appeal that must be stressed during the six weeks immediately preceding the time those who desire to confess hope to make their confession. Those six weeks are marked by special drill. Catechism classes meet somewhat longer; a certain party or entertainment must be foregone; the minister speaks somewhat more earnestly; those who plan to confess study harder than usual and conversion is held up as the objective of it all.

We know what frequently happens then. The minister dared not insist too rigorously upon conversion. To use a figure, the whole plant was not rooted in the confession of the fact of regeneration. Words of appealing admonishment had to suffice. But as the parable of the sower has it, much of the seed of that admonishment is snatched up by birds. In other cases that seed grows up luxuriously and rank, and withers away, that is, it causes an emotional upheaval that soon subsides. In the case of others the imparted plea is smothered all too soon by the many attractions life offers. The result is that we seldom hear a man testify that his conversion occurred at the time he was received or at the time of his public confession. It happens, but rarely.

The evils inherent in such assumptions and in such practices can be avoided only by decisively and periodically holding up conversion before a child as his obligation. A child must study before he reaches an age of maturity; that study ought not to be postponed until about three weeks before he hopes to make his confession. They will also admit that much confession should antedate the event of public confession before the congregation. Naturally, they see a person who lives in his daily conduct as though he were ashamed of his Jesus.
They see that this person makes his confession and thereafter continues in the same disgraceful conduct he practiced before. Seeing that, they realize that a constant confession is necessary and that confession should begin at childhood. But just as surely as study and confession should begin early, so surely should conversion come to expression early.

You may not let your children grow up without ever causing them to think of the obligation of conversion. You may not let them suppose that conversion is something that gradually happens to older people. If you do, you share the guilt when your children confess publicly without ever previously having thought of the responsibility for conversion.

Every Christian child must be educated to the conviction that he must repent and turn to God. He should be appropriately educated to that in a manner outlined in Lord’s Day 33 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Conversion, it should be remembered, means turning about in one’s way, so that one no longer pursues a way that leads away from God, but one that leads to God and to his Christ. In demanding conversion from a child one demands that he have a sense of direction in his life, a habit of struggling against the sins of childhood, and a simple, childlike knowledge of the fact that he can enjoy a precious peace and happiness in his God.

Any question as to how far one has proceeded upon that new way is beside the point. True conversion is a life-long process. Consequently there is only one relevant question: In which direction are you traveling—to Christ, or away from him? Remember that he who has not repented and turned to Christ cannot and may not make his confession.
change.” From then on I was on my guard. But he already had contact with Schilder’s theology. I got some of the men in the church that had come to a men’s society to discuss this, because we were just totally different. Finally I said to him in the society, “If you continue that way, John, the promise of God is not Yea and Amen in Christ.”

They still held John in high regard in Doon, but I was having trouble with him and he knew it. We did a lot of talking. Finally he took the call [details unknown]. He said to me, “What should I do with the call?” “Well,” I said, “that’s not for me to decide either, but if you want to look at it from your point of view, I think you’d better go because you’re going to…what I meant to say was you’re going to be in trouble.” (Laughter) So he left.

He came back once about two years later, and he preached on that trouble with Rehoboam: “Back to your tents, O Israel. We have no part in David.” He made that the occasion. He never mentioned that we had no part in David. That’s finally then when Jake Van Den Top and others finally woke up. But it took about two years after he was gone before they actually woke up to what was going on. This was going on a long time already before Schilder came around.

Then we were without a minister for quite a while. MHH: This would have been in the late 1940s then?
JB: Yeah. About the time of Vander Breggen. Then your Dad [H. C. Hoeksema] was asked to come and preach.
MHH: I’m not familiar with that history, so you need to explain that.
JB: Well, we were without a minister. Doon was without a minister quite often. Your Dad was helping his father [Herman Hoeksema] because he was getting to the point where he could hardly handle it. I don’t know how long he was there. Was it about two years?
MHH: Well, he [HH] had had a stroke.
JB: I know, but I mean that your Dad was helping in the seminary.
MHH: My understanding is that he stayed over one extra year both to do some further study and to do some teaching.
JB: Old John Kuiper was in the consistory. He didn’t like Hoeksema to start with, which was kind of general anyway with a lot of people. At any rate, he was at synod and the synod decided that it was not good that he was in the seminary. So they put him out.

They weren’t going to give him the OK to stay there. I remember John Kuiper was standing in the back of the shop [JB’s machine shop] and he was almost jumping around for glee. He said, “Oh, boy. That was the best thing that ever happened. They put him out.” I said, “Now what’s the reason for that?” “Well, he’s too smart for his own good.” He was real happy.

I don’t think it was over two weeks later and we had to have a minister, or at least try. Whoever was in control of it in Michigan, I don’t know. But anyway, there comes your father. He was just a young-looking man at that time, too. He came through down Main Street and saw our name on the shop: Blankespoor. He stopped in the shop and he wanted to know where John Kuiper lived. I told him. And he left. Lou, my brother-in-law, who was working for me, asked, “Who was that man?” Just a small town like that—we knew everybody around, of course. Well, I said, “That’s our minister for tomorrow.” He said, “That kid!” (Laughter) I never forgot that.

He had a call from Oskaloosa at the same time. But we got to talking one night. I had asked him to come over for supper. We were sitting outside of the shop there in Doon. At that time that letter was in the Standard Bearer about Kok and De Jong. They said that all people didn’t think alike as Hoeksema did, or something to that effect. I got to talking to him. I thought that was awful. He finally opened up, but he was very careful. When he first came to me, he would first find out what people thought before he ever opened his mouth. Then we really got to discussing that. From then on we were pretty much together. Some people accuse me that I was being a “preacher’s man.” That was not true! Because I don’t believe in that “man” business. I don’t. It became very evident what was coming. Finally we had Schilder on the pulpit and all that. That was after your Dad had left.

MHH: After his temporary assignment was finished?
JB: No, he took the call. I was afraid that he was going to go to Oskaloosa, but he didn’t. He took the call to Doon, which was a life-saver for Doon.
MHH: So, did Doon call him while he was serving, or right after he went back to Grand Rapids?
JB: Yeah, nearly right after.
MHH: OK. And he did take the call to Doon?
JB: Oh, yeah. I looked it up the other day…
MHH: 1949.
JB: He was there several years.
MHH: Yeah, till 1955, I believe.
JB: The split was kind of going on—the church divisions. I remember that he was more in Washington [the reference is to the church in Lynden, WA] than in Hull and Edgerton and in Doon there for quite a while. They worked him to death. Really. I don’t know what they call that anymore—on the train you could have a little room…
MHH: Oh, yeah, a sleeper berth—a Pullman.
JB: Yeah. And then he had a little room there for a typewriter. He worked about day and night there for awhile. Hull split then, and they met in Doon on Sundays for quite a while. That wasn’t so good either because there weren’t too many from Hull that came. It was split about down the middle. Edgerton went about down the middle. Then they had the court trial in Edgerton—in Pipestone. And it was a mess. Really! As far as Doon was concerned, it was not too bad. There were three families that left. One was Sam VanKetel because he was really a big friend of John Kuiper. He really wanted to be in the consistory, but he never was. And a good thing he wasn’t because if anything was decided in the consistory it would be downtown the next morning. That was the kind of guy he was. He always had his mouth open when he shouldn’t have. And the other one was John Kuiper and his son.

And he [HCH] said from the pulpit, “If you don’t agree with this doctrine, just come to the consistory. We’ll give you your papers.” He said that right from the pulpit. I don’t remember what text it was on. And that is exactly what happened. John Kuiper, at the next meeting of the consistory, got his papers.
MHH: Really?
JB: Oh yeah, yeah. He went to Hull. He was a big friend of Rev. DeJong.

John wouldn’t shake hands with your Dad. He said to him at that time, “You better take care of that, John.” John thought that he was just going to be able to say that and that would be the end of that. But that got to be a consistory matter and we had to go see John. I said, “I can tell you a story, John. There was a time when HH was so down and out he said he couldn’t preach any more. So Verhil had to go see him. And he said to Verhil, “I think I’m going to try to get in some smaller congregation and try to do more work there.” “Well,” says Verhil, “you go ahead and get a big railroad spike tomorrow, and you take that spike and you nail the door shut of the church. (Laughter) That’s what it took. I said to John, “That’s the way it is. If you don’t want to have any doctrine proclaimed anymore, you might just as well quit.” Well, he didn’t think so.

Finally it got so bad that Mrs. Kuiper said to me that they were having trouble. They thought they had better go to another church because catechism wasn’t working anymore for the children and so on and so forth. But finally it all got patched up somehow or another, and they stayed in the church.

Jake Mantel wanted to be an elder. The trouble was that the same ones were almost always getting in. It was just a rotation—one year and then back in again. I remember Jake came into the shop one time and I said, “Well, can I do something for you, Jake?” “Yeah, you don’t have to come by me on house visitation now on Wednesday night.” I said, “Oh, OK. What’s the trouble?” “Well, you’ve been to the fair.” Then he says, “Are you going to tell the minister?” I said, “No, it’s your problem, not mine. I have no problem with that.” “All right, I’ll do that.” He gets out of the shop and goes to your Dad and talks there. Pretty soon, here he comes back and apologizes. He just stepped out of the door and the phone rang. It was your Dad laughing his head off.
MHH: He said he thought it was wrong of you to attend a county fair?
JB: Yeah.
MHH: That’s interesting.
JB: That was kind of the idea, though, with a lot of people in those days. If they have a celebration of the town, you mightn’t go downtown where the celebration was.
MHH: Really?
JB: Yeah, that was quite strong in the West.
RBH: What was the reasoning for that?
JB: Well, the sin in the thing. That’s the world out there in the street. Anyway, I said to Ed Van Egdom (me and Ed were the only two elders). “You just about had to go for me to Mantel’s on family visitation.” He said, “How come?” “Well, he said I was to the fair and I mightn’t come.” And Ed, he started a-laughing and said, “I was there the day before you were.” (Laughter)

[I have redacted several narratives of a personal nature that are interesting but inappropriate in this context.]
MHH: During those years of the “trouble of 1953,” do you think that there was an element of personalities and personal animosities that entered in, in addition to the doctrinal issues?
JB: Oh, yeah, there was some of that, too.
MHH: In what sense? Who was involved?
JB: Well, people took the opinion (I suppose even my mother was a little bit guilty of that too) because your grandpa was really quite determined. They agreed that the impression sometimes was that he was a little bit like a pope. It always kind of burns me up. If you start that, Mark, where are you going to end? If you don’t want to listen to the doctrine, you have nothing left. It wouldn’t be hard for them to find something wrong with me personally. That’s no problem at all. I’ll readily admit that I make a lot of mistakes. Oh, yeah, that thing was very strong: hate Hoeksema. I even mentioned that to your father one time. “Yeah,” he said, “my name is Hoeksema.” That’s all he said.
MHH: Was there a lot of personal animosity in Northwest Iowa between congregations and between ministers or officebearers at the time of the split?
JB: Yeah. The whole West was really pretty much against HCH. That became so evident. You could talk about that for hours, but what value does it have, you know? Finally you get to the point that, where do you quit?
MHH: But, yet, Doon was the only congregation that held together?
JB: And if it hadn’t been for HCH coming, we wouldn’t have done that, either.
MHH: Really?
JB: No. They were all so set on John Blankespoor that they would have gone along with him.
MHH: Do you feel that the character and emphasis of the preaching has changed over the years or is it pretty much the same, or how do you view that in terms of the history that you have lived and compare it to today’s situation?
JB: Well, it’s the same old story which has happened, I would say, in all of church history. Your father had a lecture on the Secession of 1834. He mentions that there is no church that stays very strong after they’ve hit the peak. I think that’s what has happened in the Protestant Reformed Churches. They really want more responsibility. We’re going way too strong on responsibility.

Federation Board Update
Matt De Boer

Greetings from the Federation Board. As a Federation Board it is our duty to report to you what we have been up to and what we are seeking to accomplish in the upcoming year.

At the recent young people’s convention hosted by Redlands Protestant Reformed Church, a meeting was held to elect new members to the Young People’s Federation Board. Two delegates from each of the Protestant Reformed congregations voted to select five new members to the Federation Board. Those new members have joined the current members in the work of serving the young people’s societies of the Protestant Reformed Churches as a whole. The five new members are Stefan Bodbyl (Vice-President), Nicole Kamps (Vice-Secretary), Joel Rau (Vice-Treasurer), Mr. Brad Bruinsma (Youth Coordinator), and Professor Russell Dykstra (Spiritual Advisor). The returning members are Matt De Boer (President), Lynette Bleyenberg (Secretary), Brad Ophoff (Treasurer), Lydia Koole (Librarian), and Rev. William Langerak (Spiritual Advisor). Thanks to retired members, Brian Feenstra, Erika Schipper, Joe Holstege, Rev. Carl Haak, and Dan Van Uffelen for all of their hard work in the past two years!

The Federation Board will be working with the PR young people’s societies in order to help them grow in faith and doctrine. Presently the Federation Board is working with Southeast PRC in the planning of the 2014 young people’s convention. The convention is dear to the hearts of the Federation Board as this
is an event at which the youth of the PR churches can develop in their understanding of God’s word. One project the Federation Board is about to undertake involves the future of the Protestant Reformed conventions. Members of the Federation Board are working on a project with the steering committee of Southeast PR Church, as well as members of past steering committees to make the planning and hosting of future conventions a lighter burden on host congregations. The Federation Board is also planning the Thanksgiving and Easter mass meetings, as well as the pre-convention singspiration.

We also seek to help our young people grow in faith and understanding of the doctrines of God’s word through our oversight of the young people’s magazine, Beacon Lights. We are thankful to our editor-in-chief, Mark Hoeksema, and to all the members of the Beacon Lights staff for their hard work. Please send the Federation Board or Beacon Lights any suggestions to help us improve this magazine!

We have also recently begun to oversee the work of the Young Calvinists group. This group was established in an effort further to unite the young people’s societies of the PR churches, to encourage fellowship between our young peoples and young adults societies, and to create a greater enthusiasm for our Protestant Reformed heritage among young people. This group, currently led by Alex Thompson and Brad Bruinsma, is presently working to arrange exciting activities for the young people and young adults of the denomination and to publish edifying articles on the Young Calvinists blog.

Young people, parents, and grandparents, continue to pray for us as we begin this year of work as the Federation Board. Pray that God will give us the wisdom and strength to perform our duties for the good of the young people, and that he will bless this work.

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Christmas Special
Beacon Lights
December 8 Read Revelation 10

Thoughout the revelation of Christ to John at times there are interludes between certain events. In this chapter we have one such interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet. During this interlude John hears and sees an angel bringing another message about what is to come. Some of what John hears he is not allowed to write. The church does not and may not know all that is to come to pass before the final days, which is the sounding of the seventh trumpet. What we must do is watch and pray. In our watching we will see sure signs of Christ’s return, and then we must pray, “Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly.” Sing Psalter 277.

December 9 Read Revelation 11

Along with watching and praying, the church must be busy witnessing to the nations the wonder of grace that is ours through Christ. Even as Noah was preaching before the flood that destroyed the first creation, we too must be sounding abroad about what is to come. This witnessing comes on many levels. As individuals we must witness to those whom God has placed in our path. As local congregations we must be evangelizing the area in which we have been planted. As churches we must send out missionaries bringing the gospel to the nations. This will not be easy and may bring persecution and even death upon us, but it has a glorious end, as is described after the sounding of the seventh trumpet. Sing Psalter 183.

December 10 Read Revelation 12

Since Satan’s fall there has been a war on earth between the forces of God and the forces of Satan. We have seen that this is not a dualistic struggle is which the outcome is in question, but rather is the unfolding of God’s plan for the salvation of his church and his ultimate glory. But Satan has warred against the church, is warring against the church, and will war until the final “It is finished.” is uttered. As we see in this chapter, the battle is fierce, and the church must fight on every side. But we have the confidence that our Redeemer is on our side and will ultimately deliver us. As we wait for his return, let us don with confidence the armor of salvation and fight the fight of faith every day. Sing Psalter 34.

December 11 Read Revelation 13

Without going into all the symbolism contained in this chapter, we see the identification of antichrist and those who work on his behalf. If this were the only chapter in Revelation that we read of this or if this is the only place in the whole of scripture where this is mentioned, we would have no hope and would surrender to this mighty force. But before we despair we come to the last verse that reminds us that the beast is only a created being like man. He, even when most powerful, cannot prevail against almighty God and the Lamb who was slain for his people. We need not lose hope; we need not despair. We only need to look to our God, who will prevail and deliver us to glory. Sing Psalter 35.

December 12 Read Revelation 14

After two chapters describing the woes that will be the church’s, John is now given to see visions of victory. First he sees Christ with the entire church enthroned on Mt. Zion. Then he hears and sees judgment pronounced on Babylon, the picture of Satan’s kingdom. It is not just the kingdom that is destroyed, but also all those who have taken the mark of the beast. Finally John and the church are given to see that there will be a final victory for God’s people and a judgment on the wicked. We may be comforted by the visions of this chapter as they show to us our final deliverance from all those who do and will oppress us. May we continue to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.” Sing Psalter 36.

December 13 Read Revelation 15

Once again the revelation brings us close to the end of time. In this short chapter John is permitted to see the seven angels who are given seven vials or bowls that contain the wrath of God over various aspects of the creation. The church is permitted to see this judgment on wicked men who are determined for destruction. The church’s reaction is not of joy over the wicked’s defeat, but rather joy over the glory of God’s name. Again we are reminded of the Lord’s prayer, and especially the last part of that prayer. May our glorying ever be in God and in him alone. Sing Psalter 300.

December 14 Read Revelation 16

Think back to the theme of the book of Isaiah. That theme was “redeemed with judgment.” In this chapter we have the culmination of that theme. Just as Israel’s enemies were judged by God’s judgments upon them, so the church of all ages will be redeemed by God’s judgments poured out on the wicked by the angels with

Watching Daily
At My Gates

Chester Hunter
the seven vials. There are three significant words in this chapter. Those words are, “It is done.” Just as Jesus uttered similar words on the cross, so God’s people will hear those words, and the beginning of everlasting glory will occur. Yes, the last days will bring persecution, suffering, and maybe even death. But those last days will bring victory for the people of God, a victory wrought by Christ on the cross. Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 318.

December 15 Read Revelation 17

John and we are given a fuller description of the destruction that will be wrought upon anticrhist and his hosts. This is not to fill us with glee, but to show us what will happen to those who devote themselves to iniquity. Knowing the history of the world will help us see what is pictured in this chapter. Knowing that history and the chapter’s interpretation will sober us to watch and pray, looking for the return of the bridegroom. Knowing that history will help us realize that the things prophesied in this book will come to pass, and that we may have to suffer even as we await the return of our savior and the victory he will bring with him. Watch and pray, people of God. Sing Psalter 379.

December 16 Read Revelation 18

The Babylon of Daniel’s day was a great and wicked city. It was used by God for two reasons. First, it was God’s instrument to bring chastisement upon wicked Judea. Second, it is a picture of the wicked world in which we find ourselves today. Yes, it is a world of commercial worth, but it is a world of great wickedness. Look at the entertainment business of today. Are you enticed by it? If you are, heed the word of the voice from heaven saying, “Come out of it.” This world in all its supposed glory and wickedness is doomed to fall. In its fall will come the victory of the church of Christ. Look up, people of God, and be not deceived by what is around you. Sing Psalter 200.

December 17 Read Revelation 19

From the destruction of Babylon, John is shown the glory that will belong to the Lamb of God. We will be part of that glory because we are the bride of the Lamb. The culmination of the destruction of this wicked world will be the uniting of the church triumphant with its bridegroom. This is all part of God’s glory. All of his counsel will be brought together in that feast held in heaven. Our goal is not to make our mark in this world. That mark will pass away. Our ultimate goal is joining the throng that will sing praises to our God. For that we practice today. For that we long and hope. Sing Psalter 261.

December 18 Read Revelation 20

Once again we are directed to examine events that have happened, are happening, and will happen. Christ’s victory on the cross has bound Satan for a complete period of time. It is not a literal thousand-year period as some claim, but it is a complete period whose end will be shortly before Christ returns. This is the amillennial view of eschatology. We know the day will come when Satan will cast all his fury upon the church. That time will be short, and then the end will come. Satan will be relegated to hell forever and the saints will join together in eternal praise in heaven. Is this your desire? Is this for what you pray when you say “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done”? Christ is coming; are we watching and praying? Sing Psalter 183.

December 19 Read Revelation 21

After Satan, his hosts, and all his followers are cast into hell, the church is brought together as the glorious body she is. The bride will meet the Lamb and the two will live together in everlasting bliss in heaven. This is the culmination of the last verse of Psalm 23. This is the final fulfillment of Jesus’ shout of victory on the cross; “It is finished.” This is the result of the suffering of the people of God face and have faced on earth. Now the prayers of the martyrs are answered. Now the church will truly see that her life on this earth is but a journey, a pilgrimage, with its end elsewhere. May we anxiously await the day that is the realization of God’s aim for creation. Sing Psalter 124.

December 20 Read Revelation 22

Jesus’ revelation to John is finished with this chapter. That it is Jesus’ revelation is shown in the names Alpha and Omega. After giving to John a final look into the glory that awaits the bride, John, the churches in Asia, and the church of all ages are reminded that scripture is the word of God and may not be changed or interpreted according to man’s whim. The fact that man may not add or subtract anything to or from the book shows to us that it is totally God’s word. May we ever cherish this word, which shows to us God’s way of salvation for the elect. May we ever recite the words, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” and may we know that we “will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” Sing Psalter 55.

December 21 Read Psalm 119:1–16

The psalmist, thought by many to be David, writes about God’s law. As you read through this acrostic, you find many nuggets of gold thought about the word of God. He starts out by saying that those who keep the law of God are blessed or happy. Just as a fish is happy only in the water, so the child of God is happy only when he is walking in the law of his God. In the second section we find that it is not just the mature Christian who benefits in keeping the law, it is the young as well. Young people, is walking in God’s way your delight? Do you commit his word to your heart that you might not sin against him? All of us need to meditate on God’s law, for in it we will have gladness of heart. Sing Psalters 321 and 322.

December 22 Read Psalm 119:17–24

The first two verses of this section should be parts of our daily morning prayers. Only when God is gracious to a person will that person find joy and peace in his life. We can ask for this grace only by grace, as it is given only to
those who have been elected by grace. Only when our eyes are opened by grace can we see the beauty that is found in the word of God. We need that word to guide us through our journey on this earth because we are strangers and pilgrims here. May we have the zeal to walk according to God’s law all through our lives. Sing Psalter 323.

December 23 Read Psalm 119:25–32

There are times in our lives in which we despair. These feelings can be caused by many things, whether those causes are spiritual, emotional, physical, or from outside forces. The child of God must have one response. We must turn to God first and foremost. Though we may need a medical doctor for some of these causes, we still must see that our hope comes from God. When we understand God’s law and his way for us, then we will see that he and his works are most wondrous. When we face such trials and afflictions, we must look outward and upward, for our help comes from Jehovah who made heaven and earth. Sing Psalter 324.

December 24 Read Psalm 119:33–48

After we look to God for guidance in our troubles, we see that in his word is the way that we must go. Notice that the psalmist once more implores God to help him, and that imploring is for help in understanding the law of God. We cannot keep our Bibles closed and expect peace in our ways. Daily devotions and frequent study of the scriptures give us what we need throughout our lives. Walking in God’s law gives us life, just as a fish is at liberty swimming in its watery home. Much study of God’s word will give us the confidence to speak to those who may be afflicting us, or it may give us confidence to speak to anyone who needs to hear of God and his goodness. People of God, immerse yourselves in the scriptures, and in doing so you will find your way. Sing Psalters 235 and 326.

December 25 Read Psalm 119:49–56

God’s people endure affliction in their lives. For some it occurs very often; for others, it may be for a short, intense time. If David is the psalmist, we can see him writing these words. Consider David’s history: he knew affliction. Even in his affliction, David knew where to turn—to the word of God. Is that where you go for comfort, people of God? Do you open your Bibles after a short prayer to God that he will reveal to you words of comfort that can be found in no other place? Do you have sleepless nights? Do you consider God’s word? Whatever afflictions we may have, we can have the assurance scripture will speak to us words of truth. Sing Psalter 327.

December 26 Read Psalm 119:57–64

As we continue on our journey through this gem of scripture, we can see the psalmist’s spiritual progression. He has reached a point where he has a renewed confidence in God’s law. In whatever circumstance he found himself, he turned to God’s law, and there he found the instruction he needed to face life’s obstacles. He saw that the earth was full of God’s mercies. Like Jeremiah he could confess that God’s mercies were new every morning. He could arise at midnight and give praise to God, no matter what the situation may have been. Is this our realization? Constant and repeated journeys through God’s word will provide to us this comfort and assurance. Sing Psalter 328.

December 27 Read Psalm 119:65–80

God has made us and has ordained for us all circumstances in our lives. When we confess that God is our creator, we realize that we are nothing of ourselves. This is against all present thought of today’s worldly philosophy. When we confess that God brings into our lives all that happens to us, we realize that “all things work together for good to them that love God.” Understanding these two truths makes us turn to the word of God for comfort in whatever may afflict us. As we hear what the Spirit says to us, we gain a comfort that far exceeds anything the world has to offer. Seek God, read his word, and be comforted. Sing Psalter 329 and 330.

December 28 Read Psalm 119:81–88

It is easy to see that the psalmist has profited from a life of affliction at the hands of others. While we would never desire such a life, we can see how God does use it for our profit. Just as an injured muscle is repaired through proper physical therapy, so our souls can be repaired through the therapy of the word of God. This alone should send us to our Bibles often. This alone should make us never let it grow dusty on our shelves. When we have become strong in the word of God, we will quickly flee to it at all times. Let us open our Bibles often each day, knowing that in it we will find help in our times of need. Sing Psalter 331.

December 29 Read Psalm 119:89–96

God’s word is everlasting; of that the Christian should have no doubt. Because his word is everlasting, we can rest assured that he will be faithful to us, even as he has been faithful to past generations. God’s faithfulness to Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, Daniel, and to many others is ours as well. As we read this psalm and all other scripture, we cannot but be impressed with this fact. Nothing in history can change it, because history is God’s. As we live our lives, having a firm hold on God’s commandments will guide us through whatever way he leads us. Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 332.

December 30 Read Psalm 119:97–112

The first verses of each of these sections of this Psalm are probably two of the most familiar ones to God’s people. Read them again. Do we love God’s law as the psalmist did? Is it our meditation all the day? In this world’s busy life sadly it is sometimes easy to not meditate on God’s law. We might read it “quick a minute,” but then do we meditate on it? We must, because it is the only light on our dark and winding pathway in this life. It takes time to understand how to make the light shine. It is important that children hide God’s word in their hearts, because
only then will it be a lamp to their feet as life progresses. What a treasure God’s word is to us. Let us meditate on it often so that it will shine brightly upon life’s pathway. Sing Psalters 333 and 334.

**December 31 Read Psalm 119:113–120**

In this portion of the psalm the writer states his thesis in the first verse. He then goes on to describe the struggles the righteous have with the wicked in this world. There is one constant throughout this struggle. That constant is the word of God. Do you have that constant in your life? Does the Bible remain an integral part in the activities of your day? We must turn to God’s word early in the morning, throughout the day, and as we end that day. Only then will we find confidence in our battles against sin, Satan, and his hosts. Being armed with the sword of the Spirit is a necessity in our lives. Sing Psalter 335.

**January 1 Read Psalm 119:121–128**

The first half of this section describes the covenantal relationship that the child of God has with his God. In that relationship he is God’s servant. But the covenant is more than just a cold, businesslike relationship; it is a relationship built upon the unchangeableness of God’s word. In that word God declares that he has made us his friend-servant. We sing in that old hymn, “What a friend we have in Jesus.” On this basis we can say with the psalmist, “It is time for thee to work.” We can cast all of our burdens upon our maker because we can have the assurance that he cares for us. We can be “careful for nothing” because Jehovah is at hand. Let us love God’s word and hate every false way. Sing Psalter 336.

**January 2 Read Psalm 119:129–136**

There are three emotions in this section of the psalm. First, we see the longing the psalmist has for God’s word. Like the psalmist in Psalm 42, the writer pants after God’s word. He sees in it the solace for all his troubles. Second, we see the sorrow he has for the desecration of God’s name. We see this so vividly stated in the last verse of the section. Finally, we see his trust in that word for his deliverance. His prayer is that God order his way. He does not trust in himself for help but places all of his trust in God. Do we share these emotions. Do we long for that word? We can do this no matter what situation faces us in this life. Sing Psalter 337.

**January 3 Read Psalm 119:137–144**

Count the number of times the words righteous or righteousness are used in this section of Psalm 119. The writer obviously does not see that righteousness coming from himself, but he sees that it is to be found only in God and in his word. This was the experience of Martin Luther as he searched the scriptures to find peace in his life. When he discovered the gem, “The just shall live by faith,” he also found that man’s righteousness is not of himself, but only is from God through his Son who died that we may live. While the writer of the psalm did not have as full a revelation as Luther did, he understood that to be self-righteous would not profit him. Only the truth found in God’s word would serve for his everlasting righteousness. Sing Psalter 338.

**January 4 Read Psalm 119:145–160**

Once again we read the prayers of one of God’s people crying out for help from those who oppose him. His prayers rise up to God at all times of the day and night. In the morning he awakes with prayers for deliverance. In the night when he cannot sleep, he finds solace in prayer. Why is this true? It is true because God’s word is truth. He can depend on the promises found in it. They will never fail. What is our situation, people of God of this era? Do we go to God in prayer often? While we do not have the set times of prayer as Israel of old did, we can, must, and should go to him in prayer. We can do this in the confidence of faith shown to us in God’s word. We can do this no matter what situation faces us in this life. Sing Psalters 339 and 340.

**January 5 Read Psalm 119:161–168**

This section seems to form a summary of the ones before it. Notice, however, the number the psalmist puts on the times of prayer. Not three, as was commanded by God’s law, but seven, the number of the covenant. The writer feels the friendship and fellowship that is accorded to him by his God. He knows that he has a friend who will not fail in his time of need. Notice that his prayer also looks ahead to salvation. While the psalm is not as rich in the Messianic promises as other portions of scripture are, there is definitely a true knowledge of salvation. Salvation is of God alone and not through man’s work. Notice also in this section the positive aspects of the psalmist’s praying. Only in God can that confidence shine forth. Follow him, people of God, and he will lead you to salvation. Sing Psalter 341.

**January 6 Read Psalm 119:169–176**

Throughout scripture God’s people are compared to sheep with Christ as our shepherd. Think of Psalm 23; think of John 10 and other places in the gospels where the figure is used. Sheep need a shepherd; they cannot get along without one. The psalmist in this final prayer first prays for understanding of God’s law. Then he prays for deliverance, because as a sheep he has become lost from that word. In the final verse of this section and psalm he realizes that the only way of deliverance is that God brings him back. May we ever seek deliverance from the evils that surround us. May we ever seek to find our help from God, our only deliverer. May we cherish God’s word every day of our lives. Sing Psalter 342.
Dear Beacon Lights readers,

Near the end of 1992, I was approached by members of the Beacon Lights staff requesting that I consider writing a series of devotionals for the magazine. I believe the editor at that time was Peter Faber. I prepared several devotionals for their consideration and presented them to two staff members during the teachers’ convention that was held in Grand Rapids that year. The staff accepted the format, which is similar to the one used today, and asked me to have a month’s worth ready for the January 1993 issue.

Except for several hiatuses I have been writing these devotionals since then. In the early years I would pick texts for the days of the week, as I would use a calendar to know when the devotional would run. In those early issues I picked texts from all over the Bible, thinking to make sure that the whole of scripture was used. I remember a man from Doon saying that I had him looking up texts all over the place. In those early editions I had picked many numbers as well. Another reader commented that there were times his family would just read them, as the tunes were unfamiliar.

Later I began series writing. I did a series on the Lord’s prayer, the ten commandments, the beatitudes and others. Devotionals were written using the texts of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt. Of course during the Christian holidays devotionals were written which were applicable to Christmas, Easter, and the like. I also remember using the Psalter as the basis of a series, though I had help with that one.

As I visited other churches, I would be approached by members thanking me for my work; it was gratifying to know that there were indeed readers of those devotionals. I was happy not for my sake, but rather that our covenant God was using me for the edification of his people.

A few years ago I had again taken a break, but when my daughter went to college, I realized that writing her a devotional each morning would benefit both of us. These then were used to fill the pages of the Beacon Lights. After she graduated, I wondered what next to use as the basis for the devotionals.

I decided to work through the Bible, much as it would be read at the table. I covered a chapter a day, understanding that a family might have to use the same devotional twice for longer chapters. I began that series in 2011, and, now, just over three years later, it is finished.

As I came to the end of the New Testament, I also decided that I should put this work aside as well. It is not that there is no more material. I have only scratched the surface of God’s word. I believe that it is time for me to set it aside. I do have an idea for another writer. It has come to my mind that a chronological approach to the Scriptures would be very worthwhile.

As I ended Revelation, I did not have a month’s worth of material for publication. While casting about for an idea, I came upon the idea of using Psalm 119. Like the psalmist, I have a high regard for God’s revelation to us in his word. It is my prayer that this is the regard that the Beacon Lights readers have for the Bible. We need that regard, for on the pages of Holy Writ is found the way of our salvation.

As I end this work, it is my prayer that it was done only to God’s glory. I hope that the solas of the reformation guided my work. Sola Scriptura, Sola Christo, Sola Gratia, Sola Deo Gloria.

In His service,

Chester (Skip) Hunter

P.S. Thank you to my wife Barb who has proofread almost every one of the pages that I have submitted over the past 21 years.
Peace on Earth!

In the midst of wars and rumors of wars.

We can again expect as another Christmas season approaches that there will be an almost universal clamor for peace. Even while nations are locked in a malicious struggle for supremacy, and while others are feverishly preparing to enter the conflict at a moment’s notice, the prince of peace will be eulogized from many a platform and through many a loudspeaker. People will go on dreaming of a “war to end all war,” and of a universal peace in which they will no longer use their aluminum for bombing planes and their steel for armament, but will “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks.” They will tell you that peace can be acquired once for all by downing all dictatorial powers and restoring the freedom of democracy.

Be not deceived. Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes in divers places, famines, and pestilences. These are but the beginning of sorrows. The church will be persecuted and hated by all nations for Christ’s sake. The apostasy will be great, and antichrist will arise. All these things must come to pass, for the end is not yet.

And yet in the midst of all that, the angels’ song re-echoes: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace in the people of his good pleasure.”

Peace through conflict.

God has put enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

Already the head of the serpent lies broken and bleeding under the heel of the captain of our salvation, who entered into our conflict, bore the burden of our guilt in the anguish of his soul in a pain-racked body, broke the power of our arch-enemy, the devil, and marched triumphantly through death, hell, and the grave, to be seated on the right hand of power in the highest heavens.

I know that my Redeemer liveth.

Already the Spirit of the risen Lord has raised us out of death into life, set his throne in our hearts, giving us peace with God through the blood of the cross, and daily equipping us to the battle of faith against all the powers of death that assail us.

Oh, why do the nations rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

He shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. The Lord will hold them in derision.

The trumpet will sound, and the dead shall arise incorruptible. Death shall be swallowed up in victory in the new heavens and the new earth.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace.

Peace on earth, now and forever.

Peace, even in the face of warfare.

Whether you are a young man or a young woman at home, moving about in troublous times, in a world of unrest and confusion, full of doubts and fears, or whether you are a soldier in the training camp, threatened with the possibility of being called to the field of battle, that peace is your only vanguard.

Let not your heart be troubled.

Others may speak of a broken morale, may whisper of cowardly desertion, in sheer desperation may approach or even go over the brink of suicide, or sell their souls to dissipation and carnal lusts.

Be not disturbed, neither be dismayed. Peace Christ leaves with you, his peace he gives to you. A peace with God that passes all understanding, that assures us that all is well and that we may sagely commit our way into his keeping.

Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

For unto you is born the Savior, who is Christ, the Lord. Glad tidings of great joy.

Glory to God in the highest!

Peace on earth!

Rev. Hanko was a minister in the Protestant Reformed Churches from 1929 to 1977.
As the twenty-seventh century of His-story opens, the tribes of Israel have settled into their appointed places in the land of Canaan. They have been delivered from the bondage of Egypt, organized as a nation, and given the promised land. If this were an ordinary earthly story, we might expect them now to live happily ever after; but this is no ordinary history, and the real significance has only just begun. These people are the church, the beloved people of God. Canaan is still a picture of eternal life with God. The full revelation of deliverance from the cruel bondage of sin in Christ is still over a thousand years away. The church is, as it were, still in school being trained and prepared for eternal life with God. They have been introduced to the whole plan of God regarding deliverance from sin and now begin to live a life of gratitude and fellowship with God. They have graduated from elementary school and are moving on to high school, but they have not yet arrived at the real thing. They will now have a taste of freedom and independence, but will quickly experience that there is much more to learn about the power of sin and the value of the offices of prophet, priest, and king to bring true peace and joy to the covenant life of the church with God.

The period of the judges lasts about 350 years and therefore will be covered in three articles, each in connection with one of the three offices through which the church experiences covenant fellowship with God. In this article as we look at the first hundred years of judges under Othniel and Ehud, I want to show how the history exposes the need for God to feed his people with his word through the office of prophets who speak the word of God. In the following article I hope to show how this history exposes the need for the office of priest, and in the final article on this period of the judges we will see how this history exposes the need for the office of king. While this division is somewhat arbitrary in that there is nothing historical in the first hundred years that points directly to the office of prophet in distinction from the rest of the history of the judges, the history of the judges as a whole clearly exposes the value of these God-ordained offices for the peace and joy of the church. This history reveals this need for these three offices by demonstrating what life is like without having these offices firmly established in the life of the church.

The dominant characteristic in the church of this period of time is captured in the phrase “every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” Doing what you want sounds like freedom, but the reality is that the church over and over again finds herself deeper and deeper in the despair of sin. Freedom
to do what one wants is not the key to peace and joy. By nature our will is in bondage to sin and does not choose for the glory of God. Real peace and joy comes in the way of knowing God’s will and living in obedience to him. Real peace and joy comes only through the regenerating, powerful work of God’s grace in the hearts of his people. He has created us for a purpose, and when we are ignorant of this purpose and how to attain it, life is shallow and empty. By nature we are not interested in listening to God to learn his will, and what we may have learned quickly fades away. The church as a whole and its individual members find peace when the knowledge of God is alive in the mind and soul. This peace and joy God provides through the means of the faithful prophet who preaches the gospel of God.

Forgetting and a lack of knowledge is exactly what happened with Israel in Canaan. Shortly after the people began to settle into their new life in this promised land, Christ himself, the Word of God and chief prophet, came in the form of the angel of Jehovah ( Judges 2:1) and warned the people that of themselves, they were not going to discover God’s will and live accordingly. The people understood what the angel was saying, and they cried because they were beginning to see how life on this earth involved a battle of the old man of sin and the new man in Christ. Given a little earthly peace, we are inclined to become spiritually lazy. Parents slack off on teaching their children, and the children are pulled in a thousand different directions with the distractions and pleasures of this world. God says of the church at this time, “and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the L ORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the L ORD, and served Baalim” (Judges 2:10–11). They forgot Jehovah their God (3:7). We see then that God must give specific stories and details about life within the church during these years of painful spiritual growth. Today we hear on the news dreadful stories of famine, poverty, violence, murder, and sexual perversion, but there really is nothing new under the sun. These same things were happening even within Israel and demonstrate the corruption and misery that quickly develops when the people are not being fed with the word of God. One shocking news story that aroused the whole nation to action was the news that the body parts of a woman had been sent from a man in Gibeah to all the tribes in Israel! Behind this story were even more heinous scandals of prostitution, violence, homosexuality, and murder. We read the details in the last three chapter of Judges, and we read a summary of the story in Judges 20: 4–6: “And the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said, I came into Gibeah that belongeth to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge. And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house round about upon me by night, and thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead. And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel.” The tribe of Benjamin was unwilling to discipline these crimes and the ensuing civil war nearly wiped out the tribe of Benjamin.

Othniel was a nephew of Caleb, who was one of the faithful spies. He was from the tribe of Judah and was actively involved in leading his tribe in the conquest of cities in Canaan (1:13). His name means “lion of God” and pointed ahead to Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. As a judge and picture of Christ he was given the authority and power to deliver Israel from this enemy. After delivering them from the power of the enemy, he had the authority to instruct Israel to worship God alone and enforce that instruction. It is especially in this role as instructor that we see the value of the office of prophet because Israel was again brought to a knowledge of God and enjoyed rest for forty years.

The chapters toward the end of the book of Judges give specific stories and details about life within the church during these years of painful spiritual growth. Today we hear on the news dreadful stories of famine, poverty, violence, murder, and sexual perversion, but there really is nothing new under the sun. These same things were happening even within Israel and demonstrate the corruption and misery that quickly develops when the people are not being fed with the word of God. One shocking news story that aroused the whole nation to action was the news that the body parts of a woman had been sent from a man in Gibeah to all the tribes in Israel! Behind this story were even more heinous scandals of prostitution, violence, homosexuality, and murder. We read the details in the last three chapter of Judges, and we read a summary of the story in Judges 20: 4–6: “And the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said, I came into Gibeah that belongeth to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge. And the men of Gibeah rose against me, and beset the house round about upon me by night, and thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead. And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel.” The tribe of Benjamin was unwilling to discipline these crimes and the ensuing civil war nearly wiped out the tribe of Benjamin.
Another example of life apart from the pure preaching of God’s word is the story of Ruth. The story of Ruth begins with the words “Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.” We don’t know exactly when this famine occurred, but the famine may very well have been the result of the oppression of one of the nations God sent to chastise Israel. We bring up this story of Ruth at this time because it illustrates the misery brought on by belittling the office of prophet and ignoring the word of God. God was speaking through the famine, and they disregarded it, as well as the whole picture of the promised land as their place in heaven where they would experience the peace and blessedness of fellowship with God.

Only after Naomi returned to Israel (in every earthly way very miserable and bitter), did she begin to taste the sweet mercies of covenant fellowship with God. The office of prophet was alive and well within the sphere of Boaz and his household. Here was true peace and rest. The words of Boaz brought comfort and hope to Ruth and Naomi, and God used this office of prophet to reveal that he was working in Israel, and even through the enemy, Moab, to bring the promised Messiah who would deliver Israel from the bondage of sin and speak the words of eternal life. The story of Ruth also reveals God’s plan to strengthen the offices of prophet, priest, and especially king in the line of Ruth.

Ruth was from Moab, and we conclude this article with the second judge, Ehud, who delivered Israel from the oppression of Eglon, king of Moab. Eglon had succeeded in taking control of Jericho, from which he was able to force the church to bring their offerings to him instead of to God. This oppression went on for eighteen years before they cried out to God for deliverance. “But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab” (Judges 3:15). It is striking to note that Ehud was from the tribe of Benjamin, which had nearly been destroyed by the other tribes because it had been unwilling to discipline the crime of the men from Gibeon. The Benjamites were known for skill in war, and in particular their skill in using both hands with accuracy and power. During the civil war, it was noted in chapter 20:16 “Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth and not miss.” In this judge the office of king is more prominent in the fact that he leads and fights for the people and encourages them to the battle. When he himself comes personally to Eglon to deliver the present, he speaks as a prophet who brings the word of God when he told Eglon, “I have a message from God unto thee” (3:20). It was a message of judgment on those who hate God and oppress the church.

The rest of the judges who came after Ehud in the next two hundred years also brought the word of God to the people. Notable among them is Deborah, who is called a prophetess and a judge (4:4). Because the church had grown apostate and the men were neglecting their leadership roles in the church, God under these special circumstances appointed Deborah to judge and bring God’s word to the people. Through her God called Barak to fight the enemy, and together they sang the song of praise to God in Judges 5, which proclaimed the word of God in song even as the Psalms do.

The office of prophet was not brought to its full force and action as an office of service in the old testament church until the end of the period of judges, when Samuel was prepared by God to fill this role. Professor Engelsma writes in Unfolding Covenant History volume 5: “The period of the judges shows that the office of the prophet is necessary for the life of the covenant. God’s purpose with the history of the judges is to introduce this office into the nation with the call of Samuel” (p. 5). Let us give thanks to God for his covenant faithfulness as he continues to provide faithful ministers of his word and elders to feed the flock. May each of us be diligent as prophets learning and speaking this word.

John is a member of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa, and a former editor of Beacon Lights.
Question for Schuyler

What is the proper Christian response to suicide? Can there be any hope of salvation for someone in the church who takes their own life?

It is always a tragedy when a person takes his own life. Generally speaking, suicides die “having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12b), and the Bible takes a dim view of suicide. The only suicides in the Bible were obvious unbelievers and reprobates (Saul, Ahithophel, Zimri, and Judas Iscariot). In addition, the Heidelberg Catechism, in its treatment of the Sixth Commandment, warns, “that I hurt not myself, nor willfully expose myself to any danger” (Q&A 105). The very name suicide reveals its sinfulness. Literally, suicide is self-murder. We should therefore do everything in our power to avoid suicide, and to support a member of the church who shares with us that he is tempted to the sin of suicide. A suicidal person is in serious danger of destroying himself, and all suicidal ideation should be treated with the utmost seriousness. If a person confides suicidal thoughts with you, never dismiss these as a joke, but urge him to seek help immediately. Call a pastor, a medical professional, and do it without delay!

In a way, the question itself is not helpful. What we think of the salvation or otherwise of a suicide is not the issue. The issue, the urgent issue, is to prevent suicide, and to support the devastated family and friends who are left behind after the tragic deed is done. Family members who are affected by a suicide of a loved one are often plagued by guilt or even depression themselves. Could I have done more to prevent this? Could I have seen the warning signs? Is it somehow my fault? Was I not supportive, loving, and caring enough? Why did he feel he had to leave us this way? Let such a person speak, and say little. Be a shoulder to cry on; weep with those who weep; be supportive in practical ways; and pray that God, the father of mercies, might comfort the bereaved (2 Cor. 1:3–4).

Suicide is a mental issue. A person who commits suicide is not in his right mind, because we are naturally inclined to self-preservation. A suicidal person, usually because of some great tragedy in his life, or because of the struggle with depression, feels that life is no longer worth living. Life has become meaningless, dark, painful, and suicide is a real temptation. The devil, who is a murderer, urges the despairing soul to suicide. At bottom suicide is an act of unbelief, an act of despair. This does not mean that all suicides are unbelievers. A believer can be and often is guilty of unbelief. Unbelief, including suicidal thoughts and tendencies, and even suicide itself, is a sin, and all of us are prone to sin.

The question the reader asks is this: is suicide the unforgivable sin? Is the act of suicide a sin that God cannot or will not forgive? Does a Christian who dies at his own hand forfeit salvation, or is the act of suicide proof that the professing church member was never a child of God? These questions are not easy to answer. Neither Luther or Calvin, for example, dared go so far as to teach that all suicides perish everlastingly, although both Luther and Calvin recognized suicide as an abominable crime against God.

One argument made by some is that the suicide dies without opportunity for repentance. While this is true, it does not prove the case, and, indeed, proves too much. Consider the young person who, after an argument with his parents (a sin against the fifth commandment), is killed in a car accident. He did not have an opportunity to repent, and may have died harboring bitterness against his parents. Who would preach him into hell, especially if his rudeness was uncharacteristic of him, and in all other respects he was a good, confessing member of the church?

If the suicide was a confessing member of the church, and one of a generally godly character, but who struggled with depression, and tragically yielded to the temptation to self-murder, we do not give up hope concerning him. That does not mean that we condone suicide or in any way mitigate its seriousness, but we do not add extra sorrow to the family.
left behind. It does no one any good to speculate.

One final word: if anyone reading this feels
tempted by suicide, seek help immediately. You are
not alone. Your family, friends, and pastor will help
you. Do not keep your suicidal thoughts to yourself.
Suicide is a great sin, and with all sins we must resist
the temptation. Suicide will bring dishonor upon the
name of Christ; suicide will hurt your family and
friends; suicide is a sin against faith, hope and love;
suicide is a deeply selfish act. Suicide is never the
answer. Seek comfort in the gospel of Christ, who
gave his life for us, not in an act of suicide, but in
an act of voluntary sacrifice, that we might have life
and have it more abundantly.

What is the Christian response to suicide? One
word: compassion.

Where We Stand

Rev. Nathan Langerak

Providence (1):
The Idea of Providence

The doctrine of providence is the confession
of the church. In the Old Testament Enoch
preached it when he preached that all things
culminate in the Lord’s coming. Noah lived by faith
in it and built an ark to the saving of his house. Abra-
ham, Isaac, and Jacob believed that God suffered no
man to do them harm. The doctrine of providence
stands as the centerpiece of the book of Job. The
Psalms ring from beginning to end with the truth of
God’s providence as his intimate and minute care of
his world that he made and his control of every detail
in it. Jesus taught his disciples God’s providence
when he taught them that God numbers the hairs
of their head, clothes the lilies of the field, feeds the
ravens, and cares much more for his people. At the
time of the apostles in the midst of great tribulation
the church confessed concerning the cross of Jesus
Christ that Pontius Pilate, Herod, and the leaders of
the people did whatsoever God’s hand and counsel
determined to be done.

With the church of all ages, the Reformed creeds
clearly teach God’s providence, outstandingly in the
Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s days one, nine, and
ten, and in the Belgic Confession article 13. The
Reformed faith stands as the true development of
the Christian faith in its confession of the doctrine
of providence.

The confession of providence is an implication
of the confession of the doctrine of God. The Hei-
delberg Catechism, following the Apostle’s Creed,
teaches this doctrine in the church’s confession of
the fatherhood of the Triune God. When the church
confessed, “I believe in God the Father, Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,” she confessed as a
distinct part of God’s fatherhood not only that the
Triune God created the world in six days, as he said
in his word, but that he also upholds and governs
the same by his almighty power.

The doctrine of providence is also a confession
of faith. The Dutch theologian G. C. Berkhouwer
wrote of a crisis in the doctrine of providence. His
analysis of the cause of this crisis is that in the past
unscientific man believed the doctrine more readily,
but today science has eroded faith in the doctrine.
That analysis ignores the reality that man by nature
never believes God’s providence. Man, whether an-
cient or modern, whether scientific or superstitious,
does not believe God’s providence because he does
not believe in God through Jesus Christ. The doctrine
of providence is a confession of faith that follows
from faith’s knowledge of God, who is our Father
in Christ. Apart from the gift of faith no one does
or can believe and confess the providence of God.

It is faith in God’s fatherhood that is likewise the
essence of providence. A human may bring forth and
become a father and not care for his child, but it is
inconceivable that God as Father would bring forth
and not care for his creation. It is this care of God
as Father for the world that he made that the church
intended to express by the word providence. Faith is
the certain knowledge of and hearty confidence in that care of God not only for others, but for me also.

But then to deny that God made the world and that he likewise upholds and governs that world in every detail is also to attempt to overthrow the whole doctrine of God. This is what the Presbyterian theologian B. B. Warfield taught when he said that the confession of providence belongs to a “consistent, Christian theism.” From that point of view the doctrine of providence is simple. It is the implication of the truth that God is God. Since he is God and he created the world, then all things that happen in the world happen according to his appointment and government. To confess that God is God, and to say that I believe in the God and Father of Jesus Christ is to say that I believe in this God of providence.

The word providence means to see in advance, and thus it comes to mean to provide for some foreseen event. If we take the word in its original meaning it is, then, wholly unsatisfactory to describe the Christian and Reformed doctrine of providence. Providence is not God’s provision for his creation in light of what God sees coming, as we might see that winter is coming and prepare some canned goods.

Providence is a theological term that has been adapted by the Christian church to describe a certain doctrine regardless of the literal or original meaning of the term. The doctrinal content from scripture must define the term.

By providence we mean the omnipotent and everywhere present power of God whereby he upholds and governs all things according to his eternal counsel.

Providence is God’s upholding power, or better, God as he upholds. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 10 says “as it were by his hand.” By that word hand the Heidelberg Catechism is describing God’s providence. So we may think of the upholding power of providence this way: just as a hand holds an object up, so does the almighty and everywhere present power of God keep all things in their existence.

Providence is also God’s governing power. That government is to be conceived as God’s controlling the entire existence of the creature and of the whole of creation to bring the creature and the whole of creation to the goal he appointed for them in his counsel. He steers and directs all things by his power.

These two, the upholding and governing powers of providence, cannot be separated from God’s eternal counsel of providence. Providence is God’s decree for all things according to which also he upholds and governs them. God knows all things that have been, are, and will be, not because he sees in advance, but because he decreed those things to be.

This decree includes the goal of all things. The scripture speaks specifically of God’s purpose in his decree as the glory of his name in Jesus Christ:

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him (Eph. 1:9–10).

God’s purpose is not then the building of a good, earthly, godly culture, but Christ, and only Christ. In Christ God glorifies himself.

These three aspects of providence may never be separated from one another. God upholds purposefully and God governs what he upholds sovereignly. His providence is no mere aimless power, but also directs all to the goal he appointed for them, whether for the individual creature or for the whole cosmos.

With these three aspects of providence we see the richness of God’s upholding power.

It is not static. His upholding includes his government so that there is constant change in creation as creation is moved toward its appointed goal. To be creature is to change. Only God stays the same in his being and in all his perfections.

The evolutionist presents change in creation as a great problem for God’s providence. It is not a problem for the believer who knows the power of God. He can change the world very rapidly. In about a year and ten days he destroyed the world that then was and brought forth the world that now is and that is reserved for a fiery judgment. There can be change in animals and in the environment. There is development even at the microscopic level. There are cycles, rhythms, and flux in creation. Of some of these the Bible speaks explicitly—the water cycle, the cycle of the seasons, the planting and harvesting cycle, and many more. None of that is excluded from the providence of God. Change is part of God’s providence as he hurries all things to his goal.

We can describe what providence is more precisely as God’s word. The Reformed were in the habit of speaking of providence as continual creation. That term is not a good one. It does not distinguish properly between the works of creation and providence.
It is also imprecise and prone to abuse. The better Reformed theologians who used it recognized this and virtually qualified it out of existence.

Though we reject the term, however, we should do justice to the reason that the Reformed spoke of continual creation. They used that term originally to emphasize the closeness of the work of creation and providence. They are inseparable. Furthermore, the Reformed used that term to teach that the power of creation, the word of God, is the very same power of providence, the continual utterance of that word. In the beginning God spoke the creatures into their existence by his word so that by the word of the Lord were the heavens made and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.

That word is the essence of each creature, and continually speaking that word, God upholds that creature in its being and moves that creature toward its goal. By his word God made all things and by the continual utterance of that word all things continue to exist and are brought to their appointed goal.

This is the teaching of Hebrews 1:2–3, where speaking of the word made flesh, the Bible says “and upholding all things by the word of his power.” God’s providence is the word upholding all things by the word of his power where word means the continual utterance of his mouth. This is the teaching of Psalm 29 regarding certain particular things in the world that all are done by his voice:

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters...The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars... The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire... The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve.

It is by his voice that Jehovah works in creation. If that applies to these things, some of them grand, such as the dividing of the flames, and some of them mundane, such as the calving of the hinds, then that is how he works in all his creation.

This view of providence honors Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh, by whom and for whom God made all things. The wind and waves that were told to be still heard a familiar voice, and it is not strange that Jesus Christ now controls and directs all things.

This view of providence also makes it personal. Providence is not a bare fate, an extension or effulgence of God, or an impersonal power of God’s. Providence is God himself as he upholds and governs all things. Providence is God’s own intimate and minute care of the world in which he upholds that world and directs that world and all that is in it according to his eternal purpose in Jesus Christ to glorify that world in a new heaven and new earth for the manifestation of his glory and wonderful grace. The church never intended by this to teach that God is a father to all, or that he has a love toward all, but rather that the world is his, brought forth by his act of creation as he destined that world to be the eternal home of his people in Jesus Christ for his glory. For their sakes God cares for his world and directs it to that goal. To speak in a dim analogy: God’s care of the world is like a man who owns a vast estate of thousands of acres, worked by many hired men. He provides for all their tools and wages, and the will of the landlord is done by all, but everything serves his household and family and he does everything on the estate for them.

The creation as God made it in the beginning was not the purpose of God, and God never intended that Adam should continue, but that Jesus Christ be revealed and the creation perfected in him. That world as it is destined to be perfected in Christ Jesus is the object of his love, and for it he personally cares.

Of this care of his creation the Bible speaks vividly. He gathers the clouds and rides on them like a chariot, sends out his lightning, brings night and day, and covers the ground with water and snow. He gives the peacock his beauty, the ostrich her speed and folly, the horse his strength, and the eagle her home in the rocks. He hunts prey for the lions, provides for the beasts, feeds the ravens, commands the eagle to fly, and knows where the wild goats calve and helps them in their labor.

He clothes the lilies so that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them.

He numbers of the hairs of our head, and not one falls to the ground except by his will.

He controls the devil, raises up kings and hews them down again, stops the mouths of lions, overthrows plots against his people, and has the heathen and their counsels against him in derision.

In all this he has a paternal, particular, and gracious care toward his people, to whom he gives his daily bread and for whom in this life he averts all evil or turns it to their profit.

In short, God’s providence extends over all. To that we turn next time.

Rev. Langerak is pastor of Crete Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois.
BAPTISMS
“But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children.” Psalm 103:17
The sacrament of holy baptism was administered to:
Penny Elsbeth, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Gise & Jennifer Van Baren—Crete, IL
Gia Blair, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Ethan Lanting—Crete, IL
Myles John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jesse Lanting—Crete, IL
Casen Joshua, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joshua & Carrie Meulenberg—Grace, MI
Natalie Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Cheri VanderVeen—Grace, MI
Charlie Reid, son of Mr. & Mrs. Scott & Leigh Kooyenga—Grace, MI
Brock Alan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Laura Boddy—Grandville, MI
Kenzie Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kyle & Sarah Kooyenga—Holland, MI
Lynzie Madeline, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Vanessa Span—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Evan John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Steven Tolsma—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Clara Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Rob Span—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN
Kaden Lee, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brent & Michelle Kuiper—Providence, MI
Lily Anne, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. John & Anna Heyboer—Providence, MI
Benjamin James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Philip & Marie Hopkins—Redlands, CA
Alex David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Darin & Amy Gritters—Redlands, CA
Mason Cody, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brandon & Breanna Feenstra—Redlands, CA
Sydney Kate, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Todd & Deanna Ferguson—Redlands, CA
Harlow David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan & Jessica Hiemstra—Southwest, MI
Bartholomew Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nathan & Nicole Price—Southwest, MI

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH
“In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” Proverbs 3:6
Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:
Holly Hunderman—Byron Center, MI
Joshua Ningerink—Byron Center, MI
Alyssa Poortinga—Crete, IL
Ellen Mancusi—Crete, IL
Sean Ferguson—Edmonton, CAN
Kristi Tolsma—Edmonton, CAN
Keagan Flikkema—First, MI
Matthew DeYoung, Hannah Spriensma, Jacob Start, Nicole Van Dyke, Alexa Engelsma and David Wassink—Georgetown, MI
Kristen Pawloski—Holland, MI
Nathan Doezema—Hope, MI
Daniel Baker—Hull, IA
Kathleen Delong—Peace, IL

MARRIAGES
“For this God is our God forever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.” Psalm 48:14
Mr. Marcus Andringa & Miss Paige Decker—Hull, IA

Just Dad

Many people are familiar with the public persona of Herman Hoeksema. As one of the leading theologians of the twentieth century, a seminary professor, the pastor of a large congregation, and a prolific writer, he was well-known in ecclesiastical circles, as well as in the world in general. But to his family, he was “Just Dad.” This anecdotal biography written by his youngest child records many stories about him, some perhaps familiar but others never before told.

This small paperback will make a great Christmas gift!
The Stubborn Sheep

One dark night the stubborn sheep decided he didn’t want to do what the shepherd told him to do anymore. So, the stubborn sheep crawled under the fence and started running away from the pasture. He could hear the shepherd calling him, but the stubborn sheep kept running.

The ground under the stubborn sheep’s hooves became rocky and sharp. He stumbled over the rocks, twisting his legs painfully. He scraped his knees and whimpered because it hurt. Out of the corner of his eye, the stubborn sheep saw his shepherd standing in the distance beside the edge of a large cliff. He could hear the shepherd calling him, but the stubborn sheep kept running.

The stubborn sheep ran into a forest, dark and scary. The trees thrashed him with their branches. He tripped over sticks. In the distance a wolf began howling. Several more wolves joined the first wolf, howling their hunger at the sky. The stubborn sheep cried in fear, dashing as fast as he could through the forest. He spotted his shepherd out of the corner of his eye. He could hear the shepherd calling him, but the stubborn sheep kept running.

The stubborn sheep ran into a meadow that was covered in thorny briars. The thorns stabbed at his legs and face. The brambles clawed and tore at his fleece. He bleated at the pain. One big bush wrapped its branches around him. The thorns tangled in his fleece. He flailed and wiggled, but he was stuck. No matter what he did, he could not get himself free. He could hear the shepherd calling him, and the stubborn sheep couldn’t keep running.

The stubborn sheep slumped. He was exhausted. He couldn’t fight the thorns anymore. He bleated, calling for his shepherd to help him.

Instantly, the shepherd was at his side. “My foolish, stubborn sheep. You will always hurt yourself when you try to run. But I will never leave you even when you run away. I stood between you and the cliffs so that you wouldn’t fall when the ground became rocky. I stood between you and the wolves so that you wouldn’t get hurt when they chased you.

I am here to free you when you cannot free yourself. I will never leave you even when you are stubborn because you are my sheep.”

The shepherd tenderly peeled away the thorns, cutting away the fleece when necessary to take away the burden. The shepherd gently picked up the humble sheep and carried him home.

Questions to think about:
1. Are you ever stubborn like the stubborn sheep?
2. Read Luke 15: 3–7, Isaiah 53:6, and Psalm 23 by yourself or with your parents. How are God’s people like sheep? And Jesus like our shepherd?

The stubborn sheep runs away from his pasture. Where does he run?
“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:” 1 Peter 5:8

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