Beacon Lights

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Hopeful Strangers and Sojourners

In previous editorials we have looked at who strangers and sojourners are; we have seen that as they live in the world they are guided by God's providence; and we have shown that in the biblical figure of strangers and sojourners there are two ways and two gates.

Strangers and sojourners are hopeful or hoping strangers and sojourners. More than anything else they are those who hope. Hope is their salient characteristic. If you ask, as we are doing, what a stranger and sojourner looks like, the answer is that they are those who hope. Above everything else they are hopers (if I may use a word that isn't in the dictionary).

Hope is characteristic of our everyday lives. We use the word *hope* frequently in our conversation, both as a noun and as a verb. However, we do not use the term in quite the same way that the Bible does. Our use of the term usually indicates that something is possible, but maybe not probable, and surely not something that is certain. For example, we may say, "I hope I get an A on my biology test," when we have a sneaking suspicion that a C is much more likely. We mean that we would like to receive an A, but that this is doubtful. Or we may say, "If I ask the cute girl who always smiles at me for a date, I hope she accepts," we mean that she may say no, and we don't want to get turned down. So we hope, but we don't know.

These examples demonstrate two aspects of hope. One is desire. We want the A on the biology test, and we want the girl to accept a date. The other aspect is that of the future. While we may want the A and the date, we don't know if we will be successful in either instance. Why not? Because we are dealing with the future, and the future is by definition

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unknown and uncertain.

The biblical idea of hope is a bit different. It implies the elements of desire and of the future in the same way as our common use does, as demonstrated by the examples. However, in the scriptural idea of hope there is a third aspect, that of certainty. We must have clearly in our minds this threefold concept as it relates to our lives as strangers and sojourners.

First, hope always has to do with the future. It is obvious that hope is not concerned with the past, because the past is not unknown, but known, and it is gone. Nor is hope concerned with the present, for also the present is known. To continue the use of the examples, when you have already received a C on the biology test, it makes no sense to hope for an A, and when the girl has accepted a date, it is unnecessary to hope that she will. So it is with the pilgrim's life. In Romans 8 the apostle Paul speaks of our future redemption. The idea of the future receives his emphasis as he describes that we, together with the whole creation, are waiting for and looking forward to the redemption of our bodies, which will take place in the future. In verse 24 he sums up this idea by saying that we are saved by hope. Then he says this: "But hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" When the future becomes a present reality, hope for the future is no longer necessary.

As strangers and sojourners we are traveling the narrow way that leads to the strait gate, and the strait gate opens into heaven. The goal of our lives is not the present world, but the eternal inheritance God has prepared for us. Clearly we have not yet reached our goal. If we have, there is no longer any point in hoping, as Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:7: "For we walk by faith, not by sight." Scripture everywhere associates hope with various aspects of the future. In Hebrews 3:6, Hebrews 6:11, and 1 Peter 1:13 we read of hoping "to the end." Titus 1:2 and Titus 3:7 both speak of the hope "of eternal life," and in Titus 2:13 Paul connects hope with the appearing of Christ. Examples could be multiplied, but from these passages it is clear that our hope is concerned with the future. Implied is the question that you, young people, must face: For what do you hope? What is your goal—this world, or the world to come?

Second, hope implies a longing for its fulfillment. We hope for something that we very much want, something desirable to us. If you do not much care whether or not you get an A on the biology test, you have no desire, and you will be content with a C. If it does not matter to you if the attractive girl accepts a date, she is not the object of your desire, and you do not have a genuine hope of getting to know her.

Applied to our spiritual lives, hope means that we very much want the fulfillment of our life's journey. We want to enter the narrow gate that leads to eternal life, which is so wonderful that scripture describes it as something that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor. 2:9). This desire determines that path of life that we walk—the narrow and difficult way that alone leads to the object of our hope, since the way and the end cannot be separated. We therefore face the question, What is our desire? What do we want? If our longing is for this world with all that it includes, we will choose the wide and easy way that leads to destruction, and we will live accordingly. If we choose the narrow path, we will also live accordingly. What way are you walking? Do we want the pleasures and treasures of this world, which will give temporary satisfaction, but will soon pass away, or do we want the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fades not away (1 Pet. 1:4)?

Third, hope is certainty. Here the biblical idea of hope differs from our use of the term. When we say, "I hope," we indicate that we are uncertain. It is doubtful that you will receive an A on the test, and you are unsure that the girl will accept your request for a date. The scriptural meaning of hope is exactly the opposite. Hope is certainty. We may substitute "I know" for "I hope." When we as believers say, "I hope I am going to heaven," we do not mean, "I would like to go to heaven," or, "I think I am going to heaven, but I am not sure," but we mean, "I know I am going to heaven." We have complete assurance that heaven is our home that lies just beyond the narrow gate.

The Bible uses hope in two ways.

In a subjective sense it refers to the act of hoping. Strangers and sojourners are those who hope. They are characterized by hope. We read in Psalm 31:24, "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD." In Psalm 33:22 believers ask," Let thy mercy, O LORD, be upon us, according as we hope in thee." To the Philippian church Paul writes concerning Timothy, "Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see

how it will go with me" (Phil. 2:23).

In an objective sense hope is our goal. It is the content of our hope—what we hope for. In chapter 2 of his letter to Titus Paul teaches how we are to live in the world; part of this is that we are those who are "looking for that blessed hope." For what do we hope? "The blessed appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Paul wants the eyes of the Ephesian Christians to be opened, that they may know what is the hope of their calling (Eph. 1:18). In Ephesians 4:4 he writes, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling."

When we put these two ideas together, we have a picture of hoping strangers and sojourners. They have a goal toward which they are traveling, the content of which is described as hope. That hope is the final fulfillment of our regeneration and calling, that is, our final salvation in the day of the Lord. For that hope we hope. Read that sentence again; it is not an error or a misprint. Hope is our objective, as well as an activity on our part, to which God calls us. Strangers and sojourners are not those who look for some kind of hypothetical, future hope; they are not those who await some sort of theoretical future blessedness that is possible but unlikely. They are those who live and walk in hope; their lives are governed by hope. It is impossible to separate the walk from the goal, the journey from its end.

Thus the idea of hope is intensely practical. Hope governs our lives, and by it we are ruled. Hope is not a matter of one's grade on a biology test or of a date that may or may not happen. Hope deals with our eternal destiny and the way to it. We cannot say that we hope for our salvation and then live like the devil.

Such is the negative idea of hope. Scripture speaks of those who have no hope. In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul instructs the church concerning the matter of the saints who have died before Christ's return and in verse 13 contrasts them with those who have no hope of the resurrection: "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." Those who are not strangers and sojourners have no hope. What a miserable thing it is to be hopeless! Such were we apart from our conversion, according to Paul in Ephesians 2:12: "Ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." The Ephesians were strangers, but not in a good sense. Emphasizing that our hope is eternal, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:19, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

The contrast serves to drive home the point. We are strangers and sojourners by the grace of God according to his sovereign election. Therefore we are those who hope.

That we are "hopers" implies the calling that Peter lays on us in 1 Peter 1:13: "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Do you do this, young people? Are you hopers?

How do we know that our spiritual hope is certain, unlike our earthly hope? Because God says so in Romans 5:5: "Hope maketh not ashamed." And because God says so, never will we be disappointed in our hope. When we walk as strangers and sojourners, we have the sure confidence that as we walk the difficult way of life in this world, our eternal inheritance awaits us.

Young people, are you hoping strangers and sojourners?

Our Goodly Heritage — Mark H. Hoeksema

Introduction

In the next issue *Beacon Lights* begins a projected long-running series on the history of the PRCA.

This series will consist of transcriptions of oral history interviews I conducted in 2008–2009. Some background and explanation is in order.

Sometime in 2008 my wife, Ruthellen, and I

went to Lansing, Illinois, to visit my life-long friend Mr. James Blankespoor, whom I knew all my life as "Uncle Jim." Although he was no blood relation to me, this moniker indicates a close and familiar relationship. At the time he was 91 years old and sharp as a tack. Since then he has joined the church triumphant, which was his professed desire. During this lengthy visit he told many stories about his life in the context of the church, around which his life centered. Many of them were humorous, for he possessed a dry humor that was hilarious, and he had my wife nearly rolling on the floor with laughter.

Shortly after beginning our journey home, Ruthellen said to me, "It's too bad that we didn't record that." As we traveled, we discussed the possibilities, and came to the conclusion that we should indeed record his memories, as well as memories of other older saints. She thus deserves the credit for the initiation of this oral history.

Upon arriving home, and mostly because I didn't know who else to talk to, I contacted Jon Huisken, the archivist of the PRCA, and described to him our thoughts. His response was, "That's called an oral history. It should be done, and you're in charge." I must admit that I didn't see that coming. With assistance from Mr. Huisken and considerable guidance from Dick Harms, the archivist of Calvin College, I was able to organize this project. I wrote letters to the consistories of the PRCA soliciting names of candidates and also received suggestions from individuals. I drafted a letter of explanation and request to participate, in which I gave a justification for this project by asking, What is an oral history?

At this point I can do no better than to quote from that letter.

> An oral history is a verbal account of the memories and recollections of past events and history as experienced by or told to specific individuals. Oral history differs from the written or documented record of history in that it is not objectively provable. This does not imply in any manner that oral history differs from or contradicts documented history. On the contrary, oral history is very valuable in that it complements, adds to, gives background and context to, and enhances the formal record of history. It is the story behind the history. Lest there be any doubt as to the value of oral history, allow me to remind you that for the first 2000 years of the church's existence (until the time of Moses), the truth was preserved only by means of oral history.

I then asked and answered several questions.

> Why is an oral history being compiled? Because there exists a huge body of knowledge and experiences that are currently locked up in the minds primarily of older saints. They will very soon go to their eternal reward, and their knowledge will be forever lost to the church militant, which must continue to know its history and learn from it. This knowledge, crucial to the generations of the covenant, must be unlocked and preserved by means of an oral history.
>
> Who will participate in this oral history? Primarily older saints in their 70s, 80s and 90s. The reason is self-evident. Younger saints are still living their history, and time remains for their contribution to what may become an ongoing oral history. But old saints must be interviewed before they join the church triumphant. You are therefore encouraged to suggest the name of anyone who may have a valuable contribution to make.
>
> How will this oral history be accomplished? It will consist of an informal interview between you and myself. Our conversation will be digitally recorded. I will ask the questions, and you will give the answers. The digital recording, as well as a transcription of our conversation, will be preserved in the archives of the PRCA.

After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed by Judi Doezema, after which both the verbal and transcription versions were placed in the archives, where they remain. However, they were not easily accessible by our people; many did not even know that this material existed. Note: copies of both the verbal and transcription versions are available on request from the PRCA archives. Upon becoming aware of the existence of this material, *Beacon Lights* received permission from the archivist to publish the interviews with the consent of the interviewees, which has been obtained.

I used a standard list of questions in these interviews in an effort to achieve a degree of consistency. Nevertheless, the interviews vary widely in length and content, depending on the individual. Some are simply factual; some are a bit disjointed and somewhat disorganized, as is often true of verbal accounts. Recounted are doctrines, many difficulties, events, personal details, and contributions to the doctrine and life of the PRCA. A surprising number contained humor. It was often in answer to follow-up questions that things got interesting.

I tried to say as little as possible, allowing the

interviewees to tell their stories in their own words. Most had little problem with this, although some needed a bit of prompting.

Any necessary explanations I will put in brackets and italics.

An interesting sidelight concerns the small digital voice recorder I set in front of each person. Most people began by talking to the recorder and were often hesitant and reluctant to speak in the consciousness that their words were being preserved for history. But once I was able to get them talking, within a few minutes they forgot all about the recorder and spoke freely.

One question remains: Why is a youth-oriented magazine publishing a bunch of interviews with old people? A fair question this is, but it has good answers. First, they are instructive; they teach us our precious heritage. Those who are ignorant of or forget history are doomed to repeat it. Second, they impart to the young generation the knowledge and wisdom of the senior generation—I mean here the wisdom of the book of Proverbs. Third, they are the encouragement to the young generation of those who have struggled to live the Christian life and to defend the faith against all odds. Last, they are interesting and sometimes funny. We will learn, for example, why Loveland PR church has no windows, and we will read the story of someone's most improbable journey to the PRCA.

We at *Beacon Lights* hope you will read, learn, and enjoy.

Editor's Note — Mark H. Hoeksema

With this issue *Beacon Lights* concludes the Choosing a Vocation rubric. We thank those who have written the twenty articles for this series. The topics have been wide-ranging and varied, but two themes were consistent: Talk to those who hold the various jobs described, and pray for the Lord's will for your lives. —Editor

Ask Schuyler

Letter to Schuyler

Dear Schuyler,

Does the Holy Spirit work in the reprobate, that is, internally in their hearts and souls and minds, to use them for his purposes, and especially to restrain sin? See John 14:17. See also 1 Samuel 10:6, 10, which seems to say that the Holy Spirit came upon wicked Saul, in connection with 1 Samuel 16:14, according to which the Spirit departed from him, implying that he once possessed it. If the Spirit does not work internally in the reprobate, how is God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart to be explained?

Response

The work of the Holy Spirit is indeed a deep mystery. We know that the Holy Spirit regenerates God's elect people (John 3:8) and that the Spirit dwells within our hearts and gives us Christ and his comfort (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 20). But the question concerns the Spirit's work in the reprobate. Understandably, we want to be careful here. If we teach that the Spirit works *in the reprobate*, will we not be agreeing with the Three Points of Common Grace? In those points the Christian Reformed Church teaches that "God, by the general operation of his Spirit, without renewing the heart of man, restrains the unimpeded breaking out of sin," and that "God, without renewing the heart, so influences man that he is able to perform civil good."

As far as restraint of sin is concerned, the Bible teaches that God restrains sin, but not by a gracious operation of God's Spirit. A common illustration is a muzzle on a dog: the muzzle stops the dog from biting, but it does not cure it of its vicious nature. Even the devil is restrained this way: Christ binds the devil

so that he cannot deceive the nations (Rev. 20:3), but that does not make the devil even a little bit better. God restrains the wicked in various ways, but they never become anything less than totally depraved.

However, the Bible teaches that God works by the Spirit in the wicked. The controversial issue is with the internal work of the Spirit in the reprobate. Perhaps we are more comfortable with the idea that the Spirit works on (externally upon) the reprobate. In 1 Samuel 10:10 we read about Saul that "the Spirit of God came *upon* him," enabling him to occupy the kingly office, and even to prophesy (see also 1 Sam. 11:6). That gift (anointing, enabling) of the Spirit was temporary: "the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul" (1 Sam. 16:14). Clearly, however we understand this work of the Spirit in Saul's life, it did not bring him the blessings of salvation. Saul perished in his sins.

But there are other passages that teach that the Spirit works in the reprobate wicked. Probably the clearest is Hebrews 6:4–5. There the reprobate come into very close contact with the Spirit: they are "enlightened" (v. 4); they "tasted" (vv. 4–5); they "were made partakers of the Holy Ghost" (v. 4), but "they fall away" (v. 6). They are very similar to the hearers in Matthew 13 who hear the gospel and receive it "with joy" (v. 20). Their joy is superficial and short-lived, however: they never truly believe or bear fruit, and thus they perish. The people in Hebrews 6 were church members and had certain spiritual experiences, but they only tasted without ever digesting and profiting from the Gospel.

Then, of course, there is the work of the Spirit in hardening the wicked. Hardening must be an internal work of the Spirit, because the Spirit hardens the *heart* of the wicked. There are other examples of God's working in the hearts of wicked men. For example, God "stirred up the spirit" of Cyrus, king of Persia, so that he made a decree permitting the Jews to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1). And indeed the king's heart is in God's hand (Prov. 21:1).

Perhaps we are nervous and reluctant to confess the *internal* work of the Spirit in the reprobate because when we hear "common" or "general" we think "common or general *grace*." But we must remember that God works by his providence in all men, although not graciously in all men. The confusion of providence with grace is a serious error, but we must not overreact. Otherwise we are in danger of another error, a denial of common providence. God works upon, through, and even *in* the wicked by his Spirit to accomplish his sovereign purpose and good pleasure. The wicked are not at all outside of the operations of God. Of the wicked we can say that in God they too live and move and have their being (Acts 17:28).

How blessed we are that God has been pleased *graciously* to work in us to give us faith in Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins in his blood. "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

Schuyler

Called to the Ministry — Rev. Daniel Holstege

Called to the Ministry

"Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel" (Amos 7:14–15).

If you would ask me how I was called into the ministry of God's Word, I could hardly do better than to quote and apply to myself these words of Amos the prophet. For like Amos, I was no minister, nor was I a minister's son; but I was the son of a farmer: the Lord took me as I was following a certain path, and he said to me, "Go, preach to my people Israel."

In this article, I will tell you how it happened.

But first some background. I was born on Decem-

ber 21, 1982 in Grand Rapids, Michigan to James and Kathi Holstege. I am the first of their four children. My three siblings are Nate, Lynn, and Joe. We were raised in the Protestant Reformed Churches, as were both our parents, because our ancestors left the Christian Reformed Church with Hoeksema, Ophoff, and Danhof in 1924 and continued in the PRC up to this day. I was baptized in Southeast PRC and remained a member there until entering the ministry. My parents fulfilled their baptismal vows by sending me to Adams Street Christian School and Covenant Christian High School. In the summers, my dad put us to work on his celery farm plowing, planting, weeding, harvesting, and doing other jobs. When he sold the farm and transitioned into a greenhouse business in the mid-1990s, I transitioned too. After high school I began to pursue a two-year degree in business management at Davenport University with a view to joining the family business. But after one year of college, that changed…

The Lord took me and said, "Go, preach to my people Israel."

Let me tell you a simple little story of a day I will never forget. What happened on that day was not a mystical experience, not a special revelation, not a vision of God or Christ. But it was certainly a moment in which the Lord took me. It was a day in the summer after my first year of college. I was working in an empty greenhouse, cleaning up after a busy spring season. I was alone, sweeping the dust off the floor. I had a lot of time to think. I must have been thinking about how I had not enjoyed my first year of college. Or perhaps I was fretting over the high tuition expenses that I faced in my second year (I had grants and scholarships to pay for the first year). I began to feel deeply disturbed. I did not want to go into debt for a college education that I did not value or enjoy. And I was very troubled by my lack of enthusiasm about my current path. What happened next was a decisive moment. Yet it will sound very simple. In my mind I heard my own voice say these words: "*You know you have to do it.*" That is, you know you must discontinue your current path and pursue the ministry of the gospel. The words were absolute. I do not know *how* I knew I had to do it. But I knew. And that's the story.

What happened that day was *dreadful* to me. I wanted nothing to do with the ministry. I never considered the ministry as a child. I felt no urge or desire to be a minister. In fact, I felt an urge *not* to be a minister. I did not feel bold or brave enough to preach. I was somewhat shy as a child, and the thought of standing in the pulpit in front of all those people terrified me! I felt the fear of Moses when he said, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue" (Exodus 4:10).

Yet the call was *overpowering*. I could not resist it. It still strikes me how inexplicable it is that I became a minister. Like Amos, I was not the son of a minister, nor a relative of any minister, but I was the son of a farmer. Like Amos, I was just going about my business pursuing a life in the greenhouse industry, not wishing to preach the word. I had no reason to pursue the ministry. I was not drawn to any particular aspect of the ministry. I did not have close interaction with any ministers. I *was* told by my childhood pastor Rev. Dale Kuiper on a number of occasions that I should consider the ministry. When shaking his hand after a worship service, or after catechism class, he would say, "You really ought to consider the ministry." I always smiled and brushed his comment aside. I did not agree, and that was that. I was going to enter my dad's greenhouse business, and that was all there was to it. But I could never fully shake off Rev. Kuiper's simple words. I was haunted by them. I suppose he planted a seed in my heart, unknown to me, which the Lord later caused to sprout into an irresistible urge to go and preach to his people. Beyond that, I cannot explain what led me to leave the path I was on and to pursue the ministry. But it was the right decision. I never once looked back or doubted the decision in the least. On the contrary, I grew more and more convinced of the call.

Soon I told my parents (who somehow already suspected it). I did not return to Davenport, but I took one semester of classes at Grand Rapids Community College, and then transferred all my credits to Calvin College. God enabled me to succeed and to enjoy my studies. He helped me learn Latin at Calvin, then Greek at our seminary. He helped me finish college and graduate from Calvin in 2006. He helped me through four more grueling but happy years of study at our seminary. In my fourth year the professors sent me to Randolph, Wisconsin for my internship with another Rev. D. Kuiper (not Dale, but Doug). Then God brought me my wife too. I met Leah Regnerus not long after moving to Randolph. We dated throughout my internship and became

engaged in the spring of 2010. That summer God confirmed my internal call with two external calls. I accepted the call from First PRC of Holland and was ordained into the ministry in October. In November Leah and I were married, and one year later we were blessed with a son, Gabriel James. Last August the Lord blessed us again, this time with twins, Kirsten Leigh and Kiley Danielle.

If I would give any advice to young men considering the ministry, among other things, I would say this: If you can with a free conscience pursue any other career, do it. If you have a desire to do any other kind of work, do that. And this too: If you were pursuing the ministry, but did not feel compelled to do it, and are now pursuing some other form of work, you made the right decision. You need not feel any guilt or shame about leaving the path that leads to the ministry. If you are called to the ministry, you will know. You might not know with absolute certainty right away, as I did. But that certainty will grow stronger and stronger if you are called. Contrariwise, your doubts will grow greater and greater if you are not called.

Another way of putting it is this: Pursue the ministry only if you feel compelled to do so, only if you can do nothing else. Do not pursue the ministry because someone is pressuring you to do so. You must not be called by a man, but by God! Do not pursue the ministry because you want the attention and praise of men. You must not seek to please men, but God and Christ (Gal. 1:10). Do not pursue the ministry because you enjoy public speaking and are good at it. There are other ways you can use that gift, and that is not even the essential gift of the ministry (I Cor. 2:1–4). Do not pursue the ministry because you love the intellectual life that you see in the ministry. You will find that much of the work of the ministry is of a practical nature (visiting, counseling, meetings). Do not seek the ministry because you want to prove that you are somebody to your parents or grandparents. Even if you do prove it, you will then be stuck in a position in which you never wanted to be.

Pursue the ministry only if you cannot do anything else. If you have the urge to preach the word of God to his people, pursue the ministry! If you feel the longing to reprove, rebuke, and exhort them with all longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim. 4:2), pursue the ministry! If you feel compelled to instruct the church in the truth of the Scriptures and to call them to repentance and faith, seek the ministry! If you can find no rest until you have declared on behalf of Christ, "Be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20), then pursue the ministry of the gospel. Pursue the ministry if you want to follow Jesus in the office of minister of the gospel. Pursue the ministry if you long to have God glorified through your preaching. Pursue the ministry if you love God, love his truth, and love his church. Pursue it if you long to comfort God's people (Isa. 40:1). Pursue it if you are ready and willing to deny yourself many things and to give yourself fully for your whole life to this work.

If you are truly called, the Lord will take you and say to you, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel." Woe unto you if you do not give heed to that call!

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Consider the Creation

Dr. Julian Kennedy

Fingers

Our fingers are amazing tools that make man capable of performing skills such as intricate eye surgery or playing music, constructing everything from the tiny parts of a watch to massive ocean-going liners, airplanes, and skyscrapers. It took not only man's intellect to enable these achievements, but also his hands and fingers. Man's hand has the almost unique ability (I say "almost" because chimpanzees have it to some extent) to grasp objects because his thumb can be brought to oppose all the other fingers. How could we do basic things such as eat or wash without our fingers? How could we work? How could we use our phones? How could we wield a hammer, use a paintbrush or pen, and do even more intricate things? How could we greet friends and acquaintances with

a handshake or a hug?

The anatomy of the fingers fits them for their use. The bones, of which there are three in each digit apart from the thumb, each articulate with the other at hinge joints. This means they flex and extend in one plane, and because of tight collateral ligaments, they are stable from side to side and very hard to dislocate. Flexion—to grip—is the main movement of all the fingers, and extension past the horizontal is prevented by tight thickenings of the joint capsule on the volar (palm) side of each joint. The tendons that move the fingers run in smooth shiny synovial (oily) sheaths—two on the palm side and one on the dorsal (back) side. The thumb has these three plus two abductors (to move it away from the palm), an adductor (to move it towards the palm) and an opposer (to move it across the palm to each finger). These make the thumb the most mobile and versatile finger. The main muscle bellies for the fingers and thumb are in the forearm, but two of the thumb muscles are in the hand, and each finger also has intrinsic (built in) muscles e.g., the *interossei*, which allow you to spread and close your fingers. All these muscles would be of no use unless controlled exquisitely by the brain via two major nerves that branch into fine filaments supplying the muscles and the joints they move, and the overlying skin with its unique fingerprint pattern. So the brain receives sensory signals from the fingers and sends motor signals back.

Why do we have nails? The simple answer is that the soft (but not squishy) pulp needs something firm to press against, without deforming, when holding things. Vertical strands of tissue reaching from skin to bone keep the shape of the pulp when gripping objects, and are especially tight in the palmar surface of the hand. Compare how loose the skin is on the back of your hand!

Our fingers are well-nigh essential body parts for us to live independently.

Let us look first at what God does with his fingers.

The first time we encounter the word *finger* in scripture is in Exodus 8:19 where the magicians of Egypt failed to counterfeit God's plague of lice: "Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said." The significance here is that the finger of God brought judgment, one of the ten plagues he employed in judging the Egyptians and forcing them to let his people go. This is the finger of power.

The second mention in scripture, though it is not an instance of God using his fingers, is when a bullock was offered for the cleansing of the priests in Exodus 29:12 and the blood was to be put on the four horns of the altar by Moses' finger. Here a blood-spattered finger is used in atoning for sin.

The third mention is at Sinai in Exodus 31:18 when the ten commandments were engraved by God's finger on the two tablets of stone. We read: "And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God." This is significant because here we have the giving of God's law encapsulated in the ten commandments, which stand as an eternal, holy standard of behavior that judges mankind and finds all men guilty: "For by the law is the knowledge of sin"(Rom. 3:20). This is the finger of instruction.

How, you may ask, could God do that engraving? When the scripture says God has fingers or a hand, we know the writer, inspired by the Spirit, is using an anthropomorphism. He is giving to God a human feature that in fact he does not possess, to help us understand what he does and what he is like. Mankind can now etch with a laser on stone or metal, and I suspect God used some power akin to this, like the lightning he makes daily, to engrave these tablets.

In Psalm 8:3 we read, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained…" The work of creation is attributed to God's fingers—another anthropomorphism. This includes each human being, who is curiously "wrought" or "knitted together," as the Hebrew suggests (Psalm 139) in the darkness of his mother's womb.

The next time we read of God's finger, although it may have been that of an angel, is when Belshazzar at his impious feast saw the fingers of a man's hand writing on the wall of his palace, according to Daniel 5:5: "In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote." We later hear Daniel's interpretation of the writing, namely, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," which means your kingdom is finished, you are weighed in the balance and found wanting, the kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

These three incidents display God's power, attributed to his finger to create, to lay down law, and to judge and redeem. We can say much of God's work is accomplished by his fingers. It is worth noting that God's work of redemption through judgment is often attributed to his stretched out arm, but at the end of this powerful arm are his fingers.

These are jobs our fingers will never do!

In Luke 11:20 we read, "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you." Here Christ is plainly teaching that the power by which he powerfully exorcised evil spirits was that of the triune God.

In another, similar instance he told his disciples that the demons can only be exorcised by prayer and fasting. In John 8:5–9 we see God incarnate, Jesus Christ, writing on the ground in the presence of the Pharisees who had brought in a woman accused of adultery: "Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst."

We cannot be sure what Jesus wrote, but I would hazard a guess that it was the Hebrew for the seventh commandment 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' In the Hebrew this is just two words: "Adultery not." What Jesus had said had already convicted them of their sin. But if he had written the words "Adultery not" on the ground, as God had done centuries before on stone, that act may have added weight to the condemnation they felt within their consciences because in their presence Jehovah Salvation wrote down the sin-exposing law that included not just the act, but the thought. Remember that Christ had clearly taught the thought is as culpable as the deed.

Christ healed using his fingers (Mark 7:33) when he put them in a deaf man's ears, almost duplicating the means by which man's ears are made in the embryo when God forms the external ear canal from outside in, as in Psalm 40:6.

Christ ministered to the physical and spiritual needs of others continually.

The last time we read of fingers in scripture is also highly significant. It is in John 20:25, 27, according to which Thomas uses his to put them into the prints of the nails in Jesus' hands. The skeptical disciple used his fingers to ascertain that his Lord has truly risen. But blessed are we who have not seen him or felt his wounds.

We have examined briefly how God made our fingers with such skill that he enables us to exhibit just a little of his creativity, work, and ministry. We looked at what we read in scripture of God's fingers making the universe, bringing judgment upon Egypt, inscribing the law, casting out demons, and healing. We have a common expression, "He just needs to lift his finger" when we want to emphasize the power someone wields. In this short study we have seen that the omnipotent God only has to lift his finger to create all things, to express his holiness, to judge men and nations, and to expel his enemies. What a God we have!

How does man use his fingers? Sadly, because our bodies are used to express our soul's desires, over the centuries totally depraved man has made idols with his fingers (Isa. 2:8; 17:8) and even a tower that attempted to reach heaven under Nimrod in an attempt to establish the antichristian kingdom. We use our hands and fingers to express ourselves and make gestures which are not always good—finger pointing and finger wagging. One of the conditions that Israel needed to fulfil for God's blessing (Isa. 58:9) was to cut out evil speaking and pointing with the accusing finger. The shedding of blood by our fingers in murder will make us guilty (Isa. 59:3). What we omit to do with our fingers may also make us guilty, as was the case with the Pharisees in Matthew 23:4 and Luke 11:46, who bound numerous man-made laws on the people instead of being ministers to ease them. Thus unregenerate man uses his fingers and all his body to transgress God's holy law. In the church this has been and is most obviously manifest in the formulation, writing, and dissemination of false teaching the past twenty centuries. I suspect today many more waste far too many hours in front of the TV or playing computer games and Play Station. The devil finds work for idle hands, and he is pleased when we waste our precious time on inordinate entertainment.

Let us look at a few instances in scripture where human fingers were put to good use.

The book of Leviticus has the most references to fingers of any book in the Bible (see especially chapter 4—you can guess why).

It was because the high priest had to dip his finger in the blood of the sacrificed animal, sprinkle it before the Lord, and smear it on the four horns of the altar of incense, signifying atonement and access to the Most High. The priests' fingers ministered to the people. Today the equivalent would be our intercession for others at the throne of grace.

We use touch as a sign of affection and to introduce ourselves to new people in a handshake. This is right and proper. Paul was given the right hand of fellowship by the leading apostles after he had explained his ministry. We use fingers and hands in the intimacy of marriage to show love. We also protect little children by holding their hands. Jesus defied Pharisaic law by touching at least one leper.

So what do we learn from all this, and what can we apply? Clearly we cannot create from nothing, nor exorcise demons, but we may be the means whereby God brings down judgment as he acts in answer to our prayers (Rev. 8:3–5). However, as priests we are meant to intercede for others, and there can be no more important work than this ministry that our Lord himself exercises in heaven.

How else should we use our fingers to God's glory, as expressed in Romans 6:13? The answer is: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."

Practical work.

Ephesians 4:28: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Our daily work has this as its purpose. Then in the church there is heavy work. There are always physical tasks to be accomplished in the church and for our fellow saints—the upkeep of the building and grounds, the maintenance of members' homes and gardens, especially those who may be unwell or infirm. Transportation of schoolchildren and adults is essential to school and church. Think of all the women who ministered to Christ and Paul in their work by making meals, washing clothes, etc.

Spiritual work.

Feeding ourselves with good spiritual food from reading and studying scripture and good Reformed books is a vital job for our fingers.

Grasping an object tightly by using your fingers so it can be wielded to build or destroy, to push or pull, is basic. In ages past our fingers would have grasped a sword, as in David's day, as we read in Psalm 144:1: 'Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight:" Today the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual: "The pen is mightier than the sword." Today it is the mighty computer mouse. So if you are blogging, or commenting, or sharing, take note of Kevin DeYong's blog: "Assume that everyone, everywhere will read what you write and see what you post. You represent Christ in a real way, even if it is in the virtual world. Most people will know that you go to church, what church you go to, and that you claim to be a Christian. So let's all think before we post. Second, if you need to be critical, write in such a way that you would not be embarrassed to have the object of your criticism read it with his mother nearby."

We write (and speak) to edify the saints and oppose false teaching. Ordained men preach and use their fingers to express themselves in expounding God's word from the pulpit.

We all ought to pray (Luke 18:1): "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." This is perhaps the most important use of our hands, whether we clasp them together or not. We read in 1 Timothy 2:8: "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." You must have seen the artist Durer's "Praying Hands." This is the most well-known depiction of this ministry in all of history. Is it time you took an inventory of what you are doing daily with your fingers?

We are all necessary parts of the body of Christ in our local churches, which means we all have a part to play. As we are united to him as body parts to the head, God will show us what our jobs are. It will take time and the advice of others to help us discover our gifts and places. Be faithful in using your gifts. Remember that God honors the less comely parts. Much unsung work, done in secret, will be rewarded. Your fingers, I have no doubt, will be essential tools in that service of the Lord.

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Watching Daily At My Gates

March 13 ***Read Zephaniah 1***

Zephaniah is the last of the minor prophets before the exile into Babylon. We see in verse 1 that he is at work during the time of Josiah, who reigned soon after the reign of wicked Manasseh. In this first chapter he pronounces extreme judgment upon Judah and its inhabitants. The charge is idolatry and a false worship of God. God will tolerate neither kind of worship, as we see from the first and second commandments. God is God and there is no other. Once again we must be instructed to examine our concept and worship of God. What judgment will God make upon us as the great day of the Lord comes? Sing Psalter 251.

March 14 ***Read Zephaniah 2***

Out of the judgments in chapter one comes a ray of hope in chapter 2. The faithful in Judah are called to repent and are called to draw nigh unto God. Then the prophet goes on in the rest of the chapter to pronounce judgment on those nations round about God's people who have afflicted them. We too are called to repentance. As we hear God's word preached each Sabbath day we must hear that call. As we daily read and meditate upon that word, we must hear the call to repentance. That word makes us fall to our knees and ask for forgiveness for our sins against the thrice holy God. Let us always remember to confess our sins in our prayers and seek forgiveness from the only one who can and will forgive through the blood of his own beloved Son. Sing Psalter 334.

March 15 ***Read Zephaniah 3***

In this chapter we see the three divisions of the beloved Heidelberg Catechism. In the first part of the chapter we see the great misery that can afflict the church of all ages. Then we see the redemption that is only by sovereign, particular grace. Finally we see that the redeemed break into thanksgiving because of their deliverance from the great misery. While Zephaniah prophesied to the church of a particular age, his prophesy is timeless. Let us read this chapter and know that our God will redeem us and bring us into a better place. Sing Psalter 307.

March 16 ***Read Haggai 1***

In this post-exilic prophesy we see a call to arms—not military arms, but spiritual arms. After the return from Babylon, the people dragged their feet in rebuilding. Not all rebuilding: they had nice houses in which to live. But they had not rebuilt God's house. Today most of us attend a church that is in good physical condition. Some are more elaborate than others, but they are still serviceable as places of worship. What can be said about the spiritual condition of those places? Are the means of grace neglected? Do the causes of the kingdom go wanting? We need this call to arms because our nature is no different from that of Israel. Let us heed the call to build up the house of God. Sing Psalter 367.

March 17 ***Read Haggai 2***

Commentators divide this chapter into three words or sermons to the people of Jerusalem. In the first they are encouraged in their temple building. While this temple might not be as grand as Solomon's, God promises to them an event that would make it more grand. He then reproves them for sins that had tainted especially the priesthood and had hindered them in their work. Finally he makes a promise of further encouragement. In this chapter we see a prophecy of both the first and second comings of Christ. While our work in the kingdom does not bring about the kingdom, we are required to work and to serve as we await the day when the world will be shaken. Are we working? Are we watching? Are we praying? Sing Psalter 349.

March 18 ***Read Zechariah 1***

Along with Haggai, Zechariah is another of the post-exilic prophets. We see him reprimanding Judah for their continued sins, as well as encouraging them to walk in the world as God's people. Some of Judah had slipped back into the sins that led them into captivity. For this they are chastised. But Judah is also encouraged by the visions of the horses, the prayer of the angel, and the sign of the carpenters scattering the horns. We, as another people waiting for Christ, can draw much instruction from this book. We must live in a right way as we wait for our redeemer to return. Sing Psalter 273.

March 19 ***Read Zechariah 2***

Zechariah is given a vision for him to use to encourage God's faithful people. It was to be used, first, to encourage those who had returned from Babylon not to

give up hope, for Jehovah would build his church, and none would prevail against it. Second, it was to be used for those who still remained in Babylon to encourage them to return to the city of God. It should also be an encouragement for us that as we await the fulfillment of the New Jerusalem we faint not, but that we are ever watching and praying. Sing Psalter 237.

March 20 *Read Zechariah 3*

Here we have an expression of the struggle between God and Satan. We do not look at this as a dualistic struggle in which the outcome is in doubt, but we see Satan clinging to some hope that he can overcome the curse that has been placed upon him. Satan is stating that Israel is not worthy to be God's people because of their sin. But Israel has a redeemer. That redeemer is Christ, who is pictured as the branch and a cornerstone. This chapter served as Israel's hope even as the enemy nations around them tried to cause them to fall. It can serve as our hope even as Satan wants us to fall in God's sight. But that branch and stone is for us as well and is our hope even as we face the stormy future. Sing Psalter 318.

March 21 *Read Zechariah 4*

In this chapter we have not only a beautiful vision of how the temple of Zerubbabel's time would be rebuilt, but also a beautiful depiction of how the church in the new dispensation will be rebuilt. Zerubbabel sometimes despaired of the lack of zeal shown by the people for the rebuilding of the temple. God had to show him that that work was not by man's might, but by the power of God. God does not despise a small work, and neither should we in this age. God will use his anointed ones to bring forth a church that will be glorious in the new heavens and the new earth. For this we must look. Sing Psalter 368.

March 22 *Read Zechariah 5*

Zechariah was not only shown visions that depicted the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the comfort and peace that this would bring to the faith, but he was also shown visions that show God's wrath upon the unbelievers in their midst. The church was not completely pure when it returned from Babylon, just as no church is completely pure today. There are those whose sins must be pointed out and who must be dealt with in the church of God. That final purification will not come until Christ returns upon the clouds of heaven. Even today we must suffer with those who are not obedient to God's law. We must deal with them as God himself has commanded us in his word, even as Ezra and Nehemiah dealt with the wicked within the church of Zechariah's day. Sing Psalter 227.

March 23 *Read Zechariah 6*

In this chapter we have a prophecy that looks forward not only to Christ's first coming, but also past that to his final return. The four horses in the first part of the chapter parallel the horses of Revelation. These horses show that God rules over all parts of the world, and that all things must be fulfilled before the culmination of the new heavens and the new earth. There is also another reference to the righteous branch who is the Christ. Finally we see that the church, prefigured in the temple of that day, would not be made up only of Jews, but also of Gentiles from all nations. Are we building in that temple today? Sing Psalter 236.

March 24 *Read Zechariah 7*

In this and the following chapters the prophet speaks of the daily life of the returned captives. There was a question about the fasts that they had been holding even through the seventy years of the captivity. These fasts were a form of worship. They had not been carrying them out properly, and they are reproved for that lack. The prophet continues and reproves them for their lack of a walk of sanctification. He makes the connection between a right worship and a right walk. We must worship properly; of that there is no doubt. But we must also live out of that worship in a proper way. Either we keep both tables of the law or we keep neither. Sing Psalter 222.

March 25 *Read Zechariah 8*

This chapter is a continuation of the last one. After reproving Judah for their wrong manner of worship, the prophet now encourages them. He has the greatest message of encouragement for them. God is with them and will do great things for them. The prophet also encourages the people to continue the work of rebuilding the temple. This will be a source of blessing for them and for the Gentiles, who will come and join with them as the complete church of God. We need this encouragement as well. God has done great things for us. We need to respond with a right manner of worship and a zeal for the work of the kingdom. Most of us are those Gentiles who have been drawn to the church by sovereign, particular grace. Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 357.

March 26 *Read Zechariah 9*

The chapter opens with God's promising vengeance upon Israel's enemies of old. He will do this by the coming of a king. This king, however, will come in a lowly manner. He will ride victoriously on the colt of an ass. This king is none other than Christ. This king will not bring a physical victory to God's people, but the salvation that he brings is spiritual. This salvation will bring with it a peace and prosperity that has never been seen before. This will be a peace and prosperity of the soul. Let us behold our king and let us bow the knee to him in worship not just on the Lord's Day, but on every day of the week in our homes, in our schools, and wherever we are. Sing Psalter 318.

March 27 *Read Zechariah 10*

Rain to the inhabitants of Israel was necessary. The farmer looked for a rain both at the beginning of the season to give the crops a good start, and the latter rain

to make the increase abundant. Rain was a picture of the blessings that God gave to his people. Even through the seventy years of captivity, God blessed his people. Do we seek his blessing on our daily labors? Do we make this a part of our early morning prayers? And then do we live in a way that shows our dependence upon God for all things physical and spiritual? Let us pray with out ceasing, knowing that prayer is the chief means of thankfulness for the child of God. Sing Psalter 171.

March 28 *Read Zechariah 11*

The returned captives would not build a glorious, earthly kingdom. God's kingdom is not of this world. In fact, the descendants of these returned captives would take a betrayed Jesus and put him to death. The chapter even looks farther than the work of Christ on the earth. It speaks of a shepherd who will not shepherd the people of God. This shepherd is the antichrist. This man will be used to usher in the culmination of God's kingdom that will not be of this earth, but will be a spiritual and glorious kingdom. It is for that kingdom that we must look. We will not bring that kingdom to this earth, because it is not of this earth. Sing Psalter 221.

March 29 *Read Zechariah 12*

The church of all ages has had to undergo attacks from the world around her. The nations around Jerusalem were ever trying to attack and conquer her. The world at large today does not want the church of God to succeed. There are times, such as in the time of the kings, when God used these attacks to chastise his people for their sins. Even now God brings chastisement upon his church by means of the wicked world. But Jehovah God is gracious. He will work repentance upon his people and will gather them to him. For this we must hope; for this we must pray. Sing Psalter 386.

March 30 *Read Zechariah 13*

In this chapter we have a clear picture of what will happen within the church of God. We see that the idolatry that was prevalent would be removed. False prophets will be silenced. The Messiah will come, and the faithful will be tried and will be brought out of that trial as pure gold. As the church of the new dispensation we must see that we must go through those trials. We will be given grace, not of ourselves, to withstand those trials, and we will appear before the almighty judge as those cleansed by the blood of Christ. We must live our lives in this knowledge and live them in the hope of the new heavens and the new earth. Sing Psalter 174.

March 31 *Read Zechariah 14*

There are those who say that this chapter describes the final destruction of the Jewish nation and the installation of the Gentiles. Others say that the chapter looks forward to the final return of Christ and the final gathering of his church. Both seem to be true. The people of Zechariah's day needed to know that the Jewish nation was not the end of God's plan for his people. We need to know that the world as we know it is also not that end. There is a coming judgment and a coming realization of a glorious kingdom of God. All the manifestations of God's kingdom have the calling to be holy even as God is holy. May we live a sanctified life ever seeking to be holy as we have been commanded. Sing Psalter 132.

April 1 *Read Malachi 1*

The final book of the Old Testament serves as a bridge between the old and the new. Some say Malachi is not a man's name, but an office. Its meaning seems to be "my messenger", which is appropriate. Malachi brings a final message about who Israel is: they are the ones God loves. What must they do? They must repent from their evil ways and walk in God's ways. For whom must they seek? They must seek the Son of righteousness. As we read through the book, we must also take heed as we wait for Christ to return upon the clouds of heaven. Let us walk and worship in a way that is pleasing to our covenant God. Sing Psalter 132.

April 2 *Read Malachi 2*

While this chapter pointedly speaks of the situation in Judah after the captivity, its message is for the church of all ages. When Judah returned from captivity, the office of king no longer functioned as it did before they were carried away to Babylon. The priests were the supposed leaders. They corrupted their office in many ways, especially in the way of worship. They also influenced the people so that the ordinance of marriage was despised. People married unbelievers and divorced faithful spouses at will. The church today needs to hear and heed these words as well. Worship and marriage are carried out according to man's desires and not according to the ordinance of God. Let us listen to the prophet and let us heed God's ways. Sing Psalter 265.

April 3 *Read Malachi 3*

After prophesying of the coming of Christ and his messenger, Malachi continues his scolding of Judah for a wrong manner of worship. They were offering sacrifices that were not fit for the Righteous One. God would send his own sacrifice who would reprove the wicked priests and offer himself for the covenant people. The chapter closes with a beautiful blessing upon the faithful people of God. They would embrace Christ and would be gathered as a rich man gathers jewels and keeps them safe from all harm. Are we spending time speaking together of the wonderful things of God? Are we jewels worthy to be gathered? Sing Psalter 322.

April 4 *Read Malachi 4*

The last chapter of the canon of the Old Testament sets before the Jews of that day several things. First, the wicked are warned of the destruction to come. Second,

the blessedness of the righteous is described through the coming of the Messiah. Third, an admonition to follow the law is given. Finally, Malachi describes the forerunner who will herald the coming Messiah. We, the church of the New Testament, need to pay heed to these words. All of them will come about at the Messiah's final manifestation on this present earth. Let us watch and wait for him. Sing Psalter 69.

April 5 *Read Matthew 1*

The book opens with Christ's legal right to be the Messiah. He is the son of David as evidenced by this genealogy. He is also the Son of God, as shown in the second part of the chapter. Finally, by name he is our savior as depicted by his name *Jesus* or *Jehovah salvation*. He who is Emmanuel has come to this earth and by his death on the cross has truly saved his people from their sins. When we read the Christmas story, we must never leave the Christ child in the manager. We must see that he willingly went to the cross and died the accursed death for those whom the Father had given him. Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 198.

April 6 *Read Matthew 2*

"That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets" is a phrase seen often in the gospel according to Matthew. One of the aims of this gospel is to show to the Jews and to the church of today that Jesus is truly the messiah spoken of in the Old Testament. The whole of scripture is one. We cannot separate the testaments or take one without the other. There is ample proof of that in Matthew. We also see that Christ came to save people from every race. The wise men came from a far country. They worshiped the Christ for what he was and what he is today. We too must bow and worship our savior, not just as a baby, but as the one who died on the cross for our salvation. Sing Psalter 124.

April 7 *Read Matthew 3*

A forerunner arrives on the scene, announces his task, and leaves, having opened the way for what or whom he has announced. That was John the Baptist, the Elijah of Malachi 4. With seemingly little warning John begins preaching a different doctrine from what had been heard in Judea. Those who were supposed to be preaching the correct doctrine confronted him and were rebuffed. Then John baptized the one whom he announced. There will be signs before Christ's second coming. Do we know them? Are we looking for them? Are we paying them heed? Sing Psalter 253.

April 8 *Read Matthew 4*

Part of Jesus' becoming sin for us involves being tempted like us. The difference is that Jesus was sinless. This is the writer to the Hebrews' commentary on this chapter. Christ had to undergo all sorts of temptations. His forty days in the wilderness was just the start of his three and a half years of public ministry. As disciples of Jesus we must follow his lead in facing Satan's temptations. What must we do? We must say, "It is written…" There is only one way that we can use that phrase. We must know the word, which means we must dedicate ourselves to learning it. People of God of all ages must take time with that word so that we can say with confidence, "It is written." Sing Psalter 333.

April 9 *Read Matthew 5*

Those who have been called to be disciples are called to become citizens of a kingdom. This is not an earthly kingdom; this kingdom is heavenly. This is not a kingdom in which outward deeds merit, but inward spiritual deeds are needed. These are deeds that require obedience to the law of God. Early in his ministry Jesus lays out for the twelve disciples, for the people of Judea and Galilee, and for the church of all ages what is required of those who would follow them. Those citizens will be the happy ones—those who are truly blessed. As we read through this sermon let us seek to walk according to its teaching, looking for the end, which is blessed life with God. Sing Psalter 1.

April 10 *Read Matthew 6*

The next section of Christ's sermon on the kingdom of heaven details some of the activities of the citizens of that kingdom. One of the activities of those citizens is prayer. In the sermon Christ details parts of the prayers that we must bring to the throne of grace. Prayer should not be a once in awhile activity. As Paul says, we must "pray without ceasing." In the model prayer we are taught to adore our Father, we are taught to bring certain petitions to him, and we are taught that the reason for praying is that all belongs to God. To sum up the duties of the citizens, we can turn to the last part of the chapter , in which we are commanded to seek the things of the kingdom above all else. Let us pray and let us seek. Sing Psalter 434.

April 11 *Read Matthew 7*

After some final practical injunctions, Christ turns to the goal of those who are citizens of the kingdom. We find that the kingdom of which Christ speaks is not an earthly kingdom. The Jews of Christ's day were not going to find it in Jerusalem. It would not be David and Solomon's glorious kingdom renewed, for the Christians of the new dispensation that kingdom will not be found on this present earth. No amount of renewing will make this earth that kingdom. Christ's kingdom will be ushered in by him and by him alone. That kingdom will be established in the new heavens and the new earth, which will be a re-creation after this sinful world is destroyed. Look above, people of God, and seek the kingdom of God. Sing Psalter 4.

The Reformed Faith in Germany

The state of Christianity in Germany

The United States of America certainly is not a Christian country. But compared to Germany, there are—by the grace of God—many more Christians in America than in Germany. Statistics indicate that 35 percent of Americans go to church at least once per week. In Germany only five percent of the population goes to church regularly, and most of them are Roman Catholics.

A recent worldwide survey on belief in God showed that formerly socialist East Germany is the most atheistic region in the world. In no other part of the world do fewer people believe in a supernatural reality. But the western part of Germany, where I grew up together with my three younger siblings, is not in a much better state.

While the eastern part of Germany is dominated by atheism, most people in the west are either part of the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestant church, the latter being a merger of the large Lutheran church and the much smaller Reformed church, both of which came out of the Reformation. Especially this Protestant church has become dramatically liberal over the past 200 years, so that even in the west, less than 4 percent of the Protestants attend church on an average Sunday morning.

My family's story

My parents both grew up in this Protestant (state) church, but left the church during their time at college. They both eventually joined non-denominational evangelical churches that were founded in various places as a reaction to the liberal theology that had done so much harm to Christianity in Germany. My dad attended a nondenominational seminary, and during that time he heard about Reformed theology for the first time. He started to like it, and so he decided to pursue his doctoral studies at a Reformed Seminary in the Netherlands. During the time that he spent there (during the early 1980s), he read a lot of Reformed literature and after a while he became a member of one of the confessional Reformed congregations. After getting married, he moved to Germany and finished his dissertation here. Since there was no conservative Reformed church in Germany, he remained a member in the Dutch church.

In those days, he was called to serve as a lecturer/professor in a newly founded evangelical seminary in Giessen, where we still live today. So in the late 1980s, our young family (I was 2 years old) moved to Giessen, where my dad taught Christian Ethics and Dogmatics for the next ten years.

Despite the poor religious condition in Germany, there were some who would not tolerate the increasing liberal direction of German Protestantism. Quite a few of these people decided to leave the state church during the 20th century, and they started to found free churches. About one percent of Germans belong to those free churches, which had a very high view of scripture when they started.

The seminary where my dad taught was closely linked to those free churches, and though we as a family were members of the Dutch church, we started to attend one of the free churches in the area, since the Netherlands was a 4-hour drive away. But my parents became increasingly unhappy with the situation. From their founding most of those free churches had been mildly Baptist and Arminian. It was rather an assumed Arminianism due to the fact that Calvinism was virtually non-existent in Germany. However, the people who attended these churches wanted to be serious about their Christian life and held to a high view of scripture. But in the middle of the nineties, the problems in those free churches became much more serious. Suddenly the churches decided to change from services marked by Biblical worship to entertainment and music-driven programs. The free churches wanted to become "cool" places and forgot about their actual duty—to give glory to God, faithfully to preach the word, and thus equip believers for their everyday lives.

A new seminary and a new Reformed church

The problems in the free churches also affected the seminary where my dad had been teaching for

the past ten years, so at the end of the nineties he left the seminary together with two of his colleagues, and founded a new seminary: The *Academy for Reformational Theology*. This seminary has always been very small and has undergone many struggles during the past thirteen years. But despite its small size, it continues to operate today.

But let me concentrate on another part of our work—the church.

My dad not only decided to leave the seminary, but the sad state of the churches also made my parents think about starting a new Reformed church. They set out looking for likeminded people, which was not too easy, but in 1999 we started to gather as a group of believers in the living room of our house. The original group consisted of 2 families and a couple of my dad's students who had become interested in Reformed theology during their studies.

Starting a church is not easy. After a couple of months we found a school that would allow us to worship in their facilities on Sundays. We had a couple of visitors, and some of them stayed, became members, and are still members today. But there were also disappointments. After two years, a family that had been part of the church from the beginning left. But since others came to join the gatherings, we were able to constitute as a regular church in 2002. My dad and another man from church were ordained as elders; the newly founded church numbered about 15 members. The church took the name *Confessing Evangelical Reformed Congregation in Giessen*.

One of the difficulties for our small church is the fact that we do not have a pastor. Since my dad is a theology professor, we have an elder who is educated in preaching and teaching, but his work does not allow him much time for working in the church.

That is also the reason that we are gathering only once on the Lord's day. In addition to that, some families drive an hour to get to church, and it would be too far for them to travel back and forth twice.

But on the other hand, we did not want to miss a second message, so the elders decided to have a short break after the service, when the congregation has a time of fellowship with cake, cookies, juice, and coffee. After this break the people come together again for half an hour where they are taught one Lord's Day out of the Heidelberg Catechism. This is not actually a second service, since we do not have an extra liturgy for that, but it has proven to be valuable, since the Catechism, despite having been written in Germany, has been forgotten almost entirely in our country.

Things develop

Over the years the church grew slowly but steadily. In his sovereignty God added to the church several families and individuals. That did not go without disappointments. Some people joined the church and later left over minor issues. One family that was very integrating and hospitable was forced to leave Germany and go to Canada because they wanted to home-school their children, which is prohibited in Germany.

In addition to our Lord's day gatherings, we soon started other activities during the week. Every other Friday night we have a Bible study in which we study books of the Bible in a verse-by-verse manner. On the Fridays in between, we gather as young people (ages 14–25) for our own Bible study. We start by singing some hymns, and then a person from the group explains a passage from scripture to us. We then break up into small groups, in which we discuss the passage that we just looked at. After that we gather again, speak about our discussion, and end with a time of prayer before we have a time of fellowship, talking, and games.

Catechism classes are offered for children between 13 and 15 years old, and there are also gatherings for younger children during the week. Even the elderly people gather once a month for Bible study and fellowship.

In 2004 we were able to rent some rooms in an office building in Giessen, which we can use now for the entire week. Since then the church has grown to about 30 members and some regular attendees. This is not large, but it is a witness to the grace and faithfulness of our God. We are very glad to be able to gather every Lord's day in order to worship the Lord by singing and praying, and in order to have the word of God faithfully preached to us.

Personal experiences

Up to this point I basically have given you facts about Germany, the Christians who live there, and how our church was founded. Let me now tell you about my own journey, and how we came into contact with the PRCA.

When my parents first told me they were planning to start a new church, I was 11 years old and definitely not happy about it. For the past couple of years,

we had attended a large evangelical free church in Giessen. I had a lot of friends there who were my age, and many of them were my class-mates at the evangelical school next door that I attended. Leaving that church was a tough experience for me, since there was no one from my age group in our new and small gathering.

Sitting through sermons that lasted up to an hour seemed boring to me. But over the years I realized that what I considered boring was the primary tool that God used to give me a firm foundation not only for my spiritual life, but also for the questions that I faced during my everyday life. It was a slow but steady process of understanding not only the basic truths of the gospel, but also of understanding why the Reformed position on the various questions that serious Christians disagree about is the biblical position. After attending our catechism class, I decided to make confession of faith and thus became a communicant member of the congregation at the age of sixteen.

However, I do not want to be silent about the struggles that I also went through. Understanding more and more about the gospel was accompanied by doubts and struggles that most young people experience in those years. But looking back, I am glad that I was confronted with the word of God several times a week, even if I did not appreciate it in the beginning. It was this word in connection with the Holy Spirit that kept me from leaving the path that leads to life.

Just a few months after my confession of faith, I had a few weeks off from school for the purpose of going to an English-speaking country to improve my English skills. One of the elders in my small congregation had some contacts with the PRC and he arranged for me to come to Grand Rapids for four weeks in the fall of 2004.

The first four weeks of my trip to America I stayed with a couple from Alaska that I already knew. But coming to Grand Rapids meant arriving at a place where I did not know one person.

My fears proved to be completely needless. I was very well received by my host family and those four weeks were a great experience. I was allowed to attend Covenant Christian High School and to go to whatever class I wanted. I spent time at other peoples' houses, made friends at school, attended catechism classes, and worshiped at Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church every Lord's day. For most of you it is probably not extraordinary to worship with five hundred people, but for me it was something special.

My time in Grand Rapids was over way too fast. In addition to meeting so many great people, the trip served to confirm my Reformed convictions. For the very first time I considered whether I might become a minister one day. This was not only the start of my friendship with people in the PRCA, but over the years my siblings and other people from church have visited PR people in the area. At the same time official contacts developed between the PR contact committee and our elders, which showed that our churches are very similar in conviction in spite of some differences. Since 2004 I have returned to Grand Rapids three times, and it has always been a great time of Christian fellowship and encouragement.

In Germany I graduated from high school in 2007 and went on to the university to study Latin and History, which I finished this past summer with a master's degree. I am now preparing for a one and a half year program at a public school here, at the end of which I will be a state-licensed teacher. As much as I liked what I did at the University, I became more and more convinced that I wanted to go to a theological seminary. Since there are so few Reformed believers in Germany, I decided to have a regular profession besides it, because our church and the few other Reformed circles in Germany are too small to pay for a minister. So I started my studies at the seminary where my dad teaches in 2011, which will probably take me several more years since I will attend part-time. But I am very glad for this opportunity.

Although my studies keep me busy, the elders have given me more and more responsibilities in the church over the past years. This includes teaching a catechism class and leading the young people's meetings on Friday nights. For the future I hope to go farther in this direction, taking over more responsibilities as I get older.

I hope that you have gotten some insights into our small church world in Germany. If you have questions feel free to contact me via email (jochen-klautke@aol.com) or Facebook (Jochen Klautke). It would be great if you prayed for our small church and the work being done in Germany!

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The Calling of a Student

Students: What is your vocation? Have you made a career choice? Would you consider it your calling? If you are like the typical college student, your answer to that question likely is not a very confident one.

It is not unusual to consider the college years as a quest to find one's role in life. There are many questions that must be answered during that time. Should I major in Business? Biology? History? Am I meant to teach? Research? Run a business? The choices are endless and the decisions are intimidating. Even once a decision is made, the uncertainty may never quite go away. Students might settle on a major or a discipline, but what will they do with it? One way or another, the college student is faced with difficult decisions, with the future seemingly hanging in the balance.

Even if you find yourself in this situation—surrounded by the uncertainty of college, waiting to find your way to your true calling—put aside the tough questions about the future for a just a moment. Forget about whether you should drop your organic chemistry class or pick up another Spanish class. Stop worrying about whether you want to go with a marketing or finance concentration. Just ignore, for a moment, that you're really not sure why you're taking that one (terrible) class. The time to answer these questions will come, but there is a more pressing issue at hand.

Let's look at the vocation of the student in a broad sense of the word. Do college students have a vocation, or a calling, even in the limbo of the college years? In some ways, not really—yet. But even at this very moment, in the midst of all the uncertainty of course withdrawals, major changes, and career-altering decisions, the answer is absolutely yes.

In the academic sphere of life, students are called to use their talents to the best of their abilities. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." (Col. 3:23). Do your work well. Prepare for your classes (Make sure you go to class!). Try to do more than just good enough. Do it heartily, as to the Lord!

This is easier said than done. I'll be the first to admit it. After meeting on the first day of class and taking a quick look at the syllabus, the temptation is to see just how many classes and assignments you can skip without drastically affecting your grade. But that is the attitude of men-pleasers. As children of God, we ought to try to live up to a higher standard—even higher than the course requirements on the syllabus—the standard of the Lord.

Another important aspect of taking the college life seriously is developing the skills required to learn. Learn how to read. To listen. To take notes. To study. To persuade. To critique. These are life-long skills that every Christian should develop throughout life and will undoubtedly use throughout life. The years you spend going to school—high school, college, or beyond—are great opportunities to develop those skills.

The vocation of a college student relates to life in the church. Even though students are in some ways waiting to enter the "real world," believing students are never waiting to be a part of the body of Christ. Each student has a role, a calling both in the church universal and in your local congregation. Despite the uncertainty of the college years, a child of God does not enter a state of limbo in the life of the church. The gifts of the student, both now and later, are a valuable part of the body of Christ.

There are other reasons to take part in the life of your church. Not only do you have gifts that can be used for the benefit of the body, but other members of the church will also have their own gifts and talents to help you. To withhold yourself from the life of the church is to forfeit the benefits that others may have to offer to you as a student. Attend Bible studies and discussion groups—see what you can learn about God and about life. Have conversations with other members of your congregation (especially the older ones). You'd be surprised at the wisdom and guidance that they will be able to offer you at this point in your life.

Though in many ways the college years are a

search for a vocational identity, there is one identity that is always sure for the believer—his identity in Christ as a child of God. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1). Our calling as children of God is a daily, life-long calling to live a life of thankfulness. It does not begin with graduation or your first real job; the calling to serve our God is always with us. No matter what it is you might be doing in this life, and whatever answers you find to all those mind-numbing, future-determining college decisions, don't ever neglect that most important calling—the calling to serve the Lord.

David is a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan and is currently attending the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

Christian Living

Charles Terpstra

Young Calvinist Readers and Librarians (2)

My fellow young Calvinists, what I have not mentioned yet is that there was a third part to Rev. Herman Hoeksema's editorial in that issue of *The Young Calvinist* (Vol. 3 No. 6, June, 1921), titled "Collecting a Library". Here, "to create a new interest in the study of good books", Hoeksema encourages the Young Men's Societies in the churches to start a library. Such a library will help young men prepare for their discussion essays in the societies (what we used to call "after-recess program" in our Young People's Society—something that has sadly dropped by the wayside, I believe), and for that reason also stimulate them to read more and better books.

In this follow-up article to my previous one, I am going to give you a few brief quotations from that editorial and tell you about some of the books he recommended in his day for such a library, most of which are still excellent suggestions and readily available.

My hope is that this may once again serve to encourage our Young People's Societies to collect good Reformed books and start their own Young Calvinist libraries for the benefit of the whole society, as well as for personal growth in their Reformed faith and walk. I realize that many of our churches already have a library. Perhaps the young people can strengthen these libraries with their own section, or supplement them with their own section of books. Just a thought.

Now, here's "H.H."

> For this purpose (to prepare for society and for their own essays—C.J.T.), to remove all obstacles and every excuse for not being prepared, the Young Men's Society ought to possess a library of its own. Instead of spending the money that may be found in the treasury at the close of every season for a social or 'blow-out' (Wouldn't you like to know what a 1920s "blow out" was about?—C.J.T.), it ought to be devoted, at least in part, to the building up of a good library of books that shed light upon the subjects discussed in the meetings of the Society. And, of course, the Society ought to urge upon the attention of the members that the purpose of the library is not to adorn the room where the Society meets, but to be used by the members. In this way the Society may be a powerful means to create a new interest in the reading of good books.
>
> If work is made of this, we may perhaps succeed in creating a new interest in reading, and many of our young men may probably be roused to set themselves the task of studying different problems of the day. Then only may we expect that in the future they will take a stand, a Reformed stand, in the various spheres of life in the world (pp.173–74).

A good, practical suggestion for our Young People's societies, don't you think? With a lofty but attainable goal, wouldn't you agree? But is such a proposal still relevant for today's young Calvinists?

Some, perhaps many, would argue that it is not. With a pointed, pessimistic perspective they would say, "You can't bring back the glory days of reading and physical libraries, especially for today's youth. You will never get young people interested in reading and starting a library."

But I am not convinced. When I look at the young Calvinist men and women of our churches, I see young people who can read and who want to read spiritually more and better. I see an interest in good books and magazines, and I believe these young Calvinists would also be interested in starting a personal/family library or helping to develop their church library. Am I wrong, young people? If I am, please prove me wrong!

But how shall we move forward? To start gathering books for a library (personal or society or church) you need more practical help. You need concrete suggestions for books. Rev. Hoeksema gave such suggestions in that editorial to which I have referred. Some of them are now dated, but others are still good ones. What I like are the broad categories he mentioned, for that in itself is helpful in getting started with a library. Get a pen and paper (or your laptop, tablet, or smartphone) and start jotting down some broad areas in which to collect books. Here are some of the ones he mentioned:

- **Commentaries**: Yes, if you are going to study the Bible together, you will need some good works by others on the Bible. "H.H." mentions Matthew Henry, J. Calvin, C. Hodge, and F. Godet. These are still good, but there are many newer ones readily available too. Visit your local Christian bookstore, or better yet, visit Monergism.com's website (bookstore part) or Reformation Heritage Books (heritagebooks.org), or the RFPA (rfpa.org). Click on the category *commentaries* and browse a bit.
- **General Bible Study**: Again, if the main object of our reading and study is the word of God, personally and as a society, then you want to grow this part of your library. Here "H.H." includes books on OT and NT history, books on the miracles and parables of Jesus, and meditation and devotional works. We might add Bible surveys, handbooks, and atlases here as well. You can find many older, helpful Bible study aids in your local thrift stores.
- **Church History**: A vitally important area of knowledge that is often neglected, this ought to be a key part of your reading and library. Hoeksema lists W. Walker's *History of the Christian Church* and *Great Men of the Christian Church*, as well as G. Fisher's *History of the Reformation* (Yes, these are still available. Check on Amazon.com.)
- **American History**: This may surprise you a bit, but "H.H." actually included it, and I hope you can see why. The history of the church goes hand in hand with the history of the country in which we live (as well as world history), and therefore we ought to study our own country's history to see how God was at work more broadly for the sake of his church, e.g., during the American Civil War. Hoeksema suggested some general U.S. history books, suggestions for which you can get from your high school or college teachers. I would include a study of the lives of our key presidents by gathering some good biographies. Again, you may find such books cheaply at your local thrift store.
- **Social topics**: Here is another area you might not think of, but "H.H." has in mind especially the social/moral problems that plague each generation. In modern terms, he is suggesting that you ought to collect books on abortion, homosexuality, marriage, etc. There are some very good Christian books that cover a wide variety of contemporary ethical subjects in one volume, e.g., those by Norman Geisler or R. C. Sproul.

If you will, allow me to expand on Hoeksema's suggestions for collecting books for a library. What I would like to do is give you a list of the top books I believe you should have as young people for reading and for your personal library. I mean, of course, for your spiritual growth, both in the knowledge of the truth and in godliness. Obviously this list is going to have my personal perspective/opinion attached to it, but I hope it may be of some guidance to you in knowing where to start. Also, obviously I could make this list a lot longer, but for now I will limit myself to my top dozen titles, reserving the right to add to the list in the future.

I am going to put these in alphabetical order by author, except for the first one, which I place at the top of the list deliberately (And you will see why.).

1. **A good study Bible** I recommend the *Reformation Study Bible* (available new only in ESV from Ligonier, but you can find the older NKJV edition as well). A good study Bible is a must. Please avoid the Arminian, dispensational study Bibles, even if they are KJV (such as Ryrie, Schofield, etc.).

2. **Augustine's *Confessions***. A classic of the Christian faith. Many editions are available. Make sure it is a complete and not an abridged version.
3. **Roland Bainton's *Here I Stand***: A Life of Martin Luther. A classic. Get it, read it, and then re-read it every five years or so.
4. **J. Calvin's *Calvin's Calvinism*** (ed. by R. Dykstra, RFPA). This work includes his major, mature writings on providence and predestination. A "must have" to understand the full Calvin.
5. **J. Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion***. This is his great systematic theology of the Christian faith from a Reformed perspective. Every young Calvinist ought to make this a matter of his/her study. There are many editions, including single volumes in paperback. I suggest you get the full McNeill/Battles edition in hardcover (2 vols.).
6. **R. Hanko's *Doctrine According to Godliness: A Primer of Reformed Doctrine*** (RFPA). One of the finest summaries of the Reformed faith around, and from a PRC perspective.
7. **W. Hendriksen's *Survey of the Bible: A Treasury of Bible Information***. A solid summary of all the books of the Bible from a Reformed perspective.
8. **H. Hoeksema's *Wonder of Grace*** (RFPA). A wonderful summary of the doctrines of grace (God's plan and working of salvation).
9. **B. K .Kuiper's *The Church in History*** (Eerdmans). A classic textbook for Christian schools and readily available; get the latest edition if you can, but the older ones are good too. This work surveys the history of the Christian church from the beginning and includes Dutch Reformed and CRC church history.
10. **J. I. Packer's *Knowing God***. A classic on the attributes of God, applied well to the Christian heart and life. Another title to read and re-read.
11. **A. W. Pink's *The Sovereignty of God***. This summary of the Bible's teaching on God's sovereignty has been used by God to lead many to the Reformed faith. Be sure to get the full edition with the chapter on reprobation (old Baker ed.).
12. **R. C. Sproul's *The Holiness of God***. Now 25 years old, this work too has become a classic of the Reformed faith.

If I may mention one more encouraging thing for you to do regarding reading and starting a library, watch and listen to Rev. B. Huizinga's recent speech (Sept. 19, 2013) at the annual RFPA meeting. The topic was "Encouraging the Next Generation to Read" and the presentation was excellent. You will find the links for it at rfpa.org (go to the blog). Do it soon!

So now, get started on collecting that library! Only remember, these books are not for show and dust-collecting. They are for reading!

"Give attendance to reading" (1 Tim.4:13). "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter.3:18).

Charles is librarian/registrar of the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

Christian Living — Nathan Koole

The Madness Is Here

Winter draws to a close, and spring is beginning to show itself. This causes children to celebrate and rejoice that once again it will be warm, and they will begin to play outside again. It is truly a great work of God that can be seen in the changing of the seasons. Many stand in awe of this wonder, while others see it only briefly, and then look to the madness, the time of the year when college basketball is at its peak. The brackets and tournament now take the time of many people. March

should cause us to look to God and his greatness for his great works, but instead we look to basketball and the earthly madness that it brings. March truly does bring the madness, and as Christians we can enjoy it, but we must stay focused on our work and church and not let the madness take over our lives.

Ever since I can remember, I would love to sit around and watch the March Madness tournament that creates a big ruckus in our day and age. I remember waiting eagerly for my siblings to bring home brackets so that I could fill them out. I would sit by the computer and TV and try to watch every game; I wanted to know what teams were winning at all times so that I could tell the next person. I would change my brackets in the middle of games and hope that the underdog could pull off the upset. I dedicated a lot of my time to this, and now I realize that there are many other things that we as Christians could be occupying our time with.

As a Christian I think that too much time and energy is put into this tournament. Some of us will take off of work and change our whole schedule so that we are able to watch games that we think are important. Is the tournament the important thing here, or should we be at work and in school? The tournament definitely should not be more important, and if it is, we need to get our priorities straight.

What about selection Sunday, the day when teams are selected to be in the tournament and are given their rankings and opponents? Where are our minds? I hope that they are in the sermon and in the word. I hope that they are concentrating and being edified by the preaching. When the evening service is over, then what do we do? Do we run home to see if our teams made the tournament, and if they did, whom do they play? Do we print out a bracket right away to fill it out? I know I have done this before. That is not something that we should do. It is still the Sabbath day, and we are to use it for the worship of God and not for pleasures of this earth such as March Madness. These are all things that I am sure are happening in some of our lives. We love the things of this world and seek to enjoy them.

The madness seems to begin even before the tournament. After the brackets are filled out we can hardly talk to anyone without the tournament being addressed. It is not wrong to talk about the games; actually it is fine. The problem comes when we start to lose all communication with God and his word. It comes when we forsake our devotions and family time to maximize our time in front of a TV or computer to see the latest the tournament has to offer. God should still be the center of all our attention, and we must give him the attention and praise of which he is worthy.

When the tournament starts, many people take half a day off work or school so that they can sit around and watch games all afternoon. I am not saying this is wrong, but why do we have to skip work? Why not just wait till the day is over and watch the rest of the games? This problem also exists in high school. Kids will skip school or leave early so that they can be at home to watch more games. This almost seems ridiculous, but it happens. A lot of emphasis is put on this tournament.

March Madness brackets can also bring some people to lay down money on their bracket. They fill out a bracket and submit it to a pool, hoping to win the prize money for having the best bracket. This is gambling, and as Christians we are supposed to shy away from gambling and its wickedness.

When a game comes on, it seems to become the top priority, and everything else will take a back seat. If there is homework to be done and there is a game on, I fear that many kids, myself included, will choose to watch the game. This is a struggle with priorities, but we have to remember that God should be first in all things, not ourselves and the pleasures of the world that we choose to enjoy.

As Christians we have to remember that although it is not wrong to watch basketball, we cannot elevate it above the things that God has called us to do, such as work and school. We have to remember not to idolize players with good skills, teams that we root for, or coaches who are well respected, because they are human. God calls us to worship him and him alone. Scripture tells us we cannot serve God and mammon. So just remember that we can enjoy the March Madness tournament, but it must be limited and not take over our lives and our minds. We must remember it is through God that we even exist, and we must give him our utmost attention, praise, and glory.

This paper was written for a senior English class at Covenant Christian High School. Nathan is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

Thelma Westra

Blessed God

The poor in spirit, they are blest,
God's kingdom they'll inherit;
And those that mourn will comfort find
Imputed by Christ's merit;
The meek are blest and shall possess
God's kingdom through Christ's righteousness.

God fills with good the souls who thirst
And hunger after right;
Those who show mercy shall obtain
Compassion in His sight;
The pure in heart who love Him well
Shall in God's presence surely dwell.

The peacemakers, they shall be called
The children of the Lord;
And they who persecution bear
And walk in sweet accord
Shall in God's presence ever stand
And praise Him in the heavenly land.

So when the wicked persecute,
With cruelty revile,
And vilify and injure us
With viciousness and guile;
Then we're commanded to rejoice
And praise our God with thankful voice.

Afflictions, though they seem so great,
Are light when viewed through eyes
Comparing them with heavenly bliss
Of God's own Paradise.
Unending ecstasy and love
Will be our portion up above.

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:

Hannah Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. William & Alison Graham—Ballymena, N Ireland

Maddox David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kevin & Heather Deemter—Byron Center, MI

Cole Matthew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matt & Jori Oosterbaan—Byron Center, MI

Simone Louise, daughter of Rev. & Mrs. Nathan & Carrie Langerak—Crete, IL

Brett Russell, son of Mr. & Mrs. Russ & Katie DeVries—Edmonton, CAN

Christian James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Troy & Danae Karsemeyer—Faith, MI

Zephaniah Jai, son of Mr. & Mrs. David & Madri Mahtani—First, MI

Reese Cynthia, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nick & Leanne Engelsma—Georgetown, MI

Eli John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Frank & Kristie VanBaren—Georgetown, MI

Amos Joshua, son of Mr. & Mrs. Nick & Amanda Kamps—Grandville, MI

Hailey Catherine, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bill & Amanda Booth—Grandville, MI

Grant Henry, son of Mr. & Mrs. Mark & Sarah DeBoer—Grandville, MI

Caleb John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Rick & Carmen Mingerink—Grandville, MI

Titus John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brad & Sarah Kiel—Kalamazoo, MI

Chloe Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Cameron & Kelsey Zylstra—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN

Duncan James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Joel & Jessica Zylstra—Immanuel, Lacombe, CAN

Laura Helen, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Adam & Carrie Bosman—Peace, IL

Jordan Timothy, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jonathan & Ronda den Hartog—Redlands, CA

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:1

Public confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ was made by:

Taylor Oomkes—Byron Center, MI

Tyler Ondersma—Byron Center, MI

Alex Dykstra—Faith, MI

Kelsey Elzinga—Faith, MI

Jared Noorman—Faith, MI

Meghann Langerak—Grace, MI

Jessica Mastbergen—Grace, MI

Brad Gritters—Hull, IA

Caleb Groeneweg—Hull, IA

Colton Hoksbergen—Hull, IA

Nathan Westra—Hull, IA

Jared Zandstra—Hull, IA

Nicole Kamps—Southwest, MI

Morgan Reitsma—Southwest, MI

MARRIAGES

"Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it…." Psalm 127:1

United in the bond of holy matrimony were:

Mr. Alex Vander Schaaf and Miss Dana Kuiper—Georgetown, MI

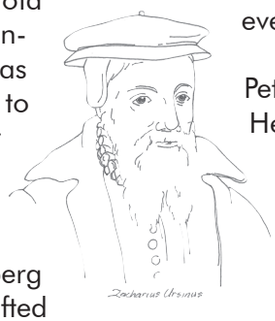
Mr. Kevin VanBaren and Mrs. Nicole Kooienga—Loveland, CO

A Turn of Events: From Chaos to Comfort

A History of the Heidelberg Catechism (Part 5)

He was a quiet and gentle boy. He loved books and he loved to study. He was well-suited to be taught in the best of schools. But his father, a tutor, could not afford this. The senate of Breslau, however, noticed how intelligent this boy of their town was.

Zacharius Ursinus was sixteen years old when he was sent to the University of Wittenberg by the senate of Breslau. When he was finished with his studies, he would return to Breslau to teach in the university there. That was the senate's plan, and that was fine with Zacharius.



Breslau, Germany was deep in Lutheran country, so Luther's school in Wittenberg was the natural place to send Breslau's gifted son. Although Luther had died four years earlier, Melanchthon, who carried on after Luther, still taught there. Melanchthon noticed this quiet, serious boy too. They became close friends. Ursinus studied under Melanchthon for seven years and then traveled throughout Europe for one final year of education. He visited some of the most important places of the Reformation, including Zurich and Geneva. While in Geneva, John Calvin also noticed this talented and godly young man. Zacharius was given a signed set of Calvin's books by the author himself. Finally Zacharius was ready to return to Breslau to teach.

At first this went well. A quiet, peaceful teaching position was all that Zacharius wanted. But people started whispering about him, and then they openly accused him. Why? In all his studies, Ursinus had not only learned Reformation doctrine from the Lutheran point of view, but he had also been taught about the Lord's supper from the Calvinistic point of view, and he believed Calvin's view. But Breslau was Lutheran and believed Luther's view of the Lord's supper. After only a few short years of teaching, Ursinus was no longer welcome there. He would have to leave his home and family. But where would he go?

His old friend in Wittenberg, Melanchthon, had died, so he could not go there. Zurich, Switzerland was his next choice. Peter Martyr lived in Zurich. Martyr was a Reformer who explained the Lord's supper in the Calvinistic way, and did so perhaps better than any other man at that time. Living in Zurich, Ursinus saw the doctrine of Lord's supper even more clearly.

Ursinus saw something else clearly as well. Peter Martyr had received a request to come to Heidelberg and teach in the university there, but he was too old to go. Martyr had some advice for Heidelberg, though: take Ursinus instead. Now what would Ursinus do? He knew that going to Heidelberg meant even more trouble and controversy. Two professors had already been thrown out of Heidelberg for fighting over the Lord's supper. Oh, to be hidden in a corner of some quiet village! Such were Ursinus' thoughts. But Ursinus was exactly the man God had prepared for the work there. Ursinus packed his bags to go. Such would be the turn of events…

"Little Lights" … let it shine!

Find all of the following words in the puzzle below:

"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Proverbs 3:5, 6

T	H	E	T	Y	L	O	R	D	K	C	V	H
W	K	G	B	C	H	N	A	E	L	I	A	E
U	N	D	E	R	S	T	A	N	D	I	N	G
D	T	E	I	V	B	P	S	I	Y	I	D	L
A	L	L	N	R	R	L	L	H	H	Y	K	B
P	L	W	D	H	E	A	R	T	N	V	U	P
L	A	O	P	K	V	C	J	F	L	O	N	Y
H	H	N	W	C	O	T	T	R	U	S	T	H
II	S	K	R	N	R	U	N	R	L	J	O	T
M	D	C	V	W	P	A	T	H	S	L	V	I
Y	U	A	N	D	K	N	L	L	S	Y	A	W

Connie is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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"Ye are all children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

I Thessalonians 5:1-8

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