Beacon Lights

Magazine of the Protestant Reformed Young People

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Strangers and Sojourners: Together

In the last editorial we examined the idea of being alone on our sojourn through life. We saw that for the most part it is not good to be alone on life's journey. In this article we will look at the flip side of being alone: We are strangers and sojourners together.

There are a couple of different ways to look at being pilgrims together. One is from the viewpoint of the communion of the saints, which has two main aspects: unity and diversity.

The unity of the saints, according to the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 21), is that all who believe are members of Christ and in common are partakers of him and of all his riches and gifts. We are one in our head, Christ Jesus, and are members of his body. The church is one in faith, one in doctrine, and one in practice and walk of life. All are in common strangers and sojourners who came from the same place, who travel the same road, who have the same purpose and goal, and who enter in through the same narrow gate. They have in common their salvation in all of its riches and gifts.

The other aspect of the communion of the saints is diversity. Each one is an individual, as we have implied in the last couple of articles. Each one of us is unique. The Catechism expresses this in terms of gifts, which implies that we have varying gifts: "Everyone must know it to be his duty readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts for the advantage and salvation of other members." Paul writes of this

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diversity in unity in 1 Corinthians 12, perhaps the clearest and most detailed explanation of the truth of the communion of the saints. This diversity is necessary because we are different in many ways. Each one of us has his own abilities or lack of them, his own strengths and weaknesses, his own personality and character, his own nature and temperament, and his own disposition and makeup. If we were all the same, there could be no variety of gifts. Not everyone can be an officebearer; not everyone has musical talents to use in the worship of the church; not everyone can lead Bible societies. Each must find his own niche in the life of the sojourning church, and then use his talents for the advantage and salvation of the other members.

There is unity in diversity, and diversity in unity.

Another way of describing the communion of the saints is in terms of friends and friendship. Like the two aspects of the communion of the saints, friendship has two aspects: likeness and difference. We will look at the concept of friendship, used often in scripture, in order to understand this idea. But first, a literary side trip of a practical nature.

Young people, most of you have probably not yet had the opportunity to travel very much, especially to countries other than our own. I'm just a tad older than you, and along with my wife Ruthellen, I have been able to go to a few overseas countries. This has been a wonderful experience, and we hope to travel more. We have been to Singapore twice. This gave us a personal meaning of the term *culture shock*. We landed from the skies onto an island populated by Chinese people, who fortunately spoke English. Actually, it was Singlish, but we learned to understand them. We could hardly have been more different from them, but upon being greeted at the airport by a good-sized crowd at midnight, it took us only a short time to make friends and to feel comfortable with them.

On another trip to Southeast Asia we went to Myanmar to teach Old Testament history. We landed in a nation populated by short, brown-skinned, pleasant-natured people who spoke Burmese. My Burmese was a little weak, so I spoke in English to the class, with Pastor Titus translating into Burmese, and another pastor translating into the Karen language. It is hard to imagine something so foreign as to be virtually impossible. But it took only a few minutes to realize that we all were one in the faith, and their receptivity to what was taught was amazing.

More recently we visited folks (now friends) in Namibia who are one with us in the faith. After driving 250 miles through the desolation (and the beauty) of the Kalahari Desert to the end of the road and the end of civilization, we met the Duvenhage family. We did not know them and had never seen them; we knew very little about them. After the initial introductions, it took about five minutes to become friends with them, and we enjoyed a totally wonderful time with them for a week. They spoke Afrikaans and English; I spoke Dutch (to which Afrikaans is related) and English, and we understood each other quite well.

On a more personal level, I have a friend who is quite different from me. I must be careful here in what I write, lest I reveal his identity. Nor are my words intended to be in any way insulting or self-serving. But facts are facts. He is not educated; I am. He is not aggressive and self-motivated; I am not entirely laid back. He has certain interests; I do not share them. We are about as different as possible from one another. How in the world can we be friends? Because we share a common faith and hope of eternal life. We may agree to disagree on almost everything else, but the unity of friends overrides our differences.

Perhaps some of you young people have had similar experiences when attending conventions and making friends with other young people from other places. Some of these friendships even develop into marriages. Your lives may be different, but you quickly make friends.

How are these instant friendships to be explained? How is it possible to establish fast friendship with the people in Singapore, to teach the Burmese and Karen people the gospel of the Old Testament, and to agree with people in Africa on all the essentials of the Reformed faith, both in doctrine and practice? The answer is the communion of the saints, which forms a basis of the unity of all God's people, regardless of place and race. This is true friendship as scripture uses the term.

After this excursion, we return our attention to the biblical idea of friends. As strangers and sojourners we need friends: those who are identical with us, but who are yet different from us. We need them because the road we travel is difficult and dangerous, and we are likely to stumble and fall. When that happens, we need someone to help us. As Ecclesiastes 4:10 says concerning two friends, "For if they fall, the one will

lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up."

As fellow sojourners we need good friends, and that starts with God, our divine friend. He is our covenant God, which means that through Christ and his work of salvation we enjoy fellowship with him. Friendship is the essence of our relationship to God. He is the sovereign God, and we are creatures, which means that we are essentially different. Yet we look like him spiritually. Perhaps the highest compliment that can be paid to anyone is what scripture says about Abraham (Isa. 41:8, James 2:23): he was called the friend of God.

As children of Abraham, we are blessed to be the friends of God in Christ. In Luke 12:4 Jesus calls us, "my friends." We read in John 15:15: "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." The Lord says in John 15:13, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends," which was exactly what he did. We are his friends in the way of obedience: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). This implies that true friendship is always antithetical, as James 4:4 instructs us: "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

This friendship is in sharp contrast to Job's three supposed friends. Instead of helping and comforting him, they were critical and condemnatory, until finally Job lamented, "My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me" (Job 19:14). In verse 19 (NIV) he complains, "All my intimate friends detest me; those I love have turned against me." With friends like that, who needs enemies?

Not everything the Bible says about friends and friendship is positive. Scripture speaks of what may best be called questionable friendships, especially with regard to the rich, who always seem to have plenty of friends: "The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends" (Prov. 14:20). "Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbor" (Prov. 19:4). "Many will intreat the favour of the prince: and every man *is* a friend to him that giveth gifts" (Prov. 19:6). Such language makes one question whether ulterior motives are involved, most of them self-serving.

There is also friendship that is outright false and fake. Psalm 41:9 speaks of this: "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." Speaking of the end times, Jesus says this: "And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. (Luke 21:16). Who can forget the ultimate example of false friendship? Judas Iscariot was one of the twelve; for three years he was apparently one of Jesus' closest friends. Yet he betrayed the Lord for thirty pieces of silver. When Jesus met him in the garden of Gethsemane, he addressed Judas as "friend," which is more correctly "comrade, mate, fellow." In a sense Judas was the friend of Jesus, although a false one. But ultimately he is anything but a friend, and Jesus did not dignify him with the gentle "friend."

In contrast, true friends "love at all times" (Prov. 17:17). Never do they betray one another's friendship by gossip, which inevitably ruins it, according to Proverbs 16:28 (NIV): "A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends." The same thought is expressed in Proverbs 17:9 (NIV): "He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends." A true friend "sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24). Since brothers usually stick together, such a friendship must be very strong and lasting. On such a friend we can safely rely.

How do friends help one another? By supporting and encouraging one another by good advice. We read in Proverbs 27:9, "Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel." Because of the value of such friendship, Solomon goes on to admonish us to preserve our friendship in our generations, and never to break it: "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not; neither go into thy brother's house in the day of thy calamity: for better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off" (Prov. 27:10). Part of friendship involves rebuking one another when necessary. Rather than becoming angry and breaking the friendship, true friends can accept criticism exactly because they are friends. Proverbs 27:6 expresses it this way: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." This is the reason never to be friends with an angry man, because he is rash and stupid in his decision-making: "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go" (Prov. 22:24). Friends

help friends think things through and make good decisions (Prov. 27:17): "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

Listen, young people, to the words of the wisest man of all time. Many things will come and go in your lives, but true friendship is forever.

"I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts" (Ps. 119:63).

Are you?

Editor's Notes

Mark H. Hoeksema

In this issue *Beacon Lights* begins the re-publication of a booklet called *Implications of Public Confession*, written by Dr. Abraham Kuyper, one of the shining lights of the Reformed faith. I say "re-publication" because his instruction on the subject of making confession of faith was originally published in booklet form by *Beacon Lights* in 1989. It was later published again, also in booklet form, although the date cannot be determined. A limited number of copies still exist, and they can be obtained by requesting them from the business manager of the magazine. When they are gone, the supply will not be replenished, since *Beacon Lights* is a magazine, not a publishing company. This scarcity is in part the impetus for our re-publication.

The elapsed time between the original publication (1989) is now 25 years. Yet the message of the booklet is timeless, which is the other aspect of our re-publication. Since our target audience today is a generation that was not even born at the time of the original publication, we have chosen to reprint this timeless material without fear of redundancy. Kuyper's words are today just as applicable and valuable to you, young people, as they were long ago. Some things never change.

In the interest of the instruction and encouragement of our young people, *Beacon Lights* will publish the twelve short chapters of *Implications* once per month for the next twelve months. Eventually this entire work will be available online for those who wish to retain it.

You will also notice a change in the authorship of the Little Lights rubric. Connie Meyer has written this column for 20 years, almost to the day. But now she has decided to move on to other endeavors and projects. *Beacon Lights* thanks Connie for her faithful work of introducing the children of the covenant to the magazine, and we wish her the best as she continues her labors elsewhere.

The new author of Little Lights is Tricia Mingerink. I do not need to introduce her, since she has done an admirable job introducing herself in her initial column elsewhere in this issue. *Beacon Lights* welcomes Tricia as a monthly contributor.

Still another change is upcoming. Chester ("Skip") Hunter, our long-time Devotional rubric author, will be leaving *Beacon Lights* when he completes his journey through the scriptures sometime this fall. This confronts us with either retiring the rubric or finding a replacement. The staff has decided to pursue the second option, and therefore welcomes applications to become the new author. If you are interested in writing for this rubric, please contact the editor (editor@beaconlights.org) or the associate editor (ryankregel@gmail.com). Tell us a bit about yourself and give us your ideas as to the format you might use.

A word of clarification. In an interview recently published in *Beacon Lights*, Henry deMots gave his recollection of certain events centering on Rev. Herman Veldman which, in his own words, was hearsay. Some of Rev. Veldman's descendants have informed me that deMots' version of events is inaccurate and that including his comments was not helpful. No offense was intended.

This incident illustrates something that we all should remember as we read future interviews. People are fallible, and memories are deficient. Therefore some recollections will inevitably be inaccurate or at least subject to challenge. It is important that we do not confuse error with malicious intent which, according to my faulty memory, I do not recall ever encountering.

Question for Schuyler

Question

Will you please give a summary of the Christian Patriarchy Movement and its dangers?

Response

The Christian Patriarchy Movement (CPM) is one about which I had to educate myself by searching online. The main advocates of the CPM (sometimes called Biblical Patriarchy) are R. C. Sproul, Jr., Doug Phillips, and Doug Wilson. Recently, Mr. Phillips fell into the public sin of adultery, and resigned from his organization called Vision Forum Ministries, and Doug Wilson is a well-known promoter of the Federal Vision heresy. There is also a group called "Quiverfull" that promotes these ideas. The basic idea of "patriarchy" is the rule of fathers, which is then applied to the rule of men in every sphere of life.

One quotation from the tenets of the CPM immediately caught my attention and raised red flags for me: "…the church should proclaim the Gospel-centered doctrine of biblical patriarchy as an essential element of God's ordained pattern for human relationships and institutions." Did you notice the key word? Gospel-centered! Beware of men who make "Gospel-centered" that which is not part of the Gospel! The Gospel is not what we do, but what God has done in Jesus Christ. Christian Patriarchy tends to legalism.

There follows a summary of the main distinctive beliefs and practices of the CPM. Please bear in mind that the movement is varied and this summary of necessity must be general.

First, God reveals himself as masculine, not feminine. Second, God has ordained distinct gender roles for men and women as part of the created order. Third, the husband and father as head of his household has absolute authority over his wife and children. Fourth, while God has ordained the institutions of church and state, the family is the primary institution, and in that sphere the husband and father is lord (patriarch). Fifth, male leadership in the home should, where possible, apply to society at large. Therefore, the CPM opposes women working outside the home, women (for the most part) pursuing further education, and women having authority over men (such as in the business world, politics, the military, etc.). Sixth, since the woman was created to be a helper to her husband, the bearer of children, and a keeper at home, the God-ordained sphere of wife is in the home. Seventh, unmarried women should prepare for domestic life and are under the authority of their fathers until they marry. Eighth, it is the calling of married women to have children, many children. Therefore, the CPM opposes contraception in almost all circumstances. Ninth, the education of children is the sole responsibility of fathers. Therefore, homeschooling is the preferred method of Christian instruction. The CPM does not encourage Christian schools and rejects public school education.

With the statements above there is much with which we agree. Some of the problems we have are with emphasis rather than substance. However, I do have some criticisms.

First, the CPM so exalts the father as head that he *dominates* his wife and children. It teaches a kind of hierarchy within the home in which the father is above the mother. The Bible teaches that the father and mother have equal authority in the home. The CPM places a grave temptation before fathers to be tyrannical and to abuse their authority. Some in the movement have even placed the authority of the father above the church, so he is not answerable even to the elders. The Bible does not teach that the wife and mother is basically a servant of the husband and father. She is his help meet; she is his companion; she is (since marriage is a covenant relationship) his friend (Gen. 2:18, 23–24, Mal. 2:14, 1 Pet. 3:7). Although the husband is certainly the head of his wife, and the wife has a calling to submit to his leadership, the Bible never calls the husband to *rule* over his wife, but to *love* her (Eph. 5:25) and to *dwell* with her, treating her with gentleness, understanding her weakness, not so he can crush her or dominate her,

but so that he can *cherish* her (Eph. 5:28–29, 1 Pet. 3:7). If a man wants someone he can dominate, let him hire a cook and housekeeper, not marry a wife! Besides all this, there is equality (spiritual equality) in marriage ("heirs together of the grace of life" [1 Pet. 3:7]). In the New Testament husbands and wives work together: the husband does not impose his will upon his wife. So much is this the case that Paul says (something shocking to the culture of his day) "the husband hath not power (authority) of his own body, but the wife" (1 Cor. 7:4). Therefore, should a couple decide to refrain from sexual intercourse for a time in marriage, it is "with consent" (v. 5). It is not for the husband to impose his will upon his wife in this or in other areas.

Second, the CPM finds much of its biblical proof in Old Testament examples (such as Abraham and other patriarchs), but it is dangerous and misleading to attempt to apply examples directly to Christians. An example is not always normative, that is, an example is *not* the same as a command. We need to apply the lives of the Old Testament saints wisely.

Third, the CPM makes much of the Old Testament law, much of which is not applicable to the New Testament believer. For example, Numbers 30 allows fathers and husbands to cancel the oaths made by their daughters/wives, so that their oath is not legally binding. Some in the CPM apply this to fathers who, they say, have veto power over their daughters' choice of a husband. While it is certainly wise for a young Christian woman to seek the approval of her father, the Christian father must not be a tyrant in this area.

Fourth, while the Bible does not support *mothers* working outside the home, the CPM movement goes too far when it discourages or prohibits all work by women outside the home. For example, Titus 2:5 and 1Timothy 5:14 call young, married women with children to be "keepers at home" and to "guide the house." While the Bible forbids women leadership roles in the church, it does not forbid leadership roles to women outside of the church.

Fifth, while a large family is a blessing from the Lord (Ps. 127:3–5), the CPM takes also this to extremes. Contraception is a contentious issue, but we cannot legislate for others. Married couples must decide before the Lord, based on their circumstances (especially the health and well-being of the mother), how many children they are able to receive. However, this does *not* mean that God is not sovereign over the womb; it does *not* justify couples refusing to have children for selfish reasons; and it certainly does *not* imply that abortion is justifiable in any circumstances. We rightly abominate abortion as murder. Besides, the motivation within the CPM for having large families is for Christians to "outbreed" unbelievers, influence politics, and redeem society. This is not at all a biblical motivation for child rearing! The CPM is allied with unbiblical Postmillennialism and other movements.

Sixth, the CPM rightly reminds parents (although they emphasize fathers) of their God-given responsibility to educate their children in godliness. However, homeschooling is not the only (or even the best) way in which this should be done. Deuteronomy 6:7, a favorite text of the CPM and homeschoolers in general, does not limit the method of teaching children to the home. The fact that Deuteronomy is the Old Testament law should give us pause before we apply it too strictly. A strict literal application of verse 7 would include verses 8–9, which speak of binding God's law upon your hand, putting it on frontlets between your eyes and writing it on your doorposts and gates. We take the principles of God's word and apply them to our situation with the wisdom given by God. While parents must never abdicate responsibility for the spiritual education of their children, and while fathers certainly take a leading role in this, it is good to delegate teaching responsibility to other Christians if they are more capable of instructing the children in various disciplines. Christian schools are a great blessing to our churches. Where they cannot be used, prayerful consideration should be given to good alternatives.

I hope this summary has been helpful.

—Schuyler

Schuyler continues to welcome your questions. Please submit them to editor@beaconlights.org.

Letter to a Young Lady in Waiting

Dear Young Lady in Waiting,

To be honest, writing this letter makes me really nervous. You see, I'm married. And someone already told me that because I'm married and you're single, you might not even read this. This is a mismatch of sorts…a married person writing to you about your single life. So who am I to give you advice on how to handle your situation? I understand that it may be difficult for you to hear from me regarding this, but please know that it is difficult for me to write to you about this as well.

I already wrote a letter to your friend who is dating. But what about you, the one who is not dating? Are you hoping to marry in the Lord someday? Or do you think you would be content to remain single for the rest of your life? Your answer might be different from another single girl's answer, and for that matter, maybe you don't even know the answer to that question right now. However, it is a question that you should be asking. Philippians 4:6 encourages you to go to God in prayer with every thing. So ask God to guide you in this matter also. With much prayer, and maybe even after much time, God will reveal his will to you.

You see, the single life can be fulfilling, and single people hold a special place in the church of Christ. Romans 12:4–8 reminds us that the body of believers has many different members, each with their own gifts and talents…and single people are no exception to this. But they have the somewhat enviable freedom to share their gifts and talents without being concerned about putting their spouse and children first. Being single is not a "problem," and single people are not to be pitied. If after much thought and prayer, you have decided that God is leading you down the path of the single life, then this letter is not for you. A dear, single friend of mine is willing to write to you in the near future regarding that topic. However, if you are hoping to date and get married someday, or even think that it's a slight possibility, then read on…

So why do you want to date? As you've probably guessed, dating is (usually!) fun. Having a boyfriend is (most of the time!) fun. But, as I wrote in a letter to your friend, you should date or look to date with the end goal of marrying in the Lord. Desiring to date and get married is not something to be ashamed of. Proverbs 18:22 says, "Whoso findeth a wife [or in your case, a husband] findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord." If you have sincerely prayed that God would reveal his will to you concerning this, then the strong desire to be a godly wife and mother can only be seen as coming from him.

I do not know your exact situation, so therefore I don't know why you are not dating. Maybe it's because you are shy, and guys scare you. Maybe it's because you had a relationship end badly, so you are not ready for another one. Maybe the only guys asking are ones you are not interested in, so you've said "no thanks" a few times. Or maybe it's as simple as the fact that no one is asking. Some of my words of advice may not apply to you, but it is my prayer that something I have to say here will speak to your heart, regardless of the reason you are not dating.

Please know that I was in your situation once. I'll be honest: I was young and probably a little foolish. But still, I wasn't dating, and I wanted to date. I know that it's not an easy situation to be in, whether you are 16, 21, or 26. Therefore, what I am about to say is a combination of my own experiences and my conversations with single girls—conversations with girls who were single for years before they found "the one." Yes, I interviewed women before I sat down to write this letter. These few words of advice are not just my words. They are hard-won words of wisdom from a variety of women. These words are heartfelt, and were spoken from the perspective of looking back on their single years with fondness, and sometimes looking back on their single years from the perspective of "I should have done that differently." As well, they are words spoken with love and concern (but not pity!) for you and your situation. Because we all know it's not easy.

First, remember that your current position of singleness is not a bad thing. There are many ben-

efits to not dating. These benefits will be explored in a future letter from my friend, but just remember that you are not an object of pity. There will always be people (some of them well-meaning) who will wonder out loud why you don't have a boyfriend or ask if you met anyone at the retreat, and generally give you a negative vibe about being single. Don't be afraid to smile, politely reply that you are single right now because it's God's will for you, and walk away.

Next, keep in mind that all things happen in God's time. Not our time. Psalm 90:4 reminds us that God is an eternal being when it says "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." This means that he doesn't do things according to human timelines. Even if you know in your heart that you are called to be a wife and mother, it doesn't mean that it will happen for you tomorrow. Or next year. Or the year after that. Patience in this matter is not always easy, but remember who is in control. He has a plan for your life…one that he knew about before you were even born.

Practically speaking, this means that your high school and/or college years should not be spent wishing you had a boyfriend. Dating is fun, but it can also be stressful. So enjoy this time with your girlfriends, your family, and your guy friends. God is blessing you with this season of single life, and there is nothing wrong with enjoying it. You know this doesn't mean go out dancing and drinking. But this time in your life can be full of joy. Ecclesiastes 3:12–13 reminds us to rejoice and enjoy the fruits of our labor as a gift of God.

However, that same text in Ecclesiastes 3 says that we should do good in our lives. Please don't spend your days or evenings twiddling your thumbs, waiting for your knight in shining armor to show up. Use your time wisely, and get involved in your church, school, and community. Go to Bible study, join discussion groups, and use your gifts and talents in the service of the kingdom. Your help is needed and can be used in so many areas (See my list of 25 Ways Single Young People Can Serve the Church of Christ at www.youngcalvinists.org). Not only that, but maybe you'll find that your knight is attending Bible study too, or working alongside you at a fundraiser.

Be very careful about saying no to a first date with a fellow believer. You may think the guy is not marriage material, but on the other hand, how will you know unless you get to know him better? Going on one date does not cue "Here Comes the Bride". There are some very serious questions that you'll need to ask yourself about the person you'll date someday…questions that will help you decide if he's "the one" or not (again, refer to the letter I wrote to your friend who is dating). But if you don't give him a chance, you'll never even have the opportunity to ask those questions.

Don't automatically assume that the guy you went to school with your whole life is not date-able. You might think you know way too much about him, but the truth is that you probably know as much about him as he does about you…and he doesn't know everything about you, right? Further, being friends first is never a bad thing.

Those things being said, you still have the right to be picky for the right reasons (but only after that first date). Don't let your strong desire to date and get married cause you to settle for less than "in the Lord". We all know that text about not being unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14), but your criteria should go even further than that. The person you date should strengthen and encourage you in your walk with Christ. He should possess qualities that will help him grow into being the spiritual leader in your home. Don't settle for less than that.

I don't want this to read like an instruction manual on "how to get a guy." But keep in mind that asking out a girl can be stressful for the guy! This means that if you are interested, then make his job easier and act interested. Make conversation, ask questions, smile, and laugh at his jokes. There's a fine line between showing interest and being pushy. Be careful not to cross that line.

Get together with mixed groups. Girlfriends are tons of fun, but if you hang out exclusively with girls, it's going to be intimidating for any guy to ask you out. Host a bonfire, start a book club, plan a beach

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day. If you are too shy to handle this, ask a friend to do the calling. Regardless of whether or not you start dating someone as a result of these gatherings, it's still beneficial for Christian young people to mingle and fellowship.

The way you dress is directly related to the kind of guy you will attract. If a guy wants to date you because you wear low-cut shirts and short skirts, then don't be surprised if you're on a date some day and you see him looking at another girl who is wearing a low-cut shirt and a short skirt. We, as Christian women, whether married or single, are called to dress and behave modestly. As well, Romans 14:13 instructs us not to "put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in [our] brother's way." If you're dressing immodestly, I can guarantee that you are being a stumbling block for your young single brothers in Christ. That being said, remember that modest apparel does not equal sloppy or frumpy. There are plenty of cute, modest fashion options out there that don't involve turtlenecks.

Education is never a waste. Spend your single years getting your degree. If you're sure college is not for you, then at the very least, read good literature and work on improving your skills in other areas. Your education and acquired skills can be utilized now as a benefit to others in the church. But you'll also use them in many situations someday as a wife and mother.

Remember that your identity is found in Christ. Your worth does not depend on whether or not you have a boyfriend, and your value does not rest on how long it takes for a guy to notice you. You are a sinner saved by grace, fearfully and wonderfully made in his image, and as such, are a beloved child of God.

Pray. James 5:16 encourages us in our prayer life when it says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous [wo]man availeth much." Pray that God will reveal his will to you in this matter. Pray for patience and wisdom as God works out his plan in your life. Pray for your future boyfriend and husband, even though you don't know who he is. Pray that God will work in both of your hearts, preparing you for each other, and for the commitment of marriage.

And I will also pray for you, my single friend.

Sincerely, Lisa

Lisa is a wife and mother, and a member of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Christian Living — Abraham Kuyper

Implications of Public Confession

Preface

In the past few years, a couple of people approached the editor of *Beacon Lights* with the idea of reprinting Abraham Kuyper's book, *The Implications of Public Confession*. The staff quickly agreed to reprint the book and search was made to determine what copyrights still existed on the book. Through the help of a few friends, it was determined that the copyrights on the book had expired, which meant that the Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies was free to reprint the book. As far as can be determined, the sixth edition in 1934 was the last printing of the book. The Federation of Protestant Reformed Young People's Societies is therefore happy to provide this excellent work for reading and study by our churches and by our young people.

The main reason for reprinting this excellent work is to provide our young people who will make or who have made public confession of faith with reading and study material on the implications of making public confession in our churches. By reading and studying this book, our young people will be made more aware of the responsibilities that become theirs upon confession of their faith. By the encouraging words of Abraham Kuyper, those who make confession of faith will appreciate even more the Reformed faith to which they have confessed agreement.

As Abraham Kuyper says, "Now she [your church] is willing to admit you to the holy supper, to let you take your place at the Lord's table with the other members, provided that you are willing to confess that their confession is yours." Also, "Bring that confession to the congregation of believers, and begin to fight one identical warfare with them. They too have nothing of which to boast in themselves…to God is all the praise and honor."

David Harbach, Editor

The Interdependence of Holy Baptism and the Holy Supper

"Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live" (Ezekiel 16:6).

Baptism is not complete without its complement, the holy supper. When an infant is born into the world, the nurse who is in attendance washes it, because it is born unclean. It needs bathing, but that is not all it needs. It also needs food. Hence, it is most likely that the same maid who washed it will also bear the infant to its mother's breast. And an atmosphere of peace and contentment pervades the nursery room only after the child is feeding at its mother's bosom. In fact, we would not hesitate to censure the attitude of a nurse who supposed she had absolved herself of responsibility by bathing the child, and cared not at all whether or not it was given an opportunity to be nursed. Such conduct on her part, we feel, would be sufficient reason to dismiss her.

This figure illustrates the significant relationship that obtains between the sacrament of baptism and that of the holy supper. We may not suppose that baptism alone is sufficient; we may not desire the sacrament of purification and neglect that of nourishment. To desire baptism and to ignore the holy supper is to rob each of its significance.

It becomes us to remember that we were once like the child the Holy Spirit depicts to us in Ezekiel 16, the child of whom we read in verses 4–6: "As for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live."

This passage tells us that we were conceived in sin and born in iniquity, that because we were born of unclean parents, we also were unclean. It tells us that before our baptism we need spiritual cleansing within, that we needed to be purged by the blood of Christ. Baptism was the external symbol of that purification of the soul by the holy Lamb of God. It is what the holy apostle confirmed by the words: "Once ye were unclean, but now ye are sanctified, now ye are justified, now ye are washed."

Our church also confesses that such is the significance of baptism. In article 35 of the Belgic Confession we read: "Now those who are regenerated have in them a twofold life: the one corporal and temporal, which they have from the first birth and is common to all men; the other spiritual and heavenly, which is given them in their second birth…and this life is not common, but is peculiar to God's elect." Article 34 states: "Therefore he has commanded all those who are his to be baptized with pure water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, thereby signifying to us that as water washeth away the filth of the body when poured upon it…so doth the blood of Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost, internally sprinkle the soul, cleanse it from its sins, and regenerate us from children of wrath unto children of God."

But baptism is not a be-all and end-all. It is true that a newly-born babe must first of all be bathed. But it must also be given food. So too the sacrament of purification needs the sacrament of nourishment as its fulfillment. Note that the Confession continues in article 35 as follows: "We believe and confess that our Savior Jesus Christ did ordain and institute the sacrament of the holy supper to nourish and support those whom he hath already regenerated, and incorporated into his family, which is his church." Further in article 35: "God hath given us, for the support of the bodily and earthly life, earthly and common bread, which is subservient thereto…But for the support of the spiritual and heavenly life which believers have, he hath sent a living bread, which descended from heaven, namely, Jesus Christ, who nourishes and strengthens the spiritual life of believers when they eat him."

Baptism therefore is merely a preliminary sacrament. It represents only the opening of the door by which we pass to the holy supper and to the mystical communion with our Lord. This truth subtracts nothing from the importance and the indispensability of baptism. Whoever is not baptized is an outsider. By desiring to be baptized he asks for admittance; by means of the sacrament of baptism he knocks at the door. By it he enters, that is, he becomes segregated from those who stand without, in order to enjoy the fellowship of those who are within. And that fellowship and communion becomes complete when, together with the assembled guests, he partakes of the holy supper.

But he who has been baptized, who has knocked at and been admitted to the banquet hall, who thereupon restrains himself from sitting at the table with the others, resembles a stranger who upon his own instigation is invited to enjoy association with a festive company, and who forthwith insults his host by standing, distant and aloof, at the door. The intruder who without an invitation and without appropriate dress forces his way into the company must be thrown out. He is an intruder. But the baptized person is not that. By desiring baptism he appropriately asks for admittance. By his baptism the door is opened, his formal clothes are extended to him, and by it he is invited to share the activities as an approved guest. Naturally he severely injures social propriety if he remains distant and aloof after these favors have been bestowed upon him. His conduct differs from that of the intruder, but it is not less culpable. Even so, it is a terrible sin to ignore the holy supper after one has been baptized.

He who undertakes to wade through the holy streams of baptism may have no other purpose in mind in doing so than to enjoy a festive fellowship with the Lord of the house upon the other shore. He knows that that Lord awaits his guests.

He who is born merely of water and of spirit is given but a distant glimpse of the kingdom. He may never be satisfied with that, but must be up and away, nor rest until he is seated at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Any Jew who becomes converted to his Messiah immediately appreciates the fact that an intimate relationship exists between these two sacraments. Observe him, if you will. He is converted Jew. The Jews' baptism was neglected when they were children. Now that they have repented and turned to God at a mature age, they choose to postpone the time of their baptism to a moment that will make it convenient for them to partake of the holy supper immediately afterwards.

The same custom prevailed in the earliest Christian churches. Those who were converted from Judaism and paganism were baptized one day, and were present at the holy supper the next. At that time no one ever thought of baptism apart from the holy supper. By asking for baptism these Christians simply were asking, "Permit me to partake of the holy supper."

We do not cross the Red Sea in order to fix camp permanently upon the farther shore; we must be on our way through the wilderness; our destination is the holy land. Having crossed the Jordan, we do not stop at its banks, but press on to Jerusalem. We may not be content with having forded the waters of baptism, but we must pursue our way until we see extended to us the rare wines that are pressed from the grapes of Eshcol.

It is the custom of infant baptism that has tended to fix lines of demarcation between these two sacraments. But such lines of distinction are inappropriate there. Naturally an infant is not qualified to partake of the Lord's supper. A child is morally too irresponsible to appropriate the blessings of his baptism to himself by a public confession. It is because of the circumstance that the perfectly appropriate and necessary custom of infant baptism is a sacrament independent from that of the holy supper.

An infant is impressionable and is therefore fit to receive baptism. But it is not yet qualified to receive the sacrament of nourishment. We must remember that the sacrament of the holy supper requires that only he may partake of it who has made his confession and his deeds a matter of personally appreciated responsibility. Hence it is inevitable that some years must elapse between these two sacraments in the life of every individual—as many years as are required to make his confession and his approach to the Lord's table a morally responsible action. The intervening time may not be longer than that, and it may not be shorter. The number of years required for each individual to be qualified for his personal confession was determined by God at the time of that person's creation. The intervening years therefore represent a fixed interim. Those who abide by it walk in the ways of God, and those who do not, depart from them. Those who curtail or add to that interim are guilty of sin.

The number of those intervening years is not the same for all. Some are qualified for the public confession at sixteen, others are twenty-three years of age, but all reach a morally responsible age sometime during this interval of seven years. Hence, it is the duty of each to respect these boundaries.

Irrespective, however, of whether the holy supper be divided from baptism by sixteen years or by twenty-three, the close relationship between the two remains the same. Throughout those years baptism sounds the plea: Seek the Lord's holy supper.

Watching Daily At My Gates

June 12 ***Read John 1***

The theme of the fourth gospel is that Jesus is truly divine. This John sets forth already in the first several verses of this chapter as well as very explicitly in verse 34. Obviously there were those who denied this fact, and to counter their claims the Holy Spirit uses John to tell the good news from this aspect. Those who doubt creation must cut out this first chapter from their Bibles, along with all the other references to that act of God. We see that Christ is no afterthought to God's work of salvation for us, but rather is the purpose of the whole counsel of God, for in his son God glorifies himself. To do away with Christ's divinity is to destroy God's glory. Sing Psalter 40.

June 13 ***Read John 2***

In this gospel we have recorded Jesus' first miracle. These miracles were means by which our savior showed to his disciples and to all the church the grace that he would bestow on his elect people. From various angles this unmerited favor of God is shown that we may know him, which is another purpose of John's gospel. Our marriage form mentions this miracle as proof that Jesus sanctioned marriage. As we live in marriage or seek marriage, may we know that God ordained this good institution for us. Let us use it as a true picture of the relationship between Christ and his bride, the church. Sing Psalter 125.

June 14 ***Read John 3***

By night Nicodemus came to Jesus. He was a member of the sect of the Jewish leaders called the Pharisees. He did not dare to come by day, but yet he was moved by the Holy Spirit to find out more of this man, whom he called a rabbi, and what he taught. Jesus taught him about the gospel. The words of verse 16, twisted by many, show to the elect the gospel in a nutshell. We know that the same Holy Spirit continued to work in Nicodemus as he showed his love for the savior at his death. Do we dare to come to Jesus by day? Sing Psalter 141.

June 15 ***Read John 4***

Jesus came to save the lost sheep. Sometimes those sheep were in undesirable places such as Samaria. Sometimes those sheep have unparalleled faith. All of them need the living water. Just as we cannot do without the familiar clear liquid in our physical lives, so we cannot do without the living water in our spiritual lives. There is only one shepherd who leads us to that water. May we follow him by seeking him in his word. May we daily search the scriptures to drink of the living water, and in drinking be refreshed. Sing Psalter 53.

June 16 ***Read John 5***

Another of Jesus' miracles for a helpless man stirred up the ire of the Pharisees. These men were so full of unbelief that they could not see the work of mercy performed by Christ. They were so blinded by their own importance that to think of someone else receiving the praise of men infuriated them. Of course, they missed the whole point of Jesus' miracles. It was not to receive man's praise that he healed, but rather to establish himself as the son of God who came to take away the sins of his people. It was only someone divine who could perform such miracles, and it was only someone divine who could bear the wrath of God. We must guard against the thoughts of the Pharisees in our lives. Sing Psalter 85.

June 17 ***Read John 6***

Do we seek the bread of life or do we seek bread? This was the question Jesus put to those who followed him across the sea after being miraculously fed. There are many things that could be said about that miracle and the one that followed. However, the important idea that we must grasp is that by his divine nature Jesus showed his true identity. Only those who were and are given the eyes of faith can see Jesus for who he is, the savior of his people. Do you see? Sing Psalter 311.

June 18 ***Read John 7***

Such teaching! Such preaching! Such unbelief! Those are the subjects of this chapter. Jesus does not spend a lot of time in Jerusalem, the home of the "church" in those days. His reasoning is that his hour was not yet come. Spending time in the nest of hatred would have hastened that hour from an earthly viewpoint, since we know that all things are in God's hands. When he appeared in Jerusalem he encountered the

church's leaders' hatred because of the doctrine that he espoused that so differed from theirs. We must seek the true bread and the living water that comes from the doctrine of our savior. Sing Psalter 258.

June 19 ***Read John 8***

Jesus' doctrine that he was the Son of God evoked the two responses that come from all true preaching. Some believe and are brought to eternal life. Others do not believe and fall farther from the truth into eternal damnation. While we do not attempt to judge the hearts of the individuals of the group that surrounded Jesus this day (he alone could do that), we can say that their reactions and teaching did condemn them. The day that the Son of God would be lifted up by them would be the day that they would be thrown out of their offices. Let us believe and in our belief cling to the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. Sing Psalter 251

June 20 ***Read John 9***

Notice the difference between the blind man and the Pharisees. One was blind but was given sight. The others were blind and apparently could not be given sight. The blind man, when he was brought back to Jesus, confessed his faith and said, "I believe." The Pharisees at this time (as we will make no judgments about the future), refuse to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. May we be as the blind man and confess our faith in Jesus, the Son of the living God. Sing Psalter 164.

June 21 ***Read John 10***

It was appropriate that Jesus used the figures of sheep, sheepfolds, and shepherds as he battled the Pharisees over his true identity. These men were called to be shepherds of God's flock. They were not true shepherds and led the sheep away from the paths of God's word and the safety of the true church. Jesus identifies himself as the true shepherd and further as the door of the fold. It is only through Christ that the elect will enter the final fold in heaven. May we hear the voice of the true shepherd each week as we attend to the hearing of God's word. May that word lead us through the one true door into heaven. There is only one. Sing Psalter 52.

June 22 ***Read John 11***

The death and resurrection of Lazarus prefigured the death and resurrection of Christ in many ways. First, it showed the glory of God. That is the reason that all things happen in this earth: God is glorified. Second, it showed the disciples how the Son of God would accomplish his purpose in a very short time. They could not put all the pieces of the puzzle together yet, but they did later. Third, it set in motion the counsel of God concerning the way to our salvation. As the Jews met and Caiaphas made his statement, we see the how of our salvation. Jesus died, God was glorified, and we were saved. Thanks be to God. Sing Psalter 47.

June 23 ***Read John 12***

John not only unfolds the glory of the doctrine of Christ's divinity, but he also shows to us the certainty of his resurrection. It was not enough that Jesus die on the cross. It was also necessary that he bodily be raised from that grave. Both the activities on the days we call Good Friday and Easter were necessary for our salvation. Notice also how the unbelief of the Pharisees is unmasked. Many of them knew the truth intellectually. Some, like Nicodemus, knew it unto salvation. Many stumbled and fell over the stone rejected by men. Do we know, do we believe, do we sing "Hosanna"? Sing Psalter 318.

June 24 ***Read John 13***

John covers a lot of ground in this chapter. Notice that much of it concerns Peter's actions. I know that it is not to discredit Peter, but I believe that it is to show Peter's eventual rise to head the Jerusalem church. But in order to do this, Peter, and all of God's children, must learn to be servants. And not only servants, but the lowest of servants: we must learn to wash the feet of others. We do this by helping anyone, no matter what their station in life is, with the most menial task. We must not be afraid to get our hands and knees dirty in reflecting the love Christ showed to us when he died on the cross. We must wash one another's feet. Sing Psalter 25.

June 25 ***Read John 14***

A blue-covered Bible resides on a shelf in my house. It is the Bible presented to me by my parents for memorizing John 14. But they gave me more than a Bible. They gave me the knowledge of a very powerful chapter in the Bible. Reread and ponder verses 1, 6, and 27. A Christian can rely on these verses to guide him through the turmoil of this life. Commit portions of Scripture to memory, people of God, for in doing so you will hide God's word in your heart that you might not sin against him. Sing Psalter 334.

June 26 ***Read John 15***

On the night in which he was betrayed Jesus spoke these powerful and moving words. First, he commanded the disciples to love one another, even as he laid down his life for his people. This is one of the great commandments. We must follow this in order to preserve the unity in the church. Second, he warned them of the hatred of the world. How does the world treat us? Are we worthy of their hatred or do we compromise the doctrines of Christ to keep peace with all men? Finally, as in the last chapter, he speaks to them about the doctrine of

the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would lead the church into the new dispensation. Let us follow his leading. Sing Psalter 221.

June 27 ***Read John 16***

People of God, do you seek peace? Do you know where to find it? This chapter and the preceding two give us ample instruction on this subject. Peace is not found in the philosophies of this world. Peace is not found in some substance found in this world. Peace is given to the child of God by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter sent from the Father by the Son. This is the only way of true peace. There was much turmoil in the disciples' minds on this night of Jesus' betrayal. We might have much turmoil in our minds during various situations on this earth. The only comfort that will quiet our fears is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Seek the peace that passes understanding. Sing Psalter 309.

June 28 ***Read John 17***

In this chapter is Jesus' high priestly or sacerdotal prayer. As he closes his discourse to his disciples about life without him and of what is expected of them, he turns to his Father and ours in prayer. In that prayer he prays not only for his disciples but also for the whole church of the new dispensation. He prays for us! In verse 9 he limits those for whom he prays to those whom the Father has given him. He does not pray nor will he die for all men. As we read this prayer let us see that Christ prayed for us, died for us, and continues to uphold us before the Father's throne of grace, and then let us pray. Sing Psalter 235.

June 29 ***Read John 18***

John in this chapter captures the high points of the activity of Jesus' betrayal and trial. He also in a few verses details only the high points of Peter's denial of his Savior. But in the details that he gives, John shows us the essence of our salvation. Jesus, who knew all things, including Peter's actions, walked the way that God ordained to the cross for us. In this chapter we see evidences once more of Jesus' divinity, as is a theme of this gospel. Do we seek a kingdom not of this world? Do we realize that this world is not and never will be our home? We need to look above where Christ sits as king and wait the day that he will usher us into the new heavens and earth by his death on the cross. Sing Psalter 203.

June 30 ***Read John 19***

In this chapter we learn of the end of Jesus' trial, his sentence, his crucifixion, and his burial. Three of the cross words are told by John, all of them important, but none so important as the final one: "It is finished." Found in those three words is the victory for us. Christ finished his work on this earth. He finished his work in undergoing the wrath of God for our sins. Yes, there are three more steps to his work for us, but this one was the end of his work of crushing the head of Satan. It was a victorious cry, and it was for us. Thanks be to God. Sing Psalter 185.

July 1 ***Read John 20***

The first of the steps of Jesus' exaltation is found in this chapter. He arose. In that resurrection he gave us the promise of our resurrection. In that resurrection he gave us the hope of eternal life with him in heaven. Peter found those things even as the Savior came to him and comforted him in the forgiveness of the sin of denying the Christ. Yet we must believe in that resurrection, or else we become like Thomas. In the upper room Jesus gave the disciples the Holy Spirit. In a short time that Spirit would be given to the whole church. Let us live the life of the spirit and bring forth the fruits of that spirit. Sing Psalter 391.

July 2 ***Read John 21***

Peter's confession and forgiveness had two steps. He privately confessed his sin to Jesus on the morning of the resurrection. But then he had to confess his sin and receive forgiveness publicly before all the disciples. This is a necessary step. Peter's sin was public and needed a public confession. While it might have grieved Peter, it was necessary for the disciples who pictured the church to hear that confession and receive it. This is the way that confession of public sin must be handled today. It is a blessing for the church and for forgiven sinners. Sing Psalter 83.

July 3 ***Read Acts 1***

The writer of this book, Luke the physician, continues where he left off in his gospel. He addresses the same man, one Theophilus. He begins by expanding the details of Christ's ascension. This ascension is important for us, as now our advocate sits at God's right hand making intercession for us and preparing us for the day when he will return to this earth and gather his people into glory. Before he leaves he charges his disciples with the task of spreading the gospel throughout the world. Representing the church of the new dispensation, Christ's disciples return to Jerusalem awaiting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Sing Psalter 182

July 4 ***Read Acts 2***

Ten days after his ascension Christ poured out his spirit upon the church in the persons of the disciples who, as they had been commanded by Christ, were waiting in Jerusalem. The signs of the third person of the Trinity truly represented him. As we see the effects of the wind, so we see the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and in the church. As fire cleanses, so the Holy Spirit enables us to walk a life of sanctification. As the Spirit

gives the church utterance, so she spreads the church throughout the world. All of these things point to the next step in Christ's work, his return to judgment. For that we wait. Let us watch and pray. Sing Psalter 287.

July 5 ***Read Acts 3***

As we saw in the previous chapter, Christ through the Spirit enabled the fisherman Peter to preach. His preaching was powerful because it was the word, which is Christ. As we attend church from sabbath to sabbath, let us seek that living Word. Let us see that it is not just a man preaching to us, but it is one who has been called and sent by the same Spirit who enabled Peter to preach with power. And young men, seek to see if you have been called. While Christ today has personally called no preacher, true preachers have a calling that they must not deny. Preaching gathers the church; we need preachers. Sing Psalter 263.

July 6 ***Read Acts 4***

The early days of the church were filled with turmoil. This was not an internal struggle, but one in which the devil tried to extinguish the flames that flickered within the members both individually and corporately. Even though Christ's death had bound Satan, he still worked hard against the body of Christ. By the Spirit church members could say publicly as they faced persecution that they had to speak the things of Christ. Is this our testimony? Do we quench the Spirit, or do we fight Satan head on when he rears his ugly head? By the Spirit we need to fear no one or no false teacher. By the Spirit we too can speak the things of Christ, our exalted king. Sing Psalter 4

July 7 ***Read Acts 5***

Satan turned his wiles to another corner. In the persons of Ananias and Sapphira, they faced a crisis within the church. Discipline was meted out swiftly. It was not a man-centered discipline, but one ordained by God. It was the severest remedy for the problem of sin. This had a two-fold effect. Pretenders to the faith were restrained; believers were encouraged. Once more the church was brought before the authorities. Once more they faced the problem head on with the well-known words, "We must obey God rather than man." Do we speak those words when faced with adversity? Do we live out of those words? Do we teach them to our children by word and actions? Sing Psalter 109.

July 8 ***Read Acts 6***

While Christ was on this earth he told the disciples that the poor would be among them always. In this chapter the church was called to establish the New Testament equivalent of the priesthood as a special office. Deacons were ordained and given the task of distributing the mercies of Christ to those in need. These were not mere financial officers; these men were charged with the task of bringing the comfortable words of the Bible and assistance to those whom God had made poor. We may never look at this office as second-rate or as a stepping stone to eldership. We must use the office to dispense those mercies of Christ even as he has given them to us. Sing Psalter 24.

July 9 ***Read Acts 7***

After being ordained as a deacon, Stephan showed himself to be an excellent ambassador for Christ. He preached in the synagogue, and when challenged about his preaching, was not afraid to answer. For that he was taken before the Jewish officials. There too he was not afraid to give an answer. That answer was from scripture, and it so infuriated the council that he was ordered to be put to death. Are we ready ambassadors for Christ? Are we willing to speak the truth no matter what the consequences? For most of us in today's world the consequences are light in comparison to what Stephan faced, but are we willing to endure scorn for the cause of Christ? Sing Psalter 253.

July 10 ***Read Acts 8***

What does Christianity mean to us? In this fast-moving account of the acts of the church of Christ, many things are happening in that church. The gospel is being spread by many means. Are we Simons, looking to buy our way into what might be considered the glamour places of the church? Are we Philips, going to preach wherever the Spirit leads us? Are we found reading our Bibles even as we go from place to place in our daily lives? In Christ's church each Christian has a calling. Are we carrying it out? We must not hide our light under a bushel. We must live the gospel so all may know whom we serve, and as the Heidelberg Catechism tells us, bring others to Christ by our godly walk. Sing Psalter 358.

July 11 ***Read Acts 9***

In this chapter we see the different directions Christ directed his church. First, he called Saul who was to be a missionary to the Gentiles. While most ministers do not receive so striking a call today, God still calls men to go and serve him in the ministry and on the mission field. Others he calls to be elders and deacons. Men of all ages, are you listening and heeding that call? Second, we see other acts of Peter, whose main work was among the Jews. There were Jews who would leave the church of the old dispensation and follow Christ as preached by the apostles. Miracles, such as the raising of Dorcas, were used as signs of the power of that preaching. Let us pray for the gathering of that church here on earth, for as that church is gathered, the coming of Christ is ever closer. Sing Psalter 194.

Interview with Alvin Rau
Part 1, March 18, 2008

The purpose of this interview is to establish the connection between the German Reformed Churches and the PRCA. Numerous references are made to three churches in the Dakotas: Isabel, Leola, and Forbes. Forbes is located just north of the North Dakota/South Dakota state line; Leola, SD is located approximately 25 miles southwest of Forbes; Isabel, SD is located about 180 miles to the west of Forbes and Leola. Also mentioned is Loveland, CO Protestant Reformed Church, a thriving congregation today. Alvin Rau lived many of the events detailed in this interview, and is clearly familiar with the history involved. Here follows his interview in two parts.

Mark H. Hoeksema (MHH): Mr. Rau, let's start by finding out a little bit about you. When and where were you born?

Alvin Rau (AR): I was born in Long Lake, South Dakota, August 6, 1930.

MHH: That would make you how old today?

AR: Seventy-seven, going on 78.

MHH: Where did you grow up?

AR: Right in the Long Lake area, Leola area and Forbes area. It's farm out there.

MHH: And that was in South Dakota?

AR: That was in South Dakota, correct.

MHH: Where did you go to school?

AR: Country school Walker #3—eight grades in one school, all one room. That was my education.

MHH: OK. What was your church background?

AR: I was brought up in the American Lutheran church, a country church out there.

MHH: And was that the background and the heritage of your parents or your ancestors?

AR: No, my grandfather belonged to the Reformed church and, as I understand, even helped establish that Reformed church—country church right in that neighborhood. But when my father got married, why, he went to the Lutheran church.

MHH: Why did he do that? Was his wife Lutheran?

AR: Yes, his wife was Lutheran, and I don't know what other reason.

MHH: And your whole family went to the Lutheran church, then?

AR: That is right, the whole family.

MHH: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

AR: One sister and 6 brothers. That's half brothers. It was a brought-together family. My father was married and was widowed when he had four boys. My mother was married and was widowed when she had one son. And then, when my parents got married, of that marriage there was one younger brother, and my sister.

MHH: OK. And did you grow up living and working on a farm there?

AR: Yes.

MHH: What are some of your earliest memories, both personal and as far as the church are concerned?

AR: We were brought up—even in the Lutheran church—we grew up knowing that there is a God and that he is to be served. But we did not receive the teaching of what we got later on in life in the Reformed church in Leola under Rev. [*Herman*] Mensch.

MHH: That brings up another subject. How did it happen that you came into contact with the Reformed church and specifically, with the Protestant Reformed Church?

AR: Well, it was primarily through Rev. Mensch. They were building a parsonage in Leola when he accepted the call to Leola and they were living on a farm about a mile south of where we were living, which was about 8 miles east of Leola and 2½ north. This was where we were residing. Mensches were living in a vacant farmhouse there while that parsonage was built. They got their milk and eggs from us. After we were married we moved in there.

MHH: Ok, let's back up a little bit to get some clarity on how this happened. You mentioned that you were married. Now, how old were you at this time?

AR: Twenty-six or 27 when we got in contact with the Reformed churches.

MHH: After you got married, did you remain in the Lutheran church for a time?

AR: Correct. We remained there.

MHH: OK. Now tell me about this Mensch that you mentioned. Who was he and what was his background and his religion?

AR: He grew up in the southern part of South Dakota. He came to Michigan somehow (I don't know how he got in contact with the Protestant Reformed Churches), but he came to Grand Rapids, Michigan and he graduated from the seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and then he accepted the call to go back to serve in the German Reformed churches in South Dakota. I don't know for sure, but in Isabel, South Dakota, is where he was ordained as a minister when the Leola German Reformed Church called him. And he came to Leola. When he started to preach concerning the sovereignty of God and particular grace—that we were saved by grace and grace alone, not by works of man—why, that preaching did not go over very good in the German Reformed church. Consequently, problems developed, and from the German Reformed church, there was a member who came to the Lutheran church where we were members at that time.

MHH: Because this person was dissatisfied?

AR: Was dissatisfied with that preaching there. Anyway, we accepted him in the Lutheran church. He did not have papers because the consistory was working with him. And when Mensch came to get milk and eggs, we got started talking about that. He said that it was not right that we accepted him. "Well, why not?" I said. "After all, he wants to be a member in our church, so we accept him." That was my knowledge and understanding of scripture at that time.

But through that conversation, we started to attend catechism classes on Wednesday nights at the German Reformed church, asking many questions concerning: "Well, OK, If God directs all things, our biggest problem is: Doesn't that make God the author of sin?" He had to clarify various questions for us to understand this. In fact, he taught me what I should be believing, growing up in the Lutheran church—justified by faith alone. And he said if the Lutheran church would be Lutheran as Luther was Lutheran, his hat would be off to them. So it sort of softened the offense that perhaps could have occurred with me when I heard those things.

MHH: What motivated you to go and start to attend classes in the German Reformed if there was little disagreement to begin with about this man coming from the German Reformed to the Lutheran? Why did you go and sit under Mensch's teaching?

AR: Well, I struggled with that a long time because, in the first place, I had problems (my mother had a couple of nervous break-downs as I was growing up) and it seemed as though if you didn't touch on religion at all, you were better off that you didn't upset her—I'll put it that way. And I had problems reading. And reading would have been one thing—leaving the Lutheran church and going to the German Reformed church and saying "I'm going either for the sake of my wife," or simply out of convenience. That would have been one thing. But then to say to my brothers, "What I was taught here [*in the Lutheran church*] is not correct. And what I am being taught there [*in the German Reformed church*] agrees with the word of God."

MHH: So you would say that Rev. Mensch played a significant part in your education, your religious education?

AR: He sure did. He played a very important part in my education, at least as far as understanding what scripture means.

MHH: Did that lead to a change of membership for you and your wife?

AR: Yes, it did. We became members there in the German Reformed church, although the handwriting was on the wall that we may well be put out of the church there in Leola when we joined there. But at that point we thought we had to. I did meet with the Lutheran minister. We had lodge members in the Lutheran church, and as far as he was concerned, there was nothing wrong with that. And we talked concerning the free will of man. He said, "Yes, that's another thing that Mensch had given me: *The Bondage of the Will* that was written by Luther." This is what the Lutheran church should be teaching and believing. When I mentioned that to the Lutheran minister, he said, "Well, we probably believed that at one time," but he couldn't conceive of it that we would still maintain that now.

MHH: So the Lutheran church had obviously slipped.

AR: It had departed. And that gave me a lot of problems for awhile too. If this is what I should have been believing as a Lutheran, how did this come about that that departure came in numerous generations? Mensch said, "Well, that's it. Those departures, they usually work out slowly so that your people are lulled to sleep, and they don't know what the truth of the word of God is anymore." He was honest in his teaching with us.

MHH: And why do you think it was that Mensch was in danger of being put out of the German Reformed church?

AR: Primarily because his preaching was not accepted by the congregation as a whole; not all of them, but the majority of them were against that kind of preaching—of a sovereign God, particular grace, limited atonement—you name it.

MHH: Was that not being taught in the German Reformed churches at that time?

AR: I guess you would have to ask my wife and Madeline [*Bertsch (Alvin Rau's sister-in-law, also German Reformed and also present during the interview)*] because I did not grow up in it. But the understanding that my wife had and I had, even when we were dating and before we got married was, usually the woman went with the man. When my father got married, he went with his wife. But usually the woman went wherever the man belonged and, yes, we serve one God with the same understanding.

MHH: Did not the German Reformed churches have their own seminary?

AR: Well, they were trying to start a seminary, but I guess that's why he ended up in the Protestant Reformed Churches because there really wasn't a whole lot there. I know that they didn't have a seminary.

MHH: Do you have any idea where their men were educated?

AR: No, I don't. [*Here Phyllis Rau (PR), Alvin Rau's wife, enters the discussion*]

PR: There was a school in Wisconsin.

AR: Yeah, but I don't think he went there. He never went there to a school in Wisconsin. There may have been a seminary in Wisconsin, I'm not sure. But I really don't know concerning that.

MHH: So, what happened? You are now in Leola. You're attending the German Reformed church under the preaching of Rev. Mensch. What happened?

AR: When he was suspended from the Leola congregation without any grounds, or the only grounds were that three-fourths of the consistory didn't want him at least…

PR: He was locked out.

AR: And even right during the service, one of the officebearers (the deacon, I believe), said, "Well, that's your interpretation."

MHH: He talked back to the minister during the service?

AR: During the service: "That's your interpretation of it." Mensch had no support from the consistory.

MHH: So he was suspended.

AR: Yeah.

MHH: And not allowed to preach in the congregation.

AR: Right.

MHH: And how did you view that?

AR: Well, when you had been instructed under Mensch that these are some of the things that we can expect for the truth's sake, why, we have to continue. But when he was put out of office, we didn't even know how to go about really protesting, but anyway, I guess he protested that action of the consistory to the classis when they were going to be meeting, which was once a year, and that was coming up. Immediately before that time, that's when it looked like this is too small. There was no hope for a church life for us. And we decided to move at that point. We had church in the basement for a couple of times, but we didn't have any officebearers. In fact we had been talking, and some in Isabel too had been talking about moving.

MHH: So the sum of the matter is that the group that remained faithful to Mensch's preaching and teaching was too small to be viable.

AR: It was just two families. This is what it came down to—the Houcks and the DeWalds.

MHH: Now, you mentioned moving. Explain that to me. You moved. Where did you move and what happened next?

AR: Well, we moved to Michigan before Forbes was ever organized as a Protestant Reformed church. At that point, when Mensch was suspended from office and that was still pending, our oldest child was ready to begin kindergarten. And we wanted to get

to where there was a Christian school. In fact, the year before, in the fall of '56 already, it looked like we were going to be moving somewhere or another. We had gone down to Loveland, Colorado to look things over there, and the possibility of moving down there; we had even thought of that. But at that point Loveland didn't have a school yet. Since we thought we are uprooting, we're going to where there is a school and full church life, which led us to Grand Rapids.

PR: Where did Rev. [George] Lubbers fit in? Because he was in that too.

MHH: That was going to be my next question. Work was being done in the Forbes area? Was there a congregation before you left?

AR: Before we left there was no congregation. But after we left, Mensch moved to Michigan at the same time when we did. I don't know how many times, but he went back and forth from Michigan to the Dakotas and he would minister to the groups in Leola and in Isabel.

MHH: Was Isabel an organized congregation at that time?

AR: Isabel was an organized congregation. By the way, when the handwriting was on the wall, that Leola is going to put him out of the ministry, Isabel called him and he accepted that call, too. So he was minister in two churches. He was serving both churches at the same time.

MHH: Who worked in the Forbes area?

AR: Nobody was working there. Mensch would still go back and forth and meet with them for awhile. But he resigned from Isabel and he didn't go back there any more, and then they got in contact with Rev. Lubbers—both Isabel and Leola groups.

MHH: So the work of Rev. Lubbers followed this history that you've just described.

AR: Yes.

MHH: But by that time, you were in the process of moving to Michigan?

AR: We were in Michigan already before then. I think we had met Rev. Lubbers about two times before we moved to Michigan, because I know he had been here in Grand Rapids for classis and he was laboring in Loveland. As he went to Loveland, he stopped in Leola. We did meet him there at the parsonage at least two times, because we got to know Gus Huber [*from Loveland, CO*] at that time too. But anyway, we did get to know Rev. Lubbers and knew that he was missionary for the Protestant Reformed Churches. About that time the work started to wind down in Loveland too. The Loveland congregation started too with the work of Mensch.

MHH: Loveland did?

AR: Yes, that was the beginning of the work. In fact, we were in Loveland for an anniversary of some kind, and even Loveland in their history mentioned that they had a student from the seminary who did some work down there, and he pointed them to the Protestant Reformed Churches. So, he played an important part in Loveland and Leola and Isabel.

MHH: Now, what happened to the church in Leola, the small group that was left?

AR: Under Rev. Lubbers, they were organized as a congregation and petitioned synod to affiliate with them and to send a missionary out. Then they were organized under Rev. Lubbers, I imagine with permission of the mission committee.

MHH: How and when did Forbes, North Dakota come into existence?

AR: That was a couple of years after we moved over here, when Forbes became organized as a congregation and came into existence. I think that is in the 1959 *Acts of Synod*. In 1959, I believe, they were organized.

In the beginning,
Free from all sinning,
God made man good.
Obey he should,
But Adam fell,
Deserving hell.
God sent His Son,
The Holy One.
He paid the price,
A sacrifice,
To save His own,
And them alone.

—Thelma Westra

Boy Meets Girl (Say Hello to Courtship)

Boy Meets Girl (Say Hello to Courtship), 2nd ed. by Joshua Harris. Multnomah Books, 2005. Paperback, 247 pp. ISBN 1-57673-709-8. £9 (15$ US).

When Josh Harris got his first book entitled *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* published at the amazingly young age of twenty-one, it became clear from the response he received (it was a Christian best-seller) that he would have to write a sequel. His first book had trashed the idea of Christian dating as the best way to get to know and marry someone because as he showed, it was fraught with unnecessary temptation and betrayed a worldly attitude toward relationships that was for the most part selfish and sinful. Too often these "romances" were fleeting, heart-breaking, and destructive. So what is the alternative? Thus he penned *Boy Meets Girl* as a guide to young people who are moving beyond friendship into the realm of courtship, which he adamantly defines as a relationship that tests whether marriage is appropriate for a couple. He clearly states that courtship should only be embarked upon when two people desire and are ready for marriage. The aim is marriage. Harris emphasizes that the correct focus of courtship is to be God himself, and our aim is to love the other, unselfishly desiring their best.

This contrasts markedly with the self-centeredness and impatience and wrong physical expressions of lust in dating. The aim of courtship is to get to know the other's character, convictions, aims, and spirituality, and careful listening is vital. He sensibly explains the need for frankness concerning past relationships. He is very practical, listing standards of physical contact that should not be exceeded, and gives ideas for "courtship conversations" (dates). The man is to lead. Courtship should occur in the sphere of accountability in the church and to both sets of parents, with advice sought from close family and church leaders before it is embarked upon. It is best for couples to pursue courtship in the sphere of the Christian community and friendship with others, and not cut themselves off and become exclusive.

Theologically, Harris is head pastor of Covenant Life Church, Gaithersburg, Maryland, a Reformed Charismatic church! Hence you would expect some differences from Protestant Reformed teaching.

His quotation from a book entitled *When God Weeps* makes us wary, though the description of what happened on the cross is very vivid and biblical. The errors here, one major and one minor, concern the mistaken idea that "God is on display in his underwear" when we know Christ was shamefully naked, but more importantly, "Jesus will be treated as if personally responsible for every sin ever committed." If he had added, "by his flock" or "by his people," we would heartily concur.

Throughout the book Harris uses real life examples of couples who courted well and others badly, and many of the stories teach serious lessons. Mistakes in this area can be forgiven and rectified, but there is also long-term fallout. He lists good questions to ask that assess whether the relationship is heading toward marriage, but he mistakenly quotes from other writers who give apparent support to the erroneous idea that marriages can be broken and that remarriage is permissible apart from the death of a spouse, quoting Matthew 5:31–32 and 1 Corinthians 7:12–16, which actually teach the opposite.

Nevertheless, this book is highly recommended for Reformed young people who want to honor God in their courtships. It gives not only a sound basis or ethos to courtship, but also good practical guidelines to follow. It is also a worthwhile read for parents of young people of marriageable age and church leaders who may be called upon to advise their single young people in this vitally important area of life.

Dr. Kennedy is a member of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland.

Called to the Ministry

If it had not been for the Lord's gracious work of salvation in the lives of my parents and me, my life would be very different right now. I can imagine what life would be like. I would be living in Singapore along with most of my extended family, Indian on my father's side and Chinese on my mother's side. I would probably be a "free thinker," as some call themselves there. That essentially means that I would be an agnostic, without any religion, dependent on my own reasoning and logic to figure out what is truth. I would probably be intrigued with the Hindu and Buddhist religions of my Indian and Chinese families, but I would probably view all religions of the world, Christianity included, as equally disillusioned about reality. I would be a humanist, dependent on myself, my reason, my opinions, and distrustful of any Christian teachings. I would be a god to myself. If God had not worked by grace in the hearts of my father and my mother, and then me, such, I imagine, would be my lost condition.

The Lord's plan for my life, however, was very different. While both my unbelieving father and mother were attending high school in Singapore, the Lord used the witnessing of students in Arminian Bible Study groups to turn their hearts from paganism to Christ. Through the study of God's word and the ministry of Reformed Christians in Singapore, both of them were converted to the Reformed faith. In his providence the Lord drew them to himself, then drew them together in marriage. Two culturally different people were made one in the Lord. But the Lord was not finished. He then worked in my father's heart the call to the ministry. Therefore Jai and Esther Mahtani moved to Grandville, Michigan where he studied at the Protestant Reformed Theological School for four years.

It was during those years in seminary that I was born—not in Singapore, but in Zeeland Community Hospital, not to pagan parents, but to believing parents with a father aspiring to the ministry as my example. Neither was I born alone, as my twin brother David was born a few minutes after me. Our family of four lived in Michigan for a short time until my father graduated from seminary, at which time we returned to Singapore where my father took a call to be the pastor of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church.

After that the Lord added to our family six more children. Three more sons were born in Singapore. My father then took a call to Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Houston, Texas, where another boy and two girls were added to our family. When that church disbanded, our family of ten moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where my father became the Eastern home missionary of our churches.

It was during these years in Pittsburgh that I began seriously to consider the call to the ministry. I have to say that it was mainly through negative circumstances that the Lord placed it upon my heart to pursue the ministry. Houston, Texas, which we grudgingly left behind, had been a bright, cheery, warm, flat country in which the Mahtani clan made many good memories. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania was a cloudy, hilly, often cold, fast-paced city that did not help the spirits of our family. Not only did the change of location try us, but domestic mission work was tough, with very few successes. Life in the home was affected by this. Depression and rebellion co-existed. David and I, the oldest children of the family were given many difficult responsibilities at a young age. We all felt "Down in the Pitts" after the move, but God was using all this to shape us—to shape me.

During these years, there were also good times. Trinity Christian School, where I went for both middle and high school, was a Christian school with many Presbyterian and Reformed teachers providing me a solid education. I thrived at school and school-sponsored sporting events. I loved the people of the mission station in Pittsburgh. And after graduating I attended Grove City College, about an hour north of Pittsburgh. There I majored in Christian Thought, a Theology major, for I was intent on pursuing the ministry from my first day of college on.

Notice how I wrote that last phrase. I was intent on *pursuing* the ministry, not intent on *being* a minister. In other words, through eight years of educa-

tion from college through seminary, I did *not* know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was going to be a minister. I had inclinations that God was calling me to the ministry. But I was not certain. I did know this: that God wanted me at least to pursue it. I knew that he wanted me to seek it, to take steps toward it. I remember one sleepless night, lying on my back in bed, the top of an old army bunk in the upper corner of our two-story house in Pittsburgh. I was at the end of my junior year in high school, and as so many juniors at that time, I began to feel the pressure of needing to figure out my calling in life. In a short year I knew I would have to make a decision on a college major. As I lay there I earnestly prayed that God would show me what to pursue, but having done so, I still could not fall asleep. The thought kept going through my mind: "Is not the ministry the most God-glorifying occupation for you at least to pursue?[1] Should I not at least try to do that work?" And so I prayed: "Lord, I will pursue it, but show me clearly that the ministry is NOT for me if that is not thy will!" From that night onward, I decided that I would pursue this work. I would pursue it until the Lord shut the door.

The Lord never shut the door. He has only confirmed again and again that he wants me, weak as I am, to serve him in this way.

After I finished up college in three and a half years, I moved to Michigan and married my wife Keri, the second daughter of Rev. and Mrs. Carl Haak, before I began seminary. During my seminary years, God blessed us with three children, Levi, Shane, and Mayla; and since becoming a minister, he has added another boy named Ezra. For those who wonder if a wife and children hinder the work, I honestly testify that my family has only been a help and an encouragement.

The seminary years flew by. Through the ups and downs, successes and failures, God never shut the door. He kept growing me and shaping me and pointing me to the next step until he finally confirmed that I was to be a minister with the call from Cornerstone Protestant Reformed church.

From the end of my junior year in high school until the time I received that objective call, there were many ways that God made me surer of the call to the ministry. In fact, these confirmations are too numerous to remember and write in one article. But I will mention three ways the Lord significantly confirmed the call in my heart.

First, it was through the people in my life. God spoke and showed his will through my teachers, my parents, my twin brother David, my wife, her parents, my professors at seminary, Rev. James Slopsema—my mentor—and other beloved people in my life. And when I say that God showed his will through them, I do not mean that they only told me what a good job I was doing as I pursued the ministry. Some of them were brutally honest about my weaknesses. But as I listened to their counsel and wisdom, I heard the Lord speaking through them and telling me which steps to take and how to improve on my way to the ministry.

Second, God also confirmed the call by impressing upon me again and again how beautiful and powerful the true gospel as preached in our churches is. The more I studied and learned, the more he awed me with his word—precious doctrines of sovereign grace that mightily impact the hearts and lives of his people. He showed me what a privilege it would be to make it my full-time work to proclaim this good news.

Third, he also confirmed the call by pointing out weaknesses in the church. I know this might be offensive to some, but I write it anyway because I think it would be helpful to a young person considering the call. As I grew up in a minister's home, as I interacted with the people in the church, I realized something very startling: God's people are sinful! Though doctrinally strong, there are weaknesses in the church, yes, in our beloved Protestant Reformed churches. However, the knowledge of this did not make me bitter. On the contrary, the more I noticed these weaknesses, which mirror my own, the more I felt the call to the ministry. Yes, I confess that some of that was sinful pride on my part, as I thought that I myself could make a difference. But the main reason that weaknesses of the church confirmed the call to the ministry was that God gave me a love for his sinful people so that I sincerely desired, and I still desire to be used by him to minister to his needy people.

So if you are a young man considering the call to the ministry, I urge you to ask these questions. Yes, there are more questions to consider, but these three especially: 1. Is God calling you to the ministry

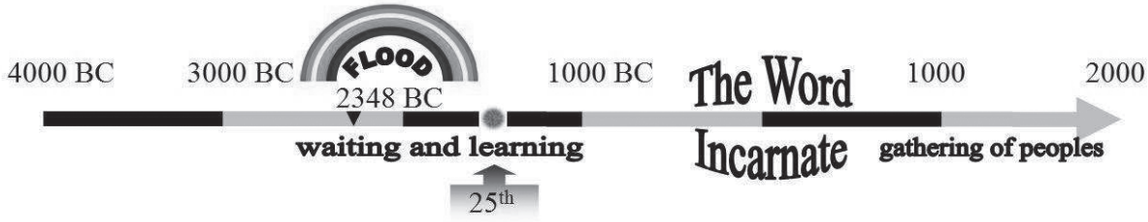
1 I do *not* mean to imply that the ministry *is* the most God-glorifying occupation. Any occupation can be equally glorifying to God when done faithfully in service of him. Here I simply give you a sample of my personal thoughts as I pondered the ministry as a young person.

through the wise and godly people in your life? 2. Do you love, and are you growing in love for the gospel that our churches promote? 3. Do you recognize weaknesses in the church, which rather than embitter you, make you desire to serve God's beloved church all the more? If yes is your answer, then pursue the ministry until the Lord closes the door or confirms it with a call from his church.

Rev. Mahtani is pastor of Cornerstone Protestant Reformed Church in Dyer, Indiana.

Church History — John Huizenga

The Twenty-fifth Century of His-Story: The Church in Bondage to Egypt



Life in Egypt had been good. The children of Israel had homes. They had plenty of good food. Their large families were well supported with a prospering business in cattle. They were strong, healthy, and robust. As a people, their numbers were growing exponentially into the hundreds of thousands. But the astounding growth and prosperity of the children of Israel brought new temptations and spiritual oppression for the church. This growth had the attention of the new Pharaoh as well, and life quickly began to change for the children of Israel. Peace and prosperity turned into terror as Pharaoh first subjected the people to forced labor, then tried an undercover plan to kill the baby boys at birth, and finally implemented an open policy of killing the Hebrew boys. The Egyptians were told that these babies posed a threat to society and must die for the sake of a united and strong Egypt. After eighty years of this horrible life of hard labor, fear, hiding, and losing covenant children, we read in Exodus 2:23–24 that "the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob."

Immediately following the verse describing the prosperity of the children of Israel, God reveals to us in Exodus 1:8–12: "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel." Those before this new pharaoh remembered the terrible famine, and how Joseph had saved the people and in fact brought power and control to the central government of Egypt. But this pharaoh was alarmed and saw a real danger to Egypt. Unless these Hebrew people joined heart and soul with Egypt, they now had the strength to side with an enemy and overthrow Egypt. He began to implement a plan to assimilate this people into the nation and harness their strength for Egypt. But this dealing "wisely" was not so wise after all. Perhaps if the children of Israel had been any other people, and not the church, this policy would have been wise. But the world must recognize a sovereign God who is gathering

a people unto himself. He is a God who will turn the plans of man upside down and accomplish his purpose in all things.

As the new pharaoh began to implement these new policies for the Hebrews, we find Amram, the father of Miriam, Aaron, and Moses, over fifty years old. He had married Jochabed (Exodus 6:20), who was actually his aunt—a daughter of Levi (Num. 26:59). Their daughter Miriam was not yet born, but the oppression of the church had rapidly become intense, and Amram and Jochabed were very concerned about bearing children of the covenant under this time of terrible persecution. When their first child—a girl—was born, they named her Miriam, which in the Hebrew means "rebellion" and "bitterness." Some years later when a son was born, they named him "Aaron," which means "light bringer." Perhaps it seemed to them as though things were changing for the better, but within a few short years, by the time Moses, their third child, was born, the new pharaoh had implemented an open policy of killing the boy babies, and they resorted to hiding the child until it was impossible to keep him hidden.

These days were indeed dreadful for the children of Israel, especially for those who were clinging to the promise of covenant children and the savior who would be born of the seed of the woman. In the middle of this dark time, God provided two remarkable women, Shiphrah and Puah, who served to thwart Pharoah's strategy. These two women were the head midwives who oversaw the work of a large team of midwives who delivered babies for the Hebrew women. Pharaoh had instructed them to see to it that the boy babies did not live. Exactly how this went is not clear, but it would seem that the plan was somewhat secretive, and the midwives could perhaps make the deaths appear accidental. But these two head midwives disobeyed the king and preserved the life of all the babies. They did so because they "feared God" (Ex. 1:17). They are not included in the list of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, but we do read that "God dealt well with the midwives"(Ex. 1:20).

We are not told how long this went on before pharaoh realized that the midwives were not obeying his orders, but we are told that God used their bold actions to strengthen the homes of his people. We read that "the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty" (1:20), and that "he made them houses" (v. 21). The idea of "houses" here is not simply the external structure of a nice house, but rather strong, godly homes with many children who were being instructed in the fear of the Lord. Whether the parents in Israel were aware of Pharaoh's horrible plot or not is not clear, but while these families were but two women away from the loss of multitudes of covenant children, they were active in establishing covenant homes. Soon pharaoh's plan was delivered to the public and it became a criminal offense for anyone to preserve the life of a baby Hebrew boy. Under this terrifying policy in which anyone could be a spy and everyone was out to save his or her own skin, even timid parents might be inclined to give up their own child to save their neck.

Into this scene a third child was born to Amram and Jochabed…and it was a boy! Exactly what they were thinking when they built a little floating cradle and placed it with this baby in the river is impossible to tell. Some view their actions as cowardly and unnatural, but God reveals in Hebrews 11:23 that faith was at work behind their actions. We read, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment." Their older daughter Miriam stayed nearby to keep watch, and perhaps to distract the alligators or snakes that might come too close. But imagine the bittersweet joy and amazement of these grieving parents as Miriam came home with the baby and the daughter of pharaoh herself! Under the protection of the royal house, his mother would be allowed to nurse the child until he was weaned. They would have a few years to teach this child the precious promises of God and instill that knowledge into his soul before they would have to hand him over to the rearing of Pharaoh's daughter.

Eventually the time came for the child to leave his father and mother, and Moses disappeared into the palace and the best life that Egypt had to offer. Time went on, and the policies of Pharaoh appeared to be having the impact upon the children of Israel that pharaoh desired. Life was much more difficult than before, but it was still tolerable and perhaps preferable in the minds of some to a life of wandering in Canaan like their fathers. God reveals nothing of any plans of the children of Israel to organize and rebel against Egypt, as the Egyptians feared; on the contrary, they seemed to be very much attached to the life and food of Egypt. We get a brief glimpse of life for the Hebrews some thirty-five years later when

Moses began as a young man to understand his identity. By the grace of God he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward" (Heb. 11:24–26). It was pride, however, that drove him to kill an Egyptian and to try to deliver Israel by his own strategy. He found that the people were reluctant. Later, when they faced hardship in the wilderness, they wished they were back in Egypt. This new pharaoh could perhaps have relied on the allurement of the earthly pleasures of Egypt to keep the people within Egypt and under its control. But God was pleased to bring this oppression upon his people in order to wake them up spiritually, make Egypt ripe for judgment, and demonstrate his power and love for the salvation of his church.

After Moses fled the country and went to live in Midian, life went on as before for the children of Israel. Pharaoh persisted in his oppression and the people began to give up, groan, and despair. Those years of booming business opportunities in Egypt were distant fanciful memories. The thrill of seeing the people multiply with busy families despite pharaoh's attempts to crush them had disappeared. All these children, now grown up, were only the multiplication of misery as they served their enemy. Pharaoh had won. The promises of God seemed to have failed. It looked as though faith had died, and that these people whom God called his own were spiritually dead. We read in Exodus 2:23: "And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage." We do not read that they cried in faith to God, but simply that they cried; and when they cried, God heard his people. The time had come for God to demonstrate the power of his grace and love, and to breathe life into this people who were dead in the bondage of sin. The time had come for judgment and the overthrow of Satan and his powers. Ironically (or rather, for the purpose of giving God all the glory) just when Satan seems to have the victory and God's people are utterly helpless, God turns the efforts of Satan upside down and works salvation and deliverance.

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

Church News

Melinda Bleyenberg

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:

Selah Elaine, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Chad & Katie Mingerink—Byron Center, MI

Dani Ellen, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Oliver & Stevie Scott—Byron Center, MI

Addison Mayli, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jacob & Anna Andringa—Crete, IL

Oliver Scott, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ryan & Paige Wories—Crete, IL

Jayden Tate, son of Mr. & Mrs. Blake & Lindsey Wierenga—Georgetown, MI

Mark James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jon & Aryn Schwarz—Loveland, CO

Mallory Joyce, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeremy & Michelle Mulder—Randolph, WI

Samantha Nicole, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Nick & Sarah Hopkins—Redlands, CA

Emma Lynn, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mark & Jade VanVoorthuysen—Redlands, CA

Lindsey Ellen, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Zachary & Lauren Feenstra—Redlands, CA

Kayla Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Kylar & Roxanne Hassevoort—Southwest, MI

Brodie David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Aaron & Erin Gunnink—Trinity, MI

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:

Cody Hoekstra—Doon, IA

Tyler Wassink—Georgetown, MI

Jackson Huizinga—Grace, MI

Steven Holstege—Southeast, MI

MARRIAGES

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

Mr. Ethan Lanting & Miss Tina Van Donselaar—Crete, IL

Mr. Matt Kortus and Miss Sarah Koole—Hope, MI

Mr. Dolan DeRoon & Miss Andria Kooienga—Hull, IA

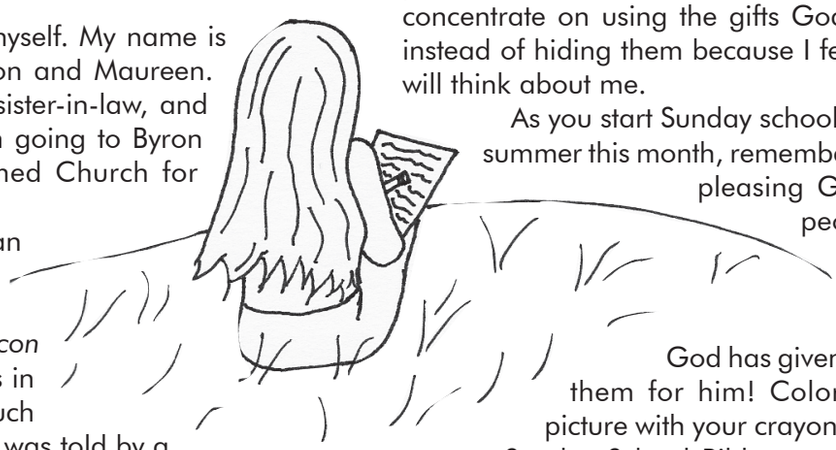
"Little Lights" ... let it shine!

Letter from the Writer

My Dear Reader,

I'm new. You might have noticed that my name has now replaced Connie Meyer's after the word "by." You might notice that these words sound different than the writer you have known for so many years.

So let me introduce myself. My name is Tricia. My parents are Don and Maureen. I have three brothers, a sister-in-law, and one nephew. I have been going to Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church for almost fifteen years.



I have never written an article for *Beacon Lights* before. I have never even submitted an article to *Beacon Lights* before. When I was in eighth grade, not that much older than many of you, I was told by a teacher that I should send the paper I'd written to *Beacon Lights*. He was the first of many teachers who told me the same thing.

But I never did.

Do you want to know why? I never sent in any articles because I was too scared. I was too scared about what other people would think about me or say about me behind my back. Have you ever been scared like that? Have you ever not done something that you should because you were too scared of what other people would think about you?

Maybe it was that kid sitting all alone on the school playground. Did you ignore them because you were too scared about what the popular kids would say if you spoke to that kid? Maybe it was a question the teacher asked in history class. Did you hide in your seat and pretend you didn't know the answer because you were scared the other kids would call you a know-it-all?

We are so afraid of what other people will think of us that we forget the one whose thoughts really matter. We should be thinking about what God thinks of us. The teasing of other people does not matter when God is pleased with our actions.

I finally gathered my courage after all these years. I volunteered to write the *Little Lights* and concentrate on using the gifts God has given me instead of hiding them because I fear what people will think about me.

As you start Sunday school and enjoy your summer this month, remember to think about pleasing God rather than people. What can you do that will use your gifts to please God? God has given us all gifts. Use them for him! Color that beautiful picture with your crayons for him! Learn your Sunday School Bible verse for him! Don't worry about what the other kids will think when you know your memory verse so well. Don't fear them. Fear God!

Sincerely,
Tricia Mingerink

Word Search: Find the underlined words from the following verse: Hebrews 13:6, "So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

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

Tricia is a member of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, 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

http://prcconvention.com