

# *Beacon Lights*

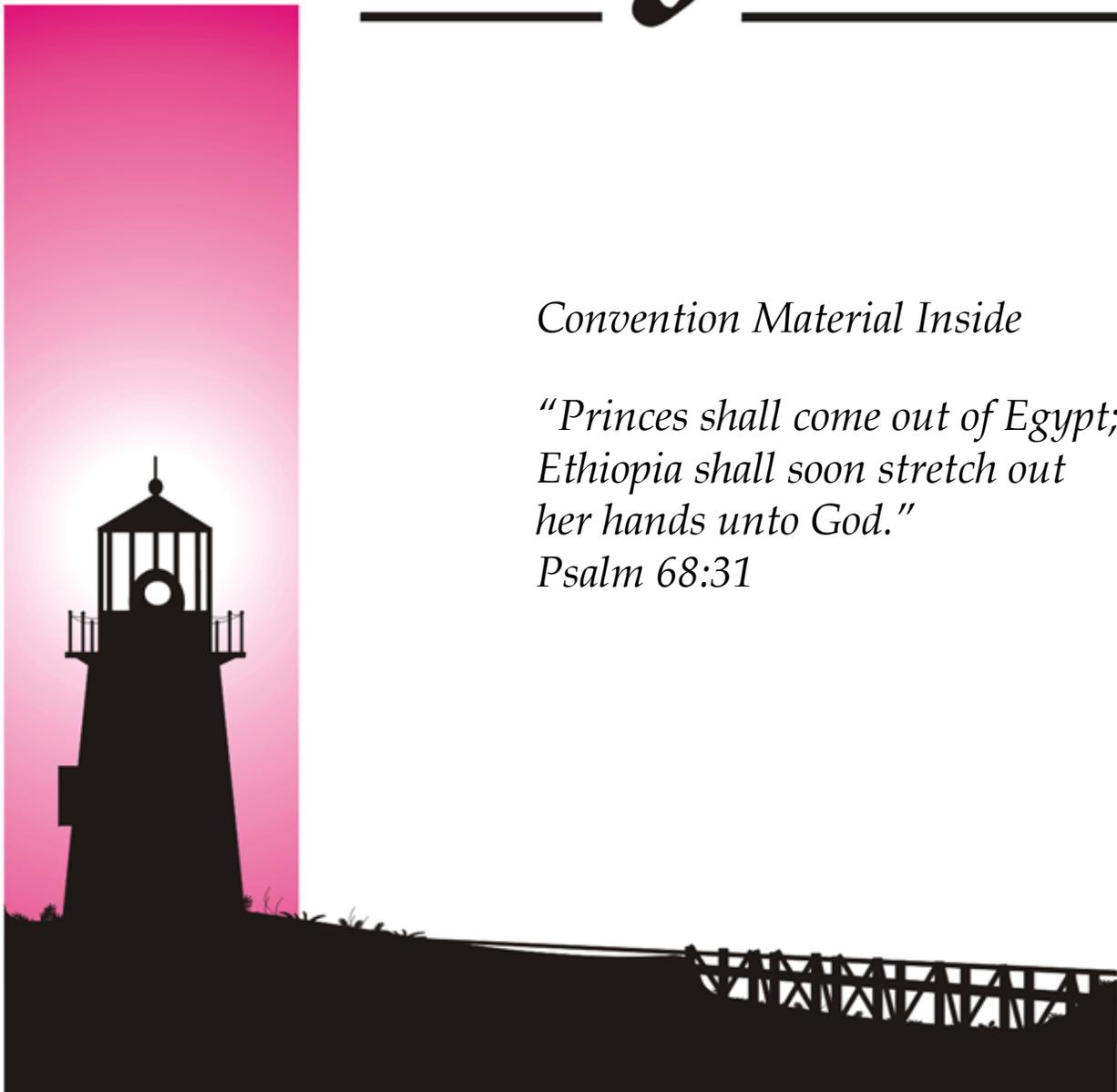
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*Convention Material Inside*

*"Princes shall come out of Egypt;  
Ethiopia shall soon stretch out  
her hands unto God."*

*Psalm 68:31*



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# Some Questions About a Church Gathered From All Nations

by John Huizenga

**Y**oung people, your convention is not far off. Have you given some thought about the theme? You have a fascinating topic that is certain to stir up in your mind some truths that you may not have thought about much before. What follows are some questions to think about.

- What is our role as the Protestant Reformed denomination in the larger body of Christ?
- How does Babel serve the church?
- To what extent was Israel a catholic church; made up of people from many different nations?
- Must the power of grace change one's personality or national characteristics and culture before he or she can truly be a Christian?
- Are you happy and content with the way God has created you?
- Do you believe that God has a particular place in His church that only you can fill?
- What kind of music illustrates the universal church?
- How is a diverse church unified?
- How can we work together and cooperate with others who are involved in building the church?

These are some questions that are addressed in a rather lengthy article that came from the address of Professor Hanko at the graduation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Seminary in June, 2000. The title is "The Church and Her Catholicity" which is the doctrine of the universal church gathered from all nations. It is a long article, but it really is "must read" material for anyone going to the convention. We plan to publish more articles relating to the topic of the convention to help you prepare for discussion and learning about this important topic. ❖

Story Time

## Lessons from Father

by Trisha Haak

**W**hen I close my eyes to recall my childhood memories I find myself standing in the middle of a forest on a warm summer day. The trees are rustling all around as the wind plays among the

branches. The sun is rising steadily, chasing away the damp and dew of night. The forest is alive with leaves so green it makes my heart ache. I am standing on a lone dirt path that weaves its way among the forest branches.

Ah, I say to myself. Here is a happy memory.

Farther down the path I see my father standing, gazing into the dense canopy with binoculars in his hand and a bird book in his pocket. Inevitably, some bird has caught his eye. My father has hawk eyes that catch everything. Perhaps it was the flicker of the bird's wing in the sunlight or its erratic movement from branch to branch. He sees animals and birds from great distances whether he is standing still or driving by in a car. He has fine eyes for bird watching.

My eyes are not as sharp as my father's. I have weak eyes, the eyes of a child. I can not see as I ought to and it takes a while for me to focus my eyes on the bird. They blend so well with the green foliage and are such tiny creatures. Sometimes I get frustrated when we go bird watching. It takes me a long time to find them even with binoculars.

But no matter. For now I run forward to see what my father is looking at. I run forward because I am confident that my father will point out to me what he sees. And just as confident that he will have patience until I finally see it.

\* \* \* \* \*

When I was 13 years old my father and I would go bird watching many Saturdays during the summer. I wasn't perhaps a willing participant at first. My father would wake me before dawn when the whole house, the neighborhood and the world were still sleeping. We would drive to the bakery in South Holland, grab something to eat and continue down the road to whatever our destination was that day.

Sometimes we stayed local and went to nature parks close to home. Sometimes we traveled over the Indiana border and into Michigan. Our destination then was Buchanan where they had a beautiful forest trail along a river. Sometimes we would even head towards Chicago and would go bird watching in the Chinese gardens behind the Museum of Science and Industry. There we would run into ornithologists from the local universities who would always refer to me as a "young fledgling."

We saw a large variety of migratory birds during that season. In the meadows and tall grasses we saw many kinds of warblers, finches, hawks, hummingbirds, swal-

lows, and red winged black birds. Along the banks of rivers we saw kingfishers, blue herons, ducks and geese. In the forest we saw more warblers, Baltimore orioles, brown creepers, Cedar waxwings, red headed woodpeckers, scarlet tanagers, and black capped chickadees. We even had an occasional spotting of my favorite bird, the Indigo bunting.

Although my heart wasn't willing at first, it soon grew to be. I came to love those early Saturday mornings as we walked among the treasure troves of nature.

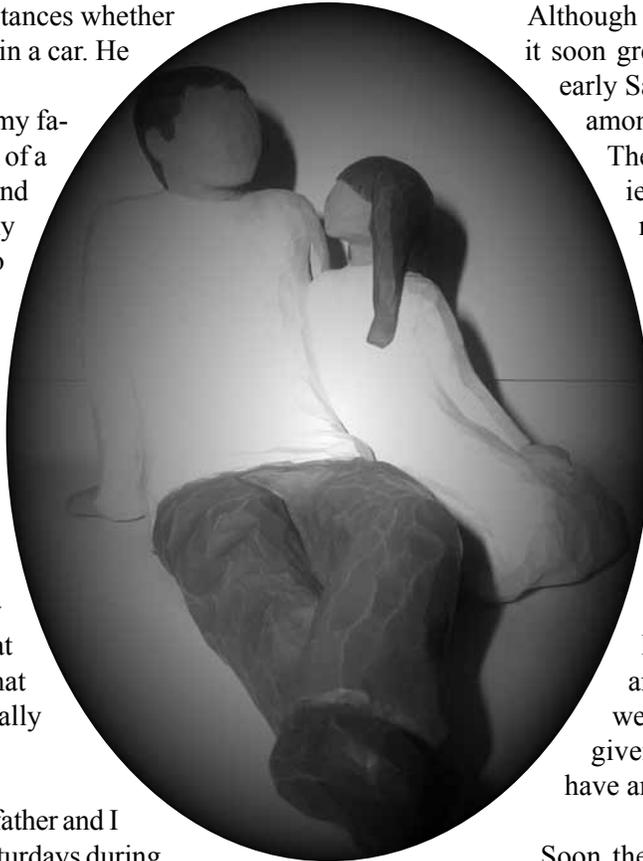
These forests came to be sanctuaries for me, restful places where my father and I could gaze upon the handiwork of God. Our only requirement was our silence. Everything else was given to us abundantly. Fistfuls of beauty and delight were ours for the taking. And although the noon day sun would beat upon our backs, to us it didn't matter. We walked on. The day, the forest, the truth was ours for the taking. Here we were kings, subduing and conquering in love. And so we walked on. After all, it has been given to us, my father and me, to have and to own those summer days.

\* \* \* \* \*

Soon the leaves began to change their colors to that of a burning fire. Some began to fall. Then all. And then the cold wings of the north winds swept down and covered us in blankets of snow. The birds flew south to lands where the sun didn't have to reach as far. But we knew they would be back next season.

We never went bird watching again after that summer. There was no specific reason why we stopped going. Life was moving on and we went with it. The next summer I had a job and worked Saturdays and then high school came and went and soon I moved away. Sometimes the migratory patterns of the human life are as unavoidable as those of the songbirds.

But I didn't fly away empty-handed. My father gave me a lesson to keep with me for always. He brought me to the forest and pointed out to me what I needed to see. Here, he said. This is the handiwork of God. This is the creation that groans and travails. Look. Listen. See. And although it may have taken me a couple of years, I



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now realize what he was pointing me to. I only wished I would have seen it all along. My father handed a truth to me, as all believing parents do to their children. He placed it within my hand and said, now hold fast. And, by the grace of God, I took the lesson and placed it in the pocket of my heart. I take it with me wherever I go.

\* \* \* \* \*

When I close my eyes to picture the covenant that God has with his people in Christ, I often picture the forests that my father brought me to. It is perhaps a weak comparison and for that, forgive me. And yet there are so many similarities that it would be foolish of me to ignore the meaning of it.

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...my heavenly Father took  
my earthly father, molded  
and prepared him and  
called him to be the tool  
that he would use to open  
my eyes.

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See, as I child I was weak, blind and unaware. I was lying on the highways and byways of my spiritual life naked, cold and destitute. In and of myself I didn't understand what covenant life could be, how beautiful and glorious it was. Then my heavenly Father took my earthly father, molded and prepared him and called him to be the tool that he would use to open my eyes. My

earthly father brought me to the forests and said, See this bird? See this creature? Upheld and sustained by the might of his hand? What tender care! What magnificent love! If God cares for this creature, how much more does He care for you?

The covenant of grace that God has with his people and his people only is a beautiful sanctuary of eternal shade. Here is where we find the rest for our souls. Within this covenant, this forest of grace, there are so many beauties for us to look upon. It's as if you and I were walking upon a trail of eternal wonder, pointing out to all the glorious birds of truth to each other. See that? That bird is mercy. Isn't it a marvel? See that creature that flies with grace? That is the patience of our heavenly Father. Your eye could not gaze upon anything more beautiful than that.

The wonder of this covenant is that we don't have to go anywhere to experience it. It abides in us. We close our eyes and there it is. Given to us by the hand of God, to have and to enjoy. The shade cools us from the heat of the sun, the beauty of it all delights us. And it was nothing of our own hand but given to us so freely.

And as I walked the earthly forests with my father so now I walk in the forest of covenant with my heavenly father. It's so beautiful. So peaceful. I walk on in this forest and truth, subduing and conquering, a king forever. I walk on because it's been given to me, to have and to own the eternal summer day. ❖

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*Trisha is a member of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.*

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Church Family

# Of Faith, Food, and the Folly of the Figure

by Jon VanOverloop

## Introduction

Seventeen-year-old Leah was considered by her parents to be their perfect child. "Life would be easy if all our kids were like Leah," they exclaimed to their friends. Leah really did have a great deal going for her. She was easy to raise, goal-oriented, reliable, hard working, and

eager to please. The combination of these personality characteristics led her to various achievements. Leah learned her catechism well, became an honor student, excelled at volleyball, was named "most likely to succeed" in her grade-school yearbook, and was a first chair in her high-school band. Her parents felt good about how

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well things were going for her and had high expectations about her future. She seemed to be developing into a well-adjusted, confident, caring, and Christian young woman. All was well...at least from her parents' perspective.

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**These lessons taught Leah that in addition to Christ and kingdom, an important part of life is body and beauty.**

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Although external appearances suggested that Leah was excelling, her inner life, her real life or soul life, plagued her. Beyond the intentional lessons at home, school and catechism, was what one might call the unintentional curriculum. This curriculum is comprised of the unintentional lessons conveyed by family, friends, and the culture in which she grew. These lessons taught Leah that in addition to Christ and kingdom, an important part of life is body and beauty. The very personality traits that from an outward perspective made Leah excel academically also made her try to achieve bodily. She succeeded easily with the one pursuit but struggled with the other. The goal-oriented, possibility-driven, and conscientious Leah was becoming a beauty-oriented, one-size-smaller driven, self-conscious woman who doubted her place in life and who was overly concerned about her body. Although her grades were good and her spikes hard-driven, she grew to be more sullen and dissatisfied.

For Leah, the body-image lessons began when she was 5 years old. At this age she received a Barbie doll at a Christmas celebration. In her own observant and subtle way she began to associate being ultra thin and stylish with popularity. At 7 years old she watched as her mother used Buns of Steel exercise videos every day in the living room. Those videos unintentionally taught Leah that women are supposed to be petite and that even the last bits of fat are unacceptable. The video's constant encouragement and repetitive phrases both motivated Mom but more importantly became part of Leah's thought patterns. At 9 years of age Leah was with her mother at the Meijer check-out counter. There she, as is expected from her observant nature, scanned the magazines and tabloids. On one magazine she noticed that a woman with a normal body type was concerned about needing to lose more weight and tone down. Again, her little culturally-conscious mind was influence and she learned that her older sister's normal body type is actually unacceptable

and overweight. Leah continued to grow and noticed that the good girls in the TV programs were always the thin girls. She concluded that if the thin girl is the good girl, then the fat girl is the bad girl... and the programs often bore that out. Her soul was once again affected and she became more determined to control her own body-image.

Leah's extremely impressionable adolescent years continued to mislead her. One day she was watching the basketball game with her father. A commercial ended with the phrase, "Pizza without the guilt." Leah again learned, but this time she learned that to eat a reasonable portion of enjoyable foods shows a lack of self-control and that one should feel guilty about eating fatty foods. On another occasion Leah heard her bone-thin mother complain to her father that Brenda (Leah's older sister) has a weight problem. Leah now learned that even father and mother make value judgments based on appearance and clothing size. If respected and God-fearing father and mother think this way, then certainly weight and body shape are important, she thought. Yet another influence in Leah's life was her friends. Among other things she finds that talking about food, fat, and figure not only is a ready source of conversation but also one that others quickly respond to and pick up on.

Lastly, to make matters even worse, Leah's weak parents gave in to her repeated requests to subscribe to Teen Magazine and too often allowed her to watch The Bachelor. Part of their appeal is the many emotions that it evoked in her. At times she laughed and at other times she cried; sometimes she was excited and at other times anxious. The devil, however, only had one emotion, and it made him smile.

The result is that now Leah, who in many respects may be an active Christian, has nevertheless vexed her righteous soul. The choices that she and her parents made included those that moved her closer to her own personal Sodom and Gomorrah. The result is yet another teenager who is consumed with issues of appearance and body shape. She is self-conscious in first meeting up with her friends. While listening to conversations she unconsciously scans those in her field of view and judges them based on their figure. The days in which she feels overweight cause her to also feel less loved and accepted. Leah's personal worth has become dependent on her body and appearance and less on her life with God. Appearance and figure has become a permanent part of who she is and will continue to influence her for years to come.

I am personally aware of many Leahs in my life. These are men and women who have genuine faith, godliness, and kingdom consciousness; yet their old

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man, that carnal and earthly-minded aspect of their soul, haunts them daily. Some are so affected that they make moral judgments of their day based on their adherence to weight and figure management programs. They think that the day gone by was either good or bad because of the exercise programs and diets that they maintained. What an earthly-minded mentality a Christian can develop! The caring for their children, bringing of meals to the needy, and time in devotion to God, all aside; when all is said and done and their heads nestle into their pillows, then their thought patterns wander to food and figure as the final moral basis for the day.

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These matters are important for us to think about. You women grow into your present bodies through an adolescent culture that is saturated with body-image concerns. It is leaving its mark on you. Tomorrow, many of you women will raise your precious children in a culture that is even more saturated with body-image than ever before. Many of your daughters, just as you might feel now, will be robbed of a sense of being loved and accepted because of their bodies; just as Leah of Jacob did. Our tender-eyed Godly men and women suffer needless anguish because of the worldly messages that they have been cultured into accepting.

What is to be done? Why are our young people like this? What is it that leads us to think these thoughts? Why is so much time and energy put into weight management and beauty programs? What can we learn of Leah?

### **Of Faith and Food**

It's important that young people establish and maintain a proper perspective on life. Young people must develop, maintain, and cherish a kingdom consciousness. What is the chief end of man? The Westminster Shorter Catechism answers that man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. We were created with that high purpose. We are to recognize that there is a real King who sovereignly created and maintains all things. It was he who brought us forth, not for ourselves, but instead for his glory. He expects and deserves our praise and our best

efforts. In his wisdom he has created a kingdom or realm that has the purpose of giving him glory. God receives glory through the praise of his people, especially in the communal worship of established churches. The 24 elders of Revelation 4 symbolize the Old and New Testament church. These elders are seated around the throne and "worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

The entity by which God caused us to exist is body and soul. That's borne out in Lord's Day 1, "That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own..." God could have formed us as spirit only; leaving us with no physical aspect. This, however, was not in his wise plan. We are quite familiar with our bodies. The body is the flesh and blood; the cellular and chemical aspect of our being. We tend to be less familiar with the soul. It is worthwhile reminding ourselves of the soul as it will be instructive for us as we address this problem of food and figure.

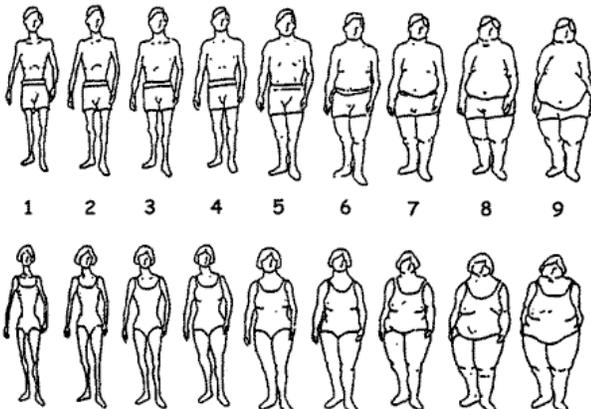
The soul-aspect of our person is that spiritual (not physical) part of us that is the origin of life from a rational and volitional viewpoint. It's the part of us that thinks, wills, desires, plans, and has emotion. The soul aspect of us can exist with or without the physical aspect of our being. In some ways one can think about the soul as the real you. That is, it is you in the deepest sense. One could say that the body does not have a soul but that the soul has a body. Now, one must be careful to not become dualistic about the body and soul because at present they together comprise the self. Someday, when we die, the body and soul will be separated but in the new heavens and new earth our souls will be once again united to our perfected bodies. These two aspects of us are inseparably intertwined in our current state and together they influence the whole person.

Our bodies affect our soul. The music we hear with our ears soothe the soul. Recall the history of David playing to Saul. The sights we take in with our eyes affect our souls as well. Pornography corrupts our souls as it leads us to think more sinfully. Lot vexed his righteous soul, and almost undoubtedly that was partially through his eyes as he lived near Sodom and Gomorrah. Exercise performed by the body is good for the soul. And even the wine that we drink affects our soul. Regarding the topic at hand, the magazines, mall posters, television programs, beaches, and commercials we watch all affect our soul's thought patterns, too.

Our souls affect our bodies. Those piercings that we chose originated with the soul's plans and desires. The abuser of cigarettes and alcohol may corrupt the body in various ways as a result of the soul's decisions. In some ways a postmortem may tell the mortician more about that individual's soul than it does about one's final cause of death because written on the tapestry of the body's skin and organs is a record of the soul's choices.

Food, calories, and fat are good!

With these thoughts in mind let us turn again to the issue. What is the Christian's perspective of food and figure? God sustains and energizes you (soul and body) with physical food. The physical affects the spiritual. Nourishment not only energizes the body but because the body and soul are intertwined it also affects our soul! We reason more soundly, think more clearly, remember more distinctly, emote (have emotion) properly when we have adequate nourishment. Food, calories, and fat are good! God has provided them in abundance and it is wrong to despise and have negative thought patterns regarding them. In Genesis 1:29 and 30 we read that one of the earliest provisions to man so that man could serve his God was an ample supply of food. II Peter 2:3 says "According as his divine power hath given us all things that pertain to life and godliness." God has given us what we need for life. Let's eat of it and even enjoy it. Also Ecclesiastes 3:13, "And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God." Carbohydrates in the form of bread is good! In fact your brain runs exclusively on carbohydrates. Let us receive these foods as the gift of God and may it energize our brain. Fat is good! Every cell of your whole body is encapsulated with two layers of fat called a phospholipid bilayer. Let us put away our thought patterns that lead us to despise the good nourishing gifts of God.



## The Folly of the Figure

Now that we have before us the correct perspective of life (to praise and serve God) and food (energy for body and soul), the next question... or as it turns out questions...need(s) to be asked. What of figure? What does body shape or facial complexion have to do with this Christian life? Given the preceding line up, whom would you choose to marry? Which of these would love his body of believers the most? Which would encourage you in your devotional life? Which would have the ability to formulate the words that you need to hear when in doubt and despair? Which would sing and pray most fervently? Which will work most diligently at raising your children in God's fear? Which will be eager to participate in society? Which will weep with those who weep and laugh with those who laugh? Which will feed the hungry, clothe the naked, go to the imprisoned? Which will invite the stranger for coffee? Which is godly? Which is laboring for the meat that endures (John 6:27)?

**...is it your desire to  
someday marry and wake  
up next to a self-centered,  
shallow, carnally minded,  
but beautiful spouse?**

Isaiah 55:2 says, "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? And your labour for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." How much time, money, and energy do you spend on the folly of a good figure? Do you feed your souls? Figure does not satisfy and only has fleeting beauty. Worms will destroy your body and it will wither away as the flower of the field. Young people, is it your desire to someday marry and wake up next to a self-centered, shallow, carnally minded, but beautiful spouse? Does it give you status to date a good looking person? Is beauty your heart's desire? May we and our Christian young people have eyes to see the true beauty in one another.

Physical beauty is literally only skin deep. Remember this most outer layer of you is not you! Too many young (and old) people identify themselves with this 1 to 5 centimeter thick covering. In reality, you are not your body. Stop identifying self primarily from only the physical aspect. You are your soul! The church of Jesus Christ needs beautiful people, not beautiful bodies. Remember who you are. You are the spiritual (and physical) entity

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who is loved by Jehovah, redeemed by the Lamb, one whose infirmities touch Christ, a member of his body, a servant to the kingdom causes, one charged to raise future young members of his church, a witness to the world, the salt of the earth, a future mother in Israel. Besides, the body that you have is not even yours anyway. Lord's Day 1, again. "That I with body and soul both in life and death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ..."

Christian beauty lies in the shape of a woman's godly spirit, her godly knowledge, her godly wisdom, her godly emotion, her godly love, her godly care, her godly industry, and her godly psyche and not one bit in the shape of her physical body. One of the effects of conversion is that we more and more put away the old man of body worship and put on the new man of Christ. I Peter 3:3,4, "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." Notice that reference to beauty in the phrase "sight of God." It's the soul that has beauty in God's eyes.

In many ways beauty is a distraction from real life; from soul life and kingdom life. One could wish God made the whole human race of members that were equally beautiful so that the distraction would go away. We see that beauty is a distraction away from kingdom life in scripture when we read of the struggles of David and Bathsheba, as well as Joseph with Potifer's wife. How many hours do our young people distract themselves from kingdom life when they work to put their faces on in the morning and exercise vigorously to tone and shape their bodies?

A kingdom consciousness guards us from getting distracted by these earthly and carnal goals. Developing a strict morning devotional schedule will benefit many young Christians. Beginning every day with time spent worshiping God develops a spiritual mindset that does not quickly leave us as we progress through the day.

#### Proper Perspective of Beauty and Exercise

But what is the place of exercise and beauty in the Christian life? Are we not to exercise and are we not to appreciate beauty? Given its distractive nature, should we not do away with beauty and its pursuit altogether? Is it more godly to dress down and develop a code whereby we all agree to wear clothes with a common pattern? Is there room for individuality and style?

God created human beauty and it is to be valued and appreciated. On day six of the creation week God created man. Adam and Eve were undoubtedly beautiful people. They were the pinnacle of his beautiful creation and at the end of the day God looked at all that he had made and said it was very good. Although fallen, God's creation still has beauty, even today. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psalm 19:1). In Christian maturity and in God-sanctified ways we can look upon one another and appreciate his handiwork as revealed by the beauty of the people around us.

I challenge you, though, to rethink beauty. Beauty is culturally defined and has changed through the ages. With no proof whatsoever, I leave this thought with you that Eve may have been farmer-strong and beautiful rather than 2009's concept of beautiful which to my mind is more of the frail and weak variety.

It is biblical for a bride to adorn herself for her husband. Isaiah 61:10 says, "...as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." We can also be reminded of Abraham's servant adorning Rebekah when she accepted the marriage invitation with Isaac. Genesis 24:47, "...and I put earring upon her face, and bracelets upon her hands." Certainly those ornaments were not only worn in secret but also were displayed publicly. Rebekah wore them to Laban's father's house. Christians in the New Testament age can dress themselves and look good for those with whom they associate. Beauty is admirable.

Exercise is also valuable and has an important place in our lives. We are not always to be studying and working but must also enjoy exercise. Regular vigorous exercise is valuable to the body and the soul. The body is more energetic and the soul rejuvenated after vigorous exercise. Exercise also maintains our health. We keep this temple of the Holy Spirit in better condition with exercise.

#### **Christian Response to Body-Image Issues.**

The center of these body-image issues is identity. Too often in young people the body becomes the dominant factor in identify. The center of identity is actually the soul. Young people's souls need to be fed. Souls are fed by the preaching of the Word. Hearing the preaching of the Word is the most important thing for overcoming these earthly-minded issues that creep up in our Christian lives. Young people need to listen and be fed by that word. As they become more heavenly minded, their kingdom consciousness will overcome insecurities that come with body consciousness.

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Reading of scripture also imparts the Word to us. We need to do devotions regularly so that we develop and grow a kingdom mindset instead of an earthly, carnal one. There is so much more to this world than simply what meets the eye. There is a spiritual world of soul-life to develop and nourish.

Christian young people need to know that the devil is active in their lives. The devil and his hosts have access to our souls. They can tempt us and they still do pull us into ungodly thought patterns. Especially when we are young warriors he beguiles us. He's called the angel of light in II Corinthians 11:14 because he makes us think that things are harmless for us when actually they lead us astray. The devil is active in culture. He is active in music, movies, and on mall walls. He likes to see us become earthly-carnal-body-image-minded people. Ephesians 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Guard yourselves from those attacks.

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kingdom consciousness  
will overcome insecurities  
that come with body  
consciousness.**

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Parents must remember to raise up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4) Authentic parental conversations about life, body, puberty, clothing, exercise, and figure are a layer of protection that stand between our sons and daughters and body-image carnal-mindedness. Parents need to make sure that their children know why they exercise to the extent that they do. Children need to see parents being active and involved in kingdom work. The valuable hours dedicated to God's work should far outweigh the hours spent exercising. Parents must value and encourage the spiritual gifts that their children exhibit to a greater extent than they value and encourage their children's physical achievements. Conversation in the home should be positive about what people are doing in our churches and how helpful others are being. In contrast conversations about food and figure should be kept to a minimum. Comments about people having a weight problem, or that others look so good because they lost a few pounds can be taken

wrongly by impressionable teenagers. Words do hurt, sometimes seriously.

Comments about people having a weight problem, or that others look so good because they lost a few pounds can be taken wrongly by impressionable teenagers.

Young people and parents need to be aware of the impact that the ungodly culture has on them. The devil is using every tool, including cultural tools to influence our thought patterns. He uses the movies, malls, and magazines. Even *Reader's Digest* is filled with advertisements that use body and figure to sell products. In addition many magazines regularly include articles about weight loss and body toning. We need to use these with discretion or avoid them altogether. Mark 9:47, "And if thy eye offend thee, pluck it out." Perhaps going to the mall every weekend is more damaging that we ever realized. Again, use with discretion.

Finally, we need to continue to pray for Zion. The church is Zion. God's people are Zion. Prayers should include words like those found in Psalter # 227:3, "Bless they who dwell in Zion, whose joy and strength thou art." Pray that God will continue to raise up young men and young women who are truly beautiful people.

Solomon finishes the book of Ecclesiastes with these notable words. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." Let us be those who in our youth maintain a kingdom consciousness. Let us fear God with a fear that loves, honors, respects, and adores the holy one. Let us keep his commandments. And let our every work whether it be done by body or soul be done as unto the Lord. God will judge our every work; our every body-image thought as well as our every body-image deed. May our work be kingdom work and the treasure we seek be kingdom treasure. ❖

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*Jon is a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.*

# Federation Board Nominees

by Emily Kuiper

**Y**oung People, during your society year you elected two delegates to represent you at the 2009 summer convention. During the convention there will be a meeting that these delegates will attend to vote for new Federation Board members. The members of the Young People's Federation Board make many decisions concerning conventions, mass meetings, singspirations, and the *Beacon Lights*. Following is a list of nominees and their goals for the Fed. Board. Those who are elected to serve on the Federation Board will serve two year terms beginning at the end of this summer. The terms are two year commitments because those who are elected to be a Vice will assume the actual position the second year DV.

Nominees for Vice-President are Jared Langerak and Joshua Engelsma.

Jared is twenty years old and a member of Southeast PRC. He is a pre-med student at Calvin College, and he also works as a janitor. Jared's goals for the Fed. Board are to maintain the good leadership and faithful guidance that the Fed. Board provides the Young Peoples Societies, to engage the Young Peoples Societies in more Federation-wide activities, and to involve more young people in writing articles for our *Beacon Lights*.

Josh is also twenty years old and a member of Hope (Walker) PRC. He is a student at Calvin College and works for Razor Sharp Lawn Care during the summer. Josh would like to have the Fed. Board encourage more fellowship among all of our Young People's Societies as well as continued spiritual growth of the young people.

Rebecca Koole and Laura denHartog are the two nominees for Vice-Secretary.

Rebecca is nineteen years old and a member of Hope (Walker) PRC. She is currently finishing up the Medical Assisting Program at Davenport University. Rebecca's goal for the Fed. Board is to continue its work in keeping the Young People's Societies organized and united, to promote the spiritual growth of the young people

during each society year through annual mass meetings and singspirations, and to encourage leadership among the young people.

Laura is nineteen years old, and she is a Veterinary Assistant. Laura is a member of Southwest PRC. Her goal is to encourage more young people to participate in the Bible studies and activities in their own church and those sponsored by the Fed. Board.

Nominees to serve in the capacity of Vice-Treasurer are Tyler Doezema and Scott Mingerink. Tyler is twenty years old and a member of Faith PRC. He is a full-time student at Aquinas College and a tax intern with Beene Garter LLP. Tyler's goals are to faithfully carry out the duties appointed to him and to encourage spiritual growth and active involvement of our young people.

Scott is a member of Southeast PRC. He is nineteen years old, and he is studying Business Management and Accounting at Grand Rapids Community College. Scott also works for Columbia Pipe and Supply. His goal is to have the board emphasize the importance of godly, anti-theological living of young people living in an increasingly wicked world. As the future of the Protestant Reformed Church, our actions and activities in our youth must reflect who we are.

Nominees for Librarian are Laura Kaptein and Elizabeth Noorman.

Laura is a member of Faith PRC, and she works for Spectrum Net Designs. Laura's goals for the Fed. Board are to encourage the young people to attend the activities that are planned for them, to get the societies of our churches involved with each other, and to encourage the young people to grow in their faith.

Elizabeth is nineteen years old, and she is finishing up the Dental Assisting program at Grand Rapids Community College. Elizabeth is a member of Southeast PRC. Her goal would be to do her best so that the Fed. Board could continue to carry out its purposes.

The two nominees for Spiritual Advisor are Rev. Van

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Overloop and Rev. Haak.

Rev. Van Overloop is the minister of Grace PRC. Rev. Van Overloop would like to help the Fed. Board continue to provide good leadership to the Young People's Societies, and especially to the church hosting the convention. He would also like to see the age gap between the members of the societies and the members of the Fed. Board narrowed.

Rev. Haak is currently the minister of Georgetown PRC. Rev. Haak's goals are to create in all the Young People's Societies an awareness of each other, to keep each Y.P. Society aware of the Fed. Board's plans and activities, to circulate discussion and study material that has

been used and found helpful, and to encourage personal use of talents, special music numbers, etc. at meetings.

Now that we have introduced you to the nominees, along with their goals, you are urged to prayerfully consider these nominees. We ask that you pray for the delegates representing you at the convention and for the current Fed. Board members as we continue to make decisions regarding the activities and publications designed for the young people of the PRC. ❖

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*Emily is a member of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.*

## Gem of the Month

# Ruth's Resolve

*“Entreat me not to leave thee”  
These words were wrung from the young widow's heart;  
Ruth would not from Naomi's ways depart  
For in her household she had learned to fear  
Jehovah, Israel's God, in covenant sphere.  
No more would she bow down to idol god;  
She'd leave her fam'ly, to take root abroad.*

*Her eye of faith was on God's promised land.  
Of course, this was as God the Lord had planned,  
Since she was chosen, a forebear to be  
Of Jesus Christ: what a great legacy!  
A Moabitess in the covenant line,  
Selected wisely, by the Lord's design.*

*Lord, may we follow in Ruth's footsteps too,  
That we leave not the paths of wisdom true.  
We also have been chosen, Lord, by Thee;  
Give us the strength that we from idols flee.  
May worldly fun not lure us foolishly  
From the true joy that's found alone in Thee.*

Thelma Westra

# Watching Daily At My Gates

by Chester Hunter

## June 16 Read John 16:1-12

Sometimes that which is necessary is sorrowful. Those are Jesus's words in verses 6 and 7. Without the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, we would not have the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit, we would not have life. The Spirit spoken of in verses 8-11 is not the Spirit that many look for. This is the Spirit of Christ who carries out the work of election and reprobation to its end. When that work is carried out to its end, then there is utmost joy among the people of God as they are all brought together in heaven. Is that the Spirit we seek? Sing Psalter 287.

## June 17 Read John 16:13-22

We see in these first few verses not only some insight into the work of the Spirit, but also some insight into the makeup of the Trinity. The persons of the Trinity do not work independently. Even as Jesus did not come into this world speaking of himself, but of the Father who sent him, so the Spirit was not poured out at Pentecost to promote himself. The Trinity has and is Unity. The Spirit shows to us the whole council of God concerning our salvation. It is the Spirit who gives to us life in Christ. This is a great comfort to us because whatever the Spirit shows unto us is true. We must remember that the Spirit is also the Comforter; therefore, whatever he imparts to us is for our comfort in this life. Sing Psalter 390.

## June 18 Read John 16:22-33

Jesus teaches the disciples and us about the necessity of coming to the Father in his name. When we pray, we cannot come to the Father on our merits. We can only come on the merits of Christ for us. The church throughout the ages will be persecuted. The disciples on that very night will be devastated about what would be done to their master. At the end of time we might think that the world is going to win. Jesus told the disciples and tells us, that he will care for us and we need not worry because he has overcome the world. Christ did crush Satan's head. Let not our hearts be troubled neither let them be afraid. Sing Psalter 392.

## June 19 Read John 17:1-8

We have in this chapter the prayer of Jesus known as the high priestly prayer. While the immediate context is for the disciples in the upper room, this prayer is for the church of all ages. It is a very comforting prayer for the people of God. In verse 3 we see the only way to eternal life—that by knowing God and his Son. We see in verse 6 that we have been chosen, and by God's power will keep his word until the end. Because Christ is our high priest, we have assurance of our salvation now and forever. Thanks be to God. Sing Psalter 235.

## June 20 Read John 17:9-14

Verse 9 preaches the truth and reality of particular grace. God has chosen a people and has saved them in Christ. That is real. That is comforting. Verse 12 teaches the further comfort of preservation of the saints. As those saved by grace, we have the comfort that we will never go lost because God will keep us. Some might say that these are cold, hard doctrines. On the contrary they are the comforting words of the truth of our salvation. We have to do nothing on our own for salvation. We can rely on the comfort that the child of God is saved from eternity to the end of time. Doctrine is not cold and hard. Doctrine is sure and comforting. Here we find the beautiful words of Lord's Day 1 proved to us. What other comfort do we need? Sing Psalter 204.

## June 21 Read John 17:13-19

First of all, let us take a look at verse 16. We are not of this world. This does not mean that we are to be isolated in this world. God does not bring us to salvation oblivious to those around us. Rather, the prince of this world is Satan. He is not our prince. We are not part of his kingdom. Therefore we are called not to live like the world but to live as members of the kingdom of Christ. Secondly, God's word is truth. This is an important truth in our lives. We can follow Scripture because it is true. It is the only way we are made holy to live in the kingdom of Christ. Each day we must seek to know truths from that Word and to live out of them. May God bless us each day with his truth. Sing Psalter 26.

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**June 22 Read John 17:20-26**

Jesus ends his high priestly prayer with words that definitely indicate that this prayer was for more than the disciples. Look at verse 20 once more. There is much comfort in this prayer. It was comforting for the disciples though they may not have known it at the time, and there is much comfort for us today. It gives to us the hope of the eternal life that will be ours. It may be that we will enter glory though death before his return, or it may be that he will take us to heaven on the clouds of glory when he returns. What a love our Savior had for us! In that love we find life, and what a glorious life that will be! Sing Psalter 31.

**June 23 Read John 18:1-9**

With three little words Jesus laid an entire company of armed men on their backs. Jesus could have done more, but that was not his purpose for coming to earth. Jesus of Nazareth needed to be captured, tried, and put to death. This was needed that none of his people go lost. Jesus had to do this alone. None of the disciples could help him bear our cup of iniquity, just as none of us can do anything to rid ourselves of that cup in order to merit salvation. But the day will come when, with a few words, he will vanquish all our foes and take us to glory. Sing Psalter 318.

**June 24 Read John 18:7-14**

After praying to his Father in the garden, Jesus was ready to walk the road to his death and our salvation. This we see as we look at the statements he made during his arrest and trial. In verse 11 we see that he knows that the cup of his people's iniquity must be drunk, and it must be drunk by him and only him. It was for us that he went through the process of cruel torture. It was for us in order that we might find life. This is also John's commentary upon Caiaphas and his statement after Lazarus's resurrection. Neither Caiaphas or John understood it at the time, but John came to the understanding when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church. Do we see this? Do we know that the only way of salvation for us is the cross? Let us daily bow in a prayer of thanksgiving for Christ's sacrifice for us, and let us live lives of thankfulness for that sacrifice. Sing Psalter 185.

**June 25 Read John 18:15-27**

How much are we not like Peter? We make boasts about our love and devotion for Christ, and then, when we are faced with opposition we claim that we never knew him. When we follow Peter's life, we see ourselves so clearly. It is as if we are his twin. Even if we

try to deny this, we find ourselves like Peter. It takes grace to walk in the same paths that Jesus walked. If we try any other way, we will end up like Peter. Let us, daily, pray for the grace to not deny our Lord, and then, at the end of each day, let us ask for forgiveness for the sin of denying our Lord and Savior. Sing Psalter 362.

**June 26 Read John 18:28-32**

Do we sometimes act like the Jews? Are we so careful that we do the "right thing" that we break every other commandment in the moral law? The child of God must keep the whole law. This was the testimony of James in his epistle to the church after the death of Jesus. We also must make sure that we do not just keep the law outwardly. We must keep it from the heart. This is true in every aspect of our life. We cannot just pretend to be a Christian. We cannot just be a Christian when it is convenient. We must walk the Christian walk each and every day of our lives. There is only one way that this is possible. It is only possible by the grace that was merited for us by Christ's death on the cross. Let us live a life of thankfulness for that grace. Sing Psalter 354.

**June 27 Read John 18:33-40**

As the worldly judge Pilate questions Jesus, a beautiful truth comes out. Jesus's kingdom is not of this world. As citizens of that kingdom, we must remind ourselves of that truth. This world is not our eternal destination. We can do and should try to do nothing to make it that. Yes, we must care for it. It is our temporary home, but it is not our permanent home. We must spend much time and energy preparing ourselves for the heavenly home Christ earned for us by his death on the cross. That is the truth of our salvation. That truth Pilate could not grasp. That truth many in the world cannot grasp. That truth is only grasped by grace through faith in Christ. Sing Psalter 302.

**June 28 Read John 19:1-7**

The situation was rapidly getting out of Pilate's hands. What he did not want to happen, was going to happen. Pilate wanted a peaceful end to this problem. He was worried about his standing before the Roman government. He knew Jesus was innocent, but he could find no way to release him and placate the Jews. He was also getting disgusted with the whole mess. God was taking it out of his hands. God was directing the whole affair by his sovereign council. This is the way he would save his people. As we look at these final days of Jesus's suffering, do we see what Jesus did for us? Sing Psalter 223.

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**June 29 Read John 19:8-15**

We have in these verses a portrayal of what will be our lot in the days before the end of time. Those who will not accept the mark of the beast will be taken before earthly judges and will not find justice or mercy. We can be comforted in the knowledge that our elder brother has walked the same path, and because he did, we have the promise of life after whatever kind of death that we might face. Let us rest assured that he is looking out for us and is preparing our place in that kingdom which will last forever. Sing Psalter 121.

**June 30 Read John 19:16-24**

After Pilate gave sentence, the Lamb of God was sacrificed for his people. We can see many Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled. All of this had to come to pass for our salvation. In this passage we see Jesus being made a public spectacle for us. Pilate meant to mock the Jews when he put that certain superscription over Jesus. But even that was turned in a way that Jesus was mocked. The soldiers began the mocking as they took his clothes and then, as was the custom, had the audacity to sit down and gamble for them. Jesus's hour had come. He would descend into hell culminating in the cry "My God, My God was hast thou forsaken me." All of this was for us. Let us remember his suffering in our prayers and pray each time "forgive us our sins." Sing Psalter 47:1-4.

**July 1 Read John 19:25-30**

John only records three of the seven "cross words". In the first, we see some truths concerning his human nature. He loved his mother, and showed that love when he entrusted her care to the disciple whom he loved. But he was also showing Mary and the others that the earthly ties had to be broken for their good and ours. We also see his human nature in his need for a drink. In order to make his final cry of victory, his mouth needed moisture. But he also thirsted for the love of his heavenly Father. His final cry showed that all was finished. All the redemptive work for our salvation was finished. He could now go away and begin preparing for each of us a place with him in glory. The soldiers did not kill him; he willingly gave up his life for us! Thanks be to God! Sing Psalter 47:5-8.

**July 2 Read John 19:31-37**

Yesterday we saw that Jesus died on his own. John, in today's reading, gives evidence of that fact. The soldiers, in order to please the Jews, began to go around

and continue their barbaric treatment of these malefactors. But when they got to Jesus there was no need for them to cause death. John makes mention that Jesus's legs were unbroken to fulfill the Scriptures. Jesus was the true and final passover lamb. Because he was sacrificed, the angel of death passes over us. We need not fear death, the grave, or hell, because Jesus has taken our place. Jesus's death is our life. Let us give thanks for that each and every time we pray. Sing Psalter 47:9-11.

**July 3 Read John 19:38-42**

The final step in Jesus's state of humiliation was being buried. Two men who would not acknowledge him in his life did so in his death. Notice how God cared for his disciples here. If the disciples had buried him, the proof of the resurrection would not have been as strong in the world's eyes. Do we see ourselves in the burial? Would we have dared ask for Jesus's body? Jesus's burial was necessary for our salvation. Let us show gratitude by acknowledging him in our lives. Sing Psalter 28.

**July 4 Read John 20:1-10**

For approximately 36 hours the friends of Jesus mourned his death. All through the Sabbath they waited quietly until they could perform acts of kindness for their Lord. John highlights the visit of Mary Magdalene. She was not the only woman who visited the gravesite that morning, but she was the one that first saw the risen Savior. John records those appearances that most emphatically prove the fact of the resurrection. Jesus had to arise from the dead. His resurrection is proof of the hope of our resurrection. This first part of the state of exultation was for us. May we serve the risen Savior all of our lives knowing that we, too, will arise into glory. Sing Psalter 358.

**July 5 Read John 20:11-18**

Jesus is risen, and whereas he was not ascended when Mary first saw him, he is ascended into heaven, and there he prepares a place for each and every one of his people. Mary was in complete distress when she saw the empty tomb. Her tears prove that. Jesus's appearance had lifted her spirits and had proved to her the truth of his resurrection. But Jesus's appearance is also proof to us of that truth. Jesus has arisen and by his rising has finished our salvation. That is our joy in this day, and in that joy we must live. When we go to the grave of a loved one; we, too, can be comforted in that Jesus's resurrection is a pledge of our final resurrection. Let this be our joy and comfort on this day. Sing Psalter 312

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**July 6 Read John 20:19-23**

After the exciting news during the day, the disciples locked themselves into the upper room to discuss what had gone on. After not believing the women's message, they changed their minds after Jesus's appearance to Peter. Their hearts are troubled as they wonder what will happen next. Then Jesus comes to them and speaks a word of peace to them. Do we feel that peace? That word is unto us as well. He then prepares them to take up their work as the church of the New Dispensation. We are members of that church and must continue on in that work. As we do that work, and as we do our daily work, let us feel the peace that passeth understanding which only comes from our heavenly Father in Christ through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Sing Psalter 309.

**July 7 Read John 20:24-31**

Are we Thomases? Sadly, we exhibit the worst characteristics of all sinners. We deny Christ like Peter, and we are slow to believe like Thomas. But God in his grace cares for each of us in his sins. As he brought Thomas to the beautiful confession of verse 28, so he will bring us to confess him. As one who encountered Jesus blurted out, "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief" so we must make the same prayer. While we do not have the miraculous signs that the church in John's day had, we have the whole Word of God that testifies of those signs to help our unbelief become belief. In believing, as John states, we have life through his name and only through his name. Is that our testimony? Do we believe the resurrection, and then believe in Jesus? That is what we must do every day. Sing Psalter 228.

**July 8 Read John 21:1-8**

During the forty days following Jesus's resurrection he made ten appearances. There were five on Resurrection Sunday, and then there were five more scattered throughout the time before his ascension. He used the occasion of each appearance to teach something that the disciples would later use in the church. This one is no different. Once again he shows to them that he is the sovereign Lord over all creation. Once again he shows to them an aspect of their work in gathering the church of Christ. We, too, must learn from these appearances. We, too, must learn that Christ will care for his sheep. Sing Psalter 53.

**July 9 Read John 21:9-14**

After graphically showing his disciples that their work would be to catch men, and by showing the manner,

as he did before, that it would be by his power and not theirs, Jesus shows them that he would care for them in that work. Jesus also shows them that there is an exact number of elect which must be gathered. Each time that Jesus appeared to them he gave them another little piece of the puzzle which would be their work. This is also instruction for us. As we search the Scriptures daily, we can find a little piece of our puzzle that is our life on this earth. We can only fit that puzzle together by his help. So when we study his Word, let us do it with prayer that the Holy Spirit will unfold the wisdom of that Word before us. Sing Psalter 65.

**July 10 Read John 21:15-19**

Besides giving to each disciple an idea about the work that they were called to carry out, Jesus had to publicly accept Peter back into the circle. Peter had publicly denied him, and now Peter had to publicly confess his sin. We need not wonder about the rightness of this event because our Lord Jesus Christ carried it out. Three times Peter had denied his Lord, and three times he had to confess that he loved him. In his love Christ not only accepted the confession but also gave to Peter the work he would do in the church. Peter's bold spirit would be useful, but Christ also told him that the work would bring him to his death. We, too, must confess our sins. Sometimes we must do it publicly, but Christ's love is always there to sustain us. We, too, have work in Christ's church, and for some of us it may mean our very lives will be at stake. Even in that circumstance Christ's love will sustain us. Sing Psalter 83.

**July 11 Read John 21:20-25**

As John finishes this gospel he relates a common misunderstanding in the church of that day. He also tells us that he had only written about a small part of all that Jesus had done while on the earth. John wanted all that read his writings to know that Jesus was Christ. He was the one who came into the world for his people. As we read the gospel according to John, we must look for those truths knowing that the "half has not been told us." As we wait for the return of Christ "let not our hearts be troubled." He has gone "to prepare a place for us" and he will "come again" and receive us unto himself. Thanks be to God for our Savior! Sing Psalter 337.

This article is encouraged reading in preparation for the upcoming Young Peoples' Convention.

# The Church and Her Catholicity

by Prof. Herman C. Hanko

*Prof. Hanko is professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary. This is the text of the speech given at the graduation exercises of the Protestant Reformed Seminary in June, 2000.*

From time to time over the past years we have come to experience in the halls of the seminary something of what it means to be part of a catholic church. That was true again this past year. It seemed to me, therefore, that "The Church and Her Catholicity" would be an eminently suitable topic on which to meditate for a little while this evening.

There are other reasons, however, why I wish to speak on this topic. Those of our Protestant Reformed churches who confess together every Lord's day the Apostles Creed confess our faith as including this truth: "We believe in one catholic church." While we confess this truth, we do not always understand and appreciate what it means. In our thinking and in our actual life, however, that confession of a faith in a catholic church becomes a bit abstract. We tend to have the notion that the denomination of which we are a part happens to be the most important denomination on the face of the earth and that, although God has his people in every land and gathers his church from every tribe and tongue and nation, nevertheless the rest of the church in the world somehow revolves around us. It is almost as if we think to ourselves that God would be hard pressed to do the work of the church if it were not for our diligent labors and for the crucially important place which we occupy in the unity of the entire church of Christ. That is a serious and sad mistake. It is because I see this in myself and in others, that it is not without profit to address ourselves to this question tonight.

There is one more reason why I chose to speak on this (this may be, after all, the most important reason of all). Over the years I have come to appreciate the doctrine of the catholicity of the church more and more.

As a matter of fact, personally, I consider it to be one of the most beautiful doctrines in the whole of Scripture. Perhaps you will not agree with that; that makes no difference. It grows on me—the truth of the catholicity of the church. It is amazingly beautiful. It has innumerable implications for doctrine and life. But its beauty especially is to be found in the fact that the Scriptures point us to one rather startling and, in my mind, extraordinarily significant truth: the fullness of the riches of the grace of almighty God cannot be revealed in all their beauty except through a catholic church. That especially is the point of view which I wish to emphasize.

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## What Catholicity Is

The eternal purpose of God as he determined it in his counsel from before the foundations of the world is this: to glorify himself and his own great name through a church redeemed in Christ. That is the one purpose of God. That is the reason why he does all things and has done all things. He created heaven and earth and all that they contain for the church. He created angels and devils for the church. He created man for the church. He created Paradise in Eden for the church. All things are only to serve the purpose of the church. All that he did, all that he does, is centered in his purpose to reveal himself in all his glory in the church.

From the very beginning, in a certain sense of the word, that church was a catholic church. Although that did not become immediately evident before the Flood,

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it was only a very short time after the Flood that one crucial event in the history of the world pointed with unmistakable clarity to God's purpose to save a catholic church. I refer to the catastrophe, the fiasco, of Babel. The immediate purpose of God at Babel was to prevent the Antichrist from revealing himself prematurely and from establishing a universal kingdom before the time was ripe for that. If Antichrist had established such a kingdom at Babel, the church would never have been saved. The existence of the church in the world would have been impossible.

Nevertheless, that was secondary. That deadly wound with which the beast was wounded cannot eventually be healed except in the blood of Christ. And it is healed in the blood of Christ in such a way that Babel is reversed and the curse of Babel is lifted. The fiasco of Babel becomes the triumphant victory of a catholic church. It was at Babel that God created the nations, the races, the tongues, and the peoples that inhabit the earth. Babel serves a catholic church.

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### Babel serves a catholic church.

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In the days of the patriarchs that church was, in a certain sense of the word, catholic, although gradually the church became limited to Abraham and his descendants. One could also find the church in Jerusalem, of all places, where a people were being ruled by Melchisedek, priest of the most high God. You could find it at Sinai, where Jethro instructed his family in the ways of Jehovah and took care of his sheep. You could find it in Haran, where Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac. Nevertheless, God narrowed the line to the descendants of Abraham until Israel became his chosen people.

We often like to think of the fact that the nation of Israel was composed of Jews. As a matter of fact, it was not. It had more foreign blood, more heathen blood, more Gentile blood than Jewish blood. It was a catholic church in the making, even in the days of Israel's history. All the sons of Jacob, without exception, married either Canaanitish or Egyptian women. Israelite blood, therefore, at the very outset, was fifty percent non-Jewish.

God continued to bring heathen into the nation of Israel in strange and startling ways, almost as if to remind Israel, "The church is catholic. You are a chosen people, set aside from all the nations of the earth. You, above all the nations of the earth, are favored by God.

But don't ever forget: The catholic church is in embryo form in you." He brought Rahab out of the smashed city of Jericho. He brought Ruth out of Moab to be a mother of Christ. He brought Egyptians out of Egypt to journey with Israel on the long way to Canaan. He brought the Gibeonites to Israel and incorporated them into the nation so that they became part and parcel of the nation of Israel. He even brought the daughters of Moab into the nation when the unmarried daughters of Moab were saved at the time Israel visited its fury upon the nation after the sin of Baalpeor.

So it was. Uriaah, the husband of Bathsheba, was a Hittite. Araunah, on whose threshing floor David offered his sacrifices to stay the plague, was a Jebusite. Even some of David's chief men and fiercest warriors were from other lands.

There was one thing, however, about the nation that persisted in the old dispensation simply because Christ had not yet come. That is, although in a certain sense of the word and from a particular point of view the nation of Israel was the catholic church, it was not quite that. It was not quite that because anyone who was joined to the church of Christ in the old dispensation had to become a Jew. He became a Jew through the rite of circumcision. He was incorporated into the Israelitish nation. He adopted the culture of the Jews and he was a part of the nation that went to Jerusalem to worship God in the temple. He was, to all intents and purposes, no longer a Hittite, or a Jebusite, or a Gibeonite, but a Jew—all because Christ had not come.

There is something about the Old Testament, though, that is always looking beyond this dispensation of shadows. When one reads the psalms and the prophets, he cannot miss that tone of eager anticipation of a better day to come. Think, for example, of Psalm 68, that beautiful psalm that David wrote at the time when the Ark was brought up to Jerusalem as a picture of the exaltation of Christ. David sings: "Princes shall come out of Egypt (the house of bondage from which God had delivered his people!), Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." That was the psalmist. That was at the time when the Ark was brought to Jerusalem. And then, "Sing unto God ye kingdoms of the earth; sing praises unto the Lord" (vv. 31, 32). It is no wonder that that verse ends with the word "Selah," which means, "pause for a moment, take a breath, meditate on this, this is staggering." Egypt, Ethiopia? Yes, another day is coming.

So it was with the prophets—Isaiah in particular. "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall

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cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (60:1-3).

When the Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth, he came as a Jew. So much was he a Jew that he could trace his genealogy all the way to Abraham. He was so much a Jew that he had to undergo the rites and rituals of the Jewish nation that had been given to Israel at Sinai. He was conscious of his Jewishness. He was conscious that all the life of his earthly ministry he remained a Jew. He would not stray outside the boundaries of the promised land. His ministry was to the Jews.

When the Syro-Phoenician woman pleaded with him to heal her daughter, he turned a cold shoulder to her and told her it was none of her business. She prevailed upon him to make an exception because she anticipated the faith of Gentiles (Matt. 15:21-31). When the Greeks asked to see Jesus, and asked Thomas in particular on the eve of his crucifixion to make arrangements with the Lord to see him, the Lord told Thomas in no uncertain terms, “Tell them, No.” And the reason which he gave was this, that he had not yet ascended. So he began to speak of his cross, of his death, of his resurrection, and of his ascension. He was a Jewish Christ (John 12:20-33).

He was a Jewish Christ when he hung on the cross. The superscription on the cross said that: “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.” Nevertheless, if you watched closely, there was an almost perceptible change in the Lord as he hung there suffering. The change was reflected even in the fact that Pilate, God’s instrument, directed that the words of the superscription of the cross be written not only in Hebrew, but also in Latin and in Greek. It’s as if the Lord is saying, “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews indeed, but take note, you Greeks, and observe, you Romans, that presently he will be the King of (what Paul calls in the last chapter of Galatians) the true Israel of God—the church gathered from every nation, tribe, and tongue.”

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### He arose, no longer a Jew, but a catholic Christ.

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He arose, no longer a Jew, but a catholic Christ. That was why Mary was not permitted to touch him—“I have not yet ascended. You want to touch me in the wrong way. I am not a Jew any longer. You may not treat Me as one of your nation. I presently will ascend.” He ascended,

not as a Jewish Christ, but as a catholic Christ. He did that because his death was the shedding of his blood for a universal church. John, in his marvelous gospel, wants us always to recognize that. Already when he describes the ministry of John the Baptist he describes John the Baptist as preaching this gospel: “Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Jesus reminded Nicodemus of the same thing: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:14). Lest there be any doubt about the implications and meaning of that expression of the Lord to Nicodemus, he goes on to make it unmistakably clear: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son” (John 3:16). It is almost a jubilant shout concerning the universality of the work of Christ that echoes again and again in the Gospel according to John.

The climax was in the exaltation of Christ. Read Daniel 7. There one sees with Daniel, in a stirring and extremely beautiful vision, the exalted Christ being brought before the throne of the Ancient of Days, and one discovers that all the nations of the earth were given to him as his possession.

So Christ poured out upon the church a catholic Spirit. The catholic Christ poured out upon the church a catholic Spirit. The Spirit is not parochial. The Spirit is not narrow. The Spirit is not the possession of one people. He is catholic in the truest sense of the word. That is the meaning of the sign of speaking in other tongues. We must not be mistaken about that sign. That speaking in other tongues does not simply mean that, now that the Spirit is poured out, things are going to be different from the old dispensation. It means that the church will now burst forth from her national boundaries of Jewry and spread over the length and breadth of the earth. God saves every nation as a distinct nation.

This is important. Everyone who was gathered together in Jerusalem on Pentecost; everyone who came together at the sound of the rushing mighty wind; everyone who heard the 120 speak could understand the Aramaic. There was no need for the miracle of tongues in order to make people from other nations understand. They all knew Aramaic. They all knew the spoken language of Jerusalem—even though they were from the dispersion. It was not in order to make the speech of the 120 intelligible and understandable that the Spirit gave to them this remarkable gift. When one of the 120 came to an Egyptian and spoke to an Egyptian in the language of Egypt, the Holy Spirit was saying to that man, “What

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in the world are you doing here in Jerusalem celebrating a feast of the Jews? Go back home. Stay there. You don't have to come to Jerusalem to be saved. You don't have to speak Hebrew in order to be incorporated into the church of Christ. Stay at home. Live your life as an Egyptian. Don't change anything in your life as far as the country in which you live is concerned. God will save you there. And God will save you as an Egyptian, with all your national and racial characteristics. The need to become a Jew in order to be saved is forever gone."

That was, after all, the great battle in Galatia. That was the reason for Paul's writing of the epistle to the Galatians. There is no need for circumcision. There is no requirement of it, because no one has any longer to become a Jew to be saved.

So the Holy Spirit, as a catholic Holy Spirit, sent by a catholic Christ, gathers a catholic church. He goes into all the nooks and crannies of the globe. He travels into all the by-ways and alleys of the world. There is not one corner of the globe where the Holy Spirit does not go to collect and to gather those for whom Christ died, those who have been chosen by God from all eternity to be a part of the catholic church.

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**The wonderful part of it  
all is that they must be  
saved as their nationality  
and racial characteristics  
require.**

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The wonderful part of it all is that they must be saved as their nationality and racial characteristics require. There is an almost infinite diversity in the church of Jesus Christ. I can only mention some of it. Fundamental to it all is the reversal of Babel, the healing of the wound of the beast, a real and true healing—by the blood of reconciliation in the cross of Jesus Christ. But the wonderful thing, the altogether astounding thing, is that not Egypt-becoming-Jewish will be saved, but Egypt will be saved. Not Ethiopia by coming to the temple will be saved, but Ethiopia will stretch out its hands to God as Ethiopia.

Nations have personalities. Races have personalities. Families have personalities. Individuals have personalities. God wants those racial, national, family personalities saved and preserved. A German is saved as a German. A Dutchman is saved as a Dutchman. He is not made Polish. A Chinaman is saved as a Chinaman. He is not made an Occidental. It has to be that way. Any effort to make it

different is contrary to the will of God, who has a greater purpose in mind than that of creating a church which is composed of racial or national clones. His purpose is to reveal the riches of his grace.

There is an infinite variety in the church. This variety is of race, of nation, of family, of individual. That is what is so important about the marvelous work of salvation. As a pastor, I have often had the feeling in my soul when dealing with a particular recalcitrant sheep, I wish he were not so stubborn! If only God would make him less stubborn, maybe we could get somewhere with him. He is like a billy goat.

Well, God is not going to make him any different. God gives to every man his personality. Whether that is stubbornness or weakness; whether that is spinelessness or foolhardiness; whether that is a tendency to be happy in one's life or forever down in the dumps—God gives to each man his personal characteristics. Those characteristics are never going to be changed. Those characteristics are not going to be changed by grace.

Grace does not make a stubborn man less stubborn. What grace does do is make him stubborn about the right things, which Scripture happens to call "steadfastness." Grace does not make the mild character bold as a lion. But grace puts the mildness of an individual in the service of a church. Grace does not make a tactless person tactful. But grace does put tactlessness under the subjection of grace in order that it may serve the purpose of the church.

So it is. What a variety of characteristics. Even the attributes of old age—the glory of the hoary head—or the attributes of children are preserved in the catholicity of the church. The glories, the beauties, of every age of life are preserved by God through death into his everlasting kingdom of heaven.

All these things become a part of that infinite variety that goes to make up the church. In fact, even sin comes in the service of the catholicity of the church. It takes a different kind of a grace (I don't profess to understand the mysterious ways of God) to save a prostitute than to save a smug, self-righteous hypocrite. The same grace will not do. It takes a different kind of a grace (all unmerited favor; all God's amazing irresistible power to save) to save a Dutchman than to save an African. The same kind of grace will not do.

Each sinner, saved by grace, has his own unique, personal, individual, spiritual pilgrimage, which is in the most marvelous way tied to the particular and unique place which that same individual will occupy in the church in glory. How the Lord delivers this one sinner from the depths of depravity and fits him as a sinner saved

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by grace for his place in glory is the grace unique to him.

That is what the Bible means, for example, when in the letter of the Lord to the church of Pergamus the Lord promises to those who overcome that he will give them a white stone, in which there will be written their name, which no other man can know. It is their name. It is their name because it fits them. It fits them because it precisely defines how that one sinner saved by grace was brought by the power of grace, in distinction from all the others, into the unity of the one church of Jesus Christ (Rev. 2:17).

In the church, therefore, we find the infinite variety that we confess when we confess one catholic church.

### **Why the Church's Catholicity Is Important**

It is important that the church be catholic. It is important because that is the only way God can reveal the fullness of the riches of his grace. In the last verses of Ephesians 2 the apostle Paul describes how the middle wall of partition was broken down through the blood of Christ and reconciliation was accomplished, so that Jew and Gentile alike could become one body in Christ. Together they form that one glorious temple built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets of which Christ is the chief cornerstone, and in which God dwells.

That is possible because we are saved by grace. That is why this entire section is introduced with the words, "For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works" (Eph. 2:8). It is grace alone.

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**The riches of God's grace are so infinitely great that they can be revealed only in a church composed of a multitude which no man can number, of individuals saved by grace in different ways.**

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Why? The apostle explains that in verse 7 when he says, "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." The riches of God's grace are infinite. Every time we confess the Apostles' Creed, including that one article of which I am speaking tonight, we say, "I believe." Then the thought passes inevitably through

my mind, "I believe it. I can't demonstrate it. I can't prove it. I can't understand it. I can't make it clear to you. But I believe it. It's an object of faith." The riches of God's grace are so infinitely great that they can be revealed only in a church composed of a multitude which no man can number, of individuals saved by grace in different ways. That is, all are saved in full connection with the kind of people they are, the place where they were born, the nature of their upbringing, their racial and national characteristics, the personalities with which they were endowed, the spiritual pilgrimage which led them out of the bondage of sin into the fellowship of the church—their own grace in each one.

When I look at you, I see a different grace, a different kind of grace, than is manifest in me. It takes a catholic church. Diamonds alone will not do it. You need sapphires and rubies and emeralds and all the precious stones known to man to reveal the beauties and riches of God's grace in this life and in the life to come. The riches of God's grace cannot be sung by a soloist. They have to be sung by a choir, by a choir composed of a large number of different voices singing different parts, but harmonizing and all singing one song, the song of Moses and the Lamb. The riches of God's grace cannot be revealed by a piano solo or a violin solo. It takes an orchestra. You have to look for the trumpets and the violas, and the cellos and the base viols, the clarinets and the flutes, and all the rest. One instrument cannot do it. The riches of the grace of God are too great. How can one individual, how can even a million individuals, each one of them in his own way, contain the riches of the infinite grace of almighty God? And, if I may say so, it ought to be obvious that this is why the doctrine of salvation by grace is fundamental to the whole of the Christian faith—the doctrine one can sacrifice only at the cost of destroying the church.

### **What Are Its Implications for Us?**

That is the catholicity of the church. What a marvelous doctrine! What a profound purpose. Into all eternity we shall marvel at the riches of God's grace only because we see each other and dwell together as the body of Christ. Yes, as the body of Christ—one body. "I believe one holy catholic church." Catholicity is impossible, absolutely impossible, without unity. It is a strange doctrine, so strange that the Scriptures say we ought to look at some figures in order to appreciate what this is.

A human body is one organism, one unity. But if you did not know anything about a human body, or if you had never seen a human body, and you looked at a toe lying

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on a table and alongside of it an ear, you would say to yourself, “It’s utterly impossible that these belong to the same entity. How can two such diverse things belong to the same organism?” Paul alludes to that in I Corinthians 12. Strange members, totally different from each other, go to compose the unity of one body. So much is this true that not one single member of the body has any meaning or any significance or any importance, and, as a matter of fact, cannot even be saved apart from the unity of the whole.

That means that the unity of the church is a complete and perfect unity because not one additional member can be added to that unity. From that unity cannot be subtracted even one member. Somehow, in some mysterious way, it is a perfect unity because all of God’s grace is revealed right here in this unity. Take one away, you subtract from the grace of God. Add one, the grace of God becomes a monstrosity. Add a third ear to a person’s head—what kind of unity do you have? None. Catholicity rests on unity because all the attributes of the church are true of the church only in Christ.

It is with a few remarks about this that I conclude.

The unity of the church is what we are urged, compelled, by Scripture to seek. The unity of the Spirit, Paul calls it in Ephesians 4. And he calls it the unity of the Spirit because he wants us to be sure that we understand that this unity and diversity is God’s creation, not ours. We are called diligently to seek to preserve the unity of the church. But it is not a unity which we, by our labors, create. It is a unity of such infinite diversity that it would be impossible for us to do it.

However that may be, it is that unity of the church that is sometimes so difficult to define. Each denomination draws a kind of a circle by which it defines what it means by the unity of the church. Some draw a great big circle — a circle that is so big that it embraces not only Christianity in a broad, general way but also those who are still committed to the idolatry of heathenism and to pagan ritual and idol worship. They are willing to do that. But that is not the true unity of the church. When they draw that kind of a circle, they are not drawing a circle that defines the limitations and boundaries of the church.

The unity of the church is in Christ. And Christ, in his own person and natures, as the head of the church, is the fullness of the revelation of God who is truth in himself and in his own divine being. Because the unity of the church is a unity which she has in Christ, that unity must be defined in terms of the truth as it is revealed in God and as it is contained on the pages of the infallible Scriptures.

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In a way, the Spirit helps the church draw that circle and has been helping the church draw that circle throughout the centuries by the confessions of the church. Our own churches have said that we seek contact with the church of Christ which confesses the truth of the Scriptures as expressed in the three forms of unity and the Westminster standards. That is the circle we draw. It is a proper circle because really the Holy Spirit drew it. The Holy Spirit drew it because the confessions are the fruit of the work of the Spirit in the church in the past.

Within that circle we stand. Within that circle we stand with the church of Christ. We are called to stand there and we are called to live together within that circle with all the churches throughout the world insofar as God makes that possible for us in the unity of the Spirit. In that way, here on earth, something of the catholicity of the church is experienced. You cannot go to Singapore or to Myanmar without pondering the mystery of the catholicity of the church. It is impossible.

There are many in every nation, tribe, and tongue who are working in the great task of building the house of God. Once in a while we hear far away the sound of hammers pounding nails and we pause to listen and we say, “Ah, there are others building the house.” Sometimes we hear the whir of saws and we say, “There are others elsewhere working on the house that God is building. We don’t know where. We can’t quite tell where. And we don’t know who they are. But we can hear it if we will listen.”

But sometimes there are some of God’s people working in another room right next to the one in which we are working. It pays for us to walk over to that room once in a while and talk to them. That is what, God willing, we are going to continue to do with our sister churches and others with whom we have contact. We are going to go over to another room as they have come to this room. We are going to talk to them about building the house.

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The conversation we will have about building the house is going to be crafted, under God's blessing, according to our faith in the catholicity of the church. We are not going to be telling each other, "You are not really working on the house." We are not going to say, "It looks to us as if you are building a shack or a shanty and you ought to quit and come into the house and get to work on the house." No. We are going to say, "You're working on the house. Thank God we know you." And we are going to talk about what a joy it is.

Synod just said that, did it not? When we talk together, we must talk together not only about those things on which we disagree, but about those things on which we do agree. That means talking about those things that are involved in being busy with the same house.

It will happen sometimes that others are going to say to us, when they come to our room where we are working, "It looks to us, brethren, as if you are using bent nails. You ought to straighten your nails. You can do a better job." Or, "You ought to sharpen your saw. The lines that you are cutting with your saw are crooked." And what we ought to say when you tell us that is, "Thanks! We didn't notice that we were using bent nails."

But sometimes we may have something similar to say to them. We will look at the corner of the wall and ceiling where you are building and we will say, "Is that quite square? Will you check it again with the architect's drawing, the holy Scriptures?" In that way we will help each other to build the house and be able to cooperate in the work more and more.

But we are not going to go to another church, and they may not come over here, and say, "Quit working in your room and come into our room and help us," because God has called them to work in their room, whether it be Australia or Singapore or Northern Ireland. We are working in our room which is called the United States.

And we are not going to ask them to wear the same kind of clothes we do because we think our coveralls hold the hammer better. No, they have found that the clothes they are wearing are suitable for the work that God gives them to do.

In that way we talk about the same house on which we are laboring, but appreciate and rejoice in the diversity of laborers and the size of the house. And we remember that God saves Australians as Australians, and Welsh as Welsh; and he does not save them by making them Dutchman. Thank God.

So we rejoice in the riches of grace. That is our call-

ing: to rejoice in the riches of sovereign grace revealed in that wonderful work of saving a church catholic. Once in a while, I hope that when we visit another room in this great house, we can sit down with the laborers there and take a break from the work and have a cup of coffee together. Then we can talk about what a privilege it is to be busy in the same work and how thankful we can be that God builds the house and that we are only laborers. I think if we do that, then we will probably set our cups down for a moment and sing together: "Except the Lord the house shall build, the weary builders toil in vain."

In that way we will look together to the day when God will have completed that glorious temple that Paul describes in Ephesians 2. Then God himself will dwell in it and all the riches of his grace will be revealed perfectly and completely. And we will revel in the riches of the grace of almighty God revealed in that which we confess: one holy catholic church. ❖

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*Prof. Hanko is professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. This article is reprinted from the Standard Bearer, Volume 77, Issue 3 & 4.*

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# I Remember Herman Hoeksema: Personal Remembrances of a Great Man (9)

by Prof. David J. Engelsma

## Silence on the Schism

During my three years of seminary training under him, from 1960-1963, Herman Hoeksema never spoke of the great schism of 1953 in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Never, whether in class or during the breaks, did he refer to, much less excoriate, the ministers who were responsible for the schism.

Indeed, he never made much in class of the doctrinal issue that was at the heart of the schism. When the subject of the covenant came up in Dogmatics, he would give it its due, explaining it as God's bond of fellowship with the elect in Christ, established by an unconditional promise. I think now he was checking on my orthodoxy, or the level of my theological development, by assigning me Genesis 17:7 for practice preaching at some point in my seminary years. But he did not dwell on the subject of the covenant. He did not delve into the doctrinal differences concerning the covenant in the Reformed churches. And he never made the subject an occasion for raising the history of the controversy over the covenant in the Protestant Reformed Churches for some six stormy years.

I did not recognize this curious silence at the time. I wish I had. Then, I would have pressed the matter at every opportunity, asking about the doctrinal, church political, and personal aspects of the conflict. Especially would I have requested of my professor the fullest and most detailed explanation of his understanding of the reality of the covenant, from its source in the triune being of God to its perfection in the new world. I would have inquired exactly how he came to his covenant conception and where its origins lie in the Reformed tradition.

Only after I was in the ministry, and Hoeksema was gone, did it strike me that he had said virtually nothing about the struggle of 1953.

Hoeksema's silence about the schism of 1953 puzzles me.

I entered the seminary in the fall of 1960, a mere seven years after the split. In numbers both of pastors and of members, the churches were still suffering the devastating effects of the schism. The deep wounds of that fierce war between colleagues and fellow church members (one must not measure the severity of church conflict by the size of the church) had to have been still fresh in his soul.

One might have thought that the schism and its doctrinal cause would have dominated the instruction, in class and out of class. Instead, the schism was never mentioned.

It was as if, had Abraham Lincoln lived, an aspiring politician studied government, one on one, in 1872 with the then retired president of the United States, never to hear of the Civil War and only now and again to be reminded, albeit forcefully, that separation of a state from the Union is revolution.

I have wondered why—why the strange silence? Was the subject too painful for him? Or, was he weary of fighting that battle? Or, did he think that he had written volumes on the schism and its doctrinal component and that any seminarian worth his salt could read, or should have read, what he had to say on the pages of the *Standard Bearer*? Or, did he regard the schism as past history, which must not interfere with the task of giving a complete, well-rounded theological education in the present?

## The Exception

There was one exception.

In October, 1960, the schismatic "Protestant Reformed Churches" held a special synod in order to consider returning to the Christian Reformed Church. Hoeksema wanted to know the discussion and decision of this synod. It was, of course, unthinkable that he himself would attend the synod. But he had an agent at

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hand—me. I was summarily delegated, on behalf of Herman Hoeksema, the *Standard Bearer*, and the Protestant Reformed Churches. Since seminary was in session and since I was the only student, seminary was canceled for the duration.

Hoeksema's report in the *Standard Bearer* of the decisions of the schismatic synod was based on my first-hand account and on the documents I managed to gather. Hoeksema referred to my reportorial role: "According to our reporter..." ("Fast Disintegration," the *Standard Bearer* 37, no. 4 [Nov. 15, 1960]: 76); "This I learned from the party that reported to me" ("Fast Disintegration," the *Standard Bearer* 37, no. 5 [Dec. 1, 1960]: 101).

When I dutifully reported on the proceedings of the synod of those who had in fact separated from the Protestant Reformed Churches, Hoeksema talked about the schism of 1953, and the ministers who had brought it about. His chief concern was whether any of the delegates and congregations indicated, finally, a willingness to return to the Protestant Reformed Churches (none did). His inquiries about the synod resembled David's asking the messenger about the safety of the young man Absalom.

The motion at the special synod of 1960 to return to the Christian Reformed Church, vigorously promoted by many delegates (none more vociferous on behalf of returning than Rev. H. De Wolf, Hoeksema's former colleague in First Church of Grand Rapids), failed on a tie vote of eight to eight. It would pass overwhelmingly at the synod of 1961.

My attendance at the schismatic synod was an eye-opener, if not for Hoeksema, then for me. But Hoeksema also learned some things. Within the very short span of seven years, the churches of that synod were disintegrating, as one after another of the synodical delegates admitted. Speakers disclosed that some of the ministers had in mind to return to the Christian Reformed Church as soon as the split occurred in 1953, if not before, and that these ministers had been working actively in the churches to this end since that time. All the while these ministers had been claiming publicly that they and their churches were determined to be and remain Protestant Reformed.

It was evident also from the angry speeches of some of the elders that they and others of the membership of those churches had been betrayed by the ministers. Having led the people out of the Protestant Reformed Churches with firm assurances that their churches were, and would always be, Protestant Reformed doctrinally, these same ministers were now bent on delivering the people over to the theology and life of common grace in the Christian Reformed Church.

## Debate at a Schismatic Synod

I took copious and scrupulously accurate notes of the speeches and church political proceedings at that long-ago synod. From my aging notebook, I quote some of the comments that were publicly uttered in the course of the deliberations of that synod of 1960.

A few months earlier, at their regular synod, the schismatic "Protestant Reformed Churches" had decided that the three points of common grace adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 are not Pelagian and Arminian. They had also confessed their guilt over the years in charging the Christian Reformed Church with these sins. This decision really settled the issue whether they should return to the Christian Reformed Church, although residual resistance delayed the return for another year. Rev. J. Blankespoor was right when he argued, in favor of the return, "We have lost the basis of separate existence in denying the three points to be Arminian and Pelagian."

Especially Rev. H. De Wolf repeatedly held this decision before the house as the reason why there should be no objection to returning to the Christian Reformed Church: "We have already said that the three points are neither Arminian nor Pelagian." "Besides," De Wolf added, "If we do not return to the Christian Reformed Church, we will simply disintegrate."

Elder Vandenberg replied: "For thirty years we have been taught the corruption of the three points and have taught our children these things. Now we are to unite with the Christian Reformed Church without repenting from our former stand or remarking on what we said before."

Arguing for a speedy return, Rev. A. Cammenga described his denomination: "a little pee-wee church as we are."

Elder Vandenberg responded: "Is the question of my religion the question of whether we will be a small or a large group?"

Rev. J. De Jong, ardent advocate of dissolving into the Christian Reformed Church, had a way at the synod of bluntly expressing the reality of synod's miserable situation, which the other ministers tactfully or fearfully skirted. In his heavy Dutch brogue, De Jong announced, "Ja, Misterr Chairrman, I am a great friend of compromise." Later, he declared, "Ja, Misterr Chairrman, there is no middle ground between the Hoeksema group (sic!) and the Christian Reformed Church."

Proposing an odd ground for ecumenicity, Rev. J. Blankespoor pleaded for joining the Christian Reformed Church in order to work with likeminded "conservatives" in that denomination "to solve problems of corruption

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in the Christian Reformed Church.” This strange ground for returning indicated how the “conservatives” in the Christian Reformed Church were wooing the separated “Protestant Reformed Churches.” History has shown that the Spirit of genuine church unity was not overly impressed with this ground for union.

Rev. B. Kok was aggressive: “We sin against God and the Holy Spirit if we now do not join the Christian Reformed Church.” Against an elder who had called the synod to honor the truth [of particular grace] in its debate and decision, Rev. Kok responded, “Unity is the truth too.”

Rev. A. Petter, who had vigorously defended a conditional covenant during the controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches leading up to the split of 1953, was adamantly opposed to returning to the Christian Reformed Church under the condition that he recognize the three points of common grace as biblical and confessional. “The three points of common grace adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924,” he insisted, “are not Scriptural and confessional.” He added: “I will not stand by and let the Christian Reformed Church condemn Hoeksema, Danhof, and Ophoff again.” Then he put a question to his colleagues who yearned to return to the Christian Reformed Church at once, “Can’t our eager brothers show us, who have conscientious objection to the three points, some of the love they reveal to the Christian Reformed Church, by waiting for awhile?”

Petter weakened his case by many prodigiously long quotations from Reformed theologians on common grace. He noticeably wearied the synod, most of whom had no interest in the doctrinal issue.

In a characteristic comment, a mournful Rev. P. Vis lamented, “Years ago we were united on common grace, now even we, small as we are, are divided.” A year later, at the synod of 1961, as the discussion moved inexorably towards the decision to return to the Christian Reformed Church, Rev. Vis would cry out, “Now I have to choose. The situation has arisen which I feared. I can neither vote for nor against this motion [to return to the Christian Reformed Church, acknowledging that the three points of common grace of 1924 are not Arminian and Pelagian and promising not to “agitate” against them]. I don’t want to say that the three points are not contrary to Scripture. Nor do I care to say that the three points are contrary to Scripture. I don’t want to carry on as a little group nor do I care to buck my conscience. I’m in a rough spot.”

Rev. W. Hofman remarked, “Our association with the Christian Reformed Church in schools, institutions of mercy, and the like [over the past seven years] reveals to

us that there is an essential unity between us.” He added the warning that “ever since 1953 we as a church have been breaking down.”

Rev. L. Doezema renounced the reformation of 1924 root and branch: “We should not have broken fellowship with the Christian Reformed Church because of the binding three points of 1924.” Later in the debate, Rev. Doezema expressed the extent to which the theology of the “well-meant offer” had already developed in his thinking. Rev. Petter had raised the doctrinal issue of common grace. Petter had stated, “I and Rev. J. Howerzyl believe in one grace only; we cannot believe in two graces.” Rev. Kok had responded, “I believe in conditions in the covenant and an offer of the gospel.” Rev. Doezema then announced, “I believe in one grace—saving grace that is common to all humanity.”

Rev. E. Knott, president of the synod, spoke against the motion to return to the Christian Reformed Church. “If I ever became a minister of the Christian Reformed Church [under the stipulations laid down by the Christian Reformed Church], I would never dare say another thing about common grace. Our entire historical position is essentially refuted by our entrance into the Christian Reformed Church under the present stipulations.”

Exactly so! And the next year his denomination joined the Christian Reformed Church under these stipulations, himself included.

That the return to the Christian Reformed Church would shut the mouths of the returning preachers regarding criticism of the three points of common grace, and that the preachers understood this, came out in a sharp exchange between Rev. De Wolf and Rev. Howerzyl. The motion to return had already failed, much to Rev. De Wolf’s disappointment. To Rev. Howerzyl, who had voted against the motion to return at that time, De Wolf put the question, “Do you actually intend to speak out [in the Christian Reformed Church] that you believe one grace and one grace only” [that is, that Howerzyl denied common grace]? Howerzyl replied, “Yes.” De Wolf shot back: “You better not explicitly say such things in the Christian Reformed Church.”

It was an especially poignant, and tense, moment when an elder in the consistory of the First Church of Rev. De Wolf, Van Tuinen by name, addressed the body (the synod had taken a decision allowing all elders in the denomination to speak, regardless that they were not delegates to synod). “Why are we in such a terrible situation? The preachers have been leading us in the way of the Christian Reformed Church. I would prefer to go back to 1953, when we left the Protestant Reformed

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Churches.” Under pressure, the elder corrected himself: “when we left Rev. Hoeksema.” He continued: “Then we said that we would be the continuation of the Protestant Reformed Churches. History has shown that they [the ministers in Van Tuinen’s denomination] have set aside these arrangements and expected us [the people] to follow. We will not. I want to go back to 1953 when we left Rev. Hoeksema.”

This same elder would speak out again at a session of the synod of the schismatic “Protestant Reformed Churches” in 1961, when those churches did decide to return to the Christian Reformed Church. Before a large audience of visitors, Van Tuinen exclaimed, in obvious distress, that “within six months of our leaving the Protestant Reformed Churches Rev. De Wolf was urging our young people to go back to the Christian Reformed Church. We elders had to reprimand him for this.” This time when the president of the synod interrupted him to require that he substitute “the churches of Hoeksema” for his “the Protestant Reformed Churches,” Van Tuinen defiantly repeated, “the Protestant Reformed Churches.”

### **Decisions of a Schismatic Synod**

When the motion to return to the Christian Reformed Church failed, the synod adopted a letter to the Christian Reformed Church asking that the three points of common grace be set aside as non-binding. Of all the foolish decisions ever taken by a Reformed synod, this one has to rank as among the silliest. In actuality, though not expressly, it was asking the Christian Reformed Church to repent of the grievous sin of adopting false doctrine and of the equally grievous sin of excommunicating and deposing faithful officebearers and people of God. It expected the Christian Reformed Church to go back on the theology of common grace, which has driven that Church doctrinally and practically ever since 1924. It really politely requested the Christian Reformed Church to confess its wrongdoing to Herman Hoeksema and the true Protestant Reformed Churches, if not to seek reunion with these Churches under stipulations laid down by the Protestant Reformed Churches.

The letter was foolish also because the schismatic “Protestant Reformed Churches” had to return to the Christian Reformed Church, regardless of the demands upon them by the Christian Reformed Church, and everyone knew it. The only alternative was returning to the Protestant Reformed Churches, and to a man the ministers of the schismatic churches opposed this. But in the meantime, as speaker after speaker at the synod of October, 1960 reminded each other, their denomina-

tion was “falling apart” and “dying.” The always blunt Rev. De Jong exposed the foolishness of the letter to the Christian Reformed Church that the synod was in the process of adopting. “Ja, Misterr Chairrman, [we are saying to the Christian Reformed Church], ‘Please remove the three points, but if you don’t we will come across anyhow.’”

The Christian Reformed Church must have shaken its collective head in wonderment when it received the letter.

Needless to say, the Christian Reformed Church declined the request to set aside the three point of common grace as non-binding.

### **The Sad End of the Schism**

The synod of the schismatic “Protestant Reformed Churches” met again in July, 1961, to consider the motion once again that had failed in October, 1960: return to the Christian Reformed Church. This time things went more smoothly. There was still resistance, especially from elders. A few ministers, with no heart for returning to the Christian Reformed Church, hopelessly bewailed their dilemma. All were forced to acknowledge that returning under the stipulations laid down by the Christian Reformed Church meant accepting the three points of common grace as biblical and Reformed, although in the finest political style of the Christian Reformed Church the judgment was couched negatively: not un-Reformed; not Pelagian and Arminian. All were reminded that joining the Christian Reformed Church meant that there would be no criticism of the three points of common grace.

On Thursday, July 13, 1961, at 2:36 in the afternoon, by a vote of eleven to five in a secret ballot, the synod decided to return to the Christian Reformed Church.

Thus was concluded for the schismatic churches a wicked piece of work. And thus was exposed the wickedness of their division of true churches of Christ before the world.

God meant it for good.

The Protestant Reformed Churches were tried as by fire concerning their love of the truth of the gospel of sovereign grace. They were purified especially of ministers whose hearts were not with the Protestant Reformed Churches in the unity of the love of the truth. And the doctrinal controversy, at the heart of the schism, established the Protestant Reformed Churches in the truth of sovereign grace with regard to the covenant. This doctrine is fundamental to the gospel. It is at the heart of the decisions of Dordt. It is thrust to the forefront today in all the reputedly conservative Reformed churches by the heresy of the Federal [Covenant] Vision.

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## Silent about the Schism

But my interest in this series of articles is Herman Hoeksema, as I knew him.

Within seven or eight short years after the split that climaxed six or seven years of violent controversy in the Protestant Reformed Churches, Hoeksema was vindicated. During the controversy, his name was blackened, his motives were impugned, his life's work was attacked, the congregations he had labored long and hard to build up were torn or destroyed, his own congregation was decimated, and he lost family and friends. Of particular, painful injury was the constant charge by the enemies that the issue was not doctrinal, but merely "personal" (the implication being always his evil person).

In the hasty, ignominious departure into the Christian Reformed Church of those who had separated from the Protestant Reformed Churches, the God of church history expressed a preliminary judgment on the schism of 1953.

One might have expected a long series of editorials in the *Standard Bearer* setting straight the record of the past thirteen or fourteen years. There was nothing of the sort. Two editorials on "Fast Disintegration" followed

the abortive synod of October, 1960. One editorial on "A Sad End" (the *Standard Bearer* 37, no. 20 [Sept. 1, 1961]: 460, 461) informed the readers of the *Standard Bearer* of, well, the sad end of the schismatic churches.

And during the three years of my seminary training, right at the time of his vindication, Hoeksema was almost completely silent about the great schism of 1953.

I think a great man of God was confident that, in time of crisis, he had fought a good fight on behalf of the truth and on behalf of the church of Christ. God had rendered His own resounding judgment on the schism in the history of the two denominations. The Protestant Reformed Churches had been preserved (though barely as it seemed to us). The clear, uncompromising testimony to particular, sovereign grace and to the antithesis was still maintained in the community of Reformed churches.

Do not dwell on the past, whether with bitterness, grief, or nostalgia. Press on to the things that lie ahead. The spirit of a great man. ❖

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*Prof. Engelsma is professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.*

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## Consider the Creation

# Sawbill Lake Reflections

by Stephanie Van Engen

Last summer we had the privilege of taking a family vacation to the Lake Superior area in northern Minnesota. On the second day of our vacation a local businessman recommended Sawbill Lake, which was a little ways north and west from where we were staying. He had our boys especially interested with his wonderful fishing tales from Sawbill Lake. This man also called up to the lake to see if they had a campsite for us, and they did.

We voted as a family to take this stranger's recommendation and give Sawbill Lake a try. We packed up our tents and moved out from our already beautiful campground in Gooseberry Falls wondering what we were getting ourselves into. Honestly, I was the one who had the biggest reservations about relocating. Not only was

there a ton of work involved with packing up camp with eight children, but we were going on the recommendation of a complete stranger! It sounded a little "fishy" to me, but the hope of being able to do some serious fishing was too great a pull for the older boys (and their dad) to keep us in the comfort of a non-fishing campground complete with bathrooms and shower.

At one point while we were packing up, one of the boys came up to me in private and almost guiltily admitted that this man had also said that we would have to take 25 miles of gravel to get there. Well, knowing how my husband felt about taking his cars on gravel roads, I instantly dismissed my son's concerns with "Oh, you know Dad would never agree to that, so I'm sure it will be fine."

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After driving north to the turn off, we drove west for one mile and the road suddenly narrowed and turned into...gravel. It was the worst gravel road we had ever been on, and it was “washboard” gravel for 25 miles. We slowed our pace to a comfortable bounce and jostle. All we could see were trees and a gravel road that stretched endlessly ahead of us. As we drove deeper and deeper into the national forest, I kept wondering what we had gotten ourselves into. I took comfort in knowing that God is always with us and that whatever happened to the rest of the week’s vacation was all in his plan. Secretly, though, I hoped that if we had made a foolish mistake, we wouldn’t suffer the consequences in a dump, rundown, hole-in-the-wall campground.

After what seemed like forever, we arrived at the campground, and it was...absolutely beautiful. The check-in lodge was a newer building, and everything seemed very clean. The campground itself wasn’t very big, but each campsite was very spacious. We picked out a campsite and set up camp. It was almost too good to be true! It was so quiet and uncommercialized. Everything was so pristine just like our friend had said it would be.

We went down to the lake, and we were the only ones around. The camp staff said that we could swim anywhere we wanted. We put life jackets on the little ones and enjoyed wading around the water’s edge and climbing on the rocks that were in the water. The beauty was indescribable.

Sawbill Lake borders on the Boundary Waters area, so the next day we took advantage of renting canoes and taking a 5-hour canoe trip into the Boundary Waters. It was an awesome experience. From this little vacation into northern Minnesota I found time to reflect on many of God’s truths and promises, which I would like to share with the *Beacon Lights*’ readers.

The most striking thing for me was the pristine beauty and peacefulness of the place. The early morning sunrises breaking forth through the mist off of the lake, the hundreds of scented pine trees reaching up to the sky, the clear water with its world of rocks underneath, the clouds drifting lazily across the sky, the loons slowly paddling wherever the breeze beckoned them, the hush of the day as the sun set with all of its brilliant colors reflecting off of the water, the night animals calling out to each other through the inky darkness, and the stars in their brightness too numerous to even begin to count were all overwhelming in their magnificence.

Early one morning my husband and I got up to watch the sun rise over the lake. While we were sitting on the

bank enjoying the stillness and the beauty, my husband offered to go back to the campsite and get the binoculars. Being already engrossed in the beauty I thought I would be content to just see things as they were, but then after a moment I started to wonder what it would be like to see everything through the binoculars.

He wasn’t gone long, and when he returned we took turns looking at things a little closer up. It was absolutely breathtaking! All of the fuzziness that we could barely see with our natural eye was instantly cleared up. Things became sharper and more distinct, and the colors were more vivid. Each branch and needle on the pine trees across the lake became focused, as well as the crevices in the rocks along the shore.

After several enjoyable moments of taking it all in, thoughts drifted through my mind of how life will be in heaven. Sometimes we think that what we have in this life is already good enough. We are content with the way things are. We don’t want our lives on this earth to end, but God promises us more! I John 2:25 says: “And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.” He promises us a better life—an eternal life free from sin. Sure we see some of God’s beauty here on earth and experience God’s goodness, but entering heaven will be like seeing through binoculars. Everything will be better. Things will be more brilliant and clear. Life will be even more glorious and breathtaking! God’s goodness and glory will be magnified!

Drifting along with these musings I was also impressed with the thought that so often we don’t long for heaven like we should. If God promises us a better eternal life, shouldn’t we yearn for that? How often we find ourselves striving for the things of this world but putting heavenly things on the bottom of our priority list. It reminded me of our instruction from the apostle Paul in Colossians 3:2: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” This is not always easy to do. There are so many responsibilities, commitments, and temptations in this life. There are so many things that keep our eyes on the things of the earth, and yet, we are told to set our affections on things above.

We, of course, cannot do this in our own strength, and our prayer is that God will help us long for His heavenly kingdom like we should. As God reveals himself to us more and more, may we be encouraged through the Holy Spirit to long after our heavenly life. ❖

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*Stephanie is a member of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.*

## Church News

### BAPTISMS

"He is the LORD our God: ...He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations." Psalm 105:7, 8

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:  
Brendan Dale, son of Mr. & Mrs. Terry VanMaanen—  
Calvary, IA

Austin Tyler, son of Mr. & Mrs. Steve Griffioen—Faith, MI

Jay David, son of Mr. & Mrs. David Zandstra—Faith, MI

Breilyn Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jay Van Baren—  
Faith, MI

Gradyn Jacob, son of Mr. and Mrs. Jake Baxter—  
Georgetown, MI

Madeline Ann, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Luke Griess—  
Loveland, CO

Mason James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Stephen Dykstra—  
Lynden, WA

Riley Kate, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Robert Holleman—  
Peace, IL

Zoe Geraldine, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Brent Huizenga—  
Randolph, WI

Trent Benjamin, son of Mr. & Mrs. James Kooiker—  
Randolph, WI

Bailey Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Karl Dykstra—  
Southeast, MI

Nathaniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tash—Spokane, WA

Blake Lee, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brad Kuiper—Trinity, MI

Luke David, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jon Drnek—Trinity, MI

### CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end." Psalm 119:33

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

Erika Poortinga—Bethel, IL

Andria Kooienga—Byron Center, MI

Lindsay Westhuis—Byron Center, MI

Justin Huizing—Edmonton, AB, Canada

Brett Bylsma—Faith, MI

Nathan Daling—Faith, MI

Daniel Pastoor—Faith, MI

Mark VanBaren—Faith, MI

Jake Baxter—Georgetown, MI

Calvin Bruinsma—Peace, IL

Leticia Fuentes—Peace, IL

Blake DeBoer—Trinity, MI

### MARRIAGES

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death." Psalm 48:14

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Keith Wynia and Miss Pam Buys—Edgerton, MN/  
Souix Falls, SD

Mr. Rockford Wigger and Miss Andrea Lenting—Faith,  
MI

Mr. Brad Schipper and Miss Sara Huizinga—Hope, MI

Mr. Kent Tjoelker and Miss Jessica VanDenTop—Lynden,  
WA

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following the topic:

**"Calvin and the Christian Family Life"**

Prof. David J. Engelsma: "Calvin's Influence on the  
Family"

Prof. Barret L. Gritters: "Calvin on the Catechizing of our  
Children"

Rev. John P. Marcus: "Calvin on Family Discipline"

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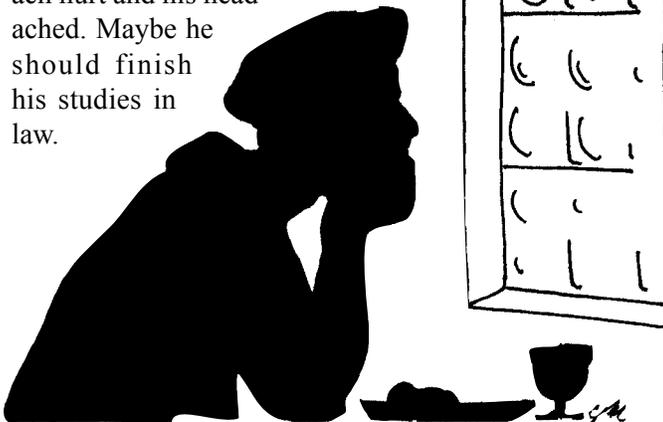
(4)

While studying law in Bourges, Jean Chauvin, now twenty-two years old, received word that his father was dying. The year was 1531. Jean traveled back to his hometown of Noyon to see his father one last time. The young Chauvin, still with his title of chaplain, performed the funeral service for his father.

And now, what would Jean do? His father had wanted him to be a lawyer, and so far Jean had learned his lessons in law extremely well. But lawyers must also be aggressive in public debate. Jean did not relish that. His heart was too tender for heated argument. He would travel to Paris instead. There—he could be a scholar.

He would try his hand at writing a book. That’s what scholars did. That suited his natural desire for peace and quiet, and study. He researched his subject well. He wrote about an ancient, secular work called Meekness, and signed it by his Latin name Johannes Calvinus. Meekness and compassion were virtues he must have thought important in this age of religious persecution and burnings at the stake. But whatever were the motives of Johannes Calvinus (for that was now how he became known, or in English, as John Calvin), his book was carefully, scholarly, and splendidly written. The new author was obviously gifted. Yet, the book did not sell so well, and John Calvin had paid for the printing himself.

He ate his meager supper of hard bread, cheese, and a little wine, and pondered his present situation. He looked out the window of his tiny, rented room. He could see the university nearby. His stomach hurt and his head ached. Maybe he should finish his studies in law.



BEACON LIGHTS

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

He packed up his belongings and headed back to Orleans once more. He spent another year there before again being called to Noyon. This time, his brother Charles needed help. Calvin helped him, and then traveled to Paris once again.

In all these endeavors, John Calvin continued to hear of the new Lutheran doctrines, and as the Bereans of old, he diligently searched the Scriptures to see if these teachings were true. We don’t know the exact circumstances of his conversion to the Reformed faith, but it occurred at about this time in his life.

The change had been slow in coming. But when it came, it was firm, and solid as rock. The Spirit cemented the truth of salvation by grace alone deeply and mightily in Calvin’s soul. This is what Calvin himself wrote of his experience: “God by a sudden conversion subdued... my heart.”

This heart, now subdued, would be used of great service to man and God. ❖

**Following is one of the texts that John Calvin studied in his search of the Scriptures. Find the underlined words from it in the puzzle below:**

This is the stone which was set at nought of you build-  
ers, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is  
there salvation in any other: for there is none other name  
under heaven given among men, whereby we must be  
saved. Acts 4:11, 12.

G	W	G	T	D	N	O	U	G	H	T
I	A	S	R	E	D	L	I	U	B	H
V	S	A	L	V	A	T	I	O	N	M
E	U	E	C	A	O	S	C	E	E	G
N	N	M	O	S	T	D	V	T	I	N
A	D	O	R	O	H	A	H	E	T	O
M	E	C	N	T	E	E	E	S	H	M
E	R	E	E	H	R	H	U	I	E	A
H	M	B	R	E	T	M	O	H	R	N
T	W	H	E	R	E	B	Y	T	V	Y

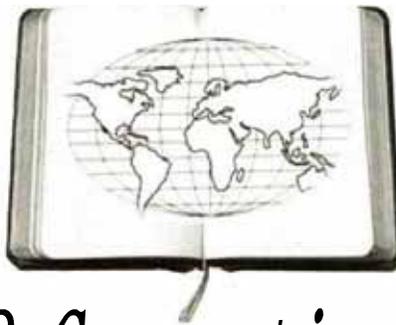
Connie is a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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