
Beacon Lights

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*"In lowliness of mind let
each esteem other better
than themselves."*

Philippians 2:3

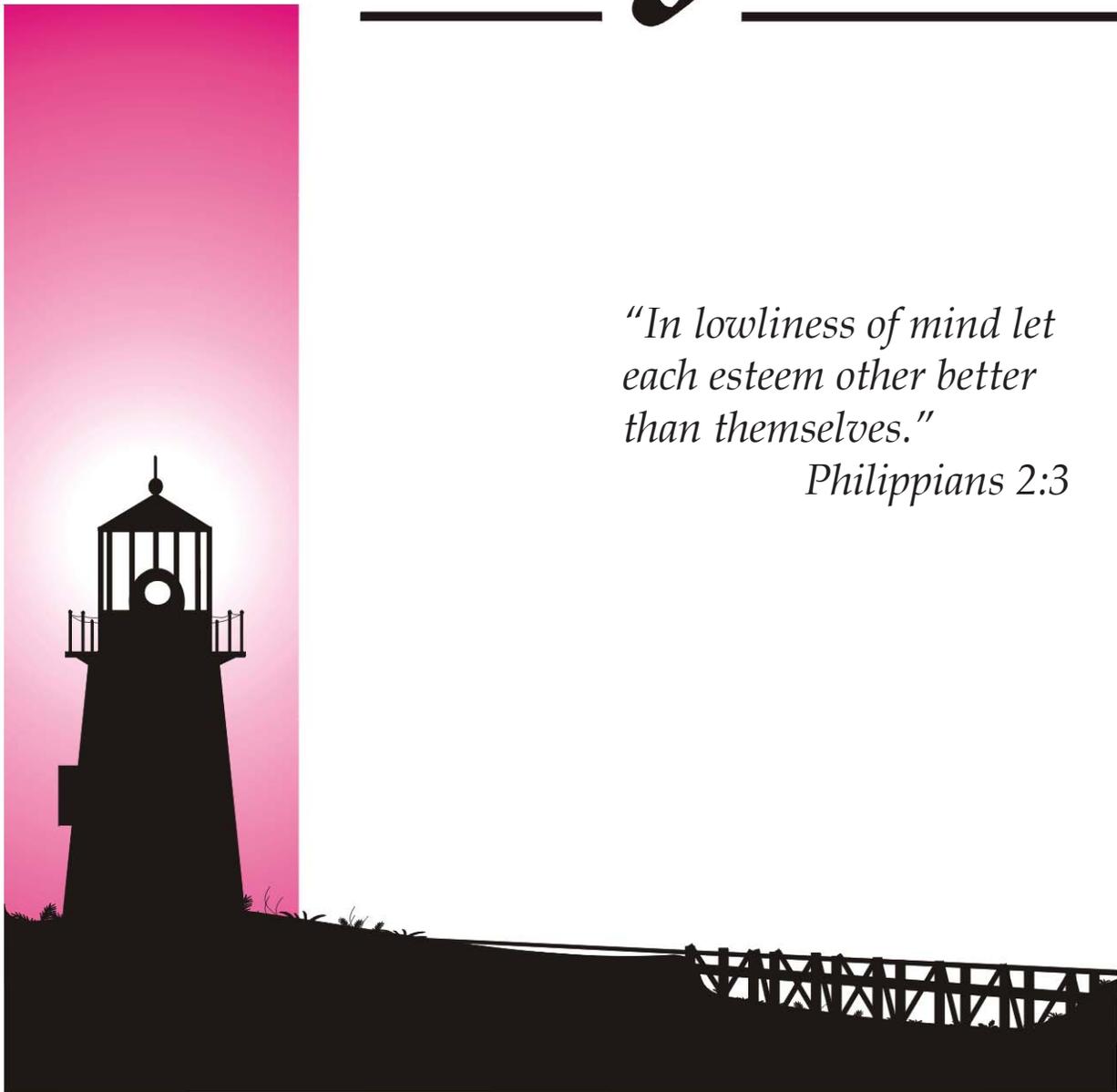


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The Body Fitly Joined Together (2)

Pride and Envy in the Church

by Ryan Barnhill



Last time we saw that the church is united in the Truth of its head, Jesus Christ. We considered how important it is for all the members of the church, and especially the young people as the rising generation, to love doctrine and the life that proceeds from it, for that knowledge is the very life and unity of the church. Disunity in doctrine is a serious disease that threatens the life of the body.

This time, I would like us to consider another threat to the body of Christ. These are sins that plague everyone. Perhaps they do not manifest themselves as much in childhood, but they intensify in the teenage years. However well they may be masked in the later years of adulthood, they always lurk in the heart, constantly making themselves known in our thoughts and occasionally in our speech and actions. They are pride and envy.

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Addressing sins in our lives such as pride and envy is important today. Pride and envy are sins of the heart. We may and must address very outward sins that may be present among the church, such as drunkenness, watching sinful movies, and abusing God's gift of music. That is right and good to do. However, we must not neglect to address sins of the heart and the evil fruits of these sins. In a series on church unity, I feel it is important to address pride and envy because, while we may not always think this way, these kinds of "subtle" sins of the heart—which often come out in our behavior, too - can do as much, if not more, damage to the body of Christ than can outwardly sinful behaviors. There is not one who can look at his heart and say, "this doesn't apply to me!" The Word of God convicts us all.

First, then, envy must be examined. In an attitude of envy, we forget the good gifts that God created us with, and desire the gifts in others He was not pleased to give us. When we are envious, we deny our own place in the body, wanting to perform someone else's function. This brings discontent and anxiety to our lives. Although we would never think it, we are really saying in our hearts that we are dissatisfied with the way that God made us. Envy, and the discontent that it brings, can even lead to anger with our own lot in life, and jealousy with the fact that someone else has something, or can do something, that we will never be able to have or do. In a meditation on I Corinthians 13, the great chapter on love, the late Rev. Gerrit Vos described envy this way:

"Envy is the hatred of the natural man over against his neighbor, either in prosperity or adversity. When the brother prospereth, envy is not to be consoled. It gnaws its heart out in the beholding of success of the neighbor: it should not happen to him. An envious soul cannot see the prosperity of his fellows. All

the good things that he hath ought to be mine! All the success he hath should be mine! I cannot see that my brother fares well...our dress, our goods, our person, our children, our all – it is good, praiseworthy, glorious! But the other? It should not be; it should not happen. I, capital I, must be glorious in my little heaven. It is the age-old sin: we are our own little god, and there must not, there dare not, be any god than we!”¹

It can be said that living in this world is comparable to walking on a balance beam, being careful not to fall into envy, as just stated, but also careful not to lean toward pride. Oh, how pride can be so real in our lives! For young people, pride can come with so-called popularity. Especially in high school, popularity can make a student’s head so big that only a select few can have the privilege of hanging out with him or her, or the “cool group” of which he or she is a part. Inevitably, some are excluded in this kind of environment. Pride can drive a wedge in relationships and tear apart the precious body of Christ. So serious is this sin of pride as it rears its ugly head in high school and in this stage of a young person’s life, that students who are excluded in this kind of atmosphere can and do often leave school and even the church. Young people, do not ever underestimate the power of pride!

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even the church. Young people, do not ever
underestimate the power of pride!

The pride that popularity can bring is only one small example. If we young people do not attack the root of our pride when we are young, it will only grow and further affect our lives as a member of Christ’s body. It feeds itself, and if it is not fought against, will fill our spiritual heart with terrible disease. Pride makes a man or woman hardened, unwilling to ever admit wrong in many areas of life—from the floor of synod, to the home in marriage, to the workplace between employees and employers. Pride praises self and looks down on the neighbor. Pride boastfully prays, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are...”² Pride is the opposite of Paul’s instruction, “in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”³ Pride focuses on self’s achievements, self’s accomplishments, and self’s recognition. Such a puffed up person severely weakens church unity.

But what does Scripture say concerning this? That we find these kinds of attitudes in our own hearts should not surprise us because they are as old as sin itself. Pride, for example, arose on the scene of history in the very beginning. Satan said to Eve in Genesis 3:4, 5, “Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” Not satisfied with what they had, they wanted more. In the pride of their heart, they desired to be as God. Wanting to be like God weighed heavier in the balance than contentment in the way God originally created them. For us, too, an element of pride and envy can be found in nearly every, if not all, our sins.

The world would say that envious people have a self-esteem problem, and would diagnose a proud person with a case of overconfidence. That is not the Scriptural answer to these sins that divide the church. When we see our many sins against each other, and the disunity they can bring in the realm of the church, we are reminded that God calls us to the picture of a body, and how its parts work in harmony: “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the

1 Vos, Gerrit. *The More Glorious Covenant: Rich Heritage of the New Testament Church*. Hudsonville: Men’s Society of Hudsonville PRC, 1986. Print. 90.

2 Luke 18:11.

3 Philippians 2:3.

edifying of itself in love.”⁴ That the church is like a body with many different parts working together in unity is something that we already know, but do we live in this knowledge? When I am envious of another person’s ability or personality, am I living in the knowledge that God gave him or her certain gifts to perform in His kingdom in a different way? When I look down my nose at someone in detestable pride, am I remembering that God uses all the members of the body, regardless of my judgment on them, for the strengthening and good of the whole?

Scripture is not done speaking in regard to this. We are reminded in James 2 that God is not a respecter of persons. When we view others through the eyes of envy and pride, we are looking at them from the faulty, biased, and sinful judgments of our mind which cannot be trusted. We are to see our family in the church without respect of persons. That is why we must understand that we are nothing but wicked sinners apart from the grace of God in Christ. We must see and understand that as young people. No matter who I am, no matter what I do, no matter who I know, no matter what I can achieve, no matter how popular I think I am, or no matter how bitter I may feel about my life in comparison to others, I am a member of the body of Christ by grace! No one is worthy of that citizenship in the body! No one may boast! No one may feel lower or less worthy than another! Young people, what a deep, profound truth to always remember in all our relationships. In this way, as was seen in the last article, our identity as a sinner saved by grace directly relates and must be applied to our life in the church.

As those who are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, we do not want to live a life of pride and envy. Instead, let us seek to love one another and build one another up, knowing that we are all of one body. In the next article, we will consider a specific group of people whom we think to be “weaker” in the church—those with special needs—and how they are a part of the body. ❖

4 Ephesians 4:16.

Church Family

Pitching Away from Sodom: The Reformed Life of Antithesis (2)

by Jonathan Langerak

Last time, we established that if we as Reformed believers—especially Reformed young people—in the 21st century would avoid the sin of Lot of pitching away from the church and toward Sodom, we must follow the exact command of Scripture and the Reformed Confessions to live antithetically. In this article, we consider the demands that this calling lays upon us. Because for us, as the church of Jesus Christ of the New Testament, the antithesis of spiritual separation and warfare commanded by the call “Come out of her, my people” has several very important, indeed *vital*, demands for our lives.

In the first place, the antithesis demands that the Reformed believer is a member of a true, instituted church of Jesus Christ. The Belgic Confession, which is binding upon every Protestant Reformed church member, lays out clearly the marks distinguishing the true from the false church: “if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin.”¹ Article 28 of the Belgic Confession draws the clear, unmistakable, urgent line of

¹ Belgic Confession, Article 29 in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 62.

the antithesis: “It is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church, and to join themselves to this congregation wheresoever God has established it.”² The two-fold, antithetical calling laid upon believers is to forsake all persons who do not and refuse to belong to the true, instituted church of Christ displaying the marks of the pure preaching of the gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of Christian discipline, and to join themselves in membership to that church, wherever it might be located in the world. This joining of the believer to the true church is demanded of the believer regardless of hardship or the circumstances of life, yes “even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it [as they were in the perilous days when Guido de Bres authored the Confession], yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment.”³

In his recent book *Bound to Join: Letters on Church Membership*, Prof. David J. Engelsma notes that “Article 28 [of the Belgic Confession] specifies some extreme hardships possibly attending obedience to [the command to the believer to join himself to a true church], including loss of one’s life.”⁴ He then remarks, “Earlier the article states that ‘all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it.’ One reason is that ‘out of it there is no salvation.’”⁵ He explains:

This is how important church membership is. The ground for this statement of the Belgic Confession is that the means of grace and salvation have been given by Christ to the instituted congregation and are enjoyed only by members within the church. Christ, the living, life-giving Christ, is in the church as the savior. As there was salvation only in the ark so there is salvation only in the instituted church.⁶

So vital is membership in the true church that God is pleased to save his people in the way of their membership within its embrace. If Israel dwelt in safety alone, then the New Testament church dwells in the safety of the true, instituted church of Jesus Christ alone.

In the second place, the antithesis means for the Reformed believer “Be ye not unequally yoked together

with unbelievers.” This is the Holy Spirit’s command in II Corinthians 6:14a. The Reformed believer may not be yoked with the unbeliever in friendship. This is both impossible and forbidden. The believer, elect child of God in Jesus Christ and the unbeliever, enemy of Jehovah outside of Jesus Christ, are radically and irreconcilably different. No superficial interest in a common activity, whether basketball, tennis, painting, or biking around the Grand Rapids area, may serve as grounds for fellowship between the believer and the ungodly.

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Especially may there not be fellowship to the extent that the believer and unbeliever are yoked together in the institution of marriage. How can this be? How can the elect, regenerated believer in Christ exist in a union of closest intimacy with one who is the sworn enemy and despiser of God completely apart from Christ, as a *picture* of Christ and the church and to the glory of Jehovah? Is it not utterly impossible? And yet some dream that they will pull it off. Arguing that the unbelieving party is “nice,” “has a sweet personality,” or “understands me as no one else does or can,” the believer rushes into an impossible union. Such a marriage as is built on these criteria—primarily and solely upon these criteria, as there is a place for their consideration—is built foolishly upon sand, and will almost certainly collapse at the first wave of trouble, like the house of the foolish man of Christ’s parable (Matthew 7:26, 27). If somehow the marriage weathers the storms which God in his providence sends upon the marriage (likely, this weathering of the storms will be accomplished only through the concession of the believer to the unbeliever), then—although the believer cannot be lost—he or she will go lost in his or her generations through the apostasy of the children of the marriage to the ways of the unbelieving parent. Did not God warn Israel that he would “visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me”? (Exodus 20:5b). Would we avoid God’s

2 Ibid, 61.

3 Ibid.

4 David J. Engelsma, *Bound to Join: Letters on Church Membership* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2010), 4.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

curse in our generations? Then let us commit ourselves to the antithesis in our friendship and especially in our marriage!

Make the true believers in Jesus Christ—who show their devotion to Christ chiefly in their membership in a true, instituted church of Christ—your true yokefellows!

If the antithesis between the members of the church of Jesus Christ and the inhabitants of the ungodly world is to be maintained, the antithesis must be taught to the covenant children of believers. Indeed, the instruction itself which is given to the children must be antithetical. This antithetical instruction begins in the Christian home, on father's knee and in mother's lap.

As an extension of the home, the good Protestant Reformed Christian school and its teachers also instruct the children of believers antithetically, setting forth the truth of creation in opposition to the theory of evolution and its daughter philosophy which is widely accepted in most Christian schools today, theistic evolution. The teachers explain the truth of God's providence in the light of rejection of deism or rule by an impersonal fate or chance. And they teach that the Reformed Christian's goal in his career is the glory of God and therefore is to be selected and ordered according to all the commandments of God, especially the fourth: "keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it...Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work" (Deuteronomy 5:12a, 13), as opposed to the world's self-serving and thankless pursuit of the most lucrative career or of the one that will give him large power over other men.

Finally, the church instructs the children antithetically in the catechism room. "Antithetical Catechism Instruction for the 21st Century" is the series title of three incredible installments by the Rev. Nathan J. Langerak appearing in *The Reformed Perspective* publication of the South Holland Protestant Reformed Church. Rev. Langerak defines "antithetical catechism instruction" as:

The practice of teaching the truth to the children of the church in which in the course of setting forth the truth of the Word of God, the errors and lies that oppose that truth are clearly exposed and sharply condemned in order that the truth may stand out more clearly and victoriously and the people of God consecrated to God more and more in the love of the truth and the hatred of the lie.⁷

7 Nathan J. Langerak, "Antithetical Catechism Instruction for the 21st Century," *The Reformed Perspective* 16, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2009): 4. The series can be found online at www.southhollandprc.org.

The covenant of sovereign particular grace established with the elect children of believers only, to the exclusion of the reprobate children of believers who are born only into the sphere of the covenant of the home, church, and good Christian school demands such antithetical catechism instruction. Therefore, "If the covenant demands it, then it must be in the catechism room regardless of whether or not some might find it distasteful, forbid it, or oppose it."⁸

Rev. Langerak emphasizes: "Antithetical instruction in the catechism room is the Reformed method."⁹ Citing the Heidelberg Catechism's Q&A 80's condemnation of the popish mass; LD 11 Q&A 30's rejection of those who seek salvation "of saints, themselves, or anywhere else" in addition to Christ; and the denouncement of good works as merit for salvation in LD 24, he writes that "the Heidelberg Catechism...is polemical and sharply polemical and was intended to be so, if its precise language is done justice."¹⁰ The Belgic Confession, ending as it does many articles with the words "therefore we reject the errors, therefore we reject the Anabaptists, therefore we detest the errors of such and such a sect,"¹¹ is just as polemical as the Heidelberg Catechism. And the Canons of Dordt, "set forth the truth of the doctrines of grace with outstanding clarity and then proceed to demolish, reject, and damn as originating out of hell the errors of the Arminians."¹²

The antithetical teaching of catechism which is the Reformed method requires an antithetical prophet, that is, one who antithetically instructs, admonishes, and warns the children of the church. The Reformed minister is required to be such an antithetical prophet if he is to be faithful to his office as a pastor in Christ's church. He must, as Herman Bavinck writes in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, "...oppose the thoughts of God to the thoughts of human beings, his truth to their lies, his wisdom to their folly."¹³

In faithful, antithetical catechism instruction as setting forth the truths of the authoritative Word of God over against the lie, "the truth, as truth, has the authority to demand faith and a certain life of holiness."¹⁴ This life of holiness is to do justice and judgment. It is to *live out the antithesis in one's own life*:

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 1.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid, 2

13 qtd. in Ibid.

14 Ibid, 17, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 2.

To do justice and judgment refers to doing all things in harmony with the revealed will of God in his law with a right discernment of good and evil, *especially as this becomes practical in their rejection of friendship and fellowship with the ungodly, as the...history of Lot in Sodom makes plain.*¹⁵

Would we avoid the sin of Lot? Would we desire that we and our children live as pitching away from Sodom and within the true, instituted church of the Lord Jesus? Then we must teach—and desire to be taught—antithetically, that we might live doing justice and judgment before the face of God!

Through the means of faithful, antithetical catechism instruction, indeed of faithful, antithetical instruction of all kinds, “God rids the church of strange children [cf. Psalm 144:11-15]... There is a vital relationship between God’s ridding the church of strange children and the church’s spiritual health and prosperity.”¹⁶ Antithetical catechism instruction is God’s means of hardening the reprobate children of the sphere of the covenant so that they reject the church, leave the church, and live in separation from the church. Just as God promised to Old Testament Israel that “Israel shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and

wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew” (Deut. 33:28), so he promises that in the way of antithetical instruction, he will prosper his church by ridding the church of the reprobate seed. “Indeed,” concludes Rev. Langerak, “*happy is that people who is in such a case because Christ delivers the church by means of faithful, antithetical—faithful, antithetical catechism—instruction.*”¹⁷ To this end, we ought to pray, and pray fervently, “Lord, give us such antithetical instruction in our catechism rooms, in our schools, and in our homes, so that thy church might be mightily purified of the reprobate seed through the setting forth of thy truth and the condemnation of the lie, so that we might be enabled to rightly live before thee in justice and judgment, and by this glorify thy most worthy name. And give us men who will so teach!”

Next time, in our final article, we will emphasize the rejection by the Protestant Reformed Churches—and every member of the PRC—of the failed fiction of common grace as a way of life, a worldview, that drives out the antithesis and thus has failed in all places where it has ever been adopted. ❖

Jonathan is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan.

¹⁵ Ibid; emphasis added.

¹⁶ Ibid, 4.

¹⁷ Ibid, 6; emphasis added.

The Reformation and Twentieth Century Protestantism

by David J. Engelsma

Excerpt from the pamphlet “The Reformation and Twentieth Century Protestantism.”

October 31 is the anniversary of the Reformation of the church—“Reformation Day.” On the 31st of October in the year 1517, in Wittenberg, Germany, the monk and university professor Martin Luther nailed to the door of the great Church a list of 95 propositions, or theses. That act and those theses became the source of that mighty movement within the church which we know as the “Reformation of the church.” We do well to commemorate and celebrate this event of the

16th century. For it had the most tremendous significance for the true church of Jesus Christ. It was the most important act of God upon the church for good from the death of the apostles to the present time.

The date, October 31, 1517, only marks what later proved to be the beginning of the Reformation. When Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the church, he had no intention of starting the Reformation. He had no plan whatever of separation from the church whose headquarters was Rome and whose head was the Pope. His purpose with the theses and the discussion of them

which he hoped would follow was the correction of certain practices and the teachings that produced those practices. He wanted the existing church to reform itself. In the 95 theses, Luther revealed himself as still very much tainted with the evils of the church as she then existed. For example, he as yet regarded the Pope as the rightful head of the church, and he was willing to allow the practice of indulgences in the church, if only the gross abuses were corrected. He himself had to develop in the truth, which, however, he did speedily, so that by 1520 he recanted his former allowance of a Pope and indulgences. The Reformation, therefore, was not Luther's intention, but the will of God. It was not Luther's achievement, but the work of God. Luther himself said, after the Reformation had sprouted and flowered: "like a blind mule I was led by Him."

Nor was the Reformation of the church a movement that was perfected through Luther and that ended with his death. It continued and advanced through other Reformers of the 16th century, especially John Calvin. It proceeded with power, and with blessing for the church in the great Synod of Dordt and the Westminster Assembly of the 17th century. It goes on today, over 450 years after its beginning. But the seed of this plant was sown on October 31, 1517. Whether Luther knew it or not, the 95 theses contained the truth that must shake the world and radically reform the church of Christ. ❖

Prof. Engelsma is emeritus Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies at the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Where We Stand

Covenant Courtship: (10) The Church Our Mother

by Aaron Lim

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish."
Proverbs 29:18*

The goal of God's covenant friendship with us is his glory. He befriends us for his glory. He saves us for his glory. The church is his glory. For her he gives himself; loves, cherishes and nourishes her according to his marvelous perfection. We experience this warmth and tenderness because we are part of the church. We are members of his covenant.

As a mother who feeds and nourishes her child, so does the faithful church feed and care for her members. The child of God is duty-bound to honour and to promote the cause of the church in the world. For the church he must spend and be spent. For her he must be prepared to lay down his life. His pursuits in this life must revolve around the church as he seeks her welfare.

A covenant young person seeks courtship and marriage to promote the welfare of the church. Covenant courtship is not meant solely for his personal desires but for the church of Jesus Christ. When godly marriages and families are established, the church is strengthened in her cause. Happy covenant families testify of the goodness of

God. His truth is developed and promoted as it is passed down from one generation to the next.

If our young people love the church, they must be concerned about her welfare as they enter into courtship. They must ask: does my relationship with my partner promote the cause of the church? Does my courtship properly reflect God's covenant love for his church?

CERC is placed in a unique position in Singapore to serve the cause of God's covenant. It is necessary for our parents and leaders to treat the covenant courtship of our young people seriously because they are the church of tomorrow. If we are lax in our preaching and instruction on covenant courtship, our young people will find partners outside the church. If parents fail to instruct their children on what covenant courtship involves, they will love pleasure more than God in their relationships. Their relationships will be carnal, worldly, pleasure-seeking and spiritually empty. This spells destruction for the church of tomorrow.

We must be prepared to sacrifice the Reformed faith if we allow our children to marry outside the church. When they marry without being doctrinally and spiritu-

ally united, the faith of the church is weakened. The faith of the next generation grows weaker. The Reformed faith loses its distinctive power and character. It gradually grows cold, abandoned and despised. This paves the road for false doctrines to creep into the church and spirals her into apostasy.

In contrast, there is hope if we treat covenant courtship with its due biblical importance. If we teach our children to date and marry in the unity of the Reformed faith, there is hope for the next generation. Our children, being spiritually united, can then develop the faith entrusted to them. They will echo the voice of their fathers and confess the beautiful Reformed truth with all its power and sharpness.

As covenant young people, it is our most high privilege and honour to carry on the faith of our fathers. Courtship is a time where we fulfill this faithful calling to God. I know the insistence on dating in the unity of our faith places many of us in difficult positions. But if we love the church and our Reformed faith, this is necessary.

I know it seems difficult to date somebody in the church that we have known all our lives. Perhaps when we know so much of the person we are familiar with his flaws and weaknesses. This has the natural tendency to put off dating that person. I believe we ought to place our perspectives in a spiritual focus when we consider this. Is it not an advantage to me that I have known this boy or girl all my life? I am very familiar with his background, family, siblings, friends, character, personality, habits and goals in life. True; he may have his own set of flaws as much as I do. But he believes in the same faith and loves the same God that I do. He confesses the same doctrines that I have been brought up in and

hold so dearly to my soul. Should not this unity in the faith thrill us enough to date within the church?

When we date and marry in the unity of the faith, we promote the cause of God's covenant. We reflect our spiritual unity with him who is our covenant Friend. May the LORD so teach us as covenant parents and young people to approach covenant courtship to the end that we may enjoy his covenant blessings! ❖

Aaron is a member of Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore.

Gem of the Month

In Loving Memory of Baby Brands. Taken to be with Jesus on April 9, 2009.

by Brenda Pipe

*Farewell my precious little one,
So soon your earthly time is done.
Our many hopes and dreams for you
Are softly fading from our view.
Your calling proved to be much more great
Than what we did anticipate.
With no more sin to weigh you down,
You're now a jewel in God's crown.
Serving Him perfectly in Heaven above.
Surrounded by His wondrous love.
And although I don't know exactly when,
I know that I will see you again.
And we will serve our God together
In perfection; in joy; in life forever.*

*The author of poem and parents of the child
are members of Loveland Protestant Reformed
Church in Loveland, Colorado.*

Watching Daily At My Gates

by Chester Hunter

October 7 Read II Corinthians 3:1-11

Paul loved the churches where he preached just as parents love their children. He wanted them to flourish in and under the gospel of God which was a gospel of living love not dead laws. This is the same hope which parents have for their children. Parents wish to see children walk in the love of Christ toward God and toward their neighbors. They wish this because they know this is the calling God has placed upon us. It is a glorious calling because it ends in the glory around the throne of God and the Lamb. Let us live in and out of the gospel of love each day of our lives. Sing Psalter 360.

October 8 Read II Corinthians 3:12-18

Throughout the ages there has been a progression of what the church has been given of the glory of God. In the Old Testament era they were only given types and shadows except for a small glimpse of the glory shown to Moses. Even this they were unable to behold as Christ had not been revealed to them. Even in the New Testament we must await the final coming of our Lord and Savior when we will be able to see the full glory of God. We must live out of the hope of that revelation. We must live by the hope of the revelation as we wait for that day. May God give to us the grace to wait with patience for that which we have not seen. This is true hope. Sing Psalter 195.

October 9 Read II Corinthians 4:1-7

As Paul continues to encourage the Corinthians, he reminds them of how he taught them. He had taught them through the preaching of the word. That preaching was not earthly in content but contained Christ. Even then, Paul realized that he was but a man speaking the glorious gospel. As we hear preaching, we must be careful not to focus on the man but to focus on the message. It is easy sometimes to speak about the minister, but harder to speak of the message. As Paul says the message is a treasure, a power of God. Do we seek this treasure? Do we bow to the power of God? As we attend church let us listen and attend to the preaching. Sing Psalter 360.

October 10 Read II Corinthians 4:8-14

As Paul worked in the various churches in both Asia Minor and in Europe, he constantly was in danger. He

looked at the sufferings that he incurred as a part of his work. He could endure them because he knew that his Christ had suffered to obtain salvation for Paul and for all of God's people. Many of us have suffered little or not at all for Christ's sake. We must be ready for such suffering. We may not avoid it by compromising our faith. We also must bring the needs of those who suffer persecution to the throne of grace. This suffering is for the gospel's sake and for the glory of God. Even if that suffering causes death, we can know that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead will raise his people into everlasting glory. Let us live out of our faith no matter what the cost. Sing Psalter 207.

October 11 Read II Corinthians 4:15-18

These final few verses of chapter 4 provide many comforting words. The section starts out with the words that all things are for our sakes. That is quite a statement! God has created us to show in us his glory. Further proof to this thought is found in Romans 8:28. "And we know that all things work for the good..." Secondly, we find that no matter what affliction we face now, it is temporary and will lead to a much greater glory in heaven which will last for ever. This gives to us the ability to withstand whatever affliction may be ours. Finally, Paul reminds us to have our eyes fixed above. The hope of heaven is far greater than anything that is happening on this earth. May God grant to us the grace to endure our light afflictions with the hope of eternal glory. Sing Psalter 88.

October 12 Read II Corinthians 5:1-8

Paul felt more keenly than most the one conflict that all believers face. While death is the passageway into heaven, it is the end to life here on this earth. While we all desire heaven, most of us are reluctant to have our lives come to an end on this earth. Paul's instruction in this matter was that while we are alive on earth, we are absent from the presence of God. Notice that his emphasis is not on if we get to heaven, but rather when we go to glory. Paul had the assurance that heaven was his through Christ. Do you wish to go to heaven? Do you wish to go to heaven now? We must all face this question. By God's grace we

can walk by faith and be willing to leave this earth and be present with the Lord. Sing Psalter 53.

October 13 Read II 1Corinthians 5:9-15

Read verse 9 once more. Here is the reason for all we do. We work that we might be accepted of Christ. Notice that Paul does not say accepted to salvation. That is already accomplished in Christ. No, this is the life of sanctification that we must walk. We must be holy even as he is holy. We must labor to God's glory no matter in what station or calling we have been placed. Every day of the week we must ask ourselves if we are doing what God would have us do. This is not only true of Sunday, though that is even more necessary, but every day is the Lord's, and we must use it as he has ordained. Let us live each day of our lives unto Christ who has made us alive through his blood. Sing Psalter 24.

October 14 Read II Corinthians 5:16-21

According to the Heidelberg Catechism conversion is the "mortifying of the old man and the quickening of the new man." In this section of Paul's epistle, we see an explanation of that second aspect of conversion. Notice that it is not our act of converting ourselves, but it is because we are in Christ. Notice the different ways Paul states that fact in verses 17-19. He finishes with the powerful reason why we must walk in that new man. The reason is that God gave his son to be an offering for sin for us. We had nothing to do with it. It is all the work of God. Why was this done? Ultimately it was done for God's own glory. Secondly, it was done so that we "might be made the righteousness of God". Let us walk a sanctified walk in thanksgiving for all that God has done for us. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift! Sing Psalter 297.

October 15 Read II Corinthians 6:1-10

Paul is not bragging or boasting as he writes these words, but rather he is imploring the Corinthians to see why he and others went through so much. It was for their salvation that he endured all sorts of troubles. Notice that he mixes those troubles with the work of God. He could endure those troubles because the Holy Spirit was helping him. He had the power of God as an armor wrapped around him. Even though they were in sorrows they could rejoice as they saw their spiritual children walking in truth. We need to esteem our ministers and other leaders for the work that they do because they do those works for our salvation's sake. Sing Psalter 165.

October 16 Read II Corinthians 6:11-18

One of the responsibilities for the child of God is that he walks the walk of the antithesis. We find one aspect of this in this portion of Scripture. Paul instructs us that we

are not to join ourselves with unbelievers. This does not mean that we are not to have anything to do with them. We must live in the world. We must witness to the world. But we are not to fellowship with them. They are not to be our friends. Any relationship we have with them is to be in the knowledge by both parties that we are different. If they will not listen to our witness, then we are to leave them alone and go to our Father. Sing Psalter 260.

October 17 Read II Corinthians 7:1-5

As Paul continues to journey toward Corinth, he asks that they receive him for the message that he wished to bring to them. He loves this church, and he wants it to walk in the holiness of the Spirit. This is the quickening of the new man that we spoke of a few days ago. This is the walk of sanctification that we must travel. In doing this we show those around us that we are Spirit-filled. Even as Paul was traveling he met opposition. That opposition did not bother him as he was doing the Lord's work. Are we bold in the faith of Christ? Does this comfort us? Sing Psalter 287.

October 18 Read II Corinthians 7:6-11

Finally Paul receives news from Corinth. Through Titus he finds that the Corinthians repented of that which Paul admonished them in the first epistle. And not just the church, but the man who was willingly living in the serious sin of adultery. What a joy it is when one repents! The angels have that joy, and the church must have that joy. We must seek repentance from erring brothers and we must accept it as well. What a blessing it is that God through Christ has given to us this means of joy. We all have sinned and all need repentance. Let us seek forgiveness from God and our brothers. Sing Psalter 83.

October 19 Read II Corinthians 7:12-16

When a person admonishes another, it seems very grievous. It may cause tears and even anger. But the purpose is that someone repents of his sin and lives a new and holy life. This must be our goal with admonishing someone. We do it because we love him just as God admonishes us. He loves us. His love is so great that he gave his Son for us. Christ loves us so much that he gave his life for us. Let us live a life of sanctification in thankfulness for this great sacrifice. Sing Psalter 175.

October 20 Read II Corinthians 8:1-9

After receiving the news of repentance with joy, Paul turns to another matter. The church at Jerusalem was suffering hardships due to a famine as well as persecution from without. Paul had instructed the Grecian church to take a benevolence collection for them. He reminds the church of Corinth of this matter and shows how the

Macedonian church had followed this command. This should be a lesson for us. There are causes and needs among the members of Christ's church. We must take the opportunity given to show benevolence to our brother in Christ. In doing so we reflect the love of Christ to our brethren in need. Each of us has this calling. Do we do it? Sing Psalter 97.

October 21 Read II Corinthians 8:10-15

Giving to the kingdom causes of the church is a great privilege. Each of us must give as we have been blessed. Think of the widow of Zarephath who gave of her meager supply of meal and oil to Elijah. She never ran out. Even though that was a miracle at that time, God's grace is sufficient for us in this matter. He will provide for us. We have these causes before us. What do we do about them? To give is not a burden but a joy. The widow's two mites were blessed by Christ himself, and so will ours. Sing Psalter 44.

October 22 Read II Corinthians 8:16-24

One of the special offices that Christ has instituted in his church is the office of deacon. These men are not elders-in-training. They have been ordained to a very important office. They are to distribute the mercies of Christ that they have collected to those who have been placed in the church with needs. These needs take different forms, and the deacons have the calling to meet those needs. We must esteem those men by honoring them in their office as well as supplying them with the means to carry out that office. This is what Paul is instructing both the church at Corinth and us. Young and old must do this. In this we show the thanks due our God for the great salvation that he has wrought for us. Sing Psalter 22.

October 23 Read II Corinthians 9:1-7

As Paul finishes this reminding the Corinthian church of the duty of giving for the poor, he admonishes them to be ready when he comes to Corinth. They had shown willingness to give when he was there the first time. Now he will come with men from Macedonia, and he does not want the church at Corinth to be ashamed that they did not have their gift ready. The principle of true Christian giving is found in verse 7. We must give cheerfully. We must give because we want to show our thankfulness to God. If we do, we will be assured that he will accept our gift as one from the heart and not to please others. May we think of this each day as we prepare ourselves to give on the Sabbath. Sing Psalter 393.

October 24 Read II Corinthians 9:8-15

Notice verse 8. God will give his grace to us. This is unmerited favor to us. We do not deserve it, and we can do

nothing to get it. All the giving that we do, does not give us grace. We can give because God gives us grace to do so. You will notice that Paul instructs us that giving has two effects. First of all, it supplies the need of the poor. Secondly, it provides assurance for the giver of God's grace. Paul concludes this section with the well-known words found in verse 15. Do we experience this feeling when we give? If not, we must examine our motives in giving. Sing Psalter 388.

October 25 Read II Corinthians 10:1-6

Paul continues his exposition of daily conversion. His focus and emphasis in this section of Scripture is the daily mortification—putting to death—of the old man. Notice this is a daily activity. This activity is something we want to do and can do because we are washed in the blood of Christ. This is not how we gain salvation, but what we do because of the fact of our salvation. It does not matter what activities we might have to do today; we must seek to put away any sinful thoughts from our hearts before they bloom into sinful activities. This is not easy, but by grace it can be done. Let us give thanks for that grace, and pray hourly for the strength to mortify our old man. In this way we will be obedient to our Christ. Sing Psalter 291.

October 26 Read II Corinthians 10:7-11

When we read this portion of Scripture we are reminded of an Old Testament episode. Do you remember when Samuel was called to anoint David as God's choice as king over Israel? Over and over he had to be reminded that God looks on the heart. Paul, too, found opposition to his physical appearance and voice. We do not know what these so-called difficulties were, but there were detractors to the gospel that tried to use these things against Paul. What about us? Are we attracted to a preacher for how he looks and sounds rather than what he preaches? We must not fall into this sin. We must seek the gospel of Christ that leads to salvation and feeds our souls. Remember what Paul wrote to the Romans: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ...it is the power of God unto salvation." Let this be our focus when we hear God's servants preach to us. Sing Psalter 371.

October 27 Read II Corinthians 10:12-18

There are two things of note in this portion of Scripture. First of all, Paul says that he will not boast. The wise Solomon wrote, "Pride cometh before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." Like Paul we need to stay away from this sin. It is so easy to do even in something that of itself is worthy. Paul in his work saw that he must not boast of his accomplishments. This is what we must strive to do as well. The second item is that of evangelism.

Paul did not want the gospel to only go to the Corinthian church. He wanted it to go to the regions beyond Corinth, and as we know, even to Rome. Is this our desire? Do we want to spread the gospel to all peoples? What about those that we come into contact with in our daily lives? Do we bring them the gospel? This is our calling. Let us work hard to carry it out. Sing Psalter 366.

October 28 Read II Corinthians 11:1-15

As Paul closes this second epistle to the church at Corinth, he goes back to an old theme. This is the theme, that his purpose in his work is to preach the pure gospel of Christ without making himself a burden to the churches. When Paul needed support, he sometimes worked at tentmaking or his needs were supplied by others. For new churches he never pressed that issue. He did not want to make himself a stumbling block for their faith. There are two lessons for us here. First of all, we should not become stumbling blocks for anyone's faith, especially those who are new in it. This includes our children and young people. Secondly, we do have an obligation to care for the ministers of the Word. As we proceed down life's pathway of faith, may we ever remember these things. Sing Psalter 417.

October 29 Read II Corinthians 11:16-21

Are we willing to do anything and to appear as anything for the gospel of Christ? Paul was. Of course, sin is not something that we can do, even for the gospel. To the world around the churches in those days, Paul appeared foolish. There seemed to be no common sense in the man. What about us? How do we appear to the world? Do we appear foolish for the gospel's sake? Are we willing to endure the scorn that goes with living a sanctified life and the antithesis? Are we willing to be scorned for keeping the Sabbath day holy, for maintaining salvation by faith alone? The world we live in wants none of these things. They want the Christian life to be easy. Paul did not find it that way. Walking the narrow way never is. Let us pray for the grace necessary to walk in that way. Sing Psalter 106.

October 30 Read II Corinthians 11:22-33

Why did Paul go through this list of troubles that he endured? Was it for his own glory? Was he boasting of his strength as he preached the gospel? Was he trying to show the Corinthians how much he endured for them? The answer to all of these questions is no! Paul suffered all of this, as he wrote in other epistles, for the cause of Christ. He suffered so that God might be glorified and so that his honor would be extolled. These trials and tribulations set him apart from the false teacher which troubled the churches. This also showed to the church of that day

and the church of this day that this world is not our home. Our home is in heaven. Let us count ourselves privileged if we have to suffer even a small fraction of what Paul suffered. Sing Psalter 105.

October 31 Read II Corinthians 12:1-6

Paul had an experience far surpassing what most had saving Moses and Christ's disciples. He was privileged to have a glimpse into heaven. In that glimpse he saw some of the glory which will belong to God's people after the judgment. He did not speak of this glory to the churches because it was not expedient for them to know of it. Rather he spoke the gospel of Christ because that is the foundation of the church as we sing in the hymn, "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord." As we go through this valley of tears let us look up to the glory that will be ours. Let us "live by faith and not by sight" until the day Christ returns. Sing Psalter 237.

November 1 Read II Corinthians 12:7-10

Sometimes we want to know more about situations in the Bible than we are told. When this happens, we are prone to speculate far past what is ours to know. That is true with this passage. There are many theories about Paul's thorn in the flesh. We do not know what it was. When we spend time speculating, we often miss the gem of the passage. This passage has such a gem. It is found in verse 9. Not only was God's grace sufficient for Paul, it is sufficient for all of God's people in whatever situation they find themselves. There is nothing in this life that God's grace cannot cover. We need to remember this fact when we are in despair over some situation which envelopes us. God's grace is sufficient. What a comfort that is! Let us pray for that grace to come upon us not only in those situations but throughout all of our lives. In this way God will be glorified. Thanks be to him for his unspeakable gift! Sing Psalter 235.

November 2 Read II Corinthians 12:11-21

As Paul prepared to come to Corinth, he wanted it abundantly clear that his coming, his writing, and his preaching had but one purpose. He wished to show the Corinthians the right way of life. Even if it caused him hardships, which it did, that was to be the purpose of his work among the church at Corinth. We all need to follow Paul's example and humble ourselves before Christ and his church that God be glorified and the church gathered unto him. As soon as we exalt ourselves neither of the above purposes will be fulfilled. May God be glorified in our entire walk on this earth as we are being prepared for the heavenly glory that will be our life forever. Sing Psalter 429.

John Calvin: Too Young?

by Joshua D. Engelsma

Much has been written about the life of John Calvin, especially in the last year or two with the celebration of the Genevan reformer's 500th birthday. This article is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of his entire life. There is already a wealth of material which does that. I would suggest that the interested young reader pick up Thea Van Halsema's easily accessible book, *This Was John Calvin*, or reread Prof. H. Hanko's *Portrait of Faithful Saints* on Calvin. The focus of this article is the astounding work of God in John Calvin when he was just a young man. Like his spiritual brothers Timothy and Athanasius, Calvin was used by God to perform astounding works at a very young age.

Calvin was born in the town of Noyon in northern France on July 10, 1509. (Martin Luther was already a young man of twenty-five at the time.) Calvin's mother died when he was just a young boy. His father Gerard, legal and financial advisor to the Catholic clergy in Noyon, later remarried. Thanks to his father's many connections, young John spent quite a bit of time with the sons of rich families in the area. Together they received the finest of educations. With these bourgeoisie boys, Calvin left Noyon and went to study in Paris sometime between the years 1521 and 1523. Calvin would have only been between the ages of twelve and fourteen at the time.

Calvin's initial desire was to study to be a priest in the Catholic Church. Holding a church office could be a very lucrative position in those days. His father, the church lawyer and accountant, could attest to that. But it was his father who told John to abandon the idea of studying for church office. Maybe Gerard saw the corruption and deceit that festered among the Catholic clergy. Or maybe he felt that his son could make more money as a lawyer. Either way, Calvin was soon on his way to a degree in law.

However, like most typical college students, Calvin's "major" changed once again. This time it was back to theology and the pursuit of church office. Calvin's father had died in 1531, so Calvin was no longer obligated to study law. He could freely pursue his first love: theology.

In 1531, Calvin was only twenty-two years old. The Protestant Reformation, at fourteen years of age, was even younger. Calvin no doubt knew about the Reformation and had heard the name Luther kicked around,

but he had always seen himself as a loyal member of the Roman Catholic Church. But God changed all this. Listen to Calvin:

To this pursuit [the study of law—JDE] I endeavored faithfully to apply myself, in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the secret guidance of his providence, at length gave different direction to my course. And first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, *God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame*, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life.¹

God so worked in the heart of Calvin, that he forsook the cold, poisonous errors of Rome and grasped the heart-warming doctrines of the Reformation.

Calvin's new faith was not popular in his native France, a fact which he soon came to realize. Under the threat of persecution, Calvin was forced to flee France in 1533. He traveled throughout Europe for the next few years, studying and growing in his knowledge of the Word of God.

But Calvin was not just studying. He was writing too, writing what would become one of the greatest works of all time, a work that would shape the Reformed faith: the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Calvin wrote this statement of the true Christian faith in order to persuade the ungodly rulers of France to call a halt to the persecution. He wanted to make it clear to them that those whom they were persecuting and driving out of the country were not a political threat. He wanted to set forth in clear language what these Reformed men and women truly believed.

The first edition of the *Institutes* appeared in 1536, but Calvin probably had it finished already in 1535.² Do the math a minute: 1535–1509. Calvin wrote this bold, clear explanation of the truth when he was only twenty-

1 John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson, vol. 4 of *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), xl. Emphasis mine.

2 Calvin's final edition of the *Institutes*, much enlarged from the first, was published in 1559.

six years old! Twenty-six! What makes this even more astounding, if that is possible, is the fact that Calvin had only been converted to the Reformed faith a few years before.

Was Calvin too young? Was he too inexperienced for such a task? From an earthly point of view it certainly seems like it. Of all people, a twenty-something-year-old man does not seem very qualified to write such a confession. Add to that the fact that he was only recently converted and it all seems quite preposterous. But Calvin was not too young, nor was he too inexperienced. God guided and directed the course of his entire life, thus preparing him to do this work when he was still just a young man.

After the publication of the immensely popular *Institutes*, Calvin became fairly well-known throughout Europe. This notoriety was at complete odds with Calvin's personality. By nature he was an introvert, a thinker, a scholar. He preferred the quiet study of the ivory tower as opposed to the glare of the limelight. He did not want to take up a public position of leadership against Rome. He hoped to remain hidden in the shadows.

This was not, however, God's plan for John Calvin. God had ordained him to be a mighty leader, and he used a fiery man by the name of William Farel to impress this upon young John. During 1536, Calvin ended up, in the good providence of God, spending the night in the city of Geneva, Switzerland. After a night's rest he intended to leave this city far behind. But Farel, well aware of Calvin's great abilities and his presence in the city, paid him a visit during the night. He asked Calvin to stay and help him reform Geneva. Calvin politely declined. Farel insisted. Calvin refused. Unwavering, Farel "strained every nerve to detain me" and "proceeded to utter an imprecation that God would curse my retirement, and the tranquility of the studies which I sought, if I should withdraw and refuse to give assistance, when the necessity was so urgent."³ Calvin finally gave in and submitted to the request of Farel. He came to realize that God had much work for him to do on behalf of the church.

After a few months of teaching in Geneva, young Calvin was ordained into the ministry there. He worked tirelessly alongside Farel trying to reform the Genevans

in both doctrine and in life. Although the city had rejected Rome and declared herself for the Reformation, the people were not receptive to the reforms of Calvin and Farel. Tensions between the citizens and the pastors soon boiled over, and the two men were forced to leave Geneva. That was in April of 1538. Calvin was only twenty-eight.

We highlight the rest of Calvin's life only briefly. From Geneva Calvin eventually settled in the German city of Strasburg. He lived and labored there in peace for three years. There he met and married a God-fearing woman named Idelette de Bure. Those three years were the happiest times of Calvin's life. But God still had work for him to do in the city of Geneva. With a heavy heart, Calvin left Strasburg in 1541 and headed back to the pulpit in Geneva. He spent the rest of his life there preaching and teaching and reforming the church until his death on May 27, 1564.

John Calvin was a great man, a great man used by God to lead his beloved sheep out of the ravaging mouths of wolves and prepared by him for this work at a young age. Calvin was young. He was inexperienced. He was

naturally bashful and repulsed by the spotlight. To all appearances, he was not cut out for this line of work. But in the eyes of God, Calvin was perfectly prepared for reformation. Sure, Calvin was young when he first took up his labors as a reformer. But, by God's grace, that did not hinder him. Calvin came to realize this later in life. Commenting on I Timothy 4:12 ("Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers..."), Calvin wrote these words: "Hence we learn

that Timothy was still young, though he held a place of distinguished excellence among many pastors; and that it is a *grievous mistake* to estimate by the number of years how much is due to a person."⁴ That was true of Timothy. It was true of Calvin, too. And it is true of us young people as well.

Believe it, young people! ❖

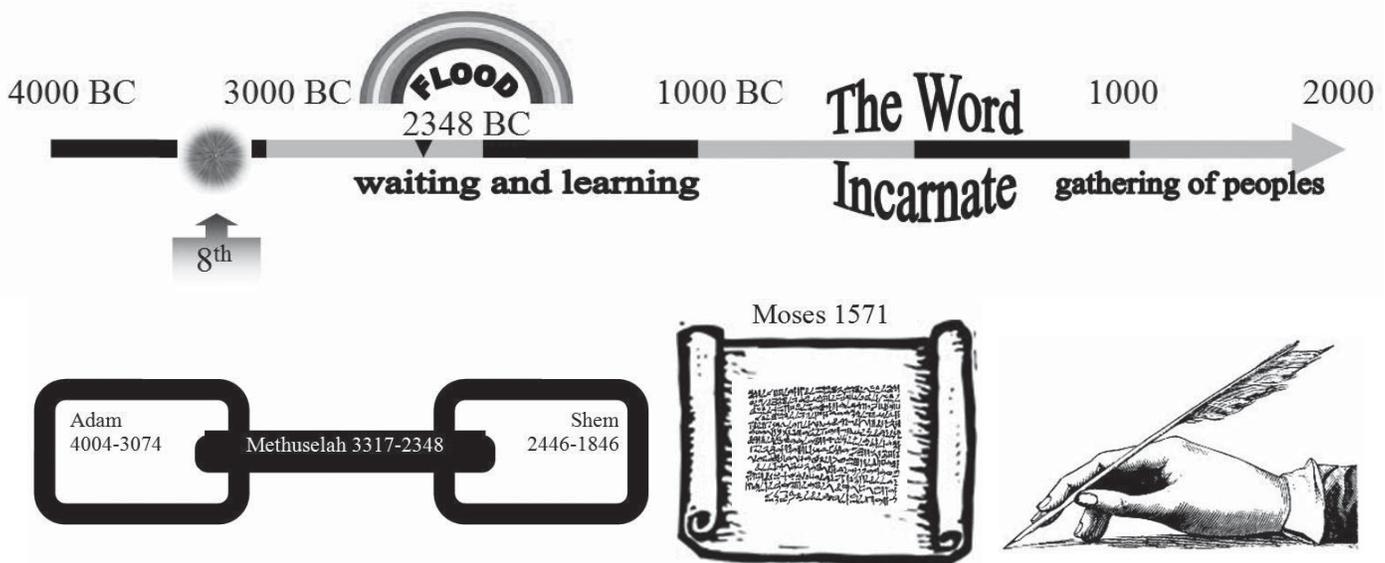
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⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. William Pringle, vol. 21 of *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 113. Emphasis mine.

³ Calvin, *Psalms*, xlii-xliii.

The Eighth Century of His-Story: God Provides His Church With a Long-Living Link

by John Huizenga



From the perspective of earthly strength and success, the church of Adam and his seed seemed doomed to extinction. The seed of the serpent was multiplying exponentially and growing in power and glory under the expertise of wicked Lamech and his children. The great warrior of faith, Enoch, would soon be removed from this earth—much earlier than is typical for life spans at this time. But it is against this dismal black background that we are better able to see the glorious wonders of God’s wisdom. This is the way God often works. With Methuselah, God paints a thin bright line across the whole black canvas that links Adam with Shem and the planting of the church in the new world. Because Methuselah and the significance that I would like to address in this article goes far beyond a mere 100 year segment of history, we set our anchor at this point in history and climb to the crow’s nest with our spyglass for a look around.

With Methuselah, God paints a thin bright line across the whole black canvas that links Adam with Shem and the planting of the church in the new world.

Methuselah was a mere boy of 13 years at the dawn of the eighth century of the world’s existence. For about 250 years he would sit under the preaching of Adam to hear directly from his mouth the stories of the creation and the fall and the promise of God concerning salvation in the seed of the woman. During this same time he would fight side by side with Enoch, the great warrior of faith

who walked in intimate covenant fellowship with God. He would then cherish these words and experiences in his heart through the great persecution of the church. As an old man he would watch Noah build the ark. During those last years before the flood, we can see Shem listening as a young man to that ancient man, Methuselah, speak the wonders of God that he had heard from Adam himself.

This living preservation of the word of God during the history before the Flood was an amazing wonder of God and a precious gift to the church. We read in Hebrews 1:1-2: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.” The church of the 8th century of history did not have God’s word in writing, but he did speak to his people, and at the heart of this revelation was the good news of salvation. “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:10-12).

The preservation of the truth about God and man was a wonder of grace. Natural man would try to bury and forget the shameful history of Adam’s fall and the humbling gospel of salvation by grace alone. But men like Enoch, Adam, Methuselah, etc. were moved by the Holy Ghost to speak the truth, as we read in II Peter 1:20-21. “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” The church at this time was fed by preaching. When the time for writing came, God prepared Moses and moved him to put this prophesy into writing.

The era of long life spans came to an end around the time of Abraham with the deaths of Noah, Shem, and Shem’s great grandchild Eber who all died around the same time. It would appear that the preservation of the word of God through the moving of men by the Holy Ghost to speak that word to the next generation had died with them. Abraham was called out from a family that was quickly departing from that word and making idols. God shows us only a few sparks of a true knowledge of God

in the stories of Job and Melchisedec. In Egypt, Satan worked very hard to stamp out the sparks of knowledge in the line of Abraham by trying to disrupt the covenant families. The lively preaching that preserved the history before the Flood seemed to evaporate with the shorter lives of men. Even so, by the time God moved Moses to sit down and write, this history and the promise of God was nothing new to him. His father Amram and mother Jochebed had carefully passed on everything of God’s word they knew to Moses before he was taken into the royal palace of Egypt.

There at the palace, God prepared Moses for the great work not only of leading his people, but also writing down the words that Methuselah had cherished, along with the further revelations needed by the church. The Belgic Confession expresses this truth beautifully with the words “God, from a special care, which he has for us and our salvation, commanded his servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit his revealed word to writing.” Whatever Moses needed for this work, God provided. The Holy Ghost would move him to record the stories he had been told by his parents. Whatever history Moses had studied in the libraries of Egypt or recorded by godly families of Israel would be used by God to prepare the gift of the holy scriptures.

God was pleased to use the written word to preserve and gather his church in the new world after the Flood. Before that time, God was pleased to use the memories and lively preaching by ancient men like Enoch and Methuselah who lived for hundreds of years. The church of all ages remembers Methuselah as the longest living man—almost 1000 years (969). This may be an interesting fact, but let’s also remember God’s covenant faithfulness in preserving all the truths of history relevant to our salvation. The living word of God as it entered the ears and heart of the first man, Adam, was carried and preserved in Methuselah right to the door of the new world after the flood. Shem, and through him the whole ancestry and children of Abraham, would hear this living word of God. They were not mere stories and myths that had been retold and embellished after being retold through thousands of generations of storytellers. Abraham heard Shem. Shem heard Methuselah speak, and Methuselah heard Adam himself. ❖

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Psalm Singing: A Reformed Heritage

by Rev. J. Kortering

Excerpt from the pamphlet: “The Reformation and Psalm Singing.” The full pamphlet is available at Protestant Reformed Churches or http://www.prca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet_37.html.

It is a well-known fact that God used the work of Martin Luther and John Calvin to restore the Word of God to its proper place. Who can forget the Diet of Worms, before which Luther was ordered to recant all his writings, and his answer came with such determination, “My heart is captive to the Word of God!” It was authoritative for his belief and every aspect of his life.

It is significant, then, that when the reformers looked for a songbook for the people of God they turned to the Psalms.

...singing was left to the
“professionals,” to the
chanting of priests and
trained choirs.

That was a book which the Holy Spirit had already prepared for the purpose of singing. In this connection we rejoice in the determination of the reformers to restore congregational singing to the worship service. The apostate Romish church had taken the reading of God’s Word from the common folk. Similarly, the singing was left to the “professionals,” to the chanting of priests and trained choirs. The reformers recognized that God’s people constituted God’s choir. Besides this, they were used by God to give the people something to sing about. How their hearts were lifted up when the burden of the guilt of sin was taken away by the blood of Christ, Who was raised for their justification! Not their works formed the basis of justification, but the finished work of Jesus Christ. That was liberty, that freed the soul from the burden of work—righteousness and gave the people the motivation to sing. What could better express the heart’s desires than the Psalms of David? Those Psalms gave

expression to God exactly what they felt in their hearts.

Both Luther and Calvin had a strong commitment to the Word of God. Both stood very close to each other concerning the doctrines taught in the Bible. They differed in the area of the sacraments and in the area of exclusive use of the Psalms in the singing of the congregation in worship. From the very beginning, Calvin saw the need to direct the church toward the singing of Psalms. When he arrived at Geneva in 1537, he and Farel set up the order of worship to include the singing of Psalms. During his forced absence and retreat in Strasbourg, Germany, he came to appreciate the lusty singing of the Psalms by the German folk. He himself began to write versifications of the Psalms along with Marot and Beza. When he returned to Geneva and could begin to implement his idea of proper worship, Psalm singing assumed its proper place. From then on Psalm singing became a Reformed and Presbyterian heritage.

To appreciate the thinking of Calvin on this point, let us allow him to speak for himself. Notice in the following quote how Calvin viewed singing as a reverent act involving the tongue, which should be viewed as common prayer.

Moreover since the glory of God ought in a measure, to shine in the several parts of our bodies, it is especially fitting that the tongue has been assigned and destined for this task, both through singing and through speaking. For it was peculiarly created to tell and proclaim the praise of God. But the chief use of the tongue is in public prayers, which are offered in the assembly of believers, by which it comes about that with *one common voice* as it were (emphasis J.K.), with the same mouth, we all glorify God together worshipping him with one spirit and the same faith.¹

Since singing is a joyful expression, he also cautions us that that joy must be sanctified by the Word.

It is not without reason that the Holy Spirit exhorts us so carefully by means of the Holy Scripture to rejoice in God and that all our joy is there reduced to its true end, for He knows how much we are inclined

to delight in vanity. Just as our nature, then, draws us and induces us to seek all means of foolish and vicious rejoicing, so to the contrary, our Lord, to distract us and withdraw us from the enticements of the flesh and the world, presents to us all possible means (the Word of God, JK.) in order to occupy us in that spiritual joy which He so much recommends to us.²

This applies to the melody of our songs. On this he writes,

Yet, we should be very careful that our ears be not more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual meaning of the words. Augustine also admits in another place that he was so disturbed by this danger that he sometimes wished to see established the custom observed by Athanasius, who ordered the reader to use so little inflection of the voice that he would sound more like a speaker than a singer. But when he recalled how much benefit singing had brought him, he inclined to the other side. Therefore, when this moderation is maintained, it is without any doubt a most holy and salutary practice. On the other hand, such songs as have been composed only for sweetness and delight of the ear are unbecoming to the majesty of the church and cannot but displease God in the highest degree.³

It certainly is consistent with such a reverential approach to the singing of God's people in worship that Calvin sought to limit the expression to the Psalms. Even though the Psalms had to be versified in order to be sung, and music had to be prepared for the singing, Calvin repeated over and over that Psalms were God's songs for such singing.

Now what Saint Augustine says is true, that no one is able to sing things worthy of God unless he has received them from Him. Wherefore, when we have looked thoroughly everywhere and searched high and low, we shall find no better songs nor more appropriate to the purpose than the Psalms of David which the Holy Spirit made and spoke through him. And when we sing them, we are certain that God puts the words in our mouths, as if He Himself were singing in us to exalt His glory.⁴

Psalm Singing Throughout History

We must be careful to put Calvin's concern for Psalm singing into historical perspective. John Calvin did not begin something new when he introduced exclusive Psalm singing during worship. If that were true, we might have occasion to raise our eyebrows. The singing of Psalms already then had a long, glorious history.

The Old Testament Psalms were written for the

purpose of singing. The title to the Psalms is, "Book of Praises." The notation "Selah," written throughout the Psalms, is a musical indicator. Already in II Samuel 6:5 reference is made to the playing of musical instruments in connection with the moving of the ark to Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat, as he led his army to battle, sang Psalms (II Chron. 20:21). Later the Prophet Isaiah spoke of singing in connection with a holy solemnity (Is. 30:29). Ezekiel had singers in the inner court of the temple (Eze. 40:44). All of them sang the Psalms.

As far as we know, there was no singing in the synagogue; at least there is no reference to this in Scripture. Our Lord Jesus sang a Psalm in connection with the last Passover (Matt. 26:30). This "hymn" was the great Hallel, "Praise God," from Psalms 113-118. The author to the Hebrews expresses, "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee," a reference to congregational singing. Part of the abuse in the church of Corinth was that each "has a Psalm" (I Cor. 14:26). Instead of waiting for the orderly singing of the congregation, the spirit-filled Christians began to sing Psalms on their own. The church was commanded to "sing Psalms" (Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16). These passages contain instructions given to the church as to how they are to admonish one another in worship. The Christian is instructed in James 5:13, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing Psalms." A recorded instance of this is found in Acts 16:25 when the bruised and beaten Paul and Silas sang Psalms in the prison.

This same tradition was carried over to the post-apostolic period of the early church. Dr. Phillip Schaff, in his *History of the Christian Church*,⁵ makes the point that during this period there were no hymns in the church, only Psalms. Drawing from the excellent article on Psalmody from the McClintock and Strong *Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Cyclopaedia*,⁶ we learn that Chrysostom, the church father of the fourth century, in his sixth homily on Repentance, extolled the Psalms above the rest of Scripture to be sung by all classes of men, at all places, and on all occasions. During this same period, the heretics introduced the singing of hymns into the churches. The Gnostics, the Arians, and the Donatists all began to introduce songs other than the Psalms. This led to the decision of the Council of Laodicea in A.D. 360 to make a decision forbidding the use of hymns in the churches. During the long period of the Dark Ages, from the fifth to the sixteenth century, Psalm singing was preserved in the monasteries, while chanting was introduced into the worship services. Wycliffe and Huss, the morning stars of the Reformation, re-introduced into

the churches the singing of Psalms.

During the post-reformation period, Psalm singing took hold and spread like wildfire throughout all of Europe: France, Switzerland, Germany, England, Netherlands, Scotland. Psalm singing is not a Dutch heritage alone. The churches of Presbyterian heritage also became exclusively Psalm-singing churches. This heritage they took with them to America, and under the direction of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church of North America, two conventions were held in 1905, the first in Pittsburgh and the second in Chicago, to promote Psalm singing in worship. The book, *The Psalms in Worship*,⁷ is a compilation of lectures given at these conventions in which all aspects of Psalm singing are treated. This is the most exhaustive and thorough treatment of this subject. The same thing was true of the Dutch churches. Psalm singing was championed in the Netherlands. Petrus Datheen, along with others, composed many of the Psalm versifications. Many variations of music and words appeared, and from these the well-known Psalm Book was composed. The Synod of Dordt in 1618-19 included Article 69 of the Church Order in which only the 150 Psalms of David could be sung in the churches—though there was a concession⁸ that a few other songs, e.g., the morning and evening hymn, the 10 commandments, Songs of Mary, Zacharias, etc. might be included. After that, the desire to maintain the exclusive use of the Psalms for worship without including hymns became the occasion for controversy. Among other issues, exclusive Psalm singing was maintained by the leaders of the Afscheiding of 1834 when they separated

from the state church in the Netherlands. Similarly, in America it was included in the formation of the Christian Reformed Church from the Reformed Church of America. The RCA allowed the singing of hymns during worship, which the CRC did not want. Those Reformed and Presbyterian churches that still maintain exclusive Psalm singing during worship are certainly in good company and possess a goodly heritage. ❖

Endnotes

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, chapter 20, section 31.
2. John Calvin, *Preface to the Genevan Psalter*.
3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, chapter 20, section 32.
4. John Calvin, *Epistle to the Reader*, June 1543.
5. Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. I, p.463
6. McClintock and Strong, *Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Cyclopaedia*, Vol.8, page 735.
7. *The Psalms in Worship*, 1907; The United Presbyterian Board of Publication, page 486, 487; Lecture by Rev. T.H. Hanna on “Specimens of Eulogies on the Psalms.”
8. Viewpoint expressed by Rev. D. Engelsma in an excellent series of articles on “Music in the Church” published in the *Beacon Lights*, a magazine for Protestant Reformed youth, February, March, April, 1983.

Rev. Kortering is an emeritus minister of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

“True humility does not know that it is humble.
If it did, it would be proud from the
contemplation of so fine a virtue.”

— Martin Luther

Church News

BAPTISMS

"For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Act 2:39

The sacrament of Holy Baptism was administered to:

Tate, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jesse VanDonge—Calvary, IA

Kailyn Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Scott Ferguson—Edmonton, AB, Canada

Brianna Rose, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Michael Klaassens—Edmonton, AB, Canada

Addison Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Daryl Koole—Faith, MI

Jacob Matthew, son of Mr. & Mrs. Matthew DeBoer—Grandville, MI

Reid Austin, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dewey Engelsma—Grandville, MI

Noah Richard, son of Mr. & Mrs. Rick Mingerink—Grandville, MI

Nicolas David, son of Mr. & Mrs. David Bleyenbergh—Grandville, MI

Ella Jane, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Michael VanderKolk—Grandville, MI

Mila Manila, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Baatenburg—Holland, MI

Caleb Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Brad Schipper—Hope, MI

Cody Paul, son of Mr. & Mrs. Kevin Kooima—Hull, IA

Braelynn Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Shane Davelaar—Hull, IA

Levi Daniel, son of Mr. & Mrs. Dan Poppema—Hull, IA

Colin Gordon, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jason Scritchfield—Loveland, CO

Parker Benjamin, son of Mr. & Ms. Justin Griess—Loveland, CO

Abbie Grace, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Bruce Koole—Loveland, CO

Emmett Bruce, son of Mr. & Mrs. Justin Verberg—Peace, IL

Emily, daughter of Susie Deasis - Philippines

Zachary Eric, son of Mr. & Mrs. Eric Pols—Providence, MI

Violet Faye, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jordan Schipper—Providence, MI

Blake Tunis, son of Mr. & Mrs. Ross VanBaren—Randolph, WI

Josiah Alan, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Hendricks—Redlands, CA

Logan Jacob, son of Mr. & Mrs. Scott Gaastra—Redlands, CA

Lydia Joy, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Timothy denHartog—Redlands, CA

Caleb John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tim Kortering—Southeast, MI

Norah Macey, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Karl Dykstra—Southeast, MI

Tyler James, son of Mr. & Mrs. Todd VanBaren—South Holland, IL

Caiden Mark, son of Mr. & Mrs. Tyler DeJong—South Holland, IL

Laci Marie, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Jeff Potjer—Southwest, MI

Hailey Faye, daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Mark Velthouse—Trinity, MI

Philip John, son of Mr. & Mrs. Jim Siertsema—Wingham, ON, Canada

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

"Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established." Proverbs 4:26

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

Joe Folkerts, Jeff Stein, Madeleine Poortinga—Bethel, IL

Bethany Dykstra—Byron Center, MI

Crystal Knapp—First, MI

Rose Doezeema—Holland, MI

Anthony Kalsbeek, Ben Laning, Monica Koole, Seth Koole, Heather Laning, Stephanie Miersma, Adam Stryle—Hope, MI

Kolette Heynen, Christina Kooiker, Nicholas Netten—Hull, IA
Kaitlin Wierenga—Immanuel, AB, Canada

Jonathan Schwarz, Ashley VanUffelen—Loveland, CO

Tom Kuiper—Trinity, MI

Aryn Kikkert—Wingham, ON, Canada

MARRIAGES

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Proverbs 3: 5 & 6

United in the bond of Holy Matrimony were:

Mr. Alex Kingma and Miss Bethany Lotterman—Byron Center, MI

Mr. Jordan Dykstra and Miss Kaylynn Gritters—Byron Center, MI

Mr. Bill Booth and Miss Amanda Windemuller—Byron Center, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Bryant and Elizabeth Landheer—Byron Center, MI

Mr. John Helmholtz and Miss Susan Oosterbaan—Byron Center, MI

Mr. and Mrs. Evan and Jessica Westra—Calvary, IA

Mr. Philip Kalsbeek and Miss Laura Koole—Faith, MI

Mr. Jared Doezeema and Miss Amber Gritters—Faith, MI

Mr. David Veldman and Miss Michelle VanOverloop—Grace, MI

Mr. Tyson Boeve and Miss Surekha Poelman—Holland, MI

Mr. Randy Kuiper and Miss Kimberly Faber—Hope, MI

Mr. Jeff VanTil and Miss Sara Kamps—Hope, MI

Mr. Justin Regnerus and Miss Cassie Andringa—Hull, IA

Mr. Jason Westra and Miss Katie Verbeek—Hull, IA

Mr. Andrew Wierenga and Miss Maria Span—Immanuel, AB, Canada

Mr. Jeremy Mulder and Miss Michelle Fischer—Randolph, WI

Mr. Nick Meelker and Miss Sonia Heys—Redlands, CA

Mr. Ben Kuiper and Miss Elizabeth Noorman—Southeast, MI

Gottschalk: Lone Voice in the Night (1)

The heavy iron gate swung open and a German count and his wife stepped inside the walls of the monastery at Fulda. Between them walked a little boy, perhaps eight or nine years old, holding his mother's hand. His eyes were wide as he stared at the simple garden and buildings. Men in brown hoods walked toward them. One man held his hands out to the visitors and spoke.

"Greetings in the name of our Savior. I am Rabanus, a priest here at the monastery of Fulda. We've been expecting you."

Count Bruno nodded and looked down at his young son.

Rabanus continued, "Is this the child that is to be the *oblata*, your gift to the church?"

"He is," answered the count solemnly. His wife clutched the boy's hand a little tighter. "This is Gottschalk," Bruno introduced his son.

"Gottschalk," the priest repeated, "meaning 'servant of God.' How fitting is the name." Rabanus smiled. He encouraged the father. "Gottschalk will receive a fine education here at the monastery."

The count nodded. He had no doubt that would be true. Rabanus was a very learned man and an able teacher at Fulda. In several years, by 822, Rabanus would become the abbot of the monastery and would make Fulda one of the most important schools in the classics and in science. The library would be unsurpassed. The count looked down at the boy. A son of an important count could not be given to just any monastery.

After more introductions the family was led into the abbey just as a dong from the bell tower echoed within the hall. Other monks, young and old, were already gathering there. Besides the bell, nothing was heard but the shuffle of feet on the hard, stone floor. The monks entered in silence with their tonsured hair cut like rings around their heads and their identical rough, brown habits. They all looked alike to young Gottschalk.

A row of them began to sing in low, even rhythm in front of the hall near the altar. Gottschalk could not understand what they were saying. They chanted in Latin. Other ceremonies were performed, and a priest raised his hands in blessing. There were candles, wafers of bread, wine, and incense. The smell made Gottschalk want to cough.

Then one of the monks stepped to where Gottschalk sat between his mother and father and held out his hand to the

"LITTLE LIGHTS"

... let it shine!

by Connie Meyer

boy. Gottschalk glanced back at his parents as the monk led him up to the altar. Gottschalk's mother bowed her head to hide her tears.

The priest said each word for young Gottschalk to repeat, words that caused him to vow to become a Benedictine monk. From this moment on he must live in strictest poverty and schedule. He must wear certain clothes, eat certain foods, and pray and work all in a certain way. There would be no meat, unless he was sick and needed to eat some to get better. There would be no wife for him when he got older, and no children or grandchildren would gather around his table. He must eat his meals in silence. Except for the company of other clergymen, he must live alone. The monastery would be his home now, for the rest of his life. That is what young Gottschalk promised by the altar.

The chanting, the ceremony, and the vows were complete, though Gottschalk understood little of what just happened.

"Servant of God" was his name, and servant of God he would remain. But no one could have known how faithful—and alone—this little servant of God would prove to be. Indeed, the teacher Rabanus would not have smiled had he known.

Find the underlined words of the text in the puzzle below:

"Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say: many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me."

Psalm 129:1, 2

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

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

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