

APRIL 2015

## WHEN HOPE AND HISTORY RHYME

BY TIM KELLER

The ancients saw history as repetitious and endless. Their image of time was a wheel, in that the ages of the world repeated themselves in great cycles. The Hindu *Vedas*, for example, taught that the universe goes through great arcs of creation, rise, decline, destruction, and then rebirth, each of which last millions of years, and which go on forever without any resolution. Christianity, however, understands history to be under the control of God who is moving it purposefully toward a great and irreversible climax.

Late modern secular culture has rejected religion and even belief in God, yet has held on tightly to the Christian-inspired idea that history is making progress. The

people once called “liberals” now call themselves “progressives,” which shows how deeply the Christian idea has embedded itself in our thinking. Secular westerners do not simply believe that we can make things better in this or that area, but that “the times” are inevitably moving the world to a better condition. We often denounce actions or positions as “having no business in the 21st century,” or as “archaic thinking out of step with the times.”

The problems with this viewpoint are obvious, however. Do we really want to say that every historical trend is a good one? And if you can think of *any* thing happening now more than in the past that you believe is bad or

wrong, then that destroys the idea that whatever is new is better than what it displaced. Partly because of these kinds of problems, a great debate over whether history is really making progress has arisen in the last two decades.

Silicon Valley and others maintains the idea that science and technology inevitably make the world better. Many excited voices there describe a future in which the problems of aging, disease, poverty, and inequality are all solved or transformed.

On the other hand there, the old hopefulness about the future has disappeared. For the first time Americans are saying that their children’s lives probably will not

*(Continued on page 4)*

## 2015 REDEEMER-WIDE CENSUS TO BE TAKEN APRIL 19

In 2004 Redeemer began the exercise of taking a regular census of worship attenders after all services on one Sunday in April. Since that initial census, we have conducted it biennially in April since 2007. The level of participation in the census has always been substantial, with between 2800 and 3300 participating each time. From the comparative data from those censuses, there are some interesting observations about worship attenders and members. Here are a few examples:

- We have grown a little older as the average age of Redeemer attendees has gone up from 32 in 2004 to 36 in 2013.
- The percentage of those who are single has dropped from 65% in 2004 to 54% in 2013.
- Historically the top five vocations of attenders at Redeemer are: 1) finance/banking, 2) healthcare, 3) the arts, 4) education and 5) law
- The number of people who participate in a Community Groups have more than dou-

bled since 2004 and 73% of all Redeemer members lead or attend a group.

- Members volunteer two to three times more than other attenders.
- At the very least 4-6% of those attending a worship service do not identify as Christian. That means there are approximately 200-300 people attending worship every Sunday who are non-Christians.

*(Continued on page 3)*

# CREATIVITY, CRITIQUE AND COMMUNITY

BY PETER KONG

*Then the Lord said to Moses, "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills — to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts."*

– Exodus 31:1-5

**M**y first thought when reading this passage was, "If only God had given ME such an explicit and well-defined commission to create art!" But where would the challenge be in that?

Fostering and practicing art, for those of us not named Bezalel, can be a tricky, elusive, and sometimes frustrating endeavor. Some of us agonize over whether we were meant to be artists at all, or how to balance our art practice with paying rent or saving for a house. Others stare over their canvases clutching brushes and keyboards, fretting that the next project will collapse in failure, or never happen at all.

God values art and wants His people to make it — we know that from Exodus 31. But how can each of us create and foster art in the best way? The Center for Faith & Work's *Faith & Art Course* seeks to address these highly individual questions in a group setting, where people can share and critique their art and discuss the challenges of letting the light of Christ shine through their work out into a world that

doesn't always understand or appreciate it.

I am grateful for three things I found during this course: encouragement, community, and perspective.

I found **encouragement** through meeting with 25 other artists every week who were willing to brave record-cold February weather to listen to my work, critique it, and pray about it. A group of people asking the one true Muse to watch over me and bless me in my art practice. Amazing! I was elated to do the same for them.

Similarly, **community**: remember the feeling you had when you walked out from an incredible show or game and couldn't help but talk and laugh with the strangers around you about how amazing it was? They were no longer truly strangers, because of the shared experience. One feels the same way when in a room full of brothers and sisters in Christ who have dedicated their lives to glorifying God. Because of our shared faith, we found a wonderful continuity between

the poetry, fiction, film, paintings, and performances that would not otherwise have been so compelling.

Finally, **perspective**: I learned that dedicating my art practice to God yields an incredible amount of freedom and creativity. If you are committed to serving Christ through dance, why not incorporate a ballet movement into a church service, as Roberto, my course colleague, is doing? (*And David danced before the Lord with all his might*, 2 Samuel 6:9). Or why not riff on God's natural creation and build a beautiful sculpture from a living tree, as Lili has done? (*He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them* Psalm 146:6). If you practice art to glorify God, you no longer need to confine your art to the pressures, tastes, and whims of other people. The possibilities are truly endless. Now go practice.

Registration is now open for the next *Faith & Art Course* to be held in May/June at [faithandwork.com/livingroom/](http://faithandwork.com/livingroom/).

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## REDEEMER REPORT

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

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Kathy Keller

Heather Klein

Hunter College Auditorium  
E. 69th St.

(between Park & Lexington)

Services: 10:30 a.m. & 6 p.m.

W83rd Ministry Center  
150 W. 83rd St.

(between Columbus & Amsterdam)

Services: 9:30/11:30 a.m., 5 & 7 p.m.

Salvation Army Auditorium  
120 W. 14th St.

(between 6th & 7th Aves.)

Services: 9:30 a.m. & 5 p.m.

# EASTER SACRIFICIAL OFFERING

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As we're celebrating God's response to our need and spiritual poverty this Easter, we also remember those He calls us to love, "the least of these brothers and sisters of mine."

That's why we receive our Easter Sacrificial Offering for Hope for New York (HFNY), our mercy and justice partner. We support HFNY in many different ways, but for over 20 years this has been one of the most significant. Financially, the majority of Redeemer's support for HFNY comes from your gifts to the

Easter Sacrificial Offering.

Because HFNY is a separate 501(c)(3) charitable organization, they greatly depend on your individual gifts to continue their work. In fact, less than eight percent of HFNY's operating budget comes from churches.

You can give during your Easter Sunday service or by sending checks (payable to "Hope for New York") to Hope for New York, 1166 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 1610, New York, NY 10036. Visit [hfny.org/donate/](http://hfny.org/donate/) to donate online. One hundred

percent of your gifts will help support various NYC populations, including at-risk youth, low-income families, immigrants, the homeless, and the elderly.

In addition, you can incorporate generosity into your daily life, throughout the year, with The Hope Exchange, HFNY's committed monthly giving program. You can learn more at [hfny.org/hopeexchange](http://hfny.org/hopeexchange).

Please pray that our congregation would give generously, motivated by the joy of what God has done.

## "NEW BIRTH" STORIES

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Peter, James and John were living quietly as fishermen when Jesus showed up and changed their lives forever — *"they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him."* (Luke 5:11) The way they lived and what they found important changed forever when Jesus came into their lives. Their lives were reborn or born anew. At the heart of the gospel are stories like this of changed lives, of new birth — people who have been forever changed by their encounters with Jesus Christ. His life, death and resurrection are the good news of the gospel and many New Yorkers who attend Redeemer have

had their lives forever changed by this gospel.

As we approach Easter, one of the ways we recognize the reality of the resurrection is through people's stories of changed lives, stories of the "new birth" where people have started a new life with Jesus. In our Easter Sunday worship services we ask some of these people to share their testimonies of how the gospel has changed their lives and how it has transformed the way they live, think and act. They are New Yorkers from diverse backgrounds and professions and yet all of their stories point to the amazing life changing power the

gospel holds.

Additionally, each year we attempt to add stories like these to an online collection of video vignettes called New Birth Portraits. We invite you to watch these short videos at [newbirthportraits.com](http://newbirthportraits.com) and to share these stories with your friends.

If you've experienced the life changing power of the gospel and would like to share your story or read others' stories, we also have a site that we launched with our 25th anniversary last fall which has many more stories of changed lives which you can read. To learn more, go to [25yearsof-changedlives.com](http://25yearsof-changedlives.com).

## 2015 CENSUS ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

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As we move forward with our vision to serve more of the city, gathering and studying this information is extremely helpful. So if you are in attendance at one of our worship services on April 19, please take the time

to participate in this year's census. The information we receive helps us better understand who is attending Redeemer and how those in attendance are engaging with our initiatives, programs and events.

Alternatively, you may fill out the survey if you receive it by email, if you are a regular attendee and do not receive an email survey form, please check with the Redeemer office that we have your current contact information.



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## HOPE AND HISTORY ... (CONT'D FROM PAGE 1)

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be better than their own. Also, a remarkable number of recent films depict a dystopian future in which civilization is largely decimated. There is pessimism among many that technology is removing our privacy, dehumanizing us, and making us vulnerable to future terrorism and to exploitation on an unprecedented scale.

The Christian answer to all this is two-fold. First, we can say that, by the standards of the Bible, the modern idea of historical progress has been too optimistic about both history and human nature. It assumes that the new is always better, which common sense tells us is not the case. C.S. Lewis in *Surprised by Joy* called this kind of thinking “chronological snobbery,” namely “the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account [alone] discredited.”

This is not just foolish, it is dangerous. It makes it possible for people to argue that whatever is new, despite its triumphalism and cruelty, is right. The Nazis

were sure that they were on “the right side of history” as were the communists. Indeed, from about 1920 through World War II, most intellectuals and academics in western society thought Marxism was the inevitable future. History is completely inadequate as a moral guide.

However, many in our post-modern era are too pessimistic. They have rejected the idea of progress for the idea that history is “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing.”

The Christian answer to the overly optimistic or overly pessimistic modern views of history is the Resurrection. Christianity, paradoxically, is far more pessimistic *and* far more optimistic than any other worldview — simultaneously. On the one hand, the Christian view of human sin is that we are deeply flawed and can't save ourselves and we may indeed have some terribly bad stages of history ahead. No other religion is has as

dark a view of human depravity. We are capable of great evil.

But the Christian promise is not that every chapter in history will be better than the first but that in the end “all things will work together for good.” God will eventually bring us not to a disembodied afterlife, but a renewed material universe with resurrected bodies. That, again, is something only biblical religion promises.

History ends with the resurrection. Resurrection is complete restoration, but only after death and destruction. This avoids the unbalanced optimism of modernity but also the hopelessness of dystopianism. On the final day of history, we know that our Redeemer will stand upon the earth, and that in our new resurrected bodies we will see God (Job 19:25-26) In the words of the poet Seamus Heaney “The longed-for tidal wave of justice can rise up — and hope and history rhyme.”