

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • January 1, 2015

CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	The Legacy of Jesus' Peace REV. MICHAEL DE VRIES	146
<i>Editorial</i>	Year In Review, AD 2014 REV. KENNETH KOOLE	148
<i>A Word Fitly Spoken</i>	Year REV. BILL LANGERAK	152
<i>All Around Us</i>	■ Is Anybody Out There? ■ Persecution of Christians by ISIS ■ What Is Rob Bell Doing Now? REV. DANIEL HOLSTEGE	153 154 155
<i>Search the Scriptures</i>	An Evil Disease (Eccles. 6) REV. THOMAS MIERSMA	155
<i>Believing and Confessing</i>	Heinrich Bullinger and the Second Helvetic Confession PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA	158
<i>When Thou Sittest in Thine House</i>	The Covenant Home: God's Ideal Institution for the Nurture of Covenant Children (4) REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG	161
<i>Go Ye Into All the World</i>	Mission Work Privileges REV. DANIEL KLEYN	164
<i>Bring the Books...</i>	<i>The Sovereignty of God</i> DR. JULIEN KENNEDY	165
<i>Activities</i>	News From Our Churches MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM	166

The Legacy of Jesus' Peace

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

John 14:27

As a new year looms before us, many are filled with fear and dread. The world is filled with turmoil and violence. What have we seen of late? Crisis in Ukraine with Russia's intrusion; the ongoing civil strife in Syria; Iran's threat of nuclear war; the barbaric acts committed by the Islamic State; fighting between Hamas and Israel; the worst Ebola epidemic in history—these are a few of the harsh realities that cause fear to grip the hearts of millions.

On a more personal level, people's lives are filled with anxiety and distress. For many, life in this world entails great pressures, tremendous stress, much frustration. Affliction, sorrow, and adversity may be heavy burdens.

Man cries, "Peace, peace," but there is no peace! Many hope in vain that the new year will provide peace. But as

people of God, we have peace, do we not? Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, has promised His people peace. In the context here of John 14, Jesus is tenderly instructing and comforting His disciples. They are together in the upper room. It is the night of Jesus' betrayal and capture. Jesus will soon go away. But Jesus says, as it were, "I leave behind for you as the greatest gift of all, a gift far greater than anything the world could ever bestow—*my peace!*" As we embark upon this new year, let us lay hold by faith upon that legacy of Jesus' peace!

A Great Treasure

In the highest sense peace is a virtue of God. Our God is a God of peace. The triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, lives a life of perfect harmony and peace. There is no strife or unrest, no discord or tension in His blessed covenant life. In the realm of perfect love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit think, will, speak, and act in perfect harmony. All the issues of the eternal, divine life are as one great harmonious choir. God is the God of peace!

By nature, we have no peace. The sad fact is that since near the dawn of history, from the time of the fall of our first parents in Paradise, man has lived in enmity against God and his fellow man. Rooted in the natural wicked-

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Reprint and Online Posting Policy

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting or online posting of articles in the *Standard Bearer* by other publications, provided that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; that proper acknowledgment is made; and that a copy of the periodical or Internet location in which such reprint or posting appears is sent to the editorial office.

Editorial Policy

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for the Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be signed. All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

Editorial Office

Prof. Barrett Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
gritters@prca.org

Business Office

Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: 616-457-5970
tim@rfpa.org

Church News Editor

Mr. Perry Van Egdom
2324 Fir Ave.
Doon, IA 51235
vanegdoms@gmail.com

United Kingdom Office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk

Rep. of Ireland Office

c/o Rev. Martyn McGeown
38 Abbeyvale
Corbally
Co Limerick, Ireland

Subscription Price

\$23.00 per year in the US, \$35.00 elsewhere
New eSubscription: \$23.00
eSubscription for current hardcopy subscribers: \$11.50.

Advertising Policy

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137 (e-mail: mail@rfpa.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org
Website for PRC: www.prca.org

The Reformed Free Publishing Association maintains the privacy and trust of its subscribers by not sharing with any person, organization, or church any information regarding *Standard Bearer* subscribers.

ness and corruption of man are hatred and envy, violence and murder, war and rebellion. Man by nature has no peace—only unrest, anxiety, confusion, conflict, and chaos. We read in Isaiah 57:20, 21: “But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

But the God of peace speaks to His church in Isaiah 66:12: “I will extend peace to her like a river.” For He is “the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20). Yes, in our Savior Jesus Christ there is peace! Scripture calls Jesus, “our Peace” and “the Prince of Peace.” Jesus says, “My peace I give unto you.” Jesus so loved us that He laid down His life for us and reconciled us to God by His atoning death. He brings us and all of His people into fellowship with the God of peace.

This peace is a precious treasure given unto us. We experience this peace within our own hearts and lives. It is the peace of being right with God. It implies the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. We are assured with the apostle, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

What a great treasure is this peace given us by Christ! Who can comprehend it? That we, who were enemies of God, might have peace with Him all our days and even forever! No wonder the apostle Paul describes it in Philippians 4:7 as “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.” It is to be taken into the very covenant life of God Himself and to dwell in the peace of His most blessed life. Rev. Gerrit Vos, in his characteristic vividness, put it this way: “Peace in your soul means that your heart and the heart of God beat in unison.”

A Free Gift

The Lord Jesus emphasizes that this peace is a free gift: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I *give* unto you.” It is a legacy that He left behind, like the money or property bequeathed to a person by the will of someone who has died. This peace is in no way something we have merited. It is not something we have earned. We simply receive it. Jesus *gives* us peace. It is a gift of pure grace, wholly undeserved and unmerited. It is itself a blessing of salvation, a fruit of His Spirit.

This free gift of peace which Jesus gives us stands in sharp contrast to the giving of the world. He says, “My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.” There is a great difference, first of all, in the *manner* of giving. The world of sin and unbelief gives only with empty words that convey no lasting treasure of peace. The world’s cries for peace are in vain, even in an earthly sense. Witness the futility of the efforts of the United Nations to achieve peace among the nations. Witness the civil strife in many places, even the increasing racial unrest here in the United States stoked by the events in Ferguson, Missouri in recent months. Yet the world in its pride is confident that man will be able to achieve peace on earth.

Yes, one day, perhaps not so far into the future, the world will have a semblance of peace as the nations of the earth unite under the rule of the antichrist. It will be a worldwide kingdom of peace that wages war against the faithful saints of God. It will be a kingdom of peace that remains in bitter enmity and rebellion against the living God. It will be a kingdom of peace that God in His wrath will bring into utter desolation. Be not deceived by the world’s vain boasts of peace and its empty promises! But in contrast to the world, Jesus gives peace—His peace—true peace, with words and work that actually convey true blessings of peace and all the benefits of salvation.

But even more than this contrast, the *gift itself* is contrasted. Jesus means, “I give *my* peace, which the world can never bestow.” The world has no true peace to give, nothing that can bring peace to the troubled soul. The world may offer fame, honor, wealth, popularity, all the pleasures and treasures of sin, but none of these will afford peace—not for a moment. These will bring nothing but the opposite of peace—trouble, turmoil, anxiety, death, destruction! But Jesus has the real thing, the true gift of His peace for us, which He graciously, sovereignly, and irresistibly bestows.

A Comforting Legacy

It is a comforting legacy that Jesus has left for us. And this is exactly what we need, also as we begin the new year! Jesus says, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” Humanly speaking, there seem to be so many reasons for our hearts to be troubled and

frightened—on a global scale, nationally, and perhaps, especially closer to home, in our own lives. The threat of increasing war is very real. Terrorism and all manner of violence continue unabated. Economic turmoil and financial pressures are great. Affliction and suffering, anxiety and depression beset many. Adversities and tribulations of various sorts may be encountered. There is the harsh reality of death itself, with the sorrows, and perhaps loneliness, that accompany it.

And as we peer into the new year, we can anticipate increasing hardships for God's people in particular. In many countries around the world persecution of Christians has been increasing, sometimes dramatically. Hundreds of thousands have fled from Syria and Iraq, many Christians among them. Islamic State militants have given Christians the choice to convert, pay an exorbitant "infidel tax," or die by the sword. Many have been killed, including children. In northern Nigeria Boko Haram terrorists have often focused their attacks upon Christians, destroying villages, burning churches, and kidnapping hundreds of women and girls.


But even in the Western world, the pressures are increasing upon Christians. We see less and less tolerance for any thoughts or convictions that are biblical, especially on college and university campuses. Pressures are great to conform to the homosexual agenda and the perversion of God's ordinance of marriage. Our place as God's children will become smaller and smaller. Is not your heart troubled and afraid, especially as you think of your children and grandchildren?

Hear the word of Jesus: "Let not your heart be troubled! Neither let it be afraid!" For Jesus has given us this legacy of peace! Even at times when our lives are in turmoil, when we are cast down in affliction, or overwhelmed with sorrow, the knowledge of Jesus' peace will carry us through. In His peace we are able to bear whatever hardships or calamities He brings upon our pathway with patience and childlike trust. It is, indeed, a peace "which passeth all understanding," that "shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). We trust that our covenant Father, who is at peace with us, does all things well.

But what about those times when our hearts and minds are shaken by calamity and that assurance of peace wavers and seems to disappear? Flee to Christ! Find your refuge in Him. Hear His Word, "My peace I give unto you.... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Pray for the working of His Spirit by which Jesus' peace will again flood your soul.

Be not deceived by the world's vain offers of peace. By faith lay hold upon the legacy of Jesus' peace! Throughout 2015 and beyond, may you enjoy that true peace wherein "your heart and the heart of God beat in unison."

Then we can sing from the heart this versification of Psalm 4:

In God's love abiding, I have joy and peace,
More than all the wicked, tho' their wealth increase.
In His care confiding, I will sweetly sleep,
For the Lord, my Savior, will in safety keep. 

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

Year In Review, AD 2014

Year of our Lord, 2014. The important words in the above statement, of course, are the words "our Lord," historically represented by the letters AD (Anno Domini).

I say 'historically,' because even that reference is under assault in our post-modern, increasingly anti-Christian age and society, as you know. Newly published books, when it comes to historical refer-

ences, are in the process of replacing AD with CE (for Common Era) and BC with BCE (Before the Common Era), so that any suggestions that the central event of time was the birth and coming of this

Jesus of Nazareth are expunged. In particular, our universities and educators are resolved not to acknowledge that some two thousand years plus of history have been coming to pass according to words recorded in some ancient, Christian gospel manuscripts—prophetic words uttered of this Jesus of Nazareth (cf. Matt. 24, Mark 13, Luke 21).

Or, as if this world is heading for some final ‘apocalypse’ according to some revelation given to an apostle named John.

Perish the thought.

The learned of our day are resolved to suppress truth and that which ‘even the very blind’ can see.

The enmity of the seed of the Dragon continues to express itself with increasing focus right down to particular details. All favorable reference to this Jesus and the Christian faith must be expunged, even ‘AD.’

The historic Christian church has commonly placed the signs of Christ’s return into four main categories: the signs in creation (as God’s catastrophic judgments fall), signs in the church (as the gospel spreads and apostasy increases), and signs in society itself (with its wars, lawlessness, and mounting tensions that cry for some resolution of peace), and the signs of the antichrist himself.

Commonly, as a year begins, one wonders what significant events will occur that will affect the course of history and society itself. Not every year has an event as momentous as the beginning of World War I, the events of 9/11 (with its destruction of the World Trade Towers),

or some great tsunamis washing far inland, putting the whole world on notice of how fragile its tenuous, man-made security is.

But in every year, especially over the past few decades, events have occurred that indicate the increased rumblings caused by the running of the four horsemen, events and occurrences that serve the ripening of all things for the inevitable coming of antichrist and his world-wide kingdom (cf. Rev. 6).

World unity, peace, and security at last!

The year of our Lord, 2014, was no exception.

It is worth noting that 2014 marked the 100th anniversary of WWI, which war unleashed the ‘dogs of war’ upon the Western world for the past 100 years. It was a war that, with its unsatisfactory conclusion and Versailles treaty, served to incubate a storehouse of resentment in those defeated, a resentment that exploded into WWII, giving rise to our Atomic Age. And it is World War II with its resulting treaties (at Yalta and Potsdam) that established an entirely new geo-political world map, which remapping, to a great extent, explains the unresolved tensions and animosities that dominate our present world and its troubling headlines.

Israel and the Middle-East?

Mounting Eastern European tensions?

Russia growling at Europe and the U.S.?

East vs. the West?

All these are the fruit of WWII and its aftermath, the “Big Three”

powers of the century past dividing the world and national boundaries to their own likings, but to that of few others.

Our present global tensions are the direct aftermath of what was set in motion 100 years ago when the guns began to thunder on the Western Front in August, 1914.

And do not think that the running of the red horse (during WWI), with all the ensuing history, was not directed by the Rider of the white horse.

The ‘war to end all wars’ (so WWI was labeled by the politicians and the experts of the time) was anything but that, as its aftermath has proved again and again.

And the number of wars and conflicts that have ‘played’ across the face of the globe since the conclusion of WW II are beyond count.

And tensions are anything but resolved 100 years later in this the year of our Lord, 2014.

Russia’s invasion of the Ukraine is a case in point—an invasion that experts thought could never again occur in our modern age. And this is just one of some fifty-six wars and unresolved conflicts occurring in 2014 (according to those tabulating these events), conflicts in which bullets and missiles are flying, families with little ones are huddling in their homes, and blood is being shed on the streets.

Of special significance in this regard is the appearance of ISIS (a widely scattered army that calls itself The Islamic State) in the Middle East. An informative article in the *SB* recently commented on this deadly new force rearing its fanatical

head in the Middle East (Nov. 1).

We comment again briefly because of the significant *reaction* to this new group of Muslim fanatics.

The reaction of the whole world to the rise of these new barbarians coming out of 'Gog and Magog' is illuminating. This is a group of fanatics practicing such barbaric slaughters and executions that they are serving to unite the world against themselves. The result of their fanatical barbarianism is that the most unlikely, unforeseen alliances are taking place—alliances between nations that to this point were avowed and seemingly irreconcilable enemies.

Radical Muslim groups agreeing with the hated West that this ISIS evil is a threat to every society, and must be confronted and stopped? And that by joint actions?

Who would have thought it!

Just when we begin to question how the prophecies concerning a future united world could possibly come to pass due to the deep suspicions and hatred of the Muslim world towards the 'Christian' West, the Ascended Christ 'moves His pieces on the board,' gives the devils freer reign in the hearts of men, and this results.

It becomes plain how the Lord Jesus, when He so wills, can remove all barriers *to His prophecies being fulfilled*.

2014 and the rise of ISIS gives testimony to that.

Whether ISIS is the evil that will open the door to antichrist's appearing and uniting the world is another question. But its appearing and the world-uniting response

to its appearance is as significant as the unforeseen demolishing of the Berlin wall twenty-five years ago, in 1989.

The demolishing of the Berlin Wall—another significant anniversary marked in 2014. Who back then foresaw what its significant implications would be?

*Just when we
begin to question
how the prophecies
concerning a future
united world
could possibly
come to pass due to
the deep suspicions
and hatred of the
Muslim world towards
the 'Christian' West,
the Ascended Christ 'moves
His pieces on the board,'
gives the devils
freer reign in the hearts
of men, and this results.*

Not the experts. It took them by complete surprise.

But on the calendar of the Ascended Christ, it was time. And a great breach between East and West was removed as a result.

However great the present divisions that separate the nations and ethnic groups of the world may be, a review of the recent past indicates that the great wound to the Dragon's head is being healed stage by stage.

The dream of a world united against the Christ and His church remains very much alive.

It is astonishing what alliances longtime enemies can forge, becoming each other's 'allies' and 'friends,' be it only for a short time.

As well, this past year, there was the outbreak of this Ebola virus. And the running of the pale-green horse of plague and death comes to mind. The medical developments of the early 1900s gave society the optimistic hope (and predictions) that by the end of the century all disease would be eradicated.

The pale horse would run no more!

Indeed, how could the prophecies of that 'mad' book of the Revelation with its harsh prophecies of increasing death via vials of wrath and disease possibly be fulfilled? Man's medical knowledge, so advanced in biology and chemistry, would corral that evil, stopping that judgment in its tracks.

In the mid-1980s no one saw HIV (the AIDS virus) coming as a judgment on the homosexual lifestyle, a virus so diabolical that it actually mutates (evolves) to escape eradication. And just as medicines have been developed that seem to have the potential to keep that plague somewhat under-control, here comes this Ebola virus. If not rigorously quarantined, it seems

there is no stopping the dreaded disease.

But even if man gets a handle on this plague, you think God cannot visit another even deadlier micro-organism on mankind when his time is ripe?

Significantly, the medical community warns us that their serums of immunization are being challenged on a great number of fronts. Dangerous, lethal bacteria once controlled by the serums are themselves becoming immune to medicine's immunization application.

The pale horse continues to run. There is no corralling him by man.

And when the Ascended Christ decides the time is ripe to pour out the vial of disease on a new level, it becomes self-evident, He can.

The words of The Book are still 'fulfilling'.

Events in history and creation keep validating God's Word as Truth.

One other item is worth noting at year's end.

The enmity of the Devil's world against Christianity and its witness continues to develop and grow.

A recent article in *World Magazine* (Nov. 15) by Marvin Olasky underscores this.

The article is titled "Fighting Christian Influence," that is, Christian influence *in the military*. An organization that calls itself "The Military Freedom Foundation" has committed itself to that goal.

The 'freedom' referred to is not that of 'fighting' for the right to practice religion, in particular Christianity, in the military.

Oh no!

Rather the organization is committed to *freeing* military personnel from being 'confronted' by any Christian witness in the military. They want it judged unlawful for a soldier to invite a fellow soldier to a Bible study on base, in particular invitations made by a commanding officer. But their policy would also forbid having Bibles available in hotel rooms rented by the military, or for that matter, any literature that might be associated with Christianity in some form—such as books by C.S. Lewis, or even Dante's *Inferno* or Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

The group charges that such activity amounts to religious intimidation, as well as being contrary to the Constitution with its principle of the separation of church and state.

The organization has its watchdogs scattered through the military. The military is under pressure to inform its personnel that anything that can be construed as proselytizing will not be tolerated. Penalties will be administered where the policy is violated. Freedom means the right not to be confronted by any type of witnessing in the name of religion.

They claim this applies to every religion, but do not think that the focus is not on Christianity and the possibility of it being spread in the military—to be treated as if it were a deadly disease.

The enmity of the serpent's seed runs deep and is becoming more and more active in excising Christianity from every forum of society and its life.

And once bearing witness to the Christian faith in the military is

judged unlawful and a threat to a person's freedom, what is to prevent our present government from applying this standard of 'freedom' to every area of public life?

A witnessing, proselytizing brand of Christianity will not be tolerated.

The handwriting is on the wall.

But let us not forget that what was written on Babylon's wall was written by the finger of God and foretold the Christ's coming in judgment on Babylon, that great representative of antichrist's kingdom in the Old Testament age.

Another great event not foreseen by men.

Babylon to fall in one day?

Impossible!

And yet it occurred.

And that according to biblical prophecy.

And Babylon's fall meant the time for God's church to return to the promised land had come, there to await the coming Messiah.

Christ's church delivered and full victory at hand.

Let us as saints and churches not be afraid to stand as Daniels in this present evil age.

2014. Year of our Lord. As will be 2015 and those following.

As evil grows, and with it the world's enmity against the Christian faith, let us not be intimidated, but continue to bear witness to The Truth in love, a love for Christ and what is really true love for our fellow man.

The gospel of this Jesus of Nazareth, God's Christ, remains this old world's only hope. ☞

Year

The beginning and ending of each year is a rather momentous time for mankind. It is celebrated with festivities the world over. We consider the year a significant marker of time, and remember important events by the year in which they occur. The church also recognizes each new year's connection to Christ by holding worship services, referring to it as 'the year of our Lord,' and assigning it a date "AD" that denotes the years that have passed since Jesus' first coming. Yet how often do we consider the biblical importance of this prominent, universal, and regular unit of time?

The significance of the year is derived from its origins. The year is not of human origins. Nor is it an arbitrary unit of time. And certainly it is not determined, as is commonly supposed, by a random explosion resulting in some chance position and velocity of earth in relationship to the sun. Certainly the year is due to our relationship to the sun. Geographically, it is the time the sun takes in its course through heaven to return to its original position, and astronomically, the time it takes earth to journey around the sun.

But the year has divine origins, and the precise unit of time it measures is deliberate. In His wisdom, the eternal I AM determined to have all of human history measured by the year. And so fundamental is it, God created special creatures assigned the task of maintaining each year of time. Not clocks or calendars, but stars. For in the beginning God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven...for seasons, for days, and for years" (Gen. 1:14).

The biblical significance of the year is that it represents the universal constancy and regularity of human life, both good and evil, and yet its dependence, finiteness, and brevity in relationship to God. To everything in each year there is a season, and a time to every purpose; there is not only a time to be born, but also a time to die (Eccl. 3:1-2). Although each year is new, yet it is of old time—essentially the same journey we regularly make around the sun, dependent upon Him for life until our years be ended (Eccl. 1:10). And this constant regularity is a gift of God that allows us rightly "to consider the days of old, the years of ancient times" (Ps. 77:5).

Rev. Langerak is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Significantly, the Eternal One Himself records our history in years. Although this record includes many things, two are notable. First, the birth and death of His covenant people. Significant it is that after informing us that God created the year, Scripture's next reference is to tell us Adam lived 130 years, begat Seth, lived 800 more years and died (Gen. 5:3). So also He records by year every birth and death of the covenant line before the Flood, and every covenant patriarch up to Jacob (interestingly, the last is son Joseph, not Judah, from whom Christ comes). How different if God had simply begun His story as so many fairy tales with "once upon a time," or saying only Methuselah "lived a long time" or forgetting when Abraham was born. God remembers we are dust, and our lives are precious in His sight (Ps. 103:14; 116:15).

A second striking feature is that God records the years His children suffer affliction. Over 16 times Scripture mentions the 40 years of wilderness wandering wherein God was grieved but still patiently cared for His people (Neh. 9:21). Repeatedly we are told of the 430 years of Israel's bondage (Ex. 12:41), the years under foreign invaders (Acts 13:20), years of famine (James 5:17) and years of captivity (Dan. 9:2). Although we are told only the approximate age Jesus begins His ministry and length of it, God records in detail the years many suffered affliction before rescue by His grace—a widow of 84 years, a daughter dead at 12 years, a woman bleeding 12 years, a woman bent over 18 years, a man infirmed 38 years, and a man lame in the temple over 40 years (Acts 4:22). He remembers our life is spent with grief and our years with sighing (Ps. 31:10).

And so in your own upcoming journey this year, consider the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2), who preached the acceptable year of our Lord (Luke 4:18). Contemplate how we spend our years as a tale that is told (Ps. 90:9). Remember that He also crowns the year with goodness (Ps. 65:11), and makes us glad in the years in which we have seen evil (Ps. 90:15). Don't forget in this brief year that God is the same and His years have no end (Ps. 102:17). And "be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years" (II Pet. 3:8). ∞

■ Is Anybody Out There?

The July, 2014 issue of *National Geographic* poses the question on its cover: “Is Anybody Out There?” In the background is a picture of the planet Jupiter with Europa, one of its moons, in the foreground. The article is entitled “The Hunt for Life beyond Earth.” The subject is the (foolish and unbelieving) search for extraterrestrial intelligence, which today goes by the acronym SETI, and refers to the various projects involved.

Astrobiology is their area of expertise. Wait, *astrobiology*?! We all know that astronomy, the study of the stars, is a real and legitimate science. But astrobiology? The study of *life* among the stars? Yes, today it is an actual area of study in modern science. But it is a *pseudo*-science, because no such life exists “out there” and therefore, none is available for observation.

The fact that no life of any kind has ever been discovered beyond earth is the reason SETI “was essentially taboo in astronomy” before the 1960s, according to astronomer Frank Drake. But in 1961 Drake called a meeting of

astronomers, chemists, biologists, and engineers, including a young planetary scientist named Carl Sagan, to discuss what is now called astrobiology, the science of life beyond Earth. In particular, Drake wanted some expert help in deciding how sensible it might be to devote significant radio telescope time to listening for alien broadcasts and what might be the most promising way to search. How many civilizations might reasonably be out there? he wondered. So before his guests arrived, he scribbled an equation on the blackboard (32).

The “Drake Equation” purports to estimate “the number of alien civilizations we could detect” (33). Since the 1960s this pseudo-science has morphed from science fiction into a serious area of study, due in part to the discovery of some 1,771 planets beyond our solar system since the 1990s. The article reports that scientists have their eye on the moon Europa. “Europa certainly seems to have

the basic ingredients for life. Liquid water is abundant, and the ocean floor may also have hydrothermal vents, similar to Earth’s, that could provide nutrients for any life that might exist there...” (40, 43). A mission to Europa is currently in the works.

But why are they so intent on searching for extraterrestrial life? What is the motive? An article in the November 10, 2014 issue of *Time* looks at a recent Hollywood movie called “Interstellar” that attempts to persuade viewers of the possibility of life among the stars. The author of this article writes,

Big cosmology has become our secular religion, a church even atheists can join. It addresses many of the same questions religion does: Why are we here? How did it all begin? What comes next? And even if you can barely understand the answers when you get them, well, you’ve heard of a thing called faith, right? Like religion, cosmology has its high priests: Einstein and Hawking.... It has its lesser priests as well: Carl Sagan, Neil deGrasse Tyson.... It has its storytellers too, none more powerful than those in Hollywood. And no moviemaker is currently more influential than Christopher Nolan, director of the coming-soon, don’t-miss, shrouded-in-secrecy *Interstellar* (44).

The search for life “out there” is a new religion for secularists. It is an attempt to answer all the big questions while leaving God and the Bible out of the picture. Big budget movies like “Interstellar” are not merely for entertainment, but are religious productions. SETI is the religion of many, if not most, secular atheists in the world today.

Creation scientist Jason Lisle probes into the motives of SETI. He asks, “But why is there such hype surrounding the notion of extraterrestrial life?”, and “Why does SETI spend millions of dollars searching for life in outer space?” He answers:

The discovery of intelligent extraterrestrial life would certainly be seen as a vindication of evolution; it is an expectation from a naturalistic worldview.... In some cases a belief in ETs may stem from a feeling of cosmic loneliness: “If there are aliens, then we would not be alone in the universe.” In many cases it comes from an academic desire to learn the mysteries of the universe; a highly developed

Rev. Holsteg is pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan.

alien race might have advanced knowledge to pass on to us. Perhaps such knowledge is not merely academic; the hypothetical aliens may know the answers to fundamental questions of existence: “Why am I here? What is the meaning of life?” and so on. An advanced alien race might have medical knowledge far exceeding our own—knowledge which could be used to cure our diseases. Perhaps their medical technology would be so far advanced that they even hold the secret of life and death; with such incredible medical knowledge, perhaps human beings would no longer have to die—*ever*. In a way, a belief in extraterrestrial life has become a secular replacement for God.... It is not surprising that the unbelieving scientist would feel a sense of cosmic loneliness, having rejected his Creator. But, we are not alone in the universe; there is God....¹

The idea of extraterrestrial life does not fit into a biblical worldview. The silence of Scripture in regard to life anywhere else but on earth is deafening. Scripture teaches that God brought forth living creatures in *the earth*. God made man in *the earth* and gave Him dominion over *the earth*. Man sinned in *the earth* and God became a man in *the earth*. Christ will soon return to *the earth*. And God will create a new heavens and earth. The search for life, especially intelligent life, beyond earth is a foolish and unbelieving project.

Astronomy is a wonderful and intriguing science. Astrobiology is not a science at all.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Ps. 19:1).

So is anybody “out there”? Yes, God is “out there.” Our Lord Jesus Christ is “out there.” But apart from God, on the basis of Scripture, there is no life “out there” beyond the earth. Soon every knee will bow to Jesus as Lord and every tongue will confess this truth.

■ Persecution of Christians by ISIS

On the cover of the November issue of *Christianity Today* we found the question, “Is this the end of Christianity in the Middle East?” The featured article was entitled “On the Edge of Extinction.” The author, Philip Jenkins, who has a much broader view of what constitutes true Christianity than most of us do, nonetheless

reveals the horrific persecution of those professing Christ in the Middle East today. He writes:

For Christians in the Middle East, 2014 has been a catastrophe. The most wrenching stories have come from Iraq, where the nascent Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL in news reports) has savagely persecuted ancient Christian communities, including Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Syrian Orthodox. Iraqi Christians have declined rapidly in number since the first Gulf War in 1991, but survivors long believed they could maintain a foothold around Mosul. This past summer, that hope collapsed. In a ghastly reminder of Nazi savagery against Jews, Christian homes were marked with the Arabic letter ن for Nazarenes—Christ followers—or *R* for *Rwafidh*, a term for Protestants, and inhabitants were targets for abuse or murder. Islamist militants have controlled Mosul since June 10. Even if the total extermination of each and every believer is not the goal, those ancient communities and churches face the prospect of utter ruin. To that extent, the end of Christianity in Iraq is within sight (37).

We hear about persecution, but it often strikes us as something from long ago or far away. But we must remember that Christians today are suffering and dying for Christ’s sake. Christians today are experiencing what Jesus prophesied when He said, “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake” (Matt. 24:9). Christians today are putting their hope in the promise of Jesus: “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven...” (Matt. 5:11-12).

Are we also prepared to suffer persecution for the sake of Christ? Such persecution may not be very far off. We are tempted to fear and tremble, especially at the prospect of our children suffering. But let us remember what Paul said to the Philippians: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” And to the Colossians about his own sufferings he wrote: “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church” (Col. 1:24). And with regard to our children, we must not forget what Jesus said: “But whoso

¹ Ken Ham, Ed. *The New Answers Book, Book 1*. (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2006), 243.

shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6). The same goes for those who *persecute* one of His little ones. But for our covenant children, great will also be their reward in heaven.

Another sign of the imminent coming of our Savior.

■ What Is Rob Bell Doing Now?

Have you been wondering what Rob Bell is doing now? The former pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, MI and author of the book *Love Wins* resigned as pastor in 2011 due in part to controversy ignited by his book. He moved to southern California to look for a bigger platform and it turns out he has found one. He is now working with Oprah Winfrey. He accompanied her as a speaker on her "The Life You Want Tour" this past fall.

Oprah interviewed Bell on November 3, 2013 on her show "Super Soul Sunday." Among other questions, she asked him, "Your definition of God?" Bell's answer: "Like a song you hear in another room, and you think, boy that sounds beautiful but I only can hear a little bit and so you start opening doors and rearranging furniture, cause you have to get in that room to hear that song. And when you get in you find the nobs and turn them all to the right, cause you're like, I gotta hear more of that. And then you open the windows cause you want the people in the

next houses to hear it." Another question: "What do you know for sure?" Bell's answer: "That you can say yes to this moment and experience a joy that can't be put into words. That is actually possible. I know that for sure." One more: "My favorite thing to do on Sunday morning is..." Bell's answer: "Um, my thirteen-year-old son and I will often go surfing, and we'll be sitting in the water, and it's quiet, and sometimes a dolphin will go by, and we'll talk, and...it's perfect, perfect...yea."²

On Sunday, December 21, 2014 "The Rob Bell Show" was scheduled to premiere on the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN). Bell has found his higher platform to deceive the masses.

One wonders whether it is even worth mentioning Rob Bell anymore. This man is far beyond the pale of orthodox Christianity, to say nothing of Reformed Christianity. But our Lord told us, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:4-5). And He warned, "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (v. 11). Rob Bell is a false prophet. And he is deceiving many. Let us take heed to ourselves. ☞

² Oprah Winfrey, "Super Soul Sunday: Oprah Goes Soul to Soul with Rob Bell," November 3, 2013, <http://www.oprah.com/own-super-soul-sunday/Rob-Bell-and-Oprah-Go-Soul-to-Soul-Video>.

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

REV. THOMAS MIERSMA

An Evil Disease

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:

A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease.

Ecclesiastes 6:1, 2

Rev. Miersma is pastor of the Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta.

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2014, p. 106.

“T here is an evil which I have seen under the sun...” (Eccl. 6:1a). The Word of God introduces a new observation of what Solomon, the preacher, has seen under the sun.

This observation stands in contrast to that which he has just shown, that which is “good and comely” (Eccl. 5:18). What is good, as a gift of God under the sun in the vanity of this present life, is to eat and drink, to enjoy the good of one's portion. That portion is transitory and its present enjoyment in contentment is its proper use. This, however, he has shown is a gift of God, a singular blessing,

not only in outward circumstances but of grace, in which God answers a man in the “joy of his heart” (Eccl. 5:20). This blessing is a gift of God unto His people.

To the one who is evil in the sight of God, namely, the wicked man, is given rather the travail of heaping and gathering. He is in bondage to covetousness. This results in the evil he now turns to as being “seen under the sun.” This evil is the consequence of his sin and depravity, of his walk in covetousness, and of his desire for earthly riches as an end in themselves. It is, therefore, in harmony with man’s state as he lies fallen in the midst of sin and death and under the curse of God upon sin.

This “evil” must be understood, then, both as the fruit of sin and as a judgment of God upon the sin of fallen man. It is an expression of God’s wrath, a working out of the curse of judgment in the life of men. That judgment of God does not come upon the world only as an eternal judgment. God judges fallen men in time as well as in eternity; it is a temporal as well as an eternal judgment. Through the fall into sin, the world was subjected to vanity, to the misery of sin and its consequences, to evil “seen under the sun.”

In the opening verses he states what this evil is, as it is seen among men, and he will develop more fully what is intended as he unfolds it in the chapter. First, however, he would call our attention to it as something which can be seen and noted under the sun. The reason to attend to it is this: “...and it is common among men” (Eccl. 6:1b). It is seen more than once. It is seen in the life of the world among men on every side. He speaks of it as common or heavy, a thing that multiplies in the life of men under the sun.

What is this evil, or misery, common among men? This: “A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease” (Eccl. 6:2). It is well to ponder this picture and what is said, for he speaks of two gifts. The one gift that is given is outward and external, readily seen. The other gift is not given nor seen in the same way.

A man to whom God giveth or upon whom God bestows riches, wealth, and honor—who would not desire such a portion? Material riches and the wealth and abundance that they purchase are a portion given among

men by God’s providence. With it comes also honor, a place of dignity, a position of power and respect among men. There is a certain order to the words used—from riches, to wealth, and to honor—for that is the sequence among men in the vanity of this world.

Does that mean that this outward circumstance is given only to the wicked? No, for he has spoken of a child of God, who likewise has received wealth and honor, but with the gift also to eat of his portion and rejoice in it (Eccl. 5:19). Solomon himself was such. But here he has in view the children of this world—the man described by Asaph in Psalm 73:7, “their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.” It may well be that he has that psalm also before him as he ponders with us what he sees under the sun.

The man he has in view has it all: riches, wealth, and honor, “so that he wanteth nothing.” In earthly terms, he lacks nothing. He has everything heart could wish. He wants or lacks “nothing for his soul,” that is, for his life in this world. Soul refers here to the needs of body and mind in earthly terms; the reference is not to the spiritual needs of his soul. He lacks “nothing for his soul of all that he desireth.” His portion is such that all that he desires in this life and world, from food and drink to the pleasures of life, whether wholesome or sinful, he has the means to satisfy.

God in His providence gives these things to him. Note well, it is the Lord’s doing. The man himself may deem it his own doing. He may boast of his own achievements, his own labor and accomplishments, but it is under the hand of God—“God hath given...” God gives to each his portion in this life. If a man prospers in his way in the things of this life, this too is of the Lord.

But what is described here is *not* grace. Grace is not in things. Grace is not measured by riches, wealth, and honor in the world. Solomon sees one who is “known that it is man” (Eccl. 6:10), that is, one who is born of Adam, a creature of the dust who shall return to the dust.

That brings the second element before us, which is not always as clearly discernible but is also seen under the sun: God’s gift of riches, wealth, and honor is a judgment of God upon the covetousness of men, a work of His divine displeasure, not grace. For this man under consideration, though he have all these things, “yet God

giveth him not power to eat thereof" (Eccl. 6:2). He is not given the gift "to eat and drink and to enjoy the good of all his labor..." (Eccl. 5:18). He is not given "power to eat thereof and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor" (Eccl. 5:19). "This is the gift of God" (Eccl. 5:19). And he does not have it! It is not given unto him by the hand of God. The reference is not to a *physical* problem, such as a medical condition which makes him unable to eat, though that may not be excluded, but to an *internal* problem, a problem of the *heart*. His covetousness and bondage to the things of this life deny him the power to eat and enjoy.

It might not always seem so. It did not seem that way to Asaph as he struggled with this in Psalm 73. Inwardly, however, as Asaph learned when he contemplated the end of the wicked, "they are utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. 73:19). God sets them in slippery places and casts them down to destruction (Ps. 73:18). Their end is one of eternal misery, and in this life fear of losing all they have, for it is their only treasure. Solomon however, adds a certain element to our understanding here. Because such a man is not rich toward God (Luke 12:21), even in this life, he does not truly enjoy the blessings of the things which he possesses. The very covetousness of such a man means he is never satisfied. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this also is vanity" (Eccl. 5:10).

He has all that his soul could desire, lacks nothing of all that his soul might want or desire, and yet truly enjoys none of it. And that, because the love of God is not there, either in his heart toward God nor in God's attitude toward him. He may have houses and lands, banquets and all abundance; he may even seem to have more than heart could wish, but "better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith" (Prov. 15:16, 17).

The wicked from that viewpoint do not even truly enjoy the things of this life. The pleasures of sin, and those

of the world with its covetousness and abundance bring no true joy. Covetousness is bondage. "The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness" (Prov. 15:9).

"God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it" (Eccl. 6:2). A stranger or foreigner comes into his place, and takes and eats the substance of his labor. Many commentaries, that make the book written by one living after the time of the captivity instead of by Solomon, apply this text to the state of Israel and the devouring of their substance by foreign powers. Such a view really misses the point of the text. While this might be an illustration, the text is speaking about the life of individual men and of something "common among men" under the

sun. It is evident in the world to this day that the wicked in their covetousness devour one another. That one labors and another—and that a stranger—comes in his place. Earthly riches make themselves wings and fly away; they are vanity. It is true in every age as Solomon has said: "There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by an evil travail: and he begetteth a son,

and there is nothing in his hand" (Eccl. 5:13, 14). God's judgment upon the covetousness of men rather confronts us: "God giveth him not..." (Eccl. 6:2).

Seeing these things as children of God, we may well tremble, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" (Luke 18:24b). It is by grace alone. Covetousness and God's judgment upon it bring the world to empty vanity. Pondering the circumstance described, we read, "This is vanity, and it is an evil disease" (Eccl. 6:2). It is a grievous misery, and in that sense, a disease, but one of the soul of fallen man and of the folly of sin in which he lies in the midst of death. It is God, in Christ alone, who delivers from such misery and gives both our portion in this life and the gift of joy therein. But He also gives an eternal treasure in a joy that fades not away. ☞

*The wicked
from that viewpoint
do not even truly enjoy
the things of this life....
Covetousness is bondage.*

Heinrich Bullinger and the Second Helvetic Confession

Introduction

Beginning with this issue of the *Standard Bearer*, the undersigned has agreed to write a series of articles explaining the Second Helvetic Confession. These articles will regularly appear in the rubric “Believing and Confessing.” This first article and the one that is to follow will serve as a general introduction to this new series. In this article we will focus on the author of the Second Helvetic Confession, Heinrich Bullinger. In the next article we will take an overview of the confession that he penned.

Very likely most readers of the *Standard Bearer* are not familiar with this Reformed confession, even though at one time it was the most popular and widely subscribed to Reformation creed. It was the first Reformation creed to be endorsed internationally. Besides its acceptance by Reformed churches throughout Switzerland, the Second Helvetic Confession (“*Helvetica*” is Latin for “Switzerland”) was at one time the official confession of Reformed churches throughout Europe and beyond: Scotland, Austria, Hungary, Poland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, North America, and elsewhere.

This confession is referred to as the *Second* Helvetic Confession, in distinction from the *First* Helvetic Confession.¹ The First Helvetic Confession, also referred

to as the *Confessio Helvetica Prior*, was published in 1536—thirty years before the Second Helvetic Confession, or *Confessio Helvetica Posterior*, which was published in 1566.² The writing of the First Helvetic Confession was commissioned by delegates of the Swiss Reformed churches meeting in Basel. The delegates chose Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), Simon Grynaeus (1493-1541), Oswald Myconius (1488-1552), Leo Jud (1482-1542), and Kaspar Megander (1495-1545) to compose a new confession specifically of the Swiss Reformed Churches. In addition, Martin Bucer (1491-1551) and Wolfgang Capito (1478-1541) served as advisors to the committee. The First Helvetic Confession contains twenty-eight articles, most consisting of one brief paragraph. Its subtitle is: “Summary and General Confession of Faith of the Churches throughout Switzerland.” A concise statement of faith, the First Helvetic Confession was intended to bring Reformed and Lutheran Protestants together in the hope of uniting the two main camps within Protestantism.

The Second Helvetic Confession was exclusively the work of Heinrich Bullinger. It was not commissioned by any particular church or group of churches. Originally Bullinger intended it to be included with his last will and testament as an abiding testimony to his faith. However, unforeseen circumstances led Bullinger to share the confession of faith that he had composed. Those who first examined it immediately saw its value as a Reformed con-

¹ The First Helvetic Confession (1536) can be found in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 1, 1523-1552*, compiled with introductions by James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 342-352.

² The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) can be found in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 2, 1552-1566*, compiled with introductions by James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 809-881. It can also be found in Philip Schaff’s *Creeks of Christendom, Volume 3, The Evangelical Protestant Creeks* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, repr. 1983), 233-306 (original Latin); 831-909 (English translation).

Prof. Cammenga is professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

fession, among whom was Frederick III, the pious prince behind the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and Elector of the Palatinate. What was intended to be a private confession of faith, therefore, turned out to be one of the most widely adopted confessions of the Reformation era. Rather than to go into Bullinger's grave with his remains, the Second Helvetic Confession was disseminated by Reformed believers around the world.

Heinrich Bullinger's Early Life

Bullinger was a second generation Reformer. He was the fifth son born to Heinrich Bullinger senior and his wife Anna (née Wiederkehr). Heinrich senior was a parish priest in the church at Bremgarten, a city in central Switzerland, when Heinrich junior was born in 1504. The bishop of Constance had oversight of Bremgarten and unofficially—for an annual fee—tolerated the marriages of clergy under his jurisdiction, something fairly common throughout Switzerland. Heinrich senior and Anna, therefore, lived together as husband and wife. From every report, the Bullingers' home was a godly home, a home characterized by the fear of the Lord. It was his father's desire that his namesake should follow in his footsteps as a Roman Catholic priest. Already at the age of fifteen the junior Heinrich was sent to study at the University of Cologne in Germany. Cologne was about a hundred miles north of Worms on the Rhine River, the Worms at which Luther would take his final stand on the Word of God before the Diet of Worms in 1521. Now the year was 1519 and Luther's protests in Wittenburg against the sale of indulgences and other abuses in the Roman Catholic Church were reported throughout Germany, including Cologne. It was in his student days that Bullinger first read Luther, as well as the early church fathers, whom he found to be in agreement with Luther. In 1520 Bullinger earned his B.A. degree. After earning his master's degree in 1522, Bullinger returned to his native Switzerland and eventually became a junior colleague of Zwingli and Oecolampadius, even accompanying Zwingli to a number of theological conferences. In 1529 Bullinger was called to be minister in the church at Bremgarten where he had grown up. He actually succeeded his father as pastor and was instrumental in bringing the cause of the Reformation to Bremgarten. Even his aged father was converted to the Reformed faith.

After Zwingli's death in the fateful Battle of Kappel in October of 1531, Bullinger was chosen to be his mentor's successor as the chief pastor of Zurich. Just when it seemed that the cause of the Reformation in Switzerland had been dealt a deathblow, God raised up a capable successor to Zwingli. For more than forty years Bullinger labored tirelessly on behalf of the Reformation in Zurich and in Switzerland, as well as on behalf of the cause of the Reformed churches worldwide. Arthur Cochrane points out that Bullinger

was called to be head of the Zurich Church even before Calvin was converted to the evangelical cause. Through his middle years he ranked easily with his friend Calvin as a leader of the maturing Reformation, not only by the eminence of his position in the strong Zurich Church, but through his voluminous Biblical, theological, historical, and ecclesiastical writings. Subsequently he outlived Calvin by eleven years and was looked to as senior leader of the Reformed Churches by such third-generation figures as Beza, Olevianus, and Ursinus. The Second Helvetic Confession is evidence of the degree to which Bullinger embodied the Reformation in his own life and thought.³

Bullinger as a Respected Reformed Leader

Bullinger was a model Reformed minister and theologian. He was a faithful preacher who expounded the Scriptures numerous times each week—six or seven times a week for the first ten years or so of his ministry in Zurich. It is estimated that Bullinger preached between seven thousand and seventy-five hundred sermons in the pulpit of the *Grossmünster*, the former cathedral in Zurich. He was also a prolific author, writing over one hundred and fifty books in the course of his ministerial career. He wrote Latin commentaries on many books of the Old Testament and on every book of the New Testament except Revelation. His *Decades* (completed in 1557) consisted of fifty sermons (five books of ten sermons each) that provided an overview of all the main doctrines of the Reformed faith. So highly valued were these sermons that Queen Elizabeth made them compulsory reading by all the clergy of the Church of England.

Bullinger was a theologian, an accomplished theolo-

³ Arthur C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 220-1.

gian. But he was not only a theologian, he was a covenant theologian. He is credited with the first theological work devoted entirely to an exposition of the doctrine of the covenant: *De testamento seu foedere Dei unico et aeterno*, that is, *The One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God*. Bullinger was a gifted educator and was committed to the cause of Christian education. He organized a system of Christian schools for the education of the children and young people of Zurich. He saw to it that committed Reformed believers were hired as the teachers in the schools of Zurich. He served as rector of and professor in the Carolinum, the local theological school in which men were trained for the gospel ministry. In addition, he was a devoted pastor, tending to the needs of the members of his large congregation, ministering to them even when the plague swept through Zurich in 1564 and again in 1565. He put himself at great personal risk of contracting the fatal disease as he brought words of comfort to the sick and dying.

Bullinger was also “given to hospitality” (1 Tim. 3:2), welcoming religious refugees from throughout Europe to Zurich. He even opened up his own home to those who had been displaced by persecution. Many persecuted believers fled “bloody” Mary Tudor’s reign of terror and sought refuge in Bullinger’s safe haven in Zurich. Bullinger was deeply involved in ecumenical pursuits, laboring tirelessly for the unification of the Reformed churches, the Reformed and the Lutherans, and even the Reformed churches and the Roman Catholic Church. And he carried on extensive correspondence with fellow church leaders throughout Europe, as well as with political dignitaries around the world. Bullinger regularly corresponded with Calvin, Bucer, Melancthon, à Lasco, Beza, Cranmer, and Hooper. Schaff informs us that

Bishop Hooper wrote from prison shortly before his martyrdom [at the hands of “Bloody” Mary], May and December, 1554, to Bullinger, as ‘his revered father and guide,’ and the best friend he had ever found, and commended to him his wife and two children.⁴

A theologian of considerable ability, Bullinger helped

⁴ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, With a History and Critical Notes, Volume 1, The History of the Creeds* (1931; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1983), footnote #1, 391.

to formulate the First Helvetic Confession in 1536. He played a key role in producing the *Consensus Tigurinus* in 1549. The *Consensus Tigurinus* represented the joint effort of Calvin and Bullinger to resolve Protestant differences over the Lord’s Supper and come to agreement on the critical issues connected to the sacrament, particularly the issue of the presence of Christ in the sacrament. At the invitation of Bullinger and the Zurich city council, Calvin and William Farel journeyed to Zurich. Calvin and Bullinger were able to reach an agreement that united the Reformed churches of Geneva and Zurich not only, but the Swiss Reformed churches generally.

Bullinger was a devoted family man. Desirous of a godly wife, Bullinger traveled to a former Dominican convent at Oetenbach in 1529. He had received reports that the nuns there had converted to the Reformation. One of the former nuns was Anna Adischweiler. It was she whom Bullinger asked to become his wife. She accepted his proposal and they were happily married for some thirty-five years. The marriage was fruitful, God blessing their union with eleven children. Six of the eleven were sons, all of whom became Reformed ministers.

Bullinger’s last years were filled with hardship and suffering. Tragically he suffered the deaths of his beloved wife, Anna, and three of his daughters, who were victims of the outbreaks of the plague in Zurich in 1564 and 1565. Bullinger himself became gravely ill during the second outbreak of the plague. Though he survived, his health was broken. Eventually he died on September 17, 1575, after more than forty years of tireless service to the Reformed church in Zurich.

Bullinger left behind a rich legacy of the truths of sovereign grace and God’s gracious covenant with the elect. Much of that legacy is contained in his confession of faith, the Second Helvetic Confession. The Second Helvetic Confession is the expression of Bullinger’s mature theological development. It provides a fairly extensive exposition of all the main doctrines of the Reformed faith and includes the refutation of the main errors that oppose the faith. It is a confession of enduring value, as profitable to the church today as when it was first published in the churches of the Reformation. ☞

The Covenant Home:

God's Ideal Institution for the Nurture of Covenant Children (4)

The Order of the Covenant Home

Any institution that is going to attempt to raise children needs to have a firmly established order. The reason the family is the ideal institution is that the institution of the covenant family is built on God's order. The world increasingly has abandoned and rejected the order of God. The result has been that the institution of the family in America is falling apart. Furthermore, the prevalence of ungodly divorce and remarriage in our society has destroyed many homes. It is impossible for the public schools in our land to repair the damage that has been done to the institution of the family, and worldly child psychologists can give little help.

The foundational principles of the covenant home are such truths as that marriage is to be a lifelong bond of love and faithfulness between a God-fearing husband and wife. A proper Christian home can only exist in this context. By His creation ordinance God made the husband to be the head of his wife and family and the wife to his helpmeet. He gave the mandate to the married not only to bear children but also to nurture them in His fear. The godly husband and wife have the joint responsibility to maintain their family. They are seriously wrong if they expect that some worldly institutions such as day-care centers or public schools can raise their children for them. They must be very careful not to tear down their home by the foolishness of their own sin or by substituting the philosophy of the world for the raising of children. Proverbs 24:3, 4 states: "Through wisdom is an house builded, and by understanding is it established: and by

knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches." When the foundational principles that the Lord has established for the covenant home are honored, there will be joy and peace and blessing in the home.

God places children under the authority and care of their parents. The children are not left to care for themselves or to determine the course of their own lives. Children are not able to do this. Permissiveness in their lives will be the occasion for a life of undisciplined ungodliness—and the judgment of God. According to God's ideal order children are called to honor and obey their parents. They are called to submit to authority and to love and respect their parents. In doing this they have the promise of the favor and blessing of the Lord upon their lives, for in this way God says that it will be well with them.

When we consider these wonders of God in creating the covenant family, we immediately realize that our sins so often mar our homes. We cannot fulfill our calling perfectly because of our sin; we are greatly in need of the help and guidance of the Lord. Even our best efforts in our homes are very imperfect. The articles of this series that I am writing intend to set forth the *ideal* that we must strive with all our might to maintain through much prayer and humble dependence on Him.

The order of the covenant home is not that of cold, harsh military regimentation. The covenant home is not a place of law upon law and precept upon precept that makes the life of children miserable. It is not the place of unreasonable punishment for every disobedience to and overstepping of the iron-fisted law of the home. Ideally, the covenant home is the place where there are loving, per-

Rev. denHartog is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2014, p. 108.

sonal relationships of care and concern. This home is the place of great concern and firm discipline to correct sin and failures in the lives of children. Children must not be allowed carelessly to continue in sin without repentance, for they will become hardened in their sin and rebellion. The covenant home is also the place where parents, by the mercy of God, forgive the sins of their children and seek to restore them to the right way. To have a truly covenantal home our children must be encouraged daily by the power of God's grace in their lives. The covenant home is the place where children must be taught the good way of the commandments of the Lord. Learning always to keep the commandments of God will cause them to experience the loving favor of God in their lives. Children need daily instruction, counsel, admonition, and encouragement in their homes from their covenant parents.

The mother has a tremendously important role in maintaining the order of her home. She has a God-given, full-time occupation of being the 'keeper of the home' and the 'guide' of her home. The heroine of the covenant community is not the woman who by some supernatural ability and wisdom is able to balance a full-time career in the world with her calling as the mother. This is an impossible task, and anyone who tries this will see the sad consequences in the lives of the children. In the covenant home the mother is honored, respected, and loved because of the personal sacrifices she makes daily in her life of self-denial and humility and not in the way of self-exaltation and human pride.

The order of the covenant home is maintained by a mother who is always there for her children. In a very practical way the mother gives structure and stability to the lives of her children, which will be a great blessing for their future. She is the one who wakes them in the morning at the appropriate time for the planned events of the day. She is careful to prepare nutritious meals for her children. She has daily care for the physical health and well-being of her children. She makes sure that her children have proper clothing to wear for every season.

The primary education of the children is received on the knees of their mother. Values and principles, attitudes concerning right and wrong are taught to the children in their earliest years in the covenant home.

Even the surveys of the world often prove that the

greatest influence and motivation of children from the earliest years of their education comes from a good mother in the home. She motivates them to do as well as possible even in education outside of the home. She teaches her children to be responsible in their lives; she gives them tasks to do in the home that serve as valuable lifelong lessons. She trains them in the first skills of their lives, and supervises other persons necessary to train them in the skills they will need for the future. She helps them to develop their God-given talents.

By her daily labors the mother in the home will determine the entire atmosphere of the home and maintain the order and beauty of this home. She will make the home a well-ordered, pleasant, and happy place for her husband and her children to live.

No less important, of course, is the God-ordained role of the father. He is set by God to be the head of this home. He is given the authority to exercise rule and discipline in this home. He must teach his children the fear of the Lord. He must teach his children the doctrines of God's word that will be foundational for ordering their Christian life. The discipline that he gives to his children must be a balance of necessary firmness and seriousness, with tender compassion and concern for his children. He must be very careful not to provoke his children to anger or to discourage them through his own misbehavior and sinful anger against them.

The father has the great responsibility of providing for the physical needs of his children. With this in mind he carries out his daily occupation, often working long hours to be able to pay for such important things as Christian school tuition. He exhausts his energies for this purpose. If a father does not provide for his household, he is according to Scripture worse than an infidel (1 Tim. 5:8).

Yet a father's devotion to his career may not be for selfish pride and worldly success. He must think first about providing for the daily needs of his family and children. He does not keep back some of the earnings of his daily labor for his own personal pleasure and satisfaction and glory in the world.

The father has the responsibility to maintain the financial stability of his family. To do this he must have the wisdom to manage his money well and not to waste and squander what God gives to him. When the father

is foolish and irresponsible in this area of his own life, he will create great tension in his home and make himself responsible for the suffering of hardship in his own family. The father does not need to make his family rich and provide every modern-day electronic gadget and all sorts of sports equipment that his children might want. He does not have to provide them with a car when they get their driver's license. Doing this, in fact, often does more harm than good for the children.

In doing this, it is urgent that the father knows how to manage his time well. To maintain order in the covenant home of which he is the head, the father must have sufficient time for continual, meaningful interaction with his children. He must show his daily practical concern and love for his children by his interest and involvement in their lives. No amount of money he can earn in his daily occupation and then give to his children can make up for lack of sincere concern for and interaction with his children. As God is the covenant Friend of His people in amazing and wonderful ways, so the father must maintain covenant friendship and fellowship with his own children. He does not allow himself to become cold and distant from them.

Time management for the family also means that it is the father's responsibility to be sure that he does not waste his time on useless pursuits of life. He must teach and discipline his children to keep them also from wasting their lives in useless activities. He must establish the proper priorities of the life of the family. He must train his children to be responsible and disciplined in their life.

Especially is it the role of the covenant father to teach his children the law of God. Of utmost importance for the order of the lives of covenant children is teaching them the absolute standard of right and wrong. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 gives important instruction. In this regard, the entire book of Proverbs has many lessons for godly fathers. Without strong moral and spiritual instruction

our children will grow up wickedly following the dictates of their own sinful nature, led away by temptations of the world and the deceit of the devil.

With this in view, the father must be an example of real, practical godliness in his whole life. Failure in this will have the result of wickedness and ungodliness in the lives of his children. Many times irresponsible young people, who are careless and undisciplined in their lives and give themselves to a life of immorality, drunkenness, and drugs have learned this from the ungodly and worldly example of an unspiritual father in their homes.

To be an example of godliness, the father must also be the one who leads his family to church and to love the truth that is taught in the church. No one can have a truly ordered life of godliness separate from the true church of Jesus Christ. The father has the calling to give doctrinal instruction to his children. He does well to be very involved in the catechism instruction of his children. He maintains the order of his God-fearing family by teaching them by word and his own godly example to be a

member of the true church and to be interested in and active in the life and ministry of this church.

Related to the faithful worship of God in the church and love for the house of God is the father's calling to teach by word and example the proper observance of the Lord's Day.

No institution of the world can establish such order in the lives of children. This should be obvious. Neither parent can raise his children alone. We all need the church and the means of grace God has given to her. Our children are greatly in need of the godly instruction and influence of the church of Jesus Christ. Even if a worldly man could succeed in part to establish order in the lives of his children, all of this would be utter vanity if these children grow up to be ungodly and leave the church. ☁

*To be an example of godliness,
the father must also be
the one who leads
his family to church....
No one can have
a truly ordered life of godliness
separate from the true church
of Jesus Christ.*

Mission Work Privileges

It is often said that mission work involves making many sacrifices. From time to time we have received well-meaning comments along those lines as part of expressions of thanks for doing the work of foreign missions. And it could easily be argued that this is true. Missionaries (perhaps especially foreign ones) could no doubt produce a list of things they have had to “give up,” so to speak. But to dwell on these things would not be spiritually healthy, nor helpful. Many years ago a fellow saint who was involved in foreign labors made some observations that struck my wife and me at the time, and that have stayed with us ever since. The individual observed that it is not good to focus on the so-called sacrifices. That leads either to feeling sorry for one’s self, or to becoming proud because of what one is doing. Much better it is to consider this work a privilege and to focus on the privileges. Those were wise words, words that have rung true. With that in mind, I hope now to give you a peek into some of the privileges we enjoy as we labor as foreign missionaries in the Philippines.

At the top of the list is the privilege of teaching the distinctive and precious truths of the Reformed faith to those who have never heard them before. The truth God has given and entrusted to us is beautiful truth. It is God-glorifying truth (“God is everything, man is nothing!”). It is powerful truth (“The truth shall make you free”). It is comforting truth (“I belong to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ”). It is motivating truth—a powerful motive for godly living as well as for witnessing to others. Sometimes that truth is rejected. But the faithful saints of God never tire of hearing it. We have found this to be true especially with regard to the truth of the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation, as well as His absolute sovereignty over all things, including the evils and troubles of life. We possess a rich inheritance. What

a privilege to be able to preach and teach it to those who are hearing it for the first time!

In close connection with this is the privilege of observing the excitement and zeal with which the truth is received. We ourselves can easily take the truth for granted. But the zeal of those who are learning it for the first time is heartwarming, and even contagious. Some cannot get enough of it. The requests for Reformed literature keep rolling in, as well as requests for us to lecture and preach. The members of the various churches and groups of believers eagerly gather for Bible studies or lectures each week, and are happy to sit through two or more hours of teaching and/or question periods. Many have also shown an eagerness to tell others (family members, neighbors, other churches or groups) of the truth, with the accompanying request that we would do the speaking, teaching, or preaching there. One cannot help but to be caught up in the excitement.

Then there is the privilege of experiencing firsthand the catholicity of the church of Jesus Christ. We are able to observe on a daily basis the reality that God saves a church from all nations, cultures, and languages on earth. We also see God’s work of gathering His people from every different station, calling, and status in life. We see the power of the grace and love of God as it crosses earthly boundaries and natural differences and unites His people in the truth—something only the grace and truth of God can do. We not only see it, but also experience it. We ourselves are able to establish lifetime (eternal) friendships with fellow believers from different nationalities and from many different walks of life. It is indeed a joy to taste the blessing of membership in Christ’s universal church.

Another privilege is to hear about and see how God works, sometimes mysteriously, to deliver His people from darkness and bring them into His marvelous light. To grow up in a Reformed church and in Christian homes and families is foreign to most believers here. Also new to many is the truth of God’s covenant and its

Rev. Kleyn is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, the Philippines.


implications for and application to life. The things that are a normal part of the makeup and thinking of those who have been Reformed all their lives (godly attitudes, antithetical living, family devotions, etc.) need to be learned by many. In some instances, the saints here covet the upbringing we have had. That in itself is humbling, and leads to a greater appreciation for the Lord's gift of godly parents and families. But the point here is that we see, again and again, that the Lord knows those who are His, remembers them, rescues them from ignorance and unbelief, and brings them to know and love and live according to His truth. God's mighty, saving grace is clearly at work in those He has ordained unto eternal life.

Another significant privilege is that of seeing the fruit the Lord gives. Sometimes the fruit is negative. Sometimes members reject the truth and leave. This has happened more than once in response to such doctrines as double predestination, infant baptism, particular grace, and others. But the Lord is also pleased to give positive fruit. We see changes within congregations: their beliefs, their practices, their worship, and their congregational life. We observe progress toward a solid and faithful denomination of Reformed churches, with others desirous to become part of it. There is evidence of a commitment to being fully Reformed—in doctrine, in worship, in church government, and in life.

And then there are the personal testimonies of those who understand a truth, or a text, or a difficult point of doctrine for the first time, and respond, "Now I finally get it! Now it makes sense! That truth is so comforting! The truth gives me great peace!" Perhaps the most encouraging has been to notice the changes that have come as a fruit of grasping the truth of God's covenant: parents joyfully bringing forth more children, God's

people worshiping each Lord's Day as families, mothers teaching their little ones to pray, fathers asking about and putting into practice family devotions, children eager to attend catechism classes, and many more. All these we have seen. Clearly the Lord fulfills the promise of Psalm 22: "The ends of all the earth shall hear and turn unto the Lord in fear; All kindreds of the earth shall own and worship Him as God alone."

One more privilege that cannot be overlooked is the Lord's use of the work, with its many challenges and varied experiences, for our own personal growth. That growth comes especially through facing questions concerning the truth that are often very different from what we are accustomed to. Various factors contribute to that difference, such as the church background of the people here, a different church scene from what is found in North America, different history as a nation, and the fact that certain words or phrases have different connotations. All these things challenge us to define and explain the truth very precisely and very carefully. We are forced, as it were, to see and consider truths we have grown up with from the perspective of those who have never heard them before. As mentioned earlier, the excitement is contagious. Our own zeal is renewed.

All of these privileges that we have considered does not deny that mission work comes with many burdens, challenges, and struggles. But certainly in light of these, it is good to ponder the privileges and rewards the Lord is pleased to give. These give joy and encouragement in the work. May the consideration of these things serve to encourage men to pursue the ministry and the work of missions. And may God be pleased to work in some the desire to take up this blessed work. 

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA, review editor

The Sovereignty of God, Arthur W. Pink. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1984 (first published 1918). Softcover. 269 pages. (also available online, Kindle, Hardback, Audio book). ISBN 0-8010-7088-0. ISBN 13: 9780801070884. [Reviewed by Dr. Julien Kennedy, Ballymena, NI.]

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

I would guess that this book, more than any other, has been used by God to introduce people to and reinforce their belief in the Reformed doctrines of sovereign grace. It is a must-read for anyone disenchanted with the false theology of their churches, for those interested in assessing Calvinism, and, I would go as far as to say, for every believer.

Why do I say this? Because the doctrine Pink de-

scribes is the most vital truth about God, namely, that as the Sovereign of the universe, He rules over all things and has predestined them from eternity. In his foreword to the first edition Pink states, “In the following pages an attempt has been made to examine anew in the light of God’s Word some of the profoundest questions which can engage the human mind.” Hence, he challenges the reader to study the truth of God’s sovereignty, and with gladness he describes the privilege of knowing these things. Pink knew that in Christendom in his time, as in ours, few believed total depravity and human helplessness, or sovereign, particular grace.

In his forward of 1921 Pink wisely and graciously added, “A few have condemned the book in unqualified terms, and these we commend to God and to the Word of His grace, remembering that it is written, ‘a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from Heaven’ (John 3:27).” Notwithstanding that ‘concession’ to the unstable, unlearned, and deceived, we still believe that all who hold to false doctrine are accountable to God.

In his third forward Pink encapsulates the benefit of this doctrine when he states, “Nothing is so tranquilizing and so stabilizing as the assurance that the Lord Himself is on the Throne of the universe, working *all* things after the counsel of His own will.” And I would also add that this sovereign God is working all things for the good and salvation of His elect people in Christ. This truth is an unashamed blast against ‘free will.’


That it is vital doctrine Pink states in his introduction: “Finally, we have sought to show that the Sovereignty of God is a truth revealed to us in Scripture for the comfort of our hearts, the strengthening of our souls, and the blessing of our lives. A due apprehension of God’s Sovereignty promotes the spirit of worship, provides an incentive to practical godliness, and inspires zeal in service. It is deeply humbling to the human heart, but in proportion to the degree that it brings man into the dust before his Maker, to that extent is God glorified.”

This book abases man and glorifies God. It is replete

with Scripture references, which show what an avid Bible scholar Pink was. He patiently gives an entire chapter and four appendices to the gainsayers who would argue against its truth, carefully expounding John 3:16 and I John 2:2.

The chapters cover God’s sovereignty in creation, providence, salvation, reprobation (this chapter and many other key parts are omitted by the Banner of Truth edition). In addition, the book covers God’s sovereignty with regard to human will and responsibility, and to prayer, as well as our response to the doctrine and the value of it. The book is comprehensive. It is a work virtually impossible to summarize because it is ‘chock full’ of weighty truths that are edifying and powerful. As an aside, I laughed when I came across the phrase ‘German neologians’!

Notwithstanding all the positives, I found one serious concern, which is Pink’s view that the fall somehow made men less responsible: “Now, strictly speaking, there are only two men who have ever walked this earth which were endowed with full and unimpaired responsibility, and they were the first and last Adams. The responsibility of each of the rational descendants of Adam, while real, and sufficient to establish them accountable to their Creator is, nevertheless, limited in degree, limited because impaired through the effects of the Fall.” I believe he is wrong there! Scripture teaches that all sin is gross and capital offence with no mitigating factors, committed by wholly responsible creatures who, as a result, deserve hell. Satan also stands alongside the first and second Adams, as a perfectly created being who had absolutely no impaired responsibility. Both he and all Adam’s fallen race are fully accountable for their sin.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough. Its truth underpins the Reformed faith which we love. I can guarantee, by God’s grace, that all—whether young person, new convert, or church officebearer—will benefit from reading it. You can read it free online too. Do make the time; it is well worth it! 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Denomination Activities

Mr. Van Edgom is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa.

In accordance with Article 67 of our Church Order the consistory of the Protestant Reformed

Churches in the USA called their congregations to worship on the National Day of Thanksgiving, November 27. We were encouraged

to "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks..." I Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Sister-Church Activities

Did you know that one of the sister churches of the PRC, the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Ballymena, Northern Ireland has a wide-ranging website? That is certainly an understatement. The site www.cprf.co.uk is extremely impressive! Its "languages" link contains Reformed literature in some 121 foreign tongues. The "audio" link has more than 1,000 sermons, interviews and debates. The "articles" page holds over 230 items, and there are more than 130 pamphlets available on that part of the website. The "Covenant Reformed News" page includes over 500 items for your reading pleasure. Of particular interest to anyone studying the Belgic Confession is the link on the right hand of the home page that is entitled "New Belgic Confession class audios." If you have some time on your hands and want to use it in a positive way, browse this site and marvel at all it contains! This is a prime example of a beneficial and enriching use of the Internet to spread the gospel.

Seminary Activities

From our seminary comes the announcement about this school year's interim course to be taught by Prof. Ronald Cammenga. "The Theology of John Calvin" will be taught weekdays 9:00-11:30 A.M. January 5-14, 2015. Visitors are welcome but must register by calling the seminary.

Congregation Activities

The existing sanctuary ceiling pulpit lights were replaced with new LED spotlights by their building committee during the week of November 17 in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, IA.

Some notices in the church bulletins just jump out at you and grab your attention. Such was the case with this bulletin announcement of Randolph, WI PRC: "Reminder, orders for Christmas wreaths and kissing balls need to be given to Jenny by today." It begged an inquiry. Some of you "kissing ball" authorities may know all about this. For the rest of us, here is what we found: These "kissing balls" are about the size of a basketball, made from a coniferous or evergreen product, with a pretty bow on top. These balls take the place of mistletoe, which may be more familiar to some. Hmmm.... Some of you may have a place for one of these devices. Unfortunately, by the time you read this notice the deadline for ordering for this year will have come and gone. Aim for next year when they may be available for purchase again.

Mission Activities

Rev. W. Bruinsma, Eastern home missionary in Pittsburgh, PA, reported that the Bible Study in Cranberry, Pennsylvania, has begun again for its new season. The first meeting had 15 people present, including some who came last year as well as some new visitors. The study this year will be on New Testament History.

Minister Activities

Rev. Clayton Spronk was installed as the seventh minister of Faith PRC in Jenison, MI on November 30. After the evening service a welcome program was held, and refreshments were served.

Rev. Steven Houck submitted to surgery in mid-November. Doctors performed an angioplasty and inserted four new stents. May God's healing mercies be evident in the brother's recovery.

Peace PRC, located in Lansing, IL announced a trio from which to call a minister, including Rev. William Langerak (Southeast PRC, Grand Rapids, MI), Rev. Richard Smit (missionary to the Philippines), and Rev. Ronald Van Overloop (Grace PRC, Standale, MI). From this trio Peace issued a call to Rev. Van Overloop on December 1.

On December 4, First PRC, Grand Rapids, MI issued a call to Rev. Van Overloop as well, from the trio consisting also of Rev. Allen Brummel (Heritage PRC, Sioux Falls, SD), and Rev. Richard Smit (missionary to the Philippines). May our heavenly Father, the King of the church be near to Rev. Van Overloop and make His will abundantly clear in the consideration of these two calls, as well as of the call to the work in Grace PRC.

Rev. Jonathan Mahtani, pastor of Cornerstone PRC, Dyer, IN, declined the call on December 7 to be the next missionary to the Philippines.

Young People's Activities

A young peoples' Thanksgiving mass meeting was held in By-

ron Center Protestant Reformed Church on Sunday, November 23 at 2:00 P.M. Byron Center pastor Rev. Audred Spriensma spoke from I Thessalonians 5:18 "Giving Thanks Always."


Young Adult Activities

Loveland, CO PRC announced plans for their annual Young Adults Retreat to be held April 6-9, 2015 at YMCA of the Rockies in Estes

Park, CO. Speeches are planned according to the theme "Our Calling to be Holy" (Col. 3) with Rev. Steven Key, pastor at Loveland, and Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Doon, IA PRC as featured speakers. Registration for this retreat was scheduled to open December 15. All this, the Lord willing.

School Activities

Heritage Christian School Foundation's "Evening of Praise" was held November 29 at Grandville, MI High School's auditorium with a dessert reception after. A wonderful opportunity for the adults and children to exalt God's name using music.

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:1. 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Teacher needed

■ Hope PR Christian School (Grand Rapids, MI) is seeking applicants to fill positions in both kindergarten and a lower-elementary grade for the 2015-16 school year. For more information or to submit your resume contact David Langerak (616-437-3643, dave.langerak@gmail.com) or Dan Hanko (616-453-9717, dhanko@hopeprcschool.org).

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Grandville PRC express their sympathy to Herm and Lorraine DeVries and their children, John and Becky DeVries and Laura DeVries, and to Don and Shelly DeVries and their children Dan DeVries and Abby DeVries, in the death of their father and grandfather,

JOHN DEVRIES.

May comfort come from the words of Psalm 116:15 "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
David Kregel, Ass't. Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Grandville PRC express their sympathy to Jon and Lori Meulenberg and Nathon in the death of Jon's mother,

HELENE DEVRIES.

May they be comforted with the words of Psalm 27:14 "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD."

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
David Kregel, Ass't. Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Grandville PRC extend their sympathy to Henry Kuiper and to Ron and Linda Corson and their children Chad and Michelle Corson, in the death of their sister and aunt,

MARIE HOEKSTRA.

May they take comfort in the words of Romans 8:18: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
David Kregel, Ass't. Clerk

Classis West

■ Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Doon PRC on Wednesday, March 4, 2015, at 8:30 A.M. the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by February 2 (30 days before classis convenes). All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Doon's consistory.

Rev. D. Kuiper, Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour January 2015

Date	Topic	Text
January 4	"Watching for Christ's Return"	Matthew 25:1-13
January 11	"Faith: Strength to Endure (1)"	Hebrews 11:33-39
January 18	"Faith: Strength to Endure (2)"	Hebrews 11:33-39
January 25	"Patiently Run the Race"	Hebrews 12:1