Variations of this cover were used throughout the 1960s.
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Editor’s Note: To the young people (and old),
If you are reading this magazine, you most likely are
experiencing or have experienced the great bless-
ing of Christian, covenantal education. But can you
defend the basis and discuss the importance of your
Christian education? I had the opportunity to do this
for my “Diverse Perspectives in Education” class at
Grand Valley State University. I was prompted to write
a paper describing my philosophy of education. The
content of this editorial is that paper. Keep in mind
that this was written to an unbelieving audience
(my Jewish professor). As such, the development of
the theology in the paper is at a lower level, and
because of space limitations, I had to limit myself in
some areas. Two important things I mentioned very
briefly or not at all were the role of the church in the
education of children and the covenantal basis for
Christian education. For those interested in develop-
ment of the covenantal basis of Christian education,
I recommend Prof. David Engelsma’s book, Reformed
Education, available from the Reformed Free Publish-
ing Association.
RK

Introduction
As a Christian I believe in the God of the Bible.
The Bible describes God as sovereign. Simply put, he
is in complete control of all things, and because he
is sovereign, he governs all spheres of life, including
the sphere of education. If God is in control and he
will do as he pleases, when he pleases, and there
is nothing we can do about it, we might as well sit
back and let him take care of educating our children,
right? After all, if God is sovereign, what responsibil-
ity does man have, if any? This is misguided thinking.
God in his sovereignty commands parents to educate
their children.\(^1\) God in his sovereignty also enables
parents to do this, not only in the home, but also by
guiding individuals (Christian school teachers) and
organizations (Christian schools), granting them
the authority and responsibility to educate children
in the place of the parents. These individuals and
organizations are instruments in God’s hands, instru-
ments he created to carry out the important work of
educating children. Christian educators, subject to
the sovereignty of God, follow the life-guiding prin-
ciples that God has laid out in the Bible. Convicted
of God’s sovereignty over all things and the truth of
his word in the Bible, I am committed to Christian
school education, and as a future educator I intend
to teach in Christian schools. As such, my philosophy
of education is very unpopular among the majority of
citizens in this country. Gordon Clark, a well known
Christian philosopher, argues that, “Many people
and most educators reject the Bible as the truth of
God.”\(^2\) It has been said that the United States of
America is a Christian nation and was founded on
Christian principles. Outwardly, yes. But peel off the
facade of “Christian in name only” and one finds
out that this is not really the case. Much of modern
Christianity is consumed with post-modern thought,
that truth is unattainable. True Christianity holds Holy
Scripture high and subjects itself to the words that
are contained in that book. This applies to education
too. The various “books” of knowledge that I will
pass down to students are subject to the Book. True
Christianity is also discipleship. The true disciple of
Jesus Christ instructs the children given by God, not
only in the home and church, but also in school. The
true disciple of Christ does this no matter the cost,
physical or financial. After all, if discipleship is not
costly, it really is not true discipleship.\(^3\) My philosophy
of education has its basis in the complementary na-
ture of the threefold cord of instruction that consists

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1 Ephesians 6:4: “And, ye fathers, provoke not your
children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and
admonition of the Lord.” King James Version

2 Gordon H. Clark, A Christian Philosophy of Educa-
tion, second revised edition, (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity
Foundation, 1988), 125.

3 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, (New
of church*, home, and school—bound together by the sovereignty of God.

**The Process of Christian Education**

Having grown up attending Christian schools my entire elementary and secondary school life, I have come to appreciate the principle of the Latin phrase *in loco parentis*. In the classroom the Christian school teacher stands *in the place of the parent*, in other words, the Christian school is an extension of the Christian home. This principle is crucial to the process of Christian education. The parents and the Christian teacher, both subject to the sovereignty of God, have the same goal of raising children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Although this duty is primarily that of the parents, one of the most important aids to assist them in this duty is the Christian school. It is imperative then that the parents and the teachers stand on the same foundation. That foundation is the Bible and their common faith in the God of the Bible. This common faith enjoys communion not only in the interactions that take place at Christian school activities, but also in the worship of God at church week after week. The parents and the teachers hear the preaching of the gospel and grow together in their common faith. The preaching also strengthens the understanding and respect between parents and teachers and also between children and teachers. This is done through faithful and proper explanation of the Ten Commandments. The fifth commandment requires children to honor their parents (Ex. 20:12). With the Christian school teacher in the place of the parent at school, this commandment requires that children respect, honor, and obey the teacher in the school no less than they would obey their parents in the home. This is done because the sovereign God has placed the teachers in authority over the students. When this application of the law is followed faithfully, the process of Christian education not only is in accord with the commands of the sovereign God, but also operates efficiently in a practical sense.

Part of the duty of Christian education as an extension of the home is discipline. Christian schools are not immune to disciplinary situations where drastic measures need to be taken, but these are few and far between. With the Christian school teacher having the same worldview as the parents, there is the benefit of continuity between the classroom and the home. The behavior of the students expected by the teacher in the classroom is the same behavior that is expected by the parents in the home. Unfortunately, discipline is a term that has a negative connotation in wider society. We often think of the aspect of discipline that paints the picture in our mind of telling off an obnoxious child or calling school security to remove an unruly, stubborn student. We often forget the aspect of discipline that is the continuous keeping of order by the teacher through proper classroom management and encouragement for students, sometimes without even realizing it. A brief example will suffice:

A former student stopped by once and expressed appreciation that I kept after him and his buddies during their senior year in Physics to do their best work and to stop goofing off. He recognized years later his nature to be lazy and goof off. The odd thing about it all was that I didn’t remember consciously making work of keeping after that student. This is one of those cases where we discipline them in quiet ways, not realizing we are doing it. This is an example of this kind of discipline that happens daily in our good Christian school.

Another aspect of discipline regards how the teacher disciplines himself. How does the teacher govern his actions? Is the teacher easily distracted, often wandering off-topic to irrelevant things and wasting the students’ time? When disorder comes to the classroom, as it inevitably will at some point, does the teacher “flip a lid,” or does the teacher remain cool-headed and address the situation maturely—in so doing, setting a good example for the students to follow? Students observe their teacher’s behavior every day. Common sense tells us that if the teacher is respectable, the students are more likely to respect that teacher. This stands true for any social interaction no matter how old you are. If someone is not respectable, you are more likely to discount their opinions. This is something that you can observe in public schools and Christian schools. How great then is the importance for the Christian school teacher to be respectable, fair, and upright in walk? 2 Timothy

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4 Due to the constraints of space, the development of this thesis focuses more on the relationship between parents and teachers and less on the role of the church in education, though it will be mentioned.

3:14–17 teaches the goal of education, that is, that the young man or woman becomes “perfect [not sinless, but mature or complete], throughly furnished unto all good works.” With a goal like this, the teacher must live up to that standard as well. In the classroom the Christian school teacher, given authority by the sovereign God, instructs by example, just as the parents in the home teach by example.

**The Purpose of Christian Education**

The purpose of Christian education is no more concisely stated than by Jan Waterink: “The forming of man into an independent personality serving God according to his Word, able and willing to employ all his God-given talents to the honor of God and for the well-being of his fellow-creatures, in every area of life in which man is placed by God.”

The first aspect of the purpose of Christian education, as defined by Waterink, is to shape individual, independent personalities that subject themselves to the standards of the sovereign God’s word. This is done in every subject. This is done every day. But for the Christian, to learn everything there is to learn in life apart from the fear of God and the keeping of his word is vanity. “The Christian school…[begins] each day’s classes with prayer to God and with the reading of the Bible. It does this under the conviction that nothing that man does is profitable unless God blesses it. Everything must be ‘sanctified by the word of God and prayer’ (1 Tim. 4:5).”

The second purpose of Christian education as defined by Waterink is to train a child in such a way that the child strives to use his or her gifts for the honor of God and also for the betterment of the people that the child will interact with throughout his or her life. To that end:

The very instruction itself must tend towards influencing the children’s ethical attitudes and behavior. When all of the instruction is God-centered, the love and fear of God are stirred up in the children’s hearts. In addition, the Christian school points out to the child that in all the relationships of life he is called to love and fear and, therefore, obey God. This is the very foundation of morality. Out of thankful love to God and His Christ, he is to honor his parents, submit to his teachers, subject himself to the State, live purely, love his neighbors on the playground, and work at his studies to the best of his ability.

The beauty of this “ethic influencing” instruction, subject to the sovereignty of God, is not only that it brings up children in the fear of God, but also at the same time it teaches them to be good and upright citizens of the state—which the sovereign God has placed in authority over them—who also contribute to the good of society in their own ways. The beauty of education that is subject to the sovereignty of God is also the fact that the sovereignty and love of God transcends all cultures, languages, social classes, and ethnicities. Instructing children in the fear of this God causes them to grow up with a respect and love for those around them. They realize that just as God loves them, he also loves and saves individuals from every nation, tribe, and tongue. This principle has its foundation in Romans 10:12–13: “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” With the fear of God and his love in their hearts, they walk through life directing that same love toward others—regardless of skin color, ethnicity, culture, or language.

The very fact that children have talents and abilities implies that they must be taught to use them. In the use of their gifts, they must be faithful stewards. The true disciple of Christ confesses that he has nothing that has not been given him by God. The Christian principle of stewardship must be reflected in Christian education. Herein lies the importance of teaching by example. Consider the fact that Christian schools do not receive any funding from the govern-

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6  2 Timothy 3:14–17, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” King James Version


9  Ibid.
ment. Therefore, Christian schools are supported by the parents who send their children to them. Parents, in addition to funding public schools by paying taxes, shell out thousands of dollars each year to put their children through Christian school education. Families struggle financially, but refuse to take their children out of Christian schools. Children see their parents working hard to fund their education and learn from this. Children learn to live without fancy houses, the latest toys, and new cars. Children in turn learn to be proper stewards of their own time, money, and abilities, no matter how much or how little that may be. Stressing again the importance of leading by example, the Christian school teacher, if he is to teach the children to be faithful stewards, must be a proper steward of what is given to him by the sovereign God. The teacher is a steward not only of his time, but also of the student’s time. Parents give to the teacher the authority over their children and the time to teach them. The teacher then must be a faithful steward of these things because the sovereign God, through the parents, has placed them in his possession.

The reality is that students vary in their God-given abilities. I quantify the idea of gifts and abilities by alluding to the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30. God has given five talents to some, two to others, and maybe only one to others. The duty of the Christian school teacher is to encourage the students to use these talents, no matter the type or amount given by God. This is done through individualizing education in such a way that each student is encouraged to use his abilities in the best way he can—a way that brings honor to the sovereign God who gave to that student his ability.

**Conclusion**

The sovereign Christian God that I worship is a rope-maker. He created three cords: church, home, and school. By his sovereign good pleasure, he braids them together. Each cord has its own function. Each cord helps support and strengthen the other two. Each cord plays a crucial part in the education of a child. The children then, as products of God-fearing parents, can be seen as tender seedlings that need constant care and education—water and fertilizer to help them grow into the mighty oak trees in society they will become. With the Christian education they receive, they will eventually spread their branches, reflecting the love of the sovereign God who gave them life and breath. Instructed and brought up in the fear of God, they will have an effect on those around them. They will then drop the acorns of their own contributions to society that have the potential to be carried far and wide. Their goal is always to honor their Maker. When it comes their time to pass on to the next life, they will be remembered as one distinctly remembers a mighty tree in the forest and the beauty and function it lent to the surrounding environment. For a Christian, that is a rewarding experience to observe and something I look forward to witnessing as a future educator.

### Interview with William Feenstra

**It is September 20, 2008, and I am interviewing Mr. William (Bill) Feenstra (BF), from Redlands, CA.**

**Mark H. Hoeksema (MHH):** Mr. Feenstra, where and when were you born?

**Bill Feenstra (BF):** I was born in Los Angeles, March 11, 1928.

**MHH:** Who were your parents?

**BF:** Thys Feenstra and Jeanette (my mother’s maiden name was Jeanette Zoetewey.

**MHH:** What can you tell me about your parents, your grandparents, your family in general? Set the stage: where did they come from, what did they do, etc.?

**BF:** My grandfather was born in the Netherlands, my mother in Utrecht. My grandfather was an architect from a long line of family architects. My mother was a homemaker.

The family came from Holland in 1911 and first
settled in Winnipeg; they moved to California later. They had a farm for awhile and then moved to Los Angeles. My dad met my mother in Redlands, California—Dad boarded there. He did manual labor there for a while—carpentry work, that sort of thing.

Our family was members of the Reformed Church in Holland, so our connection with religion goes way back. I have an old Bible dated 1637 that shows the marriage of my grandfather to my grandmother. In it is contained a spiritual wedding prayer. So it is encouraging to know that our connection to religious activities goes way back.

As Dutch Reformed, we moved to the U.S. and were members of the Christian Reformed Church. When we moved to Redlands from Los Angeles, we were members of the Christian Reformed Church. In about 1932, there was a discussion about discontinuing the Dutch language (preaching) in the Christian Reformed Church, so a conflict arose. Members of my family, along with several others, left the Christian Reformed Church as a result of that.

It’s striking that common grace was not a factor in that separation, but it was a dispute over discontinuing the Dutch language.

At that time, our group knew of Rev. [Herman] Hoeksema in Grand Rapids. They called him to Redlands. At that time they had no talks about common grace—it wasn’t an item of contention. But Rev. Hoeksema brought that truth, that word, to Redlands and formed a congregation. That was the beginning of our church.

Our first minister was Rev. Vos. He shaped the lives of my generation—Clarice Gritters, Everett VanVoorthuysen, myself—we all were shaped by Rev. [Gerrit] Vos, and we loved him.

MHH: Approximately how old would you have been when Rev. Vos came?

BF: I was probably 6 years old. Our first meetings as a separate group were in 1932. I was four years old and remember walking up some steps that my dad had to help me up. But it’s a sharp memory—from 4 years old (laughter).

We struggled for a while, but our church grew under Rev. Vos. He left us maybe in 1943 or 1944.

Our family was heavily involved in all the activities of the Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands. Dad was instrumental in getting the church built. Dad [Thys Feenstra] was also sometimes called the “watchman on the walls of Zion,” because he was a fiery person who defended the truth as he saw it. My experience was that I was in the living room when a lot of these discussions took place. The church was actually founded by a group of pretty fiery people, fiery-brand people, and they managed to control things. They didn’t go off one against the other. As the church developed, it became a little more diplomatic in the way they treated each other. Right now the church is in a sort of golden age. We have great young families coming up.

We also established our own Christian school—the first Christian school in the Protestant Reformed denomination was in Redlands. Dad was a big part of that. He also taught Sunday School for something like 35 years, and he’s still famous for that. He used to sing Psalter 60 every Sunday, for thirty-five years (laughter). So he’s well known as a Sunday School teacher for those years.

Even when I was young, I was very interested in what was going on. During the problems of 1953, I accompanied my dad on many visits and in distributing papers and talking to Rev. H. Hoeksema. We were pretty good friends. So I endured many of the controversies in Redlands. Some of them involved teaching—over whether the principal could be dealt with through the church or through the school society. I agreed wholeheartedly that it should be the school society.

MHH: Expand on that, for a few moments, if you will, in terms of the controversy of 1953 and with the school and the church. What were the issues that arose that you just referred to?

BF: With the principal, he wouldn’t sign his contract because he said the only reason he could be terminated is if the church would discipline him—which made this a church-school.

MHH: Who was the principal? Do you recall?

BF: Berkoel. He was never my teacher. My teacher was Mr. Zuidema. I’m going to talk about that in a little while. We had Mr. Zuidema for 8 years. He was a disciplinarian. I have trouble with disciplinarians because I’m kind of a naughty boy (laughter). But I have to give him credit. When we left our seats for anything, it was: turn, rise, pass—very disciplined.

MHH: Almost military.

BF: Yes. But when I went to high school out of our little Christian school, I could diagram sentences, and the people from the public schools could not. So, we had a good education, in spite of one teacher for eight grades. I give him credit for that.
The controversy in 1953 did not immediately begin with the De Wolf controversy. In fact, we kind of made light of it. Our controversy there was with Rev. L. Vermeer, who had done some illegal things—he wrote anonymous letters to people. They said his besetting sin was lying, and it was.

He left on some appointment to Michigan and he preached for the DeWolf group. At that time we decided that we shouldn’t be a member of that church anymore. So one dramatic day, a group of us decided not to go there.

MHH: To go where?
BF: To the Protestant Reformed Church as established in Redlands. We were charter members of that church, so that was hard to do.

MHH: The reason you decided not to go there was what?
BF: That he decided to preach for the DeWolf group. We did not agree with DeWolf’s stand.

We met first in a women’s contemporary club building. We called Rev. Hoeksema. I remember his sermon (I’ll think of the text a little bit later). He told us what sermons he was going preach before he got there. But he didn’t do it. When he got there, the titles of the sermons he gave us were very dramatic. I can’t recall what those texts were, but it was an emotional time. So we met in the contemporary club. Then we struggled with having ministers.

MHH: Was the group of which you were a member a minority of the Redlands’ congregation at the time?
BF: At the beginning, there were 11 families represented out of 65. Four of those had their own little controversy over the good works that are given to us by God to do. They didn’t agree with that. So those were 4 very vocal people that were part of our 11. I can remember only two of the remainder: one was myself and one was my dad. I felt there was a greater goal than just this little irratant of today: that the Protestant Reformed Church has got to succeed and survive, and I’ve got to be part of it, regardless of this little problem we’re having right now.

Well, one by one, those people returned. They thought about joining another church. It was really difficult for all of us. One by one, they returned, and now they’re key members of our church. It was a time when you had to have a vision of something better and not worry about just today.

And we slowly prospered and gained membership. We rented a church for a while.

MHH: This was still a minority of the congregation, correct?
BF: Yes. But the majority of the congregation didn’t survive very long. They became a part of the Christian Reformed Church, and the minister became part of the Christian Reformed Church.

MHH: That would have been Vermeer?
BF: No, I can’t think of his name right now.

MHH: But Vermeer was gone at that time?
BF: Vermeer was gone. He went to the Christian Reformed Church—he went to Denver somewhere where he did some other things that got him in trouble (laughter). That’s why those records are not available, because they were in the Protestant Reformed Church that was converted to Christian Reformed, and the records disappeared. I think they’re still in storage somewhere—maybe in Grand Rapids at the Christian Reformed depository, or whatever the name of that is [archives].

So I’m hoping that, maybe through Jon Huiskens [PRCA archivist] and yourself that we can recover those. We’re trying to figure out the names of the people that I can’t remember—names of those 11. I don’t remember who they were.

We grew and decided to build our own church, and twenty-five years ago we dedicated that church. Our members worked on that church every day. We had a superintendent named George Joostens, who was a craftsman. We didn’t even dare to take vacation for two years (laughter). So we formed crews, and we built a very nice church. It’s craftsman quality. We milled our own lumber and screwed a lot of things together. That was 25 years ago. I’m hoping we have a dedication this Thanksgiving. I propose that we do.

MHH: Let me back up again a little bit to the whole matter of 1953. I need to understand a little bit more clearly the connection between the church and the school at that time. You made reference to it earlier. Can you go into that a little bit more and explain how the school came to be involved and what influence this had on the history of the Redlands congregation?
BF: Well, at the time of the disagreement with the superintendent, Boerkoel, sixteen families left the church.

MHH: What precisely was the difference of opinion there?
BF: It was the insistence on the superintendent that he...
could be discontinued only if he was disciplined by the church, not if he was fired by the school board. The issue, very clear to me, was that the school board regulates the school, not the church.

MHH: But he obviously didn’t see it that way.
BF: No, and, you know, emotions get stirred and people take different paths and opinions about the matter, and sixteen families left.

MHH: Where did they stand on this issue of the connection?
BF: They agreed with the principal, the superintendent, that he should be fired only if he was disciplined by the church—that the school board did not have that authority. But that’s where personal things get involved. You find a principle and hammer away at it, and pretty soon there’s a split. I don’t think that was a major ecclesiastical problem. It was a matter of personalities, and for the principle that the school board regulates the school, not the church.

MHH: Because we don’t believe in parochialism.
BF: That’s right. It’s not a church school.

MHH: So sixteen families left. What became of them?
BF: Some of them returned to the Protestant Reformed Church after a couple years, and some of them drifted off to the Christian Reformed Church.

MHH: But the school survived?
BF: The school continued for several years. Ed Gritters was one of the teachers there, the superintendent. And it was he who received an anonymous letter from Vermeer. Myself and Al Karsemeyer and Ed [Gritters] accosted Vermeer as Matthew 18 provides. So we had our own problems with Vermeer other than the DeWolf controversy. But the DeWolf controversy triggered the split in 1953.

MHH: What was the content and intent of this anonymous letter that he sent?
BF: It was degrading to the principal—accusing him of not devoting full attention to the school, having a television in the early days of television—little insignificant things. But it was a personal attack. Later it was determined that it was his typewriter that the letter was written on. There were pretty persistent people in our church that kept on asking—Dad [Thys Feenstra] was one of them (laughter).

MHH: So he was certainly not courageous and not honest by not signing his name and doing these things anonymously?
BF: This was typical of Rev. Vermeer. He was a pretty good preacher, but his sin was lying. He could not control that. And that went on later in his life, too.

MHH: It seems a little bit hard to understand that if one has views or convictions, that one would simply not take responsibility for them. But he was unable and unwilling to do that?
BF: That’s right. He denied that he wrote the letter. We confronted him with that.

MHH: But that certainly had a negative effect on the school as a whole then, in the long run?
BF: It was a factor. When we split, there weren’t enough students left to continue the school. So our children went to the Christian Reformed school until we could reestablish.

I served on the board of the Redlands Christian School for a while because our children were there. Maybe it’s wrong, but there’s an influence there that I could bring. You know, they’re a little bit more wary of what they say and what they do because there’s a PR there. Later I was on the board when we started our own school. I think I was secretary. I was sitting at the head table and all the members of the Christian Reformed school were in the audience, asking me, “Why are you doing this? Why are you leaving us?” I said, “We have separate churches. We have separate beliefs on some issues. We believe that we need to continue educating our children in our beliefs.” I met the problem head-on. And there was no personal difficulty with that. I have very good friends there. I still serve with them now as we’re building a retirement home in Redlands that I am involved in. There was nothing personal about it.

And that’s where Jon Huisken comes in. Jon and his wife volunteered to teach in our first couple of years of school. We would not have made it without Jon. He helped us establish that school, and it’s been in existence every since. Our population is a little low right now, but we have so many young families that in a few years the population will increase again.

We’re low enough that the tuition nowhere comes near to paying the expenses, so they asked for extra donations, and the society gladly has responded. Since the inception, people who don’t have children in school have paid 25% of the budget year after year. So we’re committed. I told you earlier that we were the first school in the denomination. We’re kind of proud of that. We won’t be the last (laughter), maybe.
MHH: I find the connection between the church and the school to be very interesting, and I think in some ways unique, because you have one isolated congregation. Here in the Grand Rapids area a school can draw from a number of congregations.

BF: We haven’t had any outsiders in the school. I suppose we would, but we’re very careful if we interview somebody. If an outsider wants to come in, we’re very careful about interviewing them. I’ve done a lot of those.

MHH: So there have been applicants?

BF: Yes. Not too many. It’s very important that we control the teaching and the student population. If you accept federal help, you lose that, so we don’t have any help like that.

MHH: You have fiercely maintained your independence.

BF: Right.

MHH: And it’s obvious that the devotion to the school and the enthusiasm for the school has played a large part in the history of the church then.

BF: That’s right. That’s the foundation of the church. I often say to those young people that the future of the church is on you. They need to know that.

MHH: Do you think they understand?

BF: Yes, the young people understand. The little kids might not, but still it’s OK to tell them that someday you’re going to be the teacher or the parent or the person that helps pay the bill. It’s OK to do that. You can’t do that too early.

MHH: I agree.

BF: I say that Dad was at the center of all the decisions from the beginning of our Protestant Reformed Church. And when Mr. Kim came over, I couldn’t listen to the Lone Ranger. I had to turn the radio off (laughter). I resented that (laughter).

So I was involved in all these controversies. And I even chimed in with an opinion once in a while. As a young man, there was an announcement in the bulletin that the consistory would welcome anyone who wanted to question the decision they made. And I went. Well, then they wouldn’t let me talk (laughter) about Vermeer. They wouldn’t answer. No. They weren’t very principled. And you know, Vermeer was constantly covering up for his misdeeds, so he couldn’t be open either. So the consistory followed him pretty much. Dad was not on that consistory.

There wasn’t a strong person on the consistory at the time to deal with a person like Rev. Vermeer. He was a pretty strong personality.

So, my knowledge is very personal of all the little things that came up and the dissensions, and the disagreements. And it was pretty interesting. That was a major factor in my life—to be able to do that.

MHH: Do you think (and I know there’s a difference of opinion on this question) that 1953 certainly had to do in the long run with principle differences, doctrinal differences, and important differences. I think we all understand that. But I’ve heard it said numerous times that personalities played far too large a role in the division that occurred in ‘53. Would you agree or disagree with that?

BF: I agree. Some of the people that left us were basically Protestant Reformed people. I knew [Rev.] Ed Knott very well, and really liked him. And he left us. He was, in my view, Protestant Reformed. But I think he was part of a group, a committee that wrote a conciliatory approach to the whole problem. And Rev. [Herman] Hoeksema put him down very hard. I think it could have been handled better. Although I dearly love [Rev.] Hoeksema. He visited at our house. I really liked him. But I still think it could have been handled better.

MHH: Mr. Feenstra, how would you compare the church of today with the church of your youth?

BF: Our church was founded around some Protestant Reformed people, true believers, who had very strong opinions. Sometimes I call them fire-brands because they weren’t putting out fires with water (laughter). So our church grew with that kind of a start. Common grace was the central issue in almost every sermon until 1953, until we had it at the beginning of the service, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” That was added in 1953. It hasn’t been expounded on enough in my view. All the law is contained in one word: “Love thy neighbor as thyself.” We know who our neighbor is because of the good Samaritan, and we know the difference between a believer and an unbeliever (in Matthew 25: “When I was hungry you fed me”). That should be a central part of our preaching and it’s not. It’s a side issue, maybe. I’ll talk to you later about it.

MHH: No, I’d like to get some of this on tape. Where do you feel the emphasis is on the preaching if it is not on “Love your neighbor as yourself,” as you defined it? What then? Are you implying that there is a deficiency? Explain that, if you will, please.
BF: There’s the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. We think we’re the publican. We don’t know that we are the Pharisee. I have heard sermons that we think we’re not the Pharisee. We are. We should be the publican. When we walk away from the sermon the finger should be pointing toward us, not at the Christian Reformed Church or the Catholic church or whatever. When we talk about those churches, we should do so with compassion that they have led themselves down this path, because except for the grace of God, we’d be there. I would like that to be emphasized in our preaching.

The reason that I think we are the Pharisee is because of what we read in Numbers: “I have beheld no iniquity in Israel.” After the performance of our deed, that deed is sanctified, and then we become the publican, through the eyes of Jesus. He doesn’t behold our sin. I would like to pursue that more in our preaching. But I’m off the question.

The difference between the preaching now and then? I say we started with people with very strong opinions, who voiced them in a very strong way—no room for discussion. I think we’ve progressed now, at least in our Redlands church, to where these things are handled more internally—Matthew 18ish. If you have an issue, you take it up one by one. And if that doesn’t resolve, you go with two or three. Then, only after all that is done, do you make it an ecclesiastical problem with the consistory and so on (church hierarchy).

I think we’re making some progress. Perfection is not here. We’re making some progress. I think we’re a little bit more tolerant of someone else’s view, without giving up any cardinal truths. You can’t give up any of that. You have to stay with that.

Part of the evidence of that in our church is that our school has been in existence now for twenty-some years, and no problem that has begun in the school has ever made its way to the church. No ecclesiastical problem has come from the school. That’s very much the responsibility of our principal (Ed Karsemeyer). They handle it internally. And that’s the way it ought to be. No problem should transfer to the church. As much as possible, the administration of the school and church should be separate. You can’t do that entirely because you have people that get into consistory and are already board members. That’s a principle that I’ve developed over many years. I saw it in Oak Lawn and South Holland, where the preachers were on the school boards. Wow! They destroyed one church, you know. I spoke with each of those ministers, and with the principal about it. I was on a classis that dealt with it.

So, I guess the preaching is very similar, although we have moved more in the direction that I just talked about: Love thy neighbor as thyself. It’s an impossible thing to do. We can’t do it. But in Christ’s forgiveness, we do—not before.

I think our sermons are very Reformed. That’s central. And as part of that, I’d like to take some emphasis off of all the strictly details into how we live.

MHH: You feel that that’s deficient but that progress is being made?

BF: I think progress can be made, is being made. It seems like small to me, you know. I start with my own family, and I even have trouble there (laughter). That’s OK. I love them. We are just a great family. After church on Sunday, the family gets together and we have a lunch and we have prayer and scripture reading. I’m very proud of that.

MHH: It certainly is important to have good relationships, especially for the generations to come. Do you feel that the church, on balance, is as strong now as it was when you were young, even though perhaps it takes a different form?

BF: I believe it is. My kids, and others—the generation below me—is at least as strong on the fundamental principles of the Protestant Reformed Church. They’re very strong.

MHH: How about the youth of the church? Do you see maintenance of biblical doctrines and teachings amongst them as well? Are they knowledgeable?

BF: That’s part of the strength I’m talking about. They are very knowledgeable. They read a lot. They have become leaders in the church and very well respected.

MHH: I was referring specifically, I guess, to even the generation even below them. Is the same true of them?

BF: As far as I know, yes. My grandkids and people that age? Oh, yes. They are very firm. Redlands will survive. I won’t go into that any further.

MHH: I am a little curious how you can say that with such confidence—not that I’m disagreeing. You seem very adamant on that. Obviously, if history is a precedent, Redlands probably will survive because you’ve been through some hard times. But what makes you say that with such vigor?
BF: I can’t say for public information. I’ll tell you that after this recorder is turned off (laughter).

MHH: I will respect your wishes. Are there any other comments or any other issues that you would like to address?

BF: Well, I’m very pleased that you’re doing this [interviewing]. I think it’s important that we know our history. I’m very sensitive to history. I’m preparing pictures that can be put on DVDs to preserve our history of the school, of the church, of the building of the church. So, I’m very pleased you’re doing this. I hope we can recover some records from the Christian Reformed Church.

MHH: I appreciate those comments. It gives me an incentive to continue this work. Thank you very kindly for your willing participation and thank you very much for the insights and comments that you made.

Poem

Monica Koole

75 Years Shining Onward

Seventy and five years so blest,
Faithfully fighting truth’s conquest,
Surmounting obstacles unknown
By the one whose light it has shown.

It yet beams bright against black night
Standing firm as a beacon light,
Exposing what in its path lies,
Casting out shadows of dark skies.

We pray by grace it continues
To signal through written issues,
To bring safety in stormy night
Till laid to rest in morning light.
The Daily Press

“press toward the mark…” (Philippians 3:14)

Our Everlasting God
Read Psalm 90:1–12

Psalm 90, the only psalm with its authorship attributed to Moses, opens the fourth book of Psalms. Some suggest that Moses penned this prayer in response to the just judgment that God pronounced on Israel in Numbers 14, a judgment elicited by their unbelieving consensus with the 10 spies. In response to Moses’ pleading, Jehovah pardons them, but he pronounces this sentence: they will wander in the wilderness for 40 years, and all of them who are 20 years old and older will perish there, never to see Canaan. Even if Moses didn’t pen Psalm 90 at that specific interval, it’s likely he wrote it while he led the Israelites through the desolate wilderness. The shadow of death hung over him, too: God later declared that he would also perish outside the promised land.

To what comfort did God’s people cling as they wandered through the harsh desert, homeless? Their dwelling place was the everlasting God. The one who had birthed the creation, the one who was even before there was a beginning, was their God. When he commanded, their bodies would return to the dust, a just penalty for their sin. But he would remain forever, faithful to them and to their children. Is that God your eternal home?

Number Your Days
Read Isaiah 40:1–17

God’s anger against their sins caused the Israelites to reflect on the fleeting nature of their earthly life. What are their lives like? Like debris swept away by floodwaters. Like grass that springs up in the morning and shrivels in the evening. Like “a tale that is told.” Says Matthew Henry, “Our years, when gone, can no more be recalled than the words that we have spoken.” And what, according to Psalm 90, defines those years? Not first strength, followed by labor and sorrow. No, the line translated in the KJV “yet is their strength labor and sorrow” means this: the very best of our brief lives consists of struggle and sadness.

Since that is the case, God’s people pray, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” “True believers alone, who know the difference between this transitory state and a blessed eternity, for which they were created, know what ought to be the aim of their life” (Calvin.) Do you live each of your fleeting days mindful of what ought to be the aim of your life?

Glad for God’s Wrath
Read Psalm 90

Psalm 7:11 declares, “God is angry with the wicked every day.” But in Psalm 90, God’s people say, “we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled…for all our days are passed away in thy wrath.” They ask, “Who can comprehend the power of thy anger? Thy wrath is as great as the fear that we owe thee” (v. 11). Do these verses teach then that God is also angry with his people? Yes, God is “terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins” (HC, Q&A 10). Although he has punished those sins in our Lord Jesus Christ, we will still experience his wrath when we walk unrepentantly in sin. Our secret sins and our iniquities anger him.

The wrath of God does not produce humility in the wicked, but true believers tremble at the thought of his displeasure. Still, they understand that his chastening of them is evidence of his love. For that reason we can be glad for the days in which he afflicts us and for the years in which we experience adversity.

Works Established
Read 2 Peter 3:8–13

When I was in grade school, the supporters of our school built an addition that doubled the building’s size. The spade that was used at the ground-breaking ceremony is still displayed in the hallway there along with Psalm 90:17: “And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.” To what work did the school constituency refer when it applied that text to the ground-breaking ceremony? Certainly not to the tin-clad building that would soon be erected. It belongs to the elements that will be swept away in the stream of time, to the works that will be burned up at the end of all things. No, they prayed regarding the work that would take place within the walls of that building: the training of covenant children.

Brothers and sisters, how often don’t we fight discouragement because it seems that the work we do is in vain?
The mother washes the laundry, only to wake to another hamper full of dirty clothes. The father disciplines the child one day, only to discipline him again for the same sin on the following day. The Bible encourages us not to be weary in well-doing, for the work that we do in the name of the Lord is not done in vain: it will be established for eternity and graciously and abundantly rewarded (see also Gal. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15:58; Col. 3:24).

Sing or pray Psalter #246.

Our Promised Protector
Read Psalm 91
Psalm 91 promises God’s people that he will be their protector in trouble. The first four verses contain several metaphors that show how the Most High cares for those with whom he has established his covenant. To those who confess that Jehovah is their God, he is like a shadow. This may not strike us as a very meaningful picture, but to those who live in arid climates as the Israelites did, shade from the heat could sometimes have been a matter of life or death. Jehovah is also his people’s refuge, the fortress to whom they run when under attack. He is the one who saves them from violence—“the snare of the fowler”—and from disease—“the noisome [that is, deadly or destructive] pestilence.” He is a tender, loving Father: he bears his own on his mighty wings, and he covers them with his feathers, shielding them from the elements and bearing the brunt of their predators’ assaults.

Do you take refuge in the shelter of Jehovah’s wings? Then celebrate with the psalmist: “Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice” (Ps. 63:7).

Sing or pray Psalter #163.

Suffering and God’s Saints
Read Luke 4:1–13
Psalm 91 must be interpreted in light of all scripture, because the promise that God will protect his people is a truth that is easily misunderstood and misapplied. Many false teachers have arisen and deceived many, convincing their followers that passages such as Psalm 91 teach that no harm will ever come to them, if only they have enough faith. The devil himself exploited this text when he tempted our Lord. When we suffer, Satan also tempts us to believe that God is not faithful to his promises. But what does the Bible really say about suffering and God’s saints?

The book of Job details the suffering of a faithful saint. Job’s friends interpret his troubles the same way prosperity preachers apply Psalm 91. They counsel Job this way: “Repent! God must be punishing you because you’ve sinned!” God angrily rebukes those miserable comforters, “Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right” (Job 42:7). Joseph also confessed that even though he had suffered, God was faithful: he used for good all the evil inflicted on Joseph by his brothers. We, too, must confess that all things—joy and sorrow—work together for good to those who love God (Rom. 8:28).

Sing or pray Psalter #248.

June
14
The Promised Possession
Read Luke 21:7–19
God promises to protect his people in trouble. That doesn’t mean that his saints will never suffer. Think of a child whom you know who is doted on by his or her parents. Does getting everything that he or she wants improve that child? No! Such a child is spoiled and shallow. Yet that’s how we would like God to treat us! Hebrews 12:6 reminds us, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

In Luke 21:16ff Jesus foretells the suffering that his disciples would endure: “Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.” Then he says, “But there shall not an hair of your head perish.” What?! Some of them would be killed, but not a hair of their heads would perish? That’s right: in patient suffering they would possess their souls (v. 19). In other words, in this life you will have trouble. You will even face death. But no matter what evils befall you, the Lord will preserve your soul. That’s a possession that will be yours forever.

Sing or pray Psalter #249.

June
15
The Promise’s Peace
Read Psalm 91 and Isaiah 43:1–3
All in all, the correct interpretation of Psalm 91 depends on one little preposition, which is found in verse 15: in. Our God will be with us “in trouble.” As he walked with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace, so he will sustain you in the trials that you bear. “How can you be sure?” you might ask. Remember the lengths to which he went to be with us in trouble. The second person of the Trinity became incarnate and suffered the judgment of God for your sake and mine: “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15–16).

We can have peace even when we suffer because we know that God is with us, working all things together for our good: he would conform us to the image of his son.

Sing or pray Psalter #154.

June
16
Spoiler Alert!
Read Deuteronomy 8:1–10
Let’s pretend you’ve just begun reading a book, when you come across a review of it that contains these words: “Spoiler Alert!” You’ve only just begun the story, but now you know how it will end! Sometimes that’s frustrating,
but other times, particularly in the heart-rending sections of a book, it can be comforting to remind yourself that no matter how bad things seem at the present, you know the story has a positive outcome.

We’ve been given a “spoiler alert” with regard to God’s story. We will overcome our troubles! Christ has the victory! Just as God delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, sustained them in the wilderness, and gave them a land flowing with milk and honey, so he has redeemed us, will shepherd us through this life of sin and sorrow, and will usher us into a heavenly land where there will be no more death, crying, or pain (Rev. 21:4).

Sing or pray Psalter #35.

A Psalm for the Sabbath
Read Psalm 92

Today is a Friday, but the psalm we just read bears this heading: “A Psalm or Song for the Sabbath day.” The fourth commandment requires that God’s people keep the Sabbath day holy. The Israelites were commanded not to work on the sabbath day, but that does not mean they were idle on that day. Psalm 92 lists some of the activities that filled their Sabbath. On that day they gave thanks to Jehovah, and they sang his praise. Accompanied by musical instruments, they declared his lovingkindness and faithfulness in the morning and at night. They meditated on his great works and unsearchable thoughts. They considered the terrible end of the foolish and the blessed way of the righteous.

The command to us to keep the sabbath day holy does not mean that we must simply be inactive on the Lord’s Day. What activities occupy you on the Sabbath?

Sing or pray Psalter #250.

Call the Sabbath a Delight
Read Isaiah 58:13–14

Some who call themselves Christians maintain that the observance of the sabbath day is no longer required. They might point to Colossians 2:16–17 as grounds for their position: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come...” But this text—as translated in the KJV—doesn’t refer to “the sabbath day” but to “the sabbath days.” If you read through Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, you will see that these days of rest were part of the Old Testament feasts and festivals, which pointed to Christ and were fulfilled in him. Our Savior fulfilled the civil and ceremonial law, but the moral law of God still stands. We may not disregard the command to keep the sabbath day any more than we may disobey the command to not kill.

God promised the Old Testament saints who honored the sabbath day that they would find their delight in him and enjoy his rich blessings. That promise is for us who live in the New Testament as well.

Sing or pray Psalter #348.

On the First Day of the Week
Read Acts 2:1–21

The sabbath day, along with the institution of marriage and man’s calling to work, is a creation ordinance. God rested on the seventh day, and he blessed and sanctified it. The Old Testament saints remembered the sabbath day, and it was Jesus’ custom, too, to spend the seventh day of the week at the synagogue. But once our Lord rose from the dead on the first day of the week, believers began to assemble on that day, “the Lord’s Day,” instead. So the church was assembled when the Lord poured out his Holy Spirit upon them on the first day of the week. Acts 20:7 refers to Paul preaching in Troas on the first day of the week, and in 1 Corinthians 16:2 the inspired apostle instructs the church in Corinth to take a collection for the poor when they gathered on the first day of the week.

Although there are religious sects that insist that we break God’s law by observing the first day of the week as the Sabbath rather than the seventh, by doing so we stand with the church of the New Testament from the apostles on. Each Lord’s Day is a celebration of our Savior’s glorious resurrection, without which the Christian faith would be futile.

Sing or pray Psalter #227.

Jesus, our Sabbath Rest
Read Hebrews 4

According to Lord’s Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism, God requires that we keep the Sabbath by maintaining the ministry of the gospel and theological schools and by diligently frequenting the church of God “to hear his word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian.” Added to that, however, is a statement that concerns not only the Sabbath, but every day: “That all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me; and thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.”

In other words, our lives are to be characterized by sabbath rest. According to Hebrews 4:10, the one who has entered God’s rest rests from his works, just as God rested from his work of creation. The work of salvation is complete. You and I are unable to do anything that would merit with God. We must cease from our attempts to gain God’s approval by the works that we do and cling by faith to the righteousness of Jesus Christ, our sabbath rest.

Sing or pray Psalter #251.

Jehovah Reigns
Read Psalm 93

Throughout the Bible we read references to men and women girding themselves. To gird is to secure one’s loose cloth-
ing or to fasten a weapon onto one’s body so that he or she is prepared for action. Psalm 93 says that God girds himself, too: he girds himself with strength. He’s ready to take action, and in strength he has established the earth. That knowledge comforts the psalmist because he’s surrounded by a tumultuous sea. The reference here is not to a literal flood and waves of water, though Jehovah is certainly greater than the terrifying storms that sometimes take place at sea. No, the psalmist paints a word picture of the wicked, who “are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (Isa. 57:20).

The image of a troubled sea fits the ungodly as well today as it did in the Old Testament. At times it may seem as if unbelievers would shake the very foundations of the earth in their fury against God and his holy word. But in the ears of the mighty God to whom we belong, their raging is just a bunch of futile noise, noise that he can and will still at any time, for he reigns, the king of all the earth.

That knowledge comforts the psalmist because he’s sure and immovable. Writes Spurgeon, “As king, Jehovah has established three things that are named in Psalm 93: the earth, his throne, and his testimonies are sure and immovable.” What comfort for you and me as the storms of secularism and the terrifying tide of Islam lift up their voice against God’s word and against his saints. All of these waves are in the hand of the King, who directs their flow according to his sovereign will.

That living and abiding word of the LORD is the means by which we’ve been born again (1 Pet. 1:23): We who have been regenerated are called to be holy as our God is holy. Psalm 93 concludes with this statement: “Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, forever.” Jehovah girds himself with strength: we, his people, are called to gird up the loins of our minds. We must be ready for action, ready to fight against sin and Satan, in order that we might be sober, hopeful, and holy in all of our conduct. Do you belong to the God who reigns, to the one whose word is established forever? Then holiness must characterize your thoughts, words, and actions.

Sing or pray Psalter #126.

**June 22**

**The Lord’s Word Endures Forever**

**Read 1 Peter 1**

As king, Jehovah has established three things that are named in Psalm 93: the earth, his throne, and his testimonies are sure and immovable. Writes Spurgeon, “As the rocks remain unmoved amid the tumult of the sea, so does divine truth resist all the currents of man’s opinion and the storms of human controversy.” What comfort for you and me as the storms of secularism and the terrifying tide of Islam lift up their voice against God’s word and against his saints. All of these waves are in the hand of the King, who directs their flow according to his sovereign will.

That living and abiding word of the LORD is the means by which we’ve been born again (1 Pet. 1:23): We who have been regenerated are called to be holy as our God is holy. Psalm 93 concludes with this statement: “Holiness becometh thine house, O Lord, forever.” Jehovah girds himself with strength: we, his people, are called to gird up the loins of our minds. We must be ready for action, ready to fight against sin and Satan, in order that we might be sober, hopeful, and holy in all of our conduct. Do you belong to the God who reigns, to the one whose word is established forever? Then holiness must characterize your thoughts, words, and actions.

Sing or pray Psalter #126.

**June 23**

**Jehovah, the Judge**

**Read Psalm 94:1–7**

Psalm 93 describes Jehovah as the everlasting king. Psalm 94 declares that he is the judge of all the earth. The psalmist describes the foolish reasoning of the wicked: they think that he who formed the ear will not hear their boasting, that he who made the eye will not observe their murderous deeds, that he who disciplines entire na-

**June 24**

**In the Multitude of Thoughts**

**Read Psalm 94:12–23**

How highly does the LORD esteem the thoughts of wicked men? “They are vanity,” that is, as short-lived and as empty as a breath. That’s his estimation, too, of the multitude of anxious thoughts that trouble the psalmist in verse 19. When the psalmist allows such thoughts to fill his mind, he is in danger of slipping. The same is true of you and me. The Lord is at hand; Jehovah is our help. Therefore, we’re commanded not to be anxious about anything—not anything! To be anxious is sin! Instead, we’re commanded to let our requests be known unto God, and those prayers and supplications to him are to be accompanied not with doubt or fear, but with thanksgiving.

When he is troubled, the psalmist finds comfort and delight in thinking upon God. Likewise, you and I must replace our anxious thoughts with a multitude of thoughts about Jehovah as he’s revealed himself in his word. How important is meditation to living a faithful Christian life? “A Christian without meditation is like a soldier without arms, or a workman without tools. Without meditation, the truths of God will not stay with us; the heart is hard, and the memory slippery, and without meditation all is lost” (Thomas Watson).

Sing or pray Psalter #253:8–12.

**June 25**

**Mischief by a Law**

**Read Romans 6**

Psalm 94:20 contains a short but striking description of wicked rulers who unjustly condemn the righteous: they frame mischief by a law. In other words, the reprobate, even those who hold positions of earthly authority, are bound to a law. That law is the law of sin. They cannot do anything that does not miss the mark of God’s holiness and righteousness.

What about you and me? We are no longer bound to the law of sin. As Paul explains in Romans 6, those who are in Christ have died with him: a dead man does not sin!
Instead, we’ve been raised to new life: we’re now free to live unto God! What follows is this command: since you are free, don’t let sin reign over you anymore. Fight against the remnant of the law of sin that remains in your members! To all those whom Jesus Christ has delivered from the law of sin and death he has also given the earnest of his Holy Spirit, and there is no sin, no matter how besetting, that lies outside his power.

Sing or pray Psalter #142.

Kneel Before our Maker
Psalm 95:1–7a

Several days ago we noted how the reprobate hate any reminder that God is their creator. That reality incites rebellion within them. The same truth has a very different result in the redeemed: it moves them to worship. There are several things worth noting about this worship. First, it is corporate. The psalmist enjoins his fellow saints to join him in praising “the rock of our salvation.” Second, it is marked by joy and thanksgiving. Third, it takes place in the very presence of God. And fourth, the offered praise is guided by the word of God himself, for the saints sing to him from the inspired psalms.

In addition to the grounds that God is the creator and governor of all things, the psalmist gives his friends other reasons for praise. He reminds them how ineffably great he is in comparison to gods of men’s imaginations. But above all, he names this reason: he is our God. The Lord had set his love on them, not because of anything in themselves, but out of his great mercy. More than any other reason, that truth incites grateful praise in the hearts of his people.

Sing or pray Psalter #256.

The Voice of our Maker
Psalm 95:6–11

Psalm 95 is somewhat reminiscent of Psalm 19: the psalmist first considers God’s general revelation of himself in creation, and then he ponders God’s special revelation of himself in his word. There is a difference between the two psalms, however: Psalm 19 focuses on the law of God, while Psalm 95 mentions his very voice. Psalm 147:19–20 links election and God’s special revelation and shows how that truth moves his people to praise: “He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise ye the Lord.”

But there is a solemn warning that also comes to those who hear Jehovah’s voice: do not harden your hearts as your fathers did in the wilderness. We noted yesterday that the praise to which the psalmist calls his fellow saints is corporate. We hear God’s voice speaking to us yet today in public worship through our pastors and preachers. Do you harden your heart when you hear that word, perhaps excusing your sin on the basis of your pastor’s personality or sins, or do you respond by carefully applying that word to your heart and life?

Sing or pray Psalter #255.

Declare His Glory Among the Heathen
Read Psalm 96

What’s so striking about Psalm 96? It’s an exhortation to worship Jehovah, an exhortation that, though penned in the Old Testament, isn’t addressed only to the nation of Israel, but to all the nations of the world. “Sing unto the Lord, all the earth” (v. 1). “Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people (‘kindreds’ refers to different families or tribes of people—v. 7). “Fear before him, all the earth” (v. 9). What reason for praising God does the psalmist give all these people? The wonderful and glorious salvation that he has wrought. And how are all the nations of the earth to learn of this great Savior? Those who know his glory have the command to broadcast the good news: “Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people” (v. 3). “Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth” (v. 10).

That great commission is still the calling of the church today. Just before he ascended into heaven our Lord commanded his disciples, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations…” (Matt. 28:19a). Do you do all in your power to support the cause of missions and share the good news?

Sing or pray Psalter #259.

A Beautiful God (1)
Read Psalm 96

Psalm 96 teaches that our God is a beautiful God. “Strength and beauty are in his sanctuary” (Ps. 96:6). We live in a culture that equates beauty with youth and youth with beauty. Many of the gods of our nation are people who are outwardly beautiful: sports stars, models, actors and actresses. Their lives influence how many live, what they wear, and who they aspire to be. Consequently, Americans spend an exorbitant amount of time and money on pleasure-seeking, cosmetics, and cosmetic surgeries, hair care, and extensive wardrobes.

We care for our bodies because they are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and dedicated to the service of God. We must never intentionally desecrate or spoil that temple. We also care for our bodies and appearance out of love for our neighbor. But we must also remember that our God is not a physical being: the things that are beautiful about him cannot be beheld with the eye. Similarly, the beautiful traits that he desires in us are spiritual attributes, like grace and holiness. Who dictates how you live and how you adorn yourself: the idol gods of the nations or the one, only, true and beautiful God revealed in the scriptures?

Sing or pray Psalter #257.
A Beautiful God (2)
Read Psalm 148

There is really no way that Darwinism, the theory of the evolution of species by natural selection, can explain the beauty that we encounter in this world in which we live. Consider for a moment a strikingly beautiful piece of music, the intricate design of a butterfly’s wings, or a glorious sunrise. Those beautiful things move us, don’t they? Just as you cannot study an exquisite painting or read a masterful novel without wondering about its creator, so the beautiful things in God’s world cause us to ponder his beauty. If that’s not true of a person, Romans 1 teaches that his foolish heart is darkened, yet he is without excuse for his denial of God.

We define God’s grace as his undeserved favor. It is that, but God’s grace is also his loveliness or beauty. The fact that you and I find grace in the eyes of the Lord, that we are beautiful in his sight, that is totally undeserved and unmerited on our part.

Sing or pray Psalter #258.

A Beautiful Savior (1)
Read Isaiah 53

If you’ve ever seen an ad for a movie about the life of Jesus, perhaps you noted the handsome face of the actor chosen to play the part of our Lord. Or maybe you’ve seen a painting of what some artist thought our Lord might look like, portraying him with radiant skin, shining hair, and gentle eyes. Jesus was truly man: if cameras had existed in his day, it would not have been a sin to photograph him, but in God’s providence, we don’t know what our Lord looked like. We do know this: it was not Jesus’ outward beauty that drew his followers to him. As Isaiah 53 teaches, “he hath no form nor comeliness that we should desire him.” Rather, it was Jesus’ word, gracious and authoritative, that drew throngs. Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. Jehovah’s beautiful, spiritual attributes shone from him. Does his gracious authoritative word, applied by his Holy Spirit, work those same beautiful attributes in you?

Sing or pray Psalter #40.

A Beautiful Savior (2)
Read Revelation 1

When he lived as man on this earth, Jesus’ physical appearance was very ordinary. But when our Savior comes again on the clouds of heaven, he will be beautiful to behold! The man whose “visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men” will shine like the sun (Isa. 52:14; Rev. 1:12–18). On that day, you and I will be made beautiful, too. Like a clumsy, earth-bound caterpillar metamorphoses into a breathtaking, feather-light butterfly, our bodies—whether still alive or long in the grave—will be remade into bodies that are immortal and incorruptible. Nor will our souls be soiled with the ugliness of sin any longer. And forever we will dwell in the presence of our beautiful savior and the ineffably lovely triune God.

It was that beauty, revealed to him in the sanctuary, that David desired to behold all the days of his life (Ps. 27:4). Is that your desire, too?

Sing or pray Psalter #115.

Rejoice at His Judgments
Read Psalm 97

Jehovah’s terrible judgments can be seen in creation: storms, fire, and earthquakes. Though men all over the earth tremble at his judgments, many refuse to acknowledge him as God. The psalmist prays in Psalm 97 that those proud unbelievers may be confounded, that is, confused or ashamed, and he calls them to turn from their idols. In contrast to the wicked, the people of God rejoice when they see his judgments, even though they, too, may suffer some of the terrible consequences of those so-called “natural disasters.” Why do they rejoice? Because they belong to the Judge, they know that he reigns, and they recognize his judgments as signs that his kingdom is coming.

When we pray that the Lord’s kingdom come, we pray that the reign of the Lord may be conspicuous and his power displayed in his church and on her behalf. We should pray daily for his kingdom to come. But this should be our daily praise, whether or not it’s obvious to us at the moment: our Lord does reign!

Sing or pray Psalter #260.

Rejoice at His Marvelous Salvation
Read Psalm 98

In the documentary Expelled, commentator Ben Stein asks world-renowned atheist Richard Dawkins what he will say to God if he discovers, once he dies, that God really does exist. Dawkins chillingly quotes the late philosopher Bertrand Russell: “Sir, why did you take such pains to hide yourself?” Psalm 98 teaches that Jehovah has openly showed his righteousness in the sight of the heathen, but they consider his marvels with willing ignorance. They will be without excuse when our victorious King comes to judge the world with his truth.

How do we, to whom Jehovah has remembered his mercy and truth, respond when we behold his salvation, whether pictured in creation or revealed to us in his word? The psalmist enjoins God’s people throughout the earth to join creation in praising their King in song. Are your home, your family, and your life characterized by joyful noise and singing?

Sing or pray Psalter #261.
July 5

Tremble Before Him
Read Psalm 99

The fear of God is largely nonexistent in the world in which we live. The Bible speaks of two kinds of fear of God. One is a fear of terror; the other is a fear of veneration. Both are hard to come by in our day: the ungodly flagrantly deny the existence of God, and many believers approach him with indolent informality. But Jehovah says this about the people with whom he has made an everlasting covenant: “I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jer. 32:40b). The fear of the Lord that must characterize his saints “is a fear that leads us not to run from him but to draw near to him through Jesus Christ and gladly submit to him in faith, love, and obedience” (Albert Martin).

How do you know if you fear the Lord as you ought? The reverential fear of the Lord is the work of the Holy Spirit from which flows his other fruits: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. Are those fruits evident in your life?

Sing or pray Psalter #266.

July 6

Tremble Before Him (2)
Read Psalm 99; Ecclesiastes 12:13–14; Nehemiah 7:1–3

“Fear God, and keep his commandments.” That’s how the wisest man that ever lived summed the whole duty of man. The fear of God is a fruit that can be observed: Hananiah was a man who feared God more than many. It’s also a quality in which we must grow: the Holy Spirit works the fear of the Lord in us through the word of God. Jehovah spoke to the Israelites in the cloudy pillar: he speaks to us through the scriptures as they’re expounded in the preaching and as we read and meditate upon them. This explains why lack of reverence for God’s word always accompanies lack of reverence for God himself.

In Psalm 99 veneration for God and his word moves the psalmist to worship, and he bids his fellow saints to exalt Jehovah with him. Does the fear of the Lord determine how you worship God, both in private and in public? Are you able to set aside your own comfort and preferences in order to properly exalt the one true God? True “worship is designed to remind you that in the center of all things is a glorious and gracious King, and this king is not you” (Paul Tripp). Tremble before him.

Sing or pray Psalter #267.

July 7

Worship Fueled by Knowledge
Read Psalm 100 and 2 Peter 3:18

When Lucy Pevensie returns to Narnia in C. S. Lewis’s book Prince Caspian, she’s startled at how much bigger Aslan is. Aslan reassures her that he’s the same size he always was, but he says, “Every year you grow, you will find me bigger.” Lewis captures a truth of the Christian life in that little scene. Our understanding of the greatness of our God must continually grow. We considered yesterday that the fear of God is worked through his word; Psalm 100 verifies that truth. This familiar little psalm is a call to worship, worship that is inspired by and infused with thanksgiving. But notice especially verse 3a: “Know ye that the Lord he is God…” That joyful, thankful praise is fueled by knowledge. We cannot worship God unless we first know him, and, knowing him, we cannot help but praise him.

2 Peter 3:18 testifies to the truth that growth in grace is always joined to growth in knowledge. We must dedicate ourselves to earnest prayer and study so that we can increase in our understanding of the greatness of our God and of Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. To him be glory both now and forever.

Sing or pray Psalter #268.

James Jonker

Seventy-five years of Beacon Lights history would be incomplete without mention of James (Jim) Jonker. After attending Calvin College in the late 1950s, he was under contract to teach at Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School. However, he believed that he was called to study for the ministry in the Protestant Reformed churches, and he intended to begin his studies in January of 1962. To make this possible, Hope school released him from his contract in the middle of the school year, something unusual to say the least. The following letter gives the details.

Mark H. Hoeksema

Sewtwenty-five years of Beacon Lights history would be incomplete without mention of James (Jim) Jonker. After attending Calvin College in the late 1950s, he was under contract to teach at Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School. However, he believed that he was called to study for the ministry in the Protestant Reformed churches, and he intended to begin his studies in January of 1962. To make this possible, Hope school released him from his contract in the middle of the school year, something unusual to say the least. The following letter gives the details.
In God’s inscrutable wisdom, this was not to be. After participating in a Christmas program on December 25, 1961, he and a friend set out for Pennsylvania to visit female friends. Driving through the night on the turnpike, early on the morning of December 26 they crashed into the rear of a slow-moving semi, and Jim was killed. Further details are in the obituary above.

One of Jim’s many talents was omitted from the obituary. He was a poet, and sometimes a clever and humorous poet. After mentioning that Jim was his good friend and was involved in the activities of the young people, Prof. David Engelsma writes, “The year he died, he, Don Doezema, and I took a 6-week camping trip in the West, beginning with attending the young peoples’ convention in Loveland, Colorado. He wrote the poem about the mountains in the area of the Tetons while on this trip.”

In keeping with our practice of including poetry in the magazine, Beacon Lights will publish his poetry in this and future issues.
In God’s Country

The rolling fields of brown and green
Embraced the purple mountains high;
The rugged peaks with snowy lips
Reached bravely up and kissed the sky.

The azure blue stretched out its hands,
Pulled up the eastern shining sphere;
The sun with kindly smiling face
Gave light and life and warmth and cheer.

The great Creator, moved by love,
Looked down on hill and plain and wood
And saw his handiwork divine
Tell forth his praise and said, “Tis good.”

This past summer I was able to go to my first young people’s convention. It was held in Michigan at the Michindoh Conference Center. I learned a lot and met a lot of new people. The topic of this essay is to see similarities and differences of the young people’s convention from the 1940s and the conventions of today. The main goal of writing about this is to see how other believers got together in one place to fellowship and grow spiritually.

The young people’s conventions throughout the 1940s were normally just two days. In 1941 the convention was held at Oak Lawn, Illinois (Vol. 1, Issue 5, p. 17). In 1946 the convention was held for two days, where the first day consisted of registration and lodging arrangements, lunch at church, a business meeting, a mass meeting of all the young peoples, and a speech. Thursday, they went to Hughes Park in Hudsonville, Michigan and had a pancake breakfast.

In 1947 the convention was held for three days instead of two. The first day they had registration, lodging, supper at places of lodging, and a mass meeting of all the young peoples at First Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Wednesday they went to Townsend Park for the day. Thursday they had a pancake breakfast in the morning, and later in the day they had a banquet (Vol. 7, Issue 10, p. 14).

The young people’s convention that I attended lasted five days, from Monday to Friday morning. On Monday morning we had registration at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids and then left on buses to the Michindoh Conference Center. When we got there, we unpacked and had
The speeches, I believe, were the most important part of the convention. The theme of the convention decided what the speeches were going to be on. Some speech themes included “Thoroughly Equipped,” “The Strength and Beauty of Youth,” and “Fellowship in Christ.” From the theme “Fellowship in Christ,” Carl Reitsma wrote in a 1947 Beacon Lights: “On the contrary, our aim has been the growth and edification of Protestant Reformed youth in order that we may through communion with our God be drawn closer to him,” (Vol. 7, Issue 10, p. 8). The main reason for conventions was growing closer to God and to his people, and that has been the main goal of them ever since young people’s conventions have started. The number of speeches was limited to two. One was usually during the day of the first day, and the second was held during the banquet. The theme of the 2015 convention was “Be Vigilant.” It was based on 1 Peter 5:8. The theme song was Psalter number 71. We had speeches by Rev. Koole, Rev. McGeown, and Rev. Langerak. They were all very inspirational and encouraging, especially since we live in a day and age of much wickedness. I very much wish that I had taken notes on the speeches so that I could remember more about them. All in all, they were the best part of the day no matter how tired you were. The speeches had a way of renewing strength in you to go about the day with those words in mind.

The conventions from the 1940s and now have many differences, yet they have the same goal in mind. A young people’s convention, no matter what time period, has the same goal of having Christian fellowship with fellow believers, and to grow spiritually stronger and closer to God. I believe that I did grow spiritually stronger during this time, and from what I have read in Beacon Lights, so did other believers who went in the 1940s. It was a great experience, and I look forward to the upcoming convention in 2016.

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

Through wisdom is an house builded;
and by understanding it is established:
And by knowledge shall the chambers
be filled with all precious and pleasant riches.
—Proverbs 24:3–4
The second century AD (100s) was an age of difficult change for the young Christian church. The last of the apostles, John the beloved disciple, had passed into glory at the turn of the century. The church found herself assailed by persecution from without and troubled by heresy, her more dangerous enemy, from within. For the first time the leadership of the church fell to men, many of whom had never heard in person the preaching of the apostles. Thus the second century marked the change of an era. These early days are not the clearest to us when we look back from our own place in history. Many of the individual saints who lived during this formative era of Christian history, who kept the faith, and who handed it down to the generations that followed are lost to us in the misty past. One of the important saints of this early age is Irenaeus of Lyons. We know tantalizingly little about his life and person beyond what can be gleaned from his surviving works and the references made to him in the works of other early writers. Although we know little about the man himself, we know enough about his work on behalf of the church to recognize his importance. Irenaeus played an important role in establishing the doctrine of the early church and protecting her precious gospel heritage from corruption at the hands of heretics.

The exact date of Irenaeus’ birth is unknown. He was likely born to parents of Greek descent sometime between AD 115 and 130 in Asia Minor. The wide range of possible birth dates is due to the fact that we do not have enough historical information to pin down a precise date. Regardless, Irenaeus lived about a century after the death and resurrection of Christ. He belonged to that generation of Christians whose great task it was to preserve the doctrine of the apostles now that the apostles were no longer with the church in the world. As a young man Irenaeus studied for many years at the feet of Polycarp (AD 69-154), the bishop of the church in Smyrna. Polycarp himself had been a disciple of the apostle John. That itself is something extraordinary for us to think about, isn’t it? Imagine knowing and learning from someone who personally knew and had been taught by the apostle John! Irenaeus flourished under Polycarp’s instruction, which God used to shape and mold him. John’s theological language and emphasis on Christ as the eternal Word of God, mediated to Irenaeus by Polycarp, left its distinctive mark on Irenaeus’ thought. Polycarp also imparted to Irenaeus an abiding love for the gospel and for the scriptures. That love would be the fire that would fuel him for the rest of his life.

Aside from the time he spent at the feet of the venerable Polycarp, we know little about Irenaeus’ early life. He disappears from the historical record for about twenty years, from 155, the date of Polycarp’s martyrdom, to 177 when he appears again in Gaul (roughly modern France). During this time Irenaeus likely worked as a missionary in Gaul. Gaul was on the outskirts of the Roman Empire. Irenaeus spent a number of years after the death of his teacher, tirelessly laboring to bring the gospel to the pagan peoples who lived on the empire’s fringes. Irenaeus ended up settling down and took up permanent residence in Lyons, one of the most prominent cities of Roman Gaul. There Irenaeus became a presbyter in the church. He soon became involved in the special work of visiting the confessors of the church imprisoned in that city. Providentially, the confessors chose Irenaeus to deliver a letter on their behalf to

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2 In the early church the title “confessor” was given to a member of the church who was imprisoned for his or her confession of the Christian faith and refusal to denounce Jesus Christ. Confessors were not the same as martyrs, though many confessors became martyrs. A martyr was a Christian who was put to death for his or her faith.
the bishop of Rome. God used this journey to save Irenaeus’ life. While he was abroad, brief but fierce persecution broke out in Lyons under the emperor Marcus Aurelius. This outburst of persecution claimed the lives of many Christians in Lyons, including that of the bishop Pothinus. Upon his return to Lyons, Irenaeus was elected bishop by the people in 178. In this position he labored faithfully the rest of his life, pastoring the flock of that city and writing his many literary works in defense of the faith.

As a writer, theologian, and apologist, Irenaeus has left a deep mark on church history. Irenaeus was one of the early church’s first and finest theologians, whose skill in interpreting the scriptures and articulating theology stands above that of most other men in his age. Irenaeus stands out as a guardian of the church. It is interesting to note in this regard that Irenaeus’ name means “peaceable.” Unbeknownst to his parents, the name they gave him turned out to be quite prophetic. Irenaeus treasured the peace of the church above all, and strove throughout his ministry to bring peace to the church. That he did, not by fleeing from conflict, but by meeting heretics head on. True peace in the church, he recognized, is impossible so long as heresy is allowed to make war on the truth within her very walls. Irenaeus understood that and defended the truth of the gospel against every species of heresy that plagued the church in his day. This he did by taking up the pen. Sadly, most of his writings are lost or have come down to us only in fragments. But thankfully, his greatest work, Against Heresies, has survived the ravages of time. From this work much can be gleaned of Irenaeus’ thought. What comes out especially is his impressive knowledge of the scriptures and his ability to explain and apply them. He is the first of the early fathers to make extensive use of the entire New Testament in his writings. He is also the first to produce what can be considered a systematic theology of the Christian faith, setting forth and relating the main doctrines of the Scriptures as a unified body of truth.

In Against Heresies Irenaeus dissects the heresy of Gnosticism and refutes it from scripture. Who were the Gnostics? The Gnostics were a heretical sect within the early Christian church who taught that matter, the physical stuff that makes up the universe, is of itself evil. Salvation, therefore, consisted of being liberated from one’s body and the material world. The Gnostics taught that the way of escape (salvation) was by being illumined by a secret knowledge. Jesus’ role in this escape plan was to come down and provide this secret illumination to the select few Gnostic believers who were spiritual enough to receive it. By way of this knowledge, they claimed, the spiritual part of them would be freed from the material part. In accord with the Gnostics’ condemnation of matter, they denied Jesus’ real humanity. Jesus, they asserted, never became incarnate, he never died on the cross, and he never rose from the dead. In sum, the Gnostics denied every core teaching of the gospel and replaced them with fanciful doctrines of their own.

Removed as we are from this controversy and the ancient worldview that birthed it, we easily miss the significance of Irenaeus’ work in combating this heresy. God raised up Irenaeus at a time of great peril. At this time the church did not have any officially adopted creeds to serve as walls to protect her from the invading armies of error. Many members of the church were poor and illiterate. Very few Christians possessed their own copies of the Bible because they simply were not available. From a human perspective, the church was young and her members vulnerable to the attacks of wolves. Gnosticism was an attractive option to the people of the day. Many in the church were deceived and led captive by this error. If Gnosticism had prevailed, Christianity would have perished. The faith of the apostles would have been absorbed into the melting pot of Greco-Roman culture and religion. But God saw to it that his church would not be swallowed up by the world. The mighty bulwark which God used to protect his church was the company of great pastors and teachers who followed in the apostles’ footsteps. God raised up these men to shepherd his people along the paths of truth. God used Irenaeus to safeguard the truth and to burn away the error with the pure light of the gospel of Christ. God is still doing this today. He still raises up great saints whose work he uses to keep his church from being swallowed up by the world.

One of the main battles Irenaeus fought was a battle over scripture. The Gnostics took the scriptures and twisted them in order to make them seem to support their false teachings. Failing that, they would

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3 Schaff, 748-752.

4 It is worth noting that Gnosticism is not dead today. The New Age philosophies and religions found in our society are really nothing more than Gnosticism repackaged for the modern world.
cut out from scripture the passages they disagreed with. For example, the Gnostic leader Marcion denied that the Old Testament was the word of God. He denied this because he believed that the God of the Old Testament was a different God from the God of the New Testament. He busied himself with the task of editing the scriptures. His final product was a Bible pruned of nearly everything except the gospel of Luke and some of Paul’s epistles. In the providence of God, this misuse of scripture would in the end turn out for the church’s good, for it forced the church to think deeply about the proper use and interpretation of scripture. As a result of this conflict, Irenaeus laid some of the cornerstones of the doctrine of Scripture. He developed a couple of the most fundamental principles of biblical interpretation, principles we use to this day.

First, over against the divorce between the Old and New Testaments introduced by the Gnostics, Irenaeus taught and developed the unity and essential oneness of the Old Testament and New Testament scriptures. Against the Gnostics who contended that the Old Testament was a collection of Jewish stories about a different god, Irenaeus demonstrated the unity of the Old and New Dispensations in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ, he insisted, is the beating heart of every sacred book.5 Second, Irenaeus is one of the earliest proponents of that great principle, Scripture interprets Scripture. We rightly associate this principle with the Reformation; the Reformers more than any other applied this principle. But it was not invented in the sixteenth century. Already in the second century Irenaeus set forth this same principle in simple form. “Proofs of the things which are contained in the Scriptures,” Irenaeus says, “cannot be shown except from the scriptures themselves.” Again, he says, “All Scripture, which has been given to us by God, shall be found by us perfectly consistent…and those statements the meaning of which is clear, shall serve to explain the parables [difficult passages].”6 Upon this principle all sound doctrine depends. Irenaeus recognized that this principle was one of the keys to defending the truth and refuting the Gnostic heresy, and he applied it with rigor and great success.

However, to limit Irenaeus’ achievement to the doctrine of scripture would not do justice to his influence. Much could be said about his teaching on creation, the fall, and salvation in Jesus Christ which, for lack of space, we must pass by. Worthy of note is the prominence of the sovereignty of God in Irenaeus’ thought. This is where Irenaeus’ ability as a theologian shines through. He was able to see the sovereign rule of God over all things as the overarching truth in light of which every event in the universe must be understood. Over against the Gnostics who argued that there eternally existed two contrary principles in the universe, good and evil, Irenaeus argued that God alone is the sovereign ruler of all things. There is nothing that exists that he did not make and over which he does not have absolute control. Even the devil, Irenaeus insisted, is a creature of God and completely subject to God’s control. Irenaeus viewed all of history as the marvelous unfolding of God’s sovereign purpose, and that purpose centered in the revelation of Jesus Christ. God even causes human sin to serve his greater purpose in Christ. Irenaeus hits a very Reformed chord here! For Irenaeus, Jesus Christ is the heart of history. Nothing that happens in creation can be understood apart from him. He is the end and the goal for which all things have been created. Irenaeus’ viewpoint has been summarized well in this way:

For Irenaeus the whole of the history of salvation is a series of “works” done by God with the Son and the Spirit as his “hands,” and God has done them all in order that in them man might partake of Life. The power of God is, therefore, impeded neither by the Devil, God’s adversary, nor sin, nor death, and the victory over these enemies of God, which is won through Christ, and which extends to their utter destruction in the Consummation, has been ordained by God from the very beginning….

How many of the precious truths of the Reformed faith do we not find here in the theology of this man of God who lived over a thousand years before Luther or Calvin! Our roots go deep indeed.

Turning back to Irenaeus’ life, there is little left to say. Irenaeus’ death is veiled in obscurity just as his birth. The date usually given for his death is 202 or 203 AD. It is possible that he was martyred for his confession of Jesus Christ under the emperor Septimus Severus, though we do not know for sure.

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6 Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 3.12.9 and 2.28.3.

7 Wingren, 6.
The earliest writings claiming him as a martyr do not appear until many years after the fact. Whether Irenaeus died a peaceful death or a martyr’s death is not important. God took him to glory at his appointed time and in his appointed way, and for Irenaeus, death was sweet victory. Irenaeus served God faithfully his whole life long. He was a faithful shepherd concerned above all with safeguarding the purity of the gospel of Jesus Christ that had been handed down to him by his teachers.

Irenaeus’ significance for church history can be summed up well in this way: he was both a defender and a builder of the church. God used this saint to protect and even save his people from the soul-destroying grasp of Gnosticism. Irenaeus supplied the church with the weapons she needed from the word of God to overcome Gnosticism. But Irenaeus was also a builder in the sense that he laid some of the church’s doctrinal cornerstones upon which later generations of Christians would build. This gives us an opportunity to reflect on what sort of perspective we should take toward the saints of the past. Of course, Irenaeus had his errors (who doesn’t?) If one reads his writings one will find statements here and there with which no Reformed Christian can agree. Indeed, whenever we survey the work of the ancient fathers of the church we will find some strange beliefs that we do not hold today. But that is no reason to dismiss them. As Christians in the twenty-first century, we stand on the shoulders of the giants, such as Irenaeus, who searched the scriptures and walked the Christian life before us. That fact explains why our vision and understanding is clearer concerning certain doctrines as, for example, the covenant and sovereign grace. We see farther and more clearly than many of the saints who came before us because we stand on their shoulders. A building only reaches upward if the foundation has first been laid. Each stone occupies its own position because the stone beneath it also occupies its own position and supports the one above it. We ought to view the church, built as she is of many lively stones, in the same way. The saints of the past are our fathers in the faith, our forbearers, who through the ages have passed down to us the treasure of the gospel. God has used them to preserve the faith for us and for our children. Let us thank God for the works he has done through the saints of the past, works which have an enduring benefit for us today.

Justin is a member of Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan and is a third-year seminarian.
Sandals of the Gospel of Peace Part 2: Preparation for the Enemy

Danny, his sister Becky, and their mom leaned over a picture of a Roman soldier in a library book. Their mom smiled. “Not only did the Roman soldier’s sandals prepare him for battle, but the sandals, called caligae, also prepared his enemies.”

Becky frowned. “How can a sandal prepare his enemies for battle?”

“Because of the iron nails on the bottom of the Roman soldiers’ sandals, the enemy often could hear the Roman army coming. The enemy would hear the steady tramp-tramp of all the Roman soldiers marching closer. The enemies knew the reputation of the Roman army, and often they would run away or surrender without even fighting when they heard the sound of the army coming. Even if the enemy still decided to fight, the sound of the Roman soldiers marching in their iron-soled sandals made the enemy become scared.”

“It would be a very scary sound.” Danny tried to imagine the sound of hundreds of men all marching on rocks with nails on the bottoms of their shoes. It must’ve sounded like hundreds of knives stamping into cement.

“When we walk through this life in our sandals of the gospel of peace, the world around us will hear it. They won’t like it. It is the sound of Christ’s gospel marching through the world. Revelation also describes it as a white horse running.”

Danny remembered watching his cousins ride their big, white horse. When they galloped, you could hear the hoofbeats coming from a long ways away. It had made him want to jump out of the way so he didn’t get run over. He figured those who didn’t like to hear about God or the Bible wouldn’t want to hear those hoofbeats coming or the stomping feet.

Questions to think about:
1. Read Ephesians 6:15, Matthew 24:14, Mark 13:10, and Revelation 6:1-2 by yourself or with your parents. How did the sandals of the gospel of peace prepare the enemy for the coming of the Roman army?
2. How is this like what happens to Christians when we walk through this world?
Contentment in an Age of Entitlement

Convention 2016
-Lake Williamson-

August 8-12, 2016
Lake Williamson Christian Conference Center
Carlinville, Illinois
www.prcconvention.com

Philippians 4:11 “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content”