



# REFORMED

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## PAVILION

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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:  
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;  
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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## MEDITATION

*One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock. And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.*

—Psalm 27:4-6

**H**idden in Jehovah's pavilion! Jehovah's pavilion is his house, his temple, his tabernacle. That Jehovah has a house is in itself a wonderful thing. Jehovah is the infinite and eternal God. He is transcendent above the earth and the heavens. The heaven is his throne, and the earth is his footstool. All the inhabitants of the land are as grasshoppers before him. He dwelleth not in temples made with hands. The heavens cannot contain him, nor can the heaven of heavens. And yet the everlasting God has made himself a pavilion.

Jehovah does not need a pavilion, but his people do. God's people live in the midst of many enemies. These foes are the wicked. They are false witnesses. They breathe out cruelty. They come to eat up the flesh of the righteous man. They assemble themselves in a great host. They encamp against the righteous and raise war against him. The entire life of the righteous becomes a time of trouble. Fear stalks him. His father and his mother forsake him. He is helpless. He cries with his voice.

For his people in their time of trouble, God has made a pavilion, and there he hides them. "For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock" (Ps. 27:5).

God's pavilion is strong. Man's pavilions are tents and canvases. A wind can blow them over. God's pavilion is a castle. It is a rock, upon which God's people are lifted up above their enemies. No foe can rush God's pavilion, for God will

make them stumble and fall. No host can breach God's pavilion, for it is a secret place that they cannot find. In God's pavilion God's people stand without fear, in the perfect confidence of faith, surveying their enemies below.

The strength of Jehovah's pavilion is his presence and truth. In Jehovah's pavilion God's people behold his beauty. God's beauty is all of his perfections as those perfections appear in all of their graciousness and loveliness and glory to the child of God. Their loveliness draws the child of God to admire and worship God. God's love, God's righteousness, God's sovereignty, and God's grace are the beauty of Jehovah. This beauty fills God's pavilion.

In Jehovah's pavilion God's people inquire in his temple. They ask for, they inspect, and they contemplate God's truth. The sermons and the psalms teach them that Jehovah is their light, their salvation, and the strength of their life.

The beauty of Jehovah and the truth of his temple are essentially Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is the righteous man who sings the psalm. Jehovah is his light and salvation. He desires one thing and seeks after it: to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. And Jesus Christ is the pavilion. He is the tabernacle of God with men. In him God hides all of his people in the day of trouble.

And what of the church thus hidden in Christ? This: "I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD."

—AL

## WELCOME

Welcome to *Reformed Pavilion*, a new Reformed magazine. Because this is the first issue, a brief introduction is in order.

Let's begin with the name, *Reformed Pavilion*. The word *Pavilion* comes from Psalm 27:5. "For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock." God's pavilion is a rock. It is a fortress, a tower, a bulwark, a castle. Therefore, God's pavilion is a place of safety and protection for God's people. God's pavilion is a place where they can rest.

God's pavilion is Jesus Christ. Christ is the rock that is higher than I. Christ is the secret cleft in whom the believer's life is hid with God. Christ is the tabernacle of God with men. He is Emmanuel, God with us. Christ is a refuge for his people as their savior and deliverer. He is their head and their mediator. He is their shepherd and their guide. In his hand he keeps his people, and no man shall pluck them out. By his blood he redeemed his people, and no man shall dispossess them. By his righteousness he justified his people, and no man shall condemn them. By his love he gathered his people, and nothing shall separate them from his love.

God's pavilion is his gospel and his truth. The gospel of salvation is a bulwark for God's people from their accusers. The truth of Jesus Christ crucified and risen is the defense of God's people from lying lips and deceitful tongues. Though all the world screams the rightness and the goodness of man's will, God is true, and every man is a liar.

In the gospel of Jesus Christ, God's people have safety and rest. Being justified by faith they have peace with God through Jesus Christ. Their comfort in life and in death is that they belong to their faithful savior, Jesus Christ. Hidden in the secret of God's tabernacle, they do not hear the clamor of man. Set up upon a rock above every

enemy, they do not fear. Hidden in God's pavilion, they rest.

The word *Reformed* indicates that the magazine stands upon the Reformed faith. The cause of *Reformed Pavilion* is the truth. Its cause is not itself. Its cause is not this man or that man. Its cause is not this denomination or that denomination. Rather, its cause is the truth, which is above all. In that cause *Reformed Pavilion* has the right to publish the truth regarding any issue.

The purpose of *Reformed Pavilion* is to sound forth a witness to the Reformed faith over against the ceaseless assaults upon that faith. As a Reformed magazine, *Reformed Pavilion* must be theological, its pages proclaiming the doctrine that God is God. As a Reformed magazine, *Reformed Pavilion* must also be polemical, its pages doing battle against the lie that Man is God.

In keeping with its name, *Reformed Pavilion*, the magazine will teach theology and engage in polemics in the service of the truth, as that truth gives safety, protection, and rest to God's people. Safety, protection, and rest! How good they are! What a relief they are for God's battle-weary people! How necessary they are for the time of trouble! No wonder the psalmist exults in God's pavilion, for there he is safe. "For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock."

This does not mean that *Reformed Pavilion* will shy away from battle under a false understanding of rest. The safety and peace of God's people is not found in silence, not found in smooth words, not found in flight from the battlefield. Even the name of the magazine points to the necessity of battle. The Reformed faith is a fighting faith. A pavilion, in the sense of a castle and stronghold, is a military fortification. While the church remains on earth, she is the church

militant. Therefore, *Reformed Pavilion* must engage in the battle. But battles will be fought with a view to the safety and the peace of God's people in the truth. Battles will not be fought for their own sakes. Some battles will even be passed by altogether, not being profitable for God's people. When battle is engaged, it will be with a view to the safety, peace, and unity of God's people in the truth.

In keeping with the name *Reformed Pavilion*, the design of the logo on the front cover is based on Chillon Castle on the shores of Lake Geneva in Switzerland. The castle sits on the eastern shore of the lake, opposite the well-known city of Geneva on the western shore. The castle was held by powerful counts during the Middle Ages but was captured by the Protestant canton of Bern in 1536. Although there is no evidence that John Calvin ever visited the castle, Calvin arrived in the city of Geneva on the other side of the lake in 1536. Thus, the year 1536 was significant for the strongholds on both sides of Lake Geneva: John Calvin came to Geneva that year, and Protestant control came to Chillon Castle. The castle has long been recognized as a strong fortress, being located on a naturally defensible rocky islet in Lake Geneva. Chillon Castle's solid defenses and its connection with Calvin's Geneva make it an apt logo for a Reformed magazine. When the psalmist speaks in Psalm 27 of God's pavilion, he means such a fortress where the child of God finds protection and rest.

Next, by way of introduction, the question might be asked why a new Reformed magazine has appeared. If I may be allowed to speak personally for a moment, I recently resigned from *Sword and Shield*. My resignation letter appears elsewhere in this issue, which letter explains the reason for my resignation. Nevertheless, I still would like to write. Not because I feel myself especially qualified to write or because I think that I alone have something worthwhile to say. Rather, because the truth of the Reformed faith is a worthy topic, and I desire to say what things the Lord has led us to see of his truth. Of course, if there is no audience for *Reformed Pavilion*, then

this magazine will not last long, since it does not exist for its own sake but for the truth's sake, as that truth is a comfort and defense for God's people. How dependent we are on the Lord for all things, including a little place for *Reformed Pavilion*.

The magazine's layout will probably be fairly familiar to those who have read the *Standard Bearer* or *Sword and Shield*. The details are still being worked out, but there will likely be a brief meditation, an editorial, book reviews, and other articles of interest. One more or less regular rubric, at least at first, will be *Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*. The church controversy out of which this magazine arises is about the psalms in worship. Having a regular rubric on the psalms will give us the opportunity to develop in our understanding of God's gracious gift of the sweet Singer of Israel and his gracious gift of the songs of Zion. *Reformed Pavilion* will not only focus on the psalms but will range as far and wide as the Reformed faith.

*Reformed Pavilion* will be an electronic magazine. There are no plans to publish the magazine in print. Although I personally prefer a printed copy of a magazine to read, the convenience, cost-effectiveness, and versatility of an electronic magazine are overwhelming. God has been good to give us the means of electronic publication, and we receive his gift with thanksgiving. Those who would like to receive notifications when a new issue is published can subscribe at [reformedpavilion.com](http://reformedpavilion.com). Subscription is free, and past issues will be archived at the website. Letters and questions are also welcome. In fact, they are encouraged! These can be submitted at the same website.

The versatility of electronic publishing means that *Reformed Pavilion* can be flexible in its layout and its regularity. Some issues may be two pages, while others may be twenty. Some months may see several issues, while other months may see none. At this point there is no publishing organization that is publishing *Reformed Pavilion*. Perhaps that will change in the future as more details are worked out.

With that, grab your tablet, find a sunny spot on the deck next to the daffodils, and read on.

“For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.”

—AL

## PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS

### The Wonderful Book of Psalms

**I**n this space it will be our privilege to open up the psalms, God being gracious.

And what a privilege it is! Consider for a moment the wonderful book of psalms.

God gave the psalms to his church over the course of the entire thousand-year period of revelation in the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> From the first inspired writer, Moses (Ps. 90), all the way to the return of Israel from Babylon (Pss. 126, 137), God wrote the psalms. Alone among all the books of scripture, the psalms span all the sundry times and divers manners in time past in which God spake unto the fathers by the prophets (Heb. 1:1). The Holy Ghost moved many holy men of old to write the psalms: David, the man after his own heart, but also Moses, Solomon, Asaph, Ethan, Heman, the sons of Korah, and others who are not named.

The book of psalms is the longest book in scripture by a wide margin, its 150 songs comprising the 150 chapters of the book. The shortest chapter in the Bible is a psalm (117), as is the longest chapter (119). The book of psalms is divided into five sections, or books: Psalms 1–41, Psalms 42–72, Psalms 73–89, Psalms 90–106, and Psalms 107–150. Within these books there are further divisions, such as the hallel hymns (Pss. 113–118), which Jesus and his disciples sang at the institution of the Lord’s supper (Matt. 26:30), and the songs of degrees or ascent (Pss. 120–134), which God’s people sang as they ascended Mount Zion to worship in God’s house.

Psalms were prominent in the Old Testament worship of the church. When David brought the ark up to the tabernacle in Jerusalem, it was accompanied with psalms (I Chron. 15). When the ark was settled in Jerusalem, David appointed the singing of psalms before the ark of the Lord (compare I Chron. 16 with Pss. 96, 105, 106:47–48). When David’s house was dedicated in Jerusalem, Psalm 30 was sung. When Solomon’s temple was dedicated, Psalm 136 was sung (II Chron. 5:13). At the morning sacrifices and at the evening sacrifices, at the weekly sabbaths, at the monthly new moons, and at the yearly festival sacrifices, as the people came to Jerusalem and as they stayed in Jerusalem, psalms were sung (I Chron. 16, 23; Ps. 92). Morning by morning, evening by evening, week by week, month by month, year by year, psalms arose out of Zion.

The great reformations of the Old Testament kingdom of Israel were marked by the singing of psalms. Joash and Jehoiada’s reformation returned Israel to the singing of psalms as appointed by David (II Chron. 23:18). Hezekiah’s reformation restored the psalms as appointed by David, and all the Levites sang “praise unto the LORD with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped” (II Chron. 29:30). Josiah’s reformation restored such a passover feast as had not been seen since the days of Samuel, “and the singers the sons of

<sup>1</sup> For much of the information in this consideration of the psalms, I am indebted to Rev. Angus Stewart in his debate with Rev. Ivan Foster on psalm singing. The debate can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYYlgZR3XK4>.

Asaph were in their places, according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer" (II Chron. 35:15).

So much did the singing of psalms characterize Israel that her enemies identified her by it. The people of Israel were known as psalm-singers. Their Babylonian captors turned this fact into a particularly cruel taunt when they demanded of their Israelite captives "one of the songs of Zion" (Ps. 137:3). How could these psalm-singers sing one of the psalms of their mirth while they were being wasted by their enemies in a strange land? By the rivers of Babylon these psalm-singers sat down, they wept, they hanged their harps upon the willows, they remembered Zion.

The prominence of psalms did not disappear with the Old Testament but carried into the new. At the institution of the Lord's supper, Jesus and his disciples sang the hallel hymns, Psalms 113–118 (Matt. 26:30). This is particularly significant, for by the institution of the Lord's supper, Jesus put an end to the form of Old Testament worship and instituted the New Testament form. And belonging to the New Testament form of worship, by Jesus' institution, is the singing of psalms.

When Jesus hung upon the cross, he gave his life's blood for our redemption with psalms upon his lips. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1). "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Ps. 31:5). And when he arose from the dead the third day, he did so according to his own song. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Ps. 16:10).

God's people as a body in Ephesus and in Colossae, according to the apostles' injunction, taught and admonished one another in psalms, hymns (psalms like the hallel hymns), and spiritual songs (psalms like the songs of degrees) (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:15–16). By their singing the psalms together with grace in their hearts to the Lord, the whole word of Christ dwelt in them richly in all wisdom, for the psalms are the little Bible.

When Paul and Silas sat in the discomfort and misery of prison at midnight, they prayed and sang praises to God (Acts 16:25), with the word for "sang" in the passage indicating the sound made by psalm-singing.

Some have observed that the New Testament is so full of quotations of the psalms and allusions to the psalms that it averages one reference to the psalms every 19 verses.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the psalms sit at the heart of the scriptures. The psalms contain the sum and substance of all the other books. The entire Bible is found in the psalms: from Genesis and creation (Ps. 104) to Revelation and the great day of the Lord (Ps. 1). Athanasius called the psalms "the epitome of the whole scripture." Luther called the psalms "a little Bible." Because the psalms sit at the heart of the scriptures and because the psalms are the church's songbook, the psalms also sit in the hearts of God's people. Zion's heart yearns for the psalms. Her children speak to each other with eager anticipation thus: "O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms!" (Ps. 95:1–2).

Go from end to end in the scriptures. Go from desert wanderings to dingy prisons. Go from Babel's streams to Zion's heights. Go from the upper room to Calvary to the empty tomb. Go from David to Paul, from Moses to Asaph. Go from the church in the wilderness to the church at Ephesus. Go from the lips of God's people to their hearts. Wherever you go in all the scriptures, there you will find the psalms. What a remarkable book is this book of psalms!

It will be our privilege, indeed, to open up this book. "God be merciful unto us, and bless us" (Ps. 67:1).

—AL

### The Essence of Herman Hoeksema's Theology (1)

#### Introduction

**H**erman Hoeksema was a grand Reformed theologian and a giant among Reformed giants. It would not be out of place to mention Herman Hoeksema alongside John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, and Herman Bavinck.

What made Herman Hoeksema a giant was not his person or his character, although by all accounts he was a giant in these respects also. Intellectually brilliant, physically powerful, clear in thought and speech, and bold beyond normal measure, Hoeksema was an irresistible person. If the tales about Hoeksema are even half true, then modern-day friends of his thought must wish they had met him, and opponents of his thought must be glad they haven't. However, Hoeksema's stature was not his larger-than-life character.

Neither did the acclaim of men make Herman Hoeksema a giant. For the most part, Herman Hoeksema never had the acclaim of men; and when he did, he did not care for it anyway. For a brief time very early in his ministry, his denomination—the Christian Reformed Church (CRC)—sought after him and elevated him, but it was apparently for the merely carnal reason that people recognized him as gifted. Following Hoeksema's expulsion in 1924, the CRC mostly maintained a practiced silence regarding Hoeksema. The flattery of men's tongues that wafted his way for a while turned out to be as vain as the hearts in which that flattery was born. The spiritual children of Herman Hoeksema have long observed that the broader Reformed church world has mostly ignored Hoeksema, despite his significant development of Reformed thought.

What made Herman Hoeksema a Reformed giant was his theology. Hoeksema was Re-

formed—determinedly, unashamedly, rigorously, gloriously Reformed. Hoeksema was steeped in Reformed theology. He preached Reformed doctrine, wrote Reformed doctrine, taught Reformed doctrine. What makes his theology stand out even more starkly is that Hoeksema was Reformed in a day when doctrine in general, and Reformed doctrine in particular, had fallen out of favor. Hoeksema himself lamented the woeful doctrinal indifference of his generation. Hoeksema's colleagues in the Christian Reformed Church were busy introducing all manner of un-Reformed and worldly ideas into the church. Hoeksema's solution to doctrinal indifference was more Reformed doctrine, and his solution to all the false doctrine was to return to Reformed doctrine. Hoeksema was so filled with Reformed doctrine that he would rather give his ecclesiastical life by being put out of the Christian Reformed Church than give up Reformed doctrine. This is Herman Hoeksema's stature as a Reformed giant: his Reformed theology.

Fittingly, that which made Herman Hoeksema a giant also made him nothing. The Reformed theology that Hoeksema taught makes nothing of man and makes everything of God. Hoeksema's entire theology was built on that exact truth: God is God. In our halting and stumbling attempt to look back on history and take account of God's reform of his church, we might speak of Hoeksema as a "grand Reformed theologian" or a "giant among Reformed giants." But this is only to draw attention to Herman Hoeksema's grand Reformed theology. And that theology is grand indeed! It is the gospel that God alone is good and faithful in Jesus Christ and that therein lies the salvation of wicked and unfaithful man. Yes, Herman

Hoeksema was a grand Reformed theologian, which is just to say that God placed the glories of the Reformed faith in that earthen vessel, that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of Hoeksema.

## Centennial

The reason that Herman Hoeksema and his theology come up now is that we are approaching a significant anniversary in the years 2024 and 2025. These years will mark a century since Herman Hoeksema was expelled from the Christian Reformed Church (December 12, 1924) and since he and other deposed men signed the Act of Agreement (March 6, 1925), which essentially founded the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC).

As this anniversary approaches, there will undoubtedly be many commemorations of Herman Hoeksema. The Protestant Reformed Churches are planning a one-hundred-year anniversary program, which will surely include much material featuring Herman Hoeksema. The *Standard Bearer* has already begun publishing editorials and articles telling the history of the PRC, in which articles Hoeksema inevitably appears.

One could imagine that the Christian Reformed Church might also acknowledge the anniversary of 1924–1925 in some fashion and that she might have something to say about her former son. It is perhaps too much to hope that the CRC would present Hoeksema favorably one hundred years later, but one never knows. The CRC of our day is driving itself insane in a never-ending attempt to make itself the champion of every misguided social grievance. When one's eyes are so myopic that one can only see social justice issues that one imagines to be everywhere under one's nose, it is difficult to gaze very far into the past. But perhaps a theologian in the CRC will be able to shake free from whatever latest gender bender fad the church is scrambling to adopt to say a word or two about Herman Hoeksema. And perhaps an especially astute theologian in the CRC might even specu-

late whether there is a connection between Hoeksema's warning in 1924 that common grace would bring the world into the church and the present-day inundation of gender bending worldliness in the church.

One could even imagine that the broader Reformed world of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) churches might find themselves curious about Herman Hoeksema at some point in the coming few years. If recent events accurately reflect the present mood, then there is a spirit of goodwill, cooperation, and bonhomie between NAPARC churches and the PRC today. The PRC join with some NAPARC churches to revise their Psalter together; the PRC join with other NAPARC churches to sponsor a major conference on counseling; and the PRC mingle her observers with all the churches' delegates at the annual NAPARC meeting. One could be excused for thinking that the newfound friendliness between the PRC and the NAPARC churches might cause a NAPARC theologian or two to cast an interested glance Hoeksema's way one of these days.

As the centennial of Herman Hoeksema's deposition from the CRC and formation of the PRC approaches, *Reformed Pavilion* would like to make a modest contribution to the commemorations. Herman Hoeksema's significance in his own day, not to mention his significance today, is his doctrine. What better way to commemorate the coming centennial than to investigate Hoeksema's doctrine? And what better way to investigate Hoeksema's doctrine than by searching for the essence and the kernel of his doctrine? Therefore, the inaugural series of editorials in *Reformed Pavilion* will investigate this question: What is the essence of Herman Hoeksema's theology?

The question of the essence of Hoeksema's theology will be of interest to at least two denominations of churches: the Protestant Reformed Churches, established in 1925 as a result of the CRC's expulsion of Hoeksema, and the Reformed Protestant Churches, established in

2021 as a result of the PRC's expulsion of several officebearers and members. Both the PRC and the RPC claim Hoeksema as their theologian. Both the PRC and the RPC claim to be faithful to Hoeksema's doctrine, while accusing the other of departing from it. In the doctrinal controversies between the PRC and the RPC, both denominations quote Hoeksema to support their positions and to condemn the positions of the other. The problem with a quotation war is that Herman Hoeksema wrote thousands of pages in books, articles, and pamphlets. To pull a quote here or a quote there does not necessarily prove anything. But if one could discover the essence of Hoeksema's theology, then one could know whether this denomination or that denomination is being faithful to that theology in its teachings today. To put the same thought a different way, between the PRC and the RPC, one denomination has maintained Hoeksema's Reformed doctrine, while the other denomination is merely building the tomb of their prophet and garnishing the sepulcher of the righteous. An understanding of the essence of Hoeksema's theology will make this clear.

## The Essence of Theology

So can we discover the essence of Herman Hoeksema's theology?

In order to answer that question, we must understand what we mean by the *essence* of theology. First, when we speak of the *essence* of Herman Hoeksema's theology, we mean the essential doctrinal starting point of Hoeksema's theology. Can we discover the fundamental truth upon which all of Hoeksema's theology rested? Can we find the kernel, the heart, the principle, the viewpoint of his religion? And can we state that fundamental truth in a few words, so that we can have a simple but comprehensive statement of Hoeksema's entire theology?

Second, when we ask about the essence of Hoeksema's theology, we are not asking about the source of his theology. The source of Hoeksema's theology was scripture. One only has to read a few pages of Hoeksema's *Reformed Dog-*

*matics* to find that Hoeksema's theology arose out of his exegesis of the scriptures. The source of Hoeksema's theology was also the Reformed confessions. One only has to read a few pages of the Declaration of Principles, which Hoeksema authored, to find that Hoeksema could state his doctrine simply by quoting the confessions.

This matter of the source of Hoeksema's theology heads off an attack that will inevitably come against an investigation into the essence of Hoeksema's theology. Enemies of the Reformed faith often accuse Reformed theologians of being rationalistic. By the charge of "rationalism," enemies mean that Reformed theologians start with a pet doctrine—usually predestination—and build their entire theology around that pet doctrine. The result, according to the accusation, is a theological system that has sprung out of the mind and reason of man but that bears little resemblance to the Christianity found in the Bible. This accusation really concerns the source of Reformed theology. The Reformed faith is said to come from man's reason as its source rather than from the word of God.

The error of the accusation is that God's word itself has a single, unifying principle. The whole law can be summarized in one commandment: love God. The whole gospel can be summarized in one thing that is preached: Christ crucified. When Reformed theologians investigate the fundamental truth of God's word and take their stand upon it, that is not rationalism but faithfulness to the word of God. So also when we investigate the essence of Hoeksema's theology, it is not because he was a rationalist or because we are rationalists, as was so often charged against Hoeksema. Rather, it is because the word of God, which is the source of all theology, teaches a fundamental truth that is the kernel of all doctrine. It is this essential doctrinal starting point that we are after in Herman Hoeksema.

Third, when we ask about the essence of Hoeksema's theology, we are not asking whether Hoeksema used a certain word or phrase in his theology. For example, we are not asking

whether Hoeksema ever spoke positively of conditions. It may be interesting to know that Hoeksema used to speak of conditions in a positive sense, but that does not make Hoeksema's theology conditional. The essence of Hoeksema's theology is the thing. The essence of his theology was God's unconditional grace. That unconditional theological essence guided even his use of the word *conditions*, so that Hoeksema did not teach a conditional theology even when he used the word.

The matter of the essence of Hoeksema's theology versus Hoeksema's usage of a word or phrase will be a safeguard against those who would misuse Hoeksema because of a word. For example, in 1953 the Protestant Reformed minister Hubert De Wolf tried to make Hoeksema into a conditional theologian. De Wolf did this because De Wolf was a conditional theologian. His doctrine was that man enters God's covenant fellowship unconditionally by grace alone but that man experiences God's fellowship conditionally by man's work. When De Wolf was examined by his consistory to see whether his views were in harmony with the confessions or not, De Wolf appealed to passages in Hoeksema's writings from previous years in which Hoeksema had used the word *conditions* in a positive sense.<sup>1</sup>

And I would like to quote some authorities for that [that De Wolf's conditional statements are defensible]. I would like to read a little bit, if I may, from a pamphlet [by Hoeksema] entitled *Calvin, Berkhoff (sic) and H. J. Kuiper, A Comparison*, page 32, and on 35 and 56.<sup>2</sup>

He affirms here [that is, Calvin] what we have always taught, as we have written often in the past, that insofar as the message is general and comes to all, it is conditional. The offer is

eternal life. The condition limiting this offer is "turn from your wicked ways." This condition makes the contents of the general message particular. Just as we have emphasized in the past, a contention our opponents have tried to laugh to scorn, there is a general proclamation of a conditional and particular gospel. He promises to all that believe, peace and eternal life. Thus is the plain exposition of Calvin on this passage. He teaches all that hear a conditional doctrine. If ye turn, ye shall live, and because it is conditional, it is also particular.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that I would not go along with that statement myself. I don't believe I would say it that way. If I was to speak of particular and conditional, I would turn that around, and I would say that because it is particular, it is conditional, and not because it is conditional, it is particular, but the statement reads here,

And because it is conditional, it is also particular, and God, in reality promises eternal life only to the elect, for it is quite certain, according to Calvin, that men do not turn from their wicked ways on their own accord, nor by any instinct of nature. It is equally certain that none turn from their wickedness but the elect, therefore, the contents of this externally general message is particular, and applies only to the elect of God.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that the Rev. Hoeksema, who is the protestant in this case, used the word "promise" in the same sense in which I meant to use it in this statement, when he wrote in another

<sup>1</sup> The entire examination is published in full in the April 2022 issue of *Sword and Shield*. See "De Wolf's Examination," *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 17 (April 2022): 8–25. This quotation is taken from pages 10–11.

<sup>2</sup> The passages from Hoeksema which Hubert De Wolf quotes here can be found in Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, ed. David J. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2015), 323, 325–26, 344.

pamphlet. By the way, there is more in this book that I wanted to read. I want to read on page 35, (reading):

And Calvin explains that the two members of the text (this is out of Ezekiel) must not be separated; that God in the text, as taken as a whole, promises life only to them that turn from their wicked way, and that, therefore, the contents of this gospel is conditional and particular. That moreover, the condition can never be fulfilled by the natural man, but only by those to whom God gives grace of repentance, and that God gives this grace of repentance only to the elect, so that, according to Calvin there is in these words nothing that is in conflict with the doctrine of eternal predestination.

We find then on page 56,

Secondly, the passage is in plain denial of the view that the gospel is a message of peace to all without distinction. It is a power of salvation to them that believe only. Though the outward calling is general, the preaching is conditional and particular nevertheless.

As I was saying, the Rev. Hoeksema has used that idea of promise in that same—I would say the loose sense—in which I meant to use it when he wrote in his sermons on Romans on page 296 of that book,

Does not the Word of God clearly promise: “Ask and it shall be given you. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” And when the Lord says, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give unto you rest,” does not then the fulfillment of this prom-

ise of rest depend upon our coming to him, and is it not, besides, the experience of every sinner that is saved, that he found God only in the way of seeking him; or is there ever a sinner that finds God without having sought him; has found peace in the everlasting arms without having inquired after him? To be sure, only he that asketh receiveth. Never he that asks not. Only he that seeketh, findeth. Never he that seeks not. Only to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Never to him that knocks not. Only to them that come unto him is the promise of rest, not to them that refuse to come. Therefore, only in the way of seeking God and inquiring after him can we ever find him.

I have one more quotation, Mr. Chairman, which reads as follows, from page 227 of this same book.

The sole requirement unto salvation is that you believe on him, and call upon his name, and there is no but. If you put your confidence for righteousness upon the Christ, and upon him only, you shall be saved. In this gospel there is no appendix. There is nothing to be added. It must stand alone, absolutely alone.

That, Mr. Chairman, is the answer to that question.

De Wolf's error in quoting Hoeksema is that De Wolf tried to make Hoeksema's use of the word *conditions* to mean that Hoeksema was teaching a theology of conditions. Later in his ministry, Hoeksema would reject even the word *condition* as carrying too much Arminian baggage. But even in Hoeksema's early use of the word, it was clear that his theology was not conditional. Hoeksema was making the sound theological point that God's promise is particular and not universal. God's promise of salvation is not for all indiscriminately, even though the gospel is preached promiscuously. Rather, God's

promise is particular to those who turn, to those who believe, to those who seek, to those who ask, to those who knock. That is, God's promise is particular for the elect, who are marked by their believing and turning. Hoeksema used the term *conditions* to describe these marks of the elect because that term was part of the vocabulary of the day, but his doctrinal point was soundly Reformed: God's promise of salvation is particular for the elect.

Fourth, when one embarks on an investigation of the essence of Hoeksema's theology, one soon realizes that his project requires a boldness that borders on folly. For one thing, God gave Hoeksema a theological mind that few others have possessed. Hoeksema's understanding of Reformed theology sometimes seems instinctual and intuitive. It is as if he simply knew whether a particular teaching was Reformed or Arminian. He saw far-off horizons of the truth with clarity. The present-day student of Hoeksema quickly realizes what a pygmy he is by comparison and wonders whether his project of discovering the essence of Hoeksema's theology must inevitably meet with despair. For another thing, the sheer volume of Hoeksema's writings is daunting. How can one hope to sift through the thousands of pages in order to discover a kernel in it all?

Happily for us, Hoeksema was the kind of theologian who stated the essence of his own theology. Hoeksema did not blunder into his theology, jumping from principle to principle as he went. Rather, Hoeksema deliberately elicited the essence of the Reformed faith and made it his own. Hoeksema consciously took his stand upon a specific doctrinal foundation and consistently developed his theology from that viewpoint. The student of Hoeksema can know the essence of Hoeksema's theology, for he stated it often.

Now then, after all that and without further delay, let us discover the essence of Herman Hoeksema's theology.

## God Is God

The essence of Herman Hoeksema's theology can be stated simply yet profoundly: God is God.

The statement *God is God* was Hoeksema's own. He introduced it as the theme of all doctrine. He called it "the truth of all truths."<sup>3</sup> One might speak of election, creation, salvation, the church, the world, sin and grace, life and death; but the theme and meaning of all of it are that God is God.

By the truth *God is God*, Hoeksema meant that God is absolute. There is simply no sense in which God is relative or dependent. God is absolute especially over against man. Man is not absolute. Man is always relative and dependent. But God is God! Always and in all things, God is God. In the matter of his counsel, God is God, who does all his good pleasure, and no one can stay his hand or say to him, "What doest thou?" In the matter of revelation, God is God, and man knows nothing and can say nothing except what God shows unto him. In the matter of creation, God is God, and all things have their being and movement from God the Father, almighty, maker of heaven and earth. In the matter of redemption, God is God, who gave his only begotten Son to be the mediator and savior of his helpless and fallen people. In the matter of salvation, God is God, and he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. In the matter of his covenant, God is God, who takes his elect unto himself in Christ to be his people and gives himself unto them to be their God. In the matter of eternal life, God is God, who quickeneth the dead and calleth the things that be not as though they were. In the matter of the church, God is God, and he gathers his church by his word and Spirit from every nation, tribe, and tongue. In the matter of sin, God is God, and he wisely and justly governs wicked men and devils when they act unjustly, without himself being the author of their sin. In the matter of grace, God is God, and he favors his people in Christ, though they are of themselves undeserving of

<sup>3</sup> Herman Hoeksema, "God Is God," *Standard Bearer* 77, no. 17 (June 2001): 403.

his love. In the matter of the end of all things, God is God, and he brings all things through Christ to the goal of his glory in the new heavens and new earth, where God shall be all in all. God is God! In all things God is God!

There are other ways that the Reformed faith says that God is God, and Hoeksema often referred to these other ways as the essence of his theology. For example, the statement that God is everything and man is nothing means the same thing as *God is God*. The statement that God is absolutely sovereign means the same thing as *God is God*. The statement that all truth is theocentric means the same thing as *God is God*. The statement that all truth is theological means the same thing as *God is God*. But when one is saying *theocentric* or *theological* or *sovereign* or *God is everything*, one is essentially saying this: God is God!

This was Herman Hoeksema's theology. This was its essence, its fundamental viewpoint. God is God.

## Demonstration

Hoeksema stated the essence of his theology in several key places. Keep in mind that we are not merely pulling random quotes where Hoeksema happened to say, "God is God." Rather, we are going to those places in Hoeksema's writings where he was explaining the essence, the basic principle, the fundamental starting point of the Reformed faith and therefore of his theology. We are going to passages where Hoeksema consciously and explicitly named the sovereignty of God as God as his essential doctrinal viewpoint. The following passages are not exhaustive, but they demonstrate the essence of Hoeksema's theology.

First, we have Hoeksema's fascinating articles in the Christian Reformed magazine *The Banner*. See the introduction to these articles elsewhere in this issue. In 1918, in his very first article, as he was introducing himself to his

readers, Hoeksema referred to "the sovereignty of God as a basic principle."<sup>4</sup> Hoeksema would not allow the sovereignty of God to be a side issue but announced that, as the editor of the *Our Doctrine* rubric in *The Banner*, he would teach the sovereignty of God as a basic principle and that he expected opposition because of it.

As long as you refer to God's sovereignty only as a sort of a side issue, as something we, indeed, believe in but for the rest leave alone, these people will go along with you. But the moment you draw the lines sharply, the moment you speak of such things as the sovereignty of God as a basic principle, the moment you maintain that this sovereignty is most absolute in creation and salvation, in all things, the spirit of opposition is often aroused.<sup>5</sup>

It was especially in Hoeksema's second article that he explicitly addressed which viewpoint Calvinism proceeds from and thus the viewpoint from which his own writings in *The Banner* would proceed.

The Calvinistic fundamental viewpoint is Theological. And let me hasten to add, that is the viewpoint derived from Scripture. In Thy light do we see the light! All things are ours. Yes. But we are of Christ, and Christ is God's. For His own name's sake God made all things, even the wicked. For His own name's sake He is also forming a people unto Himself! God is the center of all things, the Source of all things, the purpose of all things. And, therefore, the truly Reformed man is concerned about God first of all, and about man only for God's name's sake. God's glory is for him the highest. It is the only purpose of all existence. It is the only possible culminating point of all history. And all things are subservient to this highest purpose of all existence and of all history. He is concerned about the glory of God. And that not in this sense, that

<sup>4</sup> Herman Hoeksema, "Introduction," *The Banner* (September 5, 1918).

<sup>5</sup> Hoeksema, "Introduction."

God's glory should be dependent upon man's will, so that the question of his life could be: How can I make it that God reaches his own glory? No, but so that he maintains God's sovereignty in all His works, and the question must be put in this form: How does God Himself realize His own glory in all His works, even through me?

To His own glory He made His eternal plan of all things.

To His own glory He created the world His Kingdom.

To His own glory He gave His only begotten Son.

To His own glory He saves His own people through His Spirit and Word.

To His own glory He establishes His Church in the world.

To His own glory He governs and directs all things, sin not excluded, and controls the history of the World.

That is the great, all-pervading principle of the Word of God. That is the fundamental principle of God's counsel. That is the great purpose of His covenant with us. And that is at the same time the fundamental viewpoint of the true and beautiful Reformed Faith.

Brethren, let us grasp this principle first of all. If we do not, we shall never be strong. If we do not make this principle our basis, our starting point in our entire doctrine, we shall fail as a Reformed people and cease to exist. All the more so, because everything is against us in the world. That world is humanistic. Man is the great object. He, his authority, his sovereignty, his salvation is placed on the foreground. His glory and bliss concern all at the expense of the sovereignty and the righteousness of God.

And, therefore, in the firm maintenance of that fundamental principle lies our salvation as a Church. God all—man nothing except for Him.

All things are ours. But we are of Christ, and Christ is God's.<sup>6</sup>

In his third article in *The Banner*, Hoeksema taught that the principle of God's sovereignty is not merely one point among others but that it is the fundamental principle that must always be maintained.

Fundamentals are always the same and never change. You cannot discuss our doctrine from the point of view of God's sovereignty one time and switch off to the sovereignty of man. As we wrote last week, the fundamental viewpoint, the basic principle of our faith is that God is all and man nothing, except in as far as he exists for God. And that principle must always be maintained, no matter from what angle you approach our doctrine. If we do not strictly maintain it we lose our faith.<sup>7</sup>

Next, we have Hoeksema's greatest theological work, his *Reformed Dogmatics*. As Hoeksema prepared to launch into all the loci of Reformed theology, he stopped to explain the primary position of the first locus, theology. The truth of God—or God is God—is really the truth that all the loci together teach.

#### The Primary Position of the First Locus

The science of dogmatics must be introduced by the locus theology (*locus de Deo*). It is true that other points of departure have been chosen. Some have treated the doctrine of man as the first locus of dogmatics. Others have conceived of dogmatics as being properly Christocentric. The fact is, however, that the locus concerning God is paramount and should have the first place in a systematic setting forth of the knowledge of God, as revealed in the Scriptures and as adopted

<sup>6</sup> Herman Hoeksema, "A Matter of Viewpoint," *The Banner* (September 12, 1918).

<sup>7</sup> Herman Hoeksema, "God's Kingdom—All Comprehensive," *The Banner* (September 19, 1918).

and confessed by the church of Christ in the world, because, strictly speaking, all dogmatics treats the revelation and knowledge of God.

The first locus, theology, sets forth the doctrine concerning God *per se*, treating his essence, his names, his attributes, his persons, and his works in eternity. The other five loci usually treated in dogmatics also have very really to do with the knowledge of God. Anthropology is concerned with man only as a work of God and man's relation to God, both in man's state of rectitude and in his fallen condition. Christology aims to set forth the knowledge of Christ as the Son of God in the flesh, the revelation of the God of our salvation, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Soteriology is concerned with man's salvation, but only as a revelation of the living God, who not only calls the things that are not as if they were, but who also raises the dead, calls light out of darkness, and changes shame into everlasting glory. Ecclesiology deals with the gathering, preserving, and perfecting of the church as the realization of God's eternal purpose of election, and the perfecting of his tabernacle, the house of God, where he dwells with his people in covenant fellowship forever. Eschatology treats the final revelation of Jesus Christ and the perfect salvation and redemption of all things, but only as the consummation and perfection of the works of God and the revelation of the perfect theodicy.

Everything in the theological discipline of dogmatics, therefore, is to be treated under theology (*sub specie dei*), as a revelation of the living God, and the dogmaticians of the Reformed faith properly placed the doctrine concerning God at the head of the different loci of dogmatics.<sup>8</sup>

Next, we have Hoeksema's opening chapter in *Believers and Their Seed*. The significance of this book, first, is its treatment of the doctrine of the covenant. In this book Hoeksema proposed that the doctrine of the covenant was more characteristic of the Reformed faith even than election. Hoeksema was not denigrating election in any way but rather elevating the covenant. Second, this book appeared in article form very early in Hoeksema's ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. It established the doctrine of the covenant as a Protestant Reformed distinctive from the first years of her existence as a denomination. Thus, the book is a foundational text for understanding Hoeksema's theology.

For our purposes, we are interested in how Hoeksema began his doctrine of the covenant. He called the covenant one of the pillars in the temple. The other pillar he called God's sovereign grace. Thus, in the very article/chapter in which Hoeksema identified the covenant as foundational Reformed doctrine, he identified that covenant as a covenant of God's sovereign grace. God's sovereignty—or God is God—was a foundational principle for Hoeksema as he developed the doctrine of the covenant.

Now for a Reformed man the question concerning God's covenant with us and our children is very important. If from this viewpoint we would speak of a Jachin and Boaz in the temple of the truth of God, then we certainly should not speak, as did Prof. H. J. Van Andel in his "The Foe Within the Gates," of the doctrine of Common Grace and the doctrine of Particular Grace; but we should indeed speak of the truth of God's Sovereign Grace, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, of the truth of God's Covenant...

The covenant idea is very really one of the most important doctrines in the confession of the Reformed churches, and rightly so. This doctrine is really more characteristically Reformed than the doctrine of election.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd edition (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 1:35–36.

<sup>9</sup> Herman Hoeksema, *Believers and Their Seed* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1971), 9, 11.

Next, we have Hoeksema's lecture entitled "The Place of Reprobation in the Preaching of the Gospel." The speech was printed as a pamphlet and later as a chapter in *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*. For our purposes, the significance of this 1927 lecture is that Hoeksema consciously returned to the essence of his theology as the starting point for every further development of theology—in this case the place of reprobation in the preaching. The truth that God is God was not some one-off doctrine that Hoeksema once taught. Rather, it was "the truth of all truths" to which he deliberately returned time and again as the foundation of all theology.

The subject of this pamphlet is not an easy one, but it is of great importance for those who love the Reformed truth. A Reformed person thinks and lives theologically. For him it is of greatest importance to know his God as he has revealed himself in his works and word. The Reformed man understands perfectly that he cannot comprehend God, because God is infinite, his being is unfathomable, and his works always fill us with adoring wonder. But still a Reformed man desires to know more and more about his God and to comprehend what God has revealed of himself.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, we have Herman Hoeksema's introductory broadcast of the radio program *Reformed Witness Hour* on October 12, 1941. This broadcast was significant because Hoeksema announced the theme that he intended to be the keynote of every subsequent broadcast. The title of his broadcast says it all: God is God. The entire broadcast is worth reading and can be found in the *Standard Bearer*. For now, here are a few quotations.

God is God. You say, perhaps, that this statement is a truism. But if it is, it is one that may well be emphatically repeated and loudly proclaimed by the church of Jesus Christ in the world, especially in the world of today...

God is God! Unless the church proclaims this truth in all its implications, in all its purity, and without compromise, she cannot preach, she has nothing to say. Unless she proclaims this truth, not as one of the tenets of her faith but as the truth of all truths, not occasionally but always, she forfeits the right and lacks the power to say anything at all about man, the world, Christ, salvation, life and death, sin and grace. It is to this supreme calling of the church that the Lord Himself calls the attention of His people and which He enjoins upon them in Isaiah 43:12: "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God."

The Lord willing, we hope to make this theme the keynote of our radio broadcasts, whatever may be the particular subject of our discussion, whether we speak of Him directly or of man, of Christ and salvation, of the church and of the world, of sin and grace, of life and death. God is God!<sup>11</sup>

## Hoeksema's Contribution to Reformed Theology

Herman Hoeksema was not the only Reformed theologian to discover the truth that God is God. Every Reformed theologian and every Reformed denomination, at least at one time, would have acknowledged that God is God. Every Reformed theologian and Reformed denomination, at least at one time, would have taught that God is sovereign and that all truth is theocentric. In fact, in those places in Hoeksema's writings where he states the essence of his theology, he states it as the essence of the Reformed faith. Hoeksema was not attempting to develop a new viewpoint that had been unknown to the Reformed faith. Rather, Hoeksema consciously uncovered the essence of the Reformed faith that made it the Reformed faith and that distinguished it from all Arminianism, Pelagianism, and every other

<sup>10</sup>Danhof and Hoeksema, *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, 478.

<sup>11</sup>Herman Hoeksema, "God Is God," *Standard Bearer* 77, no. 17 (June 2001): 403.

error. And having elicited that essence of the Reformed faith, Hoeksema made it his fundamental viewpoint. Hoeksema's contribution to Reformed theology was not that he invented a new starting point.

Herman Hoeksema's contribution to Reformed theology was that he took the essence of the Reformed faith—God is God—and he consistently and persistently applied it to every theological topic and question. Hoeksema applied the truth that God is God to God's counsel, including the *pactum salutis* and the debate between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism. Hoeksema applied the truth that God is God to the doctrine of God's grace in order to answer whether God's grace is common or particular. Hoeksema applied the truth that God is God to the doctrine of God's covenant to answer whether God's covenant is conditional or unconditional. Regardless of the doctrinal topic, Hoeksema consistently and even rigorously applied the essence of the Reformed faith: God is God!

Hoeksema's application of the essence of the Reformed faith to every theological topic was a development in Reformed theology. Many Reformed theologians had been inconsistent in their application of the sovereignty of God. Every Reformed theologian would have at least paid lip service to the sovereignty of God, but many of them left that principle behind in their teaching and development of the Reformed faith. In the matter of God's grace, theologians taught that God graciously desires the salvation of all men, but it is up to men to accept God's offer. That teaching does not proceed from the principle that God is God. That teaching proceeds from the principle that Man is God. In the matter of the covenant, theologians taught that God establishes his covenant with many who ultimately reject that covenant and fall away. Man is God. Theologians taught that God is not only good to all but also gracious to all and gives the reprobate many things out of a non-saving love for them. God is not God.

Over against all the inconsistencies of Reformed theologians, Herman Hoeksema rigorously and persistently applied the truth that God is God. In his grace God is God, and therefore his grace is always particular and sovereign and saving. In his covenant God is God, and therefore his covenant is unconditional with his elect people in Christ. In his counsel God is God and does not bargain with himself but sovereignly decrees his own good pleasure. Always and in all things, God is God.

Herman Hoeksema's application of the essence of the Reformed faith to every doctrine led him to develop the Reformed faith in beautiful and comforting ways. His doctrine of the covenant as friendship between God and his people in Christ is a jewel of Reformed doctrine. His doctrine of the organism of the human race, with reprobation serving election, is a breakthrough in the understanding of God's counsel. His doctrine of God's grace as always particular and always sovereign and always saving is a treasure of comfort for God's people. The application of the truth that God is God to all things is a great relief to the believer.

Hoeksema's significance as a theologian and Hoeksema's significance for Reformed theology was his consistency in applying the essence of the Reformed faith to every theological topic. In coming issues, Lord willing, we will have the opportunity to look more closely at some specific instances in which he did this.

—AL

# RESIGNATION

The following letter from the undersigned was submitted to the board of Reformed Believers Publishing on March 27, 2023. I had informed the board that this letter would run as my final editorial in the May 1, 2023, issue of *Sword and Shield*. The board accepted my resignation, but took control of the magazine for the May 1, 2023, issue. The board informed me that it would not include my editorial but would run its own announcement instead. Therefore, the letter is published here in *Reformed Pavilion*.

**To:** Board of Reformed Believers Publishing  
c/o Mr. Stefan Bodbyl, clerk

**March 27, 2023**

Dear brethren,

**B**y this letter I submit my resignation as editor in chief of *Sword and Shield*. I will continue to labor with the magazine until the publication of the May 2023 issue. I have submitted my contributions to that issue thus far and will see that issue through to publication. My intention with submitting my resignation now is to give the board of Reformed Believers Publishing sufficient time to secure a new editor in chief, who will take over the magazine with the publishing of the June 2023 issue.

The reason for my resignation is to avoid any interruption in the publishing of the magazine after the May 2023 issue. It is well known among the board, and more generally among the readership of *Sword and Shield*, that controversy broke out this month (March) among men who are involved in the publishing of the magazine. The controversy includes the two editors of the magazine and several men on the board of Reformed Believers Publishing. So serious is the controversy that I was suspended from my office of minister of the word and sacraments in First Reformed Protestant Church. This controversy has the potential to create a struggle for control of *Sword and Shield*. As I write this there is not yet such a struggle, so far as I know. There is no pressure on me whatsoever to resign, nor have I put pressure on anyone else to resign, whether

board members or writers or fellow editor. I only say that there is the potential and maybe even the likelihood of a struggle. Rather than wait for it to materialize, I believe it prudent for me to step away from the magazine now. This will allow the board and the new editor in chief to decide which direction they want to take the magazine, without internal strife.

I do intend to keep writing, God willing. Perhaps in the future that could include articles submitted to *Sword and Shield* or letters to the editor, but for now I will leave the operation and content of the magazine to others.

The publication of the May 2023 issue will mark the completion of the third volume year of *Sword and Shield*. Three years! Who could have dared to hope for such a thing when we sent out our first issue in June of 2020? My hearty thanks to the board and to the association for providing the editors this platform to publish the Reformed faith. It was a blessing from God to be able to write theology and to engage in polemics for three years, knowing that there was a board and an association who agreed with the believer's right to do so. Even though this is a letter to the board, I would also like to note here my hearty thanks to our correspondents who sent in letters for publication. Their contributions, whether for or against, have added tremendously to the value of the magazine. I believe that the letters editions were the most

anticipated issues that we mailed out. I also would like to note here my hearty thanks to the donors who contributed their dollars to the publication of the magazine. The board knows better than I do how tremendously expensive it is to publish the magazine and mail it to hundreds and even thousands of addresses. I am grateful that we could do so for three years on donations alone, making the publication free to our readers. I also would like to note here what is my heartiest thanks to our copyeditors for their work in preparing an excellent magazine. My work as editor in chief was truly easy due to the tireless industry of our copyeditors. For three years they combed over every word, every paragraph division, and every thought expressed. They kept their eyes on matters of style, clarity, layout. And they worked with each writer in such a way that it was not a burden to hear from them.

All of this has been from God. God has been very good to Reformed Believers Publishing in giving us three full years of publishing the blessed Reformed faith. We have been entirely dependent upon him. Permit me to quote one line from the first editorial. “We are also thankful to God for bringing this first issue to pass, being deeply conscious of our dependence upon him to bless this work and to give *Sword and Shield* its place.” It was a great privilege from God to labor with you in this dependence upon him for three volume years.

Finally, I remind the board of the purpose of Reformed Believers Publishing, and I exhort you to remain true to that purpose. From the constitution:

The purpose of Reformed Believers Publishing shall be:

- A. To promote, defend, and develop the Reformed faith, which is the truth revealed in the Word of God and expressed in the Three Forms of Unity, with special emphasis on the truths of the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation, particular grace, and the unconditional covenant.
- B. To expose and condemn all lies repugnant to this truth.
- C. To give a theological and antithetical witness to the Reformed church world and beyond by broadcasting this distinctive Reformed truth to the people of God wherever they are found.

Warmly in Christ,  
Rev. Andrew Lanning



# PROTEST

The following protest from the undersigned was submitted to the consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church on April 10, 2023. It is published in *Reformed Pavilion* as a believer's witness to the truth.

To: Consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church

April 10, 2023

Dear brethren,

Greetings in the name of our eternal High Priest.

I protest the consistory's decision of March 23, 2023, "that we judge Rev. Lanning's teaching regarding exclusive psalmody in the worship service to be legalism by bringing an erroneous application of the second commandment in the preaching." There were several subsequent decisions regarding my suspension and discipline, but they all rest on this decision. My understanding is that what the consistory decides on this protest will automatically determine what it does with the remaining decisions, so that it is sufficient for me to protest this one decision without having to protest each decision in turn.

The consistory judged that the doctrine of exclusive Psalmody in my preaching is the heresy of legalism. The consistory's judgment is wrong, **first**, because my preaching in the two sermons in question taught the pure gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. I beseech you to listen to or read the sermons again. The congregation was not put under the law for her salvation in any sense whatsoever, but she was given her Savior's perfect work for her salvation. The congregation, made thankful for her salvation by Christ's gospel, was given the second commandment, the regulative principle, and exclusive Psalmody as the rule for her thankful life. There was not a single drop of the poison of man in the sermons. (This has nothing to do with the preacher, who is a worm, but everything to do with God, who has been gracious in

giving First RPC the gospel despite the worm who preaches it.) It is wrong for the consistory to charge the pure preaching of the gospel as legalism.

The consistory's judgment is wrong, **second**, because the charge of legalism against exclusive Psalmody is a novel charge newly invented by the consistory. I have been openly and regularly preaching exclusive psalmody for two years at First RPC. The elders approved every one of those sermons. Where were the charges of legalism then? My preaching of exclusive psalmody has always arisen out of the gospel of Christ, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, and never as a law of bondage to be kept for salvation. Where were the charges of legalism then? The two elders who did not shake my hand never once mentioned legalism in their initial talks with me as the reason they were opposed to my sermon. They stated several reasons they were opposed to my sermon, but they did not even hint at legalism. Only later did the term "legalism" begin to float around. Even after Rev. Langerak's sermon, not a single elder contacted me to talk about legalism. The first time the consistory even considered the charge of legalism was the same day as the meeting at which I was suspended. If my sermons really were the dread heresy of legalism, which may not be tolerated even for an hour, where was this charge when the elders did not shake my hand? Why did the charge of legalism only get thought up well after the fact of my sermons? Furthermore, in the Protestant Reformed Churches, all the current elders of First RPC were in a sister church relationship with

Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland, which publicly teaches exclusive Psalmody as the regulative principle of worship. If exclusive Psalmody is really the dread heresy of legalism, how could the elders tolerate such a relationship even for an hour? Where were the charges of legalism then? All the elders sat for decades under instruction from Prof. Hanko and others that the regulative principle requires exclusive Psalmody. Where were the charges of legalism then? For that matter, through the history of the Reformed church, when has the faithful Reformed church ever charged exclusive Psalmody with legalism? The fact is that the consistory of First RPC, almost overnight, invented the charge of legalism against exclusive Psalmody. In doing so, the consistory led the congregation down a new path. I beseech my brethren to slow down a moment and consider what new things you have suddenly made into essential RPC doctrine overnight: the hymn “Praise God” is suddenly a psalm; exclusive psalmody is suddenly legalism; and your undershepherd who led you into the kingdom of heaven (I speak as a fool) is suddenly outside the kingdom of heaven. My brethren, you are rushing into novelties, including the novel charge of legalism against exclusive Psalmody.

The consistory’s judgment is wrong, **third**, because the consistory does not reckon with the connection between exclusive psalmody and the gospel of the psalms that God has given First RPC. When God gave us reformation of doctrine in the formation of the RPC, he also gave us reformation in worship. The reformation in our worship was a restoration of the psalms. The psalms had been taken away from us in the PRC by the doctrine that man must do something in order to obtain something from God. All the language in the psalms of the psalmist doing something was overshadowed with a conditional understanding. When God gave Christ back to us in our doctrine by showing us that Christ has accomplished all things, so that our fellowship with God is truly unconditional, God also gave us back the psalms. We have been led to see that

Christ is the sweet Psalmist of Israel who sings the songs of Zion and the songs of the Lord. We have been led to see that he sings in the midst of the great congregation. This has opened up the psalms to us again. Our worship has been reformed right along with our doctrine. It is out of this reformation of doctrine that exclusive psalmody comes. Exclusive psalmody has not come out of a denigration of the rest of scripture, or a mistrust of the Spirit’s work, or a purity of worship ideal. Exclusive psalmody has come out of the gospel.

Bewilderingly, the consistory presents exclusive psalmody in my sermons as if it did not come out of the gospel but out of an attempt to legislate holiness among us. “The preaching of the gospel gives one a love for the Psalms and a strong desire to sing these in the worship services. However, it is not the law and legislation that keeps God’s people singing and loving to sing the Psalms. Rather it is the gospel.” But the sermons did not preach that our love for the psalms comes out of the law, or the regulative principle, or exclusive psalmody. Just as the sermons in First RPC never teach that our love for God’s name comes out of the law not to take his name in vain, or our love for the neighbor comes out of the law not to murder our neighbor. The preaching at First RPC is consistently and deliberately the teaching that Christ has fulfilled – FULFILLED – all our salvation, and that the law is the rule of our gratitude. Never, never the other way around.

This is so bewildering to me. Why is the consistory trying to present my preaching of exclusive psalmody as if came out of an attempt to legislate our holiness? Why will the consistory not see that the preaching of exclusive psalmody has been taught to us just as every other requirement of God’s law, including the requirement of the schools: as the rule of gratitude and love, not as a condition for fellowship with God.

By failing to reckon with God’s reformation of worship along with reformation of doctrine, the consistory will have to go backward in the

reformation of both. If exclusive psalmody is damned as the wicked heresy of legalism, then the only reason to sing psalms in worship is that man wills it. That can be dressed up in all kinds of pretty language – order in the church, liberty in Christ, the believer’s right – but the fact remains that the only reason to sing psalms in church will not be that God wills it, but that man wills it. The enthronement of man’s will will be the undoing of the entire reformation that God gave to the Reformed Protestant Churches.

I beseech my brethren to stop promoting the idea that my preaching of exclusive psalmody was legalism in our midst, and to recognize that my preaching of exclusive psalmody arose out of the reformation of doctrine and worship that God graciously gave us.

The consistory’s judgment is wrong, **fourth**, because the consistory’s grounds do not establish its charge that the doctrine of exclusive Psalmody in my preaching was legalism.

**Ground 1:** The Reformed Creeds do not demand exclusive psalmody.

**Reply:** On the matter of what is required in worship, the creeds explicitly send us to Scripture. “Nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word” (LD 35, QA 96). “Yet they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted” (Belgic Confession 32). When the creeds explicitly send us to Scripture on a matter, the creeds require what the Scriptures require in that matter. On the consistory’s argument, it would be legalism to teach that the church must sing at all during worship, since the Reformed Creeds do not demand singing. Rather, because Scripture requires psalms to be sung by the congregation, and because Scripture does not require anything else to be sung by the congregation, the Reformed creeds demand exclusive psalmody as that which God “has commanded in his word”.

**Ground 2:** This teaching goes beyond what the scriptures reveal.

**Reply:** Scripture explicitly requires the church to sing psalms in her public worship. “Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms” (Psalm 95:2). Scripture reveals that Jesus’ practice in public worship was to sing psalms (Matt. 26:30). The apostolic injunction for the church as a body was that she sing psalms (Col. 3:15–16). Scripture’s instruction by command, normative practice of Jesus, and apostolic injunction regulates what the church sings in her worship: psalms.

Scripture also never requires the church to sing something other than psalms in her public worship. Even Colossians 3:16, to which the consistory appeals, does not require the singing of the entire Bible. There is no command in the passage to “Sing the scriptures,” “Sing the whole word,” or even, “Sing the word.” The passage does tell what material the church is to sing: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all of which are what we call the psalms. The parallel passage in Ephesians 5:19 makes perfectly clear that the material for singing is the psalms. “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

When Scripture requires something for worship (psalms) and never requires something else for worship (other songs), then the church only worships as God has commanded and does not introduce what he has not commanded. In the case of congregational singing, this is exclusive psalmody.

**Ground 3:** The Church Order does not demand exclusive psalmody but rather rejects this teaching by including songs which are not found in the Psalms.

**Reply:** Article 69 of the church order teaches exclusive psalmody. It requires the “150 Psalms of David” and excludes many, many other biblical songs and hymns that were in use in some of the Reformed churches in 1619. The principle of Dordt is expressed in the word “only.” Sing *only*.... If the principle of Dordt were, “Sing the scriptures,” as the consistory claims, then Dordt would have said so: “Sing *only* the scriptures.” That was not Dordt’s principle. Dordt told us its principle: Sing *only* the psalms (and a few concessions).

Dordt allowed a tiny handful of exceptions to the psalms. In the original article there were seven exceptions. The rule was the 150 Psalms of David. So far from overthrowing the principle or introducing another principle, the exceptions proved the rule. The rule of Dordt was: Sing *only* the psalms . . . (and a few other songs that are already in your book).

Dordt allowed a tiny handful of exceptions because people were just as stubborn then as they are now. Imagine suggesting then that the beloved hymn of prayer before the sermon should not be sung and see what would have happened. Try to suggest now that Thomas Ken’s beloved doxology “Praise God” is a hymn and see what happens. So Dordt made a concession to the people’s will. But Dordt was not enthusiastic about the few exceptions. Dordt suffered the few exceptions. And their suffering a few exceptions only went so far, as is evident from their requirement regarding other biblical songs: “All other Hymns shall be barred from the Churches, and where some have already been introduced, these shall be set aside by means found to be most appropriate”<sup>1</sup> (Van Dellen and Monsma on Article 69).

Dordt’s suffering a handful of non-psalms is analogous to God’s suffering divorce in the Old Testament. God hates divorce, but for a time he suffered his people to put away their wives for the hardness of their hearts. So also Dordt, which loved psalms, suffered a tiny handful of non-psalms for the hardness of Dutch hearts. But where the article suffers hard hearts, we ought to be ashamed, rather than demand continued room for our hardness.

**Ground 4:** The teaching of the sermon is that if we sing anything other than the 150 Psalms in the official worship service, we are committing idol worship and sinning against the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. To teach that if the congregation sings any versification of the scriptures (other than the Psalms) then the congregation does not have God dwelling with them nor experiencing his covenant fellowship through Jesus until man’s law is met is legalism. It is an extreme and legalistic application of the law in the life and worship of the believer.

**Reply:** The consistory asserts that the sermons taught “that if the congregation sings any versification of the Scriptures (other than the Psalms) then the congregation does not have God dwelling with them nor experiencing his covenant fellowship through Jesus until man’s law is met.” This assertion is entirely an invention of the consistory. The sermons taught no such thing. The sermons cannot even be misunderstood to teach any such thing. The sermons taught that Christ has already completed and fulfilled all our worship, including fulfilling the regulative principle. The sermons taught that our worship is our gratitude for salvation already accomplished. The sermons cannot be construed in any way

<sup>1</sup> Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), 283.

whatsoever to be saying that the congregation does not have God dwelling with them nor experiencing covenant fellowship until man meets some law.

In making its argument, the consistory makes a fallacious leap from breaking a commandment to not having God's fellowship. The consistory says that the sermon taught that to sing something other than the psalms is a sin against the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. The consistory then argued that this was the same as teaching that "the congregation does not have God dwelling with them nor experiencing his covenant fellowship through Jesus until man's law is met." This is a fallacy. Even when we worship as God has commanded, we are still breaking any number of commandments, because our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. But this does not mean that God withdraws his fellowship from us. God always maintains his fellowship with his elect people in Jesus Christ. The pulpit shows God's people their transgressions, but they remain God's people (Isaiah 58:1).

If the consistory's logic is allowed to stand, then the pulpit may never tell the congregation that it has sinned against this or that commandment, because that would be the same as telling the congregation that they do not have fellowship with God until they have met this or that condition.

The consistory's explanation of legalism in this ground is preposterous. I don't say that to talk down to the consistory or to cast it in their teeth, but to wake the consistory up to the weakness and folly of its arguments.

**Ground 5:** Lord's Day 35 is teaching the principle of no idol worship which principle governs our whole life and not only the official worship services.

**Reply:** Lord's Day 35 condemns image worship in every part of our life, but the

Lord's Day very definitely applies this principle to the public, corporate worship of the church. QA 98 asks whether images may be tolerated "in the churches." That is an explicit reference to public worship. Furthermore, Belgic Confession 32, explaining the same doctrine as Lord's Day 35, makes explicit reference to "the worship of God" in "the body of the church." Therefore, when the sermons teach that there is a regulative principle of worship in the public worship of the church, that teaching is perfectly faithful to the confessions.

The consistory's argument obliterates the distinction between public and private worship. The obliteration of that distinction is not only novel and bizarre for a Reformed church, but the obliteration of that distinction goes against the confessions. The confessions explicitly speak of an application of image worship in the public worship of the church.

**Ground 6:** Exclusive psalmody in worship as a demand of the law is a law of man which is forbidden in Belgic Confession Article 32, "And therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws, which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever. Therefore, we admit only of that which tends to nourish and preserve concord, and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God."

**Reply:** The ground begs the question. The ground merely asserts that exclusive psalmody is a law of man. But the scriptures overwhelmingly require the singing of psalms in the worship of the church (see the reply to Ground 2 above). Furthermore, the scriptures never require the singing of other songs in the worship of the church (see the reply to Ground 2 above). Therefore, it is no law of man to preach to the congregation that when she

worships God in church out of gratitude for her salvation in Christ, she must come before the Lord with thanksgiving and worship him with psalms (Ps. 95:2) and that she must not worship him with any other songs than he has commanded in his word (Lord's Day 35).

**Ground 7:** The history of the Reformed churches demonstrates that the teaching of exclusive psalmody as law in worship has been rejected.

**Reply:** The history of the Reformed churches does not demonstrate that exclusive psalmody has been rejected. It certainly does not demonstrate that exclusive psalmody has been charged with the heresy of legalism. During reformation, Reformed churches always

returned to exclusive psalmody. Dordt was a return to exclusive psalmody (with a few concessions that prove the rule); the Afscheiding was a return to exclusive psalmody; the very first reason for the formation of the Christian Reformed Church in 1857 was opposition to hymns and a return to the psalms; and the reformation of 2021 was a return to the psalms as God taught us the meaning of the psalms and the reality of Christ as the sweet psalmist of Israel.

On these four grounds, I ask that the consistory uphold my protest, declare its previous decisions to be in error, and take the necessary steps to restore my office and lift my discipline.

Warmly in Christ,  
Rev. Lanning

## CONTRIBUTION

Dewey Engelsma wrote the following article as a handy response that he could provide to those who were asking him for his opinion of a recent sermon by Rev. Nathan Langerak. Believing that the article sheds light not only on Rev. Langerak's sermon but also on Colossians 3:16 and the whole matter of exclusive psalmody in general, I asked and received Dewey's permission to publish it in *Reformed Pavilion*.

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### An Uncertain Sound

**O**n March 5 Reverend Lanning preached a sermon on Lord's Day 35 titled "No Image Worship." That sermon can be viewed online, and a transcript is available.

Apparently, there were concerns about the sermon, so to provide the congregation with leadership on the matter, Reverend Lanning preached another sermon on the regulative principle the following Sunday, March 12, during the evening service, titled "The Regulative Principle of Worship." That sermon can be viewed online, and a transcript is available.

After that worship service, two elders, Jon Langerak and Gord Schipper, refused to shake Reverend Lanning's hand.

On Sunday, March 19, 2023, Rev. Nathan Langerak of Second Reformed Protestant Church preached a sermon on Colossians 3:16 titled "The Indwelling Word." That sermon can be viewed online, and a transcript is available.

Many have been carried along by that sermon by Reverend Langerak.

I am not one of them.

The sermon was contradictory.

Reverend Langerak said he picked Colossians 3:16 for a specific reason. "I picked this text deliberately because this is the strongest text that the advocates of exclusive psalmody have. It is their bulwark. If they're going to promote exclusive psalmody, they must appeal to this text."

Later in the sermon he said this: "It is a source of wonderment to me that the advocates of exclusive psalmody are shy about this text, some of them."

And finally, he contradicted his earlier statement *entirely* when he said this: "And I suspect that the reason that the proponents of this exclusive psalmody do not appeal to these texts is because of the long-standing disagreement about what those words mean, and the fact the definitive explanation of what those words mean cannot be settled on the basis of scripture."

Regarding the word "wisdom" in the text, he said towards the beginning of the sermon that this referred to "an appeal to what the churches have done in the past." Later in the sermon, however, he changed the explanation so that now "wisdom" means "the faithful, sound application of the word to every situation in life that church encounters." (And to the second explanation, the child of God exclaims, "Amen!")

Reverend Langerak is overly simplistic and does his congregation an injustice in his explanation of the text. "Now, I ask you, 'Read Colossians 3. In Colossians 3 is he only talking about the public worship of God?'" He goes on to say, "It's talking about your whole life." But with some exegesis and explanation, it would be perfectly reasonable to explain that this verse, in the course of addressing the believer's whole life (which emphatically includes public worship) is specifically addressing public worship. This has been the position of other theologians who have not had any trouble explaining this verse that way. Here is Professor Hanko explaining the parallel passage in Ephesians 5:19: "Before I turn to these passages to point out their significance for the question we face concerning sing-

ing in corporate worship, I think it important to point out that the passage in Ephesians emphatically speaks of the Holy Spirit as making it possible to sing in corporate worship: 'be filled with the Spirit...'" (Herman Hanko, "The Songs of Zion: What Shall the Church Sing?", *Standard Bearer* Vol. 74, Issue 8).

The arguments Reverend Langerak used to support his position were weak, even fatally flawed.

But they were arguments the church has faced before.

In his sermon on March 12, Reverend Lanning gave a beautiful explanation of how to explain the difference between what takes place in church on Sunday (which is governed by the regulative principle) and what takes place in our home. The Reformed church has always understood there to be this separation. But how best to explain it? The Holy Spirit, through the preaching of Reverend Lanning, gave us a beautiful way to think of the relationship between church and home, and church and school. "There will be an echo of that principle in your home, not the principle but an echo of that principle..." How lovely. What a lovely image for the father in the home to consider as he leads his family in devotions around the kitchen table. What a powerful reminder and help for the teacher as she leads and instructs her children throughout the day. Does my work, do my words sound that echo that rings out from the house of God Sunday after Sunday? Those echoes reverberate throughout our whole lives and in all of our activities.

There were echoes in Reverend Langerak's sermon as well.

Echoes of the school controversy that just tore through the Reformed Protestant Churches.

The arguments Reverend Langerak made in his sermon were the exact arguments that were thrown in our teeth over and over again by the proponents of homeschooling.

Three times Reverend Langerak demanded that those who espouse exclusive psalmody

provide a specific text from Scripture. In fact, so carried away was he by this argument that he concluded his sermon with it. “And those that disturb our peace with their legalism, they must show with a specific text from scripture where God says, ‘You must only sing the psalms.’ That’s their job.”

Which of us do not have echoes of that question ringing in our ears from the recent controversy?

I can only imagine what those who argued against the Christian school as demand of the covenant must think hearing their arguments hijacked and used in another context.

There is no specific text of scripture required. We just established that. You don’t need an explicit text from scripture or an explicit text from the creeds. When scripture absolutely breathes a certain truth on every page, you insult the Holy Spirit by demanding a specific text.

After having rebuked those who asked for a “specific text” in the school controversy, to now turn around and demand a “specific text” from the proponents of exclusive psalmody is, to put it charitably, inconsistent. And that is to stretch charity to its limits.

When the church would discipline a man who decides to only come to church once on Sunday, that man can simply reply, “Show me an explicit text from scripture that says I have to attend church twice.”

More echoes.

“I was sitting munching on the gospel peacefully. I was robbed of my joy. I had joy in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I was robbed of my happiness in the worship. I was worshiping my God as he commands. And a man-made law was brought in, and I was robbed” (Rev. Langerak).

And this: “Seventeen years of my ministry, I picked more songs that weren’t psalms tonight than I have in seventeen years. I only ever pick the psalms. We could just sing the psalms. Can’t now!”

How many of us did not have that thrown in our teeth. “I was busy loving the gospel and feeding on the gospel, and then you came in and introduced this man-made law and robbed me of my joy. We had a school! It flowed out of us naturally. But then you came and called it a law and robbed us blind of our joy.”

The fact that God has put these very words on our lips so soon after the school controversy is chilling.

The fact that so many of us have simply parroted these arguments is revealing.

When we were told that the Christian school was a demand of the covenant (law), our response was, “It is? How lovely is that law! I love that law as the guide for my thankful life.”

And having heard that the singing of the 150 psalms of David is commanded us according to the regulative principle (law), the response of faith is, “It is? How lovely is that law! I love that law as the guide for my thankful life.”

For others the response is starkly different. “It is law for me to sing the 150 psalms of David? I will run away from the psalms and sing as many hymns as I can!”

Reverend Langerak’s sermon was unclear in its explanation of the text.

What do the words “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” mean? Reverend Langerak gave two different explanations and seemingly left it up to the congregation to decide which one they preferred, whether those three words mean “psalms and hymns written by somebody and spiritual songs written by somebody.” About that explanation he said this: “That’s a possibility.” Or maybe those words refer to “three different kinds of psalms.” About that he said this: “I suppose that’s defensible. I could go along with that.”

He pointed out that gifted exegetes have interpreted that text in different ways, but would that not be the case for many passages

of scripture? Since when has a minister simply left something up to the congregation's whim as to what the text means?

By leaving the end of the verse open to interpretation, Reverend Langerak could put his own construction on the first part of the verse, which is simply that the "word of Christ" referenced in the first part of the verse simply refers to the entire scripture. So that the command of the text regarding Scripture is "Make sure that what you are singing accords with the scripture."

But that is an impoverished explanation of the text.

Read the text with the understanding of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" as separate headings of the psalms (and instruction abounds that makes clear this is the proper explanation of the text). Now the text comes to life with a vibrancy and richness that is unparalleled! You could read it this way: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another by singing the psalms together, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." To that the believing child of God says, "Yes! Yes! A thousand times yes! I can't imagine having it another way!" Wisdom? Dwelling? Grace? All of this found in the divinely inspired book of songs that Jesus Christ has given to his church through the Holy Spirit. Would the Holy Spirit command anything else? Would he say, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, and now go sing a song authored by Thomas Ken"?

Reverend Langerak's sermon placed the church on a weak principle, which is to say a weak foundation, which is to say no foundation at all.

(It would behoove all of us to re-read Herman Hoeksema's article "Living From Principle," found in the November 1, 1937 issue of *The Standard Bearer*.)

Reverend Langerak rejected the principle of exclusive psalmody (using intemperate language and calling it "a stupid, man-made principle"), and the principle Reverend Langerak set

forth was this: "The principle, the principle, that governs the church's worship is *sing the word of God*." Or this: "You must sing the psalms, although not exclusively but almost exclusively." How anyone can make heads or tails of that is beyond me. He charges legalism, but on what basis can he demand ("must") that I sing the psalms "almost exclusively"? Sounds like a law.

Be that as it may, Reverend Langerak sets forth the same principle on which the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) stand.

Kind-of.

As all of us know, the PRC would occasionally stumble across a principle, and then they would immediately set about to compromise it. And that was inevitable. Because the principles of God's word are theocentric, they do not make room for man and man's doing, so inevitably the PRC would make a hash of the principle.

"The Christian schools are a demand of the covenant!" the PRC would say.

Lovely principle.

And then they would allow anyone to home-school for any reason and under any circumstance, and would never dream of bringing Christian discipline to bear on those who flouted God's covenant.

Their principle was not "The Christian school is a demand of the covenant." Their principle was "The Christian school is an option of the covenant."

So too with exclusive psalmody.

I was raised to believe exclusive psalmody. I was raised to believe that the PRC believed in exclusive psalmody. (Add that to the list of things about which I was hoodwinked.) And if anyone doubts it, then do a little research, and time and time again you will see lip service paid to exclusive psalmody. For an example of that, you can read a sermon by Rev. Ron Hanko titled "Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs." (The sermon can be found at the PRCA website.) In that sermon you read the following: "Exclusive Psalmody has always been the practice of the church and though lost in most churches today,

must remain our practice as something required by God Himself." And then this a little bit later: "We must see that not only are the Psalms a *part* of what we must sing in the worship of God, but that they are *all* we may sing" (emphasis found in the transcript). And later: "For that reason alone, the church must sing only Psalms in the worship of God, as required in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3."

Or this by Reverend Kortering:

Let us now ask why it is the position of the Reformed churches to limit the songs of worship to the Psalms. In dealing with this we should emphasize that it is not the Reformed position that the use of hymns is wrong. Hymns written by God-fearing people throughout the ages have been a great blessing to God's people. We do well to know the good hymns and enjoy them in our homes and schools. The issue of worship and the use of songs in worship is a different one." (emphasis found in the transcript) ("Psalm Singing: A Reformed Heritage," Rev. Kortering, found at the PRCA website)

And then this:

To accomplish this, the regulative principle of the Word must apply. Just as the Word of God determines for us our faith (we believe what God has revealed to us in His Word), so it determines for us our Christian conduct as to how we are to serve God and keep his commandments. It also must determine for us how we are to worship God. The Word of God regulates the details of worship. This is beautifully expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith [and then what follows is the quote from the WCF, Chapter 21, Section 1]. We find a similar expression in the Heidelberg Catechism in connection with the second commandment. 'What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than He has command-

ed us in His word" [emphasis found in the article]. The point that we want to make now is this: the Word of God does make plain that the songs to be sung in the worship of Jehovah are to be the songs which the Holy Spirit gave to us, namely the Psalms. If we are to regulate the singing of God's people by the Word of God, we will make use of those songs which God has provided for us, and which were sung by the church from the very beginning. (ibid.)

Or this from Professor Hanko:

Such proof from history, however, is not sufficient to make Psalm-singing in the worship services an element incorporated into the regulative principle of worship. For that we need to go to Scripture itself. The strong line of biblical proof which we need can be found in the Old Testament Scriptures...This is especially true of the command to sing the Psalms, for the Psalms themselves belong to that which is the possession of the church of all ages. The Psalms are part of Scripture, and Scripture, also the Old Testament, is still today our rule of faith and life. The argument, briefly stated, is as follows [he goes on to make that argument, which everyone ought to read, but which, for the sake of brevity, I will elide]. Nothing is clearer than this. Scripture enjoins Psalm singing in the worship of the church. (Herman Hanko, "The Songs of Zion: What Shall the Church Sing?," *Standard Bearer* Vol. 74, Issue 8)

Examples like the ones cited above can be multiplied.

Reverend Lanning was careful to point out at the beginning of the sermon that there were two views in our mother church regarding the regulative principle and exclusive psalmody. That makes it an oddity that Reverend Langerak would charge Reverend Lanning with legalism for espousing one of these positions. An oddity both theologically and historically.

“We believe in exclusive psalmody!” the PRC would say.

Lovely principle.

And then they would add a “but” and excuse the man-made hymns that are present in the worship service.

The words “almost exclusive psalmody” or “exclusive psalmody virtually” are oxymoronic and a complete overthrow of the principle.

The principle “sing the word” to govern our singing in church is a complete overthrowing of Psalm singing. Now, I am not saying that you won’t have psalm singing. I am not even saying that you won’t have psalm singing for many years.

But your reason for having psalm singing is not principled. It is simply the will of man. It is capricious and cruel. Because you want psalm singing, you are going to insist on it. But the man who grew up in the Christian Reformed Church and who loves 30–40 orthodox, godly hymns, he does not get to have any of those in the worship, even though they perfectly accord with the principle “sing the word of God.” Those hymns are based on the word of God and express beautifully the word of God. But he does not get them, and only because you refuse to allow him to live out of the principle that you have established. You are now subject to the will of man as to what you will sing, and that is cruel bondage.

Reverend Langerak in his sermon deals unfairly with those who espouse exclusive psalmody. He brings up Article 69 of the Church Order and casts that in the teeth of those with whom he disagrees, but he does not tell his congregation that the song they begin each service with, “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,” does not even accord with Article 69 of the Church Order (neither could it, being composed by Thomas Ken after Article 69 was written).

And neither does Reverend Langerak’s principle accord with Article 69 of the Church Order.

He charges Reverend Lanning, and those who believe in exclusive psalmody, with legalism. He contends it is legalism because it would

limit the church to sing only the 150 psalms of David and would not allow them to sing any other versification of the word of God.

According to this argument, Article 69 of the Church is then legalistic. Article 69 does not read, “In the churches the only songs that shall be sung are the word of God.” It limits the singing in the churches to ten different songs or groups of songs. If it is legalistic to restrict the church’s singing to the 150 psalms of David, then certainly it is legalistic to limit the church’s singing to the 150 psalms of David and a few others.

Reverend Langerak’s position is that espoused by erstwhile Protestant Reformed pastor, Rev. P. Vis (a pastor who, apparently, returned to the CRC after the schism of 1953):

In answer to this we would say first of all that the singing of hymns in public worship as such is not to be condemned, provided the hymns sung are truly sound. There have been some in the past and there are still a few today who maintain that hymn singing in public worship is always wrong and to be condemned and that for the simple reason that they are hymns and not psalms. And it often happens in a discussion on this subject that the main question seems to be whether or not hymns may be sung. However to our mind we have no problem there at all. Scripture nowhere demands of us that in our singing we confine ourselves to the Psalms nor does it forbid us to sing hymns. Rather it does the very opposite. For we read in Eph. 5:1–9, “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” And again in Col. 3:16, “Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” From these verses it is evident that rather than to limit us in our singing to the Psalms God even encourages us to sing hymns in addition to

these. This was also seen and understood by the Church in the past. Therefore it allowed the Song of Mary, Zacharias and Simeon, the Morning and Evening Hymns, and the Hymn of Prayer to be sung in divine worship and gave them a place in the Psalm book and Psalter. Hence the question is not at all whether we may sing hymns. Scripture plainly teaches us that we may and this the Church has always realized. ("Hymn Singing in Public Worship," P. Vis, *Standard Bearer* Vol 20, Issue 1; cf *Letters*, *Standard Bearer* Vol 77, Issue 11, 3/01)

Professor Hanko speaks to hymns, or as he puts it, "free songs."

I am not arguing that certain free songs can be found which accurately express the truth of Scripture. I can sing with a great deal of enjoyment, "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord"; and, "Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth." I am not arguing, therefore, that certain free songs are not accurate confessions of the truth of Scripture. I am not even arguing that many free songs are prayers to God set to music. What I am arguing is that this is all free songs are. And that is not enough. *The covenantal character of worship must be reflected in the singing of the church. Only the Psalms do that.* (emphasis mine) (Hanko, "The Songs of Zion")

I agree with the church historians that contend that Dordt did not want all of those other hymns; rather, they wanted the 150 psalms of David and the others that were included as concessions to the people.

Here too the PRC stumbled on the right principle.

"The mention of a few hymns in Article 69 of the church order of Dordt was a concession to a difficult situation then obtaining in the Dutch Reformed

churches (cf. VanDellen and Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary*, Zondervan, 1954, pp. 282, 283). *The spirit and intent of the article, however, are that only the Psalms be sung in the public worship of the Reformed churches.*" (emphasis mine) (Engelsma, *Standard Bearer* Vol. 68, No. 118, July 1, 1992)

And this, a few years later: "Our stand today is the historic, traditional Reformed position—that of Calvin; of the Synod of Dordt; and of the Reformed churches generally, until recently, when the Reformed churches have been amusing themselves by abandoning the Reformed tradition wholesale. The exceptions to the Psalms mentioned in Article 69 (some of which are quite unknown to most of us) find their place there through curious, historical circumstances: the popular Dutch songbook of the time of the Synod of Dordt contained also these hymns; rather than to disturb the people, Dordt made allowance for these hymns; But the spirit and principle of Article 69 is: **'In the churches only the 150 Psalms of David shall be sung. Period!'** (emphasis mine) (Engelsma, *Music in the Church*, *Standard Bearer* Vol 71, Issue 15).

Lovely principle.

Which the PRC then went on to eviscerate.

But that is one of the glories of church reformation.

The Holy Spirit leads his people back to the psalms. He did it with the church in Hezekiah's day ("Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the LORD with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped" [2 Chronicles 29:30]), and he did it with the church in 1834 ("We see as well that in the best of time, in the purest churches, hymns are never found nor tolerated...where Reformation has broken out in its purest form, hymns are completely done away with" [Hendrik de Cock]).

According to church historian Professor Herman Hanko, this has always been the case with reformation.

The close relation between the preaching and the singing in the church is underscored by the fact that when reformation came to the church, such reformation always included a return to the singing of Psalms. Apostasy which brought with it the desperate need of reformation was apostasy in doctrine, in church government, and in liturgy. Reformation was a return to the “old paths” (Jer. 6:16) in doctrine, church polity, and liturgy, and thus in singing by Jehovah’s congregation. Psalm-singing is a part of these “old paths.” (Hanko, “The Songs of Zion: What Shall the Church Sing?”)

Reverend Langerak misled the people as to what Reverend Lanning was teaching.

This is what Reverend Lanning taught: “In the first place, the regulative principle deals with the public worship of the church and not the private worship of an individual in his home. It’s the regulative principle of worship” (Rev. Lanning, *Regulative Principle of Worship*, preached 3/12/23).

This is the fear tactic that Reverend Langerak planted in the hearts of his congregation: “That’s nine-tenths of the reason why I’m preaching this to you tonight. I do not want you to be robbed. I don’t want you to go home and look at your wall and see on the wall a picture that says ‘Praise God from whom all blessings flow’ and think, ‘Well, I might not be able to have that.’ That’s a sure sign you’re dealing with legalism” (Rev. Langerak, *The Indwelling Word*, preached 3/19/23).

Reverend Langerak’s sermon was also fatally flawed.

By saying the creeds are “dead silent” on the matter, he then could not place his congregation on the foundation of the creeds.

The creeds are not silent. Therefore, Reverend Lanning could use them to support his posi-

tion. Neither is this something unique posited by Reverend Lanning. Other men have found the matter having to do with our singing in the creeds.

The Heidelberg Catechism defines the regulative principle in its explanation of the second commandment: ‘nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word.’ What obedience to the regulative principle of worship consists of, the Catechism describes in its explanation of the fourth commandment, the command concerning observance of the Sabbath: ‘learn the Word of God [implying the lively preaching of the word], to use the holy Sacraments, to call publicly upon the Lord [which includes the singing of the psalms, as well as prayers], and to give Christian alms.’ (Engelsma, *Belgic Confession Commentary*, Volume 2, 214)

Or this, from Professor Herman Hanko: It is my conviction, expressed in this article, that the Word of God requires the exclusive use of the Psalms in the corporate worship of the church. The assumption here is the regulative principle of worship, defined in the Heidelberg Catechism (Q & A 96): “What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.” I shall not argue the case for the regulative principle in corporate worship, nor shall I make any attempt to explain it in detail; knowledge of these ideas is presupposed on the part of the reader. If there is any question about these things, material can be found in many places written by many different men. It is the thesis of this article that the regulative principle of worship requires the use of the Psalms in the church’s worship. Although it is of greatest concern to me to demonstrate in this article how Scripture requires exclusive

Psalmody, I shall digress momentarily and point out a few facts from the history of the church. (Herman Hanko, "The Songs of Zion: What Shall the Church Sing?", 1/15/98)

The two sermons by Reverend Lanning were clear, systematic, free of contradiction, and most importantly, they were principled. They placed the congregation on the firmest foundation possible, the word of God and the creeds.

So, what does that mean? It means that while some sermons lead you to man and never stop talking about man, the sermons preached by Reverend Lanning led the congregation to Jesus Christ. The congregation heard Jesus Christ. Reverend Lanning, faithful to his calling, will give the congregation nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified, and he did exactly that in those sermons.

These sermons were the same doctrine as he preached on October 31, 2021, in a sermon titled "Singing the Word of Christ." That sermon is found online, and a transcript is available.

The reaction of these sermons by the congregation, myself included, reminded me of the story found in Judges 6. Gideon and ten other men, by night, cut down his father's altar to Baal as well as the grove. When the people woke up

the next day and realized what had been done, they demanded that Gideon be brought out. Why? "That he may die" (Judges 6:30). The question I have to ask myself, and that the congregation has to ask itself, is this: "Has the song by Thomas Ken and even the Psalter itself become an idol to us?" Or even deeper, "Are we so proud that we will not receive even the gentle rebuke that was issued to us in these sermons?"

Reverend Langerak's sermon, on the other hand, was a trumpet blast of an uncertain sound.

That is a reference to 1 Corinthians 14:8: "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

John Calvin, in explaining this text, says that it is as though the apostle Paul had said, "A man cannot give life to a harp or a flute, but he makes it give forth a sound that is regulated in such a manner, that it can be distinguished. How absurd then it is, that even men, endowed with intelligence, should utter a confused, indistinguishable sound!"

Yes, that describes the sermon titled "The Indwelling Word" preached by Reverend Nathan Langerak, a man "endowed with intelligence."

A confused, indistinguishable sound.

—Dewey Engelsma



REFORMED  
PAVILION

In the past few weeks, many, many questions have been posed regarding exclusive psalmody. I have compiled a few of the most frequently asked and those that I thought got to the heart of the matter. They are published here with the prayer that God would use them to continue leading us into the truth.

1. Instead of preaching about “Praise God” and exclusive psalmody, shouldn’t you have brought an overture to classis to change article 69 of the church order?

**Answer:** First, there was no urgency to bring an overture to classis because our practice in the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) was already exclusive psalmody. None of us were singing the other songs in article 69, nor was there any indication that we were about to. An overture could have certainly come someday, but there was nothing driving the RPC to change the article. Up until a few weeks ago, if your co-worker had asked you what you sang in church, you would have said, “Psalms.” Preaching exclusive psalmody in a church that practices exclusive psalmody without writing an overture first is not outrageous. The sermons on exclusive psalmody were not a disregard for order and decency, just as our practice of exclusive psalmody was not a disregard for order and decency.

Second, “Praise God” is not in article 69. It is not one of the 150 psalms of David, and it is not one of the other songs or hymns listed, including the “morning hymn” and “evening hymn.” Because it is not in article 69, there was nothing to overture. There was something to preach though, and that was patiently and regularly to instruct the congregation regarding our singing, including the fact that

one of our songs is a hymn. Most of us had no idea what “Praise God” was. That is perfectly understandable. It had been sung for generations. We and our fathers simply inherited it by tradition. But it is a tradition that can be examined, understood, and corrected through the preaching of the gospel.

Third, and most importantly, the preaching of the word does not depend upon the judgment of classis. The word is not bound (II Tim. 2:9). The truth is above all (Belgic Confession 7). We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). The minister may not come to the pulpit as the servant of men and their decisions but as the servant of the Lord and his word. “Whosoever I command thee thou shalt speak” (Jer. 1:7). The minister may bring an overture or not. But he must preach the gospel (I Cor. 9:16). In the Reformed Protestant Churches, we have already learned all this. The Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) deposed me and placed me under discipline on the charge that I should have protested instead of preached. Let us in the RPC not return to that mire so soon.

2. Is it really the sin of image worship to sing the Lord’s prayer or some other portion of scripture in worship, so that doing so is equivalent to the Israelites’ dancing naked around the golden calf?

**Answer:** This question is the hardest one for me to answer, and I have had to wrestle with it these last few weeks. The difficulty of the question is not that it makes a good point but that there are two subtle errors in the question. These two errors make exclusive psalmody appear to be preposterous, as if exclusive psalmody means that scripture is sinful. “You’re

telling me that it's a sin for me to sing God's word?!" It is hard to see through that outrageous appearance. But once one understands the errors of the question, then one can see what charge exclusive psalmody is actually making.

The first error of the question is that it makes a false equivalence between the scriptures on the one hand and the golden calf on the other. In the question there are two events. One event is the Israelites' dancing around the golden calf. The other event is the church's singing the Lord's prayer in her worship. The question assumes that the golden calf in the one event corresponds to the Lord's prayer in the other event. After all, dancing around the golden calf was image worship. If you are going to tell me that singing the Lord's prayer is image worship, then you are saying that the Lord's prayer is the same as the golden calf. With this understanding of the question, one can understand why there is so much anger against the doctrine of exclusive psalmody. God's people love the scriptures. They receive the scriptures as the word of their God. For one to equate the scriptures with that filthy golden calf is blasphemy.

The error of the question is that exclusive psalmody does *not* equate the scriptures with the golden calf. Rather, exclusive psalmody equates the *will of man* with the golden calf. What was the sin of Israel at Sinai? What was at the heart of Israel's making the golden calf, sitting down to eat, and rising up to play? At the heart of it all was Israel's *will*. Israel followed her own will to invent worship of Jehovah. Israel willed to make the golden calf. Israel willed to call her feast a feast to Jehovah. Israel willed to fornicate as part of her worship of Jehovah. The heart of Israel's sin at Sinai was will worship. This is always the case

in the false worship of Jehovah. What was so sinful about carrying the ark on a new cart that Uzzah had to die (II Sam. 6)? The heart of David's sin in transporting the ark was not the cart but the fact that David exalted his will over God's will for moving the ark. It was will worship. What was so sinful about Korah, Dathan, and Abiram's carrying fire into the holy place that they had to die (Num. 16)? The heart of their sin was that they imposed their will onto the worship of Jehovah in that which he had not commanded. It was will worship. What we call "image worship" we could just as well call "will worship," as Colossians 2:23 names it. The sin in image worship is always that man elevates his will above God's will. That is also what makes will worship such a grievous and wicked sin, for who is man, that he should impose his will on the Lord?

Now we can understand the true equivalence between the golden calf and our worship. The equivalence is not between scripture and the golden calf. Rather, the equivalence is between man's will and the golden calf. Whenever man says in worship, "My will be done," he has made a golden calf. Even if man says about singing the good and holy scriptures, "My will be done," the exaltation of his will is image worship. Even if man says about singing exclusively psalms, "My will be done," he has exalted his will. It is not scripture or the psalms that are the dirty golden calf but man's will. Exclusive psalmody does not charge the Lord's prayer with being an image but charges man's will as it exalts itself above God's will to be the image.

The second error of the question is that it reasons backward. The question tries to proceed from man and what man judges to be sin back to God and what God must require. The question asks, "Is

it sin for me to sing the Lord's prayer in worship?" The implied answer to that question is "Of course it is *not* sin for me to sing the Lord's prayer in worship!" And why is it not sin to sing the Lord's prayer in worship? Because man cannot imagine that singing the word of God could be sin. Man judges that it is right and good to sing the Lord's prayer, even though there is no passage of scripture that tells man, "Sing the Lord's prayer." Having begun with himself and his judgment of what is good, man then reasons backward to God. His thinking is this: if it obviously is not sin for me to sing the Lord's prayer, then it must be that God permits me to sing the Lord's prayer. Man has now "discovered" what God requires by reasoning backward from what man allows.

The error of this reasoning is that it does not begin with what God requires. The first question must not be "Is it sin for me?" The first question must be "What does God require?" When one finds what God requires, then one will know what he is to do. This is the correct order of reasoning.

And what does God require? God explicitly requires the church to sing psalms in her public worship. "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms" (Ps. 95:2). God recorded for our instruction that Jesus' practice in public worship was to sing psalms (Matt. 26:30). The apostolic injunction for the church as a body was that she sing psalms (Col. 3:15–16). God also never requires the church to sing something other than psalms in her public worship. God's instruction by command, normative practice of Jesus, and apostolic injunction regulates what the church sings in her worship: psalms.

But why is it so important to reason the right way in this question? Why is it so critical to begin with the question "What does God require?" and not to begin with the question "Is it sin for me?" This takes us to the heart of the second commandment. The reason God forbids image/will worship is because of the nature of God and because of the ignorance of man. God is glorious, and God is a spirit. Because of God's awesome glory, which is the brightness of all his perfections as spirit, man does not know how to worship God. Man has no internal compass whatsoever that tells him whether he is worshiping God correctly. Man cannot rely on his motive, which may be a pure motive. Man cannot rely on his religious feeling, which may be very worshipful and reverent. Man cannot rely on his fellow men, who may truly desire to worship God with him. Man cannot rely on his judgment, though he truly intends to judge righteously. Man simply has nothing in him that can tell him whether he is worshiping God truly or not. God must reveal to man in his word how he is to be worshiped. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). God is a spirit, and man must not make any graven image of his imagination to worship God (Ex. 20:4). God is a spirit, and man must not worship God in any other way than he has commanded in his word (Lord's Day 35, Q&A 96).

How important it is for the church to begin from the right starting point! Not this: How can you say it is sin for me to...? But this: What does God require?

After seeing these two errors in the question, one can see what it is that exclusive psalmody is against. Exclusive psalmody is not against the Lord's prayer, the ten commandments, or any other portion of scripture. Exclusive psalmody

is against the will of man imposing itself over against the will of God. To those who say, “I will sing what I will in church because I will it,” exclusive psalmody says, “Stop dancing around your filthy will/image.” Even when one says, “I will sing scripture because I will it” or even “I will sing the psalms because I will it,” exclusive psalmody says, “Stop dancing around your filthy will/image.” Exclusive psalmody is not against the scriptures. Exclusive psalmody is against the imposition of man’s will in the church’s singing.

3. Why did you sing “Praise God” all your life in church, including the very same worship service that you informed First Reformed Protestant Church it was a hymn? Shouldn’t you have stopped singing it the moment you knew it was a hymn?

**Answer:** Reformation does not happen all at once overnight. During reformation there must be time for instruction. Principles that were lost have to be taught and embraced before they can work through. While instruction in principles is being given, the church might have to suffer error for a time, even as she patiently labors to put out the old leaven. It has always been this way in reformation. Take our own history in coming out of the PRC. Remember how long it took for most of us to understand the doctrinal issues. Remember how long we labored in protesting and appealing. Remember how long many of us remained in the PRC even after the call to come out had been issued. Why is it that our reformation took so much time? We had our reasons, whether true patience or the weakness of unbelief. God had his reasons: to fill the cup of iniquity of our mother, to demonstrate to all that mother had truly departed, to teach us that we are dust and the offscouring of the earth, and to teach us that God is faithful when we are not.

But whatever the reasons, the reformation took time. Why should it be any different with “Praise God,” which we have sung for generations? It may very well be that the church must suffer error for a time while principles are taught and until they can work through.

The Synod of Dordt laid out the very path that I was following regarding “Praise God.” Dordt gave this instruction for how to remove hymns: “All other Hymns shall be barred from the Churches, and where some have already been introduced, these shall be set aside by means found to be most appropriate.” Those “means found to be most appropriate” do not include throwing a rope around the sheep’s necks to yank them hither and yon overnight. Those “means found to be most appropriate” include teaching, teaching, teaching. In the meantime, while the principle was being absorbed, I could suffer singing “Praise God,” just as Dordt could suffer a hymn or two. As long as the will of man was being broken down and the gospel of Christ was leading us into the truth, I could suffer it.

Now that we have lied about “Praise God” by calling it a psalm, now that “Praise God” has been made into a banner of opposition to exclusive psalmody, and now that the will of man has been enthroned in what we sing, I cannot sing “Praise God” anymore.

4. Won’t the Spirit and the gospel, and not the law, give us the psalms and a love for the psalms?

**Answer:** Yes, absolutely. The RPC (to my knowledge) have never taught exclusive psalmody as that which gives us the psalms and a love for the psalms. In the two sermons for which I was suspended, the congregation was not put under the law for her salvation in any sense whatsoever, but she was given her savior’s

perfect work for her salvation. The congregation, made thankful for her salvation by Christ's gospel, was given the second commandment, the regulative principle, and exclusive psalmody as the rule for her thankful life.

5. Why do you keep coming to church if you believe image worship is happening there?

**Answer:** Again, reformation does not happen overnight. The process of protest and appeal does not happen overnight. While reformation or protest is unfolding, the child of God may have to suffer things that he does not agree with and that he even considers sinful. Think of our own reformation. How many things were happening in the PRC (sermons, prayers, announcements of deposition)

that we believed were sinful? Why did only one or two of us storm out of the building in an instant, while most of us remained Sunday after Sunday? Because we believed that our calling as Reformed Christians was "diligently to frequent the church of God" (Lord's Day 38). Until such time as the PRC was definitely revealed to be an apostatizing church, the PRC was where we went to church. The child of God may suffer at church, but he goes to church. And when the sweet psalmist of Israel raises his psalms of praise in the midst of the congregation, that suffering child of God can sing his heart out with him, regardless of what else might be happening.

—AL



## Introduction to Herman Hoeksema's *Banner* Articles

**T**here are hidden gems tucked away in old issues of the *Banner* from the years 1918–1922. There you will find articles by Herman Hoeksema that have been all but forgotten in Reformed circles. From September 5, 1918, through August 31, 1922, Herman Hoeksema edited the *Our Doctrine* rubric in the *Banner*, which was, at the time, one of the two popular and official magazines of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC). Writing weekly, Hoeksema penned roughly two hundred articles over four years. When he began writing, Hoeksema was a young minister serving his first charge in Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. By the time he finished writing, he had taken a call to serve Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Hoeksema wrote for the *Banner* at a time of tremendous change in the Christian Reformed Church. This change is often presented as an issue of “Americanization.” Since its founding in 1857, the CRC had been a Dutch denomination. Its members had been immigrants from the Netherlands. Its services had been conducted in the Dutch language. Its culture had been unmistakably Dutch. In the early twentieth century, the CRC more and more faced the question of how to be a Reformed denomination in America. The process of a Dutch denomination consciously adapting itself to an American setting consumed the attention of the CRC.

But the change in the CRC in those years was not primarily a matter of culture or setting. Rather, it was a matter of doctrine and practice. The question was not so much whether a Dutch denomination could adapt to an American setting but whether a Reformed denomination

should remain Reformed. For some in the CRC, the appeal of Americanization was not so much a new liberty to dabble in American culture but rather a new liberty to dabble in un-Reformed doctrine. They had worn wooden shoes in the old country while they had recited their catechism. In the new country there was a chance to kick off the wooden shoes and, with them, the Reformed faith of the confessions.

David J. Engelsma, in his introduction to a speech by Henry Danhof, described the issue of the day as follows:

Danhof gave the speech in 1919 during the throes of a struggle that would fundamentally determine the future of that Reformed denomination. The issue in that struggle was the relationship between the Christian Reformed Church and the world of the ungodly. Danhof and Hoeksema contended for the spiritual separation of the church from the world. The theological term they used to express this separation and warfare was *antithesis*.

Another group, among whom was Jan Karel van Baalen, fought as vehemently for the church’s openness to the world—accommodation, cooperation, and reception—within limits. The deceptive watchword of that party was *Americanization*. The word was deceptive because what that party sought was not conformity to the innocent ways of America—language and clothes—but conformity to the corrupt ways of the world: the higher critical doctrines of European unbelief regarding the holy scriptures as well as other distinctly un-Reformed teachings; the principles and practices of the un-

godly labor unions; and fellowship with the works of darkness in worldly amusements.<sup>1</sup>

During the four years that Hoeksema wrote in the *Banner*, the CRC dealt with wild doctrinal deviations among its ministers. In 1918 the Christian Reformed synod condemned the pre-millennial doctrine of Rev. Harry Bultema. In 1922 the Christian Reformed synod condemned the higher criticism of Professor Ralph Janssen. During these same years the doctrine of common grace was permeating the denomination. The reader will encounter each of these doctrines in Hoeksema's *Banner* articles.

Hoeksema's main doctrinal topic in the first years of his *Banner* articles was the kingdom of God. "I want to make the Kingdom of God the great subject of our discussion, the main topic of my future articles, and from the point of view of the Kingdom I expect to discuss the various points of our doctrine."<sup>2</sup> Hoeksema's treatment in the *Banner* of the kingdom of God is significant. Hoeksema took hold of the entire body of Reformed doctrine from the point of view of God's kingdom. Hoeksema was really writing a *Reformed Dogmatics* installment by installment, issue by issue, week by week in the *Banner*. But he was writing that dogmatics from a particular point of view: God's kingdom. Hoeksema's approach is as fresh and appealing today as it was more than a century ago.

In order to make these hidden gems of Hoeksema's *Banner* articles accessible to today's reading public, I intend to reprint these articles in order in each issue of *Reformed Pavilion*. The first two articles can be found following this introduction. Several years ago, Rev. Steven Key typed out the first two years of these articles for his own use and gave the undersigned the typed copies. It is from these typed copies that the first hundred or so reprints will be prepared. The remaining two years of reprints will be prepared from the

archives of the *Banner* held in the Hekman Library at Calvin University. The articles will not be edited except to correct obvious misspellings and typos, but for the rest they will be presented exactly as they were published in the *Banner*.

Each of Hoeksema's *Banner* articles is a hearty meal of Reformed doctrine. The reader cannot snack his way through Hoeksema but must sit down with purpose, knife and fork in hand, and tuck in. This is not to say that Hoeksema is obscure or unintelligible. Far from it. The articles are as clear as a day in May. The theology is crisp and compelling. I trust that the reader will be carried along in each article and will even be left on the edge of his seat as he awaits the next installment. May God use these articles for the comfort and peace of his church in the glorious hope of his kingdom in Christ. Let me end this introduction with Hoeksema's conclusion to his third article.

And finally, this method [of the kingdom] connects itself most naturally with the state of mind of every child of God in the times we now experience. These are serious times. Times, no doubt, pregnant with significance for the development of the Kingdom of God. Times that cause us to lift up our heads in expectation. Hard times for the flesh, splendid times for our faith. Surely, at all times we ought to long for the completion of the Kingdom of glory and the coming of our King. But nevertheless it is in times as the present that the Holy Spirit undoubtedly concentrates the attention of the Church upon the things that are to come according to God's Word. It is in times as these that God's people learn to pray more consciously than ever, more longingly than before: "Thy Kingdom come!"

May no one take our crown!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn*, ed. David J. Engelsma (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2015), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Herman Hoeksema, "God's Kingdom—All Comprehensive," *The Banner* (September 19, 1918).

<sup>3</sup> Hoeksema, "God's Kingdom—All Comprehensive."

# HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S BANNER ARTICLES

*The Banner*

Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

September 5, 1918

(Pp. 632-34)

## Article I. Introduction

**D**ear Readers: --

Please, don't be frightened by the heading of this department, so that you pass my article by even without reading it at all.

I am different from Multatuli, who boldly wrote that he despised the public. Or if you are not acquainted perhaps with Multatuli, let me say, that I am different, too, from Mr. Bregman, our esteemed brother from Paterson. He was to speak at the Synod. His time was limited. And he advised the delegates at Synod, that they had better leave the room and take their recess if he was not finished in time, assuring them at the same time, that he would then finish the reading of his speech all by himself. He also really despised the audience, and could speak regardless of its presence or absence.

I differ in that respect. When I am preaching I like to have an audience. I hate empty pews. And when the church is well-filled I like to see the audience attentive. I dislike to see people sail off to sleep when I am preaching. Perhaps it's my pride, but I confess, that I am very sensitive in this respect. And the same is true in regard to the articles I must write for **The Banner**. I write, of course, because the Synod saw fit, that since I was successor of Rev. P.A. Hoekstra as pastor of my present charge, I should also follow him in being editor of the department, "Our Doctrine" in **The Banner**. So I accepted the appointment, and I am about to assume the responsibilities connected with this new kind of work. I will write. But I want you to read my articles. I will appreciate it very much, indeed, if you do read them. In fact, if you just omit them, I would feel

greatly obliged if you would just drop me a card, informing me of your absolute lack of interest. If all of you should feel that same way about my articles, and if you would inform me about your attitude, it would have the same effect upon me as a church running empty while I was preaching. Just as in that case I would stop preaching, so in this case I would immediately discontinue writing.

Hence, please, read or let me know that you don't.

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I must confess, that I accepted the appointment as editor of this department somewhat reluctantly, with a mixed feeling of fear and pride. I really did not know at first, whether I ought to be so flattered by the appointment as to accept it, or whether I should so fear the consequence that I should decline the honor. Of course, when accepted, the feeling of being flattered was predominant. But now September is come, and I must begin to live up to my promises; the sensation of fear is becoming stronger all the while. Not that I am reluctant to succeed my able predecessor. Nor that I am not doctrinally inclined and dislike to write under this heading. On the contrary, I love our Reformed Doctrine, and the more I study it the more I love it and embrace it as the purest conception of the truth revealed in Scripture. I love to preach it, and I am sure, I will enjoy writing a few articles in exposition of it. And yet I am somewhat reluctant in assuming the work. Let me explain why.

In the first place, I am actually afraid that the very heading of this department for many will be a sufficiently clear indication of the contents of my articles to make them turn the page and look for something that is more interesting than doctrine. Doctrine is not to the taste of our generation in general, and especially not to the taste of the younger generation. I know it, it is a deplorable fact, but it is a fact nevertheless, a fact, moreover, that is rather generally admitted to be a fact. Our age is practical rather than doctrinal. There is but little love to study the principles which God has revealed to us in His Word, there is but little incentive for intellectual exertion in order to obtain a firm grasp of the truth. Generally I find, that there is ample time for everything else, time for reading of novels, time for the perusal of daily papers and magazines, time, too, for all kinds of amusements; but there is no time for the study of our principles, or to speak in general, there is no time to make study of the truth of God's Word. A certain mental laziness, if not spiritual indifference, characterizes our age in this respect. This is one of the chief causes of my reluctance to write as editor of "Our Doctrine." For in the first place, it is clear as daylight, that it requires a little mental exertion to read as well as to write these articles. They cannot merely be enjoyed, they ought to be studied. That is the case with any reading material of a doctrinal nature, but that is especially true in regard to our Reformed Doctrine, which is not satisfied by scanning the mere surface of the truth, but attempts to penetrate into its hidden depths. In the second place, it is also evident, that the spirit of mental laziness or spiritual indifference with regard to doctrine can never cast itself with eager appetite upon the material I must needs offer, but rather turns away from it with disgust. And in the third place it must be very lucid, that in this way I lack what I would so highly appreciate: an interested public to read my article. Hence, my reluctance.

There is still another fact that causes me to hesitate. Sometimes I am afraid that some people in our Church have so weaned away from the

Reformed truth, and the Reformed view of life, that they refuse to accept it, when of a sudden it is placed before the consciousness in all the definiteness and conciseness of its conception. This may seem a strong statement, but I think actual life will bear me out. There are people, who always thought they were Reformed, but who in reality never understood the Reformed life-view, who therefore, never consciously accepted this view, and who must be woken up out of their slumbers. And if they do wake up, and see the full reality and understand the Reformed truth in all its implications, they sometimes will love it, be strengthened and heartily embrace it. But it also happens that they are astounded at first and open opponents at the finish. They refuse to accept such doctrine. They rebel against it. Of course, with this condition you will not meet if you grind the sharp corners of the truth, if you blend the shades in the picture and soften the lines of demarcation. No, as long as the trumpet does not give a very definite warning, these people never wake up. As long as you refer to God's sovereignty only as a sort of a side issue, as something we, indeed, believe in but for the rest leave alone, these people will go along with you. But the moment you draw the lines sharply, the moment you speak of such things as the sovereignty of God as a basic principle, the moment you maintain that this sovereignty is most absolute in creation and salvation, in all things, the spirit of opposition is often aroused. And there you have my second reason to explain my hesitation and reluctance. I like to draw the lines as sharply as possible. I love the unadulterated Reformed doctrine. But I also abhor strife and contentions and love to be at peace with all men.

And in the third place, there is still another reason for my reluctance to write under this heading. It is the condition of our Church that troubles me and causes me to worry sometimes. The condition is such, that gradually the question of Pilate, definitely applied to our Church and time might well be asked: What is truth? I must write on our Doctrine. But what is our Doctrine? We hear of simply Reformed Truth and

Calvinism. The distinction is sometimes made between Neo-Calvinists and Calvinists (would that someone would give some light on this distinction). We are “supra” and “infra.” We seem to harbor pre-millennialists, post-millennialists and non-millennialists. Some seem to think that it is implied in our Reformed Doctrine that we must make the whole world Calvinistic, others do not even fancy the idea of applying the Calvinistic principles in their own lives . . . .

Old straw, you say?

Perhaps it is. But let me tell you in the first place, that I could never feel the force of the “old straw argument.” Is the truth not always old and yet always new? Is not that same old truth after all always attacked by the same old lie, and does not that same old lie essentially employ the same old methods, even though they present themselves to us in some new form? And must not the truth be always on her guard and defend herself against the lie in regards to practically the same issues, be they ever so old? What force, then, can there be in the old straw argument, unless it be that it reveals a spirit that is grown indifferent to the truth? That in the first place. The figure of threshing the old straw is simply not applicable to the truth, for the truth is something you must keep on threshing if you would not lose it altogether.

And in the second place, many of the issues mentioned above do not appear to be dead at all. They seem to be pretty lively. True, pre-millennialism has been officially condemned at the Synod last June, but it is still being defended in our official church paper, “De Wachter,” and it has been recommended in the past by some of our leading men. There may be more pre-millennialists in our Church than we imagine. Yet, that view and the Reformed view of the truth cannot be reconciled. It removes our very foundation from under our feet. On the other hand, I am afraid that not a few among us, more or less consciously embrace the post-millennialistic view of life and expect a kingdom by gradual development. Yet, if pre-

millennialism differs principally from the Reformed faith, post-millennialism is still more widely divergent. We will try to explain ourselves later in regard to all these different views, the Lord willing. Now, I merely make mention of the fact, that all these different conceptions of the truth are there. And as to supra and infra, we may perhaps imagine that these views are dead, and that they are of no importance, but time and again our weekly papers prove differently. These issues are there, and they are alive, too.

Such are the conditions. And in view of these, we repeat it, it is but timidly that we enter the arena. On the other hand, however, these same facts serve as an incentive to write. Perhaps that articles on our Doctrine will stimulate a desire to study that doctrine in the case of some. Perhaps, that God will use what little we have to say, to clear the minds of others, so that they may gain a better understanding of the Reformed truth, and be strengthened in the faith. Perhaps our writing may still be conducive to the expulsion of what is not in harmony with that faith from our hearts and minds, and from our midst. And if the Lord our God would thus bless our weak efforts they would be amply repaid. Well aware, therefore, of the difficulty of the work, but also deeply conscious of its necessity and importance, we begin our work. We will try to be constructive as far as possible. For that reason we do not expect to answer all possible and probable criticism that may perhaps be offered. There is no time for such negative, destructive, and often useless argumentation as might result, should we stop to defend ourselves against all that might offer battle. And, therefore, with due respect for the views of others who differ from us in principle or in detail, but at the same time fully convinced of the truth of our own view, we hope to write in a constructive manner conclusively, as much as possible. May the Lord our God bless these labors to the strengthening of His people and the maintenance of our clear and beautiful Reformed truth.

—Holland, Mich.

*The Banner*

Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

September 12, 1918

(Pp. 653-54)

## Article II. A Matter of Viewpoint

**W**hether we shall gladly accept, heartily embrace and firmly adhere to the Calvinistic form of doctrine depends to a large extent upon our fundamental viewpoint in studying the truth.

This may seem a strange and startling expression at first consideration. Our Reformed doctrine, so many will immediately object, is not a matter of viewpoint, but of Scripture. Not our subjective view but the Word of God must absolutely determine what is truth. Our view may not be placed on the foreground, may not be a controlling factor, may not be so emphasized as to mold the revelation of Scripture; but just the reverse, our view must be subjected to and tested by the truth of God in His Word. We may not approach the Word of God with a preconceived notion, we may not carry our own philosophy into the Word of God. God's Word alone must speak and never must we attempt to fit that Word of God into the frame of our preconceived ideas. To the absolute authority of Scripture we bow. From the Scriptures as our only reliable source we derive all our knowledge. According to the revelation of Scripture we construe our entire world-and-life-view, and if there should be any element in that world- and life- view, that is not in harmony with the Word of God, we absolutely reject it without hesitation. And, therefore, our objector has it, our Reformed faith is not a matter of viewpoint, but of the Word of God pure and simple!

Don't be alarmed. We fully subscribe to all the above. The Bible is our only source; our only infallible guide; our absolute authority; our highest court of appeal. It stands supreme. Su-

preme over our subjective ideas, conceptions, notions, philosophies, feelings. It stands supreme even in our relation to our confession. Not our standards, but the Word of God must be the last and highest court of appeal. Of course, this latter not in the sense that we can freely bring our ideas on the market and that we have the perfect right of questioning the truth of our Confession to which we have subscribed without bringing our objections to the attention of the Church officially and along the ordained way. Of course not. But nevertheless, it must be maintained that the Scriptures alone may be the ultimate criterion determining, too, the truth of our Confession. Outside of the Word of God we will know nothing, and we hold most positively that in this dispensation there is no true knowledge, no true wisdom, unless it be in harmony with the Word. Outside the Word there is darkness, foolishness, the lie. We would even grow conceited about this and maintain that the Christian is the only person in this world that knows things, just because he is enabled to derive all his knowledge from Scripture, the infallible Word of God. And, therefore, there is no cause to be alarmed. We also wish to judge all things in the light of Scripture.

And yet, we repeat it, whether we shall heartily embrace the Reformed view of life is largely a matter of view-point, is largely a question of grasping its fundamental principle from the outset, is chiefly a problem of getting on the right track.

It is not a question of quoting a few Bible texts or passages from Scripture, as if that form of faith would be the purest and the most im-

pregnable that could adduce the largest number of texts in its defense.

It is a question of fundamental principle.

It is a question of obtaining the right and true view of Scripture itself.

It is a question of grasping the fundamental principle of Scripture viewing the entire organism of the truth.

You have all seen an oil painting. Perhaps you have been privileged to see some of the masterpieces of art on canvas. And if you have, you have also had the experience, that at first you could not see the beauty of the production. It seemed to you a confused mass of paint and colors and outlines, without much meaning and surely without any beauty. But you changed position. Perhaps you were too near, perhaps too distant, perhaps too much to one side. And you changed position till all of a sudden "it struck you right!" Suddenly you could see the painting in all its beauty of shades and colors and you could appreciate it as a work of art.

What was the trouble at first?

The very character of the painting, determined by its size, shades, colors, and lines, demanded that you should occupy a certain position and take a certain definite point of view in order to appreciate its beauty. And only after you had taken that certain definite position and looked at the painting from that certain point of view could you truly appreciate it. It was not you, but the painting, that determined what viewpoint was determined by the painting itself. Your viewpoint was determined by the painting itself.

The same is true of Scripture. As long as we have not taken the position dictated by Scripture, we may look at it and peruse it and study it. .... but never shall we be able to bring to light and receive in our consciousness all the beauty of truth there is contained in the Scriptures. From the Word of God itself we must derive our fundamental principle; on that fundamental principle we must take our stand; and from that stand we must study the entire organism of God's truth as revealed to us in the Word.

Let me illustrate with a few examples.

Arminianism in all its form differs quite radically from Calvinism. Principally the two have nothing in common. Arminianism denies the truth of predestination; it maintains the free will of man; it makes the entire destiny of the world dependent upon the choice of that free will. Whether Christ shall have a people depends on the choice of sinful man. Whether God's Kingdom shall be realized, how soon it shall be realized, to what extent it shall be realized—it all depends on the free choice of a sinful human being! Whether God shall really reach the glory of His Name and whether He shall ever down the devil and his opposition is a question that must be referred to this free will of the sinful creature! And you are amazed perhaps at such a doctrine. You say: "But the truth of God's sovereignty, even in regard to the salvation of His people, is so clearly taught in Scripture, that it cannot be an object of reasonable doubt!" Yes, but the Arminian also appeals to Scripture. He also can quote you text after text, and he delights in doing so, to prove that you are wrong and he is right. And the passages you quote he will so ably deprive of all their strength, that they evidently turn against your own position. Arminianism and Calvinism both appeal to the Word of God. Yet they differ radically.

Again. The full-fledged pre-millennialist has but little in common with the man of Reformed persuasion. He denies the essential unity of Israel and the Church; he claims that the Kingdom of God is now in captivity and that there is no Kingdom of God on the earth in this dispensation. He denies that Christ is King of His Church. Yet the pre-millennialist can quote you more passages from Scripture to defend his view of the truth than you ever dreamt of. He also bases his view on the Word of God and confesses with us that the Bible is the only infallible guide for our faith and life. But he differs fundamentally from the Calvinistic view of life.

How must this be explained?

The Arminian, the Pre-millennialist, the Calvinist, all appeal to Scripture and base their

view of the truth on the Word of God, but they differ in their fundamental viewpoint.

If I am allowed to use a few “jaw-breakers” which I will presently explain, I would say that the Arminian point of view is Anthropological, the pre-millennial point of view is Eschatological, and the Calvinistic point of view is Theological.

Let me elucidate.

The Arminian point of view is anthropological, we said. What does this mean? That his view of man dominates his entire view of the truth. Anthropology is the doctrine of man. And to be anthropological in one's life-view means that one begins and ends with man. His view of man determines what he shall believe of God, of Creation, of Salvation. He is deeply concerned about man all the time. Not how God reaches His glory, but how man shall enter into his eternal heritage, is the only question that occupies his mind. Of man's freedom and of man's responsibility he is for evermore speaking. So concerned is he about man, that he transfers the sovereignty of the world really to the object of his concern. He is, at least, the sole sovereign of his own salvation. And it is this doctrine of man that controls his entire life-view. In man's light he approaches Scripture and he explains all the Word in such a way that it is in harmony with his views on man. And since he cannot harmonize man's sovereignty with the absolute sovereignty of God, he denies the latter. And since he cannot leave man in absolute control of his own salvation, if he must accept the doctrine of Predestination, he rejects the latter. God is made dependent on man!

The pre-millennial view, we asserted, is Eschatological. Eschatology is the doctrine of the consummation of all things, the doctrine of the future, the doctrine of the Last Things. What now is characteristic of a true premillennialist? This, that he views all things in the light of his doctrine of the Last Things. He is always talking eschatology. The Rapture of the Church, the first and second resurrection, the Restoration of the Jews, the Second Coming, these are some of his

favorite topics. You cannot talk five minutes with him but the conversation has returned to one of these subjects. He is an ardent student of Scripture. But he investigates the Word for evermore from that one point of view, and one fundamental point of view dominates all the rest of his belief. It makes him blind in regard to the organic unity of the Scriptures. It causes him to deny the essential unity of Israel and the Church. It causes him to deny the covenant idea and the spiritual realization of the Kingdom of God in this dispensation. His view of Future Things determines his faith in general!

The Calvinistic fundamental viewpoint is Theological. And let me hasten to add, that is the viewpoint derived from Scripture. In Thy light do we see the light! All things are ours. Yes. But we are of Christ, and Christ is God's. For His own name's sake God made all things, even the wicked. For His own name's sake He is also forming a people unto Himself! God is the center of all things, the Source of all things, the purpose of all things. And, therefore, the truly Reformed man is concerned about God first of all, and about man only for God's name's sake. God's glory is for him the highest. It is the only purpose of all existence. It is the only possible culminating point of all history. And all things are subservient to this highest purpose of all existence and of all history. He is concerned about the glory of God. And that not in this sense, that God's glory should be dependent upon man's will, so that the question of his life could be: How can I make it that God reaches his own glory? No, but so that he maintains God's sovereignty in all His works, and the question must be put in this form: How does God Himself realize His own glory in all His works, even through me?

To His own glory He made His eternal plan of all things.

To His own glory He created the world His Kingdom.

To His own glory He gave His only begotten Son.

To His own glory He saves His own people through His Spirit and Word.

To His own glory He establishes His Church in the world.

To His own glory He governs and directs all things, sin not excluded, and controls the history of the World.

That is the great, all-pervading principle of the Word of God. That is the fundamental principle of God's counsel. That is the great purpose of His covenant with us. And that is at the same time the fundamental viewpoint of the true and beautiful Reformed Faith.

Brethren, let us grasp this principle first of all. If we do not, we shall never be strong. If we do not make this principle our basis, our starting point in our entire doctrine, we shall fail as

a Reformed people and cease to exist. All the more so, because everything is against us in the world. That world is humanistic. Man is the great object. He, his authority, his sovereignty, his salvation is placed on the foreground. His glory and bliss concern all at the expense of the sovereignty and the righteousness of God.

And, therefore, in the firm maintenance of that fundamental principle lies our salvation as a Church. God all—man nothing except for Him.

All things are ours. But we are of Christ, and Christ is God's.

—Holland, Mich.



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