



REFORMED

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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

Now these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, Dan, and Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt already. And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.

—Exodus 1:1–7

The book of Exodus opens in the land of Egypt. It was in the land of Egypt that the book of Genesis ended, with Israel's oath that they would carry Joseph's bones out of Egypt into the land of Canaan someday. Then Joseph died, was embalmed, and was put in a coffin in Egypt. There the book of Genesis ended, and there the book of Exodus begins.

The opening verses take us to behold the most important thing in Egypt in those days. The most important thing was not the pharaoh. We will meet him soon, but he is not first. The most important thing was not the mighty Nile River. We will spend time by the river before long, but it is not first. The most important thing was not the mighty Egyptian cities. We will note them eventually, but they will only be a note. The most important thing in Egypt in those days was the children of Israel. Them we must meet first, already in verse 1: "Now these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob."

The children of Israel were not important because of anything in themselves. Emphatically not! Look upon them even briefly, and you will turn your face away from them in shame. Shame for yourself because their nature is your nature, their nothingness is your nothingness, their corruption is your corruption. There is Reuben, who lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22). There are Simeon and Levi, who

made their father to stink among his neighbors by their instruments of cruelty (34:30; 49:5). There is Judah, who went down from his brethren, sojourned with the world, and lay with his daughter-in-law, whom he mistook for a harlot (38:1, 15). There is Issachar, whose mother Leah had to hire her own husband Jacob for Issachar to be conceived (30:18). There is Zebulun, whose neglected mother Leah longed for Jacob to dwell with her now that she had borne him six sons and so named him "dwelling" (v. 20). There is Benjamin, who would ravin as a wolf (49:27). There is Dan, born of the handmaid Bilhah according to the scheme of Rachel (30:4–6). There is Naphtali, born of the endless strife in Jacob's home between his two wives (v. 8). There is Gad, born of the handmaid Zilpah according to the scheme of Leah (vv. 9–11). There is Asher, born of Zilpah but claimed by Leah in her forlorn longing to be happy in Jacob's house (vv. 12–13). And there is Joseph, so hated of his brethren that they threw him into a pit and sold him to Midianite slavers (37:23–28). Ah, the shame!

And yet these children of Israel were the most important thing in Egypt, for the children of Israel were carried by God's promise. God had made a promise to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. By that promise God had bound his people to himself and bound himself to his people. He had brought them into his covenant, and he would give himself and all his blessing and goodness to them and their seed.

If you look, you can see that promise operating in the opening verses of the book of Exodus. There in Egypt “the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them” (Ex. 1:7). Abraham’s seed had become a great nation (see Gen. 12:2).

God’s promise is really the only thing that can explain the book of Exodus. God’s promise had carried Israel into Egypt. God’s promise would make Israel a nation in Egypt. God’s promise would bring destruction upon Egypt for

Israel’s sake. God’s promise would carry Israel out of Egypt. God’s promise would make a way for Israel through the Red Sea. God’s promise would carry Israel through the wilderness to Sinai and ultimately to Canaan.

So it always is for the children of Israel, God’s church. They are corrupt and empty of themselves. But they have God’s promise, who is Christ, in whom all the promises of God are yea and amen (II Cor. 1:20).

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the second issue of *Reformed Pavilion*. When the first issue was published, I did not take it for granted that there would be a second issue. We make our big plans, and our hearts devise our ways, but the Lord directs our steps (Prov. 16:9). With thanksgiving to God for giving us a little place, we present to you this second issue.

The highlight of this issue is a number of protests from members of First Reformed Protestant Church that were submitted to the consistory regarding its decision to suspend the undersigned from the ministry. Having heard that these members had submitted protests, I requested permission to publish them in *Reformed Pavilion*. As I understand it, these protests will all have been answered one way or another by the time this issue goes to press. In case these protests are upheld, the consistory will be making them public. In case these protests are defeated, the protestants could make them public by appealing to classis if they wanted. Either way, by the time this issue is published, these protests could all be before the public anyway. I write this just in case anyone is concerned that these members might be militating against the consistory of First RPC by allowing their protests to be published. Personally, I don’t believe it is ever militating to publish the truth. However, if

there is a reader who wonders about that, the fact that these protests have all been answered by now and therefore could be before the public should clear these protestants of any suspicion. If there are other protests that readers might consider submitting, they would be welcome.

I found the protests to be very edifying. From each one I learned something that I had forgotten, had overlooked, or had not known. The protests were truly instructive. May they be of much help to the Reformed Protestant Churches in their hour of need.

We also welcome Mr. Dewey Engelsma to *Reformed Pavilion* as a regular writer. At the request of the undersigned, Dewey has agreed to be in charge of his own rubric in the magazine. Because this is a brand-new development, the title of the rubric is still being worked out, and Dewey’s article in this issue still appears under *Contribution*. I, for one, am thankful for God’s provision and looking forward to his articles with anticipation. May the Lord strengthen our brother’s hand as he again takes up his pen.

The editorial is on hold for this issue. Readers hungry for Herman Hoeksema’s theology can get their fill in his next *Banner* article. Reading Hoeksema directly is better than reading editorials about Hoeksema anyway.

We are still tinkering with our operations over here, but the other rubrics hopefully will start to become familiar, like *FAQ* and *Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs*.

Any readers who want to submit letters for publication are hereby invited to do so. Book reviews, poetry, or other contributions are also welcome.

Finally, the table of contents page is hyperlinked to the articles. A tap or click on the article's title should take you right to the article.

There is also a hyperlink on the bottom of each page to take you back to the contents page. I suppose that this might introduce the annoyance of accidental taps, but hopefully these features make navigating the magazine convenient.

Happy reading.

—AL

PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS

Blessed Is the Man

Introduction

The psalms are a priceless treasure, a precious gift to God's church of his grace and salvation. They are a present so expensive and expansive that we who are so limited hardly know how to begin opening their depths. The psalms are so full, but we are so empty. The psalms are so rich, but we are so poor. The psalms are so glorious, but we are so shameful. How shall such as we know anything about these beautiful psalms? Ah, but here is God's grace displayed in the psalms. Our God gives us the fullness of the psalmist for our emptiness, his riches for our poverty, his glory for our shame. By the psalmist, who is Christ, and by his Spirit, we not only possess his psalms as our treasure, but we understand them and rejoice in them and sing them as well.

So where shall we rich poor begin our investigation of the psalms?

Shall we begin with the place of the psalms in worship? That would be fitting, since God created man "to glorify and praise Him" (Lord's Day 3, Q&A 6). Man was made to worship God. The fact that fallen mankind now rebelliously worships anything and everything except the

true God does not change the fact that man was made to worship God. And worship God he shall! Against his will, as he is being condemned, the knee of every man shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. But now God gathers his church to worship him. Out of the world through all ages, God gathers his elect people in Christ, delivers them from their sin and death through the perfect work of his only begotten Son, brings them together into the congregation, and tunes their hearts to his praise. What a special place in this worship the singing of the congregation holds for the child of God. With his heart full of the gospel and with his voice full of song, redeemed man sings the praises of his God.

Or shall we begin our investigation of the psalms with a theological study of the nature of God? This too would be fitting. All truth begins with God, including the truth of the psalms. One who sings unto God must know who God is. He must know that God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. The singer must know that God is glorious and that God will not give his glory unto another. The psalms are theological, which is just to say

that the psalms are of God, through God, and to God. Such a starting point would connect our study of the psalms with our study of theology in *Reformed Pavilion*, which is simply the theology of the Reformed faith. God is God! This great truth the psalms declare song by song, verse by verse, line by line. In fact, it was my intention to begin our study of the psalms exactly here, with a theological study of the nature of God.

But then I remembered that I know nothing. I do not even know where to begin. Here before us is all this treasure that is the psalms, and I do not even know how to put my hand in to take it! How poor we are even in so simple a thing as this!

What shall we do then?

Let us do this. Let us open the psalms. Let us turn to the first psalm, which is first by God's inspired order, just as the second is second by divine appointment (Acts 13:33). For there at the beginning, God shall give us his own starting point for the psalms. Even in the gift of a starting point, God is gracious and makes us poor, rich.

Blessed Is the Man

Here at the beginning of all the psalms, in the first words of the first verse of the first chapter, we find this wonderful thing: "Blessed is the man."

What a beginning! Blessed is the man!

Great things are said concerning this man. This man is ethically and morally perfect. He walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly. He standeth not in the way of sinners. He sitteth not in the seat of the scornful. This man hath no delight in wickedness. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.

This man is blessed. He is blessed because he is perfect. He is blessed because he does not assemble with the wicked. He is blessed because he delights in the law of the Lord. Blessed is the man!

Being blessed by God for his obedience, this man prospers. Can you picture the scene? Over there is a river with clear water rising high on its banks, meandering through a fertile field that is planted thick with wheat. By the rivers of water there is planted a tree that is laden with fruit in its season, whose leaf never withers. The blessed man is like that tree. Whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

So perfect and so prosperous and so blessed is the man that he shall even stand before the face of the living God. When all this man's deeds are laid bare and all his heart is opened before the eyes of him who sits in his everlasting tribunal, this man does not falter in the judgment but stands. This man is judged righteous by the perfectly righteous judge. And being judged righteous, he enters into the congregation of the righteous.

Blessed is the man!

All the more blessed does the man appear when one compares him to the ungodly. The ungodly are not like that blessed man. They are not ethically perfect but laden with sin. The ungodly hold their counsels of wickedness. The ungodly make their way in sin. The ungodly condemn the righteous from their judgment seats of scorn.

Blessed is the man! But the ungodly are not so. They are not blessed but cursed. Can you picture the scene again? There in the rich fields, the wheat is being cut down and threshed. There, against the backdrop of the fruitful tree, a great cloud of chaff threshed clean from the kernels of wheat blows away on the wind. The ungodly are like that chaff.

The reality of the picture is sobering. For the ungodly also come before the tribunal of the living God. All the works and all the souls of the ungodly are opened before the eyes of him who knows the heart. The ungodly, defiled with their sins, shall not stand in the judgment. These sinners, being judged guilty by Jehovah, shall not enter into the congregation of the righteous. The way of these ungodly shall perish.

But blessed is the man!

Oh, it is such a wonderful beginning! Its wonder is that there is only one who can possibly fit the description of this blessed man. There is only one who is ethically perfect. There is only one who is blessed because of his own work and his own worth. And that one is the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the blessed man of Psalm 1! Jesus walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly. Jesus standeth not in the way of sinners. Jesus sitteth not in the seat of the scornful. Jesus' delight is in the law of the Lord. In the Lord's law doth Jesus meditate day and night. Jesus is like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season, whose leaves do not wither, and who prospereth in whatsoever he doeth. Jesus is the one who standeth in the judgment and who entereth into the congregation of the righteous.

Blessed is the man! Blessed is Jesus Christ!

And what of you and me? You and I are not the blessed man, not in ourselves. You and I cannot say that we are ethically perfect. You and I cannot say that we meditate in God's law day and night. You and I, by depraved nature and by despicable sin, resemble the ungodly in the psalm.

But the beautiful gospel of these opening words of this opening psalm is that our gracious God has included his people in all the work and reward of his blessed man. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous! He knoweth our way not as one who discovers our way and our righteousness. But he knoweth our way as the sovereign, electing God. He knoweth our way as the one who decreed that our way is Christ. He knoweth our way as the one who elected us in the blessed man. What the blessed man has done, he has done for us. What the blessed man has accomplished is given to us. In the blessed man we have not walked in the counsel of the ungodly. Not because we did or did not do it but because the blessed man did not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, and his obedience is imputed to us. In the blessed man our delight is in the law of the Lord. In the blessed man we are like a tree planted by the rivers of waters. In the blessed man we

stand in the judgment. In the blessed man we enter into the congregation of the righteous. In the blessed man we are righteous because the electing God knoweth the way of the righteous.

Blessed is the man!

And blessed are all we in him, whose way the Lord knoweth!

Headwaters of the Psalms

Blessed is the man. These first words of the first verse of the first psalm are the key that opens the entire book of psalms. These words are the fountain of the songs of Zion. These words are the tune of the songs of the Lord. These words are the headwaters from which the entire river of the psalms flows forth.

For when one finally understands that Jesus is the blessed man of Psalm 1:1, then one understands that the entire book of psalms speaks of him. Jesus as the blessed man is not an isolated exegetical curiosity of this particular psalm. Rather, Jesus as the blessed man is the fundamental exegetical principle of the entire psalm book. If one does not know that Jesus is the blessed man, then the entire book of psalms remains closed to him. But when God reveals to the believer that Jesus is the blessed man, all the psalms are opened up to him.

That the psalms speak of Jesus was Jesus' and his apostles' testimony. Jesus expounded unto the travelers to Emmaus the things in the psalms concerning himself (Luke 24:27, 44). Peter preached at Pentecost that "David speaketh concerning" Jesus (Acts 2:25). The church knows Jesus as the mediator from the holy gospel, which gospel God published by the prophets, including the prophet David (Lord's Day 6, Q&A 19).

The whole life and work and death and resurrection and ascension and session and outpouring of the Spirit of Jesus Christ are written in the psalms.

Consider the blessed man's life through the lens of the psalms.

The blessed man is the everlasting decree of the living God. Before the world was framed and its foundation laid, in the inscrutable heart of God's eternal counsel, there is the blessed man as the decree of the living God: "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee" (Ps. 2:7).

In the fullness of time, the word was made flesh and dwelt among us. Mary brought forth her firstborn son, who was at the same time the everlasting Son of God (Ps. 2:7) and the fruit of David's body (132:11). God and man! God *with* man! God *with* us!

The small child Jesus was worshiped by the wise men of the East and was presented with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. "The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him" (Ps. 72:10–11).

The boy Jesus stayed behind at the temple when his family returned home and was wiser in the law of God than all the learned men. "I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation" (Ps. 119:99).

Set upon a mountain to preach a sermon, Jesus blessed the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the poor in spirit! The Lord "saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Ps. 34:18). Blessed are the meek! "The meek shall inherit the earth" (37:11). Blessed are the pure in heart! "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" (24:3–4).

Jesus spoke unto the people in parables. "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old" (Ps. 78:2). "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 13:34–35).

Jesus entered Jerusalem upon the foal of an ass, with the cry of the people in his ears: "Hosanna!" "Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD" (Ps. 118:26). Jesus cleansed the temple of its buyers and sellers, "for the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (69:9).

Jesus fulfilled the passover and instituted the Lord's supper with the "hallelujah" psalms upon his lips (Matt. 26:30). "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes" (Ps. 118:22–23). In the garden of Gethsemane, the disciples first slept and then fled, for "my lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off" (38:11). Jesus' own disciple betrayed him with a kiss. "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (41:9).

Surrounded by his enemies, Jesus was condemned. "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion" (Ps. 22:12–13). Suffering under Pontius Pilate, Jesus was crucified. "For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet" (v. 16). Hanging upon the cross, he suffered the jeers and taunts of the wicked. "All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him" (vv. 7–8). The soldiers standing by stole his clothes. "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" (v. 18). God from heaven poured out upon Jesus the curse due to us. "But thou hast cast off and abhorred, thou hast been wroth with thine anointed" (89:38). God from heaven covered Jesus with our shame. "The days of his youth hast thou shortened: thou hast covered him with shame" (v. 45). Suffering all the agonies of hell, Jesus cried with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (22:1). Thirsting,

Jesus was given bitter gall. “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (69:21). Having finished our salvation, Jesus cried out with a loud voice and gave up the ghost. “Into thine hand I commit my spirit” (31:5).

The third day he rose again from the dead. “I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Ps. 16:8–11).

He ascended into heaven. “Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart....Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in” (Ps. 24:3–4, 7).

He sitteth at the right hand of God the Father, Almighty. “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Ps. 110:1).

Pouring out his Spirit upon his church, he abides with her and leads her worship of Jehovah. “I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee” (Ps. 22:22).

From heaven he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself” (Ps. 50:3–6).

In his just judgment the blessed man shall cast out all the wicked. “Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of

the living, and not be written with the righteous” (Ps. 69:27–28).

In his tender mercy the blessed man shall make a new heavens and new earth where his people shall dwell with their God forevermore. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Ps. 23:6).

After all this, who could possibly say that the psalms have no gospel? Who could possibly say that the psalms are insufficient for the New Testament church to sing the finished work of her savior? And mark well, the church that once puts her foot down on the path that she *may* sing the New Testament ere long will put her other foot down on the path that she *must* sing the New Testament. So it has always gone in the church, as sure as foot follows foot and step follows step. And the ground that always has been and always will be advanced is the same: the psalms are insufficient to sing of Christ. But those who say such things know nothing of the psalms. For the blessed man is the headwaters of the psalms, and the blessed man is Jesus Christ.

Behold the blessed man of Psalm 1. Make your way through the psalms with him.

And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written...in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, and said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. (Luke 24:44–48)

Blessed is the man!

Blessed is Jesus Christ!

—AL

1. If you claim that *exclusive* psalmody is based on the requirement of God's word, then where does the Bible explicitly say that we may sing *only* psalms in church? There are passages that require us to sing psalms, but where is the passage that says that we may *only* sing psalms and nothing else?

Answer: This question illustrates a misunderstanding of the regulative principle. The regulative principle does not look for passages of scripture to say what is forbidden. Rather, the regulative principle looks for passages of scripture to say what is required. The regulative principle can be stated negatively this way: We may not worship God in any other way than he has commanded in his word (see Lord's Day 35, Q&A 96). Or the regulative principle can be stated positively this way: We may worship God only as he has commanded in his word. The key to the regulative principle is that it finds what God has *commanded*, not what God has *forbidden*. When the regulative principle finds what God has commanded in his word, it teaches us to worship him only that way and does not allow us to worship him any other way. In other words, one does not need to find the word *only*, nor does one need to find a prohibition. Rather, one only needs to find the command. For example, if God says, "Preach the word" (II Tim. 4:2), he does not have to say, "Preach only the word" or "Do not preach anything other than the word." Rather, the command itself to preach the word means that the church may preach only the word.

In the case of psalm singing, then, the regulative principle does not look for whether God has *forbidden* scriptural hymns or whether God has used the word

only regarding psalms. Rather, the regulative principle looks for what God has commanded the church to sing. As the question itself recognizes, there are passages that require us to sing psalms. See Psalm 105:2 for one example: "Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works." Furthermore, there is no command in scripture for the church today to sing something other than the psalms. That is all that the regulative principle needs to know: that God only requires us to sing psalms in worship.

When the question demands a passage that uses the words "only psalms," the question is actually operating according to the normative principle, which is a different principle than the regulative principle. The normative principle can be stated this way: we may worship God in any way that he has not forbidden in his word. The key to the normative principle is that it finds what God has *forbidden* and avoids those things. Everything that is not forbidden is permissible for the church. This would include not only scriptural hymns but any more-or-less religious song that the church finds pleasing. There are denominations that, by their confession, operate according to the normative principle, including Lutheran churches and many evangelical churches.

However, Reformed churches, according to Belgic Confession 7 and 32 and Lord's Day 35, do not operate according to the normative principle but according to the regulative principle. Therefore, the question must not be "Where does God forbid scriptural hymns?" but "What does God require his church to sing?"

2. There are other songs in scripture than the psalms, including Exodus 15; Deuteronomy 32; II Samuel 23:3–7; Habakkuk 3; and Revelation 5:9, 12. God even commanded Israel to use some of these songs in the corporate worship of the Old Testament church (Deut. 31:19; Hab. 3:19). Doesn't the presence of these other songs show that when God commands his church to sing, that command is broader than only a command to sing the psalms?

Answer: First, the question for the church is not whether there are other songs in scripture. The question is not even whether God required the church to sing another song at some point in her history. Rather, the question is which songs God commands the church to sing today. The question of which songs God requires the church to sing is one of the simpler questions to answer because God himself has selected 150 songs and has compiled them into a book of songs for his church to sing. These songs comprise “the songs of Zion” (Ps. 137:3), that is, the songs of the church that she sings in her worship of God. They are “the songs of the LORD” (I Chron. 25:7), that is, the songs given by the Lord to his church to praise the Lord. The book of psalms is the book of “praises” (Hebrew title of the book of psalms), that is, the book by which the church in her assembly praises her God. When God delivers to his church a specially prepared book of songs, when he calls that book “the songs of Zion,” “the songs of the LORD,” and the “praises,” then how much clearer could it be that God wills that the church use this book in her singing?

And, indeed, God specially prepared the book of psalms. All 150 psalms that he included are not only divinely inspired, but they are also divinely selected to be the songs in his book. The composition of the book of psalms is not arbitrary,

so that there could have been 149 psalms or 151 psalms or so that Habakkuk's prayer could have been included instead of Psalm 23. The psalms are not merely inspired with regard to their content, but the psalms are inspired with regard to the very composition of the book. God made the second psalm part of the book and gave it its specific place as the second psalm among the 150 psalms (Acts 13:33), just as he did for all 150 psalms. This is quite striking because it is obvious that the psalms are not arranged in chronological order. Perhaps Psalm 90 was written first, being a psalm of Moses, but it is not the first psalm. When the psalms were arranged in their present order, God oversaw that arrangement by the Spirit of inspiration, so that the second psalm would be second and the ninetieth psalm would be ninetieth.

This is not a strange concept for us, since we believe the same thing about every other book of the Bible. The content of Isaiah, for example, is not arbitrary, so that you could leave out chapter 40, or switch around chapter 6 and chapter 66, or replace chapter 43 with a chapter from Jeremiah. God inspired Isaiah exactly as we have it in the Bible. So also with the psalms. The first psalm must be Psalm 1, and the last psalm must be Psalm 150, and all the others must be exactly what they are and where they are.

The fact that God so carefully compiled the book of psalms exactly as he did means that God himself selected which songs would belong to the church's songbook for worship. Even if we had no idea why God selected these particular songs and even if we had no idea why God did not include other songs like “Worthy Is the Lamb,” it would be enough for us that God selected these 150 psalms. God gave his church a songbook, and by his Spirit he perfectly composed it

with precisely the songs that he pleased. Now who will say to the Spirit that he should have included also this song or that song as a song of Zion for the church to sing?

Second, it is God's prerogative to give his church special songs at certain times without intending those songs to be part of the songs of Zion compiled in the book of psalms. For example, God gave the song of triumph (Ex. 15) and the song of witness (Deut. 32) to Israel in the wilderness when there were few psalms compiled in a book yet. God did not leave his church in the wilderness without divinely appointed praises for them to sing to him but provided these special songs for them. There certainly were psalms already in the wilderness. There was the song of Moses (Ps. 90). There was Psalm 68:1, which Moses sang day by day as the ark was lifted up and set forward. "Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee" (Num. 10:35). Perhaps Israel in the wilderness also sang other songs that would later be compiled by David in the book of psalms. But there were not as many psalms in the wilderness as there would be someday. To his church in the wilderness, God gave these other songs for a time as a witness of his glory, of Israel's unfaithfulness, and of God's faithfulness.

Or, for another example, God at certain times has given his church in heaven special songs for particular occasions. God gave the saints in heaven at the time of Jesus' ascension the glorious song "Worthy Is the Lamb" (Rev. 5:9, 12). This does not mean that God intended that song for the church's worship on earth. This is evident from the fact that we read in Revelation of at least one other song that God gave his people, the words of which are not recorded (Rev. 14:3).

Third, most of the other songs in scripture have been incorporated into the psalms. One can find the doctrine of those other songs and even the very words of those other songs in many of the psalms. God himself determined which of the other songs and how much of them would be incorporated into the church's singing by compiling them in the psalms. The church then sings these other songs by singing the psalms. These other songs are related to the psalms the way the rest of scripture is, in that the book of psalms is the little Bible. When one sings the psalms, he is singing everything in the Bible.

Fourth, it perhaps goes without saying, but just in case it is not clear, this position on psalm singing does not denigrate or dishonor the other songs in scripture. Those songs are the work of the Holy Spirit of inspiration. Those songs were gifts of God to his people for specific occasions, and they are gifts of God to his people now as part of the inspired scriptures. Those songs are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Those songs are holy oracles of God. The issue is not whether those songs are good. The issue is whether God has selected them as the songs of Zion for the church to sing in her worship.

Fifth, the argument that there are other songs in scripture proves too much. Those who make the argument only want to demonstrate that it is an option for the church to sing something other than the psalms. But if one takes the position that God's command to sing includes those other scriptural songs, then one must insist that the church sets them to music and sings them. One's position may not be that we *might* sing them or we *might not* sing them, as if they were optional. If one's position is that God's command to

sing includes all the songs of scripture, then one's position must be that we *must* sing them. If it is God's command, then it is not optional but required.

3. It has been said that the regulative principle applies to the church's public, corporate worship but not to the private, individual worship of a child of God. But what is the difference between public worship and private worship? Isn't our entire life worship of God? And wouldn't the second commandment apply to our entire life, so that we are not allowed to worship God by an image at church or at home? Why do you say that there is a difference between public and private worship and then apply the regulative principle only to public worship?

Answer: This and the next two questions have to do with the difference between public worship and private worship. That distinction has been called into question in at least one sermon, has been denied in at least one judgment of a consistory, and has been rehashed in many personal conversations, so that this is apparently one of the more burning questions of the hour.

Confusion about the distinction between public and private worship centers around the fact that the entire life of the child of God is worship. And, indeed, the entire life of the child of God is worship. The Heidelberg Catechism encompasses the entire life of the child of God in its explanation of keeping the sabbath day holy: "That all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by His Holy Spirit in me; and thus begin in this life the eternal sabbath" (Lord's Day 38, Q&A 103). The child of God is also to reject image worship in his entire life, both public and private. The Heidelberg Catechism encompasses the entire life of the child of God in this prohibition with the words "in no wise": "That we in no wise repre-

sent God by images" (Lord's Day 35, Q&A 96). Therefore, worship and the prohibition of images encompass the entire life of a child of God, whether in public or private. Because of this, some become confused about whether there really is a distinction between public worship and private worship.

Behind this confusion is a simple logical fallacy. In more technical language, it is the fallacy of false equivalence. In less technical language, because two distinct things share something in common, those two distinct things are thought to be the same thing. For example, someone might say that the sky and the ground are both parts of God's creation; therefore, there is no difference between the sky and the ground. Or, red is a color and blue is a color; therefore, red is the same as blue. Or, cats and dogs are both four-legged animals; therefore, there is no distinction between cats and dogs. That same fallacy of false equivalence is happening in the confusion between public worship and private worship. The argument goes: My public worship and my private worship are both worship of God without images; therefore, there is no distinction between my public and my private worship.

The solution to the fallacy of false equivalence is to recognize that two distinct things can be distinguished, even though they are also related. The sky is different than the ground even though they are both parts of God's creation; red can be a color, and at the same time it can be a different color than blue; cats can be animals, and at the same time they can be different animals than dogs. So also public worship can be the worship of God and at the same time be distinct from private worship.

What is the distinction between public worship and private worship? The

public worship of the church is Jehovah's public gathering of his congregation before him in Christ in a formal meeting and official covenant assembly for the purpose of his glory and his people's salvation. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" (Heb. 10:25). "When ye come together therefore into one place" (I Cor. 11:20). "And gather thou all the congregation together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Lev. 8:3, where "tabernacle of the congregation" means "tabernacle of the assembly" or "meeting"). "And that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to hear His word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian" (Lord's Day 38, Q&A 103).

The private worship of an individual is his offering of himself to God as a living sacrifice of thanksgiving through Christ in his entire life and in every station and calling in which God has placed him. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands...Husbands, love your wives...Children, obey your parents in the Lord...Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath...Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh...Masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening" (Eph. 5:22-6:9). "I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may confess His name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him; and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life, and afterwards

reign with Him eternally over all creatures" (Lord's Day 12, Q&A 32).

Both public worship and private worship are the believer's worship of God without images. But one is a formal meeting of the church, and the other is the believer's service of God in his individual station and calling. The believer cannot try to apply what belongs to the one to the other. For example, the believer cannot go to work, punch his time-card, and then stand in the corner singing through the psalter all day. His private worship of God at work is that he is obedient to them that are his masters according to the flesh. The farmer cannot take the preacher out to the potato patch on Monday morning and have him preach a sermon. The farmer worships God in his station and calling by planting his potatoes. The family does not worship God in its home by having baptism and the Lord's supper. The family worships God by loving one another. Now, there may certainly be an echo of public worship in the believer's private life. He may punch his timecard and then put in his earbuds to listen to sermons as he works. The mother may fold her laundry with songs on her lips. The family may remember the body and blood of the Lord by speaking of the things of the kingdom in word and prayer. But this is an echo of the public worship in the private life of the child of God.

So also in the public worship of the church, there are a form and an order and elements that do not belong to the believer's private life. The man who has second helpings of dinner at home does not take extra helpings of the bread and wine of the Lord's supper at church. The father who leads his family in prayer at the dinner table does not stand up during the second point of the sermon at church and start praying. The family that loves

to sing Psalter #203 at home does not sing it instead of whatever number the rest of the congregation is singing at church. Rather, there must be order in the worship through the elements of worship that God himself gives to his church. “Let all things be done decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:40).

With this understanding of the distinction between public worship and private worship, one can see how the regulative principle would apply to public worship but not to private worship. Though both public worship and private worship are worship, public worship is an official, formal meeting of God with his people. In that meeting God regulates exactly which elements he has given the church for her official worship of his name.

4. It has been said that Lord’s Day 35 is about public worship. But isn’t Lord’s Day 35 about our entire life, so that in all our worship of God we may not “worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His word”? How do you know question and answer 96 is specifically about public worship?

Answer: I trust the above answer sheds light on this question, so that it has mostly been answered already. We could add this: Lord’s Day 35 itself indicates that there is a specific application to the public worship of the church. Question and answer 98 asks about images being tolerated “in the churches.”

Furthermore, the word “worship” itself in question and answer 96 points to the public worship of the church and not the private worship of the individual. We might speak of a “public worship” and a “private worship,” but when the confessions use the word “worship,” they apparently refer to the church’s official public worship, not to private worship. For example, see Belgic Confession 7 (“The whole manner of worship which

God requires of us is written in them [the scriptures] at large”), Belgic Confession 32 (“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”), and Belgic Confession 36 (“That they [the magistrates] protect the sacred ministry, and thus may remove and prevent all idolatry and false worship”). I’m not sure that an entire dogmatic principle could be rested on the use of the word “worship” in question and answer 96, but that word in the confessions at least points to public worship.

What is clear, though, in addition to the above, is that Belgic Confession 32, which is explaining the same doctrine as question and answer 96, definitely does refer to the public worship of the church. It is talking about “the body of the church,” and in that connection it mentions “the worship of God.”

5. How can the use of a scriptural hymn be an image at church but not at home?

Answer: Again, this question is dealing with the distinction between public worship and private worship. Hopefully by now it is becoming clear that there is a distinction between the public worship of the church and the private worship of an individual, so that something that might be appropriate for one is not appropriate for the other.

It could be added that what makes singing a scriptural hymn an image in public worship is not the scriptural hymn. Not at all! A scriptural hymn that is faithful to the scriptures may be used by the child of God as his confession of God’s name. The problem is not at all the scriptural hymn.

What makes singing a scriptural hymn an image in public worship is man’s will. Man’s will is the image. Man’s will is the problem. When God provides a

book of psalms for the church's worship and then commands the church to sing those songs in worship, it is will worship for man to neglect those psalms in order to sing some other song. Even if that other song is a good scriptural hymn!

It all comes down to what God requires for corporate worship. If God requires psalms, then it is will worship to use a scriptural hymn instead, even though singing that very same scriptural hymn could be good in a man's home.

—AL

CONTRIBUTION

Boundary Movers: An Analysis

On Sunday, April 16, 2023, Rev. Nathan Langerak preached a sermon at Second Reformed Protestant Church titled “Boundary Movers.”¹ The text for the sermon was Hosea 5:10–12.

The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound: therefore I will pour out my wrath upon them like water. Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked after the commandment. Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness.

The reason I took a special interest in this sermon was because the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) are engaged in controversy. This controversy is over the vital topic of the worship of God and, more specifically, the singing in worship.

Things have escalated very quickly, so much so that in the course of only a few weeks the minister of First Reformed Protestant Church has been suspended and may very well soon be deposed.

Instruction is in very short supply, so any articles or sermons on the topic of worship, the

regulative principle of worship, or exclusive psalmody are viewed as hot commodities and are immediately devoured by many.

Reverend Langerak's sermon on March 19, “The Indwelling Word,” was the catalyst for the suspension of Reverend Lanning and the driving force for the anger and bitterness that many of the members of First RPC now carry against Reverend Lanning.² So when I heard that Reverend Langerak had preached on the controversy again, it was a given that I would listen to and study that sermon.

This sermon was no improvement over the sermon preached on March 19.

It is a marvel that men and women have been carried along by these sermons.

Reverend Langerak preaches with an intensity—even a ferocity—that does not lend itself to someone's offering a contradictory opinion. I understand that.

But that is no excuse for the facile response of the people to his preaching.

Reverend Langerak's two sermons—his two (public) contributions to the controversy—have been deleterious to the cause of truth and to the church itself.

¹ The sermon and transcript can be found at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=416232248232204>.

² That sermon can be found at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3192322435011>, and a transcript is available upon request. Requests can be made by emailing info@reformedpavilion.com.

That is my judgment not because he teaches something with which I disagree. I have listened to both sermons prepared to be carried along by them and convinced by the arguments. I have learned much from Reverend Langerak. Add to that the fact that many, many people are carried along by his preaching, and it leaves me almost eager to be convinced by him. The path forward would be far smoother if that could be the case.

But I may not be carried along by the masses or by a man's intensity.

I may only be carried along by the word of God and the creeds.

And that is where Reverend Langerak failed.

The sermon was about the princes of Judah, men who were "like them that remove the bound." Boundary movers. Reverend Langerak gave many definitions of what is meant by the "bounds" but never really settled on one. He shifted metaphors somewhere in the sermon, so that it was no longer the bounds that were being moved, but now it was the ancient landmarks.

He never once said what the bounds or boundaries or landmarks that are being moved today are. Are the ancient landmarks man-made hymns, so that when Thomas Ken's hymn is removed, the bounds are moved? Is "sing the word" the ancient landmark being moved? Is it Church Order article 69? Is it the (curious) principle "sing the psalms almost exclusively"?

He preached an entire sermon on the "bounds," "boundaries," and "landmarks" and never told us what they were regarding singing in church.

Reverend Langerak simply needed the text to be a springboard from which he could launch a broadside against those who teach exclusive psalmody.

The problem for the listener is that Reverend Langerak gave no instruction.

He did not teach.

He engaged in fearmongering. He harangued. He expressed his opinion about this or that. But he did not instruct.

Here are the points that Reverend Langerak made in his sermon, as well as an analysis of the points:

1. It is a marvel to Reverend Langerak that "since we've come out of the Protestant Reformed Churches we have battled almost entirely and continually against legalism."

Response: First Reformed Protestant Church did fight a battle against legalism. The new consistory is aware of that too, because they used material from their previous decision about legalism in the decision to suspend Reverend Lanning. But I wonder if the consistory asked the question as they drafted the documents to suspend Reverend Lanning, "Brothers, are these cases the same?" I know they did not, because it is so painfully obvious that these cases are worlds apart. In one instance a new and novel teaching was introduced that taught that the congregation did not have Jesus Christ if the members did not share some level of physical proximity with each other. There simply is no proof for that position from scripture, the creeds, or church history. Exclusive psalmody, on the other hand, goes back to the beginning of Christianity itself, not to mention the fact that many churches have practiced it and still do today. The creeds point the believer to the scriptures, wherein the evidence for exclusive psalmody is overwhelming, to understand how he is to worship God (Lord's Day 35, Q&A 96; Belgic Confession 7, 32). I wish the consistory had used the definition of legalism used in the earlier case, as that would not only have been instructive for the congregation, but it also would have been the correct definition of legalism. "[The false teacher's] position that he distributed to the congregation is legalism, teaching that the congregation does not have Christ, his gospel, or his sacrament in the worship until the arbi-

trary laws of man are met.” That is helpful to the reader, but you can see why the consistory did not use it. That does not in the least bit describe Reverend Lanning’s theology, and the elders knew it.

2. Those pushing exclusive psalmody have been “rabid” for it from the beginning and have been constantly agitating for it. In fact, they scared ministers into not choosing certain hymns or certain Psalter numbers!

Response: Says who? He says this with no proof, not to mention the fact that his argument is unclear and confusing. “From the very beginning there were those who left us previously who were rabid for this.” So have they left us, or are they still with us? He paints quite a picture of men—wild-eyed and foaming at the mouth—pushing and agitating for exclusive psalmody and who knows what else, but I haven’t met them, either as an elder or as a layman. Do men have convictions? Sure. Do they state and defend them? I sure hope so. Yet Reverend Langerak says some of them left us, and some did not. This means open season has now been declared to demonize and target individual members, since they are the troublers of Israel.

I would remind all of us that just because these “rabid” men are a figment of Reverend Langerak’s overactive imagination, that does not mean they need to become a figment of ours.

3. This position will only lead to a “bottomless pit of legalism, of calculations, of changes, and of controversy.” Those teaching exclusive psalmody want more than just the 150 psalms of David exclusively sung during worship. According to Reverend Langerak,

these members will not be happy until the church disposes of the creeds. “The ultimate prize is the creeds. That’s the prize.”

Response: Reverend Lanning preached this same doctrine at the end of 2021 (after which not one person protested or even sent a letter to the consistory). And the sermon did not lead to any controversies. What Reverend Langerak is doing here is fearmongering. It is the logical fallacy of appealing to fear.³ It is one of the weakest methods possible to make one’s point. It ought to be beneath him. He offers no proof for his contention because there is none. No doubt this now will become the narrative: “They are after the creeds!” His argument that the exclusive psalmodist is after the creeds is absolutely without merit, but as a fear tactic, it works remarkably well.

4. Exclusive psalmody as a requirement of the regulative principle is ugly, and it grates on Reverend Langerak’s ears and on his soul because it puts the church under the power of man’s whim and scruple. And because of how this got brought in, it “casts doubt upon their very ethics.”

Response: The Christian school as a demand of the covenant grated on some men’s ears and souls. For others, it was a lovely orchestral suite. So what? What do the word of God and the creeds say about it? is the question. I trust those more than Reverend Langerak’s feelings. He says that exclusive psalmody puts the church under the power of man and man’s whim and scruple. I say that his position puts the church under the power of man and man’s whim and scruple. So the point has to be proved—which Reverend Langerak does not even attempt to do.

³ Reverend Langerak also makes marvelous use of the logical fallacy of special pleading, where you apply rules and standards (and slippery slopes) to others, while you exempt yourself and your position. If anyone would be justified in using the slippery slope argument in this controversy, it would be the exclusive psalmodist against the man whose position is “sing the word.” The exclusive psalmodist would have all of church history on his side, since time has shown repeatedly the church deforming into more and more and more hymn use and less and less psalm use. This then would be stated as “Reverend Langerak’s ultimate goal is to get rid of the psalms and replace them all with hymns!” We should make arguments based on the word of God and the creeds, not by appealing to men’s raw emotions.

As to how exclusive psalmody got brought in, it is almost like Reverend Langerak is making up his points as he goes along. Does how this arose cast doubt on men's ethics? I know I am capable of having shady ethics, but I can tell you how I came to this position. I heard the word of God on the second commandment preached to me, which word was grounded in scripture and the creeds. I received the word with readiness of mind and compared the word preached to the word of God (and the creeds and church history) and found that the instruction was the very word of God to the congregation. Over the last number of years, through the patient instruction of Reverend Lanning, I have grown to know, understand, and love the principle of exclusive psalmody. I know that this was the experience of the majority of the congregation as well when they heard these sermons (although many of them would later go on to flip-flop around on the issue until they finally settled on a position that would save their lives).

5. Those who teach the position must repent or leave. They are not weaker brothers, and "don't let anybody fool you."

Response: Okay, that does not seem like a very patient approach, but I can go along with it. We understand the stakes. When the odd and novel charge of legalism was made, it showed us what was coming next. We have lived through this before. But then Reverend Langerak brings up a red herring. I have not heard one person say that those who espouse exclusive psalmody are weaker brothers. I fully confess my weakness generally, but this is not a weaker/stronger brother issue. The question is this: "What does the scripture command regarding what we sing in worship?" Some say, and then go on to prove with a copious amount of

scriptural references, that the Bible is clear that only the 150 psalms of David are to be sung in worship. Others say no and then provide no proof whatsoever from scripture that we are commanded to sing man-made hymns (as well as sing almost exclusive psalmody).

6. This is not a development of the truth and did not come about through a closer study of the creeds or the scripture, and it couldn't have because this teaching is outside the boundary of the creeds and does not "comport" with the Bible.

Response: Development of the truth? Where has that been taught? Reverend Langerak erects a straw man and then demolishes it. I have never heard it taught that exclusive psalmody is a development of the truth. This is reformation and a return *to the truth*. This is Church History 101. The church compromises and goes away from exclusive psalmody, and the Holy Spirit reforms his church so that it returns to exclusive psalmody. Neither does exclusive psalmody require a close study of the creeds and the word of God. Sing the songbook that the Holy Spirit gave the church, and keep man-made hymns out of it. The creeds tell us not to worship God in any other way than he has commanded in his word. The word of God says to sing the psalms in worship. It is a very plain and simple doctrine. At this point, though, Reverend Langerak gets closer than he does anywhere else to actually making an argument. He says it doesn't comport with scripture and is outside the boundary of the creeds. But that is where he leaves it. No proof. No instruction. The congregation of First RPC, however, did hear solid and clear instruction about all of these matters. And after having swished that gospel message around in their mouths for a little while, they spit it out.

7. The position of exclusive psalmody now charges Reverend Langerak with sin and unbelief.

Response: So what? I can hear Reverend Langerak sitting under the instruction of Herman Hoeksema in the early 1920s. Reverend Langerak would say, “You are changing and will now be teaching that remarriage after divorce is sinful? Don’t you know that the church has been teaching otherwise for 500 years?! Don’t you know that John Calvin encouraged the innocent party to remarry? You’re saying the church has been sinning for 500 years? Now I am a sinner for having believed wrongly? Now I am an unbeliever?” The difference here, of course, is that Reverend Lanning did not change his view, and he did not teach a new thing. He taught something as old as Christianity itself. People need to stop using the argument “You’re saying the church has been sinning for _____ years?!?” Why do you think it is called reformation? Calvin condemns that weak, emotional argument when he rebukes those who seek “an excuse from our fathers’ ignorance when God speaketh unto us; because, though they be not guiltless before God, yet our sluggishness is more intolerable if we be blind at noonday, and lie as deaf, or as if we were asleep, when the trumpet of the gospel doth sound.”⁴

8. The reason some people are not singing is because they were willful in their hearts and wanted this false doctrine, and now they oppose God to his face. And the reason the false teacher brought this doctrine in is that he is willful.

Response: I don’t know about others, but the reason I am not singing “Praise God” is because the consistory lied to the congregation by calling a hymn a psalm and was so bent on getting that hymn back into the worship service that the consistory trampled on an actual psalm to do so.⁵ I love not singing that hymn. It unites me with the church of the past, when members of the church in the 1800s had to stand silently when the consistory (through “ecclesiastical might,” to use Abraham Kuyper’s words⁶) forced hymns into the worship services. I agree with Hendrik De Cock, who wrote, “Hymns are never introduced into the church, except to cause degeneration and contempt for the welfare of the church, or perhaps in cases of incomplete Reformation.”⁷ I love not singing that hymn the most, though, because it unites me with a lowly servant girl in the late 1600s. Her consistory, like ours at First RPC, displaced a psalm to introduce a hymn.

⁴ John Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 174–175.

⁵ The congregation of First RPC was exposed by the decision of the consistory to make “Praise God” a psalm. There should be thirty protests to the consistory against this decision, and the entire congregation should be sitting mute, even those who wanted the hymn reinstated. First RPC is full of principled men, remember? But the decision was wretched and so patently false (a hymn is not a psalm) that everyone should have agreed that this was not the way to get it back in. Turns out we aren’t very principled at all. “This is the slogan. If it works we have gained an advantage; if it fails, there is not much lost and we simply map out a different course” (Herman Hoeksema, “Living from Principle,” *Standard Bearer* 14, no. 3 [November 1, 1937]: 52).

⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *Our Worship*, trans. Harry Boonstra (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 37, as quoted in R. Scott Clark, “Kuyper: The Introduction of Hymns to Dutch Reformed Worship Was Done Unlawfully,” July 13, 2018, <https://heidelblog.net/2018/07/kuyper-the-introduction-of-hymns-to-dutch-reformed-worship-was-done-unlawfully/>.

⁷ Hendrik De Cock, [pamphlet entitled] “The so-called evangelical hymns, the darling of the enraptured and misled multitude in the synodical Reformed church and even by some of God’s children from blindness, because they were drunk with the wine of her fornication, further tested, weighed and found wanting, yes, in conflict with all our Forms of Unity and the Word of God,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20110917023204/https://gcc-opc.org/docs/DeCock.dir/hymndecock.htm#r14>.

During one worship gathering Bishop Patrick [the girl's pastor] noticed she was not singing. He drew her aside afterwards to ask if she was unwell. The maid reportedly answered, "I am well enough in health, but if you must needs know the plain truth of the matter, as long as you sung Jesus Christ's Psalms, I sang along with ye; but now you sing psalms of your own invention, you may sing by yourselves." Here was a maid who understood the difference between singing *with* Jesus and singing about him.⁸

A lowly maid! Of such is the kingdom of heaven (and next to such I feel privileged to stand) (1 Cor. 1:26–29).

The reason we are not singing is because we received instruction from the word of God and the creeds, and the Holy Spirit softened the soil of our hearts to receive that word. It is glorious, all a work of the Spirit, and we give him thanks for it...by singing what he has commanded in his word that we sing.

As to Reverend Lanning, he would confess that he is just as capable as anyone of being willful. But the explanation for his instruction is not willfulness. It is faithfulness (to the word of God and the creeds).

9. Those who teach exclusive psalmody will be cursed just like the "pervert who has sex with an animal or a close kin."

Response: I disagree. And because Reverend Langerak has made no effort to prove his position either from the word of God or the creeds, there is not much to refute. And whether it was his intention or not, the effect of his using these words has been people's comparing those who believe exclusive psalmody to be like those who have sex with animals. This is more demonizing of those who believe

exclusive psalmody (which many people and their children have been only too eager to pick up). But I say, they called my Lord Beelzebub, so I see no need to object. More, please.

But there is a biblical application to be made here, which application can be supported. Reverend Langerak's position (sing the word) was not the position of Dordt. If it were, our Dordtian fathers never would have taught the church how to get rid of the few hymns that were being sung in the church. Why would they, if the principle is "sing the word"? Reverend Langerak, and the consistory of First RPC with him, take the churches on a new path, not one trodden by the church of all ages. That means the word of God to the Reformed Protestant Churches is found in Jeremiah 18:15–17:

Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up; to make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head. I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.

10. The judgment will come on these people slowly, like a moth consumes wool clothes and like a fungus consumes an entire object.

Response: I do agree with Reverend Langerak's description of how judgment looks when it falls upon a church. I disagree with him about who it is upon whom this judgment will fall. Reverend Langerak's position is almost exactly that of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). I say "almost exactly" because the PRC at

⁸Michael LeFebvre, *Singing the Psalms of Jesus: Revisiting the Psalms* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 54–55.

least would pay lip service to exclusive psalmody, whereas Reverend Langerak characterizes exclusive psalmody as a “stupid man-made principle.”⁹ I see the rot that Reverend Langerak describes, and I see it consuming the “entire object,” and I see that happening in the PRC. Because Reverend Langerak is finished with the Holy Spirit’s reformation of the church and because Reverend Langerak is satisfied with an “incomplete Reformation” (to use De Cock’s words), that same rot will infect and consume the Reformed Protestant Churches as it has the PRC.

The striking thing is that Reverend Langerak’s principle and position (“sing the word”) is exactly that of nearly every other church in the world. (You will not find a church whose principle is “sing something other than the word.”) Reverend Langerak’s position and the position of the consistory of First RPC regarding singing would be welcomed with open arms in almost every other church on the planet, Reformed or otherwise.

What happened in the RPC was that the people wanted to be told, “You’re doing things just fine.” And Reverend Langerak was eager to oblige.

11. The position of exclusive psalmody corrupts the simplicity that is in Jesus Christ, condemns the guiltless, steals the liberty bought by Christ’s blood, and moves the ancient landmarks set up by our fathers.

Response: The life of gratitude does not displace Christ. Reverend Lanning’s sermons preached the gospel regarding the regulative principle, which truth, far from displacing Christ, exalted him as the one worthy of a life of gratitude and praise. As to the ancient landmarks, I find it preposterous that someone would claim that the ancient landmark to which

the church needs to return is that of more hymn singing and the introduction of more man-made hymns in worship. I ask the reader in all candor, “Have you ever heard that before in your life?” This is what reformation looks like when Man takes over—“More man-made hymns and less psalms of David!” It is folly—utter folly—to teach that the ancient landmarks are more hymn singing.

This sermon should have been rejected by the watchmen of Second RPC and should be discarded by the rest of us.

You will search the sermon fruitlessly for any instruction. What you get is Reverend Langerak’s opinions and thoughts about a variety of things, some of which I think came upon him while he was preaching.

The problem for the churches is that all this does is sow fear, anger, and bitterness in the hearts of the congregations, and it goads on the members to grab the nearest pitchfork and stab anyone who disagrees with them.

If your goal is to raise a mob, then Reverend Langerak’s is the correct approach.

If your goal is instruction, then it fails miserably.

I reject the sermon for more than just the fact that it incites emotion and provides no instruction.

The man preaching the sermon does not look like Christ.

This is how the Bible describes the faithful pastor of a flock and shepherd of sheep:

And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. (II Tim. 2:24–26)

⁹Nathan Langerak, “The Indwelling Word,” sermon preached on March 19, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3192322435011>.

That does not describe Reverend Langerak.

He does not instruct, even when the times (and the people) cry out for it. He does not instruct out of the word of God, and he does not instruct out of the creeds.

Even his call to repentance fails the standard set by Galatians 6:1: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

Reverend Langerak did say something with which I wholeheartedly agree, and that is this: “Either one or the other is the truth. Either what I preached is the truth, or what’s being written is the truth. But they can’t both be the truth.”

Yes.

That is correct.

That makes things clear and simple for me, even if the path is not easy.

The truth is not confusing. The truth is not an incomprehensible sound. The truth is not shrill or unclear. The truth does not leave men uncertain about what a text means or doesn’t mean. The truth is not just a man’s opinion, no matter how forcefully it is expressed.

I am thankful that God gave to First RPC a man who was gentle and eager to teach and who in meekness instructed us about the proper worship of our God.

A man whose preaching always pointed the congregation to Jesus Christ.

And that voice—the voice of Jesus Christ—I know, and that voice I will follow (John 10:4).

—Dewey Engelsma



REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

To: Consistory of FRPC

April 6, 2023

I hereby protest the decisions (Recommendations 1, 2, 3 with their grounds) taken per the advice of a committee of the consistory to the consistory, concerning their judgement of two sermons preached on March 5, 2023 and March 12, 2023 on LD 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Recommendation #1 judges that the doxology, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow," is a faithful versification of Psalm 148, and that we as a congregation continue to sing it.

Protest (1):

That the doxology is not a faithful versification of Psalm 148, and that we not sing it.

Grounds

1. The doxology is not in the Psalter, nor in Church Order, article 69.
2. The doxology is not a faithful versification of Psalm 148 in that it displaces Christ as the author of the psalm and as the singer of the psalm. Exactly how this displacement happens is further explained below.
3. Ground 2 of Recommendation #1 cites Philippians 1:15-18 as support for the irrelevancy of the motive of the writer of the doxology. But Paul, here, is not rejoicing in those who are preaching with the motive "to add affliction to his [my] bonds." Rather, his rejoicing is in verses 12-14, that "many of the brethren are much more bold to speak the word without fear," which he sees as "unto the furtherance of the gospel." By application, shall we sing false doctrine so that it may "fall[en] out to the furthering" of singing true doctrine?

Explanation

The doxology, in its content, excludes verses 13 and 14 of Psalm 148. The doxology does not take into consideration those last two verses of the Psalm.

13 Let them praise the name of the Lord:
for his name alone is excellent; his
glory is above the earth and heaven.

14 He also exalteth the horn of his people,
the praise of all his saints; even of the
children of Israel, a people near unto
him. Praise ye the Lord.

Commentary on verse 13: The command is to praise His name, which name is excellent and high above the earth and heaven. The creation hears the command. In response, the creation with man as the created head says: How can I ever do that? I am earthly and God is above the earth and heaven. I am sinful, besides. Impossible! It isn't going to happen. His glory is above the earth and heaven. But I am of the earth, earthly, and sinful besides.

Commentary on verse 14: God makes gracious provision for His people here. In addition to giving the command to praise His name, He provides the Way also, in two aspects of His grace. 1) God exalts the horn of His people. "Horn" in the O.T. means "strength and status," "horn of salvation" (*Strong's Concordance*). Passages in the O.T. speak of "horn of his anointed," "horn of salvation," "horn of oil," "horn of David," etc. "Horn(s)" in the N.T. is "often a figure of power and position" (*Strong's*). Rev. 5:6 speaks of the "Lamb, as it had been slain, having seven horns." It can be concluded that the fulfillment is Jesus Christ the divine Son of God, incarnate. Jesus Christ is the horn of His people. 2) God also exalts "the praise of all his saints."

“(The) praise is renown, glory; excellence of a person or object” (*Strong’s*). The meaning then, is that the renown, glory, excellence given to God by His saints is exalted because it is through the exalted horn of His people, even through Jesus Christ. How gracious! The saints are not left to themselves in their worship of praise to God. It is through Christ. He gives praise to God. And we with Him.

Conclusion

The doxology does not sing verses 13 and 14. It leaves them out. It leaves Christ out. It leaves the saints out. We do not have access to the Father. The praise of His saints does not reach His ears. Jesus Christ is displaced.

Let us consider our way. This is not a public charge of sin. It is an admonition. This is “comparing spiritual with spiritual” (1 Cor.2:13), “Reformed, and always reforming,” “Try the spirits...” (1 John 4:1). This is being taught to consider our way.

Recommendation #2 judges the teaching of exclusive Psalmody in worship to be legalism.

Protest (2):

That the teaching of exclusive Psalmody is not legalism, but rather it is freedom in and through Jesus Christ by faith in the gospel of justification and sanctification.

Grounds

1. Justification is by faith alone and not by works. This is the gospel and it frees us from the curse of the law. Rev. Lanning began here in the March 5 sermon: “If you want to speak of life, salvation from your sin, righteousness with God, then you must hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. You must hear His perfect work. You must have LD 7 and LD 8 and 9 and 10 and 23 and 31. You must have the truth of your Savior’s perfect work.” The gospel is first. Jesus Christ and His perfect worship to God is first. His righteous worship is ours.
2. Sanctification is by faith alone and not by works. Rev Lanning continued in his

March 12 sermon that our keeping of the commandments is not of our own obedience: “...for Jehovah God delights to dwell with you and He has prepared all things in this worship for you and brings you into that table and feeds you and nourishes you and gives you your singing, gives you the Spirit...and gives you your whole worship in His covenant mercy.” Christ gives us the fruits. God commands, and then God gives to us as a gracious gift that which He commands. He worships, and we worship with and in Him. He sings and we sing with and in Him. Christ is our sanctification in worship. He is our sanctified worship.

3. If both justification and sanctification are, by definition, by faith in Jesus Christ alone without works, and that we are taught to sing only what Christ sings, and Christ sang only the songbook of the Psalms, then the singing and the songbook are the command of Christ. Jesus Christ does not sing with man. Man receives, by faith, the songs Christ has given him to sing. To obey the command of Christ is freedom, not legalism.

Explanation

We do not, cannot, and may not FIND songs to sing in worship. He gave us the Book of Psalms to sing. He alone is our sanctified songbook and singer. We sing with Him. We do not sing songs that came to be because of the will of man. Christ gave us the songs we need to sing. To sing those songs that Christ gave us is just freedom and privilege.

Conclusion

To have as a complete gift the Book of the Psalms to sing is not legalism. It is freedom.

Recommendation #3 judges that Rev. Lanning be suspended as minister in FRPC, and discipline be administered.

Protest (3):

Rev. Lanning is not to be judged as worthy of suspension and discipline.

Ground

The charge of legalism is a false charge. If he is to be charged with anything, it would be to charge him of teaching the gospel of justification and sanctification by faith in Jesus Christ, and Him alone. This means that MAN

is NOTHING! This is what is offensive to us. This is what Rev. Lanning teaches. This is what the reformation in this 21st century is about. God is very gracious to give us such a reformation. Very gracious.

—Neil Meyer

PROTEST

Protest Re Exclusive Psalmody and The Suspension of Rev. A. Lanning

To: Consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church

April 7, 2023

I hereby protest the judgments and grounds of the consistory that were announced to the congregation on March 26, 2023:

The consistory judged that 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.

Grounds:

1. The Reformed Creeds do not demand exclusive psalmody.
2. This teaching goes beyond what the scriptures reveal.
3. The Church Order does not demand exclusive psalmody but rather rejects this teaching by including songs which are not found in the Psalms.
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 2nd 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.

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

According to articles 79 and 80 of the Church Order, ministers who teach false doctrine are to be suspended.

That the consistory of FRPC judged the teaching of exclusive psalmody in the worship service to be legalism is an entirely unrighteous and wrong judgment that not only is not supported by Scripture and the creeds, but also is itself a matter of teaching legalism. I interact below with the grounds of the consistory.

Grounds:

1. The Reformed creeds demand exclusive psalmody in LD 35 and Belgic Confession, article 32.
2. The teaching is clearly revealed in the scriptures in Col. 3:16, Matthew 26:30, and elsewhere.
3. The Church Order allowed for a specific handful of hymns (meaning songs that are not from the Psalms) as a matter of temporary concession while maintaining the teaching that exclusive psalmody be practiced in public worship.
4. Rev. Lanning's sermon on March 5, 2023 rightly taught that to sing anything but the 150 Psalms in the official worship service amounts to idolatry. To claim that the sermon 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 is legalism," is to go far beyond what the sermon actually stated and taught, to the point of slanderously falsifying the sermon. Instead, he specifically warned the congregation against seeing this law as doing something to get something and that warning was nowhere contradicted in the sermon.

5. That LD 35 teaches the principle of "no idol worship" which governs our whole life and not only the official worship services is true, but that fact is no ground for contending that exclusive psalmody is legalism. Exclusive psalmody is completely in harmony with that fact.
6. Exclusive psalmody in worship is a demand of the gospel of Jesus Christ and is no demand of the law at all. Christ fulfilled all of the law for us including the second commandment (which was a belabored point made in both the March 5 sermon and March 12 sermon). That means there is no law of any sort left for us to do to gain anything with God. Christ already gained everything. The commands of God are now for us nothing but a matter of privilege and thanks even though they still stand as real commands. To teach that they must be obeyed to gain or maintain anything from God is "to bind and compel the conscience" (Belgic Confession, article 32) wrongly. It is to put believers back under the law as bound slaves.
7. The history of the Reformed churches demonstrates that the teaching of exclusive psalmody has repeatedly been an issue in many if not most reformations as the church has had to return to the Psalms for her singing time and time again over against manmade hymns.

Further explanation on the above points of interaction:

As we believe that the Holy Spirit gave the creeds to the church of Jesus Christ in order to faithfully summarize all the doctrines that are contained in the Old and New Testaments and fulfilling Jesus' promise to guide His church in-

to all the truth by His Holy Spirit, we find the teaching of exclusive psalmody in those creeds. LD 35, Q&A 96 reads (courtesy ccel.org):

Question 96.

What does God require in the second commandment?

Answer.

That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.

That God may not be represented by images for the worship of His name is explained by the fact that God has also instructed us that we may only worship God as He has commanded in His word (referenced in Deut. 12:32: “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it”). To worship God in any other way is to bind and compel the conscience of the believer, as taught in Belgic Confession, article 32 (courtesy ccel.org):

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.

This includes worshipping God with any songs that He has not specifically given to the church for such purpose, whether that song be completely composed by human invention or compiled out of Scripture by human invention. That a song quotes Scripture is no guarantee of orthodoxy as it is a well-known proverb that every heretic has his verse. Heretics also have their songs including many scripture songs.

What is clearly taught in Scripture, however, is that the book of Psalms was given to the church by Jesus Christ Himself to use in her worship of God. As David delivered the psalms that he wrote to the musicians and singers for use in the church’s worship (see 1 Chronicles 16:7 for one example), so does Christ deliver His songs to us to be sung in worship. The Psalms themselves repeatedly testify to this fact. God commands the singing of psalms in Psalm 105:2

and in many more such verses. “Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings” (Psalm 9:11). “Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness” (Psalm 30:4). “Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise” (Psalm 33:3). “O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth” (Psalm 96:1). “Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works” (Psalm 105:2).

Nor were these psalms merely for the Old Testament church to sing. Jesus sang the Psalms with his disciples even as the Old Testament was transitioning into the New. The Psalms are referred to in the epistles. Nor did Jesus replace that OT songbook with another. The Psalms recorded in the Old Testament are uniquely timeless in character and apply to our lives today as much as they did when they were written because they uniquely apply to Christ as they are the songs that *He* sings. The Old Testament ceremonies were abolished according to Belgic Confession, article 25, but nowhere can it be found that the singing of the Psalms was abolished. The opposite is true. The singing of the Psalms would amount to idolatry if that were the case. Circumcision has been abolished. Singing the Psalms has not been. That means that singing the Psalms is specifically not idolatry and that fact is significant where the regulative principle is involved. The regulative principle is nothing more and nothing less than what is stated in Q&A 96: “nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.” The Psalms are both not forbidden, but more, they are also positively commanded to be sung in the word of God, both in the Old Testament and in the New.

Further proof for the giving of the Psalms for the church’s timeless singing is the order with which they were compiled to be included in Scripture. Their order is not arbitrary. Paul acknowledges the divine order of them when he specifically cites the “second psalm” in Acts 13:33. That proves that even the compilation of

the Psalms in their specific places was a gift to the church included in the inspired word of God. That order teaches us true doctrine. No one can deny that the Psalms contain true doctrine both in content and in form. It has been said that the book of Psalms is as a little Bible, complete in all its doctrinal truth. All agree on that point and confess that that is true. The Psalms encapsulate the Bible. That tells us that the Psalms are as a creed to the Bible even as are the creeds of the Reformed faith which are as succinct, thorough, and accurate guides and summaries to the Bible. Jesus Christ would have us sing the book of Psalms then as an accurate reflection and praise of His holy and divine truth, including the truth over against the lie.

One of many verses that can be cited in all of this is Psalm 149:2. “Praise him for his mighty acts; praise him according to his excellent greatness.” That is no mindless or thoughtless praise that is commanded there. To praise God one must have knowledge of God’s mighty acts and greatness. And that is code for doctrine. Psalm 47:7 is even more explicit. “For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.” Shall men compose songs and compile a songbook that is going to be at all adequate to praise God with understanding in all of God’s glorious and most wondrous truth? To ask the question is to answer it. God must provide the praise for us and He abundantly has in the Psalms. Shall we complain that those psalms are not enough for us to sing?

As an aside, all parties in this controversy have claimed to be content with singing the Psalms alone, but I contend that that cannot be true. To insist on singing other songs as well as psalms is not contentment with those psalms. That is simply the sad fact. If one has eaten enough to be content, one asks for no more food. If one is content to sing the Psalms, one asks for no other songs.

Colossians 3:16 has been cited as proof for both positions, one claiming that it means only the Psalms may and ought to be sung in worship, and the other claiming that the verse

means also hymns (as in spiritual songs and hymns besides psalms) ought to be sung in worship. According to one recent sermon preached on this verse, there is no definitive answer to that question. I believe Colossians 3:16 does give definitive instruction, however, as it speaks only of the Psalms while using various terms to describe them. If Colossians 3:16 referred to something other than the Psalms, God would not leave us in the dark as to what exactly those songs would be. The praise of His name is too important to be left to our imaginations. If hymns and spiritual songs are not psalms, what are they? Where are they in Scripture? If hymns and spiritual songs refer to the Psalms, however, then we know exactly where they are and what they are.

As far as the history of the church goes regarding the singing of the Psalms, what is stated in the consistory’s ground concerning this matter is simply false. The singing of psalms over against hymns played an important role in the secession of 1834 as well as the formation of the Christian Reformed denomination in 1857. Those events clearly included movement toward the psalms. Our own history as Reformed Protestant churches shows a tremendous concern for psalm singing as well, whether we currently agree on the specifics of such singing or not. I believe God has placed this issue in front of us at this time in history so that it can be conclusively decided once and for all. Do we hold to exclusive psalmody or do we not? There is no middle ground. There is no “almost” exclusive psalmody. Strictly speaking there is no almost exclusive anything. *Almost* is a relative term that cannot be specified. Something is either exclusive or it is not. In this case, singing the Psalms exclusively is not a question or compromise that can be made by adding just a few hymns, as Church Order, article 69 does (this article is further treated below). No boundaries can be drawn as to the number of hymns or their content when “exclusive” no longer means exclusive. Who is to say what hymn is faithful to the scriptures and who is to say which one is not?

The standards for such a position will be impossible to set and keep.

How troublesome this issue would undoubtedly become is already illustrated in the consistory's own justification of the traditional doxology that has been sung in our church services for decades and that most if not all of us never questioned as to its appropriateness and orthodoxy—until now.

The consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church has justified the use of a generally stated and very traditional, well-loved doxology in the worship service by claiming that the doxology can be seen as following Psalm 148. But that claim cannot be substantiated by using Psalm 148. Some of the same elements that are in Psalm 148 may vaguely be seen in the doxology, but no one can claim that the doxology would ever pass as a versification of the psalm so as to be included in our psalter as one of its faithful renditions. Even if the doxology could be proven to contain completely true thoughts and words, it is no psalm. Psalm 148 contains the praise of God with a rich and deep understanding of that praise in Jesus Christ, as all of the Psalms do. That richness and depth is completely lacking in the doxology. By comparison the doxology constitutes singing without much understanding at all.

So why did the men at Dordt include in article 69 a seemingly arbitrary and very limited list of hymns to be added to the singing of the 150 Psalms in worship? I believe the reason was to move the churches toward phasing those hymns out of the official worship completely. If their intent was to allow hymns and therefore to add more hymns, which addition is logically necessary if one claims that hymns ought to be included in worship, then the history of the church has shown a great failure in her duty. The list of hymns in article 69 is as small today as it was centuries ago when it was written. Not only are there not any more hymns there, but some that are there have been lost to history. We don't even know what they all are supposed to be. Yet the writers of the Church Order said that these

songs “shall” be sung in worship. That's the wording of the article. So what ought we to make of such a “shall” that has not been and cannot be fully heeded?

That lack reveals the intent of the article very clearly. The men at Dordt did not want hymns to be added to the worship. They wanted the Psalms sung exclusively. How can I so confidently say that? Exactly because the list is so short. They did not want them. This was a concession to those who would not have been able to understand or handle getting rid of them completely, just as the men of Dordt conceded to allow special worship services to be held but to have them was not their desire. If the men at Dordt truly wanted more hymns to be used in the worship of the churches, they would have at least added “and more” to the list. But they did not. The list is extremely restricted. Even those hymns were on their way out.

One may argue that the hymns are still there in the CO, nevertheless. The church in all these centuries never added hymns to the list but the church never got rid of the list, either. So what is the solution? That is another matter to be treated in overture, but the solution is indeed simple. Getting rid of the list of hymns in article 69 would put this matter to rest. It is the solution of peace. To leave the list to remain is to invite continuing unrest forever. If any subject is divisive, it is the subject of what songs are good to sing and which are not. Exclusive psalmody solves that problem forever.

As to the consistory's treatment of Rev. Lanning's March 5 sermon regarding LD 35, the words of the consistory added to the words of the sermon, supposedly because that is what they think the sermon meant to teach, is shamefully false. Rev. Lanning of all men has been very careful to teach that our communion and fellowship with God comes only through and in and by Jesus Christ alone. Works are never, ever, involved. Yet the consistory attributed this teaching to the sermon, 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." Rev. Lanning taught nothing of the sort. He taught the opposite, that "if you take hold of the commandment as that which you will do unto your life and unto your salvation, then you will have misused this commandment grievously." Whether we sing hymns or whether we sing psalms has nothing to do with affecting our fellowship with God whatsoever. To say that Rev. Lanning taught that this commandment must be obeyed in order to experience God's covenant fellowship is slander. To read that into what Rev. Lanning taught also shows a serious lack of understanding of what the difference between the law and the gospel really is. That lack is further explained below.

When the consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church accuses Rev. Lanning of legalism because he sought to introduce exclusive psalmody (not almost, but real exclusive psalmody) into our worship, the consistory shows that they do not understand the true gospel of Jesus Christ. If this idea of exclusive psalmody was indeed only a man's idea, the charge of legalism would be correct. But exclusive psalmody is not any idea of a man at all. It is God's. Scripture explicitly teaches what we are to sing and the creeds concur. Q&A 96 does not include a list of all of the elements of worship but each one is certainly included by implication, including the singing and including the Psalms.

What might be forbidden in this case (hymns, no matter how faithful or unfaithful they may be to the scriptures) is not so much the issue as what is commanded (the 150 Psalms).

We must see that to sing from the book of Psalms is the greatest privilege that could be given to a child of God on this earth. It is an unspeakable gift and honor to be given these words of Jesus Christ to sing, words that were composed by the Holy Spirit and given to some specially selected men in order to express the glory, the anguish, the joy, and the triumph that only Jesus Christ Himself could know. How dare we take *any* of those psalms upon our lips? That is the pressing question here. And the answer to that question is the gospel. The gospel of Jesus Christ is enough. The question is not: why mayn't we sing other songs besides the Psalms? The question is: why may we sing any of the Psalms at all? And that is the wonder of salvation. When Christ Himself sings in the great congregation, "in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Hebrews 2:12), that He commands us to sing with Him is no restriction and no bondage. It is the greatest of freedoms. From the point of view of the gospel, the command to sing the Psalms is a matter of sheer and greatest grace. Now will we spit on that command as if it were a limitation to us? God forbid. This is a command of the gospel and that is very different from a command of the law. Sing the Psalms so that you can have fellowship with Me? God forbid. That is to be under the law. Rather, sing the Psalms because you do have fellowship with Me. We need nothing else and we want nothing else. The green pastures are there, full and abundant. Now feed in them. That's a command of the loveliest sort.

In love for the brethren and for the sake of the glory of our Lord,

—Connie Meyer

To: Consistory of First RPC

April 10, 2023

Dear Consistory of First RPC,
I am protesting the following decision of your March 23, 2023 meeting:

Article 17. Motion as twice amended now reads: Motion that the consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church suspend Rev. Andrew Lanning from the office of minister of the word and sacraments. Grounds:

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.

1. The Reformed Creeds do not demand exclusive psalmody.
2. This teaching goes beyond what the scriptures reveal.
3. The Church Order does not demand exclusive psalmody but rather rejects this teaching by including songs which are not found in the Psalms.
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 2nd 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.
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.

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

Regarding ground one, that the Reformed creeds do not demand exclusive psalmody, if this is the consistory's position, then the church may not sing in worship, as that is nowhere mentioned (or demanded) in the creeds. However, the creeds are not silent about singing. The creeds point us to the scriptures for what we may have as part of our worship. In answer to the question what God requires in the second commandment, we read, "That we in no wise represent God by images, **nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word**" (emphasis mine) (HC LD 35, QA 96). The Reformed creeds point us to the Word, which leads to the consistory's next ground.

Ground two of the consistory's decision states that the teaching of exclusive psalmody "goes beyond what the scriptures reveal." But this is patently false. The scriptures are clear that God will have his church use his divinely

ordained song book in worship. Examples of this include Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, 1 Chronicles 16:9, Psalm 105:2, James 5:13, 2 Samuel 23:1-2, Matthew 26:30, and Mark 14:26, which examples show us what Christ himself did when it came to worship. As was cited in the minority report in the PRCA sub-committee report that the consistory distributed, “Christ, the Apostles, [and] the early Christian Church for three centuries did restrict themselves to the Psalms of David” which was done because of the biblical warrant for exclusive psalmody. Examples abound of the Biblical mandate for the church to sing Psalms in the worship service. Nowhere is it commanded to sing man-made hymns.

This exposes ground two of the consistory’s decision as false.

Regarding ground three which reads, “The Church Order does not demand exclusive psalmody but rather rejects this teaching by including songs which are not found in the Psalms,” certainly the consistory is aware of the fact that the Church Order can be and has been significantly amended by the Reformed Protestant Churches. So to understand Article 69 and how it ought to read, we need to know what is the principle of Article 69. Here the consistory could be instructed by Professor David Engelsma who wrote this about Article 69 of the Church and its history:

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!” (Engelsma, Music in the Church, Standard Bearer Vol 71, Issue 15).

This quotation exposes ground three of the consistory’s decision as false.

Ground four of the consistory’s decision is bizarre, and false. That ground reads as follows:

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 2nd 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.

This is bizarre because it appears that the consistory simply made this up, as they say, out of whole cloth. Reverend Lanning has always faithfully led his flock in the pure gospel of grace and for the consistory to add this to its decision is cruelty. It is noteworthy that the consistory could not even muster up a quotation to support its position. That is because there is no quotation that could possibly support it. This is what Reverend Lanning taught us regarding the regulative principle:

This matter of Christ and the regulative principle goes way deeper, way, way deeper in the matter of what Jesus sings in the church. It goes this deep, that Jesus has fulfilled the regulative principle for First Reformed Protestant Church. He’s fulfilled it already. The regulative principle is the second commandment, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images.” Jesus fulfilled the second commandment. First RPC is not under the

regulative principle of worship in her worship. You're not under it. If you are under that regulative principle of worship in your worship, that would mean that you had to fulfill that regulative principle perfectly, that you had to fulfill that regulative principle not only with regard to what happens, but the perfection of those things happening. The regulative principle doesn't just say take a Psalm, it says take a Psalm and shout from the bottom of your heart. It doesn't just say have a sermon, but it says believe that sermon, listen to that sermon.

The people of God, if they were under the regulative principle for their salvation, for their acceptance with God, would never get to him. He'd never get in the house to his dinner. But Christ fulfilled it because when he came to earth, he worshiped God exactly as God required. And he still does. He always has and always will worship God absolutely perfectly. That's your freedom. That's the liberty of the gospel for the church. And now the church hearing that loves that regulative principle. You couldn't love it if you were under it. You'd have to hate it. It would be nothing but a scourge and a whip on you all your days, but the church of Jesus Christ hearing the gospel of Christ who has fulfilled the regulative principle, loves the regulative principle. He doesn't want any human inventions. Who wants human inventions when God has prepared for us all things in this fellowship with him? She doesn't want to worship God any other way than he's commanded in his word. Who would want to do that knowing what the church knows about the perfect obedience of Christ?

This regulative principle then for the church is very, very precious. It's a dear matter to her. It's not a matter of terror for her. It's not a matter for her of feeling

uncomfortable about the worship of Jehovah for Jehovah God delights to dwell with you and he has prepared all things in this worship for you and brings you into that table and feeds you and nourishes you and gives you your singing, gives you the Spirit to pray to him, gives you the love of him to give your offering, and gives you your whole worship in his covenant mercy. That's the regulative principle of worship as taught by our Confessions on the basis of the word of God. God be praised for the worship that he gives. Amen.

Our Father, which art in heaven, we thank thee for thy word. Wilt thou bless it to our hearts, apply it that we may be fed and nourished by the gospel of the body and blood of Christ, and wilt thou so regulate our worship that we may do all things in gratitude to the glory of thy name, that we may worship thee as thou hast commanded. Amen.

He taught the beautiful gospel truth of the regulative principle, and the consistory simply invented a lie about the sermon and stated it as fact.

Regarding ground five, that "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" this too is bizarre. Is the consistory suggesting that this does not apply to our worship? Or is the consistory teaching that whatever goes on in my home may go on in church? Or that there is no regulative principle of corporate worship that governs the corporate worship of the church? In the committee material, we read the following, "It was taught in the 3/12 sermon that 'the regulative principle of worship does not apply as the regulative principle of worship to your home and the devotions you have around your dinner table.' This assumption is without merit." Without merit? This statement of Reverend Lanning should stand *without the least amount of objection*. According to the consistory's argument,

because I sing “Zaccheus was a Wee Little Man” at home, since it is a faithful versification of Luke 19:1–10, I should therefore be able to sing this in church. (Although it is interesting to point out, that according to the principle of the consistory and of Reverend Langerak in his sermon, *The Indwelling Word*, which the consistory references, there is no reason for the hymn “Zacchaeus Was a Wee Little Man” not to be included in the official worship of the church). It appears that the consistory is denying that there is a regulative principle of worship which governs the corporate worship of the church, in distinction from the rest of the believers’ life. I refer the consistory to another quotation from a Protestant Reformed theologian: “There can be no challenge by Reformed persons to the interpretation of the second commandment as laying down the regulative principle of worship, for this is the explanation of the Reformed confessions...Rejection of the regulative principle is attack upon the confessions. For an office bearer this is transgression of his sacred vow to maintain and defend the confessions” (David Engelsma, *Reformed Worship, The Basis of the Regulative Principle of Worship*, 7–8).

Ground five is without merit and ought to be discarded, post haste.

Ground six characterizes exclusive psalmody in worship as a demand of the law and as a law of man which is forbidden according to Belgic Confession Article 32. The consistory puts a lot of weight behind what has taken place over the last 500 years and decisions of the churches over that time. But nowhere does the consistory offer up any evidence that as the church has been led to confess and practice exclusive psalmody that that has drawn the charge of legalism. What the consistory has done is novel, extreme, and radical. A consistory should not be novel, extreme, and radical, so they ought to discard and dispose of ground six as quickly as is humanly possible. Article 32 is not condemning exclusive psalmody as a “human invention.” What an abhorrent thought, to think that the Holy Spirit would give

the bride of Jesus Christ a song-book and then would consider it a “human invention” when the church sings from that song book exclusively in worship! Rather, it would be accurate to characterize a decision of the consistory as a “human invention” when they take a man-made hymn, call it a Psalm of David, and then re-introduce that hymn into the worship, and displace an actual Psalm of David to do so. Ground six should be rejected.

Regarding ground seven, that the “history of the Reformed churches demonstrates that the teaching of exclusive psalmody as law in worship has been rejected,” there is much that needs to be said.

I found it ominous that the committee of Bodbyl, Overway, and Schipper would start their advice by bringing to the consistory—which the consistory then brought to the congregation—a sub-committee report of the Protestant Reformed Churches. This was a report brought to the PRCA synod which report was advocating the introduction of more hymns into the worship service by amending Article 69 of the Church Order so that the words, “as also such hymns which are faithful versifications of the Holy Scriptures” would be added. I find it striking that having just left the PRC and having declared it false, we now use the material of that church to be the cornerstone of our decision regarding worship. This would be like Martin Luther distributing a papal bull to bolster his position on some aspect of church life.

However, since the consistory makes the PRCA to be its bulwark in arriving at its position, I have used the PRCA and her theologians to show that it is the position of the consistory that is radical and extreme, and not the beautiful gospel truth that was taught by Reverend Lanning.

I did find the minority report of that PRCA committee report to be compelling. I especially like this quote, and I wonder why the consistory would not use this to *support* what Reverend Lanning taught, rather than charge it with legalism.

Reformed advocates of the use of uninspired hymns may strain to find evidence for hymn-singing in the early period of the Reformed church, but the fact that they must strain to do so only proves our point. It is remarkable that, in spite of the absence of any creedal constraints and in spite of the influence that must have been exerted on the Reformed church by other communions where uninspired hymns flourished, the practice of exclusive psalmody in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches was so uniform for two centuries after the Reformation that there exists no undisputed evidence of ecclesiastically sanctioned hymnody in their services of worship.

Calvin and those that followed in his footsteps understood that the heart and soul of a people lies imbedded as it were, in the songs that it sings. This is true of life in general, but it is particularly true of worship. This is why Calvin insisted that the church in Geneva return to the Psalter as its sole manual of praise. And so it was that the piety of the Reformed churches was from the beginning molded by the Psalter" (Michael Bushell, *Songs of Zion*, p. 223) (Michael Bushell, *Songs of Zion*, 223) (as cited in the *Minority Report*, page 297).

I don't think that I would look to Abraham Kuyper (Abraham Kuyper!) to support my position, but if the consistory wishes to do that, why did they not include this quotation from Dr. Kuyper?

Here we come to the issue of psalms versus hymns. Our fathers ruled that, with a few exceptions, only the singing of psalms was permitted in the assembly of believers. When hymns were introduced in 1807 (by unlawful ecclesiastical might) many people objected to them and refused to sing them when announced from the pulpit. At the time of the restoration of the church in the Secession and

Doleantie [Sorrowing], the position was reaffirmed that only psalms were to be sung (Kuyper, *Our Worship*, trans. Harry Boonstra (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009, page 37) (emphasis mine).

Instead of straining "to find evidence for hymn singing" in men like Abraham Kuyper, I wonder why the consistory did not look to a reformer like Henrik DeCock, since we have seen so many similarities between our reformation and the church reformation of 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."

Should the consistory like to limit itself to the majority report, I would like to emphasize this sentence, "First, Christ, the Apostles, the early Christian Church for three centuries did restrict themselves to the Psalms of David." Certainly, the consistory would not extend their charge of legalism to Christ, the Apostles and the early Christian Church for three centuries, so the consistory ought not to extend that charge today.

All of that leads the consistory to say that "the above history of the Reformed Churches shows that the church with the guiding of the Spirit led her to sing the scriptures." What the consistory is saying with this sentence can be re-written this way: "The above history of the Reformed Churches shows that the church with the guiding of the Spirit led her to sing less of the 150 Psalms of the David and to sing more man-made hymns." It is ludicrous—and that is to put a charitable spin on the matter—to think that the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ would lead the church, over time, to sing less and less of the 150 Psalms of David. And no, supplying a committee report from the PRC which is contradictory throughout, does not establish that over time the guiding of the Spirit led to less Psalm singing and more hymn singing. I will grant that because of the hardness of men's hearts the church replaced Psalms with hymns, but that must not be charged to the "guiding of the Spirit."

Why does the consistory not interact with our own history in the PRC where we were taught exclusive psalmody? Does that not belong to the history of the Reformed church? How is it possible that the members of the consistory—Protestant Reformed men for all of their lives—could live in a sister church relationship with a church—Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland—which teaches exclusive psalmody? Why were the elders comfortable for all of their lives with a sister church that was legalistic but now all of a sudden find the position of exclusive psalmody to be legalism?

The fact that we were taught exclusive psalmody for all of our lives can be easily demonstrated. I will limit myself to few quotations, but the examples can be multiplied many times over.

These quotations are found in a sermon at the PRCA website titled *Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs* by Reverend Ronald Hanko:

Exclusive Psalmody has always been the practice of the church and though lost in many churches today, must remain our practice as something required by God Himself...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...For that reason alone, the church must sing only Psalms in the worship of God, as required by Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3.

Or this from Reverend Kortering:

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 fol-

lows 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 commanded 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 (*Psalm Singing: A Reformed Heritage*, Rev. Kortering, found at the PRCA website).

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:

The argument, briefly stated, is as follows:

In II Samuel 23:1-2 David claims that he is God's instrument in preparing music for the church:

Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel said, the Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue.

One or two points are to be noticed here. David claims for himself divine inspiration to such an extent that God's Word was in his tongue by the Spirit; and that the words he consequently spoke, he spoke as the psalmist of Israel. That is, he spoke for purposes of giving the church her songs.

That this was recognized in Israel, and that the Psalms were sung by God's command, is evident from the great reformation which took place during the time of Hezekiah, king of Judah. As a part of that reformation, Hezekiah restored to the church the pure worship of God. II Chron. 29:25 reads:

And he (Hezekiah) set Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets.

Again, one ought to notice in this passage that David, along with Gad and Nathan, and so by divine revelation, determined every detail of the worship of God that was to take place in the temple. When Hezekiah brought reformation to the church, he restored the divinely ordained pattern of worship given to the church through David, Gad, and Nathan. It was by divine ordinance that this worship was ordered.

Although verse 25 does not mention the singing, verses 27 and 28 do:

And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the

song of the Lord began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

But the text is even more specific. We are told in verse 30:

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 worshiped.

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)

The PRCA had the principle correct, but like with so many other things, they refused to be governed by it. The fact that the PRCA was not consistent is their problem, and we should not allow it to become ours.

The last support that the consistory provides to support its position from the history of the Reformed church is the fact that the group that recently left us and now gathers at the Pinnacle Center removed the opening doxology because it was a hymn. The consistory would have us believe they did this out of legalism. There are many churches that do not include hymns in their worship, are they all legalists? Perhaps, the group did this because regarding what this doxology actually is, they were being honest, and honesty demands that you identify that doxology for what it is, a hymn. Just as Professor Cory Griess was honest when he wrote the following about the opening doxology:

The opening doxology is a Trinitarian hymn. 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow' is scriptural, no doubt, and is a song sung in many churches, historically, but it is not a Psalm. It is the last part

of a hymn that was written by an Anglican bishop named Thomas Ken in 1674” (Cory Griess, *Praising God in the Congregation* (6b), PRCA website).

The doxology is a hymn written by Thomas Ken and there is no warrant whatsoever in the Church Order, in the creeds, or in the word of God for its inclusion in the worship service.

So rather than charging that with being a legalistic act, the consistory ought to show more charity and identify it for what it most likely was—honesty.

Even apart from that however, the argument the consistory raises here is incredibly weak. Using this argument, someone could say this about the Reformed Protestant Churches: “See? One of the first things they did was to get rid of special services. I always knew they hated to worship God!”

These quotations expose as entirely false ground 7 which reads, “The history of the Reformed churches demonstrates that the teaching of exclusive psalmody as law in worship has been rejected.”

In fact, the opposite is true, that when the Lord has reformed his church, he has done so in such a manner as to restore psalm singing to her. The consistory would do well to listen to Professor Hanko regarding reformation and psalm singing:

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?*)

Of a truth, brothers, we could share quotations from fathers proving this position correct or that position correct, and we could weary ourselves in the process. Let us hear the word of God in Acts 17:30 and John Calvin’s explanation of that text and apply the principle of what is said there to our situation today.

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:”

Furthermore, this admonition is no less profitable for us than for the men of that time. The enemies of the gospel, when it beginneth to spring again, count it a great absurdity that God did suffer men to go astray so long under the apostacy of the Pope, as if (though there appear no reason) it were not as lawful for him now to wink at men’s ignorance as in times past. *And we must principally note to what end he saith this; to wit, that the ignorance of former times may not hinder us from obeying God without delay when he speaketh. Most men think that they have a fair colour for their error, so they have their fathers to keep them company, or so they get some patronage or defence by long custom; yea, they would willingly creep out here, that they may not obey the word of God. But Paul saith, that we must not fet [seek] an excuse from our fathers’ ignorance when God speaketh unto us; because, though they be not guiltless before God, yet our sluggishness is more intolerable if we be blind at noonday, and lie as deaf, or as if we were asleep, when the trumpet of the gospel doth sound (emphasis mine).*

Reverend Lanning patiently, carefully, and systematically laid out the gospel truth of worship and the elements of our worship. The trumpet of the gospel sounded at First Reformed Protestant Church.

In summary then, I would ask that the consistory overturn its decision to suspend Reverend Lanning and reverse its decision that what Reverend Lanning taught was legalism. What Reverend Lanning taught was glorious gospel truth and the consistory should not cast it out as an evil thing. The charge of legalism is a “new

thing” for the church, and it calls evil what God reveals in his word, namely, that in corporate worship the congregation sing the divinely inspired song book that God, through the Holy Spirit, has given to his church.

In Christ’s service,

–Dewey Engelsma

PROTEST

Kylar Hassevoort – Protest

April 15, 2023

Dear Consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church,

I submit to you my protest against the decisions of the consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church with the concurrence of Second Reformed Protestant Church, to suspend Rev. Andrew Lanning from the office of minister of the word and sacraments. I will use as my basis Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 35, Question and Answer 96, Belgic Confession Article 7, and many passages from Scripture. I will also reference Prof. Hanko’s article written in the Standard Bearer in 1998 entitled, “The Songs of Zion: What Shall the Church Sing?”

First of all, I protest Ground#1 of Recommendation#2 of your suspension letter. That ground reads; “The Reformed Creeds do not demand exclusive psalmody.” Doesn’t Lord’s Day 35, Q&A 96’s answer point us to the Word of God. “That we worship God in no other way than He has commanded in His Word.” (emphasis mine KH) Doesn’t that tell us to go to the Word of God to see how God has commanded us to worship Him? And what about Belgic Confession, Article 7. The title of this article is, “The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures, to be the only rule of faith.” And now read the first two sentences of this article. “We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe, unto salvation, is sufficiently taught therein. For, since

the whole manner of worship, which God requires of us, is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures.” (Belgic Confession, Article 7) (emphasis mine KH) Doesn’t this article tell us to look to the Holy Scriptures to see what the whole manner of worship which God requires of us? When I read both of these creeds, I believe they point us to God’s Word. So, your ground does not prove to me that the Creeds do not demand exclusive psalmody. The Creeds point us to the Word of God. Aren’t we then supposed to go to God’s Word at that point?

Second of all, I protest Ground#2 of Recommendation#2 of your suspension letter. That ground reads; “This teaching goes beyond what the scriptures reveal.” I believe this ground is stated with no proof. I will try to show next what I believe the scriptures reveal and prove it from (2) Old Testament passages.

Turn first to II Chronicles 29 and read the whole chapter. In this chapter Hezekiah began to reign as the next king of Judah. I believe that in this chapter we see the regulative principle of worship being carried out. God made Hezekiah king and God brought Hezekiah into His holy temple to cleanse the temple. II Chronicles 29: 3–5: “3. He in the first year of his reign, in the first month, opened the doors of the house of the Lord, and repaired them. 4. And he brought

in the priests and Levites, and gathered them together into the east street, 5. And said unto them, Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place.” The temple was not being used as God had commanded in His Word. It says, in verses 6&7, how the temple was being used; “6. For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord our God and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs. 7. Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burnt incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place unto God of Israel.” They were not obeying the second commandment which governs how we are to worship God. And now God’s wrath was upon Judah and Jerusalem says verse 8 and God’s wrath was not only upon the fathers but also the children says verse 9. Exodus 20: 5: “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;” Judah was not following the regulative principle of worship and therefore were not obeying the second commandment of God’s law, and God was visiting the father’s iniquity upon the children as the second commandment says God would do.

Now I want to draw your attention to verses 12–36. The Levites began the work of sanctifying the temple, and when the temple was sanctified, they worshiped God as

He has commanded in His Word by offering the sacrifices God required Israel to offer in their worship of Him. Now I want to draw your attention to verse 30, “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.” What did Levites sing? The Psalms! They worshiped God and sang glad praises to God with the Psalms. He commanded the Levites to sing the Psalms! Are we now sup-

posed to charge Hezekiah with legalism for commanding Israel to sing the Psalms in worship? If we were to charge Hezekiah with legalism, we would then have to charge the Holy Spirit and therefore God with legalism. Hezekiah didn’t command the Levites to do this. God did, through the Holy Spirit in Hezekiah.

Another chapter I draw your attention to is I Chronicles 16: 1–9. In this chapter David and God’s Old Testament church brought the ark of God into the tent that David had set up for it. After the ark was placed in the tent the church worshiped God. They offered up burnt offerings (v. 1–3), and the Levites ministered before the ark of the Lord and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel (v. 4–6). Next, we look at verses 7–9. 7. “Then on that day David delivered first this psalm to thank the Lord into the hand of Asaph and the brethren. 8. Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. 9. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works.” Once again, we see that the church was singing the Psalms in worship. The first thing David did, verse 7 says, was deliver this psalm to thank the Lord.

Both of these chapters prove to me what the Old Testament church sang the Psalms in their worship. And I believe that we are the New Testament church of Jesus Christ. We are the faithful true continuation of the Old Testament church of Jesus Christ. Romans 11: 1–10 speaks to us as the remnant of Israel and equates us to the church in the Old Testament. Galatians 6: 16 calls us the “Israel of God.” Prof. Hanks speaks to this truth of the New Testament church being one with the Old Testament church in his Standard Bearer article. Below are two quotes from that Standard Bearer article:

– “The strong line of biblical proof which we need can be found in the Old Testament Scriptures. Before the argument from the Old Testament is laid down, I must once more make an assumption clear on which the scriptural argument is based. The assumption is that the church of the old dispensation and the church of the new dispensation are one church of Christ; and that,

therefore, **an injunction for worship given in the old dispensation is binding on the church of the new dispensation as well.**” (emphasis mine KH)

- “This is especially true of the command to sing 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 point I am trying to stress here is that the singing of the Old Testament church was the singing of the Psalms. They were commanded to sing the Psalms and they sang the Psalms with gladness in praise to God. If we are one with the Old Testament church, wouldn't we want to sing the same thing they sang in our corporate worship? Why would we not want to sing the Psalms exclusively in our worship and not allow for any hymns of men to enter our worship? Israel sang the Psalms and didn't need anything else, and I believe we should do the same. As I said, I believe we are one body with the Old Testament church. I Corinthians 12:12-14; “12. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also, Christ. 13. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. 14. For the body is not one member, but many.” If we are one body, and have the same Spirit in us, how can we worship God differently than they did? The whole body is fitly joined together and works together to sustain life. The body that does not work together cannot sustain life. Once again, I say that if we believe that we are one body with the Old Testament church how can we worship God in our singing differently than they did? Lastly, we are called in Jeremiah 6:16 to return to the “old paths”. Prof Hanko writes about this in his Standard Bearer article. I quote, “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” in doctrine, church polity, and liturgy, and thus singing by Jehovah's congregation. Psalm-singing is a part of these “old paths.”” Two years ago, God brought us out of our apostate mother, the PRC. This was as great reformation for the church. The Gospel has been restored unto us, and we have returned to the “old paths” of doctrine. I believe that we should return to the “old paths” in singing as Prof. Hanko just explained.

Third of all, I protest Ground#4 of Recommendation#2 of your suspension letter. That ground reads; “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 2nd commandment. To teach that if the congregation sings any versification of 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.” The question that I have from reading this ground is, what is the definition of legalism? Is Rev. Lanning really guilty of teaching legalism? In my research and study, I see that when someone is guilty of legalism, they taught that, man has to follow the law of God UNTO his righteousness. In other words, in order to have fellowship with God, or in order to merit with God we must follow God's law. Is this what Rev. Lanning taught in his sermon? I don't see this anywhere in Rev. Lanning's sermon. When Rev. Lanning preached the sermon entitled, “The Regulative Principle of Worship,” on March 12, 2023, I believe he brought unto us the Gospel. I did not hear the law thundering down to us, “do this in order to live.” Rather, I heard the Gospel say, “live through Christ and do this out of thankfulness.” I didn't hear the regulative principle condemn me. Rather, I heard the following in Rev. Lanning's sermon,

“The matter of Christ and the regulative

principle goes way deeper, way, way deeper in the matter of what Jesus sings in the church. It goes this deep, that Jesus has fulfilled the regulative principle for First Reformed Protestant Church. He's fulfilled it already. The regulative principle is the second commandment, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images." Jesus fulfilled the second commandment. First RPC is not under the regulative principle of worship for her worship. You're not under it. If you are under that regulative principle of worship in your worship, which would mean that you had to fulfill that regulative principle not only with regard to what happens, but the perfection of those things happening. The regulative principle doesn't just say take a Psalm, it says take a Psalm and shout from the bottom of your heart. It doesn't just say have a sermon, but it says believe that sermon, listen to that sermon."

"The people of God, if they were under the regulative principle for their salvation, for their acceptance with God, would never get to him. He'd never get in the house to his dinner. But Christ fulfilled it because when he came to earth, he worshiped God exactly as God required. And he still does. He always has and always will worship God absolutely perfectly. That's your freedom. That's the liberty of the gospel for the church. And now the church hearing that loves the regulative principle. You couldn't love it if you were under it. You'd have to hate it. It would be nothing but a scourge and a whip on you all your days, but the church of Jesus Christ hearing the gospel of Christ who has fulfilled the regulative principle, loves the regulative principle." (Sermon Audio Sermon Transcription Pages 13 & 14) Doesn't that make you thankful? Doesn't that make you want to worship God in no other way than he has commanded in His Word? Not to obtain fellowship with God (LAW), but because we have been brought into fellowship with God nothing of ourselves (GOSPEL).

Rev. Lanning led us through and to Christ in his sermon, and showed us that we CAN'T worship God as He has commanded in His Word even if we tried, for man is nothing of himself. I see once again from this sermon, as Rev. Lan-

ning does in every sermon, that man is made nothing and Christ is everything. I see from this sermon how Christ's perfect worship of God is imputed unto me and before God my worship is perfect in God's sight through Jesus Christ. Does that sound like conditional theology? Did I have to do something to have fellowship with God? Or was I brought into covenant fellowship through Christ's perfect work on the cross and therefore live a life of thankfulness by worshiping God as he has commanded? It seems to me that Rev. Lanning's sermon speaks opposite to the ground you have listed here.

The second point I would like to make against Ground#4 of Recommendation#2 of your suspension letter is that I believe you took Rev. Lanning out of context in this ground. In Rev. Langerak's sermon, "The Indwelling Word," he speaks of explaining Colossians 3:16 from the point of view that the "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" all point to three different sections in the book of the Psalms. Prof. Hanko takes this position in his Standard Bearer article as well. Rev. Langerak says in his sermon that he could go along with this interpretation and would not have a problem with this. He also says that the Psalms encapsulate the entire Word of God. The doctrines of the whole scriptures can be found in the Psalms. Now you say, in this ground that, "in Rev. Lanning's sermon he said that to sing any other versification of scripture is a sin against the second commandment." I do not find this in Rev. Lanning's sermon. I feel that quote is taking Rev. Lanning out of context. He said, in his sermon, that the regulative principle requires exclusive psalmody, and therefore rejects the HYMN. Every versification of scripture is in the Psalms so, I feel that it is a stretch to say that Rev. Lanning says "that to sing any other versification of scripture is a sin" when all of scripture can be found and versified in the Psalms.

I pray that you will thoughtfully consider my protest and I pray that peace and unity may come once again to the RPC.

In Christ,
Kylar Hassevoort

BOOK REVIEW

The undersigned wrote this book review sometime in 2021, intending to publish it in *Sword and Shield*. For this, that, and the next reason, the review never made it into the magazine. It has been edited slightly for publication in *Reformed Pavilion* in 2023, but the review may still show its age. Please pardon the reference or two that may be out of date by now.

Christ and His Church Through the Ages: The Ancient Church (AD 30–590) (second edition), vol. 1. Herman Hanko. Edited and revised by Dan Van Uffelen. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2021. 272 pages, hardcover, \$36.95. [Reviewed by Rev. Andrew Lanning.]

The Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) has just published the second edition of Professor Herman Hanko's *Christ and His Church Through the Ages: Volume 1: The Ancient Church (AD 30–590)*. The first edition of this volume was a limited and unedited edition "to satisfy the immediate needs of several Christian schools and to give teachers time to provide quality feedback on adjustments they would find helpful in the finished product" (xiv). The second edition has undergone massive and extensive rounds of editing, including the addition of introductions, sidebars, charts, and maps. I have not seen the first edition, but I imagine that it is hardly recognizable in comparison with the second edition, which undoubtedly reflects the hundreds of hours that must have gone into its improvement. Apparently the RFPA considers this second edition to be the "finished product" of this volume, and a masterful finished product it is.

I consider *The Ancient Church* to be the definitive history book on this period of church history for the Reformed school student. Three more volumes are in production. If they are anywhere near the quality of this first volume, then *Christ and His Church Through the Ages* will be the definitive church history series for the Reformed student.

The Ancient Church reads like an adventure, which the history of the church is.

The history of the Church is the demonstration of the marvelous work of grace.

It is the exciting adventure of the marvelous work of grace. It is the exciting adventure of the realization of the work of Christ in the salvation of the elect. Amid the cries of martyrs who loved not their lives unto death, in the crash of the battles for the defense of the faith, through the triumphs and tragedies of a Church living in every age, one comes face to face with the truth: upon the rock which is Christ God builds His church and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. (9)

Upon picking up such an "exciting adventure of the marvelous work of grace," who could put it down?

The Ancient Church also gleams with scholarship that stands in the service of the believer. Nowhere in the book will one find the kind of stuffy scholarship that aims only at burnishing the reputation of the author. Rather, the copious charts, maps, pictures, and revisions for accuracy enhance the reader's experience and fortify his understanding. The volume is bolstered by many references to Professor Hanko's previous articles and books, especially *Portraits of Faithful Saints* and *Contending for the Faith*. The quotation of material from those previous volumes is woven seamlessly and appropriately into *The Ancient Church*, so that the inclusion of those quotations is a great help to the reader and is never a distraction, as extraneous material can sometimes be.

The Ancient Church appears perfectly suited to be a church history textbook for the high school level. The information is organized into chapters and subheadings that could be readily adapted into a lecture outline for a classroom. The use of so much visual information in maps, charts, timelines, and pictures will greatly aid the student in assimilating the information. The first edition of the book has already seen extensive use in the classroom, and the second edition has profited from the feedback of teachers. At least one round of editing specifically aimed at making the vocabulary appropriate for a student's level of comprehension. The table of contents is detailed enough to guide the reader to his desired topic. The index is comprehensive, so that any historical figure or fact can be at the reader's fingertips in a few moments. I imagine that school boards will highly recommend that teachers use *The Ancient Church* in their classrooms, only to find that the teachers already own it and have already adopted it as their textbook.

The same qualities that make *The Ancient Church* suited to be a school textbook make it suited to a very broad audience. The father and mother who want something edifying for their teenagers to read on a Sunday afternoon can put this book into their hands. The father and mother could profitably dip into the book themselves on Sunday mornings as they wait to go to church. The man who is weary from a long day of work and who finds it hard to stay awake with a book in the evening will find the material engaging and the subsections manageable. The reader who devours books will find this one to be a feast that he consumes and then returns to.

The Ancient Church is obviously the product of many hands. The meat of the book is Professor Hanko's telling of church history, and it is a treat to have another book authored by him. But the editor, Mr. Dan Van Uffelen, runs a close second for contribution of material to the book. Their years of labor on the project have produced a volume that will be profitable and enjoyable to Reformed believers for years to come.

But all of this so far is somewhat external to the content of the book. What about the actual telling of the history in *The Ancient Church*?

The power and appeal of the volume is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who is the foundation of his church, is also the clear thread that runs all the way through the entire volume of *The Ancient Church*. Even the preface establishes that "the viewpoint [of church history] must be that of God's work through Jesus Christ. The history must make clear that the Son of God from his exalted position in heaven gathers, defends, and preserves the church" (xx). And then this from the introduction:

Christ is the center of all history. He is the firstborn of every creature; he is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending. He is the first in God's counsel—not in order of time, but in principle. And he is the first and the last in history—the revelation of the counsel of God in time. History in the old dispensation pointed ahead to Christ; the new dispensation is the dispensation of the coming of Christ. (2)

The opening chapter introduces us to the theme of the volume: "Christ and His Church: The Center of All History" (2). The first unit, "The Apostolic Period," traces the sacred history of Jesus and his apostles. The second unit, "The Post-Apostolic Period," informs the reader, "The Lord is always present with his church. After he ascended to heaven in his glorified body and called his last apostle home, he did not leave his church to make her own way in the world. He had promised his church, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (Matt. 28:20)" (55). The third and final unit, "The Nicene and Post-Nicene Period," traces, among other things, the great Trinitarian and Christological controversies. Throughout the volume, the author and editor trace the thread of Jesus Christ in his work of building his church during this ancient period. Indeed, even the title of the series points to our Lord: *Christ and His Church Through the Ages*.

More than all the excellent layout and production of the volume, the appeal of *The Ancient Church* for the believer is that the history continually points him to the work of his Lord. The believer not only kneels with Ignatius in the Coliseum before he was devoured by lions or smells the smoking wood with Polycarp before he was burned at the stake (66), but he learns that “the saints must be persecuted just as Christ was persecuted because they belong to him. When the wicked persecute Christ’s people, they persecute Christ himself even though he is in heaven, for Christ and his people are one” (63).

The believer not only cheers at Augustine’s doctrine of sin and grace: “Humans are so completely incapable of doing any good that only divine grace could save us” (207). The believer not only abhors Pelagius’ and Celestius’ doctrine of free will: “They taught that our salvation is not necessarily in Christ, but in our own free will and in our own innate ability to break bad habits and follow good examples. Grace is not necessary for salvation, but one can be and often is saved merely by keeping the law” (207). But the believer also learns in *The Ancient Church* that the Pelagian controversy is really the battle of the ages.

From the time of Augustine to the present, the church’s hottest battles have been fought over the doctrines of man’s depravity and of salvation by sovereign and irresistible grace. The issue of sovereign grace was the great issue in the battle of Pelagius versus Augustine (fifth century), Rome versus Gottschalk (ninth century), the pope versus Luther and Calvin (sixteenth century), the Arminians versus the Synod of Dordrecht (seventeenth century), and the Christian Reformed Church with its doctrine of common grace versus the Protestant Reformed Churches (twentieth century). The battle for sovereign grace that began against the Pelagians is still going on today. (199–200)

Yes, indeed.

The great strength of *The Ancient Church* is the constant relating of the history of the church to Jesus Christ, whose church it is. This is what gives the volume its lasting value for the believer and his children’s children.

I have only one quibble with *The Ancient Church*, and I admit that it is only a small quibble due to a personal preference. In the first unit, “The Apostolic Period,” there are several pieces of artwork included that depict biblical events, including Moses coming down from Mount Sinai and Paul writing an epistle. Happily, there are no depictions of Jesus or God, as far as I could discern. While artwork depicting biblical figures is lawful, since Moses and Paul were mere men, the artwork that was selected for *The Ancient Church* fixed in my mind the image of a prancing Moses (22) and a balding apostle Paul (33). I thought that those two selections distracted from the history rather than enhancing it. I have no problem with the rest of the artwork in the book, which deals with the history after the biblical record and which artwork I found to be interesting and to enhance the history.

Conclusion: highly recommended. May the companion volumes be on our doorsteps soon.

—AL

Article III. God's Kingdom—All Comprehensive

There are many different avenues of approach in regard to the discussion of our Reformed doctrine.

Mark, not many fundamental viewpoints or principles that must be maintained throughout our discussion. No, 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.

But although this is true, it is nevertheless possible to look at our Reformed doctrine and approach its discussion from different angles.

The method with which you are undoubtedly most familiar is that of the Heidelberg Catechism. It follows the avenue of the Christian's consciousness, of his experience. It does not immediately turn to the Word, but to the Christian for information. Placing himself before the conscious child of God, the Christian of the Heidelberg puts the question to him time and again: "What do you think of the matter?" "What is thy only comfort in life and in death?" "How dost thou know thy misery?" And the conscious child of God supplies the answer. He gives account of himself and to himself of the wonders of salvation. These wonders have been revealed in the Word of God. And these wonders, as they have been revealed in the Word of God, are reflected in the consciousness of the Chris-

tian under the influence of the Holy Spirit. And, therefore, you do not obtain a sickly, morbid testimony, not a testimony that is independent from the Word. No, that would be a very dangerous method to pursue. But in the Catechism we meet with the testimony of the truth of God's Word as it was reflected in the conscious experience of the Christian. By following this method you naturally obtain what may be called the subjective point of view throughout. The Christian speaks of his sin and misery first. Naturally. Not because they are actually first, for they are not. Sin is not first, neither logically nor historically. But sin is in the conscious experience of the child of God, and for that reason the first part of the Heidelberg. And it is remarkable, indeed, how the little book, proceeding from the knowledge of sin, develops the whole truth of our doctrine most beautifully and in a practical way. Truly, the Catechism is a veritable little jewel, a treasure of our Church. Never let any one deprive you of its instruction by the false argument, false, because it does not apply to the case under consideration, that we must preach the Word of God freely, without being hampered or limited by a man-made book.

But let me return to my subject. What I intended to say, is that one can follow different methods in considering the truths of our Reformed faith. Besides that of the Heidelberg, there are many other avenues of approach. Consider, for instance, our Confession. I mean the Thirty-Seven Articles as you find them in the back part of your Psalter. It proceeds in a matter entirely different from the method of the Catechism. It does not start with sin and misery, in

order then to proceed to the truth of salvation and deliverance and close with a chapter on gratitude. But it follows what has been styled the dogmatical order. It speaks of God first, then discusses man, Christ, salvation, the Church, the consummation of all things. That is beautiful, too. It is less practical but the more comprehensive method. It is less fit for catechism and the pulpit, but it offers fine material for discussion to our Young Men's Societies, for instance. If I may wander from my subject just for a moment again, I would urge that our Societies take up the study of that Confession. We ought to become more acquainted with the Standards of our Church anyway. All of us. We are not Roman Catholics. We do not believe in a certain implicit faith, so that we put our trust in the Church and confess her standards without knowing what they contain. That's below the dignity of any Reformed Christian. We must know the standards of our Church. We must know what they stand for, so that we may consciously confess the truths of God's Word as they are expressed in the standards of the Church. And, therefore, once more let us, let especially our young men, make study of them in the light of Scripture. It will make them strong. And of strong young men we have need.

But I am off the target again. I mean to say, that in the future, I will not follow the subjective methods of the Heidelberg Catechism, nor the dogmatic method of the Confession. But 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.

Why I want to follow this method, you ask?

For more than one reason.

First of all for diplomatic reasons. I want to be as fresh as possible in my discussion of our doctrine. You know, I wrote in my first article, that I would appreciate it very highly if you would read my articles, and I was in earnest then. So in earnest, that I will do everything in my power to make you read. I will try to please you in the good sense of the word. And there-

fore, I first of all thought of the possibility of treating our doctrine in a new way. The same old truths cast in a new form, and viewed from a different angle, in a new light will, I hope, create new interest in old things. And that is one of the reasons why I thought of viewing all things in the light of the Kingdom-idea.

Secondly, the idea of the Kingdom of God connects itself most readily with our fundamental viewpoint, with the basic principle of our Reformed faith, namely, that God is all and that all things exist and happen for His Name's sake. You cannot mention the Kingdom of God without at the same time thinking of the fact, that God is Sovereign. I know very well, that there are many misconceptions of that Kingdom, and that because of these many people think of the Kingdom without ever having their attention called to the absolute sovereignty of our God. I know it, that when you mention the Kingdom of God many a Christian thinks of nothing but his own glory and bliss which he shall inherit when that Kingdom shall be completely realized. But that is abnormal. The chief idea of God's Kingdom is that God is Sovereign, and that in the most absolute sense of the word. It is the Kingdom in which God is King. It is the Kingdom in which God is all. It is not a kingdom in which the king exists for the sake of the kingdom, but just in reverse, a kingdom that exists for the king's sake. It is a Kingdom that is planned by Him; created by Him, that is redeemed by Him, that is under His control and guidance throughout the ages, and that will be completed and manifested in all its glory through His power alone. A Kingdom in which the great King creates and forms His own subjects. And, therefore, it will be readily seen, that this idea of the Kingdom will connect itself most readily with the fundamental viewpoint of our Reformed faith, namely, that God is all, and that all things exist for Him. Hence I chose it for my chief topic.

In the third place, it may be remarked, that the idea of the Kingdom is absolutely all-comprehensive. What I mean is this, that in making the Kingdom of God the great topic of our entire discussion, we will touch upon all the

points of our doctrine. The realization of God's plan is at the same time the realization of His Kingdom. It is through the realization of the glorious Kingdom that God glorifies His own name. And, therefore, the full treatment of the Kingdom of God will compel us to treat all the different points of the truth, for they are all related to that one, great and glorious, all-comprehensive idea of the Kingdom of God. We will have to speak of God as the absolute King in that Kingdom, for whose glory the Kingdom exists. We will have to speak of man, the viceroy, the king under God, of his creation and fall and redemption. We will have to speak of the Church and its purpose in the world with regard to the Kingdom of God. We will have a most beautiful opportunity to develop the idea of God's covenant with man, both of the covenant of works and that of grace, especially over against the arch enemy of the Kingdom of God, the devil, the old serpent. We will be compelled to speak of Christ, the Servant of God, who took the place of the fallen king, and redeems the Kingdom. We must from this point of view also speak of the final manifestation of that Kingdom and its coming in connection with the history of the world! In a word, from this angle we will reach all different points of our doctrine and that with the possibility of seeing them in a new light, and discussing them with a new interest. Besides, by following this method, by viewing the truth in the light of the Kingdom-idea, we will be protected against a wrong narrow-mindedness. Purposely I say: a **wrong** narrow-mindedness. The term "narrow-minded" is often used in an altogether erroneous sense of the word, by the enemies of the truth in its definite message. The truth is naturally narrow, in the sense that it has nothing to do with the lie. Let us never forget it. And let us never be ashamed to be truly narrow-minded. But there is also a false, a wrong narrow-mindedness, caused by the fact that we look at all things from the point of view of our own salvation, from the soteriological instead of the cosmological point of view. And, that, we may never do. Never concentrate your thought ex-

clusively on the fact of your own salvation, perhaps, still more narrowly, on the fact of the salvation of your soul. With God there is full redemption. God has a whole world to save! All creation belongs to Him. All creation belongs to His Kingdom! And that entire creation He will save and reveal in glory with Christ as King and God all in all! And, therefore, I decided all the more readily to treat our doctrine from the point of view of the Kingdom.

In the fourth place, by following this method, I will have an opportunity to combat existing false conceptions of the Kingdom of God. I do not care to hide this purpose. In the first place, I am not careful to announce from the outset, that in no way can I agree with the pre-millennial view of the Kingdom. And since it has intruded into our own circles, and many do not understand its principles, I will exert myself to oppose it. Its acceptance would imply the deathblow to our Reformed faith. It is principally anti-Reformed. I will fight it openly. But in the second place, I am sometimes afraid that as a Calvinistic people we err just as much in the opposite direction. We often hear and read statements of our "Calvinists" which would leave the impression that we can establish the Kingdom of God here upon earth by Calvinistic propaganda! To my mind this is just as fundamental an error. It blinds us to the fact, that also the principles of sin must and will develop to its fullest manifestation in the Man of Sin. It aims, indeed, at opposition against the kingdom of darkness here upon earth, but at the same time it leads gradually to the erosion of the line of demarcation between the Kingdom of God and the world. In the false expectation that the Kingdom of God will reach its consummation along the line of gradual development we will gradually be captivated by the idea that we must bring the Kingdom, bring it by all sorts of means and methods, and before we know it we are busy working for the imitation-Kingdom of the devil and Antichrist. By discussing our doctrine from the angle of God's Kingdom we will probably have an opportunity to combat both these extremes.

And finally, this method 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!

—Holland, Mich.



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— P A V I L I O N —