



# REFORMED

## — P A V I L I O N —

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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

*And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.*

—Exodus 2:1–2

**T**he king's wicked decree hangs over this text like a cold shadow. "Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river!" (Ex. 1:22). Under the shadow of that decree, a son was born to a family of Levi, and they hid him three months. Let us make our way to the humble abode of this little Hebrew slave family, for there we shall behold the unfathomable ways of God.

When we enter these Levites' home, they are already a family of four. There is the husband and father. His name is Amram. He is the son of Kohath and therefore the grandson of Levi (Ex. 6:18). And over there is the wife and mother. Her name is Jochebed. She is the daughter of Levi and therefore the aunt of Amram (Ex. 6:20; Num. 26:59). Such marriages between nephew and aunt were still permitted among the children of Israel. Only with the giving of the law would those unions be forbidden. At the beginning of our text, we are taken back in time a little way to their wedding. "And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi." After their marriage God gave them two children: a daughter, Miriam, and a son, Aaron (Num. 26:59). After Aaron was born the king made his wicked decree. Any further sons born to Amram and Jochebed must be drowned in the Nile. With that decree hanging over them, "the woman conceived, and bare a son."

Thus far we can understand. We can compare the passages and find the names and arrange the facts and have a nice little picture of this family in Levi. But with our nice little picture laid out, we come to a thing so staggering that no man can explain it. It is this, describing Jochebed's first sight of baby Moses after she bore him: "She saw him that he was a goodly child." The sight of

Moses' goodliness was so important that scripture often repeats it. "In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair" (Acts 7:20). "They saw he was a proper child" (Heb. 11:23).

There must be an explanation! Men weary themselves to find it. Almost invariably the explanation has to do with Moses' physical constitution. Something about his appearance must have surpassed the normal appearance of a baby. Everything about his appearance must have been excellent: his form, his health, his strength, his vigor, his beauty, his intelligence, his bright eyes—all was above average; all was excellent. And he must have maintained something of this excellent constitution all through his life, for when he died 120 years later, "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated" (Deut. 34:7). Thus man tries to account for the goodly appearance of baby Moses.

Ah, but man knows nothing. We must hear God explain it, which he does by the words he uses. The words for Moses' goodliness in scripture are not words for his physical appearance. Rather, they are simply the word *good*. In Exodus 2:1: "She saw him that he was good." In Acts 7:20: "And was good to God." In Hebrews 11:23: "They saw a good child." The word for what Amram and Jochebed saw is the same word for what God saw in the beginning. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). In the word *good* we find the explanation of what Moses was. To be good means to be fit for one's purpose. Everything that God had made was good not only in the sense that it was sinless and free from death, but everything was good in the sense that God had perfectly fit everything for his own purpose

with it all. Everything was perfectly fit to be the setting and stage upon which Jesus Christ would come for the glory of God and the salvation of his church.

So also with Moses. That Moses was good means that Moses was perfectly fit for God's purpose of leading his church out of Egypt. This comes out especially in Acts 7:20, where "exceeding fair" is literally "good to God," that is, good in God's sight. God saw Moses, and, behold, he was very good. God had perfectly fit Moses to deliver his people from their bondage, to take them through the Red Sea, and to lead them through the wilderness to Canaan.

Amram and Jochebed saw that Moses was good. They did not look with the eye of flesh upon Moses' form, but they looked with the eye of

faith upon God's purpose. By faith they saw that Moses was good, and by faith they hid him three months. "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment" (Heb. 11:23).

Oh, yes, these things took place under the shadow of Pharaoh's decree. But overshadowing all was the decree of Jehovah God. His purpose was at work. And that purpose was no cold shadow to God's people but was their warmth and protection. In the little slave hut of the Levite family, behold the unfathomable purpose of God come to pass according to his unbreakable promise.

—AL

## FROM THE EDITOR

A hearty welcome to one and all. Whether you have found your way to the magazine for the first time or whether you browse multiple times a week, we are glad you are here.

In this issue Mrs. Connie Meyer contributes a timely article regarding the charge of legalism that is flying thick as a swarm in the Reformed Protestant Churches today. Dewey Engelsma continues his examination of "How Did This Happen?" Don't peek ahead, but it behooves every reader of *Reformed Pavilion* to take his last line to heart. Other regular rubrics also make

brief appearances in this issue, including the editorial, *FAQ*, and another *Banner* article from Herman Hoeksema.

We are trying something new with the layout of *FAQ*. Rather than trying to cram the answers into skinny columns, as we have been doing, we are setting the answers into normal columns, with the questions highlighted in color. Hopefully this makes the reading a little more comfortable.

With that, brush off a deck chair and settle in.

—AL



## The Essence of Herman Hoeksema's Theology (2)

**T**he essence of Herman Hoeksema's theology is the simple but profound truth that God is God. Hoeksema had many ways of expressing this fundamental truth: the sovereignty of God; all truth is theological; all doctrine is really the doctrine of God; man is nothing, and God is everything; God's glory is the purpose of all things. All these expressions were just different ways of saying the same thing: God is God.

The essence of Herman Hoeksema's theology is also the essence of the Reformed faith. It was not Herman Hoeksema who discovered that God is God. That God is God is simply the kernel of the Reformed faith, especially as the Reformed faith stands over against every theological system that makes man to be God. It is no accident that the essence of Reformed theology was also the essence of Herman Hoeksema's theology. Hoeksema consciously and deliberately distilled the Reformed faith down to its essence. Having found its essence, he rigorously applied that essence to every theological question.

The burden of this editorial is threefold: first, to demonstrate that the essence of the Reformed faith is that God is God; second, to demonstrate that Herman Hoeksema consciously took up the essence of the Reformed faith as the starting point of his theology; and third, to propose that it is inescapable that Reformed churches deal with Hoeksema's theology in their own theological work.

### The Essence of the Reformed Faith

The essence of the Reformed faith is that God is God.

The Reformed faith is set forth in the Reformed confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of

Dordt—as well as the several Reformed liturgical forms. The very first confession of the Reformed churches was the Belgic Confession, published in 1561. The Belgic Confession begins with the doctrine of scripture (articles 2–7), followed by the traditional six loci of Reformed doctrine: theology (8–11), anthropology (12–15), Christology (16–21), soteriology (22–26), ecclesiology (27–36), and eschatology (37).

But before the Belgic Confession says anything else, it opens with this first article, which confesses God:

#### Article 1: There Is One Only God

We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God; and that He is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good.

This first article is not to be understood merely as an introduction to the Belgic Confession. Neither is this first article to be understood as one slice of Reformed doctrine that belongs among all the other slices of Reformed doctrine. The first article is not even to be understood as a summary of the Belgic Confession. Rather, the first article of the Belgic Confession is to be understood as the whole truth, as that truth is distilled down to its essence. The essence of the whole truth is this: God! When one has confessed God, one has said all there is to say. Any further confession after the confession of God must not be understood as moving on to a different truth. Rather, any further confession after the confession of God must be understood simply as savoring all the flavors that are contained in the essence of the truth.

When one goes on in articles 2–7 to confess scripture, one is still confessing God: “By What Means God Is Made Known Unto Us” (article 2). When one goes on in articles 8–11 to confess theology, one is still confessing God: “God Is One in Essence, Yet Distinguished in Three Persons” (article 8). When one goes on in articles 12–15 to confess anthropology, one is still confessing God: “We believe that the Father, by the Word, that is, by His Son, hath created” (article 12). When one goes on in articles 16–21 to confess Christ, one is still confessing God: “God Hath Manifested His Justice and Mercy in Christ” (article 20). When one goes on in articles 22–26 to confess soteriology, one is still confessing God: “We believe that we have no access unto God but alone through the only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous” (article 26). When one goes on in articles 27–36 to confess ecclesiology, one is still confessing God: “This holy church is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world” (article 27). And when one goes on in article 37 to confess eschatology, one is still confessing God: “Therefore we expect that great day with a most ardent desire, to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.”

Article 1 of the Belgic Confession is the whole truth, as that truth is distilled down to its essence. The essence of the whole truth is this: God.

Article 1 of the Belgic Confession does not only apply to the Belgic Confession but also to all the Reformed confessions. The Belgic Confession was the first of all the Reformed confessions. When the Reformed faith first found its voice, the first thing it said in the first article of its first confession was this: God!

The Heidelberg Catechism, published in 1563, continues the Reformed confession that God is God. The Catechism takes the essence of the Reformed faith and applies it to the spiritual comfort of the child of God. The believer’s opening confession in the Catechism is that he has comfort: “What is thy only comfort in life and

death?” The believer’s comfort is absolutely not man. The believer’s first words regarding his comfort are a denial of man’s sovereignty: “that I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own.” I am not my own! Man is not the comforter. Man is not the savior. Man is not God! The believer’s confession regarding his comfort is that he belongs to Jesus Christ: “but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” The believer’s confession regarding his comfort is the perfect work of Jesus Christ to save him: “who, with His precious blood, hath fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto Him.”

When the Heidelberg Catechism approaches the truth from the point of view of man’s comfort, it is really dealing with the truth that God is God. There is no comfort for the child of God in man, including himself. There is only comfort for the child of God in the sovereign grace of God. In speaking of the comfort of the child of God, the Catechism is really saying one thing: God. In other words, although the theme of the Heidelberg Catechism may be *comfort*, the essence of the Heidelberg Catechism is *God*. There are especially two ways that this comes out.

First, the Catechism expounds all doctrine out of God’s two main words in scripture: law and gospel. The Catechism identifies both the law and the gospel as belonging to God.

Q. 3. Whence knowest thou thy misery?  
A. Out of the law of God.

Q. 19. Whence knowest thou this [Mediator]?  
A. From the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise; and afterwards published by the patriarchs and prophets, and represented by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and, lastly, has fulfilled it by His only begotten Son.



By treating all doctrine out of God's law and God's gospel, the Heidelberg Catechism teaches one thing: God.

Second, the Heidelberg Catechism's main author, Zacharias Ursinus, opened his commentary on the Catechism with a clear confession of God. The first words that Ursinus wrote as his explanation of the Catechism are as follows:

I. What is the Doctrine of the Church?

The doctrine of the church is the entire and uncorrupted doctrine of the law and gospel concerning the true God, together with his will, works, and worship; divinely revealed, and comprehended in the writings of the prophets and apostles, and confirmed by many miracles and divine testimonies; through which the Holy Spirit works effectually in the hearts of the elect, and gathers from the whole human race an everlasting church, in which God is glorified, both in this, and in the life to come.<sup>1</sup>

The essence of the Reformed faith is that God is God. What the Belgic Confession began, the Heidelberg Catechism continued.

Finally, the Canons of Dordt, written and adopted by the 1618–19 Synod of Dordt, also teaches the truth that God is God. The Synod of Dordt developed this truth over against the Arminian confession that man's salvation is due at least in part to the exercise of man's free will. In Arminian theology man by his will is his own savior. In Arminian theology God is not God; man is God.

Over against that Arminian theology, the Synod of Dordt trumpeted the truth that God is God. The Canons are divided into five heads of doctrine, known among Reformed people by the acronym TULIP, arranged in the following order in the Canons: head 1: unconditional election; head 2: limited atonement; heads 3 and 4: total depravity and irresistible grace; head 5: preservation of the saints. The Canons of Dordt is a *tour de force* of the truth that God is God.

That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree. (Canons 1.6)

For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect. (Canons 2.8)

All men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath. (Canons 3–4.3)

What therefore neither the light of nature nor the law could do, that God performs by the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word or ministry of reconciliation, which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof it hath pleased God to save such as believe, as well under the Old as under the New Testament. (Canons 3–4.6)

But God, who is rich in mercy, according to His unchangeable purpose of election, does not wholly withdraw the Holy Spirit from His own people, even in their melancholy falls. (Canons 5.6)

In the Canons man does not save, and man is not God. In the Canons God alone saves, and God is God. In fact, all four places in the Reformed confessions where the word *sovereign* appears are in the Canons of Dordt (1.7, 1.15, 2.8, 3–4.7).

The Reformed faith taught that God is God because this is the current of scripture. If the scriptures were a river, then wherever one would scoop a handful of its waters, he would find God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. From the very first words—"In the beginning God" (Gen. 1:1)—to its great doxology—"For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36)—to its very last words—"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Rev. 22:21)—the scriptures reveal God. As Ursinus said, the

<sup>1</sup> Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Willard (Elm Street Printing Company, 1888), 1.

scriptures are “the entire and uncorrupted doctrine of the law and gospel concerning the true God.”<sup>2</sup>

Because God is the confession of the scriptures, the Reformed confessions say one thing: God. The comfort of the Christian is one thing: God. The salvation of the sinner is worked by one alone: the sovereign God. Here is the essence of the Reformed faith, as distilled from the Reformed confessions: God is God!

## Herman Hoeksema: Reformed

Herman Hoeksema was consistently, rigorously, and determinedly Reformed. For Herman Hoeksema *Reformed* meant the cardinal truth that God is sovereign. When Hoeksema spoke of a “Reformed man” or of “Reformed churches” or of “Calvinism,” he meant a man and churches and a system of doctrine that had a firm grasp of the sovereignty of God. In the Reformed faith God is God, and whatever did not measure up to this cardinal truth was not Reformed.

It can be demonstrated from Hoeksema’s writings that he recognized the essence of the Reformed faith to be the sovereignty of God. When Hoeksema gloried in the sovereignty of God, he did not propose it as his own unique theology. Rather, he identified it as the Reformed faith, the Reformed mind, and Calvinism. At the same time, Hoeksema always spoke of the doctrine of God’s sovereignty as “ours” or as belonging to “our churches.” By this, Hoeksema recognized God’s sovereignty as the essence of the Reformed faith, in which faith he was determined to stand. A few quotations will demonstrate the point.

In 1918, still early in his ministry, Herman Hoeksema identified the essence of the Reformed faith to be that God is God. From a 1918 *Banner* article: “The Calvinistic fundamental viewpoint is Theological.” Again: “The truly Reformed man is concerned about God first of all, and about man only for God’s name’s sake.”

Again: “[God’s glory] is at the same time the fundamental viewpoint of the true and beautiful Reformed Faith.” Again: “And, therefore, in the firm maintenance of that fundamental principle lies our salvation as a Church. God all—man nothing except for Him.”<sup>3</sup>

In 1923 Herman Hoeksema and Henry Danhof published the book *Van Zonde en Genade*, available in English translation as *Sin and Grace*. The book was published in the heat of intense theological battle in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) over the theory of common grace. The theory of common grace would become official Christian Reformed dogma in 1924, when the Synod of Kalamazoo would adopt the “Three Points.” But already by 1923 many of the leaders in the CRC were adamant that God displayed a non-saving favor to all men. Prominent ministers and members in the Christian Reformed Church attacked Hoeksema and Danhof for the two men’s denial of common grace, charging their denial of common grace as nothing more than Anabaptist world-flight. Loud assertions were made that common grace was indisputably Reformed. In fact, men maintained that common grace was one of the very pillars of the Reformed faith. Therefore, the battle was not merely about whether common grace was true or not, but it was about the essence of the Reformed faith. On one side were the leading lights of the Christian Reformed Church, who maintained that common grace was fundamental to the Reformed faith.

These even emphatically insist that [Abraham] Kuyper’s view [of common grace] is fundamentally Reformed. They lay more and more emphasis on the importance, all-inclusiveness, and all-controlling significance of common grace. Living in the delusion that common grace is not only an all-controlling life-view, but also a fundamentally Reformed view, they put forth their best

<sup>2</sup> Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Herman Hoeksema, “A Matter of Viewpoint,” *The Banner* (September 12, 1918).



efforts to introduce it more fully into our churches.<sup>4</sup>

On the other side were Hoeksema and Danhof, who not only denied common grace but who also found the essence of the Reformed faith in God's sovereignty. "As we promised, we now present in the following pages our view of the free grace of God."<sup>5</sup> By "free grace" Hoeksema and Danhof meant *sovereign grace*—a grace of God in which God, absolutely free of any dependence upon man, accomplishes his saving purpose in his elect.

Therefore, in *Van Zonde en Genade*, Hoeksema and Danhof not only had to criticize Abraham Kuyper's view of common grace, but they also had to demonstrate that the theory of common grace could not be Reformed. In the Reformed faith there could be no such thing as a common grace that did not save. There could only be a sovereign grace—or a free grace—because the fundamental principle of the Reformed faith is God's sovereignty. In order to demonstrate this, Hoeksema and Danhof began their book with a historical review of the principle that animated the Reformed faith. Hoeksema and Danhof's comments on the *Afscheiding* of 1834 reveal that principle.

What prompted us to take our present stand against a certain doctrine of grace?

Was it world-flight? Was it perhaps a reaction against a craving for the world—a well-intended Anabaptistic avoidance of the world?

No, not that!

Listen!

A small church of the Secessionists at Ulrum, province of Groningen, the Netherlands, recently had to be replaced by a much larger building. According to the papers in Holland, the entrance to the small church bore an inscription on a stone on its left side that read, "Man

Nothing." Engraved in granite on its right side were the words "Christ All in All."

That entrance was too narrow for many people.

Dutchmen with a broader outlook and wider inclinations chose the state church.

Only the "common folk," who were scarcely saved, and entered the church *through many different forms of persecution*, sang the following:

This is Thy temple-gate, O Lord,  
The just shall enter there;  
My Saviour, I will give Thee thanks,  
O Thou that hearest prayer.

We had our sojourn among them.

However, the inscription on the wall of the small church was not to our liking either, at first. It sounded so humiliating: *Man Nothing!* And that second part, *Christ All in All*, completely excluded man's own righteousness. Certainly we readily confessed intellectually that salvation is of the Lord and that our salvation is entirely by grace, but the full spiritual light of that truth did not immediately penetrate our hearts. Only very gradually did we learn to agree with the watchword of the reformers:

God's Spirit, working in my heart,  
Exposed to me my sin;  
God's law demanded holiness,  
But I was vile within.  
I should be clothed with righteousness;  
Instead, foul rags were all my dress.

This truth profound He taught to me:  
That of myself there's naught.  
Christ's righteousness supplanted mine;  
He Satan's downfall brought.  
Now death and grave are beaten down,  
And I receive the victor's crown.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Danhof and Herman Hoeksema, *Sin and Grace*, ed. Herman Hanko, trans. Cornelius Hanko (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2003), xxviii.

<sup>5</sup> Danhof and Hoeksema, *Sin and Grace*, xxvii.

Then we also understood the inscription at the entrance of the small church. It was directed against the Pelagian in every one of us. It was the spiritual hallmark of the Secession. The truth that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy was, as with Augustine and Luther, learned by experience and sharply impressed on the consciousness of our fathers. “God’s eternal good pleasure”—God’s election by grace—was the heart of their confession, and all the issues of our life were from that heart.<sup>6</sup>

A little later in the book:

All of this, in our judgment, is convincing proof that the Secession was indeed a return to the doctrine of free grace, the actual principle of the Reformation, the real life-source of the church, the confession of the fathers of Dordt.<sup>7</sup>

And a little later:

We learned to marvel at and regard Mother Church highly for her repeated effort to guard the principle of election by grace, regardless of disapproval, mockery, and scorn.

At the roots of their spiritual life, the churches of the Secession, in our estimation, were thoroughly sound although they were limited in gifts, manpower, and means. They walked in the footsteps of Augustine, the Reformers, and the fathers of Dordt, according to the demands of their time, revering the gospel in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.<sup>8</sup>

One more quotation from Herman Hoeksema—this one several years later—will suffice to demonstrate that Hoeksema consciously and deliberately distilled the essence of the Reformed faith in order to apply it to every theological question and to the whole life of the church. In 1946, preaching a sermon on Revelation 11:7–10 entitled “The Murder of the Church,” Hoeksema reflected on the cardinal doctrine that characterized the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) at the time.

Therefore, we as churches—and rightly so—have always emphasized the sovereignty of God. And pray, pray, beloved, that that never changes. Let nothing or no one rob you of that comfort because that is the heart of the truth of God. That’s not merely harping on a pet notion, but in it is the only comfort for the church of God. And I can say here in parentheses that according to the measure that we monkey with that truth, you increase misery. Did you ever think of it—that’s history—did you ever think of it that all the misery in the church institute in the midst of the world was always occasioned by the everlasting fighting against that cardinal truth of the sovereignty of God? And that is why, even in view of the gloomy text which we read to you, the church of Christ can be comforted nevertheless. I hope, beloved, that we see that when we speak of that on what I deem to be the very heart of the text—that is, the murder of the church.<sup>9</sup>

Hoeksema made the “cardinal truth” of the Reformed faith the cardinal truth of his and his churches’ theology: God is sovereign; God is God!

<sup>6</sup> Danhof and Hoeksema, *Sin and Grace*, 1–3; emphasis is the authors’.

<sup>7</sup> Danhof and Hoeksema, *Sin and Grace*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Danhof and Hoeksema, *Sin and Grace*, 68.

<sup>9</sup> Herman Hoeksema, “The Murder of the Church,” sermon preached in January 1946, [https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc\\_sermon=herman-hoeksema](https://oldpathsrecordings.com/?wpfc_sermon=herman-hoeksema).

## Herman Hoeksema: An Inescapable Rarity

At first glance it may seem too simplistic to say that the essence of Herman Hoeksema's theology is that God is God. After all, is not the truth of God's sovereignty a given for a Reformed theologian? Does not the Reformed faith itself proclaim God's sovereignty as its central truth? One might conclude that we have not really discovered anything about a Reformed theologian yet if our investigation has only revealed that he held to the sovereignty of God.

However, upon a little reflection, one can see how profound a thing it was for Herman Hoeksema to maintain that God is God. It is one thing to say that the cardinal truth of the Reformed faith is the sovereignty of God. It is another thing to find a Reformed theologian who really grasped that truth, let alone one who was willing to follow that truth into every theological question and apply it to every theological problem. How many Reformed theologians through the years were willing to compromise the sovereignty of God in order to appease the delicate sensibilities of man? How could it be that so many Reformed theologians led so many Reformed churches to confess a common, ineffectual, non-saving grace of God to all mankind? Or a well-meant offer of salvation by God that cannot accomplish God's saving purpose when man resists or declines the offer? Or a conditional covenant in which the great blessings of the covenant stand unrealized and unfulfilled until man takes it upon himself to fulfill the covenantal conditions? Or faith as a work of man by which man makes himself worthy of the blessing of God? Or justification by man's final faithfulness to God's law? Yes, the sovereignty of God may well be the heart of the Reformed faith. But it is exceedingly rare to find a theologian who actually maintains the truth of God's sovereignty at every point in his theology. It is not simplistic at all to identify the essence of Herman Hoeksema's theology as the sovereignty of God. Hoeksema is a rare find, even among Reformed theologians.

This does not mean that Herman Hoeksema was infallible. He could err, and he did err from time to time. This also does not mean that Hoeksema was a self-made theologian. He was not. He received the Reformed faith as a heritage from God through the Reformed churches of his day. But by God's grace Herman Hoeksema was consistent in applying the essence of the Reformed faith in a way that few others have been. His theological consistency led to some of the most beautiful and grand developments of the Reformed faith, especially the doctrine of the covenant.

Herman Hoeksema's consistency in identifying and maintaining the essence of the Reformed faith means that Herman Hoeksema did not stand off in his own little theological corner. Hoeksema stood astride all Reformed theology. Having distilled the essence of the Reformed faith and having infused it into all his theology, Hoeksema's theology is the Reformed faith. Although this has not often been recognized, Hoeksema's significance extends well beyond his own churches. The question of Hoeksema's theology does not merely settle a controversy between those denominations that descend directly in a line from Hoeksema, the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). Understanding Hoeksema's theology does not merely answer whether the present-day PRC or RPC is faithful to Hoeksema. Rather, the question of Hoeksema's theology answers who among all Reformed churches is faithful to the Reformed faith. An understanding of Hoeksema's theology ought to lead every Reformed church to ask whether it has distilled the essence of the Reformed faith and whether it applies that essence in all its theology.

Consider the issues. In the matter of whether God's grace is common or particular, one view is consistent with the sovereignty of God, and the other is not. In the matter of whether God's covenant is conditional or unconditional, one view is consistent with the sovereignty of God, and the other is not. In the matter of whether God's

revelation is subject to higher criticism or not, one view is consistent with the sovereignty of God, and the other is not. In the matter of whether the believer's good works have a bearing on God's verdict in the final judgment, one view is consistent with the sovereignty of God, and the other is not. That is, in all these matters, one view is Reformed, and the other is not.

Whether anyone pays Herman Hoeksema any mind or not, his theology remains as inescapable today as it was in his own day. For his theology was simply the Reformed faith: God is God!

—AL

## FROM THE RAMPARTS

### How Did This Happen? (2)

Reverend Langerak asked the question, “Lord, what happened?”<sup>1</sup> This is what happened.

The preaching touched an idol.

When the people saw that their idol was touched, they reacted the same way the men and women of Ophrah reacted when they saw their idol cut down. “Kill the man who did it” (Judges 6:25–32).

My mistake was to think that that idol was Thomas Ken's hymn “Praise God.”

Or maybe it was the Psalter.

And those are certainly idols for some members.

But that is not why Reverend Lanning has to die. That is not why Elders Starrett, VanDyke, and Meyer had to be brutally cut down.

Those were not *the* idol.

The idol that was touched was the idol of Man.

This is always the case. It was the case in the recent controversy with the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), and it is the case throughout all of history.

It is either God or Man.

You can hear that idol defended now in the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) when you

hear men and women say, “You can't tell me I mayn't sing that song! You can't tell me that I have been wrong for singing that hymn all of my life! These songs bubble up within me; you can't tell me it's wrong!” The minute you hear the words, “You can't tell me \_\_\_\_\_,” you know you are hearing someone about to defend his idol. It is stinking pride: pride in self, pride in traditions, and pride in names and reputations.

The men and women of First RPC heard a rebuke about their worship. The rebuke was so gentle that I am almost embarrassed to call it a rebuke.

The members of First RPC were willing to go along with it for a little while but only begrudgingly. The arguments changed on a daily, almost hourly, basis, but the root of the grumbling was the same. My idol was touched.

And the minute the members of First RPC were given a way out—a way where the idol of their hearts could be preserved so that they could be right after all, so that they did not have to change after all—they jumped at it.

Reverend Langerak gave them that way out with his sermon titled “The Indwelling Word.” The fact that the sermon was confusing, unclear, unprincipled, and unhinged did not slow the members of First RPC down in the least bit.

<sup>1</sup>Nathan Langerak, “Do Not Kill,” sermon preached on April 30, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtGWGlwpvMs&t=3638s>. This quotation is from the congregational prayer.

They jumped at it.

Even though it required them to cut down the angel of their congregation—a man who had stood in the gap and made up the hedge for this congregation—they would do that.

Even though faithful elders had to be cut down—and hastily at that—the members of First RPC would connive at that.

Even though it revealed them as sons and daughters of the inhabitants of Keilah (see I Samuel 23), they could not turn back.

Even though they would have a tear in their eye, this was the only way to preserve their idol.

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My, how things can change.

Reverend Lanning led his flock out of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and all Reformed Protestant men loved him.

Now he is suspended from the ministry, and all Reformed Protestant men despise him.

Although many things have changed, one thing has not.

And that is Reverend Lanning's faithful instruction.

He faithfully and patiently instructed his flock in the truths of God's word.

He did that regarding proper worship.

In a sermon preached on October 31, 2021, Reverend Lanning taught the congregation about the songs that the congregation must sing during the public, corporate worship of the church.<sup>2</sup>

The instruction given in that sermon was this: sing the psalms.

That's the Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of 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

in his word." The church of Jesus Christ only knows how to worship God according to the command of God himself. And God's command with regard to the singing of the worship of Jehovah is that we worship him with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, which refer to the psalms that are given to us in the word of God, so that the regulative principle of worship for the singing of the church in her public assembly is "Sing the psalms and nothing else. Do not worship God in any other way in your singing than he has commanded in his word."

Reverend Lanning explained his position when it came to such instruction. He did not want the congregation to be forced into something but desired that any changes that might take place would arise out of the heart of the congregation and would flow from the members of the congregation themselves. Was this not our complaint about the Psalter revision project that so many of us objected to when we were members of the PRC? "The leaders are forcing this down our throats!" Not so with Reverend Lanning.

What shall we do? Well, the minister could do this: he could come and tell you, "We're not singing the Psalter anymore; we're going to sing a songbook of the psalms that I pick or that the consistory chooses or that is in some other way imposed upon you." Or we could do this: recognize the principle, the regulative principle with regard to the singing in church, and preach that principle and take hold of that principle by the operation of the Spirit, so that that principle lives in the hearts of the congregation, so that the minister never has to impose anything on the church or the consistory never has to impose anything, but the church itself says, "We want to sing the

<sup>2</sup>Andrew Lanning, "Singing the Word of Christ," sermon preached on October 31, 2021, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1031212233461017>.



word of Christ. We're going to see to it that we sing the word of Christ in the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."

How could it ever come out of the hearts of the members of the congregation? It would come through the instruction of the principles of worship, which the Holy Spirit continued to provide through the preaching. It is God's will, after all, that his people are taught "by the lively preaching of His Word" (Lord's Day 35, Q&A 98).

So patiently and carefully Reverend Lanning continued to teach us the principles of proper worship.

And what a glorious topic in which to receive instruction!

John Calvin, when speaking of the Christian religion, ranked worship first ("how God is rightly worshipped") and our salvation second ("whence they must seek salvation for themselves").<sup>3</sup>

The instruction of Reverend Lanning continued in a sermon on March 5, 2023, titled "No Image Worship."<sup>4</sup> In this sermon our pastor again taught us that the regulative principle of worship flows out of the second commandment and that this matter of worship could not be more serious, as to worship God in any other way than he has commanded in his word would be to erect a graven image before God.

This too was taught by John Calvin: "The rule that distinguishes pure worship of God from its corrupted form is universal: we must not mix in what has seemed good to us but must observe what He requires who alone has the authority to command."<sup>5</sup>

God is good to us in not leaving us to our imagination.

The reason is twofold that the Lord, by forbidding and condemning all man-

made worship, calls us back to obedience to His voice alone. For (1) this greatly applies to establishing His authority, so that we may not serve our own wills but rely entirely upon His will, and (2) we are so proud, that if freedom is left to us, we can do nothing but go astray.<sup>6</sup>

In the March 5 sermon Reverend Lanning gave instruction about the song "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow."

Reformed churches, including, I would guess, every Reformed church that you and I have been a part of our entire life, including today, does sing a hymn every service. "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow" is a hymn—a hymn that has been around a long time, since 1674, but for all that, not a psalm. A hymn written by a man, an Anglican bishop, whose purpose with many other hymns that he wrote, including this one, was to give the church something to sing other than the psalms. He wanted a wider songbook for the church. And the way that he brought the hymn "Praise God" into the consciousness of the church is by teaching it in school. He insisted that that verse be the concluding verse of the morning hymn, the afternoon hymn, and the evening hymn sung by the teenagers in his region. And he was successful beyond his wildest dreams; for that hymn "Praise God" is everywhere, even in those churches who have the second commandment and the regulative principle that requires the psalms.

And if someone would say, "Well, what about article 69 of the Church Order because we have agreed as churches that we're going to sing the 150 psalms and

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2020), 6.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Lanning, "No Image Worship," sermon preached on Sunday, March 5, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=35232335114953>.

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 7.

that we're going to strictly limit ourselves only to those hymns that were available at that time and popular at that time, singing the ten commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the songs of Mary and Zacharias, certain songs taken from the Bible, and we're going to sing the morning and the evening hymn? Doesn't that include 'Praise God'?" It doesn't. "Praise God" wasn't written when the Synod of Dordt met in 1618–19. It was written many decades after the Synod of Dordt. The Synod of Dordt, when it adopted article 69 of the Church Order, said wherever in the Reformed churches hymns have spread—because it recognized hymns had spread—they are to be removed in the way deemed most conducive. The Synod of Dordt allowed a process for the removal of the hymns so there could be instruction.

Reverend Lanning ended the sermon by teaching the gospel message of the regulative principle:

The Lord Jesus Christ heard this law and loved this law and was eaten up by the zeal of God's house in his perfect worship of Jehovah; and that counts for you, so that when you appear before God in your own conscience, appear before God at the final judgment, and the question is put to you, "How did you worship? How did you do in worship?" and the answer of Jehovah God himself to that question is, "You were perfect. You were perfect. Jesus was perfect. I count his worship as yours." You live, congregation, for the sake of Jesus Christ. And now what is your response? Live and do this in gratitude to God for the perfect worship and salvation of your savior. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images." Amen.

Questions arose.

We began to put our ignorance and stubbornness on display.

It became clear that Reverend Lanning had touched an idol.

"How dare he condemn something that I have been doing my whole life?"

"You're telling me it's wrong to sing the Lord's prayer? I can't sing the song of Zacharias? I want to sing that song! It fills my soul! It can't be wrong! The Spirit in me leads me to sing these songs!"

The following Sunday, March 12, faithful to his calling as pastor and teacher—even to a congregation that was showing itself to be slow of understanding—Reverend Lanning preached another sermon on Lord's Day 35, "The Regulative Principle of Worship," to further explain the principles of proper worship.<sup>7</sup>

Before the service started, Elder Jon Langerak informed Reverend Lanning that if he taught that exclusive psalmody is required according to the regulative principle, then Elder Langerak was going to refuse to shake Reverend Lanning's hand after the sermon was preached.

(As was pointed out, the idol that was touched in the RPC was the same idol that was touched in the PRC. That idol is Man. It should not surprise us, then, when we see endless similarities between the controversy with the PRC and the controversy in the RPC. Remarkably, what we see in many of those similarities is that the PRC was more honorable than is the RPC today. Here is one example. When an elder at Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church saw that Reverend Lanning was going to preach on Jeremiah 23:4, 14—which was the text the consistory had used in the decision to require Reverend Lanning to resign as editor of *Sword & Shield*—this elder went to Reverend Lanning the day before the service to express his concerns about what he thought Reverend Lanning was going to preach on. Never did that elder say he was already planning on not shaking Reverend

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Lanning, "The Regulative Principle of Worship," sermon preached on March 12, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=312232237135528>.

Lanning's hand. I am thankful Reverend Lanning did not succumb to such pressure from his elder and was able to resist it, as he was able to resist the pressure from Unity Protestant Reformed Church.<sup>8)</sup>

In the sermon on March 12, Reverend Lanning taught that, according to Lord's Day 35, the church must worship God only as God has commanded in his word, and that includes singing only the psalms in the worship service.

That worship of God with God, who himself must determine all the aspects of that worship, all the elements of that worship, is exactly what we mean by the *regulative principle of worship*. Now, whether that word or that term is necessary can be questioned. That term does not come out of the confessions. That term is meant to express the truth, though, that the confessions do teach; and the confessions teach regarding the worship of Jehovah that God himself must set the worship; God himself must give the worship; he must give all the elements of that worship because God alone knows what pleases him. We blind, poor, naked beggars don't know what pleases God. God alone knows what pleases him, what kind of a dinner he wants to have, how that fellowship is going to look. So God himself must give that worship and give the elements of that worship.

This was the same truth as Reverend Lanning had taught us in 2021.

This was the same truth as had been taught to us for decades in the PRC and the same truth confessed by a sister church of the PRC.

What Reverend Lanning taught was no new thing.

In these sermons Reverend Lanning made no charges of sin, which is clear as he issued no call

to repentance. This congregation knows that this is not because Reverend Lanning will not, when it is called for, identify sin in the congregation and call for the congregation's repentance.

He was deposed from the PRC for doing just that.

Reverend Lanning understood that when it came to the congregation's singing, when it came to identifying idols in the hearts of the congregants, the way of patient instruction should be the approach. Reverend Lanning, after all, does not know what idols exist in the hearts of the members of the congregation. So you preach the word. This preaching will have its effect, as is taught by Ursinus in his commentary on the second commandment. "Let the true doctrine of God's word, therefore, be preached, and the idols will fall to the ground of their own accord."<sup>9</sup>

Reverend Lanning was following the same approach that the consistory took regarding the vow that was required by Protestant Reformed Christian school boards to enroll children in their schools. Those schools required allegiance to the schools over the truth of God as a condition for enrollment. Many of us were willing to simply sign that form to enroll our children, not understanding the significance of the vow being required. Instead of immediately charging sin and applying discipline to everyone who had signed the letter, the consistory, under the leadership of Reverend Lanning, patiently taught and instructed the people so we could come to a full understanding of these things. This instruction came from the pulpit and from a Wednesday night doctrines class which was devoted to the subject of vows. God blessed that instruction, so that today we can see that vow as the wicked snare that it was, which would have required us to put institutions above the truth.

But the congregation would not tolerate instruction from the pulpit about her singing, and

<sup>8</sup> Dewey Engelsma, "Foxes in the Desert," *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), December 23, 2022, <https://astraitbetwixtwo.com/2022/12/23/foxes-in-the-desert/>.

<sup>9</sup> Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1954), 532.

the consistory refused to provide that instruction in a Wednesday night doctrines class.<sup>10</sup>

True to his word, following the service on March 12, Elder Jon Langerak refused to shake Reverend Lanning's hand. Elder Gord Schipper followed Elder Langerak's lead.

To this point some in the congregation were being led and instructed by the word of God brought to them by Reverend Lanning. There were those who, although they would later turn out to be the fiercest foes of Reverend Lanning, were declaring his sermons to be the word of God, and many shared documents and articles which made the case for exclusive psalmody.

One elder told a man after the evening service of March 12 that he believed that exclusive psalmody had always been the position of the Reformed church and that he believed it himself. (That elder would waver and then flip later that week, showing himself to be unstable [see James 1:6–8]. He has plenty of company.) This reminds us again of Byron Center PRC, when the consistory loved the sermon “Shepherds to Feed You.”<sup>11</sup> Well, they loved it for a few hours, anyway, until they saw which way the wind was blowing.

The response of others to the March 12 sermon was to state that their zeal for God could determine what was proper for worship. That would find expression like this: “You can't tell me it's wrong to sing those songs! They arise out of my heart and from my spirit, and you cannot tell me it is sin to sing them!”

That is will worship and is also not a new thing just appearing at First RPC.

I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were,

in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honor of God.<sup>12</sup>

Although men and women had questions and some were grumbling, there was no furor over the sermons by Reverend Lanning. There simply was no great hue and cry against those sermons. Many people—including many who have now completely flip-flopped—gave as their testimony that the two sermons by Reverend Lanning were the word of God to the congregation. (Neither do I exaggerate when I use the word “many.”)

I want to stress this point.

If there was anger expressed after the March 12 sermon, it was against the two elders who had refused to shake Reverend Lanning's hand after the service and who could not come up with a clear reason why they hadn't shaken his hand.

Never did the charge of legalism arise out of First Reformed Protestant Church.

Let us hear Reverend Lanning in his protest against the consistory's decision:

I have been openly and regularly preaching exclusive psalmody for two years at First RPC. The elders approved every one of those sermons. Where were the charges of legalism then? My preaching of exclusive psalmody has always arisen out of the gospel of Christ, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, and never as a law of bondage to be kept for salvation. Where were the charges of legalism then? The two elders who did not shake my hand never once mentioned legalism in their initial talks with me as the reason they were opposed to my sermon. They stated several reasons they were opposed to my sermon, but they did not even hint at legalism. Only later did

<sup>10</sup> When it became clear that there were still questions about these matters, Reverend Lanning suggested to the consistory on March 6 that the topic of the doctrines class that was scheduled for March 8 be changed to something that would speak to the question of psalmody. The consistory declined (see committee report treated at the March 23, 2023, consistory meeting). This is to refuse instruction and to reject knowledge (Prov. 15:32; Hos. 4:6).

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Lanning, “Shepherds to Feed You,” sermon preached on November 15, 2020, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=21221157515502>.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, 8.



the term “legalism” begin to float around. Even after Rev. Langerak’s sermon, not a single elder contacted me to talk about legalism. The first time the consistory even considered the charge of legalism was the same day as the meeting at which I was suspended. If my sermons really were the dread heresy of legalism, which may not be tolerated even for an hour, where was this charge when the elders did not shake my hand? Why did the charge of legalism only get thought up well after the fact of my sermons?<sup>13</sup>

In its response to Reverend Lanning, the consistory ignored almost all of what Reverend Lanning wrote above but did respond by saying, “The consistory cannot answer for what happened in the past but what was specifically preached in the two sermons we have been called to judge.” Having made that clear, they then went on, *in the very next sentence*, to judge a sermon that was preached two years ago.<sup>14</sup> (There have been a few moments of levity in this controversy, and reading this from the consistory was one of those moments.)

But what about that charge of legalism? Did that arise from First RPC?

Reverend Lanning preached this doctrine on March 5, 2023. There were no charges of legalism. Reverend Lanning preached this doctrine on October 31, 2021. There were no charges of legalism. (There were no charges of anything, actually. No one objected to the sermon.) At the consistory meeting on March 8, when the March 5 sermon was discussed and when a decision was made to temporarily stop singing Thomas Ken’s hymn “Praise God,” there were no charges of legalism. Even objections that arose, as from Elder Langerak when he explained before the service why he would not shake Reverend Lanning’s hand after the service, were grounded in Church Order article 69, not in some supposed legalism.

After the March 12 sermon, Elder Paul Starrett asked Elders Langerak and G. Schipper why they had not shaken Reverend Lanning’s hand. The answer was Church Order article 69. There was no mention of legalism.

The week of March 12, Elder Langerak met with Reverend Lanning to discuss his objections to the sermon. Legalism never came up. Elder Gord Schipper spoke with Reverend Lanning the morning after the service. Legalism never came up.

The point of all of this is that the charge of legalism did not arise out of the consistory of First RPC, just as the objections against Reverend Lanning at Byron Center PRC did not arise from the consistory of that congregation. There were powerful forces from the top of the denomination that forced themselves onto the consistory of Byron Center PRC and before which the consistory simply caved.

So too with the consistory of First RPC.

Cue Rev. Nathan Langerak.

On Sunday, March 19, 2023, Reverend Langerak of Second RPC preached a sermon titled “The Indwelling Word.”

That sermon has been examined.<sup>15</sup>

And found wanting.

But what was the reaction of the congregation of First RPC to that sermon? Did the members carefully examine Reverend Langerak’s sermon and try the spirits of that sermon?

For a congregation that had prided itself on its principles, its doctrine, and its strength, the members exhibited the spiritual depth of a mud puddle.

They were bowled over and swept along by that sermon by Reverend Langerak. Men started toppling like ninepins. Men and women who had been making beautiful confessions about exclusive psalmody started to flip.

It became as predictable as it was pathetic.

<sup>13</sup> Agenda for the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, May 18, 2023, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Agenda for the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, May 18, 2023, 50.

<sup>15</sup> Dewey Engelsma, “An Uncertain Sound,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 1 (April 15, 2023): 26–34.



The people of First RPC dutifully formed themselves into a mob, which was the only fruit such a sermon as Reverend Langerak's could produce.

I say a mob because the response of the people was the same as the mob described in Acts 19. When speaking to people about the sermon and the issues themselves, what you find is this: "Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together" (Acts 19:32). I say mob because men went from loving the sermons of Reverend Lanning to crying out that he was not fit to live. Although they did throw theological dust in the air, they at least kept their clothes on (22:22–23). I say mob because this all arose by Reverend Langerak's making the minds of the brethren evil affected against Reverend Lanning (14:2). I say mob because the people began to lay "many and grievous complaints" against Reverend Lanning, complaints "which they could not prove" (25:7). I say mob because the whole church was full of confusion (19:29).

Men and women who *knew* Reverend Lanning's sermons to be the word of God now wavered or flip-flopped altogether, showing themselves unstable and double-minded (James 1:6–8).

Men began uttering perverse things by denying the regulative principle of worship altogether or by making their ignorance the arbiter of what is right and what is wrong. "I've never heard of exclusive psalmody! I've never heard of it!"

Men and women began howling, "Reverend Lanning charged me with sin! I've been singing this hymn my whole life, and now he is saying I have been sinning the whole time? How dare he say that!?"

At this point confusion reigned.

The sermons of Reverend Lanning, which before had been the word of God, were now transformed into the Medusa, upon which no man dared to look.

This had to be the case.

Reverend Langerak's sermon had given no direction and no leadership.

The only thing it did was to place torches and pitchforks in the hands of the people.

And we know how that ends.

Uninformed and ignorant mobs with pitchforks roaming the ecclesiastical streets can never end well.

This is where the consistory should have stepped in and restored order.

That is what leadership does.

That is what leadership *should* do.

This should have been the letter sent to the congregation the week after Reverend Langerak's sermon was preached:

Dear congregation,

As you know, two elders declined to shake Reverend Lanning's hand after the service on Sunday, March 12. You are also no doubt aware that Reverend Langerak preached a sermon in which he charged Reverend Lanning with teaching the sin of legalism. (That sermon can be found on the YouTube page of Second RPC.) We remind the congregation that, just as Reverend Lanning taught us in the sermon on March 12, the Reformed churches, including our mother church, have allowed for two views regarding the regulative principle and the proper application of that principle regarding the congregation's singing in public, corporate worship. Therefore, the consistory has instructed the two elders who declined to shake Reverend Lanning's hand to submit protests against the sermon, and we are sure that Reverend Langerak will be doing the same. In the meantime, we encourage our congregation to study these matters and to "try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4:1–3).

Instead, the consistory got caught up in the hysteria and decided to pick up a pitchfork of its own.

This is when the charge of legalism showed up at First RPC and showed up with a vengeance. It came from a committee that had been tasked with bringing advice on the March 5 sermon. The committee's mandate came from a decision on March 8. "Motion to appoint a committee to bring advice on the sermon preached on the evening of March 5, 2023 on the proposal of March 6 by Rev. Lanning and the proposal of March 8 from Elder Bodbyl. CARRIES."<sup>16</sup>

The committee was composed of Elders Tom Bodbyl, Gord Schipper, and Matthew Overway.

One of the cornerstones of their advice was a study committee report of the PRC, which study committee had been advocating for the introduction of hymns into the worship service.

Translated, this is what the committee brought to the consistory: "Let's go back to the false church and let her instruct us on how we ought to worship God." The consistory was so enamored with this idea that the elders distributed the PRC's study committee report to the congregation on March 29, less than a week after suspending Reverend Lanning.

So much for *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* (the church reformed, always reforming).

The committee's advice—not on the sermon, which was their mandate—was to suspend Reverend Lanning for teaching legalism.

This material was distributed to the consistory at 12:27 p.m. the afternoon of March 23. The consistory would meet several hours later to consider the advice.

At the meeting that evening, a motion came to the floor which would have declared the meeting out of order on three grounds, including the fact that the committee stepped far outside of its bounds and its original mandate. The motion failed.

The consistory would adopt the advice they had first seen only a few hours before and would suspend Reverend Lanning on a 5–4 vote.

Men and women, sensing the spirit that was in the air, embraced it.

Pitchfork, anyone?

A few days later, (then) Seminarian Bomers harangued and further inflamed the congregation of First RPC and used the pulpit to directly attack Reverend Lanning.<sup>17</sup>

All men took up the refrain that Reverend Lanning is a legalist.

"Le-ga-list! Le-ga-list! Le-ga-list!"

(As it turns out, there is a cadence and beat of that cry that goes well with thumping the butt of your pitchfork into the ground.)

No one seems bothered by the fact that in the history of the Reformed church world, the doctrine of exclusive psalmody has never drawn the charge of legalism. Neither do they seem bothered by the fact that for decades they enjoyed sister-church relations with a church (Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland) that taught this same doctrine.

When you have a pitchfork in your hand, arguments and facts seem rather beside the point.

(The charge of legalism, besides being extreme and foolish, is deeply ironic. Reverend Lanning has been branded and carries around with him the charge of being an antinomian. Which means he is a Legonomian. Wait, better not use that one. That might violate a trademark of a certain company that makes small building blocks for children. We had better go with Antinogalist. Is Reverend Lanning an Antinogalist? Without a doubt.)

Reverend Lanning, cut down again, still patiently instructs his flock.

<sup>16</sup> Consistory meeting minutes dated March 8, 2023, article 5.

<sup>17</sup> Luke Bomers, "Visited by the Dayspring," sermon preached on March 26, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=326231620336223> (see 1:07:22 and following).

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Lanning, "The Gospel of Worship," video posted March 25, 2023, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_Zjze-Gmb-0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Zjze-Gmb-0); "The Origin of Exclusive Psalmody in the Reformed Protestant Churches," video posted March 28, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFZENkdUqmI>.

But he now does it simply as a believer edifying his fellow believers.

He has done that with two edifying video messages<sup>18</sup> and a new magazine in which he instructs his fellow members in the principles of Reformed worship, while also responding to objections.

The people are rejecting it.

One man, who ought to know better, told me that he is finished listening to Reverend Lanning. That was on March 29, less than a week after Reverend Lanning's suspension. This appears to be the reaction of the rest of the congregation and the denomination. This was exactly the response of the PRC when *Sword and Shield* appeared. The people stopped reading and stopped studying. Far better to let your anger carry you than to run the risk of being confronted by the truth.

Speaking of *Sword and Shield*, do you remember how important it was for that magazine to be born, since the *Standard Bearer* was severely censoring what could be published? In their first act without Reverend Lanning as editor, *Sword and Shield* refused to publish his entirely gracious and magnanimous resignation letter.<sup>19</sup> That didn't take long.

(When I speak in terms of "the rest of the congregation" and "all men" and "all women," I am using the figure of speech called *synecdoche*, where a part of something is made to represent the whole or the whole of something is made to represent a part. An example of this in scripture is found in Jeremiah 26:9, where we read, "And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD." Of course, not everyone head for head was gathered against Jeremiah, but what the text is emphasizing is that a large number—a vast majority—was rejecting God and his prophet. This is the case at First RPC and

throughout the denomination as a whole. Not everyone has rejected the word of God as preached on March 5 and 12 and has hardened himself against further instruction. God is faithful to his promise and had prepared the soil of some men's hearts to hear that word, and anon with joy they received it [Matt. 13:20].)

The time of instruction is past.

It lasted about a week.

The similarities between the PRC and the RPC are staggering.

They are also instructive.

Reverend Lanning was working at teaching us the word of God about worship, but the people would not have it.

So when Reverend Langerak asks the question, "Lord, what happened?" he is not genuinely curious to know what happened.

He knows what happened, since he engineered it from the very beginning.

What happened was that the idol of man in the hearts of the people was touched.

Which led to a mob being formed.

Instead of leading the congregation, the consistory of First RPC sharpened the pitchforks and lit the torches.

But is that all that happened?

A mob formed and cast out Reverend Lanning for no good reason at all?

No, something far more revealing has taken place over the last two months.

The Reformed Protestant Churches have been exposed.

Turns out men are no different, no matter how you have the initials P-R-C arranged.

(to be continued)

—DE

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Lanning, "Resignation," *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 1 (April 15, 2023): 19–20.

### The True Gospel Charged with Legalism

**T**hat the gospel has been charged with antinomianism is not new. The true gospel of Jesus Christ has continually been charged with antinomianism throughout church history. The accusation goes like this: “You think you are saved by grace alone without any works whatsoever? That doctrine will make you careless and profane! You will think you can sin as you please because you are saved no matter what you do, good or evil.” Paul was pummeled with the charge. So were the reformers of the sixteenth century. It became Rome’s favorite pastime to hurl that charge at them. The charge is still popular today. Preach the true gospel of grace, and at some point you will undoubtedly be called an antinomian. The accusation is nothing new and should come as no surprise. Besides, casting the charge at others leaves the one making the charge to appear quite holy because, after all, his main concern is about not sinning—so it seems. But the charge is sheer slander. When the power of God’s grace justifies a person in Jesus Christ, God’s grace also sanctifies that person in Jesus Christ. Always. Grace leaves no man to enjoy a life of wickedness and sin unchecked. Sin becomes his greatest misery.

The false charge of antinomianism is perhaps the main weapon directed at the doctrines of grace alone, but under pressure the enemies of grace will resort to other means of destruction as well. The charge of antinomianism can be twisted into another accusation that is even more deadly. The ruse is more difficult to pull off; but if successful, the destruction will be swift and utter.

*Legalism.* The dreaded word. To be accused of being against the law of God as an antinomian is bad, but to be accused of legalism is worse. To be accused of being against the law means that you are seen as a willful sinner against all of God’s

commandments. Even if a so-called “doctrinal antinomian” is the target of such a false charge, that man is expected to start living a sordid life of debauchery at any moment. When one is accused of legalism, however, more than one’s life is involved. Everyone knows how sharply Jesus condemned the Pharisees of his day. They were considered by Jesus to be much worse than the publicans and sinners. Even if one is in fact a legalist, no one ever takes that label upon himself willingly. Not even Rome. In the end it was the legalists who crucified Jesus, not the publicans and sinners. To be called a legalist is to be accused of the worst crime ever committed on the face of the earth.

Therefore, for an enemy of grace to charge the true gospel of grace with legalism is a matter of projection, a tactic commonly used by villains. The move is ingenious. Who would ever suspect that the one making the accusation is in fact the guilty party, while the one being charged is the one who is innocent? But a challenge exists here. When a lie is this bold and this big, the liar walks on dangerous ground. Such lies will always eventually be exposed. But the liars think they can get away with it. They deceive themselves, along with everyone else.

So it is in this present controversy. Holding to exclusive psalmody in official worship is being charged with legalism on the basis that exclusive psalmody is merely a law made up by a man to regulate the worship of God but was never exclusively commanded by God himself. And to demand that a man-made law be kept instead of or in addition to God’s real and true laws amounts to legalism.

The Pharisees made up all kinds of trivial laws that they could claim to keep. For them obedience to the law of God was what saved a man—but that also presented a problem for them. They



knew that no mere man could ever keep God's holy laws perfectly. Who then could be saved? Their solution was to ignore God's true law of love for God and the neighbor and replace it with other doable, quantifiable requirements that could be met and whereby men could be saved—or at least appear to be saved. Simply put, legalism is salvation by the law or by legal means, whatever that law is considered to be. The gospel of Jesus Christ must have little or nothing to do with it. Thus, if exclusive psalmody in worship is a matter of a man-made, doable, quantifiable requirement that merely supposedly pleases God, exclusive psalmody must be a matter of legalism. That judgment seems relatively simple.

The matter is not simple, however, if the command in question is in fact God's law and was not made up by any man at all. The charge of legalism then becomes quite grievous instead. A false charge of legalism has been made in that case; and because the charge is so serious and must be taken so seriously, God's people who are charged with this sin will be wrongly persecuted and cast out.

The charge that exclusive psalmody in worship amounts to legalism is exactly such a false charge. The scriptures and the creeds are clear. God would not have us “worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word” (Lord's Day 35, Q&A 96). When it is said that the creeds “are dead silent” concerning exclusive psalmody, that is not true.<sup>1</sup> When the creeds talk about our worship of God, the creeds assume that we know what the elements of worship are. Singing is part of those elements. And if God commands us to sing, God is also going to tell us what to sing. That is a given. God will not leave us to our own devices to determine what is good to sing and what is not. The argument is being made in the Reformed Protestant Churches that because the Holy Spirit lives inside of us, we ourselves are able to compose or compile from all of scripture what we will sing for worship because we know how to praise God: simply

sing the word. I contend that we do not know how to praise God at all, even with the Holy Spirit inside of us. There is an old nature of sin inside of us too. That God must command us exactly and specifically how to worship him ought not be offensive to us. It ought to thrill us. God's mercies never cease. He tells us to sing the praises of his glorious name by speaking of all of his wonderful works with understanding. “Sing ye praises with understanding” (Ps. 47:7). “Talk ye of all his wondrous works” (105:2). Do we creatures even know about all of his works and how wonderful they are? Do we have any understanding of them at all? We need God to give us his own songs of praise so that we can worship God as we ought with regard to all of his works, and he did exactly that when he gave us the book of psalms.

The book of psalms is more than a collection of beautiful songs that praise God. Those psalms are doctrine, true doctrine expressly given to the writers of the psalms under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We tend to think of poetry and song merely as “fluff,” but the psalms in scripture are anything but shallow expressions of spiritual feeling or fluff. Deep and moving doctrine is there, doctrine that brings the church forward in her understanding of the truth of salvation and the glory of God's name. No man could have come up with any one of the psalms on his own. And no man did. Psalms are God's revelation to his church. The writers of the psalms recognized that, as they immediately delivered the songs that they wrote to the church of the Old Testament for worship. They knew what the psalms were, and they knew the psalms' purpose.

One striking example of the power of the word of God as it is found in the psalms is recorded in II Chronicles 20:1–30. The destruction of Judah as a nation under the reign of King Jehoshaphat appeared to be imminent. Throughout Israel's history crisis after crisis had assailed the people of God, and every one of those crises represented a life-or-death precipice. Israel and

<sup>1</sup> Nathan Langerak, “The Indwelling Word,” sermon preached on March 19, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3192322435011>.



Judah should have been consumed a thousand times over. But that never happened. This incident was no exception.

Three extraordinarily rich and powerful nations came together against the little (by comparison) nation of Judah to destroy her. From all earthly appearances Judah was doomed. The motive for this attack is not recorded, but that it would be humanly impossible to withstand the invasion was clear to all parties involved, especially to Judah. Jehoshaphat, with all the people of his realm, young and old, cried out to Jehovah for deliverance. And God heard.

Jehoshaphat set singers in front of the army. It had already been revealed to them that this battle would be the Lord's to win, as ultimately every battle for the truth is. But who would win the conflict this time in particular would be made astoundingly plain to all. The army would not have to lift one spear or shield to fight, but the singers would have to sing. And what did they sing? A psalm. And that was how God destroyed all their foes. The battle was the Lord's alone, indeed. The heathen armies attacked each other until not one soldier was left alive. Not one. In the aftermath it took Judah three days to gather the spoil, "it was so much" (II Chron. 20:25). All the kingdoms of those countries were left in utter terror of the true God of all heaven and earth. The victory could not have been more clear.

The psalm was simple—"Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth forever" (II Chron. 20:21)—quoting words that are repeatedly found in the psalms. The singing of those words constituted no magic incantation. The singing of those words constituted reality, a reality that God was pleased to reveal at that moment in time and history. Who can fathom the praise of this God and his mercy? Who could even begin to think in such terms? No man—except One. He who is the express image of God Almighty knows those words and sings them. He composed them. He who is the express image of God *is* them. He is the Word. The Son of God preincarnate delivered Judah that day. That is the power and glory of the psalms. That is the power and glory of Jesus Christ.

When God accomplishes his will, he does so in utmost precision and grace, exquisitely. Grace is power and beauty, a combination that is supremely glorious and divine. Even when God kills his enemies, there is no clumsiness involved. Everything God does has the stamp of his beauty upon it—even his vengeance and surely also his enduring mercy and love. The psalms convey all of that in the most eminent way. And in the end that kind of beauty has only one name: Jesus Christ.

To be given the book of psalms to sing in worship is to be given Jesus Christ. The gift is profound. The gift is enough.

The argument is made, of course, that all of scripture is the word of God, not just the psalms. That is why we may, and some would say should, sing from all of scripture in our worship of God. Who is to say the psalms ought to be our exclusive songbook for official worship services? The power of God is in all of scripture. Where does God tell us to sing *only* psalms in worship? Give us a verse!

God does tell us every principle we are to follow. He has to. He is God. We are creatures. But that does not mean that he has spelled everything out in his scriptures word for word to tell us exactly what to do every moment of our lives. Some things he expects us to simply understand once he has shown us the principles involved, and there are reasons for that. There are many things that God would have us do that he has not specifically told us, but he has not left those things to our imaginations. There is thought involved. Some call it reaching a conclusion by good and necessary consequence. God has given each of us a will and an intellect. He would not have our praise and obedience as if we were robots. We must love him and praise him *with all of our being*. That is the command. That means that we rightly love him and obey him with all of our mind and will, not just with our hands and feet. That means that we may, can, and must figure some things out. If we were explicitly and specifically told every move to make, we wouldn't have to use our whole minds anymore to obey

him. But mindless obedience is not obedience, nor is it love.

The simple answer to the question of where God tells us to sing only psalms in worship is that God has not given us one specific verse in the Bible that says, “Thou shalt sing only from the psalms in worship.” But the message is clear, nevertheless, as clear as the command to assemble for worship on Sunday instead of on Saturday and as clear as the fact that God is triune, even though the word *Trinity* is nowhere in the Bible. Every jot and tittle of God’s word is sure and complete, requiring no subtraction or addition. The command to sing only psalms in worship requires no subtraction or addition either.

When God gives a gift that is thorough and complete, one does not begin to look elsewhere for things to supplement that gift. We ought to know by now that if we will confess that Jesus did enough for all of our salvation, it is a grievous sin to attempt to add anything of our work to that saving work of Jesus Christ. The same is true if God has given us a complete songbook for worship. Will we say that that is not enough? What is not complete in the book of psalms for worship? What is lacking? Do we need to gather more verses from the rest of scripture to sing as we please or, worse, compose more of our own songs? Is the truth of all of scripture encapsulated in the psalms, or is it not? If it is not, then the 150 psalms are not complete. Then we need more. If you can find all of the truth of scripture in the psalms, however, what more is needed to sing? Any addition would be to mar that whole.

All of the word of God must be sung in worship. That argument is true. If God’s marvelous works are to be fully recounted and praised, those works are found in all of scripture. But the question is, how does one go about doing that? How can one possibly sing all of the word of God? Not every text in the Bible is meant to be sung, nor can every single text in the Bible be sung. That would be too much. The Bible must be condensed. The book of psalms does that. If we are to sing all of the word of God, then to answer how that is done is simple. Sing psalms. That is

what it is to sing all of the word of God. Without the psalms, one in all practicality cannot sing all of the word of God. Giving us all of the word to sing is exactly God’s provision in giving us the psalms.

But more is involved here. One might also argue that the whole Bible is about Jesus Christ, and that would be correct. Nevertheless, the psalms carry a unique place in that role of revealing Jesus Christ, as they consist of his own personal words, experiences, thoughts, and emotions. The psalms are not merely some musically infused poetry and verses. The book of psalms expresses the profoundest of truth, doctrine, and life in Jesus Christ. The psalms are God’s art set down as revelation to us poor sinners, who do not deserve to see such glory and much less deserve to sing such praise. Who is the express image of God revealed to man? Jesus Christ, of course. In the book of psalms we are given Jesus Christ to a depth that is unsurpassed elsewhere in all of scripture. That does not imply anything negative about the rest of scripture. It does imply that God has his unique and specific purpose marked out for every jot and tittle of scripture. That is the purpose of the book of psalms. It is God’s art that covers everything.

Any discontent with the psalms is a serious matter, therefore, as serious as making an assault on Jesus Christ himself. When it is claimed that to require exclusive singing of the psalms in public worship is a form of legalism, it is to charge God’s holy and righteous law and good pleasure with the most heinous of crimes. It is the boldest of lies. Antinomianism says that God’s laws do not have to be obeyed. To be charged with antinomianism is bad. But the charge of legalism goes much further. Legalism means that God’s holy law has been added to and displaced. That is worse. That is an attack not just on the doing or not doing of the law but an attack on the very nature of God’s holy law.

The point of contention, then, is this: Is exclusive psalmody in public worship in truth a law of God, or is it not? Is exclusive psalmody a man-made rule, or is it truly God’s holy and

righteous desire and demand? The answer to this question will settle the matter.

Everything points to exclusive psalmody being God's law and delight, and it is our delight then too. The laws of God tell us something. They tell us about who God is. God is no idolater, no liar, and no thief. God loves his holy name and will guard it with all of his divine diligence and devotion. It is our joy and privilege to do the same. God's laws represent no restrictions upon us and no limits. They are our freedom to obey. That is what Christian liberty is: the freedom to obey. It is no freedom at all to disobey God's law. Disobedience is nothing but bondage and misery.

Is God's name glorified when his psalms are sung by his people in corporate worship in sincerity and truth? It surely is. There is no argument there. Is God's name glorified when something else is sung by his people, even in sincerity and truth, in corporate worship? Is it, in fact, a matter of idolatry when something else is sung by them in worship? Great offense has been taken at answering the latter question affirmatively. Of course, the people of God can sing any song they desire to sing in order to praise God, right? Their hearts are sincere and true. Idolatry could not possibly be committed when singing other infallible words from the holy scriptures besides the 150 psalms, right? How dare we even think such a thing!

To think otherwise is to stand on very unpopular ground.

The reader is forewarned that some very unpopular ground lies ahead.

The first time Gideon acted on behalf of Jehovah to begin to demolish the idols that were found near his home, he was quite unpopular as well. His kinsmen and neighbors threatened to kill him. Removing idols was no safe occupation at that time in Israel's history. That may be difficult for us to understand. Of course, no child of God would ever want to hang on to any graven images found in his or her possession, right? Gideon found out otherwise. But God protected him. All of this is recorded in Judges 6:11–32.

The further history of Israel and Judah reveals more of the painful truth regarding the removal of idols. We celebrate to read of this king's victory and that king's reforms being put into effect as they returned to the right worship of Jehovah and destroyed all of the nation's heathen idols and altars. But even then, some things were still very difficult to do. "Nevertheless the high places were not taken away" (I Kings 22:43). Such was the scenario, repeatedly. The times were few when all remnants of idolatry were obliterated from the land. We might wonder why this was so difficult for them to do; but we might better ask, why is this so difficult for us to do? Are we so advanced in our adoring service and love of Jehovah that no idol would ever be found in our possession? The question begs no answer. We know our evil hearts; and if we don't, we ought to. Those saints of old were examples for us poor sinners who are not one bit better than they were. We have idols too. And we have a hard time giving them up.

What exactly is an idol? It is something man-made that we worship other than God, whether that thing be made of wood or stone or whether it be any false doctrine lurking on a bookshelf or in our imaginations. That is the first commandment. Positively speaking, the first commandment is to have God as our God alone. The matter seems quite straightforward.

The matter might seem more complicated though when we come to the second commandment. In the second commandment God is still being worshiped, or at least appears to be, but the problem of images still enters in. In violation of the second commandment, images are used to worship the true God. Jeroboam began the tradition for the ten tribes of Israel. After the political separation of Israel from Judah, it would no longer work very well for the people in the ten tribes of Israel to go to the temple at Jerusalem to worship God there, as God had commanded them to do. Jeroboam therefore believed he was perfectly justified in setting up some golden calves, where worship (supposedly) could take place outside of Judah. The purpose was to

worship Jehovah, after all. Shouldn't God be pleased with these efforts of the ten tribes to continue to worship him how and where it was convenient for them to do so? Such sins haunted Israel to the end of her miserable history. No, God was not pleased with such man-inspired worship of himself.

That same man-inspired worship is what we do when we sing something other than the psalms in worship. We may not worship God in any other way than he has commanded in his word. That is specifically stated in Lord's Day 35 regarding the second commandment, and that is the command of scripture regarding worship almost verbatim in Deuteronomy 12:32: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." We know that God has commanded his church to sing the psalms in official worship, and we know exactly what they are—all 150 of them. Now, may we add to those or diminish from them? If more songs may be added, where is that commanded? Exactly what songs are they supposed to be? Do we know all of the lyrics? We do not. We would have to determine that for ourselves, God forbid.

The command to worship God only as he has commanded is sheer freedom. In that freedom we know what God wants us to do to worship him. We want to do nothing else than what God wants us to do. To be able to do what one sincerely desires to do is freedom. Do we see how this command is sheer liberty?

If we have to come up with the songs and the words and the praises of God (when as mere

creatures we haven't got a clue as to his full power, might, and majesty), how shall we do that rightly? How dare we utter one self-invented song on our lips, lest we detract from God's glory in our feeble and sinful attempt to worship the true God of gods, who made heaven and earth? He knows that we are dust, but that excuses nothing. Man of himself knows nothing of how to worship God rightly. Do we see how this command then becomes something that we love? There is no restriction here. There is only freedom. That Psalm 119 looms large in the book of psalms is no mystery. The laws of God are our life and our liberty. Even as a fish delights to swim in the water, so our souls delight to do God's will. That is Christ in us, the Son of God, whose meat it was to perfectly do *only* God's will.

Legalism is very bad. A false charge of legalism is even worse. Legalism binds the conscience to obey any number of man-made pseudo laws. A *false* charge of legalism binds the conscience to *disobey* God's real laws. (If one wonders how that works in practical terms, ask anyone who believes they ought to sing only the psalms of Zion in worship, as they are now told that they must sing other songs instead.) A false charge of legalism attacks the gospel at its very core. "The truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). When there is a false charge of legalism, that freedom is gone. That freedom is gone because the truth is gone. And the truth is Christ. Yes, the matter is that serious. When there is a false charge of legalism, the gospel of Jesus Christ is cast away and lost.

—Connie L. Meyer





**1. Didn't you teach legalism and conditional fellowship with God in your sermons on exclusive psalmody, first by adding a law of man (exclusive psalmody) to the law of God (second commandment) and second, by your explicit teaching? You taught: "So there is a question of the application of the regulative principle to the singing of the church; especially this question: Does the regulative principle require exclusive psalmody?...This is the matter of your worship. It is the matter of God dwelling with you and bringing you into his covenant fellowship through the Lord Jesus Christ."**

**Answer:** This is probably the most common question/accusation in the Reformed Protestant Churches against my sermons on exclusive psalmody. Not only is the official charge of First and Second Reformed Protestant Churches' consistories against me that I taught legalism, but this accusation has been often repeated from Reformed Protestant pulpits in the last month or two. For many members of the RPC by now, it is simply a given that my sermons on exclusive psalmody taught legalism.

The above question follows the lead of First Reformed Protestant Church's consistory in its charge against me. Here is the consistory of First RPC in its own words, which comprised the first ground of their answer to my protest:

The first argument of the protest is that the sermons only taught the pure gospel, and the congregation was not put under the law for her salvation. This argument misses the point of the charge of legalism against these sermons. There are two ways one can teach legalism. The first is what the protest presents and that is to place the people of God under the true commands of the law and teach that they must keep that law in order to have their salvation. An example of this would be the error of a conditional covenant.

The other way one can teach legalism is by adding their own false scruple to the commandments so that unless someone keeps this scruple they are not truly keeping the law of God. An example of this error would be the Pharisees when they restricted the steps that a man could take on the Sabbath day. It is the consistory's judgment that the error brought in the sermons was a man's addition to the law of God and therefore is legalism not because they taught the law as the way unto salvation but because they *added* a law of man to the law of God.

However, when this addition to the law was taught it put man's law between us and Christ. It was taught in the March 12 sermon, "So there is a question of the application of the regulative principle to the singing of the church, especially this question does the regulative principle require exclusive psalmody...This is the matter of your worship. It is the matter of God dwelling with you and bringing you into his covenant fellowship through the Lord Jesus Christ." The doctrine is exactly this. If you do not sing exclusive psalmody in the worship services and you sing any other versifications of scripture, then God does not dwell with you and you do not experience covenant fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

My answer to the question/accusation is this: By God's grace, I did not teach legalism or conditional fellowship with God in my sermons on exclusive psalmody; rather, I taught the pure gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

That answer must be demonstrated. Bear with me as I must speak of myself often in this answer, which I do not for my sake but for the sake of the truth.

<sup>1</sup>Agenda for the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, May 18, 2023, 48–49.



First, I did not add a law of man to the law of God. Exclusive psalmody is not a law of man but a law of God. It has been demonstrated several times in the first few issues of *Reformed Pavilion* that exclusive psalmody is God's law for worship. For example, see Mrs. Connie Meyer's article elsewhere in this issue. Also, permit me to quote from issue 3:

Exclusive psalmody is not a law of man but a principle from God. God composed a special book for his church to sing. God inspired each song in the book (II Sam. 23:1–2). God inspired the placement of each song in the book (Acts 13:33). God called the songbook the “songs of Zion” (Ps. 137:3), indicating that these are the songs the church sings. God called the book the “LORD’S song” (Ps. 137:4), indicating that these are the songs the people of Jehovah sing. The songs in the book are Jesus’ songs, for he is the sweet psalmist of Israel (II Sam. 23:1). Jesus sang from this songbook while he was on earth (Matt. 26:30). Jesus sings from this songbook now in the midst of his church (Heb. 2:12). God commands his church to sing that book: “sing psalms” (Ps. 105:2). The apostles instructed the church to sing from this songbook (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; James 5:13). From all of that comes this principle: sing psalms in church.

The principle of psalm singing leaps from the pages of scripture. The principle presses itself upon the consciousness of the church. So clear is the principle of psalm singing in scripture that one struggles to understand how anyone could call it a law of man. It is not as if God was unclear as to his will for the church's singing. What more could men want from God in order to know clearly God's will for their singing? Do men want God to say it in a direct command? Here: “sing psalms” (Ps. 105:2). Do men want God to hand them a book? Here: the book

of psalms. Do men want God to show by Jesus' example and institution? Here: “in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee” (Heb. 2:12).

The term *exclusive psalmody* simply expresses what God has revealed: sing psalms in church.<sup>2</sup>

Second, and I do not write this with any pleasure, the consistory quoted my sermon deceitfully. The consistory cut and pasted parts of my sermon together to make it look like I was teaching that we sing psalms in order to have fellowship with God. Here is the consistory's cut-and-pasted quotation of my March 12 sermon:

So there is a question of the application of the regulative principle to the singing of the church, especially this question does the regulative principle require exclusive psalmody...This is the matter of your worship. It is the matter of God dwelling with you and bringing you into his covenant fellowship through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And here is the consistory's explanation of the doctrine that they found me teaching in their cut-and-pasted version of my sermon:

The doctrine is exactly this. If you do not sing exclusive psalmody in the worship services and you sing any other versifications of scripture, then God does not dwell with you and you do not experience covenant fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

The truth of the matter is that my sermon did not teach anything like the consistory's quotation and explanation. Rather, the sermon comforted God's people who were nervous about the regulative principle and exclusive psalmody that matters of worship are not a terror to God's people. Worship is a gift of God's grace to his people. In worship the covenant God condescends to dwell with his covenant people in Jesus

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Lanning, *FAQ, Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 3 (April 29, 2023): 7.

Christ. Therefore, learning the regulative principle is not a burden for God's people but a joyful privilege. Here is the full quotation of the introduction to the sermon:

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, the matter of what has been called the regulative principle of worship is a very dear and precious matter to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The matter of the regulative principle is not a fearful or distasteful subject for the church, and that's because the matter of the regulative principle has to do with that central activity of the church's life which is the worship of Jehovah; and for the church of Jesus Christ there is nothing better, nothing at all in all the world better, than the worship of Jehovah. The church longs for that worship and, in fact, sings of her longing for that worship when she says, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple." And if someone would try to keep the church of Jesus Christ from worshiping, if they would try to hold her back, then the church of Jesus Christ would storm the gates of the church and storm the kingdom of heaven. The church loves worship. She simply loves worship. There's nothing better for the church of Jesus Christ than the worship of her God. God is here with you, and he delights to be here with you. It's his good pleasure to be here with his church. He draws you into his house, and by the cords of his covenant love he brings you close to himself and speaks to you by his word.

There's nothing better for the church than the worship of Jehovah God, and therefore the matters pertaining to that worship, including the regulative principle of worship, are also precious to the church of Jesus Christ. Now, in our own

congregation at present, that may not seem to be so much the case that the regulative principle is a very precious thing. There might even be some tension in our own congregation about the matter and especially questions about the application of that principle to our singing.

It is striking to me that there was a difference of opinion in our mother church that maybe ran deeper than we thought, probably ran deeper than I thought, but a difference of opinion that was pretty firmly entrenched in our mother church with regard to the regulative principle and singing. One position that was taught publicly is that the regulative principle of worship requires exclusive psalmody in the church, so that what the church is to sing is the 150 psalms of David; and therefore the church is forbidden in her worship from singing hymns, that is, non-inspired, man-made songs intended for worship that were not part of the 150 psalms. Many of us grew up being taught that the regulative principle applied to the psalms. There was another position in our mother church that taught that the regulative principle did not apply to exclusive psalmody, that the regulative principle simply meant the congregation must sing and that she must sing the word, and the only reason why we practiced virtually but not entirely exclusive psalmody in the churches is because we desired to for practical reasons but not for the regulative principle's reason. And those two positions that many of us were brought up in, one or the other, have carried into the Reformed Protestant Churches.

So there is a question of the application of the regulative principle to the singing of the church, especially this question: does the regulative principle require exclusive psalmody? We will look

at that question tonight, but that does not mean that this topic for the church of Jesus Christ is something fearful, not something to be afraid of whatsoever. This is the matter of your worship. It is the matter of God dwelling with you and bringing you into his covenant fellowship through the Lord Jesus Christ. It's striking to me, and I wonder sometimes how it could be that there were two exclusionary, contradictory principles that were taught in mother and that could just go for decades and decades and lifetimes. I suppose one explanation is that now that the Lord has given reformation in the Reformed Protestant Churches, doctrine means something, and the worship of the church means something. It's not mere show. It's not mere dressing. It's not merely activities that you go through. Worship means something to the church of Jesus Christ in reformation, and doctrine means something, and this matter of the regulative principle means much for the Reformed Protestant Churches.

And so tonight we are going to consider that regulative principle out of the Lord's Day that we considered last time, Lord's Day 35, which deals with the second commandment. And because the pulpit's task from Jehovah is to teach and to instruct and to lead when there is difference, we return especially tonight to question 96 and the statement that we may not worship God in any other way than he has commanded in his word. So we consider this joyful, glad topic tonight under the theme "The Regulative Principle of Worship." In the first place, consider the principle and God; in the second place, consider the principle and Christ; and in the third place, consider the principle and the church.<sup>3</sup>

Does that sermon look anything like the sermon as the consistory quoted it? The consistory cut a patch out of the sermon here, cut a patch there, sewed them together, made a Frankenstein monster, and called it my sermon. There is no other word for it than lying. The consistory, sitting in the judgment seat, falsified my words. The consistory, with my life in its hands, bore false witness against me. Having lied, they cast me out of the city and stoned me. (Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.)

My doctrine is not that we worship God *unto* fellowship with God but that we worship God *because* of his fellowship with us. My doctrine is that God's people have the solid comfort of God's gracious presence with them in their worship and therefore seek to worship him as he has commanded. This is simply the doctrine of Calvin:

And as the Lord, in ancient times, when he called himself, He who dwelleth in Sion, intended to give his people full and solid ground of trust, tranquility, and joy; so even now, after the law has come out of Sion, and the covenant of grace has flowed to us from that fountain, let us know and be fully persuaded, that wherever the faithful, who worship him purely and in due form, according to the appointment of his word, are assembled together to engage in the solemn acts of religious worship, he is graciously present, and presides in the midst of them.<sup>4</sup>

If the doctrine of my sermons was not legalism, then what was it? By God's grace, my doctrine was the gospel of Jesus Christ. I have never taught the law to First RPC as her salvation. I have always taught the law to First RPC in its two uses of exposing her sin and regulating her life of gratitude. I have always taught the gospel to First RPC as her salvation. I have ever cried unto her that Jesus Christ's obedience alone is her obedience and that his atonement is the covering of all her sins against God's law.

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Lanning, "The Regulative Principle of Worship," sermon preached on March 12, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=312232237135528>.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1, trans. James Anderson (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 122. Calvin is commenting here on Psalm 9:11.

In fact, in the very sermons that were charged with legalism, I taught salvation through Christ and not through the law. For example, from the March 12 sermon:

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?<sup>5</sup>

So, in answer to the question posed at the beginning: By God's grace, I did not teach legalism or conditional fellowship with God in my sermons on exclusive psalmody; rather, I taught the pure gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

**2. Do you believe that it is legitimate to sing a versification of a psalm in worship? You have preached against versification in the past. Do you believe that versification of the psalms is image worship?**

**Answer:** I have been imprecise and even clumsy in my use of the word *versification*. I have used the word *versification* in connection with everything that our 1912 Psalter does in setting the psalms to music. The Psalter does versify psalms, but it also paraphrases some psalms, summarizes some psalms, interprets some psalms, adds to some psalms, subtracts from some psalms, and corrupts some psalms. I have spoken about versification in the same breath as all that paraphrasing, summarizing, interpreting, adding, subtracting, and corrupting, even though the term *versification* does not include all those concepts. I regret my imprecision in the use of that term, especially because it is possible that my imprecision has led to some of the current unrest over exclusive psalmody in the Reformed Protestant Churches. After all, if even strict versification is wrong, what are we supposed to sing? For example, I have preached:

The church becomes dissatisfied with versifications of the psalms that are only summaries of the psalm and that are

<sup>5</sup>Andrew Lanning, "The Regulative Principle of Worship."



close but not quite the psalm and that are only man's interpretation of the psalm. That becomes, after a little while, intolerable to the church because when she sings a man's summary of a psalm, she's not singing the word of Christ, and Christ isn't singing that song with her. Only the church's voices are heard, but the voice of Christ is not heard in heaven in that song. And the church becomes dissatisfied with a songbook that doesn't include every part of every psalm.<sup>6</sup>

I am sorry for my imprecision in the use of the term *versification*. I am sorry for whatever unrest my imprecision has stirred in the churches. I also repudiate the idea that versification as such is wrong or is image worship.

To define the term, *versification* is rendering a passage in verse with meter and rhyme. Versification takes a passage that does not have meter or rhyme and expresses that passage in metered and rhymed verse.

This applies to the psalms because the psalms in the Bible are not written with meter and rhyme. This is true in our English translation in the King James Version (KJV), but this is also true in the original Hebrew. The psalms in Hebrew do not follow a set meter. The ends of the lines do not rhyme. The beauty of Hebrew poetry is not in the cadence of the words or the rhyme of the words but in the thought of the words. Instead of rhyming sounds, Hebrew psalms "rhyme" thoughts. There are often two and sometimes three parallel thoughts lined up. The beauty of Hebrew verse is in the interplay and mutual illumination of those parallel thoughts.

When one versifies a psalm, he works with the words of the psalm to render those words in metered and rhymed verse. The metered and rhymed verse can be divided into stanzas, and the versified psalm can then be sung to a tune.

There is nothing wrong with versifying psalms. Versifying psalms is good and holy. A congregation that has a faithful versification of

the psalms has the psalms. When a congregation sings her faithful versification of the psalms, she is singing the psalms. The church does not need to sing or chant the King James Version to sing the psalms. The church does not need to sing or chant the original Hebrew to sing the psalms. When she sings a faithful versification of the psalms in her own tongue, she is singing the psalms. This is evident from two considerations.

First, the apostles of our Lord often used a translation of the Old Testament scriptures in their teaching and preaching. The Old Testament was written by God in Hebrew. By the time of the apostles, there was a translation of the Hebrew Bible in Greek, which Greek translation of the Old Testament was known as the Septuagint. In their preaching the apostles would often quote from the Greek Septuagint, rather than from the Hebrew original. They quoted the Greek Septuagint as the word of God. They quoted the Greek Septuagint as having God's authority for the faith and life of the people.

The matter of translation is analogous to the matter of versification. The original Hebrew Bible could be rendered in Greek translation in such a way that the Greek translation was the Bible. So also the psalms can be rendered in verse in such a way that the versification is the psalms. Just as the psalms in a faithful translation are still the psalms, so also the psalms in a faithful versification are still the psalms.

Second, meter and rhyme are not essential to the inspired text of the scriptures. One could translate any given text into prose form (without meter and rhyme) or into verse form (with meter and rhyme). Meter and rhyme are indifferent. For example, there are passages in Hebrew that have a definite rhyme and cadence, but it is impossible to replicate every aspect of that rhyme and cadence in English translation. When God created in the beginning, the earth was *TOH-hu vah-VOH-hu*—"without form, and void" (Gen. 1:2). The rhyme and the cadence of the Hebrew are immaterial to the meaning of the passage.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Lanning, "Recompensed According to My Righteousness," sermon preached on May 5, 2021, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=522115542507>.



The same thing applies to the psalms. One could translate the psalms out of Hebrew into English prose, as our 1611 King James Version did. Or one could translate the psalms out of Hebrew into English verse, as the 1650 Scottish Metrical Psalter did. Whether the translated form is prose or verse is immaterial to the meaning of the inspired text.

In light of all the above, what must be the church's approach to the versification of the psalms? The most important consideration by far in versification is *faithfulness to the psalms*. The psalms are not the word of man but the word of God. Even when God gives the psalms to man for man to sing to him, the psalms remain the word of God. The church, grateful to God for giving her his own songs to sing to him in Christ, will not be careless with the psalms but exceedingly careful. It would be intolerable to the grateful church for those psalms to be corrupted. It would be intolerable to her for man to sprinkle his lies among the psalms. It would be intolerable to her for man to add his own ideas to the psalms. It would be intolerable to her for man to leave parts of the psalms out. It would be intolerable to her for man to add his own spin to the psalms. The church's overriding concern above all others in versifying the psalms will be faithfulness to the psalms as the word of God.

The idea of being faithful to the word of God is not foreign to members of the Reformed Protestant Churches. The reason that we use the King James Version of the Bible is because it is the most faithful English translation of the word of God. Even though much of the English-speaking world would find the language of the KJV to be too archaic and clunky for modern English ears, we love the KJV for its faithfulness.

Would we be satisfied with anything less than faithfulness in our Bible translation? Wouldn't we sharply criticize unfaithful translations as playing loose with the word of God? Don't we demand that our ministers and teachers use the KJV as a faithful translation, even as our ministers and teachers willingly demand it of themselves? Faithfulness to the word is not a new concept for the Reformed Protestant Churches.

Just as conscientious as the RPC are in having a faithful Bible translation, so conscientious ought we to be in having a faithful psalter versification. Faithful versification of the psalms is good. Unfaithful versification of the psalms is bad. The question that the church must ask of her psalter versification—just as she asks it of her Bible translation—is whether it is faithful to the word of God. Unfaithfulness in versification will become just as unsatisfactory and eventually intolerable to the church as unfaithfulness in translation.

Faithfulness is not an onerous burden for the church but a matter of joyful gratitude. God in his mercy has redeemed his people from their sins. God in his kindness has brought his beloved people into his house through Jesus Christ. God in his grace has given them the right to worship him in their head, Jesus Christ the Righteous. God in his love has given them Christ's songs to sing with him. The church thus redeemed desires nothing so much as to worship her God faithfully. "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple" (Ps. 27:4).

—AL



## Article VI. The Fall of the King

**W**e are discussing Adam as an individual, regardless of the relation in which he stands to all mankind. Of course, we will remember all the while that he is far more than an individual. We will continually bear in mind that he is also Head of the Covenant and Father of the Human Race. But for clearness' sake, we will first of all discuss him as a separate person in order then to view him in relation to us.

We found that he was the king-servant, ruling over the kingdom of the world, but bowing in the dust before the countenance of his Maker, and acknowledging Him as highest Sovereign.

We found, too, that as such he was created in the image of God and after His likeness.

Now we must still add, that Adam was created in a state of unique freedom. Never was there a man again that was free in the sense in which Adam was free. Never shall there be a man in all eternity that is free in that sense of the word. In order to understand this, we must distinguish between three possible states of moral freedom. In the first place, we may call your attention to the state of the perfected saints in heaven. When once we shall be delivered from all sin, from the last trace of death, when once we shall be completely sanctified and glorified, in eternity, in the new Kingdom, we shall not be able to sin any more. That does not mean that then we shall have lost our moral freedom. Not at all. On the contrary, we shall enjoy the highest possible freedom conceivable. God certainly is free, too. In fact He is free in the most absolute sense of the word. And yet, you realize immediately that it would be the depth of wicked blasphemy to assert that God is also able to sin. No, to all eternity

we shall be free, perfectly free; nothing shall restrain us, nothing shall hinder us from living according to the desires and dictates of our heart. And yet, it must be maintained that in eternity we shall not be able to sin any more, and that for the simple reason that then we are perfect, then we have eternal life perfected, then we shall not be able to will to sin, to conceive of sin, to long for sin. Our not being able to sin shall not be caused by outward restraint, but by inward perfection. And we shall serve God freely, in harmony with the only and deepest desire of our heart and the fixed inclination of our will forever. Directly opposite of this state of the perfected saint is the condition of the sinner dead in sin and misery, the sinner as he is by nature without the regenerating influence of the Spirit of God. In a sense he is also free. He must not be compared to a lion in a cage, that longs for his freedom but is locked in with iron bars. It is not in that sense that he is in the prison of sin. That is much rather the picture of the child of God in this dispensation as he longs for the deliverance from the body of this death. No, the sinner feels himself perfectly free, he does not long for any other liberty than that which he possesses. And yet he is not able to do any spiritual good. Only, just as in the state of perfection, we shall not be able to sin any more, because of inward perfection, so in the natural state, the sinner is not able to do any spiritual good because of his inward condition of spiritual death. He can do no good, he will do no good, and he cannot will to do good. He is free, therefore, in as far as there is no outward force that compels him to sin. He is a slave of sin, however, in as far as sin has taken hold of the inmost forces of his being so that he never wills anything

but to sin. Also he, therefore, lives in harmony with the deepest desire of his heart, but that deepest desire is to hate God and to rebel against Him. Distinct, however, from both these conditions, was the state of Adam. Not as if he stood in between both these conditions, in perfect indifference, with equal inclination to fall to either side. No, Adam stood in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. He was not an indifferent being. He was created good and after God's image. But although he was inclined to do good, he was able to fall, to disobey, to renounce his true relation to the God of his creation. Never must we say that Adam already possessed eternal life. He did not. His state was not like that of the saints in perfection. To reach that state he was to travel the way of perfect and absolute free obedience. Adam had to fight in order to enter the state of perfection. He was uniquely free.

In the second place, we must also remember that Adam was placed in what may be called the stronghold, the fortress of the Kingdom. He was not commanded to roam all over the earth from the very start. No, God placed him in Paradise. And He placed him there with the positive command to dress and to keep it. You see, the condition was such, that sin had already made its appearance in creation before it entered into the world of man. Satan had sinned in heaven. We shall have abundant opportunity to discuss him and his work later. If at this stage we only remember, that he was a mighty angel, perhaps the mightiest among the angels of God, mightier perhaps even than Michael, who always stands for the children of the Kingdom. And in his great power he conceived of the idea of thrusting God from His throne, and ruling instead of the Almighty. He rebelled. But, of course, his rebellion failed as any rebellion against the Omnipotent is bound to fail. What we must clearly see, however, is this, that when Adam stood in Paradise, there was already an enemy of God as Sovereign, whose very principle of life it was to rise against the Almighty in rebellion, and who for that very reason could not leave the Kingdom of God as it existed upon

earth undisturbed. Satan was the enemy of God, and for that reason also the enemy of Adam. And for that reason Adam, as king of the world, naturally was the ally of God, God's party in the world. And this is really the very essence of the covenant-idea. Also of this covenant we shall have occasion to speak later. Only remember now, that there was a common enemy of God and Man, and that purpose of this common enemy was to attack the sovereignty of God in Man, the king-servant, the image of his maker. And, therefore, God made a covenant with man, that he might be strong in his fight against Satan. For that same reason he also placed him in Paradise, the strong hold of the Kingdom, that the battle might be concentrated, and that Adam, the ally of God, might defend the Kingdom against the assaults of Satan. Again, for that same reason God placed the two trees in Paradise. The battle had to be fought. The Kingdom had to be established. And before the Kingdom could be possibly established, the devil had to be defeated and man must be victorious over him. God, therefore, placed the two trees in the midst of the garden, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That last tree was not planted in order that man might have a stumbling-block and fall, but in order that the battle should be concentrated and he might resist and have the victory. The sovereign Word of God was connected with that tree. And therefore, if Adam resisted and refused to eat of the tree, he thereby showed that he, as the king of the world, as the ally of God, would bow in the dust before his Maker in the absolute sense of the word and rule in His name instead of in the name of Satan. But, on the other hand, if Satan also comes and connects his word with the tree, and man then bows before the word of Satan, he has delivered the kingdom, with himself, to the prince of darkness and the world has become a kingdom of the devil. The tree of life was to strengthen him in the battle, be a means of the free grace of God to him and lead him from strength to strength till he and his kingdom had reached the state of perfect stability and God would be All in all.

Thus the entire relation becomes clear.

As such he is the ally of God, God's party in the world, over against the enemy of the kingdom, the devil.

As such he was to fight the battle till his kingdom should be established and the devil be defeated.

And that battle was concentrated in Paradise, the stronghold, the fortress of the kingdom; concentrated still more in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with which the Word of God was connected, and with which Satan also connected his word.

As such he might eat of the tree of life and be strengthened with the grace of God. I imagine especially on the day of rest which God had hallowed, that he might go from strength to strength till the battle was won!

We know the history. The tempter does not come directly to Adam, but goes to his wife. This was but natural in every way. She was weaker and the devil knew it. She did not receive the command directly, nor was she in last instance the responsible one. Besides, the devil must have thought that he could more easily arouse and flatter her pride, even by the very fact that he addressed her and that he would argue with her on such an important matter as the tree of knowledge. And once having her started, he realized that she could be more easily convinced than Adam. And now it is true, that he would have gained nothing if he tempted Eve and failed to reach Adam. If Eve had sinned and Adam would have refused to eat, the kingdom would have been saved. God might have destroyed Eve and built a new woman out of a second rib of Adam. But the devil also realized that he could reach Adam far more easily through his wife than directly. And hence he goes to the woman and tempts her first.

It is interesting to study the history of the fall of Eve from more than one point of view. In the first place, I would say, that she had no business lingering near the tree all alone. Adam evidently was not there. He was busy in some other part of the garden, but Eve was caught

near the tree of knowledge without her husband. In the second place, she did not call Adam when the serpent began to talk to her about the important question. She was not king, she was queen. She was not the responsible one in the last instance, but Adam was. And when the serpent began to talk to her in so suspicious a manner about the question of eating of the tree, it would have been far safer to tell him: "My husband is not at home. You return when he is around. He knows more about these things than I do." But she does not. In the third place it is of interest to notice that she really begins to argue with the devil. The serpent from the very start really contradicted the Word of God, and Eve might have dismissed him immediately as queen of Paradise. It's a dangerous affair to argue with the devil. And the best thing you can do with him if he tries to argue nevertheless, is to dismiss him without even deeming him worthy of an argument. Eve argues. And again she shows her weakness. Formally she is entirely correct, for she places the Word of God over against the word of the devil, and that is the only way of fighting the devil. But materially she is very careless, for she does not quote the Word of God literally. God had said: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thou shalt surely die." But Eve quotes: "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden ye may eat, but of the tree which is in the midst of the garden God hath said, Ye may not eat of it neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."

Notice the difference.

God had said: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat." Eve quotes: "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden ye may eat," leaving out the words of emphasis, "freely" and "every," and calling the attention to the fruit rather than to the tree.

God had called the tree by its name, "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil"; Eve denotes it by saying: "the tree which is in the midst of the garden." God had said: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Eve spoke as if

the tree itself would kill them, for in the first place she adds: “Neither shall ye touch it,” to which God had never referred; and in the second place she says: “lest ye die,” as if death would be a natural result of the eating.

God had given the command in the singular and thereby emphasized that Adam was the head and the responsible one. Eve spoke continually in the plural, as if she shared the responsibility.

That was Eve’s weakness. If she had spoken at all she should have said: “Serpent my husband has received the command, and he is not here at present. I will call him and thou mayest argue with him.” But instead, she takes Adam’s place and finishes the battle all by and for herself.

She falls. And evidently, Adam does not offer much resistance to his wife, for we simply read, that she goes to her husband and also gives him to eat of the fruit and he did eat! It was woman suffrage in Paradise through and through!

The King had fallen!

He had lost the battle. Instead of listening to the Word of God he had listened to the word of the enemy.

He had subjected himself to another sovereign, and his kingdom had become the dominion of the Prince of Darkness!

—Holland, Mich.



# REFORMED

## — P A V I L I O N —