



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 the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiprah, and the name of the other Puah: and he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive. And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive? And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them. Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses. And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive.

—Exodus 1:15–22

It is a passage for beholding.

Behold the wrathful man. There is no fear of God before his eyes. There is no love for his neighbor in his heart. His only thought is for himself. Maintaining himself, he becomes a monster of inhumanity and indignation. “Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we!” he observes. “Kill them!” he concludes. He begins by cloaking his anger in secrecy and deceit. Privately he calls the Hebrew midwives. Quietly he tells them to put every son to death. But thwarted by the midwives, he finishes in open brutality. He parades his wrath before all his people, saying, “Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river.” Pharaoh’s wrath was against Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was in Pharaoh’s Egypt among the children of Israel. Jesus Christ was the seed of the woman and the seed of Abraham, carried in the loins of the children of Israel. The death of every son would be the snuffing out of the seed. Pharaoh’s decree was not merely aimed at some Hebrew boys or at Hebrew military might. Pharaoh’s decree was aimed at Christ. “Away with him! Drown him!” Thus it always is with pharaohs. Thus it always is with man. Man knows nothing save himself, his will, his good pleasure.

Man has no place for the seed of the woman, who is the will and good pleasure of God. Age after age, man cries out against the Christ, “Away with him! Crucify him!”

Behold the God-fearing midwives. Shiprah and Puah were the very picture of lowliness, nothingness, emptiness. Not only were the Hebrew midwives slaves themselves, but they were the servants of their fellow slaves. The midwives had their lives among the blood and the amnion and the excrement of Israel. But the midwives feared God. They believed God, and they believed his promise. They could not kill the seed. Therefore, the midwives did not as the king of Egypt commanded them but saved the men children alive. Oh, but the fear of God did not come from the midwives. The fear of God in them is not to be explained as their inherent goodness. Not at all! To find what was in the midwives by nature, you must stand with them before Pharaoh as he interrogates them. There you will find the midwives afraid of the face of man. There you will find the midwives speaking lies before the face of God and man. No, the fear of God in the midwives was God’s gift to them. It was the gift of faith, and therefore all that they received was not by work but by grace. By faith the midwives

did not as the king of Egypt commanded. By faith the midwives saved the men children alive. By faith the midwives received their houses, including their eternal house, in which they dwell with God forever. In his grace God dealt well with the midwives.

Behold your faithful God. In the iron furnace of Egypt, his promise has not failed. There he has his Son, and out of Egypt will he call him.

When it is time for God's Son to be cast into the waters, it will not be by Pharaoh's decree but by God's decree that brings the waves of wrath over his Son's head. And the death of God's Son will not be to snuff him out, but it will be the salvation of all his Shiphrahs and Puahs, his lowly, helpless people. Oh, yes, it is a passage for beholding. Behold your faithful God!

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

A genial welcome to another issue of *Reformed Pavilion*.

First, a note of thanks to all those who have communicated with questions for the FAQ. Those questions are much appreciated. If I am reading things right, I believe those questions are also helpful for the readers, as we continue studying the matter of our worship of Jehovah. Keep the questions coming!

In this issue you will also find *Reformed Pavilion's* first letter for publication. With this first piece of correspondence, *Reformed Pavilion* embarks on the exciting voyage of *Letters to the Editor*. Our thanks to our correspondent for writing in and opening the discussion. In my limited experience letters from readers add tremendously to the interest of a magazine. I suspect that people might even skip the various editorials and go right to the letters, shocking as that behavior may sound. But the issues that appear

in *Reformed Pavilion* are weighty and are worthy of robust discussion. Therefore, our readers are hereby invited and encouraged to send in your letters for publication. Whether you are from East or West, friend or foe, an exclusive psalmist or an almost-exclusive psalmist or an anti-exclusive psalmist, let us have it. The editors are standing by, pencils poised.

Also be sure to check out *The Alcove* for a bit of timely reading about Isaac Watts. And don't miss Dewey's article in *From the Ramparts* on what is happening in the Reformed Protestant Churches. Other regular rubrics appear as well, with material that we pray will be edifying, interesting, and instructive.

Finally, tulip time is here again. The only thing nicer than tulips in the sunshine in May is reading *Reformed Pavilion* amidst the tulips in the sunshine in May. Grab your tablet and give it a try.

—AL



The Sweet Psalmist of Israel (1)

Today we must take a close look at David the son of Jesse.

Why David the son of Jesse, you ask? Because we are searching the scriptures for the keys to the book of psalms that will unlock all its treasure. We are listening to the scriptures with attentive ears to hear the heavenly tunes that will carry all the beauty of the psalms to our hearts.

God gave us such a key and a tune last time. He took us to the first words of the first verse of the first psalm—the headwaters of all the psalms. There God showed us the blessed man, and there God showed us Jesus Christ. Blessed is the man! Blessed is Jesus Christ! At the beginning of all the psalms we learned the interpretation of all the psalms: the psalms are about the blessed man, and the blessed man is Jesus Christ.

There is another key to the book of psalms in David the son of Jesse. The book of psalms is known as “The Psalms of David.” When Jesus and his apostles quoted the psalms, they often referred to David. “And David himself saith in the book of Psalms” (Luke 20:42). The Reformed fathers knew the psalms as “the 150 Psalms of David” (Church Order 69). In David, then, there must be a key to unlock his psalms.

So today we must take a close look at David the son of Jesse.

David the Son of Jesse

David had something to say about himself and the psalms. So important was David’s declaration about himself and the psalms that he called that declaration his “last words.” Not last in the sense of his deathbed confession but last in the sense of his firm and abiding testimony—his last will and testament—in which testimony he would live and die.

Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. (II Sam. 23:1–2)

That is something of great significance. David the son of Jesse was not merely David the son of Jesse. Rather, David the son of Jesse was three things that are one thing. David was “the man who was raised up on high.” David was “the anointed of the God of Jacob.” David was “the sweet psalmist of Israel.”

What does this mean?

First, David was “the man who was raised up on high.” This means that God gave David a position of authority. God “dwelleth on high” (Ps. 113:5). God is “high and lifted up” (Isa. 6:1). When God raised David up on high, God gave David authority over men. God made David king. David commanded the armies of Israel and the captains of the host. David commanded the priests and the Levites in their service. David commanded the people. David commanded the mighty men and the lowly servants. God raised David up on high to exercise authority over the children of Israel.

God alone raised David up on high. David had no authority of his own over men. David was not the son of a king. David was the son of Jesse. David was not mighty even in his own family. David was the youngest son. David kept watch over his father’s flock. When his older brothers went to war, David stayed home. When Samuel came to Jesse’s house to anoint the next king of Israel, no one even imagined that it might be little David. David could not raise himself up on high. God came to David. God raised up David to

authority. By God's exaltation of him, David was "the man who was raised up on high."

Second, David was "the anointed of the God of Jacob." This means that God ordained David to office. Anointing with oil was a symbolic ceremony in which specially prepared oil was poured over a man's head. The ceremony of anointing was God's declaration that God by his Spirit had separated the anointed man to office.

The matter of holding office in Israel was a holy matter, whether it was the office of prophet, priest, or king. Holding office was such a holy matter because God went among his people through the office. The officebearer in Israel did not hold his own place. He held God's place. The officebearer in Israel did not do his own work. He did God's work. The officebearer in Israel did not speak his own words. He spoke God's words. The officebearer in Israel did not exercise his own leadership. He exercised God's leadership. God was among the people through the office. David, being "the anointed of the God of Jacob," went among the children of Jacob in God's name and doing God's work.

Third, David was "the sweet psalmist of Israel." This means that David was the bringer of psalms to Israel and the singer of psalms in Israel. David was the psalm bringer. Before David Israel had songs. She had the song of triumph at the shores of the Red Sea (Ex. 15). She had the song of witness to teach her children (Deut. 32). Before David Israel even had some psalms. She had the psalm of Moses (Ps. 90). She had the psalm of the ark (Num. 10:35; Ps. 68:1). Yes, before David Israel had songs. But God sent David to Israel to bring her many psalms. David brought psalms to Israel by writing his own new psalms. David brought psalms to Israel by directing other men—Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun—who wrote their own new psalms. David brought psalms to Israel by incorporating Israel's old songs into new psalms. Israel never stopped singing the song of triumph or the song of witness; she continued singing them in the psalms of David. David truly was "the sweet psalmist of Israel." David truly was the psalm bringer. Israel's sweet psalmist gave Israel a psalm book.

And David was the psalm singer. He delivered his psalms into the hands of the chief musicians. Through the chief musicians David taught the words of his psalms to the Levitical choirs. Through the chief musicians David taught the playing of his psalms to the orchestras of cymbals, psalteries, harps, cornets, trumpets, timbrels, and all manner of musical instruments. With his voice David led the singing. "David spake unto the LORD the words of this song" (II Sam. 22:1). With his voice David cried his psalms unto the Lord (Ps. 141:1). With his voice David called upon the Lord with his psalms (17:6). With his voice David made supplication to God with his psalms (28:2). Truly David was the psalm singer. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee" (22:22).

As the psalm bringer and the psalm singer, David was the sweet psalmist of Israel. That he was the *sweet* psalmist means that his psalms were pleasant. Certainly they were pleasant to the ear and the soul. Can you imagine it? There is the gentle glissando of the harp. There is the triumphant toll of the cymbal. There is the bright voice of the cornet. There is the haunting bay of the shofar trumpet. There is the melody of the psaltery, plucked out on well-tuned strings. And above all are the voices of four thousand well-trained Levites with a timbre as rich as thunder and a resonance as full as the waves crashing against the Mediterranean shore. What it must have been to hear the sweet psalmist and his ensemble singing the psalms of David!

Ah, but the sweetness of the psalmist was not primarily his pleasant voice upon the ear, however moving that sound might have been. The psalmist was a sweet psalmist because his psalms were pleasing to the heart. And what was—and is—so pleasing to the heart about the psalms? This one thing: God! The psalms are full of God. God the creator (Ps. 33:6). God the sustainer (Ps. 104). God the living (42:2). God the judge (50:6). God the blessed (34:1). God my God (63:1). God the good (107:1). God the deliverer (120:2). God the glorious (19:1). God the king (145:1). God the merciful (118:1). God the strong

(21:1). God our dwelling place (90:1). God our salvation (79:9). God our shepherd (23:1). God of hosts (80:7). God of Jacob (76:6). God the forgiver (130:4). God the home builder (127:1). God the oath swearer (110:4). God the excellent of name (8:1). God the refuge (62:7). God the only God (86:10)! The psalms are pleasing to the heart because they abound with God. One could even say it this way, reverently and with understanding: the psalms set God to music. The psalms are God's songs given to God's singer to sing God to God. The sweet psalmist cried to the living God as the servant of God with the words of God about God amidst the people of God. Ah, pleasant psalms! Ah, sweet psalmist!

And so David the son of Jesse was three things. David was "the man who was raised up on high." David was "the anointed of the God of Jacob." David was "the sweet psalmist of Israel." And these three things are one thing. All together they identify David the son of Jesse as the worship leader of the congregation of Israel. David had authority over men to lead their worship ("the man who was raised up on high"). David represented God in leading men's worship ("the anointed of the God of Jacob"). And David was the bringer and the singer of men's psalms in worship ("the sweet psalmist of Israel"). Yes, David the son of Jesse was the worship leader of Israel. I have not understood the depths of that truth before, and perhaps you have not either. We must begin to unfold it next time.

The Son of David the Son of Jesse

For a moment now we must look closer yet at David the son of Jesse. For there is more to David than David. David was the son of Jesse, but there is also a son of David. God had told David about this son when it was in David's heart to build God a house: "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (II Sam. 7:12–14a).

David sang about this son: "The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne" (Ps. 132:11).

David prophesied about this son: "For David speaketh concerning him...Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh..." (Acts 2:25, 30).

And who was this son of David? None other than Jesus Christ! "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David" (Matt. 1:1).

Now here is where there is more to David than David: David was this son of David. That is, David was a type of his own son. In David one could see the outline of Christ, the son of David. David's son was the body that cast a shadow named David upon the pages of the Old Testament scriptures (Col. 2:17). When one understands David the shadow in those scriptures, then one understands Christ the body that cast the shadow. David was a type of Jesus Christ.

What does this mean for the psalms? It means that what David the son of Jesse said about David and the psalms was really the words of Jesus the son of David about Jesus and the psalms. When David identified himself as "the man who was raised up on high," Jesus is that man. When David identified himself as "the anointed of the God of Jacob," Jesus is that anointed. When David identified himself as "the sweet psalmist of Israel," Jesus is that sweet psalmist. All of that to say: Jesus Christ is the worship leader of his church.

How beautiful this is! Jesus Christ is the sweet psalmist of Israel! The psalms of David are the psalms of Christ. And because the entire book of psalms is known by the name of David, all the psalms are the songs of Christ. And listen: you can hear him singing. He sings his birth: "Lo, I come" (Ps. 40:7). He sings his ministry: "I delight to do thy will, O my God" (v. 8). He sings his suffering: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (22:1). He sings his death: "Into thine hand I commit my spirit" (31:5). He sings his resurrection: "Thou wilt shew me the path of

life” (16:11). The sweet psalmist of Israel sings! The psalms are his songs!

How especially beautiful this is when one combines it with what we have already learned about the psalms. First, Jesus is the blessed man of Psalm 1, and thus all the psalms are about Jesus Christ. Now add to that that Jesus is the sweet psalmist of Israel, and thus all the psalms are the songs of Jesus Christ. Do you see? Jesus is both the content of every psalm and the singer of every psalm. The psalms are both about Jesus and by Jesus. Jesus is the subject of the psalms and the object of the psalms. In the psalms Jesus is both the singer and the song. How lovely!

Second, God is the sweetness of the psalms. The psalms set God to music. Oh yes, the psalms are about the blessed man, Jesus Christ. But the psalms are about the blessed man as he reveals the Lord God. Do you see? From beginning to end the psalms declare Jehovah as he is known in Jesus Christ. And with this the first words of the first verse of the first psalm are tied to the last words of the last verse of the last psalm.

Blessed is the man! (Ps. 1:1)

Praise ye the LORD! (Ps. 150:6)

—AL

FROM THE RAMPARTS

How Did This Happen? (1): Introduction

In his prayer during the evening service on Sunday, April 30, Rev. Nathan Langerak asked this question: “Lord, where did this come from? How did this happen?”¹

That is a good question to ask.

It is also an easy question to answer.

But the question he asked was not asked in good faith.

Is it the case that our dear brother Reverend Lanning has suddenly fallen into grievous sin, turned into someone that he never was before, and is now in the clutches of some strange false doctrine? No, that cannot be the case. Reverend Lanning has been regularly teaching exclusive psalmody for the last two years. Many of us were taught this very doctrine our whole lives and have always understood exclusive psalmody to be the historical Reformed position regarding singing in church. So the question cannot be asked in that sense.

Is it the case that Reverend Langerak is just arriving on the scene and genuinely wonders

what has taken place? As all of us know so well, that cannot be it either.

Reverend Langerak has the right to express his convictions on the matters that are unfolding right now in the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). (And we as members must judge whether the spirits that proceed out of his mouth are righteous spirits or whether they are lying spirits like those spoken of in 1 Kings 22.)

He has the right to express his judgment, but Reverend Langerak does not have the right to change our reality.

He did that when he asked the question, “Lord, what happened?”

We all know what happened.

It is not unclear.

But now we start to wonder. What did happen? How did this happen? Maybe it is not as clear as it looks. Maybe my grasp on reality is not as firm as I thought.

His sermon, and his prayer which accompanied the sermon, spoke peace to the people when

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

there is no peace. Reverend Langerak preached a sermon admonishing the people against the killing of their neighbors. Here is the truth: First Reformed Protestant Church “is full of bloody crimes, and the city is full of violence” (Ezek. 7:23).

Reverend Langerak is responsible for those crimes and for that violence.

As are the following elders: Tom Bodbyl, Gord Schipper, Dan Schipper, Jon Langerak, Dave King, and Matt Overway.

It is striking how easily the members of First RPC step over the bodies of Reverend Lanning, Steve VanDyke, Paul Starrett, and Neil Meyer on their way into church. It reminds you of another denomination with which we are very familiar.

In his prayer Reverend Langerak gave as the reason for the troubles in the RPC God’s “chastening hand.” That too looks and sounds familiar.²

Reverend Langerak’s preaching on the sixth commandment with a straight face and feigning a clear conscience reminds me of a minister who preaches every year on the seventh commandment, all the while carrying on an extramarital affair.

Two questions come to mind when you hear Reverend Langerak ask the question, “Lord, how did this happen?”

First, “Is he serious?”

Second, “Does the congregation really believe it?”

How we got to where we are today is not difficult to discern (as we shall see). Reverend Langerak’s pretending to be sincere when he asks the question of God, “How did this happen?” is sheer deceit and subterfuge. It was intended to make the sincere and thoughtful Christians in the audience start to doubt and second-guess their grasp of reality.

After having unleashed violence on the denomination, Reverend Langerak now pretends not to understand what all the fuss is about. Why are people so angry with me? Why do people hate me? In his words, “What did I do to you? What did I do to you? You’re my enemy because I tell you the truth? You’re my enemy because I bring you the word of God? You’re my enemy because I speak of Jesus Christ and his word? What did I do to you?”³

This is like the man who says to his wife—while his finger marks are still on her throat—“What did I do to you? Are you my enemy because I take you to church on Sunday? Are you my enemy because I read the Bible at dinnertime with the family? You’re my enemy because I tell you the truth? What did I do to you?”

Reverend Langerak goes on to assure the members of the congregation that men hate them with a “pure, unadulterated, devilish hatred.”

All this talk about men’s and women’s hating Reverend Langerak and the members of the congregation is calculated to have an effect. It further divides and gives no hope of any reconciliation among members of the church. Reverend Langerak is doing what he has done before in his previous (public) contributions to the controversy: stirring up the members’ emotions and driving the members in a certain direction.

Those members then walk out of church looking over their shoulders for the other members of the church who hate them with “pure, unadulterated, devilish hatred.”

As has been pointed out in detail, Reverend Langerak’s two previous sermons were the opposite of what a faithful pastor is called to do (see 2 Tim. 2:24–26).⁴ When Reverend Langerak pits one part of the denomination against another “rabid”⁵ part of the denomination, that is not love and bears no resemblance to love.

² Brian Huizinga, “2021 in the PRC: Whom the LORD Loveth, He Chasteneth,” speech given on September 23, 2021, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=9252119005469>.

³ Nathan Langerak, “Do Not Kill.”

⁴ Dewey Engelsma, “Boundary Movers: An Analysis,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 2 (April 22, 2023): 16–23.

⁵ Nathan Langerak, “Boundary Movers,” sermon preached on April 16, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=416232248232204>.

You just don't know which Reverend Langerak you are going to get. Calm, peaceful Reverend Langerak, who preaches with composure on the sixth commandment, avoiding any (explicit) mention of the controversy? Or angry, vengeful Reverend Langerak, who lashes out at members of the flock, casting out baseless accusations, as we saw in his previous two sermons on the controversy?

That leaves the flock unsettled and anxious. Which Reverend Langerak are we going to get today?

Here is the truth.

Not one member who defends exclusive psalmody hates Reverend Langerak.

Not one member who defends exclusive psalmody hates their fellow members of the congregation.

Those defending exclusive psalmody love their fellow members.

Reverend Lanning loves his flock.

He loves his flock with the pure, unadulterated love of Jesus Christ.

And the more Reverend Lanning spends himself for his flock and the more abundantly he loves his flock, the less he is loved (2 Cor. 12:15).

Reverend Langerak does not have to specifically address the controversy in each sermon he preaches. He has done his work, and it has had its effect.

His seminary students are only too eager to take up the cudgels on his behalf. We saw that from minister-elect Luke Bomers,⁶ and we are seeing it from Seminarian Tyler Ophoff. In his prayer the evening of April 30, Tyler called Reverend Lanning—and those whom Tyler accused of strengthening Reverend Lanning's hands—"enemies," and he called on God to rout them and to cast down their "wicked stratagems." He accused Reverend Lanning of seeking to "destroy the church."⁷ (I have to ask, do men believe this?

Okay, you disagree with Reverend Lanning's position on exclusive psalmody, but do you believe he is trying to destroy the church? Is there not a man left in the RPC who has any sense?)

Having given his seminary students their marching orders, they are only too eager to carry out Reverend Langerak's work for him.

That works out well for Reverend Langerak.

That allows him to get on the pulpit of First Reformed Protestant Church and preach a sermon on "loving your enemies" and pretend that he is rising above the fray and faithfully instructing the people.

(Perhaps others had the question that I did. Why would Reverend Langerak not use his time at First RPC to preach a sermon on proper worship or psalm singing or the regulative principle of worship or anything like it? Men are speaking all manner of folly by deconstructing words, saying there is no difference between corporate and private worship, saying there is no difference between singing and prayer, and then whatever else happens to arise in their minds that day. Having rejected the clear instruction of the word of God as preached by Reverend Lanning, the congregation flounders and flounders badly.)

Again Reverend Langerak failed to instruct when he had the perfect opportunity to do so.

Having started a mob, he is content to sit back and watch it stampede.

But Reverend Langerak asked a question.

"Lord, where did this come from? How did this happen?"

The articles that will follow, Lord willing, are not meant to educate Reverend Langerak on what happened. He knows better than anyone what went on behind the scenes and the conversations that took place the week of March 5.

He knows what happened at First Reformed Protestant Church because he engineered it.

⁶ Luke Bomers, "Visited by the Dayspring," sermon preached on March 26, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=326231620336223>.

⁷ Tyler Ophoff, "The Essence of Faith," sermon preached on April 30, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDWoAFLX1wg&t=2548s>.

These articles are meant to warn the members of First Reformed Protestant Church and the members of the denomination.

What has taken place is grossly unrighteous, and the members of First RPC and the denomi-

nation are taking the blood of faithful office-bearers on their hands and casting Jesus Christ out of their denomination.

(To be continued)

—DE

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

May 1, 2023

Dear editor,
Scripture speaks of singing a new song (examples include Psalm 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9, 149:1, Isaiah 42:10, Revelation 5:9 and 14:3). Psalm 149:1 says “Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.” Isaiah 42:10 says “Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth...” A new testament example of a new song is given to us in Revelation 5:9–10; And they sung a new song, saying,

*Thou art worthy to take the book,
and to open the seals thereof:
for thou wast slain,
and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood
out of every kindred, and tongue, and
people, and nation;
And hast made us unto our God kings and
priests:
and we shall reign on the earth.*

Psalm 149 calls the congregation to sing a new song. Revelation 5 shows us that a new song is not necessarily a versification of a Psalm. Based on these passages, I would conclude that the congregation has the gospel freedom to sing a song that is not necessarily a versification of a Psalm. Stating this reasoning simply:

Premise 1: The congregation has the gospel freedom to sing a new song. (Psalm 149:1, Isaiah 42:10)

Premise 2: A new song is not necessarily a versification of a Psalm. (Revelation 5:9–10)

Conclusion: The congregation has the gospel freedom to sing a song that is not necessarily a versification of a Psalm.

I would welcome any critique of this line of reasoning. I would also welcome any expounding of the concept of singing a ‘new song’. Specific questions would include: What is a new song? If the new song only refers to Psalms, then why is the song of Revelation called a new song? Do you believe that it would be wrong to sing unto the Lord the song of Revelation 5 in the congregation of saints (assume for the sake of the argument that the song of Revelation 5 was included in CO Art. 69)?

Revelation 5:13: *And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying,*

*Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power,
be unto him that sitteth upon the throne,
and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.*

In Christ,
Kent Deemter

Response

In this letter are grand things: the psalms, the glorious song of the Lamb in Revelation 5, and the new songs. What an exciting first letter for *Reformed Pavilion*! Our thanks to our correspondent for favoring such a little magazine with such grand issues.

Our correspondent raises the issue of the “new song” mentioned several times in scripture. He proposes the new song as an argument that the congregation may sing something other than a psalm. He states his reasoning as follows:

Psalm 149 calls the congregation to sing a new song. Revelation 5 shows us that a new song is not necessarily a versification of a Psalm. Based on these passages, I would conclude that the congregation has the gospel freedom to sing a song that is not necessarily a versification of a Psalm.

Our correspondent then welcomes any critique of his line of reasoning and welcomes any expounding of the concept of singing a new song. I would like to flip that order around and begin the answer with a brief exposition of what scripture means by singing a new song. If we are going to understand any line of reasoning about the new song, we must first know what the new song is.

The New Song in the Psalms

The psalms are the first places in scripture where we read of a new song. As our correspondent points out, there are six references to a new song in the psalms. For example, Psalm 149:1: “Sing unto the LORD a new song.” Therefore, the explanation of the new song must begin with the book of psalms.

The references to new songs imply that there were old songs. The references to new songs also imply that there was a point in history when the church, having sung old songs, received new songs to sing that she had not had before. That point in history was God’s appointment of David as the sweet psalmist of Israel (II Sam. 23:1). David composed many new psalms and gave them

to the chief musicians. The chief musicians kept these psalms as the God-appointed collection of songs for worship in Jerusalem, with a view to worship in the temple that Solomon would build. That this was an official collection of songs for temple worship is indicated by the fact that Judah would return to these psalms during times of reformation (see II Chron. 23:18, for example). There are other details about the history of the book of psalms that are interesting. For example, the book of psalms was not completed by David. At least two more psalms would be added after the Babylonian captivity. For another example, the collection of psalms apparently was not arranged in its final order yet in David’s time. Only after all 150 psalms were written would the psalms be arranged in their inspired order, perhaps by Ezra on his way from Babylon to Jerusalem. But for our purposes it is enough to know that there was a specific moment in history when God gave Israel a new collection of songs for her worship. That specific moment in history was God’s appointment of David as the sweet psalmist in Israel.

Before David Israel had songs. We know some of them: Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 32, and Psalm 90. Perhaps Israel even had a collection of songs before David. The mysterious book of Jasher (Josh. 10:13) may well have been an Old Testament collection of songs. But now with David Israel has new songs. In fact, she has many new songs. She suddenly overflows with songs. Included among her new songs are also her old songs. David incorporated the old songs into the new songs. Israel would continue to sing Deuteronomy 32, only now she would sing it as Psalm 78 and Psalm 94 and Psalm 106. To the old songs David added many new songs. At least seventy-three psalms are attributed to David in the titles. To these must be added the psalms attributed to Asaph, who prophesied under David. And to these must be added undoubtedly many of the thirty-four psalms that bear no title. Through David God gave Israel many new songs.

The reason for the abundance of new songs through David was the imminent building of the temple in Jerusalem by David’s son Solomon.

God had chosen his resting place upon Mount Zion. Before this the tabernacle had moved from place to place. First it was in the wilderness for forty years, then it was at Kadesh for thirty-five years, then at Gilgal, then Shiloh, then Nob, then Gibeon, and finally Jerusalem. With the building of the temple, God's dwelling would no longer be moved from place to place. As God had said, he would dwell upon Zion. Although David would not build the temple, God equipped David to prepare the temple. David collected the wood, the precious metals, and all manner of material with which Solomon would build the temple. David also collected the songs for the temple. By inspiration of God (II Sam. 23:1), David wrote psalm after psalm, which he then appointed to be used in the temple worship.

This historical fact explains why several of the psalms were called "new songs." They were songs newly given by God to Israel through David for the worship of God in his temple. This historical fact also explains what God means when he calls his church to sing a new song. He does not mean that the church should take out pencil and paper to write a new song that she has not had before. Rather, God means that Psalm 33 is the new song and Psalm 40 is the new song and Psalm 96 is the new song. From the time of David until the time that the Son of David returns on the clouds of glory, the psalms are the new songs.

The New Song in Isaiah

Our correspondent points out one reference to the new song in Isaiah—"Sing unto the LORD a new song" (Isa. 42:10). A perusal of Isaiah 42 will show that God was not referring to a song that would be newly composed. There is no new song recorded anywhere in the passage. There is only general instruction to sing (v. 10), to sing God's praise (v. 10), to give glory unto the Lord (v. 12), and to declare God's praise (v. 12). But in all this instruction, there is no new song recorded for anyone to sing.

The key to understanding the new song in Isaiah 42:10 is to take note of the audience that is being instructed to sing. The audience is the Gentiles. The audience is not Israel, who already sang the psalms. The audience is those "from the end of the earth" (v. 10). It is "ye that go down to the sea" (v. 10). It is "the isles, and the inhabitants thereof" (v. 10). It is "the wilderness and the cities thereof" (v. 11). It is "the villages that Kedar [the Ishmaelites] doth inhabit" (v. 11). It is "the inhabitants of the rock [Edom]" (v. 11). It is "the islands" (v. 12). All of these were Gentiles. All of them had their own songs to their own gods. But now God sends his servant—his elect, his Christ—to "bring forth judgment to the Gentiles" (v. 1). Now God says that he will give his Christ "for a light of the Gentiles" (v. 6). And what will be the result of this Christ upon the Gentiles? They will sing a new song! Redeemed from their sin and death by God's anointed servant, the Gentiles will worship the true God. Gone will be their ignorant paeans to their idol gods. In their mouths will be the songs of the Lord. Gone will be their heathen hymns to the sun and to the sea. In their mouths will be the new song of Psalm 33: "The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD" (v. 5).

The songs of the Lord are not called *new songs* in Isaiah 42:10 because they are newly written or because they are something other than the psalms. Rather, they are new songs to these Gentiles, who will join Israel in singing the glories of God in the old-new songs that we know as the psalms.

The New Song in Revelation

Our correspondent points out two places in Revelation that refer to the new song. If I read him right, our correspondent is especially fervent about the new song recorded in Revelation 5. In a follow-up email our correspondent quoted a section of Herman Hoeksema's commentary on the new song. That commentary is worth reading. It can be found in *Behold, He Cometh!*, chapter 12 (which expounds Revelation 5).¹ It is no wonder

¹Herman Hoeksema, *Behold, He Cometh!: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), 186–88.

that our correspondent makes much of Revelation 5. The child of God is filled with spiritual wonder at the Lamb who redeemed him. The child of God thrills to the sound of heaven's resounding song, "Worthy is the Lamb!" That new song fills the ears and the heart of the child of God, and the child of God raises that song as his worship of his redeemer. It is because of this spiritual connection to the new song in Revelation 5 that some of God's people become hostile to exclusive psalmody. I am not speaking here of our correspondent, who has not demonstrated any hostility. But in general there can be a misunderstanding about how the psalms function in worship, so that some of God's people think that exclusive psalmody takes the new song of their worthy Lamb away from them. They react to such a suggestion with shock and anger. I can very easily understand that reaction. One only has to read Revelation 5 to find that the same Spirit that inspired the song has filled the believer's heart with that song and that the Spirit is singing that song in and with the believer's heart.

Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power,
Be unto him that sitteth upon the throne,
And unto the Lamb for ever and ever!

Who in the world would take that away from the believer? Exclusive psalmody certainly doesn't take it away from the believer. The notion that exclusive psalmody quenches the new song of Revelation 5 in a believer's heart or takes the song away from the believer's lips or binds the believer under a joyless prohibition rests upon a misunderstanding of the psalms. That notion also rests upon a misunderstanding of the new song in Revelation 5.

First, Revelation 5 is descriptive, not prescriptive. Revelation 5 is describing the historical event of Jesus' ascension into heaven. Revelation 5 describes that event from the point of view of heaven. On earth the disciples saw Jesus ascend in a cloud (Acts 1:9). In heaven Jesus came and took the book out of the right hand of him who sat upon the throne. Revelation 5 describes the historical event of Jesus' ascension in highly symbolic language, as is characteristic of

Revelation in general. The Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes. The inhabitants of heaven include great beasts. God's counsel is a book with seven seals. The new song of praise to the Lamb is sung by every creature. The angels sing, "Blessing, and honour." The cattle in the fields sing, "Blessing, and honour." The fish swimming in the sea sing, "Blessing, and honour." It is evident at once that we are dealing with highly symbolic language. That symbolism *describes* the glory of Jesus Christ and his place in relationship to God's counsel. But it does not necessarily *prescribe* a practice for the church. God's purpose in Revelation 5 is evidently not to give the church Psalm 151. The church does not come away from Revelation 5 with any injunction to sing something new. The church *does* come away from Revelation 5 with the comfort of Jesus as the redeemer of the creation in the elect church—the redeemer who executes all of God's counsel concerning her salvation.

That Revelation 5 is descriptive and not prescriptive is further illustrated by the "new song" in Revelation 14:3. There we are not even told the words of the new song. In fact, we are told that "no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth." The church on earth could not even sing the new song of Revelation 14 if she tried. This indicates that the idea of the new song in Revelation is not a prescription. Rather, Revelation 5 and 14 are descriptions of various events in the saving work of Christ.

Second, the psalms are not merely one book among the sixty-six books of the Bible. Rather, the psalms are the Bible. In the psalms the church has the whole word of Christ dwelling in her richly (Col. 3:16). In the psalms the church hears the whole revelation of God (Ps. 22:22, where "name" means *revelation*). The psalms are the entire Bible in summary. The psalms are the entire Bible in miniature. The psalms are the entire Bible in song.

This means that when the church sings the psalms, she is singing the Bible. In the psalms she sings Genesis 1 and creation. In the psalms she

sings Genesis 17 and God's covenant. In the psalms she sings Exodus 14 and the Red Sea. In the psalms she sings Joshua and the conquest of Canaan. In the psalms she sings all the judges. In the psalms she sings the kings of Israel, both good and bad. In the psalms she sings the Babylonian captivity. In the psalms she sings the prophets. In the psalms she sings the birth, miracles, preaching, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. In the psalms she sings the Acts of the apostles. In the psalms she sings the epistles. In the psalms she sings the last judgment. In the psalms she sings Revelation 5 and the new song to the Lamb. The church has the whole Bible in the psalms. The church sings the whole Bible in the psalms. She does not have to put Genesis 1, Genesis 17, Exodus 14, the book of Joshua, the book of Jeremiah, the book of Acts, or Revelation 5 to its own music, for she has all of that—all of it—in the psalms! It is part of the miracle of the psalms that the psalms are the Bible in miniature.

Because the psalms are the little Bible, all the scriptures serve to illuminate and expound the psalms. The psalms do not do away with the Bible or pit themselves against the rest of the Bible. Rather, the psalms incorporate the whole Bible as the grand exposition of Jesus Christ in the psalms. This is not strange, for the first principle of interpreting the Bible is that scripture interprets scripture. That applies also in the church's understanding of the psalms. The whole Bible interprets the little Bible.

The implication of this is that exclusive psalmody does not take any passage or biblical song away from the church. When the believer's heart is full of Mary's song in Luke 1, he sings Mary's song in the psalms. When the believer's heart is full of God's covenant in Genesis 17, he sings God's covenant in the psalms. When the believer's heart is full of God's faithfulness in Deuteronomy 32, he sings God's faithfulness in the psalms. When the believer's heart is full of the new song in Revelation 5, he sings the new song in the psalms. God knew how to put the whole Bible in the psalms so that the believer lacks nothing of the scriptures when he sings the psalms.

Have you read Revelation 5? Have you heard heaven resound with the song of the Lamb? Does your heart overflow with that new song? Is your soul merry with it? Sing psalms! (James 5:13).

I might gently point out here that those in the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) who tie their umbrage against exclusive psalmody to Revelation 5 are not consistent. Their cry is this: "You're telling me by exclusive psalmody that I may not sing Revelation 5 in church!?" To which exclusive psalmody replies, "No, I'm telling you that you do sing Revelation 5 in the psalms." Those who accuse exclusive psalmody of taking Revelation 5 away must answer for themselves where Revelation 5 is in their singing. If the psalms are insufficient to sing Revelation 5 and if they must sing Revelation 5, then why have they not yet put Revelation 5 to music to sing in church? If anyone has taken Revelation 5 away from the church's singing, it is not exclusive psalmody.

With this understanding we can see what is new about the new song in Revelation 5. It is not new in the sense of being a new psalm for the church on earth. It is not new in the sense of being a new class of songs (non-psalms) for the church to sing. Rather, it is new in the sense of shedding new light on the meanings of the psalms. The psalms are full of doxologies, exclamations of praise to God. To those doxologies is now added this understanding: God is blessed and praiseworthy for his work in the Lamb.

O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth. (Ps. 96:1)

For worthy is the Lamb! (Rev. 5:12)

Comments on the Line of Reasoning

The above hopefully answers most of the questions that our correspondent raises or at least lays out the lines along which those questions can be answered. It remains yet to take up our correspondent's invitation to critique his line of reasoning. As a reminder, our correspondent's line of reasoning is as follows:

Psalm 149 calls the congregation to sing a new song. Revelation 5 shows us that a new song is not necessarily a versification

of a Psalm. Based on these passages, I would conclude that the congregation has the gospel freedom to sing a song that is not necessarily a versification of a Psalm.

Stating this reasoning simply:

Premise 1: The congregation has the gospel freedom to sing a new song.
(Psalm 149:1, Isaiah 42:10).

Premise 2: A new song is not necessarily a versification of a Psalm.
(Revelation 5:9–10)

Conclusion: The congregation has the gospel freedom to sing a song that is not necessarily a versification of a Psalm.

I have two comments about this line of reasoning. First, I believe that our correspondent should have begun his line of reasoning by defining *new song*. How can any argument be made one way or the other without first knowing what a new song is? For example, it makes quite a difference for Revelation 5 if “new song” in Psalm 149 and Isaiah 42 means *psalm* or if it merely means *class of song*. Our correspondent does not attempt a definition of *new song* until his second premise, and then it is only a negative definition: what a new song is not. But by then it is too late anyway. If our correspondent would begin with a definition of *new song*, then he could begin to draw conclusions about what God is calling his congregation to sing in this passage and that passage.

Second, I believe that our correspondent proves too much with his argument. Our correspondent is trying to prove what the congregation *may* do. He calls what she is allowed to do her “gospel freedom.” But the texts that our correspondent cites are not about what the congregation *may* do; they are about what the congregation *must* do. “Sing a new song,” commands God; not “You may sing a new song if you want to.” Our correspondent was on the right track when he initially stated his line of reasoning: “Psalm 149 *calls* the congregation to sing a new song.” Our correspondent got off the track

when he restated his reasoning: “The congregation has the gospel *freedom* to sing a new song.” Our correspondent wants to prove that the congregation is *allowed* to sing something other than a psalm. But if our correspondent’s reasoning is sound, what he has actually proved is that the congregation is *required* to sing something other than a psalm. If God says, “Sing a new song,” and “new song” means *non-psalm*, then the congregation must sing whatever that non-psalm is.

I might gently point out here that it is a curious feature of almost all opposition to exclusive psalmody that the opposition proves too much. Everyone in the RPC who opposes exclusive psalmody argues that the church *may* sing the whole word or *may* sing according to the leading of the Spirit or *may* sing what the church’s assemblies decide. But the passages that they cite for their *may* actually teach a *must* (Col. 3:16, for example). I point this out (gently) with the prayer that it will help my brethren to understand that exclusive psalmody is not the bogeyman that they have been led to believe it is but that it is consistent in a way that any other supposed principle cannot be.

Back to our correspondent. As for gospel freedom, it is absolutely true that the church of Jesus Christ has gospel freedom in her singing. But her gospel freedom is not the right to do or not do what God says. Rather, her gospel freedom is that Jesus Christ has already done everything that God said, which perfect obedience is imputed to God’s church. Her gospel freedom is that Jesus Christ has suffered God’s curse for all of the church’s disobedience, so that her sins are fully covered. And her gospel freedom is that God gives his church the right through Jesus Christ to live with him and serve him. Her gospel freedom is not that the law is taken away but that she is not under it. Her gospel freedom is not that she may do as she pleases but that she may do as God pleases. Here is the gospel freedom of the church:

O sing unto the LORD a new song; for he hath done marvellous things: his right

hand, and his holy arm, hath gotten him the victory. The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the hea-

then. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. (Ps. 98:1–3)

—AL

FAQ

1. II Timothy 3:16–17 teaches us that all scripture (not just the psalms) is profitable for the child of God. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Doesn’t this imply that all scripture (not just the psalms) is profitable to sing in worship? Wouldn’t the implication of exclusive psalmody be (contrary to the apostle) that when you sing in church only the book of psalms (and not all scripture) is profitable?

Answer: The beauty of this question is that it exalts scripture. All scripture is God’s, and therefore all scripture is profitable! There is no scripture that is lesser than another part of scripture, but all scripture is profitable. There is no scripture that is unsound, but all scripture is profitable. There is no scripture that can be ignored, but all scripture is profitable. There is no scripture that is profitless, but all scripture is profitable. The child of God thrills at this text. All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable!

Nevertheless, there is a problem with this question. The problem with this question is not the question’s view of scripture. The question’s view of scripture is sound. Rather, the problem with the question is the question’s view of worship. The question substitutes a false starting point for worship in place of the true starting point for worship. The ques-

tion tries to make this the starting point for worship: What is profitable? With that starting point, the question makes the supposedly obvious conclusion: all scripture is profitable, so sing all scripture.

That starting point has a certain appeal. Worship is certainly profitable for God’s people, as God visits his people in grace. If we want to know about worship, it appears so obvious that we should ask, “What is profitable?” That starting point also apparently backs exclusive psalmody into a corner. The starting point almost dares exclusive psalmody to say, “Scripture is not profitable” or at least, “The rest of scripture is not as profitable as the psalms.”

In spite of the appeal of the question, there is still a problem with the question’s view of worship. The starting point for worship is not this: What is profitable? Rather, the true starting point for worship is this: What does God require?

It is so important to understand the true starting point for worship: What does God require? First, it is important to understand this starting point because this is God’s starting point for our worship. God does not leave our worship of him to our imagination, but he tells us what he requires: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image” (Ex. 20:4). Because God makes requirements about his worship, the first question for us is, what does God require?

Second, it is important to understand this starting point because this is the Reformed confessions' starting point for worship. The confessions trumpet God's requirements for worship. The confessions sound this clear note regarding worship: "Worship God as he has commanded in his word!"

Q. What doth God require in the second commandment?

A. That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word. (Lord's Day 35, Q&A 96)

For, since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in [the Holy Scriptures] at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures. (Belgic Confession 7)

In the meantime we believe, though it is useful and beneficial that those who are rulers of the church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the church, yet they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted. And therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever. Therefore we admit only of that which tends to nourish and preserve concord and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God. (Belgic Confession 32)

Third, it is important to understand this starting point because the introduction of other starting points will be arbitrary and can only sow confusion. One man wants to introduce the starting

point that all scripture is profitable. Such a man concludes that we may sing all scripture. (Why he stops at the idea that we *may* sing all scripture but does not follow through on his principle to teach that we *must* sing all scripture is a mystery.) But this man has missed the point. The question is not whether all scripture is profitable. (Yes, it is.) The question is not whether all scripture is the standard of doctrine. (Yes, it is.) The question is not whether all scripture is the rule and standard of our Christian life. (Yes, it is.) The question is what God requires for worship. Whether scripture is profitable or not does not answer what God has required his church to sing to him.

Another man wants to introduce the starting point that the Holy Spirit will lead and guide the church in her singing. Such a man concludes that we may sing whatever the church decides by majority vote. (One staggers at the arrogance of man, who makes man's vote and man's feeling to be the standard of God's worship.) But this man has missed the point. The question is not whether the Holy Spirit leads and guides the church. (Yes, he does.) The question is what God requires for worship. The truth that the Spirit leads and guides the church may never be separated from the standard by which the Spirit leads and guides the church: God's word.

Another man wants to introduce the starting point that the New Testament church is mature and can sing with understanding. Such a man concludes that we may sing virtually anything as long as we do so with understanding. But this man has missed the point. The question is not whether the New Testament church can sing with understanding. (Yes, she may, must, and does.) The question is what God requires for worship. The truth that the church sings with understanding

may never be separated from the content that God has provided for her singing with understanding: the psalms.

There are now and will continue to be so many starting points proposed for worship. Is all scripture profitable? Is all scripture inspired? Is all scripture true? Does the Holy Spirit lead and guide his church? Must the church sing with understanding? But all these proposed starting points sidestep the one starting point of worship taught by scripture and the confessions: What does God require? When all these other starting points are proposed, the discussion must be brought back to God's starting point: What does God require?

So what does God require? 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” (v. 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 starting point: sing psalms in church.

That starting point does not denigrate the rest of scripture. That starting point does not denigrate the Spirit’s leading. That starting point does not denigrate the church’s understanding. That starting point simply begins with the right question: What does God require? And that

starting point answers the right question with the overwhelming testimony of the scriptures: sing psalms in church.

2. “Yeah, but what about...?”

Answer: There are many, many questions being asked about exclusive psalmody that take the form of, “Yeah, but what about...?” They are a whole class of questions that we could call *yabuts* and *wuddubouts*. These questions raise some apparent difficulty with the principle of exclusive psalmody in order to probe the principle or even to deny the principle. For example, in response to the teaching that God requires his church to sing psalms in her worship:

Yeah, but what about when I’m singing a psalm in church and I accidentally think about another passage of scripture in my heart? Is that image worship since singing is from the heart?

Yeah, but what about the fact that we can say some portion of scripture in unison as a congregation? Is *saying* scripture in unison that different from *singing* scripture in unison?

Yeah, but what about the fact that I’ve sung a hymn in church my whole life, from the time I was a child? Are you saying that I’ve always been an image worshiper?

Yeah, but what about the fact that singing and praying are essentially the same element of worship?

Yeah, but what about the fact that I worship God in my private life as well as corporately and publicly?

Some of these *yabuts* and *wuddubouts* are meant more seriously; some are downright unserious. Sometimes these *yabuts* and *wuddubouts* come from friends of exclusive psalmody looking for further understanding. Sometimes they come from those who have not made up their

minds, looking for clarification. Sometimes they come from enemies of exclusive psalmody trying to poke holes in the principle.

Rather than trying to answer every *yabut* and every *wuddubout*, let us consider two observations about them in general, which will hopefully serve as guides for how to deal with this entire class of questions.

First, the *yabuts* and *wuddubouts* are often distractions from the true starting point of worship. Whatever one says about worship, he must begin with this: What does God require? If one tries to begin anywhere else, he will get all turned around. Before any “Yeah, but what about...?” one must first answer “What does God require?”

Second, the *yabuts* and *wuddubouts* can only exhaust God’s people. Someone invents a scenario. Everyone scrambles to pick sides on the scenario. The battle is joined. Tremendous effort is expended. An entire day, an entire week is spent probing, exploring, agonizing. But the scenario is far-fetched. The scenario is not a real problem. It’s just a *yabut*. It’s just a *wuddubout*. And it is just the first *yabut* in an endless line of the same. Clever and intelligent people can imagine ten new scenarios per week, five new objections per day, and three new examples per conversation. Before one can put on his socks in the morning, there are four new *yabuts* on Facebook. And before one can take off his socks again at night, all four *yabuts* have been forgotten, and six new *wuddubouts* have been invented.

It is a sea of ever-expanding questions as far as the eye can see. God’s people become unsure. Day after day, hour after hour, conversation after conversation, another objection and then another and then another washes over them like the waves on the shore. They struggle to answer them all. They become turned around, disoriented, discouraged. The salt of the *yabuts* is in their eyes, and the water of the *wuddubouts* is in their ears. They are drowning. They nearly despair.

There is no rest in all the *yabuts* and *wuddubouts*. There is no rest even in answering all the *yabuts* and *wuddubouts*.

But there is rest for God’s people in this storm.

Just look for a moment—not at the swirling foam but at your Lord. What do you see? The sweet psalmist of Israel (II Sam. 23:1).

And just listen for a moment—not to the crashing waves but to your Lord. What do you hear? He is singing in the midst of the church (Heb. 2:12).

How lovely! The sweet psalmist is singing in church!

Then let the questions come. Listen to them; understand them. But in the end, there is really only one answer to every “Yeah, but what about...?” It is this: “I may not know about that. But the sweet psalmist is singing in church, and he said that I may come and sing with him.”

—AL

Introduction

The name Isaac Watts has been on the lips of many in the West Michigan area this week.

A class at Grace Reformed Protestant School was given an assignment to write an essay on the history and work of Watts and the influence he has had on the church.

Part of the school assignment was to include such phrases in the essay as “He wrote children’s songs that were very popular” and “The hymns of Watts are simple and precise” and “Watt’s hymns continue to be sung in many churches around the world today” and “In the first two years following the completion of his formal education, Watts produced many of his great hymns.”

Interestingly enough, a few weeks ago I received a copy of the April–June 1999 issue of the *British Reformed Journal*. This issue includes an

article on the man known by many as the writer of hundreds of beloved hymns, indeed, the Father of English hymnody.¹

Others know Isaac Watts as an anti-trinitarian who spoke disparagingly of the psalms of David, corrupted the truth of justification by faith alone, and taught the well-meant offer of the gospel and a grace of Jesus Christ that is offered to all mankind.

Won’t this article dampen the enthusiasm of some for the great hymn-writer?

Why would *Reformed Pavilion* republish this article, and why should we all spend time reading it?

Because, as one man wrote, “Watts’ heresy helps us to understand his hymns, and his hymns help us to understand his heresy.”²

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WHO

Seduced our Fathers away from Psalmody?

ISAAC WATTS UNMASKED

REPRINTED from An Appendix to:

AN APOLOGY FOR THE BOOK OF PSALMS, IN FIVE LETTERS, ADDRESSED TO THE FRIENDS OF UNION IN THE CHURCH OF GOD.

By Rev. Gilbert M’Master, D.D.

Fourth edition. Philadelphia: Daniels & Smith, 36, North Sixth Street, 1852.

NOTE TO THE READER. It goes without saying that the writers of the Biblical Psalms were all unimpeachably orthodox in their theology. But what about the writers of the hymns we have been singing for two centuries and more? How much reader, do you know about the theological reliability of such feted hymnists like Watts, Doddridge, and the Wesleys? Begin here to learn something of Dr. Watts. We are grateful to Dr. Stephen Westcott for forwarding to us the material herewith printed.

¹ Dr. Gilbert M’Master, “Who Seduced Our Fathers Away From Psalmody? Isaac Watts Unmasked,” *British Reformed Journal* no. 26 (April–June 1999): 36–43. The article as it appeared in the *British Reformed Journal* was already a reprint, making this a reprint of a reprint. *Reformed Pavilion* is republishing the article exactly as it appeared in the *British Reformed Journal*, including the introductory material and note to the reader from its first reprinting.

² Wilkinson, R. W., “Peculiar Ground: The Theology of Isaac Watts” (master’s thesis, Durham University, 1981), Abstract; <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/7841/>.

What were the opinions of Dr. Watts on the subject of the Trinity and the person of Jesus Christ?

It would be pleasant, indeed, could we find him among the sound divines of England; but there is that, it is believed, in his works which will not allow him to be so placed. If any be disposed to distinguish between the practical faith of his heart, and the speculative articles of his creed, I have no objection. Believing, however, as I do that God has not constituted us arbiters of the state of men, I have only to do with the latter. Upon the former it is not mine to decide. The doctor's sentiments concerning the Redeemer will be found in his "*Discourses on the Glory of Christ*." The edition of the Discourses now before me is that of 1746, but a little more than a year before the author's death. There you will find him zealously maintaining that the human soul of Christ, created before all worlds, is the Lord from heaven, spoken of in 1 Corinthians 15:47,¹ that in the image of this pre-existent spirit Adam was created,² that the sonship of Christ belongs, exclusively, to his human soul,³ that the covenant of redemption was not made with a person who was the Father's equal, but was a created spirit.⁴

Such are some of the views which this author supposes would make the Bible more defensible. His opinions on the doctrine of the Trinity may be gathered from the following address to God: "Dear and blessed God! Hadst thou been pleased, in any one plain scripture, to have informed me which of the different opinions about the holy Trinity, among the contending parties of Christians, had been true, thou knowest with how much real satisfaction and joy my unbiased heart would have opened itself to receive and embrace the divine discovery. Hadst thou told me plainly, in any single text, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three real, distinct, persons in thy divine nature, I had never suffered

myself to be bewildered in so many doubts nor embarrassed with so many strong fears of assenting to the mere inventions of men instead of divine doctrine; but I should have humbly and immediately accepted thy words, so far as it was possible for me to understand them, as the only rule of my faith. Or, hadst thou been pleased so to express and include this proposition in the several scattered parts of thy book from whence my reason and conscience might, with care, find out, and with certainty infer, this doctrine, I should have joyfully employed all my reasoning powers, with their utmost skill and activity, to have found out this inference, and ingrafted it into my soul.

"Holy Father! How can such weak creatures ever take in so strange, so difficult, and so abstruse a doctrine as this? And can this strange and perplexing notion of three real persons, going to make up one true God, be so necessary and so important a part of that Christian doctrine, which, in the Old Testament, and in the New, is represented as so plain and so easy, even to the meanest understanding?"⁵

But to fully ascertain his views on the subject before us, the whole of the writings of Dr. Watts on the doctrine of the Trinity and the Person of Jesus Christ must be read. The vocabulary of his nursery creed, it is probable, to some extent, the Doctor retained, long after he had abandoned the creed itself. The ambiguity of his language, his manifest desire to be in good standing with men of principles very different from his own, his destitution of ecclesiastical character, and his defect in a well-settled principle of religious belief render it somewhat difficult to find his precise position. He often used the language of the orthodox, but claimed the right to explain the terms in his own way, and to press them into an agreement with his own peculiar opinions. So scraps taken from his works may be (as they

¹ Isaac Watts: *Discourses on the Glory of Christ* (Publ. 1746) pp. 175, 176.

² Op. cit. p. 203.

³ Ibid. p. 201.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 180, 225.

⁵ Watts's '*Works*' vol. 7, pps 47–67, Leeds edition.

have been—with what degree of intelligence and honesty we say not) adduced to prove him orthodox, while taken in their full and proper connexion they prove no such thing, but the reverse.

Whatever obscurity, from the ambiguity of his language and other causes, may hang over his views, the following facts admit of no doubt—and that is, that Dr. Watts was an **anti-trinitarian** and that the distinct divine personality of the Son of God, as equal with the Father, had no place in his acknowledged creed. **The labours of his life, in which he manifested more than his usual mental vigour, were in direct opposition to the orthodox faith on this whole subject.** Thus the “Address” from which the foregoing quotation is taken, speaks in a style that forbids us to misunderstand him, and his *“Discourses on the Glory of Christ”*, before mentioned, and his *“Useful Questions”* are all in the same spirit.

In the first of those Questions he asks “What is the true meaning of the name, Son of God, given to Christ in the New Testament?” He, in reply, adduces and remarks upon several scriptures, and adverts to the view of the orthodox as including an “eternal generation of the Person of the Son by the Person of the Father, in the sameness of the Divine Essence, consubstantial, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.” And then he adds: “I am persuaded this can never be the sense of this Name in those texts for, if this be never so true, yet it is confessed to be inconceivable: and I do not think the gracious God would put such a difficult task upon the faith of young disciples.” Then he adverts to the referring of “the Sonship of Christ, rather to his human nature, or to his office as Messiah, than to such an eternal generation.” He farther says “Christ, considered as the Son of God, is throughout represented as dependent on the Father for all, and receiving all from the Father, which is hardly consistent with the idea of supreme Godhead, if that were included in Sonship.”

Again, in the same strain, he refers to 1 Corinthians 15:28 and Philipians 2 and asserts:

“the Son of God is not depressed but exalted by the economy of the Mediatorial kingdom. That kingdom shall be given up, and then the Son of God, as Son, shall be depressed, and be brought down again to his original state of inferiority.” Thus he writes: “Considered as a Son, he is naturally subject to the Father, and at the end of this economical exaltation he shall return to his natural subjection, and shalt be so forever.” “His Sonship may be better referred to his inferior nature or to his office.”

Dr. Watts, in his theory, admits the Son to be God, not “by nature” but as related to the Creator. This naturally inferior Son-Christ, as a distinct person, is thus only a creature, inferior to God, but, being related to the divine nature is, because of that created relation, called “God”.

In the third of these “Useful Questions” the Doctor asks: “Could the Son of God properly enter into a covenant with the Father, to do and suffer what was necessary for our redemption, without a human soul?” He states the orthodox views of the subject; but proceeds to represent them as self-contradictory, and to be abandoned. According to him the covenant of redemption was made between the one Person in God—that is the Father, for he admits of only one Person in Jehovah—and his (the

Doctor’s) supposed super-angelic spirit, created before all worlds, which, absurdly enough, he calls the human soul of Christ. Then he says “If we suppose the human soul of Christ to have a pre-existent state of joy, etc., before world was created, these expressions (the scriptures that speak on the subject) are great and noble, are just and true.” But if we take them in the orthodox view as to the divine Personality of the Saviour, he says “Then all these have very little justice or propriety in them”, and he adds: “According to the common [the orthodox] explication of the doctrine of the Persons in the Trinity, we can have no ideas...of this transaction”, and he adds: “One of these beings or Persons covenanting seems to be inferior to the other”, “If we give ourselves leave to conceive of the human soul of Christ, in its pre-existent

state, as the *prototokoi*, the first formed of every creature, then here are proper subjects for these federal transactions.”

In the fourth of his Questions he asks “is the Godhead of Christ and the Godhead of the Father one and the same?” This question he answers in the affirmative. But what does he mean? The ambiguity of his language and the confusion of his thought are well calculated to entrap and deceive the unwary, and to furnish a momentary countenance for an unfair advocate of his orthodoxy. The Godhead of the Father and of the Son is the same, he admits. The Godhead is a unit. It is one. According to his scheme in that Godhead, naturally and eternally, there is but one Person, the Father. The pre-existent soul, or spirit, of Christ is a mere creature and has no Deity of its own but as an exalted and favoured creature is related in a near friendship with the Father, and in virtue of this relation or created union can lay claim to deity. Strip this language of its ambiguity and his thought of its indistinctness and, in the scheme of Dr. Watts the question would be: “Is God the Father the Godhead of Christ?”, and the answer would be, “yes”. The Doctor’s denial of distinct Persons, naturally and eternally, in one Jehovah, and his doctrine of the pre-existence of the human soul of Christ—which really is no human soul at all—fills his whole scheme with error, and spreads over it a bewildering confusion.

In his deprecations of tests of orthodoxy the Doctor was sufficiently explicit, and in his refusal of consent to such a measure, at the meetings at Salter’s Hall where it was discussed with sufficient earnestness and urged by Mr. Bradbury and others, he was consistent. For him an orthodox test would not have been safe.

In a letter to Dr. Coleman of February 11th, 1747, accompanying his volume on “*The Glory of Christ*”, Dr. Watts says: “I think I have said everything concerning the Son of God which

Scripture says; but I could not go so far as to say, with some orthodox divines, that the Son is equal with the Father.” And in his preface and introduction to his treatise on the Trinity, published in 1722, twenty-six years before his death, he admits of a Trinity, but mark his language: “Three such agents or principles of action, as may reasonably be called persons.” Principles of action may be figurative, but they are not real, persons.

As an anti-trinitarian and opposer of the truth on the subject of the divine Personality of the Redeemer, he was understood by his contemporaries. The justly distinguished author of the volumes on “*The Great Mystery of Godliness*”, the Rev. Thomas Bradbury⁶ charged Dr. Watts, in 1725, with “making the Divinity of Christ to evaporate into a mere attribute”, and at a subsequent period he said to the Doctor: “It is a pity, after you have been more than thirty years a teacher of others, you are yet to learn the first principles of the oracles of God. Dr. Owen’s church to be taught another Jesus? And that the Son and Spirit were only two powers in the Divine nature?”

Dr. Doddridge was (Watts’s) personal friend, companion, and admirer. He was capable of understanding, and certainly cannot be suspected of any disposition to misrepresent, the principles of Dr. Watts, from which, perhaps, his own were not very different. Attend to the statement of Dr. Doddridge on this subject; “For as much as there is such a change and humiliation asserted concerning Christ, as could not properly be asserted concerning an eternal and immutable being, as such, there is reason to believe that Christ had, before his incarnation, a created or derived nature, which would admit of such a change.”⁷ Again: “Dr. Watts maintained One Supreme God dwelling in the human nature of Christ, which he supposes to have existed the first of all creatures, and speaks of the divine *Logos* as the wisdom of God, and the Holy Spirit

⁶ The advocates of Dr. Watts admit Mr. Bradbury to have been a “man of wit”, a man of genius but, to diminish the weight of his testimony, add, “he was a man of spleen”. The enlightened and serious reader of the volumes on “*The Mystery of Godliness*” will not thus judge. In those volumes he will trace the operations of a mind, deeply imbued with a love of truth, and of a spirit that was no stranger to the tender sensibilities of evangelical religion.

⁷ Watts “*Dissertation on the Trinity*”, “*Works*” Vol. 6, pps. 518–554. See also Doddridge, “*Family Expositor*” Vol. 2, page 154.

as the divine power, or the influence and effect of it, which he says is a Scriptural person, i.e. spoken of figuratively in Scripture, under personal characters.”⁸ He also referred Christ’s being the only begotten Son of God “to his being the promised Messiah, or to his extraordinary conception, and exaltation to his kingdom as Mediator”. President Edwards thus understood Dr. Watts, and urges fourteen distinct arguments against his hypothesis concerning Jesus Christ. He has this remark: “According to what seems to be Dr. Watts’s scheme, the Son of God is no distinct divine person from the Father”.⁹ That his son, the late Dr. Edwards, viewed the subject in a similar light is more than presumable from the fact that he transcribes these arguments of his venerable father for the press. The same conclusion may be drawn in respect of Dr. Erskine of Edinburgh, from the interest he took in the publication of these Essays of the President of Nassau Hall, and from the special notice which he takes of that part of them containing the refutation of the scheme of Dr. Watts.

In the same light are these writings of Dr. Watts understood by the venerable Dr. Anderson.¹⁰ “He taught,” says Dr. Anderson, “that the Holy Spirit is not a person really distinct from the Father, but the divine power. That there was no real distinct persons in the Godhead.” In the same point of view is the subject, contemplated by the Rev. James R. Willson, in his very interesting “History of Opinions on the Atonement”. And hear the confession of another—it is that of Dr. Ely. “We cannot deny”, says Dr. Ely, “that **Dr. Watts's treatise has wrought much mischief**. It was the book which first turned the head of the Rev. John Sherman. We wish the pernicious consequences of that treatise had terminated there.”

In the same page we are informed that Mr. Allison, late chaplain to Congress, preached the same heresy to our representatives last January (1851), and gave Dr. Watts as the author of the doctrine.

Such were the opinions of Dr. Watts, written and left on record by himself, and thus have these opinions been understood by Bradbury, Doddridge, the two Edwards, Erskine, Anderson, Willson, Ely, etc., and it is notorious that every anti-trinitarian who reads his works claims him as of that school. His solemn address admits of no explanation. If ever man is serious in the expression of his sentiments it is when he addresses God: and if ever he expresses those sentiments with precision it is when he writes them. Dr. Watts has done both. He ventured to tell his Maker that the doctrine of three real Persons in the Godhead is a strange and perplexing notion, which we *cannot* receive, and which is not even inferable from the whole contents of the Book of God!

The truth is “comparatively few divines, of any class, at the darkened period when Dr. Watts lived and wrote, held out the glimmering lamp of sound evangelical instruction”. Giving too much way to the gambols of imagination, it “occasionally carried him out (say his friends) into moral and sentimental excursions, beyond his usual limits of plain evangelical truth.” And, according to the historian of the English dissenters (Bogue), from these excursions it was no easy task to bring him back. Childishly fond of something new, over the creatures of his own fancy he doted with an overweening affection, not because they were legitimate, but because they were his ovary.

What upon this fundamental subject were the views of Dr. Watts? Certainly not those of Christianity. They might be those of a slightly modified Arianism, but not less gross or erroneous than those of the Alexandrian presbyter. The scheme of both was really a form of the old Oriental Gnosticism. The super-angelic spirit of Arius and Watts was but an Aeon of the Gnostics. The scheme of Watts may be Gnosticism, but Christianity it is not. We understand his

⁸ Watts, op. cit., Vol 6, p. 630; Doddridge Vol 2, p. 178.

⁹ Jonathan Edwards, “Essays”. (Unfortunately we are unable to give the reader a more precise reference than this given in the original by Dr. McMaster. Ed.)

¹⁰ Anderson: “*Vindiciae Cantus Domine*”, p. 221.

scheme as did Bradbury, Doddridge, Edwards, and, perhaps, as everyone understands him who attentively reads his works. Why then be specially reproached for understanding what they understood, and for saying what they said? That these vagaries of the Doctor were neither the fruits of youthful indiscretion, nor the infirmities of advanced years, he assures us himself. In the preface to his “Useful Questions” he certifies his readers that: “These papers are the product of that part of his life when his powers of mind and body were in full vigour.” That he abandoned them at a late period of his life it would be grateful to be assured of, but of the fact no evidence has been given. The well-meant attempt of Mr. Toplady to prove it, it is well known, was a failure. And his permission of the continuance of the orthodox phraseology in his poetry will not do it. The Doctor’s correspondence with Mr. Martin Tomkins, an anti-trinitarian, will explain why he did not alter, as he wished to do, the sentiments in his religious poetry. The language of poetry is no certain index of the principles of the poet. The modern transcendentalist is often poetic in his theology, and in an evangelical strain he can take the language of Rutherford, and Owen, and Edwards and talk of a close walk with God, and of intimate communion with him. The pantheism of transcendentalism allows them thus to speak a very spiritual language, while they may mean no more than their exposure to a July sun or a December frost, to a gentle shower or to a storm of hail. The poetry of fancy will not do away the heresy of prose. This brings to mind a remarkable coincidence. Bardesanes of Edessa, of the second century, and Watts of Southampton, of the eighteenth century, were both distinguished for their advocacy of error, and both were poets. And they are the only poets, as far as recollected, who attempted the imitation of the Book of Psalms, each in a book of 150 hymns. If history be credited, the Gnostic, as a poet, was not inferior to him of Southampton.

But why should the suggestion of a doubt as to the orthodoxy of Dr. Watts produce so much sensibility? Why not contend, with equal zeal,

for the soundness of Robinson and Priestly? No man will hesitate to place Robinson, the author of the “Village Sermons” and Watts in the same rank, as to orthodoxy. The same Robinson, the author of “Ecclesiastical Researches”, and Priestly, the historian of “Early Opinions”, were fellow labourers in the same cause of heresy. Why then separate Watts, Robinson, and Priestly? They were all learned and able men; and all equally mistaken in the first principles of true religion—the object and medium of worship.

Is it because Watts gave a book of “Psalms” [sic] to orthodox churches?

To the religious principles of her “psalmist” the church *cannot* be indifferent. And to none of his works are they likely to be indifferent. The works of Dr. Watts are in the market; and in the gossip of the religious newspapers of the day his name is celebrated as divine. The title by which the Spirit of God has designated an inspired poet and Prophet has been transferred to him—“The sweet Psalmist of Israel”—and his verses have been elevated to the place of the displaced Psalms of inspiration. Yet where is the enlightened Christian of any name who, knowing what he was doing, would put in the hand of his son, or into that of any serious enquirer after fundamental truth, the “Useful Questions concerning Jesus Christ” by Dr. Watts, or his more ingenious and laboured work; “The Glory of Christ”?

By those in the use of his hymns in the Psalmody of the Church no note of warning is sounded indicating the danger of his errors. His works have for a time perplexed many, and finally perverted others, and when the temptation to heresy has the sanction of the name of the “sweet Psalmist” of the church the evil work among her members will take its course.

These considerations justify this notice of these fatal errors. The interests, too, of historical verity have some claim to our regard. The defence of reputation against unfounded imputations may be left to time without further remark. It ought to be felt by Christians that the leading psalmist of their church should have been a professed believer and advocate of the truth

respecting the God of Israel. The influence which his name is likely to exert upon the faith of the church demands this.

FOOTNOTE: Isaac Watts (1674–1748) was an English non-conformist, and is listed in Schaff-Herzog's *Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge* as the one who “opened up a new path” for worship by his Hymns, which were “without precedent or rival”, and by which he “won the epithet, ‘the inventor of English hymns’”, though he was not the first Englishman to write hymns. Whereas “previously only psalms had been sung in public worship: he introduced hymns” via his book of *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* published in 1707. In 1719 he published his: *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* which he “considered his most important work, and indeed it effected the reformation [sic] of English psalmody”. This book was indeed a fateful mollification and quite free paraphrase of

the original Biblical Psalms, and it effectually acted as Watts intended it, to be a stepping stone from Psalmody to outright “hymnody”. Of the Biblical Hebrew Psalms, Watts said:

“What need is there that I should wrap up the shining honours of my Redeemer in the dark and shadowy language of a religion that is now for ever abolished, especially when Christians are so vehemently warned in the Epistles of St. Paul against a Judaizing spirit in their worship as well as doctrine?”

Watts also considered the singing of Psalms to promote “hypocrisy”, insisting that “the curses, Hebraisms, and Jewish intricacies” and the many “deficiencies of light and glory” are effectively “stopping the worshippers hearts on their ascent to heaven.” ALL THIS FROM AN ANTI-TRINITARIAN!!!!!!

COMMENTARY ON HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

The Image of God in Man

My original intent with Herman Hoeksema's *Banner* articles was to publish them without comment. Let the young Herman Hoeksema of 1918–22 speak for himself. Furthermore, the danger of commenting once is that one can establish a precedent that slowly but surely becomes an obligation. And how does one not become arbitrary? Who is to say which articles demand comment and which do not? Is the issue that I am compelled to comment on this week really that much more important than the issue last week or ten weeks from now? Should one only comment on the rare error, or should one also comment on all the sound doctrine? And this is not even to mention the near absurdity of a theological pauper commenting on a theological prince. I don't have the answers to those questions. I can only say that I am compelled to comment on the following article. Perhaps there is even value to this

for the readership, as Hoeksema's articles from over a century ago spark new and unexpected discussions today. Nevertheless, my intention is still to publish Herman Hoeksema's *Banner* articles virtually exclusively without comment. When it comes to psalmody, I am in the *exclusive* camp. But when it comes to publishing Herman Hoeksema's *Banner* articles without comment, I now find myself in the *virtually exclusive* camp. We shall see how that goes.

The doctrine that Herman Hoeksema treated in his fifth article, “The King of the Kingdom,” which is printed in this issue, was the image of God in man. “We must remember first of all that Adam was created in the image and after the likeness of God.” Hoeksema was working with the wondrous testimony of Genesis 1:26–27 and 5:1–3 that God created Adam in God's own image, so that in Adam there was a finite creaturely reflection and likeness of the infinite God. “Man

was created so that he resembled God. Surely, we strictly maintain, that he was only a finite image of the infinite God.”

So far, so good. But at this early point in his ministry, Hoeksema apparently had adopted the erroneous view of God’s image that was popular in the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) of his day. The erroneous view concerned the identity of God’s image. What exactly was God’s image in Adam? The theologians of the CRC answered that God’s image in man had a broader and a narrower sense. God’s image in the broader sense was man’s mind and will—he was a rational and moral being. God’s image in the narrower sense was man’s spiritual goodness—true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. In 1918 Herman Hoeksema taught the same. From the following article:

In the broader sense of the word, we further all know, that this image included all man’s gifts and powers. He was image of God in body and soul. He was image of God in heart and mind, with intellect and will, with imagination and emotion, in his entire being he was image of God. Nothing is excluded. All these powers and talents are needed in order to realize his calling as king under the Almighty...And that he might not only exercise dominion over all things, but be king in subjection to the Almighty, he was created also in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. Never must we conceive of the relation between the image of God in the narrower sense as if they were two separate images. No, they belong together. The one is not complete without the other.

The problem with this doctrine of God’s image in man is that it makes man to retain something of God’s image after the fall. Though man in the fall may lose his spiritual goodness—the image of God in the narrow sense of true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness—man in the fall remains a rational and moral human being—the image of God in the wider sense of man’s mind and will. If man retains something

of God’s image after the fall, then man must not be totally depraved. If man retains something of God’s image after the fall, then fallen man must yet be able to do some truly good works. This was the direction the Christian Reformed theologians were going, culminating in their three points of common grace, adopted by the Christian Reformed Synod of Kalamazoo in 1924.

Herman Hoeksema never carried the erroneous doctrine of God’s image in man to a denial of total depravity or to an affirmation of good works in fallen man. Already in 1918 Hoeksema was the foe of such teachings, as subsequent *Banner* articles will demonstrate. Hoeksema wanted nothing to do with the necessary implications of the erroneous doctrine that he and his Christian Reformed colleagues held. In fact, it was the necessary implications of the erroneous doctrine that led Hoeksema to reexamine the doctrine of God’s image in man and to reform the doctrine according to the confessions. Hoeksema came to reject the doctrine of a wider and narrower image of God and to adopt the view that God’s image consists exclusively of spiritual gifts: true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. In Herman Hoeksema’s *Reformed Dogmatics*, first published in 1966, forty-eight years after his *Banner* article, he had this to say about the image of God.

Later Reformed theologians made a distinction that has found its way into the Reformed churches through preaching and instruction, and that is rather generally accepted as belonging to Reformed doctrine. The distinction is between the image of God in a wider sense and the image of God in a narrower sense. To the image in the wider sense belong man’s rationality, morality, and so-called immortality; to the image in the narrower sense belong his true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. The wider sense implies all that distinguishes man from the lower animals; the narrower sense is his original state of righteousness. The image in the narrower sense

was lost through the fall; the image in the wider sense was retained. Man still possesses the image of God in a wider sense, though he no more possesses his original integrity.

It must be remembered that this distinction is not confessionally Reformed. The Three Forms of Unity instead leave the impression that they favor the idea of the image of God as limited to man's original integrity: true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness.¹

Hoeksema then quoted from each of the Three Forms of Unity to demonstrate his doctrine. Then, writing about the danger of the erroneous doctrine of God's image, Hoeksema warned:

This distinction [between a wider and narrower sense of God's image] is neither innocent nor without danger to true doctrine. It is dangerous because it prepares room for the further philosophy that there are remnants of the image of God left in fallen man, and that therefore the natural man cannot be wholly depraved...

So it happens that the distinction between the image of God in a narrower sense and in a wider sense gradually but irresistibly is used to teach that there is still a remnant of man's original righteousness and integrity in fallen man and that he is not totally depraved. It is a distinction that lends itself very easily to support the view of those who insist that there is a certain common grace, by virtue of which natural man is not so depraved as he would have been without that grace. If this is not a denial of the doctrine of total depravity, then words certainly have lost their plain meaning.²

Hoeksema insisted that in the fall man lost God's image entirely. In fact, Hoeksema went further to teach that not only did man entirely lose God's image but that the image was changed into its spiritual opposite. This was Hoeksema's Reformed application of the truth of total depravity to the doctrine of God's image in man after the fall.

The truth that man is totally depraved implies that man lost what is usually called the image of God in the narrower sense, as it consisted in true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness. We must understand, however, that this does not simply mean that he lost the image of God, but rather, that all that is implied in that image of God was turned into its reverse...

This must be emphasized, especially in our day when the so-called small remnants that are left in the natural man are enlarged and enhanced in such a way and to such an extent that a good deal of Adam's original righteousness is ascribed to the natural man. It is important, therefore, that we understand clearly that our Reformed fathers [in the confessions] taught not only that man lost the image of God through sin, but also that it changed into its reverse, and that man entailed on himself blindness, terrible darkness in his mind, perversity of will, and obduracy of heart. The working of his nature has become the operation of death.³

Thus Herman Hoeksema corrected the error regarding God's image in man that was prevalent in the CRC. Hoeksema's correction of the error and his development of the truth of God's image was a miracle of God's grace to Herman Hoeksema and to his spiritual children. In 1918 Hoeksema's doctrine of God's image had serious

¹ Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd edition (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 1:292–93.

² Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:294–95.

³ Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:381–82.

problems. What Hoeksema was trying to get to was this: Man in the fall remained a man with all the powers that God had given to man, but after the fall man used all those powers in the service of man and the devil to oppose God. Instead of man and all his powers being animated by the spiritual goodness in which God had created him, man had lost all his goodness, and all his powers were now animated by the spiritual evil into which he had fallen. Hoeksema was trying to get to this as part of his intriguing approach of developing all the articles of doctrine from the viewpoint of the kingdom of God. His approach is as original and fresh and fascinating today as it was then.

The problem is that in 1918 Hoeksema injected God's image into man as man. That is, Hoeksema taught that man's humanity was the image of God in man. It would have been one thing if Hoeksema had taught that man bears God's image as a rational, moral creature. That would be Hoeksema's later doctrine. But in 1918 Hoeksema taught that man's very humanity is God's image and that man cannot be man without it. Without God's image, according to Hoeksema, man would cease to be man. Therefore, man always retains God's image and can never lose it, not even in the fall. From the following *Banner* article:

It is not thus, that man is merely the image-bearer, that he possesses, bears the image of God, but thus that he is God's image. In the former case you would say, that man was made plus God's image, the image was added to his being. In the latter case you maintain that man is God's image, and that he would be man no more if he would cease to be God's image.

A few articles later, Hoeksema would write:

We are accustomed to say simply that man through sin lost the image of God. And if we only remember that this applies chiefly to the image of God in its

narrower and spiritual sense there is no danger in the assertion. But the moment we lose the distinction out of sight, it is untrue to maintain that man lost the image of God. In the first place let us never forget that this was impossible. If it is true that the image of God is not something added to man after his creation but that he himself is image of God it is plain that in the fullest sense of the word he never could lose that image.⁴

Hoeksema's 1918 doctrine of God's image in man demanded the denial of total depravity, as Hoeksema's subsequent warning in *Reformed Dogmatics* demonstrated. The fact that Hoeksema did not deny total depravity but instead reformed his doctrine of the image of God in man was due to God's saving and preserving grace. Here is what God gave Hoeksema and his spiritual descendants as the truth of God's image in man.

Man was originally created so that he actually possessed the image of God. He was not only formally adapted to bear God's image, but he was also materially endowed with the spiritual, ethical virtues of that image. These virtues, usually distinguished as true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness, are often expressed in the one term, *man's original righteousness*. *This righteousness is the original goodness of man's nature, according to which it was wholly motivated by the love of God, and according to which with all its faculties and powers it moved in the direction of God so that the operation of man's heart, soul, mind, will, and all his strength were in accord with the will of God.*⁵

There are two final observations to make about Herman Hoeksema's doctrine of God's image in man. First, Hoeksema's mature thought on the image of God contains a puzzling feature. Having denied that God's image has a

⁴ Herman Hoeksema, "The Fallen King (Continued)," *The Banner* (October 31, 1918): 788–89.

⁵ Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:297; emphasis is Hoeksema's.

wider sense and a narrower sense, Hoeksema went on to teach that God's image has a formal sense and a material sense. This is puzzling. What is the essential difference between a wider/narrower sense of God's image on the one hand and a formal/material sense of God's image on the other hand? Was Hoeksema merely renaming the distinction, so that whereas the Reformed tradition spoke of wider/narrower, Hoeksema would speak of formal/material? It is apparent that Hoeksema was not merely renaming the distinction. Hoeksema taught a great difference between man's possessing God's image (material sense) and man's merely being capable of bearing God's image (formal sense). "We may distinguish between man as the image bearer, that is, as being *capable of bearing* the image of God, and man as *actually bearing* God's image."⁶ And when Hoeksema identified the actual elements of God's image, he spoke of true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. From all of this it is evident that Hoeksema was not resurrecting the old wider/narrower distinction. It is evident that Hoeksema was simply teaching that it is one thing to be human and thus capable of bearing God's image as a rational, moral creature and another thing actually to bear God's spiritual image in Christ. In Hoeksema's doctrine man's humanity is a far cry from God's image. Therefore, it is a puzzle why Hoeksema

would yet formulate man's humanity in terms of God's image in a formal sense.

Second, the development of Hoeksema's doctrine of God's image in man is a testimony to the weakness of man and the power of God. Hoeksema's 1918 doctrine of the image went astray. God graciously corrected Hoeksema's doctrine and delivered to him and to his spiritual descendants the beautiful doctrine of God's image. Included in the beauty of that doctrine is that God restores his image to his elect people in Jesus Christ, so that in Christ we reflect our God. Let those who trace their theological lineage to Herman Hoeksema remember that we do not have Hoeksema to thank for the truth but only our gracious God. God put the treasure of the gospel in the earthen vessel that was Herman Hoeksema that the excellency of the power might be of God and not of us (II Cor. 4:7). God chose Herman Hoeksema and his theological descendants as the base things of the world that no flesh should glory in God's presence (I Cor. 1:26–29). And God has made Christ our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption that, according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord (I Cor. 1:30–31).

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⁶Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:296; emphasis is Hoeksema's.

Article V. The King of the Kingdom

It is of the greatest importance, of course, as we are studying the truth in relation to the Kingdom of God, that we become acquainted with the King of that Kingdom. Of any worldly kingdom we want to know who is its king and what sort of a person he is, what is his relation to the kingdom over which he rules, what power he has, etc. Thus it is with the Kingdom we are now discussing, the Kingdom of the world. As we wrote in our previous article, God is King in the most absolute sense of the word. But man is king under Him, and it is at man that we wish to cast a glance first of all. Who is he? How was he created? What relation did he sustain to God and the world? What is his original power? And how must his present condition be explained?

These are questions, that must be answered. And, therefore, we must turn our attention for a few minutes to Adam, the king, the head of mankind, the father of humanity, the root of human life.

It is of the greatest significance and importance, that we know Adam and obtain a correct and scriptural view of him.

By many in our day this last statement is met with a smile of contempt. Many a preacher in our day has long ceased to explain Adam to his flock and very few in the christian world, comparatively speaking, will be able to point out his significance in relation to us. If we only know Jesus! so they say. If we are only acquainted with the way of salvation in the blood of the crucified Redeemer, all is well. There is no need of so much philosophizing about Adam, the covenant of works, original sin, total depravity, etc. That is of no value to us. What we must have is Jesus,

the Saviour, the sweet and loving Jesus, beckoning with His infinite love: “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Give us the gospel and keep your doctrine! At any rate, do not treat us on a sermon explaining Adam, for you will find no interest!

Such talk, however, is in the first place extremely bold and wicked. It is the talk of the sinner, still standing in rebellion against his Sovereign, and despising His Word. Just think, God Almighty deemed it necessary to reveal to us His entire Word, from Genesis to Revelation. That Word is rich in doctrine, really it's nothing but doctrine from beginning to end, doctrine in the true sense of the Word. But now comes sinful man and boldly claims that he has no need of all this doctrine, and that he will select just one little portion of this revelation of God, and let the rest go. He practically maintains, that God made a mistake. Of course, if God had not deemed it strictly necessary, that His people should become acquainted with and appropriate His entire Word, never would He have given it to us. But in doing so He made a mistake. He might just as well have given us a little gospel, a gospel one can carry in his vest-pocket, write on his thumbnail, can learn by heart in less than five minutes. It would have been far more businesslike! Perhaps in olden times it was a suitable thing to calmly sit down and make a study of that entire Book, but if the Lord had known what a busy world ours would be in the twentieth century, He probably would have changed His mind! Such talk, I say, is extremely wicked and godless.

In the second place, such talk is also very foolish. The fact is that you cannot know the

gospel, now taking that word in its narrow and current sense, unless you understand more or less clearly the truth in its entirety. Even the simple statement: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," presupposes a world of doctrine. Back of it lies the doctrine of the fall and sin, the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God and creation, the doctrine of God's counsel and the anointing of the Holy One. You cannot understand the Gospel, unless you understand more or less clearly and fully the entire truth of God's Word. And thus it is more particularly in regard to our knowledge of Adam. You do not know Christ unless you know Adam. You cannot appreciate the second Man unless you know the first. They are related as type and anti type. Adam is after all a type of Christ.

And, therefore, never listen to such wicked and foolish talk. If a preacher mocks at the idea of explaining Adam and pretends to be serious about the preaching of Jesus and salvation, just make up your mind that he is a false prophet. And actual experience plainly shows that such a position leads to the denial of Christ as well. If a preacher begins with preaching the so-called "Gospel" in its narrow sense, refusing to busy himself with the doctrine of man and sin, the result is most invariably that in course of time it also seems foolish to him to still preach on Jesus as the Mediator, bringing atonement and deliverance in His blood. The one falls with the other.

We will, therefore, adhere to the Word and also preach on Adam.

Now, Adam may be considered from various points of view. In the first place you may consider him as an individual, as a separate person, regardless of the relation he sustains to us. But in the second place, he must also be viewed in relation to all mankind. Adam was surely also an individual. He was personally responsible for all he did over against his God, just as we are. But he was not merely an individual. He was more. He stood in a very unique relation to all his posterity, and it is of the utmost importance that we also obtain a more or less clear insight into this relation. As such he is the head of all mankind in

the covenant of works, our representative head. As such he is the father of humanity. As such he is the root of the organism of the human race. In the main, therefore, two viewpoints: Adam as an individual considered all by himself, and Adam in his relation to all mankind.

And, then, of course, we must remember first of all that Adam was created in the image and after the likeness of God. What does that imply? Very simply that man resembled God, he looked like his God. That is the most simple explanation of an image. If an image means anything at all, it implies that it resembles the original. And thus it is also with man. He was created after God's pattern. He looked like God. Not, of course, as if man was also divine. Man is not God. Man is not divine. That is often the modern story. The truth of God's image in man is often stretched to such an extent, that man is finally declared to be divine, declared to be God. You see, so they tell you, man is really divine, he is really God. God is within him. But he was not conscious of his divinity from the beginning. And the history of man really is nothing but the story of man's coming to consciousness of his divinity, God's coming to self-consciousness in man. That, then, is also the great significance of Christ. He did not come to pay our debt, and to remove our guilt by His atoning sacrifice. All nonsense! There was no such a thing as guilt. No, but His great significance is, that he reveals to man his divinity, and thus causes man to take a big step ahead in his process of development! But, of course, that is the old devil's story over again. The devil also gave his exegesis of the image of God in man, when he said, "Ye shall be like God, knowing good and evil." And, hence, that we surely must not have. The devil surely is a very shrewd interpreter of Scripture, but the trouble is, that he is sure to give you the wrong interpretation. No, man is not God, he is not divine. He is and remains creature. God is infinite, man is finite. That must always be maintained. And although God surely dwells with man, yet He is also infinitely above him. But bearing this in mind, we may nevertheless assert that the image of God in man surely means that man resembles God. That

is scriptural. Just compare Gen. 5:1 with Gen. 5:3. In the first verse we read: "This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him." And in the third verse: "And Adam lived a hundred and thirty years and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image." The implication of this comparison is, evidently, that even as the son of Adam resembled his father, so Adam, called in the gospel according to St. Luke the son of God, resembled his Creator. And, therefore, the very terms, "image and likeness," but also the comparison of Gen. 5:1 and 3, lead us to the conclusion, that man was created so that he resembled God. Surely, we strictly maintain, that he was only a finite image of the infinite God. What was infinite in God was only finite in man. God always remains the Absolute and man the relative and dependent. But even so it must be asserted that man resembled God. And then we must bear in mind still another point. It is not thus, that man is merely the image-bearer, that he possesses, bears the image of God, but thus that he is God's image. In the former case you would say, that man was made plus God's image, the image was added to his being. In the latter case you maintain that man is God's image, and that he would be man no more if he would cease to be God's image.

If we try to penetrate into the meaning of this image of God, I would say in the first place, that its chief significance consists in man's being king under God. I picture to myself the relation thus, that man necessarily had to be God's image for the simple reason that he was to be the representative of God's sovereignty on earth. He was to be king of the kingdom. And for that reason there was to be a reflection of the sovereignty of God in his very being. A king without sovereign majesty and power is nothing, is a figure-head, can not maintain himself and his throne. Thus it also was with man. Man was to have dominion over all things. He was to rule. He was to be sovereign. But if he actually was to realize this calling, if he was to be king not merely in name but in very fact, it was necessary that in all his being he showed his

credentials over against the world. And these credentials consisted exactly in this, that there was a reflection of God's perfections in his being, that so to speak, he was anointed with the oil of God's own sovereignty. It is for that reason very striking that the image of God and the dominion which man was to have over all things are mentioned in one breath in Gen. 1:26, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." And, therefore, we do not hesitate to say, that in brief the image of God in man denotes his being created as sovereign with the purpose of having dominion over all things. Again, not a sovereignty that is added to his being, but a sovereignty that belonged to his being as man. If this is understood we shall also understand how it was possible that the kingdom of the world became the kingdom of the Prince of darkness. For man, the king, subjects himself to Satan instead of remaining in subjection to God. And it is through him that Satan establishes his kingdom.

In the broader sense of the word, we further all know, that this image included all man's gifts and powers. He was image of God in body and soul. He was image of God in heart and mind, with intellect and will, with imagination and emotion, in his entire being he was image of God. Nothing is excluded. All these powers and talents are needed in order to realize his calling as king under the Almighty. It was by the use and development of these that he would fully realize his dominion and subject all things unto himself. And that he might not only exercise dominion over all things, but be king in subjection to the Almighty, he was created also in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. Never must we conceive of the relation between the image of God in the narrower sense as if they were two separate images. No, they belong together. The one is not complete without the other. In order that man might actually exercise his dominion in the name of God, be truly king, he was to be prophet and priest as well. His

knowledge was pure. We must not misunderstand this. In the first place we must never entertain the idea, that Adam was created like a babe. His mind was not an empty vessel, to be filled only by experience, it was not a blank [canvas], gradually to be covered. No, he was created with actual knowledge. But on the other hand, we must not conceive of this knowledge as if it were not capable of further development. Surely it was. Adam knew nothing of telephone and telegraph, of airplanes and machinery. His knowledge was capable of development. But his mind was pure and creation was transparent. Intuitively he looked into things. When Adam met an animal he knew him and could give him a name. From moment to moment creation was transparent, an open book to him, and his mind was pure and still intact, so that he knew intuitively. Adam knew. He knew his God, he knew the world, he knew himself in relation to God and the world. And in the midst of the world, showing forth the wonders of God's power, with all creation spelling the Name of God, he was standing as the true prophet, drinking in the knowledge of God and glorifying the God of his life from day to day. But he was also the true priest of God. Not in the sense that he was obliged to atone for sin and to pay a debt. No, Adam's relation to the law was that of righteousness. He knew no guilt, he had nothing to pay, except from moment to moment the sacrifice of his entire life upon the altar of God's love. But in that highest sense he was priest most surely. To consecrate himself to God, with all his powers and talents, with his entire being, and with all the world, to lay himself and all things in true obedience on the love of God, that

was Adam's task, that was his priesthood. And he was qualified for the task. Created in true righteousness, the law did not condemn him. Created in true holiness, not indifferent but positively holy, he was inclined to do the will of God from love and to devote himself and all he had to the God of his life. And only thus could Adam truly realize his calling as king and have dominion over all things. For only thus was he willing and able, while ruling over all, to bow in the dust before the Lord of heaven and earth, and while standing as king, to subject himself as the servant.

Thus the picture is complete.

Adam, the king-servant.

Adam created in the image of God, that he might have dominion over all and maintain his sovereignty over the world.

That image of God embracing his entire being, with body and soul, intellect and will and all his powers.

That image of God implying that he stood in true knowledge, righteousness and holiness, so that he could truly serve his Lord and Sovereign.

Thus Adam was equipped with all that was needed to realize his calling. And while ruling over all, he knew his God as Sovereign. And beholding his God from day to day in all the works of His hands, as the true prophet and priest and king, he would kneel down in the dust of paradise, his soul being overwhelmed within him because of the greatness and the wisdom and the power and the glory and the goodness of his Lord and exclaim: "O, my God!"

—Holland, Mich.