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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 when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well.

—Exodus 2:13–15

Yesterday Moses had given away all his earthly advantages and life in Pharaoh's court. He had refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He had chosen rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. He had esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. By faith he could see hell behind the palace of Pharaoh, and he could see heaven behind the slave huts of the Hebrews, for Christ was in those slave huts as the sovereign redeemer of his people. Seeing all this by faith, Moses had taken up arms against an Egyptian taskmaster, slain him, and thus delivered his Hebrew brother from brutality and death.

Surely the Hebrews would be thrilled with their champion and deliverer! Surely the Hebrews would honor Moses by following him and obeying his word! After all, "God by his hand would deliver them" (Acts 7:25). Moses' parents knew this already forty years ago when Moses was born. By faith they had seen that Moses was a good and proper child. That is, by faith they had seen that God had a purpose for Moses, which purpose must include the salvation of the Hebrews. Surely—surely!—the Hebrews would welcome their powerful brother with open arms and open hearts.

Let us see what the Hebrews thought of Moses. The second day Moses discovered two of his brethren striving with each other. Moses was already a wise judge, who could determine which

brother did the wrong. Moses rebuked him. "Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?" And what did the erring Hebrew think of Moses, this wise judge, this champion, this deliverer, this savior, this leader? Why, he hated him! The Hebrew thrust Moses away (Acts 7:27). The Hebrew rejected Moses. "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us?" The Hebrew mocked Moses. "Intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?"

It was the first rejection in a lifetime of rejections. For forty years Moses would suffer nothing but abuse and rejection from the Hebrews. "The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us" (Ex. 5:21). "They hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage" (6:9). "And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?" (15:24). "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: and the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (16:2–3). "The people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with

thirst?” (17:3). “And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt” (Num. 14:2–4). “And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink” (20:3–5).

Why did the Hebrews reject Moses? Because the flesh will not abide God or his Christ or his

servants. It is a rebuke that we must hear, for we also have flesh. Listen to deacon Stephen explain, moments before the descendants of the Hebrews stoned him. “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One” (Acts 7:51–52).

What hope do such rebellious children have? Listen to Stephen again: “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56). The Son of man has made a way into heaven for his elect people through his own flesh and blood. Though the world and the false church will always gnash on him and his servants with their teeth, Christ’s people are redeemed from their sin and death and infallibly taken into the promised land.

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

It is as hot as the dog days of August here in this little corner of Michigan, but the strawberry moon overhead tonight marks the month as June. Summer has arrived and with it another issue of *Reformed Pavilion*. The seasons change only by God’s almighty hand. So also an issue of *Reformed Pavilion* comes forth only by God’s almighty hand. There is not a word in our pens except God puts it there. With thanksgiving to him, we present to our readers the first issue of the summer.

The Alcove features John Calvin’s preface to the Genevan Psalter. Snippets and snatches of Calvin’s preface have been floating around of late, both in *Reformed Pavilion* and elsewhere on the web. The preface is presented in full in *The Alcove* this week, with a brief introduction to the

Genevan Psalter by the undersigned. If you have had a busy week and you prefer a snippet over the entire article, here it is:

Now what Saint Augustine says is true, that no one is able to sing things worthy of God unless he has received them from Him. Wherefore, when we have looked thoroughly everywhere and searched high and low, we shall find no better songs nor more appropriate to the purpose than the Psalms of David which the Holy Spirit made and spoke through him. And furthermore, when we sing them, we are certain that God puts the words in our mouths, as if He Himself were singing in us to exalt His glory.

From the Ramparts may raise eyebrows this week. The article is published with the full support and backing of the editor, for whatever that is worth. Decisive in the matter of publishing the article is the example of the apostle John, who named names for the edification and warning of the church. “Diotrephes...receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth” (III John 1:9–10). Let the church that harbors a Diotrephes take heed, for Diotrephes doth not “receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church” (v. 10). And because Diotrephes' nature is ours, may God graciously forgive our rebellion, and may he grant his people that we not cast out our brethren but that we “love in the truth” (v. 1).

This issue of *Reformed Pavilion* also carries a transcript of the prayers and remarks that were made at the recent Act of Separation and Joining meeting, held May 22, 2023. The Act of Separation and Joining was published in *Reformed Pavilion* last week. The transcript of the remarks is presented this week to add some context to the Act. Although the meeting was not officially recorded by those who signed the Act, an anonymous attendee took the trouble of video recording almost the entire meeting. The recording has been surfacing here and there the last few days. An anonymous scribe also went to the trouble of transcribing almost the entire

meeting, which transcript is also here and there. It is very well possible that the videographer and transcriber are not sympathetic to the Act and perhaps are even hostile. Nevertheless, our gratitude to them both for their labors, and that thank you is meant sincerely and unfeignedly. The transcript was checked for accuracy before publishing and was found to be fair.

We are also pleased to introduce a new rubric: *The Scrivener*. In medieval times a scrivener was a copyist. The scrivener made his living by writing, copying, transcribing, and keeping written records. *Reformed Pavilion* needs a place to publish various transcripts—for example, the transcript of the Act of Separation and Joining meeting. Just as a scrivener in a medieval castle would answer the need for the spoken word to be transcribed into writing, so *The Scrivener* answers the need of *Reformed Pavilion* for a place to publish such transcripts.

Finally, in connection with Herman Hoeksema's Banner article, the reader may want to reread the commentary found on page 27 in issue 4 of *Reformed Pavilion*.

Time to read on. If it is too hot to sit on the deck today, perhaps wait until dark. Even if you print your copy of *Reformed Pavilion*, you might be able to read it outside tonight by the light of summer's first full moon.

—AL



PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS

The Sweet Psalmist of Israel (2)

David was the worship leader of Old Testament Israel. Listen to David's inspired declaration about himself and his place in the worship of Israel: "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).

David was three things that are one thing. David was "the man who was raised up on high" with authority over men. David was "the anointed of the God of Jacob" to represent God among the people. And David was "the sweet psalmist of Israel" to bring and to sing psalms in Israel. These three things are one thing. David was the worship leader among God's people—the God-authorized, God-representing, and God-praising worship leader.

Worship Leader

The truth of David as worship leader is a rich vein of theological gold for us to mine and to explore. Let us begin with the term itself: *worship leader*. What does that mean? Perhaps some stumble at the term. Who ever heard of a worship leader? The term sounds foreign to an ear attuned to the Reformed confessions and to the historic Reformed practice of worship. The term may even look suspicious to the gimlet-eyed observer of the worship teams and praise bands and slick productions of contemporary Christianity. What do the Reformed have to do with worship leaders?

Ah, but the Reformed faith is full of the truth of the worship leader. We Reformed just know the worship leader by other names: officebearer, head, mediator.

The fact is that the worship of Jehovah must be led. God's people may not and cannot worship

God without a leader. Man is dust; God's throne is heaven. Man is of the earth earthy; God is a spirit. Man is fallen in Adam; God is righteous and holy. Man, who must worship God in spirit, is flesh. Man, who must worship God in truth, is blind. Such a one as man does not know how to worship such a one as God. Such a one as man must have a mighty leader to bring him into the presence of the holy God.

This truth is offensive to man's flesh. Man will not suffer himself to be led. Man flatters himself that he is the ideal worshiper. Man makes himself the measure of acceptable worship. If man feels worshipful, if man is moved with devotion, then man concludes that his worship must be acceptable to the holy God. Man will not acknowledge that he is poor, blind, and naked in the matter of his worship. Man stampedes into God's house, tramples upon the holy things, and congratulates himself on a job well done. Behold the folly of man.

If man is to worship God, man must have a leader. That leader is Jesus Christ. Christ is "the anointed of the God of Jacob" (II Sam. 23:1). Christ is the servant of the Lord (Isa. 42:1). Christ is the called of Jehovah (v. 6). As God's anointed officebearer, Christ is the prophet, priest, and king who delivers his elect people from their sins and brings them into worshipful covenantal fellowship with their God. Oh, the Reformed reader might not recognize the term *worship leader* right away; but he certainly recognizes *Christ*, that is, *anointed*.

Q. 31. Why is he called Christ, that is, anointed?

A. Because He is ordained of God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Ghost, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, who has fully revealed to us the secret counsel and will of God concerning

our redemption; and to be our only High Priest, who by the one sacrifice of His body has redeemed us, and makes continual intercession with the Father for us; and also to be our eternal King, who governs us by His Word and Spirit, and who defends and preserves us in (the enjoyment of) that salvation He has purchased for us. (Lord's Day 12)

And although the Reformed reader might not recognize the term *worship leader* right away, he certainly recognizes *mediator* and *advocate*.

We believe that we have no access unto God but alone through the only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, who therefore became man, having united in one person the divine and human natures, that we men might have access to the divine Majesty, which access would otherwise be barred against us. But this Mediator, whom the Father hath appointed between Him and us, ought in no wise to affright us by His majesty, or cause us to seek another according to our fancy. For there is no creature either in heaven or on earth who loveth us more than Jesus Christ; *who, though He was in the form of God, yet made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a man and of a servant for us, and was made like unto His brethren in all things.* If, then, we should seek for another mediator, who would be well affected towards us, whom could we find who loved us more than He who laid down His life for us, even when we were His enemies? And if we seek for one who hath power and majesty, who is there that hath so much of both as *He who sits at the right hand of His Father*, and who hath *all power in heaven and on earth*? And who will sooner be heard than the own well-beloved Son of God?...

Therefore, according to the command of Christ, we call upon the heavenly Father through Jesus Christ our only Mediator, as we are taught in the Lord's Prayer;

being assured that whatever we ask of the Father in His name will be granted us. (Belgic Confession 26)

Through Jesus Christ God brings his elect people into his presence and fellowship. Through Jesus Christ God leads his elect people in the worship of his holy name. Behold the grace of God.

In the Old Testament Christ was typified by David. David was the worship leader. God declared regarding David in Isaiah 55:4, "Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people." Those who sing the 1912 Psalter have often sung regarding David, God's chosen servant, that he was "a mighty leader, true and brave, ordained, exalted, strong to save" (Psalter #243:1).

Although we often think of David's leadership as his ruling and judging and warring on behalf of Israel, David's leadership included his leading of worship. The king of Israel was not only a soldier, though he was that too. The king of Israel was not only a ruler, though he was that too. The king of Israel was not only a judge, though he was that too. But the king of Israel also presided over the worship of God's people. As we will see a little later, the king of Israel commanded the priests and the Levites how to worship, where to worship, and when to worship. The king of Israel organized the Levites for their service to thank and praise the Lord.

David, as type of Christ, was the worship leader in Old Testament Israel. With regard to the psalms, now, what was the worship leader's work? Three things: the worship leader was the *provider* of psalms, the *prescriber* of psalms, and the *precentor* of psalms. Let us take up the first this time.

Worship Leader: Provider

David's first task as the king of worship in Israel was to *provide the material* for Israel's worship. God did not send Israel forth to scrounge up her own material to bring to God in worship. Rather, God himself provided his people's worship and all the material of their worship as a gift of his

grace. The worship policy that requires people to bring their own material for divine service is not God's policy but Pharaoh's. Pharaoh's policy was that Israel must serve Pharaoh with bricks but that she must find her own straw to do so. "I will not give you straw. Go ye, get you straw where ye can find it: yet not ought of your work shall be diminished. So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw" (Ex. 5:10–12). Pharaoh's service policy was tyranny and cruelty. Men think that it is the pinnacle of their freedom and liberty to bring their own man-made material into the worship of Jehovah. But man soon finds that, at his best, he is nothing but emptiness and vanity. If man must provide his own material for worship, then he will soon wear himself out scrabbling for stubble. The policy that requires man to bring man's material for the worship of Jehovah is never the zenith of liberty but is always the nadir of bondage.

God's worship policy is much different. God provides his people with all the material for their worship. God is no cruel tyrant; he is a gracious and good God. He is the overflowing fountain of all good. God graciously gives his people his only begotten Son as their savior. God graciously gives his people the right to come into his house and sit at his table. God graciously brings his people into the body of Christ and draws them into his communion and fellowship. God graciously covers with the blood of Christ's atonement all the sins of his wayward people. God graciously counts the perfect worship of Christ as the worship of his people. God graciously gives his people the Spirit of Christ so that they understand and believe the goodness and grace of God to them. And God graciously gives his people the material of their grateful worship. At no point must God's people go scrounging to find their own stubble. At no point are God's people left without the very material that God would have them bring to him in service of his holy name.

On behalf of Israel's gracious God, David's first task as the king of worship in Israel was to provide the material for Israel's worship. Although this was ultimately true with regard to

all Israel's worship material, David especially called attention to the songs that Israel would sing. As the anointed king of worship, David was "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (II Sam. 23:1).

Inspiration

David provided the songs for Israel's worship through inspiration. God the Holy Ghost inspired David to write the psalms. Thus, by speaking and singing the psalms that the Spirit gave him, David provided the songs for Israel's worship. The sweet psalmist of Israel said, "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue" (II Sam. 23:2).

God's inspiration of David to write the psalms was a tremendous wonder. Inspiration is always a wonder of God's grace. Our Belgic Confession connects the miracle of inspiration to God's gracious salvation of his church. "God, from a special care which He has for us and our salvation, commanded His servants, the prophets and apostles, to commit His revealed Word to writing" (Belgic Confession 3). But in God's inspiration of the psalms, the miracle of God's breathing his word into men is on display with a special brilliance.

In order to understand the marvel of God's inspiration of the psalms, we must travel back in time to the nation of Israel during the last part of David's reign. Now look over there, and you will see King David. He has been in many battles over many years, but now the land is at rest. He has moved the tabernacle a few times, but now it rests in Jerusalem. David has even built a few buildings, but there is one building that God did not permit him to build: the temple. David's son will build the temple, and it is in preparation for Solomon's temple that David is now busy.

As we watch, David is gathering the priests and the Levites together to organize them for their service in the temple (I Chron. 23:2). It is quite a scene. Now that the tabernacle is in Jerusalem, the Levites would no longer be consumed with the work of setting it up and taking it down, carrying it around from place to place, and packing and unpacking its many vessels. The

excitement of the day is palpable. “The LORD God of Israel hath given rest unto his people, that they may dwell in Jerusalem for ever”! (I Chron. 23:25). David the king is now organizing the priests and giving the Levites their new orders. He commissions tens of thousands of Levites to oversee the work of the house of the Lord. Thousands more are made officers and judges. Thousands more are made doorkeepers in the house of the Lord. And four thousand Levites are set aside as the temple choir. They would praise “the LORD with the instruments which I made, said David, to praise therewith” (v. 5). The office of these four thousand singers is “to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at even” (v. 30).

And now we see David set aside three Levites for a very special work in Israel (I Chron. 25:1–7). The three Levites are Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman. David assigns several Levitical helpers to each of the three, so that there are three guilds. The first guild is led by Asaph. Under Asaph are his four sons, who answer directly to Asaph. And under each of the four sons are eleven more Levites. The second guild is led by Jeduthun, who is also known in scripture as Ethan. Under Jeduthun are his six sons, and under each son are eleven more Levites. The third guild is led by Heman. Under Heman are his fourteen sons, and under each son are eleven more Levites. This makes for a total of 288 Levites in three guilds answering to the three fathers—Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman—who each in turn answer directly to David.

Why was this so important? Because the work of these three Levites was to write the psalms. Their work was not merely to *learn* the psalms that had already been written by David. Rather, their work was to *write* the psalms. That is, the Holy Spirit inspired Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman to write his word in music. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were set apart that they “should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals” (I Chron. 25:1). Each of the three is identified in scripture as a prophet or a seer. Asaph “prophesied according to the order of the king” (v. 2). Many of the psalms are “a

Psalm of Asaph” (title of Psalm 73, for example). Heman was “the king’s seer in the words of God” (I Chron. 25:5). Psalm 88 is titled “Maschil of Heman the Ezrahite.” And Jeduthun was “the king’s seer” (II Chron. 35:15), who “prophesied with a harp, to give thanks and to praise the LORD” (I Chron. 25:3). Psalm 89 is titled “Maschil of Ethan [Jeduthun] the Ezrahite.”

All three men wrote psalms. But none of the three men were allowed to write the psalms on their own. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were not the sweet psalmists of Israel. David was. Yes, God inspired Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman to write the psalms, just as God inspired David to write the psalms. But Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were only inspired in connection with David’s inspiration. Yes, Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were prophets, but they were only prophets under David. We could perhaps think of it this way: the Spirit that filled David overflowed into Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman. The overflowed Spirit in Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman moved them in perfect concert with the Spirit’s moving of David. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman only “prophesied according to the order of the king” (I Chron. 25:2). The production of the psalms happened only “according to the king’s order to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman” (v. 6).

Meanwhile, the 288 Levitical helpers assisted Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman. They were “under the hands of their father for song in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God.” They were “instructed in the songs of the LORD.” They were “cunning” (I Chron. 25:6–7). Perhaps this means that the helpers were responsible to learn and memorize the psalms in real time as they were first being sung by the inspired David and their inspired fathers. The Spirit did not inspire a psalm in the mouth of David so that the song could float away on the breeze and be lost. Rather, 288 cunning Levites with excellent memories and musical abilities listened carefully and were “instructed in the songs of the LORD” as David and their prophet fathers sang them. Thus the inspired songs of the Lord could be retained, recorded, and taught to others.

What a wonderfully bustling scene is the inspiration of the psalms of David! There stands King David, psaltery in hand, filled with the Spirit of God, singing a new song of praise. There is Jeduthun with his harp, moved with the same Spirit that fills his king, prophesying with David in song. There is Asaph with his cymbals, singing in prophecy according to his king's command. There is Heman with his horn, the king's seer in the words of God in perfect accord with his fellow prophets. There are the 288 Levites, learning and memorizing and perhaps even writing down the psalms of David as those psalms are being sung by the four prophets. And there is the temple choir, four thousand voices strong, waiting to learn the psalms of David that they may soon stand every morning in their courses to thank and praise the Lord, and likewise at even.

The child of God can hardly fathom the wonder of the inspiration of the psalms. No other songs in all the world were produced this way. There may be many good Christian songs out there that are beloved and that express true doctrine according to the scriptures. But none of those songs were inspired. To take just one example, when Thomas Ken sat down in 1674 to write his hymn "Awake, My Soul, and with the Sun," Ken could not say, "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue" (II Sam. 23:2). When Ken wrote his enormously popular eighth verse of "Awake, My Soul," which eighth verse we know as the doxology "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow," Ken could not say, "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." Ken may have written a nice hymn, but Ken was not inspired. Ken may have even written a doctrinally sound hymn, but the Spirit did not inspire Ken. Thomas Ken's hymn is not the Holy Ghost's hymn; Thomas Ken's hymn is only Thomas Ken's hymn.

When David wrote his songs, on the other hand, he could say, "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." David's songs were and are the Holy Ghost's songs. What other songs in all the world are like these

songs? What other collection of hymns could even begin to compare with the songs of the Holy Ghost? In all the world the book of psalms is the only collection of songs that the Holy Ghost spake by the mouth of the sweet psalmist of Israel. What a wonder is the inspiration of the psalms!

Jesus' Songs

The sweet psalmist of Israel was not ultimately David but Jesus Christ. That is, it was not ultimately David who provided Israel's songs; rather, Jesus Christ provided Israel's songs. Jesus Christ is the anointed of the Lord as the sweet psalmist of Israel by whom the Spirit spake.

Now, that is a relatively simple thing to say: Jesus is the sweet psalmist of Israel. That is even a relatively simple thing to understand: Jesus sang psalms while he was on earth (Matt. 26:30), and Jesus sings psalms now in the midst of his church by his word and Spirit (Heb. 2:12). It is also relatively simple to prove that Jesus is the sweet psalmist of Israel. Many of the psalms cannot even be read without hearing Jesus' voice. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:1). "They pierced my hands and my feet" (v. 16). "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (69:9). But even though it is relatively simple to say, understand, and prove that Jesus is the sweet psalmist of Israel, that truth is so miraculous and deep that we can only wonder at it. Who among men can fathom the sheer miracle of Jesus' providing the church's songs as the sweet psalmist of Israel?

Consider this astounding truth: Jesus was not yet born when he provided Zion with her songs. All 150 psalms were written and completed in the Old Testament, hundreds and even thousands of years before Jesus was born in the manger of Bethlehem. And yet Jesus provided the psalms! You could say it this way: Jesus provided the psalms for you long before you were ever born, and Jesus provided the psalms for you long before he was ever born! How can it be that Jesus provided the psalms before he was born?

The solution must be found in connection with Jesus' incarnation. That is, when scripture speaks of Jesus' providing the psalms as the sweet psalmist of Israel, it is referring to Jesus as the Word *made flesh*. Someone might propose that the second person of the Trinity is eternal and that the second person of the Trinity *apart from his incarnation* provided the Old Testament psalms. It is certainly true that the second person of the Trinity is eternal. He is the eternal Word. He is the eternal Son. He is coequal and coeternal with the Father and the Holy Ghost. The second person of the Trinity did not begin his days in Bethlehem's manger, for his goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore, God the Son was there when Moses cried, "LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place." God the Son was there when David sang his new songs. God the Son was there when the captives in Babylon hung their harps on the willows. True, Jesus was not born when the psalms were written; but God the Son was there, for he is from everlasting to everlasting, without beginning of days or end of life.

Nevertheless, God the Son did not provide the psalms *apart from his incarnation*. We must not imagine that the un-incarnated Word inspired the psalms in the Old Testament, and then only later the incarnated Word sang those psalms in the New Testament. It is not this: the Word not made flesh inspired David to sing, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and then later the Word made flesh cried upon the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

If we would try to take the position that the eternal Word apart from his incarnation provided the psalms, we would entangle ourselves in all manner of trouble. For example, we would make the second person subordinate to the first person. For the psalmist cries, "The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness" (Ps. 18:20). The living and eternal Word could not say such a thing, for the eternal Word does not receive a reward from the first person. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost together sovereignly give the reward; they do not submit to each other to

receive rewards. There is no first or last among them, but they are coequal and coeternal. There is no lording or submitting among them, for they are equally sovereign. But Jesus is subordinate to God according to Jesus' human nature. Jesus submits to God and receives from God the reward for Jesus' righteousness. Part of the wonder of the incarnation is that the second person of the Trinity united in his one person the human nature with the divine nature. Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14). Jesus is the Son of God made of a woman (Gal. 4:4). In Jesus dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh (I Tim. 3:16). Jesus is perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man (Creed of Chalcedon). Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man (Athanasian Creed 30). According to his human nature, Jesus sings every psalm.

But that still leaves the question, how could Jesus, before he was incarnate, provide the psalms as the incarnate Christ? The explanation must be found in God's eternal counsel. God's eternal counsel is his everlasting decree concerning all things. God declares the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done. God says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Isa. 46:10). God has purposed in himself all things according to his good pleasure (Eph. 1:9). God works all things after the counsel of his own will and according to his own purpose (v. 11). God has chosen his elect in Christ before the foundation of the world (v. 4). God's counsel is a book written front and back that contains his perfect will concerning all things, so that all things unfold exactly as he has decreed (Rev. 5:1). Herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance, but by his fatherly hand (Lord's Day 10, Q&A 27) and according to his holy will and appointment (Belgic Confession 13).

Furthermore, God's counsel is not a dead blueprint. When a man drafts a blueprint of a

house, that blueprint has no power, no life, no vital force. A living, breathing builder must come along and apply his vital force in order to turn the dead blueprint into a house. But God's counsel is not so. God's counsel is his living will. God's counsel is as living and vital and vigorous as the living God. For God's counsel is not merely his plan for what shall be, but it is God's good pleasure. God's counsel is not merely his proposal for what shall be, but it is God's eternal purpose for all things.

At the heart of God's counsel is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is before all things in God's counsel, in the sense that Christ is God's purpose and goal with all things (Col. 1:17). Christ is the firstborn of every creature in God's counsel (v. 15), not in the sense that Christ is the firstborn in history but in the sense that Christ is the firstborn in God's counsel. All things that God has decreed have their meaning and purpose in the firstborn. All things were created for Christ (v. 16). Christ is God's elect (Isa. 42:1), and God chose all his elect people in Christ (Eph. 1:4). Christ is God's stone of stumbling and rock of offense to the disobedient, and God appointed the reprobate to stumble upon him (I Pet. 2:7–8). God gathers together in one all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10), for it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell (Col. 1:19).

It is along these lines that we can understand how Christ provided the psalms before he was born. God's counsel is the reality, and history is the unfolding of that reality. The living counsel of God is so real and vital that it impresses itself upon history and breaks through into history. Not only does God's counsel determine and govern history, but also the heart of God's counsel manifested itself in history. Because Christ is the center and purpose of God's counsel, Christ made appearances in the Old Testament before his incarnation. Christ was the Angel of Jehovah, who met Moses in the plains of Mamre (Gen. 18),

who met Abraham as he sacrificed Isaac (Gen. 22), who wrestled with Jacob at Peniel (Gen. 32:24–32), who met Moses in the burning bush (Ex. 3), who led Israel out of Egypt (23:20–23), who met Joshua outside of Jericho (Josh. 5:13–15), and who met the people of Israel at Bochim (Judges 2:1–6).

Christ's activity abounds in the Old Testament. The incarnate Christ, before his incarnation, spoke by his Spirit of himself and his sufferings and his glory. Peter makes the astounding statement that the Spirit of Christ inspired the Old Testament prophets. There was no Christ yet in the Old Testament, and therefore there was no Spirit of Christ yet in the Old Testament. But there was God's counsel, and the Christ of God's counsel busied himself in the salvation of his people in the Old Testament. The Christ of God's counsel sent his Spirit to testify of himself for the comfort and relief of his sinful people.

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. (I Pet. 1:10–11)

Just as Christ appeared as the Angel of the Lord before he was born, just as Christ inspired the prophets by his Spirit before he was born, so also Christ provided the psalms before he was born. What a leader! What an officebearer! What a mediator!

For all who do not know how to worship God, behold your savior, who graciously covers your sin and provides the songs of your gratitude to sing with him in worship of Jehovah. Behold the sweet psalmist of Israel!

—AL

An Open Letter to Elder Tom Bodbyl

“I will remember his deeds which he doeth.”

May 27, 2023

Dear Tom,

I can begin this letter with the words “Dear Tom,” as God has kept from me a spirit of bitterness and anger such that I love you and harbor no ill will toward you. You know my affection toward you in years past, and such affection does not simply evaporate and disappear. I begin this letter with “Dear Tom” because I mean it.

Tom, you have again dealt treacherously with me and with my family.

Twice now in your work as an elder you have driven me from my church home.

How well do we not remember what took place at Grandville Protestant Reformed Church? What a time that was, as we vexed our souls over the preaching of Reverend Koole.

You knew more than any other man how troubled my wife and I were, almost to the point of being destroyed, by the preaching of Reverend Koole. How many conversations did we not have together about the terrible spiritual condition of the preacher and the congregation?

I knew that no one had as firm a grasp on what was wrong at that church as you did.

And you were a “somebody” at Grandville PRC! You were known among the congregation as one who was learned and as one who was well-read and deeply spiritual.

You were perpetually an elder.

There was not a man at Grandville PRC who was held in higher esteem or had a more sterling reputation as a theologian than Tom Bodbyl.

There was also not a man at Grandville PRC who was more keenly aware of the spiritual distress of my household than Tom Bodbyl.

There was also not a man at Grandville PRC who was in a better position to do something to help my family and me than Tom Bodbyl.

And you did not lift a finger to help us.

That was where you had me fooled.

In the coffee shop you were as bold as a lion.

You identified the error—Christ did not have a place in Reverend Koole’s soul, so Christ could not be present in Reverend Koole’s preaching—and you were not shy to condemn it.

I assumed that a man who was one thing in the coffee shop would be the same thing in the consistory room.

But you weren’t.

You were two-faced.

You were what the Bible refers to as a double-minded man. “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). Or again, in Psalm 12:2, “They speak vanity every one with his neighbor: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.”

That is the opposite of a man who has a single heart or a single mind, like the men of Zebulun. “Of Zebulun, such as went forth to battle, expert in war, with all instruments of war, fifty thousand, which could keep rank: they were not of double heart” (I Chron. 12:33).

I put my confidence in you.

What folly.

“Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint” (Prov. 25:19).

As the years rolled by at Grandville PRC (almost fifteen of them!), I increasingly wondered why nothing was being done about Reverend Koole’s preaching. There was some surface work—entirely meaningless—like the

distribution of his sermon notes before the services (which sometimes he would follow but which most times he wouldn't), but the preaching was completely unchanged.

How could this be? You saw the problem so clearly, and in private you were filled with righteous anger against the travesty that was taking place Sunday after Sunday.

How could it be that for fifteen years not one thing changed in the preaching?

When an elder is doing his work, that becomes apparent. Witness Elder Neil Meyer at Hope PRC—he did his work and was cut down less than two weeks later.

When an elder is not doing his work, that also becomes apparent.

You deceived me.

What needed to take place at Grandville PRC was for Reverend Koole to preach Jesus Christ or to be removed from office.

The word to Reverend Koole should have been this: “Preach Christ, or be deposed.”

Tom, you did your work deceitfully, and you kept your sword back from blood.

The word of God to you is found in Jeremiah 48:10: “Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood.”

Because you were unwilling to help us where we needed the help—in the consistory room—you finally came to me and told me that because nothing was going to change, it was time for me to leave Grandville PRC.

Hearing this, I knew that I no longer had a place at Grandville PRC.

Instead of driving Reverend Koole and his Christless preaching from Grandville PRC, you drove my family and me from that church.

But it got worse.

After a while, Reverend Koole decided to retire.

He cited weariness as his reason.

There was backlash at Grandville PRC from supporters of Reverend Koole, who saw his

retiring as being in some part due to pressure from those who had been critical of his preaching.

As many of those who had been critical—but who had tried to do something about it—had already left, some of this backlash fell on you.

How you explained that backlash in later years spoke volumes.

The subject of Reverend Koole's preaching and his time at Grandville PRC would come up occasionally among members of First Reformed Protestant Church.

You can imagine my shock when I would hear you position yourself favorably in that narrative, as a fighter who was doing great spiritual battle at Grandville PRC and had to bear such persecution on account of it.

But you didn't.

You did not lift a finger at Grandville PRC, and the only persecution you may have felt was backlash against those who had actually done battle.

Is there anything worse than a man's taking credit for a battle he did not fight?

The irony is that you could have done something at Grandville PRC. You could have raised a holy roar against that poseur on the pulpit and driven him from his office.

Or you could have died trying.

And look at what happened because you did nothing.

Reverend Koole went on to lead the consistory of Grandville PRC in its wicked concurrence of the deposition of Elder Neil Meyer from Hope PRC.

Reverend Koole went on to spread his heresies (including that of “available grace”) throughout the Protestant Reformed denomination.

Reverend Koole went on to write a series of articles in the *Standard Bearer* telling the people that to be saved, there was something that they had to do.

But you did nothing, such that he continues to this very day to preach and teach in that denomination.

And then reformation came in the form of the Reformed Protestant Churches.

It took you a while to come out of the PRC, but come out you did.

I admit it left me very unsettled when you were nominated and then elected to the office of elder within a few months of joining First RPC.

Did the congregation know you?

Or had you changed? I knew that you were upset with Reverend Lanning when he preached the Jeremiah sermon, and you were upset that he didn't listen to his consistory at Byron Center; but maybe, hopefully, probably you had changed.

That's possible, right?

Perhaps.

Just not in this instance.

When I read the minutes and I see the letters and I read the decisions of the consistory of First RPC, I see your fingerprints all over them.

From asking for an immediate meeting to call Elders Starrett and Van Dyke on the carpet for not shaking then Seminarian Bomers' hand, to the brutality of cutting down Elder Starrett (while hypocritically doing nothing to Elder Meyer), to distributing decisions of the PRC to support your position, to sending out documents in which you quote Kuyper and Voetius to prop up your decisions, it all reeks of Tom Bodbyl.

You were also the elder who told a man after the evening service on Sunday, March 19, that exclusive psalmody had always been the position of Reformed churches and that you had always believed it.

Four days later you suspended Reverend Lanning for teaching it.

I have seen that before.

I saw it vividly at Byron Center PRC.

You are included among the churchmen whom Pearl Buck deridingly described in her obituary of J. Gresham Machen: "princes of the

church [who] occupy easy places and play their church politics and trim their sails to every wind."

Your actions and words reek of a Protestant Reformed elder.

That is because you *are* a Protestant Reformed elder.

Tom, think of all the ministers under whom you have served as elder. That list would include men like Rev. Aud Spriensma and Rev. Ken Koole. (Don't forget to add Rev. Andy Lanning to the list.)

Now add up all of the ministers whom you have led a consistory to suspend and cut down.

Only one?

That is shocking.

And also revealing.

You could not find it within yourself to do one thing to men who showed themselves to be hirelings and vipers and purveyors of false doctrine after false doctrine after false doctrine.

You couldn't find it within yourself to do anything with those men.

But Reverend Lanning you could cut down in a matter of weeks.

When I was at Grandville PRC, after one particularly soul-destroying sermon by Reverend Koole, I went to Elder _____ after the service and asked, "Was that a good sermon?"

He had an immediate, knee-jerk response. "I heard the gospel."

I responded, "You did? You heard Christ?"

"Yes. At the end" was his response.

He went on to acknowledge that it was a problem that Reverend Koole would only tack Christ on at the end of the sermon.

Fast-forward to a few weeks ago.

After a recent sermon at First RPC—while Reverend Lanning was suspended—I went to you after the service and said to you, "That was a Protestant Reformed sermon." And it was. But what was striking was how your response, instinctively and immediately given, so closely mirrored the response of Elder _____.

This is what you said: “The law strictly preached and grace at the end.”

That can be translated this way: “An entire sermon on what man has to do and Christ tacked on at the end.”

You are not motivated by a love for Jesus Christ or his truth.

You say you love the gospel, but you don’t. You treat theology like an intellectual curiosity or a hobby. Just like men might study the ancient Aztecs or the migration habits of caribou, so you study the words and theology of men like Voetius and Abraham Kuyper.

You say you love the gospel, but you don’t.

Your history as an elder proves that.

You have been able to tolerate the grossest false doctrine and live with it.

You have never once taken up the sword against it.

You were able to tolerate the gospel for less than two years before you murdered the man who taught it.

I am not exactly sure what motivates you. Is it the power that comes with the office of elder? Is it the nurturing of a reputation as a spiritual man who is engrossed in spiritual things, and you don’t want to endanger that by ever doing the right thing if it is not popular? Are you simply a politician who adorns the bench like Elder _____? Is it the fear of man and man’s faces, so that you haven’t done what you should have done or you have done what you should not have done, all because you “loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43)?

I don’t know the answer to the question of what motivates you.

God knows the heart.

I can only see the fruit.

And your fruits are plainly seen. “For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes” (Luke 6:44).

Tom, I write this public letter for two reasons.

First, III John 1:9–10 demands it. “I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.”

The deeds which you have done are evil. Like Diotrephes, you have not received the brethren—you have not received my family—but rather, you have cast us out of two churches.

These deeds must be known and “remembered” among the people.

Second, it is my calling to warn the flock of First Reformed Protestant Church about you. You are spoken of in Acts 20:29. You are one of those “grievous wolves” spoken of by the apostle Paul which enters the church and does not spare the flock.

You did not spare the flock of Grandville PRC and the entire Protestant Reformed denomination by your inaction regarding Reverend Koole.

You did not spare the flock of First RPC and the entire Reformed Protestant denomination when you cut down Reverend Lanning, a man who knew nothing among us except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Your deeds are evil.

And the church must know it.

What the congregation of First RPC can expect from its consistory are the actions, behaviors, and words of any Protestant Reformed consistory.

Yet here is the remarkable truth.

Here is the glorious reality.

Each time you have driven me from a church, you have driven me directly into the arms of Jesus Christ.

One of the first Sundays at Byron Center PRC—after having been driven from Grandville PRC—about five minutes into the sermon by Reverend Lanning, I almost laughed out loud

and leaned over to my wife and whispered, “He can’t get to Christ quick enough.”

We were driven into the embrace of our Lord.

The first Sunday in our new congregation—after you drove us from First RPC by casting out the pure gospel and calling it an evil thing—we heard a sermon on Lord’s Day 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism.

The sermon was Christ from start to finish.

It was enough to make the child of God weep with joy to hear the comfort of his savior, to whom he belongs, both body and soul.

I have one confession, and it is this: God is good.

There is only one way for me to conclude this letter.

Not with angry opprobrium.

No, there will be none of that because I have none of that, God being gracious.

I have been driven again into the embrace of my savior; how could I possibly harbor any bitterness?

I cannot thank you for what you have done.

Your deeds are evil.

But I can thank my God, who is sovereign over the evil deeds of a modern-day Diotrephes.

Again, I am reminded of the unfaithfulness of man and the faithfulness of God.

The only way to conclude this letter is to give thanks to God for his gracious deliverance of my family and me by once again causing us to hear the voice of the good shepherd, Jesus Christ.

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27–28).

In the service of Christ Jesus,

Dewey Engelsma

THE SCRIVENER

The Act of Separation and Joining Meeting

Deacon Keith Gritters welcomes everyone and reads I Corinthians 2.

The audience sings Psalter #353.

Deacon Keith Gritters

Let’s open with a word of prayer.

Father, which art in heaven, we come unto thee in the evening hour of this day, for thou art our Lord and our God, so that in the midst of these whelming waves we can look to thee, who art truth, to steady us. As we see in this meeting, thou hast delivered us from the snare, the snare in which even very recently we did not know we were entangled. Thou hast conquered that to free us, so that we may once again be able to hear thy gospel, which is not spoken with excellency of speech or man’s wisdom but is spoken in the

power of God. So we thank thee, Lord, for that gospel. We pray that thou wilt ever give it to thy people that they may hear it, that they may know their savior and him crucified alone, that they may find all their comfort and hope in him.

We pray, Lord, also, that thou wilt be with those who stay in the Reformed Protestant Churches. We pray that thou wilt show unto them that thy word has been cast out. Show unto them that they must leave, that they must follow thy gospel and thy truth, that in that they will have peace once again.

We pray, Lord, also, forgive us, for we confess that we are sinners who have sinned against thee in thought, word, and deed.

We pray all this in Jesus’ name alone.

Amen.

Rev. Andy Lanning

Thanks, Keith, for the opening devotions.

Before we read the Act of Separation and Joining, I would like to make some remarks about the event that the Lord worked here tonight and to reflect from the word of God and the confessions on the great thing that our God is doing. At this meeting tonight God himself, through the Lord Jesus Christ and his word and Spirit, organizes and institutes his church. That is a miraculous thing. No man can explain it. It is a holy thing, it is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and it is a wonderful thing. God's saints rejoice at the establishment of the church of Christ.

That will not be the evaluation of all men regarding this meeting tonight. There are many who will evaluate this meeting as schism. That has already been done when the consistory has repeatedly called this meeting schism, and those who have intimated that there could be a separation have made this schism. And men will continue to do so. And that will be done by the Protestant Reformed Churches, who will say and have already said, "You see, RPC? We told you so. When you left us, you were guilty of schism, and all that you can do from now until the end of your existence on this earth is continuing schism, splintering and splintering again." And the Reformed Protestant Churches will also call this meeting schism and in doing so will sound very much like their mother, the Protestant Reformed Churches. The RPC's charge will be this: "The RPC is the true church of Jesus Christ, and for you to leave that church is to divide the body of Christ." That language will reflect and echo what the Protestant Reformed Churches told us two and a half years ago when we were cast out of them.

Over against all of that accusation of schism, the reality of what happens this evening is that Jesus Christ is organizing and instituting his church.

Let's read a couple of passages from the confessions that speak of this wonderful work of Christ, beginning with Lord's Day 21, question and answer 54:

Q. What believest thou concerning the "holy catholic church" of Christ?

A. That the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am, and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof.

Then also the Belgic Confession article 27, entitled "The Catholic Christian Church":

We believe and confess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Ghost.

This Church hath been from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof; which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, which without subjects He cannot be. And this holy church is preserved or supported by God against the rage of the whole world; though she sometimes (for a while) appears very small, and in the eyes of men to be reduced to nothing, as during the perilous reign of Ahab the Lord reserved unto Him seven thousand men, who had not bowed their knees to Baal.

Furthermore, this holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit.

The confessions' teaching regarding Christ's work of gathering and instituting his church is simply the confessional expression of what the word of God teaches in passages like Ephesians 2:19–22:

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with

the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Jesus Christ builds his church, and Jesus Christ defends and preserves his church. And even though the name on the side of the church may change, as this denomination or that denomination apostatizes, the Lord Jesus Christ builds and preserves his church. That makes this a wonderful and holy assembly this evening.

What is more, the Lord Jesus Christ calls his people to separate from an apostatizing church and to join themselves to a true church. That's the holy calling, both the separation from the apostatizing church and the joining of the true church. That's article 28 of the Belgic Confession, "Every One is Bound to Join Himself to the True Church":

We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and out of it there is no salvation, that no person, of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it, maintaining the unity of the church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them.

And that this may be the more effectually observed, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate themselves from all those who do not belong to the church, and to join themselves to this congregation wheresoever God hath established it,

even though the magistrates and edicts of princes be against it, yea, though they should suffer death or any other corporal punishment. Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same, or do not join themselves to it, act contrary to the ordinance of God.

That means, then, that the question we face this evening and the question we have been facing over these last weeks is whether the Reformed Protestant Churches are, in fact, an apostatizing church. If the Reformed Protestant Churches are apostatizing, we must leave. That is our confession. If the Reformed Protestant Churches are not apostatizing, we may not leave. That also is our confession. That is a very significant question for God's people gathered here tonight. Are the Reformed Protestant Churches apostatizing?

Happily for us, whether the RPC are apostatizing can easily be known. It is not difficult. It is not complicated to know, for we have the marks of the true church and the marks of the false church as those are given in the word of God and as those are summarized in article 29 of the Belgic Confession. Article 29, "The Marks of the True Church, and Wherein She Differs from the False Church":

We believe that we ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true church, since all sects which are in the world assume to themselves the name of the church. But we speak here not of hypocrites, who are mixed in the church with the good, yet are not of the church, though externally in it; but we say that the body and communion of the true church must be distinguished from all sects who call themselves the church. The marks by which the true church is known are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin; in short, if all things are managed according to the pure

Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the church. Hereby the true church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.

Then comes a paragraph about the marks of Christians, and that is followed by this final paragraph of article 29:

As for the false church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from them as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry.

These two Churches are easily known and distinguished from each other.

The essential error of First Reformed Protestant Church, which error the entire denomination connives at by the latest meeting of classis—the essential error of First Reformed Protestant Church is the exaltation of man’s will above the will of God. Even to say it is a terrible thing. The exaltation of man’s will above the will of God. When God’s word came to First Reformed Protestant Church, telling her to sing psalms with her savior as her grateful life in response to God’s grace and salvation to her, First RPC gnashed her teeth against that word. Not all at once. It took some stirring for First RPC to be roused to gnash her teeth against that word. First RPC was roused and gnashed their teeth against the word that she is to sing psalms as her grateful worship of God for his grace and salvation. When God’s word came to First RPC and told her not to introduce man-made hymns into the worship services, the response of First RPC and the denomination with her is that we will have man-made hymns. We will have them.

We do have them, and we will sing them, and we will glory in them. And it’s immaterial whether the word of God forbids it; it’s immaterial whether the Church Order forbids it; we will have man-made hymns and sing them. That is the exaltation of the will of man over the word and the will of God.

And when her officebearers came to her and rebuked her for her idolatry, rebuked her for her errors, her response was to kill those officebearers. She did that swiftly. She did that brutally. She did that without pity. Three elders and the pastor have either been suspended or deposed and, so far as I know, every one of them cast outside the kingdom of heaven under Christian discipline.

The Belgic Confession article 29 identifies the exaltation of man’s will as a clear mark of the false church. The true church is marked by this: “In short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the church.” The mark of the false church is clearly stated this way: “As for the false church, she ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ.”

The exaltation of man’s will in worship is every bit as wicked as the exaltation of man’s will in doctrine. False worship is as abhorrent to God as false doctrine. Man’s will and throne in his salvation is awful. Man’s will and throne in his worship is just as awful.

The whole matter in the Reformed Protestant Churches is not unrelated to the reformation of 2021. In 2021 man’s will was exalted over God’s will in salvation, so that man’s willing and working obtained his salvation. In 2023 the will of man was exalted in worship, so that man decided he would do as he pleased in his worship.

When man exalts his will and will not submit to the yoke of Christ, then the church inevitably corrupts all the marks of the true church. The preaching of the gospel is corrupted. The administration of the sacraments are corrupted. In fact,

the sacraments are stolen away from God's people, who cannot in good conscience have their children baptized or attend the baptism because they do not agree with the doctrine being taught in this Christian church. They cannot in good conscience take the Lord's supper. The false church in her exaltation of the will of man inevitably corrupts all the marks of the true church.

She also takes on herself all the marks of the false church. An especially stark mark of the false church is her persecution of "those who live holily according to the Word of God" and the persecution of those who "rebuke" the church "for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry." Take note of that language of our confession. When the church is rebuked for her idolatry, she responds, if she's a false church, by killing those who rebuke her, persecuting them. The false church is always marked by her slaying of the prophets. This was Jesus' word in many places, including Matthew 23:34: "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city."

The Reformed Protestant denomination is a violent city right now. Blood of the prophets runs in her streets. The blood of God's people runs in her streets. The Reformed Protestant Churches slew four officebearers in record time. That involved as much corruption as the slaying of officebearers in the Protestant Reformed Churches involved. The Reformed Protestant Churches slew and scattered the sheep of the flock by calling the pure gospel *legalism*. By calling the truth *conditional theology*, they scattered the sheep, regardless of how many smiles, how many pats on the back, how many handshakes she offered those sheep. She slew them, she scattered them when she falsely accused the word of God with legalism. The hands of the Reformed Protestant Churches are bloody.

It was not enough for the Reformed Protestant Churches to speak the lie from the pulpit and in their decisions, but they hollered the lie at God's people, so that God's people were

under great duress and were sorely afflicted. This was the murder of the church.

At classis three things happened last week.

First, the entire denomination gave their assent to First Reformed Protestant Church's rebellion and idolatry. In fact, classis made sure no one could miss the idolatry that First was busy trying to cover up. First tried to call a man-made hymn a psalm. Classis declared before the face of God and man, "Though we know it's a hymn, we know it's a man-made hymn, we know that it's not permitted us to sing in our Church Order, and we're going to do it anyway." Classis connived at and affirmed and assented to the rebellion of First.

The second thing that happened at classis was that the entire denomination refused to deliver the persecuted members of the church but joined in that persecution. Now, it may be that there was only one appeal of one man regarding his discipline at classis, but all of the men who were cut down by First RPC were cut down on the same ground of false doctrine. Whatever other grounds there may have been, every one of them was cut down on the ground of false doctrine. And that means when the classis denied the appeal of the one appellant, it also connived at and consented to the murder of the other men.

The third thing that happened at classis was that the entire denomination openly and brazenly declared that the will of man rules her. Classis, for whatever reason—whether it was a last-minute pang of conscience or whether it was a shrewd calculation—classis acknowledged the major quote that First RPC used from my sermon to prove my legalism and my conditionalism, that that quote did not prove what First tried to make it prove. They said openly—although they didn't go nearly far enough—they said openly that that quotation does not necessarily prove legalism. But he's dead anyway. Everyone sitting here tonight, whether friend or whether opponent, can testify that that quote was a big deal. That quote was a big deal to many men. That quote was a big deal in many decisions. Classis,

recognizing that that quote was used wrongly, said, “It doesn’t matter.”

Classis also openly declared that, although she now knows she is singing a man-made hymn, she will do so regardless. By that the entire denomination openly and brazenly declared that the will of man rules.

All of that means for me and my house and for those who sign the Act of Separation and Joining and their house tonight, that there is no room for the word of God left in the Reformed Protestant Churches. I do not say that with any delight. I had hoped and was very optimistic that the Reformed Protestant Churches would come to their senses, that they would stop their mad rush for a moment, take a breath, think, listen to a video, read an article maybe, and understand the issues. The Reformed Protestant Churches have kept the pedal to the metal, so that there is only room in the Reformed Protestant Churches for the will of man. Even if the Reformed Protestant Churches preach the Bible, they are doing it because they will it. Even if the Reformed Protestant Churches sing psalms, they are doing it because it is their will to do so, not the will of God for them to do so. I say that the Reformed Protestant Churches by this have cast out the will of God and enthroned the will of man.

The people of God must not remain in such a church. They must not remain in such a church not first of all because of how scary the tyranny is. And tyranny is terrifying. Whatever the capricious will of man is today will be the will that rules the church, and tomorrow it might be different. We can all attest to that in the current worship of First Reformed Protestant Church. Two Sundays ago “Praise God” was a psalm, and everybody raised that psalm to God with full throat and voice. Yesterday “Praise God” was a hymn, and everybody raised that hymn to God with full throat and voice. Who is to know how to operate and behave in such a church? There is a certain terror that belongs to tyranny because whatever a man or a group of men will decide tomorrow is now the new rule for the church.

But that’s not even the main reason that God’s people must leave an apostatizing church. The main reason is because it is an affront to God—to God himself—and to God’s people that the puny will of puny man should be exalted above the holy will of the holy God.

If there had been an option to stay and work for reform from within, we could consider it. That has been said to many today. “Why don’t you stay and help us?”

My question to those would be, “How do you envision that help would look? The four men who were trying to teach you are outside the kingdom of heaven under Christian discipline. If they make a video or if they write an article, that is considered militancy against the fifth commandment. What do you expect that help would look like?”

There is no more opportunity to stay and work for reform from within. Your help was the [March] 5 sermon. Your help was the [March] 12 sermon. Your help was the protests of your officebearers and their appeals. That help has all been rejected. There is no more time to work for reform from within. Therefore, now that the denomination has given its assent to the will of man, we must go.

That takes us to the Act of Separation and Joining. I’d like to make a few remarks about that document. The Act of Separation and Joining does five things.

The first thing it does is assert the reasons that we must leave the Reformed Protestant Churches. And I use the word *assert* deliberately. It asserts things. It does not explain, and it does not prove; it asserts. The Act of Separation and Joining does not have to prove or explain. The Act of Separation and Joining is a living statement of those members who sign it, who lived through it, who saw what happened, and who know the things that they sign their names to. The Act very closely follows the Act of Separation of 2021, which also asserted and did not explain or prove. And that Act in turn closely followed the Act of Secession and Return of 1834 by the *Afscheiding*, which Act also asserted without

explaining or proving. The explanation and the proof is available. The explanation and the proof has been given and is being given and I suppose will continue to be given. Those who sign the Act of Separation and Joining tonight are testifying that they saw these thing happen.

The second thing the Act does is declares that the signers have separated their membership from the Reformed Protestant Churches. This is the meaning of the word *separation* in the title of the document: Act of Separation and Joining. That language *separation* is the language of Belgic Confession article 28. When a church is not true or has shown itself to be apostatizing, then we are to separate, and separate ourselves from all those who do not belong to the true church. This means that by your signature on the Act of Separation and Joining, at that moment you separate yourself from the Reformed Protestant Churches.

That does raise the question whether we ought to ask for our papers also from First RPC, and there might be a couple of ways to do that. One way might be to ask for your papers. You ask for your papers with the understanding that your membership is already in the new church that is instituted tonight. Another way might be not to ask for papers but to simply inform the consistory of First RPC that you have signed an Act of Separation and are no longer a member of that church. I do believe that one of those two options is the best.

I believe that the third option, which would be to say nothing to the consistory of First RPC, ought to be avoided as much as possible. We are determined to do things orderly, and order requires that we inform the consistory as that which has oversight of us of our action tonight. So I give you my opinion that if you do sign the Act of Separation and Joining tonight that you follow that up with either a request for your papers or a letter informing First of what you have done.

The third thing the Act of Separation does is declares that the signers have been joined by Christ as members of this church, newly established and instituted. That is the significance of

the word *joining* in the Act of Separation and Joining. That word *joining* is also taken right from article 28. We are called to separate ourselves from those who are not the church and join ourselves to the church wherever God has established it. Now tonight God establishes that church here. The signing of this document, therefore, constitutes the organization and institution of a new congregation. At the conclusion of the signing, there will be a new church in this place.

Fourth, the Act declares that this church desires ecclesiastical fellowship with like-minded believers. Those who live here and desire to be one with us are invited to join. And that invitation will stand through all our days as a church by that Act of Separation and Joining. We long for fellowship with like-minded believers. Also, we desire to be a denomination; we do not desire to be an independent congregation. Independentism, the mindset of independentism, is anathema to us. We do desire that there be other churches who are organized with whom we can join. Now, as someone looks around with the eye of the flesh, that looks impossible; that looks totally unrealistic. We don't live in this world by the eye of the flesh; we live by the eye of faith and so declare in our Act of Separation and Joining that we do desire ecclesiastical fellowship with like-minded believers.

Fifth, the Act of Separation and Joining declares that we do not recognize the unjust suspension of our three elders, that is, elders Neil Meyer, Steve Van Dyke, and Paul Starrett, or of our pastor, that is, Reverend Lanning. This is a very important paragraph because Christ calls to office through his church. No man may intrude himself into office. That is the explicit teaching of Belgic Confession article 31:

We believe that the ministers of God's Word, and the elders and deacons, ought to be chosen to their respective offices by a lawful election by the church, with calling upon the name of the Lord, and in that order which the Word of God teacheth. Therefore every one must take

heed not to intrude himself by indecent means, but is bound to wait till it shall please God to call him, that he may have testimony of his calling and be certain and assured that it is of the Lord.

When you sign your name to the Act of Separation and Joining, you are declaring that, as a church, you do not recognize the suspension or deposition of the three elders and the minister. You are declaring that you recognize them, as the church of Jesus Christ, as your officebearers. And in that way the officebearers who were suspended, some of us (elder Paul Starrett and myself suspended), and the officebearers who were deposed (elder Neil Meyer and elder Steve Van Dyke)—by that you essentially call us to office in the church. This is exactly the way it was in 1834, and this is exactly the way we did it in 2021.

That also means the suspended and deposed men should not sign the Act of Separation and Joining. Our names should be there in brackets to indicate that we agree with the Act, that we stand with the church in the Act. But because this Act puts us into office in this church, we ought not sign it, lest we intrude ourselves into the office of elder and minister. So if you see the three elders and myself not signing and you see brackets and wonder what that is about, it is so that we are lawfully put into office through the church and not by our own indecent means.

A note about the Act of Separation: no one may be compelled to sign. All members of the Reformed Protestant Churches are free to sign. Each member must stand before the Lord in his own conscience in this matter. If there is anyone tonight who has felt themselves compelled that he must sign like others, then he must not be guided by that compulsion. This is your own confession and your own testimony that you believe you must leave the Reformed Protestant Churches and institute a new church here.

Confessing members ought to sign for themselves. Heads of households and those responsible for the children of the household ought to sign for their children. I ask that as you sign, you please list the household that you are

signing for, including all of the children, so that there is a complete record of everyone who is a member of this church.

One more note simply by way of housekeeping: there are several sign-up sheets to take a look at on the table here. Some of the committees that we're asking for volunteers for will be consistory-appointed committees. The consistory will use those sign-up sheets to help them appoint the people to the committees. There's also a sign-up sheet for strictly volunteer work. Those do not need to be appointed by the consistory. So if you sign up on the sheet that is strictly volunteer, then assume that you are a member of that committee from the moment of your signing.

Then I want to conclude before Deacon Gritters reads the Act of Separation and Joining by noting that you and I who sign this Act tonight have been revealed. You and I have been. It is not, first of all, that the Reformed Protestant Churches have been revealed. You might think that way, but you are the Reformed Protestant Churches. Just as it was not the Protestant Reformed Churches that were revealed in 2021; you were the Protestant Reformed Churches. You and I have been revealed according to our nature, and that nature is always, always unfaithful. That nature is trying to depart from Jehovah God and his gospel and his truth. You and I have been revealed, and we must recognize that what Christ does tonight in instituting a church exposes that nature that we carry. Two and half years after the Reformed Protestant Churches were formed—not even—she fell into the snare of man's will. And I tell you tonight, as I tell myself, you love your will more than anything by nature, and I love my will more than anything by nature. The snare that the churches fell into is the snare that will always be before your feet and mine. Even the fact that the Act of Separation and Joining can be almost verbatim the Act of Separation of 2021 shows that we have not improved as God's people. We have not improved. That means that our only hope as a church is the grace and mercy of our God. That is good hope. That is a hope you can stake your life on. That is a hope you can

stake your church membership on. That is a hope that you can live the rest of your life in in this world and a hope you can go to heaven in.

Our God has been so merciful that he came to what must be the most unfaithful people in the whole world, and he took us out of the snare and delivered us from our own sin and our own corruption. He has covered us in the blood of Jesus Christ and has counted the righteousness of Christ, who was ever faithful, as our own.

The name of the church may change, but the love of God for his church in Jesus Christ has not changed. Always this is the case. “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.”

Finally, I note that your suffering will be great. You know this to a degree already because you have suffered. That’s the nature of persecution. And you will continue to suffer for the sake of the truth. You will suffer in your families; you will suffer in your friendships; you will suffer in your homes; you will suffer in the school; you will suffer many, many ways. You will be persecuted. And when you do suffer and when you are persecuted, in that day rejoice. Shout for joy. Leap for joy, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. The servant is not greater than his lord. They have called our Lord Beelzebub. And when they call you schismatics and whatever else it may be, you may rejoice.

And so we go forward with the Act of Separation and Joining in the confidence of the mercy of our God and in humility, depending upon his grace alone.

At this time, I’d like to ask Deacon Gritters to read the Act of Separation and Joining.

*Deacon Keith Gritters reads the Act of Separation and Joining.*¹

Rev. Andy Lanning

There was one question raised for clarification about the statement in the Act of Separation and Joining that had to do with whether it’s

accurate that the officebearers were suspended and deposed. That statement is accurate because it doesn’t say that every one of them was deposed. It simply includes them in a class. Some of the officebearers were suspended. That’s elder Paul Starrett and myself. Some of the officebearers were deposed. That’s elder Neil Meyer and elder Steve VanDyke.

Are there any questions yet from those who intend to sign the Act of Separation and Joining tonight for clarification about the Act?

If there are no questions, we will proceed to the signing.

All right, at this time, then, you can come forward. The Act of Separation and Joining is here. It is in the pages that Keith just read from. The page that is open will be the beginning of the page [for signing]. When that fills up, you can turn to the next page. Again, please list all in your household that you are signing for more than yourself. Please come forward.

Signing of Act of Separation and Joining

Reading and signing of Formula of Subscription by officebearers

Elder Neil Meyer (closing prayer)

Our Father in heaven, we draw near unto thee in Jesus Christ, by whom we have access, who is the way, the truth, and the life. We come as those who dream, for again thou hast imparted unto us the freedom of the gospel. And we give thee thanks for it. We are those who return now to thy city, to thy house, Jerusalem, whose walls are broken, whose gates are burned with fire. And we hear the words of the prophet to the people of old: “The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build.” But to the enemy, “but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.”

And how shall we build? We say, “Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens.” We pray that in faith, for when thou dost rend the heavens, how shall we be preserved, except it be in Christ. Oh

¹See “Act of Separation and Joining,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 7 (May 27, 2023): 35–37.

that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful house, where our fathers praised thee, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. So we pray, return, we beseech thee, O LORD of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. For thou hast chosen the man of thy right hand; thou hast chosen Jesus Christ, who is our help in time of trouble. One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of

my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.

We thank thee for our officebearer, Jesus Christ. We thank thee that he dwells in the office of believer here tonight. We pray that he will represent himself also in our midst in the three-fold office.

We return to the words of the prophet: “The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build.” O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

THE ALCOVE

Introduction to John Calvin’s Preface to the Genevan Psalter

The following document is John Calvin’s preface to the Genevan Psalter, which psalter was first published in 1539 and completed in 1562. The Genevan Psalter had a tremendous influence on Reformed worship. The Genevan Psalter became the model for Reformed congregational psalm singing wherever the Reformed faith spread in the world. Through the influence of the Genevan Psalter, Reformed congregations, Reformed schools, and Reformed families the world over sang psalms.

The singing of psalms was one of the incontestably distinguishing marks of Calvinist culture in Europe and America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is no lack of evidence for this phenomenon from contemporary sources:

letters, diaries, local chronicles, histories, polemical tracts, martyrologies, written records of all varieties, to say nothing of the numerous editions of the psalters, attest amply and eloquently to the fact that the “Calvinists were convinced that they could legitimately appropriate the psalms to themselves...the psalms were *their* songs which they sang as the elect people of God in a covenant relationship with Him.”¹

History

The story of the Genevan Psalter is a fascinating episode in the history of the Reformation. That story begins in 1536, with Calvin’s arrival in the city of Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin never

¹Charles Garside, Jr., “The Origins of Calvin’s Theology of Music: 1536–1543,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society Held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge* [vol.] 69, part 4 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1979): 5. Garside quotes W. Stanford Reid, “The Battle Hymns of the Lord: Calvinist Psalmody of the Sixteenth Century,” *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies*, ed. Carl S. Meyer (Saint Louis, MO: The Foundation for Reformation Research, 1971): 2:43–44.

intended to stay in Geneva. He was only passing through for a single night, but God intended for Calvin to stay. God sent his servant, the Genevan minister William Farel, to compel Calvin to remain in Geneva. Farel wanted Calvin to complete the reformation of the city that had begun only months earlier. The historian Philip Schaff narrates the confrontation.

[Farel] at once called on Calvin and held him fast, as by divine command. Calvin protested, pleading his youth, his inexperience, his need of further study, his natural timidity and bashfulness, which unfitted him for public action. But all in vain. Farel, “who burned of a marvellous zeal to advance the Gospel,” threatened him with the curse of Almighty God if he preferred his studies to the work of the Lord, and his own interest to the cause of Christ. Calvin was terrified and shaken by these words of the fearless evangelist, and felt “as if God from on high had stretched out his hand.” He submitted, and accepted the call to the ministry, as teacher and pastor of the evangelical Church of Geneva.²

Within six months of beginning his labors in Geneva, Calvin, along with Farel and other ministers, presented the ruling council of Geneva with their “Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva Proposed by the Ministers at the Council, January 16, 1537.” These articles were immensely important for the Reformation for a number of reasons, not the least of which was their proposal that Christian discipline be exercised against the impenitent. These articles were also greatly significant for reintroducing congregational psalm singing into the worship of the Reformed churches. Congregational singing had been lost for more than a millennium in the Roman Catholic Church, where all the singing was

done by trained choirs. If the people spoke or sang at all, it was to mumble something that they did not understand. Worship in Rome was not heartfelt but dead. Even in Protestant churches Calvin found the prayers of God’s people to be shamefully cold. Calvin believed the congregational singing of psalms would be the remedy to cold and heartless religion. Therefore, in the “Articles” of 1537, Calvin proposed congregational psalm singing as essential for Reformed worship in Geneva.

Further, it is a thing very expedient for the edification of the Church, to sing some psalms in the form of public devotions by which one may pray to God, or to sing his praise so that the hearts of all be roused and incited to make like prayers and render like praises and thanks to God with one accord.³

On the other hand there are the psalms which we desire to be sung in the Church, as we have it exemplified in the ancient Church and in the evidence of Paul himself, who says it is good to sing in the congregation with mouth and heart. We are unable to compute the profit and edification which will arise from this, except after having experimented. Certainly as things are, the prayers of the faithful are so cold, that we ought to be ashamed and dismayed. The psalms can incite us to lift up our hearts to God and move us to an ardour in invoking and exalting with praises the glory of his Name. Moreover it will be thus appreciated of what benefit and consolation the pope and those that belong to him have deprived the Church; for he has reduced the psalms, which ought to be true spiritual songs, to a murmuring among themselves without any understanding.

² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8, *Modern Christianity: The Swiss Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1910), 348. Schaff quotes Theodore Beza, *Life of Calvin*, XXI.125.

³ J. K. S. Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1954), 48.

This manner of proceeding seemed specially good to us, that children, who beforehand have practised some modest church song, sing in a loud distinct voice, the people listening with all attention and following heartily what is sung with the mouth, till all become accustomed to sing communally. But in order to avoid all confusion, you must not allow that anyone by his insolence, and to put the congregation to derision, should come to disturb the order you have adopted.⁴

John Calvin thus laid down the principle of congregational psalm singing, which he derived from “the evidence of Paul himself” and from the example of “the ancient Church.” Calvin also laid down the method by which the psalms would be learned: the children practicing the psalms beforehand, undoubtedly in school, and then singing with clear voice in the services so that all others could also learn the psalms. The principle and the method having been established, it only remained for John Calvin to secure the material for congregational psalm singing. There was no available psalter in the language of the people. If God’s people were to sing psalms in worship, a psalter would have to be produced.

However, before any psalter could be produced, popular sentiment in Geneva turned against Calvin and Farel. The city of Geneva, with the support of neighboring seats of power, viewed the reformers’ “Articles” and their implications as an intolerable meddling in the citizens’ customs. The citizens elected anti-clerical council members, who began to unravel some of the changes. An aged minister and friend of Calvin was imprisoned and then banished “in spite of the energetic protests of Calvin and Farel.” Calvin denounced the council from the pulpit as the “Devil’s Council.” When Calvin refused to administer the Lord’s supper under such circumstances, many in the audience “drew their

swords, and drowned out the voice of the preachers, who left the church and went home under the protection of their friends.” The council of Geneva met the next day, “deposed Farel and Calvin, without a trial, and ordered them to leave the city within three days.”⁵

Calvin and Farel went briefly to Zurich, Switzerland. While there, Calvin and Farel “admitted that they had been too rigid, and consented to the restoration” of certain indifferent practices, like the use of unleavened bread in the Lord’s supper. However, Calvin and Farel continued to insist on the matters that they had presented in their “Articles” of 1537: “the introduction of discipline, the division of the Church into parishes, the more frequent administration of the communion, the singing of Psalms in public worship, and the exercise of discipline by joint committees of laymen and ministers.”⁶ The council in Geneva was unmoved and confirmed its sentence of banishment against Calvin and Farel. Calvin had labored in Geneva for just short of two years. For his unwavering insistence on congregational psalm singing in worship, among other reasons, he was deposed and banished.

Calvin went to Strassburg, Germany, where he spent three blessed years, from 1538 through 1541. It was in Strassburg that Calvin more carefully developed the order of worship for public services.

The service began with an invocation, a confession of sin and a brief absolution. Then followed reading of the Scriptures, singing, and a free prayer. The whole congregation, male and female, joined in chanting the Psalms, and thus took an active part in public worship, while formerly they were but passive listeners or spectators. This was in accordance with the Protestant doctrine of the general priesthood of believers. The sermon came next, and after it a long general

⁴ Reid, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, 53–54.

⁵ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 359–60.

⁶ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 361.

prayer and the Lord's Prayer. The service closed with singing and the benediction.⁷

It was also in Strassburg that Calvin began producing a psalter in the language of the people, which psalter would become the Genevan Psalter. In 1539 in Strassburg Calvin published the first edition, containing metrical versions of nine psalms and a couple other songs. In 1541 Calvin was recalled to Geneva when the ruling council there realized that they had erred in deposing and banishing Calvin. This time, the council agreed to the reforms that Calvin and Farel had proposed. While in Geneva, Calvin continued to add to the psalter in several more editions, until the Genevan Psalter was finally completed with all 150 psalms in 1562.

Historians and theologians who write about the Genevan Psalter recognize its importance for Reformed worship. For example, this from Philip Schaff:

The introduction of the Psalter in the vernacular was a most important feature, and the beginning of a long and heroic chapter in the history of worship and Christian life. The Psalter occupies the same important place in the Reformed Church as the hymnal in the Lutheran. It was the source of comfort and strength to the Huguenot Church of the Desert, and to the Presbyterian Covenanters of Scotland, in the days of bitter trial and persecution. Calvin himself prepared metrical versions of Psalms 25, 36, 43, 46, 91, 113, 120, 138, 142, together with a metrical version of the Song of Simeon and the Ten Commandments. He afterwards used the superior version of Clement Marot, the greatest French poet of that age, who was the poet of the court, and the psalmist of the Church (1497–1544). Calvin met him first at the court of the Duchess of Ferrara (1536), whither he had fled, and afterwards at

Geneva (1542), where he encouraged him to continue his metrical translation of the Psalms. Marot's Psalter first appeared at Paris, 1541, and contained thirty Psalms, together with metrical versions of the Lord's Prayer, the Angelic Salutation, the Creed, and the Decalogue. Several editions, with fifty Psalms, were printed at Geneva in 1543, one at Strassburg in 1545. Later editions were enlarged with the translations of Beza. The popularity and usefulness of his and Beza's Psalter were greatly enhanced by the rich melodies of Claude Goudimel (1510–1572), who joined the Reformed Church in 1562, and died a martyr at Lyons in the night of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew. He devoted his musical genius to the Reformation. His tunes are based in part on popular songs, and breathe the simple and earnest spirit of the Reformed cultus.⁸

Or, for example, this from Michael Bushell:

It would be difficult to overestimate the impact that the *Geneva Psalter* and its descendants have had upon Reformed worship practice. The popularity of the Psalter was astounding. In the year of its initial publication (1562) the *Geneva Psalter* was issued in twenty-five editions. In four years sixty-two editions followed. According to Doumergue, there were some fourteen hundred editions in all, not to mention translations into English, Dutch, Danish, Polish, Bohemian, Rhaeto-Romanic, Ladin, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Gascon, Bernaise, Malay, Tamil, Sessouto, Latin, Hebrew, Slavonian and Zend. In less than two centuries, more than thirty editions were issued in Holland alone, and Germany was not far behind. The Psalms of David thus occupied a place very close to the heart of

⁷ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 372–73.

⁸ Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 374–75.

the Calvinistic Reformation. Florimond de Raemonde, a bitter opponent of Calvinism, complained of the metrical Psalms that “nothing has so opened the way to the novelties of these new religions...The new singing, sweet and insinuating, of these rhymed Psalms has been the chain and cordage...by which they have drawn souls.” Certainly the ultimate strength of the Swiss Reformation lay in its return to the doctrines of grace, but the Psalter and the catechism became the means of applying those doctrines to the heart. The Reformation as we know it would have been impossible without them. Reid suggests that Calvin’s teachings, his organization, and his personality may have had much less impact on his contemporaries than is usually assumed to have been the case:

The thing that really “grabbed” the common man, the ordinary Calvinist soldier, was something much more mundane: his catechetical training and the congregational singing of the Psalms. More than all the fine theological reasoning, both the catechism and the Psalter entered into the very warp and weft of the humblest members’ lives.

Our Calvinistic heritage, then, is a Psalm-singing heritage, and our Reformed churches, to the extent that they have chosen to forsake that heritage, are no longer Calvinistic in their worship.⁹

Observations

John Calvin’s burden in his preface to the psalter was to show that the worship of God must be

done with understanding. Worship in the Roman Catholic Church had become a pageantry of ignorance. No one knew what was being preached, what was being prayed, or what was being sung. Worship in Rome was a series of empty actions, gestures, mutterings, processions, and ceremonies that held little to no meaning for the people. But worship was not meant to be such a barren show. God had given worship to his church for her edification and her comfort. Worship was meant to touch the believer’s heart and mind. “A good affection toward God is a thing neither lifeless nor bestial, but is a quickening movement proceeding from the Holy Spirit when the heart is truly touched and the understanding enlightened.”¹⁰

Calvin saw the congregational singing of psalms in the common tongue as an enlivening force in worship. The singing of psalms would excite men to fervent and knowledgeable service of God. “And in truth we know from experience that song has great force and vigor to arouse and inflame the hearts of men to invoke and praise God with a more vehement and ardent zeal.”

With regard to what the church should sing, John Calvin insisted on the psalms.

What is there then to do? It is to have songs not only seemly, but also holy, which will be like spurs to incite us to pray to and praise God, to meditate on His works in order to love, fear, honor, and glorify Him. Now what Saint Augustine says is true, that no one is able to sing things worthy of God unless he has received them from Him. Wherefore, when we have looked thoroughly everywhere and searched high and low, we shall find no better songs nor more appropriate to the purpose than the Psalms of David which the Holy Spirit made and

⁹Michael Bushell, *Songs of Zion*, 4th rev. ed. (Norfolk, VA: Norfolk Press, 2011), 266–67. Bushell’s quotation of Florimond de Raemonde was taken from Emil Doumerge, “Music in the Work of Calvin,” *PTR* 7 (October 1909): 540. Bushell’s quotation of Reid was taken from J. S. Reid, “The Battle Hymns of the Lord: Calvinist Psalmody of the 16th Century,” *16th Century Essays and Studies*, ed. C. S. Meyer (St. Louis: Foundation for Reformation Research), 37.

¹⁰This and the following quotations come from John Calvin’s preface to the Genevan Psalter, printed below.

spoke through him. And furthermore, when we sing them, we are certain that God puts the words in our mouths, as if He Himself were singing in us to exalt His glory. Wherefore Chrysostom exhorts men as well as women and little children to accustom themselves to sing them, in order that this may be, as it were, a meditation for associating themselves with the company of angels.

Notable regarding Calvin's insistence on psalmody is that he grounded psalmody in scripture. Calvin did not consider psalm singing in worship to be one option among others or even the best option among several. Rather, Calvin considered psalm singing to be God's biblical prescription through his apostle. Five times Calvin referred to "Saint Paul." One reference was to I Corinthians 14:15. "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." Another reference was to Colossians 3:16. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Calvin's use of these two passages made it clear that he understood them to be referring to the psalms, especially Colossians 3:16, which Calvin used in the immediate context of calling for the psalms of David. Having said that "we shall find no better songs nor more appropriate to the purpose than the Psalms of David," Calvin said, "It is necessary for us to remember what Saint Paul says, that spiritual songs can be sung truly only from the heart." The church was to "accustom itself hereafter to singing these divine and celestial hymns with the good King David."

In light of this, the tiny handful of other scriptural songs and ecclesiastical confessions that Calvin also set to music did not overthrow Calvin's psalmody. Calvin himself set the prophecy of Simeon and the ten commandments to music and published them in his psalter. Other men who worked on the psalter with Calvin set

the Apostles' Creed, the song of the angels, the prophecy of Mary, and the prophecy of Zacharias to music and published them in the Genevan Psalter. This small collection of biblical songs was an anomaly in the Genevan Psalter. The Genevan Psalter was a psalter, not a hymnal. When Calvin wrote about singing in worship, he wrote about the psalms, not hymns. Calvin's preface to the Genevan Psalter is Calvin's longest single statement about what the church must sing, and in it Calvin speaks only of the psalms. Even though there were many hymnbooks available in Calvin's day, Calvin did not labor to introduce hymns and hymnals into the Reformed churches. Rather, he labored to introduce the psalms and the psalter.

Therefore, the small collection of other biblical songs in the Genevan Psalter must not be understood as the introduction of a new principle of singing other than psalmody. The small collection of other songs certainly must not be understood as an invitation to the church of the day or of future days to introduce hymnody into the church's worship. Rather, the small collection of other songs in the Genevan Psalter must be understood as an anomaly and an irregularity. The irregularity is not that the ten commandments or the song of the angels are somehow wicked in themselves. Certainly not! But the irregularity is that these other songs appeared in the Genevan Psalter even though Calvin proposed, insisted upon, labored for, and produced a psalter for the singing of psalms.

And no wonder that there were irregularities! The reformation of worship was a monumental task. The entire dry husk of Roman Catholic worship had to be tilled under, and the entire living garden of biblical Reformed worship had to be planted and watered. With such a task, the mystery is not how Calvin could have included the tiniest handful of songs in addition to the psalms. Rather, the mystery is how Calvin could so tenaciously cling to the psalms without being swept away. The answer to that mystery is God's preserving grace. God upheld John Calvin as he labored for years to bring psalm singing to the

church. God upheld John Calvin as he faced deposition and banishment for insisting on congregational psalm singing. God upheld John Calvin as he produced a psalter in the tongue of the people for the church to sing the psalms.

Only let the world be so well advised that in place of songs in part empty and frivolous, in part stupid and dull, in part obscene and vile, and in consequence evil and harmful, which it has used up to now, it may accustom itself hereafter to singing these divine and celestial hymns with the good King David.

Finally, the Genevan Psalter included formulas and prayers to be used in the administration of the sacraments and the solemnization of marriage. Therefore, Calvin's preface briefly explains the use of these formulas and prayers in the church. Although these matters lie beyond

the scope of the matter of singing, the entire preface is reprinted here in full.

Although John Calvin wrote prefaces to various editions of the Genevan Psalter, his fullest preface was in the 1543 edition. It is the 1543 preface to the Genevan Psalter that is printed here, under the title "Epistle to the Reader." Various portions and translations of this preface are available online. The version that is printed here can be found as appendix 2 in Charles Gar-side, Jr., "The Origins of Calvin's Theology of Music: 1536–1543," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society Held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge* [vol.] 69, part 4 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1979): 31–33.

With that, we present to our readers John Calvin's preface to the Genevan Psalter.

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Epistle to the Reader

(John Calvin's Preface to the Genevan Psalter)

As it is a thing rightly required by Christianity, and one of the most necessary, that each of the faithful observe and maintain the communion of the Church in his neighborhood, attending the assemblies which are held on Sunday as well as on other days to honor and serve God, so is it also expedient and reasonable that everyone know and understand what is said and done in the temple in order to receive benefit and edification from it. For our Lord did not institute the order which we are bound to observe when we gather together in His name merely to amuse the world by a spectacle, but rather desired that from it profit would come to all His people as Saint Paul testifies, commanding that everything which is done in the Church be directed to the common edification of all, something which the servant would not have commanded had it not been the intention of the Master. Now this cannot be done unless we are taught to understand everything which has been ordained for our use. For

to say that we can have devotion, either at prayer or at ceremony, without understanding anything about them, is a gross delusion, no matter how much it is commonly said. A good affection toward God is a thing neither lifeless nor bestial, but is a quickening movement proceeding from the Holy Spirit when the heart is truly touched and the understanding enlightened. And in fact, if one could be edified by things which one sees without understanding what they mean, Saint Paul would not so vehemently forbid speaking in an unknown tongue, and would not use the argument that there is no edification unless there is doctrine. Nevertheless, if we wish truly to honor the holy ordinances of our Lord which we use in the Church, the most important thing is to know what they contain, what they mean, and to what purpose they tend, in order that their observance may be useful and salutary, and in consequence rightly regulated.

Now there are in sum three things which our Lord has commanded us to observe in our spiritual assemblies, namely, the preaching of His Word, the public and solemn prayers, and the administration of His sacraments. I refrain from speaking of preaching at this time inasmuch as it is not in question. Touching the two other parts which remain, we have the express commandment of the Holy Spirit that prayers be made in the common language and understood by the people. And the Apostle says that the people cannot respond, Amen, to the prayer which has been made in an unknown tongue. Now since prayer is made in the name of all and on behalf of all, everyone should be a participant. Wherefore this has been a very great affront to those who have introduced the Latin language into the Churches where it is not commonly understood. And there is neither subtlety nor sophistry which can excuse them from this custom which is perverse and displeasing to God. For one must not presume that He will be agreeable to what is done directly contrary to His will, and, as it were, in defiance of Him. Nor can one any longer defy Him, acting thus against His prohibition, and glorying in this rebellion as if it were a thing holy and very praiseworthy.

As for the sacraments, if we look truly at their nature, we recognize that it is a perverse custom to celebrate them in such a way that the people have nothing but the spectacle, without explanation of the mysteries which are contained in them. For if these are visible words, as Saint Augustine calls them, they must not be merely an exterior spectacle, but doctrine must be joined to them to give them understanding. And so our Lord, in instituting them, expressly demonstrated this, for He says that they are testimonies of the alliance which He made with us, and which He confirmed by His death. It is certainly necessary, then, in order to accord them their proper place, that we know and understand what is said in them. Otherwise it would be in vain that our Lord opened His mouth to speak if there were no ears to hear. And this is not a subject for lengthy disputation, for when the matter is judged with a sober disposition, there is no

one who will not admit that it is pure trickery to amuse the people with signs whose meaning has not been explained to them. Wherefore it is easy to see that one profanes the sacraments of JESUS Christ administering them in such a manner that the people do not understand the words which are spoken in them. And in fact one sees the superstitions which issue from this. For it is commonly agreed that the consecration, as much of the water at Baptism as of the bread and the wine in the Supper of our Lord, are like a kind of magic; that is to say, that when one has opened one's mouth and pronounced the words, insensible creatures feel the effect, yet men understand nothing. Now the true consecration is that which is made by the word of faith when it is declared and received, as Saint Augustine says. This is expressly realized in the words of JESUS Christ, for He does not say to the bread that it should become His body, but He directs His word to the company of the faithful, saying: Take, eat, and so forth. If we wish, then, rightly to celebrate the sacrament, it is necessary for us to have the doctrine by which what is signified in it is declared to us. I know perfectly well that that seems like an outrageous opinion to those who are unaccustomed to it, as is the case with all new things. But it is certainly right, if we are disciples of JESUS Christ, that we prefer His institution to our practice. And what He instituted from the beginning ought not to appear to us like novel opinion.

If that still cannot penetrate everyone's understanding, it will be necessary for us to pray to God that it please Him to enlighten the ignorant, to make them understand how much wiser He is than any man on earth, so that they will learn to be satisfied no longer with their own judgment or with their foolish wisdom, and be enraged with their leaders who are blind. Meanwhile, for the use of our Church, it seemed well advised to us to have published a formulary of prayers and the sacraments in order that everyone might know what he should say and do in the Christian assembly. The book will be profitable not only for the people of this Church, but also for all those who wish to know what form the faithful

should maintain and follow when they gather together in the name of JESUS Christ. We have therefore collected as in a summary the manner of celebrating the sacraments and sanctifying marriage; likewise the prayers and praises which we use. We will speak a little later of the sacraments.

As for the public prayers, there are two kinds: the ones made with the word only, the others with song. And this is not a thing invented a short time ago. For from the first origin of the Church, this has been so, as appears from the histories. And even Saint Paul speaks not only of praying by mouth, but also of singing. And in truth we know from experience that song has great force and vigor to arouse and inflame the hearts of men to invoke and praise God with a more vehement and ardent zeal. There must always be concern that the song be neither light nor frivolous, but have gravity and majesty, as Saint Augustine says. And thus there is a great difference between the music which one makes to entertain men at table and in their homes, and the psalms which are sung in the Church in the presence of God and His angels. Now when anyone wishes to judge correctly of the form which is here presented, we hope that he will find it holy and pure, seeing that it is simply directed to the edification of which we have spoken.

And how much more widely the practice of singing may extend. It is even in the homes and in the fields an incentive for us, and, as it were, an organ for praising God and lifting up our hearts to Him, to console us by meditating on His virtue, goodness, wisdom, and justice, something which is more necessary than one can say. For in the first place it is not without cause that the Holy Spirit exhorts us so carefully through the Holy Scriptures to rejoice in God, and that all our joy is there reduced, as it were, to its true end. For He knows how much we are inclined to rejoice in vanity. As thus then our nature draws us and induces us to look for all manner of demented and vicious rejoicing, so to the contrary our Lord, to distract us and withdraw us from the temptations of the flesh and

the world, presents us all means possible to occupy us in that spiritual joy which He recommends to us so much. Now among the other things which are appropriate for recreating man and giving him pleasure, music is either the first or one of the principal, and we must value it as a gift of God deputed to that use. Wherefore that much more ought we to take care not to abuse it, for fear of fouling and contaminating it, converting it to our condemnation, when it was dedicated to our profit and welfare. If there were no other consideration than this alone, it ought indeed to move us to moderate the use of music, to make it serve everything virtuous, and that it ought not to give occasion for our giving free rein to licentiousness, or for our making ourselves effeminate in disordered delights, and that it ought not to become an instrument of dissipation or of any obscenity. But there is still more. For there is scarcely anything in the world which is more capable of turning or moving this way and that the morals of men, as Plato prudently considered it. And in fact we experience that it has a secret and almost incredible power to arouse hearts in one way or another.

Wherefore we ought to be the more diligent in regulating it in such a way that it be useful to us and not at all pernicious. For this reason the ancient doctors of the Church complain frequently of the fact that the people of their times were addicted to unseemly and obscene songs which not without reason they judge and call mortal and Satanic poison for the corruption of the world. Moreover, in speaking now of music, I understand two parts, that is to say the letter, or subject and matter; second, the song or the melody. It is true that every evil word (as Saint Paul says) perverts good morals, but when the melody is with it, it pierces the heart that much more strongly and enters into it; just as through a funnel wine is poured into a container, so also venom and corruption are distilled to the depth of the heart by the melody. What is there then to do? It is to have songs not only seemly, but also holy, which will be like spurs to incite us to pray to and praise God, to meditate on His works in

order to love, fear, honor, and glorify Him. Now what Saint Augustine says is true, that no one is able to sing things worthy of God unless he has received them from Him. Wherefore, when we have looked thoroughly everywhere and searched high and low, we shall find no better songs nor more appropriate to the purpose than the Psalms of David which the Holy Spirit made and spoke through him. And furthermore, when we sing them, we are certain that God puts the words in our mouths, as if He Himself were singing in us to exalt His glory. Wherefore Chrysostom exhorts men as well as women and little children to accustom themselves to sing them, in order that this may be, as it were, a meditation for associating themselves with the company of angels. As for the rest, it is necessary for us to remember what Saint Paul says, that spiritual songs can be sung truly only from the heart. Now the heart requires intelligence, and in that (says Saint Augustine) lies the difference between the singing of men and that of the birds. For a linnet, a nightingale, a parrot may sing well, but it will be without understanding. Now the peculiar gift of man is to sing knowing what he is saying. After the intelligence must follow the heart and the

affection which is impossible unless we have the hymn imprinted on our memory in order never to cease from singing.

For these reasons the present book, even for this cause, in addition to the rest which has been said, ought to be under exceptional consideration by everyone who desires to enjoy himself in seemly fashion and in accordance with God, to look to his welfare and to the profit of his neighbors. And so there is no necessity to be particularly recommended by me, seeing that it carries its own value and praise. Only let the world be so well advised that in place of songs in part empty and frivolous, in part stupid and dull, in part obscene and vile, and in consequence evil and harmful, which it has used up to now, it may accustom itself hereafter to singing these divine and celestial hymns with the good King David. Touching the melody, it has seemed best that it be moderated in the manner which we have adopted to carry gravity and majesty appropriate to the subject, and even to be suitable for singing in the Church, in accordance with what has been said.

—Geneva, 10 June 1543



Article IX. The Fallen King (continued)

If we want to characterize in one single term the condition of man after the fall, we say that he is totally depraved.

About this condition of man, of the sinner, of Adam after he had sinned, we must still speak. Man, so we found, is guilty before God because of his sin, and being guilty, he is worthy of punishment. As the guilty one he is not an object of God's mercy or grace, but outside of Christ he is simply an object of the wrath of God. God is righteous. He maintains all His ordinances. His law is implacable. And, therefore the guilty must die. We also touched on the subject of man's spiritual death. He did not immediately die the eternal death, for God was to be justified in the history of sinful humanity and the covenant of grace was to be realized. But he died nevertheless. He died the spiritual death. And it is that spiritually dead condition which we must still discuss. It is that condition which is denoted by the term, "total depravity."

We are aware of the fact that it is an ugly expression, total depravity. We are also aware of the further fact that it has almost become obsolete, out of date. In the world the expression is deeply abhorred, and to maintain that the natural man is totally depraved, is sufficient to make you an object of the world's hatred and contempt. And that is but natural. In the first place because there is nothing so impossible for the world to realize as that man by nature is hopelessly enslaved to sin and the devil. The truth is not in them, and it is only in the light of the truth that we can admit it to be a fact that we are totally depraved. It takes the grace of God to make us subscribe to that sentence. In fact it is one of the first

signs of God's grace coming to our consciousness that we acknowledge our sinful condition and abhor ourselves in dust and ashes. It takes a child of God to understand the truth of total depravity. And, therefore, there is nothing strange in the fact that the world denies it. We not expect anything different. Acknowledgment of deadness in sin and misery is a spiritual act, and spiritual acts the world cannot perform. And, therefore by saying that man is by nature totally depraved we already imply that he will never admit it. In the second place there is nothing that leaves man by nature in such a hopeless condition as the sentence that he is totally depraved. By it you maintain that nothing good is to be expected from him, absolutely nothing. He can do no good, he will do no good, he never does any good, and you can never make him do any good. His condition is hopeless. And, therefore, the world will not hear of it. He may be a little depraved, much depraved perhaps, but totally? Never. If that were true, all the ideals of the world would vanish like smoke. The world expects to make a good deal of the natural man. If only you place him in decent surroundings, give him the opportunity of a good education, remove from his environment all that can tempt him to sin, banish saloons and houses of immorality and prostitution, teach him social righteousness and pay him living wages, give him a decent home to live in and time to live in it, in a word, if you only regenerate society, the natural man will be quite an acceptably appearing fellow! That is what the world expects. It dreams more than ever of the coming kingdom of social righteousness, a kingdom ushered in by man, being the product of united effort, a kingdom of

peace and righteousness, in which every individual member shall obtain his share of the blessings of creation; but a kingdom without the Christ of the scriptures, a man-made kingdom, and a kingdom existing for man. Once more, such expectations the world harbors in respect to natural man. But, of course, then man cannot be totally depraved. If he is totally depraved, improved surroundings, a good education, a decent home and good wages do not help him at all. They leave the spots on the leopard. If he is totally depraved, there is only one thing that can help him, and that is regeneration. Not regeneration of society only, not regeneration of society first, but regeneration of the heart, personal regeneration is what is absolutely required to make anything at all of man if he is totally depraved. And personal regeneration is beyond the power of the world. And, therefore, the very term totally depraved is nauseating to the world, and naturally so.

Besides, you should never forget that the natural man resents it very deeply to be pictured as totally depraved. He considers it an insult. He feels offended if you call him a sinner, he rebels against the Word of God when it tells him that he is a slave of sin. This is not so evident if by the term you refer to the drunkard, vomiting curses and liquor at the same time; or if perhaps you mean the fellow that satisfies his animal desires in the house of prostitution and spends the best of his life in dissipation. To call such a public sinner totally depraved might seem rather reasonable. But it does not apply to our modern civilized gentlemen and gentlewomen. What? The learned professor in social ethics, that is filled with indignation at the existing social evils, and works day and night to inspire his students with the principles of the social gospel, who devotes himself to and is willing to sacrifice himself for the noble principles of freedom and justice, whose only fault (if such it may be called) is that he does not believe in vicarious atonement and the infallibility of the Bible; who even speaks of the Christ of the Gospels and the Social Message of the prophet, that man is totally depraved, you say? Or the sweetly smiling lady, that travels the land to stir up enthusiasm among the rest of her

sex for the noble cause of equal suffrage in order that right and justice may prevail on the earth; who is busy in all kinds of charitable work, but who does not believe in the blood-theology of the church...that lady, you say, is totally depraved? It is with regard to such examples of modern civilization that it becomes well-nigh impossible, at least intolerable to maintain: Yes, my dear gentlemen and sweet gentlewoman, you are totally depraved unless you are regenerated by the Spirit of Christ in the Scriptural sense of the word.

And yet, such is the truth.

If the world cannot understand this truth, if she rebels against it, if she hates to hear of it, hers is the responsibility. The church may not alter her attitude, may not change the truth, may not cater to the wishes of the world.

Not the world, but the Word of God alone determines what is true and what shall be the testimony of the Church. And if we turn to Scripture we shall discover that the term "total depravity" is none too severe to denote the condition of the fallen king. Just preceding the account of the flood we read: "And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth." Gen. 6:12. Or still more emphatically in verse 5 of the same chapter: "And Jehovah saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Paul, quoting from Psalms 14 and 53 describes the sinners' condition in terms that leave no room for dispute when he writes: What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise; for we before laid to the charge both of Jews and Greeks, that they are all under sin; as it is written:

"There is none righteous, no, not one;

"There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God;

"They have all turned aside, they are together become unprofitable;

"There is none that doeth good; no, not so much as one;

“Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips;

“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood;

“Destruction and misery are in their ways;

“And the way of peace have they not known;

“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

And in Eph. 2:1–3 the same apostle describes the former condition of the members of the Ephesian church as follows: “And you did He make alive when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins wherein ye once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience; among whom we also once lived in the lusts of our flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.” Needless to multiply these few quotations. Scripture justifies the term, “totally depraved,” and hence in spite of whatever objections there may be urged against it from the side of the world, we shall adhere to it.

But what does that imply? Especially, what does this total depravity mean for man as the fallen king in this dispensation?

Here we must be careful. 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. He may lose his knowledge and walk in spiritual darkness, foolish and depraved; he may lose his righteousness and holiness so that he walks as the guilty and cursed one before the law, and his heart is a fountain

of sin and evil; he may be separated from his God and Creator and become a slave of the devil; but he still is man. He cannot lose himself. He still possesses power and talent. In relation to the world in which he lives he still is a glorious and powerful, a talented, a royal being, and in industry and commerce, in art and science and philosophy he exercises and develops these glorious powers. His powers may be curtailed and limited after the fall, his knowledge may no more be as when Adam named the animals God sent him, his dominion may be far less glorious, and evident than before the fall, fact is, that man still may exercise his mind and still possess dominion in the world. Only, with all these powers and all his glory he had become wicked and perverse. His mind and his will, the very inclinations of his heart work and toil and move in the wrong direction. The difference is not this, that before the fall man was a rational creature with mental activity, and that after the fall he had become an irrational brute; but this, that both before and after the fall he was a rational creature, only, after the fall he can no more truly know as before. It is not so that before the fall he has lost that power, but thus, that after the fall his will is no more subject to God as before. He still wills and thinks, he still possesses his imagination and emotion, he can still love and hate; but with all these powers and talents he rises in rebellion against the Most High and subjects himself to Satan and sin. He lost his knowledge, righteousness and holiness, but he still was a rational and moral creature, endowed with great talents and powerful in the world.

And, therefore the conclusion is, that man, as king of the world, endowed with splendid powers and mighty talents, turns away from God and stands in rebellion against Him, while he has become a subject to, a slave of the devil. He can do no spiritual good. He cannot know his God, he cannot love Him, he cannot subject himself to Him. He is inclined to all evil, his mind is filled with darkness, his heart is filled with hatred against his Sovereign, and willingly, yet without being able of himself ever to will anything else,

he serves the Prince of darkness with all the powers and talents which God has bestowed on him. Only in this light is it possible to understand that the devil can be Prince of this world and actually have dominion. If man had lost all his power and royalty never could Satan have established a kingdom with man under him. But now it is different. Now man has retained much of his original power and is willing to employ it all in the service of the Evil One instead of in subjection to God, now it is possible for the devil to realize for a time his own kingdom in the world, with man as king under him, a kingdom that will reach its highest manifestation in the dominion of Antichrist.

This condition of things would have been inconceivable if God had not immediately revealed His grace. Then the king would have been cursed into eternal death without delay, and the devil would have had nothing in him. Then there would have been no history and no development of any kingdom of darkness on earth whatsoever. But that is not God's plan. On the contrary, as we have stated before, back of the covenant of works and the fall stands the covenant of grace in the eternal plan of God. God had His Anointed, the Christ, the Second Adam. He is to vindicate the Sovereignty of God over against the power of evil, to redeem the world, to restore all creation, wrest it from the power of the devil and subject it to Himself. And when all His work is done and His kingdom is completed, He is to subject himself to God almighty that he may be all in all. Through him the covenant of grace is to be realized, and from him flows the principle of grace into the very root of the human tree. It is because of all this that humanity is not destroyed from the start, that it must have a history, that it is allowed to develop. This principle of special grace, however, injected into the human organism from the start and saving it as such, does not save all the individual branches of the tree. It saves only the elect. The reprobate are cut off. But these

reprobate branches nevertheless participate outwardly in the historical blessings of the covenant of grace. Special grace, as it were, overflows in this dispensation over all the world, and reveals itself in what we call the common grace of God. And it is under the influence of this so-called common grace of the Almighty that the world is allowed to exist, that sin only slowly develops itself, that the kingdom of darkness receives a chance to manifest its full strength and reveal all the hatred of rebellion against the Most High.

Thus all becomes plain.

Never must we stretch the doctrine of common grace till we speak of two kinds of grace. There is only one kind of grace, and that one kind of grace is special grace, and through that special grace all the world, with man as king, is to be saved. It saves humanity, but it also saves the world as kingdom.

But there are two kinds of people in Adam, separated through the injection of special grace into the human organism. They are the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, the elect and the reprobate, the children of obedience and the children of disobedience.

Outwardly, all the children of the serpent share in the blessings of grace. Also they develop, also they have a history, also they develop their kingdom under Satan. But inwardly, even these outward blessings of grace are a curse to them, for they are totally depraved, and there is no receptivity for the grace of God in their hearts.

But the seed of the woman is saved in Jesus Christ. He is their Redeemer and their King, and through His grace they become His willing subjects.

And through it all God's righteousness and holiness and wisdom and power and grace and everlasting mercy are manifested gloriously!

—Holland, Mich.