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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

Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land. Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.

—Exodus 12:15–20

In the closest possible connection with the passover feast, God instituted a second feast: the feast of unleavened bread. The feast of unleavened bread began on the same day as the passover—the fourteenth day of the first month. At even on the fourteenth day, the unleavened bread of the feast would be eaten at the same time as the roasted lamb of the passover. But whereas the passover feast lasted one day, the feast of unleavened bread would continue seven days.

The manner of celebrating the feast of unleavened bread was straightforward, with nothing complicated or unclear about its observance. The children of Israel were to purge all leaven out of their houses. Leaven was the old lump of sour, fermented dough that each family would keep on hand for baking bread. A small portion of the lump of leaven would be broken off and added to a fresh batch of dough before baking. The old leaven, mixed into the new lump, would ferment inside the fresh dough, fizzing its way through the entire batch. All the tiny air bubbles released by the action of the leaven would cause the entire batch of fresh dough to rise. The risen dough, when baked, would become a loaf of soft, fluffy bread.

In our day the use of yeast in baking bread corresponds to the Old Testament use of leaven.

In the feast of unleavened bread, the Israelites were to cleanse their houses of all old lumps of leaven. Their houses clear of leaven, Israel was to bake and eat unleavened bread, which would be a flat and crispy cracker instead of a soft loaf. The purging of leaven was not restricted only to Israel's houses but included all their assemblies ("habitations") as well. And not only their houses and assemblies but also all their nation and land were to be entirely free of leaven—"And there shall be no leavened bread seen with thee in all thy coast seven days" (Deut. 16:4).

Just as the observance of the feast of unleavened bread was clear, so the meaning of the feast is clear. In scripture leaven is one of the outstanding pictures of sin. The Pharisees' false doctrine of salvation by the will and work of man is leaven (Matt. 16:6–12). The Sadducees' false doctrine of denying the authority of the scriptures is leaven (16:6–12). The wicked life of Herod, including his godless divorcing and remarrying, is leaven (Mark 8:15). The Pharisees' hypocrisy is leaven (Luke 12:1). The Corinthian church member, living impenitently in sin, is

leaven (I Cor. 5:2, 7). The Judaizers and their yoke of bondage are leaven (Gal. 5:9).

In the feast of unleavened bread, Israel was to put out leaven as a picture of the church's putting out sin. Sin is to be put out of one's heart—"The leaven of malice and wickedness" (I Cor. 5:8). False doctrine is to be put out of one's life and church—"Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6). The impenitent sinner is to be put out of the church through Christian discipline—"He that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you...Purge out therefore the old leaven" (I Cor. 5:2, 7). The man who calls himself a Christian ("any man that is called a brother") but who lives in fornication, covetousness, idolatry, railing, drunkenness, or extortion is to be put out of the church's company—"Not to keep company...with such an one no not to eat...put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (vv. 11, 13).

The urgency of the feast of unleavened bread was that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (I Cor. 5:6). Sin operates like leaven, working unseen below the consciousness of the church, until the entire church is irreversibly infected with the sin. The sin of divorce and remarriage, sinfully tolerated under a banner of warped love, will leaven the whole church with fornication, adultery, pornography, prostitution, sodomy, unnatural women, transgenderism, incest, and bestiality. The false doctrine of the Pharisees and Judaizers, sinfully tolerated out of fear of

the gospel and the exaltation of man, will leaven the whole church with unbelief, pride, and unjustified members. False worship, sinfully substituting man's will for God's will, will leaven the whole church with every abominable fad and idol that the depraved heart of man can imagine.

Why was Israel called to keep the feast of unleavened bread? And why is the church called to purge out the old leaven of sin? Because of the passover feast! The feast of unleavened bread went hand in hand with the passover feast. The passover feast was the shedding of the lamb's blood that covered the sins of the people. The lamb's blood covered their malice and wickedness. The lamb's blood covered their pharisaical doctrine. The lamb's blood covered their pride and their fornication and their idolatry and their covetousness and their extortion and their drunkenness. The lamb's blood covered all their iniquity. Therefore, they were to put away their malice and wickedness and false doctrine and drunkenness and fornication. Because they were redeemed from all their sin by the blood, they were to put away all their old sin in service of God.

This is the gospel of the feast of unleavened bread. Not this: put away your sin so that you might be redeemed. But this: you have been redeemed, so put away your sin. Christ our passover has been sacrificed for us! Therefore, purge out the old leaven of sin, and thus keep the feast of unleavened bread.

—AL



Clomp. Clomp. Clomp.

I was asked recently if I had listened to Rev. Tyler Ophoff's speech titled "Singing According to Article 69 of the Church Order."¹ My answer was no. Reflecting on that answer later, I found it to be unsatisfactory; so over a few days I listened to the speech, typed up a transcript, and came up with this article. The individual who asked me the question wanted to know what I thought of the speech. Here, then, is what I thought of the speech.

A lot of things come to mind, but one thing more than anything else. Embarrassing. The speech was embarrassing. I don't mean first for Tyler. I love Tyler, I worked with Tyler, Tyler was a friend, and I knew Tyler well. What Tyler did was take bits and pieces of things he has heard over the last number of months and just patch them all together and call it a speech. This speech was confusing, unclear, contradictory. This has characterized Tyler's preaching and writing, which reveals something. Tyler does not know or understand the things about which he is writing and speaking. Tyler is like the child who finds his dad's work boots and then starts clomping around the house with them, making a huge racket.² All of that said, my real issue is not with Tyler. If you were to confront Tyler with this article and point out to him the flat-out contradictions, the gross inconsistencies, the confusion, and the complete lack of clarity with which the listener would have left the lecture, Tyler would just smile at you. He wouldn't be bothered by it in the least. He would just smile and then clomp away to the next sermon or lecture.

No, when I say the speech is embarrassing, I mean it is embarrassing for the members of First Reformed Protestant Church. The men of First RPC were theologians. They have studied Hoeksema and Bavinck and Kuyper, and they knew the deep things of the faith. They tried the spirits and would not just take someone's word for anything, but they would study! You couldn't slip anything by these men. But now look at them. They sit there and take this drivel that apparently passes for scholarship in the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). Some theologians.

Tyler starts his lecture by saying he is not going to give an accounting of the history of article 69 of the Church Order because he finds that "to be tedious and unprofitable." He left off a word though. Inconvenient. He would find accounting for the history to be tedious, unprofitable, and inconvenient. (Even what Tyler did say strikes me as odd. What theologian would find studying and then giving an accounting of the history of *any* Church Order article tedious and unprofitable, much less an article that has to do with the worship of the church?) If Tyler were to crack a history book to find out the history of article 69, he would find that the principle espoused by the men of Dordt was not *sing the word*. It was *sing the 150 psalms of David*. That was the principle; but being men, subject to the pressures of other men, they left in a few hymns. Ask yourself, if the principle of article 69 was *sing the word*, why in the world would Dordt speak of removing those hymns that had already made their way into the church in the way deemed most

¹ Tyler Ophoff, "Singing According to Article 69 of the Church Order," speech given on November 3, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzkL6KLHdZg>. All quotations of Reverend Ophoff are from this sermon.

² This simile did not originate with me, but it captures Tyler perfectly. For those who wish to have a more biblical description, you can find that in Ecclesiastes 10:16: "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child, and thy princes eat in the morning!"

conducive? If the principle was *sing the word*, they would not feel a compunction to remove any orthodox hymns that were already there (and given what Tyler and others in the RPC have written about the men of Dordt, we can safely assume the hymns that were in the worship were orthodox). If Tyler ever gets around to studying the history of article 69, what he will find is that the principle of article 69 was *sing the 150 psalms of David*.

There are times in the lecture when whatever Tyler is saying is incomprehensible. In speaking about the Reformed Protestant Churches' changing Church Order article 67 (which deals with special services), Tyler says this:

The Reformed Protestant Churches in America recognized the doctrine, they recognize the principle that stood behind article 67 of the Church Order and amended it to fit the practice; rather, they amended the practice to fit what the church was doing. The principle itself is timeless. The principle itself cannot change.

What? They amended it to fit the practice? Amended what? The principle? The article itself? They amended the practice to fit what the church was doing? Tyler's giving this muddled explanation of article 67 and the change that was made to it does not give one confidence in how Tyler will handle article 69.

Any confidence one might have had evaporates very quickly when Tyler starts to define terms. He starts with the word *psalms*. *Psalms* means *to sing praise*. Tyler points to I Chronicles 16 and Psalm 105:2. *Psalms* can also mean *the 150 psalms of David*. Here Tyler points to Luke 22:42 (although he meant to say Luke 20:42). And finally, it can mean *prayer*, where Tyler directs the listener to Psalm 77:20 (although he meant to say Psalm 72:20) and I Corinthians 14:15.

Tyler then moves on to define a hymn as "a versified portion of scripture other than the 150 psalms of David." He credits H. C. Hoeksema for that definition. Tyler says that is how we are to understand that word in verses like Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19. He goes on to further explain *hymn* as the "plucking of a chord, and the Holy Spirit plucks on your heart as that chord." The problem for Tyler—and the listener—is that, having given us that definition, Tyler then proceeds to blow it up. "And the church does sing hymns. 'Praise God' is a hymn. The Lord's Prayer is a hymn. The Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments are hymns. A hymn is a versified portion of scripture." Actually, the Apostles' Creed is not a versified portion of scripture. The Apostles' Creed is a summary of the main Christian beliefs in the Bible. Neither is Thomas Ken's hymn "a versified portion of scripture." Tyler's own denomination doesn't even believe that it is a versification of scripture.³ Here are other songs that would not fit Tyler's definition of *hymn*: "Amazing Grace," "How Great Thou Art," "Great is Thy Faithfulness," "In Christ Alone," and "Be Thou My Vision." There are precious few hymns that we could call hymns if we adopted Tyler's definition (although "Zaccheus Was a Wee Little Man" would qualify as a hymn, being a very faithful versification of Luke 19:1–10). Tyler simply doesn't know what he is talking about. He is clomping around and making a big racket, but that doesn't mean we should be taking him seriously. He gives a definition of a word and provides four examples, two of which don't fit his definition.

Tyler then defines the regulative principle of worship this way: "Understand that the regulative principle teaches the various elements of public worship. It teaches those various elements of public worship as they are explicitly commanded by God and that what is not commanded by God is forbidden." Later: "The

³ Let's hear from the Reformed Protestant classis in May: "Article 20. Motion was made that Classis sustain the appeal of Mr. Dewey Engelsma in this single point: 'Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow' is a hymn and not a versification of Psalm 148...Motion carried." Minutes of the May 18, 2023, classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, article 20.

regulative principle prescribes the elements of worship; the regulative principle does not prescribe the circumstances of worship.” That’s confusing. The truth is that the regulative principle of worship does not prescribe (lay down a rule) what the various elements of public worship *are*—the regulative principle of worship simply teaches that we are to worship God only as he has commanded in his word. Tyler has heard the correct definition before, because later in the speech he changes the definition to the correct one: “The regulative principle demands that we worship him in no other way than he has commanded in his word.”

Tyler then gives the elements of worship as those elements are laid out in Lord’s Day 38: the preaching of the word; the administration of the sacraments; the calling upon the name of the Lord, “which includes prayer, which includes singing, which includes confessing the truth of God when we recite the Apostles’ Creed”; and the giving of alms. Having laid out the elements, he then describes the “circumstances” of worship. Tyler does not provide a definition of *circumstances*, but it is clear that he sees circumstances as those things that are indifferent, or nonessential, to the worship. One example he provides has to do with the collections by the deacons, whether those collections are done with “a bag or a giant box.” If the elders were to change the time of the worship two days before the service or if you were to walk into the sanctuary and see the wicker baskets replaced with a “giant box” for the purpose of collecting the alms, that would be fine. Tyler adds the songbook from which his church sings, the 1912 Psalter, to the list of circumstances. “Another circumstance of the church is whether the church sings the Scottish Psalter or the blue 1912 Psalter.” What that means is that the elders could take a decision on a Wednesday to replace all the copies of the 1912 Psalter with the Scottish Psalter and could implement that the next Sunday. Tyler argues that that would be up to

the church’s freedom in accordance with the principle *sing the word*. But why does Tyler propose replacing one psalter with another psalter? According to the principle *sing the word*, the elders could go in on Wednesday and replace the 1912 Psalter with a compilation of orthodox hymns. That would be perfectly acceptable, according to his principle.

I was glad that Tyler finally got around to saying what had before only been hinted at, namely that when it comes to worship, the fact *that* we sing is an element, but *what* we sing is a circumstance. As was pointed out in a previous article, Rev. Nathan Langerak in a speech and an article brought up the topic of elements and circumstances but then put on his tap-dancing shoes and danced a jig around both so that no one would ever know what he actually believed about elements and circumstances and how those apply to singing.⁴ (I think Tyler said out loud what never should have been said out loud. Oops.)

I am still surprised, to use an understatement, that this is really their position. Is *what* you sing only a circumstance, of no greater importance and to be given no more thought than that which goes into whether the church should collect alms with a basket, a bag, or a box? That is quite something, really. (And people are taking this seriously?)

Not only is this nonsensical, but Tyler’s own church doesn’t take seriously what he is saying. By equating what they sing with how they take collection, he puts what they sing in the realm of a circumstance. But a church would never bring an overture to a meeting of classis to change the way that deacons take collection. Yet First RPC is finally getting around to changing the Church Order to fit their practice. They replaced a psalm with a hymn, properly defined, so that now the consistory is bringing an overture to the January classis to add that hymn to the list found in article 69. What gives? The answer is not that the consistory understands things correctly and the

⁴ Dewey Engelsma, “Sword and Shield,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 22 (September 9, 2023): 13.

minister has it all confused. None of them understand how to apply their principle, so what is happening at the January classis of the RPC is that the denomination is being asked to approve an overture to change a circumstance of worship.

In the interest of charity, I will write the advice that the committee should bring regarding the overture of First RPC:

Recommendation 1: We recommend that this overture be declared legally before the classis.

Ground: The requirements of article 31 have been met.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that we not approve the overture of First RPC regarding adding the hymn, as properly defined, “Praise God” to article 69 of the Church Order.

Ground 1: We already passed a motion at our May meeting which stated “that Classis recognize whether ‘Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow’ is a hymn or a Psalm is immaterial to the church’s ability to use it in public worship.” If it’s immaterial, why are we even talking about this?

Ground 2: What we sing in worship is a circumstance of worship, not an element. Therefore, it is utterly ridiculous for us to approve this overture. What next? Will First RPC ask us to approve changing the way we take collections from using a bag or basket to a giant box?

Ground 3: If an overture were to be brought, it should be to change article 69 to this: “Sing the word.” To limit the church as to specific songs she may sing is to rob the church of her liberty.

Ground 4: First RPC should have had the good sense to understand that when classis approved article 22 of its minutes in May (“Classis recommends that the churches consider updating Church Order article 69 to include the hymn ‘Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow’). Ground: This reflects the current practice of the churches”), classis was simply handing a sop to First RPC and the denomination. It was never meant to be acted upon. Did that have to be spelled out for the consistory of First RPC?

Then Tyler gets into legalism. He defines legalism as “the attaining of the favor of God for entering into fellowship with God in the way of or by means of obedience—obedience to the law of God.” I was thankful for this definition. It was clear and correct. Tyler nailed it. He also exonerated Reverend Lanning. This is what Reverend Lanning taught regarding worship, singing, and the regulative principle of worship (and quotes like this could be—and have been—multiplied):

The worship of the church in the singing of the psalms, then, does not become for her a matter of bondage. It is not for the church a matter of saying, “Well, we have to do this, so we better do it.” It does not become a matter of saying, “Well, if we’re going to have Christ dwell with us, then we better get busy with all these things.” But the matter of singing in the worship of the church—singing the psalms in the worship of the church, singing with the Lord Jesus Christ in the worship of church—is a matter of her freedom and her privilege. The Lord has been pleased to dwell with me by his word and by his Spirit; he has been pleased to dwell with his congregation by his word and by his Spirit; therefore, let us have the word of Christ dwell in us

richly and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to the glory of our God.⁵

Phew, good to finally have a Reformed Protestant officebearer make it clear that Reverend Lanning was not guilty of legalism. Tyler still calls it false doctrine, but at least that scurrilous charge of legalism can be dropped!

But wait, Tyler still tries to go on and make the case that Reverend Lanning is guilty of legalism? How is that possible when he has heard Reverend Lanning's preaching and knows that Reverend Lanning has not taught that we worship God to gain fellowship? What is his proof? Tyler appeals to this section from Reverend Lanning's sermon:

The church of Jesus Christ becomes dissatisfied with versifications of the psalm that are only summaries of the psalm and that are close but not quite the psalm and are man's interpretation of the psalm. That becomes after a while intolerable to the church because when she sings a man's summary of the psalm, she is not singing the word of God, and Christ isn't singing with her; only the church's voices are heard, but the voice of Christ is not heard in heaven in that song.

Tyler objects to this by saying,

That is conditional. Notice the language *if, then*. That is a condition. Our activity of singing the psalms brings us into fellowship with God. Our singing is decisive in the matter of fellowship.

Hmm. Where did Reverend Lanning use the word *if*? Where did he use the word *then*? Where did he say anything that Tyler says he said? Hint: it's not there. (Reverend Lanning did apologize for imprecision in his use of the word *versification* in that statement, which apology you can find in the May 13, 2023, issue of

Reformed Pavilion.⁶) Tyler is just making things up. He can do that, I suppose, but the adults in the room should not take him seriously. Clomp. Clomp. Clomp.

If Tyler is looking for conditional language, he would do well to consider a sermon he preached on June 18, 2023, titled "True Prayer." In that sermon he addressed the inevitability of prayer for the child of God. In this connection he said,

If an elect child of God doesn't believe that about prayer, don't pray. Tempt God and see what happens. God will beat that elect child with a heavy stick. He'll chastise that child of God until that child is renewed to prayer, until he prays again.⁷

This is beautiful instruction—because we all know that nothing renews us to love like being beaten with a heavy stick. What, the child of God has to do his part (prayer) so that God will stop beating him? Sounds conditional. It also sounds like a sermon preached by a former pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church:

It's the same way, really, as it is with parents. This isn't, this isn't really that hard to understand at all, is it? Think of a child, maybe a young person in the home. Maybe a little child in the home. He's constantly throwing tantrums, constantly going his or her own way, constantly rebelling against the authority of the parents, paying no regard for the rules of their parents, walking their own way. Does the parent say, "I don't love him or her anymore"? The parent says, "I love my child, but I cannot—it's not right for me—to simply ignore all that disobedience and to continue to show them gentle, warm, tender love. I must show them—something else, to bring them back again to a right relationship with me, bring them back again to where they

⁵ Andrew Lanning, "Singing the Word of Christ," sermon preached on October 31, 2021, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1031212233461017>.

⁶ Andrew Lanning, FAQ, *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 5 (May 13, 2023): 32–33.

⁷ Tyler Ophoff, "True Prayer," sermon preached on June 18, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=618232235355098>.

ought to be, so that they can walk as my friend and I can then show them that love and friendship again.”⁸

Tyler was bold to fill in the blank—the chilling blank—as to what it is you must show them, but the theology is the same.

Tyler also brings up this line from Reverend Lanning’s sermon:

There is a question of the application of the regulative principle to the singing of the church, especially this question: does the regulative principle require exclusive psalmody? We will look at that question tonight. This is the matter of your worship. It is the matter of God dwelling with you and bringing you into fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not altogether clear what Tyler was getting at in this regard, but I think he was trying to make the point that Reverend Lanning was teaching that we need to sing only psalms in order to experience God’s fellowship. This is where words are a pesky thing. Tyler can say what he likes; but then what the adults in the room can do is read the words that Reverend Lanning said, and it takes about four seconds to know that Reverend Lanning was not teaching what Tyler says he was teaching.

Tyler should also know that his church corrected course on this charge because Tyler was at the classis meeting where this was decided, where Tyler had the opportunity to speak but didn’t, and which decision Tyler has not protested. Classis said this about that quotation:

This statement in its context shows that Rev. Lanning was simply stating that the regulative principle is a matter of interest for the church because it pertains to her worship, which worship is a matter of God dwelling with his church, and which worship is a matter of covenant fellowship through Jesus Christ.⁹

Reverend Lanning’s statement is not difficult to understand. There is nothing objectionable to it. If you want to read what Reverend Lanning believes about our obedience in worship and our access to God, you can find that in all his sermons and in all his writings. Or you can take Tyler’s approach, ignore the evidence, and keep making the same false charge. But I wouldn’t recommend that. It’s behavior that characterizes the children of Belial (I Kings 21:13).

What comes next borders on the comical. Tyler mentions the fact that a minister in the Philippines, Reverend Flores, recently started teaching exclusive psalmody. This was apparently about the same time that Reverend Flores was having discussions with a Baptist Church in the Philippines (he was “seen with Navotas Baptist Church”). (Horrors. Imagine having a theological dialogue with another church.) Based on that evidence—which Tyler considers “damning”—Tyler then declares that exclusive psalmody is “big-tent theology.” Just so we all get that straight, let me explain the “damning” evidence that proves that exclusive psalmody is big-tent theology. Reverend Flores’ church was no longer in dialogue with the RPC about sister-church relations. Shortly thereafter, Reverend Flores was “seen” with Navotas Baptist Church. And then a short while later, Reverend Flores started teaching exclusive psalmody. Based on Reverend Flores’ approval of exclusive psalmody, Tyler comes to this conclusion: “It proves that exclusive psalmody is big-tent theology.” Really? That is his argument? Should we laugh? Should we ridicule? I cannot find it in myself to do either. Is he serious? Exclusive psalmody is big-tent theology because Reverend Flores started teaching exclusive psalmody soon after he was “seen” with a Baptist church? In the first place, I’m looking around this tent and not finding a whole lot of folks inside of it. Second, it is probably the case that as the pastor of a Reformed church, Reverend Flores believes in justification by faith

⁸ David Overway, “Abiding in Christ’s Love,” sermon preached on April 26, 2015, as cited in Connie Meyer’s protest to Classis East, May 10, 2017.

⁹ Minutes of the May 18, 2023, classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, article 16.

alone and infant baptism. Does that mean those are both big-tent theologies as well?

I remind all of us at this point—mercifully the halfway point—what kind of an embarrassment this is for the Reformed Protestant Churches generally and the members of First RPC specifically. Exclusive psalmody is now big-tent theology because a minister in the Philippines was seen with a Baptist church, and shortly thereafter, that minister started teaching exclusive psalmody (which the Baptist church probably doesn't even confess).

Tyler then attacks the defenders of exclusive psalmody as being biblicists. He doesn't provide any proof of that, just makes the charge. He then says this: "It is taught that in Lord's Day 35 the confessions are sending us back to scripture to find the answer of what God commands. That is biblicism." Let me quote question and answer 96 of Lord's Day 35 for you: "What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word." Tyler stamps his foot and holds his breath until his face is all red whenever someone says that we are to go to God's word to find out how we are to worship God. I think people may say that because the confessions say we are not to worship God in any other way than God has commanded in his word (LD 35) and tell us that the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in the scriptures at large (Belgic Confession 7). It almost looks from the confessions like we are supposed to find out how we are to worship God by looking to the book he gave us. The truth is, although Tyler pretends not to like this idea, I think secretly he does. I think way down deep in his heart he knows you must go to the word of God to find out how it is that God has commanded us to worship him. That's why Tyler concludes his instruction on this by saying, "It's word-regulated worship." Yes, indeed.

After attacking supposed biblicism, Tyler goes back to Dordt and exclaims that he doesn't

believe "for one second" that Dordt only suffered hymns. He claims that that is "simply conjecture" and "a fabrication of the mind." I hope that someday Tyler takes a fancy to reading church history. That would be enlightening for him. However, he does state this about article 69: "In article 69 is an expression of the liberty of the church of Jesus Christ that we are free to include other songs in worship besides the psalms." This is helpful, as we get an understanding of what Tyler believes is the church's liberty regarding her worship. If a church includes songs in worship other than the 150 psalms of David, then that church is exercising her liberty. If a church restricts the songs that can be sung, then that church is restricting her liberty. What an odd way for Dordt to allow the church to express her liberty, by dramatically limiting the songs that can be sung by using the word "only" and then writing in that article the following: "All other hymns shall be barred from the Churches, and where some have already been introduced, these shall be set aside by means found to be most appropriate."¹⁰ If the church's liberty is to include other songs and if that were Dordt's intention, then the article would only have read, "Sing the word." Why limit the church's liberty at all, especially when it comes to a circumstance? Tyler has a carnal understanding of what the word *liberty* means for the child of God, as if the church that has three hundred songs listed in article 69 is expressing its liberty far better than the church that has one hundred fifty songs listed. What is true liberty? True liberty is to walk according to the commandments of God as the friend-servant of God, accepted by God on the basis of Jesus Christ and him alone. Liberty is to walk in all the precepts of God, as taught by Psalm 119:45: "And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts." Here is the liberty of the child of God as it relates to his singing in church: sing the 150 psalms of David. True liberty is to do in worship what God commands and only what God commands, as that law of God is a delight for the

¹⁰ Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941), 283.

child of God who has been freed from having to obey the law for his salvation. Not to mention the fact that if the command of God is to sing hymns as Tyler has defined it—“a versified portion of scripture other than the 150 psalms of David”—First RPC is doing a wretched job of obeying that command.

To state that what the church sings is a circumstance and that to add more songs to the worship is evidence of the church’s liberty is a unique position. Tyler is no doubt developing the principle *sing the word*. This really opens up a lot of options for the consistory of First RPC in her singing. The consistory may want to consider a book of songs from the Cedaromont Kids: a few of their albums are pretty neat; they would fit the principle *sing the word* quite nicely; and these songs could be inserted for this coming Sunday’s worship service, as what you sing happens to be inconsequential anyway. What a great way to exercise your liberty!

Strangely, Tyler indicts and condemns First RPC in its continued singing of “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow.” He does this when he says, “There is nothing sinful with singing a man-made hymn in worship, as we have defined here in this speech: a versification of scripture, of the word.” So that means there is something sinful with singing a man-made hymn in worship that is not a versification of scripture. But that is exactly what First RPC is doing every Sunday when it sings Thomas Ken’s hymn “Praise God.” Let’s hear (again) from the RPC Classis in May: “Article 20. Motion was made that Classis sustain the appeal of Mr. Dewey Engelsma in this single point: ‘Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow’ is a hymn and not a versification of Psalm 148.”

Tyler takes a shot at the officebearers who left First RPC and says it was dishonest and deceitful for them to sign the Act of Federation (the document that was signed to organize the Reformed Protestant Churches). What was their sin? “They didn’t subscribe to the Church Order as it was adopted, including article 69 of the

Church Order in the principle of singing the word.” Not only was it deceitful, it was “immeasurably deceitful” because when these men signed the Act of Federation, there was no mention of “exclusive psalmody.” Tyler’s lack of study again reveals itself. I signed the Act of Federation, and I did it believing exclusive psalmody with all my heart. I believed exclusive psalmody because that is what I was taught from the time I was a wee lad, and it accorded with scripture and the confessions. A lot of examples have been provided to show that the Protestant Reformed Churches believed exclusive psalmody and did so on the basis of the principle of article 69, but this one will suffice for now:

The exceptions to the Psalms mentioned in Article 69 (some of which are quite unknown to most of us) find their place there through curious, historical circumstances: the popular Dutch song-book of the time of the Synod of Dordt contained also these hymns; rather than to disturb the people, Dordt made allowance for these hymns. But the spirit and principle of Article 69 is: “In the churches only the 150 Psalms of David shall be sung.” Period!¹¹

The men who signed the Act of Federation did not change from the time they signed that document to the time they left the RPC.

Tyler says that the command to “sing the word” can be carried out by singing the psalms (he doesn’t explain if he is referring to *psalms* here as praises, the 150 psalms of David, or prayers; but I think we are safe to assume he is referring to the 150 psalms of David). Tyler says that command can also be carried out by singing the Apostles’ Creed (which he shouldn’t say because it doesn’t fit his definition of *hymn*) or the ten commandments. Tyler should just come out and admit that his principle can also be carried out by asking a Protestant Reformed church for its hymnbook that it sings from before worship services or even by many songs put together

¹¹ David Engelsma, “Music in the Church,” *Standard Bearer* 71, no. 15 (May 1, 1995): 374; emphasis added.

by the Cedarhurst Kids. He shouldn't be shy or hem or haw about this. But Tyler knows better. And because he was raised in the bosom of a church that believed exclusive psalmody, he can't help but say that "the church of Jesus Christ at her strongest sings psalms." Which is an odd thing to say when his church just removed a psalm from its worship services to slide in the hymn by Thomas Ken (which, according to Tyler's definition, is not a hymn, but neither is it a psalm, so he is pretty mixed up about what it is, and so is anyone else who is listening to him). If your principle is *sing the word*, the church is at her strongest whenever she is singing anything that is orthodox; but if what you sing is a circumstance, who cares what you sing. God certainly doesn't care,¹² just like he doesn't care whether you take collection with bags or a "giant box." Tyler probably picked up this line from Hendrik de Cock, who said, "In the best of times, and in the purest churches, hymns are never found nor tolerated."¹³ (Tyler shouldn't go too far in studying and quoting De Cock though. He might learn something about reformation that he didn't know before, and although that would not be tedious or unprofitable, it would again be inconvenient.)

After having made the peculiar claim that exclusive psalmody is big-tent theology, he goes on to equate exclusive psalmody with contemporary worship.

God tells me how to worship and commands me to worship, and instead I go and worship him how I want to worship him. That is contemporary worship that is found in most churches today, and that's the doctrine of exclusive psalmody too. It is a flesh-pleasing doctrine; it has an appearance of righteousness and an appearance of piety.

More absurdity. Apparently exclusive psalmody pleased the flesh of First RPC so much that they just couldn't take it anymore and removed their minister and three elders over it. Apparently, it is so pleasing to the flesh that you can barely find a church in the world that practices it anymore.¹⁴ I suppose I could go on and on to expose how utterly ridiculous this is, but let me ask you, the reader, a question: Which group follows the principle *sing the word*, those who engage in contemporary worship or those who teach exclusive psalmody? There is a massive tent filled with churches promoting the principle *sing the word*, but the one group you don't find there is those teaching exclusive psalmody.

Getting to the end of his speech, Tyler repeats something else he heard during the controversy:

Jesus Christ fulfilled the regulative principle of worship. Fulfilled it. He worshiped God perfectly, prayed to God perfectly; he sang to God perfectly; he worshiped God perfectly all the way to the death of the cross; he never deviated from the law of God.

Hmm. Where did he hear that? Oh yes, he was taught that by Reverend Lanning:

This matter of Christ and the regulative principle goes way deeper, way, way deeper in the matter of what Jesus sings in the church. It goes this deep, that Jesus has fulfilled the regulative principle for First Reformed Protestant Church. He's fulfilled it already...First RPC is not under the regulative principle of worship in her worship. You're not under it.¹⁵

(The tragic thing about all of this, to speak foolishly, is that had Tyler been permitted to

¹² But God does care, and he condemns as idolatry any type of worship other than that which he has commanded.

¹³ Hendrik de Cock, "The So-Called Evangelical Hymns...", <https://web.archive.org/web/20110917023204/https://gcc-opc.org/docs/DeCock.dir/hymndecock.htm#r14>. See also "The So-Called Evangelical Hymns," *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 3 (April 29, 2023): 41.

¹⁴ I say "anymore" because the early church and the church in times of reformation sure loved exclusive psalmody. You can find more information about that in history books.

¹⁵ Andrew Lanning, "The Regulative Principle of Worship," sermon preached on March 12, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=312232237135528>.

continue his seminary instruction under Reverend Lanning for the full four years, Tyler could possibly have been turned out to the churches with some level of understanding.)

Getting to the end of the speech did not mean getting to the end of confusion: “Our current 1912 Psalter is not above criticism. It is man-made, and some of the psalms are very—some of the songs are very loose, that they could rightly be called hymns.” Some of the songs are so loose that they could rightly be called hymns? I thought a hymn was a versification of scripture? How could it be the case that the more loose a song is to the original, the more it could rightly be considered a hymn?

He ends with this doozy, which serves as a fitting end to the speech:

We are not opposed to a more faithful versification of the psalms, whether that be the Scottish Psalter or something else, but we would never ground it in the second commandment...The Church Order itself could also be revised to bring the current practice of the churches in line with the principle—not that it’s not in line now, but at the same time the church could look to add the Apostles’ Creed and the ten commandments and set those to tune and to meter. The Church Order could be amended to reflect the practice of the churches today, in accordance with the principle and the worship, which is *sing the word*.

More confusion. This paragraph is like the speech, a farrago of words and concepts that nobody can understand. Add a song that doesn’t qualify as a hymn as you have defined it? And do this without regard to the second commandment? It does not matter what you are doing in worship (that is not a circumstance); if someone asks you, “Why are you doing that thing?” the answer must be, “It is commanded of me in the second commandment, that I worship God in no

other way than he has commanded me in his word.” If you can’t give that answer to something you are doing (that is not a circumstance), then stop doing that thing immediately. It is idolatry, no matter how much it bubbles up in your heart. But since Tyler and the RPC consider what you sing to be a circumstance, he is right to state it that way. Just like if someone were to ask me why we worship at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday morning, I would not ground it in the second commandment.

All of this is folly. It is confusion and the wisdom of man writ large. I cannot believe the tragedy of this whole controversy over exclusive psalmody. Don’t forget, the members of First RPC were being instructed and were making beautiful confessions about exclusive psalmody, sharing articles, and having sweet communion one with another on this glorious topic. It was only after a disaster of a sermon and a tongue-lashing from Rev. Nathan Langerak that they were then moved to change their tune, which they did, some of them overnight, such that within days they were speaking nonsense and confusion.

As I listened to and studied this speech, I could have wept. You cast out pure gospel preaching...for this?

This whole matter has nothing to do with one’s eloquence or giftedness. This has to do with the content of the message. The wisdom of man always stinks like rotting garbage. And it is embarrassing when men tell you about its fragrance.

What the members of First RPC ought to hear when Tyler gives this lecture or when he walks up to the pulpit or when he starts to preach is this: “Clomp. Clomp. Clomp.”

And what the members of First RPC ought to think when Tyler gives this lecture or when he walks up to the pulpit or when he starts to preach is this: “We once had a prophet among us” (see Ezek. 33:33).

—DE

Article XLI. The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued)

The history of Shinar's valley as it is narrated in Gen. 11:1–9 in a few words, cannot be fully understood except if this passage is taken in proper connection with what we read in chapter 10 of the same book. In this latter chapter we read of Nimrod, the mighty one, the hunter before Jehovah, who founded the beginning of his kingdom in the plain of Shinar.

This Nimrod is a most interesting figure. Scripture pictures him in a few very brief sentences, but these are sufficient to justify the inference that Nimrod was a genius of universal significance. All the great men in the world that have aimed at universal power have copied after Nimrod more or less. And if today the air is pregnant with the ideal of federation, it is only a sign that the Nimrod spirit has, indeed, been restrained in the plain of Shinar but never been entirely crushed. But let us first gather what Scripture tells us about this powerful figure.

We find in Gen. 10 a genealogy of different tribes that descended from Ham. First of all we read: "And the sons of Ham: Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan," vs. 6. Then we are told that the sons of Cush were Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca. And the sons of Raamah we are told further were Sheba and Dedan, vs. 7. And finally in vs. 8 we read: "And Cush begat Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one in the earth." And further we read of him: "He was a mighty hunter before Jehovah: wherefore it is said: Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before Jehovah. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel and Erech and Accad and Calneh in the land of Shinar. Out of that land he went forth into Assyria (this is probably

the best rendering) and builded Nineveh and Rehoboth-Ir, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (the same is the great city)."

In connection with this brief record of Nimrod and his history we may call your attention first of all to the name itself. It comes from a word that means to disobey, to revolt, to rise in rebellion. The name Nimrod, then, refers to one that is a rebel, to one that rises in revolt. And if we may surmise that this name was given by his contemporaries in connection with what he revealed of his character and makeup, we draw the conclusion that there must have been something in his life that made him worthy of the name Nimrod. In connection with this name it is, indeed, striking that in the record Nimrod's name is mentioned apart from those of his brethren. The sons of Cush are mentioned first in vs. 7. And even the second generation is mentioned in Sheba and Dedan. But Nimrod is mentioned quite apart from his brethren. "And Cush begat Nimrod," vs. 8. Especially if we take this fact in connection with his name, "The Rebel," the inference is not too bold that Nimrod revolted against his own tribe and father's house. He probably refused to submit himself to patriarchal authority.

Besides, the boundaries and limitations of the family were too narrow for him. He rose in rebellion.

He revealed himself as rebellious in spirit over against his own tribe and left his father's house. He did not inherit with his brethren, perhaps. He was, at least, not counted as a regular descendant from Cush. He did not become the head of a tribe as did his brothers. And, perhaps,

he would never have been mentioned at all in the records if it had not been that the rebel, who left his father's house, ultimately became a man of great fame and gained universal significance. However this may be, certain it is that the mentioning of his name so entirely apart from those of his brethren must be intentional. It calls our attention to the fact that Nimrod must not be considered on the same level with the rest of the Cushites, that his significance is far surpassing the boundaries of his tribe, that his name is connected with a new beginning in history. Nimrod is the Cushite "par excellence."

In the third place, our attention is called to the fact that this Nimrod was a mighty man. He was called the mighty. He was known among his contemporaries as the mighty. His might was something altogether unique. His equal could not be found. He was a man, no doubt, of tremendous physical strength, so that in battle no one was his match. He was a person of great courage. His daring exploits soon gained him a name among his fellow men. But not only was he a man of great physical strength and courage, he also must have been a person of tremendous mental ability. He was a genius in every way. And, though he may have shown himself a rebel among his brethren, he became a benefactor to humanity in general. Perhaps the very fact that he was a man endowed with great powers, physical and mental, the very fact that he was a genius, caused him to feel that the tribal limitations were too narrow for him. In them he could not move about and expand. Within the boundaries of the family and tribe he could not develop and assert himself. But as the universally acknowledged genius Nimrod becomes the benefactor of humanity in general.

Nimrod was a humanist!

This may be a somewhat different picture from the one that is generally drawn in our mind. Especially the Dutch translation "de geweldige" tends to call to our mind a picture of a terrible tyrant, who by his overwhelming power and genius lorded it over the rest of mankind. But this is not implied in the text. First of all we

are told that Nimrod was a mighty hunter before Jehovah. Many commentators interpret this clause as referring to Nimrod's despotism over men. He was the mighty one, the terrible, "de geweldige" who hunted men! And as to the last phrase, "before Jehovah," many interpreters change it into "against Jehovah." And, of course, if this is allowable we obtain a terrible picture of Nimrod the mighty. Then the whole sentence ought to be paraphrased thus: "Nimrod was a mighty hunter of men against the Lord." But it is plain that the text does not at all imply such a meaning. As to the phrase that describes Nimrod as a mighty hunter, it ought to be plain that it does not suggest any despotism over against his fellow-men on the part of Nimrod. It does not speak of a hunting of men. It does not justify the interpretation that Nimrod was a man of bloodshed whose name was feared by all, before whom all the tribes of the earth trembled. Neither is such an interpretation in harmony with what we know of those primitive times. Wild animals were abounding. Often they became a real peril to life and property. And since the kings were looked upon as the protectors and benefactors of their people, they often became the mighty hunters of these wild beasts, thus jeopardizing their lives for humanity. Now, if we take the text in its most natural sense we may draw the conclusion that Nimrod was the first of those. He was a mighty hunter. He was a man of great strength. At the same time he was daring. And he began to employ his power for the benefit of humanity by hunting the wild animals that became a threat to life and property. Neither, it seems to us, can the phrase "before Jehovah" be interpreted as meaning "against Jehovah." I know not that the phrase as it reads in the original, which frequently occurs in the O.T., and which literally means "before the face of Jehovah," ever is used in the sense of opposition to the Lord. Neither is it necessary to adopt that interpretation in this case. True, in his entire life, in the very principle of his being, Nimrod stood over against Jehovah. He did not belong to the seed of the woman. He was a true Cushite, a spiritual Hamite, as is plain from all that he

does. But even so it must be admitted in the first place that Nimrod remained the servant of Jehovah who could do nothing else than carry out God's counsel. In all that Nimrod did he lived in the presence of, before the sight of, before the face of Jehovah. Jehovah guarded his every step, controlled his every move. And though Nimrod may have aimed at highest self-exaltation, and though he knew not the true service of God, yet even so, he could but fulfil God's counsel. But there is still more. Nimrod was looked upon by his contemporaries as a servant of Jehovah. In hunting the wild animals and thus serving humanity, it was thought Nimrod truly served the Lord. That this is true is established beyond all doubt by the fact that the phrase "a mighty hunter before Jehovah" became a proverbial. We read: "wherefore it is said, Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before Jehovah." There must have been some general knowledge of God at this time among all the descendants of Noah. It was only a comparatively short time ago that God had revealed himself in the terrible deluge, and the memory of it could not have died out so soon. Perhaps there was still a rather general knowledge of the promises made to Noah by Jehovah, how the fear of man had been laid upon the animal world. And it is not inconceivable at all that when the wild animals became a real peril to the existence of the race, Nimrod was looked upon as a servant of Jehovah to protect humanity. Only in this light is it to be understood that whoever served humanity in the same way in later times was called like Nimrod a mighty hunter before Jehovah.

If pictured in this light Nimrod does not seem such a distant figure after all. He was mighty. He was a great genius. Strong in physical power, amazing in courage, a great mind, he employed

his talents for the benefits of humanity by protecting them in the first place against the enemy from the animal world. And in doing so he was considered a servant of Jehovah. Once more, let us emphasize that in very fact Nimrod was no servant of Jehovah at all. He did not intend to serve the Lord. He was not conscious of his true relation to Jehovah. That all our life can be measured and estimated only in the light of our relation to God, not of our relation to men only, Nimrod did not know. In deepest principle he stood opposed to the God of heaven and earth. But he served humanity, and in serving humanity he made himself a name as servant of Jehovah. Exactly the picture of the modern humanist! Also in our time the great question is: what are we for Man, for Humanity? If we are serving humanity all is well. The service of humanity becomes more and more the criterion according to which all things are judged. It becomes the basis for cooperation and federation. Whether the truth is maintained, whether Jehovah's revelation is known, whether the Christ of the Scriptures is confessed—all these questions are of minor importance. And the great question, the question that is uppermost, is: what are we doing for humanity? Not our relation to God, in other words, but our relation to men is all determining.

Like Nimrod, men grow mighty, become hunters before Jehovah.

Like Nimrod they become men of great fame and grow tremendously popular.

But like Nimrod they after all ignore Jehovah and invoke the judgment of God. For after all, not what we are to men, but what we are before God is all determining. Not our relation to God is determined by our relation to men, but the latter is determined by the former!

—Holland, Mich.

