



REFORMED

— PAVILION —

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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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So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.

—Exodus 15:22–26

Marah

Marah! Bitterness!
The word reflects the taste of the water. Marah! Bitterness! The word also reflects the state of their souls. Marah! Bitterness!

And who could blame them? The children of Israel were three days into the wilderness of Shur. Three days of walking. Three days without water. Three days of dust. They were thirsty and growing thirstier. “What shall we drink?” they wondered. And then...water! There was water! How eagerly they must have gulped it down. How quickly they must have retched it back out. The children of Israel could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. How quickly the word must have flown through the camp. Marah! Bitterness! How quickly their souls must have turned brackish. Marah! Bitterness!

In the bitterness of their souls, they murmured against Moses. “What shall we drink?” The children of Israel should not have murmured. Did they not remember the Red Sea? Had they not been delivered from the hand of Egypt? Did they not remember Jehovah’s goodness and mercy to them? Had they not just sung that Jehovah hath triumphed gloriously?

Ah, but are we so different? We are delivered from sin and death! By the blood of God’s only begotten Son, no less. And yet we murmur. We murmur! We are discontent. We don’t have enough. They have it better. It’s not fair. Woe is me. We fret and worry and fear and grumble and sigh and pine and covet and brood and fuss and carp...and murmur. What shall we drink? or eat? or have? Marah! Bitterness!

Now behold the patience and grace of Jehovah. He meets our murmuring with mercy, and he makes our bitter waters sweet. Jehovah showed Moses a tree to cast into the waters, and the waters were made sweet. How? There is no earthly explanation, for it was a miracle and a mystery. But why a tree? As a prophecy of another tree and the bitter death of Christ upon it as the reason that our life is sweet.

Now let us learn the lessons of Marah, for at Marah God established a statute and an ordinance. That means that Jehovah laid down a permanent truth.

Here is the first lesson of Marah: the wilderness is always bitter. Trials and sorrows attend our way. Expect it, for that is God’s ordinance for the wilderness: Marah! Bitterness!

Here is the second lesson of Marah: God makes our way bitter to prove us, that our hearts might not cleave to the earth but to the Lord. Egypt with all its treasures shall be smitten with disease and destroyed, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. Therefore, diligently hearken to the Lord!

Here is the third lesson of Marah: Jehovah always makes our bitter waters sweet. Through Jesus Christ, God makes all things work together for our good and our salvation. Expect it, for that is God's ordinance for Marah: "I am the LORD that healeth thee"!

—AL

EDITORIAL

Hoeksema's Warning

Dear members of the Protestant Reformed Churches,

I write to those in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) who have a love for God's truth and who have a zeal to contend for it. Perhaps you are already aware, but your theologians are busy breathing a new wind of false doctrine into your denomination, and many will be carried away by it.

The new, foul wind of doctrine is that faith is in no sense a union with Christ, but faith is only man's activity of believing. This new doctrine opposes the teaching of a bond of faith and asserts only an activity of faith. This new doctrine denies the bond of faith in order to emphasize the necessity of man's *activity* in salvation and in order to exclude any *passivity* of man in being saved by faith. All the pious disclaimers are duly affixed to this new teaching to deceive the unwary: God gives man his activity of believing (but they are still man's activities, not God's); God gives faith only to the elect (but man must exercise his faith to enjoy Christ); man is passive in his regeneration (but there is no sense in which man is passive in faith); man is united to Christ (just not by faith). But when all the disclaimers have been paraded, the new doctrine is still that faith is only an activity and never a

bond. The watchword and emphasis of the new doctrine of faith is *man's activity*.

The Holy Spirit creates a spiritual, living connection between Christ and the sinner at regeneration. That union with Jesus Christ takes place not when we believe, but when we are regenerated, that is, when we are given new life by the Holy Spirit and cease to be dead in trespasses and sins. That union, however, is *not* faith. It is a confounding of concepts to call it faith. We should reserve the language of faith for the activity of believing...

The elect must be spiritually alive (regenerated) *before* they believe, and one who is in union with Christ believes because he has already been regenerated and united to Jesus Christ. Union with Christ, which is the mystical union (which is not faith), occurs *before* the activity of believing.¹

My Protestant Reformed brethren (if you be my brethren), is it not astonishing to you that this doctrine is being openly taught in the Protestant Reformed Churches? Was it not always your doctrine that faith is both a bond and an activity? Was not this always your confession

¹ Martyn McGeown, "Regeneration, Saving Faith, and Union with Christ," *Standard Bearer* 100, no. 16 (May 15, 2024): 392; emphasis is McGeown's.

in Lord's Day 7, question and answer 20? "Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ? No, only those who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits, by a true faith." And was not your comfort always God's activity and never man's activity?

What you are witnessing in your churches is what your founding father, Herman Hoeksema, warned you about many years ago: an emphasis on man's activity and, specifically, an emphasis on the activity of faith. Hoeksema's warning against even an *emphasis* on the activity of faith was perceptive and prophetic. Perhaps Hoeksema sensed that the Protestant Reformed Churches would always be astute enough never to adopt Arminianism by name. But Hoeksema was perceptive enough to know that man invariably drifts back into an emphasis on man. And when man emphasizes man, everything of God must eventually be lost.

In this connection [that "Christ is the entrance into the kingdom of God"] I cannot refrain from issuing to all of you a word of warning. I'll do it. You know, we talk about so much in our day, and in our churches,—we talk about responsibility. We talk about the activity of faith. And similar things. I'll warn you that on that basis and in that line we're going to lose the gospel. We're going to lose the gospel. We're going to lose election. We're going to lose reprobation. We're going to lose the gospel, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. O yes, we must preach the activity of faith. But by the activity of faith I mean not something that you and I must do, except that first of all, by the activity of faith we cling to Christ, and embrace Him and all His benefits. That is the activity of faith. Responsibility? Don't you ever forget that the accusation that Reformed people cannot maintain responsibility has always been brought against,—Reformed people have always been accused of denying responsibility by

those that are Arminians and moderns. We do not deny responsibility. We do not deny the activity of faith. Of course not. But I warn you that with the emphasis that is laid upon these things, upon conditions, upon activity of faith, and upon responsibility, you're going to lose the gospel. That's my warning.²

What your theologians are doing now is emphasizing the activity of faith, even to the point of denying the bond of faith. And because the emphasis on man has carried the day in the Protestant Reformed Churches for a long time now, you have lost the gospel. If you have any gratitude to God in your hearts for raising up Herman Hoeksema—whom you celebrate this year on the centennial of your churches—listen to his warning. No, if you have any gratitude to God in your hearts for the gospel of Christ, then stop conniving at the attacks on that gospel that come through the PRC's incessant harping on the activity of man.

The PRC cannot be fixed. Hoeksema's warning has come true, for the gospel is lost in the very churches to which he issued his warning. The new wind of doctrine that denies faith as a bond cannot be wafted away by more protests, more appeals, more letters, more discussions, more phone calls, more articles, more consistory meetings, more coffee meet-ups, more appeals to the confessions, more appeals to scripture. What will you do? Will you tarry while the brimstone is falling? Will you look back in longing at the city that God judges? To remain is to be partaker of the denomination's sins and to become ripe for the denomination's judgment. Remember Lot's wife.

My brethren (if I be your brother), it is time to wake up. I beseech you to wake up. I implore you: Wake up! Do you not see that your sleep is dangerous for you and your loved ones? Do you not see how spiritually dark your spiritual slumber is? Do you not see that your spiritual slumber is death for you and your families? "Awake thou

² Herman Hoeksema, "Transcript of Address and Question Hour," *Standard Bearer* 34, no. 21 (September 15, 1958): 490.

that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph. 5:14).

Why do you keep spending money for that which is not bread? Why do you keep expending your labor for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto the Lord as he warned you by Herman Hoeksema. Eat that which is good—God’s activities, not man’s activities. Let your soul delight itself in fatness—Christ’s unsearchable riches, not the emptiness of man. Incline your ear and come unto God by leaving the PRC

and by joining or forming a true church where the gospel of God’s activity is proclaimed, and your soul shall live (see Isa. 55:1–3).

The call does not come to you forever. But it comes to you now, so hearken. Heed Hoeksema’s warning! Awake, thou that sleepest! Arise from the dead! And Christ shall give thee light.

In love (sincerely) and in Christ (by the bond of faith),

Rev. Lanning

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA’S BANNER ARTICLES

The Banner

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(Pp. 805–6)

Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article LIX. The New King and His Kingdom (continued)

That God is one in Being was not so difficult to understand. The difficulty in comprehending what the church professes in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity rather finds its source in the threeness of the personal life of God. That one being also exists as one person seems to us inevitable. That three persons can be one being seems a contradiction in terms.

Yet this is not the case. The Trinity is a mystery, but it is no contradiction in terms. God is infinite and we are finite, and the more we meditate on God, the more we realize that there are infinite depths in God’s being we cannot fathom, infinite heights we cannot measure. God inspires us with awe. Meditation on Him brings us upon our knees in worship, fills us with a sense of our own insignificance and the immeasurable greatness of God’s Being and the inestimable abundance of His divine life. But this is not the same as saying that the church’s profession that God is one in Being and three in Persons involves a contradiction in terms.

A logical contradiction cannot possibly live in the mind of the church.

Yet the doctrine of the Trinity is a living truth, the deepest source of the conscious life of the church of God in the world, the fountainhead of all doctrine. Surely, we must give ourselves account of our conception of God as it is expressed in the formula: God is one in Being, three in Persons.

This three-personal life of God we must now discuss.

And naturally, we must first of all attempt to make clear what is meant by the term “person.” And to understand the meaning of that term, we must clearly distinguish between person and nature.

We may call your attention to the fact in the first place, that this distinction, the distinction between “nature” and “person,” is of great significance for the understanding of the truth in general. Not only for a clear comprehension of what is implied in the doctrine of the Trinity, but also for an understanding of other important elements of the truth, it is necessary that this distinction be clearly made. It occurs again and again. It is important for a true understanding of

the relation between guilt and corruption, for guilt is imputed to the nature of man. It is significant for a correct understanding of the Incarnation. Christ is the Person of the Son of God. He is not a human person. When he was born there was not another human individual next to those already existing. He was a divine subsistence, a divine Person, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. But He assumed a human nature. Not a human person did He assume. To speak thus would be absurd. Neither was He changed into a human person. He remained God of God. But He entered into human nature. The distinction is important for a true understanding of our salvation, our incorporation into Christ, and our appropriation of Him by faith. We must become like Him. We must eat and drink Him. That is, not His Person, neither His divine nature, but His human nature. He entered into our nature, that we might be incorporated into Him and be sanctified. It is important even for a true understanding of the Christian as he lives in the body of this death. From Rom. 7 we would sometimes receive the impression that Paul presents himself as a double personality. There seem to be two persons in Paul warring against each other. What the one person wills the other wills not, what the one does the other hates. Yet this is not the case. What is within Paul is the new life of Christ and the old powers of sin. The old and the new nature. And fact is that Paul, one and the same person, now acts thru the new, now thru the old nature, now he seems controlled by the power of sin, now it is evident that principally he is liberated from the law of sin and death thru the law of the spirit of life.

In detail we must not now speak about all these things. If only it is clear that the distinction between person and nature is one of far reaching significance. We meet with it time and again as we make study of our doctrine.

What is meant by “person”?

In modern times the statement is often met with that personality consists essentially of self-consciousness and self-determination. And on the face of it, this would seem quite acceptable a

definition. For fact is that a person will naturally reveal himself as both self-conscious and self-determining. He knows himself, becomes an object of reflection and knowledge to himself, objectifies himself in the mirror of his own consciousness. Besides, he is free. He determines his own relation to other beings, to persons like unto himself, and even to God. It would seem, indeed, as if the essence of personality must be sought in self-consciousness and self-determination.

And yet, this definition would lead us entirely astray. We feel immediately that in the light of this definition, the infant in the cradle is no person as yet. He is not self-conscious. He has not as yet reached that stage of development in which he makes of his own self an object of reflection. Neither does he himself determine his own relation to others. It is far rather determined for him. And therefore, such an infant would not be a person, he cannot be guilty, for guilt is imputed to the person. It is only a person that can be called guilty. A tree is not a person and, therefore, cannot be a bearer of guilt. A dog is no person and for that reason cannot be guilty. If an infant is no person, little children are without guilt as long as they have not reached the stage of self-consciousness and self-determination. And again, if that is true, our doctrine of original guilt is an absurdity. The guilt of Adam can be imputed only to persons. If infants are no persons, there can be no original guilt. And in the same sense, the righteousness of Christ can never reach them. And, therefore, if the definition is true we will have to revise our doctrine considerably. But the error lies with the definition, not with the truth of Scripture. Neither is it so difficult to see where the definition is at fault. Self-consciousness and self-determination after all are acts of the intellect and will. And intellect and will do not belong to the person but to the human nature. In the deepest sense it may be said that intellect and will belong to the very being of man. They do not belong to the individual but to the race. They do not distinguish man from man but man from other beings. And since self-consciousness and

self-determination are acts of intellect and will, they do not constitute the person, but the nature of man.

The person of men lies back of his nature, bears his nature, acts thru his nature, knows and wills and feels thru his nature. It is that which is reflected in man's consciousness as the "ego." It is that in which the human nature subsists. It is that individual subsistence, that reality back of the human nature in each individual human being, that bears and acts thru that nature in his own individual way. The old definition, therefore, that person is the individual subsistence bearing and acting thru a rational nature, is by far to be preferred above the later one.

Let us employ a few illustrations.

I can speak of the tree-nature. And by tree-nature I refer to that which is common to the tree in general. Let us say that to this tree-nature belong trunk, roots and branches in organic relationship. Wherever I find these I find the tree-nature. But this tree-nature does not exist in the abstract, neither does it subsist in just one tree. It subsists in numerous individual trees, and in each tree it is manifested in its own peculiar form. It subsists differently in the maple from the oak. And moreover, each individual maple bears its nature in a different form from the other. Each tree, therefore, is an individual subsistence that bears the tree-nature in its own peculiar way.

Again I can speak of the animal-nature in general. To it would naturally belong all that is peculiar to the animal in distinction from other natures. That general animal-nature I recognize in the horse and in the dog, in the bird and in the fish. But again, each animal bears that nature in its own way. It subsists in dog and horse, but they are different from each other. And again

each dog and horse bears that nature in its own peculiar manner. Also in case of the animal I can speak of an individual subsistence that bears the animal nature.

And yet, neither a tree nor a horse can ever be called a person. And the reason is evident. Neither the tree nor the animal subsists as a rational nature. Thinking and willing do not belong to the tree—neither to the animal-nature. If the tree could speak, it could never say "I."

Man, however, is a person. Also in his case I can speak of the human nature in a general sense. There is but one human nature. But that one human nature is borne by millions and hundreds of millions of individual human beings. They all possess the same human nature. They all act thru the same nature. That nature is a rational nature. Thinking and willing belong to it. It is a rational nature. Each individual that bears this rational nature and acts thru it must, when come to full development, do so consciously and willingly, with moral freedom. And, therefore, man is a person.

The same is applicable to God. There are no three divine Beings. God's Being is One and inseparable. Undivided. Neither are there three divine natures; nor is there one divine nature separated into three persons. There is one, undivided, inseparable divine Being; there is one undivided Nature. But in this one divine Nature there subsists three Persons. And each of these Persons acts thru the divine Nature in His own Personal way. The Father bears the whole divine Nature as the Father. The Son subsists in the whole divine Nature as the Son; the Holy Ghost possesses the whole divine Nature as Holy Ghost. God, therefore, not only manifests Himself as Father, Son and Holy Ghost, but actually subsists in threeness of Persons.

—Holland, Mich.

