



# REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:  
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;  
he shall set me up upon a rock.  
—Psalm 27:5*

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## MEDITATION

And if a man shall open a pit, or if a man shall dig a pit, and not cover it, and an ox or an ass fall therein; the owner of the pit shall make it good, and give money unto the owner of them; and the dead beast shall be his.

And if one man's ox hurt another's, that he die; then they shall sell the live ox, and divide the money of it; and the dead ox also they shall divide. Or if it be known that the ox hath used to push in time past, and his owner hath not kept him in; he shall surely pay ox for ox; and the dead shall be his own.

If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution: if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. If the theft be certainly found in his hand alive, whether it be ox, or ass, or sheep; he shall restore double.

If a man shall cause a field or vineyard to be eaten, and shall put in his beast, and shall feed in another man's field; of the best of his own field, and of the best of his own vineyard, shall he make restitution.

If fire break out, and catch in thorns, so that the stacks of corn, or the standing corn, or the field, be consumed therewith; he that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution.

If a man shall deliver unto his neighbour money or stuff to keep, and it be stolen out of the man's house; if the thief be found, let him pay double. If the thief be not found, then the master of the house shall be brought unto the judges, to see whether he have put his hand unto his neighbour's goods. For all manner of trespass, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whom the judges shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour. If a man deliver unto his neighbour an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, no man seeing it; then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good. And if it be stolen from him, he shall make restitution unto the owner thereof. If it be torn in pieces, then let him bring it for a witness, and he shall not make good that which was torn.

And if a man borrow ought of his neighbour, and it be hurt, or die, the owner thereof being not with it, he shall surely make it good. But if the owner thereof be with it, he shall not make it good: if it be an hired thing, it came for his hire.

—Exodus 21:33–22:15

### The Restitution Laws

**T**he restitution laws were God's judgments concerning the restoration of property. The key words in the passage are *restore*, *restitution*, and *make it good*. If a man stole or was

negligent, so that his neighbor suffered the loss of property, the guilty party was to restore the loss.

God's restitution laws were many and varied. They included laws regarding a pit, a violent

animal, a cattle thief, a thief who was killed in the act, a thief who was caught the next day, a thief who was too poor to restore the theft, a beast who wandered into the neighbor's field, a brush fire that spread to the neighbor's field, a caretaker of property, and a borrower. God's restitution laws included many stipulations. Sometimes the restitution was an ox for an ox, sometimes double, sometimes five oxen for an ox, sometimes money, sometimes raiment, sometimes other goods. But behind all the many and varied laws and stipulations of the restitution laws, one principle was at their heart: what a man took away from his neighbor through theft or carelessness, he was to restore.

In his mercy to his church, God put our Lord Jesus Christ under the restitution laws in our place. We had stolen God's honor by our sin. The price of restitution for such wickedness is very high: the death of the sinner. But though we had sinned, God required Jesus Christ to make it good. Our Lord paid the high price of death upon the cross in our place. Though he was innocent, he was condemned for us. Our Lord sings of the restitution he has made: "Then I restored that which I took not away" (Ps. 69:4). And our Lord has made it good indeed. He died for our sakes—and for his sake we live!

—AL

## FROM THE EDITOR

A warm welcome to our readers as this first issue of volume three arrives before you.

The first issue of volume three...who can imagine such a thing? Two years ago our ecclesiastical world was shattering to pieces. First Reformed Protestant Church had conspired with Second Reformed Protestant Church to slay God's servants. Three elders and a minister were all either suspended or deposed because they taught that God's will, not man's, determines what is to be sung in worship. And they were either suspended or deposed especially because they taught that Christ is the psalmist, that the psalms are his songs, and that he sings the psalms with the congregation and she with him in the public worship of the church. The Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) raged—in sermons, in lectures, in private conversations, in print, and in ecclesiastical decisions—against that blessed gospel and declared it to be legalism. The charge of legalism was bogus. The undersigned's protest against that charge, submitted almost exactly two years ago, is printed

elsewhere in this issue for the reader's perusal. But though the charge of legalism was bogus, it was hammered into the denomination with a mallet of violence and with the nails of lies. The denomination suffered enough spiritual blunt force trauma in those few weeks to be stunned into panicked confusion, into isolated silence, or into dissonant agreement. It will take many years for God's people—including those poor people of God who may yet remain in the RPC today—to be able to understand what was done to them in the spring of 2023. In the meantime the ministers and elders of the RPC, as lords in God's heritage, continue to violate men and women with force and cruelty.<sup>1</sup>

But, thanks be to God, what we thought was the shattering of our ecclesiastical world was in reality God's gracious rescue of a foolish and helpless little remnant. We did not know the danger of the snare we were in as members of the RPC. We did not know how sharp were the teeth of the wolves who prowled among the flock. But God knew, and he rescued us. "Blessed be the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to

<sup>1</sup> See Dewey Engelsma, "Force and Cruelty," *Reformed Pavilion* 2, no. 39 (January 4, 2025): 5–15.

their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped” (Ps. 124:6–7).

In his goodness God also gave us a little magazine in *Reformed Pavilion*. Originally started in order to teach and explain the psalm controversy to the people of the RPC, as well as to give a broader witness to the Reformed faith, it was not clear how long the magazine could last. The undersigned’s hope was certainly that God would give us a place to write, perhaps once or twice a month. It was with great thanksgiving, then, that by the second week God had given us a second issue, and then a third, and then a fourth. No, our lowly magazine has never been impressive. Men mocked it mercilessly in pulpit and print when it first appeared. And many issues since then have limped and staggered into being as thin little things. But under the blessing of God, issue gave way to issue, and volume gave way to volume. And though we as

writers and readers are so slow to understand, God continues to give us the knowledge of his goodness in Jesus Christ—issue by issue and volume by volume. And now here is the first issue of volume three...who can imagine such a thing? How good and merciful is our God!

With regard to the content of this issue, be sure to peruse Mrs. Connie Meyer’s poem. Its theme is infinitely rich, and its composition is skillful, so that the poem will yield fruit to the reader even after several readings. The poem would be profitable anytime, but it does fit especially well as Good Friday approaches.

The editorial this week picks up the history of God’s people in Holland, Michigan. Editorials on the Lord’s supper will resume in the near future, Lord willing.

The remaining articles are either self-explanatory or have already been mentioned. Without further ado, then, blessed reading.

—AL



### Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

(Lord's Day 16)

Why did Jesus have to die?  
He was God, and can't God try  
Save his people other ways,  
Without hell's horrific blaze?

Oh, but God is just, you see.  
Only hanging on a tree  
Pays the cursed death sin owes  
To the one who no sin knows.

Yes, that answer I have heard.  
Yet I wonder if a third  
Possibility can be  
Without pain and without tree?

God, who spoke and there was light—  
Can't he save us just by might?  
Oh, the darkness! Oh, the pain!  
What would suffering that gain?

Listen now, and hear this well:  
***Sinners only deserve hell.***  
Peter, and the devil too,  
Tried to stop Christ from that due.

Yes, the one who never wronged  
Any man must now be thronged  
With the barbs and blows of men,  
Thrust away from God, and then

Buried in hewn rock, he proved  
Death is real—and death he moved  
From your curse to blessing you.  
Yes, God spoke, and all was true.

Our salvation came to be  
Even as a star or tree.  
Spoken, yes, and this you've heard:  
***Jesus is God's spoken Word.***

—Connie L. Meyer

## EDITORIAL

### Classis Holland

When we last left our little band of transplanted Reformed believers, they had come through their first deadly winter of 1846–47 and their even deadlier summer of 1847 on the shores of Black Lake in Holland, Michigan.<sup>1</sup> Though many men, women, and children had fallen sick and died, God nevertheless had preserved his little flock. Though every outward appearance indicated that they should perish and their colony should fail,

the colonists looked instead with spiritual eyes upon the things that are not seen. The struggling little colony had the gospel of Christ ringing in their ears through the preaching of Reverend Van Raalte, the psalms of the sweet psalmist comforting their souls and resounding from their lips, and the Spirit of the risen Lord in their hearts. The days of their transplanting were hard days for the flesh but splendid days for faith. One Reformed believer later recalled,

<sup>1</sup> See Andrew Lanning, "Psalms in the Night," *Reformed Pavilion* 2, no. 34 (November 30, 2024): 4–9.

There were many prayers and petitions sent up to the Lord in those days. There was much grace needed to remain true to the faith, but the Lord gave much grace. Even in the midst of all these miseries men sang of the mercies of God and made the forests re-echo with His praise. No matter how poor our homes, how plain our fare, how simple our clothing, still the Lord was good in the land of our pilgrimage. *Ja*, the Lord was with us, also, when it seemed that He was against us. We continued believing that we had gone forth with Him, and we had experienced in many instances His care and help. In this faith we went on, trusting in His promises that for us the light should arise out of the darkness and better times be at hand.<sup>2</sup>

In this month of April 2025, let us revisit our transplanted brethren in their colony to see how they fared. The month of April proved to be a significant month throughout the years in Holland, Michigan, for in that month the Lord brought his church to three great milestones. April 23, 1848: the organization of the transplanted churches as a classis—Classis Holland. April 1850: the decision by Classis Holland to send delegates to the Dutch Reformed Church in New York with a view to union with that denomination. April 8, 1857: the secession of several congregations from Classis Holland to form what would become the Christian Reformed Church.

In this month of April 2025, then, let us begin by revisiting April 1848—177 years ago—in order to examine the first of those three April milestones.

## The City and Its Villages

The immigrants who had followed Reverend Van Raalte and had founded Holland, Michigan, in 1846–47 had always understood that they were the vanguard that would establish a foothold for their brethren. Though many Dutchmen were going to many cities in America during this time, Holland, Michigan, became the primary destination for the downtrodden people of the *Afscheiding* who emigrated from the Netherlands. In fact, at the time that Van Raalte was settling in Michigan, there were *Afscheiding* congregations back in the Netherlands that were being organized for the express purpose of emigrating. The entire congregation, formed of *Afscheiding* members from this town and that town, led by its minister and consistory, would board a ship and make its way to Michigan. For example, in the province of Zeeland in the Netherlands, Rev. Cornelis van der Meulen and his consistory led a congregation “especially formed for the purpose of emigrating.”<sup>3</sup> The congregation, which had been “gathered from several places in the province”<sup>4</sup> of Zeeland, the Netherlands, emigrated to Holland and established the nearby town of Zeeland, Michigan.

So it went from province to province, as a first wave of Dutch immigrants in 1847 followed Van Raalte’s vanguard to America. The Dutchmen cleared the forests and settled the land around Holland, with the settlements becoming towns in their own right: Graafschap, Overisel, Drenthe, Zeeland, Groningen, North Holland. Holland was the main city and these surrounding settlements its suburbs. “Holland was known as ‘the city’ or ‘de stad,’ in contrast with the ‘villages’ or ‘dorpjes.’”<sup>5</sup>

The newly-arrived Dutchmen faced nearly insurmountable difficulties in the villages, just

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in Albert Hyma, *Albertus C. Van Raalte and His Dutch Settlements in the United States* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), 113.

<sup>3</sup> Earl Wm. Kennedy, *A Commentary on the Minutes of the Classis of Holland, 1848–1876*, vol. 1 (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2018), 9, note 10.

<sup>4</sup> Kennedy, *Commentary on the Minutes*, 6, note 5.

<sup>5</sup> Elton J. Bruins, *Albertus C. Van Raalte: Leader of the Emigration, 1844–1867*, <https://docslib.org/doc/10483252/albertus-c-van-raalte-leader-of-the-emigration-1844-1867>, 17.

as Van Raalte had in Holland. In addition to the constant threats of sickness and death, the people were so poor. Very few of them had been men of any means in the Netherlands, and they quickly ran out of what little money they had brought. Good jobs in big American cities beckoned, and the colony was in danger of dissipating, as first this man and then that left for better opportunities elsewhere. The families who stayed often had to hire out their children to the Americans as laborers or servants just to make ends meet.

It is truly said that settlements are built on the bones of the settlers. The first two years of the great colonization effort by Van Raalte and his people were incredibly difficult. Food was usually very scarce; money soon ran out; disease and death were rampant. Many of the first settlers left and headed for the growing cities of Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo where there were increasing numbers of Dutch immigrants who thought that they had no future with the residents of the Colony. Those cities offered the opportunities of employment. Families who stayed in the Colony often sent their young people to work in those places or to be servants for well-to-do Americans. These young people earned money which enabled their cash-starved parents to make the necessary purchases for settlement.<sup>6</sup>

But God's poor people in those years were rich. For though they had little in this world, they had abundant stores in the world to come. God had given them Christ, Christ's gospel, and Christ's songs; and they were happy indeed. A Reformed settler in Drenthe, Michigan, in a letter of 1847, compared what worship had been like under the oppressive persecution in the Netherlands with what worship was like in the new land. Concerning the harassment in the

Netherlands, he wrote:

As far as we are concerned we do not wish to ever set our feet again on the soil of the Netherlands. Then you will well say why may this be? [Here in Michigan] God's name is not being blasphemed. But when I lived in the Netherlands, there the servants of Satan ruled among us...who suppressed us until the very last day, so I had to serve the Lord with a terrorized soul. Yes, they had followed us until the last of us were on board.<sup>7</sup>

But in America in 1847, in spite of all the hardships, in spite even of the loss of "several children who died in bed," the people were happy in the Lord and in the worship of his name.

So far as I am concerned I find myself satisfied in my condition. A person finds many godly people here. The worship service is very much toward our liking. On Sundays we go to Dominee Van Raalte's church.<sup>8</sup>

God continued to add people here and a congregation there. Little by little, the city of Holland and its villages became established. At the center of the lives of these Reformed men and women was the worship of their God in the congregations that the Lord had planted in their new land.

With religion central to their lives, the people of the colony, while struggling to build homes and establish businesses or farms, had...formed congregations and built log churches. Earlier, Van Raalte had preached in the open or in homes until the log church was built in the city of Holland. Similar work was done in Vriesland by the Rev. Maarten A. Ypma, who came to America with his already organized congregation, and by Seine Bolks in Overisel, and Cornelius Vander Meulen in Zeeland. Although Groningen

<sup>6</sup> Bruins, *Albertus C. Van Raalte*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Hinderik Lanning, personal letter to Remmelt Lanning, October 12, 1847, in the Dutch Immigrant Letter Collection in Heritage Hall, Hekman Library (Calvin University), under the entry "Lanning, H." Translated by Heritage Hall.

<sup>8</sup> Lanning letter.

and Graafschap did not have pastors immediately, the elders conducted services of worship.<sup>9</sup>

### Classis Holland

By the spring of 1848, the few churches of Holland and its surrounding villages turned their attention to the organization of a classis. One looks back with amazement at that first classis meeting. It was only the spring of 1848! Van Raalte's vanguard of 1846 was just emerging from its second hard winter in the deep woods of Holland. The immigrants from the wave of 1847 were only just getting their bearings in their new land. In Zeeland, for example, where the first meeting of classis was held, apparently there was no suitable church building yet constructed in which the delegates could meet, so classis convened in the home of one of the members. In the midst of poverty, sickness, death, heartache, and the relentless hardship of the members' trying to establish themselves in a new place, the churches of Holland and its villages nevertheless made the organization of a classis their priority.

But how could they do otherwise? For it was not the men of the churches who were at work but the Lord of the church. And establishing his church upon himself as the cornerstone, the Lord causes his church to rejoice in him who is the truth. United to her Lord by the bonds of his covenant love, the church is also united in true faith among her various congregations. Holland and Zeeland and the rest shared the glorious gospel and had suffered together for it. How could they do anything other than meet together to discuss matters of mutual concern?

And so it was that on April 23, 1848, the elders and ministers of the four churches that were sufficiently established—Holland, Graafschap, Zeeland, and Vriesland—met together in their first classis meeting. The formal organization of a classis meant that the four churches were now banded together as a denomination, which would be known from then on as Classis Holland.

The very first order of business that Classis Holland ever conducted will warm the hearts of

readers of *Reformed Pavilion*. Classis Holland sang a psalm. Before it considered a single matter, before it made a single decision, before it uttered a single word, Classis Holland sang a psalm. What heavenly treasures the sweet psalmist of Israel poured upon those lowly fathers of Israel. Those men had suffered tremendously for their opposition to hymns in the Netherlands. They had been fined and jailed and ridiculed in the Netherlands for seceding from the state church and its *Evangelische Gezangen*. Chased out of their buildings on the Lord's days in the old country, they had sung David in the open air of the fields and among the crates and barrels of the barns. They had come to the new world with almost nothing except their *Bijbels* and their *Psalmen*. They had found their way home in the dark Michigan woods by their loved ones' psalm singing from the doors of their rude dwellings. And now, unremarked by the high and mighty ones of this world, tucked away in a log cabin on the wild frontier of Zeeland, Michigan, with no one but the Lord looking on—and leading them!—those men marked this unfathomable milestone in the life of their new Reformed denomination by singing a psalm. Classis Holland sang a psalm!

And what a psalm! It was Psalm 103.

Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. (vv. 1–6)

After opening prayer Classis Holland turned its attention to the matters that concerned the member churches: how often classis should meet; how soon it would be seemly for a widow to remarry (there being many widows and widowers in those hard, early days); whether elders

<sup>9</sup> Bruins, *Albertus C. Van Raalte*, 18.

and deacons should serve for life or retire after a set term; whether the churches should observe appointed festival days such as Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, and Pentecost; what status the confessional standards would have among the churches of Classis Holland; whether a brother may marry his deceased brother's widow; whether pulpit supply for the vacant Graafschap congregation were possible; and school districts.

All of the matters that came to the meeting of classis were interesting and profitable, but two may be of special interest to readers of *Reformed Pavilion*, since some readers have faced these questions in their own lifetimes. First, the question of "festival days." Here is Classis Holland's judgment:

Art. 9. With regard to festival days, the question is whether we shall observe appointed festival days, the birth, the passion, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

This was discussed at length. Some of the brethren desire this [observance], because now and again much blessing has descended upon these days, and also because it [these days] are indeed appropriate to be commemorated.

Others agree that such blessing has come down but that one must not attribute this to the days as such, but to the sweet and blessed topics then handled, and one can just as well have this blessing on no appointed days, whenever such topics are handled. And also that it is perfectly appropriate that one keep these events alive.

To keep the peace, Rev. Ypma proposes that, although his reverence is fully convinced that, under the New Testament dispensation, there are no festival days, whether it would not be well to preach on the customary topics on those days of rest [Sundays] that fall on Christmas day, Easter, and Pentecost.

Most of the brethren were of opinion that the Lord in his Word has left us in ignorance as to the time, and that we therefore may appoint nothing [regarding dates]. Also, that no Christian may be deprived of the liberty that Christ has bestowed upon us; and that the ministers on every day of rest may preach on what they consider profitable and necessary for the congregation. Nevertheless, one shall handle annually the profitable and precious topics [in question] being valuable for spiritual growth, except only that one shall not get attached to regulation of day and time, so that one shall never compel conscience with regard to it.

This was generally accepted and acquiesced in.<sup>10</sup>

Second, Classis Holland addressed the matter of the Christian school. The Christian schools were a special concern of Reverend Van Raalte. During his entire ministry in Holland, he labored to establish Christian schools. However, in the early days of the colony of Holland, it was almost impossible to form Christian schools because the people were almost entirely occupied with staying alive and getting established. As the years went on, the churches gave less and less attention to forming their own Christian day schools, even though Van Raalte remained an ardent advocate for them. The churches that would follow Van Raalte into the Reformed Church in America (RCA) would entirely lose the battle for the Christian school, since the RCA generally used the public schools. Those churches that would later secede from Van Raalte and the RCA, becoming the Christian Reformed Church, would take up the cause of the Christian school.

Nevertheless, the Reformed concern for the Christian school is seen in the first meeting of Classis Holland. Even though Van Raalte would ultimately lose the battle for the Christian school, he promoted it in Classis Holland. In fact, the school issue was the only item that Van Raalte brought up at the first classis meeting:

<sup>10</sup> Kennedy, *Commentary on the Minutes*, 17–18.

“Rev. Van Raalte wishes the school districts to be discussed.”<sup>11</sup> The matter was sent back to the churches. “Art. 13. School Districts:—The churches will discuss this matter, make regulations, and fix boundaries and report later.”<sup>12</sup>

It was at the second classis meeting that classis expressed its mind regarding the Christian school.

Art. 6. Rev. Ypma proposes that the interests of the schools shall be discussed. The discussion takes place, and the judgment is: the schools must be promoted and cared for by the churches, as being an important part of the Christian calling of God’s church on earth. All lukewarmness and coldness toward that cause must be condemned and rebuked.<sup>13</sup>

Back at the first meeting of Classis Holland, classis finished its work. One of the ministers

closed with prayer. And then, having begun with a psalm, classis closed with a psalm, as was only fitting. And having seen the first of the great April milestones, shall we also close this editorial with the psalm that they sang? It was Psalm 133, that great anthem of the church’s unity in Christ.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

—AL

## THE ALCOVE

### Protest

To: Consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church

April 10, 2023

Dear brethren,

Greetings in the name of our eternal High Priest.

I protest the consistory’s decision of March 23, 2023, “that we judge Rev. Lanning’s teaching regarding exclusive psalmody in the worship service to be legalism by bringing an erroneous application of the second commandment in the preaching.” There were several subsequent decisions regarding my suspension and discipline, but they all rest on this decision. My understanding is that what the consistory decides on this

protest will automatically determine what it does with the remaining decisions, so that it is sufficient for me to protest this one decision without having to protest each decision in turn.

The consistory judged that the doctrine of exclusive Psalmody in my preaching is the heresy of legalism. The consistory’s judgment is wrong, **first**, because my preaching in the two sermons in question taught the pure gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. I beseech you to listen to or read the sermons again. The congregation was not put under the law for her salvation in any sense whatsoever, but she was given her Savior’s perfect work for her salvation. The congregation, made thankful for her salvation by Christ’s gospel, was given the second commandment, the

<sup>11</sup> Kennedy, *Commentary on the Minutes*, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Kennedy, *Commentary on the Minutes*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Kennedy, *Commentary on the Minutes*, 40.

regulative principle, and exclusive Psalmody as the rule for her thankful life. There was not a single drop of the poison of man in the sermons. (This has nothing to do with the preacher, who is a worm, but everything to do with God, who has been gracious in giving First RPC the gospel despite the worm who preaches it.) It is wrong for the consistory to charge the pure preaching of the gospel as legalism.

The consistory's judgment is wrong, **second**, because the charge of legalism against exclusive Psalmody is a novel charge newly invented by the consistory. I have been openly and regularly preaching exclusive psalmody for two years at First RPC. The elders approved every one of those sermons. Where were the charges of legalism then? My preaching of exclusive psalmody has always arisen out of the gospel of Christ, the sweet Psalmist of Israel, and never as a law of bondage to be kept for salvation. Where were the charges of legalism then? The two elders who did not shake my hand never once mentioned legalism in their initial talks with me as the reason they were opposed to my sermon. They stated several reasons they were opposed to my sermon, but they did not even hint at legalism. Only later did the term "legalism" begin to float around. Even after Rev. Langerak's sermon, not a single elder contacted me to talk about legalism. The first time the consistory even considered the charge of legalism was the same day as the meeting at which I was suspended. If my sermons really were the dread heresy of legalism, which may not be tolerated even for an hour, where was this charge when the elders did not shake my hand? Why did the charge of legalism only get thought up well after the fact of my sermons? Furthermore, in the Protestant Reformed Churches, all the current elders of First RPC were in a sister church relationship with Covenant PRC in Northern Ireland, which publicly teaches exclusive Psalmody as the regulative principle of worship. If exclusive Psalmody is really the dread heresy of legalism, how could the elders tolerate such a relationship even for an hour? Where were the charges of legalism then? All the elders sat for decades

under instruction from Prof. Hanko and others that the regulative principle requires exclusive Psalmody. Where were the charges of legalism then? For that matter, through the history of the Reformed church, when has the faithful Reformed church ever charged exclusive Psalmody with legalism? The fact is that the consistory of First RPC, almost overnight, invented the charge of legalism against exclusive Psalmody. In doing so, the consistory led the congregation down a new path. I beseech my brethren to slow down a moment and consider what new things you have suddenly made into essential RPC doctrine overnight: the hymn "Praise God" is suddenly a psalm; exclusive psalmody is suddenly legalism; and your undershepherd who led you into the kingdom of heaven (I speak as a fool) is suddenly outside the kingdom of heaven. My brethren, you are rushing into novelties, including the novel charge of legalism against exclusive Psalmody.

The consistory's judgment is wrong, **third**, because the consistory does not reckon with the connection between exclusive psalmody and the gospel of the psalms that God has given First RPC. When God gave us reformation of doctrine in the formation of the RPC, he also gave us reformation in worship. The reformation in our worship was a restoration of the psalms. The psalms had been taken away from us in the PRC by the doctrine that man must do something in order to obtain something from God. All the language in the psalms of the psalmist doing something was overshadowed with a conditional understanding. When God gave Christ back to us in our doctrine by showing us that Christ has accomplished all things, so that our fellowship with God is truly unconditional, God also gave us back the psalms. We have been led to see that Christ is the sweet Psalmist of Israel who sings the songs of Zion and the songs of the Lord. We have been led to see that he sings in the midst of the great congregation. This has opened up the psalms to us again. Our worship has been reformed right along with our doctrine. It is out of this reformation of doctrine that exclusive psalmody comes. Exclusive psalmody has not

come out of a denigration of the rest of scripture, or a mistrust of the Spirit's work, or a purity of worship ideal. Exclusive psalmody has come out of the gospel.

Bewilderingly, the consistory presents exclusive psalmody in my sermons as if it did not come out of the gospel but out of an attempt to legislate holiness among us. "The preaching of the gospel gives one a love for the Psalms and a strong desire to sing these in the worship services. However, it is not the law and legislation that keeps God's people singing and loving to sing the Psalms. Rather it is the gospel." But the sermons did not preach that our love for the psalms comes out of the law, or the regulative principle, or exclusive psalmody. Just as the sermons in First RPC never teach that our love for God's name comes out of the law not to take his name in vain, or our love for the neighbor comes out of the law not to murder our neighbor. The preaching at First RPC is consistently and deliberately the teaching that Christ has fulfilled – FULFILLED – all our salvation, and that the law is the rule of our gratitude. Never, never the other way around.

This is so bewildering to me. Why is the consistory trying to present my preaching of exclusive psalmody as if came out of an attempt to legislate our holiness? Why will the consistory not see that the preaching of exclusive psalmody has been taught to us just as every other requirement of God's law, including the requirement of the schools: as the rule of gratitude and love, not as a condition for fellowship with God.

By failing to reckon with God's reformation of worship along with reformation of doctrine, the consistory will have to go backward in the reformation of both. If exclusive psalmody is damned as the wicked heresy of legalism, then the only reason to sing psalms in worship is that man wills it. That can be dressed up in all kinds of pretty language – order in the church, liberty in Christ, the believer's right – but the fact remains that the only reason to sing psalms in church will not be that God wills it, but that man wills it. The enthronement of man's will

will be the undoing of the entire reformation that God gave to the Reformed Protestant Churches.

I beseech my brethren to stop promoting the idea that my preaching of exclusive psalmody was legalism in our midst, and to recognize that my preaching of exclusive psalmody arose out of the reformation of doctrine and worship that God graciously gave us.

The consistory's judgment is wrong, **fourth**, because the consistory's grounds do not establish its charge that the doctrine of exclusive Psalmody in my preaching was legalism.

Ground 1: The Reformed Creeds do not demand exclusive psalmody.

Reply: On the matter of what is required in worship, the creeds explicitly send us to Scripture. "Nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word" (LD 35, QA 96). "Yet they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted" (Belgic Confession 32). When the creeds explicitly send us to Scripture on a matter, the creeds require what the Scriptures require in that matter. On the consistory's argument, it would be legalism to teach that the church must sing at all during worship, since the Reformed Creeds do not demand singing. Rather, because Scripture requires psalms to be sung by the congregation, and because Scripture does not require anything else to be sung by the congregation, the Reformed creeds demand exclusive psalmody as that which God "has commanded in his word".

Ground 2: This teaching goes beyond what the scriptures reveal.

Reply: Scripture explicitly requires the church to sing psalms in her public worship. "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms" (Psalm 95:2). Scripture reveals that Jesus' practice in

public worship was to sing psalms (Matt. 26:30). The apostolic injunction for the church as a body was that she sing psalms (Col. 3:15-16). Scripture's instruction by command, normative practice of Jesus, and apostolic injunction regulates what the church sings in her worship: psalms.

Scripture also never requires the church to sing something other than psalms in her public worship. Even Colossians 3:16, to which the consistory appeals, does not require the singing of the entire Bible. There is no command in the passage to "Sing the scriptures," "Sing the whole word," or even, "Sing the word." The passage does tell what material the church is to sing: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all of which are what we call the psalms. The parallel passage in Ephesians 5:19 makes perfectly clear that the material for singing is the psalms. "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

When Scripture requires something for worship (psalms) and never requires something else for worship (other songs), then the church only worships as God has commanded and does not introduce what he has not commanded. In the case of congregational singing, this is exclusive psalmody.

Ground 3: The Church Order does not demand exclusive psalmody but rather rejects this teaching by including songs which are not found in the Psalms.

Reply: Article 69 of the church order teaches exclusive psalmody. It requires the "150 Psalms of David" and excludes many, many other biblical songs and hymns that were in use in some of the Reformed churches in 1619. The principle of Dordt is expressed in the word "only." Sing *only*.... If the principle of Dordt were,

"Sing the scriptures," as the consistory claims, then Dordt would have said so: "Sing only the scriptures." That was not Dordt's principle. Dordt told us its principle: Sing only the psalms (and a few concessions).

Dordt allowed a tiny handful of exceptions to the psalms. In the original article there were seven exceptions. The rule was the 150 Psalms of David. So far from overthrowing the principle or introducing another principle, the exceptions proved the rule. The rule of Dordt was: Sing only the psalms . . . (and a few other songs that are already in your book).

Dordt allowed a tiny handful of exceptions because people were just as stubborn then as they are now. Imagine suggesting then that the beloved hymn of prayer before the sermon should not be sung and see what would have happened. Try to suggest now that Thomas Ken's beloved doxology "Praise God" is a hymn and see what happens. So Dordt made a concession to the people's will. But Dordt was not enthusiastic about the few exceptions. Dordt suffered the few exceptions. And their suffering a few exceptions only went so far, as is evident from their requirement regarding other biblical songs: "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" (Van Dellen and Monsma on Article 69).

Dordt's suffering a handful of non-psalms is analogous to God's suffering divorce in the Old Testament. God hates divorce, but for a time he suffered his people to put away their wives for the hardness of their hearts. So also Dordt, which loved psalms, suffered a tiny handful of non-psalms for the hardness of Dutch hearts. But where the article suffers hard hearts, we ought to be ashamed,

rather than demand continued room for our hardness.

Ground 4: The teaching of the sermon is that if we sing anything other than the 150 Psalms in the official worship service, we are committing idol worship and sinning against the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. To teach that if the congregation sings any versification of the scriptures (other than the Psalms) then the congregation does not have God dwelling with them nor experiencing his covenant fellowship through Jesus until man's law is met is legalism. It is an extreme and legalistic application of the law in the life and worship of the believer.

Reply: The consistory asserts that the sermons taught "that if the congregation sings any versification of the Scriptures (other than the Psalms) then the congregation does not have God dwelling with them nor experiencing his covenant fellowship through Jesus until man's law is met." This assertion is entirely an invention of the consistory. The sermons taught no such thing. The sermons cannot even be misunderstood to teach any such thing. The sermons taught that Christ has already completed and fulfilled all our worship, including fulfilling the regulative principle. The sermons taught that our worship is our gratitude for salvation already accomplished. The sermons cannot be construed in any way whatsoever to be saying that the congregation does not have God dwelling with them nor experiencing covenant fellowship until man meets some law.

In making its argument, the consistory makes a fallacious leap from breaking a commandment to not having God's fellowship. The consistory says that the sermon taught that to sing something other than the psalms is a sin against the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment. The consistory then argued that this was the same as

teaching that "the congregation does not have God dwelling with them nor experiencing his covenant fellowship through Jesus until man's law is met." This is a fallacy. Even when we worship as God has commanded, we are still breaking any number of commandments, because our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. But this does not mean that God withdraws his fellowship from us. God always maintains his fellowship with his elect people in Jesus Christ. The pulpit shows God's people their transgressions, but they remain God's people (Isaiah 58:1).

If the consistory's logic is allowed to stand, then the pulpit may never tell the congregation that it has sinned against this or that commandment, because that would be the same as telling the congregation that they do not have fellowship with God until they have met this or that condition.

The consistory's explanation of legalism in this ground is preposterous. I don't say that to talk down to the consistory or to cast it in their teeth, but to wake the consistory up to the weakness and folly of its arguments.

Ground 5: Lord's Day 35 is teaching the principle of no idol worship which principle governs our whole life and not only the official worship services.

Reply: Lord's Day 35 condemns image worship in every part of our life, but the Lord's Day very definitely applies this principle to the public, corporate worship of the church. QA 98 asks whether images may be tolerated "in the churches." That is an explicit reference to public worship. Furthermore, Belgic Confession 32, explaining the same doctrine as Lord's Day 35, makes explicit reference to "the worship of God" in "the body of the church." Therefore, when the sermons teach that there is a regulative principle of worship in the public worship of the

church, that teaching is perfectly faithful to the confessions.

The consistory's argument obliterates the distinction between public and private worship. The obliteration of that distinction is not only novel and bizarre for a Reformed church, but the obliteration of that distinction goes against the confessions. The confessions explicitly speak of an application of image worship in the public worship of the church.

Ground 6: Exclusive psalmody in worship as a demand of the law is a law of man which is forbidden in Belgic Confession Article 32, "And therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws, which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever. Therefore, we admit only of that which tends to nourish and preserve concord, and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God."

Reply: The ground begs the question. The ground merely asserts that exclusive psalmody is a law of man. But the scriptures overwhelmingly require the singing of psalms in the worship of the church (see the reply to Ground 2 above). Furthermore, the scriptures never require the singing of other songs in the worship of the church (see the reply to Ground 2 above). Therefore, it is no law of man to preach to the congregation that when she worships God in church out of gratitude

for her salvation in Christ, she must come before the Lord with thanksgiving and worship him with psalms (Ps. 95:2) and that she must not worship him with any other songs than he has commanded in his word (Lord's Day 35).

Ground 7: The history of the Reformed churches demonstrates that the teaching of exclusive psalmody as law in worship has been rejected.

Reply: The history of the Reformed churches does not demonstrate that exclusive psalmody has been rejected. It certainly does not demonstrate that exclusive psalmody has been charged with the heresy of legalism. During reformation, Reformed churches always returned to exclusive psalmody. Dordt was a return to exclusive psalmody (with a few concessions that prove the rule); the Afscheiding was a return to exclusive psalmody; the very first reason for the formation of the Christian Reformed Church in 1857 was opposition to hymns and a return to the psalms; and the reformation of 2021 was a return to the psalms as God taught us the meaning of the psalms and the reality of Christ as the sweet psalmist of Israel.

On these four grounds, I ask that the consistory uphold my protest, declare its previous decisions to be in error, and take the necessary steps to restore my office and lift my discipline.

Warmly in Christ,  
Rev. Lanning



## Article CV: The New King and His Kingdom: Abraham, the Friend of God

**W**ith the calling of Abraham the history of God's covenant and kingdom runs into a new dispensation.

Essentially the covenant of God is the same throughout the ages. It is not thus, that there are a series of covenants God established with his people at different periods of history, that served their purpose for a time and were then discarded to be replaced by other covenants. No, the covenant of God is the same at all times. It is the same covenant before the deluge and after; the same covenant essentially that was established with Noah and that was established with Abraham; the same covenant that is established with Israel of the old and with Israel of the new dispensation. It is all the while the covenant of God with his people. And the root, the center, the head of that people is all through history the same Christ, the Seed of the woman par excellence, the Lion of Judah's tribe, the Root of David, the Lamb that standeth as though it hath been slain.

But although that covenant of God is essentially the same throughout the ages of the world's history, there are different historic dispensations of it. There is the dispensation before the deluge in the line of Seth. There is the dispensation immediately after the flood up to the time of Abraham's calling, the general dispensation of the Noahitish covenant. Mark, not a dispensation of general or common grace, but a general dispensation of grace. No specific family is as yet separated, no special nation as yet called to represent God's cause definitely in the world. There is the dispensation of Israel, of the covenant of Sinai, where God lays the foundation for the historic manifestation of his people as such

in the world. And there is, finally, the dispensation of the new covenant up to the second coming of Christ Jesus.

Once more, it is the same covenant throughout all the periods of history, but of the one covenant different historic dispensations.

Again, the history of these dispensations tells us the story of the continual, uninterrupted, organic development of God's covenant in the world. God carries out his eternal purpose. That eternal purpose is that all things may ultimately be gathered together in Christ Jesus, and that through Him God may be all in all. And the history of the various dispensations of God's covenant and kingdom presents a continued approach of realization of that eternal purpose of God. God does not retrace his steps in history. He never retreats. It may seem to us as if God is sometimes forced by the power of sin and the devil to change his course, to retreat temporarily, and to choose a new plan of action. In reality this is never the case. God always advances. His advance is absolutely irrepressible. He is never defeated. He never makes a mistake. He never fails to accomplish his own ends. History is not the record of a game of chess between God and the devil, so that God must carefully watch every move of the devil in order to calculate and make his own. But, if you want to make the comparison to a chess board at all, it is a game in which every move the devil makes is controlled by God in such a way as to be subservient to the certain victory of the Most High. Hence, there is no retreat on the part of God. There is no need of any retreat. Irresistibly God moves forward, always forward, even employing the very powers that mean to oppose Him and thwart his purpose to

advance farther and farther, until his purpose shall have been accomplished, the kingdom shall have been realized, and the eternal and perfect form of the covenant shall have been manifested in glory.

We emphasize this truth at this stage of our discussion to prevent misunderstanding. In the first place to intercept a possible impression, as if with the calling of Abraham the line of what is sometimes called “special” or “particular” grace commences. Thus the representation of this part of sacred history is often given. Before the appearance of Abraham on the stage of history all that is narrated has reference to common grace. Special grace commences with Abraham. This conception is, of course, entirely beside the representation of Scripture. The line of God’s covenant of grace commences immediately after the fall. The holy line of the seed of the woman reveals itself all through the period before the deluge, and runs over Noah and Shem, through Arphaxad and the patriarchs, directly to Abraham. Abraham is not essentially something new in history. He stands in the line of God’s covenant that is commenced in paradise. It is, as we have seen, not even true that at the time of Abraham the line of God’s covenant-people was almost or entirely extinct. Nothing could be farther removed from the actual condition at Abraham’s time. If we should consider nothing else than the line of the patriarchs from which Abraham springs, the line Shem–Terah, we may easily conclude that there must have been hundreds of people of God’s covenant living at that time. Besides, the line of which Terah was the last patriarch after the flood and from which Abraham sprang was by no means the only line. Shem’s generation was much broader; it included a good many more tribes and families than those of the patriarchs. As long as God’s covenant was not limited to Abraham and the people of Israel, as long as it was still founded on the general basis of the covenant with Noah, it is by no means unnatural to conjecture that there were people of God, covenant-people, recipients of God’s grace, even outside of the line of the

patriarchs. Such appearances as that of Melchisedec in the land of Canaan would entirely justify the inference. However this may be, when God called Abraham, He did not begin something essentially new, but develops the line of his covenant already existing. Abraham comes from an entire company of people of God.

If this is borne in mind, it will cast a somewhat different light upon the calling of Abram from Ur of the Chaldeans and later from Haran in Mesopotamia. The question arises, of course, why is Abram called? What was the purpose of this calling? Why must he be removed from Chaldea and Mesopotamia to live as a stranger in a strange country? If it is your conception that Abram lived in the midst of a people that knew not Jehovah, that wallowed in sin and that served other gods, and that at his time practically no one served the covenant-God any more, this conception will influence your answer to the question concerning the purpose of Abram’s calling. God wants to have a people. But that people has practically become extinct. It could not resist the idolatrous influence of its surroundings. And for that reason God now calls a person away from these surroundings and separates him in the literal sense, bringing him to a country in which he knows no man and can live in complete isolation. When God calls Abram, in other words, and brings him to Canaan, He gives him a place in a monastery that he may be free from all contact with the world. Abram must not only not be of the world, but he must be taken out of the world. He is given a place of spiritual safety. But if you understand that Abram is by no means a lonely child of God in danger of becoming corrupted through influence from his environment in his native country; if you remember that there were many children of God in Abram’s time, and that they lived exactly most numerous in the country whence Abram is called away, the country of the Semites; if you remember that Abram is called away from their midst, from the country where Shem even at that time lived and many others of God’s people with him; and, finally, if you remember that he

is led to the country that was chiefly settled by the descendants of Canaan, accursed of God,— I say if you remember and consider all these undeniable facts, the situation becomes quite different. Then the simple fact becomes that Abram is not called from heathendom and idolatry to a place of safety, but that exactly the opposite is true: he is called away from the midst of God's people to a land of accursed enemies of Jehovah. That this is actually the light in which we must try to understand Abram's calling is plain from the fact that long afterwards Isaac must marry a woman fetched from his former country and out of the midst of his former relationship, a woman that fears Jehovah. And still later Isaac and Rebekah deeply resent the marriage of Esau with the women of the country, while Jacob turns to the same community whence Abram was called there to find his wives. The question, therefore, is not: Why must Abram be separated from the midst of wicked people, that wallow in sin and endanger the patriarch as a lonely worshipper of Jehovah? but rather: Why is it that God calls Abram from the country and community where God's people generally lived to turn to the land of the Canaanites?

And finally, we must emphasize at this stage the truth that God's covenant is essentially always the same, to prevent the conception as if Abraham and Israel had really nothing but typical and symbolical significance. Also this representation is sometimes given. Fear of the Chiliastic belief in the eternal significance of the outward form of Israel as a nation sometimes leads us to forget, if not to deny, the fact that Israel was, in the old dispensation, very really the kingdom of God in the world, God's party in

the covenant. Surely, Israel was also typical. As a nation Israel was shadow, too. But it was not a mere shadow. It was also the true people of God in a very real sense of the word. And what is true of Israel is true of Abraham. He was not simply the father of believers. His history does not only have typical significance. His calling and separation is of significance for the manifestation of God's covenant at that time.

And, therefore, we must discuss three things in this connection. In the first place, we must consider Abram's calling and separation in the light of the significance this calling had for Abraham himself. In other words, we must look at Abraham personally as the friend of God and, as such, as God's party in the world. In the second place, we must consider the history of Abraham's life and walk in the world in the light of its typical significance for all the people of God in the world. And in the third place, we must discuss Abraham as the father of believers. The calling of Abraham is the beginning of a new dispensation of the covenant of grace, a dispensation that runs through Israel of the Old Testament, then loses its national form of the Israelitish theocracy in order to continue in the spiritual Israel of the new dispensation.

Three questions must be answered.

First of all, what was the significance of Abram's calling for himself?

Secondly, in what respect is the history of Abraham a shadow of the life of all believers in this world?

Thirdly, what is the importance of Abraham's separation for the future of God's covenant, for the development of God's kingdom after him?

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

