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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

CONTENTS

3 MEDITATION

4 FROM THE EDITOR

5 BOOK REVIEW
The Psalter

18 HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES
Article 13: Mankind's Relation to the Fallen King (continued)



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MEDITATION

And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

—Exodus 3:7–10

I know their sorrows.” Thus spake Jehovah regarding his people Israel.

What does it mean that God knew the sorrows of Israel? First, it means that God saw Israel being oppressed by Egypt. God was in the field and in the mud and at the worksite with his people as they labored under the cruel gaze of their taskmasters. God saw every glint of hatred in the eyes of the Egyptians. God saw every line of brutality etched into the Egyptian faces. God saw every blow inflicted upon every Israelite. God saw every welt raised on his people’s skin. God saw every cracked bone, every black eye, every bleeding contusion, every bruise. God looked into the faces of his people, and he saw everything written there. God saw their weariness, their anguish, their torment, their resignation, their despair. “I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt...I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.”

Second, that God knew the sorrows of Israel means that God heard the sorrowful cry of his people. God stood in the fields and heard the grunt of pain as the Egyptians’ whips met his sons’ flesh. God stood in the hovels and heard the desperate cries of his daughters as their infant sons were torn from their grasp. God stood at the ovens amidst the heat and the cinders and heard the exhausted sobs of his children as they tried to meet the daily tally of bricks. From every

corner of Egypt, the sighs and the cries and the groans of God’s people met his ears. “I have... heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters... Behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me.”

Third—and this cannot be fathomed—that God knew the sorrows of Israel means that God himself entered into their sorrows. Israel’s affliction was God’s affliction. Israel’s oppression was God’s oppression. Israel’s sorrow was God’s sorrow. When the Egyptians afflicted Israel, they afflicted God. How could such a thing be? God is not like man. God is blessed forever. All the cruelty of all the Egyptians could never touch God. And yet God said, “I know their sorrows.” Not merely this: I know *about* their sorrows. Not merely this: I know the *fact* of their sorrows. But this: I know their sorrows. That is, I, even I, know their sorrows. I know their sorrows with the knowledge of experience. I know their sorrows as my own sorrows. I know their sorrows!

Would you have more proof yet? Here it is. When Isaiah, many years later, mentioned the lovingkindness of the Lord, he used the strongest possible language about God’s dealings with Israel in Egypt: “In all their affliction he was afflicted” (Isa. 63:9). This is what God meant when he said, “I know their sorrows.”

The explanation is simple, but it is infinitely deep. God was afflicted in all the affliction of his

people through Jesus Christ. In the wonder of the incarnation, the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. The mystery of godliness is that God was manifest in the flesh. So close is the union between God and his people in Christ that when Egypt afflicted Israel, Egypt afflicted “the angel of his presence” (Isa. 63:9), who is Christ.

Thus it always is with God and his people. God knows the sorrows of his children, for Jesus Christ is a merciful and faithful high priest, who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. God sees, hears, and knows our groanings under the taskmaster of sin. He sees, hears, and knows our sighing by reason of the oppression of our enemies. He sees, hears, and knows our crying in our affliction. “I know their sorrows!”

And what do our merciful God and our faithful high priest do when they know our sorrows? God gives grace through Christ to help in time of need. “I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8).

“I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD” (Isa. 63:7). Here is the Lord’s love in Christ: “I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them.”

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

July already! The calendar turns, and how swiftly.
As Psalter #247:5 has it,

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

Or as Psalm 90:5 in the King James Version has it,

Thou carriest them away as with a flood;
They are as a sleep.

The poetry of the Psalter is beautiful and memorable and highly singable, but it wanders quite widely from the psalm. For the sake of comparison, the 1650 Scottish Metrical Version of Psalm 90 has

As with an overflowing flood
Thou carry’st them away.
They like a sleep are....

See the book review in this issue for an analysis of the Psalter and its free paraphrasing. And keep an eye out in future issues for a book review of the Scottish Metrical Version, the Lord willing. If any readers of *Reformed Pavilion* would be willing to share your experiences with your psalters, we would eagerly welcome your contributions.

The remainder of the rubrics will be familiar by now. We again publish Herman Hoeksema’s *Banner* article without comment, but the reader is referred to last week’s *From the Editor* for a few thoughts.

—AL

BOOK REVIEW

The Psalter. Unified Version: 1909. Copyrighted by the United Presbyterian Board of Publication (Pittsburgh: 1912). Copyright currently held by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (Grand Rapids: 1927). Several very slightly revised editions of the Psalter were made by the Protestant Reformed Churches, with the last revision in January of 2017. It is this last revised edition of the PRC from which all quotations in this review are made.

The Psalter of 1912 is the only psalter that many readers of *Reformed Pavilion* are familiar with. The Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) carried the Psalter with them out of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in 1924 and have used it as their only songbook in worship for their entire history. The Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) carried the Psalter with them out of the PRC in 2021 and use it as their only songbook in worship. Remnant Reformed Church carried the Psalter out of the RPC in 2023 and uses it as its only songbook in worship. Therefore, many readers of *Reformed Pavilion* who are affiliated with the above churches are very familiar with the Psalter, and, in fact, are familiar only with the Psalter.

The occasion for this book review of the Psalter of 1912 is a desire in Remnant Reformed Church to understand the book that we use to sing psalms in church. What are its strengths? What are its weaknesses? Are its strengths great enough to keep the Psalter? Are its weaknesses great enough to replace the Psalter? This book review is a first attempt to answer some of these questions by examining the Psalter. This review will only focus on the song portion of the Psalter, without examination of the doctrinal standards, liturgy, and Church Order, which are also printed in the Psalter. It is hoped that, God being gracious, this review will be profitable for those readers of *Reformed Pavilion* beyond Remnant Reformed Church as well.

Status of the Psalter

When the Psalter was approved in 1912, it became the church songbook for nine conservative

Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in North America. For example, the CRC adopted the Psalter as its church songbook in 1914 and used it into the 1930s. Since that time, every one of the original nine denominations has replaced the Psalter with a different songbook.

Today there are only a handful of smaller denominations and churches that exclusively use the Psalter as their church songbook. These denominations and churches are Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore (CERC), the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA), the Heritage Reformed Churches (HRC), the Netherlands Reformed Churches, the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines (PRCP), the Reformed Protestant Churches, the Reformed Protestant Churches in the Philippines, First Orthodox Reformed Protestant Church in the Philippines, Edmonton Protestant Reformed Church, and Remnant Reformed Church. As far as I know, this is an exhaustive list of those who still exclusively use the Psalter of 1912. The largest of those denominations—FRCNA, HRC, and PRC—have worked together through a joint committee since 2016 on a major revision of the Psalter. These churches have either recently completed or are nearing the completion of their revision. Two churches—CERC and PRCP—are sister churches of the PRC and so may consider following the PRC in adopting a revised version of the Psalter. This means that the Psalter as we currently know it is about to become all but extinct on the earth.

The Psalter Experience

Members of other denominations might have a little different relationship with the Psalter, but for those who trace their church membership back to the PRC, the Psalter is the only church songbook that they really know. The PRC carried the Psalter with them when they were expelled from the CRC in 1924 and when they organized in 1925. When the CRC moved away from the Psalter in the 1930s to introduce hymns, the PRC retained the Psalter. Generations of Protestant Reformed people for almost one hundred years have grown up on the Psalter. Those who grew up in the PRC have only sung the Psalter in church, as did their fathers, their grandfathers, and their great-grandfathers.

It is hard to describe just how influential that generational momentum is on one's soul. If the King James Version of the Bible was the warp of a Protestant Reformed young person's soul, then the Psalter was the weft. In church every pew had the Bible and the Psalter. The minister read from the Bible, and the congregation sang from the Psalter. Sunday morning, one sang the Psalter. Sunday evening, one sang the Psalter. Week after week. Month after month. Year after year. Generation after generation. The Psalter featured prominently in the school as well. The school supply list at the beginning of each year always included "Bible and psalter." Of course, "psalter" meant the 1912 Psalter, for who ever heard of another psalter? In school, day after day, the student-led devotions almost invariably included this prayer: "We thank thee for our Bibles and our psalters." Young souls (and old) were deeply impressed by the idea that when antichrist comes, he will take away our Bibles and our psalters. The Psalter has even become part of the lore of what it means to be Protestant Reformed. On that snowy Christmas Day in 1924, the first worship service of the newly expelled Herman Hoeksema and his congregation featured the singing of Psalter #422:6. Having just suffered the reproach of Christ for their confession of sovereign, particular grace, the members of the congregation filled their rented hall with these strains:

Thou art, O God, our boast, the glory of
our power;

Thy sovereign grace is e'er our fortress
and our tower.

We lift our heads aloft, for God, our
shield, is o'er us;

Through Him, through Him alone, whose
presence goes before us,

We'll wear the victor's crown, no more
by foes assaulted,

We'll triumph through our King, by
Israel's God exalted.

The Psalter was there at the beginning of the Reformed Protestant Churches as well. Gathered in January's bitter cold in 2021, the congregation filled the Boverhofs' barn with the warm refrains not only of #422 but also of #427:5.

The stone the builders had rejected,
And in contempt refused to own,
To their dismay has been selected
To be the foremost cornerstone.
This thing is from the Lord Almighty,
It is a marvel in our eyes;
Man cannot understand it rightly
Nor fathom it in any wise.

And when Remnant Reformed Church held its first worship service in a hot school gymnasium at the end of May 2023 after being compelled to separate from the RPC, the Psalter was there again. Having suffered the reproach of Christ for their confession of the sovereignty of God's will in worship, the members of the congregation sang Psalter #174:2 with their savior.

Through pain and trouble Thou hast led,
And humbled all our pride;
But, in the end, to liberty
And wealth Thy hand did guide.
Here in Thy house I give to Thee
The life that Thou dost bless,
And pay the solemn vows I made
When I was in distress.

All that is to say nothing yet of the spiritual life of devotion of those reared on the Psalter. In the homes mothers hum tunes from the Psalter as they work in their kitchens. In the truck on the way to work, fathers have words from the Psalter in their hearts. At the dinner table the family sometimes closes devotions with a selection from the Psalter. And in church the congregation, with its heart full of the gospel, sings with gusto a closing number from the Psalter. If one of these members would be called upon to lay down his life for the gospel tomorrow, he would go to his death with words and tunes from the Psalter in his heart and upon his lips.

Who can calculate the impact of the Psalter upon those who have been reared on it? The Psalter is woven into their souls, and they have a deep appreciation for it. Even those who are convicted that the Psalter has serious and even fatal weaknesses can nevertheless recognize the large place that the Psalter has had in their lives.

History of the Psalter

Where did the Psalter come from? The history of the Psalter began in 1893 with a problem. The problem was the proliferation of man-made hymns in the worship of the churches in North America. Hymns had not always been prevalent in the church, whether in North America or elsewhere in the world. In fact, for most of the church's existence since the apostles, the church sang psalms. Especially as one traces the history of the church through the Calvinistic branch of the Reformation, one finds that the church sang psalms. Where the odd hymn or two of human composition was sung, it was the exception and not the rule.¹ In North America the church had sung psalms in worship since the first settlers from England and Europe had arrived. The very first English book published in North America was a psalter: the Bay Psalm Book (1650).

However, by the eighteenth century there were powerful forces at work to displace psalmody and to introduce hymnody into the church. This movement was led by Isaac Watts, who considered the language of God's psalms to be unfit for Christians to sing. Watts embarked on a project to reword the psalms according to his own values and sensitivities, so that David would sound like Watts' misshapen idea of how a Christian should sound. Watts' arrogance and blasphemy is staggering.

The last gasp of English metrical psalters came in 1719, with the effort of Isaac Watts titled *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*. The author's aim, as he famously summarized it, was "to make David speak like a Christian." In addition to these paraphrases, he also published a variety of hymns.

The long, dark night of metrical psalmody began, if a date can be fixed, with the publication of Watts's *Imitations*...During the following century and a half, Watts's *Imitations* were the key to prising open the congregational repertoire in England, the United States, Canada, and even Scotland. Successive editions of hymnals displayed ever-declining numbers of psalm texts...

By the mid-19th century, psalm-singing churches in the United States were increasingly on the defensive as the flood of extra-biblical hymns swept across Christendom and all but extinguished the book that had been the sung praise of the Church throughout eighteen centuries.²

There were some English-speaking, psalm-singing denominations in North America that tried to hold on to psalmody, especially the

¹For the history of psalm singing in the new testament church, see Michael Bushell, *Songs of Zion: The Biblical Basis for Exclusive Psalmody*, 4th ed. (Norfolk, VA: Norfolk Press, 2011), 247–95 (chapter 6).

²Robert M. Copeland, "The Experience of Singing the Psalms," in *The Book of Psalms for Worship*, hardcover mini edition (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown and Covenant Publications, 2021), xv–xvi.

Reformed Presbyterians and the United Presbyterians. Although there were English psalters in existence at the time—The Scottish Metrical Version (1650) and the Bay Psalm Book (1650)—the Presbyterians in North America considered the language of those psalters to be outdated for modern English-speaking people. Therefore, from 1866 to 1889, these Presbyterian denominations in the United States independently produced several updated psalters that were considered to be more singable than the older psalters. This led to some confusion, as the Presbyterian churches now had to choose among several independently published psalters.

The Christian Reformed Church also held on to psalmody over against the proliferation of man-made hymns. In fact, opposition to hymns was the primary reason for a few congregations' separating from the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and forming the Christian Reformed Church in 1857. In a letter from the congregation of Graafschap, Michigan, to the classis of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church (today's RCA), the saints wrote,

Very Reverend Brethren!

We are obliged to give your reverences notice of our present ecclesiastical standpoint, namely, separating ourselves from your denomination, together with all Protestant denominations, with which we thoughtlessly became connected upon our arrival in America. We are uniting ourselves with the Seceded Reformed Church in the Netherlands [the *Afscheiding* churches—AL] and admonish your reverences herewith in love to walk on the same path with us. The reasons for this our separation, namely, 113 members, or communicants, are as follows:

1. The collection of eight hundred hymns, introduced contrary to the church order.

2. Inviting [people of] all [religious] persuasions to the Lord's Supper, excepting Roman Catholics.
3. Neglecting regularly to preach the Catechism, to catechize, and [to conduct] house visitation.
4. That no religious books are disseminated without the consent of other denominations, directing your attention to the Sabbath booklet, with the practice, by J. van der Meulen, in 1855.
5. And what grieves our hearts most in all of this is that there are members among you who regard our separation in the Netherlands as not strictly necessary, or [think that] it was untimely.
6. In the report of Rev. Wyckoff, the reverend gives us the freedom to be allowed to follow this ecclesiastical path.

Brethren, we are glad that almost the entire congregation, the number of members given above, with us, the consistory, and our dear little children, again stand upon the same standpoint on which our fathers enjoyed so much blessedness, and, oh, we should rejoice still more if the King of the Church should bring your reverences to this conviction. This is the duty of us all. The God of love be your reverences' counsellor and guide to follow the path of the truth.³

At first the Christian Reformed Church had no need for an English psalter. The churches still worshiped in Dutch at the time and so could use their beloved Dutch psalter. However, as the decades rolled on, the language of the motherland began to give way to the English of America. The CRC would soon need an English psalter.

As the nineteenth century came to a close, the psalm-singing churches in North America more and more felt the need for a uniform English

³Quoted in Earl Wm. Kennedy, *A Commentary on the Minutes of the Classis of Holland 1848–1876: A Detailed Record of Persons and Issues, Civil and Religious, in the Dutch Colony of Holland, Michigan*, vol. 2 (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2018), 712–23. Except where indicated, the brackets are Kennedy's.

psalter that all of them could use. The Presbyterians felt themselves being fractured by the several independently published psalters. The Christian Reformed Church needed an English psalter to replace its Dutch psalter. It was these needs that led nine denominations, including the United Presbyterian Church and the Christian Reformed Church, to work together on what would become the Psalter as we basically know it today. A member of the committee that worked on the Psalter relates the following history:

The movement for a Uniform Psalter was started in 1893, and after much correspondence nine Churches in Canada and the United States agreed to undertake the work. A Joint Committee of twenty-three members, ministers representing the different Church Assemblies, were selected to carry forward the work to an early and harmonious conclusion. The first meeting of this Joint Committee for actual work was held in New York City in 1901, though months had been previously given to preparation for the laborious task. For five years the Committee diligently prosecuted their responsible effort to versify the inspired Psalter, make it acceptable to the entire Christian Church, and thus unify and perfect the praises of the Lord according to His own appointment. The members privately studied to secure the true translation, the most suitable meter, the best poetic expression for the exact thought of the text, the correct accent of every word, and a natural rhyme. The whole Committee met twice a year to compare the results of private study, consider and decide upon proposed renderings, and, if possible, reach unanimous conclusions. Nine public sessions of the Committee were held, continuing for about ten hours a day for ten or fifteen days at each session.⁴

The first version of the uniform psalter was finished in 1905. After being sent to the churches for review for several years, a more or less finished version was published in 1909. After further review yet, the final version of the uniform psalter was published in 1912, which final version has been known as the Psalter ever since.

The Christian Reformed Church adopted the Psalter in 1914 as its official songbook for worship. Ten years later, when the CRC deposed Herman Hoeksema and others, the Protestant Reformed Churches carried the Psalter with them as their songbook and have used it ever since. Even when the CRC introduced hymns in the 1930s, the CRC continued to include much of the Psalter as the psalm selections in its new psalter hymnals. Thus the Psalter of 1912 became the songbook that generations of Christian Reformed and Protestant Reformed people knew. Especially for the Protestant Reformed Churches and her descendants, there simply was no other songbook for the church.

Strengths of the Psalter

The Psalter has several strengths that have commended it for use. First, the Psalter intends to be a psalter and not a hymnal. The Psalter was born during a particularly fierce assault upon psalmody. Satan wages continual warfare against psalmody. From Jesus' day—when Satan twisted the words of the psalms to tempt Christ (Matt. 4:6)—until today—when Satan has removed psalm singing from the worship of almost every church in the world—Satan has ranted and raged against psalmody without ceasing. And no wonder! The psalms are Jesus' songs. The psalms are the sweet doctrine of God. In the psalms Jesus sets God to music and sings God to God in the midst of God's people. How sweet the psalms are to God! How odious the psalms are to Satan! Therefore, Satan wages ceaseless warfare against psalmody in the church.

⁴J. C. K. Milligan, "Psalm Versification—The Uniform Metrical Psalter" in John McNaugher, ed., *The Psalms in Worship: A Series of Convention Papers Bearing upon the Place of Psalms in the Worship of the Church* (Pittsburgh, PA: The United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1907), 431–32.

In the nineteenth century Satan prosecuted his battle against psalmody through Isaac Watts and the proliferation of hymns. Characteristically, the devil fought through deceit. The devil pretended to give David to God's people. Watts' "psalm book" was even entitled *The Psalms of David*. But the devil gave to the people a perversion of David. Watts' book was *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*. Just as Satan had quoted David perversely to Jesus in the wilderness, so Satan gave David perversely to the people through Watts. Satan had no interest in David. Satan only had an interest in leading the people away from David. Step one was to give the people a corrupted version of David. Once the people had become accustomed to remaking David in their own image, step two was to lead the people away from David altogether. So effective was Satan's strategy—strictly under the sovereign control of God to accomplish his own secret purpose—that almost no church today sings David with any regularity. The songs of the sweet psalmist of Israel are almost entirely absent in the worship of the church. Even among those few churches that sing David, some of those churches claim that there is no principle reason that they ought to sing David but that they sing David because they like to.

In the midst of that fierce battle against psalmody, the Psalter was born as a stand for psalmody and as a stand against the hymnody that was flooding the churches. This endears the Psalter to the proponent of exclusive psalmody. Rather than appreciating the Psalter merely for practical or traditional reasons, the exclusive psalmist finds himself in essential agreement with the Psalter's stand for psalmody and against hymnody.

Second, the Psalter contains a wide variety of beautiful, memorable, singable poetry and music. The words of the psalms were arranged with a remarkable precision of rhyme and meter. There is never, or at least hardly ever, a forced or awkward pronunciation when one sings the Psalter. The committee precisely arranged each syllable and each accent with their correspond-

ing notes so that the pronunciation of all the words would feel natural. The rhymes are true rhymes, and the words fit the meter, so that those who sing the Psalter can simply sing it, without having to puzzle out which syllable should go with which note or how to pronounce this word to make it rhyme with that word.

The committee that produced the Psalter scoured the world for appropriate tunes. Where good tunes were available, they used them. Where new tunes or arrangements were needed, they composed them. Without ever having to take a class on music appreciation, those who sing the Psalter are exposed to a wide variety of the best music. The Psalter includes tunes from great classical composers such as George Frideric Handel (62, 354, 406), Franz Joseph Haydn (131, 261, 292, 375, 385), Felix Mendelssohn (3, 117, 154), Dmitry Bortniansky (137), Ludwig van Beethoven (2, 217), and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (36, 81, 208, 251). The Psalter includes tunes from the great Reformation, including Martin Luther's *Ein' Feste Burg* (128) and tunes from John Calvin's Genevan Psalter (189, 268, 353). The Psalter includes traditional melodies from various European peoples, including German melodies (34, 87, 146, 170, 198, 265), English melodies (9, 69, 169), a Scotch melody (212), a Welsh melody (201), a Greek melody (77), an Italian hymn (408), an Austrian hymn (261), a Portuguese hymn (57), a Sicilian hymn (413), and a Spanish hymn (64). The Psalter includes tunes and arrangements of the psalms from other songbooks that were already in existence, including the Scottish Metrical Version (247), St. Alban's Tune Book (166), Greatorex's Church Music (331), Daye's Psalter (185), and Crown of Jesus Music (214). The Psalter includes a wide variety of music styles, from simple chanting (199, 307, 348) to complex parts (254).

The committee that drafted the Psalter also deliberately used a wide variety of meters. The meter of a tune refers to the number of "beats" or syllables that the tune has in each line. For example, common meter is 8 6 8 6: eight beats in the first line, six beats in the second line,

eight in the third, and six in the fourth. Psalter #53—“The Lord’s my Shepherd, I’ll not want”—is a well-known example of this common meter. Wherever one sees “C. M.” in the Psalter, it refers to this 8 6 8 6 common meter. But the Psalter also includes many other meters, allowing for a wide range and variety of music.

So rich is the music in the Psalter that it is conceivable that a gifted music teacher in a Christian school could teach an entire course on music theory and music appreciation using nothing but the music in the Psalter.

Third, a strength of the Psalter is that it assigns one tune to one number. Some psalters mix and match tunes and psalm selections, so that one week a congregation might sing a psalm to one tune, and the next week the congregation might sing the very same words to another tune. The Psalter, however, has one tune for each number. When one sings #53, for example, one will always sing that number to its own dedicated tune. The potential disadvantage to this is that someone who is new to the Psalter might find it daunting to learn hundreds of tunes. The Psalter might feel unfamiliar to him for a long time. But the advantage of dedicating one tune to one number is that the tune instantly brings the words to mind. Those who sing the Psalter only need to hear a small snatch of a tune to know the words that go with it. In the wee hours of the morning with the baby, the sleepy mother finds the familiar tune to be invaluable in bringing the psalm to her heart. In the wee hours of the morning with mother, the hungry baby already begins to learn the melody of his worship as mother hums and softly sings about their shepherd. In times of weariness, elation, distress, joy, and persecution, the child of God does not have to rack his brain to come up with the words of a psalm. The melody that he has sung scores and hundreds of times carries the words of the psalm effortlessly to his heart and lips.

The Psalter’s Weakness: Aesthetic Paraphrasing

For all its strengths, the Psalter has one crippling weakness. The Psalter’s weakness is that

it followed a bad principle in setting the psalms to music. Whenever the psalms are set to music, there must be a principle that guides the work. There are many difficult decisions to make in setting the psalms to music, and if one does not have a principle to guide him in those decisions, the difficulties would bury him. For example, is it important to set the actual words of the psalm to music, or is it sufficient merely to set the idea of the psalm to music? How much poetic license does one have to make the psalm fit into English rhyme and meter? Is it legitimate to omit portions of the psalm? Is it legitimate to jump around within the psalm? Is it legitimate to add material to the psalm for poetic or musical reasons?

These questions inevitably arise in setting the psalms to music because the psalms in the Bible are not written with meter and rhyme. This is true in our English translation in the King James Version (KJV), but this is also true in the original Hebrew. The psalms in Hebrew do not follow a set meter. The ends of the lines do not rhyme. The beauty of Hebrew poetry is not in the cadence of the words or the rhyme of the words but in the thought of the words. Instead of rhyming sounds, Hebrew psalms “rhyme” thoughts. There are often two and sometimes three parallel thoughts lined up. The beauty of Hebrew verse is in the interplay and mutual illumination of those parallel thoughts.

Therefore, when one sets the psalms to music in English with meter and rhyme, he will inevitably face many questions. When he faces those questions, he must have a principle that will guide him. The principle that one follows is the most important thing about his psalter. The principle will affect his entire psalter in every number, either for good or bad. That is also why an evaluation of the Psalter does not need to proceed number by number through all the selections to determine whether the Psalter is good or not. There could be endless discussions, improvements, and tweaks that one makes to this or that number. Rather, one’s evaluation of the Psalter must deal with the principle behind

the Psalter. The Psalter stands or falls on its principle.

What is the Psalter's principle for setting the psalms to music? We could call the Psalter's principle *aesthetic paraphrasing*. What does *aesthetic paraphrasing* mean? First, the Psalter aimed to be mainly a *paraphrase* and not a *translation*. That is, the committee that produced the Psalter did not sit down with the original Hebrew text and make a new translation of the psalms into English. The committee did consult the original Hebrew text, but the committee did not produce a translation of the Hebrew text into English words. Rather, the committee took two existing English translations of the Bible—the King James Version and the Revised Version—and produced a new paraphrase using the language of those versions. In their paraphrase the committee rearranged words, selected new words, omitted words, skipped verses, added verses, and added words as they set their paraphrase to music.

Second, because it was a paraphrase, the Psalter did not aim to set forth the exact *words* of the psalms, but it aimed to set forth the *thoughts* of the psalms. The difference between words and thoughts may appear to be minor at first. After all, if the Psalter gets the basic idea of the psalms right, isn't that enough? Nevertheless, the difference between faithfully reproducing precise words and merely reproducing thoughts is enormous. God did not merely inspire *thoughts* in his servants and then leave it to them to put those thoughts into words. Rather, God inspired *words* in his servants. God inspired each and every word. God inspired precise words with precise verb tenses and precise noun cases. God precisely inspired whether a word was singular or plural. All scripture—every last word—is given by inspiration of God (II Tim. 3:16). And by the precise words that he inspired, God gave his people the exact thoughts that he intended. The words carry the thoughts. The thoughts are not independent of the words. Rather, the thoughts are conveyed by the words, precisely and exactly. Therefore, in setting the psalms to music in

English, the goal must be to set forth the words that God gave. The committee that produced the Psalter, however, forthrightly acknowledged that it aimed to reproduce the thoughts but that it did not aim for a strict word-for-word rendering of the psalms.

This means that the Psalter is not truly a *versification* of the psalms. Even though the committee that produced the Psalter often spoke of *versification*, the committee really meant *paraphrasing*. Versification is rendering a passage into verse with meter and rhyme. Versification takes a passage that does not have meter or rhyme and expresses that passage in metered and rhymed verse. When one versifies a psalm, then, he works with the words of the psalm to render those words in metered and rhymed verse. The result of a versification is the actual words of the psalm, arranged with meter and rhyme. The metered and rhymed verse can be divided into stanzas, and the versified psalm can then be sung to a tune.

Paraphrasing, on the other hand, is restating a passage in other words than the original. Paraphrasing takes a passage and produces a different version of that passage with new phrasing. Paraphrasing is much looser than versification, for paraphrasing allows for the rearrangement of thoughts, the addition of thoughts, and the omission of thoughts. When one paraphrases a psalm, then, he does not stick to the words of the psalm but restates the psalm in his own words. Sometimes the paraphrase will be almost exactly the psalm, sometimes the paraphrase will be close to the psalm without being exact, sometimes the paraphrase will be only loosely related to the psalm, and sometimes the paraphrase will be nearly unrecognizable as having anything to do with the psalm.

Third, the Psalter valued aesthetics over a strictly faithful reproduction of the psalm. That is, the poetic phrasing, the rhyme, the meter, the tunes, and other aesthetic considerations drove the paraphrasing of each psalm. The committee was willing to sacrifice faithfulness to the text in order to produce a poetically and

musically beautiful songbook. The committee was not indifferent to the text, but the committee was exceedingly concerned with poetic and musical beauty.

Thus we could call the principle of the Psalter *aesthetic paraphrasing*. Writing in 1905, when the first draft of the Psalter was completed, one of the members of the committee explained the committee's principle. The explanation contains some sound language about the original text and warnings against extended paraphrasing. However, notice the emphasis on "thought" above "word," "inspired sentiment" above "word-for-word rendering," and "tastes" above "text."

The difficulties in the way of Psalm versification are neither few nor small. The Committee were charged to keep close to the original text, to conform to the language of the Authorized and Revised translations, to avoid extended paraphrases, to provide a variety of meters, and to express the inspired thought with chasteness and elegance of style in accordance with modern standards and tastes. It has been well said that a translation "must not be so literal as to convert rich prose into poor verse, not so faithful as to be punctilious in interpretations, nor yet bound to the Hebrew idioms, while preserving the precise form and color of the inspired sentiment."

Hebrew poetry has neither rhyme nor meter, and to introduce them without marring the text compels poetic license for defects in both. Hebrew parallelisms differ greatly in the fulness or brevity of the truth expressed, but every line must fit the poetic measure, and something must be omitted or added to the original. But how much of the text may be omitted, or how much padding may be inserted without departing from a faithful translation? An exact metrical reproduction of the original is impossible: and a word-

for-word rendering would be neither meter nor a true translation. The Standard American Version says in the Preface, "The conception of the writer is not really reproduced by a literal translation. The Hebrews attributed mental actions or emotions to various physical organs, whereas in English such a trope is limited almost entirely to the heart and brains... The attempt to translate literally from the original has not infrequently led to Hebraisms which had better be avoided, which in some cases must be called bad and outlandish." This is specially true in the translation of poetry in which the Oriental figures of speech abound. The Joint Committee here met their greatest hindrance to harmonious action. Some shuddered at every word of the original that was omitted, and trembled for the Ark when a word or phrase was added to the text, and yet one or the other must be done, or the work would stop. In nearly every case, after careful comparison of views, the form closest to the exact thought of the original was followed, and the truth of the text was retained without sectarian bias. The names of nations hinder the use of Psalms LXXXIII [83] and LXXXVII [87]. Is it essential to retain these names, and sing such a verse as this

"Gebal, and Ammon, Amalek,
Philistia, those of Tyre,
And Assur joined with them, to help
Lot's children they conspire"?

The Committee retained some names to show the history referred to, and instead of the others made it, "The nations far and near," including the hostile peoples of to-day with those of the past. In the Eighty-Seventh Psalm the names are given literally, but all in one central verse, which may be omitted and the thought retained.⁵

⁵Milligan, "Psalm Versification—The Uniform Metrical Psalter," 432–33.

Analysis of Aesthetic Paraphrasing: Unfaithful

The Psalter's principle of aesthetic paraphrasing is a bad principle. Aesthetic paraphrasing does not do justice to the most important thing about the psalms: the actual words of the psalms. The words of the psalms are the most important thing because the psalms are the inspired word of God. The psalms are Christ's songs that he sang in the Old Testament by his Spirit (II Sam. 23:1–2), that he sang on earth (Matt. 26:30), and that he continues to sing now in the midst of his church (Heb. 2:12). Because the psalms are the inspired word of God and the songs of Christ, man is not at liberty to do as he pleases with those words. But aesthetic paraphrasing departs from the words of the psalms. Aesthetic paraphrasing departs from the words of the psalms consciously and deliberately. Aesthetic paraphrasing makes departure from the words of the psalms a principle matter. That is, the committee felt it to be its principled duty to change the words of the psalms to make them appropriate for modern audiences.

For example, one marvels at the arrogance of the committee in making this statement: "The names of nations hinder the use of Psalms LXXXIII [83] and LXXXVII [87]." As if a committee of men knows better than God what should be in Psalms 83 and 87! Did God give his church songs that could not be useful to her in every age? Do God's words in God's songs hinder their use until man comes along and removes the hindrances? The committee thought so and supposedly improved on God's inspired words by paraphrasing those words. Although that attitude toward God's inspired word is preposterous and even blasphemous, that is the principle of aesthetic paraphrasing at work.

One could multiply examples endlessly of how the Psalter departs from the actual words of the psalms. The Psalter omits key verses. Psalm 137:9—"Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones"—is not found anywhere in the Psalter. The Psalter

adds man's spin. Psalter #255:4—"While He proffers peace and pardon let us hear His voice today"—is not only dubious theology, but also it is nowhere found in Psalm 95—"To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart." The Psalter changes what is first person to second or third person and vice versa. Whereas Psalm 95:8 calls in the second person, "Harden not your heart," Psalter #255:4 changes it to the first person: "Lest, if we our hearts should harden..." The Psalter departs so far from the words and even meanings of the psalms that some stanzas are hardly recognizable as the psalms. Psalm 4:3—"But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him"—is paraphrased in Psalter #8:1 as "On the good and faithful God has set His love; when they call He sends them blessings from above." The Psalter even occasionally takes verses found elsewhere and blends them into its paraphrase. Psalter #42, which paraphrases Psalm 19, includes a chorus which is actually not from Psalm 19 but from Psalm 119:97: "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day." One could go through the Psalter number by number, comparing it with the King James Version, and find many such examples. The example of Psalms 83 and 87 given by the committee and the examples given here are not isolated instances. Rather, these examples illustrate how the committee's principle of aesthetic paraphrasing operated throughout the entire Psalter.

One historian summarized the committee's work on the Psalter this way: "Their final version...forthrightly valued elegance and aesthetics over fidelity to the Hebrew text. It simply omitted psalm portions the committee thought tasteless or sub-Christian."⁶ One denomination on the original committee rejected the principle of aesthetic paraphrasing, rejected the Psalter that was produced by the committee, and withdrew from the project. "The Reformed Presbyterian Church had already withdrawn from the joint committee and rejected both the Uniform Version and the principles upon which it was based."⁷

⁶ Copeland, "The Experience of Singing the Psalms," xvi.

⁷ Copeland, "The Experience of Singing the Psalms," xvi.

The Psalter's principle of aesthetic paraphrasing is all the more egregious when set against the Psalter's principle for translating God's names. The committee that produced the Psalter valued strict faithfulness when translating God's names. This principle of strict faithfulness to the names of God is commendable. The committee's explanation of its principle warms the heart.

The divine names are most important, as they designate the true God, His Being and unsearchable character. Each name is a distinct description, an added revelation of His Person and perfections, a new view of the depth and height of the Infinite God, our Saviour; and the name used by the inspired writer is exactly the character that the Holy Spirit there desires to be the matter of our praise. If we omit or change the name given by the Psalmist, or add a name, we change the divine thought for a poetic fancy, and substitute our idea in its place. To insert a name of God to make a rhyme or fill out a measure is not due reverence.⁸

What a tremendous principle! The Psalter took the names of God in the psalms to be "exactly the character that the Holy Spirit there desires to be the matter of our praise." The Psalter took care not to "omit or change the name given by the Psalmist, or add a name," lest "we change the divine thought." Therefore, the Psalter treated the names of God in the psalms with "due reverence." But then why did the Psalter not give the same due reverence to God's words as it gave to God's names? Not only the names of God but also all the inspired words of the psalms are exactly what "the Holy Spirit there desires to be the matter of our praise." To omit or change or add phrases and thoughts is to "change the divine thought." The fact that the committee followed the blessed principle of strict faithfulness when dealing with the names of God but abandoned that principle when dealing with the

rest of God's inspired words in the psalms makes the committee's principle of aesthetic paraphrasing all the more odious. It means that the committee knew very well that it was changing the divine thought for the sake of poetic and musical elegance.

The Psalter's bad principle of aesthetic paraphrasing is not merely to be explained from the fact that translation is difficult or that versifying is difficult. There is no doubt that translation from Hebrew to English is difficult. Each language has its own unique sentence structure, idioms, vocabulary, and grammar. Nevertheless, it is possible to make a faithful translation from Hebrew into English. God himself approved the concept of translating his word, for the apostles of our Lord often used a translation of the Old Testament scriptures in their teaching and preaching. The Old Testament was written by God in Hebrew. By the time of the apostles, there was a translation of the Hebrew Bible in Greek, which Greek translation of the Old Testament was known as the Septuagint. In their preaching the apostles would often quote from the Greek Septuagint rather than from the Hebrew original. They quoted the Greek Septuagint as the word of God. They quoted the Greek Septuagint as having God's authority for the faith and life of the people.

The matter of translation is analogous to the matter of versification. The original Hebrew Bible could be rendered in Greek translation in such a way that the Greek translation was the Bible. So also the psalms can be rendered in English translation and verse in such a way that the versification is the psalms. Just as the psalms in a faithful English translation are still the psalms, so also the psalms in a faithful English versification are still the psalms. A congregation that has a faithful versification of the psalms has the psalms. When a congregation sings her faithful versification of the psalms, she is singing the psalms. The church does not need to sing or chant the King James Version to sing the psalms. The church does not need to sing or

⁸ Milligan, "Psalm Versification—The Uniform Metrical Psalter," 433–34.

chant the original Hebrew to sing the psalms. When she sings a faithful versification of the psalms in her own tongue, she is singing the psalms.

The key in both translation and versification is faithfulness. The principle that must guide both translation and versification of the psalms is *strict faithfulness*. The psalms are not the word of man but the word of God. Even when God gives the psalms to man for man to sing to him, the psalms remain the word of God. The church, grateful to God for giving her his own songs to sing to him in Christ, will not be careless with the psalms but exceedingly careful. It would be intolerable to the grateful church for those psalms to be corrupted. It would be intolerable to her for man to sprinkle his lies among the psalms. It would be intolerable to her for man to add his ideas to the psalms. It would be intolerable to her for man to leave parts of the psalms out. It would be intolerable to her for man to add his spin to the psalms. The church's overriding concern above all others in versifying the psalms must be faithfulness to the psalms as the word of God.

The idea of being faithful to the word of God is not foreign or strange to Remnant Reformed Church. The reason that we use the King James Version of the Bible is because it is the most faithful English translation of the word of God. Even though much of the English-speaking world finds the language of the KJV to be too archaic and awkward for modern English ears, we love the KJV for its faithfulness. Would we be satisfied with anything less than faithfulness in our Bible translation? Wouldn't we sharply criticize unfaithful translations as playing loose with the word of God? Don't we demand that our ministers and teachers use the KJV as a faithful translation, even as our ministers and teachers willingly demand it of themselves? Faithfulness to the word is not a new concept for Remnant Reformed Church. Unfaithfulness in versification will become just as unsatisfactory and eventually intolerable to the church as unfaithfulness in translation.

Faithfulness is not a matter of legalistic rule-following for the church but a matter of joyful gratitude. God in his mercy has redeemed his people from their sins. God in his kindness has brought his beloved people into his house through Jesus Christ. God in his grace has given them the right to worship him in their head, Jesus Christ the Righteous. God in his love has given them Christ's songs to sing with him. The church thus redeemed desires nothing so much as to worship her God faithfully. "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple" (Ps. 27:4).

It is the Psalter's infidelity to the words of the psalm that makes its principle of aesthetic paraphrasing unsatisfactory and eventually intolerable for the church. Aesthetic paraphrasing is not faithful to the psalms. If aesthetic paraphrasing is faithful to anything, it is faithful to musical and poetic principles. The Psalter excels as a singable book. But the Psalter sacrifices the most important thing—faithfulness to the words of the psalms—in order to produce the less important thing—a beautiful sound and form.

What to Do?

If a people finds the principle of aesthetic paraphrasing unsatisfactory and eventually intolerable, what should that people do? First, there must be instruction so that everyone understands the principles involved. Especially for a people that has used the Psalter for generations, it may just feel right to use the Psalter and feel wrong to change it. We like what is familiar, and the Psalter is very familiar. We like what we were taught, and we were taught to use the Psalter. Therefore, there must be instruction in the principles through preaching, through classes, through writing, and through discussion. Then people will be able to decide based on understanding and not based on emotion or on tradition for tradition's sake.

Second, a people that is considering changing its psalter must recognize that there will be a

wide range of convictions and feelings about such a change. Even if everyone understands the principles together, that will not make everyone equally enthusiastic about implementing the principles. Some people will fully embrace implementing the principles. It will even be very exciting to them, and they will be enthusiastic. Others will understand the principles and be committed to implementing them, but they will not be so eager and perhaps even will be sad and nostalgic. Others yet will go along willingly with the implementation of principles, but they will not necessarily be committed to the implementation and will always miss their psalter. Others yet might even disagree with the principles but be willing to go along with their implementation. And others yet may be actively opposed to the principles, so that they feel compelled to protest or even to leave. The explanation for this wide range of convictions and feelings is that we are sheep who must be led and who do not see and understand everything all at once or all at the same time. Recognizing this wide range of convictions and feelings, a church's members must operate with patience and love one for another. Let every man look not only on his own things but also on the things of others. Let each one endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but let the humble mind of Christ be in each one. Let each one have charity. And in that mutual love let each one join with his brother in living by principles, so that we do not operate on what this one or that one feels, but we operate on principle together.

Third, the problems with the Psalter cannot be fixed by revising the Psalter. One can understand the desire to revise the Psalter. Everyone who uses the Psalter acknowledges that there could be improvements to it. And revising the Psalter may be less shocking to a congregation than replacing the Psalter. At least with a revision, one would still recognize his songbook as the Psalter. The whole point of a revision is that one essentially keeps the original but improves upon it, so that a revised version would still be recognizable as the Psalter. However, the

problem with the Psalter is not that it needs to be tweaked here and there. The problem with the Psalter is that its underlying principle is wrong. Aesthetic paraphrasing is not faithful to the words of the psalms. One cannot fix an underlying principle with a revision.

Perhaps an illustration would help. The New International Version (NIV) of the Bible rests on the principle of *functional equivalence* (formerly known as *dynamic equivalence*). *Functional equivalence* means that the translators seek English words or phrases that function the same as the Hebrew and Greek words or phrases. In functional equivalence the translators do not seek to translate the actual words of Hebrew or Greek into English, but they seek to translate the *ideas* into English. The English words that they choose may not be the actual translation of the Hebrew or Greek words, but the English words have an equivalent function to the Hebrew or Greek words. Thus the NIV rests on a bad principle. One could not fix the NIV by revising it verse by verse. The NIV's problem is not that it needs some tweaks or even many tweaks but that its fundamental principle of translation is wrong.

The NIV's principle of functional equivalence is comparable to the Psalter's principle of aesthetic paraphrasing. Just as one cannot fix the NIV by revising it, so one cannot fix the Psalter by revising it. An entirely different principle and approach to translation are needed.

This illustration also may help to underscore to those who use the King James Version how the Psalter is ultimately incompatible with the KJV. The KJV and the Psalter rest on two opposite and contradictory principles of translation. The KJV rests on the principle of strict faithfulness, in which the actual words of the original were translated into English. The Psalter rejected the principle of strict faithfulness, except for the names of God, and instead omitted, added, changed, and even corrupted the actual words of the original for the sake of formal elegance. The King James Version of the Bible and the Psalter make strange bedfellows. It is hard for them to walk together, for they do not agree.

Fourth, if a church is considering replacing the Psalter, that church will have to follow a clear program so that the congregation can move together. It will require time for the congregation to learn the principles, to become convicted that a change is needed, and to become familiar with a better psalter. The Christian school would be invaluable in this program. In Calvin's Geneva the Genevan Psalter became familiar to the church through the school. The children in school learned the psalms during the week. On Sunday in church the adults learned

the psalms by listening to and singing with the children.

Fifth, all of this raises the question of whether there is a psalter available that is preferable to the Psalter. There are several other psalters. The most faithful is probably the Scottish Psalter, also known as the Scottish Metrical Version (SMV) or the Psalms of David in Meter/Metre. We will have to review the SMV in an upcoming issue, the Lord willing.

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

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Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article XIII. Mankind's Relation to the Fallen King (continued)

We have obtained some conception of the idea of the covenant in general. It is an alliance between God and man based on the pledge of mutual faith and truth in all things. In the future we will gradually come to a more clearly defined conception of this central idea. What we wish to discuss first of all is the question: Is this doctrine of the Covenant, particularly that of the Covenant of Works, founded on Scripture, or is it a mere dogmatical myth finding its origin in the arid, dogmatizing mind of some theologian? Is it living, Scriptural truth, or dead human philosophy?

This is an important question.

Surely, we are a Reformed people, and as we have stated last week, the doctrine of the Covenant is perhaps more than any other element of our faith peculiarly Reformed. But in the first place it might be urged with apparent justice that the Covenant of works is not even mentioned in any of the official standards of our Church. True, it may be implied in Articles 14

and 15 of our Confession of Faith, speaking of the fall of Adam, the corruption of human nature and the imputation of his sin to all mankind; it may also be taught implicitly in the first part of the Heidelberg Catechism which traces the corruption of human nature and our incapacity to do any good to the fall and disobedience of our first parents in Paradise; it may, finally, be tacitly comprised in the Canons of Dordrecht, which express in the very first article, that "all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and are deserving of eternal death"; the fact, nevertheless, remains that the term "Covenant of works" is not found in any of the Standards of the Reformed Churches. Besides, even if the very term were found in our Confession, as true Reformed people we would not be satisfied before we had clearly grasped the Scriptural ground for this doctrine, and could demonstrate the harmony between our doctrine and the Word of our God. We are not Roman Catholics in our attitude to the Standard and the doctrine of the Church. We are not satisfied with a certain implicit faith

that the Church is right and that the doctrine of the Church must necessarily be in harmony with Scripture. We want to see, we want to be able to point out, to prove this harmony to be a fact. Not before he can appeal clearly and consciously to Scripture as the basis of his faith can a truly Reformed man be satisfied. Surely, he honors tradition in the good sense of that word. He is not a revolutionist, he always thinks twice before he differs with the doctrine of the Church and breaks with the past, for he believes that also in the past the Spirit dwelt in the Church, leading her in all the truth. And, therefore, he is not easily persuaded to set aside a doctrine of the Church. But nevertheless he cannot be satisfied before he personally is able to trace every stream and brooklet of the waters of his confession to the main spring of the Word of God.

It is only their connection with the Fountain of the Word that makes the various currents of our doctrine living streams of truth and prevents them from turning into stagnant pools of dead dogma. And it is the consciousness of that connection that must keep us from the danger of cold intellectualism and at the same time make us truly strong in the faith. And the more clearly we see the connection between the faith of our fathers and the living Word of our God, the more that faith will become truly and consciously our own, and will be scintillant with life and meaning.

And, therefore, also in regard to our doctrine of the Covenant of Works we must be able to appeal to Scripture as our basis.

However, it is above all in this connection that the Reformed man expresses his dissatisfaction with the method that would build a doctrine on the foundation of a large number of separate and disconnected passages and texts from Scripture. That is the method pursued, indeed, by many in our day. And it must be confessed that it is a method that is calculated to produce quick results, adapted to gain a sudden hold upon the minds and hearts of the masses. It is the secret of success for the Adventist preacher in many a community. But it is at the same time a method far too superficial to have any lasting effect. And besides, regardless of results,

to the Reformed mind Scripture is no collection of wise sayings, no accumulation of precept upon precept, but a living organism, the revelation of wisdom to the mind of man, adapted to be grasped and assimilated by the latter as the living truth. And it is especially in regard to the doctrine of the Covenant that this view of Scripture becomes apparent.

And then we may first of all observe that our Reformed theologians have justly pointed out, that the doctrine of the Covenant is after all nothing but an explanation of the only possible relation between God and man. It is the “*conditio sine qua non*” that is, the prime requisite, the only conceivable basis, the very nature of all religion, conceived of as communion between the creator and the creature. And for that reason they have even expressed their comparative indifference with regard to the term “Covenant of Works” if only you maintain the essence of the thing. You may discard the term, if you please, the idea and the essence of that Covenant can not be denied. For God is the absolute and infinite Sovereign of heaven and earth, infinite in His perfections, infinitely above all that is called creature. If the creature shall ever be able to stand in a conscious relation to that Highest Majesty, not only in the relation of creature to the Creator, of servant and Lord, but also in the relation of the child to his Father, of friend to his friend, then it is absolutely necessary that this Supreme Lord of heaven and earth stoop down to enter of His own free grace into such relationship with the creature. And after all, you arrive at the conclusion that the Infinite God entered into a covenant with His finite creature.

Besides, it must not be forgotten that except for the doctrine of the Covenant, the attainment of eternal life as the reward of full and unconditional obedience becomes an inconceivability. Man was not created with eternal life. He had life, but not eternal life. He was placed in a state in which he could refrain from sin, but he had not entered into the state in which he could never sin anymore. He was to merit that eternal life by his obedience. But the question arises immediately: How was this possible? Suppose

for a moment that our doctrine of the Covenant of works was a mere fiction. Grant, for the sake of argument, that there was no such a conscious entering into a covenant relationship on the part of God with man. Could Adam ever have merited eternal life by his obedience? In other words, was there a necessary and natural connection between obedience and eternal life? Was God, aside from the promise in the Covenant, in duty bound to reward man's obedience with eternal life? Can the creature make wages with the Creator? The answer is clear. It is very emphatically negative. If Adam had lived a thousand years and had continually obeyed the law that was written in his heart; if he had faithfully kept the garden and guarded it against any inroads of the devil, loved the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength, so that in all the thousand years never a thought of disobedience entered into his mind, never the rustle of rebellion disturbed the life of his soul, would he have merited anything extra? No, never! He merely would have performed what was his simple duty.

Nothing more.

Adam could never work overtime with God. He could never perform a superabundance of good works, so that he could claim extra wages, time and a half.

This must be very clear.

Adam was creature. God was his Sovereign.

Every moment of his existence, every hour of his life belonged to his God; every throb of his heart was supposed to pant after the living God; every thought of his mind was bound to have God for its highest object; every rustle of emotion in his heart was to whisper of God's love; every twinkle of his eyes was to shine with adoration of the Almighty. And that constantly, moment after moment, hour by hour, year upon year, throughout the ages of ages. Never would there arrive a payday for Adam on the which he could approach his God and say: "I have been obedient now year after year and never have I been unfaithful of Thy commandments. I now demand eternal life as my wages." He simply

would have performed what was rightly and justly demanded of him. Never could the path of obedience as such, in the very nature of the case lead him to his home of eternal life. In other words, if it is true (and there can be no dispute about the fact) that Adam was to reach eternal life along the way of absolute and unconditional obedience to his God, it is only because of a gracious Covenant dispensation from God Himself. Only if God condescended to make of man His party in the world, to enter into covenant relationship with the King of the world on the basis of faith and truth in all things, and if the Almighty, then, of free grace, promised His ally eternal life as a reward upon faithfulness, is such a connection between obedience and life at all conceivable. And hence, also from this point of view, you arrive at your Covenant relationship.

But this is by no means all.

On the contrary, in regard to the idea of the Covenant in general, it may be observed further, that the Word of God fairly teems with passages that refer to the relation between God and man as Covenant relation. The term "Covenant" is surely scriptural. Scripture speaks of the old and of the new Covenant, of a Covenant of peace and a Covenant of promise, and a Covenant of circumcision, of a better Covenant, and an everlasting Covenant (see II Cor. 3:14; Heb. 9:13; 7:22; 8:6; Gen. 17: 7, 13, 19; Ps. 105:10; Isa. 55:3; 61:8; Jer. 32:40; Ezek. 43:35; 37:26; Acts 7:8; Eph. 2:12). The Law of God is called Covenant (Deut. 4:13; I Kings 8:9, 21; Jer. 11:10, 13); "words of the Covenant" (Ex. 34:28); was placed, as we all know in the Ark of the Covenant; and the book of the law is designated as the "book of the Covenant" (Ex. 24:1-7). We read that a Covenant is established with Noah after he left the ark, known among us as the Covenant of Nature; further with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in whom all the nations of the earth are to be blessed; with Israel as a nation on the basis of the law in all its significance; and with David that his throne should be established forever, and of his seed should have dominion over Israel of God forevermore. And, therefore, as far as the idea in general is concerned, it may safely be said that

the Word of God simply abounds in references that speak of such a covenant relation. I know it, this does not strictly prove as yet that the relation between God and Adam was such a covenant relation, and the term “Covenant of Works” is not literally derived from the Word of God at all. But it does show in the first place that whenever Jehovah enters into a definite relationship with man, it is always called a covenant relation, so that, if the fact of such a relation between God and Adam can be proved to have existed in Paradise, the inference of it quite justified that it also was the relation of a Covenant. And in the second place, if in the Covenant with Israel the law was introduced partially for the purpose of being a schoolmaster to Christ, the supposition is by no means far fetched that in the past there must have been another Covenant, based on the pledge of faith and truth exactly with regard to that law, which pledge, however, was broken.

Still more.

If the question is asked, whether we are justified to conclude from the first chapters of the book of Genesis to the existence of such a Covenant relation between God and Adam, we answer without any hesitation: most certainly! In the first place, I would observe that this is plain from all the transactions that take place in Paradise. The Almighty and Infinite God reveals Himself to His creature, speaks to him face to face. We often have the idea that Adam derived all his knowledge from nature round about him, and that no “special revelation” was given him. But this is evidently a mistake. Expressly God reveals to the king of the world that dominion is given him over the beast of the field and the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea, and over every creeping thing. Especially is this plain with regard to the trees of life and of the knowledge of good and evil. Though Adam’s mind was purer than the morning air of paradise, and undoubtedly he could know God from the works of His hands, yet could he never of himself have come to the knowledge that he might not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. No, God condescends and speaks to Adam, gives him special knowledge of special things such as he was

bound to know as God’s party in the world. Definitely He makes known to Adam the condition of the Covenant, the punishment he may expect if he fails to be faithful as God’s party over against the devil, but He also places in Paradise the tree of life, that he might eat of it and live forever. In one word, all that is revealed to us of the relation between God and Adam in Paradise, corroborates the statement that the king of the world stood in covenant relation to his Sovereign. You persist that the name is not mentioned? You say, that in the first chapters of Genesis we do not read of a Covenant at all, still less of a Covenant of works? I admit. But at the same time I would answer that you will never have a controversy with me about a name, as long as you admit the idea expressed. And in the second place, it seems to me, it is but perfectly natural that the term is not used. After all the term “Covenant” could be understood only after mankind had developed and multiplied, so that various alliances and agreement, “covenants” were made among men. And that God does not speak to the first man directly of a Covenant is nothing strange. We do not meet with the term “marriage,” or “wedlock,” or “matrimony” in the first chapters of Genesis either. Surely, Adam never took out a license and there was no minister to perform the ceremony. We never read that Adam and Eve were officially “married.” Yet, who would on that account take the foolish position to hold that Adam and Eve were not united in the covenant of holy matrimony?

There is still more to which we shall refer next week as a basis for the doctrine of the Covenant of works. But in conclusion of this essay, I would say that even if there was nothing else to support this element of our Reformed faith than what we have mentioned above; even if Hosea 6:7 must read: “But they like man (or like men) have transgressed the covenant”; and even if in Romans 5 and I Cor. 15 the remarkable parallel were not drawn between Adam and his posterity and Christ and His people; even then, we would have sufficient ground for the important doctrine of the Covenant of works.

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