



# 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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REFORMED  
— PAVILION —

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And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: and I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. And they shall hearken to thy voice.

—Exodus 3:13–18a

**M**oses finally asked the right question. Moses had been asking, Who am I? Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh? Who am I that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? It is the question that always simmers near the surface of the heart of the child of God. Whom am I? Who am I?? Who am I???

But that was not the right question.

Finally Moses asked the right question. Not, Who am I? But, Who art thou?

Ah, yes! Who art thou? What is thy name? When they ask me who sent me unto them, what shall I tell them? O God, who art thou? What a question! To know God is life eternal. To know God's name is salvation.

And who is God? I AM THAT I AM. It is God's name forever. It is God's memorial unto all generations.

What does that name mean? It means that God is faithful to his covenant promise to his people in Jesus Christ. Men live today and die tomorrow, but God is I AM THAT I AM today and tomorrow and forever. Nations rise today and fall tomorrow, but God endures I AM THAT I AM today and tomorrow and forever. Men promise today

and break their vows tomorrow, but God remains I AM THAT I AM today and tomorrow and forever.

What else does that name mean? It means that God is powerful to accomplish all that he has purposed and spoken. Men say one thing and do another, but God is I AM THAT I AM, whose word is sure. Men fail to accomplish what they have spoken, but God is I AM THAT I AM, who accomplishes all his good purpose.

What did this mean for Israel? The God who loved his people had visited them and seen that which was done to them in Egypt. And the God who had said to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that he would bring his people into Canaan would now bring up his people out of the affliction of Egypt and fulfill all his good word to them. From the iron furnace unto a land flowing with milk and honey! For God is I AM THAT I AM.

What does this mean for us? All of God's promises of salvation from sin, death, and hell are sure. Not one promise can fail. For God is I AM THAT I AM, whose promises are all yea and amen in Jesus Christ.

And how do you know? By faith in Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever, in whom the I AM THAT I AM is revealed.

—AL

## FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to another issue of *Reformed Pavilion*.

A brief note about the numbering of Herman Hoeksema's *Banner* article this week. Hoeksema counted last week's article and this week's article as one, even though they appeared in separate issues of the *Banner*. We plan to follow Hoeksema's numbering, so this is the second article 14 in a row.

The magazine arrives during a much-needed rainy spell at magazine headquarters. What a perfect atmosphere for a little reading. Shake the rain off your umbrella, crack a window to hear the thunder rolling in the distance, and settle in with this week's issue.

—AL

## FAQ

**What are the possible principles of congregational singing? That is, if someone were not convinced that exclusive psalmody is correct, what other positions for congregational singing might such a person take?**

**Answer:** The strength of this question is that it deals with principles. The question correctly assumes that congregational singing in the public worship of God must rest upon a principle. Congregational singing is not left to the whim of the minister, the congregation, or ecclesiastical assemblies, but congregational singing rests upon a principle.

By dealing with principles the question does justice to the regulative principle of worship. The regulative principle of worship means that the church may only worship God as he has commanded in his word and that she rejects any worship that God has not commanded in his word. The regulative principle is taught in the Reformed confessions in Belgic Confession 7: "The whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in [the Holy Scriptures] at large." Also in Belgic Confession 32: "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." Also in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 35, Q&A 96: "What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word." Therefore, when the question of congregational singing comes up, the question must be decided by what God has commanded in his word. The question is not what pleases the church but what pleases God. The church is not free to worship God as she pleases, but the church is free to worship God as God pleases.

When it comes to congregational singing, there are really only four possible positions that one could take. At least three of these positions have been publicly advocated by those who claim to follow the regulative principle of worship. The four positions are exclusive psalmody, canonical songs, sing the word, and sing anything. The fact that there are only four possible positions makes it relatively easy to analyze and compare them.

The thesis of this answer is that there is only one principle of congregational singing that is

consistent with the regulative principle of worship: exclusive psalmody. Only exclusive psalmody is clearly and consistently the singing that God “has commanded in His Word.” All the alternative principles compromise the regulative principle at some point.

### Descriptions of the Positions

#### EXCLUSIVE PSALMODY

Exclusive psalmody maintains that the church in worship must sing the psalms. Exclusive psalmody includes only the 150 psalms in worship and excludes any songs other than the psalms. Exclusive psalmody excludes all hymns of human invention, whether those hymns are doctrinally sound or not. Exclusive psalmody also excludes all canonical songs. Canonical songs are passages of scripture, such as the ten commandments, that are set to music in order to be sung as part of the public worship of the church. As the name indicates, exclusive psalmody excludes from corporate worship any song other than the psalms.

#### CANONICAL SONGS

The principle of canonical singing maintains that the church in worship may sing any and every scripture passage. This would include those passages that are songs in scripture: the song of Moses, the psalms, and the song of the Lamb, for example. This would also include those passages that are not songs in scripture: the prophecies of Mary, Zacharias, and Simeon; the ten commandments; the Lord’s prayer; or any other passage of scripture. Canonical singing would exclude any song of human invention, that is, any song that is not a direct passage of scripture. Therefore, all man-made hymns would be excluded, regardless of whether the hymn was doctrinally sound or doctrinally suspect. As the name of the principle implies, the only songs that would be permitted in corporate worship would be songs taken directly from the canon of scripture, with all other songs being excluded.

#### SING THE WORD

The principle of singing the word maintains that the church in worship may sing any song that expresses sound doctrine. This would include singing the psalms. This would also include singing any passage of scripture other than the psalms. This would also include any traditional hymn of human invention that expresses sound doctrine, such as “The Church’s One Foundation” or “Amazing Grace.” This would also include any modern or contemporary song of human invention that expresses sound doctrine, such as “Our God Is an Awesome God.” The only thing that would be excluded is songs that contain false doctrine. The name of this principle is a bit of a misnomer, because *sing the word* would lead one to believe that he would be singing the words of scripture. But the principle of singing the word actually maintains that the church may sing any true song, whether the song is God’s word or man’s word.

#### SING ANYTHING

The principle of singing anything would maintain that the church in worship may sing anything that she wills. In principle nothing would be off-limits. As long as the song made the members of the church feel worshipful, the song would be approved. A church that sings anything could even knowingly sing songs that contain false doctrine, on the ground that the Spirit-filled members would be able to discern between the truth and the lie. A church that sings anything might exclude some songs for practical reasons but not for principle reasons.

### Some Proponents of the Positions<sup>1</sup>

#### EXCLUSIVE PSALMODY

Exclusive psalmody was the practice of Jesus and the apostolic church. Scripture records Jesus singing psalms (Matt. 26:30—the Hallel, psalms 113–118). Scripture records the apostolic injunction to sing psalms (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16—*psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* being titles over the

<sup>1</sup>This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of proponents for each position. For example, Martin Luther and Abraham Kuyper were both proponents of singing hymns in corporate worship, but they are not treated here.

150 psalms). Scripture does not record Jesus or the apostles singing or advocating songs of human invention. Therefore, Jesus and his apostles can be taken as “proponents” of exclusive psalmody inasmuch as they instituted psalmody for the New Testament church.

Although John Calvin did not use the term *exclusive psalmody*, he was a proponent of psalmody in the worship of the church. Although there were many hymnals in Calvin’s day, Calvin labored to produce a psalter for Geneva. In his preface to the Genevan Psalter, Calvin wrote,

What is there then to do? It is to have songs not only seemly, but also holy, which will be like spurs to incite us to pray to and praise God, to meditate on His works in order to love, fear, honor, and glorify Him. Now what Saint Augustine says is true, that no one is able to sing things worthy of God unless he has received them from Him. Wherefore, when we have looked thoroughly everywhere and searched high and low, we shall find no better songs nor more appropriate to the purpose than the Psalms of David which the Holy Spirit made and spoke through him. And furthermore, when we sing them, we are certain that God puts the words in our mouths, as if He Himself were singing in us to exalt His glory. Wherefore Chrysostom exhorts men as well as women and little children to accustom themselves to sing them, in order that this may be, as it were, a meditation for associating themselves with the company of angels.<sup>2</sup>

The Synod of Dordt (1618–19) did not use the term *exclusive psalmody* either, but Dordt stood on the principle of psalmody in the churches.

In article 69 of Dordt’s Church Order, Dordt required that the churches sing only the 150 psalms of David, although Dordt conceded seven other songs. At the time, these songs were published in the Dutch psalter and were popular with the people. However, that Dordt’s principle was psalmody and not hymnody is evident from the concluding sentence that Dordt appended to article 69: “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.”<sup>3</sup>

Rev. Hendrik De Cock, father of the *Afscheiding* in 1834, was a strong proponent of exclusive psalmody. The full title of his pamphlet alone reveals his position:

THE SO-CALLED EVANGELICAL HYMNS, THE DARLING OF THE ENRAPTURED AND MISLED MULTITUDE IN THE SYNODICAL REFORMED CHURCH and even by some of God’s children from blindness, because they were drunk with the wine of her fornication, further tested, weighed and found wanting, Yes, in conflict with all our FORMS OF UNITY AND THE WORD OF GOD, BY H. DeCock, Reformed Minister of Ulrum, Under the cross for the sake of Jesus Christ

And then De Cock’s opening sentence: “Hymns were never introduced into the church, except to cause degeneration and contempt for the welfare of the church, or perhaps in cases of incomplete Reformation.”<sup>4</sup>

Proponents of exclusive psalmody have also been found within the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). Those readers of *Reformed Pavilion* who trace their church membership to the PRC were raised on this principle by these ministers.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, “Epistle to the Reader,” as printed in Charles Garside, Jr., “The Origins of Calvin’s Theology of Music: 1536–1543,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society Held at Philadelphia for Promoting Useful Knowledge* [vol.] 69, part 4 (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1979): 33. See also “Introduction to John Calvin’s Preface to the Genevan Psalter,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 8 (June 3, 2023): 26–32.

<sup>3</sup> Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), 283.

<sup>4</sup> Hendrik De Cock, “The So-Called Evangelical Hymns...,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20110917023204/https://gcc-opc.org/docs/DeCock.dir/hymndecock.htm#r14>. See also *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 3 (April 29, 2023): 39–40.

Prof. David Engelsma (1983 and again in 1995) wrote about “one of our cherished positions as Protestant Reformed Churches regarding music in the church, namely, that only Psalms be sung, to the exclusion of hymns.”

Our stand today is the historic, traditional Reformed position—that of Calvin; of the Synod of Dordt; and of the Reformed churches generally, until recently, when the Reformed churches have been amusing themselves by abandoning the Reformed tradition wholesale. The exceptions to the Psalms mentioned in Article 69 (some of which are quite unknown to most of us) find their place there through curious, historical circumstances: the popular Dutch songbook of the time of the Synod of Dordt contained also these hymns; rather than to disturb the people, Dordt made allowance for these hymns. But the spirit and principle of Article 69 is: “In the churches only the 150 Psalms of David shall be sung.” Period!

This stand on Psalm-singing does not depend only on a few New Testament texts about singing, the interpretation of which is disputed; but it is based also on an important biblical truth about the worship of God, namely, that we may not worship God as we see fit (“will-worship”), but only in the manner which He prescribes in His Word. This is called “the regulative principle of worship.” It is laid down in the second commandment of the Law, as the Heidelberg Catechism explains in Q. 96: “What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise represent God by images, *nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word*” ...

Like the exclusive singing of Psalms in the worship services, the excluding of choirs and special music from the service

for divine worship is the historic, traditional Reformed stand.<sup>5</sup>

Prof. Herman Hanko (1998):

It is my conviction, expressed in this article, that the Word of God requires the exclusive use of the Psalms in the corporate worship of the church.

The assumption here is the regulative principle of worship, defined in the Heidelberg Catechism (Q & A 96): “What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.”

I shall not argue the case for the regulative principle in corporate worship, nor shall I make any attempt to explain it in detail; knowledge of these ideas is presupposed on the part of the reader. If there is any question about these things, material can be found in many places written by many different men.

It is the thesis of this article that the regulative principle of worship requires the use of the Psalms in the church’s worship.<sup>6</sup>

From 2021 to 2023, the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) were proponents of exclusive psalmody. Exclusive psalmody was regularly preached from the pulpit of First Reformed Protestant Church and the other Reformed Protestant Churches that livestreamed First’s services. No shadow of objection was raised against that preaching. Many expressed fervent agreement with exclusive psalmody, many displayed visible excitement in singing the psalms, and many joyfully proclaimed that the psalms were being opened up to them anew. In March of 2023 there was a sea change overnight in the RPC. The pastor and three elders of First Reformed Protestant Church were suspended

<sup>5</sup> David Engelsma, “Music in the Church,” *Standard Bearer* 71, no. 15 (May 1, 1995): 374–76; emphasis is Engelsma’s.

<sup>6</sup> Herman Hanko, “The Songs of Zion: What Shall the Church Sing?,” *Standard Bearer* 74, no. 8 (January 15, 1998): 178.

and deposed for their doctrine of exclusive psalmody, and they were set outside the kingdom of heaven as legalists and conditionalists. The same members and officebearers of the RPC who, only days prior, had expressed their fervent love of the preaching of exclusive psalmody have since that time damned exclusive psalmody as false doctrine and have damned its proponents as false prophets. That radical change of position was a new tack for the RPC, which had taught and loved exclusive psalmody for her first two years.

Remnant Reformed Church, which is comprised of the leftovers and leavings of the Reformed Protestant denomination after her sudden change of heart, maintains exclusive psalmody today.

#### CANONICAL SONGS

The main proponent today of the principle of canonical songs is the United Reformed minister and professor Dr. R. Scott Clark, professor at Westminster Seminary West in California. Clark appeals to John Cotton and John Murray as also holding this view.

This essay agrees with the New England Puritan theologian John Cotton (1584–1652) and the Westminster Seminary theologian John Murray (1898–1975) who concluded that the argument that, out of the entire canon of Scripture, only psalms may be sung, is a conclusion that does not seem to be so well supported by Scripture that it is inescapably true. Instead, the essence of the [regulative principle of worship] is that we must do in worship only that which is required and what is required is that God’s people respond to his Word with his Word. Therefore, in public worship, God’s people ought to respond to his Word by singing from the whole canon of God’s Word and not just the Psalter.<sup>7</sup>

Some have appealed to John Calvin’s practice in Geneva as proof that Calvin was not a proponent of exclusive psalmody but that he was in fact a proponent of singing canonical songs. After all, Calvin’s Genevan Psalter included a song of Mary, a song of Zacharias, a song of Simeon, and a song of the angels. More on this later. However, for now, note that Calvin’s Geneva sang the Apostles’ Creed, and the Apostles’ Creed is not a canonical song. It is a beautiful, true, and beloved creed that summarizes the entire gospel. It faithfully captures the doctrine of the entire canon of scripture. However, the Apostles’ Creed is not itself a passage of scripture, and therefore it is not a canonical song. One must be careful not to try to write a principle to explain Calvin’s practice. When it came to Calvin’s principle, he maintained that we can find no better songs than the psalms for worship. Whether his practice was perfectly consistent with his principle is another question.

#### SING THE WORD

Every Reformed and Presbyterian denomination that has opened up its congregational singing to include hymns of human invention is a proponent of the principle of singing the word. This is the first principle that allows for hymn singing. Both exclusive psalmody and canonical songs exclude hymns of any kind, while *sing the word* allows for every song of human invention, as long as that song is sound doctrine. For example, the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1930 agreed with the following report from its study committee. Part of the committee’s task was to investigate the matter of “free songs,” that is, songs which are not psalms or other passages of scriptures. Today we would call these free songs *hymns* or *hymns of human invention*. The Christian Reformed Synod of 1930 came out in favor of opening the denomination to these free songs.

Thus far we hope to have made clear that from the point of view of principle no objections can be raised to the free

<sup>7</sup> R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession: Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), chapter 7, Kindle.

Church-song, as if the use thereof in any way conflicts with God’s Word. We believe to have proved this from Scripture by showing:

- a) that from the absence of positive New Testament precepts in regard to Church Hymns it must be concluded that the New Testament Church itself has the freedom and the duty to regulate this and to use the free song in so far as such is conducive to the edification of the Church; and
- b) that as far as *content* is concerned there can be from the point of view of principle no objection to such free songs as are in agreement with God’s Word. And that there can be no fundamental objection to *the form*, since free formulation of Scriptural truths in Public Worship is ordained of God.<sup>8</sup>

In the Protestant Reformed Churches, curiously, Prof. David J. Engelsma also promoted the principle *sing the word*. Although in 1983 and again in 1995 Professor Engelsma had insisted on exclusive psalmody on the basis of the regulative principle, he reversed course in 2004 by denying exclusive psalmody, by adopting the teaching of *virtually exclusive psalmody*, and by basing the church’s singing on the principle *sing the word*.

The Protestant Reformed Churches are Psalm-singing churches not because they believe exclusive Psalmody is the requirement of the regulative principle. Obviously not! No church that thinks that the regulative principle demands exclusive Psalmody will permit any hymn to be

sung ever at worship. The article that rules the singing in worship of this church will read: “In the church only the 150 Psalms of David shall be sung.” Period!...

In terms of the regulative principle, which does, of course, govern our singing at church, the stand of the Protestant Reformed Churches is this: God requires the congregation to sing, and he requires the congregation to sing *his* Word; the soundest and safest and perfectly adequate policy is to sing his Word as found in the Psalms, which is, after all, the songbook that God has given us.<sup>9</sup>

In 2023 the denomination making the most noise about the principle *sing the word* is the Reformed Protestant Churches. It should be noted that the Reformed Protestant Churches in 2023 are not proponents of the principle of canonical songs. I suspect that there are some, perhaps even many, within the RPC who think that their principle is that they must sing scripture. The principle *sing the word* sounds like *sing scripture*. A cry has often been heard in the RPC along these lines: “You mean I may read the prophecy of Zacharias in church, I may preach the prophecy of Zacharias in church, I may pray the prophecy of Zacharias in church, but I mayn’t sing the prophecy of Zacharias in church?!” But the RPC’s position goes well beyond the prophecy of Zacharias to include the right to sing any true hymn, whether or not that song is a passage of scripture and whether or not that hymn is listed in their Church Order. The decision of the latest classis of the RPC regarding Thomas Ken’s hymn “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow” included the following: “‘Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow’ is a hymn,” and the fact of its being a hymn “is immaterial to the church’s ability to use it in public worship.”<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Report on the Hymn Question and the Text of Approved Hymns, to be presented to the Synod of 1930 of the Christian Reformed Church, to Convene at Grand Rapids, Michigan, June 11, 1930: 18–19, [https://library.calvin.edu/ld.php?content\\_id=71767726](https://library.calvin.edu/ld.php?content_id=71767726).

<sup>9</sup> David J. Engelsma, “The Regulative Principle of Worship and Singing,” in David J. Engelsma, Barry Gritters, and Charles Terpstra, *Reformed Worship* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 21, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes of the May 18, 2023, classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, articles 20 and 21.

## SING ANYTHING

Within churches that confess the regulative principle of worship, no one actually promotes the principle *sing anything*. However, any principle of singing other than exclusive psalmody will eventually end up in the *sing anything* camp. Once the church abandons God's songbook in principle, even if she tries to retain it for practical or historical reasons, she has already opened herself up to the whims of man in her singing. And when man controls the singing, man will not be satisfied merely with introducing man's songs, but man will also insist on introducing man's glory and honor.

### Brief Analysis

#### EXCLUSIVE PSALMODY

Exclusive psalmody is an application of the second commandment. The second commandment forbids the church from making images of God: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" (Ex. 20:4). This commandment teaches the church that she may not worship God according to her notions of God or according to her notions of what pleases God. The church would invariably settle on what pleases her—graven images, with all their stimulation of man's senses—and the church would pretend that what pleases her also pleases God. Rather, the church is to reject entirely her own will worship and worship God strictly according to his requirements. The church is not to "worship [God] in any other way than He has commanded in His Word" (Lord's Day 35, Q&A 96).

When it comes to congregational singing, God has revealed very clearly in his word what he requires. God not only requires *that* the church shall sing, but he requires *what* the church shall sing. To speak foolishly, God has gone to great lengths to make it obvious to his church that he requires her to sing psalms. The psalms are a special book in scripture, composed by God as a songbook for his church. God inspired each song in the book (II Sam. 23:1–2). God inspired the placement of each song in the book (Acts 13:33). God called the songbook the

"songs of Zion" (Ps. 137:3), indicating that these are the songs the church sings. God called the book "the LORD's song" (v. 4), indicating that these are the songs the people of Jehovah sing. The songs in the book are Jesus' songs, for he is the sweet psalmist of Israel (II Sam. 23:1). Jesus sang from this songbook while he was on earth (Matt. 26:30). Jesus sings from this songbook now in the midst of his church (Heb. 2:12). God commands his church to sing this book: "sing psalms" (Ps. 105:2). The apostles instructed the church to sing from this songbook (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; James 5:13). From all of that comes this principle: sing psalms in corporate worship.

What more could men want from God in order to know clearly God's will for their singing? Do men want God to say it in a direct command? Here: "sing psalms" (Ps. 105:2). Do men want God to hand them a book? Here: the book of psalms. Do men want God to show by Jesus' example and institution? Here: "in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Heb. 2:12). The term *exclusive psalmody* simply expresses what God has revealed: sing psalms in corporate worship. None of the other positions on congregational singing can claim this kind of clarity from the scriptures.

God has commanded his church to sing psalms in her public worship, and God has not commanded the church to sing any songs other than the psalms in her public worship. The regulative principle teaches that what is not commanded is forbidden. If other songs than the psalms are not commanded, they are forbidden in public worship. Therefore, exclusive psalmody excludes hymns from worship, including doctrinally sound hymns, not because the hymns are wicked in themselves but because God has not commanded the church to worship him with hymns of human invention. Exclusive psalmody excludes canonical songs from worship not because the songs are wicked in themselves (God forbid!) but because God has not commanded the church to worship him by singing selections other than the psalms. The wickedness is not in the canonical songs or the

doctrinally sound hymns. Rather, the wickedness is in introducing into worship what God has not commanded.

Exclusive psalmody is often portrayed by its opponents as a narrow, negative, restrictive, legalistic, mechanical, joy-killing, conscience-binding approach to congregational singing. But exclusive psalmody is anything but! Singing exclusively psalms in church is a privilege of grace. God has united his people to himself in Jesus Christ, redeemed them from their sin and death through his Son's blood, brought them into his presence and fellowship to worship him, and given them the very songs of their savior to sing with Christ to the glory of God. Hallelujah, praise Jehovah! And singing exclusively psalms in church is gratitude. Just as all of the believer's obedience to God's law is his grateful service for God's salvation, so singing exclusively psalms according to God's command is grateful service. There is nothing legalistic about that. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.

#### CANONICAL SONGS

The main problem with the principle of canonical singing is that God has not commanded it. There are very clear commands in scripture to sing the psalms, not to mention that God has specially compiled the psalms as the perfect songbook for his church. But where is the command in scripture to sing something other than the psalms in worship? Where is the example of Jesus' singing something other than the psalms? Where is the injunction or example of the apostles for the church to sing something other than the psalms? If the regulative principle of worship is going to mean anything for the church's singing, then it must certainly mean this: the church may only sing what God has commanded.

Those who appeal to the regulative principle of worship to prove the principle of canonical singing often merely assert that we are to sing scripture. For example, Dr. Clark's assertion from above:

What is required is that God's people respond to his Word with his Word. Therefore, in public worship, God's people ought to respond to his Word by singing from the whole canon of God's Word and not just the Psalter.

But *where*? Where is it required that God's people respond to his word with his word? Where is the command—the *ought*—that God's people sing from the whole canon of God's word and not just from the psalms?

One gets the sense that the principle of canonical songs does not actually arise as a principle but rather as the excuse for a certain practice. For example, men have noted that John Calvin sang a few canonical songs in addition to the psalms. As a way of trying to explain that fact, while at the same time trying to oppose the rise of hymns, men assert the principle of canonical singing.

However, when Calvin wrote about congregational singing, he wrote about psalmody, not hymnody. And Calvin grounded psalmody in scripture. Calvin did not consider psalm singing in worship to be one option among others or even the best option among several. Rather, Calvin considered psalm singing to be God's biblical prescription through his apostle. Five times in Calvin's introduction to the Genevan Psalter, Calvin referred to "Saint Paul." One reference was to I Corinthians 14:15. "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." Another reference was to Colossians 3:16. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Calvin's use of these two passages made it clear that he understood them to be referring to the psalms, especially Colossians 3:16, which Calvin used in the immediate context of calling for the psalms of David. Having said that "we shall find no better songs nor more appropriate to the purpose than the Psalms of David," Calvin said, "It is

necessary for us to remember what Saint Paul says, that spiritual songs can be sung truly only from the heart.” The church was to “accustom itself hereafter to singing these divine and celestial hymns with the good King David.”<sup>11</sup>

In light of this the tiny handful of other scriptural songs and ecclesiastical confessions that Calvin also set to music did not overthrow Calvin’s psalmody. Calvin himself set the prophecy of Simeon and the ten commandments to music and published them in his psalter. Other men who worked on the psalter with Calvin set the Apostles’ Creed, the song of the angels, the prophecy of Mary, and the prophecy of Zacharias to music and published them in the Genevan Psalter. This small collection of biblical songs was an anomaly in the Genevan Psalter. The Genevan Psalter was a psalter, not a hymnal. When Calvin wrote about singing in worship, he wrote about the psalms, not hymns. Calvin’s preface to the Genevan Psalter is Calvin’s longest single statement about what the church must sing, and in it Calvin speaks only of the psalms. Even though there were many hymnbooks available in Calvin’s day, Calvin did not labor to introduce hymns and hymnals into the Reformed churches. Rather, he labored to introduce the psalms and the psalter.

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

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

#### SING THE WORD

The main problem with the principle *sing the word* is that God has not commanded it. There are very clear commands in scripture to sing the psalms, not to mention that God has specially compiled the psalms as the perfect songbook for his church. But where is the command in scripture to sing songs of human invention in worship? Where is the example of Jesus’ singing songs of human invention? Where is the injunction or example of the apostles for the church to sing songs of human invention? If the regulative principle of worship is going to mean anything for the church’s singing, then it must certainly mean this: the church may only sing what God has commanded. Where, then, is the command to sing hymns of human invention?

Another problem with the principle *sing the word* is that churches become hopelessly inconsistent in their principle as they try to stave off hymns after they have opened the door to hymns. When churches adopt the principle *sing the word*, they are very nervous about hymns at first. They write pages and pages about the dangers of hymns, even while arguing that there is no principle reason not to sing hymns in worship. They

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, “Epistle to the Reader,” 33.

are especially worried about hymns crowding out the psalms. For example, the synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands wrote in 1927 that “Hymns, once introduced, have always supplanted the Psalms, so that men’s work superseded the work of God.”<sup>12</sup> But if God commands his church to sing hymns, then why is the church so loathe to introduce them at first? One reads about all the dangers of hymns, and one reads many exhortations not to introduce hymns, while one reads at the very same time that God permits his church to sing hymns. One scratches his head about why God would permit hymns and even command hymns if they are so bad. Did God not know, as men apparently know, that hymns are dangerous for his church? The truth is that God knows more than man will ever know about what pleases him and what is good for his church. Therefore, God has very clearly told his church what to sing: psalms. Which means God has also very clearly ruled out the singing of anything else in the worship of the church.

Those who appeal to Church Order article 69 as proof of their contention that the church is to sing the word, including hymns, are in error. Their error is that they try to make a principle out of a concession. Dordt conceded a few hymns, but Dordt’s principle was exclusive psalmody.

Article 69 requires “only 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 word*, 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 Dordt made 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.”

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.

## Conclusion

There is only one principle of congregational singing that is consistent with the regulative principle of worship: exclusive psalmody. Only exclusive psalmody is clearly and consistently the singing that God “has commanded in His Word.” All the alternative principles compromise the regulative principle. In gratitude to God for his salvation in Jesus Christ, let us sing psalms in worship.

—AL

<sup>12</sup> Acts of the Synod of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands 1927, as quoted in *Report on the Hymn Question and the Text of Approved Hymns to be presented to the Synod of 1930 of the Christian Reformed Church, to Convene at Grand Rapids, Michigan, June 11, 1930*: 12, [https://library.calvin.edu/ld.php?content\\_id=71767726](https://library.calvin.edu/ld.php?content_id=71767726).

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

(continued from last week)

**L**et us first of all notice what Paul states of the relation between Adam and his posterity. In verse 12 he says: "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and death passed upon all men for that all have sinned." The meaning of the Apostle is clearly understood if we only bear in mind that death is a punishment of sin. It is clear that all men in this dispensation are under punishment. That is a simple fact of universal experience. There can be no dispute about this fact. But the question before the Apostle's mind in this verse: why has death passed upon all men? Why are all under the punishment of death? Is it because all men individually have sinned first of all? No, the Apostle answers, by one man sin entered into the world, by that one man death also entered the world, because of the sin of that one man all men are under the punishment of death, and that for the simple reason that all have sinned in him. When that one man sinned all men sinned, and, therefore, all became guilty of the punishment of death. To illustrate this thought, the Apostle continues his argument in verses 13 and 14 by quoting from history: "For until the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come." The basis of the Apostle's argument in these verses is that where there is no law there can be no imputation of guilt, and where there is no guilt there can be no punishment. On that basis he argues:

1. The law was given from Sinai. Before that time, ever since the time of Adam, there was no law expressed. Adam first received the command that he might not eat of the tree. After this God issued no law till Sinai. And, therefore, the period from Adam till Moses is characterized by the want of an objective law.
2. There being no law, it follows that even though there was sin and transgression during that period, the guilt of that sin could not be imputed to the transgressors. Where there is no law there is no guilt.
3. And, therefore, we would rightly expect that the people from Adam to Moses were not punished either. Yet death reigned also from Adam to Moses, even though the people could not sin after the similitude of Adam.
4. The reason for this punishment can only be found in the fact that all have sinned in that "one man." It was his guilt that was imputed to them, and, therefore, they were punished.

The same thought is expressed in vs. 15 where the Apostle states that "thru the offense of one many be dead." Again death is the punishment of sin. And, therefore, the idea is once more expressed that the punishment of the offense of that one man is upon all. Not the punishment of their own, of their personal sin is upon them first of all, but the punishment of the offense of Adam. Still stronger: "judgment was by one unto condemnation," vs. 16; or: "by one man's offense

death reigned by one,” vs. 17, and again: “by the offense of one judgment came upon all men unto condemnation,” vs. 18. And most emphatically of all the relation is expressed once more in vs. 19: “by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (*door de ongehoorzaamheid van eenen zijn velen tot zondaars gesteld geworden*). And, therefore, the conclusion of this matter is that all men have sinned in Adam.

But now the question arises: how have they all sinned in Adam? What was the relation between Adam and them all? Surely, if there were no relation between Adam and mankind, they could not have sinned in him. This is established. But how must I conceive that relation? Must I say, that Adam was our first father, the very root of the human organism, and that, therefore, we were all really in him? That is the realistic view. We were all personally present when he sinned, being in his loins. If this is what the Apostle means, the creationists, who maintain that the soul of the individual comes from God, is in sore need of revision. Or does he refer merely to a judicial and ethical relation, so that God imputes the sin of that one man to all that are thus related to him? If the former is true, we merely stand in relation to Adam as the branches to the organism of the tree, or still more clearly, as the oak to the acorn. If the latter is the Apostle’s intention, we are also a covenant people with Adam as the representative head.

Which is right?

It is here that the parallel drawn between Adam and his people and Christ and those whom the Father hath given Him is of extreme importance. Evidently the Apostle means to say that in each case the relation is the same. As by one man sin entered into the world and death, so by one man, life and righteousness entered into the world. “Therefore, as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men unto condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” Or again in vs. 19: “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”

Clearly, the relation is the same in each case, and if we can determine the nature of this relation in case of the one we may conclude to the relation in case of the other group. Are we then realistically in Christ? Surely, we are in Him, and we are also born from Him. But the question here is: Is the righteousness of Christ our righteousness because we were in His loins physically and personally when He atoned? Of course not. The relation was first of all judicial by the decree of God. It is imputed to us because He is our Head in the Covenant of grace, representing us before God, so that we are by God’s own imputation righteous in Him. The relation is a covenant relation. Well, then, the same is true of the relation between Adam and all mankind, for the Apostle simply draws a parallel between it and our relation to Christ Jesus. Even as there is established a judicial solidarity between Christ and His people, so that the righteousness of the former is justly imputed to the latter, so also there was a judicial and ethical fellowship between Adam and his posterity, so that the sin of the one is reckoned in just judgment to be the sin of all. It is a matter of imputation first of all. But then it is clear that Adam was also our representative head, and that with him we are a covenant group of people in relation to God. And, therefore, the conclusion of the matter is, that on the basis of Romans 5 either the Covenant of grace with Christ as our Head must be rejected together with the Covenant of works with Adam as the head of the human race; or, if the former is accepted as Scriptural truth, the latter forces itself upon us.

It will not be necessary to enter into a discussion of 1 Cor. 15:21, 22. You may easily see that the same parallel is drawn there as in Romans 5. In Adam we die; in Christ we are made alive; by man came death; by man the resurrection of the dead. But surely, in the light of all we have discussed thus far, the conclusion is justifiable, that the Covenant of works is not mere fiction, not the invention of philosophy, but living and significant Scriptural truth, the conscious acceptance of which is indispensable for a clear understanding of our salvation.

—Holland, Mich.