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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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And the taskmasters of the people went out, and their officers, and they spake to the people, saying, Thus saith Pharaoh, I will not give you straw. Go ye, get you straw where ye can find it: yet not ought of your work shall be diminished. So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble instead of straw. And the taskmasters hastened them, saying, Fulfill your works, your daily tasks, as when there was straw. And the officers of the children of Israel, which Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and demanded, Wherefore have ye not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and to day, as heretofore? Then the officers of the children of Israel came and cried unto Pharaoh, saying, Wherefore dealest thou thus with thy servants? There is no straw given unto thy servants, and they say to us, Make brick: and, behold, thy servants are beaten; but the fault is in thine own people. But he said, Ye are idle, ye are idle: therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the LORD. Go therefore now, and work; for there shall no straw be given you, yet shall ye deliver the tale of bricks. And the officers of the children of Israel did see that they were in evil case, after it was said, Ye shall not diminish ought from your bricks of your daily task.

—Exodus 5:10–19

**T**he children of Israel were in evil case. That is, the children of Israel were in deep trouble; they were in dire straits; they were in desperate circumstances. What was Israel's evil case? This: the children of Israel were in the clutches of Pharaoh, who was enraged against them.

The details are sobering. First, Pharaoh was enraged against the children of Israel and targeted them in open hostility. Pharaoh made the outrageous rule that Israel must begin providing her own straw to make her bricks, while not diminishing a single brick from her daily quota. It was a preposterous rule and an impossible requirement. There was no straw to be had by Israel. Israel was not involved in that part of the Egyptian economy that produced straw. Israel had no access to straw. Pharaoh's cruel rule scattered the children of Israel abroad throughout all the land of Egypt in search of straw, but all they could find was stubble. And with all her time and labor devoted to scrounging for stubble, Israel could not meet the daily tally of bricks.

Second, Pharaoh persecuted the children of Israel with murderous cruelty. The officers of

the children of Israel, who organized and oversaw the children of Israel in their service of Pharaoh, were called to account for the lack of bricks. The Egyptian taskmasters beat the Israelite overseers bloody. The course that Pharaoh set for Israel could only end in Israel's death, as her members would have to absorb beating after beating after beating until they were slain.

Third, Pharaoh's rage against Israel and his cruel persecution of her was due to Pharaoh's rage against God and against God's law to Pharaoh. God had told Pharaoh to let his people go into the wilderness to sacrifice to him. Pharaoh hated this God and his law and nearly went insane with rage against him. Pharaoh threw God's law back in Moses' face when Moses first told him, and Pharaoh spit God's law in the faces of the officers of Israel when they came to complain. "Therefore ye say, Let us go and do sacrifice to the LORD."

Fourth, Pharaoh bore false witness against the children of Israel. The persecution of the church is always accompanied by men's saying "all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matt. 5:11). So also Pharaoh lied about

the children of Israel, saying, “Ye are idle.” The truth of the matter was that the children of Israel were not idle. The truth of the matter was that Pharaoh had backed them into a corner to kill them. And because what Pharaoh spoke was a falsehood, he could only establish it by repeating it over and over until it stuck. “Ye are idle, ye are idle.”

Israel’s evil case is instructive for the church. For Pharaoh was the antichrist of his day. Pharaoh was the head of the kingdom of Man, whose cause was to oppose God and to establish Man as god. Today, wherever man seeks to displace God—whether by displacing God with man in man’s salvation or by displacing God’s will for worship with man’s will for worship—there you find the kingdom of Man, there you find Pharaoh, and there you find antichrist. The church must not expect any quarter from antichrist but must expect cruelty, persecution, and a flood of evil spoken against her falsely—and all of it fueled by man’s insatiable rage against God and his word.

And when the church finds herself in evil case facing antichrist, let her rejoice and be exceeding glad. Let her shout and leap for joy. For her savior has already gone before her, suffering all the opposition and reproach of man, for her salvation. Her savior has already sealed her salvation and preservation by his blood, so that it is her privilege to join with her Lord in suffering many things. Here is the patience and rejoicing of the church:

Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. (Luke 6:22–23)

—AL

## FROM THE RAMPARTS

### *Sword and Shield*

When a controversy arose and came to a head in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), it was a newly formed periodical, *Sword and Shield*, that provided the instruction and leadership that had been absent in the denomination. (The fact that the PRC rejected the magazine and the instruction and cast it out is only a reflection of the spiritual character of those churches.) It would only be a slight exaggeration to say that people would camp out by their mailboxes, waiting for the next issue of the magazine to arrive. I remember when the first issue arrived at our home. After searching high and low, I found it in the hands of my daughter, who was intently reading what was to us a brand-new magazine. “Hi, Sweetie, can I

see that?” Ominously, I received no response. “Is that the new magazine? Can I take a look at that?!” I asked with a bit more intensity. Somewhat distracted, and curt, came the response. “I’m reading it, Dad.” A brief discussion ensued, and I walked back downstairs empty-handed and grumbling something about the fifth commandment. It was only having three copies delivered each month that kept me from facing such ignominious defeat again at the hands of my daughter or my wife, two women who are otherwise exemplars in commandment-keeping. The magazine was a lifeline for us going through a tumultuous time, and it provided instruction the likes of which many of us in our lifetimes had never before received.

Well, that is all finished now.

The spiritual light of the magazine, and therefore its usefulness to the people of God, was extinguished almost within one month.

It started with the removal of Rev. Andrew Lanning from his position as pastor of First Reformed Protestant Church. To prevent any internecine warfare at Reformed Believers Publishing, the publisher of *Sword and Shield*, Reverend Lanning resigned from his position as editor. He wrote a letter of resignation, in which he offered his resignation and at the same time expressed his gratitude to God for the magazine and to the men who had worked to establish the magazine. The letter was magnanimous.<sup>1</sup> The board of Reformed Believers Publishing responded churlishly. In its first act without Reverend Lanning as editor, the board decided to censor Reverend Lanning's resignation letter and not publish it. This came as a great surprise to me. One of the primary reasons that *Sword and Shield* had to be formed was the censorship that was going on at the *Standard Bearer*, the magazine of the Protestant Reformed Churches. This was a major point of criticism against the editors and the publisher of the *Standard Bearer* by the men who formed Reformed Believers Publishing. And then the very first decision the board of Reformed Believers Publishing made without Reverend Lanning as editor was to engage in censorship? Adding inconsistency to its hypocrisy, the board also made the curious decision to publish a different article written by Reverend Lanning in the same issue.

You have read about the controversy over exclusive psalmody on the pages of this magazine going back to mid-April of this year. The first time that *Sword and Shield* was able to enter the discussion was in the June issue. And almost the very first things that were written were lies.

I don't use that word lightly. Lies come from the father of lies, the devil (see John 8:44); and liars are those found in the lake of fire, according to Revelation 21:8. Lies reflect not only on the man who utters them but also on those who tolerate and excuse them. But lie was exactly what the new editor of *Sword and Shield*, Rev. Nathan Langerak, did in the June 2023 issue. He made untrue statements that were intended to deceive. This is how Reverend Langerak started his editorial in the June issue of *Sword and Shield*:

In every argument the position opposed and the terms used must be clearly defined. I have attempted to do that. Throughout this controversy I have tried to deal fairly with the doctrine that I oppose, if for no other reason than that I have had tremendous respect for those who promote exclusive psalmody but also because truth and righteousness demand it. In my conclusions and statements of the implications of exclusive psalmody, I have not been sensational, but I pointed out where the doctrine on its own principles leads.<sup>2</sup>

Every statement in that paragraph is false.

To that point Reverend Langerak had made three (public) contributions to the controversy: a sermon preached on March 19 titled "The Indwelling Word," another sermon preached on April 16 titled "Boundary Movers," and a speech delivered on May 12 titled "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow."<sup>3</sup> Langerak did not define his terms because in all of his contributions, he never made any real attempt to instruct. He simply harangued those who confessed exclusive psalmody and incited to anger those who did not. For example, regarding the definition of terms, members of the Reformed

<sup>1</sup> You don't need to take my word for it. You can read that resignation letter in the first issue of *Reformed Pavilion*. See Andrew Lanning, "Resignation," *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 1 (April 15, 2023): 19–20.

<sup>2</sup> Nathan Langerak, "Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow (1): Introduction," *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 1 (June 2023): 9.

<sup>3</sup> The sermons were reviewed and found wanting in the first and second issues of *Reformed Pavilion*. See Dewey Engelsma, "An Uncertain Sound," *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 1 (April 15, 2023): 26–34; "Boundary Movers: An Analysis," *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 2 (April 22, 2023): 16–23.

Protestant Churches (RPC) to this day do not know what the phrase “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” in Colossians 3:16 actually refers to because Reverend Langerak would not tell them. I know what he thinks about those words because I picked up the phone and asked him, but the members of his church and the denomination do not.

Neither has he dealt fairly with the doctrine that he opposes or given any evidence of the fact that he has tremendous respect for those who hold it. This is what Reverend Langerak wrote about the doctrine of exclusive psalmody and about those who hold it, and you judge whether this evidences “tremendous respect”:

- But when you’re arguing about a stupid, man-made principle—and that’s really what I want to call it: stupid...<sup>4</sup>
- If you start there and you stay there, no one can ever disturb your peace with this silly and foolish notion that you must only sing the psalms, and to sing anything else is sinful.<sup>5</sup>
- We were happily doing that until we were troubled by this silly controversy about singing.<sup>6</sup>
- They sucked an idea out of their thumb, they thought up something in their brain, and they went to scripture to go find it.<sup>7</sup>
- The very concept of singing the inspired psalms is unattainable. It’s silly. It’s foolish.<sup>8</sup>
- They have a two-faced god, a god who says one thing this way and another

thing this way. They have a vacillating, changeable god.<sup>9</sup>

It is also a lie for Reverend Langerak to say that he has not been sensational. More than anything else, he has been sensational in his presentation of the controversy. By *sensational* I mean what Merriam-Webster gives as the definition of the word: “arousing or tending to arouse a quick, intense, and usually superficial interest, curiosity, or emotional reaction.” Instead of instructing the people about the principle *sing the word* and what exactly that means, he has made sensational claims about those who were teaching exclusive psalmody and those who were being instructed in the truths of exclusive psalmody.

- From the very beginning there were those who left us previously who were rabid for this. They wanted this. They constantly agitated for this in the churches that we left, and they couldn’t make any headway; and they hung around in those churches like a loathsome stink, so that in those churches there were ministers who would go to the pulpit, and they would fear to choose one of the spiritual psalms for fear of the reaction of one of those members...Some of them left us. Some of them did not.<sup>10</sup>
- And I warn the churches, warn the churches that what is being promoted right now is a bottomless pit of legalism, of calculations, of changes, and of controversy.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Langerak, “The Indwelling Word,” sermon preached on March 19, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3192322435011>.

<sup>5</sup> Langerak, “The Indwelling Word.”

<sup>6</sup> Nathan Langerak, “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow,” speech given on May 12, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7Fn4iYmpyo>.

<sup>7</sup> Langerak, “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow.”

<sup>8</sup> Langerak, “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow,” question and answer session.

<sup>9</sup> Langerak, “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow,” question and answer session.

<sup>10</sup> Nathan Langerak, “Boundary Movers,” sermon preached on April 16, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=416232248232204>.

<sup>11</sup> Langerak, “Boundary Movers.”

- And, I say, the ultimate prize isn't the psalter. The ultimate prize is the creeds. That's the prize.<sup>12</sup>
- And how did they operate? By a tyrannical imposition. That's what happened.<sup>13</sup>
- There's something sinister about the treatment of scripture in this too: it's devilish. Here also, this is a literalistic abuse of scripture.<sup>14</sup>
- I do not want you to be robbed. I don't want you to go home and look at your wall and see on the wall a picture that says, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow" and think, "Well, I might not be able to have that."<sup>15</sup>

It is sensational to paint a picture for the people of a rabid mob that hangs around like a loathsome stink; that operates by a tyrannical imposition and devilishly abuses the scripture; whose ultimate prize is not your beloved psalter or even that cute sign you have on your wall with some religious phrase—no, their ultimate prize is that they want to do away with the creeds! (All he left out was the "Muhuahahahahaha!" at the end.)

Again we witness a denomination where the ministers teach lies and the elders bear rule by those lying prophets' means and where the members of the churches love to have it so (Jer. 5:31).<sup>16</sup>

Reverend Langerak went on in the June issue of *Sword and Shield* to state that the position of exclusive psalmody leads to foolish questions and that the real issue is legalism.

He is correct in that the controversy over psalm singing did lead to foolish questions. But he is wrong to attribute that to those who taught exclusive psalmody. The foolish questions arose from those in the Reformed Protestant Churches who once saw the beauty and simplicity of exclusive psalmody but then, seeing the price that would have to be paid for pursuing that truth, tried to poke holes in the doctrine with endless questions. But to paraphrase one wise man, "People look foolish when they try to poke holes in the gospel."

Reverend Langerak gave an example of one of those foolish questions. "For instance, the members of the churches are arguing about whether singing and prayer are the same thing, when the psalms themselves are prayers and meditations."<sup>17</sup> That is a question that was pursued with some fervor by those who were trying hard to work up within themselves opposition to exclusive psalmody. But the question arose *because* Reverend Langerak brought it up. "That's why in scripture singing and prayer are really the same."<sup>18</sup> Well, to the layperson, the response is, "That may be true, but they are not treated the same in our worship services. A minister cannot get on a pulpit and say, 'I have a song that we will be singing, which I just prepared this morning and which I took from the word, just as the prayer that I offered up this morning came from spiritual principles found in the word.'" Instead of criticizing those who pursued the question that *he* introduced, he ought to instruct them on how singing and prayer are the same.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Langerak, "Boundary Movers."

<sup>13</sup> Langerak, "Boundary Movers."

<sup>14</sup> Langerak, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow."

<sup>15</sup> Langerak, "The Indwelling Word."

<sup>16</sup> The consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church is also guilty of lying. "Does that sermon look anything like the sermon as the consistory quoted it? The consistory cut a patch out of the sermon here, cut a patch there, sewed them together, made a Frankenstein monster, and called it my sermon. There is no other word for it than lying. The consistory, sitting in the judgment seat, falsified my words. The consistory, with my life in its hands, bore false witness against me. Having lied, they cast me out of the city and stoned me. (Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.)" (Andrew Lanning, *FAQ, Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 5 [May 13, 2023]: 31)

<sup>17</sup> Langerak, "Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow (1): Introduction": 11.

<sup>18</sup> Langerak, "The Indwelling Word."

<sup>19</sup> Instruction about the relationship between prayer and singing was given in the third issue of *Reformed Pavilion*. See Andrew Lanning, *FAQ, Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 3 (April 29, 2023): 5–7.

Reverend Langerak accuses those who hold exclusive psalmody of legalism. This is hypocrisy on his part. Earlier this year, Reverend Langerak wrote about another controversy that had arisen in the RPC, over the matter of the schools as a demand of the covenant. About this matter Reverend Langerak wrote,

Anyone who says, “There is no demand in scripture for the good Christian school,” is actually saying, “There is no verse in the Bible that says, ‘Thou shalt form a good Christian school.’” When they say that, they take me for a fool. There are many things in the Christian life where there is no verse in the Bible that says, “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not.”<sup>20</sup>

Yet what does Reverend Langerak demand of those who teach exclusive psalmody? He said this:

And those that disturb our peace with their legalism, they must show with a specific text from scripture where God says, “You must only sing the psalms.” That’s their job.<sup>21</sup>

About the school issue and the charge of legalism, Reverend Langerak wrote this:

When we say that the command for the good Christian school is from God, then we also free ourselves from the charge of legalism. Just as it is not legalistic for the church to preach, “You may not have idols; you may not have images; you may not commit adultery; and you may not steal,” so it is not legalism for the church to preach, “You must have a good Christian school.” That is not legalism because

as we preach that you may not have idols, and you may not have images, and you may not commit adultery, and you may not steal, we preach those not as requirements for your salvation—the law is never a demand for salvation—but as the law is the guide of your thankful lives.<sup>22</sup>

Ignoring the fact that Reverend Langerak’s argument carries no weight, let us see what we do if we carry his thinking through to the controversy about singing.

The following is what Reverend Lanning taught regarding singing. Ask yourself when you read these quotations whether Reverend Lanning was teaching exclusive psalmody as a demand for salvation or as a law as the guide of our thankful lives.

- The worship of the church in the singing of the psalms, then, does not become for her a matter of bondage. It is not for the church a matter of saying, “Well, we have to do this, so we’d better do it.” It does not become a matter of saying, “Well, if we’re going to have Christ dwell with us, then we’d better get busy with all these things.” But the matter of singing in the worship of the church, singing the psalms in the worship of the church, singing with the Lord Jesus Christ in the worship of church is a matter of her freedom and her privilege. The Lord has been pleased to dwell with me by his word and by his Spirit; he has been pleased to dwell with his congregation by his word and by his Spirit; therefore, let us have the word of Christ dwell in us richly and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to the glory of our God.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Nathan Langerak, “The Demand and Necessity of the Christian School,” *Sword and Shield* 3, no. 10 (January 2023): 19–20.

<sup>21</sup> Langerak, “The Indwelling Word.”

<sup>22</sup> Langerak, “The Demand and Necessity of the Christian School”: 18. I must point out how abysmal Reverend Langerak’s argument is here. The examples he gives are all commands found in the ten commandments. Not one person who was advocating for homeschooling or arguing against the Christian school as a demand of the covenant would disagree with any of those examples for the precise reason that *they are all found in the ten commandments*. They would respond, “We agree with that, but the command for the Christian school is not found in that list!”

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Lanning, “Singing the Word of Christ,” sermon preached on October 31, 2021, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=1031212233461017>.

- If you take hold of the second commandment tonight, “Thou shalt not make any graven images,” and you try to make that commandment teach “Do this, and thou shalt live”—that is, if you take hold of the commandment as that which you will do unto your life and unto your salvation—then you will have misused this commandment grievously.<sup>24</sup>
- You are to take hold of this commandment, rather, this way: not “Do this and live” but “Live and do this.” You have the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ, perfect and complete. He has accomplished it and finished it, so that now this commandment for you is the rule and guide of your gratitude, your thankful life to God for what he has given in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup>
- That’s how you hear the commandment tonight. The commandment is meant to expose you as those who have not worshiped perfectly, as those whose worship has been full of sin, and to do that in order that we may have no hope in ourselves but only in Christ. And the use of the commandment for you tonight is to show you the life of gratitude that belongs to those who have been redeemed by the blood of the savior.<sup>26</sup>
- The Lord Jesus Christ heard this law and loved this law and was eaten up by the zeal of God’s house in his perfect worship of Jehovah; and that counts for you, so that when you appear before God in your own conscience, appear before God at the final judgment, and the question is put to you, “How did you worship? How did you

do in worship?” and the answer of Jehovah God himself to that question is “You were perfect. You were perfect. Jesus was perfect. I count his worship as yours.” You live, congregation, for the sake of Jesus Christ. And now what is your response? Live and do this in gratitude to God for the perfect worship and salvation of your savior.<sup>27</sup>

- This matter of Christ and the regulative principle goes way deeper, way, way deeper in the matter of what Jesus sings in the church. It goes this deep, that Jesus has fulfilled the regulative principle for First Reformed Protestant Church. He’s fulfilled it already...First RPC is not under the regulative principle of worship in her worship. You’re not under it.<sup>28</sup>
- The people of God, if they were under the regulative principle for their salvation, for their acceptance with God, would never get to him. He’d never get in the house to his dinner. But Christ fulfilled it because when he came to earth, he worshiped God exactly as God required. And he still does. He always has and always will worship God absolutely perfectly. That’s your freedom. That’s the liberty of the gospel for the church.<sup>29</sup>

The charge of legalism against Reverend Lanning is slander. The charge that Reverend Lanning teaches a conditional theology is slander. It is no different than the testimony of the sons of Belial against Naboth (1 Kings 21:9–13) and of the Pharisees against Paul (“laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove” [Acts 25:7]).

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Lanning, “No Image Worship,” sermon preached on Sunday, March 5, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=35232335114953>.

<sup>25</sup> Lanning, “No Image Worship.”

<sup>26</sup> Lanning, “No Image Worship.”

<sup>27</sup> Lanning, “No Image Worship.”

<sup>28</sup> Lanning, “The Regulative Principle of Worship,” sermon preached on March 12, 2023, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=312232237135528>.

<sup>29</sup> Lanning, “The Regulative Principle of Worship.”

In a lecture given on May 12, 2023, Reverend Langerak criticized Reverend Lanning for the teaching that the church sings the psalms with Jesus. “The concept that we sing with Jesus is purely carnal.”<sup>30</sup> Reverend Langerak continued that attack on the teaching of singing with Jesus in the July and August issues of *Sword and Shield*. And what was his conclusion about the whole matter of this dastardly, wicked, conditional teaching of Reverend Lanning that the church sings with Jesus? This was Reverend Langerak’s conclusion:

The purpose of the text [Heb. 2:12], therefore, is also to establish our oneness with Jesus Christ. It is precisely this point that the false doctrine of singing with Jesus denies. We *are* one with Jesus Christ. There is no other way that you can sing but to sing with Jesus.<sup>31</sup>

Or this from his speech:

There is no other way that you can sing but singing with Jesus. There’s no other way. Just like, to use the silly language, you preach with Jesus by hearing Jesus preach through his church, and you take care of the poor with Jesus by taking care of the poor through the church, so, to use the silly language, you sing with Jesus by singing through the church.<sup>32</sup>

With the July issue of *Sword and Shield*, the magazine took a turn toward the garish. It did so with a one-page article by the editor, titled “Where Was the Cross?”<sup>33</sup> Reverend Langerak made mention of the fact that at the Act of Separation meeting out of which came Remnant Reformed Church, there was a cross on the stage behind the podium; but then, at the first worship service a few days later, the cross was, in Reverend Langerak’s words, “shrouded

behind a curtain.” He asked, “Then why was that cross covered up? Can someone answer that?” This is Reverend Langerak’s engaging in more sensationalism. But I can answer his question for him because I was the one who closed the curtain. The reason the stage was shrouded by a curtain was because the night before the worship service I was there helping to get things ready, and I thought to myself, “I think the black background of the curtain would make a better backdrop than a cavernous stage,” so I pulled the curtain shut. That is the answer to his question. Later, the cross was in the hallway, moved there by the school, which was in the middle of a renovation project. (Why I am participating in this utter folly and answering his question—the answer to which he could not care less about—is anybody’s guess.)

The whole article was an absurdity (is it really the glory of the church of Christ to take two pieces of wood and nail them together in the form of a cross?), such that the magazine that was once the battleground for tremendous spiritual battles has now become the spiritual equivalent of *Mad* magazine.

Reverend Langerak accuses Reverend Lanning of being responsible for the confusion that reigned in the RPC.<sup>34</sup> Reverend Lanning is not responsible for the confusion in the RPC over this issue. Confusion reigned in the churches because the people would not bow their necks to the word of God that was brought to them, and the people cast themselves on their own devices and their own imaginations about what they should believe. From the time that Reverend Lanning was suspended until now, there has been no instruction in the proper understanding of the principle *sing the word*. We waited. We waited some more. But it never came. It was just endless browbeating about the legalism of

<sup>30</sup> Langerak, “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow.”

<sup>31</sup> Nathan Langerak, “Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow (3): Conditionality,” *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 3 (August 2023): 14.

<sup>32</sup> Langerak, “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow.”

<sup>33</sup> Nathan Langerak, “Where Was the Cross?,” *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 2 (July 2023): 14.

<sup>34</sup> “Reverend Lanning is to blame for the confusion and endless questions” (Langerak, “Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow (1): Introduction”: 11).

exclusive psalmody but no instruction. (And that continues to this very day. Men and women try fruitlessly to poke holes in exclusive psalmody but, oddly enough, never spend hours typing up a paper to explain their own position.) Whatever it was that masqueraded as instruction just engendered more confusion. Which means it was not truly instruction.

Some will say, “Yes, there has been! There have been sermons and a speech and now articles in *Sword and Shield* on the topic. You may not like what has been taught, but there has been instruction.” Okay, let’s examine the instruction that was brought and see if it truly qualifies as instruction. This will involve an examination of the principles and the application of those principles; and we will see which position, *sing the word* or *sing the 150 psalms of David*, has led to confusion and endless questions.

First, let’s hear the principle of exclusive psalmody and how it is to be applied.

The principle is this:

The regulative principle of worship requires exclusive psalmody in the church, so that what the church is to sing is the 150 psalms of David; and, therefore, the church is forbidden in her worship from singing hymns, that is, non-inspired, man-made songs intended for worship that were not part of the 150 psalms.<sup>35</sup>

Now let’s hear about the principle *sing the word*.

- The principle, the principle that governs the church’s worship, is *sing the word of God*.<sup>36</sup>

- The principle is *sing the word*, expressed this way: sing the psalms almost exclusively.<sup>37</sup>
- Over against that principle [exclusive psalmody] I advocate tonight and believe as Reformed that the principle of the church’s singing is simply this: *sing the word*. You can put that another way: praise God; praise God in the words that God gave us to praise him. Praise God by singing the word. Praise God by singing theologically sound, doctrinally correct versifications of the word.<sup>38</sup>
- The principle of Article 69 is that the churches sing praises to God during her worship services. This principle of singing praises to God is the law that the churches must not disobey.<sup>39</sup>
- We adopted Church Order article 69, and we adopted the principle of Church Order article 69, which is almost exclusive psalmody.<sup>40</sup>
- You must sing the psalms, although not exclusively but almost exclusively. And when you sing them, sing a good, faithful versification of them.<sup>41</sup>
- I don’t believe that a song needs to be a versification of a text...The principle *sing the word*, just as it applies to preaching, is *preach and sing what is orthodox*. That’s the principle.<sup>42</sup>
- Praise the Lord with your understanding, and from that we derive our understanding of the principle of our singing that we sing versifications of the sacred scripture that are orthodox, theologically sound;

<sup>35</sup> Lanning, “The Regulative Principle of Worship.”

<sup>36</sup> Langerak, “The Indwelling Word.”

<sup>37</sup> Langerak, “The Indwelling Word.”

<sup>38</sup> Langerak, “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow.”

<sup>39</sup> Agenda for the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches to be held September 21, 2023, 33–34.

<sup>40</sup> Langerak, “The Indwelling Word.”

<sup>41</sup> Langerak, “The Indwelling Word.”

<sup>42</sup> Langerak, “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow,” question and answer session.

and the church most easily and readily does that by singing versifications of the psalms.<sup>43</sup>

- We're going to glory in singing it as a hymn and as a man-made one at that.<sup>44</sup>
- The principle *sing the word*, just as it applies to preaching, is *preach and sing what is orthodox*. That's the principle. You cannot sing something that's contrary to the revealed word of God in scripture. The safest and easiest way for a church to do that is to sing versifications of the psalms.<sup>45</sup>
- What needs to be rooted out is that singing the psalms is the safeguard to that. Singing the psalms is not a safeguard to anything.<sup>46</sup>

That is a morass of inconsistencies and confusion. From one quotation to the next, there is some contradiction as to what was taught previously. That is not instruction. That is not the truth as God has revealed it in his word. Reverend Langerak may be an author of confusion, but God is not (1 Cor. 14:33).

It appears that the fundamental principle is this: *sing what is orthodox*. That does justice to the other stated principle, *sing the word*. (When the principle is stated as being the same as *preach what is orthodox*, then *sing what is orthodox* is the best summation.)

That is not the Reformed position. It is the position of every megachurch in the world, but it is not the Reformed position.

I hope that when the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches gets around to massaging article 69 so that it falls in line with the denomination's practices, it doesn't continue to limit what can be sung in those churches. If your

principle is *sing what is orthodox*, on what basis would you limit the singing at all? Church Order article 69 should simply read, "In the churches only that which is orthodox shall be sung."

Remember, this belongs to the church's liberty, which is not to be trifled with.

Dordt established that as our liberty. Our calling is to praise God with his own word. Article 69 is an expression of liberty that the churches are free to include other songs in worship besides the psalms. And we ought to stand firmly in that liberty and not be soon moved by the legalists' howling about hymns and man-made things in the worship service. There is absolutely nothing sinful with singing a hymn in worship.<sup>47</sup>

In his lecture, out of which flowed the articles in *Sword and Shield*, Reverend Langerak went further than just stating that Dordt established this as our liberty.

In the face of the legalist I say this: "Praise God" is a hymn. "Praise God" is a man-made hymn, and we're going to sing it. We're going to sing it happily, we're going to sing it joyfully, we're going to sing it over against your charge of the guiltless because there's nothing wrong or suspicious singing that theologically sound hymn. Further, I would encourage the churches that you say, "Now that we've been charged with sin, we're further going to glory in singing it. We're going to glory in singing it as a hymn and as a man-made one at that." Dordt established that as your liberty. Jesus Christ established that as your liberty.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Langerak, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow," question and answer session.

<sup>44</sup> Langerak, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow."

<sup>45</sup> Langerak, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow," question and answer session.

<sup>46</sup> Langerak, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow," question and answer session.

<sup>47</sup> Langerak, "Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow (1): Introduction": 14.

<sup>48</sup> Langerak, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow."

That did not make it into *Sword and Shield*. That Jesus Christ established as their liberty the singing of Thomas Ken’s hymn (and presumably any other orthodox hymn—“Zaccheus Was a Wee Little Man,” for example) did not make the cut. But Reverend Langerak must not be shy or embarrassed about bringing Jesus Christ into this. He must be bold and say, “Jesus Christ died on the cross to establish as your liberty the right to displace the singing of a psalm and to sing a hymn by Thomas Ken or Isaac Watts or any other hymn writer.” He should come clean and not hedge or hem or haw on this.

Here I must inject a brief word about Thomas Ken. Remember, he wrote hymns to give the church something other than the psalms to sing. His purpose, whether he would have looked at it that way or not (I cannot imagine he was as bold as Isaac Watts was in his expressed hatred for the psalms), was to displace the singing of psalms. And was he ever successful! Consider Reverend Langerak in the year 2023 glorying in the displacing of a psalm so that Ken’s hymn could be sung: “We’re going to glory in singing it as a hymn and as a man-made one at that.” Reverend Lanning was correct when he taught that Thomas Ken was “successful beyond his wildest dreams.”<sup>49</sup>

Someone might answer my question about why you would limit the singing at all this way: “Well, it belongs to the good order of a denomination to all sing the same thing, and it belongs to good order in the worship service to know what we will sing. We must limit it somehow.” That might apply if singing were an element of worship, but it would not apply if what you sing is a circumstance. Some churches use baskets to take collections, and some churches use bags with handles. Nobody would ever think about regulating that throughout the churches. It is an element of worship that collections must be taken but a circumstance as to how those collections are to be taken. That appears to be how Reverend Langerak treats singing. The fact that

the church sings is an element of worship, but what she sings is a circumstance. I say that “appears” to be what Reverend Langerak believes because after listening to and reading his speech and then reading and rereading his article in the June issue of *Sword and Shield*, it is simply not clear what he believes about singing in relation to elements and circumstances. He does not speak to the issue, but he dances around it. “Jesus said there must be singing, but whether or not there’s accompaniment of that singing is a circumstance.”<sup>50</sup> That is true, but it does not speak to the matter being debated and for which men were suspended and deposed. I do think it is fair to say that this is the only conclusion that one can come to after reading his instruction on the matter: the fact that we sing is an element, but what we sing is a circumstance. Or, more precisely, an element of worship is that we sing, which is governed by the principle *sing the word*; but what we sing is a circumstance, and as long as that circumstance does not violate the principle governing the element, then we are okay. (That is a mess too. It would be more helpful if Reverend Langerak would not dance around the issues but would come out and say clearly what he believes about this matter of element and circumstance and how it applies to what a church sings in worship.)

If what we sing is a circumstance, then the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches had better not trample on the individual church’s liberty by limiting what can be sung in its worship services *at all*. If what a church sings is a circumstance, then a consistory could distribute a few days before the worship service a booklet of orthodox hymns (since that fits their principle, *sing what is orthodox*) to sing that week, just as they could decide to change the time and location of the upcoming worship service (since both are only circumstances). In fact, if what you sing is a circumstance, you shouldn’t say anything about it at all in the Church Order. There is no article that says, “Worship shall be

<sup>49</sup> Lanning, “No Image Worship.”

<sup>50</sup> Langerak, “Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow.”

at 9:30 a.m.” or “Collections shall be taken with wicker baskets.” The article should simply read, “Sing.”

Someone might object to my earlier argumentation and say, “Sure, you lay out the principle of exclusive psalmody as being so simple, but what about the application of that principle? Aren’t there issues with how you apply that principle? Won’t you have to go back to singing the original Hebrew, or won’t you have to create a new translation of the psalms?”

Some of these things have been answered. For those who have questions about whether fulfilling this principle requires one to sing the Hebrew, I refer them to the fifth issue of *Reformed Pavilion*, where this question is addressed.<sup>51</sup>

The question above could be put more directly: “How can you claim that you are fulfilling the principle to sing only the 150 psalms of David by using the 1912 Psalter, which is at times faithful to the psalms but at other times is at best a very loose paraphrase and in certain cases simply imposes words and thoughts into the psalms? Don’t you have to find a more faithful translation or versification?”

One of the writers for *Sword and Shield*, Tyler Ophoff, also made mention of this when he wrote, “Certainly, psalter revision or some other alternative will be required for Reverend Lanning and his proponents.”<sup>52</sup>

This is not a difficult question. Reverend Langerak answered it. “They are after singing the 150 psalms as closely as possible to the original. I personally have no problem with that.”<sup>53</sup> That is correct. Sing the 150 psalms as closely as possible to the original. This is the same argument for the Bible translation that you use. If you use the Living Word Bible translation, which is a paraphrase of the original, stop using that,

and start using the King James Version, which is more faithful to the original. Is it perfect? No, it’s not. There are mistakes in translation in the KJV. But it is the closest we have to the original. If the psalter you are using is a loose paraphrase of the original and is more focused on rhyming the last words of every other line than it is in being faithful to the original, then you should try to find one that is closer to the original.

Reverend Langerak is not the only writer in *Sword and Shield* who traffics in lies and confusion.

Tyler Ophoff thought it would be a good idea to attack the name of this magazine, *Reformed Pavilion*. He danced around exactly why he objected to the name but finally came out with it when he wrote, “He [Reverend Lanning] and his supporters have run into a pavilion. It is a defensive measure because they have no ground on which to stand to attack any supposed lie.”<sup>54</sup> No, Tyler, we are brought by God into his pavilion exactly because it is God’s pavilion, which is Jesus Christ; and that is the only place to be found in a time of trouble, just like Psalm 27:5 reads: “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.” I pity the proud soul who keeps himself out of this pavilion, disdaining it as a “defensive measure.”

Tyler, like his magazine’s editor, writes things that are factually incorrect. It is not difficult to prove that they are factually incorrect. As far as lies go, they are not good lies. Lies normally carry more of an air of deceit about them, so they are more difficult to detect and expose.

Tyler wrote, “There is nothing in the controversy about worship being spiritual worship, worshiping in true faith, or worshiping out of thankfulness.”<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Andrew Lanning, *FAQ*, *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 5 (May 13, 2023): 32–34.

<sup>52</sup> Tyler Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (1),” *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 1 (June 2023): 24.

<sup>53</sup> Langerak, “Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow (1): Introduction”: 10.

<sup>54</sup> Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (1)”: 18.

<sup>55</sup> Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (1)”: 23.

This is what Reverend Lanning taught:

- The psalms are the word of God that God has written by his own Spirit, so that the men who sat down to write the psalms did not write out of their own heart the words of the psalms, but God moved them and carried them along by his Spirit to write exactly the words that they did, to compose those songs exactly as they did, for the worship of the church. When we find these psalms as the word of Christ, then that's referring in the first place to inspiration.<sup>56</sup>
- The exhortation [of Colossians 3:16] is not this: "Let him in! He wants to come in; let him in." But the exhortation is this: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." And that's something impossible for us men to accomplish and effect by our own strength. That's a work that only the Lord himself can do; he comes, and he dwells in his people powerfully and sovereignly.<sup>57</sup>
- When the commandment forbids graven images, it is teaching the church, "Do not worship God in a form you can see, or do not worship God according to that form that pleases and appeals to your senses." Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven images. God is a Spirit and must be worshiped in spirit and in truth.<sup>58</sup>
- You are to take hold of this commandment, rather, this way: not "Do this and live" but "Live and do this." You have the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ, perfect and complete. He has accomplished it and finished it, so that now this

commandment for you is the rule and guide of your gratitude, your thankful life to God for what he has given in the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>59</sup>

- The commandment is meant to expose you as those who have not worshiped perfectly, as those whose worship has been full of sin, and to do that in order that we may have no hope in ourselves but only in Christ. And the use of the commandment for you tonight is to show you the life of gratitude that belongs to those who have been redeemed by the blood of the savior.<sup>60</sup>
- Now why, why is it that the second commandment says what it does? The Catechism gives the answer, in the first place, when it says, "God neither can nor may be represented by any means." You cannot make an image of God. You cannot make an image of God because God is a spiritual being. He is not a physical being. He doesn't have form and extent. He's not made up of stuff. He is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.<sup>61</sup>

The list could go on and on. Tyler should not write blatantly incorrect things. It is not an honest course, and dishonesty is of the devil.

A few times, Tyler took issue with the speed of developments in the RPC. "Thus ended this whole shameful ordeal before even one article could be published in *Sword and Shield* in response to developments in the RPC."<sup>62</sup> Tyler needs to take up this complaint with his consistency. It was two elders who escalated things when they objected to Reverend Lanning's

<sup>56</sup> Lanning, "Singing the Word of Christ."

<sup>57</sup> Lanning, "Singing the Word of Christ."

<sup>58</sup> Lanning, "No Image Worship."

<sup>59</sup> Lanning, "No Image Worship."

<sup>60</sup> Lanning, "No Image Worship."

<sup>61</sup> Lanning, "No Image Worship."

<sup>62</sup> Tyler Ophoff, "Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (2)," *Sword and Shield* 4, no. 1 (July 2023): 15.

sermon, as they believed his preaching conflicted with article 69 of the Church Order.<sup>63</sup> From there, it was only a matter of weeks before Reverend Lanning was suspended and three elders were cut down. Had the consistory done things deliberately, there might have been time for some instruction to be given in *Sword and Shield*.

Tyler wrote, “Everyone seems to have a different idea of what is being taught by Reverend Lanning. Ask one man, and he says that it is one thing; ask another man, and he says that it is another thing.”<sup>64</sup> That is patently untrue. Ask any man what is being taught by Reverend Lanning, and the only response could be this: “Sing the 150 psalms of David exclusively in worship.”

Tyler borrowed a few arguments from the PRC. “Reverend Lanning, one man, decided that it was time for a new magazine. He has thrown off the yoke of the church of Jesus Christ. He attacks and despises the rule of Christ over him through the elders, who judged his doctrine as false.”<sup>65</sup> He is not the only one reverting to the same attacks as those made by the PRC. As has already been pointed out, the arguments are the same. The members of the RPC should work harder at not so closely resembling their mother.

Tyler called the sermon by Reverend Langerak, “The Indwelling Word,” “as pivotal in our history as the sermon ‘Shepherds to Feed You.’”<sup>66</sup> The sermon by Reverend Langerak was pivotal in that it turned the minds of the people

against God’s word and completely shut down any instruction that was being given. But the fact that it was so pivotal reveals the spiritual character of the Reformed Protestant Churches. That sermon should not have moved anyone, as it was confusing and contradictory. A sermon that would not have made it out of the Minister Training Committee should never then be viewed as “pivotal.”<sup>67</sup>

More seriously, Tyler slandered Reverend Lanning in the same way that his editor, Reverend Langerak, did. “The theology of Reverend Lanning is the theology and doctrine of our mother, the Protestant Reformed Churches...In order to have Jesus Christ in worship, one must obey the second commandment.”<sup>68</sup> Reread the quotes above from Reverend Lanning, and you see how truly false this statement by Tyler is. I suppose what Joseph Goebbels said is true: “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.”

Interestingly, the July issue of *Sword and Shield* did mark a development in the controversy that took place in the PRC. To that point, the last man to publicly slander and attack Elder Neil Meyer was an elder from Faith Protestant Reformed Church. At the 2018 Protestant Reformed synod, after it was shown that Elder Meyer and his wife Connie had been correct in their understanding of the issues, and the denomination had been wrong, this elder asked for the floor and excoriated and

<sup>63</sup> It is ironic that it turns out that it was actually the two elders who were violating article 69 of the Church Order by their defense of “Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow,” which isn’t found in that article at all. The Reformed Protestant Churches acknowledged this at their May classis. “Motion was made that the Classis recognize whether ‘Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow’ is a hymn or a Psalm is immaterial to the church’s ability to use it in public worship. Ground: Church Order article 69 permits the use of certain hymns in public worship. Motion carried” (minutes of the May 18, 2021, classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches, article 21). When the question was asked of the classis, “Does article 69 permit the use of *this* hymn [“Praise God”]?” the question was brushed aside with the answer that it has been the Reformed understanding that the church’s practice has not always been in harmony with the Church Order. I’m sure this was news to the two elders at First RPC who refused to shake the minister’s hand after a sermon because they thought the sermon was not in harmony with the Church Order.

<sup>64</sup> Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (1)”: 19.

<sup>65</sup> Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (1)”: 19.

<sup>66</sup> Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (2)”: 15.

<sup>67</sup> See the review of that sermon in the first issue of *Reformed Pavilion*. Dewey Engelsma, “An Uncertain Sound,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 1 (April 15, 2023): 26–34.

<sup>68</sup> Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (2)”: 16.

verbally abused Elder Meyer for what Elder Meyer had written about one of the professors in the seminary. (As an aside, Elder Meyer was correct in what he had written about that seminary professor.) What the elder from Faith PRC said about Elder Meyer was ugly and wicked. But to this point in time and history, that elder carried the mantle of having been the last man to publicly stone Elder Neil Meyer.

Tyler Ophoff has now taken that mantle upon himself.

In two separate sections of his July article, he went on the attack against Neil Meyer. He charged Mr. Meyer with teaching the same conditional theology as that taught in the PRC, and he charged Mr. Meyer with only “playing elder” at Remnant Reformed Church.<sup>69</sup> Tyler wrote, “When things get too tough, it is okay for elders to resign?” He went on to write, “I hope nothing too difficult makes its way into the consistory room of Reverend Lanning and the new church.”<sup>70</sup>

Let’s examine the latter point first. Was Elder Meyer right when he resigned? The answer is yes: when a church sets itself on a course that involves murdering faithful elders, then any righteous men that remain on the bench ought to get out and do so as quickly as possible. Stay and fight up until that point, but when office-bearers are being cut down, the time for debate is over. This is not a matter of things being too “difficult.”<sup>71</sup> This is a matter of a righteous man’s saying, “I will not be a partaker with you in this gross iniquity. I will no longer sit in this room and listen to your wicked prayers asking God’s blessing on your wicked deeds, but I will resign my office until such time that God allows me to take up my office again.” Spiritual murder took place in that room. Just as if adultery were taking place in that room meeting after meeting, the calling of the righteous man would be clear:

get out! Elder Meyer (and Elder Van Dyke) did exactly the right thing. (Elder Starrett did not have a choice. He was deposed in about two days—glorious for Elder Starrett, unimaginably wicked for the consistory.)

What about the former point? Has Mr. Meyer, after all these years of fighting against the theology of the PRC, finally succumbed to their theology, so that now he believes that man’s working in some way contributes to his access to God? This is a grievous charge laid by Tyler against Elder Meyer. Let’s examine Tyler’s proof. He wrote the following in the July issue of *Sword and Shield*:

It is not just Reverend Lanning teaching false doctrine. Mr. Neil Meyer wrote the following in his protest to First’s consistory, which protest Reverend Lanning published without qualification in the *Reformed Pavilion* and thereby approved of the protest:

The doxology [“Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow”], in its content, excludes verses 13 and 14 of Psalm 148. The doxology does not take into consideration those last two verses of the Psalm.

13. Let them praise the name of the Lord: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.
14. He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the Lord.

Conclusion: The doxology does not sing verses 13 and 14. It leaves them out. It leaves Christ out.

<sup>69</sup> Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (2)”: 21.

<sup>70</sup> Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (2)”: 20.

<sup>71</sup> If Tyler wants to know what “too difficult” looks like, I suggest he ask Mr. and Mrs. Meyer what it was like when Mr. Meyer languished under church discipline in a false church for over three years, while the entire denomination slandered them, all for the Meyers’ righteous defense of justification by faith alone.

It leaves the saints out. *We do not have access to the Father.* The praise of His saints does not reach His ears. Jesus Christ is displaced.<sup>72</sup>

Tyler highlighted the words, “We do not have access to the Father,” and about this he wrote, “Does that not make the Reformed ear tingle?” The answer is no, that does not make the Reformed ear tingle. It is very clear what Mr. Meyer is writing. It could be summarized this way: “The way of access to the Father is through Christ alone. If Christ is absent or displaced, we do not have access to the Father.” Tyler wrote, “I do not even know how one could talk this statement orthodox. My singing is not my access to the Father.” Of course not, Tyler; and Mr. Meyer did not teach that, neither does he believe that what you sing gives you access to the Father. Christ is your access to the Father, and when he is absent, when he is displaced, the people do not have access to the Father. What Mr. Meyer taught us was simple, it was beautiful, and it was consistent with what he had taught and defended before, always at the cost of his life. Tyler, if your ears are tingling, perhaps you have tinnitus. Drops may help.

Tyler now has the mantle of being the last man to publicly slander and attack Mr. Meyer. That mantle is not on him alone, however. The entire Reformed Protestant denomination is responsible for this attack. This means the men and women who once claimed that they were so upset with the attacks of Hope Protestant Reformed Church against Elder Meyer now reveal that they are no different than the members and consistory of the church on Ferndale Ave. The Reformed Protestant denomination is just as guilty as Hope PRC in the murder of Mr. Neil Meyer.

Tyler also found a book of logical fallacies, of which he made good use in his July article. He accused me of being guilty of making *ad hominem* attacks. He wrote,

This type of fallacy occurs when someone attacks the person instead of attacking his or her argument. An example would be saying that Reverend Langerak engineered the whole controversy and that Reverend Bomers and myself were doing his bidding.<sup>73</sup>

This would probably have been more effective if he had not done the same thing only a few pages earlier. “One man also decided it was time to leave the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC). Reverend Lanning decided, and Deacon Keith Gritters would be the instrument of Reverend Lanning’s will.”<sup>74</sup> At least wait an issue or two before you do that which you decry in others.

Tyler wrote,

Mr. Engelsma makes a lot of hasty generalizations. A hasty generalization occurs when one makes a conclusion based on insufficient or biased evidence and then rushes to that conclusion before one has all the relevant facts. Mr. Engelsma writes as though he were present at all the meetings and deliberations of the consistory when, in fact, he was not present at all.<sup>75</sup>

Tyler is correct: I was not present in the meetings. But I did exactly what I imagine he would advise any member of his flock to do when confronted with such decisions as were pouring out of the consistory room, including suspensions, depositions, and the like: get the

<sup>72</sup> Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (2)”: 18; emphasis is Ophoff’s.

<sup>73</sup> Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (2)”: 20.

<sup>74</sup> Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (2)”: 15.

<sup>75</sup> Ophoff, “Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (2)”: 20.

facts! That is what I attempted to do. I asked the clerks for the information, including minutes and supplements. I had two meetings with Reverend Lanning and Elders Starrett, Meyer, and Van Dyke to hear directly from them about what went on in those meetings. I analyzed and studied all that material, I made a judgment, and I wrote about it. (Do you mean the members of First RPC did not do the same? Please tell me it is not the case that all of the members of First RPC simply sat idly by while their minister and three elders were removed from office. I thought this was a group that studied the issues?) I was not in the room, and I did not need to be in the room, just like someone did not need to be in the room at Byron Center PRC to know that what was going on in the PRC was sheer wickedness. Tyler slanders me when he accuses me of making hasty generalizations. (Tyler, you should stop slandering people.)

Painfully and agonizingly, I continue.

Tyler wrote that Mr. Meyer and Mr. Van Dyke are playing elder because they

resigned from their Christ-appointed offices and now intrude into the office. Christ will not use these men in his church. Every vow they take on their lips is blasphemy against the name of God; every vow they ever take on their lips will mean nothing.<sup>76</sup>

He went on to quote at length a sermon from Reverend Lanning where Reverend Lanning taught the congregation the importance of vow-keeping concerning officebearers' violating their Formula of Subscription vows. Tyler acknowledged that the vows in question are different but then swiped the distinction aside and wrote, "Now, the opponents will holler that this sermon was referring specifically to the Formula of Subscription vow. That may be so, but a vow is a vow."<sup>77</sup>

I don't know if this qualifies as hollerin' or not, but the distinction is important. The Formula of Subscription requires a man to acquiesce if he believes himself to be aggrieved by the sentence of the classis regarding his Formula of Subscription exam, while he does reserve for himself the right of appeal. Had Reverend Lanning, Elder Van Dyke, or Elder Meyer been subjected to a Formula of Subscription exam, they would have been required to acquiesce while they appealed the decision made about them and to do that before they left the denomination. But that did not happen. There was no Formula of Subscription exam. The vow they were under was before God to lead their flock in the truth. When it became clear that the church of which they were a part was departing, they obeyed their vow before God and led their flock out (or were reinstated once they were led out). If Tyler were to take his argument to its logical conclusion, he would have to take up charges against Reverend Langerak, who left the PRC while suspended from his office. Langerak should have, ostensibly, submitted himself to that decision. He was under vows! (Yes, but "What vows?" is the logical question. The answer to that question matters.)

Tyler concluded by saying that Reverend Lanning's theology is a "Gordian knot."<sup>78</sup> But everyone reading this, and everyone who has paid even the slightest attention to the controversy that is now finished in the RPC, knows that Reverend Lanning's theology is simple. It is so simple a child can understand it: sing the 150 psalms of David in worship, and do so out of gratitude for Jesus' fulfilling every jot and every tittle of the law for you, including your singing. There is nothing complicated about it. Now, the man (or denomination) who teaches that we must, alternatively, sing the word, sing the psalms almost exclusively, sing what is orthodox, sing a versification (or not), sing a hymn, and so on—well, there you have a knot that is difficult to unwind.

<sup>76</sup> Ophoff, "Corrupted from the Simplicity in Christ (2)": 21.

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The August issue of *Sword and Shield* concluded the “instruction” regarding the controversy. In this issue you had Reverend Langerak publicly militating against a decision of his classis. “The false doctrine of Reverend Lanning is conditional, regardless of what the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches decided.”<sup>79</sup> Some members of the denomination, upon reading that, will ask, “If Reverend Langerak can militate against a decision of the classis and not at the same time protest that decision, doesn’t that make the meetings of classis and their decisions irrelevant?” (Hint: Yes, it does.)

The rest of the August issue had Reverend Langerak excoriating Michael LeFebvre and Rev. Angus Stewart, to the profit of absolutely no one. If you were still, at that late hour, expecting clear instruction, well then, silly you.

*Sword and Shield* has been with child, has labored, and has only brought forth the wind (Isa. 26:18). It has struck many blows and landed none.

Suffice it to say, we don’t need three copies of *Sword and Shield* anymore. Nobody is fighting over it when it arrives. Most of the time it sits there for a while before someone, out of a sense of duty, picks it up and reads through it. We will continue to receive the magazine for the time being but for the same reason that we receive and occasionally read the *Banner*: it’s free.

Although watching a magazine implode is bad, what I find truly chilling is that when a denomination enthrones man, corruption and lying almost immediately infect all the institutions that are tied to or affiliated with those churches, whether the publishing house or the school board.

As you read through this material again, you find it hard to believe how a denomination

could have so many different principles, the application of which changed so quickly and over such a short time. You go from a sermon delivered on March 19, where the principle of article 69 of the Church Order is “almost exclusive psalmody,” to a letter written by the consistory of First RPC only a few months later, where the principle of article 69 is now stated this way: “The principle of Article 69 is that the churches sing praises to God during her worship services.” This, they tell us, is the “law that the churches must not disobey.”<sup>80</sup> How is it possible for the principle, the foundation upon which the churches are supposedly standing, to change almost from week to week?

The reason that could happen the way that it did and will continue to happen is that the principle they were truly operating under was not *sing the word* or *sing what is orthodox* or *sing the psalms almost exclusively but not exclusively* or *sing versifications of the scripture* or *sing the songs that are sprinkled throughout the Bible*. Those were not their principles at all.

The principle they were operating under, and continue to live according to, is this: Man.

That is why no instruction could be given. When you do not have Jesus Christ as your foundation, the only other place to stand is on the shifting sand of man’s ever-changing opinion and whim; and that is no foundation at all. All that *could* ever be done was browbeating and berating of others and never instruction.

Which is so tragic for those members who remain under such a principle.

Because living under the principle of Man is the cruelest bondage and tyranny of all.

—DE

<sup>79</sup> Langerak, “Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow (3): Conditionality”: 8.

<sup>80</sup> Agenda for the classis of the Reformed Protestant Churches to be held September 21, 2023, 33–34. Does anyone actually believe that? Does anyone believe that Dordt wrote a Church Order article in which it used the word “only” to limit what was sung to the 150 psalms of David (oh, and these few other hymns) and said at the same time that wherever hymns had spread they should be removed in the way deemed most conducive—but for all that, their principle was *praise God during worship services*? I don’t think there is one person who believes that. I don’t even think the men who wrote those words believe it.

## Article XXII. The Fallen King and His Kingdom (continued)

**W**e are busy with the question of the effect which the fall of Man had upon his kingdom, that is upon the world in general.

In regard to this question we may remark in the first place, that it would seem to follow from the very nature of the case, from the intimate relation there existed between man and the world outside of him, that the sin of the king could not be without its effect on the kingdom over which he was placed to have dominion.

True, this would not necessarily be the case if the relation between man and the world is conceived of as mere mechanical relation. In regard to an earthly monarchy it is undoubtedly conceivable that the king falls, is dethroned and that this event has no noticeable, or at least no permanent effect on his domain. The relation between the king and the kingdom was a purely external one, was simply one of authority and sovereignty and nothing more. For a period his downfall may cause a certain disturbance and unrest in the kingdom, a state of partial revolution and anarchy may temporarily ensue, but gradually order is restored and a new form of government is established, or another king is raised to the throne, and the former domain exists as prosperously as before. Just because there was no organic relation between the king and the dominion over which he ruled, the kingdom could not be permanently disturbed by the downfall of a single king. But this is not the case with the relation between the world and its king. On the contrary, as we have had occasion to point out before, in the kingdom God created there are various orders, there is gradation, there are higher and lower provinces and

domains and they are all intimately related and mutually dependent. Nothing exists by itself. Nothing in this kingdom exists independently from the rest. All things are linked together inseparably and are intimately interrelated. And man, though the highest creature in the world, and divinely ordained to have dominion over all things, is nevertheless in every respect dependent on that very world, over which he rules, for his substance and life.

Not a very complete knowledge of scientific facts is necessary to see this mutual dependence and interrelation of the various spheres of God's creation. We can all verify its reality. That there is order and gradation in this world, so that we can speak rather distinctly of a mineral kingdom, embracing all inorganic objects, of a vegetable kingdom including all plant-life, and of an animal kingdom and finally reach man at the very top of the scale is evident to all, for it is not difficult to see that man thru his body is intimately related to the rest of the material world. He is dependent on the animal and vegetable kingdoms for his very food, and without them he could not live; he is dependent on that world for its water to drink; from moment to moment he needs the atmosphere with its wonderfully exact and delicate composition of oxygen and nitrogen to breathe. Nor is this all. Not only physically but also spiritually and psychologically man is dependent on the outside world. There exists a most intimate relation between body and soul, a relation that is more and more acknowledged in our day. On the one hand it is clear that our physical condition, in regard to which we are so largely dependent on the world outside of us,

exercises an appreciable influence over our emotional and even over our intellectual life, so that a healthy and strong soul in a weak and sickly body belongs to the exceptions. But in the second place, we should never forget that it is thru the senses that man experiences the outside world, is conscious of that world, receives impressions from that world that furnish the material for his mind to labor with. And these senses are again dependent for their operation on conditions in the outside world. And not only is man dependent on the world outside of him, but the various orders and kingdoms under him are just as mutually dependent on one another. The seed, entrusted to the earth, needs the heat of the sun and the moisture of the atmosphere to sprout, the flower wants the light of the sun to display its beauty of color, as well as the atmosphere to scatter its sweet perfume; the atmosphere in turn is mightily influenced by the tremendous bodies of water found on our globe, and the ocean reveals its being influenced by our moon by its tidal waves. The size of the earth, the force of gravity, the relation and distance of our earth to other bodies in space, — in short, all things in the world are so related, are so interlocked and concatenated, that every creature is related to and influenced by every other creature in the world. And man, the crown of creation, is dependent on and related to them all. The king and the kingdom belong together; the king is part of the kingdom.

On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that man nevertheless was king of the world, and that dominion was given him over all things. Even though it is true, that he was closely related to the world outside of him, and that he was made dependent on that world for his very existence, nevertheless he was endowed with a glory and power that qualified him to be king over all things. He was to know creation, to penetrate into its hidden depths, to see and hear and understand the works of His hands. He was the creature that was to reveal the still latent powers of the world and lead them to their full development, that was to subject all things under him,

rule over them and utilize them in harmony with the purpose for the which they had been made. In a word, he was the creature thru whom God would reach the glory of His name. Surely, also in the mineral world, also in the vegetable and animal kingdoms God glorified Himself. The very heavens declare the glory of God even regardless of the question whether there is a conscious creature that can behold His glory in them and listen to their speech. But in man the creature was made that could perceive and understand, that could think the thoughts of God spread over His works thru the Word, after Him, that could pronounce the Name of God revealed in creation; in a word, God was glorified in and thru man in the highest sense of the word. Without man the world was incomplete, with a fallen king God would not reach the purpose of His works.

Now then, because of this close relation between man and the world, we said at the beginning of this article that it would seem to be in the nature of the case, that the fall of man, his guilt and sin, his misery and death naturally would effect the world over which he was placed. With the glorious and righteous king belonged a glorious and unmarred world; with the fallen and miserable king belonged a fallen and miserable creation subject to vanity and in the bondage of corruption.

Thus we find it actually recorded in the first book of Scripture. The king of the world was originally placed in the beautiful garden wherein was the tree of life. That garden-space with its beauty and rest, its harmony and glory, with its trees and rivers represented for the glorious king the perfection of the unmarred kingdom. And as long as he had not fallen and died the spiritual death there existed the most harmonious relationship between him and his environment in the garden. But from that garden he is driven, and to the tree of life he may stretch forth his hand no more, the moment he has cut the connection between God and himself and has risen in open rebellion against His Sovereign. Nor is this all. Not only is he driven from paradise and is that beauty-spot of the original

kingdom obliterated from the earth, but man is driven into an earth that is cursed because of his sin. “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil thou shalt eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; in the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread, till thou return unto the ground.” Gen. 3:17–19. No doubt, the expression: “cursed is the ground for thy sake” is a very pregnant statement, full of deep significance. Instead of the blessing of the Almighty His curse would henceforth proceed toward all the earth. And even as in the blessing of God there is a fullness of life and joy, so in His curse there is the chilling breath of death. Difficult it is, indeed, to form any conception of the original state of the world, before man fell away from his God and Creator; difficult it is to form a correct idea of the future condition of the New Heavens and the New Earth, when all things shall have been restored to perfection everlasting. And for the same reason it is extremely difficult to estimate at all the effect of this curse of the Almighty upon every order of the kingdom. But certain it is, that an entirely different condition ensued, that tremendous changes took place in the earth’s crust and atmosphere and that the death of the king spread upon every sphere of his dominion. Not to the extent we might perhaps have expected as we shall see another time, but the effect must have been tremendous nevertheless. The earth brought forth thorns and thistles, the animal world turned in rebellion against its former sovereign, and all creatures plainly shows the effect of this penetrating, powerful curse of the Almighty God. In barren desert and death-breathing swamps, in the threatening volcano and the destructive

earthquake, in the howling storm and the striking thunderbolt, in the wild waves of the deep ocean and the dangerous flood, in the lurking beast and stealthy serpent, in the noxious weed and poisonous herb, — in short, in all creation this curse of God is plainly visible. Not only the king, but also the kingdom suffered the consequences of the rebellion of man.

The same picture is drawn by the apostle in Rom. 8:19–22 where he speaks of the groan of all creation, longing as it does for deliverance from the bondage of corruption. In this well-known and beautiful passage the apostle says: “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the revelation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly but by reason of him who hath subjected the same, in hope that the creature itself shall also be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” Also here Scripture tells us, that all creation outside of man, inorganic and organic is subject to vanity, that it is in the bondage of corruption, and that because of this bondage it groans and travails in pain. And it shall not be till the new humanity in Christ is perfectly delivered from that same bondage, that also the creature shall be delivered and participate in the glory of the liberty of the children of God. And therefore, the same solidarity is expressed as elsewhere between the king and the kingdom, the redemption and deliverance of the king from the bondage of corruption shall inaugurate the deliverance of the creature.

—Holland, Mich.

