



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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In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.

—Exodus 19:1–4

On Eagles' Wings

In the third month after they had left Egypt, the children of Israel came to the mount of God.

It is not too strong to say that Mount Sinai, also known as Mount Horeb, was the mountain of God (Ex. 3:1; 18:5). Mount Sinai was the mount of God because Jehovah dwelt on Mount Sinai as his home and his abode. No, Jehovah does not need a home. He is the infinite God. He is omnipresent. The heavens cannot contain him (I Kings 8:27). Nevertheless, though Jehovah does not need a home, he was pleased to dwell on Mount Sinai, just as he would soon be pleased to dwell in the tabernacle and then in the temple (v. 29) and just as he is always pleased to dwell in heaven (v. 30). When Moses had kept the flock of his father-in-law, he had come to this home of God, to this mountain of God, and he had beheld God there! Jehovah had appeared to him from the burning bush. Jehovah had required Moses to take off his shoes before coming into his home, for the place where God dwells and where Moses had stood was holy ground (Ex. 3:5). Now, ten plagues and three months in the wilderness later, God still dwelt on Mount Sinai. When Moses and the children of Israel arrived at the mount, Moses went up unto God (19:3).

What did this mean for Israel? It meant that God had brought Israel to his home! It meant

that God had brought Israel to himself! This is how God himself explains it: “Ye have seen...how I...brought you unto myself” (Ex. 19:4). Of all the nations on the face of the earth, God had brought this one alone to himself.

How could this be? God's home is holy ground, for God himself is holy. He is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). In his consuming holiness he would soon cause the mountain to burn, smoke, and tremble. How could Israel, incurable complainers that they were, stand on God's holy ground? How could they be brought unto God and not be consumed?

God explains this too. He tells the children of Israel through Moses, “I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself” (Ex. 19:4). I bare you on eagles' wings! What an image! Jehovah, as a tremendously large and majestic eagle with its powerful wings outstretched, bore his son Israel upon his back, soared out of Egypt, whisked him through the waste howling wilderness, and sped him to his mountain. He bore his children on eagles' wings and brought them unto himself.

By this image God teaches his church the divine power of salvation. Eagles' wings are powerful. They propel the eagle aloft. They launch him down again at his prey. So also it took divine power to bring Israel unto God: not only power to keep their clothes and shoes from

rotting (Deut. 29:5) but also power to make a sinful people right with God so that they could be with him. The power of Jehovah's eagles' wings.

Now behold the power of God, Jehovah's eagles' wings, upon which he bears us unto himself: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (I Pet. 3:18).

—AL

FROM THE RAMPARTS

Spirit-Led: An Examination (3)

What about the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC)? They also lay claim to the Holy Spirit. Are they truly led by the Spirit of Jesus Christ?

To observe the PRC today and to hear people speak of her, you would think that the battle over her heart and soul is still at stake. Or you might think that the battle over the truth and the lie is still somehow in the balance and that, perhaps, the next session of classis or synod will decide the matter. But none of that is true. When the PRC make ecclesiastical decisions today that resemble the truth, it is only to mislead the unwary. Similarly, when the Roman Catholic Church today says something true about the Trinity or the proper handling of abuse, or when the Christian Reformed Church addresses church polity correctly, it does not mean that those churches have ceased being false. Rather, just as the devil can transform himself into an angel of light, the false church occasionally offers a glimmer of light to deceive the unsuspecting.

What more can be said about the PRC that has not been said already? She is a false church, according to the marks given in article 29 of the Belgic Confession. That has been clearly shown in the first three volumes of *Sword and Shield* and in this magazine, *Reformed Pavilion*. But let's take another look at where the PRC have been and where things stand today. In all of this,

let us try the spirits of the denomination so we can see which spirit it is that lives within her heart and soul.

The Pure Doctrine of the Gospel

The PRC continue to do what false churches do: she corrupts the pure doctrine of the gospel. Today in the PRC, as in the days of John Calvin, from the pulpits, from her papers, and from her assemblies you find "the benefit of redemption buried under many twisted opinions" and "people drunk on the destructive confidence of works" seeking "salvation elsewhere than in Christ."¹ Today men would have you believe that the PRC still stand for the truth, and maybe, just maybe, the next meeting of synod will fix her problems. But not only is that not true; it is not even possible. A false church can only corrupt the pure doctrine of salvation, and that is what the PRC do yet today.

At their most recent synodical meeting, the PRC continued their compromise of justification by faith alone. They did so by saying that assurance of justification comes by way of man's good works. It is good they took that decision. It reflects what is being preached from their pulpits and what is being written in their papers. It reveals that they never meant what they said in 2018 when they made the following affirmation:

True faith cannot look to its works to help find or maintain the assurance that

¹ John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, trans. Casey Carmichael (Dallas: Protestant Heritage Press, 2016), 22.

is found in Christ alone...Good works have a proper place and function in the Christian life but they do not function as helps for finding and maintaining assurance of our justification.²

Fast forward to Synod 2024, where the delegates were asked to rule on this statement by Herman Witsius, which statement had been dredged up by Reverend Koole and defended by Classis East:

Hence, I conclude, that sanctification and its effects, are by no means to be slighted, when we treat of assuring the soul as to its justification.³

In layman's terms, and stated positively, that statement by Witsius can be translated this way: "We must emphasize good works when we talk about assurance of justification." Can there be a more baldly contradictory statement to the PRC's statement in 2018 than this one?

So what did Synod 2024 do? It declared the statement of Witsius to be true doctrine. It did so with three grounds, none of which supported its decision. Ground one defended the statement by saying that the statement was "not in conflict with Scripture, which teaches that good works are evidence of many different aspects of a believer's salvation, including righteousness, forgiveness, and our identity as Jesus' brethren."⁴ That is very much true but not at all a defense of the statement, which teaches that good works contribute to one's assurance of justification. Ground two tried to talk the statement straight by saying that it was "not in conflict with the confessions, which recognize good works as fruits and evidence of many different aspects of a believer's salvation, including true faith, election, and preservation." That is very much true but not at all a defense of the statement, which teaches that good works contribute to one's assurance of justification. What about ground three? Certainly that ground would support Witsius' statement.

Synod couldn't go 0 for 3, could they? Ground three stated simply, "This statement is not in conflict with Synod 2018," and then Synod 2024 quoted the statement of Synod 2018 that I quoted above. Why could synod make that declaration, even though it is obvious to everyone that the statement by Witsius is very much in conflict with the decision of Synod 2018? This was synod's explanation: "Statement #3 could be read as saying that works may serve as a confirmatory evidence to one who already has the assurance of his justification that he is in the faith, and thus that he is justified by faith." Not to put too fine a point on it, but what a load of malarkey that is. That is not at all what the statement says. It says this: "When talking about assurance of justification, make sure you do justice to man's working!" Why defend this statement of Witsius, even though synod couldn't find grounds to support it? Because that is what false churches do—they compromise justification by faith alone.

What also stood out about this decision of Synod 2024 was the disclaimer synod added. The disclaimer was to serve as a warning. Immediately after declaring the statement of Witsius to be true doctrine ("not erroneous"), synod added this disclaimer: "While this statement is not necessarily in error, we ought to be cautious about how we use it." Of course, synod needed this disclaimer. It had just said that man is assured of his justification by his working. That is to corrupt justification by faith alone. This shows that although the false church cannot be ashamed or blush even when it adopts something this egregiously false, it can still feel the need to try to cover all its bases. We have seen such disclaimers before. In 1924 the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) also issued a disclaimer (which it called a "testimony") immediately after approving the theory of common grace as true doctrine.

Now that Synod has made a declaration about these three points, which because

² *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2018*, 69.

³ *Agenda for Synod 2024 of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, 236.

⁴ Synod 2024 Committee 3 advice, II.D. Subsequent quotations from synod's decisions are taken from the same passage.

of the denial of Common Grace have become a matter of conflict, and in principle condemns such a denial, it feels itself compelled earnestly to warn our churches and especially her leaders against all one-sided [pursuits to] drive this matter to the extreme and abuse the doctrine of Common Grace. There is a danger here which ought not be ignored.⁵

That was not the only warning given after the adoption of common grace. At the Christian Reformed synodical meeting in 1926, more warnings were issued. Classis Grand Rapids West asked synod “to utter a strong warning against worldliness and take a definite stand against the popular evils of card-playing, theatre attendance (including movies), and dancing.”⁶ Classis Illinois presented an overture making the same request, with essentially the same grounds: this is wicked behavior, our young people are engaging in it, and we have to do something about it. Classis Illinois also made a candid admission in petitioning synod for help: “How to deal effectively with this deplorable situation baffles many a consistory.”⁷ The answer to this bafflement is this: the denomination had thrown out Christ; it no longer had the gospel; and, therefore, it could expect to be “baffled” by deplorable situations. Such warnings are useless. Their only purposes are to pacify the consciences of those who adopted the false doctrine and to keep those few members sleeping who might sense that something is wrong. Consider the state of the CRC today, and see how effective those warnings were.

Now imagine that the Protestant Reformed denomination was a true church and loved the truth of justification by faith alone. In that case it would have condemned the statement by Witsius, deposed Reverend Koole, and made this declaration:

Assurance of justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. This is taught by

Romans 5:1: “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is further taught in article 23 of the Belgic Confession: “And therefore we always hold fast this foundation, ascribing all the glory to God, humbling ourselves before him, and acknowledging ourselves to be such as we really are, without presuming to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merit of ours, relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in him. This is sufficient to cover all our iniquities, and to give us confidence in approaching to God; freeing the conscience of fear, terror, and dread, without following the example of our first father, Adam, who, trembling, attempted to cover himself with fig leaves.”

That would have been an expression of the truth of justification by faith alone. No one can even imagine adding a disclaimer after it. Can you even fathom someone suggesting adding the words, “We ought to be cautious about how we use that”? Let that sink in for a moment. The broadest and most illustrious assembly of the PRC, filled with her most leading lights, taught something about justification...and had to issue a disclaimer. The Protestant Reformed Churches have corrupted the pure doctrine of the gospel, which is the unmistakable mark of a false church.

Persecution

The PRC may have been false for many years, but they took on an unmistakable mark of the false church in 2021. That was when two ministers were put on trial at the meeting of classis in January 2021. Rev. Ron VanOverloop had taught that communion with Christ was conditional. When Reverend VanOverloop preached that false doctrine, the denomination was not troubled by it in the least. That included the

⁵ Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church 1924, 135–136.

⁶ Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church 1926, 56.

⁷ Acts of Synod of the Christian Reformed Church 1926, 57.

minister, elders, deacons, and members of Faith Protestant Reformed Church, where the heresy was preached. But a husband and wife protested the sermon and somehow made it to classis even though the consistory of Grace Protestant Reformed Church, where VanOverloop was the minister, did everything it could to prevent that, including mocking and spiritually abusing the couple who brought the protest.⁸ Something was striking about that meeting of classis. Not one but two ministers were on trial. Reverend Lanning was also being set before the tribunal. Reverend Lanning had rebuked the PRC for her errors and coldness to the truth. What took place at that meeting of classis has been well documented.⁹ It exposed the heart of the denomination. For a few hours there in Standale, Michigan, the mask of piety worn by the PRC was torn off. The Belgic Confession says that the difference between the true and false church will be unmistakable. It was as unmistakable as it could be at Classis January 2021. The honor of the delegates assembled there—ministers and elders—had been sullied, and they rose to defend it. They were ready to vote for Reverend Lanning’s deposition by the time of the first coffee break. But when it came to Reverend VanOverloop, their attitude was different. They worked hard to preserve his reputation. They stammered and they stuttered, and they hemmed and they hawed, all to try to talk his false doctrine straight. And when it was all said and done, they came out with some word salad decision that made sure that no one would repent of anything and that Reverend VanOverloop could continue with his reputation firmly intact. At day’s end Reverend VanOverloop continued in the denomination as a minister in good standing. Reverend Lanning was gone, spiritually murdered and his body tossed in the ditch alongside Lake Michigan Drive.

Reverend VanOverloop’s ministry was allowed to continue just long enough for the denomination

to expose its wicked heart in how it dealt with him. He was out as a minister less than a year later (and not for false doctrine).

How about another comparison? Compare how the denomination treated Rev. Carl Haak to how it treated Reverend Lanning. Synod 2018 made clear that Neil and Connie Meyer had been right all along that justification is actually and really by faith alone without the works of man. The Meyers had been right over against the consistory of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, which had taught and defended justification by faith and works. Synod declared that the doctrinal statement that had been submitted by Reverend Haak and others gave to good works “a place and function out of harmony with the Reformed confessions.”¹⁰ After synod had decided that the Meyers’ doctrine was correct and that the doctrine of Hope and of the doctrinal statement was erroneous, Reverend Haak said about that false doctrine, “I have always taught this doctrine, and I plan on continuing to teach this doctrine!” He was nothing if not honest. Well, what happened to Reverend Haak? Surely a comment like that, where he announced his love for justification by faith and works, would have an impact on a man’s ministry. Not even a little bit. He was allowed to retire with honors, and he now goes around the denomination continuing to preach the false doctrine that he loves so much. Had Reverend Lanning only done what Reverend Haak had done—that is, preach the lie—he would still be a minister in good standing in the denomination, with all the trappings that come with the position. But Reverend Lanning did not do that. He rebuked the PRC for her errors, and that is one thing the denomination will not tolerate.

Still not satisfied? How about Neil and Connie Meyer? They were the victims of brutal spiritual abuse by the consistory of Hope Protestant Reformed Church. Why? The Meyers followed

⁸ See Dewey Engelsma, “Violence,” *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), May 20, 2021, <https://astraitbetwixttwo.com/2021/05/20/violence/>.

⁹ See Dewey Engelsma, “Classis East (1),” *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), June 5, 2021, <https://astraitbetwixttwo.com/2021/06/05/classis-east-1/>; “Classis East (2),” *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), June 15, 2021, <https://astraitbetwixttwo.com/2021/06/15/classis-east-2/>.

¹⁰ *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America 2018*, 80.

the church orderly way. They protested and appealed. They submitted to church discipline. Why were they so hated? Because the so-called shepherds of Hope Protestant Reformed Church hated them and made sure the rest of the denomination did as well. And did the denomination ever follow suit! The ultimate reason is that Neil and Connie Meyer stood for justification by faith alone and would not budge. The devil hates that doctrine and will do anything to extinguish it. It was that spirit that was at work in the consistory of Hope PRC and the denomination. Neil languished under church discipline for three years, so that his wife Connie had to take up the battle and then herself faced the murderous tactics of the consistory. Month after month, year after year, they had to hear their savior Jesus Christ be defamed and displaced by Reverend Overway, who did it with the full support and approval of the consistory. Yet they labored on, all in the service of their Lord. And when it was shown they were right? Did the ministers of Classis East take to their pulpits to repent for having defended the lie and for having misrepresented the Meyers?¹¹ Did they admonish their members to repent? Did any members of the denomination repent? For a church that now makes a lot of noise about wanting to correct abuse, you would think they would want to start with one of the most glaring examples of spiritual abuse any of us have seen in our lifetimes. So did the denomination turn? To ask that question is to answer it. No one is sorry for the murder of that faithful couple. From the professors in the seminary to the ministers on the pulpit to the elders and deacons on the bench to the lay people filling the pews, no one is sorry for the abuse and murder of Neil and Connie Meyer.

Where do the Protestant Reformed Churches stand today? Ask yourself how many men have been suspended or removed from office for false doctrine. This is how many: none. The men

who have been the loudest defenders of the error have been placed in the highest positions of authority in the denomination.¹² Who have been relieved of their duties or suspended and deposed? Only those who taught and defended the truth and rebuked the denomination for her errors. What is tolerated from her pulpits? Error. What is not tolerated? A rebuke. This is no longer a surprise. It must be this way. For the false church “persecutes those who...rebuke her for her errors” (Belgic Confession 29).

Christ? Or Man?

The Protestant Reformed Churches rely more upon men than upon Christ. Consider the history of the PRC with Guidepost Solutions. Synod 2023 of the PRC turned to Sodom to do her spiritual work. That is not hyperbole. That is what Guidepost Solutions is, according to her public pronouncements.¹³ The PRC said to Sodom, “Come over and help us.” So Sodom did.

“But,” someone will protest, “the PRC corrected that!”

Did they? This is what the final report of Synod 2024 had to say about the work of the synod concerning the third-party organization the denomination had hired.

Synod’s decision did NOT declare the decision of 2023 erred in seeking to combat the sin of the sexual abuse of minors by using a third party to assist the PRCA in discovering the extent of the sin within the PRCA. The decision also did NOT declare the decision of 2023 erred in judging that the PRCA needed assistance from an independent third-party to help PRCA examine itself for the purpose of identifying and seeking to overcome woeful weaknesses and failures in addressing the sin of abuse. While synod declared it erred in hiring a

¹¹ See Dewey Engelsma, “Repentance,” *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), May 20, 2021, <https://astraitbetwixttwo.com/2021/05/04/repentance/>.

¹² See Dewey Engelsma, “Trusting in the Shadow of Egypt,” *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 32 (November 18, 2023): 5–9.

¹³ Guidepost Solutions (@GuidepostGlobal). 2022. Twitter, June 6, 2:05 PM. <https://twitter.com/GuidepostGlobal/status/1533872616812978176>.

secular organization to do church work, the proper perspective is that the focus must be on the much more serious matters of combatting the heinous sin and crime of child sexual abuse and of acknowledging and seeking to overcome the devastating sin of the improper response to child sexual abuse by consistories.¹⁴

If ever there was a minimizing of sin so that not one person in the entire denomination would think of repenting or of turning from their wickedness, it was that summary of synod written by the second clerk of synod, Rev. C. Spronk.¹⁵

Consider the monstrosity of what the Protestant Reformed Churches did by calling in Guidepost. They turned to Sodom for help. A church that claimed to be the church of the risen Lord Jesus Christ said to Sodom, “Please come over and help us.” The condition of the PRC is the same as that of Israel when she went to Egypt for help: “This is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the LORD” (Isa. 30:9).

Someone may still say, “Yes, but at least the PRC are no longer working with Guidepost.” And I say it is even more wickedness to suspend the relationship with Sodom without a confession of sin than if they had just continued on their way, allowing Sodom to fix their problems. Now they can add hypocrisy to their sin of calling in this third party.

Ask yourself how many people will repent, having read the decision to discontinue the work with Guidepost. Where was the admission of sin for having committed this unspeakably wicked deed? They had Jehovah, on the one hand, and Sodom, on the other hand; and they chose Sodom. Not one person will repent or even feel the slightest bit of remorse for what the denomination did or what the members connived at. It is an unmistakable mark of the false church, according

to article 29 of the Belgic Confession, that “she relieth more upon men than upon Christ.” The writers of the Belgic Confession never could have imagined what took place in the PRC, which would have led them to write, “She relieth more upon Sodom than upon Christ.”

What made this even more egregiously wicked was what these decisions did to the abused members of the denomination. By bringing in Guidepost in the first place, the leaders of Synod 2023 gave the members of their denomination false hope that help was on the way. The abused members of the denomination knew that they would not receive help from their consistories, and the “divines” assembled at Synod 2023 knew there would be no help from the consistories. That is why, after much deliberation, they voted to bring in this third party. You bring in a third party because you can’t do the work yourself. After Synod 2023 the message to the denomination was, “Help is on the way!” Think of what this must have done for the abused and torn members of the denomination. You can hear the joy in their voices: “Help is on the way!” I must not defend that response, but neither am I going to pick up a stone. They were abused, torn, and rent—men and women for whom the foundations were destroyed—and they had found no help from the men who were in place to protect them. Instead of shepherds to feed them, they had shepherds who tore them to shreds and who did nothing about the wolves who had been given free rein in the sheepfold. These abused members were desperate. So when the denomination, through her assembly of wise men, pointed them not to the hill of Jerusalem, where God dwells (Ps. 121), but to the valley of Hinnom, where evil dwells (Jer. 19:2–6), of course their spirits would lift.

And now Synod 2024, calmly, coolly, and no doubt with a few yuk-yuks at the coffee breaks, decided to break off the PRC’s relationship with

¹⁴ Clay Spronk, “Final Report of the 2024 Synod of the PRCA,” <http://www.prca.org/about/church-government/synod/itemlist/category/428-synod-2024-trinity-prc-hudsonville-mi-june-11-14-17-18-20-2024>.

¹⁵ The sermon preached at Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church titled “Shepherds to Feed You” is a perpetual witness against the wickedness of the Protestant Reformed denomination. You can find that sermon here: <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=21221157515502>.

Guidepost. After a Pontius Pilate-like washing of their hands, the delegates went back to their untroubled lives, ignoring the harm that such an act would do to the abused members of the denomination, who thought help was on the way. Now you see it, now you don't! I can imagine how hopeless—and helpless—this leaves the abused sheep of the PRC. Help did not come from within, and help cannot come from without. And not one soul repents of the monstrously wicked act of having called Sodom in the first place.

What makes this second act so heinous is that synod cloaked it with piety. Having found a Bible at this session of synod, they realized, “Hey, Israel shouldn't go to Sodom for help after all!” And what continues is that the spoiled in the denomination are not delivered from the hand of the oppressor; violence continues to be done to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow; and innocent blood continues to be shed in that place (Jer. 22:3). There is no help for the abused in that denomination. And more abuse will take place. Wolves have entered the sheepfold, and there are no shepherds to break the jaw of the oppressor and free the oppressed

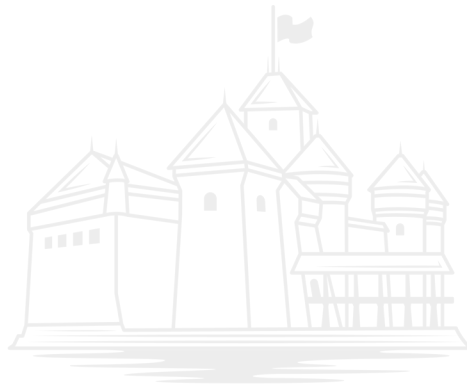
(Job 29:12, 17). The elders of that denomination are winsome men, most of them successful in business and at making money, men about whom everyone speaks well; but they are not spiritual men. They are carnal. They can be of no help to the abused. The only help that will truly rescue and save the abused in the PRC is the pure preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Where the pure preaching of the gospel is found, there you will find the sacraments administered purely and discipline administered properly. In a city filled with wolves, hirelings, and oppressors, Jesus Christ is the only hope of the oppressed; and he is not to be found in the PRC. The oppressed will look for relief in vain.

The Protestant Reformed Churches are governed by the spirit of man and not the Spirit of Christ. They are false, according to the marks of the Belgic Confession, and a church in which the Spirit of Jesus Christ takes no part, except to condemn.

All of that being true, why do so few in the denomination care?

(To be concluded)

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— PAVILION —

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

We were discussing the idea of the unity of the counsel of God, more specifically the truth that the counsel of God as a whole is characterized by unity of purpose. One single purpose dominates the counsel of our God with regard to all things.

This purpose, so we stated, is the glory of His Name.

That this should be the all controlling purpose, it may be stated, stands to reason.

God is the highest Good. And because He is the highest Good and there is no Good above or next to Him, it stands to reason that in all that He does He aims at the glory of His own Being. Hence, nothing else could possibly be the purpose of the counsel of the Almighty than this Highest Good, the glory of His Name.

We made an attempt to show on the basis of Scripture that this is no mere philosophy, however, that it is no mere human conclusion, but that it is the truth as presented in the Word of God. It is always necessary to adhere closely to Scripture. All our doctrine must ultimately be liberated from all human, merely human reasoning and be shown to have its source in the infallible Word of our God. Only in this way will we be able to safeguard ourselves against all sorts of errors that might easily enter into a discussion of our doctrine. And at the same time, this is the only safe and certain way to carry on the development of our Reformed doctrine for the future. The line of Reformed thought as expressed in our standards certainly is capable of further development. Though we confess that the Reformed conception is the purest conception of the truth; though we confess that this conception is expressed in our

Reformed standards; there has never been anyone who maintained that our fathers, or that any theologian, said the very last word as to the development of this Reformed thought. But to do this we must first and last cling closely to the Word of our God. And again and again it ought to be shown that the Reformed conception of the truth is in harmony with Scripture. While doing this we should, indeed, pay high regard to what the great Reformed theologians have written in the past. We never ought to show any lack of respect for the work of such men as Dr. Kuyper and Dr. Bavinck in the Netherlands. They are, indeed, geniuses, God-given giants of thought, that have beautifully expounded and developed the truth of our Reformed faith. And gratefully we make use of their work. If only we remember that even their work need not be regarded as final, and that, to say the least, they have no official authority. It would seem sometime as if a quotation from either Bavinck or Kuyper settles any question with regard to our Calvinistic life-view. The impression is sometimes given as if it were presumptuous to differ from them in any respect. It sounds almost conceited to maintain that the line of Reformed faith is capable of further development even after they have expressed themselves. Now, this attitude we refuse to adopt as our own. Once more, we have the highest regard for the great Dutch theologians. We owe a good deal to them, especially to Kuyper. But we do not feel as if it were presumptuous to differ with them in some respects, neither do we admit that they have added the very last stone to the structure of our Calvinistic faith. Once more, then, there is need that all our Reformed doctrine be continually explained in the light of Scripture, and that the

contact with the Word of God be strictly maintained. This is true of all our doctrine. But this is true in the highest sense of that heart of our Reformed conception: the eternal counsel of God. Fact is, of course, that this heart of our conception is often attacked. The slightest emphasis cannot be laid on this part of our faith but the enemy will tell us that we are determinists. Now, of course, our Reformed view of the counsel of God has absolutely nothing to do with determinism. In the near future we hope to make plain the difference. Now, however, it must first of all be plain that this Reformed conception of the counsel of God is based on Scripture. If we know this, if we see this, if we are convinced of this, we do no more hesitate to accept it, to teach it, and to give it exactly the place and the emphasis Scripture gives it. For the Word of God is the ultimate and final basis of all we believe. Before it we bow unconditionally and that even regardless of the question whether human reason justifies our conviction or not.

It is for this reason that we reminded you of that tremendous portion from Rom. 9, where the apostle ultimately silences all objections to his doctrine by an appeal to the figure of the potter and the clay. There it was plainly shown that in all God's counsel He aims absolutely at the manifestation of His power and glory, both in the vessels fitted to destruction and in those fitted to honor. And in language which we would hesitate to adopt, were it not the Word of God, the apostle expresses the truth of the highest sovereignty of God.

It is for the same reason, and because of the fundamental significance of the subject, that we wish to call your attention to at least one more portion of the Word, rich in significance from more than one point of view, but especially for our purpose.

I refer to Eph. 1:3–14.

In general I may state, in the first place, that in this most glorious passage the apostle speaks of the counsel of God, first with a view to the salvation of His people, but second also with a view to the reuniting of all things in heaven and on earth in Christ. And in this passage he expresses

as often as three times that the purpose of this eternal good will of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the praise of the glory of His grace. No other purpose is mentioned at all. Even when the believers are mentioned they appear for the purpose "that we should be holy and without blemish before Him in love."

But let us for the spiritual joy of it enter a little into detail and tarry a while with this beautiful passage.

We must remember, for a correct understanding of the entire passage, that it is the purpose of the apostle to picture Jesus Christ in all His fulness as the Head of the Church. In his epistle he wants to come to the idea that the church is the Body of Christ and that, therefore, she derives by faith her all from Him as the Head. An idea which must be grasped and maintained also for a correct understanding of the power of faith. Now, then, in this passage the apostle begins by giving thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for the fact that He did bless the church with all manner of spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. The very evident thought of the apostle is that the blessings of our salvation are centrally all in Christ. Christ is, therefore, the fulness of the spiritual blessings we possess. And only thru our union with Him do we receive them, vs. 3. In the second place the apostle places himself before the question where this union of the church with Christ, so that the church derives all her spiritual blessings from Him and even possesses the fulness of her spiritual blessings in Him in heavenly places, where that union finds its origin. And he turns to the counsel of God for an answer. God has chosen us in Him. In the counsel of God, therefore, that union was established, and the connection of the church with Christ is only the realization of the eternal plan of the Almighty. "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." He "predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." And it is because we were thus chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, because He did thus predestinate us unto the adoption of children by

Jesus Christ, that this union of the church with Christ is realized in time. But now the apostle comes to the question: what is the purpose of all this? Why did God thus predestinate us? For what purpose did He choose us in Christ? And He gives the answer in vs. 6, “To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” Already in vs. 4 the apostle made mention of the purpose from a different point of view when he said: “that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” But here he comes to the direct statement of that purpose of God’s counsel. The praise of the glory of His name! That is the purpose to which everything in that eternal good pleasure is subservient!

But even this is not all. The apostle continues to speak of that eternal purpose in a still broader sense. He says that this God of grace hath abounded to us in all wisdom and prudence. He made known to us the mystery of His will. And that mystery of His will was nothing less than the eternal purpose which He purposed in Himself to gather together again in one all things both that are in heaven and that are on earth, namely in Christ Jesus. A tremendous thought, indeed! God purposed in Himself before the foundation of the world, that ultimately all things in heaven and on earth, all God’s creation, should be gathered together under one head, namely Jesus Christ! He is here pictured as the ultimate King and Head of all creation. He appears here as having been appointed King and Head of the universe from all eternity! The New King of the New Kingdom in the counsel of

God is the Incarnated Word! That had been a mystery hitherto. The devil never had an idea that this was God’s purpose. The old dispensation never fully understood this mystery. But in the new dispensation this was clearly revealed. In the new dispensation God unveiled this mystery, and abounding toward us in all wisdom and prudence He revealed that His ultimate purpose had from eternity been to gather all things in heaven and on earth in Jesus Christ! Now, then, in that same Christ, we, who are predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, we have obtained an inheritance. And what is the purpose of all this? “That we should be to the praise of his glory who first trusted in Christ.” Again the same conclusion: the praise of His glory is the purpose of this mighty counsel and good pleasure, vss. 8–12.

And, finally, the apostle speaks of our being sealed unto this inheritance by the Spirit of promise. He is the earnest of the inheritance we look forward to in glory. The earnest until the redemption of the purchased possession. And after the apostle has also developed this idea he once more returns to the purpose of it all when he says: “unto the praise of his glory.”

Surely, an emphatic statement of the truth that the purpose that dominates the counsel of God is nothing less and nothing else than the glory of His own Name!

And this is the fundamental, the basic thought of the entire Word of God.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

