



REFORMED

— PAVILION —

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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 thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: there shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount...And the LORD said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. And let the priests also, which come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them. And Moses said unto the LORD, The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it. And the LORD said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest he break forth upon them. So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them.

—Exodus 19:12–13, 21–25

Set Bounds Unto the People

Set bounds unto the people! So Jehovah commanded Moses in preparation for God’s descent upon Mount Sinai. The bounds that Moses was to set were barriers around the base of Mount Sinai. Whether by a ditch or a hedge or a wall, the children of Israel must be blocked from ascending the mountain. When the trumpet sounded long, they may come up to the barrier but no further. The rules for Israel were very clear: go not up into the mount. The rules were very strict: touch not the border of it. The rules were very severe: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death. The rules were comprehensive: whether it be beast or man, it shall not live. Can you imagine anyone trying it? A man, wild with fevered curiosity to see what Jehovah looks like, breaking through the barrier at a run! Such a man was to be stoned if he was at close range or shot through with a dart, arrow, or spear if he was at long range. Set bounds unto the people!

The bounds were perplexing to Israel. The bounds kept the people from God. They spoke of judgment and sudden death. They were so strict! Israel “could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the

mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart” (Heb. 12:20).

But the bounds were instructive. The bounds taught the people that they had no access of themselves to the living God. This was a remarkable lesson, for Israel was sanctified! Their clean clothes and their consensual abstinence were evidences of their purity (Ex. 19:14–15). Moses, type of Jesus Christ, had sanctified them (v. 14). They were a holy nation (v. 6). They obeyed God’s command (v. 14). About this sanctified, obedient, holy nation, Jehovah said, “Set bounds unto the people!”

What can it mean that Jehovah set bounds unto his holy people? This first: the way to Jehovah is not through the holiness of the people. Not even through the real and true holiness wrought by Jesus Christ himself through his Spirit in our hearts. Likewise, the way to Jehovah is not through the obedience of the people. Not even through the real and true obedience wrought by Jesus Christ himself through his Spirit in our hearts. The salvation gift of holiness and its resultant fruit of obedience are not our access to God.

This second: the only way to Jehovah is through the mediator. Jesus declared it: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Moses and Aaron pictured it: “And the LORD said unto him... thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest he break forth upon them” (Ex. 19:24). The blood of Christ accomplished it: “For ye are not come unto” Mount Sinai, “but ye are come unto mount Sion... and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling” (Heb. 12:18, 22, 24).

Thus we confess it: “We believe that we have no access unto God but alone through the only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous, who therefore became man, having united in one person the divine and human natures, that we men might have access to the divine Majesty, which access would otherwise be barred against us” (Belgic Confession 26).

Set bounds unto the people! For the only way to Jehovah is the mediator, through whom we go safely through the bounds unto our God.

—AL



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Luther's German New Testament

Reformation Day is coming! As we near the end of September, we begin to anticipate October. And the imminence of October means that Reformation Day is coming. For on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. Luther certainly did not know that this would mark the beginning of the great Reformation. Luther only intended to introduce a debate among the monks about the nature and efficacy of indulgences. Luther even intended to defend the pope's honor by his theses, which honor Luther feared was being sullied by the pope's buffoonish indulgence peddlers. The furthest thing from Luther's mind was beginning a reformation of the church. But God intended reformation. What looked like Luther's mallet tapping a tack into a wooden church door was in reality God's hammer splintering the prison doors of the Roman Catholic Church that his people might be freed. God caused Luther's Ninety-five Theses to be printed and published throughout all of Europe, to the great chagrin of Satan but to the blessed joy of God's beleaguered people. October 31 is Reformation Day, and Reformation Day is coming!

In anticipation of Reformation Day, the editorial this week is a brief look at another significant date in the early years of the Reformation. October 31 is Reformation Day, but today's date—September 21—was just as important in God's reformation of the church. For on September 21, 1522, Luther first published his German translation of the New Testament, which translation he had made while in hiding at the Wartburg castle. The publication of scripture in the language of the people was revolutionary. For the first time in their lives, the common people of Germany could read the word of God for

themselves. Though they were the base things of the world, God had made his people prophets, priests, and kings in Christ. With the publication of Luther's "September Testament," these spiritual priests could read for themselves all the labor and service of their chief High Priest. And with the words of their High Priest ringing in their ears, they could begin to discern the deception of the popish charlatans who had held them so long in spiritual bondage. As one historian remarked about this event,

Most people today when gazing up at the Wartburg remember that it was the place where Luther did the one thing that would more than anything symbolize all else that he did when he translated the New Testament into German, forever releasing from its Latin prison the simple song of freedom itself, which would fly around the world and never again be hidden away.¹

Without further ado let us transport back in time to this date 502 years ago that we might behold the soul-gladdening sight of God reforming his church.

Here I Stand

The story of Luther's 1522 translation of the New Testament begins in May 1521. At that time Luther was in grave danger of being murdered. The two most powerful men in the empire—the pope and the emperor—considered Luther to be public enemy number one. Although the common people of Europe considered Luther to be a hero of the downtrodden and although God's people found in Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone the key to life and happiness and heaven, the hierarchy of the church saw in Luther the greatest possible threat

¹ Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017), 237.

to the church's power. For Luther had arrived at the unshakable conviction that scripture, not the pope, was the highest spiritual authority for the child of God. Though the pope and all his servants said one thing, if scripture said another thing, then let God be true, and let every man be a liar. With the spiritual knowledge that scripture was the highest court of appeal, Luther could stand on scripture's doctrine of justification by faith alone over against every papal minion who said otherwise. And if the pope wanted Luther to recant his doctrine of justification by faith alone, then the pope and his servants would have to convince Luther out of the scriptures. But if the pope and his servants could not convince Luther out of the scriptures, then Luther had no choice but to stand on the gospel.

In mid-April 1521 Luther survived the greatest showdown of the Reformation at the Diet of Worms. He had been summoned to the city of Worms to answer for his doctrine. The pope's summons put Luther in a precarious position, for the penalty for refusing to recant his doctrine would be death. The emperor had promised Luther safe passage, but emperors had broken that promise before. On the day Luther appeared, the contrast in the audience chamber could not have been starker. Assembled on one side were the pope's most distinguished servants and the emperor. On the other side was the lowly monk, Martin Luther. When the papal representative pressed Luther to recant his doctrine—on the ground that the entire weight of Christian thinking and writing was against him—Luther took his stand. In words that rang through the packed audience chamber of the Diet and that will continue to ring through the halls of history until the Lord returns, Luther declared,

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the scriptures or clear reason, for I do not trust in the Pope or in the councils alone, since it is well known that they often err and contradict themselves, I am

bound to the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. God help me. Amen.²

Following Luther's speech two imperial soldiers escorted him out of the audience chamber. The audience assumed that Luther was being led to his death. Taunts rained down on him in the stairwell. Fervent wishes were uttered for Luther to burn in the flames. But whatever evil end the emperor might have been contemplating for Luther, the emperor's plan was not yet settled. The Lord turns the hearts of emperors whithersoever he will, and the imperial soldiers delivered Luther to the house of his friends. Luther entered, smiling, and shouted, "I've come through! I've come through!"³

Kidnapped!

But having come through, Luther continued to stand in mortal peril. Before Worms the pope had excommunicated Luther, but that had not stopped Luther. At Worms the pope and the emperor had combined their strength against Luther, but Luther had remained steadfast. After Worms the only conceivable path remaining was to silence Luther by killing him. Indeed, Luther and his friends fully expected the emperor to do everything in his power to kill Luther. Luther embraced his imminent death at the hands of the papal tyrants and even hoped for it. But Luther's friends prevailed upon him to let them "kidnap" him instead so that they could whisk him away to an undisclosed location, where he could weather the outbreak of imperial wrath. Luther reluctantly agreed and wrote to his friend, "I shall submit to being 'imprisoned,' and hidden away, though as yet I do not know where."⁴

Early in May 1521, the kidnapping ruse that had been planned by Luther's friends was put into effect. As Luther and two friends traveled on the roads back to Wittenberg,

² Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 216.

³ Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 217.

⁴ Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 231–32.

the three of them were violently set upon by a group of armed horsemen...The kidnapppers—for such they now revealed themselves to be—pointed their fearsome crossbows at the wagon driver, demanding with rough curses to know whom he was carrying. Certainly not privy to what was going on and fearing for his life, the driver blabbed what they surely already knew...The men rather roughly grabbed Luther, but not before he had grabbed his [Greek] New Testament and the Hebrew Bible. They likely forced him to run alongside their horses until they were out of sight. When the coast was clear, they could reveal themselves as friendly, which Luther had certainly suspected. They now stripped him of his monk's habit and dressed him in a knight's cloak, so that anyone seeing him would have no idea that he was a monk...Because they didn't want anyone to be able to follow them or trace their path, they took a wildly circuitous, serpentine route toward their mysterious destination, deep in the Thuringian forest.⁵

One of the friendly kidnapppers was the castellan of the Wartburg castle, a majestic and remote fortress in the middle of the thick Thuringian forest. Under the cover of midnight, deep in the woods, Luther's kidnapper-deliverers escorted him into his new home.

Luther was at the Wartburg castle, and almost no one in the empire knew about it, although, just as was hoped, many soon heard about the kidnapping and wondered whether Luther had been killed.⁶

A Mystery Guest in the Castle

The Wartburg castle was no stranger to guests. Knights often took up lodging in the Wartburg's rooms. Therefore, for the months that stretched into nearly a year that Luther was to remain hidden in the Wartburg, he would be disguised

as a knight. Although Luther chafed at not being in the thick of the Reformation in Wittenberg, one gets the impression that Luther rather enjoyed keeping up his disguise in the Wartburg. Monks were recognizable by the bald heads of their tonsures, so Luther grew out his hair in curly locks. Monks kept their faces clean-shaven, so Luther grew an unruly beard with a thick mustache. In Wittenberg Luther had been known as "Doctor Luther"; in the Wartburg Luther was known as "Junker Jorje," which translates roughly as "Sir George." Doctor Luther had worn the plain robes of a monk, but Junker George wore the silks and colors of a knight. Doctor Luther had eaten plain fare, but Junker George ate the dainties that befit his station. One of Luther's pastimes, in full Junker George disguise, was to approach strangers in the Wartburg and ask them whether Martin Luther's whereabouts had been discovered yet.

Luther's days in the Wartburg were filled with affliction. Luther suffered from nearly constant, painful constipation—and in letters to his friends spared no detail of the sweaty, bloody exertions that his malady caused. Luther also suffered from the vicious spiritual attacks of Satan, who knew all about Junker George's true identity and who aimed the fiery darts of doubt at Luther's soul. The story even goes that Luther once threw an inkpot at his tormentor, though Luther did not do so out of any imagination that he could drive away the devil by spilling ink. In this, as in all things, Luther found his comfort time after time in the wounds of Christ.

But above all, Luther's days in the Wartburg were filled with writing. He was determined to spend his banishment in "Patmos"—as Luther called the Wartburg—in what work the Lord would give him. From the Wartburg Luther produced shorter booklets, longer books, and voluminous correspondence. Although only the very closest of Luther's friends knew where he was hiding, the whole world soon knew that Luther was alive, as a flood of his writings poured into circulation.

⁵ Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 235.

⁶ Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 235.

Luther's German New Testament

By far the most ambitious writing project that Luther undertook was the translation of the entire New Testament from Greek into German. From every point of view, Luther's project was astounding. Scholars devote *years* to translating the scriptures; Luther completed the entire New Testament in eleven *weeks*. Translators must be able to navigate effortlessly in both the Greek original and the target language; Luther not only was fluent both in Greek and in various German dialects of the day, but by his translation he also virtually created the modern German language spoken today. God swept Luther along in the scriptures, and historians look back at it in awe.

That Luther managed to pull off the entirety of this project in eleven weeks has boggled the mind of scholars for half a millennium. This is because such an undertaking requires an extremely rare set of skills, and history has judged that Luther performed it exceedingly well, so well that his is still today the principal German translation that is used or upon which subsequent translations have been based...

It is a startling fact of linguistic happenstance that a number of these [local German] dialects, which were merging to become a universal or "High" German around that time, were doing so in precisely the area of Luther's Saxony. By using this new language with what can only be reckoned virtuoso skill, and putting it into a book that was the only book many families would own, he helped Germans find a national voice in a way that he never particularly intended but that can never be sufficiently appreciated. In doing so he helped create a German national identity, pulling a common scarlet-and-gold thread of Scripture through each of the more than three hundred patches on the rich linguistic quilt.⁷

As wonderful as Luther's translation was, it was evident to him that the work had been God's and not his own. With his typical wit Luther wrote to a friend how humbling the work had been. "I also have undertaken to translate the Bible. It is good for me, for otherwise I might have died with the fond persuasion that I was learned."⁸

God's grace alone had saved Luther from sin and death, and God's grace alone carried Luther through the translation of the New Testament. Finally the people had a Bible in which they could read of their savior firsthand in their own tongue. The New Testament in German was published on September 21, 1522. In his preface to his "September Bible," Luther sounded the glad tidings that were contained in the scriptures.

"Gospel" is a Greek word and means in Greek a good message, good tidings, good news, a good report, which one sings and tells with gladness. For example, when David overcame the great Goliath, there came among the Jewish people the good report and encouraging news that their terrible enemy had been struck down and that they had been rescued and given joy and peace; and they sang and danced and were glad for it (1 Sam. 18:6).

Thus this gospel of God or New Testament is a good story and report, sounded forth into all the world by the apostles, telling of a true David who strove with sin, death, and the devil, and overcame them, and thereby rescued all those who were captive in sin, afflicted with death, and overpowered by the devil. Without any merit of their own He made them righteous, gave them life, and saved them, so that they were given peace and brought back to God. For this they sing, and thank and praise God, and are glad forever, if only they believe firmly and remain steadfast in faith.⁹

⁷ Metaxas, *Martin Luther*, 272–74. What Metaxas calls "linguistic happenstance" was, of course, God's sovereign providence.

⁸ Arthur Cushman McGiffert, *Martin Luther: The Man and His Work*, ed. Roelof A. Janssen (Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2017), 269.

⁹ Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Protestant Reformation* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968), 38–39.

Conclusion

Reformation Day is coming. And what a reformation God wrought by his word and Spirit in his church through the translation of the scriptures. May the Lord's wonderful work of old

yet encourage God's people today, who are kept by the same word and the same Spirit.

“Zion heard, and was glad” (Ps. 97:8).

—AL

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S BANNER ARTICLES

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Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

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

The question that is occupying our attention is that of the Theodicy. The question: Is there unrighteousness with God?

God's counsel is all-comprehensive. Nothing escapes the power of His irresistible will.

Fact is, however, that there is a good deal of evil in the world. There is both physical and moral evil. The question arises, therefore: Is there, then, unrighteousness with God?

Now, to arrive at the only correct answer of this question we wish first of all to take the standpoint that the very question is absurd, because it implies a contradiction in terms. It presupposes an impossible comparison and judgment. It proceeds evidently from the erroneous idea that there is a certain standard of righteousness to which God Himself is subject, and according to which we would be able to express a judgment in regard to the righteousness of God. It implies that there is a principle of righteousness that can serve us as a criterion more ultimate, more absolute than God Himself, with which the Most High can be compared. If I must determine whether anything is perfectly perpendicular, I apply the plumb-line. This latter instrument serves as the standard, as the ultimate criterion, with which I compare the object to be tested, and according to which I form my judgment. If it must be decided whether or not any article possesses the expected weight

or measure, the standard weight or measure is applied. If it is to be determined whether a man is guilty or innocent, judgment is expressed upon him in the light of the law. And thus the question: Is there unrighteousness with God? implies a comparison between God and some ultimate standard of righteousness to which also He should be subject.

Now, any such comparison is impossible. The very attempt involves a denial of the God-head of God. For if there is actually a criterion, a standard of righteousness higher than God, a law to which even God is subject, a principle not, of course, within God, but outside of Him and above Him, that law, principle or standard is God. Or still further, if man is in a position to sit in judgment and determine by way of comparison whether or not God is righteousness, Man is really God, Judge of the Most High. The question, therefore, is absurd. It involves a contradiction in terms. It might just as well be put in this form: Is God God? Or from another point of view it might be restated in this manner: Is righteousness righteousness? The question presupposes the possibility that God is not God. It grants the possibility that righteousness is not righteousness. It places a power, a law and standard outside God's own being and above Him.

Not so infrequently some such conception of God is presented. The Most High is often placed

on a par with the creature. It is presented as if God with all creation is subject to certain laws and principles according to which both He and the creature must act. Mark, not thus that these laws and principles are sought in the very Being of God, for then they could not serve as a criterion applied to Him. The moment I myself am the ultimate standard and criterion of all law, no one can sit in judgment over me. It is just because there are laws to which I am subject that I can be judged. No, but the case is often stated as if there were abstract rules and principles of truth and righteousness apart from the Most High, laws and principles which we also know and according to which we are able to judge the Most High God.

This entire view is wrong.

Mark, we must not be misunderstood, we do not assert that there are no objective principles of truth. We do not assert that there is no objective righteousness. That would be casting ourselves right in the very midst of unbelief, of most radical agnosticism. But we maintain that there is no truth apart from God, that there is no standard of righteousness apart from God's very Being, that there are no principles of righteousness outside of God and above Him according to which the creature would be able to pass judgment. To maintain this latter view is to deny the Godhead of God.

And, therefore, in answering the question of the theodicy we assume the standpoint that God is righteousness because He is God.

This is simply an ultimate truth.

There are for science ultimate truths, truths that are so absolutely beyond all doubt by any normal mind, that they are not in need of proof. They are self-evident. They are their own testimony and they appeal immediately to every human mind as being truths. And, at the same time, they are truths that are not capable of further verification. They cannot be proven. They must simply be accepted. They are called axioms. That the whole is greater than any of its parts, for instance, is such an axiom. No one doubts it. Anyone that doubts these truths is

abnormal. True, along a long and intricate way of philosophy man can sometimes cause himself to live in the delusion that he doubts even these truths. But fact is, that he becomes abnormal in so doing.

Well, then, we maintain that it is such an ultimate truth, such a truth that is self-evident, that has the testimony of its own veracity within itself, such a truth that is not capable of further proof and that is in need of no further proof, in short, that it is an axiom that God is righteousness.

If God is God He must be ultimate. There is nothing above Him. He owes the source of His existence to nothing. He exists of and by Himself, as the absolutely independent, the absolutely free one. If we may speak of limitations we would say that God is limited only by His own Being. That Being of God is the ultimate source of all things, in harmony with that Being is also His mind and His will. As God, then, He is at the same time the source of all righteousness, of all law, of all truth and justice. It is not thus, that anything is righteous because we judge it thus. Still less may we say that God is righteous because He is in conformity with certain principles we know. But anything is righteous simply because it is thus announced by the Most High. Every single principle of righteousness flows from Him, has its source in Him. And of all righteousness He is the only and ultimate standard. Once more, then, God is righteous because He is God.

It seems to me in regard to the question of the theodicy this is the only safe ground to occupy. If, then, the question is asked: Is there unrighteousness with God? we would simply answer: God forbid!

That this is correct may be learnt from whatever solution of the problem has ever been given. They may briefly be divided into two classes. The one class is characterized by the fact that it denies the Godhead of God in some way. As has already been mentioned, one of the latest attempts is the theory of a finite God as was proposed by Wells. God is not infinite. He meets with difficulties. He is Himself struggling

with the power of evil, struggling to make the best of this world. But since He is finite He does not always immediately succeed. Of course, this entire finite-God theory simply does away with God. If God is not infinite in power and wisdom, if He is limited and may be successfully opposed and thwarted in His purposes by the creature, He may still be a powerful Being, but He is God no more. A finite God is no God. The same method has been applied to other attributes of God essential to the very idea of the Godhead. It has been stated that God were not all-wise, that He is not absolutely holy, righteous, good. But it is not difficult to see that all these solutions have this in common, that they destroy the very conception of God. On the other hand it has been denied that evil is really evil. There is really no sin, but only a subjective feeling of sin and guilt. There is really no physical evil, no suffering as evil, for after all, this so-called evil is productive of a greater good. It is stated by some, that if out of the latest war only the League of Nations might come forth as its result, God would be sufficiently excused for sending the war over the earth!

Over against all these views we maintain as a fundamental principle: God is righteous because He is God, and there is no creature that can possibly sit in judgment over Him.

This solution we also find in Scripture. Where the question is touched upon in the Word of God, we find that very answer first of all: God is God, hence there is no unrighteousness in Him. Job is called to see the greatness of God in order that under the impression of God's majesty and power he might learn to confess that it does not become the creature to call his Creator to account. Asaph, who is in pain and anguish and trouble because of the problem, must enter the sanctuary in order to view things from a different, from God's own point of view. Once in the right relation to God, the question is not so troublesome anymore. And when Paul raises the question, not as his own, but as a possible objection to his doctrine of God's absolutely free pleasure, he gives the same answer. God forbid!

thus he exclaims. And what is implied in this exclamation becomes sufficiently clear when he proceeds to argue that God is God and the creature cannot call God to account. The creature may not start to ask the question as to God's righteousness, for even this would be calling God before the bar of human judgment. It behooves the creature rather to bow down in worship before his Sovereign and commence by confessing: Thou art God, and therefore, there is no unrighteousness in thee! With regard to the specific problem before us, this implies that we strictly maintain the all-comprehensive character of the counsel of God. Even the evil of this world and the sin of this world does not escape that counsel. But just as strictly do we maintain that even thus there is no unrighteousness with God. He holily and righteously determined all things by His eternal counsel.

But after all it must never be forgotten that even in the consciousness of God's moral creatures the question is not different. What we mean is that to all eternity in the immediate testimony of all God's moral creatures, the devil and all his followers not excluded, this undeniable axiom shall always be uppermost: God is righteous. God realizes His all-comprehensive counsel especially in His moral creatures through His Spirit. That Spirit gives irresistible testimony that God is, and for that reason there are in actual fact no atheists. A man may, indeed, work himself into the delusion that he is an atheist, — in his heart of hearts he will never rid himself of the testimony: God is. God will not let him. But in that same way God also through His Spirit bears testimony of His own righteousness. He works out His own theodicy. In the hearts of His people He justifies Himself through faith. But also the world He convicts of sin and righteousness and judgment. Hence, the same condition prevails here. Man may for a time seem to kill that testimony and live under the delusion that God is not righteousness, in his deepest heart he will never succeed, and the end of it all will be that all creatures shall justify God.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.