



REFORMED

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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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From the Ramparts Editor: Dewey Engelsma

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MEDITATION

This is the sum of the tabernacle, even of the tabernacle of testimony, as it was counted, according to the commandment of Moses, for the service of the Levites, by the hand of Ithamar, son to Aaron the priest. And Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the LORD commanded Moses. And with him was Aholiab, son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, an engraver, and a cunning workman, and an embroiderer in blue, and in purple, and in scarlet, and fine linen. All the gold that was occupied for the work in all the work of the holy place, even the gold of the offering, was twenty and nine talents, and seven hundred and thirty shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary. And the silver of them that were numbered of the congregation was an hundred talents, and a thousand seven hundred and threescore and fifteen shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary: a bekah for every man, that is, half a shekel, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for every one that went to be numbered, from twenty years old and upward, for six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty men. And of the hundred talents of silver were cast the sockets of the sanctuary, and the sockets of the vail; an hundred sockets of the hundred talents, a talent for a socket. And of the thousand seven hundred seventy and five shekels he made hooks for the pillars, and overlaid their chapiters, and filleted them. And the brass of the offering was seventy talents, and two thousand and four hundred shekels. And therewith he made the sockets to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the brasen altar, and the brasen grate for it, and all the vessels of the altar, and the sockets of the court round about, and the sockets of the court gate, and all the pins of the tabernacle, and all the pins of the court round about.

—Exodus 38:21–31

Living Stones

After several months of construction by Bezaleel, Aholiab, and the wise-hearted in Israel, the pieces of the tabernacle and its furniture were complete. Yes, there was still work to be done. The garments of the high priest and the other priests still had to be made. The pieces of the tabernacle still had to be assembled to pitch the tent. But the pieces were all made and stored, ready for the great day in which God's house would be set up. With the pieces of the tabernacle finished and stockpiled—here the great rolls of curtains, there the stacks of acacia boards covered with gold, and there the bowls filled with pins and other hardware for the joinings—Ithamar the priest, son of Aaron, went over the entire stockpile to count the value of all the gold, silver, and brass that had been used. He found “the sum of the tabernacle, even of the tabernacle of testimony, as it was counted” (Ex. 38:21).

Ithamar counted a tremendous sum. Of gold: 29 talents plus 730 shekels. Of silver: 100 talents plus 1,775 shekels. Of brass: 70 talents plus 2,400 shekels. In today's dollars, using conservative conversion rates and estimates, this represented hundreds of millions of dollars. There was not a town nor a passing caravan nor a nation on earth in those days that could have converted the tabernacle's value into local coin. The materials of the tabernacle were priceless!

But if we take a closer look at the gold, silver, and brass, we shall discover the gospel of our salvation that will gladden our hearts. For the gold, silver, and brass are very precisely named in Ithamar's tally. It was not merely “the gold” but “the gold of the offering” (Ex. 38:24). It was not merely “the silver” but “the silver of them that were numbered of the congregation” (v. 25).

It was not merely “the brass” but “the brass of the offering” (v. 29). That is, the metals represented men. Yes, the tabernacle was made of men!

For consider the silver. Each man of fighting age in Israel had given half a shekel of silver as his atonement money (see Ex. 30:11–16). Six hundred three thousand five hundred fifty men were represented in the silver bases that anchored the tabernacle’s wooden frame, the silver hooks on the pillars that held the great curtains, the silver accent bands that blazed around the dark acacia pillars, and the gleaming silver chapiters that capped each of the rich brown pillars.

And consider the gold. The gold had been jewelry in the ears and on the arms and fingers of the people, which jewelry they offered to the Lord. “And they came, both men and women, as many as were willing hearted, and brought bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold: and every man that offered offered an offering of gold unto the LORD” (Ex. 35:22). By their offerings all the people of Israel were represented in the sheets of gold that covered the interior pillars, the golden thread that was worked into the fine linen cloth, and the gleaming golden furniture of the tabernacle.

And consider the brass. The brass had been kept in the tents of the people of Israel as a valuable and useful metal, which the people had then offered to the Lord. “Every one that did offer an offering of...brass brought the LORD’S offering” (Ex. 35:24). By their offerings all the people of Israel were represented in the brazen altar of burnt offering and its brazen grate, the brass tongs and firepans, the brass anchors for some of the pillars, and the countless brass pins by which the curtains of the tabernacle were hung.

What is the significance of the fact that the precious metal of the tabernacle represented men? Why, it is this: God graciously builds his house of his people. That is, God gives his people an everlasting place in his presence through Jesus Christ. God makes his people the gold and silver and brass of his tabernacle. God makes his people the living stones of his temple. “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 2:5). And God does this for his people in Jesus Christ. For Jesus is the elect cornerstone and the righteous foundation of God’s house.

Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. (I Pet. 2:6–10)

Ithamar took “the sum of the tabernacle” (Ex. 38:21). And here is the sum: “they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27).

—AL



FROM THE EDITOR

A hearty welcome to our readers near and far. For our readers in the northern hemisphere, summer tumbles toward fall; for our readers in the antipodes, winter blossoms into spring; and our readers on the equator wait for a little breeze to cool the skin. But wherever you are, it is time once again to take up this week's issue of *Reformed Pavilion*. May the Lord, who changes not, bless it for his glory and for our refreshment.

This week we take a brief leave from the articles on the Canons of Dordt to begin a review of Prof. David J. Engelsma's new book, volume 1 of

Reformed Theology. We will return to Dordt before too long, Lord willing. But for an issue or three, let us spend some time considering what the professor has to say. There are many interesting things to be gleaned from this first of two volumes.

Also, be sure to note the date and time of this year's Reformation Day lecture hosted by Remnant Reformed Church. A flyer appears elsewhere in this issue.

Happy reading!

—AL



REFORMATION DAY LECTURE

MARTIN LUTHER'S "Theology of the Cross"

Friday, October 30, 2026 · 7:00 p.m.

Martin Luther is most remembered for his 95 Theses, nailed to the church door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. But though his 95 Theses may be Luther's most famous contribution to the Reformation, he made his most profound contribution six months later at the Heidelberg Disputation on April 26, 1518. With the eyes of Europe and the church upon him to see if he would soften his 95 Theses, Luther ran even further into the Reformation with his "Theology of the Cross." It electrified the audience. Not only did Luther not soften his 95 Theses, but he advanced beyond them by leaps and bounds. Luther's "Theology of the Cross" was unlike anything the wisdom of man had heard before. Europe staggered; the church was scandalized; the best and brightest men mobilized against it. Still today, Luther's "Theology of the Cross" appears to be great folly to the wisdom of man. Ah, yes—it appears to be great folly to the wisdom of man; but the "Theology of the Cross" is a sweet comfort to the mind of faith. For the "Theology of the Cross" is simply the gospel of our Savior applied to the doctrine and life of his church.

What is Luther's "Theology of the Cross"? It is not so much a doctrine to be set alongside other doctrines. Rather, the "Theology of the Cross" is a way of thinking. It is the way for faith to think like God and not like man. For God did not glorify himself in the palace of a king but in the sweat and blood and death and curse and scandal of the cross. When the church grasps this by faith, then she understands all of theology and all of life.

This Reformation Day weekend, we would be very pleased if you would join us for a lecture on Martin Luther's "Theology of the Cross."

DATE	Friday, October 30, 2026
TIME	7:00 p.m.
SPEAKER	Rev. Andrew Lanning
TOPIC	Martin Luther's "Theology of the Cross"
PROGRAM	Lecture, followed by Q&A and refreshments
VENUE	Pavilion Christian School 9181 Kenowa Ave. SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49534
HOST	Remnant Reformed Church

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BOOK REVIEW

Reformed Theology, volume 1. David J. Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2026. 444 pages, hardcover, \$59.95. [Reviewed by Rev. Andrew Lanning]

Volume 1 of *Reformed Theology* is the first installment of Prof. David J. Engelsma's dogmatics. Following the traditional division of Reformed doctrine into six loci (main chapters), volume 1 treats the introduction to dogmatics, the doctrine of God (theology), the doctrine of man (anthropology), and the doctrine of Christ (Christology). Presumably, volume 2, when it is published, will treat the doctrine of salvation (soteriology), the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology), and the doctrine of the last things (eschatology).

Volume 1 of *Reformed Theology* expresses the grand Reformed doctrine that Professor Engelsma has (mostly) taught and written for some sixty-three years in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC). Engelsma was ordained into the ministry in the PRC in 1963 and appointed to the chair of dogmatics in the Protestant Reformed Theological School in 1988, and he has continued teaching and writing since his emeritation in 2008. Now, in 2026, the sum and substance of Engelsma's body of doctrine is set forth in *Reformed Theology*. From the back cover: "*Reformed Theology* represents a succinct expression of David J. Engelsma's decades-long ministry spent pastoring, preaching, writing, and teaching." The soul that has spent any time under Engelsma's powerful preaching, lecturing, or writing throughout the years will instantly recognize the contents of *Reformed Theology* as vintage Engelsma.

The appearance of Engelsma's *Reformed Theology* is something of a surprise to this reviewer, although it is a welcome surprise. When the undersigned was Engelsma's student in seminary from 2002

to 2006, Engelsma was nearing the age at which he would be required by synod to retire. Without hyperbole, Engelsma's dogmatics class was not only the best seminary class being taught in the Protestant Reformed seminary, but it was the best seminary class being taught anywhere in the world at the time. Even the world-renowned Richard J. Mouw of Fuller Theological Seminary could not hold a theological candle to David J. Engelsma of the Protestant Reformed Theological School, as their 2001–03 books and debate made clear.¹ Because of the importance of Engelsma's dogmatics class, someone would occasionally suggest to the professor that he should write his dogmatics. Although Engelsma never rejected the possibility outright, he left the distinct impression that writing a dogmatics was not a priority for him, if it was even on his list of projects at all. The PRC still had Herman Hoeksema's dogmatics, after all. Some of us students—unshakable in our conviction that we were very wise and knew everything—thought that we might even "threaten" our beloved professor with the possibility of a posthumous publication of his dogmatics lectures from our class notes if he would not publish his own dogmatics in his lifetime. I do not recall that we ever brought our threat to his attention; I hope that we did not, even if it was meant good-naturedly. I blush now at the memory of our arrogant presumption toward the man, but the anecdote illustrates that even the students who sat under his theology, loved his theology, and lived and breathed his theology were never led to expect that Engelsma would write a dogmatics someday. Its appearance on the scene at the late date of 2026 is all the more welcome for its being unexpected.

¹ Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001); David J. Engelsma, *Common Grace Revisited: A Response to Richard J. Mouw's He Shines in All That's Fair* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2003); "Engelsma Mouw Debate," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVtUFkb8r2E&list=PLpCI00AFTF6anJrSeyQuslGTggsRTP2C->.

Sound Reformed Doctrine

In its main lines *Reformed Theology* is the sound doctrine of the glorious Reformed faith. The heart of the Reformed faith is the sovereign God of the covenant, and Engelsma does justice to this theme. From beginning to end the book breathes the warm gospel that the sovereign God has taken his elect people into his covenant life through Jesus Christ. From beginning to end the book also fights against any notion that God is somehow less than sovereign in his covenant love for his people in Christ or that their salvation is in any way conditioned upon them. For example, “Conditionality is basic to and revelatory of the heresy of the doctrine of the dependence of salvation upon the sinner in all its forms” (127).

One hopes that Engelsma will carry into volume 2 this same repudiation of any conditionality, especially when he deals with the believer’s experience of salvation. The foundation that Engelsma has laid in volume 1 will not admit of any notion in volume 2 that man’s work precedes God’s work in the believer’s consciousness and comfort of his salvation. It is difficult to understand how the same Engelsma of *Reformed Theology* could have written in recent years that there is a particular aspect of man’s salvation in which man’s activity precedes God’s activity and in which God’s activity waits upon man’s.² May the Lord yet be pleased to correct our beloved professor of his error, which would cause not only us but also the angels in heaven to rejoice. Indeed, may the Lord yet be pleased to correct our beloved professor of his error even by his own words in *Reformed Theology*.

Engelsma on Infralapsarianism and Supralapsarianism

This reviewer found the most intriguing section of Engelsma’s book to be his treatment of infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism (xi–xii, 200–204). The debate between *infra* and *supra* has to do with the logical order of God’s decrees. Is God’s decree of election logically before and above (*supra*) his decree of the fall (*lapsus*)—supralapsarianism? Or is God’s decree of election logically after and below

(*infra*) his decree of the fall—infralapsarianism? Engelsma criticizes both sides of the *infra/supra* debate.

What makes Engelsma’s treatment of the debate so intriguing is how boldly and thoroughly Engelsma departs from Herman Hoeksema’s supralapsarianism. Following the lead of their spiritual father, the Protestant Reformed Churches for one hundred years have been outspoken proponents of supralapsarianism. Now, a century later, Engelsma announces to the world that Hoeksema’s doctrine was seriously defective. Already in the foreword, Engelsma announces his dissent.

There are doctrines concerning which Hoeksema...left room for further discussion, including dissent. An instance...is his treatment of the order of the decrees in God’s eternal counsel, specifically, his enthusiastic advocacy of what he called “my doctrine of a *super-supralapsarianism*”—not simply supralapsarianism, but “super-supralapsarianism.” I contend that Hoeksema’s account of this aspect of the fundamental doctrine of predestination does justice neither to the grace of election nor to the righteousness of reprobation. In the liberty granted by the Synod of Dordt, which, although intending to commit to the infralapsarian order, deliberately permitted the supralapsarian order, I put forward a new and different understanding of this doctrine as to the order of the decrees, an understanding that is determined by the clear biblical revelation, regardless of seeming logic. *Pace*, Hoeksema; *danke*, Paul. (xi–xii)

Engelsma could hardly have stated his objection to Hoeksema’s supralapsarianism more strongly: Hoeksema’s supralapsarianism does not do justice to the grace of election; nor does Hoeksema’s supralapsarianism do justice to the righteousness of reprobation! If true, the PRC (as well as her discarded children, like Remnant Reformed Church) must repudiate Hoeksema’s supralapsarianism posthaste. After all, one’s doctrine must do justice

² See, for example, his writings quoted in *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 5 (August 15, 2021) and *Sword and Shield* 2, no. 8 (October 15, 2021).

to God's grace—for God is gracious in election! And one's doctrine must do justice to God's righteousness—for God is righteous in reprobation!

Engelsma even implies that Hoeksema's supralapsarianism was the result of a rationalistic imposition of human logic on God's decrees that departed from God's biblical revelation concerning his decrees. Engelsma alleges that his own proposal is "determined by the clear biblical revelation," and that over against Hoeksema's "seeming logic" (xii). Hoeksema followed logic, but Engelsma will follow Paul. By this Engelsma takes the side—mildly, and only on this issue, but nevertheless takes the side—of those opponents of Hoeksema throughout the years who have dismissed his theology as mere rationalism. Hoeksema's supralapsarianism comes very close to being the heart of all his dogmatics. If it turns out that Hoeksema's supralapsarianism was unbiblical rationalism, then the rest of Hoeksema's theology must be called into question as well.

Because Engelsma's concern in the infra/supra debate is that God be known as gracious in electing and righteous in reprobating, Engelsma has the objects of God's election and reprobation appearing before God in his counsel as fallen and guilty. Then the grace of election is that God chose sinners, and the righteousness of reprobation is that God rejected sinners. In the specific question of whether the logic of God's counsel is election–fall (supralapsarianism) or fall–election (infralapsarianism), Engelsma takes the infralapsarian side.

However, Engelsma's proposal regarding the logical order of God's decrees is confusing; at least it is to this reviewer. Perhaps it is just that my short theological legs cannot keep pace with Engelsma's strides, but it seems to me that Engelsma jumps from thing to thing. There are at least three places where Engelsma announces that he is explaining the order of the decrees, but those three places all give different orders or deal with different things. I would have a hard time trying to describe on these pages exactly what Engelsma's position is. Engelsma's position is neither infra nor supra; but it incorporates elements of both infra and supra, while it is at the same time both more than infra and less than infra but also both more than supra and

less than supra. At least, I think that is Engelsma's position.

The confusion of Engelsma's position is disappointing, because he is onto something in his criticism of the traditional infra/supra debate. Engelsma is especially onto something in his doctrine that Jesus Christ is the heart and center of God's decree. Whatever else Engelsma's proposal gets wrong, it gets this magnificently right: it brings the believer face to face with Jesus Christ as the decree of God. Yes, Christ at the heart of God's decree! How soul-gladdening for the elect sinner, chosen and saved by grace in Christ. "God's election of them [his people] was wonderfully gracious. And so must the gospel of their election resound in their souls always" (203). Amen and amen! A clear development of that line would have made the section on infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism not only the most intriguing part of the book but also the best part of the book. As it stands now, more study is needed.

But what about the infra/supra debate? And what about Hoeksema's enthusiastic supralapsarianism? And what about the fact that the Reformed confessions are infralapsarian? Is there anything that can be said about these things?

First, we can say something about Hoeksema's monumental contribution to the infra/supra debate. The real defect of the traditional infra/supra debate was that neither side did justice to Christ as the center of God's good pleasure. The debate focused on relating the logical order of God's decrees of election and the fall. Was the divine logic election–fall (supralapsarian)? Or was the divine logic fall–election (infralapsarian)? But in either system, where is Christ?

Hoeksema's contribution to the infra/supra debate was his insistence that Christ is ultimate in the counsel and purpose of God. Engelsma recognizes this as Hoeksema's contribution: "Regarding the strength specifically of Herman Hoeksema's supralapsarianism, it has Christ first in the decree" (202). By teaching Christ as ultimate in God's purpose, Hoeksema ascended above the defect that was common to both infra and supra. And although Hoeksema called his position supralapsarianism,

he indicated that he was getting above and beyond the traditional debate by calling his version of supralapsarianism a “super-supralapsarianism.” It was *super* not in the sense of being a lot more of the same old supralapsarianism but in the sense of being above and beyond the same old supralapsarianism.

In fact, by his super-supralapsarianism, Hoeksema actually broke out of the lapsarian debate altogether. Hoeksema did not coin a new term for his position, but he could have. For Hoeksema was not merely investigating the logical place of the fall—a lapsarian position, from the Latin *lapsus*: “fall.” Rather, Hoeksema was investigating what was ultimate, what was preeminent, what was superior in the counsel and purpose of God—a proterian position, to coin a term, from the Greek *pro*: “before.” What was at the very heart of God’s counsel? What was God’s core purpose, to which every other decree pointed? For Hoeksema, Christ was ultimate. Christ was the core decree. All God’s decrees, whether election or the fall or anything else, had Jesus Christ as their focus, their goal, their meaning. God decreed all things for the sake of Jesus Christ, his ultimate good pleasure. This view is not infralapsarianism. This view is not even classic supralapsarianism. Rather, this view is Christo-proterianism.

Hoeksema’s super-supralapsarianism—really, his Christo-proterianism—did not arise from a rationalistic imposition of human logic on the decrees of God. Rather, it arose from scripture. For the scriptures say about Christ that in God’s counsel “he is before (Greek: *pro*) all things” (Col. 1:17)—Christo-proterianism! The scriptures say about Christ that in God’s counsel he is “the firstborn (Greek prefix: *pro*) of every creature” (v. 15)—Christo-proterianism! The scriptures say about Christ that in God’s counsel he is “the beginning, the firstborn (Greek prefix: *pro*) from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (v. 18)—Christo-proterianism!

Second, the wonderful thing for the Reformed believer who loves the Reformed creeds is that the

creeds are also Christo-proterian. What Hoeksema did with supralapsarianism the creeds had already done with infralapsarianism. Was Hoeksema a super-supralapsarian? Then the creeds are super-infralapsarian. That is, the creeds ascend above the traditional infra/supra debate and teach Jesus Christ as the center of God’s counsel. For example, consider the definition of election in the Canons of Dordt 1.7. This article is often cited as evidence that the creeds are infralapsarian. But notice that Jesus Christ sits at the center of the definition as the great Elect of God, in whom God’s elect are chosen. “Now election is the unchangeable purpose of God whereby, before the foundation of the world, he hath chosen in Christ a definite number of particular persons to salvation.” Yes, “in Christ”—Christo-proterianism!

Is this not refreshing for those who love the Reformed creeds? For one hundred years the Protestant Reformed supralapsarian thought that he had to stand at arm’s length from the infralapsarianism of his creeds. See, for example, Homer Hoeksema’s otherwise masterful commentary on the Canons of Dordt. Homer Hoeksema could not embrace the creed as it stands but had to continually inform everyone how the supralapsarian would state the position differently and better than the infralapsarian fathers of Dordt.³ What kind of divided mind must it cause a denomination to be forever accusing its creeds of weakness, especially on the doctrine of God’s eternal predestination of his people in Christ? But when the Reformed believer understands that his creeds are Christo-proterian before they are anything else, then he can embrace—without excuse or apology—the Reformed creeds exactly as they are written. This is no small advance. After one hundred years, the super-supralapsarian—really, the Christo-proterian—can finally exult in the Christo-proterian viewpoint of his creeds, without having to make corrections to that viewpoint.

(To be continued)

—AL

³ Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers: An Exposition of the Canons of Dordrecht*, 2nd ed. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2013). Page 38 is representative: “Hence it can be maintained that supralapsarianism is stronger on this point than infralapsarianism.”