



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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I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

—Exodus 20:2

The Lord Thy God

When Jehovah spoke out of the midst of the fire on Sinai, this is how he began: “I am the LORD thy God.”

Those are very special words.

Those words reveal the deepest heart and essence and kernel of Jehovah’s relationship with Israel. The heart of Jehovah’s relationship with Israel was not this: *thou shalt*. Yes, God would speak many *thou shalt*s to Israel. Ten of them and then a hundred of them. But that was not the heart of the relationship! Such a thing is impossible. The relationship between God and man can never have *thou shalt* as its center. *Thou shalt*s speak of man. *Thou shalt*s speak of man’s obligation and man’s responsibility and man’s working and man’s doing. God’s relationship with man cannot be built on man. It cannot be a covenant of works, a covenant of *thou shalt*s. And it never has been. Not with Adam in paradise, not with Abraham in Canaan, and not with Israel at Sinai.

Rather, the heart of Jehovah’s relationship with Israel was this: I am the LORD thy God. The LORD thy God! That is intimate language. It is a husband’s vow to his wife: I am yours. So Jehovah speaks to Israel: I am thine. I am the LORD thy God!

That is also gracious language. The frightened and rebellious children of Israel could make no claim on Jehovah. They could not bind to themselves the God who is a consuming fire! Jehovah must bind Israel to himself as a gift of his grace. So he does: I am the LORD thy God!

That is also powerful language. It does not speak of man and all the nothingness of his works, but of God. He is Jehovah! He is God! What

would be destroyed if it depended upon weak man stands forever upon the living God.

What, then, is the heart of Jehovah’s relationship with Israel? Gracious and unbreakable fellowship. Or, if you will, God’s everlasting covenant of grace.

I am the LORD thy God. Yes, very special words indeed.

But what is this?? When God spoke those special words to Israel, the people were terrified! They ran from the bottom of the mount and stood afar off (Ex. 20:18). They intreated that the words should not be spoken to them anymore (Heb. 12:19). The Israelites were afraid because God spoke directly to them. No one stood between Israel and God. Usually someone did! Usually God spoke to Moses, and Moses spoke to the children of Israel. It was still the word of God that the Israelites heard, but they heard it from Moses. Moses stood between. Moses always stood between! But at Sinai no one stood between. Jehovah, face-to-face with his people, said to them directly, “I am the LORD thy God.” Israel heard the voice of words (Heb. 12:19). Moses did not talk with Israel from earth, but Jehovah talked with Israel from heaven (Ex. 20:22). “And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (v. 19).

It is a lesson for us. The covenant of the LORD our God is established with us only through the mediator of the covenant, our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb. 12:24). It is God’s everlasting covenant of grace *in Christ*.

—AL

Farm Wagon Sunday

Exactly 190 years ago today, one of the great episodes in the reformation of God's church took place. On Sunday, October 12, 1834, Rev. Hendrik de Cock and Rev. Hendrik Scholte stood upon a farm wagon in the fields of Ulrum, the Netherlands, and preached the gospel of grace to God's people assembled there. The people were nothing to behold. They were poor. They were lowly. They were oppressed by the authorities, who had locked them out of their church building. Dutch society in those days was really going places, but the people standing in the hayfield were an embarrassment to their fellow citizens. The hearts and minds of those backward people were filled with the old Reformed faith, but the old Reformed faith was incompatible with the grand kingdom of man that was breathlessly being pursued by all the people who mattered. Yet for all their poverty and reproach, those poor, backward people had found a rich treasure hidden in the field that day—the treasure of the pure gospel of Jesus Christ, preached from a farm wagon and recognized by faith as the real treasure that it was. And just as in Jesus' parable of the hid treasure, those poor, despised people gladly traded all that they had of life on this earth for the joy of that inestimable treasure of the gospel.

On this October 12, 2024, let us recall the great work of God on October 12, 1834, as we revisit Farm Wagon Sunday.

Our story begins a few days before Sunday, October 12, 1834, with the arrival of Rev. H. P. Scholte in the town of Ulrum, the Netherlands. Reverend Scholte was the minister in the Dutch town of North Brabant, but he had traveled to Ulrum to encourage his friend, Rev. Hendrik de Cock, and to encourage Reverend De Cock's congregation. And how Reverend De Cock and his congregation needed encouragement! The people

were starving for the gospel of Jesus Christ, but the church in Ulrum would not feed them. The people were languishing for the psalms of the sweet psalmist of Israel, but the church in Ulrum would not sing them. God's beleaguered people in Ulrum were suffering tremendously. And not only in Ulrum but also throughout the entire nation of the Netherlands, God's people were being spiritually starved.

What had happened in the Netherlands that had left God's people so famished for the gospel? Very simply, the Reformed church of the Netherlands had apostatized from the truth of the gospel. The fall of the Reformed church in the Netherlands was grievous, for she had once been a true church of Jesus Christ. Some two hundred years prior, back in 1618–19, the Dutch Reformed Church had met at the famous Synod of Dordt. Through its synod the Dutch Reformed Church had condemned the clever lie of Arminianism that God saves man but that he does so through the free will of the sinner. Through its synod the Dutch Reformed Church had stood for the gospel truth of salvation by God's sovereign grace alone, without the cooperation of man. At its synod the Dutch Reformed Church had formulated and adopted the great Canons of Dordt, by which the Dutch Reformed Church confessed the great doctrine of the scriptures that salvation is of the Lord and not of man. Washed in the water of Christ's word and clothed in the white robes of his righteousness, the Dutch Reformed Church had been the lovely bride of Christ.

But over the years the Dutch Reformed Church had grown weary of her husband and had become infatuated with another. Her heart turned from Christ and his heavenly kingdom to man and his earthly kingdom. The Netherlands grew wealthy through her powerful shipping and trading companies. The Netherlands became

more educated than any other nation through her marvelous schools. The people of the Netherlands were orderly and clean, so that Dutch society became a wonder to the world. The cities were sanitary and beautiful; the farms and pastures of the countryside were neat and tidy.

And the church! Oh, the Dutch Reformed Church! Her buildings were stately. Her membership was burgeoning, for the Dutch Reformed Church was the state church, and virtually all the citizens were members. If you had entered any Dutch town on a Sunday, you would have seen orderly congregations entering the beautiful buildings. What a lovely nation of industrious citizens, all clad in their Sunday finest. Hear the rafters ring with their lusty singing. Hear the stirring oratories of all their honorable *dominees*. Oh, the church! The Dutch Reformed Church!

But for all her formal beauty and for all her fervent services, the Dutch Reformed Church had apostatized by 1834. The beauty of the church was entirely external. Inwardly and spiritually, the church stank with corruption. The Dutch Reformed Church had disengaged herself from Christ and had instead engaged herself to man. The Dutch Reformed Church had ceased to be a heavenly institution and had instead taken up her citizenship here below. And wherever one looked in 1834, one could see the marks that the Dutch Reformed Church was the synagogue of Satan. The sermons were not Reformed but Arminian. The songs of her worship were not the psalms but the *Evangelische Gezangen*—the “Evangelical Songs,” which were a collection of man-made hymns imposed upon her by a government board. The loyalty of the leaders was not to Christ and his truth but to the establishment of a prosperous Dutch society. Thus had the Dutch Reformed Church apostatized and become a fine-looking but foul-smelling harlot.

But God had his people in the Dutch Reformed Church. By a miracle of his grace, he had reserved to himself a remnant chosen unto everlasting life. And God had restored among his people the knowledge of the old Reformed faith

and the true gospel of salvation. God had raised up earthen vessels to preach that gospel, including Rev. Hendrik de Cock. In Ulrum De Cock preached the depravity of man and the grace of God. In Ulrum De Cock chose only psalms in worship, contrary to the government requirement that the minister choose at least some *Evangelische Gezangen* each service. De Cock wrote sharp pamphlets condemning the evangelical hymns as contrary to God’s will. De Cock wrote sharp pamphlets condemning his fellow ministers as wolves in the sheepfold of Christ. And when word began to spread that in Ulrum there was a preacher of the true gospel of grace, people from surrounding towns flocked to hear De Cock preach. Parents from other churches even had their children baptized in De Cock’s church—though it was contrary to the law of the land—because only there could they honestly make the baptism vow that they believed the doctrines “taught here in this Christian church.”

Though Hendrik de Cock’s manner of preaching the truth was thoroughly biblical, confessional, and orderly, De Cock’s manner was intolerable to the false church institute and to polite Dutch society. De Cock was sowing disorder in the grand kingdom that was the Dutch Reformed Church! De Cock was wrecking the precious unity of the church of Christ! The Dutch Reformed Church responded to Reverend De Cock’s gospel by suspending him from the ministry and steadily docking his pay. The church had no interest in preserving the gospel for God’s people; the church’s only interest was preserving its own authority by driving the troublemaker from its midst. And so De Cock was forbidden from preaching in Ulrum.

What were God’s people to do? They had tasted the glorious gospel of salvation, but now their own church had tried to snatch it away from them. The people tried going to church, but they could not in good conscience sit under the parade of Arminian ministers that marched through their pulpit. They could not stomach the watery hymns of their wretched songbook but craved the solid sustenance of God’s psalms.

The people tried staying home and meeting together with several families in conventicles, in which they sang the psalms and exhorted one another from the scriptures, but they realized that a conventicle could only be temporary until such time as God would restore the true worship of the church. They longed to be in the house of God under sound gospel preaching, with the psalms of Zion on their lips and in their hearts.

So it was that, in early October 1834, the downtrodden saints of Ulrum were overjoyed when they heard that Reverend Scholte was coming for a visit. Reverend Scholte was known to preach the same sound doctrine of the gospel as their pastor, Reverend De Cock, had preached. Reverend Scholte was known to select only psalms for the congregational singing, like their pastor had. With Reverend Scholte in town, God's people in Ulrum could go to church again on the Lord's day. What anticipation there must have been in the hearts of those poor scattered sheep in the days leading up to Sunday!

But when Reverend Scholte arrived in Ulrum, the same powers that had forbidden Reverend De Cock from taking the pulpit went to work to prevent Reverend Scholte from taking the pulpit. From Wednesday, October 8—the date of Scholte's arrival—to Sunday, October 12, the two ministers and several members of the congregation repeatedly sought permission from the state church minister to allow Reverend Scholte to lead a worship service on Sunday afternoon. But just as often as they sought permission, the state church minister refused. The saints met in the homes of members in Ulrum each evening that week, as they continued to seek opportunity to worship together on the coming Sunday.

On Friday it appeared to the people of Ulrum that they might be granted some relief. They were able to enter the church building that Friday evening when the official Keeper of the

Keys opened the door to let them in. They proceeded to have a worship service by candlelight, since it was well after dark by then. Reverend Scholte preached and baptized the infants of several families that had been unable to present their children for baptism by state church ministers. The congregation sang the psalms of David with great joy. Reverend Scholte warned the people against the apostasy of the state church, including the church's corruption of worship by the introduction of hymns. One government official reported about the service that Scholte

warned the people against the corrupt teachings of the High Priests of Baal, and not to walk in the path of those who feared the world but not God—who raised a new altar at the side of the old by placing the Evangelistic Songs alongside the Book of the Psalms: that their fine sounding worship would not be accepted by God.¹

The government viewed that worship service in the most unfavorable light. The Keeper of the Keys would later be named in an arrest warrant for granting the people entry to the building. Men from the congregation who met with government officials on Saturday were informed that Scholte would be forbidden any further entry to the pulpit. But the people of God were filled with anticipation nonetheless. Reverend Scholte remained in town, and they so longed to assemble for worship on the Lord's day.

Finally, the morning of Sunday, October 12, 1834, dawned. Long before the state church minister arrived to begin the services, God's people crowded the church building. Reverend Scholte was on hand. Reverend De Cock was on hand. The consistory—which supported De Cock but which had no power to undo the decisions of the state—was on hand. Then the state's appointed minister, a Rev. N. Smith, arrived.

¹ T. K. Loots, "Report of Happenings at Ulrum" (October 17, 1834), in *Van Raalte Papers: 1830–1839*: 19 (Consistory and Congregation in Ulrum and Cornelia Kennedy, transl., "The Act of Secession of the Consistory of Ulrum"), https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=vrp_1830s, 21; see "Report of Happenings at Ulrum," *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 24 (September 23, 2023): 7.

Reverend Scholte addressed him on behalf of the assembled people: “Your Honor, these people are gathered here to hear not you but me, and therefore I again ask you to yield the pulpit to me.”² Reverend Smith would hear of no such thing, and he proceeded to ascend the pulpit and begin the service.

What were God’s people to do? What could they do? They settled into their pews to await God’s will. They did not hinder Reverend Smith during any part of the service. Their orderly behavior in church that morning, even under such spiritual distress, proved that the slander against them that they were disorderly people was false. God also gave his people the courage to stand for the truth over against the lies of the state church. Reverend Smith announced the singing of stanzas 2 and 3 of Evangelical Hymn #77—which hymn was notorious among the people of Ulrum for being an Arminian interpretation of II Peter 1.

2. Add, Christian! to faith virtue,
The fervent courage in sorrow and joy,
To always resist evil;
Add to virtue a valiant knowledge,
That banishes selfishness and delusion;
To valiant knowledge, a moderate life;
Add to moderation patience,
If God wills that you should suffer.
3. Add to patience godliness,
So that, as you spread your light,
Men gaze upon your example;
Keep, according to the most perfect
and great commandment,
Love and reverence toward God,
Paired with brotherly love,
And, in that brotherly spirit,
Also general love for humanity.³

When Reverend Smith announced the hymn, the godly men stood up and put their hats on their heads for the duration of the hymn, thereby indicating that they took no part in that desecration of God’s worship.

When the service was finished, there was a great deal of confusion and conflict. Reverend De Cock tried to speak to Reverend Smith about his sermon, while Reverend Scholte requested of Reverend Smith that he (Scholte) be allowed to preach in the afternoon. Reverend Smith’s son refused to allow anyone to discuss matters with his father publicly but informed them that they could have their discussions at his lodgings. Reverend De Cock announced to the people that if they stayed where they were, Reverend Scholte would begin a second service immediately. But those who spoke with the authority of the government commanded the people to leave the church immediately. The government authorities prevailed, and when the building was vacated, the doors were locked for the rest of the day. There would be no worship for God’s hungry and thirsty people in the church building in Ulrum.

After some discussion among the despised remnant, they agreed to meet again at 1:00 p.m. on the land outside the parsonage. When the people arrived, they found Reverend Scholte and Reverend De Cock standing upon a farm wagon. The wagon served as an impromptu platform from which they could be seen and heard by God’s assembled people. Reverend Scholte announced the singing of Psalm 68, including verses 11 and 13.

The Lord gave the word:
Great was the company of those that
published it.

² T. K. Loots, “Report of Happenings at Ulrum,” 24.

³ The Dutch hymn book was entitled *Evangelische Gezangen Om Nevens Het Boek Der Psalmen Bij Den Openbaren Godsdienst in De Nederlandsche Hervormde Gemeenten Gebruikt Te Worden (1608)* (*Evangelical Hymns To Be Used Alongside the Book of Psalms in Public Worship in the Dutch Reformed Churches*). The English translation of Hymn #77 given here was done by AI from the site https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_eva005evan01_01/_eva005evan01_01_0079.php. The translation appears to limp quite badly in some places, but the reader can at least catch the sense of how man-centered and emotion-driven the hymn is. For the saints who loved the sweet spiritual refreshment of the psalms, hymns like #77 must have been brackish and foul indeed.

Though ye have lien among the pots,
Yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove
covered with silver,
And her feathers with yellow gold.

From the wagon in the field, Reverend Scholte proceeded to preach the gospel of God's grace to the sheep of God's pasture. And assembled in the field under the preaching of the gospel, the poor in spirit found the hid treasure of the unsearchable riches of Christ. At the conclusion of the service, the assembled people sang that great doxology of the ages, Psalm 72:18–19.

Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,
Who only doeth wondrous things.

And blessed be his glorious name for ever:
And let the whole earth be filled with his
glory;
Amen, and Amen!

What a Lord's day! What refreshment for the weary! Though the setting was as humble as could be imagined—a sermon delivered from a

wagon and psalms sung in a field—the reality was as grand as could possibly be: the meek people of God violently storming the kingdom of heaven because they had been given its treasures in Christ and could never stand to be without them again.

After the service Reverend Scholte returned home to North Brabant. But that was not the end of the events in Ulrum. Two days later, on Tuesday, October 14, 1834, the congregation of Ulrum signed the Act of Separation and Return, by which it left the corrupt state church and took its place as the first church of the *Afscheiding*.

Behold the ways of the Lord, whose footsteps are in the sea and whose paths are not known. Behold God's salvation of the remnant, who are nothing in this world but who are the apple of his eye. And behold his sovereign power, for he uses the foolishness of preaching—even from a farm wagon!—to save his elect people.

To be continued...

—AL



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— PAVILION —

I think Rev Danhof makes some profound points about our relation to God. His point that because our knowledge of God is rooted in fellowship with God all true knowledge is “faith-knowledge” is foundational. Although he doesn’t make the point, it is for that reason that all true knowledge (of anything) is derived from the Bible. This is only one of the profound points that Rev Danhof makes in his article. However, there is one point about our knowledge of God that I question.

Perhaps I misunderstand Rev Danhof, but I am concerned that he minimizes revelation. There are places where he seems to say that in the revelation of God to us there is no identity between God’s knowledge and our knowledge. Again, I say in the matter of *revelation* there is no such identity. Such seems to be Rev Danhof’s position.

He says on page 8, “God is the INEXPRESSIBLE. For the creature God is the unfathomable, unspeakable, but nevertheless—yes, also because of this—the adorable MYSTERY of all mysteries: the great FAITH-SECRET. No, the creature names not God” (Reformed Pavilion, October 5, 2024). Rev Danhof emphasizes the incomprehensibility of God and it is in this context that he speaks the above, so when he speaks of “mystery” here he speaks of that which is “inexpressible”, “unfathomable”, incomprehensible. God is this “MYSTERY”. God is unknowable and because of this He is adorable. I don’t see it that way at all. How can I adore someone I don’t know?

Rev Danhof’s use of the word mystery here in connection with our knowledge of God is not biblical. When Scripture uses the word “mystery” it refers not to something unknowable, not to something that is inexpressible, not to something that is a riddle; rather by “mystery” Scripture refers to that which is hidden but is made known by revelation. This is clear from Ephesians chapter 3 where Paul speaking of the

gospel says, “How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.” In the bible, mystery is something you can “understand”, not something “inexpressible” and “unfathomable”. The bible doesn’t tell us to adore a mystery that is unknown and inexpressible; rather the bible tells us to adore the mystery that is known – Jesus Christ (3:9).

A couple of paragraphs later Rev Danhof writes: “Man knows his God. He does not know him as God is in himself, nor as God is fully conscious in himself, nor with the knowledge wherewith God knows himself. In his knowledge of God, man is completely, wholly bound to the revelation that God has given of himself to man. What may lie behind that self-revelation is completely unknown to him, and his is unable to approach either with his thought or imagination or with is language.” I understand Rev Danhof is at pains in his article to emphasize the creature-creator distinction. By his own searching man can never find out God. Man can never reason from the creation to God. Man can only get to God because God reveals himself to man.

The problem I have with Rev Danhof’s writing here is he establishes no identity between God’s knowledge and ours *at the point of revelation*. The nature of revelation is the issue, not the incomprehensibility of God. I have always believed that revelation is the bridge between the eternal God and man. Revelation is that bridge because revelation is Christ and Christ is the eternal Son of God in human nature, so that the union of Christ’s divine nature with his human nature is the explanation of revelation. In Christ we truly know God: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). Christ doesn’t declare or show us some likeness of God. The knowledge we have

of God through Christ is not an analogy; it's not that God gives us a knowledge that's merely analogous to what God is really like. If all I have is an analogy – a partial similarity or comparison – I don't really know God at all.

John 3:18 teaches that the divinity of Jesus, his position in the Trinity as the eternal Son of God means that the knowledge he gives us of God is true knowledge. By true knowledge I mean this: the statements of the bible mean the same thing for God as they mean for me. This is the logic of the verse. It is Jesus's position and place in the Godhead as the Son to be eternally "in the bosom of the Father." It is precisely in this place and position that He knows the Father, loves the Father, lives with the Father. When he declares the Father to us, He declares how it really is "in the bosom of the Father." What use is a mere analogy of these things? There's no wonder in that. But revelation is a wonder, a great miracle whereby Jehovah God reveals what He really is in His infinite being to mere dust-frames. The miracle of revelation is Christ: "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John14:9).

Speaking about man's knowledge of God, Rev Danhof says, "He does not know him as God is in himself, nor as God is fully conscious in himself, nor with the knowledge wherewith God knows himself. In his knowledge of God, man is completely, wholly bound to the revelation that God has given of himself to man." It is true that

God knows more about himself than He reveals to us. God is infinite; man is finite. Man never comprehends God, but man by revelation truly knows God. We don't know all about God that God knows about God. It's a distinction in the quantity of knowledge, not in the quality. But Rev Danhof maintains we don't know God as God is in himself, "nor with the knowledge wherewith God knows himself." Of course, I have no way of clarifying the statement with Rev Danhof; I can only take the statement as written, but to me as it is written it establishes a boundary between God's knowledge and our knowledge *at the point of revelation*. Remember Rev Danhof is making this statement in the same breath as he speaks about revelation and when we speak about revelation we speak of identity of knowledge, not separation.

Again, I want to emphasize: the issue is not God's incomprehensibility (God is completely and utterly unknown and unknowable without revelation); the issue is the nature of revelation. If Scripture's statements (and those logically inferred from Scripture) mean different things for God than they mean for us which seems to be Rev Danhof's position – we don't know God "with the knowledge wherewith God knows himself" – then we can never be sure we know God at all. And in that case, we might as well give up the Christian faith as an exercise in futility.

—Philip Rainey

Reply

A warm welcome to our correspondent, Mr. Philip Rainey, who writes in response to the article "God Is God" by Rev. H. Danhof in last week's issue of *Reformed Pavilion*.¹ Mr. Rainey's letter furnishes the undersigned an opportunity to invite our readers to write in when they are so minded. Letters are always welcome. I would guess that most recipients of *Reformed Pavilion* read the letters in any given

issue before they read the other articles. And no wonder, for the letters usually raise doctrinal issues and discussions that are interesting and profitable for the readership. So, dear readers, keep the letters coming as you have inclination and opportunity.

Our correspondent raises the essential doctrine of God's revelation of himself. As our correspondent indicates, God's revelation of

¹ Henry Danhof, "God Is God," trans. Henry De Jong, *Reformed Pavilion* 2, no. 26 (October 5, 2024): 6–10. All quotations from this article can be found on page 8.

himself is a true revelation. That is, God reveals himself to the creature as God truly is. God's revelation of himself is not a lie, as if God would deceive the creature by giving the creature false information about himself that does not correspond to the reality of who God is. Nor does God reveal himself in a mere analogy, as if God would only give the creature comparative information about himself, so that the creature could only know what God is like but could never know who God actually is. Rather, God's revelation of himself is a true revelation of who he really is. The result of God's true revelation of himself is that the creature truly knows God.

None of this means that the creature ever comprehends God. God is infinite, and the creature is finite. God alone comprehends God. But, as our correspondent indicates, the issue is not whether God is comprehensible or incomprehensible—God is incomprehensible. Rather, the issue is whether man can truly know God by God's revelation of himself to man. As our correspondent rightly says, "Man never comprehends God, but man by revelation truly knows God."

The fact that man truly knows God by means of God's revelation of himself is a confessional matter for the Reformed. In Belgic Confession 2, regarding God's revelation of himself, we confess, "We know Him..."

Our correspondent writes with a concern about Rev. Henry Danhof's presentation of God's self-revelation.

Perhaps I misunderstand Rev Danhof, but I am concerned that he minimizes revelation. There are places where he seems to say that in the revelation of God to us there is no identity between God's knowledge and our knowledge. Again, I say in the matter of *revelation* there is no such identity. Such seems to be Rev Danhof's position.

As our correspondent recognizes, Henry Danhof has long departed the earth and cannot

comment on his position or on our correspondent's understanding of it. It falls to the reader, then, to judge—in the light of God's word and by the Spirit of Christ—what Reverend Danhof has written and what our correspondent has written. In the meantime, permit the undersigned a few editorial comments.

First, I agree with the doctrine of God's self-revelation that our correspondent lays out. Mr. Rainey correctly explains the distinction between comprehensibility and knowability, gives the correct definition of "mystery," and very beautifully expounds the place of Christ in God's self-revelation. As our correspondent is undoubtedly aware, these issues have been hotly debated in Reformed and Presbyterian circles. In fact, our correspondent's views have been considered dangerous in apostatizing churches. Men have been charged with rationalism, deposed from office, and chased out of churches for holding the truths that our correspondent confesses.² Nevertheless, our correspondent's view is biblical and confessional.

Second, though I agree with our correspondent's doctrine of God's self-revelation, I am not convinced by our correspondent that Henry Danhof erred in his doctrine of God's self-revelation. Danhof certainly writes about God's incomprehensibility in passages that are worded as strongly as possible, but I do not see those passages as necessarily erroneous. At worst, there is a statement or two that could have been clarified; Danhof's writing style is so dense. But even in those cases, Danhof was making a very specific point, and—in my judgment—it was not the point that our correspondent fears that he was making.

For instance, in the "mystery" passage that our correspondent references, Danhof is not calling God unknowable, as our correspondent fears. Rather, that passage is the culmination of Danhof's lengthy warning against any philosophical God-concept that man might concoct. Over against the creature's haughty philosophy,

² The interested reader can delve further into these debates in Herman Hoeksema, *The Clark-Van Til Controversy* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation), 1995.

God remains the unfathomable. God is not the philosophical secret; God is “the great FAITH-SECRET”—that is, known only by faith through God’s revelation of himself. In that sense God is a mystery. As Danhof concludes that passage, “But that does not make God into an abstraction for man. Being converted, by the communion of life, by the bond of the covenant, man knows his God—albeit according to man’s own measure—in God’s fullness of eternal reality.” Is not that exactly what our correspondent confesses? Man knows his God! Yea, even this: man knows his God in God’s fullness of eternal reality! Man does not know God by man’s philosophy; man knows God only by faith. But by faith man knows his God.

For another instance, our correspondent calls out Danhof’s statement that “what may lie behind that self-revelation [of God] is completely unknown to [man].” Of all the statements that our correspondent calls out, this one made me wince. Perhaps Danhof did go too far. After all, it sure sounds like Danhof is saying that, even in the matter of God’s self-revelation, man does not at all know the reality behind the revelation. However, upon closer reading, I believe that Danhof is making the specific point that man has no means by which he can test God’s self-revelation. Man is not able to go behind God’s revelation in order to conduct an independent investigation of God. Man is not able to set up an independent standard by which to measure God or God’s revelation. Rather, God’s revelation is the standard. Therefore, “in his knowledge of God, man is completely, wholly bound to the revelation that God has

given of himself to man.” It appears that Danhof is not denying man’s true knowledge of God by revelation; rather, it appears that Danhof is denying man’s proud philosophical inclination to set himself as judge above God’s revelation. Danhof beautifully concludes that paragraph with the confession that man’s knowledge of God is true.

But the knowledge of God that man possesses is for him suitable, true, reliable, sufficient, and saving. For with it he knows God as God and as his God. And to know the truth is life eternal. Man knows the God of his life according to his own measure. That is for him blessedness. That knowledge, after all, is given with and rooted in the fellowship of life with the Eternal. It is a fruit of that fellowship. Therefore it is, strictly speaking, never in its nature philosophic-knowledge. It is faith-experience. Our God-knowledge is faith-knowledge. Precisely, therefore, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. The believer finds in the mysteries of his God his life’s element, comes through contemplation of them to adoration, and calls out in holy delight, “His name is WONDERFUL!”

So much for my editorial comments. Let the reader take it from here and see what he thinks. Thanks be to God, who really and truly makes himself known to us by his Spirit, according to his word. “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).

—AL



REFORMATION DAY LECTURE

THE ACTIVE OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST

OCTOBER 31, 2024 | 7:30PM

Jesus is “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jeremiah 23:6).

Jesus is “made unto us...righteousness” (I Cor. 1:30).

Jesus is “Christ our righteousness” (Belgic Confession 22).

But what can it mean that Jesus is our righteousness? Certainly it means that Jesus himself is righteous, and how glorious is his righteousness! When the law said, “Do,” Jesus did. When the law said, “Don’t,” Jesus didn’t. Jesus stood under all the strict commandments of the righteous God’s holy law, and Jesus perfectly obeyed. Oh, yes, Jesus is righteous!

But Jesus is *our* righteousness? What can it mean? Listen to this lovely explanation: “Jesus Christ, imputing to us all his merits and so many holy works which he has done for us and in our stead, is our righteousness” (Belgic Confession 22).

How wonderful! How unexpected! It is the language of substitution. It is the language of one’s doing something instead of another and for another. Jesus stood in the place of us ungodly sinners and obeyed God’s law “for us and in our stead”!

And the result of Jesus’ substitutionary obedience? We are righteous before God! Not because we obeyed a single commandment but because Jesus obeyed every single commandment for us. Yes, we are righteous before God! Because Jesus is our righteousness.

We call Jesus’ substitutionary obedience for us his *active obedience*. This Reformation Day, come hear the glorious gospel and blessed comfort of Jesus’ active obedience. Come rejoice in the wonderful news that Jesus is our righteousness!

HOST

Remnant Reformed
Church

SPEAKER

Rev. Andrew Lanning

FORMAT

Lecture followed by
Q&A and Refreshments

VENUE

Pavilion Christian School, 9181 Kenowa Avenue Southwest, Grand Rapids, MI 49534

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

It is, no doubt, safe to state that in regard to all we have discussed thus far with respect to the counsel of God, there is no difference of opinion in Reformed circles.

All Reformed people confess that God's counsel is all-comprehensive, including evil as well as good, embracing the actions of all moral agents, men and angels, good and evil, as well as all that exists and occurs in the rest of creation. There may be difference of presentation in regard to this truth, there may be difference of emphasis, but in respect to the doctrine as such all Reformed people are agreed. In regard to sin and evil there are some who prefer to speak of allowance on the part of God rather than of willing, while others do not hesitate to maintain that even with a view to evil we must hold that in His counsel God willed it, though naturally He willed it in a different sense than He willed the good. And seemingly, on the face of it, there is an obvious difference between the two. Yet, when you investigate you will find that the difference is only apparent. Those who prefer to say that God allowed sin after all do not mean that sin is some self-existing, independent entity or power that could possibly originate apart from God's counsel and with a view to which God was a mere looker-on. Their sole motive for speaking as they do is the fear to present matters as if God were the cause of sin, as if He and not the creature were responsible for sin. They surely mean to maintain that sin and evil have a place in the counsel of God and that this counsel in that absolute sense is all-comprehensive. On the other hand, those who dislike that term "allowance" on the part of God because it represents God as more or less passive over against

the rise of sin and who, therefore, prefer to say that according to God's counsel He willed evil, hasten to add that even thus God is not the cause of sin and that the creature remains the responsible party. At bottom there is no real difference. All maintain the all-comprehensiveness of God's counsel. And not to maintain this is equivalent to being Arminian.

There was of old, however, a controversy in the Reformed Churches as to the question how we must conceive of the order of the decrees.

It is here that we touch the difference between "supra" and "infra."

In the popular mind these terms were connected with many points of doctrine. And on the whole it may safely be said that by far the majority of people, even of those who loved to discuss the problem, never understood the real issue. It is often amusing to note on what basis a minister is frequently classed either with the supra-lapsarians or the infra-lapsarians. But the controversy proper concerned, strictly speaking, nothing but the question as to how we must conceive of the order in the decrees of our God. The question may be concisely put in this way: Is God's counsel as to the fall of man subservient to the decree of predestination, or does the latter follow the former? In other words: In the counsel of God does election follow sin, or must the fall serve to bring out the elect?

That is the question. And according as we answer this question our view must needs be either more soteriological, or theological. If we answer: the decree regarding the fall of man must be thought first and that of predestination (election and reprobation) as following it, our

entire conception will naturally be more soteriological. Then we will not emphasize that Christ exists for God and His people for Christ, but rather the reverse, that Christ's sole purpose is to save the elect and restore a fallen creation. On the other hand, if the answer is: the fall in God's decree serves the counsel of predestination, must come to realize election and reprobation, our entire conception will be more theological throughout. For then the line runs thus. God willed to have a people for Himself and to establish a kingdom for His glory. He willed that for a greater manifestation of His grace and righteousness this covenant-people should be formed and this kingdom be established through the deeper way of sin and redemption. He chooses that people in Christ. To bring out His elect He holily wills the fall. The fall in that case serves the counsel of election.

This is the question.

Now, it is not our intention to revive this controversy in all its detail. Not because we think the question is of no interest and of little significance. We think it is. It is a question that concerns fundamentals. And it is exactly upon fundamentals that we must put all emphasis. The salvation of our Church and the maintenance of ourselves as a Reformed people must by no means be sought along the line of less emphasis on doctrine. We must not have less doctrine, but more. And the more we emphasize doctrine, the more we realize the importance of doctrine and its development, the more we shall also realize the significance of exactly such fundamentals as are concerned in the question of "supra" and "infra." We are not as afraid to thresh old straw as some are. Neither do we wish to refrain from reviving the entire controversy because we are ourselves hesitant as to our stand. We frankly state that we take the supra view as our own, even though we cannot in all things agree with its great exponent, Dr. A. Kuyper. But times have changed. The situation of our Church is so entirely different from a few years ago, the problems that present themselves are so radically different, the emphasis has

shifted to such an extent, that we do not consider it the proper time to lose ourselves in a discussion about the difference between supra and infra. In our time we must stand for a progressive Calvinism. I know this will sound strange in the ears of some from our pen. And I do not wish to be misunderstood. I wish to state clearly that I do not consider those progressive Calvinists who wish to put less emphasis on doctrine and principle and more or less go along with the so-called progressive spirit of our age. No, that is exactly what I view as being detrimental to all Calvinism. But by progressive Calvinism I mean that we firmly grasp the true Calvinistic line of thinking, especially the positive line of God's covenant and kingdom, and carry it to a higher and purer, to a clearer stage of development. For the present I think it is the duty of our Church to develop, emphasize and propagate those principles that are dear to us all.

Just two things, therefore, I wish to emphasize.

The first is that we must never forget that when we speak of the order of God's decrees, we must rule out the time element absolutely. There is no chronological order conceivable in the decrees of the Almighty for the simple reason that the idea of time is not applicable to them. I think it is not superfluous that this be clearly stated. After all, the popular conception often is that in some moment in eternity God formed His plan of the universe and its salvation. And from that point of view it is also conceived that God decided upon one thing after another. There is an order of time in the decrees of God. God's counsel, then, becomes a sort of a sketch, a plan made and finished at a certain time, just as an architect makes a plan of a building. Now, this view is erroneous. The decrees of God are eternal. They are as eternal as the eternal God. He is eternally willing to establish and manifest that which He realizes in time. And, therefore, in that sense of the word we can never speak of order in the decrees of God. It is a question of logical order. It is a question of logical subordination. It is a question as to what is primary and what

subservient and secondary logically. This must, of course, always be remembered. God's counsel is His eternal will with a view to all things in time.

The second thought I wish to present is that we must grasp and emphasize the positive line of God's covenant and kingdom as the element to which all else is subservient. Never may we present the matter as if God's original intention was to realize His Kingdom and covenant without sin's intervention and that the fact of sin arising changed God's mind, so that redemption is after all a sort of repair work that is deplorable. If that conception were true, God after all would not have been absolutely free in His counsel. He would have been more or less determined by the fact of sin. And it always remains a more or less deplorable fact that the original form of creation was not developed. God, then, was thwarted in His purpose. And there is no guarantee that He will not be thwarted again. Instead we want to emphasize the positive line. God willed from all eternity to form for Himself a people and establish a Kingdom for His Name's glory in Christ Jesus. From all eternity He also willed, though Himself never responsible for sin and never the cause of sin, that this people of His covenant and this Kingdom of His glory should be formed and established along the deeper way of sin and redemption to the manifestation of His grace and righteousness. All else, creation and fall, election and reprobation, must serve the realization of that counsel of the Almighty. They are means to an end. And the end is the glory of God in the realization of His Kingdom and His covenant in Christ Jesus, Immanuel, the Word become flesh.

Following this positive line we get this result.

God from all eternity loved His people, His Beloved, in Christ. It is, from this positive point of view, that people He created in Adam. From this same viewpoint that people in Adam are submerged with our first father in sin and misery. But according to election that people fall immediately upon Christ Jesus, in whom they are chosen. It is grace that saves them at the moment of their fall. It is that people that is saved in Noah from the flood, that is delivered from the bondage of Egypt by a mighty hand, that manifests itself through Israel's theocracy, that is chastised in Babylon, that is delivered again and led back to the land of the covenant, that finally culminates in the Word become flesh, that is gathered into the Church of the new dispensation, that shall finally enter into the eternal covenant in glory everlasting and in the eternal kingdom shall be led to living fountains of water.

Such is the positive line of God's counsel as realized in history. True, this chosen Beloved of Jehovah never appears in the world in her purest manifestation. She is not entirely delivered from sin. And the reprobate shell is always with the elect kernel. But on the other hand, that people is always there. There is never a moment in history that this line of God's people is discontinued.

According to this conception of the counsel of God, all things in that counsel are for this chosen people, heirs of the kingdom; but these people are for Christ, the Beloved par excellence, the King Supreme; and this King with His people are for God, Who is all in all.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

