



# 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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If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life.

—Exodus 21:22–23

### Protection of the Helpless Unborn

**A**mong the judgments that God delivered to Israel through Moses was the judgment concerning men who inflicted injury on an expectant mother. The scene is heartbreaking. There is a mother, great with child. How helpless are mother and child! The child is not fully formed but is still being fashioned within (Ps. 139:16). In her condition the mother is helpless to defend herself or her unborn child. In her condition the mother is helpless to flee from danger. But there, in the presence of the mother, are men filled with anger. They strive with each other, coming to blows. In the course of the men's fighting, one of the men injures the mother so grievously that she cannot continue to carry her child. The mother's body responds to the injury by going into labor, and the child is born prematurely. How frightening for the mother! Amidst violence and pain and grief and blood and fear, she delivers her child into the world.

The man who injured the mother by his striving must be punished. If the prematurely-born baby survives the birth and lives, then the violent man's punishment will be whatever price the woman's husband lays upon him. If the husband requires money, then the violent man must pay it. If the husband requires an animal, then the violent man must give it. The judges will be involved to ensure that the requirement is equitable. Woe to the violent man! For he must now deal with the father of the child whom he very nearly killed.

But if the prematurely-born baby is stillborn or lives only briefly and then dies of the injuries inflicted, then the violent man must die. Life must be given for life. Woe to the violent man! For he must now die for the death that he caused.

What is the lesson of this judgment concerning the unborn baby? The lesson is not merely that abortion is forbidden. Certainly, this judgment teaches that abortion is forbidden. Men who inflict violence upon the unborn child so that the child perishes are butchers and monsters of iniquity. The abattoirs of the abortion industry bear witness to the hard heart of man. Men who cause a woman's fruit to depart with mischief following will be cursed of God, except they believe in the Lord of life and repent of their murder.

But the lesson of God's judgment concerning the unborn baby is not merely that abortion is forbidden. Rather, in this judgment God declares his fierce and sovereign protection of his helpless people. For how helpless were the mother and her unborn child! And how helpless are God's people! We are not strong to defend ourselves from the fierce and angry foe. We are not swift to escape from the violent and bloody man. We are as helpless as the unborn. "Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long" (Ps. 44:22). But God protects his people, who are his little children. "Thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb" (139:13). And through his holy child, Jesus, he gives us the victory over

all our bloody oppressors. “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because

greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (I John 4:4).

—AL

## EDITORIAL

### As Often As Ye Eat This Bread and Drink This Cup (4)

**T**hus far in our investigation of the Lord’s supper, we have seen that the apostolic and early church administered the Lord’s supper frequently—at least once every Lord’s day and usually every time they gathered for worship. We have also seen that as the doctrine of the Lord’s supper became corrupted in the Middle Ages, the frequency of participating in the Lord’s supper declined drastically. Communion had become a nightmare of superstition and bondage. There was no comfort or relief in the Lord’s supper, which had been transformed from a spiritually nourishing meal into a cold and fearful duty. By the time of God’s great sixteenth-century Reformation of his church, most people in the Roman Catholic Church only partook of the Lord’s supper once per year—and that only because they were required to.

This time we turn our attention to the recovery of the Lord’s supper in the Reformation. The reformers argued for a frequent administration of the Lord’s supper, in keeping with their view of the Lord’s supper as the comfort of the gospel for God’s people.

#### Martin Luther

The reformation of his church that God worked through Martin Luther was profound. Like the former and the latter rains that come down to revive the dry and barren ground, God’s gospel of justification by faith alone came down from heaven to revive the dry and barren souls of God’s people. Where the gospel went, the hearts of God’s people were made like the floors that are full of wheat and the vats that overflow with wine and oil (Joel 2:23–24). How wonderful was

God’s reformation of his church! How refreshing to his weary people!

The aspect of the Reformation that concerns us now is the reformation of the Lord’s supper. Whereas Rome had corrupted the doctrine of the Lord’s supper, Luther restored the true meaning of the Lord’s supper. Even though it is probably a reflex for us to lump Luther’s doctrine of consubstantiation with Rome’s doctrine of transubstantiation, Luther’s doctrine of the Lord’s supper was as different from Rome’s doctrine as day is from night. Rome’s doctrine of the sacrament was that the Lord’s supper is a re-offering of Christ, made by worthy people as their gift to God. Luther’s doctrine of the sacrament was that the Lord’s supper is a gracious meal, provided by a merciful savior as the gift of himself to his sinful and hungry people. Luther’s doctrine of the Lord’s supper was the recovery of the true essence of the Lord’s supper: a real spiritual meal in which Christ graciously feeds his empty people with his proper body and blood for their salvation and comfort. A Reformed man is thrilled with the essence of Luther’s doctrine of the Lord’s supper because Luther’s doctrine of the Lord’s supper is the gospel.

Luther rejected a great deal of commonly accepted doctrine regarding communion. He was particularly opposed to the celebration of private masses, to the understanding of communion as a repetition of the sacrifice of Calvary, to the notion that there are “merits” in simply attending mass, to the doctrine of transubstantiation, and to the “reservation” of the

sacrament—the claim that the body of Christ remains present in the bread even after the celebration of communion is over.<sup>1</sup>

It is also true that Luther made a grievous error in his doctrine of the Lord's supper, which error a Reformed man rightly condemns. Luther taught that Christ's physical body is present in, with, and under the bread in such a way that a partaker eats Christ's body with his earthly mouth and chews Christ's flesh with his earthly teeth. Over against this error of consubstantiation, the Reformed confess that we truly eat Christ's proper and natural body but by the operation of the Holy Spirit through faith, not with the mouth.

In the meantime we err not when we say that what is eaten and drunk by us is the proper and natural body and the proper blood of Christ. But the manner of our partaking of the same is not by the mouth, but by the spirit through faith. (Belgic Confession 35)

Nevertheless, while thoroughly rejecting Luther's error, which is not insignificant, a Reformed man can still rejoice at and agree with the essence of Luther's doctrine of the Lord's supper. For the essence of Luther's view was not consubstantiation but Christ's gracious gift of himself and his righteousness to his sinful people. Luther's essential doctrine is captured in the Formula of Concord, one of the Lutheran confessions:

We believe, teach, and confess that the whole worthiness of the guests at this heavenly Supper consists alone in the most holy obedience and most perfect merit of Christ. And this we apply to ourselves by true faith, and are rendered certain of the application of this merit, and are confirmed in our minds by the

sacrament. But in no way does that worthiness depend upon our virtues, or upon our inward or outward preparations.<sup>2</sup>

Luther's reformation of the doctrine of the Lord's supper led to a reformation of participation in the sacrament. God's people had been terrified to come to the Lord's supper under Rome's doctrine. They approached the altar of a holy and an angry Christ only once a year and only because it was their duty. But once Luther's doctrine of the gospel broke through, God's people understood by faith the mercy of their savior and his supper. God's people could finally come to Christ's table to eat and drink their fill of his righteousness. In the Augsburg Confession Luther's weekly celebration of the Lord's supper—still called the "Mass" at that time—is evident.

At the outset we must again make the preliminary statement that we do not abolish the Mass, but religiously maintain and defend it. For among us masses are celebrated every Lord's Day and on the other festivals, in which the Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth noting Luther's method of returning God's people to a frequent celebration of the Lord's supper. The common people in Rome had never been allowed to drink the wine of the supper, nor had they been allowed to touch the bread, which was placed on their tongues by the priest. The people of God had been held in bondage by Rome for so long that they could not all at once start coming to the table regularly. Some of them were so wounded in their consciences by the terror and burden of the law that they had lain under that they were still terrified of encountering Christ in the sacrament. How heartbreaking that Christ's gracious meal had been transformed by Rome

<sup>1</sup> Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 2, *The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), 54.

<sup>2</sup> Formula of Concord, Epitome 7:9, as quoted in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 7, *Modern Christianity: The German Reformation*, rev. ed. (1910; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 674.

<sup>3</sup> Augsburg Confession, Apology, Article XXIV, paragraph 1, <https://thebookofconcord.org/apology-of-the-augsburg-confession/article-xxiv/>.

into a chain of guilt and manacles of despair for God's people. Luther was very gentle with them, letting the balm of the gospel do its work of healing their stricken and wounded consciences. Luther was sharp with those men who tried to force the people to the table and instead counseled patience as the people were taught and taught and taught again about their freedom in the gospel.

There were people who had grown up revering the host and the chalice of wine in such a way that it was impossible for them quickly to behave as though these were nothing special, as though they, who were common laypeople, should be able to touch the host with their hands and handle the cup of wine without terror. Luther well remembered his own paralysis at his first Mass. So to force people to handle the cup with their own hands was no different from forbidding them to partake of the cup. In these and other things, freedom must be the only guide. Let people be free to take the cup, but let them not be coerced to do it.<sup>4</sup>

What refreshment and relief the Lord gave to his people when he gave them his gospel and restored to them his supper. How gentle the Lord is with his broken people, and how tenderly he binds up all their wounds.

### John Calvin

John Calvin equaled Martin Luther in his regard for the Lord's supper. In fact, Calvin surpassed Luther; for whereas Luther stumbled in his doctrine of consubstantiation, Calvin saw clearly the believer's true partaking of Christ's body and blood by the spiritual means of faith and by the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ's flesh, separated from us by such great distance, penetrates to us, so that it

becomes our food, let us remember how far the secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to wish to measure his immeasurableness by our measure. What, then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space.<sup>5</sup>

In the Lord's supper the child of God partakes of Jesus by a wonder of God's grace and love. For Calvin, therefore, the Lord's supper was a marvelous banquet in which our compassionate Father lavishes his love upon his children for their assurance and salvation.

God has received us, once for all, into his family, to hold us not only as servants but as sons. Thereafter, to fulfill the duties of a most excellent Father concerned for his offspring, he undertakes also to nourish us throughout the course of our life. And not content with this alone, he has willed, by giving his pledge, to assure us of this continuing liberality. To this end, therefore, he has, through the hand of his only-begotten Son, given to his church another sacrament, that is, a spiritual banquet, wherein Christ attests himself to be the life-giving bread, upon which our souls feed unto true and blessed immortality [John 6:51].<sup>6</sup>

Historians, reflecting on Calvin's high estimation of the Lord's supper, marvel at his appreciation for the sacrament.

The Reformers, no less than the patristic and medieval theologians, held the Lord's Supper in the highest regard. "No writer has gone beyond Calvin in his estimate of the importance of [the Lord's Supper] in the corporate life of the church," insisted the great Calvin scholar, John T. McNeill. Calvin maintained, "There is nothing in

<sup>4</sup> Eric Metaxas, *Martin Luther: The Man Who Rediscovered God and Changed the World* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017), 282–83.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics 20–21 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 4.17.10, 2:1370.

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.1, 2:1359–60.

heaven or earth of greater value and dignity than the body and blood of our Lord.” Indeed, “nothing (is) more beneficial to the church than this holy sacrament.” The Lord’s Supper played not a secondary, but a central role in the life of Reformed churches throughout most of their history.<sup>7</sup>

Because of the great refreshment that God bestows upon his people through the Lord’s supper, Calvin favored a frequent administration of the sacrament—at least every Lord’s day; if possible, every service. From the earliest days of his ministry, Calvin urged the leaders of the church to administer the Lord’s supper often. For example, in his Articles of 1537, which he submitted to the city council of Geneva, Calvin dismissed the idea of administering the sacrament a mere two or three times per year as incompatible with Jesus’ institution.

It would be well to require that the Communion of the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ be held every Sunday at least as a rule. When the Church assembles together for the great consolation which the faithful receive and the profit which proceeds from it, in every respect according to the promises which are there presented to our faith, then we are really made participants of the body and the blood of Jesus, of his death, of his life, of his Spirit and of all his benefits. As for the exhortations made there, we are to recognize and magnify by professing his praise the marvellous things graciously vouchsafed by God to us; and finally we are to live as Christians, being joined together in one peace and brotherly unity as members of one and the same body. In fact, it was not instituted by Jesus for making a commemoration two or three times a

year, but for a frequent exercise of our faith and charity, of which the congregation of Christians should make use as often as they be assembled, as we find written in Acts ch. 2, that the disciples of our Lord continued in the breaking of bread, which is the ordinance of the Supper.<sup>8</sup>

What Calvin had recommended at the beginning of his ministry, in 1537, he consistently maintained throughout his ministry: the Lord’s supper was such a precious gift of God to his church that it ought to be administered very frequently. In his final edition of his *Institutes*, published in 1559, Calvin used strong language to condemn the medieval practice of infrequent administration. Calvin saw the frequent administration of the Lord’s supper as providing true spiritual refreshment for God’s people and as a preventative to Rome’s multiplying ceremonies of man’s invention.

Now, to get rid of this great pile of ceremonies, the Supper could have been administered most becomingly if it were set before the church very often, and at least once a week.<sup>9</sup>

What we have so far said of the Sacrament abundantly shows that it was not ordained to be received only once a year—and that, too, perfunctorily, as now is the usual custom. Rather, it was ordained to be frequently used among all Christians in order that they might frequently return in memory to Christ’s Passion, by such remembrance to sustain and strengthen their faith, and urge themselves to sing thanksgiving to God and to proclaim his goodness; finally, by it to nourish mutual love, and among themselves give witness to this love, and discern its bond in the unity of Christ’s body. For as often as we

<sup>7</sup> Terry L. Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin: Recovering the Historic Ministry and Worship of Reformed Protestantism* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2014), 151.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva Proposed by the Ministers at the Council January 16, 1537*, as quoted in *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 43 (February 3, 2024): 7–8.

<sup>9</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.43, 2:1421.

partake of the symbol of the Lord's body, as a token given and received, we reciprocally bind ourselves to all the duties of love in order that none of us may permit anything that can harm our brother, or overlook anything that can help him, where necessity demands and ability suffices... [After citing Acts 2:42] Thus it became the unvarying rule that no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving.<sup>10</sup>

Plainly this custom which enjoins us to take communion once a year is a veritable invention of the devil, whoever was instrumental in introducing it...It should have been done far differently: the Lord's Table should have been spread at least once a week for the assembly of Christians, and the promises declared in it should feed us spiritually. None is indeed to be forcibly compelled, but all are to be urged and aroused; also the inertia of indolent people is to be rebuked. All, like hungry men, should flock to such a bounteous repast.<sup>11</sup>

Calvin's advice that the Lord's supper be administered frequently was not followed. The leaders of the city of Geneva opposed Calvin's plan on the ground that the people were not ready to receive the Lord's supper frequently. It is questionable whether the city leaders were honestly accommodating the weaknesses of the people or whether they had merely found a convenient reason to oppose Calvin. Geneva would end up expelling Calvin from the city for his Articles of 1537, so it is possible that the city leaders were merely using the people's weakness as a pretext for maintaining the medieval tradition of infrequent participation in the Lord's supper.

Whatever the case, Calvin anticipated the leaders' objection. He proposed a system of rotating the administration of the Lord's supper among the churches of Geneva in such a way that each individual church would administer the Lord's supper only once a month but that those who wished to partake each week would know ahead of time where the Lord's supper was to be administered that particular Sunday. In this way a believer could partake every week, while the churches would accommodate those who were not yet convinced that they may do so.

But because the frailty of the people is still so great, there is danger that this sacred and so excellent mystery be misunderstood if it be celebrated so often. In view of this, it seemed good to us, while hoping that the people who are still so infirm will be the more strengthened, that use be made of this sacred Supper once a month in one of three places where now preaching takes place, viz., St. Pierre, Riue or St. Gervais, in such a way that once a month it take place at St. Pierre, once at Riue, and once at St. Gervais, and then return in this order, having gone the round. It will be always not for one quarter of the city alone, but for all the Church; and for it a convenient hour will be chosen and announced everywhere on the previous Sunday.<sup>12</sup>

The leaders of Geneva would not have it. Politics prevailed, and a city council was elected that was downright hostile to Calvin. After only two years in its midst, Calvin was unceremoniously banished from the city of Geneva in 1538. Three years later, when the city had fallen into chaos and had again become a prey for the Roman Catholic Church, the city leaders summoned Calvin to return. Against his own desires, but convinced that it was the will of

<sup>10</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.44, 2:1422.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.46, 2:1424.

<sup>12</sup> John Calvin, *Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva Proposed by the Ministers at the Council January 16, 1537*, as quoted in *Reformed Pavilion* 1, no. 43 (February 3, 2024): 8.



God, Calvin returned to preach and to teach in Geneva. But even then the leaders would only agree to administer the Lord's supper four times per year.

Later on, in 1541, after his return to Geneva, [Calvin] further gave in to the weakness of human nature and agreed to a celebration four times a year, viz. Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and the first Sunday of September.<sup>13</sup>

Geneva and Calvin never came to agree on the frequency of the Lord's supper. Though Calvin preferred weekly administration, taught weekly administration, and proposed weekly administration, the city council of Geneva would only administer the Lord's supper four times a year. Calvin submitted to the decision and suffered it, but he was never in agreement with it. Calvin's position to the end was that the rich spiritual banquet of the Lord's supper, given by the Lord to his church in grace, ought to be administered often to God's hungry and thirsty people. Toward the end of his life, Calvin wrote, "I have taken care to record publicly that our custom is defective, so that those who come after me may be able to correct it the more freely and easily."<sup>14</sup>

### Dutch Reformed Church

God brought the Reformed faith of John Calvin to the Netherlands. The gospel of salvation by grace alone to the glory of God alone spread like wildfire in the northern part of the lowlands, and God established the Dutch Reformed Church on the foundation of that glorious gospel.

From the beginning the Dutch Reformed Church inclined to an infrequent administration of the Lord's supper. The pattern that had been established in Geneva in the 1530s and 1540s soon became Reformed tradition. By the time the next generation of Reformed ministers had been trained and were preaching in the Netherlands, it was normal to celebrate the

Lord's supper only occasionally. It was only a short step from there for the accepted tradition to become a synodical mandate and a Church Order requirement.

The Synod of Dort, 1574, held that the observation [of the Lord's supper] should take place every two months. Following Synods endorsed this position. But the Synod of Dort, 1578, added that the "Kruiskerken," Churches beneath the cross of persecution, which often had to meet secretly, should celebrate the Lord's Supper whenever it was convenient. This was, of course, only a temporary ruling. As soon as persecution ceased the general rule went into effect. The Synod of 's Gravenhage, 1586, decided that if circumstances were favorable the Churches should also celebrate the Lord's Supper on Easter Sunday, the day of Pentecost and on Christmas. Until the year 1905 the Church Order provided: "The Lord's Supper shall be observed, as much as possible, once every two months. It will also tend to edification to have it on Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas, where the conditions of the Churches permit such."

The Netherlands Churches [the Dutch Reformed Church] altered this reading in 1905, and our [Christian Reformed] Synod of 1914 adopted this new redaction, so that Article 63 now simply reads: "The Lord's Supper shall be administered at least every two or three months."<sup>15</sup>

With this, we have arrived at the answer to our question posed in the first editorial in this series. How did it come about that Reformed churches are so infrequent—even stingy—in their administration of the Lord's supper? How can the Reformed doctrine of the Lord's supper be so rich but the Reformed tradition

<sup>13</sup> Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 2009), 253.

<sup>14</sup> Bretschneider, *Corpus Reformatorum*, XXXVIII, i, 213, as quoted at <https://www.reformedworship.org/article/march-1990/lords-supper-how-often>.

<sup>15</sup> Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), 264.

of infrequent administration be so poor? Infrequent administration of the Lord's supper did not come from the reformers, who promoted as frequent as possible an administration of the Lord's supper. Rather, the Reformed tradition is a carryover from the city council of Geneva,

which only granted the churches four celebrations of the Lord's supper each year.

Next time let us investigate whether the Reformed tradition is consistent with the Reformed doctrine of the Lord's supper.

—AL

## HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

*The Banner*

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(pp. 23–24)

**Our Doctrine** by Rev. H. Hoeksema

### Article CII: The New King and His Kingdom: Melchisedec (continued)

Suppose, then, in the first place, that we take Melchisedec seriously, in the full significance of all that is attributed to him in the Word of God.

Suppose that he were a real priest of God.

Granted that he was a real king of righteousness.

Suppose that we do not diminish his significance as a historical person even in the least.

Then, what was Melchisedec?

The essential idea of priesthood is, as also Dr. Kuyper points out, that of consecration to God. The full significance of the priesthood you do not behold in the office of Aaron. It does not merely imply the sacrifice of bulls and goats. That form of the priesthood was transitory. It was temporary. But the real priesthood is eternal. It is the consecration of self and all that belongs to self to the Most High God and that from the principle of love to God. Such a priest Melchisedec was. It is part of the excellency of his priesthood over that of Aaron. True, there seems to be no reason to think that Melchisedec as priest of God did not bring sacrifices, or that, at least, he did not bring sacrifices of blood. Most probably he did. We read of bloody sacrifices early in the history of man, even at the time of Abel. But although it may readily be granted that also Melchisedec brought sacrifices of blood,

the essence of his priesthood was that he consecrated himself and his kingdom to the Most High. But this is not all. Melchisedec must have been called to his priesthood in some way. That he was priest of the Most High, as the text has it, surely implies that he consecrated himself to God Most High, but it also implies that God had called him in some manner unknown to us to officiate as priest-king. And therefore, that Melchisedec was priest implies in the first place that he knew the true God. The God he knew was the same God Abraham served, as is plain from the acknowledgement on the part of Abraham with regard to the priesthood of Melchisedec. The latter knew the true God. It implies in the second place that he loved the true God. His knowledge was not simply a mere historical knowledge, the knowledge that the true God existed above all other gods, but the true God he loved. For it is exactly that love of heart that was required for the true priesthood. In Melchisedec's heart there was a love of the Most High. It implies in the third place that from that love of the true God Melchisedec consecrated himself to Him, with all that he had, with his kingdom, and thus became truly a king of righteousness. And, finally, it implies that to all this, to officiate as a real priest of the true God in the midst of his people he was called by God himself, and his priestly work and function was pleasing

to God. God accepted him. There is no reason to think that his priestly work was not acceptable to the Most High. He did not simply make an attempt at priesthood, but he was very truly a priest of God, and acceptable undoubtedly to Him. In short, in Melchisedec we meet with a man who knows and loves and serves the Most High God and whose service is accepted by Jehovah.

Now, if this may be granted, place side by side with this priesthood and service of Melchisedec the explanation that this priesthood must be explained from the operation of common grace. Let us understand clearly what this means. It means that Melchisedec must be viewed as standing outside of the sphere of special grace. The latter is represented by Abraham. Melchisedec has no part with it. His priesthood, thus it is said, is a remnant of the priesthood of creation, as it originally existed in Adam, preserved through the power of common grace. There is no redemptive element in this priesthood. It is purely natural. Melchisedec, then, let us make no mistake about it, was a natural man. There was no essential difference between him and the heathen world surrounding him. He was, spiritually, like all the Canaanites, even though there was a greater remnant of what was originally given to man in creation present in him. Two thousand years after the fall of man we find a natural man, without the redeeming grace of God, who brings praises to the true God, who knows and serves Him, whose service is acceptable to God, who represents the eternal priesthood, a priesthood exalted far above that of Aaron, who is a type of Christ. Surely, no one would believe that this priest of the Most High God, this type of Christ, was not saved. In the light of all that we read of him we may safely conclude that Melchisedec was saved, and also actually lives forever.

If this explanation is accepted, I do not see how certain conclusions can possibly be avoided. In the first place, the conclusion that Adam the moment he fell into sin was not totally corrupted without and apart from the redeeming influence of saving grace. He was not so corrupt that

even without special grace he could not be priest of God, consecrating himself to God and accepted by Him. If two thousand years after this fall we find a man without redeeming grace, who reveals still so much knowledge and love and consecration to the Most High, if two thousand years after the fall we find such a pure service of God as revealed in Melchisedec's priesthood, surely, in Adam this must have been present in far greater measure. In the second place, the conclusion that up to at least two thousand years after the fall of man, the natural man, without redeeming grace, could know and serve and love the true God. If that is true, you obliterate for that time at least the distinction between the natural and the supernatural, between the carnal and the spiritual. For, however glorious a remnant you may perceive in the priesthood of Melchisedec of the original, the fact remains that you look upon this priest as a natural, carnal man. What is called common grace leaves a man carnal, natural. And at the period when Abraham meets Melchisedec there is no essential difference between the natural Melchisedec and the spiritual Abraham. Then you may, indeed, explain Abraham from Babylonia, you may explain Moses from Hammurabi, you obliterate the distinction between natural philosophy and religion on the one hand and special revelation on the other. And finally, if at the time of Melchisedec we find a natural man, without the redeeming grace that is in Christ Jesus, thus officiating as priest, and thus purely serving the true God, there seems no reason why the same could not be true today. Natural religion would seem entirely sufficient for the service of God. Melchisedec is the scriptural picture of a man as he is by nature, yet serving God acceptably.

It is for that reason that we deny the possibility of explaining Melchisedec from what is called common grace. We hold that Adam through his sin corrupted our whole nature and corrupted it on the spot. We maintain that Adam after he had sinned was priest of God no more, except through saving grace. Surely, he was still prophet, priest and king, but not of God. By sin

he was priest of the devil, king under him. True, this corruptness of his nature did not immediately develop to its fullest extent. This it will only through history, organically. The priesthood of sin will meet with its fullest development in the man of sin who shall sit in the temple of God not as a priest, not as a servant, but as a God. But this does not alter the fact that essentially man changed into a priest of the devil, whose service could not be acceptable unto God, the moment he sinned. It is in Cain, not in Melchisedec, that we see the development of the priesthood of man without grace. And if this is true, it is impossible that two thousand years after that fall into sin we should find a man without redeeming grace that is truly a priest of the Most High God. Another explanation of Melchisedec must be found.

But, you say, that is not exactly our meaning when we say that Melchisedec was priest of God through common grace. We wish to maintain all that is said of man's corruption by nature. And I am well aware of that fact. But the moment you do justice to Melchisedec's corruption as a natural man, full justice, that moment you face the other difficulty that you cannot explain all that we read of him as priest of the Most High God. Granted that Melchisedec must not be explained from special grace. Granted, therefore, that he was a natural, carnal man. Granted that his nature was corrupt, his understanding darkened, his heart perverse, his mind enmity against God. But how, then, do you explain that he was priest of the Most High? How do you explain that Scripture regards his priesthood as more exalted than that of Levi? How do you explain not only that he had knowledge of the true God, but that he served Him, that he consecrated himself to Him, that he was king of righteousness? How will you do justice to the fact that this man Melchisedec, a carnal, natural man, could possibly be pictured as made like unto the Son of God, as typical of Christ? You realize, if you maintain Melchisedec's natural corruption, you cannot explain all this, and you must maintain that his priesthood was after all not acceptable to God.

Now also this we do not wish to accept. We want to maintain all that Scripture tells us about the priesthood of this wonderful man. But then, we emphasize once more that we do not explain him from what is called common grace, but from special grace.

—Grand Rapids, MI

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### Reply to Rev. H. Hoeksema

It has been seen that by denying common grace one is committed to much more. The implications of the denial are many and manifold. They affect every article of the Christian faith. They extend to every locus of Reformed dogmatics. If common grace has to go, much more has to go. This has already in a measure been demonstrated and will be demonstrated still more fully as we go on. Then too, more specifically, there are other consequences resulting from the denial. Force the doctrine of common grace out of the Christian faith and the necessary distinction between creation and redemption (“schepping en herscheping”), the work of God the Father and the work of God the Son, cannot be maintained. And if the proper distinction cannot be maintained, the relation of the one to the other becomes a wrong relation. Then, likewise, the correct relation between the covenant of grace and the covenant of works, between Israel and the non-Israelitish nations, between Christianity and paganism, between religion and culture cannot be maintained. Take the doctrine of common grace out of the Reformed system, and what is left ceases to be Reformed. The doctrine is essential to the system. It is the case here as with the essential attributes of God. Deprive, in your theology, God of one of his essential attributes and your whole theology becomes impossible. If common grace has to go, it is difficult to see what part of your theology will remain unchanged.

How now, we proceed to ask in our further examination of Rev. Hoeksema's denial of common grace, how does his denial affect sacred history? What influence will that denial have on the interpretation of the biblical facts? Can we, denying common grace, still adhere to the

Reformed interpretation of the Scriptures? Or, can the Reformed view of revelation be kept intact? These and similar questions press themselves upon us as we consider the further implications of the denial of God's working through common grace.

In taking up some of these questions it will simplify matters if we first of all try to make clear what in barest outline the Reformed teaching in regard to common grace is. Very briefly stated the Reformed position is as follows. Immediately after the fall, when the "foedus operum," i.e., the covenant of works, had been broken, God intervened with his grace, his common grace and his special grace. These henceforth became operative. By his common grace God curbs sin and upholds in being this world of ours. Had God not interposed with his common grace, man's fall would have involved this world in ruin. That grace, therefore, was in character a "bewarende genade."<sup>1</sup> It preserved and perpetuated the ordinances of creation. The presence in man of the remnants of the divine image, the seed of religion, man's God-consciousness—this is to be ascribed to God's common grace. By virtue of this same grace the institutions of marriage, of the home, of society, of the State either continue to exist or are permitted to develop. As we follow the history of the descendants of the first human couple, the working of common grace becomes very manifest. Though a fratricide, Cain's life is spared. In his favor God gives Cain a sign which shall be instrumental in protecting him against the avenger of blood. This murderer becomes, furthermore, the recipient of numerous other gifts of God's common grace. He is permitted to become the father of a race. His race through God's common grace is privileged among other things to build a city and lay the foundations of civilization. In addition to this it is privileged to originate and develop the fine arts. The race of Seth, on the other hand, is permitted through the working of common grace to preserve the knowledge of the true God. After the flood this common grace receives its

fixed form in God's covenant with Noah and all Noah's descendants, a covenant that henceforth remains effective in the life of the world. The descendants of Noah, through God's common grace, develop into powerful nations. These nations at different periods in the history of the world become the founders of great civilizations. Babylonia, Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, all are centers which at one time or another witness the rise of great empires. In these empires arts and sciences, philosophy and literature, law and medicine, architecture and sculpture, flourish. God does not leave himself in this pagan world without a witness, "doing good to them, giving them rain and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness." These pagan peoples, too, are, to use Paul's own words, "the offspring of God." In Him they live and move and have their being. God is not far from each and every one of them. He giveth them "life and breath and all things." Among them are found men of genius, of high morality, of proverbial virtue, men with a lofty conception of God. Socrates and Plato in all subsequent periods of history have aroused the admiration of the believer. And what holds true of Greece can be said of pagan peoples elsewhere. All of which goes to show that there is an abundant working of God's common grace in the pagan world.

But, similarly, among the people of promise, under the old and new dispensation, there is operative, in addition to God's special grace, the general grace of God. To all men alike, to the believer and unbeliever, God dispenseth numerous gifts of his common grace. There is a working of the Spirit of God in all men. True, not the spirit of sanctification, which worketh only in the heart of the believer. Nevertheless, in a real sense, the working of the Spirit of God, the Spirit which is the author of the beautiful and good among men in general. The Word lighteneth every man coming into the world.

These are some, and only some, of the implications of the doctrine of common grace as taught by Reformed theology.

<sup>1</sup> English translation: preserving grace.

Turning now to our critic, let us see what happens. First of all it may be said that of the working of common grace no mention dare be made. For the simple reason that there is no common grace. “The common grace theory,” Rev. Hoeksema tells us, “is inadequate\*\*\*\* and therefore we deny it.” There is only the grace which is in Christ Jesus, the grace for which Rev. Hoeksema discards the title of special grace, the grace which I hope, though I am far

from sure, Rev. Hoeksema will hold with us to be always “zaligmakend,” “wederbarend.”<sup>2</sup> For this is to be kept in mind, that the grace which is in Christ Jesus is a saving grace. What, now, happened, according to Rev. Hoeksema, when Adam fell? He answers, “It was nothing but the power of this grace in Christ Jesus \*\*\*\* that kept the world from ruin from the beginning.”

(To be continued)

[R. Janssen]



<sup>2</sup> English translation: saving, regenerative.