

Dear Brethren,

Your committee brings the following for your consideration and judgment:

Information:

1. On March 5, 2023 Rev. Lanning preached a sermon on LD 35 entitled “No Image Worship.”
2. In that sermon the doctrine of the Regulative Principle of Worship was taught with specific application to the singing of the church. The teaching was that the second commandment governs the singing of the church such that the church sings the Psalms. (“[...] Lord's Day 38, the elements that belong to worship are [...] the singing of the Psalms.” “Reformed churches have concluded that the singing of Psalms belongs to the regulative principle.” “[...] the regulative principle says, ‘Do not depart from those Psalms to sing something else.’” “[...] the second commandment and the regulative principle that requires the Psalms.”)
3. A further specific application was made regarding the doxology *Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow*. It was taught that this song was a hymn and not a Psalm and that to sing it in our worship services is the breaking of the second commandment.
4. On March 6, Rev. Lanning sent an email to the elders asking for their advice about whether or not to change the subject of the upcoming doctrines class to the regulative principle. Along with this email he sent a proposal for changing the doxology to Psalter #268. After several elders responded it was decided to leave the topic of the doctrines class and to hold a consistory meeting after the class to discuss how to proceed.
5. On March 8, the consistory met and took the decision to: “temporarily cease using *Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow* as the doxology before the worship services and substitute Psalter #268. Ground: This will give the consistory time to study the pertinent statements made in the sermon of March 5.”
6. Also, at this consistory meeting a committee of Elders Tom Bodbyl, Matt Overway and Gord Schipper was appointed “to bring advice on the sermon preached on the evening of March 5, 2023 on the proposal of March 6 by Rev. Lanning and the proposal of March 8 from Elder Bodbyl.”
7. On March 12, Rev. Lanning preached a followup sermon on LD 35 entitled “The Regulative Principle of Worship.” In this sermon Rev. Lanning was even more explicit in his teaching that the regulative principle of worship demands Psalm singing and only Psalm singing during the public worship services of the church. From the sermon, “The question now is, does that regulative principle apply to exclusive psalmody. So that the church is required by God to sing the Psalms in her public worship... The answer is, it does.” And, “The worship of Jehovah in the matter of singing requires the Psalms and exclusive psalmody.” After this sermon Elders Jon Langerak and Gord Schipper did not shake Rev. Lanning’s hand as a sign of disapproval of what was preached.
8. On March 15, after the council meeting another consistory meeting was held in order to discuss the differences and how to proceed. At this consistory meeting Rev. Lanning presented to the consistory an overture which he intended to bring to the next Classis meeting seeking to change Church Order Article

69 to have the churches sing exclusive psalmody during her worship services. Also, at this meeting it was agreed that the two elders who disagreed with the sermon ought to bring a protest to the consistory specifying their grievances. The date for our next consistory meeting was set for March 29.

9. On March 19, Rev. Langerak preached a sermon on Colossians 3:16 entitled "The Indwelling Word." In this sermon he publicly charged the teaching of Rev. Lanning of the requirement of exclusive psalmody with legalism.

10. Even though the committee was only asked to judge the March 5 sermon on LD 35, we believe that we must also address the March 12 sermon on LD 35 Q&A 96 because it was intended to be a further teaching and instruction on a point of difference. ("...because the pulpit's task from Jehovah is to teach and to instruct and to lead when there is difference, we return especially tonight to Question 96...") This sermon made plain and explicit what was implicit in the March 5 sermon.

Committee Advice:

At the outset this needs to be stated. We love singing the Psalms and are not interested in bringing hymns into our worship services. We love our current Psalter and want to keep singing these songs till our Lord returns. We are bound to Article 69 of the Church Order and that gladly. We certainly can say that this reformation has given to us a greater and richer understanding of the Psalms and of our seeing Jesus Christ in the Psalms as we sing them. This new awareness and consciousness of Jesus Christ in the Psalms was worked by the preaching of the gospel. The preaching of the gospel gives one a love for the Psalms and a strong desire to sing these in the worship services. However, it is not the law and legislation that keeps God's people singing and loving to sing the Psalms. Rather it is the gospel.

Regarding the Doxology Question

We believe the following shows that the doxology *Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow* is a faithful versification of Psalm 148.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow

[Ps 148: vs 1 Praise ye the LORD]

Praise him all creatures here below

[Ps 148: vs 7 Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: vs 8 Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling his word: vs 9 Mountains and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: vs 10 Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl: vs 11 Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: vs 12 Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children:]

Praise him above ye heavenly host

[Ps 148: vs 2 Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all ye stars of light. Vs 3 Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Vs 4 Praise him, he heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Vs Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created.]

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

[Ps 148: vs 1 Praise ye the LORD. vs 7 Praise the LORD vs Let them praise the name of the LORD vs 14 Praise ye the LORD]

Note: LORD in all capital letters is the name for Jehovah. The covenant God, three persons in one being. Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Regarding the History of the Reformed Church

See the attached document that was brought to the Synod of the PRCA in 1960 when they were addressing the overture of First PRC to add hymns to Article 69.

What we emphasize here came out of that report.

In the part of the report titled, Exegetical Survey it was stated, "An express precept that in the Christian congregations the Psalms must be sung one does not find in the New Testament." And again, "There is no commandment that one may only sing psalms; neither is there a prohibition, excluding the hymn." The opinion of Voetius was that, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (II Cor. 3:17)

That exclusive psalmody as law was not the position of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Hoeksema can be easily shown. Kuyper wrote, "Does this now mean that the congregation does not have the right to formulate its own songs to sing and pray to the Highest Being, either in prose or in poetry? We are not aware of such a prohibition. After all, we have always allowed spontaneous prayers in our churches. No one has ever claimed that only those prayers could be used in church that were found either in Holy Scripture or in the Psalms. Yet, strict consistency would require such limitation if the singing of new prayer-songs is not allowed. (*Our Worship* by Abraham Kuyper, pg 38) Rev. Herman Hoeksema's position was, "And, therefore, I still maintain that such hymns as are faithful versifications of Scripture and are approved by the Synod may be sung in the churches." (Standard Bearer 1961, Vol. 38, issue 2, pg 32)

Jesus promised that he would send his Spirit to guide the church into all truth. (John 16:13) The above history of the Reformed Churches shows that the church with the guiding of the Spirit led her to sing the scriptures.

What is striking, is that in our own brief history as a congregation, those that began worshipping separately at the Pinnacle Center and were charged with legalism for their man made laws which they created regarding worship, this same group also at one of their first gatherings at the Pinnacle Center removed the doxology from their rival worship service because it was a "hymn". Likewise, the Puritans and others of that same purity of worship bent have all gone down the road of legalism in their lives and worship. Those who practice exclusive psalmody as a law of worship historically have shown themselves

to be plagued with legalism in their doctrine and practice. Let us take note of church history and not repeat the errors of those who have gone before us. Is it legalism to practice exclusive Psalm singing? No. Is it legalism to demand according to the law (2nd commandment) exclusive Psalm singing? Yes, it is.

With Regards to the Church Order

Article 69 of the Church Order says that, "In the churches only the 150 Psalms of David, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, the Twelve Articles of Faith, the Songs of Mary, Zacharias, and Simeon, the Morning and Evening Hymns, and the Hymn of Prayer before the sermon shall be sung." This Church Order article does not demand exclusive psalmody. Rather it gives place to other songs of Scripture, hymns and songs that express truths which the churches confess. By this we can see that our Reformed Fathers rejected the notion of exclusive psalmody in the worship services.

Also, though the Church order is not a creed and confession of one's doctrine it is a binding document used for "the lawful order of the church." (CO 86) This is in harmony with the teaching of Belgic Confession 32, "it is useful and beneficial that those who are rulers of the church institute [...] establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the church." This is what Church Order Article 69 does. It lawfully orders the church in her singing for the maintenance of the worship of the body of the church. There are songs that could be added to this article and there are songs that could be taken away. But as Reformed churches we have agreed these current songs are allowed in the worship services of our congregations.

If one disagrees with or wishes for these ordinances to be changed there is a way to do this. You have this liberty. However, Church Order 86 tells us "no particular congregation or classis [(which would also include an individual minister)] shall be at liberty to [alter, augment or diminish any article relating to the lawful order of the church], but they shall show all diligence in observing them, until it be otherwise ordained by the general synod." That is to say that Rev. Lanning has the right to seek to change Church Order Article 69. However, for the promotion of decency and good order and for the preservation of peace and unity in the churches he ought to use all wisdom and due diligence of the means available to him for the changing of a church order article. Preaching against a Church Order article is not showing all diligence to observe the lawful order of the church.

With Regards to the Scriptural Arguments

Rev. Lanning's appeal to scripture for support of exclusive psalmody is unconvincing and without merit. The fact that God provided his church with a song book does not mean that he requires them to sing only those songs found in that song book. Rev. Lanning made much of 2 Samuel 23:1-2 to prove that David was the "sweet psalmist of Israel." However, 2 Samuel 23:2-7 is a Psalm of David which is not included in the book of Psalms. According to the position of the sermon it would be idolatry to sing this Psalm of David which is not one of the 150 Psalms. It is arbitrary to limit the songs of the church to only those found in the book of Psalms. God gave his people many songs that do not appear in the Psalms which they sang and used to praise and worship him both at home and in their worship services.

This can also be seen in the song of Deuteronomy 32. God gave his people this song through Moses. It was meant to be sung in their worship. This is why many of the Psalms mimic and repeat the words and message of this passage. But now according to this exclusive psalmody teaching if one were to sing Deuteronomy 32 in church they would be guilty of idolatry but if they sang the same words as found in the Psalms then they would not be committing idolatry? This is confusion and nonsense. God is not contradictory. He is pleased with praise and worship in all of the songs that he has given his people to sing whether they are found in the Psalms or if they are found in another portion of scripture.

The fact that Jesus and his disciples sang the Hallel does not prove exclusive psalmody. To teach that this is now prescriptive [law] for the church's worship, is an imposition on the text. The Old and New Testament church is one. If the Old Testament church could sing other songs than the Psalms in their worship of Jehovah then so can the New. Scripture is replete with other songs that Israel sang. (Habakkuk 3:1-19, Judges 5 – Song of Deborah and Barak, Deuteronomy 32 – Moses's song, Isaiah 26, I Kings 4:32, II Chronicles 35:25, Song of Solomon)

There is no proof from scripture that the church of the New Testament must sing exclusive psalmody. The teaching of scripture is to be found in Colossians 3:16. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." The principle is that the believer sings. He sings scripture, which includes the Psalms but not exclusively.

When we sing the Psalms Christ sings with us. When we sing other versifications of scripture, Christ sings with us. Why? Because all scripture is the word of Christ and all scripture speaks of Christ. ("All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:" 2 Timothy 3:16, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." Luke 24:27) Psalm 22 and Hebrews 2 do not limit this singing of Jesus with his brethren to the singing of Psalms. This is an arbitrary limitation and imposition on the texts.

With Regards to the Creeds

The 2nd commandment is a principle that applies to the believer's whole life, which includes the home as well as the assembly of believers on the Sabbath day. It was taught in the 3/12 sermon that "the regulative principle of worship does not apply as the regulative principle of worship to your home and the devotions you have around your dinner table." This assertion is without merit. A principle is a fundamental truth that serves as the foundation for a system of behavior. As such principles are valid in all situations of life. If a principle does not govern our behavior in all aspects of our life then we have situational ethics. The worship of God is governed by the principle of the second commandment and the second commandment is applicable to all areas of life and to all ages of the earth. Therefore, if the second commandment demands exclusive psalmody in church then the second commandment demands exclusive psalmody in the home. Likewise, if the second commandment requires exclusive psalmody of the New Testament church then it also requires exclusive psalmody in the Old. The second commandment's governance of the worship of God is the same no matter what sphere of life or what Testament we are talking about.

The elements of worship may not appear in all spheres of life. A minister does not preach in his home but he must preach in the church. However, the principle remains the same so that what he teaches in the home and what he preaches in the church are only those things that are according to the Word of God. Likewise, with the element of singing. The principle of what we sing in both home and church for the worship of God are only those things that are not graven images, that is the pure doctrine of the Word of God.

Also, due to this unjustified distinction between the regulative principle governing church worship but not the home the sermon taught, "There will be an echo of that principle in your home, not the principle but an echo of that principle..." We believe the principle of Lord's Day 35 equally applies to the home and the church. Besides, an echo doesn't contradict the voice. An echo only does and only can say the same thing as the voice. If the principle demands exclusive psalmody in the church then the "echo" of that principle in the home would also demand exclusive psalmody in the home.

Further, the elements of our worship on Sunday are found in Lord's Day 38. Lord's Day 38 does not say, "Sing the psalms" as was taught in the March 5 sermon. Lord's Day 38 says that "on the sabbath...[we] publicly call upon the Lord." This includes prayer and singing. Lord's Day 38 does not say we sing the Psalms exclusively. This was an imposition upon the actual words of the creed.

It was often stressed in the March 12 sermon "that there may be no human inventions in the elements of worship." There appears to be a fundamental error in understanding what the Belgic Confession means by "no human inventions." What this means is that we may not add our own elements to the ones God has required for our worship of him. This means that if I decide that God should be worshiped by going to confession or praying to saints or honoring relics or paying indulgences I have brought a human element or invention into the worship of God. What the phrase "no human invention" does *not* mean is that we cannot use *anything* of man in the elements of worship that God has commanded. If this were the case as the sermon alleges then reciting the Apostles Creed and preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism and using the forms for Baptism and the Lord's Supper would all be idol worship and be forbidden by Belgic Confession Article 32 and LD 35. No human inventions does not mean nothing of man may be used in the legitimate required elements of worship. What it does mean is that nothing of man's imagination as new elements of worship may be added unto the legitimate and specified elements of worship.

We believe that in controversy the creeds are decisive for us. The recent controversy regarding the school issue is instructive. At the Formula of Subscription Exam of Rev. Vander Wal, he was asked by Rev. Nathan Langerak, "... in a Reformed church, a doctrinal question or a controversy really of any kind can be settled on the basis of the language of the creeds themselves, with no reference to scripture?" And again Rev. Lanning clarified, "Would it be ungodly or a denial of scripture or somehow un-reformed for a church to answer that? So not merely logical and formally but really." (*see transcription of the exam*) Exclusive psalmody cannot be proved by the creeds. This should settle the matter for the Reformed Protestant Churches. The creeds are silent and so we should be silent and not trouble the churches with these laws of men.

However, though the creeds do not demand of us exclusive psalmody, we do believe they address the issue of a *demand* for exclusive psalmody in worship. In Belgic Confession Article 32 we read, "And therefore, we reject all human inventions, and *all laws*, which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to *bind and compel the conscience* in any manner whatever. Therefore, we admit only of

that which tends to *nourish and preserve concord, and unity*, and to keep all men in obedience to God.” Rev. Lanning brought a human law into the worship of God, “exclusive psalmody.” By demanding exclusive psalmody, we are creating a law whereby we bind and compel the consciences of the members and disrupt the concord and unity we have. This is what the Belgic Confession forbids us to do.

We believe Rev. Lanning fell into the very trap that he warned the congregation of in the sermon. “And there may be no human scruples of man that govern the worship service. A scruple is a feeling that is guided by a conviction. It may even be a feeling guided by a principle. You have a conviction about something, your conviction might even be right. You have a principle, it might even be a biblical principle. But now you have feelings that are guided by that conviction and feelings that are guided by that principle... But the worship of the church may not be governed by the scruples of a man...” Our opposition to this legislation for exclusive psalmody is not due to any desire for hymns, but rather is due to an opposition to the laws and scruples of man that bind the conscience and introduce legalism into the Reformed Protestant Churches.

Recommendation #1

Motion that we inform the congregation that the doxology, *Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow* is a faithful versification of Psalm 148 and we will begin singing it again this coming Sunday. By this decision we are rejecting the proposal of Rev. Lanning presented to the consistory which was recommending a change of our doxology based on the regulative principle.

Grounds:

1. When singing this doxology, we are singing a faithful versification of Psalm 148.
2. The motive of the writer in writing this doxology is irrelevant. Paul writes in Philippians 1:15-18, “Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”
3. This song complies with Article 69 of the Church Order, “In the churches... the 150 Psalms of David... shall be sung.”

Recommendation #2

Motion that we judge Rev. Lanning’s teaching regarding exclusive psalmody in the worship service to be legalism by bringing an erroneous application of the second commandment in the preaching.

Grounds:

1. The Reformed Creeds do not demand exclusive psalmody.
2. This teaching goes beyond what the scriptures reveal.

3. The Church Order does not demand exclusive psalmody but rather rejects this teaching by including songs which are not found in the Psalms.
4. The teaching of the sermon is that if we sing anything other than the 150 Psalms in the official worship service, we are committing idol worship and sinning against the 2nd commandment. To teach that if the congregation sings any versification of the scriptures (other than the Psalms) then the congregation does not have God dwelling with them nor experiencing his covenant fellowship through Jesus until man's law is met is legalism. It is an extreme and legalistic application of the law in the life and worship of the believer.
5. Lord's Day 35 is teaching the principle of no idol worship which principle governs our whole life and not only the official worship services.
6. Exclusive psalmody in worship as a demand of the law is a law of man which is forbidden in Belgic Confession Article 32, "And therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws, which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever. Therefore, we admit only of that which tends to nourish and preserve concord, and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God."
7. The history of the Reformed churches demonstrates that the teaching of exclusive psalmody as law in worship has been rejected.

Recommendation #3

Motion that the consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church suspend Rev. Andrew Lanning from the office minister of the word and sacraments.

Grounds: See recommendation #2 above with its grounds.

Recommendation #4

Motion that the consistory of First Reformed Protestant Church seek the sentence of Second Reformed Protestant Church regarding Rev. Lanning.

Ground: Article 79 of the Church Order requires that elders and deacons, and by implication ministers, shall be suspended from office "by preceding sentence of the consistory thereof and of the nearest church." Second RPC is the nearest church to First RPC.