

Clarion

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE: TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE



Music in our Churches

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THE PREDOMINANCE OF THE PSALMS
EVALUATING THE GENEVAN TUNES

Clarion

Clarion: a trustworthy and engaging magazine, widely spread and read in Canadian Reformed households and beyond.

To equip God's people for his glory, in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, Clarion adheres to the following core values:

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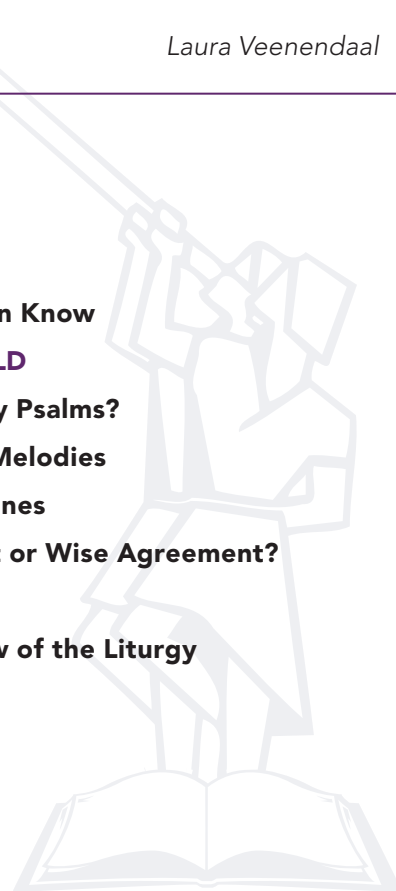
This issue is a special one: a theme issue entitled "Music in Our Churches." One of our co-editors, Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, prepared our lead article and did a lot of work organizing the rest of the material.

The issue includes a mixture of educational and opinion pieces, particularly regarding the suitability of Genevan tunes. Rev. Holtvlüwer wrote to me that this is by design: "There are two articles representing both sides of that particular debate so that readers can assess the argumentation. The other articles are mostly instructional in nature, to help members and musicians alike appreciate and better utilize our songs to the glory of our God."

Laura Veenendaal

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Connect with him on Facebook or Twitter (@PeterHoltvluer) where he is currently tweeting on Christ in the Psalms.

A Song Book We All Can Know

All members are called by God to unite their hearts and voices in his praise

How large should a church song book be? How many songs is ideal? It's a real question facing our federation, and our upcoming general synod will have to consider it. There is an overture coming from the churches in western Canada asking Synod to approve the songs found in the new *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* (a joint production of the URC and OPC, 2018) alongside of our existing *Book of Praise*. As churches, we've agreed in Article 55 of the Church Order that this approval is necessary before they can be sung in the worship services.¹ Our song book currently has 150 psalms plus eighty-five hymns² for a total of 235 songs. The *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* has 150 psalms (with additional renditions for many of the psalms) plus over 400 hymns. Roughly speaking, that would total more than 600 songs within the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*. Add to that our existing 235, and each congregation would have well over 800 songs available to sing every Lord's Day.

To some that prospect might come as a sigh of relief – finally, some more choice! And no doubt there is a gain in the flexibility of selection, especially among the hymns. Certain sound and well-loved hymns seem designed to fit like a glove when it comes to certain Bible passages or sermons or situations in the congregation and the ability to sing them just then might be very edifying, not to mention glorifying to the Lord. That's an advantage. But I wonder: have we carefully considered the *disadvantages* of adopting such a large song selection? And what might be the advantages to keeping the approved collection more compact?

I invite you to think along with me as I count at least four benefits to keeping the church's song selection trim:

1. The whole congregation can know the songs well

When the church sings to the Lord, it should sing from the heart and with as much gusto or pathos as it can. To do that, it must know the tune well. But just how many songs can a congregation actually know to sing well? Surprisingly, there is a limit, and it's not a very high number. Scott Aniol, who teaches courses in ministry, worship, hymnology, aesthetics, culture, and philosophy at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, discusses this question in a blog post. In his context, churches have no defined limit to the number of songs available to them. As he says, many churches often have hymnals with more than 700 hymns and yet, "The truth is that most churches – and I'm being very generous in my estimate here – can only sing around 150 songs."³ This is backed up by the comments of Marie Paige, director of Musicademy, an online resource for worship training. She too works in an environment of virtually unlimited choice of worship music. When asked, "How many songs does an average church need?" she answered, "Our initial answer would be 'Not as many as you might think'. Most congregational members struggle with lots of new or unfamiliar songs so it's good to have a relatively small core list. We've actually created a Master song list for small churches that has about 50 choruses and 20 hymns."⁴

As Canadian Reformed churches we have to be honest and admit that we already have our hands full knowing all the tunes in our own song book. While it seems that we can heartily sing most of our eighty-five hymns, we do struggle to know and sing well all 150 psalms.⁵ For example, which congregations sing Psalms 10, 11, 41, 58, 83, 88, 94, 114,

120, and 129 with confidence? In my experience, they are few and far between. Adding new tunes (be they alternate tunes to some psalms or additional hymns) will not help us get to know the songs we already have. The larger the song book, the bigger the problem.

Ask any Canadian Reformed minister who has preached several times in United Reformed congregations and chooses the songs either from the blue *Psalter Hymnal* (with its 493 selections and which has been in use for over fifty years!) or the new *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* and they will tell you that many times the congregation struggles to sing certain selections.⁶ When the song count is so large, it's simply not possible for any congregation to really know its own song book, and that is unfortunate. Either many selections will never be chosen (why have them then?) or the congregation is made on occasion to stumble through certain ones they don't know – not a very edifying experience. But if as churches we maintain a song book consisting of the 150 psalms plus a lean selection of excellent, well-chosen hymns, all church members will be in a good position to learn all the songs and sing God's praises heartily no matter the song chosen.

2. All generations can sing them well together

Maintaining a relatively stable, compact song book of psalms and hymns will allow grandparents to sing heartily to the Lord right beside their children and grandchildren. In the so-called worship-wars of the 90s, many evangelical churches created a rift between the generations by offering a "traditional" worship service first thing Sunday morning, followed by a service featuring contemporary Christian music. Naturally, the older people tended to go to the first and the younger people to the second. The music actually served to divide the generations, whereas God calls the generations to join together in praising his name (Ps 71:18; 79:13). We don't experience this to that extreme in our federation at the moment, but if we open up song selection so drastically (adding the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* will be quadrupling our present number of songs), do we not risk losing a powerful and beautiful connection between the older and younger members? How will the older ones keep up with this incredibly fast pace and volume of change?

I already see a division of the ages when it comes to songs at weddings, funerals, and even some school assemblies. Certainly some well-known hymns are chosen which all can sing, but more and more new songs are selected for audience singing known to younger members but lost on

the older ones because they don't know the tune. The result is singing that is muffled and flat, which is awkward at best. What is awkward in those situations is unacceptable in church, where all members are called by God to unite their hearts and voices in his praise. The church's song book should be accessible and easy to sing for everyone, enabling heart-felt singing across the generations. I am not suggesting no new songs should be introduced. Indeed, as churches we have a well-established process in place to do just that.⁷ But care should be taken to allow the older and younger members to grow accustomed to them together. This implies a paced and measured approach to adding (or replacing) songs within our *Book of Praise*.

3. Singing the same songs enhances unity across the federation

When individual congregations know their song book well, members can travel from one congregation to another across the federation and literally be on the same page, singing from the same song sheet. Being familiar with all the tunes makes a worshipper feel part of the worship service and really at one with the congregation, even though they may all be strangers to you. Over the years I've worshipped in RCUS, OPC, FRC, and URC congregations on various occasions and while the preaching was always sound and edifying and the fellowship warm and friendly, I always felt hampered by the fact that I was not able to sing (or sing well!) many of the songs. This is not strange as you can expect that when you go to a different church federation with a different history. Conversely, when I once travelled half-way around the world to Australia and worshipped in one of our sister churches there, I could fully join in the singing since they also use the *Book of Praise*. That was a blessing! Together we could give expression to our unity in the true faith and it made me feel right at home. And in Canada right now we have that blessing across our federation, a common song book well-known to all, a treasure we should not quickly give up.

4. The primacy of psalm-singing

As Reformed people we have long recognized that God calls us to sing the inspired Psalms back to him. While our churches do not believe the Lord forbids us to sing uninspired hymns in worship, Reformed churches have long maintained that the Psalms should have the primary place.⁸ On account of that principle, our federation decided

at Synod Chatham to “set the limit at 100 hymns, since Psalms have a predominant place in the liturgy of the Reformed Churches” (Art. 115, 6.1.1.; see also the Preface to the *Book of Praise*, p. v). This limit is a safe-guard to ensure that our churches don’t let hymns side-line the psalms, that we keep singing a majority of psalms in our worship services – and isn’t that safe-guard needed?

I think our churches are already in danger of losing the primacy of psalm-singing. We pay lip-service to the principle of psalm-singing but, as one study shows, in practice the psalms are barely chosen more often than hymns in the worship services.⁹ Do ministers, consistories, and congregations pay attention or even care about this? Do individuals, parents, families, and our Christian schools love to sing the psalms in their own devotions? If I again survey the weddings, hymns, and school assemblies I’ve attended, in many cases the number of hymns consistently outnumber the psalms. And what of the pre-service songs being chosen of late from outside the *Book of Praise* in a number of our churches? Are those making these selections looking to learn the psalms to new tunes? Are they selecting psalms from the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* or the Scottish metrical psalms or other sources? From all that I can gather, it is far and away hymns and contemporary Christian songs being chosen, not the psalms.

All of this together shows to me that among the average church-goer, psalm-singing is declining. If we now add 400 plus hymns to our selections for worship services, are we likely to start singing more psalms? If we are serious about predominantly singing the psalms in worship, keeping a limited selection of hymns (100 or less) is a real advantage. The simple reality is that the more hymns made available, the more pressure will be experienced to sing them instead of the psalms. If an average congregation has trouble learning 150 songs, and if the psalms are to have the primary place in our singing, it only makes sense to concentrate on learning all the psalms while keeping our hymn section lean indeed.

Conclusion

Before we rush into adopting 400 additional hymns for the worship services, we should consider carefully the ramifications, not least to the impact on psalm-singing. If the complaint is that some of the Genevan Psalm-tunes are too difficult, then let’s examine the situation and deal with it. As a federation, we can work together to switch out undesirable tunes if that is the wish of the churches. If the com-

plaint is that our current hymn selection is inadequate in some fashion, then let’s deal with that. Little used or simply inferior hymns can be swapped for better, more sound, more fitting hymns which congregations would love to sing. Perhaps we can kill two birds with one stone and improve our hymnary by making use of some of the best hymns from our sister churches in North America to help demonstrate our unity with them. Improvements to either the psalm tunes or the selection of hymns can be made without greatly affecting the overall size of our song selection. A carefully-crafted, compact song book can then continue to be a blessing for our churches across the generations and across the federation.

¹ For the rationale behind this agreement see Rev. J. DeGelder’s article “Article 55: Straitjacket or Wise Agreement?” later in this issue.

² For the purposes of this article, the “psalms” are those songs which try to set the inspired Psalms of Scripture to music (as close to the text of Scripture as possible) while “hymns” are any other songs deemed suitable for church worship.

³ <http://religiousaffections.org/articles/hymnody/how-many-songs-can-one-church-sing/> April 5, 2017. Aniol comments further that the reason most hymnals today have “anywhere from 400 to 800 songs” is “marketing. Many hymnals published today are attempts to appeal to the broadest constituency they can,” i.e. multiple denominations and multiple end-users (including choirs, music professors, et al).

⁴ <https://www.musicademy.com/2010/10/how-many-songs-does-an-average-church-need/> October 24, 2010.

⁵ See the study of Tim Nijenhuis at <http://www.genevantunes.com/gtstatistics.html>. For the issue of challenging tunes and whether they are truly unsingable, see my article, “Learning to Sing the Whole Book of Praise” in *Clarion*, 51, July 5, 2002. It can be found online at: http://clarionmagazine.ca/archives/2002/329-352_v51n14.pdf.

⁶ This happens to CanRC ministers who don’t know which tunes are familiar to the URC congregation. They choose songs based mostly upon the lyrics and assume the tune is known to the church since it’s in their song book. URC pastors know the tunes familiar to their flock and tend to more readily stick to them, just as CanRC pastors tend to do in their own churches.

⁷ For an outline of this process, see Rev. G. van Popta’s article “Hymns” later in this issue.

⁸ See Rev. D. Wynia’s article “Why Do We Sing Mostly Psalms?” later in this issue.

⁹ See again the study of Tim Nijenhuis, above, where out of 1231 worship services assessed he notes that the “psalms were chosen 52% of the time.”





The Stone is Rolled Away from the Tomb

“And he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.’” (Mark 16:1-8)

All four gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – devote a large part of their gospel writing to the final week of Jesus Christ’s life. Clearly, his suffering, death, and resurrection are important. All four gospels also give an account of the women who went early to the tomb on Sunday morning. As many as seven women went out in the wee hours of the Sunday morning, after the Sabbath rest was officially over, and well before it was even light. They were on their way to Jesus’s tomb, fully equipped with spices, perfume, and ointments.

While the men had scattered in every direction when their master was arrested, the women were glued to Jesus Christ’s every move and to everything that happened to him. There is an old, well-known question: “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” The women were there. They were at his death; they saw the soldiers thrust their spear in the Master’s dead body; they saw his lifeless body pried from the cruel spikes of the cross; they followed all the way to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea and watched his burial. They loved him so much; all their hopes and fears had been wrapped up in him; there was nothing that could tear them away from even that final and ir retriev-

able moment when his cold, lifeless body was laid in the tomb.

Some of the women are mentioned by name. They have stories to tell. There is Mary Magdalene: Jesus had driven seven demons from her. Another gospel account mentions Joanna: Jesus had healed her. These are sisters who had experienced in a very real, cruel, and horrible way the consequences of the fall into sin, a world that groaned in agony, a life which is no more than a constant death. The one experienced disease. The other was possessed by demons. What was this but a foretaste of an eternity of weeping and gnashing their teeth in the fires of hell? But Jesus Christ had delivered them from that. He had delivered them from the bondage of both disease and Satan. Could it be that he would deliver them perfectly and eternally from Satan, sin, and death, restoring them to a wonderful fellowship with God? This was their hope! Had been! Those hopes and dreams are now dashed. They are now paying their last respects. This was no easy journey that Sunday morning by the seven women. It was the most heart-rending and troubling journey of their lives. They were saying goodbye to the one in whom they had placed all their hope!

But when the women came near the tomb, they saw that the stone had been rolled back. The significance of this stone rolled away is not immediately apparent to the women. They enter the tomb. Luke tells us they looked for the body of Jesus, but couldn’t find it. They started to panic. That’s when the young man dressed in a white robe, an angel, announced to the women, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.” The significance of the open tomb is now made quite clear: Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead!

It was a lot to take in for these amazing women. But their former hope was being rekindled. Our hope is stirred up! The empty tomb and the resurrected body of Jesus Christ demonstrated that he had crushed Satan’s power, paid for our sins, reconciled us to God, and gave us the hope of the resurrection from the dead and life everlasting. Jesus had drunk from the cup that his Father gave him, and now he was moving forward, on toward Galilee where he would reinstate his disciples and prepare them for the spreading of the gospel to the whole wide world. C

For further study

1. Why did no one seem to expect Jesus to rise from the dead, as he had predicted?
2. Why would Mary Magdalene and Joanna’s story seem pointless in light of Jesus dying and not rising from the dead?
3. How does Jesus Christ’s resurrection give comfort to you?

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Why Do We Sing Mostly Psalms?

Singing what uninspired people have written can introduce mistaken impressions, and even perpetuate doctrinal error in the church. Sometimes intentionally, much more often unintentionally, people have written hymns that do not accurately or fully reflect the teaching of Scripture. History shows that unlike the Spirit-inspired psalms, hymns are subject to certain doctrinal and ethical impulses. Quite often this has led to an over-emphasis on certain aspects of the individual Christian's life, and an under-emphasis on the objective work of God in Jesus Christ and of our place in the kingdom of God and the congregation of Jesus Christ. Church history is marked by a pattern created by spiritual trends or theological developments, which in turn provoke reactions or counter-developments.

Hymnody's risk of imbalance

Both before and after the Reformation, pietism and mysticism arose in reaction to formalism, intellectualism, and hypocrisy. The strains of pietism and mysticism show up in many hymns as subjectivism: an over-emphasis on the individual believer and his or her personal spiritual experience. The result is that we lose the focus on objective scriptural reference points, such as the covenant, the congregation, even the character of God himself, and the tendency is to encourage worshippers to build their spiritual confidence on what they feel and experience as individual believers. One of the most egregious examples of this unhealthy and unscriptural emphasis on the spiritual experience of the individual believer is the hymn "I Come to the Garden Alone," in which the singer claims that he experiences a communion with Christ "in the garden" which "no one has ever known." Further, there often seems to be an almost exclusive focus on God the Son and, in particular, his death on the cross, rather than a full-orbed worship of all three Persons of the Trinity, and recognition of all of the work that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit do for us.¹

According to the principle *lex orandi, lex credenda*, these weaknesses can lead to weaknesses in the doctrine and life of believers. For instance, seeking spiritual certainty in the quality of our personal spiritual experiences and condition distracts us from faith's focus on God's steadfast love for us, displayed throughout salvation history and pre-eminently in Jesus Christ. Looking to our spiritual experience for validation of our status as God's children is bound to lead to doubt rather than certainty.

It is important to mention a couple of caveats at this point. First of all, the argument in this article is not against singing hymns per se, but about the potential dangers of singing hymns *predominantly*. As churches, we recognize that there are sound scriptural hymns that may be sung to the glory of God and the edification of the congregation. Second, some of the potential dangers of hymns may not be obvious when we consider particular hymns. The potential dangers associated with singing hymns has more to do with what we might describe as a kind of cumulative effect or impact that singing hymns predominantly could have on our faith and our life.

The Psalter's perfect balance

The truth is that the psalms reflect the whole range of our experience as believers. Luther wrote, "The Psalter is the Book of all saints; and everyone, in whatever situation he may be, finds in that situation Psalms and words that fit his case, that suit him as if they were put there just for his sake, so that he could not put it better himself, or find or wish for anything better." Calvin said, "Not without good grounds am I wont to call this book an anatomy of all parts of the soul, since no one can experience emotions whose portrait he could not behold reflected in its mirror. Yes, the Holy Spirit has there depicted in the most vivid manner every species of pain, affliction, fear, doubt, hope, care, anxiety, and turbulent emotion, through which the hearts of men are chased."²



But the Holy Spirit has not only depicted “every species of. . . turbulent emotion” in the Psalms. He has also provided nourishment and instruction for our faith, by directing us to the foundation of our faith: the steadfast love of God, revealed in all of his mighty acts of salvation. For these reasons, Reformed and Presbyterian churches have historically adopted the principle of singing predominantly psalms in public worship services.

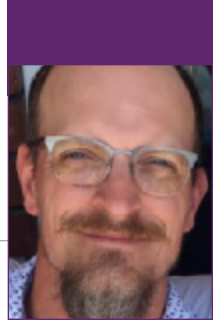
¹ F. Van Deursen, *Psalmen II* in *De Voorzeide Leer* (Barendrecht, NL: Drukkerij Liebeek en Hooijmeijer, 1978), pp. 353-384. In the essay, *Een vergelijking van psalmen met gezangen* (“A comparison between

psalms and hymns”) among other things, Van Deursen traces the development of pietistic and mystical hymnody in the medieval period, and its reappearance, in post-Reformation hymnody, especially among the German pietists (e.g. August Hermann Francke, Nicholas von Zinzendorf), but also among the Methodists (e.g. John Wesley). He identifies several examples of hymns that reflect pietistic and mystical influences. The medieval fascination with the physical aspects of the passion of Christ is reflected in a hymn such as, *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*, based on a composition attributed to the mystic monk, Bernard of Clairvaux.

² Both quotes found at this website: <http://www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/glorysufficiencypsalms.htm#.XDOdds1OmM9>



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Pursuing Easier Psalm Melodies

In the Footsteps of John Calvin

The Genevan Psalter was, and still is, one of the greatest treasures the Christian church inherited from the Reformation. The first complete set of versifications of all 150 Psalms ever published, it proved to be very successful in Renaissance Europe, where it finally allowed protestant Christians to sing in worship again. Roman Catholic church music had become so complex that it eventually evolved into a spectator affair, with professional musicians on stage and the people in the pews silently watching them perform. Nobody seemed to care about facilitating untrained singers in the congregation to express praise, lament, prayer, and jubilation to the God they came to praise and worship. This changed when John Calvin saw the need to accommodate the untrained singers gathered for worship and enable them to express every human emotion, using the very words of Scripture, without being hindered by music they couldn't perform. This need was one of the guiding motivations Calvin had for the publication of the Genevan Psalter.

Calvin's solution worked well in his era, but times have changed. In both Canadian Reformed and numerous contemporary worship services, I have observed the very same problem that John Calvin was trying to address, namely the problem of untrained singers, unable to participate fully in worship. In some cases where contemporary worship music is used, many worshippers cannot keep up with the complex rhythms and irregular melodies being performed by well-trained church musicians. To some extent, the songs we use in the Canadian Reformed churches present a similar problem. Having accompanied congregational singing in our community for many years, I have observed people within our circles having a difficult time expressing their worship, as the tunes of our psalter are often difficult to

relate to. To visitors to our churches, including well-trained musicians I have met, the Renaissance-style music we use is completely foreign.

Why are the Genevan tunes difficult today?

The Genevan melodies are based on modal scales, scales that have only been used marginally since the Baroque period.¹ Modal melodies lack a tonal centre, making every line feel unfinished to a modern ear. Most contemporary music does have a tonal centre and is comparatively easier to learn and follow. Modal melodies have a somewhat unpredictable contour with semi-tone and whole tone intervals in different places than the majority of music people are exposed to and accustomed to.

Nobody knows for certain how some of the Genevan tunes are to be performed, since the sharp symbol was not yet used in the sixteenth century. This is why there is disagreement among church musicians as to how to perform Psalms 23, 27, 30 and 150, for example. This problem is referred to as "*Musica Ficta*."² Even my music professors at Berklee can't tell me for sure how to correctly perform these melodies. Time signatures and bar lines are also absent, which obscures the proper rhythm and accent pattern that contemporary musicians rely on.

The thing that further complicates the singing is the lack of symmetry in melodic contour, lack of repetition, and irregular poetic meter. For example, note the meter of Psalm 38 is: 8.4.7.8.4.7, and Psalm 89: 12.12.13.13.13.13. The original tunes were composed to fit French poetry; English language and poetry prefer shorter and more symmetrical lines, like 8.8.8.8 or 8.6.8.6. English hymn tunes are easily interchangeable thanks to this symmetry, but finding alternatives

for existing lyrics is a major challenge. In our congregation we have been finding a well-known substitute tune for some of the lyrics in our psalter. The tune “Finlandia” can be used for Psalm 37, “O Perfect Love” for Psalm 12, “Solid Rock” for Psalm 127, and “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” for Psalm 142. Psalm 91 can be sung to the tune of “How Deep the Father’s Love,” Psalms 126 and 148 to “In Christ Alone.” From a composer’s point of view, though, writing new tunes for the Anglo-Genevan meter seems at times like squeezing new wine into old wineskins.

How beloved is the Genevan Psalter really?

I know there is a strong attachment to the Genevan Psalter among the Dutch immigrants here in Canada. At the same time, I witness a decrease in capable organists and at times lack-lustre singing in our congregations. In an attempt to reinvigorate psalm performance in our churches, I devoted over ten years to writing contemporary piano arrangements for all the Genevan tunes. This project has been proven successful for me, as I have sold sheet music all over Canada, the U.S., South Korea, Australia, and elsewhere. This seems to reinforce the idea that the Genevan tunes are in use all over the world, but to be honest, using some random statistics, there are more adherents of Vietnamese Operatic Music and a wider audience for atonal serialism composers in the world. To argue that the Genevan Psalter is in wide use everywhere would be like making the argument that people from every culture are able to consume *dropjes* and learn to like them as well. The only tune that appears frequently in other churches’ hymnals is Louis Bourgeois’s Old 100th.

Worship is to be both effective and genuine

Many times I have heard the term “our beloved Genevans,” but how true is this sentiment actually? Only about thirty-five of the tunes of the psalter are being sung fifty percent of the time, about forty of the psalms have been sung less than ten times in over 1200 worship services I have analyzed over the past two decades.³ This means that a large quantity of psalms is lying dormant. The reason why these songs aren’t used is obvious: their tunes are just not good enough. If we were to rank the Genevan tunes in popularity from 1 to 150, Psalm 23 – the most beloved and quoted psalm in the world with the most obvious reference

to Jesus Christ in the Psalms – would rank at number forty-eight. Psalm 150 ranks sixty-six for popularity. About a quarter of the psalms contain stanzas that are never sung. Psalms 58, 64, 83, 88, 120 and 129 are rarely sung. Surely the lyrics have most to do with the song choices, but I am convinced the melodies are a major factor as well. Difficult tunes are rarely sung, making them more obscure, making them even more difficult to perform. In contrast, the psalm melodies that do work well, e.g. Psalms 19, 25, 84, 103, 116, 118, 119, 134, are musically most similar to contemporary melodies, with conjunct melodies based on modes closely related to the major scale.

Time for new psalm tunes?

In today’s churches there is a hunger and a craving for well-written new songs, based on the Psalter. The oft-heard critique that contemporary worship music is all fluff and rooted in secularism is simply untrue. Faithful contemporary hymn writers and worship leaders are writing brand-new hymns based on the Psalms. What sense is there in discouraging new renditions of the Psalms? Are we maybe too proud of our heritage and too attached to our Dutch traditions? I question the usefulness of having only one set of psalms when so many of them are rarely sung.

The musical language used to express every kind of emotion today is completely different from the time of the Reformation. Changing the musical language for worship to facilitate today’s Christian when communicating with God therefore makes good sense. For similar reasons Luther translated the Bible in common German. The apostle Paul argues against the use of speaking in tongues in worship if nobody understands what’s going on and are thereby hindered in worship. Canadians generally don’t understand the musical language of our tunes and they take tremendous effort to learn. It makes sense to make some necessary changes to address this.

There can be no doubt that musical composition has generally evolved thanks to the creative genius of men like Bach, Handel, Mozart, and those who followed in their footsteps. Many faithful and successful hymn writers like Watts and Wesley, contemporaries like Kendrick, Getty, and Townend, have also been able to write excellent tunes sung by millions of Christians in worship. What most of these successful melodies have in common is their use of symmetry, repetition, and rhythmic predictability, making them easy to perform using contemporary instruments. The melodies have a tonal centre, based on Major and Minor scales, and are in essence pentatonic, i.e., based on five notes, five notes that are found in every musical culture and

style on the planet. Some of the best-known melodies in the world are based on this pentatonic scale: “Amazing Grace,” “Swing Low Sweet Chariot,” “In Christ Alone,” “How Deep the Father’s Love,” “Ring Around the Rosie,” “Auld Lang Syne,” and “Old Macdonald.” In popular music, examples include songs like: “My Girl,” “Stairway to Heaven,” and “Another Brick in the Wall.”

Facilitating psalm-singing

In the preface of his commentary on the Psalms, John Calvin calls this book “An Anatomy of the Soul.” He continues, “For there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror.” He also implies that worship is to be both effective and genuine. If worship music hinders the untrained singer, their worship is likely not effective nor genuine; it’s hard to express one’s emotions if the music is foreign and unknown; it’s hard to really worship with heart and soul when the tunes are simply too challenging.

To truly follow in the footsteps of the likes of Luther and Calvin, a healthy Reformed church with a love for biblical truth and an eye on the future of the Kingdom would do this: facilitate the worship of the church by giving the people contemporary ways to express every human emotion through accessible melodies that even make sense to the unchurched visitor. To be true to the directive of Scripture we would sing new songs, avoid stumbling blocks, and eliminate divisive issues that separate us from other Christians. Many alternative, scripturally-sound, and well-written renditions of the Psalms are available to us. In my own library I have five to twelve versions of psalms fit for our worship readily available. I think it’s time we truly encourage psalm singing in our churches and stop giving lip service to a 500-year-old heritage we have unsuccessfully tried to import and implement in Canadian society.

CALL DECLINED

Declined the call extended to him by the Chilliwack Canadian Reformed Church:

Rev. Rolf den Hollander

of the Covenant Canadian Reformed Church in Grassie, Ontario

CALL ACCEPTED

Accepted the call to St. Albert, Alberta:

Rev. Kenneth Wieske

former missionary to Brazil

Accepted the call to the Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Church:

Rev. Rodney Vermeulen

of the Trinity Canadian Reformed Church in Glanbrook, Ontario

CHURCH NEWS

The legacy of Calvin’s Psalter is not great because the tunes came from Geneva but because it facilitated genuine congregational singing. Let us honour the legacy of John Calvin and use the ideas that gave birth to the Genevan Psalter to equip the church with a complete collection of psalms where everyone can participate in giving full expression of every human emotion without being hindered by the music. Let us write and sing to the Lord new songs, using the best-known practices in music to accommodate the biblical practice of teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in our hearts.

¹ Margo Shulter, “When did modal music give way to the modern key system?” at: <http://www.medieval.org/emfaq/misc/modality.html>

² Tess Knighton and David Fallows, eds., *Companion to Medieval and Renaissance Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997) p. 265.

³ Tim Nijenhuis at: <http://www.genevantunes.com/gtstatistics.html> 



Frank Ezinga
Professionally trained organist with years of experience
accompanying congregational singing in Reformed
churches in The Netherlands
and Canada (presently in Langley, BC).



A member of the
Vereniging van
Gereformeerde
Kerkmusici, the Royal
Canadian College of
Organists, American Guild
of Organists, and the
Hymn Society.

Singing the Genevan Tunes

As a church in North America, we are singing the Psalms set to the Genevan tunes. While a number of these tunes have been used in other psalters and hymnals, the question has been raised if these tunes are foreign to our North American ears. The tunes are written in so-called “modes,” which has been used as an argument to indicate that the tunes are outdated and have outlived their usefulness. As outreach is on our church agendas these days, the unfamiliarity with these tunes is sometimes mentioned as a barrier. In this article I would like to review the Genevan tunes and address these concerns.

The modes

The Genevan tunes are written in modes (ecclesiastical or church modes). But what are modes? When piano students play eight consecutive notes going up or down, we talk about practicing scales. Modes are types of musical scales, with a particular arrangement of distances between subsequent tones. Each different scale (mode) sounds slightly different, but still has eight notes.



Example of a mode: Mixolydian scale

But, why would we use the different scales or modes? When musicians use modes in their music, they want to evoke a certain feeling.¹ The listener is usually not aware of the use of modes, but has a certain experience. Both Plato and Aristotle believed that the modes to which a person listened molded the person’s character.² The effect of modes on character and mood was called the “ethos of music.”

For example, the mode Dorian is connected with majesty, masculinity; Hypodorian with seriousness; Phrygian with excitement, anger; Lydian with sadness; Ionian with sweetness, agreeability.³ By using these modes in musical compositions, these associations can be evoked for the listener. Some compositions use a combination of modes.

That is interesting, you say, but why is this this important to us? Maybe a well-known American musician can give the answer. The renowned composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein found it important that American young people understood the church modes. He explained and demonstrated the modes⁴ at one of the Young Peoples Concerts (23 November 1966), which was broadcasted by CBS.⁵ That was a long time ago, you say, how about today? Most music students in Canada know about modes because they are included in the Grade 8 theory requirements of the Royal Conservatory of Music.⁶ In the USA, public high schools include the modes in their music curriculum.⁷ Convinced that nobody is too young to learn about modes, the Orff method (for teaching music) includes an excellent resource to teach modes to children in grades 4-6.⁸ Therefore, we can conclude that modes are relevant to North American musicians and music educators, also in the twenty-first century.

Modes in today’s music

That is the classroom, you say, but we don’t hear music with modes in our culture today, do we? Although the modes originated in Ancient Greece,⁹ the modes continued to be used with the exception¹⁰ of about roughly 200 years after J.S. Bach. For the baby boomers, Bernstein mentioned the Beatles’ music (twentieth century) in the introduction. For young people, we can add the Simpson’s theme song (Danny Elfman) which uses the Lydian mode (and so does movie music by John Williams¹¹). Simon & Garfunkel

kel's *Scarborough Fair* uses the Dorian mode. Teens may find this more interesting: EDM¹² musician Martin Garrix uses scales that are close to the Phrygian and Locrian scale.¹³ EDM musician Deadmau5 works with the Dorian, Lydian, and Aeolian modes.¹⁴ The song *Olsen* by Boards of Canada uses the Mixolydian mode. If this music would be just major or minor (rather than church modes), it would eliminate the character and the signature of their music. These musicians use the modes to evoke certain feelings, and it is a critical component of their global artistic success. Therefore, if modes are taught in our education system, are part of music from the past, are heard on TV, are used by world-renowned contemporary musicians today, having some songs in church that are based on modes makes them relevant and part of today's musical culture.

Awkward or difficult tunes?

Fine, you say, but some of the tunes don't fit and sound foreign to me. Part of the problem is that we are not singing and accompanying the Genevan tunes to support their modal character. Rather, we force the tunes into major or minor. (Dutch accompaniment books are part of the problem.¹⁵) For example, Psalm 23 has a beautiful tune, appreciated by famous composers.¹⁶ However, this tune is usually accompanied and sung in a minor key, giving it a sad character, which creates a disconnect with the text. When combined with a slow tempo, the congregation is left emotionally in "death's dark valley."

Some Genevan tunes are experienced as being more difficult to sing than others. Although the selection of difficult tunes is different from one congregation to another and one country to another, there is a pattern. Imprecatory and lament psalms are in general less frequently sung, and therefore the tunes have become unfamiliar. This problem is not unique to the Reformed churches.¹⁷ Regardless of the text though, the Genevan tunes have strong musical relations internally. When the tunes are broken down into sections, these sections can be used to make different tunes. For example, Psalm 10 is generally unfamiliar. The first line is composed of Psalm 92 the first half of line 2 and the first half of line 3. The second line of Psalm 10 is identical to the last line of Psalm 148. As all lines of Psalm 10 are based on other, well-known psalm tunes, we can conclude that the tune of Psalm 10 is not difficult. However, singing about the wicked people – of which there are many in today's world – through the words that God has provided, is difficult. The same can be said for other psalms that are sung infrequently.¹⁸

Visitors and the Genevans

You may find this interesting, but wonder: how do visitors on Sunday experience singing the Genevan tunes? It might depend on their background. A pre-existing church background plays a role in how people respond.¹⁹ It may be true that people totally unfamiliar with the Genevan tradition will at first have difficulty singing them, but is that not also true for any other church's musical tradition? This issue is not unique to the Canadian Reformed churches. Guests will need to put out effort to learn to sing the songs of whatever church they are visiting, and the Genevans are quite learnable. We can even provide regular visitors with several aids to help them.²⁰ A church should not choose its songs or tunes based on what guests might prefer but on what most honours the Lord and best serves the congregation.

Why would people attend a Canadian Reformed worship service? It is primarily for the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and him crucified. Singing songs (psalms) focussed on this Christ is in harmony with that message. The tunes are not unimportant, but the role they play is a supporting one. We can see that when we consider that different denominations have different church music and tunes. When going to a Catholic service, there is no surprise about chants and the use of Latin. In a Scottish Presbyterian congregation there could be no accompaniment at all, just the *a cappella* singing of the metrical psalms. In a community church a band plays and sings, with the text projected on the screens. In a Reformed church service, one may expect Genevan psalm singing. And there is nothing wrong with that. The unique songs of a church are part of its unique identity,²¹ culture, and history.²² Changing church music means changing the church. The Internet lists countless examples.

The Genevans and catholicity

Some discussions about issues in the western world have been identified as "first world problems." Can discussions about the psalm tunes be classified the same way? In Poland the Genevan tunes are being used for a new psalm book,²³ with great understanding of its historical significance. Two different editions of the Genevan Psalter were published in Korea²⁴ in order to create a musical church identity that is different from pagan culture and Christian Contemporary Music.²⁵ In Indonesia psalms continue to be sung, often without accompaniment. Another reprint of their Genevan Psalter was published in 2012.



Is that their only reason, you ask? When churches make the choice to use the Genevan tunes, a deeper appreciation is the result when they discover the intrinsic relationship of the Genevan tunes with plainsong. The relationship between the Genevan tunes and Gregorian chants²⁶ brings them in connection with songs that date back to the first centuries. Not only that: studies²⁷ have demonstrated that a relationship between plainsong and tunes from the Synagogue extends the connection of the Genevan tunes to the Jewish singing. This adds a unique aspect to the singing of the Genevan tunes, so that to some, singing with “the church of all ages” becomes more meaningful.

We have seen that the modal music was written since the times of Ancient Greek down through the ages (including the Genevan tunes) and continues to be used in modern music in North America. The Canadian Reformed churches may be thankful for their unique history and their own identity as a church federation, just like the Presbyterians, Anglicans, Catholics, and the URC. Our unique, rich, and yet relevant church music is a subset of our history and identity, where the Genevan tunes have been sung from generation to generation, from continent to continent.

¹ <https://www.guitar-muse.com/modes-part-2-the-feelings-modes-evoke-4928>

² Franchinus Gaffurius, *De Harmonia Musicorum Instrumentorum Opus.*, tr. C.A. Miller (Münster, Germany: American Institute of Musicology, 1977) p. 181.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁴ <https://leonardbernstein.com/lectures/television-scripts/young-peoples-concerts/what-is-a-mode>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKFqFjKZW80>

⁶ https://www.rcmusic.com/sites/default/files/files/S44_TheorySyl_2016_ONLINE_RCM_V2_F.PDF

⁷ Example: Iowa City West High School, <https://westhighapmusic-theory.wordpress.com>

⁸ <http://www.beatinpathpublications.com/DGagne/home.html#G-MIM>

⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/art/church-mode>

¹⁰ <https://leonardbernstein.com/lectures/television-scripts/young-peoples-concerts/what-is-a-mode>

¹¹ For example: E. T. (the Extra-Terrestrial) soundtrack

¹² EDM = Electronic Dance Music

¹³ For example: *Lions in the Wild*, *Sun is Never Going Down*, *Now That I've Found You*

¹⁴ For example: *Maths* (Locrian), *Snowcone* (Dorian), *Raise your Weapon* (Aeolian)

¹⁵ For example: Jaap Nieuwenhuijse, *Orgelboek 150 Psalmen*; Cor van Dijk, *Voor de Opperzangmeester*, W.H. Zwart *150 Psalmen*

¹⁶ In addition to Psalm 23 (BWV 350), J. S. Bach also arranged the Genevan settings of Psalms 36/68, 42, 77/86, 134.

¹⁷ Vatican II removed some imprecatory psalms for Catholic liturgical use. Peter M. J. Stravinskis, *The Catholic Answer Book* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 1994) p. 90.

¹⁸ Research of ten years over a twenty-year period in Langley CanRC included also Psalm 11, 13, 28, 54, 79, 120, 129.

¹⁹ In 2018, a community hymn sing evening in Langley, BC featured tunes suggested by Presbyterian/Anglican visitors, yet unfamiliar to our own people with a Christian Reformed Church (CRC) background, as these traditions did not share the tunes to the same words.

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5iVEFCSUuR56vwQ47ye9Mg/videos>; <https://www.genevanpsalter.com/music-a-lyrics>; <http://www.psalmbboek.nl/zingen.php?psID=1#psvs>

²¹ Gertrud Tonsing, ‘*Forming identity through Song*’: *How our songs in worship shape our theological identity: A study of Lutheran hymns and how they shaped German descendent Lutheran congregations*. Herv. teol. stud. [online]. 2013, vol.69, n.1 [cited 2018-12-25], pp.1-11. ISSN 2072-8050.

²² <https://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu/content/why-amish-sing>; <http://www.reformedfellowship.net/why-your-church-needs-a-new-psalter-hymnal-by-michael-kearney>

²³ <http://psalterz.pl/wp/>

²⁴ Online edition: <http://blog.daum.net/hwang6710>

²⁵ Rev. Jin Won Bae, Reformed Churches Korea

²⁶ Dr. J.R. Luth, *Daer wert om 't seerste uytgekreten. . .* (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1968) p. 85.

²⁷ H. Hasper, *Calvijs beginsel voor de zang in de eredienst* (‘s-Gravenhage: ‘Stichting Geestelijke Lieder en uit den Schat van de Kerk der eeuwen, 1955) p. 608; A.Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish music in its historical development* (New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1992) p. 129. C



He has also taught Church Polity for a number of years at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary.

Article 55 – Straitjacket or Wise Agreement?

When we talk about congregational singing in our churches, at some point in the conversation someone will bring up Article 55 of the Church Order (CO). They do so to illustrate how the CO so restricts the local churches that they have no freedom when it comes to worship. In reality, however, those restrictions are pretty minimal. Local churches have lots of freedom and flexibility. Article 55 is one of only three articles in the CO in which we have agreed as churches on certain parameters for our worship services.¹ Here we have decided together that “the metrical Psalms adopted by general synod as well as the hymns approved by general synod shall be sung in the worship services.”

Desiring more hymns

As an ecclesiastical document, the CO obviously does not regulate what we sing at home or in our schools. It only applies to the worship services. I am not sure how much our families still sing at home, but singing is very much part of what’s happening in our Christian schools. Many among us also attend conferences and retreats where they learn and sing new Christian songs to praise the Lord. And many of our church musicians stay in tune with what is happening in the area of Christian music and song.

All those experiences seem to trigger a growing desire to sing more and other songs in our worship services than those jointly adopted and approved. Since Synod Carman (2013), the Canadian Reformed churches are using a new *Book of Praise*, with the 150 adopted psalms and eighty-five approved hymns. Synod Chatham (2004) has capped the maximum number of hymns at 100 in an effort to maintain the predominance of Psalm singing.²

Is there an alternative to Article 55? Yes. The decision could be left entirely to each local consistory as is done in the United Reformed churches. Article 39 of their CO has this provision: “The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. Hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of the Scripture as ex-

pressed in the Three Forms of Unity may be sung, provided they are approved by the Consistory.” The CanRC Classis Central Ontario of September 7, 2018 wanted to go this route. It adopted an overture asking Synod Edmonton 2019 to amend Article 55 CO along similar lines to the URC article but this overture did not survive “second reading” at the subsequent Regional Synod East. Apparently, the brothers at RSE did not think this was a good way to go, and so they decided not to ask Synod Edmonton to change Article 55.

Congregational singing is teaching

So, why do we have Article 55 in our Church Order as it is? Is it a wise agreement between the churches to help each other “maintain good order in the church of Christ” (as is the purpose of the CO according to Article 1)? Or is it a straitjacket that imposes unnecessary restrictions on the freedom of the local church?

To get to that, it might be helpful to have a look at the bigger picture and ask ourselves the question: Why do we sing in church? The usual answer is that we sing to praise and glorify God, in response to his work and Word. That’s correct, and there is plenty of evidence in Scripture to support this. But there is another significant aspect to singing in corporate worship. In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, Scripture urges us to “speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (NIV).³ Notice the additional purpose of congregational singing mentioned here. What do we do when we sing? We *address one another* (Ephesians) and we *teach and admonish one another in all wisdom* (Colossians).⁴ In other words, when we sing together, we are not only speaking to God, but we are also speaking to each other. And we do so with the purpose to teach each other, learn from each other, encourage each other and admonish each other. Have you ever thought of that when you opened your *Book of Praise* for the next song?

It is well-known that within the church we teach, instruct, encourage, and admonish. This is not only the job of

ministers and elders but to some extent we are all involved in that. And because it is the church of Jesus Christ, we do so not with human ideas and concepts, but with the Word of God. This has significant implications. It means that in Ephesians 5 and Colossian 3 the apostle Paul places “congregational singing” in the same category as other preaching and teaching that goes on in the congregation.

If that’s the case, what does that mean for *what* we sing? How should this impact the lyrics, the content of our songs? To quote part of the above-mentioned overture from Classis Central Ontario, what we sing should “faithfully reflect the teaching of Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity.” This is, of course, nothing new. This rule basically summarizes the Principles and Guidelines for selecting songs, approved by Synod Chatham 2004 and used by the SCBP for selecting the hymns we now have in our *Book of Praise*.⁵

Hymns in our history

However, all this does not answer our original question: why have we agreed in Article 55 CO that the songs we sing in public worship must be approved by a general synod and should not be left up to a local consistory? When this question comes up, the focus is usually on the hymns, not on the psalms.⁶ Why do we need to agree together in the federation which hymns can be sung in the local worship services? Is there value in this rule, or is it actually redundant? Are the elders of the local church not capable or dis-

To assess the lyrics of a song is not always easy

cerning enough to select hymns that faithfully express the teaching of Scripture as summarized in the confessions?

The history behind Article 55 can help us here. Our church order is rooted in the church orders of the early Dutch Reformed churches and heavily influenced by the Church Order of Dort (1618/19). Our theological and liturgical roots lie in the Reformed churches in The Netherlands since the Great Reformation. When it comes to singing hymns in church, this history shows a pretty consistent pattern, and it is instructive to know why our forefathers made certain decisions in this matter.

From the start and following the lead of John Calvin, the Dutch churches concentrated on singing the Psalms. Several synods in the sixteenth century repeatedly rejected suggestions for “free songs” – what we would call hymns – to be sung besides the Psalms. They reluctantly allowed for a few exceptions but were not specific about that.⁷ The Synod of Dort 1618/19 was more specific. In Article 69 of its famous Church Order, it listed the particular hymns which were permitted, and added: “All other hymns are to be excluded from the churches, and in those places where some have already been introduced, they are to be removed by the most suitable means.”⁸ Why was the synod so insistent in its firm stand? Because hymn singing had become part of the controversy between the Reformed and the Arminians. In 1612 a Provincial Synod of Utrecht had approved a collection of hymns with a strong Arminian flavour. This collection was published in 1615, only a few years before the ecclesiastical conflict came to a head. The Synod of Dort was intent on rooting out and keeping out unbiblical ideas from the churches and thus established a careful measure to protect congregational singing.

Dort’s provision remained the status quo for about 200 years. Unfortunately, in 1807 a bundle of 192 hymns was introduced, many of which reflected the liberal, rationalistic, and moralistic theology of the day. The result was that after the nineteenth century reformations, the Reformed churches returned to Article 69 CO as formulated by Dort 1618/19. This experience also fostered in the Dutch Reformed churches a general aversion to singing hymns. In the course of the twentieth century, most Reformed and also Presbyterian churches have gradually expanded the number of hymns in their psalters and hymnals. In the Canadian Reformed churches this expansion has been relatively modest, to preserve the primary place of the Psalms.

A wise safeguard

From this overview, what can we learn about hymn singing? Why this Reformed reluctance? And why the caution not to leave the selection of hymns in the hands of the local elders? There is obviously not a direct command in Scripture to do it this way, so what is the rationale behind it?

Remember how in our singing we are to *teach and admonish one another in all wisdom*. This makes it important *what* we teach. Are we teaching each other good ideas or bad ones, biblically rich and fulsome or biblically shallow and one-sided? In singing, we are voicing what we believe,

our doctrine, our theology – either good or bad. This calls for careful discernment to determine whether our hymns accurately reflect God’s Word and deeds and the teaching of the Reformed confessions. To assess the lyrics of a song is not always easy, since imbalance or errors can be subtle; it also takes extra effort to ascertain what truths may be missing or left out of the songs but which ought to be included. For such a task with far-reaching implications, it is better to cooperate together as churches and use the collective wisdom of many counsellors across the federation (Prov 11:14).

History shows time and again that false doctrine is sung much earlier than it is preached

As Reformed churches we share our confessions. Our confessional DNA shows we are one in faith. Our songs play an important role in this as well. They must show our confessional DNA and our unity in faith. But here is the challenge. Especially since the nineteenth century, an enormous number of hymns have been written and the production continues today. Such songs often reflect a particular spiritual trend, or theological ideas that were prevalent in a particular time or among particular groups. Mysticism, Methodism, Arminianism, Pentecostalism, Universalism, and other misconceptions have entered the hearts and minds of God’s people through the singing of poetically and musically attractive hymns, often driving out the Psalms.⁹

History shows time and again that false doctrine is sung much earlier than it is preached, and when we sing those ideas, we become more open for them when we encounter them elsewhere. Satan knows this, of course, and he will gladly help us believe what we sing instead of singing what we believe. The churches have recognized this reality and have therefore agreed in Article 55 CO to help each other in being watchful for wrong ideas entering the church via songs.

This is in line with one of the principal goals of the Church Order, that we help each other in the federation to remain faithful to the truth of God’s Word and the confessions. For that purpose, we have a Form of Subscription that all office bearers in all the churches are asked to sign. *Together* we take responsibility for faithful teaching in the

church. Similarly, we *together* take responsibility for faithfully teaching one another when we sing in worship. After all, the New Testament is full of warnings against false teaching. In that light, Article 55 CO is just a wise safeguard to protect our unity of faith.

¹ The other ones are: Article 52, where we agree on the frequency of corporate worship and on regular catechism preaching, and Article 56, where we agree on the manner in which the sacraments are to be administered.

² As such this is a fairly arbitrary number, of course. Why not 79 or 114? However – the point of this article is not to discuss the ideal number of hymns. This is about the stipulation that, regardless of the number, all the hymns we sing in worship need to be approved by a general synod.

³ In this article I won’t get into the debate on the exegesis of those three nouns: Do they all refer to the Psalms, or is Paul talking about different categories of songs? Let’s just say that Reformed churches have always given the Psalms the primary place in worship, but have also left room (sometimes reluctantly) for hymns, that is, new songs about the fulfilment of God’s promises in Jesus’ finished work on earth.

⁴ To dig deeper into this question “Why we sing in church?” I recommend a series of articles with that title written by Nick Smith in *Christian Renewal*, Vol. 37, #2, Oct. 5, 2018 (37, 38); #3, Oct. 26, 2018 (34, 35); #4, Nov. 16, 2018 (32, 33) and #5, Dec. 7, 2018 (36, 37).

⁵ See Report SCBP to Synod Chatham 2004, Appendix 2B, and Art.115, #6 of the Acts of Synod Chatham 2004,

⁶ Since the book of Psalms, as God’s own Word, is foundational for the songs of the church, all 150 Psalms are included in full in the *Book of Praise*, as well as in the new *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* of the URC/OPC. I have heard no one argue against that, regardless of the preference for particular tunes. For more on the importance of singing the Psalms, see the article of Rev. Dick Wynia, “Why Do We Sing Mostly Psalms?” elsewhere in this issue of *Clarion*.

⁷ The Synods of Dordrecht 1574, Dordrecht 1578, Middelburg 1581 and ‘s Gravenhage 1586.

⁸ As cited in Clarence Bouwman, *Spiritual Order for the Church* (Winnipeg: Premier Printing, 2000) p.208. The entire original Church Order of Dort is printed in English in Appendix 1.

⁹ In 1807 the liberal authorities in The Netherlands made it even compulsory for the churches to sing at least one such hymn in every worship service. More info to illustrate this point can be found in Abraham Kuyper, *Our Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) chap. 7. For the loss of Psalm-singing and the rise of hymn-singing generally in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see also D. G. Hart & John A. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002), p.161–163.





Hymns

Co-editor Peter Holtvlüwer asked me to write about the hymn section of the *Book of Praise*. We are primarily a psalm-singing church, but we also have hymns in our songbook, and likely we sing both psalms and hymns most Sundays.

Table of contents

The table of contents for our hymns is found on pages 356-357 of the *Book of Praise* (BoP). At present there are eighty-five hymns and what is good to note is that the songs are organized according to the structure of the Apostles' Creed. In the early days the collection of hymns had no real discernible order. For instance, who remembers that the Apostles' Creed (now Hymn 1) used to be Hymn 45? To arrange them according to the Apostles' Creed was the idea of the late Rev. G. van Dooren, who served on the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* (SCBP) for twenty-six years, 1954-1980.¹ It first appeared in 1979. The order is:

- “We praise you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”
- “With them his covenant he established”
- “O come, O come, Emmanuel”
- “The Word became incarnate”
- “Christ Jesus full atonement made”
- “Christ has risen! Hallelujah!”
- “The LORD ascended up on high”
- “He has come, the Holy Spirit!”
- “Watch o’er your church, O LORD”
- “Come, LORD Jesus! Maranatha!”
- “Praise to the LORD, the Almighty”

To organize the hymns according to the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith is good. Every Sunday we confess faith in our Triune God, and it is great to have our hymns organized accordingly. It also ensures a good balance to our hymn collection. The organization of the 150 psalms obviously suggests itself, but it is good to think about and be purposeful when it comes to organizing the hymns.

I suggested that it is a good way, but it is not the only way. In 2018 the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* (TPH) was published by a joint committee of the OPC and URCNA. Its 425 hymns are organized this way:

- Worship
- Faith and Life
 - o God
 - o Jesus Christ
 - o The Holy Spirit
 - o The Church
 - o Salvation
 - o The Christian Life
 - o Special Topics
- Service Music

Both structures are good. Without quibbling about which is better, perhaps it could be said that while the TPH follows a systematic or thematic method of organization, the BoP takes a synthetic and historical approach, intentionally following the order of the Apostles' Creed – from God and creation to God and consummation.

Canticles and hymns

Our collection of hymns includes quite a number of “canticles.” According to a strict definition, canticles are songs based upon parts of Scripture which are not psalms. There are thirty-one such songs in our hymnary. The clue as to whether a song is a canticle is that in the case of a canticle, a text of Scripture is printed under the title. For instance, if you look at Hymn 17, “The Song of Mary,” you will see “Luke 1:46-55” included. That easily identifies it as a canticle. It is good to sing canticles, for then, too, we know that we are singing words put into our mouths by God himself.

The singing of hymns has, from time to time, proven to be contentious. John Calvin's Genevan Psalter (1562), besides the 150 psalms, included only four canticles: The Ten Commandments and the songs of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon.² There are Reformed churches which allow only the psalms to be sung in the Lord's Day worship services. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America and the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) follow this strict application of the “Regulative Principle.”³ The introduction of the singing of hymns has, historically, been one of the reasons for church secessions. For instance, it was one of the complaints that led to the Dutch Secession (“Afscheiding”)

of 1834. On the North American side, such introduction was one of the causes for a secession from the Reformed Church in America and the subsequent formation of the Christian Reformed Church in 1857.

What are we to say about the singing of hymns? Is it allowed? Since the establishment of the Canadian Reformed churches we have allowed also the singing of hymns. Hymns, as well, are an important way for us to sing praises to our God. We live in a covenant relationship with our God in which he extends the gospel to us and in which we respond with faith, praise, and obedience. The writing of hymns is part of our covenant response of praise to God. In the new covenant we are no longer little children who can only speak God's words after him but adults who can think and respond in a grown-up way.

The hymns in our collection have various sources that span the centuries. Some are based on ancient Christian texts, such as the Apostles' Creed (Hymns 1 and 2) and the fourth century Apostolic Constitutions (Hymn 6); others on our confessions, for instance Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's 1 (Hymn 64); another on an apocryphal text, Ecclesiasticus 50:20-24⁴ (Hymn 85); many others are free poetic songs based on Christian themes and motifs; a number of others are based on various benedictions and doxologies.

Principles and guidelines

General Synod Neerlandia (2001) gave the SCBP the mandate to increase the hymnary. At that time, we had sixty-five hymns in the BoP. To help fulfill this mandate *Principles and Guidelines* were crafted,⁵ which were approved by Synod 2004 and then given back to the SCBP and the churches to guide us in the selection of hymns (please see sidebar).

In the process of augmenting our hymnary, the committee was guided by two criteria: first, the proposed hymns had to meet the adopted principles and guidelines and, second, they would have to fortify those parts of the collection that, possibly, needed strengthening. A careful inventory was performed of the several categories, and it was deemed that seven of them should be augmented.

This was a significant process in which the SCBP involved the whole federation of churches. First letters were sent to the churches asking for suggestions. In the meantime, the SCBP made a careful assessment of the hymns we already had. The hymns the churches recommended were then evaluated according to the principles and guidelines.

The general synod had also given the committee the mandate to examine the 150 psalms and to revise where necessary. The committee used the good services of Dr. William Helder for this.

Two subcommittees were appointed by the SCBP: one consisting of members from the Carman and Winnipeg churches to evaluate the hymns, and another made up of members from Fraser Valley churches to assess the revised psalms. These subcommittees gave advice to the SCBP which was used to make recommendations to the subsequent general synod, which led to the Authorized Provisional Version in 2010. The churches were invited to give feedback to the SCBP which, upon further evaluation, led to the "final" version in 2014, the songbook from which we currently sing.

Is it a perfect product? No, but it is, in my estimation, a very good product, one that is accepted and loved by the membership of the churches. By effectively turning the whole federation of churches into one large super-committee, all were able to take ownership of the *Book of Praise*.

Where to from here?

The *BoP*, although it is a good product, is neither perfect nor complete, hence the word "final" a few lines back was put in scare quotes. Our present BoP is the "final version". . . for now. The last hymn has not yet been written or sung. The work of writing new hymns will, and should, continue until the return of our Lord Jesus on the clouds of heaven. There is room for improvement to and expansion of our current collection. Some disappointment has been expressed that not more of the classic English hymns have been included. Perhaps we should add them. Or some newly written hymns could be included.

This was recognized by our most recent general synod. It noted that there has been a long-standing practice of having the churches directly address the SCBP with suggestions for improvement and augmentation of our songbook. The synods have recurrently mandated the SCBP "to receive, scrutinize and evaluate the contents of correspondence from the churches and report to the next general synod as to the validity of the suggestions made." And further "to seek, receive, evaluate and recommend proposals for changes to the hymn section to be compiled for possible submission to a future Synod" (Article 122 of General Synod Dunnville, 2016).

Getting practical

How ought this to be done? The consistories could appoint committees to ask their congregations for suggestions. The committee can then evaluate the suggestions according to our adopted principles and guidelines and advise their consistory. Attention should also be paid to whether the proposed song "fits" within our present Apostles' Creed structure. Several years ago the SCBP recommended the inclusion of two marriage hymns (*Augment*, 2007); however, it was thought that since the BoP is primarily meant

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION OF MUSIC IN THE CHURCH*

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches entered into "Phase Two" of ecumenical relations, effective January 1, 2002, with the goal of eventual federative unity. The synods of those two federations mandated their respective committees to labour together to recommend to the churches a common songbook that would be faithful to the Scriptures and our Reformed confessions.

PREFACE

The Bible is filled with references to singing. From the very beginning God's people have responded to His grace, almighty power and presence with song. The songs of the Church are, essentially, prayers to God. They are filled with praise and thanksgiving, sorrow for sin and petition for forgiveness, and prayers for intercession in behalf of others in Christ. They also include instruction and exhortation. Thus the songs of the Church express the entire spectrum of the Christian's experience. While every believer may find personal expression of praise, thanksgiving, petitions, and repentance in song, and while we encourage the families of our churches to make use of the songbook in family devotions, the principle purpose for which this songbook is being developed is for congregational singing. The Psalms and hymns are being selected with the prayer that they may express and enrich our congregational worship of God.

Psalm 66:2 "Sing out the honor of His name; make His praise glorious."

Ephesians 5:19 "...Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

PRINCIPLES:

THE SONG OF THE CHURCH IS TO BE SUITABLE FOR THE CHURCH'S WORSHIP TO THE GLORY OF GOD

1. *The songs of the Church are to be scriptural*

In content, form, and spirit the Church's songs must express the truth of the Holy Scriptures. Augustine, referring to the singing of Psalms, said, "No one can sing anything worthy of God which he has not received from Him . . . then we are assured that God puts the words in our mouth."

2. *The songs of the Church are to be a sacrifice of praise.* [Hebrews 13:15]

Singing is an important element of the congregation's response to God's redeeming work in Christ Jesus and the Word proclaimed in the worship service.

John Calvin wrote, "Singing has great strength and power to move and to set on fire the hearts of men that they may call upon God and praise Him with a more vehement and more ardent zeal. This singing should not be light or frivolous, but it ought to have weight and majesty."

3. *The songs of the Church are to be aesthetically pleasing*

The songs for worship are to be a beautiful blend of God honoring poetry and music. [Psalm 92:1-4]

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING SONGS:

1. The songs of the Church must be thoroughly Biblical. They are to represent the full range of the revelation of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. [Psalm 147:1]
2. The Book of Psalms is foundational for the Church's songs. Therefore, all of these Psalms, in their entirety, ought to be included in the Church's songbook.
3. When Psalms or other portions of Scripture are set to music, the words must be faithful to the content and form of the inspired text. [2 Timothy 3:16]
4. In the case of songs other than the versification of Scripture, the words must faithfully express the teaching of Scripture [Proverbs 30:6] as summarized by our Reformed confessions.
5. The songs of the Church must be intelligible [1 Corinthians 14:15] and edifying to the body of Christ. [Colossians 3:16]
6. The songs of the Church must reflect and preserve the language of the Church of all ages rather than accommodating current secular trends. [Romans 12:2a]
7. In content and form, the songs of the Church must be free from artificiality, sentimentality, and individualism.
8. The music of the song should suit the text.
9. The music of the Church should be expressive of the Reformed tradition. Use is to be made of the music developed in the tradition of this rich heritage (e.g., the Genevan Psalm tunes and the Scottish Psalter).
10. The music of the Church should not be borrowed from music that suggests places and occasions other than the Church and the worship of God. [Ephesians 5:18-21]
11. The melodies and harmonies of church music must be suitable for congregational singing, avoiding complicated rhythms, excessive syncopation, and a wide range of pitch.

**This document was approved by General Synod Chatham 2004 and can be found in the Acts of Synod Chatham, p.176 (listed as "Appendix 2B").*

for the worship services, it ought not to be "cluttered up" with songs obviously meant for other occasions and that, therefore, would not be sung in worship services. Arguably, marriage hymns, as beautiful as they may be, do not really fit into the present organization. As long as we are using the structure of the Apostles' Creed, attention should be paid to this by members, committees, and consistories. It would be helpful to state in one's proposal where the song fits. Once the consistory has reviewed their committee's work it can make a proposal to the SCBP which will, then,

evaluate all the proposals to make recommendations to a general synod and, via it, to the churches.

It has been said that ecclesiastical mills grind slowly, and also that one person does not, necessarily, always get his way.⁶ Liturgy, although it must be based on biblical and confessional principles, is always somewhat of a compromise. We need to give and take a bit all-the-while honouring each other and thinking the best of one another. In the meantime, let's sing our psalms, canticles, and hymns to the praise and glory of our King!

¹ Br. M.M. de Groot, sr. also served from 1954-1980.

² Premier Printing has published the *New Genevan Psalter* consisting of the 150 Psalms and these four canticles. It is a contemporary English version of the original 1562 edition. See www.newgenevanpsalter.com Available from books@premierpublishing.ca.

³ The regulative principle of worship is the doctrine that God commands churches to conduct public services of worship using certain distinct elements affirmatively found in Scripture, and conversely, that God prohibits any and all other practices in public worship.

⁴ Ecclesiasticus 50:20-24 – “And now bless the God of all, who everywhere works great wonders, who fosters our growth from birth, and deals with us according to his mercy. May he give us gladness of heart, and may there be peace in our days in Israel, as in the days of old. May he entrust to us his mercy, and may he deliver us in our days!” (NRSV).

⁵ In those days the SCBP was working together with the songbook committee of the URCNA towards a “common songbook.” Alas, the project died in the cradle.

⁶ *Lieverkoekjes worden in de kerk niet gebakken.*



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He is also a trained organist and pianist who occasionally accompanies congregational singing.

Understanding the Flow of the Liturgy

Pointers for Church Musicians

Most church musicians remember the first time they played in church. It was perhaps a bit nerve-wracking, but thankfully you got through the service in one piece and you received some encouraging comments after the service. So, you were asked to play again and eventually you became a regular member of the music team. You learned to deal with the occasional criticisms (too fast, too slow, too loud, too long, etc.) and by now you have become comfortable in your own skin. Playing in church does not give you sleepless nights anymore!

Is there room for further growth? I would suggest that other than just expanding the repertoire of pieces you can play, it would also be good to do some further study in the area of liturgy. Having a basic understanding of the char-

acter and flow of the worship service can be really helpful. After all, as church musician you constantly have to take decisions such as: what kind of prelude would be fitting for a certain psalm, what should be the “tone” of a certain song, etc. In this article I would like to present some basic liturgical insights and offer some practical applications.

Principles

Let’s begin by setting out a few basic principles.¹ First of all, a worship service is not just a gathering of believers but also a meeting of God and his people. God speaks to his people (for example, through the preaching of the Word) and his people respond to him (for example, in prayer and singing). The implication is that church musicians have a

modest and yet important role to play – to support this very special meeting! Second, the character of our worship should be informed by the awareness that we are worshipping an awesome God, a holy God, a saving God. Also, we have to keep in mind that we have received the wonderful privilege of coming into his presence because of the work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Therefore, the appropriate atmosphere in worship will be a combination of awe and adoration, humility and joy. We remember the exhortation to worship God with reverence and awe (Hebr 12:28). At the same time, we are encouraged to enter his gates with thanksgiving (Ps 100:4).

It is important for church musicians to be alert and accompany the singing in such a way that the appropriate mode is reflected

One more foundational insight: God's Word teaches us that the ministry of praise is an important part of worship. As the psalmist says, our God is holy, "Enthroned on the praises of Israel" (Ps 22:3). There has to be singing in church and it has to be done well. This is where musical accompanists come in as they can do a lot to enhance the ministry of praise. But if that is the case, it is important that they should understand what they are doing. On the one hand, the role of church musicians is modest. They are not called to put on a performance. They are called to simply serve the singing of the congregation.² On the other hand, they are called to support and guide the singing of the congregation in such a way that the end result will bring glory to God and joy to his people. This may sound like a tall order, but it is a wonderful calling at the same time.

Before we talk about details, there is one more general guideline that I would like to propose: it is important for church musicians to develop a sensitivity to the mood, the "tone" that is required and fitting for various moments and times in worship. Good Friday requires a different mood than Easter Sunday. A lament requires a different kind of prelude than a praise song. During Lord's Supper – when the congregation is asked to "remember and believe" – you want the music to facilitate reflection. After a baptism you want the music to promote thankfulness and praise. Etcetera.

Pre-service and opening song

Let's now make this practical and consider the various moments of a typical Sunday morning worship service. The question is what church musicians can do to support the different moments of the liturgy. Let's begin with pre-service music. What kind of music would be fitting to play before the service? Let's say you had just learned to play Mozart's "Alla Turca" or De Falla's "Ritual Fire Dance." Would it be fitting to play such pieces in church? Many of us would instinctively feel this is not a good idea, although it may be hard to put in words why that is so. Somehow those pieces are too playful. They make people imagine a context that is different from a worship setting. Before the service you want to hear something "worshipful," something that brings people in the right mood for worship. There are many options: from playing overtly Christian music (variations on psalms, hymns) to playing classic music such as Bach, Mendelssohn, Franck, or contemporary sacred music such as Gjeilo and Lauridsen. In general, we need to play the kind of music that will help people settle down and get into the right frame of mind for the worship service to begin.

After the votum and salutation the minister will usually announce a song of praise. Church musicians should support this by playing an upbeat prelude that sets the right tone, and by choosing harmonisations and a volume that will support the praise character of the song. A question: How long should the prelude be? Answer: just long enough to introduce the tune, set the tone, and allow people to find the song in their song books (or on the screen). There is no need for a long prelude. As far as accompaniment of the singing goes, it is important that the music should be firm but not so loud that it will overpower the singing of the congregation.

Responding to the Law

The next song in the worship service will be a song of response after the reading of the Law. This can be a bit complicated because the Law can be approached from different perspectives. Sometimes the minister will choose a song that expresses confession and contrition, for example Psalm 51 ("God, you have I offended, you alone.") Sometimes the minister may choose a song of assurance, such as Psalm 25 ("He, the LORD, is good and upright; love and mercy he will show."). At other times, the minister might choose a song that reflects the Law in its function as a guide for the Christian life, such as Psalm 101 ("The path of

blameless living I will ponder.”) It is important for church musicians to be alert and accompany the singing in such a way that the appropriate mode is reflected, whether it be subdued or upbeat, etc.

Ministry of the Word

Continuing through the order of worship, the next song will often be a song of preparation for the proclamation of the Word. The minister might choose a song that has a connection to the message of the sermon or he might choose a song that speaks more generally about the privilege of being under the Word (e.g. Psalm 119: “Your word, it is a lamp to guide my feet.”) In general, it is important for the accompanist(s) to keep things short and simple at this stage. Allow the liturgy to move on to the next stage: the preaching of the Word.

After the sermon there will be a song of response. How should accompanists handle this? Again, a lot depends on the message of the sermon and the kind of song that is chosen. If it was an invigorating sermon that is followed by a song of praise, the musical accompaniment will have to reflect the triumphant character. If it was a sermon that touched emotions deeply, and the song of response has a more comforting character (“If you but let the Father guide you”), it might be fitting to have a soft and tender prelude.

The offertory and closing song

The most challenging part of the worship service for accompanists is the collection or offertory. Here you are expected to play for around four to five minutes and be ready to initiate the closing song once the deacons are done. What is the purpose of the music here, from a liturgical perspective? Initially the music should have the character of an interlude that will allow the congregants to reflect on the message they heard in the sermon and also the purpose of the collection. It often works well to play a familiar hymn that has a connection to the main theme of the sermon. To-

wards the end of the interlude, however, you need to make the transition to playing a prelude that prepares the congregation for the final song of the worship service – usually a song of praise and thanksgiving. That final song needs to be accompanied with appropriate gusto.

After the congregation has received the benediction, the musician(s) continue to play till people have left the sanctuary. Formally speaking, the worship service has ended but the postlude can still add something to the worship experience. God’s people have heard the gospel and received his blessing. This calls for an upbeat piece of music or perhaps an appropriate hymn that fits with the message that was heard.

In conclusion

Musical accompanists have an important role to play during worship services and many of them put in considerable effort to prepare well. They deserve our appreciation! If the musicians understand what they are doing, they can enhance the worship experience and make a significant contribution to the ministry of praise. They may then also pray for the Holy Spirit to enable and guide them to play in such a way that the congregation is edified and the Lord himself is glorified. Similarly, it is entirely appropriate for the minister and the congregation to intercede for the church musicians from time to time and ask that the Holy Spirit would enable them to support the ministry of praise.

¹ Recommended resources to learn more about these principles: G. VanDooren, *The Beauty of Reformed Liturgy* (Premier, 1980). K. Deddens, *Where Everything Points to Him* (Inheritance, 1993). For a Presbyterian perspective, see Ryken, Thomas & Duncan, *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship* (P & R Publishing, 2003). For biblical and church-historical perspective on worship, see H.O. Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture* (2nd ed., WJK, 2002) and D. A. Carson’s chapter “Worship under the Word” in the book edited by him, *Worship by the Book* (Zondervan, 2002).

² For more on this, see Peter H. Holtvlüwer’s article “Musicians Reflect on Psalm-Singing,” *Clarion* Vol. 67, no. 24 (Nov. 30, 2018), p. 642-645.



Clarion Kids

Saul's Conversion

Acts 9:1-19

Not everyone was happy to hear the good news of Jesus's work and teachings. There was a man named Saul who did everything he could to stop the disciples from preaching. One day while Saul was travelling, he was stopped by a bright light from heaven. He heard the voice of Jesus asking why Saul was persecuting him. Afterwards Saul was blind. Three days later, God sent a man named Ananias to Saul. He told Ananias that Saul was his chosen instrument to spread the gospel to the Gentiles. Saul was then able to see again, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized. Now Saul was God's servant instead of his enemy.

Go to www.clarionmagazine.ca to print and colour this picture!



Word Search

D	S	L	S	S	S	L	U	D	C
E	P	E	A	P	I	T	I	O	H
Z	H	U	L	L	I	S	Z	N	O
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K	A	S	E	R	V	A	N	T	V

Ananias	Baptized	Chosen
Disciples	Gentiles	Preaching
Saul	Servant	Spirit

Double Puzzle

Unscramble the clues to solve the final word.

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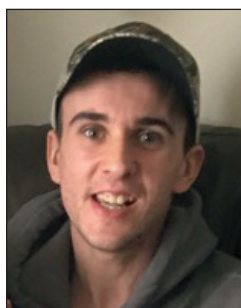
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by
Emily
Nijenhuis



Eddie VanRooteslaar

Hello! My name is Eddie VanRooteslaar and this year I will be 26! I have lived at the Beacon Home in Dunnville for two years now and I love having my own place here! I have a good job on a dairy farm - we built a new barn and now have robots and a Juno. We have brushes for the

cows to scratch themselves.

I coach the Dunnville Mighty Ducks hockey team. We usually have games on Saturday nights. It's a lot of fun.

I'm an uncle to eight nephews and nieces. I am part of a large family that I love getting together with. I enjoy going to church, I also enjoy Friendship.

I love taking care of my own farm in my room - if you are ever in town I'd love to show you my farm!

I also enjoy company so if you ever wanted to come over and visit me I would welcome you!

When I get your birthday cards I save them all up until my birthday and then open them all and hang them in my room - I really look forward to getting them so don't forget to send them.

Eddie

May Birthdays

- 1 Clarence Zwiép will be 65**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON NIA IT8
- 4 Debbie Veenstra will be 45**
4238 2nd Concession Road
Sherkston, ON LOS 1R0
- 10 Rob De Haan will be 54**
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
- 21 Eddie Van Rootselaar will be 26**
c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON NIA IT8
- 30 Bernie De Vos will be 44**
c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2

Congratulations to the many of you celebrating a birthday in May! We wish you all the Lord's blessing and a wonderful day with family and friends.

A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

If there are any address or other changes that I need to be aware of please let me know as soon as possible.

Rachel Vis

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www.merf.org



Indonesia: Blessed by Courage and Wisdom

By PASTOR VICTOR ATALLAH



Muslim relatives and neighbors listening to gospel proclamation

Indonesia is often called the largest Muslim nation, but this gives a wrong impression. While a large majority identify as Muslim, most of these barely know enough about Islam to be considered true Muslims. Indonesian folkways prevail, despite the saturation of the country with mosques of different sizes. These are built by generous gifts of oil wealth from the Arabian Gulf. The same wealth finances Indonesian clergymen, but their influence is largely limited to poor, uneducated village

communities and remote areas. Attacks against Christians and church meeting places can happen in these areas. From time to time, there is discrimination and even occasional violence from Islamists inspired by Jihadist ideologies.

Growing Respect

Overall, the Muslim majority is rapidly shrinking, especially in the sprawling urban areas. Many of the educated, the young people and social media users

are disenfranchised from Islam. They are becoming irreligious and secularized nominal Muslims, similar to many of Christian background in the westernized world. Some are positively impacted by the gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ is making major inroads culturally, socially and spiritually. In Indonesia Christians are growing in number and enjoying more and more tolerance and respect.

It is heartwarming to fellowship with many first and second generation converts whose lives and convic-

tions are influencing their families, neighborhoods and work places. Several of MERF's staff in Indonesia comes from converted families. What is amazing is the standing of these converts among their families, friends and neighbors. In some cases, they command the respect of entire communities. More importantly, their testimonies are bearing much fruit. They are not asked to defend what they believe or to compare it to Muslim beliefs. They simply explain why they became followers of Christ.



Indonesian believers are eager to learn

Gospel Opportunities

We spent quality time with the extended family of one of MERF's Javanese staff. Her mother and uncle and his wife are all first generation converts. Her father is a second generation convert. Her mother's sister, who still identifies as Muslim, and some Muslim neighbors helped prepare an elaborate meal for us and then happily sat down to hear my strong and clear gospel message. Other Muslim neighbors warmly waved or shook hands with us, even though they knew well that we came with a gospel message.

The faithful missionary

vision and zeal of local churches reaches out creatively to their Muslim communities. In one case, a church started a project enabling poor farmers to learn how to grow dragon fruit, a profitable crop. The men are hosted on a farm while undergoing the training. In the process, without any coercion or pressure, they are exposed to regular Bible reading and gospel messages. Another church started a low cost private school with a clear Christian curriculum. The school allows Muslim families to enroll their children and also hires Muslim staff for non-teaching jobs. Another church started a very small community-service radio station. All are welcome to

freely advertize community events and services and the station regularly broadcasts Bible readings, Christian songs and simple gospel messages. When such community building ventures carefully avoid overt or covert remarks critical of Islam, they are blessed by gently bearing gospel fruit.

Bible Teachers Needed

Today there are thousands of Indonesian young people, many recent converts, desiring to grow in biblical understanding. Many seminaries and Bible training institutions have sprung up, mostly financed by well-meaning believers. Yet, a lot of them

lack qualified staff and good teaching resources. Thus, they welcome opportunities to receive qualified, sound Bible teachers.

This is a time of golden opportunities for equipping native Indonesians to do faithful work in evangelism and church-planting. The backbone of MERF's ministries is providing sound and applied biblical training for national spiritual leaders. There are now two MERF training centers in Indonesia. The one in Makassar (Sulawesi island) is well-equipped and quite active. The newly-opened facility in the capital, Jakarta (Java island) is being expanded to provide intensive 3 to 4 month training programs for groups of village evangelists. *Currently MERF is seeking a qualified, experienced Bible teacher for the Jakarta center.* Inquiries and resumes are welcome at: merf@merf.org. Please pray for the Lord's provision.

3-Minute VIDEO

Take a video tour of MERF field ministries: www.powerofchristatwork.net

“Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!”
— Psalm 96:3

MERF-Canada

Thank you for your faithful support!
Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address at the bottom of the page.
Online donations can be made to Middle East Reformed Fellowship (Canada) Inc. through www.canadahelps.org



Indonesian Community Radio Station

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