

Clarion

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



Blessings Worship Music Conference

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THE TREASURE OF THE PSALMS IN WORSHIP
HUMAN DIFFERENCES AND DUTCH CHURCHES

Clarion

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

To equip God's people for his
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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

A report of the Worship Music Conference held at Blessings Christian Church this spring begins with these words: "An overview of all the Acts of the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches reveals that the most discussed and debated aspect of our worship services is what we should sing." In this issue our lead article, from Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, discusses "Objections to Psalm Singing." We also begin a three-part series from Martin Jongsma on the singability of the Genevan melodies.

In our previous issue, *Clarion* ran a translated article from Dr. Bart van Egmond on the influence of egalitarianism on the church. Here we publish a follow-up article, "Making 'Room' for Human Differences at the Expense of God's Word." Thank you to Mr. Pieter Torenvliet for the work of translating.

The rest of Issue 17 is filled with columns Treasures, New & Old, Education Matters, Ray of Sunshine, and *Clarion Kids*. There is also a letter to the editor and a canticle.

Laura Veenendaal

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Cover photo: Blessings Christian Church building (Mike Sieders)



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

Objections to Psalm Singing

The Psalms do actually speak of Jesus by other names

In recent *Clarion* issues, solid biblical reasons have been put forward for why we should be singing more psalms than hymns¹ in worship at church, home, and school. Yet not all are convinced. Some believe that we should sing more hymns than psalms and they have raised objections to singing psalms predominantly. I thought it would be worthwhile to examine three common objections and see how they stack up.

1. The name of Jesus is missing

Followers of Jesus want to sing about Jesus (naturally enough!) but the Psalms never mention his name. So, some say that while it's okay to use the Psalms from time to time to sing praises to God, Christians should be most concerned with singing praises directly to Jesus or songs about Jesus. For this we need hymns written after the first coming of Jesus.

At first that sounds like a strong argument, but what if we applied it to hymns? Do all biblically sound hymns suitable for church worship actually mention the name Jesus? You might be surprised how many do not, including long-standing favourites Abide With Me, Amazing Grace, Be Thou My Vision, Crown Him with Many Crowns, It is Well With My Soul, Loving Shepherd of Thy Sheep, O Worship the King, Rock of Ages, and Take my Life and Let it Be. All of these are found in the new *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*, a song book which has gathered the best hymns of the OPC and URC/CRC traditions.

I went a little further and took a sampling of the TPH's first thirty hymns and could find only seven that mention the name Jesus. The truth is, aside from the legitimacy and importance of singing hymns to God the Father and the Holy Spirit and the Trinity, many a fine hymn can speak of Jesus by all kinds of other names or even metaphors:

Christ, God, Son, Lord, King, Almighty, Saviour, Shepherd, Rock, Truth, and Light to name a few. No one questions whether these are truly Christian songs about Jesus. And if it's perfectly acceptable to sing of Jesus by other names in our hymns, why not in the Bible's Psalms?

For the Psalms do actually speak of Jesus by other names. Let me list them:

- *Jesus is the Anointed One* (lit. "Christ"). Psalms 2, 18, 20, 28, 45, 89, and 132 speak of the Lord's anointed one, the king, often first referring to David but ultimately to Jesus.
- *Jesus is God* (Col 1:15–19). When the name "God" appears in the Psalms, as it so often does, then, unless the context specifies a certain person of the Trinity, we are singing not just of the Father or the Spirit but also of Jesus (e.g. Ps 3, 4, 5, 7, etc. See also Ps 45:6 and how this is applied directly to Jesus in Heb 1:8).
- *Jesus is the LORD* (Heb. *Yahweh*). Many may think this is a reference only to God the Father, but the New Testament shows that Jesus is Yahweh in the flesh (see for e.g., Rom 10:13 and Heb 1:10–12). Paul tells us that Jesus is worthy of the name that is above all names before whom every knee will bow, which is precisely what Isaiah said of the LORD (Phil 2:9; cf. Isa 45:23). The context of a psalm may indicate that the Father is in view (e.g. Ps 110), but very often God the Son is included like he regularly is when the name "God" is used. Try thinking of Jesus as you sing praise to the LORD with Psalms 29, 33, 35, 84, 100, 115 etcetera and see how fitting it is.
- *Jesus is Lord* (Heb. *Adonai*). Found in many psalms (Ps 8, 12, 16, 22 etc. Compare esp. 110:1 with Matt 22:42–45), "Lord" is frequently applied throughout the NT to Jesus. "Jesus is Lord" became a mini confession of faith for the early church (1 Cor 12:3).

- *Jesus is King.* Many psalms speak of the human king over God's people (Ps 45, 61, 63, 72, 89 etc.) and many others describe God as King supreme (Ps 10, 47, 84, 93-99, 145 etc.). Jesus fits both descriptions. As perfect God and perfect man, as Son of God and Son of David, he is by nature the divine King and he is by calling the human Christ-King who sits on David's throne (Luke 1:32-33).

When you stand back and think of all the names for God found in the Psalms and how they all apply fully to Jesus (as well as to the Father and the Spirit), then you realize that all the Psalms' praises are being directed to Jesus as much as to the other members of the Trinity. It also means that all the mighty works of the LORD God and all his blessed characteristics sung about there are being sung of Jesus too.

But it gets better: all the human suffering described in the Psalms is Jesus' suffering. This is unique to Jesus as the Son of Man (neither the Father nor the Spirit ever became human), the Man of Sorrows. Also, all the human hope and expectations along with the joys and jubilations that the inspired poets put down are expressions of Jesus' hopes and expectations, joys and jubilations during his earthly ministry. The Psalms reveal to us something about Jesus not even the NT reveals and something no uninspired hymn could ever make known: his inner thoughts and emotions as he suffered throughout his life under the burden of our sin. Just read Psalm 13 or 22 or 40 or 71 or 109 or 118 and see how Jesus is the "I" of those and every psalm. Feel along with him a little of his pain and anguish as well as his abounding joy in his God, the Father. It can truly be argued that you can't possibly sing *more* about Jesus than when you sing the Psalms for only in these songs do you get inside Jesus' own heart. We simply have to adjust our eyes, roll up our sleeves, and work a little harder to learn to see the Lord Jesus shining through in each of the psalms.

2. The Psalms are Jewish

What is meant by this objection is that the Psalms were written by Jews from the Old Testament period and what's needed now are songs written by Christians from the New Testament period. The Psalms may speak of Jesus in shadows and figures, but what the church needs today are songs that speak of Jesus with the plain teaching of the New Testament.

There is a hidden assumption in this argument that the Old Testament is inferior revelation compared to the New Testament, which is false. All of God's revelation is of equal value and all of it is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Further, a separation is implied between "OT Jewish faith"

and "NT Christian faith," whereas the Bible teaches that there is only one Lord and one faith (Eph 4:5). Abraham, Moses, David and every believer of the Old Testament put their trust in Christ the same as every believer of the New Testament (Heb 11). Certainly, God revealed additional information about the Saviour after the incarnation, but that takes nothing away from the importance of the earlier revelation. As mentioned above, the Psalms reveal things about Jesus that the NT does not (his inner struggles) and so they are every bit as vital for coming to know and believe in Jesus. It's also true that God implemented changes in the administration of his covenant when he moved history beyond the first coming of Christ, but it remains the *same* covenant, only made new or renewed.

All of God's revelation is of equal value

With that in mind, it is no surprise that Jesus and his apostles continued to sing the Psalms and taught their followers to do the same (Matt 26:30). It is remarkable that neither Jesus nor his apostles ever commanded songs to be written about him. The Holy Spirit had already given 150 songs that spoke of Christ and these they happily used (Col 3:16; Eph 5:18-19). Psalms is the most quoted OT book in the NT and frequently it is quoted to reveal something of Christ (e.g. John 13:18, Acts 2:25-28; Heb 1:5-13). The shadowy nature of how Jesus is revealed in the Psalms was no obstacle; rather, with the additional revelation of the New Testament those old songs become new, as it were, fresh and full. Just as with NT eyes we can more fully understand how Christ is revealed in the books of Moses or those of Samuel or Kings, so too we can more fully appreciate the depth and nuances of Christ in the Psalms.

3. We are commanded to sing new songs

The Psalms themselves command us to sing a "new song" (e.g. Ps 33:3, 40:3, 96:1) and so it is said that believers should continually write new compositions for singing in church.

This too, at first glance, seems like a persuasive argument, but notice that there is no command here to "write" a new song, only to "sing" a new song. Further, the expression is never in the plural but always in the singular: sing a new song. That is suggestive and leads to the question: what does the Holy Spirit mean by a "new song"? Were every-day Israelites expected to write and sing new songs continual-

ly? Is this how Christ and the Apostles saw this command and is this what they encouraged?

A closer look at these references show in the first place that a “new song” is one which the Holy Spirit gave as revelation to David or one on his appointed associates. This is clear from Psalm 40:3, “He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God” (cf. Rev 14:3). Psalm 40 is itself the “new song” spoken of and that seems to be the same for Psalms 33, 96, 98, and 149 as each one announces the singing of a new song in the opening verses. The special focus of each of these divinely-given new songs is to praise and thank God for a recent act of deliverance.

The emphasis in the expression is not on chronologically new material. As one writer puts it, “In biblical Hebrew, a new song is not necessarily a song that was recently written. The phrase is an idiom for a certain kind of praise song.”² The word “new” in Scripture does not always mean brand new, never-before existing. It can often mean “renewed” or “afresh.” For example, the “new moon” is the same moon reappearing afresh each month. When Jeremiah tells us that the LORD’s mercies are “new” every morning, then he means that we experience the same mercy again and again every day (Lam 3:22–23). We know that the “new” heavens and earth will be the current heavens and earth renewed by the purifying fire of God (2 Pet 3:10–13). In the same way, the “new songs” given in particular psalms can serve again and again as fresh expressions of praise to God in different or even totally new situations of deliverance.

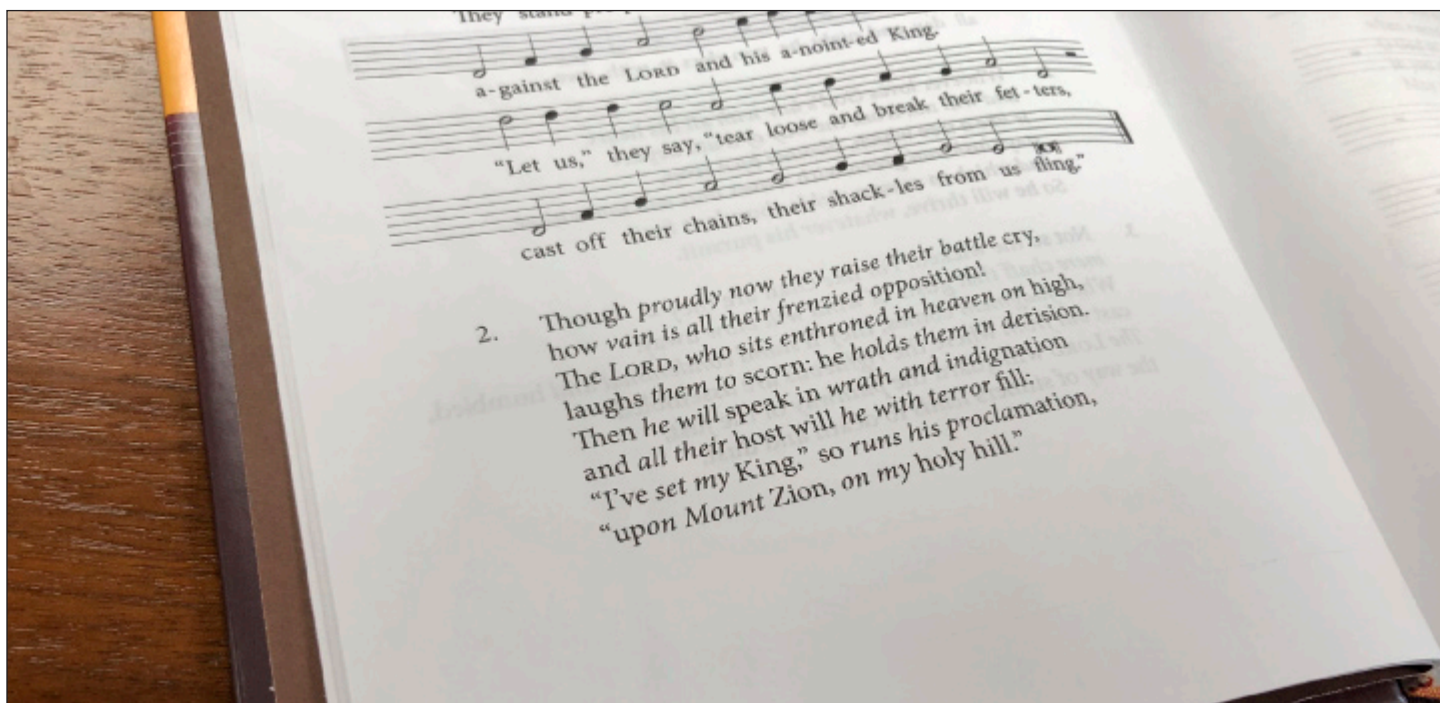
The simple fact remains that average Israelites were not under command to write new songs for temple worship.

Only David and his appointed men – all of whom were inspired by the Holy Spirit to compose songs for temple worship – were ever permitted to write such songs (1 Chron 16:4–7). We don’t believe in on-going revelation and so no musician today – no matter how skilled or godly – can be inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the kind of “new song” the Bible speaks of. Also, neither Jesus nor the Apostles commanded much less encouraged NT believers to write their own “new songs.” Rather, their example points us to using the ancient Psalms as peer-less, Spirit-given songs to praise Father, Son, and Holy Spirit anew time and again.

This article is not making a case against hymns or the writing of new songs for worship. But I am making the case that hymns should take a backseat to the Psalms in all our worship. Psalms are the only songs inspired by the Spirit of God. They all speak of Christ and are fully Christian. As God’s revelation, the Psalms have so much to teach us about our Saviour even as we use them sing our laments and praises and thanksgivings to the Lord. They are meant to form our thought-patterns as we think about our God and ourselves and our relationship to him. And God commands them of us. Let’s honour God by singing first and foremost his songs, the Psalms.

¹ By “psalms” I mean the 150 biblical psalms. By “hymns” I mean all other songs intended for Christian worship.

² Joel R. Beeke and Anthony T. Selvaggio, eds., *Sing a New Song: Recovering Psalm Singing for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), ix.





Redeemed Work

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.” (Ephesians 5:15-16)

What difference does the gospel make in how you work? Are there things that Christians do inherently differently than non-Christians when it comes to their jobs? Christians talk about being lights shining in this dark world. Are you able to do that at your work?

Too often when these kinds of questions are asked, Christians can respond in two ways. The first way is to think to yourself, “I am just going to keep my nose clean, make sure I don’t swear, don’t steal things from the company, work hard, and this will show people I am different than the world.”

The second way to respond is to say, “Fine, I need to step it up. I need to do more blatant evangelizing to my co-workers. I have to tell them who Jesus Christ is and what he has done. Maybe I can set up a group book study and slip in some Christian books.”

Though these are not necessarily incorrect responses to how Christians should do their work in light of the gospel, they often become the only two options, and that has its limitations.

The problem with the first approach is that often there is not much of a difference between the quality of work between Christians and non-Christians. Therefore, as a Christian, you feel you

must outperform everyone in order to stand out. You can end up so performance or results-driven that people are turned off by any light you might be trying to shine.

The second approach runs into problems too. Bible studies may not be allowed at your work. Talking to clients about your religion may be off limits too. Being too forward about the gospel might ruin any chance to develop relationships with your co-workers if you push too far too fast.

But Christians need not be limited to these two options.

In Ephesians 4-5, Paul lays out how the Christian walk should look different than the non-Christian. Although he talks about working in an honest way (Eph 4:28) and living a holy life (Eph 4:31), these kinds of actions are all supposed to stem from a difference in understanding between Christian and non-Christian. The non-Christians are darkened in their understanding (Eph 4:17), the Christian puts off that old self and is wise (Eph 4:22, 5:17).

The contrast is in how the two understand this world and their role in it. Non-Christians may work honestly and without bitterness and anger, but do it only because they know they will get more clients that way. They may work

really hard, and outperform everyone, but do it because their career is their identity. Christians, though, have seen Jesus Christ give himself for them, as Paul writes in Ephesians 5:2: “And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Because of this, the Christian works honestly and performs well, but not for the bottom line of money, not for finding fulfillment in their career and accomplishments. Christians want to use their time sacrificially to bring God’s justice and mercy and truth into this world. They look at the bigger picture of how their job or their company or their field can greater serve God’s purposes. The gospel redeems work and it gives it new meaning. That always manifests itself in every aspect of life, including the work place.

When the apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians, “Look carefully then how you walk. . . making the best use of the time,” he is saying that Christians should think carefully about how to use their time in loving, other-focused ways. This is the wise way that the Gentiles do not understand. This is the way only one who has been saved by grace understands.



For further study

1. If profit or performance is removed as the greatest goal of your work, what God-centred purpose can replace it?
2. How can the vision or purpose of your job, your company, or your field of work be improved to better reflect the redeeming work of the gospel?

Making “Room” for Human Differences at the Expense of God’s Word

This article first appeared in Nader Bekeken (April 2018). Both this article and its prequel were written in response to the (Dutch) General Synod decision to permit women admission to all the ecclesiastical offices of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated). In his earlier article, Dr. van Egmond described the changes in Western society’s thinking about the roles of men, women, sexuality, and gender. In Canada, when we heard about the decision of our Dutch sister churches to admit women to all the ecclesiastical offices, we may have wondered what motivated the thinking of our Dutch brothers and sisters that that change was possible. In this article, he describes the impact of these cultural changes on the thinking in the Reformed churches: a hermeneutical and philosophical paradigm shift.

In the previous article, I wrote about the liberation of men and women as people currently perceive such liberation in our culture. Our culture has been actively distancing itself from God’s revelation in the Bible. This growing distance is evident in the way our society now deals with marriage, sexuality, and gender.

In this article, I will illustrate in two main points how this emancipation process is also unfolding in the church: in the discussion about the women in office, and in the thinking about homosexuality. I have observed that also in the church there is a desire to increase the liberties of men and women. This desire does not arise from God’s Word, however, but instead, it comes at the cost of his Word. And that can never be experienced or seen as true freedom.

Men, women, and office

In the previous article I showed that “deconstruction” is typical of postmodernist thinking. Postmodernism asserts that traditional norms that are handed down in a community always and inevitably exclude the views and lifestyles of others. That is believed to be unacceptable be-

cause those traditional views cause the oppression of other people. Each person must be able to live according to his own insights. Therefore, people need to be liberated from the oppressive standards of others; only then will they be able to find true freedom for themselves. We saw, for example, that marriage was “deconstructed” as a bastion of male power. Why? To provide opportunities for women, so they can develop and shape their own destiny. I believe that this same mechanism/process of deconstruction also insinuated itself into the ecclesiastical discussions about women in office. This discussion was not about holding a traditional practice up to the standard of the Bible (because indeed, traditional standards or practices are never infallible; see BC, Art 7), but instead, this discussion was used to create room for a new view. How did that process unfold?

For many centuries the Christian church taught that only brothers can be called to the offices in the church: priest, bishop, elder, or preacher. The church recognized fully that God poured out his Spirit over men and women, that he gave both genders all kinds of different gifts, including those of prophecy.¹ Both are called to dedicate those gifts in the service to Christ. But that did not mean that everyone could be called to the ruling offices in the church. The church had always been convinced that the Bible teaches us that God calls men for the government of the church. Today, however, the conviction has arisen in the (Reformed) church that the governing offices can also be opened to the sisters.

What is your duty, then, if you espouse such views? You must show that this view will bring the church more closely to responding faithfully to the Word of God. Prophecy may not be despised in the church, but everything must be tested and whatever is good is kept (1 Thess 5:20-21). We have to test the spirits to determine whether they are from God (1 John 4:1). First, it is important to lay out thoroughly the manner in which the church has always tried to do justice

to all the scriptural data. Then you must demonstrate that we have received new insights that do more justice to Scripture. That is how we must move forward together as we listen to and obey God's Word.

What is not acceptable, however, is that the classic conviction of the church – a conviction that had always been accepted as an apostolic norm – is profiled as just another human opinion. If the classic conviction is only a *human* opinion, or just another possible interpretation from the Bible, then a different opinion can be placed next to it, which must then be given equal legitimacy. By embracing this shift in thinking, room has been created to allow women into the ruling offices of the church. I'm not suggesting that people have consciously made this shift. But I believe that I see this procedure at work, for example, in the argumentation used in the Pijnpunten Report² (translated in the English version as the "Sore Points.") In this synod report, the classic belief of the church on this point is presented as the opinion of a certain group within the church. It is asserted that this group makes their case by emphasizing texts that command women in the congregation to remain silent, and texts that stress the difference between men and women. But then there is another group in the church that puts more emphasis on texts that focus on the gift of the Spirit to the entire congregation, about the broad involvement of sisters in the congregation, and about the fact that social differences are inconsequential when it involves participation in the church of Christ (Gal 3:28).³

What is going on here? The traditional, ecclesiastical practice has not been evaluated on the basis of Scripture so that, on the basis of such an evaluation, one can conclude whether or not this practice is according to God's Word. No, the writers of the report take as their point of departure that this practice is based on a selective reading of certain texts in the Bible. They assert that another selection of Bible texts is also possible. Then, you arrive at a different result. You would say: don't we see the Bible as a unity as we did in the past, and do we not believe that the Lord does not contradict himself? Then, on the basis of these texts, it should not be possible to arrive at completely opposite conclusions? But you can indeed arrive at that different conclusion if you believe that the Bible itself is not unambiguous. Then you can also read it in different ways. The writers of the report have not demonstrated this, but it has been adopted as their point of departure. In this way, room is created to provide legitimacy to views that are not rooted in the Bible.

At this point, the deputies concluded that we've come to a stalemate. The "Sore Points" Report calls it trench war-

fare.⁴ It makes no sense to go back to the Bible to see who is right, because everyone makes an appeal to his own selection of Bible texts. We only have interpretations. That's why it's better to put up with each other and, as much as possible, try to be understanding of each other's viewpoints. But then my question is: do we no longer believe – as the church has done for centuries – that the Bible speaks unambiguously here? Do we no longer believe that the exclusive calling of men to the ruling offices does not stand in contrast to the complete engagement and equality of brothers and sisters in the congregation? It appears these ambiguities and contradictions had to be created first, to legitimize a new viewpoint biblically. And what have we achieved as a result? We "liberated" women. Now there is room for them to serve in all the offices of the church. But to achieve that result, we have had to sacrifice the unambiguity of the Scriptures, to be left with subjective opinions.⁵

From the Word to . . . silence

There's much more going on under the surface here, I believe. You can read about this in a blog by Dr. Jos Douma, which he wrote after the Synod made its decision concerning men/women and office.⁶ He expressed his joy that we can finally say farewell to a culture in the church in which we always had to agree on everything. We no longer have to know everything with certainty and, therefore, we don't have to box each other about the ears with our assertions that we are right. As a result, room has been created for the "peace of Jesus." That is a peace that does not depend on shared views on all kinds of issues.

Do we no longer believe – as the church has done for centuries – that the Bible speaks unambiguously here?

The first question that I have is this: Where does this room come from? Is this room that we have received from God, or is it room we have created ourselves by means of our opposition to God's Word? And I wonder: How do we know where the limit of that room is? Who determines its limits? Why should we not have to agree about men, women, and office, but we do have to agree about the deity of Christ? Concerning the latter point, after all, there are all kinds of people who call themselves Christians but who embrace all kinds different views. They also appeal to the Bible in their own unique way.

Where Douma wants to take us at this point becomes clear from the continuation of his blog. In fact, he does not look for the peace that Jesus gives in the binding power of the Word,⁷ but, quite emphatically, he takes us away from the Word, in silence. In the discussion about men and women in the church, he advocates moments of contemplation. “And if the discussions that follow still become overheated, then again seek silence for three minutes, just to listen inwardly, and to place your trust in the Spirit of peace. Often, more happens in silence than in discussion. Silence is a time for the Spirit to commune.”

This remark reminds me of what is so typical of post-modern spirituality. From a postmodern perspective, words are only things that stand between God and man. God does not reveal himself so much through his Word. And if he does, we cannot but create more distance from God because we all give those words a different interpretation. As such, we will never truly learn to know God through the Word. Therefore, we must seek God in silence, behind the letters and behind the spoken word.⁸ In this context, we no longer experience the unity of the true faith that binds us together, but the unity of a divine primal being, which we access by abandoning our preconceptions and to turn inwardly into ourselves. This spirituality implies that, in the end, all religions are about the same thing. They verbalize imperfectly the one unnamable mystery that we call God. I am convinced that Douma does not want to go in that direction. But I do wonder whether his manner of thinking doesn't move in that direction.

Homosexuality

Concerning yet another topic, we see how the thinking about men and women that currently captivates the thinking of our culture also gradually receives a legitimate place in the church, albeit at the cost of the authority of God's Word. Let me explain that.

Because of the influence of the Austrian psychiatrist, Sigmund Freud, it has become normal in our culture to define yourself as a human being based on your sexual feelings.⁹ Those feelings may be a heterosexual, or homosexual, or both sexes at the same time (i.e., bisexual). In any case, your own experience is the point of departure that defines who you are as a person. Consequently, to really be yourself, you have to be able to express yourself on the basis of your personal feelings. The question is however, whether there is such a thing as absolutely authentic feelings. Feelings can also be generated and cultivated through stimuli in your environment. But more importantly, you, or your own feelings can never be the source

which defines who you are and how you can develop. That can only be God's Word. In his Word, he reveals why he has created us, and also how he will renew us through the work of Jesus Christ and through his Holy Spirit.

Concerning this latter point, it appears that a shift in thinking has taken place in our (Dutch) churches. Increasingly, it has become normal not to view ourselves from the perspective of God's Word, but from one's own experience. That's also evident in the thinking about homosexuality. Currently, we are aware of people with an involuntary homosexual orientation. The Bible does not write about this condition. Therefore, are we not asking too much from the Bible if we expect to find answers how we must deal with that condition? In this line of reasoning, we take our subjective experience as our point of departure to approach the Bible, rather than taking the Bible as the point of departure to approach ourselves.

In this line of reasoning, we take our subjective experience as our point of departure to approach the Bible, rather than taking the Bible as the point of departure to approach ourselves

For the sake of argument, imagine that in the time of the Bible homosexual orientation as an involuntary condition was completely unknown. Does that matter? I don't think so. In no way does the Bible teach us to think of ourselves from the perspective of our sexual feelings and then connect our identity to that sexuality. The Bible does not speak of people in terms of their sexuality: heterosexuality, gay, or bisexual. The Bible speaks only about humans in terms of being man or woman. Therefore, that must also be the normative starting point when we think of ourselves and our sexuality. In the beginning, God created mankind in his image, and he created them male and female (Gen 1:27). Together, man and woman were given the mandate to work the earth, to subdue it and fill it. With that mandate in mind, he also established marriage. Man is given the calling to leave his father and mother and is to be united to his wife and become one body with her. In the context of that union of husband and wife, the sexual relationship was also created. With a view to the union of husband and wife in marriage, God created sexual desires.

Clearly, we live after the Fall (Gen 3). What has changed as a result of the Fall? Not the sex of humans. God still makes people as man and woman. Nor has he changed the calling of humans. God still calls people to image him as a man or as a woman. Our ability to be image-bearers of God as a man or woman, however, *has* been lost. That has also had an impact in the way this loss affects our sexual desires. As a consequence, these desires share in the enmity of the flesh against the Spirit (Gal 5:17). That does not only apply to men and women with homosexual feelings, however. It also applies to men and women who have a heterosexual orientation, even though the latter reminds us more emphatically of God's original creational purpose. After the Fall, no one possesses the qualities to be a man or a woman in accordance with God's calling, although the lack of those qualities is evident in different ways with different people. Consequently, the struggle of Christians will vary from person to person in this matter. At the same time, it is also a battle in which Christians, regardless of their sexual desires, may (and must) stand shoulder to shoulder: a struggle under the benevolent authority of our Saviour Jesus Christ to learn to live again as a man and woman in accordance with God's original intention, both inside and outside of marriage.

I do not want to make light of the struggle of our brothers and sisters who have homosexual feelings. For them, struggling against their misdirected sexual desires means that they have to abandon the hope of marriage. That is not the issue for a Christian who has heterosexual feelings. My concern here is the point of departure we adopt when we reflect on our sexual condition: God's Word. Through his Word, God created us and recreates us. God brings his cre-

ation to life by speaking his Word. Through his Word he heals the lame and raises the dead. This divine method of creation and recreation implies to us that, in the very act of listening to his Word, God provides us with real freedom and genuine human development, even though that development must unfold by the dying of our old nature in this life, and even through death itself. But upon Christ's return, God shall call his men and women from the grave, and then we may be made perfect and complete to be men and women in his new world.

Because God provides us with true freedom through his Word, it is paramount that we do not embrace the thinking of the world with regard to the liberation of both homosexuals and heterosexuals. The world seeks human freedom in the confirmation of our corrupt nature. That nature must be given room to develop. Therefore, God's Word must make way for human sin. While God's Word clearly instructs us that it is the other way around! Life is to be found in his Word. His Word that has become Man, that very Word which became flesh.

Conclusion

In this article I wanted to illustrate how postmodern thinking about the "liberation of men and women" has influenced the church. This influence has left an impact at ecclesiastical meetings. I have tried to clarify that wherever people engage in a struggle to effectuate liberation based on egalitarian thinking, the downside is that God's Word must give way. If God's Word must make way for this change, the Lord himself will withdraw from us. When that happens, we can expect nothing good to follow.



Endnotes

¹ Concerning this issue, I read a remarkable but nuanced explanation in Thomas Aquinas's commentary on 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35. He states that women in the Bible prophesized, and at the same time that Paul forbids the speaking of women in the congregation. Aquinas concludes that women, just like men, may receive prophetic revelation, and that they may also share this with the church, but that the apostle forbids women from doing that in the context of ruling in the church. In the latter it is their task to remain subject to men. Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio in omnes Pauli apostoli epistulas*, Turin, 1912,

² See <https://www.gkv.nl/organisatie/deputaatschappen/mvindekerk/> An English version of the sensitive textual issues (called "Sore Points") is available from this website. Clearly, an English version of the report was generated to reach out to the Anglophone sister churches, e.g., Canada, Australia, Scotland, Ireland, etc.

³ Deputy report Men/Women and Office, Sensitive issues concerning women in office, p. 8-9 (Dutch: Deputaten M/V en Ambt, Pijnpunten rond de vrouw in het Ambt, p. 8-9.)

⁴ Deputaten M/V en ambt, Pijnpunten rond vrouw en ambt, p. 5.

⁵ It is interesting to note that the synod decisions followed a double

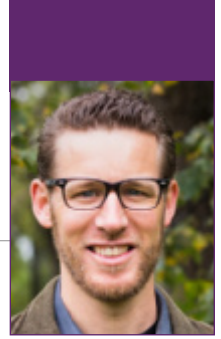
track. On the one hand, an attempt was made to present the equal rights of men and women pertinent to accessing the offices as revealed as God's revelation in the Old and New Testaments (i.e., the equality characterizes the new covenant). That means two views are not possible, but that actually the idea of equality has "won out" over the traditional view. On the other hand, however, it is asserted that in the churches the two points of view should be allowed to co-exist.

⁶ Blogwritten by Jos Douma: <http://www.levenindekerk.nl/2017/06/17/man-vrouw-ambt-ende-vrede-van-jezus/> (accessed 24 May 2018).

⁷ See Lord's Day 21.

⁸ This postmodern spiritually also explains the great attraction of mysticism and rituals that appears in our churches. We have to find another way to God when faith in his Word is under siege. (The attraction of Eastern (Greek) Orthodox mystical and ritualistic theology also among Reformed people in North America is another sign of postmodernism among Christians. – Translator)

⁹ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*. Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union With Christ, Pittsburgh, 2015, p. 93-96.



Reflections on the Worship Music Conference: The Treasure of the Psalms

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Colossians 3:16)

An overview of all the Acts of the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches reveals that the most discussed and debated aspect of our worship services is what we should sing. This is not really a surprise since it is such a personal and important aspect of our worship; it is our response of faith to God. Musical taste is personal, it is also cultural. Every nation and language has their own music and musical style which changes each era. That music is so frequently debated is therefore an indication that culture is constantly changing and evolving. Music is a great gift from God. Through it he provides people with the possibility to express our deepest feelings and emotions. Music provides an outlet for our soul. Jean Calvin writes in the preface to the 1543 edition of the *Genevan Psalter*, “Now among the other things which are proper for recreating man and giving him pleasure, music is either the first, or one of the principal; and it is necessary for us to think that it is a gift of God deputed for that use.” So, what is the best way to use this precious gift of God?

It was for this reason that I travelled to Ontario on May 3, 2019 for a two-day worship music conference organized by Blessings Christian Church in Hamilton. What better way to start a worship music conference than with a time of worship!? As a matter of fact, the entire weekend was filled with frequent times of worship which was led beautifully by the worship teams and various musicians under the capable direction of Blessings’ music director Tim Nijenhuis. During these times of worship, we mainly sang psalms. Some we sang as they can be found in the *Book of Praise* of the Canadian Reformed Churches with the melodies of the *Genevan Psalter* and the versification as can be found in the

2013 published edition. Other arrangements kept the text as it can be found in the *Book of Praise* and used a different melody. For example, we sang Psalm 126 to the melody of *In Christ Alone*, Psalm 128 to *The Church’s One Foundation*, and Psalm 91 to *How Deep the Father’s Love for Us*. This worked quite well, although in some instances the text didn’t quite fit the melody. Nevertheless, it provided a unique focus on the text by bringing out a Christ-centred focus in how these well-known hymns relate to the Psalms. Besides this we also sang versions of the Psalms as they can be found in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*.

The keynote speakers provided clarity and perspectives on a variety of discussion points. Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer focussed on “Seeing Christ in the Psalms” and provided great insight in how to read and sing the Psalms. A great take away was his encouragement to pastors and the consistory to be very deliberate in choosing Psalms for the worship service so that not only the favourites are regularly sung. Effort needs to be made to sing all the Psalms in a year or two. It will be beneficial for the church to experience the full range of expression of faith and emotion as can be found in the Psalms. Furthermore, those leading the worship service should explain how the chosen psalm or hymn fits within the context of the entire service and how it points to Jesus Christ. This is not only helpful and beneficial for visitors; it will encourage engagement and active participation. It will lead to a better understanding of the song and therefore better expression of the music in singing and playing.

Tim Nijenhuis provided an overview of the “History and Intent of Calvin’s Psalter” and concluded that Calvin’s main concern was that everyone should be able to sing versions of the Psalms that focus on God’s Word. So, would Calvin have wanted us to hold on to the melodies? If there are melodies that are awkward with the English text and that prevent us from singing the Psalms as they are intended (according to

Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer there is only a handful), should we not desire to change the melodies? These are questions that lead to more questions. Who decides which melodies are awkward? What do we do with the awkward melodies? Should we add multiple versions like the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* has done? Isn't it just a matter of unfamiliarity?

Kent Dykstra presented "Penalty Kill or Power Play? Principles for the Accompaniment of Congregational Singing." Aside from perhaps the minister, there is probably no person that opens themselves to more criticism in the church service than the musician that accompanies the congregational singing. Comments about music selection, tempo, volume, registration, style, and instrumentation are bound to have been heard by musicians who serve in this capacity. Kent provided and demonstrated great insight in how to find a balance in accompanying the congregation. The most important thing for the accompanist is to be consistent so that the congregation knows what can be expected.

"Simply Singable: The Anglo-Genevan Psalter Reconsidered" by Martin Jongsma provided historical, musical, and practical considerations that the Genevan tunes are, in reality, "simply singable." Martin suggested that the Genevan tunes are learnable and that it will just take more effort to get more familiar with the tunes. It was recognized that in the Canadian Reformed Churches we are all "trained" singers. Many of us have been taught many of the songs from the *Book of Praise* in school at an early age. This certainly gives the members of the Canadian Reformed Church an advantage to others who are not familiar with the Genevan melodies.

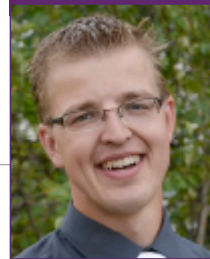
The conference wrapped up with a panel discussion that allowed for free and open dialogue between all the keynotes. The panel also included Christian singer-songwriter Jamie Soles, who provided a unique "outsiders" perspective. What became clear is that everyone on the panel has the desire to promote psalm singing. The questions and discussions are mostly about cultural context. How does the cultural context of the members of the congregation and the history of the local church determine which version of the Psalms we sing? Regardless of which version of the Psalms we sing, it is important to note that we are singing hymn versions of the Psalms with texts that are versifications and translations of Scripture.

According to Jamie Soles, many churches he visits are amazed that there is such a thing as a book of songs that are based on the Psalms and are excited about the possibility to sing them. It is currently one of Jamie's goals to write melodies for all the Psalm texts as found in the *Book of Praise*. In this way to he wants to provide the churches with the ability to sing the Psalms. During a concert in the evening many versions of the Psalms were shared by various musicians. Jamie Soles also shared many of his versions, which captured the mood of the Psalms and proved to be very singable. It truly was a celebration of the Psalms.

The goal of the conference was to get people thinking and talking about how we can encourage singing the Psalms and worship our Heavenly God and Father. This goal was achieved. Praise the Lord!

C





Simply Singable: The *Anglo-Genevan Psalter* Reconsidered (Part 1 of 3)

This three-part article is an adaptation of my speech given at the recent music conference titled “The Treasure of the Psalms in Worship” put on by Blessings Christian Church during the first weekend in May 2019. I am thankful for receiving the opportunity to speak on the subject of the *Anglo-Genevan Psalter* and, more specifically, the singability of the Genevan melodies. The *Anglo-Genevan Psalter*, as found in the *Book of Praise* (or adopted song-book of the Canadian Reformed churches), uniquely features “English metrical versions of all the psalms. . . sung. . . to the authentic Genevan melodies of the sixteenth century.”¹ These melodies, in particular, not only continue to characterize the psalm-singing found in Canadian Reformed churches today, but more importantly, they link its singing to a Reformation model and practice that is profoundly relevant and deeply meaningful. In the face of claims that these Genevan melodies are “too difficult,” historical, musical, and practical considerations do otherwise suggest that the Genevan tunes are, in reality, “simply singable.” In order to support this fact, I will consider the following three aspects: 1) historical highlights: briefly reviewing the history of the *Genevan Psalter*; 2) melodic masterpieces: examining the musical characteristics of the Genevan tunes; and 3) foreign or familiar: reviving the Genevan melodies today.

Historical highlights

Any study of the *Anglo-Genevan Psalter* immediately requires us to consider the French reformer and theologian John Calvin (1509-1564), who conceived and directed the creation of the *Genevan Psalter* (1539-62). Calvin’s intent was to provide a songbook in the vernacular for the French Protestant (aka. Huguenot) church of the mid-sixteenth century. The preface to the 1543 *Genevan Psalter*, featuring Calvin’s lengthiest writing on the subject of church music,

clearly indicates that he equated singing with prayer. Not only had Calvin already addressed the subject of singing in his *Institutes* (1536), under the heading of prayer, but in his 1543 preface he specifically refers to two types of prayers: word alone and singing. Thus singing, as a form of prayer, needed to contain an appropriate text, which was then adorned with a fitting melody.

Regarding the text of the songs, it was Calvin’s view they be “not only honest, but also holy, which will be like spurs to incite us to pray to and praise God, and to meditate upon His works in order to love, fear, honour, and glorify Him.”² Such song texts not only encouraged piety, but they also legitimized the early church practice of singing the biblical psalms. Calvin writes that “when we have looked thoroughly, and searched here and there, we shall not find better songs nor more fitting for the purpose, than the Psalms of David, which the Holy Spirit spoke and made through him. And moreover, when we sing them, we are certain that God puts in our mouths these [words], as if he himself were singing in us to exalt his glory.”³ Additionally, the complete spectrum of human emotion found in the Psalms, as divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit, were and continue to be a fitting and enduring source of sung text for the Reformed church.

The first version of the resulting songbook appeared in Strasbourg, 1539 and featured nineteen psalm versifications of Calvin and Marot most probably adapted to melodies of the German Reformed church in Strasbourg.⁴ This early psalter was the forerunner to the gradually expanded Genevan versions of 1542, 1543, 1551, and finally 1562. The final version of 1562 included the poetic renderings of Clément Marot (1496-1544), who was one of the foremost poets of the French court, and Théodore de Bèze (1519-1605), who was one of the greatest Latin poets and a leading theologian of the Reformed church in Geneva.

This final version also featured the melodic craftsmanship of Guillaume du Franc (1505-1570), who was an important court singer charged with the responsibility of teaching the children in 1541, Loys Bourgeois (c. 1510-1559), who was a distinguished Renaissance composer known for his French manual *Le droict chemin* which discussed “The Correct Way” to sing, and Maître Pierre, who was most likely the musician known as Pierre Davantès (1525-1561).⁵ Undoubtedly, Calvin clearly sought the expertise and skillsets of notable poets and qualified musicians.

From the outset, Calvin desired that the whole congregation would sing; and this wish during a time when illiteracy (both musical and written) was very high. In order to ease and facilitate the practice of congregational singing in Geneva, the children were taught the psalms at school. Students at the Genevan Academy were to spend one hour each day in psalm-singing; this was mandated by the city council in 1543 and then affirmed in 1559 by “The Order of the College of Geneva.”⁶ Precentors (or those who led the singing - as in a *voorzanger* or literally “fore-singer”) were entrusted with the responsibility of teaching children to lead psalm singing in the Genevan congregations; this task was first given to Guillaume Franc from 1541 to 1545, Loys Bourgeois from 1545 to 1552, and later on, Maître Pierre. In this way, the psalms were gradually taught to the congregation through the lips of the school children.

From a pedagogical vantage point, the *Genevan Psalter* plainly exhibited the following three characteristics:

- 1) the melodies were “simply singable” enough for the general population to be able to learn;
- 2) these melodies were not “simplistically singable” or “dumbed down” ditties that required no effort to learn, but erstwhile (or former) musical compositions that required effort to learn. Hence, diligent practice was needed to commit them to memory. And
- 3) these melodies were not written in a “popular music” style, “here one day, gone tomorrow,” but were designed to stand the test of time, to be truly “classic.”

In this respect, the Genevan melodies convey a melodic grandeur that runs counter to the short, repetitive phrases and narrow pitch range which frequently marks “popular music.” Despite the illiteracy of the time, it was Calvin’s primary intent to create a psalter that both encouraged and enabled the entire congregation to sing.

Calvin’s musical influence was demonstrated by a rapid development of congregational singing in Reformed churches throughout Europe and in particular, the adoption of the *Genevan Psalter* by the Dutch Reformed churches of The Netherlands.⁷ In 1566, the Dutch preacher Piet-

CALL ACCEPTED

Candidate Jeremy Segstro

has accepted the call to the Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church to serve as minister of the Word.

Candidate Eric Onderwater

has accepted the call to the Grace Canadian Reformed Church in Brampton, Ontario to serve as minister of the word with a focus on mission. He subsequently declines the calls to the Redeeming Grace United Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario, the Adoration United Reformed Church of Vineland, Ontario and the Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington, Ontario.

Candidate Mark ten Haaf

has accepted the call to serve as Minister of the Word at Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta and has declined the calls to the American Reformed Church in Nooksack Valley, Trinity Canadian Reformed Church in Glanbrook, Ontario, and the call from the Free Reformed Church in Armadale, Australia to serve as Missionary in Lae, Papua New Guinea.

New location and worship service times for Nooksack Valley

On Sunday, August 4, and following, the congregation of the American Reformed Church at Nooksack Valley will be using the Sumas Christian Reformed Church building for worship, with services scheduled at 8:45 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. respectively. This building is located at 700 Sumas Avenue, Sumas, Washington.

CALLED AND ACCEPTED

Rev. John Ludwig

has been called and has accepted the call to serve as Minister of the Word at the Neerlandia Canadian Reformed Church South, and has subsequently declined the call to the Dovedale Reformed Church of New Zealand.

CHURCH NEWS

er Datheen (ca. 1531-1588) translated the *Genevan Psalter* into Dutch and it was soon adopted by the Synod of Emden in 1571 as the official songbook of the Dutch Reformed churches.⁸ Throughout the centuries, these Genevan melodies (albeit in their various rhythmically altered forms) continued to mark the singing of the Psalms in the Dutch Reformed churches.

Following the immigration of many of our ancestors during the twentieth century, deputies for an English Calvinistic Psalter (1968) advocated preparing a *Genevan Psalter* for the two-fold purpose that 1) “our churches would not only possess a well-balanced Psalter but also” 2) that it “would have contributed in a unique manner to the culture of our nation, which is for the most part unfamiliar with

the magnificent Genevan tunes.”⁹ Since its completion in 1972, the *Anglo-Genevan Psalter* is characterized by its use of the original Genevan melodies, and now since 2014, is distinguished by a modern, up-to-date English versification of the entire psalter.¹⁰ Regarding the versification of

the psalms, the Canadian Reformed churches are deeply indebted to the devotion and expertise of the English-language scholar William Helder. We can be truly thankful that we have the privilege to sing from such a distinguished song book.

C

Endnotes

¹ Preface to the *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter* (2014): v.

² John Calvin, Preface to *Genevan Psalter*, 1543.

³ Elsie Anne McKee, ed., *John Calvin: Writings on Pastoral Piety* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001): 96.

⁴ Virtually nothing is known about these early melodies; Vander Ploeg writes that “much if not all the melodic material in this modest psalter came from either Greiter or Dachstein.” Matthias Greiter (1495-1550) was the cantor at the Strasbourg Minster, while Wolfgang Dachstein (1487-1553) was the organist at the same church. Refer to: Sander Vander Ploeg, “The Composers of the Genevan Psalm Tunes,” *Reformed Music Journal* 6, no. 2 (1994): 49.

⁵ Jan Luth, “The Music of the Dutch Reformed Church,” in *Sweelinck Studies: Proceedings of the International Sweelinck Symposium Utrecht 1999*, edited by Pieter Dirksen (Utrecht: STIMU Foundation for Historical Performance Practice, 2002): 27.

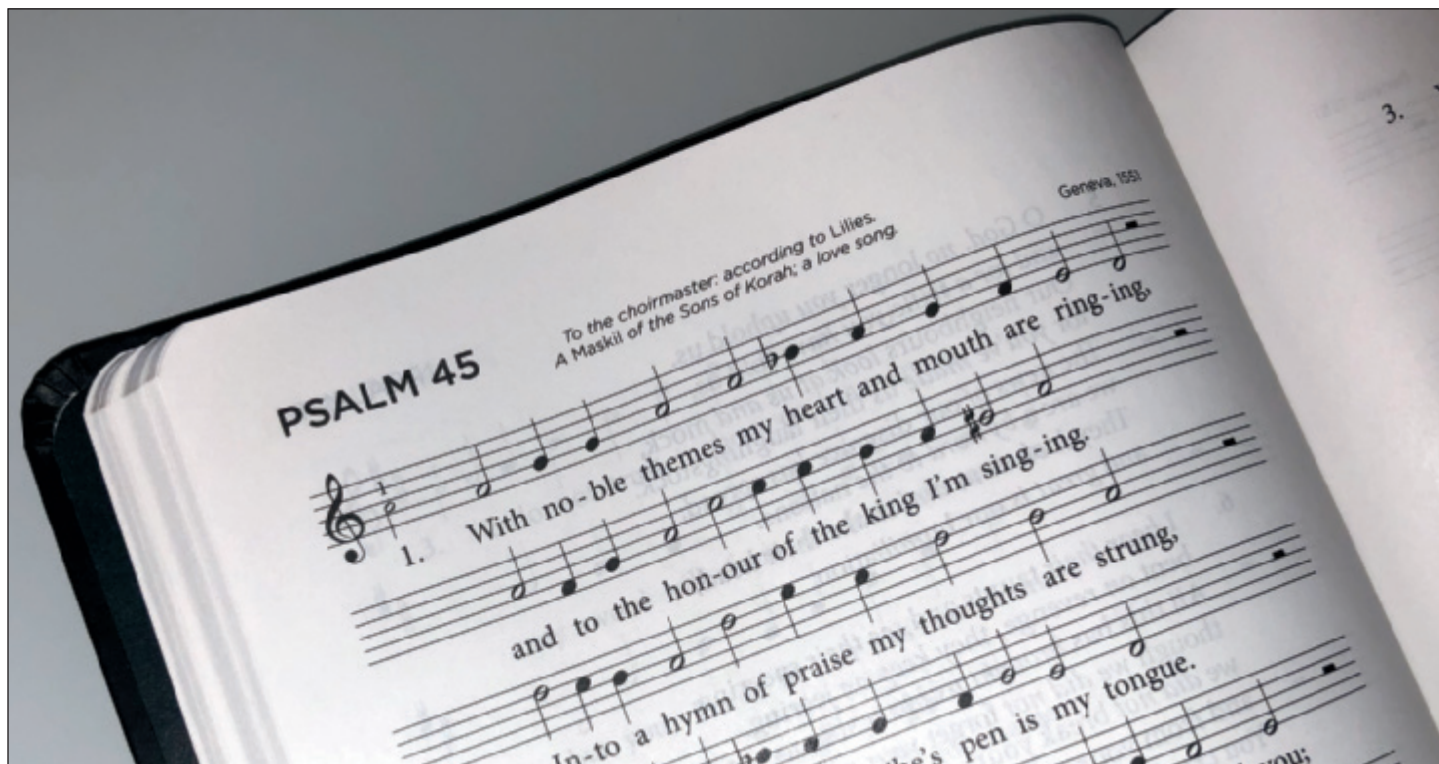
⁶ Witvliet, “The Spirituality of the Psalter: Metrical Psalms in Liturgy and Life in Calvin’s Geneva,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 32, (1997): 290.

⁷ Carl Schalk, ed., *Key Words in Church Music: Definition Essays on Concepts, Practices, and Movements of Thought in Church Music* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1978): 339-40; see also: Luth, “The Music of the Dutch Reformed Church,” 28.

⁸ A. Ros, *Davids soete lier: vijf eeuwen Nederlandse psalmberijmingen* (Apeldoorn, NL: Uitgeverij De Banier, 2010): 68-9; unlike Ros, Dutch church music scholar Jan Luth argues that it was the Synod of Dordrecht in 1574 which officially recognized Datheen’s Dutch translation as the song book of the Dutch Reformed churches; see: Jan Luth, “The Music of the Dutch Reformed Church,” 30.

⁹ *Acts of General Synod Orangeville* (1968): 102.

¹⁰ The earliest English setting of the entire *Genevan Psalter* seems to be the following collection entitled: *All the French Psalm tunes with English words. Being a collection of Psalms accorded to the verses and tunes generally used in the Reformed churches of France and Germany. Perused and approved by judicious divines, both English and French* (1632). See: <https://genevanpsalter.blogspot.com/2011/06/earliest-english-edition-of-genevan.html>.





My Comfort is that Jesus Christ Will Come Again for Me

...from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

1. My com - fort is that Je - sus Christ will come a - gain for me.
 2. The judge will come from heaven a - bove, and be the ver - y one,
 3. His en - e - mies are mine as well, and I will see them cast,

He'll judge the liv - ing and the dead with per - fect eq - ui - ty.
 who bowed him - self in low - li - ness be fore the judg - ment throne.
 in to per - di - tion with - out end, by jus - tice un - sur - passed.

Though per - se - cu - tion, grief, and pain, af - flict my mor - tal life,
 It was for my sake that he bore the aw - ful wrath of God.
 But me, and all his cho - sen ones, un - to him - self he'll take

I lift my head with ea - ger hope for res - cue from the strife.
 He has re - moved the curse from me, and its dis - tress - ing rod.
 to heav - en - ly glo - ry, joy, and bliss. He'll nev - er us for - sake.

Text: QA 52, Heidelberg Catechism, (Art. 7, Apostles' Creed,); vers. George van Popta, 2019
 Tune: Traditional English Melody; arr. Arthur S. Sullivan

CMD
 NOEL



Clarion Kids

Sowing Generously

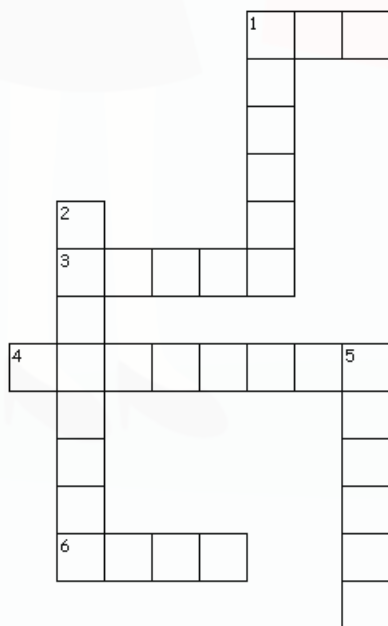
2 Corinthians 9:6-16

Getting a gift is a very nice feeling, but sometimes it feels even better to give a gift! When we cheerfully give from what God has given to us, God is happy. Anyone who gives generously will also be treated generously by others. But if we never want to give anything, or only give things away when we have to, we will be treated the same way. We should be happy to give, and not do it with a grumpy face. After all, everything we have really belongs to God. God loves a cheerful giver, and giving gifts to those in need is a great way to show God how much we love him! What are some ways that you can sow generously today?

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



Crossword Puzzle: Solve the clues to fill in the puzzle.



Across

1. Everything we have belongs to ____.
3. When we give it makes God ____.
4. We should be _____ when we give.
6. Giving generously is a way to show ____.

Down

1. When we give we should not be _____.
2. God loves a _____ giver.
5. This passage is about _____ generously.

by Emily Nijenhuis

Marsha Moesker



Hello everyone, Marsha here, writing from the Lighthouse in Fergus. September eighth is my birthday and I am turning a lively forty-two. Grey hairs aside, I feel great for forty-two! People ask me for tips all the time and I show them (because I don't speak) that it helps to cut down on the sugar intake and keep active. I take lots of walks, two or three a day. I like

to take my friends along so they stay active too. Sometimes I deliver papers when I walk and this kills two birds with one stone, some spending money and some exercise! (I am all about efficiency.)

I love living at the Lighthouse. The people there take excellent care of me, making sure I don't eat too much, too fast, or eat the wrong things, or get lazy about stuff. My roommates are cool, too. We have lots of fun together working in the garden, doing laundry, having meals, or just chilling. I love seeing visitors there, too, because then we sometimes get extra good snacks! I also love attending Fergus North church right next door to the Lighthouse. Sometimes I like to sing during the service so everyone knows I am there, and they can tell how much I like it.

I like to go home to visit mom and dad, too. They feed me ice cream there, which is the best! Nothing like ice cream on a hot day! I also love sitting and snuggling with my dad. We watch cooking shows or listen to music. My favourite music is from the band ABBA. I also like a bit of country too though. Anything with a good, happy beat really. None of that panflute stuff though, it makes me so sad I could cry.

Anyway, as this is my birthday month, I wanted to give a shout out to all those who faithfully send me cards and treats every year. They are all appreciated and enjoyed! It is so nice to feel loved and cared for. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

With love, Marsha

September Birthdays

6 Katie Deboer will be 19

34756 7 Avenue, Abbotsford, BC V2S 8C4

8 Marsha Moesker will be 42

c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line, RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

14 Jerry Bontekoe will be 55

c/o Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

15 Cindy Blokker will be 30

984 Farnham Road, London, ON N6K 1S1

22 Nick Prinzen will be 47

c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

25 Dave Vanveen will be 49

c/o Lighthouse
6528 1st Line RR 3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

29 Paul Dieleman will be 50

c/o Beacon Home
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

Happy birthday to all of you celebrating in September! May it be a day celebrated with family and friends, thanking our great God and Saviour for all he has given you.

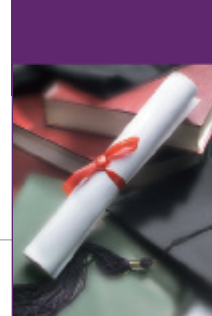
A NOTE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

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

731 Lincoln Street, Wellandport, Ontario L0R 2J0
tom.rachelvis@gmail.com • 905-329-9476





Jordan is married to
 Amanda, they have
 four children, and they
 attend Providence United
 Reformed Church in
 Strathroy, ON

Metaphor as Education

Part 3: Technology and Relationships

The previous articles discussed how important relationships and metaphorical language are to understanding the world. This article discusses how technology (such as screens and the Internet) impacts our communication and understanding. What does technology do to our relationships? The final article will discuss Metaphor and Empathy.

On a recent Grade 12 graduation trip, we were traveling along in a school bus when one of those fancy Greyhound-type busses passed us. The students started clamouring for our bus driver to keep up and stay beside the other bus. I thought that they were going to start waving to, observing, or interacting in some way with the passengers in the other bus. They were, indeed, trying to connect with the other bus; the fancier busses have routers and free Wi-Fi, and if you are close enough you can pick up the signal. I found myself wondering: What does this era of Internet “connectivity” bring to our relationships?

To be sure, technology has changed our relationships and even the way we think about relationships. How we carry out conversation changes how we understand. In his famous and still insightful book *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman writes that “the clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation.”¹ To this Postman adds, “Our languages are our media. Our media are our metaphors. Our metaphors create the content of our culture.”² The media he is speaking of is any form of communication. For instance, Postman separates oral communication and written communication. Pictures, movies, and radio are examples of types of media. Each medium, Postman claims, becomes a metaphor for the culture that uses it. To use more familiar language: the type of media we use becomes a lens through which we interpret the world. If we want to understand our culture, we must listen to the way we speak. The way we communicate says something about how we think. The very way in which we communicate establishes the context for what we will talk about or pay attention to. And since a primary mode of communica-

tion is technology (by technology I mean screens, wireless connectivity, the Internet, and social media), we ought to be concerned with how it affects us.

A transformation

Certainly technology has transformed the way we communicate. Author Andy Crouch, along with a research group, has paid attention to the effects screens have on our culture. In his book *The Tech-Wise Family*, he says that “even at their best, social media, like all media, substitute distant relationships for close ones.”³ While technology allows us to connect with people over vast distances instantaneously, the connection is limited. This is because there still is physical space in between those who are communicating. The Internet or electric connection spans the distance but decontextualizes along the way. We aren’t seeing the same things our parents or children are seeing when we are on video chat with them. The environment is not the same. It is easier to be distracted from conversations when they happen through technology. We allow side bar conversations with others to creep in and interrupt. Phone conversations used to be broken up by weak connections; now we are having weak conversations because of phone(y) connections. The physical distance is crossed but only in a limited way. This decontextualization pervades all interactions with technology especially that on the web.

Space changes with technology, but so does time. Since information passes through screens and the Internet at the speed of electricity, we perceive their pace as instantaneous. Distance is not just covered; it is covered quickly. The connections occur in a moment of time. The Pony Express was famous for its ability to deliver mail and to do so quickly. And while the Pony Express “has nothing on” the Internet, it takes nothing, or nearly next to it, to send an email. We aren’t amazed at email; we expect it to be fast. Information and answers are designed to always be at our fingertips. We command-prompt as kings and our servant responds with superhuman speed.

Diminished depth

There are at least four ways that digital space and time diminish depth of conversation. Technology obscures our identity, fractures our focus, increases our impatience, and intensifies our opinions.

When we place ourselves behind a screen, we create a sort of false shield and fall into what Stephen Marche calls an “Epidemic of Facelessness.” Human identity is obscured because, as Marche says, an “inability to see a face is, in the most direct way, inability to recognize shared humanity with another.”⁴ When we sit at a computer or stare at a phone and try to connect with others, we often unwittingly turn people into problems or issues which we then need to correct or manipulate. We become anonymous and our audience lacks personality. Rather than relating to or identifying with others, we see screens and think we are perceiving people.

Screens and devices are developed to distract. Our focus is fractured because, as Andy Crouch points out, “the makers of technological devices have become absolute masters of the nudge. Every notification that comes in on your smartphone is a nudge – not a command or demand, but something that makes it easier to stop what ever you’re currently doing.”⁵ Though we are not required to respond to every noise made by our devices, one buzz from a phone is enough to disrupt a pleasant dinnertime conversation, or even a current phone conversation. The design of the Internet is such that one distraction brings about another. Every web page is filled with hyperlinks that are all too ready to let us go down a new rabbit hole and get absorbed in a maze of new information. Once connected, it is difficult to disconnect.

Then there is the issue of increasing impatience. It seems at times that a great deal of our patience falls into that space obscured by our screens. We begin to expect instantaneous answers. Apparently my father-in-law and I both have the annoying habit of answering questions in a detailed way. If something is worth being answered, we think it is worth answering well. But most people don’t want detailed, in depth answers with nuance; they have quick queries and want even quicker answers. And Google is only too happy to oblige. But quick answers don’t breed deep understanding; and there are questions worth spending some time on.

When our identities are shielded, our focus diminished, and our patience lost between us and the Internet, it is easy for us to respond hastily and without thinking to what our screens display. The Internet intensifies opinions. It is a place where many can quite readily give their opinions and others

can read and respond to them. Take the fact that YouTube videos and online news articles have a “comments section.” I’ll admit that I am guilty of reading those comments. Delayed judgement and patience and willingness to refrain from response is hard enough in face to face conversation. Online it is almost impossible. The anonymity of being behind the screen makes it difficult to type and read with respect.

A limited resource

Technology is a valuable resource which can connect people. It helps channel business conversations, facilitates communication between loved ones who are far away, and it allows information to be neatly stored, readily accessed, and easily manipulated. But there are limitations to its ability.

Perhaps because of its ability to cross time and space instantaneously, technology often creates a different kind of distance. There is relational distance between people who communicate online. There is contextual distance between those crying out for help on social media and those responding to the stated problem. There is contextual and experiential distance between those who write medical information pages and those who are self-diagnosing diseases. There are gaps in understanding when skimming a few words replaces reading whole works. While it is possible to overcome this distance, it takes thought, time, and energy to do so. Too often this distance is unperceived and we expect technology to fill in the blanks that it is not equipped to fill.

If, as Postman suggests, technology is our language, it will become our metaphor, our lens to view new information. With technology as our context, it will begin to create the content of our culture. Whereas good metaphors give us glasses to see the world, technology often serves to blur the distance between relationships and understanding. If so, we do well to expose these weaknesses and equip ourselves for learning and relating in a technological culture. Perhaps we should adjust our prescription and polish our lenses.

¹ (Postman 1986, 8)

² (Postman 1986, 15)

³ (Crouch 2017, 117)

⁴ (Marche 2015)

⁵ (Crouch 2017, 34)

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