



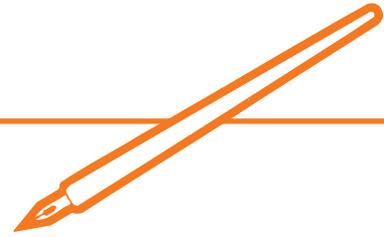
Concerning Music in our Churches

INSIDE:

- *Who Governs the Church?*
- *Angels and Missions*
- *The First Psalters in the Dutch Reformed Churches*



By J. Visscher



Who Governs the Church?

A Constant Question

One of the questions that crops up from time to time in the life of the church has to do with its governance. Who rules the church? Who is responsible for its leadership and direction? Who is in charge?

Of course, different churches have and continue to answer this question in different ways. The Roman Catholic Church is convinced that the Pope as the supposed successor to the apostle Peter has the ultimate authority. The Anglican Church insists that a college of bishops, with the archbishop of Canterbury as first among equals, should make the final decisions. Most congregational churches are firmly established in their view that it is the membership that must have the final say.

It varies from the very hierarchical to the very democratic.

What this brief overview shows you is that church government takes on different forms. It varies from the very hierarchical to the very democratic. It can be very concentrated or very diffuse. It is sometimes very centralized and at other times very decentralized.

There are also many variations on the above. Take the modern North American evangelical mega church where the senior pastor leads the church. Probably it is due to his dynamic personality and organizational skills that there even is a church. He will often have an advisory board, but in actual fact everyone knows who is really giving the orders. Today there are more popes in Protestantism than in Rome.

Another model that is popular today on this continent is the co-operative one in which government of the church is a shared and fluid thing. Together, pastors, members and denominational authorities direct the affairs of the congregation. While attractive in a way, this model suffers in times of crisis when clear leadership is needed and all three are contending for it.

Indeed, when one studies church government the impression is often conveyed that there are many choices, styles and forms, and that it is up to each church to determine which it likes best. Some would even say that it is up to each to choose their own brand of "poison" believing that no matter which one you take they all have their down sides.

The form of government: arbitrary or divinely ordained?

But is that true? Is church government simply a matter of human choice? And is the choice based purely on practical considerations? Or does the Bible also have something to say here? Is Scripture audible or silent on this matter?

From our perspective as Reformed believers, we have always insisted that the form of our church government is not an arbitrary thing. And neither is it a matter of human choice. It too has been regulated by God. It too is revealed in his Word.

What in particular does it reveal? It reveals that it is God's will that the church of our Lord Jesus Christ be governed by elders. Each local church is to have a body of elders. Acts 14 tells us about how "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them (the disciples) in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" (14:22). In his letter to Titus Paul tells him, "the reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you" (1:5). From these two very clear citations we learn that elders are deemed by the apostle Paul to be an essential part of the church. Their appointment does not come across as an option, but rather as a necessity.

These men are to watch over the souls of the children of God.

In the face of this it is all the more curious, even disturbing, that many churches, while proudly and openly claiming to be based on the Bible, ignore this very requirement. They choose to invent their own form of church government and act as if Scripture is completely silent on this topic. But could the apostles have spoken any plainer?

Elders for what?

In addition to appointing elders themselves and in telling their helpers to do so, the apostles leave no doubt as to what these elders are to do. The apostle Paul writes to Timothy about, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well. . ." (1 Tim 5:17). Earlier in the same letter he had said by way almost of an aside, "if anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" (1 Tim 3:5). Elsewhere in Acts 20, Paul, in bidding farewell to the Ephesian elders, charges them, "Keep watch

over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God. . ." (Acts 20:28). Peter says much the same when he writes to the scattered believers of Asia Minor, "To the elders among you . . . Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers..." (1 Pet 5:1, 2).

From these and other places, we learn that it is the duty of the elders to "direct," "manage," "care," "keep watch" and to "shepherd." A closer look reveals that what is meant has everything to do with spiritual care and direction, with spiritual management and watchfulness. Physical or material care may not be totally out of the picture (via the deacons), but it is the spiritual aspect that receives the emphasis here.

What's inside?

In his editorial, Dr. J. Visscher addresses the disturbing trend that churches which claim to act in a biblical fashion, no longer acknowledge the requirement of elders in the church. Of course, also disturbing is those churches who have elders, but those elders are not active. This editorial shows that the office of elder is an old and well-established institution, and thus a blessing to the church of Jesus Christ.

Rev. W.L. Bredenhof writes about angels from the perspective of mission work. This is a tremendous support and comfort for missionaries who often work in lonely and difficult circumstances.

Dr. R. Faber presents his third article in a series about the principles and practices of singing psalms and hymns in the public worship of Reformed churches. The purpose of this article is to describe the psalters used in the Dutch Reformed churches from the middle of the sixteenth century until the synod of Dort in 1618.

We have an interesting article by Francis Ubertelli, "Concerning Music in our Churches." It may seem more technical than we are used to, but it takes us down the path of some very interesting observation of music which must ultimately praise God.

A report submitted by brothers of the Owen Sound congregation shows that the Lord is blessing the Reformed churches in Quebec. We appreciate the contacts which are being enjoyed and promoted by the Church at Owen Sound. This bodes well for our contact with the ERQ.

In a press release of Classis Niagara we read that Rev. G. Wieske is retiring as of February 28, 2003. We thank the Lord for allowing Rev. Wieske to serve as a faithful minister of the Word. May he now also enjoy his retirement.

We have a short article which recounts the tremendous blessing of the Urban Mission ministry: two members of the Chinese Christian Fellowship profess their faith and receive the sign and seal of baptism; one small boy is also baptized.

We have a meditation by Rev. T.G. Van Raalte, a news release from MERF-Canada, and a letter to the editor.

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These men are to watch over the souls of the children of God. They are to keep them close to the Lord. They are to identify and chase away the wolves. They are to protect the flock.

Modern or ancient?

In and of itself this is all a tremendous New Testament teaching, but we also need to be aware that this is not a New Testament invention. Some writers leave the impression as if the office of elder were a Pauline or early Christian church creation; however, a closer look at Scripture reveals that this office was well-known already in the Old Testament.

The office of elder in the Christian church has deep historical roots and broad biblical support.

The first time that it is mentioned is in connection with the people of Israel in Egypt. When Moses is sent back to Egypt by the Lord he is supposed to present himself to the elders (Exod 3:16). Some scholars even surmise that the office of elder is of Egyptian origin. Later when Moses leads the children of Israel out of Egypt, he is assisted by the elders (Exod 12:21; Num 11:16-17). Once the Israelites are in the promised land, it is the elders who seem to function as judges, often dealing with matters at the city gate (Deut 19:12). In addition, to being community leaders, they also handled judicial matters.

Stepping over into the time during which the Lord Jesus ministered on earth, we learn that the office of elder remains current. Elders functioned as local town and synagogue leaders (Mark 5:22; Luke 7: 1-5). They were also members of the Sanhedrin. In addition, they took part in judicial dealings (Mark 15: 1). There is evidence to indicate that they were also the guardians of various religious traditions (Mark 7:3).

As a result of this rich background, it would be a rather naïve thing to ascribe this office to the fertility of the mind of Paul. By the time that he came along it was already well known.

Indeed, it was known not just in Palestine but also throughout the Mediterranean region. Also Greek and Roman cultures had a well defined tradition in which elders were regarded as leaders of the community and often served as arbiters and judges in matters of legal dispute.

A solid basis

What all of this means is that the office of elder in the Christian church has deep historical roots and broad biblical support. In light of this it is all so difficult to fathom why some churches do not see the need to structure their church government after this pattern.

At the same time it is also hard to comprehend why some churches that do have elders no longer insist that they function as elders in a biblical fashion. What do I mean? I am referring to churches that I know of where elders are elders in name, but not in deed. They have the title, but they do not do the work. They do not know their sheep because they do not visit them. They do not visit them and hence they can not instruct, admonish, and counsel them. They do not watch over them and so they are not able to care spiritually for them. It would be better to have no elders than such elders.

In summary, churches that do not know what it is to be ruled by elders need to bring their church life into conformity with the Word of God. Churches that have elders in name only need to put them to work in true biblical fashion. Churches that have elders in name and deed must regularly review how well these men are doing their work in the congregation of Jesus Christ.



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By T.G. Van Raalte

Illuminating the Way to God

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Matthew 5:14-16

From the second verse of the Bible to the very last chapter, light represents what is good. When the Lord Jesus calls his disciples the light of the world, He, of course, distinguishes them from whatever is dark and evil. The church is to be very distinct from that which is around them.

Jesus, however, does not first call the church to be the light of the world but simply says that they are. He speaks to his disciples in grace when He declares, really, that He has made them into the light of the world. Since his work is effective and transforming, He then obligates us to live as light in the midst of darkness.

After the fall into sin, the world is made up of those who grope about in darkness, like Pharaoh. Unless someone turns on the lights the people will keep walking in darkness.

God himself is the ultimate source of this light, for He established the way of salvation. Yet, whatever He has done He also does in Christ, and thus we find that Christ is the very light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5). He was also prophesied to be the Sun of Righteousness (Mal 4:2). In Him all righteousness is focussed and concentrated. Thus, He fully illuminated the way to God. He is the true light who gives light to every man whose eyes are opened to comprehend it (John 1:5; 2 Cor 4:4). This truth, then, is the light that must shine out from Christians.

When you are the world's spiritual light source, you can't hide. Christ did not hide. "I have done nothing in se-

cret," He said (John 18:20). There can be no such thing as secret discipleship, for either the secrecy destroys the discipleship, or the discipleship destroys the secrecy. A disciple is by definition visible, active, and influential, because such was his Lord and Master whom he is following and from whom he is learning. Paul speaks of us shining like stars in this universe as we hold out the word of life (Phil 2:15-16). We are to be as beacons and lighthouses.

But light is not only about a spoken message. One's entire walk of life is part of the message. The deeds of light, we read elsewhere, consist in all goodness, righteousness, and truth (Eph 5:9). By their godly walk of life, Jesus' disciples should stand out.

So, dear Christian, we must have words and deeds that illuminate the way to God for the rest of the world. Is that what our lives are like? Does your life consist only in goodness, righteousness, and truth? Surely you must admit that there is some darkness within you! What shall we do? For, if we are not truly shining the light, the world will be lost. No one else is going to be the light of the world.

The important question is what you do when this happens, when you realize you have sinned. Do you like sin? Do you harbour it in your heart?

No, you must go and confess it to God. You go back to the original source of light and repent in humility. That activity is probably the most distinct thing about being a Christian in

this world. By this, we get rid of the darkness in us. If non-Christians do not see any sign of the law, of repentance, of living out of forgiveness by grace, then they are not seeing Christianity, because they will not be pointed to Christ, the Saviour from sin. They will not learn what are the means by which his grace is received in one's heart, the foundation of all good works.

Let us practise what is distinctive for the church, namely all the characteristics found in the Beatitudes, such as counting the self poor, mourning for sin, humility, hunger for God, mercy, purity, and peacemaking. We have to go back to those things again and again.

The Christian faith is not just a set of good morals. It is living for Christ out of the forgiveness from Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, counting yourself to be nothing apart from Jesus Christ.

The world must be drawn to Christ's church because it is light, not because it is a more exciting shade of darkness. Only light illuminates the way to God. Love for God, humble obedience to Him, repentance of sins, and rejoicing in grace will mark the decisive difference of the church over against the world. All this will show that life with God is desirable. 

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Angels and Missions

By W.L. Bredenhof

Over the last decade or so, angels have been popular figures on the stage of what we may call secular spirituality. This popularity involves a lot of sentimental speculation and very little biblical content. Since we do not live in Reformed cloisters, we are not altogether unaffected by this unfortunate trend. One of two extremes can sometimes result: either we capitulate to the secularists and essentially deify the angels or we neglect angels altogether in reaction to cultural trends. Neither extreme is desirable.

Historically, the Reformed churches have neither ignored the angels nor given them excessive attention.¹ If one looks at the index of Calvin's *Institutes*, two-thirds of a page are filled with references to angels. This soundly reflects the emphasis found in the Scriptures. In a similar way, Article 12 of the Belgic Confession has a paragraph devoted to the scriptural teaching about the creation and purpose of angels. The intriguing thing is that this teaching has a weighty bearing on how we think about the missionary task of the church.

Belgic Confession Article 12

Says our Confession, "He also created the angels good, to be his messengers and serve the elect." The angels were also part of God's created work, though we do not know at what point they came into being. Regardless, their purpose is clear: they exist to serve God and his people. Though they were created good, some of the angels have fallen – these we call the devils and evil spirits. These hounds of hell "are so depraved that they are enemies of God and of all that is good. With all their might, they lie in wait like murderers to ruin the church and all its members and to destroy everything by their wicked devices." This means that when we consider our missionary task, there is a formidable array of opponents

waiting to destroy everything we try to do. But, on the other hand, the reverse is also true: we have a redoubtable heavenly host allied with us as, by the power and grace of God, we break ground for his kingdom. The good angels serve to build and establish the church. They are there to facilitate our missionary task!

The missionary task was given to the church by the Lord Jesus in such passages as Matthew 28:18-20. The Scriptures are clear that the angels must always be considered in connection with Him. They exist to serve the church and its task because they first exist to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. In popular portrayals, angels tend to be individualistic. They stand on their own. However, in the Scriptures, angels are first the servants of God, sent out by the Lord Jesus and therefore under his authority.

The good angels serve to build and establish the church. They are there to facilitate our missionary task!

This is clear in a passage such as Mark 1:13 where, following the temptations of Satan, our Lord Jesus was served by the angels.

The service of the angels

This service of the angels is a feature of the ongoing spiritual battle with Satan and his minions. In the Old Testament this is most vividly seen in Numbers 22-24. Dr. J. DeJong describes quite accurately the scene: "Particularly the first chapter describes the intensity of the struggle with Balaam first being commanded not to go, and then going, and finally a messenger is sent to meet him, an adversary. We have here an adversary against the Adversary, an op-

ponent opposing the opponent."² And, of course, in the New Testament we see this battle with Satan and his angels in the Revelation of Christ to John. The whole Bible makes it clear that we live in a time of spiritual conflict. And one of the most pre-eminent ways that the Lord Jesus fights this conflict is through his angelic armies. These armies continue to serve the Lord Jesus as He daily gathers his church from the four corners of the earth.

These angels are therefore an integral part of the mission of the church. Their involvement is not dispassionate, rather the Scriptures make clear that they are emotionally involved with what is going on. They share in the disappointments and the joys as lost sinners are brought to their master, King Jesus. Luke 15:10 tells us that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." When there is joy within the bride of Christ, there is also joy with his servants. But why?

It's because, as Christ's servants, the angels are also participating with the church in the gathering of lost sinners. Here we can think of their supporting role in the book of Acts. Angels appear in the very first chapter to comfort and encourage the apostles after the ascent of our Saviour. In chapter 5, an angel appears to release the apostles from prison so that the intense growth of the church could continue unabated. He encouraged the apostles to continue preaching to that end. In chapter 8, an angel goes to Philip and sends him down the desert road to Gaza where he providentially meets the Ethiopian eunuch – thus the gospel begins its journey into Africa! In chapter 12, Peter is released from prison again by an angel. Then, in chapter 27, an angel appears to Paul and assures him that he will provide a witness before Caesar.

What about today?

Do the angels continue to form an integral part of the mission of the church? Though their presence may not be visible to the same degree, we have no reason to believe that the angels have withdrawn themselves from the church-gathering work of Christ in this present day. They serve Jesus Christ and they have not stopped doing so. In fact, the so-called Olivet discourse shows that they will have a role in the last days of this earth: "And then He will send his angels, and gather together his elect from the four winds, from the furthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven" (Mark 13:27). In their facilitating and guiding the missionary task of the church today, they are preparing for the great last day of our Lord Jesus.

There is an interesting story that has circulated for many years in Reformed churches about a certain preacher in the Netherlands. If I am correct, the story took place in the nineteenth century. This preacher held an evangelistic service in a certain town and then made his way safely home through the dark streets. A number of years later, a man came to him and told him that he'd become a Christian because of the preacher's ministry. He asked if he remembered that dark evening so many years ago. He did. He then asked who the other two men were who had been walking with him. He and a friend were lying in wait to kill the preacher (who had irked them with his message and presence), but the other two had scared them away. The preacher replied that he had been all alone that evening. Suddenly, he realized that he had not been alone after all!³

Whether or not that story is totally accurate, we can be sure that the scriptural teaching on angels means that missionaries are never alone. Certainly, we have the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and guides us with the Word. But we also have the angelic host who protect us. In so doing, they serve the Lord Jesus as He gathers his church through us. They not only protect, but in ways unknown, they also engage the enemy in offensive battle. While we do not want to speculate à la Frank Peretti, we do know that the angels are fighting the spiritual war in the spiritual realm – and their victory is assured.

The scriptural teaching on angels gives insight and strength, not only to the missionary (and those who support him), but also to the mission congregation. The young believers can know that

their struggles are the concern of the Lord Jesus and that He will support them with His angels. But the mission congregation can also find strength in this teaching when they gather for worship. Sometimes, especially at the beginning, mission congregations can be small. Such a congregation does not worship alone! The Lord Jesus is there with them (according to his promise in Matthew 18:20), but we also learn from such passages as Hebrews 12:22 that his holy angels are present too. In his *Institutes* (3.20.23), Calvin writes: "God willed to appoint the angels to care for our salvation. Consequently, they attend sacred assemblies, and the church is for them a theater in which they marvel at the varied and manifold wisdom of God [Eph 3:10]."⁴ An acute awareness of this fact can be an immense support for young believers who often feel the isolation and loneliness which true faith in Jesus Christ can bring.

The bottom line is that angelology (the doctrine concerning angels) is a matter of comfort for all of us, but especially when it comes to our missionary task. When faced with our spiritual struggles (not against flesh and blood), we can recall the experience of Elisha and his servant in 2 Kings 6:16-17. They were surrounded by a heavenly army of angels, prepared to fight the Lord's battle. Angels continue to do battle today; they continue to serve our Lord Jesus. A heavenly host is warring together with us. We know that the power of God is on their side and ours and thus we can have both courage and optimism in our work of proclaiming the gospel to lost sinners.

We can be sure that the scriptural teaching on angels means that missionaries are never alone.

In different ways, Jesus Christ continues to gather his church: He sends his Spirit. He sends men. He also sends angels. Thus, the glory belongs not to the angels, nor to us, but to our faithful Saviour, the Shepherd who gathers his sheep!

¹ In this assessment, I differ with Johan D. Tangelder, "Angels in Reformed Spirituality" in *Reformed Perspective* 21.11 (Sept. 2002), pp.22-23. I believe the Re-



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formed confessions give appropriate emphasis to the angels and this is proportionately represented in Reformed dogmatics texts.

² "Angels and their Role in Pastoral Care," by Dr. J. DeJong, in *Koinonia* 19.1 (Spring 2002), p.11.

³ I do not recall the written source of this story, though I do remember a version told by a professor while I was a student at the Theological College. I cannot verify its authenticity.

⁴ The quote is from the Battles edition. In his commentary on Ephesians 3:10, Calvin seems to contradict these words. However, two points are in order: First, the text reference to Ephesians 3:10 does not originate with Calvin – he may be combining Ephesians 3:10 with Hebrews 12:22. Second, in his commentary, Calvin homes in on the erroneous teaching that the angels need to be in the worship services to hear the Word of God and so to grow spiritually.



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A Celebration of First Fruits

By Sarah Vandergugten

"Don't worry," one of the greeters reassured the woman who looked with puzzled dismay at the liturgy sheet handed to her. "The inside is in English!" The woman was not alone. Many who attended the special evening worship service on September 15, 2002, quizzically studied the front cover of the order of worship. For most it was the first time they had seen John 3:16 in Chinese. Yes, Chinese in a Canadian Reformed worship service!

The Langley church building was rapidly filling to capacity. Members of both Cloverdale and Langley were eager to witness the special events that would take place this evening. Two members of the Chinese Christian Fellowship would profess their faith and receive the sign and seal of baptism. One small boy would also be baptized. At 7:15, Pastor Frank Dong escorted Joey Zhan, Sue Xiu and James Tan (Sue's son) to the front pew. Appropriately, the joyous strains of Psalm 87 cascaded from the organ loft.

In a service where God's electing hand was clearly evident, Pastor Dong had chosen "The Church's One Foundation" as the opening hymn.

Elect from every nation,
Yet one or all the earth,
Her charter of salvation,
One Lord, one faith, one birth.

The service began. It was not long before Joey Zhan and Sue Xiu rose to answer the questions of the adult baptism form with a quiet, confident "I do." Sue answered the questions for infant baptism in similar fashion. They moved forward and each adult knelt in turn to receive the sign and seal on their foreheads. James, on the other hand, stood tiptoe on the kneeling bench, determined to inspect the water in the baptismal font. It was a beautiful moment. "Give thanks to God rejoicing, because the Lord is good" (Psalm 107:1).

The hour of temptation

Pastor Dong began his sermon by asking what happens now that this very special event has occurred. Is it time to relax and take it easy in your spiritual

神愛世人，甚至將他的
獨生子賜給[他們]，叫一切信他的，
不至灭亡，反得永生。
(約翰福音第三章第十六節)

張子楨 (Joey) 徐曉榴 (Sue)
譚斐 (James Tan)

Front of the liturgy sheet: John 3:16
in Chinese

life? No, not for a moment, because the Devil is never at rest. But we have our hope in Jesus Christ who suffered in much greater fashion than we can imagine and resisted the Devil. He understands the pull of human desires and the fierceness of the adversary's attack. From here, Pastor Dong developed his theme around Matthew 4, where we learn how Jesus was tempted by the Devil, how he resisted, and how he was victorious.

The Devil is no dummy! He waits for the opportune moment to tempt Jesus. What better time than after forty days without food? What better time to show an easier way to be Messiah than at the moment when Jesus was beginning the difficult road that led to the cross. Why wait to become ruler of all, if the goal can be accomplished here and now by one small act of worshipping the tempter? Similarly the Devil will tempt us in moments of weakness. He will suggest that we have the right to satisfy our desires. He will whisper that we can rest easy, because we know we have all the promises. He'll try to convince us that we can go after whatever we want, and not worry how we get there.

It is written. . .

Thankfully, Jesus resisted all three temptations with one powerful authority, the word of God. For each temptation there is one answer: "It is written. . ." The unchanging eternal word of God proves to be the weapon the Devil cannot withstand. Jesus does not turn stones to bread, for "Man does not

live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." He does not leap off the temple mount because it is wrong to put "the Lord your God to the test." He does not bow down to Satan because it is right to "worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." Jesus does not give way to the temptation of thinking that there is an easier way to do God's will. Neither does he trifle with temptation but firmly resists with "It is written. . ."

The Devil left Jesus, defeated by the Saviour's perfect purity. It was an inglorious retreat. Yet he retains the power to place temptations in our way, and invite us to turn from loving God. Our victory is sure if we remain steadfast. Christ has conquered the Devil for us, and we are Christ's and He is ours.

The tale of the skylark

The message ended with a memorable story to firmly resist all temptation. Pastor Dong related the legend of the skylark, the happiest of all birds. Skylarks are meant to soar high in the heavens. But there was a little skylark who encountered an old man who collected skylark feathers. This man would trade a worm for feathers. The young skylark was hungry, and only too ready to give up two feathers. After all, he had lots more. This went on, day by day. An older skylark warned the young one, but he paid no heed. Then the time came for the skylarks to migrate, and the little skylark could manage only a weak flutter. He could no longer soar where skylarks are meant to soar. He had traded his wings for worms. Pastor Dong noted there are only two options when confronted with temptation: give in or resist. He reiterated, "Don't trade your wings for worms!"

With that message firmly imprinted in our hearts and minds, we sang a final hymn of thanksgiving and moved to the fellowship hall to continue the celebration of this special event in the history of the Canadian Reformed Churches. May our faithful covenant LORD continue to bless the efforts of our Urban Mission Project among the Chinese in the Greater Vancouver Area. 

The First Psalters in the Dutch Reformed Churches

By R. Faber

1. Introduction

This article is the third in a series about the principles and practices of singing psalms and hymns in the public worship of Reformed churches. The series started with the contributions of the major reformers to the development of psalters in the sixteenth century.¹ While there are different emphases in the writings of Luther, Zwingli, Bucer and Calvin on the subject, there are also several common, biblical principles which they applied in the selection of material and music for the earliest psalters. The second article treated the significant role of John Calvin, and of the Genevan Psalter in particular.² Calvin's place in the history of Reformed psalter is important especially for the Canadian Reformed Churches, as their psalter is a direct descendant of the book of praise employed in the Genevan churches in the sixteenth century.

It is the purpose of the present article to describe the psalters used in the Dutch Reformed churches from the middle of the sixteenth century until the synod of Dort in 1618. We shall relate the characteristics of a few, commonly used psalters, and the decisions of the broader assemblies pertaining to the use of the psalter in the public worship services. In so doing we hope to illustrate the origins of some of the practices that are still followed today.

2. The Souterliedekens

The first significant Dutch-language psalter was published in 1540, and it bore the title *Souterliedekens*, or "Psalter-songs." While the author remained anonymous, it is believed that a Dutch nobleman by the name of Willem van Zuylen van Nyevelt provided the versification. It contained the

150 Psalms of David and fifteen canticles, including the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10), the Prayer of Habakkuk (Hab 3:1-19), and the Song of Moses (Deut 32:1-43). It was written in contemporary Dutch, and not Latin, so that for the first time the people of the lowlands were able to hear, understand, and sing the Psalms of David in their native tongue. The melodies were drawn from familiar folksongs, including children's songs, hunting tunes and drinking songs of Germanic and French origin. Thus the psalms could be sung in private and in public without drawing the attention of the Romanist inquisitors, whose ears were sensitive to songs of religious and political dissent.

The Souterliedekens showed the relevance of the Psalms to daily life.

The prologue of the psalter states that the purpose of its publication is to provide a Christian alternative to the bawdy, indecent songs that were popular at the time. The reader is told that wherever he may be, whether at work in the field, traveling, in God-fearing company, or at table, he may magnify the name of the Lord in song. Students of the *Souterliedekens* have debated whether the psalter is of Roman Catholic or Protestant origin. Especially the inclusion of "Ave Maria" may lead one to think that the author was Romanist. On careful inspection, however, the evidence points to a Protestant author who was wary of the anti-Protestant government over the lowlands, and who did not wish the psalter to appear revolutionary. The statement in the prologue that the words of the biblical text are rendered

as closely as is possible suggests reformed authorship, as fidelity to Scripture was a claim common to the leaders of the Reformed faith. There are other indications in the text and in some of the melodies that suggest broadly reformed influences.

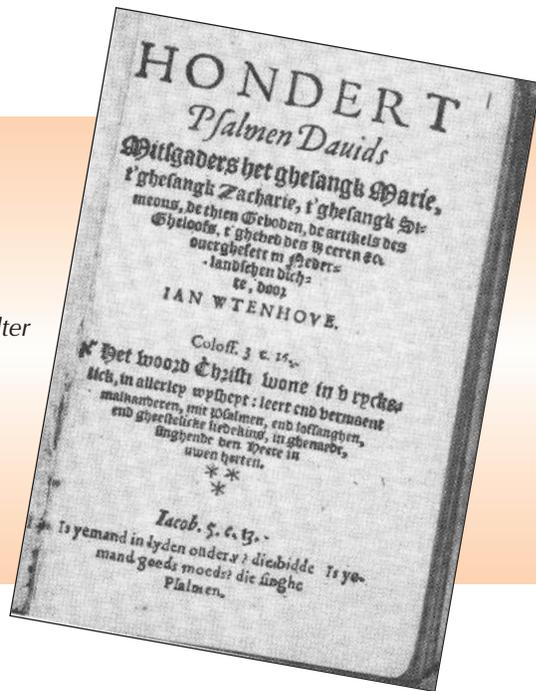
The *Souterliedekens* were very popular throughout the lowlands, enjoying some thirty reprints. Even when the Dutch Reformed churches were being formed in the late 1560s and another edition was adopted officially, the *Souterliedekens* continued to be sung. Evidently they appealed to a broad spectrum of people, and filled a gap in the religious life of the Dutch. Not intended for use at public gatherings, the *Souterliedekens* functioned in the context of personal and familial devotions.

Whereas the *Souterliedekens* have made no direct lasting imprint upon the psalm-singing of Reformed churches of Dutch background, they occupy an important place in their history. They represent an independent psalmody of distinctly Dutch origin, one which was not affected much by the developments in other countries. Moreover, they were of great use to the people of the Netherlands at a critical time in the gestation of the Reformed churches there. They provided a source of comfort in times of persecution, and instilled in the Dutch an appreciation of the relevance of the psalms for every circumstance of life.

3. The Dutch Psalter of Jan Utenhove

Political and religious suppression of Reformed believers in the lowlands towards the end of the 1540s resulted in the establishment of Dutch-speaking Reformed congregations first beyond the lowlands, especially in Germany and England. During the reign of young Edward VI, England was a haven for

Title page of a psalter
composed by
Jan Utenhove



Reformed believers driven from their native lands. The Dutch-speaking Strangers Churches, as the English called them, were served by several leaders, including John à Lasco, Marten Micronius, and Jan Utenhove. Utenhove was a well-educated elder who published a Dutch translation of a confession, church order, and psalter for the congregations in and around London. Thanks to his contacts with such reformers as Martin Bucer, Utenhove was able to infuse Reformed principles in the psalter.

For the corporate worship of the Strangers Churches the *Souterliedekens* were deemed inadequate. Apparently their worldly melodies were not sufficiently majestic and dignified. Utenhove also wished to replace the everyday language of the *Souterliedekens* with a literary, poetic rendering. Moreover, the London leaders wished to produce a psalter that was explicitly reformed. Thus the influence of Martin Bucer's commentaries on the text of the Old Testament Psalms can be seen in Utenhove's translation. The psalter also reveals traces of Calvinist interpretation of Scripture. The Genevan reformer's principle that the text of songs sung during worship services should be from the Bible affected Utenhove, who permitted only a few hymns. For the melodies and metrical patterns he relied upon Lutheran songbooks, but with

each new edition incorporated more Genevan tunes.

The first Dutch psalter for the London churches appeared in 1551. It was a small collection of ten psalms and two hymns, entitled *Eenighe Psalmen* ("a Few Psalms"). These were chosen carefully to promote the liturgy of the Reformed worship services of the refugee churches. Besides versifications of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed, which had their proper place in the Sunday services, the booklet included the following Psalms: 1, 2, 3, 51, 103, 120, 124, 125, 127, 130. At first glance this selection appears random, but further examination reveals that each psalm contributed to the liturgy. Psalm One functioned in the believers' response to the reading of the Law, while Psalm Fifty-one was sung as a public confession of sin by the congregation.

Corporate singing is an integral part of the worship service.

When we recall that the refugee churches consisted of mainland Europeans living in exile from regions where the Reformed faith was being persecuted, we appreciate the inclusion of three psalms which express petitions in time of oppression (Ps 2, 3, 120), as well as comfort in distress

(Ps 125) and thanks for deliverance (Ps 124). Psalm 127 was sung at marriage ceremonies (commonly appended to the worship service), while Psalm 130 was sung at funerals. Psalm 103, a song of general praise to the covenant God, completed the singing repertoire of the liturgy. Though modest, this selection reflects the conviction that corporate singing is an integral part of the worship service.

The close involvement of the congregation in the liturgy is conveyed also by the summaries, called *argummenta*, which preceded each psalm. These summaries instructed believers in the content, context, and meaning of each psalm. They helped believers to sing with a greater understanding of the circumstances in which the poem was penned. Moreover, the summary often applied the psalm to the ministry or passion of the Lord Jesus Christ, thus illustrating the place of the psalm in the history of redemption and revelation. The summary especially applied the psalm to the new testament church, so that believers could see the relevance of it to their own circumstances. The following summary of Psalm 83 is illustrative: "David desires the assistance of God against the surrounding uncircumcised nations, which constantly sought to destroy Jerusalem and the congregations of God; this psalm is also a prayer of Christians, against all tyrants and the gates of Hell, which seek to overpower the church of Christ." In the twenty-first century, when some church-goers may question the value of singing the Psalms of David, Reformed churches might consider restoring such instructive summaries.

Yet another indication that the psalter used by the Dutch Reformed churches in England was central to the liturgy is the inclusion of the song of prayer before the sermon, first printed in the 1556 edition, which had been expanded to twenty-five psalms. This hymn was not based directly upon a passage of Scripture, but upon the Reformed understanding of the proclamation of the gospel, which requires the illumination of the Holy Spirit. In singing this petition, the believers ask God to open the mouth of the preacher, the ears of the hearers, and the hearts of all to receive His Word. The hymn, composed by Utenhove, became a hallmark of the Reformed churches, and was included in

numerous later editions, until well into the nineteenth century.

We should not underestimate the importance of Utenhove's contribution to the development of the psalters of the Dutch Reformed churches. For his translation was employed not only in the refugee churches in and around London during the 1550s, but also in Emden, Frankfurt, and other places to which the congregations moved when Mary Tudor banned the Strangers Churches in 1553. Thus the psalter was disseminated in the Netherlands, Germany and France, and continued to be used in the worship services, so that several of its features were assumed in the practices of the Dutch Reformed churches on the mainland. Utenhove's translation contributed to the development of the syllabic style of versification, according to which each syllable receives a single note. The result was an emphasis upon simplicity and clarity; the unison of the congregation was expressed also by the single melody and non-antiphonal arrangements. These characteristics were destined to mark the Dutch Reformed psalmodies for generations to come.

Of greater importance, perhaps, is the fact that the integral role of the psalter in the liturgy of the London churches was adopted by the churches in the lowlands. Indeed, it was Utenhove's edition which first combined the psalms and hymns with public prayers, catechism, forms for the sacraments and church order. In this way the psalter became a required book for every believer attending the Sunday worship services. During those services corporate psalm-singing followed the law, preceded the proclamation of the gospel, and attended the administration of baptism and the participation in the Lord's Supper. Also in the execution of church discipline, psalm-singing played a role, as the congregation would humble itself in song and prayer. In this way the early Dutch Reformed churches made psalm-singing a key feature of the liturgy.

For several reasons, however, Utenhove's edition declined in use. While it avoided dialects and vulgar phrases, the versification used a literary style that was too high for popular liking. Church leaders thought that a version using simpler language was more desirable. In 1565 a different translation of thirty-seven psalms, using the melodies of the Genevan psalter, was offered to the

public by Lucas de Heere. Furthermore, the Genevan Psalter itself was being spread throughout Europe. Although the definitive, complete edition of Utenhove's versification appeared in 1566, Utenhove, who was its greatest proponent, passed away in the same year.

4. Petrus Datheen and the *Psalmen Davids*

Petrus Datheen lived in London during the 1550s, and was a member of the Strangers Churches there. Following the accession of Mary Tudor he moved to the mainland, and settled in Frankfurt in 1555, where he served as pastor; thereafter he moved to Heidelberg, and later the Netherlands, where he served the growing churches in various ways. In 1566 he published the first edition of *De Psalmen Davids* ("The Psalms of David"), a Dutch translation of the text of the Genevan Psalter (1562). The immediate success of this edition is shown by the fact that it was reprinted five times in the first year.

Datheen's edition reflects the influence of Calvinism in the lowlands.

There are several reasons why Datheen felt compelled to offer a new psalter. Apparently he was dissatisfied with Utenhove's versification on the grounds that it was too literary and highly poetic. Datheen wished for a rendering of the psalms that was

accessible to the common, uneducated person. Therefore he did not seek to convey the poetic qualities of the Hebrew or French text; rather, he aimed for a simple translation using common words. Evidently Datheen succeeded, for critics of later generations charged the text with being more suited to the yard of the farm than the yard of the church!

Another reason Datheen translated the Genevan Psalter was to provide the churches with a psalter that could be used during the worship services secretly held during the time of persecution in the 1560s. The psalms would provide a vehicle for expressing the prayers, lamentations, and praise of the churches "under the cross." The preface to Datheen's translation states that the song-book, with its biblical text, provides "words whereby the heart would be raised heaven-ward, and be strengthened in faith, righteousness and patience." With all the members of the catholic church, which includes Jonah, the friends of Daniel, and David in midst of trouble, Christians may employ the psalms in time of difficulty. Like the Lord Jesus himself, from whose mouth the Psalms were cited frequently and especially towards the end of his life on earth, the believer of the second dispensation may use the psalms in times of greatest hardship.

A third, more ambitious purpose for Datheen's edition was to promote the unity of the fledgling federation of Reformed churches in the lowlands. Calvinism was on the rise, and the increasing



Petrus Datheen

differences between it and Lutheranism made Utenhove's version less attractive. Datheen's edition was more unified than Utenhove's also in structure and meter; the collection represented a complete rendering of the French Genevan psalter. Even the text reflected the French (not Hebrew), including the content and number of each stanza. As a result, the accents and stresses on words sometimes conflicted with the rhythmic pattern of the French melodies, and weak syllables were accented. Judged by its own merits, then, the versification was not very good; later generations were to witness numerous attempts to improve Datheen's version. The success of the edition rested on its admired origins in the work of the Genevans Beza, Marot, and Calvin, whose introduction to the Genevan Psalter was translated by Datheen and included in his Dutch edition. Like Utenhove's edition, Datheen's included the catechism, parts of the church order, and the public prayers. As a complete, Calvinist book of common worship, then, the edition met with approval. It would remain in use until the last decades of the eighteenth century, when it was determined to provide a new, state-sanctioned psalm-book (the *Staatsberijming*).

5. Decisions of the early Dutch Reformed Churches

As the Reformed faith was practiced more openly in the last years of the 1560s, the churches addressed the role of psalm-singing in the worship services. The first major gathering was the Convent of Wesel (1568), which resulted in a number of decisions. Article 31 concerned the singing of psalms and hymns. Though provisional in nature, the determination of synod was that "in ecclesiastical singing the psalms as versified by Petrus Datheen will be retained throughout all the churches in the lowlands, lest due to the variety of versions anything should be introduced that may be less suitable and less edifying." Implicitly rejected in this decision was the versification of Utenhove. While some historians have stressed the role of Datheen himself – he was chair of the convent and the first signatory – the decision was no doubt that of the body as a whole. The convent decided also how the singing would be incorporated into the liturgy: by means of placards or boards the

psalms would be announced, while it was left to the freedom of the churches whether singing would be in series, from Psalm 1-150, or according to the choice of the leader. Psalms were to be sung also before the worship services, to acquaint the members with them, and there is some evidence that "precentors" (lead singers) instructed the congregations in the melodies and texts.

The Synod of Dordt held in 1574 had to respond to the question whether it would be beneficial to introduce more hymns to the psalm-book. Article 43 records the decisions that until such time as the churches decided upon a definitive edition, only the psalms as put to verse by Datheen would be sung. Apparently in certain regions of the lowlands psalms and spiritual songs other than the ones rendered by Datheen were popular. Especially in some rural regions the farming families were partial to Lutheran songs, while in other areas the edition of Utenhove remained in use. Synod decided that for the sake of the unity of the churches a single psalm book should be used, and that individual consistories should not add hymns arbitrarily. The Synod of Middleburg in 1581 came back to this topic, and decided to not allow the singing of hymns which are not to be found in Scripture. Article 51 reads: "in the churches only the Psalms of David will be sung, while the hymns not found in Scripture will be omitted." Exception was made for congregations in certain rural parts of the country where German spiritual songs were in vogue; Synod did not wish the matter to become a scandal.

As was noted above, Datheen's versification was not without shortcomings and it met with various detractors. One notable attempt to displace his translation was by Philips van Marnix van St. Aldegonde, who translated directly from the Hebrew text of Psalms. The edition which appeared in 1580 employed the melodies of the Genevan psalter, in part because these were known throughout the lowlands at this time. It included the 150 psalms, as well as some hymns, such as the Ten Commandments, the Articles of Faith, and the Song of Simeon. Marnix aimed for a more singable translation, one that accounted for the relation between words and tone. By printing Calvin's foreword at the front of his

edition, Marnix competed with Datheen for respectability. Considerable effort was made to introduce this edition to the churches. However, the attempt was unsuccessful, for various reasons. These include church-political forces, and the fact that this versification did not appeal to all for literary and aesthetic reasons.

The Synod of Utrecht, held in 1612, permitted the publication of a psalter containing forty-eight hymns (for festive occasions, etc.), but this proposal was not widely implemented. The Great Synod of Dort (1618) was approached by the regional synods of three provinces to effect some unanimity concerning the singing of psalms and hymns, and had to make a more exact decision than previous assemblies. It upheld the criterion of Synod Middleburg (1581) that hymns of which the text was found in Scripture were acceptable, and permitted the inclusion the Song of Mary, the Lord's Prayer, and four other hymns, in the book of praise. It was left to the freedom of the churches to use Utenhove's prayer-song for the preaching of the gospel. It is interesting to note that practices in the churches reveal that the decision to include only hymns with biblical texts was not strictly applied, for – to give but one example – the "Evening prayer," a Latin hymn ascribed to Ambrose, appears in later editions.

Thus it transpired that the versification of Datheen became the official psalter of the Dutch Reformed Churches. It would remain so until well into the eighteenth century, when the criticisms of Datheen's version became stronger and greater in number. But it was not until 1773 that the States General determined to commission a new psalm-book. However, we shall leave that chapter in the history of the Reformed psalters for another time, as it deserves its own treatment.

¹"The Reformers on Psalms and Hymns in Public Worship," *Clarion* 50.6 (2001), 137-140; 50.7 (2001), 159-161.

²"John Calvin on Psalms and Hymns in Public Worship," *Clarion* 51.16 (2002), 386-389; 51.17 (2002), 405-407.



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Concerning Music in our Churches

By Francis Ubertelli

A lot of young people, as well as those young at heart, increasingly entertain the possibility of singing more brisk and lively music in the worship service than what can sometimes be perceived as the heavy and daunting traditional hymnology of the psalm book of our churches.

In the community of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have the daily opportunity to hear about music and also about the way music is seen by many, especially since the Song Book Committees of both Canadian/American Reformed Churches and United Reformed Churches in North America are now meeting. On the one hand, music is funny, light, and flighty. On the other hand, music is serious, dangerous, stupendous, or even forbidden.

On the one hand, music is funny, light, and flighty.

Of course, in a popular culture, people do not necessarily think in terms of those simplistic and perhaps too harshly condensed and stereotyped descriptions.

Emmanuel Kant

Be that as it may, we can also read the signatures of the human condition in a musical experience because the faculty through which we receive the impression of the beautiful is not the feeling in itself (emotion) but the imagination (mental imagery), that is, the active state of pure contemplation – as Emmanuel Kant would have said.

Because Kant's views were not founded on biblical principles per se, this assertion could easily constitute one of many postmodernist points of view. Because Kant is the only philosopher to discuss aesthetics in such a manner, we would like to outline his

ideas concerning the perception of the beautiful. By setting up an *a priori* "aspect" about the impression of the beautiful, Kant discovered that this aspect went beyond an empirical universality. The impression of the beautiful is justified on the finality of its representation (which is deduced from understanding the perception in its absolute context) in connection with our faculty of knowledge as it is. This is how we are able to appreciate a piece of music. It is the freedom of the imagination and the understanding that constitute the foundation of the pleasure taken from the impression of the beautiful.

Kant maintains that this aesthetic relationship is the same for all, and thus can be universally communicated. Hence the claim a "judgement of taste" founded on a universal validity.

But where Kant fails, in terms of Christian ethics, is when he asserts that taste in itself is devoid of concept. This thought leads "art" towards autonomy because the aesthetic of the perfection, taken from the ideal of the beauty, will not find its identity within the sensory intuition of pleasure. Henceforth beauty is seen as a finality in the service of our own pleasure. So, it is our fantasies or our own taste that will dictate how art should be formed – this cannot be.

This article will endeavour to wrestle with issues surrounding music itself. We disagree with Kant's belief that music will conquer its autonomy.

What we think about music might not be congruous with the postmodernist avant-garde of our secular times, especially when we see the truth being wiped out in favour of a multi-level syncretism. We believe that music suffered the disastrous consequences of the fall and therefore must be studied and criticized in order to discern the truth. It is also within the framework of a potential congregational symbiosis that this criticism is done.

Often when attempting to discern what may constitute a godly music for our Lord's service, we mix up issues of text and music so that the poetry of the song may be seen to justify the choice of music we use. Music is rather organized into many parameters, among them, pitch (the notes), rhythm, and timbre (orchestration, or the instruments used). We would like to focus on one particular aspect of the rhythmic parameter: syncopation. We conclude that although syncopation may be used in a proper manner, the over-exploitation of syncopation is faulty.

The human understanding cannot claim its autonomy over the Lord.

Further, in this article we will be dealing with music of western origin, that is, the music that sprang from a Christian society. We do not propose to broach issues surrounding ethnomusicology as this is beyond the scope of this essay.

Syncopation

Syncopation displaces the normal recurrence of a strong beat by the irregular placement of strong and weak beats so that *the continuum is broken off*. The regular system of strong and weak accents in music example a (in sidebar) is organized in a type of duple meter. In this type of duple meter, the first note in each of the paired eighth notes is strong, while the second note of each pair is weak. In music example b, each weak beat of one eighth-note pair has been tied to the strong beat of the next eighth note pair. The resulting rhythmic pattern alternates between eighth notes and quarter notes. Because of the singular position of the

quarter note in example b, the quarter note is now accented. What was a weak beat in music example a (except for the final weak beat) has been forced in music example b to become strong, and the original strong beat is forced to become weak.

Syncopation has been used in varying degrees throughout known musical history. An especially gripping example of a culture's fascination for syncopation is found in the *Ars subtilior* movement of fourteenth century in which those who practised music were primarily concerned with expressing extremely complex rhythmic inter-relationships. Today's popular music also makes use of syncopation to a high degree; it is the way in which this genre of music treats this rhythmic construct, however, that creates a problem.

Popular music has the peculiar tendency to make up for the unexpected weakness of the first note of the paired eighth notes by hammering the weakened strong beat by some means or another. The systematic "hammering" of the strong beat will generate an interest only towards the beat itself to such a level that the absolute pitch parameter (harmony, melody, etc.) will have the function of a decoration, an embellishment, instead of a normal guideline for the pitch continuum. In other words, the roles of the pitch and rhythmic parameters are reversed in popular music. Throughout the history of western music, music has used pitch as its primary vehicle for expression, and although rhythm was an important factor in its organization, it has been

relegated to a secondary status. One look at the emphasis placed on the pitch parameter in music theory treatises from the ancient Greeks to the present will be sufficient to convince the skeptic that although rhythm is fairly important, the preoccupation with pitch parameter organization is greater than that of the preoccupations with rhythmic organization.

The importance accorded by popular music to the rhythmic parameter by way of syncopation creates a dialectic impossibility: in the same way that it is impossible to name the tri-chord C-E-G a C-major triad if it is not found in a tonal context, so it is impossible to accord to the rhythmic parameter the same importance and expressive qualities enjoyed by the organization of the pitch parameter.

Why has this faulty assertion previously been mentioned? On the one hand, because of the rhythmic parameter as we know it today, such as that found in techno music for example, the idea goes nowhere and cannot participate of the imagination that characterizes and stamps music.

On the other hand, if we were considering only the "music," characterized earlier as being an embellishment because of its emptiness, without its beat scheme, we would quickly understand that it has no substance, devoid of surprise and imagination. It would easily suffer the comparison of Plutarch's acosmism where we conceive an original uncreated disorder in which the elements of the cosmos have to be ordered, or organized, to exist.

We should expatiate upon the Christian contemporary music, saying that even if there is no drums or amplified bass, the beat scheme remains due to syncopation. This could be the thesis for another article.

To conclude on these views, in a Christian mind-set, we would say that music must be an answer to the Lord within the framework of the covenant. A music that begets itself by its own parametric constituencies is utterly faulty because it becomes idolatry through radical pantheism, therefore rebellious against the structure of Creation. It is a question of esthetical language versus a theological one. The human understanding cannot claim its autonomy over the Lord, otherwise we face ascribing ourselves to *nominalism*, the opposite view over the speculative immobility of contemplation.

Are we in front of the basis for a musical theology?

Observations on Emmanuel Kant were taken from Hans-Georg GADAMER, Vérité et Méthode, les grandes lignes d'une herméneutique philosophique. Translated in French by Étienne Sacre, Paris, Seuil, 1996, pp. 66, 67.

¹ *Media Release, Clarion Magazine, Vol. 51, No. 9, April 2002, p. 213.* It says that each committee has "a general set of guidelines and principles" and the task of hymn selection.



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a) Regular Placement of Rhythmic Accents

b) Irregular Placement of Rhythmic Accents: Syncopation

S = Strong Beat
W = Weak Beat

St. Georges de Beauce – Owen Sound

A growing relationship

By H. Bosscher, P.G. Feenstra, J. Scheper

Several years ago the congregation of Owen Sound received a request from the ERQ church in St. Georges de Beauce to support the calling of a second minister who would help develop Reformed church life within their congregation. Rev. Paulin Bédard was called by the congregation and has been supported by the church in Owen Sound together with many other churches and individuals. The main focus of Rev. Bédard's work has been a teaching ministry (training elders, catechism classes, translating Reformed material, etc.). Over the years many good and positive developments have taken place: annual home visits have been introduced, the young people of the church are receiving instruction in Reformed doctrine, articles and books have been translated into the French language. New areas where we can help and encourage continue to be explored.

Even though the distance is great (approximately 1100 kilometres), our congregations have grown closer together. Members of the Owen Sound congregation have visited St. Georges and members of their congregation have visited in Owen Sound. The contact is both stimulating and encouraging to all involved.

A recent visit

On December 20, 2002, seventeen people made their way from the Owen Sound area to the heartland of the province of Quebec. We were generously given permission to stay at the facilities of Institute Farel in Charny. Jeff and Cathy Scheper stayed until December 23 and the rest of us stayed until December 26.

Saturday

On Saturday morning, the brothers Henry Bosscher and Jeff Scheper (mem-

bers of the Owen Sound Mission Board) and Rev. Feenstra travelled to St. Georges to meet with the consistory of their church. We were eagerly and warmly received. Rev. Feenstra was given opportunity to present a meditation on "I believe: the forgiveness of sins." The meditation was translated beforehand into the French language.

Topics discussed during the meeting included: the progress and benefit of our relationship, the manner in which the Church at St. Georges ensures that all the doctrines of salvation are sufficiently taught, the possibility of radio broadcasting in the province of Quebec, the task of the elders to supervise financial giving and to motivate the congregation to share their resources with others. Encouragement was given to the elders to start teaching the adults the Heidelberg Catechism by introducing a second service.

Members of the Owen Sound congregation have visited St. Georges and members of their congregation have visited in Owen Sound.

In the afternoon we were served lunch and went for a long hike in a beautiful park in the city of St. Georges. This gave time to talk informally to some of the members of the congregation. In the evening each of our respective families were hosted by members of the congregation for dinner and shown warm French hospitality. These visits gave plenty of opportunity for interaction and discussion. Although language was at times a barrier, unity in the Reformed faith stretches beyond

such boundaries. The families we visited were delighted to have an opportunity to sit together and enjoy a meal with others who share the same faith. They spoke of the persecution and hardships that they experience not only in the community but also among their families. Many times they stand alone in a culture that is predominately Roman Catholic.

Sunday

Prior to the church service, catechism classes are held for three quarters of an hour. Rev. Feenstra had an opportunity to attend the class of senior students taught by Rev. Bédard. In this class Rev. Bédard was teaching the students the second head of doctrine of the Canons of Dort. A handout was given explaining the differences in position between the Arminians and the Reformed churches on the doctrine of atonement. Rev. Bédard concluded with speaking about the practical implications of the Reformed doctrine of atonement, including how it affects the work of mission and evangelism.

Before the worship service began all the English speaking guests were handed a translated copy of the liturgy and then of the complete sermon. Rev. Veilleux preached from Philippians 2:9-11. The sermon comforted, encouraged and exhorted the congregation to celebrate the birth of Christ in view of the whole history of salvation. Reverend Veilleux spoke of how throughout his entire ministry, Jesus taught the following rule: the one who humbles himself will be exalted. This rule Jesus applied to his own ministry. Rev. Veilleux also noted that sooner or later, every knee will bow – in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; every knee will bow before the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus we exalt at Christmas is not a baby anymore. He is not a little character in a

little drama for children. The first time Christ came, He came veiled, taking the form of a child. The next time He will come He will be without a veil, and it will be extremely clear for everyone who He really is! Everybody will bow the knee.

After the service, Rev. Feenstra was given opportunity to address the congregation on behalf of the congregation at Owen Sound (Rev. Veilleux translated as he spoke). He expressed thankfulness to the Lord for the years during which the two congregations have been able to work together in harmony and mutual growth in the Reformed faith. He said, "Our congregation prays for you frequently. Be assured that many members remember you in their personal and family prayers. It is our fervent prayer that you may continue to be a strong and faithful witness of the Reformed faith in a society of relativism, despair and hopelessness. May the Lord work mightily through his Spirit so that the eyes of many may see the riches of the gospel. May He also give us courage, patience and wisdom in presenting the gospel to others. We pray that you, young people, may make the good confession. We know that the attacks against the church will not only come from the outside but also from within. Together we must be vigilant and seek to bring everything in conformity to God's holy Word. Our love for you has grown stronger over the last years as we have come to know many of you personally and have learned more of your struggles and joys." The reception that we received was very warm and many expressed their great gratitude for the contact.

Singing

In the afternoon we were given opportunity to join the members of the congregation to sing several songs that spoke of the birth of Christ. In a local highschool, a Christmas "party" had been organized by members of the community for underprivileged and unemployed people. To enter a gymnasium packed with approximately 800 people immediately highlighted the secularization and hopelessness of many. Rev. Veilleux introduced the members of the congregation and why they had come to sing. The "regular" Christmas songs heard on the radio and elsewhere were not selected because the congregation of St. Georges wished to draw the attention of the audience to the significance of Christ's birth. Af-

ter the singing, members distributed 300 candles which had a passage of Scripture and a contact address attached to it. All the candles disappeared quickly as many were eager to receive them. The members of St. Georges pray that this opportunity will be used by the Lord to lift the scales from the eyes of those who walk in darkness so that they begin to read the Word and seek fellowship in the true communion of his people.

Again we could hear of the Lord's work in rescuing his children from the slavery of sin and the bondage of false religion.

Afterwards, the members of the congregation were invited to an "Open house" at the Bédards, once again giving opportunity for adults and children to intermingle with the visitors from Ontario. In the evening we were invited for dinner to different homes. Late in the evening we arrived back at Farel after two intense days that were packed with impressions and memories.

Tuesday evening with the congregation in Quebec City

On Tuesday evening (Christmas Eve) we worshipped with the congregation that is located in Ste. Foy. The worship service was led by Rev. B. Westerveld (who was ordained minister of this congregation approximately a year ago). After the service we were invited to join the congregation for dinner. We once again were treated to French hospitality. We remained with the congregation for the evening and enjoyed a time of fellowship, singing,

playing games and getting acquainted. Again we could hear of the Lord's work in rescuing his children from the slavery of sin and the bondage of false religion.

Conclusion

Throughout this visit, and as a result, we were all impressed by the goodness and grace of the Lord. The many things we take for granted are treasured dearly by Reformed believers in Quebec so that they also speak about their love and zeal for the Lord very freely and openly. We stand amazed at the Lord's sovereign grace and electing love, by which He, in the vastness of the province of Quebec, gathers, defends and preserves for Himself a church chosen to everlasting life.

We were reminded of the need to continue praying for and assisting these brothers and sisters. Like every other congregation, they, too, have their struggles and issues. Satan will undoubtedly try to bring division and disunity there as he does elsewhere. Yet we firmly believe the Lord will protect and guard his children. The experience also convinced us once again of the importance of having contact with churches at a local level (congregation to congregation), rather than communicating to each other through Interchurch Committees alone.

We wish to thank all those churches and individuals who have supported this project financially and through their prayers. The need is great and your support is appreciated. It is our prayer that the Lord may continue to bless the growing relationship between the congregations of St. Georges and Owen Sound so that through these efforts the Lord's Name is honoured and so that Reformed believers continue to encourage and help one another in the true service of the Lord. C



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NEWS from MERF-Canada

“Christ Loved his Enemies!” – Testifies a Palestinian Convert

At this time when emotions of hate, fear and anger are quite rampant among Muslim people, there is one message that provides people with inner peace and enduring hope. It is the message of the Gospel. This message is penetrating the lives of many today – even among desperate and hopeless Palestinian people. E.H. is a middle-aged Palestinian businessman from Ramallah in the West Bank. Here is part of his testimony:

September 11, 2001 caused much disunity and tension to our family. . . . Everyone in our community was shocked about what happened in America on that day. We heard that all the hijackers were Arabs and Muslim. At first most people met the news with disbelief. But it did not take long for everyone to realize that it was for real and begin to react to the events. . . . Most did not agree with what happened to innocent people. But some, including relatives of mine, said that perhaps the world might now sympathize more with our sufferings. Since the 1967 [Israeli/Arab] war, I have lost an uncle, three cousins and one nephew. This has also been the experience of many Palestinian families. So there is much anger. There is also bitterness and hate. There is so much suspicion and fear among all people here – Muslims and Jews. . . .

About two years ago I fell asleep while listening to the evening news on Radio Monte Carlo. I was awakened by the voices of two people talking on the radio. They talked about what they called heavenly wisdom. I had never heard this before. Then I realized that they were talking about the Christian prophet. For some reason, unknown to me at that time, I became convinced that there was something special about this. Later

on, I realized that it was God’s will for me to hear what I heard. Then I realized that Issa (Jesus) was not just a prophet. I began to learn more and it became clear to me that He was God’s way of loving me in an unlimited way. . . . I wish that all people would believe in Him. He loved His enemies. I learned that from Him. . . . This solves the problems of the Arabs and Jews. . . . There would be no killing or hate here or in America.

Meeting of MERF’s International Council (IC)

On October 15 and 16, 2002 the IC meeting of representatives from Support and Field Committees took place at the John Calvin Center in Larnaca, Cyprus. Participants heard firsthand reports of the growing ministries in some thirty fields, most of which are predominantly Muslim. The work is growing in closed countries like Iran, Tunisia, Algeria, Mauritania and Morocco. Muslim people are now able to hear the Gospel in countries as far away as Azerbaijan and Afghanistan. MERF now supports tens of faithful indigenous workers who are able to reach out to their own people, with no need for language study, cultural adjustment or hard-to-get resident permits.

MERF-Iran was represented by the team leader. With the exception of Saudi Arabia, Iran has had the most oppressive, anti-Christian regime on earth for over twenty years. Yet, this oppression has not succeeded in shrinking the vibrant Iranian church. With tears of joy MERF IC participants heard confirmation of the ongoing growth of the underground Iranian church. More encouraging still is the news that the level of persecution of the suffering church in Iran is lessening. Praise God that although lower levels of harassment continue, in the past eighteen months no believers have been tortured or murdered.

Pastor Danny Awad of the Baraka congregation in Bethlehem, Palestine presented a moving report of the suffering of the small Palestinian Christian minority. Yet, again, by God’s grace they continue to bear a vibrant testimony of Christ’s enduring kingdom of love to both Jews and Muslims.

Reports of growing communities of believers in different parts of Chad and Mali, among the Berbers of Algeria and among the tribes of northern Somalia show how the Lord has continued to use both the radio broadcasts and the indigenous workers to bring about amazing Gospel success in lands long considered spiritually barren.

One of the highlights of the meetings were the reports on the Loki Biblical Training and South Sudan Ministry Center Project and the growing ministries throughout Sudan and the surrounding countries. Pastor Yousif Matar was appointed to coordinate MERF’s growing ministries in North Sudan and the Nuba mountains. Pastor James Ninrew will coordinate ministries for South Sudan. Miss Judy Luhombo, a Kenyan with valuable experience in missions administration in East Africa, comes to MERF supported by a church in Wales. She is preparing to join the Loki team as administrator, librarian and coordinator of women’s training.

The desperate need for training and equipping many more pastors, elders and evangelists in the Sudan to meet the needs of the growing church there led to the plan to build the Loki centre in North Kenya on the border with South Sudan. In the providence of God the project turns out to be of much benefit for churches in the whole region of East Africa, including the growing church in southwest Ethiopia. The ideal location of Loki makes the centre accessible also to ministry needs in Kenya, Uganda, Eritrea and Somalia.

The entire five-building project is expected to be ready for use soon. Already the solar-powered broadcasting/administration building is up and running and the broadcasting teams have moved to the centre and begun to produce Gospel messages in the Dink and Nuer languages.

Rev. V. Atallah's visit to Canada

During the month of November, Rev. V. Atallah visited Canada and held speeches in Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia. It had been eight years ago that Rev. Atallah visited Canada and it was good to have him in our midst again and so gain a better understanding of the work being done by MERF as well as the religion of Islam. We thank the Lord who has protected Rev. Atallah on his travels in this vast country.

It was very exciting to hear how the church of the Lord is growing in the Middle East. In the eyes of the world the numbers may not be large or significant. But the seed is being sown and at his time the Lord calls each one of his own to Himself in this hostile Muslim world. To the converts it makes a big

difference to be Reformed. Being Reformed helps them to endure suffering; believing in the sovereignty of God means you know that God is in control in contrast with the fatalism of Islam.

Thank you!

As MERF-Canada we are deeply appreciative of your financial contributions which continue to come in so faithfully. Please keep supporting this work of the Lord not only with your donations, but above all with your prayers. We will end this newsletter by quoting from the "Update from Victor and Lisa Atallah" October 2002.

At this time when the world seems to be speedily moving to an era of fear, hatred, violence and wars, mostly focused on what seems to be an unending conflict with Muslim zealots, it is time for us all to stop and think God's thoughts after Him. What would the Lord have us do better than take the Gospel, His "power unto salvation" to these millions who desperately need to be liberated from the evil grip of man's religions? What more joy can we experience than seeing the love of our self-giving God

conquer the self-seeking hate of the kingdom of darkness expressed in religious fanaticism?

Commitment to MERF's vision, indigenous strategy and cost-effectiveness has governed our and MERF's missionary endeavours over the years. God is on the throne. He is carrying out His good purposes. His grace is at work transforming the lives of many Muslim people. Let us continue to pray for them and show them that the Kingdom of King Jesus is about God offering Himself freely in love and mercy. They need to know that they too can be received and accepted as valued citizens of Christ's blessed Kingdom of the redeemed from "all families of the earth."

If you would like to make a personal donation, please make your cheque payable to MERF-Canada and send it to:

MERF-Canada

1225 Dundas Street, RR 1,
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

Yours in his service,
Rev. J. Mulder, chairman
Mrs. J. Van Dam, secretary 

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address. They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length. Please include address and phone number.

Dear Editor:

Broader assemblies of the Canadian Reformed Churches have the custom to issue a Press Release at the close of the meeting. I have not seen this done by other church communities. In fact some men from other federations have referred to this practice as a Canadian Reformed distinctive, although one they like. Personally, I also like to read these press releases regularly published by *Clarion*. They provide the reader with an idea what lives in the churches of the federation. They show that the churches continue to assist each other, and confirm that things are done decently and in good order. Sometimes, however, they are cause for a question or eyebrow to be raised, as was the case with the Press Release Classis Manitoba December 9, 2002 (*Clarion* Vol. 52, No. 1). We could read in arti-

cle 5, Correspondence, section b. about Rev. T. VanRaalte being the "contact person" for Classis Manitoba, who will keep contact with Rev. R. Aasman, "contact person" for Classis Alberta. I am curious about this new classical position of "contact person." Is this perhaps a new Canadian Reformed equivalent to the position of stated clerk in other federations? Classis is not a meeting of individuals, but a meeting of churches who have delegated two of their men to deal with matters they could not finish in their consistories or which belong to these churches in common. Perhaps it would be better, if indeed there is a need for a Classis to be contacted by anyone other than the churches that make up that Classis, that a church be appointed for that purpose. In this way any confusion or hint of permanence will be

avoided. This is important, especially in view of our current relationships with other federations that have, like us, a great distaste for anything that looks like hierarchy.

Sincerely,
Gerard J. Nordeman

Brother Nordeman's concerns about hierarchy are laudable. However the "contact person" to whom he refers is neither something new in the prairie Classes nor anything like a stated clerk. It is a yearly appointment by Classis to carry out the specific charge of Classis, namely, to pass on the Acts of Classis to the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC, and to invite a delegate to the next Classis.

RA



Press Release of Classis Niagara – December 11, 2002 in Smithville, Ontario

Opening

On behalf of the convening Church of Grassie, br. P. Feenstra calls the meeting to order. He requests all present to sing Psalm 145 stanzas 1 and 3. Scripture reading is Psalm 145. In prayer a blessing is asked over the meeting. Br. Feenstra welcomes the delegates, the fraternal delegates of the URC, Rev. A. Bezuyen and elder C. Dykstra, the Grade 8 class of John Calvin School in Smithville and other guests.

Credentials and constitution

The credentials are found to be in proper order and Classis is declared constituted. The proposed officers take their place.

Rev. G. Wieske - chairman

Rev.J. VanVliet - clerk

Rev. D.G.J. Agema - vice-chairman

The Agenda is adopted with some additions.

Form of subscription

The vice-chairman reads the Form of Subscription for the Churches in Classis Niagara. Rev. K.A. Kok and Rev. G. Wieske give their signature to this form.

Question period ad Article 44 CO

The chairman asks the required questions (Art 44 CO). The Churches at Attercliffe and Lincoln ask for the advice in matters of discipline. Advice is given in closed session.

Letter of Classis Ontario West re Fund for Needy Churches

Classis decides to accept the proposed assessment for 2003 of \$15.00 per communicant member.

Reports

Three church visitation reports are read and received with thankfulness.

Fraternal delegates

Rev. A. Bezuyen addresses Classis on behalf of Classis Ontario of the URC. Rev. VanVliet responds.

Retirement Rev. Wieske

Classis, with the concurring advice of the deputies of Regional Synod approves the request of Rockway to grant Rev. G. Wieske honourable retirement (Art 13 CO) as of February 28, 2003. Rev. Wieske is thanked for his work in the Classis. The Church of Lincoln is delegated to represent Classis at Rev. Wieske's farewell service.

Appointments

Convening church: Lincoln

Suggested date: March 19, 2003

Suggested officers: chairman: Rev. Kok; clerk: Rev. Agema; vice-chairman: Rev. VanVliet.

Closing

After personal question period and censure ad Art 34 CO, adoption of the Acts and approval of the Press Release, the chairman requests Classis to sing Psalm 145 stanzas 2 and 5 and leads in prayer of thanksgiving. Classis is declared closed.

*For Classis,
D.G.J. Agema, vice-chairman*

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers

It has been a while since you have heard from me. I will try to write to you more often. Hopefully you will also take the time to write to me so that I know how you are doing. I am looking forward to seeing some letters with riddles or puzzles in my mailbox. If you would like to become a member of the Busy Beaver club just send me a letter. Please include your name, address, how old you are, and when it is your birthday.

Are you enjoying the weather you are having? Which kind of activities are you doing? Isn't it amazing how God shows his majesty and power by sending hot weather to some parts of the world like Australia, while at the same time He sends very cold weather to some areas of Canada, while in B.C. the spring bulbs are starting to grow? I hope that you are enjoying the weather you are having. It is wonderful to know that God is in control of this world, including the climate we live in.

Lots of love, Aunt Betty



FROM THE MAILBOX

Thank you for your e-mail Jodi Feenstra. I think you're brave to experiment when you are baking. Your description of the cookies sounded delicious. I am sure your mom appreciates the help you give her. Keep it up!

Thanks for sending the word search.

PEN PAL WANTED

Jodi Feenstra would like to have a pen pal. She is 9 years old and in grade 4. She loves to fish, play outside, read and do crafts. If you would like to write to her, please send a letter to:

RR 2, Stn Main, Dunville, Ontario N1A 2W2



Aunt Betty

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