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BAPTISM IS NOT JUST A MATTER OF HUMAN RESPONSE



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Does Infant Baptism Still Matter?

Baptism is not just a matter of human response

In some ways the title for this article should be longer and thus read: “Does the Baptism of Children Born to Believing Christian Parents Still Matter?” Why mention the longer version? To underline the fact that this is not about the baptism of all infants as such, but only about those infants who are born to believers or to Christians who are living and active members of a local faithful church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why this article?

With that clarification out of the way, you might be wondering, “Why this article anyway? What occasions it?”

There are a number of developments that have led me to ask this question. The first has to do with the rise of various organizations in which those who come from different theological traditions on this matter are coming together on a regular basis. One can refer for example to the Gospel Coalition, which has among its leaders such well-known adult Baptist only proponents as Donald Carson and John Piper, as well as any number of openly infant baptism proponents such as Ligon Duncan and Tim Keller. Then too there are the Conferences organized by Ligonier, the Banner of Truth, and others. In short, it is not unusual to see adult baptism only speakers and attendees at conferences sponsored by organizations with infant Baptist roots, and vice versa.

A second development that leads me to ask the question is the rising popularity of any number of adult Baptist only writers and scholars in Reformed circles. Here I am thinking not just of Carson and Piper, but also of Mark Dever, Tom Schreiner, Albert Mohler, and Andreas Kostenberger. I can also include such more established

figures as Charles Stanley and John MacArthur. Indeed, one can even go further back and include John Bunyan and Charles Spurgeon. The list of Baptist notables is long and deep. As well, there is ample evidence that their popularity is growing. Part of the resurgence of what has been called “the new Calvinism” owes its existence and growth of the efforts of these men.

A third development calling forth this question has to do with things that happen at the local level. By this I mean that it is not unusual to come across people who were born into homes in which infant baptism was the norm, who received the sacrament as babies, but who on becoming older departed and sought membership in a Baptist church of one type or another. It would appear that neither the fact that they had been baptized already, nor the fact that they would (in most cases) need to be baptized again, held them back.

Does it still matter?

Taking these three developments together, as well as some other factors that I have not mentioned, you can perhaps see why I am asking this question: “Does infant baptism still matter?” Of course, it is still in our confessions and practiced in our churches, but is it still seen as an important and meaningful part of our Reformed identity? Or is it so that it has slipped into the minor, optional, even indifferent category?

Now, in asking these questions it is not my intention to start a new round of sacramental wars. Indeed, I have great respect and esteem for many, if not all, of the names that I have just mentioned. I buy their books, learn from their insights, recommend their publications, and

listen to their speeches. These men have and continue to contribute much to the growth and vitality of the Christian church. They need to be read by you and me.

And yet they should *not* be read uncritically. Neither should they be read with an attitude that assumes that no differences exist between us. Baptism still matters! Whether you are someone who believes in both infant and adult baptism, like me, or someone who believes in adult baptism only, it matters!

Why? In what way does it matter?

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The issue of *Clarion* in your hands begins by asking: "Does the baptism of children born to believing Christian parents still matter?" In his editorial, Dr. James Visscher focuses on the baptism of infants who are born to believers.

Dr. Theo Lodder continues to examine the Old Testament in regards to music and instruments in worship. We also begin a three part series from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam, in which he deals with whether or not women should be ordained into ecclesiastical office. His first article looks at Deborah; is she an example for today?

Issue 4 brings to you a report of the Grand Opening of Vernon Canadian Reformed School Society's building. There are regular columns Treasures New and Old and Education Matters. You will also find three letters to the editor, two book reviews.

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Why it still matters – because God matters

A number of ways come to mind and the first is that this matters because it has to do with my *God*. It has to do with who he is and what he does. Now, that may surprise and even perplex you. Is this subject of such an importance that it has a direct bearing on our view of God?

Yes, it is. For consider this: the general Baptist view is that baptism is a human-response sacrament. In other words, the gospel command goes out “believe and be baptized.” Every person who hears the call of the gospel needs to respond to it with repentance and faith and once they do so, they may rightly request to be baptized into the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In other words, here is something that we as people and as human beings must do. We need to repent. We need to believe. We need to confess. We need to be baptized.

God elects, calls, and sets apart a people for himself, a people wrapped in covenant, a people marked by God's special sign of ownership

This is not wrong. Whenever the gospel goes out and confronts adults, it calls for this type of response.

Nevertheless, there is more to it. Much more! For at bottom baptism is not just a matter of human response, it is first and foremost a matter of God inventing, God initiating, God calling, and God covenanting. When it comes to baptism generally, and to infant baptism in particular, we need to see that this is above and before everything else a matter of God and his work.

Why it still matters – because his people matter

Added to this, it is also a matter of God and his *people*. Already before the beginning of time God decided that what he wanted was a people to call his own, a people who would love and serve him, a people who would bear his mark and emblem, a people of the promise, a people redeemed by his Son.

Once time began our God started immediately to work on the creation of that people. He made and called Adam and Eve. He watched them fall and started again with Seth and others. He became more explicit with Abraham. He rescued Israel and made it his very own liberated

possession. He sent his Son, and the calling of his people from all the nations began. God wanted a people then and he still wants a people today.

In a day and age in which me-ism and self-centeredness are all the rage, we need to be reminded that while salvation is personal, it is not individualistic. The angel reminded Joseph that our Redeemer “will save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). The church is a corporate and communal body and it matters to God.

Why it still matters – because his covenant matters

In this connection there is another question that needs to be asked, namely: “How and in what way does God gather his people together?” He does it through something else that matters, namely *covenant*. He revealed himself to Abram and established his covenant of grace with Abraham and his seed. He entered into a most amazing arrangement with Abraham, and with all of the children of Abraham, an arrangement full of mercy and grace, love and compassion, justice and holiness, communion and intimacy. He made him into the father of all believers.

To underline the reality and veracity of this, he also created a special sign and seal. God ordained circumcision (Gen 17:9-14). He demanded that all the males born or bought in Abraham’s household were to be set apart through circumcision and thus identified as his. He claimed them all. Special mention is made of how he claimed Abraham and Sarah’s son Isaac and of how his covenant was “an everlasting covenant” (Gen 17:19).

Hence the OT teaches us that God elects, calls, and sets apart a people for himself, a people wrapped in covenant, a people marked by circumcision, or, if you will, by God’s special sign of ownership.

Does all of this turn into a different story in the NT? Some would have us believe that there the rules drastically change, but did they? It is true that in time God replaced circumcision (a blood ceremony) with baptism (a bloodless ceremony), but the essential meaning does not change. Circumcision and baptism both point to the removal of sin and the renewal of the heart (Col 2:11-13).

Why it still matters – because all of God's people matter

But then if God creates a relationship called covenant with and for his people and gives it a sign called circumcision or baptism, he also uses this sign to lay claim to a

whole people. In other words, all of his children matter. He is not just claiming a certain segment. He is not limiting himself to a certain group. No, our God claims people of all ages. When Moses gave his farewell address to the people of Israel, it is said that he “spoke to all Israel” (Deut 1:1; 31:1). He calls and claims them all.

He even claims the very young. Circumcision has to be administered to eight-day-old boys. And listen to what God says if this is not done: “Any uncircumcised male who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Gen 17:14). Any adult who is not circumcised in Abraham’s tent or later in Israel, as well as any uncircumcised child, is a covenant breaker. He does not belong to God’s people.

Rather harsh, we would say. In reality, it underlines the fact that God’s covenant is not some minor, indifferent, optional relationship and that circumcision is not some nasty, painful, and optional ritual either. God’s covenant needs to be taken seriously.

And the same applies today. We believe that “baptism has replaced circumcision” (Form for the Baptism of Infants, *Book of Praise*, 587). And then it may be true, that some aspects change as the OT sacrament gives way to the NT one; however, one thing does not change. And it is this: just like circumcision baptism remains God’s way of claiming his people, of adding to his people, of placing his stamp of ownership on his people.

Being baptized is not a guarantee of automatic salvation; it signals a call to all of its recipients to embrace what God has promised and to live as God expects

“Yes,” but some will say, “Only this does not apply to children. There is no text in which God tells us that he wants us to baptize our children. So children are excluded. They do not belong until they become adults and can properly ‘repent and believe.’”

Interesting point! But is it valid? Did God say in the OT, “Circumcision is only for the adults in Abraham’s tent”? No, he claimed them all. Children are deemed a “heritage from the LORD” (Ps 127:3). Children are called “a reward” (Ps 127:3). “Blessed” is the man who has lots of them (Ps 127:5). In the OT then children are part and parcel of God’s people. They belong!

Where’s the proof text?

Where is the text for this in the NT? There is no text! It may even be asked, “Who needs a text to state the obvious?” For imagine that, as our Baptist friends allege, this all changes in the NT. What an uproar that would have created! For remember the NT church remained for many years a predominantly Jewish church. Such a church would have ignited into great controversy had God suddenly said through his apostles, “From now on your children will no longer belong to my people. They will have to wait on the sidelines until such time as they are able to repent of their sins, believe in my son Jesus Christ, and be baptized. Only then will they belong and be my children.”

Nowhere does he say this! Indeed, he says the very opposite, “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). That’s Peter speaking on Pentecost day to all of those God-fearing Jews from around Asia Minor. He’s telling them that the promise is still for them and for their children. He’s telling them to come to faith in Jesus Christ and he is telling them to teach their children to do the same as they mature. Being baptized is not a guarantee of automatic salvation; it signals a call to all of its recipients to embrace what God has promised and to live as God expects.

Hence baptism matters to God. It matters when it comes to the teaching of covenant and it matters when it comes to his people, even to all of his people. What an encouragement this is!

Necessary and needed

This comes to light in any number of ways. A father is speaking to his son who has been bullied and reminds him that while he may not be special in the eyes of his peers, he is special in the eyes of him who matters most, namely his heavenly Father. This gives encouragement to a mother dealing with a wayward daughter who needs to be reminded that she has a Saviour to whom she can turn for understanding, forgiveness, and restoration. This helps a pastor or elder address a young member who is going astray by stressing that this is not about some dull and distant religion but about being an heir and having a glorious inheritance that can be lost and forfeited. Being a covenant child represents a status to be embraced with joy, a treasure to be mined with vigour, and a life to be lived with confidence. It gives purpose, meaning, and direction to the lives of young and old alike.

On a personal note

It does so especially in difficult circumstances. Thankfully, most of our children and grandchildren are born healthy and able these days, but some are not. Some have physical ailments. Some have mental issues. Some have both.

So what about those children who are not well and who cannot formulate or verbalize their faith? Where are they? Are they in salvation limbo because they cannot really “repent and believe” so to speak? Is God silent, indifferent, non-committal about them? Do believing parents need to wring their hands in worry as they consider the eternal future of such children?

I have a young grandson who is autistic. He does not really speak and he may never really speak. Will he ever come to know the basics of the Christian faith? I don’t know. Will he ever come to profess his faith in a clear, unequivocal, and adult manner? I don’t know.

What I do know, however, is that he is a son of believing parents, that he has been baptized and wears God’s mark and emblem, that he is a recipient of God’s promises, that he is part and parcel of God’s covenant people and family, and that just as “God-fearing parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in their infancy” (CD, I 17), so they need not doubt the status and salvation of their mentally challenged children either. Our God claims our children. He calls our children to love him and to live a holy life. And as for those of his chil-

dren who are too broken to respond, he does not ignore them. He still loves them, claims them, and saves them. They are his and he will care for them eternally. He is gracious! He is merciful! He is faithful!

To my Baptist friends

So I would say to all of my Baptist friends, and all those who are leaning in their direction:

- (1) Do not restrict baptism to adults only. Do not deprive your children of the promises of God and of belonging to the people of God;
- (2) Be careful that you do not make baptism a sacrament only for the mature and the able, as if God is silent when it comes to the unable: the infants of believers who die, the severely mentally challenged and the demented;
- (3) Realize too that circumcision as a ceremony saves no one; so too the rite of baptism (whether infant, adult, or both) saves no one. What mattered in the OT is what one did with the promises and demands found in one’s circumcision and what matters today is what one does with the promises and demands found in one’s baptism;
- (4) If you are looking for a text that commands the church to baptize infants, change course and look instead for a text declaring that the little children of Abraham are no longer in covenant with God. When you find it, let me know. **C**





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Works Religion

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

(Ephesians 2:10)

If there’s one thing Reformed Christians are usually very clear about, it is that salvation is not by works. In many places and in many ways, Scripture teaches us that our status with God depends not on anything we do but only on the obedient life and atoning death of Christ Jesus. Everything that needs to be done for our salvation has been done long ago in the life, death, and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Here in Ephesians 2, the apostle repeatedly emphasizes that salvation is God’s gift. In verse 5 he says, “It is by grace you have been saved.” Again in verse 8 we read: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” The corollary of salvation by grace is stated emphatically in verse 9: “Not by works, so that no one can boast.”

For good reason, then, Reformed Christians are untrusting of any preacher who does not emphasize that our position with God rests exclusively upon the work of the Saviour. Rightly we say that salvation is by grace alone, in Christ alone, and is received by faith alone. Any dilution of these biblical truths leads to the charge of “works religion” which is seen as the negation of true Christianity.

From a different perspective, however, the Bible does promote “works religion.” In many places

and in many ways, Scripture teaches us that receiving the gift of salvation through faith alone will have a transformative effect upon our lives. Works are not the basis of our acceptance with God, but they are the necessary and expected result of being saved. It’s not too strong to say that the purpose of salvation is that we would abound in good works.

In Ephesians 2:10, the apostle says that Christians are “God’s *workmanship*.” When you look at the life of a believer, you are seeing the result of God’s creative and skillful labours. Just like a potter might shape a lump of clay into an attractive vase, so God is forming us into people who are living attractive lives of obedience to their Creator.

How can God transform dead sinners into beautiful saints whose lives abound in good works? The answer is found in the next part of the sentence which reads, “Created *in Christ Jesus* to do good works.” The dynamic of the Christian life is our unity through faith with Christ Jesus. By faith we are made one with our Lord and Saviour. Apart from Christ we can do nothing, but as believers grafted into him through faith we may abound in good works.

By linking God’s workmanship in our lives to Christ, the apostle also points us to the goal of God’s creative work in our lives. What God works toward in our lives is that we would

be conformed to the image of Christ (see Rom 8:29). In Galatians 4:19 the apostle says that the object of his strenuous labours among the Galatian believers is that Christ would be “formed” in them. A Christ-like life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control is the purpose God has in mind in saving us.

At the end of verse 10, the Apostle Paul brings the good works we are called to do into the framework of eternity. He says that God “prepared” these good works “*in advance* for us to do.” The meaning is similar to what we read in 1:4 which states that God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world “to be holy and blameless.” God’s election, then, cannot be separated from our way of life. The fruit of his election is faith, and with that an enthusiasm and resolve to live according to God’s will.

In view of passages like Ephesians 2:10, the Reformed faith emphasizes on the one hand that we are not saved by good works, while on the other hand it strongly affirms that we are saved for good works. When people in the church are “eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:14), that is evidence of good doctrine. When people in the church show indifference and apathy to the commandments of the Lord, this is a sure sign they know nothing at all about the grace of God. **C**



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Musical Instruments and Musicians in Worship in the Bible: The Old Testament (Part 2)

As we continue to survey the impressive Old Testament data about musical instruments and musicians, we turn our attention to the manner in which their use reflected the spiritual vitality of God’s people, how the Book of Psalms speaks of them, some thoughts about *Selah*, and some preliminary conclusions.

The spiritual vitality of Israel

The health and vitality of music and song in Israel was an indication of the nation’s spiritual condition. On the one hand, the silence of musical instruments, the unemployment of musicians, and the fading away of joyful song were sure symptoms that God had removed his favour and brought judgment on account of the rebellion and subsequent deformation of his beloved nation (Neh 13:10; Ps 137; Jer 7:34; Ezek 26:13; Amos 5:23). On the other hand, a sure sign of spiritual revival and reformation was the restoration of Davidic worship, when musical instruments would once again come to life, voices of joy and gladness would again be heard, and the Levitical musicians would have their jobs back (2 Chron 23:18; 35:15; Neh 13:10-12; Jer 33:10-11; Amos 9:11-12).

The Psalms

The Book of Psalms is full of exhortations to praise God with the sound of instruments and song. Some of the most prominent examples, from Psalms 33, 92, 98, 144, and 150, follow here:

Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous;
it is fitting for the upright to praise him.
Praise the LORD with the harp;

make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.

Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully, and shout for joy. (Ps 33:1-3)

It is good to praise the LORD
and make music to your name, O Most High,
to proclaim your love in the morning
and your faithfulness at night,
to the music of the ten-stringed lyre
and the melody of the harp. (Ps 92:1-3)

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;
make music to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
with trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn—
shout for joy before the LORD, the King. (Ps 98:4-6)

Of David.

Praise be to the LORD my Rock,
who trains my hands for war,
my fingers for battle...
I will sing a new song to you, O God;
on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you,
to the One who gives victory to kings,
who delivers his servant David from the deadly
sword. (Ps 144:1, 9-10)

Praise the LORD.
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens.
Praise him for his acts of power;
praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,
praise him with the harp and lyre,
praise him with tambourine and dancing,
praise him with the strings and flute,
praise him with the clash of cymbals,
praise him with resounding cymbals.
Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.
Praise the LORD. (Ps 150)

Also in the Psalms, then, instruments and singing are of a piece. They are typically mentioned together. When the one is mentioned, the other is implied.

Instruments as weapons

Psalms 144, which is from the hand of David, implies a close relationship between war and song. The war-king is also the song-king. There is also a word-relationship between “musical instruments” and “weapons of war” in the Old Testament, which is anything but incidental. Musical instruments – instruments of power – are arguably the most effective weapons of war that King David wields.¹

Selah

A term that occurs often – more than seventy times – in the Book of Psalms, and is particularly relevant to the matter of musical instruments in worship, is the Hebrew word *Selah*. It must be acknowledged at the outset that there has been uncertainty about the meaning of this term among lexicographers and commentators. Koehler and Baumgartner call it “obscure”² and Holladay calls it “unexplained.”³ A common thread in the suggestions and explanations offered, however, is that *Selah* is a “musical or liturgical marker,” in the words of Dr. James A. Swanson.⁴ Some have suggested that it means “pause,” as translated by the New Jerusalem Bible⁵ or “Silence!” according to the eminent Hebrew scholar, William Gesenius.⁶ Old Testament commentator Franz Delitzsch believes that “in a psalm where *Selah* is appended. . . the stringed instruments. . . and the instruments generally, are to join in in such a way as to give intensity to that which is being sung.”⁷

A closer look at the semantic root of this word supports Delitzsch’s assertion about *Selah*. Brown, Driver, and Briggs suggest that the word is, in fact, a verb in the imperative mood, meaning “lift up” or “exalt,” from the Hebrew verb *salal*.⁸ Gesenius connects it to the verb

salah, “to be quiet, to be silent,” and to the noun *seleh*, “rest, silence,” and designates its form as Milel.⁹ In this same entry, however, where he comments that this word has “been so much discussed and tortured by the conjectures and blunders of interpreters,” Gesenius argues that “it seems to have been used to mark a short pause in singing the words of the psalm, so that the singer would be *silent*, while the instrumental music continued.”¹⁰ In support of this interpretation, Gesenius mentions firstly, that the Septuagint always renders this Hebrew word *diapsalma*, which means “interlude”; secondly, that its usual position in the middle of the psalms where a section is finished implies that it was used to divide the respective psalms into strophes; and thirdly, that in Psalm 9:17 *Higgayon Selah* is used, “which should apparently be rendered ‘*Instrumental music – pause*,’ i.e. the instrumental music was to continue while the singer paused.”¹¹ This explanation seems the most plausible, especially considering the fact that almost all the occurrences of this word are in the Psalms, many of which call for the use of musical instruments.

God specifically commanded his people to use musical instruments to praise and worship him

While the two most likely meanings of *Selah*, “Silence!” on the one hand and “Strike it up!” on the other, initially seem to contradict each other, the meaning of the related Hebrew words along with the locations and uses of this word in the Psalms strongly suggest that *Selah* designated an instrumental interlude (in the middle of a psalm) or crescendo (at the end of a psalm)¹² during which the voices went momentarily silent and the musical instruments swelled to punctuate and intensify the words being sung.

This interpretation, admittedly, joins the long list of other attempts to explain this obscure term. Just like other obscure musical terms, mentioned in the headings of many psalms, should be included in the public reading of Holy Scripture, so should *Selah*.

Preliminary summary of Old Testament data

Right from the beginning, musical instruments and musicians made an integral contribution to human life

and culture by means of the music and song they produced. Long before David organized the Levitical ministry of music, God's people were using musical instruments to praise and worship him. God specifically commanded them to do so even as early as their sojourn in the desert. The evidence suggests that the playing of musical instruments and singing were typically combined.

Right from the beginning, musical instruments and musicians made an integral contribution to human life and culture

King David organized and supervised the ministry of music and song by appointing a generous tithe – more than ten percent – of Levites to this ministry, giving them specific instructions and providing them with the resources they needed to fulfill their task. These Levite musicians were to serve by leading and to lead by serving. Musical instruments, furthermore, were the tools – the temple implements – which David gave the Levites to carry, lift up, and enhance the holy song of God's people for the worship and praise of God. They were fittingly called, therefore, *the LORD's instruments and instruments of sacred song*.

The musicians were expected to make music that was loud, moving, and impressive – even fearful, for they were wielding instruments of power. Fearful, for King David, the music-king was also the war-king, and the musical instruments he entrusted to the Levites were his most powerful weapons of war. There is something dangerous about the ministry of song inaugurated by King David!

When the kingdom of Solomon was at its pinnacle, the splendour and quality of the musical instruments displayed the splendour of Israel's great King, Yahweh. When musical instruments came to life and voices of joy and gladness sang; when the Levitical musicians had work and their mighty *Selahs* punctuated the people's praise; that was a sure sign of the health, vigour, and strength of God's beloved nation!

¹ Cf. 2 Chronicles 20:21 where Jehoshaphat, after consulting with the LORD, appoints musicians to lead the army into battle with song. David, similarly, had used his music-making with an instrument to drive evil spirits from Saul (1 Sam 16:14-23).

² Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

³ Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

⁴ James A. Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 1997).

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ William Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, Samuel P. Trigelles, transl. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

⁷ Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1:31.

⁸ Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906); cf. Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1998).

⁹ Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² In Psalms 3, 9, 24, and 46 there are *Selahs* at the end.





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Prophetesses, Then and Now (Part 1 of 3)

Deborah, an Example for Today?

When the issue of whether women should be ordained into ecclesiastical office is discussed, one of the arguments in favour of their ordination is the fact that Scripture mentions prophetesses. If women could function as prophetesses in biblical times, why can they not be ordained in the church today? The name of Deborah often comes up in this connection. Do we not have an example here of a woman who was used by God in the official capacity of a judge, exercising authority over men, and a prophetess, authoritatively speaking the Word of God? Could this not be an indicator that we are impoverishing the church today by denying talented females admission to the office of elder or minister? Indeed, Deborah is often used as a star precedent for female ecclesiastical ordination. Is such an understanding warranted? Let us take a closer look.

Historical context

A primary rule for the correct interpretation and application of Scripture is to place the passage in question within its biblical context. Deborah lived in the days of the judges. This was a time characterized by Israel's repeated apostasy, followed by divine judgment, and the desperate cry of the nation for deliverance. God would repeatedly graciously respond by raising up a judge who, equipped with the Spirit, would rescue the people from their enemies. Prior to Deborah's time the Lord had raised up Othniel and Ehud to save his people. However, after Ehud died, Israel again relapsed into sin and so the Lord sold them into the hands of Jabin, a king of Canaan, whose commander with 900 chariots was Sisera. He cruelly oppressed Israel for twenty years (Judg 4:2-3). The situation was critical. Danger was everywhere. Normal travel and therefore commerce was impossible and villagers took refuge in walled cities (Judg 5:6-7). In these critical times Israel cried to the Lord for help (Judg 4:3). He heard their cry and used Deborah to give deliverance.

Deborah in God's service

It is interesting to note how God introduces Deborah in the book of Judges and how he involved her for the salvation of his people. "Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment" (Judg 4:4-5 ESV). With the preceding two crises, the Hebrew expression "the Lord raised up a deliverer" (Judg 3:9, 15) is used. We also frequently read of the judges being empowered by the Spirit for their military task (Judg 3:10; 6:345; 11:29; 14:19; 15:14). Remarkably, these expressions are not used with Deborah. Rather she is introduced as a prophetess and not a military leader.

As a prophetess she was judging Israel and the Israelites came to her for judgment. What does this mean? One would imagine that she functioned as a judge and was resolving legal issues brought to her. However, this interpretation is unlikely. A judge in the book of Judges is a military leader who delivers Israel and when judge "so and so" judged Israel for so many years, then it means he ruled Israel for so many years (e.g. Judg 3:10; 10:2, 3 etc.). The NIV therefore translates that she "was leading Israel" (Judg 4:4). How was she leading Israel? She was a prophetess. People came to her "for judgment." Literally it says: "for the judgment" (Judg 4:5). In other words, in this time of national crisis when Israelites "cried to the Lord for help" (Judg 4:3), they came to Deborah as prophetess for the judgment which she as prophetess could give, namely the judgment of God with respect to his answer and response to their cry for help. It is not surprising that the people went to her. After all, as prophetess she was God's representative for the people. She spoke God's Word.

The times were extraordinary. After all, the normal way to get God's judgment in a national emergency was for the leader of God's people to go to the high priest who had the Urim and Thummim "in the breastpiece of judg-

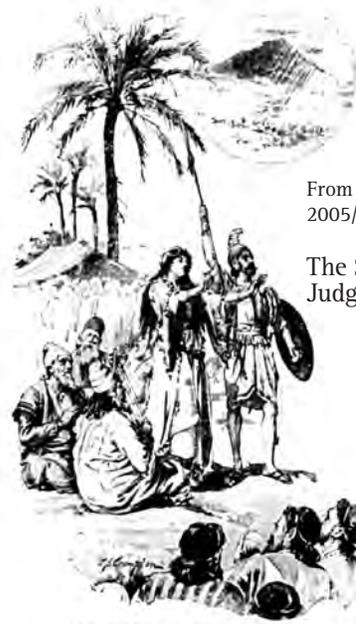
ment” (Exod 28:30 ESV). God through Moses had given specific instructions in this regard (Num 27:21). The fact that the high priest was not consulted indicates that in the decadent time of the judges the priesthood did not function as God had intended. The degenerate state Israel’s religious life which would typify the days of Eli (cf. 1 Sam 2:12) was already a reality in the days of the judges (Judg 8:22-35; Judg 17-18). In response to this sad state of affairs, God mercifully raised a prophetess, Deborah, and later he would send an unnamed prophet as well (Judg 6:8). People could thus still inquire of God by going to Deborah to seek a decision or judgment from God. And they did. They were grievously suffering under the cruel oppression of Sisera.

When the people came to Deborah for God’s decision or judgment with respect to the current crisis, God responded through her. The result was that she summoned Barak and gave him God’s command to mobilize ten thousand men to defeat the foe (Judg 4:5-7). When he protested because he was afraid, Deborah assured him that she would accompany him. Her coming along as spokesperson for the Lord gave tangible expression to the fact that God himself would go with Barak and give him the victory.

Deborah is never pictured as a military leader of Israel, a judge in the sense of Othniel or Gideon. She is a prophetess. It is therefore not surprising that there is no reference to her with respect to the battle. Although she gave leadership through her prophetic task, she is not described in Scripture as the judge who delivered Israel from Sisera. Rather it is God who is specified as the deliverer of Israel (Judg 4:23) and he used another woman, Jael, to kill Sisera (Judg 4:21). Deborah’s subordinate role as prophetess and not as military leader is also evident from the fact that God did not send Deborah to head the troops into battle, but Barak. Furthermore when Samuel would later mention deliverers of Israel (1 Sam 12:11), he did not mention Deborah, but he did name Barak, the commander. Similarly, Deborah is not mentioned with the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. Several leaders are listed from the time of the judges, including Barak (v. 32), but not Deborah. All of this underlines her relatively modest role with respect to the deliverance of Israel.

Answering the question

God raised up Deborah to be prophetess in Israel when that nation found itself in dire straits. Deborah’s function



From http://www.oneyearbibleblog.com/2005/04/april_25th_read.html

The Song of Deborah and Barak
Judges 5:1

as prophetess was an exception within an exceptional situation. The fact that she was also known as the wife of Lappidoth could indicate the ad hoc character of her office. People came to her in the current circumstances for God spoke through her, but there is no record of her going out and prophesying among the people. Without taking anything away from her being a prophetess, it should not be forgotten that she is also identified as a married woman, indeed as “a mother in Israel” (5:7). Her prophetic office was not everything. She also fulfilled a woman’s normal place in Israelite life.

Can Deborah function as an example for us to follow for today by ordaining women into the office of elder or minister? Taking all the factors mentioned above into consideration, the answer is clearly no. The situation in Israel was desperate and by way of exception God raised her up as a prophet in Israel by endowing her with the gift of prophecy. In this way God enabled her to pass on God’s command that Barak (and not Deborah) summon and command a military force against the enemy (Judg 4:6-7). That God used a woman to make this clear was an implicit condemnation of the lack of male leadership in Israel. Furthermore, the need for Deborah to accompany Barak and to go with him to the battlefield (Judg 4:9-10) underlines how male leadership was totally lacking in Israel. For a woman to have to goad a male to take charge and so in effect give leadership was akin to a disaster (cf. Isa 3:12). It showed that things had gone terribly wrong. Deborah is therefore not an example to be followed and her situation certainly provides no justification to open the leadership offices of the church to women. But God is sovereign and he can do in extraordinary circumstances what we are not allowed to do. He therefore did use Deborah in a special way for his service.



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More than Conquerors: CRTA East Convention, October 25-26, 2012

Fog shrouded Southern Ontario on the morning of October 25, as guests from Niagara, Chatham-Kent, Georgian Bluffs, the Ottawa Valley, and anywhere in between, headed for Smithville in the Heart of the Niagara Peninsula for the annual CRTA-East Convention. The haze was heavy around Hamilton, but travellers were treated to a magnificent surprise as the sun conquered the smoggy shroud for a beautiful and balmy fall-day. Smithville was ready, too, and John Calvin School's facilities proved once again to be ideally suited for a conference such as this, with a total (between the two days) of well over 150 Reformed teachers. While the Canadian Reformed Teachers Association (CRTA) organized the event, guests included students from Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College. Other guests included staffs from Providence Reformed Collegiate (Komoka), Hope Reformed Christian School (St. George), and Hope Academy (Etobicoke) – each of which are supported in a significant way by members of URC congregations.

The CRTA Convention Committee savoured the fruit of its preparatory labours, as the event unfolded like the final unwrapping of a chocolate bar prepared for a special celebration. When its work started in January, it reviewed what had been learned from previous conferences, and set out to apply it in preparations for the next. What flavour should it have, what workshops would provide a suitable mix for the intended audience, what theme would fit, what speakers would need to be invited, what sort of packaging and advertising would be called for? In the end, most guests might not know the various nutritious ingredients that went into it, but the final flavour and aroma should entice one to fill up and eat more – if only it were available. The preparation was a challenge, and, despite some flaws, the victory was sweet.

Devotional speech

The chosen theme spoke of a much greater victory: “More than Conquerors.” Referring to groaning, grace, and glory, Rev. John Bouwers of Immanuel Orthodox Reformed Church (URC) in Jordan, Ontario, presented his inspirational speech on Romans 8:37: “In all things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” In Greece, Nike was the goddess of victory, but Paul speaks of believers being *more than conquerors*, hyper-Nikeans, through Christ. In the groaning of creation, which teachers observe and experience daily in the effects of sin, dysfunction, bullying, and other distractions, we need to build on the foundation of grace shown in God's love in Christ. Nothing can separate us from that love. No distraction, no devil, nothing. In Christ, teachers are victorious, can conquer sin, and are able to have dominion. If this is their focus, children see their model of trusting Jesus Christ, find rest in what he has done, pray and know that God hears, and humbly submit to his fatherly care in all situations. Christ overcame; in him we are *nike*.

We need to build on the foundation of grace shown in God's love in Christ

Rev. Bouwers' inspirational presentation was a fitting way to unwrap the theme of being conquerors. It lifted up the listeners like the rising sun had lifted up the shroud of the morning's fog, and it set the tone for what was to come in a wide range of workshops and presentations for teachers at all grade levels and subject areas. Some of these workshops were practical and offered solutions for various challenges teachers face in such aspects as the



At the registration table

courses they teach, relationships with others or themselves, and (government or otherwise) imposed expectations. Others were informative, shedding light on lesser-known aspects of teachers' responsibilities or ways to enhance students' learning experience, and offering assistance in implementing the newly-gained insights. Yet others were more philosophical in nature, and appealed to the deeper thinkers and reflectors among the audience. On the first day, topics offered were workshops on worksheets, teaching music, promoting peer and team relationships, restorative practice, character education, talk, walk, and conversations, being a new teacher, seeing and teaching the big picture in Bible, speaking and recitation contests, novel studies, technology in the primary grades, and whether Reformed Education is enough. The latter will also be the topic of a planned article in *Education Matters*. At the end of the first day, the conference felt like a good place to come back to and more to chew on.

Action in Christian education

Were you ever treated with a home-made yogurt parfait, home-made muffins, home-made fruit cups, and home-made raisin bread? What a spread for a Friday morning. Once the participants relished the foods, and conquered any tinge of hunger pangs, they joined in devotional singing, reading, and prayer. The stage was set for the main speaker, Mrs. Julie Lindhout, to speak about issues for action in Christian education.

Using her background experiences in teaching and in working for the Ministry of Education, Mrs. Lindhout focused on three key aspects. Firstly, she urged our Christian schools to be models for schools around us as we deal with bullying, with environmental education, and with parental engagement. In the matter of bullying, she advised schools to be guided by John 14:15 and by Matthew 22. She pleaded that staffs be fully honest with themselves in evaluating how they deal with bullying, and how they should keep the classrooms and their schools as safe havens for the students. She begged teachers to not allow put-downs, sarcastic comments, or tolerate any

Love is not an option in the Christian schools' classroom

of these even if they are jokes. Funny and innocent can become hurtful when repeated, she said. She advised teachers to stay away from personal comments, to use positive words, to be a good listener (especially on the playground), and to deal empathetically and fairly with all, including the bullied and the bully. Love, she stated, is not an option in the Christian schools' classrooms.



Rev. John Bowers during his devotional speech



A group of CCRTC students

Secondly, Mrs. Lindhout urged teachers to frame environmental education in the light of stewardship and of Lord's Day 11. Again, she urged us to use the Ministry documents as resources to help us identify and deal with the sub-issues of this huge topic. Our schools can be models for the schools around us in this issue as well.

Thirdly, in the issue of parental engagement, our Christian schools can also be models for the Ministry. Mrs. Lindhout called on school principals and staffs to examine different ways in which we can include parents, getting them into our schools as much as we can. School personnel must treat them as individual persons who are willing and often capable to share their expertise in the classroom or in the school.

Closing

After Mrs. Lindhout's speech, participants sampled food, took drinks, and hunkered down for a CRTA business meeting. After the Chair shared details about the executive and the changes happening there, Ted Witten presented a report from the Pension Committee, Matt VanPopta spoke on behalf of the *Compass* editors, the *Education Matters* team tabled a written report, Nathan Kok shared details from ASC, and Dave Nienhuis shared the details of the CRTA budget. Lastly, the Chair informed all present that Convention 2013 will DV be hosted in John Calvin Christian School in Burlington.

Who were the workshop presenters? About half of the fourteen workshop presenters were colleagues presently teaching at the various elementary or high school levels. The other presenters were educational consult-

ants, former teachers, professional counsellors, or social workers. All these presenters taught, entertained, teased, or challenged their participants. Some participants left their workshops with bright red cheeks, others with various upper decibels of laughter, a few with sagging shoulders, and the rest with cherishing smiles. The workshop topics ranged from the "Gooney, Fizzy, Tasty, and Crazy" (science workshop) to "Fast Track" (sports), "Applied Apologetics", and "Check This Out, Mate" (setting up an inter-school chess tournament).

Listening to speeches, attending workshops, and socializing with peers can be hard work. After two full days, teachers, presenters, and organizers gathered together for a final closing. An aura of thankfulness filled the gym for this opportunity to be encouraged and motivated by another CRTA convention. The Convention Committee, as well as the Ladies Auxiliary and the staff of Smithville's John Calvin School, were enthusiastically commended and thanked. After giving thanks to our heavenly Father for such a wonderful, congenial, and informative conference, the clean-up ensued, and teachers parted with "good-bye," "see ya later," or "all the best." The Convention 2012 chocolate bar was fully unwrapped, thoughtfully savoured piece by piece, and considered sweet.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma akingma@ech.ca



Grand Opening: Vernon Canadian Reformed School Society Building

The evening of December 1, 2012 will be another momentous day in the history of some young children from Vernon. Not only did these seven students get to stay up until 9:00 that night, but they were also the ones to cut the ribbon, officially opening the newly built portable that our school will call home for the foreseeable future. Although classes had begun in the new building mid-November, it was with much thankfulness to our heavenly God and Father that, along with the chairman, these students could officially open our school.

Surrounded by sixty or so guests, the evening began with Rev. Witten leading with prayer, followed by the ribbon cutting ceremony. The Chairman gave a speech in which he highlighted many of the blessings we as a school society have been fortunate enough to receive and he thanked the countless volunteers who made our school building a reality. Krista Veenendaal led her students in a poem they had worked on for this occasion and some parents were conscripted for a play that the older students had practiced.



After some singing the students eagerly showed off their new school to all the visitors, paying special attention to each of their desks. Everyone moved over to the church to enjoy a scrumptious evening of appetizers and desserts expertly prepared by Sherry Vanderdeen and Kristen DeBoersap. While everyone enjoyed fellowship and food a slide show of the building of the school, made by Joel Vandermolten, played in the background.

All in all a wonderful evening was had by everyone. Indeed, it was an evening that reflected the blessing of God's work in our midst and the privilege of, once again, having a choice for parents of Reformed education in Vernon.

For the promotion committee,

Vince VanBeelen 

Letter to the Editor

As a musician I wouldn't presume to know enough about theology to write about it in *Clarion*, so in this response to Rev. Stam's editorial of January 11, 2013, I will stick to the discipline I do know something about, which is music. Knowing my place as an accompanist, I could perhaps start off by simply complementing what the minister writes. He makes a valid point, the unfortunate fact that organ playing as a whole is on the decline. As a music teacher in the Canadian Reformed community, this issue is often pointed out to me. Unfortunately, most people discussing this with me actually have never learned to play the organ themselves, and have not brought any potential organ students for me to teach. Rev. Stam also correctly states that organs cost a lot of money, perhaps that fact makes some people think the instrument is frivolous in their opinion. Perhaps this is why most people are not likely to invest in training or even remunerating church musicians either.

I'm glad Rev. Stam admits that he is expressing his personal opinion in his editorial. This is the very cause of the situation he writes about, it is personal opinion that stands in the way of promoting organ music. Rather than making good use of these grand and veritable instruments, people don't always share the opinion that it is a nice instrument to listen to. Ironically, John Calvin dismissed the pipe organ as useless and Martin Luther referred to it as "an instrument of the devil, set on fire by hell itself." It is also ironic that Rev. Stam sees the potential benefit in adding percussion instruments to the worship service while he dismisses the piano, which is in fact classified as a percussion instrument. Based on practical knowledge and experience I would argue that the piano adds a subtle rhythmic drive to congregational singing, which helps maintaining order, and never overwhelming the human voice. This way the voice - the instrument God created - and the very words he gave us ring out above all other sounds.

Based on personal opinion one could also argue that there is no need for flutes, trumpets and string instruments in the worship service, but perhaps it is more worthwhile to find out what God prefers in this regard. In many of the Psalms and other passages of the Old Testament (1 Chron-

icles 15; 2 Chronicles 5 and 9 e.g.) use of these instruments in worship is clearly promoted. When discussing worship music we need to learn to leave personal opinion out of the equation altogether. Instead we should promote skilled musicianship based on biblical principles.

Finally, let us also make a clear distinction between Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) and Contemporary Worship Music (CWM). CCM is not intended for worship, it is simply contemporary music reflecting a Christian worldview. CWM, on the other hand, is written specifically for corporate worship. Considering the renewed lyrics, our own Anglo-Genevan psalter can now technically even be classified as CWM. Let your voices shake the ground!

Tim Nijenhuis

Music teacher, Guido de Brès, Hamilton



Response

Thanks for the letter! I know I am in over my head in this matter, but I wanted to call attention to the fact that we need more capable organists.

As an amateur musician and after many years as lead guitarist for the group "The Stammers", I do know something about music, but this pales in comparison with true expertise.

Still, writing about liturgy always gets the mood swinging.

I am not sure whether Tim Nijenhuis is promoting organs and/or pianos.

My other point was merely that the organ has almost all other instruments incorporated, but no percussion. The piano helps, and I did say that I like organ and piano *together*. What I am concerned about is that there is a growing lack of organ players. Something for the Guido de Brès music department, perhaps?

Alas, as expected, my plea for cymbals fell by the wayside. No bang for my buck.

Klaas Stam

Please leave your drums at home

A well written article regarding our liturgical tradition from the hand of Rev. Klaas Stam (January 11, 2013). Also a very clever reference to “organ donation” complete with some very accurate observations about empty organ benches and guest organists. This topic deserves our attention.

One observation is rather outdated: the organ should not come at a very high cost nowadays. There may be a lack of *organ donors* in the medical world; we find the opposite situation in the church organ situation. Since we see many churches closing their doors there is a large number of “organ donors;” the law of supply and demand is at work. Especially in the PKN (Protestant Churches in The Netherlands) we see church attendance on the decline at a rather high speed. Very likely the organ did not play anymore for a longer time before the door of the church was closed. Not only by a lack of organists but also because other instruments took the place of the organ.

That leads us to the question of why the organ fell out of grace with church people. While there are many more reasons, we will suffice with the prime reason. Many organs are oversized for the congregation/building they are placed in. An organ has many more stops than necessary for accompanying the congregational singing; not all of these stops are suitable. Some enthusiastic organists, lacking a decent education of which stops to use and when, pull all that they can find and submerge the congregation in a rather tumultuous situation. Add to this that the attention for rhythm is below level and we have created a situation where most will prefer a piano over an organ. We therefore may have to encourage all too enthusiastic organists to review their job description.

Rev. Stam also asks attention for some forms of liturgical renovations. More hymns old and new, he favours the immediate inclusion of hymns and stylish melodies that come to us from contemporary Christian music. This approach is not new. It started in the PKN-affiliated churches approximately thirty years ago, and we can taste the fruits today. While the Dutch sister churches did not learn from it, we should do better. Visit the PKN churches and you will notice that there is a correlation between church attendance and liturgical renovation. Where the old fashioned organ plays you have also a more steady church attendance. Another observation of some of our sister churches in Holland teaches us that where the liturgy renovations are the most drastic the church attendance is not improved but rather declining.

Many among us have a similar desire for renovation while the cynics among us already brace themselves for

the tsunami of suitable hymns which can be added to our *Book of Praise*. It is very likely that this desire to add “good old hymns” and “stylish” melodies from contemporary Christian music will lead to obesity of our *Book of Praise* just as in Holland. While K. Schilder’s “prophets on the organ bench” are no longer with us, it seems like the organ and its bench itself became a prophet.

As we have seen in Holland the past twenty years or so it became increasingly difficult to fill the organ bench; the next bench that was hard to fill was the elder bench; then the rest of the benches slowly lose occupancy. A few more hymns did not help; many more hymns did not give a durable solution. A band of guitarists and drums did not have the desired result. One commentator remarked rather cynically that if a restaurant does not serve good food, a better pianist would not solve the problem of loss of customers. They came for the food, not the music.

What to do now that we see alarming situations in Holland and also some of the symptoms in our own churches? Should we not blow the trumpet, or beat the drums (Ezek 33)? Well, many of our organs have in the disposition a trumpet. So Rev. Klaas, don’t take your drums to town, son, please leave your drums at home.

*John de Boer
Langley*

Response

Thanks also for this letter. The matter of organs and other accompaniment is alive among us!

I did not and do not promote *contemporary* Christian music. I merely suggested that there are old hymns of good repute that have a long-standing usage in the church, and I gave some examples of tried and tested hymns in the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

I know what is going on in The Netherlands. More than others I have been writing about developments there. Meanwhile our special sub-committee on the Dutch sister-churches has presented an excellent up-to-date report. Everyone should read that! Kudos to our subs. But our Canadian situation in liturgy is *entirely* different than “over there.”

I was writing about the organ bench being empty, but meanwhile John de Boer has emptied all the pews. Not so fast, John. Our churches are still relatively full every Sunday, and therefore we need good music and engaging hymns as has been the custom in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Our *Anglo-Genevan Book of Praise* is a gem. The *Genevan* part is superb, and the *Anglo* section could perhaps use a boost.

Klaas Stam

Letter to the Editor

It is with great appreciation that I read the highly practical article by Dr. Theo Lodder re: the SCBP's report to the upcoming synod and especially the warm conclusion that he ends with. My comments stem from the paragraph dealing with the "difficult" Genevan tunes.

Dr. Lodder expresses the sentiment of a growing number of churches "that alternate melodies be offered for the more difficult Genevan melodies, so that those psalms that are sung less frequently or never, on account of the melody, may be sung more frequently." I've heard these comments expressed quite often also in the congregation which I call home. Since I did not grow up with the Genevan melodies, at least not all of them, but have definitely come to appreciate them greatly, I became intrigued with these difficult melodies. And so our council came up with a list of lesser known psalms (Psalms 10, 11, 41, 58, 59, 88, 120, and 129) and we sing them on a rotational basis as a pre-service song in the a.m. worship service. Surprisingly enough, the melodies are not that difficult once they become more familiar. In fact they become/ probably always were beautiful.

The question still begs, "Why are they so little used in our communal worship?" In my humble opinion, it is the content of these psalms that poses the difficulty. More than a few of them are highly imprecatory, they invoke judgment and a curse. Psalm 88 is in some ways a bitter lament. I am not implying that God made a mistake here, definitely not. When one reads these psalms closely and carefully within the context of Scripture as a whole, we see only grace upon grace. The difficulty lies in where and how we fit these psalms into our weekly liturgy. There is nothing wrong with an honest struggle as long as it does not become a burying of the talent into the ground. Why not sing these psalms on a rotational basis within your home congregation. You not only learn the melody, you also learn the psalm. These psalms do not have a difficult melody; rather, they are simply unknown or little known. Wrapping these psalms in a different melody will not alter this. On the same note there is nothing wrong with a new melody.

*Norm Schuurman
Lincoln*

Response

Thanks, Brother Norm, for your kind and thoughtful response to my musings on the "difficult" Genevan tunes. I hope your response is a reflection of a growing sentiment in the Canadian Reformed Churches, since it certainly is a reflection of the sentiments of others who are discovering the Anglo-Genevan Psalter for the first time.

Your church leaders are to be commended for their effort to help the congregation learn the unfamiliar melodies. Ideally, church music and song should regularly be placed on the agenda of consistory meetings; they are such an important aspect of the Lord's service on the Lord's day, and of the spiritual formation of Christ's churches. Way to go, Lincoln!

I agree that in many cases there is a relationship between the unpleasant content of a particular psalm and its unfamiliarity. Probably, as you suggest, a more accurate assessment of at least some of these psalm tunes is that they are unfamiliar, rather than difficult.

One of the widely-acclaimed qualities of the Genevan Psalter, strikingly, is the genius with which the music was written to fit the words. This is surely one of the reasons for its longevity and popularity. For example, the Genevan setting of Psalm 129 helps us, in a way that few other tunes could, get into the skins of those with plows digging into their backs. Our unfamiliarity with a selection of such melodies may be nothing less than an incriminating exposure of our pansified, easy-chair spirituality. If a psalm is raw, so should its melody be.

The Genevan Psalter surpasses, by a long shot, the monotonous predictability of much contemporary Christian music, and even of much of the psalmody and hymnody of the last few centuries. For this reason, as I wrote, we should maintain the complete collection of the Genevan tunes for the 150 Psalms.

Idolizing the Genevan Psalter, however, is an ever-present temptation. Exploring and adopting other melodies, then, could help us resist this temptation. Enlarging our psalm-singing repertoire could also enrich our musical palate, and reflect the catholicity of the psalm-singing church of all ages. Gifted and spiritually mature musicians and poets of our own time could also be motivated, in this way, to offer the best of their creative impulses, and write some new settings of the Psalms.

Dr. Theo Lodder 

*Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication.
Submissions need to be less than one page in length.*

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Little One Lost: Living with Early Infant Loss, Glenda Mathes, Grandville: Reformed Fellowship Inc., 2012

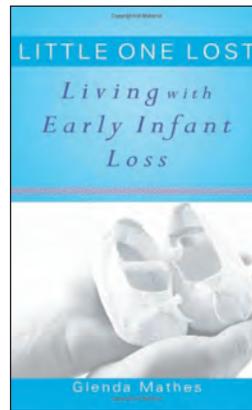
Additional Information: Softcover, 139 pages, \$10.00

I've encountered it many times as a pastor. I've also experienced it personally together with my wife. Miscarriage or "early infant loss" is a common enough phenomenon. Though it is so common, we are hardly adept at dealing with it in a Christian way. People don't know what to say, they don't how to act, and they don't how to give comfort. So, more often than not, people say nothing, pretend as if it didn't happen, or undermine it. Those who've experienced it may themselves be reluctant to tell others – many times a couple who have lost a baby early on won't feel free to tell their pastor or elder either. This book has a huge potential to change the way we view early infant loss and the way we deal with it in our Reformed churches and families.

Readers of *Christian Renewal* will be familiar with the author since her writing regularly appears there. She's a member of a United Reformed congregation in Iowa. *Little One Lost* grew out of an article written for *Christian Renewal* some years ago. Mathes was contacted by women who had experienced this kind of grief and their encouragement led her to write something more substantial. In the book she draws on the experiences of others, and also that of her and her husband.

Little One Lost is written from the heart and it shows. She writes at the end of how this book was difficult to write. I believe it. But just as the best sermons are those preached from the heart, so also the best and most powerful books are written by authors who care passionately about what they're writing.

Mathes covers every aspect of this subject and does so with sensitivity. This book is not only about miscarriage, but also about still births and sudden infant deaths.



She notes how early infant loss affects not only mothers, but also fathers, siblings, and grandparents. She draws our attention to how abuse or abortion can complicate the grieving process. There's a helpful and compassionate discussion about funeral planning in these instances. I also appreciated the way in which she identifies infertility also as a loss. Towards the end of the book, Mathes includes a section on things that

are and *are not* helpful to say to grieving parents (including the infamously uncompassionate "Get over it!").

This is a very practical book. Moreover, the author offers her practical advice and wisdom based on the teaching of Scripture and its summary in the Reformed confessions. She has excellent chapters on biblical, covenantal, and confessional comfort. There was only one concern that I noted. Chapter 8 deals with the grief of fathers. Mathes writes, "God the Father gave up his one and only Son. He knows the pain that fathers as well as mothers feel in loss" (49). While I'm sure that author does not subscribe to the heresy of patripassionism, these words could be misunderstood as pointing in that direction.

Little One Lost is the best book I've read this year – no exaggeration. It's highly recommended for pastors, elders, and anyone who wants to help those grieving the loss of a baby. Those who are working their way through such a loss will also benefit. It can sometimes be hard to work through a book of this nature, which is why I think grieving parents will really appreciate the short chapters – each one is only three or four pages. You can work through it slowly if you have to. This book needed to be written and I commend Glenda Mathes for writing it and Reformed Fellowship for publishing it. I plan to keep several copies on hand.

CORRECTION

The book *God and Government* by Dr. Cornelis Van Dam is available from the website of the Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA) for a donation of \$25.00 including shipping (and not \$35.50 as mentioned in the February 8 *Clarion*). Go to <http://arpacanada.ca> and follow the books link. All proceeds from this book go to ARPA.

Beholding the Glory of the Lord, Being Changed by His Beauty, Jos Douma. (Dick Moes, Trans.) iUniverse: 2012

**Additional Information: 168 pages
Available at Amazon. US\$ 13.95**

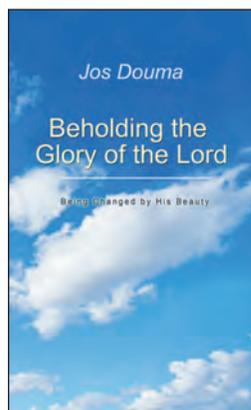
Original Title: *Kijken naar de Heer; veranderen door zijn schoonheid*

Faithful believers know the sting of defeat firsthand. Constantly burdened by their sinful nature, they long passionately for perfection. Time and again they put their mind and heart to trying harder and obeying better, only to be faced once more with their inability to be perfect. Intent on crucifying their old nature, they often experience that their new nature is insufferably unstable.

During his walk with the Lord as minister of the Word in Haarlem (The Netherlands), Jos Douma discovered that the emphasis on trying and obeying is more effective when placed in a larger context. For believers to become like their Lord, they must also behold him in his glory. In his book “Beholding the Glory of God, Being Changed by His Beauty,” he shows with a bounty of scriptural evidence that believers are transformed into holiness by humbly meditating on the beauty of the Lord.

The author brings his readers to discovering the beauty of the Lord by focusing their attention on 2 Corinthians 3:18, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” When our eyes are opened to see the beauty of the Son of God, we transform to become like him. This miraculous process is divided by the author into three sections: “Oh, How Beautiful,” “Look! Look!” and “A True Metamorphosis.”

The beauty of the Lord Jesus is evident in four aspects of his person and work. Jesus’ wonderful names show his many functions, such as faithful witness, bridegroom, Messiah, true vine. His virtues describe his divine qualities of being eternal, almighty, righteous, loving, omnipresent. His impressive deeds tell the story of



salvation from becoming human to washing his disciples’ feet. And finally, Jesus’ precious words convey warning and direction, hope and grace.

The section “Look! Look!” describes the balance between hearing and beholding. Ears and eyes work together. “Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear,” Matthew 13 verse 16. The Lord knows that our eyes

are obscured with the results of sin, but in Christ he takes that veil away. After the author describes which sinful habits and ideas are part of the veil, he urges us to “track down these thoughts, because they hinder spiritual change in our lives. They form a veil, a bond that forms a barrier that hinders you from radiating the glory of Jesus” (p. 32).

In the section “True Metamorphosis” Douma arrives at the miracle of the spiritual transformation. Fully aware of the reality of sin, the author explains that “here on earth this transformation will remain piecemeal. We do not urge each other to be perfect and without sin, because we believe that this perfection is meant for later. Yet, we may grow toward perfection here on earth” (p. 43). This spiritual, life-long transformation is an individual process, but can be characterized as gracious, Christ-centred, and future-oriented.

As an aid to worship the author continues with an elaboration on the names, virtues, deeds, and words of Jesus (see above). Each of these forty small excursions into the Scriptures is in fact a meditation that could be read on its own as part of our daily devotions. The section “In Conversation” adds further practical value by facilitating a structured discussion about the beauty of beholding the glory of the Lord.

This book is not meant to supersede the need to listen and obey. Neither does it eliminate the struggle to stay in step with the Spirit. But it describes the momentous effect that beholding the glory of our victorious Lord has on our daily walk of faith.

