

Clarion

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**MANOAH MANOR
CELEBRATES THIRTY YEARS**



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Was There Ever a Covenant of Works?

There is something more precious at stake

From the interesting report of our delegates to the URC Synod 2014 I understand that this Synod held a “colloquium” (a learned conversation) about the covenant of *works* and the covenant of *grace*. Special time was set aside for this colloquium and special guests were parachuted in to Synod. In the end everyone agreed that we cannot in any way be saved by our works. Salvation is always out of grace through faith. Excellent.

How did the matter ever come up at this URC synod? This happened because some URC delegates were not sure about the Canadian Reformed view on the covenant. Perhaps some erroneously thought that the Canadian Reformed Churches allowed for a covenant by which mankind could achieve salvation. Then the principle of *sola gratia* (only by grace) would be lost.

I also understand that the URC members wanted to preserve the concept of a covenant of works. It goes like this: before the fall man was called to work and so to merit eternal glory. This was called the covenant of works. But after the fall into sin, there was *only* the way of faith and grace. This is called “the covenant of grace.” The covenant of works disappeared. Well, not quite.

The key of the matter is apparently that there had to be a covenant of works before the fall or *Christ* could not have fulfilled it. Because Christ was obedient and fulfilled the covenant of works, we may now be taken up in a second covenant, called the covenant of grace. To suggest that there was no covenant of works would be to demean the saving work of Christ.

Covenant of works?

The last thing I would ever want to do is demean the work of our Lord and Saviour. At the same time I ask where the scriptural and confessional basis is for a covenant of works before the fall into sin. Fair question, right? It is deduced from the text, but not implied in the text. You will not find the expression in the Scriptures or in the (continental) Reformed confessions. When a covenant is mentioned in the Old and New Testaments it is the Mosaic covenant based on the law revealed at Sinai. This is the covenant of works which condemns us because we cannot keep it. This is the covenant fulfilled by Christ so that we no longer under works but under grace (Rom 6:14). Good works never served to merit eternal life; only Christ gives this life by his righteousness and holiness.

Therefore the Scripture states, “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast” (Eph 2:8, 9). I want to add to this the observation that even *before* the fall the Lord Jesus was chosen as our Mediator. We also read in the Scriptures that our Lord “was chosen *before* the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for our sake” (1 Pet 1:20). Is anybody still prelapsarian? Let’s not even go there, but I still have the question: where do we read that before the fall (“pre-lapsus”) man could earn salvation? Is there really biblical data that demands belief in a time of testing before the fall? How long was this testing supposed to last? Did God place man in Eden so that he might prove himself worthy of his calling or position?

Garden of Eden

God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In this garden Adam and Eve were fully sustained as God's children. The Lord gave them food and drink in abundance. They were allowed to eat freely of the tree of life, and from all trees really. The only limitation was that they would not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Issue 3 begins with an editorial from Rev. Klaas Stam. In this editorial he asks, "Was there ever a covenant of works?" This question is asked in connection with some of the differences that our federation may have with the URCNA.

There is a conclusion on "Musical Instruments in the Worship Service" by Dr. Arjan de Visser. Here we see how the use of musical accompaniment in the worship service can be utilized to appropriately support the worship service. A series from Sarah Vandergugten continues in this issue as well.

In news from the federation we have a report from Man-oah Manor on its thirtieth anniversary. Issue 3 also contains a Treasures New and Old meditation, the Clippings on Politics and Religion and the You Asked column, a press release, and a Mission News insert.

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Adam was to “work the Garden and take care of it.” This was the work to which he and his wife were called. We do not read that eternal life would only be given upon obedience. They could already eat of the tree of life. This blessing and privilege was explicitly taken away after the fall into sin.

Let us linger here a moment. We do not know the extent of the verbs “to work [the Garden] and to take care of it” (Gen 2:15). This “work” does not mean intensive, back-breaking labour. This can also not be used as a passage to undergird a “covenant of works.” The Bible does not say that Adam and Eve would have merited (eternal) life by their works. The Lord does say that if they ate from the tree of knowledge and evil they would surely die. This means that there is only one obligation in this relationship, namely that Adam and Eve recognize the Lord God as *Sovereign*. This was said at the very beginning of the relationship: “When you eat of it you will surely die.”

Did God place man in Eden so that he might prove himself worthy of his calling or position?

To “work” the garden means to make it even more beautiful, to cultivate it and promote in it God’s glory. This “work” is not heavy labour but an enjoyable task in which Adam and Eve could serve God. Sometimes we think that Adam and Eve had nothing to do in the Garden except eat fruit. But they were not fruitcakes. In reality they were using their gifts to make the Garden even more pleasing than it already was. God would proudly observe their efforts and would come into the garden to speak with them, also about their work. He loved their work.

In the original language the verb “to take care” is literally “to guard” (Hebrew SMR). Why post a watch or issue a command to stand on guard, if there is no danger? So there was danger. Adam and Eve were to keep this garden from evil. Does it go too far if I suggest that the LORD informed Adam and Eve about the sad events that led to the dragon being thrown to earth (Rev 12)? It would be strange to post a watch and not tell him about the enemy who would surely come. I do not think that

Adam and Eve were people who had no clue as to what they were facing. God does not keep his children clueless.

To say it succinctly, Adam and Eve were given endless abundance so that God would receive constant obedience. This is the essence of a covenant: I give you all, you give me all. As in every covenant, the covenant-maker sets the rules and the covenant-keeper accepts those rules. It remains a covenant through the ages that follow. This how God wished to live with his children.

Why would God ever enter into such a relationship with Adam and Eve? Because he loved them, as the work of his hands. God made them so that they would live for him. There is no other reason why God would give such blessings to a man and woman. God alone made this covenant and he also safeguarded it. It was made to *last* as an eternal covenant.

Let us take this one step farther. There is an eternal covenant of love. That is why it was safeguarded in Christ before the creation of the world. I do not read anywhere about a covenant of works. Christ did not become our Saviour after and because we broke the covenant of works. We broke the covenant of love and Christ immediately was proclaimed as a Lamb without blemish or defect (1 Pet 1:19). I think we see the extent of our depravity clearer when we realize that sin is a breaking of the one covenant of love.

Westminster Standards

Is there any place where a covenant of works is mentioned? Well, yes, you can find it in Chapter VII of the Westminster Standards. There we read, “The *first* covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” We also read, “Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a *second*, commonly called the covenant of grace, wherein he freely offers unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ. . . .”

So, first, there is a covenant of works before the fall by which man could merit life, and second, there is a covenant of grace after the fall wherein God freely offers life and salvation in Jesus Christ. Sounds good. But we do not find anywhere in Scripture the evidence for this first covenant, a covenant of works. It almost sounds as if God kept a second option at hand, to use if the first covenant did not work out.



The Canadian Reformed Churches called this approach to the covenant a “divergence” which needed further discussion, but they did not intimate that the Westminster Standards were in error. Let me quote from the report to the Canadian Reformed Synod of Burlington 1986, “Although in this respect continued discussion is desirable since weaknesses and imperfections in the Westminster Standards could benefit from careful emendation, the divergency (sic) now discussed was not an impediment to recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Acts*, p. 146).

Sometimes I tremble at the gall which our synods showed when they dared to speak of *weaknesses and imperfections* in the Westminster Standards. But really, this did not hinder the Canadian Reformed Churches to accept the OPC as sister church. We cannot allow for errors, but we can live with weaknesses. We all have our own history and formulations which may be discussed, but this should be done within the existing bond of fellowship as sister churches.

Who cares?

Is this matter really important? I would have let the matter rest. Sometimes doctrinal matters are made too complex. But apparently it is important enough to have a colloquium on it at a general synod. I have never heard of such a colloquium being held at one of our synods. *But there is something more precious at stake.* God loves us as a father loves his children. He has entered into a rela-

tionship with us which was made secure in Christ even before we were created. The striving of our life must be that we *respond to this love*, find joy in this wondrous relationship, and walk in good works which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2: 10). There is *one* covenant and it is *God’s covenant of love*. I wrote a book a while back dealing extensively with this topic. Probably never made it to any synod.

Believers and their seed

Some have said that God’s covenant is made only with the *elect*. Wrong. The covenant of love is made with *believers and their seed* and it sometimes becomes clear that not all who are of Israel are truly Israel (Rom 9:6). Still, upon all covenant children there lies an obligation to love God and serve him. Regeneration and faith are required not as conditions but as obligations. *Noblesse oblige*, as we sometimes say.

People sometimes think that they have the right to break with God and his church. Or to keep it in terms of God’s covenant: I never asked for this covenant and so I don’t really want it. Someone even added: I never asked to be baptized, either. Or I hear that someone says, “Well, I did make public profession faith, but I didn’t mean it. I did it because it was expected.” Sounds tough and honest, but I find it rather pathetic. God is not moved by our pathetic prowess. We can break the covenant, but it still exists. God calls us back to it in Christ. If we don’t listen, we should read Edward’s sermon on sinners in the hands of an angry God, an unbearable sermon actually preached at Enfield, Connecticut, on July 8, 1741. That sermon would also benefit from careful emendation, especially in its Christology. *Only love, not terror, will lead a sinner heaven-ward.*

In the covenant God keeps us to his word. His promises are true and remain true. So we must remain true to God. The covenant is not a contract, but a relationship. A relationship needs to grow. It has its ups and downs. It is a living and dynamic reality. God entered into this relationship with Adam and Eve well before the fall. After the fall it became clear that this covenant of love could be salvaged only through the redeeming work of Christ. John 3:16, “God so *loved* the world that he gave his only-begotten son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.”





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Fellowship in God's Light

"God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth." (1 John 1:5-7)

For us Reformed believers, doctrine is important. Rightly so. For if you have the wrong doctrine then you believe the wrong thing about God and how he relates to us. And then you either damage your relationship with God, or you break it all together.

As John points out, some people claim to have fellowship with God, but they fool themselves. Although they think they are walking in the light, they are actually walking in darkness.

Because of the fall into sin, God's creation became full of darkness. That is what John refers to in his gospel when he says that the light shines in the darkness, but that the darkness has not understood it (John 1:5). Because of sin we are that darkness and live in that darkness.

It is wonderful that as believers God has called us out of darkness into his light (1 Pet 2:9) and that we are now children of light (1 Thess 5:5). Those who do wrong hate light (John 3:19-21). But when God's light shines in us and on us, it reveals our true nature as God meant it to be (Eph 5:8-13).

Without light life is not possible. Light makes everything beautiful. Darkness and light cannot exist in the same place. If we are walking in the light, the darkness has to go. When we hang on to sin, then the light goes.

To walk in the light and to be a light is only possible if you have fellowship with the Lord God. It means to take his outstretched hand and to allow him to guide you. It means to have true fellowship with him. Fellowship implies sharing, sharing everything.

Through his Son God has given us everything we need for body and soul. God's Son stripped himself of all the glory and majesty that he had and humbled himself by sharing in our human nature (Phil 2: 6-9).

It is hard for us to share everything with God. We want to share only if it doesn't cost anything. Often we treat him like a distant relative who out of necessity and obligation came to live with us. We are under the same roof with that person and store our food in the same fridge, and

use the same appliances and furniture, but we don't really share. Although we have fellowship in some form or another, there is no real meaningful interaction. We are like two ships that pass each other in the night. There is only obligatory giving and communication. There is no warmth. There is no spark. There is no connection. There is no joy.

Fellowship with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ should be the most joyful thing in our whole life. He is responsible for every aspect of our well-being. Our possessions, our talents, our health, whatever we have, mean nothing without him.

God is our light. And he is our light into eternity. He shares everything with us and will continue to do that into eternity. He wants to be with us always in a meaningful way.

It says in Revelation 22:5 that in the New Jerusalem God's people will no longer need the light of the sun or the moon or the stars. For the Lord Jesus Christ is their light. If we live with and in the light then we will have fellowship with him forever. **C**

For Further Study

1. Why is having the right doctrine not enough?
2. Through his Son God shares everything with us. What is our response? What more can/should we do?
3. Why is meaningful fellowship with God so important?
4. What makes fellowship with the triune God so joyful?

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Good News for Women

The Women around Jesus (Part 3)

So far, we've had a brief overview of the position and role of women as portrayed in the Old Testament. That should help us realize things really did change in the early New Testament church. Because we read and study Scripture through twenty-first century lenses, where we're accustomed to many freedoms for women, we seldom realize there was indeed a significant shift in the position of women during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. We read stories or passages that are not remarkable to us, but would have been to first century followers of Jesus. Exploring the gospels focused on Jesus' interaction with women may reveal things we've never noticed before. It will become apparent that Jesus the Messiah is restoring women to an honoured position.

Female followers

Christ Jesus' earthly sojourn took place mostly in Israel, among the Jewish people. Jesus called twelve men to be his disciples. He did not call any women specifically to that position. When he sent out the seventy-two there is no record that any of them were women (Luke 10). Yet women were followers, assisting him and The Twelve in significant ways. In Luke 8:1-3 we read,

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some of the women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

We note that Jesus is traveling through Palestine with a group that consists of both male and female followers

and disciples. In the custom of the day, that would have been highly unusual. Remarkably, the women were the ones providing financial support for the daily needs of the group.¹

In chapter 10 (v. 38-42), Luke tells the story of another noteworthy and potentially awkward situation. Jesus is at the home of Martha and Mary in Bethany. He is teaching and Mary is sitting at his feet listening, along with his disciples. From our perspective, not particularly significant. We hear in Martha's response that she is frustrated that Mary is not helping her, and that's legitimate. What we perhaps don't understand is that women would not sit at the feet of a rabbi. Only men would learn at the feet of a rabbi, in order to teach others. (cf. Paul and Gamaliel: Acts 22:3) But Jesus tells Martha that "Mary has chosen what is better." He did not tell Mary to leave, but approved of her choice.

Interaction with women

In his teaching, Jesus regularly interacted with women, affirming their faith and loyalty. Some examples: the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-16); the poor widow who gave all (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:1-4); the Gentile woman of great faith (Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30). His own disciples were surprised by his conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well – a Samaritan and a woman at that (John 4)! Regardless, Jesus revealed himself as Messiah. When he demonstrated full knowledge of her sinful past, she believed in him. Her testimony led her fellow Samaritans to acknowledge him as "Savior of the world" (John 4:42).

John 8:1-11 relates the story of the woman caught in adultery. Jesus refuses to condemn her. The men who brought her to him for judgement leave without throwing

any stones of condemnation. He does tell her to leave her sinful ways, but his actions support her. In effect, he has judged those who thought of bringing only the woman “caught in adultery” to him, and not the man who would have been just as guilty. Deuteronomy 22:22 imposed the death sentence for both.

We note that Jesus is traveling through Palestine with a group that consists of both male and female followers and disciples

Jesus’ parables included stories where women were lead characters (Matt 13:33, 25:1-13; Luke 13:20-21, 15:8-10, 17:35, 18:1-8); he was not afraid to be touched by an unclean woman, in fact he healed her (Matt 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:42-48); he respected men and women equally, and did not favour one over the other. When the Pharisees tried to test him, he held to the original plan for marriage. He maintained that Moses had permitted men to divorce their wives, because of the hardness of their hearts. Jesus refers back to the seminal text, Genesis 2:24, where marriage is clearly a permanent relationship between one man and one woman (Matt 19: 3-9). No divorce, no polygamy. A better situation for all, especially for women. However, Jesus also notes that in the life to come there will be no marriage (Matt 22:23-30; Mark 12:18-25). There will be no further need of that most intimate relationship; all relationships will be subsumed into communion with the triune God (John 16:22-23; Rev 21:3, 7). Human hierarchical structures become superfluous.

Women as Witnesses

At the end of Jesus’ life, it was the women who continued to follow Jesus, even to his death. Mary of Bethany – who had learned at his feet – understood that Jesus must die and anointed him with costly oil (Matt 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8). John was the only one of The Twelve at the cross. The rest had fled! The women were there. The gospel writers mention several by name: Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, the mother of Zebedee’s sons, and,

again, the many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs (Matt 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke: 23:49; John 19:25-27). Some of these same women were witnesses of Jesus’ burial by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (Matt 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23: 55-56). Women were the first witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome (Matt 28:1-9; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-11; John 20:10-18). The women were instructed to “go and tell” the Eleven and all the others (Matt 28:1-10; Mark 16:7; John 20:17-18). The fourth century church father, Augustine, gave Mary Magdalene, the first to encounter Jesus after his resurrection, the honorific title “Apostle to the Apostles.”

As my pastor noted one Easter Sunday, the gospel writers – who were all men – were initially dependent on the witness of women that Jesus really died, that he was buried, and that he had risen from the dead! The point here is not to minimize the role of The Twelve, or any of the men who followed Jesus; but we should understand that it would have been remarkable at that time in Jewish history to consider women worthy of such momentous responsibility. Women were not even permitted to be witnesses in court, with rare exceptions. Not surprisingly, Luke writes of the disciples: “But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense” (Luke 24:11). Equally at play was simple disbelief in Jesus’ promise that he would rise on the third day. In any event, the Lord chose women as his primary witnesses of Easter morning’s historic events. Ironically, that bolsters the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection. No first century Jew would have bothered to fabricate evidence where women were considered trustworthy witnesses. Jesus did not hesitate to give them that responsibility.

A new covenant sign and seal

As time neared for Jesus’ return to his Father’s side, he instructs his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. . .” (Matt 28:10). Jesus did not choose a sign and seal that could be administered to males only. The new covenant, as had the old, remained one between God and his people as a whole (Gen 17: 9-11), but now the sign of the covenant – baptism

– was to be administered equally to males and females. Is that a big deal? Yes it is! The Lord Jesus could have chosen a covenant symbol that could only be administered to men and boys, or he could have stipulated that only males were to be baptized. But he did not. Since the very beginning of the Christian church women as well as men, girls as well as boys, have been baptized, bearing the sign and seal of the covenant on their own bodies. That is a significant change!²

One other consideration: is it fair to suggest that the shift from a male only covenant sign to one that included women might also indicate a shift in the distribution of covenant blessings and responsibilities? In the Old Testament, men received the larger share in covenant blessings, not least in the inheritance of goods and lands. Women received those only by exception (Zelophehad and Job’s daughters), although if God’s law were maintained, they were appropriately cared for. But do we see in circumcision an indication of a superior rank of males within the covenant, and in baptism a move toward equal status and responsibilities? It would seem so.

***It would have been remarkable
at that time in Jewish history
to consider women worthy
of such momentous responsibility***

The New Testament makes clear that only those who are united with Christ receive the covenant blessings; that truth is confirmed to all in baptism.

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh [sinful nature], by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross (Col 2: 11-14).

Jesus’ completed work of salvation makes this as true for women as for the men. All receive an equal share of new covenant blessings.

This brief survey of the gospels, focusing on Jesus’ interaction with women, shows he gave them remarkable prominence during his brief public ministry. Women followed and supported him. Jesus forgave their sins, healed them, told parables about them, and validated the desires of those who want to learn from him. He accepted the care and honour they bestowed on him. He affirmed marriage as it was intended from the beginning; that was an improvement especially for women. He gave them radically significant roles as witnesses of his death and resurrection. True, there are no specific verses that say, “Note how Jesus is treating women better than they had been in the Old Testament,” but it is clear that he did. In Jesus’ kingdom, even in “the already but not yet” of his time on earth, it was becoming apparent that the ultimate relationships are not between persons, not even in the intimacy of marriage. It is the relationship with Jesus as saviour that restores both women and men as true image bearers of God, as was the intent from the beginning.

¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, “Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View,” *Theology Matters* 6, no. 1 (2000), 1 – 11.
² For the idea of the significance of the shift from circumcision to baptism, I am indebted to Ra Mclaughlin <http://thirdmill.org/answers/answer.asp/file/40447>.





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Musical Instruments in the Worship Service (2)

In the previous article we discussed biblical principles regarding the worship service of the Christian church. It is time to move on to the question: What exactly is the role of singing and music in worship? *Singing* is clearly commanded in Scripture. Colossians 3:16 – “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.” What exactly the apostle means with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is an issue that we will bypass for now. That the Christian congregation is expected to sing is clear.

What does the Bible say about the use of *musical instruments* in Christian worship? Here the opinions diverge. In the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition there are some who do not allow musical instruments in Christian worship. An example is the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA). The RPCNA’s Directory of Public Worship stipulates that only Psalms are to be sung (no hymns) and that they “are to be sung without the accompaniment of instruments, since these are not authorized for New Testament worship.”¹ Interestingly, the RPCNA does allow the use of choirs in worship, even though choirs are not authorized in the New Testament either!

The main argument against using instruments during worship is that the New Testament does not authorize it (the so-called regulative principle of worship is at play here). What shall we say in response? It is true that the New Testament does not explicitly prescribe the use of musical instruments. On the other hand, the New Testament does not explicitly forbid it either.

One could argue that the many calls in the Psalms to praise the Lord with the harp and the lyre and the tambourine have abiding significance, even in the new covenant. One could also point to the fact that there is

exuberant worship in heaven (as mentioned in the book of Revelation). Since the NT neither demands nor forbids the use of musical instruments, it appears that this matter is left in the freedom of the churches.

The early Christian church followed the example of the Jewish synagogue. There was singing and chanting but no musical instruments were used. As a result, for hundreds of years the Church did not allow musical instruments in worship. Even today the Eastern Orthodox tradition does not allow musical instruments (although they do use choirs and solo-singing). The Western church started to allow the use of instruments during the late Middle Ages. By the time Luther and Calvin came around, the use of musical instruments was still a relatively new phenomenon.

Calvin

Calvin wanted to go back to the early church. He believed that it is wrong to use musical instruments in worship. He had various reasons for his position. First, he believed the musical instruments were part of the Old Testament dispensation, when the church was still immature. Now that the church is mature, the whole congregation (not just the Levites) must participate in singing the Psalms. Instruments, however, are not needed anymore. Second, he believed that musical instruments do not fit in the simple and intelligible worship style which the Lord prefers. Playing musical instruments is like speaking in tongues, Calvin said. You hear the sound but you do not understand the message. Third, Calvin was afraid that music would become a distraction. He criticized the Roman Catholic Church for allowing “organs and many other similar ludicrous things” in worship.²

In other words, as Reformed people we have a slight problem. We love Calvin and we love organs, but in this

case we cannot have both. We either have to dump Calvin or we have to dump the organ. It's your choice. . . .

Of course, we have already made that choice. In our tradition we have moved closer to Martin Luther who had a more positive view of music than Calvin, seeing it as a gift of God that is to be used in worship. Indeed, Calvin's arguments against the use of musical instruments do not convince.³ To answer his first objection, it is clear that sacrifices have been abolished in the new covenant because of the sacrifice of Christ. But this in itself does not prove that musical instruments have been abolished as well. Second, to compare musical instruments with speaking in tongues is a strange argument.

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Speaking in tongues disrupts the service. Musical accompaniment merely serves the singing. Third, music can be a distraction indeed. Calvin has a point here. But it is not necessarily the case. Calvin's reluctance to allow musical instruments in the church should probably be explained as a reaction against the deformation of worship which he witnessed in the Roman Catholic Church of his time.⁴ I would like to think that Calvin, had he been able to see how musical instruments can support the singing of the congregation, would have taken a more positive attitude to using musical instruments.

Concluding principles

In our Reformed tradition we have come to hold a position that is more open to the use of musical instruments. It may be summarized as follows: First, the use of musical instruments is *not essential* to worship. While congregational *singing* is commanded explicitly, the New Testament does not prescribe the use of musical instruments. Thus, if we wanted sing *a capella* all the time, that would be okay. Singing in four-part harmony (without instruments being used) would be an excellent alternative.

Second, the use of musical instruments in worship is *legitimate*. In the old covenant musical instruments were used for the temple service. The book of Revelation mentions the use of musical instruments as part of heavenly

worship. While the NT does not demand the use of musical instruments, it does not exclude it either. I cannot see it otherwise than that the Lord has left this matter to the discretion of the church.

Third, the use of musical instruments in worship can be very *beneficial* if it supports the singing of the congregation. In other words, while there is no place for solo performances, musical instruments do have the potential "to benefit the liturgy immensely."⁵

Pointers for church musicians

Let me conclude with some pointers for church musicians. To begin with, church musicians have a wonderful calling. They are called to support the liturgy of the worship service and to enhance the covenantal fellowship between the Lord and his people by playing appropriate music. It is therefore essential that church accompanists should understand the character of the worship service.

Second, church musicians should understand that their role is to serve and to support the liturgy, whether it is by accompanying the singing of the congregation or by playing before and after the service. The music should not draw undue attention to itself. Our worship should be congregation-centred, not player-centred.

Third, church musicians can set the tone for worship by playing in ways that are fitting for the specific moment in the liturgy. Before the start of the worship service, instrumental music can help get the congregation in the right mood for worship. I would recommend a meditative kind of music (not too wild). After the worship service, as the congregation departs, it will be fitting to play some more upbeat music.

During the collection, instrumental music can set a tone that is appropriate for the action of offering our gifts. Since the collection usually happens after the sermon, instrumental music can be appropriately used to help the congregation meditate some more on the message that was preached. One of the best ways to do this is to play a variation on a well-known Psalm or hymn that relates to the message. Some accompanists are very good at this!

Finally, church musicians can also support the worship experience by setting a tone that is fitting for the Psalm or hymn that the congregation is singing. To be able to do this, accompanists will have to prepare and reflect on the Psalms and hymns that are in the liturgy. What kind of Psalm or hymn is this: a lament, a confession of sin,

a song of praise? The accompaniment for each song should be fitting and facilitate the congregation's singing. To mention a few examples: At the beginning and the end of the service, the minister will often choose a song of praise. At other points in the service, for example after the reading of the Law, he may select a song of penitence. Whatever the choices are, the accompanist needs to set the tone that is fitting. Psalm 51 needs a different kind of accompaniment than Psalm 150. This can be a challenge, especially when the mood in the Psalm changes from one stanza to the next (example: Psalm 25, stanza 3 to 4). Sometimes the message even changes halfway through the stanza (for example, in Psalm 73:7 and 86:4).

Questions

During the conference in Burlington the question was asked whether it is okay to have a soloist sing a suitable song during the time of the collection. I have attended church services where this was done well. I can also think of other occasions where unfortunately it became a performance. While I admit that it can be done appropriately, I feel that we should not open the door to this kind of thing. Let the singing and music in the worship service remain congregation-centred. Thankfully, there are many other occasions where talented singers and musicians can sing or play their instruments to the glory of the Lord!

Another question is whether it is helpful to have a praise band leading the congregation in singing. The idea would be that you have a band on stage (keyboard, guitars, drums) and one or more soloists who "lead the singing." Again, I have seen this being done well. My wife and I regularly attend Light Night evenings in the Cornerstone church building in Hamilton. The music and the singing are beautiful. I have noticed that sometimes people find it easy to sing along with the band, other times many seem to be struggling and prefer simply to listen. I have come to the conclusion that having a good worship band leading the singing is fitting for a praise and worship evening but not for a worship service where the emphasis should be on congregational singing. Both the visual aspects (having a band on stage) and the auditory aspects (soloists leading the singing) lead almost automatically to the idea of this being a performance. See also the reference made earlier to the article "Why Men Have Stopped Singing in Church."

I hasten to add that an ensemble of musical instruments can accompany congregational singing very well. A small ensemble of musicians (for example, a piano, an acoustic guitar amplified through the sound system, and a flute or a violin) can do a wonderful job in accompanying the singing of the congregation. A trumpet can be used on festive occasions, with invigorating effect. When the ensemble is small they do not need to occupy a lot of space on stage, which helps to avoid the impression that the musicians are giving a performance. It would be good if our churches in general would become more open to the idea of allowing small ensembles to accompany congregational singing, especially on festive days such as Christmas, profession of faith, etc.

At the same time, I hope that the church organ will maintain (perhaps I should say, regain) its place of honour in our worship services. The church organ as such is not "more biblical" than other instruments, but from a liturgical perspective it cannot be denied that the organ is very suitable to carry congregational singing. Unfortunately, the organ is such a powerful instrument that it can also drown out the singing of the congregation. But if it is played well, the organ is a great instrument for the accompaniment of congregational singing. With its deep 16 foot stops, the organ lays a foundation under congregational singing that allows everyone (also the men) to sing with confidence. If I'm not mistaken, we have come through a period that our young people were not interested to play organ because somehow that was not "cool." I am thankful to see signs that we are outgrowing this phase, and I'm hoping that playing organ will once again become something that our young people want to do.

¹ Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, section F-2.

² Calvin's commentary on 1 Samuel 18

³ For a broader discussion: See my articles "Church music in Calvin's tradition," *Clarion* 58 (2009), 589-591, 621-623.

⁴ Two helpful articles on this matter: John Barber, "Luther and Calvin on Music and Worship." *Reformed Perspective Magazine*, Vol. 8, nr. 26 (2006). W. David O. Taylor, "John Calvin and Musical Instruments: A Critical Investigation." *Calvin Theological Journal* 48 (2013): 248-269.

⁵ I have benefited from reading the article by Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Choir & Organ - Their Place in Reformed Liturgy." <http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/choir-organ-their-place-in-reformed-liturgy-nicholas-wolterstorff>.



Manoah Manor Celebrates Thirty Years of Blessings and Service

In 1967, a group of church members came together to discuss the feasibility of building a rest home for the aging members of the Reformed community in the Fraser Valley. Many more meetings were held, plans were formulated, property was bought, and a home with apartments designed for Independent Living was built. Manoah Manor officially opened its doors on October 27, 1984 in Langley, B.C. The name reflected the kind of facility it was to be; “Manoah” is *rest* and “Manor” is *home*.

Phase 2 came some years later, with more apartments added, plus an Intermediate Care wing, to provide more care for those elderly residents who could no longer take care of all their own needs.



Rev. Doug VandeBurgt, George Geurts, visiting the Open House event, Peter VanSeters, chairman of the board of Manoah Manor, Mike Krabbendam, administrator of Manoah Manor

Fast forward from October 27, 1984 to October 27, 2014

Manoah Manor, its residents and staff threw open those doors again, and invited interested people and the supporting community to come celebrate thirty years of providing a community of safety, protection, kindness, assistance, and love to our senior members. The facility has kept pace with the needs of our seniors and numerous renovation and refurbishing projects have also taken place over the years. The open house gave the opportunity for hundreds of people to tour some of the refurbished suites. As well, changes made to the Intermediate Care wing, especially the new and improved bathing room, could be admired, changes which add to the comfort of the residents and ease the work of the staff. Comments made were all very positive.

Pat Kieneker, Mrs. Mien Kieneker, visiting the Open House event, Mrs. Tina Doornbos, Mrs. Mag VanderHorst, residents of Manoah Manor



The staff is to be commended for the loving and respectful care they give to the Manoah residents, and it is the hope and prayer of board, staff, administration, and

residents that this facility will continue to be blessed by the Lord for years to come, and continue to be a blessing to our senior members.





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Q In our Bible Study group we discussed the need for a Christian to pray to God for indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Some of the members answered this question in the positive because we need to pray to our heavenly Father for all our needs, including the need of the presence of the Holy Spirit. The remainder of the group answered in the negative because the Spirit is at work in us from the first act which is regeneration, and therefore the Bible has an abundance of texts which support the view that the Spirit indwells us. We should thank God for the Spirit which is at work in us and pray that the fruits of the Spirit will be visible in our day to day life. This view creates some tension with Q and A 116 of the HC where it is stated that God only gives his grace and Holy Spirit to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask him for these gifts and thank him for them. This also creates some tension with the Canons of Dort where regeneration (work of the Spirit) is viewed as the work of God alone without the will of men. Could you provide us with some insight here?

A This is one of those matters in which both views are correct (hence, we don't have to fear a division among the members of this Bible Study group, thankfully). In the covenant the *LORD* works with us for one hundred percent and we are responsible for one hundred percent. *God* works faith and without the Holy Spirit man is unable to believe; yet, on hearing the Word *man* is responsible for it and is called to submit to the Word, repent and believe. By baptism we are assured of the forgiveness of our sins in Jesus blood; yet, the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray, "Forgive us our sins. . . ." The Spirit of God works in the church, which is the workshop of the Holy Spirit: there *God* is at work in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil 2:12); yet, then the admonition is added to work out *your own* salvation with fear and trembling. The hearer has to work with the Word of the Lord, work in the Spirit of the Lord. This emphasizes man's responsibility which is

never abrogated, responsibility for everything the Lord is doing in our life. We receive the *promise* that the Holy Spirit will dwell in us; yet, the Lord Jesus teaches us that God will *give* you this Holy Spirit when you ask for it (Luke 11:13).

God the Holy Spirit dwells among us. He lives in his holy congregation and he dwells there with those who *receive* his Word with a believing heart. As we confess with Lord's Day 20, "He is also given to me, to make me by a true faith share in Christ and all his benefits." Thus by the indwelling Holy Spirit we receive the power to bear our cross, to give us patience, endurance, to help us forgive, and to give us strength so that we won't succumb. Hence the Lord's Prayer is a *spiritual prayer* by which we *ask for* everything we need for body *and soul: for* God's Holy Spirit to help us fight against sin, *for* giving us the light of the Scriptures, *for* comfort, encouragement endurance, etc. At the same time the Scriptures speak about insulting, of grieving the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption (Eph

4:30), namely by those who do not live by the undeserved favour of God, who do not value the precious blood of the Son of God, who do not display the sincerity of faith in God, rejecting his Word.

The Holy Spirit renews us, so that we pray *for* the Holy Spirit, to be renewed more and more. We desire progress in our life as God's children. Every work on our faith, every increase in our fruits, and every enrichment of our life in the grace and peace of God through Jesus Christ, is a work by the Holy Spirit. When Paul, therefore, exhorts us to pray *in the Spirit* (Eph 6:18), it's a prayer that's in-

itiated and supported by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit directs our prayers to God and brings them in accordance to the will of God (Rom 8:26). Prayer is the *means* whereby the Holy Spirit opens our hearts and minds *for* God and *to* God. Prayer, also, is the *means* of the Spirit by which he strengthens, increases, and multiplies our faith, so that we are enriched by all the treasures and gifts in Christ that come to us in the way of prayer. Then here too we have to pray and work: we pray *for* the working of the Holy Spirit and all the days of our life we *let* the LORD work in us through his Holy Spirit (LD 38). 

Is there something you've been wanting to know?

An answer you've been looking for?

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander

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