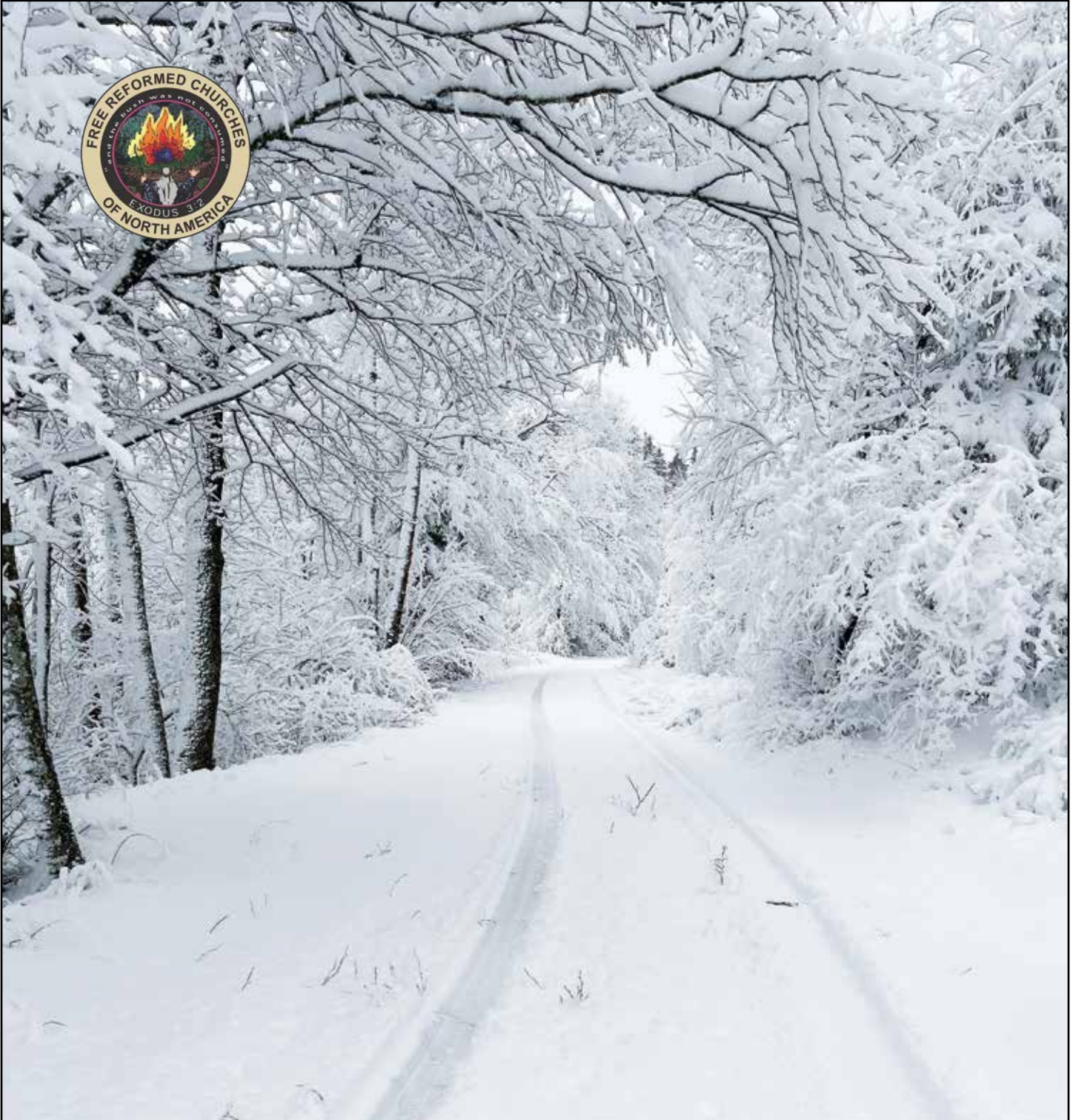


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THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



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SING UNTO THE LORD

*“Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the Lord a new song,
and his praise in the congregation of the saints”
- Psalm 149:1*

The call to sing unto the Lord rises in many Psalms. Just use your concordance to count the many times the call to sing appears. My estimate would be about thirty-three times. Next to the proclamation of the Word, singing unto the Lord is an important part of our Reformed worship.

It must have been awesome for the shepherds in Ephrath’s fields to hear the proclamation of the birth of Christ by an angel, followed immediately by the proclaiming of a multitude of angels. *“And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”* (Luke 2:13-14). Some interpret that the heavenly host spoke those words, others have interpreted it as chanting, but I believe that this heavenly host of angels sang to the praise of God. And no doubt the angels are exceptionally good, even perfect at singing the praises of the Lord!

However, what will the singing be like in heaven by the redeemed? I once heard an elderly preacher state something that left me spell bound. He stated, “When the redeemed in heaven lift up their voices, the angels will fall silent in absolute awe for the song they will hear, because they cannot sing what is recorded in Revelation 5:9 for instance: *‘Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.’*” This may be some speculative thinking of the elderly preacher, but it does tell me that the singing of the redeemed in heaven will be something to look forward to!

I love singing! My grandparents and my parents loved singing. When my grandmother was on her sickbed due to stomach cancer, she told me that her favorite Psalm was Psalm 42, the fifth stanza:

But the LORD will send salvation, And by day His love provide.
He shall be my exultation, And my song at eventide.
On His praise e’en in the night I will ponder with delight,
And in prayer, transcending distance, Seek the God of my existence.

The night hours were hard on her physical system and so her spiritual wellbeing often took her to sing Psalms to her Redeemer in the night hours. While I was still a young boy, I remember my parents always singing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs while washing the dishes. If my memory serves me well, I remember an unusual discipline approach by my father. I would sometimes quarrel with my younger sister, and as “punishment” he would tell me, “Get yourself to the pump organ in the other room and play some Psalms or Hymns and let me hear some singing!” Hmm, I still love singing!

On a side note, singing keeps me alert. Having preached twice on the Lord's Day and travelling back home (sometimes an hour drive), I find it very helpful to sing while driving to keep me alert and awake! I praise the Lord therefore also for the safety of singing.

As a preacher about to proclaim the Gospel, I always find the strength of congregational singing to be a great stimulant to preach the Gospel to the praise of the Lord. It reminds me of a passage in 2 Kings 3, where the Prophet Elisha had great difficulty declaring the Word of the Lord to wicked King Jehoram. Realizing his difficulties, he called for a minstrel. When the minstrel had played his instrument (and no doubt sung), Elisha sensed that the hand of the Lord came upon him, and he could declare the Word of the Lord. Good singing will do that to the preacher.

We are blessed with good singing congregations, singing even in four-part harmony in many of the congregations, or singing with some tenors lifting their voices above the congregational voices. It raises the desires of every preacher to preach the glorious Gospel!


Among the Reformers, John Calvin raised the importance of congregational singing in contrast to the chanting done by select groups in the Roman Catholic Church. Calvin, in fact, studied the Book of Psalms and saw to it that a singable version of the Psalms was made with the help of some scholars and musicians. He wrote: "Corporate singing subdued the fallen heart and restrained wayward in the way of piety ... It also amplifies the effect of the Word on the heart, multiplying the church's spiritual energy, this singing was the appropriate response to the good news of God's salvation. Sounds of praise welled up in believers as they came to know God. Spiritual joy could not be contained. Christ Himself, in fact, urged them to make their praise audible, sang with them, and led them in song."

Audible singing became a drawing card for visitors to Strasbourg where Calvin pastored a French refugee church for three years. The singing of the congregation was heard well beyond the walls of the church and often drew visitors to enter and join in.

Calvin once stated that "Christ urges us by His example to sing (Psalms) publicly so that they might be heard by more persons. For it was not enough that each one give thanks individually to God for the blessings he has received, unless making known the testimony of our gratitude openly, we should invite others to do the same."

Charles Haddon Spurgeon also spoke about congregational singing in several of his sermons. He believed in full-bodied, congregational singing and cautioned against individual performances: "Why, we hear of churches where four people are hired to do the praise of God, and all the people sit still and listen to them. And that is according to the New Testament, is it? It must be a very 'revised version,' surely. I find nothing of that sort in the book I have been accustomed to use. Let all the people of God praise Him. Singing should be congregational, but it should never be performed for the credit of the congregation ... Our singing should be such that God hears it with pleasure – singing in which there is not so much art as heart – not so much of musical sound as of spiritual emotion. They shall sing to the glory of God" (Sermon #1615).

In another sermon, Spurgeon lays out why everyone in the congregation should sing: "I know there are some of you who do not feel as if you could praise God this morning: let us ask the Master to put your harp in tune. Oh be not silent! Be not silent! Do bless Him! If you cannot bless Him for temporals, do bless Him for spirituals; and if you have not of late experimentally enjoyed many of these, then bless Him for what He is. For that dear face, covered with the bloody sweat; for those pierced hands, for that opened side, will you not praise Him? Why, surely, if He had not died for me, yet I must love Him, to think of His goodness in dying for others. His kindness, the generosity of His noble heart in dying for His enemies might well provoke the most unbelieving to a song. I am therefore not content unless all of you will contribute your note. I would have every bird throw in its note, though some cannot imitate the lark or nightingale; yea, I would have every tree of the forest clap its hands, and even the hyssop on the wall wave in adoration. Come, beloved, cheer up. Let dull care and dark fear be gone. Up with harps and down with doubts. It must be praise from 'the whole multitude.' The praise must be unanimous- not one chord out of order to spoil the tune" (Sermon # 678).

Let us therefore worship the Lord with corporate singing, singing from the heart, in praise for who He is and for what He has done. Let us sing in church to stimulate the preacher. Be corporate minstrels and see what God's hand will yet do. "Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of the saints" (Psalm 149:1). 

Rev. H. Bergsma is an emeritus Free Reformed pastor residing in Dorchester, Ontario.

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WHY CHRISTIANS MUST BE READERS

“The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.” (2 Timothy 4:13).

Paul is in prison and in a short time is to lose his life at the instigation of the Roman Emperor Nero. But in prison, he invites Timothy to bring with him books and parchments. It is a most interesting scene. Here is a great man, full of the Spirit of God, with a life of fruitfulness almost un-paralleled in the history of mankind. Soon he will leave this world and go to be with Christ. But in his prison cell he longs for something which Timothy can bring--books and parchments.

We cannot know for sure what these books and parchments were. They might, of course, have been the Scriptures of the Old Testament. We bear in mind that the New Testament Scriptures were only beginning to exist at this time as a collection of books. They certainly were not yet put together in the form of a completed New Testament. So in all likelihood these books and parchments included the Old Testament Scriptures. But Paul was a prolific reader and an indefatigable student. It is probable that amongst these books and parchments were other books, perhaps commentaries on Scripture or even secular books written by Greek writers of the pagan world. You will know that on two or three occasions Paul reveals his familiarity with pagan Greek literature. He evidently did not despise the best of the Greek literature. At this point, we might ask a question of our text. If it was the Bible of the Old Testament that Paul was asking to be brought, my question would be, “Why did he need it?” He had a consummately good memory. He had studied the Scriptures from his childhood, and he must have been almost able to quote the Old Testament from memory. Some people have achieved something similar. Why then would he need the Scriptures, if he had them stored away in his own mind?

On the other hand, if it was not the Bible of the Old Testament he was asking for, but other books, one might ask, “Why would he want them?” He was, after all, so close to death and to glory. Soon he would see his Saviour’s face and receive his immortal honours from Christ. You would hardly think that such a man would be interested to read anything but divine, spiritual, and inspired literature. But whatever it was he wanted, and whatever it was he needed, he asked for these books to come. So, we are faced with the question: Why?

Reasons to Read

Let me suggest three reasons.

First, I would suggest that if a man is once a reader, he is always

a reader. And a prison cell to a reader becomes a home from home when there are books. A small shelf of familiar books is like a small cluster of familiar friends. How the apostle in prison at Rome would have rejoiced to see these old “companions” beside him!

And then, as a second reason, it does not matter how advanced a Christian is in knowledge, grace, wisdom and experience; in this life he has not yet come to perfection. The apostle was forever pressing on to that perfection which was his desired goal.

Even as the shadow of eternity fell upon him, he was anxious that his dying days should be also learning days and days of progression. Evidently, there were still things he had to learn, and he was humble enough to indicate his readiness to learn from books.

Let me offer to you a third reason. I would suggest that the apostle includes these words for Timothy’s sake, as though to say to Timothy, “You must be a reader, Timothy. You are taking up the work that I am laying down.” Technically, Timothy was what we call an evangelist. An evangelist in the New Testament sense is what we would call an apostolic helper. He did not have plenary divine inspiration as the apostles did. Whenever the apostles opened their mouth officially to preach, what they said was infallible, conveying the very Word of God. But Timothy did not have that gift. His work was the consolidation of the churches of Christ, and it was essential that amongst other responsibilities that Timothy would take upon himself was reading the best books.

So, I do not think it is straining the passage to say to you that the doctrine from these words is surely this: A Christian man or woman must be a reader, all his or her life. We are to be readers to our dying day. No book is remotely comparable to the Bible. It is most important that in talking about books we say something first about the way to read the Bible to greatest profit. When we read the Word of God, I believe we should try to memorise it and try to learn it off by heart. We cannot know the Bible too well.

Encouragements from History

We know nothing compared to some of our forefathers in the faith. You would have heard of the Waldensians. They were the evangelicals of the Middle Ages. They lived in northern Italy in remote and inaccessible valleys and hillsides. They maintained the Word of God in its integrity and purity for centuries. Their ministers more or less had to learn the New Testament by heart before they entered the ministry, and often they knew the Psalms also. We know our Bible so little compared with them. We feel so humbled to compare ourselves with them. The Waldensians are an inspiration to us to learn our Bible.

It is not enough just to read it. We are to imbibe it until, like John Bunyan, our very blood is ‘bibline’ and the mind of Christ fills our whole conception of everything. Judge everything by this book. That is the way in which we are to use the Bible.

Then, let me say, read the Bible so as to consolidate your theology. What is missing in many Bible readers today in the world is that they have not understood the theology of the Bible, and that is an incalculable loss. What is the theology of the Bible? It is the distillation of all its teachings. Put the Bible in the crucible, heat it up, distill it to its essence, and what you have is what the world has learned to call “Calvinism.” The system of theology of the Bible is the system of grace which is enshrined for us in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, and in similar statements of religious doctrine and belief. We must see that and have that consolidated more and more in our minds.

You will forgive me for being a little parochial in saying that there is one very good thing in the Highlands of Scotland that we could export to Christians all around the world. After the evening services and prayer meetings on a weeknight and on the Lord’s Day, they frequently gather together in one or other of the homes of the congregation to talk about the Word of God. One of the men, let us say, will ask the questions, and another of the men will volunteer answers; and then other people

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will be drawn in to speak from their own experience about things relating to the text of Scripture that is being discussed.

God did not make us to be mindless. We begin with the mind. True religion begins with the mind, and that is what is so wonderful about Calvin, the Puritans, and those who followed on in the same linear succession. They begin with the mind. They address the mind. They give factual, propositional instruction to the intellect of man.

Then the Puritans addressed the heart. The mind is the first thing, but not the only thing. What we believe must affect our emotions, and that is what they believed in: the religion of the heart. Their books deal with such subjects as keeping the heart, watching the heart, and resisting the devil and temptation.

This is the practice of the Christian life. They dealt with every aspect of the believer's life: prayer; meditation; how to listen to sermons; how to sanctify the Sabbath day; our conduct in divine worship; family worship; the instruction of children; the Christian's daily walk and conversation; and knowing your adversary the devil and his wiles.

Treasure Troves Recovered

I should say that between the two world wars the Puritan books were worth next to nothing in England. You could go to a secondhand book dealer and ask for these books, and if there were any there to be had, you could get them for maybe a shilling a volume. Nobody wanted them. They were simply being thrown out. Indeed, during the wartime, they were being pulped by the government. You would receive a shilling or something for every ton of books that you turned in to some government agency, and they just pulped them for the war effort.

So, thousands of the best theological books vanished in that way. But, in 1957, a small start was made to reprint some of these great old books. You may know some of the early books that were published by the Banner of Truth Trust. When some of us who were young Christians in that period (as I was) started to read

these books, it was like beholding a lost continent! It was like standing on the edge of a new world!

The Banner continued its work, and it grew and grew and grew. When they first began to publish Puritans and to reprint Spurgeon, some Christian publishers said with a smile, "It's a waste of time, because nobody is going to buy these old books!"

But they did, until it literally came to the stage that the demand for some of the books they published outstripped the supply! They could not get them out fast enough!

Some of these books are the very best books the world has ever seen. Scarcely any language in the world has had such books as the English language. Today if you go to countries which are influenced by the gospel, the first thing these other countries have to do is to read our language. In Korea today and other countries, Christians are learning our language because they want access to the Puritans!

I was very touched recently while in Korea to meet a number of young people who said to me, "We have started a Puritan club." I said, "What's that?" "We get together and one of us reads from one of the Puritans to all the rest," (translated into Korean, of course).

I thought, What an extraordinary thing! Young people gathering to read the Puritans. But you see, my point is this: You and I don't need to learn the English language. We have it; we were born with it. It is our mother tongue. Shame on you and me if, having the language and having the books and having the means of getting them, we do not fill ourselves with this divine knowledge. Through reading the Word of God and the best books, the smell of heaven should be felt by others to be in our hearts and homes. ①

Rev. Maurice Roberts is an emeritus minister of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) who has frequently ministered in our churches in the past. Article taken and condensed from his book entitled Sanctification and Glorification.

God did not make us to be mindless. We begin with the mind. True religion begins with the mind, and that is what is so wonderful about Calvin, the Puritans, and those who followed on in the same linear succession.



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Romans: Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament By J.V. Fesko

Romans is one of the best-known books in the Bible and likely the most famous letter in history, as it is the apostle Paul's most systematic presentation of the gospel of Christ. In this expository commentary, J.V. Fesko considers this panoramic view of the breadth, height, and depth of divine grace. Fesko helps us understand both the big picture of Paul's letters and also key passages in his writings by paying careful attention to the structure of redemptive history. Be edified as you read this survey of Romans, observing the consistent way the apostle exalted the glory of God as he called for the obedience of faith. The author is an ordained minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and is also academic dean and professor of systematic theology at Westminster Seminary, California. It is endorsed by Kim Riddlebarger, senior pastor of Christ Reformed Church in Anaheim (URCNA) and Guy Prentiss Waters, James M. Baird, Jr. Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi. Waters says, "For many reasons, Romans is an intimidating book for pastors to preach. In this latest Lectio Continua contribution, Fesko shows us how to explain and to apply with confidence this magisterial letter to the contemporary church. Fesko's Romans models thoughtful exegesis, sound doctrine, and relevant application. I heartily recommend this book to anyone who wants to understand this epistle better." Hardcover, 441 pages, Reformation Heritage Books **RBS Price \$30.00**



RECENT BOOKS

C is for Christian: An A to Z Treasury of Who We Are in Christ By Alistair Begg

Going from A to Z, kids will learn about the amazing things that are true of us if we know Christ. Each letter teaches children about an aspect of our identity in Christ using Bible verses and clear engaging teaching by Alistair Begg. Reflection questions and prayers are included, making it possible to use this resource devotionally, such as for bedtime devotions or morning baskets. It can also be used as a kind of catechism, summarizing some of the Bible's truths about being a Christian. The alphabet format makes these theological truths easy to remember. The book can be read to kids 4+ or read by kids 7+. It is attractively illustrated. Hardcover, 64 pages, The Good Book Company **RBS Price \$22.50**



A "phoenix of women:" Puritan spirituality in the letters of Brilliana Harley By Michael A.G. Haykin

The life of Lady Brilliana Harley of Brampton Bryan, Herefordshire, England, was marked by a deep and living relationship with God. A Puritan Presbyterian by conviction, Brilliana was shunned by her neighbours during the tumultuous English Civil Wars and is remembered as valiantly resisting the siege of her home by the forces of Charles I. Brilliana's letters reveal the heart of her spirituality. While concerned about her son Edward (Ned)'s studies at Oxford, his diet and exercise, she especially encourages him about the value of a vital relationship with God. Her letters also expose the breadth of her reading and her theological acumen. As the troubles around her increased, she took increasing solace in the truths of election, the sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross and the sovereignty of God in salvation. The soil of her heart was truly warmed by "the sweet waters of God's Word." The book is endorsed by Joel R. Beeke and Simonetta Carr. Softcover, 148 pages, Heritage Press **RBS Price \$19.00**



Margaret Paton: Letters from the South Seas

By Margaret Paton

John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides is a missionary classic. In this companion volume, Margaret Whitecross Paton gives an enthralling account of missionary life in the New Hebrides from the 1860s to the 1890s. She was the second wife of the pioneer missionary to the New Hebrides, John G. Paton. The steady advance of the gospel in the islands is vividly described, and the whole account is set against the background of the joys and sorrows of family life. Margaret Paton writes with rare grace, humour, and pathos. *Letters from the South Seas* is an inspiring story, full of the triumphs of Christian faith and love, and a missionary classic in its own right--a book to prize. The author, Margaret Whitecross Paton, was the daughter of the Rev. John Whitecross, whose work, *The Shorter Catechism Illustrated*, was republished by the Trust. A gifted writer, musician and artist, she died in 1905. Hardcover, 316 pages, Banner of Truth Trust **RBS Price 31.00**



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PSALMODY THROUGH THE AGES

Psalmody Through the Ages, A Survey of the History of Psalmody by Ted. J. Postma. Foreword by Ray Pennings.
Published by Free Reformed Publications (2005) <<https://frcna.org>> Softcover, 180 pages.

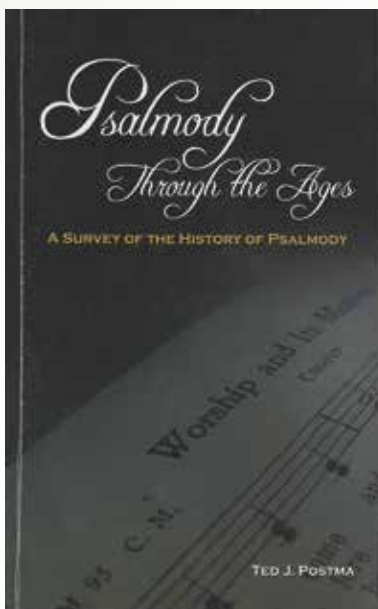
With a great deal of hesitancy, this book review is written, because the reviewer does not pretend to be a trained musician. However, this book deserves attention because it touches on the songs we sing in our worship services. This book came to my attention (again) recently because of a reference in articles on Psalm singing in *The Clarion*, the bi-weekly magazine of the Canadian/American Reformed Church (vol. 73, 2024). Rev. Peter Holtflurer believes this is the best book he has read on Psalmody. A re-reading of Postma's book confirmed it for me.

This book is valuable for several reasons. The author develops a historical timeline of singing and worship from the Old Testament to today's contemporary music scene. Postma lets the facts of history speak for themselves but does not hesitate to give his own carefully construed opinions. The book is well-written and well-researched with numerous footnotes in fine print that do not detract from the main storyline. The book is completed with a list of over one hundred "Sources Consulted," representing a variety of mostly Psalm-singing authors and denominations. They range from American, Canadian, and Dutch theologians Joel Beeke to T. Brienen, K. Deddens, John Frame, Robert W. Godfrey, J. Korting, Bert Polman, J. C. Ryle, R. C. Sproul, A. Velema, G.I. Williamson, and Free Reformed pastor Jack Schoeman. In addition to being a valuable resource on Psalmody, this book is an excellent resource for decision-making regarding the use of hymns, Bible songs, and contemporary songs. It also complements pastor Joel Overduin's book, *20th Century Revival of Genevan Tunes*.^{*} This book is especially valuable at this time in our history and culture where increasingly we are faced with decision-making on the choice of songs and music appropriate for worship or other occasions.

The author begins with the Old Testament. When temple worship became the principal mode of worship, it was distinguished by clearly defined regulations and specific musical instruments. The worship songs came from a divinely inspired prophet or seer and King David. Once the Psalter was compiled, the Book of Psalms became the songbook of Israel. Those holding to exclusive psalmody today agree with this claim.

Moreover, there is good evidence that the terms "hymns" and "psalms" are used interchangeably in the Old Testament Psalms (pp. 15-16). From Matthew 26:30, we learn that the Lord Jesus sang a hymn (*hymnesantes*) after the Last Supper with His disciples. The hymn they sang is part of the *Hallel Psalms* found in Psalms 113 to 116. Word forms used in the Gospels indicate the use of the inspired Psalms. Similar references are used in the Epistles, where the apostles and Christians sang psalms and hymns. Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God in prison (Acts 16:25). The words *psalms* and *hymns* are used interchangeably with an emphasis on the Spirit's work in the believer. For example, "Whenever ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm..." (1 Cor. 14:26). There is evidence that the New Testament church sang psalms and hymns from the Psalms by referencing the Old Testament (cf. Rom. 15:9-12; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26; Heb. 2:12-13; Jas. 5:13) (pp. 21-22).

More controversial are Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, which use the terms "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." Postma points out that the word for "hymn" found in Matthew 26:30 (the *Hallel*) calls the psalm a hymn. Most plausible, Postma thinks, is that the terms "psalms, hymns



and spiritual songs" are found in the titles of the Greek translation (*Septuagint*) of the Book of Psalms, the Old Testament Psalter, a translation with which the Hellenist Jews would be familiar. States Postma: "We can conclude that the titles in the *Septuagint* refer to one and the same thing—inspired songs" (p. 25). "Most people would recognize that the psalms referred to by Paul must be the inspired songs from the Book of Psalms and perhaps other Old Testament psalms..." (p. 24). To be fair, Postma also cites those who have other opinions.

The possibility is also raised whether the New Testament church may have sung songs of Mary and Zacharias and other such inspired songs (p. 27). Summing up, Postma states: "lyrics extolling the Triune God, by their very presence in the New Testament, are inspired and can be made available as inspired songs for our time" (p. 31). Dutch Reformed churches had the same view as evidenced in the Psalm books for singing they brought with them to North America, which included "Enige Gezangen" (Some Hymns).

The first two chapters set the tone for the rest of the book. Examining the Early Church, Postma records that they essentially continued the singing of Psalms (Jerome A.D.347-407; Chrysostom A.D. 347-407). "All Christians employ themselves in David's Psalms more frequently than in any other part of the Old or New Testament... [and] are recited and sung night and day" (p. 33). A beautiful quotation attributed to Basil of Caesarea (A. D. 325-379) is: "A psalm is the tranquillity of souls, the arbitrator of peace, restraining the disorder and turbulence of thoughts, for it softens the passion of the soul and moderates its unruliness (p. 34). Athanasius (A.D. 297-373) believed that "a man can find nothing more glorious than the Psalms, for they embrace the whole life of man, the affections of his mind and the emotions of his soul. To praise and glorify God, he can select a Psalm suited to every occasion, and thus will find that they were written for him" (p. 35).

Sadly, with the advent of heretical views, Christians turned to "uninspired hymns." Therefore, the historian Pliny, the Martyrs, Eusebius, Clement of Alexandria, Ambrose, and Augustine strongly supported the use of the Psalms of David for primary use. Augustine pointed out that the voice of Christ and His Church is heard in the Psalms and strongly condemned the Donatists for "singing psalms of human composition" (p. 41). The inroads made by hymnody led the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 381), to forbid the use of "uninspired hymns or private psalms composed by individuals in churches" (p. 42). "In summary, the early church struggled to stay on a path that continued to favor the Psalms as songs for worship" (p. 43).

When the church entered the Middle Ages (A.D. 800-1400), this struggle continued. But also hymns, which to this day have become traditional, were composed, such as "O Come, O Come, Emanuel" and "Creatures of Our God and King." Eventually, singing became the domain of the monasteries by monks and nuns. The Gregorian chant emerged, and corporate singing seems to have disappeared.

The Reformation era re-discovered the authority of Scripture in a way that transformed singing, especially in corporate worship. "The importance of singing the Psalms was understood within the context of *sola scripture* and the Spirit using Scripture to bear witness of Him... For the Reformers public worship meant communication from God to His people

and response or worship from the people back to God, with Scripture occupying the central place of this exchange... Subsequently, activities such as choirs where only a portion of the congregation responded, were banished" (p. 50). The views of other Reformers, such as Huss, Luther and Zwingli, who differed from Calvin, are mentioned. Calvin wanted people to be focused on the content of the Psalms and was concerned that music would evoke emotions that were not Spirit-centred. It does not seem that he objected to other songs, but his priority was Psalms sung from the heart with melodies and rhythms that were appropriate to the words of the Psalms (p. 93). With the help of talented composers and musicologists, the *Genevan Psalter* became the favourite songbook for young and old and set the standard for other nationalities as well: Dutch, German, Hungarian and English (p. 65).

In The Netherlands, the 1618-19 *Synod of Dort* promoted what some scholars refer to as exclusive psalmody to counteract the influx of Arminian hymns (p. 68). The absence of organ accompaniment lasted until the early 1700s, and congregational singing became much slower (p. 69). In Scotland and England, several Psalters appeared. The *Bay Psalter* was a favourite of the Puritans. Soon the "Regulative Principle," which stated that acceptable worship is limited by God's revealed will and nothing unauthorized by Scripture may be added became a Presbyterian standard.

Yet, it did not take long for some to decide differently. Isaac Watts (1674-1748), a Calvinistic theologian, introduced inspired (Bible) songs and un-inspired hymns to the psalms. As noted, hymnody had not disappeared during the Reformation. Watts was troubled by the poor literary quality of some English Psalters and wanted to accommodate Scripture to personal circumstances, including the paraphrasing of some New Testament content. He also wanted to "Christianize the Psalms" because some were even opposite to the spirit of the gospel, he said (p. 81). No doubt, he meant the imprecatory psalms.

During the *Great Awakening*, George Whitefield and the Wesleys introduced hymns in their revival meetings. The Wesleys were especially gifted poets and the "deeply intense experience and nature of the meetings led to spontaneous versification of their experiences." Other Calvinistic revivalists who led the way to hymns were John Newton, William Cowper, and Toplady. Many hymns entered the songbooks of this era (1700-1800). Postma also notes that "during the revivals, hymns shifted more and more away from a language that involved the corporate 'we' and praise to God to a language that focused more on the individual 'for me'; and 'my' feelings" (p. 95).

Continuing his historical analysis, Postma focuses on "The Gospel Songs Era (1800-1900)" when the Industrial Revolution brought rural folks to the city, where many lived in poverty. The emerging Sunday School movement, rather than catechizing children, taught the Bible narratives and led to songs and hymns composed to simplify the gospel for the mostly illiterate people and children. Ira Sankey, Dwight Moody, Fanny Cosby, Philip Bliss and Horace Spafford became well-known, as well as the music of Lowell Mason, William Bradbury and others, who believed the Psalms were for the old dispensation and were not meant for people under the new dispensation (p. 99). Horatius Bonar, pastor of a Scottish church and esteemed Calvinist who supported exclusive psalmody in worship, wrote several gospel songs to accommodate the many new converts and adapt to the invitation character of the revivals. Others in the Scottish and continental Reformed tradition did not agree with the changes.

Deepening liberalism in the Dutch Reformed Church led to the Secession movement (1834) which retained the Psalter with several Bible songs, the Lord's Prayer, The Ten Commandments. Psalm singing was restored. Dutch Reformed immigrant churches in America met with nine different Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in North America to prepare a new versification of the Psalms in English, from which the 1912 Psalter emerged. This Psalter included 413 settings of the Psalms plus doxologies and Scripture songs and hymns, bringing a new set of hymn tunes from

English and American traditions. Postma includes a detailed narrative of how various orthodox Reformed denominations responded so that now the Free Reformed share a Psalter with the Heritage Reformed, Protestant Reformed Church, and a few other churches. A few years ago, a committee with these and other denominational representatives was formed to update this Psalter. Until this time in history, very few denominations have maintained Psalmody (meaning primarily Psalms), although there is a renewed interest in Psalm singing in worship services.*

Postma's book does not end here. To further educate us on the development of singing in worship services, he tackles "The Contemporary Hymnody Era (1900-Present)" in chapter eight. A detailed overview of the lyrics, music, and authors of songs with social themes and the categories of Praise and Worship and Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) is laid out. The lyrics, music, and the authors are extensively examined in a very insightful manner. Very interesting are his critiques of popular songs such as "Shine, Jesus Shine," "Give Thanks" and two different renditions of "As the Deer" and "Like a Deer." Postma believes that indiscretion and poor judgment are dangers, but "Like the revival and gospel hymns of earlier eras, there are satisfactory contemporary Christian worship songs," which may have their place on certain occasions (p. 144).

In chapter nine, "The Spirits of the Times," Postma shows how culture influences song and worship. Modernity and today's post-modernity are pervasive influences in our culture and have resulted in the transformation of reverent, worship services to entertainment. He mentions the increasing willingness of the church to employ worship styles that attract people, which he calls "Consumerism" (p. 147). A "smorgasbord" mentality has entered the church and produced various worship styles.

Postma also examines Bible songs (a.k.a. Versified Songs), where verses of the Bible are set in poetry for singing. Bible songs would also include songs in the Bible outside the Psalter, such as the Lucan canticles. He provides several reasons why they are valuable (p. 154). To sing a Bible song is to sing Scripture.

In the "Coda" at the end, he rounds up his book with a final summary. Here are some quotes (pp. 159-160):

"Today we have a smorgasbord of songs. Chants, psalters, hymns, gospel songs and contemporary songs of all sorts are all here for the plucking."

"The introduction of hymns into the worship services has put hymns at the same level as the Psalms, thereby undermining or challenging the distinctiveness of the Psalms as inspired songs in the canon."

"Currently, various churches of the Reformed persuasion continue to respect and follow the decisions of the *Synod of Dort*."

"In order to sustain psalmody, it is the duty of the church to ensure that psalmody is subject to good literary quality and appealing melody."

"In order to sustain psalmody, it is also imperative that the adequacy or sufficiency of the Psalms is clearly communicated by church leaders."

"There is an increasing number of Bible songs, which are very faithful to Scripture and deserve our recognition."

Ted Postma is a church organist, has an MA in teaching, served as principal of a Christian school, and in retirement does consulting. He is to be most heartily thanked for his painstaking work which should be consulted by anyone interested in understanding the value of Psalmody and Christian songs.

This book is available from Free Reformed Publications < <https://frcna.org> > and may also be purchased in Canada at Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario, and at Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.

Mrs. Ricky (Frederika) Pronk is a member of Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario.

**20th Century Revival of Genevan Psalmody in Reformed Worship by Rev. Joel Overduin.*

WHO IS MY MOTHER, BROTHER, SISTER?

MUTUAL CARE IN THE CHURCH



“Our churches are not known for being particularly loving,” remarked one of my elders during a book study about a decade ago, when our church building was undergoing reconstruction. That “honest” remark struck a chord within and attuned me to similar sentiments expressed by others in different congregations, in various settings, and in different denominations.

As a single individual who adheres to Reformed beliefs but does not come from a Dutch background, I want to emphasize that I have great respect for the people who have made my congregation a good place to be a member of. Among her strengths is a genuine spirit of care and compassion. Members often cook meals for families and friends who have just had a baby, are sick, or need extra help. On Sundays, they invite people or visitors for coffee or soup and buns. They are keen on supporting one another through various activities and contribute generously to a range of missionary and other worthy causes, including the local Christian school where I work. As I said, it’s a great church community of which to be part of.

However, a recurring sentiment in different congregations, and across Reformed denominations, is that church life often falls short of what it could be. The people I speak with are not complaining; they are expressing a genuine heartache that is not unique to a specific congregation.

You see, we may excel in the proper preaching of the Gospel, hold the correct doctrines, and keep the traditions of our fathers. However, our churches are not always places where everyone feels loved and safe to share their thoughts, struggles, burdens, and sins, without fear of judgment, shame, or ostracism.

According to Tertullian, an early Church father, when the

ancient Romans observed the fast-growing community of Jesus’ followers, they noted: “See how they love one another; how they are ready even to die for one another.”

Can we honestly say the same of our churches when compared to the New Testament ideal? Do we reflect the testimony of the New Testament believers?

Nature of the Church Family

While we certainly share common goals, work well together, and engage in many communal activities, is that the same as loving one another and being willing to even die for each other?

Article 29 of the Belgic Confession explains that the true church must embody two essential elements:

1. The Marks of the Church: These include the pure preaching of the Gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline. Without these, the church falls into heresy;
2. The Marks of True Christians: These include having faith, receiving Jesus Christ as Saviour, crucifying sinful desires, and loving God and neighbour. Without these, the church falls into dead orthodoxy.

In other words, a true church consists not just of members who agree with the Reformed doctrines and traditions; the members must also be characterized by a living faith that is validated by acts of love towards God and the brethren. 1John 4:7-8 stresses the relational nature of knowing God and loving the brethren, as it is written: “Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.”

Of course, we can point to acts of love and kindness within our congregations. As already mentioned, we take care of our own, in many different and generous ways!

Families in the Church Family

However, there is an important difference between us and the New Testament church. While many New Testament Christians were called to leave behind their earthly families and friends to find their new family in the church community, our church communities are largely made up of well-established, closely-knit families who naturally tend to dispense their most affectionate expressions of love and care within their established circle of family and friends.

Family is a wonderful gift, and it is a great blessing if we have been saved and have family members who are also brothers and sisters in the Lord, by God's grace. However, if our earthly family displaces the role of our (extended) spiritual family, we need to reflect on Jesus' question and answer: "Who is my mother, or my brethren... whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother" (Mark 3:33,35). Furthermore, if our bonds are only with family members, even if they are not true believers, we are in danger of compromising in a way that weakens spiritual integrity and hinders the spiritual growth of the church.

We need to guard against devoting so much time and energy to our earthly family and friends that it precludes our opportunities or desires to seek out, bond, and fellowship with spiritual brothers and sisters in the Lord, beyond our earthly family. Being too inward family focused weakens the spiritual fabric of a congregation. Let us remember the words of the Psalmist: "I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts" (Psalm 119:63).

Needs in the Church Family

There is a second difference to consider. It is described that the New Testament church, "continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46). In many North American Reformed congregations, there is the expectation that churchgoing fellow believers are not "needy" or dependent on others for love or fellowship.

We might even piously justify leaving it to the Lord to be their friend and companion, falling into the situation James warns us about: "You say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? (James 2:16).

Furthermore, there are those who think that Christian fellowship is to merely exchange greetings on a Sunday morning. This and similar brief interactions are not enough to truly be considered fellowship. If they were sufficient, we would have no need to gather with others after the service or during the week. For those who are single, widowed, or otherwise alone,



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John 6:12

CHURCH FAMILY

this mindset can lead to extended periods of loneliness.

So, yes, there is room for us to grow in this area. It would already go a long way if everyone would prayerfully “adopt” and include one new person into their social circle who is not currently part of it; someone who is unrelated to us but who is a brother or sister of Jesus Christ. Treat them as a long-lost sibling. Invite them to your family events, birthday parties, holidays, special occasions, and trips, just as you would with your existing friends and family members. Give extra consideration to those brothers and sisters who are single, alone, or new to your church.

Privileges in the Church Family

I must also emphasize that all this loving the brethren should not be construed as a chore or religious duty to add to our already busy lives.

Firstly, as the Apostle John teaches us: “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.” (1 John 3:23). While the Apostle John explains that this may mean that “we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16), he also reminds us that: “his commandments are not grievous.” (1 John 5:3).

For this reason, secondly, loving the brethren is not grievous, it is actually a rich blessing. It can foster deeper spiritual relationships than family bonds (1 Corinthians 1:10), encourage us to be kindly affectionate with one another (Rom. 12:10) and to mutual growth in faith (1 Thessalonians 5:11-14), help us to keep each other accountable (Matthew 18:15-20), and, in time, enable us to trust each other enough to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16), to the edification of the body of Christ in love. (Ephesians 4:13-16).

Thirdly, loving the brethren can be a touchstone for us to glean whether the love of God truly dwells in our hearts or whether we are still “carnal”, as it is written: “But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.” (1 John 3: 17-19).

Fourthly, since it is our purpose on this earth to love and glorify God, it would bring great honour to God’s name if our churches would further foster an environment where the love for the brethren of Jesus Christ is not only preached but is also visibly practiced, prompting those within and without to say: “See how they love one another; how they are ready even to die for one another.” ¹

Mr. Alfonso d’Amore is a member of Maranatha Free Reformed Church and teacher at Rehoboth Christian School, Copetown, Ontario.



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GOD'S PATIENCE

A REFLECTION ON THE NEW YEAR

Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it. —Luke 13:8

The barren fig tree mentioned by Jesus in Luke 13 is an illustration of every person in his natural state. A just verdict is pronounced against this tree because it does not bear fruit. Actually, it should be cut down. But the tree receives an intercessor in the person of the gardener. The vineyard keeper asks the owner of the vineyard to give him another year. He would like to try once more to see if this barren tree will bear fruit. *“Let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it.”*

Here you see our portrait, for many of us look like this fig tree. This tree represents you and me. If we would only see this! In the year past, there was no visible fruit whatsoever! The vinedresser comes to look and does not find any fruit. You were placed in the vineyard of the Lord to bring forth fruit, but where is it? Did you only produce leaves? Graciously, you were able to enter another year. But could you have blamed God if He had not allowed you to do so? Surely you cannot say anything if the tree of your life is cut down. Examine yourself and ask: “Did I bring forth fruit that glorified God?” Consider what you owe God and examine the extent of your focus on the Lord this past year. God is entitled to fruit. Because the tree of your life is planted in God’s vineyard, He does no injustice to you when He asks for fruit.

Although fruit is lacking, God still rightfully demands a harvest. Considering all this, is it not a miracle that you were allowed to enter a new year? Should it not humble you that God is not tired of you? Not only did you fail to produce good fruits, but you brought forth stinking fruits. Yet, in spite of all this, the Lord is longsuffering and says, *“Let it alone this year.”* The Lord does not withdraw His goodness, even though you never stop sinning.

But remember that judgment delayed does not imply judgment cancelled. If the fig tree bears no fruit, then the gardener will say to the owner, “Then after that thou shalt cut it down.” The final blow will come and “in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.” But, until today, we are still examples of God’s longsuffering. The Lord still bears with you. He carries and forebears you. He delays His judgment. You deserved judgment, but it was not carried out.

God postpones judgment in order that He might cancel it! A new year is also a time of grace. What are you personally going to do with this precious time of grace? Knock, call, and seek before it is too late. Time is precious and there are few opportunities left to answer God’s call. The Lord has no pleasure in your death but rather desires that you redeem the time given so mercifully to you.

May this year become a genuinely new year for you. What a blessing it would be if your life was a new beginning this year! Your life cannot stay the same. It must be changed and trans-

formed. You must be converted.

Likewise, if you are a child of God, it is not because of your worthiness that you entered a new year. It is only because the Lord has carried you from one day to the next. It is only because of the prayer of the great Intercessor who is seated at the right hand of God. If there is any fruit on your tree, it is not produced by you, but only by and through Christ (Hos. 14:8).

As you start another year, may it cause you to be deeply dependent on Him who sustains all things. Your old nature is against you. What you will be able to offer the Lord with one hand, you will first have to receive from Him with the other hand. How this ought to humble you, for you have nothing according to your own labours. In this life, everything comes from the Father. Blessed are the poor in spirit for they will be made rich! ❶

*Rev. Frans Bakker (1919-1965) served the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk of Driebergen the Netherlands. Free Reformed Publications has published a 366 day devotional of his writings entitled *The Everlasting Word*. Highly recommended!*



*“Bless the Lord,
oh my soul!”*

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NAPARC 2024 REPORT



The Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA) are members of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), which meets each year in November. Three FRC delegates, Elder Ed Laman, and Pastors Kenneth Hutton and Rob VanDoodewaard, traveled on Monday, November 11 to Kansas City, MO for the annual NAPARC conference. Our fourth delegate, Pastor Jan Neels, joined us there, having traveled from Alberta with his wife, Gayle. We attended meetings Tuesday through Thursday. The Ontario delegates flew home Thursday afternoon and the Neels' continued their annual trip to visit their children in South Dakota and Oklahoma. This is a summary report of our bi-lateral meetings, the general sessions, and other issues of interest.

Bi-lateral Meetings

United Reformed Churches of North America: Their Synod approved special reports on digital media and corporate worship; a human sexuality statement; and a new church planting manual. Though local churches allow pulpit exchanges, we thought it best to let it develop on its own at the local level. Mention was made of local pastors from both federations meeting for prayer and fellowship, with the hope that it will develop locally into further arrangements like pulpit exchanges.

Presbyterian Reformed: We gave brief denominational updates. How can we help the PRC? Rev Michael Ives preaches in FRCs occasionally. We continued a discussion begun last year, using the HRC-FRC agreed upon Reformed Doctrinal Statements. We covered the topic of the Scriptures and the covenant of grace. Are there two covenants or three covenants? How to address the congregation is the main concern.

Canadian Reformed: We discussed the new Psalter and reviewed our Synod decisions. We told them about the Protestant Reformed Church in the Netherlands (PKN) and brother Floris Visser and how that process went. We explained our policy for visiting ministers, and they have something similar. We encouraged more local involvement.

Protestant Reformed Churches: The PRC were there as observers to NAPARC. Their federation recently went through a painful split about certain doctrinal issues. They are still recovering from that. We spoke about sexual abuse cases they are dealing with involving men in leadership.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church: The question was asked, "Can we get closer together as churches?" A further question was then asked, "What are the things that separate us?" Various things were discussed, such as hymns, feast days, subscription, confessions, more latitude in the OPC regarding Genesis 1. There was some discussion regarding confessional membership and the nature of a credible confession of faith.

General Sessions

Dr. J. P. Mosely (RCUS), last year's chairman, opened the general assembly by reading from Romans 15: 1-13 and leading us in prayer. After the agenda was adopted, we began to hear reports from the local churches.

Associate Reformed Presbyterians: They have 261 churches. Their general assembly received a final report on secret societies like the Free Masons, concluding that such societies are ungodly. They formed a new Canadian presbytery of ten congregations

which will be established in September of 2025. They have a foreign mission organization called Seed Ministry operating in Rwanda, India, and Kenya, training men for ministry. Sadly, they had to dissolve a presbytery due to the mishandling of a sexual abuse case.

Canadian Reformed Churches: This denomination consists of seventy churches, twelve of which are vacant. Their church relations committee is developing two new rules: 1. What they do as a federation, and 2. What they do as congregations. This would cover such matters as pulpit fellowship and table fellowship. They have concerns about attendance at afternoon worship services. They are seeing more and more disconnect between Canadian churches and their Dutch Reformed roots.

Eglisé Reformé de Quebec: They have five French-speaking congregations consisting of about 260 souls. Three of their churches are presently vacant. In Quebec, there is growing interest in the Reformed faith. They asked for prayer for more French speaking ministers.

Free Reformed Churches: Elder Laman presented a summary of our most recent Synod meeting.

Heritage Reformed Churches: They reported that they have appointed committees looking into rewording their forms and looking again at the KJV matter. They have a new congregation in Conway, Arkansas. PRTS continues to have world-wide influences. The HRC is working on establishing the Puritan Reformed College, which will be able to grant undergraduate degrees.

Korean American Presbyterian Church: This federation consists of 40,000 members in 493 congregations. They are very much concerned about the shortage of eligible elders. They hope to celebrate their fiftieth anniversary in 2028. They established a new school called the Global Alliance of Theological Education, teaching prospective ministers in Korean, English, and Chinese. They are losing many of their covenant children, and they fear that in the next twenty years, many of their churches will be closing.

The devotional service Tuesday evening was led by Rev. Chris Campbell, pastor of the hosting RCUS congregation. He preached on 3 John 1-4. The theme was “The Joy of Gospel Ministry.” He focused on the joy we have when people believe the truth, and the joy we have when they behave according to the truth. We have one Master and one message.

On Wednesday morning, the opening devotions were led by Dr Bruce Parnell, this year’s chairman (RPCNA) who read Psalm 127 and led in prayer. The reports of the various member churches continued.

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How to apply

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Please forward inquiries and/or applications to:

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 Phone (905) 562-7303 Fax (905) 562-0020
 Email: bkemper@hcsjordan.ca Website: www.hcsjordan.ca

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord.” Ps. 127:3

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Korean Presbyterian Church in America – Kosin: They are anticipating the celebration of their 40th anniversary. They have eight presbyteries, consisting of 118 churches and 12,000 members.

They run Students for Christ and do short term mission work on the Navajo Reservation. They experience a shift of generations, with a sparse wave of new immigrants. They wonder how to bridge the gap. They offer great support for English speaking pastors.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church: The OPC experiences various ecclesiastical challenges. They had a special report on office bearers to help the flock. They implemented a sabbatical program to prevent pastor burnout. They established the Obadiah Fund for retired pastors who had no pension. They have close ties with the Hungarian Reformed Church. They have a disaster relief response program that supplies equipment and funding to presbyteries in hard struck areas.

The Presbyterian Church of America: The PCA doubled in numbers in 35 years. There are PCA leaders in many influential positions in education and government. Despite their membership of 388,723 souls, they still represent only 8/100 of 1% of the US population. Many of their pastors are leaving the PCA or the ministry altogether. They suffer from loss of truth, radicalism, and animosity toward any church that claims to have standards. The PCA strives to remain biblical, Reformed, confessional, and devoted to missions.

Presbyterian Reformed Church: This denomination conducts their own theological training, using resources from various seminaries. They do mission work in Liberia with Rev. Tim Worell on the ground there. Rev. Ives works in South Jersey in

a home missionary position. He requested more connections with others trying to establish a work among Hispanic peoples.

Reformed Churches in the United States: This is the oldest Reformed denomination in North America, celebrating their 300th anniversary in 2025. They are working out how to manage ministerial aid to

emeritus ministers. They reworked their home missions manual and are seeking to improve their sexual abuse prevention policy. They have 3 new congregations and seven new pastors. They established a permanent ministerial assistance committee.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America: There are many burnt out pastors needing greater care. They have more churches, but smaller congregations, so the need for ruling elders is great. Teaching elders are carrying the greater load. There is increased persecution in their Chinese churches. They have constant need for more pastors. They run a Theology for Youth program aimed specifically at their teenagers. They schedule yearly Family Camps.

United Reformed Churches of North America: The URC is challenged to prepare enough pastors and ruling elders. They are working on nourishing internal unity. They now have a foreign missions coordinator and a home missions clerk. They had approved a report on digital media and corporate worship and a report on human sexuality. There was no dissenting vote on the latter, something to be cherished today. They stated we need each other for accountability and encouragement.

Bible Presbyterian Church reported as observers. This denomination consists of 38 churches. Their work in Myanmar is hindered by government interference. Their future mission work will depend more and more on organizations experienced in local languages and cultures. They run Western Reformed Seminary

in Seattle and are accepting students from other denominations.

Protestant Reformed Church reported as observers. Lately, they have had great schism in their denomination. They hope to celebrate their 100th anniversary next year. They have approximately 8,000 members in thirty-two congregations, with twenty-five active pastors.

There are seven vacant churches, some very large. They approved the new Psalter--a joint effort with HRC and FRC--and are introducing it to their congregations.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada reported as an observer. This denomination was established in 2023, as an offshoot of the RPCNA. They have 10 congregations and operate the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary of Canada.

Issues of Interest

First discussion topic: Consultation on Theological Training. The discussion was largely around trying to see what more can be done on a local level to broaden and strengthen relationships between churches. It was felt that more interaction could be encouraged between presbyteries etc., to facilitate this.

Second discussion topic: What can we do to encourage men for pastoral ministry and missions? It was observed that often too much is being asked of pastors. This can lead to burnout and an increasing sense in the minds of young men that the ministry is an unattractive calling. Mention was also made of the need for pastors and elders to take young men under their wings and seek to mentor them in godliness and with a view to considering the ministry.

Third discussion topic: When member churches get requests from foreign countries seeking help or affiliation, it is often best to refer them to more local church associations for connections. Cultural differences also need to be taken into consideration when considering the viability of forming a relationship.

Overall, the meetings went well. We were greatly encouraged by the fellowship with various brothers. There were times, however, when we got our alphabet soup mixed up somewhat with all the Rs, Ps, and Cs. Was that now the Reformed Presbyterian Church or Presbyterian Reformed Church? We enjoyed genuine Kansas City hospitality at the local RCUS church, including savouring some of the best in smoked meats. The brisket on a bun was unforgettable. My wife and I enjoyed our time together with our FRC brothers. Our delegates are thankful for the privilege of representing the FRCNA at NAPARC 2024. Next year's meeting is scheduled for November 11-13. The venue is Geneva College in Beaver Falls, PA, hosted by RPCNA. ①

Rev. Jan Neels pastors the Free Reformed Church of Blackfalds, Alberta and serves on the Free Reformed Interchurch Relations Committee.



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- High School Teacher: Gr. 10 English Course (Second Semester: Feb-June)

Next School year (2025/2026):

- High School Vice Principal/Teacher

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"Let the people praise Thee, O God; let ALL the people praise Thee" Psalm 67:5

56TH ANNUAL *Ladies' Conference* of the Free Reformed Churches




Reasons to Sing

- **DATE**
Tuesday, May 6, 2025 DV
- **LOCATION**
Mitchell Arena & Community Centre
185 Wellington Street
Mitchell, ON N0K 1N0
- **COST**
\$25 (includes lunch)
payable by e-transfer to
frcladiesday@gmail.com
or cash at the door.

9:30 am
Coffee

10:00 am
Morning Session Speaker:
Pastor Rob VanDoodewaard

1:30 pm
Afternoon Session Speaker:
Kara Dedert

Please follow us on:  [FRC Ladies League](#)  [@frcladiesleague](#)  [scan for link](#)

Online pre-registration will be required.
A link will be sent to each society and church bulletin in advance.



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Colossians 3:17

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Compassion Care is a non-profit organization within the Southern Ontario Reformed community. We provide all home care services to help our families care for their loved ones.

AS WE HAVE THEREFORE OPPORTUNITY, LET US DO GOOD UNTO ALL MEN, ESPECIALLY UNTO THEM WHO ARE OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH.

GAL. 6:10

OTHERWISE WE CANNOT CONTINUE

And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. —Exodus 33:15

The fact that true faith is not easily satisfied is clearly illustrated by Moses' desire for God to accompany him on his journey. Moses receives the command that the Israelites must continue their journey through the wilderness. God gives Moses the promise that an angel will go with him and the people, but that is not enough for Moses. His desire is for God alone.

True faith is not easily satisfied. Of course, we cannot demand anything of the Lord, for the Lord is not obliged to give us anything. Our sinfulness causes us to forfeit every right before God. That is something Moses and his people acknowledge after the people have danced around the golden calf. Our past, as well, speaks loudly of our sinfulness. We have no right to any claims for a blessing from the Lord at the beginning of this New Year. If only all of us would truly believe this.

We need the Lord Himself to come alongside us. Moses did not have enough in a promise or even with an angel from heaven. He does not dare to continue his journey through the wilderness with only an angel. For what does a promise mean if we lack communion with God? What good can an angel from heaven do without the God of heaven? Moses would rather not continue on, for he needs the Lord Himself. A promise is beautiful. An angel from heaven is even more satisfying. But without the countenance of the Lord shining on us, we have a poor beginning in the new year.

Do not be too easily satisfied. You need the Lord and nothing less. *"And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence."*

The Lord commands Moses to continue his journey with the people of Israel through the wilderness. But the Lord will not go up with this people anymore because they have sinned. Now God offers to send an angel along with them. But Moses rejects the proposal. Moses needs the Lord to lead them further.

The Lord knows that Moses could not comfort himself with the promise of an angel. The promise stands as a trial of faith. The Lord's proposal causes the heart of Moses to burn for the living God. Moses realizes God's people cannot continue without Him. Their hearts yearn for the living God. They cannot live or go on without God.

God wants Moses to feel what it would be like to continue without Him. That is why the Lord proposes to send an angel along from heaven. This is how God deals with sinners. When He wants to incorporate people into His blessed communion, He first leads them into the darkest depths.


The Lord sometimes appears to withdraw Himself, while in reality He desires to draw His children to Himself. The Lord shows the sinner how awful it is to be without God. At the same time, the Lord also shows that it is impossible for Him to have communion with the sinner. Then the Lord shows how, by His great mercy, He Himself bridges the huge chasm between Himself and the sin-

ner. In this way, the Lord Himself shows what lives in His child's heart. He shows that His child cannot live without Him.

Is your heart like this, beloved? Do you dare enter the new year without the welcoming countenance of the Lord resting upon you? Perhaps you are asking for many things. But if you are content with less than the Lord Himself, you still do not ask enough. There is no greater sorrow on earth imaginable than to be without God. Has that also become your greatest sorrow? What would be your greatest joy? Give an honest answer to these questions.

What a glorious mystery that those who are without God, and yet cannot live without Him, can never ask too much of God! Moses petitioned the Lord, and the Lord waited for such a petition. Having shown them their poverty, He gives them everything they ask of Him. In spite of suffering, hardship, pressure, sickness, or death, we can be comforted by the welcoming countenance of the Lord.

For our sake, God's countenance did not shine upon Christ at Calvary. He had to go His own way while being forsaken of the Father. He did this so that a sinner who has forsaken God may still experience the Lord's willingness to journey with him. We can experience the unfathomable love of God for sinners.

May God truly be adored! 

*Rev. Frans Bakker (1919-1965) served the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk of Driebergen the Netherlands. Free Reformed Publications has published a 366 day devotional of his writings entitled *The Everlasting Word*. Highly recommended!*

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Join Our Team at Rehoboth Christian School!

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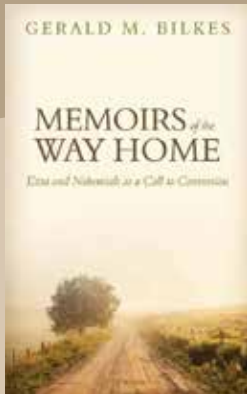
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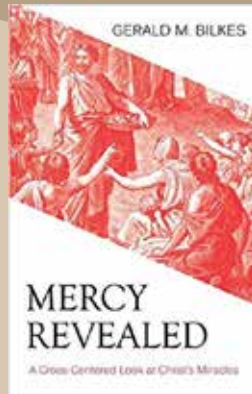
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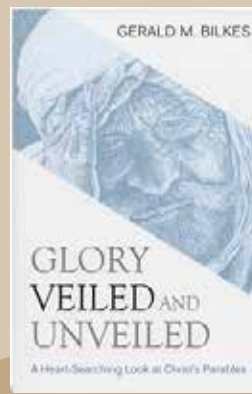
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7:00 pm

Maranatha Free Reformed Church
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