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<http://www.rcnz.org.nz>

Copy Deadline:

Six weeks preceding the month of publication. Church and family notices are free, subject to sufficient space and editorial acceptance.

All correspondence regarding distribution and payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

Mrs Nicola Wharekawa
79 McLeod Street
Upper Hutt
Email: ricwhare@paradise.net.nz

Subscription per volume:

\$40.00 (eleven issues)
Bulk Rate: \$35.00
Overseas: \$60.00
Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40

Production Staff:

Distribution: M. & D. van der Zwaag
Design & Layout: Matrix Typography
Printed by: Flying Colours

Editorial

Ever since Adam, man has been making excuses or objections to coming to faith in the Lord. Man by nature is a rebel, dead in his sins, corrupt in his being and any excuse seems like a good excuse.

You have probably heard some people say things like: "Christianity is old fashioned, it's out of date, nobody believes that stuff any more"; or, "It's illogical, it's totally unreasonable, no sound thinking person would assent to that!"; or, "If God created everything good, where did evil come from?"

In order to answer such objections, you need to know your Bible and confessions pretty well. Actually, it would be good to have classes in apologetics to be able to understand the arguments against such unbelief.

Mr Daniel Flinn writes a response to the idea of Christianity being antiquated. Mr Michael Flinn deals with the "illogical" objections. Mr Paul Archbald rebuts arguments against the existence of evil.

For our Christmas meditation, Mr Larry Wilson of the OPC kicks off this issue, writing about Jesus Christ the "incarnate Liberator".

Mr Wes Bredenhof, a pastor in the Canadian Reformed Church, celebrates 450 years of the Belgic Confession.

Mrs Sally Davey writes about nineteenth century statesmen or politicians who wrote hymns, some of which we still sing today.

Book reviews for this issue are: *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal*, by T. David Gordon and reviewed by Stephen J. Tracey; *Singing and Making Music: Issues in Church Music Today*, by Paul S. Jones and reviewed by Darryl Hart.

Acknowledgements

2011 has been another interesting year for the magazine. Many thanks to all our contributors for taking the time to write articles according to a designated theme. Your labours have been appreciated. A special thanks to those overseas contributor who wrote for us.

Many thanks to the members of the National Publications Committee, who ensure that the administration, finances and distribution of the magazine are taken care of.

Many thanks to our regular columnists, Mrs Sally Davey and Mrs Harriet Haverland, who have diligently supplied copy each month.

Many thanks to Flying Laser Colours for their expert technical support and printing a high-quality magazine, and always on time.

I would like to acknowledge the amazing work that Mrs Sally Davey does as sub-editor for each issue. I depend heavily on her talents, creativity, suggestions and practical help; and appreciate the diligence with which she applies herself to the task. Many thanks, Sally.

On behalf of the *Faith in Focus* team, we wish you all a blessed and safe holiday season.

Back cover image: Mr John Walraven

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of NZ. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

The incarnate LIBERATOR for a world in terror

Larry Wilson

Reverberations from the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington have cast a pall over the usual festivity of the “Christmas” season. This situation brings to mind a song by the sixties’ folk-rock team, Simon and Garfunkle: “Silent Night/5:00 News.” One speaker emits a beautiful duet of the Christmas carol “Silent Night,” while the other blares out the worst news you can imagine from the height of the Vietnam War era. I don’t think Paul Simon intended to praise “Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.” Rather, I think he intended to mock Christians, to show them up as unrealistic dreamers who indulge in wishful thinking while the world goes to hell. In any case, he powerfully illustrated the very reason why the Son of God did appear. He came *because of* the bad news! God says that “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

The Son of God appeared ...

Jesus’ birth was no ordinary birth. “The *Son of God* appeared.” God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, “*appeared*.” He became flesh (John 1:1-3, 14). Born of the virgin Mary, almighty God himself became man. The Maker of the heavens and the earth entered our world and took on himself our human nature. He did not stop being God, but he added a human nature to himself – one person with two natures, divine and human.

God told Joseph, “You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). The name Jesus means “Jehovah is salvation” or “Jehovah saves.” But we can legitimately paraphrase it as “God-to-the-Rescue” because that’s exactly who Jesus is: God to the rescue.

... to destroy the works of the Devil

The terrorism of September 11 didn’t take God by surprise. It didn’t spoil his appearing. No, it and the countless acts of terrorism that have occurred all through the ages and all around the world are the very *reason* for his appearing. Why did the Son of God appear? “The reason the Son of God appeared was *to destroy the works of the devil.*”

What are the works of the devil? Jesus called the devil a liar and a murderer (John 8:44), and that’s exactly what he is. He deceives and destroys. He’s the ultimate murderer behind all murders. He’s the ultimate liar behind all lies. He’s the ultimate sinner behind all sins.

Good and evil aren’t equal, eternal forces – like yin and yang, or the light side and the dark side. No, from eternity past, God is good. But evil got started in heaven itself when angels rebelled

against the God who created them. They became the devil and the demons who follow his malevolent leadership.

Genesis 3 tells how evil invaded our world. Evil came to earth because we asked it to come. Read Genesis 3! Ever since our first parents, Adam and Eve, fell into sin, human history has been ugly and harsh. We experience sin and misery under God’s curse. Disease, natural disasters, and death all find their roots in our original fall into sin and in God’s just curse upon our sin. Every time a human being made in God’s image cries out in pain, the devil feels wicked satisfaction. Every time someone grieves at the loss of a loved one, the devil gloats with depraved joy. The devil is a liar and a murderer.

And his most wicked work of all is the sin that we humans do. Under Satan’s malignant domination, we are a whole



The angel Gabriel visiting the Virgin Mary.

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race of liars and murderers. We don't necessarily kill each other literally. Sometimes we do, as in the terrorist attacks. But we can each be just as cruel and just as evil without being anywhere near that blatant.

The Bible exposes our selfishness, our greed, our apathy, our lust, our envy, etc., for the wickedness that it is. It unmaskes the gravity of our failure to live as those designed to bear the image of the holy God. We continually fall short of the glory of God, that image that God holds us responsible to manifest (Rom. 3:23). Our refusal is cosmic treason against the living God who created us and to whom we owe love with all our hearts and souls and minds and strength. Instead, each and

every one of us is befouled by the works of the devil.

Nor can we shift the onus to the devil. God's Word tells us that we do just what we want to do. We want to live ungrateful lives, independent of our Creator and Sustainer, the God in whom we live and move and have our being. We're "bad to the bone," polluted from our very core to every part of our being. "I know that nothing good dwells within me" (Rom. 7:18). *Nothing good!* These are the works of the devil. And we are the willing workers of the devil's works. The devil takes fiendish delight every time he sees a human being – originally made in the image of God – looking more like the devil. He loves to see us depraved, enslaved, and doomed to hell. And that's exactly what we deserve – to be eternally cut off from our Maker, whom we have so deeply offended.

Christ came to wage war

When God says that "the Son of God appeared ... to destroy the works of the devil," it isn't just wishful thinking. Jesus succeeded in the mission that God sent him to accomplish.

But it sure doesn't *look* like he succeeded. His birth was lowly. And as an adult, he had no place to lay his head. Who could guess from appearances that this was the Son of God, who had come to destroy the works of the devil? He preached and healed. But then he died young, horribly put to death. He was despised and rejected by men. He was crucified, a fate reserved for the worst of criminals. His death looks like the opposite of victory – and not just because of its appalling disgrace. It looks like failure because, as he hung there, God unleashed his white-hot wrath and curse against him. God damned Jesus. Jesus suffered the full torment of hell. "Cursed is every one who hangs on a tree" (Gal. 3:13, quoting Deut. 21:23). Is it any wonder that people think that Jesus' birth and death don't look like he destroyed the works of the devil?

But what did the incarnate Son of God accomplish? When the devil incited the crucifixion of Christ, he thought he won the ultimate victory. But actually he went "a bridge too far" in his war against God. When Jesus died on the cross, he did precisely what he had planned to do, as part of an intra-Trinitarian arrangement from all eternity (Acts 2:23). He accomplished exactly what he intended to accomplish. He voluntarily laid down

his life in the place of his elect, in order to redeem them by making satisfaction to God for their sins. He suffered the punishment of hell as a *substitute* for sinners. He satisfied God's justice for them. He propitiated God's wrath for them. He redeemed God's elect.

By his own death, Jesus defeated death. Therefore, it was impossible for death to hold him. He arose victorious from death, never to die again. And his victory is victory for *everyone* who entrusts himself to him. Just as he rose to eternal life, so he raises everyone who belongs to him to eternal life. God-to-the-Rescue gives us new life right now. When we die, he perfects our souls and takes them to be with him. And when he returns in power and glory, he will liberate even our bodies from decay. He will transform them into the likeness of his glorious body.

You can never experience the real hope behind "Christmas" until you understand who Mary's baby, born in Bethlehem, really was and why he came. Jesus was and is *the Son of God* – God-to-the-Rescue – God incarnate, come to wage war, *to destroy the works of the devil*. Cling to Jesus as *your Saviour*. Submit to him as *your Lord*.

The baby of Bethlehem is God's warrior, who came to liberate us from the ultimate terrorist. The September 11 attacks didn't surprise him. Jesus came to rescue us from this world of terror. Jesus came to rescue us in our terrorised lives. And that means that there's hope for you if you rest in Jesus as the Son of God and embrace him as your Saviour. Ask King Jesus to rescue you from the devil's power. That's why he came. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."

The author is the general secretary for the Committee on Christian Education. He quotes the ESV. Reprinted from New Horizons, December 2001.

The Curse

Springtime!
New beginning
digging ...
sowing ...
thinning ...

What is showing?
Lush-green foliage
among it growing
Adam's heritage

Thorns and thistles
foul, cursed fixture
everywhere these missiles
this evil mixture

Ever since the fall
each undertaking
marred is by trouble
of our own making

Until,
-what thrill!
God's paradise
restored shall be
from curse's blast
at last
set free.

When shall it be?

*John Goris
Wellington September 2000
Genesis 3:17,18*

Common objections answered (1)

“Christianity is antiquated”: a human response to a divine quality

Daniel Flinn

Some 2000 years ago, in the time of the early church, Christians were described as people “belonging to the Way” (Acts 9:2). This is a good description for Christians, because Christ Himself said “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6).

In the current modern era, the Way of Christianity is criticised by some for being “antiquated”, “outdated”, or “old”. These criticisms come from people who are interested in the questions of today, rather than the answers of yesterday. Perhaps ironically, almost 2000 years ago, there were some who had the same attitude. The inhabitants of Athens, for example, used to spend their time “in nothing other than telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21).

Why do people turn from God’s Way in pursuit of something “new”, when as we read in Ecclesiastes 1:9, “there is nothing new under the sun”? And how should we respond to them? We find the answers to these questions by lifting our minds up from the poverty of natural human thought, and by instead looking to the eternal nature of our glorious God, the fountain of all truth, who has revealed Himself to us in His unchanging Word. Only by considering the nature of our God can we see that eternity is a divine, rather than a human, quality; only then can we know how to respond appropriately.

Eternity is a divine quality

Perhaps one of the clearest statements about the eternity of our God comes from the opening verses of Psalm 90: “LORD, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born, or Thou didst give birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God”. The phrase “from everlasting

to everlasting” expresses that God’s existence spans from one end of infinity (before the world was created; before time itself) to the other end of infinity (past the Day of Judgment, and beyond – forever). God always has been and always will be.

Because God is eternal, so is His name: “Thou, O LORD, dost abide forever, and Thy name to all generations” (Psalm 102:12); “Thy name, O LORD, is everlasting” (Psalm 135:13). He is “the Alpha and the Omega” (Revelation 1:8).

In addition to being eternal, our God

is also unchangeable. God declares about Himself: “I, the LORD, do not change” (Malachi 3:6). With our God, there is “no variation, or shifting shadow” (James 1:17). Throughout all eternity, though earth and heaven pass away, God will remain the same: “Of old Thou didst found the earth; and the heavens are the work of Thy hands. Even they will perish, but Thou dost endure; and all of them will wear out like a garment; like clothing Thou wilt change them, and they will be changed. But Thou art the same, and Thy years will not come to an end” (Psalm 102:24-27).



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Because God does not change, nor do the aspects of His character. Just as His existence is eternal, so His lovingkindness is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 103:17); his righteousness “is an everlasting righteousness” (Psalm 119:142); his faithfulness continues “throughout all generations” (Psalm 119:90); and He “keeps faith forever” (Psalm 146:6).

God’s reign as King on high is also from everlasting to everlasting. He is “on high forever” (Psalm 92:8). His throne is established “from of old” (Psalm

repeated expressions is the phrase “Truly, truly, I say to you” (John 6:26). Scripture tells us that the Lord Jesus is “full of” truth (John 1:14).

Jesus’ relationship with the truth is even more clearly established when He says: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). By saying “I am” the truth, Jesus is declaring that not only does He *speak* the truth, He Himself *is* the truth.

The unity of Jesus and the truth is further revealed in His identity as the

liar, and the father of lies” (John 8:44). But Jesus is “the truth”. And because “it is impossible for God to lie” (Hebrews 6:18), there was “no deceit found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:22).

The truth also has significance in light of the contrast between the followers of Jesus and the followers of Satan. Jesus says that everyone who is “of the truth” hears His voice (John 18:37). However, those who cannot hear His voice are not of the truth (John 18:37; 8:43-44); they are of their “father the devil” (John 8:44). They do not recognise the truth; nor do they understand it – which is why, when standing before Jesus (who Himself is the truth), Pilate says, “What is truth?” (John 18:38).

Because of God’s eternal and unchanging nature, His truth is also eternal, and will never change. His truth “is everlasting” (Psalm 117:2); His word “stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8); and “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Divine law is eternal

Because God – the King on high – is eternal and unchangeable, so is His law. God’s precepts are upheld “forever and ever” (Psalm 111:7-8); and every one of God’s righteous ordinances “is everlasting” (Psalm 119:160). The counsel of the LORD “stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation” (Psalm 33:11). God’s testimonies are known from “of old” (Psalm 119:152); He has founded them “forever” (Psalm 119:152), and they are “righteous forever” (Psalm 119:144).

One important law, with which God has bound Himself, is His eternal covenant with His people. Scripture declares that: “He has ordained His covenant forever” (Psalm 111:9); and “He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which he commanded to a thousand generations ... Then he confirmed it to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant” (Psalm 105:8, 10). Thus an important application of the eternity of God’s law, is that we can rely on His covenant forever.

Man’s passing existence without God

In contrast to the eternity of God, man’s days on this earth are short. Man is “but flesh, a wind that passes and does not return” (Psalm 78:39); he is “like a mere breath” (Psalm 144:4); and his thoughts are “a mere breath” (Psalm 94:11). He withers away “like grass” (Psalm 102:11);

“When our non-Christian friends criticise Christianity for being antiquated or outdated, we can see clearly that they are speaking out of their natural fallen state. In that state, their thoughts are inclined towards the passing, transitory matters of this life – because they are passing, transitory creatures, whose thoughts are a mere breath.”

93:2); and His kingdom is “an everlasting kingdom” (Psalm 145:13). He will “reign forever” (Psalm 146:10); and His dominion endures “throughout all generations” (Psalm 145:13).

Divine truth is eternal

One consequence of God’s eternity is that His truth is eternal. In order to demonstrate the eternity of God’s truth, we must examine His truth in connection with our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus, the second person of the Godhead, declared when He was before Pilate, that the reason He had been born and come into the world, was to “bear witness” to the truth (John 18:37). Indeed, one of Jesus’ most commonly

Word. Scripture declares of Jesus: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:1; 1:14) – that is to say, Jesus Christ is the Word, and the Word is God. It is natural then, for Scripture to declare that “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17), because not only is Jesus Christ “the Word”, he is also “the truth”.

Jesus’ unity with the truth gains further significance in light of the contrast between Jesus and Satan. Satan is the “father of lies” (John 8:44), who “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). Whenever Satan speaks a lie, “he speaks from his own nature; for he is a

“as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more; and its place acknowledges it no longer” (Psalm 103:15-16). Man’s days are “like grass” (Psalm 103:15); they are like a “passing shadow” (Psalm 144:4), or a “lengthened shadow” (Psalm 102:11), about to disappear.

However, those who walk in the LORD are able to enjoy blessings which are of a divine, and therefore eternal, nature. They, in contrast to the fading grass, will be “like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither” (Psalm 1:3); they will “never be shaken” (Psalm 15:5; Psalm 55:22). They will receive “life forever” (Psalm 133:3); will “abide forever” (Psalm 37:27); will “endure forever” (Psalm 89:36-37); will be established “forever” (Psalm 89:4, 28-29); are “preserved forever” (Psalm 124:1); and are “as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever” (Psalm 124:1). Their inheritance will be “forever” (Psalm 37:18); they will inherit the land “and dwell in it forever” (Psalm 37:29); and they will inherit God’s testimonies “forever” (Psalm 119:111). They will be “remembered forever” (Psalm 112:6); their righteousness will endure “forever” (Psalm 112:3; Psalm 112:9); and God will guard their going out and coming in “from this time forth and forever” (Psalm 121:8).

On the other hand, contrast the righteous (who will be eternally blessed) with the wicked (who will not receive such blessings). The wicked are like “chaff which the wind drives away” (Psalm 1:4); they will “wither quickly like the grass, and fade like the green herb” (Psalm 37:1-2); “Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place, and he will not be there” (Psalm 37:10); the wicked will perish, and “like the glory of the pastures, they vanish – like smoke they vanish away” (Psalm 37:20); “they are destroyed in a moment” (Psalm 73:19).

Our appropriate response to God for His eternal blessings

Because God is eternal, and because the blessings which He gives to us are eternal, it is fitting that our response to God for His blessings to us should also be eternal. For this reason, we will give thanks to God “forever” (Psalm 52:9); we will tell of His praise “to all generations” (Psalm 79:13); His praise will endure “forever” (Psalm 111:10); His glorious

name will be blessed “forever” (Psalm 72:19; 145:21; 115:18), and “from everlasting even to everlasting” (Psalm 106:48); He will be blessed “from this time forth and forever” (Psalm 113:2).

Our appropriate response will be God-centred – declaring His nature, remembering His deeds and His law. His lovingkindness we will sing of “forever”; His faithfulness we will make known “to all generations” (Psalm 89:1). His deeds and wonders we will remember from “of old” (Psalm 77:11); His acts and works we will praise and declare “from one generation ... to another” (Psalm 145:4). His ordinances we will remember from “of old” (Psalm 119:52); and His precepts we will “never forget” (Psalm 119:93).

For our part, our conduct towards God will be appropriate eternally – obeying, trusting, and hoping in Him. We will obey Him “continually, forever and ever” (Psalm 119:44), and will perform His statutes “forever” (Psalm 119:112); we will trust God “forever” (Psalm 52:8); and we will hope in God “forever” (Psalm 131:3).

Our appropriate response to those who object that Christianity is antiquated

In light of these scriptural principles, we are able to view those who criticise Christianity much more accurately. When our non-Christian friends criticise Christianity for being antiquated or outdated, we can see clearly that they are speaking out of their natural fallen state. In that state, their thoughts are inclined towards the passing, transitory matters of this life – because in their natural state they are passing, transitory creatures, whose thoughts are “a mere breath” (Psalm 94:11). Their thoughts are naturally turned away from the eternal God. They do not seek Him out. They do not appreciate or value His eternal nature as they should. They do not respond to Him with everlasting praise and thanksgiving as they should. They do not remember His deeds from of old. They do not obey His eternal law, or value it. Nor do they value the eternal nature of His Son, who is His Word, and His truth.

How should we respond to such critics? First, we should respond with patience. All too often, our natural approach is one of frustration, when we don’t immediately see in our non-Christian friends the changes that we hope to see. But we should recognise that our

impatience stems from our own passing, transitory human nature. Although we are naturally inclined to look only at the problem directly in front of us, we should instead lift up our eyes to the eternal purposes of our unchanging God. Just as God does not unfold all of His purposes throughout history in a single moment, so also we cannot expect to see others change immediately. Our aim should be to display in our approach to others the same patience and forbearance that God shows us in His character.

Second, in love, we can expose to our non-Christian friends the poverty of their current state. They do not have the truth. Furthermore, for as long as they seek what is new and shun what is old, they will not find the truth – because the truth is older than time itself (“In the beginning ... the Word was with God” (John 1:1)). Without the truth, they do not have the Way to God – and they will perish in darkness. Moreover, their destruction is imminent; like “the glory of the pastures” (Psalm 37:20), they will be “destroyed in a moment” (Psalm 73:19).

Third, we can explain to our non-Christian friends the desirability of the eternal nature of our God. It is no criticism of God to say that He is eternal; on the contrary, it is to His glory. It is glorious that before all things, God existed. It is glorious that, because of God’s eternal nature, the blessings which flow from Him are also eternal: His eternal Word, which is always true; His eternal law, which does not change; His eternal covenant, on which we can always rely; and the blessings of everlasting life in heaven. In the same way, it is no criticism of Christianity to say that it is old; on the contrary, it is glorious that we will “never be shaken” (Psalm 15:5) – it is glorious that the Way in which God leads us, is the way “everlasting” (Psalm 139:24).

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Common objections answered (2)

“Christianity is Illogical”

Michael Flinn

You’ve all heard this objection or something akin to it. Christians are crazy! You have to kiss goodbye to your intellect to be one of those born again evangelicals. Or as the Sunday School student put it when asked by the teacher what faith is:

“Faith is believing something you know isn’t true.”¹

Should we Christians lie down and accept that we will always be consigned to the lunatic fringe of society by those who would describe themselves and their own views as “rational” and “sensible” and “objective” – or should we stand up and defend our Christian beliefs against those who attack and mock them by trying to show people that Christianity is in fact *reasonable* after all?

The apostle Paul, for one, stood firm against all the attacks that came in his day. He was conscious of being “put here for the defence (apologia²) of the gospel” (Phil. 1:16) and his idea of *defence* was not to shrug his shoulders and *apologize* for holding Christian beliefs. On the contrary, by his own testimony, he went on the offensive against the unbelieving views of those who attacked Christian truth, and in the process “demolish[ed] arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God (2Cor. 10:5).

To a Greek philosopher, such as Socrates, all a Christian like Paul would have to do would be to convince him that Christianity was *rational*, that it

made sense to him as he went about weighing anything and everything up independently in his mind. To a man like Socrates, reasonable arguments and convincing proofs were everything. Even the gods and their actions were to be scrutinized against the touchstone of his human reason. If the actions and proclamations of the gods were reasonable, well and good; if not, they were to be rejected:

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates taught that the soul “will calm passion, and follow reason, and dwell in the contemplation of her, beholding the true and the divine” (84a). Expanding upon this in the *Crito*, Socrates described the rational man as an independent thinker who is neutral in his approach to truth. The philosopher should be a completely detached, rational thinker who refuses to heed popular opinion in order to follow after the truth wherever it may be...Hear the Socratic exhortation:

My dear Crito,...we must examine the question whether to do this or not; for I am not only now but always a man who follows nothing but the reasoning which on consideration seems to me best...Then, most excellent friend, we must not consider at all what the many will say of us, but what he knows about right and wrong, the one man, and truth herself will say.³

The apostle Paul knew how important *reason* and *rational arguments* were to Socrates and the other Greek philo-

sophers. But he also knew something about them that they did not know. He knew that they, along with all the rest of mankind, were part of fallen humanity and that their problem was not that they lacked a good argument or a rational explanation of Christianity. Their problem was an ethical one. Because of the fall they were not neutral and objective at all. In fact, they were busy suppressing the clear and obvious truth that God had already given them because they would rather do that than face up to the consequences of humbling themselves before their Creator and Lord and acknowledging their sinfulness and their need of salvation. Over against Socrates, above, listen to the apostle, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles (Rom. 1:18-22).

So then, for the apostle Paul, defending the faith to a man like Socrates did not amount to giving him an argument that he had not yet considered and thereby convincing him by superior reasoning to become a Christian. Socrates had already been convinced by God’s general revelation of himself through creation. But Socrates had suppressed

“The apostle Paul knew how important *reason* and *rational arguments* were to Socrates and the other Greek philosophers.”

that plain truth and turned away from what was staring him in the face, only instead of constructing an idol in the form of a graven image made to look like man and birds and animals and reptiles, he fashioned instead an idol of human reason and bowed down to that instead. Socrates did not need to be *convinced*. He needed to *repent*. And in order to do that, he would need the gracious enlightening work of the Spirit of God to remove the scales from his eyes and give him the will to obey and respond to God's call (cf. 1Cor. 2:14; Romans 8:7; John 3:3-8).

Consequently, when Paul went to the Greek city of Corinth as a missionary, he was determined not to defend the faith by means of appeal to human reason. Instead, he said the following:

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. The Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength (1Cor. 1:20-25).

And in Corinth Paul resolved to preach "not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1Cor. 2:4,5).

Likewise, in Athens, when defending the faith in the hearing of Greek philosophers, he simply proclaimed the truth about God, over against the idolatry of the city. He did not shy away from speaking of the resurrection, even when he knew that for the Greeks, this would be a stumbling block and downright offensive (Acts 17:16-34). And when some believed, including a man called Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus (vs. 34), Paul knew that this was not because he had spoken with superior argument and reason, it was because God the Holy Spirit had graciously

worked in their hearts and enabled them to see the truth and repent from their sin.⁴

For us as Christians today, this should encourage us greatly. We know something about our non-Christian colleagues, neighbours, schoolmates, fellow university students, etc. that they do not yet know about themselves. Their problem

“If every human being determines for himself what is reasonable, on what basis can societies function?”

is not that they have not yet been given a reasonable argument for the existence of God or for the validity of the Christian worldview. Although they might challenge us to supply this and they might even say that they would believe if we did, we know that this is not the real issue. The issue for these people is ethical or moral. They are suppressing the truth that confronts them continuously because they do not want to face the consequences of humbling themselves and submitting to their Creator and Lord. That being the case, one of the first and best things we can do is pray for them. Pray that the Lord would work in their hearts, remove the scales from their eyes, and give them the will to believe and respond. Secondly, we can challenge their own way of looking at the world and the way that they try to determine what is true and right for them. What accounts for the order, pattern and structure of the world if not the Bible's explanation that it has been created by God? What makes science even possible if the world is a random collection of atoms that just happened to be thrown together by chance? How do concepts like evil and justice have any meaning at all if they cannot be referred back to a God who has created the world and whose character determines right from wrong, good from evil? If every human being is "ultimate" and must determine for himself what is reasonable and true, on what *reasonable* basis can societies function, establish laws and conduct their affairs?⁵

Above all, do not be discouraged with any conversation that you might

have with a person who does not yet believe. Remember that whether or not a person believes does not come down to whether you have the right argument or the right words to say. Simply bear testimony to the truth and pray that the Holy Spirit will use your witness in this person's heart and life. Even if the response is not encouraging right now,

that very conversation that you have had can be brought back to a person years later as the Holy Spirit continues his work of enlightening darkened understanding and calling people sovereignly to God the Father and to the saving work of Christ.

Notes

- 1 Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe*, p.1.
- 2 Greg Bahnsen points out that the Greek word *apologia* (from which we derive the English word 'apologetics') denotes a speech made in defence, a reply made to an accusation. In the 1st century it was used especially in judicial contexts in which a formal reply would be given to accusation in court, but the term is also used in the NT to speak of the defence used by Christians when challenged by unbelievers. "Socrates or Christ: The Reformation of Christian Apologetics", in *Foundations of Christian Scholarship*, Gary North ed., Ross House Books, 1976, p. 194.
- 3 *Crito*, in the Loeb Classical Library, cited by Bahnsen, op. cit., p. 200.
- 4 Paul's defence in Acts 17 in many ways parallels what he affirms about fallen man in Romans 1. You might like to compare the two passages and discover the connections for yourselves. In Paul's apologetic, theory and practice went hand in hand.
- 5 For further areas that can be explored, see Cornelius van Til's *The Defense of Christianity and My Credo*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, pp. 27-30.

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Common objections answered (3)

The problem of evil

Paul N Archbald

1. Background

The “problem of evil,” briefly stated, goes like this: The Bible teaches that God is good and just (James 1:12-18; Ps. 111:7), and at the same time all-knowing and all-powerful, i.e., sovereign (Is. 45:7; Ps. 95:3-5; 115:3; Acts 17:24-26). Such a God would want to prevent all evil and is surely able to do so. However, there is much evil in the world. Therefore God is either able to prevent it (sovereign) but unwilling (not good); or willing (good) but unable (not sovereign). On this view, there is a contradiction within the Bible’s teaching about God. The Bible is therefore not reliable. The God of the Bible cannot exist.

This argument has been around a long time. It was already present in the ancient world, applied to their many gods. The Greek philosopher, Epicurus

over the centuries to show how flawed is this argument from the existence of evil. The church father Irenaeus (2nd century AD) argued that evil was necessary for spiritual growth. Augustine (4-5th century AD) reasoned that evil was not a thing, but the absence of something. God could therefore not be charged with the creation of evil, since it is not a thing.

Prior to that, Greek philosophy had persuaded many that matter was evil. They struggled to see how a good God could personally create matter. This view even affected some of the church fathers. That is probably why Arius (3rd-4th century AD) denied that Christ is divine: He could then create the world without God “getting His hands dirty” with matter, avoiding that aspect of the problem of evil – as it was seen at that time. Arius’ views on Christ went on to influence the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who deny the divinity of Christ.

reason why God ordained a particular tragedy, crime or sin. Nor will we be able to explain precisely how predestination works, or how man can still operate as a free agent, without free will and under God’s predestination. We can, however, make a satisfactory defence in general terms:

1. If the unbeliever would win this argument over the problem of evil, he would be left with a world in which the evil remains, but with no hope of redemption. There would be no hope of final justice. The problem that evil exists would remain with man – a hopeless situation. “Winning” this argument – if he could – gets man nowhere. It would leave him in a worse position.
2. God has always shown Himself thoroughly opposed to evil. From the beginning, He forbade sin and warned of dire consequences from it (Gen. 3:3). When Adam and Eve fell into sin, He followed through with those consequences. He has continued to forbid and punish sin ever since, bringing both temporal and eternal consequences. He has redeemed His elect from sin. He turns evil to good. Eventually He will banish every last trace of evil from the world, at the same time balancing the scales of justice. Moral evil has not been done by God, but by man. What men call evil today is a mixture of moral evil perpetrated by those opposing God and just consequences coming upon a rebellious world.
3. A distinction must be made between the doing of evil and the predestining of it. God does not *do* evil. He does *predestine* it. As I mentioned, we may not know the precise reasons why He predestines particular evils, but we do know the ultimate reason: it is for His glory. In fact, the Christian defines moral evil as hostility to the glory of God. On that definition, God’s predestination of evil cannot be evil, *for He predestines everything*

“The “problem of evil” is not really a logical or philosophical problem for the Christian. It is merely another expression of lack of faith on the part of the unbeliever.”

(3-4th century BC) expressed it clearly. Many unbelieving philosophers have taken it up since then. It has worked its way into popular thinking: “I can’t believe in a God who would allow such atrocities as....” Many regard it as an infallible proof that Christianity is false. It is probably the “best” argument that unbelievers have in their arsenal. Yet for all that, it is weak and seriously flawed.

Christians have made many attempts

2. Counter-arguments

Because of the frequency with which this issue arises, it is important for the believer to know the argument and how to deal with it. If you can master this one, you should be able to handle most of what will be thrown at you. That is not to say that the Christian can answer every question that might arise concerning evil. For example, we will not often be in a position to explain the specific

for His own ultimate glory. Men and devils, however, frequently act in opposition to God's glory. They are the doers of evil.

4. This is seen most clearly in the evil perpetrated by those who crucified Christ. According to Lk. 22:22, Acts 2:23 and 4:28, these actions were predestined by God. He predestined it for very good reason: His glory and the salvation of sinners. Those who crucified the Son of God were, however, held accountable. The same dynamics apply to other lesser crimes and sins.
5. Trying to explain away the "problem of evil" by introducing the idea of man's original "free will" is not helpful. First, because man's freedom is always under God's predestination. Second, because unbelievers will still hold God culpable if He is able to prevent evil, but decides not to – say, to preserve man's free will. They will argue that surely a sovereign God could have found some way to prevent evil without harming man's free will.
6. The unbeliever is not actually in any position to judge God in any matter, let alone in questions of good and evil. Man cannot judge the "secret things" (Dt. 29:29). He cannot see the final outcomes. He does not know all the reasons why God predestines evils. He does not know how predestination works. He is simply not in a position to judge God's ways. The question of the apostle Paul is very relevant here: "O man, who answers back to God?" (Rom. 9:20). People will sometimes reply that if that is so, why does God put within man a sense of right and wrong, of justice and so on? But the problem is that men try to make their finite and fallible sense of such things the bench-mark for judging God.

Greg Bahnsen, in his helpful book, *Always Ready*, makes the point that the unbeliever is actually the one with the problem of evil. For the non-Christian argument depends on the premise that there is evil in the world. But the unbeliever has denied the only proper basis for defining objective evil. He has defined evil in a subjective and relativistic way. He cannot prove that evil exists, only that things happen that he (and others) don't like. In a sense, he is attacking God by borrowing absolutes from the Bible. To use C. Van Til's analogy, he is like the little child who must stand on his father's lap in order to reach up to

slap him in the face. This is where the Christian must really press upon the unbeliever: "You ask how a good God can permit evil? Well, from where do you get your idea of good and evil? You refuse to accept the Bible's definition of evil as judging your own life, but you want to use an absolute definition of good/evil to judge God!"

Bahnsen goes on to point out that the Christian presupposes that God is both good and sovereign, for that is what the Bible teaches. We therefore see God's predestination of evil as good in itself, and for a good reason – even though we don't know all the specifics. The real problem is that the unbeliever examines things from a different presupposition. He refuses to trust the Lord unless he knows all His reasons. He trusts himself, his own moral sense and reasoning powers, more than he trusts God. The "problem of evil" is not really a logical or philosophical problem for

the Christian. It is merely another expression of lack of faith on the part of the unbeliever.

These things need to be said to the unbeliever who raises the "problem of evil." He needs to be challenged as to his basic presupposition, that there is no God, or that God has not spoken an infallible Word. He needs to be challenged as to the meaninglessness and hopelessness of a world where there is no God, no absolute truth and no hope of a remedy for evil. He needs then to be told the gospel that offers the only hope, the only solution to the unbeliever's problem of evil. That gospel provides a solution only because it is given to us by a God Who is perfectly good and sovereign, uncompromised by the problem of evil.

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History in focus

Happy 450th Birthday to the Belgic Confession!

Wes Bredenhof

This year marks 450 years since the Belgic Confession was written by Guido (or Guy) de Brès. The Confession made its appearance late in 1561, famously being tossed over the castle walls at Tournai (or Doornik, as the Dutch call it). However, it is quite likely that the Confession was written already early that year. In his authoritative book on the Confession, Dr. N. H. Gootjes suggests that it may have been written already in February of 1561. It was most likely first printed on May 25, 1561.

Gootjes also believes that the Confession had been adopted by the Reformed churches in the area we know as Belgium even before it was printed. This is why the Confession uses the first person plural throughout, "We believe...." At subsequent synods, the

authority of the Confession was confirmed and the text of the Confession was fine-tuned. This process continued up to the Synod of Dort and beyond. Today the Confession continues to be a living document and so is periodically tweaked in some of its details by churches that hold it. One of the classic examples is the original Confession's assertion that Paul was the author of Hebrews. That assertion has been removed from the Canadian Reformed edition.

Following its publication, the Belgic Confession became widely accepted. It went through numerous printings and its first translation was into Dutch already in 1562. Within a century it had been translated into German, Latin, Greek, English, and Spanish. It quickly became one of the most widely held and respected Reformation confessions.

“It always represented the voice of the church, testifying of her faith to the authorities and the rest of the unbelieving world.”

But why? That’s a question not often asked. We sometimes take this confessional document for granted. Did you know there were *many* confessions and catechisms produced during the sixteenth-century Reformation? I’m not speaking of four or five or maybe ten. We’re talking about *dozens*. Dutch scholar William Heijting produced two substantial volumes containing confessions just from the Reformation in The Netherlands. So why did the Belgic Confession rise to the top and endure while all these others have mostly been forgotten? There are several factors.

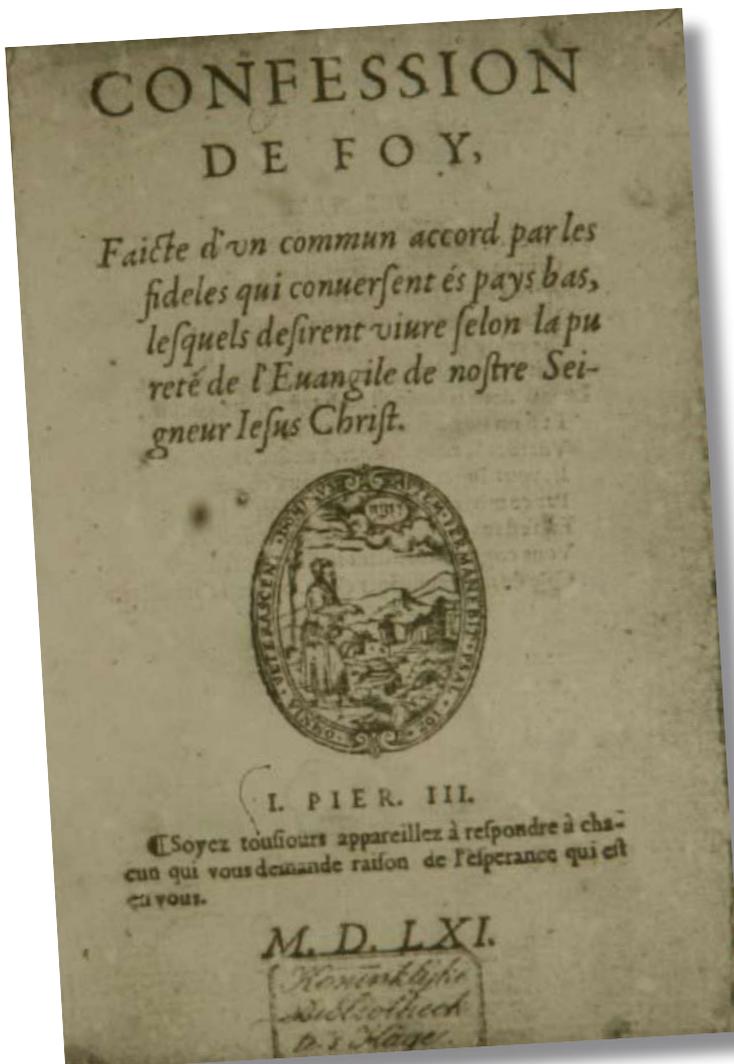
What makes the Belgic Confession special?

First, as mentioned a moment ago, the Confession was accepted early on as the statement of faith of the Reformed churches in the Low Countries. It bore ecclesiastical authority from the start. It was and still is the defining confession of the Reformed churches of that region and churches that trace their lineage there. By “defining confession,” I mean that this is the starting point for what we together believe. The Heidelberg Catechism is primarily a teaching document, while the Canons of Dort are

a sort of commentary on some points from the Confession and Catechism that were drawn into question by the Arminians. The Confession, on the other hand, defines what we believe *corporately*. It was never written as the personal confession of Guido de Brès — it always had a corporate character. It always represented the voice of the church, testifying of her faith to the authorities and the rest of the unbelieving world. With good reason, P. Y. DeJong titled his commentary, *The Church’s Witness to the World*. That was its design from the beginning.

Next, the Confession has been recognised as a faithful and well-worded summary of the essential teachings of the Bible. It was developed with an eye to previous confessional writings produced by such Reformed pioneers as John Calvin and Theodore Beza. It’s also firmly grounded in the biblical teachings of the early church. Quotes and allusions from the church fathers are to be found everywhere. In other words, the Reformed churches were not sucking this out of their thumbs. There was a deep respect for the tradition that respected the Bible. So the Belgic Confession has long been recognised as a clear, concise, and reliable guide to biblical truth.

Finally, the Confession has also endured because of its roots in the persecuted church. Those roots make it unique. It is the only one of the Three Forms of Unity forged in the fires of persecution and in the shadows of martyrdom. None of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism died for their faith. Neither did any of the authors of the Canons of Dort. But on May 31, 1567, Guido de Brès was hung for “the cause of the Son of God” (as he was accustomed to say). As far as I’ve been able to determine, the Belgic Confession is the only officially adopted Reformed confession written by a martyr. Other Reformed martyrs did write confessions — there was the Guanabara Confession, written by four Reformed martyrs in Brazil in the sixteenth century — but none of those confessions were officially adopted by any church. This makes the Belgic Confession a unique document in our confessional library. It has brought Reformed believers close to the suffering church of the past. It brings us today also to the suffering church that endures crosses and trials for the sake of Christ. This too has contributed to its endurance.



Play it again!

The Belgic Confession is 450 years old! It has served us well, but only insofar as we have paid attention to it. The Catechism is heard each and every Sunday. Unfortunately, sometimes the Confession gathers dust. In his book *Credo*, Jaroslav Pelikan compares confessions to CDs. When CDs are stored they are inert and

static. They can be handed down from parents to children without ever being used or heard. They suddenly become dynamic when placed in a CD player and the sounds of beautiful music issue forth from the speakers. Similarly, confessions only have value as they are “played,” as they are engaged and as their voice is heard through the coming generations.

The 450th birthday of the Belgic Confession presents a great opportunity to “play it again.”

Mr Wes Bredenhof is pastor of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church, Hamilton, Ontario.

Reprinted from the Clarion, June 2011.

Feminine focus

Sally Davey

Hymns from the statesman’s study – or, the 19th-century politician as hymn-writer

Christian statesmen are rare in our day. It is seldom that one sees genuine faith, political wisdom and selfless service combined in one individual. Few are even churchgoing: how many politicians do you know who could be found in a church, singing hymns, on any given Sunday of the year? How many even give the Christian faith the time of day? Or are not actively opposed to serious Christians having a say in a national debate? Well, it was not always so.

Nineteenth-century British parliaments included some notable Christian men. Not all members of Parliament were genuine believers; but there would have been few with an attitude that religious convictions ought be excluded from political decision-making.

They were also men with eclectic interests. Parliamentary sessions did not last as long as they do today; and there were many months of the year when Parliament was not sitting. Members were free to attend to their private affairs or to travel. Many were great letter-writers, readers, even scholars. Some had investments in industry or commerce. Others were farmers or philanthropists with a multiplicity of good causes and voluntary associations to which they gave considerable time.

Politicians with strong Christian con-

victions also gave their time to a multiplicity of projects. William Wilberforce, of the previous generation, was perhaps their best role model. One of the activities that occupied some of them was the habit of hymn-writing; and perhaps the century’s most famous politician of all, William Gladstone, used to while away quiet times on the Front Bench by translating the hymns of Cowper and Toplady into Latin, Greek and Italian! Others wrote their own; three of whom I introduce here. They were men of letters, politicians, busy men of the world – but also Christians who turned their gifts and talents to the production of some hymns we still sing today.

Sir Robert Grant

The first, in order of birth, was Sir Robert Grant (1779-1838). Born in India, the son of Charles Grant, who was Chairman of the Directors of the East India Company, young Robert had many spiritual advantages. He was the child of evangelical Christian parents who were part of the circle of friends including William Wilberforce, John Thornton and Charles Simeon (and known collectively as the “Clapham Sect”, from the village where many of them lived). Growing up, he had many encouragements in the faith, and the example of the godly,

tirelessly hard-working servants of Christ surrounding him. When he was 11 years old his family moved back to England, where his father became *the* powerful figure for the East India Company at home. He contributed knowledge of India to the Clapham Sect - who were concerned to see missionaries sent to India. (Many in the East India Company were against missionaries, who, they thought, would “upset” the status quo among the natives. Thus men like Grant were a powerful influence for good in high places.)

When he was 16, Robert entered Magdalen College, Cambridge – the uni-



Sir Robert Grant

versity where his family's friend, Charles Simeon, had so much influence for good as Vicar of Holy Trinity church. He and his older brother, Charles, did very well academically, coming third and fourth in their class, respectively, after Henry Martyn, who went on to become one of the great pioneer missionaries in India.

Later Charles and his brother were both called to the bar in London, and he went on to serve in various legal positions before being elected Member of Parliament for Elgin Burghs in 1818. Then followed a parliamentary career (he served in three more constituencies) that lasted until 1832. After this he was made Judge Advocate General, and in 1834 he was appointed Governor of Bombay.

While in Parliament Robert Grant was a tireless advocate for the removal of the "disabilities" of the Jews – constraints which prevented them being elected to Parliament, and so on. He was also active in the campaign against slavery, and a supporter of a great number of the Clapham causes – the Bible Society and its distribution of the Scriptures being but one.

During his brief time as Governor of Bombay (he died there in 1838) Grant was busy with works of mercy, particularly the championship of a scheme to found a medical school for the training of native Indian doctors. The idea had faced general opposition – local government officials had thought Indians were not capable of the study required – but Grant persevered, and by the time of his death had persuasively argued the case and won considerable support for the scheme. His sudden death left a void; but it was decided to go ahead with building the medical school as a fitting memorial to him.

But Robert had other projects on the go, among them the writing of religious poetry; and after his death, his brother Charles published a volume of these poems; two of them, at least, still sung today as well-known hymns. The first was written in 1815, before Grant entered Parliament. "Saviour, when in dust to Thee", is an appeal to Christ – on the basis of his life lived on our behalf, his suffering, death and resurrection – to hear our prayers. It is a powerful appeal. The second, written in 1833, just before he went to India, is his most famous. Based on Psalm 104, "O worship the King, All glorious above" is "one of the great hymns on the magnificence of God in His creation", in the view

of J.R. Watson, author of an anthology of hymns covering the entire history of Christian hymnody.¹

Sir John Bowring

The second hymn-writer politician is Sir John Bowring, who was born in 1792 to an old Puritan family – though by then (like so many other Congregationalists) it had become Unitarian. He was, nevertheless, spiritually inclined, and wanted in his boyhood to become a minister. Not being part of the Church of England, he was unable to study at Oxford or Cambridge, and was educated at a Unitarian school. He was a very bright student, excelling in languages – so much so that he was later known as one of the world's greatest polyglots – knowing 200 languages, and being able to speak 100.

A prolific reader and writer, he contributed to some of the leading journals of his day, and became editor of one, the *Westminster Review*, in 1825. Bowring became a respected political economist and, from 1835, when he was elected to Parliament, a keen advocate of parliamentary reform, Catholic emancipation (*ie* the removal of restrictions on Roman Catholics to engage in public life in England) and the education of poorer people.

Bowring travelled extensively in Europe during his younger years – sent to investigate the state of trade between Britain and different European countries. He also collected folk songs and translated the songs of many European countries, especially Eastern Europe. He even published a collection of medieval Czech poetry.

In 1849 Bowring was appointed Governor of Canton – an important post, given the efforts being made at the time to open trade between the European

nations and China. He was there four years before his appointment as Governor of Hong Kong, where he remained until 1859. His final posting was as commissioner to Italy in 1861, to enquire into trade between Britain and the new Italian nation. His was a rich and varied public career; but again, he was far more than a writer, politician or administrator.

Bowring also wrote hymns. Among his many publications was an 1825 collection, *Hymns*. One of them we still sing today as *Psalter Hymnal* No. 429², "In the cross of Christ I glory". It is a fine meditation on Galatians 6:14, the text that also inspired Isaac Watts's "When I survey the wondrous cross". Again I quote J.R. Watson, who nicely draws attention to Bowring's literary skill. "The idea of the Cross 'towering o'er the wrecks of time' may well have been inspired by seeing a ruined church in a post-Napoleonic-war-journey ... The image is a fine one ... it allows the reader to glimpse the Cross standing over a ruined universe ..." He also draws attention to the word "sublime" – an important word in the Romantic period, well capturing the majesty and wonder Bowring was trying to convey.³

Sir Philip Pusey

Our third hymn-writer-politician was Philip Pusey, who lived from 1799 to 1855. Pusey grew up in a wealthy Berkshire landowning family. Attending Eton and then Christ Church, Oxford, he had the privilege of a good education. His younger brother, Edward, was a scholar of note, becoming Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford – and one of the leading associates of John Henry Newman in the Tractarian movement. Philip inherited the family estate and began an influential career as a farmer, and from 1830, as a Member of Parliament. He was considered by his contemporaries to be a pleasant, kindly man – good company, enthusiastic and hard-working.

It was to farming that he devoted much of his considerable energy – and it was an exciting time to be a farmer keen on seeing progress in the industry. These were the days when science was first being applied, successfully, to agriculture and he was a founding member of the Royal Agricultural Society and the editor of its mouthpiece, *The Royal Agricultural Journal*, to which he also contributed quite a number of articles. Pusey also supported the establishment of the Royal Agricultural College at Cirencester. On his own



Sir John Bowring

en.wikipedia.org



National Portrait Gallery, www.npg.org.uk

Sir Philip Pusey

estate he carried out “improving” experiments – in soil chemistry, with fertilisers, and in tile draining, among other things. He was among those who tried hard to improve the lives and working conditions of agricultural labourers, and was considered a model landlord in his time. As a Member of Parliament the issues he took up reflected the same concerns. He also made studies of the conditions of the poor in England and Scotland. It was said of him that his convictions were strong – and would at times lead him to stand at odds with his party’s line.

I find it fascinating -and encouraging - that such a busy man, even a large-scale farmer whose own boots definitely got muddy, was also a committed church-

man, finding the time and reserving the energy to write a hymn like this:

*Lord of our life, and God of our salvation,
Star of our night, and Hope of every nation,
Hear and receive Thy Church’s supplication
Lord God Almighty.*

*See round Thine ark the hungry billows curling;
See how Thy foes their banners are unfurling;
Lord, while their darts envenom’d they are hurling;
Thou canst preserve us.*

*Lord, Thou canst help when earthly armour faileth,
Lord, Thou canst save when deadly sin assaileth,
Lord, o’er Thy Church nor death nor hell prevaieth;
Grant us Thy peace, Lord.*

*Grant us Thy help till foes are backward driven,
Grant them Thy truth, that they may be forgiven,
Grant peace on earth, and after we have striven,
Peace in Thy heaven.*

Pusey’s brief petitions sound like the straightforward requests of a practical man. They speak with awareness of the troubles both Christians, individually, and the church as a body, always face. But they speak with faith that neither death nor hell can prevail against the church; and that God’s help – better than earthly armour - defeats everything sin and temptation may throw at us. There is graciousness in his request that the enemies of the church may be forgiven, once their resistance is overcome. I enjoyed singing this hymn many times as a child and young person.

Reflecting on these hymns, and considering who wrote them, is very encouraging. They help us realise that Christians from all walks of life may write hymns worthy of Christ’s church, if their knowledge of the Bible and their abilities with language be equal to the task. Even busy statesmen proved capable of their production.

Notes

- 1 J.R. Watson, *An Annotated Anthology of Hymns* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002), p. 263.
- 2 Although I find the tune given, “Rathburn”, rather staccato-like, tending to trivialise Bowring’s words, to my ears. There are two alternatives, “Oxford (Stainer)” and “Wychbold”.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p.261

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

QUOTABLE “QUOTES”

“Next to faith this is the highest art – to be content with the calling in which God has placed you.” *John Bunyan*

“Grace is love that cares and stoops and rescues.” *John Stott*

“The peace of God means being grateful for his past mercies, conscious of his present mercies, and certain of his future mercies.” *John Blanchard*

BIRTHS

Buckland, Hezekiah James – a son born to Brendan and Belinda – 3 October (Bishopdale)

De Boer, Addison Elly Gea – a daughter born to Erik and Jackie – 12 October (Christchurch)

Loveday, Evan Roy – a son born to Warwick and Lydia – 30 September (Pukekohe)

Voschezang, Theresa Johanna – a daughter born to Roley and Joanna – 13 October (Pukekohe)

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Bishopdale: Carien van der Colff

Hamilton: Ashleigh Voschezang, Leanne den Hartigh and Tony Lorigan

Nelson: Nathan Borger

North Shore: Sunny Yoon and her two children, Haeun and Haneul, into membership

WEDDINGS

5 November – Freddie Minnee and Sarah de Jonge married in Palmerston North

DEATHS

Fietje, Henk – We would like to thank all of you who have supported us over the past few weeks with your visits, cards, meals and especially your prayers. The day of the funeral was hard as we said goodbye to a loving husband, father and Opa. But it was a blessed occasion where we could all come together to praise God for receiving Henk in to glory, through His son, Jesus Christ. With love, Maria Fietje and family (25

September – Christchurch)

Smith, Craig – We have all felt so completely surrounded by the Lord's peace and love and the support and help of our dear brothers and sisters in Christ, family and friends. We will miss our husband and father yet we are thankful to know his eternal state with such certainty and look forward to seeing him again in Glory. We so appreciate all your prayers and support. With love from Barbara and the children. (30 September – Palmerston North)

Ututa'aloga Ta'avaogo Tom Young – Our hearts go out to our sister Alovale (Vale) and Tom's immediate as well as extended family. We share in the loss and join in praying that the Lord will use this time to give very, very special comfort and hope to the family, to the Samoan community and to us as his spiritual family. (29 September – Bucklands Beach)

FROM THE PASTOR

Hamilton: Michael Willemse: At Christmas time we celebrate not just the birth of a personal Saviour but also of a King. The Gospels stress that Jesus was the promised descendant of David and Isaiah, when prophesying about His coming, said "He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever." (Isaiah 9:7). Jesus came not only to save sinners but also to establish His Kingdom. With His birth and ministry, the "Kingdom of Heaven" has broken into this world and it continues to grow to this day. Jesus' life, teaching and miracles all showed something of what His Kingdom is like and hinted at the glory to come. As Christians, we are not only children of God but citizens of Christ's Kingdom and its ambassadors. In our lives, Christ's reign is brought to bear on our homes, our neighbourhoods, our communities and our workplaces. Wherever Christians are, people should detect the sweet smell of heaven and have a foretaste of the new heaven and earth. We are called to proclaim Christ's Kingdom, to show what it is like and to call others to submit to His rule. But we may only do these things as Christ dwells in us through the Spirit, as we submit to His Kingship and live in the power of His completed work of salvation. May Christ so dwell in us this Christmas that people catch a glimpse of His glory and the wonder of His

Kingdom. May we rejoice in our King and His Kingdom be extended through us in anticipation of the day when "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea"! (Hab. 2:14)

MINISTERS, STUDENTS, CHURCH WORKERS

Joshua Flinn has been considering whether the Lord is calling him to train for the ministry of the Gospel. Actually, the idea has been in his mind for many years, but lately he and Hannah have become more sure. Session discussed this with Joshua and Hannah and the last Presbytery meeting appointed the Revs John Haverland and Dirk van Garderen to interview Josh and Hannah. We are very happy to report that they have concurred with the decision of the North Shore session to recommend Joshua as a student for the ministry in the RCNZ. For a couple of personal reasons, they are not in a position to begin such study immediately. Further, Joshua wishes to study at Mid America Reformed Seminary (about which we would be very happy) and the American academic year begins mid-year. The plan at present is that Josh would serve an internship for the first six months of 2013 with us here, during which he may begin studying either Greek or Hebrew, and begin his formal studies in July 2013. We are very thankful that the Lord has put this desire in Josh and Hannah's hearts and wish them every blessing and strength.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Christchurch: Please keep the COM, the elders and the deacons in prayer as we move closer to a settlement with the insurance company regarding our facilities on Cornwall Street. May the Lord give wisdom and discernment as we seek to honour and glorify Him in all our decisions. May the Holy Spirit give us unity of heart and mind as decisions are made for the future at 63 Cornwall Street.

MISSIONS

Dunedin: Those who attended the meeting with Alan and Odette Douma on Thursday night experienced a wonderful time of being informed about the gospel work in Papua New Guinea and sharing in the warmth and enthusiasm that our missionaries bring to their task. We are reminded to pray for the fledgling PNG Reformed churches and for wisdom and humility for the Doumas. Theirs is

a long-term work and we also need to look to the Lord to provide personnel who can carry it on in the future.

North Shore: Janice Reid is commended by the Hamilton congregation and works with HCJB Christian Radio in SE Asia training announcers and programmers to prepare and present Christian radio broadcasts. She has also written follow-up Bible study courses. She will be visiting our congregation and will give a presentation of her work to us. It would be good if we could plan to stay for this so that we may pray for this work more intelligently and also to encourage Janice who has been doing this work so faithfully for twenty years or so.

PRISON MINISTRY

Christchurch: The Prison Team have had a very rewarding time. There were seven inmates at the service and they were eager to listen and discuss matters of faith. Please continue to remember the two teams that visit, that the message that is delivered falls on eager ears and that the Lord might use this for the extension of His kingdom.

Hamilton: Our special offering is for Prison Care Ministries (PCM), which is a faith ministry which seeks to help release male prisoners to re-integrate into society. Currently PCM operates four houses in the Hamilton area with 3-5 men per house. There are also 92 men on a waiting list to be released into one of these houses. Bible studies are run weekly in each house with attendance at this a requirement.

DEACONAL

Bishopdale: SHOE BOXES. Operation Christmas Child is a unique project of Samaritan's Purse that brings joy and hope to children in desperate situations around the world through gift-filled shoe boxes. In 2010, teams in Australia and New Zealand delivered 305,976 gift-filled shoe boxes to South East Asia and the South Pacific.

ACTS OF SERVICE

Christchurch: Missions at Home – With the advent of beautiful spring weather, it's about time we kick-started some outdoor service activities in church! We're planning to help some of the people in the congregation out with gardening for a few hours. Even if you're not crazy on gardening, it should be a pretty epic time working and laughing

together and it's a great way to contribute a bit to the people at church.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Bishopdale: Crafty Kids Club has been running for quite a few years and we always get an amazing response from the children at Cotswold school who are always keen to come along. Please pray that the children's hearts will be open to the message they will hear and for opportunities to further share about Christ to them and their families.

CLASSES & COURSES

Hamilton: Leadership – The session has invited a number of men to join with others for leadership training sessions that will be conducted by our pastor and some of our retired and current office bearers. However, all are welcome to attend. The sessions are based on the Office Bearer training course prepared by Rev. J Haverland. Please consider that the question is not whether you are currently a "leader", you already are. The question is: "What kind of leader are you?" We pray that this course will go some way in helping you to be a more godly leader so that your leadership will please God and be a blessing to you, to your family and to the church.

FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

Bishopdale: Get your team (max 4 people) together and get studying as it's time for the Cadet and Calvinette fundraiser Quiz Night!! Come and have some fun and show off your prowess.

Masterton: Homeleigh Christian School Board has asked the Cadets and Calvinettes to join in with their book/garage

sale. This is to help raise funds for the upcoming National Camp. As the Cadets have already lamington runs and a firewood sale organised we will direct any surplus funds to the mission project that Cadets and Calvinettes support. This mission project is a child adoption program in the Solomon Islands, which was set at the last executive meeting. With this we would like to ask the people of the congregation if they have any items surplus to requirements available for this garage sale or if you know of somebody else who has. Thanks for your consideration and "go clean out these old cupboards!"

Pukekohe: Some of the youth are fundraising so that we can go to the National Youth Camp in January. We are happy to help with any jobs around the house or garden such as washing windows, babysitting, garden work, doing your church cleaning duty, washing cars, spring cleaning, anything you can think of that needs doing let us know. We would really appreciate you helping us out.

ACTIVITIES

Avondale: Church History Month at the Library: We are exploring the history of the church this month at the library. We encourage every member, from age 0-111, to come and take out a book or DVD about what God has been doing in the history of His Bride, the Church. There are heaps of wonderful biographies, many only available this month, which you can sign out and read that will encourage you in your walk with the Lord. Any one of these books will be a blessing to your heart and mind and will be well worth your time. Find

out about the "great cloud of witnesses" that surrounds us. (Hebrews 12:1)

Bishopdale/Christchurch: Have you prepared for the 250 km Coast to Coast adventure from the West Coast to Sumner Beach. The course involves cycling, tramping/running and rafting/kayaking. A good level of fitness is required.

Dovedale: The Big Weekend 2011 Saturday morning – Photo Rally, meet at the church and come roam the streets for the secret code. Saturday Evening – 'Old School' themed evening of fun, food, and games. Dress up in your best 'Old School' outfit from mum or dads wardrobe, or the op-shop. Please bring a dessert to share. Sunday – Church service at Bishopdale followed by a shared lunch. A devotion will be led by Pastor Andrew de Vries, and weather permitting – sports/games.

Dovedale: We are planning on another singspiration, this time at church. We plan to sing some of the new hymns from the new hymnal, plus some of your favourites. We have always enjoyed great enthusiasm for the joy of singing to the Lord at our gatherings and just know this will continue as we meet this time at the church instead.

Dunedin: Save Saturday evening for a fun-filled quiz night here at the church! The congregation is invited to test their knowledge, exercise their minds, and enjoy an evening of socialisation.

Foxton: It's time again for a bit of fun and fellowship at the annual trivial pursuits quiz night! Come along for a thrilling night out. Entry is by gold coin. Spot prizes, drinks and nibbles supplied. Be there to add to the atmosphere!

Books in focus

Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal

by T. David Gordon. P & R, 2010.
Reviewed by Stephen J. Tracey

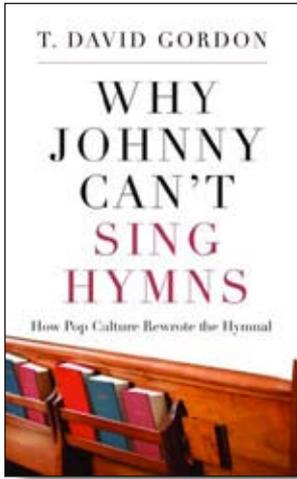
T. David Gordon has stepped into the minefield of music in the modern church. Or perhaps it would be better to say that he stepped into the minefield of modern music in the church. Most office-bearers

know this is a minefield where one is apt to lose a limb. Members – not always young and not always disgruntled, as one might imagine – pushing for "missional" music are not likely to be satisfied with "we've always done it this way" or "we can't offend the older folk," or "we just don't like guitars, or drums, or words projected on screens." Nor should they be satisfied with such arguments.

It is not unusual to hear the phrase "use the culture to attract the culture."

The question, however, is what culture? Use what culture to attract what culture? And when the culture is attracted, what then? Change culture? The classic bait and switch, although everyone knows the bait is rarely switched. It just wriggles and grows on the hook.

All too often our answers to "missional" music questions fall short. An example of this appears on the OPC website series of questions and answers. The only question relating to church music



includes the following sentences:

*Choirs were used in the Old Testament worship of God and are therefore not forbidden, so choral responses reverently executed today are not forbidden. Similarly, special music is referred to and is therefore not forbidden.*¹

The argument that something is not forbidden is not the Presbyterian understanding of the regulative principle of worship. Something needs to be commanded. This lack of carefully nuanced answers contributes to the frustration that swirls around this debate, as well as the awful experience of churches losing limbs; sometimes strong and healthy limbs.

So Dr. Gordon's contribution to the question is most welcome. The strength of the book is that it will help church sessions approach the question of church music much more thoughtfully than I suspect is usually the case. Thought is exactly what is called for. Dr. Gordon says:

I am bothered that such a near-total change has taken place in Christian worship in about two decades, without significant theological study. (p170)

This issue is not a matter of taste; it is a matter of serious aesthetic, theological, and liturgical principle. To choose contemporary worship music over traditional worship music is to reject the criteria proposed by all those generations of hymn-writers and hymn-compilers. Such a wholesale rejection, without a season of theological (and musical) reflection analogous to that which informed the Reformation, has been a disservice both to the church and the world. (p176)

[This book] is designed to describe how we got where we are now, and to make a case that, regarding worship music, where we are now is not so good. (p179)

Much of the book consists of describing a variety of cultural forces and implied values of which many people, lay or clergy, are unaware. (p179)

This is an important point – it is not easy for us to question our own culture, or to consciously express our values. T. S. Eliot probed in the same direction in his lecture *The Idea of a Christian Society*. He said, “We conceal from ourselves the unpleasant knowledge of the real values by which we live.”² Eliot went on to argue that the church's business was to interfere with the world.³ He said:

*I want to suggest that a task for the Church in our age is a more profound scrutiny of our society, which shall start from the question: to what depth is the foundation of our society not merely neutral but positively anti-Christian?*⁴

Similarly Calvin M. Johansson observes that

*the church, like the children of Israel, found out that culture is not all that neutral. Baal is not dead ... From the folk mass to coke and potato chip communion to gospel entertainment, the church cannot wiggle free from its lovers' quarrel with the world.*⁵

That is the issue Gordon wrestles with in this book; the non-neutral cultural issues of church music. He brings a “media-ecological perspective,” and the result is a book that questions the unquestioned assumptions of our culture. Discussing issues of aesthetic relativism, musical form and content, meta-narratives and the concept of sacred music, Dr. Gordon questions the value of contemporaneity as the apparently sole criteria for assessing church music.

Johnny hasn't been persuaded that hymn-singing is wrong; Johnny simply cannot relate to anything that does not sound contemporary. He cannot shed his cultural skin, the skin of contemporaneity, of triviality, of paedocentrism. He thinks he “prefers” contemporary worship music to other forms, but in reality he prefers contempora-

neity as a trout prefers water; it is the only environment he knows. In roughly twenty-five years, Christian worship has gone from being serious to casual – not because a case has been cogently or theologically argued that “casual” is more appropriate to a meeting with God, but because the culture itself has become casual, and the church has chosen not to resist the cultural inertia. David Letterman doesn't take anything seriously – why should we? (p173)

[Johnny has been] temporarily befuddled by a commercial, paedocentric, contemporaneous, pop culture – but biblical light can bring him understanding and clarity in the matter of hymnody, as that light has illuminated in many matters before. (p185)

The book is eminently readable. When I received my review copy two people in my home had read it before I got my pencil to it. Dr. Gordon writes with wit and wisdom. This is not a heavy book, but it is a chewy book. The questions for reflection may prove useful to church sessions and other groups reading together. Dr. Gordon helps us think about music that is biblically sound, not faddish; straightforward, not manipulative. Music that is ascetic, not indulgent; honest, not pretentious; and God centered, not egocentric. Music that is more wholesome and edifying, rather than entertaining. He is not simply defending Old Western Man music but believes we should patiently develop and teach “a biblical perspective on singing praise” (180).

Notes

- 1 “Music in Worship” (OPC.org Question and Answer), http://www.opc.org/qa.html?question_id=126, accessed 2-15-2011.
- 2 T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture, The Idea of a Christian Society and Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (1939; repr., Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1948), 7.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 71.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 5 Calvin M. Johansson, *Discipling Music Ministry, Twenty-first Century Directions* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 27.

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Ordained Servant Online, April 2011.

Singing and Making Music: Issues in Church Music Today

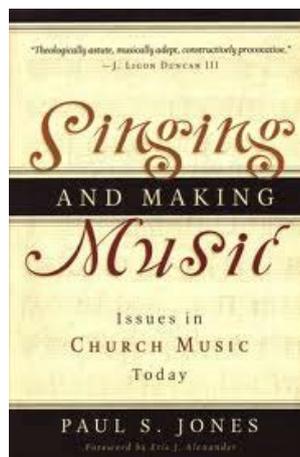
by Paul S. Jones. P&R Publishing,
Reviewed by Darryl Hart

In the worship wars of the last two decades, Presbyterians who are suspicious of novel forms are prone to look for help and encouragement wherever they can find it. The trend among evangelical Protestants has been running so decisively toward music and styles designed to interest “seekers” that any defense of older forms of worship will be greeted wholeheartedly. This is especially true for congregational song where older musical tastes and musical idioms have come under assault without serious or obvious rejoinder.

In this context comes a welcome book by Paul S. Jones, the music director at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. This center-city congregation, partly through Jones’ own efforts, has resisted mightily the recent innovations in worship while also maintaining a tone and order of service that characterized American Protestantism throughout most of the twentieth century until the worship wars began. Jones’ book is a plausible defense of traditional Protestant song and worship music. It offers much wisdom on how to think about the selection of hymns, performance, and the function of music in worship, while also introducing readers to some of the great hymnody and worship music from the church’s history. But these assets come with a cost. Jones’ conservatism does not accurately reflect the convictions and teaching that informed Presbyterian and Reformed Christianity from the Reformation until the awakenings of the eighteenth century. Instead the book presents a conservative Protestant perspective rather than a Reformed one. Consequently, while those looking for arguments against the innovators will find considerable help from *Singing and Making Music*, readers desiring a more consistently Reformed argument will have to look elsewhere.

Jones excels on so many fronts that to fault him for not being sufficiently Reformed may seem like nit-picking. At the practical level the book brims with good advice about appropriate ways to use music in worship, from the selection of hymns to criteria for selecting an organ. Jones also provides valuable historical perspective on various hymn writers, answers misconceptions about

them (such as the oft-repeated remark that Luther used bar tunes), and the origin and function of service music (e.g., the prelude, introit, offertory, and postlude). Most of Jones’ instincts about church music stem from a sober understanding of worship as a time when frivolity and informality are inappropriate. For instance, in a chapter on criteria for church music, Jones writes, “Text and music should be well matched. At times one will encounter a solid, doctrinal text set to a trivial tune – this can be true of contemporary music or of a favorite hymn” (280). He adds, “worship of God should be somehow set apart from the mundane tasks of everyday life. ... music used to worship God should be meaningful and other than ordinary ...” The book is especially effective in countering the standard arguments that have been used in favor of “contemporary” over “traditional” worship. Jones is convinced



that the reasons for replacing hymns with praise songs originate from an approach based more on the spirit of the age than on biblical norms. “A ‘me-focused’ age ... is hardly one that should inform and define our approach to God,” he laments, “And yet, it does.” Even so, as much as the contemporary church seems to be shunning psalms and hymns, Jones argues that “both forms are biblical and necessary” (191-192).

Despite Jones’ good sense on various matters related to church music and congregational song, he departs significantly from the sort of outlook that had informed Presbyterian worship up until the rise of hymns during the revivals of the eighteenth century. Granted, the case of exclusive psalmody is not going to resolve the worship wars, or if it does, its success will be to make everyone feel like the vanquished. But the bulk of Reformed theologians for close

to two centuries after the Reformation believed that psalms were the only appropriate form of congregational singing. The Christian Reformed Church, for instance, only introduced hymns early in the twentieth century, and the Covenanters still sing only psalms. Unfortunately, Jones does not spend much time with the Reformed argument against hymns but instead argues, following Hughes Old, that Calvin’s psalter was simply his preference for the congregations in Geneva. When Jones confronts the Westminster Standards, which also maintain exclusive psalmody, thus showing how lasting the conviction was even down to the 1640s, he accepts Robert Rayburn’s argument that chapter twenty-one of the Confession also refers to hymns “in a wider sense” of psalms (101). Aside from not doing justice to the older argument against hymns, Jones’ logic also belies an insufficient appreciation for the regulative principle of worship which requires the church to find a biblical warrant for the elements of worship (what should be sung) rather than simply discovering that Scripture does not prohibit a specific practice (any form of song is permitted).

Other problems attend Jones’ failure to work within Reformed boundaries. One is the matter of office and whether churches should have paid musicians directing the musical component of a congregation’s worship. Jones tries to justify church musicians by citing the singers and musicians who were part of Levitical worship. But such an appeal (following the regulative principle) would require all churches to have musicians, not merely provide grounds for their possibility. Perhaps even more difficult is the appeal to part of Old Testament worship that Reformed Christianity has typically regarded as being fulfilled in Christ and so no longer necessary. Aside from questions of office and redemptive history, the use of musical instruments itself was generally forbidden among Reformed Christians until the nineteenth century. Jones seems to be unaware of the objections to musical instruments that Columbia Seminary’s John L. Girardeau raised forcefully at the time when congregations began to make the organ an essential piece of church furnishings and congregational singing. One last concern of note is the function of song in worship. For those like Calvin, song was a form of prayer (thus making the psalms highly pertinent for worship). But for Jones, song functions as both sermon

and prayer (the subjects of his first two chapters respectively). Whether one follows Calvin on song as prayer, to consider song as a form of proclamation invites a blurring of the elements of worship as well as the differences between officers and church members that will further the confusion now surrounding Presbyterian worship.

From one angle, then, Jones' book is a valuable counterweight to the trend that flouts good taste and common sense in worship. And to his credit, he does try to ground his points in the Bible, not merely in standards of good music. Such standards, by the

way, should not be discounted, since as the creator God is also the author of them. But from another angle, one that relies on the insights of historic Reformed teaching about worship and the ministry of the word, Jones' book obscures the biblical theology that gave Presbyterians a form of worship that was distinct from Lutheran, Anglican and evangelical practices. His book is a helpful reminder that conservative or traditional worship is not the same as Reformed worship. It may even have the added value of showing how biblical historic Reformed worship was. For rather than looking to Scripture alone

for what it says about song, Calvin, the Westminster divines and subsequent church officers reflected theologically on the epoch-making significance of Christ's ministry and the changes necessary for Christian worship, especially for the way God's people sing.

D. G. Hart, a ruling elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, serving at Calvary OPC, Glenside, Pennsylvania; and is the director of fellowship programs and scholar-in-residence at the Intercollegiate Studies Institute. Ordained Servant, February 2008.



“Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, Or have you seen the storehouses of the hail ... ?” Job 38:22