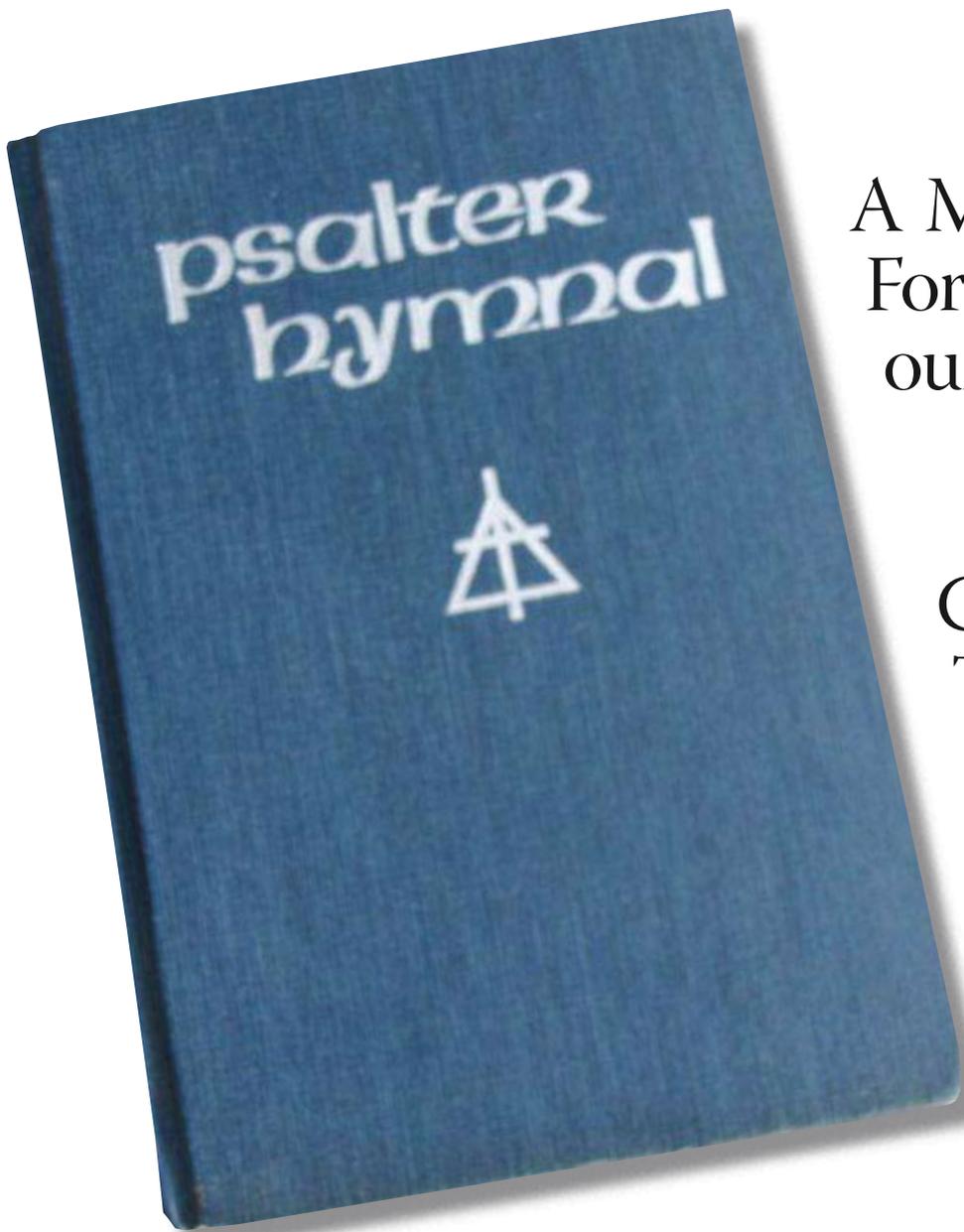


faith in
focus

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

VOLUME 38/8 SEPTEMBER 2011



A Mighty
Fortress is
our God

Guide me o
Thou Great
Jehovah

Singing hymns for God's praise

Contents

Singing hymns for God's praise (1) Hymn singing in Victorian England	3
Singing hymns for Gods praise (2) "So which hymns should we sing?"	6
Singing hymns for Gods praise (3) What makes a great hymn?	10
Feminine focus Teach ... your children well – with a good hymnal	13
God's definition of forgiveness Part 2	15
Focus on home Gleanings Wellington Presbytery report	17
Books in focus	20
Missions in focus An African church coming of age	23

All correspondence regarding editorial content and advertising should be sent to:

The Editor:

Walter Walraven
7 Winchester Avenue, Pinehaven
Upper Hutt 5019
Email: fnf@rcnz.org.nz
Reformed Churches Home Page
<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

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ has always loved to sing. . Singing, which had been confined to priests and choirs, was restored to God's people at the time of the Reformation. No longer were those who worshipped mere onlookers.

Our singing is an integral part of our dialogue with the Lord in worship. He "speaks" to us and we respond in song.. How dull would be our worship if the singing were left out. And there was a time when God's people were deprived of this. In our era we probably take this for granted, even to the point where we just don't think about it any more. There is also a constant call by some members of the church to sing new songs with catchy new tunes – some of these things are addressed by our contributors.

In this issue we take a look at the singing of hymns. Mr John Haverland gives us an overview of how hymnody developed in Victorian England.. Dr. Michael Flinn and Mr Bernie Vaatstra comment on the poetry of some good hymns and what sort of music should accompany them. Mr and Mrs Timothy and Lou Ann Shafer write about what makes a great hymn. Their credentials suggest they are eminently qualified to do so.

Mrs Sally Davey looks at teaching children with the use of a good hymnal. It is obvious that this article is not just about singing, but theology too.

Mr Daniel Wilson gives us part two of his studies on biblical forgiveness.

Mr Brian Wingard an OPC missionary to Mbale, Uganda tells about the coming of age of this African church. Mr and Mrs Barry and Anne James will be going to this same mission in August, Lord willing, to take up teaching duties in the Knox Theological College in Mbale for a six month period.

Instead of the usual column of "World in focus", I have inserted some reviews of what I believe to be some interesting and useful books.

Cover image: Mrs Sally Davey.

Photo/image credits: p4, 5, 7, 14 Mrs S Davey; p20 Mr J Holtslag; p23 & 24 *New Horizons*, April 2011.

No time for reading the Bible? "We cannot look seriously into one another's faces and say that it is want of time. It is want of intention. It is want of determination. It is want of method. It is want of motive. It is want of conscience. It is want of heart. It is want of anything and everything but time." *Alexander Whyte*

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 Dort, 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.

Singing hymns for God's praise (1)

Hymn singing in Victorian England

John A Haverland

A brief history

Some of you may have attended worship services in various evangelical or charismatic churches when you have been on holiday in a town where there has been no Reformed church. In many of these churches, especially in the larger ones, the singing will be led by a band and a group of singers. Often they are the ones singing while the rest of the congregation is largely silent; the band and singers are the performers and the worshippers are the audience. This practice is similar to the worship services of the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages. At that time the priests chanted their way through the liturgy, in Latin (a language most of the people could not understand), while the gathered worshippers were silent spectators.

The Reformation of the sixteenth century changed this situation dramatically. The Reformers believed that the people of God ought to sing God's praise. Martin Luther, a skilled musician and a talented hymn writer, led the way. He wrote hymns the German people could sing in their own language, including his most famous hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is our God*. Calvin also promoted congregational singing, but wanted the church to sing primarily (though not exclusively) the Psalms. For the next 250 years reformational churches that followed Calvin maintained this practice of singing metrical versions of the Psalms and some of the New Testament songs.¹

In the Protestant churches in England and Scotland the Psalms were sung unaccompanied and were often led by a precentor, who gave out each line before the congregation joined in. This made singing a psalm a very slow process, slowed even more by the repetition of lines and very long notes. Often the precentor sang solo because of the lack of enthusiasm of the congregation.

In the late 1700s many English parish churches began to abandon this method

of singing metrical psalms and instead introduced a choir and instrumentalists who were located in a gallery and who led the psalm singing. (In the large towns and cities most churches preferred an organ, but in the rural areas the singing was led by this gallery band.) These bands were usually vigorous, spontaneous and enthusiastic, which most worshippers saw as an improvement on the precentor. However, these instrumentalists were usually amateurish, disorganised and irreverent. Thomas Hardy's novels portray them "first and foremost as per-

tion at Mark Lane Chapel in London, wrote 600 hymns and Christianised versions of the Psalms for use in his church. Charles Wesley wrote many hymns for the large open-air rallies held during the 1740's and 50s, at which he and his brother John preached. Charles was a prolific writer of hymns producing as many as 6,500!

The Church of England was slower to accept hymns. Many in that denomination were concerned about the poor state of their congregational singing. In 1790 the Bishop of London told the clergy

“Around the 1750s a growing number of Dissenting churches began to sing hymns, both in their chapels and even more so in their open air services.”

formers out to have a good time and only secondarily, if at all, as committed to leading God's people in worship and praise.”² On Saturday nights they were out playing for dancing parties and on Sunday they were leading the congregation in worship. Many of the clergy, understandably, were most unhappy with the gallery bands and sought to remove them from the church. The bands were ousted between 1830 and 1850 with the introduction of barrel organs, which brought more regularity and order to congregational singing.

Around the 1750s a growing number of Dissenting churches began to sing hymns, both in their chapels and even more so in their open air services.³ The 18th century English revival gave them plenty of material to use. Isaac Watts, minister of an Independent congrega-

of his diocese that “of all the aspects of worship in the Church of England none was ‘at so low an ebb’ as the psalmody”.⁴ The gallery bands had discouraged members of the congregation from joining in the singing of the psalms but the evangelicals in the Church of England encouraged worshippers to sing chanted psalms and hymns. By the beginning of the 1800s a small number of hymns were included in the Prayer Book and in 1820 the Archbishop of York approved a collection of 146 hymns. “The Archbishop's collection”, as it came to be known, was taken up by a good number of churches in the North of England and went through 29 editions. By the 1840s hymns had become fully accepted in the Church of England.

Queen Victoria came to the throne of England in 1837. Her reign coincided

with a proliferation of hymn writing and singing. Great poetry was combined with rousing and thrilling tunes and congregations were eager to sing devotional words to these strong tunes. Hymns became a means of expressing personal devotion and expounding sound doctrine. These hymns and tunes were written by Dissenters, evangelical Anglicans and by those in the High Church and Oxford movements of the Anglican Church, especially John Keble. Hymns became a major feature in the worship services of all the main Christian denominations in England. Worshipers were now able to sing the praise of God in their own language to tunes they found appealing and singable. Horton Davis is quite certain that “the greatest factor in popularising Victorian services was the hymnody.”⁵

The Victorians wrote hymns, not just for worship, but for all times and places. In a preface to one of their later hymnals the Primitive Methodists wrote they required hymns “for the sick chamber, for the marriage feast, for funerals, for journeys by sea and land, for various social gatherings, for the home sanctuary, for personal and private use, for praising God ‘secretly among the faithful’ as well as in the ‘great congregation’.”⁶ Hymns were written for every conceivable (and even inconceivable!) purpose and occasion; one was written for use during a cattle plague and another to be sung before a parliamentary election!

Various factors were at work in pro-

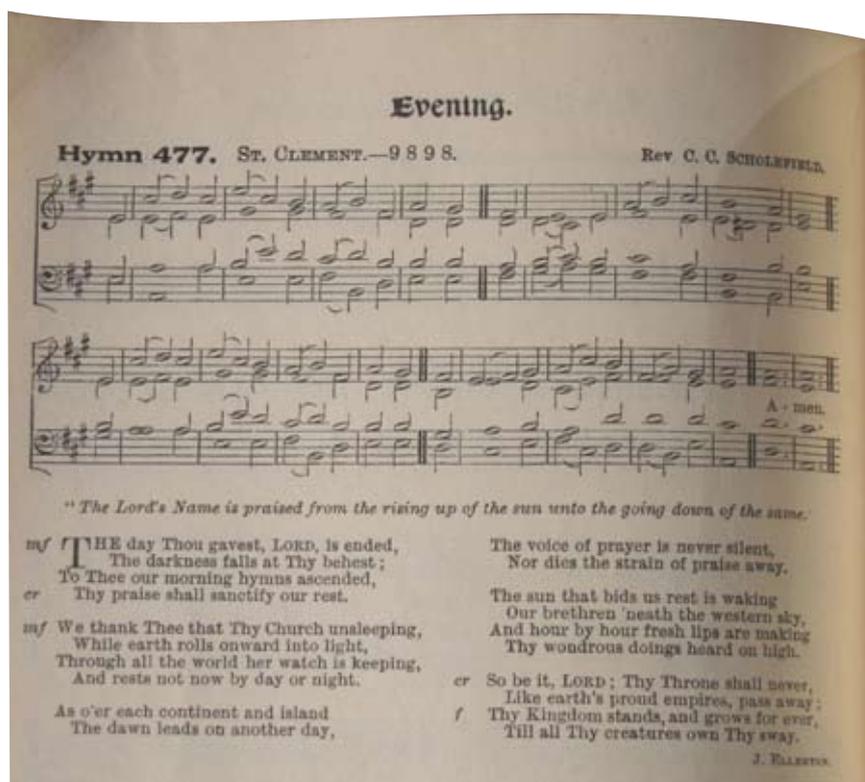
moting this great increase in singing. In the 1840s and 50s there was a great interest in learning music; these decades “saw a burst of musical education and an explosion of popular interest and involvement in choral singing unparalleled before or since.”⁷ Choral societies sprang up all over the country. Sunday Schools also encouraged the singing of hymns. By 1888 three quarters of English children attended Sunday School and singing was an important and popular part of their programme. Hymns were also widely sung by families in their homes and were learnt at school. The combined effect of singing them at home, school and church made hymns the folk song of Victorian Britain. “... it was hymns rather than parlour ballads, folk songs or music hall numbers that most exercised the nation’s vocal chords – not just in churches and chapels, but in school rooms, at public meetings and social gatherings, in the streets and, most of all, at home in the nursery or parlour It is almost impossible for us to grasp the ubiquity and pervasiveness of hymns in Victorian culture Their texts appeared on postcards and tombstones, on framed posters to be hung up at home and in school reading books.”⁸

Hymn writing attracted some of the finest poets and composers of the Victorian period. This was due to a strong culture of reading and writing poetry combined with the healthy condition of the English church. A faithful church

meant there were many biblical and capable ministers. Some of them devoted their considerable talents to writing hymns. This is not surprising given that ministers of the Word ought to have a thorough knowledge of the Bible, and the original languages, and facility in the use of words. Significant hymn writers of the 18th and 19th centuries included Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, William Cowper, John Newton, Augustus Toplady, Horatius Bonar and Phillip Doddridge. Examples of their compositions can be found in most hymnbooks.

Ian Bradley cites the hymn-book as one of the great Victorian inventions, alongside the penny post and the railway system. “From modest origins as a tool of reforming clergy wishing to improve congregational worship, the hymn-book became one of the central institutions of Victorian religion, defining the identity of different denominations and church parties and providing a handbook for doctrine and devotion which, if sales provide any indication, had more influence and impact than any other category of publication.”⁹ Twelve hundred hymn books were published in Britain between 1837 and 1901. Between 1830 and 1880 the Church of England alone produced an average of one hymnal a year. These appeared at a time of increasing literacy among the English population; bringing with it an insatiable appetite for reading, especially of devotional books, and including hymn-books. The most popular of these was *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. This book sold steadily at a rate of 3000 copies per week for 35 years clocking up sales of 35 million by the end of the century. The hymns were arranged according to the church year. An innovation in this book was to give each hymn its own tune and to print the verses and melody on the same page. This was a significant change from the system of leaving it to the clergy and the musicians to mix and match a tune to a psalm or hymn. This new practice provided a strong, singable tune for each hymn and established an association between a tune and a hymn that aided the memory and caused a hymn to become well-loved. Think of the associations of tune and hymn with John Newton’s “Amazing Grace”, Charles Wesley’s “And Can it Be”, and John Keble’s “Sun of My Soul”.

The Church of Scotland was much slower to allow hymns into its worship services, even though the greatest Scottish hymn writer, Horatius Bonar, came



“Hymns are also a means of instructing Christians about the faith. The Victorian hymn writers were well aware of the power and influence of this medium of communication and worship.”

from this denomination. A number of his hymns, including “I heard the voice of Jesus say”, were part of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, but he was not allowed to have them sung in the church where he was a minister for over 20 years. At last, in 1893, the three main Presbyterian churches in the United Kingdom set up a joint hymnal committee. In 1898 they produced *The Church Hymnary*, the last great denominational hymn-book of the Victorian era.

A few observations

We can always learn some lessons from the past. Here are a few observations on our hymn singing today. One lesson worth noting from this brief history is the need to sing the Psalms and to sing them in an edifying manner. In writing about hymns in this issue of *Faith in Focus* we do not intend to minimise the value of the Psalms. Christian congregations today ought to sing the 150 Psalms and their neglect in worship is a sad and telling indicator of the ill-health of the wider church. But we need to sing the Psalms well. Our new Psalter, *Sing to the Lord*, is a significant step forward in this area. The metrical psalms selected follow the biblical text very closely, which cannot always be said of the psalm selections in the blue Psalter Hymnal. The committee has selected a variety of tunes and careful attention has been given to finding a tune to match the words. Another plus is that the numbering of the psalms follows the biblical psalter. Let’s pray this new book helps us sing the Psalms consistently and well.

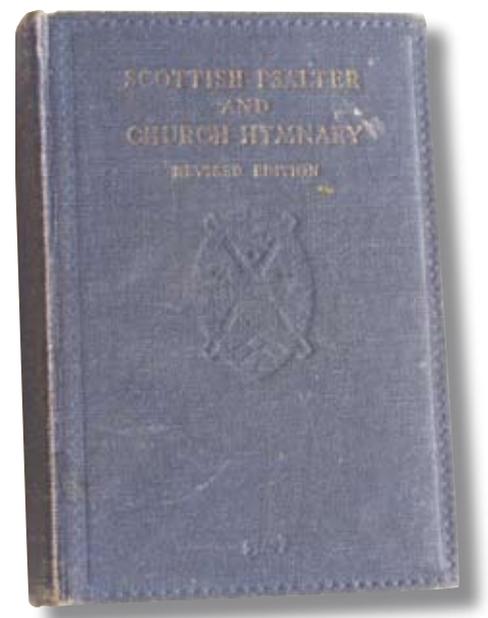
This brief history of hymn singing also highlights the importance of skillful and appropriate musical accompaniment in

worship. The gallery bands of the English parish churches, with their rag-tag and undisciplined musical style, discouraged the congregation from singing. Others far more qualified than I could write on this subject but I want to note that musical accompaniment, whether from one instrument or a collection, must be skillful, well-timed, of the correct tempo and of appropriate volume (not too soft nor too loud).

Hymns are also a means of instructing Christians about the faith. The Victorian hymn writers were well aware of the power and influence of this medium of communication and worship. In 1780 John Wesley put together the first major denominational hymnbook for the Methodist Church, claiming that it contained “all the truth of our most holy religion, whether speculative or practical.”¹⁰ John and Charles Wesley saw hymns as a means of teaching Christian doctrine. They wanted to counter what they saw as bad teaching and to promote their own peculiar doctrines, such as their view on sanctification. The High Church and Oxford movements had their own agenda, as did Calvinists such as Isaac Watts and Horatius Bonar. Hymns teach doctrine, whether that be true or false, orthodox or heretical. Singing sound, orthodox hymns and songs will encourage believers in a sound, biblical theology. Singing hymns and songs that are theologically weak and/or heretical will lead people into error. We are what we sing. With this in mind we must sing not only what is bright and cheerful, expressing our spiritual “highs”, but also sing about the struggles believers go through in severe suffering and in the face of horrendous evil; and their diffi-

culty in holding on to their faith in such times. The psalms and many hymns of the church give us a treasure chest of sound doctrine written out of profound human experience. Therefore, it is a great loss if we do not have a Psalter-Hymnal in the form of a book. It seems to me the move to data-projectors is a significant step backwards for a number of reasons. Singing from a screen means that people do not have the music in front of them, nor can they look at the words before or after singing the psalm or hymn, nor do they have a book at home to sing from or refer to.

There is great value in singing hymns. Thousands of hymns have been written and only a comparatively small number of these have been passed on and are used today. It is estimated that around 400,000 hymns were written during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). Less than 1000 have survived and are still being sung today. The chaff has been blown away and the best have been preserved. Singing hymns that come from the history of the Christian church makes us aware that we are part of the holy catholic¹¹ church that has existed for 20 centuries. These hymns connect us with our historical, theological and musical tradition. The Victorian period has provided us with hymns that have rich imagery and depth of meaning. Sometimes that meaning is not easily grasped. At times we need to think carefully about the words and the images. Bradley warns against being “seduced by the vandals who would strip out the beauty and ambiguity from ‘difficult’ language and replace it with the blandly banal.” He observes that these hymns were not written



to entertain or boost audience ratings. Rather, they were intended “to praise or petition God, convert sinners, sustain the righteous, guide the perplexed, comfort the downhearted, challenge the complacent, wrestle honestly with doubt, celebrate the wonder of creation, teach the basic doctrines of the faith or penetrate the mystery of holiness.”¹²

I want to conclude with a quotation from the preface to one of the many huge-selling collections of hymns in the Victorian Age. “Next to the Bible itself, hymns have done more to influence our views, and mould our theology, than any other instrumentality whatever. There is a power in hymns which never dies. Easily learned in the days of childhood and of

youth; often repeated; seldom, if ever, forgotten, they abide with us, a most precious heritage amid all the changes of our earthly life. They form a fitting and most welcome expression for every kind of deep religious feeling; they are with us to speak of Faith and Hope in hours of trial and sorrow; with us to animate to all earnest Christian effort; with us as the rich consolation of individual hearts, and as one common bond of fellowship between the living members of Christ’s mystical body.”¹³

Notes

1 Metrical versions of the psalms are paraphrases of the biblical text in verse form, with regular poetic meter and rhyming lines.

2 *Abide With Me – The World of Victorian Hymns*, Ian Bradley, (1997, CIA Publications, London), p. 4. This is a fine book on Victorian hymnody and has been my main source for this article.

3 The Dissenting churches were all those outside of the established Church of England.

4 *Abide With Me*, p. 15

5 *Abide With Me*, p. 46

6 *Abide With Me*, p. 8

7 *Abide With Me*, p. 33

8 *Abide With Me*, p. xiii

9 *Abide With Me*, p. 53

10 *Abide With Me*, p. 7

11 *Je.. Universal*

12 *Abide With Me*, p. xv

13 *Abide With Me*, p. 52

Mr John Haverland is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Pukekohe.

Singing hymns for God’s praise (2)

“So which hymns should we sing?”

Michael Flinn and Bernie Vaatstra¹

Introduction

This article reaches back to an article that I wrote entitled “Poetry – the Language of the Soul”, which was published in the September 2010 edition of *Faith in Focus*. That article explored the nature and characteristics of poetry (as opposed to prose and other types of literature) and also examined some of the techniques that poets use in order to express their ideas. The article concluded with the following:

In good poetry, words are never wasted. The poet thinks long and hard about which word to choose, and even where to place it in the line or sentence in order to express his ideas and the beauty of his art. This is true of poetry in every language, including the Hebrew poems that are found in Scripture. Poetry is also the language of the soul, often expressing in a few words, and in a very telling way, feelings and experiences that others can readily understand and identify with.

Given that hymns are also poetic in nature and form, a number of questions arise: What makes for a good

hymn? What sort of hymns should we sing in the worship of God, and, especially as our churches are going through the process of producing a new psalter hymnal, what sort of hymns should we look for to include in that hymnbook? This article will explore some answers to those questions. It is not exhaustive. It does not deal with every issue that arises in relation to this subject, but hopefully, it will stimulate fruitful thought and discussion on this important issue.

Important Elements of a “Good Hymn”

“A Mighty Fortress is our God”

Let’s launch into our subject with a discussion of two hymns that I think are *good hymns*. The first is “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”. Here are two verses of this hymn:

*A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our Helper, He, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
And armed with cruel hate,*

On earth is not his equal. (vs. 1)

*And though this world, with devils
filled,*

*Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God has willed
His truth to triumph through us.*

The prince of darkness grim,

We tremble not for him;

His rage we can endure,

For lo! his doom is sure,

One little Word shall fell him. (vs. 3)

First, notice how these verses express *biblical truth*. Think of Psalm 46, which speaks of “God Almighty”, the “God of Jacob”, as “our fortress” (vss. 7). Even though the waters roar and foam, and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea (vs. 1), we will not fear because God is our “refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (vs. 1). Think of such passages as Ephesians 5:10-18, which speak of the believer’s battle against “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”, and of 1 Peter 5:8, which speaks of the devil as a “roaring lion, looking for someone to devour”. Think of Genesis 3:15, the very first gospel message of the Bible, which holds out hope in a Person who will crush the serpent’s head. Think

of Revelation 19:11-16, which depicts Jesus as the “Word of God”, riding on a white horse, and striking down the nations with a “sharp sword”.

Second, notice the striking imagery of the hymn and the fact that the words are carefully chosen to express the ideas of the song in beautiful and compelling language:

*A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our Helper, He, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.*

“Bulwark” is a word that we don’t often use today. A bulwark is a “defensive wall”. The term “bulwark” can also be used figuratively to describe a person or an institution that stands firm against destructive forces in life or in society.² To speak of God as a “bulwark never failing” describes, in very few words, some wonderful and very comforting theology. Likewise, the phrase “flood of mortal ills prevailing”, in a mere 5 words, expresses *volumes* about the struggles we all have to endure this side of heaven. As Leland Ryken points out, poetry “advertises its distinctiveness. It speaks a language of images.”³

Third, notice how the cadence and tone of the music matches the content of the song. The tune “flows” up and down, like the flood of mortal ills prevailing in this life, but the overall rhythm of the song is *rock steady and powerful*, expressing the confidence and trust that the believer has in God in spite of all the ups and downs in life.

“Guide Me, Oh Thou Great Jehovah”

*Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
Feed me till I want no more,
Feed me till I want no more.*

Much of what was said above can also be said about this great hymn.⁴ But this song has an added dimension: It is very well known! Christians know it and love it. Even non-Christians know and love it. Call me crass, but I do enjoy a good rugby game, and I’ll be following the exploits of the All Blacks in the World Cup later this year with eager interest. There is nothing quite like a Welsh test match against the All Blacks when, before the game begins, thousands of voices erupt in unison in the stadium with the words

“To speak of God as a “bulwark never failing” describes, in very few words, some wonderful and very comforting theology.”

of Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah! There is no doubt about it, the Welsh know how to sing, and when they sing this song *en masse* (at a rugby venue!) it gives me goose bumps.

This characteristic of a “good hymn” is important to keep in mind. I’m not opposed to new songs being written for God’s people to sing in worship, but it seems to me that the vast majority of “new songs” that are churning off the production lines (under copyright, of course) are eminently forgettable. Will your children and your grandchildren be singing them? Would the non-Christian world ever sing them? Contrast this with some of the world’s great hymns, such as “How Great Thou Art”, or Psalm 23, “The Lord’s my Shepherd, I’ll not want...”

I’ve noticed this important feature of hymn singing and just how powerful music can be, when ministering in rest homes. Go into any retirement home and open the Word of God, in a little sermon, and most of the heads will be nodding. But sing “The Lord’s my shep-

herd” and eyes will open up and shine with joy. And everyone will join in. Music, and the words of these hymns, can reach the soul of a person with the wonderful truths expressed in them, in a way that nothing else can.⁵

Other Considerations

1) Avoid Scripture in Song

I can just imagine the eyes of many readers popping out on reading this heading. How can this be wrong? After all, this is Scripture! What can possibly be wrong with setting it to music and singing it in public worship? Just this: Luke 14:26⁶, for example, is not a song, or even part of a song. And when it is stripped of its literary context, set to music, and sung over and over again in worship, God’s people can get a very distorted and unbiblical perspective on the Christian life!⁷ We should look for songs that are based on Scripture, and express biblical themes and truths, not songs that simply take a verse or two of Scripture and set music to it.



2) Songs for *Congregational* Worship

We need songs that a *congregation* can sing, preferably in harmony. This gives a rich, full sound as the congregation unites in praising God corporately. In public worship, we should not sing as a bunch of individuals, all “doing our own thing” (and trying to outdo each other) so to speak. We should sing *together* as one. This raises a problem that I have with much of the modern Christian worship music. It seems to me that

“We should sing *together* as one. This raises a problem with much of the modern Christian worship music. It seems that many of the modern songs are somewhat one dimensional, both in terms of the words and also musically.”

many of the modern songs are somewhat one dimensional, both in terms of the words and also musically. I’m generalizing here, which is always risky, but I’m prepared to stick my neck out on this one. In my view, many modern Christian worship songs focus on the feelings that I have (or don’t have but should have) as a worshipper – *my* love for Christ, *my* feelings about how awesome God is, etc, rather than giving opportunity for a *congregation* to express the full-orbed beauty and richness of Biblical truth and Christian experience in a setting of corporate worship. Also, it seems to me that many of the modern songs have been written with a music team in mind – a small group up the front with tuneful voices and microphones, who “lead” the congregation by singing *to it* and *over it*. People in the congregation listen to the pleasant and melodious soprano, and join in as best they can. The tunes are therefore lyrical, but very simple, and the harmonies are non-existent.

3) Musical considerations

What about the music to which our

hymns are set? We know from Scripture that music was an integral part of the temple worship, that instruments were used, and that God’s people were encouraged to sing or shout for joy (1 Chron. 6:32, Psalm 81:1-3). However, Scripture does not provide us with specific guidance regarding the style and content of the music that accompanies our hymns. Rather, we are guided more generally by the regulative principle of worship⁸ and by the law of love.

We are also given the ability to reflect God’s glory, order, creativity and goodness and can thus appreciate beauty, albeit with our lens distorted by sin. So how do we use our creative ability to select and produce the most beautiful, good and God-honouring musical settings for our hymns?

3.1 Quality

In all things that we bring before the Lord, we should strive for excellence. When we sing hymns we should aim to sound like choirs of angels! Does the music we produce in church compare favourably with secular music? This has been the case throughout European history, but is sadly less so now. A motet or cantata sung in church was the pinnacle of musical creativity during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, but I would suggest some worship music today is a poor copy of what may be found in the world. Happily, if one takes the effort to look, there is still beautiful, original and excellent music for congregational singing being produced, which perhaps time will help sift from the rest! So is the

music of our hymns excellent? Does it abide by the rules of music theory, the “language” of tonal music that has been discovered and developed over hundreds of years⁹? Are the melodies sufficiently accessible for singers of various abilities, yet do they encourage the singers to extend their voices and sing out? Are the rhythms appropriate and do they fit the metre and flow of the poetry? Are the harmonies rich and correct?

A hymn in our Psalter that displays many of these good musical qualities is 355 – “O Sacred Head Now Wounded”. The melody is within the range of most singers. The harmonies are beautifully crafted with a number of resolved dissonances and modulations between C major and A minor. It is a pleasure to sing the tenor or base as the counterpoint flows beneath the melody, adding complexity and richness. The rhythm is steady but not dull. And the music eminently suits the bitter and yet glorious theme of our Saviour’s death on our behalf.¹⁰

3.2 Complexity

One shortcoming of a number of the songs in the *Psalter Hymnal* is the simplicity of the music. Simple beauty is sometimes desirable, depending on the nature of the psalm or hymn. However, a number of older and many new worship songs are based on 3 or 4 harmonies with little rhythmic or melodic interest. Some songs also repeat the same musical phrase three times with one intervening bridge passage. Simple music is often easy to learn but quickly becomes old, whereas more challenging music often grows on one over time. Examples of more musically complex and challenging settings that have grown to be favourites with me include “Jerusalem” by Hubert Parry (set to Psalm 145 in our provisional Psalter) and “Love Unknown” by John Ireland (set to Psalm 143). I will also mention the Genevan Psalm settings. These tunes were written with wonderfully syncopated rhythms. Many of the arrangements in the blue *Psalter* have been simplified, which renders them rather dry and stodgy. I believe the syncopated arrangements in the *CRCA Book of Worship* are closer to the intentions of the writers and much more enjoyable to sing.

3.3 Emotion

Is the emotional content of the music appropriate for the theme of the hymn being expressed? Our understanding of

appropriate emotion is that it is informed by our knowledge and will. Therefore the emotion when we sing to God should be largely informed by the truths we are expressing. If you take away the words and listen to many worship choruses, the melodies and harmonies are indistinguishable from many secular love songs heard on popular radio stations. These arrangements are designed to pull at the heartstrings and can do so regardless of, or sometimes in spite of, the words being expressed. I was recently introduced to a number of worship songs that were all based on harmonic progressions similar to those used in the familiar pop-inspirational song, "You Raise Me Up". Yet one was a song of praise, one of supplication and one of exhortation to seek the lost for Christ. The emotional content of the music was inappropriate for the ideas being expressed in the words of the songs. This is not to say that the music should be without emotion – this is impossible anyway, as even the most dissonant, chaotic collection of notes will provoke some sort of emotion (perhaps anxiety!) – rather, it should fit the ideas expressed in the words and should not be the dominant feature of the music that accompanies our hymns.

3.4 Instruments

The musical arrangement should be amenable to accompanying singers rather than dominating them. In fact, well written hymn music in four-part harmony sounds good whether accompanied by an organ, piano, group of instruments, or sung *a cappella*. The goal of the church musicians should be to assist the congregation to sing with all their hearts, not to distract them with the dexterity and grandeur of the accompaniment. For the musician, this is a fine line to tread. I find a good indicator to pull back the enthusiasm of my accompaniment is when increasing numbers of congregational members start complimenting my playing after the service! We can perform for each other any day of the week, but in the worship service we are corporately bringing our offering of praise before the Lord.

Finally, we need to remember that good hymn music comes in many varieties and that musical taste varies from person to person. I know that not many would share my level of enthusiasm for the Genevan Psalms, or perhaps for hymns written by the composers of Jubilate Hymns; some would treasure music that I might listen askance to. But we

should be able to put aside matters of personal taste and sing all these songs together with love for God and love for our neighbour.¹¹

Conclusion

Well, that's probably enough "food for thought" on this important subject of which hymns we should sing in corporate worship. By way of conclusion, we can think of no better words than these from Psalm 148:13,14

*Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendour is above the earth and
the heavens.
He has raised up for his people a
horn,
the praise of all his saints,
of Israel, for the people close to his
heart.
Praise the Lord.*

Notes

- 1 This article is the result of combined effort by two authors. Overall, Michael Flinn has contributed sections that discuss the theology and literary nature of the hymns and Bernie Vaatstra has contributed sections that discuss the musical aspects of the hymns. At times, the first person is used, leaving the reader to decide who is writing at that point.
- 2 E.g. in the following sentence: "The nation's security forces are a **bulwark against** the breakdown of society."
- 3 Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, 2002, p. 246. Ryken goes on to say: "In sum, poetry is not our everyday way of speaking. It possesses, to use a formula of J.R.R. Tolkien, "arresting strangeness". It aims to overcome the cliché effect of language. The poet is a wordsmith, always on the lookout for freshness of expression, ready to unlock what the Old English poets quaintly called 'the word hoard' in ever new ways" (p. 247).
- 4 For example, in terms of biblical content, this verse alludes to the experience of the Lord's people in Old Testament times, when they wandered as pilgrims in the wilderness and were guided by the Lord and fed with manna from heaven (Exodus 16). It also alludes to our Lord's description of himself as the "bread of life" that comes down "from heaven" (John 6:35-38), the One who provides in such a way that those who come to him in faith and trust will no longer have any hunger or thirst (John 6:35) but will live forever (John 6:50-51). In describing this life as a "pilgrimage" through "this barren land", the song also reminds us of Hebrews 11:13-16.
- 5 Music can evoke powerful emotions and associations, and this must be kept in mind when selecting hymn tunes. "Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken" (Psalter Hymnal 402) is a great hymn in terms of the words, but when sung to the tune that was the Deutsche Nationalhymne (German National Anthem) *Deutschelandleid*, it can evoke powerful and distressing emotions for the generation of people who lived

during WWII in Europe. This illustrates, by way of negative example, the ability of music and hymns to touch the heart in a way that nothing else can.

- 6 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes and even his own life – he cannot be my disciple."
- 7 This same point can be made when fragments of a psalm are taken out of context and set to music as well. A classic example is "This is the Day that the Lord hath made..." This "Scripture in Song" is taken from Psalm 118:24. "This is the day..." is often sung by Christians as an expression of thankfulness to God for "today", "this day". Let us praise God for the here and now of the last 24 hours. However, in the psalm itself, the "day that the Lord hath made", and in which we are called to "rejoice" is the Day of Resurrection, the Day on which the Stone that the builders rejected became the "capstone" (vss. 22-24).
- 8 As expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism, LD 35, Q. 96 "What is God's will for us in the second commandment? That we in no way make an image of God nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in his Word."
- 9 J.S. Bach was instrumental (forgive the pun) in progressing and developing musical theory and language, and provides scholars and musicians endless study and new insights even today. The four part harmony that underpins many hymn tunes was brought to its apex by Bach, with some biographers conceiving of it as "absolute music". A devout Christian, the chorale hymn tune was the basis of much of Bach's creative output.
- 10 I can think of many other examples of ancient and modern hymns with excellent musical settings; but on the other hand, there are a few musical arrangements in our faithful blue Psalter that are not quite excellent. This is why it has been exciting to look through the selections the hymnody committee has made for our new denominational hymnbook, and note many with excellent and beautiful musical accompaniment, both old and modern.
- 11 C.S. Lewis illustrates this concept when reminiscing on his early experiences of church music: "I disliked very much their hymns, which I considered to be fifth-rate poems set to sixth-rate music. But as I went on I saw the great merit of it. I came up against different people of quite different outlooks and different education, and then gradually my conceit just began peeling off. I realized that the hymns (which were just sixth-rate music) were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic-side boots in the opposite pew, and then you realize that you aren't fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit." *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994, p. 62.

Dr Michael Flinn is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.

Mr Bernie Vaatstra is a member of the Reformed Church of Palmerston North.

Singing hymns for God's praise (3)

What makes a great hymn?

Timothy and Lou Ann Shafer

What makes a hymn "good"? Is it good because we like it, because it is familiar, because it brings back pleasant memories of loved ones or special events or times? These feelings and associations are certainly very real to all of us, but they are subjective. Are there objective standards that we can use to evaluate hymns?

Music is an emotional language that conveys meaning. It is this emotional language to which most of us relate when we listen to music or participate in it. But the building blocks (elements) used to construct the music are objective and can be evaluated in a clear and thorough way for craftsmanship and effective communication. When music is paired with a text (as in a hymn), it can also be evaluated in terms of how well it matches the affect (emotion) of the text and conveys its meaning.

The Bible warrants this evaluation. We are to seek after that which is excellent (Phil. 1:9-11 and 4:8).

Let's look at the excellent hymn,

"Holy, Holy, Holy." We can discern its specific musical characteristics and derive principles by which to evaluate other hymns (of any style).

Text and music

The first aspect of the hymn to consider is the text. The text of "Holy, Holy, Holy" was written by Reginald Heber, an Anglican minister and later bishop of Calcutta, in 1826 (the year of his death). It is based on the images of heavenly worship received by the apostle John in Revelation 4:8-11. Heber was enthralled with the holiness of God and used the symbolism of threes in his poem to extol God's Trinitarian nature. The Center for Church Music comments on this hymn (see songsandhymns.org/hymns/detail/holy-holy-holy):

God is "holy, merciful and mighty," he's "perfect in power, in love and purity," he's worshiped by saints, cherubim, and seraphim, and he's praised "in earth and sky and sea." Through these consistent units of three, this hymn describes and worships God in three persons.

This excellent text is Christ centered, doctrinally rich, edifying for new and mature believers alike, and well crafted in its poetry.

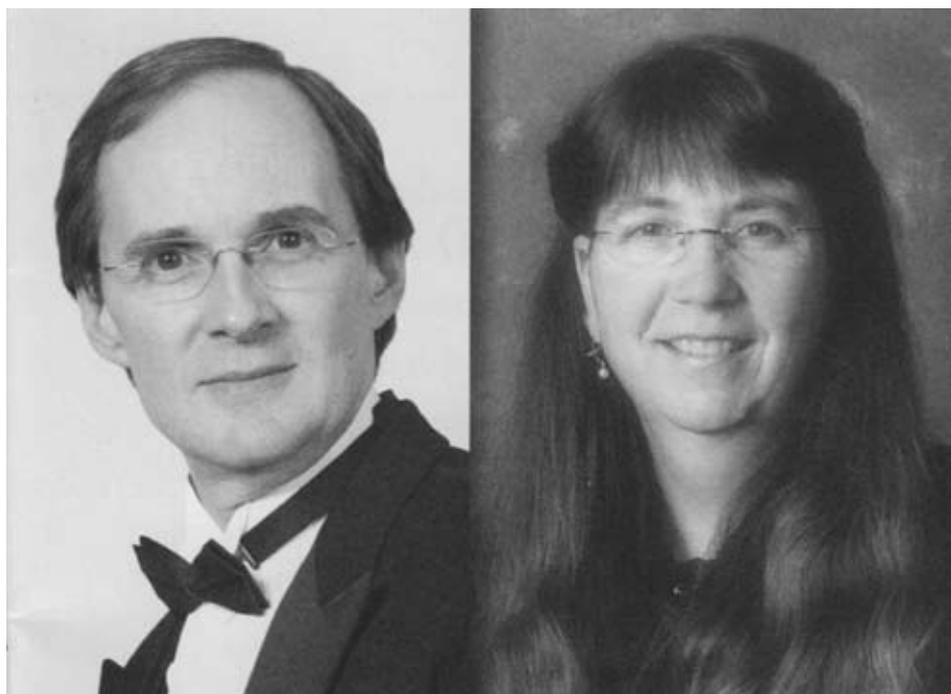
The music was composed for this poem in 1861 by John B. Dykes, a musician and theologian. The tune was named NICAEA because the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) examined and affirmed the doctrine of the Trinity as a true and essential doctrine of the Christian faith.

Melody

Dykes had a daunting task in front of him to set this wonderful text to music that would be worthy to carry its profound biblical doctrine. His musical training enabled him to bring musical ideas to the text that timelessly support its propositional truths.

What are these musical ideas? A brief summary of music theory will be helpful before beginning. As polyphony and harmony developed in the West, music took on what is described as a tertian harmonic foundation. This means that our harmony is based on notes that are a distance of a third apart. (This interval can be experienced at the piano by playing any white key, skipping the next white key, and playing the following white key.) This interval became the foundation for the construction of all harmony; chords are constructed by "stacking" intervals of thirds together. Our basic harmonic unit is called the triad because it contains three notes, built from ascending thirds. Triads can be built on each note of a scale, resulting in the chords that are used to accompany a melody.

Dykes began his melody by separating the notes of the triad that is built on the foundational first note of the scale. He used them for the strong and distinctive presentation of holiness that is repeated six times in the poem. The symbolism is clear: one chord consisting of three notes stands for one God in three persons. As with all analogies that attempt to represent or explain the mystery of our trini-



Timothy and Lou Ann Shafer

tarian God, this analogy ultimately breaks down. But the three-in-one musical presentation is so boldly and clearly presented that there can be no mistaking what Dykes intended.

Melodic intervals and their direction are part of the composer's musical toolbox for communicating ideas. A rising interval carries certain natural expressions because of the strength and energy required to produce higher pitches when singing. Also informing the natural expressive qualities of ascending intervals are the upward-based physiological responses that people tend to manifest when experiencing feelings along the emotional spectrum of joy, triumph, strength, power, enthusiasm, exuberance, etc. Conversely, when experiencing sadness, grief, despair, fatigue, defeat, etc., people tend to exhibit physiological responses in which the body moves in an essentially downward direction.

The intervals in Dykes's opening melodic phrase present bold leaps between pitches, ascending by relatively large distances from the first note to a climactic point on the word "Lord" (in measure three) that is six notes higher than the starting note. These ascents emphasise the importance of each statement of the word "holy," and build up to the highest note for the One who is holy. The climactic high point of the sound conveys the highness and holiness of the Lord, unifying the content of the text with the spirit of the music.

Dykes constructed his tune with the voice in mind. The tune's melody can be easily sung by a congregation of average musical ability.

Rhythm

Rhythmically, the tune NICAIA is very straightforward. The meter is common time (4/4), which is perfect for the majestic declamation of the text. Simply constructed for ease in congregational singing, the rhythms are largely quarter notes, half notes, and whole notes. Processional in nature, the opening rhythm (four quarter notes, two half notes) also reinforces the increasing emphasis of the thrice-mentioned "holy" by stretching out the syllables in the third repetition. This rhythmic element reinforces the attention given to the third iteration of the word "holy" by the ascending pitches.

Harmony

Further emphasising the greatness and breadth of this moment in the opening

of the hymn is the harmony—particularly the counterpoint created by the bass line against the melody. From its starting point, the bass takes off in the opposite direction from the melody, moving generally downward by both leap and step to a point five notes lower than it began. The polarity created by this contrary motion between the two extreme voices (soprano and bass) is the musical equivalent of spreading the arms far apart in a grand gesture. It creates a tremen-

chords supporting the word "Lord" are in an extremely open position, skipping several notes of the chord between each member of the chord.

This is an additional gesture that contributes to the feeling of grandness at the climax. It is a tangible sensation in the hands of a keyboard player, who begins the hymn with both hands in a closed position, with the fingers close in to the palms, and by measure 3 arrives at the climax, where both hands are expand-

“When the text of a song is set well to the musical elements, the resulting naturalness of the syllabic inflection contributes immensely to a song's singability, and the meaning of the text is amplified to more fully express its affect.”

dous sense of the greatness of our God at the precise moment that the worshiper is singing his name, "Lord." All the voices move together rhythmically, but in opposite directions, to create a sense of both oneness and comprehensiveness that expresses both the omnipotence and omnipresence of our Lord.

Texture

Yet another element emphasising the expansiveness of the gesture is found in the texture of the music, specifically in the voicing of the chords. Voicing refers to the distance between individual notes of the chord. For instance, the opening triad is written in what musicians call closed position. That is to say, there are no gaps between members of the chord; the triad consists of D, F#, A, and Dykes does not skip any of these notes as he constructs the opening chord. With each successive half note, the voicing becomes more open, until by the time we arrive at the triad on the climactic melody note at the beginning of measure three, Dykes has progressively increased the distances between chord members, so that the two

ed to a wide position with large spaces between the fingers.

Musical text setting

When setting the text to music, several levels of dynamic inflection must be considered. The most basic level is the syllabic level: polysyllabic words must be set with the natural syllabic inflection that they are given when they are spoken. For example, the word "holy" must be set as it would be spoken, with the musical emphasis on the first syllable rather than the second.

The second level of inflection is at the level of the phrase. Musicians often refer to this as "shaping" or "phrasing." This means determining the most important word (or words) of the group of words in the thought and arranging the music in a manner that points to and emphasizes that word.

The syllabic textual inflection in NICAIA is nearly flawless throughout all four verses. Every polysyllabic word receives a musical treatment that correctly inflects the word as it would be spoken, and all the monosyllabic words

are treated in a naturally inflected manner. For example, Dykes places the stressed syllable of the word “holy” (i.e., “ho”) each time on a strong beat in the measure. The complex phrasing inflection is also well done. For example, the word “God” is emphasised in the last line of the first verse, through rhythmic, intervallic, and harmonic means.

When the text of a song is set well to the musical elements, the resulting naturalness of the syllabic inflection contributes immensely to a song’s singability, and the meaning of the text is amplified to more fully express its affect. The congregant is able to sing with both the affections and the intellect fully engaged as directed in Scripture (1 Cor. 14:15).

Conclusions

This brief analysis of “Holy, Holy, Holy” barely skims the surface of this hymn’s deep riches. Even so, the excellence of craftsmanship in its poetry and the music is unmistakable. What guidelines can we glean from our look at this hymn, which will help us evaluate other hymns for use in worship?

1. The text of a hymn must be Christ centered, doctrinally sound, poetically well crafted, and edifying for new and mature believers alike.
2. The music for the hymn must be well crafted in its elemental layers—in its melody, rhythm, harmony, and texture, and in their interaction.
3. The components of the music should complement and amplify the text in their construction and affect. The interaction of the text and the music should reflect their congruency.

4. The hymn (text and music) should be singable by congregations of average musical ability. Musical inflection should support natural spoken inflection, and hymns should be constructed with group singing in mind, rather than solo singing.

These guidelines point to larger biblical principles that should guide our actions in choosing music for worship—namely, congruity, excellence, and holiness.

When biblical truths are set to music, that music bears a great responsibility to support the truths of the text. While texts predominantly address the intellect, music primarily addresses the affections. It is vital that the music teach our affections in a manner that is congruent with the truths of the text, even as the text teaches our intellect. In other words, the music must fit the text. Paul implicitly addresses this when he commands that all things in worship be done in a fitting manner (1 Cor. 14:40). Calvin echoes this sentiment in the preface to the Genevan Psalter of 1565: “[Regarding] the melody, it has seemed best that it be moderated in the manner we have adopted to carry the weight and majesty appropriate to the subject, and even to be proper for singing in the church, according to that which has been said.”

As stated earlier, the Lord commends excellence. Throughout the Scriptures, we are exhorted to give the Lord our firstfruits as a sacrifice of praise in gratitude for what has been done for us in Jesus Christ. Down through the centuries and continuing today, the Lord has blessed his church with thousands of

doctrinally rich, excellent hymn texts that fulfill the scriptural directives in Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19. Not to be overlooked, though, are the encouragements that the Lord gives specifically to musicians to seek training and skill in their craft (1 Chron. 15:22; Ps. 33:3). The musical aspects of a hymn should be prepared and evaluated with as much care and diligence as the text.

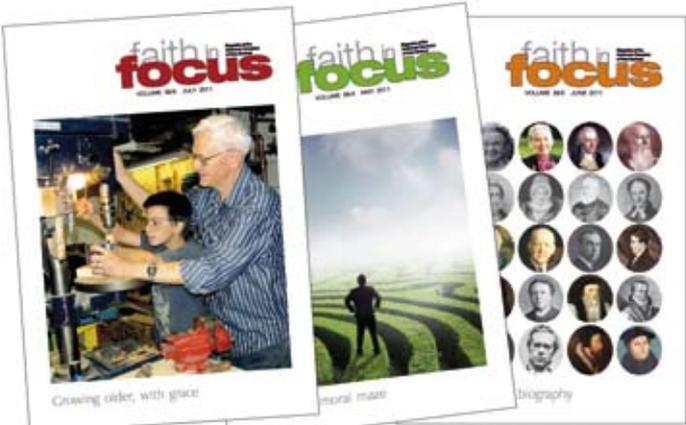
Finally, we are repeatedly commanded in the Psalms to worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness (Ps. 29:2; 96:9). Instead of imitating or reflecting the musical culture of the world, a good hymn seeks to support the holy truths set forth in the text. Again, Calvin speaks to this issue in the preface to the Genevan Psalter:

And in truth we know by experience that singing has great force and vigor to move and inflame the hearts of men to invoke and praise God with a more vehement and ardent zeal. Care must always be taken that the song be neither light nor frivolous; but that it have weight and majesty (as St. Augustine says), and also, there is a great difference between music which one makes to entertain men at table and in their houses, and the Psalms which are sung in the church in the presence of God and his angels.

The authors, husband and wife, are members of Westminster OPC in Hollidaysburg, Pa. He is Professor of piano at Penn State University; she is a music educator and choir director. Reprinted from New Horizons, March 2009.

Want to give a unique gift? Give a **SUBSCRIPTION** of

faith in **focus**



See page 2 for details

Feminine focus

Sally Davey

Teach ... your children well – with a good hymnal

The idea that we should teach the next generation the truths of our faith is nothing new. But perhaps the suggestion that we could do it by using a hymn book is. Nonetheless, this is one of the lessons of the book of Psalms. The psalms are the hymns of the Bible, and they contain a lot of theological truth. They even record some memorable instructions on teaching young people. Take Psalm 78, written by Asaph. This Levitical musician begins by exhorting Israel to “tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders he has done.” He demonstrates *how* in the rest of his psalm, by recounting some of those glorious deeds; including God’s marvellous acts of mercy to rebellious Israel in the wilderness. Over three millennia, countless children have grown up singing this psalm, and in doing so have learned many valuable historical and theological lessons.

The Psalms teach truth

When I first began to read the psalms as a young Christian, I saw them as songs of spiritual experience. There were psalms of joy, psalms of hope, fear and trust – psalms for the whole spectrum of human experience. Whatever I was feeling at the time, I could find a psalm to match my state of mind. But as I progressed in understanding, I began to notice how much truth, how much theology, they contain. I even read once that the Psalms are the Old Testament book most quoted by Jesus and Paul. Intrigued, I began to check the references, and the evidence certainly stacked up. I could see that Jesus and Paul both quoted the Psalms to make theological points, not experiential ones. That was illuminating. The Old Testament believers weren’t just singing to cheer themselves up; they were instructing themselves and one another as they sang the psalms. Paul is making this point in Colossians

3:16 when he tells the Colossian Christians to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ...” And, with a good hymnal, we do the same thing today as we sing the truth about God back to him.

For this reason, a good hymnal that contains theology-filled hymns is an excellent tool for teaching children and young people the Christian faith. Learning by singing embeds truth in their hearts and minds, since music aids the

priate their truth and begin to live it. This could be fostered by making hymn-familiarisation part of Sunday School lessons. Perhaps one hymn a week could be the focus of the class, with some brief, simple explanation of the main message of the hymn, and of any unfamiliar words. This hymn could be one that is going to be sung later during the service. In one church I know well the minister used to visit the Sunday School classes to do this himself (which certainly underscored to those children that hymns are special and important!)

“Learning by singing embeds truth in their hearts and minds, since music aids the memory.”

memory. The words will stay with them for life, and will be there in old age, when many other things are forgotten. If we want our youth to learn sound theology, then we’d do well to make sure they have theologically-sound hymns to sing. This isn’t to say that singing doesn’t involve the emotions; or that theology shouldn’t be experiential – it should be. But if our singing is *merely* experiential we run the risk of becoming mindless, uninformed – more like “pagans” – prone to be “led astray to mute idols”¹, as Paul warns the Corinthians at the beginning of his three chapters of instruction on worship.

Active efforts

Singing together from a good hymnal in worship teaches us well; but there are other ways we can reinforce such teaching. The aim is to get to know these hymns very well, and to understand what they are saying so that we appro-

Another useful thing to do would be to add hymn-singing to your family devotions, if you don’t sing already. Add a few words of introduction by commenting on the text, or the ways the text and tune match each other well. Tell a few things about the writer of the hymn, his or her trials or joys; some facts about his or her life and times. All this helps bring the hymn alive for your children, and aids their appreciation and enjoyment of singing hymns. Much of the information you’ll need is rapidly found on the internet, in Wikipedia or hymn websites, as well as in books like Faith Cook’s *Hymn Writers and their Hymns*. (Such a book would be a great addition to your family’s home library). If you are a home schooler, getting the children to search out such information for themselves would prove a valuable project.

What are some examples of hymns that immediately lend themselves to instruction? Some of the first that come to

mind are those that were deliberately written to teach children, like those of Mrs Cecil Frances Alexander. She was a Sunday School teacher (as well as the wife of a bishop) who wrote hymns to teach children the points of the Anglican catechism. They include "All things bright and beautiful", "There is a green hill far away" and "Once in royal David's city". Other hymns that are excellent teachers of doctrine are "Firmly, I believe and truly" (a basic statement of faith) and "Praise, my soul, the king of heaven". Or what about "Christians, awake, salute the happy morn", for a very full hymn on the truths about Christmas? These hymns contain many of the key teachings of the Christian faith, and they are matched with good tunes. The whole family will enjoy singing and memorising them together.

Considering the poetry

Hymns are also poetry, and because of that a great deal may be conveyed by the writer in just a few words. Good poets take a great deal of care in choosing their words, and they often choose expressive words that have several layers of meaning. Thus, it shouldn't surprise us when we find a word in a good hymn that isn't used in casual conversation.

There may be words that we have to look up in a dictionary. That is good for us – and for our children. It may mean that we develop wider vocabularies, and become more articulate and expressive as a result. Take these lines of Joseph Addison, based on Psalm 19:

*The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,
And spangled heav'ns, a shining
frame,
Their great Original proclaim.*

You may think Addison could have used more basic words than *spacious*, *firmament*, *ethereal* and *spangled*. But rather than complaining that you don't know what they mean; and using your children, your other-than-English native tongue or your own conversational habits as an excuse, why not open your dictionary and investigate? "Spacious" has connotations of vastness, expansiveness, amplexity. There is a generosity and impressiveness implied that "wide" simply doesn't convey. "Spangled" is a word used to describe the effect when someone or something is decorated with sparkly jewellery. Simply to say that the sky was "starry" does not suggest (as Addison does here) that *God decorated the heavens with the glittering array of*

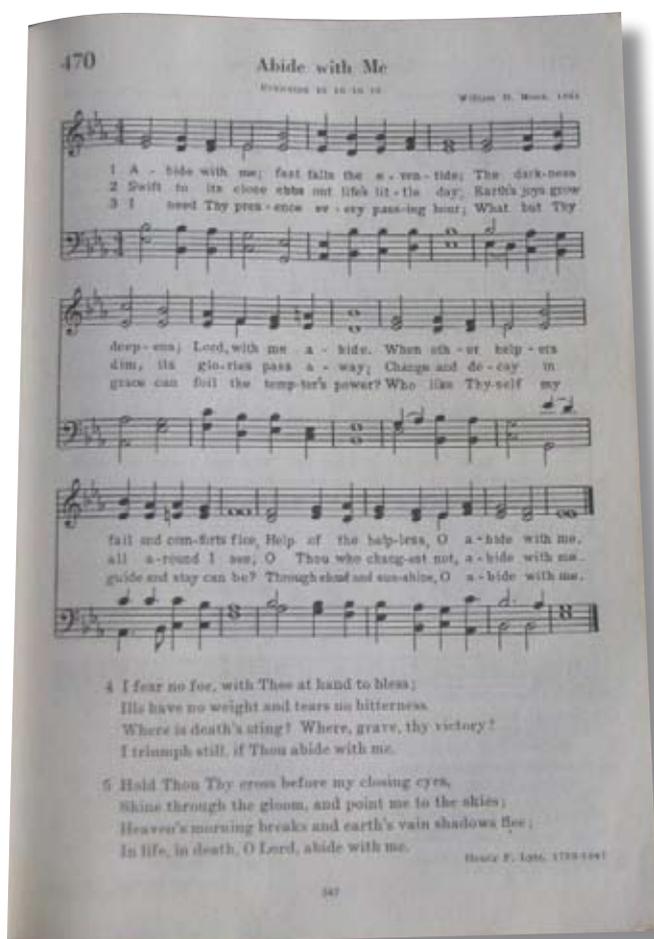
stars. "Ethereal" is a lovely word. It suggests heavenliness, but also a spiritual, intangible, unearthly delicacy and refinement. The word "firmament" is a useful one that goes beyond the physical idea of the sky. It suggests shape – an arch or vault – as well as communicating the idea of heaven being God's dwelling place.² In the last line quoted above, Addison has managed to capture in four short words what theologians have taken tens of thousands to say: that the creation reflects the glory of God, its maker, or "Original". It is well worth taking the time with children to teach them what the words of hymns mean. Get them in the habit of using dictionaries, and go there with them to enjoy the riches of meaning to be found in some of these special words.

Appreciating the history of hymnody

Another thing that a good hymnal can teach us is chronological humility. The realisation that we are not the first to experience the truths of the Christian faith – and that others before us may actually have held to them more faithfully – is good for us. An important feature of a good hymnal is a range of hymns from the entire sweep of church history. Singing hymns that date from as long ago as the early church and up until the present is one way to join in the communion of saints that will only be more complete in heaven. A good hymnal will include the best of the hymns that come from all those periods. If we take the trouble to learn about the saints who wrote them, and their times, we'll develop appreciation for the ways they and their contemporary church have been more faithful than we have. We may learn a few things! I shall never forget first learning about the life of Henry Francis Lyte, and the circumstances in which he wrote the hymn "Abide with me". It was rightly humbling, learning about the faith with which he faced his death from tuberculosis; and ever since I have sung these words with better understanding of their meaning, and more love for their writer.

Teach them well

But because the needs and desires of young people are often raised as objections to singing older, more complex or poetically challenging hymns, I thought I would address some of the things that I sometimes hear said, in the hope that all of us would develop more ap-



“I learned that worship was not primarily for evangelism.”

preciation for what a good hymnal can do for us.

I remember being in my teens and early twenties, and thinking and saying (somewhat rebelliously, as young people often do) that older people shouldn't impose their tastes on us, that we need to sing songs that are relevant to us, and so on. While I never enjoyed *Scripture in Song* etc myself (they were too simple and short and tended to be repeated over and over) I somehow had the idea that when the church sung, it should sing things that “the world outside” (usually meaning the younger generation!) could “relate to”. But that was when I was new to the Reformed faith, when my childhood experience of what was actually good-quality hymnody had sadly been connected to dead liber-

alism. It was before I had learned some important things about worship, and what we should sing as we worship. In the first few years after I became part of reformational churches I learned that worship was not primarily for evangelism. I also learned that singing in worship has a teaching function. So I began to appreciate properly the good hymns I'd learned as a child and teenager that were full of biblical truth – not just short Bible verses, but extended, verse-upon-verse development of biblical teaching in well-constructed thoughts. I began to realise that Christians in earlier times had often done this better than Christians in more recent times.

All this tells me that while we ought to be concerned about young people's

demands for up-to-date, contemporary songs we ought not to shift direction on the basis of their desires. Young people, by definition, are less mature, and need guidance. As they grow older they change, develop more discernment, and learn to appreciate what they didn't before. I'm convinced that the answer to these demands is to *teach* them. Teach them the biblical view of singing in worship, teach them the hymns of the faith and what they mean, teach them about the language of poetry. Young people are quite receptive to all the interesting things that can be learned from hymns. They will take their cue from you, their parents. What is *your* view of the hymns we sing? What should your view be? And what kind of Christians would you like your children to become? Make the connections, and teach your children well.

1 1 Corinthians 12:1-2

2 I have taken all these word-definitions from *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993)

God's definition of forgiveness

Part 2

Daniel Wilson

There you are, sitting in church, when you see **that person** coming over to talk to you. You know who I mean: that *former friend* who offended you a couple of months ago. He made that rude comment to you and NEVER apologised or said sorry or anything! Well, here he comes... and what do you know, he wants your help with a project he is working on around his house. He is acting as if nothing happened at all! Oh, the arrogance of some people! You politely (but somewhat coldly) reply that you are simply too busy to help him out. You know you have some free time, but you tell yourself that your time would be better spent with your family and your *real friends*. Over time, *that person* gets the message and stops bothering you, and you both learn to politely avoid one another at church functions. You both rationalise that you aren't bitter or anything; you just aren't as “close” as you once were. And in this way, Satan suc-

cessfully drives a wedge between two brothers/sisters in Christ to the harm of many in the church – perhaps for generations to come.

Last time, we began this series by looking for God's definition of forgiveness in His Word. In Ephesians 4:31-32 (and Colossians 3:13), God calls believers to forgive *each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven us*. As Christians, we know a good bit about how God has forgiven us in Christ. We know that while we were still His enemies, God loved us and sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross for our sins. We know that God offers forgiveness and salvation to ALL His enemies – none of whom deserve it! And we rejoice that God saves all those who repent of their sins and receive His gift of forgiveness through faith in Christ. God's forgiveness shapes our understanding of human forgiveness, which we defined last time, as follows:

Forgiveness is a commitment by the offended to pardon graciously the

*repentant from moral liability and to be reconciled to that person, although not all consequences are necessarily eliminated.*¹

Now, to some of you, that definition is about as clear as mud. So, think of it this way: Forgiveness is essentially an attitude that leads to action. We graciously offer forgiveness to all who offend us; promising to actually forgive those who repent. And our forgiveness is a four-fold promise not to bring the matter up again to yourself, to others, or to the offender – nor will you use it against them.

But wait a moment ... Does this mean that I have to wait until someone repents before I can forgive him? What if I knew he didn't mean to do it? Or, what if he now lives far away, or is even dead? There are many situations where someone might not have repented, and yet I want to forgive him and move on with my life... Are you saying that I can't? **No**, I am **not** saying that. Rather,

this is where God's teaching on "covering in love" is so important. Repeatedly in Proverbs, God gives principles of conflict resolution. Gossip and a vindictive spirit flow from hatred, but love covers sin and keeps offences quiet (see Proverbs 10:12; 17:9). As Peter says in I Peter 4:8, "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." Paul expands on this principle in I Corinthians 13,

*"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, **it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth.** It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."* (emphasis mine)

In these Scriptures, God is teaching us HOW we show the love of Christ to our neighbour. We love by overlooking small offences. We love by not getting angry easily. We love by refusing to gossip about the offences of others. We love by not keeping records of the sins of our

no record of wrongs. If you choose to cover or forgive some offence, make sure you truly throw the blanket of love over the whole incident.

However, what do you do when you try to cover an offence in love, but the memories of that incident just keep coming back to mind? Perhaps, you tried to overlook some rude comment a friend made, but you just can't seem to help being upset about it. Whenever a particular incident continues to "throw off the covers" of love, you need to resolve it according to Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18 and Luke 17.² Keep in mind that the offence may not clearly be sin; it might just be your perception of another's attitude or actions. But if you simply cannot keep the matter covered in your mind, then you **must** deal with it God's way.

Jesus gave us the most basic principle of resolving these sorts of conflicts in Luke 17:3b, "If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him."³ Matthew 18:15-17 explains this more extensively, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." The goal

change them? In Romans 12:18 the Apostle Paul gives us this instruction, "If it is possible, **as far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.**" (emphasis mine) God went to great lengths to make peace with us in Christ. And His love constrains us to show that same love as we seek to live at peace with others. Biblical repentance and forgiveness is God's appointed process for restoring broken relationships. *As far as it depends on you*, don't leave problems unresolved and relationships cold or distant. Simply put, you need to decide whether you should cover that past offence in love, or whether you should still go and speak to the other person about it. Either way, you may need to ask for forgiveness for the way you acted.

Practically: if you decide to cover the offence in love, you could say something like this, "Mike, a long time ago I got upset about something you said to me. Since then, I have decided that it wasn't such a big deal. But, for a long time, I have sinfully held a grudge against you. I allowed my sinful reaction to affect our friendship. Will you please forgive me for the way I reacted?" Or, if you believe the offence still needs to be confronted, then you must preface your confrontation with your own confession of sin. "Alice, I need to ask your forgiveness for not coming to you about this sooner. I was offended by something you said to me back in April. I should have come and spoken to you about it then, but I didn't. I have sinfully let that offence harm our friendship ever since. Will you please forgive me?" At that point, most friends will either know or will ask which comment was so offensive. And you can work matters out from there.

Now, some of you might be objecting in your mind, "No! I don't have to go to them. They sinned against me. I know the Bible too, and Matthew 5 says that the offender has to come to me!" But that is the beauty of God's commands! If believers obey Matthew 5:23 and Matthew 18:15, then the offender and the offended should meet each other halfway – both going to talk to the other. The reason Jesus spends so much more time explaining that the **offended** must go speak to his brother, is because the **offender** may not know he has done anything wrong! He may have said or done something without thinking it was offensive. One of my professors had a great saying to explain this concept: *He who has the sore toes goes, because he is the one who always*

“Many minor disputes have been made worse by harsh words, when a soft answer would have led to reconciliation.”

friends and family. Covering over offences in love is the fundamental expression of the *attitude* of forgiveness. If you have a heart willing to forgive all those who offend you, then you will cover many offences in love. But recognise this: "covering an offence in love" means that you are making the same four-fold promise as forgiveness! You are promising to shove that offence under the blanket of love, never to bring it up again to yourself, to others, or to the offender – nor will you use it against them! It is very easy to tell yourself that you are covering an offence in love, when in reality, you are actually just writing it down on a ledger in your mind. And then you pull it out at the next fight or disagreement as a trump card, "Remember when you did this...?!" But God says that *love keeps*

of confronting your brother is **not** to get even. It is **not** to rub his nose in his error. Jesus tells us to show our brother his fault, in a private way, in order to win him back as a friend. Furthermore, you rebuke him with the intention of forgiving him as soon as he repents. Remember that you should have already tried to cover the offence in love. Therefore, your tone and words must reflect your desire to cover this offence under the blanket of loving forgiveness. Many minor disputes have been made worse by harsh words, when a soft answer would have led to reconciliation.

Did the situation described at the beginning of this article sound familiar? Perhaps that describes one or more of your relationships. How do you change those situations? Or, do you need to

knows. If someone has “stepped on your toes” in some way, he may not know it. But the one with flat toes certainly knows. Therefore, he is the one who must cover the offence in love, or if that is not possible, he must go, confront his friend, and seek reconciliation.

If your friend doesn't listen to you, you should let the situation and emotions cool down a bit and try again later. If he still does not listen to you, then you should choose one or two wise friends (that you both respect) to help you seek reconciliation. If possible, it is best to avoid choosing office-bearers at this point, in order to avoid escalating the conflict. The one or two friends' job is not to side with you. They are to eval-

uate the entire situation. If you are in the wrong, they should tell you, so that you can go and repent to your brother. The witnesses are there to explain to you both where you are wrong and to help you reconcile. If you can't resolve the matter at this point, then you may need to take it to the elders of the church for resolution. Much more could be said about this part of Matthew 18, but that would be better reserved for a series on church discipline.

Last month, we defined God's forgiveness, which helped us define how we are to forgive. This month, we have expanded on that definition to describe the basic practice of forgiveness: from covering in love to confronting our brother.

But, what if you don't feel like forgiving? What if your brother “repents,” but you doubt their sincerity? What actually is biblical repentance? We hope to address these matters next time.

Notes

- 1 Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008), 55.
- 2 Jay Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving*, (Merrick, NY: Calvary Press, 1994), 34-35.
- 3 We will deal more extensively with Luke 17:1-10 in the next article.

Mr Daniel Wilson is the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the Reformed Church of Nelson.

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

QUOTABLE “QUOTES”

“I believe that if there is one thing which pierces the Master's heart with unutterable grief it is not the world's iniquity but the church's indifference.”

F. B. Meyer

“Study it through, pray it in, live it out, pass it on.” *Leighton Ford*

“Our Lord has many weak children in his family, many dull pupils in his school, many raw soldiers in his army, many lame sheep in his flock. Yet he bears with them all, and casts none away. Happy is that Christian who has learned to do likewise with his brethren.” *J.C. Ryle*

BIRTHS

Bilton, Eliza Grace – a daughter born to David and Johanna – 20 June (North Shore)

Coupric, Peter Zachary – a son born to Jacob and Thelmarie – 27 June (Bishopdale)

Holtslag, Harrison Johan – a son born to Ed and Evelyn – 20 June (Silverstream)

Hoyt, Ingrid – a daughter born to Bevan and Erika – 24 June (Oamaru)

van der Werff, Lachlan – a son born

to Koen and Robyn – 9 July (Silverstream)

Wierenga, Orla-Jean – a daughter born to Jonathan and Ingrid – 15 June (Wellington)

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Wanganui: We rejoice today with Kieren and Susan Stanger as they become members of our church and their children Rachel, Naomi and Hannah are baptised.

DEATHS

De Vries, Arie passed away on Friday morning at his home in Wainuiomata. Arie loved his Saviour, Jesus Christ, and was prepared for this day. Our sympathies and prayers are with the family. We pray that the funeral service will be a comfort to them, as it reminds those who attend of our certain hope in Jesus Christ.

FROM THE PASTOR

Oamaru: Bruce Hoyt

This Wednesday evening the session calls the congregation together for our Annual Congregational Meeting. Why do we have an ACM? It is to provide an opportunity to hear about what has happened in the life of the church over the past year, to discuss any concerns we may have as a congregation and to give thanks to God for His blessings. This is the time for any member to raise matters

for discussion that you would like other members to consider for possible action by the congregation or the session. We also consider a financial report for last year and discuss and adopt a budget for the coming financial year. In this way we commit ourselves to the financial support of the teaching/preaching ministry of the word, the activities of the church, the upkeep of the church building as well as our shared responsibilities with the other Reformed Churches of New Zealand. Finally, we want to have a time of prayer for the Lord's blessing and direction as we seek to be the church of Christ here in Oamaru. Let us make this a time of jointly committing ourselves to the work the Lord has called us to do as His people.

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Vicar **Craig Van Echten** has been invited to lead worship services in Dunedin, Hastings and Australind (Western Australia). Pray that the Lord's will might become clear to Craig as he awaits confirmation of his call to the pastoral ministry.

Pastor **Rott** and his family have found a house in the suburb of Halswell, Christchurch. We are thankful that they now have somewhere more permanent after this long wait for them.

The **Ketchens** will now have all their belongings packed up and ready to go to

With thankfulness to God,
we look forward to celebrating

The Diamond Wedding Anniversary

Of our Mum & Dad and Nana
& Pop:



Arie and Janny NUGTEREN

Married 25 Sept 1951

Jim & Helen

Andrew & Lydia, Arwen,
Corrin, Kenric, Devlin, Arden,
Dominic

Glenys & Jonny, Katie, Alana,
Danielle

Karen & Mark

Rowan

Henry & Jo

Ben & Karen

Sam & Mel

Melinda & Julian

Jocelyn & Bruce

Hannah & Jesse

Steven

Ray

Roy & Jolanda

Ryan & Ineke, Inge

Tim

Aimee & Richard

Joel

2a Hannan St, Levin

Palmerston North. Please pray for them,
that their final weeks in the US would
be a blessing for them as they spend
time with family and friends.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Bishopdale: The building consent drawings and documents are presently with council, and we expect the building consent will be issued at the end of July.

MISSIONS

Rev. Alan and Odette Douma, denominational missionaries to PNG, will be in NZ during Synod. They will also visit various Reformed Churches to tell about their work in the Bible College and churches where they serve.

Hamilton: Helen Haakma is going to Uganda on a short term mission trip to help start a facility that will be used to train local people in woodwork and sewing skills. The team of people going are hoping to take donated wood work tools (not electric) with them to help start things off.

DENOMINATIONAL

Two years are almost up which means it'll soon be time again for the bi-annual **Hamilton Reformed Youth Ball** on the 7th of October and we'd LOVE it if you could come and join us for this occasion! This year our ball is titled "All that Jazz" and the dress theme is 1920's Jazz. It's the perfect excuse to get out your Al Capone, Charlie Chaplain, Zelda Sayre or Blues brothers outfits and come have a swinging good time! All the proceeds from the ball this year will be going to Rahab Ministries Thailand. There will be activities organised for the Saturday and all are welcome to join us for church on Sunday morning. There will be billets organised for the Friday and Saturday nights for those who need it. It's an amazing cause and a great night out. So get your outfits and your friends together and come and join us here in Hamilton for a weekend, we'd love to see you!!

The next **Young Adults Convention (YAC)** is being organised for the 18-30s age group at 'Lakeview Bible Camp' in Rotorua. Church services will be held at the camp. The camp has been booked until Monday morning – to encourage those who can do so to travel back on Monday rather than on Sunday night. We are very pleased to announce that the

studies will be led by Dr Peter Reynolds – Principal of Grace Theological College. Studies will focus on the book of Ruth with the theme God's intervention in the lives of hurting people, and our part in that. Aim of the camp: A weekend where our relationship with God is the ultimate focus – through Bible study, prayer, discussions and singing.

Youth Indoor Soccer tournament: Pukekohe's annual event is held at the Pukekohe Recreation Centre. Get together a team of 6 players. Teams must have two girls on the court and may only have one player 25 years old or over. The cost is \$15 with all profits going towards Tear Fund. A barbeque lunch is provided.

Volleyball Tournament 2011: The annual volleyball tournament is tentatively booked for Sat 25 September, open to all the churches in the North Island and is being run as a fundraiser for Hutt Valley and Silverstream Christian schools. This year the teams will be split up into two categories – Social and Competitive teams. Each team has a max of 8 players (i.e. 2 reserves) and must have a least one female player.

ACTS OF SERVICE

Bishopdale: We will be singing at St. Winifreds and would love to see both men and women there to share the gospel in song with the residents.

Pukekohe: Our church will lead the services at the Franklin Village Rest Home for a month. The residents appreciate these services. If you are able to do so, please come and support the singing.

Silverstream: The youth group are offering assistance to anyone in the congregation who may need help; whether it be gardening, cleaning, fire wood stacking/splitting, etc; ask and we will be more than willing to help.

CLASSES and COURSES

Buckland's Beach: A "Preparing for Membership" class will start again for a 7 to 9 week period. The course will provide an opportunity to those people considering joining the church to learn about our church, denomination and the church doctrines we hold to. Topics that will be discussed are: What is the Church? How do I become a member? What does the Church do? What does it mean to belong to a Church?

Dovedale: Christianity Explored – we would appreciate your prayers for us. For those who do plan to invite a friend,

keep in mind that this isn't just a box-ticker: invite someone not just to fulfil a duty but because you care about *them*. If we don't have our hearts in it, this is pointless. Pray for the kind of love Jesus showed to us. Pray for our friends. And most of all, pray for the Lord's will to be done, and his name to be praised even through our feeble means – because we ourselves cannot soften a single heart.

North Shore: Our next Introducing God Course is planned to begin in early October and will run through to early December. We are looking for participants interested in the Christian faith, invited or brought along by members of the congregation. Building or developing a relationship in which one feels free to invite someone often takes time, so this is another reminder of this great evangelistic opportunity.

Wellington: Earlier this year, Session made arrangements for Peter Reynolds to conduct a marriage seminar here in Wellington from 7th-9th October.

ACTIVITIES

Avondale: Ladies 'A Mid-Year Encouragement' This Weekend: The outline of events are;

Session 1: Mocktails and Hors d'oeuvres, Friday evening,

Session 2: English High Tea, Saturday afternoon

Session 3: Indian Dinner, Saturday evening.

If you cannot make it for all the sessions, feel free to join where you can.

Shared Lunch: We will be having a shared lunch to welcome (and celebrate!) all our new members from July 2010 to June 2011. There have been many covenant children born, professions of faith, and members transferring from other congregations. Certainly a reason to fellowship and celebrate! Try to make sure that you introduce yourself to any of these new members that you do not already know.

Buckland's Beach: Women's Fellow-

ship Pizza Evening – Ladies, on a cold winter's evening, let's get together for some fellowship that warms both the body and soul. Pizza bases will be provided, but you are asked to bring your favourite toppings. The idea is to create your own pizza and then share it. Be there in order to enjoy a great fellowship event.

We will hold a special 'language assisted' worship service intended to give special help, support and encouragement to the folks for whom English is very much a second language. A special invitation has been extended to all the folks who attend the LABS classes. We would also encourage all our own members – especially our Asian brothers and sisters – to make a special effort to be there. The need be there with these folks is the most powerful testimony that we can give. Fellowship afterwards – over a nice mid-winter bowl of soup and finger foods – is also something to look forward to!

Dovedale: We praise God for His faithfulness to the church as we celebrate our 10th anniversary as an instituted church. We would love to have any photos of Sunday School, church picnics, Ladies fellowship, church camps etc. so we can complete the 10 year anniversary photo book. May the Lord be with us and guide us as we continue to worship and serve Him here in Hornby.

Dunedin and Oamaru: Dear youth, we would like to invite you to come along to Dovedale Youth Group's annual Lake Lyndon weekend. Lake Lyndon is on the way to Porter's Pass ski field, 20 minutes from Castle Hill and about an hour's drive from Christchurch. We will have a couple of studies, but this is mostly a fun weekend for us to get to know each

other in a more social setting.

Hamilton: It has been suggested that after the evening service, for those who want to do so, we share a meal of soup and bread and have fellowship over a meal. Would families please bring a pan of soup and those who live alone or the elderly some buns or bread to go with it?

Hastings: "Difficult or Different; Wired or Weird". All women, young and not-so young, are invited out for a fun evening that will focus on relating to others. We will also try to see how to recognise different personalities and how to deal with them Biblically. We will aim to finish at the same time as Catechism and the children are invited to stay for supper. Please bring a plate to share.

Nelson: Garage Sale- Car wash- Sausage sizzle: The Cadet and Calvinette club are raising funds to hopefully send a group of children from our club to the National Cadet and Calvinette camp in Otaki in January next year. We would be willing to accept any junk (as well as better quality stuff) that you are willing to donate. Now would be a good time to clean out your cupboards and garage.

North Shore: Cadets and Gems are going to the Star Dome. The show begins with a simulated session on astronauts. We will also have the opportunity to view the night sky – stars, moon and all (even if it's raining!).

Wainuiomata: Annual Mid Winter Dinner – You will find the invitations to our Mid Winter Dinner in your cubby holes. These are for members 18 years old and over. We are still looking for items for the Auction, or small items to put in our surprise baskets. See you there and watch this space.

Short Report Wellington Presbytery

The Wellington Presbytery met on Saturday 11th June 2011 at the Reformed Church of Palmerston North. The moderator was Rev Andrew Nugteren and the vice-moderator was Rev David Waldron.

Some noteworthy items from this meeting are:

- that on the Wellington Session's

request, the Presbytery approved the songs "God and God alone", "O Church arise" and "You're the Word of God."

- that Br. B Wieringa was replaced as Youth Liaison by the Rev. L de Vos, subject to consent from the Wainuiomata Session.
- that after the Rev. P. Kloosterman had given a report on the OMB, some comments were heard on the dangers of diversity, and difficulty of supporting too many different mission projects. PNG is still seen

*Want to give a unique
gift? Why not give a
subscription of*

Faith in Focus



Delegates of the Wellington Presbytery meeting in June.

as our primary field for mission due to immediate oversight and involvements.

- that the Presbytery provisionally adopted an overture from the Wellington Session to amend Article VII of its standing rules in relation to the practice of conducting a *Colloquium Doctum* for ministers coming from sister churches.

Present Wording:

(a) Content of *Colloquium Doctum* shall include the areas of Dogmatics, Ethics, Symbolics, Church Order and general questions.

(b) The investigation shall be conducted by means of a general discussion led by various appointed delegates, but including [others?] who wish to participate.

Provisionally Adopted Wording:

A general discussion led by appointed delegates, including areas such as recent theological controversies and debates in the Reformed world, soundness of doctrine, a knowledge and appreciation of the practice and usage of the RCNZ, his previous ministerial record, sanctity of life and motives for seeking ministry in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

This provisionally adopted wording will be reviewed after the next *Colloquium Doctum*.

- that Palmerston North Session requested that a *Colloquium Doctum* be organised in Palmerston North for the examination of the Rev. Nathan Ketchen. A sub-committee consisting of the Revs P. Archbald and A. Nugteren and the Clerk were appointed to organise this.

The meeting was closed with the decision to meet in Palmerston North on the 5th of November 2011, at which time the *Colloquium Doctum* of the Rev N. Ketchen would take place.

Pieter van Huyssteen

Books in focus

Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus

D. A. Carson.

Crossway Books, 2010. Reviewed by OP pastor Everett A. Henes.

Scandalous is a collection of talks that D. A. Carson gave at a 2008 conference. He draws the reader in as he engages key biblical texts pertaining to the crucifixion and its effects. He does this not only from a scholarly perspective, but also from a pastoral and personal one.

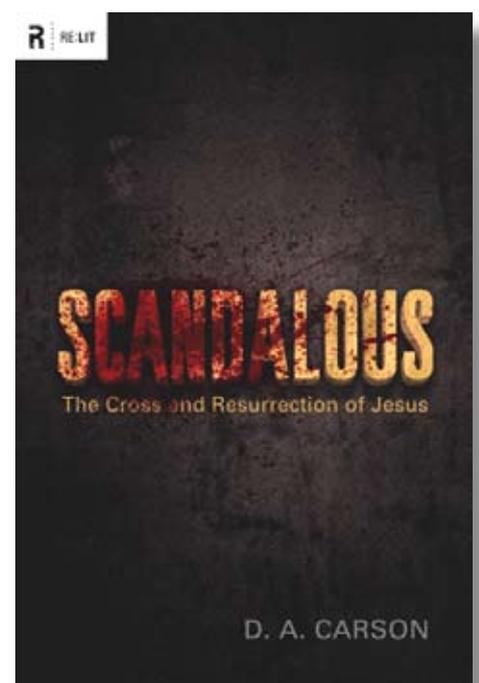
First comes "The Ironies of the Cross," based on Matthew 27:27-51. Four ironies are considered: The man who is mocked as king is king. The man who is utterly powerless is powerful. The man who can't save himself saves others. The man who cries out in despair trusts God. These ironies drive home the message of Christ's humiliation and exaltation.

For the Son of God to be treated thus is, indeed, scandalous.

Second is "The Center of the Whole Bible," Romans 3:21-26. Carson does a wonderful job of putting these verses into their context in Romans, explaining Paul's argument beginning in 1:18. The wrath of God is poured out on all men, and their only hope is the propitiation of that wrath that comes in 3:24-25.

Third, he examines Revelation 12 and focuses on "The Strange Triumph of a Slaughtered Lamb." In some countries, the church is persecuted, while in others (like our own) it is left alone to the point where materialism impacts it greatly. In all cases, though, it is the wounded dragon, Satan, who is attacking the church. We must remember that, in God's perspective, he is a defeated foe, and thus his doom is sure.

Fourth, Carson examines John 11 in "A Miracle Full of Surprises." He con-



siders how Jesus allows Lazarus to die so that the glory of God might be clear. Jesus confronts death in outrage (being moved deeply), in sorrow (weeping), and, ultimately, by overcoming it (raising Lazarus to life). The reader is pointed forward to the crucifixion. Jesus will be brutally killed, but he will overcome death through his resurrection from the dead.

Fifth, in "Doubting the Resurrection of Jesus," Carson examines Thomas's doubt that ends in the declaration that Jesus is his Lord and his God. The story of Thomas serves as one of the testimonies of John's gospel to his readers, so that they may believe in Jesus. The purpose of this account, Carson argues, is to add the testimony of a skeptic to the rest of the testimony concerning Christ.

Carson's work is an enjoyable and quick read, with captivating introductions, clear exegesis, and convicting conclusions. As you read through this little book, you will be reminded of the scandal of the cross and, by implication, the scandal of your salvation through the cross. Carson reminds us that we can have eternal life only because Christ was humiliated and crucified.

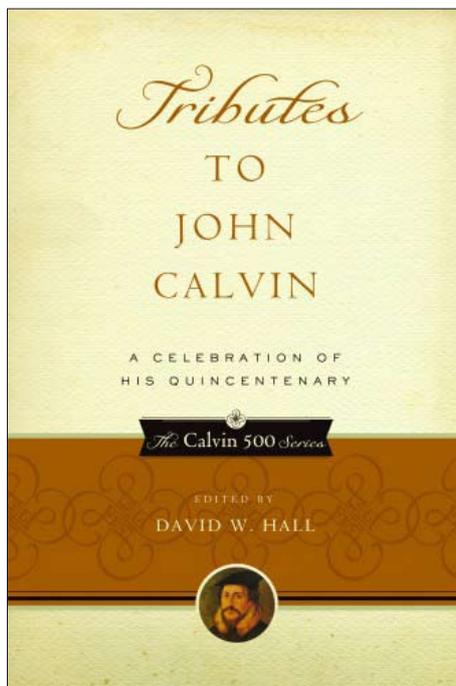
Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of His Quincentenary (Calvin 500 Series)

edited by David W. Hall.

P&R Publishing, 2010. Reviewed by OP minister Jeffrey C. Waddington.

Even though 2009, the five hundredth birthday of John Calvin, has come and gone, books celebrating the significance of Calvin still pour forth from the presses. And that is a good thing! The church has been blessed with the Calvin 500 Series, and this volume strengthens the reputation of what is now an eight-volume set. Tributes to John Calvin consists of edited papers presented at the Calvin 500 conference held in Geneva in the summer of 2009.

The papers in Tributes to John Calvin were presented by twenty-two scholars under three categories: Calvin's times, Calvin's topics, and Calvin today and tomorrow. The book opens with a foreword by R. Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He comments on the abiding significance of Calvin as



a Reformer, theologian, biblical scholar, lawyer, churchman, and follower of Christ. As Mohler points out, Calvin's theological contribution to the church appears more rather than less significant today than at previous times (p. xii). David Hall follows Mohler with a preface describing the original context for the presentation of the papers. He notes that there is not complete agreement among the scholars on every point of Calviniana (pp. xv-xx).

The first nine chapters examine Calvin in the context of his own time and place. They range over such subjects as Calvin's children, ecclesiastical discipline, Calvin as a lawyer, Calvin as a Frenchman, Calvin and women, Calvin and preaching, Calvin as a liturgist, Calvin as a New Testament commentator, and Calvin as a comrade in arms with Martin Luther. Especially helpful are the chapters on preaching by Hughes Oliphant Old and liturgy by Terry Johnson. Calvin understood preaching to be itself a form of worship. This is a bracing tonic for our times, when preaching is increasingly ridiculed even in so-called Christian circles.

Chapters 10 through 17 focus on topics of interest to Calvin himself. These include the catholicity of Calvin's theology, Calvin on sacred and secular history, Calvin's principle of worship, Calvin's doctrine of assurance, Calvin's principles of governance, prayer, Calvin's doctrine of Scripture, and Calvin's eucharistic ecclesiology. David Hall's chapter on governance summarises what is given fuller exposition in another of the Calvin 500

Series volumes, Calvin and the Public Square. Here Hall argues for a similarity between Calvin's view of the church and his view of the state (i.e., republicanism).

The final section, consisting of chapters 18 through 23, considers Calvin's significance for today and tomorrow. This includes a Calvin bibliography, a history of the contention in nineteenth-century American Reformed circles, Calvin's impact on the arts, Calvinism in Asia, union with Christ in Calvin's theology, and Calvin's view of life, death, and eternal life. The chapter on union with Christ by Bruce McCormack makes for interesting, if not completely persuasive, reading.

All in all, this is a full and satisfying book. Readers will disagree here and there, but these studies remind us that we ought to be thankful for the ministry and influence of John Calvin.

Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism

J. V. Fesko.

Reformation Heritage Books, 2010.

Reviewed by OP pastor Everett A. Henes.

Dr. Fesko has done a great service to the church by writing on the subject of baptism. Many modern Reformed treatments are too short and narrow in their focus, oftentimes looking only at the question of infant baptism. Fesko examines baptism through historical, biblical, and systematic theology. He understands Scripture as a unified whole that unfolds by way of covenant throughout redemptive history.

Section one surveys the history of the doctrine and practice of baptism. The historical approach does not provide as "neat" an answer as either credo- or paedobaptists would prefer, particularly regarding the questions of mode and recipients. Fesko shows how a focus on personal experience in salvation often came to exclude infants from being baptised.

Section two deals with the crucial biblical evidence, with chapters on baptism as new creation, as covenant judgment, and as eschatological judgment. As new creation, baptism is rooted in Genesis 1:2 and linked to the Flood and the Exodus. In all of these watery ordeals, a new creation emerges. Explored next

is the idea of circumcision as covenant judgment, followed by the connection of circumcision to baptism and baptism as covenant judgment. This provides a background to Jesus' statement to his disciples, "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). The point of this is to show that in Christ being judged, his people receive the blessing, but "for those who undergo the waters of baptism and never have faith in Christ, the waters of baptism are those of covenant-judgment" (p. 245). In "Baptism as Eschatological Judgment," we read of the baptism of fire that John the Baptist refers to in the Gospels. The Spirit-fire baptism is, to the church, a blessing; but to the unregenerate world, a coming judgment.

Section three presents a positive formulation of baptism through systematic theology. Fesko looks at baptism as a means of grace and as a sacrament. He examines the institution of the sacrament, the formula used, and what is signified in baptism: initiation into the covenant community and union with Christ. Just as infants in the Old Testament were given the covenant sign (circumcision) of the gospel, so infants in the New Testament are to be baptised. Fesko also argues that the inclusion of infants in one sacrament (baptism) does not entail their inclusion in the other (Lord's Supper). In "Baptism and Ecclesiology," he returns to a historical discussion to argue that a valid baptism depends solely on who ultimately administers it (p369). The Reformers held that God was active in baptism

and, therefore, any baptism done with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is valid.

As the pastor of a church that has many Baptists who regularly attend, I have found this book to be a good one to recommend for reading and useful in improving my own understanding of baptism.

The Secret of Contentment

William B. Barclay.

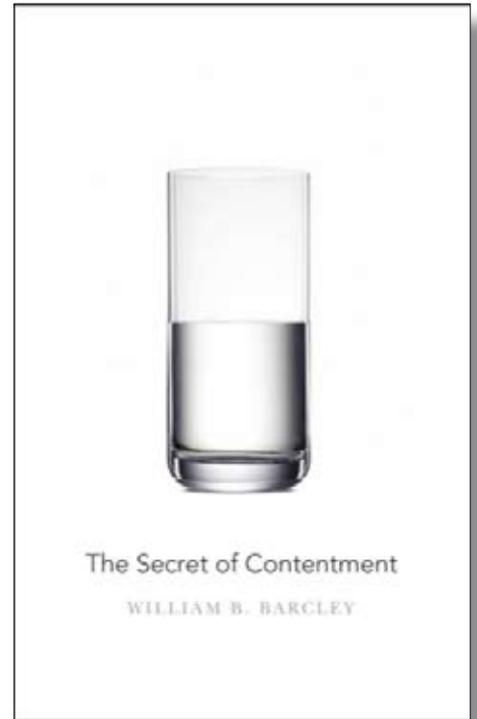
P&R, 2010. Reviewed by OP minister Dick Ellis.

This fine little book is fairly simple. It would be easy enough even for those who don't consider themselves readers. Its theology is standard, Reformed fare; readers will find comfort in the emphasis on God's sovereignty, which is always good and purposeful.

But it is deceptively simple because it is deeply challenging. We know theology better than we internalise and practice it. Barclay challenges us to examine our hearts closely to identify what we love most: the things of this world or God himself. Our anxieties and discontent reveal greater affection for this world than we like to admit. All along, Barclay takes us from theory, where we're often most comfortable, to practice, where we need to do uncomfortable things like dying to sin.

Barclay is unabashedly dependent upon Jeremiah Burroughs's *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*. His definition of contentment is even lifted verbatim from Burroughs: Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition. It would be hard to improve on that definition. The author's purpose is to make Burroughs's jewels accessible to a wider audience.

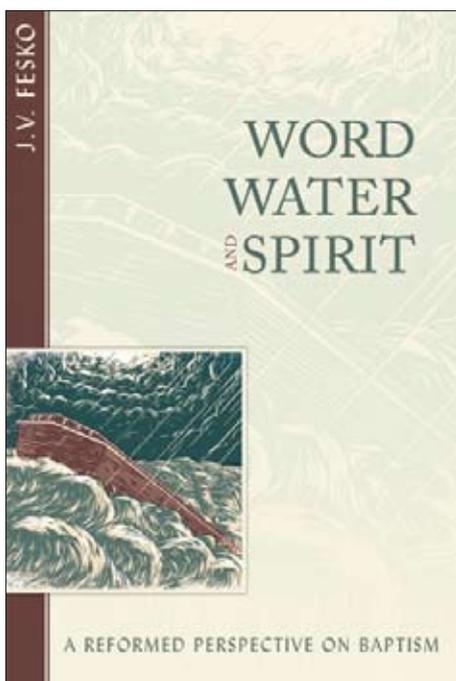
The book is loosely dependent on Paul's letter to the Philippians. For example, chapter 5, entitled "Finding Contentment in the Midst of Affliction," unfolds Philippians 1:12-26, in which Paul speaks of gladly suffering for the Philippians' joy and progress in the faith. He finds his contentment in theirs. Each brief chapter concludes with probing discussion questions, making it a useful tool for a Sunday school class or Bible study group.



Some of the most memorable phrases are quotations from Burroughs. "There is a heaven in the soul of a godly man," and "no soul shall ever come to heaven, but that soul which has heaven come to it first." The joy of heaven is unhindered knowledge of and fellowship with God. And therein lies our challenge: unexpected bills, the aggravation of thoughtless people, and our sins all obscure our vision of God.

The pursuit of contentment is a counterintuitive enterprise. Again, leaning on Burroughs, Barclay states that "there was never any man or woman so contented as a self-denying" one. You find contentment not by pursuing what you want, but by denying yourself as you develop a taste for what is truly good. We not only do what pleases God, but are pleased with what God does. We learn, and relearn, that what gives God glory and what is for our good coincide, rather than conflict.

We owe Mr. Barclay thanks for inviting us to "behold, by faith, the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ," and to delight and rest in that glory. This is a simple, accessible book, but one you won't outgrow until you see the Lord Jesus and become like him.



An African church coming of age

Brian T. Wingard

"You must be patient with us; we are just a young church." These words have been repeated to me over and over again in the last seventeen years. It has been a constant refrain since Dorothy and I first arrived in East Africa. It was usually said when the leaders of the indigenous church were doing something they knew to be wrong but culturally expected, and they wanted the plea of immaturity to excuse what they were doing (or at least mollify the *muzungu* [foreign] missionary). As this refrain is heard again and again, it tries one's patience, rather than encouraging it. One longs for the day when maturity will no longer need the plea of youth to justify every kind of aberration.

What a joy it is when one beholds a church beginning to come of age. This is happening in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Uganda (OPCU)! The OPC's Uganda Mission, as well as the Committee on Foreign Missions, is committed to what is known as the "Nevius Principle." This is the goal of establishing a church that is self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing. Since work started in Uganda in the mid-1990s, the OPC and the Mission have been earnestly praying to reach this seemingly impossible goal. There have been challenges of the most serious nature and many heartaches. Now God appears to be sending the "firstfruits" of his answer to these prayers. Rejoice with us!

The ministry of the word

Currently the chief mandate of the Mbale Station is the teaching at Knox Theological College. Its purpose is to prepare men who will serve in the pastoral ministry of the OPCU. Emphasis has been placed on training sound preachers, remembering Paul's command to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2, "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." Much effort has gone into this instruc-

tion, and now the fruit is being reaped. The congregations are hearing sound, systematic preaching through books of the Bible, so that the whole counsel of God is being proclaimed.

An exciting extension of this discerning and confident handling of the Word of God has been a radio ministry of preaching. Every Sunday and Thursday afternoon, one of the pastors preaches, with another translating, on Faith Radio, an FM station in Mbale. Pastor Steven Hamya has been ably preaching through Nahum, stressing both the judgment and grace of God. Pastor Dan Kyabene is very capably preaching through Galatians, so needed where grace is mistakenly tied to works. Pastor Charles Magala just finished Hebrews and has started James in his very gracious manner. By word of mouth, they have learned that the broadcast has been heard as far away as Iganga, a town about 110 km. from Mbale. Although first suggested by OP missionary Philip Proctor, the radio ministry did not begin until later through the encouragement of a friend of one of

the pastors. What an encouragement it is to see the pastors laboring to "spread the tent."

Beginning to look outside

One of the aspects of self-propagation concerns the indigenous church taking interest in the propagation of the gospel outside its own national borders. For a small and struggling church, this is a challenge. "How can we send the gospel to the world, when we have difficulty enlarging our own congregations and planting others?" This is a natural response to the suggestion that a "receiving church" should think about being a "sending church."

Even in this respect we begin to see the first signs of progress. The pastors of Mbale Presbytery were invited to take part in the ordination of officers for the Reformed Fellowship Church of Kenya (RFCK). Originally the RFCK requested transport money for two OPCU pastors from the Reformed Church in the U.S. (RCUS). Later, the RFCK wanted *three* pastors to go. Even though it was suggest-



Brian and Dorothy Wingard

ed that the RCUS might agree to fund the transport of one more, the presbytery made plans to fund the third man itself. One of the supporting speeches in the presbytery urged the church to be thinking about the witness and impact that they might be able to have in a neighboring country, rather than focusing exclusively on local needs, such as (necessary) building projects. This is a long way from sending a missionary to serve in another country, but it speaks of the beginning of a wider view of the church.

Diaconal matters

One of the areas in which the problem of dependency, the silent killer of the African church, is evident in Mbale is in diaconal ministry. Surely Christians who are incomparably wealthier than their brothers elsewhere have an obligation to show mercy. Yet wise diaconal aid should be supplemental, and the indigenous church should seek to understand how God's blessing to them may be used for the relief of the suffering in their own congregations.

There are signs of coming of age in this respect too. Last fall a hailstorm destroyed the somewhat temporary structure of Kakoli OPCU. On their own initiative, the presbytery's diaconal committee contributed materials to erect another (very) temporary structure, and the members of the committee labored alongside the members of the congregation so that worship on the following Lord's Day could take place.

The chairman of that committee,



Brian Wingard teaching at Knox Theological College.

Milton Wasota, without requesting any funds from the Mission, organized a presbytery-wide diaconal seminar to encourage the deacons of the local congregations to imitate such service as related above. He also invited missionary deacon Bob Wright, who challenged the deacons to examine ways that God has provided for them to increasingly meet the diaconal needs of their own congregations. Bob drew upon his own experience in South Karamoja to suggest that the congregations need not be as dependent upon the Mission as they presently are.

For the first time in the history of

the OPC's Uganda Mission, a report was submitted by the indigenous church telling of their use of diaconal funds received from the OPC. When the Mission saw the report at its January 2011 meeting, there was a spontaneous ovation.

The future

The matters reported above do not mean we are at the end of the journey. Self-sufficiency and self-propagation are still some distance off. However, progress of a real and remarkably encouraging kind has been made. Prayer for the future of the work is needed. In the coming year, the indigenous church will have to deal with significant changes in the Mbale Station of the Mission. Every bit of the maturity that it has gained in the past few years will be necessary to face this challenge. Yet as we see the manner in which God has begun to answer the prayers of so many years, we can be confident that he will answer these as well.

Reprinted with permission from the April 2011 issue of New Horizons.

Mr Brian Wingard is a missionary for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the U.S., serving in Mbale, Uganda.



Charles Magala expounding Scripture on Faith Radio.