



# *THE* **STANDARD BEARER**

***A Reformed  
Semi-Monthly  
Magazine***

## **THE REFORMATION AND WORSHIP**

If we find ourselves preferring other houses to the house of God, other books to the Bible, other tables to the Lord's table, and other activities to the hour of prayer, let us take alarm! Confess the laxity, turn from the worldlimindedness, root out the spiritual problem that is in us. Earthly life can get no better, or rise any higher, than to be sitting with the saints at the feet of Jesus, our chief Teacher and Prophet.

See "The Good Practice of Two Services..." — p. 37

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In This Issue ...

This special issue of the *Standard Bearer* on worship is part commemoration, part instruction, and part controversy.

We commemorate the 16th century Reformation of the church as a re-forming of worship. Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma reminds us of the distinctive characteristics of the worship restored particularly by the Reformed branch of the Reformation. These characteristics derive directly from the knowledge of God made known in the gospel. Rev. Ron Cammenga demonstrates that Luther and Calvin agreed that the preaching of this gospel is the heart of the public worship of the true church. Prof. Robert Decker lays out Calvin's own liturgy in Geneva. Essentially, this is the liturgy "in use in the worship services of the Protestant Reformed Churches."

Rev. Dale Kuiper gives instruction as to the practice of holding two worship services each Sabbath, at one of which the Heidelberg Catechism is preached. Prof. Herman Hanko pleads for the congregation's singing of Psalms in worship. Rev. Gise VanBaren contends that the day of public worship — the Lord's Day — is "the day which must be kept holy according to the fourth commandment." All of this instruction is timely in view of the demise of the second service, the intrusion into public worship of hymns and choirs, and the profaning of the Sabbath Day — in Reformed churches.

The editorial is a critical examination of the prominent contemporary movement of "liturgical renewal."

Running through all the articles is the exhortation to Reformed Christians, indeed all Protestant believers, to join in the right, pure public worship of God in the assembly of a faithful, obedient church. This is the theme of Rev. James Slopsema's meditation on Psalm 29:2.

May we ask that especially those who criticize or question the traditional form of worship in the PRC and other Reformed churches consider carefully this our apology for our faithfulness to the Spirit's work in the area of liturgics at the Reformation.

—DJE



# Worshiping Jehovah in the Beauty of Holiness

*Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.*

Psalm 29:2

This beautiful Psalm was penned by David.

The theme is expressed in the very last verse: "The Lord will give strength to his people."

Interestingly, the opening two verses are addressed to the (sons of) the mighty, who are the angels of heaven. They are called to worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. Notice that the name LORD is all in capital letters. That means that in the original we find the name Jehovah. The angels are called upon to worship *Jehovah* in the beauty of holiness. In that worship they are to give unto Jehovah the glory due unto His name.

This same calling comes also to us.

Since we are created a little lower than the angels, the Bible often sets the angels before us as examples. This is the case, e.g., in the third petition of the Lord's prayer: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This is a prayer that God grant us on earth the grace to do His will as perfectly as the angels do in heaven.

Should the angels in heaven be called to worship Jehovah in the beauty of holiness, certainly the same calling falls to us.

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The occasion for this calling to worship Jehovah is the glory of His name.

First, there is a matter of translation. The KJV speaks of giving unto Jehovah "the glory due unto his name." Literally, however, we read of giving unto Jehovah "the glory of his name."

To the glory of the name of Jehovah we now call attention.

"Jehovah" is God's covenant name. It emphasizes especially that God is faithful to the covenant He has made with His people.

The "name of Jehovah" refers not to the proper name "Jehovah" but to God Himself as He reveals Himself to be Jehovah, the faithful covenant God. Let me explain. Names have meanings. So too do the proper names God gives Himself. In the case of the living God, the names He gives to Himself reveal His true character. But it is also true that God reveals Himself through the works of His hand. Hence, in the Bible the name of God refers to God Himself, as He reveals Himself through the works of His hand. And that brings us to the name of Jehovah, the name of Jehovah God Himself as He reveals Himself through the works of His hands to be Jehovah, the faithful covenant God.

The psalmist speaks of the glory of that name.

In verse 3 David identifies God as the God of glory.

Now glory is the revelation of excellence and virtue. Whenever you see the good qualities of a person or thing revealed, you see its glory.

In like manner is Jehovah the God of glory. All that is good, ex-

cellent, and virtuous belongs to God. And this excellence of God is also displayed in the works of His hand. It is manifest in His work of creation. It is more brilliantly displayed in the works of salvation in Jesus Christ. In keeping with His covenant with them, Jehovah sovereignly and graciously saves His chosen people in Jesus Christ from sin and death to enjoy eternal life with Him. In this great covenant work all the glorious virtues of God are brilliantly displayed. And that is the glory of the name of Jehovah.

David continues in this Psalm to describe the glory of Jehovah's name.

In verses 3-9 David calls attention to the great might and power of Jehovah. The great power of Jehovah is seen in the thunder and lightning, which the psalmist calls the voice of Jehovah. Jehovah speaks through the thunder and breaks the mighty cedars of Lebanon, the king of all trees. His thunder shakes the mighty wilderness of Kadesh, the most dreaded of all wildernesses. His voice affects the whole creation, even making the hinds to calve prematurely.

All this clearly indicates that the Lord sits as King forever (v. 10).

David concludes this Psalm (v. 11) by showing how Jehovah uses His great power: "The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace."

We must understand these words in their historical setting. This Psalm was occasioned by the threat of Israel's enemies, who sought to overthrow her and destroy the cov-



enant of Jehovah. God reveals here that through His great power He would strengthen His people Israel under king David's leadership to overcome her enemies, so that Israel would continue to enjoy the peace of God's covenant.

All this, of course, only looked ahead to Another in whom the strength of Jehovah would be displayed in a much greater measure. For David was only a type or picture of Jesus Christ, the great King that was to come. The promise of Jehovah to strengthen His people was, therefore, really a promise to raise up the great Christ, and through Him to strengthen the church, that she may overcome forever her spiritual foes to enjoy the peace of eternal life.

This promise has already been fulfilled in part in that Jesus Christ, in the power of His death and resurrection, strengthens us daily in our battle against the powers of darkness, leading us from victory to victory. This promise will be completely fulfilled when the King, Jesus, returns at the end of the world in the power of the Father to destroy forever the powers of darkness and exalt the church into eternal glory.

This is the glory of the name of Jehovah!

And this is the occasion for the call to the angels of heaven and to us to worship Jehovah.

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The character of the worship we are to render to Jehovah is expressed first in the term "worship," which means to bow the knee.

In the Bible, examples abound of bowing the knee to one's fellow man and even to angels. Such action was an outward display of reverence for and devotion to the service of another.

This is the character of the worship we are to render to Jehovah. We must bow to Him the knee. Of importance in worship is

*Of importance  
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not the outward action of bowing but the inner attitude which is expressed in such bowing. We must worship Jehovah by holding Him in highest reverence and respect. In that reverence we are to devote ourselves to serving Him. The reason for such worship is obvious — the glory of His name.

The character of the worship we are to render to Jehovah is also expressed in the phrase, "Give to Jehovah the glory of His name."

We have already seen what is the glory of Jehovah's name. The name of Jehovah is God Himself as He reveals Himself, through the works of salvation in Jesus Christ, to be Jehovah, the faithful covenant God. In these great works all the glory of God is most brilliantly displayed.

Our worship of Jehovah consists in giving to Him the glory of His name, i.e., acknowledging the glory of His name and praising Him for it.

In this way especially do we show the reverence and devotion to Jehovah that is expressed in the term "worship."

It ought to be clear that this worship involves more than the worship we give to the Lord at His house on the Lord's Day. Worship involves the whole of our life. Daily and in all our activities we are to stand in awe and reverence before the great Jehovah. Daily we are to devote ourselves to Him in loving service. And whenever we have opportunity, we are to give to Him the glory of His name — in the songs we sing and hear, in the words we speak.

But the Lord has also called us to set aside one day of the week, the weekly Sabbath, to worship Him in a special way. We are to gather together with our fellow saints in order to bow the knee to Him in prayer, to sing His praises, to receive the sacraments, and to hear the preaching of His Word. The Lord

also calls us to worship Him daily at the family altar by meditating upon His Word in prayer. How important these aspects of worship are! For then our attention is focused on the glory of Jehovah's name as revealed in His Word. And the Lord uses this to fill us with reverence for and devotion to Him, so that we worship Him in all of life's activities. Neglect the true worship of Jehovah at His house or the worship of His name at the family altar, and you will not be able to worship Him in your daily life.

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Worship Jehovah in the beauty of holiness.

Holiness is, negatively, separation from the sin of this world. Positively, it is devotion to the living God.

The psalmist speaks of the *beauty* of holiness. The word "beauty" has the basic idea of an ornament. An ornament is something that adorns, beautifies. Hence, we read of the "beauty of holiness." This expression views holiness as a beautiful ornament that adorns us. This ornament of holiness was given to us of God. He gave it to us and the angels at our creation. Through the fall we lost it. God has graciously restored it to us in Jesus Christ.

This holiness is the source of all true worship.

Hence, we are to worship Jehovah in the beauty of holiness. That is, we are to worship Jehovah only in the context or sphere of holiness, so that our worship arises out of the holiness with which God has adorned us.

No, do not worship Jehovah in terror and dread fear. And do not worship Him in superstition or out of mere custom. For then your worship will only be an outward display of reverence and devotion. Such worship is false.

Worship Jehovah rather in the beauty of holiness, that you may from the heart reverence Him and give to Him the glory of His name.

□



# Reformed Worship Vs. Liturgical “Renewal”

The Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) have not been noticeably affected by the powerful movement of liturgical “renewal.” The form of their worship services — both of them every Sabbath — is basically that of the Reformed tradition going back to the Synod of Dordt at the beginning of the 17th century. John Calvin would recognize our services of public worship. Not only would he recognize them, but he would also approve them. He would urge us to administer the Lord’s Supper more often, and he would question us about our use of instrumental accompaniment for the congregation’s singing of the Psalms. But he would approve our liturgy.

Liturgy is the form of the public worship of the church. It refers to what we do at a worship service and the order in which we do it. In his privately printed notes on “Liturgics,” Dutch Reformed theologian H. Beuker described liturgy this way: “Liturgy with the Reformed always signifies the established forms for the spiritual (public) worship service....” Every church has a liturgy. It may be elaborate or simple, highly structured or open to variation, predominant or incidental. But there is a liturgical aspect to every gathering of believers and their children for the public praise of the God and Father of Jesus Christ. The question is not, “Do we have a liturgy?” but, “What is our liturgy?”

This makes the present movement of liturgical change that is

sweeping the Protestant churches of interest to every denomination.

Three distinct trends can be distinguished. All three ought to be of concern to the church that knows herself to be called by God to be distinctively Reformed in worship. There is the carefully calculated, sophisticated form of worship that caters to the wishes and feelings of the people, especially the young, educated, wealthy people. This worship is characterized by contemporary music, dramatic presentations, and short, positive — at all costs positive — non-doctrinal sermons about practical problems in the people’s lives. Leading the way in North America is the Willow Creek Church in Illinois. We may call this the “user-friendly” liturgy.

A second trend is the free-wheeling, exuberant, disorderly services of the charismatics. What will take place and when are up to the unpredictable spirit of the movement, who functions according to no known law. This worship is characterized by hand-waving, healing, tongues, prophesying by members of the congregation, and, of late, uncontrollable laughter. The local Assembly of God practices this liturgy. Many evangelical and some Reformed and Presbyterian churches play with this liturgical dynamite. It advertises itself as the liturgy of “life” in distinction from that of doctrine and order.

The third major strain of liturgical “renewal” in Protestantism is the

development of elaborate ceremony. The service is filled with all kinds of symbolical activities, e.g., candle-lighting, and symbolical objects, e.g., banners. Much is made of the “church year.” It becomes important that the clergy are dressed in special, impressive garb. The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper takes the central place in worship. This is the liturgy of Romanizing ritual. Those who would challenge the adjective are invited to read Thomas Howard’s *Evangelical is Not Enough: Worship of God in Liturgy and Sacrament* (Ignatius, 1984). Prominent theologians are heading in this direction. The magazine, *Reformed Worship*, promotes this liturgy.

These are not innocent developments. They are not relatively insignificant developments. The true church of God has fought great wars over the issue of liturgy. The Reformation fought the ritualism of Roman Catholic worship. This was necessarily involved in the Reformation’s denial that the church’s performance of the ceremonies of the sacraments bestows grace and in the Reformation’s assertion that the heart of true worship is the teaching of sound doctrine.

Jenny Geddes threw her stool at Archbishop Laud’s bishop, thus occasioning the struggle of Scottish Presbyterianism first against Charles I and then against Charles II, when, in St. Giles, Laud’s bishop attempted to impose upon the Pres-



byterians the Anglican form of worship. One of the issues at stake was the Lordship of Jesus Christ over His church.

The Dutch Reformed should not forget that the Secession of 1834 in the Netherlands occurred, in part, because of the intrusion into Reformed worship of sentimental, man-centered, Arminian hymns. The modernist State Church had arranged a "user-friendly" service of worship.

To suppose that differences in liturgy are unimportant in comparison with differences in theology is a mistake. It is impossible to separate liturgy from theology. In a provocative article on Reformed liturgy, Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff points out that Reformed liturgy differs from Roman Catholic liturgy because of differing theological conceptions of both the preaching of the Word and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper ("The Reformed Liturgy," in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, Eerdmans, 1992, pp. 273-304).

The Reformed faith condemns and rejects all three of the leading liturgical trends in Protestantism today. Against all three liturgies, the "user-friendly," the lively disorder of neo-Pentecostalism, and the ritualistic, the Reformed faith charges that they are lawless. They have no regard for God's rules in Scripture for His worship. All three strains of liturgical experimentation feel free to introduce whatever seems to the worship committee, the minister, or the church to enhance worship.

Second, contemporary liturgical "renewal" in all its forms denigrates and displaces the Word of God in the worship of the church. The effect of the changes is that the preaching of the doctrines of Scripture loses its central, primary place. I know of no movement of liturgical "renewal" that has as its main purpose to restore or emphasize the preaching of the Word and, with this, the office of the ministry of the Word.

Third, as regards the people-oriented liturgy in evangelicalism, Prot-

estantism has forgotten that worship does not center on the worshipping congregation but on the worshiped God. The question is not, "What makes us feel good?" but, "What is this great and glorious God worthy of?" "User-friendly" liturgy is frivolous, superficial, and often trivial. The frivolity begins with Pastor Tom, Dick, Harry, or Bill flashing his pearly whites and saying, "Good morning." Reformed worship begins with God's greeting of His people in Christ, "Grace, mercy, and peace be granted to you."

Fourth, charismatic worship is false. The extraordinary operations and gifts of the Holy Spirit ended with the office of the apostles. Period.

Fifth, the invented pomp and ceremony of Protestant ritual, like that of Rome, is empty and useless. God is not honored by it; the congregation is not blessed. The judgment by Southern Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell upon the liturgy of ritual is true:

The miserable votaries of Rome confound the emotions of mysterious awe produced by the solemnities of a sensual worship with reverence for God and the impressions of grace. Doomed to grope among the beggarly elements of earth, they regale the eye, the fancy and the ear, but the heart withers. Imagination riots on imposing festivals and magnificent processions, symbols and ceremonies, libations and sacrifices; the successive stages of worship are like scenes of enchantment, but the gorgeous splendours of the liturgy, which famish the soul while they delight the sense, are sad memorials of religion "lying in state surrounded with the silent pomp of death." The Holy Ghost has been supplanted by charms, and physical causes have usurped the province of supernatural grace (*Collected Writings*, Vol. 3, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974, p. 319).

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And the explanation of a Protestant church's turning to ritual by Christian Reformed preachers Idzerd VanDellen and Martin Monsma is also true: "As spiritual life begins to wane, formalistic and extraordinary observances begin to increase. He who serves God in Spirit and with devotion will have little need for the unusual, and for constant innovations" (*The Church Order Commentary*, Zondervan, 1941, p. 275).

The Reformed faith condemns these liturgies in the interests of maintaining its own characteristic worship.

The principle of Reformed worship is that the public service of worship is God's presence and fellowship with His people in Christ. The service is covenantal. God is with us. *God is with us*, the God who makes Himself known and gives Himself to us chiefly through the preaching of the Word and, in connection with this Word, by the two Christ-ordained (simple) ceremonies of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. *God is with us*, the God who is to be loved, revered, praised, and thanked.

This determines the purpose of Reformed worship. It is not to please self-centered, self-seeking, self-satisfied Americans. When Herman Hoeksema describes the purpose of worship, he even denies that the purpose is "that of saving souls." But the purpose, according to Hoeksema, is "the public and united service and glorification of God with thanksgiving and joy in an orderly manner." Only then is the purpose also, "and in subordination," the "edification of the saints" (unpublished notes on "Liturgy," p. 1).

It is characteristic of Reformed worship that the reading and preaching of the Bible is central and dominating.

The elements of worship — the *how* of worship — are decided by



God Himself. The Reformed faith holds the "regulative principle" of worship. This is not Scottish Presbyterian. It is Reformed. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that we may not "worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word" (Question 96). This "regulative principle" is nothing less than the rule of the second commandment of the law. Obedience to this rule in public worship is not bondage, but "true liberty," as Hoeksema points out: "In the Spirit of Christ, we have the true liberty, which is not the same as wantonness, but which means in regard to public worship that the form and the principles of public worship are derived freely from the Word of God." The prescribed elements of worship are listed in Lord's Day 38 of the Catechism.

It belongs to the Reformed liturgical mind that it is opposed to change. Are we to suppose that at the end of the 20th century the triune God has changed *His* mind about the right worship of Himself?

The Reformed mind has its differences with C. S. Lewis, including his ideas on liturgy, but it appreciates his warning against the liturgical tinkering that bedevils Protestant churches in our day:

(A worship service) ... "works" best when, through long familiarity, we don't have to think about it.... The perfect church service would be the one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God. But every novelty prevents this. It fixes our attention on the service itself; and thinking about worship is a different thing from worshipping.... "'Tis mad idolatry that makes the service greater than the god." A still worse thing may happen. Novelty may fix our attention not even on the service but on the celebrant. You know what I mean. Try as one may to exclude it, the question "What on earth is he up to now?" will intrude. It lays one's devotion waste. There is really some excuse for the man who said, "I wish they'd remember that the charge to Peter was Feed my sheep; not Try experi-

ments on my rats, or even Teach my performing dogs new tricks."

This incessant changing of the form of worship is "the Liturgical Fidget" (*The Joyful Christian*, Macmillan, 1977, pp. 80, 81). It is a theological, ecclesiastical, and spiritual affliction.

The PRC may resist liturgical "renewal." Their liturgy never died. It is not out-of-date.

They are called to maintain a Reformed liturgy. They will do this only if the members know what they have and think into what they are doing in the services of worship. They will do this only if they reverence the great God whose worth they are to extol at church. They will do this only if they submit to the will of God concerning the acceptable manner of His worship. They will do this only if the Spirit of Christ graciously works in them to worship the Father "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). □

— DJE

*Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma*

# Let the Earth Keep Silence!

## The Solemnity of Reformed Worship

Pressure. Constant pressure. That is what the faithful church always experiences as she attempts to follow the dictates of God's Word. The same is true as far as her worship is concerned. After lying shipwrecked for centuries in the idola-

try of Roman Catholic liturgy, biblical worship was again restored during the years of the great church reformation of the 1500s. But Satan did not give up his relentless attack upon the church and her worship. What John Calvin observes while exegeting John 4:24 in his commentary on the gospel according to John reveals a deep insight into the nature of man: "Since men are flesh, we ought not to wonder, if they take delight in those things that corre-

spond to their own disposition. Therefore it arises, that they contrive many things in the worship of God which are full of display, but have no solidity." It is of no surprise therefore that biblical, Reformed worship has again come under attack.

Wicked, unbelieving man always places the church under pressure to conform her ways to his. "If you want me as a member of your church, then you have to make your-

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self attractive to me" is what he demands of the church. And the carnal seed within the church would quickly agree with this demand — all in the honorable name of church growth. Ignoring the dictates of God's Word, these badger the church to concoct a new, innovative liturgy that is more relevant for the time and culture in which we live. People in our time and culture no longer desire instruction in righteousness. They do not wish to hear about sin; they do not wish to learn all kinds of doctrines about God or Jesus Christ. What they want is a liturgy that makes them feel good about themselves. They want to hear of their positive qualities as human beings, and how they can be of service to humanity. People like attention. They enjoy using their talents too, to praise God. All this ought to be reflected in the worship of the church.

Pressure, constant pressure, is placed upon the church, not only from outside but especially from inside. Eliminate instruction and replace it with talks that incite people to service. Use every device available to give people a good feeling about themselves, an emotional high, a "breakthrough experience with God." Allow people to use their "ministries" to worship God in the church.

Pressure! And the result? Many Reformed and Presbyterian churches have given in to the pressure and have changed their liturgical practices, forgetting the very principles that saved them from the idolatrous worship of the Romish church. How the gold has grown dim!

We ought to remind ourselves of the very purpose of worship, and therefore of all our liturgical practices: to pay homage to God. Some criticize this as only the opinion of straight-laced Calvinists. Opponents of Reformed worship slanderously describe this principle as Calvinism's "uncompromising devotion to God's glory, its one-sided exaggeration of the creaturely sense, its total rejection of religious comfort and self-

interested piety, its certitude of the priority of God's will and inevitable character of His justice hardening into a doctrine of predestination so ruthless that it sees and adores in all things and events ... the inscrutable action of the Divine."<sup>1</sup> Critics may even falsely accuse Reformed worship of being boring and lacking life. But there is one accusation that can never be leveled against Reformed worship, and that is, that it is not biblical. That one can never say!

The very purpose of all true worship is "to pay homage to, to render honor to, to kiss the hand of" God. This is the literal meaning of the terms Scripture employs for worship. This idea is also the heart of Psalms 95 through 100. Notice Psalm 95:6, 7: "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the sheep of his pasture..."; and Psalm 96:7-9, "Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the earth, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due his name: bring an offering and come into his courts. O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him all the earth." No person with any knowledge of Scripture can deny that worship must be theocentric, i.e., it must center in God. All attention must be directed to Him as the God who is all glorious in His sovereignty, beautiful in holiness and grace, and unsearchable in wisdom and might. All honor and glory must be directed toward him. That is the very purpose of worship.

This principle of Reformed worship (*solī Deo gloria*) was the main emphasis of the Calvinistic Reformation in Switzerland. It would be fallacious, however, to credit Calvin with the founding of such a prin-

ciple. Before Calvin appeared on the scene in Geneva, Reformers such as Zwingli, Bullinger, and Bucer had already firmly established this principle of Reformed worship. For example, Zwingli, in his work, *Commentary on the True and False Religion*, insisted that because of the corruption of the human nature man always refuses to acknowledge the supremacy of God, and, as a result, substitutes a multitude of false religious practices in his worship. The true focus of all Christian worship therefore must be God.<sup>2</sup>

It is our knowledge of God Himself, therefore, which will decide the characteristics of proper worship.

What do we believe about God's sovereignty? "All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare to him?" (Is. 40:17, 18).

What do we believe about God's power? "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained: what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Ps. 8:3, 4). What do we believe about God's wisdom? "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33). What do we believe about the holiness and justice of our God? "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Will not this knowledge of God, then, dictate to you and me what will characterize us when we come before Him to worship? How dare we come before God and rob Him of His glory and honor? Before the face of God almighty we could not be so bold as to change our worship to satisfy the cravings

*It is our knowledge of God Himself which will decide the characteristics of proper worship.*

<sup>1</sup> *Worship*, Evelyn Underhill, p. 288.

<sup>2</sup> *War Against the Idols*, Carlos M.N. Eire, pp. 83, 84.



of sinful, unbelieving man! We must bow before the living God!

That means, first, that the chief characteristic of proper worship will be its solemnity. Solemnity means "characterized by quietness and earnest sobriety." Contrary to all the clamor that worship is dead unless the church fills it with all kinds of showy and loud devices which claim to invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit, the true believer clothes himself in sobriety and quietness when he comes into the presence of God in worship. "But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (Hab. 2:20). We come into the presence of the holy, sovereign, omnipotent God of heaven and earth! We come before Him with fear and trembling and we kiss His hand! We come to pay homage to the King of kings and Lord of lords. And we do this only in the way that He prescribes — nothing more and nothing less! Commenting on the second commandment in his *Institutes*, Calvin writes, "Wherefore, in general, he (God) calls us entirely away from the carnal frivolous observances which our stupid minds are wont to devise after forming some gross idea of the divine nature, while at the same time, he instructs us in the worship which is legitimate, namely, spiritual worship of his own appointment."

Many argue that these extra observances are not carnal or frivolous but indeed given praise and honor to God. When a famed soloist or vocal group leads the worship in song, they sing praise to God. They and those listening honor God! When the congregation involves itself in liturgical dance, when the service becomes open forum for panel discussion, when one stands before the congregation to speak in tongues, when God's people have opportunity to witness of their own religious experiences, they do all this to bring glory to God. These modern liturgical practices, it is contended, allow more congregational participation, making the worship much more lively, and

simultaneously bring praise, honor, and glory to God whom we serve.

But analyze this once. Is this really true? If we use these means, is our worship God-centered or man-centered?

Who receives more attention: God or man? We ought to understand well the rule of worship: nothing is allowed into the worship except that which is appointed by God in Scripture, lest we fall into the same empty and vain idol worship as the Roman Catholic Church.

We ought also to remember who it is that we serve. Only then will we heed the injunction of Scripture in Ecclesiastes 5:1, 2, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." The solemnity required of us in worship cannot be stated more clearly or sharply. Neither does this rob the worship service of its joy and life. Indeed, this is the very joy and life of worship, that we have opportunity to give glory and honor to God in the way He has prescribed.

In this regard it becomes clear as well that our worship must be characterized by simplicity and orderliness. Again, such a view of worship was re-established by the Swiss Reformation. The Lutheran Church as well as the Romish Church failed to worship in this way. The liturgy of these churches was detailed and bulky, with emphasis on liturgical ceremony and rites. The Swiss Reformers, however, stripped the liturgy of everything that the Word of God did not dictate. This must be the standing rule today as well, especially in light of a chapter such as I Corinthians 14. One receives the impression from

*I Corinthians 14. One receives the impression from*

this chapter that if there were any early New Testament church that enjoyed the innovations of worship free from the dictates of God's Word

it was this one. So filled with different observances was

this congregation that if one were to pass by on the outside they would think the congregation was mad (v. 23). Because of this, Paul enjoined this congregation in verse

40, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

Is that not natural too, in light of whom we worship? If we bow before the living God we will not be quick to do anything in worship unless He Himself tells us we ought to do it. We wait to hear what God will say. And what God commands us to do in our worship of Him is very simple and orderly. What brings glory to God? Congregational singing? Do it. Prayer? Use it. Confession? Speak it. Christian giving? Give freely in worship to God. Reading and instruction in God's Word? Never neglect it! These are the dictates of God's Word. Simple and orderly. Why do we need anything more? By these God-ordained means we give our solemn praise to God. We honor and adore Him.

Such worship makes those in whose hearts God works by His Spirit and grace happy and joyful. When they hear the call to prayer, they respond by going up to God's own house and bowing before Him. To the believer there is nothing more important than that the God whom he loves receives praise and thanksgiving. After all, it was for this purpose that he was chosen, created, and saved. To God be the glory in our worship! □



# Preaching in Reformed Worship

The will of God governs the church's worship. According to that will of God, at the heart of worship is to be the preaching of the gospel. The Reformed faith gives the central place in worship to the ministry of the Word.

We must worship God aright. But the right and proper worship of God is the worship of God *through* His Word. This is expressed in the well-known Reformation creed, the Heidelberg Catechism. The first question and answer of Lord's Day 35 teach that the Second Commandment requires that we worship God in no other way than He has commanded in His Word. Then the question is asked, "But may not images be tolerated in the churches as books to the laity?" The answer given is: "No: for we must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have his people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of his Word."

## The Reformation's Recovery of Preaching

The outstanding achievement of the Reformation of the 16th century was its restoration to the church of the pure preaching of the gospel. By the time of the Reformation, preaching had fallen into horrible neglect. The church did not busy herself in preaching. The clergy did not occupy themselves in sermon-making

and sermon delivery. And the people did not come to worship services to hear carefully worked-out expositions of God's Word.

Rather than being busy in the spread of the gospel, the leaders of the church either isolated themselves from God's people in some monastery or were preoccupied in pursuing political ambitions. Rather than laboring with the Word, clergymen were whiling away their time in idleness, drunkenness, and debauchery. Rather than hearing the Word of God regularly on the Lord's Day, the members of the church were contenting themselves to attend periodic Masses or to go off on extended pilgrimages. In the pre-Reformation church there was a silence, a deafening silence, of the hearing of the preaching of the Word.

The Reformers changed all that. Being, to a man, preachers themselves, they made it their objective to restore preaching to the church. This was their passion. This was their life-calling. This was their heartfelt service to God and to His church.

Luther emphasized the centrality of the preaching in worship in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church which emphasized the importance of the sacrifice of the Mass. While Luther did not minimize the importance of holy communion, he gave the chief place in worship to the preaching. In his writings, repeatedly he insists upon it that the congregation is not even to gather for worship unless the Word is preached.

In a treatise entitled, "Concern-

ing the Ordering of Divine Worship in the Congregation" (1523), Luther complained of the great and serious abuses that have crept into divine worship. "The first," he says, "is that God's Word has been silenced, and only reading (of liturgy, RC) and singing remain in the churches. This is the worst misuse." A little later in that same work he writes, "Now in order to do away with these misuses, it is necessary to know, first of all, that the Christian congregation never should assemble unless God's Word is preached ... no matter for how brief a time this may be. Therefore where God's Word is not preached, it is better that one neither sing, nor read, nor even come together." In his work on "The German Mass and Order of Service," Luther lays down the principle that "among Christians the whole service should center in the Word...."

As on most other issues, Calvin was in agreement with his mentor Luther on the centrality of the preaching in worship. He writes in his *Institutes*, (IV, III, 1), "Further, nothing fosters mutual love more fittingly than for men to be bound together with this bond: one is appointed pastor to teach the rest, and those bidden to be pupils receive the common teaching from one mouth.... The Lord has therefore bound His church together with a knot that He foresaw would be the strongest means of keeping unity, while He entrusted to men the teaching of salvation and everlasting life in order that through their hands it might be communicated to the rest." Calvin goes on, "... there is nothing more

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notable or glorious in the church than the ministry of the gospel, since it is the administration of the Spirit and of righteousness and of eternal life." And, he contends, "Christ has so ordered in His church, that if it (i.e., the pure preaching of the gospel) is removed the whole edifice must fall."

### Why the Importance of Preaching

Why is the preaching central to the worship of God? Why can there be no worship of God apart from the preaching of the Word? Why is preaching the chief task of church and minister alike? There are several reasons.

First of all, the Word is central because we *know* God through His Word. If we are to worship God, we must *know* Him. And we know Him through His Word. We do not know Him through images; we do not know Him through involved liturgical ceremonies; we do not know Him through frenzied religious services whose main appeal is to the emotions. But we know God through His Word, because it is in His Word that God has chosen to reveal Himself.

The preaching of the Word is central to worship, secondly, because it is the chief means of faith. This is the teaching of Scripture and this was the position of the Reformers. Nothing else in worship, not even the sacraments, has the importance of the preaching of the Word. The preaching is unique, because the preaching is the means both to work and to preserve faith. Even the sacraments derive their importance from the preaching. They depend on the preaching and serve only to reinforce the preaching of the gospel. Paul writes in Romans 10:17, "So then faith cometh by *hearing*, and hearing by the Word of God." And in I Corinthians 1:18 he says, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it (the preaching) is the power of God." The preaching, nothing else, is the power by which God saves men.

And thirdly, the preaching of the Word is central because in worship the people of God have *fellowship* with Him through His Word. That is the reality of worship! That is the miracle of worship — fellowship with God, standing in God's presence, before the face of God! But you do not have fellowship with God through an image. He is not present to you through ceremonies and religious rites, as impressive as they may be. God is present to His people and God has fellowship with His people *through His Word*.

*The preaching,  
nothing else,  
is the power by which  
God saves men.*

### A Warning to the Church Today

As was the case in the Roman Catholic Church prior to the Reformation, so it has become true of many Reformed churches today that the preaching no longer occupies the central place in worship. Over the years the time allotted to the preaching has been steadily reduced, so that ten or fifteen minutes is standard fare in most churches today. Substitutions have been made for the preaching, substitutions that are supposed to attract the unchurched and keep the young people in the church. The second service in many churches has been abandoned altogether. Little by little the Reformed churches have relinquished their distinctive heritage and moved closer and closer to Rome.

Neither are we exempt from dissatisfaction with the preaching. We are often quick to voice complaints about the manna with which God feeds us. Sermons are too long! The preaching is so doctrinal! Why does the preacher always have to be negative? Why can't our services be spiced up a little? Worship is so dull!

Have we forgotten what the preaching is? Have we forgotten what worship really is? Have we forgotten that not our will but God's will is determinative for worship?

And we suffer. There is the loss of assurance of salvation. Our lives are joyless and without purpose. There is no peace, no confidence, no good hope for the future. We are restless, worldly, self-centered. There are problems in our marriages. There are heartaches with our children. A price is paid for our contempt for the preaching of the gospel.

In the 62nd of the 95 Theses that Luther nailed to the chapel door in Wittenburg on October 31, 1517, he wrote: "The true treasure of the church is the holy gospel of the glory and grace of God." May that conviction be shared by each of us. May we continue to value this treasure as the Reformers valued it. And may we exercise ourselves on behalf of its preservation as they exercised themselves. □

The publick worship being begun, the people are wholly to attend upon it, forbearing to read any thing, except what the minister is then reading or citing; and abstaining much more from all public whisperings, conferences, salutations, or doing reverence to any person present, or coming in; as also from all gazing, sleeping, and other indecent behaviour, which may disturb the minister or people, or hinder themselves or others in the service of God.

*Directory for the Publick Worship of God*  
adopted by the Westminster Assembly



# Calvin's Liturgy

John Calvin condemned the Mass of Roman Catholicism in no uncertain terms. "Of all the idols, he knew none so grotesque as that in which the priest called down Christ into his hands by 'magical mumblings' and offered him anew on the sacrificial altar, while the people looked on in 'stupid amazement.'"<sup>1</sup> Calvin proceeded to formulate his ideas on worship (liturgy) by basing them on the clear warrant of Scripture and appealing to the invariable custom of the ancient church.<sup>2</sup> The Reformer concluded, "No assembly of the church should be held without the Word being preached, prayers being offered, the Lord's Supper administered, and alms given."<sup>3</sup>

Calvin's earliest efforts at reforming the worship of the church appeared in the 1536 edition of his *Institutes* (Chap. IV):

Now as far as the Lord's Supper is concerned, it could have been administered most becomingly if it were offered to the church quite often, and at least once a week. First then, it should commence with common prayers, after which a sermon should be delivered. Then, the bread and wine having been placed on the table, the minister should recite the Institution of the Supper, after which he should expound the promises which are left to us in it; at the same time he should excommunicate all those who are excluded from it by the Lord's prohibition. Afterward, prayer should be offered that the Lord, with the kindness wherewith

he has given us this sacred food, would also teach and prepare us to receive it with faith and thankfulness of heart, and in his mercy make us worthy of such a feast, inasmuch as we are not so of ourselves. At this time, either psalms should be sung or something should be read; and in becoming order the faithful should partake of the most holy banquet, the ministers breaking the bread and giving the cup. When the supper is finished, there should be an exhortation to sincere faith and the witness of the same, to love, and to a manner of life worthy of Christians. At the last, thanks should be given and praises sung to God. When these things are ended the church should be dismissed in peace.<sup>4</sup>

Calvin never deviated from these ideas, but only expanded on them in the final edition of the *Institutes*. Notice, Calvin insisted on the frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper. He wanted it to be celebrated every Lord's Day. During his first pastorate in Geneva the Reformers (Calvin and Farel) proposed in a document titled, "Articles Concerning the Organization of the Church and of Worship at Geneva," that the church would be edified by two means especially, the frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper and the exercise of discipline. Because of the "frailty of the people," the Reformers compromised on a schedule of monthly Communion. Later, in 1541, when Calvin returned to Geneva, he attempted to introduce the liturgy he used in Strassburg. Calvin again attempted to introduce weekly Communion, believing there was "nothing more useful to the church than the Lord's Supper." God himself, Calvin believed, added

the Supper to his Word and, therefore, it was a perilous matter to separate them.<sup>5</sup> The Council of Geneva, much to Calvin's dismay, insisted upon a quarterly celebration of Communion. Calvin continued to express his dissatisfaction, declaring as late as 1561, "Our custom is defective."

As is evident from his statement in the *Institutes* of 1536, Calvin's Communion liturgy contained four fundamental elements. These elements, the Protestant Reformed reader will recognize, are retained intact in our own *Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper*. They are: 1. Rehearsal of the Lord's institution as the warrant of the sacrament. 2. Proclamation of the Lord's promises which relate to His ordinance, and supply meaning and reality to its signs. 3. Excommunication of obdurate sinners. 4. Stress upon worthy participation in the sacrament and holiness of life.

With a couple of exceptions, only Psalms were sung, and that too without instrumental accompaniment. Concerning instruments Calvin believed, "... that they formed part of that system of training under the law to which the church was subjected in its infancy" and, "... we should not foolishly imitate a practice which was intended only for God's ancient people."<sup>6</sup> (Unsigned, incidentally, is grateful that Calvin's view on this matter did not prevail in the Dutch Reformed tradition.)

Calvin's order of worship began with the minister speaking the majestic words, "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Amen." This was followed by a prayer of confession.

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This was a brief form prayer read by the minister while the congregation knelt.<sup>7</sup> This was followed by the minister reading some Scriptural promises of forgiveness, after which the absolution was pronounced by the minister, "Let each one of you acknowledge himself truly a sinner, humbling himself before God, and believe that the heavenly Father desires to be gracious to him in Jesus Christ. To all who in this manner repent and seek Jesus Christ for their salvation, I declare absolution in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."<sup>8</sup> The absolution was not used in Geneva. After the Confession of Sin the congregation rose to sing the Ten Commandments as a guide for the grateful obedience of the forgiven Christian.

During the singing the minister left the table for the pulpit. There he prepared for the reading of Scripture and preaching by offering a prayer for illumination. This and the prayer of application after the sermon were the only "free" prayers in Calvin's liturgy. All the other prayers were form prayers. And, even for these two "free" prayers, Calvin offered the ministers several models. After the prayer of application, the minister offered the congregational prayer. This prayer concluded with the Lord's Prayer,

which in some congregations was sung by the congregation.

Then, the congregation rose to sing the Apostles' Creed. At this point the congregation was dismissed with the benediction of Aaron, "The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace," and with a word about alms, "Remember Jesus Christ in his little ones."

In Geneva, on the four Sundays when Communion was celebrated, it occurred after the sermon. When the Lord's Supper was finished, and before the benediction as given above was pronounced, the congregation sang the Song of Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace ... For mine eyes have seen thy salvation...."

Calvin's principles of liturgy and the essentials of his order of worship remain in use in the worship services of the Protestant Reformed Churches. There are some differences, viz., we do not kneel to pray, we do not sing either the Apostles' Creed or the Ten Commandments, we do not sing the Song of Simeon after Communion, we do not have an absolution pronounced to the congregation, we have some but not

nearly as many form prayers as did Calvin, and we do use instrumental accompaniment in the singing of the Psalms. And certainly our churches, with Calvin, make every effort to base our worship on the "clear warrant of Scripture," appealing to the "invariable custom of the ancient church."

May God grant us grace to continue in this so that we worship Him who is Spirit, in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). □

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> In addition to Thompson's book and the pertinent sections of Calvin's *Institutes*, the reader who wishes to pursue this subject further ought to read, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition*, by James Hastings Nichols. These books are in the Seminary Library.

<sup>3</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV, xvii, 44.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by Bard Thompson in *Liturgies of the Western Church*, pp. 185-186.

<sup>5</sup> Thompson, p. 190.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, Psalm 144:9 and 149:3.

<sup>7</sup> For a copy of this prayer cf. Nichols, p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Nichols, p. 43.

Rev. Dale Kuiper

## The Good Practice of Two Services, One Given to Catechism Preaching

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"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Hebrews 10:25

How striking, that while the apostles were still living there were church members who neglected some or all of the worship services. The writer to the Hebrews makes clear that it is the calling not only of the elders but of the membership in general to exhort in regard to this



spiritual laxity. Urgency is sounded in the words, "so much the more as ye see the day approaching." That is the day of Christ's return! The days prior to His return are evil days, days of persecution, lawlessness, false prophets, and apostasy. Only the exposition and application of the Word of God is sufficient to comfort, warn, and correct in such fearful days. And if the church needed to heed these words two thousand years ago, how much greater the urgency of heeding them today!

Shall God set a table of heavenly benefits before His people, call them to that table, and His people not come? Today attendance at many churches is falling off, and attendance at the second service in many cases can only be called shameful. As those who were bidden to a great banquet in Jesus' parable in Luke 14:15ff. had all kinds of excuses for not coming (I have bought a piece of ground, or five yoke of oxen, or married a wife), so there are all kinds of excuses for absence from church today. It's too hot or too cold. The pews are too hard. The minister is long-winded or too doctrinal. I went this morning. I have school work to finish. I'm tired. I want to catch a game or a special on television, etc. Do people who limp along on these excuses know with whom they have to do? And do they understand what takes place in preaching services? We have to do with God, who makes it possible that almost without exception we can be in church twice. And in the preaching of the gospel, not a mere man is holding forth, but Jesus Christ is speaking through His ambassadors (John 10:16; Rom. 10:1-17; Eph. 4:21). It is our privilege in the worship services not merely to hear about Christ, but to hear Christ Himself speaking to us.

Already in A.D. 109, according to a letter written by the unbeliever

Pliny to the Emperor Trajan after investigating the Christian church in Lythania, "the Christians assembled on an appointed day (Sunday) at sunrise.... Afterwards (at evening) they assembled again to eat ordinary

and innocent food (the agape)."<sup>1</sup> During the

Middle Ages the preaching of the gospel waned, and ritual and sacerdotalism held sway. Often the priests did not preach at all for several

months — which may have been just as well, since most of them had no theological training and many of them could not read or write. The little preaching that did take place was done by itinerants who usually spoke out-of-doors. We do read of Jacob Mene of Cologne, late 1400s, that "it was Mene's practice to preach a sermon from seven to eight in the morning, and again after the noon meal."<sup>2</sup>

The Reformation of the early sixteenth century saw the church return to a simple style of worship with an emphasis on biblical preaching. Regarding Martin Luther, Schaff writes, "He gave the most prominent place to the sermon, which was another departure from previous custom. He arranged three services on Sunday, each with a sermon: early in the morning, chiefly for servants; the mass at nine or ten; and in the afternoon a discourse from a text in the Old Testament."<sup>3</sup> From the Ecclesiastical Ordinances, a kind of church order for the churches of Geneva, written in 1541,

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Christian Church* by Philip Schaff. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963. Vol. I, p. 222.

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 672.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., Vol. VII, p. 488.

<sup>4</sup> *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin* by Philip Hughes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966. p. 40.

we learn that Calvin and his fellow pastors prescribed "a service in the morning, catechism for instruction of little children at noon, and a second sermon in the afternoon at three o'clock."<sup>4</sup> Three sermons were to be preached during the week as well, so that five regular ministers and three assistant ministers were required in the city. The Reformation was not only a return to the doctrine and liturgy of the apostolic era, but it was a return even in regard to the frequency of the church's official worship.

Thus from apostolic times through the time of the Reformation, when circumstances were fairly normal, the church gathered in public worship twice on the Lord's Day. What accounts for this uniformity of practice? On the one hand there are the limitations imposed by the saints' ability to concentrate on and assimilate the truth of Scripture, and the pastor's time to prepare sermons adequately and have the necessary energy to preach. These are natural considerations, to be sure, but important nonetheless. Sermons were thought necessary in every service of worship, and rightly so. Chadwick records that in Torgau, Strasbourg, and Rostock the total services in a week could number twelve, and in the year 1640 fifteen hundred. A certain Pastor Herberger complained, "We preachers preach ourselves to death."<sup>5</sup> On the other hand there is the need of the people of God to hear the gospel, commune with God in prayer, sing His praises, and fellowship with one another in God's house. If a city or village had no preacher, members visited other parishes that did. Nor was the lack of preachers rare. In 1597 in the Arch-deaconry of Norfolk there were eighty-eight churches that received only four sermons, and eight churches that never

<sup>5</sup> *The Reformation* by Owen Chadwick. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965, p. 420.

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 418.



heard a single sermon. "But the appetite for sermons was avid. Chaderton once preached for two hours, and then said that he would stop as he was trying their patience; but there were cries of 'For God's sake, go on! We beg you go on!' So he continued for another hour."<sup>6</sup> On average the sermon lasted an hour, with the hour-glass on the pulpit keeping the preacher in check.

Two services on a Lord's Day fits. It fits the time and energy available for gathering in worship. It fits the people's needs. And it fits the pastor's time in the study during the week, and his energy to proclaim in a lively manner. Who would dare to introduce an overture to reduce the number of services from two to one? What principle or practical grounds could be offered? Who would dare to put his congregation or denomination out of step with the church of the past two thousand years? Why, then, the discontent in the churches regarding two services? The discontented ought not to look at the practice, but at the practitioners!

It is hard to pinpoint the reason for the wretched attendance many churches suffer in the second services. Is this the fault of the pulpit or of the pew? Likely, both are at fault. Poor preaching causes the congregation to wonder why they troubled themselves to get dressed and drive to church; their souls are not being fed. Many stop coming, and others raise a clamor for something, almost *anything*! In response, and in desperation, worship committees arrange for crowd-drawing and crowd-pleasing entertainments. An evangelist is hired periodically to revive the congregation. Musical groups are brought in to please the youth. Films are shown and plays are given to hold the attention of those raised on television. As liturgical innovations multiply, the devil laughs and the angels weep. Hard to say who is to blame for the silencing of

preaching in the second service. Can the death of the morning service be far behind?

On the whole, our churches are full in the evening services. The youth are to be commended for coming up to God's house twice on the Lord's Day. But let us not rest on our laurels. When there are empty seats, when some do stay away a number of times, let us "exhort one another; and so much the more as we see the day approaching!" And if we find ourselves preferring other houses to the house of God, other books to the Bible, other tables to the Lord's table, and other activities to the hour of prayer, let us take alarm! Confess the laxity, turn from the worldmindedness, root out the spiritual problem that is in us. Earthly life can get no better, or rise any higher, than to be sitting with the saints at the feet of Jesus, our chief Teacher and Prophet.

The practice of conducting two preaching services on Sunday spread, after the Reformation, from Germany and Switzerland to other European countries including the Netherlands. Through wars and under persecution these services continued in the Reformed churches in the northern lowlands. Today it is reported, sadly, that many Reformed churches in the Netherlands have only one service, and some have closed their doors altogether. But through various emigrations from the Netherlands to North America, the practice of morning and evening services has survived, and is thriving among us. The Church Order of

Dordt, and subsequent decisions and documents, require this of us. The call letter in use among us stipulates that the minister shall preach twice on the Lord's Day. The Lord's Supper is to be administered every

two or three months, preceded by a preparatory sermon and followed by an applicatory sermon, implying two weekly services. The questions for church visitation contain the inquiry

whether the minister preaches twice on the Lord's Day according to the original form of these questions. But there is one respect in which the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and we differ from the church in its previous history. Preaching the Heidelberg Catechism is required in one of the two services.

After the Heidelberg Catechism was published in Germany (1563), Calvinistic churches in various countries began to preach the Catechism in their services. When news of this reached the Netherlands in 1574, a Dutch synod decided to allow the practice. It became mandatory for all the Reformed churches according to Article 61 of the Synod of 's Gravenhage (1586). With minor revisions this article was adopted by the Synod of Dordt (1618-19) and is found in further-revised form as Article 68 of our Church Order. Originally, the Catechism was to be preached in the afternoon service, further evidence that two services were required in the churches. But many of the people did not appreciate Catechism preaching. Some thought it too doctrinal. Others objected that it was the preaching of the word of man. Many began to stay home in the afternoon to register their objections.

The situation was serious enough for it to appear on the agenda of the great Synod of Dordt. Dordt discovered the reasons for poor attendance at these services to be: ministers failing to hold services at all in the afternoon, people insisting on working or playing on Sunday afternoon, the Arminians objecting to Catechism preaching(!), and the government failing to maintain Sunday as the day of rest and allowing certain field labors.<sup>7</sup> The Synod maintained the decision of 1586 and stated that ministers who failed to preach the Catechism were

<sup>7</sup> *The Church Order Commentary* by VanDellen and Monsma. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1941. pp. 278-279.



to be censured. Ministers were to continue these services even if their families were the only people in attendance. And the church visitors were instructed to take close note of this matter in every congregation.

We generally preach the Catechism in the morning service, when minds are fresh and people are most alert. But some of the old cavils against Catechism preaching can be heard in the churches today. Too much doctrine! Have they never heard that the first great profit of having the inspired Scriptures is *doctrine*? The time has indeed come "when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (II Tim. 4:3). In these days of shallow "Christianity," of ignorance and indifference, of subjective feelings, of sharing and being sincere, the churches need to hear

"the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in the Heidelberg Catechism." Then all the counsel of God is preached, and it is preached according to a standard adopted by the churches and agreed to by the membership.

How the Catechism is to be preached, i.e., what use is to be made of the Scriptures in this regard, we will not treat. Recent articles on these pages have done so. But that Catechism preaching is not preaching the Word of God is a charge that must be answered here. First, look at the proof-texts in the margins of the Catechism. Every phrase and teaching is solidly grounded in the Word of God, and many more texts could be adduced. Next, look at the many quotes from the Bible to be found in the questions and answers themselves. Then, notice the biblical terminology or vo-

cabulary that is employed. But, above all, see that the truth that the Catechism sets forth is biblical truth! Let the preacher show that clearly, with a proof-text here and there, with a biblical example at the appropriate time, that the congregation is aware, yes, is convinced, that the Word of God is being preached. For when we rightly preach the Catechism, we are preaching the Word of God as surely as when we preach on a text or passage from the Bible.

This practice of truly Reformed churches does not equate the Bible and the Catechism in the area of infallibility and authority. This practice does appreciate the biblical truth that the Catechism contains. Are there errors in the Catechism? That is possible, since it is a document written by men. Have you found one? Show it to your consistory. Do not count on it. □

*Prof. Herman Hanko*

# Worship the Lord in Psalms

## Psalm-singing and Reformation

Whenever God brought reformation to the church of Jesus Christ, a return to Psalm singing was a part of it. This ought not to surprise us. It lies in the nature of reformation.

True reformation in the church always has certain distinguishing characteristics, one of which is a return to what Jeremiah called "the old paths." Reformation is a return to these old paths in doctrine, church government, and liturgy. Any movement in the church which lacks

this characteristic cannot properly be designated church reformation.

The singing of Psalms characterized the church's worship in its early new dispensational history. This is not surprising, for the Psalms were God's gift to the church precisely for singing, and the Psalm bundle was all the church had. Two things are important here: the church sang; and the church sang *Psalms*.

Gradually the Roman Catholic church drifted away from congregational singing and from Psalm singing. Congregational singing was replaced by choirs. Again, that such a thing should happen is not surprising, for the Roman Catholic Church denied the priesthood of all believers. That is, the church de-

nied that the people of God possessed the Spirit, and Paul makes it clear that one must be filled with the Spirit to sing: "Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms..." (Eph. 19:18, 19). It is not even so surprising that the Romish Church lost the Psalms, for the Psalms, if sung in the church, will keep the church on the path of the truth. The Psalms no longer expressed Romish theology, and so songs were invented to express erroneous doctrines.

There is a reciprocal relation between heresy in the church and a drift from Psalm singing. I am not contending that no other factors enter when a church loses the truth. But surely one factor is the loss of

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Psalm singing. It is a fact that in post-reformation times heresy was sung into the church. But, as I say, the relation is reciprocal. A church which drifts from the truth finds the Psalms an inadequate vehicle to express her lust for wrong doctrines.

The Reformation was a return to the old paths: the old paths of the doctrines of free and sovereign grace; the old paths of biblical church government; the old paths of worship in which the *congregation* sang Psalms. Calvin, almost from the outset of his work in Geneva, insisted on congregational singing of Psalms. One author goes so far as to say that congregational singing was "one of the four foundations for the reform of the church." He goes on to say: "Calvin placed singing at the heart of his theology of the Church. The reason is not far to seek. To put it with the utmost simplicity: The Church is the place where the Gospel is preached; Gospel is good news; good news makes people happy; happy people sing."

So it has been throughout post-reformation history. In the decline of the State Church in the Netherlands, choirs were introduced and hymns were sung. In *De Afscheiding*, led by Henry DeCock in 1834, the church returned to congregational singing of Psalms. In the years prior to 1857 the Reformed Church of America let choirs do part of the singing and all sang hymns. When the Christian Reformed Church began, the saints in Holland returned to Psalm singing. In the course of time the Christian Reformed Church drifted from her Psalm-singing heritage and thought choirs would be nice. In 1924 our churches returned to congregational singing of Psalms. In every case it was a part of church reformation. And church reformation always included a return to Psalm singing.

Those who agitate for the introduction of hymns and choirs in the

church or tolerate such innovations ought to remember that such innovations always have been a part of departure from the faith.

### Psalms and Worship

It is not our purpose to argue in detail the biblical grounds for congregational singing of Psalms. A great deal of literature has been written on the subject, and the interested reader can study the arguments for himself.

A few aspects to this question are, however, worth our while to consider.

It is a distinctive and emphatic teaching of the Scriptures that the *congregation worships*. This is what the most important part of keeping the Sabbath Day is all about. The congregation of Jesus Christ comes together to worship God. They are, on the wings of worship, transported into God's dwelling place in the heavens. In God's presence they worship God. There are different aspects of that worship. In some parts of the worship the minister leads the congregation in its speech to God — as in the public prayers. In some parts of worship the congregation listens attentively in worship as God speaks to the saints — as in the preaching. In some parts of the worship the congregation itself actively and on its own engages in worship — as happens in the singing. Suddenly the minister is only a part of the congregation. Overwhelmed by the wonder of being in God's presence, the congregation joins in speaking to God — in singing. It is the only opportunity for the congregation so to speak.

This must not be taken from her. Choirs take it away. Choirs are for show, for entertainment, even for edifying. But this may be done in programs. Choirs may not steal from the congregation what is her own. A congregation ought to be jealous of this part of her worship and refuse to allow any choir or so-

loist to steal her own worship.

That the congregation sings is so crucial because the congregation worships in the office of believers. Are only soloists able to worship? Are only choirs able to worship? Cannot God's people worship? Rome denied that God's people were themselves the prophets, priests, and kings who know the Lord, can speak to Him, and can rule in His name. The people of God function in the office of believers because they have the Spirit. "Be filled with the Spirit ... singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:18, 19).

Many powerful arguments have been set forward by others in defense of exclusive Psalmody. Psalm singing is biblical. Psalm singing is the heritage of the Reformation. Psalm singing is done by the church which is determined to remain faithful to the Reformation. And saints in apostatizing churches, eager to return to the heritage of the Reformation and walk again in the old paths, throw out the hymns and return to the Psalms.

The point that needs emphasis here is a striking difference between Psalms and most hymns. It is characteristic of most (though not all) hymns that they are either anthropocentric or wrongly Christocentric. That is, they concentrate in man, man's experiences, man's importance; or they concentrate in a Christ who is a friend in some sloppy sentimental way but is far from the eternal Son of God through whom God reveals Himself.

The difference between Psalms and hymns is a crucial difference between apostasy in a church (accompanied by choirs and hymn singing) and reformation in a church (accompanied by congregational Psalm singing).

The theocentric character of the Psalms is exactly comparable to the one crucial issue which always necessitates reformation: the issue between sovereign and particular grace and salvation by human merit and works.



It is a striking fact of history that the times when the truths of sovereign and particular grace were strongly and consistently maintained were few and far between; but when these times were present, they were times of church reformation. The reformation of Calvin and Luther — over against Rome; the great Synod of Dordt — in a death struggle with Arminianism; the truths of sovereign and particular grace in DeCock — over against the humanism of the State Church; the struggle to defend particular grace over against those who were determined to make it "common."

Hymn singing is, all too often, singing silly songs about man or sloppy songs about Christ. They go along with the constant drift in the church towards Pelagianism and its harlot sister, Arminianism. The robust, powerful, weighty, theocentric Psalms — they belong to the mighty battle in defense of sovereign and particular grace.

### The Psalms and the Christian

The two crucial New Testament passages which enjoin on the congregation of Christ to sing Psalms in worship (Eph. 5:18, 19 and Col. 3:16) have some interesting things to say about these Psalms in connection with our singing.

One of them is that singing is by being filled with the Spirit and by possessing the indwelling of the Word of Christ. Those two expressions really mean the same thing, for we have the Word of Christ by means of Christ's Spirit.

Christ's Spirit inspired the Word of Christ and caused it to be written in the Scriptures. Christ's Spirit puts that Word in our hearts, that same inspired Word of the Scriptures, so that it becomes our own confession. When Christ's Spirit puts Christ's Word in our hearts then, and then only, are we able to sing.

This is a powerful and unassail-

able argument for exclusive Psalmody, but it is also a striking description of what singing ought to be. Some have argued that the singing itself is not important, only the words sung. One may bellow or roar, whisper or mutter, as long as he concentrates on the words. Calvin tended to be suspicious of beautiful singing lest it detract from the words.

*... the Psalms  
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own biography  
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life.*

The words are indeed the important thing. But the singing is also important. One can express things in music which can be expressed in no other way. We do not sing too well here upon earth, for our singing voices are rather poor. But in heaven the singing too will count. And the singing counts now. God has given marvelous gifts in music. The tune, the harmony, the cadence, the poetry, the rhythm, the tempo — all make singing what it truly ought to be. When words and music are perfectly fitted and when the church sings, then God's truth is expressed in ways in which only music can do it.

Finally, the Psalms are so crucially important because the Psalms are that unique book in Scripture which gives us God's own biography of the Christian life. It is all there — from the hand of God. There you will find our only comfort in life and in death, for time and for eternity, for body and for soul — "Whom have I, Lord, in heaven, but Thee?" There you will find that this comfort is ours by way of knowledge of misery — "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned." There you will find all the truths of deliverance through Christ from His suffering throughout His life to His cross (Ps. 22), resurrection (Ps. 16), ascension (Ps. 68), and exaltation (Ps. 2, 72, 110). There you will find gratitude — gratitude in prayer (Ps. 5) and gratitude in an obedient walk according to God's law (Ps. 119). It is all there — all the sufferings, the trials, the temptations, the heartaches,

the agony, the pain; but, also the joy, the aching wonder of fellowship with God, the awe of a creation singing its doxologies, the quiet serenity of a soul brought in from stormy seas to the quiet calm of the harbor.

It is God's biography of us — a spiritual biography in which every line brings a response, every word an echo, every melody a rush of feeling. We need the Psalms. Hymns have their own experiences of life; but they are man's interpretation and so often wrong in all sorts of ways. In the Psalms we have God's biography. Then we understand our life as it ought to be understood.

A Reformed church of the Reformation is a church where the congregation of Jesus Christ sings the Psalms. □

That the Psalms in depth of spiritual process by far transcend that which afterwards presented itself as church song, or endeavored to place itself above the Psalms.

That the hymns almost nowhere insinuated themselves into the churches, but they soon revealed the inclination first to replace the Psalms, and afterwards to put them aside.

That in the Psalms resounds the abiding, eternal keynote of the godly mind, while all hymns bear a temporal character, stamping the one-sided conception of the moment in the church of God.

That the hymn almost everywhere has led to all kinds of choir-singing, while the congregation finally fell silent.

That in the struggle between hymn and Psalm, the indifferent in the congregation all took part against the Psalm and for the hymn, while the godly more and more chose for the Psalm and against the hymn.

*Dr. Abraham Kuyper,  
on singing at church, in  
Onze Eeredienst  
(Our Public Worship)*



# The Lord's Day

"Day of rest faces test," said the headline in the *Holland Sentinel* of July 25, 1994. Neither the headline nor the accompanying article presents any surprises. Clearly there is a wide divergence of views concerning Sunday as a day of rest. Clearly also, rapid changes in views and practices have taken place in the past five to ten years, especially in those communities which honored Sunday as a special day of rest.

The different views (quoted in this paper) of Sunday as a day of rest varied between those of our own Rev. W. Bruinsma of First Prot. Ref. Church of Holland, and of Yohannes Mengsteab of Zion Lutheran Church. Rev. W. Bruinsma is quoted as insisting, "The day is the Lord's day that he sanctified for use.... The Sabbath is desecrated — buying and selling, recreation. People go to church once, even when it's offered twice.... The Bible says that in the last days people are going to be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God...." Yohannes Mengsteab insisted, however, "It does not matter what day to do worship. We could meet on Friday if the congregation wanted to."

What is the "Reformed" view of the Lord's Day? The topic seems to assume that there is a single "Reformed" position in opposition to

views of other churches. Fact is that there are two widely divergent views on the question — both claiming to represent what is properly Reformed.

The Reformed Ecumenical Synod was requested by the Reformed Churches of Australia to make a study of the "exegetical, doctrinal and pastoral aspects" of the fourth commandment. An appointed study committee presented a majority and minority report to the Synod of 1972 (Sydney, Australia). That Synod appointed another committee with a more specific mandate to report to the Synod of 1976 (Capetown). That committee likewise was divided and presented two differing reports. The Synod of 1976 carefully evaded the differences when it adopted the following:

"1. That Synod express its thanks to the Study Committees for their reports and the Free Church of Scotland for its communication.

"2. That Synod, recognizing the varying viewpoints on this issue that have existed for many centuries among the Reformed churches, advocate a brotherly forbearance on the part of member churches towards each other, free of a judgmental attitude, on this issue.

"3. That Synod take note of the Material (the two Study Reports and the Communication) and the evaluation, and recommend them to member churches for study and appropriate action.

"4. That Synod adopt the Message to the Churches."

In reading the two lengthy reports of the minority and majority committees, it becomes very apparent that there is a great difference of opinion among the Reformed churches, and, according to these reports, a difference that has existed also through the New Testament age. Calvin himself is quoted as supporting both (conflicting) views.

The majority report of the committee insists on a loose view of Sunday. These quote Calvin from the *Institutes* II, viii, 34, where he taught that "it really does not matter which day it is, just as long as there is one; but in the preceding paragraph (II, viii, 33), he serenely states that the ancients substituted the Sunday for the sabbath.

"When the Anabaptists accuse him of being a Judaist, he writes: 'We do not celebrate it with most minute formality, as a ceremony ... but we adopt it as a necessary remedy for preserving order in the Church'" (R.E.S., Acts 1976, p. 216).

The conclusion of this report is, "Nowhere in the New Testament, however, do we find the idea that the celebration of the day of the Lord has come in the place of the celebration of the sabbath, or that the Sunday and the sabbath are essentially one. On the contrary, the New Testament states that there is now freedom in regard to the sabbath, which belongs to the Old Testament shadow. The celebration of Sunday, which goes back to the oldest church, possesses an essentially different character than the celebration

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of the sabbath. The necessity of Sunday celebration is not based on the sabbath commandment, but is associated with the need for mutual encouragement and admonition in the church" (p. 233).

The report finally states, "That for many centuries the Sunday has also been a day of leisure time has been a rich blessing. Although it is not a matter of divine command, our Sunday rest is, nevertheless, a divine gift. It may one day be again taken away from us (e.g., by an anti-Christian government). Then we would no longer have the duty to abstain from our daily labor. However, the church must continue to assemble together on that day" (p. 236).

These, then, who claim to be sons of the Reformation insist that Sunday is a nice time to worship God — but not an essential time. It is nice to abstain from labor, but it is not essential.

The minority report supports that view of Sunday to which we traditionally have held. The report recommends that, "The RES calls upon its member churches to continue observing the Lord's Day as a day of rest, worship and celebration, recognizing it as a 'creation-redemption ordinance' whose festive character has been shaped by the historical-redemptive continuities and discontinuities of God's way with his world as revealed in Scripture; a Day which, looking backward, commemorates God's rest as the climax of a finished creation, the interim redemption of God's people at the Exodus; the transforming power of Christ's resurrection, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; a Day which, looking forward, eagerly anticipates the eternal sabbath rest which awaits the people of God upon a new earth under new heavens" (p. 205-6).

The minority report concludes by reminding, "The New Testament, rather than listing rules for the Lord's Day, highlights the freedom we have in Christ. In that freedom we must decide what is compatible

with the rest of the Lord's Day in the light of the guidelines of the Old Testament and the example of our Lord. Christians have liberty regarding certain debatable things, among which are activities which some Christians deem permissible on the Lord's Day and others deem not permissible" (p. 208).

Whatever some "Reformed" teachers present, we must continue to maintain that Sunday is the New Testament "Sabbath," the "day of rest," the day which must be kept holy according to the fourth commandment. The fourth command itself ties the Sabbath of creation with that mentioned in the commandment.

The ten commands were written by God's hand in stone. Nine without question remain fully valid for the New Testament age as well as the Old. It would be very strange if the fourth could be part of the type and shadow of the Old Testament — no longer valid for today.

We must follow the tradition of those Reformed fathers who insisted on maintaining Sunday as Sabbath — a day of rest in which one refrains from labor. This position is becoming ever more difficult to maintain since many businesses today insist on Sunday labor. Observance, however, is not merely a negative thing. We are positively to worship God with His people in His house of prayer. We are to contemplate through the day God's marvelous works — and especially that work of Calvary. We are to perform works of mercy such as visitation of the sick and widows.

The consequences of adopting the more liberal position concerning the Sunday-sabbath are clearly evident. Sunday labor is becoming increasingly popular with "Reformed" Christians. The same is true with respect to Sunday activities: Sunday becomes a family day to be spent at the beach or some entertainment cen-

ter. It becomes a time to enjoy sports on television or even by attending the event itself. At the same time, those churches maintaining this view of Sunday find that not enough people attend a second service to make it worthwhile. Even the one service in the morning shows increasing problems with attendance.

If one can "worship" God every day of the week and in all that one does, why bother with church services?

Faithful observance of Sunday as the day of rest, the Lord's Day, has its spiritual rewards. One is renewed for another week of labor. There is increase

in a knowledge of God's Word — and consequently also comfort in what that Word declares. To lose the Sabbath would be to lose all for which the Reformation stands. To maintain it properly, not legalistically, promotes spirituality and godliness.

Prof. D. Engelsma, in his pamphlet, "Remembering the Lord's Day," begins by stating, "The Dutch have called Sunday, 'God's dike.' In the Netherlands, the dike keeps back the threatening seas and, thus, preserves the Hollanders from watery destruction. So, the Lord's Day holds back the raging waves of materialism, earthlimindedness, and pleasure-madness that threaten to engulf the Church and the Christian." Those who would pursue this subject more in detail, would do well to read the whole of that pamphlet.

The Reformation gave back the Bible to the church. Proper observance of Sunday gives God's people the opportunity to hear in the preaching and through study at home what God has to say to His people in that Word. □

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*Sermons on Job*, by John Calvin. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993. 751 pp. \$49.95 (hard-cover). *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries: Daniel I (Chapters 1-6)* by John Calvin. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company and Carlisle, Cumbria: The Paternoster Press, 1993. 300 pp. \$24.99 (paper). *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries*, by T. H. L. Parker. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993. 239 pp. \$16.99 (paper). *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, by T. H. L. Parker. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993. 257 pp. \$16.99 (paper). [Reviewed by the Editor.]

Several important, profitable books by and about John Calvin have recently been published.

The Banner of Truth has published the 159 sermons on Job that Calvin preached in 1554 and 1555. The worth of this big book can hardly be overestimated. It gives us the preaching of Calvin as he delivered the sermons. The sermons were taken down by a professional scribe hired for this purpose. The book is full of biblical exposition, sound doctrine, and exhortation to a godly life. Pastors will learn something about good, Reformed preaching. All Christians will be edified. Hear Calvin on Job 1:12, "And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD":

Here at the first blush a man might marvel, why God did so give over his servant Job to Satan's pleasure: is it meet that the Devil should have such credit with God, that when he craveth leave to work us mischief, God should grant it him. It seemeth that God favoreth him, and that he maketh sport with us in the mean while as with a tennis ball. But let us mark, that when God granteth Satan this thing, he doth

it not to pleasure him, neither is he moved of any favor that he beareth towards him: but because he hath ordained it in his own purpose: he is not moved by Satan's suit, nor persuaded by him to suffer Job to be punished. He had already so determined in his own purpose (p. 21).

Since this is a facsimile edition of the translation by Englishman Arthur Golding in 1574, the book is cast in Elizabethan English and uses the old English script. In no time, however, the attentive reader figures out that "v" is "u," "u" is "v," and a letter that looks for all the world like "f" is really "s."

Adding to the value is a good table of contents (by 16th century Golding) that shows where in "this Booke" the "principall matters (are) conteyned."

Calvin's *Daniel* commentary is the first of two volumes on Daniel. This volume gives Calvin's lectures on Daniel 1-6. A subsequent volume will give his lectures on chapters 7-12. This volume is also the firstfruits of the ambitious project by Rutherford House to provide a new translation in English of all of Calvin's Old Testament commentaries. The Old Testament commentaries were last translated into English in the 19th century under the auspices of the Calvin Translation Society. This is the translation that was published by Eerdmans in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The commentary on Daniel published by Eerdmans in 1948 was the translation by one Thomas Myers in 1852. In his outstanding work, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries*, T. H. L. Parker is critical of that 19th century translation of Calvin's Old Testament commentaries:

The Old Testament volumes are in general badly edited. In few instances are the foot-notes at all helpful; often they are downright silly. The exceptions shine as rare gems. The editor of Genesis adds to the

score against him that he omits anything that might bring a blush to the cheek of the young person — Gen. 19:31ff. and 38:10 are left out *in toto*. The translating in most of the volumes is unsatisfactory, not in the sense of gross incorrectness but in its imprecision. This was, it may be suspected, often deliberate, in their effort to make Calvin a good "Evangelical" of the mid-nineteenth century breed.... The truth was that the editors were not interested in presenting a sound edition of their author but only in supplying commentaries on the Bible that should carry the authority of Calvin's name and therefore be of polemical service (pp. 2, 3).

Calvin's New Testament commentaries have recently been retranslated into English. Now the Old Testament commentaries are being similarly published in a new English translation. The general editor of the project is D. F. Wright assisted by D. F. Kelly. Consultant editors are T. H. L. Parker, J. H. Leith, J. I. Packer, and R. S. Wallace. Contributing editors are R. C. Gamble, D. C. Lachman, A. N. S. Lane, and J. G. McConville.

The new translation of Calvin's *Daniel* from the original Latin is by Calvin scholar, T. H. L. Parker. The translation is faithful and readable. Calvin's lectures to his students (and this is what the Daniel commentary is), though helpful to the work of the seminarian and the pastor, are clear and instructive to the layman. Worthwhile simply as Calvin's explanation of the Holy Scriptures, the commentary on Daniel has special importance by virtue of its treating God's Word on the conflict between the kingdom of antichrist and the church in the last days. Commenting on the refusal of Daniel's three friends to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's image as recorded in Daniel 3:16-18, Calvin said:

This is a most noteworthy passage. For first this reply is to be remarked: when men tempt us to



deny God, we must shut our ears and admit no deliberation. For as soon as we even debate whether it is lawful to leave his pure worship we begin to injure God severely, whatever our reason may be. Would that it were well known to all that God's glory is so transcendent, so vital, that everything must be put in its proper place when there is any thought of diminishing or obscuring that glory. But today the fallacy deceives very many into thinking it right to weigh in the scales, so to say, whether it might be best to swerve from the true worship of God for a time when some advantage on the other side suggests itself (p. 131).

The commentary exposes the suggestion by the theonomists that Calvin was postmillennial as the merest nonsense. In his explanation of the dream of the great image in Daniel 2, Calvin distinguished the kingdom of Christ — the little stone — from the other four kingdoms as heavenly, spiritual, and not visible or external. It is identical with the church. In the preface to the commentary, Calvin declared that "the throne and scepter of Christ is the preaching of the gospel."

The book is handsome in appearance featuring Holbein's flattering portrait of Calvin. The completed set will be impressive.

*Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* and *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* by T. H. L. Parker are companion pieces. In these volumes, the noted Calvin scholar — and sympathetic spirit — analyzes Calvin's commentaries on the books of the Bible. The work on the New Testament commentaries is more technical. It treats of such matters as the history of the writing and translating of the New Testament commentaries and the Greek text used by Calvin. The two most im-

portant chapters for the Protestant pastor are chapter four, "Calvin's Method and Interpretation," and chapter eight, "Prolegomena to Exegesis." The latter has an interesting section on Calvin's relation, in exegeting Scripture, to other interpreters of Holy Scripture. Calvin the exegete availed himself of the work of others, but also demonstrated, and insisted on, freedom of exegesis. He refused, for example, to be bound by the interpretation of Luther. This, he said, would constitute slavery for the minister of the Word called by God to work with the Scriptures.

It is Parker's study of the Old Testament commentaries that is the gem. The book is a valuable introduction to the Reformed view of and work with Old Testament Scripture. It treats in some depth and at some length Calvin's doctrine of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments; Calvin's exposition of the history in the Old Testament Bible; Calvin's view of the law; and Calvin's interpretation of prophecy.

Parker's description of Calvin's doctrine of the covenant is intriguing (pp. 181ff.). It will sorely discomfit those who have convinced themselves that Calvin taught that the covenant is a conditional agreement and that the promise of the covenant is to all the natural progeny of Abraham.

Calvin's attitude of childlike faith toward the Old Testament, as set forth by Parker (who barely hints at some doubts of his own about this attitude), is simply delightful. Referring to Calvin's acceptance of all the miraculous in the Old Testament, Parker writes:

Improbability causes him no problems. He even goes out of his way to emphasize the improbability of

some stories. We might say that the more improbable a story is, the better he is pleased. For Calvin's world was one in which God himself was present and active continuously, a world in which, although men had wills and could use them, God's will was done, a world in which God continuously and continually did miracles, the ordinary miracles of the created order or the extraordinary miracles transcending the created order (pp. 96, 97).

Parker illustrates Calvin's attitude toward the "improbable" from Calvin's explanation of the history of the flood, specifically the ark: "how the humans were going even to survive for three days shut up in a box — 'the smell of dung alone' he says, 'would have stifled all the living creatures in the Ark'. But all these problems would be looked after by God" (p. 98).

Coming through in every aspect of the Reformer's explanation and application of the Old Testament is his reception in faith of the Scriptures as the very Word of God:

The fact is that for Calvin the Bible, the whole Bible and every nook and cranny of the Bible, is the Word of God as completely as if God himself had spoken the actual words. At every point, therefore, we are confronted by God's will, God's mind, and not by human purposes and ideas (p. 66).

God grant His church today spiritual sons of Calvin in the preaching and teaching of the Old Testament Bible.

*Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* is a treasure.

This entire harvest of books by and about John Calvin is a feast for every student of Calvin and of the Word that he served faithfully and well in his day. □

## Report of Classis East

September 14, 1994

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, September 14, 1994 at the Hope Protestant Re-

formed Church, Walker, MI. Each church was represented by two delegates. Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

was welcomed back to Classis East as he has now taken up his duties as pastor of the Georgetown PRC.



The session was chaired by Rev. W. Bruinsma.

Most of the business of classis was routine. Reports were heard from the stated clerk and the Classical Committee. Classical appointments were granted to Byron Center. The following schedule was adopted for Byron Center (evening service only, unless otherwise designated): September 25 — Joostens; October 2 — Woudenberg; October 9 — VanOverloop; October 16 — Koole; October 23 — Kuiper; Octo-

ber 30 Cammenga (A.M.), Slopsema (P.M.); November 6 — Bruinsma; November 13 — Spruiensma; November 20 — Joostens; November 27 — VanOverloop; December 4 — Gritters; December 11 — Cammenga; December 18 — Kuiper; December 25 — Bruinsma; January 1 — Koole; January 8 — Fliikkema; January 15 — Spruiensma.

The Synod of 1994 requested Classis East to investigate our obligation to continue to support, at the present level, our small, needy

churches, giving special attention to church extension work. In response to this request, classis appointed a committee of three to study this matter and report to the January, 1995 meeting of classis.

The expenses of classis amounted to \$991.00. Classis will meet next on January 11, 1995 at the Southwest PRC. □

Respectfully submitted,

*Jon J. Huiskens*

Stated Clerk

## News From Our Churches

*Mr. Benjamin Wigger*

### Congregational Activities

The membership of the Adult Bible Study of our First PRC in Holland, MI invited their entire congregation to a week-long camp-out at Muskegon State Park. For those who could not make the camp-out there was a special invitation extended to join the group of campers on the last night for a potluck supper.

Each year the members of First in Holland kick off their society year by holding an Inspirational Meeting. Each society takes a turn hosting this event. This year's meeting was sponsored in part by First's Men's and Ladies' Societies. Members from all of First's societies were invited to get together for a time of fellowship, and to hear Rev. Peter Breen, one of our denomination's retired ministers, speak.

On Sunday evening, September 11, the congregation of Byron Center, MI PRC heard their pastor, Rev. Barry Gritters, preach his farewell sermon. This service was followed by a program of thanksgiving from Byron's congregation for the past years of Rev. Gritters' ministry in their midst. After several special

numbers, and a presentation of a gift, the congregation was able to say goodbye to the Gritters individually over coffee and cake.

### School Activities

Now that all of our Christian schools are in full swing, we ought to make mention of the fact that by God's grace there is one more Christian school to add to the list of PR covenant schools. We speak of the Faith Christian School in Randolph, WI. This is their first year of operation, and even if we were not there in late August when the doors opened, we all can share in the joy and thankfulness of those in Randolph who have done so much these past years to move this long-ing from a dream to a reality.

We can only imagine the joy that must have filled the sanctuary of the Randolph, WI PRC on August 22 when Faith Christian School was officially dedicated. This dedication/convocation service was preceded by an open house at the school, and followed by refreshments provided by Faith's Mothers' Club. Rev. S. Key, Randolph's pastor, preached a fitting sermon the day before entitled, "A Consecrated Child," based on I Samuel 1:27, 28.

### Denominational Activities

The Hope Heralds, an all-male choir primarily from the Hope PRC

in Walker, MI, were able to give two concerts in the month of September. They first sang in the auditorium of our Hope Church on Sunday evening, September 11; and a couple of days later they gave a concert at the Kalamazoo, MI PRC. The concert at Kalamazoo served also to signal the beginning of Fall society activities at Kalamazoo.

Seminary Convocation was held this year on the evening of September 7 in the Hope PRC in Walker, MI. Prof. Hanko, this year's speaker, addressed the students, friends, and supporters of our churches' seminary on the topic, "Our Church-Governed Seminary."

The annual meeting of the RFPA, the organization responsible for publishing this magazine, was held in the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI on September 22. Rev. C. Hanko spoke on the subject, "Our Heritage and Our Standard Bearer." All readers of the SB were enthusiastically encouraged to attend.

### Minister Activities

Rev. Carl Haak, pastor of the Lynden, WA PRC has accepted the call he received from the Bethel PRC in Elk Grove Village, near Chicago, IL. He plans to preach his farewell sermon at Lynden on October 23.

Rev. B. Gritters and his wife and family were able to move from the parsonage at Byron Center, MI PRC

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*Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.*



to their new parsonage at the Hudsonville, MI PRC on September 13. Plans called for Rev. Gritters to be installed as Hudsonville's eighth pastor on September 23, with his first sermon as Hudsonville's pastor coming on September 25th.

On Sunday evening, September 18, the congregation of the Byron Center, MI PRC extended a call to Rev. W. Bruinsma to serve as their pastor. With him on that trio were the Revs. Dykstra and Slopsema.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

On September 10, 1994 our parents,

**HENRY W. and TRUDY KUIPER**, celebrated 40 years of God's faithfulness to them in marriage.

We are grateful to our heavenly Father for giving us parents who fear Him. Thanks be to God for the good example, the covenant instruction, the love, and the guidance He has given us through them. We pray for God's continued blessing on them in their life together and in the midst of God's church.

"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

- ❖ Henry A. and Betty Kuiper
- ❖ Keith and Wanda Bruinsma  
Brian, Greg, Sheila, Janelle,  
Calvin, Micah
- ❖ Barbara Kuiper
- ❖ Daniel and Deb Kuiper
- ❖ Henry and Judy Buiter  
Nathan, Alicia, Monica, Ryan
- ❖ Christine Kuiper
- ❖ David and Karla Zandstra  
Bart, Rhonda, Krysta, Caleb
- ❖ Dolores Kuiper
- ❖ Greg and Mary Flint  
Cassi

Lynden, WA

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Martha Ladies' Aid Society of the Hull Protestant Reformed Church expresses its sympathy to Eunice Brummel, Bernice Van Maanen, Florence Brunsting, Mina Hoekstra, Hillie Hoekstra, Jane Hoksbergen, and Lois VanMaanen in the loss of their brother and brother-in-law,

#### DONALD HOEKSTRA.

May they find comfort in Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Rev. R. Moore, President  
Marie Brummel, Secretary

### RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mr. and Mrs. Society of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church expresses its Christian sympathy to fellow members Roger and Marlene Groenendyk in the loss of their mother and mother-in-law,

#### MRS. WINIFRED GROENENDYK.

May they find comfort from Isaiah 51:11: "Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion and everlasting joy shall be upon their head; and they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall fly away."

Don Doezeema, President  
Florence Key, Secretary

### Food for Thought

"The believer that knows his own heart will ever bless God for election."

—J.C. Ryle □

### NOTICE!!

#### "Martin Luther: Theologian of the Glory of God"

Prof. David Engelsma,  
Speaker

Prof. of Dogmatics and  
Old Testament Studies in the  
Protestant Reformed Seminary  
Dordt College Chapel  
Sioux Center, Iowa

November 4, 1994

7:30 P.M.

**We invite you to attend  
and bring a friend!!!**

Sponsored by the Protestant Reformed  
Church of  
Hull, Doon, and Edgerton

### REFORMATION CONFERENCE

Where: Southwest Prot. Ref. Church,  
in Grandville, MI

When: Friday and Saturday,  
November 4 and 5

What: Four lectures:

Friday, 8 P.M. —

"The Reformation's Emphasis on the  
Centrality of Preaching in Worship"  
(Rev. Ron Cammenga)

Saturday, 9:30 A.M. —

"The Reformation's Emphasis on  
Congregational Worship"  
(Rev. Kenneth Koole)

Saturday, 11 A.M. —

"The Reformation's Emphasis on  
Spiritual Worship"  
(Rev. Ron Cammenga)

Saturday, 1 P.M. —

"The Reformation's Emphasis on  
Family Worship"  
(Rev. Kenneth Koole)

Lunch will be provided at noon on Saturday.

A cordial invitation is extended to all  
readers of the SB in the Grand Rapids area.