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*The Church's
Song: How
are we doing?*

*A New
Direction*

*A Guide to
Reformed
Worship*



Set your hearts on the things above



Th.E. Lodder

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The Church's Song: How are we doing?

The time-tested practice of singing predominantly psalms is recognized as a good one

Presently the churches are giving a fair bit of attention to congregational singing. Twenty-eight additional hymns have been submitted to the churches for testing and the text of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter is in the process of revision. While we're giving attention to the church's song, it seems a good time also to give some consideration to *how* we sing the psalms in church.

Looking good

On the whole it can be said that there is a healthy respect for the singing of the psalms in the churches and it is done well.

The time-tested practice of singing predominantly psalms is recognized as a good one and is observed fairly consistently. Organists have a large repertoire of music on the psalms to draw from. Enter any Canadian Reformed church on any given Sunday and you are likely to hear the psalms being sung faithfully.

The church's song is precious

The churches have recently agreed that a revised versification of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter is beneficial, reflecting the desire to keep psalm-singing alive and meaningful for young and old alike. Dr. William Helder is to be commended for his diligence and skill in undertaking this painstaking project.

I will never forget the smile of familiarity that came over my eight-year-old son's face when we first sang the new versification of Psalm 3, ". . . Who point at me and shout / 'God will not help him out!'"

This sort of reaction from our children and young people makes relearning them every bit worth the trouble.

Room for improvement

At the same time, there is certainly room for improvement. If we want to preserve psalm singing in the churches – and we must – there are a few areas that deserve our attention.

Psalm selection

Ministers would do well to give more attention to the pattern of their selections. Although it isn't a good idea to choose two or three unfamiliar psalms for the same church service, completely avoiding the more challenging ones is also not helpful.

Our trouble with some of the Genevan melodies stems not so much from their intrinsic complexity as from the fact that we just don't sing them enough. Do we avoid singing Psalm 129 because it's a tough tune, or is it a tough tune because we avoid singing it?

Learning the difficult ones

The best way to learn the difficult tunes is to sing them more often. Ministers, then, should keep this in mind in their song selection.

Perhaps choirs, including children's choirs, should take on the challenge of learning some of the less familiar tunes. Then on Sundays when they spread out in the congregation they will be able to help and support the congregation in singing those psalms.

Ministers could encourage their congregations to sing through the Psalms in their homes by providing members with a weekly schedule in which two or three stanzas are sung daily. For those who do not



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have a musical instrument or a musician to plunk out the more difficult tunes, there is a collection of CDs that was produced a few years ago in Alberta which has musical accompaniment for all 150 Genevan Psalms (www.tedeummusic.com).

Tempo

Musicians play an integral role in leading the singing of the psalms appropriately. There are a number of factors that a musician has to bear in mind when choosing the tempo at which to play a psalm, including the tune, the words, the building, the instrument, the size of congregation, even the average age of worshippers. For many of the psalms, however, we could pick up the pace. Sometimes we're left to break into an anxious sweat because the singing is so slow.

Let's take Psalm 2 as an example. This is a war song – a march. And that's how it should be sung – with vigour and energy – with the windows open for passersby to hear. We fully agree with Augustine and Calvin that the psalms need to be sung with weight and majesty. Sometimes, however, we rob psalms of their weight and majesty by singing them at a painfully slow pace.

Musical excellence and training

Having served as church organist myself for more than a decade in my student years, I'm aware of the colossal amount of preparation time required to do a good job accompanying congregational singing for the Lord's Day services. Many musicians sink hour upon hour of preparation into service playing.

We all should have a great deal of appreciation and respect for these brothers and sisters who take their responsibilities seriously. There are others, though, who seem to forget that they are leading God's people in divine worship. Even the most skilled and talented musician cannot mask a lack of preparation.

Paying the piper

Most would agree that we as churches need well-trained and skillful musicians to lead the singing in the worship service. One way in which we

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could encourage church musicians strive for excellence is by putting our money where our mouth is. There are churches that have dedicated upwards of \$5,000 to the remuneration of church musicians. Is this extravagant? Not at all!

Add up the time required for service preparation, not to mention the costs of quality musical training, instruments, and church music, and the churches are still getting a deal! Consider also that making music was part of the full-time, paid ministry of the Levitical priesthood (1 Chronicles 16).

It's appalling how much money we will spend to purchase CDs and mp3s, ipods, stereos and entertainment centers, when compared to how little is dedicated to the music we use to worship God in the church.

I truly believe that when our children and young people observe the high value we place on church musicians, also in dollars and cents, they will also be more inclined to develop and refine their musical skills in the Lord's service, for the excellence of the church's song. Perhaps then parents, too, have more incentive to fork out money for those expensive music lessons.

Antiphonal singing

Many of the psalms were originally sung antiphonally, such as Psalms 115 and 136. With the singing of Psalm 136, for example, you could have the men and boys sing all the odd stanzas, women and girls all the even stanzas, with everyone singing the refrain and final stanza together. This is in line with the apostolic appeal in Ephesians 5:19: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs."¹

Nothing new

Many of the things I'm proposing here have been suggested before by church liturgists and pastors and have even been liturgical custom in the church's past. The church's song is far too precious for us to let it fall silent, lose its luster, or turn false. Let's do everything the Lord calls and enables us to do with renewed purpose and thanksgiving, always striving for beauty and excellence.

¹ The late Dr. K. Deddens dedicated an entire chapter to antiphonal singing in his book *Where Everything Points to Him* (1993 [1981]).



M.H. Van Luik

A New Direction

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MATTHEW 13:52

“Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”

Colossians 3:1b

After Paul writes that the Christians in Colossae have been raised with Christ, he commands them to “set their hearts on the things above.” Christians do not look for their life in this world, but they look for it in the heavenly realm where Jesus Christ dwells. Paul literally writes, “Seek the things above.” The tense he uses says that you must continually seek the things above. Every single moment of your life you need to be looking to heaven for everything that you need. We live on this earth, but we seek our direction from above, from Jesus Christ.

The word “seek” speaks about the orientation or direction of our will. Our will can be oriented or directed either to good or to evil. And therefore Paul commands us to seek the direction for our heart and will from Jesus Christ who is above. Our will needs to be guided by the fact that we have died to this world and we have been raised with Christ to a new life. We now take our direction from heaven; from Jesus Christ who is seated at the right hand of God. Because of this new direction in our life we can begin to put the old nature to death and put on the new that Paul will write about in the rest of this chapter. While we are still living in this world, Jesus Christ is already directing our hearts from heaven.

Paul reiterates this point in verse 2 when he writes, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” Paul is about to write about the Christian life in chapter 3, but before he does so, he must first address how this new Christian life is possible. He argues that you can

only live as Christians when your *mind* is set on the things above. The way you think will very much determine the way you are going to live. Our thinking is going to determine the overall direction of our life. What lives in your mind will determine your motives and aims.

Paul reveals something about how change must come about in our lives. Too often we are more concerned about behaviour modification than with seeking a change of heart and will. Behaviour modification is done through the use of rules and regulations. When someone does something that is unethical they are reminded about the right rule and often as much force or pressure as possible is brought to bear on that person to bring about a change of behaviour.

Ultimately, that kind of change is not true or real change. Change for the sake of fitting into a family or fitting into the church is not the kind of change that Christ desires. The gospel is not about behaviour modification, but the gospel is the power by which the Lord God changes your heart and mind. And therefore Paul is really laying the foundation in our text for the Christian life. He says, “Set your mind on the things above.” That means that your mind needs to be continually directed to Jesus Christ in heaven.

Paul warns us, “Do not set your mind on earthly things.” If you still set your mind on earthly things that indicates that you have not died with Christ. It means that you are still looking to the things of this life for everything. The false teachers in Colossae, by their emphasis on

keeping earthly rules and regulations really set their minds on those “earthly” things to save them. While Paul is fighting specific false teachings in this letter, no doubt there is also the wider concern that today we still have our minds set on earthly things. When we set our mind on what our flesh desires, it leads us away from Jesus Christ. When the material things of this earth and the pleasures of this world are the things on which your mind is focused, that will destroy your spiritual life.

If your mind is preoccupied with how you are going to make a living, if you are preoccupied with enjoying the material things of this life, then you can be sure that where your mind is, there you will be also. If your mind is directed to the things of the world, then you still belong to this world. But if your mind is directed to Christ Jesus above, then the focus of your mind will be with Christ Jesus.

Paul is not saying that we must forget about this world, or that this world is not important. We need to be careful that we do not make a separation between heaven and earth. Paul teaches us that life on this earth is only possible when your heart and mind is focused on the heavenly realm above, because that is where your life on this earth must come from. You will not find life or joy here on earth, but your life and joy can only be found with Christ Jesus who is seated at the right hand of God in heaven. He alone is able provide both for your physical and spiritual life. Therefore set your heart and mind on the things above.



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A Guide to Reformed Worship (Part 2) – The Introductory Elements

This series of articles began with a consideration of two important principles for Reformed worship: the Regulative Principle and the Principle of Covenantal Structure. In this article, we will begin looking at the different elements of the worship service. With this installment, we begin at the beginning with the introductory block.

Call to worship

One of the clearest injunctions regarding Christian worship is that it will involve the reading of God's Word. Paul commands Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture. . ." – and there are many other such passages. A great deal of our worship service, therefore, is going to involve the reading of Scripture. God will speak his Word to us and we in turn also take his Word upon our lips and speak it back to Him.

That brings us to the beginning of the worship service and the question: what is an appropriate way to begin? If our worship is to be structured along the lines of the covenant, should it not reflect the gospel truth that it is God who calls us to Himself? In the covenant of grace, God takes the

initiative to come to us and to call us to a meaningful and friendly relationship with Himself. Here we can think not only of God's call to Adam and Eve in the Garden in Genesis 3, but also of his gracious initiative in calling Abraham and others.

*It is sad that the call to
worship is rare in the
Canadian Reformed
churches*

Therefore, it makes good liturgical sense for God to have the first word in the worship service. Through the reading of an appropriate passage of Scripture (often from the Psalms), God graciously calls his people into his presence. With the call to worship, the congregation is reminded that it is God who has authoritatively called us to this place.

It is sad that the call to worship is rare in the Canadian Reformed churches. In most of our churches, God's people get the first word through the so-called votum,

"Our help is in the name. . . ." In some places, there is a "quasi call to worship" with words such as "Let us lift up our hearts to the Lord." But those words often are more like a signal for the congregation to stand up than a true call to worship being spoken by the minister on God's behalf. Why not have a short, clear Scripture passage where God is clearly calling the congregation to worship Him? If we take the covenantal structure and character of our worship seriously, this is something we need to carefully reconsider.

Votum

The next words in the service also come from Scripture, but they are a confession of faith on the part of God's people: "Our help is in the Name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth" (Ps 124:8). These words can be considered our response to God's call for us to worship Him. God puts these beautiful words on our lips at the very beginning so that we recognize our entire dependence on Him. We come to Him as needy people waiting to have our thirst quenched and our hunger satisfied.

We call this the “votum,” which is a word taken over from Latin. It is something like a vow or a confession of faith. The word’s Latin origin reflects the fact that this element of our worship service dates back to far before the Reformation. The reformers recognized its value and simply continued the practice of having Psalm 124:8 at the beginning of the service.

I already mentioned that these words come from the part of the congregation. In most of our churches, however, they are recited by the minister on behalf of the congregation. In those instances, the individual members of the congregation need to be self-consciously saying those words in their hearts with the minister. A better arrangement, however, is to have the congregation itself recite those words. An introduction may be necessary; something like, “Congregation, where does our help come from?” or “Let us confess together. . . .” If the votum is truly something from the side of the people, and if it is practical to do so, why not have the congregation recite it?

Greeting

So far we’ve looked at two elements: God has spoken the call to worship and the people respond with their confession of faith (the votum). Given the covenantal structure, it makes sense that God would have the next word. He does so through the greeting extended through the minister. The minister lifts up his hands (a traditional liturgical gesture of blessing and greeting) and speaks from God’s Word a salutation or greeting.

Typically the opening song will be one of praise and adoration for God

Here again, we simply have God’s Word being read and used in a liturgically appropriate way. God has called us into his presence with his Word, we have responded with our confession, and now He greets us in the same manner that the churches of the New Testament were greeted by Him. In all of this, it is amply clear that there are truly two “parties” in

the worship service and they are in a relationship with one another.

At the end of the greeting, it is customary for the minister to say “Amen.” As you may recall, “Amen” simply means “it is true and certain.” God puts his seal on the greeting when the minister says “Amen.” But God’s people should also respond with their own “Amen,” either in their hearts or vocally. With their “Amen” they express their confidence that they have truly been welcomed into God’s presence.

Opening song

The final element of the beginning of the service is the response of God’s people in song. Typically the opening song will be one of praise and adoration for God. It will exalt Him and in so doing, prepare God’s people for the rest of the worship service.

It hardly needs to be argued that the singing of psalms and hymns is a divinely mandated part of Christian worship. Even though passages like Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 were not originally written as instructions on how to do public worship, they surely do not mean anything less than that God’s people should be singing when gathered together for worship. More than that, the entire Bible portrays God’s people as singing praise to Him and we would only expect that this would also be done today when we gather for worship. As mentioned, this is not a controversial matter in any Christian circle. We naturally sing because we want to sing and if that desire were not enough, God’s Word commands us to sing.

In the next installment, we’ll consider the next block of the worship service, the confession of sin.



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“In Wisdom You Made Them All. . .” (Part 1 of 2)

Does the human race have a special place and task in the cosmic scheme of things? The answer to that question has changed drastically over the past century or so. When our civilization could still be called Christian, it was normal to speak of mankind as the “crown of creation” and of its habitat, the earth, as a privileged part of the cosmos. True, Christians knew they were flawed, fallen beings. They also knew that the earth was puny, little more than a dot, by cosmic standards. But they did not for these reasons hold the earth or humanity in contempt. Both served a high purpose. Man had been given the earth as his dwelling place in order to have dominion over his fellow-creatures and so to serve God.

Today that conviction is largely gone. Faith in God has been declared a delusion and with that faith the belief in the significance of both the human species and its habitat has also been lost. Rather than being exceptional, the earth is now a typical planet among many similar ones and the human race is a chance appearance, no better than any of the other species and by no means essential to the earth’s well-being. According to some we are, in fact, the destructive element on earth, the enemy of the other species, the dangerous parasite whose demise would greatly benefit the planet. This is the opinion of some “deep ecologists,” extremist animal rights groups, and other radical branches of the environmentalist movement.

The Copernican Principle

Where did these ideas come from? Are they just subjective impressions, a product of our pessimistic postmodern worldview? According to a majority of today’s scientists, they are not. The current opinion regarding the earth’s and mankind’s insignificance, they say, is based on solid scientific evidence. Whereas people used to believe that the earth was at the centre of the cosmos, we now know that it is located in a corner of the Milky Way, which is but one of many billions of galaxies. This physical “dislocation” implies, we are told, a drastic reduction in our status and provides scientific proof against the biblical message of mankind’s (and the earth’s) unique position, origin, and purpose.

These beliefs receive their justification from the so-called Copernican Principle, which is held to be a scientific concept. Because of the important role it plays in the areas we are dealing with, a note on its origin and function is in order. The principle is named after Nicolaus Copernicus, a Polish cleric, mathematician, and astronomer, who began the process of the earth’s removal from the cosmic centre by proposing (in 1543) the replacement of the ancient earth-centred model by a sun-centred one. The earth-centred model (the so-called Ptolemaic World System) had been inherited from the Greeks and still served the Middle Ages (about 500-1500). It consisted of a central stationary earth with the “heavenly bodies” – sun, moon, and planets – revolving



The Ptolemaic
World-System

around it (see picture on this page). The Christian Middle Ages liked this model, which was in a number of ways in accordance with their general worldview. The earth's location at the centre symbolized man's special status as the creature made in God's image, while the fact that it was also at the lowest point in the system symbolized his fallenness. The Middle Ages further liked the hierarchical nature of the cosmos and the fact that the heavens surrounded the earth. This made manifest God's unceasing supervision and providence and protection. Medieval people could feel at home in the universe. Space did not terrify them, nor did it convey a sense of cosmic loneliness, as it so often does today. There was no empty space.

The old model had not only a religious but also a scientific function and served, among other things, to predict eclipses. As a scientific model it had its weaknesses, however. A major setback was the difficulty it posed in explaining the apparently erratic orbits of the planets. Copernicus found that the problem could be removed if the model was changed from an earth-centred to a sun-centred one. That solution was not immediately accepted. The idea of a central sun and a moving earth went against common sense and, according to many, also against the Bible. Had not Joshua ordered the sun and not the earth to stand still? Various scientists, however, continued Copernicus' work and by the late 1600s the sun-centred model had become the accepted one.

The process of our "dethronement"

Although the new model removed the earth from its central place, it did not immediately affect the belief in the earth's and man's special status. Most early scientists, including Copernicus himself, were Christians. They saw their work not as an attack upon Scripture but as a

means to glorify the Creator by showing the magnitude and order of the universe. They also continued to see humanity as God's special creation, made in his image. Even when in the eighteenth century (the so-called Enlightenment or Age of Reason) this biblical faith declined, the belief in the superior status of the human race continued, thanks to the predominantly humanistic worldview of that period.

The situation began to change in the nineteenth century, when among several thinkers the deism of the Enlightenment was replaced by atheism. It is true that the Copernican Principle of mediocrity was not promoted as a scientific tool until the twentieth century, but the preceding age set the stage. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the century's foremost "death-of-God" philosopher, wrote:

Has not man's determination to belittle himself developed apace precisely since Copernicus? Alas, his belief that he was unique and irreplaceable in the hierarchy of beings had been shattered for good; he had become an animal, quite literal and without reservations; he who, according to his earlier belief, had been almost God. . . . Ever since Copernicus man has been rolling down an incline, faster and faster, away from the centre. . . .

Nietzsche was partly right in blaming the new astronomy for the loss of human self-esteem, but only partly. In the days of Copernicus and his followers opinions were divided. Many rejoiced that the earth had been moved from its lowly place at the bottom and become a "star," a glorious heavenly body. Others, however, focused on the possible negative implications of the new model and their number may well have increased over the centuries. But man's "belittling of himself" has been a result not only of the astronomical discoveries. A more important role has been played by

scientific theories that claimed to prove the "death of God" and thereby denied man's special place in the universe. This was acknowledged by Nietzsche's younger contemporary Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), who mentioned *Charles Darwin's* contribution to the marginalization of man. It was Darwin, after all, who had shown that the human species had descended from the animals. Nor was that the end of the process of demotion. It was continued, Freud said, by his own work. His theory of the unconscious showed that the human ego, which had been so highly exalted by both Christians and humanists, was no more than the plaything of irrational desires and instincts. Instead of being made "a little less than God" (Psalm 8), man had become product and part of a non-rational nature.

Our position in space and time

Although Copernicus and his followers had no intention of lowering the status of man and his habitat, developments in astronomy did underline the message of the earth's relative insignificance. As early as 1609, the scientist Galileo had searched the heavens with the newly invented telescope and discovered that the Milky Way galaxy consisted of an unimaginably large number of stars. This showed that the cosmos was far greater than previously imagined; that it might even be infinite in size. Its inconceivable vastness was confirmed in the twentieth century. In the 1920s the American astronomer Edwin Hubble, using the most advanced telescope then available, discovered that the Milky Way was not unique (as had been thought until that time) but was only one of several galaxies in an expanding universe. Astronomers now estimate that there are at least a hundred billion galaxies, each of them containing billions of stars.

The estimated number of stars in all the galaxies of the universe, scientists tell us, "vastly exceeds the number of grains of sand on all the beaches of the world."

In such a universe, planet Earth is no more than a speck, and so indeed is the sun (which has been demoted to an "average" star, one among many, whose apparent brilliance is a result of the fact that it is much nearer to the earth than any other star). As the seventeenth-century poet John Donne already complained, in the new model "The Sun is lost and th'earth, and no man's wit / can well direct him where to look for it. . . ." Cosmic distances are so great that they have to be measured in light-years – the distance that light can travel within one year, which is close to ten trillion kilometres. The extent of the Milky Way is estimated to be more than 100,000 of such light-years. This means that in order to go from one end to the other, one would need to travel at the speed of light – which is close to 300,000 kilometres per second – for a period of 100,000 years. (I am assuming here, for simplicity's sake, that we could measure time by an earth-bound clock, although in fact time would greatly change for someone travelling at this speed). By way of comparison: the light of the sun, which is located at a distance of almost 150,000,000 kilometres from the earth, reaches us in about eight minutes. And even the extent of the Milky Way is next to nothing by cosmic standards. In the 1990s astronomers using the Hubble Space Telescope discovered galaxies that they calculated to be up to twelve billion light-years removed in space and time.

If these mind-boggling cosmic distances served to diminish the status of the earth and its inhabitants in the eyes of many, so did new theories of cosmic time. The twentieth century witnessed

the birth and triumph of the so-called Big Bang theory of the universe's origin and development. According to this theory the universe was not a few thousand, but billions of years old, and the age of the earth also was much greater than had previously been believed. Even so, the earth was a late-comer.

According to some we are the destructive element on earth, the enemy of the other species

Astronomers date the age of the cosmos at about 14 billion years, that of our galaxy at 10 billion, and that of the earth at 4.5 to 5 billion. The span of humanity's existence was much shorter yet. According to evolutionary scientists the age of the human species is one (or a few) hundred thousand years.

Science or ideology?

The description by modern science of the magnitude of the universe undoubtedly contributes to the widespread belief in the insignificance of the earth and mankind. Does it also, however, justify that belief by *proving* the Copernican Principle of the earth's and man's non-exceptional status? In fact, it does not. The principle implies that location and size determine value, which is obviously untrue. Moreover, some scientists are also challenging the principle's scientific value, pointing out that there are few if any instances where its use has advanced our understanding of the universe. These dissenters further show that recent scientific discoveries not only fail to endorse but actually provide potent disclaimers of the Copernican Principle. The

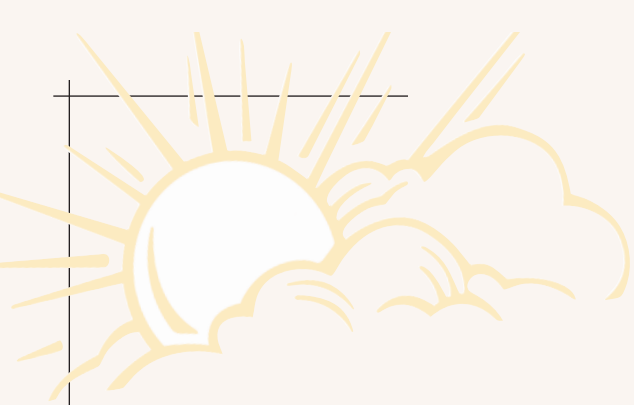
discoveries support the idea that the earth is unique and uniquely fitted for the sustenance of life. We will turn to the arguments and proofs later. The question that now concerns us is why, in spite of its apparently questionable scientific foundations, the Copernican Principle is so strenuously promoted.

One important reason, it appears, is its ideological function – the fact that it provides "scientific" support for the anti-biblical view of man and his world that characterizes our times. The principle is also, as already suggested, grist for the mill of radical ecologists and animal-rights activists, who blame our ecological problems on the belief that we are superior to other species. That belief, they say, is founded on the biblical teaching of man as the head of creation, which is a major cause of the destruction of the world's environment under the leadership of western Christianity.

But if hostile to the Bible, the principle is not opposed to all religion. Radical ecologists who subscribe to it have no problem advocating pantheism and a variety of neo-pagan religions. This is telling. Atheists may proclaim that we can live without faith in the supernatural, but our postmodern age shows that for many people this is too difficult. Now that faith in the God of Christianity has been declared a delusion, a replacement must be found, and more often than not the universe and the earth are made into a god (or goddess).

The hope of receiving help and guidance from sources beyond the earth is an important element also in the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence, which, as we will see, has been greatly stimulated by the Copernican Principle. We will turn to that topic in the next installment.





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

*"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard
service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that
she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."
Isaiah 40:1, 2*

At the dawn of each new day prayers and supplications must go before God's throne for Him to be our Rock and Redeemer. Yes, we may not know what we will all have to face each day; but one thing we know for sure. . . whatever we do, it will be tainted with sin. We so need to depend on Him alone and the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Thus when we look at Isaiah 40:1 and 2 we may indeed find comfort in knowing that God will take care of his people. God in his infinite wisdom understands the hardships and difficulties we face in life. All around us it may seem as though no one cares and life seems to be falling apart. Yet every moment of our life is seen by our heavenly Father. He sees and watches all that we do here on earth. At times we may also feel so alone in all our struggles. Yet, what will we do then? Despair and stop running the race? No, we may not do this. We must turn to God's Word, for it stands firm and sure! We cannot let the magnitude of our sins weigh us down. Rather we may seek our solace and peace from God. By his wounds we are healed. We can cast all our burdens and worries on Him. He assures us that He will find rest for our souls. We must confess our sins before Christ. Trust in Him and He will never

disappoint you. For we are the Lord's most treasured possession. He will also assure us of eternal life.

All adversity that is on our path is used to test our faith and should want to bring us closer to Him. Remember, one thing, nothing can separate us from his love. Rely on Him alone, each day anew. Our God is the faithful God who keeps all of his promises. In all of life's situations, God will provide comfort to those who have their hope, love, and desires to serve Him.

The Lord reassures us in Isaiah 41:13, "For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, 'Do not fear; I will help you.'" All praise and adoration to Him alone, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of his only begotten Son.

*Though in death's valley, lonely and forsaken
I am by gloom and shadows overtaken,
I fear no evil: Thou art ever near me
And in my grief and sorrow Thou dost hear me.
Thy rod and staff, O God of my salvation,
Shall comfort me in all my tribulation.*

Psalm 23:2

Birthdays in December:

- 10 **JAMES KAMMINGA** will be 23
Box 1125, Carman, MB R0G 0J0
- 16 **JULIE KAMMINGA** will turn 19
Box 1125, Carman, MB R0G 0J0

Congratulations to both of you James and Julie on your upcoming birthdays. May you have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends. May He surround you with his love and care and the gift of comfort in his Word. Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
Phone: 905-563-0380
Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



roadside assistance

the magazine for Reformed young people

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word. Ps 119:9

Roadside Assistance is a bimonthly magazine for and by Reformed youth. It aims to provide a forum for stimulating discussion about faith issues, encouraging each other in the fight of faith, passing on Bible knowledge, building and expressing identity as Christians, sharpening hearts and minds through Biblical reflection, stimulating reading on Biblical issues, and educating one another. As a way of spreading the excitement around the world, we will occasionally be publishing one of our articles as a column in Clarion. We hope you'll enjoy the magazine, and perhaps you'll even consider contributing.

www.roadsideassistancemagazine.com

As I Walked down the Hall

Byron Tuininga

As I walked down the hall of the upper floor in my parents' house, I happened to look upon a mighty wonder. It was as I leaned to further open the end window, trying to appease the ever-increasing density of the stuffy air in my room, that my gaze fell upon a very bright and intense star. As I looked at it for a while I wondered which it would be in the heavens, number 1, 3, 17, or 200007? Something I would never know and yet in that vast expanse, our Father knows every number and characteristic of each and every star. And He upholds them and governs them.

As I sat pondering this wonder of his, and how He upheld it, I also came to reason of its size. That one star, so bright, dwarfed our sun in size, and yet looked so small so far away. Such a distance, I thought to myself, really places in perspective the immense size of this our universe. And here we are on but one of eight planets, a small

insignificant blob of substance. What are we in this universe? How small we must seem to a God who is in control of this universe. We are but small specks, breath-inhabiting clumps of dirt. A masterpiece among the masterpieces of the heavens and all that is in them.

*We took a slighter path,
one less adorned with
conscience and greatly
lacking judgement and
understanding*

Yet, if we are so small, how is it that this God, the upholder of all things, also seeks to uphold us small pitiful sinners? God created this universe, these heavens and this earth for us to live in, for us to inhabit while we praised his glorious name and works, but we

rejected Him. We took a slighter path, one less adorned with conscience and greatly lacking judgement and understanding.

But these heavens, these plants, these stars, they did nothing to kindle the anger of God, but took the blow because we as the stewards of the King failed to keep his commands, and as the steward fails, so also fails everything he is steward of. Yet God sustains them all, holding them all in his hand, allowing nothing to go on without his knowledge and will.

Thus, we, a small unlikely grouping of clay, on a uniquely proportioned planet, in an immensely large universe, are more than nothing. We, who are inhabited by sin, as small as we are, hold a larger spot than the largest aspect of all created things. For there is nothing other than we, his crowning creations who were bought by the blood of Christ. What are we in this

universe? We are blessed, blessed that in his infinite mercy and love, our Father did not forget his children when they often forget Him. He did not leave us when we left Him and his commands, as though they were nothing. Though He is the all perfect, powerful, and knowing God, we choose to make Him as nothing in our lives. And we who are nothing, who are clay, we are made into something by his

perfect blood. Our condemnation is on us if we forget that He is everywhere in his creation, that He cannot be escaped.

What a strange encounter in a very common situation in life. Strange, I thought to myself, how opening the window tonight would give me such a sense of intense relief to know that God our God, our Father is in command. He remembers all,

knows all, and controls all. I know nothing of the good that was allowed me in the first Adam in Eden, and I would never know either if it were not for Him. So I prayed that we who are nothing would not ever think to forget Him who is everything, in our pride, our lust, and our sin. Pray and praise, to God our God, for as I walked down the hall tonight, He watched over me.



Book Review

Reviewed by W. L. Bredenhof

With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship

D.G. Hart and John R. Muether (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2002).

Additional Information: paperback, 203 pages, \$12.38.

In his 1955 classic, *The Defense of the Faith*, Cornelius VanTil argued that Reformed apologetics has to be consistent with Reformed theology. It makes no sense for Reformed believers to argue for the Christian faith with Arminian or Roman Catholic systems of apologetics. He lamented, "If only Reformed theologians were true to their own principles and ideas!" In *With Reverence and Awe*, D.G. Hart and John Muether apply VanTil's appeal for consistency to the area of worship and to good effect.

Hart (professor at the two Westminster seminaries) and Muether (professor at Reformed Theological Seminary in Florida) put forward the thesis that "Soundness in doctrine. . . goes hand-in-hand with what is appropriate in worship. Historically, Reformed worship has always flowed from Reformed theology" (p.15). For instance, they demonstrate how the Creator-creature distinction will find liturgical expression among Calvinists: "The vast gulf separating God from his creation means that God alone is infinite and independent, and that we are finite and dependent. This will restrain the notions of individualism, self-confidence and assertiveness that our culture privileges. Instead, humility and self-denial will characterize our comportment" (p.14).

The authors provide a comprehensive overview of the

defining principles of Reformed worship and also a helpful guide to putting those principles into practice. Of equal importance, they discuss current trends in broader Christian worship in North America and warn readers of the temptations that these present. In this vein, I especially appreciated the critical analysis of John Frame's efforts to defend "contemporary worship."

Overall, this is a book that can be reliably used as a primer about what we do in worship and why. While it can especially be recommended for office bearers (those responsible for oversight of our services), study groups might also find it worthwhile. The authors ground their efforts in the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions. Above all, they remind us that our great and holy God is indeed to be worshipped "with reverence and awe." (Heb 12:28). Only such worship is acceptable.



Further Discussion

Federational Seminary or School of the Churches?

From principle to preference?

On Friday, May 18, and Saturday, May 19 of this year, Synod Smithers unanimously made some important decisions regarding ecclesiastical unity with the URCNA. One of those decisions was regarding the mandate of the Theological Education Committee. It is especially this decision that received strong criticism in a couple articles, which I read recently. The Rev. J.L. van Popta wrote in the *Clarion* of October 12, that Synod Smithers has now said that the theological college is no longer a necessity. At the end of his article he says: "I, for one, think that our Synod 2007 was way off the mark in their decision. Even though we can't support it with a text, we need to maintain our principle that the church should control the education of its ministers."

In the same week, I received from several sides by email a copy of a speech of the Rev. W. VanOene about the Liberation of 1944, in which he said: "Imagine my disgust and disbelief when I read that our latest general synod, the one at Smithers, stated that the churches having a Seminary of their own is not a principle but a matter of preference. Apparently the brothers in Smithers were much wiser and had a deeper insight

into the Scriptures than the brothers in 1892 who insisted on it that it was a principle." And: "That Synod Smithers put the coffin ready for the United Reformed to bury the Seminary and the churches with it."

That is strong language! But did Synod Smithers really make that decision? Having been at Synod in Smithers as a delegate, I started wondering if, maybe, I attended a different Synod Smithers than the one which made this decision. So I took the *Acts* of Synod Smithers 2007 to see what went wrong. I can tell you: Synod Smithers did not make that decision!

What did Smithers decide?

The *Acts* have been sent to all the churches and I assume that all confessing members received a copy. I'm not going to quote the entire decision. You can read it in Article 103, page 83. I want to draw your attention especially to the considerations 3.3 and 3.4.

Consideration 3.3 starts with: "The mandate for the theological education committee must be based on 2 Timothy 2:2, which directs us to the principle that the churches are responsible for the theological training of their students for the ministry." Can it be more clear? How can anyone be

able to say that Synod Smithers abandoned this principle?

We continue to read: "In this connection, it should be noted and appreciated that the two theological education committees have already come to agreement on the following six statements, as reported to Synod Chatham 2004" and then the six statements follow, of which the first is: "It is the task of the churches to train ministers." Read also the other five statements. As far as I know, these six statements were also adopted by the URCNA Synod Schererville, this summer.

Consideration 3.3 closes with the words, "These agreements indicate that the two committees are solidly united in the biblical principle of theological education being the full responsibility of the churches."

Let us now have a look at consideration 3.4:

The principle of 2 Timothy 2:2, which points in the direction of the churches being responsible for the training of the ministry, does not necessitate the conclusion of a "federational" seminary. Article 19 of the Church Order of the CanRC also does not necessitate a federational seminary as "an institution for the training of the ministry" is not the same as

federational seminary. Already it is possible under Article 19 for the churches to maintain an institution apart from that institution having to belong to the federation. Therefore, it would be best, for clarity's sake, to realize that "federational" seminary is terminology that has arisen (in the statements of agreement and in the mandate of Synod Chatham) out of current practice and is not itself the Reformed theological education principle. The principle remains: the churches are responsible for the training for the ministry.

These two considerations are crucial in understanding the decision of Synod Smithers. In the decision, in 4.4.1, we can clearly read that the committee is mandated to seek agreement with the URCNA committee about theological education for the new united federation, *on the principle of 2 Timothy 2:2* (emphasis added), taking into consideration the joint statements made by the theological education committees (see consideration 3), while expressing the strong preference for at least one federational seminary.

What Synod Smithers did was to define more precisely what exactly the principle is behind Article 19 of our Church Order. The two brothers confused the present practice of the federational seminary with the principle of the churches being responsible for the training of the ministers. It might be helpful to have a look at the church history, to get a better understanding of the difference between this principle and our present practice.

Principle

A principle for the church is something that must come from Scripture. Neither of the two brothers mention a text on which they base their principle. Both brothers refer to a principle which has been held by our churches, but Rev. van Popta uses the vague expression "since the time of its forefathers." Rev. VanOene only says that the brothers of the Secession maintained this principle in 1891. In the document "Why do the Canadian Reformed Churches have their own seminary?" which was written in 2003 as a paper by the Theological Education Committee to be discussed with the URCNA committee (see *Acts Chatham 2004*, page 224), the text 2 Timothy 2:2 is mentioned, but also in that document we can't find when exactly the church decided that this should be the principle. When we look at the Acts of the churches in the nineteenth century, then we discover that the churches of the Secession decided in 1849 to establish the Theological School because it was beneficial and necessary to do so (my translation, the original text in Dutch can be found in the *Acts of Synod Amsterdam of the Christelijk Afscheidene Gereformeerde Kerk*, 1849, chapter IV). It was only in 1891, just before the union in 1892, that it was decided by the synod to maintain the principle that the church is called to have its own institution for the training of its ministers, at least if it comes to the theological education of the ministers. (See the Acts of the eighteenth session of the synod of 1891 of these churches, art. 172 and 173). It is remarkable that although in the discussion 2 Timothy 2:2 was

mentioned by some of the brothers, the Synod did not decide to include it in the decision. It was also remarkable that when it came to a vote, more than one third of the delegates were in favour of leaving the decision to a synod of the united church after the union (fourteen of the forty delegates).

We can see the same happening in our Canadian Reformed churches. It is more because of practical reasons that the synods decided our own Theological School should be established, because for several reasons it was not desirable to send our students to the school in Kampen, The Netherlands (see W.W.J. VanOene, *Inheritance Preserved*, revised edition, page 190). Reading through the Acts starting from 1962, I couldn't find any mention being made of the principle. Not even in the Acts of Orangeville 1968. It was only when the matter of theological education came up in our contacts with the URCNA that the principle was mentioned in the documents. Synod Smithers is, as far as I know, the first synod which explicitly defined the principles for theological education and used the text from 2 Timothy 2:2. Apparently until then Article 19 of the Church Order has always been sufficient. By accepting the agreement on the six statements, mentioned in Article 103 of the Acts of Synod Smithers, the URCNA also indicated that they want to work on the basis of these principles. These six statements are in line with what Article 19 of our Church Order states.

Practice

We must discern between principle and practice. The principle is that the churches are responsible for the training of the

ministers. The practice as we have it now is a federational seminary, of which the professors as well as the board of governors are appointed by general synod and the funds for this college are collected from the churches by means of assessments.

However, history teaches us that the practice can be different, while maintaining the same principle. The churches which established the Theological School in 1854 did it differently. There were no assessments. The funds came in as a freewill offering from the churches. Every church decided how and how much they gave to the school. The governors were appointed by the provincial (regional) synods and had to report each to their own provincial synods. The professors were appointed by general synod through a free vote. The way we do

it is not the only way and not necessarily the best way.

In The Netherlands, all the churches were close to the place where the Theological School was established and logistically it was no problem to have one school. Therefore, the general synod is the appropriate assembly to deal with the school. In North America churches are spread out over an area of thousands of kilometres. Our situation is completely different. Should we have the same situation as in The Netherlands with only one school for the entire federation? While maintaining the same principle, we can have a different practice, even more so because we live in a different situation.

Conclusion

The decision of Synod Smithers regarding theological education is

a good decision which maintains and even strengthens the principle that the churches are responsible for the training of their ministers. We should also keep in mind that it is a principle that churches which stand on the same confessional basis and are one in faith should seek the highest form of unity, which means in our situation ecclesiastical unity. If we want to keep our present practice of a federational seminary, that may be fine, but if it will put unity with the URCNA in danger, then we are making a practice more important than a principle and we are on the wrong way. We should not confuse our practices with our principles.

From time to time Clarion will publish longer responses to articles received. The decision as to which responses to publish will rest with the Editor.



Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

First of all, I want to thank Rev. Bredenhof for his well-written editorial in *Clarion*, September 14, 2007.

In his opening words, he mentions that we are Psalm singing people. It is with those words that I have difficulty. Are we indeed a Psalm singing people? It seems to me that more and more we are drifting away from the Psalms – the most beautiful songs we can sing!

We are once again confronted with another twenty-eight unnecessary hymns. The Psalms are given by the Lord Himself; what can be more beautiful than that? Are we more or less telling the

Lord that the Psalms are not enough and that we can do better? Haven't we learned from history yet?

Professors, doctors, and ministers please read this editorial and act upon it!

Let the congregations sing all the Psalms to the praise of Him who made them all and was pleased to give them to his church to be used, all of them!

*With brotherly greetings,
B. VanderBruggen
Carman, Manitoba*



Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.

**Press Release of Classis
Niagara, September 19, 2007**

On behalf of the convening church at Grassie, Rev. S.C. Van Dam welcomes the delegates. He reads from Micah 4:1-8, leads in prayer, and asks them to sing from Psalm 147:1, 4, 6.

The credentials are examined and found to be in order. Classis is declared constituted and the officers suggested by the last classis take their place. Rev. D. De Boer was chairman, Rev. C.J. VanderVelde, clerk, and Rev. Van Dam, vice-chairman. The chairman remembers the churches at Attercliffe and Lincoln which are vacant and the classical treasurer who is in the hospital at the present time.

The chairman asks the questions set out in Article 44 of the Church Order. The church at Attercliffe and Blue Bell ask advice regarding matters of pastoral oversight. In closed session, advice is given. The church at Attercliffe also expresses its concerns with respect to the nine points of Schereville adopted at the URCNA Synod 2007. Advice was given to the church at Attercliffe regarding this matter.

The report of the classical treasurer is submitted. The treasurer suggests a \$1 assessment for classical expenses and an assessment for \$1 for the expenses of Regional Synod East for a total assessment of \$2 per communicant member. This is adopted.

The report of the church at Smithville as the church overseeing the Fund for Needy Churches is presented. After discussion, Classis decides to grant the church at Blue Bell its request for \$21,396.00 (Can) and to set an assessment of \$17 per communicant member for the year 2008.

Rev. A. Souman presents a church visitation report to the church at Blue Bell. This positive report is received with thankfulness.

Rev. P. VanderMeyden from the Vineland Free Reformed Church speaks some words of greetings to Classis as a fraternal observer. The chairman responds with appreciation for the words of Rev. VanderMeyden.

The convening church for the next classis is Lincoln and the date is set for December 19, 2007. The suggested officers are Rev. K. Kok as chairman, Rev. De Boer clerk, and Rev. VanderVelde as vice-chairman. Rev. Kok and Rev.

Souman are appointed as the church visitors. Rev. Souman and Rev. VanderVelde are appointed as examiners. It is decided to continue granting pulpit supply once a month to the vacant churches of Attercliffe and Lincoln.

The delegates for the next Regional Synod in Fergus on Nov 14, 2007 are selected by the vote of Classis. The following brothers were selected: for ministers, the primary delegates are Rev. VanderVelde and Rev. De Boer, with Rev. Kok as first alternate and Rev. Souman as second alternate. For the elders, the primary delegates are Br. K. Jager and Br. A. Schutten, with Br. W. Oosterhoff as first alternate and Br. J. Van Ommen as second alternate. Rev. De Boer is appointed as fraternal delegate to the next Classis Ontario South (URC).

It is determined by the chairman with thankfulness that nothing censurable was said or done during the meeting. The Acts of Classis is presented and adopted. The press release is presented and adopted. The chairman closes the meeting with prayer and Psalm 145:1, 5 is sung.

*For Classis,
Rev. S.C. Van Dam,
vice-chairman at that time*

