

450 YEARS • GENEVAN PSALTER  
40 YEARS • ANGLO - GENEVAN PSALTER

# Clarion



THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE  
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1562

2012

LES  
P S E A V M E S  
M I S E N R I M E  
F R A N C O I S E

*Par Clement Marot, & Theodore de Beze.*

P S E A V M E I X.

Chantez au Seigneur qui habite en Zion, & annoncez  
ses faits entre les peuples.

Ce qui est semé en mespris,

Ainsi fera la Resurrection des morts:



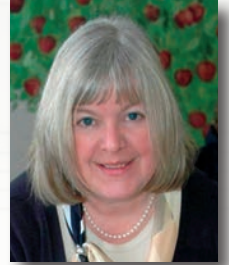
Resuscitera en gloire, 1. Corinth. 15. 42.

De l'imprimerie de Michel Blanchier,  
POVR ANTOINE VINCENT.

M. D. L X I I.

Avec privilege du Roy pour dix ans.





Dr. Christine van Halen-Faber is the principal of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College and a member of the Standing Committee of the Book of Praise

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## Something to sing about

*As God's people, what better way is there than to sing God's words to us back to him?*

Anniversaries are generally considered to be festive opportunities for reflection and celebration – and so it is not surprising that in the year of our LORD 2012 we are delighted to pay special attention to two coinciding anniversary events: The 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first complete collection of the 150 Psalms set to music in what we have come to know as the Genevan Psalter and the fortieth anniversary of the *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter*.

For members of a Reformed Christian church, the singing of the psalms is not new. After all, one of the key principles we inherited from our forefathers during the great Reformation is the centrality of God's Word in all of life – in living, in preaching, in singing. Another principle is the practice of congregational singing in which all voices young and old, in-tune and off-tune, male and female participate equally.

As God's people, what better way is there than to sing God's words to us back to him? Re-echoing his Word in worship and praise – individually as his Spirit moves us, and together of one accord, as a community of believers. No matter the situation in which we may find ourselves, the psalms form a rich treasure trove of gems – all fitting in their own way.

No wonder that the members of the Standing Committee of the *Book of Praise* encouraged the commemoration of the double anniversary and the result is the special *Clarion* issue now before you. Putting this celebratory issue together proved to be a very rewarding assignment in the end. But where to begin, that was the question.

I began by reflecting on my own experience of the place of psalm-singing in my life: A crackling reel-to-reel tape recording of my enthusiastic singing of Psalm 146:1 (to an alternate melody!) provides evidence that

when I was a toddler, my parents introduced me to the psalms. I recall learning the weekly memory work song in elementary school, and how the introduction to “really long psalms” (Psalm 19:2) in Grade 2 made me think that this grade would be much harder than Grade 1. My thoughts go back to receiving my very first copy of the Psalter, and to family singing after supper, of selecting one's favourite stanza, and then predicting who would pick which psalm. . . ! Even now, there are the occasions in which I catch myself humming a line or two while driving or working or gardening – melodies and words just coming out of nowhere. Somehow, over time, the words and melodies of the Genevan Psalter have ingrained themselves deep down in my psyche without much effort on my part. Somehow, the psalms grew on/in me. I consider this a great gift, a blessing. The privilege of carrying the text and the melodies of the psalms within oneself was brought home even more in a conversation I had with a very frail, elderly sister of a congregation. Tucked deeply within thick layers of blankets to keep her warm, she spoke about waiting patiently and eagerly for her Lord to take her home. She knew it would not be long anymore. In our final conversation she said, “Christine, keep reminding future teachers how important it is to teach the psalms and hymns as memory work to the next generation: I can't read the Bible anymore, but I can still sing! In my head, I sing the psalms I learned in school while I was a little girl – amazingly, after more than eighty years, the words and melodies all come back to me. I never realized what a privilege it is to have the words inscribed on my heart and mind!” Indeed, I will not easily forget these haunting words spoken by this elderly sister. Words of trust and comfort shaped by faith and life experience.



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**A gem of great value**

The process of preparing this issue also allowed me to broaden my perspective. The history of the Genevan Psalter in itself is an interesting one, as is the history of the development of the *Book of Praise*. As is often the case when exploring historical contexts, one comes across all sorts of stories and narratives of experience. Not all of it is positive or laudable. Not all of it is suitable for publication, when we are called to defend the honour and reputation of our neighbour. In humility it is good to remind ourselves that psalters remain the imperfect products of faithful people who are limited by their imperfections. Yet, the blessings given by God on the work of sinful people are truly amazing and never to be

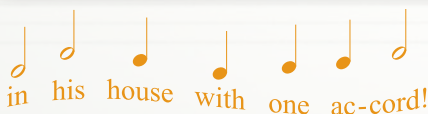
**What's Inside**

Dear Readers, in your hands is a very special issue of *Clarion*. As this year marks the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Genevan Psalter as well as the fortieth anniversary of the *Book of Praise*, it is our pleasure to put together an issue celebrating this double anniversary.

The pages of Issue 13 are almost entirely devoted to our topic. You will find articles on the history of the Genevan Psalter, the development of our *Book of Praise*, and the use of psalms in our Reformed schools. Our Treasures New and Old meditation focuses on music and is accompanied by beautiful and original artwork. We also include poetry and a music review.

Throughout the issue we are also publishing quotes from around the world about the Genevan Psalter. Our guest editorial was written by Dr. Christine van Halen-Faber; in addition, she has spent a great deal of time compiling the material for this special issue and we thank her for that! We hope you enjoy your reading.

Laura Veenendaal





"For those who know them, the melodies of the Genevan Psalter are among the most beautiful and precious in all of music. I consider it a great privilege to have grown up with them. As organist, they continue to inspire and move me. Their association with the psalms is one of Western music's greatest gifts to the church and the world. I hope that by using these tunes *in the way for which they were intended*, including the unduly neglected one for Psalm 23, they will always be kept alive."



**Jan Overduin**

– Professor Emeritus at Wilfrid Laurier University,  
Waterloo, ON

*Jan was University Organist and Professor (and Chair) of the Organ and Church Music Department. Although retired, he remains active as performer, clinician, choir director, teacher, lecturer, and consultant*

underestimated. This includes the blessing of having the Genevan Psalter in a variety of languages. Living as a post-Pentecost church of our Lord Jesus Christ we may stand in awe of the fact that on every Lord's Day, the "songbook of the covenant" is used actively by believers on all continents. Indeed, those whom the LORD has written on the roll of nations proclaim in joyful music and song that "In Zion are the springs of my salvation" (Ps 87).

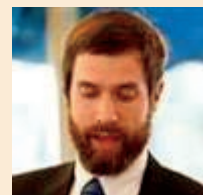
~~~~~  
**As a singing church we look forward  
to what is to come**  
~~~~~

For me, the confirmation that the Genevan Psalter is used and encouraged world-wide in churches who want to remain faithful to the Word was one of the most exciting affirmations of its value. It was good to be in contact with brothers and sisters across the globe for whom singing the biblical text of psalms is of deep value. The enthusiasm with which they responded to my queries on the use of the Genevan Psalter in worship services today was encouraging and heartening. It became clear very quickly that for many, the Psalter is a treasure indeed – a (re)discovered gem of great value.

However, while some are excited about the Genevan Psalter as gem of great value, others who have used this gem for some time may run the risk of becoming used to it, and no longer appreciate it for the treasure it represents. Perhaps we may even run the risk of speaking a little disdainfully about the psalms as "those old songs." Perhaps here, too, familiarity may breed contempt. It is a development we all must fight. We have to be mindful of the fact that we can look with renewed appreciation at older gems when they are cast in new settings. For example, our choirs and our schools will do well to learn more about the history and purpose of the Genevan Psalter and by exploring different harmonizations and practising alternate settings. We ought to encourage young (and older) musicians, especially organists and other accompanists, to improvise and compose new tapestries of sound that suit the rich text of the psalms – even when the results may not be equally pleasing to all ears and tastes. In the end, the gems themselves are the ones that count.

As a post-Pentecost church we gratefully acknowledge that the church-gathering work of our Lord Jesus Christ continues and will continue until the day of his return. We acknowledge with a deep sense of awe that this work is dynamic, it is on the move,

"These melodies represent the beginning of modern congregational song. Yet though primitive they are not at all crude. In centuries of rigorous trial, the rhythms have been altered, the harmony and accompaniment has varied a great deal, and they have been sung at every imaginable tempo. Remarkably, though these semi-anonymous composers worked almost with model, the contour of the melodies remains unchanged, and their power and effectiveness remains unmatched. They did it right the first time."



**Michael Owens**

*Michael Owens is the founder of the Genevan Psalter Resource Center, and is a musical amateur and denominational outsider who tunes pianos and tries to improve congregational song from his home in Lancaster Co., PA. To find him, please go to <http://www.genevanpsalter.com>*

"The Genevan melodies embody the existential grit and inspiring joy of the biblical psalms. Genevan melodies voice the specific tenor of God's different psalms: Genevan 51 is utterly sad; Genevan 47 is exuberant as the ascension. But original Genevan tunes are never sweet or sentimental. When the worded text is crisp and well married to the life-sensitive melodies, you have songs for congregations to sing with the compelling, rhythmic vigour of God's very Word."



Calvin Seerveld

*Calvin Seerveld is emeritated professor of Philosophical Aesthetics at the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto*

and as such demonstrates the ongoing character of the history of redemption. Our songs sung in corporate worship need to reflect this also: The songbook of the church indeed includes all 150 Psalms in their entirety, but it also includes songs that praise God for his love, grace, and mercy described in the New Testament.

As a singing church we look forward to what is to come, and may begin to sing of that also – in eager anticipation of the consummation that awaits us when, in the words of Rev. G. VanDooren to General Synod Toronto, "our Saviour will lead us into the land where we will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb forever."

Until then, the Genevan Psalter and the *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter* give us much to sing about! 🎵

"Children love the Genevan psalms. When at a church in New Hampshire, we taught the congregation all of the Genevan psalms in the five years we were there. We taught Psalm 99 to the children of the school and the congregation. The adults resisted at first, but during worship, when we sang Psalm 99, the children sang out so heartily that the adults were shamed. We had no more problems teaching the psalms to them after that."

Dr. Louis Schuler

*Kim and Louis (also known as Duck) Schuler are the editors of Cantus Christi, a hymnal which contains many of the Genevan psalms with Goudimel harmonizations in its pages*

"The reason why we, the Reformed Church in Japan, sing the Genevan Psalter in Japanese is to praise God abundantly and powerfully in worship. Many protestant churches in Japan use a hymnal that came from the American churches in the eighteenth century. We used to sing from it also, but felt that some hymns are not suitable for public worship because of their melody and text. Then we took notice of the Reformed tradition and the Genevan Psalter."

Rev. Yukio Kanata

*Rev. Yukio Kanata is the pastor at Koshien Reformed Church near Kobe, Japan. He is the chairperson of the Third Constitution Committee in charge of liturgy and the "Genevan Psalter" included in the hymnal*

"God gave the church of the Reformation the Genevan psalms to be actively sung by his congregation. We may join in this choir every Sunday again. For over fifty years I have been allowed to accompany this joyful noise from the organ bench. Let us always treasure this precious gift and these wonderful tunes at home, at school and in the worship service. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord in his house with one accord!"

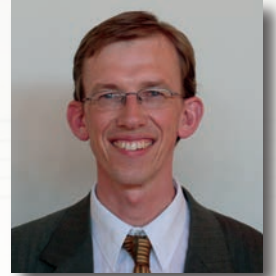


Dr. Geert Spyker

*Dr. Geert M. Spyker is a retired primary, secondary, and post-secondary educator, who actively serves as an organist in the Free Reformed Church at Southern River, Western Australia*

in his house with one ac-cord!





*Dr. John Smith is Professor of Old Testament Studies at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton, Ontario*  
[jsmith@crtcs.ca](mailto:jsmith@crtcs.ca)



## Cosmic Praise

Psalm 148 begins and ends with “Praise the Lord.” Between these two Hallelujahs, the psalm has two parts, the first about praising the Lord from the heavens (verses 1-6), and the second about praising him from the earth (verses 7-14). In the first part, the psalmist mentions three levels of heaven: the realm of the angels, the realm of the stars, and the realm of the clouds (cf. 2 Cor. 12:2). All three have to praise the Lord because he created them for that purpose.

The second part summons an array of earthly elements to join in praising the Lord: sea creatures and ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds, heat and cold, mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars, a variety of animal kinds, and finally, classes of people: kings, princes, rulers, men, women, old and young. These together have to praise the Lord from the earth because his splendour is above the earth and the heavens. In short, the psalm summons all creation to join in cosmic praise for God. Notice how often it has the word “all:” all angels, all heavenly hosts, all shining stars, all hills, all cedars, all cattle, all people, all rulers, all saints. No one is exempt.

The word “praise” is a command, which begs the question: who is giving the command? Oddly enough, the people who sing this psalm appear to be the ones giving orders. The saints are telling the heavens and the earth what to do. “Okay, heavens, praise the Lord! Angels, sun, moon, you stars up there, and you sky as well, all together now! Now, earth, it’s your turn: you mountains, trees, let’s go, animals, and people everywhere – kings, princes, old, young – all together now!” It’s a bit weird. God’s people act as though they’re directing a cosmic orchestra, and all the elements of creation are musical instruments about to play a universal tune together. It would be one thing if God was directing the orchestra, but God’s people. . . Isn’t that ludicrous?

Not entirely. After all, we confess that creation was made “to serve man, to the end that man might serve his God” (BC, Art. 12). Remember the high calling that God gave to Adam and Eve in Paradise, to have dominion

over the works of his hands. Man was created in the image of God, fit to rule under God, from paradise, close to his throne. So the thought of people directing a cosmic orchestra to God’s praise is not as crazy as it sounds. True, we don’t feel as though the angels and nature and animals and world rulers will praise God because we say so. We don’t experience that kind of dominion, but that’s because of the fall into sin. Expelled from paradise, man feels little and helpless under the sun, moon, and stars, unable to imagine that he rules the creatures of the land and sea (Ps 8). He is often at the mercy of the elements. The earth resists his cultivation. Man has become blind to God, lost in idol worship. Between fellow humans there is hatred, murder, warfare, and corruption. The thought of all creation uniting to praise God is unthinkable because sin has brought disharmony and discord.

Yet this psalm is there, in a fallen world. God is working to restore man to his high place, close to him, and he starts that work with Israel. As the adopted people of God, Israel receives the high calling to summon all creation to praise the Lord. That’s all the more remarkable when you consider that this psalm was probably written after the exile, under Persian rule. Oppressed by a foreign power, God’s people confess the Lord to be the supreme king of the universe, and they call all creation, all kings, all nations to praise him. This psalm is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. Israel sings of a horn, a metaphor for victorious strength. The saints confess that their covenant God rules over all creation, a confession that to the human ear sounds ridiculous, impossible, but the impossible, the ridiculous, is true. That is the strength of God’s people: they alone sing God’s truth, and no one can take it from them.

Now consider that God put this psalm in Scripture, that he is its Author. People can write songs about their ideal worlds, but their songs have no power to change the world. When God writes a song, the world begins to change. He does the impossible. He can restore the cosmos which man has ruined, so that it reunites to



praise his name. He began to do that through Israel, but Israel itself was an unfaithful people, in need of restoration. So God sent his own Son to make the praise of Psalm 148 come true. The Son left heavenly glory behind and entered the world under the praises of the angels. The one worthy of all praise entered the created order, came under the governance of sun and moon, was subject to the elements, experienced the curse of creation, felt the weakness of the sinful flesh and the power of the evil one at work in the world – a world of temptations and demons and sickness and death – and there he began his work of restoration.

His ministry brought strife, because the hearts of his people were under Satan's dominion. Christ offered his life to break the power of the ruler of this world. He rose as the firstborn of a restored humanity. He ascended to God's right hand, passing through the heavens. He has become greater than the angels; they fall at his feet in worship and give him all praise. He sits enthroned at God's right hand, receiving all dominion in heaven and on earth. A man of Israel now sits near God in the highest heaven. From there he gathers a church, a new covenant community, the beginnings of a restored humanity, believers who are being renewed by the Holy Spirit and who make this psalm their song.

We're called to take the words of this psalm on our lips, and to go into the world with its truth, so that people broken free from Satan's grip might know God from his Word, and talk about his power when they look at the sun, the moon, the stars, the sea creatures, the weather patterns, the landscape, the trees, and the animals, and expect a better world where heaven and earth, saints and angels join together in cosmic praise for God. 🎵







Arjan de Visser



# The Genevan Psalter: 450 Years

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In this issue of *Clarion* we commemorate the fact that 450 years ago, in 1562, the first complete version of the Genevan Psalter was published. It had taken more than twenty years to get to that point and it had not been an easy journey. In this article we trace the history of the Genevan Psalter and offer some reflections on its character and significance.<sup>1</sup>

Any historical discussion of the Genevan Psalter will have to mention the name of John Calvin. His understanding of worship was foundational for the Genevan Psalter. Calvin believed that the ministry of praise is an important part of the worship service and that singing God's praises is a *congregational* ministry. One of Calvin's problems with worship in the Roman Catholic Church was that the congregation was not singing anymore: Most of the singing was done by the clergy or by specialist singers. First and foremost, then, Calvin wanted the congregation to sing again.

Another important aspect of Calvin's understanding of worship is that he believed that especially *the psalms* should be used for the ministry of praise. Even though Calvin was not completely opposed to the singing of hymns, there is no doubt that he preferred the psalms.

There was, however, a practical problem: How can a group of untrained voices like a congregation sing the psalms? Would a congregation be able to *chant* the words of the psalms literally as they are found in the Bible? Probably not. So Calvin adopted the practice which he had seen and heard in Strasbourg: Have the congregation sing *metrical versions* of the psalms on melodies that are singable for the average person.

Calvin did more than just provide the vision for a Psalter in French. He also initiated its production. Seeing that metrical versions of the psalms did not exist, he initiated the production of a French Psalter. He started

the project while he was serving the French refugee church in Strasbourg in 1539. He continued to move the project forward for the next twenty-three years until it was finally finished in 1562.

## Editions

The historical development of the Genevan Psalter is interesting. While Calvin remained the man who provided the stimulus to bring the project to completion, various people were used to compose texts and melodies. The first edition (Strasbourg, 1539) was a small collection of twenty-two psalms and hymns which included thirteen versifications by the gifted poet Clement Marot. This man was a well-highly acclaimed poet who had friends in high circles. Even the French king, Francis I, knew him personally and liked his work. No doubt the fact that Marot was involved in versifying psalms for the Genevan Psalter was an important factor in its success.

The melodies for the first edition were mainly borrowed from the songbook of the German church in Strasbourg. One of the most famous melodies from this collection is the current Psalm 68 which was composed by Matthias Greiter.

After a few years Calvin moved back to Geneva and in 1542 a new edition of the Psalter was published; in 1543 it was followed by another one. The main author of the texts was, again, Clement Marot. The main composer of melodies was Guillaume Franc. One of the best loved melodies from this collection is the melody of Psalm 24 (also used for 62, 95, and 111).

Soon after this, both Marot and Franc left Geneva. Marot's task as a poet was taken over by the theologian Theodore Beza. Franc's role as composer of melodies was taken over by Louis Bourgeois who served in Genevan churches as a kind of music director. Bourgeois composed



many well-loved melodies, the most famous among them probably the tune of Psalm 134 (the “old hundredth”) which is also used for the hymn “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” In 1551 an expanded edition of eighty-three psalms was published with a number of new melodies by Bourgeois and new texts by Beza.

Unfortunately the gifted Bourgeois left Geneva soon after this. He had made the mistake of making improvements to the notation of the psalm book without asking permission from the city magistrates. He was arrested for his efforts and Calvin had to intervene in order to get him out of jail. In those days tinkering with music notations could put you in dire straits!

The project was continued with another composer: a certain Maistre Pierre, whose real name was probably Pierre Davantes. Beza continued to take care of the texts. Finally, in 1562 a complete collection of the 150 psalms was published. John Calvin was able to see the completion of a project that was close to his heart a few years before his death.

## Popularity

The Genevan psalms became very popular throughout French-speaking Europe in a very short time. The Huguenots in France enjoyed singing the Genevan psalms during their worship services but not just there. When war broke out between Huguenots and Roman Catholics the psalms functioned as war-songs of the Huguenots. Beza’s version of Psalm 68 was heard



Clement Marot



Theodore Beza

in his house with one ac-cord!

## Church News

Declined the calls extended by the Langley, CanRC and Redeemer CanRC of Winnipeg for mission work in Manitoba:

### Rev. J. Louwerse

of Neerlandia, Alberta

### Examinations Sustained

Examined by the Classis Pacific East on May 31 and granted permission to be ordained to the ministry of the Word and sacraments

### Candidate Justin Roukema

on the battlefield: “God shall arise and by his might put all his enemies to flight; his triumph will be glorious.” If Huguenots were arrested and executed because their faith they would sing Genevan psalms as well. In one such incident fourteen Protestant martyrs sang Psalm 79 as they were led to the scaffold: “Your land, o God, the nations have invaded; by heathen hordes your heritage was raided.”<sup>2</sup>

Even in aristocratic and royal circles the psalms of Marot and Beza found appreciation. Many people know that Queen Elizabeth I of England did not think highly of the Genevan psalms. In her opinion the melodies lacked dignity and she referred to them as “Genevan jigs.” Less known but more impressive is the report about King Francis I of France. The king had never allowed the Reformation to take root in his country. Under pressure from the Roman Catholic Church he had even banned the publication and distribution of the Genevan psalms. Nevertheless, when King Francis was on his deathbed he ordered the Psalms of Marot to be read aloud for his consolation!

## Melodies

Scholars have long debated the origin of the Genevan melodies. For some time the theory was popular that many of the Genevan melodies were modifications of *chansons*, songs that people were singing in the streets and the bars of Geneva. Although this theory could perhaps explain Queen Elizabeth’s reference to “Genevan jigs,” it does not pass muster. After all, Calvin had told the composers that the melodies should have a dignity that is fitting for worship, so it is highly unlikely that the composers would have used folk melodies of the kind that are used in streets and bars.

The common opinion among scholars today is that most Genevan melodies were new creations while some of the melodies were based on hymns from the repertoire of the Roman Catholic Church. A well-known example is



## Tubilate Deo.

*Icy l'Eglise est exhortee de s'assembler au Temple pour adorer Dieu, & le benir pour sa misericorde & verité.*

Vus tous qui la terre habitez,  
Chantez tout haut à Dieu, chantez, Ser-  
uez à Dieu ioyeuſement, Venez de-  
uant luy gayement.

the melody of Psalm 80 which is remarkably similar to the old hymn *Victimae paschali laudes*. Another example is Psalm 141 which is closely related to the hymn *Conditor alme siderum* (each melody has four lines, the third line is identical).<sup>3</sup>

Another argument to support the theory that most melodies were new creations is the choice of modes to support the content of the specific psalm. There is no room in this article to discuss the concept of the so-called church modes, but the Genevan composers certainly succeeded in creating melodies that support the message of specific psalms. The melody of Psalm 51 (in the Phrygian mode) supports the content of the psalm which is a prayer for forgiveness. The melody of Psalm 19 (in the Mixolydian mode) supports the content of the psalm which praises the Lord's revelation in creation and in his Word. Even though it can be argued that not all melodies support the content of the psalm fittingly (Psalm 60 is an example), in most cases the composers have succeeded in creating melodies that convey a sense of worshipful dignity, which is exactly what John Calvin wanted these melodies to do.

### Datheen's Psalter

Given the immediate popularity of the Genevan Psalter in the francophone world, it is not surprising that attempts were made to translate the Genevan psalms into other languages. In 1566, only four years after the publication of the complete Psalter in Geneva, Rev. Peter Datheen published a complete translation of the Psalter for the Dutch churches. Datheen's Psalter had significant deficiencies: The "metre" did not always match the

melody, resulting in awkward emphases. Still, within a few years it became the official Psalter of the Reformed Church in The Netherlands.

Not everyone received Datheen's Psalter with enthusiasm. Many congregations, especially in the eastern part of The Netherlands, continued to sing hymns from the Lutheran tradition. People complained that Genevan melodies were too difficult to sing. Of course, during those days church organs were not used for accompanying the singing. Following Calvin, most Reformed people thought that the organ was too frivolous an instrument to be used in the worship service. The congregations had to make do with the service of the precentor (*voorzanger*).<sup>4</sup>

For a few centuries the singing of the psalms remained a difficult topic on the agenda of ecclesiastical meetings. Perhaps there is some consolation here: The complaint that Genevan melodies are difficult to sing is not a recent (or purely North American) problem.

We do not need to deny that there is difference in quality among the Genevan melodies. Most melodies are excellent, beautiful, singable, fitting to the words of the psalms. Some melodies do not have those excellent qualities. On the whole, however, the Canadian Reformed Churches have inherited a real treasure from The Netherlands, and ultimately from Geneva: A complete collection of metrical versions of all the psalms on melodies that enables the congregation to sing God's praises with reverence and dignity. It is a collection worth keeping. 🎵

#### (Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> A helpful resource for this article was Jan R. Luth, "Het Geneefse Psalter." In Karla Apperloo-Boersma & Herman J. Selderhuis (eds.), *Calvijn en de Nederlanden* (Apeldoorn: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2009), 182-193.

<sup>2</sup> For these and other reports regarding the use of the Genevan Psalms during the religious wars in France, see Rowland E. Prothero, *The Psalms in Human Life* (New York: Dutton, 1905), 190-191. Available online.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the origin and character of the Genevan melodies, the articles by Pierre Pidoux are still a good read: Pidoux, "History of the Genevan Psalter" (translated from French), three articles, *Reformed Music Journal*, Volume 1 (1989).

Available online at [spindleworks.com](http://spindleworks.com).

<sup>4</sup> For more information on the Genevan Psalter in The Netherlands, see: Jan R. Luth, "Het Geneefse Psalter in Nederland." In Apperloo-Boersma & Selderhuis, 194-209.





George van Popta



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# A brief history of the *Anglo-Genevan Psalter*

When our forefathers arrived in Canada in the early 1950s, they noticed the absence of an English Psalter on the familiar Genevan melodies. There was discussion as to what to do. Should they use the *Psalter Hymnal* of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC)? Or should they make their own Genevan Psalter? Although the worship services were first held in the Dutch language in which they could use the Dutch Psalter, they felt it important to develop an English one.

At the first synod (Homewood-Carman, 1954) the churches agreed that the thirty-four psalms in the CRC *Psalter Hymnal* that were set to Genevan tunes could be used. Further Synod decided to appoint a committee with the instruction to study the whole matter of the rhymed version of the psalms in the English language and to report to the churches and the next synod (Homewood-Carman, 1958).

The committee got to work. They published a little booklet with the thirty-four psalms. The idea, at first, was not necessarily to produce a Psalter set exclusively to Genevan tunes; rather, it was to produce a Calvinistic Psalter. Synod 1958 instructed the committee “. . . to compose a Psalter in the English language including, if possible, other hymns of the Scripture. . . and to make use of material available in the Psalter of the CRC and other Psalters in as much as the versification is faithful and tunes answer the Church musical norms.” Synod 1962 said that the committee did not need to confine itself to Genevan tunes; however, it needed to ensure that the psalms and hymns were faithful to Scripture and that they could be understood and sung in the churches. The rhyming had to be intelligible and the music of a high quality.

In 1961, a songbook was published containing eighty-two psalms and fourteen hymns. To this was added, in 1967, a Supplement, thirty-four more psalms and nineteen hymns. Most, though not all, of the psalms were set to Genevan tunes.

  
in his house with one ac-cord!

Synod 1965 made some significant decisions. It instructed the committee to include in the Psalter (at this point and thereafter called the *Book of Praise*) hymns of other parts of Scripture and of the confessions. As to the melodies of the psalms, the Synod did not restrict the committee to Genevan tunes but said that other appropriate melodies could be used. The committee was also authorized to publish, by way of exception, two different versions of the same psalm (one on a Genevan tune, one on a different tune) if not doing this would possibly result in the psalm never being sung because of the melody.

Even though synods had said that the committee did not need to restrict itself to the Genevan melodies for the psalms, the committee did. In its report to Synod 1968, the committee said:

The ultimate aim of Deputies (i.e., “the committee”) is to present to the Churches a complete Psalter comprising all 150 Psalms on the Genevan tunes. They would like to emphasize the phrase “on the Genevan tunes.” Deputies do not anticipate any objections to the first part of this suggestion; all of us are convinced that the Churches are in need of a complete Psalter. The second part of the suggestion, however, implies that Deputies, will no longer avail themselves of the opportunity offered by the Edmonton Synod (1965), namely that they did not have to limit themselves to the Genevan tunes, but were at liberty to use different tunes so long as these served the purpose of the congregational singing, (namely) the praise of the Lord. Deputies are now of the opinion that they should not make use of this possibility. They have come to the unanimous conclusion, after many lengthy discussions, not to recommend to the Churches to add another one to the many existing Psalters, which are composed of a number of tunes well-known in the Anglo-Saxon world together with beloved Genevan tunes.





Towards the end of October, we were pleasantly surprised when we found a copy of the Book of Praise in our mailbox. By the time these lines are being read there will be no Church that has not yet received the copies which it ordered. There is happiness and gratitude in the Churches because of the arrival of

the Book of Praise in its present form. . . . From the very beginning the Canadian Reformed Churches have felt the need for a Psalmbook which contained faithful rhymings that could be sung on the Genevan melodies. . . . This work was undertaken in order that the praises of the Lord might be sung in the midst of the congregation in such a manner that both the music and the words are fitting and acceptable to Him. With the completion of this work the Canadian Reformed Churches have contributed to the culture of the English-speaking world and therein fulfilled a part of our task in the world.

Rev. W.W.J. VanOene  
From: *The Canadian Reformed Magazine*,  
Nov. 25, 1972 – Vol. 21 Issue 24

If this were the result of their work, Deputies would consider the work previously done a waste of time and money since there are many of this type of Psalter available in our country. Instead, Deputies would like to suggest that the Churches once and for all forsake this concept of an eclectic Psalter and proceed to the completion of a *Genevan Psalter*. If our Churches achieved this – and Deputies are convinced that this is certainly possible within a reasonable period of time – then our Churches would not only possess a well-balanced Psalter, but would also have contributed in a unique manner to the culture of our nation, which is for the most part unfamiliar with the magnificent Genevan tunes. Deputies flatter themselves that thus they may contribute to the Psalmody of our nation. That they certainly do not aim too high may be inferred from the enthusiasm with which musicologists from many quarters have received our still incomplete Psalter. This change of policy entails of course that the non-Genevan tunes of some Psalms in the existing *Book of Praise* will be replaced by Genevan tunes.

This has been the track upon which the Canadian Reformed Churches have been ever since: The Psalter exclusively Genevan and the hymn section a mix of Genevan and non-Genevan.

The first complete *Book of Praise* was published in 1972 by order of General Synod New Westminster, 1971. It contained all 150 psalms on Genevan tunes, and sixty-two hymns.



General Synod of  
Homewood – Carman,  
1954

Hal - le - lu - jah! Praise the LORD



Rev. G. VanDooren, convener of the Committee on the Church Book, addresses the General Synod 1974 in Toronto, where the first edition of the *Book of Praise* was formally presented:

*I want you to know, however, that we always started our meetings with the prayer that our*

*God would help us in finding the men who could provide us with faithful rhymings so that He could be enthroned on the praises of Israel.*

*And He surprised us. New talents came to the fore (the brethren do not want their names mentioned) and. . . we could complete our mandate only because of these new, surprising, talents.*

*Thus you may understand, Mr. Chairman, no one can be more happy about the completion of the Psalmbook than our Committee, after those twenty years during which there were changes in membership, but the Committee remained the same.*

*We are fully aware that this new and complete edition is not perfect; maybe we must say, it is "provisional." We dare not deny that it shows the fingerprints, maybe even (as one scorned) the "wooden shoes footprints" of immigrants. Undoubtedly a new generation will be able to improve it and bring it closer to the perfection which will arrive when our Saviour will lead us into the land where we will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb forever.*

*But we do believe that by the publication of this Book of Praise we have saved and secured, for the generations to come, the Calvinistic, Genevan, Covenantal Book of Praise.*

Rev. G. VanDooren

From: Acts, General Synod Toronto, 1974, pp. 39-41

The second complete edition of the *Book of Praise* was released in 1984. In this edition the hymns were arranged according to the order of the Apostles' Creed and several changes were made to the hymn section to give a total of sixty-five.

General Synod Neerlandia, 2001 instructed the committee to begin the work of expanding the hymnary. The result was the publication of the *Augment* in 2007, a collection of twenty-eight hymns, nineteen of which eventually found their way into the present *Book of Praise*.

General Synod Smithers, 2007, directed the committee ". . .to initiate a thorough review of all 150 Psalms in the 1984 text of *Anglo-Genevan* Psalter in the *Book of Praise*." This work was done in cooperation with all the churches. Using the power of the Internet, revised psalms were made available to the churches via a website as they were approved by the committee. As well, hard copies of the revisions were also presented to the churches.

The committee received much valuable feedback from the churches, which was very helpful in finalizing the committee recommendations to the churches and General Synod Burlington, 2010. This latter synod approved the Authorized Provisional Version of the *Book of Praise*, which the churches are all using. The definitive version will, Lord willing, be approved at the upcoming Synod Carman, 2013.

In a sense, a circle will close: the work was begun in Carman and will find a conclusion in Carman. As Canadian Reformed people and churches, we may be very thankful to the visionaries of the first synods. It is remarkable that a far-flung federation of Dutch immigrant churches had the dream of producing an English Calvinistic Psalter. The dream resulted in something unique to the world: the *Book of Praise*, the only English songbook that contains the complete collection of all the tunes used in the first Genevan Psalter of 1562. On this fortieth anniversary, it is worth noting that the *Book of Praise* is truly catholic since Reformed churches throughout the world sing the Genevan Psalms in their own languages.

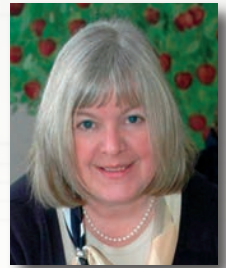
May God continue to be praised by his people as we sing from the *Book of Praise*. ♪

♪ in his house with one ac-cord!





Christine van Halen-Faber



## A Peek Behind the Scenes

Dr. Christine van Halen-Faber is the principal of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College and a member of the Standing Committee of the Book of Praise

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A wonderful side benefit of preparing a celebratory issue to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the *Book of Praise – Anglo-Genevan Psalter* is that you can spend some time on letting your thoughts wander into the past. In my mind, I had lots of questions: What actually had to happen to make the dream of our recently-immigrated forefathers in the mid-1950s a reality? What motivated the early songbook committee members (e.g., Br. M.M. de Groot Sr., Br. J.J. Knecht, and Rev. G. VanDooren) to persevere under sometimes challenging circumstances? How did they embark on the monumental task of developing a complete English Genevan Psalter that was faithful to the Scriptures and historically relevant in that it reflected the Reformed tradition on the American continent? How did they manage the sheer work it takes to publish a complete psalter – given that these were the days in which the modern conveniences of word-processing, email, and document-sharing had not yet seen the light of day? What did it take to produce the 1972 edition of the Psalter? If I could only sneak a little peek behind the scenes. . . .

To satisfy my curiosity and to find answers to some of my questions, I decided to go to a dependable source, to someone who has been involved with the *Book of Praise* for many, many years: Our brother, Dr. Bill Helder. I told him that I was particularly interested in finding out a little more about the mundane aspects of the work – about the *modus operandi* of the committee, about his early involvement, and about those details that tend to stay alive only in an oral history. A little reticent at first, Bill became quite animated once we got started. He recalled the letter he received in the fall of 1970. It was an urgent appeal for help from the church book committee, which was desperately trying to finish

the English text of the 150 psalms for publication. Rev. VanDooren and Br. Menno de Groot Sr. had kept the work going after the sudden death of Rev. Kouwenhoven, the Hebrew expert on the committee. They had sought (and received) the advice of “external advisors” but they realized that at that stage they needed someone who loves and knows the English language. “We need someone who can review and fix up the proposed text so that it sounds like proper English.” Young brother Bill Helder, a doctoral student in the English Department at McMaster University at that time, seemed to fit the bill. Bill chuckled when he said, “I must have been pretty sure of myself back then. Somehow I didn’t consider the task too daunting, nor did it bother me that I was the junior member by several decades. I just did it.”

For several years, the committee met on a monthly basis. Location and meeting times were flexible to accommodate all members. The committee would meet in the homes of Rev. VanDooren and Br. de Groot, and at the Theological College’s stately building on Queen Street S. in Hamilton. Often meetings would start in the late afternoon and run over the supper hour, well into the evening. But that was not a problem either – even though these were pre order-in-pizza days: Occasionally Rev. VanDooren would disappear into the kitchen to fry fish in a way for which he had become quite famous, and together the brothers would feast on a meal while continuing the discussion on the text of a stanza of one of the psalms. Faithfulness to the biblical text was of utmost importance to the members of the committee. In Dr. Helder’s words, “From the very start it was obvious to me that anyone with literary pretensions would have to learn to set limits to his creativity when versifying psalms. But the other extreme to be avoided is a bland and prosaic literalness which also does not do justice to

Mr. M.M. de Groot Sr.



Rev. G. VanDooren



Dr. William Helder

the scriptural text but which all too many assume to be satisfactory. I think this was the more important lesson that I had to learn. Psalm versification (like much hymn writing, especially nowadays) tends to be a kind of sub-literary genre, but if a final product is to be any good at all, there should still be room for the art that conceals art. As I see it, in working with the scriptural text it is of the utmost importance to strike the right balance. Since it is always Scripture that sets the standards, creating a faithful psalter is indeed a humbling task.”

The preparation and sharing of the newly-developed text of the psalms among members of the committee presented its own challenges. Although some members used the type writer, others preferred handwritten drafts of a new text. In particular, the proposals by Br. Walter van der Kamp stood out because of his beautiful schoolmasterly script. Each proposal was made on a “ditto master” and then fed through a spirit duplicator with its characteristic smell and bluish print. Rev. VanderBoom prepared multiple copies of the Minutes by placing black carbon paper between layers of regular paper. This method was used also to make text corrections on the spot and circulate them instantly to the members of the committee. All in all it was a laborious process. Later, with increased access to photocopiers, things became a bit better – even if one drawback of those early photocopies was that the shiny

paper surface did not lend itself well for writing and making notes or corrections. Looking at the archival copies now it is remarkable to note that over the years the text itself has gradually faded with age!

Steadily the preparation of the first complete collection of the 150 psalms took shape. The music type setting was done in The Netherlands at a company that had experience in publishing Psalters, and as everything began to fall into place, the Song Book Committee could announce that it was ready to publish the 150 versified and rhymed psalms as part of its report to the churches: The first complete English Genevan Psalter was published in 1972.

In 1980, the Rev. VanDooren, the “father of Genevan psalmody in North America,” retired from the committee, along with Br. Menno de Groot Sr. and Rev. W.W.J. VanOene – leaving Dr. William Helder as the sole survivor of that committee. In a personal letter to Bill, Rev. VanDooren made it a point to pass on his psalmody mantle to his much younger committee member: “Make this a priority in your life.” As churches we may be thankful that our brother Helder has taken up the task and as a result, he became very instrumental in the preparation of the 1984 edition of the complete *Book of Praise*.

Looking back over the many years of his work on the *Book of Praise*, Bill Helder acknowledges that the first decade of his involvement was a kind of apprenticeship during which he gradually developed a fairly definite set of criteria for the rhyming of the psalms. Most recently, Dr. Helder completed a complete review and revision of the versification of the psalms in order “to bring the Psalms we have into closer harmony with the actual text of the biblical Book of Psalms and to present them in the most stylistically beautiful and pleasing form” (Report to Synod 2010).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, wordprocessing, Internet access, and file-sharing may have changed the way in which we work – yet fundamentally, our task today is not so very different from the one our pioneering forefathers took up so diligently. The Canadian Reformed Churches own a genuine treasure in the form of the *Book of Praise*. 🎵

<sup>1</sup> For more information on this project, see the July 30, 2010 issue of *Clarion* which features an article in which Rev. Theo Lodder interviews Dr. William Helder about his work in revising the rhymed text of the psalms.

in his house with one ac-cord!





“You American Calvinists have done pretty well in preserving the major and minor melodies of *The Genevan Psalter*. Psalms 42, 68, and 73 are all in your *Psalter Hymnal*. But the finest Genevan melodies are not in major or minor, but in the dorian, phrygian, and lydian modes. You have let all those interesting melodies fade just at a time when contemporary composers are turning toward the medieval modes again. Just wait, some composer is going to snap up all those Genevan melodies just when you have let them go. For instance, is there anybody here in music theory at Calvin College who knows Psalm 51, the Calvinist *kyrie* in the phrygian mode?”



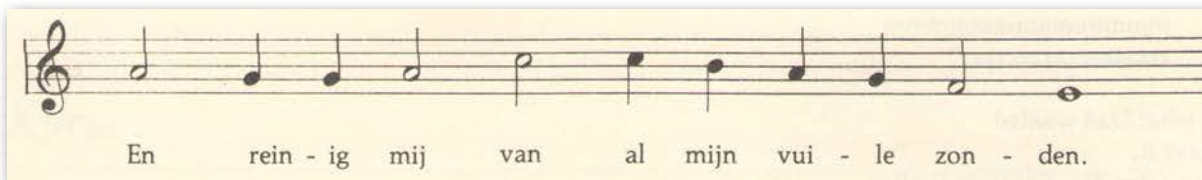
My hand was the only one to go up.

“You mean you can sing it?”

I did,  
right from the solemn opening



to the heavy phrygian close



The Jewish musicologist led the applause afterwards and insisted that hearing the Genevan 51 as preserved in a folk tradition had been worth his whole trip to Grand Rapids.

And I thought it hardly mattered that Dad knew so little about musical style seeing he had such class. ♪

♪  
in his house with one ac-cord!





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## The *Book of Praise*: A Music Textbook?

The trusty *Book of Praise* receives a prominent place in our schools. If your local Canadian Reformed school is similar to the two schools that I have served, then all students receive their own copy sometime in the primary grades. For the rest of their school years, it is kept close at hand inside their desks, often right beside their Bible. The psalms and hymns are used for classroom devotions and weekly memory work. The creeds and confessions receive attention during Bible class, and in some cases are consulted during science or social studies lessons. Even the Church Order is pulled out once in a while, especially when we are discussing church government. And let us not forget the prayers: only last week one of my sixth grade students used the “Prayer Before Meals” to open our lunch hour.

But our *Book of Praise* is first of all a collection of songs. Without the music it contains, we would have little use for rhymed versifications of the Psalms, and hymns would be nothing more than religious poetry. If music is indeed a fundamental component of the *Book of Praise*, does it necessarily follow that the *Book of Praise* is a fundamental component of our music classrooms or programs?

To be honest, the answer is not likely to be a resounding yes. My guess is that the extent to which the *Book of Praise* is used varies widely. It depends on the school culture, leadership, staff, parent community, and to some extent even the surrounding churches.

It must be admitted that the *Book of Praise* was written as an aid to corporate worship, not as a music textbook. There are some characteristics of our psalms and hymns that make them less suitable for use in music education. For example, they do not include harmony. Few of them are suitable for use as rounds, which is usually the first exposure to part-singing for children.

The psalms and some of the hymns do not have metre. With some exceptions, they don’t include repeated word or rhythm patterns, which often help children learn the music. They are somewhat limited in style and genre, and are weighted heavily toward one musical period: the medieval/renaissance.

However, the psalms and hymns in our *Book of Praise* have a great advantage over other music: our students are already familiar with them. They have heard them sung in church and (hopefully) at home. In addition, the tunes are generally simple rhythmically and melodically. The fact that harmony is not included makes them easier to read for young children.

Most importantly, the purposeful use of the songs in the *Book of Praise* highlights and solidifies the connection between the church and the school. Use of the Genevan psalms and synodically approved hymns is a philosophical decision that flows out of a school’s appreciation for our collective history and musical heritage.

In my opinion, there are many opportunities to use the *Book of Praise* in the music classroom that go far beyond simply singing the psalms and hymns in unison. All of these are currently in use in our schools (at least in the two that I teach at).

In the primary grades, children can begin to learn alphabetical note names and note values. After singing a psalm or hymn, children can identify the first notes of each line. They can count how many “As” there are in a line, or how many quarter notes. The layout of our *Book of Praise* is certainly conducive to simple activities such as these.

Other musical concepts are often taught later in elementary school. For example, accidentals include sharps and flats. Children are able to point out sharps and flats in a psalm and are also able to hear the

Hal - le - lu - jah! Praise the LORD

difference that they make if they play them with or without the accidental. Often the discussion will turn to the “phantom” accidentals that we often place in our music. If I play a line of a psalm as written compared to as commonly sung, the children have a variety of opinions as to which they prefer. Surprisingly, a good number prefer the way the psalm is written rather than the way they are used to singing.

Intervals and key signatures are two other musical concepts that can be taught using psalms and hymns. On a worksheet, students can identify the first interval of a variety of psalms, or identify their key signatures. Many of the hymns provide examples of music with different time signatures.

Music history is mostly taught in the older grades, and often focuses on the classical period. However, it is important to teach the place that the Genevan Psalter had in musical history. It was a reaction to the increasingly complex music being sung in the churches, mostly by trained choirs. Although it sprung from the Renaissance period, it signified a break with much of the music of the period.

In advanced music classes, alternate scales based on modes are sometimes taught. The psalms, because they are written using these scales, are ideal for demonstrating the various modes.

There is a fair amount of recorded music that is based on the Psalms, especially organ music. It is useful for listening instruction because the tunes are usually familiar. Students can identify the melody and how it is altered. They can discuss harmonies, vocal textures, and instrumental timbres. One of my favourite activities is to play a psalm prelude and have the students page through their *Book of Praise* to try and find the psalm that it is based on. Sometimes this can be quite a challenge! There is also a growing amount of music in contemporary style that is based on the Psalms.

Children, young and old, sing psalms and hymns throughout their school years, often during devotional time. However, they can also be sung in music class. For this purpose, simple two-part arrangements are useful. Such arrangements have been circulating in our schools for a long time. Some of them have also been included in a volume of all 150 psalms for part-singing, harmonized mostly by Goudimel, that is available from Inheritance Publications. If choir is available in the older grades, the four-part harmonies in this book are useful as well.

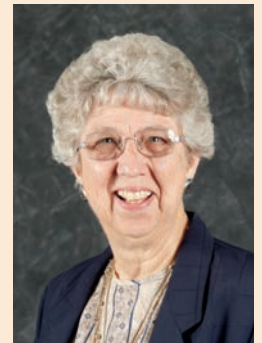
in his house with one ac-cord!

For many students, the first exposure to instrumental music is the recorder. There are many excellent recorder methods available. Many include a good mix of traditional and classical music, but none, to my knowledge, contain music of the Genevan Psalter. As a result, it is a good idea to supplement a method book with playing directly from the *Book of Praise*. Not every psalm or hymn is suitable for beginning recorder players, but many are. After a few years of instruction and practice, almost any tune will be possible to play.

Some schools include Orff instruments in their music programs. Others use pitched percussion instruments such as Boomwhackers or handbells. Some of the tunes in the *Book of Praise* lend themselves to the inclusion of percussion, both pitched and unpitched. One barrier is that the teacher will usually have to arrange these pieces themselves – unless the students themselves are involved in creating the music.

In instrumental music classes, the ability to play by ear is an important skill. In my band classes, I will often begin a class by singing the first note of a psalm. Students will imitate this note on their instruments. Then I'll add one note at a time until the students can play the

“My appreciation of the Genevan Psalter expanded in stages from 1) head knowledge in church music classes; 2) congregational singing and vibrant organ settings in The Netherlands; 3) learning how the psalms shaped and sustained the faith of Dutch immigrants in North America; 4) learning of the international reach – including Germany, Hungary, Indonesia, and most recently, Japan, where Reformed churches now have the entire Genevan Psalter. This jewel of the Reformed tradition still shines!”



Emily R. Brink

Emily R. Brink was editor of the 1987 Psalter Hymnal, which included forty Genevan tunes; she is currently Senior Research Fellow at the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Grand Rapids, Michigan



"I'm always surprised that the composers of the Genevan tunes with only two note values – fast and slow – created so many spheres. Every melody fits perfectly with the content of the relevant psalm. And yet the melodies are also capable to express the twists in the psalm text. Musically, the tunes are an inexhaustible treasury. You can use them as themes for composing or improvising in styles that did not exist yet when they were composed."



Peter Sneeep

Peter Sneeep is composer of church music and organist and choir member in De Kandelaar, Martuskerk, and Schaapskooi in Amersfoort

The final challenge is to identify the number of the psalm. Once in a while, I'll turn it around and have the students challenge me! They sing the first line of a psalm and I'll have to come up with the number.

Finally, instrumental music classes can make use of compositions based on Genevan tunes or synodically-approved hymns. The difficulty is that very few arrangements are commercially available, aside from arrangements of "Old Hundredth" (our Psalm 134). Credo Christian High School has contributed to a solution by commissioning various works for concert band, mostly by the composer Timothy Johnson. Other music teachers have arranged music themselves. The amount of music available is slowly growing, but more can be done.

**It is a highlight for teachers when students sing their hearts out, extolling the Lord's praise and putting his enemies to silence**

The preceding paragraphs give examples of how the *Book of Praise* can be used in the music classroom. However, pedagogical considerations should not be in the forefront when deciding whether or not to use the *Book of*

*Praise* as a music textbook. The primary reason for doing so is because use of the music in the *Book of Praise* helps us express our identity as Reformed schools.

Using this music is *confessional* because it is associated with the Word of God as versified in our psalms and hymns. In using these songs we confess the Triune God to our children and teach them to use his Word in praise and confession of who he is.

It is *covenantal* because it allows us to express a common bond with other Reformed believers of past centuries. They express God's faithfulness to his promises and call his covenant children to a life of thankfulness.

It expresses the *unity of purpose* with the home and church by strengthening a common musical bond. Students can hear the connection between singing in the church on Sunday and singing at home during family devotions – which can only be a positive thing.

**Students are unanimously excited that it is the same *Book of Praise* they earn to use at home in family devotions and in church**

Finally, it is *antithetical* – partly because it sets us apart from other religions. It also sets us apart from the world. Students should be taught to appreciate the music in the *Book of Praise*, especially the Genevan Psalter, because it is *their* music, as opposed to the music that the world constantly bombards them with.

The music in our *Book of Praise* is *our* music. It is the music of our ancestors, both spiritual and (in many cases) physical. It connects us to believers in sixteenth century Geneva, in Jacobite Scotland, in Enlightenment England, and even in medieval Italy. We can make this music come alive for our children by giving it a prominent place in our schools, and making *our* music *their* music. ♪

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Arthur Kingma [abkingma@kwic.com](mailto:abkingma@kwic.com).



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# Why to Teach Memory Work

The curriculum of Covenant Christian School in Millgrove is developed and organized so that the children may come to know God more deeply and richly and live for him more faithfully. The school curriculum explores all dimensions of his creation. God's design for creation and his will for human society and culture must be understood and obeyed. This is the way of godly wisdom.

Covenant Christian School's program seeks to attain a general standard of achievement for all students to the best of their ability and provides systematic subject studies to provide a firm basis for further studies in various disciplines. In teaching the children at our school, we attempt to develop this awareness in all subjects of the curriculum.

In Bible History classes, the students develop knowledge of the Bible and its concepts. As the child becomes acquainted with the account of God's revelation as found in the Scriptures and his knowledge deepens and matures, the focus is shifted from an emphasis on facts to relationships to foster a deeper understanding of our responsibility within the framework of God's promises and commands. Bible memory work emphasizes the need for using Bible verses and selections from the *Book of Praise* to support the Bible History classes and to prepare the child for active participation within the worship service.

## Rationale

The decision to sing and learn psalms and hymns in our school is not really ours: there is a command to sing. The children of the covenant need to know the songs of the covenant and sing them with joy. We sing the songs because the Lord wants us to know the words of the covenant and to have them written in our minds, on our hearts, and on our lips. "Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them. . .

in his house with one ac-cord!

And when many disasters and difficulties come upon them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants" (Deut 31:19-21). These words are spoken to Moses concerning the song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32). The purpose of the covenant-song is stated: *in the future it will be a witness*. Singing psalms and hymns serves not only a purpose in the present, but also in the future – in and after "troubled days" and "heavy times" people will recall the songs which they have learned when they were young.

Deuteronomy 31 also teaches us that the covenant song is not only the property of the individual, but belongs to the congregation, the people of God. The very fact that the Lord has passed on these songs to the church turns these songs into church songs, community songs. Since these psalms are songs they should be sung to the teacher, rather than recited as poetry or written as prose.

The memorization of God's Word occupied an important place in Israel. The covenant people were exhorted: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands, and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deut 6:6-9).

The memory of the LORD's saving acts was regularly reinforced with the celebration of the three great annual feasts. Memorials also functioned in a similar way. Constantly Israel had to orientate to what God had said and done and was doing. And it was done in such a way that a child could understand and remember.

Considering Israel's situation, it is obvious that the singing of memory work today from God's Word is important and should be done at a child's level.



"Our use of the *psalms* as the songbook of the covenant is a reformation of liturgical practice in 120 years of Korean church history. For the past ten years, our congregation has sung the psalms using the Genevan melodies, and the children like them even better than the adults do. Our congregational singing is sometimes done in four-part harmony, accompanied by soprano, alto, tenor, and bass recorders and piano. Although it is not perfect and needs to be revised, we treasure our Korean Psalter."



*Rev. DongSup Song*

*Rev. DongSup Song studied theology at Hapdong Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. He presently serves as pastor at Jayoo (Free) Reformed Church in Jeonju, Korea*

Students need to think in biblical terms, using biblical thought and what they already know about the Bible. The thinking of the students needs to be orientated around the LORD and what he said and did. Students need to be constantly challenged to see reality and all things pertaining to their lives through the glasses of God's revelation to us. That is the only antidote to the secularization of society around us. The place of memorization should not be underestimated. The trends in our secular society to downplay memorization of any kind must be resisted. "I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Ps 119:11). "The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not slip" (Ps 37:31).

### Main understandings

1. Understand that as covenant children we have to know the songs of the covenant (Deut 31:19, 20);
2. Understand the importance of memorizing passages from Scripture (Deut 6:4-9);

3. Understand that memory work is an effective tool whereby covenant children learn to speak God's Words after him;
4. Understand that the texts and songs will feed our life of faith and become a source of strength, guidance, and comfort in all circumstances, i.e. times of joy, thankfulness, and praise; and times of temptation, trial, and grief;
5. Understand that God's Word is the only antidote against the corruption and brokenness of life in this world.

#### Editor's note:

The Covenant Christian School document elaborates further on the structure of the memory work program, home-church-school communication, and suggestions for teaching and evaluation. ♪

"Our congregation almost always sings one psalm from the Genevan Psalter every Sunday. Even though it is not so easy to sing the Genevan melodies, our church members both young and old continue to try. Our favourites are 100 and 150. The melody of Psalm 100 is popular in Japan, but the rhythm was different from the original Genevan. 'Our Japanese Genevan Psalter 100' is almost same as the original rhythm, and we love it."



*Rev. Takayuki Ashida*

*Rev. Takayuki Ashida has served the Shin-Urayasu Tokyo Bay Reformed Church since 2006. He obtained a Th.M. in church education and worship at Calvin Theological Seminary*



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# Introducing the Psalms

Samuel reminded the Israelites to “be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; [and to] consider what great things he has done for you” (1 Sam 12:24). This resonates with well-known passages like Deuteronomy 6, Joshua 24, and Psalm 78. One significant way to impress the Lord’s great deeds on the children’s hearts is to teach them the songs of the covenant. When John Calvin set to work to have the psalms sung again in the churches, musician Louis Bourgeois was charged to teach them to the children. Today, in our schools, it is one of the glorious tasks of our primary teachers to help the children learn these very songs from the *Book of Praise*. I asked them how they do it, and appreciate their responses.

## Joy

Primary students’ minds are like sponges, sucking in every word their teacher says, and absorbing every image presented before their eager eyes in books, on bulletin boards, screens, or flip charts. It’s the ultimate truth to them, and they make connections to the reality they know. Watch their eyes light up when they can point out the sounds, the letters, and the numbers they know appear on the chart paper, one line at a time, as part of learning a “new psalm”! Listen to their enthusiastic voices as they tirelessly sing the words of the covenant, and begin to connect them to the Bible stories heard at home, in church, or at school! Learning it one or a few lines at a time, they’ll repeat it with exuberance many times a day: For opening and closing devotions, before and after recesses, and between lessons.

To help students learn the psalms and instill the joy connected to the praise of our God, teachers use several approaches. They often paraphrase the meaning, provide instrumental support, and select stanzas that fit with a lesson – whether in Bible or otherwise. As the year goes on, they add to the students’ repertoire of known psalms. Some teachers have their children sing the psalms in rounds, or add elements of competition or antiphonal

singing. Some teachers report to parents on a weekly basis how well their child did – and may reward knowing it with a sticker. In the end, the psalms will stick as well, etched in their memories for life. It is a highlight for teachers when students sing their hearts out, extolling the Lord’s praise and putting his enemies to silence, by themselves or as a group, in ways that can put adults to shame (Ps 8).

To introduce the psalms, many teachers use large font flip-charts or projections early in the school year; but, by and by, students get their own *Book of Praise*. In one school, this happens at the end of Kindergarten; another does it in September; in some, just before or after Christmas, or after the March Break when they begin to



Avigail Sikkema  
in PNG

in his house with one ac-cord!



master the art of reading. Some schools wait till Grade 2, and one is waiting for the final edition – but in every case it is a highlight for the students. It is *their own Book of Praise*, a treasure with *their name* on it. They can read it for themselves, it makes them feel “grown up,” and, in many cases, they get to keep and cherish it till they graduate! They are thrilled to find the psalms they already know, and soon select favourites to sing at every opportunity. Some teachers play games to help them find a psalm quickly, as the initial introduction may slow devotions down. For frequently sung psalms, teachers may give out bookmarks – whether ready-made or prepared in art class. Apart from all these good things in school, students are unanimously excited that it is the same *Book of Praise* they learn to use at home in family devotions and in church.

### Smiles

The *Book of Praise* is good for smiles. Primary teachers are positive about the new *Book of Praise* – especially because the psalms are easier to explain, flow better, and make more sense to the children. However, not a few have been lovingly smiled at for singing the old words – and find themselves forced to look at the words. Some also need to look at the notes to get the tunes right.

**One significant way to impress the Lord's great deeds on the children's hearts is to teach them the songs of the covenant**

Students are excited to sing “their memory work” in church – and frequently put a smile on people’s faces. Several schools and teachers make sure their ministers know which psalms the students know or are learning, so they can include it in the Sunday liturgy. Often, this takes the form of a list, which parents may also have, or a line in the school news weekly or the students’ agenda. One teacher notes that students who do not sing Genevan tunes in their home church have no trouble learning them, and that they, too, benefit from this rich Reformed



*Psalm singing in Korea*

heritage. Some teachers also noticed that families seem to be all over the psalm-singing map – from never, to perhaps once a week, to every day at supper time devotions. Psalm 8:2 comes to mind here again.

Some teachers shared anecdotes about children making inappropriate connections to the reality they know. One student was challenged by Psalm 87:2, and explained why: “We are near the end of Grade 1, and we have to learn harder ones now!” Another child changed the words in Psalm 72:9 to “Like lemonade with riches flowing,” and commented that he liked it pink. Clearly there remains reason to clarify a psalm’s intended meaning!

Our Grade 1 teachers have an enviable role in introducing their students to the *Book of Praise* – and they love it. Parents are privileged to have their children attend a school where this is an integral part of the program. Our churches are blessed with the gift of schools where this happens, so we can sing the praises of the Lord with one voice, deep appreciation, and lasting joy. May the Lord’s praise continue to resound in our classrooms, in our homes, and in our churches. May it be an integral part of how we “fear and serve the Lord and serve him faithfully with all our heart; [and our consideration of] what great things he has done for us,” and how we pass that on to our children. ♪

  
 Hal - le - lu - jah! Praise the LORD



## Review of *Psalms Unplugged*: Sing a Song Newly to the Lord

The Psalm Project is a group of musicians from The Netherlands who recently passed through our hometown of Hamilton on their “Teach Us to Pray” tour. At a morning workshop, the group’s pianist and composer, Eelco Vos, explained that the name of their tour referred to a key part of their “quest:” to encourage Christians to a greater knowledge and familiarity with the psalms, which, as the church’s inspired prayer book, teach us who God is, who we are, and provide us with a model for addressing God in all circumstances. The musicians of The Psalm Project began from a realization that as many of their fellow Christians were singing fewer and fewer of the psalms, the inspired language of the psalms was beginning to pass out of the everyday devotional life of the church. In the workshop we attended, Mr. Vos recalled a time when people went about their daily tasks singing or humming psalms in the Genevan tunes, and described that their “quest” is to renew this familiarity for the current generation by producing new music based on the Genevan tradition. The *Psalms Unplugged* is a collection of their work in English, and represents the best qualities of The Psalm Project.

We were impressed with the high standard of musicianship that characterizes both their live and recorded music. The musicians are sensitive to matters of music theory and history, a necessary strength to draw on the long-standing tradition of Genevan tunes in our churches to develop music in a more “contemporary” sound with integrity. It should be noted that *Psalms Unplugged* is not a collection of updated Genevan tunes, but a transformation of that tradition into today’s everyday musical forms – this is the answer to the question “What might some of our Genevan psalms sound like if they had been written in 2012?” In place of the simple rhythms, choral accompaniment, and different musical modes of the Genevan tunes, The Psalm Project uses complicated rhythms, repetition, verse/refrain lyric structures, only the modern major and minor scales, and multiple instruments with complex parts.



<http://www.thepsalmproject.com/>

The songs of *Psalms Unplugged* can be divided roughly into two kinds: some are suitable for singing *with*, while others are meant to be listened *to*. “Praise the Lord (Psalm 150)” is a good example of the first kind; its melody is easy to learn, and its lyrics express communal worship of God. The structure of “Praise the Lord” is a common one in contemporary Christian worship music (verse 1, verse 2, chorus, verse 3, chorus, instrumental break, chorus) and while the Genevan tune for Psalm 150 is easily recognizable as the foundation for both words and music, it is clear that this is not merely a new version, but a new song. The joyfulness of the psalm is celebrated through musical elements such as a light, choppy rhythm emphasized by the acoustic guitar and bass, a single clear voice singing the verse melody, a strong major tonality, and a key change before the third verse. The term in music theory for this relationship between lyrics and music is “text painting.” The technical elements of the music “paint” the meaning of the text, with the result that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Text painting is at the heart of *Psalms Unplugged*, something abundantly clear in the second category of their songs, those meant to be listened to. For example, “My God, My God, Why (Psalm 22)” uses a slow, plaintive melody with subdued accompaniment to express the plea “please don’t forsake me,” and shifts to an aggressive rhythm and a dark, minor mode when describing the despair and terror of the psalmist surrounded by foes. The melody of “My God, My God, Why” is a difficult one for a group to sing together, but allows a solo voice opportunity to paint the text of the psalm, so prompting the listeners

in his house with one ac-cord!



to reflect on the testimony of the singer. The witness of this song calls its hearers to respond with worship, not in song the way that a congregational psalm like Psalm 150 does, but in meditation and prayer.

It is clear, then, that while *Psalms Unplugged* is an album of high quality music that certainly prompts its listeners to worship, The Psalm Project's arrangements of the psalms are not suitable (or designed) for adoption into our corporate worship via the next edition of the *Book of Praise*. Based on our own experience with the CD, we can highly recommend it for both casual and more serious listening, whether weekdays in the car or over Sunday morning coffee. In this way, The Psalm Project has certainly succeeded in their quest to return the psalms and some of their Genevan melodies to the everyday experience of Christians who love this tradition. *Psalms Unplugged* has real significance as something that accompanies our taking ownership of our tradition: if the Genevan tunes are going to remain the musical language of our churches, they need to really belong to us. The work of The Psalm Project represents a respectful renewing of the Genevan tradition in musical language that the current generation can recognize as its own, so that the psalms continue to be a presence in the everyday life of the church. ♪

**"Unlike their English counterparts, the Genevan psalms boast a variety of quirky metres, syncopated rhythms, and distinctive tunes associated with each psalm, which makes them a joy to sing. Those who do so regularly, whether in The Netherlands, Hungary, Korea, or North America, have come to love them, and deservedly so. I myself came late to the Genevan Psalter, but over the past twenty-five years they have become an integral part of my walk with God."**



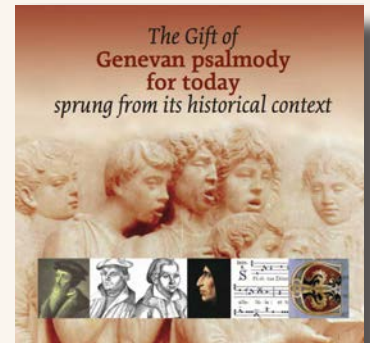
**Dr. David T. Koyzis**

*Dr. David T. Koyzis teaches political science at Redeemer University College and is author of Political Visions and Illusions (InterVarsity Press, 2003).*

*He maintains a website devoted to the Genevan Psalter located at: <http://genevanpsalter.redeemer.ca>*

## Recent recordings of interest to musicians, educators, and all who love the Genevan Psalter

In this 2011 recording, Calvin Seerveld (professor emeritus of Philosophical Aesthetics at the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto ON) and Stephanie Martin (composer and associate professor at York University, Toronto) present a thought-provoking, informative, and richly illustrated lecture on the history of Genevan Psalmody. The six voices of the *Pax Christi Chorale* directed by Stephanie Martin provide exquisitely sung examples ranging from Gregorian chant and polyphonic song to a variety of psalm settings. On this CD, the text of most of the psalms is written by Seerveld. For more information, visit <http://www.seerveld.com/tuppence.html>



The *PsalmenProject* (not to be confused with The Psalm Project that gave rise to *Psalms Unplugged*) features well-known Dutch organists at consoles of majestic organs in historic churches in The Netherlands. The aim is to record all 150 Psalms. Each CD consists of several stanzas of approximately ten different psalms sung by volunteer participants who form a "choir" for this purpose. The organists, including Gerben Mourik, Dick Sanderman, Peter Sneep, Paul Kieviet, Arjan Versluis, Jaap Zwart, and Eric Quist, showcase the unique characteristics and features of each organ as they present a variety of approaches to preludes, accompaniments, and improvisations. An inspiration for all, and especially for organists!



For more information, visit <http://www.psalmenproject.nl>



# Ray of Sunshine

by Corinne Gelms and  
Patricia Gelms



Sarah VanderGugten will be celebrating her seventeenth birthday this month, and was born July 14, 1995. She is cared for at home by her Dad, Mom, and sister Michelle in Smithville, Ontario, and is currently enrolled at the Beamsville High School in the special needs class. Here she attends regularly, aided with specific exercises or other class

activities. However, on November 17 of 2011 Sarah underwent hip surgery and has been home recuperating ever since. Wearing a double-cast for about thirteen weeks, she is now coping with a brace as the healing process continues.

Sarah is tube-fed and receives four feedings per day. She loves to listen to music and enjoys going outside for a walk or a ride in the van. She loves the company of her family and can light up a room with her big smile!

Once again we can look forward to the birthdays of those who are celebrating it this month. It is always filled with such anticipation, and it is our hope and prayer that you have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends.

May you experience the many rich blessings from the hand of our Heavenly Father that he daily grants to those who trust in him.

## Birthdays in July

- 4 JAMES BUIKEMA will be 51  
653 Broad St West  
Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8
- 14 SARAH VANDERGUGTEN will be 17  
23 Jane Street  
Smithville, ON LOR 2A0
- 20 CHARLIE BEINTEMA will be 37  
29 Wilson Avenue  
Chatham, ON N7L 1K8
- 29 JANINE KAMSTRA will be 27  
532 Moxley Road N  
RR2, Dundas, ON L9H 5E2
- 29 TOM VANDERZWAAG will be 59  
c/o Anchor Home  
361 Thirty Road  
RR2, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2



### A note to all parents and caregivers

If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of please let us know as soon as possible.


You can contact us by the following means:

Mail: Corinne Gelms

8301 Range 1 Road, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0

Phone: 905-957-0380

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in his house with one ac-cord!