

VIII.

REPORT

OF THE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON PSALMODY

In *Notes on the Psalms* by G. Campbell Morgan, published 1946, a quote by Martin Luther is followed by one from Calvin.

“In the Psalms, we look into the heart of all the saints, and, we seem to gaze into fair pleasure-gardens; into heaven itself, indeed; where bloom the sweet, refreshing, gladdening flowers of holy and happy thoughts about God, and all His benefits. On the other hand, where will you find deeper, sadder, more piteous words of mourning than in the Psalms? In these again, we look into the heart of the saints, and we seem to be looking into death, yea, into hell itself. How gloomy, how dark it is there, because of the many sad visions of the wrath of God!”...Martin Luther

“What various and resplendent riches are contained in this treasury, it were difficult to find words to describe.....I am in the habit of calling this book, not inappropriately, ‘The Anatomy of all Parts of the Soul,’ for not an affection will anyone find in himself, an image of which is not reflected in this mirror. Nay, all the griefs, sorrows, fears, misgivings, hopes, cares, anxieties; in short, all the disquieting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated, the Holy Spirit hath here pictured to the life.” Calvin, Preface to *Commentary on the Psalms of David*

We have proved the truth of these quotations from these giants of the Reformation in our own experience, in our homes and congregations, and wherever we meet, Kirk Sessions – I do hope you begin your Sessions with singing a Psalm as well as prayer – Presbyteries, Synods and of course our General Assembly. If the Psalms of God give us, according to Calvin, “The Anatomy of all Parts of the Soul”, then they also give us “A Whole Christ”. We need both for “our own personal growth in grace and our own personal knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” and for serving those we have been set amongst to minister the Gospel of God’s Glorious Grace that our Lord in His mercy will continue to save a people for Himself. So we increasingly love, appreciate, and treasure the Psalms, and in seeking to sing and study them, to do all that we can to preserve them, lift them up, defend their use, and, to the limits of our feeble strength, make them available in our staff and sol-fa editions. It is only just that we record our thanks to the Trinitarian Bible Society for their exceptionally fine printing of the words-only edition, copies of which so many of our people use and you will see in all our buildings “for the use of visitors”. We are also profoundly grateful that the TBS include the metrical Psalms in so many fine editions of the Word of God. It is their intention to bind the Spanish Metrical Version of the Psalms, the majority the work of our brother Rev. Dr Jorge Ruiz, into the back of the new Translation of the Spanish Bible when it is completed.

The Psalmody Report is of course a report which seeks to bring before the Fathers and Brethren some knowledge of the work of the Psalmody Committee over the last year and which may introduce some aspect of the wonderful book of Praise that our Lord has given us to use in His worship and for our instruction in Holy living. We always stress that it is for use in Worship; Worship that may be public when we lift our voices and sing as best we can together in places that may have been built for public worship or places that have been erected for other uses; or Worship in the home with the family gathered around as young and old we seek to magnify the Lord; or indeed Worship that is private when we may raise a lonely voice and trust that it will be heard on high.

In this year which marks what many tell us is the 500th anniversary of the Reformation we cannot help but think of those who in the long dark ages before the Reformation took hold and spread, there were those chosen by our God to keep a light, however small, burning here and there; men whose names are unknown today but who were faithful when the Church was not. If the Reformation is about any one thing it is about

the Word of God. That is what the Reformers brought before the decadent and decaying Church. “What do the Scriptures say?” “The Word of God” which our Lord has assured us “will endure for ever” (I Peter 1:25). The Word of God which challenged the doctrine and practice of a Church which dared to set its own teaching above that which God has laid down in that enduring Word, seeking to enslave the minds and devotion of men and grow rich in the process. The Lord down through the ages has used novel ways to protect His Word and to bring its truth before the minds, and hearts of men. In Hungary, for example, men learned whole books of the Bible by heart and they would go around the fairs singing their chosen Scripture Book; Genesis, Isaiah, John’s Gospel or even the Psalms. God kept His word before men. At other times the light shone brightly in other lands and such was the case in the Church that covered the majority of our homeland and sent missionaries to much of mainland Europe. They took of course God’s Word with them and that portion of God’s Word that teaches so much of the Gospel as it presents Christ as they taught it and sang it. What a joy to learn that Philip Melancthon, no less, maintained that such missionaries from the Celtic Church brought the Gospel and the Psalms to his own country.

This has been the year in which we ran out of Staff Psalters. The more we buy at the one time the cheaper each copy. We didn’t do that when we had our last reprint. On this occasion when we asked for the means to pay for another reprint we have had to wait. As far as we know we are more than likely the only group in the world who are making available to the world wide Church the Scottish Psalter in Staff. The numbers requesting copies has fallen off to some extent, but we certainly will be asking the Fathers and Brethren for permission to go ahead with a second reprint. It will be our desire on the Psalmody Committee always to make sure that we have copies in stock. On the other hand more and more are discovering that the Lord would have them use his given book of Praise in their worship. This is especially true in Latin America. We are thankful for that.

Recently we heard an excellent lecture on the Guide and Goddlie Ballads that came to Scotland from Germany. These songs or hymns at times set passages from Scripture to music to teach God’s Word; others spoke of Christian teaching and experience, while yet others were used to show the futility of Roman Catholic teaching. They were sung when men and women gathered and even while they worked together inside and outside. One song was printed on one sheet of paper and sold for very little. They were quickly committed to memory and much good and helpful teaching was spread in this way there being no internet, Facebook, or WhatsApp, that might be used today to publish the Gospel. In fact speaking with some of our younger folks they would dearly love if our Church was to give the lead to spread God’s word in this way. Already there are a good number of groups and individuals who are making the Scottish Psalter available on the net for folks to listen to and to learn the words and the tunes.

When these songs and hymns, many of them composed by Luther himself, were smuggled in to Scotland and England from mainland Europe they were quickly replaced by metrical translations of the Psalms in Scotland. The Psalms of God put into the same metre as many of these Ballades, soon proved to be so well received and preferred to anything else. The tunes were already known. We presume that as they were so well known and so well accepted by the people of Scotland that John Knox, despite his time in Calvin’s Geneva with the Genevan melodies of Louis Bourgeois, Franc and Devantes felt that he was not required to follow his mentor in his choice of metre and melody and a very few of the Genevan melodies, changed in rhythm are in our present Psalmody; the Old Hundred being the best known. It may surprise us to know that some of the Genevan melodies were “borrowed” from secular chansons. Yet even today congregations of many different tongues would be able to sing the same Psalm in their own language at the same time to the same Genevan tune. We proved this a year or two back when we had Dutch and Spanish visitors sing Psalm 65 together. We might well have had French, Polish, Hungarian, Japanese and Korean voices, and others join in as well; a truly modern Pentecost moment. Perhaps we ought to insert a warning to any future members of this committee who may wish to introduce new melodies that Bourgeois was imprisoned while in Geneva for trying to encourage the singing of alternative tunes to the Psalms. Up to that moment each Psalm had its own tune with a few exceptions where the same tune was used for several psalms. He was released when Calvin intervened on his behalf. Soon after he left to take up a post in Lyon where in later

life his daughter was baptised as a Catholic, and his last publication in 1560 was a number of four part secular songs. He had denounced this particular musical form as “dissolute” while in Geneva. The Psalms in Geneva were sung in unison.

It is a very special privilege to belong to a Church that is bound to the Regulative Principle which was shown by the Lord to those who were coming out of Romanism. Led by the Lord they “found the Psalms”, and in Geneva and other Reformation cities, God-given able men put them into metre, men such as Clement Marot, Theodore Beza, along with others who were enabled to marry them to appropriate melodies. In Scotland, the assortment of those who versified the Psalms included James VI. He was present at the General Assembly which took place in Burntisland St Columba Church where a new translation of the Bible was called for in 1601. It was when James VI became in addition James I of England that it was again put forward and the result was our magnificent AV or KJV in 1611.

It encourages all of us, I am sure, that we have a work for the Lord which the Lord in the kindness and mercy of His love, is blessing as the Psalms go out with the music in Staff and Sol-fa. Folk are asking for them as well as the CDs.

On the dust cover of Dr Campbell Morgan’s gem of a book, already referred to, there appears part of a review from a Free Church ‘Record’ of 1946. (The year the book was published). It is as follows:

“The Book of Psalms is a constant source of instruction, encouragement, warning, reproof, refreshment. Whatever we need is there, and we need never look for it in vain. The seeker for goodly pearls will find them there, not at once; but patience and perseverance, and the skill which is their result, will reveal them. Not immediately, for part of the joy and the profit is in the seeking and the constant incentive is the knowledge of that profound truth that he that seeketh findeth.

Dr Campbell Morgan was a most diligent seeker and his NOTES ON THE PSALMS contain the results of much study, thought and keen observation. To comment on 150 Psalms in 133 pages is some feat, but it is done, and the result is profitable to the reader and a welcome reminiscence of a presence no longer in our midst and the sound of a voice that is still.”

It would seem fitting that we close this report with a quotation from Dr Campbell Morgan himself. (Psalm CXXII, Jehovah the Glory of the Pilgrim)

“This is the song of the pilgrims in anticipation of Jerusalem, and the house of worship. It sets forth the glory of the stablished and compacted city where the tribes gather to give thanks to Jehovah. Yet through it all it is evident that the glory of the city and temple consists in the fact that they are the city and house of Jehovah. It is not a song of buildings, or of material magnificence. It is rather the song of assembly, of testimony, of judgement, of peace, of prosperity.

These all issue from the supreme fact of Jehovah’s presence. To Him, the tribes are gathered. Their testimony is of His name. The judgement, peace and prosperity are all the outcome of Jehovah’s relation to His people. The tenses of the song have caused some bewilderment as they seem to indicate the presence of the worshippers in the city, while yet they suggest the attitude of absence. The affirmation, “Our feet are standing within thy gates,” is that of the confidence of faith. It is the claim of citizenship even though the citizen has not yet actually reached the city. The call has come to ascend to the house of the Lord; and with songs of praise and prayers for the city, the pilgrim prepares to respond, while the hope becomes a present consciousness of the joy of assembly.”

William B. Scott, *Convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Special Committee on Psalmody and thank the Committee, especially the Convener and Clerk;
2. The General Assembly give thanks to God for the dedicated on-going work of the Trinitarian Bible Society, and urge our ministers and sessions to encourage continued prayer for those who seek to provide the Word of God to so many. The Assembly is also thankful to learn of their willingness to include the Spanish Metrical Psalms when the present new translation of the complete Bible is completed;
3. The General Assembly encourage the singing of the Psalms whenever appropriate and helpful at various gatherings;
4. The General Assembly welcome the reminder that God has preserved His Word down through the ages in some novel and unusual Providences and that our Bible will endure forever according to His promises to do so;
5. The General Assembly note the Supplementary Report and congratulate all those who took part and thank all who helped them as well as those who tested them.

APPENDIX

27 took part in the 2017 Psalmody Test (7 less than in 2016) and gained awards as shown:

Cross

Grade 1: Kenneth Iain MacLeod (duly performed)

Grade 2: Heidi MacLeod, (continuation), Felicity MacLeod (continuation)

Knock & Point

Grade 1: Norman A. MacLeod (duly performed)

Grade 2: Christina MacLeod

Grade 4: Alexander MacLeod (duly performed)

Snizort

Grade 1 (Group Award): Sarah MacLeod, Jonathan MacLeod, Angus Nicolson,
Isobel Ann MacLeod, Catherine MacFarlane

Stornoway

Grade 1: George Kenneth MacDonald (duly performed), Peter MacDonald (duly performed),
Katie MacKenzie (duly performed)

Grade 2: John MacDonald, Calvin MacKenzie

Grade 3: Lydia MacDonald

Grade 4: Susanna MacDonald

Grade 6: David Craig (adult, continuation), Emma Craig (continuation), Lily Craig (continuation),
Sarah Craig, Thomas Craig (continuation)

Tarbat

Grade 1: Tamara D. MacLeod (adult)

Grade 3: Malcolm S. MacLeod (adult, continuation)

Grade 6: Murdo D. MacLeod (adult, continuation), Veda Joy MacLeod (adult, continuation)