

VIII.

REPORT

OF THE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON PSALMODY

1. Introduction

The Praise of God is clearly of central importance to the Church and her testimony. It is that part of Christian worship in which all present engage audibly and actively. It goes without saying that the content of the praise and the manner of the praise are of vital importance in the Church and in the experience of the Christian believer. We read in the Word of God in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ: *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name* (Hebrews 13:15).

The content and manner of our sung praise are brought together in Paul's letter to the Colossians, where we read: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord* (Colossians 3:16). Some commentators and expositors take this verse as justification for non-inspired, or non-canonical, materials of praise, though it is no such thing. To equate these terms with, say, modern hymnody is a huge leap which just cannot be proven. It is much more natural to see the terms as expressive of the Psalter in the diversity of its types of song, something, we would maintain, that is reflected in the *titles* to the Psalms themselves. (In the Greek translation of the Old Testament [the Septuagint], well known and used in New Testament times, the title of Psalm 76 has all three terms – Hymn, Psalm and Song!). At any rate, what Paul is referring to in Colossians 3 is “the word of Christ,” which cannot be uninspired praise, but rather praise given by Christ through the Holy Spirit. As we read in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, in what is essentially a parallel passage: *...be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord* (Ephesians 5:18,19).

It is without any apology that we confine our sung praise to the inspired words of the Biblical Psalms, with the conviction that they are from Jesus and speak of Him and His Church (Luke 24:44). But if the content of our sung praise is what it is – Holy Spirit-inspired Scripture speaking of Christ – then the manner of our praise should be exemplary, wholehearted and enthusiastic. The responsibility of the Committee is: (a) to ensure a continuing supply of Psalmodies which provide accurate translations of the Psalms for singing with appropriate music for unaccompanied singing; (b) to produce aids to the leaders of the song in the congregations and the congregations themselves; (c) to encourage, in general terms, the use of metrical psalms among the Churches in public worship.

2. Availability of Psalmodies

In 2013 the Church embarked on a project of producing a Staff split-leaf Psalter. In the nature of the case, it was not inexpensive to buy. However, between that first printing in 2013 up to 2020, 1,750 copies were printed. We are thankful to the Lord for the success of this project, as there are less than 300 copies presently in stock. It has been widely distributed, not least by the Presbytery of the United States. Another printing is anticipated (DV) for 2023. We have in stock forty copies of the Sol-fa edition last published by the then undivided Free Church in 1990/91, and obtained some while ago.

3. Aids for Congregational Singing

There are still some copies available of the excellent *Manual For Precentors* published by the Committee in 2009. This is an invaluable aid for leaders in congregational song. In addition to this, the Committee have produced a *Classification of Metrical Psalm Tunes*. This booklet is intended to address the question of suiting tunes to the context and content of the Psalms. To a significant degree this is implicit in the Psalters

which have suggested tunes at the head of the various Psalms. However, the booklet will help clarify appropriate tunes for the theological and emotional nature of the passages selected for singing. We are thankful to the Rev. William and Mrs Isobel Scott for advice on this, and for Mr Donald Macleod, Point, for his technical skills in producing the final printed booklet.

4. Additional Psalm Tunes

The Committee have initiated an inquiry into the possibility of incorporating into our Psalters tunes commonly used in some of our Congregations but not presently included in the Psalters. This project is at an early stage, and it is expected that notes of progress will be included in future Reports.

5. 'Worthy to be Praised!' CDs

Another aid for Psalm-singing is available in the outstanding production through Rev. William and Mrs Isobel Scott, and the various singers involved, of a series of 12 Psalm CDs (plus a compilation disc, 'Praise the Lord'). They are designed to tie in with the cycle of annual Psalmody tests. There are also teaching CDs in these collections, which help with part-singing. These CDs are available from the Clerk to the Committee (psalmody@fccontinuing.org) and from the website operated by Mrs Mary Gillies (sing-the-psalms.webs.com).

The Committee appreciate that CDs are now being largely displaced by digital online recordings, such as are found on iTunes and similar media. This matter is being actively pursued by the Committee.

6. Encouragement of the use of Metrical Psalms in Public Worship

One of the purposes of the Psalmody Committee is the general encouragement of Psalm singing, not only within the Church but also beyond her bounds. This seems even more important given the departure of the erstwhile Free Church of Scotland from the principle of purity of worship in using only inspired materials of praise in public worship, unaccompanied. Among the interesting contacts in this connection in the past year has been one from a group called 'Psalmii Cantati' (literally, *Psalms sung*) within Romania. The group has initiated 'The Psalms Project Romania' which is "a ministry dedicated to restore Psalm singing in the contemporary Evangelical church." Contact has only been made lately and it remains to be seen what support we can give this encouraging development in furthering the singing of Psalms in the present day. See the YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ogBfss1VU24>.

7. Membership of the Committee

The Committee has been blessed through the appointment to the Committee of Mr Christopher Reeder from the Presbytery of the United States. In that connection, the 'Zoom' arrangement for Committee meetings has been a positive feature of the meetings in the past year.

The Committee is again indebted to Rev. Andrew Allan for his excellent work as Clerk to the Committee.

JOHN W. KEDDIE, *Convener*
CALUM MACLEOD, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Special Committee on Psalmody and thank the Committee, and in particular the Convener and the Clerk, for their diligence;
2. The General Assembly note with thankfulness the wide circulation of the Staff Psalmody and the anticipation of another print run;
3. The General Assembly thank the Special Committee on Psalmody for making available a booklet providing *Classification of Metrical Psalm Tunes* and commend its circulation among Precentors and Congregations;

4. The General Assembly thank Congregational Precentors for their work in leading the singing of praise in the Congregations;
5. The General Assembly encourage the Special Committee on Psalmody to continue to encourage and promote the principles and practice of Psalm singing wherever they have opportunity;
6. The General Assembly encourage Presbyteries in the teaching of Psalm singing in the Congregations within their bounds.