

# Introduction to the Genevan Psalter

David T. Koyzis,  
Redeemer University College,  
Ancaster, Ontario, Canada

## *The chief liturgical book of God's people*

For millennia the biblical psalter has been the chief liturgical book of God's people of the old and new covenants. The Psalms are unique in that they simultaneously reflect the full range of human experience and reveal to us God's word. In them we hear expressions of joy and lament, cries for revenge against enemies, confession of sin, acknowledgement of utter dependence on God, recitations of his mighty acts in history, and finally songs of praise and adoration. With the rest of the Old Testament, Christians share the biblical Psalter with the Jewish people, with whom it originates. Many of the Psalms are ascribed to David himself, and there is even a tradition making him the author of the entirety of the book. While there is no certainty to the ascriptions traditionally prefacing each psalm, it is likely that many of them do indeed originate with the revered founder of the Judaic dynasty. If the latest of the psalms were composed during the Persian and perhaps even into the Hasmonean eras, then the Psalter was compiled over the better part of a millennium of Jewish history before being finalized sometime during the second temple period. Translated into Greek as part of the Septuagint, the Psalms naturally found their way into early Christian usage as well.

The New Testament writers see in several of the Psalms, for example Psalms 2, 8, 22, 41, 69, 110 and 118, a foretaste of the coming Messiah. The early church fathers added to this number, seeing Jesus Christ, not only in several other individual psalms, but in the whole of the Psalter itself. Thus the psalms of lament came to be seen as describing, not merely the miseries of the human authors, but the very sufferings of Christ. Further, the imprecatory psalms were no longer cries for vengeance by a hurting and oppressed people, but invocations of the very judgement of Christ against the enemies of his coming kingdom. <sup>1</sup> While there is nowadays a certain reluctance to see too many gratuitous references to Christ in a prechristian liturgical collection, nevertheless insofar as the Psalms partake of the larger redemptive-historical narrative of Scripture, we are fully justified in seeing in Christ the ultimate fulfillment of the salvation spoken of in these poetic stanzas. Thus in some Christian communities the singing of a psalm is ended with a Trinitarian doxology.

The Psalms were, of course, meant to be sung, as they in fact were from ancient times by God's people. Exactly how they were sung we can only speculate. Psalm 136 at least was meant to be sung antiphonally, perhaps between a cantor and the assembled congregation. We know that Hebrew poetry proceeds, not according to the strict rhyme and metre familiar to especially protestant Christians, but by means of parallelism and repeated stresses in the parallel lines. The ancient Hebrew psalmists delighted in repeating a thought twice, but in different words. And contrary to the strict metrical structure of modern Christian hymnody, that of the Hebrew psalms is much closer to our children's nursery rhymes in that, while the basic rhythm is repeated in successive lines or groups of lines, the number of syllables varies from one line to the next. <sup>2</sup> A recent attempt to recover something of this original poetic flavour can be seen in Gelineau psalmody, invented in the 1950s by the French priest, Fr. Joseph Gelineau.

In many Christian traditions the singing of Psalms has been eclipsed by hymns of more recent vintage. This is a phenomenon common to Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy and the various forms of protestantism. All the same, many of the church's most famous hymn-writers, such as Martin Luther and Isaac Watts, turned their efforts to the versification of the biblical Psalter. The former's "A Mighty Fortress" is a christological rendition of Psalm 46. The latter's "O God, Our Help in Ages Past" is a free paraphrase of Psalm 90. Yet many churches today go through an entire Sunday worship service without singing even a single psalm. Thankfully, this is being rectified in most traditions, as psalmody is increasingly reincorporated into the liturgies of Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist and other churches. Many of these have opted for metrical versifications of the

psalms. Moreover, there are still a few churches, such as the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, which, as a matter of principle, sing only the Psalms in the liturgy.

### *The metrical psalter*

Why metrical versifications? In the years just prior to the Reformation the Psalms were generally sung in Latin to Gregorian chant. Gregorian and other forms of chant very likely have their origins in the synagogue and perhaps even temple worship of Judaism. In theory, the chant known as plainsong, with its elegant simplicity, could be sung by an ordinary congregation with a little training. In fact, however, the chanting of the psalms and other hymns tended over time to be monopolized by the clergy, cantors and choirs. Furthermore, as lay people gradually lost the use of Latin (or, in southwestern Europe, as Latin proper developed into the several Romance languages), much of the liturgy was no longer comprehensible to them. The liturgy, far from being the “work of the people,” did not incorporate them as full participants. It is not surprising, then, that private devotions were often said in the pews while the mass was being celebrated at the altar.

To rectify this situation, the Reformers sought to render the liturgy, including the biblical Psalms, in a form more easily accessible to the people. During the first part of the sixteenth century, the French court poet, Clément Marot, turned his hand to versifying the psalms in rhymed, metrical form, and in his own French language. These brilliant texts, popular even among those remaining loyal to Rome, were set to music by Louis Bourgeois and became the basis of the several editions of the Genevan Psalter of 1542, 1551 and 1562, which further drew upon the texts of Théodore de Bèze, John Calvin’s successor at Geneva, and the music of Claude Goudimel. These in turn were influenced by similar metrical psalters in use at Strasbourg and elsewhere. Calvin himself wrote some metrical versifications of Psalms, but these did not survive, as he was apparently a better theological systematizer than poet.

Although the Genevan Psalms continue to be sung in the Netherlands, Hungary, South Africa and elsewhere, they early fell out of use in the English-speaking world, except for a very few tunes. More familiar to Anglo-Saxon Reformed Christians is the tradition dating back to the Sternhold and Hopkins’ Psalter of 1551, Tate and Brady’s “New Version” Psalter of 1696 and, above all, the Scottish Psalter of 1650. In these the tunes are generally set to the uniform metre known as iambic heptameter, or common metre (8.6.8.6 or CM). A glance at the metrical tune index in the back of a typical English-language hymnal indicates a preponderance of common, long (8.8.8.8 or LM) and short metre (6.6.8.6 or SM) tunes. A notable exception to this pattern was Henry Ainsworth’s Psalter of 1612, published in Amsterdam for the expatriate English-speaking Reformed communities in the Netherlands, and brought over to Plymouth, Massachusetts, by the Pilgrims eight years later. [3](#) Borrowing several of the Genevan tunes, the Ainsworth Psalter was eventually supplanted by the more widely-used Bay Psalm Book with its more regular metres. [4](#)

By contrast, the Genevan tunes are set to wonderfully irregular metres and the tunes themselves have a pronounced rhythmic intensity and modal flavour, making them sound more like Renaissance madrigals than conventional hymns. Queen Elizabeth I of England is said to have derisively called them “Genevan jigs,” because of their dance-like qualities. [5](#) The 1929 edition of The Scottish Psalter has split pages so that the various texts and tunes can be mixed and matched, which is quite easily done due to the very few uniform metres used throughout. By contrast, one could scarcely do this with the Genevan Psalter because of the sheer number of different metres included. In this respect, the Genevan tunes are remarkably similar to the German chorale tunes associated with the Lutheran Reformation. Indeed both can perhaps be said to partake of a common continental European musical and liturgical heritage.

Immigrants to North America from especially the Netherlands brought with them something of the Genevan tradition. The Canadian Reformed Churches, originating in the mid-twentieth-century Netherlands, sing from their own *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter [sic]*, [6](#) containing English versifications for all the Genevan tunes. They are perhaps the only group of Christians in this continent to maintain the Genevan Psalter in its

entirety. In the Christian Reformed Church, originating in the mid-nineteenth century United States and spreading into Canada after the second World War, the Genevan tradition never died completely. Nevertheless, in its effort to americanize itself during the xenophobic years of the first World War, the CRC allowed much of that tradition to be eclipsed by the more typically Anglo-Saxon 1912 Psalter. Those Genevan tunes that were retained were kept in their later, isometric, and thus less rhythmic, forms. The 1989 edition of the Christian Reformed Church's *Psalter Hymnal* brought back a number of Genevan tunes and returned them to their original rhythms, although their modal character is not always apparent in the musical arrangements in that collection. It is unfortunate that the typically ponderous way of singing the Genevan psalms has led many congregations to abandon them altogether in favour of more contemporary tunes and praise choruses. Yet when sung properly, the Genevan psalms can be a delight to the ear.

Perhaps the best known of the Genevan tunes in the English-speaking world are Psalms 42, 66/98/118 and 134. The first tune is familiar as the setting for the beloved Advent hymn, "Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People," a metrical versification of Isaiah 40:1-8 written by Johannes Olearius and translated into English by Catherine Winkworth. A number of texts have been set to the second tune, including Reginald Heber's eucharistic hymn, "Bread of the World, in Mercy Broken." The third tune was renumbered as Psalm 100 in the Scottish Psalter and is often listed as OLD ONE-HUNDREDTH in contemporary hymnals, thereby masking its Genevan origins. English-speaking Christians sing Bishop Thomas Ken's doxology, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," to this tune. Psalms 12, 68, 107 and 124 have also found their way into Anglo-Saxon hymnals, sometimes in altered form to make them fit the more uniform metres therein.

### *For love of the Psalms*

It is appropriate to recount something of my own experience with the psalms, noting what led me to undertake this project. I grew up in an Orthodox Presbyterian Church congregation, where we were accustomed to singing the psalms, although I rarely knew we were doing so, since the OPC's *Trinity Hymnal* scattered the psalms among the other hymns. Those psalms we did sing came largely from the 1912 Psalter. In my youth our family began worshipping in a non-Reformed church which sang from a nondenominational hymnal heavily oriented towards the revival songs of Ira Sankey, Charles Gabriel and Fanny Crosby. Needless to say, there were almost no psalms in this collection, except possibly the Scottish Psalter's ubiquitous 23rd Psalm, which has managed to find its way into most hymnals. In short, in moving from one denomination to another, we had lost the singing of psalms, yet I did not feel this loss, because I was never aware of our having sung them to begin with!

In my undergraduate and graduate student years I began to discover the liturgical practices of the most ancient of the Christian churches, including the Roman Catholic and Orthodox, many of which survived within the Anglican and Lutheran churches. My initial introduction to this tradition came in the form of a little volume purchased at the bookstore of Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota: Herbert Lindemann, ed., *The Daily Office: Matins and Vespers, Based on Traditional Liturgical Patterns, with Scripture Readings, Hymns, Canticles, Litanies, Collects, and the Psalter, Designed for Private Devotion or Group Worship* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1965). [7](#) It was a marvellous book, filled with all the riches of the Christian ages, some of which were familiar to me but much of which were not. Since I was not part of a community that worshipped in this way, I privately followed the pattern of the daily office prescribed in its pages for perhaps a year or two, before making other discoveries that would further enrich my devotional life.

In the Episcopal Church's revised 1979 Book of Common Prayer I discovered the Daily Office Lectionary, which took the reader through much, if not most, of the Bible in the course of two years. It prescribed for each day of the church year, beginning with Advent, an Old Testament reading, one or more Psalms, a New Testament epistle reading and a gospel reading. At about the same time I began attending an Anglican church which followed a similar pattern for each Sunday of the church calendar, following the three-year ecumenical lectionary. This too prescribed a psalm to be said or sung between the Old Testament and epistle readings. It is no exaggeration to say that I fell in love with this rich pattern of going through so much of Scripture in the

course of the liturgy. Although my present church community has not discovered this pattern for itself, I continue to follow the daily office in the course of my own personal prayer regimen, though I have sometimes abbreviated it as my own circumstances have changed. (Try praying the psalms while a screaming toddler is tugging at one's trousers cuffs!)

It was the use of the Psalms that most impressed me. The Lindemann volume took one through the Psalter at an exceedingly leisurely pace, prescribing at most two psalms per week. The Daily Office Lectionary guided one through the entire Psalter over a six-week period, with some variations due to the changing seasons of the church calendar and the occasional interruption of a feast day. I myself simply read through the Psalms in course, covering approximately two psalms a day. At other times I have followed a pattern covering the Psalter in four weeks. I have been rather less than legalistic about all this, sometimes going through long periods without the Psalms or even the remainder of scripture. Yet there they are, always ready to take me back and to sustain me through times of joy and adversity.

Everyone goes through tough times, and I am no different in this respect. During such periods I have found it deeply comforting to immerse myself in the Psalms, drinking in their praises, complaints, expressions of sorrow, and individual and corporate confessions of sin. Even the darkest of the psalms, Psalm 88, regularly takes my breath away when I read it. Who, after all, has not felt abandoned at some point in life? Who has not despaired of both present and future? And, even though we are loath to admit it, who of us has not wished to call down God's wrath on someone who has crossed us in some way? I have sometimes joked that, had Prozac been around two and a half millennia ago, a third of the Psalms and the whole of Ecclesiastes and Job might not have been written! Yet the expressions found therein are part of the fabric of life—a life lived in a less-than-perfect, and sometimes horrific, world. But a life lived, all the same, in God's presence. God's love sometimes touches us by means of the very suffering that seems so vexing while we are going through it. But afterwards, that suffering has become such a part of us that we cannot imagine exchanging it for something else. Our trials become for us what Sheldon Vanauken famously called God's "severe mercy," a mercy without which we would surely be lesser persons.

At least since the Enlightenment many Christians have claimed to find the psalms something of an embarrassment. Even so indefatigable an apologist for the Christian faith as C. S. Lewis refers to some expressions therein as uncharitable and even "devilish." [8](#) In Dostoyevsky's celebrated novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, there is a scene in which the protagonist Alyosha's recently deceased mentor, Father Zosima, is being memorialized prior to burial. Because Father Zosima was a "priest and monk of the strictest rule, the Gospel, not the Psalter, had to be read over his body by monks in holy orders." [9](#) When I first read this part of the book, I couldn't help pitying Father Zosima, because he was departing this life without the benefit of the Psalms. But, of course, the author's point was that, for the mere monk not subject to such a strict discipline, the Psalms would have to suffice. I could not bring myself to accept this implied inferiority of the Psalter. Indeed, I and many others have found in the Psalms the very lifeblood of the believer.

### *The Genevan Psalter*

What then of the Genevan Psalter? Again, I did not grow up with it and did not discover it until I was around thirty years of age. However, during a visit to Prague a decade earlier I had purchased a Czech protestant psalter and hymnal published in 1900. [10](#) Ten years later, to my surprise, I finally recognized that this volume contained all one-hundred-fifty Psalms set to their proper Genevan melodies. I had not known that Czech protestants, who trace their heritage to the fifteenth-century pre-reformer Jan Hus, had ever sung these, but some evidently did, at least as recently as a century ago. By the time I noticed this, I had only recently discovered the Genevan melodies in their proper, rhythmic forms. To begin with, I had come into possession of a recording of Hungary's Debrecen College Cantus singing arrangements of the Genevan tunes (four by the celebrated twentieth-century composer Zoltán Kodály) with Albert Szenci Molnár's Hungarian versifications. At a used bookstore in South Bend, Indiana, I purchased an old copy of the Psalter and liturgy of the

Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland. Shortly thereafter, having moved to Hamilton, Ontario, I acquired a copy of the Dutch *Liedboek voor de Kerken*, an ecumenical collection containing, once more, all of the Genevan tunes, but with a more recent versification of the texts in Dutch. Unable to play the piano, I generally worked these tunes out on the guitar, where they took on something of the flavour of John Dowland's compositions for the lute. In my head I heard these tunes in their Renaissance context, where their similarity to the works of Thomas Tallis, William Byrd and Orlando Gibbons seemed evident. I felt that I had discovered a huge and largely untapped source of great riches. Around this time I began to versify the Psalms in a contemporary idiom so they could be sung to these marvellous melodies. The current collection is a product of this effort.

Of course, I make no claim for special canonical status for the Genevan tradition, which would obviously be a most unreformed thing to do. One of the things that distinguishes us as Reformation Christians from our fellow believers outside the Reformation is that we regard Scripture as the basis for our unity, refraining in principle from ascribing normative status to the postbiblical accretions in our various local traditions. At the same time, there is something to be said for holding on to those traditions that have served us well in the past, even if we understand that they must ultimately be subject to the overriding standard of God's Word. Moreover, if that particular tradition has directed us to the Word itself, as have the Genevan tunes, then there is all the more reason to maintain it.

To be sure, this is not the only way to sing the Psalms. The Presbyterian Church (USA) devotes an entire section of its *Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990) to numerous metrical and a very few chanted psalms. Several denominations, including the PC(USA), the United Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church in Canada, have published separately bound psalters. [11](#) Then there is the rich tradition of Anglican chant, which combines the best of the gregorian and metrical traditions and is appropriately sung by choirs and congregations alike. One should also mention the wonderful collection published in Great Britain titled *Psalm Praise* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 1973), a few of whose offerings have found their way into the denominational hymnals, including the CRC's *Psalter Hymnal*. Norman Warren and Jim Seddon's rendition of Psalm 30 is especially haunting. In Roman Catholic circles the Grail/Gelineau Psalms have been notably influential in the years following the second Vatican Council's approval of vernacular liturgies. [12](#) Gregorian chant has been maintained in Roman and Anglo-Catholic circles. And, finally, there is the tradition of Byzantine chant, largely unknown and certainly underappreciated in the west.

The Genevan tradition deserves an honoured place among these venerable and innovative ways of singing the Psalms. Though its roots are definitely in the Reformed churches, the Genevan Psalms would quite fittingly be sung in virtually any Christian gathering. I myself once heard Genevan Psalm 96 sung as the appointed psalm in a Roman Catholic church service televised from Québec one Sunday afternoon over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. There is no reason why Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans and Anglicans could not find use for them in their own services of worship. My hope is that this collection will serve to disseminate an appreciation for the Genevan Psalms beyond their natural constituency.

With respect to the versifications, I admit that, having no knowledge of Hebrew, I have relied on the major English translations of the Psalter, including the Revised Standard Version, the New International Version and the New Jerusalem Bible. I have not sought a word-for-word translation, which would, in any case, be impossible within a fixed metrical scheme. The Scottish Psalter comes close to a word-for-word translation, but largely at the expense of comprehensibility. My own versifications are free paraphrases—sometimes close to the text and sometimes merely communicating the overall sense of the text, as seemed appropriate in each case. While the biblical scholar, with her exacting standards, may not like my approach, the poet will be more understanding. Some of the versifications are rhymed (e.g., Psalms 23 and 51) and some are not (e.g., Psalms 24 and 143). To an extent it has been possible to retain something of the parallelism of the Hebrew poetic form, but this has not always worked within the constraints of the Genevan metres. I have not been overly literalistic or legalistic on this score and have taken poetic licence where necessary. It must also be recognized that it is not always easy to write in English for the Genevan tunes. The Genevan metrical schemes and the French

language both have an abundance of feminine endings, that is, phrases ending on unstressed syllables. By contrast, English has relatively few of these, which in large measure explains why English-language psalters have tended towards the uniformity of common, long and short metres. Thus in the present collection certain kinds of words, e.g., those ending in -ing and -tion, will be noticed to reappear in several of my versifications. In any case, I have attempted to match the stresses in the melodies with those in the text, which not all existing English renderings of the Genevan Psalms do consistently.

As for the harmonizations, these were worked out, with the single exception of Psalm 8, in the year 1999 and following. I have attempted to recover something of the modal flavour of the arrangements, taking as my inspiration the music of those Renaissance masters mentioned above. Yet I have not slavishly kept within a modal framework, particularly where a musical line repeats itself and would thus seem to call for something different the second time. Some of the harmonizations may sound a little dissonant to those familiar with the arrangements traditionally sung in the Dutch churches. Moreover, if one follows the suggested tempos above the top lines of most of the psalms, the traditionalist is likely to find them entirely too rapid. To such a person I have a two-fold answer: First, I am rendering them as I have heard them in my head. Coming fresh to the Genevan tradition means that I am working without the benefit and the burden alike of having grown up hearing them sung a certain way. Second, at a time when so much traditional hymnody is being neglected in favour of (to my mind) vastly inferior praise music, with its repetitive phrases and transparently derivative tunes, we need to affirm that the singing of the Psalms need hardly be a dreary business. The liveliest of the Psalms, e.g., 47 and 92, would even seem to call for a supportive percussion instrument, such as the tambourine. At the same time, we should never shrink from singing the laments, which sorely need to be reincorporated into our liturgical life. Our individualistic, consumer-oriented churches often seem to suffer from a lamentable inability to lament. Our congregations need to learn once again to sing Psalms 88 and 137, among many others.

Finally it should be noted that the metrical psalters, including the Genevan, almost always included a few biblical canticles outside of the Psalter proper, and my own collection reflects this. Thus at the end of the volume one will find two versions of the Decalogue, one from Strasbourg and an early one from Geneva; and two of the three Lukan canticles, namely, the Song of Zechariah from Luke 1:68-79 (the *Benedictus*) and the Song of Simeon from Luke 2:29-32 (the *Nunc Dimittis*). The last canticle included is an extrabiblical one, the *Te Deum*, the ancient creedal hymn reputedly composed by Nicetas of Remesiana (4th-5th century), though sometimes attributed to Sts. Ambrose and Augustine. The first three stanzas are an adaptation from Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady's New Version Psalter of 1698, while the final three stanzas are my own versification. The first tune to which it is set, OLD 22ND, is from the Anglo-Genevan Psalter, while FOREST GREEN is a familiar English tune found in most hymnals.

How ought the Psalms to be used in the course of worship? There are at least three possibilities: (1) according to a lectionary prescribing a psalm of the day; (2) according to the theme of the scripture readings and the sermon based on them; and (3) according to the focus of a particular part of the liturgy, in which case more than one would be used in a single service. Lectionaries have an ancient lineage and are used even in Judaism where the reading of the weekly Torah portion leads the synagogue congregation through the five books of Moses in the course of a year. Most Christian lectionaries are oriented to the church calendar and the changing seasons from Advent to Pentecost. Those Christians critical of the use of lectionaries argue that they in effect constitute a canon within the canon—that they unduly limit the amount of Scripture we hear read in the course of the liturgy. Better perhaps is a lectio continua which would take a congregation through a single book over successive Sundays and cover most of both testaments in the course of a pastoral term of service. Yet most protestant churches follow neither a prescribed lectionary nor a lectio continua but have embraced the highly subjective approach of topical preaching. This means that, far from avoiding the “canon within the canon,” the congregation is simply exposed to their pastor’s own preferred internal canon. To be sure, the traditional one-year lectionaries of the Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans and Anglicans were deficient in that they included little if any of the Old Testament and covered only a portion of the New. The adoption of the three-year lectionary by most of these churches (with the exception of the Orthodox) was meant precisely to expand

and not to limit the amount of Scripture heard in the liturgy over the period covered. This would, of course, include the Psalms.

The Reformed churches have traditionally used the Psalms, not as appointed by a lectionary, but as expressions of a particular focus in a specific part of the liturgy. Thus the congregation might sing Psalm 95 or 150 as an opening psalm of praise where Roman Catholics or (more recently) Anglicans might sing the *Gloria in Excelsis*. Its members might similarly sing Psalm 32 or 51 as a confession of sin where other Christians might sing the *Kyrie eleison* or recite the general confession in the Book of Common Prayer. The Reformed churches in Geneva sang Psalm 103 as a post-communion thanksgiving psalm, while the churches in Zürich sang Psalm 113 at this place. By contrast, Anglicans following an older version of their prayer book would sing the *Gloria in Excelsis* here. The disadvantage of this approach is that, just as the *Gloria*, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei* and so forth, became fixed elements of the liturgy in the western church, so have Reformed congregations tended to alternate among a very few Psalms from one Sunday to the next. If Psalm 51 suffices as a general confession of sin, why sing a different penitential psalm next week? The net result is that few of the Psalms are actually sung over time.

Perhaps the best alternative would bring together these approaches, which need not be mutually exclusive but can indeed complement each other. Psalms can be used to reflect the changing seasons of the church calendar, the developing themes of a single book read through in course as part of a *lectio continua*, and to reflect the different moments in the liturgy.

It is in the interest of encouraging, among other things, greater Christian unity, even in liturgical matters, that I am offering the present collection to the churches. After all, we do have the Psalms in common, even if we do not share other elements of our liturgies. Since the Genevan tunes are eminently singable, I hope and pray that my own effort might, if only in a small way, promote a widespread love for singing the Psalms, both within and without the formal liturgical setting. “Let everything that breathes praise the Lord!” (Psalm 150:6)

*David T. Koyzis, Season of Pentecost, 2001*

---

#### NOTES:

1. A recent example of an interpretation of the Psalms as the prayers of Christ can be found in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: the Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970).
2. See “Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry,” in *The Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha: Expanded Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 1523-1529.
3. See Waldo Selden Pratt, *The Music of the Pilgrims: A Description of the Psalm-book brought to Plymouth in 1620* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1921).
4. See Zoltán Haraszti, *The Enigma of the Bay Psalm Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), and *The Bay Psalm Book: A Facsimile Reprint of the First Edition of 1640* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).
5. Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship That Is Reformed According to Scripture* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), p. 53.
6. The subtitle is misleading. The Anglo-Genevan Psalter, incorporating much of the Sternhold and Hopkins corpus, was published by the English protestant exiles on the continent during the reign of Mary Tudor

(“Bloody Mary”). The Canadian Reformed psalter thus includes only the Genevan and not the Anglo-Genevan Psalms.

7. The daily office is a form of prayer growing out of the canonical hours observed in the monasteries. These are spaced about three hours apart and, in the western tradition, include Matins, Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline. Each of these offices consists of the following items more or less in order: opening versicle (e.g., Psalm 51:15 or 70:1); followed by Psalm 95 (for Matins) or another canticle; one or more additional psalms; readings from Old Testament, Epistles and Gospels; another canticle (e.g., the Te Deum, the Benedictus or Magnificat); the Kyrie; petitions; the Our Father; collects; and a closing doxology or benediction.

8. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1958), p. 25.

9. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnet (New York: The Modern Library, no date), p. 393.

10. *Malý Kancionál* (Kutná Hora: Karel Šolc, 1900). The front cover of the volume bears a picture of a chalice, the symbol of the Husite reformation.

11 See, for example, *The Psalter: Psalms and Canticles for Singing* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).

12. *The Grail, The Psalms: A New Translation from the Hebrew Arranged for Singing to the Psalmody of Joseph Gelineau* (Ramsey, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1963)



The Genevan Psalter is a collection of 126 melodies designed to be sung with metrical translations of the 150 Biblical Psalms and three other Scriptural songs. It is sometimes referred to as the French Psalter, as the tunes were designed to be sung with French metrical versions of the Psalter. As the first and most influential music to be composed specifically by and for Reformed Christians, these tunes represent a significant element of the heritage of all Reformed or Calvinistic Christians.Â For more information and background on the Genevan Psalter and this project, please see my introduction. Everything on this website is free. I am receiving no financial return for any work represented here. Fan mail is almost as good.

The Genevan Psalter is a collection of metrical psalms created under the supervision of John Calvin. Metrical Psalms are rhymed versions of the songs from the Book of Psalms, found in the Bible. Origins. Before the Protestant Reformation the singing of the Psalms was generally done by a select group of performers, not by the entire congregation.Â Based on the introduction of this psalter "Pseaumes octantetrois de David" we can conclude that the supervising composer of this edition was Louis Bourgeois. It is not exactly clear how many of the melodies were actually composed by him, but it is generally assumed that most of the new additions were from his hand. The 1562 edition. Finally in 1562 a complete Psalter was issued with rhymed versions of all 150 Psalms.