

**Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise
Report to General Synod - Supplementary report**

The Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise submits the following supplementary report for General Synod Dunnville 2016.

1.) Contact with URCNA Psalter Hymnal Committee regarding a Common Songbook (Acts, Art. 182)

General Synod 2013 mandated the committee to renew the initiative of working toward a common songbook, as an appropriate aspect of continuing to prepare for the eventual union of the two federations. On March 17, 2014, the SCBP sent an e-mail to Rev. Rand Lankheet and Rev. Harry Zekveld, members of the URCNA Psalter Hymnal committee for the two Ontario URCNA classes, making known our desire to “revive the lines of communication between our respective songbook committees, so that, in line with the stipulations of Phase 2 Ecumenical Relations, we make one another aware of developments in our work for the songbooks of our federations. Since the URCNA and the OPC are both sister churches of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and are cooperating in the production of a new Psalter Hymnal, we would like to encourage restored and regular communication between our committees.” The reply indicated that our request would be brought to the committee for an official response. In the meantime, Rev. Zekveld directed our attention to the website where we could view the proposed psalm collection of the joint URCNA/OPC Psalter Hymnal. To date, we have not received the URCNA Psalter Hymnal’s promised “official response” to our request for renewed regular communication.

The 2014 Synod of the URCNA adopted a collection of psalms for inclusion in the proposed joint URCNA/OPC Psalter Hymnal, a total of some 275 songs. 21 of the psalms are set to Genevan tunes. The committee is proposing a hymn collection of some 278 hymns, for adoption at Synod 2016. Their proposed timetable is as follows: May 1, 2015 – Completion of proposed Hymnal collection posted online; December 31, 2015 – Deadline for responses from churches and individuals; Approx. March 2016 – Finalization of proposal in time for the agendas of the Synod/General Assembly.

The OPC General Assembly of 2014 also adopted the proposed collection of psalms: After a period of questions, the committee's recommendation, “that the 81st General Assembly approve the metrical psalms, psalm paraphrases, and psalm partials for the proposed psalter-hymnal as a package,” was approved by the assembly.

2.) Proposed Change to Belgic Confession, Article 34.

In consultation with Dr. Jason Van Vliet and Dr. Jannes Smith, the committee proposes to replace the word ‘expiation’ in the first sentence with the word ‘propitiation’. The revised text would read as follows:

“We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, who is the end of the law (Rom 10:4), has by his shed blood put an end to every other shedding of blood that one could or would make as a propitiation or satisfaction for sins.”

The following serves as grounds for this recommendation:

1. It is clear that the change from 'propitiation' to 'expiation' occurred in the work leading to the 1984 Book of Praise. A look in the archives of the SCBP reveals a draft page of Belgic Confession Article 34 which had the old 'propitiation' which was scratched out in pen and 'expiation' was written above it. All the draft copies after that have 'expiation'. There is no explanation for the change. There is simply a note in brackets that whereas the French & Latin of the Belgic Confession have both 'propitiation and satisfaction' the Corpus Reformatorum only has the latter, i.e., 'satisfaction'. That is interesting but it doesn't answer the question why 'propitiation' was changed to 'expiation'.
2. Bakhuizen van den Brink clearly indicates that both the French & Latin have 'propitiation', while the Dutch has a word that could mean more generally 'atonement' but certainly could mean 'propitiation' as well. So, as far as faithfulness to the original is concerned, 'propitiation' would be the better way to go.
3. The RSV has 'expiation' in 6 passages; the ESV (to which the rest of the Book of Praise 2014 is aligned) in none. Of these six, three times RSV has the verb 'make expiation'. Of these three the ESV once has 'cleanses' (Deut. 32:43), once 'make atonement' (2 Sam. 21:3), and once 'make propitiation' (Heb. 2:17). The other three times the RSV has the noun 'expiation', and in all three the ESV changes it to 'propitiation' (Rom. 3:25, 1 Jn. 2:2, 4:10). Making the recommended change to Article 34 ensures a closer alignment with the ESV.
4. It should also be said that in Belgic Confession Article 34 the word 'propitiation' (or 'expiation', as we have it presently) is speaking most directly about Old Testament sacrifices. As the text says, the shedding of Christ's blood puts an end to all other shedding of blood "*that one could or would make as a propitiation or satisfaction for sins.*" The only drawback with translating 'propitiation' here is that when the person in the pew reads his Old Testament in ESV or NIV84 he will not see that word 'propitiation' anywhere. The word is always 'atonement', or 'atoning sacrifice'. For that reason it might be easier to have "*one could or would make as an atonement or satisfaction for sins.*"
5. Even after taking the comment in #4 into consideration, the best solution may still be to switch back to the word 'propitiation'. It is true to the original. It is better than 'expiation'. And even though 'propitiation' may take some explanation, it's not so bad if God's people need to learn some (new) vocabulary to appreciate the riches of Christ's work for us.
6. In Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1984), p. 888, a discussion on the word 'propitiation' concludes that "*the consistent Bible view is that the sin of man has incurred the wrath of God. That wrath is averted only by Christ's atoning offering. From this standpoint his saving work is properly called propitiation.*" Both this discussion and the ESV's scrubbing of 'expiation' in favour of 'propitiation' suggest that 'expiation' has problematic associations in theological debate.

Respectfully submitted,

The Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise:

Arie H. den Hollander, secretary/treasurer
 Dr. Jannes Smith
 George Ph. van Popta, convenor
 Richard Wynia