

Common Songbook Sub-Committee of the CPEU

Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*

June 10, 2003

C/O Rev. C. Bosch, Sec.,

505 Enfield Rd.,

Burlington, ON. L7T 2X5

The Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity,

C/O Rev. W. den Hollander,

154 Regent Street

Richmond Hill, ON L4C 9N9

Esteemed Brothers;

Greetings! Enclosed please find our report to your committee as mandated by Synod Neerlandia, (Acts, Art. 73, Consid. 4.7). We trust you will include it in your report to Synod Chatham, 2004.

Over the past two years our committee has had two fruitful meetings with our URC counterparts. These meetings were held in a brotherly atmosphere of mutual trust. The results of these meetings are documented in our report.

We would like to draw the attention of your committee to the fact that, aside from the Psalms and Hymns and the Church Order discussions, there may be areas that are not covered in our present discussions with the URC. These include the wording of the Ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity as well as the Liturgical Forms and prayers. We mention this as it appears that at some time more direction will need to be given re: these matters.

On behalf of the SCBP, and with

Greetings in our Lord,

C. Bosch, sec.

Report to the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CPEU) Regarding the United Reformed Churches

Esteemed Brothers:

In connection with moving to Phase 2 in our relationship with the URCNA, Synod Neerlandia 2001 directed the Committee, "to deal with the matter of the songbook." (Acts, Art. 73, 5.5) Synod considered that the Committee should

"...work closely with committees appointed by the URC Synod. These committees should report at regular intervals to the CPEU, which, in turn will produce a single comprehensive report, jointly with the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the URC." (Acts, Art. 73, Consid. 4.7)

In keeping with this mandate the Committee presents the following report.

1.0 Introduction:

The Committee held two joint meetings with the United Reformed Churches' Psalter Hymnal Committee, the first on March 15-16, 2002, in the Cornerstone URC of London, ON and the second on March 21 and 22, 2003, in the Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church. The URC committee consists of nine members from various places both in Canada and the USA. These meetings were held in a brotherly (and sisterly!) atmosphere and were excellent, productive meetings in which a number of things were accomplished.

The Press Releases of these meetings were published in both *Clarion* and *Christian Renewal* and the Minutes were exchanged.

2.0 March 15, 16, 2002 Meeting:

At this meeting, chaired by Rev. E. Knott of the URC, Rev. G.Ph. van Popta presented a report on the history of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Rev. D.Vander Meulen presented a report on the history of the URC Psalter Hymnal Committee and the mandates given that committee by URC Synods.

It was noted that while the URC committee was mandated "... to consider for inclusion..." the 150 Psalms in metrical settings from the Anglo-Genevan Psalter, our committee was mandated "...to include...." them. A positive and profitable discussion took place re. our respective mandates, history, and procedures.

As a result of the discussions the following was decided:

- a. That our committee formulate Principles for Song Selection for discussion and approval by both committees. Following such approval these will be submitted to the churches of each federation.
- b. That two members of the URC committee formulate a preface to these Principles for presentation and approval at the next meeting.
- c. That Minutes of each committee's meetings would be exchanged.

2.1. Mar. 21, 22, 2003 Meeting:

This meeting, chaired by Rev. G.Ph. van Popta, heard progress reports of the work done by the respective committees since March 2003.

The URC committee recommended a suggested "Preface" to the "Principles and Guidelines for the Selection of Music in the Church." It also scrutinized the "Principles and Guidelines" for song selection as proposed by our committee. It will ask the URC Synod (2004) to relieve the committee of its responsibility for the prose section of the planned new URC Psalter Hymnal

Previously the committee decided to follow the divisions of the Apostles' Creed (Triune God, church, salvation, etc.) in compiling hymns deemed suitable for a new songbook.

Our committee reported on its activities. Besides dealing with copyright issues, it formulated a set of Principles and Guidelines to govern the selection of hymns for a combined songbook. It also analyzed some hymns from the Psalter Hymnal, (1976 edition).

After extensive discussion, the "Preface, Principles and Guidelines" were unanimously adopted as follows:

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION OF MUSIC IN THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Reformed Churches and United Reformed Churches entered into "Phase Two" of ecumenical relations, effective January 1, 2002, with the goal of eventual federative unity. The synods of those two federations mandated their respective committees to labor together to recommend to the churches a common songbook that would be faithful to the Scriptures and our Reformed confessions.

PREFACE

The Bible is filled with references to singing. From the very beginning God's people have responded to His grace, almighty power and presence with song. The songs of the Church are, essentially, prayers to God. They are filled with praise and thanksgiving, sorrow for sin and petition for forgiveness, and prayers for intercession in behalf of others in Christ. They also include instruction and exhortation. Thus the songs of the Church express the entire spectrum of the Christian's experience. While every believer may find personal expression of praise, thanksgiving, petitions, and repentance in song, and while we encourage the families of our churches to make use of the songbook in family devotions, the principal purpose for which this songbook is being developed is for congregational singing. The Psalms and hymns are being selected with the prayer that they may express and enrich our congregational worship of God.

Psalms 66:2 - "Sing out the honor of His name; make His praise glorious."

Ephesians 5:19 - "...Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

*PRINCIPLES:***THE SONG OF THE CHURCH IS TO BE SUITABLE FOR THE CHURCH'S WORSHIP TO THE GLORY OF GOD**

1. The songs of the Church are to be scriptural.

In content, form, and spirit the Church's songs must express the truth of the Holy Scriptures. Augustine, referring to the singing of Psalms, said, "No one can sing anything worthy of God which he has not received from Him . . . then we are assured that God puts the words in our mouth."

2. The songs of the Church are to be a sacrifice of praise.^[1]

Singing is an important element of the congregation's response to God's redeeming work in Christ Jesus and the Word proclaimed in the worship service.

John Calvin wrote, "Singing has great strength and power to move and to set on fire the hearts of men that they may call upon God and praise Him with a more vehement and more ardent zeal. This singing should not be light or frivolous, but it ought to have weight and majesty."

3. The songs of the Church are to be aesthetically pleasing.

The songs for worship are to be a beautiful blend of God-honouring poetry and music.^[2]

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING SONGS:

1. The songs of the Church must be thoroughly biblical. They are to represent the full range of the revelation of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.^[3]
2. The Book of Psalms is foundational for the Church's songs. Therefore, all of these Psalms, in their entirety, ought to be included in the Church's songbook.
3. When Psalms or other portions of Scripture are set to music, the words must be faithful to the content and form of the inspired text.^[4]
4. In the case of songs other than the versification of Scripture, the words must faithfully express the teaching of Scripture^[5] as summarized by our Reformed confessions.
5. The songs of the Church must be intelligible^[6] and edifying to the body of Christ.^[7]
6. The songs of the Church must reflect and preserve the language of the Church of all ages rather than accommodating current secular trends.^[8]

7. In content and form, the songs of the Church must be free from artificiality and sentimentality.
8. The music of the song should suit the text.
9. The music of the Church should be expressive of the Reformed tradition. Where possible, use is to be made of music developed in the tradition of this rich heritage (e.g., the Genevan psalm tunes and the Scottish Psalter).
10. The music of the Church should not be borrowed from music that suggests places and occasions other than the Church and the worship of God.^[9]
11. The melodies and harmonies of church music must be suitable for congregational singing, avoiding complicated rhythms, excessive syncopation, and a wide range of pitch.
 - 1) Hebrews 13:15
 - 2) Psalm 92: 1-4
 - 3) Psalm 147:1
 - 4) 2 Timothy 3:16
 - 5) Proverbs 30:6
 - 6) 1 Corinthians 14:15
 - 7) Colossians 3:16
 - 8) Romans 12:2a
 - 9) Ephesians 5:18-21

3.0 Future Direction:

At the March 21 – 22, 2003 meeting of our committee and that of the URC, a discussion took place re: the course to take towards the goal of a common Reformed songbook. We note the following:

- 3.1 The URC Psalter Hymnal Committee will propose to its next synod that initially both the *Book of Praise* as well as a *Psalter Hymnal* be recommended for use in the churches.
- 3.2 While the Psalter Hymnal Committee is mandated to produce a complete Psalter it is not bound to include the 150 Anglo-Genevan psalms. Our committee, however, is bound by its mandate to include them.

The combined committees decided to:

- 3.3 continue to work together, using the Principles and Guidelines to scrutinize and recommend suitable hymns.
- 3.4 be gracious, open and amenable to each other's point of view, remaining cognizant of each other's mandates while striving towards unanimity.
- 3.5 concentrate our efforts on the hymns.
- 3.6 use the divisions of the Apostles' Creed (cf. # 2.1. above) as a general guide to organizing the hymns.
- 3.7 maintain close contact between our committees, reporting to each other on our progress re: hymns every other month starting May 1, 2003.
- 3.8 hold our next combined meeting in Jenison, MI, in March 2004.

In addition to this our committee decided:

- 3.9 In our contact with the URC Psalter Hymnal Committee we will restrict our discussion to the Psalm and hymn sections of the proposed combined song book.

Respectfully Submitted;

Rev. D.G.J Agema

Rev. C. Bosch (secretary)

Prof. Dr. N.H Gootjes

C. J. Nobels (treasurer)

C. Van Halen-Faber

G. Ph. van Popta (chairman)

Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity

United Reformed Churches in North America

Editorial Note: This appendix was intended for inclusion in the Acts of Synod Neerlandia 2001. Since it is an important document in regards to the relationship of our churches with the URCNA, it is now included in these Acts.

Phase One – Corresponding Relations

The first phase of ecumenicity is one of exploration, with the intent that by correspondence and dialogue, mutual understanding and appreciation may develop in the following areas of the two churches' lives:

- a. view and place of the Holy Scriptures
- b. creeds and confessions
- c. formula of subscription to the confessions
- d. significant factors in the two federations' history, theology and ecclesiology