

# THE PSALMODY OF THE CHURCH.

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The way of a sinner's restoration to God, and the matter and manner of acceptable worship equally lie beyond the province and the range of human discovery. They must be made known to us; and the making of them known to us constitutes the chief burden and aim of divine revelation. As this revelation is now completed, if any one should still be found asking "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" the curt and somewhat indignant words of the prophet Micah, pointing to The Book, convey to him the final answer— "HE HATH SHEWED THEE, O MAN, WHAT IS GOOD."

In the Westminster Confession of Faith (Chap. XXI) the general teachings of God's Word, and the faith and testimony of the universal Church on this subject, are thus distinctly enunciated— "The light of nature sheweth that there is a God who is to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, or in any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture."

Praise is the purest and the noblest part of worship. In other exercises the human element predominates; in this the divine. In prayer, the worshipper is first and chiefly concerned with himself; in praise, he rises above self, and becomes absorbed in the contemplation of the ineffable grace and loveliness of God. All worship culminates in praise. From its very nature and design, this ordinance demands for its right observance forms of the most elevated and celestial type. The songs of the Church must be divine. Preaching is the address of one man to his fellows on behalf of God; and although all its success depends on the harmony between this human address, both as to matter and manner, and the will of God revealed for our salvation, yet great freedom of thought and latitude of expression must necessarily be allowed in such a case. Prayer is the humble appeal to God of a deeply-interested and needy suppliant; and although his petition can be granted only so far as it is in accordance with God's revealed will, yet its whole value, as a prayer, depends on its being the true, natural, confiding, unreserved utterance of the felt peculiarities and necessities of the case. Forms of prayer would require to be separately cast for each individual in an infinite variety of moulds, which none but the hand of God could fashion and multiply as needed, in order to be available for the momentarily-changing and interminable exigencies of the Church. A few model prayers, or model sermons, such as we have in the Scriptures, with such general directions for the public worship of God as the Church may consider it necessary to issue from time to time, may be of some advantage in helping to the right observance of these ordinances; but forms, in either case, must prove an obstruction to the devotion and edification of the Church. With praise it is different. The hearer rises from his seat, the suppliant from his knees, to express before God their sense of his greatness in Psalms of adoring gratitude and love. God himself is both the object and matter of our praise. Does not the great swelling heart of the Church, conscious of the incompetency of all earthly productions, demand for this exercise songs adequate to the high occasion—songs worthy of God, and fitted to evoke and carry upward to his throne the triumphant gratulations of redeemed humanity—in a word, God-given songs; and, therefore, such as are not merely safe to be used in this most self-forgetting and ecstatic exercise, but fitted also to raise up the Church into more perfect oneness with God himself; and with the Church in heaven?

## I. THE MATTER OF THE CHURCH'S PRAISE.

Jehovah; the sole object of worship, is "eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth." So far, then, as the matter of praise embodies and reflects the glory of the Great Being whom we worship, it will be equally suitable to every dispensation, and must remain substantially unchanged. Besides, the way of salvation is one and unchangeable in every age; and, as the experiences and progressive attainments of God's children are at all times necessarily very similar; so the songs that are divinely adapted to give expression to their emotions at one time; will be found equally

suitable at all times. We are thus led to anticipate, not merely that the whole matter of the Church's praise will be found in the Bible, but that it will be found in a collected form, arranged and classified into such "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" as are best suited to the varying circumstances of men, and calculated to unite and elevate in the mystic bonds of a common worship, the rejoicing heart of the redeemed Church over the whole earth.

### ***WHAT SHOULD BE THE MATTER OF THE CHURCH'S PRAISE?***

Of course "glory to God in the highest" must ever form its all-pervading and most distinguishing element. Praise is the celebration of God's majesty and supremacy—of the glory of his works, and the sublimity of his purposes—the absolute perfection of his dominion over the universe, and the concentrated splendour of his moral attributes, softened into grace, as it shines upon our sinful world in the Person and work of his eternal son. Any serious error or defect here must be fatal to the Psalmody of the Church.

The grace and truth which emanate from God, and are wrought up into the subjective and devotional life of the Church, form an essential part of the matter of her praise. In all their original parity and completeness, these should be reflected in our songs of worship.

Besides, the matter of the Church's praise must include and duly celebrate the great deliverances, spiritual and providential, which are all summarily represented in those wonders of old which God wrought for his chosen people, as recorded in his Word, but which he is perpetually renewing to the end of time. The answer of every believing prayer, the issue of every spiritual conflict, the agonising consciousness of impending danger, the piercing cry for immediate help, the joyous confidence of approaching victory, and the irrepressible shout of a realised deliverance—all must find full, poetic expression in the songs of the Church.

These songs, moreover by their prophetic expansiveness, must embrace the gradual enlargement and final triumphs of God's cause on earth—until "men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed." Praise exults in anticipation of the future, as well as in remembrance of the past. Thus exuberant gratitude and rejoicing hope mingle together their joyous strains as the Church advances in her career of conquest, or as individuals gradually advance towards, and are at length permitted to take part in, the ecstatic praises of eternity.

### ***HOW CAN SUCH A PSALMODY BE PROVIDED?***

Assuredly not by the Church. She is incompetent to the task. And even if competent, she is not warranted to undertake it. When did God devolve on any man, or body of men, the right to determine what should be offered to him in praise? We naturally look to One higher than a worshipper for songs of worship. We instinctively ask for One far removed above the level of sinful, erring, wayward humanity, to teach us to praise, and supply us with its matter. Our songs must be known to have come from the very midst of the throne and of the excellent glory, that we may be confident of their acceptance there, when they return glowing with the enkindled emotions, and fragrant with the bursting gratitude, of the church. Divine matter alone can be employed, or accepted, in the exercise of praise. And even were that matter furnished to their hand, men would prove utterly incompetent to prepare it aright for the ordinance of worship.

The matter of praise must be distributed in brief, poetic, and exulting odes of universal adaptation. The highest and most elevating style of thought and of utterance alone is befitting such a service. Each song must be framed so as to express the emotions, not of one, or of a few, but of all. The completed collection must embrace in its various songs—each differing from the rest in length, or style, or substance—the entire matter of the Church's praise for all time. Yet this collection, as a whole, must be so brief, simple, and easy of entire appropriation, that when associated with suitable music, it may be readily grafted upon the memory of childhood, and so familiarised as to become the living embodiment and efflorescence of the devotion and piety of the people from generation to generation. An immature, ever-changing, multitudinous, uncertain psalmody mocks, but cannot satisfy, the deep and abiding necessities of the Church of God. This is no proper field for the display of conceited gifts, or the trial of empirical effusions. When the rage of hymn-making seizes upon men, countless rhapsodies will be amassed together and offered as suitable vehicles of the Church's praise. Must they all be accepted and sung, that a full tribute of worship may be presented to Jehovah? If not, who is authorised to make the final selection? And when it is made, who can give confidence to the anxious worshipper, that all the matter of praise is embraced in it, clothed in language fitted to the ear of God, untainted with error, and purged from such spurious and self-pleasing emotions as are so apt to beguile us even in the divine presence? The Church never has undertaken a work so super-human and responsible as this. Nor has God given the slightest hint that such a work was ever expected at her hands. We are shut up to the conclusion, that God himself must be the author and finisher of the praises of the Church.

## ***HAS GOD PROVIDED US WITH SUCH A PSALMODY?***

If he has, then that fact at once disposes of any prior question as to his own sole right and fitness to undertake the task, and as to the utter incompetency and unwarrantableness of the Church to intermeddle in the matter. Has God furnished the Psalmody of the Church? Then that conclusive fact stamps upon every part of it the full sanction of divine authority, attests the infinite suitableness and value of the Psalms to the necessities of the Church, and enforces upon the conscience and heart of each believing worshipper an imperative obligation, freely and devoutly to use them in his worship.

1. A BOOK OF PSALMS *is contained in the Bible*. It is a part of the completed canon of revelation, an essential portion of those scriptures which are "given by inspiration of God." Its authority and infallibility will not now be called in question. It contains 160 separate and complete odes in every variety of structure and of style. These are classified and arranged into five distinct books or sections, each closing with a fitting doxology. In its conception and execution, in the manifest design of every part and in the scope of the whole, in the abrupt language and impassioned style which characterise it, as well as in the hallelujah spirit by which it is pervaded—it is unmistakably a book of Psalms. Such is its divine title, and as such it has been quoted and referred to, both by our Lord and his apostles, and by the whole catholic Church.

2. *This book contains the whole matter of the Church's praise*. This has been the admiring testimony of worshippers in every age. The profoundest students of the Psalms have been the most impressed with the amazing fulness, variety, and suitableness of their matter for the service of the sanctuary. They have been called, on this account, a miniature Bible—a kind of epitome of the whole scriptures, the choice and flower of all things profitable in other books, a mirror of the soul of everyone who sings, the expression of the innermost life of worshipping men, an inexhaustible fount of pure devotion. Who can ever say that his spiritual experiences have outgrown David's Psalms, that he has risen above their height, expatiated beyond their range, or descended and explored beneath their depth?

3. *This book is expressly given to be sung in the worship of the Church*. The word, *psalm*, signifies a composition to be sung. The Psalms were familiarly called of old, "the Lord's Songs"—"The Songs of Zion." In the New Testament they are characterised by an apostle as "psalms, and hymns, and inspired (or spiritual) songs." They were originally composed in that abrupt, impassioned, direct style which is only suitable to praise, and were given to the "chief singer" to be set to music, and thereafter used in the public worship of the Church. The mere reading of them is tame and flat, and utterly fails to stir the passions and strike into intense vibrations all the chords of the heart, as the singing of them is so well known to do. David did not say, "O come, let us read unto the Lord a new poem," but "O come let us sing unto the Lord a new song." The ancient Church sang them "with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped." No other scriptural songs or hymns were ever used by them after the completion of the book of Psalms. Christ and the apostles sang them, and commended them to be sung, and introduced no other songs into the worship of the Christian Church. The early Christians, comprehending the resistless force of these obligations, sang nothing else for centuries, and loved them as the most elevating and inspiring portions of their daily devotions. The Church has uniformly recognised in the book of Psalms an inspired and completed book of praise—a manual of devotion for all times—and psalm-singing has in every age been taken to represent the purest and most perfect worship of the Church of Christ.

4. *The Book of Psalms is perfectly adapted to the service of the sanctuary, and there is no warrant for the production of any other*. The instinctive demand of the Church has been met. An inspired and completed Psalter has been furnished. We have now songs that may be fearlessly sung in the immediate presence of the Eternal. Their matter and style of expression must be acceptable, for they have been specially furnished by himself. In attempting to use them we are educated to praise. Clothed in becoming reverence, they at once usher us into the divine presence, unveil his surpassing glory, kindle our bosoms into a flame like that with which seraphs burn continually; and then, by the simple vehicle of a song, which at once gathers up and intensifies our holiest emotions, pour forth our rapturous adoration in strains befitting his Royal majesty. Comprehensive enough to include all the matter of praise, they are yet sufficiently short, simple, and few in number to fall within the range of ordinary capacities. Children commit them to memory with pleasure. The humblest and busiest of men, by daily use, are able to absorb them so completely that they come unconsciously to give tone, sublimity, and substance to their whole devotional utterances.

A book of Psalms is not found in the New Testament. It was no more needed there than a second sun is needed in the firmament. God has provided in the Old a sufficient collection of songs for the whole religious life of humanity. Who thinks of the Psalms as a mere Jewish psalter? Their continued use by Christ and the apostles and the whole Church stamps them as intrinsically Christian. They are the peculiar heritage and treasure—the joy and the glory of the Christian Church more than ever they were of the Jewish. God has given no hint that additional psalms are needed. He has promised no inspiration for the production of Christian hymns. No apostle ever seized the harp of David and tried to add to or amend the

book of Psalms. If uninspired men dare to attempt it, let them be at once confronted with the question— "Who hath required this at your hands?"

### ***THE PSALMS ALONE TO BE USED IN PRAISE.***

This is the inevitable conclusion to which every line of argument leads. The matter of praise can be furnished only by God. He has provided the Church with a book of Psalms divinely adapted to her service of song. This he has commanded us to sing. It has been sung with profit and delight by the Church in every age. God has given no other psalms to the Church. He has commanded no one to add to her psalmody, nor has he promised any help that would be available for such a purpose. In no way has he ever warranted the expectation that mere human songs would be permitted to mingle with his worship, or that his blessing would accompany their use. If we are to be guided by God's revealed will and the approved practice of his Church, rather than by our own vagrant fancies and the dangerous devices of men, we will rest in the conclusion that the Psalms alone are to be used in worship.

In singing the book of Psalms, we may pass at once, and with boldness, into the holiest of all, confident that we are offering praise, that we are giving to the great God the glory due unto his name, that we are stirring up within ourselves and presenting unto him only such emotions as are well-pleasing in his sight, and such as will be beneficial to ourselves and others—in short, that we are doing true homage before the Jealous One, by worshipping him only in the way which he has appointed, and which he has pledged himself to accept at our hands.

On the other hand, if we take up one of the almost countless collections of hymns recently offered to the Church, what a Herculean and superhuman task is required of us before we dare venture to use any part of it in the solemn exercise of worship! Does it contain the true matter of the Church's praise without the fatal admixture of error or defect? Is each separate ode expressive of the sentiments of scriptural worship in language of celestial purity and poetic fire? Does the entire collection contain no misrepresentation of the divine character and purposes—no biased statement of Christian truth or experience—nothing that fosters sinful prejudice, ministers to self-deception, or panders to a domineering sensationalism—thus tending to make self, and not God, the centre and the end of all our worship? These questions require to be settled by each worshipper before he opens his lips in the use of such hymns. He cannot depute the task to another. Nor is any council or synod competent to decide for him what he should offer in praise to God. He must decide for himself. To his own Master he standeth or falleth. And, when he has done so, may he not still be arrested and silenced by the challenge, "Who hath required this at your hands?" Is it not a daring impertinence, a solemn affront offered in the very exercise of worship, to come before God with the singing of human hymns, when he himself has furnished us with psalms which he has commanded us to sing?

### ***HYMN SINGING AN EVIL AND A NUISANCE IN THE CHURCH.***

1. *It is a glaring departure from God's ordinance and the approved practice of the Church.* The mind of God has been so clearly expressed on the subject that it was never called in question, nor was any attempt made to introduce human compositions in his praise until the spirit of Anti-Christ had deeply infected the Church. Now, almost the only argument by which men encourage and vindicate themselves in the practice is that for many centuries the Church has been so departing. "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return into you, saith the Lord of Hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?"

2. *It is a dangerous intrusion of will-worship into the house of God.* The Spirit of Christ and of true Christian worship is embodied in the words "Not my will, but Thine be done." God's expressed will is that we should sing the Psalms. In direct opposition to that, and to gratify, in preference, man's own will, hymns, which were first composed for mere private or social uses, were introduced into the public worship of God. Now almost every church makes its own taste and will the ultimate standard of decision. Will-worship runs riot in the sanctuary, domineers over every ordinance, mounts unabashed to the very Throne, and seems to have become perfectly uncontrollable.

3. *It is a palpable dishonour done to the Spirit of inspiration.* His Psalms are branded and rejected as Jewish, unchristian, unfit to be sung and injurious to worship, while paraphrases, and hymns of multifarious origin, which many denounce as worthless, erroneous and abominable, will be boldly presented to God in worship, in preference to the Songs of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> "I want a name for that man who should pretend that he

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<sup>1</sup>The General Synod of the Irish Episcopal Church has just sanctioned the use of a new collection of Hymns in public worship. Some of its ablest members criticised these hymns as "contrary to Church doctrine, unpoetical, and absurd in point of grammar and construction." Yet all will now be required to sing them in the worship of God.

could make better hymns than the Holy Ghost. What a blasphemous attempt!" exclaimed the godly Romaine.

4. *It renders true praise almost an impossibility in the Church.* Men must know beforehand what they are to sing, and be well assured that it is in accordance with God's will, before they can praise with the spirit and with the understanding also. How can they know this of hymns that bear no stamp whatever of divine approval? And even if an infallible test could be devised, how is it to be applied to the hundreds of hymns in different collections, that are so hastily adopted, and then so speedily subjected to change, revision, and alteration? No wonder that so many silently listen to the music in the Church as they would do at the Opera, or feebly chime in with the tune, without expending a thought upon the matter or the object of their worship. Is not this the reason why singing is now so generally abandoned even in family worship?

5. *It fosters a dangerous sensationalism in the Church.* The Psalms are objective. Coming from the eternal throne, they never rest until they have borne us back with them into the royal presence. Self-abhorring and self-forgetting, we learn to "worship God" as we sing the Psalms. Hymns are mainly subjective. They act upon and embody the feelings and sympathies of humanity. Most of them have had no spiritual or devotional origin. The few favourites that are found here and there in immense collections, are lauded, because they are so very touching, heart-stirring, and sensational. Many of them are direct appeals and addresses to sinners, to saints, to angels. Their tendency is to move and gratify the feelings rather than to honour God. Yet the most thrilling and melting sensations are not to be mistaken for devotion; nor will mere animal or emotional excitement contribute to healthful and intelligent worship.

6. *It opens the floodgates of error in the Church.* Hymns steeped in heresy are prepared and industriously circulated for the purpose of infecting the minds of worshippers, and preparing them for the reception of the grossest errors. In this manner the early Church was deliberately *hymned* into Gnosticism, Arianism, and Pelagianism, even as, in the modern churches, God's silly people are quietly permitting themselves to be sung into Arminianism, Tractarianism, and popery.

7. *Consecrates and promotes sectarianism in the Church.* The Westminster Standards and Directory for Worship were framed in as close accordance with scripture as possible, for the noble object of bringing the churches in these kingdoms into the nearest conjunction and uniformly in religion. Hymn-singing serves the opposite purpose. It first establishes a great gulf between those who indulge in its vagaries and such as cannot depart from a scriptural worship. Then it impiously deepens, and tries to consecrate before God every shade of controverted opinion and of sectarian jealousy. Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians, Baptists, Plymouthists, and Moravians, Unitarians, Universalists, and Roman Catholics, Rationalists, Swedenborgians, and Latter-day Saints are each seeking to force their peculiarities upon God, and to obtain his special sanction to their views in opposition to all the rest. Each church would instantly reject the hymn-books of the others with abhorrence. But that God, whom they worship, and who is a jealous God, is supposed to be well-pleased with them all, or, at any rate, they require him to endure them all in his public worship.

8. *It practically ejects God's book of Psalms from his own house, and from the devotional heritage of his people.* Hymns are at first introduced to supplement and Christianise the Psalms! A very small and carefully selected list, it is pretended, will suffice for this purpose. But these novelties are so run upon for all occasions, that the feeling is quickly generated that the Psalms are unsuitable or unfit to be used, and a demand is created for a much longer compilation. That which was proposed to supplement soon comes to supersede. Those who presume that God's Psalms need to be modified and improved by them will not scruple much about setting them aside. Besides, almost every man, at some period of life, thinks himself capable of writing hymns. When a demand is admitted, the supply becomes enormous. The fountains of the great deep seem to be broken up, and muddy effusions pour forth like a deluge in the sanctuary, before which the Psalms are soon swept away and forgotten. Hymn-singing churches have no rest in this surging deluge of frothy innovations. They are continually rejecting their old collections and forming new compilations. Each book contains from about 300 to 1,000 hymns. Besides, many congregations and Sabbath-schools have their own private collections. Not less than 50,000 hymns have been used by the churches in these countries in praise, the great majority of which are now universally condemned. The Syrian Church has about 14,000, and the German churches not less than 80,000. Man triumphs, and God is insulted in the very sanctuary of his strength. The songs of inspiration are rejected, and the true matter of the Church's praise is displaced by the pious inventions and the whimsicalities of men.

## II. THE MATTER OF THE CHURCH'S PRAISE.

On this the Directory for Public Worship says—"It is the duty of Christians to praise God publicly by singing of psalms together in the congregation, and also privately in the family. In singing of psalms the voice is to be tunably and gravely ordered; but the chief care must be to sing with understanding, and with grace in the heart, making melody unto the Lord."

Beyond all question, the Temple service of the Hebrews was the most magnificent choral worship that the world has ever seen. As arranged by David and Asaph, the choir consisted of some 4,000 singers and players. None of the music, however, of these "great choristers of God" has been preserved. In the synagogues and in the assemblies of the Christian Church for centuries a simple, solemn mode of chanting the Psalms must have been their principal music. One whole psalm, at least, would be sung at a time. Sometimes a number were sung in immediate succession. When Christ and the apostles rose from the Communion table to go into the Mount of Olives they sang together the usual *Hallel* that was associated with the Passover, and which consisted of six psalms. These, it seems probable, were devoutly chanted. A chant is simply a musical recitation suited to the rhythm of Hebrew poetry—a musical tune with the simplest inflections, the measure of which is the natural length of the syllables to be uttered. Our common tunes require the Psalms to be cut up into lengths and arranged in metre. Metrical versions of God's Word never give entire satisfaction. Besides, with such music we are limited to the use of a very small fragment of a psalm at one time. In chanting we can sing a whole psalm in the very form given to it by the Spirit of inspiration; and there is this further advantage connected with it—the music is subordinate to the matter, and is beautifully illustrative both of the language and the spirit of the composition.

As Anti-Christ became fully developed in the Church, and the tendency to all kinds of ritualism and superstition gathered force, not only did metrical hymns displace the Psalms, but a new and very different style of music took possession of the sanctuary. Long and elaborate compositions of the most intricate character were prepared, and litanies, responses, and masses sung to them by trained and clerical choristers. The people were neither expected nor permitted to join in them. One of the early councils declared "that none but canons and the choir, who sing out of parchment books, should presume to sing in Church." The music, as in the theatre, was performed only to be listened to. To aid in the general effect, and to give body and volume to the several parts, the organ was soon felt to be indispensable. It was pretended that the religious impression and influence of such music upon the mute and ignorant masses must be very great. Congregational singing and public praise were thus extinguished. This is still the music of the Romish Church, and, with little variation either as to matter or manner, it is to be found also in all Anglican and cathedral services. The same idea, in a modified form, predominates in many Protestant churches where the organ or the professional choir are employed to attract and entertain the congregation. Indeed the organ—which is utterly unfit for leading or improving Church psalmody—can only be thought of as a means of evoking the religious sentiments and feelings of the people. It is the Devil's substitute for *preaching* quite as much as for *praise*.

As vernal suns melt the ice and snows of winter, and suddenly cover the land with noisy streamlets and foaming rivers, so did the exuberant life of the Reformation period burst over Europe in songs of jubilant thanksgiving and irrepressible praise. Discarding at once Mediaeval hymns, organs, and orchestral performances, the book of Psalms was rendered into metre, and, with a suitable tune to each psalm, was sung by the people as their defiant protest against popery, and their grateful celebration of God's great mercy. Teachers of music sprang up everywhere; practice-meetings were held in private houses; psalm singing was heard in the public promenades, and was the entertainment of picnics and boating parties. Not even persecution could abate "the impetuous fury of psalm-singing." At length the chills and frosts of winter passed again over the Churches, and this first love waxed cold. The psalms gradually fell into disuse, and sacred music was neglected. Congregations having books in their hands would not sing, unless the lines were first read out to them, and the few tunes in which they attempted to join were sung in such a drawling and excruciating way as to create a disgust to the noble exercise. "To see the dull indifference, the negligent and the thoughtless air that sits upon the faces of a whole assembly, while the psalm is on their lips, might tempt even a charitable observer to suspect the fervency of inward religion; and it is much to be feared that the minds of most of the worshippers are absent or unconcerned." To remedy this intolerable state of things, Dr. Watts undertook to Christianise David and his harp, and to supply the deficiencies of God's book of Psalms. Others went still farther by gathering up excellent gospel songs and sonnets, prepared for private use, with every scrap of evangelical doggerel of an exciting or sensational tendency, wedding them to the lightest airs of the theatre or the street, and then introducing them to the sanctuary to enliven its worship. Others, again, called out for the thunder of the organ to drown these shameless defects, and to fill the sanctuary with, at least, the semblance of praise. All this was but avoiding Scylla by dashing upon Charybdis. The true remedy would have been found in seeking a revival of spiritual religion, and in rousing the people to the duty and privilege of singing God's Psalms in a manner befitting their exquisite pathos and

unapproachable majesty, and not altogether unworthy of the public service of that God with whom we have to do.

### ***IN WHAT MANNER SHOULD WE SING THE PSALMS?***

1. *Intelligently.* We are rational beings. This is a reasonable service. "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." It requires the concentrated action of all the mental faculties, as well as previous familiarity with the matter of the Psalms. On this account they should be regularly explained from Sabbath to Sabbath. Where their excellence is appreciated they will never be laid aside.

2. *With the heart.* God looketh on the heart. He says to every worshipper, "My son, give me thine heart." When filled with love, and joy, and gratitude, how it beats responsive in his presence, imparts its own thrilling emotions to the music and the psalm, and pours out its richest and its sweetest treasures unsparingly at his feet! Without this, the finest music and the noblest Psalmody are empty and worthless offerings—not better than the husks which swine do eat.

3. *With the voice.* It is the divine outlet and utterance of the mind and heart in man. God's voice is himself, and we receive it as such. So when we ask God to accept of us we say—hear my cry, attend to my voice. It is a distinctive and inseparable part of ourselves; the natural embodiment of our emotions and desires. We cannot give utterance to them without it. God has made it with special adaptation to this end, and therefore it is, beyond all comparison, the most consummate organ of expression and of praise. He formed it for himself, and claims its most skilful intonations for his worship. We insult, but do not praise God when we use mechanical instruments in its stead. If there be "no essential distinction between the music of the voice and the music of an instrument," may we not use instruments to deepen and interpret our emotions in prayer as well as in praise? The church of Rome plays her litanies and masses with as much propriety and effect as she plays her anthems and oratorios. This substitution of man-made instruments and offices in place of God's is the very core of Anti-Christian worship. The early Christians perfectly understood the symbolical import of the musical instruments which are mentioned in the book of Psalms, and could sing about them with as much freedom and intelligence as they sang of the sacrifices, which no one thinks of renewing. Thus Clement of Alexandria, at the close of the second century, refers to those mentioned in the 150th Psalm. "Praise him with the psaltery. The tongue is the psaltery of the Lord. Praise Him on the lyre. By the lyre is meant the mouth struck by the spirit as it were by a plectrum. Praise him on the chords and organ. Our body he calls an organ, and its nerves are the strings by which it has received harmonious tension, and when struck by the Spirit it gives forth human voices." The common sense of the Church in all ages has declared that instrumental music may be calculated to gratify the senses and inflame the passions, but not to aid, unless as types or symbols, the devotions of men. It properly belongs to the public procession and the battlefield, to the theatre and the drinking saloon, but not to the Church of the living God.

4. *With distinct enunciation.* Every word, as well as every note, should be clearly pronounced. Otherwise, to a stranger coming into the Church, our singing might as well be in an unknown tongue.

5. *Skilfully.* The art of singing cannot be learned without much study and practice. It is a divine art, and should be cultivated incessantly for the glory of God's name and the improvement of his worship. "As it is commanded of God that all should sing, so all should make conscience of learning to sing. Those, therefore, who neglect to learn to sing live in sin, as they neglect what is necessary to one of the ordinances of God's worship." If any say the heart is everything in praise, we reply they can have no heart whatever in the exercise who do not strive to perform it in the most skilful and perfect manner. In every congregation there should be a standing class for the improvement of sacred music.

6. *With appropriate melody.* Each psalm has its own character and style, and should have its own tune. The collection is not too large for this. The Reformers everywhere accomplished it with ease. Some of the longer historical psalms are specially adapted for chanting, and chanting is the most simple, ancient, and devotional form of all music. Every tune should be marked by a religious character; the singer and the hearer should at once feel that they are not in the theatre, or the concert-room, or in the private social party, but in the house of the most high God.

7. *Harmoniously.* All voices are not alike. In pitch as well as in tone they have deep natural distinctions. Instead of vainly trying to obliterate these distinctions, we should aim to harmonise them in God's worship. Human voices resolve themselves into what is called four-part harmony, a natural arrangement by which the different voices of women and men are employed together, according to their pitch. Each individual should find out his own proper part, and cultivate and practise it in full-toned harmony with all the rest. When two or three meet together in the name of Christ they are required to agree together, or harmonise, as to what they shall ask, and as to their general intercourse and action for the common good. Should they not, in the

same manner, tune their feelings and voices to sing together in the harmonious expression of their common praise?

8. *In the way of direct and sustained adoration.* "O come, let us sing unto the Lord. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods." Yet how often do the indolent posture, the wandering eyes, the frequent interruptions, that would not be permitted during prayer, indicate the want of that solemnity which befits an act of divine worship! When the Jews sang praises they bowed their heads and worshipped, and the redeemed in the Apocalyptic heaven fall down and cast their crowns before the throne. Should not we also take the attitude of highest respect and adoration when engaged in this exercise? "Thou, even thou, art to be feared; and who may stand in thy sight if once thou art angry?" "Praise ye the Lord. Ye that stand in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God."

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