



The Standard Bearer

***A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine***

Special Issue:

Reformed Worship

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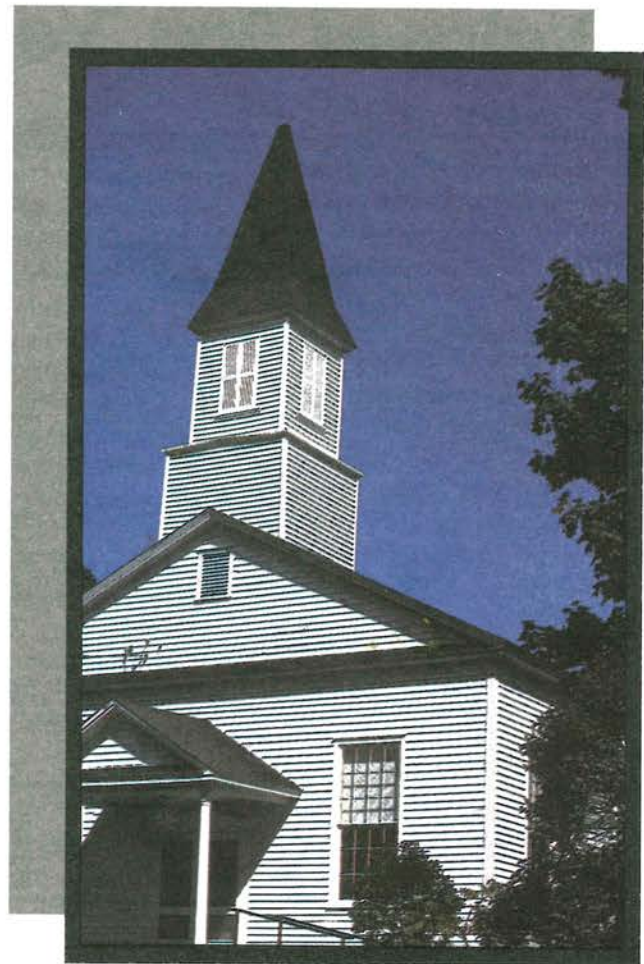
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Vol. 74, No. 8
January 15, 1998

Editorially Speaking:

This issue is different. The usual rubrics are missing. The articles that do appear are longer than is customary.

The explanation? You have in your hands a special issue on "Reformed Worship" consisting of the addresses given at a Protestant Reformed officebearers' conference

last September. The conference was held in the building of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL.

Including all of the speeches in their entirety in one issue (with the exception of the one that becomes the editorial in this and the following issue) has its advantages. Each address retains its full force, something that is lost when an article is broken up and read in installments. In addition, having the complete

treatment of the subject in one issue is helpful for future reference and for spreading this witness about worship to others, something that we hope our readers will do.

For "Reformed Worship," always a fundamental topic, is timely today in the churches of the Reformation. It is controversial, explosively so.

—DJE

(cover photo by Mr. Dave Moelker)

Editorial

Preaching in Worship: Voice of God, Voice of Christ (1)

The subject of this editorial contains two distinct truths. Both are of fundamental importance for the right worship of God. One is the *nature* of preaching. This truth lies on the foreground and is immediately obvious to all. The question at issue is whether preaching is God's Word or man's word.

The other truth is the *place* of preaching in worship. This truth lies more in the background of the subject and might easily be overlooked. Does preaching have a place in worship? Does it have a place at all? If it does have a place, is this place central or peripheral?

Is the place of preaching in worship this, that preaching is merely one of a number of equally important activities? Or is preaching, with the sacraments that are attached to it, the heart of the worship of the church of God?

If preaching has the central place in worship, is this because of what preaching itself is, because of what preaching is by God's appointment? Or is this because of tradition and culture—Reformed tradition and Western, intellectual culture?

In the teeth of the "liturgical renewal" in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today, I contend

that the preaching of the Word of God is *vox Dei* (voice of God) and, more particularly, *vox Christi* (voice of Christ). For this reason, preaching is not merely part of every service of the public worship of the Triune God in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Ghost, but is the central, preeminent act in the worship of the church.

Between these two truths concerning the nature and the place of preaching, there is mutual relationship. As the voice of God, preaching is the central act in worship. Who would presume to exclude from worship the voice of God? Who would dare to consign the

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voice of God to a peripheral, subordinate place in worship?

But the relationship may also be stated this way: God has ordained preaching as His voice exactly in order that His voice may have the central place in the worship of the church.

The truth of the nature of preaching and the related truth of the place of preaching in worship are the two most important issues at stake in the battle by the true, faithful Reformed church for right worship. The battle for the faith now at the end of the ages rages also on the front of worship. "Rages" is the appropriate verb here. For one thing, the battle over worship is furious. For another thing, the conflict in the congregation between those introducing innovations and those holding on to the old ways produces hot anger and heated exchanges.

The movement for liturgical renewal, or "progressiveness" in worship, hinges on a denial of both the nature of preaching as the voice of God and the place of preaching as central. Regardless of the conscious motives of everyone who promotes this renewal of public worship, the movement as such has two results. It dislodges the sermon from its central, dominant place in the worship service, and it inculcates a view of preaching as the word of man (and now, woman).

The seriousness of the raging conflict over worship is that with the loss of a regard for preaching as the Word of God is lost the right worship of God. Where worship is thus corrupted, there can be no giving of grace to needy sinners. Preaching as the Word of God is the means of grace.

The question whether preaching is the Word of God or the word of man is forced on us at the present hour by the assault on preaching in the Reformed churches. It is this assault that drives the movement to overhaul Reformed worship.

One does not have to read many issues of the journal *Reformed Worship* to realize that in the restructured worship that this Reformed periodical envisions and promotes preaching is, at best, one element among many. Fact is, although the editors pay lip service to preaching, preaching does not have their heart. What truly interests them are banners, dialogue, dance, and music—especially music.

Whereas *Reformed Worship* damns preaching in worship with faint praise and scant attention, Presbyterian theologian John M. Frame expresses that the current renewal of worship in supposedly conservative Presbyterian and Reformed churches takes dead aim at preaching. He does this in his recent book, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship* (P&R, 1996). Under the heading "Preaching and Teaching" Frame denies that "teaching in the church is ... restricted to elders" (p. 91). He affirms that drama is a legitimate form of preaching and teaching. He asserts that "teaching can take place through dialogue" (pp. 92-94).

This reputedly conservative and certainly influential Presbyterian theologian says, "I see no reason why some worship services should not be entirely musical" (p. 114).

Basic to his gutting of the regulative principle of worship (by so expanding it that it becomes meaningless) is his denial of any validity to the distinction between official, public worship by the church and informal worship at home by a family (pp. 44, 45). This effectively negates the necessity of preaching at church, for obviously we do not have preaching in our family devotions.

It comes as no surprise, then, that in the last chapter, "Putting It Together," where Frame describes the ideal worship for which he has laid the foundation throughout the

book (which also happens to be the public worship that Frame has created and leads in his southern California "New Life Presbyterian Church"), the preaching of the Word is lost in the shuffle. (I use the word "shuffle" deliberately since Frame also approves dance in the worship, pp. 130-132.) Not the preaching, but the lively praise songs; the choruses; the clapping; the whistling; the tapping of tambourines; John Frame's prayer; hymn after hymn after hymn; John Frame's talking to the congregation between the hymns; the Lord's Supper; and John Frame's directing the choir are on the foreground (pp. 145-154).

All these other activities take up most of the time. Unless they hold services for two hours or more in southern California, the sermon cannot be longer than 15 minutes.

The book comes highly recommended by professors at leading, conservative Reformed and Presbyterian seminaries. Steve Brown of Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida states, "This is the kind of book that you will read and say, 'But, of course. Why didn't someone explain it that way before?' John Frame has done the church a great service ... with biblical balance, insight, and an irenic spirit." Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia gives this commendation: "Some of Frame's conclusions and applications are controversial, but anyone concerned about worship honoring to God and true to Scripture will surely benefit from reflecting on this stimulating, clearly argued, and always biblically focused study" (back cover). Frame himself is professor at Westminster in California. The Reformed and Presbyterian saints who have their young men trained for the ministry in these seminaries must not be surprised when their pastors have them dancing in the aisles. They have been forewarned.

The attack on preaching in the churches of the Reformation is open, direct, and brutal. Dutch Reformed theologian Klaas Runia has taken note of this frontal assault in the publication of a series of lectures, *The Sermon under Attack* (Paternoster, 1983). Essentially, the criticism of the sermon is the fruit of the Enlightenment's liberation of Western man "from the authoritarian shackles of Scripture and the church." Modern man "does not want to be told what is true and worthwhile; he wants to discover it for himself and, accordingly, he also wants to determine for himself what he should do. . . . He wants to join in the discussion. *But the sermon provides no opportunity for discussion* (my emphasis—DJE)."

Runia quotes L. E. Keck, expressing well the attitude of the people toward sermons:

If something is worth communicating, don't spoil it by preaching it! Let it emerge in the give-and-take of the group; celebrate it by music, dance or drama. In preaching, people are as passive as chickens on a roost—and perhaps just

as awake. For whatever reason, the authority of the preacher has become problematic (p. 6).

With the assault on preaching goes a deep doubt concerning the effectiveness of preaching. Runia quotes Henry Ward Beecher:

The churches of the land are sprinkled all over with bald-headed old sinners whose hair has been worn off by the friction of countless sermons that have been aimed at them and have glanced off and hit the man in the pew behind (p. 10).

The Reformed layman cannot but notice the wounding, if not the murder, of the sermon in Reformed churches. John J. Timmerman, esteemed professor of English at Calvin College for many years, ruefully reflected on the demise of the sermon in his 1987 semi-autobiography, *Through a Glass Lightly* (Eerdmans):

The sermon was formerly the centerpiece of worship; now addi-

tions and adornments, creative participation and additions, sometimes reduce it to a sermonette.... The long prayer is now written down and read to God. The sermon is in danger of becoming a diminishing dot in a flurry of addenda.... I sometimes think the sermon is in many churches a diminishing island in a surging sea of activities (p. 125).

Implied, if not bluntly stated, in all this criticism and neglect of the sermon is the modern conviction that preaching is a human activity: a man (or, now, a woman) talks about God and spiritual things. This can be beneficial, if the speaker is gifted. But preaching is just another human act that must fight for its few minutes in the limelight of the liturgy with all the other acts that clamor for a place.

Such a conception of the preaching of the Word is a radical break with the conception held by the Reformation. There is today the loss of faith that preaching is the voice of God. □

(to be continued) —DJE

Reformed Worship: Fellowship with the Holy One

Rev. Steven Key

O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.

Psalm 96:9

The subject that we treat to day is a subject of great significance. It is immediately evident not only from the passage that was just read, and particularly verse 9 of Psalm 96, but from all Scripture, that to worship God is the highest of all religious obliga-

tions and experiences. You and I are called to worship Jehovah. We are, in the words of Psalm 29:2, to "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness."

Fundamentally, worship, according to the literal idea of the term, is "bowing the knee towards" Jehovah. It is, therefore, our act of praising and magnifying the alone living God. In the broader sense, worship is to characterize your

whole life and mine. To worship Jehovah is to acknowledge Him as the sovereign Lord and the One who alone is worthy of all honor and glory.

But that worship comes to expression especially in the public assembly of the church. It is the church's *public* worship that is our focus today. The public assembly of the church is a special, covenantal gathering, in which God and His people fellowship together.

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Those whom God has gathered, and purchased with the precious blood of His own dear Son come together in the presence of their Redeemer, listening to Him and responding to Him in commanded acts of faith and love. Such is public worship. The church gathers before the sovereign Jehovah, the Holy One. He speaks; and they bless Him in return.

In worship we enter into fellowship with the living God. That in itself makes this a subject of great significance.

But in the second place, this subject of worship has been *made* a subject of importance in our day. I speak now just from the viewpoint of the Reformed church world.

Years ago, one could go to churches in a variety of Reformed denominations and find striking similarities in worship. Whether Protestant Reformed, Christian Reformed, Netherlands Reformed, and to some extent even in churches of the Reformed Church in America, the style of worship was essentially the same. Apart from the use of hymns in the CRC and RCA—and even hymn singing was very limited in the CRC for some decades after hymn singing was first allowed in worship—worship services were very similar.

That is no longer true. In fact, in our day varying opinions over matters and methods of worship have caused no little division in many churches. Many church members, crying for new things in worship, have left their churches to go elsewhere or to form new congregations, even within the same denomination. Other churches gradually have adopted all sorts of innovations in worship. These things have brought the whole matter of worship to the foreground once more.

What must we think about all these developments in recent years? Why do *we* worship the way we do? Is there more than mere tradition governing our wor-

ship practices? And what must we say when other Reformed churches worship God by way of greater individual participation and special music, and what to us seem to be rather chaotic liturgies, perhaps even liturgical dance and programs and children's services and such like things?

The question might be asked: Who are we to say that men may not worship that way? So let's face some of these things.

But then let us also be reminded: The object of worship is not us, but God. Because that is so, we ourselves have no right to determine how *God* shall be worshiped. But God does have the right to demand of men that we worship in a particular way. And when it comes to our worship, we had better understand what God requires.

Christ stated clearly in John 4:24 that we are to worship the Lord in spirit and truth. Worship must be *spiritual*, therefore, lest it become mere formalism. But without truth, worship becomes an activity of mysticism and emotionalism, a matter of feelings which arise from our deceitful hearts. Truth is the standard set by God Himself and recorded for His church in the inspired Scriptures.

The fact that we enter the very presence of God in worship means not only that there are general principles to be observed within the bounds of true Christian liberty, but that God Himself sets the boundaries within which our Christian liberty may be exercised. That includes even the elements of worship.

If we want truly to please the King of kings in our worship, we will try to find out those things that please Him, and we will subject ourselves willingly to His desires, rather than trying to please Him in our own way and by our own standards. For not only the *act* of worship, but also the *content* of that worship is important to Him.

Yes indeed, this is a pertinent

subject to consider from Scripture. For the God who made the judgment concerning Israel in Isaiah 29:13 and Ezekiel 33:31, and Christ who repeated that judgment in Matthew 15:8 and Mark 7:6, "This people worships me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; they draw near me with their mouth, but their heart is far from me"—that God makes the same judgment today concerning those who put on an appearance of worship but do so with disobedient hearts.

Our concern today is not primarily with those who worship in ways other than the ways that we worship; but our concern is exactly with the way that *we* worship as congregations. Do we in our own congregations worship God as God must be worshiped?

We must not worship God merely as a matter of tradition. Our worship of Him must be in spirit and in truth. And therefore, from the moment we enter the sanctuary, we must come with a particular attitude and understanding into the presence of the Holy One, whose name is Jehovah. That begins, in fact, prior to entering the doors of the sanctuary. Already Saturday night and into Sunday morning it must be our desire as God's people more perfectly and sincerely to render to Jehovah the worship that He requires from us. For so shall we also receive His richest blessings.

In calling your attention to the general theme, "Reformed Worship: Fellowship with the Holy One," I focus especially on the instruction of Psalm 96:9 and call your attention to three necessary characteristics of proper worship, *Reformed* worship.

That worship which is fellowship with the Holy One is *covenantal* worship, *holy* worship, and *fearful* worship.

Covenantal Worship

You and I, according to the words of this text, are called to worship Jehovah.

Now I want immediately to emphasize what I consider a fundamental truth concerning Reformed worship: Worship is the highest expression of God's covenant of grace.

To understand that, it is necessary to have a proper biblical understanding of the *covenant*.

The covenant, as God has revealed it in Scripture, is that bond of infinite love and fellowship that God lives within Himself as the triune God. He is the *covenant* God. The three persons of the holy Trinity live a life of perfect fellowship and love within the one divine being. That is God's covenant life.

But God has been pleased, out of His own good pleasure, to take a people into that life of fellowship and love. He has been pleased to establish His covenant with a people outside of Himself in *Christ Jesus*. The eternal and infinite God takes us into the fellowship of His own family life.

When you and I, when His people, come together to worship, that blessed reality comes to its highest expression. Worship is fellowship with the living God, the highest living expression of God's covenant of grace with us.

To understand that covenant as a relationship of fellowship and love into which the triune God takes His people in Christ, rather than an agreement or contract, adds a much clearer dimension to the concept of worship.

Worship is a *covenantal activity*!

Have you thought of worship in those terms? Jesus Himself reminds us of this when He says in Matthew 18:20: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." In the fellowship of His saints Christ appears, to reveal the love of the Father.

We must realize that our coming together to worship is not simply a social gathering. It isn't just you and your relatives, some friends, and the preacher talking

about God. *God Himself* is in our midst, in Christ Jesus! If we truly worship Him, we enter into that fellowship with the living God!

That is absolutely amazing, a wonderful thing! Immediately before the worship service, as the organist is quietly playing and you are contemplating the fact that you are now in the house of God, soon to begin holy worship, it ought to amaze you! God is a spirit! And He is ready to enter fellowship with you in the highest expression of His covenant love! Absolutely amazing!

The most fundamental element in such fellowship with God is that of conversation. Conversation is at the heart of any fellowship. Whether we speak of the fellowship of husband and wife, parents and children, or of friends and of saints within the one household of faith, the communion that they share is a communion of conversation. There is no fellowship without such conversation.

We express our fellowship by speaking to one another of our hopes and desires, our sorrows and fears, our joys and excitements. By conversation we seek comfort and encouragement to support us in the distresses and trials of our lives. We offer sympathy and words of comfort to those who need someone to help them through the burdens and sorrows of life. All these things take place by means of conversing one with another.

The expression of covenant fellowship with Jehovah is found in the conversation of *worship*; for worship is indeed a holy conversation between God and us.

In our conversation with Him, we do not approach Him flipantly, but with recognition of His greatness and infinite glory. We wait to hear what God will say. We come in the consciousness that our help is in the name of Jehovah, who made heaven and earth. We recognize, therefore, that our worship cannot begin until God speaks. And then we hear the words, pro-

claimed by God's ministering servant, "Beloved, called to be saints." Amazing! God greets us as His beloved! And we stand in awe before Him and worship Him. We express our praise and adoration to the alone living God, *our* Father.

But at the center of worship is the preaching of the Word. That Word at its very heart is God's promise to His people, the assurance that in the face of all their troubles His promise will be fulfilled by Him who is faithful.

Through the Word of the gospel, as it comes to us in that which Paul calls "the foolishness of preaching," God in Christ speaks to us His people. He reveals Himself to us by that holy conversation. He shows us His great glory, the majesty of His being, His infinite holiness and perfect righteousness. He shows us His mercy and love, His abounding grace. He makes known that He alone is God, and He is good. He makes clear that He knows us through and through.

He doesn't hesitate to expose to us our sins and our weaknesses. He tells us that He has no fellowship with unrighteousness, that He will surely punish all workers of iniquity, and that we ourselves are sinners who cannot find fellowship with Him except first His justice is satisfied.

But He also gives us the good news of our everlasting salvation in Christ Jesus, of that salvation by which He separated us out of the human race, for reasons which He alone knows—for there was nothing in us which could cause Him to love us. He points us to Christ, His only begotten Son, given for us, willingly to walk the way of the cross that we might be partakers of this such great fellowship, that we might indeed participate in covenant worship with our God. He tells us of His counsel, of His will which encompasses everything that takes place in heaven and on earth. He reveals to us great and glorious things!

And as God speaks to us His people through the preaching of the Word, as well as though those other elements of the worship service in which the minister speaks in God's name, we also respond in speech to God.

To this great wonder that the Almighty God would speak to us and enter into covenant fellowship with us, our initial response is to praise Him. Shall we not praise the exalted God who stoops so low as to initiate a conversation with us?

So we speak to Him. We speak to Him in song. We praise Him with the singing of the Psalms which He gave us to glorify Him. And in the songs of Zion that we sing, we not only praise Him, but we also enter into fellowship with Him. We pour out our souls to Him, giving expression to our deepest thoughts, our spiritual desires and even the emotions of our hearts.

We enter into prayer, another form of covenant conversation. We express our thankfulness to the God of our salvation, our Friend-Sovereign Jehovah. We thank Him for who He is and what He has done for us. And because He also would have us approach Him with all our needs, we tell Him our needs and the needs of which we are aware within His church.

In our worship service there is fellowship taking place between us and the living God. And at the heart of that covenant fellowship is a conversation that takes place between God and us.

Yet, let us understand, this conversation must be a holy conversation. For we are called to "worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness." That brings us to what I call the second necessary characteristic of Reformed worship.

Holy Worship

In worship we find fellowship with the Holy One.

Our worship therefore must be holy worship.

In Psalm 96:9 we are called, literally, to prostrate ourselves, bow with our faces to the earth, before Jehovah in the splendor of holiness. Let us remember: We worship *Jehovah*, who is transcendent in His holiness. The whole of Psalm 96 resounds with that truth. The psalmist calls us to worship in that consciousness.

Bless the name of Jehovah! "For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised." He is God alone.

"Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name." God is sovereign; we are but creatures.

It is an astounding privilege that we may even enter His presence; that He would converse and commune with us. That God is holy means that He is totally "set apart," completely consecrated to Himself and His own glory. We are to worship Him in the consciousness that we stand before the brilliant light of the splendor of God's holiness.

That means that we recognize that we do not approach Him as His equals.

In the first place, God Himself is so infinitely glorious and set apart, that even the angels cover their faces with their wings and cry, "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory." That is what we read in Isaiah 6:3.

You and I must indeed approach God in deep humility. It is of great significance that the term "worship" means to bow with our faces to the earth!

We come into the presence of Him who alone is perfectly holy! And therefore we come, not simply as creatures before the Creator, but as sinners before a holy God. That must be our consciousness too. Else we will not worship Him who alone is Jehovah, but we will worship a god of our own imaginations.

If we come before Him as if He is our equal, we profane His name and make it common. And that is exactly the violation of the third

commandment, where we are forbidden to take His name in vain.

We do that, you know. We do that all too often. We sit in worship with our minds wandering; we sing the words of the Psalter numbers, taking God's name upon our lips, without any thought whatsoever; we do not concentrate during prayer. And in all of this we profane the holy God. Let us confess that, shall we?

It is amazing that God even lets us worship. There is nothing in us that makes us fit for covenant fellowship with Him. We who are conceived and born in sin, and who sing with the psalmist in Psalm 65 that our "iniquities prevail against" us daily, forfeit by our sins all right to covenant fellowship with God.

That He is pleased to gather us together and to dwell with us and converse with us is the great wonder of His everlasting mercy and love in Jesus Christ our Lord! For God can only dwell in fellowship with those who are holy as He is holy. And you and I are holy only as we stand in Christ Jesus, and are indwelt by His Spirit.

For that very reason, as we worship Jehovah in the beauty of holiness, we do so recognizing that this holy conversation is always initiated by God Himself. And He initiates this holy conversation sovereignly and powerfully, so that our part of the conversation flows from His work in us.

That is why those in whom God does not work cannot possibly worship Him. They may put on an appearance of worship. They may even put on a very enthusiastic appearance of worship. But the man or woman who is outside of Christ, who has not a true and living faith, cannot possibly worship Him.

Worship is only the response to God which is effected by God Himself.

Our worship, when it is true, spiritual worship, is the fruit of God's powerful Word. That is very clearly taught us in Psalm 27:8:

"When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek."

God is sovereign in all the work of salvation. He is sovereign in the establishment and realization of His covenant. He is also sovereign in that worship which is the highest manifestation of that covenant fellowship. When God says to your regenerated heart, "Seek ye my face," His speech is powerful, efficacious, irresistible. And therefore you enter the conversation. You worship Him in the beauty of holiness.

If we understand this; if we enter the sanctuary in the consciousness of coming as sinners saved by grace into the presence of the holy Jehovah, it will have a profound impact on how we worship.

No saint can enter God's presence in worship and then experience the riches of God's fellowship without being deeply conscious of His own unworthiness and the depths of God's mercy and grace. You may use that as a gauge in measuring how your own participation in worship measures up to this biblical standard. How conscious are you of your own unworthiness to be here and the riches of God's love and mercy revealed to you? For the result of such a consciousness will indeed be a hearty desire to render God praise. "For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised" (v. 4).

Furthermore, to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness is to worship in such a way that the entire service is one totally consecrated to Jehovah.

Do you understand what that means? That means that our own thoughts and desires and feelings have nothing to do with what constitutes worship. Worship is for God and God alone.

The God who is totally consecrated to Himself and His own glory requires the same from us. That He has condescended to be approached by sinners, to allow men and women who have rebelled

against Him to come into His presence and to be received by Him in worship—that is an amazingly gracious thing.

But let us understand, God will also determine how we are to worship Him. That is what the second commandment of the ten is all about. How shall we worship God? "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. For I the LORD thy God am a jealous God." He is jealous of His own honor, of His holiness. And for that reason He tells us in His Word how to worship Him.

We observe in our day a terrible departure from this truth. Scripture tells us that we are to worship Jehovah in the hearing of the Word of God, in song and prayer and offerings and sacraments. But people in our day want more. They want new modes of revelation, drama, entertainment. It is presumption. For what it says is that worship must be pleasing to *me*, not to God.

To many it has become a light thing to approach the true and living God. In presumption they assume that God will accept any way of their inventions, as long as the heart is sincere. So you ask people about worship, and they say, "I think we should do this, and I think we should have that. I like this; I find that boring." *I, I, I.*

And where is God in the beauty of His holiness?!

God forbid that we approach Him with such presumption, setting our own opinions above the very will of the Holy One!

But let us also understand, such sin is not seen only in those who have rejected the Word of God for human inventions in the worship services of the church. To worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness not only means that we are restricted to God's own will as to how we shall worship Him.

It also means that our worship

must not be offered to God in a slovenly, superficial, and sinful manner. Half-hearted worship is an abomination to Him. I called attention in the introduction to those scathing and condemning words of Christ, "This people worships me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." Holiness must characterize our worship in every respect. "Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy" (Ps. 99:9). Our worship in every respect must be wholehearted devotion to the God of our salvation.

So we are called to worship Him in fear.

Fearful Worship

"Fear before him, all the earth."

This call is a call to the church. Let that be understood. "All the earth" marks this call as belonging to the church as it shall be gathered out of all nations, tribes, and tongues, indeed, from the entire face of the earth. This Psalm is one of the great missionary hymns, one of the many prophecies in the Old Testament where Israel was pointed to the universal nature of the body of Christ. The many languages of the sons of Adam who were scattered at Babel will all blend in the same song of praise when the Lord gathers His people at Zion.

With that understood, we may consider that concept of "fearing" the Lord.

That is not the fear of terror. It is true that Scripture often uses the word "fear" in that sense. After all, the holy God cannot look upon sin without great indignation. He takes righteous offense at any attack upon His holiness. And sin is such an attack. The judgments of the holy God against sin cause the ungodly and unbelieving to shrink back in terror before the Judge of all the earth. Those who are outside of Christ have every reason to live in terror before the face of the holy God. Scripture emphasizes that repeatedly.

But we speak now to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, who are the objects of His perfect love. John writes in the fourth chapter of his first epistle that perfect love casts out fear. There is no fear of God in the fellowship of His love. That is, there is no fear in the sense of terror, being afraid of rejection and damnation.

Yet you and I are called to worship Him in fear.

Because the reference cannot be to the terror of judgment, it has come to have another meaning, that of reverential awe and holy adoration, a fear inspired by deepest love for God. The psalmist sings of this fear in Psalm 19:9: "The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether."

That idea of fearing God is most prevalent in Scripture. Repeatedly God's people are described as those who fear Him. The whole duty of man is to fear God, and to keep His commandments, according to Ecclesiastes 12:13.

That fear of the Lord was even possessed by Christ. Even as fulfillment of the promise given to Him in the Old Testament, in Isaiah 11:2, the Son of God received the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD."

Search the Scriptures, and indeed you find the fear of the Lord a prevalent and important concept.

Here in Psalm 96:9, it is revealed as an essential part of worship. Nor is this the only such passage. David sings in Psalm 5:7: "But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple."

To fear God is to stand before Him with a deep sense of love and adoration.

But the word used here in Psalm 96:9 is striking. The word that is translated "fear" in this text is different from the word that is generally used. In fact, this word

is only twice translated by the word "fear" in the Old Testament. The other use is found in I Chronicles 16:30, where you have almost a parallel song to this Psalm.

The word, in the picture language of the Hebrews, is a word that pictures a woman squirming or writhing in labor. You realize that a woman in labor is not comfortable. Her mind is not wandering and day-dreaming. She certainly is not sleeping. She can only think about her labor and the joy that is soon to be fully realized in the birth of her child.

The idea conveyed by this term, therefore, is that in worship before the holy Jehovah we do not "get comfortable," so to speak. In worship we labor to focus single-mindedly on the Holy God in whose presence we worship, and on the full realization of His glory as we shall experience in His fellowship.

That doesn't come easy. Worship is hard work. It is difficult because we are attracted to that which is concrete and visible, to that which entertains, while God requires the spiritual exercise of the heart.

To worship Him in spirit and truth, therefore, requires tremendous effort. Proper worship is so to fear Jehovah, to stand before Him with a focused sense of love and adoration.

Such fear of God is to be so captivated by this great salvation that He has provided for us in Christ Jesus, that we can only fall before Him in amazement and deep reverence, to praise and extol Him who has been so merciful to us!

This deep love for God, awe and reverence toward Him, is also expressed in a deep concern to live as obedient sons and daughters in His household. That also belongs to proper worship. We must be motivated in our worship by a strong desire to do that which is pleasing in God's sight, according

to the will of Him who has saved us.

I say again, worship is not self-serving. When the fear of Jehovah is lacking in us—and let us confess, it is often lacking—we use the name of our God in vain. We become guilty of intolerable arrogance. Our worship must reflect the fear of Jehovah, profound reverence and adoration, and a desire to do His will and to be faithful doers of the Word and not hearers only. Else it is not worship at all.

From the moment we step through the doors of the sanctuary, and in fact even several hours before, we must humble ourselves before the great Jehovah, seeking His face. The prayers that we offer upon entering the sanctuary, seeking His blessing upon the worship service and the preaching of His Word, seeking the application of the Holy Spirit to our own hearts; the songs that we sing; the hearing of the gospel; all the elements of the worship service must express that awe of God, without which it is impossible to please Him. And when such fear is present, when we enter into fellowship with the Holy One, we will enjoy the blessedness of His favor and love. Oh, to taste of the wonder of His grace in taking us into His own covenant fellowship!

Yes, our worship is weak. We fall so far short of this biblical calling in worship, that we ought to hide our faces in shame. But we come before Him in Christ. And when that is true, we not only confess our sins and receive His merciful forgiveness, but we also thank Him for His Word, for this instruction He gives us in how to worship Him. For Jehovah is great, and greatly to be praised.

"O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth." May God give us grace to put to practice the calling which He gives us, and so to teach the people which He has entrusted to our care. □

The Songs of Zion: What Shall the Church Sing?

Prof. Herman Hanko

Introduction

It is my conviction, expressed in this article, that the Word of God requires the exclusive use of the Psalms in the corporate worship of the church.

The assumption here is the regulative principle of worship, defined in the Heidelberg Catechism (Q & A 96): "What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word."

I shall not argue the case for the regulative principle in corporate worship, nor shall I make any attempt to explain it in detail; knowledge of these ideas is presupposed on the part of the reader. If there is any question about these things, material can be found in many places written by many different men.

It is the thesis of this article that the regulative principle of worship requires the use of the Psalms in the church's worship.

The Argument From History

Although it is of greatest concern to me to demonstrate in this article how Scripture requires exclusive Psalmody, I shall digress momentarily and point out a few facts from the history of the church.

Anyone who is at all ac-

quainted with the history of the church, especially since the time of the Reformation, will know that exclusive Psalmody in the worship services acts as a deterrent to the introduction of heresy into the pulpit.

It is equally true that the singing of songs other than the Psalms opens the door, not only to liturgical innovation, but also to unbiblical preaching.

It is not difficult to understand the reason for this. Preaching and singing both belong to worship. Worship, when it is truly worship in the presence of God, requires harmony and agreement between preaching and singing. It is preposterous to imagine that a congregation can listen in a satisfied way to heresy in preaching while singing the songs of Scripture. And it is equally preposterous to think that the church which has abandoned the Psalms will long be satisfied with sound, orthodox preaching.

I am not saying by this that there cannot be found some hymns (by which I mean songs other than those based on the Psalms) which express certain truths of God's Word. But true biblical and Reformed preaching is *theocentric*; i.e., it begins and ends with God and His glory. Hymns may express themes which are biblical and truths which are orthodox, but the body of hymns taken as a whole are either anthropocentric or wrongly Christocentric, but not theocentric. And to be God-centered is to be orthodox.

It is undoubtedly for this rea-

son that already in the 16th century it was said of the Arminians that they sang their way into the church, for Arminian error flew into the church on the wings of songs other than the Psalms. And this has been the pattern since those days.

Someone phrased it correctly when he said: "Let me make the ballads of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws."

The close relation between the preaching and the singing in the church is underscored by the fact that when reformation came to the church, such reformation always included a return to the singing of Psalms. Apostasy which brought with it the desperate need of reformation was apostasy in doctrine, in church government, and in liturgy. Reformation was a return to the "old paths" (Jer. 6:16) in doctrine, church polity, and liturgy, and thus in singing by Jehovah's congregation. Psalm-singing is a part of these "old paths."

Direct Biblical Proof

Such proof from history, however, is not sufficient to make Psalm-singing in the worship services an element incorporated into the regulative principle of worship. For that we need to go to Scripture itself.

The strong line of biblical proof which we need can be found in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Before the argument from the Old Testament is laid down I must once more make an assumption clear on which the scriptural argument is based. The assumption is

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that the church of the old dispensation and the church of the new dispensation are one church of Christ; and that, therefore, an injunction for worship given in the old dispensation is binding on the church of the new dispensation as well.

It has been argued, even by those who will agree that the church is one in all ages, that nevertheless a command concerning worship given to the church which lived in the times of types and shadows is not valid for the church today simply because the worship of God was bound to the temple and the rituals and ceremonies of Old Testament times, while the church today is free through the Spirit of Christ.

There is a certain superficial validity to the argument, but it is not difficult to see that, carried out consistently, the argument would make irrelevant to the church today the entire moral law embodied in the ten commandments.

The point here (a point which I do not intend to argue in detail) is that, while the *form* of the administration of God's covenant with His people (in the context of which worship took place) was changed with the fulfillment of the types and shadows, the substance remains intact and binding on the church today as well as on the saints of the older times.

This is especially true of the command to sing the Psalms, for the Psalms themselves belong to that which is the possession of the church of all ages. The Psalms are part of Scripture, and Scripture, also the Old Testament, is still today our rule of faith and life.

The argument, briefly stated, is as follows.

In II Samuel 23:1, 2 David claims that he is God's instrument in preparing music for the church:

"Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the

God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel said, the Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue."

One or two points are to be noticed here. David claims for himself divine inspiration to such an extent that God's Word was in his tongue by the Spirit; and that the words he consequently spoke, he spoke as the psalmist of Israel. That is, he spoke for purposes of giving the church her songs.

That this was recognized in Israel, and that the Psalms were sung by God's command, is evident from the great reformation which took place during the time of Hezekiah, king of Judah. As a part of that reformation, Hezekiah restored to the church the pure worship of God. II Chron. 29:25 reads:

And he (Hezekiah) set Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets.

Again, one ought to notice in this passage that David, along with Gad and Nathan, and so by divine revelation, determined every detail of the worship of God that was to take place in the temple. When Hezekiah brought reformation to the church, he restored the divinely ordained pattern of worship given to the church through David, Gad, and Nathan. It was by divine ordinance that this worship was ordered.

Although verse 25 does not mention the singing, verses 27 and 28 do:

And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters

sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

But the text is even more specific. We are told in verse 30:

Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshiped.

Nothing is clearer than this. Scripture enjoins Psalm singing in the worship of the church.

Covenantal Worship and Covenantal Psalms

The third line of argumentation must be made from the character of the Psalms themselves. My argument here is that the Psalms are deliberately inspired by God to be covenantal in form because worship itself is, in the deepest sense, covenantal.

In order to make this point it is necessary to go first of all to the New Testament Scriptures and pay attention to two passages, well-known and usually quoted in the debate over exclusive Psalmody. They are the passages in Ephesians 5:18, 19 and Colossians 3:16.

Ephesians 5:18, 19 reads (we take here the more correct translation of the RV):

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

Colossians 3:16 reads:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto the Lord.

Here again I must point out

that I am arguing on the basis of an assumption which I do not intend to prove. That assumption is that the three words used in both passages, (psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs) refer together to the Old Testament Psalter found in the 150 psalms.

If anyone questions that, I refer such a one to the literature on the question, which is vast and compelling and which is prepared by scholars who know more about the formal aspects of the Hebrew Psalter than I.

I call attention to one point only. The use of three words to describe one document is not strange to the Scriptures. One example will suffice. In I Kings 6:12 the three words, statues, judgments, and commandments, are all direct references to the law of God, though each word looks at God's law from a slightly different viewpoint. So psalms and hymns and spiritual songs all refer to the book of Psalms, though each word conveys a slightly different idea concerning them.

Before I turn to these passages to point out their significance for the question we face concerning singing in corporate worship, I think it important to point out that the passage in Ephesians emphatically speaks of the Holy Spirit as making it possible to sing in corporate worship: "be filled with the Spirit...."

Two points have to be made here. The first is rather obvious. The Holy Spirit always works in the hearts of His people in connection with (and never apart from) His own Word which He has given to the church through infallible inspiration. If the Holy Spirit alone makes singing in corporate worship possible, then the Holy Spirit will use His own Word in the work of enabling the people of God to sing. That Word is found in the Psalms.

The second point is not so obvious; at least, no one seems to call attention to it. The question arises:

Why does Paul speak here of the need to be filled with the Spirit?

The answer to that question lies emphatically in the fact that in the new dispensation the *whole* congregation sings, while in the old dispensation the Levites sang.

If you read carefully the passages we quoted above from II Chronicles, you will have noticed that the Levites did the singing, not the whole congregation. This changes in the new dispensation.

Why the change? Paul explains that. In the old dispensation the Spirit was not yet poured out, and so the people of God did not possess that Spirit which made them prophets, priests, and kings in the church. There were special offices of prophets, priests, and kings; and those who held these offices possessed the Spirit—by way of promise of another age to come. The Levites, for their work in the temple, possessed the Spirit. Hence, they did the singing.

But now, with the dawning of another age, an age which begins with Pentecost when the Spirit is poured out upon *all* flesh, all the people of God possess the Spirit. No longer do these saints need the Levites to bring to them the Word of God and sing for them so that the responsibility of "speaking to one another" and "teaching and admonishing one another" falls upon the Levites (See also II Chron. 17:8, 9); they now possess the Spirit themselves—and the Spirit's own words in the Psalms—so that they can speak to one another and teach and admonish one another.

But these remarks are a bit of a parenthesis. I am particularly concerned with the words "speaking to one another" and "teaching and admonishing one another." This, the apostle says, is characteristic of the corporate worship of the church in her singing. A strange description of singing indeed. I wonder whether we even give any thought to this aspect of singing—even though we sing the Psalms. When we sing the Psalms we are talking

to each other; even teaching each other—and, of all things, admonishing each other. In singing there is conversation and discussion going on between the saints who are joined in singing. That strikes me as extremely peculiar.

In order to appreciate the force of those startling expressions of the apostle, we must remind ourselves of the *covenantal* nature of worship. It might not be without purpose to point out, though in passing, that the very nature of the covenant is at stake here. If the covenant is a treaty or pact or agreement based on mutually accepted conditions, stipulations, obligations, and promises, the covenantal character of worship is erased. What is going on in worship is not God and man sitting down to discuss the conditions and obligations of a certain agreement which both hope to realize in time and through discussion.

Worship is profoundly spiritual. God and His people are living together in friendship and fellowship. Worship is the highest expression here on earth of the great truth that the covenant is a living bond of communion between the eternal and living God and the church which He has saved through Christ.

This was already prefigured in the temple, for the temple was a concrete symbol of God and His people dwelling under one roof in covenant fellowship with each other.

In the new dispensation this reality is achieved through Christ's perfect work by which He becomes, in His own body, the temple: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" ... (John 2).

Because worship is the highest expression of God in fellowship with His people, there is a holy conversation going on in the worship, for conversation lies at the heart of fellowship. There is no fellowship where there is no conversation.

In that holy conversation in

which God and His people are speaking together, God's speech is always first: first logically, first sovereignly, first creatively, first causatively. Our speech is the effect of which God's speech is the cause.

This is of crucial importance to an understanding of Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3.

There is conversation going on in the worship. God is speaking. And God's people are speaking. God is speaking to the whole congregation; and the congregation, together, is speaking to God—and also to one another; and to one another in the singing. That is what Paul is talking about.

Our worship is, after all, *corporate* worship.

This too, I fear, is often forgotten. As I worship in the holy congregation, I can easily be one individual in a sea of worshipers, thinking about and concerned with my own personal relation to God, and forgetting that I am only one in the corporation of the body of Christ.

This is wrong.

I am reminded of one of Luther's prayers. Luther liked to go through the Lord's Prayer and make a special prayer in connection with each part of the prayer the Lord gave us. In connection with the very first word of the Lord's Prayer, the word "Our," Luther prayed:

It is also Thy will that we should not individually name Thee Father, but together call Thee our Father and united pray for all. So give us a united love that we may know and consider all to be brothers and sisters. United we ask Thee, our beloved Father, for each and all, even as one child speaks for another to its father. Amen.

The point that needs to be made here is that the singing is carried on by the church in the context and as a part of covenantal worship. The only songs that I know which have about them that

covenantal character are the Psalms. They are unique.

I am not arguing that certain free songs can be found which accurately express the truth of Scripture. I can sing with a great deal of enjoyment, "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord"; and, "Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth." I am not arguing, therefore, that certain free songs are not accurate confessions of the truth of Scripture. I am not even arguing that many free songs are prayers to God set to music.

What I am arguing is that this is *all* free songs are. And that is not enough. The covenantal character of worship must be reflected in the singing of the church. Only the Psalms do that.

A number of years ago, reading the Psalms during our family devotions, I took the time to write down on a slip of paper precisely who was speaking to whom in every part of the Hebrew Psalter. It was an enlightening exercise.

While, of course, in a certain sense of the word God is speaking in every Psalm because the Psalms are inspired by God, nevertheless in some of them God addresses others in direct discourse. God speaks to Christ, e.g., in Psalm 110 and Psalm 89. God speaks to David in Psalm 132:11-18. God speaks to the wicked in Psalms 50:16-23 and 2:6-9, as well as to kings in Psalm 2:10-12a.

But mostly He speaks to His people in a direct way. A few examples will suffice. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. Be not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee" (32:8, 9). "Be still and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth" (46:10). "Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacri-

fice" (50:5; see also vv. 6, 7-15).

No free songs do what is unique to the Psalms: a direct address of God to His people. This is essential to covenantal worship.

Sometimes the Psalms are the speech of God's people to God, in which speech they pour out their hearts in praise and thanksgiving, in prayer and petition, in wonder and awe. These Psalms are to be found everywhere, for the Psalms are often prayers uttered before God's face. "Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up" (56:1). "Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me" (59:1). "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness.... Against thee, thee only have I sinned..." (51:1, 4).

Many times the Psalms are didactic, what we could probably call confessions of faith. The full range of the truth is found in the Psalms, and no single truth concerning God in all His works is omitted in this marvelous Psalter. I cannot begin to list those Psalms here which are such confessions, but I can remind you of some of the Psalms which do so in familiar and much-loved words. Psalm 23 is perhaps the very first Psalm which little children learn when they can scarcely lisp the words of the AV: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Psalms 25, 27, 32, 46, 48, 73, and many others arise out of the confident belief of the saints in the truth as it is revealed in Christ.

In many of the Psalms God's people are speaking directly to others. The variety of the list is astounding. They speak in the Psalms to workers of iniquity (6:8, 9), to their own souls (16:2, 3), to Jacob (24:6), to the mighty (29:1, 2), to children (34:11-22), to all people (49), to God-fearers (66:16), to judges (85:2-4, 6, 7). God's people have something to say to just about everyone and everything about God and His works. Where in free songs do you find anything like that?

Sometimes God's people are very conscious of the fact that they speak only what God has first spoken, and they give expression to that: "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek" (27:8).

And sometimes everyone is talking together and the conversation almost gets so mixed up that one can hardly tell who is talking (Psalm 91:9-16).

In other words, the Psalms are the only book of songs which express all the holy talk that is going on in the intimacies of covenant fellowship between God and His people, and between God's people together.

Now, it is to this latter that Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 refer especially.

It is a little difficult to express this, but the simple fact of the matter is that Paul emphatically states that in singing the Psalms together in church we are speaking to one another, and teaching and admonishing one another.

That is strange language which the apostle uses. How often do we really think of our singing in that fashion? How can that be done when a choir sings instead of the congregation? How does that happen when songs other than the Psalms are being used, Psalms which are written in such a peculiar way that this sort of thing becomes possible?

I am not sure that I understand how corporate singing results in speaking to one another and teaching and admonishing one another. I am not sure I understand the "mystique" of music. Music is a wonderful gift of God. Music does things to people. Music does things to the singer, as well as to the one being sung to. Music is mysterious, ineffable, affecting one in strange and unexpected ways. Music can do things which no other means of communication are capable of doing. I am not sure why this is true.

But it happens when people

sing together. I can and often do sing alone—especially when I am driving my car a fairly long distance. It is interesting, edifying, uplifting. Music does that. When we are merry, James says, then we ought to sing Psalms.

But singing with others is different. Singing with the family around the piano does things to me. Hearing my wife and the children sing together is moving. And this is especially true, as many families have testified, in times of great spiritual crisis—when, e.g., the Lord has taken a loved one from their midst; or when one of the family is in the hospital. Singing communicates between those joined in a song in a way that is different from speaking directly or reading. It is more forceful and affective. It is mysterious. Each is singing to the others.

When the church of Christ comes together, the saints sing together. They sing what God has said, what they want to say together to God, what they must say to all the world about them, what they want to tell each other, what lives in their hearts and souls. And when through song together they speak to each other, they teach and admonish each other as well. The fellowship between God and His people comes to concrete expression in the conversation of singing. The fellowship between the saints which is rooted in the covenant is spoken of freely, joyfully: instructing, comforting, encouraging, teaching, admonishing, and edifying. When I sing Psalm 23 alone in times of great trouble, it is one thing, for I confess before God's face that indeed Jehovah is my Shepherd. But when, in the midst of these troubles, other saints are singing with me, they are also singing to me and telling me that Jehovah is also their Shepherd, and they have never lacked anything, even in their greatest sorrows.

Because the Psalms are so complete in their descriptions of every aspect of God's covenant, they

alone can be used in the highest reality of that covenant here on earth, the corporate worship of the church.

Our Spiritual Biography

The last line of argumentation for exclusive Psalmody has to do with another unique feature of the Psalms. The book of Psalms, taken as a whole, constitutes a spiritual biography of the people of God.

Let it be understood what I am saying. The Hebrew Psalter constitutes a biography for *every* child of God; and the Old Testament Psalter constitutes a *complete* biography. That is, not one single element of the spiritual life of any child of God is omitted.

It would take more time than I (or the *Standard Bearer*) have to demonstrate this. Nor need it be done. If you have doubts about it, read the Psalms. That's all I can say. I warn you ahead of time, that they are a *spiritual* biography, and you yourself must be a spiritual man or woman to recognize this great truth. But I assure you that it is all there.

You may ask: What does this have to do with Psalm singing and exclusive Psalmody in the corporate worship of the church?

Well, it has much to do with it; but a few preliminary remarks are in order.

In the first place, by "spiritual biography" I mean something definite and specific. I mean, essentially, that the Psalms are all, in the final analysis, Messianic.

It is true that some Psalms are directly Messianic, and Christ Himself is so clearly speaking in them that He spoke the same words when He was on earth (Ps. 22). Some Psalms unmistakably speak of Christ in a prophetic way, foretelling many things of Christ's suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation—as well as His coming in judgment upon the clouds.

But all are essentially Messianic in the sense that Christ is speaking in all of them of Himself; speaking

through His Spirit; speaking of His work—in sometimes unbearably poignant ways.

But, and this is unique also to the Psalms (it cannot be the characteristic of free songs), Christ speaks in the Psalms historically. That is, Christ speaks *through* the sweet singers of Israel, through those who sang and wrote the Psalms, through the church which took the Psalms into their hearts. Christ singing of Himself, yes. But Christ singing of Himself in His glorious relation to His people as their Savior and Redeemer. And so, Christ is singing of Himself as He lives in and through His people and is the great power of all their life from here to glory. Christ is singing in them; and when they sing, He sings through them so that their entire spiritual life is Christ in them.

And that brings up the second point that needs saying, especially because we are talking about the corporate worship of the church.

As I mentioned earlier, in the holy conversation that goes on in worship between God and His people, God takes the initiative. His speech is first and creative. Our speech is the result of God speaking to us.

But let it be understood that in Reformed worship this is exactly why preaching is central to worship. In preaching, God speaks. He speaks to His saints.

But—and here is the point that needs so desperately to be made: God does not speak as a lecturer who wishes to educate His people in a given subject; nor does God speak, as some ministers seem to think, to entertain. God has only one reason for speaking to His people, and that reason is that by His divine and powerful speech, God *saves*.

Nor does God speak to save in a robot-like fashion, so that salvation goes on, while God is speaking, mysteriously, unconsciously, automatically. Nothing of the kind. When preaching is genuinely the

speech of God, the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the elect to make that very word spoken in preaching effective in the salvation of the sinner. But that very Word preached is made effective by that work of the Holy Spirit when He impresses the Word of God upon the consciousness of each saint.

When I speak of the consciousness of each saint, I refer to the saint in all the relationships of life in which he stands and which form a part of his experience as God leads him by His counsel step by step, moment by moment through life, with all its joys and sorrows, burdens and trials, joyful moments and sorrowful times. The believer comes to church as a sinner who has struggled with sin, fallen and broken; he comes out of the life of the week carrying heavy burdens, weary beyond description, thirsting for that which nothing here on earth can satisfy, overwhelmed with problems, caught up in Satan's snares, wounded by fiery darts; in desperate need of help which no man can bring.

God speaks to the believer through Christ; but speaks so that he hears the voice of the Good Shepherd, knows the Shepherd, hears his Shepherd call him *by name* (Jesus says, John 10), and the Spirit speaks that Word preached to the sinning saint in the depths of his consciousness. It is the power of preaching. It is that which makes preaching the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16).

Christ through the preaching calls: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden." And the Spirit presses that Word on our consciousness so that we become aware of the great burden of our sins and the weariness it brings. But that same Spirit impresses the call of Christ on our consciousness: "Come to me!" And by the power of the Spirit we say, "He is calling me!" And we flee to Him who alone can give rest.

But then, a song is announced.

The saints must sing it. They must sing it in response to God's speech to them. They must express what God has said to them in their own life and calling in the world. Here are these marvelous Psalms. They are, taken together, a divine biography which is all-inclusive, containing everything that is included in the life of the believer — of which the preaching speaks. They are God's interpretation of what He has done in our lives. They are God's commentary on what is involved in that glorious work of salvation which is our portion here in the world.

If only we will limit ourselves to God's explanation of what happens, we will not get involved in our own interpretation (which free songs so often do), nor in fantasy experiences, which characterize so many hymns. But we will say to God and to one another only what God Himself has said, first, to us.

This is, by the way, the answer to a rather serious objection to exclusive Psalmody. I refer to the objection of some that the Hebrew Psalter is inadequate to express New Testament truth in all its riches because it is Old Testament truth revealed in types and shadows. We need, so it is said, songs for Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Ascension Day. The Hebrew Psalter is inadequate.

I reject the objection.

The problem is not that the Hebrew Psalter is inadequate. The problem is that we do not take the time to understand what the Psalter given us of God is all about.

The fact that the Psalms are a spiritual biography erases the objection. Although to a certain extent the Psalms do reflect the dispensation of types and shadows, this does not mean that the Psalms are not adequate to express New Testament truth. Again, if you are doubtful of this, read them. As a matter of fact, the Psalms are less Old Testament-like than any other of the Old Testament Scriptures, with the possible exception of

Isaiah 53. Where does a particular verse make a truth either obscure or obsolete, or incomplete, or inadequately developed because it is not written in the context of New Testament revelation and New Testament truth? You say: the Psalms are always talking about sacrifices? So does Romans 12:1, 2. You say: The Psalms lack the full expression of the truth of the resurrection, e.g. They do? Remember, the Psalms speak of the resurrection of Christ, not only as a historical fact, but they speak of the living Christ in us as we experience His life in our resurrection life. Will not Psalm 16, and, yes, also Psalm 17, do? Peter found it adequate to express the truth of what happened in Joseph's garden. Peter heard Christ saying

in Joseph's garden: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, nor suffer thine holy one to see corruption." Every saint still hears Christ say that, in his own consciousness, as he looks forward to the full glory of the resurrection of his body in a time yet to come. So he sings: "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell...."

The whole of the Christian life is there. The birth of the believer in God's providence; his salvation in Christ; his walk in God's creation; his battle with sin; his constant need of grace; his longing to enjoy God's gift of sleep when he is on his bed; his fears and terrors, struggles and sorrows, joys and hopes—in relation to God, to his fellow saints, to the world about

him, to his family, to death, to the resurrection, to the world to come, yes, fundamentally and principally, to Christ.

The Psalms are his traveling companion in his pilgrim's sojourn, his road map, his torch to find his way, his comfort and inspiration, his song book when talking to God, and always everything he wants to say to God, to the world about him, and to those with whom he lives in the company of the redeemed.

It must be that that is why my wife and I, when venturing out in our songs together into the realm of hymns, always find ourselves returning to the Psalms. And that is why we, and all who understand the Psalms, want to sing the Psalms in church on the Lord's Day. □

The Force of the Second Commandment in Worship

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

The force of the second commandment is that the one true God is to be worshiped only as He desires. The nature of God, on the one hand, and the nature of God's fallen-into-sin creatures, on the other hand, are such that God alone can determine how He is to be worshiped.

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First, let us briefly consider the concept of worship.

Worship is the serving of God by His people whenever and wher-

ever God meets with them. Worship can be public or private. Private worship is the serving of God which takes place wherever God meets with individuals or groups of believers, such as families. Public worship is the serving of God which takes place wherever God meets with His people as the instituted church on earth through the instrumentality of the offices He instituted in the church. God comes to His people to fellowship with them and to bless them. His people approach God to serve and to worship Him as the God of their salvation in Jesus Christ, and to extol His glory as manifested in His virtues.

The first and chief purpose of public worship is the public and united service and glorification of God with joy and thanksgiving in an orderly manner (Ps. 35:18; 111:1;

122; 149). The second purpose of public worship is the edifying and building up of the church collectively through the strengthening and growth of the individual members as part of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11, 12). Through the means of public worship the people of God are strengthened in their faith.

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Next, let us consider the second commandment. It reads, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third

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and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20: 4-6).

The second commandment forbids the making of images of the one true God spoken of in the first commandment.

Images of the one true God are forbidden for several reasons. First, we *may not* make an image of Jehovah because of His freedom as a Spirit (John 1:18; 4:24). An image attempts to comprehend the Incomprehensible One, to control and limit Him. Second, we *cannot* make an image of God because of His infinite majesty and glory (Is. 40: 25,27,28). God and His majesty are so infinitely great that man cannot know God unless He is pleased to reveal Himself. And even then our knowledge of God is not comprehension. Third, we *need not* make an image of God because of the nature of His covenant with His people in Christ. God has already established an intimate relationship of love, so He is very near us, in our mouths and in our hearts (Deut. 30:12-14; Rom.10:6-9). His people do not need images to bring Him close to them.

The second commandment's prohibition of images speaks specifically to the manner in which the one true God is worshiped. Whereas the first commandment rejects all other gods for the one God, the second commandment determines the contents and manner of the worship of Jehovah. It emphasizes that the one God is to be worshiped only in the way He commands, and not as man imagines. An image is the effort of the human imagination to represent the deity, which representation is thought to be needed to regulate the relationship between the god and its worshipers. Thus the second commandment regulates the worship of the one true God.

The fathers of the Reformed faith took the position that the second commandment spoke to the

question of the proper worship of God. This is evidenced in the explanation of the second commandment as found in the Reformed creeds.

On the continent of Europe the Heidelberg Catechism expresses creedally how the Reformers applied the second commandment to public worship. Lord's Day 35 of the Catechism speaks to the second commandment as follows.

Q. 96. What doth God require in the second commandment?

A. That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His word.

Q. 97. Are images then not at all to be made?

A. God neither can, nor may be represented by any means: but as to creatures; though they may be represented, yet God forbids to make, or have any resemblance of them, either in order to worship them or to serve God by them.

Q. 98. But may not images be tolerated in the churches, as books to the laity?

A. No: for we must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have His people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of the word.

The Westminster standards reflect the thinking of the Reformers on the British Isles. The Larger Catechism presents the fathers' interpretation of the second commandment and show clearly how they believed it spoke about worship.

Q. 108. What are the duties required in the second commandment?

A. The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, hearing of the word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church govern-

ment and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God, vowing unto him: as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.

Q. 109. What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, *all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship, not instituted by God himself; tolerating a false religion; the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it; the making of any representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them; all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretence whatsoever; simony; sacrilege; all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed.* (emphasis mine—RVO).



The second commandment regulates the worship of God by the church. This commandment denies man the right to determine what belongs as an element of worship. Positively, God Himself, in His Word, prescribes the elements of the church's worship. That fact that this right belongs to God clearly implies that man does not have this right.

This is known as the "regulative principle." It is the principle that God is to be worshiped only in ways prescribed in Scripture. The Heidelberg Catechism stated it thus: "That we in no wise...worship Him in any other way than He has

commanded in His word" (q. 96). The Westminster Confession declares that "the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men,...or any other way not prescribed in Holy Scripture" (XXI, 1).



The second commandment's demand that God be approached and worshiped only as He has commanded does not stand alone in the Scriptures. Elsewhere the Scriptures expressly forbid man adding anything to God's commands respecting His worship and His service.

"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandment of the LORD your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2).

"What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deut. 12:30).

"Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Prov. 30:5, 6).

Concerning the worship of God in the tabernacle, Moses was admonished to be careful to every detail God had shown to him when he was before God on Mt. Sinai. "And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was showed thee in the mount" (Ex. 25:40 and Heb. 8:5). The detail of God's commands concerning the construction of the tabernacle and the use of the tabernacle for worship made it very plain that whatever was not commanded was forbidden. Those who, contrary to such clear revelation, worshiped God in another way became the object of the fearful vengeance of the

jealous God. Consider the history of the fire from the Lord which devoured the priests, Nadab and Abihu, because they offered "strange fire before the LORD, which He commanded them not" (Lev. 10).

In the new dispensation, the apostle Paul expressly condemns "will-worship" (Col. 2:20-23). In this passage Paul describes will-worship as worship according to the doctrines and commandments of men.

These passages of Scripture support the second commandment's rule that it is the will of God, not the will of man, which is to determine the worship of the one true God.



The application of the second commandment to a worship service requires the making of a legitimate distinction between the "elements" and the "circumstances" of a worship service.

By "elements" is meant an item or a matter which is included in the liturgy of the service of worship. "Circumstances" refer to the way in which the elements are included or practiced in the worship service. The elements which God's Word authorizes to be used to worship Him are: salutation, blessings, singing of Psalms, reading of Scripture, prayer, the administration of the two sacraments, offerings, and chiefly the preaching of the Word. The regulative principle demands these elements to be a part of the service.

The regulative principle applies to the elements of a worship service, and not to every circumstance connected with a worship service. The Westminster Confession declares that "there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to

the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed" (I - 6). There is much in a worship service concerning which no commandment of God is given, such as the time of day of the services and the length of a service. The regulative principle does not demand that there be a specific biblical command for all the circumstances in a worship service. For example, the minister, while preaching, may stand, though we read in Scripture that Jesus sat. Also, the exact way in which the elements are to be present in the service is not detailed for us in Scripture. God gives no explicit command concerning the order of the elements in the service, the amount of time to be given to each element, etc. In such cases the church has freedom, a freedom she must always use with care.

However, the way in which the elements are present in the worship service is to be always one of reverence, so that it is obvious that the Most High Majesty is being worshiped. Also solemnity, simplicity, orderliness, and stability are to characterize the way in which the elements are present in the worship service (I Cor. 14:40). The way in which the elements of the worship of God are present should not be ritualistic and strictly external ceremony, on the one hand. And, on the other hand, the way in which the elements of a divine worship service are present should not be frivolous and entertaining.



Just how forceful is the force of the second commandment can be seen in God's use of the words "hate" and "love" in the second commandment.

God describes the making of images of Him as "hating" Him. This hating God by making of images of Him arouses His jealousy (Deut. 4:24). He pursues with anger all who do not worship Him as

He has commanded, but are contemptuous of Him. He is jealous of His glory and will not give it to a mere image (the fruit of human imagination). He is jealous of the total devotion His covenant wife owes Him. Self-willed worship arouses jealousy in God, just as jealousy is aroused when one sees his mate loving another.

And in the second commandment God says that it is "love"

which makes worship real and true. Love of God is doing always what He wants us to do ("keep My commandments"), and doing that especially in our worship of Him.

The second commandment speaks directly to the worship of God. It specifically demands that God not be worshiped according to the imagination of man. Positively, it demands that God be worshiped

as He has commanded. May the force of this truth be ever before the consciousness of the instituted church as it determines what belongs to a service of worship. And may the force of this truth be ever before the consciousness of believers as they gather for worship, fleeing mere formality and insincerity to love the one true God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. □

The Participating Pew

Rev. Barry Gritters

Introduction

It should be a given in Reformed circles that all the members participate when the church gathers for the public worship of Jehovah God. Every heir of the Reformed tradition ought to know well the place of every believer in the worship services of the church. I would imagine that the Reformed officebearers present at this conference, because of their precious reformation heritage, simply assume that each member will be actively involved in the worship.

This—participation of the pew—should neither be taken for granted nor assumed. For as soon as the Reformed officebearer makes this assumption, either the church will lose the necessary participation of the pew, or will fall into dead orthodoxy, which I define as a formal carrying out of biblical mandates without the support of head or heart.

I pray that this paper will promote the biblical and Reformed understanding of the participation of the pew, so that we may present to God an acceptable worship, a sacrifice well pleasing to God, to whom belongs all our praise.

Participation of the pew can be lost, really, in two directions. On the one hand, the pew can participate in the worship in an improper *manner*, either by usurping the place of the duly appointed officebearers or by involving itself in activities that are not required by Scripture. By allowing this improper participation, the church will inevitably lose the true worship of God. I will say something about that in the second section of the paper.

On the other hand, pew participation can be lost by a reversion to the mentality of Roman Catholic sacerdotalism, where the pew only observes the worship of the priests or ministers, but does not actually participate in the worship of God.

I submit that there are always dangers for the Reformed pew on both sides—the danger to participate improperly, and the danger not to participate at all. Therefore, I would like first to explain the *necessity* of congregational participation in the worship of God, then to explain the *manner* of that participation, both negatively and positively. Finally, I will give suggestions as to how this participation can be *promoted* in the worship of Reformed churches.

The Necessity of Pew Participation

There are at least three reasons the people of God in the pew must participate actively and consciously in God's worship on the Lord's Day.

First, God demands active participation by the pew because He requires worship from His *church*, not only from the officebearers in the church. Writing to the *churches*, Peter says that they "should show forth the praises of" God. The Old Testament calling of Israel to bring their worship to God is a calling not to a select few people in the nation, but to the nation itself, as type of the new covenant church of Jesus Christ.

According to the Reformed faith, the church (the new covenant Israel) is made up of believers and their seed. (I realize that among confessing believers and their seed are also some reprobate, but that does not alter the point being made: that God requires worship from the church as it manifests itself on the earth.) In distinction from Roman Catholic ecclesiology, the Reformed faith holds that the church is the body of confessing believers and their children. Whereas Roman Catholic doctrine holds that the church is made up of the priests, bishops, cardinals

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and popes—the clergy—Reformation theology holds to the priesthood, and membership in the church, of every believer. Thus, the people of God all must bring worship to God when they gather together on the Lord's Day in the house of praise.

(As an important aside, this shows the importance of *doctrine* for life, and the correlation between theology and the *practice* of the church. What we *believe* about the church directly affects the *behavior* of the church. I pray that this will always be pointed out to the people of God.)

Second, God requires active participation by the pew because by participating rather than simply observing, the believer receives the benefits of salvation that Christ purposes for him. What God has joined together in the church—namely the hearing of the preaching and the salvation of believers—man must not attempt to put asunder. When Romans 10 teaches that salvation is linked inseparably to the hearing of the preaching proclaimed by a “sent” preacher, we obey.

But “hearing the preaching for salvation” must not be understood in any other way than a *believing* hearing. To hear believingly requires a careful, active participation in the public proclamation of the Word. A worshiper must “hold onto the hem of His garment,” and refuse to let go until He blesses him. Any other manner of hearing comes under the classification of “tempting God,” that is, asking God to give *what* He has promised in a *way* that he has not promised.

God's way of salvation requires of His people that they participate in worship.

Third, active participation by the pew in worship is necessary because the worship of God by the church is the purpose of God in saving the church.

At this point, many Reformed believers make a serious mistake of misunderstanding the truth of

my previous point. We have just established that worship is the means by which God brings us the benefits of our salvation. But that is not to say that the primary purpose of worship, or the great importance of worship, is to receive the benefits of salvation. The ultimate purpose of worship is to declare the great worth of Jehovah God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By definition, worship is declaring the worth of God. Our English word “worship” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *weor-thscipe*, which means sounding forth the *worth* of another; and the biblical words for worship indicate a “bowing the knee towards” and “bringing praise to,” another.

To make my point clear, we may ask which proposition the Reformed man would choose as correct if the alternatives were the following:

- a. Salvation is the goal of our worship.
- b. Worship is the goal of our salvation.

I contend, on the basis of Scripture, that the second is ultimately correct, even though the first has some truth in it. We may say without hesitation that God's purpose in saving the church in Christ is that the church might *worship* Him now and in eternity. To put it differently, God does not call us to worship Him in order that we may be saved; He saves us in order that we might worship Him to His eternal glory.

Choosing only two familiar texts is sufficient to show the validity of this point. When God said in Isaiah 43, “This people I have formed for myself, they shall shew forth my praise,” it is plain that He meant: “I formed them in order that they would show forth my praise. This is why I created them, gathered them, and shaped them to be what they are: so that they would be able to give me praise.” When Peter, speaking to the church, said in I Peter 2:9, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal

priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew for the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light,” he meant: “This is the purpose or end of your election, your appointment to the kingly priesthood, and your setting apart as a distinct people: that you might bring me praise.” Although the KJV of Rev. 4:11 is a questionable translation, it is good theology: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and *for thy pleasure* they are and were created” (my emphasis, BLG).

Forgetting this is why we participate *wrongly*. Supposing that *our* benefit is the primary purpose of worship, we sometimes complain (perhaps justifiably) about a worship service that did not edify us. How often do we complain if a worship service does not bring glory to God? This consideration ought to be primary in any analysis of a Reformed church service.

To sum up: the pew must always engage in the public worship of God with these things in mind: 1) God calls the entire church to worship, of which each member is part; 2) the benefits of salvation are received primarily by an active involvement of the believer; and 3) God saves His people with this design, that they might bring Him the “worship due unto his name” (Psalm 96:8).

The Manner of Pew Participation

If the danger of Roman Catholicism is to be feared, so is an over-reaction to this evil by an attempt to involve the pew in an *illegitimate manner*. I will try to be brief here as well, because I want to concentrate our attention on the positive aspect of pew participation.

The danger of an *improper* participation by the pew is that the pew either violates Paul's command that everything be done “decently and in order” (the charismatic error), or that the pew tries

to take a leading or entertaining role in worship (more the danger some Reformed churches have fallen into).

This negative point may be put in the form of a principle: Reformed worship is carried out by the people, not for the people. Or, Reformed worship requires the active participation in every act that they possibly can. Or, Reformed worship is a communal activity, in which all the worshipers are active at every point.

One outstanding example of violation of this principle is the inclusion of "special numbers" as part of the worship. Beautiful as they may be, special numbers by an individual or group (small or large) should be saved for another occasion than the public worship of the church. At every point, the *congregation* actively participates in the worship of God.

Where there is singing, the congregation sings. Where there is confession of faith, the congregation should recite a creed together. And although it is impossible for the congregation to be active in the same manner during the preaching of the Word, nevertheless, the members are as active as they possibly can be at that time—by believing, "kissing the Son," receiving the Word as truth.

If it is objected that the church of the old covenant had special groups worshiping for the rest—the Levites and the special singers and players of musical instruments—we may respond that the Reformed officebearer should not make such a hermeneutical and exegetical mistake. The Old Testament includes many practices not carried over into the New. Now, because we confess the priesthood of all believers, we no longer ask "priests" or "Levites" to worship for us. To allow choirs to supplant any of the congregational singing is to detract from that great reformational principle.

The history of Reformed churches brings out plainly that

this nineteenth century phenomenon, coming largely out of revivalism, is out of place in Reformed circles. For generations, no soloist or quartet, choir or musical group made its way to the pulpit of the Reformed church. But in the last century, without explanation or defense, they became so commonplace even in Reformed churches that when new members join a Reformed church that lacks these things, a good deal of time must be spent explaining the history and biblical principle behind the absence of these special numbers in our worship services.

In the late 1940s, the Rev. P.Y. DeJong wrote long series of excellent articles in the *Banner* about worship. Understanding "special numbers" to be a danger for his denomination already then, he issued a warning to the churches about them: "The church in the middle ages reduced believers to a state of nonage. Instead of being active at the time of public worship, they were present in the church largely, if not exclusively, as silent spectators. A dead and dread silence hung over the cowed worshipers on the eve of the Protestant Reformation. One of the outstanding contributions of this new arrival was the restoration of congregational singing to its rightful place in the house of God."

As church history shows, allowance of "special numbers" in the worship services inevitably leads to the mentality that church is entertainment rather than worship. The Lutheran Søren Kierkegaard put his finger on this danger when he remarked (although with a not altogether happy analogy) that "people have the idea that the preacher is an actor on the stage and they are the critics, blaming or praising him. What they don't know is that they are the actors on the stage; he is merely the prompter standing in the wings, reminding them of their lost lines." God is the object of worship by the congregation.

Perhaps inconsistent with this principle—that the entire congregation actively participate in every element—is (at least can be) the practice of the playing of an instrument (organ) while the deacons receive the offerings. I cannot see how the singing of a solo or a quartet is different in principle from the playing of the instrument. Although the playing of an "offertory" will be viewed differently than a "special number" because of its long use among us, it is nevertheless the participation of *one* to help the *whole* worship better—the purported purpose of all special music. Understand well, this is not said out of a desire to promote special numbers during the offering or any other time. I only submit that the PRC are not without some slight inconsistencies in their holding to these principles of worship. (Another example of which could be the singing of the beautiful trinitarian hymn, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow ... praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," as the beginning doxology, rather than a *Psalm*.)

How should the pew participate in worship? What must be said about the congregation's activity in worship? How may the Reformed officebearer be instructed to build up the worship services in his congregation? I will submit three particulars in answer to these questions. And then I will give some ways in which the officebearer can promote godly worship among the members of his congregation.

First, the people of God must be taught to participate with the *proper attitude*. Required of the people of God is that they worship with the desire to bring something to God, rather than to get something from Him. In order to foster that attitude, the people of God must learn to *revere* the holy God, as I trust Pastor Steve Key will have pointed out in his introductory address to this conference. But that must be emphasized here

as well. The people of God will not participate properly unless first of all their hearts are right. They must come to give the worship that is due the majestic, holy, sovereign, gracious, creator God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

How, pray tell, will that happen unless they learn, in a reverent atmosphere, that "God is great and greatly to be praised"? The people of God must know their God. They must know Jesus Christ—and not as a weak, pathetic beggar who cannot accomplish his will, but as the sovereign Lord who reigns as King over all. A man will not worship as he should unless this reality is established in his heart.

A delightful illustration of the truth that must be learned here is found in C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*. Every few years I take the time to read these books to the younger children in my family, as much for my enjoyment as theirs. In that series, Lewis symbolizes the Christ with a great lion, Aslan. Before the children—Lucy, Susan, and Peter—meet Aslan for the first time, talking beavers answer their questions about him:

"Ooh," said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver, "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then isn't he safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

Second, the people of God must participate with their *intellect firmly engaged*. This is not to say that in the Reformed worship service the intellect has the primacy. It is to say the worship service is and must

remain intellectual. The way to the heart is the head. The people of God must think. Away with the worship services that are so orchestrated that the emotions have the primacy.

Let every Reformed believer be reminded of Paul's warning in I Corinthians 14: "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also."

Worshipping without the intellect is one way of coming under the condemnation that God pronounced on apostate Old Testament Israel. It is formalism—a going through the motions, doing what is right, without engaging the mind and directing it towards God. The heart cannot be close to God unless the mind participates in worship.

A Reformed sermon addresses the mind of the people of God, the mind of every person present, young and old. The Reformed preacher understands that, today as well as 2500 years ago, "God delights in obedience rather than sacrifice, and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offering." It is striking to me that the Hebrew parallelism in that verse indicates that the knowledge of God is parallel to, and therefore an explanation of, obedience! This—knowing God—is the proper manner in which God wills to be worshiped!

Third, the people of God must *participate in every element* of the worship. With a proper attitude of humility and reverence, the Reformed worshiper engages his mind and heart in all parts of the worship.

I detect that a danger for many is that they may be prepared to listen to the sermon, ready to hear a good message, perhaps even to talk about it for a while afterwards, but they are relatively unprepared for and unthinking as regards the other elements of worship. A man supposes, perhaps unconsciously (to judge graciously), that the rest

of the service is only introductory to, or a warming up for, the sermon. Then he is not "listening" when the people of God confess together, "Our help is in the name of Jehovah, who made heaven and earth." He is not worshipping when the commandments are read or the Psalms are sung. He does not really make the congregational prayer his prayer. He seems to be interested only in the Word preached. The mistake is that he sees the Word only in the sermon, and forgets that the Word is primary in every aspect of the worship.

A notable illustration of weakness in this regard is the offerings. I believe that gross weakness is exhibited when the time to give our offerings is almost viewed as a "half-time." Here the children go out to the bathroom, the latecomers read the bulletin, moms pass out peppermints, the serious-minded reads his pamphlet (and to include the preacher, the preacher finds the stanzas for his next song, or reminds himself of his sermon's introduction). But precious few are meditating on the act of worship that giving gifts is. Either the time of offering is an important part of worshipping God and must be treated as such, or the churches ought to put the box in the back of the building for the money to be dropped in as the people arrive and not take the five minutes or so required to "pass the plate."

There is work to be done properly to participate in every part of worship.

But even though there is weakness in these other areas, no weakness could be more serious than a weakness with regard to the hearing of the gospel. In this part of worship, Jesus Christ speaks to His people as really as when He did during His earthly ministry. To be in the presence of the speaking Christ without honoring Him with attentive ears and believing hearts—why, what could be more tragically evil? Let no one be

present during offerings, singing, and confessing faith, without active and careful participation. But God forbid that the people of God sleep or ignore the speech of the Son of God to the church. Here, above all, we "kiss the Son." On account of failure in this, more than anything else, "his wrath is kindled" (see Psalm 2).

The Promotion of Pew Participation

How can the officebearers promote godly participation in worship?

I would suggest that during family visitation, a special point be made to discuss with the members the urgent necessity of a worship that pleases the Lord. I am encouraged by the willingness of elders to talk specifically about particular needs in the congregation. Here is a great need: proper worship by the members. What need could be greater? The purpose of our salvation is worship! The minister must preach about proper worship. But the elders must reinforce that word with the one they bring "from house to house."

Among other things, I pray that the elders would encourage the people of God in this way:

First, the elders should see to it that the *current trend of casual dress* in worship does not catch on among us.

It may seem trivial to begin with this as a way for the elders to encourage proper worship; but I do not consider it trivial whatsoever.

I was astounded recently when we worshiped in a conservative church away from home, and most of the members who returned to God's house for the second service (few though they were) came in jean-shorts and tennis shoes. It cannot be said categorically that casual dress is indicative of an irreverent heart. But it usually is. Not for the praise of men, but for God's praise, we ought to wear our best. Controversial, I admit. Old fashioned? I accept the label with-

out shame.

Second, the elders can suggest ways for the people of God to *listen well to the preached Word*. The sermon is not the only element of worship; but it is the most important. Thus, the better the people of God can do with hearing the Word, the more holy will be their worship. Some take notes on sermon outlines provided by the pastor. Children too young to listen for concepts can be taught, even at the youngest age, to listen for certain words, making marks by the word *holiness* on a pad of paper each time that word is said, *Jacob* if the sermon recounts his history, *wisdom* or some other key word that parents can certainly anticipate by looking at the sermon title or outline. Children who have a difficult time listening, or are fidgety after ten minutes, can be asked to make notes of the sermon. Anything (within the bounds of reverence and holiness) to keep them from counting bricks or falling asleep.

Finally, in connection with hearing the Word, the members must be taught to *prepare for worship*. In order to come with the proper attitude that God requires, the people of God must be encouraged to prepare. If the elders would do nothing else than this, and the Lord would bless it, my heart would rejoice.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* claims that without "a due preparing of their heart, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand," the people of God cannot keep the Lord's Day holy, and proper worship cannot take place (*Conf.* 21:8; see also *Cat.* 117, 160!).

Preparation for worship begins already on Monday morning when we begin to teach our children to look forward to worship. When they learn that Sunday is the beginning of the week instead of the end; that Sunday has the power to bring us through this desert land where all the streams are dry; they will begin to look forward to the

Lord's Day as a day of rest and enrichment, instead of dreading it as a day of dreariness.

A commendable way to prepare for the worship is to speak about the sermons both before and after the service. In this way, the people will find it a joy to listen, so that they can be ready to speak with like-minded believers about their faith. Probably one of the most difficult things for a pastor to understand (or is it humbling?) is that after the worship is finished, the people can immediately begin speaking about the car they bought the day before, the fish they caught, the meal they served. I think we can learn something from our Presbyterian brothers, whose confession is that it is *sin* not to rest from all our "own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations" (*Conf.* 21:8). The elders can help by mixing with the people and encouraging discussion about some positive aspect of the sermon. Parents ought to ask questions of their children at the dinner table, making sure that they are genuinely interested in the subject themselves.

Some prepare for the Lord's Day by reading through a good commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, anticipating the sermon for the coming Sunday. I have had more than one member tell me of his profit from reading Herman Hoeksema's *Triple Knowledge* as we proceeded through the Heidelberg Catechism. Having one's heart and mind on spiritual things throughout the week makes for eagerness to come to God on the Lord's Day. But any good Reformed literature will whet the appetite for worship.

Perhaps best, by way of outward, physical preparation, is what is done on Saturday evening. Is it any wonder that worship is drudgery when the night before was late and busy? How many of our families are at restaurants until late, playing cards until late, doing books or finishing the wash or out in the garage until late on Satur-

day night? I have a difficult time understanding that there is *any* heart for worship at all when no concerted effort is made to be in bed on time the evening before. Has anyone ever done a study on the Old Testament boundaries of the day as "evening and morning"? What implications might there be for the church today if we considered the Lord's Day to begin Saturday evening? If all the families (or individuals) spent the evening in quiet meditation, singing of the Psalms, reading a good book, the Lord's blessing on our worship would be rich.

Above all, the preparation must be spiritual. It is a matter of faith. All the outward things mean nothing unless the heart is right before God. Each outward element of preparation must be exercised with the desire of Psalm 27: "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple."

But the Lord will not bless all the elders' talk in the world, unless the officebearers themselves are practicing what they preach. I often remark to people in my pastoral work that, even if the member does what is right before God in one respect, if he is not living before God honestly in another respect, God will "dam up" His blessings to the man until he returns in a way of serious and genuine repentance. Likewise, the officebearers may speak until they are blue in the face, but if *their* worship is not heartfelt, intelligent, and with the proper attitude, the Lord will likely not answer their prayers when they plead, "Lord, give us

true, spiritual worshippers."

The minister must prepare his heart, and his mind. He must think about the songs before he announces them. What will the people think when the minister shows that he hasn't even taken the time to consider which stanzas of the Psalm to sing? How can the people be eager to hear the law when, in a monotone, the minister reads the commandments with his mind on something else? Where will the heart of the people be when the pastor introduces the service with the great apostolic benediction, but with such lack of feeling that in the very same breath he can announce the next song? The spirituality of the people and the

service will rarely be higher than the heart of the pastor who leads. Pray God to give us (make us) pastors who show their preparation to the pew.

Pastors and elders, the responsibility is ours first of all. Moats and beams, men. And *our* preparation is not complete unless it has led us to say, as we walk to the sanctuary, "As pants the hart for streams of living water, So longs my soul, O living God for Thee; I thirst for Thee, for Thee my heart is yearning; When shall I come Thy gracious face to see?" When we do, I believe that the Lord will honor that preparation with a membership that participates, to His glory. □

ANNOUNCEMENTS

NOTICE!!

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will be hosted by the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Houston, Texas on Wednesday, March 4, 1998, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the classical agenda is to be in the hands of the Stated Clerk 30 days before classis convenes. An officebearers' conference is also planned for Tuesday, March 3. All meetings will be held at the J-Bar-J Guest Ranch in Sealy, Texas. All delegates or visitors in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Trinity's consistory, Mr. Ben Hopkins, 5368 Franz Rd., Katy, TX 77493, phone: (281) 391-2368

Rev. S. Key,
Stated Clerk

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With thankfulness to our heavenly Father we are privileged to celebrate, on January 24, 1998, the 35th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

GERALD and BONNIE KUIPER.

We are grateful to God for their love and faithfulness to one another, as well as for all the ways in which they have given of themselves in His service throughout their married life together.

May our Lord continue richly to bless them in their marriage and uphold them in His loving arms.

"Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!" (Psalm 31:19).

- * Gerald and Beth Kuiper
Jordan, Travis, Kelsey
- * Douglas and Pamela Dykstra
Joshua, Justin
- * James and Karen Daling
Nathaniel, Brandon
- * Matthew and Tami Kuiper
- * Timōthy Kuiper
- * Andrew Kuiper
- * David Kuiper

Hudsonville, Michigan