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The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

SPIRIT AND TRUTH

The following article is taken from a sermon originally preached at North Road Chapel on Lord's Day 25th September 1988

“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23-24)

As the Saviour spoke these words, a completely new order, a fresh revelation was dawning; the beams of gospel day were beginning to shed their light. *“The hour cometh,”* says Christ, and He speaks not of a covenant-keeping Jehovah of one nation, but rather of *“the Father”*. The great question now is to be not **where** men will worship, but **how** they will worship. In future, the worshipper at Jerusalem will not be accounted a true worshipper because he happens to worship in that city; neither will the one who goes to Gerizim be reckoned false on account of his going there. Locality will indicate nothing. It is to be they who worship in spirit and in truth, they alone are genuine, no matter where it is on earth: whether in Judah, Samaria, Assyria, or Egypt. By this, of course, we are not to understand that Christ was speaking contemptuously of the ceremonial law and of the old economy – indeed not – but those things were only the shadow and prefiguring of the good things to come.

“The Father seeketh such to worship Him.” The hour ordained from all eternity was dawning. Out of every kindred, tribe, and nation a people were to be **called**. They would be a royal priesthood unto God, a holy nation of purged worshippers – men and women who, through sovereign grace, by virtue of Christ's blood, would have access into the holiest of all. The veil, which had for ever kept men out, and prohibited entry into the holy tabernacle and temple, was to be torn asunder.

A peculiar people from all lands was to be called out. The Holy Spirit would be sent down to infallibly effect this. Every elect soul ordained unto eternal life would be sought out. The word “*seeketh*” means ‘to pursue’. God, by His Holy Spirit, would pursue and seek out every one chosen in Christ, wherever they might be – whether Jew or Gentile – who would be baptised into one body – the Church. These will be kings and priests unto God for ever and ever. The Father seeketh this, or, is in pursuit of it. Not that the Almighty is looking for those whom He might never find – no, no! Rather is it that He is pursuing according to a pre-determined plan – that which is ordered in all things and sure – and in this, the whole Trinity is involved for the accomplishing of the Covenant of Grace, which in its ultimate will be to the glory of God the Father (cf Philippians 2:11).

“*God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24). We come now to a most important matter, yet one sadly misunderstood. This verse deals with the subject of **worship**. “*God is a spirit*”, that is, immortal and invisible to finite beings; He dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen nor can see (cf 1 Timothy 6:16); He is the Almighty, Eternal, Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent Supreme Being; the True and Living God. “Being of beings, throned afar”, yes, but not remote, not an ‘unknown God’; indeed only in the previous verse presented to us as ‘Father’ (cf Acts 17:23, 28); one who is in pursuit of a plan which will bring all His people unto Himself in bonds of intimate relationship – even giving the spirit of adoption (cf Romans 8:15), making us His own children. But what we are to learn here is this: that God is not being reduced to man’s level; rather, it is man, through sovereign grace, being raised to such heights as to become heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, receiving at the end even the glory of Christ the Mediator (cf John 17:22). The people of God should realise this: the majesty and eternal splendour of the One to whom they are eternally linked through grace, and worship and address Him accordingly, that is, in spirit and in truth.

Much of that which is commonly termed worship is fleshly rather than spiritual; external rather than internal. One might have buildings, ornate decorations, stained glass windows, costly fittings, musical instruments or equipment valued at tens of thousands. Why is this? Because God requires it, or because men love it this way?

I am not advocating shoddy, unkempt buildings for the gathering of God's people for corporate worship; indeed, they should be kept in an immaculate condition, for only such are they honouring to God. But they should be plain and unostentatious. Even the tabernacle, which was designed by Jehovah Himself, was a plain, functional place of gathering. 'But what about Solomon's temple?', some will ask. Solomon had a divine mandate to build it in such a fashion, but did God set great store upon the architecture and magnificence of that building, for its own sake? Was it not repeatedly plundered, and ultimately razed, and rebuilt again, and so on? And for all the architectural splendour in which it stood in Christ's day, how often did He frequent it, and what was His divine assessment? Every Sabbath day He was in the synagogue. These were invariably plain stone buildings with simple fittings. Remember what our Lord said concerning the temple, which was but a showpiece for religious activity: "*There shall not be left here one stone upon another*" (Matthew 24:2). Never did He leave any instructions that such buildings must again be erected as though to glorify God thereby. That such lavish building projects have been frequently undertaken we know; and also what denominational pride has ensued as a result.

"*God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him **must** worship Him in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24). Must – there is no alternative in this, no option. This 'must' is final. There are three 'musts' presented in John's Gospel, and all are unequivocal and of vital importance:

"*Ye **must** be born again*" (John 3:7)

"*The Son of man **must** be lifted up*" (John 3:14)

'[God] **must** be worshipped in spirit and in truth' (cf John 4:24)

In these three, we should observe again the Trinity: God the Holy Spirit effects the new birth; God the Son was to be lifted up to die and to make atonement for sin; God the Father is the object of worship. There is divine order here. It is only when a person has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and justified by virtue of Christ's work that they can truly and spiritually worship God. For, says the Spirit of God, "*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*" (Proverbs 15:8).

This then brings us to the point of true worship. What is it? How would we define it? **First:** it is the action, or response, of the new nature – that spiritual life which arises because of new birth – perfectly harmonising with what has just been said. A person must be born again; unless and until this takes place, no one can worship in the true and real sense, simply because they have not the capacity so to do. "*For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh*" (Philippians 3:3). 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh'; therefore try as it may, it cannot comprehend God, who is Spirit. But that which is born of the Spirit is spirit – that is, to be born of God. In consequence, there is a link: spiritual life is imparted by God Himself, and just as sparks fly upward, so the sparks of eternal life return to their divine source. The new nature within wells up to its heavenly spring.

Second: worship is the activity of a redeemed people – and them alone. Not until Israel were brought out of Egypt and had crossed the Red Sea did they sing and worship the Lord. This incident is a most accurate prefiguration.

Third: worship proceeds from the heart, and it is occupied with God alone. In Exodus chapter 15 and Israel's song of redemption, the words "Thou", "Thee", and "He" occur numerous times, because everything revolves around God Himself. Anything of man, or of the flesh, detracts from true worship. Worship is not of the eyes, or even the ears, but "*in the spirit*" – that is, from the new nature – and I go so far as to say this:

the more spiritual the worship, the less attractive will it be to the flesh. That which goes under the guise of worship in so many places today is geared to appeal and please – a bright, attractive service, music of the day, entertaining songs and talks. This is a mockery and a blasphemy. Holy worship is not to entertain people, or to appeal to the flesh. *“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him”* (Psalm 89:7).

Great emphasis is laid upon solos, groups, and choirs today. Indeed, a ‘worship leader’ and supporting band is considered essential for a successful gathering in this age. The ‘attractiveness of music’ has entirely displaced the ‘foolishness of preaching’. Was there a choir laid on at Pentecost to attract the people? Were Mary and Martha asked to sing a duet, or Mary Magdalene asked to give her testimony? Did Philip organise a group to come with him to Samaria to sing to the people and present the message in song? Friends, I will tell you this – the only music which ascends beyond the roof of a church building is that which issues from the hearts of born-again people, who sing with grace in their hearts unto the Lord. No compere, conductor, or choir is needed for this. Only this week I was in touch with a man who was telling me of serious troubles within his church. “It is such a pity”, he said, “because there is great potential – we have a lot of young people, a super choir and choir-leader; we try to make the services bright and lively, and so on”. I said, “Brother, what about the preaching?” “Ah, that is alright”, he said, “but people prefer the singing. I can always worship better if the singing is good”. “What is more”, he said, “in preparation for preaching, sometimes my mind is a blank; but if I put on a tape of a good choir then inspiration will come flooding in”.

All I can say is, that I would not want to depend upon such means for my preparation, and if such music is so essential to worship then very many dear saints of God are greatly impoverished. Was anything like this laid on in the upper room, as the Saviour and His disciples sung that hymn before going forth into the garden? Who assisted the apostles, who

although their backs were raw and bleeding sang praises unto God in the Philippian jail? Singing, to be acceptable unto God, indeed the only singing known in Scripture, is to be ‘from the heart, unto the Lord’ (cf Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:19). To whom do choirs and groups sing – to God or to the audience?

Worship must be in the Spirit – that is, from the new nature – not something which appeals to the flesh. Worship must also be in the truth – that is, according to the divine mandate. Anything introduced into worship which is extra-biblical, whilst it may delight the eyes and ears of men, will never delight the ear of God; and indeed it will be an abomination unto Him. Man does not worship God by admiring wonderful architecture, gazing upon pictures, listening to a grand organ, to skilled musicians, to a highly trained choir, or by the smell of incense. All these things pertain to the flesh; eyes, ears, noses, hands. Some will claim that these things help; they create an atmosphere; “it does something for me; somehow it makes me feel good; music can even bring tears to my eyes; what is more, I like the showmanship of a professional evangelist – the oratory alone has some kind of magical effect upon me which I cannot explain”. How much of this there is today! It is carnality. It is a caricature of worship. It is that which plays upon the emotions. It is highly dangerous. By it, thousands have been deceived. It is neither in the Spirit nor according to truth.

True spiritual worship is decorous, orderly, and reverential. It occupies the worshipper with God Himself. It is always within the orbit of, and majors upon, divine truth; it is always characterised by a deep fear of God. These are the hallmarks of true worship, and if anyone desires to worship the Lord, then it must be according to the biblical pattern. Indeed, beloved, this is to worship “in the beauty of holiness”. May the Lord ever keep us faithful in it for His glory.

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

LONG SHADOWS

5. Forms of Worship (continued)

Exclusive Psalmody

In the previous article of this series, further examination was made of the ways in which the ancient practices of Jewry, destined by God to ‘vanish away’, have been erroneously revived in the Christian church, greatly to the detriment of the true and proper worship of the Lord. In particular, in the matter of participation in worship, where the appointment of individuals or ensembles to have priority or responsibility for praise, to the exclusion of others, was seen to be a characteristic of the Old Testament temple format, and entirely at variance with the New Testament pattern. There remains, however, another and more subtle way in which the ‘long shadows’ of Judaism continue to cast a pall on Christian worship – in the shape of ‘Exclusive Psalmody’.

Two Mountains

At first sight, the arguments for the exclusive use of metrical Psalms in worship are compelling, especially in these days when modern church ‘music’ has degenerated to the point of being indiscernible from that of the world, in all its licentiousness and carnality. ‘If anything other than the inspired Word of God is permitted in sung worship, then this is the inevitable outcome’, it might be claimed; ‘therefore, what better safeguard than to restrict oneself solely to the language of the Psalms?’ This portion of scripture was communicated by God, thus constituting a part of His Holy, infallible Word; there is clear precedent for their use in corporate worship in both Old and New Testaments; they are relevant to a vast spectrum of human emotions and experiences; they are simultaneously devotional and doctrinal, penitential and prophetic; they testify of Christ Himself (cf Luke 24:44, Acts 2:31); they can prove a delight and joy to sing! Who then, would not gladly confine themselves to this Divine anthology in the Christian church today?

The lead article in this edition, “Spirit and Truth”, by former editor and minister W. H. Molland, has been included to emphasise the position of North Road Chapel in respect of ‘modern Christian worship’; a stance held and maintained, in the mercies of God, for over 50 years, through the various crises caused by ‘charismania’, changes in Bible versions, revisionism in hymnbooks, and the general downgrade in Evangelicalism. But the words of the Lord Jesus quoted in that connection are highly instructive: “*Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him*” (John 4:21-23). Two distinct options presented themselves to the mind of the Samaritan woman. One was the popular, local form of worship practised in the temple on Mount Gerizim, incorporating errors that dated back to the fall of Israel (cf 2 Kings 17:24-34); the other, which might have seemed the antithesis, or even the antidote to these things, was the Levitical system being observed in the temple at Jerusalem. Which would Christ favour, or support? **Neither**. There was error in both directions; both were incompatible with true New Testament worship.

In hearing and seeing the worst excesses of so-called ‘praise’ in modern Christendom, one might charitably conclude of them, “*ye worship ye know not what*”; the complete absence of reverence and godly fear must be the product of ignorance, if not something worse. One beholds their ‘devotions’ and concludes with Paul, that their profane attempts at worship are manifestly to a God unknown (cf Acts 17:23). But the remedy to the religious errors of Athens, or Samaria, or indeed Britain, is **not** to insist on a return to the limitations of Judaism, even though it be associated with a better comprehension of God. A prison cell might afford protection from dangers that lie without, but it is still a prison. Lest this metaphor seem too severe, observe the words of Paul: “*Howbeit*

then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" (Galatians 4:8-9). The Apostle notes precisely the same dangerous swing from one extreme to another, that the Lord Jesus refuted at Sychar. The spiritually-minded believer must resolve neither to depart unto Mount Gerizim with the modernist, nor to regress back to Jerusalem with the Exclusive Psalmist.

Neither our fathers, nor we

It might be argued that confining one's worship to the words of the Psalms is a sensible precaution, and that as such, there can be no harm in it. However, when the arguments are examined more closely, it will be seen that other errors are propounded in the exclusive psalmody position. Not least, that it represents a restriction more severe than anything that can be found or inferred from the Bible itself. A time existed before any part of the book of Psalms had been communicated by God – but His believing people were not consigned to silence on that account. They were not required to wait until its content had been divinely revealed and transcribed by men. Numerous examples exist of antecedent songs, such as those with which the godly patriarchs Elihu and Job were familiar (cf Job 35:10); or those which begin (cf Exodus 15:1-19, 21) and end (cf Deuteronomy 31:22-32:44) the account of the Hebrews' wilderness journey; or that sung by Deborah and Barak (cf Judges 5:1-31). Allowing that most of the book of Psalms was completed during David's lifetime, it might be expected that if God demanded exclusivity, all subsequent examples of sung worship would be limited to that selection. But this is not the case either: David's son Solomon felt no such restriction (cf 1 Kings 4:32, and 'The Song of Solomon'), nor did Isaiah (cf Isaiah 5:1, 26:1, 27:2), or Habakkuk (cf Habakkuk 3:1-19). While it is clear that the Psalms were intended for, and used in, the worship of the Temple (cf 1 Chronicles 16:7), it is impossible to say whether all 150 were utilised, or if others also once

existed; and we will look in vain for any God-given stipulation in Scripture that these and these only were to be sung, even to the Levites in the era of Temple worship.

As the New Testament age dawns, other examples are afforded where God is audibly worshipped in language other than that of the Psalms – as by Mary (cf Luke 1:46-55), Zacharias (cf Luke 1:67-79) and Simeon (cf Luke 2:29-32). The disciples knew and quoted the Psalms extensively (cf Acts 1:16, 20, 2:25-28, 34-35), but whilst they incorporated them into their prayers and praises, they did not confine their utterances to those words only, as Acts 4:24-30 illustrates.

In two verses describing sung worship in the early church, the apostle Paul references “*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*” (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16), his choice and form of words suggestive of variety and diversity. The defenders of Exclusive Psalmody go to great lengths to demonstrate that the three underlying Greek words in these texts, and their Hebrew counterparts, may all be applied to the Old Testament Psalms. But this is not sufficient as an argument. To maintain the cause of ‘exclusivity’ it must be proved that these three words cannot mean anything else **except** the Psalms. And here the argument fails, because the words adopted by Paul have broad usage and meaning. Hence ‘psalm’ also occurs in connection with the disorderly worship at Corinth (cf 1 Corinthians 14:26), or spontaneous praise in times of happiness (cf James 5:13); while ‘song’ is a word as generic in the original languages as its English translation – and could be used equally of the Psalms (cf prefixes to Psalm 18, 30, 45, 46, etc), or at the other extreme, of the ungodly singing of the world (cf Genesis 31:27, Ezekiel 33:32).

Those who contend for exclusive psalmody on the grounds that only the directly-inspired language of Scripture is acceptable for use in worship, set for themselves a very dangerous precedent. For if this is the case for sung praises, then what of public – or indeed, private – prayer? And if prayer, then what of preaching? If a believer cannot safely be allowed to

choose words with which to praise the Lord in song, how then is he able to petition the Lord in prayer, or proclaim the Lord from the pulpit? This is a line of reasoning that may swiftly lead to all the errors of liturgical worship – in which every aspect of religious expression becomes rigidly prescribed, tightly defined by prayerbooks, psalters and calendars, and ultimately devoid of either spirit or truth. It is a situation at once alien to the New Testament, and indefensible from the Old. It is to “*bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders*” (Matthew 23:4). If a character like the apostle James were to encounter such artificial restrictions being imposed in Christian worship today, he might well ask: “*Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able, [or ever commanded] to bear?*” (Acts 15:10).

Poetic Licence?

Another fundamental problem with the exclusive psalmody position is the way in which it undermines the principles of ‘formal equivalence’ Bible translation. The users of metrical psalters frequently state they are singing the words of Scripture only, and in a form that is as close to the original as possible. This is essential to their claim that only the inspired Word of God is being sung, and not the works of men. But many different English-language psalters exist – they are not the same as each other, precisely because humans have been involved in translation; making decisions and choices, and having countless ‘questions and strifes of words’. Of those available to English speakers, the 1650 Scottish Metrical Psalter – largely the work of Francis Rous (1581 – 1659) and a succession of committees – is the version championed by most exclusive psalmists for its closeness to the original texts. Some very audacious claims have been made for it, including that it is a better or more faithful translation of the Psalms than the 1611 Authorised Version of the Bible. Such claims wilfully ignore the fact that the requirements of English poetry are mutually exclusive to the application of a ‘formal equivalence’ translation philosophy. There is a huge, if unacknowledged,

contradiction on the part of those who simultaneously defend the exclusive use of both the Authorised Version of Scripture, and the Metrical Psalter, alleging that both are accurate translations, when they are manifestly different from one another. And there is perhaps nothing more incongruous than to see both printed and published together, between the same covers, when ‘their witness agrees not together’.

Put simply, ‘formal equivalence’ translation philosophy seeks to preserve word meaning, word order, grammatical form, and even word count, as closely as possible, within the limitations of the vocabulary of the target language. This principle underpinned the production of the Authorised Version of the English Bible during the early 17th Century – and remains one of the most compelling reasons for the continued use of this Bible version to the present day. By contrast, the chief object of a metrical psalter is to produce singable verse, and must therefore maintain a repeating rhyme-scheme, a consistent syllable count, and the correct pattern of syllabic accents, between its lines. This places immense constraints upon the work of translation, which cannot possibly be called ‘formal equivalence’ in these circumstances. Even though a directly equivalent English word might exist for a Hebrew original, if it cannot be made to conform to the requirements of scansion and rhyme, it will have to be exchanged for something less suitable.

These deficiencies are offset, it is claimed, by virtue of the fact that usable verse is created, which can be sung by an English-speaking congregation. The Psalms were intended for singing, and designed to be set to music; and since that end is achieved by a metrical psalter, the singer is brought closer to the sense and spirit of the original. But even in this argument there is a profound misconception. Perhaps some Bible-readers imagine that, if only they could read and pronounce the Hebrew language of the Psalms, they would soon hear that certain words rhymed with one another, and could count up the number of syllables to determine what metre of tune would suit the original. If so, they would be disappointed to learn that Hebrew poetry bears no resemblance to the systems and

structures of English verse whatsoever. Whilst the repetition of sound or rhythm might fall pleasantly on the ear of a native English-speaker, in Hebrew poetry, the equivalent is the recurrence of an idea, or theme, expressed in different words. Such verses could not be sung to short repeating melodies or phrases, and would be chanted to one continuous tune.

Attempting to force the poetry of one language to comply with poetic forms of another is a hopeless cause, and will always come at the expense of sense and meaning. Take one practical, if extreme, example: there is a type of traditional poetry in the Japanese language called ‘Haiku’, the format of which (greatly over-simplified) requires 17 syllables across three lines, organised 5, 7 and 5 syllables respectively; a word referring to nature or the seasons; and a word effecting a shift or change in meaning. Suppose the first verse of Watt’s hymn “When I survey the wondrous cross” was to be recast according to these rules. It might then become:

Wondrous cross I view,
Glory’s Prince died on the tree;
All my gain made loss.

It could be argued that the poetry of one nation and language has been effectively converted into that of another. But consider what has happened in the process: words lost, added, or substituted; comprehension and clarity sacrificed, simply in order to satisfy the arbitrary demands of another culture’s poetry. This is precisely what happens in the making of metrical psalters. If the ‘new wine’ of Divine revelation is forced into the ‘old bottles’ of English verse, an adverse outcome is inevitable, and it is the plain truth of Scripture that perishes in the process (cf Luke 5:37).

How many singers of Psalms are convinced that there is a verse in the Bible which says of God, “He leadeth me in green pastures”? Of course there is not, but the oft-repeated, broken syntax of Psalm 23 in Rous’s

setting, enforces this misconception. Or who can possibly claim that such an expression as “Froward thou kyth’st unto the froward wight” is a sound and faithful translation of the words: “*with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward*” (Psalm 18:26); or that the couplet “Moreover they thy servant warn // How he his life should frame” has not added an entire clause to the words of Psalm 19:11? God places a high premium upon the preservation of His own Word, saying “*thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it*” (Deuteronomy 12:32, cf Revelation 22:18-19). He does not say ‘except it be for the sake of English poetry’. He most certainly does not say ‘unless to make it comply with popular Scots ballad tunes of the 17th Century’. In these matters, there is a Divine prohibition, not poetic licence.

New Songs

A metrical psalter sets out to achieve two objectives: a faithful and accurate translation of the Word of God; and the creation of singable verse in the English language. As these two aims are at variance with each other, neither is accomplished successfully. Formal equivalence translation principles are not upheld, and the resultant ‘poetry’ subject to such irredeemably mangled grammar, as to be hardly worthy of the name. Neither of these deficiencies would be a problem, were it not for the insistence that a metrical psalter is somehow equivalent to the original, inspired Word of God, unsullied by human hands, to be afforded the same sanctity and reverence as the Bible itself, and sung from uniquely.

Isaac Watts wrote settings of many Psalms. We may disagree with aspects of his theology and dislike some of his expressions. If this is the case, those verses can be amended or omitted. He had the humility to describe his very worthy works as ‘The Psalms of David Imitated’; and we receive and recognise them as such. No-one is suggesting his name should be removed from the foot of these compositions, his stanzas venerated as though equivalent to Scripture, or sung to the exclusion of

all else. Metrical Psalms should be treated exactly the same way. Thus we are happy to sing in our hymnody across three centuries, from Psalm 100 (“All people that on earth do dwell”, Kethe, Anglo-Genevan Psalter, 1561) to Psalm 150 (“O praise ye the Lord!”, Baker, Hymns Ancient & Modern, 1861), ‘teaching and admonishing ourselves’ by these means, and blessed along the way by the settings of Milton, Luther, Watts, Wesley, as well as those of Rous and the Westminster Assembly.

The conclusion of Scripture is, that David was a prophet, and foresaw something of Christ, and the New Testament age (cf Acts 2:29-36). This is evident in the language of the Psalms. Levitical systems of worship and Temple service would cease, for God never so much desired animal sacrifices as a broken and contrite heart (cf Psalm 51:16-17, 50:7-14), appointing them only as a prefiguration of Christ (cf Psalm 40:6-10). The purposes of God always extended far beyond the bounds of Jerusalem or Israel, reaching to ‘the heathen’, ‘the uttermost parts of the earth’ (cf Psalm 2:8) and ‘all nations of the world’ (cf Psalm 72:11). And persons from these distant places must, in their turn, join the concert of praise that ascends to the Lord: “*Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands*”, “*O praise the Lord, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people*” (Psalm 100:1, 117:1). That being the case, little wonder that the Psalmist exhorts, four times over, “*O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth*” (Psalm 96:1, cf 33:3, 98:1, 149:1).

The songs of Old Testament, earthly Zion, cannot in isolation serve a New Testament people called out of every nation, tribe and tongue. Thus David, ‘seeing this before’, spake of ‘new songs’ – and we, in our turn, do not hesitate to sing them, “*that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter*” (Romans 7:6). And in order that we might ‘excel, to the edifying of the New Testament church’, we “*will sing with the spirit, and ... will sing with the understanding also*” (1 Corinthians 14:12, 15). May God impart such a spirit, and His truth, to all our readers.

R. J. Steward

HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID

...the blessed Lord was not unmindful of the spiritual wants of His people in all ages, for He inspired David, Asaph, Heman, and Ethan to write those blessed Psalms which were, not only used in the temple service, but have been such a treasure of consolation to His family in all time, and will continue to be so till time shall be no more. The temple and its service have all passed away. No Levite now sings in its courts; no high priest now offers sacrifice at its altars. The great High Priest has come, and offered Himself as a sacrifice; and offering and burnt offering are no more required. The true priests now are 'the royal priesthood', the saints of God, who, through regenerating grace, offer "*spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*" (1 Peter 2:5). But the Psalms still remain as the enduring expression of every gracious feeling of the regenerate heart; as a precious manual of living souls, embracing the whole compass of Christian experience; as a sympathising friend and faithful guide of the church of God, that can sink with her into the lowest depths of sorrow, or soar with her to the loftiest heights of joy. This wondrous depth and variety of experience, so suitable to all the states and stages of divine life, has made them the daily companion of the family of God, soothed many an aching heart, laid them on many a dying pillow, and inspired the last whisper of many an expiring breath.

It is true that we do not, indeed cannot, sing the Psalms. Song requires poetry, and that such as the natural ear has moulded into the form adapted to the native language. Prose cannot be sung unless chanted, as in cathedrals, or in a solo voice as recitative; both of which are not only highly artificial, but destructive of the combined voices of a congregation. Thus, though the Psalms are Hebrew poetry, and were sung in the temple as poetical and musical compositions, they cannot, as translated into English prose, be sung now in our assemblies, for the form of poetry cannot be transferred from one language to another by simple translation, but must be adapted to the peculiar shape, such as metre and rhyme, which English verse requires. The Psalms cannot,

therefore, be sung as they stand in our Bibles; and as to the attempts which have been made to versify them, and thus adapt them to singing, we all know what miserable failures have been the almost invariable result of such attempts, from Sternhold and Hopkins¹ to the latest versifier.

Hymns, then, have naturally and necessarily come to occupy the place of the Psalms in Christian churches, and this not only because poetical form is indispensably necessary to tune, but because they can set forth Christian truth in a way which the Psalms could not possibly do. Until Christ came in the flesh there could be no clear revelation of His Person and work. The Psalms, therefore, though, as interpreted by the light of the gospel, full of blessed truth, are inadequate exponents of Christian doctrine; and we might as well accept the preaching of the Old Testament prophets, as fully adequate to the proclamation of the gospel, as confine our singing to the Psalms as amply sufficient for the utterance of Christian truth and the expression of gospel praise. Mr. Romaine² used to object to the singing of hymns in public worship, as being mere human compositions. But, with all our respect for Mr. Romaine, might we not ask him if his sermons were not human compositions, and yet he preached them in the public worship of God; and were not the prayers that he read human compositions also? Nay, the very Psalms themselves, for which he so strongly pleaded, being versified by modern pens, were human compositions also, unless he believed that the same Spirit who inspired David to write them in the Hebrew, inspired Tate and Brady³ to translate them into English verse.

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1. Thomas Sternhold (1500 – 1549) and John Hopkins (d. 1570) compiled the first English metrical psalter for the ‘Anglican’ church. Suppressed during the reign of Mary, it was first published in 1561 and continued in use until 1717.
 2. William Romaine (1714 – 1795), an evangelical Anglican clergyman, and an extreme proponent of exclusive psalmody.
 3. Nahum Tate (1652 – 1715) and Nicholas Brady (1659 – 1726) published their *New Version of the Psalms of David* in 1696.

Hymns, then, as written by godly men, are to singing, as a part of the worship of God in our Christian assemblies, what the preaching of the servants of the Lord is to the proclaiming of the gospel; and we may add, what prayer by men of God is to the worshipping of Him in spirit and in truth. The Lord, in tender mercy, as ever mindful of the wants of His people, has bestowed upon some of His saints and servants the grace and gift of experimental and poetical utterance, and has highly honoured with His blessing the hymns written under His teaching and unction [...] For the blessedness of hymns is not limited to the use of them in the public worship of God. They form a treasure of spiritual and experimental truth which the Holy Ghost makes use of to comfort the mourners in Zion. Their very form not only gives them a place in mind and memory, but condenses truth into the smallest compass, so as to present it in its very spirit and essence; both of which circumstances, we need not observe, are especially favourable to their application with a divine power to the heart. And as the gracious men who wrote them penned them for the most part under a divine influence, the Holy Spirit, in applying them with a sweet unction to the soul, is but sealing on the hearts of others what He first wrought by His own grace in the hearts of their composers.

J. C. Philpot (1802 – 1869)
The Gospel Standard, June 1859

“To be employed, with solemn pleasure, in singing the praises of God with the spirit and with the understanding also, is a blessing peculiar to God’s elect; nor can even they be thus engaged, only as the blessed Spirit influences the mind, and favours them with the unction of His grace. It is one thing to have the ear charmed, and another to have the heart engaged in this most delightful part of God’s worship in His Church below. *“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound”* (Psalm 89:15).

William Gadsby (1773 – 1844)

THE NEW SONG

“And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders...” (Revelation 14:2-3)

The ‘new song’ here can only mean the last, the final, the eternal song of redemption. It is called the new song because the old song is the song of creation: *“When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy”* (Job 38:7). At creation, when life sprang forth into the conscious enjoyment of celestial being, the angelic chorus filled all the vast realm of visible and invisible life with rapturous and melodious praise and thanksgiving for the privilege of life in all the intensity, and beauty, and wonder, and mystery of it. The creation of man was designed to be the top-stone of this mystery, as there was entrusted to him the dominion of the lower creation in anticipation of his ultimate rule over the entire creation. The disruption of this joy by the fall of angels, and afterward by the fall of man, opened the way for a yet higher creation, that of eternal redemption, by which God would participate in the infinite sorrows of that which had fallen, and bear through death its curse, its pain and its tears; to establish that new creation of unsullied joy and peace, love and truth which, because united indissolubly with deity incarnate, could never fall again.

Hence this ‘new song’, which can only be sung when redemption is finally accomplished and realised in the triumph of the Redeemer over all forces and powers of evil, including the last enemy, death (cf 1 Corinthians 15:26). Singing is the antithesis of sorrow. There will be no cessation to the new song, because Christ has put an end to the reign of sin and death from which all sorrows spring.

C. D. Alexander (1904 – 1991)

EDITORIAL

There are many delights and enjoyments to be found in this particular season of the year, as the darkness and dormancy of winter gives way to the verdure and vibrancy of spring – with the increased hours of daylight, and its profound effects upon plant and animal life. It is a transformation that has long been witnessed with pleasure: *“For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle [dove] is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell”* (Song of Songs 2:11-13). The child of God, blessed with spiritual insight, views something more in these natural phenomena: *“Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle [dove] and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming”* because these, though mere creatures, *“know ... the judgment (or, ordinances) of the Lord”* (Jeremiah 8:7). So we may: *“ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?”* (Job 12:7-9). The material and animal creation praises and glorifies the Lord, testifying to His laws enshrined in nature, declaring His handiwork, and obeying – albeit unconsciously – the injunction of Scripture: *“Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: Fire, and hail; snow, and vapour; stormy wind fulfilling His word: Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl”* (Psalm 148:7-10).

In the cases of some aspects of creation, that testimony and act of praise is audible – expressed in a form that may be received ‘by the hearing of the ear’, and described as song: *“the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches”* (Psalm 104:12). In this respect, they serve as an even more direct exhortation unto the people of God: would that our praises were as instinctive, spontaneous,

continuous, and constant! For the singing of birds may be heard, at all times of day – even in some species, during the hours of darkness – and independently of external circumstances, as though to teach: “*Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires*” (Isaiah 24:15); and, “*in the night His song shall be with me*” (Psalm 42:8).

The expression and example of praise from nature thus continues, and will endure to the end of time, where it is seen to rise to a glorious climax: “*For the earnest expectation of the creature [creation] waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God ... Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation ... [waits] for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body*” (Romans 8:19-23). And with what a remarkable and ‘new’ song will it greet that great day, when the very stones themselves will lend their voices: “*For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands*” (Isaiah 55:12). Which inclines us to ask, with the hymnwriter:

“And shall man alone be dumb
‘Til that glorious kingdom come?
No! the church delights to raise
Psalms and hymns and songs of praise!”

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

6th & 7th June 2026 D.V.

Saturday 3.00 pm & 5.30 pm Tea served 4.30 pm
Lord’s Day 11.00 am & 6.30 pm

Preacher: Mr J. Munday, Exeter

a cordial invitation is extended to all