

HERESY IN HARMONY

On Worshipping our Emotions

In our editorial “A Different School of Thought,” (Reformed Polemics, May 24/96) we noted that churches which give up singing the Psalms exclusively, generally give up singing the Psalms entirely.” (Dr. Richard L. Ganz) We note the word “generally,” and we also note that for us the point is not that we must reject all hymns and sing only the Psalms (exclusive psalmody). The relevant point is that we, knowing beforehand what “generally” happens when we stop singing the Psalms, must reject the school of thought that suggests that “change must be welcomed and what is old must be discarded.” (Rev. P. De Jong)

We must continue to sing the Psalms, “for the gospel is most certainly at stake here.” And when we do decide to sing a “different” song, particularly from a source other than our Book of Praise, we must be circumspect lest we employ hymns that undermine and contradict the Word of God; hymns that do not reinforce the message of the Psalms (Dr. C. vander Waal). We must be careful that when we “sing to the Lord a new song” we remain in tune with Scripture. Many so called modern hymns do not harmonize with the message of the Word of God, and when we make use of them we actually end up singing heresy in harmony.

Furthermore, there is the undeniable danger, particularly in our Christian schools and homes, that in our choice of music (“Christian” rock, Contemporary Christian Music, “Praise and Worship,” etc.) we actually wind up worshipping our emotions instead of our God.

The worship of God is a serious matter. What people find pleasing and appropriate in worship is often unacceptable to God (see Gen. 4:3-5; Lev. 10:1-3). What people find worshipful, God often finds detestable. Too often the music heard and sung at our Christian schools or the music programs put on by them is borrowed from evangelical rather than Reformed sources. But we seem to sing them without any qualms.

Some years ago Prof. Hamersma of Calvin’s music Dept. wrote in the Banner: “While we, (the Christian Reformed Churches) have not adopted the evangelistic service, we have adopted the evangelistic-service approach to the evaluation of our church music... As a denomination (Christian Reformed) we have a specific theological position: the Word of God interpreted in our doctrinal standards... Does the music in your church suggest you have another starting point?”

In the Canadian Reformed Churches we have agreed that in the worship services we will sing only the Psalms and Hymns in our Book of Praise. Nevertheless, it is still prudent, paraphrasing the question posed by Prof. Hamersma, to ask, “Does the music heard in our churches, our homes, and our schools, suggest that we have another starting point than the Word of God?” With a view to the recent discussions about “music for the Christian” (Reformed Perspective Feb.-Aug./95) this question is certainly worth some prolonged thought.

Already years ago the late Prof. Henry Van Til warned church members about the unscriptural or non-Reformed content of many of the hymns used in the Christian Reformed Churches. Also in the Canadian Reformed Churches we have members who have lost some of their Reformed feelers, and

go more by how well they like the songs, and how well they can sing them. We read in Information,

January 29, 1994, Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs: "The reason why so many Canadian Reformed people have the Psalter Hymnals in their homes is because of the choice of hymns and the way the music is printed. There are beautiful, scripturally based songs that are not included in the Book of Praise."

We can probably concur with this statement, but must also conclude, on the basis of statements made by Christian Reformed people about their own Psalter Hymnal that "a lot of the hymns sung by our people (Christian Reformed) are man-centered rather than God centered. The songs emphasize my soul, my experience, my happiness, etc... Subjectivism and experientialism are real dangers among us today." (J. Tuininga, A Threat of Fundamentalism, Outlook, October, 1986)

Tuininga, and also others in the Christian Reformed Churches, gave examples of the objectionable hymns that should be deleted from the Psalter Hymnal. It is interesting to note that in a number of cases these are exactly the hymns that Canadian Reformed people want incorporated in the Book of Praise. Some examples: "Silent Night", #342, "Beautiful Saviour", #373 (particularly stanza 2 and 3), "Come To the Saviour", #410, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul", #425, "Majestic Sweetness Sits Enthroned", #382 (stanza 1), "My God, Is Any Hour So Sweet", #433, "Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire", #434 (stanza 1 and 2).

These type of Arminian, humanistic, subjective, experiential or sentimental poems have attained the status of hymns in a number of churches because of their common use during services.

The usage of this kind of hymn is extremely dangerous because we are, to a great extent, influenced by the songs we sing. Christine Farenhorst writes in, *Singing in Parts, Towards Harmony, Part 3*, that "there are not many people who will detect or look for error in well-known hymns simply because they are carried away by familiar tunes and often repeated words. A congregation's general acceptance of truth, in the Biblical sense, is subtly influenced by what it sings. Through a hymn a congregation can be deceived, and be led into the folly of perverse doctrine. In other words, a congregation can sing heresy in harmony!" (Christian Renewal, October 11, 1993) She concludes that "there is no doctrinal quarrel with any hymns in the Anglo-Genevan Psalter... There are a number of incorrect hymns in the Psalter Hymnal which could be deleted."

The multiplication of hymns at the expense of the Psalms, and not in the style of the Psalms, is often a sign of deformation! Rev. R.B. Lanning, states that "changes in the view of worship and introduction of hymnody are in fact signs of deeper changes in a denomination; they are preludes to the decline and fall of a church. In this sad truth of church history, the Christian Reformed Church was no exception to the general rule." (Christian Renewal, May 15, 1995)

We need to heed the admonitions of the late Prof. J.G. Vos which he wrote some years ago in *Blue Banner Faith and Life*: "The trend of modern hymnbooks is largely toward the over-emphasis of the subjective experience at the expense of the objective foundation... The Psalms are balanced; they are free from all one-sided emphasis. They have stood the test of time. Let us hold on to them, love them, glory in them, sing them heartily, and never, never apologize for them or be

ashamed of them.” No doubt these are relevant admonitions for our discussions about music suitable for our churches, homes, and schools.

There seems to be a connection between the music heard and sung at some of our school assemblies and Christmas/Easter programs, and the so called “Praise and Worship” (P&W) evenings held in some of our churches. Al Siebring, in his article Music in Worship (4), (Christian Renewal, June 19, 1995) writes that “many churches are moving away from the traditional model of corporate praise out of a common hymnal, in favour of singing ‘choruses’ or what’s often referred to as “Praise and Worship” music... The music is very easy to learn, uncomplicated in terms of its harmonies, with lyrics that are often Scripture-based, but very repetitive.”

Siebring quotes Prof. D.G. Hart, a former member of the Christian Reformed Church, who draws a penetrating connection between the so-called “Praise and Worship” genre of music and the philosophy of deconstructionalism... the ultimate fruit of relativist thinking. He writes: “What characterizes this style’ (Praise & Worship) is the praise song (four words, three notes and two hours) with its mantra-like repetition of phrases from Scripture, displayed on an overhead... Gone are the hymnals which keep the faithful in touch with previous generations of saints. They have been abandoned, in many cases, because they are filled with music and texts considered too boring, too doctrinal, and too restrained... Gone is any conviction that one liturgy is better than another because it conforms to the revealed truth and the order of creation, or that one order of worship is more appropriate than another for the theology which a congregation confesses. Worship, like food or clothes, is merely a matter of taste.”

Siebring then continues with his quotes from Prof. Hart: “Evangelicals and the academic left believe that we need to be liberated from the past, from formalism, and from existing structures in order to come into a more intimate relationship with life or with the divine... The triumph of P&W, like the ascendancy of the cultural left in the academy, is firmly rooted in our therapeutic culture. The most widely used reason for contemporary worship is that it is what the people want and what makes them feel good... Yet, while evangelicalism may have a large market share, its consumer satisfaction may also be low, especially if it deceives people into thinking they have really worshipped God when they have actually been orshipping their emotions.”

Siebring concludes his article with the question. “So what are we to make of Dr. Hart’s critique?”: “Hart says the connection between the deconstructionists of the so-called cultural left and the evangelicals who promote a loosened musical worship style has its roots in ‘...an anti-elitism that questions the distinctions between good and bad (or even not so good), or between what is appropriate and inappropriate’... There must be some objective standard by which we measure whether music is pleasing to the Divine Ear of God. He, after all, created music and harmony just like everything else... We must come back to drawing a distinction between music used in corporate worship services and music that is designed for other purposes - call it ‘campfire music’ if you will. And within that context I would agree with most of what Dr. Hart has written.”

The point that Siebring makes is that “Praise and Worship” music, by its very nature, should never be thought of as a replacement for the Psalms and hymns of the faith that have spoken so powerfully to so many generations of Christians, especially in the context of corporate worship. Furthermore, as Reformed people we are quite familiar with the Reformed concept of corporate

worship in our worship services. We don't come together to entertain each other or to be entertained, still less to entertain God, but to corporately or collectively worship our God. The school assemblies and morning devotions in our schools are definitely not worship services, yet the Reformed principle of corporate worship certainly applies to these formal venues for worship. Our students do not come together for religious amusement as presented by the popular performers of "campfire music." Clearly such music has more to do with entertainment than with the corporate worship of God. They come together to corporately or collectively praise and worship their God. Hopefully they will, as a rule, use the Psalms and Hymns in our Book of Praise.

The worship of God is a serious matter. Let us learn from church history what generally happens when we stop singing the Psalms. Also, let us oppose the multiplication of hymns at the expense of the Psalms and not in the style of the Psalms. Let us make sure that the hymns we sing are in tune with the message of the Word of God, lest we end up singing heresy in harmony. And finally, let's make sure that by our choice of music, whether it be for church, home and school, we do not wind up worshipping our emotions instead of praising our God.

Ron Dykstra

LORD'S SUPPER NOT FAST FOOD

In the April 29, 1996 issue of "Christianity Today" there was a short news-type article about the Lord's Supper celebration. It seems that a Chicago-based company is strongly promoting a new product to streamline the celebration of the Lord's Supper in larger churches. The product: a small plastic cup (similar to a coffee cream cuplet) containing juice or wine, with a double lid which contains a wafer of unleavened bread. To use, you simply peel off the top layer of plastic first, and take out the wafer. Then you peel back the second layer to open the cup to drink the juice or wine.

The cups are sold in boxes of 210 or 500, which fit existing communion trays. Unused cups can be stored away, and have a shelf life of about a year. Predictions are that more than 150 million units will be sold in 1996. The corporation president says that they are "convenient, economical and safe". He has heard complaints that his is a fast-food approach to the Lord's Supper, but his response is, "Jesus provided the first fast-food meal when He fed the multitudes".

I'm sorry, but I really do believe that this is a fast-food approach to the Lord's Supper. Jesus supplied the multitude with a simple meal, not with a celebration of the Lord's Supper. I have little problem with Christians going to MacDonald's for a happy meal, but I do wonder if its beneficial for the purpose of the Lord's Supper celebration to make the celebration as convenient and economical as possible. Participants need to meditate at the Lord's Supper celebration. The soul is fed there, not the body. This means that when you take a fast-food approach to the Lord's Supper, much of what it signifies and seals is lost, and people are left spiritually hungry.

Of course, there is no set, detailed prescription for the exact manner of the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the Bible or elsewhere. There is a certain amount of freedom in this. However, in deciding how the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated, I believe that factors such as economy and

efficiency should play as minor a role as possible. The meaning of the celebration should play the overwhelming role. There should be an acute awareness of what the Lord's Supper is about, and therefore the celebration of the sacrament should be made as meaningful as possible to the whole church.

In the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 28, Q. & A. 75 we confess how the Lord's Supper signifies and seals to us that we really share in Christ's one sacrifice on the cross and in all His gifts. This Lord's Day points to the importance of the manner in which we celebrate the sacrament. Note that according to the answer of this Lord's Day, the actions of the minister with bread and cup are deemed important to the celebration as well as the strengthening of faith. I would find it a loss if we would have cups such as those described above. All neat, convenient, economical and safe, but what happens to the solemnity of the Lord's Supper celebration? We can make it quick and efficient and easy, like a MacDonal'd's meal, but what happens to the spiritual nourishment of the believers?

It's true that in some churches, especially the larger ones, the services in which the Lord's Supper is celebrated can become quite long, with three or more tables and all kinds of moving back and forth. But would the solution be to streamline this solemn event with the cups described above? I am of the opinion that it is even somewhat of a loss when churches go over to celebrating the Lord's Supper in the benches. There may still be a representative table at the front of the church, and the minister would still break bread and pour wine into a cup. But isn't some of the solemnity and symbolism of the Lord's Supper sacrificed for convenience when the Lord's Supper is celebrated in the benches to streamline things? Remember, the point is not to get the bread and wine to the mouths as efficiently as possible. It's to nourish the congregation in the Spirit by faith (Article 35, Belgic Confession). As well, it would seem that the supervision of the Table of the Lord by those who have the responsibility for the keys of the kingdom of heaven is compromised to a certain degree.

The Lord's Supper in Scripture and confessions definitely has a meal character. Herman Ridderbos is quite strong on that point in his book "The Coming of the Kingdom" (Paideia Press, 1978). He states (page 412): "Another significant feature is the fact that Jesus, when taking leave of His disciples, ordains what in the coming time also takes the form of a meal, i.e., eating and drinking. For in accordance with the conceptions of the Old Testament (and those of late Judaism), the joy and bliss of the kingdom of God is represented as the sitting down to and enjoyment of a meal (Matt.8:11; 22:1ff; Luke 13:28; 22:30, and others). This is also why the meeting of the disciples at a meal for the time to come cannot be an accidental form of the bond of union which embraces them all and which is founded in their faith in Christ. But this conception expresses their common participation in the joy of the coming kingdom of God, the gospel of which had been preached to them by Christ." With this in mind, I believe that using the Lord's Supper in the benches takes away from its meal character. And that meal character is important to the sacrament. We confess in Article 35 of the Belgic Confession "This banquet is a spiritual table at which Christ makes us partakers of Himself with all His benefits and gives us the grace to enjoy both Himself and the merit of His suffering and death." And the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper speaks about nourishing and refreshing our hungry and thirsty souls with Christ's crucified body and shed

blood to everlasting life. We need to maintain as much of the meal character of the Lord's Supper as possible.

Therefore, wouldn't it be a better idea to remodel our church buildings or to design church buildings to accommodate more tables at the front? I believe that this is something we ought to consider more. There are churches in our federation which are adopting some form of celebration of Lord's Supper in the benches. I do not believe that this is a good trend. As far as safety is concerned, there could be some concerns. But I believe that even then there are other solutions than celebration of this feast in the benches.

There is more to celebrating the Lord's Supper together at a table. There is also the fact that we need to consciously walk to the front and take our place at the table. That is in itself an important event for oneself as well as for others. It's like a renewed profession of faith. You have examined yourself, and have answered affirmatively to the three questions of self-examination. The Belgic Confession, Article 35 refers to this when it says; "Therefore no one should come to this table without careful self-examination, lest by eating this bread and drinking from this cup, he eat and drink judgment upon himself".

In addition to this, would it not be of importance that the congregation sees who makes that profession and attends the table of the Lord? We are all responsible for each other, and it's important that we see each other attending the table of the Lord too. That's part of the meal aspect. It's a communal event, in which we not only experience our communion with Christ, but also with each other as members of one body. A meal in Bible times was an expression of unity. That comes to the fore in what the apostle Paul writes in 1 Cor.10:17: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." In his Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, when he explains 1 Cor.10:17, John Calvin writes that Paul mentions there that we are one bread not to exhort us to love, but "that the Corinthians may understand that we must, even by external profession, maintain that unity that subsists between us and Christ, inasmuch as we all assemble together to receive the symbol of that sacred unity."

And so the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper also takes that scripture passage to this application: "As one bread is baked out of many grains and one wine is pressed out of many grapes, so we all, incorporated in Christ by faith, are together one body. For the sake of Christ, who so loved us first, we shall now love one another, and shall show this to one another not just in words but also in deeds". Therefore I believe that attending a table and sitting at table together is a very meaningful action at the celebration of the sacrament. You show your unity in faith and love, and you actually see those with whom you are united in that one body. These are the people you are obligated and publicly confess to love for the sake of the one Lord.

There is one more aspect, and that is the matter of the supervision of the Lord's Supper celebration. I once attended a worship service in one of our sister-churches in the Netherlands where the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the pews. A number of guests were announced, and it must have been difficult for the elders to pay attention to who partook of the bread and wine in the benches. Supervision of the sacrament was, I felt, compromised by the celebration in the pews. There is something to a formal invitation to the table, and to the officebearers standing watch by the table. The pure administration of the sacraments is one of the marks of the true church. We do not

celebrate the sacrament alone. Lack of supervision makes people unsure of who they celebrate the sacrament with, and that is a compromising of the nourishing of the believers at the celebration of the sacrament.

In conclusion, I believe that we need to keep the purpose of the Lord's Supper firmly in mind when we consider how it is to be celebrated. Anything that might compromise the spiritual nourishment of the believers with Christ should be avoided as much as possible, and efficiency and cost should be very minor factors. The best manner, I believe, is still around a table, sharing the bread and wine as signs and seals of Christ's body and blood. To aim for that may mean some inconvenience and cost. It may require redesigning church buildings so that all can celebrate at table together. But the result is that the strengthening of faith and the bond of love is least compromised. As we confess in Lord's Day 29, Christ wants to teach us by this celebration that as our meals at table at home sustain us in this life, so His crucified body and blood sustain us spiritually to eternal life. He also wants to assure us by the visible signs and seals that as surely as we eat in remembrance of Him, so surely are His suffering and obedience ours.

Rev. J. Moesker

Dear Editor,

In the March 29 issue of Reformed Polemics, Rev. J. Van Popta asks those who oppose the adoption of the NIV to show how the Report failed in fulfilling the mandate given to the Committee by Synod Lincoln 1992. Part of the mandate of the Committee was "to report to the churches and next General Synod *six months* prior to the next General Synod." (Acts of General Synod Lincoln, p.21). The first advertisement for the Committee's Report appeared in the March 24, 1995 issue of Clarion. Synod Abbotsford began on May 9, 1995. That left a period of approximately six weeks between the announcement of the availability of the Report and the commencement of Synod—a pitifully short period of time for the churches to study it.

In recent issues of Clarion several writers have bemoaned the fact that individual letters were accepted by Synod Abbotsford when our principles of church government preclude such a possibility. Some of these individual letters were in regards to the Bible translation issue. The above-mentioned writers are absolutely correct in their assessment of the situation. However, did the Committee on Bible Translations make it possible for concerned church members to pursue the church-orderly process when they presented the Report a mere six weeks before Synod? The Committee clearly failed in fulfilling an important part of their mandate. This leaves us with the question: in light of this obvious failure, should Synod Abbotsford even have accepted the Report on the table?

In His Service, Wes Bredenhof