

Psalm Singing: A Reformed Heritage

by Rev. J. Kortering

As Reformed believers, we exalt the name of God through the use of His Psalms. By Psalms we refer to the Book of the Psalms of the Old Testament as they have been set to music over the years. The original Psalms were composed by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of singing. People of God have been blessed through the years by the singing of these Psalms.

Of how many heroic characters have these old temple songs been the inspiration! Jewish saints and patriots chanted them in the synagogue and on the battlefield; apostles and evangelists sung them among perils of the wilderness, as they traversed the rugged paths of Syria and Galatia, and Macedonia; martyrs in Rome softly hummed them when the lions near at hand were crouching for their prey; in German forests, in Highland Glen, Lutherans and Covenanters breathed their lives out through their cadences; in every land penitent souls have found in them words to tell the story of their sorrow, and victorious souls the voices of their triumph; mothers watching their babes by night have cheered the vigil by singing them, mourners walking in lonely ways have been lighted by the great hopes that shine through them; and pilgrims going down into the valley of the shadow of death have, found in their firm assurances a strong staff to lean upon.¹

As we look back over the years, we rejoice in that God used the Reformation of the sixteenth century to restore Psalm singing to its proper place in the church. In 1517 the hammer blows at Wittenburg nailed down three great truths: the authority of the Word of God, justification by faith alone, and the priesthood of every believer. The Reformation did not end with Martin Luther. His work became the catalyst for the development of truth. Building upon this foundation, John Calvin erected the great citadel of truth, "*Soli Deo Gloria.*"

Both Luther and Calvin saw the need to restore congregational singing to the worship service. Even though Luther did not limit this singing to the Psalms, he did have a great appreciation of the Psalms.

What else is the Psalter than prayer to God and praise to God that is a book of hymns? Therefore the most blessed Spirit of God the Father of orphans, the teacher of infants, seeing that we know not what or how we ought to pray, as the Apostle saith, and desiring to help our infirmities, after the manner of schoolmasters³ who compose for children letters and short prayers, that they may send them to their parents, so prepares for us the book (of the Psalter) both the words and feelings with which we should address our heavenly Father.²

¹ *The Psalms in Worship, 1907*; The United Presbyterian Board of Publication, page 486, 487; Lecture by Rev. T.H. Hanna on Specimens of Eulogies on the Psalms."

² *Ibid.* p.495.

John Calvin, on the other hand, championed exclusive Psalm singing in the Reformed churches. He too expressed reverence for the Psalter.

*Wherefore, although we look far and wide and search on every hand, we shall not find better songs nor songs better suited to that end than the Psalms of David which the Holy Spirit made and uttered through him. And for this reason, when we sing them we may be certain that God puts the words, in our mouths as if Himself sang in us to exalt His glory.*³

In this pamphlet it is our purpose to set forth three propositions which we hold to be true. First, we like to show that from the time when the first Psalm was written by Moses to the present, there has always been a segment of the church that sang these Psalms exclusively in their worship services. Second, that such Psalm singing is a Reformed heritage, rooted in the desire to be faithful to the Holy Scripture, also in our singing. Finally, we like to show that there is a great spiritual blessing in the singing of the Psalms. If your church is a Psalm-singing church, it is our prayer that by reflecting upon its significance you may be stimulated to thank God for this heritage and continue to praise God through these Psalms. If your church sings both Psalms and hymns, we encourage you to consider the Psalms, that they are not pushed aside but given a proper place in worship. Finally, if you are not familiar with the Psalms set to music as contained in *The Psalter*⁴, we suggest that you investigate whether your spiritual life and worship would not be enhanced through the use of these Psalms.

THE REFORMATION AND PSALM SINGING

It is a well-known fact that God used the work of Martin Luther and John Calvin to restore the Word of God to its proper place. Who can forget the Diet of Worms, before which Luther was ordered to recant all his writings, and his answer came with such determination, "My heart is captive to the Word of God!" It was authoritative for his belief and every aspect of his life.

It is significant, then, that when the reformers looked for a songbook for the people of God they turned to the Psalms.

That was a book which the Holy Spirit had already prepared for the purpose of singing. In this connection we rejoice in the determination of the reformers to restore congregational singing to the worship service. The apostate Romish church had taken the reading of God's Word from the common folk. Similarly, the singing was left to the "professionals," to the chanting of priests and trained choirs. The reformers recognized that God's people constituted God's choir. Besides this, they were used by God to give the people something to sing about. How their hearts were lifted up when the burden of the guilt of sin was taken away by the blood of Christ, Who was raised for their justification! Not their works formed the basis of justification, but the finished work of Jesus Christ. That was liberty, that freed the soul from the burden of work--

³ John Calvin, *Preface to the Genevan Psalter*.

⁴ *The Psalter*, copyrighted by the United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1912, published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

righteousness and gave the people the motivation to sing. What could better express the heart's desires than the Psalms of David? Those Psalms gave expression to God exactly what they felt in their hearts.

Both Luther and Calvin had a strong commitment to the Word of God. Both stood very close to each other concerning the doctrines taught in the Bible. They differed in the area of the sacraments and in the area of exclusive use of the Psalms in the singing of the congregation in worship. From the very beginning, Calvin saw the need to direct the church toward the singing of Psalms. When he arrived at Geneva in 1537, he and Farel set up the order of worship to include the singing of Psalms. During his forced absence and retreat in Strasbourg, Germany, he came to appreciate the lusty singing of the Psalms by the German folk. He himself began to write versifications of the Psalms along with Marot and Beza. When he returned to Geneva and could begin to implement his idea of proper worship, Psalm singing assumed its proper place. From then on Psalm singing became a Reformed and Presbyterian heritage.

To appreciate the thinking of Calvin on this point, let us allow him to speak for himself. Notice in the following quote how Calvin viewed singing as a reverent act involving the tongue, which should be viewed as common prayer.

*Moreover since the glory of God ought in a measure, to shine in the several parts of our bodies, it is especially fitting that the tongue has been assigned and destined for this task, both through singing and through speaking. For it was peculiarly created to tell and proclaim the praise of God. But the chief use of the tongue is in public prayers, which are offered in the assembly of believers, by which it comes about that with **one common voice** as it were (emphasis J.K.), with the same mouth, we all glorify God together worshipping him with one spirit and the same faith.⁵*

Since singing is a joyful expression, he also cautions us that that joy must be sanctified by the Word.

It is not without reason that the Holy Spirit exhorts us so carefully by means of the Holy Scripture to rejoice in God and that all our joy is there reduced to its true end, for He knows how much we are inclined to delight in vanity. Just as our nature, then, draws us and induces us to seek all means of foolish and vicious rejoicing, so to the contrary, our Lord, to distract us and withdraw us from the enticements of the flesh and the world, presents to us all possible means (the Word of God, JK.) in order to occupy us in that spiritual joy which He so much recommends to us.⁶

This applies to the melody of our songs. On this he writes,

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, chapter 20, section 31.

⁶ John Calvin, *Preface to the Genevan Psalter*.

Yet, we should be very careful that our ears be not more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual meaning of the words. Augustine also admits in another place that he was so disturbed by this danger that he sometimes wished to see established the custom observed by Athanasius, who ordered the reader to use so little inflection of the voice that he would sound more like a speaker than a singer. But when he recalled how much benefit singing had brought him, he inclined to the other side. Therefore, when this moderation is maintained, it is without any doubt a most holy and salutary practice. On the other hand, such songs as have been composed only for sweetness and delight of the ear are unbecoming to the majesty of the church and cannot but displease God in the highest degree.⁷

It certainly is consistent with such a reverential approach to the singing of God's people in worship that Calvin sought to limit the expression to the Psalms. Even though the Psalms had to be versified in order to be sung, and music had to be prepared for the singing, Calvin repeated over and over that Psalms were God's songs for such singing.

Now what Saint Augustine says is true, that no one is able to sing things worthy of God unless he has received them from Him. wherefore, when we have looked thoroughly everywhere and searched high and low, we shall find no better songs nor more appropriate to the purpose than the Psalms of David which the Holy Spirit made and spoke through him. And when we sing them, we are certain that God puts the words in our mouths, as if He Himself were singing in us to exalt His glory.⁸

PSALM SINGING THROUGHOUT HISTORY

We must be careful to put Calvin's concern for Psalm singing into historical perspective. John Calvin did not begin something new when he introduced exclusive Psalm singing during worship. If that were true, we might have occasion to raise our eyebrows. The singing of Psalms already then had a long, glorious history.

The Old Testament Psalms were written for the purpose of singing. The title to the Psalms is, "Book of Praises." The notation "Selah," written throughout the Psalms, is a musical indicator. Already in II Samuel 6:5 reference is made to the playing of musical instruments in connection with the moving of the ark to Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat, as he led his army to battle, sang Psalms (II Chron. 20:21). Later the Prophet Isaiah spoke of singing in connection with a holy solemnity (Is. 30:29). Ezekiel had singers in the inner court of the temple (Eze. 40:44). All of them sang the Psalms.

As far as we know, there was no singing in the synagogue; at least there is no reference to this in Scripture. Our Lord Jesus sang a Psalm in connection with the last Passover (Matt. 26:30). This "hymn" was the great Hallel, "Praise God," from Psalms 113-118. The author to the Hebrews expresses, "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee," a reference to congregational singing. Part of the abuse in the church of Corinth was that "each has a Psalm" (I

⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, chapter 20, section 32.

⁸ John Calvin, *Epistle to the Reader*, June 1543.

Cor. 16:16). Instead of waiting for the orderly singing of the congregation, the spirit-filled Christians began to sing Psalms on their own. The church was commanded to "sing Psalms" (Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16). These passages contain instructions given to the church as to how they are to admonish one another in worship. The Christian is instructed in James 5:13, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray, Is any merry? let him sing Psalms." A recorded instance of this is found in Acts 16:25 when the bruised and beaten Paul and Silas sang Psalms in the prison.

This same tradition was carried over to the post-apostolic period of the early church. Dr. Phillip Schaff, in his *History of the Christian Church*⁹, makes the point that during this period there were no hymns in the church, only Psalms. Drawing from the excellent article on Psalmody from the McClintock and Strong Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Cyclopaedia¹⁰, we learn that Chrysostom, the church father of the fourth century, in his sixth homily on Repentance, extolled the Psalms above the rest of Scripture to be sung by all classes of men, at all places, and on all occasions. During this same period, the heretics introduced the singing of hymns into the churches. The Gnostics, the Arians, and the Donatists all began to introduce songs other than the Psalms. This led to the decision of the Council of Laodicea in A.D. 360 to make a decision forbidding the use of hymns in the churches. During the long period of the Dark Ages, from the fifth to the sixteenth century, Psalm singing was preserved in the monasteries, while chanting was introduced into the worship services. Wycliffe and Huss, the morning stars of the Reformation, re-introduced into the churches the singing of Psalms.

During the post-reformation period, Psalm singing took hold and spread like wildfire throughout all of Europe: France, Switzerland, Germany, England, Netherlands, Scotland. Psalm singing is not a Dutch heritage alone. The churches of Presbyterian heritage also became exclusively Psalm-singing churches. This heritage they took with them to America, and under the direction of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church of North America, two conventions were held in 1905, the first in Pittsburgh and the second in Chicago, to promote Psalm singing in worship. The book, *The Psalms in Worship*¹¹, is a compilation of lectures given at these conventions in which all aspects of Psalm singing are treated. This is the most exhaustive and thorough treatment of this subject. The same thing was true of the Dutch churches. Psalm singing was championed in the Netherlands. Petrus Datheen, along with others, composed many of the Psalm versifications. Many variations of music and words appeared, and from these the well-known Psalm Book was composed. The Synod of Dordt in 1618-19 included Article 69 of the Church Order in which only the 150 Psalms of David could be sung in the churches -- though there was a concession¹² that a few other songs, e.g., the morning and evening hymn, the 10 commandments, Songs of Mary, Zacharias, etc. might be included. After

⁹ Phillip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. I, p.463

¹⁰ McClintock and Strong, *Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Cyclopaedia*, Vol.8, page 735.

¹¹ *The Psalms In Worship*, see above.

¹² Viewpoint expressed by Rev. D. Engelsma in an excellent series of articles on Music In the Church" published in the *Beacon Lights*, a magazine for Protestant Reformed youth, February, March, April, 1983.

that, the desire to maintain the exclusive use of the Psalms for worship without including hymns became the occasion for controversy. Among other issues, exclusive Psalm singing was maintained by the leaders of the Afscheiding of 1834 when they separated from the state church in the Netherlands. Similarly, in America it was included in the formation of the Christian Reformed Church from the Reformed Church of America. The RCA allowed the singing of hymns during worship, which the CRC did not want. Those Reformed and Presbyterian churches that still maintain exclusive Psalm singing during worship are certainly in good company and possess a goodly heritage.

THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE FOR WORSHIP

Let us now ask why it is the position of the Reformed churches to limit the songs of worship to the Psalms. In dealing with this we should emphasize that it is not the Reformed position that the use of hymns is wrong. Hymns written by God-fearing people throughout the ages have been a great blessing to God's people. We do well to know the good hymns and enjoy them in our homes and schools. The issue of *worship* and the use of songs in worship is a different one. It is a historical fact that John Calvin expressed his concern for proper worship over against the terrible abuse by the church of his day. Recall that these were the days when cathedrals were built and such an emphasis was placed on outward adornment that little effort was expended upon the spiritual welfare of God's people. Outward pomp characterized the services themselves. Elaborate liturgy, meticulous details for the sacraments, ornate vestments for the priests, all marked the services as show pieces. The philosophy of Scholasticism influenced the thinking of the leaders so that what the people heard did not reach their hearts. At best, it challenged their minds. As we indicated before, the singing was taken away from God's people and given to choirs of trained voices who could give expression to Gregorian chants. Festive organs graced the edifices, and emphasis fell upon outward style rather than worshipful response. No wonder then that the reformers had to find some direction, some foundation upon which to determine truth and error. This foundation became the Word of God. They realized that the details of worship must not be determined by what people like, not by style or popularly accepted modes, but by what God wants for Himself as His people worship Him. God reveals Himself to us in His Word as the sovereign God, creator and sustainer of the universe. He is holy in all His ways. When He speaks He calls the entire earth to keep silence. His justice and mercy kissed each other in the Person of His Son as He died upon the cross of Calvary. He rules the world by His almighty power and governs His church by His Word and Spirit. Worship of so great a God must give Him the glory due His Name. John Calvin struggled his whole life to spell out for us how this is to be done. All worship must praise the Almighty Sovereign while at the same time being beneficial to His people. Proper worship must glorify and edify His people.

To accomplish this, the regulative principle of the Word must apply. Just as the Word of God determines for us our faith (we believe what God has revealed to us in His Word), so it determines for us our Christian conduct as to how we are to serve God and keep His commandments. It also must determine for us how we are to worship God. The Word of God regulates the details of worship. This is beautifully expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

In light of nature sheweth that there is a God who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised) called upon, trusted in and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But that acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.¹³

We find a similar expression in the Heidelberg Catechism in connection with the second commandment.

*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 us in His word.**¹⁴*

The point that we want to make now is this: the Word of God does make plain that the songs to be sung in the worship of Jehovah are to be the songs which the Holy Spirit gave to us, namely the Psalms. If we are to regulate the singing of God's people by the Word of God, we will make use of those songs which God has provided for us, and which were sung by the church from the very beginning.

[EPHESIANS 5:19](#) and [COLOSSIANS 3:16](#) HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS

God instructed the church of the Old Testament to make use of His Psalms. "Then on that day David delivered first this Psalm, to thank the Lord, into the hand of Asaph and his brethren. "Give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works" (I Chron. 16:7-9). Christ led His disciples in singing Psalms at the Passover (Matt. 26:30). Paul instructed the New Testament church to sing Psalms (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16).

We should say a few things about the passages in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. They are somewhat similar. "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 to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). Both of these passages were delivered to the churches and not just to individual Christians. In Ephesians the contrast is given between the drunken feasts of idol worship and the gathering of God's people for worship. Rather than drunken babbling, the Word exhorts His people to sing in the Spirit. Similarly, in Colossians, the immediately preceding verse deals with the reminder that they are "called in one body," a reference to their relationship to one another in the church. The Word of Christ mentioned in verse 16 is the Word preached unto them. By singing Psalms they will also be able to teach and admonish one another as the Word of Christ dwells in them. As a church, as well as individual Christians, they are to make use of the Psalms in their singing.

¹³ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 21, section 1.

¹⁴ *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 35, q. 96.

You could ask, do not these passages of Scripture teach the opposite? In both texts mention is made of, "Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." In trying to understand what is referred to by this threefold description, we learn that there has been and is much controversy and difference of interpretation. These differences can be broken down into three groups. First, there are those who teach that three different *subjects* are intended (the view of Jerome and other church fathers): Psalms deal with subjects of an ethical nature; hymns deal with the subject of God's divine majesty; spiritual songs are concerned with nature and the world. Others suggest that three different *forms* are intended (the view of Augustine and Hilary): Psalms are to be chanted with music; hymns are for the voice alone; and spiritual songs are to be shouted with short bursts. Finally, there are those who suggest that three different *sources* are intended (the view of Beza and Grotius): Psalms are Old Testament collections; hymns are collections of various songs such as Song of Mary and Song of Zacharias; and spiritual songs are premeditated compositions prepared for singing.

We consider this threefold description as referring to the Psalms of David. All three (Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs) are designations of the Psalter. We present five considerations. First, if Paul and the Holy Spirit had in mind different kinds of songs other than the Psalms, what songs did He have in mind? It is a historical fact that none existed. The so-called Songs of Mary, etc., did not exist as songs at this period of history; they became songs much later. It is sheer speculation that part of Paul's epistles were considered odes or songs and that these were intended. Second, the suggestion that Paul was not referring to existing songs, but that he was instructing the church to write them and that this is implied and intended is again doing violence to the scriptures. His burden is to instruct the church to do something *now*, make use of the songs they already have, use the Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as edification and admonition. Third, the word translated "hymn" is used in another passage in the New Testament, Matthew 26:30, where there is no controversy at all but that the hymn that Jesus sang with His disciples at the last Passover was the "hallel" of Psalms 113-118. Fourth, the designation "spiritual songs" is not a reference to some inspired songs in a general way, but very literally Holy Spirit inspired songs. This is the position taken by authorities in Greek such as Thayer, Cremer, and Robertson. What songs did the Holy Spirit give the church? There is only one answer: the Psalms. Finally, the Greek scrolls which were available in the days of Christ and the apostles were known as the Septuagint Bible, the Old Testament Hebrew translated into Greek. This Bible has different headings above each Psalm. (By the way, these headings were not part of the inspired Bible, but were designations added, yet recognized by the early church.) Some Psalms have "Psalms" written above them. In fact, 67 have such a designation. Six have "hymns" written above them, and 35 have "spiritual song" written over them. Some have more than one such designation or combinations.

Why they had such designations and why certain Psalms have different ones is difficult to determine. It is generally understood that "Psalms" is the broadest category and are reflective, expressing God's greatness and our response; "hymns" lift up the souls of God's people in praise to Him; "spiritual songs" articulate what God means to us in all areas of our lives.

Under the regulative principle of the Word of God guiding us in all areas of our lives, including worship, the Reformed churches follow the example of the early church to make use of the Psalms as God has intended. As Colossians 3:16 indicates, singing such Psalms teaches and admonishes, for they are songs which God has given His church for that very purpose.

THE ADEQUACY OF THE PSALMS

From time to time the question is raised as to the adequacy of the Psalms for the New Testament church. Is perhaps the Old Testament view of God different from the New Testament? This is the position taken by the hymn writer Isaac Watts, who gave us such hymns as "Joy to the World" and "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." His view of the Old Testament God cautions us concerning the use of hymns. Speaking of the Psalms he writes,

*Some of them are almost opposite the spirit of the gospel. There are a thousand lines in the Book of Psalms which were not made for a church in our day to assume as its own. I should rejoice to see David converted into a Christian. There are many hundred verses in the Book of Psalms which a Christian cannot properly assume in singing. Psalms 13, 16, 36, 68, 69, and 109 are so full of cursings that they hardly become a follower of the blessed Jesus. (**The Psalms In Worship**, p.472, index p.570.)*

No, the Psalms reveal to us the one true God, surely in His fiery wrath against the workers of iniquity, yet also in His grace and mercy as the God of our salvation.

Does the Old Testament give a view of Christ that the New Testament church cannot appreciate or is inadequate? This is perhaps the most common charge brought against the use of the Psalms today. Yet, if we study the Psalms carefully we find quite a different picture. The Holy Spirit was correct when He through Paul reminded the church that by singing Psalms, "the Word of Christ dwells in us" (Col. 3:16). Christ Himself made great use of the Psalms, impressing upon His disciples that the Psalms spoke of Him: "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24:44). The Psalms did speak concerning Christ. Think of those which spoke directly to Him --e.g., Psalm 22 and 110. Some spoke typically of Him -- e.g., Psalm 16, 18, 21, 61, 72, 118. His offices were explained: prophet (Ps. 22), priest (Ps. 110), and king (Ps. 2). Details of His ministry were indicated: His eternity (Ps. 90), His incarnation (Ps. 40 and 22), His rejection (Ps. 22), His triumphal entry (Ps. 8 and 118), His being beaten (Ps. 41), His cross (Ps. 22), His dying words (Ps. 31), His resurrection (Ps. 60), His ascension (Ps. 16), His return in judgment (Ps. 50, 72, 98). The prophetic character of these Psalms does not make them inadequate for the New Testament church. Frequently they were written from the viewpoint of Christ's work as already finished, and always they lift the church beyond the earthly ministry of Christ to His majestic return at the end of the world when His kingdom shall be established forever. Even in heaven we will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15:3).

One more point as far as the adequacy of the use of the Psalms is concerned. The Holy Spirit worked in the lives of the authors of the Psalms in such a way that they expressed their inner longing, their grief over sin, their cry for forgiveness, their hope in God. Surely, if worship is for praise and edification, the Psalms give God His due, for they present God to us, not from the subjective, emotional, even unreliable experience that God's people may have in their dealings with God, but rather, the Psalms extol the one true God, and cause us to fall on our knees in repentance and praise. Similarly, they express deep feelings on behalf of God's people. But these emotions of worship are not those of mere men, grappling with the Divine Being; they are true emotions that flow from a proper encounter with God. We identify with the grief, the heartache, the burden which the Psalmist expresses in the Psalms. These are true and correct for they have their origin in God, not man. Through such cries for need, we are lifted up to Jehovah, to view His mercy in Christ, His forgiving love that did not cancel out His justice, but satisfied it in the Person of His own Son. The cries of the children of God blend with the groans of the Son of God which rise unto the ears of the Lord of Hosts. He knows and He delivers. He is the Sovereign God of our salvation.

Do we limit the work of the Holy Spirit if we limit ourselves to singing the Psalms? Granted that the Holy Spirit inspired the Psalms, does this mean that the Holy Spirit cannot use other people to compose proper songs for the church to sing? These songs may be of different kinds. Indeed, gifted men have written spiritually edifying songs about the Christian experience which extol God. Others have written songs, or if you will, set to music passages of the Holy Scripture. Is there not a place to make use of these in the worship services? In answering this question, we must recognize that the songs we sing, the versifications of the Psalms as, e.g., in *The Psalter* are not themselves inspired. There is a long and interesting history as to Psalm tunes, versifications written by the reformers themselves and by others throughout the history of the church. Some of these are well done, others poorly done. In this area there is room for constant improvement and re-evaluation. The point is this, can we not add to the Psalms other themes and passages of Scripture? Admittedly, the idea of adding other Scripture passages set to music has much appeal. This is a very limited application of the idea of introducing "hymns" into the church. Could we not limit ourselves to Scripture, whether Old or New Testament? In dealing with this, we must approach it from the viewpoint that we limit the work of the Holy Spirit. Surely, He is able to give the church gifted men and able to guide them in the production. Yet, the question is more basic: has not the Holy Spirit given to us such a book already, the Psalms, and should we not consider this adequate? If the Spirit saw the need for a New Testament book of praise, He could have given that to us as He did with the Psalms. The fact is that He did not. We must not be wiser than God. If we are going to be bound by the regulative principle of the Word of God, limiting our worship to what God has given us, we do well to consider the adequacy of the Psalms for such worship.

THE BENEFITS OF PSALM SINGING

In closing, let us reflect in thankfulness for God's gift to the church of His Psalms. Let us also reflect with thankfulness that God used the reformers to return Psalm singing to the churches. What a blessing such singing is. Page through *The Psalter* and reflect upon the spiritual depths

of these songs. What a treasure! Personally, I find it so encouraging when believers who have not a background of Psalm singing are introduced to singing the Psalms as they worship with us and their reaction is not of despair because they have to give up the hymns which they are accustomed to sing, but rather they become very appreciative of them and become the strongest advocates for maintaining the Psalms in worship. We do well to caution ourselves that our familiarity with the beloved Psalms does not cause us or our children to become indifferent to such a goodly heritage. Rather let us count our blessings that we still have such meaningful songs in our worship. Truly, let us sing these Psalms with enthusiasm and praise. Let us not limit our Psalm singing to the church service. The more we sing them in our homes and schools the more familiar they are to our children. And children love to sing songs they know. The word of the Holy Spirit through James still holds true: "Is any happy? Let him sing psalms" (Jas. 5:13).

If God has raised up among us people gifted in music and able to evaluate the accuracy of versification and correctness of melody, there is room for such improvement. If we desire to learn new tunes for old songs, that too can be done, only it must be done with care. Our Dutch forefathers loved their Dutch Psalms. Many aged saints still sing them in the night watches and on their death bed. We too have beautiful Psalms in our English language, and they have become part of our spiritual life that we do not want to lose. Heritage must not be confused with tradition. Traditionalists hold onto the past just because they refuse all change. If we see Psalm singing as a heritage, we hold onto Psalm singing as a divine mandate, but recognize that it too must be adapted to the singing of each generation. In this way we hold a healthy appreciation for the work of the Spirit.

Let's sing with greater enthusiasm, "My steadfast heart O God, will sound Thy praise abroad with tuneful string. The dawn shall hear my song, Thy praise I will prolong, and where Thy people throng, thanksgiving bring" (*Psalter*, 298).

May God bless us as we use His Psalms to His glory.