

IN RESPONSE - A RATIONALE FOR EXCLUSIVE PSALMODY, PART 1

by Dennis Prutow

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A candidate for licensure examined by the Midwest Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church asked an incisive question regarding exclusive psalmody. As I recall, the query went something like this: What is it in moving from the speaking voice to the singing voice that requires the use of prescribed songs?

I say this is an incisive question because it strikes at a contemporary criticism of exclusive psalmody. Why can't I use my songs? It also asks the appropriate question of Colossians 3:16. Paul draws a distinction between the spoken word in worship which must be Scriptural and our singing in public worship which must be Scripture, specifically the Psalms. The agonizing question is Why? What is it that makes the difference.

The answer has to do with our makeup as human beings and how we best learn the truth of God. Beyond doubt, singing is an important part of our worship. We take for granted that singing is a way to reinforce and bring home the truth of God. As we shall see, there is a specific rationale involved here. I propose to answer the question before us in two parts. First we look at our basic makeup from a biblical perspective. In this we look at the primary gateway to the human heart. Second, we look at how singing affects us. The music we sing should complement the spoken word.

To begin our discussion, we look at the biblical definition of the heart. The human heart is not simply the organ in our bodies pumping blood to the various extremities. Biblically speaking, the heart involves the mind, emotions, and will. Proverbs 23:7 warns us against a selfish man and says, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." The heart includes the mind. The heart also involves the emotions. The Bible speaks many times of the glad heart and of sorrow and sadness of heart. Finally, the heart includes the will. The Bible speaks of the willing heart and mind. The heart is the "center and source of the whole inner life, with its thinking, feeling, and volition" (Arndt and Gingrich, p. 404).

It is important for us to see this. When the heart is renewed, this means the mind, emotions, and will are deeply affected.

God illumines our minds. He bridles our emotions. He directs our wills. This is the import of effectual calling as expounded in Question and Answer 31 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Question: What is effectual calling?

Answer: Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the gospel.

When God enlightens our minds, we see the beauty of Christ and His work on behalf of sinners. When the Holy Spirit convinces us of our sin and misery, we have a deep sense of guilt and helplessness. Both our mind and emotions are brought into play. Finally, when the Spirit renews our wills, we not only assent to the gospel, we actually turn to Christ and embrace Him as the new Lord and Master of our lives.

Now the question comes. What is the appropriate entrance into the human heart? Do we gain entrance into the human heart by way of the mind, emotions, or will? The gospel comes to us first of all as a message. Jesus Christ is the Word of God. The primary means by which God designed the message to be transmitted was through a book we call the Bible and through explanations of this book we call preaching. The written and spoken word is first of all directed to the mind, the thinking apparatus. We come to know God first of all by understanding the message about Him. This is cognitive rather than emotive.

Romans 12:1 is instructive here.

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your *spiritual* service of worship" (italics added).

The word translated spiritual in the New American Standard Version is rendered reasonable in the Authorized Version.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your *reasonable* service (italics added).

The word in the original Greek language is λογικῆν, logical. The difference in translations may be understood this way. The supremely rational and logical is the spiritual.

This does not mean the emotions do not come into play. When we understand the message of sin and the significance of the savior, suddenly we *feel* very guilty. We have a deep *sense* of helplessness. As the Holy Spirit applies the *message* to our hearts, the *message* affects our *emotions*. We see our need of action. The Spirit must then renew our wills. Without this final step of renewal, we walk away from what we know and feel is correct (Romans 8:7). The Spirit must change our hostile dispositions. This is the root of new birth. When the Spirit renews the will, removing resident enmity, we embrace Christ unto salvation.

The point I am making is that the primary place of entrance into the human heart is the mind not the emotions. We often attempt to enter the heart by way of the emotions. However, decisions made in the heat of emotion are often regretted. Attempting to enter the heart through the emotions results in considerable cognitive dissonance. We are torn between feelings and proper knowledge.

Many well meaning evangelists attempt to wrench human hearts emotionally in an effort to turn men and women from their wicked ways to Christ. Charles Finney's anxious bench is the classic example.

Churches use music in this way. Music prepares the heart. How? Emotionally? Do we not rely upon the Holy Spirit to do His work? I fear we do not really trust the Spirit to do the work He promised to do. We would rather stir emotions than faithfully labor at the arduous task of expounding the Word of God. We then have a sense of power.

Having established the priority of the mind in entering the heart, how does this principle impinge upon worship?

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IN RESPONSE - A RATIONALE FOR EXCLUSIVE PSALMODY, PART 2

by Dennis Prutow

We have seen an argument for the priority of the intellect in knowing God. The primary gateway to the heart is the mind not the emotions. Music, by its very nature, is very emotional. We are all familiar with so-called mood music. Certain types of music and instrumentation are particularly emotional. The pipe organ and bagpipes come to mind. The music coming from these instruments can lift our emotions or bring us to tears. A pragmatic argument for a cappella singing takes the emotionally driving force of music seriously. It says we ought not to be stirred up for worship by instruments. The power of worship is the indwelling Spirit. Our hearts are the instruments.

Here is the main question we are attempting to address. *What is it in moving from the speaking voice to the singing voice that requires the use of prescribed songs?* The primary thrust of music is toward the emotions. Music is meant to impact our hearts emotionally. Certain melodies, harmonies, and dissonant chords send messages to our hearts through our emotions. There are triumphant tunes and compositions that evoke fear, even terror. The complete range of emotions can be registered with musical notes. Properly understood, this is good. Improperly utilized, eternally evil consequences can result.

Several years ago, while serving in another denomination, I entered the church building one Lord's Day morning to a serious question. "Did you go to the combined band concert in the shopping center yesterday?" This was a concert given by the combined bands of two city high schools. A telling comment followed. "Why it was almost a religious experience." This mother of one of the band members realized what she had said, blushed, and went on her way.

For this person, the concert was a deeply moving *experience* bordering on the religious. Dr. Robert Godfrey carries the thought further. He tells us music is the new sacrament. This is the place where people meet God. For this reason, musical instruments have center stage in many churches. Where there once was a communion table and baptismal font we now find drums, guitar and synthesizer along with the piano and organ.

Is music the new sacrament? My wife and I had the privilege of attending an annual conference of the National Association of Evangelicals in Dallas, Texas. The worship leader was a professional musician. Apparently pastors and elders called of God are not adequately qualified to lead in worship in such circumstances. I agree, I'm a little sarcastic here. Along with much fine entertainment, the piano or synthesizer was also played softly during times of prayer. Why? I am told the music assists our prayers. I cringe. Isn't Jesus Christ the only intercessor we need? Surely His assistance is sufficient!

The point I'm trying to make is simple. Music drives us. Music drives us emotionally. However, the primary doorway to the heart used by God is the mind, the mind grasping the message of Christ. Through this gateway the entire heart is then affected, mind, emotions and will.

Those of us who worship with a cappella singing, cannot do so without music. To be sure, it is a different type of music. It is music produced only by the human voice. This music should flow from the heart and be empowered by the Spirit. It is also music utilizing the Word of God. We argue this music uses only the songs and hymns of the Old Testament Psalter.

What is it in moving from the speaking voice to the singing voice that requires the use of prescribed songs? It is the emotions. We are sinful human beings. Our emotions are warped and easily manipulated. Emotions ought not to lead us. Yet in worship we too often place feeling first.

There are two sides to this coin. First, if we do not experience the euphoric high generated by an emotional response to particular types of music, we do not think we are engaging in worship. To temper our emotions and cause us to contemplate the message more thoroughly, we are given prescribed songs to sing. When we do not follow the divine principle here, we are in danger of placing our emotions at the forefront of our worship. This should not be the case. When we move from the speaking voice to the singing voice the emotional swing can call us to action without thought. To witness this, go to any so-called Christian rock con-

cert. It differs little from an emotion packed athletic event.

Great emotional impact in a song does indeed come from the music. However, I maintain the music should complement the message. When we sing of the glories of God we should employ stately and majestic tunes. The words of the song then guide the music. Because of our emotional makeup, we should utilize the songs, words, provided by God. This will do two things. First, it will properly bridle our emotions. We will not be driven by the music but by the words we sing. The words of the song will temper the music. Second, our emotions will be disciplined and trained by the Word of God. We must literally learn to feel the proper things at the proper times. Psalm singing can help train our emotions.

The second side of the coin is just as important. Because of our emotional makeup, we simply do not like to sing about certain subjects. We are uncomfortable singing about the judgments of God. We are fearful of singing prayers which call down God's wrath against his and our enemies. The Psalms are filled with these themes. If we had it our way, we would exclude the fear of the Lord from the Psalter's vocabulary and sing only of God's love and grace. We also do not find it terribly edifying to sing history. Again the Psalms rehearse the history of Israel and the great deeds of God on behalf of His people. Then too, we are lazy. We don't want to learn new tunes or new songs. This is especially true when they challenge our thinking. But this is the whole point. It is our thinking that must be challenged and stimulated. If we neglect the themes of judgment in our singing, we have a truncated view of God and His grace. Our emotions are not properly trained to harmonize with the justice of God. Sanctification is stunted. These are good reasons, it seems to me, to understand the need for singing only prescribed songs in worship.

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IN RESPONSE - ROMANS 8:6-8 & HUMAN INABILITY

by Dennis Prutow

It is not my intention to do a full exposition of Romans 8:6-8¹ but to dwell on the meaning of Paul's phrase translated in the New American Standard Version "the mind set on the flesh."

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so and those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:6-8).

The word translated *mind* is not the normal word for mind which often refers to the thinking apparatus. The word *mind*, φρόνημα, refers to the way of thinking or mind-set. It refers to our *aims, aspirations* and *strivings*.² We can think of this mind-set as the disposition of the mind or the inclination of the mind.

Genesis 6:5 says, "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."³ The problem with fallen human beings is their ugly dispositions. Here is how the New International Version puts Genesis 6:5, "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." In other words, the ugly disposition inclines fallen humanity toward evil all the time. Even outwardly good things are done for bad reasons with evil intent.

We might therefore translate Romans 8:6-8 using the term disposition.

The disposition of the flesh is death, but the disposition of the Spirit is life and peace, because the disposition of the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so and those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Romans 8:6-8).

We are keying in the effects of the fall on the human mind. The fact we have minds is part of the image of God in us which remains. The image of God in the broad sense includes our being rational, spiritual and moral creatures. This portion of God's image is defaced. It is not effaced or eradicated. We continue to have minds. We continue to be spiritual beings; we have souls. We continue to have a moral sense; we still have consciences.

The image of God in the narrow sense involves righteousness, holiness and true knowledge. Paul exhorts, "Put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Ephesians 4:24). The parallel is in Colossians 3:10, "Put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him." Fallen human beings no longer possess true knowledge, righteousness and holiness.

So why can't fallen people please God? It's their ugly dispositions. Their minds are innately hostile toward God. Does their thinking apparatus still function. Absolutely! Fallen human beings are not without minds. They remain rational creatures. They can construct rocket ships to go to the moon. They can split atoms and understand the function of sub-atomic particles. Unbelievers can read and comprehend books like the Bible. They can also have a very comprehensive *formal* understanding of the Bible. This is so because they can grasp the meanings of words, master the grammar, and follow the arguments of Scripture. The problem is not a lack of natural ability to read or hear and then comprehend. The problem is moral. Unbelievers are hostile toward God. They are ill-disposed to heed the overtures of the gospel. They are disinclined to answer the appeals of Christ.

The Puritans were fond of making a similar distinction. They too spoke of natural ability and moral inability. By this they meant fallen human beings have the natural faculties needed to come to Christ but they absolutely will not use them to come to Christ because they are ill disposed, *morally* unable. Many modern Calvinists insist this is incipient Arminianism. They blame Jonathan Edwards for the outcome they see in Charles Finney. However, Finney taught fallen sinners have both natural ability *and* moral ability.

There is more than a modicum of truth in the Puritan position if we rightly understand the effects of the fall. The image of God in the narrow sense is effaced, eradicated. The image of God in the broad sense is defaced, damaged; yet it remains. On the other hand, speaking of Jonathan Edwards, John Gerstner moderates Edwards' distinction between natural ability and moral inability.

His doctrine of the fall and the complete obliteration of the moral image in man means that that inclination to virtue has been totally erased. That is the same thing as to say man no longer has any natural ability to incline toward God.⁴

Understanding Romans 8:6-8 in light of what we have said is of utmost importance for our evangelism. I have heard individuals say, "There is no sense giving that unbeliever a Bible; he can't understand it anyway." This is the death of evangelism. Unbelievers still have the ability to read and *formally* understand the Bible. It is important they do so. Our prayer should be for the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit to change their hostile dispositions and thus enable them to embrace the Christ of the Bible. God grant us grace in this important work.

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¹ Here is the Greek text of Romans 8:6-8. τὸ γὰρ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς θάνατος, τὸ δὲ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήνη· διότι τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς θεόν, τῷ γὰρ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐχ ὑποτάσσεται, οὐδὲ γὰρ δύναται· οἱ δὲ ἐν σαρκὶ ὄντες θεῷ ἀρέσαι οὐ δύνανται.

² Arndt & Gingrich, p. 847

³ The Greek word referring to the *intent of the thoughts* and used in the Septuagint is διανοεῖται. It refers to the kind of thinking a person does and to the disposition (Arndt & Gingrich, p. 186). Here is the Greek: ἰδὼν δὲ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ἐπληθύνθησαν αἱ κακίαι τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ πᾶς τις διανοεῖται ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ ἐπιμελῶς ἐπὶ τὰ ποιηρὰ πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας

⁴ John Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Orlando: Ligonier Ministries, 1992) vol. II, p. 357.

IN RESPONSE - REVELATION 12 & THE BIRTH OF CHRIST, PART 3

by Dennis Prutow

Jesus Christ came into the world, lived a perfect life, died on behalf of undeserving sinners, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, took His place on the throne of God, and rules as King of kings and Lord of Lords. In all of this Christ plundered the devil's domain and took a host of captives for His own kingdom. This defeat of the devil is symbolized in Revelation by his being cast down to the earth. The earth in Revelation represents the domain of Satan. Theologically, it is the world, all that is opposed to God. Revelation 12:13 goes on to say,

And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child.

In defeat, the devil turns in rage against the church of God. This is the story of the church throughout the present age. Persecution waxes strong and then wanes. When persecution comes, the church flourishes. God always protects and sustains His people.

But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent (Revelation 12:14).

The place of safety for the people of God is under His mighty wings. Psalm 17:8 pleads, "Keep me as the apple of the eye; Hide me in the shadow of Your wings." And Psalm 91:4 promises, "He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark." Christ uses the same imagery when He laments the unfaithfulness of Israel.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling (Matthew 23:37).

So the church is protected and nourished by the Father.

This protection and nourishment persists throughout the present age. The time frame given in verse 14 is taken from Daniel 7:25, "a time and times and half a time." It is the same period mentioned in

verse 6 as "one thousand two hundred and sixty days." This is also the period during which the two witnesses of Revelation 11:3 prophesy. In Revelation 11:2 this period is given as forty-two months, the time of the trampling of the holy city. Finally, this is the period of the ascendancy of the beast in Revelation 13.

We do not take these numbers literally but symbolically. The number of days means the days of wilderness wandering for the church are numbered. The forty-two months refer to the relative shortness of the time of our wilderness wandering. The three and one-half years also refer to the relative shortness of this time. This is one-half of seven. The persecution of the church does not come to completion. The church remains. Calamity is cut off suddenly by the return of Christ. The dragon knows his time is short, verse 12.

Satan therefore doubles his efforts.

And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood (Revelation 12:15).

The flood of water is a torrent of false doctrine and heresy with which Satan inundates the earth. These are the teachings of the cults which undermine the deity of Christ. They are the false evolutionary suppositions of science. They are the false teachings of philosophy espousing the ultimate goodness of human nature and the ultimacy of the human will.

To too large an extent, these anti-biblical teachings flood the church. Help comes from a strange source.

But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth (Revelation 12:16).

As already stated, the earth represents the world, not physically but spiritually. The world is the domain of Satan, the kingdom of darkness. The world is always ready to swallow the lies of the devil and drink deeply from the fountains of heresy and unbelief. When the world imbibes, this should be a red flag for the church. She is warned not to drink too deeply of the things of this world and become intoxicated. Unfortunately, the church has drunk deeply at the springs of psychology, management and entertain-

ment. Rather than being brokers of truth, seminaries are teaching young pastors to major in management, cling to counseling techniques and learn to entertain their constituents. This is how you build a successful church, by the world's standards. This is the flood coming from the mouth of the dragon.

The final verse in Revelation 12 once again sets before us a vision of Genesis 3:15. God said to the serpent in Eden,

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.

Revelation 12:17 describes the perverse hostility of the dragon.

So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

I say this is perverse hostility because of the way the vision portrays it. The earth helped the woman. Who then suffers under the wrath of the dragon? It should logically be the earth. This is not so. The dragon makes war with the children of the woman. Satan's hostility and animosity toward the church is completely illogical and irrational.

The children of the woman (Revelation 12:17) or the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15) are those "who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus." They love Christ and display this love through obedience. The testimony of Jesus is the gospel of Christ proclaimed by the church. The measure of this gospel is the Word of God (Revelation 11:1). Those "who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" persevere to the end. They are "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). They are recipients of the gospel riding forth to victory (Revelation 6:1-2) They sing with the angels, "Glory to God in the highest" (Luke 2:14).

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