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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt: and in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.

And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, Come near before the LORD: for he hath heard your murmurings. And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God. And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host.

—Exodus 16:4–13

When the Lord Heareth Your Murmurings

The contrast could not be more stark. On one side was Israel. The only thing Israel did was murmur, and the Lord heard Israel's murmurings. "He heareth your murmurings against the LORD" (Ex. 16:7). "What are we, that ye murmur against us?" (v. 7). "The LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him" (v. 8). "Your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD" (v. 8). "For he hath heard your murmurings" (v. 9). "I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel" (v. 12).

What is it to murmur? To murmur is to drink in the Lord's gifts and then to spit them back in the Lord's face. To murmur is the ultimate insult against a benefactor. Instead of overflowing with gratitude for the rich gift bestowed, the recipient laments the gift and curses the giver.

So it was with Israel. She had been delivered from the iron furnace of Egypt. Rich gift! She had been baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea. Rich gift! Her bitter water at Marah had been made sweet. Rich gift! Her feet had rested in the piece of heaven that was Elim. Rich gift! And what did Israel do with all these rich gifts? Instead of overflowing with gratitude, she murmured! She spit God's gifts back in his face. "Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt!" (Ex. 16:3).

Do you see yourself murmuring with Israel? That is the only thing that you do too. It is because our flesh is so carnal and earthly. God's gifts are heavenly, and all his gifts upon the earth serve the heavenly. But we measure the value of God's gifts with an earthly yardstick. Do I have heaven? But my lot in this life is so small! Do I have salvation? But I have so many

sorrows upon this earth! Do I have Christ and all his riches? But I have paid such a heavy price of suffering!

What an ugly thing to behold on Israel's side: man and his murmuring.

But on the other side was God. And what did God do when he heard Israel's murmurings against him? Did he pick up the Red Sea and dump it on them so that they would drown with the Egyptians? Did he lead them into a dead end in the burning wilderness, where they would shrivel up and die? Nothing of the sort! Rather, God did the most unexpected thing. When the Lord heard Israel's murmurings, he fed them! He fed them! Quails in the evening, so that their bellies were pleasantly satisfied with a hot meal. And bread in the morning, so that they would never spend another day hungry.

How wonderful! How unexpected!

But that is God's grace. It is wonderfully unexpected. Grace does not match injury for injury. Grace matches mercy for injury. And grace matches mercy for injury by delivering wave upon wave of grace to his people. Grace does not operate according to small, earthly logic; rather, grace operates according to God's infinite lovingkindness.

Behold God's explanation for feeding murmuring Israel: "and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God" (Ex. 16:12). And behold the blessed demonstration of God's grace to you in Jesus Christ: "and of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16).

—AL

EDITORIAL

But What Does God Require?

Two ministers in the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC)—Rev. Luke Bomers and Rev. Tyler Ophoff—have recently preached sermons against Remnant Reformed Church and Remnant's doctrine of exclusive psalmody.¹ These two ministers sat under the undersigned's preaching; they learned the gospel at my feet; but they have become cruel and ungrateful men. In their recent sermons they have unleashed vicious lies about what exclusive psalmody is and about what Remnant has taught. Their lies are a particularly cruel persecution against God's people because lies set narratives that brand the victims for life. When one's name is cast out as an evil thing by the lies of the oppressors, those lies are the only things that most people will believe about that one.

Nevertheless, Remnant Reformed Church in her congregational prayers prays for the Reformed Protestant Churches, who have persecuted us and despitefully used us. Our prayer is that God will not lay the murder of his church to the charge of his people in the RPC. There are those who simply got caught up in the fray or who were overwhelmed by the speed of the proceedings or who were cowed by the anger of their leaders. These members knew not what they did. May God have mercy upon you in Christ, and his loving-kindness is great toward you! Our prayer is also that God will not forget the murder of his church by those who knew what they did and who have been revealed as God's enemies. "For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish" (Ps. 1:6).

¹ Luke Bomers, "No Graven Images," sermon preached on June 9, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXEhBo8ywyQ>; Tyler Ophoff, "Fellowship in the Gospel," sermon preached on June 2, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P79B3AWxvwM>. All quotes from these ministers are taken from these sermons.

I mention that this is our prayer, but not to boast. Remnant is nothing; God is everything. So great is God's mercy that he has been pleased to take the leftover part that men discard—the remnant—and make of that little nothing a people for himself. “And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage” (Ezra 9:8). Rather, I mention that this is our prayer so that you in the RPC who know that something is amiss in your churches might be assured that we in Remnant love you in the Lord and that there is a place here for you when you, too, shall finally be driven from your homes.

As for what the two ministers preached, all their accusations have been answered—sometimes multiple times—in previous issues of *Reformed Pavilion*. If someone would like specific articles and pages, write in, and I will be happy to provide that information. One might also consult Elder Dewey Engelsma's excellent index at his blog.² In this editorial permit me a few observations and a question. These observations and this question are written especially for those in the RPC who have any sense that something is off in their denomination's position on singing in church.

First Observation

The Reformed Protestant representation of exclusive psalmody is a caricature, a straw man. The two ministers' descriptions of exclusive psalmody do not reflect the actual doctrine. Rather, the two ministers' descriptions of exclusive psalmody deceitfully inject venom into the doctrine, with the result that the minds of God's people are poisoned against it.

For example, Reverend Bomers accuses exclusive psalmody of declaring a portion of God's word to be sin.

And now in exclusive psalmody it was told you that in an aspect of your worship, if you took a portion of God's word, it suddenly became sin. It's a portion of God's word, where God is known and God is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, that now suddenly became sin. Think about that...

But in exclusive psalmody, under the show of wisdom, under a philosophy that was nothing but rooted in the mind, the carnal mind of man that stands at enmity against God, there came the doctrine that you cannot glorify God with a part of his word in worship...But as soon as you call a part of God's word, where he reveals himself in the face of Jesus Christ, sin and idolatry, that's folly.

Reverend Bomers' accusation is a transparent distortion of exclusive psalmody. Exclusive psalmody never declares God's word to be sin. God's word is always holy, just, and good. Rather, exclusive psalmody declares man's will to be sin. When man worships God according to man's will and not God's will, that worship of man is sin. Even when man uses what is good—God's word—but uses it contrary to God's will, man's use of that good thing is sin.

Consider the devil. He quoted God's word to Jesus in the wilderness. What the devil did was sin—not because the word that he quoted was sin but because the devil used it contrary to God's will. The devil was sin, not the word.

Consider Saul. He kept the best sheep and oxen of the Amalekites to sacrifice to God. What Saul did was sin—not because the sacrifice of sheep and oxen was sin but because Saul intended to worship God with those good things contrary to God's will. Saul's will was sin, not the sheep.

Consider even David. He brought the ark out of the house of Abinadab upon a new cart, with psalms filling the air. What David did was sin—not because there was anything wrong with a

² Dewey Engelsma, “Exclusive Psalmody (Index),” *A Strait Betwixt Two* (blog), March 9, 2024, <https://astraitbetwixttwo.com/2024/03/09/exclusive-psalmody-index/>

new cart but because God had commanded the ark to be carried by the Levites with staves. David's will was sin, not the cart.

So also when exclusive psalmody declares that the church is to worship God in her assembly with the psalms only, that is not because exclusive psalmody declares the rest of the word to be sin. Rather, exclusive psalmody declares man's will worship to be sin when man worships God in any other way than God has commanded in his word.

For another example of distorting the doctrine of exclusive psalmody, take Reverend Ophoff's definition of exclusive psalmody:

Let's give a definition once again to exclusive psalmody. Exclusive psalmody is the requirement according to the second commandment that one must obey in order to experience Christ singing with her. You must obey the law, and when you obey that law of the second commandment, then the congregation's voice joins in with Christ's voice. Exclusive psalmody is that requirement of the second commandment that you sing only psalms and that if you don't sing the psalms, then you are committing the dread sin of idolatry, rooted in the second commandment.

That definition is a transparent example of begging the question, poisoning the well, and building a straw man. Reverend Ophoff's personal evaluation of exclusive psalmody is that it is conditional. But instead of demonstrating how exclusive psalmody is conditional, Reverend Ophoff self-servingly builds conditions into his very definition of exclusive psalmody: "one must obey in order to experience Christ singing with her." But that is not exclusive psalmody! That is not how anyone has taught exclusive psalmody: "obey in order to experience."

Even when Reverend Ophoff gets close to defining exclusive psalmody by referring to the second commandment, he leaves out the matter of public, corporate worship.

Over against both Reverend Bomers and Reverend Ophoff, exclusive psalmody is the doctrine that the church in her public worship must sing only psalms, since this is what God requires in his word. Exclusive psalmody is grounded in the second commandment of God's law: that we not worship God "in any other way than He has commanded in His Word" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 96). Exclusive psalmody is also grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ, for he is the sweet psalmist of Israel (II Sam. 23:1); he is the perfect worshiper, who sings in God's house (Ps. 22:22; Heb. 2:12); he is the head, who brings his body with him before the Lord (Ex. 28:15, 21, 29); and he graciously fills his church with his Spirit so that she may overflow with his songs (Eph. 5:18-19).

To those in the RPC who have a sense that something is amiss, you are correct. Your ministers are not dealing honestly with exclusive psalmody. They have built a straw man, called it *exclusive psalmody*, and burned it. But to this day they have not yet actually dealt with exclusive psalmody.

Second Observation

The Reformed Protestant Churches are desperate to make the issue of exclusive psalmody to be an issue of conditional fellowship or conditional experience. For example, Reverend Ophoff's sermon alleges, "They tried to put you under man's law, fabricated in his own heart and their own mind, and said you have fellowship when you sing the psalms."

But no one ever said this. No one ever said, "You have fellowship when you sing the psalms."

The same goes for the RPC's strange reformulation of my teaching. My teaching is that the believer sings with Christ when he sings the psalms. Reverend Ophoff reformulates this as "One must obey in order to experience Christ singing with her."

But no one ever said this. No one ever said, "One must obey in order to experience Christ singing with her."

The issue in exclusive psalmody is not obtaining fellowship or obtaining experience by obeying the law, just as the issue in any commandment of God is not obtaining fellowship or obtaining experience by obeying the law. The law requires that we have no other gods before Jehovah but not in order that we obtain fellowship with God by keeping the law. The law requires that the schools be maintained but not in order that we obtain fellowship with God by keeping the law. Rather, our fellowship is solely and exclusively and only through Jesus Christ and his finished work. Our fellowship is always received by faith, never by works. The law does not give us our fellowship with God in Christ. Rather, the law exposes our sin and shows us the rule of gratitude for the salvation that Christ has perfectly accomplished. The attempt to make exclusive psalmody and the second commandment an issue of obtaining fellowship only confuses the matter.

My preaching and Remnant Reformed Church's doctrine have never made exclusive psalmody a matter of obtaining fellowship either. Much has been made of my statements that when we sing the psalms in church, we are singing with Christ and that if we sing man-made hymns in church, we are not singing with Christ. But those statements are simply patterned after scripture's language about those who are in Christ and who live grateful lives unto God. God's people, who are in Christ, who are redeemed by Christ, and who have fellowship with Christ, do things with Christ. We are dead with Christ, and we shall live with Christ (II Tim. 2:11). We are buried with Christ by baptism into death, and we walk in newness of life with Christ (Rom. 6:4). We are planted together with Christ in the likeness of his death, and we shall be also with Christ in the likeness of his resurrection (v. 5). Our old man is crucified with Christ that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin (v. 6). We are joint-heirs of God with Christ (8:17). We suffer with Christ, and we shall be glorified with Christ (v. 17). We are crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20). We are risen with Christ (Col. 3:1). We are dead with Christ from the

rudiments of the world (2:20). Therefore, let none of you suffer as a murderer, for Christ does not murder. And let none of you suffer as a thief or as an evildoer or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, that is, if any man suffer with Christ, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (I Pet. 4:15–16). And, gloriously, added to all of this that we have and do with Christ, we sing with Christ. Christ is the worshiper. Christ is in the midst of the great congregation. Christ sings to God in the midst of the church as he declares God's name to his brethren. And we sing with him. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Heb. 2:12).

Singing with Christ is not a matter of obtaining fellowship or obtaining experience by keeping a law. Singing with Christ is a matter of gratitude. Christ does not sing man-made hymns in church; so in gratitude, don't sing man-made hymns in church. Christ sings psalms in church; so in gratitude, sing psalms in church.

Even more, singing with Christ is a matter of privilege! It is a gift of deepest grace to sing with Christ! Why such a strained attempt to make the language of singing with Christ to be conditional? Cannot we see that that language drives home the *privilege* of singing psalms? Christ is the sweet psalmist of Israel, who sings psalms in the midst of the great congregation! And—miracle of grace—he gives us the privilege of singing his songs with him! What an empty exercise to try to twist that language into conditions, as if it means that we must obey a law in order to make God beholden to give us some fellowship and experience. It is much better to let that language stand in all its wonder as conveying the unspeakable privilege of grace that it is to sing Jesus' songs with him in the great congregation. God is not beholden to us for our psalm singing! We are beholden to him!

To those in the RPC who sense that something is amiss, you are correct. Your ministers have twisted the language of privilege into an unrecognizable condition. They only confuse the issue by trying to make a matter of gratitude

into a matter of conditional fellowship and conditional experience. And in doing so they have taken away from you the key to the psalms: Christ is the psalmist, the psalms are his songs, and he is the one singing them.

Third Observation

It is very curious that Reformed Protestant ministers feel the need to defend psalm singing. For example, Reverend Bomers:

And I am not at all now diminishing the psalms. The psalms are the word. The psalms, you can say, are a word in miniature. That's true. You don't need to sing anything other than the psalms. The psalms have all of the theology that you need.

But why do the RPC feel the need to defend psalm singing? According to the doctrine of the RPC, God is indifferent to whether the church sings psalms, whether the church sings other passages of scripture set to music, or whether the church sings man-made hymns. All that God requires, according to the RPC, is that the church sing the word, where *word* simply means *truth*. It does not follow from that principle that the psalms should have any kind of privileged place whatsoever in the worship of the church. God did not give the psalms a privileged place in the worship of the church; why should the church try to reserve some privileged place for the psalms? In fact, isn't a defense of psalm singing getting close to the legalism of which the RPC accuses exclusive psalmody? If God did not command singing only psalms, then it is legalistic for the RPC to promote singing only psalms: "You don't need to sing anything other than the psalms."

What is more, the Reformed Protestant ministers reveal that they do not understand how the regulative principle works. The regulative principle does not mean that God's law provides the church with her options. Rather, the regulative principle means that God's law tells the church what she must do. If the RPC's principle of singing is *sing the word*, the regulative principle means that the RPC must sing the word. She

may not limit herself to the psalms but must sing other passages and doctrinally sound man-made hymns.

Equally curious is the fact that while Reformed Protestant ministers are defending psalm singing, they almost never exult in man-made hymns. Reverend Bomers and Reverend Ophoff both categorically condemned exclusive psalmody in their sermons, but that is only the negative. Both Reverend Bomers and Reverend Ophoff neglected the positive development of hymns that must accompany the negative condemnation of exclusive psalmody. If God requires man-made hymns, then the churches must be instructed in the goodness, rightness, and necessity of man-made hymns. The ministers require the churches to sing a man-made hymn every worship service: Thomas Ken's "Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow." The RPC sing this man-made hymn more than they sing any of the 150 psalms. Where is the instruction of the people in the goodness of Thomas Ken's hymn? Where is the exegesis of the language of Thomas Ken's hymn? Where is the proclamation of the glories of the doctrine of Thomas Ken's hymn? Where are the quotations from Thomas Ken's hymn during sermons on providence or the Trinity? This is the instruction that the people need if they are going to understand and practice the principle of singing the word.

One gets the sense that the RPC are rather embarrassed of their man-made hymn. Or, if they are not embarrassed, one certainly does not get the sense that they are glad that they get to sing it more than any psalm.

To those in the RPC who sense that something is amiss, you are correct. Your ministers hammer away against the principle of exclusive psalmody, while in the same breath proposing that you practice exclusive psalmody: "You don't need to sing anything other than the psalms." Your ministers condemn the evils of exclusive psalm singing but will not instruct the churches in the glories of hymn singing. They are double-minded, unstable, and double-tongued. Any principle of worship that such men form will eventually crumble

and in the meantime can only be maintained by threats and by force.

A Question

But what does God require?

When all the smoke and all the accusations and all the twisting of words are cleared away, this question remains: What does God require? That ultimately is the issue when it comes to exclusive psalmody. If God requires his church to sing psalms and if he does not require her to sing other songs, then exclusive psalmody is true. However, if God requires his church to sing other songs, then exclusive psalmody is false. It should be easy enough to demonstrate from scripture which of those positions is correct, since God has not left his church in the dark regarding her worship.

What does God require?

Our Reformed confessions teach that this question is the issue in the matter of our worship.

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

A. That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word. (Lord's Day 35)

We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For, since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures; *nay, though it were an angel from heaven*, as the apostle Paul saith. For, since it is forbidden *to add unto or take away any thing from the Word of God*, it doth thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. (Belgic Confession 7)

In the meantime we believe, though it is useful and beneficial that those who are rulers of the church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the church, yet they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted. And therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever. Therefore we admit only of that which tends to nourish and preserve concord and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God. (Belgic Confession 32)

Time and again the confessions point us to the scriptures to find what God requires for worship. The solution to the question of exclusive psalmody can be found in those scriptures, as clearly and as obviously as anyone could wish.

What does God require?

The two ministers also implicitly acknowledge that the question of exclusive psalmody is ultimately a question of what God requires in his word. Reverend Bomers accuses exclusive psalmody of being an invention of man.

[Exclusive psalmody] was rooted in the traditions of men and not after Christ...

But in exclusive psalmody, under the show of wisdom, under a philosophy that was nothing but rooted in the mind, the carnal mind of man that stands at enmity against God, there came the doctrine that you cannot glorify God with a part of his word in worship...That commandment was a commandment of men.

Reverend Ophoff makes the same accusation.

And the heart of it, the heart of that legalism, wasn't even God's law. At least the Protestant Reformed Churches put—tried to put—you under God's law. They [those who would become Remnant

Reformed Church] tried to put you under man's law, fabricated in his own heart and in their own mind, and said you have fellowship when you sing the psalms.

When both ministers make the accusation that exclusive psalmody is a law of man, they are implicitly acknowledging that the question of exclusive psalmody must be decided by what God requires. Their conclusion is that God requires psalmody *and*—psalmody *and* biblical songs, psalmody *and* man-made hymns, psalmody *and* other songs than the psalms. On the other hand, the conclusion of exclusive psalmody is that God requires psalmody. And because the second commandment means that we do not worship God in *any other way than he has required in his word*, God's requirement of psalmody means psalmody *only*.

What does God require?

With this question before us and all the twistings behind us, we can finally get somewhere. God's word is so crystal clear on which songs are the songs of Zion that exclusive psalmody leaps from the pages.

Would one like to hear it in an explicit command? Here: "Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works" (I Chron. 16:9). And here: "Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms" (Ps. 95:2). And here: "Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works" (105:2).

Or would one like God to hand to his church a psalter to go along with her Bible so that she knows what to sing? Here: the book of psalms.

Or would one like to see what Jesus did in his worship? Here: "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Heb. 2:12). And here: "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives" (Matt. 26:30), where "hymn" refers to the great Hallel hymn, Psalms 113–118.

Or would one like to hear what the inspired apostles of the Lord taught about singing, which instruction is the Lord's instruction for his

church? Here: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:18–19), where "psalms," "hymns," and "spiritual songs" refer to various headings above the 150 psalms. And here: "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). And here: "Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (James 5:13).

What does God require? There is nothing dark or hidden or mysterious about it! It could not be any clearer! Sing psalms!

If one would maintain that God requires something else in the church's singing, then let that one show that. And it will not do to say meaningless phrases like *word-oriented* singing or *word-infused* singing or *word-governed* singing or other like terms. Rather, let that one show from the scriptures that God requires his church to sing something other than the psalms. Let that one show from the scriptures that God requires Thomas Ken's hymn. Let that one show from the scriptures that God requires any true man-made hymn. And if one finds the requirement in scripture to sing man-made hymns, then one must sing those hymns as well.

Conclusion

To those in the Reformed Protestant Churches who know that something is amiss and who feel themselves to be under the thumb of cruel men, this article is written especially for you. Go back to the beginning and start with the question, what does God require? Once you have found the answer to that question, then you know where you must stand. Your God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and of very great mercy. And he has hidden you in the secret of his pavilion in Christ, where the strife of tongues cannot destroy you.

—AL

BOOK REVIEW

Reflections on the Psalms. C. S. Lewis. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017. (Originally published in the United Kingdom in 1958 by Harcourt Brace.) 192 pages, paperback, \$13.99. [Reviewed by Rev. Andrew Lanning]

C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) hardly needs an introduction. From his Narnia series of children’s books to his popular Christian philosophy, Lewis has been read by millions. Although never ordained in the Church of England, where he was a member, C. S. Lewis was considered a giant of theology the world over. Though it has been some sixty years since his death, it would be difficult to find a more universally recognized religious author than C. S. Lewis. Therefore, when my eye lit upon his *Reflections on the Psalms* in a bookstore recently, I had to know what he had to say about the songs of Zion. In short order the book was purchased, packaged, and perused.

C. S. Lewis’ *Reflections on the Psalms* is a loose collection of Lewis’ thoughts on the psalms. There is no central thesis to the book, nor is there any logical organization to the twelve chapters and two appendices. The only organization that Lewis claimed for the book is that what he found “repellent” in the psalms he dealt with first, and what he found pleasant in the psalms he dealt with last (7). Lewis’ reflections on the psalms range over many topics: judgment, imprecations, death, the creation, praises, and spiritual meanings, to name several. Lewis’ own evaluation of his book was this:

In this book, then, I write as one amateur to another, talking about difficulties I have met, or lights I have gained, when reading the Psalms, with the hope that this might at any rate interest, and sometimes even help, other inexperienced readers. I am ‘comparing notes’, not presuming to instruct. It may appear to some that I have used the Psalms merely as pegs on which to hang a series of miscellaneous

essays. I do not know that it would have done any harm if I had written the book that way, and I shall have no grievance against anyone who reads it that way. But that is not how it was in fact written. The thoughts it contains are those to which I found myself driven in reading the Psalms; sometimes by my enjoyment of them, sometimes by meeting with what at first I could not enjoy. (2)

There were two things that stood out to this reviewer in C. S. Lewis’ *Reflections on the Psalms*. First, C. S. Lewis’ approach to the psalms was unbelief. Second, C. S. Lewis was a literary genius, whose writing style is irresistible. These two things make Lewis’ book a particularly clever attack of Satan against the scriptures. C. S. Lewis’ *Reflections on the Psalms* is one of those “wicked counsels devised against Thy holy Word” that the child of God prays for God to destroy (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 123).

What does it mean that C. S. Lewis’ approach to the psalms was unbelief? Lewis held to a higher critical theory of scripture. That is, Lewis believed that scripture was not the word of God but that scripture was merely the word of man. Instead of divine inspiration, Lewis spoke of “Divine pressure” (130). The words that men wrote in the scriptures were not God’s words, but they were men’s words that they wrote as God nudged them this way and that. Because scripture is the word of man, it contains all the errors, contradictions, falsehoods, and even wickedness to which man is prone.

Lewis explained his higher critical theory using the false but popular declaration that the scriptures carry the word of God. At first glance that declaration looks like a pious and believing

affirmation of the scriptures. How precious and valuable the scriptures must be, for the scriptures carry the word of God! But that declaration is an assault on the scriptures, for it denies that the scriptures *are* the word of God. The scriptures merely *carry* the word of God, but the scriptures *are* the word of man. God did not write the Bible; man did. The actual words that were written in the Bible were not God's words from God's mouth by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; rather, the actual words that were written were man's words. One must get behind and beyond the literal words in order to discover any divine message in the scriptures. That message must be extracted from the tone and the temper conveyed by the words and not from the words themselves; for the words themselves are not divine words, and the scriptures are not divine writings.

Here is Lewis' description of his view of scripture:

The human qualities of the raw materials [that is, the actual words that were written] show through. Naïvety, error, contradiction, even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness are not removed. The total result is not 'the Word of God' in the sense that every passage, in itself, gives impeccable science or history. It carries the Word of God; and we (under grace, with attention to tradition and interpreters wiser than ourselves, and with the use of such intelligence and learning as we may have) receive that word from it not by using it as an encyclopedia or an encyclical but by steeping ourselves in its tone or temper and so learning its overall message. (130)

C. S. Lewis' higher critical view of scripture is unbelief. Higher criticism denies the word of God. Though higher criticism makes many pious noises about scripture's *carrying* the word of God, higher criticism denies that scripture *is* the word of God. To Jehovah's "Thus saith the Lord," higher criticism replies, "Yea, hath God said?" In claiming that scripture is the word of

man, higher criticism denies scripture's testimony about itself. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Pet. 1:21). In denying that the actual words of scripture are the very words of God from God's mouth, higher criticism denies scripture's testimony about itself. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16).

C. S. Lewis' higher criticism led him to spiritual disaster when he applied it to the psalms. C. S. Lewis disdained the psalms, and C. S. Lewis hated and cruelly treated the psalmist. Lewis blasphemed God by openly accusing the psalms of wickedness in one breath and then openly mocking the psalms as naïve in the next breath.

In some of the Psalms the spirit of hatred which strikes us in the face is like the heat from a furnace mouth. In others the same spirit ceases to be frightful only by becoming (to a modern mind) almost comic in its naïvety. (23)

For Lewis certain aspects of the psalms are "repellent" (7), "nasty" (8), full of "self-righteousness" (20), "devilish," "the refinement of malice" (24), "diabolical," full of "pettiness and vulgarity," "hard to endure," "contemptible," full of "bad parts" that "will not 'come away clean'" (25); and the psalms were written by "ferocious, self-pitying, barbaric men" (27).

And note well that Lewis did not merely mean that some psalms, upon first reading, *seemed* "repellent" and "diabolical" to him. Rather, Lewis meant that the psalms actually *are* devilish in places. For Lewis it was a sin for the psalmist to speak what he spoke at that time, and it would be a sin for a Christian to think or speak that way today.

The hatred is there—festering, gloating, undisguised—and also we should be wicked if we in any way condoned or approved it, or (worse still) used it to justify similar passions in ourselves. (26)

C. S. Lewis was especially disdainful of the imprecations in the psalms. But Lewis was also disgusted by the psalmist's cries for judgment, by the psalmist's ascribing praises to God, and by what Lewis assumed to be the psalmist's pharisaical haughtiness.

And once Lewis had set himself as an opponent of the psalms because they were so wicked and foolish, what did he do with the psalms? Did he recommend that God's people cast the psalms away from themselves? No, having mocked and belittled and condemned the psalms, Lewis set himself as the savior of the psalms. Lewis informed his readers that he, C. S. Lewis, had been able to find some good use for the psalms. This is the pattern that repeats throughout the book. Lewis highlights something that he imagines is wicked and foolish about the psalms, and then he regales his readers with his own wisdom in rescuing that wicked and foolish thing for his own spiritual use. If there is any theme to be found in Lewis' book, it is this: the psalms are wicked and foolish, but the brilliant C. S. Lewis has found a way to be spiritually profited by them. For example,

The self-righteous Psalms can be dealt with only at a much later stage; the vindictive Psalms, the cursings, we may turn to at once. It is these that have made the Psalter largely a closed book to many modern church-goers. Vicars, not unnaturally, are afraid to set before their congregations poems so full of that passion to which Our Lord's teaching allows no quarter. Yet there must be some Christian use to be made of them; if, at least, we still believe (as I do) that all Holy Scripture is in some sense—though not all parts of it in the same sense—the word of God. (22)

And what use did Lewis find for the cursings in the psalms? Merely this: be nice to people, for if you are not nice to people, you might be the occasion for their uttering the kinds of wicked cursings found in the psalms.

It is monstrously simple-minded to read the cursings in the Psalms with no feeling except one of horror at the uncharity of the poets. They are indeed devilish. But we must also think of those who made them so. Their hatreds are the reaction to something. Such hatreds are the kind of thing that cruelty and injustice, by a sort of natural law, produce. (29)

C. S. Lewis wrote as if he appreciated the psalms. His book is coated with a veneer of praise for the psalms. Lewis produced many interesting thoughts about the psalms and made many captivating observations about the psalms. For example, some of his comments on praises in the psalms are edifying. "All enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise" (109). And a little further on:

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. (111)

Nevertheless, for all his apparent appreciation for the psalms and the psalmist, C. S. Lewis considered the psalms to be full of wickedness and the psalmist to be barbaric. And C. S. Lewis found the psalms to be unprofitable until he came along and rescued them. In spite of the veneer of appreciation for the psalms, what becomes clear is that C. S. Lewis did not so much appreciate the psalms; rather, C. S. Lewis appreciated C. S. Lewis.

C. S. Lewis lacked the key that opens the psalms. The key to the psalms is that Jesus Christ is the psalmist. The psalms are Jesus' songs. When a Christian sings the psalms, he does not sing as a private individual. His cursings of the wicked are not his own private cursings; his praising of God is not his own private praising; his crying out for justice in his righteous cause against the foe is not his own private crying. Rather, the Christian sings with

Christ. The cursings of the wicked are Jesus' cursings that the Christian sings with his head; the praising of God is Jesus' praising that the Christian sings with his Lord; the crying out for righteous judgment in one's cause is Jesus' crying that the Christian cries with his mediator. But without this key to the psalms, the psalms must remain a closed and locked book. Without this key to the psalms, the best that Lewis could do was to try to set himself up as the savior of the psalms.

Let the church of Jesus Christ take note. If one rejects and ridicules the notion that Jesus is the psalmist, if one rejects and ridicules the notion that Jesus sings the psalms with his church and the church sings the psalms with Christ, then that one closes up the psalms to himself and to his children. Whatever love he imagines he has for the psalms and for the psalmist will cool in his heart, and love for the psalms will be absent in his generations. Even if one never adopts the higher criticism of C. S. Lewis regarding the

psalms, one will nevertheless be left with C. S. Lewis' hopeless project of trying to rescue some spiritual use for the psalms despite the absence of the sweet psalmist of Israel.

On the other hand, the church to which God has graciously given the key to the psalms is a happy church. There is nothing like singing the songs of Zion with Zion's king. The sweet psalmist opens up the psalms to his people, and the psalms open up the sweet psalmist to his people. Then the psalms don't need to be rescued for the church's use; rather, the psalms rescue the church by opening up the wonder of the sweet psalmist of Israel to her.

As for C. S. Lewis' *Reflections on the Psalms*, the book is not recommended, except as an example of unbelief regarding the psalms. May God destroy the sentiments of *Reflections on the Psalms*, as he destroys all wicked counsels devised against his word.

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REFORMED
— PAVILION —

Article LXII. The New King and His Kingdom (continued)

If we turn to Scripture for light on the relation between the Father and the Son, the first and second Persons of the Holy Trinity, we do not seek in vain. There is on the one hand an abundance of proof for the truth of what is expressed in the phrase “eternal generation,” and on the other hand Scripture sheds a surprisingly clear light on the relation that exists between these two divine persons.

And then we do not particularly seek proof for the doctrine of eternal generation in Ps. 2:7. This text reads: “I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.” It is not so infrequently the first, if not the only text that comes to our mind when asked for Scriptural proof of the doctrine of eternal generation. Now we do not deny that there is such proof in this passage. The Psalm plainly does apply to the Christ. In fact, Psalm 2 furnishes a beautiful example of the truth that prophecy has more than one fulfillment, and that the text of the Word of God often has a more remote and spiritual meaning next to or based on the literal. The anointed mentioned in the Psalm, against whom the heathen rage and the rulers take counsel, is in the first place the king of Israel, either David or one of his descendants upon the throne, whom God had set upon His holy hill of Zion. And the enemies that rage are the heathen nations and rulers that rise against him for destruction. It is to him in the first place that the Lord says: “thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” It is to him first of all that the Lord promises power and victory over the enemy, and it is in regard to him that the kings of the earth are counseled to be wise and kiss the Son lest they perish from the way. And

yet, there is no shadow of doubt in Scripture, that this whole Psalm refers ultimately to Christ, the King of Zion in the spiritual sense, who will triumph over all His enemies and possess the uttermost parts of the earth. In Acts 4:25–28 Peter and John witness of the fact that David spoke in this second Psalm of the Messiah and that the enemies, the heathen that raged against Him, were the Gentiles under Pilate and Herod together with the people of Israel. In Acts 13:33 Paul quotes the latter part of 2:7 and explains that this was fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ Jesus. Hebrews 1:5 plainly expresses that the words: “thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” apply to the Christ. In Rev. 2:26, 27 we read: “And he that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.” The plain reference is evidently to Ps. 2:9. There is, therefore, no doubt whatever, that the reference in Ps. 2 is to the Messiah in the glory of His power. Yet, we would not quote this passage in the first place as a proof of the doctrine of eternal generation. We do not deny that this proof may be implied in the words. “This day” may very well be conceived of as an eternal present. Even as God is the eternal I AM, so He may eternally say: “this day have I begotten thee.” And the perfect “I have begotten thee” may be explained as referring to the fact that the act of generation is eternally complete and absolute. But the fact remains that there is no further proof of Scripture for this explanation. According to Paul in Acts 13:33, the “this day” refers to Christ’s resurrection. In that God raised up His Son Jesus He fulfilled the

words of the prophecy of Ps. 2:7. At that day He begot the Messiah as such from the dead. On that day He gave Him power and realized His decree. From that day He sits on the holy hill of Zion as Messiah to reign in glory. The whole Psalm is rather a prophecy of the kingship of Christ in the new dispensation, than a reference to His eternal Godhead. It is a refutation of the view that Christ is not very literally king in the new testament day.

In all seriousness, we do not understand how they explain the Word of God that deny this truth of Christ's kingship!

The doctrine of eternal generation, however, is not simply based on a single text. It is rather the current teaching of Scripture, it is often the tacit presupposition that underlies all that is revealed of the relation between the Father and the Son. Especially is this the case in the New Testament. Not as if the Old Testament revealed nothing of a Triune God. Indeed, it does. Just recall the frequent manifestation of the Angel of Jehovah. But the fact is, that very naturally in the new dispensation, when the Word has become flesh, this revelation is much clearer. And if we investigate Scripture on this point we will not only accumulate proof for the doctrine of eternal generation, but at the same time we will gain a clearer conception of the significance of this doctrine for our entire conception of the truth.

Just let us examine a few passages.

In John 1:14, 18, we read: "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." And: "No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." And in John 3:16 we find the well-known text: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." In themselves, it may be admitted, these passages tell us nothing about eternal generation. They simply prove that the Word is Son in an altogether unique sense of the word. He is Son as there is no other, for He is the only begotten. And in the second place, they

reveal that He is begotten, generated by the Father. But passages like these become of great significance when we place alongside of them such as we find in John 10:30. There Jesus says: "I and the Father are one." In this text the personal distinction between the Father and the Son is clearly expressed. Christ speaks of "I and the Father." Personally they are two. But what we wish to emphasize in this connection is the fact that the essential unity of the Father and the Son is emphasized beautifully. Especially according to the original, Jesus says literally: "I and the Father are one in essence." This is significant. It reveals that the Son is as truly God as the Father, that He subsists in the same divine Nature. He is, therefore, also co-eternal with the Father. The Father did not exist before Him. There never was a moment in the divine life that the Son did not exist, that the Father existed alone. The inference is self-evident. We have here a Father that begets a Son, yet He does not exist before the Son. We have here mention made of a Son that is begotten of the Father, yet He does not follow the Father in point of time. With the Father He is one in essence, co-eternal. How is this possible? How is it conceivable that a Son begotten of a Father does not come into existence after the Father in point of time? The only answer possible is that of the doctrine of eternal generation. From eternity to eternity the Father begets, is Father in the absolute sense of the word; from eternity to eternity the Son is begotten, is eternally Son. There never was and there never is a moment in the divine life that the Father does not generate the Son. There never was and there never is a moment that the Son is not begotten of the Father.

Significant, too, is John 5:26.

There we read: "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself."

Practically the entire passage from vs. 19 on is highly significant for the subject we are now discussing. It may be noted first of all that according to the context Jesus is speaking to the Jews of His personal relation as Son to the Father. Not of His

human relation to God, but of His divine relation as second person in the Trinity to the Father is He speaking. The context shows that the Jews to whom He is addressing Himself understood it in that sense. From vs. 17 we learn that Jesus had said: “My Father worketh hitherto and I work.” And according to vs. 18 the Jews plainly understood that by this saying He made Himself equal with God. And it is in that light and on that basis that Jesus proceeds to answer the Jews. He tells them that the Son copies the Father. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise,” vs. 19. While, therefore, the Lord maintains that the Son is, indeed, equal with the Father, doing what things soever the Father does, yet He also acknowledges that the Father is first and reveals Himself in and thru the Son. The Father shows all things He Himself doeth to the Son, vs. 20. And thus the Son raiseth and quickeneth whom he will, even as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, vs. 21. Thus also, the Father hath committed all judgment to the Son, in order that all should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. And even as they honor the Father who honor the Son, so they that refuse to honor the Son do not honor the Father that sent him, vss. 22, 23.

Significant words, indeed, to ascertain the exact significance and place of the Son in relation to the Father!

But of this later.

What we want to emphasize now is that this entire passage finds its climax in the comprehensive statement of vs. 26: “For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.”

Two things draw our attention.

In the first place, the fact that the life of which the Lord is here speaking, which the Son possesses, is divine life, it is the life of God. The life of the Son is equal to the life of the Father. The Son has that life even as the Father has it. There is no difference. The Father has this life in himself, as God. In no way is the Father dependent for His life. But the same is true of the Son. He also possesses that life, that same life. And He possesses it even so, in the same manner as the Father possesses it. He also possesses that life in himself. Once more, then, the Son makes Himself, indeed, equal with God. The Jews were right, and Jesus emphasizes here that they did not misunderstand Him.

And yet, it is also plainly emphasized that the Son as Son receives this life of the Father. He hath given to the Son to have life in Himself. It is the same apparent anomaly. On the one hand the Son is equal with the Father, co-eternal, having the divine life in Himself. On the other hand, that eternal, divine life He receives as Son from the Father.

It is this apparent anomaly which the church expressed in the doctrine of eternal generation.

—Holland, Mich

