

The Lakeview Lamp

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” - Psalm 119:105

January 8, 2006

The Spiritual Simplicity of Our Singing

Paul Earnhart

In the 1940's Elmer T. Clark observed that it is “a peculiar type of mind which is convinced that God is interested in whether his worshipers sing with or without instrumental music” (*Small Sects in America*, p. 16). Clark's words carry a twentieth century bias. The truth is that the mind which he thought so peculiar was once dominant in “Christian” thought. The use of musical instruments in the worship of the churches is a relatively recent development. Most Protestant churches in America did not yield to the practice until the nineteenth century.

The unadorned simplicity of our spiritual singing is not a cultural statement but a matter of faith – a response to the teaching of the New Testament.

The worship of the Old Testament church with its complex rituals was not simple. During the intricate rites of the temple sacrifices a Levitical chorus was commanded to sing and a Levitical orchestra to play (**II Chronicles 29:25-28**). But the New Testament refers to the appointments of temple worship as “*carnal ordinances, imposed until a time of reformation*” (**Hebrews 9:10**). This reformation is dramatically illustrated by the total absence of any reference in the New Testament to Christians worshipping God with sacrificial animals, incense, lamps, choirs, or orchestras. There is only the admonition for the disciples to speak to each other and to the Lord in “*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*” (**Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16**).

Christian worship in song is not a choral contest. Spiritual singing has spiritual ends. Since God's ways differ radically from our own (**Isaiah 55:8-9**) it is of no consequence that in the mind of some the absence of musical instruments (or of devotional lamps and incense) diminishes the appeal of the singing. What is important is that we have sufficient trust in God to follow His instructions with the confidence that His methods achieve His purposes.

The silence of the New Testament on instrumentally accompanied singing has had its impact in history. The early centuries not only reveal no use of instrumental music in worship but an expressed opposition to it as belonging to the spiritual infancy of the Old Testament church. Eusebius of Caesarea (early 4th century), commenting on **Psalm 91:2-3**: “Of old at the time those of the circumcision were worshipping with symbols and types it was not inappropriate to send up hymns to God with the psalterion and kithara.... We render our hymns with a living psalterion and a living kithara with spiritual songs. The unison voices of Christians would be more acceptable to God than any musical instrument.”

Chrysostom (late 4th century): “It was only permitted to the Jews, as sacrifice was, for the heaviness and grossness of their souls. God condescended to their weakness, because they were lately drawn from idols; but now, instead of organs, we may use our own bodies to praise him withal.” Theodoret of Cyrhus (early 5th century): “Question: If songs were invented by unbelievers to seduce men, but were allowed to those under the law on account of their childish state, why do those who have received the perfect teaching of grace in their churches still use songs, just like the children under the law? Answer: It is not simple singing that belongs to the childish state, but singing with lifeless instruments, with dancing, and with clappers.

Hence the use of such instruments and the others that belong to the childish state is excluded from the singing in the churches, and simple singing is left” (*Questions and Answers for the Orthodox*).

The Roman Catholic Church continued this opposition at least until the time of Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274) who wrote: “Our church does not use musical Instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize.” The Greek Church (Orthodox) has never used musical instruments. Several Protestant reformers held to the same sentiment. Calvin wrote that “musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law” (*Commentary on Psalm 33*). Wesley was more succinct: “I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels provided they are neither heard nor seen.”

The use of instruments in worship is not progress but a carnal retreat to spiritual kindergarten. We should glory in the supreme spirituality of our singing, sanctified by God and accompanied by the higher melody of our hearts.



Preacher’s point – If you are visiting with us and are wondering why we don’t have any instrumental music, it has nothing to do with our personal likes and dislikes. It is because in the New Testament God has not authorized the use of instrumental music in worship to Him. Since we direct our worship to God, shouldn’t we worship Him in the way He has told us to do and leave out everything else? We are content to sing as God commanded (**Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16**). Are you?

*“In the day of my trouble I will call to You, for You will answer me.” –
Psalm 86:7*

Family News

Bonnie Sue Brown is doing much better.

Virginia Bryant continues to be better with less pain.

Mary Burnett has now moved back home! You may still have the address (182 Rebecca Drive) in your directory. Note the phone number is now 822-5717.

We are glad to report that **Quinton Coppage** is doing much better.

Sandlyn Fultz had surgery three Wednesdays ago. It went well. Two Wednesdays ago she was readmitted to the hospital with all the symptoms of meningitis. They put her on antibiotics. She will remain on antibiotics a little while longer. Good pathology results have been received regarding the tumor they removed during the surgery: it is not cancer.

John Jenkins, Robert’s father, has lung cancer. So far he has tolerated the new chemotherapy well. He is eating better. He should get another chemotherapy treatment in about a week and then every 21 days after that.

Barbara Matish, a friend of Bonnie Sue Brown, had successful heart surgery in December. She has been home for a while but has yet to return to work.

Fran Pickens will be moving soon.

Laura Reed fell this past week. She remains sore.

Remember **Dustin Simpson** as he continues to serve in the Navy. You can write him at (please use four lines):

MM3 SIMPSON, DUSTIN
Box 44

USS Enterprise CVN-65
FPO AE 09543-2810

Georgia Taylor was in the hospital from two Saturdays ago through Wednesday. She had not been, and continues to not be, eating well.

Remember the Christians in **Vietnam** while Allen is here. Recently some of them suffered from some flooding (several lost their homes and some died).

Ame White had surgery four weeks ago. It went well, but the recovery has not gone well. She is improving. Previously *Family News* has mentioned **George Whitten** the principal at Wessington Place Elementary as being seriously ill. Sadly, he passed away Thursday night. His funeral was yesterday afternoon.

Robert Wray remains about the same.

Out of town, traveling, or visiting: **Malones** (Allen is preaching)

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"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks" (1 Thes 5:16-18).