

Young People's Forum (III.13)

Dear Young People,

Some objections that have been made against the Psalms for singing in the corporate worship of the church is that there are no Psalms to sing on special Christian holidays. The church usually commemorates the birth of Christ on Christmas, the death of Christ on Good Friday, the resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday, the ascension of Christ on Ascension Day, and the outpouring of the Spirit of Christ on Pentecost Sunday. There are hymns that are written especially for these days, but, so one says, there are no Psalms. And so, the conclusion is reached that the Psalms are not enough for the church.

Now, there is a certain truth to that if one thinks of Psalms that sing of special events that surrounded these parts of the life of Christ. But the meaning of these events is clearly set down in the Psalms. In the last article I pointed out that there are even certain Psalms that speak, though rather distantly, of Christ's birth.

But the present Christmas carols that we sing are not all that great either. In fact there are only a few that are even true. "We three kings of Orient are" for example, is full of mistakes. There were not necessarily three; the Bible does not tell us how many came. They were not kings, but more likely teachers in some school in the area that is now Iraq. The star that appeared in the East did not lead them to Canaan; it apparently disappeared after the wise men set out on their journey and did not appear again until these men were leaving Jerusalem, when it appeared, filled them with joy, and led them to the house where Jesus was staying with his parents.

The same is true of the favorite carol, "Silent Night, holy night." There is a line in that carol that says, "No crying he makes." But this is not true. Scripture tells us that Christ was like us in all things except for our sin. He too cried when he was hungry or uncomfortable. We must be careful that we do not deny his humanity.

I am not fond either of some of the "carols" in our Psalter. Particularly, the Son of Simeon is one I cannot sing. It is not a versification of Scripture at all, and some of its lyrics border on wrong theology.

Jesus! The vision of thy face
Hath overpow'ring charms!
Scarce shall I feel death's cold embrace,
If Christ be in my arms.

When flesh shall fail, and heart-strings break
Sweet will the minutes roll;
A mortal paleness on my cheek,
But glory in my soul.

I can't sing the song in divine worship. Apart from the sentimentality of the last verse, it is not even true that Christ is in my arms. I am in Christ's arms, and that is my salvation. Or, at least, as John 10 says, I am in his hands, but most emphatically he is not in my arms. He never was and he never will be. The thought of it is repulsive. He is, after all, Lord of lords and King of kings. High above us, He powerfully rules over all.

I do not think it is a sin to sing some of the Christmas carols. But I find them in appropriate for divine worship on the Lord's Days. And so, if some in the congregation

“go caroling” that is good; but let us sing with discernment and not just mouthing the words.

The Psalms are full of Christ’s suffering. That Christ himself is often speaking in the Psalms of his suffering is plain from the fact that two of the seven crosswords were taken directly from the Psalms. The fourth crossword, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” is taken from Psalm 22:1. “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit” is a direct from Psalm 31: 5: “Into thy hand I commit my spirit.” That Christ could take these quotations from the Psalms was possible because he was himself speaking in the Psalms, although through his servant, David.

There are Psalms that speak directly of Christ’s suffering, and do so in such prophetic accuracy that one cannot help but think that Christ himself was speaking through the Psalmists of his own suffering. Read Psalm 22:1-21 in which passage the text even speaks of the soldiers who gambled over Christ’s clothing. Psalm 69:1-21 even speaks of the drink that was given to Christ while he was on the cross. Psalm 41:9, while it speaks of Ahithophel’s treachery against David in the rebellion of Absalom, also speaks of the betrayal of Christ by Judas Iscariot.

These are specific and concrete prophecies of Christ’s suffering.. There are many more places that speak of Christ’s suffering as depicted in the life of David and the other Psalmists.

There are also references in the Psalms to Christ’s resurrection, Psalms that can be sung when the church commemorates that blessed event. Perhaps the clearest is in Psalm 16:5-11. In fact, Peter, in his great Pentecostal sermon,. Quotes this Psalm as proof that the Old Testament Scriptures speak of Christ’s resurrection (Acts 2:30-32). While Psalm 17:15 does not speak directly of the resurrection of Christ, the verse implies and presupposes this resurrection.

And so we sing Psalter numbers 27 – 31 on Easter, and that includes the last verse of Psalter number 31:

When I in righteousness at last
Thy glorious face shall see,
When all the weary night is past,
And I awake with thee
To view the glories that abide,
Then, then I shall be satisfied.

Nor ought we to forget that Christ’s resurrection is proved by Paul to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia by quoting Psalm 2 (Acts 13:33: “God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

But the resurrection of Christ is included in the Psalms that speak of Christ’s ascension to heaven and his glorification and exaltation at God’s right hand. The Psalms are many and definite.

But we shall wait for this until next time, the Lord willing.

In Christian love,
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