

Epiphany V

teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord (Epistle).

You don't imagine that the spiritual life of a congregation can be measured by the amount of noise it makes. Neither did St. Paul. There is a terrible opposite error, which may loosely be called the Quaker heresy, that proper worship is silent (unless of course the Spirit requires some individual to speak) and therefore no liturgy, no common vocal prayer, is possible.

This is an error, because Christ died for *all men*, not just for the minority who are skilled in silent worship and non-verbal prayer. (Not that such worship is always wrong - we spent approaching half an hour most mornings together in silent devotion when I was in theological college.)

It is also an error, because Christ died for *the entire human being*, which means body, mind and spirit (if you like such an analysis) and not for only parts of us. All parts of us needed healing; all parts are healed; so all parts should give glory to God for that healing.

The Christians of the ancient church of Ethiopia perhaps understand this truth most thoroughly. Not only do they delight in composing and singing hymns, they also regard dance as an important offering to the Lord. So did David (see II Samuel 6.14 to the end!) I do not mean that we *must* dance in church, but there is the response of the human body to the Lord.

In most churches, as with us, bodily posture matters, and singing, which is a bodily as well as a mental act, also matters. I do not deny the possibility of the quiet said service - but we should remember that this is unusual, unknown to most churches (it only happens in Romanism and Anglicanism). Now certainly it is possible for worship to degenerate into a mere performance, from which the Spirit (and the human spirit) has departed. But we do not prevent this danger by abandoning the performance. Rather, our best approach is to take part with body, mind and spirit, and so give the Spirit a chance to join Himself to our worship.

This may seem a long prelude to the text, but it is important to understand that true worship is both *in your hearts* and with the body and mind. Then we can turn to the details. I don't think St. Paul knew three different sorts of composition (psalms, hymns, songs). He knew, of course, the Book of Psalms, but he also knew that the Jews had never stopped writing new material. So far as we know, the synagogue was always a place of singing and chanting and posture, not just of speech. Some Christian music can be shown to be derived from Jewish music. At least in the fourth century, when it was safe, the Church began both to use the Psalms and to write hymns.

We don't have to use the Psalms mechanically - the Church selected psalms, selected verses within psalms, translated freely (including into verse) and even "Christianised" the psalms. And the Church has generally been enthusiastic about hymns (Anglicanism however banned them until the nineteenth century). In the Traditional Anglican Church, we naturally keep up the use of the best older hymns, and we do not forbid new hymns (though we are careful about their quality and their orthodoxy, and realistic enough to know that most hymns go out of use quite quickly).

Hymns may indeed serve for *teaching and admonishing*, but the essential requirement is that they are an offering *to the Lord* which we make *together*. C. S. Lewis did not personally like hymns - but he accepted that "anything the congregation can do may properly and profitably be offered to God in public worship" and that there is a duty for each of us to acquiesce in what edifies other Christians.

The sermon relates to the Epistle for the Sunday