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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SHORT ESSAY TOWARD THE IMPROVEMENT OF PSALMODY ***

IMPROVEMENT OF PSALMODY***

E-text prepared by Lewis Jones

Transcriber's note:

This essay was included at the end of the first printing of Isaac Watts (1707) "Hymns and Spiritual Songs" but was omitted from the 1818 reprint from which the Project Gutenberg edition of that work (e-book #13341, <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/13341>) was transcribed.

The original 1707 page numbers are retained within curly brackets.

The spelling and punctuation of the 1707 printing are also retained; so are any inconsistencies and errors (e.g. "Excercise" on p. 265) except that a mistake at the bottom of page 246, as noted in the publisher's concluding "Errata," has been corrected.

The long 's' has been replaced by its modern equivalent.

Words broken off and hyphenated at the ends of lines have been joined up and the hyphens deleted.

Italics in the original are indicated by underscores around the text. Watts uses italics for proper nouns and quotations; when proper nouns occur within quotations their italics are removed.

Greek letters have been transliterated (e.g. *Psalmos*).

A Short Essay Toward the Improvement of Psalmody:

Or, An Enquiry how the Psalms of *David* ought to be translated into Christian Songs, and how lawful and necessary it is to compose other Hymns according to the clearer Revelations of the Gospel, for the Use of the Christian Church.

by

Isaac Watts

{233} A Short Essay Toward the Improvement of Psalmody: Or, An Enquiry how the Psalms of *David* ought to be translated into Christian Songs, and how lawful and necessary it is to compose other Hymns according to the clearer Revelations of the Gospel, for the Use of the Christian Church.

To speak the Glories of God in a religious Song, or to breath out the Joys of our own Spirits to God with the Melody of our Voice is an exalted Part of Divine Worship. But so many are the Imperfections in the Practice of this Duty, that the greatest Part of Christians find but little Edification or Comfort in it. There are some Churches that utterly disallow Singing; and I'm perswaded, that the poor Performance of it in the best Societies, {234} with the mistaken Rules to which it is confined is one great Reason of their intire Neglect; for we are left at a loss (say they) what is the Matter and Manner of this Duty; and therefore they utterly refuse: Whereas if this glorious Piece of Worship were but seen in its Original Beauty, and one that *believes* not this Ordinance, or is *unlearned* in this Part of Christianity should *come into such an Assembly, he would be convinced of all; he would be judged of all, he would fall down on his Face, and report that God was in the Midst of it of a Truth;* 1 Cor. 14. 24, 25.

In order to trace out the Matter or Subject of religious Singing, let us collect into one View the chief Texts of the New Testament where this Worship is mention'd, and afterwards see what Arguments may be deduced from thence, to prove, that 'tis proper to use Spiritual Songs of humane Composure, as well as the Psalms of *David* or the Words of other Songs recorded in Scripture.

The most considerable Texts are these; *Mat.* 26. 30. & *Mark* 14. 26. relate, that our blessed Lord and his Disciples *sung an Hymn.* Acts 16. 25. *Paul and Silas prayed and sung Praises unto God.* 1 Cor. 14. 15. *I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the Understanding also.* Ver. 26. *Every one of you hath a Psalm.* Eph. 5. 19, 20. *Speaking to your selves in Psalms and Hymns, and Spiritual Songs; singing and making Melody in your Hearts to the Lord, giving Thanks always for all things to God and the Father, in the Name of {235} our Lord Jesus Christ.* Col 3. 16, 17. *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: And whatsoever ye do in Word or in Deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving Thanks to God and the Father by him.* Jam. 5. 13. *Is any among you afflicted, let him pray: Is any merry, let him sing Psalms.* Rev. 5. 9. *And they sing a new Song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the Book and to open the Seals thereof, for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by thy Blood.* Rev. 14. 3. *And they sung as it were a new Song before the Throne.* Rev. 15. 3. *And they sing the Song of Moses, the Servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy Works, &c.* To all these I might add Acts 4. 24, &c. Where it is suppos'd the Disciples met together and sung; for they lift up their Voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord! thou art our God, which hast made Heaven and Earth, and the Sea, and all that in them is: Who by the Mouth of thy Servant David hast said, Why did the Heathen rage, and the People imagine a vain thing. The Kings of the Earth stood up, and the Rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a Truth, against thy holy Child Jesus whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the People of Israel, were gathered together for to do whatsoever thy Hand and thy Counsel determined before to be done, &c.

{236} If we turn over the New Testament, and search out all the Songs that are there written, we shall find the Matter or Subject of them as various as the Occasions upon which they were sung or spoken: Such are the Song of the Virgin *Mary*, Luke 1. 46, &c. They Song of *Zecharias*, ver. 67. The Song of the Angels, *Luke* 2. 13. And of *Simeon*, ver. 29. Besides many others in the Book of the Revelations. The three chief Words used to express the Matter of Singing, are *Psalmoi*, *Humnoi kai Odai*: *Psalms, Hymns and Songs*, as the three Verbs from which these are derived are generally used to express the Act of Singing, *psallo*, *humneo*, *i ado*. Now if it were lawful after so many learned Contentions about these Words, I would give my Sense of them thus:

1. I think no Man hath better explain'd the original Meaning of these Words than *Zanchy*. A Psalm, *Psalmos*, is such a Song as usually is sung with other Instruments besides the Tongue. Hymns, *Humnoi*, such as are made only to express the Praises, and set out the Excellencies of God. Songs, *Odai*, such as contain not only Praises, but Exhortations, Prophecies, Thanksgivings; and these only sung with the Voice.

2. The Scripture doth not always confine it self to the original Meaning of all these Words; for *Psalmos* a Psalm, and the Word *psallo*, are used, 1 Cor. 14. and in other Places of the New Testament, where we can never suppose the primitive Church in those Days {237} had Instruments of Music. And the Word *Ode* a Song, is used several times in the Book of *Revelations*, where Harps are join'd with Voices in the Emblematical Prophecy.

3. The Sense therefore of these Words in the New Testament seems to be thus distinguish'd. A Psalm is a general Name for any thing that is sung in Divine Worship, whatsoever be the particular Theme or Matter; and the Verb *psallo* is design'd to express the Melody it self rather than to distinguish the

Matter of the Song, or Manner whereby the Melody or Music is performed; and therefore in Eph. 5. 19. our Translators have well rendred *adontes kai psallontes, Singing and making Melody*; and it should be thus rendred, Jam. 5. 13. *Is any merry, let him make Melody*. I confess in the New Testament the Noun *Psalmos* refers generally to the Book of Psalms, and without Doubt there are many of the Palms of *David* and *Asaph*, and other Songs among the Books of the Old Testament which may be prudently chosen and sung by Christians, and may be well accomodated to the Lips and Hearts of the Church under the Gospel. Yet this Word is once used in another Sense, as I shall show afterwards.

An Hymn, whether imply'd in the Verb *humneo*, or exprest in the Noun *Humnos*, doth always retain its original Signification, and intend a Song whose Matter or Design is Praise: Nor is there any thing in the Nature or Use of the Word either in Scripture or other {238} Authors, that determines it to signify an immediate Inspiration, or humane Composure.

A Song, *Ode*, denotes any Theme or Subject compos'd into a Form fit for Singing, and seems to intend somewhat suited to the Gospel-State, rather than any Jewish Psalms or Songs in all the five Verses in the New Testament where it is used.

Eph. 5. 19. & Col. 3. 16. 'Tis join'd with the word *Spiritual*; and that seems to be used by the Apostle in all his Epistles, as a very distinguishing Word between the Law and Gospel, the Jewish and the Christian Worship. The Jews had *carnal Ordinances*, and *carnal Commandments*, and their State and Dispensation is often called *Flesh*, but the Church under the Gospel is a *spiritual House, blessed with spiritual Blessings*, endow'd *with spiritual Gifts*, to *worship God in Spirit and in Truth*, to *offer spiritual Sacrifices*, and to *sing spiritual Songs*.

Col. 3. 16. Confirms this Sense, for *the Word of Christ* must *dwell richly in us in Psalms and Hymns, and spiritual Songs*. Now tho the Books of the Old Testament may in some Sense be called the *Word of Christ*, because the same Spirit which was afterwards given to *Christ* the Mediator did inspire them; yet this seems to have a peculiar reference to the Doctrine and Discoveries of *Christ* under the Gospel, which might be compos'd into spiritual Songs for the greater Ease of Memory in learning, teaching and admonishing one another.

{239} Rev. 5. 9. & 14. 3. There is mention of a *New Song*, and that is pure Evangelical Language, suited to the *New Testament*, the *New Covenant*, the *new and living Way*. of Access to God, and to the *new Commandment* of him who sits *upon the Throne*, and *behold, he makes all things new*. The words of this Song are, *Worthy is the Lamb, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy Blood, &c. and none could learn it but those who follow the Lamb, who were redeemed from among Men, &c.* And it must be noted here, that this Book of the *Revelations* describes the Worship of the Gospel-Church on Earth, as is agreed by all Interpreters, tho it borrows some of its Emblems from the Things of Heaven, and some from the Jewish State. I might here remark also, that when a *new Song* is mention'd in the Old Testament, it refers to the Times of the *Messiah*, and is prophetic of the Kingdom of *Christ*, or at least it is a Song indited upon a new Occasion publick or personal, and the Words of it are accomodated to some new Tokens of Divine Mercy.

Rev. 15. 3. *They sing the Song of Moses, the Servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb*; that is, a Song for temporal and for spiritual Deliverances; or, a Song for all antient or all later Salvations of the Church. As *Moses* was a Redeemer from the House of Bondage, and a Teacher of Divine Worship with Harps and Ceremonies; so the *Lamb* is a Redeemer from *Babylon* and spiritual Slavery, and he {240} is the great Prophet to teach his Church the spiritual Worship of the Gospel. The Church now, under the Salvations and Instructions of the *Lamb*, sings with the Voice to the Glory of the Vengeance and the Grace of God, as *Israel* under the Conduct of *Moses* sung with Harps; for we must observe, that these Visions of the Apostle *John* often represent Divine Things in a Gospel-Church, in Imitation of the Ranks and Orders of the *Jewish* Camp and Tribes, and by the Rites and Figures used in the time of *Moses*; and it would be as unreasonable to prove from this Text, that we must sing the very words of the *15th of Exodus* in a Christian Church, as to prove from this Book of the *Revelations* that we must use Harps and Altars, Censers, Fire and Incense. But 'tis plain that the *15th of Exodus* cannot be here intended, because the Words of the Song are mention'd just after, (*viz.*) *Great, and marvellous are thy Works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy Ways, thou King of Saints*. Yet after all, if it could be proved, that the very Song which *Moses* sung is here design'd, still it must be confest that the Song of the *Lamb* is also to be sung; and if the following Words in this Text are not to be esteem'd the Song of *Moses*, then neither are they to be esteem'd the Song of the *Lamb*; because there is not any express mention of the *Lamb*, or his Death, or Resurrection, or Redemption; nor is there any other Song in Scripture that bears that title and consequently it must signifie a Song compos'd {241} to the praise of God for our deliverance by the *Lamb*, in imitation of the Joy composed for deliverance by the Hand of *Moses*: And thus at least we are to suit part of our Psalmody to the Gospel-State as well as borrow part from the Old Testament, which is the chief point I designed to prove.

The next Enquiry then proceeds thus: How must the Psalms of *David* and other Songs borrowed from Scripture, be translated in order to be sung in Christian Worship? Surely, it will be granted, that to prepare them for Psalmody under the Gospel, requires another sort of Management in the Translation, than to prepare them merely for Reading as the *Word of God* in our Language, and that upon these two accounts:

First, If it be the duty of the Churches to sing Psalms, they must necessarily be turned into such a sort of Verse and Metre as will best fit them for the whole Church to join in the Worship: Now this will be very different from a Translation of the original Language word for word; for the Lines must be confined to a certain number of Syllables, and the Stanza or Verse to a certain number of Lines, that so the Tune being short the people may be acquainted with it, and be ready to sing without much difficulty; whereas if the Words were merely translated out of the *Hebrew* as they are for reading, every Psalm must be set through to music, and every Syllable in it must have a particular musical Note belonging to itself, as in Anthems {242} that are sung in Cathedrals: But this would be so exceeding difficult to practise, that it would utterly exclude the greatest part of every Congregation from a Capacity of obeying God's Command to sing. Now, in reducing a *Hebrew* or a *Greek* Song to a Form tolerably fit to be sung by an *English* Congregation, here and there a Word of the Original must be omitted, now and then a Word or two superadded, and frequently a Sentence or an Expression a little alter'd and chang'd into another that is something a-kin to it: And yet greater Alterations must the Psalm suffer if we will have any thing to do with Rhime; those that have labour'd with utmost Toil to keep very close to the *Hebrew* have found it impossible; and when they have attain'd it most, have made but very poor Music for a Christian Church. For it will often happen, that one of the most affectionate and most Spiritual Words in the Prose will not submit to its due Place in the Metre, or does not end with a proper Sound, and then it must be seclud'd, and another of less proper Sense be put in the Room of it: Hereby some of the chief Beauties and Excellencies of *David's* Poetry will be omitted and lost, which if not reviv'd again, or recompenc'd by some lively or pathetic Expression in the *English*, will necessarily debase the Divine Song into Dullness and Contempt: And hereby also it becomes so far different from the inspired Words in the Original Languages, that it is very hard for any Man to say, {243} that the Version of *Hopkins* and *Sternhold*, the *New-England* or the *Scots* Psalms, are in a strict Sense the Word of God. Those Persons therefore that will allow nothing to be sung but the words of inspiration or Scripture ought to learn the *Hebrew* Music, and sing in the Jewish Language; or at least I can find no Congregation with which they can heartily join according to their own Principles, but the Congregation of *Choristers* in Cathedral Churches, who are the only *Levites* that *sing Praise unto the Lord with the Words of David and Asaph the Seer*, 2 Chron. 29. 30.

Secondly, Another Reason why the Psalms ought not to be translated for Singing just in the same manner as they are for Reading, is this, that the Design of these two Duties is very different: By Reading we learn what God speaks to us in his Word; but when we sing, especially unto God, our chief Design is, or should be, to speak our own Hearts and our Words to God. By Reading we are instructed what have been the Dealings of God with Men in all Ages, and how their Hearts have been exercis'd in their Wandrings from God, and Temptations, or in their Returns and Breathings towards God again; but Songs are generally Expressions of our own Experiences, or of his Glories; we acquaint him what Sense we have of his Greatness and Goodness, and that chiefly in those Instances which have some Relation to us: We breath out our Souls towards him, and make {244} Addresses of Praise and Acknowledgment to him. Tho I will not assert it unlawful to sing to God the Words of other Men which we have no Concern in, and which, are very contrary to our Circumstances and the Frame of our Spirits; yet it must be confest abundantly more proper, when we address God in a Song, to use such Words as we can for the most part assume as our own: I own that 'tis not always necessary our Songs should be direct Addresses to God; some of them may be mere Meditations of the History of Divine Providences, or the Experiences of former Saints; but even then, if those Providences or Experiences cannot be assum'd by us as parallel to our own, nor spoken in our own Names; yet still there ought to be some Turns of Expression that may make it look at least like our own present Meditation, and that may represent it as a History which we our selves are at that time recollecting. I know not one Instance in Scripture, of any later Saint singing any part of a Composure of former Ages, that is not proper for his own Time, without force Expressions that tend to accommodate or apply it. But there are a multitude of Examples amongst all the Scriptural Songs, that introduce the Affairs of preceding Ages in the Method I have described. Psal. 44. 1, &c. When *David* is recounting the Wonders of God in planting the Children of *Israel* in the Land of *Canaan*, he begins his Song thus, *We have heard with our Ears O God, our Fathers have told us* {245} *what Works thou didst in their Days, in times of old, how thou didst drive Out the Heathen with thy Hand, and plantedst them, how thou didst afflict The People, and cast them out.* Psal. 78. 2, &c. *I will open my Mouth in a Parable, I will utter dark Sayings of old which we have heard and known, and our Fathers have told us, we will not hide them from their Children, shewing to the Generation to come the Praises of the Lord.* So he relates the Converse and Covenant of God with *Abraham*, *Isaac* and *Israel*, as a Narration of former Providences and Experiences, Psal. 105. 8, 9, 10, &c. So in the *Virgin Mary's* Song, and the Song of *Zecharia*. And I know not any thing can be objected here, but that a

Prophet perhaps in some instances may assume the Words of *Christ* or the Saints in following Ages; but it should be observed that this is almost always in such Respects wherein Persons or Circumstances present were typical of what is future, and so their Cases become parallel.

By these Considerations we are easily led into the true Method of translating ancient Songs into Christian Worship. Psalms that are purely Doctrinal, or merely Historical, are Subjects for our Meditation, and may be translated for our present Use with no Variation, if it were possible; and in general, all those Songs of Scripture which the Saints of following Ages may assume for their own: Such are the 1st, the 8th, the 19th, and many others. Some Psalms may be apply'd to our Use by the Alteration of a Pronoun, putting {246} *They* in the place of *We*, and changing some Expressions which are not suited to our Case into a Narration or Rehearsal of God's Dealings with others: There are other Divine Songs which cannot properly be accommodated to our Use, and much less be assum'd as our own without very great Alterations, (*viz.*) such as are filled with some very particular Troubles or Enemies of a Person, some Places of Journeying or Residence, some uncommon Circumstances of a Society, to which there is scarce any thing parallel in our Day or Case: Such are many of the Songs of *David*, whose Persecutions and Deliverances were very extraordinary: Again, such as express the Worship paid unto God by carnal Ordinances and Utensils of the Tabernacle and Temple. Now if these be converted into Christian Songs in our Nation, I think the Names of *Ammon* and *Moab* may be as properly chang'd into the Names of the chief Enemies of the Gospel, so far as may be without publick Offence: *Judah* and *Israel* may be called *England* and *Scotland*, and the Land of *Canaan* may be translated into *Great Britain*; The cloudy and typical Expressions of the legal Dispensation should be turned into Evangelical Language, according to the Explications of the New Testament: And when a Christian Psalmist, among the Characters of a Saint, Psal. 15. 5. meets with the Man that *puts not out his Money to Usury*, he ought to exchange *one that is no Oppressor* for an Oppressor or Extortioner, since Usury {247} is not utterly forbidden to Christians, as it was by the Jewish Law; and wheresoever he finds the Person or Offices of our Lord *Jesus Christ* in Prophecy, they ought rather to be translated in a way of History, and those Evangelical Truths should be stript of their Vail of Darkness, and drest in such Expressions that Christ may appear in 'em to all that sing. When he comes to Psal. 40. 6. and reads there Words, *Mine Ears hast thou opened*, he should learn from the Apostle to say, *A Body hast thou prepared for me*, Heb. 10. 5. Instead of *binding the Sacrifice with Cords to the Horns of the Altar*, Psal. 118. 27. we should *offer up Spiritual Sacrifices* (that is the Prayer and Praise of the Heart and Tongue) *acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*, 1 Pet. 2. 5. Where there are any dark Expressions, and difficult to be understood in the Hebrew Songs, these should be left out in our Psalmody, or at least made very plain by a Paraphrase. Where there are Sentences, or whole Psalms, that can very difficultly be accommodated to our Times, they may be utterly omitted. Such is Psal. 150. part of the 38, 45, 60, 68, 81, 108. and some others, as well as a great part of the Song of *Solomon*.

Perhaps 'twill be objected here, that the Book of Psalms would hereby be rendred very imperfect, and some weak Persons might imagine this Attempt to fall under the Censure of Rev. 22. 18, 19. that is, of *taking away from, or adding to the Words of the Book {248} of God*. But 'tis not difficult to reply that though the whole Book: of Psalms was given to be read by us as God's Word for our Use and Instruction, yet it will never follow from thence that the whole was written as a Psalter for the Christian Church to use in Singing. For if this were the Design of it, then every Psalm, and every Line of it might be at one time or another proper to be sung by Christians: But there are many hundred Verses in that Book which a Christian cannot properly assume in singing without a considerable Alteration of the Words, or at least without putting a very different Meaning upon them, from what *David* had when he wrote them; and therefore there is no necessity of translating always intire Psalms, nor of preparing the whole Book for *English* Psalmody. I might here add also Dr. *Patrick's* Apology in his Century of Psalms first publish'd, that he took but the same Liberty which is allow'd to every Parish-Clerk, to chuse what Psalm and what Verses of it he would propose to the People to sing.

Give me leave here to mention several Passages which were hardly made for Christian Lips to assume without some Alteration: Psal. 68. 13, 14, 15, 16. *Tho ye have lain among the Pots, yet shall ye be as the Wings of a Dove cover'd with Silver, and her Feathers with yellow Gold: When the Almighty scatter'd Kings in it, it was white as Snow in Salmon. The Hill of God is as the Hill of Bashan, &c. Why leap ye, ye Hills, &c; ver. 25. {249} The Singers went before, the Players on Instruments followed after, amongst them were the Damsels playing with Timbrels: Bless ye God in the Congregation, even the Lord from the Fountain of Israel: There is little Benjamin with their Ruler, the Princes of Judah and their Council, the Princes of Zebulun, and the Princes of Naphtali. Because of thy Temple at Jerusalem Kings shall bring Presents unto thee. Rebuke the Company of Spearmen, the Multitude of Bulls, with the Calves of the People, till every one submit himself with Pieces of Silver. Psal. 71. 2, 3, &c. Take a Psalm, and bring hither the Timbrel, the pleasant Harp with the Psaltery, blow up the Trumpet in the New Moon, in the Time appointed on our solemn Feast-Day, &c. Psal. 84. 3, 6. The Sparrow hath found an House, and the Swallow a Nest for her self, where she may lay her Young, even thine Altars, O Lord of Hosts, &c. Blessed is the Man whose Strength is in thee, in whose Heart are the Ways of them, who passing*

thro the Valley of Bacha make it a Well, the Rain also filleth the Pools. Psal: 108. 2, 7, 8, 9. *Awake Psaltery and Harp, I my self will awake early. God hath spoken in his Holiness; I will rejoyce, I will divide Shechem,* and mete out the Vally of Succoth; *Gilead is mine, Manasseh is mine, Ephraim also is the Strength of mine Head, Judah is my Lawgiver, Moab is my Washpot, over Edom will I cast out my Shoe, over Philistia will I triumph; Who will bring me into the strong City, who will lead me into Edom* Psal. 69, 8 & 109. are so full of Cursings {250} that they hardly become the Tongue of a Follower of the blessed *Jesus*, who dying pray'd for his own Enemies; *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.* Psal. 134. is suited to the Temple or Tabernacle-Worship; the Title is, *A Song of Degrees*, that is, as Interpreters believe, to be sung as the Kings of *Israel* went up by Steps or Degrees to the House of God; In the *two first Verses* the King calls upon the Levites, *which by Night stand in the House of the Lord, to lift up their Hands in the Sanctuary, and to bless the Lord;* the *3d Verse* is an Antiphona or Reply of the Levites to the King; *the Lord that made Heaven and Earth bless thee out of Zion.* 'Twould be endless to give an Account of all the Paragraphs of ancient Songs, which can scarce ever be accommodated to Gospel-Worship.

The Patrons of another Opinion will say we must sing the Words of *David*, and apply them in our Meditation to the things of the New Testament: But can we believe this to be the best Method of worshiping God, to sing one thing and mean another? besides that the very literal Sense of many of many of these Expressions is exceeding deep and difficult, and not one in twenty of a religious Assembly can possibly understand them at this Distance from the Jewish Days; therefore to keep close to the Language of *David*, we must break the Commands of God by *David*, who requires that we *sing his Praises with Understanding*, Psal. 47.7. And I am {251} perswaded, that St. *Paul* if he lived in our Age and Nation, would no more advise us to sing unintelligible Sentences in *London*, than himself would sing in an unknown Tongue at *Corinth*, 1 Cor. 14. 15, 19. After all, if the literal Sense were known, yet the Application of many Verses of *David* to our State and Circumstances was never design'd, and is utterly impossible; and even where it is possible, yet 'tis so exceeding difficult that very few Persons in an Assembly are capable of it; and when they attempt it, if their Thoughts should be enquir'd one by one, you would find very various, wretched, and contradictory Meanings put upon the Words of the Hebrew Psalmist, and all for want of an Evangelical Translation of him. 'Tis very obvious and common to observe that Persons of Seriousness and Judgment that consider what they sing, are often forced to break off in the midst, to omit whole Lines and Verses, even where the best of our present Translations at used; and thus the Tune, and the Sense, and their Devotion is interrupted at once, because they dare not sing without understanding, and almost against their Consciences. Whereas the more unthinking Multitude go on singing in cheerful Ignorance wheresoever the *Clerk* guides them, a-cross the River *Jordan*, thro' the Land of *Gebal, Ammon and Amalek; He leads 'em into the strong City, he brings them into Edom;* Anon they follow him *thro' the Valley of Bacha*, till they come up to *Jerusalem;* they wait upon him into {252} the Court of Burnt-Offerings, and *bind their Sacrifice with Cords to the Horns of the Altar;* they enter so far into the Temple, till they join their Song in Consort with the *high sounding Cymbals*, their Thoughts are be-darkened with the Smoke of Incense, and cover'd with *Jewish Veils*. Such Expressions as these are the beauties and Perfections of a *Hebrew Song*, they paint every thing to the Life: Such Language was suited by Infinite Wisdom to raise the Affections of the Saints of that Day: But I fear they do but sink our Devotion, and hurt our Worship.

I esteem the Book of *Psalms* the most valuable Part of the Old Testament upon many Accounts: I advise the Reading and Meditation of it more frequently than any single Book of Scripture; and what I advise I practise. Nothing is more proper to furnish our Souls with devout Thoughts, and lead us into a World of Spiritual Experiences: The Expressions of it that are not *Jewish* or peculiar, give us constant Assistance in Prayer and in Praise: But yet if we would prepare *David's* Psalms to be sung by Christian Lips, we should, observe these two plain Rules.

First, They ought to be translated its such a Manner as we have reason to believe *David* would have compos'd 'em if he had lived in our Day: And therefore his Poems are given as a Pattern to be imitated in our Composures, rather than as the precise and invariable Matter of our Psalmody. 'Tis one of the Excellencies of Scripture-Songs, that they {253} are exactly suited to the very Purpose and Design for which they were written, and that both in the Matter, in the Stile, and in all their Ornaments: This gives Life and Strength to the Expression, it presents Objects to the Ears and to the Eyes, and touches the Heart in the most affecting Manner. *David's* Language is adapted to his own Devotion, and to the Worship of the *Jewish Church*; he mentions the very Places of his Journies, or Retirements, of his Sorrows, or his Successes; He names the Nations that were Enemies of the Church, or that shall be its Friends and tho for the most part he leaves the single Persons of his Time nameless in the Body of his Psalm, yet he describes them there with great Particularity, and often names them in the Title. This gives us abundant Ground to infer, that should the *Sweet-Singer of Israel* return from the Dead into our Age, he would not sing the Words of his own Psalms without considerable Alteration; and were he now to transcribe them, he would make them speak the present Circumstances of the Church, and that in the Language of the New Testament: He would see frequent Occasion to insert the Cross of Christ in

his Song, and often interline the Confessions of his Sins with the Blood of the Lamb; often would he describe the Glories and the Triumphs of our blessed Lord in long and flowing Verse, even as *St. Paul*, when he mentions the Name and Honours of Christ can hardly part his Lips from 'em again: {254} His Expressions would run ever bright and clear; such as here and there we find in a single Verse of his old Composures, when he is transported beyond himself, and carried far away from *Jewish* Shadows by the Spirit of Prophecy and the Gospel. We have the more abundant Reason to believe this, if we observe, that all along the sacred History as the Revelations of God and his Grace were made plainer, so the Songs of the Saints express'd that Grace and those Revelations according to the Measure of their Clearness and Increase. Let us begin at the Song of *Moses*, *Exod. 15.* and proceed to *David* and *Solomon*, to the Song of the *Virgin Mary*, of *Zecharias*, *Simeon*, and the *Angels*, the *Hosanna* of the young Children, the Praises paid to God by the Disciples in the *Acts*, the Doxologies of *Paul*, and the Songs of the Christian Church in the Book of the *Revelations*: Every Beam of new Light that broke into the World gave occasion of fresh joy to the Saints, and they were taught to sing of Salvation in all the Degrees of its advancing Glory.

Secondly, In the Translation of *Jewish* Songs for Gospel-Worship, if Scripture affords us any Example, we should be ready to follow it, and the Management thereof should be a Pattern for us. Now tho the Disciples and primitive Christians had so many and so vast Occasions for Praise, yet I know but two Pieces of Songs they borrow'd from the Book of Psalms. One is mention'd in *Luke 19.38.*

{255} Where the Disciples assume a Part of a Verse from the 118th Psalm, but sing it with Alterations and Additions to the Words of *David*.

The other is the Beginning of the second Palm, sung by *Peter* and *John* and their Company, *Acts 4. 23, 24, &c.* You find there an Addition of Praise in the Beginning, *Lord thou art God which hast made Heaven and Earth, and the Sea, and all that in them is.* Then there is a Narration of what *David* spoke, *who by the Mouth of thy servant David hast said, &c.* Next follow the two first Verses of that Psalm, but not in the very Words of the Psalmist: Afterwards an Explication of the *Heathen* and the *People*, (viz.) the *Gentiles* and *Israel*: The *Kings* and the *Rulers*, (viz.) *Herod* and *Pontius Pilate*, and the *Holy Child Jesus*, is God's *anointed*. Then there is an Enlargement of the Matter of Fact by a Consideration of the Hand of God in it, and the Song concludes with the breathing of their Desires towards God for Mercies most precisely suited to their Day and Duty; and you find when they had sung, they went to Prayer in the Assembly, and then they preached the Word of God by the holy Ghost, and with amazing Success. O may I live to see Psalmody perform'd in these evangelick Beauties of Holiness! May these Ears of mine be entertain'd with such Devotion in Publick, such Prayer, such Preaching, and such Praise! May these Eyes behold such returning Glory in the Churches! Then my Soul shall be all Admiration, my Tongue {256} shall humbly attempt to mingle in the Worship, and assist the Harmony and the Joy.

After we have found the true Method of translating *Jewish* Songs for the Use of the *Christian* Church, let us enquire also how lawful and necessary 'tis to compose Spiritual Songs of a more evangelic Frame for the Use of Divine Worship under the Gospel.

The *First* Argument I shall borrow from all the foregoing Discourse concerning the Translation of the Psalms of *David*: For by that time they are fitted for Christian Psalmody, and have all the Particularities of Circumstance that related to *David's* Person, and Times alter'd and suited to our present Case; and the Language of *Judaism* is chang'd into the Stile of the Gospel; the Form and Composure of the Psalm can hardly be called inspired or Divine: only the Materials or the Sense contain'd therein may in a large Sense be called the Word of God, as it is borrowed from that Word. Why then may it not be esteemed as lawful to take some Divine Sense and Materials agreeable to the Word of God, and suited to the present Case and Experience of Christians, and compose them into a Spiritual Song? Especially when we cannot find one ready pen'd in the Bible, whose Subject is near a-kin to our present Condition, or whose Form is adapted to our present Purpose.

The *Second* Argument shall be drawn from the several Ends and Designs of Singing, which can never be sufficiently attain'd by {257} confining ourselves to *David's* Psalms, or the Words of any Songs in Scripture. The first and chief intent of this part of Worship, is to express unto God what Sense and Apprehensions we have of his Essential Glories; and what notice we take of his Works of Wisdom and Power, Vengeance and Mercy; 'tis to vent the inward Devotion of our Spirits in Words of Melody, to speak our own Experience of divine Things, especially our religious Joy; 'twould be tiresom to recount the endless Instances out of the Book of Psalms and other divine Songs, where this is made the chief Business of them. In the Texts of the New Testament where Singing is requir'd, the same Designs are propos'd; when the *Ephesians* are filled with the Spirit, the Enlightner and Comforter, they are charged to indulge those Divine Sensations, and let them break out into a *Spiritual Song*, *Eph. 5.19.* When *any is merry* or chearful, the Apostle *James* bids him express it by *Singing. Giving Thanks unto God*, is the Command of *St. Paul* to the Saints while he enjoins Psalmody on them; And speaking the Wonders of his Power, Justice and Grace, is the Practice of the Church constantly in the Visions of *St. John*. To *teach*

and admonish one another, is mention'd by St. Paul as another Design of Singing; the Improvement of our Meditations, and the kindling Divine Affections Within our selves, is one of the Purposes also of religious Melody, if Eph. 5. 19. be rightly translated. Now, {258} how is it possible all these Ends should be attain'd by a Christian, if he confines his Meditations, his Joys, and his Praises, to the *Hebrew* Book of Psalms? Have we nothing more of the Nature of God revealed to us than *David* had? Is not the Mystery of the ever-blessed Trinity brought out of Darkness into open Light? Where can you find a Psalm that speaks the Miracles of Wisdom and Power as they are discover'd in a crucify'd *Christ*? And how do we rob God the Son of the Glory of his dying Love, if we speak of it only in the gloomy Language of *Smoke and Sacrifices, Bulls and Goats, and the Fat of Lambs*? Is not the Ascent of *Christ* into Heaven, and his Triumph over Principalities and Powers of Darkness a nobler Entertainment for our tuneful Meditations than the removing of the Ark up to the City of David, to the Hill of God, which is high as the Hill of Bashan? Is not our Heart often warm'd with holy Delight in the Contemplation of the Son of God our dear Redeemer whose Love was stronger than Death? Are not our Souls possess'd with a Variety of Divine Affections, when we behold him who is our chief Beloved hanging on the cursed Tree, with the Load of all our Sins upon him, and giving up his Soul to the Sword of Divine Justice in the stead of Rebels and Enemies? And must these Affections be confin'd only to our own Bosoms, or never break forth but in *Jewish* Language, and Words which were not made to express the {259} Devotion of the Gospel? The Heaven and the Hell that we are acquainted with by the Discovery of God our Saviour, give us amore distinct Knowledge of the future and eternal State, than all the former Revelations of God to Men: Life and Immortality is brought to light by the Gospel; we are taught to look far into the invisible World, and take a Prospect of the last awful Scene of Things: We see the Graves opening, and the Dead arising at the Voice of the Archangel, and the Sounding of the Trump of God; We behold the judge on his Tribunal, and we hear the dreadful and the delightful Sentences of Decision that shall pass on all the Sons and Daughters of *Adam*; we are assur'd, that the Saints shall *arise to meet the Lord in the Air, and so shall we be for ever with the Lord*: The Apostle bids us, *Exhort or comfort one another with these Words*, 1 Thess. 4. 17, 18. Now when the same Apostle requires that the *Word of Christ must dwell richly in us in all Wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms and spiritual Songs*; can we think he restrains us only to the Psalms of *David*, which speak very little of all these Glories or Terrors, and that in very obscure Terms and dark Hints of Prophecy? Or shall it be suppos'd, that we must admonish one another of the old *Jewish* Affairs and Ceremonies in Verse, and make Melody with those *weak and beggarly Elements, and the Yoke of Bondage*, and yet never dare to speak of the Wonders of new Discovery except in the plain and simple Language of Prose?

{260} Perhaps 'twill be replied here, that there are some Scriptural Hymns in the Book of *Revelations* that describe the Affairs of the New Testament, the Death and Kingdom of our *Lord Jesus*, and these are lawful to be sung in a Christian Church; I am glad that our Friends of a different Opinion will submit to sing any thing that belongs to the Gospel; I rejoice that the Bible hath any such Pieces of Christian Psalmody in it; lest everything that is Evangelical should utterly be excluded from this Worship, by those who will sing nothing but what is inspired; but how seldom are these Gospel-Songs used among our Churches? how little respect is paid to 'em in comparison of the *Jewish* Psalms? how little mention would ever be made of them, if it were not to defend the Patrons of *Jewish* Psalmody from the gross Absurdity of an entire Return to Judaism in this Part of Worship? But give me leave also to add, that these Christian Hymns are but very short, and very few; nor do they contain a hundredth Part of those glorious Revelations that are made to us by *Christ Jesus* and his Apostles; nor can we suppose God excludes all other Parts of the Gospel from Verse and Singing.

Most express words of Scripture furnish me with a *Third* Argument, Eph. 5. 19, 20. & Col. 3. 16, 17. Which are the two chief Commands of the New Testament for Singing; both bid us *make Melody, and give Thanks to God the Father, in the Name of our* {261} *Lord Jesus Christ*. This is one of the Glories of Gospel-Worship, that all must be offer'd to the Father in his Name. So very particular is our *Lord Jesus* in this Command, that his last Sermon to his Disciples mentions it four times, *John* 14. 13, 14. & 16. 23, 24. Nov why should we make Conscience of praying in the Name of *Christ* always, and offer up our Praises in his Name when we speak in Prose? And yet when we give Thanks in Verse, we almost bind our selves to take no more notice of the Name of *Christ* than *David* or *Moses* did. Why should every part of Divine Worship under the Gospel be express'd in Language suited to that Gospel (*viz.*) Praying, Preaching, Baptism and the Lord's Supper; and yet when we perform that part of Worship which brings us nearest to the heavenly State, we must run back again to the Law to borrow Materials for this Service? And when we are employ'd in the Work of Angels, we talk the Language of the Infant-Church, and speak in Types and Shadows? While we bind our selves to the Words of *David* when he inclines his Ear to a Parable, and opens his dark saying upon the Harp, Psal. 49. 4. we have given too great Countenance to those who still continue the use of the Harp while they open the dark saying.

The *Fourth* Argument may be thus drawn up. There is almost an infinite Number of different Occasions for Praise and Thanksgivings; as well as for Prayer, in the Life of a {262} Christian; and

there is not a Set of Psalms already prepared that can answer all the Varieties of the Providence and the Grace of God. Now if God will be prais'd for all his Mercies, and Singing be one Method of Praise, we have some Reason to believe that God doth not utterly confine us even to the Forms of his own composing. This is thought a very sufficient Reason to resist the Imposition of any Book of Prayers; and I grant that no Number of Prayers of humane Composure cam express every new Difficulty or future Want of a Christian; scarce can we suppose a Divine Volume should do it, except it be equal to many *Folio's*. However I can see no thing in the inspired Book of Praises that should perswade me that the Spirit of God design'd it as a universal Psalm-book; nor that he intended these to include or provide for all the Occasions of Thanksgiving that ever Could befall *Jews* or *Christians* in a single or social Capacity. We find in the History of Scripture, that new Favours receiv'd from God were continually the Subject of new Songs, and the very minute Circumstances of the present Providence are describ'd in the Verse. The Destruction of *Pharoah* in the *Red-Sea*; the Victory of *Barak* over *Sisera*; the various Deliverances, Escapes and Successes of the Son of *Jesse* are described in the Songs of *Moses*, *Deborah* and *David*. The *Jews* in a Land of Captivity sat by the Rivers of *Babylon*, and remembred *Sion*; they could find none of the antient Songs {263} of *Sion* fit to express their present Sorrow and Devotion, tho some of them are mournful enough; then was that admirable and artful Ode written, the *137th Psalm*, which even in the Judgment of the greatest humane Criticks, is not inferiour to the finest Heathen Poems. 'Tis a more dull, and obscure, and unaffecting Method of Worship to preach, or pray, or praise always in Generals: It doth not reach the Heart, nor touch the Passions; God did not think any of his own inspired Hymns clear and full and special enough to express the Praise that was his due of new Blessings of Grace and Providence; and therefore he put a new Song into the Mouths of *Mary*, *Zecharias* and *Simeon*; and 'tis but according to his own Requirement, that the *British-Islands* should make their present Mercies under the Gospel the Subject of fresh Praises; *Isa. 42. 9, 10. Behold the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them; Sing unto the Lord a new Song, and his Praise from the End of the Earth; Ye that go down to the Sea, and all that is therein; the Isles and the Inhabitants thereof.* As for the new Songs in the *Revelations*, the occasions of some of them are very particular, and relate to the Fall of *Anti-Christ*; It can never be imagin'd that there are a compleat Collection of Psalms to suit all the Cases of a Christian Church: They are rather given to us as small Originals, by Imitation whereof the Churches should be furnished with Matter {264} for Psalmody, by those who are capable of composing spiritual Songs according to the various or Special Occasions of Saints or Churches. Now, shall we suppose the Duty of Singing to be so constantly provided for when there was any fresh Occasion under the Old Testament, and just in the very Beginning of the New, and yet that there is no manner of Provision made ever since by ordinary or extraordinary Gifts for the Expression of our particular joys and Thanksgivings? This would be to sink the Gospel, which is a Dispensation of the Spirit, of Liberty, of Joy, and of Glory, beneath the Level of Judaism, when the Saints were kept in hard Bondage, and had not half so much Occasion for Praise.

The Fifth Argument may be borrow'd from the extraordinary Gift of the Spirit to compose or sing spiritual Songs in the primitive Church, express'd in *1_Cor_. 14. 15, 26.* The several Parts of Divine Worship, Praying, Preaching and Singing, were performed by immediate Inspirations of the holy Spirit in that Day, for there two Reasons. (1.) That there might be a Discovery of Divine Power in them, and the Seal of a Miracle set to the several Parts of Christian Worship, to convince the World, and to confirm the Church. (2.) Because there was not time to acquire a Capacity of Preaching, Praying, and composing Spiritual Songs by Diligence and Study, together with the ordinary Assistance of Grace and Blessing of {265} Providence, which would have taken up many Years before the Gospel could have been universally preached. But even in those Times of Inspiration, as *Timothy* himself was *not to neglect the Gift that was in him given by Imposition of Hands*, so he was charg'd to *give Attendance to Reading, to Exhortation, to Doctrine, to meditate upon these things, to give himself wholly to them, that his profiting might appear unto all*, *1 Tim. 4, 14, 15.* And it is granted by all, that the Ministers of the Gospel in our Day are to acquire and improve the Gifts of Knowledge, Prayer and Preaching, by Reading, Meditation and frequent Exercise, together with earnest Requests to God for the ordinary Assistance of his Spirit, and, a Blessing on their Studies; Why then should it be esteem'd sinful, to acquire a Capacity of composing a spiritual Song? Or why is it unlawful to put this Gift in Excercise, for the Use of Singing in the Christian Church, since 'tis one of those three standing Parts of Worship which were at first practis'd and confirm'd by Inspiration and Miracle?

Some may object here, that the words *psallo* and *Psalmos*, which the Apostle useth in this Chapter, intend the Psalms of *David*, and not any new Song: But if we consult the whole Frame and Design of that Chapter, it appears that their worship was all performed by extraordinary Gifts: Now, 'twas no very, extraordinary thing to bring forth, one of *David's* Psalms; nor would it have been proper to have hindered the inspired Worship with such an Interposition of the ordinary Service of an antient *Jewish* Song; 'tis very credible therefore that the Word *Psalm* in this Place signifies a new spiritual Song, and 'tis so used frequently in the Writings of the Primitive Fathers, as appears in the Citations, *pag. 274.*

To close this Rank of Arguments, I might mention the Divine Delight that many pious Souls have

found in the Use of spiritual, Songs, suited to their {266} own Circumstances, and to, the Revelations of the New Testament. If the spiritual Joy and Consolation that particular Persons have tasted in the general Duty or Singing, be esteem'd a tolerable Argument to encourage the Duty and confirm the Institution, I am well assured that the Argument would grow strong apace, and seal this Ordinance beyond Contradiction, if we would but stand fast in the Liberty of the Gospel, and not tie our Consciences up to meer Forms of the Old Testament. The Faith, the Hope, the Love, and the heavenly Pleasure that many Christians have profess'd while they have been singing evangelical Hymns; would probably be multiply'd and diffus'd amongst the Churches, if they would but breath out their Devotion in the Songs of the Lamb as well as in the Song of *Moses*.

Thus far have we proceeded in a way of Argument drawn from Scripture and the Reason of Things. Many Objections have been prevented, or sufficient Hints given for the Removal of them. Those that remain and seem to have any considerable Strength, shall be propos'd with an Attempt to answer them; for I would not have Christians venture upon the Practice of any thing in Divine Worship without due Knowledge and Conviction.

Object. 1. The Directions given for Psalmody in some Parts of the Old Testament, lead us to the Use of those Songs which are inspired, *Deut.* 31. 16, 19, &c. *And the Lord said unto Moses, write ye this Song for you, and teach it the Children of Israel, put it in their Mouths, that this Song may be a Witness for me against the Children of Israel; for when I shall have brought them into the Land which I swear unto their Fathers, which floweth with Milk and Hony, &c. Then they will turn unto other Gods.* And in *Psal.* 81. 1, 2, 3, 4. Where we are required to worship God by Singing, we are not commanded to make a new Psalm, but to make one that is already made, for the words run {267} thus, *Sing aloud unto God our Strength, make a joyful Noise to the God of Jacob; Take a Psalm and bring hither the Tymbræl, the pleasant Harp with the Psaltery, blow up the Trumpet in the New Moon, in the Time appointed, on our solemn Feast-Day, for this was a Statute for Israel, and a Law of the God of Jacob.*

Ans. 1. I have cited these Texts at large wherein the Objection lies, that an Answer might appear plain in the Text to every Reader. How peculiarly do these Commands refer to the *Israelites*? The very Words of the Precept confine it to the *Jews*, to the Men that dwelt in *Canaan*, to the Worship that is paid with Tymbræls and Trumpets, to the Days of the New Moon, and solemn Jewish Festivals; and if we will insist upon these Scriptures as precise Rules of our present Duty and Worship, the Men that use Musical Instruments in a *Christian Church* will take the same Liberty of returning to *Jewish* ordinances, and use then same Text to defend them.

Ans. 2 But if we should grant our selves under the Gospel still obliged by these Commands, yet they do not bind us up intirely to inspired Forms of Singing, since the same sort of Expression is used concerning Prayer; *Hos.* 14. 2. *Take with you Words, and say unto the Lord, take away all Iniquity, and receive us graciously,* &c. Now who is there that esteems himself confin'd to use no other Prayer but scriptural Forms? In other Places, where these Duties are injoin'd, we are bid to pray, or to praise, or to sing; and why should we not be as much at Liberty to suit the Words and the Sense to our present Circumstances in Singing as well as Praying, or in praising with Verse as well as praising in Pros?

Object. 2. The examples of Scripture direct us to inspired Matter for Singing: *Deut.* 31. 21. *Moses wrote this Song the same Day, and taught it the Children of Israel.* *I Chron.* 16. 7. *David delivered first this Song, to thank the Lord, into the Hand of Asaph and {268} his Brethren.* Now in his dying Words, the sweet Psalmist of Israel tells us, *2 Sam.* 23. 1, 2. *The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his Word was in my Tongue.* And in the Days of *Hezekiah*, which was some Ages after *David*: *2 Chron.* 29. 27, 28, 29, 30. *Hezekiah commanded to offer the Burnt-Offering upon the Altar; and when the Burnt-Offering began, the Song of the Lord began also with the Trumpets and with the Instruments ordained by David King of Israel, &c.. Moreover Hezekiah the King and the Princes commanded the Levites to sing Praise to the Lord, with the Words of David and of Asaph the Seer.*

Answ. There are nothing but Examples of *Jewish*, and very ceremonious Worship; Nor do they effectually prove, that the *Jews* themselves were forbid upon all Occasions whatsoever to use more private Composures in their Synagogues, tho in the Temple 'tis probable that for the most part they sung inspired Psalms. But it must be remembred, that these Psalms are all suited to their Dispensation, and yet without doubt they chose such out of them from time to time as best fitted their present Case; and so will we Christians take as many of the Psalms of *David* and other Scripture-Songs, as are suited to our Dispensation and our Circumstances; but there will be but very few in Comparison of what the antient Levites might use, especially if we must *sing the very words of David and Asaph the Seer* without Omission or Paraphrase.

Object. 3. We cannot pretend to make better spiritual Songs than the Spirit of God himself has made, therefore if we should neglect these, and sing humane Composures, we should incur the Censure of the prophet *Malachy*, Chap. 1. v. 13, 14. *Ye brought that which was torn, and the Lame, and the Sick, thus*

ye brought an Offering, saith the Lord, should I accept this of your Hands?

Ans. 1. Can we pretend to make better Prayers {269} than the Spirit of God has made and scatter'd up and down thro' all the Old and New Testament? Can we compose better Sermons than *Moses* or *Solomon*? Better than our Saviour and his Apostles preach'd, and the Spirit of God hath recorded? Why then should not we use Scripture Forms of praying and preaching, as well as of Singing? And tho we may hope for the ordinary Assistance of the Spirit in our Prayers and Sermons, yet how can we expect that these shall be as good as those which were compos'd by his extraordinary Inspiration?

Ans. 2. Divine Wisdom accommodates its Inspirations, its Gifts, its Revelations, and its Writings, to the particular Cases and Seasons in which he finds a Saint or a Church. Now tho we cannot pretend to make a better Prayer than that of *Ezra* or *Daniel*, or our Lord, for the Day and Design for which they were prepared; yet a Song, a Sermon, or a Prayer that expresses my Wants, my Duties or my Mercies, tho it be compos'd by a humane Gift, is much better for me than to tie myself to any inspired Words in any part of Worship which do not reach my Case; and consequently can never be proper to assist the Exercise of my Graces or raise my Devotion.

Ans. 3. I believe that Phrases and Sentences used by inspired Writers are very proper to express our Thoughts in Prayer, Preaching or Praise; and God has frequently given Witness in the Hearts of Christians how much he approves the Language of Scripture; but 'tis always with a Proviso that those Phrases be clear, and expressive of our present Sense, and proper to our present Purpose: Yet we are not to dress up our Prayers, Sermons or Songs in the Language of *Judaism* when we design to express the Doctrines of the Gospel: This would but *darken Divine Counsel by Words without Knowledge*; it would amuse and confound the more ignorant Worshipers, 'twould disgust the more Considerate, and give neither {270} the one nor the other Light or Comfort: And I think it may be as proper in our Churches to read a Sermon of *Moses* or *Isaiah* instead of preaching the Gospel, as to sing a Psalm of *David* whose Expressions chiefly refer to *David* the Shepherd, the King, the Fugitive, the Captain, the Musician and the *Jew*. In short the Prayers, Sermons and Songs in Scripture are rather Patterns by which we should frame our Worship and adjust it to our present Case, than Forms of Worship to which we should precisely and unchangeably confine our selves. And as Sermons which are conformable to the Holy Scripture in a large Sense may be called the *Word of God and the Word of Christ*, and are usually and justly so called if they are agreeable to the Scripture and drawn from thence; so Hymns of Humane Composure according to the Spirit and Doctrines of the Gospel may be as well termed the *Word of Christ*, which is the proper Matter for Christian Psalmody. *Col. 3. 16.* whereas in the strictest and most limited Sense of the Word nothing deserves that Title but the *Hebrew* and *Greek* Originals.

Object. 4. In the New Testament there are Promises of Divine Assistance to Ministers and private Christians in preaching the Gospel and in Prayer; But we have no Promise of the Spirit of God to help us to compose Psalms or Hymns for our private Use or for the Use of the Churches; and how can we practise in the Worship of God what we have no Promise of the holy Spirit to encourage and assist us in?

Ans. 1. There are many general Promises of the Presence of *Christ* with his Ministers, and the Supply of his Spirit in the Discharge of all their Duties for the Edification of the Church: Now there are several Performances which are necessary for the Churches Edification, to which there is no peculiar Promise made of the Assistance of the Spirit in express Words: Such are, Translating the Bible into {271} our Mother-Tongue, Composing our Sermons or at least the Substance and Scheme of them before preaching, Writing pious and useful Treatises upon divine Subjects, and Diligent Reading and study of Books so written; nor is there any more express Encouragement to expect the Presence of the Spirit in turning the Psalms of *David* into Rhime and Metre, than in composing new Spiritual Songs: And yet Ministers that are fitted for such Performances may pray and hope for Divine Assistance in them all, and trust in the general Promises for Help in particular Services.

Ans. 2. There is no need of these Gifts of Criticism or of Poesy for all Christians nor all Ministers, tho it seems necessary that some should be furnish'd with them. A few Persons in an Age or a Nation may translate the Scriptures into the National Language, and may compose a sufficient Number of Hymns to answer the chief Designs and Wants of the Church for that Day for publick Worship. Where there happen Occasions very particular, the Ministers of the Gospel are not or should not be so utterly destitute of common Ingenuity, as to be unable to compose or at least to collect a few tolerable Verses proper for such a Season.

Object. 5. We find no Instances in Scripture of humane Composures sung by the People of God; and 'tis not good to practise such pieces of Worship without a Precedent.

Ans. Whensoever there was just Occasion for an Hymn according to some new and special Providence, we almost every where find a new Song recorded in Scripture, and we call it inspired, nor do I know any just Reason to suspect or doubt of the Inspiration; but if there had been any one which

was not the Effect of an extraordinary Gift but only compos'd by a good Man, we should be ready to take it for inspired because mention'd in Scripture; as we do too {272} many Expressions of the Saints in that divine History, and make every thing that a good Man saith Heavenly and Divine: However if there can be no Pretence made to such an Example in Scripture, yet so much Reason, Argument and Incouragement as hath been already drawn from Scripture sufficiently justifies this Practice, since we perform many Circumstantials of Worship under the Influence of a general Command without express and special Examples.

Object. 6. We ought to sing nothing to God but what is given us for this very End that it may be sung, lest we indulge Will-worship and the Inventions of Men.

Ans. 1. To convert the Verses of *David* into English Lines, to confine them to an exact Number of Syllables, and to make Melody in particular Tunes, may as well be called the Inventions of Men and Will-Worship: But these Inventions are absolutely necessary for the Performance of Divine Commands, and for the Assistance of a whole Congregation to sing; with any tolerable Convenience, Order or Decency, as the Reverend Mr. *Boyse* has well proved.

Ans. 2. Those that refuse to sing Forms of humane Composure tho the Sense be never so divine, generally allow it lawful to take any Parts of Scripture and alter and transpose the Words into a Form fit for Singing; But to take a mere Parable or Story out of the Bible, and put Some Rhimes onto the End of every Line of it, without giving it a new and pathetic Turn, is but a dull way of making spiritual Songs, and without a precedent too. *David* did not deal so with *Genesis* and *Exodus*, tho he loved the Words of the Law as well as we pretend to value the Words of the Gospels and Epistles. The most part of the New Testament as it stands in our Bible was never given us for Psalms, Hymns and spiritual Songs; but for divine Instruction and Materials for this and other Duties, that so we might borrow the Doctrines and {273} Discoveries of the New Testament, and compose Sermons and Songs out of them: But if we take Chapters and Verses promiscuously out of the New Testament, and make them jingle and rhyme, and so sing them, we are guilty of singing what God never commanded to be sung, as much as if we compos'd spiritual Songs by humane Art agreeable to the Sense of Scripture and the Christian Faith.

If the Addition of humane Testimony concerning the Practice of Churches in former or later Ages might have any influence to establish the Consciences of those who are doubtful in this Matter, I might acquaint them that the Churches of *Germany* and the *Eastland* Churches, use many Divine Hymns which are compos'd on several Subjects of the Christian Religion, without any Pretence to extraordinary Gifts. The Church of *England* approves this Practice, as appears in those Spiritual Songs at the End of the old Translation of the Psalm-Book, and some Churches among the Dissenters. The *Christians of the first Ages were wont to meet together on a Day appointed before it was Light, and to speak a Song to Christ as to God.* Thus *Pliny* the *Roman* testifies in a Letter to *Trajan* the Emperour in the Beginning of the second Century. *Tertullian*, who flourish'd about the Beginning of the Third Century, relating the Manner of Administration of the Lord's Supper, asserts *That after they had eat and drank what was sufficient for those that must worship God by Night, &c. Every one was urged to sing unto God publickly either out of the holy Scriptures, or according to their own Genius and Ability,* Apol. C. 39. *Origen*, who flourish'd in the Middle of the Third Century, speaks of *singing Hymns or Praise to the Father in or by Christ in good Rhime, Tune, Metre and Harmony.* *Origen de Orat.* Sect. 6. *Eusebius*, B. 7. C. 19. quotes *Dionisius* writing against *Nepos* thus, *Altho I heartily love Nepos for his Faith, his Study of Knowledge and the holy Scriptures, as well as {274} for various Psalms and Hymns composed by him, which are used to this Day by some Brethren, yet, &c.* In the Acts of the Council of *Antioch* mention'd by *Eusebius*, B.7. C.30. It was one of the Accusations of *Paulus Samosatenus* the Heretick Bishop of *Antioch*, that he *abolished those Psalms which were wont to be sung to the Honour of the Lord Jesus Christ as novel and compos'd by Modern Authors, and that he appointed Women on Easter Day in the Middle of the Church to sing Psalms in his Praise.* And in the Fragment of an anonymous Author extant in *Eusebius* we find the Heresy of *Artemon*, who denied the Divinity of Christ, confuted not only by the Scriptures and the Writings of the precedent Fathers, but also by the *Psalms and Hymns of the Brethren which were formerly compos'd by them, wherein they sung Praises to the WORD of God, declaring Christ to be God.* Such a private composed Hymn was that which *Clemens Alexandrinus* mentions as one commonly known among the Christians in his Days, beginning *Kaire Phos, or Hail Light.* *Spanheim* in his sixth Chapter of the fourth Century of his *Christian History* speaks thus, *Besides Hymns and Songs, and private Psalms, of which there was a great Number in their solemn Assemblies, the Psalm Book of David was brought into the Western Church in this Age in the Time of Damasus and Ambrose; but in the Eastern Church the singing of David's Psalter by Antiphona's or Responses was brought in by Flavianus Antiochenus.* The Use of Psalms compos'd by private Persons seems not to be forbidden in the Church till the Council of *Laodicea* in the fourth Century.

CONCLUSION.

THUS have I drawn together my Thoughts upon this Subject at the Request of several Ministers and private Christians who practise Psalmody in this Method themselves, and sing the Songs of the {275} Lamb as well as the Psalms of *David* in their publick and private Worship, and especially at the Celebration of the Lord's Supper. I had design'd and almost prepar'd a larger Discourse, wherein the Duty of Singing and the Manner of Performance would have been consider'd. But this Essay has already swell'd beyond the Bulk propos'd: There are many that would rejoice to see Evangelic Songs more universally encouraged to the Honour of their Lord *Jesus*, and to the Joy and Consolation of their Fellow-saints. If the Spirit of God shall make any of these Arguments I have used successful to attain this glorious End, I shall take pleasure in the Release of their Souls from that part of *Judaism* which they have so long indulged. I hope the Difficulties that appear'd frightful and discouraging will be lost, and vanish by a diligent and fair Perusal of what is written; yet those that pay a sacred Reverence to the Inspired Writings, may still find it hard to yield to the Conviction; Scruples and Reliques of an old Opinion will perhaps hang about their Consciences still: A Fear and Jealousy of admitting any Forms humane Composure in the Worship of Singing will scarce permit their Lips to practise that to which their Understandings have given their Assent. I would intreat such to give this Discourse a thoughtful Review; and tho they may not judge every Argument conclusive, nor every Objection sufficiently remov'd, yet if there be but one unanswerable Reason it ought to be attended to; and the whole put together may give such Light and Satisfaction as may encourage the Practice of this Duty. 'Tis very easy to make Cavils and Replies to the strongest Reasonings; but let us have a Care lest we rob our Souls and the Churches of those Divine Comforts of evangelic Psalmody, by a Fondness of our old and preconceived Opinions. *He that believeth may eat all Things*, and should not be forbidden: He may partake of *Flesh {276} and drink Wine*; he may tast of the various Pleasure of the Gospel, and sing the New Song: *Another who is weak eateth Herbs*, and satisfies himself with ancient Melody. *Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not, and let not him which eateth not judge him which eateth, for God hath received him*, Rom. 14. 2.

If the Hymns and spiritual Songs which are here presented to the World are so unhappy as to discourage the Design of this Essay, I will censure and reprove them my self: If they are condemned as being unsuitable to the Capacity or Experience of plain Christians, I will easily confess a Variety of Faults in them; 'twas hard to restrain my Verse always within the Bounds of my Design; 'Twas hard to sink every Line to the Level of a whole Congregation, and yet to keep it above Contempt. However among so great a Number of Songs I hope there will be some found that speak the very Language, and Desires and Sense of the meanest Souls, and will be an Assistance to their Joy and Worship. The Blemishes of the rest may serve to awaken some more pious and judicious Fancy to a more successful Attempt; and whoever shall have the Honour of such a Performance, I promise my self a large Share in the Pleasure. But we must despair of hearing the *New Song of the Lamb* in its Perfection and Glory, till *Babylon the Great is fallen, and the Kingdoms of this World are become the Kingdoms of the Lord and his Christ*, till the *New Heavens and the New Earth* appear, till *all the former things are passed away, and all things are made New*.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SHORT ESSAY TOWARD THE IMPROVEMENT OF PSALMODY ***

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