

The Psalms in Worship

A SERIES OF CONVENTION PAPERS BEARING
UPON THE PLACE OF THE PSALMS IN
THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

EDITED BY

JOHN McNAUGHER, D.D., LL.D.

Professor of New Testament Literature and Criticism in the
Allegheny Theological Seminary



PITTSBURGH

The United Presbyterian Board of Publication

1907

COPYRIGHT 1907 BY
THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION
PITTSBURGH, PA.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN EXCLUSIVE USE OF THE PSALMS IN PRESENT-DAY APOLOGETICS

BY THE REV. M. G. KYLE, D. D., PHILADELPHIA, PA.

THE form in which this subject is stated plainly demands the following treatment: I. Apologetics; a definition. II. Present-day Apologetics; an explanation. III. Psalmody in Present-day Apologetics; a discussion.

I. The function of apologetics is, in general, to safeguard the truth of God from impinging error and to "justify the ways of God to men." More specifically, it is to keep to the fore the "present truth" and stand in the breach against the latest assault. Apologetics is the standing army of the Church militant, which faces every way in time of peace, always presents a solid front in the line of immediate progress, and concentrates at the danger-point in time of war. Thus apologetics becomes an important part of the practical means of the Kingdom of God for the accomplishment of its blessed mission.

II. Present-day apologetics, while not neglecting for a moment its general duty to safeguard the truth and "justify the ways of God to men," is pressingly called to its more specific task of keeping to the fore the "present truth" and standing in the breach against the latest assault. Present-day apologetics is all that apologetics ever was, and something that it never was. Every form of unbelief that ever assailed the Church of God is still at large and venomous; all the heresies and "isms," all the philosophies and "ologies" that have existed under time-worn names in centuries gone by, keep springing into new life under new names in our own day. And in addition to all this, there has come in the present day, mainly from the technically literary side of learning, and under the very adroit and taking name,

“The Modern View of the Bible,” a scientific massing of all the forces of the guerrilla warfare of unbelief in all ages; and accompanying this *coup de guerre* is the diplomatic demand for the canonization of unbelief itself and its enrolment among the saints and worthies on the specious plea of “loyalty to truth and the scientific method.”

The daily press of the world, in its hypocritical altruism, journalistic literature of the day, with its apparent assumption of omniscience, and modern fiction, from its arrogated seat as moral lawgiver of mankind, voice the demand for this “modern view of the Bible.” There is a “modern view” of the Bible which needs no apologetics against it. The Church learns. The philologist, the geographer, the archæologist, the critic, under the guidance of the promised Spirit are ever coming into the truth, not getting away from it, are finding out the truth and corroborating it, not finding out that it is all a myth, a legend, or something else belonging to fairyland. But that which calls itself the “modern view” is something very different.

A scientific and clear-cut statement of the things most generally agreed upon by the exponents of the “modern view” is difficult to obtain; but the goal toward which the “modern view” looks, and to which some of its advocates have already come, is easily discerned. Professor George Adam Smith says, rather vaguely, “We may say that modern criticism has won its war against the traditional theories. It only remains to fix the amount of the indemnity.”¹ Professor T. K. Cheyne ventures to speak out a little on the dangerous subject of indemnity when he belittles and thrusts into the realm of the problematical the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, His descent into Hades, His resurrection and ascension, and says, “The question of questions is, what was there in the personality of Jesus which led the earliest disciples to identify Him with the Christ the Son of God?”² That is, of the “virgin birth, the virtuous life, the

¹ *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 72.

² *Bible Problems*, 1904.

vicarious death, and the victorious resurrection," he looks askance at all but the virtuous life. An old author from the days before unbelief became so diplomatic stated the case explicitly when he said, "In the former part of the *Age of Reason* I have spoken of the three frauds—mystery, miracle, and prophecy; I have spoken also in the same work upon what is called revelation, and have shown the absurd misapplication of the term to the books of the Old Testament and the New."³ These are the words of one Thomas Paine, who speaks candidly, if bluntly, of the three frauds, viz., "mystery, miracle, and prophecy," instead of insinuating doubts concerning the mystery of the incarnation, the miracle of the resurrection, and the prophecy of His atonement. I have quoted this execrated author that we may not be deceived by the fine-turned phrases of the polished advocates of the "modern view." Indeed, we must note that the practical method for the introduction of the "modern view," as announced by its advocates, is not less important from an apologetic standpoint than the "view" itself. Professor Cheyne has this in a recent number of the *Nineteenth Century*: "The most important point for those of us who study the Old Testament is . . . how by a combination of old methods with new, and by the attainment of a new point of view, to reconstruct our study; and how by the gentlest possible transition to introduce our pupils and the public to this new treatment of the Old Testament." And the *Homiletic Review* furnishes this from the pen of Dr. Willard Scott: "The wise minister, under these circumstances, will not need to be told to treat his subjects suggestively rather than dogmatically." "A considerate care also should be used, which may be both apt and noble at the same time in one of a right spirit, to avoid words and phrases which have come to have an unwelcome meaning to people of conservative tendencies, such as 'Higher Criticism,' 'Evolution,' the 'Man of Galilee,' and the like. Ministers should consider not only what they mean by the words, but what others may infer from them—oftentimes a very different

³ Paine's *Age of Reason*, p. 127.

thing—and to make their approach to new truth as far as possible along the familiar paths of the fathers, contenting themselves with such variations or inferences, not very extensive at any one time, as will set people thinking.”⁴

To meet the enemy in the olden time, when he buckled on his armor, advanced as an enemy, and cried “Stand guard there,” was one thing, something that developed the apologetics of a century ago; to meet the same enemy in academic robes or in priestly vestments, with prophetic mien and even ecclesiastical authority, and withal assuming all the importance of a scholarly “Four Hundred,” is quite another thing. This is present-day apologetics.

III. The exclusive use of the Psalms may be variously defined, but for the purpose of this paper it means that the Psalms be accorded the same preëminence and authority that has been accorded hitherto in Protestantism to other Books of the Bible, to the end that nothing else shall displace or supplement them *for the purpose for which they were given*. There are important questions of literature, of interpretation, and of criticism, as the authorship of the various Psalms, the completeness of doctrine in the Psalms, and Thirtle’s recent discovery of the meaning of the titles of the Psalms, which connect the Psalter in a vital way with present-day apologetics, but are entirely outside the scope of this paper, which is confined to the apologetic value of an exclusive use of the Psalms in the praise service.

The importance of such an exclusive use of the Psalms in present-day apologetics is, first, in general, to safeguard against error one of the most potent and impressive portions of religious worship. The Church would do well to heed that pregnant aphorism of Andrew Fletcher: “If a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation.” One little social custom of a people, whether in Church or in State, is more potent for good or for evil than a very great theory, whether it be embodied in law or in the-

⁴ *Homiletic Review*, September, 1904.

ology. So long as the Psalms are accorded an equal pre-eminence and authority with the other Books of the Bible, so that nothing else shall displace or supplement them in the use for which they were intended, the singing custom, one of the most potent for good or evil of all human customs, is safeguarded against error, while the use of hymnology of human composition opens the door to the insidious introduction of every species of belief or unbelief, of "ism" or sectarianism. Historically the making of hymn-books had its inception in the desire of Bardesanes and his gifted son Harmonius, of the second century, to popularize false doctrine, and they have ever been one of its most copious and dangerous channels. Here, then, is a very real use of Psalmody in practical apologetics, and one not the less timely because of its age and universal applicability.

But second, and more specifically, the importance of an exclusive use of the Psalms in present-day apologetics is in maintaining the uniqueness of Scripture through inspiration. True, the "modern view" admits the uniqueness of Scripture, but it is the uniqueness of literary and moral character, which makes it only *primus inter pares*. The "modern view" also speaks—and very lovingly—of inspiration, but, again, it is only an inspiration that distinguishes *among many*, not an inspiration that differentiates *one*. Present-day apologetics has need to stand for the uniqueness of Scripture, not only for an aloofness, but for an aloneness of Scripture, through inspiration *unshared*. This uniqueness is being assailed both as to its authority and as to its preëminence, and at the very point of departure from an exclusive use of the Psalms. Canon H. Hensly Henson of Westminster puts the case thus: "Moreover, it is hard to see why the traditional practice of limiting the lessons read in Church to the Bible should forever continue. It was the custom in the primitive Church and throughout the Middle Ages to read the lives of the saints. We want to supplement the canonical Scriptures by the Christian compositions which have secured the ap-

proval of general acceptance, and taken the rank of spiritual classics among religious people, just as in the worship of the Church the Psalter has been supplemented by hymns and anthems.”⁵ And why not? It is useless to lift up holy hands in horror at the Canon’s conclusions unless in practice we reject his premises; his logic here is impeccable. If we may find substitutes or supplements for one God-given Book for the purpose for which God gave it, who is to say nay to us if we indulge our fancy and our vanity in doing the same for every other? And if the choir and the congregation have such large “Christian liberty,” it is a petty meanness that denies to the more highly trained pulpit the same privilege. And if the Church of Christ takes to herself to find something else “just as good” as the Psalter that God has given her for a specific purpose, need we wonder that refined indifference, not to say infidelity, goes further along the same road and announces the finding of something “just as good” and as much to the purpose as all the rest of the Bible.

Third. The importance of the Psalter in present-day apologetics is in opposing the enthronement of subjectivism in the religious life. The whole Bible belongs to the realm of the objective in religion. The law of God is a command from without; the gospel is a message from without; prophecy is warning and exhortation from without, not mere apprehensiveness; the Proverbs are precepts of everlasting, universal, absolute truth from without, not mere vagaries of the hermits of thought; the Epistles belong to the field of dialectic, of premise, comparison, and conclusion, not to the field of speculation, going off on tangential airships into the vasty realms of the unknown and the unknowable; and even the Apocalypse announces itself to be the images of things “which must shortly come to pass.” So the Psalms are the objective praise of God. They celebrate what God is in His being and His attributes, and what He does in creation, in providence, and in redemption, together with the Spirit-guided experience of a human soul, and set man in the

⁵ *Contemporary Review*, April, 1904.

presence of the Almighty to humble himself before the throne of God. On the other hand, the "modern view" of the Bible, when condensed into a single scientific term, is subjectivism, more definitively, Emersonian subjectivism. It is the setting up of a subjective standard of truth, the enthronement of self as the final judge of what is truth. The poet said, "Things are not what they seem," but this new philosophy stands upon the notion that things are what they seem, and if not, so much the worse for the things. A recent great sermon on a great occasion by a great preacher, who is himself one of the foremost advocates of the "modern view," had for its theme "The seemly is the true." But with fallible and exceedingly various human taste as the standard of the seemly, "The seemly is the true" means simply that what any man likes is truth for him. *This is subjectivism.* Now this subjectivism is the formative principle, the very soul and spirit, of the historical criticism of the Bible, which is the working method of the "modern view." I listened in the summer of 1904 to a most astonishing illustration of this subjectivism run mad in a lecture at Berlin by Professor Adolf Harnack, a leading exponent of historical criticism and of the "modern view" at the present day. In his course of lectures on the trustworthiness of the Gospel records he had come to the incidents of the last week of the Saviour's life. He concluded that everything was authentic except the Lord's last words on the cross, "Into Thy hands I commend My spirit." This expression he thought was a summing up by Luke of the trustful sentiments of the Twenty-Second Psalm, and by him put into the mouth of the dying Jesus. But if Luke discerned this to be a summing up of the Psalm, and an appropriate expression of the mind of Christ, and if Harnack could so clearly analyze Luke's mental processes and penetrate to the secret source of his words, why may not Jesus Himself have thought these thoughts and used these words? But great is German criticism, and great is the subjective standard of truth in the "modern view" of the Bible!

Now, apologetics of to-day has to deal with this new claim and

practice—of a subjective standard of truth, that “the seemly is the true.” And one of the most dangerous outlets of subjectivism is permission by Christian sentiment to every soul that can give off a spiritual vapor of some sort to do so, while the rest of the Kingdom wafts it heavenward as the very breath of praise to God. To be healthy physically we have need to keep clear as much as possible of the exhalations of bodies, and breathe God’s pure air; and to be healthy spiritually we must get rid of the exhalations of souls, and breathe God’s pure air. Thus one of the most powerful preventives and correctives of this detestable subjectivism of the present day, and so one of the most practical methods of present-day apologetics, is to sing or chant God’s praise only in the objective realities of God and His works, and the Spirit’s work in the soul, as celebrated in these same Psalms of the Bible—which God has given us so to use.

The determination of the proper use of Biblical Psalmody in the Church belongs not to the scope of this paper, and, indeed, that must be determined by every branch of the Church for itself; but that determination, whatever it may be, right or wrong, is vital in present-day apologetics. Perfection is not to be expected, but any branch of the Church that does not make a safe determination of this question in its practice will not long stand before the assaults of the present-day conflict. This question is far broader than United Presbyterianism. I appeal to every branch of Christ’s Church and, with no intention or desire to thrust upon others our determination of it, call upon them to determine it for themselves, face to face with the fact that it stands at the very heart’s center of the Biblical question of to-day.