

IN TRANSLATIŌNE

John Brown of Wamphray Singing of Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs in the Public Worship of God

FROM DE CAUSA DEI CONTRA ANTISABBATARIOS

John Brown of Wamphray, an exiled minister of the Church of Scotland, was the most important Scottish theologian of the period known as the Killing Times (1660–1688). He was one of the strongest defenders of the Covenanter cause.¹ Among many books he wrote while residing in Holland, Brown's *magnum opus* is his *De Causa Dei contra Antisabbatarios* (2 volumes 4to, Rotterdam, 1674, 1676).² The experts past and present are in agreement in their assessment of the man and this work. "In addition to establishing the continuing obligation of the Sabbath, it discusses a wide variety of questions concerning the law of God..." (Lachman).

JOHN BROWN OF WAMPFRAY (c.1610–1679). The extract presented here is translated from Joanne Broun, *De Causa Dei Contra AntiSabbatarios Tractatus* (Rotterdam: Apud Henricum Goddaem, Bibliopolam. Anno [1674]). The selection translated appears in volume 2, pages 954–966. TRANSLATED BY N. E. Barry Hofstetter, Th.M.

1. See more about the life of Brown of Wamphray in Mr. Backenstro's article in this issue, 118–119.

2. D. C. Lachman, "Brown, John (of Wamphray)," *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel M. De S. Cameron, David F. Wright, David C. Lachman, and Donald E. Meek (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 98.

3. John MacPherson, *The Doctrine of the Church in Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh: MacNiven & Wallace, 1903) 49.

4. James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland, 1560–1750* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872.; Second Edition, edited by N.L. Walker and W.G. Blaikie, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888; repr. Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1982).

5. Robert Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the Restoration to the Revolution* (Glasgow: Blackie, Fullarton, & Co., [1828]) 304.

6. "Brown of Wamphray, published, in Rotterdam, an exhaustive Latin work against the Anti-Sabbatarians, in two volumes, which were respectively issued in 1674 and 1676. In the second volume, page 959, Paul's three words are restricted to the Book of Psalms, and several very cogent reasons are given for doing so." David Hay Fleming, "The Hymnology of the Reformation," *Original Secession Magazine* (January-June and September 1884); repr. in *An Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature 4* (Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 1991) 223–246.

7. Brown uses the Greek word ἐθελοθρησκιας.

MacPherson writes that Brown's "most elaborate work is *De Causa Dei Contra Anti-Sabbatarios*, a huge work which would fill at least five goodly octavo volumes, full of interesting and important matter, especially regarding fundamental questions about the sanctions of law and the law of God."³ Walker calls it "great in length, great in learning, great in patient sifting of the subject, and in meeting of assertions and marshalling of arguments."⁴ Wodrow styles Brown as "a man of very great learning, warm zeal, and remarkable piety."⁵

The translation presented here is a section from this great work on the subject of Psalm singing. While perhaps nothing is surprising from what one would expect to find,⁶ it is fitting to have the comments readily available of one of the leading Covenanter figures on a subject that has come to be so identified with Covenanter worship practice. The text translated begins with the portion ending the previous section where Brown is addressing imposed forms of prayer and "free" prayer, and articulates what we today call the regulative principle of worship. In the subsequent portion, Brown deals with the subject of singing of praise in public worship, proving first that singing of praise is an element of public worship under the New Testament, before moving on to deal with what he believes should be the content of such praise. Due to the length, the translation will be presented in two parts, with the balance to appear in the 2008 issue (D.V.).

CHRIS COLDWELL

Singing of Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs in the Public Worship of God

Nor should this be omitted, since this practice was not enjoined by the Lord. Nevertheless, it is strictly urged, and sedulously observed by them, and holds a certain type of will worship⁷ at the very least, an observance rooted in the will that is not divinely ordained. God does not wish to be worshipped according to the precepts of men, Matt 15. He hates and abominates every act of worship which he did not institute. It cannot be denied, that these formulations are prohibited in the worship of God, and that they are not prescribed by God, either as a category, or individually. Assuredly they do not pertain to the circumstances of worship, but constitute a part of the worship itself. How, therefore, are they able to usurp it as though so commanded? Or how is it possible for anything added or enjoined by men as part of the worship of God when in fact it has not been instituted by God? It is fitting for us to remember the judgments inflicted against the sons of Aaron (Lev 10), against Uzziah (2 Sam 6), against the Bethlemites (1 Sam 6), and against those who change anything in their worship of God.

God today is a jealous⁸ God and does not wish to permit anyone to alter worship of him with impunity. It is well known why we object to the Popes, when we dispute against their abuses in divine worship, and condemn them on account of their additions. Here, however, the change of manner which has been ordained by God is obvious, namely that the addition destroys. Moreover, when God permits, so that we worship in a natural manner in prayers, it is the case that we express the thoughts of our soul in our own words appropriate to them,⁹ and so utilize the ability freely conceded to us by nature. Not only does God permit this without ordaining a formula, but the Spirit has become our help and has promised the required resources. He makes it more than sufficiently clear that he wills us to address him without prescribed formulas using natural speech. Since therefore the matter so stands, to whom is it permitted to change this manner, to take away our liberty, to add or enjoin anything to the divine order, so that anyone, once the natural manner of addressing God is rejected, is bound to the words ordered and formulated by men? And who with good conscience is able to approve this corruption in divine worship, to embrace the addition, and to confirm it in his own practice? But enough of this.

In the fourth place, there is another public exercise that must be treated, and that is the hymn, doxology or the act of thanksgiving that is modulated through sound, or the singing of psalms, hymns or spiritual songs. There are those that deny that this is a legitimate exercise of divine worship permitted in the NT, and desire that that all vocal worship now be eliminated, and require only spiritual singing in the heart. We indeed acknowledge this as necessary, but we also claim that vocal singing is also required. Indeed, this type of singing, either to a tune or a kind of rhythmic chanting is not denied in the OT. They object, however, that the external worship which nature and art furnished in the NT God now entirely repudiates since it was not perfected in Spirit and in truth. Truly they do not consider that God had once for all repudiated all worship which was not offered in Spirit and in truth. Indeed, God instituted in the OT certain external rites in worship which have now been abolished, but it does not appear that all external worship has been abolished, nor does it follow. It is not possible for God to be worshipped in Spirit and truth when worship is exhibited to him which cannot be performed without art and nature, such as reading, listening, the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and so forth.¹⁰ Without the arts and the help of nature it cannot be done.¹¹

But that this action which arose under the NT is part of divine worship is evident. (1) From the example of Christ, who, after the Supper instituted by him, sang a hymn with his disciples. To the same extent that we ought to imitate him in the other actions instituted in that Supper, so also in this.

They object: It is indeed apparent that they praised God, but not that they used singing or a modulated voice, for ὑμνεῖω signifies praise or celebrate. *Response:* In the opinion of some, it means “lament,” as Novarinus witnesses with regard to the passage.¹² However, it does not follow from this that Christ and the apostles lamented. Furthermore, the word in general may signify “praise” or “give thanks.” Properly and commonly, however, it signifies “to sing or speak¹³ a hymn” and so it can be rendered in every passage in the NT where it appears (cf. Mark 14:26, Acts. 16:25, Heb 4:12¹⁴ and here). So it is rendered by most authorities, including Beza, Piscator, and Pagnus “when they had sung a hymn.” Mauldus, “when they had sung praise to God.” Noyarinus, “when they had spoken praises.” The interpreter of Euthymius, “when they had spoken praises.” “Hymns are,” Augustine says, “praises to God with song. If there is praise, but not of God, then it is not a hymn. A hymn must have three elements then: praise, to God, and singing.

(2) Furthermore, that vocal singing took place in the NT is clear from the example of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:25), “who in the middle of the night were praying and singing hymns.”¹⁵ Thus also from the instruction of Paul when he wrote both to the Ephesians and the Colossians: Eph 5:19 “Speaking mutually to one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord.” Col 3:16, “Let the word of God dwell among you richly with all wisdom, by teaching and admonishing yourselves mutually with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thanksgiving singing in your heart to the Lord.” Yet he does not mean to excite anyone, because expressly the apostle does not enjoin anyone to sing, but that they speak to one another, teach and admonish one another. For when he bids them to teach and admonish one another he also bids them to speak to one another. When he bids them to speak to one another in Psalms, etc., he commands something else, that they teach and encourage one another in Psalms, etc., as Paul had done based on the law (Acts 28:23). This abundantly makes clear

8. *Zelotypus*, transliterated from the Greek ζήλοτυπος, meaning “jealous.”

9. Sc. “the thoughts of our soul”

10. [Ed. Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith 21.5.]

11. This argument sounds rather convoluted to modern ears, but Brown simply means that without human skills (*artes*, arts) and abilities (*natura*, nature) even true worship cannot take place.

12. *in loco* is slightly ambiguous: it could also be referring to the passage in Novarinus where this is discussed, but this makes little difference to the overall meaning of our text at this point.

13. *dicere hymnum* or *laudes* (praises) implies singing or rhythmic recitation.

14. This is a misprint in the original, Heb 2:12 is intended.

15. These scriptures are translated directly from the Latin as presented in our text.

that whenever they employ this particular mode, meaning “singing and making melody,” ἀΐδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες, these words denote vocal and audible singing. No one may make this exception, that Paul here prescribes nothing concerning this exercise in public assemblies or for the churches. Since it is in the Epistles, he prescribes it for the use of the churches, and it has a particular concern for them. If in private assemblies the apostle enjoins the use of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, in order that some edify others by singing, who shall persuade us that this exercise should not promote edification in the public assemblies of the church? If it promotes it or is able to promote it, why should we not think that the apostle enjoins it here?

(3) That in the time of the apostles, in the public assembly of the church, it was the custom to sing hymns to God is evident from 1 Cor 14:15–16, 26. There the apostle especially urges that the one who makes melody and sings does so with intelligence and edification.

(4) James chapter 5:16 confirms this as a NT practice. Is anyone of good spirit? Let him make melody.

(5) There are those who confirm this practice from the prophets of the OT and in other predictions and mandates, which look toward us. Consider Isa 52:8, Ps 100:1; 95:1–2.

Nor can this argument be advanced, that it is possible for God to be praised using musical instruments. For these instruments pertain especially to that economy, something which cannot be said concerning vocal singing. Those who oppose this exercise claim that external singing was a type of the internal singing of the heart. But by what testimony do the Scriptures confirm this? Christ, as we have seen, sung a hymn with the disciples in the administration of the Lord’s Supper. They would not have done this if it had been any kind of type. Indeed, nature teaches that God must be praised by our voice, and James instructs us to sing psalms, whenever we are of good cheer. We do not believe that the apostle wished to prescribe an improper use of the type in any way nor is it possible to supply any rationale to call praising God with our tongue a type, any more than we could so describe prayer.

(6) Surely in Scripture the tongue, modulating hymns and praises to God, is called our glory—Psalm 16:9, 108:2, 57:8? Surely this is agreed that God must be praised by our tongue, since it is no less our glory now to exult than it was the glory

of the saints of old? No less are we bound to celebrate praises to God by our glory now. Surely God is said to inhabit the praises of Israel, יְהוָה בְּתוֹכָם, Psalm 22:4.

(7) The most famous Voetius proves this from the nature of singing in his *Ecclesiastical City*, part 1, book 2, tract 2, chapter 2, p. 521.¹⁶

Which is nothing else [he says] other than human speech pronounced with some modulation, for the παθηματα of our soul, or the signifying, moving, bending, composing and leading of our affections, the impressing of the proposed matter more deeply. As common experience teaches, and those authors who prescribe the use of music, it is the modulate word that is most useful in moving and helping intelligence, memory, and affections.

See also Deut 31:19.

(8) The Gentiles themselves, instructed only by the light of nature, had their own songs for praising their fictitious and false gods. Nature demands that we celebrate our true God, to whom alone we ought to render acceptable worship, with altogether modulated speech. The tongue is the primary instrument with which we praise others, and, as we stated above, it is called “our glory.” Therefore, by that special instrument of praise, we are bound to praise our God.

(9) By whatever argument our adversaries contend against this exercise, by that same argument they could contend against other external obligations, but in fact they do not deny them as moral necessities. Moreover, when they claim either that nothing is apparent in the Psalms either in vocal singing (which they take as a spiritual gift), or that it is impossible to use carnal or pagan men as examples, or that it cannot be performed by nature or art, surely they can, by this same argument, prove that we should not use human voice in the reading and hearing of Scripture, or in expressing our prayers? Even the carnal or pagan man is able to read, hear, and speak words according to the power of speech. Nothing is apparent in these external acts which would deny the use of nature and art as an example. However, let none say that these are not moral requirements to which we are obligated under the N.T.

(10) Experience agrees that this exercise properly done is advantageous to promoting edification. The author of *Questions and Responses to the Orthodox* discusses this in his “response to question 107,” citing Voetius as above, p. 522.¹⁷

Wherefore [he says], it is not the use of songs through instruments of this type and others agreeable to the unwise that is received, but simple singing remains among them. Moreover, this excites the soul with a

16. [Ed. Gisbertus Voetius (Gijsbert Voet), *Politica Ecclesiastica*, volume 1 (Amsterdam: 1663).]

17. [Ed. *Quaestiones et Responsiones ad Orthodoxos* “has come down to us as a pseudonymous work, probably dating from the 4th century, perhaps from the hand of Diodorus of Tarsus (died c.391) or of Theodoret.” “The Epistle of Davenant (Epistola Davenantii) Bishop of Salisbury to Samuel Ward, Master of Sydney Sussex College, Cambridge,” translated by S. Joel Garver. Footnote 29. <http://www.joelgarver.com/writ/hist/davenant.htm> (accessed June 6, 2007).].

certain pleasure, to ignite the desire in order to celebrate. It lays to rest the affections and lusts of the flesh, the evil thoughts of one's enemies, removing them as they arise by suggestion. It produces the generous and brave contenders in piety through constancy in adverse affairs. For all those sad and mournful happenstances which occur in life it affords medicine.

See also Num 21:17; Prov 20:12; Ps 145:7 and 89:1, 47; Eph 5:19; James 5:13.

(11) From the Psalm itself, which was established for the honor and celebration of the Sabbath, we learn this to be the most agreeable exercise of the Sabbath day. Ps 92:1, 4: "It is good to celebrate Jehovah, and to sing psalms to your name, Excellent One. I shall sing about the deeds of your hands." As long as the Sabbath endures, so this exercise ought to endure. In the NT we have the Sabbath, that is the Lord's Day, our Christian Sabbath, as we proved above. See also Ps 95:1-3.

(12) This is confirmed by the practice of the ancient Apostolic church afterward. About the practice of the Christians, Pliny the Second witnesses "it is their custom to assemble on a stated day before dawn, and to sing a song among themselves to Christ as though he were a god." Origin, Book 8, *Contra Celsum*, "We sing hymns only to the God of the universe and to God the Word, his only begotten." Tertullian, in his *Apologia*, c. 39, witnesses "In public assemblies psalms and hymns are sung." In c. 9 of *De Anima*, amid "The Rites of the Lord" he surveys "The Singing of the Psalms." Gregory Nazianzenus, in *Orations* 48, instructs "to sing hymns in place of tympanis, psalmody in place of shameful and disgraceful songs," surely in public celebrations. Epiphanius, at the end of Panarius, when he seeks the order and faithfulness of the church, says "Matin hymns are done regularly in the holy church itself, and Matin sermons." Others abundantly testify in the same fashion. From all of these it is clear that the custom of the Eastern church, from the time of the apostles, was to sing to God in their public gatherings. Some have observed, rather than the church creating it, that the use of singing psalms created the church. The Western church accepted this somewhat later, but they did accept it, as may be shown by many references. See Voetius above, p. 523.

The question is advanced concerning the substance of these sacred songs. There are those who assert that we ought not to bind ourselves exclusively to the Psalms of David in our public assemblies, and also to other hymns in Scripture, since they wish these to have been taught to be celebrated according to the Mosaic system,¹⁸ adapted from the teaching of the OT., but also assert that we ought to use hymns composed by private members of the church as the Spirit dictates, members furnished with that gift of the spirit.¹⁹ However, this opinion ought not to be stipulated:

(1) Since this opinion rests only on one support, it is not sufficiently firm, consider 1 Cor 14:26. "But by the reading of the chapter cited," (says Voetius, above, p. 527), "they ought to have learned that the Apostle is speaking concerning the gifts of prophecy, tongues, etc., given to some extraordinarily in the church. Their use and exercise had to be controlled for the edification of the church. Hence, it is a poor conclusion to apply the argument in whatever way you wish to those who fill the church today. If these things are in doubt for household worship, extemporaneous vs. the premeditated use of the Psalms, whether tunes should be used in singing, how much less with regard to the church are extemporaneous songs appropriate, in order to obey 1 Thess 5:21, 'test all things,' and 1 Jn 4:1, 'test the spirits?'" It is clear that the early church, and especially the church at Corinth, had various extraordinary gifts. It is now broadly agreed, however, that these gifts have now ceased. Therefore, from this, the fact that there were those who were gifted, under the leading of the Spirit, in forming a certain type of spiritual song and happened to be in the congregation of the faithful does not mean that they only had to sing Psalm or hymns which were composed by private individuals so endowed with the extraordinary gift. Even less does it mean that the Psalms of private individuals should be preferred to the Psalms and hymns dictated infallibly by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, it is probable from v. 15 that while some were accustomed to sing in an unknown tongue, that the practice nevertheless is not now to be approved.

(2) Moreover, if it has become our moral duty under the Gospel to sing hymns or Psalms, as has now been proven, then either we ought to sing Psalms dictated by the Spirit of God as recorded in the Scriptures, or it is necessary for the church of one accord to compose and prepare its own Psalms. But this does not follow. The actual reasoning is this: if it is not fitting to sing Psalms other than those composed by members of the church, it would be necessary to do so in many churches, so that the Psalms and hymns would be composed and written beforehand. In singing Psalms, it is not possible for the church to agree as one unless the material were prepared beforehand, since all the various musical elements, including tune, rhythm and meter, would have to be sufficiently learned by all ahead of time. It would therefore be necessary that they be in one church, those who are versed in that art. Otherwise, there will be no resources available for preparation of the singing.

(3) If it is necessary that the substance of the sacred songs be composed in this way, it is quite likely that Christ the Forerunner would have wanted to institute such a gift so that

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18. Latin, *cultus*, meaning in this context "system of worship."

19. This second use of *spiritus* is not capitalized in the original.