

# THE SOURCE OF THE CHURCH'S SONG - Part 2

## SOLA SCRIPTURA AND MUSIC

Music has a unique way of fusing our brains to words, meaning and memory. It is how we are created. It's not a random byproduct of vocal cords, it's by design.

*"When singing praise to God, so much more than just the vocal box is engaged. God has created our minds to judge pitch and lyric; to think through the concepts we sing; to engage the intellect, imagination, and memory; and to remember what is set to a tune."*<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the Reformation, people were singing to learn and remember the truths and teachings of scripture (Sola Scriptura). Teachings were passed from person to person, from congregation to congregation, not only in writings and sermons, but in song.

*"The hymn became, next to the German Bible and the German sermon, the most powerful missionary of the evangelical doctrines of sin and redemption, and they accompanied the Reformation in its triumphal march. They were first printed as tracts. These hymns were scattered wide and far, and they were sung in the house, and in the school, and in the church, and on the street."*<sup>2</sup>

The Reformers used music to teach and transform the church. First, because they could not help but to sing out of the rediscovery of the gospel, but also, they saw singing as an indispensable tool to teach the deep truths and doctrines of scripture to the people. The scriptures were sung!

**THESIS: We believe what we sing.**

### LEX ORANDI, LEX CREDENDI

How did the reformers displace a thousand years of high church ritual? The Word of God, the Gospel, in their liturgy. The congregation went from spectators to engaged worshipers. Reminding each other, in creeds and songs, of what the scriptures say and mean.

The Reformers reform was widespread and a powerful force because of their understanding of **Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi** (the law of prayer, is the law of belief). How worshipers prayed

informed how they believed. How they believed was shaped by their liturgy. If their pattern and practice of worship propagated error, then it would undermine their theological truths. On the other hand, if what they practiced, prayed and sang, it would reinforce, invigorate and propagate quickly what they were trying to teach. It was a powerful means by which to communicate theology. It was the way to drive home the truth, and to protect their flock from error. The focus of their liturgy shifted from the priests to the full participation of the congregation.

### **Arius Heresy**

In the 4th century AD, the arch-heretic, Arius used popular tunes (jingles) that he wrote to teach and spread the theology that he taught which was the Arian heresy (a non-trinitarian doctrine of Christ).

*“Who, after abandoning the oracles of divine Scripture, call Arius's Thaliae; a new wisdom? And with reason too, for they are announcing a new heresy. And hence a man may marvel, that, whereas many have written many treatises and abundant homilies upon the Old Testament and the New, yet in none of them is a Thalia found; nay nor among the more respectable of the Gentiles, but among those only who sing such strains over their cups, amid cheers and jokes, when men are merry, that the rest may laugh; till this marvellous Arius, taking no grave pattern, and ignorant even of what is respectable, while he stole largely from other heresies, would be original in the ludicrous, with none but Sotades for his rival. For what beseemed him more, when he would dance forth against the Saviour, than to throw his wretched words of irreligion into dissolute and loose metres?”*<sup>3</sup>

Alexandria was a major port city, so Arius composed songs that sailors could easily remember. This is one of the major reasons why it got legs quickly and spread so rapidly and embedded itself deep in Christianity.

‘Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi’ was not an invention of the Reformers, it was straight from the Word of God to His people.

## SONG AND THE WORD IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Song is indispensable and connected with the life of God's people throughout scripture. Songs that not only give us a way to vent our emotion in spirit and truth in worship, but to remind us in every circumstance in life, in joy or grief, sadness, loss, or celebration, that the Word of God is our anchor and will last forever.

**Exodus 15:1-18** - First song of praise to God.

**Numbers 21:17-18** - Short song, "Spring up, O Well".

**Deuteronomy 31:19-22** - God commands again to Moses to write a song.

**2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles** - Music comes to forefront of how God's people are to praise Him.

**Psalms** - The entire book of Psalms is a 'songbook' with many exhortations to Sing

**Matthew 26:30** - Jesus and the apostles singing a hymn before they went out the Mount of Olives.

**Acts 16:25** - Paul and Silas are singing hymns to God in while in prison.

**1 Corinthians 14:26** - A hymn is to be used to build each other up.

**Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Timothy 3:16** - are just a few passages thought by many scholars to be quotations from early church hymns.

**James 5:13** - Song is prescribed for comfort.

**Revelation 14:3** - The 144,000 were singing a new song.

**Revelation 15:3** - The saints in heaven are singing once again, "The Song of Moses."

## THE MEANS: COLOSSIANS 3:16

As the Reformers taught through the scriptures, they began to write songs that would help to teach the common people their rich theology of the doctrines of grace. The foundational text for the reformers monumental shift in their worship liturgy and music in the church is found in Colossians 3.

*"That it is good, and pleasing to God, for us to sing spiritual songs is, I think, a truth where no Christian can be ignorant; since not only the example of the prophets and kings of the Old Testament (who praised God with singing and music, poesy and all kinds of stringed instruments) but also the like practice of all Christendom from the beginning, especially in respect to psalms, is well known to even one: yea, St. Paul doth also appoint the same (1 Cor xiv) and command the Colossians, in the third chapter; to sing spiritual songs and psalms from the heart unto the Lord, that thereby the word of God and Christian doctrine be in every way furthered and practised." 4*

## The Command: Teach

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. - Colossians 3:16*

The Apostle Paul gives us a command to teach each other. Not just teach, but teach in the context of song. The Greek word here for singing is used to describe the lyrical emotion of a devout and grateful soul. It's the same word used in Ephesians 5:19. This is not a command given only to those who are musically gifted. It's for all of us.

This is how God in His infinite wisdom and sovereignty designed music to affect us. He intended it to anchor deep truths to our soul and to help us remember His word.

*"Teaching," he saith, "and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Mark also the considerateness of Paul. Seeing that reading is toilsome, and its irksomeness great, he led them not to histories, but to psalms, that thou mightest at once delight thy soul with singing, and gently beguile thy labors. "Hymns," he saith, "and spiritual songs." But now your children will utter songs and dances of Satan, like cooks, and caterers, and musicians; no one knoweth any psalm, but it seems a thing to be ashamed of even, and a mockery, and a joke. There is the treasury house of all these evils. For whatsoever soil the plant stands in, such is the fruit it bears; if in a sandy and salty soil, of like nature is its fruit; if in a sweet and rich one, it is again similar. So the matter of instruction is a sort of fountain. Teach him to sing those psalms which are so full of the love of wisdom;" <sup>5</sup>*

## How do we sing?

### 1. The source of our singing: The Word

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...*

Dwell: be at home! (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16)

Richly: abundantly! (Titus 3:4-7)

Scripture is to permeate every aspect of our lives, control every thought, word, and deed. We remember what we sing, so sing rich, deep songs. Rich theology produces rich songs. Shallow songs produce shallow theology.

We must sing songs that give us a complete full picture of the Godhead. Sing the deep truths of the gospel. From our song lyrics, we should know our condition and how we are saved, how our proper response should be. We sing songs that point us to the riches found in scripture. You want to know what a church believes? Their view of scripture? You can look up their statement of faith, or simply look at the songs they sing.

## **2. The audience for our singing: Each other**

*...teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing...*

Sing it to each other. We are to remind each other. Teach, admonish, in all wisdom. (Hebrews 10:19-25)

This is not a private experience. This is for each other. Our songs should be accessible. Our services should be united. Not sectioned off by stylistic preferences. Children and people new to Christ need to be singing the great songs of our faith alongside those who have been walking with God for 80 years. Our singing teaches. We are reminding each other of what we believe.

## **3. The object of our singing: God**

*...with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

We sing heartily (not half heartily), with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, giving thanks to God in our song. He's the object of our worship. Not us. God knows who He is but it is so that we would be reminded of who He is. We come seeking to do that which honors Him. To worship Him the way He instructs us to worship (Psalm 103:1; Colossians 3:17).

The list of Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is not a checklist, but a call to use all that is musically available to us. We have these examples given to sing Psalms right from scripture, to sing hymns that summarize our beliefs, and to sing songs of testimony that remind us of what God has done. This is a command that is not landlocked in style and culture, but a command that transcends centuries, style, and culture. The principles apply whether you're in a church in California or across the globe in a remote village in the foothills of the Himalayas.

## **REFORMED PRINCIPLES OF WORSHIP**

*"The Reformers understood the necessity of the written Word for salvation and the importance of the sweep of the Scriptures for the Christian life. It is no surprise, then, to see their liturgical texts soaked in the biblical text – not only through the scriptural lessons, but other liturgical forms which contained Scripture." <sup>6</sup>*

The Scriptures were seen everywhere. Their worship service liturgies went from the Medieval mass where God's voice was not present (no scripture), to being completely 'soaked in the biblical text' (Sola Scriptura).

### **The Normative and Regulative principles of Worship**

When the churches of the Reformation affirmed sola scriptura, the question had to be asked, "Are the scriptures alone sufficient to regulate the worship of the church or does tradition have a place in regulating the worship of the church?" This question gave rise to two answers in the church of the Reformation.

#### **Normative Principle:**

The "Conservative Reformation" of Luther adopted the policy of preserving the worship of Medieval Catholicism except where it is most obviously contradicted by Scripture.

#### **Regulative Principle:**

Only those practices or elements which are specifically commanded or modeled in Scripture are to be permitted in worship services.

Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, who were all incredibly talented musicians with the skill to write poetry and music, were concerned with ceremony and performance's potential of distraction from their theological teachings. They each developed their own form and practice of church liturgy.

#### **Ulrich Zwingli (Unofficial category: Affective principle):**

Zwingli believed that music was too powerful and too emotional to be used in Christian worship. He argued that music would too easily move people away from focusing on the Word and its meaning for them. So among other things, he had the church organ destroyed. In the place of singing, Zwingli had the congregation recite Scriptural passages antiphonally.

#### **Calvin (Regulative Principle):**

"Only those practices or elements which are specifically commanded or modeled in Scripture are to be permitted in worship services."

*"This is a thing neither dead nor brutish, this good affection toward God: rather it is a lively movement, proceeding from the Holy Spirit, when the heart is properly touched, and the understanding enlightened." 7*

**Luther (Normative Principle):**

“We are going to keep the elements in the German mass intact, as long as they don’t directly contradict scripture.”

Tradition died hard. Luther was not compromising but saw value in keeping some elements as tools to teach in his liturgy. Above all, Luther wanted people to remember what they believed and have their emotions stirred by vigorous, passionate singing.

Concerning the reformation of the Mass:

*“We will do so in such a way that we will no longer rule hearts by the word of doctrine only, but also put our hand to it and bring it into practice in the public administration.”<sup>8</sup>*

Luther was a prolific hymn writer often collaborating with other composers. It was said that men feared his hymns more than himself. His most famous hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” was considered the anthem of the Reformation. Luther revolutionized music style. He was focused on creating music that was easy to sing and remember.

*“These songs have been set in four parts, for no other reason than because I wished to provide our young people (who both will and ought to be instructed in music and other sciences) with something whereby they might rid themselves of amorous and carnal songs, and in theirs stead learn something wholesome, and so apply themselves to what is good with pleasure, as becometh the young.”<sup>9</sup>*

Luther brought common forms of music to the forefront of church singing. It was said of him that he did as much for the Reformation by his hymns as by his translation of the Bible.

*“His hymns were known by heart by every peasant in Germany.”<sup>10</sup>*

## COMMON PRACTICES PAST AND PRESENT

Even though the Reformers did not all agree on the form and practice of their liturgy, they all agreed this: **Sola Scriptura as the only source for our singing.** They have handed down to us unchanging and timeless principles. The Reformers restored to us an understanding of a biblically faithful worship service.

### **Congregational Worship is:**

1. Trinitarian
2. Word-centered

### **New Testament Commands for Worship:**

The Reformers blueprint for worship liturgy came from the New Testament commands for worship summarized in Acts 2:42:

*“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”*

Elements found in a biblically faithful worship service:

- Read the Word
- Pray the Word
- Preach the Word
- See the Word
- Sing the Word

We believe what we sing. Sola Scriptura, the battle cry of the Reformation, is the only foundation on which we build our congregational worship liturgy. Our singing. Sola Scriptura governs all. Although musical styles are fluid and subjective, we must be uncompromising in the source for our Word-centered liturgy. Not one opportunity in our gatherings should be wasted. We must have a high view of the biblical content of music that fills our minds to rightly teach and admonish each other.



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