

### III. The Declension and Resurrection of Psalm Singing

#### A. The Breadth of Psalm-use.

It is striking that nearly all the Calvinistic bodies (including much of Anglicanism) were Psalm-singing communities until relevantly recent times. Most of the larger bodies began to use "human-originated" hymns and songs in the latter part of the 18th century and this snowballed in the 19th and 20th centuries. When the exclusivity of the Psalms was surrendered there was almost always a predictable swing of the pendulum into the neglect of the Psalms. But Psalm singing is still a large part in the Dutch-Reformed (general term) circles and still the only "acceptable" worship music in the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America.

#### B. The Chief difficulties:

We can only summarize these briefly.

1. An arbitrariness in the exclusive use that makes the pastures on the other side of the fence really look green.
2. Wording: often in the paraphrases and metrical versions it is poorly arranged and poorly phrased for comprehensive singing. I will probably give an example from Psalm 23...you will be fortunate if I do not sing it.
3. Subject Material...much of it is foreign to our understanding and expression. There is little we need that is not found in the Psalter but there is much in the Psalter which we do not sing with intelligence (the imprecations, etc.)
4. Tunes and emotions...an artificiality may be caused which is damaging to the heart of the worship sequence.
5. Cessation of Enterprise...hard to say it right but if all the worshipful songs are written why should my heart be exercised individually? There are answers, of course, but the problem is an obtrusive one.

#### C. Some corrective helps:

A few positive things are helping the image today...

1. The return of "singing classes"...where those who enjoy the Psalms just get together and "sing!"
2. The Reformed Synod made a brilliant contribution some years ago but, unfortunately, it was kept pretty much to themselves. They put a count in the Song-Book indicating how many quarter notes should be sung in a minute and how long it should take to sing a stanza. This gave the song leader a metronomic guide (although not an inflexible rule) and offered a means whereby the song would neither drag nor be abused by speed.
3. Contemporary Psalm ascriptions (singing)