

singing

extract of Proposition XI § xxvi

§ xxvi. There is no need for long discussion about the singing of psalms, because it is just the same as in the two previous subjects of preaching and prayer. We recognize that this is part of God's worship, very sweet and refreshing when it proceeds from a true sense of God's love in the heart, and arises from the divine influence of the Spirit, which leads souls to breathe forth a sweet harmony or words suitable to the present condition. They may be words used in the past by the saints and recorded in Scripture, such as the Psalms of David, or other words, such as the hymns and songs of Zachariah, Simeon, or the blessed Virgin Mary. But as for the custom of formal singing, there is no trace* of it in Scripture, nor any basis in true Christianity. Besides all the abuses which come with prayer and preaching, formal singing has this specific abuse: often great and horrid lies are said in the sight of God, because all kinds of wicked and profane people take it on themselves to sing loudly¹ representing the experiences and condition of blessed David, things which are not only false about themselves but also about some more sober people who utter them. They will sing sometimes (Psalm 22:14) "my heart is like wax; it has melted within me;" and verse 15 "my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue clings to my jaws; you have brought me to the dust of death." And Psalm 6:6: "I am weary with my groaning; all

¹ The English word Barclay uses is "personate," and the Latin word is *personare* which means "resound, sing loudly." Following the Latin, it seems the modern English idea of "impersonate" (which would also fit with the context) was not Barclay's intention.

night I make my bed swim; I water my couch with my tears.” And many more verses which the people who say them know to be false about themselves. Sometimes they will confess immediately afterwards, in their prayers, that they are guilty of the vices which are the opposite of the virtues they have just finished saying they had.² Who can suppose that God accepts such juggling?³ Such singing pleases the carnal ears of men more than the pure ears of God, who detests all lying and hypocrisy.

So the singing which pleases him must arise from that which is PURE *in the heart* (from the *Word of Life* within). Through that, when it dwells richly in us, spiritual songs and hymns are offered to the Lord, according to what the apostle says in Colossians 3:16.

But regarding their artificial music, whether by organs or other instruments, or by voice, there is no precept or example for it in the New Testament.

Source: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XI § xxvi (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 341-342; and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) p. 262.

² Latin: *Et aliquando immediate post psalmum fatebuntur in orationibus se eorum vitiorum reos esse, pro redemptione a quibus cum David jamjam laudaban Deum*, “And sometimes right after the psalm they will confess in prayers that they are guilty of those vices, from which just before, along with David, they were praising God for redeeming them.”

³ Latin: *hypocrisin*, “hypocrisy”