



## The *Pulpit Exchange*

It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (1 Corinthians 1:21)  
So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. (Nehemiah 8:8) Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

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### Proper Worship Forms: Segregated Seating and Kneeling Prayer

We think of segregated seating and kneeling prayer as one aspect of our worship patterns. We know that whenever we deal with the mechanics of worship, we can threaten the spirit of worship. Our desire would be that we would discuss some of the mechanics of worship and thereby enhance worshipping the Lord in spirit and in truth. In Acts 1:12-14, we have a general overview of the brethren's assembly. "Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."

In Nehemiah 8, we have the account of the children of Israel gathering together to hear the law

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## **Introductions**

### **Consanguinity of Preaching**

For some this may seem a big word but its significance in everyday affairs, especially related to the laws of marriage, is very important. Consanguinity means, "a blood relationship, or "a close connection or affinity." The Levitical laws in Leviticus 18 and 20 give reference to for-bidding marriage between close relatives. Modern Science recognizes the wisdom of these God given laws and the laws of most modern nations recognize them. We teach and practice what we believe to be a safe and Scriptural practice in the plural ministry. The plural ministry helps to 'round out'

Vol. 1 No. 1, January 2006. The Pulpit Exchange is a compilation of written sermons without commentary, published as often as possible, in the interests of promoting sound preaching in our conservative Anabaptist churches. The purpose of this periodical is not to glorify man. All sermons have been transcribed and printed with permission. Names are removed so that we can focus on the message and content rather than on a certain speaker or style. (Names will be published in the next issue). Nor will there be any commentary or editorial.

Messages have been selected on the basis of topic rather than the speaker. Messages have been selected from congregations within the Conservative Mennonite Church of Ontario, Conservative Mennonite Churches of York and Adams Counties, PA., Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, Maranatha Amish Mennonite Churches, Mennonite Christian Fellowship, Nationwide Fellowship Churches, Ohio Wisler Mennonite, Washington-Franklin Mennonite Conference, and certain selected unaffiliated Amish Mennonite congregations.

We welcome submission of recorded sermons, topics, school meetings, writer's meetings, and special conferences by ministry and laity (where recording is permitted) provided permission has been obtained by the speaker for the recording. Submissions must have a title, the name of the speaker and the congregation responsible for recording (date would be helpful).

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the preaching and lends itself well to ensuring the congregation receives a balanced diet. We also recognize both the wisdom and strength that pul-pit exchange gives to the local congregation. This can be accomplished through revival meetings, special meetings, and regular exchange between related congregations. Pulpit exchange lends itself well in preventing a congregation from becoming ingrown and somewhat 'consanguineous.' It lends further strength to the practice of the plural ministry.

Thus this periodical is brought forth, not as a substitute for preaching or regular pulpit exchange, nor as a commentary, but to meet a need of strengthening our congregations. God has provided a lesson through nature in the spring and summer. Many flowers, trees and other plants require cross pollination. These trees and such like are not self fertile, but require others to pollinate them. Thus the need for pulpit exchange is well illustrated.

May we be strengthened in our conviction and in the Word through *The Pulpit Exchange*.  
—KGW

being read and expounded. The Scripture says that they came, "men and women, and all that could hear with understanding." (Nehemiah 8:2) This would suggest to us that at least, from about primary age on, the children were there as well. These Scriptures would underscore that worship in the Scriptures is present-ed as a family affair. It is not only for the older folks, or the adults. In Deuteronomy 31:12 the Lord said, "Gather the people together, men, and women, and children . . . that they may hear . . . and fear the LORD your God."

Certainly, we believe yet today that those who fear the Lord and believe the Scriptures, worship the Lord as a family. Thus, if we all will come to church, which we believe is right, then we will need to decide on acceptable and normal patterns of worship.

I remember hearing of an individual who came to a church fellowship that had a standard and considered normal practices of worship. He came from a church where it was not quite as much that way. His comment was, "It is so much of a blessing and so relaxing to come to church and know what to expect. Where I came from, you never knew what to expect when you went to church, what pattern or method might be used when we went to church today." He found it to be relaxing and enhancing to the worship experience. This is what we want it to do.

If we will come as a family, which we intend to do, then we will need to consider what is normal and acceptable worship patterns, among these, the seating arrangement. Some in the past, and possibly yet today, rent a family pew. They came to church as a family also, but they rented their

pew. Frequently the position of the pew indicated the affluence of the family or sort of signified where they were in the social strata. Their seating thereby gave them some acknowledgement of that.

I know of no Scripture that tells us how to seat ourselves in the assembly. However, it is interesting to notice how the people of God did in the past. History would teach us that the Jewish worship in the synagogues, was actually a place of teaching that was formulated following the exile or during the time of the exile. It was continued, and in the time of Christ, the synagogue was the accepted place of worship. There was an entrance for the men, and a separate entrance for the women. The women sat in a gallery at the rear of the assembly room. Herod's temple in Jerusalem had a men's court and a court of the women.

Apparently, the Jews practiced segregated seating in their normal worship assemblies. Orthodox Jewish synagogues today still practice segregated seating. I know of one Jewish synagogue where the men gathered sort of in the centre and a little lower, and the women were in a sort of balcony around the side, and possibly in the back. One brother said of a Jewish synagogue which was a bit small and maybe a bit older building that the men sat in the centre and the women in the balcony in the back and above. This may be a little like at Numidia, where there is a balcony in the back of the auditorium. When the service became a little lengthy, the women would start shuffling their feet to indicate that was now time to

stop, and that the discussion was getting a little too long. This probably did not enhance their worship, but it does indicate that they do have segregated seating.

One early Christian in the second century AD had this to say in defence of a false accusation that the Christian's involved themselves in licentiousness worship practices, "We are so far from indulging in licentious practices that some of us blush about even modest intermingling among the men and women." This is not a direct quote but it is the thought. We receive the distinct impression that the interchange between the men and women was very reserved and discreet. M. G. Weaver, in his book on Lancaster Conference Mennonites, describes the layout of an early Mennonite auditorium by saying, "It was divided into four sections. One for older men and one for the older women; one for the younger men and boys, and one for younger women and the girls."

Certainly, we are not the only ones that have this practice, nor did we begin this practice. It certainly is right that we diligently preserve it. We do appreciate the fact that we go to church where segregated seating is the normal worship pattern. In our discipline we say, "Due to the contribution that mixed seating makes to the moral breakdown, we will follow the practice of segregated seating for worship services. Wedding and funerals may be considered exceptions." We promote vigorously that public worship is a family affair. We do not promote leaving the children

with a baby sitter or having a special children's church. We bring the family along to church. We also feel that the segregated seating arrangement enhances our worship rather than inhibits it.

In the first place we practice segregated seating because of the contribution to the moral breakdown that mixed seating makes. We at times speak of the contribution to the lack of reserve and discretion in society that the mixed workplace has made. I would suggest that we would very quickly experience, to some degree, the same deterioration if we moved to mixed seating for regular worship services. We should not consider it normal to sit elbow to elbow with our brother's wife or with our sister's husband or to stand up after the service and be face to face with our neighbour's spouse, or a young person of the opposite gender. This should make us feel a little bit like our hands are at the wrong place or for a sister that her dress belt might be twisted. It should be a bit foreign to our mind set — that this is not normal. We should feel out of ease to engage in animated conversation for a half an hour with someone of the opposite gender because that is who we sat beside during the church service. It should feel awkward to simply enter the after the worship service discussion with them. I would suggest that it can, and probably would, very soon be different, if our seating arrangement were mixed instead of segregated.

I remember one young lady who told us that most of her close friends were boys and men instead of

women. This was highly irregular. Of course at least in our mind frame it is. In our society, often people look at the mixed up genders a little bit like we believe we should look at colour of skin. We know we do not notice that. We try to at least accept them as the same as us, whatever the colour of skin is. Yet, I have the impression that there is about that much reserve between the genders in society. We believe a certain healthy reserve between the men and the women, and the boys and the girls is right, and we want to safeguard that. One of the ways that we safeguard this is to continue the practice of segregated seating for worship services.

In the second place, we practice segregated seating so that we may worship without distraction. There is a natural attraction toward the opposite gender. That is God-given and right. However, if that attraction, even the perfectly legitimate aspects of it, is nurtured or concentrated on, at the time of our worship toward God, it is a distraction. Thus, we say that we practice segregated seating, that we may worship without distraction.

I remember once when a dating couple visited, a number of years ago in an older Conference church. In that congregation, the practice was segregated seating. Although, I do remember as a boy in the Lancaster Conference setting, it was not at all uncommon for at least dating couples to sit together during the church service. This dating couple came to church and wanted to sit together. One of the ministry met them at the door and said, "We practice segregated seating

here ... "Oh," he said, "My girlfriend and I are almost married." This brother said, "My wife and I are married, and we do not sit together either." Thus, they sat separate that evening.

There are times when we have visitors from other church backgrounds or settings that come to our services. We do permit them to sit together as couples or families if they wish, but we do not ourselves, so that we may worship without distraction.

Furthermore, in the third place, we practice segregated seating and thereby experience more tranquil, delightful worship services. Maybe this would be simply some of the side benefits of segregated seating. Children are more easily taught to sit still when their parents are separated, than when they are sitting beside each other. Recently, following a wedding, a mother who sat in front of us, made a comment. I noticed during the service there was a little struggle to keep the children behaving like they should. She was doing a good job, but she was had to work at it a little. She commented later, "I am really not so sure it is better to sit together as a family than apart, as far as the children behaving."

This is right. It is easier to teach the children to sit still if we are sitting separately than sitting together. The little one sitting on mother's lap is sure that if father's is so close that would be better. When she gets to father's lap, she is just as sure in a few minutes that mother's would be better. Thus, back and forth, if you grant the wish, it will go nearly endlessly, throughout the service. I do not be-

lieve that we practice segregated seating so that children learn to sit still. No, but it is easier when we are sitting separate. It is a side benefit.

We also experience more delightful worship services in the singing aspect. The singing is better with segregated seating and everybody all blended to each other. Normally when we think of a mixed chorus, the male and female voices are split up in respective parts of singing. It helps produce good accapella singing, and harmonious four-part music. Again, this is not the reason why we practice segregated seating, but it is a side benefit.

Why do we make exceptions for weddings and funerals? I suppose it is for the same reason as some push for mixed seating in regular worship service. It is thought of, that the family stays together. I asked someone who attends a church that decided to move from segregated seating to mixed seating if he could share with me some of the reasoning that went into that. I thought it would help me to understand a little different mind set. However, he said, "I do not really remember if there was any." He said, "I really think there are maybe some negatives associated with it, maybe more than positives." He mentioned an additional negative. Sometimes if the auditorium is fairly well filled, and a whole family enters, then there is not room for the whole family on a given bench. If father sits with the boys, and mother with the girls, then they can fit in easier. This was sort of an insignificant reason.

I suppose, typically at a funeral, we view as a family in the viewing after

the service. At weddings we meet the married couple as a couple or as a family. These are sort of family centered services. However, it is true that at our Old Order brethren funerals, they have segregated seating, and the viewing is before the service. I am glad when there are weddings and funerals, to see at times effort made that the men still sit beside the men and the women beside the women. The very reasons that I gave for practicing segregated seating apply there. At times there are awkward situations where a mother has to crawl out past a whole bench full of men and women to attend her little baby. That can be a challenge. I personally have not felt that we are unduly jeopardizing the practice of segregated seating by making these exemptions, but we should continue to consider them as exceptions rather than the norm. It has been a blessing to us because of that.

The last thing that I will mention will introduce the kneeling prayer. We practice segregated seating in the fourth place, for it fits well with our practice of kneeling for prayer. Even in a crowded auditorium, it is not violating propriety to kneel to pray. This brings us to the second half of our discussion on proper worship patterns, the practice of kneeling prayer. We say, "In keeping with the following Scriptures, we will continue the practice of kneeling prayer in our worship services." In Psalm 95:6 we read, "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker."

In 2 Chronicles 6:13, we read of

Solomon at the dedication of the temple. He was on a pulpit of wood. The Scripture says that he, "kneeling down upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven, And said, O LORD God." Some people ask, "Why do we not lift our hands like the Scripture says, 'lifting up holy hands'" (1 Timothy 2:8) God's will is "that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." It is not wrong to lift holy hands. There are also other postures that are accurate and acceptable to God. However, we believe that there are some aspects of kneeling prayer that we cherish and want to keep. When we think of Solomon, kneeling "upon his knees before all the congregation of Israel," we know that people come to their king on their knees. In this example, we have a king before his people on his knees. Is that typical? I would say, "Oh, yes, a thousand times yes." May the people of God ever know that their ministers are on their knees before their Lord on their behalf frequently. It is not at all uncommon to expect, in fact it should be expected, that our ministry, that we as ministers are kneeling before our God on behalf of our people. May we not sin brethren, in ceasing to pray for the people that God has called us to serve, kneeling on our knees.

It is typical that we should come and kneel before our Lord because, just as surely as any suppliant comes before his king to beseech his well-being, we must come before our God. It is right that we do it on our

knees. We probably have heard of the apostle James, who had calloused knees, like camel's knees, because of his often kneeling and persistent labour in prayer. One songwriter gives an observation, (in referring to this song, I do not mean to endorse it or encourage it). Its words have some inspirational encouragement that I thought I would refer to. "We are standing up for Jesus, Every time we kneel to pray." Further, we have heard the statement, "The Devil trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees." These may be oversimplified statements, yet certainly they contain inspirational encouragement to give ourselves to prayer. May we ever be that kind of people.

In Philippians 2:10, 11 we read, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." In this context it is not referring to a future event, but in the current present tense. The Lord, "bath highly exalted him." (Philippians 2:9) This has happened. "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." This is present and now. We ought to be kneeling parishioners. We ought to be kneeling prayers. "That every tongue should confess." In this passage, bowing knees and confessing tongues go hand in hand. In the first place, we practice kneeling prayer because it is a symbol of posture and reverence. We are approaching the sovereign of the universe — the One whom the "heaven of heavens cannot contain," (I Kings 8:27; 2 Chronicles 2:6; 6:18) — the One

8who "hangeth the earth upon nothing." (Job 26:7) "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:4) How should we come to the Sovereign of the universe? I know of no better way, than to come humbly bowing on our knees. It is right that we come before him in a posture symbolizing reverence.

I understand at least some of the Ukrainian's who have come across from the Ukraine in recent years, consider it inappropriate to sit at the table and pray before eating a meal. They said, "We sit to visit with peers, but not when we come before one of a superior position:' Thus, they stand or they kneel instead of sitting to pray. Even in their schools I understand when the teacher asks the student a question, it is not considered respectful to stay sitting in their seat to answer it, but they stand up beside their seat to answer his questions. There is something about this that I think is right. At least, we should remember that as we come into the throne room of the universe, we are coming to the sovereign One, the God of all creation, the one, "with whom we have to do." (Hebrews 4:13) Our God is certainly worthy of our greatest reverence. Thus, we kneel as an expression of reverence when we enter the throne room of the universe.

In the second place, we kneel to pray because it is a symbol and posture of position, surrender and obedience. Do we remember when Joseph dreamed his dreams? His sheaf arose and his brother's sheaves made obedience to his sheaves? (Genesis 37:7) It also says, "the sun and the moon



and the eleven stars made obeisance to [him]." (verse 9) Jacob was perplexed. He said, "Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" (verse 10) We also remember that this is precisely what took place in that interchange in Egypt with Joseph. They were expressing their submission, surrender, and obeisance to this lord of the land, who happened to be Joseph. Are we a love slave of Jesus Christ? Have we submitted to His Lordship?

It is certainly right, particularly in the incidences of planned prayer, to kneel to pray. By this I mean to say that when we are driving down the road and cry to the Lord, "Lord, help me," when someone dashes out in front of us and we want to avert an accident, or on the tractor, or milking the cows, or in the kitchen, certainly we cry out to the Lord, where we are. However, in our instances of planned prayer it is right that we come in the posture of kneeling. We state thereby, to the Lord, "I hold nothing back. I am fully surrendered. Whatever Thy will or pleasure, I will accept." Of course, of yet greater importance than our posture is that our heart is there. This is how it needs to be. When that is the case then kneeling prayer becomes very normal.

The third area that I believe we practice kneeling prayer is because it is a posture of supplication. I realize these are closely related. In Luke 22:41, 42, we have the example of our Lord Jesus, "And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, re-

move this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." We kneel to pray because it is a posture of supplication. The account is given of a military general in Napoleon's army, who had committed a crime worthy of execution. Upon hearing of the planned execution of this military general, this general's daughter made a journey to Napoleon's court. She arrived there and plead with Napoleon to give her father a pardon from his crime (whatever it was that he had committed). Napoleon replied to her request, "justice demands execution." Her immediate rejoinder was, "Oh sir, it is not for justice that I plead, but mercy." The account continues by saying that Napoleon granted her request and pardoned her father.

When we come before our Lord, do we come extolling our virtues and pleading our rights because we are 'so righteous?' What do we have to plead? We come as suppliants pleading for mercy, generosity and benevolence. Our rights and virtues were forfeited at the fall. Were it not for Jesus Christ, all the grand and glorious promises of God for us, were nil. They were nixed. Thus, it is right that we come as suppliants on our knees, pleading His mercies and benevolences. "Nevertheless," As our Lord prayed, "not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42) Thus we come and kneel to pray as suppliants. In the fourth place, I will simply refer to the account in Acts 20. This is the account of the apostle Paul leaving the brethren at Ephesus. He told them very likely they would not

see him anymore. It says in Acts 20:36 "And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all." They had a kneeling prayer meeting. I see several things in this verse. There is equality among the brethren. When we kneel to pray, no one is exalted or on display. When a minister is preaching he is standing up and the rest are sitting down. There is a sense in which it is right that we focus in the direction of someone who is preaching or teaching. However, when we kneel to pray it is not that way. We are all equally suppliants. We are all equally surrendered, and reverencing our Lord. No one is exalted or on display. Every service that we gather together, we all kneel down and pray together. We all, like I mentioned, do reverence. We all submit and surrender. We all plead for mercy. All of us, regardless of talent, level of responsibility, lot or station, acknowledge that without the Lord, we can do nothing. Thus, we kneel to pray.

We kneel and thereby enter our closet and shut the door. I know that symbolically, because we do not each have our own closet that we shut when we kneel to pray at church. However, the Lord said that is how we are to pray. Did He not? (Matthew 6:6) We do not pray on "the corners of the streets," (verse 5) but in our "closet," shutting the door. What is in a closet? When we go in a closet and shut the door, we cannot

see anything. There really is nothing there to make us comfortable. Usually there is not comfortable furniture in the closet, nor is there physical nutrition. What is in the closet? Is it not only the Lord and us? I think that is what the Lord wanted. This is why He said, "Come into `thy closet.' Shut the door. Leave the things that would distract out there. When you come to pray, pray like that." It is only the Lord and you, and the Lord and me.

As we come to pray, (I am thinking now publicly) we stand, turn, promptly drop on our knees, close our eyes, not looking quick to see who is behind us, or what might have happened. We do not open our neighbour's closet by whispering. We do not turn on the light so to speak in our closet by quickly fixing ourselves up a little. These things are not reverent. These things are not showing submission. Those things are showing a little too much attention to self. They are distractions. As we come and kneel and shut the door, it is a good symbolical way of doing that. We block out thereby distractions and it aids us in entering the prayer experience. May we safeguard this practice again by being all that it potentially symbolizes within our heart and truly worship Him in spirit and in truth. May the Lord bless us.

# Preserving Appreciation for Congregational Singing

The singing we appreciate today is certainly a part of a legacy of faith. It is part of our heritage of music or heritage of faith and a product of many generations and centuries of time. Like many other gifts we tend to forget it, or we tend to fail to thank the Lord for it. This is not an automatic process. What we enjoy in our worship services takes time and effort, especially in light of the rising generation as it tries to appreciate and embrace the values of the older generation. We know that congregational singing can easily be lost as we look about in the Mennonite church at large.

The many churches that had what we have today, lost it in only a few short decades. This was replaced by other things. Voices become replaced with instruments. Church music is replaced with secular music and the worship by the people, that is congregational singing, is replaced with worship for the people. The worship and singing is being done by professional singers and special selected groups, chorus-es and choirs. Some of us lived through the 1950's and '60 when special music was introduced into the Lancaster Conference. In the more liberal areas it was embraced and practiced very early, although it was officially outruled until 1968, when the discipline was changed. In spite of this many churches were violating that rule. As we look back over that, some of us had not been involved in it. I do not believe it built appreciation for congregational

singing. It actually laid the ground work for more drama, skits and what they called creative worship. Eventually congregational singing went out the back door. Today some of those people might long for what we have. We should be thankful for what we have.

We know that good spiritual singing is the result of a spiritual life within. The song flows out of a new heart. Someone has said the following about songs of praise and worship that flow out to our great God, "Wash a man's heart in the blood of Christ. Fill him with the Spirit of God and he has a melody on his lips that rises from within." The Holy Spirit motivates and refreshes the spirit of man within, releasing a song on the lips. Thus, when we sing, that fountain of living water springs up to life eternal in our singing (John 7:38). It not only reaches the extent of our buildings, but we believe it actually vibrates into the courts of heaven. It certainly is an inspiration for worship and singing to think that Christ is listening, receiving our worship and hearing our songs. He is not evaluating it so much on the basis of perfection of the song. This is more from our perspective. We like harmony and correctness, which is right, but the Bible actually says, "Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands." (Psalm 100:1) Thus, God accepts any sounds which are verbalized and come from deep spiritual life within. Congregational singing and spirituality go hand in hand.

This word preserving is interesting. We seek to preserve the appreciation for congregational singing. Note what we want to preserve. When appreciation is lost for a thing or a practice, then the practice itself will wane. We could illustrate this with the Christian women's veiling or anything of that sort. If we lose appreciation for it, then the practice is fast dying and it will always be replaced with something else. It is possible to practice something with not understanding its value merely from a traditional viewpoint. That is a danger with our worship practices. "We have always done it this way. Ever since we came into churches this is always how we have done it. It is just the way we do it." This is a fine viewpoint, but it does not really build an appreciation and conviction for what we have.

There are times in church life when we are tested related to our practices. In the area of singing there are influences which are knocking on the door of our homes, schools and churches. These are musical influences which, if we allow them to come in and take hold, it will cause the spiritual singing or the congregational singing to deteriorate as we have known it. If we study Church history, we see the old story. Those influences come in small steps at a time. Thus, we do want to preserve the appreciation so that we can preserve the practice. In studying Lancaster Conference history, probably people have been singing in certain churches for decades and more than a century. Is it not wonderful to be associated with a legacy of faith, and a heritage of music that is shared in this generation?

The question is, how will we handle this today as stewards of that legacy and stewards of that heritage? We want to especially appeal to young people to appreciate what we have, and put your all into developing appreciation for these time worn profitable practices.

We want to look at the subject in three areas 1) congregational singing from a Biblical perspective, 2) from an historical perspective, and 3) from a present day perspective. The Bible does not specifically talk about congregational singing, but there are a number of times in the Bible when group singing is mentioned. The Bible has much to say about singing. The word 'sing' is listed about one hundred fifteen times in the Bible. Seventy of these are found in the Psalms. In about seventy of the one hundred and fifteen times, references are made especially to God or directly to the Lord. "I will sing unto the LORD." (Psalm 104:33) This established an immediate principle related to our musical interests. God created the ability to sing, so in turn we can praise the Lord.

Satan always takes these good gifts and capitalizes them for his own use. Satan recognizes the value of music in promoting his program. He takes it and brings wicked influences into the Church. As Christians we should always, and only, be singing unto the Lord. This is a very important principle. Congregational singing which endures must focus first on the Lord and on worship. There are four basic principles or objectives that we find in the Bible related to singing. Singing is to glorify,

edify, unify and to testify. These four objectives come into singing, especially in congregational singing, at certain points.

First of all, singing is to glorify. Special effort must be made in our singing to glorify God. There is always a possibility in glorifying self. "What a beautiful voice I have," or "How nice this singing sounds." The latter is not wrong in itself. The first one is wrong. To think of how beautiful this singing sounds as we sing together is not wrong, but this is not really the first objective of music. The first objective of singing is to glorify God. The music itself must remain secondary to the text of the hymn. The music is only the carrier of the text. In order to glorify God we must meditate beyond the actual sound and harmony of the music and really meditate and concentrate on the words because that is where the spiritual inspiration is. If too much emphasis is placed on rudiments and harmony on music, it will detract from the worship. On the other side is too little emphasis. One of the reasons congregational singing was lost in many churches was that finally and ultimately they could not sing anymore, and they lost the ability to sing because they lost interest in the rudimentary part of music. Thus, there is a balance in this. If we overemphasize or de-emphasize the musical part of it (the artful part) both of those lead to the demise of the practice and it is lost.

Ephesians 5:19 says, "Singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Colossians 3:16 "Singing with grace in your hearts to the

Lord." Notice it is always unto the Lord. The primary purpose of singing is to glorify God. The content of Biblical singing surrounds the theme of salvation — from the Song of Moses in Exodus to the Song of the Redeemed in Revelation. Interestingly enough in Revelation it says the redeemed, "sing the song of Moses... and the song of the Lamb." (Revelation 15:3) It is a combined and merged song of salvation that has been at work through the annals of time and climaxes in eternity itself. We preserve appreciation for congregational singing by preserving the worship emphasis.

Secondly, singing it is to edify. Colossians 3:16 says, "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Singing edifies when it is spiritually upbuilding. We cannot underestimate the value of singing that it has in nurturing the saints as we sing together. It is not only worshipping God, but it is also nurturing the saints. It is the element of edification. Our singing must, in order to do this, be filled with doctrinally sound words. The edification is proper. It becomes a powerful tool in nurturing in the brotherhood. For this to happen, our songs must be of the type that lift the spirit and nurture the soul. They must not only be they type that moves the emotions and body, but they must first of all move the spirit. We preserve the right kind of singing by providing the right kind of songs and the right kind of book.

We appreciate the effort that has gone into publishing song books in

the last one hundred years. There have not been too many in the past years. There is some feeling that it is time to publish another song book within the conservative realm. This may be true, our fathers took effort to sift through those songs and put them, we might say, through the Mennonite sieve, before they put them in the song books, and they came into our racks. It would be totally unethical to have song books of the Brethren, or Lutheran churches in our song racks. We want Mennonite song books. It is not that the songs are all different from the other books, but these have been sifted and have been proven true to Mennonite doctrine, belief and practice. Not every song is. Sometimes there are some that are weak in that respect. Therefore, we appreciate the edifying part of congregational singing.

Thirdly, singing is to unify. There is the fellowship value that we receive as we sing together. Congregational singing nurtures kinship. It nurtures fellowship and a flowing together of spirits, voices and emotions. The men and the women, the boys and the girls, the young and the old, the talented and the less talented — everyone joins in. What a blessed experience it is as we lift up our voices together in praise to the Lord. This can be done on a personal level too. Without a doubt, worship is important. Congregational singing brings corporate worship into focus. This is another important element of Christian life and Christian living. The more harmonious the singing the more this principle of unity will be realized.

We should do our part in blending our voices, and the parts together in congregational singing. We can sing without this harmony, but appreciation for congregational singing will be best preserved by paying attention to togetherness, and to harmony. We must sing those words together as we are singing. We must follow the leader as he leads. Our singing should be such that as we are singing together, if someone is outside listening and steps into the auditorium, they can hear the words because fifty, or a hundred, or five hundred people are singing the same words at the same time. This requires some effort, but it brings blessed unity and harmony. We certainly appreciate that element of fellowship. What would our services be like without singing together? It is wonderful to pray together, to discuss Sunday School lessons together, to hear the minister, but certainly the singing together is a great value in unifying us together as a group.

The fourth area to consider is that singing is to testify. Good congregational singing is a testimony. People coming into our services are often impressed by the singing. We must handle that complement very wisely. If people tell us, "Your singing is beautiful," we should be sure to channel the glory back to God. Singing is an attractive force. This has been true in all Mennonite and Anabaptist history. Of the Anabaptists, it was said, "Their songs became the strongest attractive force to the brotherhood. Many times they sang in their services at the risk of their lives." In our day we

have no fear that the authorities will be driving past our meeting houses, hear our singing and come in and arrest us because we are Anabaptists. Nevertheless the Anabaptist forefathers sang at the risk of being detected and at the risk to their life. This tells us how they valued singing together. They could have omitted that in their services. They could have only read their songs quietly, but they sang lustily and took the risk of being detected and being arrested, because they valued congregational singing. They must have appreciated congregational singing. This should be a lesson to us today.

There are many occasions in the Bible where we notice groups singing. In Exodus 15 the Bible says, "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song." (Exodus 15:1) After they were redeemed and saved as they crossed the Red Sea they sang, and joined their voices together. In the Song of Deborah it says "Then sang Deborah and Barak." (Judges 5:1) The Psalms 120-134 are called the Songs of Degrees. When were these songs used? Why are they called Songs of Degrees? What is the background of the use of these songs? Do we know? I understand that as the Israelites began to gather from the scattered regions of Israel and moved toward the Temple in increasing numbers they were singing these songs as they went. They began only with a few dozen. They raised the number to a few hundred and continued until it was thousands of people moving toward Jerusalem in their yearly journey. These songs were used as they ascended. We can

tell with their words how they are ascending toward Jerusalem. They see Jerusalem in the distant land, at a distant point. They were joining their voices together in singing as they travelled.

In Revelation 5:9-14, I am impressed with the extension of this song and how it spreads out and includes larger and larger groups, until finally it seems to say the whole heaven is ringing with the songs. It is not twenty-four people up front singing for them. At one point it says the twenty-four elders do sing. It seems like they begin the song. It then expands out to the whole heavenly throng. In verse nine it speaks of the four and twenty elders and the four beasts, "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto

him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever."

Notice it is an expanding song that finally filled heaven and earth. It is all the redeemed singing together. Will this not be a wonderful time? Sometimes we wonder what we will be doing in heaven. We will be singing. We will sing with the thousands and millions of others. We do not know the number, but it will be a heavenly song. We guarantee it will be better than any we ever have sung on this earth. It will be more perfect. The Bible says they are to worship Him with a perfect praise world without end.

We want to look at congregational singing from an historical perspective next. The early Church definitely practiced congregational singing. It was likely one part and history would confirm this. This began to change from about the fourth to the sixth centuries, when the churches began to have special selected choirs. Then the function of singing was largely in the hands of the ministry. By the time of the middle ages only the evangelical groups such as the Waldensians continued congregational singing in the common language. It was because of the effective use of singing by these groups that in 1272 the Roman Catholic leaders urged the use of songs in the vernacular (that is the common language) of the people, in their own churches, because they said the heretics were leading people astray by composing and teaching

them to the children in the streets.

The Reformation, and especially the Anabaptist movement was a move toward the Biblical teaching of worship by the people. They again resumed the practice of singing by the people, instead of worship for the people. At first, Zwingli and also Conrad Grebel had opposed any singing in the churches. I think this was a reaction to the abuses of singing by the Catholic church. It was not until 1598 that singing was introduced into the worship services in the Reformed church in Zurich. Conrad Grebel himself, opposed all music including singing in the worship service. This however was not the accepted opinion of the Anabaptists. We find that the Anabaptists did sing in the worship services, but they avoided the liturgical songs and also instrumental music.

The Anabaptists emphasized the priesthood of all believers. This brought an emphasis in their worship services on participation, that is, singing by the people rather than singing for the people. Singing was restored to the Biblical, historical place. There are some critical times in Mennonite congregational history. One is the transition from the Martyr hymns (the *Ausbund*) to more Christian life-centred hymns. The *Ausbund* was used until the beginning of the 1800's. In 1803 and 1804, there were two American hymn books printed (in German of course) one at Lancaster and one at Franconia. These included some of the martyr hymns, but they also included some other hymns that spoke more on Christian life. We believe this was a church looking at a



need, and adjusting the music to the present day need.

Another transition was from the unison to four- part singing. This happened around the late 1800's. This was quite a problem in the Mennonite Church. Again, it took some time, but during this time congregational singing continued. Notably, the singing translated from German to English during the same time period. Congregational singing continued through this time and the church produced the Church and Sunday School Hymnal in 1903, which was basically English but it did have a German Appendix. This seemed to be somewhat of a com-promise. The pressures of the Twentieth Century apostasy meant that by the mid 1950's special singing had been introduced into the Mennonite Church, and by 1970 some of the Lancaster Conference churches had musical instruments —especially the organ. Both of these developments were part of the influence of the great apostasy that was sweeping the Mennonite Church at large. As we mentioned, this time, especially during the 1960's, was a time of choruses and quartets.

The conservative revival movement of the past decades followed the earlier conviction and position and early outruled special singing. We are glad for this position. The Lord has blessed this position. It has given us room to concentrate our interests on emphasizing the music skills that relate to congregational singing. Our schools have certainly contributed to this, and also our Bible Schools. We are glad to be part of the conservative movement. We would say today, at

times, there are pressures church wide for special singing or professional type singing. We must try to keep our interests geared into efforts that will benefit the Church as a group, and not only develop our own musical interests.

The last subject to look at is congregational singing from a present day perspective. These are some practical areas. It is not an automatic process to preserve what we have. Firstly, inspirational singing and spiritual singing rise and fall together. This is true from the personal level and also true from the group level. Our singing interests are an index to the spiritual level of our soul and our heart on a group level. When playing, entertainment and amusements come into the church, then interest in congregational singing will wane. Eventually, it goes out the back door because in order to maintain good congregational singing, we need a spiritual level within the church. The play mentality does not build spirituality, especially in the young people. We need the support of young people to keep this congregational singing going in the right direction. When their interests flow into the play business they will not have interest in developing congregational singing.

We appreciate when young people get together and when they do, instead of playing, they sing. This is a good evidence of spiritual life within. This will help to preserve congregational singing on a congregational level. Congregational singing, after a while, will not satisfy

if they are directed at entertainment. Congregational singing will seem old folkish and dry. When there is a spiritual vitality within the church, especially among the youth, congregational singing will be appreciated, and our congregations (our church house) will ring with singing. We certainly appreciate the contribution our young people are making. There are many reasons why a church should remain spiritual, but one of them (we will add to the subject) is so that we can maintain our worship forms that have been brought down to us and have served us well.

Secondly, singing must be done with the spirit and with the understanding. The Bible says we must discipline our mind to avoid distractions. When we are singing, we are supposed to be worshipping God. When there are things that could distract us, we must keep our mind focused on the message of the song. We must concentrate and meditate in our singing, as we sing. Notice the punctuation, the commas, the periods, the phrases and the question marks. We cannot necessarily sing those, but we should concentrate and focus on those as we are singing.

Let us take for instance the song, Peace Perfect Peace. This is a question, Peace, perfect peace in this dark world of sin? Yes, (it is not in there but ... ) "The blood of Jesus whispers peace within." The first phrase is a question, and the second phrase is an answer. As we note this, it helps us to interpret the texts. Another example is the song, Thou Art the Way. "Thou art the way to Thee alone," Thou art the way ...

Thou art the truth . . . Thou art the life," and then the last sentence, "Thou art the way, help me the way to keep, the truth to live." It is in the Church and Sunday School Hymnal #209 [and also the Church Hymnal]. This is an illustration and example of what we should be doing with singing. This hymn is built upon John 14. We sing that song. It is an old familiar song. We should think of the words, especially the punctuation and Biblical connotations and relationships. This certainly will help us in our singing. We should plan to participate in the singing providing we are physically able. Sometimes we have a cold or older people have reasons for not singing. We should plan to participate as we physically can. Song leaders and especially ministers can help in this area by occasionally calling attention to a certain song or a certain phrase.

Thirdly, the fundamentals of music must be sufficiently understood in order to preserve congregational singing. If our interest in the basic rudiments drops too low as a group, or if it rises too high into professionalism, then our congregational singing will greatly suffer. Music is a combination of tones arranged and sung in a way that produces a pleasing effect. Keep in mind what we call intonation, learning to sing on pitch and sounding the tones accurately. Off key singing can become very depressing in a congregation. A congregation can perhaps absorb one or two monotones, but if everybody would be monotone we could hardly sing. Some people do not have the gift of singing. I would

encourage that in the younger years we try to arrest those problems in the child's voice while there is opportunity. There are very few people that cannot be taught to sing and to hold a pitch if we start early enough.

Intonation, the rhythm and tempo, measures and scores, area system of pulses and accents as we teach in song leadership classes. If singing loses its accent and its rhythm, then it loses its inspiration and it will seem dull. Our voices and parts should blend together in harmony. Listen to your voice and listen to the voices of those around you. Sometimes voices do not blend in that they are too loud and harsh. People may not be aware of that. We should sing lustily or with feeling and invigoration, but we also should try to blend in with the group because congregational singing is a unifying experience. A congregation should follow the leader providing he is leading correctly.

Fourthly, the congregation will need dedicated and able song leaders. The congregational quality of singing in a given congregation often follows the interest and enthusiasm of the leader. That is especially true over a period of time and years. The congregation reflects what the leader is doing. The congregational leader has the privilege of picking the songs. If he only picks the old familiars and never dabbles or tries to sing something a little bit newer, the congregation may become sort of stale in the singing. All songs could be sung profitably, but to sing the same songs over and over is not necessary. The dedicated song leader will be studying his books. I would suggest we

read the songs in our private devotions and get familiar with them. Then, at least if we try a newer song we will know the text. We might know some songs by the words that we may never lead. It is part of your duty to study the books and become acquainted especially with the books that are in the church. Song leaders should lead. Song leaders should be not only song starters, but they are song leaders from the first tones to the last tone. Learn your work and live with music. Too many song leaders do not have singing as a major interest in their life and their singing interest starts Sunday morning when they need to choose songs. We must live with music and let it grow on us and appreciate it. We are called to a work that is very influential and very needed.

The last point is, influences that undermine congregational singing must be dealt with and eliminated. In order to maintain an appreciation for this kind of singing, our music interests must be basically confined to singing that sounds like our church music. If we listen to music in tape or sing other type music from other books that would not sound reasonably comfortable in this setting, then we are probably on the wrong track. We face a battle ground in this area and Satan is seeking to destroy a good thing. This is especially and usually critical among young people. We appreciate their interest in singing, but in their quest for new songs sometimes they wander out into an area that does not contribute, that is, it is not conducive to good congregational singing.

There are a few areas in particular to consider. One is Gospel Music. It is music with a driving rhythm that arouses the emotion and perhaps gets the body swinging, but it may leave the soul and the spirit famished. The soul and the spirit may never touch God. The person is moved, but we are not moved with spirituality, that is, something that touches God. There are songs that play lip service to Christianity but fall short in the words. There are phrases in there to consider. We call it Christian singing. We call it Gospel singing, but it does not fairly represent the real Gospel message. Those songs are often not doctrinally sound. We need to keep those out of our services, out of our schools, and out of our homes. For other reasons too, but especially for this reason related to our subject. It will destroy interest in good congregational singing. Once that appetite is whetted there is no filling or satisfying it. It leads on and on because that kind of singing really does not fulfill.

Contemporary worship and praise music as it is called today, is a step more current than Gospel music. It contains a strong charismatic emphasis designed for contemporary charismatic settings. These are songs that humanize our love for Christ. The song is talking about love, but we are not sure when we hear it whether it is a man crooning for his lover, or it is a Christian reaching out for Christ's love. Many of those songs have an undercurrent that is intended to incite lustful love, rather than true Christian love. There is a combining of culture and religion into this modern con-

temporary worship and praise movement. This thing is saturating America. Many of these songs are written especially for those settings of the charismatic interest and the Holy Spirit movement. They include repetitive phrases such as "Amen, Amen," "Halleluiah, Praise the Lord." All those are good phrases when they are used correctly, but when they are repeated over and over and over again not much is said and there is not as much value till they are done. I would like to caution us in this influence. Parents have a great part in this. Schools have a great part. Young people have a part in developing conviction for the right kind of thing. Do not let your interest wander out into areas that are detrimental to spirituality and a detriment to congregational singing. All the songs that we listen to and sing should sound such that we would be fairly comfortable to bring them into a church setting. We would not want to bring in the wrong kind of music. The sound of the songs should sound much the same as our congregational singing. The element of the content and the way they are sung would be basically the same. There is some measure for flexibility in that, but maybe not often as much as we would like to think and make room for ourselves. Let us be careful in this area. We appreciate what we have in congregational life, the heritage of faith, the legacy of singing, and the heritage of music. We have a responsibility and accountability in this time and we are intending to do our part in preserving this practice in

our day. Let us be reminded again that it is not an automatic process. Every generation must lay hold, value and promote it in their genera-

tion and in the rising generations. May God bless us and help us to live for Him and to only praise and adore His name.

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