

SINGING FOR OUR SUPPER: CONGREGATIONAL SINGING DURING THE LORD'S SUPPER

by Andrew J. Miller

AMONG THE INITIAL REFORMS the Reformers made to the practice of the Lord's Supper was active participation by the congregation. Hughes Oliphant Old explains: "No more was the Communion to be a show for worshippers who simply watched but did not participate."¹ Indeed, John Calvin's practice was to have his congregation sing during the distribution of the bread and the cup.² Continuing this legacy was, among others, C. H. Spurgeon, who viewed singing as an important part of the celebration of the Lord's Supper.³

Despite this historical precedent, however, congregational singing during the distribution of the Lord's Supper is not widely practiced today, despite recent pleas for its implementation.⁴ In what follows, I suggest reasons why recovering this

1. Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship: Reformed according to Scripture, Revised and Expanded Edition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 126–127. Likewise, B.B. Warfield explains: "Much of the disputation at the Reformation centered . . . around the Lord's Supper; and the restoration of it to its original significance and mode of administration was one of the marks of the Protestant churches" (B. B. Warfield, "The Posture of the Recipients at the Lord's Supper" in John E. Meeter, *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield—II* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1973], 351.).

2. Old, *Worship*, 130. This practice did not originate with Calvin but was practiced much earlier. See James McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 10, 75, 109, and 120. McKinnon quotes the fourth-century document *Apostolic Constitutions VIII* (trans. Funk): ". . . Psalm 33 with its highly relevant verse 8, 'O taste and see that the Lord is good', is sung during the distribution of Communion...." Likewise, Winfred Douglas concludes from liturgies dating to A.D. 690: "Thus the custom of singing a hymn at the Communion is of very ancient standing." See Charles Winfred Douglas, *Church Music in History and Practice: Studies in the Praise of God*, rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), 32, 67, 71, 74–75, 143–144.

3. Old, *Worship*, 144.

4. For example: "We need to sing more. . . . In your worship services, sing while you are collecting the offering and distributing the elements of the Lord's Supper" (Leonard R. Payton, *Reforming Our Worship Music* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999], 46.). Payton, among others, laments a lack of sacred music and a passive reception of music today. See also T. David Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns: How Pop Culture Rewrote the Hymnal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010); Paul Munson and Joshua F. Drake, *Congregational Singing*

practice would benefit God's people. While there is nothing wrong with silence at various times during a worship service, there are good reasons for us to "sing for our Supper."

1.1. A Foretaste of Heavenly Praise

One glorious reason to sing hymns during the distribution of the elements is that making our celebration rich with song previews the wedding feast of the Lamb and his bride. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church's *Directory for the Public Worship of God* explains that the Supper points us to that feast: "The Supper is also a bond and pledge of the communion that believers have with him and with each other as members of his body . . . (1 Cor. 10:17). The Supper anticipates the consummation of the ages, when Christ returns to gather all his redeemed people at the glorious wedding feast of the Lamb."⁵ There at the final wedding feast, songs of joy will be sung (Rev. 19:5–9).

As a foretaste of heaven, singing unites congregants as they join their voices in praise, reminding them that the Lord's Supper is a communal meal. We partake as individuals, but we are also a united body through Christ. Instead of only doing an individual activity, inspecting our own hearts and meditating on the gospel, we are also doing a corporate activity, singing together, as in Romans 15:5–6: ". . . together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul Jones explains: "Singing hymns is a unifying activity, for when we sing we lift up our voices as one to God."⁶

Corporate singing is also a proclaiming *together* of God's Word. What better way to spend those minutes of passing the bread and the cup than by proclaiming together the gospel of Jesus's blood and righteousness? When we sing hymns together during the distribution, it is another form of "proclaim[ing] the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26), a corporate form. As such, "singing for our Supper" engages congregants in an active response to what God has done and mimics the wedding feast of the Lamb.

1.2. Singing Guides Believers

A second support for "singing for our Supper" comes from the power of music to shape us. I hardly need to argue that music powerfully affects human beings,

(CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2016), 52–53, 107–110; Paul S. Jones, *Singing and Making Music: Issues in Church Music Today* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 149.

5. *The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2015), 152 (III.C.2).

6. Jones, *Singing and Making Music*, 80. Ambrose of Milan (354–430) concurs: "For this is a symphony, when there resounds in the church a united concord of different ages and abilities as if of diverse strings. . . ." (*Expositio euangelii secundum Lucam* 7:238, quoted in Munson and Drake, *Congregational Singing*, 45.).

something Martin Luther explained at length.⁷ Likewise, there is great truth in the old saying attributed to Napoleon that the one who controls a nation's music controls the country.⁸ Christians have their own version of this: "*Lex orandi, lex credenda*" (loosely translated as "the law of praying [is] the law of believing").⁹ The editors of the *Trinity Hymnal* explain this in their preface: "It is well known that the character of its song, almost equal with the character of its preaching, controls the theology of a church."¹⁰ If we grant such a controlling place to music, it follows that singing during the distribution of the elements can shape our understanding of the sacrament in a beneficial way.

Luther saw music as an important teaching vehicle. Sacred music has a didactic role. He wrote: "Music and notes, which are wonderful gifts and creations of God, do help gain a better understanding of the text, especially when sung by a congregation and when sung earnestly."¹¹ We might say that singing hymns during distribution then helps us to "discern the body of Christ," in that it helps us to understand the gospel, insofar as the hymns sung express the gospel.¹² As Augustine remarked upon hearing hymns in worship: "The sounds flowed into my ears and the truth was distilled into my heart."¹³

Luther went so far as to say that we are *strengthened* by singing God's praises because the hymns we sing are linked to the ministry of the Word: "We have put this music to the living and holy Word of God in order to sing, praise and honor it. . . . He is thereby praised and honored, and we are made better and stronger in faith when his

7. Luther wrote: "next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. It controls our thoughts, minds, hearts, and spirits. . . . Our dear fathers and prophets did not desire without reason that music be always used in the churches. Hence, we have so many songs and psalms" (Martin Luther, "Preface to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae iucundae* (1538)," in *Liturgy and Hymns*, vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 322. (Note: Rhau's work was a collection of chorale motets published in 1538.)

8. Napoleon is purported to have said: "Give me control over he who shapes the music of a nation, and I care not who makes the laws."

9. See Payton, *Reforming Our Worship*, 31.

10. *Trinity Hymnal* (Philadelphia, PA: Great Commissions Publications, 1961), cited in Gordon, *Why Johnny Can't Sing Hymns*, 35.

11. Martin Luther, "Treatise on the Last Words of David," in *Notes on Ecclesiastes, Lectures on the Song of Solomon, Treatise on the Last Words of David*, vol. 15 of *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1972), 273-74; and Martin Luther, "Preface to the Burial Hymns (1542)," in *Luther's Works*, 53:327; quoted in Jones, *Singing and Making Music*, 3-4.

12. This is briefly expressed also in Mark Ashton with C. J. Davis, "Following in Cranmer's Footsteps" in *Worship by the Book*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 117.

13. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 9.6-7, 14-15.

holy Word is impressed on our hearts by sweet music.”¹⁴ This certainly fits with the insistence of the Reformed tradition that a church’s “worship leader” be its minister of the Word. Likewise, Colossians 3:16 confirms the didactic purpose of song in its plural exhortation: “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.”¹⁵ We are encouraging one another as we praise God in song.¹⁶

The Reformers believed, writes Terry Johnson, that “singing the Word is sanctifying in the same way that reading and preaching the Word are (John 17:17; 1 Pet. 2:1–2).”¹⁷ This accords with the principle that our worship in song not only *reflects* our theology, but *guides* it. By singing during the distribution of the Lord’s Supper, we shall subtly be shaped to instinctively look to Christ.

Particularly, singing hymns during the distribution gives direction to congregants in their participation of the Supper. They are shown what to reflect upon by the minister in his hymn choice. Whereas congregants can fall into morbid introspection that saps one’s desire to celebrate the Supper and creates a dread of it, singing during the distribution of the elements provides direction to our reflection during those moments. A proper balance can be struck of mourning over personal sin, determining to pursue righteousness, and rejoicing in the gospel. We are encouraged not only to reflect on our sin, but also on the overwhelming and transforming grace of God.¹⁸

After all, corporate singing is a form of prayer. Our private individual prayers and meditations are guided by corporately praying in song hymns such as “Not What My Hands Have Done” or “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” This guided meditation guards congregants against looking to themselves for righteousness, which is a real temptation for all of us. As Edward Fischer wrote: “where is the man or woman, that is truly in Christ, that findeth not in themselves an aptness to withdraw their hearts from Christ, and to put some confidence in their own works and doings?”¹⁹

14. As Jones concludes: “Luther believed that music should be composed to teach doctrine and to instruct young people—that by singing the Word of God, one’s faith can be strengthened” (Jones, *Singing and Making Music*, 3–4.).

15. Citing this passage, Paul Jones explains: “The Bible is unambiguous in stating that sacred music has a spiritually educational purpose. The idea that singing the Word of God will strengthen one’s understanding of it has biblical support” (Jones, *Singing and Making Music*, 6.). He gives Psalm 119:171–175 as an example, as well as Psalm 119:54.

16. See Munson and Drake, *Congregational Singing*, 55.

17. Terry L. Johnson, *Worshipping with Calvin: Recovering the Historic Ministry and Worship of Reformed Protestantism* (Grand Rapids: EP Books, 2014), 53.

18. See the Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 174 on what believers should do during the administration of the Lord’s Supper.

19. Edward Fischer, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Christian Focus, Scotland: 2009), 41.

1.3. Singing Guards Believers

Furthermore, singing hymns during the distribution of the Lord's Supper positively *facilitates* our considering the gospel and keeps us from navel-gazing. It guards against overly focusing on ourselves and making the Lord's Supper something we attempt to earn. As one of the great transmitters of our Reformed tradition, Herman Bavinck, explains: "Of primary importance in the Lord's Supper is what God does, not what we do. The Lord's Supper is above all a gift of God, a benefit of Christ, a means of communicating his grace."²⁰ Likewise, Michael Horton writes: "The Supper is a means of grace for the weak, not a reward for the strong."²¹ By focusing congregants on God's actions and promises, expressed in hymns, singing during the Supper reinforces the nature of communion as salve for sick souls.

Because faith is extrospective, outward looking, the Reformed tradition has recognized that we grow by looking outward—to Christ—rather than inward, to ourselves. Singing hymns that reflect the gospel during the distribution of communion guards against our human proclivity to self-reliance. Puritan Richard Sibbes said: "Satan knows that nothing can prevail against Christ, or those that rely upon his power. Therefore his study is how to keep us in ourselves."²² Likewise, Scottish pastor Robert Murray M'Cheyne said: "For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ."²³ It is worth stating: the Lord's Supper is *about Christ* and his action. The Christocentric nature of our celebration of the Supper is supported by singing hymns concerning Christ.

20. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), IV:567, cited in Richard Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace: More than a Memory* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2013), 70.

21. Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 819, cited in Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace*, 110. Horton adds: "The problem with the pietistic version of the Lord's Supper, therefore, is that in its obsession with the individual's inner piety, it loses much of the import of the feast a sacred meal that actually binds us to Christ and to each other. Instead of viewing it first as God's saving action toward us and then our fellowship with each other in Christ, we come to see it as just another opportunity to be threatened with the law. Instead of celebrating the foretaste of the marriage supper of the Lamb on Mount Zion, we are still trembling at the foot of Mount Sinai. It is no wonder, then, that there is a diminished interest in frequent communion" (Michael Horton, *God of Promise* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 160–61.). See also Howard Griffith, *Spreading the Feast: Instruction and Meditations for Ministry at the Lord's Table* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 32.

22. Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2011), 115, quoted by Douglas Bond, *Grace Works: And Ways We Think It Doesn't* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 129.

23. Robert Murray M'Cheyne, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1844), 293; cited in Bond, *Grace Works*, 294.

Singing hymns of Christ during the distribution follows these principles. There are certainly differences of opinion on how Christians grow, the specifics of sanctification. But we can all agree with Paul's prayer for the Ephesians and his desire that they understand more of God's love in Christ, "the breadth and length and height and depth," of "the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge." One of the great blessings of the Lord's Supper is having a tangible assurance of God's love for us in Christ. By singing hymns about our redemption in Christ, we are encouraged to look outward, to him, rather than look within. We are reminded in our songs that "the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7) and that we "rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9).

1.4. Singing Promotes the Joy of the LORD

Just as singing hymns of God's grace keeps us from dwelling upon our failings, it also reminds us that the celebration of the Supper is joyful.²⁴ Singing is a natural way of rejoicing, as Scripture testifies in many places, such as Isaiah 27:2: "A pleasant vineyard, sing of it!" When something wonderful has happened, we sing to celebrate. While the Bible includes dirges and songs of mourning, it richly associates singing with joy (e.g., Zeph. 3:17). Singing celebrates redemption (e.g., Ex. 15).

Certainly, the Lord's Supper reflects upon the brutal death of Christ, and we are right to consider our sin and Christ's death with the utmost seriousness. Nevertheless, the Scriptures never leave us with only mourning over sin and over Christ's atoning death, but always transitions those tears of sadness into tears of joy. As Thomas Watson puts it: "Though we remember our sins with grief, yet we should remember Christ's sufferings with joy. Let us weep for those sins which shed his blood, yet rejoice in that blood which washes away our sins."²⁵ True repentance includes both a realization of "the filthiness and odiousness of . . . sins," and "the apprehension of . . . mercy in Christ" (WCF 15.2).

The Directory for the Public Worship of God suggests that the pastor administering communion may exhort his congregation: "With joyful hearts, in Christian love, partake of his Table, giving thanks for the great love that he has shown to us."²⁶ Our celebration of the Supper is a feast and not a funeral, the wine of the Supper is a drink of celebration, and singing hymns expressing the atoning work of Jesus Christ focuses us on the joy that flows from his victory over our sin.²⁷

24. Old explains: "From the story of the wedding at Cana we understand that the sacrament [of the Lord's Supper] is a celebration of the joyful life of the coming kingdom" (Old, *Worship*, 116.).

25. Thomas Watson, *The Lord's Supper* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2004), 67.

26. *The Book of Church Order*, 153–154 (III, C.4).

27. Howard Griffith put it well in his book *Spreading the Feast*: "We are to come [to the Lord's Supper] with deep joy and deep solemnity. . . . Think, for example, of a wedding. For most of us, there is no happier event. . . . We are to come to this Table with profound joy" (Griffith, *Spreading the Feast*, 63.).

Richard Barcellos, writing on how the Lord's Supper is indeed a "means of grace," whereby God's people are strengthened, explains: "Because it is a means of grace for believing sinners, though seriousness and reverence and awe are certainly appropriate, joy and hope ought to have their place as well because we are feasting upon Christ, further tasting that the Lord is good, and being helped along as pilgrims in a foreign land."²⁸ The Spirit of God indeed *strengthens* us through fostering joy in our hearts—joy not based on our obedience during the past week, but upon what Christ has done. We should remember that the people of God mourning over their sin in Nehemiah 8:10 were told: "do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

The more the Lord's Supper is treated as a funeral or a time of morbid introspection, the less congregants will want to celebrate it. On the other hand, if singing hymns increases our joy and peace by focusing us on the gospel in the celebration of communion, then it follows that we will desire to partake of it frequently, as we ought.²⁹

1.5. What About Self-Examination?

Anecdotally, one finds that those most opposed to singing during distribution are those concerned—and rightfully so—with properly examining themselves.³⁰ They emphasize 1 Corinthians 11:28: "Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." Indeed, this is a critical part of our celebration of the Lord's Supper. However, it should not obscure our focus on Christ; and more practically—it cannot be fully done in the five minutes of distribution.³¹

28. Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace*, 110.

29. If we believe that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace, we should eagerly desire to partake of it. Calvin wrote: "All, like hungry men, should flock to such a bounteous repast" (Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.46, cited in Griffith, *Spreading*, 54.).

30. For example, while admitting that music should surround the celebration and be directive of our reflection, Rayburn argues for silence during the Lord's Supper. He quotes Oswald Milligan, saying: "silence . . . has the inestimable advantage of providing a time when the voice of man being hushed, Christ is left free to speak His own word to the soul that waits upon Him" (Oswald Milligan, *The Ministry of Worship* [London: Oxford University Press, 1941], 113, quoted in Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980], 269.).

31. Barcellos explains: ". . . it seems to me that the self-examination should take place prior to coming to the Supper, not at the communion service." He then adds: "In my experience, this verse is often used for individuals to examine, for instance, how many times they read their Bible or how long and fervent their prayers were in the recent past. If they fail the test, a form of self-excommunication is enacted and the Supper is not taken. For some, this may even be viewed as an act of piety and reverence. Though we ought to read our Bibles and pray privately, I do not think this is what Paul had in mind. I rather think that since no one reads their Bibles and prays perfectly, instead of being an argument not to take the Supper it is just the opposite" (Barcellos, *The Lord's Supper*, 109-10.). See also Griffith, *Spreading the Feast*, 58–65.

The Westminster Larger Catechism, summarizing Scripture's teaching on this self-examination in Q&A 171, implies an operation demanding far more than five minutes. Much is demanded of a person *before* the bread and the cup are even distributed:

They that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves of their being in Christ, of their sins and wants; of the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, repentance; love to God and the brethren, charity to all men, forgiving those that have done them wrong; of their desires after Christ, and of their new obedience; and by renewing the exercise of these graces, by serious meditation, and fervent prayer.

What is described here cannot be accomplished exclusively in five to ten minutes of a worship service; this calls us to self-examination as a way of life. Clearly, the distribution of the Lord's Supper is not the one time and place where God's people can spend time examining themselves. God's people ought to be exhorted to spend time during the week in private worship and contemplation that prepares them for the Supper on the Lord's day.³² The examination that occurs during the distribution of the elements is an extension of a much larger calling. Therefore, it should not be viewed as an "either-or" situation; a person can both examine himself *and* sing during the distribution of the elements.

Certainly, private meditation on Christ and silent self-examination during the distribution can be and has been edifying to many of God's people. At the same time, we must not give congregants the impression that five minutes of silent meditation are adequate to fulfill what is entailed in the quotes above from the Larger Catechism and 1 Corinthians 11:28.³³

Furthermore, we should be aware of how people go beyond what 1 Corinthians 11 instructs. Addressing the 1 Corinthians passage, Gordon Fee writes:

This paragraph has had an unfortunate history of understanding in the church. . . . [The table] has been allowed to become a table of condemnation for the very people who most truly need that assurance of acceptance that this table affords—the sinful, the weak, the weary. One does not have to “get rid of the

32. Watson suggests: “The musician first puts his instrument in tune before he plays. The heart must first be prepared, and put in tune, before it goes to meet with God in this solemn ordination of the sacrament” (Watson, *The Lord's Supper*, 39.).

33. Our Puritan forefathers, for example, wrote extensively on preparation for the Lord's Supper. See Terry L. Johnson, *Serving with Calvin: Leading and Planning Services of Worship in the Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: EP Books, 2015), 253.

sin in one's life" in order to partake. Here by faith one may once again receive the assurance that "Christ receiveth sinners."³⁴

Likewise, John Calvin further critiques the idea that preparation for the Supper consists of intense introspection. He compares it with Roman Catholicism when he writes: "The Papists . . . order all those who are about to receive the Supper to examine their lives carefully and anxiously, so that they may unburden all their sins in the ear of a priest. That is their method of preparation!"³⁵ Calvin said instead:

. . . the holy examination of which Paul is speaking is far removed from torture. Those people think that they are clear after they have tortured themselves with their thoughts for a few hours, and have let the priest into the secret of their shamefulness. It is another kind of examination that Paul requires here. This is the quickest and easiest method of preparation for you. If you want to derive proper benefit from this gift of Christ, you must bring faith and repentance.³⁶

Thus, as one writer sums up: "the emphasis of preparation should be on Christ's invitation for repentant sinners—not on the exercise of rigorously trying one's conscience."³⁷ Calvin argues that pastors ought to invite believers to the Table in the following manner: "As being poor, come to a kindly giver; as sick, to a physician; as sinners, to the Author of righteousness; finally, as dead, to him who gives us life."³⁸

1.6. Practical Considerations

It is my hope that this article fosters an openness to singing hymns during the Lord's Supper—or at the very least, that the article clarifies why some in the Reformed tradition would believe it wise to do so. As evidenced by the above quotations, there is broad support for the principles that lie behind "singing for our Supper."

I have also sought to anticipate and answer possible objections. Singing in the Supper is not done to avoid uncomfortable silence, or because we are unconcerned with examining ourselves, or because we are trying to be "high church." Nevertheless, one might wonder, what does this look like in practice? Below are a few humble suggestions for the implementation of "singing" in the Supper.

34. Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 566–567.

35. John Calvin, *First Corinthians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 253.

36. Calvin, *First Corinthians*, 253.

37. Jeffrey T. Hamling, "Receiving Christ Better: The Eucharistic Theology of Robert Bruce" (MA Thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 2006), 102.

38. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 4.17.42.

The leadership of a local church might begin to incorporate this practice slowly, singing during the distribution only on occasion. Weekly celebration of the Supper facilitates variety particularly well—a church could alternate between distributing the elements with singing one Sunday, and with silent reflection the next.

Typically, the hymn should be timed to end right around the time the bread or the cup is fully distributed, though there is no problem if it ends before or after. Depending on the size of the congregation and the time it takes to distribute the elements, longer or shorter hymns can be chosen. For example, “God, Be Merciful to Me” has six stanzas and so could be divided into two, the first three stanzas sung during the distribution of the bread and then the last three sung during the distribution of the cup. Alternatively, “Till He Come” could be sung during one element’s distribution and “Thy Works, Not Mine, O Christ” could be sung during the other’s distribution.

It seems advisable that the hymns selected should be those that the elders have memorized, as it is unlikely that they will be able to bring their hymnals along with them as they distribute the elements. Elders can be encouraged to memorize the hymns that feature frequently with the Supper.

While standing during singing is typically to be preferred, when it comes to “singing for our Supper,” it is more practical for the congregation to remain seated.

Based on the principles expounded above, it seems wise that the hymns chosen will be more specific than general, for example, they should be about the life we have in Christ and through his work and the application of salvation by the Spirit, rather than a hymn of God’s greatness or kingship.³⁹ “All People That on Earth Do Dwell” is a wonderful hymn, but others that speak more specifically to the realities represented by communion should be favored for singing during the celebration of the Supper.

Conclusion

In my opinion, not enough has been written as a rationale for the circumstances of how believers celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Even less has been written about the singing of hymns during the distribution of elements. On the other hand, thoughtful Christians have been concerned with other details of our observance of the Supper—for example, there are numerous examinations of whether we should use leavened or unleavened bread. It is my hope that this article will at the very least spur more thoughtful writing on this subject of Christian reflection during the Lord’s Supper and singing during the distribution of the elements.

39. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s *Directory for the Public Worship of God*, while not speaking of singing during distribution, does explain that *after* the Lord’s Supper has been partaken, it is “well” that the congregation sing a hymn focused on Christ. It is quite appropriate to associate the singing of psalms or hymns with the Lord’s Supper, and particularly, the directory notes: “a psalm or hymn that focuses on the benefits of Christ’s death and the triumph of the gospel.” One of the goals is “bringing forth gratitude and joy and renewed commitment of the believer to his Lord” (*The Book of Church Order*, 155 [III, C.7].).

What effects will “singing for our Supper” have on a congregation? As argued above, “singing for our Supper” enriches our celebration of the Lord's Supper abundantly. As an expression of the ministry of God's Word, it further strengthens God's people through the joy of the Lord, where the Spirit is pleased to work. As the truths of the gospel are sung in hymns selected by the minister, the congregation is built up in their knowledge of God as they express their faith. It also unites the congregation together as they corporately sing together. In fact, it gives the covenant children in the congregation a tangible way to participate in the celebration even without partaking of the Supper, as they can sing of Christ and his grace even before they might be ready to come to the Table.