

## QUESTION 91

### Taking God's Name in Praising Him

Next we have to consider the taking of God's name in order to call upon Him in order to pray to Him or to praise Him. We have already talked about prayer (question 83). So now what remains is to talk about praise.

And on this topic there are two questions: (1) Should God be praised out loud? (2) Should singing be used in praising God?

#### Article 1

#### Should God be praised out loud?

It seems that God should not be praised out loud (*Deus non sit ore laudandus*):

**Objection 1:** In *Ethics* 1 the Philosopher says, "What belongs to the best is not praise, but something greater and better." But God is above all the best things. Therefore, God is owed not praise, but something greater and better. Hence, Ecclesiasticus 43:33 likewise says, "God is greater than all praise."

**Objection 2:** Praising God belongs to the worship of Him, since it is an act [of the virtue] of religion. But God is worshiped more with the mind than with the mouth; hence, in Matthew 15:7-8 our Lord cites the following passage from Isaiah [29:13] against certain individuals: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." Therefore, the praise of God resides in the heart rather than in the mouth.

**Objection 3:** Men are praised out loud in order that they might be spurred on to better things. For just as bad people become proud because they are praised, so good individuals will be spurred on to better things because they are praised; hence, Proverbs 27:21 says, "In the way that silver is proven in the furnace, so is a man proven by the mouths of those who praise him." But God is not spurred on to better things by the words of men, both because He is immutable and also because He is supremely good and without the possibility of growing in goodness. Therefore, God should not be praised out loud.

**But contrary to this:** Psalm 62:6 says, "My mouth will praise you with joyful lips (*labiis exultationis*)."

**I respond:** We use [spoken] words in one way with respect to God and in another way with respect to a man. For with respect to a man we use words in order to express to him with our words what is conceived in our hearts, which he cannot have cognition of. And so with respect to a man we use the praise of our mouth in order to make known either to him or to others that we have a good opinion of the one who is being praised, so that (a) we might thereby spur the one who is being praised on to better things and so that (b) we might thereby lead the others, in whose presence he is being praised, to a good opinion of him and to reverence for him and to the imitation of him.

By contrast, with respect to God we use words not, to be sure, in order that we might make our thoughts manifest to Him who sees our hearts (*qui est inspector cordium*), but rather in order that we might lead ourselves and the others who are listening toward reverence for Him. And so our spoken praise is necessary not, to be sure, because of God, but rather because of the very one who is giving the praise and whose affections are stirred up toward God by praising Him—this according to Psalm 49:23 ("His sacrifice of praise will honor Me, and that is the way by which I will show him the salvation of God"). And to the extent that with his affections a man ascends toward God by praising him, to that extent he thereby withdraws from what is contrary to God—this according to Isaiah 48:9 ("And in return for your praise I will restrain you, lest you should perish"). Again, spoken praise leads the affections of others to be spurred on toward God. Hence, Psalm 33:2 says, "His praise is ever in my mouth," and afterwards (33:3-4) it adds, "Let the meek hear and be glad. Magnify the Lord with me").

**Reply to objection 1:** There are two ways in which we can speak of God:

First, *with respect to His essence*. And so since God is incomprehensible and ineffable, He is greater than all praise. Now it is the reverence and honor of *worship (latría)* that is owed to Him on this score. Hence, Jerome's Psalter says, "Our praise of You will keep silent, O God," with respect to the first point, and "Our vow will be rendered to You," with respect to the second point.

Second, *with respect to His effects*, which are ordered toward our advantage. And on this score God is owed *praise*. Hence, Isaiah 63:7 says, "I will remember the tender mercies of the Lord, the praise of the Lord for all the things that the Lord has bestowed upon us." And *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 1, Dionysius says, "You will find that all the sacred hymns," i.e., divine praises, "of the theologians are directed toward the blessed processions of the Thearchy," i.e., of the divine nature, "dividing the names of God by manifesting and praising them."

**Reply to objection 2:** The praise of the mouth is useless to the one praising if it is without the praise of the heart, which speaks praise to God when it reflects upon the might of His works with affection. However, as has been explained, the exterior praise of the mouth is capable (a) of stirring up the interior affection of the one who praises and (b) of encouraging others to praise God.

**Reply to objection 3:** As has been explained, we praise God not for *His* benefit, but for *our* benefit.

## Article 2

### Should singing be added to the praise of God?

It seems that singing should not be added to the praise of God (*cantus non sint assumendi ad laudem divinam*):

**Objection 1:** In Colossians 3:16 the Apostle says, "... teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual canticles (*in Psalmis et hymnis et canticis spiritualibus*).” But we ought to add nothing to divine worship (*nihil assumere debemus in divinum cultum*) over and beyond what is handed down to us by the authority of Sacred Scripture. Therefore, it seems that we ought to use only spiritual canticles, and not bodily canticles, in praising God.

**Objection 2:** In commenting on Ephesians 5:19, "... chanting and singing to the Lord in your hearts," Jerome says, "Let the young men listen who are assigned the role of singing in the Church: You should sing to God not with your voice but with your heart, and you should not, in the manner of stage actors, smear your throat and neck with medications in order that theatrical rhythms and songs might be heard in church." Therefore, it is not the case that singing should be added to the praise of God.

**Objection 3:** Praising God belongs to the small and to the great—this according to Apocalypse 19:5 ("Give praise to our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, the small and the great"). But it is not fitting for the greater ones in the Church to sing. For Gregory says (and this is found in *Decretals* 92, chap. *In sancta Romana Ecclesia*), "I establish by the present decree that in this diocese the ministers of the sacred altar should not sing." Therefore, singing is inappropriate in praising God.

**Objection 4:** In the Old Law God was praised with musical instruments and human singing—this according to Psalm 32:2-3 ("Give praise to the Lord on the harp (*cithara*), sing to Him with the psaltery (*psalteria*), the instrument of ten strings. Sing to Him a new canticle"). But the Church does not use musical instruments such as harps and psalteries in praising God, lest she seem to be imitating the Jews (*ne videatur iudaizare*). Therefore, by parity of reasoning, neither should singing be added to the praise of God.

**Objection 5:** Praise that belongs to the mind is more important than praise that belongs to the mouth. But the mind's praise is impeded by singing, both because (a) the attention of those who are

singing is drawn away from the consideration of what they are singing for as long as they are concerned about their singing, and also because (b) what is being sung is less well understood by others than it would be if it were spoken in the absence of singing. Therefore, singing should not be used for praising God.

**But contrary to this:** As Augustine mentions in *Confessiones* 9, Ambrose instituted singing in the church of Milan.

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 1), spoken praise is necessary in order for a man's affections to be spurred on toward God. And whatever can be useful for this purpose is appropriately added to the praise of God.

Now as is clear from the Philosopher in *Politics* 7 and from Boethius in the prologue to *Musica*, human minds are manifestly disposed in diverse ways by diverse musical melodies. And so it was advantageous to establish that singing should be added to the praise of God, in order that the minds of the weak might be more spurred on toward acts of devotion. Hence, in *Confessiones* 10 Augustine says, "I am inclined to approve of the custom of singing in church, so that with the ears of the weak delighted, their minds might swell up with pious affections." And of himself he says in *Confessiones* 9, "I wept at Your hymns and canticles, moved piercingly by the voices of Your sweet-sounding Church."

**Reply to objection 1:** It is not only canticles that are sung interiorly in the spirit that can be called 'spiritual canticles', but also those that are sung exteriorly by the mouth, to the extent that the latter spur one on to spiritual devotion.

**Reply to objection 2:** Jerome does not condemn singing in an unqualified way, but instead criticizes those who sing in a theatrical manner in church, not for the sake of stirring up devotion, but for the sake of making a show or producing pleasure. Hence, in *Confessiones* 10 Augustine says, "When it happens that the song moves me more than what is being sung about does, I confess that I am sinning and deserve punishment, and after that I prefer not to listen to the singer."

**Reply to objection 3:** Spurring men on toward devotion by teaching and preaching is more noble than doing it by singing. And so deacons and prelates, who are charged with spurring the minds of men on toward God through preaching and teaching should not get involved with singing, lest they thereby be drawn away from greater things. Hence, in the same place Gregory says, "It is a very reprehensible custom for those who have been established in the order of the diaconate to serve by singing when it is more appropriate for them to free up their time for their duty of preaching and for taking care of the alms."

**Reply to objection 4:** In *Politics* 7 the Philosopher says, "Teaching should be accompanied not with a flute or any artificial instrument such as the harp or anything else of this kind, but only with things that make for good listeners." For it is more the case that musical instruments of sort in question move the mind to pleasure than that a good interior disposition is formed through them.

Now such instruments were used in the Old Testament both because (a) the people were more uncultivated and carnal (*populus erat magis durus et carnalis*), and so they were spurred on by instruments of this sort in the same way that they were spurred on by earthly promises, and also because (b) corporeal instruments of this sort prefigured something.

**Reply to objection 5:** The mind is drawn away from the things that are being sung by the sort of singing that is eagerly used to give pleasure. However, if someone is singing for the sake of devotion, then he pays more attention to what is being said, both because (a) he lingers for a longer time over it, and also because (b), as Augustine points out in *Confessiones* 10, "All the affections of our spirit, in their diversity, have their own proper measures in the voice and in singing, and they are stirred by a hidden familiarity with them."

The same line of reasoning holds for those who are listening. In their case, even if they sometimes do not understand what is being sung, they nonetheless understand why it is being sung, viz., to praise God. And this is sufficient to stir up devotion.