I.

It is important that you realize the basis upon which I speak to you. I am speaking not as an expert. I am strictly an amateur. I have always felt that way in my own field. Believe it or not though I have preached now for 39 years the first of next month, I have never felt like a minister. I have always had the attitude of a layman. I am in keen sympathy with the man who has to sit in the pew and has no chance to talk back. If he is there, he has to take what we give him from choir and pulpit whether he likes it or not.

Now since I speak as an amateur you may feel that what I have to say is of secondary importance. But in reality I am convinced that this is not the case. I represent the average man. That common man that Lincoln said the Lord must have loved because he made so many of them. I do not know music. That does not mean that I am not very sensitive to music. I have a great capacity to enjoy it if it is good and to suffer when it is bad. I therefore speak at your constituency. I am the audience. My reaction would be that of perhaps 95% of those for whom you sing.

Sometimes musicians forget this. They play or sing to the 5% of musically trained people that might be present and forget the 95% of the untrained that are sure to be present. That is as foolish as it would be if the minister were to assume that everyone in his congregation was an expert theologian, and would talk as if he were speaking to a group of college professors.
Of course if he held the college professors he would have to be simple and interesting just as if he were talking to people with no theological training. I am speaking then as a representative of those that listen to your singing.

II.

Now since you are a part of the choir, what is your business? What does your church and your Lord have a right to expect of you? What are you and I about anyway? If we do not know what we are trying to do, we are not likely to do it effectively. To the ship bound for no definite harbor, no wind can be favorable.

As members of the choir, we are not present simply to entertain. Of course our music ought to be entertaining. If it isn't people are not going to listen. This is the case with a sermon as well. What we say might be as fundamental as the Decalogue and as true as the Sermon on the Mount, but if it is not interesting people will not listen. But while music should be enjoyed rather than endured, you are no more to sing to display your voice than I am to preach to display mine.

What then is your task? Yours and mine are the same because fundamentally we are engaged in the same high business. You are here along with your minister to lead the congregation in worship. That fact is something that ought to color all that we think and do. We are leaders in worship.

Since that is the case, we are engaged in the biggest business under God's stars. Some time ago
one of the greatest thinkers in the University of Chicago, a man not over religious declared that no other form of human endeavor accomplished so much as worship. Through the long centuries singing sings and sermons have gone hand in hand through the worship of God, but it would seem that singing even antedated the sermon. Man is a worshiping animal. There is no nation or tribe of any tongue that did not have some form of worship. But worship at its best has for long centuries been born out of song and has given birth to song.

We have with us still in our Bibles that amazing hymn book of the Jews. Those songs were written far more than 2,000 years ago. Yet they are as fresh and up-to-date as anything you read in the newspaper before coming to this banquet. In this brief hymn book you find reflected every mood of the human soul. There are patriotic songs. There are prayers of petition, cries of hungry hearts, singing as a hart panteth after the water brook so panteth my soul after thee, 0 Lord. There are songs of thanksgiving; there are songs of proclaiming the greatness of God.

When we come to the Christian era, we find that it was burn in a burst of song. "And there were in that same count-shepherds abiding in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.... and suddenly there was with the angels a multitude of the Heavenly hosts praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest." Since that day every real
revival has given birth to a burst of song.

Therefore when we sing, we worship. Our own hymn book is full of prayers of petition. The greatest single hymn ever written in American was that written by a young divinity student, Ray Palmer. It is a prayer. "My faith looks up to thee, O Lamb of Calvary."

Now hear me while I pray, take all my guilt
And let me from this day, be wholly Thine."

As our hymn book is rich in prayers of petition, it is also rich in hymns of praise. Gratitude is not something that we can take up or let down at will. Gratitude is a mark of spiritual maturity. We do not expect appreciation from a baby six weeks old. But if we never learn to say thank you, it means that we have never grown up. Gratitude is a source of joy. All grateful people are joyous people. We have hymns that give thanksgiving to God. Our hymn abounds in them. Take the poem, "O love that will not let me go. I rest my holy soul in Thee." The author of that hymn is bursting into a song of praise.

Then singing is a way of preaching the gospel. Men of my profession are called Ministers of the Gospel. I am here to proclaim the good news about God. Many of our hymns are written for that purpose. They bring us the glad tidings of great joy. I am a great believer in variety of music. But to run past the singing of gospel hymns would be as silly and hurtful as to run past the preaching of gospel sermons. You and I have the task and privilege Sunday by Sunday
to lead our fellows in the highest of all high arts. The art of worship. You do this through song. I undertake it through the sermon.

III.

How then shall we best accomplish this?

1. I think it is well to realize that we are members of a team. All choir members and ministers are striving for the same goal, the winning of men and women to Christ and the building up of souls in Christ.

Since we are members of the team, we ought to do team work. That means that each of us must fill his or her own place. Not everybody can sing a solo every Sunday. Not every man on a football team can carry the ball and make a touchdown. Some must run interference. You have your position. When a man asked a friend who was singing in the choir, "What is your position?" He said, "I'm neutral!"

As a young man I did some football coaching. If there are any small boys here I know they are wondering why I have back slid and quit. I had one player who was a star, but he lost as much yardage as he gained. He didn't do team work.

Since we are members of a team, we ought to be punctual. I read an article recently on "Wasting People's Lives." The writer spoke of a man who rushed into a committee meeting after keeping 10 men waiting 10 minutes apologizing for being behind time. In wasting the other fellow's time, he was wasting the other fellow's life, and we don't any like to do that.
I once had a choir leader who insisted on being from 2 to 5 minutes late at each service. When I would speak to him about it, he would be 5 minutes ahead of time. He couldn't manage to be on time. A minister who starts his service late does not give the impression of a crusader. He gives the impression of an ecclesiastical tramp. He is a vagrant. I used to know an old chap back in Tennessee who I met often. I never caught him when he was going anywhere. He was always knocking about. That is what the man who is late is doing.

Now since you lead us in worship you are doing all of that that will help forward that great cause. Your attitude as you sing and after you sing means a great deal. You would not take it kindly if your minister were to laugh and chatter while you were singing and only grow solemn when their part came. Not only so but their irreverent behaviour would disturb the congregation. Did you ever hear a choir sing like a flock of angels only to chatter like magpies when the sermon began? You may not care to hear your minister, but remember there are folks sitting in front of you who might like to hear him. If you are flippant and irreverent, you not only cheat yourself but you cheat others and you give a lie to what you have undertaken to do.

I take it that in any choir you desire to learn to sing better. It ought to mean something far deeper than that. You desire to learn to help others to learn to worship better. Why not seek to enter
experimentally into the songs of prayer and praise that you sing? Bear in mind that these great hymns have been through the centurions' stairways up which other souls have climbed to meet God. Let them do that for you. If you do that will be a great reward in itself.

Such a practice does not only bring a blessing to you, but it makes you a blessing to others and being a blessing is the very epitome of living.

A great choir master some years ago was rehearsing Handel's "Messiah." The leading soprano sang, "I Know that My Redeemer Liveth." When she had finished the choir leader who was a genuine Christian and knew her for one asked her softly did she really know. She bowed her head for a moment. When she raised her eyes, she whispered, "I know." "Then sing it again." It is for very needy men and women, boys and girls.

To the experience of transforming worship.