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**WHY
PSALMS
ONLY?**

FOREWORD

Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield once stated that a consistent Christianity is most easily defended. While Arminianism might appear more attractive than Calvinism to the mind of the natural man, it cannot stand the test of rigorous logic. Similarly, a mode of worship that appeals to carnal sense and unsanctified emotions may appear to misguided souls more attractive than the purity and simplicity of Scriptural worship.

Mr. John W. Keddie has cut through the jungle of decadent tradition and shallow sentimentalism by appealing to the authority of the Word of God as warranting the singing of Psalms in worship to the exclusion of uninspired hymns. Standing firmly on the solid ground of the regulative principle of Reformed worship, he shows that the singing of Scripture Psalms rather than uninspired hymns is "clearly in a line of Christianity with the Apostolic, Reformed and Puritan practice".

The Biblical and historical argument sketched in sharp outline in this essay could be elaborated and documented fully.* It may also be supplemented by practical considerations of the highest order. Uninspired hymnody invariably brings with it the danger of unsound doctrine and unwholesome piety. Only the last day will tell how many have sung themselves into a dream of "Blessed Assurance" while holding a lie in their right hand. But even the noblest strains of a Hart, a Toplady or a Newton, while serving for the edification of the Lord's people, may not replace the God-breathed songs of David and Asaph without impoverishment of the service of the Sanctuary and an imbalance in experimental religion. John Calvin well spoke of the Psalter as "anatomy of all parts of the soul" and aptly quoted Augustine "that no one can sing things worthy of God, unless he has received them from Himself".

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* This has been done in Michael S. Bushell's 226-page manuscript, *The Songs of Zion*.

WHY PSALMS ONLY?

Introduction

It is our purpose in this booklet to enquire into the theological and historical bases for the sole use of Biblical Psalms as a vehicle for praise in the public worship of God, to the exclusion of uninspired compositions of men.¹ It will be necessary throughout to set this position over against contrary views, which at the present time comprise the "majority" opinion amongst Christian Churches. As this is admittedly the case, does the onus therefore lie with the minority to prove the validity of their practice? On that particular question we would offer the following observations:

(a) On a matter of *principle* responsibility for proof lies with *whoever* advances any given position. In Biblical interpretation the exposition of any view, irrespective of whether that view is a majority or minority one, ought to be demonstrably in conformity to the Scriptures, properly understood.

(b) Majorities are not always right. Scripture history itself furnishes us with many a relevant illustration of this. "Majority" opinion has been the occasion of real tyranny from time to time throughout the history of the church.

(c) It may be noted that "exclusive Psalmody"² was not always in the minority amongst Protestant and Reformed Churches. This point is made to draw attention to the fact that throughout the history of the Church mere *consensus* has often undergone radical changes and therefore a "majority" is not self-evidently conclusive, as if invested with an automatic divine right. We contend, therefore, that this is first and foremost a matter of *principle*. The question of majority or minority opinions being subordinate to the primary concern: "what saith the scripture?" (cf. Rom. 4:3 & Gal. 4:30).

There is of course no dispute that men have liberty to compose hymns or songs (or poetry) as expressions of faith-commitment and for private edification or that of others. Thus, we do not "denounce" hymns as such. What we do dispute however, is the *warrant* to intrude such (human) compositions into the public worship of God. Perhaps an objection will be raised that this is a relatively peripheral and unnecessarily divisive matter when compared to the centrally important concerns of the Gospel in which our energies should be employed. Certainly it is true that the question of the promotion of the Gospel "to the uttermost ends of the earth" and the interests of revival within the Church ought primarily to actively engage our attention. However, that said, how are we to distinguish the

peripheral from the central? Is it true to say that the arrangements concerning the *content* and *form* of public worship of the professing Church are to be deemed unimportant? It is noteworthy in this context that after our Lord had driven the traders and moneychangers out of the Temple precincts the disciples remembered that it was written, "the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (John 2:17, citing Psalm 69:9). The importance of this question can also be underscored by the attendant implications concerning the sufficiency of Scripture as regulative in all matters of faith and practice.³ Furthermore, one is reminded of the word of Christ: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). Of course it may be said that merely adopting the practice of exclusive Psalmody will not necessarily be attended with the divine blessing in a manifest way. In any case it is proper to ask whether it is not a hindrance to the full enjoyment of God's blessing to resist a practice which is demonstrably scriptural?

In this paper our method of approach will be to deal firstly, with textual evidence; secondly, with some historical considerations; and, lastly, draw some conclusions as a result of our examination of the issues involved. It will be appreciated that this is not by any means an exhaustive piece of work. Several cognate matters have been scarcely touched, if at all. For example, there is no specific discussion of the doctrine of the Church, in which the idea of public worship is rooted. Also, the question of instrumental accompaniment has not been dealt with, though it is our conviction that similar species of argument as those developed here could be adduced in support of the prohibition of musical instruments from public worship of the Church.

It is our earnest prayer that this exposition may lead to a greater understanding of the practice defended and may contribute to an increased zeal for the purity of worship – that worship which is "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23).

TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

Command to sing Psalms.

Perhaps the first point to be dealt with is the question of the nature of the command to sing Psalms in the worship of God. Some people go as far as to deny that there is any such command. In this connection the following points are apposite:

- (i) The Psalms are the fruit of supernatural (divine) inspiration;
- (ii) They are clearly *designed* to be sung;⁴
- (iii) The degree of Psalm-citations in the NT indicates a significant dependence of NT theology and experience on the Book of Psalms;
- (iv) There is no evidence that any other than inspired materials were ever used in the services of the sanctuary in OT (or NT) times;
- (v) There are clear indications that the Psalms were used as praise in the NT (Eph. 5:19 & Col 3:16);
- (vi) By "good and necessary consequence" God's people ought to sing these compositions in every age, and by implication it is also a duty.⁵

The total effect of the above points is to establish a warrant to sing Psalms in Christian worship. It is therefore facile to say that there is no command to sing Psalms, though our arguments remain to be fully developed showing that Psalms *only* should be used in worship services in every age.

Approach to the Textual evidence.

We make two general points here: *Firstly*, as far as NT texts are concerned, there are several passages bearing on the subject, and it is important that these are rightly understood, according to sound hermeneutical principles. Such texts as Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 are of great significance, especially as they are frequently appealed to in support of the position that uninspired hymnody may legitimately be admitted into public worship services. The exclusive Psalmodist's concern, therefore, is to ascertain what substance there is in such an understanding of these texts. Are there satisfactory grounds for such a conclusion, or is there an alternative interpretation which more persuasively commends itself to us? *Secondly*, in interpreting the words "hymn" or "song" as they are used in the NT, the importation into these words of present-day connotations must be resisted. For one thing, as Professor William Binnie observed, "the employment of *metre* in sacred song was unknown to the Jewish Church".⁶ Thus, we will be found indulging in faulty exegesis

if we consider that what the Biblical writers meant by these terms is the same as what we now understand by them. We now turn to specific texts in detail.

Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:24

Here it is recorded that after the last supper, in connection with the Passover celebration, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn (*καὶ ὑμνήσαντες ἐξῆλθον*) prior to going out to the Mount of Olives. What is meant by “hymn” in this context? It is generally held by commentators that the reference here is to a Psalm from the “Hallel”, the name given to Psalms 113-118, which were used by the Jews especially in connection with the Passover celebrations. For example, R. V. G. Tasker comments as follows: “*An hymn* should perhaps be rendered ‘*the hymn*’, as it would seem probable that the reference is to the final Passover hymn which consisted of Psalms cxvi-cxviii.”⁷ Thus, there is no inference here that Christ and the disciples used any other material than the Psalms of Scripture.

Acts 16:25

Paul and Silas, having roused the “multitude” in the market place at Philippi (vv. 19-22) were put into “the inner prison” (v.24). Nothing daunted, “at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises to God” (*προσευχόμενοι ὕμνου τὸν θεόν*). Here the AV readers ὕμνου “sang praises”. The ASV reads “sang hymns”. Clearly whatever they sang was something committed to memory and not unlikely to be a Psalm. As J.A. Alexander commented: “*Praying, hymned* (or *sang to*) *God*, seems to express, not two distinct acts . . . but the single act of lyrical worship, or praying . . . by singing or chanting, perhaps one or more of the many passages in the Book of Psalms peculiarly adapted and intended for the use of prisoners and others under persecution.”⁸ Certainly Paul’s use of the Psalms in his epistles indicates great familiarity with them, and it is not at all far-fetched to entertain the notion that he may, with Silas, have been singing Psalm 146, amongst others. In any event, there is certainly no evidence here requiring the supposition that materials other than Biblical Psalms would have been used — quite the reverse.

Ephesians 5:19 & Colossians 3:16

We shall take these two verses together for our purpose. At the outset it should be affirmed that Paul is not necessarily referring here to public worship.⁹ This at least is not disputed. What is disputed is the species of argument which maintains that “the mention of ‘hymns’ and ‘songs’ clearly reveals that we can sing other material than the Psalms”.¹⁰ This is an entirely un-necessary

deduction from these texts, as we shall proceed to demonstrate.

(a) The triadic distinction, *psalmos*, *hymnos* and *odee* (ψαλμοὶ καὶ ὕμνοι καὶ ᾠδαὶ πνευματικαῖς) as used here would in fact be perfectly familiar to his readers as indicative of the various titles of the Psalms in the Hebrew psalter or Greek Septuagint translation thereof. According to Murray and Young¹¹, the word *psalmos* occurs 94 times in the Greek Scriptures of which in 67 it appears in the titles of the Psalms. *Hymnos* occurs 19 times, of which 13 appear in Psalm titles. And *odee* occurs 86 times of which 36 are in the titles of the Psalms. Other than in the texts cited, in the NT the word (verb) *humneo* occurs in contexts – e.g. Heb. 2:12 (“sing praise”, ὑμνήσω) – in which the reference is to the Book of Psalms and thus gives no warrant for the assertion that uninspired compositions are alluded to. *Odee* is used in the Book of Revelation – e.g. Rev. 5:19 – and though it refers to songs other than the Psalms, does not refer either to uninspired material, or, “modern” hymn-types.

(b) There is therefore no necessity to raise the issue of any apparent tautology involved in the interpretation of these verses – i.e. “psalms and psalms and psalms”¹² – any more than one would maintain that the titles to the psalms were simply arbitrary or purposeless. In that there are *real* differences involved, the terms employed by the Apostle would be readily understood by his readers. There is nothing inherently mysterious here. Furthermore, the same triadic form is to be found in other Biblical contexts, as, for example, in Exodus 34:7 (“iniquity and transgression and sin”); Deuteronomy 5:31 and 6:1 (“commandments and statutes and judgements”); and Acts 2:22 (“miracles and wonders and signs”).

(c) Amongst Reformed Bible commentators the interpretation of these texts just outlined finds general support from Binnie,¹³ Manton,¹⁴ Daille,¹⁵ and Bayne,¹⁶ as well as the *Report* by Professors Murray and Young cited above. In some cases even some sound conservative scholars are somewhat unimpressive in their interpretation of these texts. In the course of one paragraph of his exposition of Colossians 3:16 F.F. Bruce says that “it is *unlikely* that any sharply demarcated division is intended,” though the “psalms” *might be* drawn from the OT Psalter . . . the “hymns” *might be* Christian canticles, and the “spiritual songs” *might be* unpremeditated words sung “in the Spirit”.¹⁷ He also says that it is “*unlikely* that the ψαλμοί and ὕμνοι and ᾠδαὶ πνευματικαί should be found in the three types of composition found in the OT Psalter”¹⁸ but does not support this statement with any arguments. E.K. Simpson (on Ephesians 5:19) says that the designations *psalmos*, *hymnos* and *odee* “differ but little from one another”.¹⁹ These comments at least indicate that it is decidedly imprudent to conclude

that one has warrant from these texts for the use of “materials other than the Psalms”. What is more, tautology has not been circumvented and perhaps appears as more of a problem given this type of interpretation.

To summarise the main points arising from our understanding of these two texts:

(1) There is no evidence from these texts for the use of non-inspired materials in the public worship of God.

(2) The triadic distinction used by Paul would readily be understood by those familiar with their Hebrew OT Psalter or the Greek Septuagint, where the Psalm titles are differentiated psalms, hymns, and songs. This interpretation does justice to the *analogy* of Scripture, i.e. Scripture is its own best interpreter.

(3) Even supposing Paul *meant* other materials than the Psalms, it is reasonable to presume that his hearers would know exactly what he was referring to, i.e. he was referring to something *then existing*. But, other than the Psalms, we can have no confidence concerning any other supposed compositions as nothing of such a nature has come down to us from that period.²⁰

(4) In any event we do possess an “inspired”, God-breathed (θεόπνευστος) manual of praise in the Psalms, the *mizmorim*, *tehillim*, and *shirim*. What need have we of any uninspired compositions besides?

James 5:13

In the text the Apostle James enjoins the singing of praises, especially by those who are “merry.” Now, in the first place, it is not apparent that public worship is referred to here.⁹ Further the word *psalletō* (ψαλλέτω) means simply “sing” or “praise”.²¹ Whilst this does not specifically imply Psalms, it is not at all unlikely that it is the Psalms which were in the Apostle’s mind when he penned the exhortation. Certainly it does not necessitate the deduction that materials other than Psalms are referred to. Manton comments thus: “In the original there is but one word ψαλλέτω, let him sing, but because this is the usual acception of the word ψαλλέτω in the church it is well rendered ‘let him sing psalms’ ”.²²

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

The "Regulative Principle."

The "regulative principle", as understood by the Calvinistic Reformers and the Puritans, is beautifully expressed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*;

"... the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or in any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture."²³

It is of importance to note at this point the difference between the Calvinistic Reformers and the Lutheran and Anglican Reformers so far as their view of the nature and extent of the normativeness of Scripture is concerned. The Lutherans and Anglicans maintained that anything could be admitted to the worship of the Church so long as there was no express prohibition in Scripture. The Calvinists on the other hand maintained a stricter method of interpretation in affirming that nothing should be admitted into the worship of God except what has the specific warrant of Scripture. The Calvinistic Reformers, Scottish Presbyterians and English Puritans generally adopted this view. The great Church historian William Cunningham pointed out that the implications of this "if it were fully carried out, would just be to leave the Church in the condition in which it was left by the Apostles, in so far as we have any means of information — a result, surely, which need not be very alarming, except to those who think that they themselves have very superior powers for improving and adorning the Church by their inventions".²⁴ It scarcely needs to be pointed out that the consequences of the adoption of the laxer view — a basically *permissive* one, and unquestionably the predominant one today even in evangelical Churches — has been the tendency for Biblical materials in worship to be displaced and countless innovations of one sort or another, having no warrant in God's word, to be introduced. Now, the practice of exclusive Psalmody arises from the *application* of the regulative principle, as defined above. It is a deduction from the Scripture data. But what Biblical support is there for such reasoning? We cannot in this booklet enter into a detailed discussion on this aspect of the matter.²⁵ In general the regulative principle may ultimately be considered to be a consistent application of the commandment expressed in Exodus 20:4-6 ("... keep my commandments.") This, however, is a broad reference, and more explicit

testimony to such a principle is found in such texts as Deuteronomy 12:32:

“What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.”²⁶

Such texts emphasise the commands of God and therefore His comprehensive prerogatives in establishing absolute norms in the manner in which He is to be worshipped (and also over all of life and faith). Similar thought is also expressed in the words of the Great Commission:

“Go . . . and teach all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you . . .” (Matt. 28:19-20)

This, essentially, is the “regulative principle”.²⁷

NT “Christian Hymns”

Several NT texts are often appealed to as examples of “hymn-types”.²⁸ This supposedly evidences a developing (or developed) liturgical tradition amongst the early Christians. Allusions to such “hymns” in the NT, it is said, gives some sort of Biblical respectability to the use of materials for song outside the Biblical revelation. How are these claims to be evaluated?

It should be said at the outset that the whole concept of hymn-citations in the NT is somewhat elusive, and deductions based thereon must be considered tenuous. In this connection we would draw attention to the following points:

(a) It would seem to be impossible to *prove* the existence of such “hymns” either from NT evidence or from extra-Biblical material as no recognisable composition from this era has come down to us;

(b) Even if it could be demonstrated conclusively that hymn-type structures are to be found in the NT it is quite another thing to show that these were either approved for Christian worship services, or even designed for singing in the first place;

(c) Quotations from poetic or hymn-like *sources* no more logically leads to a warrant for using uninspired materials in praise than do allusions to the apocryphal literature²⁹ or heathen philosophers³⁰ lead to the acceptance of such sources in place of the Bible as the source of the Church’s authority;

(d) As far as the sources of the supposed hymn-citations are concerned it appears that no two writers ever quote the same “hymn” and that no one writer quotes the same “hymn” twice.³¹

In view of the above, one would be justified in concluding that, despite many learned commentators to the contrary, the “wish” is father to the “thought” here. The exegetical methodology is questionable and certainly highly conjectural.

The Early Church (Post-Apostolic)

On the question of the use of the Psalms in the post-Apostolic Church, we shall merely refer to the work of the Rev. James Harper, *The Psalter in the Early Church*, in which he concludes that "those who contend for the exclusive use of the Scripture Psalter in the direct and formal praise of God, find in the history of the early Church signal confirmation of their position".³² Another writer of a more recent date put it thus:

"In the Western Church, the hymn was slower in winning its way largely because of the prejudice against non-Scriptural praise, and not until nearly the end of the fourth century was hymn-singing beginning to be practised in the churches."³³

Reformed Church

As noted above, the Calvinistic Reformers generally held to what we have called the "regulative principle". The period of the Reformation, especially in its Calvinists expression, marked a "renaissance" in congregational song. Unquestionably the "hymn-book" of the Reformation was the Biblical Psalms. As Millar Patrick put it:

". . . at a stroke the Reformed Church cut loose from the entire mass of Latin hymns and from the use of hymnody in general, and adopted the Psalms of the Old Testament as the sole medium of Church praise."³⁴

It is historically incorrect to maintain, as some do, that Calvin and those who followed him were not concerned to exclude non-Biblical material from worship services. It is undeniably true that John Calvin attached the Canticles (Scripture songs other than Psalms), the Ten Commandments (in metre), the Lord's Prayer, and the Creed (the latter for reading),³⁵ to the Psalter he used. However, despite any concessions he may have made to a somewhat more formal liturgical emphasis than, for example, the great Scottish Reformer John Knox allowed, Calvin was still instrumental in the revival of Psalmody.³⁶ As Calvin himself said: ". . . we cannot find better songs than David's Psalms: which the Holy Spirit has spoken and created".³⁷

English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians

As far as the Puritans are concerned, the representative *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) is clear in its articulation of the regulative principle, as quoted above. Further, the *Confession* explicitly enjoins "the singing of psalms with grace in the heart,"³⁸ and it is noteworthy that the Westminster Assembly which produced the *Confession* and *Catechisms* also sponsored a metrical translation of the 150 Psalms of Scripture, which speaks volumes for their

position.³⁹ Frequently reference is made to "hymns" written by Puritan writers (such as John Bunyan). However, invariably such compositions were originally written for contexts other than public worship. It was the following century that saw the intrusion of non-inspired materials into public worship, principally through the efforts of Benjamin Keach, a Baptist, and of course, Isaac Watts, an Independent. One dissenting voice from the 18th century was the Anglican William Romaine, a contemporary of the hymn-writers John Newton and William Cowper. Romaine had this to say in 1775:

"... our hymn-mongers ... shut out the Psalms, to introduce their own verses into the Church, sing them with great delight, and, as they fancy, with great profit, although the practice be in direct opposition to the command of God, and, therefore, cannot possibly be accompanied with the divine blessing."⁴⁰

In the case of the Scottish Presbyterian Church the fact is that up to 1781, from the time of the Reformation, the *only* manual of praise authorised for use in the Church was the Psalter. That year saw the General Assembly of the Kirk 'permit' the use of Paraphrases of other portions of Scripture.⁴¹ Hymns, that is materials other than Scripture, were not authorised by the Kirk until as relatively recently as 1861, and in the case of the Free Kirk, 1872.⁴² As Professor James MacGregor commented in 1869:

"... our Church, for many generations, has not in her congregational praise, made use of any materials of merely human inspiration; and that, with reference even to materials of divine inspiration, the ambiguous quasi-sanction attained by the "paraphrases" dates only from a very recent period of her history, derives its origin from the deepest darkness of her "dark age" of moderatism."⁴³

The five "hymns" often printed at the back of the Psalm book MacGregor characterises as "partly Socinian, mainly deistical, wholly unevangelical at heart," and having no Church authority, having been "dragged in from the fly-leaf for the purpose of giving to the impression some colour of historical foundation in fact". It is interesting to note that the great Scottish Historian, David Hay Fleming, had his Bible bound with the Psalms, but to the exclusion of the Paraphrases, out of deference to Reformation principle and practice.⁴⁴

So far as Presbyterian Churches beyond the bounds of Scotland are concerned — e.g. those in the U.S.A. and in the antipodes — very much the same story could be told as has been described above in relation to Scotland.

MAY WE SING UNINSPIRED HYMNS IN PUBLIC WORSHIP?

Conclusions

The following arguments are adduced as the primary Biblical-theological and historical considerations in support of a negative response to the above question:

(1) There is no evidence from either the OT or NT for the proposition that progressive revelation was ever expressed in or by the Church in its worship through the use of uninspired materials. To put it another way, “there is no visible case in which with the sanction of God, any congregation ever sang a song of merely human inspiration”.⁴⁵

(2) David’s introduction of song(s), and manifestation of a musical “gift,” (2 Sam. 23:1) was under the direct inspiration of the Spirit of God. It seems perfectly clear that the Church in the OT – and later in the NT, as witness the close of the NT “canon” – *recognised* what was God’s word and thus inspired, as a consequence of the revelatory activity of God himself and the Word’s *self-authenticating* nature.

(3) It is contended that other inspired utterances such as the songs of Moses (Ex. 15:1-19 & Deut. 32:1-43) and Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10) in the OT, and of Mary (Luke 1:46-55)⁴⁶ and Simeon (Luke 2:29-32) in the NT, were exceptional effusions of praise, of an inspired nature, in connection with particular (and even absolutely unique, as with the *Magnificat*) “acts of God” and not necessarily for perpetual use in the Church’s song.

(4) To our knowledge there are no “exclusive Psalmists” who maintain either that David wrote all the Psalms, or, that praise should be limited to those Psalms which could be shown to have been written by David, or, that Psalms were not written after his day. The point is that the *whole* book of Psalms, whoever penned by, is to be considered as the final(ised) hymnbook of the Church. It satisfies the demands of divine provision, and is the only collection of songs of praise as such which can lay claim to plenary and verbal inspiration.

(5) There is an absence of any divine command to men to compose hymns for Church worship in the NT, nor is the Spirit’s help promised.

(6) In view of the absence of any provision of a divinely-inspired manual of praise in the NT it is surely exceedingly presumptuous of mere men to arrogate to themselves what they presumably consider to be a lacking in God’s word as to His provision for our worship. It

was for this reason that Romaine wrote:

"I want a name for a man who should pretend that he could make better hymns than the Holy Ghost . . . why . . . would any man in the world take it into his head to sit down and write hymns for the use of the Church? It is just the same as if he were to write a new Bible . . ." ⁴⁷

(7) Evidence advanced for the use of any materials other than the Psalter in the Early Church for the first 100 years and more A.D. is tenuous.

(8) As far as the restriction of praise to the Book of Psalms by the Reformed Church is concerned, it is relevant to observe with Hislop that, "the exclusive use of the Psalter is derived from its [the Calvinists] concept of revelation". ⁴⁸

(9) There is considerable weight of evidence pointing to the fact that in general the exclusive use of Psalms was the norm in the Reformed Churches prior to the middle of the 18th Century. This practice was rooted in their understanding of the "regulative principle". However, whilst this is so, our case does not rest on merely an "argument from history". If this were so we might be found guilty of making the Scriptures void by our traditions (Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7). Of course the same standard applies to the modern hymn-singer too. And he also has to face up to the fact of a marked *dis*-continuity between predominant practice today and that of the history of the Church prior to the 18th century. In this respect the "exclusive Psalmist" is certainly more clearly in a line of continuity with the Apostolic, Reformed and Puritan practice.

(10) The singing of God's praise is an act of worship distinct in its nature from other elements such as prayer and preaching, and the divine warrant respecting one element must be distinguished from that concerning another. ⁴⁹ Thus a mere "argument by analogy" with "free" prayer and preaching is invalid. "There is on Scripture record no case of public prayer or preaching by book." ⁵⁰

(11) What is not commanded (i.e. authorised) in God's word concerning forms of worship ought not to be imposed upon God's people, for,

"God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to his word; *or beside it, if matters of faith and worship*". (West. Conf. XX, Sec. II.)

In this respect, ironically, the introduction of uninspired hymns into public worship is actually the *antithesis* of Christian liberty, in so far as it is a "commandment of men". ⁵¹

(12) Finally, the implication of all this is, essentially, that God's

people today ought to use in worship only materials authorised in God's word. The sufficiency of Scripture needs to be adhered to and consistently worked out, even though it may involve the renunciation of previously hallowed but unscriptural patterns of worship. As the late Professor John Murray put it, it may be that

"We have become accustomed to a certain pattern of thought and conduct. It may be surrounded by the halo of sanctity derived from an established family, social or ecclesiastical tradition, and we are not willing to bring this pattern or conviction to the test of those criteria which the truth demands. Or perhaps after persuasion to the contrary by the evidence of truth, we are not willing to let truth have its way; just because it means a breach with the convenient and the conventional."⁵²

Notes

1. By "uninspired" is meant writings which are not part of God's revelation in Scripture. Conversely, by "inspired" is meant canonical Scripture, revealed "at sundry times and in diverse manners" (Heb. 1:1; cf. II Peter 1:21) and all "God-breathed" (II Tim. 3:16). This is the orthodox Christian doctrine of Scripture. Cf. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 1.
2. By "exclusive Psalmody" is meant the limitation of congregational song to the 150 Biblical Psalms. However, the principal concern is to establish or maintain that we have a *warrant* only to use in public worship songs immediately inspired by God the Holy Spirit. The exclusion of other Scripture songs, or paraphrases of parts of Scripture, arises primarily from uncertainty as to warrant, and, in the case of paraphrases, the human arbitrariness in choosing passages to be paraphrased.
3. *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q & A.3: "The holy scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience". Cf. *West. Conf.*, Ch.1, sec. VI.
4. Cf. for example, the Psalms with the inscription, "To the Chief Musician", i.e. the leader in the service of song. Ps. 4, 6, 8, 9 . . . etc. Cf. also I Chron. 16:7ff; Psalm 95:2; Psalm 105:2 for "commands" to sing Psalms.
5. Peter's citation of Isaiah 40:8 (I Peter 1:24-25) is a relevant reminder of (a) the timelessness of (OT) scripture and (b) the fact that the gospel is rooted in that word. By implication the Psalms are similarly "abiding".
6. William Binnie, *The Psalms: Their History, Teaching, and Use*, London, 1886, p.377. We cannot in this booklet deal with the question of the use of metrical translations of the Psalms. For a useful discussion of aspects of that question see J. L. Clugston, *The Making and Marring of the Scottish Psalter*, N.S.W., 1974. Murray McCheyne's testimony is of interest in this respect: "The metrical version of the Psalms . . . is truly an admirable translation from the Hebrew, and is frequently more correct than the prose version." (A. A. Bonar, *Memoir and remarks of the Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne*, London 1966 (1892), p.621).

7. R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Tyndale Commentary, London, 1961, p.252. Cf. Art. "Hymn" in *New Bible Dictionary*, London, 1962, p.549.
8. J.A. Alexander, *Acts of the Apostles*, Geneva Commentary, London, 1963 (1857), Vol. 2, p.121.
9. This does not of course remove these texts from relevance to the question of public worship. If the song referred to in these passages denotes materials for praise in less formal acts of worship, then certainly no inferior standard ought to characterise more formal acts of the public worship of the Church. Thus the importance of these texts to the present discussion. It is a matter of what can be considered apostolically sanctioned.
10. R. A. Morey, "Reformation in our Singing", in, *Reformation Today*, Mar/Apr 1977, p.9.
11. John Murray & William Young: *Minority Report of the Committee on Song in the Public Worship of God*, (Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1947), p.16.
12. Morey, op. cit., p.8.
13. *The Psalms: Their History, Teaching, and Use*, London, 1886.
14. *Exposition of the Epistle of James*, 1693, p.443.
15. *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Colossians*, 1648, Sermon XLI.
16. *An Exposition of Ephesians*, Sovereign Grace, 1959 reprint, p.484ff.
17. F.F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians*, NICNT, London, 1957, p.284. (Emphases mine – JWK). Cf. W. Hendriksen, *Colossians* [Edinburgh, 1976 (1967)], pp.240-1 for a similar species of argument. Bruce does not indicate what he means by the term "in the Spirit".
18. Op. Cit., p.284, n.118.
19. E.K. Simpson, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, NICNT, London, 1957, p.125. Cf. W. Hendriksen *Ephesians* [Edinburgh, 1974 (1964)], p.161-3.
20. The provision of songs for the use of the Church not immediately inspired by God is foreign to the whole history of God's revelation of Himself and His will for the Church. It is *possible* that there were *charismatic* effusions in the early days of the NT Church – as for example in I Co. 14:15 & 16 (cf. v.26: "Every one of you hath a psalm (*ψαλμου*)" – though in that case the "song" would neither have been uninspired nor for *congregational* use).
21. "Sing praise" (ASV & RSV): "sing psalms" (AV & Berkeley).
22. Manton, op. cit., p.439.
23. Chapter XXI, Section 1. Cf. *Belgic Confession*, Article VIII.
24. *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, London, 1967 (1862), p.32.
25. For a full discussion of this subject see, *The Biblical Doctrine of Worship*, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 800 Wood Street, Pittsburgh, Pa., 15221, (1973). See especially the article by Professor Norman Shepherd, *The Biblical Basis for the Regulative Principle of Worship*, (op. cit., p.42ff.) for a lucid treatment of the question at issue here. Also valuable though scarce is the published volume of "addresses" given at *The Psalm-Singers Conference*, 5th-8th August 1902 (Belfast, 1903, 328pp.).
26. Cf. Deut. 4:1-2 (with which cf. Rev. 22:18-19.)
27. Cf. Textual Evidence, *supra*, for detail on the question of Psalm-singing.
28. Cf., for example, I Cor. 13 & Phil. 2:5-11.

29. Cf., for example, Jude 14; parallel between Eph. 6:13-17 and Wisdom of Solomon, 5:17-20, etc.
30. Cf. F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, NICNT, Edinburgh, 1965, p.359.
31. See, *Expository Times*, February, 1972, Vol. LXXXIII, No. 5, p.153.
32. J. Harper, *The Psalter in the Early Church*, Pittsburgh: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1891, p.24.
33. C. Northcott, *Hymns in Christian Worship*, London, 1964, p.19.
34. *Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody*, London, 1949, p.9.
35. *Ibid.*, p.16.
36. Cf. R. Peter, "Calvin and Louis Budé's Translation of the Psalms," in, *John Calvin*, Abingdon, Berks.: Sutton Courteney Press, 1966, p.190ff.
37. "Epistle to the Reader," at Head of *Psalter*, 10th June, 1543.
38. Chapter XXI, Section 5; cf. "Of Singing of Psalms," in *Directory for the Public Worship of God*, (1645).
39. Cf. Millar Patrick, *op. cit.*, pp.94-96, 102, for comments on the origin and influence of the "Westminster Version" of the Psalms.
40. See his *Essay on Psalmody* (1775).
41. Cf. C.G. McCrie, *The Public Worship of Presbyterian Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1892, p.285. For details of the adoption of uninspired hymnody by other erst-while Psalm-singing Churches see the relevant essays in *The Biblical Doctrine of Worship*, *op. cit.*
42. McCrie, *op. cit.*, pp.332-336. The Free Church of Scotland which continued after the emergence of the United Free Church of Scotland in 1900 promptly rescinded the Acts which had permitted the use of such compositions in public worship and reverted to the use of Biblical Psalms exclusively. (See *Free Church Acts of Assembly*, Act V, 1905.)
43. *Free Church of Scotland Assembly Papers*, May 1869, pp.152-161.
44. H.M. Paton, *David Hay Fleming, Historian and Antiquary*, Edinburgh, 1934, p.21. Cf. David Hay Fleming, *The Hymnology of the Scottish Reformation: A Reply to Dr. Horatius Bonar and George W. Sprott*, Perth, 1884. Fleming was "Stone" Lecturer at Princeton Theological seminary in 1907 and again in 1914.
45. MacGregor, *op. cit.*
46. Allusions to the Psalms in the *Magnificat* are most noteworthy. See textual citations in marginal reference Bible.
47. Romaine, *op. cit.*
48. D.H. Hislop, *Our Heritage in Public Worship*, Edinburgh, 1935, p.181.
49. Cf. Murray and Young, *Report*, *op. cit.*, p.14.
50. MacGregor, *op. cit.*
51. Cf. Col. 2:20-23 & Matt. 15:8-9.
52. *Collected Writings, 1: The Claims of Truth*, Edinburgh, 1976, p.v.