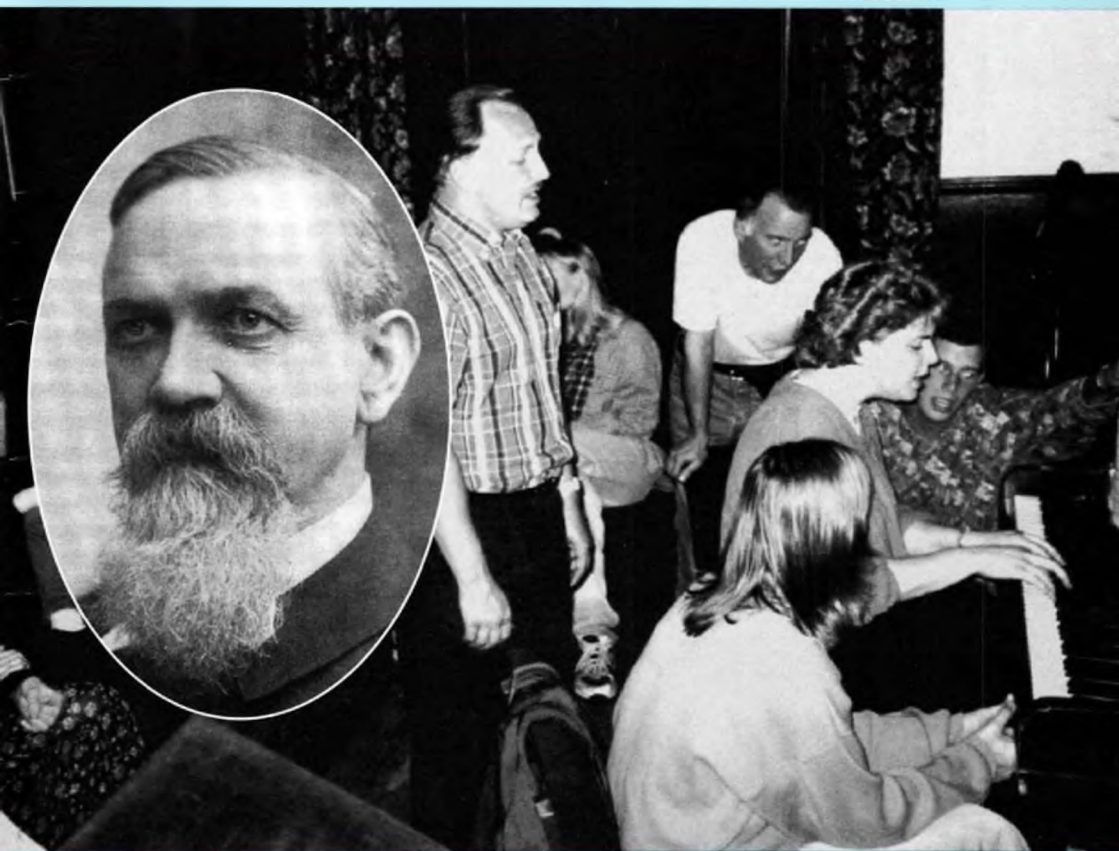


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Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs

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EDITOR

Hugh L. Williams

"Fairhaven"

9 Chapel Lane

Walton-by-Kimble

LUTTERWORTH

Leicestershire LE17 5RL

ENGLAND

☎ 01455 55 40 28

E-Mail hughw@netmatters.co.uk

DEPUTY EDITOR

Allen Baird

44 Bathmore Heights

Old Ballymoney Road

Ballymena

Co. ANTRIM

BT43 6NQ

N. IRELAND

All correspondence or articles for publication should be sent to either of the two above addresses. Letters for publication must be headed "Dear Editor" or should carry a specific permission to print.

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Old-time Covenanter R.J. George, a stickler for Exclusive Psalmody is pictured (inset), while in the main picture the psalm-singers of one hundred years after his times still gather around for a late evening Psalm-sing at the BRF Conference in Northern Ireland July 1998.

Psalms *and* Hymns ?

An examination of claims for Extra-Biblical Non-inspired Hymnody as having Apostolic Sanction

Without doubt, no Christian will deny that Christians are required to worship God, and as part of that worship, to praise Him in song. From the very beginning of Apostolic practice we find that the early Christians “continued stedfastly in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2: 42). From those ancient times the Church of Christ has continued to reflect, sometimes clearly, sometimes dismally, those pristine ideals, in which the protocols for approaching the Divine Majesty were all rooted and grounded in the Word of God *alone*. Approaching the King of Kings demanded the right protocols, most assuredly more so even than in approaching a Caesar, or any other dignitary invested with the majesty of human government.

As one would never dare presume to come into the presence of an earthly potentate according to protocols of one’s own ingenuity, so the Word of God lays it down clearly that the Most High Sovereign God has laid down **His** protocols for His people, that in approaching Him in worship “what thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it” (Deut. 12: 32), that we should “come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with Psalms” (Psalm 95 : 2), and that “all things be done decently and in order.” (1 Cor. 14:40).¹

The actual **content** and **style** of Christian worship must therefore be under the control of the Word of God *alone*. The only possible alternative to this is to say that Christian worship is either wholly, or partly, left to the ingenuity, if not the whims, of man. Leaving aside the matters known to theologians as “adiaphora”, that is: “things indifferent” such as the place and time of worship, the length of the service, the frequencies of services, etc., if the actual content of worship is not governed entirely by protocols laid down by the Most High, then the door is open for varying degrees of human innovation and expression. Such a situation could not regulate

¹ The “regulative principle” of worship is herewith encapsulated. For a thorough exposition of this principle, see : **Michael S. Bushell**: *The Songs of Zion* (Publ. Crown and Covenant, USA 1980)Ch. 1 pages 10 - 47.

human behaviour in worship. Under such circumstances all manner of practices from the modern "Toronto" phenomena to the Roman Mass could be justified. Indeed, by such human-centred principles even the sacrificial slaughter of a lamb on "easter" Sunday, as still practiced by the Armenian Orthodox Churches can be justified. Ugly it might seem to us, but who is to say it is wrong, and unacceptable to God if Divine worship is a matter left open to the multi-variant ideas of all and sundry in the Churches? And indeed, as one looks across the manifold phalanx of Christian denominations and groupings today, one finds that across this vast spectrum, literally "anything goes."

The ancient Churches of the Apostolic era knew nothing of such diverse nonsense. A beautiful and majestic uniformity of worship arose in those far-off days, a uniformity rooted in the authority of the Word of God *alone*. This pristine and pure worship was uniformly regulated by the Divine Word such that in its sung praise only Divine-inspired lyrics received sanction. In its sung praise to the Most High God, the ancient and Apostolic Churches reflected back to Jehovah the very words inspired by His Holy Spirit, and no other words. They sang the Psalms of the Old Testament and no other songs. In such an exercise of praise the image of Christ was embedded in their lyrics, for the Apostle had instructed them that the words of the Psalms were indeed "the Word of Jesus Christ". "Let", said he, "the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom;" and by way of explaining this, he adds: "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." (Col. 3 : 16). And in so singing those Biblical lyrics, they reflected to one another, and above all toward God, the very image of the Christ whose Holy Spirit had inspired those words.

That exclusive Biblical Psalmody was the sole vehicle of sung praise right from the Apostolic beginnings we have super-abundant testimony from Church history.² Such practice remained the norm in all orthodox Churches of East and West for the first four centuries. By the fifth century, the Psalter had attained such prominence that candidates for ordination to the ministry had to demonstrate complete knowledge of it by heart.³ The composing and introduction of extra-biblical lyrics, commonly called "hymns", was essentially the preserve of the heretical sects during this period.⁴

It happens that an unfortunate linguistic slip occurs in theological vocabulary at this juncture. The noun "hymn" has come to be applied universally to extra-biblical spiritual lyrics, and "hymns" are seen by the modern mind to be distinct from

² Cf.: Bushell, *Op. Cit.* Chapter 5 pages 121 to 129.

³ *Ibid.* p. 122, referring to A.F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Publ. Cambridge Univ. Press 1903) and page cii.

⁴ Cf. Bushell: *op cit.* pp123 - 4.

the Psalms of the Old Testament. This linguistic error has been the trigger for a great deal of misapprehension and misinterpretation of the biblical doctrine of sung praise, as we shall forthwith see. As an attempt to clarify the confusion that has sprung up here, henceforth we will refer to hymns composed by non-Divine-inspired poets as “extra-biblical”.

The initial development of extra-biblical lyrics in the orthodox churches came only gradually, and after many centuries. Schaff, the famous Church historian can tell us that outside of the Psalms:

“So far as we are able to gather from our sources, nothing, except the Psalms and New Testament hymns (such as the ‘Gloria in Excelsis,’ the ‘Magnificat,’ the ‘Nunc Dimittis,’ etc.), was as a rule sung in public worship before the fourth century (the practice which had sprung up in the church of Antioch seems to have been exceptional; see Kraus, p. 673). Before the end of that century, however, the practice of singing other hymns in the service of the church had become common, both in the East and West.”⁵

Again, Schaff informs us:

“We have no complete religious song remaining from the period of persecution (i.e. from the first three centuries) except the song of Clement of Alexandria to the divine Logos (which however, cannot be called a hymn and was probably never intended for public use); the Morning Song and the Evening Song in the Apostolic Constitutions, especially the former; and the so-called *Gloria in Excelsis*, which’ as an expansion of the hymn of the heavenly hosts, still rings in all parts of the Christian world. Next in order comes *Te Deum* in its original eastern form. The *Ter Sanctus* and several ancient liturgical prayers may also be regarded as poems. Excepting these hymns in rhythmic prose, the Greek church of the first six centuries produced nothing in this field which has had permanent value or general use. It long adhered almost exclusively to the Psalms of David who, as Chrysostom says, was first, middle and last in the assemblies of the Christians; and it had, in opposition to heretical predilections, **even a decided aversion to the public use of uninspired songs.**”⁶ (Emph. mine; *Ed.*)

⁵ *Ibid.* page 122 quoting Schaff: *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*; second series Vol. 1 p. 247, note 14.

⁶ Schaff: article: *The Greek and Latin Hymnology* in: *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 1866 page 680. Cited in Bushell, *op cit.* page 123.

In the Western, or Latin churches, extra-biblical lyrics evidently began to make some, if unofficial headway in the Fourth century, after the Edict of Milan (AD 313) and the “establishment” of Christianity as the “state religion” of the Roman Empire. At first the Churches resisted what was an incoming tide of extra-biblical lyrics composed by orthodox writers, which lyrics were seemingly a late reaction to the spread of heretical “hymnody”. We find the Council of Laodicaea in about A.D. 381 prohibiting the ecclesiastical use of these uninspired or “private psalms”, as they called them. In A.D. 451 the Council of Chalcedon confirmed this decree. With the ensuing rise of Roman Catholicism in the following centuries, a plethora of extra-biblical lyrics was introduced, yet the Council of Braga in A.D. 561 renewed the prohibitions against their ecclesiastical usage, a decision that was further taken up and ratified by the Fourth Synod of Toledo in the Seventh Century.⁷ But we have now reached the age of massive apostasy, and the perversion of the Christian liturgy by the evolving papacy. On through the centuries of the Dark Ages and into the Medieval times, extra-biblical lyrics came to assume a canonical authority and usage which paralleled that attributed to the Psalms.

The testimony of Scripture, and of early Church history is unequivocal. The ancient Christians worshipped God via Biblical Psalmody exclusively, a position that did not begin to erode until some 300 years after the Apostles, and the erosion of which took some 500 further years. And at the end of this, let it be said, Psalmody was not ousted completely, but in the Medieval churches it remained at least on a par with extra-biblical hymnody.

This testimony, from Biblical texts and from Church history, is indubitable. The Ancient Christians from the Apostles on were exclusive singers of the Old Testament Psalms, and they put up a long and stern resistance to the introduction of extra-biblical lyrics.

Now it happens that there are those who make an objection to the above conclusion, an objection based on the Apostle’s statement in Col. 3 : 16. They are wont to assert that in that text, besides “psalms”, the apostle mentions also “hymns” and “spiritual songs”. At this point, the linguistic slip occurs. These “hymns” and “spiritual songs”, they aver, refer to spiritual lyrics outside those enclosed in the Canon of Holy Writ. When appraised that the titles “psalms”, “hymns”, and “spiritual songs” all refer to the variant titles of the lyrics in the Old Testament book of Psalms,⁸ they ridicule the idea, claiming that such an interpretation reduces the apostle’s words to the trite level of effectively meaning : “psalms and psalms and psalms.....” Such objectors usually go on in their worship to utterly abandon

⁷ Cf. Bushell: *op cit.* page 125.

⁸ For the technical details establishing this fact see the article following in this journal page 15 entitled *The Biblical Doctrine of Psalmody* by R.J. George.

Biblical Psalmody and settle for a liturgical diet of “hymns and hymns and hymns.....” thereby hoisting themselves on their own petard. But their interpretation fails to conform to Biblical standards on these counts:

1.) It is necessary, in exegeting the meaning of a text to determine how the writer, and the readers, at the time of writing would have understood it, and to apply *that* as the true interpretation. It is entirely fatuous to proceed from the modern situation, in which “hymns” are seen as being something different to “psalms”, and to interpret the text from the modern standpoint accordingly. I may not inject my own presuppositions into the Biblical text. To do so is eisegesis, not exegesis, and if eisegesis is anywhere legitimate, then it opens the door to Gnosticism, and to interpreting the Bible in any way you like. Now the vital question here is: What would the Christians of the Apostolic age have understood by the terms “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”? It is their answer to such a question which will determine what my answer today ought to be! In order to discover the answer to this question, we must take note of the following:

2.) In the Old Testament, there is, believe it or not, no book that carries the name: “The Book of Psalms” ! No! Such a title may be evident in English translation, but in the original Hebrew, the book is “Sepher Tehillim”, literally the “Book of Praises”. Now in that “Book of Praises”, there are some pieces that are denominated with the Hebrew word equivalent to our “psalm”, others denominated with the Hebrew word equivalent to our “hymn”, and others denominated with the Hebrew word for our “song”. And some of these pieces are denominated “psalm” and “song”. These three distinctions were reflected in the LXX (Greek translation of the Old Testament made BC 260-160 approx.) by means of the same three Greek words which the Apostle uses for “psalm”, “hymn”, and “song” in Col 3 : 16.

3) On the grounds of the above factors, “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” can only refer to the Hebrew “Sepher Tehillim”, the Book of Praises, known to us, in English translation, as the “Book of Psalms”. As such the early readers of the Apostle’s letters would have understood it. As such, they would have been “allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture”, rather than turning aside to allow extraneous sources or considerations to control their exegesis.

4) What other sources, or books of lyrics could the apostle have possibly been referring to? There are no references to any such books in the New Testament. Nor are there any such references in extra-canonical early Christian literature. (Except to “hymnbooks” produced by heretics). Plenty of evidence for pseudo-gospels, like the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas (so-called), for various epistles falsely carrying the name of an apostle, or for various other literature from orthodox sources, but no evidence of any orthodox “hymn-books”. Strange, this, that so much extra-canonical litera-

ture has been preserved from apostolic and sub-apostolic times, but no examples of **orthodox** “hymn-books”, and no references in the Canonical literature either to any such “hymn-books”. One would have thought that in the Apostolic period, if the modern evangelical hymn-lobby argument is right, then there would have been “hymn-writers” galore, churning out lyrics en masse.

In the 18th Century Evangelical revivals, so many hymnwriters came to the fore, and literally thousands of “hymns” were penned. Surely then, if those 18th Century revivals were a true reflection of Biblical and Apostolic Christianity, then the Apostolic period of the 1st Century AD should have manifested a plethora of Wesleys, Watts’s, and Williams’s, etc.? And if so, then where is the manuscript evidence of their poetic production? Where is the archaeological evidence of 1st Century AD orthodox hymns and hymn-books?

Again, if such “hymn-writers” and their products existed in the time of the Apostles, why no mention of them in the New Testament? Why no inclusion of a book of their “hymns” in the New Testament, as the Old Testament carried “Sepher Tehillim”?

And why no mention of any such orthodox “hymn-writers” and their products in early extra-Canonical Biblical literature? Plenty of such literature has been preserved from those times right down to today, one only has to peruse Vol. 1 in the Ante-Nicene Fathers to see just a selection from the orthodox alone. No mention in any of it of orthodox “hymnwriters” and “hymns”, but plenty of references to passages in the “Sepher Tehillim”!

Now it happens that in those ancient days, there were heretics, like the Gnostics, who early on entered Christian churches and began to corrupt them with the kind of heresies St. Paul combats in his epistle to the Colossians. Such heretics *did* produce “hymns”, and left their hymns on record! We do have therefore evidence of “hymns” after all, but *not* of “orthodox” hymns. This very fact shouts loud. If heretical hymns have been preserved through all these last two millenia, how come no orthodox hymns have been preserved? This is a specially important factor, because orthodoxy was a phenomenon spread all over the ancient world of the Roman Empire, whereas heretical sects tended to be localised, and relatively restricted to different districts and periods. Such considerations make it much more likely that orthodox “hymnbooks” would have been preserved than those of heretics. That is, *if* the orthodox had “hymnbooks”. This evidence is therefore much more than simply “negative” evidence, i.e., an argument from the absence of evidence that favours “hymns”. For the circumstances shout loud that *if* the Ancient Churches utilised extra-Biblical songs or “hymns” in worship, then there *should* be evidence. After all, the very fact that the “hymnody” lobby scrounge around through the Scriptures looking for “hymn quotations” would be entirely

unnecessary if collections of extra-Biblical lyrics had been handed down from the Ancient churches, and the fact that the Hymn-lobby has to do the Scripture scrounging is testimony to the absence of evidence that will support them.

The heretics did produce extra-Biblical “hymns” then, and the evidence testifies to it. But most interesting in this respect is the motive the various heretics had for producing these non-Canonical human lyrics. It was to wean the Christians away from the Psalms, because this was the only way to tear Christians away from the orthodox understanding of the doctrines and person of Jesus Christ! Strikingly significant is the widespread refusal amongst the heretical sects to sing Psalms, substituting instead their own man-made “hymns”. This trend started as early as the late 2nd Century A.D., when the Gnostic heretic Bardesanes (born A.D. 154) composed, with the aid of his son, a rival Gnostic “psalter” containing 150 hymns in direct challenge to the 150 Biblical Psalms. The Church “Father” Ephraemi Syrus aptly summed up this Gnostic subversion of Biblical Psalmody when he described it as “deserting David’s truth and preserving David’s numbers”.⁹ Extra-biblical hymnody was a major mode of propagation of the Gnostic Heresy, with Valentinian and Marcion also famous for their heretical hymns. Such hymn-writing was also deployed by Arius in the propagation of anti-Trinitarianism.

The learned Eric Werner summed it up thus:

“Usually heretics composed new hymns, spurning the traditional Psalter. Hence heresy was often eager to replace the Psalms by new hymns. The Marcionites and some of the Syrian poets were especially notorious for their heretic hymns. Thus the chronicle observes, ‘the heretics have replaced St. Peter by Marcion as prince of the Apostles; and instead of Psalms they wrote their own hymns’”.¹⁰

So why *are* there records of heretical hymns, and *no* records of Apostolic Christian “hymns”? The conclusion is obvious, the ancient Christians had no extra-Biblical “hymns”, exclusively the Old Testament Psalter was their “hymnal”.

But some will want to insist that the Greek New Testament is replete with quotes from “hymns” written by the un-catalogued and completely hypothetical “Wesley’s and Watts’s” of the apostolic times. Various New Testament passages are adduced as proof of such. Their arguments are at best ethereal and at worst positively

⁹ Cf. **Bushell** *op cit*, pages 123 - 124 where he cites the ancient Church historian **Sozomen** :*Historia Ecclesiasticae* 3: 16 , and **Ephraemi Syrus**: *53rd Homily on Heretics*.

¹⁰ Cf. **Eric Werner**: *The Sacred Bridge* (New York: Columbia University Press 1959) page 320, cited in **Bushell**, *Op Cit*. page 197(note).

neurotic. In University Departments of Biblical Studies all over the world, this matter has been debated for generations. Some actually claim to see a Gnostic hymn in the structure of the Greek in John Ch. 1 verses 1 to 18, a “hymn to the divine logos” as they call it. And many can see “hymnic” structures elsewhere, the principal ones being: Romans 11: 33-36; Philippians 2 : 5-11; Colossians 1: 15-20; and 1 Timothy 3: 16. True to form, modern evangelical scholarship has mounted this “bandwagon”, though they eschew any “gnostic” link-up.¹¹ However, unlike the top-level Biblical critics, the evangelicals do not seem to appreciate the sheer tenuousness of the arguments adduced. The presence of such “poetry” or “lyricisms” in the Greek New Testament is in fact hotly disputed at top levels of Biblical Criticism. Himself an eminent form-critic and scholar, Professor Charles F. D. Moule of Cambridge University was want to give out a caution to his fellows here:

“These passages may or may not be strophic....i.e., symmetrical and balanced in their lines or their rhythms: nobody has conclusively demonstrated that they are. Even if they are not.....they might have been sung (!) but who is to prove that they were hymns? Prose and Poetry, adoration and statement, quotations from recognized liturgical forms and free, original compositions, mingle and follow one another so easily in the mind of the Christian thinker that one can never be certain how much or how little of ‘common prayer’ one is over-hearing.”¹²

Still others, sensibly, call attention to the fact that as the Greek language carries with it case endings and verbal flexions, there is a tendency in the language to slip into *apparent* poetry-like cadences without the writer intending to do so.

“....prayer, praise, and preaching are all set forth (in the Greek New Testament) in stately, rhythmical prose. There is simply no attempt-

¹¹ For a technical-theological refutation of the Evangelical position on these so-called “hymnic” passages, see the excellent analysis found in: *The Biblical Doctrine of Worship* (Publ. 1974 by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.) Hereinafter abbreviated as **BD of W**.

¹² **C.F.D.Moule**, *The Birth of the New Testament*, (Publ. Harper & Row, New York 1962) pp.25 - 26. Cited in **BD of W** page163. Notable is Moule’s observation here that even non-strophic sentences “might have been sung”! What he means of course is that in the Ancient Churches the singing was a species of “chant”, similar to Anglican chant today. And as everyone who has experienced the Anglican worship knows, Cranmer’s prayer-book has the whole book of Psalms in the prose form of Miles Coverdale’s translation. Anglicans today can teach us how to chant such prose very effectively. A good Anglican choir chanting the Psalms creates a majestic sound indeed. Now Moule is really pointing out here, that the kind of mentality that scours the Greek New Testament looking for “hymnic” structures is really blatantly reading the modern European musical ethos back in to the ancient world. They did not need lines in “common metre” or whatever for singing in those days, as the pointed plainsong and chant were the fashion of those times, and such musical form does not need the production of lyrics in strophic, or versified form.

ed distinction in the New Testament between praise and prose, between confession and hymn (sic)."¹³

And again, it is usually people of high intelligence and fertile imaginations who are cursed with the tendency to see pattern, to see poetry, to see art, where none such actually exists. If you don't understand this, try staring at the floral patterns on the wall paper, and see how many human faces you can find staring back at you, mysteriously synthesizing out of jumbled masses of decorative lines! And so one finds that there are those who can read the Greek New Testament and see poetry, see lyrics, in all sorts of places, where none was intended. One might add, that in similar vein, the same groups of scholars that can see such lyrical patterns in the New Testament inevitably fall into the orbit of those who can "see" the Documentary Hypothesis patterns of 'J', 'E', 'D', and 'P' in the Old Testament, thereby reducing the Writings of Moses to a conglomerated stitch-up in an attempt to make nonsense of the Divine Inspiration of Scripture.

But a further set of considerations must needs assail those who find "hymnic" patterns in the Greek New Testament. *Suppose* that, well, yes, the claims are correct, that there are actually quotations of what appear to be ancient Christian poetic pieces, suggestive of early Christian "hymns"(extra-Biblical lyrics) in the New Testament. First of all, the texts adduced can at most, only be demonstrated as poetic, and not hymnic.¹⁴ Now by what logic may one move from the poetic to the hymnic? For example, in the 19th Century the Evangelical Anglican poetess Christina Rossetti (1830 - 1894) wrote a beautiful **poem** about Christ's birth. Just a poem. A classic..... "In the bleak mid-winter, Frosty wind made moan, Earth stood hard as iron, ..." etc. Now as a poem, it has metre and rhyme. As such it can easily be set to music by a competent musician, and after Miss Rossetti's death in 1894, along came Gustav Holst and he set the whole thing to music. Thus you will find it in most modern "hymn-books", set to the tune "Cranham", by Holst. But there is a giant leap of logic here, if one now characterises Miss Rossetti as a "hymnist", and that "she wrote the hymn, 'In the bleak mid-winter' ..." For manifestly she wrote it as a poem, **not** as a hymn.¹⁵ Now how therefore may one argue from the presence of strophic, poetry-like lines in the New Testament to hymns? The most you can deduce from such a premise, (even if it is true) is that you have evidence there for poetry. By what logic may one honestly proceed on to deduce the presence of a "hymn"? This is an important consideration, bearing in mind that in all ages people have been want to reduce certain truths to easily rememberable little lines with

¹³ Cf. Lee P. Bittner III, in *An Exposition of Philippians 2 : 5-11* in **BD of W**, page 163.

¹⁴ As Moule (Cf. quote note 12 above) points out, even if these passages are strophic and therefore extracts of Christian poetry, "who is to prove that they were hymns"?

¹⁵ Cf.: **Article:** *In The Bleak Mid-Winter* in series "English hymns of world renown" in **THIS ENGLAND** magazine Winter 1998 pp. 26 - 27.

strophic structure. Consult a good reference library, the English language is full of such catchy little sayings, "A stitch in time, saves nine", or, and here's a good Calvinistic one concerning Salvation and the Atonement,

"God **thought** it,
Jesus Christ **bought** it,
The Holy Spirit **wrought** it,
In my heart and soul."

Some good orthodox dogma there, perfectly outlining the full Trinitarian eternal/objective/subjective elements concerning justification! Been around for generations, that little saying. But I've never known it to be sung in Church! When I incorporate this saying herewith into this article, I in no way indicate that such is more than a handy quasi-poetic device for conveying truth, (my old Sunday School teacher in South Wales used to impress this particular saying on me when I was a lad) and in *no way* should I be understood to be (i) advocating that this should be set to music and sung in worship, and (ii) manifesting evidence that the aforesaid saying was actually used in song in worship!

Now apply this truth to the so-called "hymnic" quotes in the New Testament. Are they hymns? Or just strophic, and easily rememberable sayings encapsulating some profound Scripture truth in a few words? Were not such linguistic devices commonplace in the ancient world when the bulk of the population was illiterate and could only rely on the memory, not on any notebooks? When they lived before the age of mass-produced cheap bibles? ¹⁶

Does it therefore logically follow *necessarily* that such alleged "poetic" or "hymnic" portions constitute evidence for, and a sanction for, the composing of, and usage in worship of, extra-Biblical lyrics as a legitimate vehicle of praising God?

¹⁶ It is a well-known fact in Biblical Critical circles that the memories of those of the Ancient Oriental world were far more acutely developed than is the case with ourselves today. Huge tracts of material were memorised, in Judaism, Rabbis memorised the whole of the Hebrew Old Testament, and in the Ancient Churches right down to the time of the Waldenses of the 12th to the 16th Centuries it was required of a candidate for the ministry that he demonstrate memorization of the whole of the Psalter. He would later be required to demonstrate similar faculty with respect to the Gospels. In order to facilitate memorising in an age before plentiful supplies of pen and paper, and before widespread literacy, material for the memory was often arranged with "catch" words every so often, in order to act as "catalysts" to trigger continuity in the memory. Some critical analyses of St. Mark's Gospel by modern scholars have drawn attention to alleged "catch-word" phenomena in that Gospel, whereby it was fitted for memorization. But further beyond this, and more indubitably, we have the example of the Old Testament, where we find such phenomena as "acrostics" whereby a number of succeeding verses each begin with succeeding letters of the Hebrew alphabet. A notable example of this is Psalm 119, but the feature is also found in Psalms 9; 34; and 37. Other examples are found in Proverbs 31:10ff., and Lamentations Chapters 1-4. Such a literary device was evidently designed with a purpose to effectuate assistance to the memorization process.

To anyone schooled in the basics of formal logic the answer can only be **no**.

The position we have reached is this:

If, (and it is *if*) certain passages in the Greek New Testament are indeed poetic, then:

i) They are poetic. **FULL STOP.**

ii) An illegitimate logical jump is necessary now if one wishes to move from the “poetic” to the “hymnic”. (A poem is not necessarily a hymn).

iii) There are other, equally as plausible, if not more plausible explanations for the presence of these allegedly poetic passages than that of averring them to be “hymn quotes”. (Details given above, and see also footnote 16.)

Even more overwhelming are the following considerations too. *Let us suppose* again that the five passages generally argued over as providing the principal, if not the only justification for averring the presence of “hymn-quotes” in the Greek New Testament, do, for the sake of argument provide just that evidence. Where in all the canons of honest logical thinking can one find a logically just procedure for deducing from *this* that *this* warrants the composing of, and use of, extra-biblical hymns for worship? For the evidence would merely allow one to say that :

“Somebody or other, in Apostolic times, wrote Christian hymns. In possibly 5 places in the Greek New Testament the inspired writers quote from such hymns.”

And that is all the evidence can provide. Nothing else. Nothing else at all!

To aver that the evidence sanctions extra-Biblical hymnody is an unwarranted logical jump. No lawyer worth his salt would let such an argument pass in a court of law.

For there is, within the argument claimed by the pro-hymn lobby, a hidden piece of logic, smuggled in as a catalyst to precipitate the required logical jump.... and that piece of logic, opened and unravelled, is encoded like this:

“If an apostle quotes it, it must have Divine sanction for use in worship.”

Well! And so the Inspired penmen of the Greek New Testament quoted the Apocrypha on 116 occasions,¹⁷ so that means that they sanction the Apocrypha as inspired Scripture for use in Worship and Study?

¹⁷ Cf. index of quotations, pp. 918-920 in THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT (Publ. United Bible Societies (UBS) 1966. In spite of the fact that the UBS Greek Text is a critical edition based on the foundations of Westcott and Hort, its extensive indexing is an excellent aid to analysis and study. One could only wish for a Textus Receptus edition carrying the same facilities.

Saint Paul quoted the Greek philosophers on 3 occasions,¹⁸ with approval too! Does that mean that he thereby provides Divine sanction for the use of the Greek Philosophers on a par with Scripture, and usage in Christian Worship?

Obviously not!

Then, with equal ultimacy, how can quotations from extra-Biblical Christian lyrics (if true) provide a legitimate premise for usage of such in Christian worship? How can such quotations indicate Apostolic approval for “hymn-singing”? Truly, they cannot. And that is all that can be deduced *even if one grants* that there actually are quotations from extra-Biblical lyrics in the New Testament, a premise, let it be remembered, that is hotly disputed even in those modernist critical circles which generated such theories galore in the first place.

But another massive consideration presents itself here. The evangelicals and others who argue for “hymnic” quotes in the Greek New Testament can only find five passages that can by any stretch of imagination achieve some sort of highly disputable possibility as supports for their case. Just five measly, and disputable quotes, only two more than the number of cast-iron, indisputable, Greek philosophic quotes in the New Testament.

In Majestic contrast, the Greek New Testament carries 413 quotations from 104 of the Old Testament Psalms.¹⁹ Wherewith our “hymn-quotes” now? Five against 413! Now if the presence of mere quotations were to be allowed to indicate approval of usage, and yield indication of apostolic practice, what does this evidence indicate to us about the sung worship in Apostolic churches? Why, a ratio of 413 to 5 (roughly 83 to 1) leaves the extra-Biblical “hymns” out of sight. But what do those 413 Psalm quotations tell us? And tell us in contrast to hymns? They indubitably tell us that the “*Sepher Tehillim*” was the Book of Praises which the Apostolic writers most readily found on their lips, or in their hearts when composing their epistles or gospels. They tell us that it was the lyrics of Biblical Psalmody that was dominant in their consciousness, not any man-made “hymns”. It was to the Psalter that these men turned, “moved” or “borne along” by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, when they were guided, by the Heavenly Paraclete, to infuse their writings with the forceful verve of spiritual lyricism. The Psalter, the Psalter, the Psalter, they quoted, 413 times, *more times than they quoted any other book of the*

¹⁸ This feature is again listed in the indices of the UBS Greek New Testament, page 920 thus:

In Acts 17: 28 St. Paul quotes ARATUS *Phaenomena* 5 “we also are His offspring...” (This quote also found in PSEUDO-EPIMENIDES.

In Titus 1 : 12 St. Paul quotes EPIMENIDES *De Oraculis* “all Cretans are liars.....”

In I Cor. 15: 33 St. Paul quotes MENANDER *Thais* 218. “evil communications corrupt good manners.....”

¹⁹ Cf. index of quotations in THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT (Publ. United Bible Societies 1966) pages 906 - 909.

Old Testament.²⁰ If this tells us anything, it tells us that the Apostolic Church was infused through and through with Biblical Psalmody. And let this also be said, the source of all their lyrical quotations has been preserved through the ages, and is available for our examination today, the Book of Psalms in everyone's Bible! Where, by contrast are the preserved "Christian hymnals" from the Apostolic era? Why, there is no sign of them at all save ethereal fragments in the fevered imaginations of certain high-toned scholars, to whom hypotheses all too frequently assume the air of reality.

Finally, let us come back to the "archaeological" question. Why are there no remains of ancient Christian hymnals from the Apostolic era? Why no references to such, in the New Testament, or in other literature from the Apostolic period?

Now *if* the Greek New Testament writers were actually quoting extra-Biblical "hymns", then such hymns **MUST HAVE BEEN WELL-KNOWN** and in **WIDE-SPREAD USE**. Otherwise the quotations would lack authority to the minds of the readers. In short, as quotations, they would fail to function as quotations. Now the whole argument of the "hymn-lobby" goes into a tail-spin here, for if usage of such hymns was as widespread as the "hymn-quotation" hypothesis requires, the chances of their preservation in collections of such hymns would have been extremely high. Higher than that of the chances for preservation of heretical hymns, seeing that the heretical hymns did not have the benefit of such widespread usage. Yet it is the heretical hymns that have survived, not any Christian "hymns". And yet again, if there were any such well-known Christian "hymns", from which the New Testament writers quote, why can no such quotations or references to such hymns be found in any orthodox Christian literature in the early Ante-Nicene Fathers? The answers are obvious.

There are no orthodox extra-Biblical "hymns" preserved because there were none to be preserved.

There are no orthodox extra-Biblical hymns quoted or referred to in the early Ante-Nicene Fathers because there were none to which they could refer.

Thus, weighing up all the evidence, the conclusion *necessarily* follows, that when St. Paul commands Christians to be "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Col. 3 : 16), then he must be referring to the Hebrew "Sepher Tehillim", or the "Book of Praises" which was composed of "Psalms, hymns, and Spiritual Songs." Hence the notion: "Psalms and psalms and psalms" is exposed as an heretical slur.

In maintaining Biblical Psalmody, the ancient Christians ensured that their sung

²⁰ Cf. *ibid*. The only one near to the Psalms is Isaiah, with 412 quotes!

praise was infused with the “word of Christ” (Col. 3: 16). In losing Biblical Psalmody, the modern-day churches have lost the “word of Christ”, and replaced it with poor man-made substitutes commonly called “hymns”. Worse, modern evangelical Calvinism even, has drifted to such an enormous epistemic distance from the Psalter, that it fails to recognise the Biblical Psalms as being “the word of Christ”. An almost total loss of understanding of the Psalter has emerged, such that the modern worshipper sees not how the Psalms can be appropriate and relevant for worshipping Jesus Christ, and to be so par excellence above their man-made hymns. They see not how the Psalter is invested with the presence and Majesty of Christ in a way totally missing from even the very best “hymns” of the Wesley’s, Watts, and whoever.

God forbid that we should herewith sneer at all those devout Christians who, due to ignorance, error, and bad teaching outside their control in their local churches, are singers of man-made hymns. Doubtless the Most High God understands, He who will not quench the smoking flax, or bruise the broken reed.....He who sees them stumbling through the fog of modern ecclesiastical rebellion, ignorance and error, we dare not say that He turns His face away from their efforts to praise Him, especially when in intermittent places the words of their hymns may be coincident with words from the Psalms. But the evidence is indubitable, that the attempt to worship the Most High via the words of mere men is fundamentally insulting to God, indicative of rebellion against His protocols and provisions when done consciously and deliberately, and leads inevitably to severe spiritual impoverishment and corrosion of worship. We do believe that God would have us once again come to Him as per the way He commands, using the provision He has made, in the Divine-inspired “Sepher Tehillim”. We believe that we must break through the darkening clouds that have shrouded the Psalter, break through there to rediscover the glorious light of the Lord Jesus, and to reflect back to Him in His own words our adoration for Him who is the One True God, Our God, and our Redeemer.

To this issue, how the words of the Biblical Psalms are the “word of Christ”, revealing Him in a unique way, we hope (DV) to return in a future issue. The loss of this appreciation in the Churches has been a major factor in the rise of extra-Biblical hymnody and the gradual abandonment of Psalmody. Reinforcing what was already a wholesale apostasy from “the word of Christ” in worship was the impact, in the mid-19th century, of Dispensational theology. In one stroke, the insidious influence of this aberrant system relegated the whole of the Biblical Psalter to the Dispensation concerning the Nation of Israel, and as such it was seen as having no right place in Christian worship. Again, the advent of modernism, with its progressivist “God-is-lovism” ethos drew the line at the manifestations of God’s severity as well as His goodness as celebrated in the Psalms, and thus modernism too added its impetus to the fashionable trends that thoroughly penetrated even the Calvinistic churches of those times. May God grant that in these days His people make a rediscovery of the glorious and Sacred Lyrics of the Holy Ghost.

The Biblical Doctrine of Psalmody

Taken from Lecture XVIII in :
Lectures in Pastoral Theology: Vol. 3

by

R. J. George

Professor of Theology & Church History
Covenanters Seminary, Allegheny, PA., 1892 - 1910
With additional annotations.

“The Book of Psalms, which are of divine inspiration, is well adapted to the state of the Church, and of every member, in all ages and circumstances; and these psalms, to the exclusion of all *imitations*, and uninspired compositions, are to be used in social worship.”—Reformed Presbyterian *Testimony*, Chap. XXIV, Sec. 8.

I.

That Which Is Not Commanded in the Worship of God Is Forbidden.

This proposition is fundamental to all discussions as to how God is to be worshiped. (This is) proved by :

1. Didactic statements of Scripture.
2. Striking Scripture examples.
3. The teachings of the Reformed Churches.
4. The Westminster Standards.

Those churches holding to the Westminster Standards which have departed from this rule, seek to justify themselves by the Confession of Faith, Chap. I, Sec. 6, which contains this language:

“There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and the government of the Church common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.”

In opposition (to their interpretation of this statement) let it be observed:

1. This (statement) does not speak of the worship of God, but of “some circumstances concerning” that worship;
2. That it does not speak of all the circumstances, but only such as are “common to human actions and societies,” which hymn-singing certainly is not;
3. Such an interpretation contradicts the explicit language of the Confession of Faith where it treats specifically of religious worship, Chap. XXI, Sec. 1.

The constant effort to use this paragraph of the Confession of Faith to justify the introduction of human inventions into the worship of God shows a surprising paucity of arguments. Truly, “The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that a man can wrap himself in it.”

II.

The Psalms Were Given by Inspiration, and Were Appointed to Be Used in the Worship of God in ALL Ages.

This proposition is not new, and never has been denied by any branch of the Christian Church. The psalms have been thrust aside practically and denied a place in many church hymnals, and when included in a collection are seldom used in worship; yet the divine warrant for their use has not been called in question by devout and intelligent Christians.

1. The psalms were given by inspiration.

This is distinctly affirmed in Scripture. **2 Sam.** xxiii, 1, 2:

“David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, **The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue.**”

This claim is confirmed by the inspired writers of the New Testament:

Acts i, 16: “Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.” **Acts** iv, 25: “Lord, Thou art God, . . . who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?” **Heb.** iii, 7: The writer quotes from **Ps.** xcv, 7, and ascribes the words to the Holy Ghost, “Wherefore, Today, if ye will hear His voice.” When, therefore, men speak against the psalms as being cruel, vindictive, and unfit for Christian worship, they are speaking against the Holy Ghost, and are perilously

near to the commission of that sin “which hath no forgiveness, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”

2. Objections to the doctrine that the psalms are inspired.

(i) The psalms were not all written by David. How, then, do we know that the other writers were inspired?

Answer:

A. The psalms were collected into a **book**, those of other writers intermingled with the psalms of David.

B. This **Book** of Psalms is quoted as of divine authority.

Luke xx, 42: “And David himself saith in the **Book** of Psalms.” This is Christ’s endorsement. Acts i, 20: “It is written in the **Book** of Psalms.” This is Peter’s endorsement. Acts xiii, 33: “As it is also written in the second psalm.” This is Paul’s endorsement.

C. This **Book** of Psalms is recognized by the whole Christian Church as an inspired book.

It *always* has held its place in the canon of Scripture.

(ii) It is objected that the *metrical* version is not inspired.

Answer:

A. The metrical version is inspired in the same sense that the *prose translation* is inspired.

The enemies of an inspired psalmody, in their eagerness to cast odium on the psalm-book, frequently refer to it as “Old Rouse,” Dr. John W. Bain, in a little volume entitled *God’s Songs and the Singer*, says:

“It is often said that we contend for the exclusive use of Rouse’s version. It is perhaps scarcely worth while to deny this assertion. No amount of denial or any other evidence seems to make any impression on those who assert it. If anyone will take the trouble to examine the History of the Westminster Assembly, issued by the Presbyterian Board of Publication, which should be good authority on this subject, he will find that the version we use was in the hands of a committee of that assembly for two years and much pains taken in revising it. It was then sent to Parliament and then over to the Scottish General Assembly. It was nearly five years in the hands of two able committees of that assembly, and the Presbyteries of that Church, undergoing a most searching examination and revision; and was, in 1649, adopt-

ed as the assembly's version, translated and diligently compared with the original text, and former translations, more plain, smooth, and agreeable to the text than any heretofore."

Those who speak in contempt of this as "Old Rouse," reveal their ignorance of its history and their disposition to be unpleasant at the same time. On the other hand, it is folly for the advocates of the exclusive use of an inspired psalmody to treat the matter of a change of versions of the psalms as though it involved the question of the use of uninspired songs in worship. What our Church contends for, is the exclusive use of the psalms of the Bible in the best version obtainable. When she has that, she has an inspired psalmody.

3. These psalms were appointed by God to be used in His worship.

2 Chron. xxix, 30: "Moreover, Hezekiah the king, and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer." **1 Chron. xvi, 9:** "Sing unto Him: sing psalms unto Him." **Ps. xcv, 2:** "Make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms" **James v, 13:** "Is any merry? let him sing psalms" **Eph. v, 19:** "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." **Col. iii, 16:** "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Whatever differences of view there may be as to the "hymns and spiritual songs" spoken of in the last two passages, all agree that the word "psalms" means the psalms of the Bible. So that we have the divine warrant and command both in the Old Testament and in the New for the use of the inspired psalms in praise to God; and just as explicitly in the New Testament as in the Old.

III.

The Scriptures Contain No Warrant for the Introduction of Uninspired Compositions in the Worship of God.

So far as the Old Testament is concerned this seems to be universally conceded. But there are passages in the New Testament which have been confidently relied upon as containing such authority, (in that they speak of "hymns" or "songs").

(1). Matt. xxvi, 30. "And when they had sung an hymn they went out into the Mount of Olives."— This "hymn" which Christ and the apostles sang at the last supper consisted of psalms, because:

- (i) The margin reads, *Psalm*. "When they had sung a psalm."

- (ii) The following Biblical authorities generally agree that this was the Great Hallel, composed of Psalms 113-118.
- A. *Albert Barnes*, after referring to the Jewish custom of using these psalms on such occasions, adds: "There can be no doubt that our Saviour and the apostles used the same psalms in the observance of the passion."
 - B. *Adam Clarke* says: "As to the hymn itself, we know from the universal consent of Jewish antiquity that it was composed of Psalms 113-118."
 - C. *Lange* translates it: "And when they had sung the hymn of praise," and adds, "the second part of the Hallel, Psalms 115-118."
 - D. *Bengel* says: "They either sang, or recited, Psalms 113, 114, 115, 118, 136, in which the mystery of redemption is nobly expressed."

You will find the same view in Lightfoot, Alford, Meyer, Jacobus, Gill, and a multitude of others. Whoever appeals to this passage as supplying a warrant for modern hymn-singing evinces complete vacuity of the subject.

This is the only instance in which we have account of our Saviour singing; and in this case He set the seal of His approval upon the songs which He Himself had provided for His people, by inspiration of His Spirit. If we wish to follow closely in the footsteps of our Lord, we must sing psalms exclusively. Jesus did.

- (2). The passages, **Colossians iii, 16**, and **Ephesians v, 19**, which speak of "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs", contain no warrant for the use of uninspired songs.

Colossians iii, 16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." This is the crucial text on this subject. Those who favor the use of hymns interpret this passage as including in the matter of praise uninspired compositions. I believe that it contains a distinct command for the continued use of the Old Testament Psalter in the New Testament Church. Note that:

- (i) **All authorities agree that the Scripture psalms are included.**

This is a very important concession, because it shows that those who have excluded the psalms have done so in the face of repeated commands in the New Testament to continue their use. It also sweeps away at one stroke the oft repeated objection that the psalms are not suitable for use in the Christian dispensation.

- (ii) **The three names, "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,"** are all found in the titles to the psalms, in the Hebrew Old Testament and in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translation of approx. 260 - 160 BC.

The **Hebrew** words (used to entitle and within individual Hebrew Psalms) are:

מִזְמוֹר *Mizmor* used 57 times means: **Religious song** sung with a stringed instrument.

שִׁיר *Shir* used 39 times means: Religious or secular **song**

מִשְׁכִּיל *Maschil* used 13 times can mean: meditative, didactic, or skilful *Mizmor*.

מִכְתָּם *Michtam* used 6 times meaning is not clearly known to us

שִׁגְגָיוֹן *Shiggayon* used once (Psalm 7) meaning is not clearly known to us

תְּפִלָּה *Tephillah* used 5 times means: “**prayer**”

תְּהִלָּה *Tehillah* used 7 times means “**praise**”.

The **Greek** words used in the LXX psalms are:

Ψαλμός *Psalmos* used 79 times means “song of praise” with stringed instrument

ὕμνος *Hymnos* used 13 times means “hymn or song of praise”

ὥδή *Ode* used 45 times means “a song”.

It will be seen that there is not a definite distinction of meaning between the two latter Greek terms, but that they have semantic fields that flow into and merge with one another. The feature in *Psalmos* concerning the “stringed instrument” appears to be the major differentiation, according with the Hebrew *Mizmor*.

The **English** words used in translation to cover all these terms are:

Psalm, Hymn, Song.

However, in some Psalms in English Bibles the Hebrew words *maschil* and *michtam* are emplaced in the English merely transliterated, without any attempt to indicate the meaning, because the terms are not yet fully understood.

Whereas correlation between the English and Greek terms is obvious and easy, it requires more investigation to see the correlation between the Greek LXX terms *Psalmos*; *Hymnos*; *ode*; and the Hebrew terms, there being seven of the latter that generally match with just three in the Greek. It is necessary to examine this correlation:

First: The Hebrew מִזְמוֹר *Mizmôr*. The root of this word means “to pluck” and appears to refer to the “plucking” of the strings of a musical instrument. The word is used 57 times in the Psalter in the superscriptions of verse 1 in each case, and is translated by the Greek LXX as ψαλμος *Psalmos* on 56 of those occasions. The odd one occasion it is translated by the Greek ὥδη *ode*, which translates into English as “song” or “ode”. Notable in this connection is the fact that the Greek LXX gives on 13 occasions the translation ψαλμος ὥδης *psalmos odeis* or some such combination of *psalmos* and *ode* meaning “a psalm, (or) song”. The Greek is in such instances translating a Hebrew combination containing *Mizmor* and *Shir*. Also notable are such superscriptions as the following:

Secondly, the Hebrew word שִׁיר *Shir* meaning a “song” occurs some 39 times in the Psalms, and is translated by the LXX as ὕμνη *ode* some 34 of those times. On 3 of the remaining five occurrences the Greek LXX translates *Shir* by a synonym for “song”, namely the Greek word ᾠσμα *asma*, and on one occasion translates by the Greek word *psalmos*. Out of these 34 occurrences of the word, 29 of them are in superscriptions or titles to the Psalms.

With the fact before us that these three Greek words are all found in the titles to the psalms; and that they occur many times; and that they were found in the Septuagint (LXX) in use among the Greek-speaking Christians to whom Paul wrote these two Epistles, Ephesians and Colossians; and that all are agreed that *Psalmois* refers to the psalms of the Bible, is it not most **un**reasonable to insist that the other two words *Humnois* and *Odais* mean **un**inspired songs?

That the “songs” are the songs of inspiration is placed beyond all doubt by the qualifying word, “**spiritual**”; and grammatically it applies to the psalms and hymns as well as to the songs, i. e., psalms, hymns, and songs, spiritual.

Thayer, in his Greek lexicon of the New Testament, referring to this passage and the similar one, Eph. v, 19, defines the Greek word πνευματικῶς *pneumatikais* used for “**spiritual**” as “divinely inspired and so redolent of the Holy Spirit.”

Albert Barnes, in his commentary on 1 Cor. x, 3: "And did all eat the same spiritual meat," says: "The word *spiritual* is evidently used to denote that which is given by the Spirit of God; that which was the result of His miraculous gift; that which was **not** produced in the ordinary way.," Again, "The word *spiritual* must

be used in the sense of supernatural, or that which is immediately given by God.” Hence, “spiritual songs” are songs produced in a supernatural manner, those given immediately by the Spirit of God.

This view is sustained by many of the ablest and most scholarly divines the Church has produced, including Owen, Calvin, Beza, McKnight, Bloomfield, Home, Durham, Bengel.

(iii) The psalms are, in a pre-eminent sense, “the Word of Christ.”

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another.” This is the condition of being able to “teach and admonish.”

A. Christ by His Spirit is the author of them.

This was proved above, see section II, 1, previously. (Pages 16-17 herein).

B. In many of the psalms Christ is the speaker.

Ps. ii, 7: “I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee.” **Ps. xl, 7:** “Then said I, lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of Me.” **Ps. xxii, 1:** “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Such psalms as these are the word of Christ in as real a sense as the sermon on the mount is His word.

C. Christ is the subject of many of them.

a. The inspired writers frequently quote from the psalms and apply the language to Christ.

E.g., **Acts** iv, 25, 26; **Eph.** iv, 8, 9, 10, **Heb.** i, 5-12.

b. Christ quotes from the psalms and applies them to Himself.

E.g., **Matt.** xxi, 42; **Matt.** xxii, 43, 44; **Luke** xxiv, 44, “In the psalms concerning Me.”

(iv) No other book in the Bible reveals Christ with more fullness than does the Book of Psalms.

Note just some of the particulars:

1. His Divinity

Ps. xlv, 6: “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.” Compare with **Heb. i, 8.**

Ps. cx, 1: “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand.” Compare with **Matt. xxii, 42-45.**

2. His eternal Sonship.

Ps. ii, 7: "I will declare the decree." Compare with **Heb. i, 5.**

3. His incarnation.

Ps. viii, 5. Compare with **Heb. ii, 9.** Ps. xl, 6-7, compare with **Heb. x, 5-7.**

4. His mediatorial offices.

a. Prophetical.

Ps. xl, 9, 10, and xxii, 22. Compare with **Heb. ii 12.**

b. Priesthood.

Ps. cx, 4. Compare with **Heb. vii, 17.**

c. Kingly office.

Ps. xlv, 6. Compare with **Heb. i, 8.** Ps. cx, 1 Compare with **Matt. xxii, 42-45;** and **Heb. i, 13,** particularly. See also: **Ps. xxii, 28; Ps. lxxii, throughout.**

5. His betrayal.

Ps. xli, 9. Compare with **John xiii, 18.**

6. His agony in the garden.

Ps. xxii, 1. Compare with **Heb. v, 7.**

7. His trial.

Ps. xxxv, 11. Compare with **Matt. xxvi, 59, 60.**

8. His rejection.

Ps. xxii, 6, Compare with **Matt, xxvii 21-23; Luke xxiii, 18-23.**

Ps. cxviii, 22. Compare with **Matt. xxi, 42; Acts iv, 11, 12.**

9. His crucifixion.

Ps. xxii; **Ps. lxix.** Compare with Gospel accounts.

10. His burial and resurrection.

Ps. xvi, 8-11. Compare with **Acts ii, 25-31.**

11. His ascension.

Ps. xlvii, 5. Compare with **Acts i, ii, and 1 Thess. iv, 16.** **Ps. lxviii, 18;** Compare with **Eph. iv, 8-10.** **Ps. xxiv, 7-10;** Compare with **Rev. v, 6-14.**

12. His second coming.

Ps. L, 3, and xcvi, 6-9. Compare with **Matt. xxiv, 31; 1 Cor. xv, 52.**

This is sufficient to show that these psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, are replete with Christ, and it could well be said of them, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly."

(v) Uninspired songs could not be placed on a level with the psalms of inspiration as a rule for teaching and admonishing.

A. It is agreed that the psalm *are inspired*.

B. If the "hymns" and "spiritual songs" (as per Eph. v, 19 and Col. 3, 16) are **uninspired**, then Paul would be placing the writings of men on a level with the Word of God as a rule for the "teaching and admonishing" he mentions therewith.

This would be wholly incredible !!!

(vi) The inspired psalms alone are adapted to be the vehicles of grace to the heart, and of praise to the Lord. "Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

A. Because of their outward form and style.

Speaking of the Hebrew poetry, Dr. Albert Barnes says: "Their poetry of a religious kind, also, is all of a high order. There is none that can be placed on the same level with much that is found in the hymn books of most denominations of Christians: very good, very pious, very sentimental, very much adapted to such use as is supposed to excite feelings of devotion; but withal so flat, so weak, so unpoetic, that it would not in a volume of mere poetry be admitted to a third or fourth rank, if indeed it would find a place at all."—Preface to *Barnes' Commentary on Psalms*.

John Milton says: "Not in the argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition, they may easily be made to appear, over all kinds of lyric poetry, incomparable."

Edward Irving, in his *Introduction to Horne on the Psalms*, says: "If we consider the manner or style of the book, and draw it into comparison with the lyrical productions of cultivated and classical nations, it may well be said that, as the heavens are high above the earth, so are the Songs of Zion above the noblest strains which have been sung in our land." And after drawing contrasts between these and the songs of other nations, he concludes thus: "We challenge anything to be produced from the literature of all ages and countries worthy to be compared with what we find in the English version of the Book of Psalms."

B. Because of their eminently devotional character: "To the Lord."

Out of a great mass of testimony to the preeminence of the psalms as a book of devotion, I select just one of recent date, that of the Hon. Wm. E. Gladstone. After describing the separation of the Jewish people from the other nations of the world,

he proceeds: "In the inner sanctuary that provided for the most capable human souls was reared the strong spiritual life which appears to have developed itself pre-eminently in the depth, richness, tenderness, and comprehensiveness of the psalms.

"To the work they have accomplished there is no parallel upon earth. For the present I will put aside all details and am content to stand on this fact, that a compilation which began at the latest with a shepherd of Palestine, three thousand years ago, has been the prime and paramount manual of devotion from that day to this: first for the Hebrew race, both in its isolation and after it was brought, by the translation of its sacred books, into relations with the Gentile world; and then for all the Christian races in all their diversities of character and circumstance.

"Further, that there is now, if possible, less chance than ever of the displacement of those marvelous compositions from their supremacy in the worship of the Christian Church. And beyond all doubt it may be said that their function has not been one of ritual pomp and outward power alone. They have dwelt in the Christian heart, and at the very center of that heart, and wherever the pursuits of the inner life have been largely concerned and cultivated, there, in the same proportion, the psalms have towered over every other vehicle of devotion."

There is a fitness in such a tribute to the psalms from such a man as Gladstone. If you cannot feel it, you cannot be taught to do so. But if you can, by any stretch of your powers, imagine a man of any depth uttering such an appreciation of any collection of hymns, then you ought to thank God for your powers of imagination.

C. Because they are *objective*, rather than *subjective*: "To the Lord."

The grace is *subjective*; "in your hearts." The praise is *objective*: "to the Lord." This is one of the marked characteristics by which the psalms are distinguished from the hymns. The hymns are self-centered, the psalms are God-centered. Professor Taylor Lewis of the Union Theological Seminary writes clearly on this point in an article entitled, *The Old Scotch Psalmody*:

"Another feature is its clear *objectiveness*, or the striking contrast it presents to that extreme *subjectiveness* which makes much of our most modern hymnology so feeble because so vague. The former has ever some glorious outward object or idea, drawing the soul to itself. The other is characterized by a wholly subjective rapture, or by a continual moaning, or a continual self-questioning about inward frames and feelings. Take for a few examples the hymns beginning, 'I love to steal away'; 'Far from the world, O Lord, I flee'; 'I am weary of straying, O fain would I rest'; 'There is an hour of calm repose.' Very sweet and soothing are such hymns, at times. They may be channels, too, of grace; but how different from those more churchly strains which the Scriptures give us: How different, too, from any conception we can form of the hymns that Paul and Silas most probably sang at midnight in the jail at Philippi."—*The Bible Psalmody*, pp. 20-23.

I conclude, therefore, from the above reasoning, that this passage which has

always been relied on by the advocates of hymn-singing as containing a warrant for these practices, has no such meaning.

The titles, "psalms, and hymns, and songs," belong to the inspired psalter; and, as qualified by the word "spiritual," are not true of any other: I conclude that the psalms are "the Word of Christ," and uninspired songs are not His word: that the psalms are a true standard for "teaching and admonishing" and the uninspired songs are not such a standard, and therefore could not be placed on a level with the psalms by the apostle; and that the psalms are adapted to be the vehicles of grace to the heart and of praise to the Lord, as uninspired songs are not. The passage furnishes no warrant for the use of uninspired songs in worship, but is an explicit apostolic injunction that, in the praise service of the New Testament Church, the divinely authorized psalmody should be continued.

Making melody in your hearts: Some of you will live to speak inspiring words on this text. All of you will sing the psalms in the spirit of praise and by God's grace will lead a flock of His people to make a loud noise joyfully every Sabbath day. But you will do it only as you feel yourselves grounded in the biblical truths that demand a pure praise service.

The Churches which during the Dark Ages remained separate from Romanism, continued to use the inspired psalms exclusively.

It is a disputed question whether the Waldenses owe their origin to Peter Waldo in the twelfth century, or whether they are to be identified with the Vaudois, who can be traced almost if not altogether to the apostolic age. Dr. C. H. Strong argues the probability that the latter is true, and that if Paul took the "journey into Spain" of which he speaks in Rom. xv, 24, his voice may actually have been heard among their secluded valleys. It is a well established fact that through the Dark Ages these people maintained a consistent testimony against the corruptions of Rome. The argument to prove that through all their history they were (exclusive) psalm singers is found in:

History of the Waldenses by Dr. C.H.Strong p. 58 ff.

Jonathan Edwards, Exclusive Psalmody, and the Price of Consistency

by
Allen Baird

The one thing Jonathan Edwards has acquired fame for in contemporary Reformed circles is his involvement in and subsequent defence of the 'revival' that has come to be known as "The Great Awakening."¹ This must be considered a matter of the utmost regret and shame, as to do so is to concentrate on Edwards at his weakest.² Thus, an utterly caricatured and distorted picture of Edwards is presented, for he was a theologian who in many other ways stands implacably opposed to much that passes for Reformed theology today. Such is especially the case in his defence of the Biblical doctrine of Divine sovereignty.³ And lessons could be learned from Edwards not only in the area of doctrine, but also in that of practice. It is that part of a Christian's practice referred to as *public worship* that is the focus of this article.

In his work entitled *A Treatise concerning the Religious Affections* Edwards argues for the use of Psalms in the following way:

"And these expressions of holy affection of which the Psalms of David are every where full, are the more to our present purpose, because those psalms are not only the expressions of the religion of so eminent a saint, but were also, by the direction of the Holy Ghost, penned for the use of the church of God in its public worship, not only in that age, but in after ages; as being fitted to express the religion of all saints, in all ages, as well as the religion of the psalmist. And it is moreover to be observed, that David, in the book of Psalms, speaks not as a private person, but as the *Psalmist of Israel*, as the subordinate head of the Church of God, and leader in their worship and prais-

¹. See especially Jonathan Edwards: *Theologian of Revival* by **Ian Paisley**. This is also the emphasis of **Iain Murray's**: *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*. Those who turn to such books for an exposition of Edwards' theology will be sorely disappointed.

². See my article in **BRJ** (Issue No. 19, July-Sept 1997), pp. 4-9, which is entitled: '*The Great Awakening: Was It?*'

³. For what is surely one of the greatest sermons on the sovereignty of God ever written and preached, see *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, (Banner of Truth, 1988), Vol. 2, pp. 3-7. No talk of 'tension' or 'balance' or 'paradox' here!

es; and in many of the psalms, he speaks in the name of Christ, as personating him in these breathings forth of holy affections; and in many others he speaks in the name of the church.”⁴

Edwards here seems to be arguing for the exclusive use of Psalms in the public worship of the New Testament church *on the basis of the nature of true religion*..

Firstly, Edwards considers the *content* of this true religion. Edwards had been arguing that true religion, to a great extent, was a matter of the heart, by which he meant the inclination or the will.⁵ “That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference. God, in his word, greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, fervent in spirit, and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion.”⁶ True religion has much to do with action and those duties which God requires of us, but our affections are the “spring” or cause of godly practice. True religion has also much to do with the understanding, particularly in the hearing of the Word of God. But if this word leaves a person completely unaffected and unchanged, then he really knows nothing of true religion itself.

In discussing the importance of the affections, Edwards considers the lives of Paul, John and David, as examples of eminent saints. David is especially singled out for examination, since he is the only one who is described as “that *man after God’s own heart*; who has given us a lively portraiture of his religion in the book of the Psalms. Those holy songs are nothing else but the expressions and breathings of devout and holy *affections*; such as an humble and fervent *love* to God, *admiration* of His glorious perfections and wonderful works, earnest *desires*, thirstings, and pantings of soul after him; *delight* and *joy* in God, a sweet and melting *gratitude* for His great goodness, a holy *exultation* and triumph of soul in His favour, sufficiency and faithfulness; his *love* to, and *delight* in, the saints, the excellent of the earth, his great *delight* in the word and ordinances of God, his *grief* for his own and others’ sins, and his fervent *zeal* for God, and against the enemies of God and his church.”

Thus the Psalms contain an account of the true religion as it was lived out by one of the greatest saints of God who ever wrote a song. It is the case that the writer of any religious poem or hymn may only write an account of the sort of religion with which he or she is acquainted. And the quality of what they write will directly parallel the quality of how they have lived. It therefore follows that the author who has

4. *Works of Jonathan Edwards* : (Banner of Truth), Vol. 1, p. 240.

5. It should be noticed here that by ‘affections’ Edwards did not mean (a) what commonly today are called ‘emotions,’ since affections are a matter of volition rather than feeling or impulses, or (b) to imply that these affections are in some way contrary to or unrelated with intellect. ‘Whence it comes to pass, that the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty (of the will - AB), perhaps in all nations and ages, is called the heart’ (*Works*, Vol. 1, p. 237). The will therefore is the intellect when it is inclined to and has a preference for the things it views and considers.

6. *ibid.*

greatest experience of true religion will be the most able to write songs containing and expressing it. Here Edwards describes David as one of the greatest saints of God who ever existed. It was for this reason that his Psalms are so full of religious power and purity. If there are any in the church who ask whether their hymns or 'choruses' should be sung instead of the psalms of David, then Edwards would put a simple question to them:

"Only if you think that you are a greater saint than David, who knows more about true religion than David did, and whose songs contain greater affection for the cause of God than those written by David."

This should cause all advocates of hymnody to stumble and fall at the very first hurdle.

But Edwards argues on. Not only are the Psalms to be thought of as some great personal achievement by one man. Because they express the essence of the content of true religion by a man who was after God's own heart, they are also suitable to express the true religion of *all* the saints of God in *all* ages, as well as the religion of the psalmist. If this is so, then it can only be so because of the great Reformed truth that *the essence of true religion is exactly the same in the New Testament as it was in the Old*. Thus, Edwards would have nothing to do with the Dispensationalist lie that the method of salvation differed in the Old Testament to the New, or that there is a different people of God in the New Testament than there was in the Old. Both Covenant Theology and the Exclusive Psalmody position demand a view of the Old and New Testaments in which they are perceived to be a fundamental unity as far as true religion is concerned. It is no accident or surprise, then, when church history is examined, to learn that it has been those groups who have trivialised the Old Testament the most and failed to assert its fundamental oneness with the New, who have been the most vigorous neglecters of the Psalms in their worship.⁷

Second, Edwards considers the *source* of true religion. From where did the Psalms of David receive such a special status and commendation that they are to be taken as an example to all other men of the nature of true religion? Edwards says that they receive such a standing "by the direction of the Holy Ghost." Although David was really and fully the author of each of the psalms he wrote, he was not its ultimate author. The supreme author of the Psalms of David is none other than the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit who sovereignly gave David spiritual life and caused him to progress in way of true religion was the same Spirit who directed him, by means of predestination and providence, to write holy poems which ought to be considered as inspired, and therefore inerrant and infallible. Here is another stumbling block to those who are determined to introduce hymns. Edwards asks, "Can you

⁷ I am here particularly thinking of Arminians, Baptists, Dispensationalists, Premillennialists, and Antinomians, all of whom neglect in some way the unity of the Old Testament with the New (e.g., in election, in covenant, in the method of salvation, in the identity of God's people, and in law), and all of whom, with very few exceptions, were and are avid hymn-singers.

assure me that they are without error and are perfect, as these Psalms are? Further, if your conscience permits you to reply in the affirmative, can you assure me that they are as good as, if not superior to, those which have been written by the Holy Spirit?" The only person who could answer in the affirmative to this is a person to whom divine and human writings have the same worth, that is, someone who denies the orthodox doctrine of inspiration altogether.

Because the Psalms are inspired, it follows that they possess all the usual attributes of scripture, attributes which not only relegate all hymns to a poor and continuous second best when compared to the God-breathed Psalms, but which positively demand that only the Psalms be sung as a matter of principle. For instance, since the Scriptures are *sufficient*, and the Psalms are in the Scriptures, it follows that the Psalms are sufficient. The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture means that the Scripture is sufficient for the purposes to which God gave it without the need of supplementation by human traditions. Therefore, the Book of Psalms is also sufficient for the purpose of being sung from in public worship without any need of being supplemented by human poetry and hymns. The same can be easily shown with the other attributes of scripture. Only the Psalms are *necessary*, and since hymns are therefore unnecessary, they are unimportant, and should not be insisted upon by individuals or churches. Those who insist upon hymns think more highly of their poetry than the unity of the church, since they are elevating something trivial to the status of the indispensable. Only the Psalms are *authoritative*, and hymns-composers therefore have no more authorisation to use their poems in God's worship than Shakespeare had to use one of his plays, or any other human author, in Divine worship. What right has some individual poet to force me to sing about his or her religious experiences or thoughts? But, as Edwards says, since the same Spirit who dwells in the lives of all Christians in all ages is the same Spirit who inspired the Psalms, the Psalms have a present universal quality which can serve as a principle of *unity* to the people of God in a way that no set of hymns ever could.

But to say with Edwards that the Psalms were written under the "direction" and guidance of the Holy Spirit is to say more than that the words are true. It means that the Holy Spirit so directed the life and experiences of David, and the other authors of the Psalms, that their writings would prove exhaustive of the sort of circumstances undergone by the universal church throughout history. Therefore, the Psalms are not only collections of the individual and corporate, the historical and then contemporary, experiences of God's people, which express sentiments of a somewhat arbitrary and individualistic nature. Rather, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all the Psalms have a *normative* status, and not only describe for us how certain people thought and felt and acted, but also prescribe for us how we ought to think and feel and act under similar circumstances. The Holy Spirit guided not only the words of the Psalms but also the experiences and situations of those who wrote them, and those for whom they are written. This is the full meaning of inspiration.

This is also a divine guarantee that the Psalms will always be relevant and useful to the people of God when sung publicly. What hymn can boast such a glorious pledge as this?

Third, Edwards considers the *structure* of true religion, especially as regards public worship. What was so distinct, so unique, about David, that his writings, as opposed to the writings of those like Paul or John, should be sung from in public worship? Edwards explains that David wrote the Psalms not only to provide a pattern for true personal religion, and not only under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, but as someone who had - and has - been given a special role of leadership as far as the worship of the universal church of Jesus Christ is concerned. David is described in the scriptures as *the* Psalmist of Israel, or to put it in modern language, *the* hymn-composer of the church. The Israel which David wrote and sung Psalms for is the very same church of Jesus Christ which exists today. The "Israel" for whom he was a "sweet Psalmist" was *the church*, which was then confined within one nation, and so geographically unified in a way that is impossible today. Yet it is the same church which exists today under the headship of the same Christ. This title has been given to no composer of hymns. They write for no-one but themselves. Edwards also points out that David was not only a divinely inspired composer, but that he was a church officer and worship leader, giving his Psalms an authoritative status not only as part of the canon of scripture but also in the organised worship of the institute church itself. David therefore speaks explicitly, in many of his Psalms, in the name of and on behalf of the universal church of Christ.

But not only did David's unique place in a then uniquely organised church of Christ give him a special right to compose psalms to be used in the public worship of God. David had a unique relationship to Christ himself. First, David was a great prophet of Christ, speaking in the name of the Messiah about his Lord's future life and work as perhaps no other Old Testament prophet did. Second, David was a great type of Christ, especially in his public capacity as warrior-king of Israel, but also, more privately, through the many trials and afflictions David passed during the course of his life.⁸ Thus the utter foolishness of those supporters of hymns who complain that the Psalms "do not speak of Christ" is laid bare. If the observations of Edwards here are correct, then it must be concluded that *there never was a person in the history of the world more fit to write songs for Christian people than David the suffering king.*

In another of Edwards' great works, entitled *A History of the Work of Redemption*, Edwards also argues for the use of Psalms:

"This also was a glorious advancement of the affair of redemption, as God hereby gave his church a book of divine songs for their use in that part of pub-

⁸ Elsewhere, Edwards claims that "David, as he was the ancestor of Christ, so he was the greatest personal type of Christ of all under the Old Testament ... Hence, Christ is often called David in the prophecies of Scripture; as Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24." *Works*, (Banner), Vol. 1, p. 552.

lic worship, viz., singing his praises, throughout all ages to the end of the world. It is manifest the book of Psalms was given of God for this end. It was used in the church of Israel by God's appointment: this is manifest by the very title of many of the Psalms, in which they are inscribed to the chief musician, i.e. to the man that was appointed to be the leader of divine songs in the temple, in the public worship of Israel. So David is called *the sweet psalmist of Israel*, because he penned psalms for the use of the church of Israel; and accordingly we have an account that they were actually made use of in the church of Israel for that end, even ages after David was dead; as 2 Chron. xxix. 30. 'Moreover, Hezekiah the king, and the princes, commanded the Levites to sing praises unto the Lord, with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer.' And we find that the same are appointed in the New Testament to be made use of in the Christian church, in their worship: Eph. v. 19. 'Speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,' Col. iii. 16. 'Admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.' So they have been, and will, to the end of the world, be made use of in the church to celebrate the praises of God. The people of God were wont sometimes to worship God by the singing of songs to his praise before; as they did at the Red sea; and they have Moses's prophetic song, in the 32nd chapter of Deuteronomy, committed to them for that end; and Deborah, Barak, and Hannah sung praises to God: but now first did God commit to his church a book of divine songs for their constant use."⁹

Thus, this time he argues for Psalms *on the basis of the progress of divine revelation*.

Edwards begins by making the basic point that the Psalms were originally brought into use by the ancient church by means of *divine appointment*. Unlike modern hymns, the Psalms were not made use of merely because someone thought they were 'nice,' or 'made people feel good.' Certainly, they were not introduced 'for the youth,' or for the sake of being 'trendy.' Rather, by the special direction of the Holy Spirit, they were written for specific use in public worship, as even many of their titles demonstrate. And while it is possible to have hymns written and utilised in churches by *ecclesiastical appointment*, it is not possible to have them so authorised by 'God's appointment.' Unless, that is, one is a Charismatic, in which case it would be possible to have hymns authorised by some new divine revelation, or unless one is a Roman Catholic, in which case hymns could have papal appointment, which is supposedly the same as divine appointment. However, neither of these options is open to a Protestant, particularly one who calls himself Reformed.

Thus, it was at the time of David that the Psalms were officially brought into use in the church. This Edwards calls "a glorious advancement in the affair of redemp-

⁹ *Works*, (Banner), Vol. 1, p. 554.

tion.” Before this stage, there was no official book of praise for God’s people. Rather, there were only spontaneous and sporadic song-like outpourings by individual church leaders under divine inspiration. Now, however, all the people of God could participate in a corporate and ordinary manner. This great advancement in the liberty and unity of God’s redeemed people was not limited only to the time of David. As Edwards points out, it continued to be authoritative after the death of David, and even into the New Testament period. Edwards seems to be working here under the principle that *any commandment of God continues to be of binding force unless specifically repealed by some later advancement in revelation..* If this were not so, there would be no Biblical warrant for equating the ‘psalms, hymns and spiritual songs’ spoken of in the New Testament with those previously written in the Old. Therefore, those who wish to introduce non-Biblical ‘psalms, hymns and songs’ into the New Testament church are actually rebelling against previously given divine ordinances, denying the unity of the church over time, and overturning earlier advancements made in the outworking of redemptive history. These are not small charges.

After all these arguments and insights, it might be reasonable to expect that Edwards would defend the exclusive use of the Book of Psalms in the public worship of the people of God. But instead, we read this:

“But what is more especially found fault with, in the singing that is now practised, is making use of hymns of human composure. I am far from thinking that the Book of Psalms should be thrown by in our public worship, but that it should always be used in the Christian church, to the end of the world: but I know of no obligation we are under to *confine* ourselves to it. I can find no commandment or rule of God’s Word, that does any more confine us to the words of the Scripture in our singing, than it does in our praying; we speak to God in both. And I can see no reason why we should limit ourselves to such particular forms of words that we find in the Bible, in speaking to him by way of praise, in meter, and with music, than when we speak to him in prose, by way of prayer and supplication. And it is really *needful* that we should have some other songs beside the Psalms of David. It is unreasonable to suppose that the Christian church should forever, *and even in times of her greatest light* (emphasis mine - AB), in her praises of God and the Lamb, be confined only to the words of the Old Testament, wherein all the greatest and most glorious things of the Gospel, that are infinitely the greatest subjects of her praise, are spoken of under a veil, and not so much as the name of our glorious Redeemer ever mentioned, but in some figure, or as hid under the name of some type. And as to our making use of the words of others, and not those that are conceived by ourselves, it is no more than we do in all our public prayers; the whole worshipping assembly, excepting only one, makes use

of the words that are conceived by him that speaks for the rest"¹⁰

Edwards defends the position here that the use of hymns, along side Psalms, is not only *permissible* but *required* in the New Testament church. And the arguments Edwards provides as support for this position really constitute a complete reversal of all that he had previously written on the topic. Instead of looking for commandments in the development of revelation which would tell him that he was specifically *permitted* to use new hymns in the church, he now suddenly argues that there is no commandment to *forbid* him from introducing such novelties (which, as a matter of fact, is false - Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Gal. 3:15; and Rev. 22:18-19). And instead of being content with the greatness of the religion expressed in the Psalms and clarity with which they speak about Christ, all of a sudden Edwards considered the Psalms to be inadequate and cryptic in the extreme (which, as a matter of fact, is also false - Lk. 20:42; 24:44; Acts 1:20; and 13:33).

How could Edwards have made such comments as these after all that he had previously said? How could someone blessed with one of the greatest minds ever given to a New Testament saint debase himself by producing such pathetic arguments? The reason was simple. Edwards had a 'hidden agenda' and a 'vested interest' in defending the use of hymns. He was no longer acting as an expounder of Scripture and a developer of Reformed theology. Rather, he was speaking as a movement-leader and a demagogue. What cause was Edwards really defending here? Was it the cause of hymnody? No. It was the cause of the revival.

Hymn-singing was a revival phenomenon, and because Edwards was committed to defending the revival, he found himself required to defend the new practice of hymn singing also. This connection between hymnody and revivalism can be proven here in two ways. Firstly, in the quote above, Edwards complains against the notion that the church should be restricted to psalmody "even in times of her greatest light," meaning the present revival. Since revival is such a work of the 'extraordinary,' then the plain, old 'ordinary' Book of Psalms is no longer good enough, but too confining, too restrictive, in other words, too good at governing and checking all the unbiblical activities which abounded in the revival at the time. It therefore had to be dispensed with.

Second, it is worthy of note that the book of Edwards' in which this quote is to be found is entitled *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England, and the Way In Which It Ought To Be Acknowledged and Promoted*. The quote is taken from the third part of this work, in which Edwards is concerned with "Showing, In Many Instances, Wherein The Subjects, Or Zealous Promoters, Of This Work, Have Been Injuriouslly Blamed." Edwards here not only defends the 'outward manifestations' and bodily effects so associated with the nature of the revival itself, but also such 'incidentals' as unsupervised children's meetings and lay-preaching. Those who opposed these things are branded as 'Pharisees.' This

¹⁰ *Works* (Banner), Vol. 1, p. 396.

connection between hymnody and revivalism is not unique to the “Great Awakening” of America, but also exists in the context of United Kingdom.¹¹ Indeed, many of the hymns still sung in Northern Ireland today actually were written during the ‘revival’ of 1859. Other ill effects of that particular phenomenon still curse the land of Ulster to this day.¹²

The price of this inconsistency of Edwards on the doctrine of Exclusive Psalmody amounted to more than a forced obligation to defend those excesses and abuses which defined the nature of the revival. In his heirs, he had to give up using Psalms altogether. The “Great Awakening” only speeded up the process somewhat. Within a few generations the Psalms were not used at all in New England Congregationalism. Now, contemporary Presbyterians in America who are interested in defending hymnody actually quote Edwards to defend their practises.¹³ The ultimate price of inconsistency is that the good in our theology will be rejected in later history and the bad will live on in an increasingly developed form. Unfortunately, this price was paid by Edwards not only with regard to his theology of worship, and his theology of revival, but also in his theology as a whole, so that a century later, the heretic and hyper-revivalist Charles Finney could claim that he was a direct descendent of the same ‘New England’ school of theology as Edwards helped found. Inconsistencies in our doctrine of worship exact a heavy price from us, for the LORD, who is a jealously consistent God, visits the inconsistencies of the fathers upon their children, even unto the third and fourth generations.

¹¹ For instance, in *Heritage of Revival* (The Faith Mission, 1986), Colin N. Peckham, supporter of Revivalism, Arminianism and ‘Second-Blessing’ Pentecostalism, describes the changes introduced into Presbyterian worship in Scotland by the revival brought about by D. L. Moody. “Scotland, weakened by the Disruption, wore a cloak of piety and good conduct, but joy and religion were divorced, and many thought it blasphemy to claim certainty of heaven. Scots had long been nurtured on the solemn creeds and dogma of historic Christianity. For centuries their minds had been drilled in the Shorter Catechism and the doctrines of the Westminster Confession, even where no Christian experience was to be found. The worship of the Scottish Church had been conducted along rigidly Puritan lines. Strong feelings existed against the use in services, of ‘human’ hymns and for the most part only the Psalms were sung. The battle to introduce the organ into the public worship only began in 1856, and for the next ten years debates as to its use continued in parish churches and Assembly halls.” (pp. 6-7).

¹² Arminianism, Dispensationalism, Independentism, narrow Fundamentalism, Pentecostalism, Antinomianism, world-flight, aggressive antipaedo-baptism, lay-preaching, mission-halls, Sunday schools, children’s meetings, legalism, hatred of creeds, use of hymns, ignorance of church history, unsupervised communion, neglect of church membership, women teaching in the church, indifference to Christian education, the non-existence of church discipline, and a thousand and one other evils, are the only “heritage of revival” that Northern Ireland has known.

¹³ For instance, John Gerstner says the following. “The demand that worship be in spirit and in truth grew out of Edwards’ commitment to the exclusive rule of the Word of God in worship, this conception embodied in what is known as the ‘Regulative Principle,’ one of the defining marks of Puritan practical theology. Yet he did not find that the application of this God-honoring rule required the exclusive use of Psalms in public worship.” John H. Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, (Berea Publications, 1993), Vol. 3, p. 404. As evidence for this, Gerstner provides the quote I have given above. There is no mention of the more numerous positive affirmations of the use of Psalms written by Edwards.

WHO Seduced our Fathers away from Psalmody? ISAAC WATTS UNMASKED

REPRINTED from An Appendix to:

AN APOLOGY FOR THE BOOK OF PSALMS, IN FIVE LETTERS, ADDRESSED TO THE FRIENDS OF UNION IN THE CHURCH OF GOD.

By **Rev. Gilbert M'Master, D.D.**

Fourth edition. Philadelphia: Daniels & Smith, 36, North Sixth Street, 1852.

NOTE TO THE READER. It goes without saying that the writers of the Biblical Psalms were all unimpeachably orthodox in their theology. But what about the writers of the hymns we have been singing for two centuries and more? How much reader, do you know about the theological reliability of such feted hymnists like Watts, Doddridge, and the Wesleys? Begin here to learn something of Dr. Watts. We are grateful to Dr. Stephen Westcott for forwarding to us the material herewith printed.

What were the opinions of Dr. Watts on the subject of the Trinity and the person of Jesus Christ?

It would be pleasant, indeed, could we find him among the sound divines of England; but there is that, it is believed, in his works which will not allow him to be so placed. If any be disposed to distinguish between the practical faith of his heart, and the speculative articles of his creed, I have no objection. Believing, however, as I do that God has not constituted us arbiters of the state of men, I have only to do with the latter. Upon the former it is not mine to decide. The doctor's sentiments concerning the Redeemer will be found in his "*Discourses on the Glory of Christ.*" The edition of the Discourses now before me is that of 1746, but a little more than a year before the author's death. There you will find him zealously maintaining that the human soul of Christ, created before all worlds, is the Lord from heaven, spoken of in 1. Corinthians 15:47,¹ that in the image of this pre-existent spirit Adam was created,² that the sonship of Christ belongs, exclusively, to his human soul,³

¹Isaac Watts: *Discourses on the Glory of Christ* (Publ. 1746) pp. 175,176.

²Op. cit. p. 203.

³Ibid. p..201.

that the covenant of redemption was not made with a person who was the Father's equal, but was a created spirit ⁴.

Such are some of the views which this author supposes would make the Bible more defensible. His opinions on the doctrine of the Trinity may be gathered from the following address to God: : "Dear and blessed God! Hadst thou been pleased, in any one plain scripture, to have informed me which of the different opinions about the holy Trinity, among the contending parties of Christians, had been true, thou knowest with how much real satisfaction and joy my unbiassed heart would have opened itself to receive and embrace the divine discovery. Hadst thou told me plainly, in any single text, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three real, distinct, persons in thy divine nature, I had never suffered myself to be bewildered in so many doubts nor embarrassed with so many strong fears of assenting to the mere inventions of men instead of divine doctrine; but I should have humbly and immediately accepted thy words, so far as it was possible for me to understand them, as the only rule of my faith. Or, hadst thou been pleased so to express and include this proposition in the several scattered parts of thy book from whence my reason and conscience might, with care, find out, and with certainty infer, this doctrine, I should have joyfully employed all my reasoning powers, with their utmost skill and activity, to have found out this inference, and ingrafted it into my soul.

"Holy Father! How can such weak creatures ever take in so strange, so difficult, and so abstruse a doctrine as this? And can this strange and perplexing notion of three real persons, going to make up one true God, be so necessary and so important a part of that Christian doctrine, which, in the Old Testament, and in the New, is represented as so plain and so easy, even to the meanest understanding?" ⁵

But to fully ascertain his views on the subject before us, the whole of the writings of Dr. Watts on the doctrine of the Trinity and the Person of Jesus Christ must be read. The vocabulary of his nursery creed, it is probable, to some extent, the Doctor retained, long after he had abandoned the creed itself. The ambiguity of his language, his manifest desire to be in good standing with men of principles very different from his own, his destitution of ecclesiastical character, and his defect in a well-settled principle of religious belief render it somewhat difficult to find his precise position. He often used the language of the orthodox, but claimed the right to explain the terms in his own way, and to press them into an agreement with his own peculiar opinions. So scraps taken from his works may be (as they have been- with what degree of intelligence and honesty we say not) adduced to prove him orthodox, while taken in their full and proper connexion they prove no such thing, but the reverse.

⁴. *Ibid.* pp. 180, 225.

⁵. Watts's *Works* vol. 7, pps 47-67, Leeds edition.

Whatever obscurity, from the ambiguity of his language and other causes, may hang over his views, the following facts admit of no doubt- and that is, that Dr. Watts was an **antitrinitarian** and that the distinct divine personality of the Son of God, as equal with the Father, had no place in his acknowledged creed. **The labours of his life, in which he manifested more than his usual mental vigour, were in direct opposition to the orthodox faith on this whole subject.** Thus the "Address" from which the foregoing quotation is taken, speaks in a style that forbids us to misunderstand him, and his "*Discourses on the Glory of Christ*", before mentioned, and his "*Useful Questions*" are all in the same spirit.

In the first of those Questions he asks "What is the true meaning of the name, Son of God, given to Christ in the New Testament?" He, in reply, adduces and remarks upon several scriptures, and adverts to the view of the orthodox as including an "eternal generation of the Person of the Son by the Person of the Father, in the sameness of the Divine Essence, consubstantial, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father." And then he adds: "I am persuaded this can never be the sense of this Name in those texts for, if this be never so true, yet it is confessed to be inconceivable; and I do not think the gracious God would put such a difficult task upon the faith of young disciples." Then he adverts to the referring of "the Sonship of Christ, rather to his human nature, or to his office as Messiah, than to such an eternal generation." He farther says "Christ, considered as the Son of God, is throughout represented as dependent on the Father for all, and receiving all from the Father, which is hardly consistent with the idea of supreme Godhead, if that were included in Sonship."

Again, in the same strain, he refers to 1. Corinthians 15:28 and Philippians 2 and asserts: "the Son of God is not depressed but exalted by the economy of the Mediatorial kingdom. That kingdom shall be given up, and then the Son of God, as Son, shall be depressed, and be brought down again to his original state of inferiority." Thus he writes: "Considered as a Son, he is naturally subject to the Father, and at the end of this economical exaltation he shall return to his natural subjection, and shalt be so forever." "His Sonship may be better referred to his inferior nature or to his office."

Dr. Watts, in his theory, admits the Son to be God, not "by nature" but as related to the Creator. This naturally inferior Son-Christ, as a distinct person, is thus only a creature, inferior to God, but, being related to the divine nature is, because of that created relation, called "God".

In the third of these "Useful Questions" the Doctor asks: "Could the Son of God properly enter into a covenant with the Father, to do and suffer what was necessary for our redemption, without a human soul?" He states the orthodox views of the subject; but proceeds to represent them as self-contradictory, and to be adandoned. According to him the covenant of redemption was made between the one Person in God- that is the Father, for he admits of only one Person in Jehovah- and his (the

Doctor's) supposed super-angelic spirit, created before all worlds, which, absurdly enough, he calls the human soul of Christ. Then he says "If we suppose the human soul of Christ to have a pre-existent state of joy, etc., before the world was created, these expressions (the scriptures that speak on the subject) are great and noble, are just and true." But if we take them in the orthodox view as to the divine Personality of the Saviour, he says "Then all these have very little justice or propriety in them", and he adds: "According to the common [the orthodox] explication of the doctrine of the Persons in the Trinity, we can have no ideas...of this transaction", and he adds: "One of these beings or Persons covenanting seems to be inferior to the other", "If we give ourselves leave to conceive of the human soul of Christ, in its pre-existent state, ad the prototokoi, the first formed of every creature, then here are proper subjects for these federal transactions."

In the fourth of his Questions he asks "is the Godhead of Christ and the Godhead of the Father one and the same?" This question he answers in the affirmative. But what does he mean? The ambiguity of his language and the confusion of his thought are well calculated to entrap and deceive the unwary, and to furnish a momentary countenance for an unfair advocate of his orthodoxy. The Godhead of the Father and of the Son is the same, he admits. The Godhead is a unit. It is one. According to his scheme in that Godhead, naturally and eternally, there is but one Person, the Father. The pre-existent soul, or spirit, of Christ is a mere creature and has no Deity of its own but as an exalted and favoured creature is related in a near friendship with the Father, and in virtue of this relation or created union can lay claim to deity. Strip this language of its ambiguity and his thought of its indistinctness and, in the scheme of Dr. Watts the question would be: "Is God the Father the Godhead of Christ?", and the answer would be, "yes". The Doctor's denial of distinct Persons, naturally and eternally, in one Jehovah, and his doctrine of the pre-existence of the human soul of Christ- which really is no human soul at all- fills his whole scheme with error, and spreads over it a bewildering confusion.

In his deprecations of tests of orthodoxy the Doctor was sufficiently explicit, and in his refusal of consent to such a measure, at the meetings at Salter's Hall where it was discussed with sufficient earnestness and urged **by** Mr. Bradbury and others, he was consistent. For him an orthodox test would not have been safe.

In a letter to Dr. Coleman of February 11th, 1747, accompanying his volume on "*The Glory of Christ*", Dr. Watts says: "I think I **have** said everything concerning the Son of God which Scripture says; but I could not go so far as to say, with some orthodox divines, that the Son is equal with the Father." And in his preface and introduction to his treatise on the Trinity, published in 1722, twenty-six years before his death, he admits of a Trinity, but mark his language: "Three such agents or principles of action, as may reasonably be called persons." Principles of action may be figurative, but they are not real, persons.

As an anti-trinitarian and opposer of the truth on the subject of the divine Personality of the Redeemer, he was understood by his contemporaries. The justly distinguished author of the volumes on "*The Great Mystery of Godliness*", the Rev. Thomas Bradbury⁶ charged Dr. Watts, in 1725, with "making the Divinity of Christ to evaporate into a mere attribute", and at a subsequent period he said to the Doctor: "It is a pity, after you have been more than thirty years a teacher of others, you are yet to learn the first principles of the oracles of God. Dr. Owen's church to be taught another Jesus? And that the Son and Spirit were only two powers in the Divine nature?"

Dr. Doddridge was (Watts's) personal friend, companion, and admirer. He was capable of understanding, and certainly cannot be suspected of any disposition to misrepresent, the principles of Dr. Watts, from which, perhaps, his own were not very different. Attend to the statement of Dr. Doddridge on this subject; "For as much as there is such a change and humiliation asserted concerning Christ, as could not properly be asserted concerning an eternal and immutable being, as such, there is reason to believe that Christ had, before his incarnation, a created or derived nature, which would admit of such a change."⁷ Again: "Dr. Watts maintained One Supreme God dwelling in the human nature of Christ, which he supposes to have existed the first of all creatures, and speaks of the divine Logos as the wisdom of God, and the Holy Spirit as the divine power, or the influence and effect of it, which he says is a Scriptural person, i.e. spoken of figuratively in Scripture, under personal characters."⁸ He also referred Christ's being the only begotten Son of God "to his being the promised Messiah, or to his extraordinary conception, and exaltation to his kingdom as Mediator". President Edwards thus understood Dr. Watts, and urges fourteen distinct arguments against his hypothesis concerning Jesus Christ. He has this remark: "According to what seems to be Dr. Watts's scheme, the Son of God is no distinct divine person from the Father"⁹. That his son, the late Dr. Edwards, viewed the subject in a similar light is more than presumable from the fact that he transcribes these arguments of his venerable father for the press. The same conclusion may be drawn in respect of Dr. Erskine of Edinburgh, from the interest he took in the publication of these Essays of the President of Nassau Hall, and from the special notice which he takes of that part of them containing the refutation of the scheme of Dr. Watts.

⁶. The advocates of Dr. Watts admit Mr. Bradbury to have been a 'man of wit', a man of genius but, to diminish the weight of his testimony, add, "he was a man of spleen". The enlightened and serious reader of the volumes on "*The Mystery of Godliness*" will not thus judge. In those volumes he will trace the operations of a mind, deeply imbued with a love of truth, and of a spirit that was no stranger to the tender sensibilities of evangelical religion.

⁷. Watts "*Dissertation on the Trinity*", "*Works*" Vol. 6, pps. 518-554. See also Doddridge, "*Family Expositor*" Vol. 2 page 154.

⁸. Watts, *op.cit.*, Vol 6, p. 630; Doddridge Vol 2. p. 178.

⁹. Jonathan Edwards, "*Essays*". (Unfortunately we are unable to give the reader a more precise reference than this given in the original by Dr. McMaster. *Ed.*)

In the same light are these writings of Dr. Watts understood by the venerable Dr. Anderson ¹⁰ "He taught," says Dr. Anderson, "that the Holy Spirit is not a person really distinct from the Father, but the divine power. That there was no real distinct persons in the Godhead." In the same point of view is the subject, contemplated by the Rev. James R. Willson, in his very interesting "History of Opinions on the Atonement". And hear the confession of another- it is that of Dr. Ely. "We cannot deny", says Dr. Ely, "that **Dr. Watts's treatise has wrought much mischief**. It was the book which first turned the head of the Rev. John Sherman. We wish the pernicious consequences of that treatise had terminated there."

In the same page we are informed that Mr. Allison, late chaplain to Congress, preached the same heresy to our representatives last January (1851), and gave Dr. Watts as the author of the doctrine.

Such were the opinions of Dr. Watts, written and left on record by himself, and thus have these opinions been understood by Bradbury, Doddridge, the two Edwards, Erskine, Anderson, Willson, Ely, etc., and it is notorious that every anti-trinitarian who reads his works claims him as of that school. His solemn address admits of no explanation. If ever man is serious in the expression of his sentiments it is when he addresses God: and if ever he expresses those sentiments with precision it is when he writes them. Dr. Watts has done both. He ventured to tell his Maker that the doctrine of three real Persons in the Godhead is a strange and perplexing notion, which we cannot receive, and which is not even inferable from the whole contents of the Book of God!

The truth is "comparatively few divines, of any class, at the darkened period when Dr. Watts lived and wrote, held out the glimmering lamp of sound evangelical instruction" Giving too much way to the gambols of imagination, it "occasionally carried him out (say his friends) into moral and sentimental excursions, beyond his usual limits of plain evangelical truth." And, according to the historian of the English dissenters (Bogue), from these excursions it was no easy task to bring him back. Childishly fond of something new, over the creatures of his own fancy he doted with an overweening affection, not because they were legitimate, but because they were his ovary.

What upon this fundamental subject were the views of Dr. Watts? Certainly not those of Christianity. They might be those of a slightly modified Arianism, but not less gross or erroneous than those of the Alexandrian presbyter. The scheme of both was really a form of the old Oriental Gnosticism. The super-angelic spirit of Arius and Watts was but an Aeon of the Gnostics. The scheme of Watts may be Gnosticism, but Christianity it is not. We understand his scheme as did Bradbury, Doddridge, Edwards, and, perhaps, as everyone understands him who attentively reads his works. Why then be specially reproached for understanding what they

¹⁰. Anderson: *Vindiciae Cantus Domine*", p. 221.

understood, and for saying what they said? That these vagaries of the Doctor were neither the fruits of youthful indiscretion, nor the infirmities of advanced years, he assures us himself. In the preface to his "Useful Questions" he certifies his readers that: "These papers are the product of that part of his life when his powers of mind and body were in full vigour." That he abandoned them at a late period of his life it would be grateful to be assured of, but of the fact no evidence has been given. The well-meant attempt of Mr. Toplady to prove it, it is well known, was a failure. And his permission of the continuance of the orthodox phraseology in his poetry will not do it. The Doctor's correspondence with Mr. Martin Tomkins, an anti-trinitarian, will explain why he did not alter, as he wished to do, the sentiments in his religious poetry. The language of poetry is no certain index of the principles of the poet. The modern transcendentalist is often poetic in his theology, and in an evangelical strain he can take the language of Rutherford, and Owen, and Edwards and talk of a close walk with God, and of intimate communion with him. The pantheism of transcendentalism allows them thus to speak a very spiritual language, while they may mean no more than their exposure to a July sun or a December frost, to a gentle shower or to a storm of hail. The poetry of fancy will not do away the heresy of prose. This brings to mind a remarkable coincidence. Bardesanes of Edessa, of the second century, and Watts of Southampton, of the eighteenth century, were both distinguished for their advocacy of error, and both were poets. And they are the only poets, as far as recollected, who attempted the imitation of the Book of Psalms, each in a book of 150 hymns. If history be credited, the Gnostic, as a poet, was not inferior to him of Southampton.

But why should the suggestion of a doubt as to the orthodoxy of Dr. Watts produce so much sensibility? Why not contend, with equal zeal, for the soundness of Robinson and Priestly? No man will hesitate to place Robinson, the author of the "Village Sermons" and Watts in the same rank, as to orthodoxy. The same Robinson, the author of "Ecclesiastical Researches", and Priestly, the historian of "Early Opinions", were fellow labourers in the same cause of heresy. Why then separate Watts, Robinson, and Priestly? They were all learned and able men; and all equally mistaken in the first principles of true religion- the object and medium of worship.

Is it because Watts gave a book of 'Psalms'(sic) to orthodox churches?

To the religious principles of her 'psalmist' the church *cannot* be indifferent. And to none of his works are they likely to be indifferent. The works of Dr. Watts are in the market; and in the gossip of the religious newspapers of the day his name is celebrated as divine. The title by which the Spirit of God has designated an inspired poet and Prophet has been transferred to him- "The sweet Psalmist of Israel"- and his verses have been elevated to the place of the displaced Psalms of inspiration. Yet where is the enlightened Christian of any name who, knowing what he was doing,

would put in the hand of his son, or into that of any serious enquirer after fundamental truth, the "Useful Questions concerning Jesus Christ" by Dr. Watts, or his more ingenious and laboured work; "The Glory of Christ"?

By those in the use of his hymns in the Psalmody of the Church no note of warning is sounded indicating the danger of his errors. His works have for a time perplexed many, and finally perverted others, and when the temptation to heresy has the sanction of the name of the "sweet Psalmist" of the church the evil work among her members will take its course.

These considerations justify this notice of these fatal errors. The interests, too, of historical verity have some claim to our regard. The defence of reputation against unfounded imputations may be left to time without further remark. It ought to be felt by Christians that the leading psalmist of their church should have been a professed believer and advocate of the truth respecting the God of Israel. The influence which his name is likely to exert upon the faith of the church demands this.

FOOTNOTE: Isaac Watts (1674 - 1748) was an English non-conformist, and is listed in Schaff-Herzog's *Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge* as the one who "opened up a new path" for worship by his Hymns, which were "without precedent or rival", and by which he "won the epithet, 'the inventor of English hymns'", though he was not the first Englishman to write hymns. Whereas "previously only psalms had been sung in public worship: he introduced hymns" via his book of *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* published in 1707. In 1719 he published his :*The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* which he "considered his most important work, and indeed it effected the reformation (sic) of English psalmody". This book was indeed a fateful mollification and quite free paraphrase of the original Biblical Psalms, and it effectually acted as Watts intended it, to be a stepping stone from Psalmody to outright "hymnody". Of the Biblical Hebrew Psalms, Watts said:

"What need is there that I should wrap up the shining honours of my Redeemer in the dark and shadowy language of a religion that is now for ever abolished, especially when Christians are so vehemently warned in the Epistles of St. Paul against a Judaizing spirit in their worship as well as doctrine?"

Watts also considered the singing of Psalms to promote "hypocrisy", insisting that "the curses, Hebraisms, and Jewish intricacies" and the many "deficiencies of light and glory" are effectively "stopping the worshippers hearts on their ascent to heaven." ALL THIS FROM AN ANTI-TRINITARIAN !!!!!

Book Reviews

Two Important new Productions concerning Psalmody and the Regulative Principle Reviewed by Dr. Stephen Westcott.

"The Worship of God"

by Rev. Malcolm Watts, Minister of Emmanuel Church, Salisbury, England, and Rev. David Silversides, Minister of Loughbrickland Reformed Presbyterian Church, Northern Ireland.
Marpet Press, Edinburgh. 72pps.
(Available from James A. Dickson Books, Edinburgh price £3:75).

Reviewed by **Dr. Stephen Westcott.**

Most readers of BRJ will be sympathetic to exclusive psalmody in worship, and aware of the Biblical 'regulative principle' that lies behind the practice, but another new booklet reminding us of the solid reasons for this form of worship cannot go amiss, especially when it is a new production (not a reprint from earlier phases of the debate) and even more so when (wonder of wonders) one of the co-authors ministers, not in Scotland, but in the south of England!

"The Worship of God" stems from the 1997 'Salisbury Conference' hosted by Pastor Malcolm Watts at his Church, Emmanuel Church in the ancient city of Salisbury and the three major sections of the book reflect the three papers presented at that conference; *'The Importance of Purity of Worship'* by Malcolm Watts himself, and *'The Westminster Directory of Public Worship'*, and *'How should our Churches Worship Today?'* by Pastor David Silversides of Loughbrickland Reformed Presbyterian Church, Northern Ireland.

It is understood that the Salisbury conference is to be an annual event, and the fact that the series 'kicked off' directly with the subject of Psalmody and purity of worship is a very heartening and encouraging fact

indeed. One suspects that the Conference itself may have done more to publicise the issues surrounding the regulative principle and Psalmody for a south of England audience than the published booklet will, as (sadly) such productions will always tend to be purchased by those already 'converted', and by-passed by the evangelical and even semi-reformed Christian readership in the South. Getting a more wide-ranging and publicised debate on this issue is still a desideratum, and there is a sense that moves are afoot (see below) to pre-empt any revival of Psalmody in English evangelical and reformed circles. Possibly giving or loaning copies of this booklet to enquirers or waverers might be of some help, although at £3:75 it might be thought a bit expensive for those purposes, whilst at 72 pages still a little 'lightweight' to put on one's own shelves as a reference manual on the subject. This, of course, is a handicap that all Conference reports labour under, unless sufficient of them are built up before publication to make a heftier tome.

The 'Introduction' tells us that the intention was to provide 'a concise treatment of Scriptural and reformed worship' and pastors Watts and Silversides have succeeded excellently in doing just that, within the time and space limitations imposed on them by the Conference format.

In his contribution on *"The Importance of Purity of Worship"* Malcolm Watts opens with a wide-ranging consideration of the term 'worship', then homes in on the essence of divine worship, considering *'The Nature of Pure Worship'* in light of:

- a) The Divine glory,
- b) Obligations of the moral law,
- c) God's revelation,
- d) Man's response,

- e) Body and soul,
- f) Bringing an offering,
- g) Only the very best, and
- h) God is in the midst.

Next we pass on to "*The Standard of Pure Worship*" when we are invited to consider:

- a) God's absolute sovereignty,
- b) God's assertion of right,
- c) A faithful ministry,
- d) Specific instructions,
- e) Too strict?
- f) Binding in both Testaments.
- g) A great temptation,
- h) Inevitable judgement,
- i) Reformation, leading to
- j) A summary on the importance of pure worship.

This reviewer was particularly impressed with Pastor Watts' high view of divine worship as an offering- "the sacrifice of our lips"- to an Almighty and All-holy God. How different is this concept to the current English evangelical 'norm' where man is central (getting the congregation in the right mood, or putting emotional pressure on the unconverted) and no real worship (see Malcolm Watts' careful definition) takes place at all! Again one is reminded how naturally hymns and choruses fit in with a man-centred and Arminian theology, and how the Biblical psalms complement our God-centred and God-is-sovereign and all-sufficient Reformation faith. On page 23 we have a solemn warning that "it is Satan's great aim to deny God his honour by corrupting the Biblical ordinances" and at once we think of i) worship practices, and ii) Bible 'versions', and see that the warning cannot be made too often or stressed too strongly today. Pastor Watts concludes with some very appropriate verses from Psalm 102 (Scottish metrical Psalter) and a list of 14 references for further study.

The first of Pastor Silversides' contributions is "*The Westminster Directory of Public Worship*" sub-titled "*A Puritan View*" (i.e. of worship). After a brief historical

resume on the Westminster Assembly attention is focused on the Westminster "*Directory for the public worship of God*", which is taken as a 'representative of the Puritan approach to worship'. Sub headings lead us through:

- a) An awesome view of God and our utter dependence upon Him,
- b) The place of truth-led emotion,
- c) a strong view of order,
- d) Uniformity of worship,
- e) The regulative principle is essential,
- f) Approved parts of worship, and finally,
- g) Festival days.

Here indeed is '*multum in parvo*', much rich and helpful material in a small space, as each of these themes within the Westminster Directory is stated, and then commented on with an eye to relevance in our current situation, leading up to the inescapable conclusion, in light of all this: 'Is anything less than utter submission to God's Word appropriate? We must seek the honour of Him of whom it is written, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2:6). Everything we do in our worship should be in the acknowledgement that Christ is king in Zion. Let us seek to acknowledge His kingship in all our worship, in our hearts and in our outward forms.'" (p.46) *Amen* to that!

Ten references are supplied for further study.

The final paper brings all of this home in the consideration of "*How Should our Churches Worship Today?*" "It is good," says Pastor Silversides. "to look at the past, but not as an escape from the present. Certainly we need to consider what the Puritans did, but we need also to consider what we should be doing"(p.48). And what should we be doing today? Making worship 'relevant' to modern society? Something that will hold the attention and attract the young? The answer is: consider the Scriptures, to understand what we should be doing (and one might add, why we are doing it, if we already are)! Now Biblical worship requires that all present join in worship (that is, the whole Church, or the whole family, or the believer

alone, in private worship) and none be excluded or relegated to the role of 'audience'. It involves a vocalised confession of man's sinfulness and inability, and of God's majesty and sovereignty, indeed the line between prayer and praise is necessarily blurred when sinners come into the presence of Almighty God.

These Biblical concepts of the real sinner-Saviour-Sovereign God relationship on the one hand, and 'entertainment' on the other could not be further apart! On this foundation we are led to consider: a) Instrumental music in the worship of God, b) The abrogation of the use of Old Testament instruments, c) Hymns and Spiritual songs, d) What does 'spiritual' mean? (ever considered that songs could only be called 'Spiritual' if they were indited by the Holy Spirit? That is inspired. Only the Psalms fit that criterion!), e) Other parts of Scripture (i.e. may they be sung in worship?), f) Uninspired hymns, g) The sufficiency of the Psalter, h) The use of spiritual gifts, and finally, i) Is Psalm singing divisive? Again a helpful list of references, in this case a 'select list of recommended books', concludes the paper.

It would be unfair to criticise any production for what it does not contain, and what was never part of the authors' intention, but one feels that important and practical questions are still to be considered (and I know of no current publication that deals with this), especially the issue of just *which* are the metrical Psalms? It is nowhere stated in the book, but it appears that Malcolm Watts takes the view that the Scottish Psalter and traditional Scottish psalm tunes are more or less mandatory to his position (I have the advantage of a tape of the Psalmody sung at the Salisbury conference!). Others will prefer either that Psalter with more up-to-date tunes, or one of the more modern Psalter versions such as *"The Book of Psalms for Singing"* of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). The danger is that we can have almost as many Psalm books as we now have Bible 'versions', and like them they shade from literal

and strict, through loose to downright paraphrase 'imitation' and slang. And how do we maintain that vital ground of singing what is inspired and part of the Bible, as against what is man-made and imperfect, when some Psalm versions are so far from the original as to really qualify as 'hymns' after all? Here lies the great danger to our 'regulative principle' position, and the counter must be to insist that nothing counts as real 'Psalmody' unless it is as literal and accurate a translation, as would be acceptable in a good prose Bible version. (Indeed, we might suggest that a 'metrical' version within the Bible, would be nearer to the original than our current prose translation, and might be simply turned to and sung, without the need for any additional 'book' at all.★)

Does 'strict adherence' to the Westminster Standards mandate the use of the Psalter then in use, and none other (as some would have us believe)? And the same few sixteenth and seventeenth-century tunes? And what of the Puritan practice of 'lining out' the Psalm (yes, there are extreme factions who would have us employ lining-out again, even though it was intended as a help in days when illiteracy was still common). May not even the Psalms be sung carelessly and badly, and should not a seriously 'regulative principle' reformed Church make efforts to practice and improve its psalmody (along with other 'mid-week' activities)? I would just suggest that issues such as these need to be faced and discussed, before the Reformed can offer a united front to the hymn advocates, and checkmate the progressive 'blurring' between Biblical and non-Biblical offerings in worship.

But to return to the subject of this 'review': The presentation and format of the book(let)

★ "Josephus asserts, and most of the ancient writers maintain, that the Psalms were composed in various meters. They have undoubtedly a peculiar conformation of sentences, and a measured distribution of parts. Though the regulations of Hebrew Prosody are now lost there can be no doubt, from the harmonious modulation of the Psalms, that they were written in some kind of metrical order, and must have been composed in accommodation to the measure in which they were set. The Masoretic writers have marked them in a manner different from the other sacred writings." Robert Grey, *'A Key to the Bible'*, 1825.

is excellent, and the paper of high quality—in fact so much so in fact that the pages are so ‘shiny’ that they tend to reflect too much light (especially when read under artificial lighting), but it is hard to criticise a production for being of too high a quality! Get this one, read it, make its arguments your own, be sure you know why you sing Psalms alone (if you do) and why your Church should (if it doesn’t), and pray for a return to ‘uniformity of worship’, according to God’s own regulative principle, in our day and age.

PRaise!

Book Preview: “Praise! Psalms, Hymns and Songs for Christian Worship”, Distributed by the Evangelical Press, Darlington, England.
(Words edition £6:99, Music edition £29:99, publication ‘Autumn 1999’)

Previewed by: Dr. Stephen Westcott.

In view of the above review and comments it may be timely to ‘preview’ a forthcoming production that is fairly inevitably set to sweep the ‘evangelical’ scene in England later this year, for certainly this new effort will be bidding to get the widest possible acceptance across all stripes of the evangelical spectrum, from semi-reformed to charismatic. And you can be sure that it will receive the widest possible publicity, and enthusiastic promotion.

So what is so new, or so sinister or so alarming about yet another new evangelical ‘hymnbook’? Well,

- a) it is coming from what is generally thought of as a broadly ‘Reformed’ source (Evangelical Press) and
- b) it *claims* to be a **Psalter** (Psalm book) as well as a hymn book.

This production, we are told, meets “A clear need for a new and comprehensive book of psalms, hymns and songs for Christian worship....this book combines all three, to provide a single song book which is sufficient for all occasions, reflects the language of today, and is faithful to Scripture.”

So here, at once, is that blurring of inspired and non-inspired. The very sub-title of this work (echoing the “Psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs” of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16) twists Scripture to suggest the modernistic view that man-made ‘hymns’ are advocated in the Epistles (where all sound commentators understand the titles and divisions of the Biblical Psalter). Do we then, at least, have a book with an inspired first-part, then two man-made sections? Indeed we are informed that “At least one version of every Old Testament psalm is provided”, and some very complementary things are added about the Psalms. But again let us be careful to note the ‘code’ language: OLD TESTAMENT PSALMS. The claim that is as old as the early Gnostics, that was revived by Benjamin Keach in the C17 and Isaac Watts in the C18 and echoed by Joseph Irons in the C19, “the psalms are part of the Old Testament worship, we need new ‘psalms’ for the New Testament” (“and, as the Holy Ghost has not seen fit to inspire any for us, we are at liberty to write our own!”) Such teaching completely fails to grasp the eternal spiritual nature of the Psalms, the use of typology and symbolism, and above all the complete and final all-sufficiency of the Bible.

But allow this production to be your Psalter and you will do so at the price of being told that this is the ‘Old Testament’ part of worship (and we all know that the O.T. is fulfilled in the New). And as we are Christians and not Jews (but, pardon me, *we are* the Spiritual Israel and *we* dwell in “the tents of Shem”, the root bears us and not us the root) so we pass on to the New Testament praise section of the Book: ‘updated’ old favourite hymns, and new hymns and songs. How invidious it all is!

And then why, one wonders, include those 150 Psalms to sing at all? Can it be that the faithful remnant have been making an impact after all, and the issue just will not go away? Let us return to what is claimed to be “at least one version of every Old Testament psalm”. If that statement were to be made about any other Bible Book, Old or New Testament, we would expect a faithful attempt to reproduce the original Hebrew or Greek in English. That

is, after all, being "faithful to Scripture", and that is what this book claims. With growing amazement we read ; "The psalm versions range from those that stay close to the text of the original psalm and cover every verse, to hymns that are more loosely based on the broader theme of the psalm. Psalms which make clear reference to Christ or his church have frequently been interpreted in the light of the New Testament." How about a version of the rest of God's Holy Word, "loosely based" on what is decided to be the "broader theme" of each passage, and then the whole re-worked in light of the translator's theological view of how it should be understood "in light of the New Testament"! I guess that would out-paraphrase even the sloppiest and slangiest paraphrase God is insulted with already! And yet this is openly done, with the largest single block of literature in God's inspired word!

And note, very carefully indeed, that here we do not have a song-book in three parts (Psalms, Hymns, Songs) as all the advance literature would have us believe. We have some Psalms (close literal renderings), some paraphrased psalms, some re-written hymns based loosely on the psalms, then closely Bible imitating hymns, looser hymns, shading out to the innovative new songs. By this gradation the vital difference is eroded, blurred, destroyed!

No-one, in the Psalms section, can be sure whether he or she is offering inspired or man-made worship! And you can rest assured that our isolated Reformed faithful, urging Biblical psalms (or begging for at least an admixture of Psalms so that they can, in good conscience, vocally worship God) in their churches and fellowships across the nation will soon be confronted with this new production, given an occasional selection from 'part 1: psalms' and made to feel very self-righteous and Pharisaic indeed if they demur (however extreme the paraphrase may be). We rightly rejected and continue to reject Bibles with the 'Apocrypha', because what God has written cannot be confounded with what is man-made. Here (in this new song-book)

the 'apocrypha' far outweighs the Biblical. Let all those who would genuinely seek to be Biblically reformed have nothing to do with this forthcoming production! Are there, then, lessons to be learned from this? Indeed there are. We may claim the regulative principle and make our boast of adherence to the Psalms in worship. Fine.

But the Presbyterian churches have allowed a plethora of Psalm versions and renderings to build up, many of which themselves shade away from accuracy for the sake of 'tune' and 'popularity'. The reformed who genuinely believe in the regulative principle in worship can only defend that position if they have a clear antithesis from, and not common ground with, evangelical hymn-singers. Our rock, fortress and citadel is that what we offer in sung worship is inspired, a God-provided part of the Bible. If the Hebrew psalms were indeed metrical, then the metrical English version (or whatever language version you care to name) must be provably at least as textually and verbally accurate as our common 'prose' version. This does not necessarily mean exactly the old Puritan versions. But it does mean that we must take seriously the task of developing our Psalmody (and then tunes, and after that singing abilities) if we are not to be marginalised and swamped, and if (far more vitally) our Sovereign God is to receive worship well-pleasing to Him.

(And, by the by, if you believe that the regulative principle excludes 'instrumental music' in worship here is what "Praise!" offers; "Guitar chords are given throughout". Yes, that includes all the Psalms, genuine, adulterated or spurious!)

Stephen Westcott. Bristol 1999.

Let us come before His
presence with thanksgiving
and make a joyful noise
unto Him with
Psalms.

Psalm 95 : 2.

British Reformed Fellowship

Founded in 1990 by a group of Reformed Christians concerned for the defence of the Historic Reformed Faith in the British Isles

SECRETARY:

Mr. Philip Rainey
26 Caldwell Park
Portrush
Co. ANTRIM
BT56 8PJ
N. IRELAND

Secretarial Office

Telephone: 01265 82 39 13

E-Mail philip.t.rainey@lineone.net

To which all subscriptions should be sent for membership in the British Reformed Fellowship and for the British Reformed Journal, and any other correspondence not concerned with matters for printing in the Journal.

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2) The Doctrines set forth in :

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The Belgic Confession,

The Heidelberg Catechism

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- (a) To promote a knowledge of the Reformed Faith in the British Isles, as defined in the Doctrinal Basis.**
- (b) To organise meetings, conferences, preaching services and other activities in order to further the Reformed Faith and to give practical expression to the unity enjoyed by Christians of Reformed persuasion.**
- (c) To encourage the formation of groups in different areas of the country who will seek to promote the Reformed Faith on a local level.**