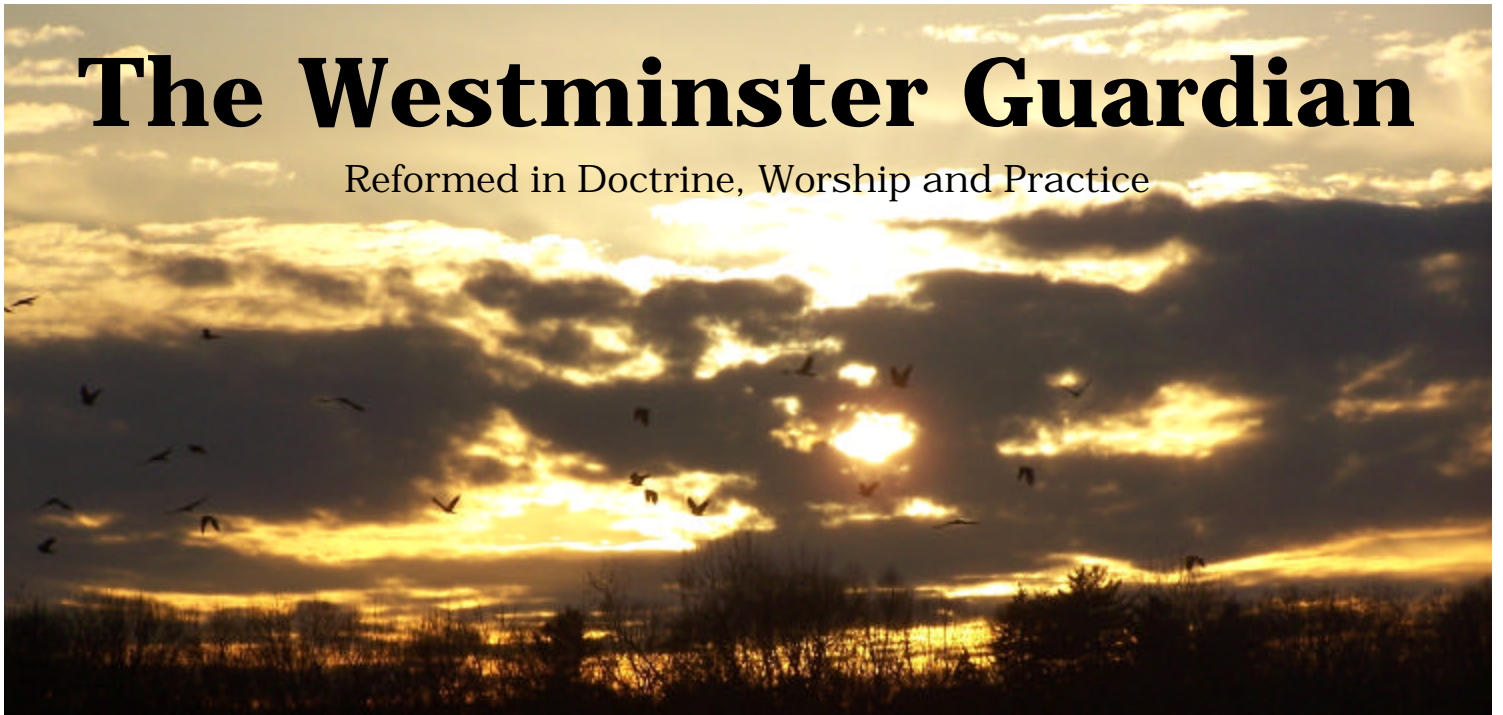


The Westminster Guardian

Reformed in Doctrine, Worship and Practice



Issued by the Publications Committee of the
Westminster Presbyterian Church in the United States
website: <http://www.wpcus.org>

Table of Contents

- Exclusive Psalmody: A Biblical Defense *Page 2*
Rev. Brian Schwertley, B. A., M. Div.

- Select Works of James Begg on Worship *Page 12*
Mr. Greg Fox

- A Preliminary Discourse to Catechizing *Page 15*
Thomas Watson

- The Westminster Standards and the Civil Magistrate *Page 17*
Mr. Brian M. Hanley

- Letter: Are You Being Schismatic? *Page 20*

Vol 1

March 2009

No 1

Introduction

One of the most (if not the most) important activities that believers engage in is the worship of the thrice holy, triune God of Scripture. While all Christians agree as to the importance of worship, there is not agreement as to the content of worship. Some churches sing hymns of merely human composition; some churches sing uninspired hymns and inspired songs from the biblical Psalter, while some churches sing only from the 150 Psalms of the Bible. Using the book of Psalms alone as the manual of praise in the church is referred to as exclusive Psalmody. Today exclusive Psalmody is so rare among churches that many people have never heard of it or

God was angry because they did not follow “the due order...as Moses commanded

encountered it. When some people do encounter it, they often think it is odd, antiquated, and dull. What most Christians do not know is that at one time most

churches practiced exclusive Psalmody. During the sixteenth, seventeenth, and most of the eighteenth centuries, the book of Psalms was used as the only manual of praise in Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The purpose of this study is to show from Scripture that Reformed worship, or exclusive Psalmody, is not just a bizarre tradition inherited from Calvin or Knox, but is the teaching of God’s holy word.[1] “This is necessary, for due to our Church’s long continued practice of the apostolic and Reformed mode of worship, there is persistent danger that people outside our Church will regard our worship as simply the perpetuation of an ancient tradition, and as not broad-based on Scripture.”[2] It is our earnest prayer that this little book will be used of God to bring many of our Reformed and non-Reformed brethren back to the purity of worship attained by the Calvinist wing of the Reformation.

The Scriptural Law of Worship

There are a number of important doctrines in the Bible which are deduced from many parts of Scripture and cannot be conclusively proven from one or two verses. Exclusive Psalm singing is one such doctrine. Exclusive Psalmody flows directly from the overall teaching of Scripture regarding the worship of Jehovah. The Bible teaches that “the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in holy Scripture.”[3] When it comes to the elements of worship and the content of praise, we must have a warrant from God’s word. God sets the parameters on what is permissible in worship, not man. In other words, anything that the church does in worship must be proven from the Bible. This proof can be attained by an explicit command of God

(e.g., “Do this in remembrance of Me,” Luke 22:19); or by logical inference from Scripture (i.e., there may not be an explicit command, but when several passages are compared, they teach or infer a scriptural practice); or by biblical historical example (e.g., the change from the seventh day to the first day of the week for corporate public worship).

The Reformed doctrine of worship called the scriptural law of worship; the puritan principle of worship; or, the regulative principle of worship is clearly taught in both the Old and New Testaments.[4] In Genesis 4:3-5 we read that God rejected Cain’s offering of the fruit of the ground, but accepted Abel’s offering of animal sacrifices. Why? Because even though offering fruit is not prohibited, it also was not commanded. Leviticus 10:1-2 records that God killed Nadab and Abihu because they offered strange fire, which God “commanded them not.” The offering of strange fire is not prohibited in Scripture, but it also is not commanded. In Deuteronomy 12:32, in the specific context of avoiding false heathen worship practices, God said, “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (cf. Deuteronomy 4:2; Jeremiah 7:24,31; 19:5; 1 Kings 12:32-33; Numbers 15:39-40). In 2 Samuel 6:3-7 we read of God’s judgment on David’s men who were moving the ark. Why were they judged? God was angry because they did not follow “the due order...as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord” (1 Chronicles 15:13-15). Jesus chided the Pharisees for adding to God’s law: “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?” (Matthew 15:3). Jesus told the women at the well that “they that worship Him [God] must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). When Jesus Christ gave orders to the apostles before His ascension into heaven, did He give the church the authority to make up their own doctrine, government, worship, and holy days? Absolutely not! He said to teach “them [the nations] to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus told the Pharisees who made up their own rules regarding

The biblical teaching regarding worship is crystal clear. The church’s job is not to innovate and create new worship

worship, “In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). Paul says

that adding the commandments and doctrines of men to Christianity is “self imposed religion, false humility” and is of “no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Colossians 2:20-23).

The biblical teaching regarding worship is crystal clear. The church’s job is not to innovate and create new worship forms or ordinances, but simply to see what God has declared in His word and obey it. “The power of the church is purely ministerial and declarative. She is only to hold forth the doctrine, enforce the laws, and execute the government which Christ has given to her. She is to add nothing of her own to, and to subtract nothing from what her Lord has es-

ablished. Discretionary power she does not possess.”[5]

John W. Keddie writes,

The great Church historian William Cunningham pointed out that the implication of this [principle] ‘if it were fully carried out, would just be to leave the Church in the condition in which it was left by the Apostles, in so far as we have any means of information—a result, surely, which need not be very alarming, except to those who think that they themselves have very superior powers for improving and adorning the Church by their inventions’ [The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation, p. 32]. It scarcely needs to be pointed out that the consequences of the adoption of the laxer view—a basically permissive one, and unquestionably the predominant one today even in evangelical churches—has been the tendency for biblical materials in worship to be displaced and countless innovations of one sort or another, having no warrant in God’s word, to be introduced.[6]

The regulative principle of worship is crucial in understanding exclusive Psalmody, for while there is abundant biblical evidence that Psalms were used for praise in both the Old and New Testament eras, there is no evidence in the Bible that God’s people ever used uninspired human compositions in public worship. Churches which use uninspired hymns in public worship must prove that such a practice has biblical warrant from either a command, historical example, or by deduction. In a moment we will examine the standard arguments used by Reformed authors to justify the use of uninspired songs in public worship. It will be shown that these arguments are based on either a faulty exegesis of Scripture, a misunderstanding or perversion of the regulative principle (e.g. praise as a circumstance of worship), or on unsubstantiated speculation (e.g., the hymn fragment argument). We will see that the Calvinistic Reformers, Scottish Presbyterians, French Huguenots, Dutch Reformed, and English and American Puritans were biblically correct in maintaining exclusive Psalmody.

The Testimony of Scripture: Is Psalm Singing Commanded? Is Uninspired Hymn Singing Authorized?

The question regarding whether or not God’s church is required by God to sing the Psalms in public worship may seem absurd, yet there are Reformed pastors and scholars opposed to exclusive Psalmody who actually argue that singing the Psalms is not required.[7] One pastor has argued that while the Scripture requires believers to sing praise, it does not require the singing of Psalms in worship. A Reformed Baptist scholar says that, “since neither the Old nor the New Testament directly command the singing of Psalms by the congregation in the public worship of God, we can see that it is a privilege more than a duty.”[8] The reason that opponents of exclusive Psalmody argue that Psalm singing is not commanded is that if the singing of uninspired songs is not by divine appointment, then one could argue that the content of praise is a circumstance of worship. Arguing that the Psalms are not commanded is an attempt to circumvent the regulative principle of worship. If it can be shown from Scripture that the singing of inspired song was by divine appointment, then the singing of

uninspired human compositions is automatically excluded from public worship. One must show a divine prescription for the use of uninspired songs in Scripture. This (as noted below) is impossible.

Those who argue that Psalm-singing is not commanded and therefore is merely a circumstance of worship must ignore a wealth of scriptural evidence. The singing of the Spirit-inspired Psalms is supported by specific command, historical example, and deduction.

1. Specific Commands

The book of Psalms contains several commands to praise Jehovah with the singing of Psalms.

Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth; Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises. Sing to the LORD with the harp, With the harp and the sound of a psalm, With trumpets and the sound of a horn; Shout joyfully before the LORD, the King. Psalm 98:4-6

Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works! Psalm 105:2

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms (Psalm 95:1-2; cf. Psalms 81:1-2; 100:2).

2. Designed by God for Singing

That the book of Psalms is clearly designed by God to be sung is indicated by the musical terminology found in the Psalm titles and throughout the Psalms themselves. There is the mention of chief musicians and various types of musical instruments as well as the names of melodies by which certain Psalms were to be sung. The Psalms are constantly referred to as songs, psalms (melodious songs), and hymns. While it is true that the Psalms can be read, chanted, prayed, and so on, they were and are clearly intended to be sung by God’s people.

3. Historical Examples

There are several biblical historical examples of Psalms used in public worship recorded in the Bible (cf. 1 Chronicles 16; 2 Chronicles 5:13; 20:21; 29:30; Ezra 3:11). “There are, in fact, numerous indications in the Scriptures that the Psalms or their contemporary (inspired) counterparts were not only performed by the Levitical choirs before the people of God, but taught diligently to the ‘common’ people as well (e.g., Exodus 15:1; 2 Samuel 1:18; 2 Chronicles 23:13; Psalms 30:4; 137:1 ff.; Matthew 26:30; James 5:13).”[9]

4. Placed in the Canon

The fact that God has placed within the canon of inspired Scripture a collection of 150 worship songs itself proves that God requires these songs to be used in public worship. Bushell writes,

The Lord has given to us in Scripture a whole book of inspired psalms and then has commanded us to ‘sing psalms.’ Quite apart from the question of whether or not we

may sing other songs in worship, is it not the height of foolishness and impiety to stare the Lord in the face, as it were, and insist that we have no obligation to sing the particular psalms that He has been gracious enough to place in our hands? We would argue that the inclusion of a collection of songs in the canon of Scripture, without any demonstrable limits to their use, constitutes a divine command to use the whole of that book in services of worship. If the Lord hands us a book of psalms, as He has done, and commands us to sing psalms, we have no right, without further instruction, to exclude certain psalms from those that are made available to the Church.[10]

Those who argue that the placing of an inspired hymn-book in the middle of the canon is not significant and is not a clear indication of what God intends to be used in the church's worship "might as well argue that the composition of the canon provides no specific indication that the sixty-six books in the canon are those to be used when the word of God is read in the church's worship." [11]

Only Inspired Songs Used

A careful examination of the Scripture passages which discuss the songs used in worship and how worship songs were composed reveals that God only authorizes and accepts divinely inspired songs for the praise of Himself. "If when the Bible speaks of the source of worship song, it portrays the text as one produced by divine inspiration, then inspiration is a biblical norm for this ordinance as well." [12] There are so many examples in the Bible which show the connection between writing songs of praise for the church and prophetic inspiration that it is astounding that this point has been largely ignored by those who claim to hold to the regulative principle. There is the example of the prophetess Miriam who, by divine inspiration, composed a song to celebrate God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 15:20-21). We also have the inspired song of Deborah the prophetess (Judges 5). There are the Spirit-inspired songs of the prophet Isaiah (e.g. 5:1, 26:1 ff., etc.) as well as the divinely inspired song of Mary (Luke 1:46 ff.). If 1 Corinthians 14:26 refers to Christians composing songs for public worship, these songs were "as is universally admitted, charismatic songs and therefore products of the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit." [13] (The question of whether the new covenant church should sing divinely inspired songs outside of the book of Psalms is dealt with below.)

The Old Testament saints whom God used to write the Psalter wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Note once again that prophetic inspiration and the writing of songs of praise go hand in hand. King David, whom the Bible calls a prophet (2 Chronicles 29:25-30), wrote his songs by a special gift of the Holy Spirit (2 Samuel 23:1, 2; Acts 1:16). The New Testament repeatedly refers to David as a prophet when it quotes his songs (cf. Matthew 22:43-44; Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16-17; 2:29-31; 4:24-25). The worship of the temple musicians and singers is referred to as prophecy in Scripture (1 Chronicles 25:1-7). This designation, when applied to song content, obviously means that what they sang was the product of divine inspiration. Thus, the temple musicians and singers who were involved in writing songs for worship did so under the special operation of the Spirit. Heman (who was appointed

by David as a worship leader of the sanctuary) is called a seer (1 Chronicles 25:5) in Scripture; a term synonymous with the word prophet.

Bushell writes,

Prophetic titles and roles are consistently attributed to the chief temple musicians and singers. Asaph, for example, one of David's principle musicians (1 Chronicles 6:39; 15:17; 16:5 ff.; 2 Chronicles 5:12), appointed by him over the service of song and by Solomon in the Temple service, is also called a 'seer' and placed alongside David as far as authority in Temple music is concerned (2 Chronicles 29:30). Nor ought we to miss the significance of the fact that some 12 of the Old Testament Psalms (50, 73-83) are attributed to Asaph, thus confirming his role as a writer of inspired worship song. Jeduthun, another chief temple singer, is also called a 'seer' (2 Chronicles 35:15; cf. 25:1; and Psalms 39, 62, and 77 titles). [14]

The writing of worship songs in the Old Testament was so intimately connected with prophetic inspiration that 2 Kings 23:2 and 2 Chronicles 34:30 use the term Levite and "prophet" interchangeably. The worship of Jehovah is so important that nothing less than infallible Spirit-inspired lyrics are acceptable for praise in the church.

James A. Kennedy writes,

What is praise? The word is derived from the word 'price.' But who knows God's price or value? To prepare a complete and sufficient manual of praise one must know, on the one hand, all the divine excellences, for they are to be set forth in sufficient measure and due proportion; and, on the other hand, the whole range of human devotional feeling called forth by contemplating the divine perfections. But such vast knowledge is only possible to one to whom a divine revelation has been made. And to give adequate expression to this knowledge, divine inspiration is an absolute prerequisite. God evidently deemed it necessary to have His praises prepared thus, for as a matter of fact He inspired David, Asaph, and others to compose them. And He never puts forth divine power unless it is necessary. God kept the manual of praise strictly under His control. Why should he be indifferent to this matter now? And why should we be put off without a divine book for this dispensation? Are we not as worthy of such a perfect book as the Old Testament Church? [15]

There have been attempts (by opponents of exclusive Psalmody) to refute the assertion that divine inspiration was a requirement for the composition of worship songs to be used by the church. One author argues that the Scripture only requires theological accuracy in the composition of worship songs. The problem with his argument is that he does not offer any scriptural texts or examples to back up his claim—not one. Another author quotes several examples of worship songs that are not found in the book of Psalms as proof that divine inspiration was not necessary. The problem with this person's argument is that every song he refers to

was given by divine inspiration (e.g. Exodus 15:20-21; Judges 5; Isaiah 5:1; 26:1 ff.; Luke 1:46 ff.; 1 Corinthians 14:26). His own argument is self-refuting. Another author quotes from Isaiah 38:20 (“The Lord was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord”) as proof that uninspired songs were used in public worship in the Old Testament era.[16] This author assumes that since these songs, written by King Hezekiah, were never inscripturated into the canon, therefore they must be uninspired. This argument falls to the ground when we consider that many prophecies and inspired writings were not included in our Bibles. (There are Old Testament prophets named of whom we have no surviving oracles. There is the missing letter of Paul to the Corinthians as well as the volumes of sayings, proverbs, and teachings that Christ spoke to His disciples, etc.). The fact that Hezekiah’s songs (except the one recorded in Isaiah 38) were not inscripturated does not tell us at all whether or not they were inspired. In fact, the passage under discussion, if anything, indicates that his songs were inspired. Note the transition from the singular (me) to the plural (we). The king identifies himself with the Levitical choir of the Temple, which as noted above functioned as a musical prophetic guild. In any case, there certainly is not a shred of evidence that Hezekiah composed uninspired songs. That assertion is assumed, not proven.

There are “Reformed” pastors who argue that the fact that every instance of worship song in the Bible is divinely inspired holds no significance for today’s church. They reason that since worship songs are in the Bible, which in itself is divinely inspired, they of necessity must also be inspired. This reasoning is fallacious for two reasons. First, the Bible contains many infallibly recorded statements of uninspired people speaking. The Bible records people lying, people with bad theology, and even Satan lying to Jesus. No one would argue that Satan’s lies were divinely inspired. Second, and even more significant, is the fact that the Holy Spirit emphasizes that worship songs came not from any one who decided to write a song, but only from seers and prophets. The only way to argue against the sole use of divinely inspired songs in the church is to abandon the regulative principle of worship, either explicitly or by subterfuge. Abandoning the scriptural laws of worship places one outside of Reformed Christianity (with regard to worship) and sets him squarely in the Episcopal, Lutheran, and Anabaptist camp.

The Psalms and Apostolic Worship

The Bible teaches that the Psalms were sung for public and private worship in the apostolic church. The singing of divinely inspired songs in worship is not only an Old Testament worship ordinance, but also a new covenant era ordinance.

Matthew 26:30

In fact, it was Jesus Himself who specifically used the Psalms for praise when He introduced the New Testament ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. Both Matthew and Mark tell us that immediately after the institution of the Lord’s Supper Jesus and the apostles sang a hymn. “And when they had sung a

hymn [lit. ‘when they had hymned’], they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matthew 26:30; cf. Mark 14:24). It should be noted, as will be demonstrated below, that the word hymn as used in our English Bibles frequently refers to selections from the Book of Psalms. Thus the majority of commentators believe that the word hymn here refers to a Psalm or Psalms from the Hallel (i.e., Psalms 113-118).

James Morison writes,

Or Psalm, as it is in the margin and the Geneva: or very literally, And when they had hymned (humnesantes). The word does not imply that it was but one hymn or psalm that was sung or chanted. And if the tradition, preserved among the Jews, is of any weight in such a matter, the hymning at the conclusion of the supper would embrace Psalms cxv., cxvi., cxviii., which constitute the second part of the Jewish Hallelujah, or Hallel, as they call it. The other part of the Hallel consisted of Psalms cxiii., cxiv., which it was customary to chant at the commencement of the feast.[17]

Matthew Henry points out (in his commentary on the passage) that if Jesus and the disciples had departed from the normal Jewish practice of singing the Psalms after the Paschal meal, it probably would have been recorded in the Gospel accounts, for it would have been a new practice. He then writes,

Singing of psalms is a gospel-ordinance. Christ’s removing the hymn from the close of the Passover to the close of the Lord’s Supper, plainly intimates that he intended that ordinance should continue in his church, that, as it had not its birth with the ceremonial law, so it should not die with it.[18]

The Holy Spirit tells us that the Lord of glory sang Psalms at the institution of the Lord’s Supper.

Bushell writes,

Psalmody and the Lord’s Supper are no more separable now than psalmody and the Passover ritual were in Old Testament times. There is thus no instance of Scripture that shows more clearly than this the abiding significance of the Old Testament Psalms for the New Testament Church.[19]

Does your church follow the example of Jesus Christ and the Apostles by singing the Spirit-inspired Psalms of Scripture whenever you partake of the body and blood of our precious Savior?

It is providential that when Jesus was about to enter the humiliation, torture, agony, abandonment, and darkness of Golgotha He had the words of victory upon His lips.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing; It is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the house of the Lord. God is the Lord, and He has given us light; bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I will praise You; You are my God, I will exalt You. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. (Psalms 118:22-29).

If the head of the church choose the Spirit-inspired Psalms for praise, comfort, and edification, should not His bride do likewise? Who are we to set aside the ordinance of the Son of God?

Acts 16:25

In Acts 16 Paul and Silas are cast into “the inner prison” (v. 24) as a result of mob influence upon the civil magistrates at Philippi. Luke records that “at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God” (v. 25). The verb used in this passage (*humneo*) translated as “singing hymns” (NKJV, NIV, RSV), “sang praises” (KJV), “sang hymns” (ASV), “singing hymns of praise” (NASB) is the same word used to describe Psalm singing in Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:24 (cf. also the section below on Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16). Given the fact that pious Jews often committed many of the Psalms to memory for devotional use, many commentators believe Paul and Silas were singing from the book of Psalms.

Kistemaker writes,

Paul and Silas not only edify and strengthen themselves, but also provide a witness and a source of encouragement to the other prisoners who listen to their prayers and psalms (compare Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; James 5:13).[20]

Lenski writes,

What hymns they sang we, of course, do not know, but the psalms of David have ever been dear to those who suffer, especially also to those who suffer wrong.[21]

Hackett writes,

...their worship consisted chiefly of thanksgiving, the language of which they would derive more or less from the Psalms.[22]

Alexander says,

Praying, hymned (or sang to) God, seems to express, not two distinct acts but the single act of lyrical worship, or praying by singing or chanting, perhaps one or more of the many passages in the Book of Psalms peculiarly adapted and intended for the use of prisoners and others under persecution. [23]

Although there is no way for us to know conclusively what Paul and Silas sang, given the fact that there is not a shred of evidence for uninspired hymnody within the New Testament, it is very likely that they were singing Psalms. Additionally, we have to keep in mind that the word *hymn* as used in the Scriptures frequently refers to the contents of the Book of Psalms, and in no instance clearly refers to uninspired hymns of human composition. “In any event, there is certainly no evidence here requiring the supposition that materials other than Biblical Psalms would have been used—quite the reverse.”[24]

Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16

Two passages which are crucial to the exclusive Psalmody debate are Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. These

passages are important because they are used as proof texts by both exclusive Psalm singers and those who use uninspired hymns in worship. Paul writes,

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:18-19).

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. (Colossians 3:16).

Before we consider the question of how these passages relate to public worship, we first will consider the question “what does Paul mean by psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs?” This question is very important, for many advocates of uninspired hymnody (who claim to adhere to the regulative principle) point to this passage as proof that uninspired hymns are permitted in public worship by God. When examining passages such as Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, one should not make the common mistake of importing our modern meaning or usage of a word, such as *hymn*, into what Paul wrote over nineteen hundred years ago. When a person hears the word *hymn* today, he immediately thinks of the extra-biblical non-inspired hymns found in the pews of most churches. The only way to really determine what Paul meant by “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” is to determine how these terms were used by Greek-speaking Christians in the first century.

When interpreting religious terminology used by Paul in his epistles, there are certain rules of interpretation which should be followed. First, the religious thinking and world view of the apostles was essentially from the Old Testament and Jesus Christ, not Greek heathenism. Therefore, when Paul discusses doctrine or worship, the first place to look for help in understanding religious terms is the Old Testament. We often find Hebrew expressions or terms expressed in koine Greek. Second, we must keep in mind that the churches that Paul founded in Asia consisted of converted Jews, Gentile proselytes to Old Testament Judaism (God-fearers), and Gentile pagans. These churches had a Greek version of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. When Paul expressed Old Testament ideas to a Greek-speaking audience, he would use the religious terminology of the Septuagint. If the terms *hymns* (*humnois*) and *spiritual songs* (*odais pneumatikais*) were defined within the New Testament, then looking to the Septuagint for the meaning of these words would be unnecessary. Given the fact, however, that these terms are rarely used in the New Testament and cannot be defined within their immediate context apart from a knowledge of the Old Testament, it would be exegetically irresponsible to ignore how these words are used in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament.

When we examine the Septuagint, we find that the terms *psalm* (*psalmos*), *hymn* (*humnos*), and *song* (*odee*) used by Paul clearly refer to the Old Testament book of Psalms and not to ancient or modern uninspired hymns or songs.

Bushell writes:

Psalms occurs some 87 times in the Septuagint, some 78 of which are in the Psalms themselves, and 67 times in the psalm titles. It also forms the title to the Greek version of the psalter. *Humnos* occurs some 17 times in the Septuagint, 13 of which are in the Psalms, six times in the titles. In 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah there are some 16 examples in which the Psalms are called ‘hymns’ (*humnoi*) or ‘songs’ (*odai*) and the singing of them is called ‘hymning’ (*humneo*, *humnodeo*, *humnesis*). *Ode* occurs some 80 times in the Septuagint, 45 of which are in the Psalms, 36 in the Psalm titles.[25]

In twelve Psalm titles we find both psalm and song; and, in two others we find psalm and hymn. “Psalm seventy-six is designated ‘psalm, hymn and song.’ And at the end of the first seventy two psalms we read ‘the hymns of David the son of Jesse are ended’ (Ps. 72:20). In other words, there is no more reason to think that the Apostle referred to psalms when he said ‘psalms,’ than when he said ‘hymns’ and ‘songs,’ for all three were biblical terms for (the) psalms in the book of psalms itself.”[26] To ignore how Paul’s audience would have understood these terms and how these terms are defined by the Bible; and then instead to import non-biblical modern meanings into these terms is exegetical malpractice.

One of the most common objections against the idea that in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 Paul is speaking of the book of Psalms is that it would be absurd for apostle to say, “sing psalms, psalms, and psalms.” This objection fails to consider the fact that a common literary method among the ancient Jews was to use a triadic form of expression to express an idea, act, or object. The Bible contains many examples of triadic expression. For example: Exodus 34:7—“iniquity and transgression and sin”; Deuteronomy 5:31 and 6:1—“commandments and statutes and judgments”; Matthew 22:37—“with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (cf. Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27); Acts 2:22—“miracles and wonders and signs”; Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16—“psalms and hymns and spiritual song.” “The triadic distinction used by Paul would be readily understood by those familiar with their Hebrew OT Psalter or the Greek Septuagint, where the Psalm titles are differentiated psalms, hymns, and songs. This interpretation does justice to the analogy of Scripture, i.e., Scripture is its own best interpreter.”[27]

The interpretation that says that “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” refers to the inspired book of Psalms also receives biblical support from the immediate context and grammar of these passages. In Colossians 3:16 we are exhorted: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” In this passage the word of Christ is very likely synonymous with the word of God.

In 1 Pet. 1:11 it is stated that ‘the spirit of Christ’ was in the Old Testament prophets and through them testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory which should follow. If, as is definitely stated, the Spirit of Christ testified these things through the prophets, then Christ was the real Author of those Scriptures. Prominent among those prophecies, which so testified concerning Christ, is the Book of Psalms, and therefore Christ is the Author of the Psalms.[28]

After Paul exhorts the Colossian church to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly, he immediately points them to the book of Psalms; a book which comprehends “most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible;”[29] a book far superior to any human devotional book, which Calvin called “an anatomy of all parts of the soul;”[30] a book which is “a compendium of all divinity.”[31] Do we let the Scriptures, the word of Christ dwell within us when we sing uninspired human compositions in worship? No, we do not! If we are to sing and meditate upon the word of Christ, we must sing the songs that Christ has written by His Spirit—the book of Psalms.

The grammar also supports the contention that Paul was speaking of the book of Psalms. In our English Bibles the adjective *spiritual* only applies to the word *songs* (“spiritual songs”). In the Greek language, however, when an adjective immediately follows two or more nouns, it applies to all the preceding nouns.

John Murray writes,

Why does the word *pneumatikos* [spiritual][32] qualify *odais* and not *psalmois* and *hymnois*? A reasonable answer to this question is that *pneumatikais* qualifies all three datives and that its gender (*fem.*) is due to attraction to the gender of the noun that is closest to it. Another distinct possibility, made particularly plausible by the omission of the copulative in Colossians 3:16, is that ‘Spiritual songs’ are the genus of which ‘psalms’ and ‘hymns’ are the species. This is the view of Meyer, for example. On either of these assumptions the psalms, hymns, and songs are all ‘Spiritual’ and therefore all inspired by the Holy Spirit. The bearing of this upon the question at issue is perfectly apparent. Uninspired hymns are immediately excluded.[33]

If one wants to argue that *spiritual* does not apply to psalms and hymns, then one must answer two pertinent questions. First, why would Paul insist on divine inspiration for songs, yet permit uninspired hymns? We can safely assume that Paul was not irrational. Second, given the fact that psalms refers to divinely inspired songs, it would be unscriptural not to apply *spiritual* to that term. Furthermore, since we have already established that the phrase “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” refers to the divinely inspired book of Psalms, it is only natural to apply *spiritual* to all three terms. Since the book of Psalms is composed of divinely inspired (or spiritual) psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, we obey God only when we praise Him using the biblical Psalter. Uninspired hymns do not meet the scriptural criteria for authorized praise.

Another question that needs to be considered regarding these passages is: “Do these passages refer to formal public worship services or to informal Christian gatherings?” Since Paul is discussing the mutual edification of believers by singing inspired songs in private worship situations, it would be inconsistent on his part to allow uninspired songs in the more formal public worship settings. “What is proper or improper to be sung in one instance must be seen as proper or improper to be sung in the other. Worship is still worship, whatever its circumstances and regardless of the

number of people involved.”[34] “If psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are the limits of the material of songs in praise of God in less formal acts of worship, how much more are they the limits in more formal acts of worship?”[35]

James 5:13

James 5:13 says “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.” The verb translated sing psalms in the KJV can also legitimately be translated sing praise. The phrase sing praise (psalleteo) itself does not identify the content of what is used to sing praise. Therefore, one must let Scripture interpret Scripture in order to determine its meaning. In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 the noun form of this word (psalmois) refers to the Old Testament Psalms. In 1 Corinthians 14, it refers either to Old Testament Psalms or to divinely inspired songs not preserved in the New Testament canon. In Romans 15:9, it is used in a citation from the Septuagint version of Psalm 18:49. This citation alludes to the Messiah praising God among the nations. When Christ praised Jehovah during his earthly ministry He used the Old Testament Psalms (cf. Matthew 26:30).

There is not a shred of biblical evidence that James 5:13 refers to uninspired praise. All the scriptural evidence points in the opposite direction: Spirit-inspired praise. Therefore, this passage cannot be used as a proof text for uninspired materials in worship.

1 Corinthians 14:15, 26

In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul deals with revelatory gifts and the need for intelligibility in the assembly for the edification of the body. He also deals with the closely related issue of proper order in public worship. In this context Paul speaks of the praise as practiced at Corinth:

15I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.

26Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

Although there are writers who believe that these passages refer to Old Testament Psalms, the majority of interpreters believe that Paul is referring to a type of charismatic hymnody. That is, there were believers at Corinth who received songs of praise by the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Whatever position one holds to regarding these passages, one thing is certain: divine inspiration was a prerequisite for writing worship songs at Corinth. Therefore, this passage cannot be used to support the uninspired hymnody practiced today. Since in God’s providence none of these inspired songs were inscripturated, their use was limited to the first century prior to the close of the canon.

These passages, however, are often used to raise a question regarding the sufficiency of the book of Psalms for praise in the new covenant era. If the book of Psalms is sufficient for praise in new covenant churches, then why were other inspired songs of praise used? These passages do not disprove exclusive Psalmody for two reasons. First, these passages do not refer to congregational singing, but rather to a single individual

who speaks in tongues or prophecies while singing. Since the revelatory gifts have ceased, this practice is no longer a part of congregational worship. Second, the churches in the apostolic age had to function without a complete New Testament to interpret the Old Testament, thus direct revelation was needed.

Bushell writes,

The Old Testament psalms are in a sense insufficient for the worship needs of the Church in this dispensation, but only in the sense that they require the interpretation of the completed New Testament canon to be properly understood, used, and sung. God may well have given the Corinthians such charismatic songs to ‘fill the gap’ until this need was met. This was, in fact, what the charismatic gifts were all about. So the presence of charismatic singing in the early days of the Church cannot be offered as justification for composing new songs now, any more than the exercise of prophetic gifts in the same context can be seen as suggesting the need for new prophetic oracles in the present day.[36]

Furthermore, even if one accepts the interpretation that 1 Corinthians 14:15, 26 proves that churches today can sing other songs besides the book of Psalms, these passages would only permit the few inspired songs given in Scripture that are not in the book of Psalms and no others. When the revelatory gifts ceased with the death of the apostles, so did the possibility of divinely inspired hymnody.

The Hymns of the Apocalypse

The Book of Revelation contains a number of examples of worship song (e.g., 4:8, 11; 5:9-13; 7:10-12; 11:17-18; 14:2-3; 15:3-4; 19:1, 2, 5, 8). A question that needs to be answered regarding these songs is: “Do these allusions to worship in heaven teach us anything regarding what we are to sing in public worship and how we are to conduct public worship at the present time?” No, they clearly do not.

The Book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature, and therefore was not meant to be a literal guide or pattern for public worship. If it were, we would all be Romanists, for Revelation describes an altar (6:9; 8:3, 5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7); incense (8:4); trumpets (1:10; 4:1; 8:13; 9:14); harps (5:8; 14:2; 15:2) and even the ark of the covenant (11:19). We also would have to be mystics, for Revelation has every creature, including birds, insects, jellyfish, and worms, etc., praising God (5:13). Apocalyptic literature uses figurative language and dramatic imagery to teach spiritual lessons. “The important thing in watching a drama is not the props, but the message they help to portray.”[37]

The Book of Revelation is filled to overflowing with obscure rites, with thrones and temples, and with a whole host of liturgical acts that cannot possibly relate to our own circumstances of worship. The attempt to derive elements of worship from such apocalyptic literature can only lead to liturgical chaos.[38]

Furthermore, even if one wanted to take the apocalyptic scenes of worship in heaven as normative for the church today, they still would not authorize the use of uninspired

hymns, for the songs sung by the angels, four living creatures, and sinless heavenly saints “are in the nature of the case inspired compositions, proceeding as they do from heaven itself and the very throne and presence of God.”[39] But (as noted) the apocalyptic worship scenes with their altar, incense, harps, and other ceremonial images clearly cannot be applied to the new covenant church without Scripture contradicting itself, which is impossible.

Some writers appeal to the new song mentioned in Revelation 14:3 as scriptural authorization for the composing of new songs today. A study of this phrase in Scripture, however, will prove that the biblical phrase new song has nothing to do with composing new uninspired songs after the close of the canon. The phrase new song in the Old Testament can refer to a song which has as its theme new mercies or new marvels of God’s power (e.g., Psalm 40:3; 98:1). But keep in mind that this phrase is only used to describe songs written under divine inspiration. This fact limits new songs to the inspired songs of the Bible. Since the phrase new song is only used to describe songs written by people who had the prophetic gift, and did not apply to just any Israelite, it therefore certainly does not apply to Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, or any other uninspired hymn writer.

Another meaning of new song refers not to a song describing new mercies, but rather to singing a song anew; that is, with a thankful, rejoicing heart; with a new impulse of gratitude. The song may in fact be very old, but as we apply the inspired song experimentally to our own situation, we sing it anew. This is probably the meaning of sing a new song in the Psalms, which use the phrase, yet do not discuss new mercies. For example, Psalm 33 uses the phrase sing a new song, and then discusses general well-known doctrines: creation, providence, and hope and trust in God. Also, there is a sense in which all the Old Testament songs are new songs for the new covenant Christian, in that we sing the Psalms with an understanding and perspective unknown to Old Testament believers. Because of God’s expression of love in and by Christ, Jesus and the Apostle John can even refer to a well-known Old Testament commandment (Leviticus 19:18) as a “new commandment” (John 13:34; 1 John 2:7; 2 John 5).[40]

What About the Alleged Hymnic Fragments in the New Testament?

A common method for arguing against exclusive Psalmody is to appeal to the existence of hymnic fragments within the New Testament. The existence of these hymnic fragments, we are told, teaches us that the apostolic church was engaged in hymn writing, and thus we also ought to compose our own hymns. The problem with this argument is that it is not based on solid scriptural evidence, but is basically the speculation of modernistic theologians and commentators.

The Greek scholar Delling writes,

Attempts have been made to identify various primitive Christian hymns or hymnal fragments in the N.T. But such identifications must remain hypothetical, particularly as there is in the N.T. no attempt—and this is a point worth noting in itself—to use the Greek style of metrical hymns. The pieces in

the N.T. which take the form of praise are in general so little controlled by any discernable laws that for the most part judgment as to their character as hymns can claim only limited validity.[41]

A study of the literature which speaks of these so-called hymnic fragments reveals that the methodology for determining what is and is not a hymn fragment is totally subjective and unreliable. Subjective speculation does not provide a biblical foundation for church practice, especially in light of the biblical evidence in favor of exclusive Psalmody.

Furthermore, if hymnology flourished in the apostolic church, as many suppose, “it is indeed remarkable that not a single one of these hymns has survived intact outside the New Testament writings. Nor is there a single shred of undisputed historical evidence suggesting the use of such hymns in the Church in the second century. It is just as astounding that not a single one of these ‘hymns’ is identified as such in the New Testament writings themselves.”[42]

Since Scripture never identifies the poetic or rhythmic passages as songs or hymns fragments, and since there is not a shred of evidence that these fragments were used for worship songs in the apostolic church, or even in the second century, we can refer to the hymn fragment argument against exclusive Psalmody as the grasping after invisible straws argument.

Conclusion

Thus far we have examined the foundation of biblical worship (the regulative principle) and the testimony of Scripture regarding the content of worship songs. The regulative principle of worship, which is clearly taught in Scripture and is clearly stated in all the Reformed and Presbyterian creeds, places the burden of proof for the use of uninspired hymns in worship upon the believers who advocate their use. For the Reformed believer, it is not enough to say that uninspired hymns are not forbidden; one must provide a biblical warrant for their use from Scripture.

When examining the scriptural testimony regarding worship songs, we have noted that the singing of divinely inspired Psalms is commanded in both the Old and New Testaments. There are historical examples in both the Old and New Testaments of Psalms used in worship. Also, there is abundant evidence that divine inspiration was a prerequisite for writing worship songs for the church. However, when we look for authorization in Scripture for the use of uninspired songs in worship, we cannot find a command, historical example, or authorization of any kind. Those who find justification for the singing of uninspired songs in worship from Ephesians 5:19 or Colossians 3:16, or from the “hymn fragment” argument, are letting their presuppositions and emotional attachment to uninspired hymns influence their exegesis. Simply put, it is impossible to find a warrant in Scripture for singing uninspired hymns in worship. The exclusive Psalmody debate, in its essence, boils down to whether people who say they are Reformed are really willing to submit themselves to the regulative principle of worship.

[1]. This short treatise on exclusive Psalmody contains nothing new or original. In fact, the author would prefer that everyone purchase a copy of Michael Bushell's *The Songs of Zion* (Available from Crown and Covenant Publications, 800 Wood St., Pittsburgh, PA 15221) and read it carefully. But, because we have found few believers willing to read a long scholarly treatise such as Bushell's, we have organized many of the arguments for exclusive Psalmody together in a shorter format.

[2]. M.C. Ramsey, *Psalms Only: Objections Answered* (Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, 1971), p. 3.

[3]. The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap XXI:1. "It was the application of this principle which enabled the Protestant Reformers to accomplish their great work of reformation. They denied for example the validity of five of the seven sacraments of the corrupt Church, and retained only Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Likewise the application of this principle enabled them to purify the worship of God by ordering it in accordance with God's will as set forth in His Word. Thus the work of the Reformation had its positive and negative aspects. It involved the rejection of the use of altars, crosses, crucifixes, candles, incense, and a host of other unscriptural practices, as well as the reinstatement of free prayer as distinct from set forms of prayer, the reading and exposition of God's word, and the congregational singing of the Psalms. Where this principle that what is not prescribed is forbidden is rejected or ignored, purity of worship is imperiled" (M.C. Ramsey, *Psalms Only*, pp. 24-25).

[4]. For more on the Regulative Principle of worship see: B. Schwertley's *Musical Instruments in the Public Worship of God*, Chapter One. An electronic version of this book is available free at <http://reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/music.htm>. Similarly, *Sola Scriptura and the Regulative Principle of Worship*, chapters 4 and 5, also in an electronic format, are available at no charge at <http://reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/sola.htm>.

[5]. James H. Thornwell, *Collected Writings* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1872) 2:163.

[6]. J.W. Keddie, *Why Psalms Only?* (Cambridge, England: Scottish Reformed Fellowship, 1978), p. 8. People of Reformed and Presbyterian persuasion should note that all the Calvinistic Reformers and Churches of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries held to a very strict interpretation of the regulative principle. Calvin's view can be found in his *Institutes* I, XI, 4; I, XII, 1 and 3; II, VIII, 5 and 17; IV, X, 1 and 8-17; cf. commentary on Jeremiah 7:31; sermon on 2 Samuel 6:6-12; tract on "the necessity of Reforming the Church"; and, the confession drafted by Calvin for the Reformed churches of France (1562). John Knox's view is clearly set forth in *A Vindication of the Doctrine that the Sacrifice of the Mass is Idolatry* (1550). The Reformed Creeds also teach the regulative principle of worship; cf. the *Belgic Confession* (1561) Art. VII, XXIX, XXXII; the *Heidelberg Catechism* Question 96; *The Westminster Standards*, Confession 1:6,7; 20:2; 21:1; *Shorter Catechism* 51; *Larger Catechism* 108, 109. A strict interpretation of the

regulative principle can be found in the writings of: George Gillespie, William Ames, Samuel Rutherford, Jeremiah Burroughs, Thomas Watson, Thomas Ridgeley, Thomas Boston, William Romaine, John Cotton, Thomas Manton, Matthew Henry, John Owen, R.L. Dabney, James H. Thornwell, John L. Girardeau and many others. The regulative principle is still officially recognized by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, the Presbyterian Reformed Church, the American Presbyterian Church, the Free Church of Scotland, and many other Reformed denominations.

[7]. One apparent example is Stephen Pribble's *The Regulative Principle and Singing in Worship* (Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1995; originally published in *The Harbinger*, January-February, 1994). After reading Pribble's book one has the impression that he believes Psalm singing in worship is optional. However, when confronted personally Pribble admits that Psalm singing is authorized by scriptural historical example.

[8]. R.A. Morey, "Exclusive Psalmody," *Baptist Reformation Review*, Winter 1976, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 43 ff. For an excellent refutation of Morey's view, see Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, pp. 13-15.

[9]. Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion: A Contemporary Case for Exclusive Psalmody* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant, [1980] 1993), p. 15. "The Old Testament emphasizes the divine appointment of the song service in the temple (1 Chronicles 6:31-48; 25:1-31; cf. 2 Chronicles 29:25). Although this worship often fell into decay, when it was Reformed the warrant was found in the law given by God through David. This can be seen in the reform of 835 B.C. (2 Chronicles 23:18), in the reform about 715 B.C. (2 Chronicles 29:30), in the reform of 622 B.C. (2 Chronicles 35:15), in the laying of the foundation of the second temple about 537 B.C. (Ezra 3:10), and in the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem around 434 B.C. (Nehemiah 12:45-46). Song was not considered a mere circumstance which did not need specific warrant, but was regarded as a proper area for divine prescription" (Rowland Ward, *Psalm-Singing in Scripture and History* [Melbourne, Australia, 1985], p. 5).

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

[11]. Sherman Isbell, *The Singing of Psalms* (Presbyterian Reformed Church, 1996), Part VIII, no pagination.

[12]. *Ibid.*

[13]. Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 31.

[14]. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

[15]. *The Psalms: the Divinely Authorized and Exclusive Manual of Praise in The Psalms in Worship*, Ed. John McNaugher (Edmonton: Still Water Revival Books, [1907] 1992), pp. 60-61.

[16]. Stephen Pribble, *The Regulative Principle and Singing in Worship*, pp. 11-12.

[17]. James Morison, *A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, [1884] 1981), p. 537. A.A. Hodge concurs: "Four cups of wine, the Mishna tells us were always drunk...They

also always sang the Hallel, or praise-psalms, consisting of all the Psalms in our Bible from the 113th to the 118th inclusive. The first part, including the 113th and 114th Psalms, was sung early in the meal, and the 115th, 116th, 117th, and 118th Psalms at the close, after the fourth or last cup of wine had been drunk. This is the 'hymn' alluded to (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26) when it is said, 'And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives'" (Popular Lectures on Theological Themes, [Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, 1887]). The following commentators teach that Christ and the Apostles sang the Hallel (i.e., Psalms 113 through 118) at the Last Supper: Alfred Plummer, R.C.H. Lenski, Art Gundry, John Peter Lange, William Hendriksen, G. Campbell Morgan, R.V.G. Tasker, C.H. Spurgeon, Matthew Henry, etc.

[18]. Matthew Henry, Commentary on the Whole Bible (McLean, VA: MacDonald Pub., n.d.) Vol. 5, p. 392.

[19]. Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, pp. 78-79.

[20]. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), p. 598.

[21]. R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, [1934] 1961), pp. 672-673.

[22]. Horatio B. Hackett, *Commentary on Acts* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), p. 190.

[23]. J.A. Alexander, *Acts of the Apostles* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857] 1991), p. 121.

[24]. J. W. Keddie, *Why Psalms Only?*, p. 5.

[25]. Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, pp. 85-86.

[26]. G.I. Williamson, *The Singing of Praise in the Worship of God*, p. 6.

[27]. J. W. Keddie, *Why Psalms Only?*, p. 7.

[28]. M.C. Ramsey, *Purity of Worship* (Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia: Church Principles Committee, 1968), p. 20.

[29]. Martin Luther, *Preface to the Psalter*, [1528] 1545, *Luther's Works* (tr. C.M. Jacobs; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960) Vol. XXXV, p. 254.

[30]. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (tr. James Anderson; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), Vol. I, pp. xxxvi-xxxix.

[31]. Basil, quoted in Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 18.

[32]. We should be very careful not to define the word "spiritual" in these passages in the modern sense of "religious." The word "spiritual" here refers to something which comes from the Spirit of God, and thus is "inspired" or "God-breathed." B.B. Warfield writes of pneumatikos: "Of the twenty-five instances in which the word occurs in the New Testament, in no single case does it sink even as low in its ref-

erence as the human spirit; and in twenty-four of them is derived from pneuma, the Holy Spirit. In this sense of belonging to, or determined by, the Holy Spirit, the New Testament usage is uniform with the one single exception of Ephesians 6:12, where it seems to refer to the higher though superhuman intelligence. The appropriate translation for it in each case is spirit-given, or spirit-led, or spirit-determined" (*The Presbyterian Review*, Vol. 1, p. 561 [July 1880] quoted in Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, pp. 90-91).

[33]. John Murray, *Song in Public Worship in Worship in the Presence of God*, (ed. Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, Greenville Seminary Press, 1992), p. 188.

[34]. Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, pp. 83-84.

[35]. J. Murray and W. Young, *Minority Report, Minutes of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (14th General Assembly, 1947), p. 61, as quoted in Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 84.

[36]. Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 81.

[37]. William E. Cox, *Studies in Final Things* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966), p. 159.

[38]. Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 94-95.

[39]. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

[40]. Some think that new in new song merely means that the psalmist is asking God's people to sing an inspired song with which they are not yet familiar. Others think that the phrase sing a new song is a liturgical phrase equivalent to "give it all you've got." "Calvin regards new as equivalent to rare and choice" (W. S. Plumer, *Psalms* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1867] 1975], p. 408). Speaking of the phrase new song in Revelation, Bushell writes: "The concept of 'newness' in the Book of Revelation is thus used as a poetic device to express in a heightened sense the fullness and scope of the eschatological redemption of all things. The 'new song,' the 'new name,' the 'new heavens,' the 'new earth,' and the 'new Jerusalem' are all yet future. The fact that we have in these visions a present anticipation of this newness, provides no more warrant for the production of 'new' worship song than it does for the building of a 'new Jerusalem.' Quite the contrary is the case. It is very significant, in fact, that worship song is placed in the category of the 'new' things of John's vision. The distinguishing character of the 'newness' attributed to these objects is its divine origin" (*The Songs of Zion*, p. 96).

[41]. Gerhard Delling, "humnos" in Ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), Vol. 8, p. 500. Delling is a modernistic German scholar and is not an exclusive Psalm singer.

[42]. Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 98.

Psalm 105:2

Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him:
talk ye of all his wondrous works.

March 2009

The works included in this edition are *Anarchy in Worship*, *Purity in Worship in the Presbyterian Church* and *The Use of Organs in Christian Worship Indefensible*.

James Begg (1808-1883) was born in New Monklands, in Lanarkshire, Scotland. He was educated at Glasgow University and ordained in The Church of Scotland in 1830. He took part in the Disruption in 1843 and spent the remainder of his life in the Free Church of Scotland. He founded The Scottish Reformation Society in 1850 where he served as editor of *The Bulwark*, or *The Reformation Journal* for 21 years. He also founded the Protestant Institute of Scotland, an Anti-Catholic Society. From 1866 to 1873 Begg served as editor of *The Watchword*, a periodical printed by Constitutionalists in opposition to union between the Free Church and the United Presbyterian Church. He

He argues against the practice of loose subscription, which many of the innovators were appealing to in order to practice their will-worship.

also edited *The Signal*. Other works authored by Begg include, *A Handbook of Popery*, *The Headship of Christ*, *Free Church Principles*,

and *Memorial in regard to the Constitution of the Free Church of Scotland*.

Anarchy in Worship

Anarchy in Worship was written in 1875. In it Begg defends purity in worship, as practiced in the Free Church of Scotland, against those in the Church that were seeking to introduce instrumental music and uninspired hymnody. Begg begins by explaining the regulative principle of worship from scripture then proceeds to explain the position of the Westminster Standards on worship. He argues against the practice of loose subscription, which many of the innovators were appealing to in order to practice their will-worship.

Begg places the innovators into five categories; the presumptuous and blasphemous innovator, the popularity hunting innovator, the politic and scheming innovator, the aesthetic innovator, and the well-meaning innovator. Begg exposes the error of each category of innovator from scripture then proceeds to argue that their ordination vows forbid them from introducing such innovations. In regard to vows taken by Church officers he writes,

“The purity of worship practised in the Presbyterian Church ever since the Reformation has not been thrust upon her from without. It has been the result of her own view of Scripture, and of her own deliberate choice; nay, it has been maintained by a determined and heroic struggle for ages on the part of her noblest sons. The appointment of all her ministers, besides, is only made conditionally; the condition being that, before their settlement, or acquiring any rights, they shall avow and subscribe their adherence to all her distinctive principles and peculiarities. To allege that they may afterwards set these avowals

at defiance, and still retain their offices, is to outrage morality and overthrow the liberty of the Church and her congregations. No man is forced to become one of her ministers. All enter into office and take the necessary vows with the most unconstrained freedom; and if they are afterwards dissatisfied, and wish to introduce novelties, they are at the most perfect liberty to withdraw and join a more congenial fellowship. Honest men, on finding that they cannot fulfil their vows, will surely adopt this alternative,—will withdraw and take the consequences.”(pp.44, 45)

The issues that Begg faced in the Free Church of Scotland are still prevalent in the Church today. It is for this reason that this work has been the republished. For the truths and principles that Begg defended then, still apply to the present, and will apply to future controversies regarding innovations in worship and the practice of loose subscription.

Purity of Worship in the Presbyterian Church

Purity of Worship in the Presbyterian Church was written in 1876. In this work Begg lays out the clear teaching of the Westminster Standards on worship and gives a history of the worship in the Scottish Church since the Reformation. Begg Writes,

“The object of the following treatise is to give a clear and consecutive view of the worship of the Scottish Church, both as a matter of doctrine and of history. It is many years since any controversy existed amongst Presbyterians on the subject of worship, and therefore much ignorance prevails in regard to it. Errors on this subject, however, must be fatal, not only because of the sacredness of the principles involved, but because the same principles affect the entire round of doctrine, discipline, and government in the Christian Church. In carrying forward the recent innovations in worship, there are very different classes engaged. There are the ignorant and thoughtless. But the most dangerous class are those who

All proper Presbyterians are consequently content to ‘sing psalms’ to God, and to avoid all ‘worshipping of him in ways not appointed in his Word.

know perfectly well what they are doing and aiming at. They are seeking, for political reasons, and contrary to their solemn ordination engagements, vir-

tually to upset the Revolution Settlement by bringing the Scottish Church into as near a resemblance as possible to the Church of England, and this through the agency of an equally unconstitutional congregationalism. In this aim we may venture to predict that, as on former occasions, they will be defeated. But it is sad to be plunged again into the old contest, from which great evils may result; while it is well to keep in view that in such a struggle there can be no middle course. Either the principles of the First and Second Reformation and of the Revolution Settlement in regard to wor-

ship, for which our fathers contended, are true and defensible, or Presbyterianism must be abandoned. So far from this, however, we believe that at the present moment Scotland is as earnestly Presbyterian as ever, although she requires enlightenment in regard to this new debate. She only requires to be thoroughly informed in regard to the true bearing of the questions at issue, and the real danger of the schemes pursued, to act with energy as she did of old.”(pp.iii, iv)

Listed among the innovations in worship that Begg addresses in this work is posture in worship. He writes,

“The postures of worship long established, and which still exist in the great mass of Presbyterian congregations over the land, consist in sitting at singing and standing at prayer, the latter being clearly according to primitive practice. These postures are now reversed by certain innovators. The people are taught to stand at praise and sit at prayer—kneeling being physically impossible in our Scottish churches—although sitting at prayer is an independency previously unheard of in the Christian Church.”(p.11)

Other innovations included the observance of Christmas and Easter, liturgies and instrumental worship. Begg quotes from such Reformation giants as John Knox and David Calderwood. There is also a brief history of Scottish Psalmody that is interesting.

Begg hoped that this treatise would receive wide circulation, “and be duly considered by all who really value the purity of our Presbyterian worship. It is worse than absurd to profess adherence to the Westminster Standards whilst men trample upon their distinctive principles in regard to the worship of God.”(p.vi)

The Use of Organs in Christian Worship Indefensible

The largest work in this collection is Begg’s *The Use of Organs in Christian Worship Indefensible*. Included in this work is *A Treatise On the Use of Organs* written by his father. Begg begins this work by defining the regulative principle of worship from scripture and then showing how the use of instrumental music in worship is inconsistent with this principle. Begg writes,

“If we introduce instrumental music in our New Testament worship, we cannot plead either the precept or example of Christ or his apostles. Their precepts and examples under the New Testament system are all the other way, and therefore, if we act in the face of these, we can no longer maintain the great principle of the Reformation, viz., that no worship is lawful which God Himself has not prescribed. If this principle again be abandoned—if we hold that we may alter the worship of the Christian Church according to our own mind and fancy—how far may we not go. As good an argument can be made for the use of incense, priests, sacrifices, indeed, of the whole temple system, as for the use of instrumental music in Christian wor-

ship. Nay, we may change the whole government, discipline, and doctrine of the Church, as well as its worship, on the same ground; for the instant we admit the principle that the system of the Church of Christ is not revealed in his word, and was not perfect as left by our Lord and the apostles, and that men may, at their own hand, alter the form and substance of Christian worship, or anything else in the Church, the whole theory to which we have referred is levelled at a blow, and no limit can be set to the spirit of change.”(pp.18, 19)

In the second chapter Begg addresses the argument that the use of instruments in worship is only one of to what degree art is used in worship. He writes,

“It is most natural that such blind creatures as we are should imagine that what is pleasing to ourselves must necessarily be pleasing to God; and hence have arisen gorgeous cathedrals, the splendid vestments of priests, magnificent images and pictures to gratify the eyes, clouds of incense for the nostrils, and peals of instrumental music for the ears. As the gospel has died out, all this formalism and ritualism have come in; and it is all part and parcel of the very same system of sensuous worship, as opposed to spiritual.”(p.64)

The next two chapters are reviews. The first is a review of a sermon by a Scottish Episcopalian, Edward Ramsay. In his sermon Dean Ramsay praises the recent innovations in Scottish Presbyterianism and is hopeful that it will eventually lead to a full conformity to the worship and government of the Episcopal Church. Begg points out Ramsay’s inconsistent arguments and lack of scriptural proofs. The second is a review of Dr. Robert Lee’s book *The Reform of the Church of Scotland, in Worship, Government and Doctrine*. Dr. Lee was a minister in the Established Church in Scotland. Begg proves that Lee’s position is unscriptural, insubordinate and illegal in the Established Church. He quotes at some length from Alexander Blaikie’s book *The Organ and other Musical Instruments*, as noted in the Holy Scriptures. Blaikie writes,

“I. ‘The Presbyterian form of worship admits of none of the gorgeous compositions which are heard in the Romish Church,’ (‘Progress of Music,’ p. 26; London, 1846,) because it is formed entirely on the model of the synagogue, can never be identified with Prelacy, which, so far as it rests on Scripture, takes its forms and usages, in these matters, from the temple service, its holy places, persons, and things. They are distinct species, and can never become one. II. Wherever Presbyterians employ organs, they abandon, in so far, their identity. They cease (in the manner of praise) to be
Presbyterians. III. The playing of organs in churches, not Episcopal in other matters, follows the introduction and use of uninspired poetry, vulgarly called hymns.”(p.127)

“V. All proper Presbyterians are consequently content to ‘sing psalms’ to God, and to avoid all ‘worshipping of him in ways not appointed in his Word. They believe that he ‘is a

jealous God,' that he has inspired the Old Testament precisely as much as the New one, and that when he says 'sing psalms' and 'sweet psalms,' we do not know that he will accept of anything else."(p.129)

In the last chapter Begg presents to all dissenting Presbyterians their duty of maintaining purity of worship. He restates the Westminster Standards commitment to the regulative principle of worship as taught in scripture and provides an introduction to his father's work *A Treatise On the Use of Organs*.

A Treatise On the Use of Organs

Begg's father wrote this treatise during the organ controversy in Glasgow, in 1808. Dr. Candlish, in his book *The Organ Question*, writes,

"Of the pamphlets, several, including one by that most strenuous and uncompromising foe to innovation, the late Dr Begg of New Monkland, are very valuable, and will deserve attention if the fight is to be seriously renewed. Before the friends of the Organ renew the fight, they would do well to study the records of that former conflict."(p.28)

Dr. Begg begins his treatise in the Old Testament. He shows when and how instruments were prescribed in Jewish worship. In the next chapter he turns his attention to the New Testament and shows how there has been no command for their continued use. Dr. Begg contrasts the temple worship of the Jews with synagogue worship, the latter being that which Christian worship is patterned after. He also points to the example of our Lord and the apostles. Dr Begg writes,

"In determining this question, it is of the greatest importance that we carefully attend to the example and precepts of Christ and his apostles. But though both instrumental and vocal music accompanied the sacrifices in the Jewish temple, yet there is no instance of Christ or His apostles either employing or recom-

mending musical instruments in the praises of God. There are, however several instances of their singing the praises of God themselves, and exhorting others to the performance of this duty."(pp.172, 173)

In the next chapter Dr. Begg examines Church history to determine exactly when organs were first introduced into Christian worship. Dr. Begg quotes Bellarmine as his source. According to Bellarmine it wasn't until the year 660, under the direction of Pope Vitalian, that the organ was used in Christian worship. This means that for over six centuries the Christian Church sang a cappella.

In the last two chapters Dr. Begg inquires into the lawfulness of introducing instruments into the worship of the Established Church of Scotland and answers arguments in favor of employing organs. Dr. Begg concludes that the standards of the Established Church forbid the use of instruments or any innovations in worship, only authorizing the singing of psalms. He also concludes that all arguments for the use of the organ in worship stem from a lack of understanding the regulative principle and Scripture.

The book concludes with six appendices listed below.

- I. Moderatism Past and Present
- II. Is the Established Church legally entitled to use Organs, or to alter its Worship?
- III. Expense of Musical Instruments for Churches, and how this is sometimes defrayed—*Strange Proceedings in New South Wales*
- IV. Dancing in Worship
- V. The Westminster Divines and the New Testament Greek—Objections to the foregoing argument
- VI. Instruments not Necessary in Singing

Select Works of James Begg on Worship can be purchased at www.puritanreprints.com

Matthew 15:9

But in vain they do worship me,
teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled”
(Colossians 1:23).

Intending next Lord’s day to enter upon the work of catechisms, it will not be amiss to give you a preliminary discourse, to show you how needful it is for Christians to be well instructed in the grounds of religion. “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled.”

Exposition

I. It is the duty of Christians to be settled in the doctrine of faith. It is the Apostle’s prayer, “The God of all grace stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Pet 5:10). That is, that they might not be meteors in the air, but fixed stars. The Apostle Jude speaks of “wandering stars” in verse 13. They are called

Not to be settled in the faith is provoking to God.

wandering stars, because, as Aristotle says, “They do leap up and down, and wander into several parts of

the heaven; and being but dry exhalations, not made of that pure celestial matter as the fixed stars are, they often fall to the earth.” Now, such as are not settled in religion, will, at one time or other, prove wandering stars; they will lose their former steadfastness, and wander from one opinion to another. Such as are unsettled are of the tribe of Reuben, “unstable as water” (Gen 49:4); like a ship without ballast, overturned with every wind of doctrine. Beza writes of one Belfectius, that his religion changed as the moon. The Arians had every year a new faith. These are not pillars in the temple of God, but reeds shaken every way. The Apostle calls them “damnable heresies” (2 Pet 2:1). A man may go to hell as well for heresy as adultery. To be unsettled in religion, argues want of judgment. If their heads were not giddy, men would not reel so fast from one opinion to another. It argues lightness. As feathers will be blown every way, so will feathery Christians. *Triticum non rapit ventus inanes palæ jactantur* (Cyprian). Therefore such are compared to children. “That we be no more children, tossed to and fro” (Eph 4:14). Children are fickle, sometimes of one mind, sometimes of another, nothing pleases them long; so unsettled Christians are childish; the truths they embrace at one time, they reject at another, sometimes they like the Protestant religion, and soon after they have a good mind to turn Papists.

1. It is the great end of the Word preached, to bring us to a settlement in religion. “And he gave some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the edifying of the body of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children” (Eph 4:11, 12, 14). The Word is called a hammer (Jer 23:29). Every blow of the hammer is to fasten the nails of the building; so the preacher’s words are to fasten you the more to Christ; they weaken themselves to strengthen and settle you. This is the grand design of preaching, not only for the enlightening,

but for the establishing of souls; not only to guide them in the right way, but to keep them in it. Now, if you be not settled, you do not answer God’s end in giving you the ministry.

2. To be settled in religion is both a Christian’s excellence and honour. It is his excellence. When the milk is settled it turns to cream; now he will be zealous for the truth, and walk in close communion with God. And his honour. “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (Prov 16:31). It is one of the best sights to see an old disciple; to see silver hairs adorned with golden virtues.

3. Such as are not settled in the faith can never suffer for it. Sceptics in religion hardly ever prove martyrs. They that are not settled hang in suspense; when they think of the joys of heaven they will espouse the gospel, but when they think of persecution they desert it. Unsettled Christians do not consult what is best, but what is safest. “The apostate (says Tertullian) seems to put God and Satan in balance, and having weighed both their services, prefers the devil’s service, and proclaims him to be the best master: and, in this sense, may be said to put Christ to open shame” (Heb 6:6). He will never suffer for the truth, but be as a soldier that leaves his colours, and runs over to the enemy’s side; he will fight on the devil’s side for pay.

4. Not to be settled in the faith is provoking to God. To espouse the truth, and then to fall away, brings an ill report upon the gospel, which will not go unpunished. “They turned back, and dealt unfaithfully. When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel” (Ps. 78:57, 59). The apostate drops as a wind-fall into the devil’s mouth.

5. If ye are not settled in religion, you will never grow. We are commanded “to grow up into the head, even Christ” (Eph.

Knowledge of the grounds of religion much enriches the mind. It is a lamp to our feet

4:15). But if we are unsettled there is no growing: “the plant which is continually removing

never thrives.” He can no more grow in godliness, who is unsettled, than a bone can grow in the body that is out of joint.

6. There is great need to be settled, because there are so many things to unsettle us. Seducers are abroad, whose work is to draw away people from the principles of religion. “These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you” (1 Jn 2:26). Seducers are the devil’s factors; they are of all others the greatest felons that would rob you of the truth. Seducers have silver tongues, that can put off bad wares; they have a sleight to deceive (Eph

4:14). The Greek word there is taken from those that can throw dice, and cast them for the best advantage. So seducers are impostors, they can throw a dice; they can so dissemble and sophisticate the truth, that they can deceive others. Seducers deceive by wisdom of words. "By good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom 16:18). They have fine elegant phrases, flattering language, whereby they work on the weaker sort. Another sleight is a pretence of extraordinary piety, that so people may admire them, and suck in their doctrine. They seem to be men of zeal and sanctity, and to be divinely inspired, and pretend to new revelations. A third cheat of seducers is, labouring to vilify and nullify sound orthodox teachers. They would eclipse those that bring the truth, like black vapours that darken the light of heaven; they would defame others, that they themselves may be more admired. Thus the false teachers cried down Paul, that they might be received (Gal 4:17). The fourth cheat of seducers is, to preach the doctrine of liberty; as though men are freed from the moral law, the rule as well as the curse, and Christ has done all for them, and they need to do nothing. Thus they make the doctrine of free grace a key to open the door to all licentiousness. Another means is, to unsettle Christians by persecution (2 Tim 3:12). The gospel is a rose that cannot be plucked without prickles. The legacy Christ has bequeathed is the Cross. While there is a devil and a wicked man in the world, never expect a charter of exemption from trouble. How many fall away in an hour of persecution! "There appeared a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns; and his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven" (Rev 12:4). The red dragon, by his power and subtlety, drew away stars, or eminent professors, that seemed to shine as stars in the firmament of the church.

To be unsettled in good is the sin of the devils (Jude 6). They are called "morning stars" (Job 38:7), but "falling stars"; they were holy, but mutable. As the vessel is overturned with the sail, so their sails being swelled with pride, they were overturned (1 Tim 3:6). By unsettledness, men imitate lapsed angels. The devil was the first apostate. The sons of Sion should be like mount Sion, which cannot be removed.

II. The way for Christians to be settled is to be well grounded. "If ye continue grounded and settled." The Greek word for grounded is a metaphor which alludes to a building that has the foundation well laid. So Christians should be grounded in the essential points of religion, and have their foundation well laid.

Here let me speak to two things:

1. That we should be grounded in the knowledge of fundamentals. The Apostle speaks of "the first principles of the oracles of God" (Heb 5:12). In all arts and sciences, logic, physic, mathematics, there are some *præcognita*, some rules and principles that must necessarily be known for the practice of those arts; so, in divinity, there must be the first principles laid down. The knowledge of the grounds and principles of religion is exceedingly useful.

a. Else we cannot serve God aright. We can never worship God acceptably, unless we worship him regularly; and how can we do that, if we are ignorant of the rules and elements of religion? We are to give God a "reasonable service" (Rom 12:1). If we understand not the grounds of religion, how can it be a reasonable service?

b. Knowledge of the grounds of religion much enriches the mind. It is a lamp to our feet; it directs us in the whole course of Christianity, as the eye directs the body. Knowledge of fundamentals is the golden key that opens the chief mysteries of religion; it gives us a whole system and body of divinity, exactly drawn in all its lineaments and lively colours; it helps us to understand many of those difficult things which occur in the reading of the Word; it helps to untie many Scripture knots.

c. It furnishes us with armour of proof; weapons to fight against the adversaries of the truth.

d. It is the holy seed of which grace is formed. It is *semen fidei*, the seed of faith (Ps 9:10). It is *radix amoris*, the root of love. "Being rooted and grounded in love" (Eph 3:17). The knowledge of principles conduces to the making of a complete Christian.

2. This grounding is the best way to being settled: "grounded and settled." A tree, that it may be well settled, must be well rooted; so, if you would be well settled in religion, you must be rooted in its principles. We read in Plutarch of one who set up a dead man, and he would not stand. "Oh," said he, "there should be something within." So, that we may stand in shaking times, there must be a principle of knowledge within; first grounded, and then settled. That the ship may be kept from overturning it must have its anchor fastened. Knowledge of principles is to the soul as the anchor to the ship, that holds it steady in the midst of the rolling waves of error, or the violent winds of persecution. First grounded and then settled.

Applications

Use one: See the reason why so many people are unsettled, ready to embrace every novel opinion, and dress themselves in as many religions as fashions; it is because they are ungrounded. See how the Apostle joins these two together, "unlearned and unstable" (2 Pet 3:16). Such as are unlearned in the main points of divinity are unstable. As the body cannot be strong that has the sinews shrunk; so neither can that Christian be strong in religion who wants the grounds of knowledge, which are the sinews to strengthen and stablish him.

Use two: See what great necessity there is of laying down the main grounds of religion in a way of catechising, that the weakest judgment may be instructed in the knowledge of the truth, and strengthened in the love of it. Catechising is the

best expedient for the grounding and settling of people. I fear one reason why there has been no more good done by preaching, has been because the chief heads and articles in religion have not been explained in a catechistical way. Catechising is laying the foundation (Heb 6:1). To preach and not to catechise is to build without foundation. This way of catechising is not novel, it is apostolic. The primitive church had their forms of catechism, as those phrases imply, a “form of sound words” (2 Tim 1:13), and “the first principles of the oracles of God” (Heb 5:12). The church had its catechumenoι, as Grotius and Erasmus observe. Many of the ancient fathers have written for it, as Fulgentius, Austin, Theodoret, Lactantius, and others. God has given great success to it. By thus laying down the grounds of

religion catechistically, Christians have been clearly instructed and wondrously built up in the Christian faith, inso-much that Julian the apostate, seeing the great success of catechising, put down all schools and places of public literature, and instructing of youth. It is my design, therefore (with the blessing of God), to begin this work of catechising the next Sabbath day; and I intend every other Sabbath, in the afternoon, to make it my whole work to lay down the grounds and fundamentals of religion in a catechistical way. If I am hindered in this work by men, or taken away by death, I hope God will raise up some other labourer in the vineyard among you, that may perfect the work which I am now beginning.

The Westminster Standards and the Civil Magistrate Mr. Brian M. Hanley

The change made in the role of the civil magistrate found in the Westminster Confession of Faith (here after WcoF) was first introduced in Philadelphia (1729) and was ratified in 1788 by the first General Assembly. The time frame in which this happened was during the time of the revolutionary war. There were concerns at that time, about the abuses of the king of England and this influenced Presbyterian officer bearers. A number of them believed that the civil magistrate role needed to be separated from the church.

When these ministers came to Philadelphia arguing their exception to the WcoF, there was a desire in the assembly to arrive at an agreement. While changes where made to the WcoF some of the language was left, in order to allow, for those that hold to the original confession to remain in harmony with the standards. The language was watered down in order to enlarge the fence around the church (i.e. to let more people in). With these changes, I see conflict with the other parts of the standards.

Regarding these changes in chapter 23.3, I will start with the last change first. This section tells us that the civil magistrate has the power to call together synods. This was deleted in the American revision. Professor John Murray noted that it was this very provision that assembled the Westminster Divines, quote:

“The last sentence of this section is the defense, on the

part of the Westminster Assembly, of that Ordinance of the English Parliament of 1643 in accordance with which the Assembly convened on July 1st of that year. The Westminster Assembly was the creature of the Long Parliament.”

If this civil power authority did not exist, the WCoF would not have even have come into existence. Where else should the ruler go for council, but to the church. (2 Kings 1:6)

This change over time has allowed all churches to be treated equal including the cults.

The American revision of the WCoF calls for the civil magistrates to be “nursing fathers” to those under their care. What are the duties of a “nursing father”? Are they not to seek the obedience of the commandments of

God. The English version says;

“the truth of God be kept pure and entire; that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed; all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline prevented or reformed; and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed”

This refers to the civil government’s role to establish the two tables of the moral law. The American revision of the WCoF rewrote this and focuses primarily on the second table of the law. The effect in America was a slippery slope, which threw away the first table and in time questioned and started to remove the second table of the law.

Even with this rewrite of this section of the WcoF the original meaning still shines through in certain places. First, the American revision was able to include that the government is to be a “nursing father”. This is a reference from Isaiah 49:23 quote,

“And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.”

... advancing the kingdom of Christ and maintaining purity of doctrine

The reformed understanding of Isaiah 49:23 puts weight behind the role of the magistrate. John Calvin wrote on Isaiah 49:23:

“But that ‘nursing’ aims at an object...about removing superstitions and putting an end to all wicked idolatry, about advancing the kingdom of Christ and maintaining purity of doctrine, about purging scandals and cleansing from the filth that corrupts piety and impairs the lustre of the Divine majesty”.

Secondly, the Westminster Larger Catechism #191 encourages the civil magistrates to protect the people as regards to religious matters. The meaning of this can be seen in Thomas Ridgeley, commentary on the Larger Catechism quote;

“magistrates may be guardians, not only of the civil, but of the religious liberties of their subjects”.

What are religious liberties? It is to have the freedom to follow God’s commandments. One could argue that the observance of the fourth commandment should be enforced in the land (a.k.a. the blue laws).

Finally, the Westminster Larger Catechism #106, tells us that:

“according to each one’s place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.”

This originally meant that the civil magistrate should remove idolatry (1st & 2nd commandment) in the land. What does it mean in light of American revisions? This is what I meant by apparent contradictions.

... now according to the latest news, it is a Judo-Christian-Muslim nation.

The civil magistrate in the original WcoF would seek agreement with the church institution in order to make such things the law of the land. This was exactly how decrees were done in England. The Parliament would ask the ecclesiastical body for something (the Westminster Standards, a ruling on musical instruments, etc.) and when the church came back with a synodical degree the Parliament made it the law of the land. Such a system has tremendous weight behind it.

The American revision of the WCoF holds that preference is not given to different denominations. This has been carried over to all denomination and that includes false religion. This change over time has allowed all churches to be treated equal including the cults. In the beginning this country was a Christian nation, then a Jewish-Christian nation and now according to the latest news, it is a Judo-Christian-Muslim nation. This is far adrift from what the church officers that revised of WCoF ever envisioned for our future.

Today, we have over two hundred years to look back on history, and we see that more and more the country was building a bigger wall between church and state. The country was attempting to bring neutrality to government. With a vacuum created, the teachings of atheism, modernism, and today new age thinking moved into the void. With the millions of babies killed every year through abortion, the removal of prayer, and Bible reading in our schools, it is time for American denominations to revisit the doctrine of the civil magistrate, and see that the original Westminster Confession and Catechisms were right after all!



Brother,

Excuse me for asking this question, but is there a legitimate reason for the WPCUS to exist, given the existence of 'larger' and more historic churches such as the RPCNA? Are you being schismatic? (This is a question, not an accusation.)

Your brother in Christ,
Timothy

Dear Timothy,

The RPCNA holds to a very loose understanding of subscriptionism. They tolerate feminism, the ordination of women, extra-biblical holy days such as Christmas and Easter, and Arminianism. They have ministers in their denomination that explicitly reject the regulative principle of worship, and have done so in writing (e.g., Tim McCracken). They have a college that is hostile to the reformed faith. Their own testimony rejects sections of the Westminster Standards. They tend to persecute and mistreat men who hold strictly to the Westminster Standards. They reject the historic Presbyterian concept of covenanting and are themselves completely unfaithful to the original covenants. They are members of NAPARC, which has member denominations that allow ministers to teach the Auburn Ave heresy. Their seminary and most churches reject the Received Text of Scripture in favor of the Critical Text. I could give you numerous examples of people being persecuted out of their churches for insisting on the RPW being followed in worship (e.g., Christmas programs). I could go on and on. The WPCUS is faithful to the covenants and the original Westminster Standards. Therefore, we are in line with the historic Presbyterian church. The original Covenanters of Scotland would have absolutely nothing to do with the RPCNA. They were unwilling to worship with the Revolution Settlement church that was ten times more reformed than the RPCNA. I hope this answers your question.

For Christ's Crown and Covenant,

Books Available by Brian Schwertley:

Auburn Avenue Theology: A Biblical Analysis (264 pp) \$9.95 ea. **New!**
Exclusive Psalmody: A Biblical Defense (73 pp.) \$6.95 ea.
Sola Scriptura and the Regulative Principle of Worship (243 pp.) \$7.50 ea.
Sovereign Grace: Five Points of Calvinism (155 pp.) \$6.50 ea. **New!**
The Regulative Principle of Worship and Christmas Revised 2nd ed. (180 pp.) \$6.50
The Premillennial Deception: Chiliasm Examined in Light of Scripture (76 pp.) \$2.50 ea.
Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of God Revised 2nd ed. (168 pp.) \$6.50

Prices do not include shipping and handling.

For quantity discounts, contact Pastor Schwertley.

Please make checks or money orders payable to Brian M. Schwertley, P.O. Box 147, Iola, WI 54945

For further information, call Rev. Schwertley at (715) 445-2851 or e-mail at bschwertley@athena.net.



WPCUS Churches Which Broadcast on Sermon Audio:

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermonsource.asp?keyword=WPCUS>

E-Mail List:

To be added to our email list, send an email to eList@wpcus.org with "Add Me" in the subject.

Free Online Books

<http://www.reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/s36p93.htm>