

PSALM SINGING IN SCRIPTURE & HISTORY

by Reg Barrow

The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence; singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God... (Westminster Confession of Faith 21:5, 1647, emphasis added).

It is the duty of Christians to praise God publickly, by the singing of psalms together in the congregation, and also privately in the family. (The Directory for the Publick Worship of God; Agreed Upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster... as a Part of the Covenanted Uniformity in Religion... with an Act of the General Assembly, and Act of Parliament, Both in Anno 1645 Approving & Establishing the Said Directory).

The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his word... also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry. (Westminster Larger Catechism, partial answer to Question 108, 1648).

The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted of God himself; tolerating a false religion... all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretence whatsoever... all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed. (Westminster Larger Cat., part answer to Q. 109, 1648).

The reasons annexed to the second commandment, the more to enforce it... are besides God's sovereignty over us, and propriety in us, his fervent zeal for his own worship, and his revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom; accounting the breakers of this commandment such as hate him, and

threatening to punish them unto divers generations; and esteeming the observers of it such as love him and keep his commandments, and promising mercy to them unto many generations. (Westminster Larger Catechism, partial answer to Question 110, 1648).

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. (Col. 3:16, emphases added).

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. (Eph. 5:19, KJV, emphases added).

This newsletter will be concerned with establishing that the only legitimate historical, confessional and most importantly, Biblical means of addressing God in public worship-song is via the Psalms.¹ I will grant at the outset that this is a tall order for one short newsletter. But if all I accomplish here is to encourage some to delve further into this important issue, a measure of success will have already been attained. Having observed that much of the Reformed community is not even acquainted with their own heritage of exclusive Psalmody, much less the unassailable exegetical strength of this position, I hope that this encouragement to search the Scriptures and heed the wisdom of our forefathers will not fall upon deaf ears. For great stress is laid upon the importance of discussions concerning worship throughout the works of all the major Reformers. John Calvin's reply to the Romanist Sadoletto, in 1539, is a case in point, when he writes, "I have no difficulty in conceding to you that there is nothing more dangerous to our salvation than a twisted and perverse worship of God."² And John Knox, forceful as usual, sets forth the end of all those who love the lie of man-made worship, when he states that for the "avoiding of idolatry you may perchance be compelled to leave your native country and realm; but obeyers of idolatry, without end, shall be compelled, body and soul, to burn in hell."³ These discussions were for the Reformers, and are for us, much more than just academic wrangling; in them are contained the very issues of eternal life and death. The Lord, in Scripture, constantly warns against man-made devices in worship, and His most severe judgments are brought upon individuals and nations for sins which involve the very principles herein discussed (cf. Rev. 21:8, 2 Chr. 24:18, Gal. 5:19-21). On the other hand Psalm singing is one of the great joys of the Christian life. Returning the praises of God to the Almighty in a manner which He has instituted (and with which He is pleased) can and has lead to great blessing upon all those who practice it.

The Historical Testimony

The historical testimony reveals to us a most intriguing picture.⁴ In it our Lord shows us that at the times in which He has been pleased to visit this Earth with great light, He also has given His human light-bearers the grace to practice exclusive Psalmody in public worship. In fact this testimony is so clear that it is rarely contested and is often readily conceded even by those opposed to exclusive Psalmody. Gary Crampton, in a recent article, is one example of this when he stated that "there is little question that through the centuries of church history exclusive Psalmody has been heavily endorsed by those within the Reformed community."⁵

The Early Church

Concerning the early Church, Bushell notes that, "The introduction of uninspired hymns into the worship of the Church was a gradual process, and it was not until the fourth century that the practice became widespread."6 G.I. Williamson further points out that a "second noteworthy fact is that when uninspired hymns first made their appearance, it was not among the orthodox Churches but rather the heretical groups... If the Church from the beginning had received authority from the Apostles to make and use uninspired hymns, it would be expected that it would have done so. But it did not. Rather it was among those who departed from the faith that they first appeared."7 This historical testimony raises a number of interesting questions for those who claim to adhere to the regulative principle of worship and yet maintain the use of uninspired hymns in public worship. First, if the Psalter had been insufficient, why was there no command to produce new songs for worship, only commands to sing that which was already in existence? Second, if a new manual of praise was necessary, why was it that the Apostles did not write any new songs under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Third, why is it that we do not find even one "hymn" fragment among all the early church writings that have survived to this day. Moreover, there is not even one mention of the use of uninspired "hymns" among orthodox Christians until they began to be written in reply to the heretical "hymns," which had not surfaced until late in the second century?8 Fourth, why was there still strong opposition to the introduction of uninspired hymns well into the fifth century? The Synod of Laodicea (A.D. 343) and the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) both opposed the introduction of uninspired "hymns." In addition to this Bushell states that "as late as the ninth century we find appeals to the earlier Councils in support of a pure psalmody."9

The Protestant Reformation

As we reach the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century we find that "the same clericalism which denied the Bible to the common people eventually denied them the Psalter as well and replaced congregational singing with choral productions in a tongue unknown to the vast majority of the worshippers."10 As the Reformation progressed we encounter an almost complete return to exclusive Psalmody (excluding the Lutherans, who had not extended the principle of sola Scriptura to their worship). Bushell states,

The Scottish Reformer John Knox not surprisingly followed Calvin in this matter, and the Reformed Church as a whole followed their lead. "This meant that at a stroke the Reformed Church cut itself loose from the entire mass of Latin hymns and from the use of hymnody in general, and adopted the Psalms of the Old Testament as the sole medium of Church praise."11 Hence forth to be a Calvinist was to be a Psalm-singer. For some two and a half centuries the Reformed churches as a rule sang nothing but the Psalms in worship.... The metrical Psalter was born in Geneva where it was nurtured and cherished by all who embraced the principles of Calvinism.12

Furthermore, the importance that Calvin placed on Psalm singing can be seen in the following account,

When Calvin and Farel were banished from Geneva (April 23, 1538) for refusal to submit to the liturgical practices which the Council had taken over from Bern, they appealed their

case to the Synod which met at Zurich on April 29, 1538. At that time they presented a paper drawn up by Calvin containing 14 articles specifying the terms upon which they were willing to return to Geneva. They admitted that they had been too rigid and were willing to concede a number of the disputed practices... But on several other points they stood firm. They insisted on... the more frequent administration of the Lord's Supper... and the institution of the singing of Psalms as a part of public worship (emphasis added).¹³

This was an extremely bold stand for truth, and, as we know, Calvin returned to Geneva, and Psalm singing commenced. As he matured, Calvin insisted on, and instituted, the practice of the exclusive (acappella) singing of Psalms in Geneva's public worship.¹⁴ Another interesting historical note concerning the development (and strength) of Calvin's arguments against uninspired hymns is placed in context by the following conclusion reached by Bushell,

Calvin knew, as well as we ought to know, that in the last analysis a "counsel of prudence" and a "case of conscience" amount to the same thing. In worship-song, as in other things, God deserves the best that we have to offer. No pious man can in clear conscience offer up one sacrifice of praise to God when prudence dictates that another would be better. Calvin says as much in the passage which we just quoted. How one can read Calvin's conclusion that "no one can sing things worthy of God, unless he has received them from God Himself" and yet conclude that "he had no scruples of conscience against the use of human songs" is quite beyond our comprehension. These sentiments, which Calvin borrows from Augustine (on Psalm 31, sermon 1) and takes as his own, are at the very heart of all arguments against the use of uninspired hymns in the religious worship of God. Calvin's own practice, his insistence on the inspired superiority of the Psalms, and his defense of the Regulative Principle, all point toward the unavoidable conclusion that Calvin limited himself to the Psalms... because he thought it would have been wrong to do otherwise. The Reformed Church as a whole followed him in this belief and clung to it tenaciously for over two centuries. Modern Presbyterian worship practice has no claim to Calvin's name at this juncture. Calvin would have wept bitterly to behold the songs sung today in those churches which claim to have followed in his footsteps... the fact remains that in practice the Genevan Reformer was as strict a Psalm-singer as ever there was.¹⁵

The "Signature of Puritanism"

Psalm singing has been called the "signature of Puritanism."¹⁶ "The English Puritans, being Calvinists and not Lutherans, held to the view that the only proper worship-song was that provided by God once and for all in the Book of Psalms... (t)his was Calvin's conviction, and a metrical Psalm before and after the sermon was the usual practice at Geneva."¹⁷ "[O]ur Calvinistic heritage, then, is a Psalm-singing heritage, and our Reformed churches, to the extent that they have chosen to forsake that heritage, are no longer Calvinistic in their patterns of worship."¹⁸

The Westminster Confession of Faith

A Survey of English and Scottish Psalmody would not be complete without a reference to the work of the Westminster Assembly. Since the Westminster standards still have creedal authority in some of the smaller Presbyterian bodies which, however, are no longer committed to exclusive Psalmody, it is worth pointing out here that the Westminster Divines sanctioned nothing but the use of Psalms in the religious worship of God (emphasis added).¹⁹

It is at this point that major contradictions appear for those attempting to uphold the Westminster Confession along with the use of uninspired "hymns" in worship. The writers of the Confession were well aware of the fact that the regulative principle of Scriptural worship demands divine institution for all elements in the public worship service. Thus, to suppose that the writers of the Confession would sanction that which they could not find divine institution in scripture for and also did not include in the Confession under this section, belies a misunderstanding of the regulative principle itself. It imports the Lutheran idea that that which is not forbidden is permissible in public worship, rather than the Calvinistic conviction that that which is instituted or prescribed by Scripture is required. This is a common error today, even among Presbyterians—who, of all people, should know better. In fact, according to all the written records, the idea that uninspired "hymns" were suitable worship-songs was not even discussed at the Westminster Assembly, "the only disputes of any magnitude being over the practice of 'lining out' the Psalms and over whether to use the Psalter version of Rous or the 'Metaphrase' of Barton."²⁰ Thus, it can be unequivocally stated that one is of necessity in violation of both the spirit and letter of the Westminster Confession of Faith outside of the practice of exclusive Psalmody (regarding public worship-song).

Bushell summarizes our survey of Reformed thought,

It is remarkable that, in spite of the absence of any creedal constraints and in spite of the influence that must have been exerted on the Reformed Church by other communions where uninspired hymns flourished, the practice of exclusive Psalmody in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches was so uniform for two centuries after the Reformation that there exists today no undisputed evidence of ecclesiastically sanctioned hymnody in their services of worship during that period.²¹

Now, it readily can be seen, even in this short historical overview, why those with even a cursory knowledge of Reformed history concede the historical argument to the exclusive Psalm singers.

Sola Scriptura in Worship

Since Scripture, and not history (as helpful as it is), must be our final authority, it is to the Scripture we will go. Some positions against exclusive Psalmody can be dismissed at the outset. First, unless one is ready to institute the use of literal altars, incense, etc. in public worship, the highly symbolic and figurative nature of the book of Revelation can be no safe guide for worship (here and now).²² Second, it should be noted that most (if not all) arguments against exclusive Psalmody are of a negative nature. These anti-Psalm arguments could possibly prove that the Psalm singer's position is incorrect, but for those holding to the regulative principle, you cannot prove the positive institution of uninspired hymns by a negative argument against exclusive Psalmody. I have personally requested proof for the Biblical institution of uninspired hymns from one prominent minister who says that he upholds the regulative principle (but still uses uninspired man-made compositions for public worship-song), and have yet to receive any answer. Can you provide this proof? This is really the crux of the matter for those espousing

uninspired hymns: Where is the Biblical institution for uninspired songs in public (New Testament) worship? Williamson is to the point concerning this insurmountable obstacle faced by those promoting such an innovation (i.e. modern "hymn" singers):

It is of no small importance that textual proof has never been demonstrated for the use of uninspired songs in worship. No one has yet found even a single scripture text to prove that God commands His Church to sing anything other than the psalms of the Bible in worship. And it is not because men have not searched diligently! A few years ago a Committee of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church made such a search. This Committee had a majority in favour of the use of uninspired hymns in worship. And yet, after an exhaustive search through scripture requiring a number of years to complete, such proof could not be found. The Committee Chairman admitted that it is 'impossible to prove that uninspired songs are authorized in scripture.' He even said that 'to demand such proof before one can in good conscience sing uninspired songs is to demand the impossible!' (The Presbyterian Guardian, Vol. 17, p. 73). This is a grave admission. But it is no more than the facts require. For the bare truth is that no one has found so much as a single text of scripture commanding the use of uninspired songs in divine worship. And remember, we are not to worship God in any other way not commanded in His word.'²³

At this point those promoting uninspired songs in worship are probably protesting that I have forgotten about Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, but such is not the case. Having come out of a "hymn-singing" tradition, these very scriptures comprised a major part of my initial protest against the position which I now hold. So let's take a look at them. Williamson is most instructive here,

The proper interpretation of scripture terms requires that we discover, not what we mean by these terms when we use them today, but what the inspired writer meant when he used them. And it is one of the oddities of biblical interpretation that this rule is commonly observed with reference to the term 'psalms', and commonly disregarded with respect to the terms 'hymns' and 'songs'. For the fact is that all three of these terms are used in the Bible to designate various selections contained in the Old Testament Psalter. In the Greek version of the Old Testament familiar to the Ephesians and Colossians the entire Psalter is entitled 'Psalms'. In sixty-seven of the titles within the book the word 'psalm' is used. However, in six titles the word 'hymn' is used, rather than 'psalm', and in thirty-five the word 'song' appears. Even more important twelve titles use both 'psalm' and 'song', and two have 'psalm' and 'hymn'. Psalm seventy-six is designated 'psalm, hymn and song'. And at the end of the first seventy two psalms we read that '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 the simple reason that all three were biblical terms for psalms in the book of psalms itself. We are in the habit of using the terms 'hymns' and 'songs' for those compositions that are not psalms. But Paul and the Christians at Ephesus and Colossae used these terms as the Bible itself uses them, namely, as titles for the various psalms in the Old Testament Psalter. To us it may seem strange, or even unnecessary, that the Holy Spirit would use a variety of titles to describe His inspired compositions. But the fact is that He did so. Just as the Holy Spirit speaks of His 'commandments and his statutes and his judgmentss' (Deut.. 30:16, etc.), and of 'miracles and wonders and signs' (Acts 2:22), so He speaks of His 'psalms, hymns and songs'. As commandments, statutes and judgmentss are all divine laws in the language of

scripture; as miracles and wonders and signs are all supernatural works of God in the language of scripture; so psalms, hymns and songs are the inspired compositions of the Psalter, in the language of scripture itself... The New Testament evidence sustains this conclusion. On the night of the Last Supper Jesus and His disciples sang 'an hymn' (Matt. 26:30). Bible expositors admit that this was 'the second part of the Hallel Psalms (115-118)" which was always sung at the Passover. (New Bible Commentary, p. 835.) Matthew called this psalm a 'hymn' because a psalm is a hymn in the terminology of the Bible. To the same effect is the Old Testament quotation in Hebrews 2:12, in which the Greek word 'hymn' is quoted from Psalm 22:22. In this quotation from an Old Testament psalm, the word 'hymn' is used to denote the singing of psalms because the Old Testament makes no distinction between the two. But if Scripture itself says that psalms are hymns, and that hymns are psalms, why should we make any distinction between them? If we grant that the Apostle used biblical language in a biblical sense there is no more reason to think that he spoke of uninspired hymns in these texts (Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:19) than to think that he spoke of uninspired psalms, because hymns are inspired psalms in the holy scriptures.²⁴

Furthermore, to reject Mr. Williamson's explanation regarding these verses leads to some major problems. We have already observed that no evidence exists that any uninspired "hymns" existed during the period when these verses were written. Only the inspired Psalms (i.e. psalms, hymns and spiritual songs) were in use as public worship-songs at that time, and no Biblical command is found anywhere to produce additional songs beyond those already contained in the existing book of divine praise—the Psalms. Is the regulative principle then in error? We think not. Why then were no new songs produced by the early church if these verses were understood to call for them? The Apostles themselves did not produce any such songs, either inspired or uninspired—not even one that we know of. This helps demonstrate that they did not interpret these verses as modern "hymn-singers" do. Moreover, to approach these verses by importing a modern meaning into the words "hymns and spiritual songs, not only rests on very shaky ground—leaving much room for doubt and in no way fulfilling the requirements of the regulative principle for clear Biblical warrant in worship practices—but would also destroy the basis for Grammatico-Historical interpretation of Scripture.²⁵ Therefore, we can see that Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 cannot possibly mean what those opposing the position of exclusive Psalmody say they mean, because their interpretation does not fit any of the existing Biblical (or historical) data—while the Psalm singers interpretation fits perfectly!

Finally and probably most importantly, Bushell has dug down to the root of the problem in the matter of human innovation in worship,

Arrogance, pride and self-assertion are at the very heart of all attempts to find a musical replacement for the Psalter. William Romaine makes some very pointed comments in this connection, to which advocates of uninspired song in worship would do well to listen: "I want a name for that man who should pretend that he could make better hymns than the Holy Ghost. His collection is large enough: it wants no addition. It is perfect, as its author, and not capable of any improvement. Why in such a case would any man in the world take it into his head to write hymns for the use of the Church? It is just the same as if he was to write a new Bible, not only better than the old, but so much better, that the old may be thrown aside. What a blasphemous attempt! And yet our hymn-mongers, inadvertently, I hope, have come very near to this blasphemy; for they shut out the Psalms, introduce their own verses into the Church, sing them with great delight, and as they fancy with great

profit; although the whole practice be in direct opposition with the blessing of God." We see, therefore, that the sufficiency and divine origin of the Psalter are in themselves adequate arguments for its exclusive use in worship. As we have pointed out a number of times already, the very fact that the Bible contains a book of inspired psalms immediately places worship-song in the same category as the authoritative reading of the Scriptures in worship. The former is but the musical counterpart of the latter, and as such is incompatible with the use of uninspired hymns in worship.²⁶

Psalmody, Separation, and the Lord's Supper

One major practical question remains concerning exclusive Psalmody. This is where "the rubber meets the road." Can you attend worship services which practice the idolatry of "hymn" signing and be free of sin yourself. My answer would be no!²⁷ Hymn singing is a direct violation of the second commandment. To attend such services without at least publicly protesting (and then bringing formal charges against the public officers who promote and maintain this sin) involves one in the breach of both the second and ninth commandments. Remember, the duties required in the second commandment include "the disapproving, detesting, (and) opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry."²⁸ Additionally, the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment include "undue silence in a just cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either reproof from ourselves, or complaint to others."²⁹ With the Act, Declaration, and Testimony, for the Whole of our Covenanted Reformation... by the Reformed Presbytery we must "testify against all those who, under pretext of superior charity or liberality, fiercely clamour for union of churches (and union within churches—RB) by a sacrifice of divine truth."³⁰ There is no neutrality possible where the regulative principle is concerned. True Christian love demands that we speak out on this matter. It is not loving to hold your peace, and it is not kindness or faithfulness to forbear warning a brother when you know that he is in sin.³¹ Moreover, there can be no real unity while these matters are swept under the table. There can be no real and lasting reformation where the worship of God is corrupted. Exclusive Psalmody and modern "hymn" singing cannot both be commanded of God at the same time. God is not the author of confusion. Moreover, if those in "power" will not hear legitimate reproof, then we must remember that the "duty of holiness toward God, engaged to in the covenant, comprehends in it a zealous endeavor to maintain the purity of the doctrine, worship, discipline and government of his institution, in opposition to all those who would corrupt it, or decline from it... by reproving (them) for sin; or upon those rejecting reproof, by withdrawing from (them)."³² Additionally, "[w]e shall in like manner detest, and abhor, and labour, to extirpate all kinds of superstition—all rites and ceremonies superadded by human inventions to the worship of God, not enjoined and required in his Word; together with all heresy and false doctrine, and all profaneness and immoralities of every kind, and whatsoever is contrary to sound religion... We shall upon the other hand, endeavour to keep ourselves, as far as we can, from all partakings in other men's sins, by consenting unto associations, incorporations, combinations, compliance with, or conniving at, their sins."³³ The necessity of separation from those holding to different worship practices is best illustrated as it comes to a head concerning participation in the Lord's Supper. I will end this short appeal for consistency concerning worship-song with some citations bearing on communion and exclusive Psalmody:

We think that the original Presbyterian Church of the Reformation was right, and that to abandon its position was accordingly a sin in the sight of God— a sin in fact which is serious enough to justify us in maintaining a separate existence; in order that, by that

existence, we may consistently testify against sin... We all accept the Westminster Standards. These declare that the Second Commandment forbids "all devising, using and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God Himself"...Now our church holds that this interpretation of those Commandments binds people to the exclusive use of the Psalms in divine worship, and puts them under solemn obligation to sing praises, as in apostolic times, without the use of musical instruments, and requires them to renounce the system of secretism as a system of darkness altogether unworthy of such as are called of God to be "light in the world." ...If our interpretation is not right we ought to disband. If it is right, our Session ought to see that it is honored in every particular by every person who proposes to come to the Lord's table under their jurisdiction... We hold, whether rightly or wrongly, that to undertake to praise God with songs other than those which the Holy Spirit has inspired for that purpose is a sin, and such a sin as, unrepented of, should prevent a person from sitting down at the Lord's table, either in our Church or in any other... The fact is that we find ourselves under obligation, in these respects, to bear a faithful testimony not only to the world, but to such other Churches also as differ with us on these intrinsically important questions. At the communion table our testimony comes to its climax. Shall we weaken where we should be firmest? Shall we waver where we should be immovable? Shall we make it apparent on the Holy Mount that we are sincere in our conclusions and mean to maintain them to the end, or shall we choose the Holy Mount to make it apparent to other Churches and to the world, that we only half believe what we profess? Here, of all places, it would seem, we ought to aim to be perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48).³⁴

FOOTNOTES:

1. I am assuming throughout this newsletter that the reader is acquainted with the Presbyterian-Reformed-Covenanter-Puritan understanding of the regulative principle of worship. If you are not familiar with this Biblically controlling principle of worship (also called the Scriptural law of worship), which is simply the logical outgrowth of the Reformation principle of sola Scriptura, it was dealt with in the previous issue of Christian Reformation Today, #15-16, entitled "Worship." For more extensive treatment of the regulative principle see Greg Price's *The Regulative Principle of Worship in the NT and OT* (available from SWRB on video, cassette and forthcoming as a bound photocopy), John McNaugher's *The Psalms In Worship* (SWRB, [1907] 1992), Kevin Reed's *Biblical Worship* (Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995), Carl Bogue's *Scriptural Worship* (Blue Banner Books, 1993), George Gillespie's *A Dispute Against English Popish Ceremonies* (Naphtali Press, [1637] 1993), "A Vindication of the Doctrine that the Sacrifice of the Mass is Idolatry," in *Selected Writings of John Knox* (Presbyterian Heritage Publications, [1550] 1995), G.I. Williamson's *Scriptural Regulative Principle of Worship* and his *Instrumental Music in the Worship of God* (SWRB bound photocopies, 1995), *The Auchensaugh Renovation of the National and Solemn League and Covenant* (SWRB rare bound photocopy, [1712] 1995), and W.J. McKnight's *Concerning Close Communion* (SWRB rare bound photocopy, reprinted 1995). As we will see at the conclusion of this newsletter, the last book mentioned maintains that the violation of the regulative principle (i.e. the second commandment), by the use of man-made, uninspired compositions in public worship-song, is a sin which should result in the offender being barred from the Lord's table — in all churches which faithfully uphold Scriptural worship and the Westminster standards.

2. Cited in Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin*

(Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 199, footnote 18.

3. Godly Letter of Warning, cited in Kevin Reed, *John Knox the Forgotten Reformer: Studies in the Theology of the Scottish Reformer* (Presbyterian Heritage Publications, forthcoming), pp. 86-87.

4. For those, who, in extreme overreaction to Popery, have adopted the Anabaptistic notion of authority, and thus rejected the uninspired historical testimony of the true Church outright, (as if the Scripture was recognized in a vacuum), we submit the following rejoinder, "Nor otherwise can a Christian know the time or place of his birth, or the persons whom God commands him to honor as his father and mother, than by uninspired testimony; and the same is true of his covenant obligation, if baptized in infancy. Against all who ignorantly or recklessly reject or oppose history as a bond of fellowship, in the family, in the state, but especially in the church, we thus enter our solemn and uncompromising protest" (Reformed Presbytery, *Act, Declaration, and Testimony, for the Whole of Covenanted Reformation* (SWRB rare bound photocopy [1761, 1876] 1994), p. 178.

5. "Psalms, Hymns & Spiritual Songs" *Counsel of Chalcedon*, May 1991, p. 9.

6. Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown and Covenant Publ., 1980), p. 122.

7. G. I. Williamson, *The Singing of Psalms in the Worship of God* (SWRB, bound photocopy, 1994), pp. 16-17.

8. The first use of uninspired "hymns" was found among a heretical group called the Bardessanes. Cf. Williamson, *Singing of Psalms*, p. 16. 9. Bushell, *Songs of Zion*, p. 125.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

11. Bushell cites Millar Patrick, *Four Centuries of Scottish Psalmody* (London, 1949), p. 9, in *Songs of Zion*, p. 131.

12. Bushell, *Songs of Zion*, p. 131, 132.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 141. Calvin allowed "a few Biblical songs" (Bushell) to be sung in his youth. However, this is a far cry from requiring uninspired "hymnody," and, as he grew in grace, he insisted upon the practice of exclusive Psalmody!

16. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 147. For more proof that the Westminster Assembly gave positive sanction to exclusive Psalmody see "Notices Regarding the *Metrical Versions of the Psalms* Received by the Church of Scotland" in *The Letters and Journals of Robert Bailie* (SWRB rare bound photocopy, reprinted 1994), volume 3, pp. 525-556. Keep in mind that the Westminster Divines were required to send all their work to parliament for approval, and that besides the fact that there were no discussions of man-made hymns ever recorded of this august body, much was recorded concerning which Psalter would be presented to

parliament. Much work was also done in producing a suitable version. Given the Westminster divines covenanted goal of uniformity in worship, and their strict adherence to the regulative principle (as demonstrated by the citations from the Larger Catechism above), it is astounding indeed that there are those in our day that claim to hold to the Westminster standards who even question this point.

20. Ibid., p. 147.

21. Ibid., p. 172.

22. One could even do away with marriage trying to use heaven as a guide for that which takes place here and now on earth (see Luke 20:35). Clearly the argument that runs to the book of Revelation for support of worship practices, by trying to transfer what is clearly symbolic and typical into that which is literal, proves too much, and if applied consistently would (and has) led to many ridiculous extremes — not the least of which is Roman Catholic idolatry. Cf. James Glasgow, *Heart and Voice: Instrumental Music in Christian Worship Not Divinely Authorized*, (Belfast, late nineteenth century, SWRB rare bound photocopy), for a refutation of this error.

23. Williamson, *Singing of Psalms*, p. 18.

24. Williamson, *Singing of Psalms*, pp. 10, 11.

25. It is also interesting to note that to interpret "hymns and spiritual songs" as something other than the Biblical Psalms leads to a number of other thorny problems. First you are left with a grammatical construction that is found nowhere else in Scripture (in which a separate item is listed, followed by a disparate set of two items, in a set of three items total). The "hymn-singers" interpretation also turns this verse into a mere tautology (i.e. the verse then reads Psalms, hymns and hymns). Why repeat "hymns" twice? And what is the Biblical difference between a "hymn" and a "spiritual song"? Furthermore, comparing worship-song to preaching and prayer is clearly a false analogy. Worship-song is comparable to the reading of Scripture in worship. Teaching Elders (or anybody else for that matter) are never told to write new Scripture or to write new songs for public worship. On the other hand Teaching Elders are often commanded (either directly or through approved Scriptural example) to expound Scripture using their own words and also to pray with words of their own composition. Calvin's comment that every man is a little idol factory seems to be especially applicable when it comes to worship-song. Regarding Grammatico-Historical interpretation see Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (SWRB, [1895] rare bound photocopy 1993), pp. 70, 101-140.

26. Bushell, *Songs*, p. 102, emphasis added.

27. The arguments found in John Bradford's *Hurt of Hearing Mass* (SWRB [1580] rare bound photocopy 1995) could also be applied to the obligation for separating from the idolatry taking place during the singing of uninspired man-made compositions in public worship. Calvin's battle with the Nicodemites is also very instructive here (cf. Eire, "Calvin Against the Nicodemites" in *War Against the Idols*, ch. 7). *A Modest Apology for the Conduct of Seceders, in Refusing to Join in Christian Communion with Sectarians, Latitudinarians, etc., who have Departed from the Purity of Reformation Once Attained to in these Kingdoms* (SWRB, [1773] rare bound photocopy 1995) and John Knox's *An Admonition to Flee Idolatry, Romanism and All False Worship* (SWRB, [1554] rare bound photocopy 1995) should also be consulted.

28. *Westminster Larger Catechism*, partial answer to Question 108, 1648.

29. *Westminster Larger Catechism*, partial answer to Question 145, 1648. M'Neilly's *How Best to Secure*

a Return to the Use of Psalms in the Ordinance of Praise (SWRB rare bound photocopy) should also be consulted, as it contains the practical steps to take if you find yourself in in a "hymn" singing church, having come to Psalm-singing convictions. Also see our newly published tracts "Some Comments for Those Who Attend Idolatrous Worship" by Knox, Burgess and Philpot, and "Of Separation from Corrupt Churches."

30. First emitted 1761 in Scotland and adopted by the Reformed Presbytery in 1876 (SWRB rare bound photocopy, 1994).

31. "Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov. 27:5-6). "It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools" (Eccl. 7:5).

32. Reformed Presbytery, *The Auchensaugh Renovation of the National and Solemn League and Covenant...* (SWRB photocopy, [1712, 1880], reprinted 1994).

33. Ibid, pp. 118-199.

34. W.J. McKnight, *Concerning Close Communion* (SWRB photocopy, 1995). Of course we have left numerous issues regarding all of these matters untouched. Here, I have only endeavored to introduce what I consider some of the more important aspects of the debate over public worship-song. Therefore, I strongly encourage all Christians, whether Psalm singers or not, to obtain and prayerfully study the items listed throughout this newsletter. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1 John 5:21).

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