

A Review of Iain H. Murray's *The Psalter—The Only Hymnal?*

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Introduction

In 2001 the Banner of Truth Trust published a small booklet by Iain H. Murray entitled, *Should the Psalter be the Only Hymnal of the Church?* In this booklet Murray sets out to answer the question, “whether or not Christians and churches are left to form their own judgment on the material they use for this purpose [congregational praise], of whether there is a principle which requires them to use one book alone, namely the Book of Psalms (that is, the Psalter in metrical form).”¹ In this booklet Murray attempts to prove that the exclusive psalmody position is unscriptural and that the use of uninspired hymns is permitted and even superior to the Psalms.² Before we analyze Murray’s specific arguments some general comments are in order.

First, we regard Iain H. Murray as a dear brother in Christ even though we believe the position he holds on this issue is unbiblical and unconfessional. Murray is an excellent scholar and historian who has made a great contribution to the cause of the Reformed faith in modern times (this author owns several of the books Murray has written). Second, for those familiar with the debate over exclusive psalmody Murray really offers nothing new except for some interesting quotes by Puritans who believed that uninspired hymns were lawful. He takes old arguments that have already been thoroughly refuted³ and carefully reworks and fine tunes them. Third, although Murray acknowledges his adherence to the regulative principle of worship, he often argues as if the regulative principle did not exist. In fact the booklet contains *no proof whatsoever from Scripture* that uninspired hymns were ever commanded by God or used by God’s church before the canon was closed. His basic argument for the use of hymns is twofold: some Puritans believed it was permissible and the Psalms are simply inadequate or insufficient for New Covenant worship.

1. Murray’s first argument says, “Where is the proof in Scripture that God appointed the one-hundred-and-fifty Psalms of David for the public worship of the Old Testament church?”⁴ Murray goes on to point out that while some Psalms were written for public worship others were originally penned for use in prayer and teaching. He says, “That all the Psalms were ever used in the temple in worship, or that all were ever given for congregational praise, is simply an assumption which rests on no evidence.”⁵

¹ Iain H. Murray, *Should the Psalter be the Only Hymnal of the Church?* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2001), 4-5.

² Murray says “that it is difficult, and at times impossible, to make the language of David and Asaph the most appropriate expression of Christian experience” (23).

³ It is interesting that Murray’s list of “recent publications” (see footnote 3) in favor of exclusive psalmody ignores the most important modern treatment of the subject, Michael Bushell’s, *The Songs of Zion: A Contemporary Case for Exclusive Psalmody* (Pittsburg, PA: Crown & Covenant, [1977] 1980, 93).

⁴ Iain H. Murray, 6.

⁵ *Ibid*, 7.

Although this argument appears clever, it must be rejected because it fails to recognize the necessary and obvious difference between all the diverse, divinely inspired Psalms as originally composed and the later providential organization and placement of the various Psalms into the completed Psalter by Jehovah. There is no question but that certain Psalms grew directly out of personal experiences, prayers and so forth that were *divinely inspired* Hebrew poetry. There perhaps was even an early collection of Davidic Psalms that were explicitly defined as prayers (see Psalm 72:20).⁶ Five Psalms are referred to as prayers in their titles (17, 86, 90, 102, 142). There are also Psalms that contain no *direct* praise or even *direct* address to God (e.g. 1, 2). But does the fact that certain Psalms were originally composed as prayers in a time of need or crisis or that others have the mere appearance of being didactic poetic statements of doctrine, ethics or salvation history, mean that God Himself cannot take these divinely inspired poems whether deliberate songs of praise, or prayers or statements of doctrine and place them into one book which is the hymn book for the church after its completion? For Murray's argument to carry any weight one must ignore the fact that *God Himself organized all the inspired material in the Psalter and labeled it: "The Book of Praises"* (Hebrew, *Sephir Tehillim*), or as the Greek Septuagint translated it: "The Book of Psalms."

Once God the Holy Spirit organized all the various materials into the Book of Praise and the Old Testament canon was completed, the Jews had a definitive, inspired manual of praise. They understood that their hymnbook was a product of divine inspiration and never attempted to make non-inspired additions to it. They understood that praise songs came from God Himself through the prophetic gift and thus produced no uninspired hymnbooks. The fact that God required divine inspiration for worship songs and that He organized 150 separate, inspired works into a hymnal or manual of praise teaches us that singing Psalms is the musical counterpart to the reading of Scripture in public worship. Apparently, God in His sovereign good pleasure wanted to be worshipped only with praise songs that were *perfect* and not tainted by human defects and sin. Anyone who thinks he can write better songs than the Holy Spirit does not know the perfection and richness of the Psalter, nor the full implications of the deceitfulness of sin in the human heart.

Although some modern scholars may think the title "The Book of Praises" is arbitrary, insignificant and perhaps even inappropriate because the book contains so much diverse material (e.g. prophecies, teaching, prayers, etc), they must ignore the fact that Christ Himself used the title. Jesus said, "Now David himself said in the Book of Psalms" (Lk. 20:42). The inspired word used by our Lord *psalmon* (or *psalmois*, Lk. 24:44) from *psalmos* originally denoted the music of a stringed instrument or a song sung to the accompaniment of music. Therefore, both Jesus and Peter (see Ac. 1:20) identify the whole Book of Psalms as a hymnbook or a book which is designed by God to be sung. Given the title of the Book of Psalms and the explicit confirmation of this title by the New Testament, Murray's assertion that there is no evidence that the book as a whole was given by God for congregational praise is incredible. Moreover, given the fact that the Book of Psalms is clearly designed to be sung as praise; that believers are repeatedly commanded to praise Jehovah with the singing of Psalms (e.g. Ps. 81:2; 95:1-2; 98:4-5; 100:2; 105:2; etc); and that there are many inspired historical examples of the use of

⁶ Interestingly, Psalm 72 is called a Psalm of Solomon not David. Whatever Psalm 72:20 means, *it cannot mean* that all the Psalms prior to this Psalm were written by David.

Psalms (or their inspired counterparts) in public worship (Ex. 15:1; 2 Sam. 1:18; 1 Ch. 16; 2 Ch. 5:13; 20:21; 23:13; 29:30; Ez. 3:11; Ps. 30:4; 137:1ff.; Mt. 26:30, etc). Murray's assertion that there is no evidence that the Psalter was designed for public worship is baffling. As Bushell notes,

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.⁷

If Murray does not think that the placing of an inspired hymnbook in the middle of the canon is significant or that its designation by God as a "Book of Praise" indicates divine warrant for its use in public worship, then (if consistent) he could also argue that the completed canon of Scripture gives us no specific indication that the 66 canonical books should be used for the Scripture reading in public worship. Such reasoning, of course, is absurd.

2. Another argument is based on the (intentional or unintentional) complete disregarding of *sola Scriptura* or the regulative principle of worship. (That is, the biblical doctrine that all the elements or parts of worship must have biblical proof or divine warrant before they are permitted in the worship of God; see Gen. 4:3-5; Lev. 10:1-2; Deut. 4:2; 12:32; 2 Sam. 6:3-7; 1 Ch. 15:13-15; Num. 15:39-40; 1 Ki. 12:32-33; Jer. 7:24, 31; 19:5; Mt. 15:3, 9; 28:20; Jn. 4:24; Col. 2:20-23; etc.) Murray writes, "To argue that because we have only one inspired 'Book of Praises,' therefore nothing of merely human composition is ever to be set to music for the praise of God, is thus to make a deduction which goes beyond anything which Scripture actually says."⁸ This argument is misleading and fallacious for it oversimplifies and misrepresents the way exclusive psalm singers argue. Those who contend for inspired songs in worship do not offer such a one-sided argument. They do not simply say, "The Bible has an inspired hymnbook therefore man-made hymns are forbidden." Rather, they point out that not only does the Bible have an inspired, sufficient hymnbook but there is not a shred of biblical evidence that God has authorized uninspired songs for the worship of Jehovah. There are no divine commands regarding man-made songs in worship. There are no historical examples of God's saints using uninspired hymns in the whole Bible and there are no genuine or sound deductions from Scripture that can be made for uninspired songs in public worship. Exclusive psalm-singers do not need to find an explicit command forbidding uninspired hymns in worship, nor do they need to make such a deduction. The regulative principle has essentially already done both. What Murray needs to do is to stop the smoke screens

⁷ Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, 14-15. Interestingly, a number of Old Testament scholars refer to the Book of Psalms as the hymnbook of the Second Temple (e.g. see A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* [Grand Rapids: Baker, (1902) 1982], xv).

⁸ Iain Murray, 8.

and obfuscations and go directly to Scripture and demonstrate that God has authorized uninspired hymns for the element of singing in public worship. In his booklet he never does this. Instead he goes to church history and selectively quotes Puritans or Presbyterians who agree with him.

3. Murray's next argument is based on disregarding the different elements of public worship. He writes, "Nowhere in Scripture is the idea presented that praise *spoken* has to be restricted to Bible words, words appointed by the Holy Spirit; why then should praise *sung* be different? Further, as already said, the Book of Psalms contains many prayers. It could be called a Book of Prayers as well as a Book of Praises. In that respect there is nothing comparable to it elsewhere in Scripture, yet no one holds that the prayers of the church must ever be restricted to the inspired words that God has given us."⁹ This argumentation should be rejected for a number of reasons.

First, once again Murray writes as though the regulative principle of worship does not exist. The issue is not whether there is an explicit statement or "the idea" that uninspired hymns are forbidden by Scripture. The question that needs to be answered is: Is the use of uninspired hymns authorized by God for use in public worship? The answer to this question is no. They are not. In the whole Bible there are no divine imperatives or explicit commands for uninspired songs in worship. Further, if one carefully studies Scripture he will see that divine inspiration was a prerequisite for writing worship songs for the church (see. Ex. 15:20-21; Jg. 5; 2 Sam. 23:1-2; 2 Ki. 23:2; 1 Chr. 25:1-7; 2 Chr. 29:25-30; 34:30; 35:15; the titles of Ps. 39, 62, 77; Ac. 1:16; etc). The Bible teaches that hymn writing for public worship required a prophetic gift. It was not for anyone who decided to make up a song. Moreover, there is not one enscripturated historical example of an uninspired song in public worship in all of Sacred Writ, not one! If our brother shows us from Scripture that uninspired hymns were commanded by God or used in public worship before the canon of Scripture was closed we will gladly embrace uninspired hymnody. In the meantime we will hold fast to the revealed will of God.

Second, Murray falls back on the old anti-exclusive psalmody argument that since we are permitted to make up our own prayers, we also should be able to make up our own worship songs. While no one denies that praise, prayers, Bible reading and preaching can have at times certain things in common, Murray's attempt to blur the distinction between prayer and singing praise as distinct elements of public worship is unscriptural and unconfessional. In the Westminster Confession of Faith: prayer, reading the Scriptures, singing of psalms, preaching and receiving the sacraments are all described as "parts" or separate elements of public worship. Each distinct element of worship is even proof-texted by the confession.¹⁰

The reason the Confession makes these distinctions is simple. The Bible tells us what the distinct elements of worship are (e.g. preaching—Mt. 26:13; Mk. 16:15; Ac. 9:20; 17:10; 20:8; 1 Cor. 14:28; 2 Tim. 4:2; reading God's Word—Mk. 4:16-20; Ac. 1:13; 13:15; 16:13; 1 Cor. 11:20; 1 Tim. 4:13; Rev. 1:13; prayer to God—Dt. 22:5; Mt. 6:9; 1 Cor. 11:13-15; 1 Th. 5:17; Phil. 4:6; Heb. 13:18; Jas. 1:5; the singing of Psalms—1 Ch. 16:9; Ps. 95:1-2; 105:2; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) and sets forth different rules for each specific element of worship. For example, women are permitted to sing praise in church (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Jas. 1:5; etc) but they are not permitted to preach

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ See *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 23:3, 5.

(1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-14), lead in prayer, read the Scriptures or administer the sacraments. What this means is that the regulative principle (i.e. *sola Scriptura* in the sphere of public worship) must be carefully applied by the church to *each separate element*. If it is not, which is what Rev. Murray wants us to do, then the inevitable result would be liturgical chaos in the churches. If one ignores the fact that singing praise is a separate element of worship and asserts that the Book of Psalms can be treated as a prayer book *in the same manner* as a manual of praise, then logically one could eliminate the element of singing praise in church and replace it with corporate prayer. Murray would, of course, reject such a move; but, when his position is driven to its consistent end that would be the result.

Furthermore, a careful examination of Scripture reveals that the Bible does indeed tell us the proper—authorized—*content* of each element. While the prophetic gift or divine inspiration (as noted above) was required to write praise songs for public worship, the Bible authorizes the use of our own uninspired words in prayer as long as we follow the pattern or model given to us by Christ (cf. Mt. 6:9). God promises His people that the Holy Spirit will assist them when they form their prayers (cf. Zech. 12:10; Rom. 8:26-27). Therefore, when Murray essentially asks: “if we can make up our own words in prayer, then why can we not also make up our own worship songs,” the answer is simple. God authorizes our own words in prayer but has a different requirement for praise.¹¹

4. Murray’s next argument is based on the fact that “Hebrew poetry...is very different from our own.”¹² Consequently, “there has to be a strong case for saying that the Churches which chanted the psalms were more correct.”¹³ Murray goes on to explain that since chanting likely would not be uplifting today, the Psalms need to be put into English metre. This, Murray asserts, would involve adding words to the Psalms that are not there. This argument in its essence is that a true exclusive psalmody is not workable today due to the great difficulties in turning Hebrew poetry into singable English poetry. In other words, if the metrical psalms are unfaithful translations why not be fully consistent and

¹¹ Murray rejects *The Confession of Faith’s* teaching that Scripture even defines the *content* of each separate element of worship. He writes, “The regulative principle controls what shall or shall not be parts of worship: it is sung praise that is authorized as a part, *not the very words of which that part has to be made up*” (p. 11, emphasis added). The problem with Murray’s assertion is that it explicitly contradicts Scripture. The Scripture reading *requires* reading from the Bible alone, not the Apocrypha. Preaching *requires* the exposition of Scripture (Mk. 4:34; Lk. 24:27; Ac. 2:14-40; 17:3; 18:36; 28:23; etc) not the church fathers or the *Bhagavad Ghita*. Praying *requires* following Christ’s pattern with our own uninspired words or petitions (Mt. 6:9). And singing praise *requires* songs written by the Holy Spirit (1 Chr. 6:39; 15:17; 16:5ff; 25:1-7; 2 Chr. 25:1-7; 29:25-30; etc). Bushell writes, “Clearly, if preaching and singing and teaching all require separate warrants as to who may perform these acts in worship, then they also require separate warrants as to their verbal content. Similar observations can be made about the often-mentioned parallel between prayer and singing. It is argued that since our prayers contain non-canonical words, so may our songs. But no one would argue that because we pray in worship we do not need to sing in worship (taking these words here as usually understood), or that because we have a ‘song book’ for use in worship, it would therefore be permissible to have a ‘prayer book.’ The parallel simply cannot be maintained consistently. The problem with this whole line of reasoning is that it abstracts the terms ‘prayer,’ ‘teaching,’ ‘preaching,’ and ‘singing’ from their scriptural context and deals with them as nothing more than linguistic phenomena, rather than as living aspects of biblical worship. Such a procedure is not valid and cannot help but lead to erroneous conclusions. ‘Singing,’ ‘preaching,’ and ‘teaching’ all assume a content and a context. Justice cannot be done to these concepts without keeping their context in mind” (*The Songs of Zion*, 49-50)

¹² Iain H. Murray, 9.

¹³ *Ibid*, 10.

have deliberate loose paraphrases and even new songs altogether? This argument in different variations is rather common.

There are a number of reasons why this argument must be rejected. First, this argument (even if we accept all of Murray's presuppositions) does not at all refute exclusive psalmody. At the very most, it would prove that churches need to be very careful and exacting in translating the Psalms into metre. If such a task is impossible, which is what Murray implies, (it by the way is not impossible), then churches must learn to sing the Psalms without metre (there are churches which have already learned to do this out of the New King James Version). If a Reformed Christian is truly convinced that metrical Psalms are inherently defective and thus unfaithful to the command to sing Psalms, then instead of turning to gross paraphrases and uninspired compositions, which are even more unfaithful, he should sing the original phrasing out of a literal translation.

Second, the logic of Murray's argument is seriously flawed. Murray's argument assumes that if a minor paraphrase of the Psalms is wrong, then gross paraphrases and uninspired hymns are therefore right. This type of logic is like asserting that since unjustified anger in the heart is wrong; therefore physical violence and murder are justified. Or if group A is doing something wrong, group B can also do something even worse. If there are churches that are using unfaithful translations of the psalms or metrical versions that are loose paraphrases, then the only biblical solution is to repent and use a faithful translation.

5. Murray next turns his attention to whether it can be proved that exclusive psalmody can be applied to the New Covenant era. He writes, "If it could be proved that the Psalter alone was the authorized praise of the Old Testament church, it would still be another proposition altogether to establish that it must remain the sole manual for the New."¹⁴ Murray then appeals to Ephesians 5:19 and 1 Corinthians 14:26. He points out that, out of all the commentators of which he is aware, none take the position that Ephesians 5:19 refers to the Old Testament Psalter. He also quotes Charles Hodge on 1 Corinthians 14:26 ("Every one of you hath a psalm") who says, "such a song given by inspiration, and not one of the Psalms of David."¹⁵

Regarding Murray's argumentation we have two considerations. First, the 1 Corinthians 14:26 passage may indeed teach that, before the close of the New Testament canon, some persons in the church who had the gift of prophecy were given new divinely inspired songs by the Holy Spirit. Such an interpretation certainly fits the context where Paul is discussing the proper use of revelatory gifts. But, we ask, does this interpretation disprove the idea that only divinely inspired songs are permitted in public worship? No, not at all! It actually supports the position that divine inspiration was a prerequisite for writing worship songs for the church. Therefore, *at the very most* one could use 1 Corinthians 14:26 as a possible proof text for including the handful of inspired worship songs that are found in the Bible (that God did not include in the Book of Psalms) in public worship. Further, if the apostolic church did have some new *divinely inspired* worship songs that does not affect this debate because: a) as noted Murray is arguing for *uninspired* compositions; b) the revelatory gifts have ceased and thus that are no men qualified to compose new inspired songs; and c) there are no surviving *inspired* New Covenant songs.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1856] 1964), 304.

The fact that the apostolic church did not produce a hymnal of inspired or uninspired songs for public worship is noteworthy. The period of revelatory activity lasted at least forty years. If hymns were being composed, copied and passed around to all the different churches (which is what one could expect if Murray's position was true), then there would be many surviving hymns from the first century. But, there are *none, not even one*. If hymnody flourished in the apostolic church, as many suppose, it is indeed remarkable that no hymns have ever been discovered from this period. It is also remarkable that the New Testament contains no hymns.¹⁶

Second, the Ephesians 5:19 (cf. Col. 3:16) passage also does not support the use of uninspired hymns in worship. If anything it is an excellent proof text for the use of the Psalter in New Covenant worship. Although a lengthy, detailed exegesis of this passage is beyond the scope of this essay, the following observations are noteworthy.

a) The words "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" are best defined not by our modern usage or by ancient pagan literature but by examining how these words are used in context of worship in the Word of God. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the *Septuagint*), when speaking of worship, the words psalm (*psalmos*), hymn (*hymnos*) and spiritual song (*odee*) are *never, ever* used to describe uninspired hymns but are always used to describe the songs in the Psalter or their inspired counterparts. The word *psalmos* occurs 78 times in the Psalms (67 times in the Psalm titles). The term *hymnos* is found in 13 Psalms (in 6 titles) and *odee* is found in 45 Psalms (36 titles). "In 2 Samuel, 1 and 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*)"¹⁷ Moreover, in the Psalm titles it is common to find these terms combined. In the Psalm titles 12 times "psalm" and "song" are combined. Twice "psalm" and "hymn" are placed together. One Psalm title (76) even combines all three ("psalm, hymn and song") like Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. Therefore, comparing Scripture with Scripture we have solid exegetical warrant for interpreting "hymns" and "spiritual songs" in the same manner as "psalms" because all three terms are repeatedly used in Scripture to describe the Psalms of the canonical Psalter.

b) The expression "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" was a common triadic literary method for expressing one important thought or object: the book of Psalms. The Bible contains many such triadic expressions (e.g. Ex. 34:7, "iniquity and transgression and sin;" Dt. 5:31; 6:1, "commandments and statutes and judgments;" Dt. 6:5,

¹⁶ The only thing that an advocate of uninspired hymnody could do with 1 Corinthians 14:14-26 is to argue that this passage is evidence that the Psalter was insufficient for New Covenant public worship. The possible inference for insufficiency, however, does not justify or provide divine warrant for uninspired hymns. Given the fact that the apostolic church did not produce an inspired or uninspired hymnal to supplement the Psalter indicates that even if these were new inspired songs, they were not intended for perpetual use in the church. Since the charismatic gifts were designed to aid the church before the New Testament canon was complete, these prophetic songs may have been a temporary measure because the infant New Covenant churches would be unable to properly interpret and understand the Psalms without the New Testament canon. There is also the distinct possibility that these prophecies were only sung by individuals and were never intended for corporate use. One must also not rule out the possibility that the word "psalm" in 1 Corinthians 14:14-26 does in fact refer only to the Old Testament psalms. This interpretation is common. Whatever view one holds, this passage does not provide divine warrant for our modern uninspired hymnals.

¹⁷ Michael Bushell, 86.

“heart...soul...and strength;” Mt. 22:37, “heart...soul...and mind” (cf. Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27); Ac. 2:22, “miracles and wonders and signs;” Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16, “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”). When uninspired hymn mongers grasp at the word “hymn” as if it authorizes the songs of Watts or Wesley (both heretics) they grasp at straw.

c) In the parallel passage, Colossians 3:16 the immediate context indicates that the three terms used by Paul describe a part of God’s infallible Word. The apostle says “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col. 3:16). The expression “word of Christ” is synonymous with the Word of God. The pre-incarnate Son of God was the Author of the Psalms (cf. 1 Pet. 1:11).

d) The grammar of the passage also indicates that the three terms used by Paul describe only Spirit inspired songs. In the Greek the adjective “spiritual” (i.e. of the Spirit, Spirit given, or determined by the Holy Spirit [i.e. “inspired” or “God-breathed”]) can apply to all three preceding nouns. The word *pneumatikos* [“spiritual”] qualifies all three datives and is feminine in gender due to the gender of the noun closest to it. This means that all three terms “psalms, hymns and songs” are “spiritual” or inspired by the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ People who appeal to Ephesians 5:19 as a proof text for uninspired hymns in public worship have not followed sound, biblical principles of interpretation.

(6) Murray’s next section, which begins with the title “The Regulative Principle,” is really mislabeled; for, after one erroneous comment about the regulative principle,¹⁹ Murray spends almost 9 pages discussing church history. The purpose of this section is to refute the contention by exclusive psalm-singers that “the best Reformed Churches and authors” believed that uninspired hymns in public worship were unauthorized. There are a number of observations and comments that need to be expressed regarding this section.

First, unless one is a Roman Catholic or a “Steelite,” church history cannot settle controversies in doctrine, ethics or worship (read *The Westminster Confession of Faith* 1:10). Murray even acknowledges this fact on page 20. It is rather odd that in a booklet of only 32 pages, Murray spends nine pages selectively quoting Puritan and Presbyterians who may have regarded uninspired hymns as permissible. Given the fact that Murray is an excellent historian this is perhaps understandable. Nevertheless, once again we point out that the booklet is almost devoid of exegesis and contains no actual proof from Scripture that uninspired hymns are authorized by God.

Second, the manner in which Murray appeals to church history is often very misleading. This assertion will be demonstrated by the following observations.

a) The Puritans had disagreements on a number of issues (baptism, church government, erastianism, justification from eternity, the civil magistrate and biblical law, etc) and it is not difficult for a historian with access to a good library to selectively gather quotes in order to give a one-sided, distorted picture. Exclusive psalm-singers have never claimed that all the Reformed churches or Puritans held to exclusive psalmody.²⁰ But,

¹⁸ See John Murray, “Song in Public Worship” in *Worship in the Presence of God*, (eds. Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, Greenville Seminary Press, 1992), 188. For the New Testament meaning of *pneumatikos* see B. B. Warfield, *The Presbyterian Review*, 1:561 (July 1880). For a more detailed exegesis of Eph. 5:19 which refutes Iain H. Murray’s view see: Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, 83-93.

¹⁹ Iain Murray asserts that the regulative principle does not extend to the content of praise. (This assertion was refuted above in section number 3). Note that Murray’s assertion is *not* accompanied by any supporting evidence whatsoever.

²⁰“After 1696 hymnody gained acceptance among dissenters [i.e. various independents] and eventually among Anglicans. Metrical Psalms largely gave way to Psalm paraphrases used as hymns (particularly

contrary to Murray's historical section, it can be proved to be the dominant position of Presbyterians from the first reformation period in Scotland to the latter half of the eighteenth century. Exclusive psalmody was also the position of the Synod of Dordt (1618-19), a large international Reformed Synod.²¹

b) It is well known by historians that Calvin limited the songs used in public worship to the Psalms and a few metrical versions of portions of Scripture. (There is no historical evidence that Calvin actually wrote, "I greet thee, who my sure Redeemer art," or, that it was sung in the Reformed churches at that time). Calvin may not have been a self-conscious exclusive psalm-singer as were many that followed him. But, it is disingenuous to present him as a support for uninspired hymnody. Interestingly, the very same author (Louise F. Benson) that Murray quoted to demonstrate that Calvin was not an exclusive psalm-singer wrote in a different work: "The hymn of human composure, that had won so hardly a restricted place in the liturgy of the Latin Church, that had developed so phenomenally in the German Reformation, is now excluded from Reformed worship. The inspired songs of Scripture, substantially the Old Testament Psalter, furnish the exclusive subject-matter of praise."²²

As to whether Calvin held a *principled position* against uninspired hymns in public worship the comments of Bushell are on the mark. He writes, "It is an undeniable historical fact that non-canonical songs were excluded from the Geneva services and that this state of affairs was due to Calvin's influence and desire. He is not likely to have followed such a course unless he felt that it was required scripturally, especially considering the importance that he attributed to congregational singing.... There is also the fact that, throughout its long history of development, the *Geneva Psalter* never included a single hymn."²³ The only time Calvin spoke specifically to this issue in print he said: "...[N]o one can sing things worthy of God, unless he has received them from Himself. Therefore, after we have sought on every side, searching here and there, we shall find no songs better and more suitable for our purpose than the Psalms of David, dictated to him and made for him by the Holy Spirit. By singing them ourselves we feel as certain that God put the words into our mouths as if He Himself were singing within us

those by Isaac Watts) or to non-metrical chants.... The first additional material for worship permitted in many Scottish churches was Scripture set to metre after the style of the 1650 book [the Rous Psalter]: *The Scottish Paraphrases* (1781). Modern [uninspired] hymns were introduced by the Relief Church in the late eighteenth century, but were not widespread in Scottish Presbyterianism until roughly between 1850 and 1875" (J. S. Andrews, "Psalms, Psalter," in, organizing ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* [Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993], 683).

²¹ "The Great Synod was convened by the States-General of Holland on November 13, 1618. Among the 84 Dutch delegates were 18 secular commissioners. Included were 27 delegates from various German states, Switzerland, England, and Scotland" (David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, (1963) 2004], 4).

²² Louise F. Benson, *The Hymnody of the Christian Church* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1956), 86, as quoted in Bushell, 178.

²³ Michael Bushell, 179-180. The one possible exception to this was the first edition of the Geneva Psalter (1542) that contained the Apostle's Creed; which at least in the early days of Calvin's Geneva was sung only before the Lord's supper was celebrated. Regarding this exception keep in mind the following: First, it was sung as a confession. Second, at that time both Roman Catholics and Protestants believed it was composed by the apostles. Calvin regarded it as apostolic (see *Institutes* 11.16.18 and *Theological Treatises*, 92). Therefore, although not a portion of Scripture, it was not regarded as an uninspired hymn. Third, it was removed from the final, authorized version of the Psalter (1562). For a detailed discussion see Bushell, 179-181.

to exalt His glory...it should accustom itself hereafter to sing these divine and heavenly songs with good King David.”²⁴

c) Murray’s inferences regarding the Scottish church of the first reformation period are completely unwarranted. He writes, “The Scots Psalter of 1564, which remained in general use to the time of the Westminster Assembly, was based largely on the work of Sternhold and Hopkins and while their renderings usually kept closer to the original than paraphrases, they were clearly not composed in the conviction that nothing other than the biblical text may be introduced.”²⁵ Regarding this statement we make the following observations. There is really no way that Murray can know whether these men believed in using uninspired hymns in public worship unless he can produce a statement to that effect. Further, whatever these men may have thought, the Church of Scotland as a whole was opposed to uninspired hymns and did not permit their use in public worship. If the Church of Scotland had nothing against uninspired hymns, which is what Murray implies, then why did they not use hymns, adopt the use of a hymnal or assign members of Presbytery to produce hymns for public use?

d) The Westminster Standards, which are the pinnacle of the Protestant Reformation and the Reformed creeds, explicitly take a position of exclusive psalmody both in the *Confession of Faith* (“The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the word...; singing of psalms with grace in the heart...are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God” [21:5]) and the *Directory for the Publick Worship of God* (“After reading of the word, (and singing of the psalm,) the minister who is to preach...It is the duty of “Christians to praise God publickly, by singing of psalms together in the congregation, and also privately in the family. In singing of psalms, the voice is to be tunably and gravely ordered; but the chief care must be to sing with understanding, and with grace in the heart, making melody unto the Lord. That the whole congregation may join herein, every one that can read is to have a psalm book; and all others, not disabled by age or otherwise, are to be exhorted to learn to read. But for the present, where many in the congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers, do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof.”²⁶) These quotes prove that the word psalm or psalms refers not to worship songs in general, whether inspired or uninspired, but to the book of Psalms in particular.

Those who argue that the word “psalm” in the Westminster Standards is merely a general term for any worship song whether inspired or uninspired, are easily refuted by reading the *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*.²⁷ This work demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt that: uninspired hymns were never even

²⁴ From the *Epistre au lecteur in La forme des priers et chants ecclesiastiques* (1543), in Calvin, *Opera*, Vol. VI, pp. 171ff., in Bushell, 181-182. “The Psalms in Calvin’s view are so superior to human hymns that to place the latter alongside the former could only be an act of impiety” (Ibid, 182)

²⁵ Iain Murray, 13.

²⁶ To read the Westminster Directory of Worship on this issue see: *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, [1646] 1958, 76, 94), 376, 393.

²⁷ Alex F. Mitchell and John Struthers, eds., *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines While Engaged in Preparing Their Directory for Church Government, Confession of Faith, and Catechisms (November 1644 to March 1649) from Transcripts of the Originals Procured by a Committee of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1991 [1874]).

considered by the assembly; and, no ministers or representatives ever complained or argued that uninspired hymns should be included in public worship. The only major issues of debate were whether or not other translations of the Psalms into metre would be allowed besides the Rouse Psalter; and, there was some discussion on the issue of lining out the Psalms.²⁸

After the declension in Scottish and American Presbyterianism in the 1700s (i.e. a loss of emphasis and understanding of the regulative principle of worship and the negative influence of pietistic sentimental revivalism) Watt's paraphrases and then uninspired hymns made many inroads into the large Presbyterian bodies. Exclusive psalmody was officially (i.e. constitutionally) abandoned by the PCUSA in 1788 when their new directory for worship changed the statement in the original directory (1644), "Singing of Psalms," to "by singing Psalms and hymns." Watts' book, *Hymns*, was officially sanctioned by the PCUSA in 1802. The first officially Presbyterian hymnal did not appear until 1831.²⁹

We conclude this brief historical section with a reminder that the best way to ascertain the position of Presbyterians on exclusive psalmody and uninspired hymns in the past is not to quote the opinions of a few ministers here and there; but, rather, to look at the corporate discussion of synods, general assemblies or councils.

(7) The last section of Murray's booklet is called "the positive case for hymns." Murray writes, "I believe it can be argued from the New Testament not simply that the case for hymns is left open, but there is good reason for believing that the praise of the church was not intended to be left precisely where it was in the former dispensation."³⁰ In this section Murray gives a number of reasons why he believes that hymns are essentially superior to the Book of Psalms. We will briefly consider each argument.

First, after noting many of the differences between the Old and New Covenant administrations Murray writes, "All evangelical truth can be found in the Psalter, but not to the degree in which it is now made known." If by this Murray is arguing that the Psalter is insufficient because all the minute details regarding Christ and the gospel are not found within it, then we respond with the following observations.

a) Although the Psalter does not tell us every detail and doctrine of the New Testament (or the Old Testament either. The Psalms do not give a detailed history of Israel. It doesn't tell us all of God's law or anything about the prophets.), it does give us a very full picture of everything we need to know in our praise in conjunction with the other elements of worship. The truth is, is that no element of public worship was designed by God to tell us everything in worship independently of the other elements. Although the Psalms are full of rich doctrine and teaching, their central purpose is praise. They are not designed to replace the Scripture reading or the sermon.

Furthermore, the Psalter reveals such a clear portrait of Christ and His work that any suggestion that they are inadequate in their exposition of Christ's work is wrong. It shows either a lack of understanding regarding their content or is simply an attempt to

²⁸ Ibid, see 163, 221, 222, 298.

²⁹ For a more thorough discussion of the abandonment of exclusive psalmody by the PCUSA, see Bushell, 198-212. The abandonment of exclusive psalmody by other Presbyterian denominations and Dutch Reformed churches is discussed on pp. 212-220. For further reading on the PCUSA and Watts' Psalms see Charles Hodge, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1851), part 2, 244-306.

³⁰ Iain Murray, 20.

form an excuse for man to add to what God has given us for praise. The Psalms teach Christ's divinity (Ps. 45:6; 110:1), His eternal sonship (Ps. 2:7), His incarnation (Ps. 8:5; 40:7-9), His mediatorial offices as Prophet (Ps. 40:9-10), Priest (Ps. 110:4), and King (Ps. 2:7-12; 22:18; 45:6; 72; 110:1). The Psalms give us Spirit-inspired details regarding Christ's betrayal (Ps. 41:9), His agony in the garden (Ps. 22:2), His trial (Ps. 35:11), His rejection (Ps. 22:6; 118:22), His crucifixion (Ps. 22; 69), His burial and resurrection (Ps. 16:9-11), His ascension (Ps. 24:7-10; 47:5; 68:18), and His second coming and judgment (Ps. 50:3-4; 98:6-9). They also tell us of the victory of Christ's kingdom (Ps. 2:6-12; 45:6ff.). Some Psalms reveal so much vital information regarding Christ's person and work that they are called messianic Psalms (Ps. 2, 8, 16, 22, 40, 45, 69, 72, 110).³¹

b) While the Psalter is not exhaustive in telling us everything in the Old or New Testament, *neither are uninspired hymnals*. In fact the Book of Psalms is far richer, better and more doctrinally complete, and balanced than any modern hymnal. Hymn writers historically have avoided the judicial aspects of God's character in favor of love and heavenly bliss. They have avoided the important imprecatory aspects of praise which, contrary to Murray, is not inappropriate in the New Covenant era. Hymns do not contain warnings against trusting in princes (Ps. 146:3-4) and they certainly do not focus on the doctrine of creation in a manner that approaches the Psalter (e.g. see Ps. 146:6). Hymnals do not contain the many antitheses between the righteous and the wicked that are found in the Psalter. Neither do they contain such amazing statements about God's holy law as found in Psalm 119. Such examples could be multiplied extensively. Since it is impossible to put every bit of biblical history, prophecy, and doctrine into one manual of praise this raises an important question. Who do you think should decide what belongs in the church's manual of praise—God or sinful man?

Murray refuses to acknowledge that the history of hymnology is a history of declension. It is only a matter of course for sinful human beings to neglect unpopular doctrines in their hymnals. Even if a humanly produced hymnal contained no unorthodox doctrines, it still would be grossly unbalanced theologically by emphasizing popular doctrines while ignoring the less popular teachings. Perhaps, because songs of praise are on God's people's lips week after week and day after day, one reason God limited their use to divinely inspired songs was to protect us from ourselves; to ensure that worship would not become man-centered, unbalanced or even heretical.³²

³¹ For an excellent discussion of the sufficiency of the Psalter see Michael Bushell, 10-52.

³² That man cannot be trusted with placing songs of praise on the lips of God's people week after week is demonstrated by the *Trinity Hymnal*, the manual of praise developed and published by the "conservative" Reformed denomination the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Many consider the *Trinity Hymnal* to be the best hymnal ever produced. Out of the 742 selections in the hymnal very few are actually Psalms. Out of the 150 inspired songs of the Psalter at least 50 have been completely omitted. Most of the others are gross paraphrases or hymns based on the Psalms. "If one only considers those selections that are categorized as a metrical translation of a psalm or a psalm portion...then there are only 41 psalms represented in this hymnal.... [and most] of the psalms that are represented are incomplete. The 150 psalms of the inspired Psalter contain a total of 2461 verses. If one rejects a hymn that claims a tenuous relationship to some psalm, or a loose paraphrase replete with many human interpolations, as representing God's word then not much is left. The 41 psalm and psalm portions, that are metrical translations of the original psalms, contain only 370 verses of those originals. An astounding 85% of the Psalter has vanished" (Louis F. DeBoer, *Hymns, Heretics and History: A Study in Hymnody* [Sanderstown, RI: American Presbyterian Press, 2004], 150-151). Tragically, the *Trinity Hymnal's* editors following human wisdom were not satisfied with *detracting* from what God has commanded but also thought it wise to add many popular hymns written by

Second, Murray thinks it is inappropriate to only use Old Covenant terminology in New Covenant praise. He writes, “Is it then credible that the language of Christian praise must be confined to the words of an age of far less light and privilege?”³³ There are a number of problems with this question.

a) While the Psalms do contain some praises couched in the terminology of Old Covenant shadows of things to come, much of the book is easy to understand and could have been written in any dispensation. Further, with the completed New Testament canon we fully understand the meaning of these concepts. In fact the Psalter was less useful and far more difficult as a manual of praise for the Old Testament saints than for the New. The apostles themselves did not understand how Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled many of the Old Testament prophecies until *after* Christ manifested Himself to them after the resurrection (Lk. 24:44-49; Jn. 20:19-31). To argue that the Psalter is insufficient, precisely at the time when it became the most relevant and useful, lacks sound biblical evidence and common sense.

b) The fact that Murray does not like the actuality that God chose to put the inspired hymn book of the church together *before* the death and resurrection of Christ is irrelevant. Murray and others may not like the reality that the Psalter contains a lot of Old Testament terminology that must be viewed through the lens of the New Testament. But, we ask, how does that prove divine warrant for the use of uninspired hymns? The fact that something does not seem right to us or that we would prefer something to be done differently does not fulfill the requirement of divine prescription for a new worship practice. Murray must still demonstrate from Scripture that the use of uninspired hymns in public worship is *commanded*, or he must find *historical examples* of the use of uninspired hymns in public worship in Scripture. His booklet contains no such argumentation whatsoever.

Third, Murray continues his previous line of argumentation with the statement, “that it is difficult, and at times impossible, to make the language of David and Asaph the most appropriate expression of Christian experience.”³⁴ Murray supports this assertion with two lines of reasoning. a) The first (following Watts) is the idea that the imprecatory psalms as written and intended are inappropriate for New Covenant praise.³⁵ This

heretics: Unitarians, Roman Catholics, Arminians and feminists. Thus, the leaders of the O.P.C. and other Reformed denominations (e.g. P.C.A.) are directly responsible for exposing covenant families to heretical propaganda week after week. Everyone with knowledge of church history knows that uninspired hymns have repeatedly driven out the Psalms. These uninspired hymns have been very detrimental to God’s people because people are usually completely unaware that they are repeatedly saturating their minds with false, dangerous doctrines and philosophies.

³³ Iain H. Murray, 23.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Murray seems to have a deep affinity for Isaac Watts and has obviously been influenced by Watts’ arguments against exclusive psalmody. Therefore, it is important that we understand that Isaac Watts was a dangerous heretic. This assertion is proven by a number of observations. 1. Watts has been called the father of modern dispensationalism because he believed the New Testament teaches a new, different and better ethic than the Old. He also makes statements about the Psalms that question its divine inspiration (e.g. “but we meet with a following Line which so particularly belongs to one Action of Hour of the Life of David or Asaph, that breaks off our Song in the midst; our Consciences are affrighted lest we should speak a Falsehood unto God...” (from the preface to Watts, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*). Watts believed the some Psalms were so contrary to the Christian spirit that he omitted whole Psalms and left out sections of others. As Louis F. DeBoer writes, “No infidel higher critic and no rationalistic textual critic has presumed to take

argument must be emphatically rejected because these prayers for doom upon the unrepentant wicked were written by the Holy Spirit and are rooted in God's holy and righteous nature and character. As the Sovereign Lord, God possesses the right to root out and destroy all evil beings from His creation. If these imprecatory songs are inappropriate or immoral for use in the New Covenant era, then they would also be wrong for use in the Old Covenant era as well. God's nature and character, as well as His moral law, never change. Isaac Watts' views on this matter are practically blasphemous.

b) Murray's second line of argumentation is perhaps the most astounding and absurd of the whole booklet. This is where Murray attempts to demonstrate that there are uninspired hymns that "better express the feelings of the believer to Christ crucified" than Psalm 22. Murray may prefer the hymns he cites to Psalm 22 but who is he to decide what other Christians think about Psalm 22? Is this how the worship of the New Covenant church is to be decided: by personal feelings, subjective impressions, sentimentality and emotionalism? It is this exaltation of the subjective feelings of believers that is responsible for the replacement of the inspired, majestic, challenging, intellectual songs of the Psalter with modern Charismatic pop songs and hippie style mantras. Moreover, contrary to Murray's subjective feelings, there are no uninspired hymns that come anywhere near Psalm 22. As Spurgeon notes, "For plaintive expressions uprising from unutterable depths of woes we may say of this psalm, 'there is none like it.' It is the photograph of Lord's saddest hours, the record of his dying words, the lachrymatory of his last tears, the memorial of his expiring joys.... Before us we have a description both of the darkness and of the glory of the cross, the sufferings of Christ and the glory which shall follow. Oh for grace to draw near and see this great sight! We should read reverently, putting off our shoes from our feet, as Moses did at the burning bush, for if there by holy ground anywhere in Scripture it is in this psalm."³⁶

Furthermore, as we sing Psalm 22 we can sing with a complete *faith* in this description of Christ crucified, for we are singing the very words of God. But, even in Murray's choice of supposedly better hymns, we cannot sing with this kind of faith because these hymns are written by sinful, fallible men. John W. Keddie writes, "Iain Murray himself mentions a few well-known hymns which he considers to be superior to Psalms in speaking of the cross (p. 25). He mentions Cowper's *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. Yet we might ask: Where does the Bible speak of the cross as 'wondrous'? Why did Cowper not rather write, 'When I Survey the *Cursed Cross*' (in terms of Gal. 3)? Paul Gerhardt's *O Sacred Head! Sore Wounded* is also mentioned. But

such extensive liberties with the word of God as Watts presumed to do in the guise of 'Christianizing the Psalms'" (*Hymns, Heretics and History*, 63).

2. Although Watts considered himself a trinitarian, his writings on the subject are heretical. After carefully examining a number of quotes from Watts' publications on this topic, DeBoer concludes: "Finally, was Watts an Arian or a Unitarian? Strictly speaking, the answer is no. He always considered himself a Trinitarian, and his views never fully coincided with the standard definitions of either of those errors. However, his redefinition of the Trinity, although unique, basically constituted a new variant of Arianism/Unitarianism. By denying that the Spirit and the Son were fully and eternally God in the same sense as the Father, he was essentially Unitarian. By proposing that the Son was some kind of deified created being, and more than mere man, he was essentially an Arian. And by reducing the Spirit to nothing more than a divine force he was agreeing with both. No matter how one considers it, Watts was a heretic with respect to the Trinity" (Ibid, 101).

³⁶ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: An Expository and Devotional Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1882-1887] 1983), 1:365.

why has it been thought necessary in some hymn books to change the title to, ‘O Sacred Head *Once Wounded*’? And again, in Charles Wesley’s *And Can It Be*, the imagery is luscious and the accompanying music may be moving. But look at verse 3 and ask: Did Christ really empty Himself of all but love? What does that mean? Where did Wesley get that [heretical] idea?”³⁷

Fourth, Murray next sets forth an argument based on the lack of certain expressions in the Psalms found in the New Testament. He quotes James Hamilton saying: “Does it never strike you as a strange test of spirituality, that you would sing songs for fifty years without ever mentioning Immanuel, the Rock of Ages, the Lamb of God, the Resurrection and the Life? Is it not a strange token of growth in grace and in meetness for heaven, that you should have been singing all this time without having yet come to the name of Jesus?”³⁸ Although this is a very common argument against exclusive psalmody, in reality it is nothing more than an appeal to sentimentality with no scriptural foundation. This point will be demonstrated by the following observations.

a) The Bible does not command us to make sure that all the different designations for God or Jesus are included in our songs of praise. If it did then Murray’s objection would be significant. Furthermore, there are biblical names for Christ in the Old Testament that are not even explicitly identified or used in the New Testament (e.g. *Jehovah Tzidkenu*, [cf. Jer. 23:5-6]). This reality, however, does not mean that the New Testament is somehow insufficient and needs to be supplemented by man.

b) Murray’s argument presupposes that the worship of Jesus Christ is somehow insufficient or inferior if such biblical designations are not used. But, these designations and the word “Jesus” are not *intrinsically* sacred, mystical or holy. We do not serve or worship these words, but rather the Person these words represent or point to. Therefore, if the ideas these words represent are found in the Psalter (and they certainly are) then Murray’s objection amounts to nothing more than a clever appeal to our emotions. We respect all the different designations for God and Christ in Scripture and do not use them in an irreverent manner because of the Person behind the name.

In the Bible, the expression “in the name” refers not to a magical power connected to the sounds of syllables but to a recognition or acknowledgment of the person who is named. When Paul says, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (Phil. 2:10), he refers to a recognition of the power, authority and majesty of the theanthropic Person not the syllables. “At the name of Jesus; not at the sound of the word, but the authority of Jesus; all should pay homage.”³⁹ As Calvin notes: “...Paul speaks of

³⁷ John W. Keddie, *A Review of the Pamphlet: The Psalter—The Only Hymnal?* (Internet Article: <http://www.reformed.com/pub/psalter.htm>), 3. Murray also argues that uninspired hymns are superior to the Psalms on the issue of assurance of salvation (25). This statement is remarkable given the great statements in the Psalms which teach that God preserves His people. For example Psalm 37:28 reads: “For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off.” Psalm 121:3, 7-8 says, “He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber.... The Lord shall preserve you from all evil: he shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and forevermore” (cf. Ps. 12:7, 17:8; etc).

³⁸ James Hamilton, *The Psalter and the Hymn Book*, 16-17, as quoted in Iain H. Murray, 26.

³⁹ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McClean, VA: MacDonald Publishing, n.d.), 5:733. Virtually all commentators point out that the name that is above every name is the title “Lord” which points to Jesus’ deity and His office. See John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 60-61; Peter T. O’Brien, *Commentary on Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 238; J. Hugh Michael, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton,

Christ's whole dignity, to restrict his meaning to two syllables, as if any one were to examine attentively the letters of the word Alexander, in order to find in them the greatness of the name that Alexander [the Great] acquired for himself. Their subtlety, therefore, is not solid, and the contrivance is foreign to Paul's intention. But worse than ridiculous is the conduct of the Sorbonnic sophists, who infer from this passage before us that we ought to bow the knee whenever the name Jesus is pronounced, as though it were a magic word which had all virtue included in the sound of it. Paul, on the other hand, speaks of the honour that is to be rendered to the Son of God—not to mere syllables."⁴⁰

c) Jesus Christ himself regarded biblical synonyms as perfectly acceptable for public worship. Note the baptismal formula from our Lord's own lips: "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). The only people that this author is aware of that require saying the word "Jesus" during baptism are anti-Trinitarian "Jesus only" Pentecostals. Christ teaches us that we do not need to say the word "Jesus" for a biblical baptism. A reference to the second person of the trinity is sufficient. Therefore, following our Lord's own reasoning, the Psalter's abundant references to the person and work of Christ are perfectly acceptable as New Testament praise.

d) The New Testament authors writing under divine inspiration substituted the Greek word *kurios* ("Lord") for the Hebrew word signifying God's covenant name (Yahweh or Jehovah) when quoting Old Testament passages (e.g., Matthew 3:3; Isaiah 40:3; Acts 2:20 21; Joel 2:31,32; Mark 1:3; Isaiah 40:3; Acts 2:25; Psalm 16:8; Acts 2:34; Psalm 68:18; etc.). In doing so, they were usually following the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the LXX) commonly used by Greek speaking Jews of their own day. If there was something special or unique about the word Jehovah itself rather than the truth or meaning behind the word, then such a substitution would have been unbiblical. If we know that the word Lord in the Psalter refers to Jesus Christ, then to sing that word is every bit as honoring as pronouncing the word "Jesus" itself.

e) Those who appeal to the idea that we must sing Jesus' name are inconsistent. The divine-human mediator was never called Jesus. His name was *Yehoshua*, not Jesus. We know of no uninspired hymns which speak of *Yehoshua* (with the exception of the Messianic Jewish movement). One may object by saying, "Yes, but *Jesus* is a transliteration of the Greek word *Iesous* which is a transliteration of the Hebrew word *Yehoshua*. Therefore the English word Jesus represents *Yehoshua*." That point is true. However, it does not prove that the word "Jesus" "is more important to have on one's lips

1928), 96; Richard R. Melick, Jr. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 107. Since Christ is repeatedly called Lord in the Psalms, the idea that the Psalms are deficient or inferior is erroneous.

⁴⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on Philippians*, 61. John Gill concurs, "...for in the bare name there can be nothing which can command such a peculiar respect; it was a common name with the Jews.... Moreover, the words ought not to be rendered at, but in the name of Jesus; that is, in and by reason of the power, authority, and dignity of Jesus, as exalted at God's right hand every creature is to be subject to him" (*An Exposition of the New Testament* [Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979 (1809)], 135, 136. Further, if God was so concerned about the use of and pronunciation of particular words during public worship, then why did He allow the proper pronunciation of the most significant name of God in Scripture, "YHWH" (commonly pronounced Yahweh or Jehovah) which occurs 5,321 times in the Bible, to be forever lost to mankind?

than other names by which God makes Himself known.”⁴¹ When psalm singers praise the Redeemer by singing the inspired songs of Scripture they are worshiping Jesus Christ in the way that He has commanded. This is what pleases God. There is no evidence that God prefers the name of Jesus over other designations. The “Jesus name” argument is an assumption without evidence.

f) The name Jesus or *Yehoshua* means “Jehovah is salvation.” This name was given by an angel to Mary to indicate the mission of the child. “You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The purpose of the name is to teach us about Christ’s role as the redeemer of God’s elect. Do the Psalms teach us about Christ’s role as the Savior? Yes, they do so abundantly (e.g., Psalms 2:7-12; 8:5; 16:9-11; 22; 24:17-10; 35:11; 40:7-9; 41:9; 45:6ff.; 47:5; 50:3-4; 68:18; 69; 72; 110; etc.). Given the fact that the Psalter gives us a clear picture of Christ and His redemptive work, the idea that we must sing Jesus’ name to worship Him properly is simply not true. Once again it must be emphasized that it is what the name represents or points to that is what is important. Once one understands the doctrinal riches contained in the Psalter, he will understand that the “Jesus name” argument is really just an excuse to depart from the all sufficient manual of praise that God has given us—the Psalms.

Fifth, Murray’s final argument is based on his interpretation of church history. He writes, “I believe there is a confirmation from history of the argument that the larger blessings of the New Testament era warrant additional forms of praise. It is hardly accidental that the eras that have been richest in the production of spiritual hymns have been those when there has been a new measure of the Spirit given to the churches.”⁴² There are a number of problems with this statement.

a) It is simply not true. The apostolic church which put Christian churches all over the Roman Empire produced no hymns or hymnals. The reformation under John Calvin which produced the greatest school for Christ at that time in the whole world and achieved the most complete reformation of doctrine, worship and church government, produced no new hymns or hymnals. We could add the amazing work of John Knox and Andrew Melville; the world shattering revival of 1638 and men such as George Gillespie, Samuel Rutherford and Robert Baillie. There also was the work of the Westminster Assembly of Divines which produced the best church confession the world has yet seen. Once again, Murray is presenting a very biased, one-sided interpretation of church history.

b) Murray essentially ignores the fact that the revivalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a mixed bag that often produced rotten fruit. The revivalism of men like John and Charles Wesley with their mix of corrupt theology and uninspired hymns was part of the downfall of evangelical religion in the British Isles and the United States. Hymns often become little Trojan horses exposing people to unbiblical pietism, Arminianism, humanistic concepts of love and fairness, distorted concepts of the attributes of God, feministic modern concepts of the church and family and even colonial/racist concepts of Great Britain. For example, once the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. cut itself loose from the regulative principle or *sola Scriptura* on worship, it

⁴¹Richard Bacon, Review of Crampton (Rowlett, TX: FPCR, 1996), see http://www.fpcr.org/blue_banner_articles/crampton.htm.

⁴² Iain H. Murray, 27.

was only a matter of time for this church to move towards Arminianism, prelacy in worship and modernism. Contrary to Murray's assertions it could be demonstrated that human autonomy in worship (i.e. will worship) historically has led to the exaltation of the human will in salvation and in ethics. In short, the use of uninspired hymns has been a disaster for Reformed churches.

In fact, a case could be made that the use of uninspired hymns and the very loose (and really non-existent) concept of divine warrant upon which hymnody rests is directly responsible for the widespread takeover of "contemporary Christian music" (i.e. Charismatic-Arminian "pop" worship) in virtually all the Reformed denominations that once held to the old uninspired hymnody. Even in many churches where this new so-called "celebrative worship" has not completely overtaken the old time hymns, the practice is usually blended worship with some of this and some of that. This historical reality demonstrates that those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind. When the Reformed churches allowed human autonomy in worship contrary to the Bible and their standards, they released the monster of human tradition which they now cannot contain. The only solution to this very serious problem is to go back to a strict confessional interpretation of the regulative principle and the inspired sufficient Psalter that God has so graciously given us.

Conclusion

After a careful analysis of Iain H. Murray's booklet, we conclude with a few important summations and observations. First, Murray never produces any evidence whatsoever that uninspired hymns have been authorized by God. He produces not one command or inspired historical example or sound logical inference to that effect. Instead, Murray primarily resorts to an appeal to certain individuals in church history who agree with him and he relies on arguments based on sentimentality and emotion. Second, Murray presents a very one-sided biased view of church history. He selectively quotes from certain Puritans and ignores the Westminster Assembly's decision on this matter which is explicit and undeniable. Third, Murray's attempts to argue from Scripture are either completely fallacious or at the very most would authorize only the handful of inspired songs in Scripture which are outside the canonical Psalter. Given these and other considerations, we ask our dear brother to repent of the declension set forth in his booklet and instead raise the banner of truth in opposing the widespread corruptions in worship found in so-called Reformed churches of our day.

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