

# Exclusive Psalmody: A Biblical Defense, Chapter 3

## Objections to Exclusive Psalmody

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Christians who say that they adhere to the regulative principle of worship, and yet sing uninspired hymns in worship, must (unless they are willing to admit they have abandoned the regulative principle or are willing to admit their worship practice is unauthorized and sinful) justify the use of uninspired songs from Scripture. Since there is no evidence of the use of uninspired songs in the Bible, the approach that most Reformed pastors have taken is to either circumvent the regulative principle, or offer excuses for abandoning this biblical practice. Note the following arguments.

### *1. The Insufficiency of the Psalter*

One of the most common arguments used against exclusive Psalmody is “that the psalter is doctrinally and spiritually insufficient to meet the worship needs of the New Testament church.”<sup>1</sup> It is argued that the church needs worship songs written *after* the redemptive work of Christ on earth was completed to look back upon what Christ has accomplished, and reflect upon it. This argument would have merit if the Psalms did *not* discuss and reflect upon the work of Christ. When the Psalter is examined, however, we find more information and doctrine regarding the person and work of Christ than any humanly devised hymnbook. The idea that the book of Psalms is not adequate as a manual of praise for the new covenant church is an assumption that completely ignores the rich content of the Psalter (this fact will be considered further in a moment).

Once we understand that the Psalter is sufficient and adequate as a manual of praise for the new covenant church, any idea that we need a new uninspired book of praise, or additions to the Psalter to make it adequate, is at once overthrown. When approaching a thrice-holy God, infinite in perfections, should we not use only the very best worship songs available? Since the Psalms are written by the Spirit of God and are infallible, theologically perfect and totally sufficient, why would anyone want to supplement them, or replace them with uninspired fallible compositions? Bushell writes, “That man who prefers a humanly composed song to one written by the Spirit of God, when the latter fully suits his purposes, is, to say the least, lacking in spiritual discernment. And that man who would mix together in one book the inspired songs of God with the uninspired songs of sinful men (as if the latter were in any way comparable with the former in majesty, holiness, and authority) is, whether he knows it or not, guilty of sacrilege, of bringing the things of God down to the level of sinful men. The only way to avoid this charge

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 11.

is to claim that the Psalms are in a very real sense outdated, so much so that even frail and sinful men may presume to improve upon them.”<sup>2</sup>

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 shows a lack of understanding regarding their content. 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; 22:28; 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; 45:6 ff.). 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).<sup>3</sup>

The Psalms are a treasure house of biblical doctrine. One can learn more about God from the Psalter than a hundred hymnals. The Psalms tell us about: God’s self-existence (Ps. 94:8; cf. 33:11; 115:3), His absolute perfection (Ps. 145:3), His immutability (Ps. 102:26-28), His eternity (Ps. 90:3; 102:12), His omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-10), His omniscience (Ps. 94:9; cf. 1:6; 37:18; 119:168; 81:14, 15; 139:1-4), His omnipotence (Ps. 115:3), His veracity (Ps. 25:10; 31:6), His sovereignty (Ps. 22:28; 47:2, 3, 7, 8; 50:10-12; 95:3-5; 115:3; 135:5-6; 145:11-73), His wisdom (Ps. 19:1-7; 33:10, 11; 104:1-34), His goodness (Ps. 36:6, 9; 104:21; 145:9, 15, 16), His mercy (Ps. 136; 86:5; 145:9), His longsuffering nature (Ps. 86:15), His holiness (Ps. 22:3; 33:21; 51:11; 71:22; 78:41; 89:18-19; 98:1; 99:3, 5, 9; 103:1; 105:3; 106:47; 111:9, etc.), His righteousness (Ps. 119:137, etc.), His remunerative justice (Ps. 58:12). The Psalms teach that God is the creator (Ps. 89:47; 90:2; 96:5; 102:25; 104), and the Savior (Ps. 19:14; 28:35; 106:21). They teach His providence (Ps. 22:28; 104:14; 104), His hatred of sin (Ps. 5:4; 11:5), His punishment of the wicked (Ps. 7:12, 13; 11:6), and His chastening of His people (Ps. 6:1; 94:12; 118:18, etc.).

The Psalms contain a theological balance and fullness that is astounding. From the Psalter we learn of general and special revelation (Ps. 19:1-2; 103:7), original sin (Ps. 51:5), total depravity and the universality of sin (Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3), justification by faith and the free remission of sins (Ps. 32:1 ff.; 51:1-5; 103:1-13; 106; 130:4; 143:2), repentance (Ps. 51:1-4; 39), kingdom victory (Ps. 2, 45, 46:7-11, 47, 72), and the judgment of the wicked and the blessing of the righteous (Ps. 9:16; 37:28; 59:13; 73:26-27). The Psalter informs us that the gospel will go to all nations (Ps. 67:1-7; 72:6-17; 87:4-6; 98:1-9; 106:5; 148:11). Bushell writes, “The Psalter recognizes the reality of sanctification, on the one hand, but never loses sight, on the other, of man’s inherent depravity. Side by side with emphatic assertions of personal integrity (e.g., 7:3 ff, 17:1 ff, 18:20 ff; 26:1 ff; cf. Acts 20:26 ff; 23:1; etc.) one finds ‘the fullest recognition of personal sinfulness (51:5; 69:5), of man’s inability to justify himself before God (130:3ff;

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 23-24.

143:2), of his need of pardon and cleansing and renewal (32:1; 65:3), of his dependence on God for preservation from sin (19:12 ff.), of the barrier which sin erects between him and God (66:18; 50:16); as well as the strongest expressions of absolute self-surrender and dependence on God and entire trust in Him.”<sup>4</sup>

A common objection to the sufficiency of the Psalter is that the new covenant church should not rely solely upon a book of praise that uses types, symbols, and prophecies to describe the work of Christ. When we consider that we now have a completed canon in which the types, symbols, and prophecies are interpreted and fully understood, this objection has no merit. It is absurd to suggest that at the precise moment when the Psalter can be fully understood and be even more edifying for the people of God that it is no longer sufficient. The Psalms are much more useful with the New Testament than without it. “Our belief in the sufficiency of the psalter for New Testament worship is in large part a consequence of our understanding of the organic connection that exists between the two Testaments. They proclaim the same Gospel, exalt the same Christ, and confirm the same covenant (Gal. 3:6-18; Rom. 4:9-25), and it is in no wise inconceivable that they should enjoin the use of the same psalter in worship.”<sup>5</sup>

Another objection to the sufficiency of the Psalter is the idea that the imprecatory Psalms are inappropriate for worship in the new dispensation. The imprecatory Psalms are songs in which the psalmist petitions God (often in a strong manner) to pour out His wrath upon his (the psalmist’s) and/or the covenant people’s enemies.<sup>6</sup> Isaac Watts (who did more to destroy exclusive Psalmody among Reformed believers than any other person) wrote, “While we are kindling into divine love by the Meditations of the Loving Kindness of God and the Multitude of His Tender Mercies, within a few Verses some dreadful Curse against Men is propos’d to our lips.”<sup>7</sup>

The idea that the imprecatory Psalms are inappropriate for Christians to sing is totally unbiblical for a number of reasons. First, the Psalms were written by the Holy Spirit; therefore, the idea that these imprecatory petitions are barbaric or unethical is totally wicked. Second, one can only regard the imprecatory Psalms as improper for new covenant believers if one holds to a dispensational or modernistic hermeneutic. Both of these theological perspectives are unscriptural and outside the pale of the Reformed faith.<sup>8</sup> Third, the imprecatory Psalms are frequently quoted in the New Testament (e.g., Ps. 69 and 109). “Psalm 69, which bears more of the imprecatory character than any other Psalm except 109, is quoted in five separate places and referred to in several others. No other psalms are more frequently quoted in New Testament than

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<sup>6</sup> The Psalms usually considered imprecatory are 55, 59, 69, 109, and 137.

<sup>7</sup> Isaac Watts, Preface to *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1707), p. iv-vi; quoted in Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 201.

<sup>8</sup> Any argument that wars against the divine inspiration of the Psalms that we are considering wars against the whole Book of Psalms. They stand or fall together. The believer in inspiration will not therefore be guilty of irreverence and profanity of flouting these Psalms; for that which is said and done against them is said and done against the Holy Spirit; and who will dare to risk having such a charge lodged against him? (J. H. Webster, “The Imprecatory Psalms,” in Ed. John McNaugher, *The Psalms in Worship*, p. 312).

the imprecatory psalms, except the Messianic psalms.”<sup>9</sup> Jesus even applies Psalm 69 as a prophecy regarding His own situation (cf. Jn. 15:25).

Many believers have argued that the imprecatory Psalms are an excellent reason why the church must have kinder, gentler hymns to supplement the Psalter. This type of thinking is unbiblical. It ignores both Scripture and history. One must always keep in mind that the Psalter was written and organized by the Holy Spirit. It therefore contains a balance and proper emphasis on the attributes of God and His dealings with men that is *exactly* what God desires. The attributes of God, such as His wrath, are not ignored or downplayed, but given proper emphasis. God’s hatred of the wicked and His awful judgments against them are an important part of the Psalter. “God is both sovereign and righteous; he possesses the unquestionable right to destroy all evil in his universe; if it is right for God to plan and effect this destruction, then it is right also for the saints to pray for the same.”<sup>10</sup>

Anyone who is familiar with the shift from exclusive Psalmody toward Psalm imitations and uninspired hymns in Reformed and Presbyterian churches knows as a fact of history that the proper balance of the Psalter was immediately lost when manmade compositions were permitted. Hymn writers avoid the judicial aspect of God’s character in favor of love and heavenly bliss, etc. The history of human 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 could be grossly unbalanced theologically by emphasizing popular doctrines while ignoring the less popular teachings.

The God-centered Psalter has increasingly been replaced with man-centered worship. “Historically, churches have only used both Psalms and hymns together in near-equal numbers for one generation. Beyond the first generation, hymns dominate. Why should this be so? We can’t be sure, but we can surmise that hymns demand less of the worshipper than do Psalms. The Psalms teach us as we sing them in a way that hymns do not. Since the hymns of an age fit better with the preconceptions and preferences of that age than do the Psalms, imperfect saints resist the difficult teachings of the Psalms and embrace the easier, often half-complete picture of God and the Christian life drawn by their hymns.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, the imperfect man-made hymns eventually drive out the perfect, balanced, God-breathed Psalms. Thus far, that has been a tragic fact of history.

As the twentieth century draws to a close, worship has degenerated to the point that in many “Reformed and Presbyterian” denominations the churches are imitating the slap-happy, campfire, Las Vegas-style worship invented by Arminian and charismatic heretics. Such worship is often called “celebrative” worship. The abandonment of the regulative principle and the Psalter has led to an overhead projector with the word *ichabod* written all over it. The sober majesty of the Psalter has been replaced with youth camp emotionalism. Many older more conservative believers are attempting to stem the tide against this new form of worship. They

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> J. G. Vos, “The Ethical Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms” in *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (May 1942), p. 135 as quoted in Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Bill and John Edgar, *Ten Brief Arguments for Exclusive Psalmody* (Broomall, PA: Tract, n. d.).

recognize that it is worship light; that it is theological pabulum. They want to return to Hart, Toplady, or Newton. They want to get rid of the guitars and drums and return to the piano and organ. But as long as they are unwilling to obey the regulative principle of worship and return to exclusive Psalmody they will be steamrolled by the new worship gimmicks that appeal to the flesh.

It is time for Reformed and Presbyterian churches to submit themselves to the regulative principle of worship and to recognize the sufficiency, superiority, balance, and theological perfection of the Psalter. “The psalter is inspired by God; it is a unique collection never to be equaled, much less surpassed, in quality or reverence by similar productions of uninspired men; it is a sufficient manual of praise; it requires neither supplementation nor abridgment.”<sup>12</sup> God has written the Psalms, placed them in the middle of our Bibles, and commanded us to sing them. To set aside the hymnbook that God has given us, or to greatly abridge it and mix it with human compositions (e.g., the Trinity Hymnal), is foolish, arrogant, and sinful.

## 2. *Singing Is Not a Separate Element of Worship*

The most common attack against exclusive Psalmody today is based on the idea that singing is not a separate element of worship, but is merely a circumstance of worship. Greg Bahnsen writes, “Is singing a separate ‘element’ of worship or a ‘circumstance’ of worship? If the latter, it does not require Biblical warrant according to the regulative principle. I have argued that singing is simply a means to (one circumstance through which to) pray, praise, exhort, or teach—rather than an element of worship itself.”<sup>13</sup> What Bahnsen is saying is that the general command to praise God is an element of worship, but how this command to praise is carried out is a mere circumstance of worship. Thus, a person could praise God through singing, or silent meditation, or speaking, or even through drama or dance, for the circumstances of worship are not strictly regulated by God’s word. The whole reason that Bahnsen and others<sup>14</sup> attempt to place worship song outside the category of the elements of worship is to place the content of worship song in the same category as prayer or preaching. The reason for this subterfuge is simple. If worship song is only one means or circumstance in which to “pray, praise, exhort, or teach,” as Bahnsen alleges, then men are permitted to make up their own uninspired praise songs.

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Greg Bahnsen, *Exclusive Psalmody, Antithesis 1*, no. 2 (March-April, 1990), p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> The argument that singing is not a separate element of worship was popularized by Vern S. Poythress, a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary and a Presbyterian Church in America minister. In 1974 he wrote, “We regard teaching-by-singing and teaching-in-the-narrow-sense as simply two forms of teaching, each particularly effective in meeting certain needs and expressing certain aspects of Christian doctrine. Each has its advantages and limitations, due to the nature of the medium of expression. We challenge the exclusive psalmist position to prove from Scripture, rather than assume, that teaching-by-singing and proclaiming are ‘two separate elements of worship.’ To us they appear little more ‘separate’ than preaching to a visible audience versus preaching over the radio” (Ezra 3, “Union With Christ, and Exclusive Psalmody” in *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1-2 [1974-75], pp. 225-226). Poythress’s position clearly contradicts Scripture, three hundred and fifty years of Presbyterian church history, and the Westminster Standards (see *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXI:3-XXI:5). His anti-Confessional view doesn’t seem to bother either Westminster Seminary or the Presbyterian Church in America.

The Bible clearly permits believers to make up the content of prayer and preaching; thus, men can also make up the content of their singing (as long as the content of each is biblical).

Although it is true that singing, teaching, prayer, and preaching can have certain aspects in common (e.g., some Psalms contain prayer, prayer can contain praise, sermons can contain praise and supplication, etc.), the idea that singing praise is not a separate element of worship must be rejected for the following reasons. First the idea that singing praise is not a distinct element of worship is clearly contradicted by Scripture. When the Scriptures command a religious act and regulate that act as to content and manner of performance, that act cannot be considered a mere circumstance of worship, but immediately becomes an element of worship. The Scriptures contain many commands to praise God by singing (Ex. 15:21; 1 Ch. 16:9, 23; Ps. 9:11; 30:4; 33:2, 3; 47:6, 7; 66:2; 68:4, 32; 81:1; 95:1; 96:1, 2; 98:1, 4, 5; 105:2; 135:3; 147:7; 149:1, 3, etc.). God has placed a hymn book, a book of inspired worship songs in the middle of our Bibles, but he has not given a book of prayers. Singing praise was an important and necessary aspect of worship throughout the covenant people's inscripturated history. Furthermore, Scripture emphasizes that divine inspiration was necessary to write worship songs. This fact immediately places the content of praise outside the circumstances of worship. To assert that the specific command of God to sing praise can be fulfilled by teaching Sunday school, or preaching a sermon, or even leading the congregation in prayer is absurd.

Second, the idea that singing praise is not a distinct element of worship, would if consistently held lead to liturgical chaos. In other words, some pastors in their zeal to refute exclusive Psalmody have invented an idea that if pushed to its logical conclusion leads to absurdity. For example, if praising God by singing is only a circumstance of worship (i.e., it is merely one possible way of praising God among many), then worshipping God by singing unto Him is optional. Remember, the circumstances of worship are those things which are not commanded and strictly regulated by God's word. If a church decided to throw their Psalters in the dumpster and stop singing altogether, then according to Greg Bahnsen, Vern Poythress, and others, that church could not be disciplined by the Presbytery. If singing praise is only a circumstance of worship, then disciplining a church which refuses to sing praise would be like disciplining a church for using padded chairs instead of wooden pews. Furthermore, if singing and teaching are not separate parts or elements of the worship service, then women are forbidden by Scripture to sing in church, because women are explicitly forbidden to teach or preach in public worship (1 Tim. 2:12; 1 Cor. 14:34-35). The attempt to place singing under the general category of teaching in order to make up uninspired lyrics in praise leads to insurmountable difficulties. If singing, preaching, and prayer are not distinct elements or parts of religious worship, then one lawfully could have a church service in which everything (including the sermon) could be sung or nothing at all could be sung. Those authors who attempt to blur the biblical distinction between distinct elements or parts of worship cannot even construct a worship service without denying their own position. When they conduct worship they make "rigid distinctions between prayer, the preaching of the Word, the reading of the Scriptures, and

the singing of psalms or hymns.”<sup>15</sup> If they did not make distinctions between the elements or parts of worship, they would be out of a job and they know it.

Third, the whole argument that singing praise is a circumstance of worship is based on a perversion of the meaning of circumstance. When the Puritan and Presbyterian theologians of the past as well as the Westminster divines discussed a circumstance of worship, they made it very clear that they were only discussing things in worship which hold no religious significance. The Confession of Faith says,

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.<sup>16</sup>

When the confession discusses circumstances common to human actions and societies, it is referring to non-religious activities and matters such as a place to meet, chairs, lighting, a time to meet, the length of the service, etc. Is singing praise to Jehovah common to human actions and societies? What about preaching the word or prayer? It is obvious that matters that are dependent upon instructions from God’s word, such as prayer, preaching, singing praise, and so on, cannot be circumstances of worship. That is, they cannot be determined solely by the light of nature. Therefore, the regulative principle applies to worship itself or all worship ordinances (prayer, reading the Scriptures, preaching, the sacraments, singing praise); but, the circumstances, incidentals, or conditions under which worship is conducted is not under the regulative principle, but the light of nature and Christian prudence or common sense. Therefore, Scripture strictly regulates the whole content of worship (i.e., men are not permitted to add, detract, or alter what God has commanded).

This distinction between the circumstances and parts (or elements) of religious worship was the Reformed position of the seventeenth century. The definition given in the Westminster Confession is clearly reflected in the writings of the greatest theologians of that time. George Gillespie (1613-1648) wrote,

Beside all this, there is nothing which any way pertaineth to the worship of God left to determination of human laws, besides the mere circumstances, which neither have any holiness in them, forasmuch as they have no other use and praise in sacred than they have in civil things, nor yet were part-determinable in Scripture, because they are infinite; but sacred significant ceremonies, such as cross, kneeling, surplice, holidays, bishopping, etc., which have no use and praise except in religion only, and which, also, were most easily determinable (yet not

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 49.

<sup>16</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, I:IV.

determined) within those bounds which the wisdom of God did set to his written word, are such things as God never left to the determination of any human law.<sup>17</sup>

Samuel Rutherford (c. 1600-1661) penned, “In actions or religious means of worship, or circumstances physical, not moral, not religious, as whether the pulpit be of stone or of timber, the bell of this or this metal, the house of worship stand thus or thus in situation.”<sup>18</sup> William Ames (1576-1633) wrote, “The outward circumstances are those which pertain to order and decency. 1 Corinthians 14:40. Let all things be done decently and in order. But the general rule of these is that they be ordered in that manner which maketh most for edification. 1 Corinthians 14:26. Of this nature are the circumstances of place, time, and the like, which are common adjuncts to religious and civil acts. Therefore although such like circumstances are wont to be called of some rites, and religious or ecclesiastical ceremonies, yet they have nothing in their nature which is proper to religion, and therefore religious worship doth not properly consist in them.”<sup>19</sup> Likewise, John Owen (1616-1683) wrote,

It is said men may add nothing to the substance of the worship of God, but they may order, dispose, and appoint the things that belong to the manner and circumstances of it, this is all that is done in the prescription of liturgies. Of circumstances in and about the worship of God we have spoken before, and removed that pretense. Nor is it safe distinguishing in the things of God where himself hath not distinguished. Indeed, there is nothing in its whole nature, as it belongs to the general being of things, so circumstantial, but that if it be appointed by God in his worship, it becomes a part of the substance of it; nor can anything that is so appointed ever by any be made a circumstance of his worship.<sup>20</sup>

When the eminent Presbyterians and Puritans of the past carefully delineated the differences between the circumstances of worship and the parts or elements of worship, they usually were refuting the unscriptural notions regarding worship espoused by Episcopalian theologians. Given the fact that the arguments used by Gillespie, Rutherford, Ames, and Owen also refute the teachings of Bahnsen, Poythress, Coppes, Gentry, Jordan, Crampton, Frame, and the authors of the OPC majority report (1947), etc., one can honestly assert that the majority of conservative Presbyterians in our day have abandoned the teaching of the *Confession* (1:4) and have unwittingly embraced an Episcopal or Lutheran conception of worship. If you think this is an exaggeration, name the churches in the PCA or OPC that do not celebrate extra-biblical holy

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<sup>17</sup> George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded Upon the Church of England*, Ed. Christopher Coldwell, Dallas, TX: Naphtali Press, [1637, 60] 1993, p. xli. For a much more thorough examination of the Puritan/Presbyterian view of the Regulative Principle read Sherman Isbell's, *The Singing of Psalms* and Dr. William Young's, *The Puritan Principle of Worship* (Vienna, VA: Publication Committee of the Presbyterian Reformed Church, n.d.).

<sup>18</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church-Government and Excommunication* (London: John Field for Christopher Meredith, 1646), p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (London: Edward Griffin for Henry Overton, 1642), p. 318.

<sup>20</sup> John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning Liturgies and Their Imposition*, in *Works* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1850-53] 1965), Vol. 15, p. 40.

days (e.g., Christmas and Easter), and that do *not* use instruments or uninspired hymns in public worship.

When these men argue that only the general categories of teaching and praise are elements of worship while all the various detailed worship ordinances<sup>21</sup> are only circumstances of worship, they have for all intents and purposes destroyed the regulative principle. If the general goal of the worship service is teaching, yet the various methods of achieving this goal are circumstances that are only determined by the light of nature, then virtually every innovation under the sun can be introduced in public worship as long as it serves the purpose of teaching (e.g., drama groups, movies, comedy skits, musical groups, art exhibitions, plays, and so on). “If the church judges that additional sacraments would be beneficial for teaching or praise, why may not men institute such?”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, these men (whether they have intended it or not) have opened the flood gates to virtually anything that men can place under the general category of praise: liturgical dance, incense, candles, the church calendar, holy days, etc. When men arbitrarily redefine the regulative principle in order to introduce unauthorized human compositions in worship, they introduce the leaven of Romanism and/or the Charismatics into their denominations. Declension is inevitable.

Fourth, the idea that Scripture only regulates the general function of worship, such as praise or teaching, is contrary to the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Confession does not just set forth a general category, such as praise or teaching as elements of worship; it instead describes each particular worship ordinance that all serve as the ordinary parts of religious worship. The Confession names “prayer with thanksgiving,”<sup>23</sup> “[t]he reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, 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: beside religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings, upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in a holy and religious manner.”<sup>24</sup> The authors of the Confession clearly believed that scriptural authorization or proof was required for each separate part of worship. That is why each distinct element of worship is proof-texted by the Confession. Isbell writes, “Several worship ordinances serve a teaching function. Among them are the reading of the Scriptures, the preaching of the Word, the singing of Psalms, baptism and the Lord’s supper. Inasmuch as Scripture institutes

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<sup>21</sup> “The first idea contained in them [worship ordinances], is that they are religious duties, prescribed by God, as an instituted method in which he will be worshiped by his creatures. Now, the ordinances, as thus described, must be engaged in according to a divine appointment. No creature has a warrant to enjoin any modes of worship, pretending that these will be acceptable or well-pleasing to God; since God alone, who is the object of worship, has a right to prescribe the way in which he will be worshiped. For a creature to institute modes of worship would be an instance of profaneness and bold presumption; and the worship performed would be ‘in vain’; as our Saviour says concerning that which has no higher sanction than the commandments of men” (Thomas Ridgeley, *A Body of Divinity* [New York: 1855], 2:433).

<sup>22</sup> Sherman Isbell, *The Singing of Psalms*, Part I.

<sup>23</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, XXI, iii.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, XXI, v.

each of these parts of worship, the regulative principle descends to the level of these actions, requiring the use of them specifically, and excluding any others from the church's worship."<sup>25</sup>

The attempt to broaden the definition of the circumstances of worship and blur the distinctions between the separate elements of worship is anti-Confessional and unscriptural. When it comes to worship, the Word of God is very specific. The Bible tells us *what* the distinct elements of worship are: preaching from the Bible (Mt. 26:13; Mk. 16:15; Ac. 9:20; 17:10; 20:8; 1 Cor. 14:28; 2 Tim. 4:2), reading the word of God (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 Chr. 16:9; Ps. 95:1-2; 105:2; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). It tells us *who* is permitted to participate or conduct each part: both men and women are to be baptized (Ac. 8:12), both men and women are to pray (Ac. 1:13-14, 1 Cor. 11:5) and sing praise (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Jas. 1:5), but only men are permitted to preach and teach (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-14).

The Bible also tells us the proper *content* of each element. Scripture reading requires reading from the Bible alone. Reading from the *Apocrypha* or Shakespeare or uninspired theology books does not qualify as Scripture reading. The singing of praise requires the singing of inspired songs, and the writing of worship songs for public worship requires divine inspiration, as noted above. Preaching, which is a separate element of worship, involves reasoning from the Scriptures (cf. Ac. 17:2-3; 18:4, 19; 24:25); it involves explaining or expounding God's Word (cf. Mk. 4:34; Lk. 24:27; Ac. 2:14-40; 17:3; 18:36; 28:23). New-covenant teachers did not speak by divine inspiration, but interpreted divinely inspired Scripture. This practice was the same in the Old Testament; Levitical teachers explained and interpreted the inscripturated law to the covenant people (cf. Neh. 8:7-8; Lev. 10:8-11; Dt. 17:8-13; 24:8; 31:9-13; 33:8; 2 Chr. 15:3; 17:7-9; 19:8-10; 30:22; 35:3; Ezra 7:1-11; Ezek. 44:15; 23-24; Hos. 4:6; Mal. 2:1, 5-8). Another element of worship is prayer. The Bible authorizes the use of our own 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).

The fact that God authorizes the use of uninspired speaking when a Christian preaches, teaches, or prays does not mean that God also authorizes the use of uninspired materials for the Scripture reading and the singing of Psalms. Why? Because, as noted above, Scripture (and the *Confession of Faith*) treats each of these aspects of the worship service as different parts or elements of worship, and also sets forth different rules for each of these elements. Once a person attempts to place the different elements, or parts of religious worship, under general categories so that the rules that apply to one element can be applied to another, then one has circumvented apostolic worship. Using these general categories (set forth by Bahnsen and Poythress), one could argue that since women are permitted to pray and to sing praise, they also are permitted to preach. The immediate objection to this assertion is: "But Paul clearly forbids women to preach and teach in the church." That statement is true. However, it is an unwitting admission that the

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<sup>25</sup> Sherman Isbell, *The Singing of Psalms*, Part I.

New Testament does have *different parts* of worship that are under *different rules*. 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.<sup>26</sup>

As Reformed believers, we must not abandon the scriptural attainments regarding worship achieved by our spiritual forefathers. To abandon the regulative principle or to redefine it to render it meaningless is to abandon biblical worship and our Confession. Those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind. Those who pervert Scripture to have Watts, Toplady, and Newton will end up with Rome, Canterbury, or Vegas.

### 3. *God Doesn't Command the Singing of Psalms*

Another objection to the exclusive Psalm singing position is based on a misunderstanding of how exclusive Psalm singers apply the regulative principle. A pamphlet by an Orthodox Presbyterian pastor sets forth the idea that the exclusive Psalm singing position depends upon proving that only the Psalms are commanded to be used in worship in the Bible. Psalm singers have always acknowledged that other divinely inspired songs besides the Psalms were used for worship before the close of the canon. However, Psalm singers do not sing the inscripturated inspired songs found outside the Psalter because they believe that only the Psalms were intended by God for *perpetual* use in the church.

The Holy Spirit is the one who organized the book of Psalms. He did not include every inspired song in the Bible within the Psalter. The fact that God did not place every inspired song within God's hymnbook probably indicates that some inspired songs were only used on a specific occasion or for a limited period of time. Keddie writes, "It is contended that other inspired utterances such as the songs of Moses (Ex. 15:1-19; Dt. 32:1-43) and Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10) in the Old Testament, and of Mary (Luke 1:46-55) and Simeon (Luke 2:29-32) in the New Testament, were exceptional effusions of praise, of an inspired nature, in connection with

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, pp. 49-50.

particular (and even absolutely unique, as with the *Magnificat*) ‘acts of God’ and not necessarily for perpetual use in the Church’s song...the *whole* book of Psalms...is to be considered as the final[ised] hymnbook of the Church. It satisfies the demands of divine provision, and is the only collection of songs of praise as such which can lay claim to primary and verbal inspiration.”<sup>27</sup> One may disagree with this argument. One may consider it a weak deduction. But, since there is not a shred of biblical evidence that uninspired songs were ever used for the praise of Jehovah, if there is going to be a debate among Reformed believers it ought to be between exclusive Psalm singers and those Christians who want to include the handful of other inspired worship songs which are found outside of the Psalter.<sup>28</sup>

Stephen Pribble, in a desire to remove the regulative principle of worship as a foundation of Psalmody, overstates his case and thus asserts something which is totally unbiblical, that the singing of the Psalms is not clearly prescribed in Scripture. He writes, “But is it true that ‘the Psalms are clearly prescribed for worship in the Scripture?’ As surprising as it might seem, the answer is no.... It is highly significant that nowhere in Scripture are we specifically commanded to sing *mizmor*, the technical term for Psalm.... While there are general commands to sing praise to God, there is no command to sing the Psalms specifically, and an analysis of worship song in Scripture reveals that other materials besides the Psalms are sung in worship.”<sup>29</sup> Pribble argues that one must find a specific command in Scripture to sing *mizmor* in order to have a legitimate claim that the Bible commands us to sing Psalms. He then argues that the Hebrew words translated *psalm* (e.g., NKJV) used by Psalm singers as divine prescriptions to sing Psalms are only general terms which mean “sing” or “sing praise” (*zammerv*), or “sing songs” (*zemirot*, *zimrah*).<sup>30</sup> Pribble also points out (correctly) that the expression “sing praise” is used of songs of praise outside the biblical Psalter.<sup>31</sup>

Regarding Pribble’s argument, the first question that we must answer is, “do we need to find a divine imperative connected with the word *mizmor* to conclude that the singing of Psalms is commanded by God?” There are a number of sound exegetical reasons why Pribble’s argument must emphatically be rejected. First, when we repeatedly read in the book of Psalms that God commands His people to sing praise, how shall we identify the content of this praise? What did God have in mind when He said “sing praise”? Given the fact that the command to “sing praise” and “sing songs” is found throughout the Psalms (9:11; 18:49; 27:6; 30:4, 12; 47:7; 59:17; 75:9; 95:2; 98:5; 101:1; 104:33; 105:2; 119:54; 135:3; 146:2), it is an absurd notion to

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<sup>27</sup> J. W. Keddie, *Why Psalms Only?*, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> The debate would then be between say Scottish Presbyterians and English Puritans on the one side and the Dutch Reformed on the other. The latter have since the Synod of Dordt included a few “*gezangen*” (i.e. songs) at the end of their Psalters. These have included the *Magnificat*, the angels’ chorus to the shepherds of Bethlehem, Simeon’s Song of Praise, etc., as well as versifications of the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer, etc. It is interesting to note, however, that as the *Herformde Kerk* (the Dutch State Church) became more liberal these “*gezangen*” were expanded to include more and more uninspired material. (See *Het Boek Der Psalmen*, etc. [1773 Edition], Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1919 and *Psalmen* [1933 Edition of the GKN] n.v. Uitgevers Maatshappij Gebr. Zomer & Keuning, Wageningen).

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Pribble, *The Regulative Principle and Singing in Worship*, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

argue that the command to “sing praise” or “sing songs” does not apply to the Psalter. When a divinely inspired prophet writes a worship song and the worship song contains the command “sing praise” anyone using simple logic would conclude that the command at least minimally applies to the song in which it is given.<sup>32</sup> If Shakespeare handed a book of essays to a friend and said “read essays” the person would immediately conclude that Shakespeare wanted him to read the essays connected with the exhortation.

Second, Pribble’s attempt to limit a command to sing Psalms to a command to sing *mizmor* does not fit with the scriptural data regarding praise. The Hebrew word *tehillah* meaning “praise” and translated “song of praise” (RSV) or “psalm of praise” (KJV) is used in the Psalms (e.g., Ps. 22:25; 33:1; 34:1, etc.), as a Psalm title (Ps. 145), and in its plural form for the whole Psalter. The verb is used as a call to praise Jehovah—“You that fear the Lord, praise Him” (Ps. 22:23). Also, it is used of praise in the congregation (Ps. 22:22). (Note, the translators of the Septuagint render the Hebrew word for congregation as *ekklesia*.) Although this term (*tehillah*) is applied to songs outside of the Psalter there can be no question that the command to praise Jehovah includes the Psalter. James Limburg writes,

The noun *tehillim*, ‘praises’, is derived from the Hebrew root *hll*, ‘praise’. That root also appears in ‘hallelujah’ (‘praise Yah’, or ‘Yahweh’), found only in the Psalter, always at the beginning or ending of psalms (104:35; 106:1, 48; 113:1, 9; 146-50, beginning and end of each, etc.). The noun ‘praise’ occurs often in the psalms: ‘He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise (*tehilla*) to our God’ (40:3; also 2:25; 33:1; 34:1; 48:10, etc.). Psalm 145 is the only psalm to be designated as *tehilla* in the title, translated ‘Song of Praise’. Of the 206 occurrences of *hll*, ‘praise’ in the Old Testament (146 verbal, 60 nominal), about two-thirds are in the psalms or in phrases taken from the psalms (THAT, 493). Because the collection of psalms contains so many expressions of praise to God, it became known as ‘praises’ or *Tehillim*.<sup>33</sup>

Can Psalm singers claim a clear prescription in Scripture to sing the Psalms in worship? Absolutely! Are we supposed to believe that the term ‘hallelujah’ which means “praise Yahweh”; which *only* occurs in the Psalter is a general term which does not refer to the Psalms? Such a thought is ludicrous.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> This logic lies behind the fact that many English translations translate four different Hebrew words (all nouns meaning praise, song, or psalm) as psalm because the context indicates that this was the intent of the author. The translators of the Septuagint render the general term *zemirot* (songs) in Psalm 95:2 as *psalmois* (psalms).

<sup>33</sup> James Limburg, editor-in-chief David N. Freedman, *Book of Psalms in The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), Vol. 5, p. 523.

<sup>34</sup> Pribble acknowledges that Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 “probably refers to the Old Testament Psalter” (p. 8). However, he argues that neither “text specifically refers to the public worship of God” (p. 8). Even if one accepts the interpretation that these passages do not refer to public worship (which is debatable) there can be no question as to their application to private worship and informal gatherings. In any event these passages provide a clear prescription for the use of Psalms in worship. Once again note that Pribble’s assertion that the singing of Psalms is not clearly prescribed for worship is false. In private conversation, Pribble does agree that Psalm singing is taught by biblical historical example. Furthermore, the church that he pastors does sing some Psalms alongside man-made uninspired compositions.

Third, (as noted earlier in this study) every historical example in Scripture of saints writing songs for praise involved divine inspiration (e.g., Exodus 15:20-21; 2 Samuel 23: 1, 2; 1 Chronicles 6:39; 15:17; 16:5ff.; 25:1-7; 2 Chronicles 5:12; 29:25-30; 34:30; 35:15; 2 Kings 23:2; Psalms 39, 62, 77 [titles]; Matthew 22:43-44; Mark 12:36; Acts 1:16-17; 2:29-31; 4:24-25). David, Heman, Asaph, and Jeduthun are all called prophets or seers. Also, every historical example in the Bible of God's people singing praise involved only divinely inspired songs (e.g., Exodus 15:1; 2 Samuel 1:18; 1 Chronicles 16; 2 Chr. 5:13; 20:21; 23:13; etc.). Given the biblical record, there is no divine warrant whatsoever for defining "singing praise" in a manner that involves uninspired songs. Since divine revelation ceased with the death of the apostles and the close of the canon, the most that Pribble could argue for would be to include the handful of other divinely inspired songs of praise that did not make it into the biblical Psalter. If one follows the standard biblical procedures of interpreting the Scripture (i.e., a grammatical-historical-theological hermeneutic) and simple principles of logic, Pribble's argument must be rejected. Context (both broad and narrow) determines the meaning of a word, not our own preconceptions.

#### *4. Psalm Singers Can't Sing the Name of Jesus*

One of the most popular arguments against exclusive psalmody is that "if we only sing the Psalms then we deny the church the opportunity to praise our Savior using His name as the divine-human mediator (Jesus)." Although many people consider this to be the strongest argument against exclusive psalmody, it in reality is nothing more than an appeal to sentimentality with no scriptural foundation. There are a number of reasons such an argument is fallacious.

First, nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to sing the name "Jesus". If God preferred the name Jesus over other biblical designations for our Lord (e.g., Immanuel, Yahweh, Lord, Savior, *Jehovah Tzidkenu* [cf. Jer. 23:5-6], the Prince of Peace, Messiah, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the Son of Man, etc.), then He would have revealed His will concerning this matter to us in the Bible.

Second, it is not the word "Jesus" that we are to serve, exalt, worship and glorify, but what or whom the name points to or represents. There is nothing *intrinsically* sacred, mystical or holy regarding the word "Jesus." We respect the word and do not use it in an irreverent manner because of the *Person* behind the name. Bible scholars recognize that even the biblical expression in the name refers 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 Jesus. Matthew Henry writes, "At the name of Jesus; not at the sound of the word, but the authority of Jesus; all should pay a solemn homage. And that *every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*—every nation and language

should publicly own the universal empire of the exalted Redeemer, and that *all power in heaven and earth is given to him*, Matthew 28:18.”<sup>35</sup> John Calvin concurs,

...Paul speaks of 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 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 the passage before us that we ought to bow the knee whenever the name of 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.<sup>36</sup>

John Gill makes this important observation,

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, &c.] Which is to be understood, not of the outward act of bowing the knee upon hearing the name, and the syllables of the mere name Jesus pronounced; for in the bare name there can be nothing which can command such a peculiar respect; it was a name common with the Jews: Joshua is so called in Heb. iv. 8 and the name of Elymas the sorcerer was *Bar-Jesus*; that is, the son of Jesus, Acts xiii. 6. Now, how monstrously ridiculous and stupid would it be, for a man, upon hearing these passages, and upon the pronouncing of this word, to bow the knee? 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.<sup>37</sup>

Since the Psalms eloquently and thoroughly recognize the power, authority and majesty of Christ as well as define His character and ministry, they exalt His glorious name because they exalt His person. To ignore this point and demand the use of the word “Jesus” in singing praise is superstitious and irrational.

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<sup>35</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:733. Interestingly, the majority of commentators point to the title “Lord” as the name which is above all other names. Calvin writes, “The meaning therefore is, that supreme power was given to Christ, and that he was placed in the highest rank of honour, so that there is no dignity found either in heaven or in earth that is equal to his. Hence it follows that it is a Divine name” (Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians, [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], pp. 60-61). Peter T. O’Brien writes, “The name (*to onoma* is definite) greater than any other God conferred on Jesus as a gracious gift (*ekarisato*) is his own name, *kurios* (‘Lord’), in its most sublime sense, that designation used in the LXX to represent the personal name of the God of Israel, that is, *Yahweh*” (*Commentary on Philippians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], p.238). J. Hugh Michael writes, “The Name of Jesus stands for ‘Jesus as bearing the new Name of Lord conferred on him by the Father’” (*The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928], p. 96). Richard R. Melick, Jr. writes, “Most agree that the ‘name that is above every name’ is the title ‘Lord’. Further most agree that the title refers to Jesus’ character, as well as to his function” (*Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991] p. 107). Since Jesus Christ is repeatedly called Lord in the Psalms, the idea that the Psalms are deficient in their exaltation of Christ is erroneous.

<sup>36</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Philippians*, p. 61.

<sup>37</sup> John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament* (Streamwood, IL.: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979 [1089]), pp. 135-136.

Third, the idea that synonyms for the word “Jesus” are biblically inadequate for praise is disproved by the fact that God Himself did not consider a providential preservation of His own covenant name to be important. God’s covenant name (*YHWH*) is the triune God’s most frequent designation in Scripture occurring 5,321 times. This name was personally given to Moses when he asked God to reveal His name to the children of Israel (Exodus 5:13). God responds by revealing His covenant name—the Hebrew tetragrammaton (i.e., four consonants) *YHWH* translated as “Lord” (KJV, NKJV, RSV, NIV, NASB, *A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text*), “Jehovah” (ASV), or “Yahweh” (*Jerusalem Bible*). When God spoke this name to Moses, Moses heard the proper pronunciation (i.e., he knew what the proper vowels were) and relayed the correct pronunciation to the covenant people. Over time, however, the proper pronunciation of the word was lost forever because the Jews out of fear of violating the third commandment never pronounced God’s covenant name. Instead when they came to *YHWH* they would say “Adonai” or “Lord,” another name for God. As a result all the modern transliterations of *YHWH* (e.g., Jehovah, Yahweh) are at best educated guesses. Therefore, various cults that regard Protestant Bibles as corrupt because they use the word LORD instead of Jehovah or Yahweh are ignorant of history.

The whole point of this discussion regarding God’s covenant name is that God did not consider a providential preservation of His own covenant name to be important. When we sing the Psalms or read our Bibles (no matter what the translation) we are not reading or singing God’s covenant name. We are, however, reading or singing a synonym which seems to be just fine as far as God is concerned.

Fourth, 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.

Fifth, 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 were 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.

Sixth, 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 than other names by which God makes Himself known.”<sup>38</sup> 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.

Seventh, the name *Jesus* or *Yehoshua* means “Jehovah is salvation.” The 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.

##### *5. Metrical Psalms Are Unfaithful Translations*

A rather common argument against exclusive psalmody is based on the assumption that metrical versions of the Psalms for singing (i.e., the Psalms are translated in a manner so they can be set to music and thus are made to rhyme, etc.) are really not translations of the Psalms but are at best gross paraphrases of the original Hebrew. Thus, it is argued that the singing of metrical Psalms is little or no different than singing uninspired hymns which are based on Scripture or which teach redemptive history. In other words, both are human compositions and if one is permissible then so is the other.

While this argument is common, it is refuted in a number of ways. First, note that the whole argument is based on an unbiblical, immoral analogy. The argument assumes that if a group of people distort the original meaning of the Psalms with a bad or faulty translation this somehow permits other people to use man-made hymns. In other words, if group A does something wrong, group B can also do something wrong. If it is indeed true that some Reformed believers are using sloppy, poorly translated metrical versions of the psalms, then our response as Christians should never be “Let us do likewise” or even worse “Let us go a step further by ignoring the inspired psalms altogether.” Rather it must be, “Brother, repent! There are excellent, faithful Psalters available. You do not need to use a defective translation!” To those brothers who

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Bacon, *Review of Psalmody* (Rowlett, TX: FPCR, 1996), Internet article.

use this argument we ask one simple question, “Does the fact that some churches use terrible paraphrases of the Bible for the Scripture reading in public worship justify the use of non-inspired Christian writings instead of the Scripture?” No, of course not! Then, poor translations of the Psalms do not justify man-made hymns.

Second, many who use the metrical Psalm argument assume that metrical versions of the Psalms (by virtue of the fact that they must be phrased to rhyme and fit music) are of necessity bad translations. In other words, it is impossible to be faithful to Scripture while using a metrical Psalter. This argument must be rejected because it is based on a false assumption. Metrical Psalms can and have been faithfully and accurately translated from the original tongue. Further, even if it were true it would not justify the use of man-made hymns. If a Reformed believer holds that metrical Psalms are inherently defective and thus unfaithful to the scriptural command to sing Psalms in worship, then instead of turning to uninspired compositions he should chant the Psalms in their original phrasing (i.e., out of one of the more literal translations of the Bible) during worship.

Third, the metrical Psalms argument, in order to be consistent, would ultimately require the Scripture reading in public worship to be done in the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek). Anyone familiar with Bible translation understands that a strictly word for word, *absolutely* literal translation of the Hebrew and Greek text is impossible. Even the best, most literal translations in use today (e.g., KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB) must at times resort to a phrase or multiple words to accurately convey the meaning of a single Hebrew or Greek word. Further, it is important that a translation pursue as best as possible the majesty of style and elegance of the original language. God commands His people to read the Scriptures and to sing the Psalms. This requires translation. In the case of singing this may at times require a metrical translation. What is important is that Christ’s church be as faithful as possible to the original language as it translates God’s word. Once again, if a translation of the Bible or the Psalms is inaccurate, defective or sloppy in any manner the solution is not to discard the Holy Scriptures but rather to do a better, more faithful job of translation.<sup>39</sup> Accuracy is not an option, but a requirement. While we commend our brothers for pointing to the need for accurate translations of the Psalms, we must reject their attempt to circumvent God’s requirement of the singing of *inspired* songs in public worship.

### *Conclusion*

After examining the most popular arguments against exclusive psalmody in use today, we can only come to one conclusion. The arguments against exclusive psalmody are not based on a

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<sup>39</sup> As the Confession puts it, “The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old) and the New Testament in Greek (which at the time of the writing of it was most generally known to the nations)...But because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God who have a right unto and interest in the Scriptures and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner” (1:8).

sound exegesis of Scripture. Rather, they are vain attempts at justifying human traditions that have no divine warrant. We ask our brothers who advocate the use of uninspired hymns in worship to produce even one biblical command or historical example that supports their position. There are none. Since we cannot find a shred of biblical evidence for the use of uninspired songs in new covenant public worship, we will remain faithful to Scripture and the reformation attainments of our spiritual forefathers. Let us return to the simple, unadorned worship of the apostolic church and the Westminster Standards. (cf. *Confession of Faith*, 21:5).