

Psalm-Singers'  
Conference.

Belfast, August, 1902.

Psalm-Singers'

Conference,

Held in

The N. M. C. A. Hall,

Wellington Place,

Belfast,

On

5th, 6th, 7th, and 8th August,

1902.

---

Belfast :

Fountain Printing Works, 56 Fountain Street.

1903.

far back as I can remember, I can remember singing the Psalms. I can go back to the hour when first I was taught by loving mother's lips,

"The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want,"

and I have looked over the lives of men from the first to the close, and I find that the man who can begin by saying in early life, "The Lord is my Shepherd", will be able to close his experience by singing,

"I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

And when sometimes discouraged by reason of omissions and transgressions, I have turned to the 51st Psalm, and have found there words that brought me up to the very Throne of God in heaven. And if I desire to give expression to the cleansing power of Jesus Christ, to the mighty power that transforms and lifts men up from the depths, I can turn to the 40th Psalm, and find the words,

"He took me from a fearful pit,  
And from the miry clay,  
And on a rock He set my feet,  
Establishing my way."

So, beloved, whatever may be our experience there is nothing necessary outside the one hundred and fifty Psalms; and I thank God for them. We, as Psalm-singers, are in the minority, but we are on the right side, and we know that one day victory shall be ours.



## DO EPHESIANS 5, 19, AND COLOSSIANS 3, 16, WARRANT THE USE OF UNINSPIRED HYMNS IN THE ORDINANCE OF PRAISE ? •

By REV. PROFESSOR JAMES HARPER, D.D., Xenia, Ohio, U.S.A.

Many, indeed most, hymn-singers, if asked by what authority they present in worship songs of mere human composition, would answer that no warrant is needed other than the general

• Read by Rev. A. T. Hemphill, Swanwick, Illinois, U.S.A.

command to praise God in song and the use of songs of orthodox tenor.

Others, however, with a clearer apprehension of the law of worship, when asked by what authority they offer to God in solemn service songs of uninspired origin, point to a few things in the New Testament as affording such sanction, but chiefly to the two texts, Ephesians 5, 19, and Colossians 3, 16, which are now to engage our attention. In our view, on the contrary, the texts specified neither warrant nor favour the use of uninspired hymns in the worship of God, or, indeed, of any but those embodied in the Canonical Psalter.

It may not be needless in these unsettling days to explain briefly what we mean by the phrase, "an inspired hymn." There are those who go so far as to say that a hymn composed by a good man and embodying Scriptural sentiments may be characterized as "inspired". The distinction between "inspiration" and "spiritual illumination" is thus denied or ignored. All genuine disciples of Christ enjoy spiritual illumination, but only a few of them have received the gift of inspiration. By inspiration men may receive truth and be qualified to express it inerrantly; by inspiration truth may be intellectually apprehended and declared. By spiritual illumination the moral beauty and excellence of the truth are perceived and felt. Inspiration moves in the sphere of the intellectual, and does not necessarily imply the regeneration of him thus gifted; spiritual illumination relates to the moral, consists in a sense of the beauty and excellence of spiritual truth, and belongs to all regenerated persons and to none else. The gift of inspiration insures an intellectual perception of truth and ability to convey it correctly. The grace of spiritual illumination affords an *appreciative* sense of truth as far as known; but it is no guarantee that this truth may not be mixed with error, and may not be badly blurred in an attempt to communicate it to others. To be a good man and to be an inspired man are very different conceptions. Moreover, why limit inspiration to the work of hymn-writing? Why not set up a claim of inspiration for sermons and theological treatises? If John Henry Newman was inspired in writing the hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light," why might he not have been inspired in writing Tract Ninety to prove how one might properly assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England while in his heart a Romanist?

Coming now to the task more immediately in hand, we submit a series of considerations tending to the conclusion that in Ephesians 5, 19, and Colossians 3, 16, the practice of singing uninspired hymns in the worship of God has no support.

1. In these verses there is no direction given to compose psalms, hymns, or songs wherewith to worship God. The injunction is to employ, not to prepare, the compositions specified. It is significant that nowhere in Scripture are we told to prepare a hymn for the worship of God. To pray according to our ability and in reliance on the Spirit as our Helper, we are urged and commanded; but never to make a hymn for use in the solemn worship of God. When solicited by His disciples to teach them to pray, our Lord complied; but He never gave them a model hymn, as He did a model prayer, nor was He ever asked so to do. We thus learn incidentally that prayer and praise, however close their affinity, are distinct exercises.

2. It is altogether unlikely that the Ephesian and Colossian converts, most of them but a short time before brought out of heathenism, were possessed of a body of songs of their own composition designed for use in worship.

3. The Apostles to whom, under the Head of the Church, it was allotted to settle authoritatively its form, order, discipline, and worship in its New Testament stage, did not provide a single song for use in worship, while they inculcated the duty of singing the praises of God. Do not these facts indicate that they counted the Psalter an adequate praise-book for the New Testament Church, as it had been for the Old?

4. Directed to praise God in song, yet unprovided with hymns either of their own or of Apostolic composition, the converts of Ephesus and Colosse would most naturally turn to the Book of Psalms, a collection of devotional odes given by God for the special purpose of praise, and for centuries used as its hymn-book by the Jewish Church, a collection, moreover, bearing many indications that it was meant for permanent and world-wide use.

5. The terms used by the Apostle would be sufficient, if anything were needed, to convince those people that the inspired Psalter was meant to be to them, as it had so long been to the Jews, the manual of praise.

Greek was the mother tongue of the people primarily addressed in these two Epistles. The Greek translation of the Old Testament, commonly called the "Septuagint" version, was the chief, if not the only, part which they possessed of that "word of Christ", the rich indwelling of which in them Paul urges. If they examined the Psalter in that version, they would find the very words "psalm", "hymn", and "song" employed as sub-titles of the different poems collectively called "The Book of Psalms". As to the reference of the word "psalms" there can be no reasonable doubt. It may apply in a general way to the entire compilation as "The

Book of Psalms", while in a special sense it may mean some only of the poems embraced in that collection. The objection of Archbishop Trench that, had the Book of Psalms been meant, the article in Greek would have been prefixed, may be met in two ways—either by saying that in Greek the article is often omitted before a word denoting a *well-known* object; or by maintaining that the Apostle refers to those odes in the sacred collection which are distinctively and explicitly designated "psalms" in the Greek translation of the Psalter. The latter method of dealing with the objection in view seems preferable.

That the word "hymns" is applicable to the Psalms at large, although, perhaps, to some of them more particularly, the Ephesian and Colossian converts could easily discover by consulting their Greek translation of the Psalter. For instance, in Psalm 72, 20, where, in our English translation, we read, "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended," the Greek translation is to this effect—"The *hymns* of David, the son of Jesse, are ended."

Again, in Psalm 100, 4, where, in English, we read, "into His courts with praises," the Greek translation is equivalent to "into his courts with *hymns*".

Moreover, many of the psalms bear the title of "songs", as those primarily addressed by Paul could easily see in the inscriptions of Psalms 18, 45, 46, 120-134, inclusive. Whether these inscriptions be regarded as a part of the inspired text or not, they certainly existed in the Septuagint translation.

Corroboration of the views now expressed may be easily found. For instance, Josephus, a contemporary of Paul, writing in his "Antiquities of the Jews" (Book VII., chapter 12, section 3) about King David, says—"David composed odes (or songs) and hymns to God . . . and taught the Levites to sing hymns to God, both on that called the Sabbath day, and on the other festivals." The reference here is unquestionably to psalms composed by David, and to these Josephus applies the very words (odes, or songs, and hymns) which some now deem inapplicable to them. It is observable that Josephus does not use the word "psalms" in describing David's literary labours. This is due, probably, to the fact that, in the earlier and strictly classical Greek, the word *Psalmos* denoted rather the music than the words of a song. But it was of the words that Josephus was treating. Elsewhere and in different instances this Jewish historian alludes to the Psalms under the title of "hymns". (See Antiquities, Book XI., chapter 3, section 8; Book XI., chapter 4, section 2; Book XX., chapter 9, section 6; Contra Apion, Book I., section 8.)

Some confirmation of our view of the verses under notice may be derived from the writings of Christian antiquity. Thus Augustine, in his "Retractations" (Book II., chapter 11), speaks of hymns "chosen out of the Book of Psalms".

Repeatedly, in "The Apostolical Constitutions", the Psalms are styled "the hymns of David", or simply "hymns".

In his work entitled "Paidagogos", written early in the third century (Book III., chapter 4), Clement of Alexandria, commenting on Colossians 3, 16, uses this language, "ᾠδὴ πνευματικὴν ὃ Ἀπόστολος εἶρηκε τὸν ψαλμόν," that is, "The Apostle has called the Psalm a spiritual song."

Commenting on Ephesians 5, 19, Jerome, one of the most learned of the Fathers, makes this remark: "The difference between psalms and hymns and spiritual songs is best seen in the Book of Psalms."

Furthermore, the close connection hinted in Colossians 3, 16, between the rich indwelling of "the word of Christ" and the singing of "psalms", "hymns", and "spiritual songs", favours our interpretation. By "the word of Christ", we understand the Scriptures; for He is the great Prophet of the Church, and by His Spirit men of old were qualified and moved to write the Scriptures, which emphatically treat of Him. Now it is safe to affirm that the indwelling of "the word" in the heart is more likely to result from the use of the inspired Psalms than from the use of uninspired hymns. When we sing the Psalms, we are singing the very word of Christ, and a part of it which sets forth with special vividness His character and work.

6. The epithet "spiritual" used by Paul in these texts would teach the Ephesians and Colossians, as it may us, that the songs authorized for use in worship are inspired songs.

There are those who think that this word "spiritual" is meant to qualify, or characterize, the three terms, "psalms," "hymns," and "songs," and it may be conceded that this view is not forbidden by the rules of Greek syntax. Certainly, however, these rules do not require it; and it strikes us unfavourably for this reason chiefly, that "psalms" at least would be understood to be spiritual, whatever that word may mean. The same could not be said of "songs"; for there were secular and convivial songs, which could not be called "spiritual", whether in the sense of "holy" or in the sense of "inspired". The word "hymn" also, like the word "psalm", but in a less degree than it, was identified with religion. Hence to guard against misconception the Apostle joins the defining word "spiritual" to the doubtful word "songs".

Now what is the import of this epithet "spiritual",

the English equivalent of the Greek word, πνευματικαῖς (*pneumatikais*), used by the Apostle?

There are twenty-two occurrences in the Greek Testament of the adjective, πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*); and it can scarcely be denied that in these instances some latitude of meaning attaches to it. In Ephesians 6, 12, for example, where we read, according to the Revised Version, of "spiritual hosts of wickedness", the word indicates the fact that the enemies meant are not flesh and blood, not material, but immaterial, entities.

Again, in 1 Corinthians 15, 44, the expression "a spiritual body" means, as the contrast in the verse shows, a body suited to the *pneuma*, or spirit. This may be called the physical meaning of the word. Generally, however, in the New Testament, the word is used to signify an immediate, supernatural product of the Holy Spirit. For example, in Romans 1, 11, the "spiritual gift" of which Paul writes, seems clearly to be a gift of the Holy Spirit conducing to the edification and comfort of believers. Paul could impart the gift only instrumentally. To impart it efficiently was the prerogative of the Holy Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 2, 15, it is said, "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things." The word "spiritual" in this occurrence is not, strictly speaking, equivalent to "pious" or "saintly", but to renewed and enlightened by the Spirit of God. True, a man renewed and enlightened by the Spirit is a pious, or saintly, man; but the aspect in which he is presented when described as "spiritual" is that of having life and discernment from the Holy Spirit. The contrast between the "natural" man and the "spiritual" man is equivalent to that expressed in John 3, 6—"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Be it observed that the songs spoken of in Ephesians 5, 19, and Colossians 3, 16, are styled "spiritual"; and just as a "spiritual" man is one *directly* made so by the Holy Spirit, and as a spiritual gift is directly imparted by the Spirit, so a spiritual song is one directly produced by the Spirit's agency, that is, an inspired song.

In this interpretation we are sustained by some of the most acute and accomplished Biblical scholars. Meyer, for instance, says that πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*) is equivalent to θεόπνευστος (*theopneustos*), that is, God-breathed, or inspired.

Tholuck, in the Introduction to his Commentary on the Psalms, writes thus—"They", that is, the Psalms, "are referred to (Ephesians 5, 19, and Colossians 3, 16) in connection with 'spiritual songs', which latter are to be apprehended as songs suddenly *inspired* by the Holy Ghost."

Braune, author of the exposition of the Epistle to the Ephesians, which forms part of the General Commentary edited by Dr. Lange, says, "ὠδαὶ πνευματικαὶ (*ōdai pneumatikai*) are spiritual songs in general, productions of the Holy Ghost in the department of poetry as regards form, out of the Christian life as regards substance." Further, he remarks, "'Spiritual' belongs to the undefined 'songs', not to 'psalms' and 'hymns', which are confessedly productions of the Holy Ghost; the word means precisely this, however, and not merely that Christian thoughts and feelings find expression therein."

Bishop Ellicott says that spiritual songs are "such as the Holy Spirit inspired and gave utterance to". \*

Regard to brevity forbids further discussion; but the considerations which have been presented seem to us to warrant the conclusion that in Ephesians 5, 19, and Colossians 3, 16, no sanction is given to the use of uninspired songs in the worship of God, or, indeed, to the use of any others in that solemn exercise than those embraced in the Book of Psalms.

---

\* I feel impelled to present a few more testimonies, as kindly furnished me by my scholarly friend, Rev. John M'Naugher, D.D., Professor in the Allegheny Theological Seminary, Allegheny, Pennsylvania. They are as follows:—

Cremer, in his *Biblico-Theological Lexicon* (fourth English edition, p. 510), makes *πνευματικὸς* in this text (Ephesians 5, 19) to mean "determined by the Spirit", "produced by the Spirit".

Sanday, in his *Commentary on Romans* (p. 187), says that Paul gives to the law the epithet "spiritual" (*πνευματικὸς*), "which is equivalent to ascribing to it a *direct* Divine origin." Elsewhere (p. 181) Dr. Sanday says that "the law is spiritual in the sense of being Spirit-caused or Spirit-given".

Dr. James Denney, Professor of Theology, Glasgow, in the *Expositor's Greek Testament* (published in 1900), says of the phrase "ὁ νόμος πνευματικὸς", "the law comes from God, Who is Spirit, and it shares His nature: its affinities are Divine, not human."

Moule, on *Romans 7* (*Expositor's Bible*), commenting on the same phrase, speaks of the law as "framed by the sure guidance of the Holy Spirit".

Thayer, in his *Lexicon on πνευματικὸς*, says of the *ὠδαὶ* of Ephesians and Colossians, that they are "Divinely inspired and so redolent of the Holy Spirit".

Dr. Edward Robinson, treating, in his *New Testament*

Lexicon, of *πνευματικός*, says that the songs mentioned in Ephesians 5, 19, and Colossians 3, 16, were "composed in the Spirit".

---

## NO DIVINE WARRANT FOR THE USE OF UNINSPIRED HYMNS IN THE ORDINANCE OF PRAISE.

By REV. JAMES H. LITTELL, Wheeling, West Virginia, U.S.A.

This subject is one of solemn importance to him who regards the will of God. Since God has given us an inspired Psalter to be used in praising Him, we believe that His appointment should be carefully observed.

Timidity on our part may have led us to over-scrupulousness in the matter of praise, for, perhaps, the use of uninspired songs may be a means of edification. Nevertheless, if we err, we err on the right side—our error is negative; while, if the singers of uninspired songs in God's worship are in error, their transgression is positive.

While disclaiming an entire condemnation of "hymn-singing" as a sin *per se*, we hold that there is a transgression and wrong in attempting to substitute human composition for the *Inspired Word* in the Ordinance of Praise.

But if there be any sufficient warrant for the use of uninspired songs in the Ordinance of Praise, such warrant must come from one of three sources, namely, from the *Example of Christ*, the *Teaching of Scripture*, or the *Practice of the Early Church*.

Let us briefly examine these three grounds.

### I. THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST FURNISHES NO SUFFICIENT WARRANT.

The example of our Lord is as authoritative as is His precept. His example, indeed, is precept in action; and, therefore, it speaks to us with all the authority of a direct command. At the close of the Passover, when the Lord's Supper was instituted, it is written, "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives."

The "hymn" which was always sung in connection with the Passover feast was the *Great Hallel*, consisting of the 113th to the 118th Psalms inclusive. The "hymn" used on that occasion was some portion of this sacred song, which was