

*SIC ET NON: VIEWS IN REVIEW*The Content of Song for the Public Worship of God:
Exclusive or Inclusive Psalmody? Part One

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Psalmody in the Church, Old Testament and New[‡]

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INTRODUCTION

This presentation of “Psalmody in the Church, Old Testament and New” assumes the Regulative Principle: In worship, whatever God does not command is forbidden. The study sets forth the origin and perpetuation of Psalmody in the Old Testament economy, briefly discusses Psalmody in the New Testament, examines Paul’s understanding of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), argues that Paul commands the exclusive use of psalms in public worship (Col. 3:16), and proposes that the ground for such a command is found in the subjective element, the true genius of Psalmody.

The argument of the paper proceeds along the following line. King David instituted Psalmody according to God’s command through Nathan the prophet. King Hezekiah then codified Psalmody, thus excluding other worship songs. Ezra and Nehemiah carried out the commands of David in the second temple period. When we enter the New Testament, the long-standing Biblical tradition of Psalmody is carried forward by Christ, the disciples, and the Apostle Paul. The ground for this millennia-long practice appears to be, in part, Psalmody’s subjective element. The thesis for the paper is simple. The New Testament commands the exclusive use of the 150 canonical psalms in the God-directed stated public corporate worship of the church.

THE ORIGIN AND PERPETUATION OF PSALMODY

David introduced the singing of psalms before the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem and in the tabernacle in Gibeon. After a failed attempt (1 Chron. 13:1–13), David

brought the ark to Jerusalem and placed it in a tent he pitched for it (1 Chron. 16:1). At the same time, the tabernacle was in Gibeon, five or six miles northwest of Jerusalem (1 Chron. 16:39). This anomalous situation existed until Solomon dedicated the temple (2 Chron. 1:3–4; 5:4–5). It was during this period that David introduced Psalmody to Israel.

He [David] appointed some of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the Lord, even *to celebrate* [proclaim] and *to thank* and *praise* the Lord God of Israel ... So he left Asaph and his relatives there before the ark of the covenant of the Lord *to minister* before the

VIEWS IN REVIEW: *Sic et Non: Views in Review* is an occasional feature under the purview of the Reviews & Responses editor and will afford a place for a collegial and scholarly discussion of noteworthy if not controversial positions within the Confessionally Reformed community. Since this issue contains John Murray’s work on the content of worship song which advocated Exclusive Psalmody, the editors here present an exchange of papers on the question. Dennis J. Prutow served pastorates in both the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and was the Professor of Homiletics and Pastoral Theology at Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pa. He retired in 2013 after forty-five years of ministry and is now RPTS Professor Emeritus of Homiletics. He is the author of a number of publications including *Public Worship 101*, *The Visions of Revelation*, and *You Cannot Escape from God*. He is administrator of Westminster Evangelistic Ministries, an outreach of Sterling Reformed Presbyterian Church, Sterling Kansas and the Midwest Presbytery of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. Andrew J. Webb was born in England and moved to the USA at the age of six. He became a Christian through the ministries and teachings of Ligonier Ministries and John Gerstner and R.C. Sproul, Sr. Before entering seminary in 1997 (M.Div, WTS, Philadelphia), he worked in advertising and systems administration. Pastor Webb who has an M.A. in history from the University of St. Andrews, Fife, teaches Old Testament and History at Carolina Bible College, and is senior pastor of Providence Presbyterian Church (PCA), Fayetteville, N.C.

‡This paper is a reworking of Chapter 11 of Dennis Prutow, *Public Worship 101* (Pittsburgh: RPTS Press, 2013), 231–260.

ark continually, as every day's work required ... He left Zadok the priest and his relatives the priests before the tabernacle of the Lord in the high place which was at Gibeon ... With them were Heman and Jeduthun, and the rest who were chosen, who were designated by name, *to give thanks* to the Lord, because His loving-kindness is everlasting. And with them were Heman and Jeduthun with trumpets and cymbals for those who should sound aloud, and with instruments for the *songs of God* ... (1 Chron. 16:4, 37, 39, 41–42, italics added).

First Chronicles 16:8–36, the large center section of 1 Chronicles 16, gives us examples of the praise David assigned to the Levites. This section quotes Psalms 105:1–15; 96:1–13; 106:1 and 46–47. This was the beginning of Psalmody in Israel's worship. Martin Selman comments on 1 Chronicles 16:37–43.

This paragraph summarizes the Levites functions (cf. 1 Ch. 23–26). Basically they were in charge of the music (v. 31, cf. v. 32; 'singing', JB, or 'the service of song', ...) and with the duties of the tabernacle (v. 48). 'After the ark rested' (v. 31, RSV), the musicians were divided between the ark in Jerusalem and the Tent of Meeting (v. 32) in Gibeon (cf. 16:1–4, 41–42).¹

Why did David introduce Psalmody into the worship of Israel? He did so because of the command of the Lord. We learn this later under Hezekiah's restoration of God-ordained worship. "He then stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with harps and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; *for the command was from the Lord through His prophets*" (2 Chron. 29:25, italics added). God commanded the addition of praise with psalms and instrumental accompaniment.

King Hezekiah regularized temple Psalmody. "Moreover, King Hezekiah and the officials ordered the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and Asaph the seer" (2 Chron. 29:30). Keil and Delitzsch put it this way, "The king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words (psalms) of David and Asaph ..."² John Kleinig adds, "If there was no collection of psalms attributed to David and Asaph, this decree would have authorized the preparation of such an edition. These were thereafter to be used to praise the Lord as the public burnt offering was presented at the temple."³

The practice of Psalmody continued after the exile. The people offered praise according to the direction of David, which we have seen was the command of God.

The sample of praise in the following quote refers to Psalm 106:1, 107:1, 118:1, 118:29, or 136:1.

Now when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Israel. They sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, "For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever" (Ezra 3:10–11).

Nehemiah 12:45–46 commends the priests and Levites for their service and hearkens back to the Psalmody of David and Asaph. This also appears to be a reference back to Hezekiah's decree.

For they performed the worship of their God and the service of purification, together with the singers and the gatekeepers in accordance with the command of David and of his son Solomon. For in the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, *there were* leaders of the singers, songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving to God.

Psalmody began in the tabernacle and was carried into the temple and not the synagogue. As Edersheim says, "There was no service of 'praise' in the synagogues."⁴ Is Edersheim correct? "No contemporary sources makes any mention of singing in the synagogue during the first [century A.D.] ... Nor in early rabbinical documents which might, in places, have bearing on the period is there any mention of singing in the ancient synagogue."⁵ As we will see, this is not the case regarding the church. "More recently the point has been underlined by Sigmund Mowinckel: 'The synagogue service was in ancient times always songless, and further: 'Nor before mediaeval time did synagogal poetry and singing come into existence.'"⁶ In a more recent work, Christopher Page, speaking of the Mishnah, redacted around 200 AD, says that "there is no mention of synagogue

1. Martin J. Selman, *First Chronicles* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2008), 111.

2. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Books of the Chronicles*, trans. Andrew Harper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 452.

3. John W. Kleinig, *The Lord's Song* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 68.

4. Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 268.

5. John Smith, "The Ancient Synagogue, the Early Church and Singing," *Music and Letters* 65 (1984): 5. Smith cites, "Mishna, the Tosefta (completed A.D. c.250), the Jerusalem Talmud (completed A.D. c.400), and the Babylonian Talmud (completed A.D. c.500)."

6. Smith, 5 cites Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 1.4.

music in that compilation”⁷ Edersheim appears to be correct. The element of praise arises from temple Psalmody.⁸

Yes, the people of God did sing other songs of praise. The Old Testament is clear. The song of Exodus 15 celebrates deliverance from Egypt. The song of Judges 5 celebrates victory over the Canaanites. These songs, and others like them, were occasional; they were composed for and sung on particular occasions. Furthermore, these celebrations reflected the culture and times in which Israel lived. They were the songs of culturally conditioned occasional celebrations. The services prescribed for the tabernacle and the temple were quite different. These services were conducted at stated times, were prescribed by God, and carefully regulated by God. They were part of the stated corporate public worship of God directed from heaven.⁹ Scripture always draws an analogy between the Old Testament Temple and the New Testament church and not with the occasional celebrations of the Old Testament. Psalmody is introduced by David, codified by Hezekiah, and carried forward by Ezra and Nehemiah. It is this Psalmody we meet when we enter the New Testament.

PSALMODY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We begin with the example of Jesus and the disciples singing the Psalms. In preparing the Passover (Luke 22:8), Peter and John joined in singing psalms in the temple while they were slaying the Passover lamb.¹⁰ The psalms sung on this occasion were Psalms 113–118, the Egyptian Hallel. This is the *hymn* sung by the disciples at the close of the Passover and the institution of the Lord’s

Supper. “After singing a hymn [*humnesantes*], they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matt. 26:30, Mark 14:26). Hendrickson comments, “When they had hymned,” says the original. Since, as has been shown, the Lord’s Supper was the natural outgrowth of the Passover, it is probable that the hymns of praise that were lifted up to God were Pss. 115–118.”¹¹ Psalms 113–114 were sung earlier in the Passover celebration. Alexander adds, “*When they had sung a hymn*, a single word in Greek, *hymning* (or *having hymned*), referring no doubt to the series of psalms usually chanted at the Passover ... ”¹² We see two important things here. First, Jesus and the disciples sang the Psalms. Second, the Psalms *are* Biblical *hymns*.

In this context, Matthew Henry says, “Singing of psalms is a gospel-ordinance. Christ’s removing the hymn from the close of the passover to the close of the Lord’s supper, plainly intimates that he intended that ordinance should continue in his church, that, as it had not its birth with the ceremonial law, so it should not die with it.”¹³ Henry also speaks to the appropriateness of Christ’s use of the Psalms in this circumstance. “It is not unseasonable, no, not in times of sorrow and suffering; the disciples were in sorrow, and Christ was entering upon his sufferings, and yet they could sing a hymn together. Our spiritual joy should not be interrupted by outward afflictions.”¹⁴ As we will see, this is one of the beauties of Psalmody. The Psalms are a *divine guide* for the exercise of our inner thoughts and affections.

Paul and Silas also sang the Psalms. “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns [*humnoun*] of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25). The verb *humneō* means *to sing hymns*. The *hymns* they were singing were psalms. “[I]f we are correct in reasoning that the human spirit, under duress and trial, turns instinctively to what is familiar and well-known, there is nothing to deny that the Psalms of the Old Testament rang through the dark prison, greatly to the interest of the missionaries’ fellow-captives.”¹⁵

Matthew Henry comments on this text. “This proves that the singing of psalms is a gospel ordinance, and ought to be used by all good Christians; and that it is instituted, not only for the expressing of their joys in a day of triumph, but for the balancing and relieving of their sorrows in a day of trouble.”¹⁶ Yes, the Psalms are uniquely qualified for such circumstances. J. A. Alexander adds that Paul and Silas were “singing or chanting perhaps one or more of the Book of the Psalms peculiarly adapted and intended for the use of prisoners and others under persecution.”¹⁷

James 5:13 exhorts us to sing the Psalms. Compare the

7. Christopher Page, *The Christian West and Its Singers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 42.

8. In *Public Worship 101*, I argue this origin of New Testament praise temple Psalmody. *Public Worship 101*, 231–234.

9. See my full discussion of the distinction between occasional culturally-conditioned worship settings and heaven-directed stated public corporate worship in *Public Worship 101*, 84–90.

10. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), 2.487–488.

11. William Hendrickson, *Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 913.

12. J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1980), 382.

13. Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1985), 5.392.

14. Henry, 5.392.

15. Ralph Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1964), 43.

16. Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6:211.

17. J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1980), 2.121.

King James Version for the more literal translation. “Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms [*psalletō*].” Ralph Martin, who is no friend of exclusive Psalmody, says, “[T]he allusion in James V, 13: ‘Is any merry? Let him sing psalms’ may be taken to refer to Davidic psalms.”¹⁸ Matthew Henry also says here, “[T]he singing of psalms is a gospel ordinance.”¹⁹ In this context, Calvin points to the Psalms as a bridling influence guiding our passions and emotions. We are seeing not only the use of psalms in the New Testament, but the rationale for the psalms as a divine guide to inner passions and emotions.

But such is the perverseness of men, that they cannot rejoice without forgetting God, and that when afflicted they are disheartened and driven to despair. *We ought, then, to keep within due bounds*, so that the joy, which usually makes us to forget God, may induce us to set forth the goodness of God, and that our sorrow may teach us to pray. For he has set the singing of psalms in opposition to profane and *unbridled* joy; and thus they express their joy who are led, as they ought to be, by prosperity to God (*italics added*).²⁰

1 Corinthians 14:15 and 26 do not speak of newly inspired hymns. “What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing [*psalō*] with the spirit and I will sing [*psalō*] with the mind also What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm [*psalmon*]” Calvin disagrees with the supposition that these texts refer to newly inspired hymns. “When he says, ‘I shall sing the Psalms,’ or I shall sing, he is speaking specifically instead of generally. For, since the Psalms had as their themes the praises of God, he uses ‘singing psalms’ [*psalein*] for blessing or giving thanks to God.”²¹ Calvin goes on to affirm that the Corinthians sang psalms.

From this verse we also gather, however, that at that time the custom of singing was already among believers. That is also established by Pliny, who, writing at least forty years after the death of Paul, tells us that the Christians were in the habit of singing hymns to Christ before daylight. And indeed I have no doubt that from the very beginning they adopted the usage of the Jewish Church in singing psalms.²²

Therefore, we conclude that there was a centuries-old tradition of Psalmody excluding other songs in Public worship, which carried over to the infant New Testament church.

PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SONGS

Do the three terms, psalms, hymns, and songs, refer to the 150 Psalms? Early psalters make this connection. The title page for the Sternehold Hopkins psalter published in England in 1562 bears two Scripture quotes: *If any be afflicted, let him pray: if any by merry, let him sing Psalms; Let the word of God dwell plenteously in you, in all wisdom teaching and exhorting one another, in Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, and sing unto the Lord in your heart.*²³ The first book published in America was the so-called “Bay Psalm Book,” officially *The Whole Book of Psalms Faithfully Translated into English Metre*, and was printed in Cambridge in 1640. The title page bore a quote of Col 3:16.²⁴ What about the Biblical exegetical case?

Consider the Septuagint. By the beginning of the Christian era, “if the message of the Christian faith could be sent forth in the Greek tongue, which had become the truly international language of the day, the Word could penetrate almost anywhere in the Græco-Roman world.”²⁵ It is therefore not surprising to see the rise of a Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. “The importance of this book, which was the Bible of the apostolic Church, is beyond all exaggeration.”²⁶ The United Bible Society’s *Greek New Testament* lists sixty-six quotations from the Old Testament based on the Septuagint.²⁷ Everett Harrison writes, “As time has passed and investigation has proceeded, the consensus of judgment is that the influence of the Septuagint upon the New Testament is so important as to be crucial in the field of interpretation.”²⁸

Septuagint Psalm titles appear to influence Paul’s thinking. We should remember that these titles or

18. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, 43.

19. Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6.999.

20. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 354–355.

21. John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 292–293.

22. Calvin, *First Corinthians*, 293.

23. Thomas Sternehold and John Hopkins, *The Booke of Psalms Collected into English Meeter*, bound with *The 1599 Geneva Bible, Facsimile Edition* (Ozark: L. L. Brown, 1995).

24. Richard G. Appel, *The Music of the Bay Psalm Book* (New York: Institute for Studies in American Music, 1975), 1.

25. Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 50.

26. C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (London: SPCK, 1961), 208.

27. *The Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1983), 897–898.

28. Everett F. Harrison, “The Influence of the Septuagint on the New Testament Vocabulary,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 113 (Jan. 1956): 38.

superscriptions are the first verse of each of the Psalms in the Hebrew text. This is also true in the Septuagint. They are part of the now recognized divine text and, as Michael LeFebvre indicates, “evidence seems to increasingly support their ancient provenance . . .”²⁹ LeFebvre goes on to show, “Both Biblical and extra-biblical evidences have pointed to the importance of the superscriptions.”³⁰

Harrison also says, “It is unquestionably true that the use of terms in the New Testament not only reflects Septuagint usage but goes beyond it in some instances.”³¹ The terms *psalms*, *hymns*, and *songs* fit this category. From what we read in the Septuagint, the Psalms of the Old Testament were considered psalms, hymns, and songs. Since this is the case, when Paul refers to singing psalms, hymns, and songs, he refers to the Psalms of the Old Testament. Here are a few psalm titles clearly equating psalms, hymns, and psalms. MT refers to the Hebrew Masoretic Text and LXX refers to the Septuagint.

Psalm 4:1 in the MT is designated as “a psalm belonging to David.” The LXX title says, “among the Psalms [*en psalmois*] a song [*ōde*].”

Psalm 6:1 in the MT is designated as “a psalm belonging to David.” The LXX title adds, “among the hymns [*en humnois*].”

Psalm 61:1 in the MT is designated as “belonging to David.” The LXX title adds, “among the hymns [*en humnois*].”

Psalm 65:1 is designated both “a psalm [*psalmos*] of David” and “a song [*ōde*]” in both the MT and the LXX (64:1).

Psalm 66:1 is designated both “a song” and “a psalm” in the MT and “a song of a psalm [*ōde psalmou*]” in the LXX (65:1).

Psalm 67:1 in the MT is designated “a psalm, a song.” In the LXX (66:1) the same psalm is designated as “among the hymns a psalm of a song [*en humnois psalmos odes*].”

Psalm 68:1 is designated “a psalm of David, a song” in the MT and “a psalm of a song [*psalmos odes*] LXX (67:1).

Psalm 75:1 is designated both “a psalm of Asaph, a song” in the MT, and “a psalm of Asaph of a song [*psalmos tōi Asaph odes*]” in the LXX (74:1).

Psalm 76:1 is designated both “a psalm of Asaph, a song” in the MT. The LXX (75:1) title reads, “among the hymns, a psalm of Asaph, a song [*en humnois psalmos tōi Asaph ode*].”

Psalm 72:20 marks the end of Book 2 of the Psalter and reads, “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.” Psalm 72 may have been penned “for Solomon” when David, just before his death, transferred the kingdom and power to him.³² Since the Psalter contains several other Psalms of David, Psalm 72:20 appears to reflect the end of David’s reign and the beginning of Solomon’s. Significantly, the LXX says, “The hymns [*hoi humnoi*] of David the son of Jesse are ended.” In other words, the LXX considers the Psalms of David to be hymns.

To properly interpret Paul, we must get into his head and into his thinking. When Paul refers to psalms, hymns, and songs, what does he mean? Paul used Greek with facility; all his letters are in Greek. Paul was quite familiar with the Septuagint; for example, he quotes the Septuagint twenty-two times in Romans. The bulk of these quotes are from the Psalms and Isaiah. Six of the thirteen quotations from the Psalms come from the Septuagint.³³ As Harrison indicates, the use of terms in the New Testament reflects Septuagint usage. Since this is the case, when Paul thinks of psalms, hymns, and songs, he is thinking of the Psalms of the Old Testament. We therefore hold that the terms *psalms*, *hymns*, and *songs* used by Paul refer to the 150 Psalms of the Old Testament.

Songs and hymns refer to psalms in other contexts. First Chronicles 1–9 is a genealogical survey with historical notes. Chapter 6, verses 31–32 present David’s appointments for the service of *song*. “Now these are those whom David appointed over the *service of song* in the house of the Lord, after the ark rested there. They ministered with *song* before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, until Solomon had built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem” (italics added). We have already established that David instituted Psalmody in the stated worship of God according to the command of God. In these texts, the term *song* refers to psalms. We have also already discussed 1 Chronicles 16:42 regarding David’s institution of Psalmody. Look at the specific language. “With them were Heman and Jeduthun with trumpets and cymbals for those who should sound aloud, and with instruments for the *songs of God*” (italics added). Taken in context, the term *songs* refers to David’s Psalms.

Next, we again turn to Hezekiah. Note 2 Chronicles 29:27, “Then Hezekiah gave the order to offer the burnt

29. Michael LeFebvre, “The Shape of the Psalter” (Paper, International Christian College, 2000), 4.

30. LeFebvre, 4.

31. Harrison, “Septuagint,” 39.

32. Mark D. Futato, *Transformed by Praise* (Phillipsburg: P and R, 2002), 116–118.

33. *The Greek New Testament*, 899.

offering on the altar. When the burnt offering began, *the song to the Lord* also began with the trumpets, accompanied by the instruments of David, king of Israel” (italics added). We have already established that when Hezekiah revived the true worship of God, this included the singing of psalms, “praises to the Lord with the words of David and Asaph the seer” (2 Ch. 29:30). Here again, the term *song* refers to psalms.

Remember Nehemiah 12:46. “In the days of David and Asaph, in ancient times, there were leaders of the singers, *songs* of praise and *hymns* of thanksgiving to God” (italics added). The mention of David and Asaph may harken back to Hezekiah’s decree and the preparation of an edition of the Psalms for singing in temple.³⁴ This reference to David and Asaph also indicates that the terms *songs* and *hymns* refers to the Psalms of David and Asaph. It is not only the Psalm titles that give definition to the terms *song* and *hymn*.

Recall the singing of our Lord, the disciples, and Paul and Silas. “After singing a *hymn*, they went out to the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:30, Mark 14:26). As we have seen, the term *hymn* refers to psalms. “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing *hymns* of praise to God” (Act 16:25). We saw that the term *hymn* in this text also refers to psalms. We should expect that this is the case. Not only the Psalm titles but also other Old Testament data point us in this direction. The terms *psalms*, *hymns*, and *songs* refer to the Psalms of the Old Testament. Given all of these data, we hold that the terms *psalms*, *hymns*, and *songs* used by Paul refer to the 150 Psalms of the Old Testament.

Grammar confirms this line of thinking. Ephesians 5:19 speaks of “psalms and hymns and songs” (italics added). This expression uses *three words*, in this case nouns, connected with *and*. This figure of speech is known as hendiatriis, one through three. This figure uses three similar terms connected with *and* to express one thing.³⁵ In this case, the three terms do not refer to three different categories of song; rather, they refer to one category of song, the Psalms. This is the idea behind hendiatriis. The terms *psalms* and *hymns* and *songs* used by Paul in Ephesians 5:19 refer to the 150 Psalms of the Old Testament.

Paul uses a different figure in Colossians 3:16 and packs the three terms more closely together. He strings together the terms *psalms hymns songs* without using *and*. This figure of speech is *asyndeton*, meaning without conjunctions. It “ordinarily join[s] coordinate words or clauses ... The terseness of expression usually adds effect to the words.”³⁶ In this case, where psalms, hymns, and songs are joined as one, we have a

conjunctive asyndeton.³⁷ Bullinger, therefore, says these three terms are synonyms.³⁸ These grammatical considerations confirm that the terms *psalms*, *hymns*, and *songs* used by Paul in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 refer to the 150 Psalms of the Old Testament.

Literally, Ephesians 5:19 reads, “psalms and hymns and psalms *spiritual*”; Colossians 3:16 reads, “psalms hymns songs *spiritual*.” What about the modifier, *spiritual*? First, the adjective “‘spiritual’ means produced by or belonging to the Holy Spirit.”³⁹ B. B. Warfield writes,

[O]f the twenty-five instances in which the word occurs in the New Testament, in no single case does it sink even as low in its reference as the human *spirit*; and in twenty-four of them is derived from [*pneuma*], the *Holy Ghost*. In this sense of belonging to, or determined by, the Holy Spirit, the New Testament usage is uniform⁴⁰

Second, the modifier appears at the end of the figure and applies to all the terms.⁴¹ For example, Paul calls Epaphroditus, “my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier” (Phil. 2:25). The text literally reads, “brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier of me [my].” The modifier ‘my’ appears at the end of the hendiatriis and applies to all three terms. In like manner, ‘psalms and hymns and songs *spiritual*’ all come from the Holy Spirit; the Spirit inspired them. For this additional reason, we understand the terms *psalms*, *hymns*, and *songs* used by Paul to refer to the inspired canonical Psalms of the Old Testament.

EXCLUSIVE PSALMODY

Our first step is to properly understand Colossians 3:16. This text involves the corporate setting. Paul writes to the church, “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae” (Col. 1:2). The people hear Paul’s letter read to them as they are gathered in sacred

34. Kleinig, *The Lord’s Song*, 68.

35. James D. Hernando, *Dictionary of Hermeneutics* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing, 2005), 117.

36. Hernando, *Dictionary of Hermeneutics*, 111.

37. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 138.

38. Bullinger, 333.

39. John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Minneapolis: James and Klock, 1977), 14.

40. B. B. Warfield, “Pneumatikos and Its Opposites in the Greek New Testament,” *The Presbyterian Review* 1:3 (1880): 561.

41. Edward A. Robson, “Interpretation of the Two-Kai Configurations of the Greek New Testament,” *Semper Reformanda* 7:2 (Summer 1998): 9.

assembly. Note the plurals within the immediate context of Colossians 3:1–3. “Therefore if you [plural] have been raised up with Christ ... [You plural] Set your mind on the things above ... For you [plural] have died and your [plural] life is hidden with Christ in God.”

The plurals continue throughout the passage including Colossians 3:16. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you [plural] richly, teaching [masculine plural nominative participle] and admonishing [masculine plural nominative participle] one another [plural] in all wisdom, singing [masculine plural nominative participle] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your [plural] hearts [plural] to God” (Col 3:16, ESV).

Finally, Paul defines teaching and admonishing as preaching or proclamation. “We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom” (Col. 1:28). Preaching takes place in corporate worship. The preaching and singing Paul discusses in Colossians 3:16 is part of corporate worship.

Now consider the syntax, sentence structure, of Colossians 3:16. The text reads as follows in the English Standard Version, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (italics added). Paul’s basic command is simple, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” Adverbial participles follow. They indicate how we follow the basic command. The participles are *teaching and admonishing*, on one hand, and *singing*, on the other hand. There is a further parallel in the text. We are to teach and admonish one another in or *with all wisdom*. We are to sing in or *with thankfulness or with grace in our hearts*.

Our versions translate the text in two different ways. Here is the New American Standard Update. “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another *with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (italics added). This version links psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with teaching and admonishing. Compare the English Standard Version. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (italics added). This version links psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with singing. Why the difference?

As just mentioned, the main clause in the text is an

42. John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 252.

43. Eadie, 251.

imperative, “Let the word of Christ dwell [*enoikeitō*] in you richly.” Two participle phrases indicate how we ought to follow the command. They are present active participles indicating contemporaneous action with the main verb, dwell. Literally, the text reads: The word of Christ let dwell in you richly (1) with all wisdom teaching [*didaskontes*] and admonishing [*nouthentountes*] one another; (2) with grace singing [*adontes*] with your hearts to God. The words *psalms, hymns, songs spiritual* [*psalmois humnois odais pneumatikais*] are between the two participles phrases. As a result, some versions place these words with teaching and admonishing, as do the Authorized Version and the New American Standard Version. “Our objection is,” says John Eadie, “that while metrical or musical compositions are not the common vehicle of instruction or admonition, they are specially connected with sacred song.”⁴² Other versions therefore consider it more logical to place psalms, hymns, and songs with singing, as do the New International Version and the English Standard Version. Eadie suggests a similar division of the text.

Let the Christian truth have its enduring abode “within you”—let it be no stranger or occasional guest in your hearts. Let it not be without you, as a lesson to be learned, but within you, as the source of cherished and permanent illumination ... Different ideas have been formed of the best mode of dividing the following clauses of the verse ... [T]he idea of wisdom is better joined to the following clause, which refers to mutual teaching—“in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another” ... Our translators, too, so point the verse as to make psalms and hymns the material of instruction, whereas, it seems better, and more appropriate, to keep the clause distinct, thus—“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another: in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto the Lord.”⁴³

If this exegesis holds, Paul regulates singing and preaching differently. First, according to Paul, teaching and admonishing with all wisdom is preaching. Again, note Paul’s use of language in Colossians 1:28. “We proclaim Him, *admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom*, so that we may present every man complete in Christ” (italics added). The practice in the synagogue was to expound Moses through the eyes of the prophets. There, the objective was to apply the teachings of Scripture to contemporary circumstances. Therefore, this teaching and preaching had to be Scriptural. Here, Paul exhorts teaching Christian truth. This

teaching and preaching must be rooted in Scripture. It too must be Scriptural.

Second, Paul is more specific when it comes to our singing. He not only requires our singing to be Scriptural, he specifies the Scriptures we are to use in our singing; he specifies the psalms, hymns, and songs inspired by the Spirit found in the Book of Psalms. Again, the English Standard Version exhorts, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . singing *psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (italics added). What are we to sing? We are to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; as indicated above, these are the songs of the 150 Psalms of the Old Testament. In other words, Paul commands exclusive Psalmody. Remember the Regulative Principle: In Worship, whatever God does not command is forbidden. Paul commands exclusive Psalmody in the New Testament church by the power of and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The Psalms are God given inspired songs. We dare not forget this is the case. The coordinate truth is that God is most holy, excellent, and good. Jesus Christ goes so far as to say, “No one is good except God alone” (Mark 10:18, Luke 18:19). To be truly good is to be Godlike. At the same time, we fall infinitely short of this perfection. We live in a crooked and perverse generation (Acts 2:40, Phil. 2:15). Malcolm Watts therefore says,

Once this is understood, the question naturally arises: how can men, even with the aid of revelation, set forth in praise the wonders of a Being so illustriously great? He is surely “exalted *above* all blessing and praise” (Neh. 9:5, emphasis added), and it must surely follow that our most sublime songs fall unspeakably below His transcendent majesty. The problem, of course, is further aggravated by the fact that men are fallen and therefore subject to sin and error. If the divine glory rises far above the flights of human praise, certain it is that men corrupted in all their faculties of soul, with defective understanding of spiritual things, are altogether incapable of producing material for praise. The general principle lies in the question, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” (Job 14:4; cf. 11:12, Eph. 4:18).⁴⁴

God solves the dilemma. He gives His people a book of praise He inspires. He gives His people the sacrifice of praise His people may offer to Him. We have the privilege of singing back to Him the praise He condescends to give to us. All of this is in keeping with the Regulative Principle. This position is not new, unusual, nor remarkable. Calvin goes back to Augustine to make this point.

Now what Saint Augustine says is true, that no one is able to sing things worthy of God unless he has received them from Him. Wherefore, when we have looked thoroughly everywhere and searched high and low, we shall find no better songs nor more appropriate to the purpose than the Psalms of David which the Holy Spirit made and spoke through Him.⁴⁵

You may protest that we do not sing God’s words back to Him; we sing paraphrases of the Psalms with rhyme and meter. The response is quite simple. When properly accomplished, a metrical psalter set to music is a version of the Psalms much like the versions of the Bible we commonly use. A version is a translation carried out by committees seeking to be faithful to the original language. Creating a metrical psalter is a similar technical process. It involves the work of translating Hebrew poetic parallelisms and then converting them into western verse. The latter process is called prosody, “the science or art of versification, including the study of metrical structure, rhyme, stanza forms, etc.”⁴⁶ We first translate the Psalms from Hebrew to English. We then engage in versification, prosody, to produce a metrical version of the Psalms. Finally, we match the metrical version of each Psalm with a specific tune. The process is designed to produce a metrical version of the Psalms holding as closely to the original text as possible while rendering the text in a form suitable for placement with music.

THE GENIUS OF PSALMODY: THE SUBJECTIVE ELEMENT

To grasp the genius of Psalmody, we must reorient our approach to the Psalms. Michael LeFebvre points out that we rightly read sixty-five books of the Bible as *God’s word to us*. “But the Psalmbook is different: it alone is composed as a collection of *songs from men to God*. They are no less God’s inspired word . . . but of all the Bible’s books, in the Psalms we receive an exceptional gift designed to become *our words to God*” (italics added).⁴⁷ LeFebvre adds,

The Book of Psalms is unique. It is a hymnal. It is the only book of the Bible with God as the audience and

44. Malcolm H. Watts, “The Case for Psalmody,” *Sing a New Song*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Anthony T. Selvaggio (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2010), 127–128.

45. John Calvin, “Preface’ to the Geneva Psalter (1545),” Charles Garside, *The Origins of Calvin’s Theology of Music: 1536–1543* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1979), 33.

46. *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1958), 1169.

47. Michael LeFebvre, *Sing the Songs of Jesus* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010), 15.

God's people as its appointed speakers. This is an important feature of the Psalms with significance for how we should use them in the church today.

The Psalms are words for God's people to sing to Him. This does not mean the Psalms are any less God's word to us than other books of the Bible ... Like the rest of Scripture, the Psalms are fully God's word to us. But unlike the rest of Scripture, the Psalms are further designed to become our words to sing back to God.⁴⁸

The Psalms have a distinctive subjective element. This subjective element is the *special significance* of the Psalms as God's word given to us to sing back to Him in worship. Geerhardus Vos alerts us to this important aspect of the Psalter. As God's words we sing back to Him, the Psalms, says Vos, are distinguished by a "penetrating subjectiveness."⁴⁹ He clarifies this subjective element.

The deeper fundamental character of the Psalter consists in this that it voices the subjective response to the objective doings of God for and among his people. *Subjective responsiveness is the specific quality of these songs.* As prophecy is objective, being the address of Jehovah to Israel in word and act, so the Psalter is subjective, being the answer of Israel to divine speech (italics added).⁵⁰

As both God's inspired Word and our subjective response to God and His deeds, the Psalms become the divine guide to our subjective responses to Him and His deeds. As we take the words of the Psalms on our lips, God guides us in responding to Him both objectively, the words we sing, and subjectively, the feelings and emotions we express. Calvin puts it just this way when he too speaks of this subjective element in his Preface to the Psalms. Notice the stress Calvin places on this subjective aspect of the Psalms in giving expression to our emotions.

I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, "An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul," for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the

Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated. The other parts of Scripture contain the commandments which God enjoined his servants to announce to us. But here the prophets themselves, seeing they are exhibited to us as speaking to God, and laying open all their inmost thoughts and affections, call, or rather draw, each of us to the examination of himself in particulars in order that none of the many infirmities to which we are subject, and of the many vices with which we abound, may remain concealed. It is certainly a rare and singular advantage, when all lurking places are discovered, and the heart is brought into the light, purged from that most baneful infection, hypocrisy. *In short, as calling upon God is one of the principal means of securing our safety, and as a better and more unerring rule for guiding us in this exercise cannot be found elsewhere than in The Psalms, it follows, that in proportion to the proficiency which a man shall have attained in understanding them, will be his knowledge of the most important part of celestial doctrine.*⁵¹

As we sing the Psalms, the Spirit probes the anatomy of our souls. He lays bare our raw emotions. He counters our deep-seated tightly held hypocrisies. Then, when we cry out to God and vent our own emotions, the Spirit provides us an "unerring rule for guiding us in this exercise [which] cannot be found elsewhere than in The Psalms ..."⁵²

The subjective element of the Psalter becomes our own as we sing the Psalms. As God's word and a means of grace, the Psalms are the divine guide for the proper expression of our emotions. Through the Psalms, God bridles and trains us in the inner person. As we mimic the Spirit in His divinely given guidance, He forms Christ in us.

Ultimately, this may be the reason the apostle Paul circumscribes singing more closely than teaching. He knows the subjective element of the Psalter from his own study, experience, and singing. His experience is deeply rooted in the Old Testament and reverberates with the emotions, heart, and soul of David. Holding this thought, listen to Colossians 3:16 and note Paul's own emphasis on the subjective element. "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God*" (ESV, italics added).

Calvin's emphasis on the subjective element in the Psalter goes back to Athanasius of Alexandria (296–373).

48. LeFebvre, 16–17.

49. Geerhardus Vos, "Eschatology of the Psalter," *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 356–357.

50. Vos, 324.

51. John Calvin, "The Author's Preface," *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 1:xxxvii. Italics added.

52. Calvin, *ibid.*

Here are excerpts from his “Letter to Marcellinus Concerning the Psalms.”

[A]mong all the books, the Psalter has certainly a very special grace, a choiceness of quality well worthy to be pondered; for, besides the characteristics which it shares with others, it has this peculiar marvel of its own, that within it are represented and portrayed in all their great variety the movements of the human soul. It is like a picture, in which you see yourself portrayed, and seeing, may understand and consequently form yourself upon the pattern given. Elsewhere in the Bible you read only that the Law commands this or that to be done, you listen to the Prophets to learn about the Savior’s coming, or you turn to the historical books to learn the doings of the kings and holy men; but in the Psalter, besides all these things, you learn about yourself. You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries. Moreover, whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you do not merely hear and then pass on, but learn the way to remedy your ill. Prohibitions of evil-doing are plentiful in Scripture, but only the Psalter tells you how to obey these orders and abstain from sin. Repentance, for example, is enjoined repeatedly; but to repent means to leave off sinning, and it is the Psalms that show you how to set about repenting and with what words your penitence may be expressed. Again, Saint Paul says, Tribulation worketh endurance, and endurance experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed; but it is in the Psalms that we find written and described how afflictions should be borne, and what the afflicted ought to say, both at the time and when his troubles cease: the whole process of his testing is set forth in them and we are shown exactly with what words to voice our hope in God. Or take the commandment, In everything give thanks. The Psalms not only exhort us to be thankful, they also provide us with fitting words to say. We are told, too, by other writers that all who would live godly in Christ must suffer persecution; and here again the Psalms supply words with which both those who flee persecution and those who suffer under it may suitably address themselves to God, and it does the same for those who have been rescued from it. We are bidden elsewhere in the Bible also to bless the Lord and to acknowledge Him: here in the Psalms we are shown the way to do it, and with what sort of words His majesty may meetly be confessed. In fact, under all the circumstances of life, we shall find that these divine songs suit ourselves and meet our own souls’ need at every turn.⁵³

Imagine songs for worship that give you divinely inspired words to express all your longings, griefs, sorrows, and praise. Imagine a book designed and edited by God for this purpose. The Psalter is such a book. It is a marvel. Athanasius continues,

[B]ut the marvel with the Psalter is that, barring those prophecies about the Savior and some about the Gentiles, the reader takes all its words upon his lips as though they were his own, and each one sings the Psalms as though they had been written for his special benefit, and takes them and recites them, not as though someone else were speaking or another person’s feelings being described, but as himself speaking of himself, offering the words to God as his own heart’s utterance, just as though he himself had made them up. Not as the words of the patriarchs or of Moses and the other prophets will he reverence these: no, he is bold to take them as his own and written for his very self. Whether he has kept the Law or whether he has broken it, it is his own doings that the Psalms describe; every one is bound to find his very self in them and, be he faithful soul or be he sinner, each reads in them descriptions of himself.

It seems to me, moreover, that because the Psalms thus serve him who sings them as a mirror, wherein he sees himself and his own soul, he cannot help but render them in such a manner that their words go home with equal force to those who hear him sing, and stir them also to a like reaction . . . And every other Psalm is spoken and composed by the Spirit in the selfsame way: just as in a mirror, the movements of our own souls are reflected in them and the words are indeed our very own, given us to serve both as a reminder of our changes of condition and as a pattern and model for the amendment of our lives. . . .

It is possible for us, therefore, to find in the Psalter not only the reflection of our own soul’s state, together with precept and example for all possible conditions, but also a fit form of words wherewith to please the Lord on each of life’s occasions, words both of repentance and of thankfulness. . . .⁵⁴

We neglect this subjective element and abandon Psalmody to our peril. LeFebvre asks a question about the Psalms posed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945). “How did

53. Athanasius, “Letter to Marcellinus Concerning the Psalms,” *Fisheaters.com*, accessed November 15, 2011.

54. Athanasius, *Ibid.*

these words which men sang to God come to be regarded as words from God to man? That is, if the Psalms were composed for worshipers to lift their thoughts (by singing) up to God, why do we study them (by reading) as thoughts from God down to us?"⁵⁵ The answer to this question is crucial. We dropped the subjective element. As LeFebvre observes, "We stopped using the Psalms as human words to God."⁵⁶

As just observed, we see the subjective element in Paul as he advocates Psalmody (Early 60s AD). Athanasius carried the subjective element forward in his teaching of Psalmody (c. 350 AD). Calvin (1543) likely derived his understanding of the subjective element from Athanasius and he too advocated Psalmody. Finally, we see the subjective element in Geerhardus Vos (1902).

For Vos, the subjective element in the Psalter comes to its own in the heart's longing for the life to come. "The Psalter bears eloquent witness to the truth that a hope of infinite perpetuation for the collective body is not enough. It requires the *assurance* of the eternity of religion *in the individual soul* to secure the permanence of religion as such" (italics added).⁵⁷ How do we come to this assurance? "The Psalmists had their faces set toward this [assurance] and through wrestlings of prayer with Jehovah won their way to the light."⁵⁸ We take the wrestlings of the Psalmists on our own hearts and lips. Their groaning, seeking, joy, and praise become our groaning, seeking, joy, and praise. Their words from God become our words to God. Vos contrasts God-born eschatological assurance with modern humanism and skepticism. We dare not abandon God-born Psalmody-instilled eschatological assurance and compromise with humanism or with skepticism. "The Church by compromising and affiliating with this would sign her own death-warrant as a distinct institution."⁵⁹ To extend the argument, we stop using the Psalms as our own words to God and we abandon the subjective element in Psalmody to our own peril.

CONCLUSION

King David instituted Psalmody according to God's command through Nathan the prophet. King Hezekiah codified Psalmody, thus excluding other worship songs in stated God-regulated public corporate

temple worship. Ezra and Nehemiah carried out the commands of David in the second temple period. The long-standing Biblical tradition of Psalmody is carried forward by Christ, the disciples, and the Apostle Paul. Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, commands exclusive Psalmody in the church, the New Testament temple of God (2 Cor. 6:16, Eph. 2:21–22, 1 Pet. 2:5). The ground for this millennia-long practice appears to be, in part, Psalmody's subjective element as just discussed. In keeping with the Regulative Principle of Worship, the thesis for this paper is simple. The New Testament commands the exclusive use of the 150 canonical Psalms in the stated public corporate worship of the church. The reader may judge the worthiness and strength of the arguments presented.

Response by Andrew J. Webb

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to interact with Dr. Prutow on the subject of the psalms, and I hope it will be helpful to present and future readers. When I began this endeavor it was with two great aims in mind. The first was to persuade those who are convinced of the Exclusive Psalmody position that not everyone who sings hymns does so because he does not believe in the Regulative Principle of Worship, but that many orthodox Presbyterians actually create and sing uninspired hymns because they believe we are commanded to do so by God. My second aim (and I hope this will not be a great surprise to anyone) was hopefully to encourage readers who might never have sung the psalms to make them a part of their own corporate and family worship and thus practice what I would describe as *Inclusive Psalmody*.

At this point, I will confess that I personally remain unconvinced that the Exclusive Psalmody position, as it was explained by Dr. Prutow, really is the teaching of Scripture. I will not be able to explain all of the reasons that is the case, but here are five of my main objections to his argument:

1. Dr. Prutow argues in the *Introduction* to his essay that "King David instituted Psalmody according to God's command through Nathan the prophet. King Hezekiah then codified Psalmody, thus excluding other worship songs."

While it is true that King David did much to reform and order the worship of the tabernacle according to the instructions of God, this is not the same thing as saying

55. LeFebvre, *Singing*, 15.

56. LeFebvre, 27.

57. Vos, "Eschatology," 364–365.

58. Vos, 365.

59. Vos, 365.

that David instituted what is today known as Exclusive Psalmody (EP). Indeed, the claim that David “instituted Psalmody” and that Hezekiah excluded “other worship songs” strikes me as an odd and anachronistic claim. The canonical psalter did not exist when David was commanding that songs be sung in worship, and the psalter wasn’t completed until long after the death of Hezekiah. The psalms that David composed during his lifetime (and we must remember that Scripture tells us that he composed many more psalms than are contained in the psalter) were, by definition, worship songs; and there is nothing in Scripture that indicates that he only permitted the 73 songs he composed that eventually ended up in the collection contained in the psalter to be sung in the worship of God. Certainly, while Hezekiah instructed the Levites to sing the songs of David and Asaph, we know that he didn’t *only* allow the songs of David and Asaph to be sung. Scripture tells us that Hezekiah himself composed psalms of thanksgiving and ordered them to be sung in the Temple. We read about his practice in Isaiah 38:20 which tells us, “The LORD was ready to save me; Therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments All the days of our life, in the house of the LORD.” E. J. Young, in commenting on this verse, states, “In speaking of *my songs* the king probably has reference to songs of thanksgiving and deliverance which he himself has composed. Yet the king, in the transition from singular to plural, wishes to identify himself with others who also sing, namely the choir. The singing was religious worship of praise, for it was to be conducted in the Temple as long as the singers lived.”¹

None of these Psalms of Hezekiah which were sung in Temple worship ended up in the final collection of psalms contained in the psalter. Even though that makes these psalms non-canonical by definition, Scripture does not give us any reason to believe that there was something wrong with these songs or their use in the Temple. Calvin even calls Hezekiah’s practice worthy of our own emulation:

By his example he shows what all believers ought to do, when God miraculously and in an unusual manner exerts his power on their behalf. They ought to make known their gratitude, not only to their contemporaries, but also to posterity; as we see that Hezekiah did by this song, which may be regarded as a public record. We see that David composed many psalms on this subject, when he had been delivered from very great dangers, so that he took care to celebrate till the end of the world what was worthy of being remembered by all ages. (Psalm 18:2, and 27:1.)²

The command of David to sing praises to God (1 Chronicles 16:9) or Hezekiah’s order to sing the songs of David and Asaph (2 Chronicles 29:30) could not have “excluded” other worship songs as the psalter was not complete at that point, and songs by men not mentioned by David or Hezekiah in their instructions (such as Solomon, Heman, and Ethan the Ezrahite) were included in the final version of the Psalter.

We also need to remember that it was not only the singing of psalms that David and Hezekiah ordered; they also ordered the playing of musical instruments and the appointment of choirs, and whenever we see in Scripture psalms being sung in Temple worship from the time of David to the time of Nehemiah, we also see these musical instruments being played and choirs singing with an emphasis that this practice was according to the command of God (1 Chronicles 16:42, 2 Chronicles 7:6, Nehemiah 12:40, etc.). Despite this, most proponents of EP have argued that the use of these instruments was temporary and only intended to continue for as long as the Temple existed, and that the practice was to stop with the advent of New Testament worship with its simpler, more spiritual worship. To state that music was to go through a profound transformation between the Old Testament and the New Testament, but that singing was not, but was to remain forever frozen at the point that the last Temple service was conducted, strikes me as special pleading. Surely a theological transformation as profound as that associated with the coming of the New Testament era and “worship in Spirit and Truth” should also have altered not only *how* the people of God sang praises, but also the praises that were sung?

2. Throughout his section on *Psalmody in the New Testament* (190–191), Dr. Prutow makes a logical error common to proponents of Exclusive Psalmody: namely, he assumes that whenever a reference is made to singing in the New Testament, the songs being sung are *necessarily* canonical psalms. It shouldn’t surprise us that when one presupposes that the New Testament church practiced Exclusive Psalmody one finds that any reference to singing must be a reference to the singing of psalms. This is similar to the Baptist practice of assuming that any reference to *baptism* in the New Testament must necessarily also be a reference

1. E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol. 2, 1-39 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 528.

2. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 45 volumes (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844–1856; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), volume 8, Commentary on the book of the Prophet Isaiah, 3.163.

to immersion, and reading this understanding into every narrative description of a baptism.

But Dr. Prutow goes even further in assuming that psalm singing was occurring even when the text doesn't refer to singing at all. For instance, Dr. Prutow writes, "In preparing the Passover (Luke 22:8), Peter and John joined in singing psalms in the temple while they were slaying the Passover lamb." But the passage he cites, Luke 22:8, only says, "And He sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat.'" Dr. Prutow assumes that Peter and John would have joined in the singing of psalms at the Temple when the Passover lamb was being slaughtered. This is indeed possible, as Alfred Edersheim assumes; but it is neither explicitly stated nor implied by the text. Often the evidence for Jewish Temple practices, including the specific order of worship during the slaying of the Passover lamb as well as the practice during meals like the Passover, is not taken from the Scriptures, but from Rabbinical commentaries such as the Mishnah and the Talmud; and it is from these resources that Edersheim (whom Prutow cites) draws much of his material for his works describing first century Judaism. While these Rabbinical works are frequently accurate, we need to keep in mind that they are not Scripture and that they do contain errors. At best they are *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*.

In any event, to assume that the Apostles entered into psalm singing when they were involved in worship at the Temple, or even that they sang psalms on other occasions, is not an issue in dispute. *Inclusive psalmody*s like myself will readily affirm that the apostles sang psalms during the ministry of Jesus. What is in dispute is if they and the apostolic churches *only* sang psalms. In presupposing that the Apostolic church only sang psalms, and in never treating this as a seriously debatable point, even while attempting to prove that the Apostolic church only sang psalms, Dr. Prutow is committing an informal logical fallacy, called *petitio principia* or "begging the question."

An example of this question-begging occurs when he states, "Paul and Silas also sang the Psalms. 'About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns [*humnoun*] of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them' (Acts 16:25). The verb *humneō* means to sing hymns. The *hymns* they were singing were psalms."

Where does the verse in question explicitly say that Paul and Silas were singing psalms? It doesn't. The verse says they were singing hymns, and we know for a fact that the New Testament includes instances where hymns other than canonical psalms were sung, such as the

previously mentioned Song of Mary (the *Magnificat* of Luke 1:46–55), the song of Zechariah (the *Benedictus* of Luke 1:68–79), and the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29–32). Why should we assume that Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon were able to lift up non-canonical hymns of praise but that Paul and Silas could not?

Dr. Prutow again assumes that allusions to singing in the New Testament must necessarily be allusions to singing psalms when he writes, "James 5:13 exhorts us to sing the Psalms. Compare the King James Version for the more literal translation. 'Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms [*psalletō*].'"

The problem with the argument above is that the verb *psalletō* does not mean sing psalms, it means simply to "sing" or to "sing praises," the Greek *noun* meaning psalms, ψαλλοῦς, does not occur in the passage. This is acknowledged in word-for-word English translations of the Scriptures such as the NASB which simply says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises." Therefore it strikes me as very curious to say that the King James is being *more* literal when it adds a noun (psalms) that doesn't occur in the Greek text of James 5:13. To sing praises does not necessarily mean the same thing as to "sing psalms," unless we already believe, as Dr. Prutow seems to, that every time the word "sing" is used in the New Testament, it refers to singing canonical psalms.

Dr. Prutow also occasionally assumes in his paper that one commentator, who supports Exclusive Psalmody, is sufficient to support a conclusion that is disagreed with by a majority of equally or even more qualified commentators. For instance, he writes,

1 Corinthians 14:15 and 26 do not speak of newly inspired hymns. "What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing [*psalō*] with the spirit and I will sing [*psalō*] with the mind also ... What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm [*psalmon*] ..." Calvin disagrees with the supposition that these texts refer to newly inspired hymns. "When he says, 'I shall sing the Psalms,' or I shall sing, he is speaking specifically instead of generally. For, since the Psalms had as their themes the praises of God, he uses 'singing psalms' [*psalein*] for blessing or giving thanks to God.

No one would seriously argue that Calvin is not a great commentator on the Scriptures. However, how many would seriously argue that Charles Hodge wasn't also a great commentator on the Scriptures? I ask because

Hodge comes to a conclusion that is opposed to that of Calvin:

A psalm, a song of praise to God. This can hardly mean one of the Psalms of the Old Testament but something prepared or suggested for the occasion. One was impelled by the Spirit to pour forth his heart in a song of praise. Comp. 1 Cor. 14:15.³

3. In his section entitled *Psalms, Hymns, and Songs* (191–193), Dr. Prutow makes the common EP argument that because the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Old Testament contains the terms Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, and Paul was very familiar with the Septuagint, that all of these terms must refer to canonical psalms:

*To properly interpret Paul, we must get into his head and into his thinking. When Paul refers to psalms, hymns, and songs, what does he mean? Paul used Greek with facility; all his letters are in Greek. Paul was quite familiar with the Septuagint; for example, he quotes the Septuagint twenty-two times in Romans. The bulk of these quotes are from the Psalms and Isaiah. Six of the thirteen quotations from the Psalms come from the Septuagint. As Harrison indicates, the use of terms in the New Testament reflects Septuagint usage. Since this is the case, when Paul thinks of psalms, hymns, and songs, he is thinking of the Psalms of the Old Testament. We therefore hold that the terms *psalms, hymns, and songs* used by Paul refer to the 150 Psalms of the Old Testament.*

As I attempted to prove in the first paper, there is no reason to *assume* that this is the case. That psalms and hymns existed that were not contained in the psalter is indisputable; but the weakest part of the argument is the assumption that “spiritual songs” also referred to canonical psalms. As I pointed out in the earlier essay, “Spiritual Songs” in Paul’s usage is his way of saying “Christian songs.” Several commentators, such as Eadie and Hendriksen, both of whom Dr. Prutow cites favorably, are convinced the phrase “spiritual songs” in Col. 3:16 and Eph. 5:19 cannot be a reference to canonical psalms.

Perhaps the most simple and conclusive refutation of the idea that these Spiritual Songs are canonical Psalms is given by Hendriksen when he writes,

The word *song* or *ode* (in the sense of poem intended to be sung) occurs not only in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 but

also in Rev. 5:9; 14:3, where “the new song” is indicated, and in Rev. 15:3, where the reference is to “the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” These are not Old Testament Psalms. Moreover, a song or ode is not necessarily a *sacred* song. In the present case the fact that it is, indeed, sacred is shown by the addition of the adjective *spiritual*.⁴

4. In his section entitled *Exclusive Psalmody* (193–195), Dr. Prutow, building on his earlier presuppositions, concludes:

Second, Paul is more specific when it comes to our singing. He not only requires our singing to be Scriptural, he specifies the Scriptures we are to use in our singing; he specifies the psalms, hymns, and songs inspired by the Spirit found in the Book of Psalms. Again, the English Standard Version exhorts, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . *singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God*” (italics added). What are we to sing? We are to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; as indicated above, these are the songs of the 150 Psalms of the Old Testament. In other words, Paul commands Exclusive Psalmody. Remember the Regulative Principle: In Worship, whatever God does not command is forbidden. Paul commands Exclusive Psalmody in the New Testament church by the power of and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

This argument can only hold if all of Dr. Prutow’s earlier conclusions hold firm, including his conclusion that psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are definitely a reference to the canonical psalms, a conclusion that we have good reasons not to come to. Also, while I would agree that the singing of the church should be *scriptural*, this is not the same thing as to conclude that it should be composed exclusively of the 150 Canonical Psalms. I disagree with the notion that the same process that produces a *scriptural* sermon, cannot produce a *scriptural* psalm, hymn, or spiritual song that accurately teaches the doctrines contained in Scripture and acceptably praises God.

It is true that such compositions *might* contain errors, but the same can be said of sermons. God chose to include several inspired sermons in Scripture as well, and

3. Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of First Corinthians* (New York: R. Carter & Bros., 1860), 300; electronic ed., p. 324.

4. William Hendriksen and S. J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*, Baker’s New Testament Commentary, volume 9 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 162.

yet hardly anyone would argue that these are the only sermons that should be preached on the basis of the fact that they are all inspired and don't contain any errors. Rather, we rightly see the inspired sermons in Scripture as models on which to base our own uninspired compositions. The same can be said of prayer. The Scriptures contain a myriad of inspired prayers, including the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13, Luke 11:1-4), which was given in direct response to the disciples' request to be taught how to pray. The Lord's Prayer is even introduced in language that could be interpreted exclusively: "When you pray, say..." (Luke 11:2). And yet, while Christians have always prayed this prayer, they have always seen it as an inspired model for their prayers rather than the only prayer they should be praying.

Additionally, I would contend that if we are to preach *scripturally*, then our preaching must be based on "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Therefore our preaching must encompass both the Old and the New Testaments and leave nothing out. We could certainly preach the gospel using the Old Testament alone; after all, those were the Scriptures the apostles almost exclusively used in their own preaching. But to deliberately omit from our preaching the greater witness of the New Testament, now that it has been given to us by the Holy Spirit, would be a tragic error. And yet that is exactly what Exclusive Psalmody tells us we must do when it comes to our singing. To sing only the Psalms is to sing as though revelation came to an end a full 400 years *before* the birth of Christ. It is to say that to actually sing the name of Jesus is forbidden to the church and that what is in the Old concealed, must remain concealed in our singing. Such a practice would go against the entire flow of sung praise in the Bible, where new revelations and new deliverances were always accompanied by new anthems of praise from God's people that specifically mentioned the great things God had done for His people. Are we also going to contend that because a song occurs in the New Testament, such as the *Magnificat* or if it occurs in the Old Testament outside of the Psalter, such as the Song of Moses or the Song of Songs (which is literally the "greatest song" in the Old Testament), that to sing it in worship would be a sin?

5) Finally, in his last section entitled *The Genius of Psalmody: The Subjective Element* (195-198), Dr. Prutow warns,

We neglect this subjective element and abandon Psalmody to our peril. LeFebvre asks a question about the Psalms posed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). "How did these words which men sang to God come to be regarded as words from God to man? That is, if the Psalms were composed for worshipers to lift their thoughts (by singing) up to God, why do we study them (by reading) as thoughts from God down to us?" The answer to this question is crucial. We dropped the subjective element. As LeFebvre observes, "We stopped using the Psalms as human words to God."

While I would agree that Dr. Prutow is quite right to say that there is a subjective element to psalm singing, and that we abandon Psalmody to our peril, he appears to be creating a false dilemma by making it seem that by rejecting the doctrine of *Exclusive Psalmody* as not actually taught in Scripture, we are also abandoning Psalmody. While that can happen, it doesn't have to. Elsewhere I have argued as strongly as I can for the practice of *Inclusive Psalmody*, stating in my guide to the worship of our congregation:

The Book of Psalms, which contains songs, meditations, and prayers, is a wonderful source of divinely inspired hymns of praise. It has provided the church in all the ages with a rich compendium of theologically impeccable and spiritually edifying songs for use in its worship.... Unfortunately, as many other Presbyterian Pastors have noted, the modern church seems to have gone from exclusively singing Psalms, to exclusively singing Hymns. It is my conviction that Scripture teaches us that the New Testament church should be singing both and that to neglect the Psalms is to impoverish the people of God.⁵

So rather than asserting that the church can sing *only* canonical psalms or *only* uninspired hymns, I would still argue that we are called to sing both, along with other portions of inspired Scripture and uninspired compositions based on Scripture, or as Paul put it much more succinctly, "Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs."

5. Andrew J. Webb "A Brief Guide to Presbyterian Worship or Why We Worship The Way We Do." <http://www.providencepca.com/essays/whyweworship.html#Singing1> [accessed December 12, 2015].

SIC ET NON: VIEWS IN REVIEW

The Content of Song for the Public Worship of God: Exclusive or Inclusive Psalmody? Part Two

By Andrew J. Webb with Response by Dennis J. Prutow

Inclusive Psalmody
Andrew J. Webb

While I am an admirer of every chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 21 has always been one of my favorites. It begins by introducing us to the guiding principle behind all true Christian worship, namely the idea that God is the only One who can tell us how we should worship Him, or as the Westminster Divines put it in their more dignified manner, “the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself.” The Divines went on to state that because God has taught us the only acceptable way of worshipping Him in the scriptures He has forbidden the invention of new ways of worshipping Him not found in scripture, stating that, “He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.”¹ Those who are familiar with Presbyterian theology will immediately recognize this formula as the “Regulative Principle of Worship” or RPW for short.

In my own life, the RPW, which I firmly believe to be the teaching of scripture, has been a huge help. During my initial years as a Christian in the early 1990s I was exposed to Protestant worship styles varying from Pentecostal to Charismatic to High Church Episcopalianism and quickly learned that amongst evangelicals churches there was a “worship war” going on that pitted the advocates of what is most often called “traditional worship” against those who were in favor of “contemporary worship.” More often than not, the advocates of traditional worship argued that their older style of worship was superior because it was more orderly, more reverent, and more acceptable to the older members of the church, while those in favor of contemporary worship argued that their style of worship was better because it was more Spirit-filled, more exuberant, and more likely

to result in unchurched people, usually described as “seekers,” coming to church.

I was personally torn between these positions. I saw some pragmatic value to contemporary worship, but I also appreciated the more traditional approach to worship, and I didn’t think the halfway house of “blended” worship that sought to bring together elements of both styles was going to ultimately satisfy anyone. It was a great relief then to learn that there was a better and more scriptural answer to the question of how Christians should worship than simply following the preferences of the pastor or the strongest faction in the congregation. The RPW gave us an answer that I supposed should have been obvious, namely that if our objective is to worship our Almighty God, shouldn’t He be the one who decides how He is to be worshiped? And if scripture really is sufficient to guide us in every aspect of life, faith, and practice so “that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17), then we can be sure that God has given us sufficient instruction in how to worship Him within its pages. This meant that worship was also an area where we could safely trust in God and lean not on our own understanding (per Proverbs 3:5).

Finding the RPW finally meant that I didn’t have to worry about my preferences any longer, and I grew to love simple, biblical worship. However, it wasn’t long after I embraced the RPW that I began to encounter Presbyterians who told me that my views on worship didn’t really follow the Regulative Principle. If I *really* wanted to follow the Regulative Principle and worship God the way He commands in scripture, then I needed to stop singing hymns and sing only psalms. They pointed out that section 5 of chapter 21 of the WCF says nothing about singing hymns, rather it says that our worship song should consist of the “singing of psalms with grace in the heart.”

1. Westminster Confession of Faith, 21.1.

They went on to explain that when the Westminster Standards speaks of singing psalms, it was referring to the inspired psalms we find in scripture in the Book of Psalms, and they asserted that the Book of Psalms was always intended by God to be the *only* hymn book of the church, so since the Psalter is the only hymn book of the church we aren't supposed to be making up our own hymns of praise to God and singing them in worship! This is the position widely referred to as Exclusive Psalmody, or EP for short, and is followed by Presbyterian denominations like the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America and the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).

I will have to admit that, at first, EP was very compelling to me, as it seemed to be the more conservative approach: *let God determine the content of what we are going to sing*. To tell the truth, after years of frequently having to sing repetitive hymns and praise songs that were often either theologically “iffy” or devoid of any real theological content, the idea that I'd never have to sing “Shine Jesus Shine” or its like again was very attractive. However, I also immediately had misgivings about EP. I knew that the authors of the Westminster Confession were quoting Colossians 3:16 when they mentioned “singing of psalms with grace in the heart,” but that Colossians 3:16 actually says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord,” which is also basically what Ephesians 5:19 says. “Why then,” I asked my Exclusive Psalmody friends, “does the scripture command, in two places, that we are to sing, ‘psalms, hymns, and spiritual Songs’ and not just ‘psalms?’” “Ah,” they explained, “well, in the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, in the Book of Psalms, psalms are sometimes also called hymns (humnos) and songs (ode) in the titles. So what Paul was saying is sing all the Psalms.”

What I later discovered they had neglected to mention is that these titles for psalms are extremely infrequent (especially “hymn”), are never all used together in a psalm title, and that the complete phrase “spiritual songs” is never used at all in the Septuagint. In fact, the more I studied, the more I began to doubt that the phrase “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” did mean *singing psalms, psalms and psalms from the Book of Psalms*. Over time, I became convinced that we are actually supposed to be singing psalms from the book of psalms, or more properly metrical arrangements of psalms—that is, psalms rearranged so that they can be sung in English—as well as Christian Hymns and Songs not found in the Psalter.

In the end I had many reasons for coming to that conclusion, but space prevents me from listing all of them so I'll only be discussing the reasons that seemed most compelling at the time.

In Ephesians 5:18–19 Paul counsels the Christians of Ephesus, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” He also gives almost exactly the same advice to the saints in Colossae, telling them, in Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

In these verses Paul points out that in Christian worship, members of the congregation are not speaking only to God, but to one another. They are to teach and admonish one another with the word of Christ, and their singing is not to be like the drunken carousing of the pagans, but full of Spirit-filled, melodious singing. Clearly they aren't supposed to sing the bar room ballads that marked the former dissipated lives of many of the Ephesians and Colossians before their conversion to Christianity. Paul is also zealous to make sure that they realize that their worship must be “heart worship” and that in order for their songs to be “right” their singing must not only follow the right form, it must be the result of what Paul describes in Col. 3:16 as *letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly*. Therefore as the gospel matures in the hearts of Christians, the natural result should be an outpouring of sung praise. For Christians to sing rightly in worship, regardless of what they sing, the word of Christ must first dwell in them. This means that only someone who believes the gospel can truly sing the gospel in the way that Paul commands. But what songs are Christians to use as they sing the gospel? Paul doesn't leave them in the dark; he tells them they are to sing three different varieties of song, and the first kind he mentions is *psalms*.

When we see the word *psalms* (Greek: *psalmos*) in the New Testament, we need to recognize that it is not necessarily a reference to a psalm from the canonical book of psalms, because the Greek word *psalmos* by itself simply refers to a song designed to be sung with musical accompaniment, and could refer either to one of the sacred poems contained in the canonical Book of Psalms, or to a sacred poem formed on the *model* of the Old Testament Psalms. As an example of the possible use of the second type of psalm, 1 Corinthians 14:26 reads regarding the worship of the Corinthian brethren: *How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together,*

each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification (NKJ). Here Paul is referring to the ecstatic worship of the Corinthian church, and he is not saying that their worship was full of arguments about which of the canonical Psalms they should sing, so that one Corinthian worshiper said, "Let's sing psalm 22!" and another replied "No, let's sing psalm 100!" Rather the psalms spoken of in 1 Corinthians 14:26 are clearly new compositions, which Charles Hodge affirms in his commentary on the verse saying, "where ψαλμὸν appears to mean such a song given by inspiration, and not one of the psalms of David."

The second kind of song Paul recommends to the Christians of Colossae and Ephesus are *hymns*. A hymn (Greek: *Hymnos*) is a song of praise to God, a divine song. Augustine believed that a hymn had to have three essentials: *it must be sung; it must be praise; it must be to God*. Psalms therefore could also be spoken of as hymns, but by this definition we also find hymns that do not belong to the Old Testament Psalter scattered throughout the New Testament: the Song of Mary (the *Magnificat* of Luke 1:46–55), the song of Zechariah (the *Benedictus* of Luke 1:68–79), and the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29–32). Hughes Oliphant Old remarks of these songs, noting how they *complete* the songs of the Old Testament psalmists, who wrote looking forward to the coming of the Messiah:

These are clearly Christian psalms written in the literary genre of Hebrew votive thanksgiving psalms. In a sense these Christian psalms complete the Old Testament Psalms. So many of the Psalms contained prophetic oracles that intimated the reign of the Christ. Now that the Christ had indeed come, surely the people of God should sing the votive thanksgiving psalms. In Covenant theology the thanksgiving hymn filled a most significant role. It confessed the obligation God's people owed to their Redeemer. They had cried to God; God had heard their cry and saved them; now they owed to God their lives in obedient service. Even more than that, the thanksgiving hymn was a thankful confession before the world of the covenant faithfulness of God to his people. The Old Testament Psalms had for generations cried out for the Lord's anointed; now the New Testament psalms confessed that the cry had been heard and the promise fulfilled.²

In the quote above, Oliphant is pointing out something important about these hymns, namely that they are far from being theologically gratuitous compositions

unnecessary to the life and worship of the church: rather, they are the *necessary* response of God's covenant people to the fulfillment of the promises He made to them in the Old Testament. This pattern of God's people responding to His redemptive acts with an outpouring of new praise follows the same model set for us in the Old Testament. For instance, in the Exodus after God had miraculously delivered his people from the wrath of Pharaoh by bringing them through the Red Sea and then destroying the armies of Egypt, the people responded with a new song of thanksgiving (Exodus 15:1–21) that rehearsed the details of their deliverance in detail. In a very real sense, for Christians to have experienced the long awaited deliverance of God through the birth, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then *not* to have composed and sung new songs of thanksgiving, would have been like Miriam and Moses remaining silent on the far side of the Red Sea.

So it should not surprise us that we find an outpouring of new praises from the people of God as they experience firsthand the fulfillment of God's promises to send a deliverer. It's also notable that while Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon, would all have been very familiar with Old Testament psalms, they chose to respond to God's amazing grace to them with hymns of thanksgiving of their own composition. Clearly they thought that doing so was appropriate and allowable, and can we really say that it would be sinful for God's people to also sing the inspired compositions of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon, in their worship today? If the answer to that question is "no", as I believe it must be, then we have demonstrated that the church is not necessarily limited to singing *only* the songs of the Old Testament Psalter.

A study of the New Testament indicates to us that this outpouring of new songs of thanksgiving that accompanied the birth of Christ was not an isolated event. In addition to these Lukan hymns of thanksgiving, we find fragments of other New Testament hymns in the letters of Paul (Eph. 5:14; Col. 1:15–20; I Tim. 3:16, and perhaps others).

Then, of course, we have the example of the songs of the church triumphant, the heavenly hymns of Revelation (Rev. 15:3, Rev. 5:9–10, etc.) It's notable that around the Throne of God in heaven, the redeemed don't just sing psalms, but also hymns of praise to the Lamb – Jesus Christ. And if the worship of the church militant is in fact practice for the eternal worship of the church triumphant, then it should follow that heavenly pattern.

2. Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship Reformed According to Scripture* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 37.

Certainly if Pliny the Younger is to be believed that pattern was in fact what the early church followed, for he reported the following about the worship practices of the Christians in a letter to Emperor Trajan written in 112 AD:

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god....

Pliny wrote his letter to Trajan approximately twenty years after the writing of Revelation, the last letter in the Bible, so while it is possible that there had been a dramatic change in worship patterns between the end of the Apostolic age and the first years of the second century, it is unlikely that this change would have occurred so quickly.

Finally the third form of worship song mentioned by Paul is the *Spiritual Song* (Greek: *Pneumatikos Ode*). What is a *Spiritual Song*? First, in order to understand what they were, we must keep in mind that *Pneumatikos*, meaning spiritual, was one of the terms that Paul used to refer to Christians:

Galatians 6:1. Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

“Christian” was a term coined by the enemies of the church (Acts 11:26) and never used by Paul to refer to the saints. Therefore, Paul’s way of saying Christian song would have been *Pneumatikos Ode*.

The non-EP commentators whom I have surveyed are convinced that *Pneumatikos Ode* is not a reference to a canonical psalm. For instance, the nineteenth century Scottish theologian John Eadie stated in his commentary on Ephesians 5:

The ode is a general term, and denotes the natural outburst of an excited bosom—the language of the sudden impulses of an Oriental temperament. Such odes as were allowed to Christians are termed “spiritual,” that is, prompted by the Spirit which filled them. But the

psalms and hymns are already marked out as consecrated, and needed no such additional epithet. For the prevailing meaning of the adjective, see under Ephesians 1:3. Odes of this nature are found in Scripture, as that of Hannah at her boy’s consecration, that of the Virgin at the Annunciation, and that of Zechariah on the birth of his son.... As a considerable portion of the church at Ephesus was composed of Jews, these psalms in the idiom of a Jew might be the Psalms of the Old Testament, and not merely sacred poems thus named by them, as is the opinion of Harless; and the hymns might be compositions of praise specially adapted to the Gentile mind, though not inapposite to the Jew. The imagery, allusions, and typical references of the Psalms could not be fully appreciated by the Gentile sections of the churches. And these “spiritual odes,” perhaps of a more glowing and individual nature, taking the shape both of psalms and hymns, might be recited or chanted in their assemblies or churches, as the Spirit gave utterance. Acts 10:46. Tertullian says in his Apology ... Many hymns which were originally private and personal, have thus become incorporated with the psalmody of our churches.³

That the psalms formed the core of the worship songs of the early Christian church and the guide for future compositions is indisputable, but to assert that the Apostolic and the early church *only* sang canonical psalms and that we should as well is, as we have seen, biblically unsupportable. It is also historically unsupportable, as we also have evidences of non-canonical hymnody dating back as far as the close of the first century. Perhaps the best surviving example of this hymnody is to be found in the *Odes of Solomon*, a collection of 42 orthodox Christian hymns, written in the style of the psalms. It is believed that Ignatius of Antioch, who wrote around 100 AD, interacted with the *Odes* in his own writing.⁴ Writing about the nature of these Odes, Hughes Oliphant Old notes:

The Odes of Solomon is the only sizable collection of Christian hymns which has come down to us from the earliest centuries of the church. They seem to have been composed at the close of the first Christian century. Originally they were composed in Syriac. They are the praises, not of the Western church, but the Eastern church, a church still very close to the Semitic roots of Christianity. The Odes of Solomon are Christian psalms in a way very similar to the canticles in the Gospel of Luke. That, of course, is implied by the title of the work. Just as Solomon, the son of David, continued the

3. John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Griffin, Bohn, & Company, London, 1861), 409.

4. See R.M. Grant, “The Odes of Solomon and the Church of Antioch,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 63 (1944): 363–97; and V. Corwin, *St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch*, Yale Publications in Religion 1 (New Haven, 1960), 71–80.

doxological service of his father by writing the Song of Solomon, so Christians continue the doxological service of the Son of David, anointed by the Spirit, by singing Christians psalms. The title is a sort of apologetic for Christian hymnody.⁵

Olds goes on to note the value of the *Odes* to us in determining what the worship of the early church sounded like: “It probably gives us about as clear a picture of the worship of the early church as any document that has come down to us. The spirit of the New Testament worship is found in these hymns with an amazing freshness and vitality” (Old, p. 39).

Other examples of early church hymnody have also come down to us, most notably the Christian psalms found at the end of the book of canonical psalms in the Alexandrian Manuscript; but as the Alexandrian Manuscript itself dates from around 400–440 AD, we cannot regard this evidence as decisive as the hymns found in the *Odes of Solomon*.

All in all, I find the conclusion that the New Testament church is to sing the Canonical Psalms, and *only* the Canonical Psalms, to be unsupportable. While I strongly believe that the psalms should be sung in Christian worship, I tend to agree with Old Testament Scholar E.J. Young’s conclusion regarding their primary role in the Christian church when he wrote:

“Moreover we are mistaken when we regard the entire Psalter as designed for the usage of the Temple. That some Psalms were so used cannot be denied, but it is interesting to note that liturgical directions are lacking for many of the Psalms. *The Psalter, rather, is primarily a manual and guide and model for the devotional needs of the individual believer.*”⁶

Response by Dennis J. Prutow

That the Westminster Confession teaches us that we ought to sing Psalms in our stated public worship seems beyond doubt. Two of the proofs are Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:9. Robert Shaw (1795–1863) states,

The Psalms of David were especially intended by God for the use of the Church, in the exercise of public praise, under the former dispensation; and they are equally adapted to the use of the Church under the present

dispensation ... [T]hey were intended by the Spirit for use in the Church in all ages.¹

More recently, G. I. Williamson: “It will be observed that the confession does not acknowledge the legitimacy of the use of modern hymns in the worship of God, but rather only the psalms of the Old Testament.”²

Pastor Andrew Webb doubts that this is the case.

I knew that the authors of the Westminster Confession were quoting Col. 3:16 when they mentioned “singing of psalms with grace in the heart,” but that Col. 3:16 actually says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord,” which is also basically what Eph. 5:19 says. “Why then,” I asked my Exclusive Psalmody friends, “does the scripture command, in two places, that we are to sing, ‘Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs’ and not just ‘Psalms?’” (204)

Pastor Webb then concludes,

Over time, I became convinced that we are actually supposed to be singing psalms from the book of psalms, or more properly metrical arrangements of psalms—that is, psalms rearranged so that they can be sung in English—as well as Christian Hymns and Songs not found in the Psalter. (204)

First, as indicated just above, the Westminster Divines hold that the psalms and hymns and songs of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 are the Psalms of the Old Testament. Failure to see that the Psalms of the Confession include the hymns and songs of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 is reading back into the Confession and into Paul a twentieth and twenty-first century understanding of hymns and songs rather than allowing the texts to speak for themselves.

Second, when Pastor Webb refers to “Christian Hymns and Songs not found in the Psalter” (204), he does not further define these Christian Hymns and Songs. Surely he does not believe that Paul has modern hymnody and contemporary choruses in mind when

5. Old, 39.

6. E.J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1989), 309. Emphasis added.

1. Robert Shaw, *An Exposition the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Fear, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1998), 274–275.

2. G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 167.

he speaks of hymns and songs. And when he later adds that such hymns and songs are “appropriate and allowable” (205), he is articulating the normative principle of worship rather than defending the regulative principle of worship. The Normative Principle states that, in worship, whatever is not forbidden is permissible, while the Regulative Principle states that, in worship, whatever is not commanded is forbidden.

In studying the Old Testament context of the terms “psalms and hymns and songs,” Pastor Webb says, “What I later discovered they had neglected to mention is that these titles for psalms are extremely infrequent (especially ‘hymn’), are never all used together in a psalm title, and that the complete phrase ‘*spiritual songs*’ is never used at all in the Septuagint” (204).

First, in his analysis of the Psalm titles in the Septuagint, Pastor Webb apparently missed Psalm 76:1 [75:1, LXX], which says, “among the hymns, a psalm of Asaph, a song” [ἐν ὕμνοις ψαλμὸς τῷ Ἀσαφ ᾠδὴ]. Second, as for the use of the term *hymn*, consult my previous paper for a review of Septuagint Psalm titles and other uses of this term. In addition, note that while Psalm 72:20 says, “The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended,” the Septuagint states, “The hymns of David the son of Jesse are ended” [ἐξέλιπον οἱ ὕμνοι Δαυὶδ τοῦ υἱοῦ Ἰεσσαί]. In other words, the Psalter considers the Psalms of David to be hymns.

Third, what about the phrase “spiritual songs”? In Ephesians 5:19, the form in the original Greek is as follows, “psalms and hymns and songs spiritual” [ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς]. The three nouns form an hendiatri, a “figure of speech where three words are employed to express a single concept.”³ Review my previous explanation of this figure in my first paper. Also note that the modifier follows the series.

As indicated in my previous article, Philippians 2:25 is an example of an hendiatri with an appended modifier. Here is the English Standard Version with italics added, “I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus *my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier*, and your messenger and minister to my need.”

3. James D. Hernando, *Dictionary of Hermeneutics* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 2005), 117.

4. B. B. Warfield, “Pneumatikos and Its Opposites in the Greek New Testament,” *The Presbyterian Review* 1:3 (1880): 561.

5. John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 293.

6. James H. Charlesworth, *The Earliest Christian Hymnbook* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), xxi.

7. James McKinnon, *Music in the Early Christian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 23.

8. Charlesworth, *Early Christian Hymnbook*, xxii.

Epaphroditus is a “brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier.” In Greek, the modifier “my” follows the hendiatri, ἀδελφὸν καὶ συνεργὸν καὶ συστρατιώτην μου. “My” modifies “brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier.” In the same way, it would be proper to translate Ephesians 5:19, “spiritual psalms and hymns and songs.” All three are spiritual, that is, inspired by, or as Warfield says “belonging to, or determined by, the Holy Spirit.”⁴ Thus, Pastor Webb errs. There is no separate category of “spiritual songs” in either the New Testament or the Old Testament. Once again, see my previous article.

Finally, Psalms and Hymns and spiritual Songs do not represent three varieties or forms of worship song as alleged by Pastor Webb. As indicated, to hold to this position is to read a modern understanding of hymnody and contemporary Christian song back into the New Testament. In discussing Psalms, Webb agrees with Hodge that “the psalms spoken of in 1 Corinthians 14:26 are clearly new compositions.” I spoke to this text in my previous paper and the position of Calvin. Note that Calvin understands Pliny’s *hymns* to be *Psalms*.

From this verse we also gather, however, that at that time the custom of singing was already among believers. That is also established by Pliny, who, writing at least forty years after the death of Paul, tells us that the Christians were in the habit of singing hymns to Christ before daylight. And indeed I have no doubt that from the very beginning they adopted the usage of the Jewish Church in singing psalms.⁵

Under the category of hymns, Pastor Webb brings up the song of Exodus 15. The response is found in my previous paper where I draw the distinction between occasional culturally-conditioned worship settings and heaven-directed stated public corporate worship.

Pastor Webb also brings up the supposed hymn fragments imbedded in the New Testament (205). He mentions Ephesians 5:14, Colossians 1:15–20, and 1 Timothy 3:16. We can add Philippians 2:5–11 to this list. There are no known manuscripts or fragments of manuscripts to substantiate that the Apostle Paul was quoting from hymns existing at the time of his writing.

The Odes of Solomon (206) is a collection of 42 psalm-like compositions and is known as the “Earliest Christian Hymnbook.”⁶ Musicologist James McKinnon notes the possibility of the composition of the *Odes* at the end of the first century.⁷ “Specialists on the *Odes* now agree that the collection was completed in the early second century, and most likely before 125 CE.”⁸ In addition, “The *Odes* are quoted only in the early fourth century

by Lactantius [ca. 240– ca. 320] ...”⁹ The first known extra-biblical hymn that continues in use, in the Greek Orthodox tradition, is *Phos Hilaron*, “Hail Gladsome Light,” and was composed about the third century.¹⁰

There are, therefore, no extant manuscripts of hymns or hymn fragments that date back to the early first century. There are also no known extra-biblical hymns or songs that date to this time. Paul likely wrote Philippians in 60 or 61 A.D. and his first letter to Timothy in the early 60s.¹¹ It is, therefore, unlikely that Philippians 2:5–11 and 1 Timothy 3:16 are early hymn fragments. The same could be said about Ephesians 5:14 and Colossians 1:15–20.

Pastor Webb brings up the comment of Governor Pliny mentioned above (206). “He reported the following about the worship practices of the Christians in a letter to Emperor Trajan written in 112 AD: ‘They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god’” For an answer to this, see Calvin’s comments above. Indeed, what was a *hymn* from Pliny’s perspective may indeed have been a *Psalm* from the Christian perspective. Remember, in the New Testament, the Psalter is a major source of material about Christ. Then too, Pliny was certainly no expert in Christian praise.

Under the category of hymns, Pastor Webb refers to worship in heaven (205). “Then, of course, we have the example of the songs of the church triumphant, the heavenly hymns of Revelation (Rev. 15:3, Rev. 5:9–10, etc.). It is notable that around the Throne of God in heaven, the redeemed don’t just sing psalms, but also hymns of praise to the Lamb–Jesus Christ.” My position on this objection to exclusive Psalmody is simple. We are responsible to maintain the standards for worship God gives us in the age in which we live. Since God commanded David to add Psalmody to public worship, he was not privileged to retain worship as it was under Moses. Neither would he have been privileged, had he received revelations of the future, to institute worship as we know it now under the new economy in Christ. Similarly, although we may have intimations as to what worship will be like in the consummation, we are not yet there. We have standards of worship to maintain here and now, which were given to us by God, for here and now. Standards for worship in the future are not yet ours.¹²

As Pastor Webb indicates, he does not see why Westminster speaks of “singing of Psalms with grace in the heart” and not of “singing Psalms and Hymns

and Spiritual Songs with grace in the heart” (204). After all, both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 use the latter language. Pastor Webb does not agree that the Psalms include the hymns and songs of which Paul speaks. Again, he appears to be reading back into the texts a twentieth and twenty-first century view rather than allowing the texts to speak for themselves.

Our brother concludes his essay by saying that the psalms are “primarily a manual and guide and model.” This appears to be Pastor Webb’s bottom line. The word psalm, he says, could refer “to a sacred poem formed on the *model* of the Old Testament Psalms.” In this light, hymns and spiritual songs outside the Psalter are “appropriate and allowable.” This position is the normative principle of worship rather than the regulative principle of worship. The former anachronism and the arguments seeking to support it leads to this latter position. ■

9. *Ibid.*, xxi.

10. M. Eleanor Irwin, “Phos Hilaron: The Metamorphoses of a Greek Christian Hymn,” *The Hymn* 40:2 (April, 1989): 7.

11. D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 506, 571.

12. See my discussion of “Biblical Transitions in Worship” in Dennis Prutow, *Public Worship* 101 (Pittsburgh: Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2013), 477–484.