

The Regulative Principle of Worship & Song in the Public Worship of God

By John Murray

INTRODUCTION¹

The material printed here is a compilation of contributions written by Professor John Murray for the Committee on Song in the Public Worship of God, which was appointed in 1944 by the eleventh General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.² The General Assembly *Minutes* do not specify the authorship for each section of a 1946 report issued in the name of the committee as a whole. The present preface identifies those portions of the 1946 report which were written by Murray, including the committee's foundational definition of the regulative principle of worship. That writing deserves recognition in the corpus of Murray's work. By bringing together here the whole literary output of Murray as a member of the committee, his contributions are presented in the mutual connection and dependence in which the author understood them.

The committee was created in consequence of a suggestion by Professor Murray. The General Assembly of 1943 had elected a committee to present to the General Assembly of 1944 a preliminary plan for a hymnal for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and Murray was one of the nine members of that committee. When the committee reported, Murray presented a minority report, challenging three recommendations of the committee. The committee was proposing "that any larger hymnal which the General Assembly undertakes to publish contain both metrical psalms and hymns," "that the approximate composition of the musical portion of the larger hymnal be 85 per cent hymns and 15 per cent psalms," and finally, "that the General Assembly elect a committee of nine to begin the preparation of the larger hymnal." Murray noted that "there has been division of judgment within the Committee as to whether uninspired compositions may legitimately be sung.... Our subordinate Standards distinctly provide that God

may not be worshipped in any way not prescribed in the holy Scripture. This General Assembly, therefore, is inescapably faced with the question whether the singing of uninspired hymns in the public worship of God is authorized by the holy Scripture."

Murray urged "that this General Assembly elect a committee of seven to make a diligent study of the teaching of the Word of God and of our subordinate Standards regarding the question of the songs that may be sung in the public worship of God and to report its findings to the Twelfth General Assembly," and that meantime no further steps be taken toward the preparation of a hymnal. These two recommendations by Murray were adopted, and the General Assembly elected Messrs. Edward J. Young, John Murray, Robert S. Marsden,

THE AUTHOR: John Murray (1898–1975) was a Scottish Presbyterian ordained in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He studied at Princeton and subsequently helped J. G. Machen found Westminster Theological Seminary. Professor Murray was a leading figure in theological studies infusing systematic theology with the exegetical work of biblical theology. From his labors came substantial contributions in key loci such as doctrine of adoption, sanctification, and worship. Regarding the worship of the church, Professor Murray brought renewed interest in the scriptural worship principles of Presbyterianism.

1. Introduction by R. Sherman Isbell. Rev. Isbell is a minister of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), a contributor to *The Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, a translator for *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, and a visiting instructor at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. He is a graduate of Edinburgh University, the Free Church of Scotland College, and Westminster Theological Seminary, and he has served pastorates in Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Alberta and Maryland.

2. [This material was prepared by Rev. Sherman Isbell, and with his approval has been augmented by Chris Coldwell who provided a new collation with the surviving draft manuscript of the portion of this work on the regulative principle of worship. Rev. Isbell first examined the Murray file at WTS archives February 17, 1993 and subsequently referenced it in "The Regulative Principle and Worship Song: Part I," *The Presbyterian Reformed Magazine*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, Summer 1993. While the material is important as to the subject addressed, it bears

R. B. Kuiper, John H. Skilton, Arthur W. Kuschke and William Young to serve on the study committee.

The thirteenth General Assembly (1946) was presented with “a partial report” from the study committee. Murray’s authorship of section “A” of the report is evident from an initial draft of the text and from a cover letter, both in Murray’s handwriting, which are preserved among his papers in the archives of the Montgomery Library at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. In his letter to the committee members, Murray says, “This paper is being sent to you in the hope that study of it beforehand will be of some assistance in furthering and perhaps expediting our work at the next meeting of the Committee on November 10th.... I thought it necessary to enter into some detail in view of questions raised at our

noting that Murray’s MS acknowledges a phrase which was becoming current for designation of the Reformed tradition’s concept of the appropriate form of worship: the Regulative Principle of Worship. The earliest American use of this exact phrasing which has been found to date is from a 1905 exposition of the Westminster Shorter Catechism by James Harper, who was Professor of Theology at then Xenia Theological Seminary of the United Presbyterian Church of North America: “The Second Commandment lays down the regulative principle of worship: it forbids idolatry” (*An Exposition in the form of question and answer of the Westminster Assembly’s Shorter catechism* [United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1905], 221). Contemporary British phrasing for the Presbyterian principle was “the principle regulative of worship,” which from the perspective of coining a term was a bit more cumbersome (Francis Petticrew, “The Scriptural Principle Regulative of the Worship of God,” in *Psalm-Singers’ Conference* [Belfast: Fountain Printing Works, 1903]). Harper used a slightly different description in an 1883 article on the Psalms. “The law regulative of worship is not that we may use both what is commanded and what is not expressly forbidden...” (*A Religious Encyclopaedia: or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology*, Volume 3 [Funk & Wagnalls, 1883], “Psalms. Use of the, in Worship,” p. 1960). Murray had used the British phrasing in 1939 (*The Sovereignty of God*, Papers presented at the first American Calvinistic Conference of 1939, ed. J. T. Hoogstra [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1940], 26). For the report Murray uses both phrasings. The American usage seems to have begun to stick after this and use in the report no doubt helped to popularize the phrase as a moniker for the Presbyterian principle of worship. See Frank J. Smith and Chris Coldwell, “The Regulative Principle of Worship: Sixty Years in Reformed Literature: Part One (1946-1999),” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 2 (2006), 98ff.]

3. Letter from William Young to the present writer, May 25, 1993. William Young (1918–2015) was a native of Brooklyn, New York. He graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1941 and was ordained in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1942. During the years 1944–1946, when the General Assembly committee was doing its work, Young was stated supply at Bloor East Presbyterian Church, Toronto.

4. William Young, “Introduction,” dated July 1990, in *The Scriptural Warrant Respecting Song ... As Stated In The Minority Report Of The Committee On Song* (Vienna, Va.: Publications Committee, Presbyterian Reformed Church, [1990]), p. i.

last meeting.” Subsequently the initial draft of Section “A” was extensively revised, and the body of the text printed below is that which was actually submitted to the 1946 General Assembly. In the cover letter which accompanied the initial draft of Section “A,” Murray refers to his desire to rewrite and improve that draft, noting that at that preliminary stage of the committee’s work he had had insufficient time to devote to preparation of the paper, but was nevertheless sending it to the committee members, such as it was, with the hope that it would facilitate discussion. William Young has since observed: “Section A of the 1946 report is clearly the work of John Murray.... Section C is evidently based on parts of my report on the scripture proof of the regulative principle, except for the addition to C in the 1947 report, in which I did not concur.”³ Thus the bulk of the committee’s incomplete report in 1946 was composed by the two men who would dissent from the majority findings of the committee in the following year.

The 1947 General Assembly received from the committee a majority report and a minority report, each seeking to complete what was begun the year before in the “partial report” which had been issued in the name of the committee as a whole. In the second year, the argument put forward by the majority was that song need not be restricted to the words of Scripture, and that this position is compatible with the statement of the regulative principle set forth in the 1946 “partial report.” However, the minority report, signed by two men, one of whom had provided the committee’s defining statement of the regulative principle, and the other of whom had laid out the Scripture proof for that statement, concluded that “there is no warrant in Scripture for the use of uninspired human compositions in the singing of God’s praise in public worship.” William Young has noted that the minority report, though signed by Murray and Young, “was written entirely by Prof. Murray.”⁴

For the text of Murray’s contribution to the 1946 “partial report,” we have followed the committee’s typescript of the report, in which evidently is found the text submitted to the 1946 General Assembly. The typescript is among Murray’s papers at Westminster Seminary. In a very few places, the published General Assembly *Minutes* contain minor and inconsequential departures from the typescript of the committee text. The present writer has Murray’s personal copies of the 1946 and 1947 General Assembly *Minutes*, in which Murray has entered marginal corrections where a word was omitted, and a plural form is questioned, in the published text

of Part C of the 1946 report, but no annotations have been made respecting the portions from 1946 or 1947 of which he was the author.⁵

SHERMAN ISBELL

Part I:⁶ From “Report of the Committee on Song in Worship, presented to the Thirteenth General Assembly [of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church], on the teaching of our subordinate standards respecting the songs that may be sung in the public worship of God (1946)

By John Murray⁷

*A. The Teaching of the Subordinate Standards respecting the Regulative Principle of Worship.*⁸

There is a principle clearly expressed in our subordinate Standards which has frequently been called, the *regulative* principle of worship. There is an appropriateness in the word “regulative”, because it is the principle that

deals with the question: in what way or ways are we to worship God? What are the elements which constitute the true and acceptable worship of God? How may we know that the way in which we worship God is acceptable to Him?⁹

To be quite concrete and historical, there are two well-defined answers to this question in Christian churches. One of these is that of the Romish Church, followed in principle by Lutherans and Episcopalians, namely, that it is proper to worship God in ways not forbidden in the Word. In contrast with this there is another answer, namely, that God may be worshipped only in ways instituted, prescribed or commanded in the Word. The contrast is patent—the one says: what is not forbidden is permitted, the other says: what is not prescribed is forbidden.¹⁰

It is in relation to this question that the regulative principle is to be understood. It will surely be conceded that it has a right to such a denomination. The following examination of our Standards will show that a regulative

5. [Texts for Parts I & II are taken from the minutes. For Part I Murray’s draft MS has been collated with the committee’s final typescript. There is no MS for Part II in the WTS archive. Cf. Orthodox Presbyterian Church, General Assembly, “Report of the Committee on Song in Worship” [Partial Report,] *Minutes of the ... General Assembly* (Philadelphia: Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1946), 101–105; *Minutes* (1947), 58–66. <http://www.opc.org/GA/song.html> (accessed May 25, 2015).]

6. [WTS Archives. John Murray Papers. Box 0001, item 2. Folder: Worship and the Church, Introduction (hereafter, IntroMS). 3 pages handwritten. In annotations noted in the footnotes, paragraph breaks are denoted by ¶. Cross outs by a single line note clear and unclear crossed out words (deletion; ???). Editorial insertions are marked in square brackets [] and words in the typescript not in the MS are surrounded by braces { }. Murray’s interline insertions in the MS text are marked with arrow brackets < >.]

7. [A cover letter for the MS signed by John Murray to members of the Committee on Song in Worship reads: “Dear Brethren of the Committee on Songs in Worship, ¶ This study paper is being sent to you in the hope that some study of it beforehand will be of some assistance in the furthering and perhaps expediting our work at the next meeting of the committee on November 10th. There may be some revision of this paper before we meet. I should like to rewrite it and improve it in some ways but I don’t believe I shall have time for that in the next few weeks: to do this and get it into your hands in sufficient time to be of use to you. ¶ Please pardon some of the detail. I thought it necessary to enter into some detail in view of questions raised at our last meeting. ¶ Cordially, ¶ John Murray”. WTS Archives. John Murray Papers. Box 0001, item 1. Folder: Worship and the Church, Cover Letter. 1 page handwritten. The letter is undated but it was written between a meeting of the committee on 14 September of either 1944 or 1945, anticipating the next meeting on 10 November. While it may seem less likely they would have delayed any work by nearly a year, that would also not explain yet another year’s lapse until the first report to general assembly in 1946. It may be they only released a partial report of the material on the regulative principle in 1946 after failing to reach a unified consensus that year and the previous

year, when it was apparent there would be a significant division concerning the content of song for the public worship of God.]

8. [Section number “A.” is not in the draft MS. See footnote 13.]

9. [Murray distilled this paragraph down a bit in the final text, choosing to remove a defense of the term “regulative principle.” The original text is of interest as an early, if not the earliest, defense of using a term such as the regulative principle of worship to describe the Presbyterian rule for worship. “Introduction.” This paper deals with the principle regulative of worship taught in the subordinate Standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is sometimes spoken of as the regulative principle of worship. It is to be admitted that there are many principles of true worship—God alone is to be worshipped, the glory of God is the end of worship, worship must always be rendered through the mediation of Christ, God must be worshipped in Spirit and in truth, the Son and Spirit are to be worshipped equally with the Father, God is to be worshipped according to His Word. Others also might be mentioned. It is also to be admitted that all of these principles are in a sense regulative of worship. So when we speak of the regulative principle it is not to be supposed that the other principles are not regulative also. But there is a principle distinct from these other principles clearly expressed in our subordinate Standards and in order [page 2 of IntroMS begins here] to distinguish it from the others it may properly, for the sake of distinction, be called the regulative principle. In the last analysis it makes little difference what name it bears. It might even be call[ed] principle R, in order to distinguish it from others such as A, B, and X. But there is still an appropriateness in the name ‘regulative,’ because it is the principle that deals with the question: in what way, or ways are we to worship God? How may we know that the way in which we worship God is acceptable to Him?”]

10. [“... there are {at least} two well-defined...” “In contrast with this is there is the another answer, namely, that God may be worshipped <only> in ways {page 3 of IntroMS begins here} instituted, prescribed or commanded in the Word.” Instead of the paragraph ending with, “what is not prescribed is forbidden,” the draft reads, “what is not commanded is forbidden.”]

principle is clearly enunciated and that it is precisely formulated in answer to the questions stated above.¹¹

I.¹² The first statement in our subordinate Standards bearing upon this question is that in the Confession of Faith, Chapter I, Section vi, namely, “there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed”.¹³

With respect to this statement it should be noted that it is one of two acknowledgments made with reference to the doctrine that, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men”. We are now¹⁴ interested simply in the import of the above acknowledgment with respect to worship as it bears upon the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture just quoted. The teaching of this section as applied to worship would run as follows: “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary” for the worship of God “is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture” except that “there are some

circumstances concerning the worship of God, ... common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed”. We may now proceed to analyze this statement.

1. The exception stated applies only to *circumstances*¹⁵ of worship. It cannot apply to any substantial part or element of the worship. It cannot apply to anything that enters into the worship itself but only to certain conditions under which the worship is given or conducted.¹⁶

2. The exception stated applies only to *some* circumstances. The effect of this restriction is to allow that there may be circumstances of worship that are either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.

3. The exception stated applies only to some circumstances *common to human actions and societies*. They are therefore circumstances that are not peculiar to worship. Such are, for example, the circumstances of time and place. They may also include order and length of service, for since human societies are mentioned it is natural for us to think of the meetings of such societies in this connection.¹⁷ The obvious meaning of this section of the Confession is that all that does not fall into the category of “some circumstances, ... common to human actions and societies” must conform to what is “expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture”, in other words, the authority of Scripture is necessary for the whole content of worship—that for which we have Scripture authority is that which is expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from it and *vice versa*.¹⁸

16. Murray’s handwritten draft provides at this point a supporting citation which was omitted in the committee report: “It may serve good purpose to quote from J. Henley Thornwell: ‘Circumstances are those concomitants of an action without which it cannot either be at all, or cannot be done with decency or decorum’ (quoted from Girardeau, *Music in the Church*, p. 152).” The passage is from *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, edited by John B. Adger and John L. Girardeau (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871–1873), 4:246. [Notes 16 & 18 are original to Rev. Isbell’s work.]

17. [Page 4 of the RPWMS begins here. This began a new paragraph in the MS but the break is omitted in the final typescript and in the minutes. “Confession” was not capitalized in the draft MS, and the ellipse has been inserted interline. At the end of the paragraph, *vice versa* was not underlined in the MS.]

18. A further citation in Murray’s handwritten draft illuminates the argument, but does not appear in the committee report: “It is of interest to quote from George Gillespie in this connection: “Besides all this, there is nothing which any way pertaineth to the worship of God left to the determination of human laws, beside the mere circumstances, which neither have any holiness in them, forasmuch as

11. [In the draft MS at “It” beginning this paragraph, Murray has written a paragraph break symbol (¶). This break is reflected in the committee’s final typescript text.]

12. [WTS Archives. John Murray Papers. Box 0001, item 3. Folder: Worship and the Church, The Principle Regulative of Worship Taught... (hereafter, RPWMS). 22 handwritten pages. The section title was placed here in the MS, but Murray has written interline in a circle, “Insert: Introduction, 3 pages”. The title was subsequently changed to that given above, but as originally written it read: “The Principle Regulative of Worship taught in the Subordinate Standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.”]

13. [Murray has drawn a curved line between the period and the quotation mark to the left of the period. Murray understandably follows British style in placing periods and commas outside of the closing quotation mark which sensibly makes clear that the punctuation is not part of the cited text. Here and elsewhere in the MS a line appears to make placement clear when Murray has written a period under the quotation mark. The typescript of the committee appears to follow this convention; but American usage is followed in the text published in the OPC Minutes. While for typographical reasons the editor favors American usage which places commas and periods within the closing mark, in the text presented here, Murray’s usage is preserved.]

14. [Page 2 of the RPWMS begins here. The ellipse later in the text was inserted interline in the MS draft.]

15. [In the MS: *circumstances*. Subsequent use of italics should be understood to have been underlined in the draft and will not be further noted.]

II.¹⁹ The next statement in our subordinate Standards²⁰ bearing upon the question is that in the Confession, Chapter XX, Section ii: “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters²¹ of faith or worship”. This does not, of course, expressly state the principle regulative of worship, but it does teach something closely companionate with it. In matters of worship, as well as of faith, the conscience is free not only from what is contrary to the Word but also from what is beside it. That is to say, in the matter of worship the conscience is not bound by anything unless it is taught or enjoined in the Word, either by express statement or by good and necessary consequence. What is out-with the deliverances of the Word has no authority for the conscience. The law for the conscience in worship is that which is authorized by Scripture.

This section does not reflect²² on the question whether the Christian is free to worship God in ways not taught in Scripture or not authorized by Scripture. It would have been outside the purpose and scope of this section to introduce this question. However, it must be noted carefully²³ that this section does not say or imply that the Christian is free to worship in ways that are beside the teaching of Scripture. What the section says is that the conscience is free *from* all that is beside the Word in matters of worship; it does not say that the conscience is free to use what is beside the Word.

This section, however, does say emphatically²⁴ that to include in worship anything that is beside the Word,

they have no other use and praise in sacred than they have in civil [page 5 of the RPWMS begins here] things, nor yet were particularly determinable in Scripture, because they are infinite; but sacred, significant ceremonies, such as cross, kneeling, surplice, holidays, bishopping, etc., which have no use and praise except in religion only, and which, also, were most easily determinable (yet not determined) within those bounds which God did set to his written word, are such things as God never left to the determination of any human law’ (*The Presbyterian’s Armoury*, Vol. 1, p. xii.) [Cf. Gillespie, “To all the Reformed Churches,” in *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies* (1637); *Works* (1846), *A Dispute* (Naphtali Press, 1993) xli; (2013), 16.]

19. [RPWMS page 6 begins with section II.]

20. [... our <subordinate> Standards....]

21. [The old error in the Confession’s text dating to 1719 of “word, or” and “in matters” was singled out by S. W. Carruthers as perhaps the most egregious error that crept into the traditional text of the Confession over the centuries. Murray reviewed Carruthers’ work in 1939 and would have been familiar with this error, and is apparently citing from it. Cf. John Murray, “Review of S. W. Carruthers, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, II:1 (1939), 50–55. Also Murray, *Works*, 3:291–295; 4:362. See S. W. Carruthers, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Being an Account of the Preparation and Printing of Its Seven Leading Editions, to Which*

out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience. For the section proceeds: “So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience.”²⁵ The only worship that can be rendered *out of conscience*, then,²⁶ is the worship authorized by Scripture, that is to say, worship not beside the Word but worship authorized²⁷ in the Word.

It should be observed, furthermore, that, in matters that are beside the Word, worship and faith are put on the same level. It is pertinent to ask if, in the teaching of the Confession, we are conceded the liberty of incorporating into our *faith* anything that is beside the Word? It would appear that we are not. If so, are we not justified in presuming, to say the least, that the Confession meant the same principle to apply to worship, even in the terms of this section?

²⁸III. In Chapter XXI, Section i, of the Confession the principle regulative of worship is expressly and unequivocally formulated. It says: “But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, 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.”²⁹

The following points may be made regarding this section.

1. It enunciates a principle that applies to *all* worship of God, a principle *regulative* of all worship. This principle is that God may be worshipped only in a

Is Appended a Critical Text of the Confession (Manchester: Aikman, 1937), 127–128. The Burges MS of the Confession which is also correct with some difference in punctuation, was published by Carruthers in 1946 and adopted by the OPC in 1956 as their text of the Confession.]

22. [Page 7 of the RPWMS begins here.]

23. [MS: “carefully noted.”]

24. [MS: “does, however, emphatically say”. For “include” the MS has “introduce.”]

25. [“... is to betray true liberty of conscience” {etc.}.]

26. [Page 8 of the RPWMS begins here.]

27. [The word “worship” is inserted interline above and between “that” and “taught”, which the final typescript version replaced with “authorized”. In the MS “beside” and “taught” are emphasized but “beside” and “authorized” are not emphasized in the committee’s typescript or in the OPC minutes.]

28. [Page 9 of the RPWMS begins with section III. Short word crossed out, “III N? In.”]

29. [The draft manuscript reads: “in the Holy holy Scripture.” There is possibly a change of ink or pen here beginning with the scratched “Holy.” Murray has heavily edited what follows including striking out the immediate next paragraph, “Any exposition to show the meaning and effect of this section hardly seems necessary. But lest it import there should be any doubt we may undertake the superfluous.”]

enunciate the same principle as we have already found in the Confession. It is stated both positively and negatively in both Catechisms. We shall see that it is most important to note the principle of exclusion as well as that of inclusion.³⁸

In Question 108 the Larger Catechism says: “The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his word” and the Shorter Catechism, Question 50, says: “The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his word”.³⁸ It might be argued that this positive statement,³⁹ though it makes mandatory the worship of God instituted in His Word, yet does not rigidly exclude the propriety of worshipping God⁴⁰ in ways not instituted in the Word. It is here that the effect of the principle of exclusion, formulated in Questions 109 and 51 of the respective Catechisms, becomes apparent. The Larger Catechism, Question 109, reads: “The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counseling, commanding, using, or any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself”,⁴¹ and the Shorter Catechism,⁴² Question 51: “The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word”.⁴³

Any further observation seems unnecessary other than to say that the worship authorized and enjoined is that instituted or appointed in the Word and that *any religious worship or any way of worshipping God not appointed in the Word would be characterized in the language of Question 108 of the Larger Catechism as “false worship” and therefore to be disapproved, detested and opposed, and according to each one’s place and calling, removed.*⁴⁴

V. It remains to deal with “The Directory for the Public Worship of God”, adopted by the Sixth General Assembly of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church.⁴⁵

There is an obvious distinction between the Confession, Larger and Shorter Catechisms⁴⁶ on the one hand, and the Standards of Government, Discipline and Worship, on the other. The former are accorded a higher place in the constitution than the latter, inasmuch as the former are expressly mentioned in the formulae of subscription, whereas the latter are not thus mentioned, even though the approval of the government and discipline of the Church is required in some of the formulae.

It should be observed that the “Directory” is “The Directory for the Public Worship of God” and is more

limited in its scope than the statements from the Confession and Catechisms dealt with already.⁴⁷

The relevant sections of the “Directory” may, however, be discussed briefly.

In Chapter II, Section 1, the “Directory” says: “Since the holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice, the principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible, and from no other source”. In the succeeding sections some of these principles are formulated. The principle regulative of worship, found in the Confession and Catechisms, is not formulated,⁴⁸ and there is no unequivocal statement affirming or denying it.

There are some remarks, however, that may be made.⁴⁹

1. Chapter II, Section 1, quoted above,⁵⁰ says, “the principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible, and from no other source”. Since the principle regulative of worship applies to public worship and⁵¹ since such a principle is enunciated in the Confession and Catechisms, this must be one of the principles the “Directory” says must be derived from the Bible, and from no other source. This means that, according to the “Directory”, the regulative principle must be that taught in the Word of God. What this teaching is the “Directory” itself does not say.

2. In Chapter II, Section 7, the “Directory”⁵² says,

38. [RPWMS p. 15 begins at “IV.”]

39. [RPWMS: “statement, ~~does not~~ though...”]

40. [Page 16 of RPWMS begins here.]

41. [Comma placement is unclear here but British usage has been followed.]

42. [“It is here that the <effect of the> principle ... becomes apparent. <The Larger Catechism,> Question 109, reads and <the Shorter Catechism,> Question ...”]

43. [Murray has drawn a line to ensure the period is placed right of the closing quotation mark at the end of this sentence/paragraph.]

44. [RPWMS: “and that any religious worship or any way of worshipping ... and opposed as well, according...”]

45. [Page 17 of RPWMS begins at “V.”]

46. [There is a comma here in the MS. A sentence which began this paragraph in the draft was not included in the final text. ‘I must confess that I am in doubt as to whether or not the “Directory” may properly be regarded as a “Subordinate Standard” in terms of the motion made at the meeting of the Committee held on September 14th.]

47. [Page 18 of RPWMS begins at “Public Worship of God...” RPWMS: “statements ~~dealt with in~~ from the Confession and Catechisms dealt with already.”]

48. [RPWMS: “is not ~~stated~~ formulated...”]

49. [RPWMS: “There are ~~two comments~~ <some remarks> however...”]

50. [“... {just} quoted above...”]

51. [The “and” was inserted interline. RPWMS page 19 begins here.]

52. [“Directory” is not in quotation marks in RPWMS.]

“The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed forms for public worship but, in the interest of life and power in worship, has given his church a large measure of liberty in his matter. It may not be forgotten, however, that there is true liberty only where the rules of God’s Word are observed and the Spirit of the Lord is, that all things must be done decently and in order, and that God’s people should serve him with reverence and in the beauty of holiness.”⁵³ It is possible that the phrase, “a large measure of liberty” might be appealed to as expressing a different principle from that already dealt with as taught in the Confession and Catechisms. Furthermore, it is possible that it may have been intended in this way by the framers of the “Directory”. With respect to any such contention or intention two things must be said.

(a) The phrase “a large measure of liberty” refers to “forms for public worship”. It is entirely reasonable to assume that “forms” refer to something different from that which comes within the scope of the regulative principle enunciated in the Confession and Catechisms. Surely this section should be interpreted as referring to the kind of fixed liturgical forms to which the framers of the Westminster Standards were consistently opposed.⁵⁴ It can at least be said that the regulative principle of the Confession and Catechisms is not in the least inconsistent with such denial of fixed forms as is expressed in this section.

(b) The large measure of liberty must be exercised, according to this section, within “the rules of God’s Word”. It is not, therefore, unrestricted liberty, and so, if the regulative principle be a principle of God’s Word, the liberty must be exercised within, and compatibly with, that principle or rule.⁵⁵

(c) Even supposing that the phrase, “a large measure of liberty” was intended to express a different principle from that enunciated in the Confession and Catechisms,⁵⁶ the occurrence of this phrase could not have the effect of abrogating the plain and unequivocal statements of the other Standards.⁵⁷

Part II: “Minority Report of the Committee on Song in the Public Worship of God submitted to the Fourteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church” (1947)⁵⁸

The above-mentioned committee presented to the Thirteenth General Assembly a report bearing upon the question of the regulative principle of worship. This principle is to the effect that divine warrant or authorization is required for every element entering into the worship of God. In the words of the Confession of Faith of this Church, “The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, 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” (Chapter XXI, Section i).

In terms of the commission given by the Eleventh General Assembly and in accordance with the regulative principle set forth in the report of the committee, presented to the Thirteenth General Assembly, the question with which this report is concerned is: What does the Scripture warrant or prescribe respecting the songs that may be *sung* in the public worship of God?

53. [Here again, Murray has drawn a curved line between the closing quotation mark and the period to indicate placing the period to the right of the mark, which style was followed by the typescript but not by the Minutes. Page 20 of RPWMS begins at “principle from that already dealt....”]

54. [“Surely this section <meant to> should be interpreted <as referring> to the <the [sic] kind> of fixed liturgical forms to which.... with the <such> denial of fixed forms contended/considered? such as is expressed in this section.”]

55. [RPWMS page 21 begins with “It is not, therefore....” The MS reads: “... therefore, unlimited unrestricted liberty....”]

56. [RPWMS: “...that the <phrase, “a> large....” “Catechisms, it would have to be said the occurrence....” A word, perhaps “were”, was struck out in the MS just prior to “was.”]

57. [The draft manuscript included the following text concluding this paragraph which was not included in the final version of the committee’s report. “At best it would be far too meager a basis on which to have ground the annulment of the express and rep? sustained statement of the other more basic and normative Standards. At worst it would be a surreptitious and unworthy way of securing such

an end. In any case, on this supposition, as our Standards now are it would have to be regarded as an inconsistency having no normative effect so far as the <????> subordinate Standards are concerned. [RPWMS page 22 begins here] the question of the regulative principle taught in our subordinate Standards is concerned. ¶_____” In the final typescript partial report of 1946, following Murray’s section, is section B, “The Teaching of our Subordinate Standards Respecting the Songs That May Be Sung in the Public Worship of God.” The section C which appears in the minutes appears as a separate typescript in the archive folder with the title “The Teaching of the Word of God Concerning the Regulative Principle of Worship,” but lacking the “C” designation (WTS Archives, John Murray Papers; Box 0001, item 6; Folder: Worship and the Church; 3 pp.). Murray did not author either section B or C and they are not reproduced here. As noted by Sherman Isbell in the introduction, Dr. Young believed C was derived from his notes presented to the committee.]

58. [There is no MS for the minority report (Part II) in the WTS archive. The text is taken from the GA minutes. *Minutes of the ... General Assembly* (1947), 58–66. <http://www.opc.org/GA/song.html> (accessed May 25, 2015).

In dealing with this question it should be appreciated that the *singing* of God's praise is a distinct act of worship. It is to be distinguished, for example, from the *reading* of the Scripture and from the offering of prayer to God. It is, of course, true that songs of praise often include what is of the nature of prayer to God, as it is also true that in the offering of prayer to God there is much that is of the nature of praise and thanksgiving. But it is not proper to appeal to the divine authorization or warrant we possess as to the content of prayer in order to determine the question as to the content of song. *Prayer* is one element of worship, *singing* is another. Similarity or even identity of content does not in the least obliterate the distinction between these two specific kinds of exercise in the worship of God. Because of this distinction we may not say that the offering of prayer and the singing of praise to God are the same thing and argue from the divine authorization we possess respecting the one to the authorization respecting the other. One or two examples may be given of the necessity and importance of guarding the distinctiveness of the several parts of worship and of determining from the Scripture what its prescriptions are respecting each element.

Both reports submitted by this committee are agreed that some Scripture songs may be sung in the public worship of God. But these Scripture songs may also be *read* as Scripture and they may be used in preaching. In such cases the actual materials are the same. But *reading* the Scripture is not the same exercise of worship as *singing*, and neither is preaching the same as *singing*, or *reading* the Scripture. The same kind of distinction applies to the exercises of *praying* and *singing* even when the content is identical.

The Lord's Supper is an act of thanksgiving as well as one of commemoration and communion. But though the partaking of the bread and the wine includes thanksgiving, just as prayer and singing do, yet the celebration of the Lord's Supper is an act of worship distinct from both prayer and singing, and the divine prescriptions respecting the celebration of the Lord's Supper cannot be determined by the divine prescriptions regarding prayer or singing but must rather be derived from the revelation God has given respecting the observance of that distinct element of the worship of God.

Consequently the minority contends that the argument used in the report of the committee, to wit, that, since we are not limited in our prayers to the words of Scripture or to the "prayers" given us in Scripture, therefore the same freedom is granted in song, is invalid. We may not argue thus from the divine warrant respecting

one element to the divine warrant respecting another. The question of the divine prescription regarding the songs that may be sung in the public worship of God must be answered, therefore, on the basis of the teaching of Scripture with respect to that specific element of worship.

When we address ourselves to the question of the teaching of Scripture we find that the New Testament does not provide us with copious instruction on this matter. It is for that reason that we are placed under the necessity of exercising great care lest we overstep the limits of divine authorization and warrant. This report will deal with the evidence that is directly germane to the question.

THE SCRIPTURE EVIDENCE

I. Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26. Here we are told that, on the occasion of the passover, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn before going out to the Mount of Olives. The Greek is *humnesantes*, which literally means "having hymned." The evidence available to us from other sources is to the effect of indicating that the hymn sung on this occasion was what is known as the Hallel, consisting of Psalms 113-118. This instance evinces the following facts.

(1) No warrant whatsoever can be adduced for the singing of uninspired hymns. There is no evidence that an uninspired hymn was sung on this occasion.

(2) The evidence we do possess evinces that Jesus and His disciples sang a portion of the psalter.

(3) The singing took place in connection with the celebration of the Old Testament sacrament of the Passover and the New Testament sacrament of the Lord's Supper. II. I Corinthians 14:15, 26. Paul is here dealing with the assembly of the saints for worship. He says, "I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also" (vs. 15), "Each one hath a psalm" (vs. 26). From the verb that Paul uses in verse 15 we might quite properly translate as follows: "I will sing a psalm with the spirit and I will sing a psalm with the understanding also," just as in verse 26 he says, "Each one hath a psalm." We must conclude, therefore, that psalms were sung in the church at Corinth and such singing has, by obvious implication, the apostle's sanction and is confirmed by his example.

The question does arise: What were these psalms? It is possible that they were charismatic psalms. If so, one thing is certain — they were not uninspired compositions. If charismatic they were inspired or given by the Holy Spirit. If we today possessed such charismatic

psalms, sung by the apostle himself in the assemblies of worship or sanctioned by him in the worship of the church, then we should have the proper authority for the use of them in the songs of the sanctuary. It so happens, however, that we do not have conclusive evidence to show that we have any of such alleged charismatic psalms. But even on the hypothesis that they were charismatic psalms and even on the hypothesis that we have examples of such in Acts 4:23-30, I Timothy 3:16, we are not thereby furnished with any authorization for the use of *uninspired* songs in the worship of God.

On the hypothesis that they were not charismatic psalms we have to ask, what were they? To answer this question we have simply to ask another: what songs in the usage of Scripture, fall into the category of psalms? There is one answer. The Book of Psalms is composed of psalms and, therefore, by the simplest principle of hermeneutics we can say that, in terms of Scripture language, the songs that are repeatedly called psalms perfectly satisfy the denotation and connotation of the word "psalm" as it is used here. If inspired Scripture says, "Each one hath a psalm," and Scripture also calls the "Psalms" psalms, then surely we may also sing a Psalm to the praise of God in His worship.

So far as these two texts are concerned we can say that they provide us with no warrant whatsoever for the use of *uninspired* hymns. We can also say that, since the psalms we possess in the psalter are certainly psalms in the terminology of Scripture itself, we are hereby provided with divine warrant for the singing of such in the worship of God.

III. Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16. With respect to these two texts it should be noted, first of all, that Paul is not necessarily referring to the public worship of God. The context does not make clear that Paul is confining himself here to exhortation that concerns the behaviour of believers in relation to one another in the assemblies of worship. Paul may very well be giving general exhortation. Indeed, the context in both passages would appear to show that he is exhorting to a certain kind of exercise in which believers should engage in reference to one another in the discharge of that mutual instruction and edification requisite to concerted advancement of one another's highest interests and of the glory of God.

This consideration does not, however remove these texts from relevancy to the question of the public worship of God. For, if Paul specifies psalms, hymns and Spiritual songs as the media through which believers may mutually promote the glory of God and one another's edification in those more generic Christian exercises, this fact has very close bearing upon the question

of the apostolically sanctioned and authorized media of praise to God in the more specific worship of the sanctuary. In other words, if the apostolically enjoined media or materials of song in the more generic exercises of worship are psalms, hymns and Spiritual songs, then surely nothing inferior to psalms, hymns and Spiritual songs would be enjoined for use in the more specific exercises of worship in the assemblies of the church. If psalms, hymns and Spiritual songs are the limits of the materials of song in praise of God in less formal acts of worship, how much more are they the limits in more formal acts of worship. With respect to these two texts the following considerations are to be borne in mind.

(1) We cannot determine the denotation or connotation of psalms, hymns and Spiritual songs by any modern usage of these same words. The meaning and reference must be determined by the usage of Scripture.

(2) Some of the facts with reference to the usage of Scripture are very significant.

The word *psalmos* (psalm) occurs some 94 times in the Greek Scriptures, that is to say, some 87 times in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament and 7 times in the New Testament. In the Septuagint some 78 of these instances are in the Book of Psalms. In the great majority of instances in the Book of Psalms, some 67 in all, it occurs in the titles of the Psalms. In three of the seven instances in the New Testament the word is unmistakably used with reference to the Psalms, in two instances in the phrase the "Book of Psalms" (*biblos psalmon*) and in the other instance with reference to the second Psalm. It is surely significant, therefore, that in some 70 of the 94 instances the reference is clearly to the Book of Psalms or to Psalms in the Book of Psalms.

The word *hymnos* (hymn) occurs some 19 times in the Greek Bible, 17 (?) times in the Old Testament and 2 times in the New (in the passages under consideration). Of the 17 Old Testament instances 13 occur in the Book of Psalms and 6 of these are in the titles. In the seven instances not occurring in the titles the reference is in each case to the praise of God, or to the songs of Sion. The other four instances in the other books of the Old Testament have likewise reference to the songs of praise to God.

The word *odee* (song) occurs some 86 times in the Greek Bible, some 80 times in the Old Testament and 6 times in the New. Apart from these two passages (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16), it occurs in the New Testament only in the Book of Revelation. Of the 80 occurrences in the Old Testament some 45 are in the Book of Psalms and 36 of these are in the titles of the Psalms.

It is surely apparent, therefore, how large a proportion

of the occurrences of these words is in the Book of Psalms. These facts of themselves do not prove that the reference here in Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16 is to the Book of Psalms exclusively. But these facts must not be forgotten as we proceed to determine the character of the lyrical compositions mentioned in these two texts.

(3) In the New Testament the word *psalmos* occurs seven times, as was just stated. Two of these instances are in the texts we are considering. One of these instances is I Cor. 14:26, a text dealt with already. Two instances (Luke 20:42, Acts 1:20) refer to the Book of Psalms (*biblos psalmon*). Luke 24:44 clearly refers to Old Testament inspired Scripture and probably to the Book of Psalms. Acts 13:33 refers to the second Psalm. In none of these instances is there any warrant for supposing that “psalms” refer to uninspired human compositions. In the majority, without the least shadow of doubt, the reference is to inspired Scripture.

In the New Testament the word *hymnos* occurs only in these two passages. The verb *hymneo* (to hymn) occurs four times (Matt. 26:30, Mark 14:26, Acts 16:25, Heb. 2:12). As we found already, the synoptic passages most probably refer to the singing of the Hallel by our Lord and His disciples. Acts 16:25 refers to the singing of Paul and Silas in prison. Hebrews 2:12 is a quotation from the Old Testament (Ps. 22:23) — *en meso ekklesias hymneso se*.

No evidence whatsoever can be adduced from the usage in support of the use of uninspired hymns.

Apart from these two instances the word *odee* occurs in the New Testament only in Rev. 5:9, 14:3(2), 15:3.

From the New Testament, then, no evidence can be derived to show that these words may be used here (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16) with reference to uninspired songs. Even though *odee* is used in the Book of Revelation with reference to songs other than those in the Book of Psalms it is not used there with reference to uninspired human compositions but with reference to inspired songs.

(4) We now come to the consideration of some facts which are even more significant than those already discussed. The Book of Psalms is composed of psalms, hymns and songs. We have already found that the overwhelming majority of the instances of these words in both Testaments has reference to the Book of Psalms. We now come to the discussion of the meaning of these words in the titles of the Psalms.

In the Septuagint *psalmos* occurs some 67 times in the titles to the Psalms. In most cases it is the translation of the Hebrew *mismor*, but in a few cases it translates other Hebrew words. *Psalmos* means simply “song of praise.” The frequency with which the word *psalmos*

occurs in the titles is probably the reason why the Book of Psalms is called in the LXX version simply *psalmoi*. In the Hebrew it is called *tehillim*.

It is perfectly obvious, therefore, that the New Testament writers, familiar as they were with the Old Testament in Greek, would necessarily have the Book of Psalms in mind when they used this word *psalmos*. There is no other piece of evidence that even begins to take on the significance for the meaning of the word “psalm” in the New Testament that this simple fact takes on, namely, that the Book of Psalms was called simply “Psalms” (*psalmoi*). The usage of the New Testament itself puts this beyond all doubt. There the Psalms are called the Book of Psalms.

There is nothing in the context of these two passages requiring us to regard “psalms” as referring to uninspired compositions. On the other hand, there are abundant instances in the usage of Scripture elsewhere which show that the word “psalm” refers to an inspired composition. Furthermore, there is no instance in which the word “psalm,” as used with reference to a song of praise to God, can be shown to refer to an uninspired song. It is therefore quite unwarranted to regard “psalms” in these two passages as referring to uninspired songs, whereas there is abundant warrant for regarding them as denoting inspired compositions. Consequently, if we are to follow the line of the evidence provided by the Scripture, we are forced to find the “psalms” here mentioned within the limits of inspiration.

As we found, the word *hymnos* appears some 17 times in the Septuagint version. In thirteen cases it appears in the Book of Psalms. In five or six cases it appears in the titles of the Psalms as the translation of the Hebrew *neginoth* or *neginah*. It is significant that on several occasions in the text of the Psalms *hymnos* translates the Hebrew word *tehillah* which is the word used to designate the Book of Psalms in the Hebrew. This shows that psalms may be called hymns and hymns are psalms. Psalms and hymns are not exclusive of one another. A psalm may be not only a psalm but also a hymn.

These facts show that when, in the usage of Scripture, we look for the type of composition meant by a “hymn,” we find it in the Psalms. And we have no evidence whatsoever that a hymn, in the usage of Scripture, ever designates an uninspired human composition.

The word *odee* occurs much more frequently in the titles of the Psalms than does the word *hymnos*, but not as frequently as does the word *psalmos*. There are some 36 instances. It usually translates the Hebrew word *shir* but not always. Occasionally it is the translation of *mismor*, the word generally translated by *psalmos*. *Odee*

occurs so frequently in the titles of the psalms that its meaning would be definitely influenced by that usage.

The conclusion to which we are driven then is that the frequency with which these words occur in that book of the Old Testament that is unique in this respect that it is a collection of songs composed at various times and by various inspired writers, the book that stands out distinctively and uniquely as composed of psalms, hymns and songs, would tend most definitely to fix the meaning of these words in the usage of the inspired writers. The case is simply this that beyond all dispute there is no other datum that compares with the significance of the language of the Septuagint in the resolution of this question. When taken in conjunction with the only positive evidence we have in the New Testament the evidence leads preponderantly to the conclusion that when Paul wrote “psalms, hymns and Spiritual songs” he would expect the minds of his readers to think of what were in the terms of Scripture itself, “psalms, hymns and Spiritual songs,” namely, the Book of Psalms.

(5) The evidence does not warrant the conclusion that the apostle meant by “psalms, hymns and Spiritual songs” to designate three distinct groups or types of lyrical compositions. It is significant in this connection that in a few cases in the titles of the Psalms all three of these words occur. In many cases the words “psalm” and “song” occur in the same title. This shows that a lyrical composition may be a psalm, hymn and song at the same time.

The words, of course, have their own distinctive meanings and such distinctive meanings may intimate the variety and richness of the materials of song the apostle has in mind. Paul uses three words that in the established usage of Scripture designate the rich variety of such lyrical compositions as were suited for the worship of God in the service of song.

(6) Paul specifies the character of the songs as “Spiritual” — *odais pneumatikais*. If anything should be obvious from the use of the word *pneumatikos* in the New Testament it is that it has reference to the Holy Spirit and means, in such contexts as the present, “given by the Spirit.” Its meaning is not at all, as Trench contends, “such as were composed by spiritual men, and moved in the sphere of spiritual things” (*Synonyms*, lxxviii). It rather means, as Meyer points out, “proceeding from the Holy Spirit, as *theopneustos*” (Com. on Eph. 5:19). In this context the word would mean “indited by the Spirit,” just as in I Corinthians 2:13 *logois . . . pneumatikois* are “words inspired by the Spirit” and “taught by the Spirit” (*didaktois pneumatos*).

The question, of course, arises: why does the word

pneumatikos qualify *odais* and not *psalmois* and *hymnois*? A reasonable answer to this question is that *pneumatikais* qualifies all three datives and that its gender (fem.) is due to attraction to the gender of the noun that is closest to it. Another distinct possibility, made particularly plausible by the omission of the copulative in Colossians 3:16, is that “Spiritual songs” are the genus of which “psalms” and “hymns” are the species. This is the view of Meyer, for example.

On either of these assumptions the psalms, hymns and songs are all “Spiritual” and therefore all inspired by the Holy Spirit. The bearing of this upon the question at issue is perfectly apparent. Uninspired hymns are immediately excluded.

But we shall have to allow for the distinct possibility that the word “Spiritual,” in the grammatical structure of the clause, is confined to the word “songs.” On this hypothesis the “songs” are characterized as “Spiritual,” and therefore characterized as inspired or indited by the Holy Spirit. This, at least, should be abundantly clear.

The question would arise then: is it merely the “songs” that need to be inspired while the “psalms” and “hymns” may be uninspired? The asking of the question shows the unreasonableness of such a hypothesis, especially when we bear in mind all that has already been shown with reference to the use of these words. On what conceivable ground would Paul have insisted that the “songs” needed to be divinely inspired while the “psalms” and “hymns” did not need to be? In the usage of Scripture there was no hard and fast line of distinction between psalms and hymns, on the one hand, and songs on the other. It would be quite impossible to find any good ground for such discrimination in the apostolic prescription.

The unreasonableness of such a supposition appears all the more conclusive when we remember the Scripture usage with respect to the word “psalms.” There is not the least bit of evidence to suppose that in such usage on the part of the apostle “psalm” could mean an uninspired human composition. All the evidence, rather, goes to establish the opposite conclusion.

We see then that psalms are inspired. Songs are inspired because they are characterized as “Spiritual.” What then about the hymns? May they be uninspired? As already indicated, it would be an utterly unreasonable hypothesis to maintain that the apostle would require that songs be inspired while psalms and hymns might not. This becomes all the more cogent when we recognize as we have established, that the psalms and songs were inspired. It would indeed be strange discrimination if hymns might be uninspired and psalms

and songs inspired. But it would be strange to the point of absurdity if Paul should be supposed to insist that songs had to be inspired but hymns not. For what distinction can be drawn between a hymn and a song that would make it requisite for the latter to be inspired while the former might not be? We, indeed, cannot be sure that there is any distinction so far as actual *denotation* is concerned. Even if we do maintain the distinct colour of each word there is no discoverable reason why so radical a distinction as that between inspiration and non-inspiration could be maintained.

The only conclusion we can arrive at then is that “hymns” in Eph 5:19, Col. 3:16 must be accorded the same “Spiritual” quality as is accorded to “psalms” by obvious implication and to “songs” by express qualification, and that this was taken for granted by the apostle, either because the word “Spiritual” would be regarded as qualifying all three words, or because “Spiritual songs” were the genus of which “psalms” and “hymns” were the species, or because in the usage of the church “hymns” like “psalms” would be recognized in their own right and because of the context in which they are mentioned to be in no other category, as respects their “Spiritual” quality, than the category occupied by psalms and songs.

In reference to these two passages, then, we are compelled to conclude:

(a) There is no warrant for thinking that “psalms, hymns and Spiritual songs” can refer to uninspired human compositions. These texts provide us with no authorization whatsoever for the singing of uninspired songs in the worship of God.

(b) There is warrant for concluding that “psalms, hymns and Spiritual songs” refer to inspired compositions. These texts provide us, therefore, with warrant for the singing of inspired songs in the worship of God.

(c) The Book of Psalms provides us with psalms, hymns and songs that are inspired and therefore with the kind of compositions referred to in Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

This survey of the evidence derived from Scripture shows, in the judgment of the minority, that there is no evidence from Scripture that can be adduced to warrant the singing of uninspired human compositions in the public worship of God. The report of the committee maintains that we do have warrant for the use of such songs. The minority is well aware of the plausibility of the arguments of the committee, to wit, the argument drawn from the analogy of prayer and the argument

drawn from the necessity of expanding the content of song to keep pace with the expansion of the revelation given in the New Testament. The former of these arguments has been dealt with in the earlier part of this report. The latter is much more cogent. There are, however, two considerations that require to be mentioned by way of answer.

(i) We have no evidence either from the Old Testament or from the New that the expansion of revelation received expression in the devotional exercise of the church through the singing of uninspired songs of praise. This is a fact that cannot be discounted. If we possessed evidence that in the Old Testament period the church gave expression to revelation as it progressed by the singing of uninspired songs in the worship of God, then the argument from analogy would be rather conclusive, especially in view of the relative silence of the New Testament. But no evidence has been produced to prove the use of *uninspired* songs in the worship of the Old Testament. Or, if instances of the use of *uninspired* songs in the worship of the New Testament could be adduced, then the argument of the committee would be established. But the very cases adduced by the committee to show that there was an expansion of song in the New Testament do not show that *uninspired* songs were employed. Hence we are compelled to conclude that, since there is no evidence to show the use of *uninspired* songs in the practice of the church in the New Testament, the argument of the committee cannot plead authorization from the Scriptures. The church of God must in this matter, as in all other matters concerned with the actual content of worship, confine itself to the limits of Scripture authorization, and it is the contention of the minority that we do not possess evidence on the basis of which to plead the use of *uninspired* songs in the public worship of God.

The argument of the committee that “the New Testament deals with conditions in the early church which have not been continued and which cannot be our present norm” fails to take due account of the normative character of Scripture. It is true that we today do not have the gift of inspiration and, therefore, we cannot compose inspired songs. But the Scripture does prescribe for us the way in which we are to worship God in the conditions that are permanent in the church. And since the Scripture does warrant and prescribe the use of inspired songs but does not warrant the use of uninspired songs, we are to restrict ourselves to those inspired materials made available to us by the Scripture itself. In other words, the Scripture does not provide us with any warrant for the exercising of those gifts the

church now possesses in the composition of the actual content of song.

(ii) If the argument drawn from the expansion of revelation is applied within the limits of Scripture authorization, then the utmost that can be established is the use of New Testament songs or of New Testament materials adapted to singing. Principally the minority is not jealous to insist that New Testament songs may not be used in the worship of God. What we are most jealous to maintain is that Scripture does authorize the use of *inspired* songs, that is, Scripture songs, and that the singing of other than Scripture songs in the worship of God has no warrant from the Word of God and is therefore forbidden.

On the basis of these studies the minority respectfully submits to the Fourteenth General Assembly the following conclusions:

1. There is no warrant in Scripture for the use of un-inspired human compositions in the singing of God's praise in public worship.

2. There is explicit authority for the use of inspired songs.

3. The songs of divine worship must therefore be limited to the songs of Scripture, for they alone are inspired.

4. The Book of Psalms does provide us with the kind of compositions for which we have the authority of Scripture.

5. We are therefore certain of divine sanction and approval in the singing of the Psalms.

6. We are not certain that other inspired songs were intended to be sung in the worship of God, even though the use of other inspired songs does not violate the fundamental principle on which Scripture authorization is explicit, namely, the use of inspired songs.

7. In view of uncertainty with respect to the use of other inspired songs, we should confine ourselves to the Book of Psalms.

Respectfully submitted,

John Murray
William Young



John Murray (from Burton Goddard). Used with the permission of the Archives of the Montgomery Library at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia PA.