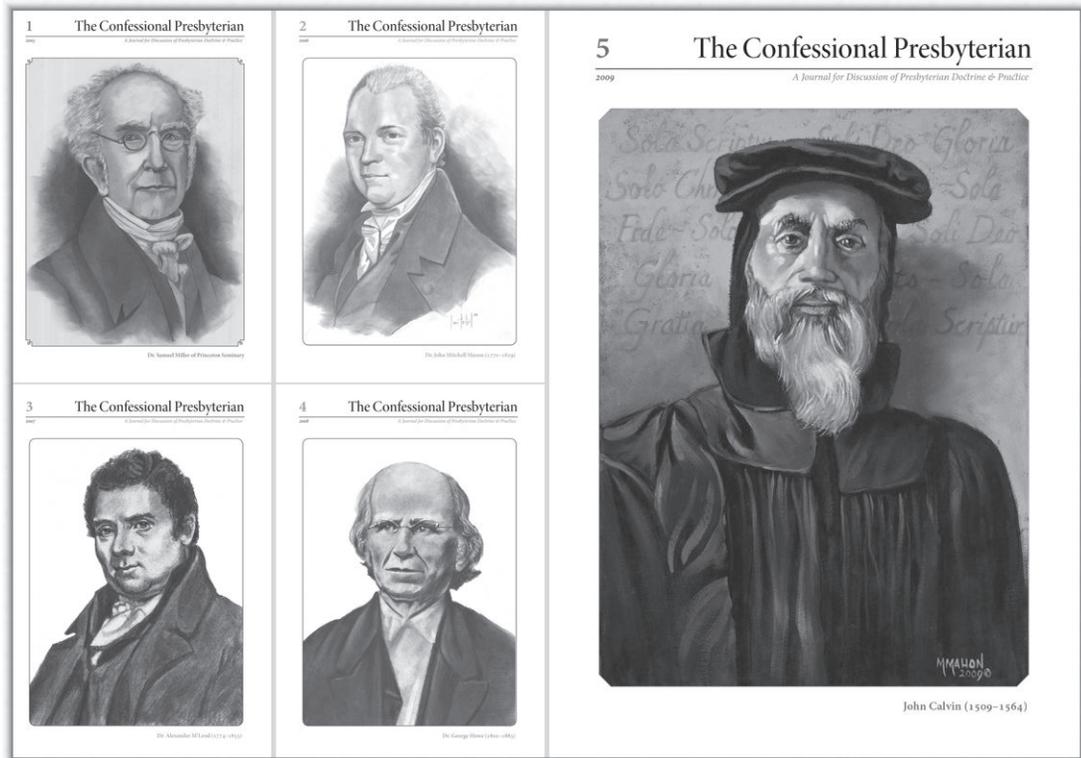


The Confessional Presbyterian

A Journal for Discussion of Presbyterian Doctrine & Practice

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Westminster and Worship Examined: A Review of Nick Needham's essay on the Westminster Confession of Faith's teaching concerning the regulative principle, the singing of psalms, and the use of musical instruments in the public worship of God. *By Matthew Winzer. An Extract From The Confessional Presbyterian (2008) 253–266.*

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EDITORIAL

The space required to detail the wonderful and varied contents of this the fourth and largest installment yet of *The Confessional Presbyterian* journal, has not left much room for editorial comment! We commend all of it, and particularly note with thanks permission to reprint Guy Richard's *Samuel Ruth-*

erford's Supralapsarianism Revealed, which appeared some years ago in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, and note as well that the T. & J. Swords series in *Antiquary*, is concluded in this issue. Unhappily, the John Brown of Wamphray on Psalmody must wait to complete in a future volume under a new translator; meantime, Dr. Richard was also most kind in providing an extract from Samuel Rutherford's *Examen Arminianismi* on the subject of the civil magistrate as an *In Translatiōne* entry for this issue. Dr. Frank J. Smith's work reviewing material on Reformed worship will continue as the Lord wills in

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Front Cover: George Howe (1802–1883), Professor of Biblical Literature, Columbia Seminary. Graphite and charcoal on bristol, Copyright © 2008 by Mike Mahon.

Back Cover: The East Prospect of the Abby of St. Peter & of the Parish Church of St. Margaret, Westminster, by Benjamin Cole (fl. 1723–1767). Published in William Maitland, *The History and Survey of London* (London: 1756).

Although the conference organizers would deny this, the approach engendered is reminiscent of contemporary appeals in the political realm to “justice” and “fairness”—concepts that are cut off from the specific definition of, say, a Constitution, or particular moral teaching; concepts that can then be twisted into any shape desired. The fact that the presentations were couched in honeyed tones does not negate the implicit attacks upon those who would want to maintain full subscription to the Westminster Standards.

But perhaps even more basically, the whole approach calls into question a commitment to objective theological and ecclesiastical standards. The attack on Dabney is really an attack on systematic theology per se. It is a surrender to a re-framing that discounts the objective nature of the theological enterprise, and posits rather that “theology is application.”

The conference generated some discussion on blogs. The reader’s attention is particularly called to the comments of Bryan Cross, a former student at the PCA’s national seminary (Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis) who later converted to Roman Catholicism. He was largely encouraged by the presentations. He also made the following observation: “During Bill Boyd’s talk, I was sitting about two pews ahead of Bryan Chappell [sic], the President of Covenant Theological Seminary, and I heard him lean over to somebody next to him and say, ‘This is not your father’s PCA.’ I concur. For me, it was a kind of PCA ‘aggiornamento’, a call to think more broadly than the limits of a particular ecclesial ‘ghetto.’” (See “*Denominational Renewal*,” Part 1, Thursday, May 1, 2008, available on-line at <http://principiumunitatis.blogspot.com/2008/05/denominational-renewal-part-1.html>.)¹⁹

SUMMARY

Most of the authors whose books are reviewed in this article manifest an appalling lack of Biblical fidelity. Most distressing is the reality that among the worst offenders are popular writers in the Reformed community, such as John Frame and R.C. Sproul. There are numerous places where many of these authors either do not understand or do not deal with the historic Reformed understanding of worship, as exemplified in what has become known as the regulative principle of worship.

One of the benefits of, say, the book by Robert Dickie, is that we can point to it as an example of how someone with whom we do not totally agree theologically, has nevertheless grasped the fact that much of what passes today for worship is not worthy of the name. However, while a book such as his may be useful, and while someone could glean some good from it, there can also be a danger—that of being content with what we might describe as “Reformed lite.” Placing his material in the hands of novices or immature believers may assist them in resisting the temptation of contemporary worship.

But it may also result in their being immunized against the Puritan approach set forth in the Westminster Standards. Therefore, caution is urged in its use.

Rowland Ward’s contribution in dealing with the Westminster Assembly’s Directory for Public Worship is useful and represents on-going scholarly interest and development. However, his peculiar take on the Assembly’s view of the content of worship song leaves much to be desired.

The blogs we reviewed give evidence of a wide spectrum of opinion—from general sympathy for and support of the historic Reformed approach to worship, to a vitriolic attack upon that view.

As we concluded in last year’s *Confessional Presbyterian*, there is a continuing interest in the doctrine of worship and the regulative principle. But, as we also noted, there is much misunderstanding and confusion, with no sign of their dissipating. Some of the so-called experts clearly are simply ignorant. It is possible that others, through their employment of confusing terms and straw-man arguments, know only too well what they are doing. In any case, may God have mercy on all of us, that we may be enabled to fear Him and to worship Him in Spirit and in truth.

FRANK J. SMITH, PH.D., D.D. ■

REVIEW: Nick Needham, ‘Westminster and worship: psalms, hymns, and musical instruments,’ In *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, 2, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005). 540 pages. ISBN 978-1-857-92878-5. \$37.99. Reviewed by Matthew Winzer, Grace Presbyterian Church (Australian Free Church), Rockhampton, Queensland, Australia.

WESTMINSTER AND WORSHIP EXAMINED: A Review of Nick Needham’s essay on the Westminster Confession of Faith’s teaching concerning the regulative principle, the singing of psalms, and the use of musical instruments in the public worship of God.

An attempt has recently been made by Nick Needham “to give an accurate historical judgment relating to the [Westminster] Assembly’s views and deliverances relating to exclusive

19. According to Wikipedia, “aggiornamento” means “bringing up to date,” and “was one of the key words used during the Second Vatican Council both by bishops and clergy attending the sessions, and by the media and Vaticanologists covering it. It was used to mean a spirit of change, openness, openmindedness and modernity.” Further, “The rival term used was *ressourcement* which meant a return to earlier sources, traditions and symbols of the early Church.”

psalmody and non-instrumental worship.”¹ If, however, one were expecting to find a detailed examination of the writings of the divines, he would be sorely disappointed. Throughout the article reference is made to only one fragment of writing from a member of the Assembly; all other quotations are taken from the statements of individual Puritans who neither attended the Westminster Assembly nor spoke specifically to the issue of exclusive psalmody. Moreover, no use has been made of the valuable historical material to be found in the writings of those members who have provided some sketches of its proceedings. Given this regrettable state of affairs, it must be said that the article fails in its attempt to provide an accurate historical judgment on the Assembly’s views. Whoever is the rightful possessor of the views Mr. Needham has represented, they have not been shown to belong to the Westminster Assembly.

The Regulative Principle Of Worship.

The author begins with a clear explanation of the regulative principle of worship as taught in chapter 21.1 of the Confession. He correctly notes that the Confession uses the word *worship* “in the specific sense of performing acts whose basic and primary function is to express honour and veneration towards God” (*Westminster*, 224). As such it is to be distinguished from a wider definition of the word which considers all of life as worship. He then summarises the Confession’s statement as to the way God is to be worshipped: “God must be worshipped in ways He Himself has authorized in Scripture” (227). It is shown how this view differs from the Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Anglican position, which maintains that the church has power to decree ceremonies to a greater or lesser degree (229). He then turns to the Westminster Catechisms (Larger and Shorter) to clarify the meaning of the Confession and to confirm its insistence that worship must be instituted by God Himself (231–232).

1. J. Ligon Duncan, *The Westminster Confession into the 21st century*, 2, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005) xiii. Hereafter referred to as *Westminster*.

2. For example, J. I. Packer writes, “To them, there could be no real spiritual understanding, or any genuine godliness, except as men exposed and enslaved their consciences to God’s Word.”—‘The Puritan Conscience’ in *Puritan Papers 2* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2001) 238.

3. *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994 rpt.) 86.

4. Ministers of Sion College, London, *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici* (1646; 1654; Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 1995) 7. The Naphtali Press edition is a critical edition which notes the differences between the first and third edition of the *Jus Divinum*.

5. C.f. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel-Worship: or, the Right Manner of Sanctifying the Name of God in General* (London, Printed by Peter Cole, 1658) 8: “in God’s Worship there must be nothing tending up to God but what he hath commanded; whatsoever we meddle with in the Worship of God, it must be what we have a Warrant for out of the Word of God.”

In this part of the author’s presentation one would have expected to have seen some discussion of the Confession’s teaching of the regulative principle in relation to liberty of conscience. Chapter 20.2 provides a treatment of the subject under this important heading, which is acknowledged by historians to be fundamental to the way the Puritans understood religion.² This section of the Confession states, “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 matters of faith or worship.”³ The fact that a certain practice is not contrary to the Scriptures does not justify its use in worship to God; it must be positively taught in the Word as something that is required of the individual by God Himself. If it is not required by God in His Word then it is forbidden.

Given the importance of worshipping God according to true liberty of conscience, it becomes necessary to define what a divine institution is. According to a Presbyterian manifesto written by the ministers of Sion College at the time the Assembly was sitting, it is only what “can be proved by Scripture to have this stamp of divine warrant and authority set upon them” that “may properly be said to be *jure divino* [by divine right], and by the will and appointment of Jesus Christ.” “*Jus divinum* [a divine right] is the highest and best Tenure, whereby the Church can hold of Christ any Doctrine, Worship, or Government. Only God can stamp such a *jus divinum* upon any of these things, whereby Conscience shall be obliged.”⁴ It does not suffice that an act of worship can be justified on the basis of Scriptural principles; this only constitutes a normative principle which is applicable to all of life. Faithful exegesis is required, whereby a *divine right* must be established from the Word of God for the introduction of a particular action or function into the worship and government of the church. Such an action must be shown to be (1) “above and contradicting from all human power and created authority whatsoever;” (2) “beyond all just, human or created power, to abolish or oppose the same;” and (3) “so obligatory unto all Churches in the whole Christian world that they ought uniformly to submit themselves unto it in all the Substantials of it so far as is possible” (*Jus Divinum*, 7). This divine warrant⁵ can only be discovered by an interpretative process which takes into account the obligatory examples, divine approbation, divine acts and divine precepts of holy Scripture (13–35).

It should be noted that this *divine right* is required even for the smallest details of God’s worship. This is a point on which all the Westminster divines were agreed, Presbyterian and Independent alike. The Scottish commissioner, Samuel Rutherford, stated the claim of the smallest matters on the conscience of the worshipper:

We urge the immutability of Christ's Laws, as well in the smallest as greatest things, though the Commandments of Christ be greater or less in regard of the intrinsic matter; as to use water in Baptism or to Baptise is less than to Preach Christ and believe in him, 1 Cor. 1.17, yet they are both alike great, in regard of the Authority of Christ the Commander, Matt. 28.18, 19. And it's too great boldness to alter any commandment of Christ for the smallness of the matter, for it lieth upon our conscience, not because it is a greater or a lesser thing, and hath degrees of obligatory necessity lying in it for the matter; but it tieth us for the Authority of the Law-giver.⁶

In a similar vein, Jeremiah Burroughs, the English Independent, made it a noteworthy point that,

In the matters of Worship, God stands upon little things. Such things as seem to be very small and little to us, yet God stands much upon them in the matter of Worship. For there is nothing wherein the Prerogative of God doth more appear than in Worship.

He proceeded to explain,

Now God hath written the Law of natural Worship in our hearts, as that we should love God, fear God, trust in God, and pray to God: this God hath written in our hearts. But there are other things in the Worship of God that are not written in our hearts, that only depend upon the Will of God revealed in his Word. And these are of such a nature as we can see no reason for but only this, because God will have them.... God would have some waies for the honouring of him, that the Creature should not see into the reason of them, but meerly the Will of God to have them so (Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel-Worship*, 11).

This Puritan emphasis on human conscience being subject to the authority of God alone means that every action offered to God in formal worship, whether it be a small or a great action, requires a divine warrant in order that the conscience may offer it in faith to God. Worship is an act of bowing to His sovereign authority. There is no genuine honour given to the divine Name where there is not implicit submission to the divine Will; there is no place for human creativity in the worship of the Almighty. True worshippers are receptive, not creative; they attend on the Most High God and await His Word before they do anything in His court.

It is regrettable that Mr. Needham represents the regulative principle as allowing a certain degree of sanctified creativity and freedom in the worship of God. He writes,

The principle is rigid and inflexible, and does rule out creativity (sanctified or otherwise), as far as the ingredients of our worship are concerned; but it equally allows us a measure of Christian liberty in the exact way that we mix or combine those ingredients. Form and freedom are both provided for (*Westminster*, 240).

He finds this freedom in what the Confession (chapter 1.6) calls "circumstances concerning the worship of God ... 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." Mr. Needham considers that "in the realm of circumstance, 'Whatever is not forbidden is lawful, if it is edifying'" (284).

Do circumstances, as defined by the Confession of Faith, give freedom to practice things which edify if they are not forbidden by Scripture? The answer is a definite *no*. That which edifies is by nature a religious action and must therefore be deemed to be a part of worship. Genuine circumstances are non-religious and merely facilitate the performing of that action which God has prescribed. Samuel Rutherford further elucidates this necessary point:

In actions or Religious means of Worship, and actions Morall, whatever is beside the Word of God is against the Word of God; I say in Religious means, for there be means of Worship, or Circumstances Physicall, not Morall, not Religious, as whether the Pulpit be of stone or of timber, the Bell of this or this Metall, the house of Worship stand thus or thus in Situation.⁷

A circumstance therefore is nothing more than a means of worship without any religious significance whatsoever. It is that without which the action as an action could not be performed. It is an *adjunct* which incidentally accompanies the worship rather than an *addition* which qualitatively affects the worship.⁸ That which edifies is not an *adjunct* but an *addition* to the worship of God.

Another Scottish commissioner to the Assembly, George Gillespie, also carefully distinguished between "common circumstances and sacred ceremonies" in a sermon before the House of Commons:

I know the Church must observe rules of order and conveniency in the common circumstances of Times, Places,

6. Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (London: printed by John Field, 1646) 19, 20.

7. Samuel Rutherford, *Divine Right*, 119. The pagination is disordered and should read 109.

8. See William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (London: Edward Griffin for Henry Overton, 1642) 318: "the circumstances of place, time, and the like," are "common adjuncts to religious and civil acts."

and Persons; but these circumstances are none of our holy things: they are only prudentiall accommodations, which are alike common to all humane Societies, both Civill and Ecclesiasticall; wherein both are directed by the same light of nature, the common rule to both in all things of that kinde; providing alwayes, that the generall rules of the Word bee observed.⁹

In language virtually identical to the Confession's statement relating to circumstances, George Gillespie here makes the same two points as Samuel Rutherford. First, "these circumstances are none of our holy things," meaning that they have no religious value; and secondly, "they are only prudentiall accommodations," that is, convenient means for carrying out the action required by God.

It is clear that Mr. Needham has gone too far in claiming that circumstances are such as are edifying and not forbidden in Scripture. This effectively creates a class of religious actions which are *beside* the word in matters of faith and worship, contrary to the limiting principle of worship as articulated by the Westminster Confession, chapter 20.2 and 21.1. He allows for human creativity in contrast to the Confession's explicit statement forbidding men to assume this prerogative which belongs to God alone.

Singing Of Psalms.

In his treatment of the singing of psalms, Mr. Needham correctly notes "that the acts of worship the Confession explicitly authorizes are the only acts for which it finds scriptural justification" (*Westminster*, 247). He also observes that "The third ingredient of worship mentioned in Confession 21.5 is 'singing of psalms with grace in the heart'" (248). It is pointed out that *The Directory for the Publick Worship of God* contains a section entitled, "Of Singing of Psalms," and the conclusion is reached that "There can be no controversy then, that the Westminster documents regard psalm-singing as a divinely authorized act of Christian worship" (248).

Given this clear statement that psalm-singing is a divinely authorized *act of Christian worship*, it comes as something of a surprise when the author later asserts that "The authorized act of worship is to sing praises to God. What we sing—the

genre of song—then comes into the category of circumstance" (284). The Confession has clearly maintained that "psalms" are the matter to be sung in worship as plainly as it has stated that the Scriptures are the matter to be read in worship. Nevertheless, Mr. Needham feels the liberty to say that the matter of sung praise is a mere circumstance of worship. He no doubt finds this freedom in his idiosyncratic idea that the regulative principle allows for sanctified creativity in things which edify, even if such things are not positively instituted by the word of God; but it has already been shown that this concept is contrary to the Confession; the Confession teaches that anything which is offered to God in worship requires a divine warrant. *What* is sung in worship is undoubtedly intended to express honour and veneration towards God; therefore *the matter* of sung praise is a part of the instituted worship of God.

The Historical-contextual Interpretation of "Singing of Psalms" in the Westminster formularies.

Much of the author's treatment of "singing of psalms" is concerned with showing that seventeenth century writers used the word "psalms" to refer to compositions other than the Old Testament book of Psalms. This compels him "to think twice before presuming that 'psalms' in the Westminster Confession obviously and exclusively mean the psalms of David" (250). A little later in the essay he becomes more bold and declares that exclusive psalmody is "the least probable" historical-contextual interpretation of the reference to "singing of psalms" in Confession 21.5 (280, 281). It is finally maintained that a plausible interpretation is, "That it is lawful to sing any spiritually edifying material" including extra-scriptural hymns (281).

The critical question which naturally arises at this point is whether Mr. Needham has evaluated the appropriate historical context? Is the broader seventeenth century context a sufficient indication of the movements at work in the Westminster Assembly?

It should be considered that the Parliament called the Assembly with the resolution to bring the Church of England into "nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland, and other Reformed Churches abroad."¹⁰ Subsequently "The Solemn League and Covenant" made it a point of avowed duty before God that the Churches of God in the three kingdoms of Scotland, England and Ireland be brought "to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church-government, *directory for worship* and catechising; that we, and our posterity after us, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us."¹¹ The Assembly's proceedings were part and parcel of that great movement known to history as "the second reformation." Its transactions cannot therefore be considered as maintaining the seventeenth century status quo, but must be seen in the light of this solemn self-imposed

9. George Gillespie, *A Sermon Preached Before the Honourable House of Commons at their late solemne fast, Wednesday, March 27, 1644* (London: Printed for Robert Boſtock, 1644) 29. The phrase, "common circumstances and sacred ceremonies," is from the margin.

10. 'An Ordinance of the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, for the calling of an Assembly,' etc, 'June 12, 1643,' in *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1994 rpt.) 13.

11. 'The Solemn League and Covenant,' in *Westminster Confession*, 359. Emphasis added.

obligation to reform the worship of the church according to the word of God.

Given this impetus to bring the Church of England into a uniformity with the Church of Scotland, it is of first importance to ascertain what the Church of Scotland understood by the expression “singing of psalms” when used in the context of the ordinary parts of public worship.

According to the 1641 “Government and Order of the Church of Scotland”—usually attributed to Alexander Henderson, who would later serve as a commissioner to the Westminster Assembly—“The publike worship beginneth with prayer, and reading some portion of holy Scripture both of the Old and New Testament, which the people hear with attention and reverence, and after reading, the whole Congregation joyneth in singing some Psalm.” The Order goes on to mention another two times when the Psalms are sung in the public service, namely, after the reading and prefacing of the Scriptures and prior to the closing benediction.¹²

From this description of ordinary religious worship it is not made clear what is meant by “singing some Psalm,” but the historical record shows that the Psalms of David in Metre were the only songs authorised to be used in public worship. The matter has been thoroughly investigated by the able Scottish church historian, David Hay Fleming, who gathered the relevant witnesses together and showed conclusively that human additions to worship-song were “disallowed as a Prelatic innovation,” and “that human hymns were not used in God’s public worship at the second Reformation.”¹³ It is needless to reduplicate this evidence as Mr. Needham acknowledges that “In actual liturgical practice, the Reformed Church of Scotland was exclusively psalm-singing” (*Westminster*, 274). So it is clear that when the 1641 “Order of the Church of Scotland” says that “the whole Congregation joyneth in singing some Psalm,” it undoubtedly means to refer to the Psalms of David as then used by the Church of Scotland.

Now, considering the reforming resolution of the Parliament to bring the Church of England into nearer uniformity with the practice of the Church of Scotland, the “singing of psalms” mentioned in both the Confession and Directory might naturally be understood to refer to the Psalms of David as authorised and sung in the Church of Scotland. The historical context at least points in this direction; some corroborating evidence is required to show that the Westminster Assembly did in fact make moves to adopt the Scottish practice. This evidence is to be found in the Assembly’s work on a Psalter which included a metrical version of the Old Testament book of Psalms and nothing else.¹⁴

The Work and Proceedings of the Westminster Assembly.

As early as October, 1643, Robert Baillie indicates that the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly went

up to London with the following prospect: “it is liklie that one of the points of our conference will be anent a new Psalter.”¹⁵ The commissioners were not disappointed. On 20 November, 1643, the House of Commons resolved

That the Assembly of Divines be desired to give their Advice, whether it may not be useful and profitable to the Church, that the Psalms, set forth by Mr. Rous, be permitted to be publickly sung, the same being read before singing, until the Books be more generally dispersed.¹⁶

This resolution, besides initiating work on the new Psalter, also shows that the materials to be used in the worship-song of the Church of England at this time were those “permitted to be publickly sung,” and that the view of the Westminster divines was consulted as to what materials would be fit for this purpose.

The Assembly’s reception of Parliament’s resolution was recorded by John Lightfoot:

Wednesday, Nov. 22.—The first thing done this morning was, that Sir Benjamin Rudyard brought an order from the House of Commons, wherein they require our advice, whether Mr. Rous’s Psalms may not be sung in churches; and this being debated, it was at last referred to the three committees, to take every one fifty psalms.¹⁷

The Assembly did not take their commission lightly, but proceeded immediately to examine Rous’ Psalms for their fitness to be authorised for use in the Church of England.

In relation to undertaking to revise the Psalms of Rous, the Assembly Minutes record an important statement by Alexander Henderson, which connects this Psalm book to the Assembly’s work on a directory of worship as well as to the proposed uniform practice of the churches of Scotland and England:

Mr Hinderson: We had a psalme booke offered to our church made by Lord Sterling, but we would preferre this [Rous’ Psal-

12. Alexander Henderson, *The Government and Order of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Printed for James Bryson, 1641) 15–17.

13. David Hay Fleming, ‘The hymnology of the Scottish reformation,’ in *Shorter Writings of David Hay Fleming*, volume 1 (Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 2007) 49.

14. See S. W. Carruthers, *The every day work of the Westminster Assembly* (Greenville, S.C.: Reformed Academic Press, 1994) 161–167, for a brief account of this forgotten aspect of the Assembly’s work.

15. Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, ed. David Laing, volume 2 (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1841–1842) 101.

16. ‘House of Commons Journal, volume 3: 20 November 1643,’ *Journal of the House of Commons*, volume 3: 1643–1644 (1802) 315–317. URL: <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=8111>.

17. John Lightfoot, ‘Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly of Divines,’ in *Whole Works*, volume 13 (London, J. F. Dove, 1824) 60.

ter] to that, for I have seene it. Well done to revise the booke & if it come to a directory of worship, that ther might be uniformity in that in the whole Island....¹⁸

This record should not go unnoticed, for it shows that the mention of a Psalm book in the final draft of the Directory for Public Worship had a specific referent in mind, namely, a metricated version of the Old Testament book of Psalms.

Little is recorded concerning the Assembly's deliberations on the Psalter. Robert Baillie has noted that "Mr. Nye spoke much against a tie to any Psalter, and somewhat against the singing of paraphrases, as of preaching homilies; we, understand, will mightily oppose it: for the Psalter is a great part of our uniformity which we cannot let pass until our church be well advised with it" (Baillie, *Letters*, 2.121). It appears from this notice that some of the extreme opinions of the separatists found their way into the Assembly via Philip Nye. They had become so vehemently opposed to the Book of Common Prayer that they would have nothing uninspired in the worship service, not even paraphrases of the Psalms. Robert Baillie's personal opinion reflected the mind of the Scottish commissioners that the Psalter was an essential ingredient in that uniformity of worship which was sought in the Solemn League and Covenant.¹⁹

Some further notices of the Assembly's work reveal that their labours on the Psalter were concerned with accurately reflecting the original Hebrew of the Old Testament Psalms and excluded anything which did not keep closely to the text. John Lightfoot's Journal entry for December 22, 1643, records, "Mr. Gibson proposed, that a select committee of Hebricians might be chosen, to consult with Mr. Rous upon the Psalms, from Psalm to Psalm, for the solidity of the work, and the honour of the Assembly" (Lightfoot, *Journal*, 90). Robert Baillie reports that the new translation of the Psalms excluded the uninspired doxology, or conclusion, "resolving to keep punctuallie to the originall text, without any addition." He adds that all parties were content to omit it because it was

18. As quoted in Chad Van Dixhoorn, "Reforming the Reformation: Theological debate at the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1652," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2004, Volume 4 [Appendix B: Minutes of the Westminster Assembly volume 1, Folios 198v-441v (17 November 1643 to 11 April 1644)], page 344.

19. For Robert Baillie's description of the separatists' disorders in singing during public worship, see his *Dissuasive from the Errors of the Time* (London: Printed for Samuel Gellibrand, 1646) 118, 119, where he exposes their practice of allowing an individual to "sing the hymne which himselfe had composed."

20. "January 1645: An Ordinance for taking away the Book of Common Prayer, and for establishing and putting in execution of the Directory for the publique worship of God," *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660* (1911) 582-607. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=56006>.

21. "The Directory for the Publick Worship of God," in *Westminster Confession*, 393.

an addition whereupon "the Popish and Prelaticall partie did so much dote" (Baillie, *Letters*, 2.259). The divines were not prepared to include any matter in their covenanted psalm book which did not adhere closely to the inspired text.

While work on the Psalter steadily proceeded, the Directory for Public Worship was completed by the divines and presented to the Parliament, whereupon the following ordinance was passed:

The Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, taking into serious consideration the manifold inconveniences that have arisen by the Book of Common-Prayer in this Kingdome, and resolving, according to their Covenant, to reform Religion according to the Word of God, and the Example of the best Reformed Churches, have consulted with the Reverend, Pious, and Learned Divines called together to that purpose; And do judge it necessary, that the said Book of Common-Prayer be abolished, and the Directory for the Publique Worship of God, herein after mentioned, be established and observed in all the Churches within this Kingdome.²⁰

The ordinance indicates, first, that the Parliament was acting in accord with its covenanted commitment to uniformity in religion; secondly, it was following through on its resolution to follow the example of the best Reformed Churches; and thirdly, that what the Assembly of divines had concluded with respect to the public worship of God was to be universally implemented throughout the churches of the kingdom.

As already noted, the Directory for Worship contains a section on the singing of psalms. In this section it is written, "That the whole congregation may join herein, every one that can read is to have a psalm book; and all others, not disabled by age or otherwise, are to be exhorted to learn to read."²¹ It has been shown that Parliament made provision for this psalm book in directing the divines to give consideration to the suitability of Rous' psalms. At the very time the Directory was passed and enacted the divines were still completing the examination and alteration of this Psalter. In the absence of any other provision, the most logical conclusion is that the Directory's mention of "a psalm book" is a reference to the Psalms of David in Metre which they were in the process of finalising.

The psalm book was finally completed on November 13, 1645, and sent up by the Assembly to the House of Commons with this resolution:

Ordered—That whereas the Hon^{ble} House of Commons hath, by an order bearing the date the 20th of November 1643, recommended the Psalms set out by Mr. Rouse to the consideration of the Assembly of Divines, the Assembly hath caused them to be carefully perused, and as they are now altered and amended, do approve of them, and humbly conceive that it

may be useful and profitable to the Church that they be permitted to be publicly sung.²²

The finished product received the imprimatur of the House of Commons on November 14, which resolved, “That this Book of Psalms, set forth by Mr. Rouse, and perused by the Assembly of Divines, be forthwith printed.”²³

All that was required now was the examination and approval of the Psalter in Scotland. In a public letter on November 25, 1645, Robert Baillie wrote, “The Psalms are perfyted: the best without all doubt that ever yet were extant. They are now on the presse; but not to be perused till they be sent to yow, and your animadversions returned hither, which we wish were so soon as might be.”²⁴ In two private letters he expressed a longing which he shared in common with his fellow labourers in England: “It is our earnest desyre that the Psalter might at this time be put in such a frame that we needed not to be troubled hereafter with any new translation thereof.” “These lines are likely to go up to God from many millions of tongues for many generations.”²⁵ These statements reveal that the Psalter committee in London desired their version of the Psalms to be a manual of praise which would be used for many generations and that they were not inclined to make any efforts towards producing another.

The Assembly of divines subsequently recommended the emended version of Rous and passed over another version from the pen of Mr. William Barton, which had been referred to them by the House of Lords. Barton’s Psalms had been brought to their attention on October 7, 1645; after perusal, they sent the following communication to the House of Lords on November 14, the same date that the House of Commons authorised the use of Rous’ Psalms:

in Obedience to the Order of this Honourable House, they appointed a Committee to consider thereof; and, upon the whole Matter, do find Reason to certify this Honourable House, That albeit the said Mr. Barton hath taken very good and commendable Pains in his Metaphrase, yet the other Version, so exactly perused and amended by the said Mr. Rouse and the Committee of the Assembly with long and great Labour, is so closely framed according to the Original Text, as that we humbly conceive it will be very useful for the Edification of the Church.²⁶

From this communication it becomes clear that the Assembly considered their labours had produced a translation which closely reflected the original text, and that they were not prepared to work on another. Although the revised Psalter was sent to Scotland for further examination and correction, the Assembly of divines made no further efforts in the way of preparing materials to be sung in the public worship of God. As far as they were concerned, ample provision had been made

for fulfilling that part of the service which they entitled “the singing of psalms.”

The matter, however, was not yet concluded. On March 26, 1646, the House of Lords inquired of the Assembly of divines as to why the psalms of William Barton “may not be sung in Churches as well as other Translations, by such as are willing to use them.”²⁷ The divines sent in their answer on April 25:

whereas there are several other Translations of the Psalms already extant: We humbly conceive, that, if Liberty should be given to People to sing in Churches every one that Translation which they desire, by that Means several Translations might come to be used, yea in one and the same Congregation at the same Time, which would be a great Distraction and Hinderance to Edification.²⁸

Not only did the Assembly confine its labours to the Psalms of David in Metre, but they would not even consider allowing more than one metrical Psalter to be used in the Church lest it cause distraction and hinder that edification which they considered the approved Psalter was fitted to promote.

This review will not trace the history of the Psalter as it moved from England to Scotland because it has no bearing on the question as to what is meant by the term “psalms” in the Westminster formularies.²⁹ It suffices at this point to simply

22. Alex F. Mitchell and John Struthers, *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edmonton, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1991 rpt.) 163.

23. ‘House of Commons Journal Volume 4: 14 November 1645,’ *Journal of the House of Commons*, volume 4: 1644–1646 (1802) 341–342. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=23544>.

24. Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2:326.

25. *Ibid.*, 330, 332. The letter also records the willingness of the Psalter committee to receive the corrections made by the Church of Scotland: “I can give assurance that whatever corrections comes up from yow shall not only be very kindly taken into consideration, but also followed, whenever we are able to shew that they are reasonable; for in this we find both Mr. Rouse and all the committee very tractable.”

26. ‘House of Lords Journal, volume 7: 14 November 1645,’ *Journal of the House of Lords*, volume 7: 1644 (1802) 701–705. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=33446>.

27. ‘House of Lords Journal, volume 8: 26 March 1646,’ *Journal of the House of Lords*, volume 8: 1645–1647 (1802) 236–239. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=33989>.

28. *Ibid.*, 283–286. URL: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=34013>.

29. For further information one might consult David Laing’s useful collection of papers appended to Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 3:540–556. One will also find therein all the official information concerning the “other Scriptural songs.” Mr. Needham notes the 1647 Act of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland which recommended that “Mr. Zachary Boyd be at the pains to translate the other Scriptural Songs in metre, and to report his travails also to the Commission of the Assembly” (*Westminster*, 278). He deduces from this

show that the Commissioners considered the Assembly's work on Rous' Psalter to provide for that part of public worship which the divines called "the singing of psalms." This is

recommendation "that the General Assembly intended to have Boyd's translation of the non-Davidic songs of Scripture authorized for use in public worship," and suggests the reason why it did not follow through on this intention was "perhaps due to apathy (the common problem encountered by the liturgical innovator)" (278, 279). He further reasons that the Westminster Assembly's use of "psalms" might be interpreted as requiring all the songs of Scripture "in the light of the Church of Scotland's actions" (281). All of this, however, is mere conjecture; and even if the conjecture could be proven, it would still serve to limit "singing of psalms" to inspired songs contrary to Mr. Needham's "plausible interpretation" which allows for extra-scriptural hymns.

(1) Earlier Psalters were printed with non-Davidic compositions included with them, and Mr. Needham himself notes that competent historical authorities agree that such supplements were not authorised for public use (*Westminster*, 274). As Louis F. Benson has observed, "the addition of hymns was made so easily simply because their use in church worship was not proposed" ("The Development of the English Hymn," in *Princeton Theological Review*, volume 10 [1912]: 53). These additions were useful for private instruction, and the General Assembly may have thought the other Scriptural songs could serve the same purpose. This was the suggestion of David Hay Fleming after consulting the authority of Neil Livingston: "as Livingston has said, 'it may still have been the understanding that these songs, though they were considered susceptible of improvement, were to be used for private purposes'" (*Hymnology*, 22). Even if individuals like Zachary Boyd hoped that the other songs might be incorporated into the public service, there is no clear testimony to show that this was the mind of General Assembly. There is therefore no reason to assume they would have been authorised for use in public worship.

(2) The notion that apathy led to the failure of the General Assembly to make provision for the other Scriptural songs is groundless. When the Psalms were authorised for use in public worship it also discharged "any other than this new paraphrase, to be made use of in any congregation or family after the first day of May in the year 1650" (quoted in *Hymnology*, 22). In the absence of any other provision it is safe to conclude that the Scottish church was content with the newly appointed Psalter and exclusively adhered to it as a part of the covenanted uniformity which she was still obliged to seek with the Church of England, albeit the relationship had now become somewhat strained. The subsequent Cromwellian occupation hindered the regular meeting of General Assembly and effectively halted any procedure which could have been initiated through the ecclesiastical system. Whether it was deliberate or not, the Church of Scotland remained exclusive psalm-singing.

(3) Even if the General Assembly might have intended to authorise the other Scriptural songs for use in public worship, such an intention could not provide an interpretive key to the meaning of "psalms" in the Westminster documents because those documents had already been formulated prior to any action by the General Assembly. Moreover, the Westminster commission only recommended the metricated Psalms to the General Assembly. The most that this hypothetical intention could prove is that the General Assembly understood Westminster's use of "psalms" to include Scriptural songs in general; but this itself is negated by the fact that the "other Scriptural songs" are never referred to as "psalms."

30. "Minutes of the Commission of the General Assembly," as quoted in Robert Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 3:540.

expressly stated in a paper by the Commissioners which was presented on December, 1646, to the Grand Committee at London, and was subsequently laid before the Commission of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland at Edinburgh on January 21, 1647, courtesy of Robert Baillie:

And because the singing of Psalmes in Churches is a part of the publike worship of God, We desire that the Paraphrase of the Psalmes in meter, as it is now examined, corrected, and approved by the Assembly of Divines here, and by the Commissioners of the Gen. Assembly in Scotland, may be lykwise authorized and established by Ordinance of Parliament.³⁰

The corroborating evidence has now been considered. It has been demonstrated that the Church of England, in conscientiously pursuing covenanted uniformity with the Church of Scotland, sought to make provision for that part of worship called "the singing of psalms" by preparing and authorising a book of metricated Old Testament Psalms to be used throughout the kingdom. They made no further provision for the singing of any other materials in the Church of England. When this is taken in connection with the fact that nothing was to be used in public worship but what was authorised by public authority, it becomes clear that the covenanted Church of England adopted the same exclusive psalm-singing practice as the covenanted Church of Scotland. Given this state of affairs, there is really only one way of interpreting the phrase "singing of psalms" as used in the Confession of Faith and Directory for Public Worship. It must specifically refer to the Old Testament book of Psalms. There is no historical-contextual basis for a generic interpretation of the word "psalms," according to which it is taken to mean a religious song. If Mr. Needham had investigated the appropriate historical context, namely, the proceedings of the Westminster Assembly, he would have seen that the phrase "singing of psalms" was limited to the Old Testament book of Psalms.

External Evidence: the Milieu of 1640s London.

That the historical context of the Confession and Directory was exclusively psalm-singing is substantiated by the external evidence as found in the contemporary situation within which the Assembly undertook its work of reformation. This situation is described in a book published in 1645, the year the Assembly was hard at work in preparing a Psalter. The author was Thomas Edwards, an English Presbyterian minister, who sought to expose the religious errors which were prevalent in his day. His dislike of innovations is unmistakable:

The Prelatical faction and that Court party were great Innovators, given to change, running from one opinion

to another, being Arminians as well as Popish, yea some of them Socinians, and countenancing such, and were every day inventing some new matter in worship, adding this ceremony and the other, putting down some part of worships, and altering them by substituting other; as in putting down singing of Psalms in some Churches, and having Hymnes; in putting down all conceived Prayer, and commanding bidding of Prayer, with a multitude of such like: so our Sectaries are great Innovators, as changeable as the Moon, bringing into their Churches new opinions daily, new practices, taking away the old used in all Reformed Churches, and substituting new; taking away of singing of Psalms, and pleading for Hymnes of their own making....³¹

This was the milieu within which the Westminster Assembly undertook the work of reformation. According to this contemporary Presbyterian minister, the old practice used in all Reformed Churches was “singing of Psalms,” whilst the prelatical faction sought to introduce hymns and the sectaries pleaded for hymns of their own making.

After the Directory for Public Worship was published it suffered scathing criticism from these same two parties, when it was seen that the Assembly had adhered to “the singing of psalms.” Both factions stood on their liberty to sing songs other than those found in the Old Testament book of Psalms. The high church advocate was for traditional hymns whilst the high spirited enthusiast claimed individual inspiration.

The first author to comment on the Directory appears to have been the high-churchman, Dr. Henry Hammond, who condemned various parts of it because of its variance with the liturgy of the Church of England. Dr. Hammond argued for the continuance of some hymns in the service and understood “singing of psalms” in the Directory to be referring to the Psalms of David in Metre.

And thus in all Ages of the Church some Hymnes have been constantly retained to be said or sung in the Churches; I mean not only the daily lections of the Psalmes of David (which yet this Directory doth not mention, but only commands a more frequent reading of that Book, then of some other parts of Scripture) nor the singing of some of those Psalmes in Metre, (which yet this Directory doth not prescribe neither, save onely on daies of Thanksgiving, or after the Sermon, if with convenience it may be done, making it very indifferent, it seems, whether it be kept at all in the Church or no, unlesse on those speciall occasions.)³²

What did this contemporary high churchman understand the Directory to prescribe when it speaks of “the singing of psalms” after sermon? The singing of the Psalms of David

in Metre. Moreover, he found this to be too restrictive and considered it contrary to the age-old tradition of singing some hymns.³³

Another antagonistic commentator on the Directory was the Quaker, Francis Howgill, who was against the use of all forms in worship, and therefore wrote from the opposite perspective of Dr. Hammond. Like Dr. Hammond, he understood the Directory to be referring to the Psalms of David in Metre in its use of the phrase “singing of psalms.”

Dir[ectory]. The next comes on the performance of the worship, which is reading, preaching, with singing of Psalmes...

An[swer]. You that have nothing to quicken your affections, but to turn Davids cryings and tears into a Song....

Dir[ectory]. And now I come to the singing Psalmes, and their Mass-house, the place of their Worship, and so I have done with their traffique. First, they say, that singing of Psalmes publicly in a Congregation, with a tuneable voice, is a Christians duty.

An[swer]. Where was it enjoined by Christ, or any of his Ministers? I am ignorant, and yet the Scripture I know, but no where read in it, that singing of Prophecies, and Prayers, and other mens conditions, turned into Rime and Meeter by Poets, and Masters of Musick, in an invented tune (in the same mind which invents tunes for Ballet-mongers) and to sing such conditions amongst proud, wanton, and disdainful people....³⁴

Whatever one may think of the rhetoric, it is undeniable that this contemporary critic of the Directory understood

31. Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena* (London, printed for Ralph Smith, 1645) 51.

32. Henry Hammond, *A view of the new directorie and a vindication of the ancient liturgie of the Church of England in answer to the reasons pretended in the ordinance and preface, for the abolishing the one, and establishing the other* (Oxford, Printed by Henry Hall, 1646) 29.

33. The high-church devotion to human hymns in contrast to the Puritan preference for metricated Psalms may be gauged from a paper drawn up in the University of Cambridge in 1636, which was endorsed by Archbishop Laud as “Certain disorders in Cambridge to be considered in my visitation.” In relation to Emmanuel College, it says, “Their Chappel is not consecrate. At surplice prayers they sing nothing but certain riming psalms of their own appointment, instead of Hymnes between the Lessons.” Quoted by James M’Cosh, ‘Life of Stephen Charnock,’ in *Works of Stephen Charnock*, volume 1 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864) ix.

34. Francis Howgill, *Mystery Babylon the mother of harlots ... The directorie for the publick worship of God through England, Scotland, and Ireland, which now is the chief traffick her last reformed merchants trades with, in all these nations* (London, Printed for Thomas Simmons, 1659) 35, 37.

the phrase “singing of psalms” to be referring to the Psalms of David in Metre.

It is instructive to note that a contemporary reformed commentator on the Westminster Confession of Faith specifically refutes the Quakers by means of the wording of the Confession which indicates that “singing of psalms” is a part of the ordinary worship of God. David Dickson, the Professor of Divinity successively of Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities, took his students through the Confession as a means of training them for the ministry. These lectures were later published under the title, “Truth’s Victory Over Error.” In this work he asks the question, “do not the Quakers and other sectaries err, who are against the singing of psalms, or at least tie it only to some certain persons, others being excluded?” He answers in the affirmative, and provides the following as one of the reasons by which they are confuted:

We cheer and refresh ourselves by making melody in our hearts to the Lord, Eph. v. 19. Which ariseth, first, from our conscientious going about it as a piece of the worship of God, and in so doing we are accepted in that. Secondly, From its being a part of Scripture, appointed for his praise, whether it agree with our case or not. That being the end wherefore it was designed to be sung, is sufficient warrant for our joining in the singing thereof.³⁵

This contemporary commentator understood the Confession to teach that the psalms to be sung in worship were “a part of Scripture, appointed for his praise”—which can be none other than the Old Testament book of Psalms.

What does this external evidence demonstrate? First, that the contemporary situation amongst unreformed parties was one which allowed for the inclusion of man made hymns. On the high church side there was a concern to allow for the inclusion of traditional hymns, while the sectarian side insisted that individual freedom to express Spirit-inspired songs should not be curtailed. Secondly, that the custom in the reformed churches was to adhere to the singing of psalms to the exclusion of man-made hymns. Thirdly, that the Westminster Assembly, in seeking to bring the Church of England into nearer conformity with other reformed churches, prescribed the singing of psalms as an ordinary part of the worship of God; and fourthly, that both unreformed parties criticised the Westminster Assembly for exclusively adhering to the psalms and not allowing for man-made hymns.

35. David Dickson, *Truth’s Victory over Error* (Kilmarnock: John Wilson, 1787) 143. Although the work was not translated and published until 1684, the original Latin lectures were delivered within a few years of the Confession’s publication.

36. Thomas Ford, *Singing of Psalms: the duty of Christians under the New Testament, or a vindication of that gospel-ordinance* (London, Printed by W. B., 1659).

To date all the evidence contradicts Mr. Needham’s view that “psalms” might be taken generically for a religious song. The Church of Scotland practised exclusive psalm-singing, the Church of England was brought into uniformity with the Church of Scotland and made provision for exclusive psalm-singing, and unreformed contemporaries criticised the Westminster Assembly for prescribing exclusive psalm-singing.

Advocates for Exclusive Psalmody Amongst the Westminster Assembly of Divines.

It may now be added that there were members of the Westminster Assembly who advocated the practice of exclusive psalm-singing and one member who wrote an entire book to vindicate it. The author of the book was Thomas Ford; its title is significant because he uses the phrase “singing of psalms” as adopted by the Confession and Directory. Its full title is, “Singing of Psalmes the Duty of Christians under the New Testament, or, A vindication of that gospel-ordinance in V sermons upon Ephesians 5.19 wherein are asserted and cleared I. That, II. What, III. How, IV. Why we must sing.”³⁶

As to *what* must be sung in gospel-worship, Mr. Ford found it in his text, Ephesians 5.19, which speaks of psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. The fact that hymns and songs are mentioned together with psalms did not lead him to conclude that compositions other than the Psalms of David might be sung in worship. To the contrary, he commented,

I know nothing more probable than this, viz. That Psalmes, and Hymns, and spirituall Songs, do answer to Mizmorim, Tehillim, and Shirim, which are the Hebrew names of David’s Psalmes. All the Psalmes together are called Tehillim, i.e. Praises, or songs of praise. Mizmor and Shir are in the Titles of many Psalmes, sometimes one, and sometimes the other, and sometimes both joynd together, as they know well who can read the Originall. Now the Apostle calling them by the same names by which the Greek Translation (which the New Testament so much follows) renders the Hebrew, is an argument that he means no other than David’s Psalmes (Ford, 14).

Having provided a grammatico-historical interpretation of his text, he asks the pertinent question, “But why should any man prefer his Composures before David’s Psalmes, is it because they are more excellent?” He observes, “God himself hath made and given us a Psalm-book,” and claims this will suffice for every condition of God’s people: “There can be no composures of men, that will suit the occasions, necessities, afflictions, or affections of God’s people, as the Psalmes of David” (Ford, 21). The Psalms are far superior to anything composed by uninspired men:

Let it once be granted that we must sing Psalmes, I'll warrant you David's Psalmes shall carry it; there being no art or spirit of man now, that can come near that of David.... I would fain know what occasions God's people now, or at any time, either have, or can have, which David's Psalmes may not suite with, and better than any Songs composed by an ordinary gift (Ford, 21, 22).

When it was objected that there should be freedom to compose songs as equally as there is to compose prayers, the answer is given that God prescribes a set form for singing but not for praying: "The Apostle hath prescribed us what to sing, viz. Psalmes and Hymnes, and spiritual Songs, which are the express Titles of David's Psalmes, as was shewed before." "There is a difference in this, that the Lord did not prescribe unto his people set formes of Prayer, as he prescribed set formes of Psalmes, 2 Chron. 29.30. They were to sing in the words of David and Asaph, but we read not that they were to pray in any such set form" (Ford, 27, 28). He then spends much time defending the singing of psalms in a mixed congregation and urging the people to sing the psalms of David with the spirit of David.

A second member of the assembly who advocated exclusive psalm-singing was Samuel Gibson. He has already been mentioned in association with the Assembly's labours in preparing a Psalter, where he showed a keen interest in "the solidity of the work." In a sermon before the House of Commons on September 24, 1645, he vindicates the Puritan commitment to the Bible and the use of the songs of Zion:

But it hath been often said, *Take away the Common Prayer Book, take away our Religion.* Nay, our Religion is in the Bible; there is our God, and our Christ, and our Faith, and our Creed in all points. The whole Bible was St. Paul's belief; there are the Psalmes of David, and his prayers, and the Lord's Prayer, and other prayers, by which wee may learne to pray; we have still the Lord's songs, the songs of Zion, sung by many with grace in their hearts, *making melody to the Lord*, though without Organs.³⁷

The Lord's songs are the songs of Zion, and these Bible psalms suffice for making melody to the Lord.

Another member to make comment on the subject is Thomas Young in his work which surveys the fathers' attitudes towards sanctifying the Sabbath day. He observes that sometimes the early church sang from the Old Testament book of Psalms: "As for the hymns themselves, the Divine Oracles being sung with a sweet voice, did animate their sound, and therefore they sung sometimes David's Psalter"—Chrysostom and Augustine being consulted as authorities.³⁸ He further notes Tertullian's testimony that early Christians would

sing to God "either out of the Holy Scriptures or of his own invention," and that "Socrates mentions some Psalmes that were written by Chrysostom." He concludes, however, with the canon of the Council of Laodicea which prohibited the singing of private psalms in church:

"Conc. Laod. Can. 59. it is prohibited, that no private Psalmes be uttered in the Church. Therefore St. Austin in the aforesaid place doth blame the Donatists, for leaving Davids Psalmes, and singing Hymns which were invented by themselves" (Young, 358).

Finally, John Lightfoot, the renowned oriental scholar, has also gone on record as to what compositions should be sung in worship. He is the one and only representative of the Westminster Assembly who is quoted by Mr. Needham, but it is clear from consulting the original words of Dr. Lightfoot that he has been misquoted. Mr. Needham states that "Lightfoot mentioned the exclusive psalmodist interpretation of Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19," but that "he preferred the interpretation 'that by these three are meant the Psalmes of David, and other songs in Scripture'" (*Westminster*, 270). Dr. Lightfoot, however, does not give personal preference to this view but explicitly states that this is the interpretation of others: "Others differ upon particulars, but agree upon this, that by these three are meant the Psalmes of David, and other Songs in Scripture."³⁹ Because Mr. Needham has failed to correctly represent his source, he has no basis for this conclusion: "Thus a leading Westminster divine: all the songs of Scripture may be sung in public worship" (*Westminster*, 270). However, even if this had been a correct conclusion, the result would have been that this Westminster representative only allowed for inspired songs in worship whilst Mr. Needham considers the genre to be sung to be a mere circumstance.

If Dr. Lightfoot did not personally endorse the inspired songs interpretation, what, it might be asked, was his view on the matter to be sung in worship? He notes that the hymn sung by the Lord at the end of the Passover was "the very same that every company did, viz. The great Hallel, as it was called, which began at the CXIII. Psalm, and ended at the end of the CXVIII." This leads to a striking observation: "Here the Lord of David sings the Psalmes of David." The point is then expounded:

He that gave the Spirit to David to compose, sings what he composed. That All-blessed Copy of peace and order, could

37. Samuel Gibson, *The Ruine of the Authors and Fomentors of Civill Warres* (London: Printed by M.S., 1645) 25.

38. Thomas Young, *The Lord's Day* (London, Printed by E. Leach, 1672) 357, 358.

39. John Lightfoot, *The Works of the Reverend and learned John Lightfoot*, volume 2 (London, Printed by W. R., 1684) 1160.

have indited himself, could have inspired every Disciple to have been a David, but submits to order, which God had appointed, sings the Psalms of David, and tenders the Peace of the Church, and takes the same course the whole Church did" (Lightfoot, *Works*, 2.1160).

Another point is raised for discussion. "But had they a vulgar translation in their own tongue?" The answer is given in the affirmative, and proven from the Talmud. An inference is then drawn from this fact: "here is our warrant for our framing the Psalms into our Tongue and Metre. Thus have we seen the Example, nay institution, of our great Master" (2.1160).

Having noted that God has appointed that the Psalms of David should be sung by the whole church, that Christ Himself adhered to this divine appointment, and that His example in singing in the vulgar language is sufficient warrant to sing from a metrical translation of the Psalms, Dr. Lightfoot concludes with an appropriate application: "If you sing right, sing Davids Psalms, but make them your own. Let the skill of composure be *His*, the life of devotion *yours*" (2.1161). What, then, was Dr. Lightfoot's view on the matter to be sung in worship? The answer is, the Psalms of David. They were appointed by God, sung and instituted by Christ, and are the right matter to be sung by the whole church.

The evidence is now complete. First, the Church of Scotland practised exclusive psalm-singing. Secondly, the Westminster Assembly laboured to bring the Church of England into uniformity with Scotland's practice by making provision for singing from the Old Testament book of Psalms. Thirdly, contemporary critics of the Assembly chided the Directory for Public Worship for excluding man-made hymns and restricting the matter of worship-song to the Psalms of David. Finally, individual members of the Westminster Assembly espoused the exclusive use of the Psalms of David. In the light of this evidence, it is clear that Mr. Needham has failed to properly represent the views of the Westminster Assembly when he claims that exclusive psalmody is the least probable historical-contextual interpretation of the reference to "singing of psalms" in Confession 21.5.

The Wider Puritan Tradition.

What now should be made of Mr. Needham's portrayal of the wider Puritan tradition? Did the Westminster Assembly reform the Puritan tradition so as to make it exclusive

psalmodist, or is there evidence within that tradition of a commitment to exclusive psalmody? Some brief remarks on the nature of Mr. Needham's evidence should suffice to show that the Puritans did not advocate what he has attempted to extract out of their writings.

While Mr. Needham has correctly noted a diversity of opinion with respect to the interpretation of Ephesians 5.19 and Colossians 3.16, he has not established that the Puritans always saw these verses as being directly tied to the practice of public worship. In his summation of Matthew Poole's Annotations (although the places cited were not written by Matthew Poole),⁴⁰ Mr. Needham states, "Poole's commentary does not adopt the exclusive psalmodist interpretation of 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs' as meaning simply the psalter" (*Westminster*, 250). The exclusive psalmodist position, however, is a position relative to the public worship of God; but at no point does Mr. Poole's continuators suggest that they consider the apostle Paul to be providing a directory for public worship.

Mr. Needham quotes Thomas Cartwright on Colossians 3.16 and Paul Baynes on Ephesians 5.19, and concludes that they "accepted the use of non-Davidic songs in public worship" (*Westminster*, 263); but one looks in vain for a direct tie of the words of the text to a public worship situation. In the case of Thomas Cartwright, Mr. Needham's only argument for non-Davidic songs is the fact that he has not referred the three terms to the Davidic psalter and that the word "spiritual" is used for songs that excite spiritual feelings. The Davidic Psalms would certainly excite such feelings, so one is at a loss to know why the Elizabethan Presbyterian must be understood as allowing for other songs.

Paul Baynes specifically denies that the terms refer to the matter to be sung: "It may be asked, what is the difference betwixt these words? *Ans.* Some take it from the matter of them, some from the manner; that of the matter will not hold."⁴¹ He subsequently discusses the difference of the words in terms of the manner of singing. He does say that a spiritual song might be one which is framed according to the Scripture (Baynes, 505), but makes no suggestion that this is to be used in an ordinary public worship context. When he comes to "the sum of the verse," he speaks of "singing both in private and publick, which this Scripture and Col. 3.16 do commend;" but where he speaks of the church service he confines his terms to "Psalms"—"and all things, Psalms, Prayers in the Church must be to edify" (505). When he finally applies the passage he provides this maxim: "get the spirit of David to sing a Psalm of David" (506). There is certainly no evidence for Mr. Needham's suggestion that Paul Baynes "might have approved of newly written uninspired worship-songs other than the Davidic psalms" (*Westminster*, 267).

Mr. Needham does acknowledge two Puritan expositors

40. Edmund Calamy, *The Nonconformist's Memorial* (London, Printed for W. Harris, 1775) 135, identifies Mr. Richard Adams (Colossians), Mr. Edward Veale (Ephesians, James), and Dr. John Collinges (1 Corinthians), as the continuators of Mr. Poole's annotations on those places quoted by Mr. Needham.

41. Paul Baynes, *A commentary upon the whole Epistle of the apostle Paul to the Ephesians* (London: Printed for S. Miller, 1658) 504.

who understood the terms “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” to refer to the Davidic Psalms, namely, John Cotton and George Swinnock (271). The fact is that there was a galaxy of Puritans who understood the text in this way:

William Perkins: “The booke of Psalmes, which containeth sacred songes to be fitted for everie condition both of the Church and the particular members therof, and also to be sung with grace in the heart, Col. 3.16.”⁴²

Henry Ainsworth: “There be three kinds of songs mentioned in this book: 1. Mizmor, in Greek psalmos, a psalm: 2. Tehillah, in Greek humnos, a hymn or praise: and 3. Shir, in Greek ode, a song or lay. All these three the apostle mentioneth together, where he willeth us to speak to ourselves with ‘psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs,’ Ephesians 5:19.”⁴³

Nathanael Homes: “David’s Psalmes are so full of praises, that they are called Tehillim, praises. Therefore the Apostles in that, Ephes. 5, Coloss. 3, and Matth. 26.30, useth a Greek word of the same signification; namely, humnos, a hymn.”⁴⁴

Edward Leigh: “as the Apostle exhorteth us to singing, so he instructeth what the matter of our Song should be, viz. Psalmes, Hymnes, and spiritual Songs. Those three are the Titles of the Songs of David, as they are delivered to us by the Holy Ghost himselfe.”⁴⁵

William Barton: “Scripture-psalms (even David’s Psalmes, called in Hebrew by the name of Psalmes, and Hymns, and spiritual Songs), and no other, should be used in the Church; for no other are the word of Christ, and consequently cannot have that certainty, purity, authority and sufficiency that the Scripture psalms have. . . . God hath ordained and indited a Psalm-book in his Word, for the edification of his Church.”⁴⁶

Jonathan Clapham: “The Apostle, Eph. 5 and Col. 3, where he commands singing of Psalmes, doth clearly point us to David’s Psalmes, by using those three words, Psalmes, hymnes, and spiritual songs, which answer to the three Hebrew words, Shorim, Tehillim, Mizmorim, whereby David’s Psalmes were called.”⁴⁷

Thomas Manton: “Now these words (which are the known division of David’s psalms, and expressly answering to the Hebrew words Shurim, Tehillim, and Mizmorim, by which his psalms are distinguished and entituled), being so precisely used by the apostle in both places, do plainly point us to the Book of Psalmes.”⁴⁸

Cuthbert Sydenham: “I find they are used in general as the title of David’s psalms, which are named promiscuously by these three words.”⁴⁹

Isaac Ambrose: “Whether may not Christians lawfully sing Davids or Moses Psalmes? and how may it appear? Answered affirmatively: Eph. 5.19, where, under those three heads, of Psalmes, and Hymns, and Spiritual songs, Davids Psalmes are contained.”⁵⁰

Finally, in 1673 an edition of the Scottish Metrical Psalter was printed for the Company of Stationers at London, which contains an introductory epistle with the following statement: “to us David’s Psalmes seem plainly intended by those terms of Psalmes and Hymns and Spiritual Songs, which the Apostle useth, Ephes. 5.19, Col. 3.16.” The epistle is subscribed by **Thomas Manton, D.D., Henry Langley, D.D., John Owen, D.D., William Jenkyn, James Innes, Thomas Watson, Thomas Lye, Matthew Poole, John Milward, John Chester, George Cokayn, Matthew Meade, Robert Francklin, Thomas Dooelittle, Thomas Vincent, Nathanael Vincent, John Ryther, William Tomson, Nicolas Blakie, Charles Morton, Edmund Calamy,**⁵¹ **William Carslake, James Janeway, John Hickes, John Baker, and Richard Mayo.**⁵²

Mr. Needham concludes his historical examination by stating, “Almost all the Reformed commentators we have looked at failed to interpret these terms as referring to the Davidic Psalter alone” (*Westminster*, 283). The problem is that he does not appear to have consulted a sufficient number of materials in order to arrive at a fair idea as to how Ephesians 5.19 and Colossians 3.16 were understood by the Puritan tradition at large. Moreover, he has failed to appreciate the fact that his quoted commentators did not necessarily see the terms in these texts to be prescribing the matter of song to be sung in public worship, but were more concerned with the application of the Word to a godly life in general. On the other hand, the Puritans quoted in this review did consider these texts to be prescriptive of worship-song, and have expressed their conviction that the apostle intended to refer to the Psalmes of David by means of these terms. On the whole, therefore, it must be concluded that Mr. Needham has not truly represented the general thought of the Puritan tradition relative to the duty of singing psalms.

42. William Perkins, ‘The Art of Prophesying,’ in *Works*, volume 2 (London: Printed by John Legatt, 1631) 650.

43. Henry Ainsworth, ‘Annotation on Ps. 3, title,’ in *Annotations upon the book of Psalmes* (1617).

44. Nathanael Homes, *Gospel Musick, or, The Singing of David’s Psalmes* (London: Printed for Henry Overton, 1644) 16.

45. Edward Leigh, *Annotations upon all the New Testament* (London: 1650) 306.

46. William Barton, *A View of Many Errors* (London: Printed by W.D., 1656) epistle to the reader.

47. Jonathan Clapham, *A short and full Vindication of that sweet and comfortable Ordinance, of singing of Psalmes* (London: 1656) 3.

48. Thomas Manton, *Works*, volume 4 (Pennsylvania: Maranatha Publications, rpt., n.d.) 443.

49. Sydenham Cuthbert, *A Christian sober and plain exercitation* (London: Printed by Thomas Mabb, 1657) 179.

50. Isaac Ambrose, *The Compleat Works* (London, 1682) 256.

51. The son of Edmund Calamy the Westminster Divine who died in 1666.

52. As quoted in *The true psalmody* (Edinburgh: James Gemmell, 1878) 98. The subscribers’ names have been provided by David Laing, *Letters and Journals*, 553.

Musical Instruments

Little needs to be said under this section of the review. The author states the position of the Westminster divines in no uncertain terms: “Clearly the Westminster divines did not believe in the validity of instrumental worship” (*Westminster*, 291). This review has already referred to Samuel Gibson’s sermon before the House of Commons, in which he states, “we have still the Lord’s songs, the songs of Sion, sung by many with grace in their hearts, *making melody to the Lord*, though without Organs” (Gibson, *The Ruine*, 25). Mr. Needham quotes the ordinance of Parliament made on May 9, 1644, “for the speedy demolishing of all organs,” and “none others hereafter set up in their place” (*Westminster*, 291). He notes that all appeal to the Old Testament in justification of instrumental worship “breaks itself to pieces on the reefs of the regulative principle” (296), and proves that in Old Testament worship “the noise was the worship: an audio-symbolic evocation of the majesty and glory of God . . . which passed away with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, when worship ‘in Jerusalem’ passed over into worship ‘in spirit and truth’” (298).

So far the Westminster/Puritan tradition has been well preserved. The reader, however, is soon introduced to a subtle distinction: “But what shall we make—not of instrumental *worship*—but of instrumental *accompaniment* under the New Covenant?” (299). It is shown that an appeal to the circumstantial argument could only justify the use of a single instrument to keep congregational singing in tune, and that large congregations would not really need such accompaniment. It is also clarified that instruments have a tendency to take over the worship service and that such abuse must be guarded against. In sum, though, the author thinks “the use of a single instrument, purely to keep the singing in time and in tune, can be justified as a circumstance of worship” (302).

This of course is Mr. Needham’s own opinion, and something for which he offers no support from the Westminster representatives. As noted, Parliament ordered the demolition of organs and made it clear that they were not to be set up in the future. It is doubtful, therefore, that the second reformation movement would have accepted this somewhat subtle distinction between instrumental worship and accompaniment.

Conclusion

The spiritual insight of William Cunningham may help to capture the fundamental concern of this review:

Men, under the pretence of curing the defects and shortcomings, the nakedness and bareness, attaching to ecclesiastical arrangements as set before us in the New Testament, have

been constantly proposing innovations and improvements in government and worship. The question is, How ought these proposals to have been received? Our answer is, There is a great general scriptural principle which shuts them all out. We refuse even to enter into the consideration of what is alleged in support of them. It is enough for us that they have no positive sanction from Scripture.⁵³

The regulative principle of worship requires positive Scriptural warrant for everything that is offered to God as a specific act of worship. Mr. Needham has affirmed the Westminster Assembly’s insistence that all worship must be instituted by God Himself, but he has weakened this principle by allowing for things which edify if they are not forbidden by the Scriptures.

Concerning the Assembly’s view relating to the singing of psalms, Mr. Needham has failed to examine the work of the Assembly in making provision for this ordinary part of public worship; the primary focus in determining the original intent of the Westminster divines should begin if not end here. His investigation of the “historical-contextual” setting is concerned with the broader Puritan tradition, and in many cases he has imposed a public worship context onto the statements of those he has quoted. It is only by following this faulty process that he is able to interpret the Westminster formularies as allowing for extra-scriptural songs. Otherwise there is no reason why they should not be understood according to what the Confession calls “the plain and common sense of the words” (chapter 22.4). The exclusive psalm-singing practice of the Church of Scotland, the Westminster Assembly’s work in preparing a Psalter, the milieu of the 1640s in which it undertook its work of reformation, the testimony of individual Westminster representatives, and the broader Puritan tradition all provide sound reasons for taking the word “psalms” as a reference to the Old Testament book of Psalms.

Finally, Mr. Needham has correctly noted that the Westminster divines did not believe in the validity of instrumental worship and that the Parliament ordered the permanent demolition of all organs. No evidence has been provided that the Assembly might have considered their use as a circumstance of worship to keep the singing in time and in tune. The circumstantial argument for mechanical instruments must therefore be considered as a personal opinion which finds no support in the work and writings of the Westminster Assembly. ■

53. William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Banner of Truth, 1989 rpt.) 36.