

not wish to reveal to his readers (MHW, pp.18ff.). Hebrew poetry, says MHW, is characterised by “rhythm,” which consists of “a fixed number of accented syllables in the line” (MHW, p.18). (Contrast European lyrical verse, which usually has a fixed number of *total* syllables per line without any recourse to *accented* syllables.) Again, Hebrew poetry is distinguished by parallelism, of which there are some eight or more kinds, and there are clearly such phenomena as stanzas, verses, and refrains. And IHM would have us believe that Hebrew poetry is “prose, not metre” (IHM, p. 8)!

Again, says MHW, it is not a matter of taking liberties with the text when one alters word order to process Hebrew poetry into English. What is paramount is to convey the same lyrical impression in the English as the Hebrew does to the Hebrew, and hence metric versification in English can be justified. Indeed, one might add that it is a facile and puerile appreciation of foreign languages to suppose that correct translations necessarily follow the exact word order of the originals, since grammar, morphology, idiom, and syntax differ from tongue to tongue, and in the translation of the Hebrew and Greek Bibles into English, such adjustments of word order in even the manifestly prose passages are necessary. In the poetic, and lyrical passages, this is more so.

One might also add that IHM has seemingly never developed an appreciation for “chanting.” He might do well to listen to some good cathedral choirs chanting the psalms. There is a set of CD’s that cover the whole Psalter, and it is amazing what depth of pathos and variation can be nuanced into a chant. IHM should listen to CLASSIC FM, and note the popularity of Gregorian chant and similar chanting amongst the classical music buffs. So much for his assertion that “it is hard to see how chant would be musically uplifting in congregational praise today” (IHM, p. 10). If chanting has one great drawback, it is this: it is more difficult to perform than it is to sing a simple melody.

But with MHW we concur that “metrical psalmody helps to preserve the poetic nature of the Psalms” (MHW, p. 19).

IHM finishes this subsection with a flourishing sneer at what he calls the amount of freedom exclusive psalmodists need to exercise in translating the Psalms into English verse, and insinuates that such freedom takes the translator away from the actual inspired “words of God” in the originals (IHM, p. 10). MHW demolishes him here, with a detailed examination of the technicalities underlying such translation. MHW refers to the meticulous nature of the translation of the Scottish Psalter as verified by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and such eminent Puritan divines as Manton, Owen, Jenkyn, Watson,

Matthew Poole and others. All concurred in declaring how faithfully close the English Psalter was to the Hebrew original (MHW, pp. 19-20).

In his third sub-section, IHM posits that even if it could be proved that the Psalter was the alone authorised praise for the Old Testament people of God, then that does not establish it as the sole manual of praise for the New (IHM, pp. 10-11).

IHM seems oblivious to the fact that in the Hebrew the book of Psalms is, as MHW shows, entitled "The Book of Praises" (MHW, pp. 17-18). MHW gives seven irrefutable reasons why the Psalter is evidently the praise manual for the Old Testament times—seven reasons which IHM seems never to have heard of. What about the Psalter's occupying the same exclusive position for the New Testament people of God? Ephesians 5:19, for example, is interpreted by the exclusive psalmists to refer to the Psalter alone. However, IHM roundly asserts, "we know of no prominent orthodox commentator who takes that view." He cites Eadie, Charles Hodge, Lenski, Hendriksen, etc. (IHM, p. 10). Again, we are forced to say that this is hideous use of evidence. Eadie was a Scottish United Presbyterian of the mid-19th century. His denomination was throwing psalmody out; the same goes for Charles Hodge. Lenski was a Lutheran, and Lutherans never were in favour of exclusive psalmody. Hendriksen was a doyen of the Christian Reformed Church in the USA, which denomination had introduced hymnody and thrown out exclusive psalmody. (Something to do with common grace, I believe, a feature which also induced that denomination to throw out the whole Reformed faith ultimately.)

And IHM "know[s] of no prominent orthodox commentator[s] who take [the exclusive psalmist] view [of Ephesians 5:19]!" MHW can point us to them and give apposite quotes from them (MHW, pp. 27-30). Here they come, with their provenance and date of relevant writing in brackets: Nicholas Byfield (Puritan; 1615), Henry Ainsworth (Puritan; 1627), Jean Daillé (Huguenot; 1648), John Cotton (New England Puritan; 1649), Isaac Ambrose (Puritan; 1650, 1659), George Swinnock (Puritan; 1662), Thomas Manton (Puritan; posthumously published in 1701), Dr. John Gill (English Baptist; early 1700's), and John Brown of Haddington (1775). That is of course, just to name a few.

Question: Was IHM really ignorant of all this lot? No, he knows of John Cotton as an exclusive psalmist because he cites him at the bottom of the next page. Again we question the reliability of the way IHM utilises evidence.

What is notable here is that IHM makes absolutely no attempt to exegete Ephesians 5:19 and its associated New Testament texts. If you want that, you

have to read MHW, who will show you that such texts indubitably prove exclusive psalmody as incumbent on New Testament Christians.

Let us proceed to IHM's next step. He compounds his error from the previous assertion and *assumes* that as the material referred to as praise in Ephesians 5:19 is "uncertain," then "it is far less so in the case of 1 Corinthians 14:26" where the apostle says, "Every one of you hath a psalm." Now here I would immediately say that a biblical Psalm is positively specified. But IHM gives us this following mealy-mouthed assertion from Hodge: "It appears to mean such a song given by inspiration, and not one of the Psalms of David" (IHM, p. 11). What kind of exegesis is this? Is this Princeton in all its glory, is it? "It *appears* to mean . . .!" And on such a rickety platform IHM would stand his exegesis and his doctrine? Surely the question is: "What *does* it mean?" And is not the Bible capable of supplying a solid answer to that? But IHM thinks he has an ally here, he goes on to cite the exclusive psalmodist John Cotton as agreeing with Hodge on this! Well, does he? MHW explains that Cotton was speaking of it as possibly an extraordinary gift under immediate divine inspiration, as part of the charismata, and certainly not as a natural poetic gift to compose hymns (MHW, p. 30). Now if Cotton is right, such a charismatic Psalm would be every bit as divine inspired scripture as the Book of Psalms. And use of such a composition would effectively be an addition to the Old Testament manual of praise. But we see here nothing to support the idea that an "uninspired" lyric is warrantably introduced into New Testament worship. As MHW says, either this text refers to a Psalm of David, or it must refer to another Psalm equally as inspired. "Either way" he sums up, "it provides no warrant for the introduction of uninspired hymns" (MHW, p. 31).

IHM at last moves on to discuss "The Regulative Principle" in his fifth section (IHM, pp. 11-20). Regrettably, we find we have to say that this whole section is a miasma of misconception, misquotes, and continual idiosyncratic use of evidence. Also IHM naturally enough assumes that what he has said thus far is valid, and hence plunges ahead loaded with the accumulated down-drag of his previous errors. There is no formal explanation of the regulative principle given, with any exegesis of the cardinal Scriptures that pertain to it, only a brief flourish in allusion, in which he presents an erroneous picture of what the principle is, asserting that it only requires that sung praise be a part of worship, but does not specify what words we are to use in such singing. This is just plain untrue. But IHM asserts that exclusive psalmodists object that the "best Reformed churches and authors thought otherwise and saw hymns of human com-

posure as an intrusion on divine authority" (IHM, p. 11). This contention of the exclusivists he then subjects to nine pages in which he claims to prove the contrary (IHM, pp. 12-20).

He begins, of course, citing Luther as unfamiliar with a restriction to psalmody. Then he alludes to the presence of such Scriptural songs as the *Nunc Dimittis* in the Genevan Psalter, and with the old chestnut concerning the hymn allegedly composed by John Calvin, which he says, was "to be found in the same Genevan Psalter." He argues that Calvin gave priority to Psalms as a *preference*, not as a *principle* (IHM, p. 12).

However, MHW in response can quote Calvin's *The Form of Ecclesiastical Prayers and Songs* of 1542. Therein Calvin asserts exclusive psalmody founded on Scriptural principles. And contra IHM's claim that Calvin's hymn was included in the Genevan Psalter, MHW can inform us that this was NEVER so, because in every edition of the Genevan Psalter between 1542 and 1562, it NEVER contained a single human hymn. MHW can also tell us that it was not until the 19th century that anyone ascribed that particular hymn to Calvin, and he is able to present us with an array of evidence counter to IHM's assertion, linking the particular hymn with someone else (MHW, pp. 31-34).

The rest of IHM's fifth section follows the same desultory path. He purports to find evidence from all quarters of old-time divines who agree with him against the exclusivists. It is sufficient, for this review, we believe, to say that all his evidence is thoroughly overturned and refuted by the diligent researches of MHW (MHW, pp. 31-46). One example may suffice: IHM wheels out the Puritan John Flavel, claiming that nobody was a "stronger upholder" than he of the regulative principle. He says that Flavel warned that there was no "surer and speedier way" to men's ruin than to "bring their own inventions into God's worship." But on the other hand IHM claims Flavel was "far from supposing that hymns belonged to that category" which Flavel was proscribing, and so much so that Flavel provides us with a "hymn of his own composition in the same volume in which the warning was written" (IHM, p. 15). All this is again a misuse of evidence by IHM. MHW points out, first, that Flavel's "hymn" was composed from two biblical passages, and as such it could not be considered to be an *uninspired* hymn. Second he shows that in the 17th century a "hymn" was just another name for "a lyrical poem" not understood to be "a metrical composition sung in a religious service." MHW brings other examples of the same to our notice, and sums it all up by giving solid historical reasons explaining that the Puritan indulgence in poetry and lyrical poetry was not intended for public

worship. A 20th century expert on these matters, Prof. Erik Routley, who was Lecturer and Tutor in Ecclesiastical History at Mansfield College, Oxford, concurs with MHW. Routley states: “during the seventeenth century scarcely any English hymns were written at all. The familiar hymns from that age are *poems which their authors never designed for congregational singing*” (MHW, pp. 37-38).

IHM throughout this section makes the unwarranted logical jump again and again, that poems are hymns. A man may compose a plethora of poems, and even sing some of them, without denying exclusive psalmody for corporate worship. This feature leads IHM into the logical trap whereby he tries to undermine exclusive psalmody on the grounds that some exclusivists sang uninspired lyrics in private. As the issue concerns corporate praise, IHM’s assertion lacks logical justification.

MHW also gives us a thorough exposition of the Scripture texts underlying the case for exclusive psalmody (MHW, pp. 18-27), a feature which IHM studiously and significantly avoids, even in his section entitled “The Regulative Principle.”

In his sixth section, IHM considers “The Positive Case for Hymns” (IHM, pp. 20-29). At the outset he starts with the words: “I believe it can be argued” — not a confidence-generating beginning. Why could he not say, “I believe it can be definitely established from the Word of God!” The fact is that he is here tacitly admitting that what he wants to establish cannot be established from Scripture. Nevertheless, with his usual flourish and rattle of pseudo-authority, he blunders on, claiming that “there is good reason for believing” that the New Testament leaves matters “open” on the case concerning hymns and Psalms (IHM, p. 20), and that fundamentally New Testament truth, including the work of Christ and the New Covenant, are not adequately portrayed in the Old Testament Psalms. IHM considers the example of “Christ crucified” as illustrative of his claims here. He takes issue with “a recent defender of exclusive psalmody” who wrote that “no human poet can advance beyond Psalm 22 or indeed approach anywhere near it” (IHM, p. 24). IHM goes on to say that the words of “O sacred head sore wounded” (by Bernard of Clairvaux), and the words of “And can it be that I should gain” (IHM does not inform his readers that this hymn was written by an Arminian, Charles Wesley), and the words of “When I survey the wondrous cross” (IHM does not tell his readers that this hymn was written by the quasi-Arian Isaac Watts, who right to his last days doubted the Scripture doctrine of the Trinity, and openly said that David’s wording in many

Psalms was inappropriate for Christians), are, in fact, better expressive of the believer's feelings than the words of Psalm 22 (IHM, p. 25). Whether he realizes it or not, IHM is effectively saying that the lyrics of the Arminian and the quasi-Arian are superior to those of the Holy Ghost. And unwittingly he is exemplifying the whole problem of human hymnody, that in its very method and application it requires Christian believers to swallow the words of composers from every spectrum of Christendom. And we have the gross spectacle today, of Evangelical, even Calvinistic Christians, singing the lyrics composed by Romanists, Anglo-Catholics, Arminians and who-knows what else. A check out of even *Christian Hymns*, probably the best and most evangelical of modern hymnals, will yet reveal such idiosyncrasies.

From page 25 on IHM enlarges on this theme, claiming to show how hymnody is superior to psalmody for the New Testament Christian. He is explicit. For instance, on the subject of heaven, "hymns have excelled the Psalter" (IHM, p. 25). "I believe there is confirmation from history of the argument that the larger blessings of the New Testament era warrant additional forms of praise" (IHM, p. 27). He goes on to suggest that the eras of revival such as the Great Awakening have been richest in the production of new hymns because in those times there was "a new measure of the Spirit given to the churches" (IHM, p. 27)! Now this reveals it all, the fact that in the rock bottom of the argument for hymnody its proponents tacitly regard hymn-writers as being moved, inspired, under a "new measure of the Spirit." And that what they compose under this Divine influence is superior to the words of God in the Psalms. Superior, because not only equally theopneustically generated by the Holy Ghost, they also supersede psalmody with an assumed manifestation of greater light and greater relevance to each modern situation as history unfolds. This is the high-horsed arrogance of the whole hymn lobby, that, like the Pope in Rome, they regard themselves as being under the charismatic anointing of the Holy Spirit, and moved, "borne along" (II Peter 1:21), by the inspiration of the heavenly Paraclete. Hence, though they dare not admit it openly, they nevertheless smuggle the principle through into their theology and practice, that non-biblical hymns are effectively new Scripture. They may indeed, be rather fuzzy in their assertions over all this, but their attitude and their practice give them away. Read one of their sermons, even of such a fine pulpiteer as Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and you will find that whereas in the New Testament the apostolic writers are rich in the quantity of Old Testament Scripture they quote, and indeed quote the Psalms probably more than any other Old Testament book, nevertheless, our modern

hymnody-evangelicals like MLJ fill their sermons with quotes of extra-biblical hymns. This whole practice betrays a sub-conscious mind-set which, at its deepest level, regards the words of hymnody as being as sacred and authoritative as Holy Writ, and superior indeed to that Word in terms of their ability to reveal Divine Truth, and lead believers in worship.

And in their liturgical praxis, they usually supersede psalmody with hymnody, virtually totally. And is not such total obliteration of psalmody the exact and axiomatic result of the kind of “positive argument for hymns” that IHM advances here? For if hymns indeed “excel the Psalter,” as he says, then it is inescapable logically that hymns ought to replace the Psalms totally. And this is strangely more than IHM wants to establish. He explicitly says in his booklet, “I agree Psalms are needed today. More psalm singing would be a blessing to many” (IHM, p. 30). It is exclusive psalmody IHM wants to rule out. He agrees that some Psalms should be sung. But if hymns are superior, which according to his “revival-orientated” theology they are, then surely the Psalms must be a second-class ticket, and unworthy of Christ? And is this not the tacit belief of millions of modern, untaught, misled professors of faith? Hymnody is their total practice, and any thought of psalmody seems to them a strange, and unsupportable innovation?

Suffice to say, that IHM’s assertions here, and in the rest of his booklet, are hounded off the battlefield by MHW’s steady, patient, and efficient cascade of refutation. It is impossible in the space of a review to do justice to MHW’s weighty argumentation. We can only exhort the reader to purchase his booklet, and read it alongside an open Bible, and he will see indubitably the biblical answer to the question posed at the beginning of this review article.

In conclusion, it seems apposite now to compare the two booklets, side by side, as it were.

First, *The Psalter—The Only Hymnal?* (Edinburgh: Banner, 2001) by Iain H. Murray costs £1.50. It measures approximately 125 mm. X 180 mm. and runs to about 10,000 words. The booklet has 32 pages, carries 43 footnotes, and is set out in 8 sections, with some 35 Scripture references, but no bibliography and no indices of Scriptures, topics or persons. Neither does it contain any exegesis of relevant Scripture texts, nor any examination of the philology of key words.

Second, *God’s Hymnbook for the Christian Church* (no place: James Begg Society, 2003) by Malcolm H. Watts costs £3. It is a response to Iain Murray’s booklet, and follows its sequence of argumentation, but with so much more

depth, detail, and precision, that one can only say that it outclasses Murray's work. Watt's booklet is produced in an immaculate style and measures 150 mm, X 210 mm. It runs to some 64 pages with approximately 25,000 words in the main body of the text, carries 127 footnotes, and is replete with a general index covering three pages (each double column), and a Scripture index of some 309 references (200 OT, 109 NT), as well as a useful bibliography.

Whereas Murray's use of evidence is deficient, and, we feel justified in saying, subjected to "spin," Watts' argumentation is characterised by a meticulous carefulness and avoidance of spin. He is thereby able to fully refute Murray on every point. Also Watts carefully examines the philology of the apposite Scripture terms endemic to the argument and produces a detailed, and precise exegesis of the relevant biblical texts.

Malcolm Watts has evidently done his work far more thoroughly than the Banner man, and his booklet deserves the widest possible circulation. It ranks, we believe, as the best booklet on Psalmody we have ever seen (and we have examined quite a few over the last 40 years). If Michael Bushell's 240-page book, *The Songs of Zion* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant, 2nd edition 1993), provides the standard for a thorough and full work establishing exclusive psalmody, then Malcolm Watts' booklet is its equivalent at a level more accessible and understandable to most Christians. As such, Mr. Watts' booklet ought to be in every Christian home. The publishers, the James Begg Society, are to be commended for bringing this work to the public, and bringing it in such an attractive and well-arranged format. The booklet is worth buying in bulk, and copies ought to be distributed world-wide as far and as fast as they can go.

Iain Murray's booklet too, is not without its use. It is, as we asserted earlier, an example of the biblical, theological, and logical bankruptcy of the hymnody lobby. And here and there he makes concessions and admissions that suggest that he is not as convinced by his own reasoning as he would really like to indicate. He admits the cogency of the exclusivist position, and he concedes that Psalms ought to be sung in worship. It is sad that his reasoning has been so swayed by unbiblical considerations. Exclusive psalmodists ought to read his booklet candidly, for in a back-handed manner, it will only testify to them even further, if such further testimony was needed, of the correctness of their position. But those who are uninformed, are likely, we fear, to be led astray by the idiosyncrasies therein, the full force of which is an unwitting, and unintended argument promoting *exclusive hymnody*, as Mr. Murray himself would see if he were to inspect the ramifications of his logic.

In evaluating these two productions, we have had it brought to our notice that a much briefer review of Mr. Watts' booklet was printed recently in the *Evangelical Times* (*ET*) for October 2003 (page 22). The review was really as dismissive as it was brief, and the writer seemed to think Mr. Watts had not "convincingly answered Iain Murray's request for scriptural proof that the 150 Psalms were the God-appointed manual of public worship for the Old Testament church, and that they remain the sole manual for the New." Also, the reviewer did not accept that Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 "can bear the weight that exclusive psalmodists seek to place on them."

In response to this we would affirm the absolute opposite on both the above points. Mr. Watts fully answers the reviewer's quibble on the matters of exegesis and biblical philology, but we wonder at the reviewer's ability to appreciate such arguments (MHW, pp. 19-31). And as to Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, the reviewer should rather be asking whether those texts can "bear the weight" the hymn-lobby "seek to place on them." The fact is that modern evangelicals virtually *in toto* read the Bible as if it first appeared in the 20th century, and interpret it in the thought categories of modern Western man. The real meaning of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" in the above texts is to be determined by comparing Scripture with Scripture, and not importing modern predilections or traditions. As such the answer is inescapable, and the *ET* reviewer has not, in my considered view, really come to terms with the *Sola Scriptura* of the Reformation. But then, if he had been convinced by Malcolm Watts' work, would the *Evangelical Times* have printed his review? The whole evangelical set-up in Britain is filled with hymnody right up to the back of its teeth, and practically they read Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 as meaning "[man-made] hymns and hymns and hymns." And psalmody goes to the wall completely. And that is the force of Mr. Murray's logic as I demonstrated above. If you regard modern hymnody as inspired by the Holy Ghost, tacitly you are subconsciously regarding it as Scripture, and if you add to that the notion that these hymns are superior vehicles to the Psalms as to the amount of revelation and relevance they possess, then of course, you *should* abandon psalmody *altogether!* Mr. Murray does not want that, a fact that the hymn-lobby and the *ET* reviewer seem to have missed.

So how should we worship God?

Personally, I am sick of having other people ram the uninspired words of modern hymnists down my throat, and expecting me to sing them. I find error, even heresy, and distortion abound in them, and I have to concur with the late C. S. Lewis that the bulk of them are no more than fourth rate poetry set to fifth

rate music. (As CSL was an Oxbridge Professor of the English language, I think I can rightly say that his words carry some weight.) So when, in the modern evangelical services of today, I am required to praise the Most High with the profane words of fallible men, I stand up, I look up, and I shut up. What right, what authority, has any minister, cleric, or office-bearer got to shovel down the throats of all and sundry the words of mere men and say, "Sing!" But such office bearers have the mandate, indisputably, if what they call us to sing, is the pure words of God. None can quarrel with the Psalms. You can quarrel with the Arminian Wesleys, with the quasi-Arian Isaac Watts, and the plethora of Romanist, Anglo-Catholic, and charismatic hymn-writers whose productions pepper the pages of even the best of evangelical hymnals, but you cannot object to being required to sing the Words of God. May God bring forth more and more of his pure psalmody, is my prayer. All Christians could unite around the Psalter. *This could not be said of any hymnal.*

Three hundred years ago, an English dissenting minister named Watts began a full-scale crusade against psalmody. He began by paraphrasing the 150 Psalms with cavalier liberty, and also produced a book of hymns, and led our forefathers away from the wholesome biblical psalmody. Shaky on his doctrine of the Trinity, he failed in 1719 at the Salter's Hall Conference to come forward to support those ministers who wanted the English Dissenters to maintain fidelity to the *Westminster Standards*, and so was a party to the triumph of the Arians in abolishing subscription to those standards. This Watts carried on his work against the Scottish and other Psalters, and became world-renowned as a hymnist.

Today, amazingly, lightning strikes at the same place a second time, only in its mirror image. It is an English dissenting minister, name of Watts, who now takes up the battle for exclusive psalmody, and his adversary is a man of Scottish Presbyterian connection, who in 1972 swore allegiance to the *Westminster Standards*, has a world-renowned reputation for his work in Reformed publishing, and is an advocate for hymnody.

Well! Chance? Or predestination?