

PURITY OF WORSHIP

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Originally published 1946 by M.C. Ramsay (Taree, NSW)
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Reprinted by direction of the PCEA Synod, May, 2025

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ISBN:
ISBN-13:

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This booklet deals with many important aspects of Christian worship. The design is to set forth the Scriptural character of pure worship. The appeal throughout is to the Word of God. Our aim is, by God's grace, to arouse the spirit of inquiry, for it is recognised that unwittingly and through lack of real investigation and consideration of the matter, many Christians think they are worshipping God acceptably, when they are worshipping in ways which are not of divine appointment.

It is recognised gratefully that there is taking place in Australia a wider and deeper interest in Scriptural doctrine. In certain cases, this has led to an interest in Scriptural worship. Unfortunately, many inquirers are content to restrict their investigation for they fail to recognise that doctrine covers worship even as it encompasses every aspect of our life. They do not recognise the organic relationship of Christian doctrine and worship. Indeed, so interrelated are doctrine and worship, that a failure to learn the truth concerning one inevitably imperils the other. If a church

claims to be Scriptural, it should show its Scriptural nature by adherence to the true doctrinal position and form of worship. On Scriptural grounds there should be no addition to or subtraction from that which is of divine appointment.

It should be noted that the mode and quality of the worship in Christian Churches determine, in a great measure, their influence. There is a light form of worship which fails to nourish reverence, and which repels even the ungodly. Worship which is truly Apostolic in character powerfully promotes the cause of Christ. Thus, the reasons are urgent why the Churches should retrace their steps by returning to thoroughly Scriptural worship. Those who hold that the New Testament is mostly silent in reference to the mode of worship practised in Apostolic days have a very superficial knowledge of its teaching.

We desire a careful consideration of the contents of this booklet. In a day when many professing Christians are seeking excuses for

not following the clear guidance of Scripture, we pray that God will incline graciously the hearts of those who peruse these pages to cleave to that which Is Scriptural and to count it an honour to maintain it.

We look for brighter days. We are not without hope that the wonder-working God will perform many great works of grace, in our day, in these southern lands. May He implant in many hearts intense longings to know and to do the will of God set forth in His Word! May there be a return to the Scriptural principles maintained by the Apostles! To this end it is our privilege to pray and labour. "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned" (Lam. 5:21).

The author of the following pages had desired for many years to write on the subject of Divine Worship, but the demands of a busy pastorate prevented the preparation of even a very brief treatment of it. Now, late in life and in partial retirement, it has been possible to achieve that purpose. I would like to

acknowledge indebtedness to my wife, whose love of the Lord and devotion have contributed invaluablely to my life and work. Tribute is gladly paid to Mr. R. D. Eagleson, M.A., Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Sydney, who has given much encouragement and great practical assistance, including many valuable suggestions.

May the God of truth bless what is written to the formation of correct views and practices in reference to Divine Worship, to His glory!

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CHAPTER ONE

The Principles of Worship

To treat of the worship of the living and true God is to deal with a subject of tremendous importance. Worship is the highest activity of man, for it is the response of the human soul to God. True and therefore acceptable worship is not something which man naturally renders. It owes its origin to God Himself, who gives to men the desire and the power to worship Him.

Persons may be influenced by the mere outward forms of religion, and have their emotions stirred greatly, but unless the Holy Spirit moves them they fail to worship God. Many believe that they naturally have the will and the power to worship God acceptably. This is a delusion. God alone implants the spirit of worship. Therefore, worship owes its origin to the sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit in the soul of man. Indeed, every movement of the human soul Godward, whether in penitence, petition or praise is divinely produced. The disinclination of man, if left to himself, to seek God, is due to the ravages of sin in human hearts and is one of the penal consequences of the transgression of Adam, as set forth in the Book of Genesis and confirmed throughout the Old and New Testaments.

Although many Christians readily acknowledge that true worship is spiritual in character, there is great diversity in the methods they adopt in worship. Some say that the "spirit" of worship is everything. Such do not look to the word of God to ascertain the acceptable mode of worship. They err in that they are concerned only with what they designate the "quality" of worship and ignore the divinely prescribed mode. This false attitude is that of the mystics. They overlook the basic fact that to disregard Biblical precept and example is a sin which vitiates the quality of the worship rendered. Formalists on the other hand, are satisfied if the conventional forms are observed, even though the worship be unspiritual. The extremes of the mystic and of the formalist are to be avoided, for true worship is Biblical in quality and in mode.

From the earliest days of human history God has had His people. They were the objects of His sovereign choice and grace, and they worshipped Him. When the Israelites had been freed from Egyptian slavery and had arrived at Mount Sinai, God gave directions to them concerning the erection of the tabernacle and appointed the mode of service which was to be rendered Him in it. In the book of Exodus, beginning at chapter twenty-five, we have a record of this. That worship was of a typical nature and directed attention chiefly to the coming of the Messiah, His Person and His work.

It is noteworthy that when God, with sovereign authority, appointed the tabernacle worship, He made plain that no alteration in it was allowable without His positive enactment. It was not to be subjected to addition or subtraction. This is an abiding principle in reference to all which God has appointed.

In all ages God jealously guarded His worship, and we read in the Scriptures of severe divine judgments which came upon those who did not respect what God had appointed, e.g., Nadab and Abihu "offered strange fire before the Lord,

which He commanded them not; and there went out fire from the Lord and devoured them." (Lev. 10). God had restricted the priesthood to the descendants of Aaron; but Korah, Dathan and Abiram presumed to perform the functions of the priests, and an awful divine judgment overtook them (Num. 16). Saul was removed from being King of Israel because he intruded into the functions of Samuel by offering sacrifice. (I Sam. 13:13-14). Such cases as have been recorded in Scripture are warnings to successive generations, *even* as the Apostle Paul intimated, "for whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning" (instruction) (Rom. 15:4). These clearly intimate that God does not look with indifference on any interference with what He

has enjoined, and especially in reference to the worship of I f n i - self. We do well to bear in mind that in addition to the right spirit of worship there is the right mode of worship.

There is another feature of the Jewish religion, the synagogue worship, which is very important. This worship consisted of the reading and exposition of the Scriptures, prayer and praise. When the Jew attended the synagogue, he became the participant in a simple but highly spiritual form of worship, wherein was brought before him his responsibility to study God's Word and to offer prayer and praise. The Lord Jesus and His Apostles foretold the destruction of the temple and the cessation of its highly ornate and symbolic services; but they uttered no word to suggest that any such doom awaited the synagogue worship, for the basic principles of the worship observed in the synagogue were to be incorporated into the Christian worship and thus perpetuated throughout the whole of the Christian era. The New Testament Scriptures do not leave us in any doubt concerning the worship practised by the Apostles and the early Christian Church generally. Therefore, the way to worship the Living God has not been left to man's

device or choice but has been divinely authorised.

CHAPTER TWO

Instrumental Worship

There are Christians who are dissatisfied with the simple, unadorned mode of Christian worship, and who turn to the typical and temporary worship of the Jewish tabernacle and temple, in order to gather support for the use of instruments of music in Christian worship. Logically their action is unwarranted, seeing that New Testament worship is based on and therefore organically related to the synagogue worship. Nevertheless, we find that many advocates of instrumental music in Christian Churches seek to find support for their view in the uses made of the silver trumpets in tabernacle and temple. To further counter such an appeal, let us recount the facts.

At Mount Sinai God authorised the use of silver trumpets, but they were not to accompany the singing. They were appointed for four purposes: (a) "For the calling of the assembly", i.e., for summoning the people to meet; (b) To announce that the people were to resume marching;(c) "If ye go to war ... thou shalt blow an alarm with the trumpets"; (d) " Ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt-offerings and over the sacrifices of the peace-offerings". The blowing of the trumpets had nothing whatsoever to do with

congregational singing, for there was no such singing in the tabernacle and temple. Further, the blowing of the trumpets was performed by the priests.

When King David was advanced in years and had made great preparations for the building of the temple, which was to replace the tabernacle, God directed him to change the age-long practice by introducing into the tabernacle instruments of music. The advocates of instrumental music into Christian worship are doomed to disappointment if they look to this for encouragement. Again, let us view the facts. For David to have made this change without divine instructions would have been grievous sin. It is recorded in II Chronicles 29:25: "And he (Hezekiah) set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries and with harps, according to the commandment of David and the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; *for so was the commandment of the Lord by His prophets.*" This clearly records that when King Hezekiah "set the Levites" in the temple, he was following the example of King David who had "set the Levites" in the tabernacle. Also, it is plainly stated that King David in introducing musical instruments into the tabernacle obeyed "the commandment of the Lord". Further, it is clear that this change was effected when the tabernacle was about to be replaced by the temple.

In this connection it should be noted that the appointment of Levites to use cymbals, psalteries and harps in the temple had nothing at all to do with congregational singing. Musical instruments were appointed not for the ordinary worship of the Jew, but for the highly figurative worship in the temple, where Levitical orchestras accompanied the priestly singing.

Those who maintain that Jewish worship had associated with it instruments of music fail to appreciate the facts; and some of the facts are as follows. The ordinary worship of the Jew was that of the synagogue, and it was *always* unembellished. The men of Israel were commanded to attend

the temple worship only thrice annually. Throughout the remainder of the year, Sabbath by Sabbath, they met for worship in their synagogues. Their wives and children attended regularly the synagogues where the services were marked by simplicity. In order to correct false views and to counter erroneous statements it is necessary to declare and to reiterate that the Jew knew nothing of musical accompaniments to congregational singing. The singing in the temple was not congregational. In the synagogue where there was congregational singing, there was no musical instrument. It can be affirmed confidently that from the time the tabernacle worship was authorised until the advent of Christianity, the Jews did not employ musical instruments in their congregational praise. Despite the clear teaching of history, it is common to hear Christians assert the contrary. It is erroneous then to imagine that the Jews were accustomed to ornate services or instrumental music in their ordinary worship.

Some Christians direct attention to the fact that in many Jewish synagogues in these days instrumental music accompanies the congregational singing. In this connection the following statements of Rabbi R. Brasch of Sydney should prove helpful. "There are no definite records as to the actual introduction of instrumental music into the synagogue until 1810, when Reform Temples in Germany did so for the first time . . . In the present-day world, orthodox synagogues still abstain from instrumental music . . . but every Liberal and Reform Temple accompany the congregational singing and the choir on an organ." It is both interesting and informative to notice that the instruments of music were first used in synagogues at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that is, about the same time as they began to be introduced into Protestant churches.

* * *

It is well to emphasize that the temple worship, being typical, was necessarily temporary. It foreshadowed Christ and the blessings of the Gospel. On the contrary, the synagogue worship was neither typical nor transitory. The three outstanding elements of the worship in the synagogue—the reading and exposition of God's Word, prayer and praise—are the leading and essential parts of Christian worship.

In the Book of Psalms there are references to many features of the temple worship. In the New Testament there are also many. The Apocalypse (Revelation) refers frequently to the Jewish temple and its service; but the Epistle to the Hebrews is an inspired interpretation of the symbolism of the temple worship and therefore abounds in references to it. An objection sometimes brought against the Book of Psalms, as a manual of Christian praise, is that it refers to incense, animal sacrifices, instruments of music, etc., which were peculiar to the temple services. But those who so object appear to overlook the fact that the New Testament treats of all these characteristics of the temple worship, and sets forth their spiritual significance, as symbolic of Christ, His work and the blessings of the Gospel.

Christians have a clearer insight into the spiritual significance of much of the contents of the Psalms than was possible in the pre-Christian era; consequently, the Psalter is pre-eminently suitable as the Christian's manual of praise.

In the light of Scripture, Christians throughout the world need not be in doubt as to what should be included in and what should be excluded from Christian worship. In this respect no individual or church is a law to himself or to itself. We are not advocating the practices of any particular church or churches but are declaring the principles of true worship as set forth in the Word of God. It is the duty of Christian people to stand firmly for Scriptural doctrine and worship, and it is their privilege to do so. The success of the Christian

cause is conditioned by this. That which God has appointed is always right, and when and where observed leads to true success. Ephemeral success may seem to attend worship which is of man's devising, but real durable results accrue to those who comply with that which is divinely prescribed. Thousands of years have passed since God declared, "them who honour me, I will honour" (II Sam. 2:30). That declaration is valid for today.

As the Lord Jesus foretold, the temple worship terminated with the destruction of the building, but the age-long synagogue worship persisted. In the Epistle to the Hebrews the symbolic character of the temple worship is set forth at great length, and the temporary nature of it is emphasized. There it is asserted that that service was "a shadow of good things to come." (Heb. 10:1). How fatuous and futile it would be for anyone to attempt to erect a building to fulfil the functions of the Jewish temple! It would be equally futile and presumptuous to seek to reproduce the temple worship, and to imagine that such worship would now be acceptable to God. To do so would be a grievous dishonour to the Lord Jesus, for it would indicate a greater appreciation of the types than of the glorious archetype, the Saviour Himself. Nevertheless, there is a very degraded form of Christianity which has an order of sacrificing priests, altars, incense, elaborate services of music, other features of the temple worship and, as an anomaly, bloodless sacrifices.

Such action is characterised by the Apostle Paul as a return to "the weak and beggarly (impoverishing) elements" (Gal. 4:9). Very pertinent are the remarks of Dr. John Owen, "it is a sad instance of the degeneracy of the corrupted nature of man... The principal reason why the church of the Jews rejected Him at His coming was that they preferred these institutions and their carnal use, above and before Him who

was the substance *and life of them all*" (*Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Vol. IV, p. 39.) What need there is for such in our day to come to the clear light of the word of God, and to grasp the Scriptural concept of Christ and His perfect work and to worship Him as He Himself has appointed! May God defer not to work mightily to this end!

Instrumental music, as an art, is common to all peoples civilised and uncivilised. Throughout the whole of human history, it has been practised. In itself, it is good. Only its misuse calls for condemnation. In the fourth chapter of Genesis, we read of the use of musical instruments prior to the Deluge. From Genesis chapter thirty-one, we learn that the patriarchs used them, for Laban said to Jacob that if he had been advised of his impending departure, he would have sent away Jacob "with mirth and with songs, with tabret and with harp". It is recorded in Exodus 15 that after Israel's triumphant passage through the Red Sea, the women celebrated the event, for "Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." The company of priests whom Saul joined played upon various musical instruments (I Sam. 10).

In I Sam. 18 it is recorded that women "came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing with tabrets, with joy and with instruments of music" to meet King Saul and David. These and other similar events had no reference at all to the worship of God. In those days, as in these days, at local and national rejoicings and festivities, musical instruments were played. From the earliest periods of human history until today music has been employed at social gatherings, and martial music has been in use from the remote past. The many references throughout the Old Testament to the employment of instrumental music on these occasions have

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not the least bearing upon the worship of God.

CHAPTER THREE

Psalms or Hymns

The Lord Jesus, whose Person and work are set forth prophetically and with marvellous precision in the Book of Psalms, used the Psalms, when on earth He rendered praise to the Father. This in itself is not a valid reason why we should employ the Psalms. Christ kept holy the seventh day—the pre-Christian Sabbath—and observed the Old Testament ceremonies. The New Testament administration was ushered in with His death and resurrection. The moment He died, the divinely-appointed sacrifices of the temple lost their validity. The day the Lord rose from death was the first Christian Sabbath or Lord's Day. Consequently, arguments based on Christ's observance of Old Testament ordinances are not necessarily valid. What we do well to notice is that the Saviour found in the Psalms that which expressed His Own experiences; consequently, the words of the Psalmists often were on His lips. This witnesses to the fact that the Psalms are Christian in thought and feeling.

It is recorded in Matthew 26:30, that the Lord and His apostles sang "a hymn". This took place as they were observing the Passover. The Jews consistently sang Psalms 113 to 118 inclusive, in portions, throughout the Passover

season. Consequently, commentators generally agree in declaring that Christ and His followers sang these particular psalms at that time.

Should the use of the word "hymn" cause anyone perplexity, we draw attention to this that the literal rendering of Matt. 26:30 is: when they had hymned or sung praise. Therefore, this verse affords not the least support for the singing of uninspired hymns.

On this occasion of the observance of the Passover, the Lord instituted that sacrament which is called the Lord's Supper. Consequently, we see the passing over of the Psalms from the Old Testament Passover to be associated for the first time with a Christian sacrament; for the singing of a Psalm followed the institution and observance of the Lord's Supper. This transition was very significant and has a message for us today.

To find full authority for the use of the Psalms only in Christian worship we must go to the Apostolic age. The Lord Jesus had promised His immediate followers the gift of the Holy Spirit to teach them "all things" and bring to their remembrance "whatsoever" the Lord has said to them (John 14:26). Further, Christ had said concerning the Spirit, "He will guide you into all (the) truth . . . and He will shew you things to come." (John 16:13). These tremendously great endowments fully qualified the apostles to order the constitution of the Christian church—its government, doctrine and worship, also to direct its pastoral and missionary activities.

The Lord Jesus, who sent the Holy Spirit to bestow unique powers on the apostles, did not commission them to compose a new psalmody. Why was this? Psalms constituted an admirable manual of praise in the pre-Christian era and they are a perfect book of praise for the Christian era. Much in the prophetic Psalms, and most of them are prophetic, was

largely obscure to the Jewish worshipper. Whereas the Christian worshipper, living under greater privileges and in clearer light marvels at the rich spiritual significance of statements in the Psalms which were but dimly understood in pre-Christian times.

It is instructive to notice the efforts made by some hymn-singers to find support in the New Testament for the use of hymns in worship. The fact is that the New Testament is destitute of anything which would favour the hymn-singer. This we declare in the spirit of Christian charity. There are those who profess to find portions of hymns embedded in the New Testament Epistles. Some scholars do not risk their reputations by making definite statements to this effect. Professor James On stated "fragments of these hymns *are believed* to be found in such passages as Eph. 5:14, I Tim. 3:16". (*The Early Church*, p. 23). That which should be emphasized, for it is unquestionable, is that in the Epistles are to be found very frequent quotations from the Book of Psalms and numbers of these extracts are very long.

Further, it should be borne in mind that all religious poems are not hymns. If it could be shown, and it cannot, that in Eph. 5:14 and I Tim. 3:16 there are fragments of Christian poems, that in itself would lend no support to the theory that those poems were employed in Christian worship.

The Apostle Paul when calling for orderliness to characterise the worship in the church in Corinth wrote, "when ye come together, everyone of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine " I Cor. 14:26. Thus we see that psalms were in use in the Corinthian Church, and the Apostle made no reference to hymns. In James 5:13 the pertinent advice is given, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing Psalms." Most of the psalms are expressive of joy and thanksgiving. James exhorts Christians to sing psalms

especially when they are joyful. In addition to those already dealt with, there are other portions of Scripture which refer to the matter or substance of praise. There is Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Advocates of hymns in worship claim that this Scripture warrants the employment of hymns as well as psalms in praising God. On the other hand, there are those who strongly hold that in this portion of Scripture believers are exhorted to sing only psalms in rendering praise to God.

There is a kindred passage: Ephes. 5:18-19: "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves (better, 'to one another') in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." As these two portions of scripture are in certain respects parallel, they will be dealt with conjointly. Both passages have reference:(a) to "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs"; (b) to the singing of them; (c) to the singing from the heart; (d) to offering this praise "to the Lord"; (e) to benefiting one another in the singing of praise.

In Col. 3:16 the statement introductory to praising God is "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly", whereas in Eph. 5:18 it is "Be filled with the Spirit". These statements are by no means mutually exclusive but complementary, for he who has the word of Christ dwelling in him in rich measure, is surely filled with the Spirit, the converse is equally true. These preliminary observations should enable us to perceive more clearly the meaning of these two passages of Scripture.

The word "psalm", which is derived from the Greek word *psalmos*, is a translation of the Hebrew term *mizmor*, which is the title standing at the head of fifty-seven of the psalms. Thus, it is evident that not every psalm has the superscription "psalm". But it is this word which has come to be the

designation of the whole book. Therefore, we speak of the "Book of Psalms", the Jews called the entire book the "Book of Psalms", and the Lord Jesus used this designation, e.g., the Saviour declared "and David himself saith in the Book of Psalms . . ." (Luke 20:42).

Thus, we see that although the one hundred and fifty units are called in the Scriptures the Book of Psalms, only fifty-seven of them bear the superscription psalm (*mizmor*) in the Hebrew Old Testament. The title which the Book of Psalms bears in Hebrew is *Sepher Tehillim*—the Book of Praises. It is this Hebrew word *tehillim*, which is rendered hymns in the New Testament. Numbers of the psalms in the Hebrew bear the superscription *Shir*, which is rendered by the English word song. A 1 1 this indicates that the words "psalms", "hymns", "songs", which appear in Ephes. 5 and Col. 3 are titles borne by different psalms. This shows that the exhortations in these portions of Scripture have reference to the contents of the Book of Psalms and to nothing else. Indeed, the New Testament contains no reference to uninspired hymns.

The question may be raised, why did not the apostle, when referring to the substance of praise, use the simple designation "psalms", and thus obviate any cause of perplexity? There are several replies to this query. One is that the use of the three terms—psalms, hymns and songs—when rightly understood, should occasion no perplexity. Another reply is that the Scriptures elsewhere furnish a clearly parallel use of terms. The Jews sometimes termed the whole of the Old Testament "the law", sometimes "the law and the prophets", and sometimes "the law, the prophets and the psalms". In John 10:34 it is recorded "Jesus answered them, is it not written in *your law*, I said ye are gods?" Yet the quotation He made was from Psalm 82:6. We read in Matt. 23:40 the words of Christ—"on these two commandments

hang *all the law and the prophets*". The Lord Jesus when speaking to His followers after His resurrection declared, "all things must be fulfilled which are written in *the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms concerning me.*" (Luke 24:44). On this occasion Christ purposely used the three terms to denote the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures. We, taking a superficial view, might have expected Him to use a single comprehensive term. We may be sure that the apostle, in writing to the Ephesian and Colossian Churches, purposely employed the three terms—psalms, hymns and songs—to give added clarity and force to his directions. Certainly, those to whom he wrote knew that the exhortation was to praise God with the contents of the Book of Psalms.

The Apostle's method is similar to the way in which Acts of Parliament and legal documents are phrased, e.g., "in any box, chest, carton or other container", i.e., he is being precise, avoiding any misunderstanding—he wants the people to know that he includes *all* of the one hundred and fifty "psalms".

Seeing that the injunction was to sing "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs", the adjective "spiritual" merits our attention. Prof. C. J. Ellicott, D.D., an acknowledged scholar, says that "spiritual" means "such as the Holy Spirit inspired and gave utterance to" (vide *Commentary on Ephesians*). Dr. Charles Hodge stated that the word "most commonly means derived from *the Spirit*". (*Commentary on 1st Corinthians*, p. 173). We know that the psalms, hymns and songs which constitute the Book of Psalms were all given by the Holy Spirit, even as David declared: "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue" (II Sam. 23:2). No hymn-writer, unless daringly presumptuous, would make any such claim on behalf of his own compositions.

Further, we must treat of the application of this adjective "spiritual". The rendering in our Authorised Version makes it

qualify only "songs"; but in the Greek language when an adjective is placed immediately after two or more nouns, it has application to all the preceding nouns. It is placed after all three nouns in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16. Therefore an exact rendering of the passage "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" is "spiritual psalms, spiritual hymns and spiritual songs". This is illustrated in II Thess. 2:17, "and establish you in every good word and work". The adjective "good" in the original Greek is placed last, and transliterated the passage would read, "establish you in every word and work, good". Our translators recognising that "good" qualified "word" as well as "work" correctly rendered the passage. Had the translators acted consistently and with due observance of Greek syntax they would have made the adjective "spiritual" in Eph. 5 and Col. 3 qualify psalms, hymns and songs. Also, we have already seen that these three terms were given to different psalms in the original Hebrew. It may be noted that the first translation of the Old Testament, the Greek Septuagint version, made approximately 200 B.C., conserves psalms, hymns and songs as titles of the contents of the Book of Psalms.

In this connection we now deal with the introductory statement in Col. 3:16: Let this "word of Christ dwell in you richly". What is this "word of Christ"? In I Pet. 1:11 it is stated that "the spirit of Christ" was in the Old Testament prophets and through them testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory which should follow. If, as is definitely stated, the Spirit of Christ testified these things through the prophets, then Christ was the real Author of those Scriptures. Prominent among those prophecies, which so testified concerning Christ, is the Book of Psalms, and therefore Christ is the Author of the Psalms. It was with this fact in mind that the Apostle Paul exhorted his fellow-Christians to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly, for he

immediately referred to the contents of the Book of Psalms as "psalms, hymns and songs". In singing them they would sing "the word of Christ", and by meditating upon them they would have that word of Christ, the psalms, dwelling in them in rich measure. Thus we see that psalms, hymns and songs in Col. 3: 16 are in apposition with "the word of Christ". The Christian Church of today would do well to regain that reverence, which characterised the apostolic church, for all parts of the Scriptures. Then instead of criticising the Book of Psalms and other portions of the Scriptures, the Church would view the Scriptures with wonder, awe and reverence.

It should be very obvious that in the early Christian Church the singing of the Psalms was congregational, as in the synagogues, and had no instrumental accompaniments, and no officially appointed choirs. It should be equally obvious that the Psalter is the only manual of praise sanctioned by Scripture. Bishop Westcott wrote "the Psalter in its fulness belongs to no special time." Bishop Pollock of Norwich declared "the Psalms will always be the best hymn-book of the Church" (*Islington Clerical Conference, 1938, p. 8*).

The Church in the Apostolic era clearly differentiated between inspiration and illumination. Today the Church has so blurred the distinction that many have come to regard these terms as synonymous. For example, many say that God *inspired* good persons to write hymns. This usage of the verb "inspired" is not Biblical. Inspiration guarantees infallibility. The word "inspired" in Scripture means God-breathed. This indicates that the words are given by God and therefore express the mind of God with divine accuracy. This is the claim which the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments make for themselves. John Bunyan was *illuminated* by the Spirit of God to write many helpful books, especially *The*

Pilgrims Progress. But this wonderful allegory is not inspired; if it were, it necessarily would possess as much authority as the Scriptures. Bunyan rightly did not claim inspiration for his writings, but David the psalmist did, when he said, "the Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue" (I I Sam. 23:2). When David sought divine light, in order that he might understand better the Word of God, he prayed for illumination thus, "open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law" (Ps. 119:18).

The Apostles, as we have seen earlier in this section, had been promised inspiration by the Lord Jesus, and they rightly claimed it. The true minister of the Gospel may justly claim to be illuminated by the Spirit of God, but it would be presumption for him to claim that his words are inspired or God-breathed. People who think lightly o r contemptuously o f the Biblical doctrine of verbal inspiration and regard it as something mechanical would do well to consider that in order to guarantee divine accuracy in the expression of divine truth, the words must be divinely given. We could not be assured of accuracy, if God gave only the thoughts to His penmen and left it to themselves to choose the words. Moreover, the Scriptures claim for themselves verbal inspiration. The prophets made this claim for their statements, so did Christ and His apostles, as may be seen in the following selected Scriptures. The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah each testified that the Lord said to him, " I have p u t my words into *thy mouth*: (Isa. 51:16, Jer. 1:9); David declared, *His word* was in my tongue" (II Sam. 23:2); the Lord Jesus said, "the *words* that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63); the Apostle Paul affirmed that he spoke "not in the *words* which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth" (I Cor. 2:13). The Biblical doctrine of inspiration guarantees the infallible accuracy of the Scriptures.

CHAPTER FOUR

Imprecatory Psalms

Probably no book has received more frequent and higher commendation than has the Book of Psalms. It is also true that this book has been subjected to a great deal of adverse criticism, and especially so during recent years. The motives prompting these criticisms we pass over, for our purpose is to see if these critical comments are justified. Usually, the attacks have been directed against those psalms which are frequently described as imprecatory. If these criticisms are valid, they go a very long way towards discrediting the whole book. Under the circumstances, we feel impelled to subject these imprecatory psalms to a close examination. This does not mean that we are setting out to defend them. In the highest sense, they need no defence.

We firmly believe that a just treatment of these imprecatory psalms—35th, 69th and 109th—will not only rebut the arguments of their critics but will cause to shine more brightly before the eyes of God's people the splendour of these particular psalms and enhance the beauty of the whole book as the divinely given and perfect manual of praise. Further a correct appraisal of these psalms will lead to a better understanding of the whole of the divine revelation.

Despite the oft-repeated cry that the imprecatory psalms lack the spirit of true Christianity, it can be shown clearly that their contents harmonise with the teaching of both the Old and New Testaments. We avow that the sentiments and petitions in these psalms accord with the spirit of the words of the prophets and the apostles and of the Lord Jesus Himself.

Throughout the centuries, certain statements of Scripture have been selected as objects of attack, with the purpose of discrediting the Scripture generally. We have observed that frequently those portions which were regarded as more vulnerable, have been shown ultimately to be the very truth of God, and have been used to discomfit unfriendly critics, and to reinforce the confidence of the people of God in the full reliability of the Scriptures. Not once nor twice the assailants of God's Word have had to withdraw in the face of remarkable vindications of the divine character of those passages of Scripture which they, in their folly, imagined would provide battering rams for the destruction of God's Word. In this confidence we proceed to an examination of the imprecatory psalms.

If these psalms were "unchristian", they would have been shunned by Christ and the apostles. Nevertheless, the New Testament records bear witness to the fact that both Christ and His apostles made an extensive use of the imprecatory psalms. This is sufficient of itself to nullify the charge that they are unchristian. Dr. Binnie, when referring to the number of quotations made from these psalms made the striking comment, "the nature of the quotations is even more significant than their number" (*The Psalms*, p. 285).

It is recorded in John 15:25 that the Lord Jesus quoted Psalm 35:19, "they hated me without a cause" and stated that these words described the attitude of His enemies to Him. In

John 2:17 we read that when Christ, in zeal for His Father's glory, expelled the traffickers from the temple, His followers saw in it the fulfilment of the words of Psalm 69:9, "the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up." When Peter addressed the Christians in Jerusalem prior to Pentecost he advised them to choose a man to take the place of Judas Iscariot as an apostle (Act 1:20), and reinforced his exhortation by quoting from two of the imprecatory psalms—the 69th and 109th—"Let his habitation be desolate and let no man dwell therein, and his bishopric (office) let another take." Delitzsch, a n able commentator, designated Psalm 69 "*Psalmus Ischarioticus*"—the Ischariot Psalm, (see *The Psalms* by Dr. Binnie, p. 293). In doing this Delitzsch was following the custom of the ancient church, e.g., Augustine, applied Psalm 69 to Christ and His enemies. Undoubtedly this psalm and Psalm 109 portray the enmity of Jews and Gentiles and especially that of Judas Iscariot, to the Lord Jesus. The ample use made of them by Christ and the apostles forbids any other interpretation. The contents of these psalms are most definitely confirmatory of this.

The Apostle Paul in the following passage—Rom. 11:7-10 — quoted Psalm 69:22-23: "What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded, according as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear unto this day. And David saith 'let their table be made a snare and a trap, and a stumbling-block and a recompence unto them; let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway'." Here it is pertinent to remark that if the sentiments quoted in this passage from the imprecatory psalms are "unchristian", they are not less so when embedded in the Epistle to the Romans. Dr. Handley Moule, Bishop of Durham (Eng.), a scholar renowned for his sanity and

saintliness, had this to say in reference to Psalm 69, "let us remark, for one point, that this same dark psalm is, by the witness of the apostles, as taught by their Master, a psalm full of the Messiah. It was undoubtedly claimed as His Own mystic utterance by the Lamb of the Passion . . . So the Lord Jesus did endorse this psalm. He more than endorsed it; He adopted it as His Own ... In any case, do not let us talk with a loose facility about their incompatibility with 'the spirit of the New Testament'. From one side, the New Testament is an even sterner Book than the Old; as it must be, when it brings sin and holiness out into the light of the Cross of Christ . . . His eyes must have rested, often and again, upon the denunciations of the psalms. He saw in them nothing which struck discord, in the ultimate spiritual depth, with His Own blessed compassions. Let us not resent what He has countersigned." (*The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 292.)

It is plain that the Lord Jesus personally endorsed the denunciations found in the imprecatory psalms, and He Himself uttered words correspondingly severe. For example, we may quote Matt. 23:32-35. "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify . . . that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth." Of more awful import, if possible are the words of the gracious Redeemer recorded in Luke 19:27, "But those mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before Me."

There are some sincere souls who, unable to account for some of the sterner statements in the psalms, seek to meet the objections of the critics by declaring that such statements

reflect the immaturity and defects of the moral teaching of the Old Testament. This procedure is unwarranted, for it is based on a false view of the moral code of the Old Testament. The law which God gave to Israel was grounded in the moral nature of God Himself, and as such reflected the divine holiness. Consequently that law is perfect and is binding always and on all men. That law was written originally on the heart of Adam, for he was made in the moral image of God. Our failure to keep that holy law, which God gave through Moses, is our condemnation. When the Lord Jesus came to obtain redemption for us, He came under the penalty and precept of that law. In other words, He obeyed perfectly and continuously the precepts of that law, and in His Own holy Person suffered the penalty due to us for our transgression of that law. Hence, we have it stated in Gal. 4:4, 5, "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." Also, it is unthinkable that "the Holy One of Israel" should exact laws which are in any degree faulty. We must reject the argument based on the alleged inferiority of the moral code of the Old Testament.

God spoke through the psalmists to give to His church a manual of praise. David was the chief of the psalmists and the author of the imprecatory psalms, and he declared, concerning himself "the Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue." (II Sam. 23:2). Surely the Holy Spirit is not to be charged with providing songs of praise which are tainted with wrong sentiments, and which betray a vindictiveness irreconcilable with the spirit of true Christianity! Further, does Old Testament teaching foster a spirit of revenge? In Exodus 23 :4, 5, it is written, "if thou meet thine *enemy's* ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of *him that hateth thee* lying under his burden and wouldest forbear

to help him; thou shalt surely help with him." In Lev. 19:18 it is commended, "thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; I am the Lord." These precepts accord with the teaching of the Lord Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount His words were explanatory of the truth set forth in the Old Testament Scriptures. Dr. Binnie declared, "there is no lack in the law of Moses . . . of precepts, which for the charitable spirit they breathe, are not surpassed by anything in the Christian Scriptures" (*The Psalms*, p. 289). Job avowed his freedom from the spirit of revenge in these words, " if I rejoiced at the destruction of him who hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him; neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul" (Job 31:29,30).

We look in vain for that vengeful and vindictive spirit which some Christians complacently declare characterises the teaching of the Old Testament. The spirit of true charity is set forth beautifully in Psalm 7, "O Lord my God, if I have done this ... If I have rewarded evil unto him who was at peace with me; yea, I have delivered him that without cause is mine enemy; let the enemy persecute my soul and take it; yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth, and lay mine honour in the dust" (vv. 3-5). This is in accord with Proverbs 25:21, 22, "if thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink; for thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord shall reward thee." Such words are sufficient to dispel the idea that the teaching of the Old Testament favours vindictiveness.

When the Lord Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount set forth clearly the great spiritual and moral principles of the law of Moses, He, in no respect, contrasted His teaching with the truths made known by God through Moses. It is true that He said, Matt. 5:43, "ye have heard that it hath been said, thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy," but He did

not say nor imply that the Old Testament teaching inculcated the hating of one's enemy. The Lord was referring to a rabbinical perversion of the teaching of the Old Testament. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, "the way to approach this statement is to start with the teaching of the Pharisees and scribes. They said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy.' That was actually what they taught. The question at once arises in one's mind, where did they find this in the Old Testament? Is there anywhere there a statement to that effect? And the answer is, of course, No." (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, vol. I, p. 299). Very helpful in this connection are the words of Dr. William Binnie, "when Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount, commands us to love our enemies and to pray for them who despitefully use us and persecute us, He does this, not in the way of setting forth a new commandment, as so many have strangely supposed, but rather in the way of rescuing the old commandment from the perverse glosses of the scribes, and setting it forth anew with His endorsement" (*The Psalms*, p. 289).

If, as Dr. Moule asserted, Christ appropriated and endorsed the sixty-ninth psalm, how can its teaching logically be characterised as unchristian? Not only the Lord Jesus, but the apostles made use of the imprecatory psalms by quoting some of their sternest statements. This makes it abundantly clear that they did not regard their teaching as conflicting with the message of the Gospel. The Rev. Alexander Blaikie wrote concerning these psalms, "to allege that in any instance they breathe a spirit inconsistent with the Gospel, is to represent the Holy Ghost as at variance with Himself. The law of love was as truly enjoined with regard to enemies under the old as under the new dispensation". (*The Philosophy of Sectarianism*, p. 75.)

Dr. John Kitto has expressed so many relevant facts within the compass of a paragraph that we must quote him: " I n

reality, the feeling expressed in these Psalms may well be considered as virtuous anger, such as Bishop Butler explains and justifies in his sermon on 'Resentment and the Forgiveness of Injuries', and such as Paul teaches in Ephesians 4:26, 'Be ye angry and sin not'. Anger against sin and a desire that evil-doers may be punished are not opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, or that love of enemies which our Lord both enjoined and exemplified. If the emotion and its utterance were essentially sinful, how could Paul wish the enemy of Christ and the perverter of the Gospel to be accursed (anathema) 1 Cor. 16:22, Gal. 1:8, and especially, how could the spirits of the martyred saints in heaven call on God for vengeance (Rev. 6:10), and join to celebrate its final execution (Rev. 19: 1-6)? Resentment against the wicked is so far from being necessarily sinful, that we find it manifested by the Holy and Just One Himself, when in the days of His flesh He looked around on His hearers with anger, 'being grieved for the hardness of their hearts' (Mark 3:5); and when 'in the great day of His wrath' (Rev. 6:17), He shall say to all workers of iniquity 'Depart from me ye *cursed*' (*Matt. 25:41*). (*Encyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, vol. III, p. 613).

Unfortunately, the view has gained currency that in the Old Testament, God revealed Himself as the God of judgment, and in the New Testament as the God of love. Most who adopt this view have necessarily a shallow knowledge of the contents of the Bible. Both the divine love and judgment against sin are set forth most clearly in the Old and New Testament, for the revelation made of the character of God is harmonious from Genesis to Revelation. Also it should be borne in mind that in the New Testament is set forth the greatest act of divine judgment—the death of the Lord Jesus for the sins of all His people, when the sinless Son of God, in our nature was, in the words of the Apostle Paul, "made sin for us", and "died for our sins, according to the

Scriptures."

Those who hold the false theory that there is lack of harmony in the Bible, and that the Old Testament is essentially a book setting forth the divine wrath, must find it difficult to account for the many acts of divine judgment recorded in the New Testament, and the many words of stern denunciation, spoken by Christ and His apostles. Such theorists would find it helpful if they were able to transfer to the Old Testament the records of the judgment

which overtook Ananias and Sapphira and kindred judgments. They fail to grasp that an organic unity subsists between the Old and New Testaments and that the Bible is a harmonious whole—a self-consistent unity. The sentiments expressed in the imprecatory psalms are accordant with the contents of the Old and New Testaments.

Another very important question arises: are there no imprecations in the New Testament in addition to those quoted from the Book of Psalms? In other words, are imprecations a feature of the whole of divine revelation? Again, we quote Dr. Handley Moule: "It is in the New Testament the souls of saints at rest are heard saying (Rev. 6:10), 'How long, O Lord, holy and true dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?' It is in the New Testament that an apostle writes (II Thess. 1:6), 'It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them who trouble you?'"

Rev. A. Blaikie commented on the contents of the imprecatory psalms, "Even in the New Testament similar sentiments and phraseology frequently occur." (*Philosophy of Sectarianism*, p. 76). The apostle Paul expressed an imprecation in II Tim. 4:14, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil; the Lord reward him according to his works." The apostle Peter in condemning Simon Magnus for

hypocrisy uttered the malediction, "thy money perish with thee" (Acts 8.20). We read in Rev. 18:20 of the call to rejoice over the destruction of spiritual Babylon, "for God hath avenged you on her". In Rev. 16:5,6 it is recorded by "the apostle of love" that he heard an angel cry, "thou art righteous, O Lord . . . because Thou hast judged thus; for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink, for they are worthy." Such utterances are reminiscent of certain statements in the Book of Psalms. The Apostle John also heard an angel "say with a loud voice, fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come". As a final example from the Book of Revelation we may cite chapter 19:1-2, "I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia for true and righteous are His judgments, for He hath judged the great whore . . . and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand".

If it be right, and the Bible says it is, to rejoice in God's judgments, can it be wrong to imprecate or call upon God to reveal Himself, by His judgments, as the Moral Ruler of the universe? In other words, is it not right to ask God to deliver His people and to overthrow their enemies, and thus to vindicate the justice of His administration and to declare His holiness? Such is the desire of the inspired poet expressed in Psalm 58:10,11, "the righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked; so that a man shall say, verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily there is a God who judgeth in the earth". In impugning the imprecatory psalms, people perhaps unknowingly, are impugning the whole of divine revelation. We do well to lay to heart the words of a past bishop of Durham, already quoted, "let us not resent what He has counter-signed."

Before proceeding further with our examination of these

particular psalms, it should be added that we do not undertake to fully explain them, for in them as in the Scripture generally, there are divine depths of meaning. Professor Iverach spoke in the highest praise of the psalms generally when he declared "the psalms I never can fathom". Their fathomless depth attest their divine authorship. Some have sought to modify the force of the imprecations found in some of the psalms by describing them as predictions of the divine judgment. In reference to this Dr. William Binnie has this to say, "the commentators, such as Horne and Henry, whose sole object is the edification of their readers, have been used to say that David's words are to be understood not as expressing desire, but as predicting the doom of the enemies of God. If this explanation is offered as the strict interpretations of the words, it must be rejected. It is certain that the psalmist speaks in the *imperative*, not in the *future* merely" (*The Psalms*, p. 294). Dr. Kitto stated, "most of our devout commentators insist that the expressions in question are not maledictions, but mere declarations or predictions of what will come to pass. This explanation is however quite inadmissible; for in several of the most startling passages — such as 59:14; 69:25, 28; 79:6; the verbs in the original are plainly imperative and not indicative" (*Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature*, vol. III, p. 612).

David, the author of the imprecatory psalms, always manifested a readiness to forgive even his enemies. In his public life as well as in his private life he exhibited the same spirit. In his attitude to King Saul, he showed remarkable patience. Repeatedly Saul sought to kill David and repeatedly broke his promise not to do him harm, nevertheless, David refrained from taking vengeance. Similarly, David "bore with much long-suffering" the reproaches of Shimei. How can we attribute to David a vengeful spirit when we find him, in one of the "cursing" psalms, affirming in reference to his bitter

enemies, "as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother; I bowed down heavily as one that mourneth for his mother." Ps. 35:13,14.

In the psalms are not found utterances of resentment for private injuries. David imprecates individuals and nations who have wronged the people of God and brought dishonour upon the God of Israel. Also when David utters imprecations against his own enemies, they are not those who have wronged him privately, but in his public capacity as "the Lord's Anointed". Such are the enemies of David in his representative capacity in the theocracy and are thus the enemies of God and of His cause. Dr. Lloyd Jones writes, "it is exactly the same with the so-called imprecatory Psalms which trouble so many people. The psalmist, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is pronouncing judgment against not only his own enemies, but the enemies of God and those who are abusing the church and the kingdom of God as it is represented in him and in *the nation*." (*Studies in the Sermon on the Mount, vol. I, p. 226*). Dr. Moule commented "David appears in the psalm (69th) not merely as a private person crying out about his violated personal rights, but as an ally and vassal of God, one whose life and cause is identified with His." (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, p. 291*). In commenting on an imprecatory psalm, John Calvin gave this advice, "always it behoves us to bear in mind that David deals not in a private case of his own." (*Commentary on the Psalms, vol. III, p. 128*). Rev. A. Blaikie wisely remarked, "none of the psalms ought ever to be applied to private feuds or personal quarrels". (*Philosophy of Sectarianism, p. 76*). Dr. Binnie wrote "the motive of the imprecations is not to be sought in a sense of personal wrong or of wounded honour,

not in personal selfish vindictiveness, but in a holy regard to the glory of God, trodden in the dust and given over to contemptuous blasphemy . . . David speaks in his public character, as the chosen servant of the Lord and anointed King of Israel; and has in view, not his own particular foes, but the enemies of the cause of which he is representative—the cause of God, and of truth and righteousness in Israel . . . To read these psalms of his as if they were the utterances of some private individual in reference to neighbours who have done him a private wrong, is to leave out of the account the principal element in the case" (*The Psalms*, pp. 283-4). Professor A. J. Alexander in commenting on Psalm 69:22 stated, "the imprecations in this verse and those following it are revolting only when considered as the expression of malignant selfishness. If uttered by God, they shock no reader's sensibilities nor should they when considered as the language of Him who, though He prayed for His murderers while dying, had before applied the words of this very passage to the unbelieving Jews (Mt. 23:38), as Paul did afterwards (Rom. 11:9.10). The general doctrine of providential retribution, far from being confined to the Old Testament, is distinctly taught in many of our Saviour's parables." (*Commentary on the Psalms*, p. 295).

Some persons grievously misunderstand the motives of King David in giving instructions to his son Solomon to punish Joab and Shimei. Both these men had committed crimes for which they deserved to be put to death. Here we need not consider the case of the worthless Shimei. Joab was the commander-in-chief of the Israelitish army and had committed murders, and thus in the words of David had "shed the blood of war in peace". The king knew well the terrible guilt of Joab, and was aware that to allow him permanently to go unpunished might well bring down heavy divine judgment on the nation. Therefore, the aged and

enfeebled king directed his wise and energetic son to put to death Joab—"the captain of the host". A judge who pronounces sentence of death is not to be charged with vindictiveness. David's counsel to Solomon regarding Joab and Shimei had nothing of the nature of one who bore a grudge. All this helps us to understand the imprecations in the book of Psalms. The following quotation is from Dr. Binnie's book on the Psalms: "It is not to be forgotten that the thing which yields him (David) so much joy is not the vengeance itself, or the fearful destruction of his enemies, but the public vindication of the divine justice, the unequivocal demonstration of the reality and power of the divine government (p. 284).

The Apostle Peter declared that "the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of David, spoke before concerning Judas" (Acts 1:20); and it was in the imprecatory psalms that the Holy Spirit so spoke.

CHAPTER FIVE

Worship in the Sub-Apostolic Church

We have nothing approaching a full history of the sub-Apostolic period. The Christians for the first five centuries were essentially a psalm-singing people. Pliny, who was praeter of Bithynia, wrote a letter to the Roman Emperor, about 102 A.D. in which he stated that the Christians in that province "had been wont, on a certain day, to sing a psalm (Latin, carmen) to Christ as to a God". Some have wrongly thought that this meant that the Bithynian Christians sang what is now popularly called hymns. Such fail to understand that those early Christians recognised that in singing psalms, they were praising Christ, for like the Apostolic church they knew that the psalms are Christ-centred.

History furnishes conclusive evidence that in the early centuries doctrinal errors came into the Christian Church. Jerome who died in the year 420, had declared that the church was "a thicket of heresies". Extant records tend to confirm this strong statement. Under such circumstances it would have been strange if the worship handed down from the Apostles had retained its pristine purity. Nevertheless, but few uninspired hymns were imported into Christian worship. We have seen that when the opponents of

Christianity sought to destroy the books of the Christians, they recorded having seized copies of the Scriptures and especially copies of the Psalter, but they made no mention of finding prayer-books or hymn-books. In the church of the early centuries there was stout opposition to the use of uninspired hymns in worship. The Council of Laodicea, which met circa 360 A.D. declared against the use of such hymns, and the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. did likewise.

Dr. William Binnie gave this very temperate appraisal of the situation: "upon the whole, therefore, it may be accepted as a well ascertained fact that, down till so late a period as the middle of the fourth century, the Psalms reigned supreme and almost alone in the service of song throughout the whole Church, and especially in the west. The remarkable prominence still given to the Psalter at the beginning of the fifth century comes out perpetually in the life and writings of Augustine." (*The Psalms*, p.368).

In his *Confessions*, Augustine tells of the influence of the Psalms upon him throughout the whole of his Christian life. Here are a few brief extracts: "Oh! in what accents spake I unto Thee, my God, when I read the Psalms of David, those faithful songs and sounds of devotion, which allow of no swelling spirit . . . and how was I by them kindled toward Thee, and on fire to rehearse them . . . and yet they are sung through the whole world."

The following paragraphs are from *The Psalms*, by Dr. Binnie (pp. 373-384). "In order that the people might sing with the understanding, Augustine bestowed much pains on the exposition of this part of Scripture. In his collected writings, a much larger space is devoted to the Psalter than to any other book of Scripture. He published in his lifetime *Enarrations*, a kind of running commentary on all the Psalms; and of these the greater part were discourses actually delivered to

Christian congregations. Besides the *Enarrations*, there are some twenty-two sermons founded on texts in the Psalms. In introducing his *Enarrations*, the preacher would sometimes say, "I have united with you, beloved, in singing this psalm; I beg that you will now, in your turn, unite with me in applying your minds to a devout meditation upon it." There is evidence that Augustine's expositions were listened to with breathless attention by great congregations. His *Enarrations* were much read and greatly prized for a thousand years; and indeed were only superseded by the exposition of the Reformers."

The apostolic church, as the contents of the Book of Acts reveal, worshipped God and carried out their vast evangelistic work among Jews and Gentiles without resorting to the use of musical instruments. The Gospel in itself was the attraction. It needed and received no embellishments from the apostolic Church. This accounts for the total lack of references in the New Testament Epistles to instrumental music in the Christian Church. This was to be expected seeing that the worship of the Church was modelled after the synagogue worship. The New Testament writers gave injunctions to sing to God with the voice, but none to play instruments of music, for such were foreign to their worship. For centuries the early Christians observed this simplicity of worship. As the New Testament is destitute of any reference to the use of incense in Christian worship, so it is destitute of any reference to instrumental music in New Testament worship. To introduce both into Christian worship is to do that which lacks any Scriptural authority. To employ one of these, and not the other, is to act illogically and inconsistently.

In the early centuries eminent Christian leaders such as Justin Martyr, Basil, Chrysostom, Jerome and Augustine all practised in their churches singing unaccompanied by

musical instruments. Reference is made to these, not that we follow the examples of men, however much renowned, nor because we regard the sub-apostolic church as providing guidance for the church of later centuries, but for the purpose of making it abundantly plain that the legacy of worship bequeathed by the Church of the Apostles to the Christian Church of all ages did not include instrumental music and man-composed hymns.

CHAPTER SIX

Decline and Reformation in Worship

The Book of Acts particularly, and the New Testament generally, provide much information concerning the Apostolic Church, its constitution, worship and work. Those early Christians exercised deep faith, hope and love, great zeal for God's glory and deep compassion for the unsaved, all of which gave strong spirituality to the life and worship of the Church. Their worship was characterised by directness and simplicity, and freedom from all mere human adornments. Herein was its great attraction. The late Mervyn Archdall, M.A., Canon of St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, wrote, "In I Corinthians 14 we have an account of what the worship of the infant Christian community was. Prayer, psalmody and Christian instruction alone are mentioned as part of it." (*The Church and Churches*, p. 39.) It is plain that those churches today are truly apostolic, in the correct sense of that term, which proclaim the truths preached by the Apostles, observe their mode of worship and follow their mode of church government.

The early Christians, like the Jewish worshippers in the synagogues, praised God in the words of the psalmists, having no musical accompaniment. This is reiterated here,

and specific reference is made to it, because there are those who declare that the singing of the Psalms should always be with musical accompaniment, for it is averred that the word "psalm" designates a song sung to the accompaniment of a lyre. The Biblical use of the term "psalm" reveals the falsity of that assertion. For example, a psalm was none other than a psalm when sung in the synagogue without the use of a musical instrument. Professor Binnie stated, "the general idea expressed by Psalm is a poem framed to be sung rather than read" (*The Psalms*, p. 5). In the Epistle of James 5:13, the downcast Christian is exhorted to pray, and to the happy believer the exhortation is, "Let him sing psalms". English scholars who produced the Authorised Version were accustomed to indicate in the marginal notes even matters of small importance, and if '*psalleteo*' in the epistle of James meant to sing with a musical accompaniment, they would have indicated such in the margin.

If the Apostles had used musical instruments in praising God, no doubt the practice would have been maintained in the church. But there is the clearest evidence that the apostolic and sub- apostolic Church refrained from rendering inanimate praise. Also, the use of instruments in the praise of God was unknown in the Christian Church for many centuries. Congregational singing was a characteristic of the worship in the synagogues and became an equally helpful feature in the worship of the Christian Church. Consequently, in Jewish synagogues and in Christian churches the Psalms were sung by the congregations without the employment of any musical instrument. After a few centuries the Christian Church lost much of its pristine spirituality, and this led to the rise of the Papacy. This in turn, led to a debasement of Christian worship, both in reference to its spirituality and mode. Pope Gregory (590-604) abolished congregational singing and restricted the singing to professional choirs. The

congregations were bereft of their divinely-given right to take part in singing the praise of God. Another disastrous circumstance was that the people became increasingly ignorant of the Psalter, which generally had maintained its pre-eminence as the manual of praise in the church. Another untoward factor was that the Latin language fell increasingly into disuse, so that few in the congregations understood it, but the choirs continued to sing the Psalms in Latin. This led to a greater ignorance of the contents of the Book of Psalms. These two unscriptural practices of the Papacy, with their baneful effects, largely continue to this day. To the people the Psalter became a fountain sealed, and the worship became in spirit and mode increasingly unlike Apostolic worship. The late saintly Bishop of Durham, Dr. Handley Moule wrote of the Christians in apostolic days meeting "in some Christian upper room, devoid of every semblance of decorative art and dignified proportion, only to listen to the Word, to pray and praise in the name of the Crucified, and to eat and drink at the simple Eucharist, the rite of thanksgiving for the *Master's awful death*" (*Messages from the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 267).

Under the influences of successive popes and their councillors, the Christian Church degenerated. Throughout the mediaeval period, there were but few rays of divine light. Upon that darkness broke the light and in a very large measure the darkness disappeared. The light which scattered the spiritual darkness was the Word of God applied by the Holy Spirit. The dissemination of the truths of God's Word and the workings of the Holy Spirit produced the results known as the Protestant Reformation. The Reformers were not the purveyors of a new religion or of new doctrines and practices, for they sought to lead people back to the fountain-head, the Word of God. In doing this the thorough-going Reformers acted on the Scriptural principle of

admitting into the divine worship only that which had the sanction of God. They were greatly helped in carrying out the task of bringing the Church into conformity with the Apostolic pattern. They rejected all so-called holy days other than the Lord's Day, abolished the mass with its altar and sacrificing priests, forbade the use of the crosses and crucifixes as religious symbols, prohibited auricular confession, priestly absolution, the use of incense and candles, and abolished the elaborate service of music and the many other unscriptural and therefore unauthorised methods of worship. But their work was equally constructive, for they reintroduced the right of congregational singing and restored the Psalms to the people, in their own languages, as their manual of praise. Prayer was shorn of its many superstitious accretions and was set forth as the direct approach to God, by the individual, in faith, through Christ the only Mediator. The Word of God was set forth as the only rule of faith and practice, and tradition, papal pronouncements and the decrees of Church councils were all subordinated to the Word of God and were all to be tested by the Scriptures. By moulding divine worship after the simple mode prescribed in the Scriptures, they totally reformed a great portion of the corrupt church, so that it was restored to its pristine glory. Indeed, the church regained very much of that light, strength, zeal and scriptural soundness which had characterised the church in the days of the Apostles.

Once again, praise ascended to God in the singing of the songs of Zion—the Psalms—unaccompanied by instrumental music. Once again, prayer became direct, spiritual and powerful and was no longer a superstitious performance. Once again, the Scriptures were given their right place in Christian worship, and multitudes listened eagerly and receptively to the Word of God read and expounded. Once again, the two sacraments were given their Scriptural place in

the Christian Church and became an additional source of blessing to the worshippers, for they were no longer treated as superstitious rites. Once again, the Psalter became a fountain unsealed, and millions drank of the pure water of that fountain. Once again many walked "in newness of life", doing the will of God as set forth in His Word.

It is well-known that the subject of worship engaged the serious attention of the Reformers. Martin Luther and John Calvin differed in their attitude to the mediaeval mode of worship. Luther sought to conserve much of it. Calvin sought to abolish all parts of that worship which lacked divine sanction, for he was much more logical and consistent than Luther. The latter sought a compromise between the worship of Rome and that of the apostolic Church, even as doctrinally he failed to make his teaching thoroughly Scriptural. Luther held that whatever was not explicitly forbidden in Scripture was permissible. For example, his doctrine of consubstantiation was neither that of the Middle Ages nor of Scripture. The consequences were that Luther favoured a highly ceremonial form of worship, whilst Calvin held to that Scripturalness which had characterised the worship of the Apostolic Church. It would be wrong for anyone to regard the example of either Luther or Calvin as infallibly correct. Men should be followed only in so far as they follow the Scriptures. This citation from *The Story of the Church* by Dr. G. P. Fisher, indicates the unscriptural character of many parts of the public worship of God as practised by Luther. "Private confession before communion he neither rejected nor did he make it obligatory. Exorcism in connection with the rite of baptism was retained by him. It was not until 1543 (three years before his death) that the custom of elevating the host in the Lord's Supper was dropped in Wittenberg. The

altar was furnished with candles and the crucifix . . . The organ was still used . . . The churches were decorated with pictures, the subjects being scriptural.... The "church year" was reformed but not given up by the Lutherans. The great festivals connected with the life and work of Jesus—the Advent, Christmas, with Circumcision and Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, Whitsuntide, and the festival of Trinity—were retained, as were also the days commemorative of the Apostles, the day of John the Baptist, and the feasts of the Annunciation, Purification, and Visitation of the Virgin Mary. Even the day in honour of Michael the Archangel, and that of St. Lawrence, a martyr in the third century, were not abolished." (pp. 420-1).

In contrast with Luther, Calvin adopted the Scriptural principle that the mode of worship is not something for man to devise but has been prescribed by God. Luther can scarcely be regarded as a reformer in the matter of worship. On the other hand, Calvin fostered a form of worship which closely approximated to the Apostolic mode. He laid special emphasis upon the exposition of the Scriptures, the directness of prayer, the rendering of praise by the congregation singing Psalms without musical accompaniment. It is true that Calvin allowed to be used in praise several Scripture Canticles, especially the song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32), but quite early the Reformed churches excluded from worship the singing of the canticles of Scripture, for they came to recognise clearly that the Psalms only were the divinely appointed manual of praise. The fact that for a time Scriptural canticles were sung in the Genevan churches, has been used by some writers to claim that Calvin favoured the singing of hymns in worship. This is to do that great reformer an injustice; for Calvin was resolute in holding that uninspired songs such as hymns should be rigorously excluded from worship, for they lacked the necessary divine sanction.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Concluding Remarks

There is a powerful factor operating against the adoption by the Christian Churches of that pure form of worship which characterised the Christian Church in the days of the Apostles. That factor is deep and wide-spread ignorance. Most Protestants do not know the character of Apostolic worship and therefore are unaware that the churches generally have departed from the form of worship practised in Apostolic times and widely adopted in Reformation days. Considerable ignorance prevails concerning the history of the introduction of instrumental music and hymns into the Christian Churches. There is a lack of knowledge not only of the periods when these introductions were made, but of the fact that they are importations into Christian worship. There was a time when Presbyterians throughout the world used the Psalms only as the substance of their praise. The same is true of other churches, and even of the Roman Catholic Church. As a result of this lack of knowledge so many Christians erroneously imagine that the current forms of worship are both Apostolic and Reformed. Worse still through a lack of assiduous study and attention to the teaching of God's Word they unthinkingly accept that God is

pleased with almost any form of worship if it is offered in sincerity.

Many Christian Churches of today should retrace their steps, for they have departed further and further from Apostolic doctrine and worship and consequently from Reformation attainments. Many remedies may be suggested; but surely the remedy is a true revival of the churches—a revival devoid of anything fictitious—a revival which is the result of the powerful working of the Holy Spirit, leading people in deep humility to God, through the mediation of the Lord Jesus. True revival will lead

to a return to God, to His Word and to His ways as set forth in the Scriptures. In this way only, will the churches regain their pristine freshness, power and glory; for with teaching and practice—doctrine and worship—brought into conformity with Apostolic Christianity, Christ will be honoured in deed, and not simply in word, as the King as well as the Saviour of the Church.

May the Sovereign God outpour the Spirit and arouse the churches from indifference and slumber and awaken them to a recognition of the loss they incur in not rendering Scriptural worship, and the dishonour they do to God in withholding the glory due to Him.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Appendices

There are some persons who, whilst not prepared to advocate the use of hymns in divine worship, are disposed to favour the use of paraphrases. Sometimes this partiality for them has been occasioned by old associations. Perhaps in their youthful days they had been accustomed to sing paraphrases, or they look upon the use of them as a compromise betwixt psalm-singing and hymn-singing. In any case we must resort to Scripture in order to determine if their use in worship is lawful.

Scripture affords no authority for the singing of paraphrases in divine worship. It should be observed that doctrinally some of them are unsound. One does not need to be a literary critic to recognise that most of the compositions in the collection called paraphrases, are not paraphrases at all. Why they were so classified we may never know; but we may surmise that they being hymns, were placed in the category of paraphrases in order to aid their importation into the praise of God. Some of them, like some hymns, have certain beauties of thought and expression, but unlike the Psalms, are not divinely appointed to be used in worship. The Scriptural principle governing worship is that what is not

prescribed by God is forbidden. We must act in accordance with that principle, and rigorously exclude the paraphrases from our worship of God.

Concerning hymns, it has been considered unnecessary to criticise adversely the contents of hymn-books, for our primary aim has been to treat the subject of worship in the light of Scripture and Scripture, as we have seen, rules out hymns in principle. True it is that numerous hymns cannot endure the searchlight of the Word of God, but the severest critics of the hymns are those who use them. From time to time, scathing criticisms of hymns come from leaders in various churches. If psalm-singing Christians were to utter such devastating criticisms, they would be regarded as narrow-minded and boorish. For example, "The Sydney Morning Herald" of October 8th, 1966, recorded that "the Anglican Bishop of Grafton, N.S.W., recently described many hymns used in his Church as `sentimental, unpoetical, nonsensical and heretical'." How ironical it is that these same Christians will be found defending the use of hymns in worship in preference to God-given, God-appointed songs of praise, the Psalms.

The modern pronounced tendency to use liturgical forms makes this subject of additional importance. The more reformed churches, at an early stage came to regard with disfavour the use of liturgies, and this disapproval continued until recent times.

The case for and against the use of set forms in worship must be decided by appealing to Scripture. There is convincing evidence that free prayer was in use in the Apostolic Church, and one outstanding example is found in Acts 4:23-30. There is also no indication that written prayers were used in the Apostolic Church.

Those who favour the use of liturgical forms are disposed to refer to the fact that John Calvin compiled what might be termed a service book; for the Reformer drew up certain forms to be used in administering the Sacraments, celebrating marriage, etc. Likewise, John Knox compiled the "Book of Common Order". Both these service books were compiled for the guidance of the church in a period of immaturity and lack of trained ministers. Knox himself did not use the "Book of Common Order" nor was it required of other ministers to do so. In many parishes in Scotland, owing to the scarcity of ministers in early Reformation days, the services were conducted by "Readers". These "Readers" used to read the Scriptures, offer prayer and preside over the offering of praise, and in doing so, were to use the "Book of Common Order". The employment of "Readers" was for the purpose of meeting the emergency due to the lack of ministers. It was a temporary arrangement.

Apart from these historical facts, it is clear that the Apostolic Church did not use liturgical forms. This is the matter of paramount importance, and apart from all historical considerations, furnishes the necessary conclusive evidence. If a liturgy were essential, then we would find reference to it in the Epistles.

As Christians we must, in the matter of posture in prayer as in other matters follow the guidance of God's Word. It is not to be one of personal likes and dislikes. There exists today a great diversity in the forms observed in Christian worship. This has been occasioned generally by failure to accept the guidance God has given, and much of it, we fear, is of the nature of "will-worship" (Col. 2:23).

Reverting to the synagogue worship, we recognise that the Jews stood to pray. They might or might not, on other

occasions, kneel in prayer. Standing was the posture usually adopted when praying. The Lord Jesus said "two men went up into the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a Publican . . . The Pharisee *stood* and prayed thus with himself . . . and the Publican *standing* afar off would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven" (Luke 18:10, 13). Also, Christ said, "when ye *stand* praying,

forgive, if ye have ought against any." (Mk. 11:25). Thus, we see that standing was the usual posture whether praying in private or in corporate worship. Nevertheless, it was not the exclusive method, for Solomon knelt, as well as stood, in prayer at the official opening of the temple (I Kings 8:22, 54). The Apostle Paul declared, " I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:14). Therefore, both standing and kneeling in prayer have the divine sanction. The early Christian Church adopted both these postures.

It is interesting and instructive to note that one of the canons of the great Council of Nice which met A.D. 325, decreed that Christians should stand in prayer on the Lord's Day, as expressive of joy and triumph, befitting the day commemorative of the Lord's victory over death and all His adversaries. On other days they were permitted to kneel. However we may view such a decree, the point pertinent to the present subject is that these two, standing and kneeling were the recognised postures in prayer in the fourth century. These two practices were adopted by the churches of the Reformation.

Owing to the current deep ignorance of Reformation attainments and of Scriptural precedents, we may well wonder how many who sit at prayer fail to recognise that Scripture gives no countenance to that practice. Some will reply that it is not the posture of the body but the condition of the soul which is of importance. This is but a half-truth at best. We know that the attitude of the soul is of supreme

importance, and this should never be overlooked; but what about the soul's attitude to God's will and divine guidance and institution? In prayer the posture should be such as accords with Scripture, and such as becomes those who worship the infinitely glorious one who is their Creator and the God of their salvation.

A feature of the Old Testament typical system was the observance of certain holy days and seasons, such as the Days of Unleavened Bread (the Passover), the Feast of Tabernacles, Pentecost and the Day of Atonement. These had special typical significance, and like the temple and its worship, did not have permanent duration. With the advent of Christ and the bringing in of the Christian dispensation they lost their validity and were abolished. The Sabbath referred to in the Ten Commandments did not form a part of the typical system given by God through Moses to Israel. In the earlier days of human history there was but one holy day, the Sabbath, and all other days of the week were alike, in that none of them was holy. The Apostolic Church returned to the simplicity of the era prior to the inauguration of the types, and observed as holy, only one day in the week. That was the Lord's Day or the Christian Sabbath. Their religious observance of the Lord's Day rests on a foundation much older than the resurrection of Christ. It is based on the law of the Sabbath ordained at the creation. The ordinance designated the Lord's Supper superseded the Passover, and the day, designated in Scripture the *Lord's Day*, replaced the ancient Sabbath. The Lord's Day is therefore the weekly festival of Christ's resurrection and the one holy day. Christ entered into His rest on the day of His resurrection. Hence, the first day of the week became the Christian Sabbath, i.e., rest day. When Gentile Christians observed the typical days and seasons of the Church of the pre-Christian era, the Apostle Paul

protested, "how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"

"Ye observe days and months and times and years; I am afraid of you lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." (Gal. IV:9-11). Should any reader demur and say that the observances the Apostle opposed were those of certain days of Christian commemoration, our argument is equally relevant. It is greatly to be regretted that many Christians observe as holy the days called Good Friday and Christmas and the Easter periods. These lack the divine sanction. We are not to add that which God has appointed.

There are misguided Christians who hold that the Sabbath enjoined in the Fourth Commandment was annulled when Christ rose from the dead, and that the Lord's Day is quite a different institution. This view is unscriptural, for it is clear from the Scriptures that the ancient Sabbath was transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week and was given much richer significance as the Lord's Day, in that it became the divinely appointed memorial of the resurrection of Christ as well as of the Creation. Had the Christian Church rejected all "holy days" of man's appointment, and followed the teaching of the Word of God in observing would be far less prevalent than it is today. The Lord's Day is one of the great divine institutions and was appointed by God to be the special day of rest from toll and to be devoted to man's highest exercise, the worship of the living and true God.

Since early in the nineteenth century there has been on the part of very many Protestant Churches an increasing dislike for the purity which was generally practised by these churches in earlier years. This was occasioned to a large degree by the adoption of a sceptical attitude to the Scriptures and the consequent decline in Biblical preaching. Even where the divine authorship and reliability of the Scriptures were

maintained the emphasis generally was on but a few of the great doctrines of God's Word. This, together with the tendency to treat lightly the duty of obedience to God's revealed will, and the consequent view that man may please himself as to the way he worships God, has led to a rejection of the Scriptural principles regulative of worship. The concepts of humanism have so invaded the province of worship, that many Christians have concluded that modes of worship which are pleasing to men are necessarily acceptable to God. Thus, many churches refuse to seek any guidance from God's Word concerning their worship. Yet these churches originally stemmed from the Churches of the Reformation. Their views of worship are utterly alien to the teachings of Scripture and to the Reformed concept of the Scriptural principles of worship as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) : "The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His Own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture". (Chap. XXI, Section 1).

Dr. A. A. Hodge made the following pertinent comments: "Since God has prescribed the mode in which we are acceptably to worship and serve Him, it must be an offence to Him and a sin in us for us either to neglect His way, or in preference to practise our own." We have in no case any right, upon the ground of taste, fashion or expediency, to go beyond the clear *warrant of Scripture*" (*A Handbook on the Confession of Faith* pp. 271-2).

As for the content of worship, the same chapter in the Confession defines praise as "the singing of Psalms with grace in the heart."