

The Blue Banner

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Worship Song Regulated By Scripture

From the Editor

This issue of *The Blue Banner* is devoted to a review by Richard Bacon of Benjamin Shaw's *Studies in Church Music*. The goal of *Studies* seems to be to justify the use of choirs, musical instruments, and songs other than Psalms in public worship. We have extended the invitation to Mr. Shaw to respond to the review if he so desires. I originally corresponded with Ben Shaw and Greenville Seminary when this monograph was published, because I was alarmed at the use the author made of Ex. 15:20, to support the use of musical instruments in public worship. I expressed to him my fear that this gave the dance and drama crowd all the support they needed to justify dance in worship, something I thought Greenville opposed. His response is the letter to which Pastor Bacon refers in footnote "2" of this review.

It appears the reason for the booklet's publication was to ease the minds of seminary supporters who may have feared the school was in favor of exclusive psalmody, because of the Seminary's backing the publication of *Worship in the Presence of God* (See the footnote referred to above). This motivation in and of itself is not necessarily to be faulted. However, judging from the content of Shaw's piece, and the flippant dismissal of the arguments in favor of a *cappella* exclusive psalmody, in my opinion there was no desire to deal thoroughly and fairly with this position. At this point, there is no reason to think that any deceit was involved. The booklet has all the appearance that the author rushed into print to justify his and the seminary's positions with arguments not very clearly thought out. Mr. Shaw in his letter to me has retracted his use of Ex. 15:20 to justify musical instruments, saying he does not believe it has anything to say to public worship. He also states he is opposed to the use of dance in public worship.

I am disappointed in Greenville Seminary. First, because they published such a tract that doesn't deal fairly with the issues, and appears to have been published out of the need of political expediency. Second, because of the lack of scholarship evidenced. I expected better. It is proof to me that even Greenville (which as an institution represents those in the PCA defending stricter confessionalism), while seemingly able to articulate the regulative principle by quoting the Westminster Confession, fails to really understand the principle or its application.

It is my hope that Mr. Shaw in some measure responds to Pastor Bacon's review. I trust at least he will make his retraction regarding Ex. 15:20 public. Certainly those of us who disagree with Greenville Seminary's position against a *cappella* psalmody do not wish them any ill. We pray that our brethren would more seriously and thoroughly consider these issues and the arguments involved in discussing them. We have to be willing to put every custom and tradition we hold dear on the table, else through prejudice to our traditions we put forth silly and shallow arguments to keep them. Lacking this willingness we will fail to submit to our Lord Jesus Christ, when his regulative principle of worship cuts deep against our own cherished traditions.

Worship Song Regulated By Scripture

A Review of Benjamin Shaw's monograph *Studies in Church Music* (Greenville, SC: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1993). By Richard Bacon.

Benjamin Shaw is Instructor in Old Testament at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. His recent pamphlet on church music is the most recent in a series of monographs that have proven quite useful. Previous pamphlets include Dr. Morton Smith's discussion of full subscription to the Westminster Standards and a discussion by Grover Gunn concerning the usefulness of presuppositional apologetics.

In 1992, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary Press published *Worship in the Presence of God*, edited by Dr. Frank J. Smith and Dr. David Lachman. Two of the articles in the book took the "exclusive psalmody" position relative to worship song. However, both the exclusive and the non-exclusive positions were presented.¹ In an apparent attempt to distance the Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary faculty from any suspicion that they hold to either exclusive psalmody or the principle of a *cappella* singing, Mr. Shaw has written his monograph entitled, *Studies in Church Music*.²

Mr. Shaw asserts in his introduction that the main purpose of his pamphlet "is to provide guidance in the area of church music for two groups of people in the church ... It is hoped that these studies will provide a context in which they may reflect on and consider their own musical tastes in the light of the biblical and theological issues involved." We must agree with Mr. Shaw that in light of much that passes for worship song

in contemporary church settings we would do well to consider our worship practices in terms of what Scripture requires of us.

The proper approach to the study of worship is conditioned by a prior understanding of the so-called “regulative principle of worship.” Historically, those churches commonly called Reformed and Presbyterian have accepted the regulative principle while the Lutheran and Anglican churches have rejected it.

The Regulative Principle

The regulative principle, simply stated, is that whatever is not commanded by Scripture as an element of worship is by that very omission therefore forbidden in worship.

As the Genevan Reformer John Calvin stated in his recently translated *Sermons on Second Samuel*, “This rule ruins all the man-made inventions in the papacy’s so-called worship of God, which has so much pomp and foolishness. All of that is nothing but sheer trash before God, and is in fact an abomination to him. Hence, let us hold this unmistakable rule, that if we want to worship God in accordance with our own ideas, it will simply be abuse and corruption. And so, on the contrary, we must have the testimony of his will in order to follow what he commands us, and to submit to it. Now that is how the worship which we render to God will be approved.”³

Obviously, there have been many in the history of the church who disagree with the principle. Some may think it too restrictive of human creativity; others may think the principle is born of misguided zeal; others may think the principle is legalistic at the core; others may simply think it claims a greater authority and sufficiency for Scripture than the Bible itself claims.

If we accept the regulative principle, then only the worship song commanded by God may be used. That seems clear enough.

Nor do those who reject the regulative principle of worship necessarily maintain that “anything at all” is acceptable in worship. For example, if a particular action is specifically forbidden by Scripture, virtually all Christians agree that we may not do it in worship. In point of fact, that is the principle usually set forth by Lutheran, Anglican and Roman authors.

Hopefully the reader will see how the regulative principle will affect our approach to church music (though I would personally prefer the term “worship song” to “church music,” I nevertheless understand Mr. Shaw to mean the worship of the Lord in song by the church). If we accept the regulative principle, then only the worship song commanded by God may be used. That seems clear enough. Yet, among Reformed believers (most of whom claim to believe the regulative principle) there are significant differences of opinion as to what constitutes appropriate church music. How is that to be explained?

During a worship service held in conjunction with the PCA General Assembly in Birmingham in 1991, a ballet troupe

purported to worship the Lord in dance. The speaker who followed the “worship dance” asserted that any present who were not moved by the performance (it is difficult to justify calling it anything else) were simply “insensitive to the Spirit of God.”

Significantly, the worship service took place in a church whose officers were supposed to be committed to the regulative principle and the remarks made afterward were by a pastor (though it was not the pastor of that particular church) who has implicitly vowed to uphold the regulative principle. We must assume that in their understanding of the regulative principle God has commanded ballet in New Testament worship.

If a consistent application of the regulative principle includes the use of musical instruments in worship, then there is nothing in the regulative principle that prohibits dance.

Mr. Shaw does not specifically endorse the use of “liturgical dance” in his booklet. However, his citation of Exodus 15:20 to justify the use of musical instruments in worship certainly implies that dance (at least by women) is equally justifiable. If a consistent application of the regulative principle includes the use of musical instruments in worship, then there is nothing in the regulative principle that prohibits dance.⁴

The question that Mr. Shaw never fully answers is how the regulative principle should affect our understanding of worship song. He acknowledges in the first paragraph of his introduction, “Some people have one view of worship, some another, both claim to be following the regulative principle and each side has doubts as to whether the other is indeed in accord with the regulative principle.”⁵

The simple principle that A is not non-A informs us that if one person maintains that God requires liturgical dance and another person maintains that God forbids liturgical dance they *cannot* both be right — at least one of the positions is wrong.⁶ Shaw mentions the regulative principle again when he states that since exclusive psalmody has never been an unanimous view, “this is a matter on which each side ought charitably allow the other to hold and practice its own view without impugning the integrity of others relative to the regulative principle.”⁷

First, I am aware of only two churches in the PCA that hold “exclusive psalmody” as an official position. There is, however, a third congregation that practices it. As there are more than one thousand congregations in the PCA it is unlikely that psalmodists will disallow other practices any time soon.

One view or the other is flatly incorrect. Either worship songs other than the Psalms are forbidden or they are allowed.

Second, however, impugning integrity is not the issue. One view or the other is flatly incorrect. Either worship songs other than the Psalms are forbidden or they are allowed. According to the regulative principle what does it take for any element to be forbidden? Only that it not be specifically commanded. It is not impugning one's integrity to insist that on the basis of his own confession of the regulative principle, consistency requires a specific command (whether explicit or implicit) for any action to be regarded as an element of worship.

If it seems to us that the regulative principle is too strict, let us recall that it is nothing other than the application of the principle of Sola Scriptura to the activities of worship. In the same way that the church is not free to add doctrines to the Christian religion apart from those taught in Scripture, neither is she free to invent elements of worship that are not commanded.

If it seems to us that the regulative principle is too strict, let us recall that it is nothing other than the application of the principle of *Sola Scriptura* to the activities of worship. In the same way that the church is not free to add doctrines to the Christian religion apart from those taught in Scripture, neither is she free to invent elements of worship that are not commanded. As the southern Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell so aptly phrased it, "We are clearly taught that the silence of Scripture is as real a prohibition as a positive injunction to abstain. Where God has not commanded, the church has no jurisdiction."⁸

Before such a statement could be made, however, it would first be necessary to demonstrate that musical accompaniment, choirs, and content of worship song are items that fall under what the Confession means by circumstances. Samuel Rutherford, one of the Scottish delegates to the Westminster Assembly, writing at the very time the Assembly was sitting, gave as examples of circumstances, ". . . there be means of worship, or circumstances physical, not moral, not religious, as whether the pulpit be of stone or of timber, the bell of this or this metal, the house of worship stand thus or thus in situation."¹¹

George Gillespie, another delegate to the Westminster Assembly, understood circumstances of worship in the same way. As examples, Gillespie mentioned, "the set hours for all public divine service, when it should begin, how long it should last, the order that should be kept in the reading and expounding of the law, praying, singing, catechizing, excommunicating, censoring, absolving of delinquents, etc., the circumstances of the celebration of marriage, of the education of youth in schools and colleges, etc."¹²

In another place Gillespie stated, "I know the church must observe rules of order and conveniency in the common circumstances of times, places, and persons; but these circumstances are none of our holy things. They are only prudential accommodations, which are alike common to all human societies, both civil and ecclesiastical, wherein both are directed by the same light of nature, the common rule to both in all things of that kind; provided always that the general rule of the word is observed."¹³

In order for any action to be justifiable in worship, then, we must demonstrate that the action is either a commanded element of worship or a mere circumstance of worship.

Circumstances of Worship

It is common to hear an objection that there are some things clearly not appointed in Scripture that nevertheless must be done. The church must obviously therefore be free to legislate some aspects of the worship. Examples given might include the time of the assembly, whether to use chairs or pews, what tune to use in singing, etc. Mr. Shaw mentions the question of the preacher's posture while preaching, noting that Luke 4:20-21 *seems* to indicate that Christ explained Scripture while he sat.⁹

This consideration brings us to a discussion of the role of circumstances in worship. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (I.6) states the exception as follows: ". . . there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed."¹⁰ Perhaps, then, the content of worship song, choirs, organs, etc. are merely circumstances that are regulated by "the light of nature and Christian prudence." While it may be imprudent for one church to use organs, perhaps Christian prudence would dictate their use by another church.

If the reader will indulge a rather lengthy quotation, the southern Presbyterian scholar Thornwell sheds considerable light:

"Now the question arises, what is the nature of these circumstances? A glance at the proof-texts on which the doctrine relies enables us to answer. Circumstances are those concomitants of an action without which it either cannot be done at all, or cannot be done with decency and decorum. Public worship, for example, requires public assemblies and in public assemblies people must appear in some costume, and assume some posture. Whether they shall shock common sentiment in their attire, or conform to common practice; whether they shall stand, sit, or lie, or whether each shall be at liberty to determine his own attitude — these are circumstances: they are necessary concomitants of the action, and the church is at liberty to regulate them . . . We must carefully distinguish between those circumstances which attend actions *as actions* — that is, without which the actions could not be — and those circumstances which, though not essential,

are added as appendages. These last do not fall within the jurisdiction of the church. She has no right to appoint them. They are circumstances in the sense that they do not belong to the substance of the act. They are not circumstances in the sense that they so surround it that they cannot be separated from it."¹⁴

In order for any action to be justifiable in worship, then, we must demonstrate that the action is either a commanded element of worship or a mere circumstance of worship. However, if we maintain that such and such an action is an element of worship, then we cannot rightly leave it undone when the occasion warrants it.¹⁵ Yet if we maintain that the action is a circumstance of worship, then it is necessary to demonstrate that it is common to human actions and societies and that without the circumstance attached the element of worship could not be performed. For example, an assembly must meet at some time, so without an appointed time the action of assembling for worship could not take place.

Congregational Singing

Generally speaking, Shaw seems very favorable to the congregation singing praise. He spends more time than one would expect abhorring practices that were never widespread and are raised for no particular reason that Shaw ever relates. The practice of lining out the Psalms was instituted as a stop-gap measure: "where many in the congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers, do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof."¹⁶

The practice of lining out was not due to churches not having a sufficient supply of Psalters in the pew, as Shaw suggests. In fact, the same portion in the *Directory* states, "That the whole congregation may join herein, everyone that can read is to have a psalm book; and all others, not disabled by age or otherwise, are to be exhorted to learn to read." First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett (FPCR) session, in an endeavor to take seriously the advice of the Assembly in this regard, instituted a program in which each child in the church is presented with his or her own Psalter when he or she learns to read.

As a church becomes convinced that God has prescribed only the psalms as worship song, one of the difficulties it faces is learning a new repertoire of tunes.

The second practice to which Shaw objects is that of limiting the number of tunes used in worship. Actually one of his references clearly indicates that the church of Scotland in 1713 was making reasonable efforts to teach people more psalm tunes. As a church becomes convinced that God has prescribed only the psalms as worship song, one of the difficulties it faces is learning a new repertoire of tunes. Since becoming a psalms-only singing church, FPCR has learned more than sixty-eight Psalm tunes. Admittedly, we sing some better than others and

some we sing quite poorly at present. But we are practicing and by God's grace we are improving. We have begun singing in parts only recently. We realize that we have a duty before the Lord not only to sing joyfully, but as skillfully as we are able.

Practically, what can be done to improve congregational singing? First, the congregation must be singing the psalms more than in a worship service once a week. The psalms, just as the rest of Scripture, must be a part of every Christian's daily walk with God. Sessions, and especially ministers, should encourage the singing of psalms in private and family worship. Heads of families should be called to account that they are raising their families in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Special care should be paid to the children of the church to make certain that they are learning to sing the songs of Zion.

The psalms, just as the rest of Scripture, must be a part of every Christian's daily walk with God.

Second, the church can meet for the express purpose of learning to sing the psalms. We would not excuse a slow reader from his duty to read the Bible; we would not excuse a tongue-tied person from his duty to pray according to his place and station; neither should we excuse those who are musically untrained from singing. In fact, if singing is commanded to be done in worship, then the church has a clear duty to teach God's people how to do it (Matthew 28:19). An excellent time for such meetings would be Sabbath afternoons. *Westminster Larger Catechism* number 117 teaches that the whole day is to be spent in the public and private exercises of God's worship. We should learn to delight in singing the songs the Holy Spirit composed. As John Chrysostom advised, "learn to sing psalms, and thou shalt see the delightfulness of the employment. For they who sing psalms are filled with the Holy Spirit, as they who sing satanic songs are filled with an unclean spirit."¹⁷

Choirs

Shaw begins his discussion of choirs with the admission that they "only gradually became a part of the worship."¹⁸ He further acknowledges, "The development of the choir was also positively affected by the doctrine of the mass, for which many texts were set to Gregorian tunes."¹⁹ This point should be setting off a few alarms. Choirs arose to provide the "sound track" for the idolatrous worship of the mass. Should we not regard choirs as suspect on that basis alone?

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Shaw maintains that because there were choirs of ordained priests in the Old Testament, the use of choirs is justified in

New Testament worship. When it is objected that priestly ceremonies associated with the temple form part of the weak and beggarly elements of the law, Shaw replies, "However, this assertion cannot stand up to examination, because it begs the question, 'in what way are choirs merely ceremonial?'" He proceeds to maintain that the existence of a heavenly choir in Revelation 5:9 is normative for our earthly worship. While Shaw speaks of others begging the question, it is he who begs the question, for he never demonstrates that Revelation 5:9 is normative, but instead assumes that which he is called upon to prove (the applicability of temple worship as portrayed in Revelation 5 to present day worship).²⁰

Shaw never explains in what way the assertion that the Old Testament priestly choirs were part of the ceremonial law begs the question. Perhaps he merely means to say that if one intends to assert that they were ceremonial that he should also explain in what way they were ceremonial or typical. That seems fair enough. But then after making that point, Shaw should have proceeded to examine the literature on the subject.

In his commentary on Psalm 149, Augustine maintained that the chorus or choir was typical and now consists of all Christians. In commenting on Psalm 150, he wrote, "The 'choir' praiseth God when society, made peaceful, praiseth him." The Old Testament choirs consisted entirely of Levites, as Rowland Ward demonstrates:

In the Old Testament public [temple] worship, instrumental music and singing was a priestly and Levitical function accompanying sacrifice. It was introduced by command of God (II Chronicles 29:25-30; Ezra 3:10-11), and was regarded as prophetic (I Chronicles 25:1-3, 5; II Chronicles 20:14; 29:25; 35:15, and note 'priests and prophets' in II Kings 23:2 is rendered 'priests and Levites' in the parallel passage, II Chronicles 34:30), and no cases in which the singing was unaccompanied can be established.

There are four features to note about Old Testament temple worship: (1) praise was not congregational but was by a priestly choir using inspired songs; (2) the singing was always accompanied by a priestly orchestra; (3) the singing and playing was always linked with sacrifice (I Chronicles 16:39-42; II Chronicles 5; II Chronicles 29:25-30); (4) all these features were in accord with the command of God.

These four features have their fulfillment in the New Testament temple in which all the Lord's people form a holy priesthood.²¹

With the advent of Christ and the establishment of the new and better covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Hebrews 8:13), we would anticipate certain changes in the form of worship. Christ prophesied during his earthly ministry that such would be the case (John 4:21). Further, the writer of Hebrews assured us that the ordinances of divine worship which appertained to the first covenant were only until the time of reformation (Hebrews 9:1-12). The Psalmist prophesied with the voice of Christ, "in the midst of the congregation [not just the priestly choir] will I praise thee" and "my praise shall be of

thee in the great [large] congregation" (Psalm 22:22,25). As most know, this is the Psalm that was on the Savior's lips as he died upon the cross for the sins of the great congregation. But if there could be any doubt, the New Testament dispels it, for this passage is there interpreted, "in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Hebrews 2:12b, emphasis added).

The priestly ministrations of the old covenant have been fulfilled in Christ (Hebrews 10:9; etc.). But choirs were part of the priestly ministrations of the old covenant (specifically a 288 voice choir and commanded by God through David in I Chronicles 25:1-7). However, the priestly functions of the new covenant belong to every believer (Romans 12:1; Philippians 2:17; 4:18; Hebrews 13:15-16).

Nothing in the passage indicates that those who were singing were doing so either "on behalf of the congregation" or to the exclusion of others.

Shaw claims to find a choir in Revelation 5:9. There is undoubtedly a chorus of voices singing praise to the Lamb in the passage (Revelation 5:7-10). Note, however, that the passage simultaneously proves less than Shaw requires when properly understood and more than he really desires if understood the way he has posited. Nothing in the passage indicates that those who were singing were doing so either "on behalf of the congregation"²² or to the exclusion of others. In fact, verse 10 identifies them: "[thou] hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." Here in a passage that is filled with imagery of the temple (God's throne in verses 1 and 6; the Lamb in verse 6; beasts and elders in verses 6 and 8; incense burners in verse 8; priests in verse 10, etc.) we cannot expect to find literal, non-temple worship forms. We may as well look to Ezekiel for new covenant worship forms as to Revelation.

If we take Revelation 5 as normative for worship and interpret it in a literal manner, then how do we answer those who maintain that we should add incense burning to our worship since it also is found in the worship of this passage?

Additionally, if we take Revelation 5 as normative for worship and interpret it in a literal manner, then how do we answer those who maintain that we should add incense burning to our worship since it also is found in the worship of this passage? If the reply is that the vials of incense must be understood in a non-literal way as representing the prayers of God's church, then neither should the harps be understood in a literal way in the same passage. If incense is the church praying, there is no reason to understand the falling down and singing in any way other than the church worshipping and praising the Lamb of God. The passage does not teach (nor

does any part of the New Testament teach) that some believers worship “on behalf of others.”

The final passage Mr. Shaw adduces in favor of the use of choirs in new covenant worship is I Corinthians 14:26. Shaw reports, “In I Corinthians 14:26, Paul addresses the question of the proper use of spiritual gifts in the church: ‘How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm...’ Charles Hodge rightly said, ‘*Everyone* is used distributively; one has this and another that.’ (page 168).”

Paul was not exhorting the Corinthians in verse 26 as to what they *ought* to do, but was describing what they actually did. This fact is obvious from verses 27 and following in which Paul exhorted the church with a series of “let him” or “let them” statements. Further, if I Corinthians 14:26 were normative for present day worship (i.e. subsequent to the close the canon), it would require (or permit) the use of tongues and revelations as well as choirs.

Bishop John Lightfoot, the Erastian commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, understood the passage in light of his extensive research in both Hebrew idiom and the Jewish Talmud. In his New Testament Commentary, *Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae*, Lightfoot said regarding the phrase, “what is it, brethren,” “The apostle renders in Greek the phrase **מהו** most common in the schools ‘what is to be resolved in that case?’ To the same sense the apostle in this place, **τι οὖν ἐστὶς**; *what therefore is to be done* in this case, about the use of an unknown tongue? He determines, ‘I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding.’

“So verse 26: **Τι ἐστὶν, ἀδελφοί**, *what is it, brethren?* that is, ‘what is to be done in this case, when everyone hath a psalm, hath a doctrine’ &c. He determines, ‘let all things be done to edification.’”

The solution Paul commanded was that singing of Psalms, as well as everything else in worship, be done with understanding .

Lightfoot further maintained regarding I Corinthians 14:26, the meaning of “every one of you hath a psalm,” etc. is, “when ye come together into one place, one is for having the time and worship spent chiefly in singing psalms, another in preaching, &c. One prefers singing of psalms, another a tongue, another preaching, etc.”²³

The erudite Bishop Lightfoot demonstrated that the significance of the phrase “every one of you hath a psalm” is unrelated to choirs or solos or special music programs. Rather, Paul was pointing out yet another aspect of the life of the Corinthian church in which strife was prominent. Therefore the solution Paul commanded was that singing of Psalms, as well as everything else in worship, be done with understanding (I Corinthians 14:15) and for edification (I Corinthians 14:26).

Instrumental Accompaniment

Shaw begins his examination of the use of musical instruments in worship with an *argumentum ad ignorantiam*. This fallacy is illustrated by the argument that there must be

ghosts because no one has ever been able to prove that there aren’t any.²⁴ Shaw maintains, “In the apostolic church of the first century, we do not know what the practice was regarding the use of musical instruments in worship.”²⁵ Another way of saying the same thing is that there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever, either biblical or historical, that musical instruments were used in the first century church or synagogue.

Miriam’s use of the dance and timbrel does not demonstrate that instrumental accompaniment to worship song survived the abrogation of the ceremonial law.

Mr. Shaw additionally points to the use of the timbrel by Miriam and all the women who went after her to demonstrate that instrumental praise predates the tabernacle/temple worship. We must, of course, acknowledge that it does. Exodus 15:20 predates Numbers 10:2-8. Significantly, the use of the timbrel by Miriam and the women: (1) was not called an ordinance, as the trumpets (and later David’s instruments) were; (2) pertained only to a specific non-repeatable act in redemptive history. The Passover, not Miriam’s timbrel, was the worship ordinance commemorating deliverance from Egypt; (3) was not viewed in Scripture as cultic, but civil.

Miriam’s use of the dance and timbrel does not demonstrate that instrumental accompaniment to worship song survived the abrogation of the ceremonial law. Animal sacrifice predated the tabernacle/temple by thousands of years. The rite of circumcision predated the Mosaic economy by 430 years (Galatians 3:17). The substance of sacrifice continues (Romans 12:1, Hebrews 13:15) while the ritual of animal sacrifice has ceased. The substance of circumcision continues (Romans 2:29) while the ritual of foreskin removal has ceased. In like manner, the substance of worship continues in the new covenant (John 4:24; Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:11; etc.), though the present forms reflect the simplicity and spirituality of the present dispensation (Galatians 4:9-10; etc.).

The introduction of musical accompaniment in new covenant worship must fight against two things: (1) there must be a scriptural warrant for its use in new covenant worship; and (2) the opposite position has been held “by all the early fathers, by all the Presbyterian reformers, by a Chalmers, a Mason, a Breckinridge, a Thornwell, and by a Spurgeon” and by a Dabney.

Shaw further claims, “We don’t know what the synagogue did about musical instruments. Hence the entire argument falls apart.”²⁶ This statement is in reference to the argument that the church arose not from temple observances but from synagogue observances. If Nehemiah chapter eight is the beginning of the synagogue system as the Cunningham lecturer D. Douglas

Bannerman demonstrated over one hundred years ago,²⁷ then we know a considerable amount concerning the synagogue system, including the fact that no mention of instrumental accompaniment is made in any known contemporaneous sources.²⁸

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Mr. Shaw, while admitting that the primitive and early church avoided the use of musical instruments in public worship, is of the opinion “this avoidance did not, however, spring from some sense that the Bible forbade the use of instruments in worship. Instead, it sprang primarily from a desire to keep the church distinct from paganism.”³⁰ The modern church would do well to cultivate a similar desire. However, Mr. Shaw’s opinion is not altogether accurate, as an examination of the original documents demonstrates.

For example, Cyprian, while recognizing that the instruments used by pagans were dedicated to idols, also objected to them on the basis of their worthlessness in true religion and because they stirred up what he considered to be inappropriate emotions.

For example, Cyprian, while recognizing that the instruments used by pagans were dedicated to idols, also objected to them on the basis of their worthlessness in true religion and because they stirred up what he considered to be inappropriate emotions.³¹

The great Augustine, though not of the same authority as Scripture, nevertheless interpreted the old covenant musical instruments *as having their fulfillment in Christ*. In other words, he opposed the use of instrumental music in public worship for the same *basic* reason John Calvin opposed it: “In a word, the musical instruments were in the same class as sacrifices, candelabra, lamps and similar things.”³²

Commenting on Psalm 58:9, Augustine wrote, “But what is Psaltery? What is harp? [Christ’s] flesh therefore working things divine is the psaltery: the flesh suffering things human is the harp . . . And these two . . . have been fulfilled in the Gospel, and it is preached in the nations.” After maintaining that the chorus or choir consists of all Christians, Augustine continued to comment on Psalm 149, “Wherefore taketh he to him the timbrel and psaltery? That not the voice alone may praise, but the works too . . . So too do those, whensoever thou singest Halleluia, deal forth thy bread to the hungry, clothe the naked, take in the stranger: then doth not only the voice sound, but thy hand soundeth in harmony with it, for thy deeds agree with thy words.”

We need not agree with every particular of Augustine’s somewhat allegorical approach to realize that he opposed the use of musical instruments because he regarded them as being

fulfilled in the spiritual worship of the new covenant Christian; not merely because the pagans used musical instruments. The early and sustained opposition to the use of musical instruments in the eastern church and in the most reformed periods and places in the western church should not be so lightly dismissed.

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As early as approximately AD 200, Clement of Alexandria was interpreting the Old Testament musical instruments in such a way as to correspond with the non-instrumental nature of new covenant worship.

The lyre, according to its primary signification, may by the psalmist be used figuratively for the Lord; according to its secondary, for those who continually strike the chords of their souls under the direction of the Choir-master, the Lord. And if the people saved be called the lyre, it will be understood to be in consequence of their giving glory musically, through the inspiration of the Word and the knowledge of God, being struck by the Word so as to produce fruit. You may take music in another way, as the ecclesiastical symphony at once of the law and the prophets, and the apostles along with the Gospel, and the harmony which obtained in each prophet, in the transitions of the persons.³³

Clement used similar reasoning when he stated such things as, “for the tongue is the psaltery of the Lord By the lyre is meant the mouth struck by the Spirit ‘Praise with the timbrel and the dance,’ refers to the Church meditating on the resurrection of the dead in the resounding skin Our body he calls an organ, and its nerves are the strings, by which it has received harmonious tension, and when struck by the Spirit, it gives forth human voices.... He calls the tongue the cymbal of the mouth, which resounds with the pulsation of the lips For man is truly a pacific instrument. . . .”³⁴

It is not necessary to agree with Clement on every particular of his interpretation (or on any particular for that matter) to see that he is interpreting the musical instruments of the old covenant in a way consonant with the spiritual nature of new covenant worship, not simply opposing musical instruments to keep the church “distinct from paganism.”

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the old covenant in a way consonant with the spiritual nature of new covenant worship, not simply opposing musical instruments to keep the church “distinct from paganism.”

John Calvin made a clear statement concerning musical instruments in his comment on Psalm 81:2, “with respect to the tabret, harp, and psaltery, we have formerly observed, and will find it necessary afterwards to repeat the same remark, that the Levites, under the law, were justified in making use of instrumental music in the worship of God; it having been his will to train his people, while they were as yet tender and like children, by such rudiments, until the coming of Christ. But now when the clear light of the gospel has dissipated the shadows of the law, and taught us that God is to be served in a simpler form, it would be to act a foolish and mistaken part to imitate that which the prophet enjoined only upon those of his own time.”³⁵

But, if the use of musical instruments in public worship is not commanded, then it is prohibited.

The New England Puritan John Cotton explained how the use of musical instruments in the temple worship was part of the ceremonial law in his work on *Singing of Psalms a Gospel Ordinance* (1647). “Singing with Instruments, was typicall, and so a ceremoniall worship, and therefore is ceased. But singing with heart and voyce is morall worship, such as is written in the hearts of all men by nature Or suppose singing with instruments were not typicall, but only an external solemnitie of worship, fitten to the solace of the outward senses of children under age, (such as the Israelites were under the Old Testament, Galatians 4:1, 2, 3). Yet now in the growne age of the heires of the New Testament, such externall pompous solemnities are ceased, and so externall worship reserved, but such as holdeth forth simplicitie, and gravitie; nor is any voyce now to be heard in the church of Christ, but such as is significant and edifying by significance, (I Corinthians 14:10, 11, 26), which the voyce of Instruments is not.”³⁶

Christ and his apostles worshipped God truly and spiritually (John 4:24; Ephesians 5:18-19), yet no mention is made in any apostolic worship of the need (or even the use) of an organ or other mechanical aid. But if such an instrument is necessary to true worship, it is so unlikely that the Holy Spirit would neglect mentioning it as to be unimaginable to the great majority of God’s worshippers for these past two millennia.

It is certainly within the realm of possibility that Mr. Shaw is correct and the divines of the purest ages of the church were wrong. However, as musical instruments cannot be understood as circumstances of worship, given the definitions of Rutherford, Gillespie and Thornwell *supra*, then they must be viewed as commanded. But if they are commanded, then Christ and the apostles must have played harps and psalteries on the eve of his crucifixion when Christ instituted the sacrament of his supper. When the thousands of worshippers of God in Acts 2:46-47 praised him not only in the temple, but in house churches they must have used timbrels and organs. When the church at Antioch met in Acts 13:1-3, there must have been those who played on the viol and cornet. But, if the use of

musical instruments in public worship is *not* commanded, then it is prohibited. As the Presbyterian giant R. L. Dabney said, “For His Christian church, the non-appointment of mechanical accompaniment was its prohibition [T]he innovation is merely the result of an advancing wave of worldliness and ritualism in the evangelical bodies.”³⁷

Authorized Songs

Shaw claims that the position of “exclusive” psalmody “is drawn largely from an exegesis of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 that interprets the Greek word *πνευματικος* in the sense ‘inspired by the Spirit’. . . . [But] the exclusive psalmodist argument presses the meaning of *πνευματικος* farther than it can legitimately be pressed.”³⁸ The position is actually based on a bit more than that, but the psalmodist does deal rather extensively with the two passages.

Interestingly, Shaw does not deal with the fact that virtually no modern New Testament scholar disputes that the “hymning” at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26) was from Psalms 113-118. James exhorted those who were merry to sing psalms, and none would suggest he did not mean for his readers to sing canonical psalms.³⁹ The final reference to psalm-singing in the New Testament is I Corinthians 14:15-16. This passage is not undisputed in its reference to the Old Testament Psalter. Some scholars are of the opinion that it may, in fact, refer to charismatic compositions. None has set forth the idea that it refers to a corpus of liturgical songs *other than* the Psalter, however.

The actual significance of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 lies elsewhere. If neither of these passages commands the use of worship song other than the 150 Psalms, then there is not a command in all of Scripture to sing such songs (and there is certainly no command to compose them). The non-psalmodist . . . in order to be faithful to the regulative principle, must demonstrate that songs other than the Psalms are intended in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.

First, Shaw’s claim that the psalmodist misinterprets the word *πνευματικος* is asserted, not proven. In I Corinthians 2:13 the word is used in a nearly identical sense in the phrase, “comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” In the Corinthian context, Paul used the term specifically to refer to that which was taught by the Holy Spirit as opposed to being taught merely by human wisdom. The Corinthian passage does not prove what the word means in Ephesians and Colossians, but it *does* demonstrate that psalmodists are not “pressing the meaning of *πνευματικος* farther than it can legitimately be pressed.”⁴⁰

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use of worship song *other than* the 150 Psalms, then there is not a command in all of Scripture to sing such songs (and there is certainly no command to *compose* them). The non-psalmodist (by psalmodist, we refer to one who maintains that only the psalms are commanded for our use as worship song), in order to be faithful to the regulative principle, must demonstrate that songs other than the Psalms are intended in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.

Basically, where the psalmodist and non-psalmodist disagree on the exegesis of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 is the specific meaning of the terms “hymns” and “songs.” The psalmodist understands them to refer to the book of Psalms in the Old Testament. The non-psalmodist understands them to refer to songs other than the 150 psalms of the Hebrew Psalter.

A simple and straightforward understanding of the regulative principle indicates that an action need not be specifically forbidden in Scripture — its non-mention is sufficient to exclude its practice from public worship.

Some non-psalmodists question whether Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 have reference to public worship. However, there is not a single passage in all Scripture that the non-psalmodist can adduce for his practice if not these. We may want to review the regulative principle at this point: Anything not specifically commanded by Scripture, is by its very omission thereby forbidden. A simple and straightforward understanding of the regulative principle indicates that an action need not be specifically forbidden in Scripture — its non-mention is sufficient to exclude its practice from public worship. But if Paul is exhorting the Ephesian and Colossian Christians to use Psalms in a non-worship setting, it is hard to imagine that the standard for the public worship service would be lower.

The Greek word ὕμνος is used only in these parallel passages in all the New Testament. We cannot look elsewhere in the New Testament for further light on the *noun*. But a cognate *verb* is used four times in the New Testament.⁴¹ Two of the four are in reference to Christ’s singing of Psalms 113-118.⁴² A third is Acts 16:25, in which Paul and Silas “sang praises (ὕμνεω) to God.” This passage does not shed any additional light because no mention is made in the passage of the content of their praises, nor can it be inferred from the passage. The fourth place where the word is used in the New Testament is Hebrews 2:12. There the word is used to translate the Hebrew ללה of Psalm 22:22. Though the quotation is from the Hebrew Psalter, too much should not be made of that fact.

What we see then, is that when the verb (or participle) is used in the New Testament, and it is possible reasonably to infer the contents, it refers to singing Psalms. Further, nothing in the other passages leads us automatically to assume that anything other than the Psalms is intended. We have not proved that the word ὕμνος, when used in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 must necessarily refer to the Psalter. However, we have demonstrated that it is not unreasonable to suggest that it refers to the Psalms. Additionally, we have demonstrated that the word is nowhere used in the New Testament to designate

anything that *must* be understood as praise song arising from any other source.

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If the ψαλμοι (psalms) of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 refer to the Psalter and the ὕμνοι (hymns) of these verses likely refer to the Psalter, that only leaves the ᾠδαί (songs) as possible candidates to demonstrate the command to utilize human compositions as the content of public worship song. Importantly, it must be demonstrated beyond question that this term has reference to human compositions before such human compositions are allowed in public worship by the Reformed understanding of the regulative principle

1. The so-called songs of Zachariah and Mary and the supposedly poetic passages found in Ephesians 5:14 and I Timothy 3:16 are not songs in the proper sense of the word, and there is no evidence they were used in worship until several centuries after the apostles.⁴³

2. If I Corinthians 14:26 is regarded as sanction for uninspired hymns, we must point out that it is hardly a clear or undisputed sanction. (1) If the psalm spoken of was a psalm written by the inspiration of the Spirit, as some suggest, it is no sanction for us to do so today as the revelatory gifts have ceased with the close of canon. (2) More likely it was a reference to each person in the assembly pressing his own preference with too little regard for the edification of the assembly.⁴⁴ Regardless, the only songs actually mentioned in I Corinthians 14:26 are psalms.

3. The apostle must have been writing of songs then in existence. The command was only to sing, not to compose. If Paul referred to some corpus of songs *other than* the Psalter, then let their advocates produce them for us. When they do, we will sing them.

The purpose of the songs is that of “being filled with the Holy Spirit” in Ephesians and “letting the Word of Christ dwell in us” in Colossians. But for which uninspired songs can such a claim be made?

4. As discussed somewhat above, the word “spiritual” is against these songs being merely human compositions. Such lexicographers as Thayer, Cremer, and Robinson, and other scholars such as Warfield, Meyer and others define

πνευματικος as meaning "produced or inspired by the Holy Spirit." In short, it is not *any kind* of song, but a *specific* kind of song that Paul commanded to be used.

5. The purpose of the songs is that of "being filled with the Holy Spirit" in Ephesians and "letting the Word of Christ dwell in us" in Colossians. But for which uninspired songs can such a claim be made?

6. These three terms are used predominantly in the Psalm titles of the LXX (Septuagint). Paul quoted heavily from the LXX when referring to Old Testament passages. While this consideration does not prove that Paul must necessarily have intended the Psalter, it certainly demonstrates that we need look no further than the Psalter for an understanding of what songs Paul *may* have meant.⁴⁵

We are puzzled by Greenville Seminary's publication of this monograph, especially because of that institution's purported strict subscription. The plain position of the Westminster Confession and Directory For The Publick Worship of God is a cappella congregational exclusive psalmody. Unless and until someone can demonstrate the contrary, we should continue to maintain this standard Presbyterian view.

Concluding remarks

We appreciate Ben Shaw's desire that our worship music be in accord with God's will. However, we would respectfully challenge him not only to do better exegetical work and historical study, but also to consult any standard text on logic before he ventures again into print.

We are puzzled by Greenville Seminary's publication of this monograph, especially because of that institution's purported strict subscription. The plain position of the Westminster Confession and Directory For The Publick Worship of God is a cappella congregational exclusive psalmody. Unless and until someone can demonstrate the contrary, we should continue to maintain this standard Presbyterian view.

Endnotes

1 The non-exclusive position was advocated by "OPC Majority Report on the Content of Worship Song," pp. 375-92. The articles taking the "exclusive" view were Dr. John Murray's "Song in Public Worship," pp. 179-92, and Dr. Frank J. Smith's "The Singing of Praise," pp. 193-226.

2 Mr. Shaw stated in a letter to the editor of *The Blue Banner* dated September 20, 1993: "It may be that our publication *Worship in the Presence of God* led you to believe that Greenville Seminary holds to exclusive Psalmody and non-

instrumental worship. Knowing that people might have that perception, we went ahead with the publication of the work because we believe the position has an honorable history and has a right to be heard. . . . "However, none of the regular faculty holds to either exclusive Psalmody or non-instrumental worship." At Mr. Shaw's request, we are **not** making this letter available.

[Editor's Note: In my original letter, I wrote because I was distressed with Greenville apparently giving the dance and drama folks the argument they needed to justify dance. I felt Shaw's claim that Ex. 15:20 pertained to public worship did this. Although I disagreed with his conclusions, this was my only reason for writing, and I did not mention the issues of musical instruments or exclusive psalmody. In his answer, Shaw attempts to understand my disappointment in light of Greenville's stance against a *cappella* psalmody and explains (quoted above) why the booklet was published. He objects to my assertion that his using Ex. 15:20 necessarily justifies dance if it is used to justify musical instruments, but then also asserts he now believes the passage has nothing to say to public worship. This is what I believe, and why I was distressed enough to write in the first place.]

3 John Calvin, "Lessons From The Death of Uzzah," in *Sermons on Second Samuel*, Douglas Kelly, translator (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), p. 246.

4 Other passages often used by those who employ musical instruments are Psalms 149 and 150. Psalm 149 commands, "Let them [the children of Zion] praise his name in dance: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp." Psalm 150:4; "Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organ." It is exegetically untenable to maintain that instruments are allowed (much less commanded) in these passages without granting the *same status* to liturgical dance.

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5 *Studies in Church Music (SCM)*, p. 5.

6 Contraries are two propositions which cannot both be true, but can both be false. Contradictories are two propositions which cannot both be true *and* cannot both be false.

7 *SCM*, p. 19.

8 Thornwell, *Writings*, IV, p. 246.

9 All that is actually said by Luke is that Christ "stood up for to read" (verse 16) and when he was finished he returned to his seat. Subsequently, whether he remained seated or stood up again, "gracious words proceeded out of his mouth." (verse 22) From this let us learn that it is not the manner or posture of the preacher which is the essence of preaching, but the Word of God explained (I Thessalonians 1:5; Romans 10:17; *q.v.*).

10 The Scripture passages referenced by the confession include nature teaching that if a man has long hair it is a shame to him (I Corinthians 11:13-14), the principle that all worship activities should be done for edification (I Corinthians 14:26) and the principle that a service of worship should be orderly (I Corinthians 14:40).

11 Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (London: 1646), p. 109.

12 Gillespie, *English Popish Ceremonies* (Dallas: Naphtali Press, 1993), pp. 290-91.

13 Gillespie, "A Sermon Preached Before the Honorable House of Commons, Wednesday March 27, 1644" reprinted in *Anthology of Presbyterian and Reformed Literature*, Summer 1988 (Dallas: Naphtali Press), p. 14.

14 *Writings*, IV, pp. 246-47.

15 For example, the sacrament of baptism is an element of ordinary worship, but a worship service is not defective if there are no proper candidates for baptism present.

16 "Directory for the Publick Worship of God," *Westminster Confession*, Free Presbyterian Publications, p. 393.

17 Homily XIX on Ephesians

18 *SCM*, p. 10.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Begging the question, or *petitio principii*, is defined by Irving Copi in *Introduction to Logic* as assuming as "a premiss [sic] for his argument the very conclusion he intends to prove" (page 83). Gordon Clark, in *Logic*, defines it similarly: "One of the premises from which the conclusion is deduced is the conclusion itself, somewhat disguised in form" (page 15).

21 *The Psalms in Christian Worship*, pages 30-31.

22 *SCM*, p. 8.

23 John Lightfoot, *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, IV, pp. 263-66 *passim*. See also Lightfoot's sermon on this passage in *Works*, vol. VII.

24 See Copi, pp. 76-77 for a fuller discussion of the fallacy.

25 *SCM*, p. 12.

26 *SCM*, p.18.

27 Bannerman, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church*, 1887, pp. 123-62.

28 See also Campegio Vitringa, *De Synagoga Vetere*.

29 R. L. Dabney, Review of Girardeau's *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*. Dabney's review first appeared in the July 1889 *Presbyterian Quarterly*.

30 *SCM*, p. 12.

31 *On the Public Shows*, sec. 7.

32 Calvin, "The True Worship of God," in *Sermons on Second Samuel*, p. 241.

33 *Strom.*, VI.xi.

34 *Paed.*, II.iv.

35 John Calvin, *Commentary on The Book of Psalms*, Vol. III (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint of 1843), p.312.

36 Quoted in William Young, *The Puritan Principle of Worship*, Publ. Committee of the Presbyterian Reformed Church, n.d.

37 *Op. cit.*

38 *SCM*, p.19.

39 Interestingly, James did not use a phrase in Greek that has both a verb and an object as it appears in English. Rather, it is the single-word jussive (imperative) ψαλλετω, "let him psalm!" or "may he psalm!"

40 *SCM*, p. 19.

41 *New Englishman's Greek Concordance*, p. 877.

42 Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26.

43 For a fuller exposition of this and the following considerations, consult James A. Kennedy, "The Psalms the Divinely Authorized and Exclusive Manual of Praise," in John McNaugher, ed. *The Psalms in Worship*, pp. 59-71.

44 See the discussion of this passage *supra*.

45 In the LXX the terms "psalms, hymns and songs" occur in the titles 109 times by my count. Anyone wanting a list of all the Psalm titles in *Greek* from the LXX should send \$1.00 and a 9x12 self-addressed stamped (allow 4 stamps) envelope to *The Blue Banner*.

Quotation

The Puritan principle of Worship was no invention of the Puritans. On the contrary, it is the principle regulative of Worship formulated by Calvin and adopted by all the Reformed Churches, as will appear from a consideration of passages in the writings of Reformed writers and the Reformed creeds.

The reformed view of the principle regulative of the external worship of God stands out by way of contrast with the Lutheran view. Lutherans have held that what is not forbidden in the Word of God may be allowed in the Worship of God. Ceremonies in worship are thus regarded as to a large extent indifferent (Adiaphora), i.e. things neither commanded nor forbidden in the Scriptures. . . . The Reformed view has uniformly been that only that which is prescribed by the Word of God may be introduced into the Worship of God. Calvin formulated this regulative principle with clarity and applied it with great consistency in the Reformation at Geneva. It is implicit in his celebrated definition of pure and genuine religion as "confidence in God coupled with serious fear - fear which both includes in it willing reverence, and brings along with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed by the law."

-- William Young, *The Puritan Principle of Worship*.

Why The Blue Banner?

We've expanded our mailing considerable since explaining our title for this newsletter, so it bears repeating. The name was chosen from admiration and attachment to the days of the Covenanters who fought for religious freedom from the imposition of the doctrines and commandments of men, and from the tyranny of government control of the church. They were fighting for the Crown Rights of King Jesus as the only lawgiver and governor in his church. Some of the troops had blue banners blazoned with red lion-ramparts breathing the phrase, *For Christ's Crown and Covenant*. In a nostalgic fashion we use this title to look back to a purer, more zealous age. Yet we also with hope in God look forward to a day when the church again is at the stature of those days, and beyond that to days when the church shall not be fighting to gain back to the level of past attainments, but is forging ahead and exceeding the strides made at the Reformation. In some small measure, we trust, this newsletter will witness to the past and prepare the next generation to do great things for the Lord.

Exclusive Psalmody

If you never received, or would like additional copies of the October 1992 issue *Review of Exclusive Psalmody*, which was an interchange between Richard Bacon and W. Gary Crampton, copies are available at fifty cents each.

The Blue Banner

The Blue Banner is published by The First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, Texas, which is a part of the Presbyterian Church in America. The work is supported by gifts. The cost to produce and mail a subscription is about \$15.00 per year. If you are able, please consider giving a gift of \$30.00 to support your subscription and one other. If you are not able, we are pleased to send it to you for free.

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Session: Pastor Richard Bacon. Elder David Seekamp

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Calvin on Isaiah 2:3

But we ought also to observe, that the commandments of God are called ways and paths, in order to inform us that they go miserably astray who turn aside from them in the smallest degree. Thus every kind of unlawful liberty is restrained, and all men, from the least even to the greatest, are enjoined to observe this rule of obedience, that they keep themselves within the limits of the word of God.

John Calvin

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- ***Worship Song Regulated by Scripture***
A Review of *Studies in Church Music*.