



SECOND  
GENERAL COUNCIL  
HELD IN  
PHILADELPHIA  
1880  
UNITED STATES



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# REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

## SECOND GENERAL COUNCIL

OF THE

# PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE,

CONVENED AT PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER, 1880.

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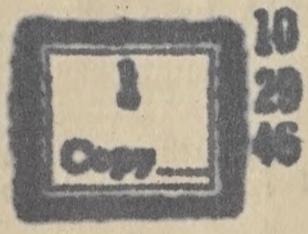
EDITED BY

JOHN B. DALES, D.D., AND R. M. PATTERSON, D.D.

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The REV. JOHN DEWITT, D. D., of Philadelphia, then read the following paper :

### THE WORSHIP OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES.

In submitting to the Council some thoughts touching the worship of the Reformed Churches, I must, because limited in time, confine myself to a consideration of the ideas which have determined its characteristic forms, repressing what I should have been glad say as to its historical development.

Religious feelings and the acts by which they are both awakened and expressed, may be arranged under the objects on which they terminate. Those which terminate on the actors, the subject of the feelings, fall under the head of *the means of grace*; such as terminate on other men are included in the term *benevolence*; while those which terminate in God fall under the head of *worship*.

While this classification exhausts the whole of religious feeling and action, its divisions are by no means mutually exclusive. The same religious act may properly be placed in all the classes. Prayer, because it terminates in God, is distinctly an act of worship. But prayer is also one of the means of grace, as such terminating in the petitioner himself: and including, as it does, intercession, and in this view of it, intended to affect other men, it is benevolent.

But all religious acts terminate ultimately in God. Means of grace and benevolence, as well as worship, have as their final reason and object the living God, "the chief end of man," the accepted chief end of the Christian. Hence *worship*, in a large sense, properly includes all religious feeling and action. And it is in this larger sense that it is used, when made to designate the whole round of the public services of the house of God; as in the phrase, "the worship of the Reformed Churches."

Strictly speaking, worship is the act of the single spirit. Indeed, all human action is at last referrible to the forth-putting of the single responsible will. But free spirits may act in unison. And since the religious wants of the spirit are the wants of our common human nature, and since other wants are personal and the result of circumstance, free spirits can in nothing unite either so profoundly or so often as in the worship of God. For this reason it is peculiarly proper to affirm worship of an assembly or a communion. Hence our title declares not only a great historical fact, but also a profound psychological truth. There is "a worship of the Reformed *Churches*."

But our title suggests division as well as union. The word "Reformed" brings into view the fact that the worship, as well as the theology and the polity of Mediæval Christianity, was revolutionized in the reformation of the sixteenth century. Of the changes effected in worship by this revolution, the Reformed Churches, here represented, are the heirs.

The acts of public worship, common to every branch of the Christian Church, are praise, prayer, the administration of the sacraments, and the declaration and exposition of the word. An exhaustive treatment

of the subject would oblige us to notice the influence exerted by the Reformation on each of these acts, and the relative place assigned to each of them: and also to notice the change effected in the form of the place of worship, the material house of God; and the new kind and degree of sanctity with which by the Reformation it was invested. But without specifying these changes in detail, it is to be said that they were effected under the domination of great formative ideas, for which the word Reformation stands.

I suppose that the Reformation is accurately described in a single sentence as an endeavor, at least, to revive a spiritual and scriptural Christianity. Spiritual truth appealing to the spirit of man; the spiritual God in immediate communion with the human spirit, and the written word of God, the infallible rule of the latter in his relations with the former,—as opposed to a dominant organization, through which alone man could approach God, and by which alone spiritual truth could be interpreted, and whose official declarations were above, if they did not supersede the written word as the rule of faith—these ideas of spirituality and scripturalness formed the theology and polity, and determined the worship of the Reformed Churches.

Out of the reign of these ideas, sprang the traits by which our worship is distinguished. These I shall endeavor briefly to describe and defend.

1. Of these, the *first* is what we call *simplicity*, and what others call *bareness* or *nakedness*. We and these others may agree perhaps in describing it by the statement, that the Reformation, broadly speaking, divorced *worship and fine art*, which had been married in the Mediæval Church.

Whether we like it or not, this is the statement of an historical fact. The majestic cathedral, the gorgeous vestments of the ecclesiastics, the complicated and imposing ceremonies, the balanced and decorous liturgies, and the enchanting altar-pieces which even now so powerfully impress us, and which sometimes we are tempted to describe as aids to devotion, are not products of the Reformation. In respect to these, the Reformation was destructive. It stripped off decorative ornaments. It regarded them, at least, as useless *impedimenta*; as weights, which could serve only to make difficult and tardy the flight of the spirit of man to its communion with the spiritual God.

Contemplating the simplicity or baldness of the worship we have thus inherited, all of us, it may be, are at times disposed to believe that any changes in the Reformed practice hereafter to be made, may well be made on the line of a return to mediæval worship: and the question is often asked, whether the interests of spiritual and scriptural religion may not be promoted by church services among us, in which fine art will lend its treasures to excite devotion.

I do not hesitate to say, that the divorce of fine art and worship by the Reformation was an inestimable blessing to man. Nor until sin shall have been destroyed may we safely reunite them.\* Then only

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\* A half-hour is too brief adequately to unfold a subject as large as the worship of the Reformed Churches. I take advantage of the permission to add notes, in

will the union be without peril to the human spirit. The new Jerusalem, whose form is perfect, whose streets are gold, whose gates are pearls, and whose adornment is the glory of all earthly kings, may not descend from heaven until man himself is perfected. This, to call it a theory, is the theory on which the worship of the Reformed Churches is based. I hold it to be justified, alike by the nature of fine art and that of religious worship, and by the teachings of the word of God.

For what is fine art, considered as a pursuit? It is the endeavor of man, laboring in the realm of matter, to produce or exhibit material beauty. The two terms to be emphasized are the substantive, *beauty*, and the qualifying adjective, *material*. However art may idealize, it idealizes within the realm of the material. It cannot be conceived of as existing, apart from matter. The products of art are material products. The enchanting melody of music, the moving cadence and rhythm of poetry, the splendid periods of oratory, the glowing canvas and the speaking marble are indebted for being to the material body and the material world: and however we may talk of the spiritual influence of art, it is severely true, that whoever gives himself to the pursuit or the enjoyment of fine art, so far gives himself to the seen, the material, the temporal. Matter, therefore, and the sensibilities that are most closely related to the physical life of man describe the domain of art. If it appeals to something more than the *body* (*σῶμα*), it does not appeal to the free, willing, rational, and worshipping *spirit* (*πνεῦμα*). The feelings it awakens are those distinctly of the soul (*ψυχή*). Artistic life and enjoyment cannot, as such, be higher than psychical. (1 Thess. v. 23.)

But we are conscious of a life not thus connected with matter. There is an element of human nature and of each human person that will survive "the wreck of matter and the crush of worlds." This is the *spirit of man*. It is the spirit that discerns the spiritual God, that is alive to final causes, that perceives and feels the moral relations between man and man. There are qualities and expressions and emotions characteristic of the life of the spirit; just as there are qualities, expressions, and emotions characteristic of the lower psychical life which produces and enjoys fine art. The quality of *holiness* expresses itself in *religion*, and produces *spiritual peace*; just as the quality of *material beauty* expresses itself in *fine art*, and produces *sensuous pleasure*. This spiritual life has to do with qualities and relations not dependent on matter. When I think of beauty as related to fine art, I call up before me the image of something material. But when I think of holiness or God, I rise above the material; I am in the spiritual world.

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order to emphasize the fact briefly stated above, viz.: that throughout this paper, man is of course regarded, as *in some degree at least, under the power of sin*. Unfortunately, we do not yet need to discuss, as a practical question, whether an artistic worship will suit the perfect and ultimate society. Christianity begins with the recognition of sin in man. This recognition, as it determines our theology and our polity, ought also to form our "worship."

Observe, then, the terms thus set over against each other. Here is material beauty revealing itself in the forms of fine art, and yielding pleasure; and there is the spiritual quality, holiness, expressing itself in religion, with its characteristic product of spiritual peace. Holiness and beauty! Christianity and fine art! Spiritual harmony and sensuous pleasure! Spiritual relations and material forms! Religion and æsthetics! How wide apart they are! Wide apart, indeed, as heaven and earth, as spirit and matter.

Moreover, it is important at this point to observe, that fine art and the feelings it excites are, within their own sphere, as ultimate as religion and the spiritual emotions. A work of fine art is its own purpose. That it is "a thing of beauty," is its right to be. This is both the justification and the glory of art as a pursuit. Its products are not symbolical. They do not point the beholder to higher things which they prophesy. To quote the words of another, "if there is anything settled in the theory of art, it is that fine art is its own end. It is self-sufficing, self-included and irreferent."\* He, therefore, violently removes beauty from her proper throne, and forbids to her the mission appointed by her Creator, who refuses to contemplate her as ultimate in her own realm, and reduces her to a symbol and hand-maiden. Nor will he fail at last to find, that beauty, just because it is an ultimate quality, having no mission save to be and by being to bless, is ill-adapted to serve as a symbol or a mere shadow of good things to come, though they are the good things of the spiritual world. These must be ill-represented by artistic forms. For artistic forms, by reason of their beauty, must compel attention to themselves as supreme. Spiritual realities can be best expressed and revealed, not by ultimate and self-sufficing art, but by prophetic and serviceable symbol.

It is clear, therefore, from the very nature of the two, that fine art must be ill-suited either to express or to excite spiritual worship. It is clear, also, that this statement does not deny to fine art an exalted mission. It but points out the boundaries of the realm in which it is acknowledged as supreme. It but asserts, that fine art exists to represent in human products the quality of material beauty with which the Creator has adorned the work of his hands; and that existing legitimately to represent natural and material beauty, it must, for that reason, be ill-adapted to express or to awaken the supernatural and spiritual beauty of holiness.

Did time permit, it could be made plain that the history of religions justifies this statement. It could be shown that because "the very calling of art, as a department of effort, is to render sensuous the spiritual," and because man, as a sinner, dislikes and is afraid to contemplate pure spiritual truth, whenever it has been attempted to make religious worship artistic, religion has at last become sensuous, and

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\* Dr. Shedd.

spiritual realities have been obscured by the means adopted to reveal them.\*

But the history of one people I may not omit to notice; for it is the history of a people, trained by the spiritual God himself. The teachings of their history are the rule of our faith. I know that eloquence and poetry wedded to music were employed by the Hebrew people in religious worship; and so far the Reformed Churches maintain the union of art and religion. But so subordinate to other elements is the artistic element in poetry and oratory, that we do not call poets or orators, artists. And it is this very subordination of the artistic element to the higher intellectual and moral elements that entitles poetry and oratory to places in the services of the house of God.† With these exceptions, as to whose employment there is no dispute, it is indisputable that God, at least, discouraged fine art, as a pursuit, among the Jews. And though he appointed a detailed ritual, it is a ritual that makes no artistic appeal to man. It did not impress the Hebrew æsthetically; and care was taken that it should not. The Hebrew life was an elaborate life, and Hebrew civilization was lofty and complex. But how deficient were the Hebrews in artistic perception! And how utterly barren are their records of mention of

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\* If material beauty is fitted to excite spiritual worship, one would suppose that beauty in nature, the work of God, ought more profoundly to impress man in a religious manner than beauty in art, the work of his fellow. Even more profound than that of the material beautiful should be the religious impression of the material sublime. For beauty is "multitude in unity," which unity the beholder sees and grasps and feels. But the material sublime is too vast to be apprehended by the beholder as a unity. There is a remainder that he cannot grasp. He is therefore awe-stricken in its presence. It is this unknown, unseen remainder, which may easily, it should seem, suggest the infinite and the spiritual, and so excite worship. Now, of the *material sublime*, the eminent example is the firmament at night, as Kant declares in his often-quoted remark. But it is instructive to notice, that when one of the greatest of modern Reformed Churchmen, Thomas Chalmers, brought to view, in a series of sermons, the relations of astronomy to Christianity, he was so fearful that the material sublimity of the heavens *might, by making an æsthetic, prevent a religious impression*, that he added to his six astronomical discourses a seventh—which still more modern Reformed Churchmen would do well to ponder—on "the slender influence of taste and sensibility in matters of religion."

† The arts of poetry and of eloquence are widely separated from the arts of painting and sculpture, and architecture the union of the two, by the fact that the former employ *articulate speech*. Speech does not *present* anything to the *senses*, in order immediately to excite the sensibilities, as painting and sculpture do. Speech *symbolizes* thought to the understanding and reason, and thus through the *intellect* excites the feelings and arouses the will. Sculpture and painting *image* the *seen*. Language *symbolizes* the *unseen*. For this reason, poetry and eloquence properly find place in services intended to make man feel the reality of that spiritual world, whose elements may be *symbolized* in ritual (Hebrew) or language (Christian), but can never be *imaged*. Music is properly employed still more subordinately as the handmaid of poetry; since by melody they are allied, and since it addresses the hearing ear, through which poetry reaches the intellect and the feelings. There are deeper and more cogent reasons for their employment in "worship;" and these are brought out indirectly in the "Literary Essays" of my revered teacher, Professor Shedd; than whom no modern writer has thought more profoundly, or written more clearly and eloquently on the relations of æsthetics and religion.

artistic products! The prohibition of images of Deity was announced at Sinai. The Cherubim in the most holy place were not artistic representations. "No skill of delineation could make the Cherubim other than unsightly objects to the eye." And if you should select a scene, which by no possibility could be made pleasing, outside of Greece, you would select the characteristic act of the Hebrew ritual; the blood-stained priest at the altar plunging his knife into the victim. Or turn to those great visions in the word of God, in which alone we see anything like an image of the Deity. Take the latest and sublimest of them all. All of us recall the description of the Son of God and Man which opens the Revelation of St. John. Who, in reading it, has not felt, in some degree, what the apostle felt, "And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead?" Have we not been tempted to think of it as an artistic achievement greater than the *Apollo Belvidere* or the *Venus Victrix*? But the truth is, that it is not artistic at all. As Archbishop Trench has well said, "This description of the glorified Lord, sublime as a *purely mental conception*, becomes intolerable if we *give it outward form and expression*, and picture him with this sword proceeding out of his mouth, these feet as burning brass, and this hair white like wool."

So it is with all of the visions of Scripture, that bring man into the presence of God. The impression they leave upon us is ethical and spiritual just because it is not artistic. It is largely to this lack of artistic life and culture among the Hebrews and in the Apostolic Church, that we owe our spiritual religion, our Christianity, with its amazing power to lift man above his material surroundings, and to reveal to him the unseen, the unimagined, but ever-present God. With reverence be it said, we cannot easily tell with what wise pains, the God of Abraham secluded his chosen people, and held them back from communion with those who worshipped nature, and whose religion was blent with and expressed by art, and, if he did not forbid by precept, at least prevented by providence, a life of artistic culture or artistic enjoyment. I cannot doubt that the same all-wise and all-merciful God also guided that movement of the Reformation, by which the services of the house of God again became unartistic; and the simple, the severe, the naked, if you please, but spiritual worship of the Reformed Churches was established.\*

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\* I said, *supra*, that "the Cherubim in the most holy place were not artistic representations." The Cherubim were "composite creature forms." So indeed according to Winckelmann were the statues of Greek gods and heroes. "The study of artists in producing ideal beauties was directed to the nature of noble beasts, so that they even undertook to adopt from animals the means of imparting greater majesty and elevation to their statues. This remark, which might at first sight seem absurd, will strike profound observers as indisputably correct, especially in the heads of Jupiter and Hercules." (Greek Art, Part I., chap. ii., sec. 40.) But the difference between them is that the Hebrew did not attempt, and the Greek always attempted, to reduce the composition to *unity*, the essential trait of beauty. Hence, to employ Archbishop Trench's expression, the Cherubim were "unsightly to the eye;" while the Greek statues of Jupiter and Hercules have

II. Without dwelling longer on this trait of our worship as Reformed Churches, it is but just to say that it is simply *negative*. The change, thus far noticed, was destructive. And therefore, if the Reformation was more than a destructive revolution, if it was a Re-formation, we may expect to find *a positive trait*, which, associated with this negative feature, distinguishes our forms of public worship.

I mention this positive trait in saying, that when, by the Reformation, art was displaced, truth was exalted to the place which art had filled in worship. The exaltation of revealed truth, of the written and inspired word of God, is positively, as the displacement of fine art is negatively, the idea, by which the worship of the Reformed Churches has been shaped.

I assume that this statement needs no elaborate proof here. It at once explains, and is confirmed by great and well-known facts of history. All of us know that the Reformation, springing into public view by the theses of Luther, upheld by him as *truth*, never failed to emphasize this note of the Church; that above all, it is the pillar and ground of the truth. It was the truth, as truth to be believed, announced, explained and defended, that most of all inspired the labors of the Reformers. Thus the Reformed Churches became the heirs, not of elaborate services, but of detailed confessions; in which *the word of God* was announced as the supreme rule of faith, and the *truth* was declared and interpreted. These are the cathedrals which our fathers built: the Gallican, the Belgic, the Scotch, the Westminster Confessions; the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. To the great spiritual and scriptural revival that produced these confessions we owe it, that our worship is broadly distinguished from that of the Mediæval Church by the fact, that we have adopted truth instead of fine art, as the means by which, chiefly, worship is awakened and expressed.

The question whether this has been a gain or loss to spiritual religion, I do not stop to discuss. I do not regard it as a question. That truth expressed in language and addressed directly to the conscience, the reason and the will, is by its character infinitely better fitted to impress spiritual realities on man, to bring him face to face with the spiritual God, and so to promote acceptable worship; than is fine art, whose mission is to represent material beauty, seems too clear for argument. And even were it not so clear, the question is answered by the ultimate fact, that the spiritual God has chosen finally and fully to reveal the spiritual universe to his Church in the world, not by artistic representation, but by his written word.

Thus, then, would I distinguish the Reformed worship from the

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been the admiration and despair of twenty centuries. The explanation of this difference is that the Greek nature, "saturated with beauty," tried to *represent* it, in forms of fine art; while the Hebrew, dominated by spiritual ideas, tried to *symbolize* them. Wide apart as are the Hebrew Cherub, and the Greek Jupiter and Hercules, are the forms of a *spiritual*, and the forms of an *artistic* worship.

Mediæval worship which preceded it, and which in the Churches here represented it displaced. *Truth, which had been subordinated to fine art, was employed anew, as the means to excite and the food to nourish devotion; and art was so far displaced, as thereafter to be used in sacred song and sacred eloquence alone.*

Let no one suppose that, because I do not touch on *prayer* and *praise* as acts of worship, I imply that the Reformed Churches do not assign to them the very highest place in the public worship of God.\* This question was never in debate between them and the Mediæval Church. The former, like the latter, of course, regard them as the loftiest acts in which the human spirit can engage. For, in them, man directly addresses and communes with God. But what shall excite the spirit of man to praise? and what shall move the spirit of man to prayer? These are the questions. And the Mediæval Church answers: "A service that will satisfy the taste and excite the sensibilities of man." The Reformed Churches answer: "The revealed truth of God addressed to the conscience, the reason and the will."

Of the great formative ideas which I have thus tried to announce and uphold, we, as the Reformed Churches, are the representatives. By these ideas, whatever is distinctive in our worship was shaped. But in a paper on the "Worship of the Reformed Churches," I can go no further than to give these ideas expression. For the Reformation went no further. It was not a movement that either imposed or suggested details. These it left to the peoples whom it led out of darkness. And thus, when fully formed, some of the National Churches framed brief and simple liturgies, and others discarded liturgies. But whether they framed liturgies, as well calculated to promote and express union in worship, or whether they rejected pre-written prayer, as "having," to employ Milton's phrase, "less intercourse and sympathy with the heart wherein it was not conceived," all of them were united in loyalty to the ideas which I have now set forth. And it was by the greater vigor with which they applied, and by the greater length to which they carried them, that the Reformed Churches were distinguished, in the forms of their worship, from the Lutheran and Anglican communions.

We may expect that changes will be proposed and adopted in the several Churches represented in this Council. Well will it be for them if these changes shall be made under the influence of the ideas that determined our worship at the Reformation. In the Church, of which I have the honor to be a pastor, we are without a liturgy, and are under a directory that is content to declare principles and to make general suggestions. Signs are not wanting, however—one of which shone brilliant in our firmament last night†—that a call for pre-

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\* I cannot refer to the *sacraments* as acts of worship, further than to say that a moment's reflection will serve to convince the reader that neither of them is *artistic*. Both are *symbolical*. To administer them in an artistic manner, with a view to making an æsthetic impression, is to obscure their symbolical meaning.

† The paper of Prof. R. D. Hitchcock, D. D., LL. D., of New York, on "The Ceremonial, the Moral and the Emotional in Christian Life and Worship."

scribed forms may become quite general. Such a call, should it seek by simple means to express and promote union in worship, might well be heard with attention, and answered by compliance. But should the proposed liturgy be so elaborate, as at all to diminish the relative importance now given to the announcement and exposition of *the truth*, from the central pulpit, in the studied discourse, by the ordained preacher, I trust that it will never become either the law or the custom of the Church. Above all, should the call spring out of, or seek to satisfy, *a prevalent æsthetic impulse*, I pray that it may be successfully resisted. For artistic worship is "poisonous honey" to Christians still weak and sick with sin. Only when, at the consummation of all things, the living Church shall itself be without "spot or wrinkle," may the outward temple safely be adorned with consummate beauty; as only then the voices of the people of God can unite in the consummate and immortal liturgy.

It was announced that the HON. S. M. BRECKINRIDGE, of St. Louis, who was on the programme to read a paper on "Ruling Elders," was unable to be present.

The REV. C. H. READ, D. D., of Richmond, Va., then read the following paper:

#### RULING ELDERS.

The office of Ruling Elders in the churches of Jesus Christ is the topic announced for consideration at this stage in the proceedings of this Council.

Condensation and brevity—as much as is consistent with *the topic in hand*—will need no apology.

A class of persons, known as "Ruling Elders," invested with *some kind of authority*, and exercising *some kind of power*, is constantly recognized in the *Holy Scriptures*, through all the ages, since the organization of the Church of God in the family of Abraham.

The precise mode of their appointment, and the precise nature and exercise of their official power, *from the beginning*, is not distinctly set forth; but *the office itself* is often and very clearly recognized.

An Eldership comes, at first, faintly into view in the divine records; then more and more distinctly it takes on dignity and power as these records advance, until we find Elders associated with almost every important act of government, a council, a sanhedrim, composed of Elders chosen from the different tribes of Israel; and then, a body of men ordained to office in all the regularly organized churches of Jesus Christ. Scriptural and patristic proofs to these points can hardly be necessary in this immediate presence; but such proof may be of use when the utterances of this Council may come to be reported throughout the land and world.