

# The Regulative Principle of Worship: Sixty Years in Reformed Literature

## Part One (1946–1999)

By Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D. with Chris Coldwell

Of all of the doctrines maintained historically by the Calvinistic branch of Christendom, perhaps none has been subject to as much controversy within that tradition as the regulative principle of worship.

Over the past decade or two, there have been increasing numbers of books, pamphlets and articles on the subject of worship within the Reformed community. Even before the recent plethora of material, ecclesiastical struggles spawned concern over the nature of worship. However, not all of the writings from purportedly Reformed men have held to this *sine qua non* of Reformed worship, viz., the regulative principle.

Before we take an historical overview of how the regulative principle of worship (sometimes abbreviated “RPW” in more recent literature) has fared over the past couple of generations within the Reformed world, we need to understand what is meant by the principle itself.

### I. THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

The phrase “regulative principle of worship” does not appear in the creeds and confessions of the Reformation and Post-Reformation era. However, this term, which may not have been used until the twentieth century, sums up the teaching of the Reformed church.<sup>1</sup> The principle is quite simple: whatever is commanded by God for worship is required, and whatever is not commanded is forbidden. This principle therefore goes contrary to the view of worship embraced by Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Anglicanism, viz., that whatever is not forbidden in worship is allowed. Or, to put it another way, the Calvinistic perspective is that we are not only forbidden to employ in worship what is *proscribed*, but we are limited in worship to practice only according to what Scripture has *prescribed*. The regulative principle does not simply prescribe princi-

ples that may be expressed in a variety of ways. Rather, the regulative principle prescribes the actual practices or elements of worship.

The Calvinistic branch of the Reformation, in contrast to the Lutheran branch, maintained this stricter view. However, it was in the Post-Reformation development of the Puritan movement that the principle became more refined; and it was in the Westminster Standards that the principle came to its classic expression. Chapter 21 of the Westminster Confession of Faith states:

The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But 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.<sup>2</sup>

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1. For some clues to the origin of the term “Regulative Principle of Worship,” see the Editor’s introduction to Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D. and David C. Lachman, Ph.D., “Reframing Presbyterian Worship: A Critical Survey of the Worship Views of John M. Frame and R. J. Gore,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 1 (2005) 116, 150. Hereafter “Reframing Presbyterian Worship.”

2. S. W. Carruthers, M.D., Ph.D., *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Being an account of the Preparation and Printing of its Seven*

Furthermore, the proper way to worship has implications with regard to Christian liberty and liberty of conscience. Chapter 20 of the Westminster Confession says that “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also” (Carruthers, 127)

Other Reformed creeds and confessions also reflect the regulative principle. For example, the Heidelberg Catechism, in Lord’s Day 35, answers Question 96 (“What is God’s will for us in the second commandment?”) this way: “That we in no way make any image of God nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word.”<sup>3</sup>

But while this prescriptive principle had a solid creedal and confessional basis, and a strong attestation by countless theologians and churchmen throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its influence waned in the eighteenth century, and it largely lost its hold in much of the Reformed community by the early nineteenth century. The reasons for this development are multi-fold.

One could cite the petering out of Reformed piety and orthodoxy in general, particularly in Europe, but also in America. From the jeremiads of New England Puritans, as they mourned the pervasiveness of genuine faith in what was to be a “city set on a hill,” to the various secession movements out of the Church of Scotland, to the theological confusion and ecclesiastical turmoil and division in American Presbyterianism, the hollowness of what was once a solid doctrinal core echoed across

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*Leading Editions, to which is appended a critical text of the Confession with notes thereon* (Manchester: R. Aikman & Son, [1937]) 129.

3. *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1979) 48.

4. Julius Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America, Changing Patterns Since 1787* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1967) 30.

5. With few exceptions, the scope of this article is limited to an examination of the conservative branches of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches in the United States. In our estimation, liberals who reject *sola scriptura* as a general principle, are unlikely to adopt it with respect to worship. Moreover, when denominations have to debate the propriety of goddess worship, the regulative principle of worship must seem to that constituency to be a quaint, not to mention antiquated, notion. For the most part, the liberals who discuss the regulative principle do so merely as an historical curiosity, and not as a principle that should be followed.

both sides of the Atlantic. This twin blow—the cooling of fervor and the rise of heterodoxy—had a devastating and profound effect on the church’s worship.

Another factor was the rise of secularism—a movement which was given official blessing by American Presbyterians when they amended the Westminster Confession of Faith to tolerate pluralism. The result of this modification had a profound effect on how the church regarded the Second Commandment. Previously, the law of God was regarded as having universal application, including with regard to the civil magistrate. However, if how God wants to be worshipped was not universally applicable, then how could one claim that there was only one way to worship?

The several revival movements also had a detrimental effect on a traditional Presbyterian understanding of worship. This is true not only because of the emotionalistic approach to spiritual matters, but also because of the breakdown in denominational distinctives—the “least common denominator” phenomenon.

And yet another reason for the diminishing of the traditional Reformed perspective on worship was an increasing rationalism, which led to the diminution of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. As Julius Melton has noted, even Old School Presbyterians in the early nineteenth century did not appeal only to the Bible, but pointed to that which is “reasonable,” as justification for various worship practices.<sup>4</sup>

With the loss of the foundational principle came the loss of many of the distinctives of Presbyterian worship. By the end of the nineteenth century, practices such as Psalmody and a *cappella* singing were distant and fading memories for much of Presbyterianism. The Presbyterian Church was pulled in two somewhat disparate directions: toward an evangelicalism that drank deeply from the well of maudlin Romanticism; and toward a high church liturgical perspective which aped Anglicanism.

At the same time, full-blown liberalism was making serious inroads in mainline Presbyterianism in America, especially in the North. For conservative churchmen, making common cause with “Fundamentalists” across denominational lines seemed more important than concern over the details of worship, even though the co-belligerency with believers not of the Reformed faith would lead to a further dilution of doctrine.

Not until the intra-denominational reform movements of the twentieth century—movements which led to ecclesiastical separation—would there be a serious reconsideration among conservative Presbyterians in America of the doctrine of worship.<sup>5</sup>

II. THE 1940S—BEGINNING TO REDISCOVER  
REFORMED WORSHIP

From the mid-nineteenth century up through the 1940s, there was a serious decline in Calvinistic doctrine and thought. During these several decades, churches were few in number which upheld Calvinistic teaching in actuality rather than in name only. However, as conservatives awakened to the dangers of liberal theology, they also began to re-discover their theological roots. Among “Northern” Presbyterians, this theological renewal came to expression most especially in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC).

*The OPC Debate*

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) was embroiled in the Modernist–Fundamentalist battle. The most prominent of the conservatives in the theological fight for the soul of the denomination was J. Gresham Machen.

Machen started his teaching career at Princeton Theological Seminary, but when the seminary’s governing structure was compromised by the liberals in charge of the denominational apparatus, he resigned in 1929 to help found Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

In 1936, Machen and several others were forced out of the PCUSA itself, and he and his followers thereupon formed the Presbyterian Church of America, later renamed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

From its start, this new denomination earned a reputation for being doctrinally careful and precise. With a desire not to repeat the mistakes of the past, the OPC often formed General Assembly study committees on controversial matters, in order to try to discern God’s revealed will.

One of the early professors at Westminster Theological Seminary was John Murray. Raised in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, Professor Murray held to a strict view of the Sabbath and of worship. Particularly, the Scotsman believed in and taught that only inspired songs should be sung in public worship, and that the congregational singing should be done without musical accompaniment.

In the 1940s, as the OPC began to consider the publication of its own hymnal, John Murray raised the question as to the propriety of singing uninspired hymns in public worship. Accordingly, the OPC General Assembly in 1944 appointed a committee to consider the matter. Sherman Isbell provides the background.<sup>6</sup>

The committee was created in consequence of a suggestion by John Murray. The previous year the General Assembly had elected a committee to present to the 1944 General Assembly a preliminary plan for a hymnal for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and Murray was one of the nine members of that committee. When the committee reported, Murray presented a minority report, challenging three recommendations of the committee. The committee was proposing “that any larger hymnal which the General Assembly undertakes to publish contain both metrical psalms and hymns,” “that the approximate composition of the musical portion of the larger hymnal be 85 per cent hymns and 15 per cent psalms,” and finally, “that the General Assembly elect a committee of nine to begin the preparation of the larger hymnal.” Murray noted that “there has been division of judgment within the Committee as to whether uninspired compositions may legitimately be sung.... Our subordinate Standards distinctly provide that God may not be worshipped in any way not prescribed in the holy Scripture. This General Assembly, therefore, is inescapably faced with the question whether the singing of uninspired hymns in the public worship of God is authorized by the holy Scripture.”

Murray urged “that this General Assembly elect a committee of seven to make a diligent study of the teaching of the Word of God and of our subordinate Standards regarding the question of the songs that may be sung in the public worship of God and to report its findings to the Twelfth General Assembly,” and that meantime no further steps be taken toward the preparation of a hymnal. These two recommendations by Murray were adopted, and the General Assembly elected Messrs. Edward J. Young, John Murray, Robert S. Marsden, R. B. Kuiper, John H. Skilton, Arthur W. Kuschke and William Young to serve on the study committee.

The thirteenth General Assembly (1946) was presented with “a partial report” from the study committee. Murray was responsible for the opening section “A,” which provides the fundamental statement of the regulative principle. Murray’s authorship is evident from the draft text and draft cover letter, both in Murray’s handwriting, which are preserved among his papers in the archives of the Montgomery Library at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. In his letter to the committee

6. John Murray, “Song in the Public Worship of God,” Preface by Sherman Isbell, 2001. <http://members.aol.com/RSICHURCH/song1.html>. All Internet references for this article were last accessed and checked on March 31, 2006.

members, Murray says, “This paper is being sent to you in the hope that study of it beforehand will be of some assistance in furthering and perhaps expediting our work at the next meeting of the Committee on March 10th.... I thought it necessary to enter into some detail in view of questions raised at our last meeting.” This statement of the Reformed regulative principle deserves recognition in the corpus of Murray’s writings. William Young observes: “Section A of the 1946 report is clearly the work of John Murray.... Section C is evidently based on parts of my report on the scripture proof of the regulative principle, except for the addition to C in the 1947 report, in which I did not concur.” Thus the bulk of the committee’s incomplete report in 1946 was composed by the two men who dissented from the committee’s majority report the following year.

7. “Murray’s handwritten draft provides at this point a supporting citation which was omitted in the committee report: ‘It may serve good purpose to quote from J. Henley Thornwell: “Circumstances are those concomitants of an action without which it cannot either be at all, or cannot be done with decency or decorum” (quoted from Girardeau, *Music in the Church*, p. 152).’ The passage is from *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, ed. John B. Adger and John L. Girardeau (Richmond, Va.: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871–1873), 4:246.” Isbell, *ibid.* The work by Girardeau which Murray cited, was *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Richmond, Va.: Whittet & Shepperson, 1888).

8. “It is of interest to quote from George Gillespie in this connection: ‘Besides all this, there is nothing which any way pertaineth to the worship of God left to the determination of human laws, beside the mere circumstances, which neither have any holiness in them, forasmuch as they have no other use and praise in sacred than they have in civil things, nor yet were particularly determinable in Scripture, because they are infinite; but sacred, significant ceremonies, such as cross, kneeling, surplice, holidays, bishopping, etc., which have no use and praise except in religion only, and which, also, were most easily determinable (yet not determined) within those bounds which God did set to his written word, are such things as God never left to the determination of any human law’ (The Presbyterian’s Armoury, Vol. 1, p. xii).” Isbell, *ibid.* Murray was quoting from Gillespie’s *English Popish Ceremonies* (*The Presbyterian’s Armoury: The Works of George Gillespie*, edited by William M. Hetherington [Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1846] 1.xii). See also George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies*, ed., Christopher Coldwell (Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 1993) xli.

9. “Report of the Committee on Song in Worship Presented to the Thirteenth General Assembly, on the Teaching of Our Standards Respecting the Songs That May Be Sung in the Public Worship of God” (Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Minutes of the General Assembly [1946] 101–107).

10. “Report of the Committee on Song in the Public Worship of God to the Fourteenth General Assembly” (*Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Minutes of the General Assembly* [1947] 51–66).

11. Robert S. Marsden, “Song in the Public Worship of God. A Study of Committee Reports,” *The Presbyterian Guardian* 17 (March 10, 1948) 72–74. Hereafter Marsden.

Isbell goes on to note that Murray’s original version of this restatement of the regulative principle indicates some of the works he consulted in two footnotes left out of the official report. Where the report examines circumstances of worship, Murray makes reference to a work by James Henley Thornwell, via John Girardeau,<sup>7</sup> and to one of the most important works on worship in the history of Presbyterianism, George Gillespie’s *Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies*.<sup>8</sup>

What is clear from this recounting of the history of this report is that if there had been no John Murray in the OPC, the committee to study worship song would likely not have been formed. Nor would the OPC have had the man in her midst who crafted this classic statement of the regulative principle. As it was, the Northern Presbyterian Church from which the OPC sprung did not have a body of literature defending the regulative principle to which the committee could appeal; and apparently, judging from Murray’s cover letter, at least some of the committee members were not familiar with the doctrine. Thus Scotsmen acquainted with Scottish and Southern Presbyterian literature reintroduced the faithful remnant from the Northern Church to the historic regulative principle of Presbyterianism.

As noted, this affirmation of the regulative principle of worship was presented in a unified report to the 1946 General Assembly.<sup>9</sup> The next year, however, with regard to the content of worship song, the committee split into majority and minority reports,<sup>10</sup> and the two were considered as a whole at the 1948 meeting of the Assembly. In March of that year, prior to the meeting, a report on the committee’s work by Robert S. Marsden was published in *The Presbyterian Guardian*, which was a defense of the majority’s position on worship song, but repeated the finding of the 1946 report: “The committee began its work by considering the question of whether or not there was a regulative principle of worship. In examining this question, the committee found, first of all, that the Scriptures teach, and the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms enunciate such a principle.”<sup>11</sup>

The minority report, signed by Professor Murray and William Young, maintained that the content of worship song should be confined to inspired song. The majority report, headed by Marsden, held that “hymns” of human derivation could also be sung in public worship. The Murray-Young report criticized the majority report for abandoning the regulative principle that the whole committee had supported the previous year. Without a doubt, the majority position had not proven its case Biblically, per the requirement of the regulative

principle—a reality essentially conceded by Chairman Marsden a year later.<sup>12</sup>

However, the failure of the Marsden report to maintain the regulative principle was not only in terms of the outcome, but also the presuppositions. The majority report assumed that two elements of worship—the singing of praise and the praying of prayer—were essentially identical. In other words, the OPC majority report conflated these two separate practices of worship, and asserted, in essence, that prayer could take place through the medium of singing. By not understanding the uniqueness of each of the elements of worship, the OPC was setting itself up for yet further confusion on the nature of an element of worship—confusion that would become evident in the writings of more than one scholar at Westminster Seminary in the 1970s.

#### *The Southern Presbyterian Experience*

As their conservative brethren were being ejected from the ministry in the PCUSA, conservatives in the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS, commonly called the Southern Presbyterian Church), were gearing up for battle. Before its decline, the PCUS had a strong history of defending the regulative principle, evidenced by the writings of men such as James Henley Thornwell, John L. Girardeau, John B. Adger, and Robert L. Dabney.<sup>13</sup> Foremost among the efforts to call the Southern Church back to her heritage was the *Southern Presbyterian Journal*.

Founded in 1942, the *Journal* focused much of its attention on opposing merger with the PCUSA, at least in part because of the Northern Presbyterian “loose” subscription (in contrast to “strict subscription”) to the Westminster Standards. But the publication also called attention to the departures from orthodoxy within the Southern Church itself.

In 1948, Dr. R. E. Hough’s article, “The New Altar,” came out strongly in favor of the regulative principle of worship. Pastor of Central Presbyterian Church in Jackson, Mississippi, Dr. Hough wrote: “[The Church] is in a world which has many new forms and ceremonies, in themselves often attractive, to tempt her from the path of obedience, and from the spiritual worship laid down in the Scripture. Sad to say in many instances [she] seems to be yielding to this seduction, and on the pretext of adorning the service in such a way as to attract people to them.... If the attraction of people is the purpose of the service, then by all means let us go all the way and put on a good show that will compete with the attraction and amusement of the world.” He

also wrote: “It is high time, many believe, for the Church to restudy the matter of public worship, not from the aesthetic and popular viewpoint, but as to what pleases God. We are no more left to our inclination and taste in fashioning altars and crosses and candles than was Ahab in fashioning his altar.”<sup>14</sup>

*Johannes G. Vos*

The son of famed Princeton Theological Seminary professor Geerhardus Vos, J. G. Vos built on the Biblical-theological (“history of redemption”) insights of his father. J. G.’s commitment to *sola Scriptura* led him out of “mainline” Presbyterianism into the much smaller Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), a group often known by its nickname, the “Covenanters.”

Becoming a missionary and minister in the RPCNA, and later a member of the faculty at Geneva College (the denominational school in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania), Professor Vos championed the exclusive psalmody and *a cappella* singing of his adopted church. He did so in a time when many even in the RPCNA did not understand or appreciate the regulative principle of worship, and did not know why they held to their distinctive worship practices.

Over the course of three decades, J. G. Vos edited the influential *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, a publication which set forth standard Puritan and Covenanter views, including with regard to worship.<sup>15</sup> Among the

12. “It might have been said that a certain disciple, not one of the apostolic company, composed a song which is not recorded in Scripture, and that that song was sung in a public worship service. But even then it would be impossible to *prove* that that song was not inspired. It would thus be impossible to *prove* that uninspired songs are authorized in the Scripture, and to demand such proof before one can in good conscience sing uninspired songs is to demand the impossible!” Marsden, 73. Throughout this article, emphases within quotations are original to the text unless otherwise noted.

13. The defense of the regulative principle of worship by these Southern Presbyterians is perhaps summed up best by John L. Girardeau’s 1875 sermon before the PCUS General Assembly of that year. John L. Girardeau, “The Discretionary Power of the Church,” *Sermons by John L. Girardeau*, Rev. George A. Blackburn, ed. (Columbia, S.C.: The State Company, 1907) 369–412.

14. R. E. Hough, “The New Altar,” *Southern Presbyterian Journal* (January 1, 1948) 7; cited in Frank J. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America: The Silver Anniversary Edition* (Lawrenceville, Ga.: Presbyterian Scholars Press, 1999) 18–19.

15. *Blue Banner Faith and Life*. Clay Center, Kan.: ed. J.G. Vos, 1946–1979. Volume 1 #1 (Jan. 1946) to v 34 #4 (Oct.–Dec. 1979). Monthly, January–June 1946. Quarterly, July–September 1946–1979. “A quarterly publication devoted to expounding, defending, and applying the system of doctrine set forth in the word of God and

many articles which Professor Vos wrote for this magazine were those penned from 1946 to 1949 which constituted a commentary on the Westminster Larger Catechism.<sup>16</sup>

Commenting on the Larger Catechism's perspective on the Second Commandment, Dr. Vos wrote that the "three duties imposed on God's people" are "(a) To receive the true worship, that is, to recognize it as a binding obligation on the conscience and conduct. (b) To preserve the true worship, that is, not merely to believe it as an article of faith, but actually to practice it in our life. (c) To preserve the true worship, that is, to adhere to it strictly as it is appointed in Scripture, scrupulously avoiding all corruptions or human changes in matters which God has appointed in his Word." "Why must we be so careful to receive, observe, and preserve the true worship of God?", he asks; and he answers: "Because God is jealous concerning his worship, that is, he is not willing to allow us to do as we please in matters of worshiping him. God is sovereign; he is supreme over all; therefore we are bound to obey his will: and he has revealed in the Scripture that it is his will that he be worshiped strictly and only according to his own appointed ordinances and in no other way whatever" (Vos, *Larger Catechism*, 283).

Professor Vos noted that the "obligation to maintain purity of worship" is nullified by the Roman Catholic position (and by Protestant bodies that follow the same principle), by allowing the church to "make decrees concerning ordinances of worship and even add new ordinances not appointed in the Scriptures. This mistaken attitude concerning worship is the explanation of many corruptions of divine worship which exist in the Church of Rome and those bodies which copy 'Catholic' worship" (283).

The professor wrote that the "scriptural principle concerning divine worship is that the only right and acceptable way of worshiping God is that appointed by himself, which may not be changed by men"; and posited that the doctrine of divine sovereignty is the basis of that scriptural doctrine of worship. Besides the

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summarized in the standards of the Reformed Presbyterian (Covenant) Church." Published by Board of Publication of the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, July–September 1953–1979. Place of publication varies. Also issued on microfilm by ATLA. Periodical information from the card catalog entry for the collection held by the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary Library.

16. These articles have more recently been gathered in book form, which is the text cited in this article. Johannes G. Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary*, ed. G. I. Williamson (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2002). Hereafter Vos, *Larger Catechism*.

absolute sovereignty of God, the other basic principle that would help to "convince people of the validity of the principle that God is to be worshiped only as appointed in his Word, and not according to human preferences or desires," is "the full inspiration and authority of the Bible" (288–289).

The author observed: "Unless we can succeed in convincing people of the validity of this principle [i.e., the regulative principle of worship], our opposition to particular details of false worship will seem to them to be merely a stubborn insistence on our customs of worship over against their customs of worship. To seek reform in particular matters of worship, without gaining acceptance of the underlying principle of worship, is like trying to build a beautiful and substantial house with no foundation under it but sand" (289).

The Larger Catechism's treatment of "the reasons annexed to the second commandment, the more to enforce it", led him to write that "God is greatly concerned and desirous, not only that he be worshiped by his rational creatures, but that he be worshiped by them in the particular manner which he has revealed as his will concerning how he is to be worshiped. People often speak as if it made no special difference to God whether people worship him or not, or how they worship him. But God is jealous concerning his own worship; he cannot be indifferent to whether, or how, he is worshiped" (298–299).

Professor Vos posed a question—"What figure of speech is often used in the Bible to bring out the hateful wickedness of false worship?"—and he answered:

The figure of a wife who is unfaithful to her marriage vows. God is represented as the husband of his people, the Old Testament nation of Israel, and also the spiritual Israel, which is the Christian church. In this spiritual "marriage" relationship, loyalty required that Israel worship the true God, with whom she was in covenant, alone. But Israel proved unfaithful to God's covenant, and turned to worship the divinities of all the neighboring heathen nations. Time and again in Scripture this involvement in false worship is denounced as spiritual adultery. Hosea 2:2–4 is only one of many passages of the same nature in the Old Testament prophets. By this figure of speech, so often and emphatically repeated, God showed how hateful and displeasing his people's compromise with false worship was to him (300).

For J. G. Vos, then, failure to maintain the prescribed practices of worship, necessarily entailed compromise, and an infidelity on a par with worshiping false gods.

## William Young

As mentioned previously, Dr. William Young was a co-signer with John Murray of the OPC Minority Report on Worship Song. A philosophy professor (who during his career taught at Christian colleges as well as the University of Rhode Island), Dr. Young penned an article in 1947 for *Christian Opinion* magazine on the second commandment.<sup>17</sup> He wrote that the principle in question is that “The Holy Scripture prescribes the whole content of worship”; and added: “By this is meant that all elements or parts of worship are prescribed by God Himself in His Word. This principle has universal reference to worship performed by men since the fall. In other words it has equal application to the Old and the New Testament. It is also universal in that it is regulative of all types of worship, whether public, family or private” (“Second Commandment,” 75).

Dr. Young deliberately contrasted this principle with

the ambiguously stated principle that God is to be worshipped according to His Word. Of course it is true that God is to be worshipped according to His Word, but it is also true that the civil magistrate should administer his office according to the Word. In this sense, the worship of God would not be in principle regulated more directly than the conduct of civil government. Such is not the Calvinistic view of the character of the worship of God. Neither may we say that God’s Word provides us with general principles of worship, but leaves the particulars of practice to the discretion of the Church. The whole content of worship includes specific acts of worship as well as the broad principial basis of these acts. The Word of God, moreover, obviously prescribes specific acts of worship even in quite minute detail, in addition to laying down the general principles of worship. This principle may not be construed as admitting that Scripture itself opens up in the New Testament economy an area of liberty in the worship of God within which area nothing is prescribed by God and everything left to the judgment of men. The admission of such an area of liberty is tantamount to asserting the un-Reformed principle that anything not expressly forbidden in Scripture is allowable in the worship of God. On the Reformed principle no part of the content of God’s worship can be regarded as belonging to *adiaphora*, to the class of actions neither required nor forbidden by divine commandment. Whatever has not been commanded is prohibited (76).

After dealing with the matter of circumstance, using especially the writings of seventeenth century theologians George Gillespie and John Owen (76–79), Dr. Young adduced the validity of the regulative principle on the following doctrinal grounds: (1) the nature of the sufficiency of Scripture, and of Scripture’s nature as the only infallible rule of faith and practice; (2) the sovereignty of God; (3) man’s total depravity, which means that manmade worship will always be unacceptable; (4) Christ’s exclusive kingship over the Church; (5) the fact that, even as the church’s doctrine, government, and discipline are prescribed, even so she may not invent new ways of worship (79–83).

Professor Young then appealed to various Scriptures in support of the regulative principle. The first such passage was the second commandment itself (Exodus 20: 4, 5), which, in its prohibition of idolatry, implies that “every product of man’s brain and hand introduced into God’s worship is, in the very nature of the case, an idol.” Other Mosaic passages which teach the regulative principle include Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; and Exodus 25:40.

The minuteness of detail in the divine prescriptions as the construction of the tabernacle and as to the practice of worship to be performed in it made it perfectly plain to God’s ancient people that whatever was not commanded was forbidden. Those who, contrary to such clear light, worshipped God with their own inventions, ... became the object of the fearful vengeance of a jealous God. In this connection observe that the jealousy of God is revealed against idolatrous corruptions of and superstitious additions to His worship. Meditation on this much forgotten attribute of God should impress us with the grave importance of the purity of God’s sanctuary. The Lord will not suffer His bride to seek after her own heart and eyes, after which she is accustomed to go a whoring (Num. 15:39, 40), but visits such unfaithfulness with the severest rebukes (84–85).

Dr. Young also referenced Jeremiah 7:31, which says,

17. William Young, “The Second Commandment: The Principle that God is To Be Worshipped Only in Ways Prescribed in Holy Scripture and That The Holy Scripture Prescribes The Whole Content of Worship—Taught by Scripture Itself,” *Christian Opinion* 5.2 (1947). This essay was reprinted twice in Vos’s *Blue Banner Faith and Life* (12.1 [January–March 1957] 12–17; and 19.2 [April–June 1964] 66–71), as well as in Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, eds., *Worship in the Presence of God: A collection of essays on the nature, elements, and historic views and practice of worship* (Greenville, S.C.: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1992). The last is the source for the text cited in this article; hereafter, “Second Commandment”.

“They have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and daughters in the fire: which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart.” He commented: “How clearly does this passage show that God does not view sin as does man. Man would revolt at the unnatural and inhuman cruelty of the burning of the fruit of one’s own body before an idol. But in God’s mind this is but secondary, the essential evil being that it is worship which He did not command, neither came it into His heart” (85).

Dr. Young addressed the objection that, in the New Testament, the Church is free from such regulation of worship. He wrote that “this would be contrary to the identity of the covenant of grace in both the old and the new dispensation. The principle regulating the worship of God belongs to the substance of the covenant of grace. With reference to the heavenly Father, the most mature saint remains a covenant child, and the most mature state of the Church itself remains subject to the ordinances imposed by the Church’s Head and Lord. Notwithstanding the changes involved in abrogation

18. “The importance of the regulative principle of worship for the origin and essential character of the Puritan movement appears in the definition of Puritanism given by Prof. Horton Davies in his standard work on, ‘The Worship of the English Puritans’ (Chap. I. p. 1.)...” William Young, “The Puritan Principle of Worship,” *In Servants of the Word [Puritan Conference 1957]* (Southampton, England, 1958) 46.

19. “I find it surprising that so well informed a writer as Horton Davies suggests that the Puritans probably were not aware of the cleavage between themselves and John Calvin’ and how their viewpoint differed from the practice of other Reformed churches [Davies, 48].... The facts are otherwise, and Davies really undermines his assertion on his page 112.” Rowland S. Ward, “The Directory for Public Worship Prepared by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster in the Year 1644,” *Westminster Assembly 2004: A Conference on the Westminster Standards*, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia Pa., November 21–22, 2004 (Unpublished; MS dated February 18, 2006) 2. Ward goes on to conclude, “I am quite satisfied there is no fundamental difference between Calvin and the Westminster men on worship. They are in agreement in the principle, and the differences in form and rubric are those which a church, in due subjection to Scripture, may maintain without schism.” Ward, 13.

20. Dr. Davies had previously published a more general, less detailed and popular work on worship, *Christian Worship, its Making and Meaning* (Wallington, U.K.: The Religious Education Press, Ltd., 1946). A second edition was issued as *Christian Worship, its History and Meaning* (New York: Abingdon Press, [1957]). He gives similar definitions (citing the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition): “In comparison with the Lutheran and Anglican reformations, which were conservative, his type of churchmanship and worship may seem radical, but it was considerably less so than that of the Puritans in England and the Quakers, so that it may be termed moderate as a mediating though logical view of worship. Whereas Luther was willing to retain all features of the medieval rite that did not conflict with the understanding of the gospel he obtained from the New Testament, Calvin held that what was

of the ceremonial law, there is no change in the divine prerogative of appointing the worship to be rendered by the Church.” Appeal was made to New Testament verses (Mark 7:7, Matthew 28:20, and Colossians 2:22, 23) in order to support the abiding validity of the regulative principle for the new covenant (86–88).

Dr. Young also utilized several Scriptural examples which illustrate the regulative principle (88–89): (1) the sacrifices of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:3, 4); (2) Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1, 7); and (3) various others, including, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16); Moses smiting the rock at Kadesh (Numbers 20); the rejection of Saul (1 Samuel 13); and the handling of the ark (1 Chronicles 15:13).

### Horton Davies

We cannot close out the 1940s without noticing the first of several historical works to be covered in this survey, which, while not uncritical of or even sympathetic toward the regulative principle, nevertheless are helpful in that they present it more or less accurately in the words of those who did hold to it. The late Horton Davies’ 1948 work, *Worship of the English Puritans*, which is based upon his 1944 Oxford dissertation, presented the Puritan view of worship with frequent citations from important works of the period. In a few years it had become a standard work.<sup>18</sup> While his book is not above criticism,<sup>19</sup> it was particularly important at the time as a means by which many were introduced to the Puritan (and Calvinistic) view of worship, and it continues to be an oft-cited work on the subject. The opening chapter lays out the difference in the worship views of Luther and Calvin, and clearly links the Puritan principle to that of the Genevan Reformer.

The real difference between the Lutheran and Calvinist reforms in worship may be summed up as follows: Luther will have what is not specifically condemned by the Scriptures; whilst Calvin will have only what is ordained by God in the Scriptures. That is their fundamental disagreement. It is of vital importance in the history of Puritan worship, since the Puritans accepted the Calvinist criterion, whilst their opponents, the Anglicans, accepted the Lutheran criterion (Davies, *English Puritans*, 16).

Following Calvin, they [the Puritans] affirmed the sufficiency of Scripture as a directory of worship, as well as the repository of the saving knowledge of God (49).<sup>20</sup>

Davies summed up the Puritan “apologia” for their view of worship this way:

In their apologia their first position was inevitably the all-sufficiency and perfection of the Scriptures for the ordering of worship. William Bradshaw writes in 1605:

‘IMPRIMIS they hould and maintaine that the word of God contained in the writings of the Prophets and Apostles, is of absolute perfection, given by Christ the Head of the Church, to bee unto the same, the sole Canon and rule of all matters of Religion, and the worship and service of God whatsoever. And that whatsoever done in the same service and worship cannot be iustified by the said word, is unlawfull.’

Having stated their thesis in such bold terms, they proceeded to justify it by quotations from the Scriptures. It is their invariable practice to find a warrant in Holy Writ for every postulate they make. Thus, believing themselves bound to the Word of God, they do not assert a mere opinion, or a reasonable conviction, but the declared will of God. What may appear as Bibliolatry to their successors or opponents is, in fact, their consistency.

The Scriptural citations warranting their main thesis are derived from both Testaments. Thus II Peter i 19–21 and II Timothy iii 15–17 urge the perfection of the Scriptures; while Matthew xv 9, 13, and Rev. xxii 19 are taken to forbid any man-made additions to the worship of God. Even more relevant and stronger proof-texts are found in the Old Testament. Exodus xx 4–6 (the Second Commandment), Joshua i 7, Deut. iv 2, xii 32, and Proverbs xxx 6 assert that God will not tolerate any additions to his worship since he is ‘a jealous God.’

Once their thesis is established, the Puritans then diligently search the Scriptures for evidences of the worship which God demands from his people. Their norm is the Apostolic Church and their aim is to re-establish its purity and simplicity in their midst. They believe that the worship of this church is characterized by six ordinances: namely, (i) Prayer; (ii) Praise; (iii) the proclamation of the Word; (iv) the administration of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper; (v) catechizing; and (vi) the exercise of Discipline ... (50–51).

In a final chapter entitled “A Survey and Critique of Puritan Worship,” Davies’ criticism came down to the

complaint “that its [Puritanism’s] Biblical criterion was too rigidly applied.”

The dominant principle in Puritan worship is that only the worship prescribed by God in his Word is acceptable to the Divine Majesty. It is expressed in characteristic fashion by John Owen:<sup>21</sup>

‘The end wherefore God granted his word unto the church was, that thereby it might be instructed in his mind and will as to what concerns the worship and obedience that he requireth of us, and which is accepted with him. This whole Scripture itself everywhere declares and poseth, it declareth, that of ourselves we are ignorant how God is, how he might be worshipped, Isa. viii. 20. Moreover, it manifests him to be a “jealous God,” exercising the holy property of his nature in an especial manner about his worship, rejecting and despising every thing that is not according to his Will, that is not of his institution, Exod. xx. 4–6.’

The characteristic Puritan reverence for the Scriptures, as Dr. F. J. Powicke remarks,<sup>22</sup> was carried to the point of Bibliolatry.’ This meant for every detail of worship Biblical sanction or silence was required (257–258).

Davies published a companion volume to this work forty years later, *Worship of the American Puritans, 1629–1730* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990).<sup>23</sup> In chapter one, “The Beginnings,” Davies describes the worship of early New England. Regarding New England Puritan worship, he writes: “One is impressed by the

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not prescribed by the Bible was positively forbidden to the Christian man. For this reason, although his forms of worship attempted to imitate the worship of the primitive Church, he was primarily concerned to design a form of worship with strong biblical authority” (55). “These criticisms, carried over from England and Scotland to North America by immigrants, have accounted for the dislike until recent times of precomposed forms of prayer and an ornate liturgy, among the heirs of the Puritans.... But this conception of worship is not a merely negative, dissenting, or niggardly view of worship. It must be recognized that these churches have made several positive contributions to worship. The most notable of them is the use of extemporary prayer” (67).

21. Davies is citing John Owen’s “A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God,” *Works* (Edinburgh: Goold ed., 1862) 15.450.

22. Davies is citing F. J. Powicke, “English Congregationalism in its greatness and decline (1502–1770),” in *Essays Congregational and Catholic, issued in commemoration of the centenary of the Congregational Union of England and Wales*, ed. Albert Peel (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1931) 299.

23. Horton Davies, *Worship of the American Puritans, 1629–1730* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990).

novelty of the worship in several ways. First and foremost, one notes the determination to use all the ordinances in their pristine purity as Christ's commands in Scripture, thus to avoid the arrogance of human invention, which is idolatry condemned by the Second Commandment. It is this that accounts for the insistence on the biblical basis of all the ordinances. This leads to the denial of any formal liturgy and the demand for extemporaneous prayers, and it even determines the correct order for the different types of prayers" (Davies, *American Puritans*, 11). In chapter three on "The Theology of Worship," Davies again paints the difference in Lutheran and Calvinian worship: "This was essentially not a philosophical theology, but a biblical theology, and in this way it showed its Calvinian heritage.... Calvin, by contrast, insisted that Scripture was to be dominant as God's law in church and state. His principle was in reference to God: *Quod non jubet, vetat* (He forbids what He does not command). Thus Scripture was to be dominant, not only in faith and ethics, but as God's law it must dictate church worship and polity. For Calvin the Bible was, in his own words, "*la sainte parole et loi de Dieu*," the holy word and law of God. The Puritans followed Calvin in their insistence that *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) was the paramount and exclusive liturgical criterion" (23–24).<sup>24</sup>

#### Overview: 1946–1949

American Presbyterianism had lost its grasp of her foundational Reformational principle governing the worship of God. A transplanted Scot (John Murray) brought new life to a twentieth century understanding of the Regulative Principle by crafting a defense which hearkened back to the literature of Scottish and Southern Presbyterianism. Conservative Southern Presbyterians had some reaction to worship innovations, with at least one call to study seriously the issue of public

24. Davies also compares and contrasts Anglicanism and Puritanism in his magnum opus, *Worship and Theology in England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961–1975) 1.69ff. He comments on the Puritan demand for a biblical warrant for all worship ordinances as follows: "Biblical fidelity could all too easily degenerate into Bibliomania in the more extreme forms of text-hunting and strained interpretation.... Disregarding such special pleading and hair-splitting interpretation as mere eisegesis, it must still be recognized that the value of providing a Biblical warrant for all the ordinances of Puritan worship was that each was directly related to the divine will, and that this gave these ordinances an august authority for those who used them, as the Puritans did, in the obedience of faith" (71).

25. Robert S. Marsden, [Review] Henry A. Bruinsma, ed., *Accompanists of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College and Seminary, 1954), *Westminster Theological Journal* 17.1 (November, 1954) 84–85.

worship, but there was no strong restatement of the principle their forefathers had championed. Professor Murray, joined by his fellow signer of the minority report on worship song, William Young, along with J. G. Vos in the RPCNA, were solitary voices in the wilderness at this period, but they laid a firm foundation for later generations to take up the charge of defending Presbyterianism's Biblical worship principle.

### III. THE 1950S AND 1960S—A GROWING CALVINISTIC AWAKENING

As we have seen, the regulative principle came back to the American Presbyterian scene with a classic statement of Presbyterianism's historic rule of worship, laid out by John Murray in the OPC report on worship song in 1946. However, with rare exception, it remained a forgotten principle to the rest of the Reformed churches in this country. In a 1954 book review of a volume of papers "presented at the first annual Calvin College Conference on Church Music, held in August, 1953," Robert Marsden remarked:

Perhaps one word of adverse criticism would not be out of order. The papers presented at the conference generally show a striking unawareness of the implications of the regulative principle of worship, an unawareness which mars most discussions of the subject of church music which are held in groups of other Reformed backgrounds than the Scottish. A good starting place for the discussion of the problems of church music would be the accurate statement of the Westminster Confession of Faith that "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 any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture" (XXI, 1). Unfortunately, most of those who have taken this important biblical principle seriously have interpreted it in a way that greatly impoverishes the church by excluding most music that is taken for granted in other Reformed communions. We believe that a conference on church music can proceed with an awareness of this biblical principle, and can arrive at sound solutions of the problems in the light of it.<sup>25</sup>

#### *The Banner of Truth Trust*

More promising was the fact that throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a growing number of churchmen, seminary students, and lay people were becoming aware of

Calvinism. Aiding the Calvinistic re-emergence was the appearance of The Banner of Truth Trust, a British-based organization dedicated to re-publishing sixteenth and seventeenth century books, including that of the Puritans, as well as the fruit of contemporary authors.

Begun in 1957, the Banner of Truth was not homogeneous, but represented a wide diversity of generally Reformed beliefs. Accordingly, its efforts focused mostly on Biblical commentaries, biographies, and devotional material; and it tended to avoid what might be considered the divisive issues of ecclesiology, polity, and worship.

Three exceptions to this general observation were the republication by the Banner of Truth of James Bannerman's *The Church of Christ*;<sup>26</sup> the appearance of William Cunningham's "The Reformers and the Regulative Principle" and other pieces in *The Reformation of the Church*;<sup>27</sup> and later, an essay on worship by John Murray in his *Collected Writings*. The Bannerman book contained much that is relevant to the regulative principle of worship, particularly in a section entitled "Church Power Exercised in Regard to Ordinances" (1.322–2.185). Two of that section's subsections are "Extent of Church Power as Regards the Public Worship of God" (1.340), and "Limits of Church Power as Regards the Public Worship of God" (1.360). In these chapters, and in the one by Cunningham, these nineteenth century Scotsmen clearly advocated the regulative principle of worship. John Murray, as noted previously, also unambiguously championed the historic position; however, only one brief essay on the subject appears in the collection of his writings published by Banner of Truth. This is not the full treatment one would expect when trying to do justice to the writings of a man for whom the doctrine was so central to his thinking.<sup>28</sup>

Nevertheless, despite staying away, for the most part, from issues of ecclesiology, the Banner of Truth helped sow seeds of interest in historic Reformed theology, including Puritanism; and those seeds were destined to grow in the decades to come.

*William Young*

Meanwhile, there were a few churchmen who contended for traditional Presbyterian and Reformed worship. Among these was the previously mentioned Dr. William Young, whom we have noted was the co-signer of the 1947 OPC minority report on the content of worship song, and author of an oft-reprinted article on the Second Commandment.

On December 18, 1957, William Young delivered an

address at the Puritan Conference in London, England, entitled, "The Puritan Principle of Worship." This article was published in serial form by J. G. Vos' *Blue Banner Faith and Life*.<sup>29</sup> Besides being another testimony for the regulative principle, this piece of writing is especially significant in that the views of Calvin and of the Puritans with respect to the regulation of worship, and largely with respect to the content of worship song, are seen as being woven of the same cloth.

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 the following consideration of the Reformed creeds and the works of Reformed writers....

Calvin also finds the regulative principle of worship established by the second commandment of the decalogue. He expounds the commandment thus: "As in the first commandment the Lord declares that he is one, and that besides him no gods must be either worshipped or imagined, so he here more plainly declares what his nature is, and what the kind of worship with which he is to

26. James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (1869; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1960).

27. William Cunningham, "The Reformers and the Regulative Principle," in I. H. Murray, ed., *The Reformation of the Church* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965; reprint, 1987). Other articles were: "The Regulative Principle and Things Indifferent" by John Hooper, "The Abolition of Vestments" by John à Lasco, and "Scripture and the Ordering of Worship From the Preface to the Geneva Service Book of 1556." The Banner of Truth also published the work from which the Cunningham extract came: William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967) 31–46.

28. John Murray, "Worship," *The Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth, 1976) 1.165–168. The article was a transcription from an incomplete undated manuscript. The text ends just as Murray was beginning to reference the difference in the OPC regarding psalmody.

29. "The Puritan Principle of Worship," in *Servants of the Word [Puritan Conference 1957]* (Southampton, England, 1958) 46–58. Dr. Young enlarged this paper and it ran serially in: *Blue Banner Faith and Life* 14.2 (April–June 1959) 74–78; 14.3 (July–September 1959) 133–36; 14.4 (October–December 1959) 181–84; 15.1 (January–March 1960) 11–15; 15.2 (April–June 1960) 72–74; 15.3 (July–September 1960) 129–31; 15.4 (October–December 1960) 192–94; 16.1 (January–March 1961) 28–30. It was also later printed in tract form by Dr. Young's denomination. *The Puritan Principle of Worship* (Vienna, Va.: Presbyterian Reformed Church, [1990]). The citation here is from the text as it appears on The Westminster Presbyterian website, <http://members.aol.com/RSIGRACE/puritan1.html>. Dr. Young also wrote a very short piece entitled "Acceptable Worship" (*The Presbyterian Reformed Magazine*, 2.2 [Winter 1969] 19–20).

be honored, in order that we may not presume to form any carnal idea of him. The purport of the commandment, therefore, is, that he will not have his legitimate worship profaned by superstitious rites. Wherefore, in general, he calls us entirely away from the carnal frivolous observances which our stupid minds are wont to devise after forming some gross idea of the divine nature, while, at the same time, he instructs us in the worship which is legitimate, namely, spiritual worship of his own appointment.” ...

In Calvin’s refutation of the claims of the Church of Rome, the regulative principle of Reformed worship provides a charter of Christian liberty. A superficial view might suppose the regulative principle to be a confining, restricting principle, that condemns Christian worship to barrenness and ugliness. In Calvin’s doctrine and practice, as in that of the Puritans in the following century, the regulative principle was a liberating power, cutting off at the root the tyrannical imposition of men in the worship of God, and exhibiting the worship of God in its native beauty, the beauty of holiness.<sup>30</sup>

*Gordon H. Clark*

Gordon Clark was perhaps the most astute philosopher in the Reformed world in the twentieth century. In the 1950s, he wrote articles on the Westminster Confession of Faith which appeared, in serial fashion, in the

30. The text of this article is online at <http://members.aol.com/rschurch/worship.html>, and these citations come from part one and two.

31. Gordon H. Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956) 83ff.

32. Quoted in Carl W. Bogue, *The Scriptural Law of Worship* (Dallas, Tex.: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1988) 4.

33. J. I. Packer, “The Puritan Approach to Worship,” *Diversity in Unity: Papers Read at the Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference, December 1963* (London: Available from *The Evangelical Magazine*, 1964) 3–13. This was reprinted as chapter 15 in Packer’s *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1990), which was the American version of the text published as *Among God’s Giants: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Eastbourne: Kingsway, 1991). The conference papers have been reprinted in *Puritan Papers Volume 3 1963–1964* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2001).

34. Rowland S. Ward, “The Directory for Public Worship Prepared by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster in the Year 1644,” *Westminster Assembly 2004: A Conference on the Westminster Standards*, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia Pa., November 21–22, 2004 (Unpublished; MS dated February 18, 2006) 8 n34. These conference lectures are to be published by P&R. Dr. Ward is citing page 326 from *Among God’s Giants*. The word “substantive” was not in the original 1963 text.

*Southern Presbyterian Journal*. Those articles were later gathered into a book, entitled, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?*

Even though Dr. Clark tended to be rather conservative in his views, he only barely touched upon the meaning of the regulative principle of worship. In discussing Chapter 21 of the Confession of Faith, he wrote that “Bible-believing Presbyterians will not make the sign of the cross, sprinkle themselves with holy water, bow to the altar, or invent any rite not prescribed in the Scriptures.”<sup>31</sup> He also expressed dismay at the offering of ballet at a Christmas service, saying that that dance “was a bit incongruous with divine worship” and out of accord with “the Puritan principle of the law of God from which we should not turn aside, either to the right hand or the left.”<sup>32</sup>

*1963 Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference—Iain H. Murray*

Six years after Dr. Young’s 1957 address on the “Puritan Principle of Worship,” in December 1963, two additional papers on the Puritans and worship were read before the Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference. One was delivered by J. I. Packer, entitled “The Puritan Approach to Worship.”<sup>33</sup> In covering his subject, Packer tried to steer clear of controversy by lauding the Puritan “approach” to worship and focusing more on “the inner reality of worship, as the Puritans understood it,” rather than on their ‘rule.’ He also saw a difference between the Puritans’ worship rule and that of Reformers such as John Calvin, making the comment that the “idea that direct biblical warrant, in the form of precept or precedent, is required to sanction every item included in the public worship of God was in fact a Puritan innovation...” (*Diversity in Unity*, 4–5).

We agree with the Rev. Dr. Rowland S. Ward’s assessment of this statement as later modified and published in Packer’s *Among God’s Giants*: “I do not think J. I. Packer is correct in stating ‘the idea that direct biblical warrant in the form of precept or precedent, is required to sanction every substantive item included in the public worship of God was in fact a Puritan innovation...’ It depends on what is meant by ‘substantive’ but the statement is in any case too broad” (emphasis added).<sup>34</sup> An earlier critic of Packer’s characterization of the regulative principle as a Puritan innovation was Edmund P. Clowney, who wrote:

Now if, as a matter of fact, there is authoritative revelation from Christ, the King of the church, respecting the

order or his kingdom; if the keys of the kingdom are his to give and are to be used by the church governors meeting in his name; then the problem of conscience that the Puritans faced cannot be evaded. It is a necessary corollary of the ministerial character of rule in the church. No man can rule in his own name or in collective human authority. Rule must be in Christ's name, in his authority. Only Christ's Word has that authority; the authority of his ministers is therefore declarative, not legislative. All of which brings us to perceive what the Puritans perceived, but which Calvin surely perceived before them.<sup>35</sup>

The second of the two 1963 papers, entitled "Scripture and 'Things Indifferent' A central issue in Puritan controversy," was presented by Iain Murray, one of the co-founders of The Banner of Truth Trust. It contains an unapologetic defense of the regulative principle of the Puritans, and gives an excellent statement and defense of it, canvassing early and later Puritan writings as well as Scottish works by George Gillespie, Samuel Rutherford, William Cunningham and James Bannerman.<sup>36</sup> Murray writes:

The Puritans claimed that the Scriptures are not only a full revelation of the Gospel of Christ but also that they contain all things necessary for the government and worship of His Church. They believed it to be a fundamental principle that just as no spiritual teaching is to be accepted which is not found in Scripture, so nothing of spiritual significance is to be added to the Church beyond what is warranted by the written Word. This principle—the regulative principle of Scripture,<sup>37</sup> as it was later called—they held to be bound up with the Bible's own teaching about its authority and upon the basis of this principle they laid down their whole policy for the reformation of the Church in two major propositions:

- (1) Everything introduced into the Church without Scriptural sanction is unlawful.
- (2) The form of the visible Church in the New Testament is permanently binding upon all generations of Christians (*Diversity in Unity*, 16).

Iain Murray concluded his paper with the following five points regarding the regulative principle of worship:

1. Once the regulative principle is discarded there is no

other principle which can keep the Church true to the simplicity of the New Testament....

2. Christian liberty cannot be preserved without the maintenance of the regulative principle....

3. The opposition expressed against the regulative principle is not without significance.... Those who contended against the principle ... often showed a desire to restrict Scripture rather than be restricted by it....

4. The regulative principle is essentially a uniting principle amongst Christians, for as far as it is truly applied it puts away all man appointed practice and promotes a common concern to give allegiance to Scripture alone....

5. While the regulative principle will always arouse controversy in this world, its main force is not to make men controversialists but God-fearing.... We are not here then to spend our brief lives in a strife of words; but if we profess this principle, we must look to God alone, stand in awe at His Word, serve Him in obedience to His statutes, and pray that as His 'commandment is exceeding broad' so may we by Christ's Word dwelling richly in us, be taught an increasing conformity to all His revealed will. For, 'Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments' (Psa CXIX. 6). This was the essential spirit of Puritanism: may God restore such grace to His Church today! (*Diversity in Unity*, 32–34).

35. Edmund P. Clowney, "Distinctive Emphases in Presbyterian Church Polity" in *Pressing Toward the Mark: Essays Commemorating Fifty Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, ed. Charles G. Dennison and Richard C. Gamble (Philadelphia: The Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1986). Clowney discusses the regulative principle on pages 100–105. Clowney is referencing Calvin's *Traacts and Treatises on the Doctrine and Worship of the Church* (Eerdmans, 1958) 118, 122.

36. Iain H. Murray, "Scripture and 'Things Indifferent' A central issue in Puritan controversy," in *Diversity in Unity*, 14–35. Interestingly, Dr. Ward criticizes Murray's much later presentation of the regulative principle in his lecture on the Directory for Public Worship as similar to Packer's 1963 comments in being "too general" (Ward, *ibid.*). See Murray's later piece in J. W. Carson and D. W. Hall, eds., *To Glorify and Enjoy God* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994) 176–178.

37. After its use in the 1946 OPC report by John Murray, the prominence given the phrase "regulative principle of worship," in Dr. Young's 1957 Puritan conference paper and in Iain Murray's for 1963, as well in *Reformation of the Church* (1964), probably did much to cement the phrase as the title for the confessional Presbyterian and Puritan principle.

## G. I. Williamson

Ordained in the United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNA), G. I. Williamson eventually served for a number of years in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, and more recently in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He has been a defender of the

38. G. I. Williamson recently recalled how he was like a lonely voice in the wilderness: "I'm now 80 years old and I donated my library to Mid-America Reformed Seminary, so I'm not much help in any historical research." He observes about this period of time: "I began speaking and writing on the subject of the Regulative Principle of Worship as it is stated in the Westminster Standards, and Exclusive Psalmody, in the late 1950s. And I can tell you that, in those days, I felt like one crying in the wilderness. While many things are worse now than they were then there is certainly much more sympathy for a revival of the use of the Psalter than there was in those early decades of my 53 years in the ministry. Much of what I've done was only in sermonic form. But the article I wrote on 'The Singing of Psalms in the Worship of God,' which originally appeared in the *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, has been printed and reprinted over the years as a longer tract by the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Belfast, Ireland." Personal Correspondence, G. I. Williamson to Chris Coldwell, Friday, November 11, 2005.

39. G. I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964).

40. "Holy Days of Men and Holy Days of God," *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, July–September 1962. The tract has been available since this time in a variety of forms and appears in several places on the Internet. This quote comes from the text as published at [www.fpcr.org](http://www.fpcr.org). It also appears on G. I. Williamson's website at [http://www.evertex.net/giwopc/holy\\_days.html](http://www.evertex.net/giwopc/holy_days.html).

41. Joseph Duggan, *Should Christians Celebrate the Birth of Christ* (Havertown, Pa: New Covenant Publication Society, n.d.). NPCS, formerly known as The Society for Scriptural Faith and Worship, began publishing in the 1970s. Bob English, who was in charge of this publishing ministry until his death several years ago, confirmed in a 1999 email to Chris Coldwell that older examples of this tract show a date as early as February 4, 1959. NPCS also published in tract form Williamson's "Holy Days of Men and Holy Days of God" as well as his tract on psalm singing. Another of the society's imprints was John Girardeau's *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of God* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1888; Havertown, Pa: New Covenant Publication Society, 1983), with a two page introduction by Duggan dated 1980. This publication contains the following statement of the regulative principle (9): "A divine warrant is necessary for every element of doctrine, government and worship in the church; that is, whatsoever in these spheres is not commanded in the Scriptures, either expressly or by good and necessary consequence from their statements, is forbidden."

42. Iain H. Murray, "Life of John Murray," *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982) 3.72.

43. Edwin H. Palmer, Jay P. Green, and John Murray, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Wilmington, The National Foundation for Christian Education, 1964–1972). Only four volumes were published. While Freeman and Duggan do not mention a worship principle per se, one can see allusions to such in "Feasts and Festivals," 2.184–185; "Easter," 3.481–482; and "Christmas," 2.449–450; and "Gods, False," 4.387.

Regulative Principle of Worship since the late 1950s.<sup>38</sup> He is perhaps best known for his classic study guides on the Westminster Confessional Standards.

In his 1964 study on the Westminster Confession of Faith, Pastor Williamson taught the regulative principle of worship. In dealing with the Confession's Chapter 21, he illustrated the difference between non-mandated worship and commanded worship by means of circles: only the "inner" circle (worship that is commanded) is maintained in Reformed churches; and it alone has the blessing of God.<sup>39</sup>

Two years earlier an article by Pastor Williamson appeared serially in Vos' *Blue Banner Faith and Life*. In "Holy Days of Men and Holy Days of God," he took up the challenge of applying the regulative principle of worship to pretended holy days:<sup>40</sup>

And so we say again, that such holy days are an utter abomination unto God, even though they are highly esteemed among men. And they are an abomination because God has said, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it; Thou shalt not add thereto nor diminish from it." No, not even by means of time-honored and custom-hallowed tradition. For the fact is that all religious worship, reverence, feeling and conscience which comes from any source but the infallible Word of God is just that—abomination in His sight.

## Joseph Duggan and David Freeman

Another enduring tract against pretended holy days, which appeared a few years prior to Mr. Williamson's, was that by Joseph Duggan, entitled *Should Christians Celebrate the Birth of Christ*.<sup>41</sup> Duggan was for many years a ruling elder at Knox Presbyterian Church (OPC), where David Freeman ministered—the man John Murray considered his pastor.<sup>42</sup> Both Duggan and Freeman, who was John Murray's friend from school days at Princeton, shared Murray's commitments regarding the doctrine of worship. In addition to this tract, the two men contributed articles touching upon worship issues for the *Encyclopedia of Christianity*.<sup>43</sup> This multiple volume work was never completed and it is tantalizing to imagine who might have provided the entry under "worship" and what it might have said. Among many articles, Freeman contributed the entry on "Feasts and Festivals," and Duggan entries on "Christmas" and "Easter."

Freeman writes that the Old Testament feasts "were authorized and commanded by God." Noting God's displeasure with the Jews' observance of these commanded

feasts, he adds, “Externals without corresponding heart devotion and commitment are worthless in Biblical religion.” He then concludes: “In the NT there is the Lord’s supper instituted by Christ to memorialize His death and to be observed by His disciples until the promise of His return is fulfilled.... The yearly celebration of the birth of Christ (Christmas) and memorializing of His resurrection (Easter), as commonly observed in the churches, are not enjoined in the NT.” Duggan notes: “The accretion of pagan elements to Christian worship, the fact that the day was often accompanied by riotous excess, and—perhaps most compelling—the fact that the establishment of holy days by the church constituted a usurpation of divine prerogatives in the province of religious practice engendered the opposition of Calvin, the English Puritans, Knox, and the Presbyterians, among others.”

In his tract against Christmas, Duggan more expansively observed:

At that time [the Reformation] Christians were called back to the Scriptures as the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy God. A person who bases his religious faith and practice on the Scriptures alone must necessarily reject all inventions of men in the religious realm, whether they be of pagan origin or are alleged to be the invention of the pious.

Christians should constantly examine their religious practices to see if they be Scriptural. We are all too prone to do things merely because of tradition, without critically examining our customs. This must be guarded against lest we find ourselves adopting a heathen attitude towards religion. The heathen endeavors to worship deity according to a manner of his own invention. He acts as if he were able of himself to approach the Almighty. The Christian, on the other hand, confesses that he is of himself weak, ignorant, foolish and sinful and that therefore God, who alone is holy and wise, must reveal Himself to us and the proper manner of our worshipping Him if we are to do so at all. God has graciously done this for us in the Bible and we do well to despise our own opinions and ideas and turn only to His revelation....

It is, of course, a good thing to honor Christ and to meditate upon this very important aspect of God’s grace. However, we must ask ourselves if it is proper to do so in a manner of our own devising or in a manner which has been adapted from heathenism. The conclusion to which the Scripture demands we arrive is that

our worshipful activity must be determined by Scripture alone. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* gives excellent expression to this principle: ‘But 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 in any other way not prescribed in the holy Scriptures.’

*Julius Melton and Ernest Trice Thompson*

In the 1960s, as some conservatives were rediscovering the doctrine of the regulative principle of worship, two Presbyterian historians in the liberal mainline churches were consigning it to the dump heap of history, while at the same time leaving a more or less clear statement of it.

Julius Melton in his *Presbyterian Worship in America* refers to “the hallowed Calvinistic and Puritan view that worship must contain no elements not specifically authorized by Scripture” (11). Referring to a famous family which helped to liberalize the Presbyterian Church, he also mentions the “elder van Dyke” who “took issue with the ‘Puritan principle’—that ‘nothing is to be permitted in our worship which is not expressly commanded or sanctioned in Scripture’—claiming that it was based on a false and legalistic view of Scripture and led to hypocritical twisting of Scripture to support established customs” (120). “Presbyterian worship ... could be characterized as worship according to the Word. This was related in turn to a view of the church as the People of the Word. John Calvin, in seeking to purge worship of accumulated ‘error,’ took the stand that nothing was to be trusted or allowed in worship except that which the Scripture—the Word of God—commanded” (14). Melton concluded at the end of his book: “Complementing these new findings from the scientific study of the Bible has been a new approach to the Bible itself. Its authority is seldom today conceived of in a legalistic fashion. Therefore the Puritan-Calvinistic view of worshipping strictly by Scripture’s rules has to a large extent faded from the scene. It is more common today to seek to frame worship according to the biblical attitude and from the biblical perspective than to search out explicit biblical directions” (147).

Ernest Trice Thompson in his monumental history of the Southern Presbyterian church, *Presbyterians in the South*, was no more a favorer of the regulative principle than Melton, but he records considerably more about the historic Presbyterian principle as held by men such

as Thornwell, Dabney, Peck and Girardeau.<sup>44</sup> The history does have a liberal slant, and it is certainly very clear by the third volume that Thompson is intent on crowing about the success of the liberals against the conservative minority as the PCUS slid into apostasy. The bogeyman which the liberals apparently had to defeat was the commitment of the old PCUS to “divine-right” Presbyterianism, which is underscored by the fact that Thompson saw the need to have a chapter entitled “*Jure Divino* Presbyterianism” in both volume one and again in volume two of the three volume work. The value of *Presbyterians in the South*, on this score at least, is in presenting the views of the old guardians of “divine right” in their own words at a time when their works were quite scarce and out of print. Regarding “divine right” in the worship of God, Thompson writes:

Exponents of *jure divino* Presbyterianism in the South were concerned not only that the church should develop a Scriptural polity, but also that it should maintain a Scriptural mode of worship. Disturbed by innovations in the realm of liturgies and church architecture, defended by articles appearing in the *Repertory* (representing the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary), along with certain big church tendencies appearing in one of the churches still in nominal connection with the General Assembly, T. E. Peck wrote in defense of the traditional mode of worship:

“As there is nothing which God, in His blessed word, defends with more exquisite jealousy than His worship; as there is nothing that He rebukes with more severity, than the impertinent assumption of man to determine forms of worship for himself; as there is nothing in which, notwithstanding, man has been more prone to intermeddle, than in this very thing, it is of vital importance to us to ponder it. If we know our own hearts, we are seeking no paltry party ends, but the glory of our common Lord, whose sovereign prerogative we believe to be invaded, and the true welfare of that Church which is the mother of us all.”

Mr. Peck was especially concerned with the introduction of liturgical features and the intrusion of instrumental music into the worship of the church. Such innovations, he argued, were a long step toward Roman Catholicism and generally accompanied a period of spiritual decline

in which men relied on their own efforts rather than on the Holy Spirit. They were to be resisted also because they had no support in the Directory of Worship or in the Word of God. “The church,” he held in agreement with the almost “unanimous faith of the Reformed Churches,” “is bound by the written word, in the sense that she is not only to do what God has enjoined, in the matter of His worship, but to abstain from doing what He has not enjoined.” “God,” he insisted, “is absolute dictator in this affair of worship; and, consequently ... every invention of man therein ... is a grand impertinence and wickedness.” Opposition to musical instruments (including organs) in the worship of God would continue in some parts of the Presbyterian South till the end of the 19th century. Opposition to liturgical innovations, to any innovation lacking positive divine (i.e., Biblical) sanction, would linger even longer.

The idea of a *jure divino* Presbyterianism was now firmly established in the minds of influential leaders of Southern Presbyterianism. As J. B. Adger, speaking of the principle involved in the board controversy, was to write later: “The church ... is permitted to act only by divine command. For everything set up by her she must produce a ‘thus saith the Lord.’ In the whole sphere of religion, whatever is not commanded is forbidden.... Our doctrine, our discipline, our worship, are all divine and revealed things, to which the church can add, from which she can take away, nothing.” So in regard to conduct. “Neither contrary to the scriptures, nor yet in addition to the scriptures, can she impose any new duties not imposed on men by the word. On the other hand, she cannot make anything to be sinful [slavery, for example] which God himself has not, in his holy word, forbidden. In fine, the church has no legislative power, except as to the mere circumstances of time and place, order and decency, which, from the nature of the case, scripture could not regulate, and which must needs be left, and have therefore been left, to human discretion.... All the power which the church has about laws is declarative and ministerial. Her officers declare, not their own will, but the Lord’s, and that only as he makes it known in the word....” (*Presbyterians in the South*, 1.528–529).

A decade later, when the final two volumes of the work were published, Thompson recorded the growing enthusiasm for the introduction of liturgical forms, as well as the spread of the use of musical instrumentation in public worship. Regarding the desire for greater congregational ‘participation’ in the worship service,

44. Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1963; 1973). The second and third volumes were not published until 1973.

Thompson writes: “The *North Carolina Presbyterian* insisted that arguments for change based on the need of congregational participation were out of place, for the congregation participated adequately by listening attentively to the sermon. The movement for greater variety and more aesthetic beauty in worship, the editor further insisted, overlooked a fundamental principle of Presbyterian worship—that nothing is legitimate in worship unless expressly or implicitly set forth in Scripture. ‘Man has no more right to introduce new features into worship than new articles in the Faith.’ Dr. R. L. Dabney added that it was a step toward popery, the goal toward which all ritualism inevitably pointed.” Thompson then proceeds to give a brief and mostly accurate description of the Presbyterian opposition to musical instrumentation in public worship, and to observance of the church calendar, both of which innovations became generally practiced in the PCUS as the old and dwindling guardians “passed off the scene” (2.427–428, 431).

Thompson makes it very clear that the PCUS liberal agenda could only have gone forward by the church’s abandonment of *jure divino* Presbyterianism in doctrine, polity and worship. Regarding the allowing of women into office, he states: “This action is significant, not only for the particular matter in hand, but because it marked a clear departure from the Thornwellian tradition, the legalistic static *jure divino* interpretation of Scripture which had for so long dominated the church’s life . . .” (3.479).

He also noted that female ordination, “though not recognized at the time, [represented] the beginning of a break from the literal, legalistic, *jure divino* interpretation of Scripture, which had retarded and confined the development of the church in other areas” (3.400). Thompson more pointedly says at the beginning of a chapter entitled “Toward Theological Maturity”:

In the 1920’s the Southern Presbyterian Church remained predominantly conservative, adhering closely to the tradition of the fathers, including the doctrinal system of the Standards, strictly construed; a *jure divino* Presbyterianism, which demanded a “Thus saith the Lord” for any change in theology, polity, or worship; a rejection of “higher criticism” and evolution; an insistence on the spiritual or non-secular character of the church; and strong opposition to any union with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

In the following decade, as we have seen, there came ferment, change, a growing desire to escape from the dead hand of the past (3.486).

### Continuing Church Movement

In the Southern Presbyterian Church, conservatives started as early as the 1940s to call for separation from the mother denomination, with a view towards a Continuing Presbyterian Church. As noted above, key to this movement was the *Southern Presbyterian Journal* (renamed in 1958 the *Presbyterian Journal*).

The earlier efforts in the *Journal* to call to faithfulness with respect to worship intensified in the 1960s, as more “experimental” worship became in vogue. Perhaps most notorious in the development of experimental worship in the Southern Church was the “New Days! New Ways?” conference held under denominational auspices at Montreat, North Carolina, in August 1968, featuring face masks at the Sunday morning worship service and a psychedelic communion service that evening (Smith, *History of the PCA*, 27). The next month, the *Journal* editorialized:<sup>45</sup>

If there is anything the Bible says clearly, it is that God is very particular about the way (the manner, the form) of worship. Cain’s offering was rejected, while Abel’s was accepted. The Lord Jesus said to the woman at the well, “God wants people to worship Him in spirit and truth.” Idolatry (in part) is the devising of false forms of worship, such as images, medals, candles, prayer wheels, flagellation, drugs, entertainment—most of which have their place, but not necessarily in church.

If proper worship is what *I* want to do, then the Hindu’s bed of spikes, the Mohammedan’s barefoot pilgrimage, the mountaineer’s snake-handling, are all praiseworthy. And if worship is the appeal to someone in his own idiom, then let’s bring the discotheque into the sanctuary.

Come to think of it, that’s what they’ve done!

But isn’t that rather a sign of the secularization of the Church, rather than of valid worship?

### Other Works for this Period

Several works for this period from the mainline liberal churches and presses may be mentioned in passing—works which, while using words like “Presbyterian” or “reformed” and “worship” in their titles, contain little on the Reformed and Presbyterian regulative principle.

45. “Re: ‘Experimenting,’” *Presbyterian Journal* (September 28, 1968) 12; cited in Smith, *History of the PCA*, 495.

In 1960, George Hendry's contemporary interpretation of the Westminster Confession, published by the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern) publishing house, correctly articulated the historic words and the general concept of Presbyterian worship.<sup>46</sup> However, five years later, the same John Knox press published a British work by Stephen F. Winward entitled *The Reformation of Our Worship*.<sup>47</sup> While that author attempted to be even-handed in citing what he viewed, historically speaking, as the positives and negatives of both the Anglicans and the Puritans regarding their worship practices, he clearly was for a more liturgical approach, and there is not really much interaction with the Puritan principle of worship. Winward is also one of a number of writers, the most notable being W. D. Maxwell, and more recently D. G. Hart, who repeat the contention that Calvin believed in the necessity of set forms. This mistaken conclusion has been corrected by Dr. Rowland S. Ward in his recent lecture on the Westminster Directory for Public Worship.

It has been claimed by Charles Baird that Calvin highly approved set forms of prayer from which ministers should not be allowed to vary offering the following translation from Calvin's Latin letter of 1548 to Lord Somerset.... However, the standard English translation made in 1858 (shortly after Baird wrote) indicates the reference is to the importance of a set Catechism, *not* to a form of prayers.

46. George S. Hendry, *The Westminster Confession for Today: A Contemporary Interpretation* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1960). "These facts [i.e., those from the light of nature] are deemed sufficient of themselves to convince men that they ought to worship God; but in order to learn *how* God is to be worshipped, and to avoid error and superstition, they have to follow the ways prescribed in Scripture." This "general obligation to worship" is "regulated only by the prescriptions of Holy Scripture." Hendry, 187.

47. Stephen F. Winward, *The Reformation of Our Worship* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1965).

48. Ward, "The Directory for Public Worship," 10, 11 n45. In this instance Winward is relying on an earlier work by Maxwell: Pehr Edwall, Eric Hayman, and William D. Maxwell, *Ways of Worship, The Report of a Theological Commission of Faith and Order* (London: SCM Press, 1951) 121.

49. Frederick W. Schroeder, *Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia, Pa.: United Church Press, [1966]) 67. Schroeder was president of Eden Theological Seminary from 1941 until 1962. Eden was the seminary for the Evangelical and Reformed Church which united in 1957 with the Congregational Christian Churches to form the United Church of Christ.

50. Howard G. Hageman, *Pulpit and Table: Some Chapters in the History of Worship in the Reformed Churches* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1962). For Hageman the basic Reformed principle of worship is that "there is not and cannot be one liturgy for the Reformed church, valid at all times and in all places" (Hageman, 109).

Baird ... has been followed by too many who partially cite Baird's purported quotation of Calvin in a context of prayer rather than catechesis, e.g. D. G. Hart, in his *Recovering Mother Kirk* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) 26. Similarly, W. D. Maxwell, *A History of Worship in the Church of Scotland* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955) 72-73, a standard but not always accurate writer, who purports to cite Calvin's Latin *Opera* but it is in identical words to Baird's translation. Baird also refers to Bingham's *Antiquities* but the reference he gives [II, 747] is not relevant to the issue. Perhaps Baird worked from imperfect notes brought back from his period of study in Europe.<sup>48</sup>

Also from this period is Frederick W. Schroeder's *Worship in the Reformed Tradition*. Schroeder observed that in "all matters of worship, theological principles have priority over any and all liturgical traditions, however much the latter may carry the sanction of antiquity or common usage"; but beyond that general principle, he does not display much comprehension of the regulative principle of Calvin and the Puritans.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, long time RCA minister and professor at New Brunswick Seminary, Howard G. Hageman, in his *Pulpit and Table*,<sup>50</sup> exhibits the kind of prejudiced opinion one might expect from someone strongly influenced by the Mercersburg school of thought.

For many years the idea appears to have been completely accepted in Reformed circles that nothing should be allowed in public worship but what was explicitly commanded in the Bible. With the results of that theory we are all familiar. The exclusive use of the psalms in praise, the banning of organs and musical instruments, the destruction of all forms of Christian pictorial art, the virtual reduction of worship to a sermon—these became the chief hallmarks of Reformed worship. And while we have, of course, become much less certain about most of these old standards, we have really ignored the basic liturgical questions raised by the Bible. It is the Biblical factor itself which today is asking the Reformed churches whether they have not perverted the Biblical witness in their worship. Our basic perversion goes back to the beginning of our history. It was present in the thinking of Zwingli, but it was fully developed in later centuries.

The recovery of this Biblical insight, stimulated by a renewed scholarship of the New Testament congregation, should bring us back to the conviction which we would never have lost had Zwingli not conquered Calvin in

our liturgics. In the act of Christian worship, Word and Sacrament belong together... Word and Sacrament are only different media for the same reality, Christ's coming into the midst of his people (Hagerman, 111–112).

We agree with Thomas G. Reid's assessment that Donald Macleod's *Presbyterian Worship* "has little of note to offer"<sup>51</sup> as it does not even address the Puritan rule.<sup>52</sup> In his *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition*, James Hastings Nichols also has very little if anything to say about the principle. As with other writers, he places the rejection of all forms in worship with the more extreme and Separatist Puritans. He does say interestingly enough (citing Martin Luther's *German Mass*) that because these churches had no "significant evangelistic or educational role, as with a state church congregation," and because they were made up of "real Christians," "one would have no need of elaborate liturgies, but would require only the simplest of forms."<sup>53</sup> More typical, however, of liberal churchmen is the attitude of liturgical theologian Jean-Jacques von Allmen. In his 1965 book, he argues for the necessity of forms as they reflect the recapitulation of the history of Christ's work of salvation.<sup>54</sup>

#### Overview: 1950–1969

Starting in the 1940s, a re-awakening Calvinism occurred among conservative Presbyterians, some of whom were forced out of the "mainline" Northern Church, and some of whom remained in the Southern Church to fight the battle against modernism. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a time often seen as one of theological decline, there was a strengthening of resolve—perhaps we might say a sharpening of doctrinal understanding, including with respect to worship—among those who were willing to count the cost of fidelity to the Lord of the church. The conservatives in the Southern Presbyterian Church, in particular, recalled their Puritan heritage, in the on-going war against theological liberalism. However, the regulative principle of worship, while it received some important attention by a few, or was a passing curiosity of historical interest to others, was still a relatively unknown doctrine awaiting the significant attention it deserved. What Iain Murray stated in 1963 regarding England, could equally describe the state of the church in this country: the "Puritan teaching on the regulative principle of Scripture is almost as obsolete in England as the teaching that the earth is flat" (*Diversity in Unity*, 17).

#### IV. THE 1970S—UNCERTAINTY AND CONFUSION

As the 1970s opened, the Presbyterian doctrine stating God's propriety in His worship had obtained a moniker over the proceeding decades, and become known as the *regulative principle of worship*. The principle had been classically restated and defended in a denominational report, was the subject of several conference lectures, and had received some degree of treatment in a few books. Yet, as some recall at this time, there was not even a readily available and succinct tract defending it.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, the regulative principle continued to receive attention throughout the decade in various papers, articles, and books, and was the subject of at least one thesis. The scene was also set for later assaults on the doctrine.

#### The RPCNA

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), a denomination often referred to by its nickname ("Covenanters"), has been in existence since the eighteenth century. Despite some challenges to its worship views, particularly in the twentieth century, it has always maintained a *cappella* exclusive psalmody. However, the church as a whole has not always understood why it continued to hold to that traditional Presbyterian position.<sup>56</sup>

51. Thomas G. Reid, Jr., "The Acceptable Way of Worshipping the True God: Recent Writings on Worship of Particular Interest," in *Worship in the Presence of God*, 338.

52. Donald Macleod, *Presbyterian Worship: Its Meaning and Method* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1980).

53. James Hastings Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968) 94.

54. Jean-Jacques von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965). Professor von Allmen was one of the leading advocates in the ecumenical liturgical movement of the last century, and also supervised Hughes Oliphant Old's doctoral study on the *Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship*.

55. In correspondence with Mr. Coldwell, Sherman Isbell recalled that the only tract available at the time was a booklet published by the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. The piece was not just on the regulative principle of worship, which it does not treat in depth, nor is that a phrase which is used in the text (the nearest phrasing being a single use of "principles regulative of worship"), but was largely on a *cappella* exclusive psalmody. See M. C. Ramsay, *Purity of Worship* (Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, 1968). Text online at <http://pcea.asn.au/purofwor.html>.

56. This is not to say that there were not ministers and others who did understand. Nor is it to say that the RPCNA did not maintain a general orthodoxy. Citing Nancy E. Clark's M.A. thesis at Butler University ("A History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church"), John Allen Diluvik contends that the reason why the "New Light"

In 1973, the RPCNA undertook a symposium on the doctrine of worship. The various essays were gathered in a book in January 1974, entitled, *The Biblical Doctrine of Worship: A Symposium to state and clarify the Scriptural teachings concerning worship with emphasis on the use of the Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship*.<sup>57</sup> Several of the essays dealt directly with the regulative principle of worship.

The opening essay was by Dr. John H. White, who would later serve as President of Geneva College, the denominational school in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.<sup>58</sup> One of his conclusions is that “Worship (service) ‘latreia’ must be seen in both its narrow sense (cultic institutions, etc.) and in its broad sense (all of life is a service before the Lord)” (Robson, 11).

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Reformed Presbyterians (i.e., the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, General Synod—the group that ultimately merged into the Presbyterian Church in America) changed its denominational worship, is because of a doctrinal decline; see John Allen Diluvik, *The Doctrine and History of Worship in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1982) 178.

57. Edward A. Robson, Philip W. Martin, John M. McMillan, eds., *The Biblical Doctrine of Worship: A Symposium to state and clarify the Scriptural teachings concerning worship with emphasis on the use of the Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship* (N.p. [Pittsburgh, Pa.]: Board of Education and Publication, 1974). Hereafter Robson.

58. John H. White, “Worship in the Pentateuch,” in Robson, *The Biblical Doctrine of Worship*, 1–15.

59. Norman Shepherd, “The Biblical Basis for the Regulative Principle of Worship,” in Robson, 42–56. The quote is on page 44. See also “An Exposition of Matthew 15:3–9,” penned by the Session of the Sterling (Kan.) Reformed Presbyterian Church (99–100); the Session opines that “all of life is worship for it is lived in the presence of God.”

60. Within a few years, Professor Shepherd would become embroiled in a controversy regarding the doctrine of justification. He eventually left the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for the Christian Reformed Church of North America. His views have recently been condemned by the Reformed Church in the United States as being “another gospel”; see “RCUS Synod Declares Views of Norman Shepherd to be Another Gospel,” *Presbyterian & Reformed News* 10.1–4 (January–December 2004) 1.

61. See S. Ray Blair, “According to the Pattern Shown in the Mount: An Examination of Exodus 25:40” (Robson, 23–26); Paul M. Martin, “An Exposition of Leviticus 10:1–3” (27–31); Robert W. McMillan, “An Exposition of Deuteronomy 12:30–32” (32–39); M. L. McFarland, “An Exposition of Deuteronomy 12:29–39” (40–41); Robert B. McCracken, “An Exposition of II Chronicles 26:16–21” (77–81); Robert W. Morrow, “II Chronicles 26:16–21” (82–83).

62. John Murray, “The Worship of God in the Four Gospels” (Robson, 92–98); and William Young, “The Second Commandment: The Principle that God is To Be Worshipped Only in Ways Prescribed in Holy Scripture and That The Holy Scripture Prescribes The Whole Content of Worship—Taught by Scripture Itself” (Robson, 307–315). Dr. Young’s contribution was his classic piece on the Second Commandment.

The notion that worship can be thought of as encompassing all of life (even with a distinction between worship in a broad sense and in narrow sense) can lead to the perspective that the regulative principle applies to all of life. This is indeed the view taken by Professor Norman Shepherd, then a professor at Westminster Theological Seminary and minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Referring to Deuteronomy 12:32 (“Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor taken away from it”), Mr. Shepherd claims: “This principle applies to the whole scope of our obedience to God. We may properly speak of it as the regulative principle for human life.”<sup>59</sup>

Professor Shepherd essentially undercut one of the key Scriptural supports for the regulative principle. If there is not an essential difference between the principles which govern life and the principles which govern worship, then the regulative principle of worship, as conceived historically in the Reformed faith, becomes meaningless.<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, numerous contributors did maintain the traditional understanding of the regulative principle.<sup>61</sup> Particularly noteworthy in this regard were contributions by John Murray and William Young.<sup>62</sup>

In dealing with the Four Gospels, Professor Murray argues from John 4:24 that worship “in spirit and truth” bears directly upon the content of worship. If worship must be consonant with the nature of God, it must be in accord with what God has revealed himself to be and regulated as to content and mode by the revelation God has given in holy Scripture. The sanction enunciated (“in spirit and truth”) excludes all human invention and imagination and warns us against the offence and peril of offering strange fire unto the Lord. No principle more than this inculcates jealousy to ascertain that what we offer has the warrant of divine authority” (Robson, 93–94).

In dealing with Matthew 15:2–9, he notes that the particular occasion for Jesus’ words “was the subterfuge by which the fifth commandment has been made void” (Robson, 95). At first blush, one might be led to believe that the professor’s position is that worship encompasses all of life. However, the Westminster Seminary professor was being far more precise, and rather making the point that all of life falls under God’s law. He definitely would have rejected the notion that all of life is worship, or that the regulation of life in general was synonymous with the regulation of worship.

*Francis Schaeffer*

One of the great popularizers of evangelical Christianity in the 1960s and 1970s was Francis Schaeffer, founder of L'Abri in Switzerland. An American who helped countless Europeans and Americans to discover “true truth” (in contrast to the relativized “truth” of a post-Christian era), Dr. Schaeffer emulated a Christian lifestyle (as seen in his radical hospitality), and worked for cultural transformation in the face of a dying Western Civilization. He was a minister in the Bible Presbyterian Church, which later became the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (1961–1965), and then the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES).

One of his concerns was that the church be relevant for the modern times. Accordingly, in dealing with the church at the end of the twentieth century, Dr. Schaeffer utilized the concepts of form and freedom in an effort to maintain absolute truths while at the same time allowing flexibility in the church's practice. The result was a confused formulation regarding the authority of the church.

Francis Schaeffer wrote:

My primary point as we prepare for the end of the 20th century is, on the one hand, that there is a place for the institutional church and that it should maintain the form commanded by God, but, on the other hand, that this also leaves vast areas of freedom for change. It is my thesis that we cannot bind men morally except with that which the Scripture clearly commands (beyond that we can only give advice), similarly, *anything the New Testament does not command in regard to church form is a freedom to be exercised under the leadership of the Holy Spirit for that particular time and place*. In other words, the New Testament sets boundary conditions, but within these boundary conditions there is much freedom to meet the changes that arise both in different places and different times.<sup>63</sup>

Least there be any misunderstanding of his view, Dr. Schaeffer stated: “It seems clear to me that the opposite cannot be held, namely that only that which is commanded is allowed. If this were the case, then, for example, to have a church building would be wrong and so would having church bells or a pulpit, using books for singing, following any specific order of service, standing to sing, and many other like things. If consistently held in practice, I doubt if any church could function or worship” (Schaeffer, 67 n1).

However, what Francis Schaeffer evidently did was to

fail to distinguish between matters which are substantive and matters which are circumstantial. Given his stature in the Reformed world, it is perhaps surprising that a trained philosopher and veteran minister would have made such a mistake. However, it is important to remember that he was a product of his time—a time when the regulative principle of worship was only beginning to be rediscovered. Dr. Schaeffer therefore represents a fundamentalist understanding of worship. His basic misunderstanding of the regulative principle led him both to caricature and to reject it.

*The PCA*

In 1973, out of the Continuing Presbyterian Church movement, the denomination now known as the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) was organized. Most of the congregations and ministers who initially formed the PCA had withdrawn from the Southern Presbyterian Church, because of its manifest departure from Reformed orthodoxy.<sup>64</sup>

The Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church asked the Rev. Dr. Morton H. Smith, founding faculty member of Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi, to write a theological defense of the anticipated action to separate from the mother denomination. Dr. Smith responded with his magisterial *How is the Gold Become Dim*, a volume which took its title from Lamentations 4:1. In tracing the decline of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), the book dealt with the decline of the worship of God among Southern Presbyterians.

Dr. Smith noted that the Protestant Reformers “spoke of worship as one of the marks of the church”; and he cited questions and answers from the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms regarding the second commandment to demonstrate the Presbyterian position of the regulative principle of worship. He lamented the eventual observance of a church or liturgical calendar (religious holy days), which downplayed the significance of the Sabbath; and commented that “there is no Biblical basis for such a calendar.” He shared the consternation of many Southern Presbyterians with an overemphasis at the General Assembly on rituals and liturgies. He mentioned the “psychedelic worship service” that occurred in Montreat, North Carolina, on August 4, 1968, under the auspices of a denominational agency,

63. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the 20th Century* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1970) 66–67.

64. For a fairly comprehensive treatment of the formation of the PCA, see Smith, *History of the Presbyterian Church in America*.

and the subsequent inaction by the General Assembly to condemn said experimental worship, as an example of the General Assembly condoning “sacrilegious, unbiblical forms of observing the Lord’s Supper”; and claimed that the General Assembly “has departed from being a true Church in this particular area.” He also stated “a marked decline in the worship of the PCUS is to be found in the use of various pictures and symbols as aids to worship. . . . Pictures of Christ, crosses and other such religious symbols are to be found in many Churches and Sunday School rooms.” He concluded his chapter by saying: “As the Continuing Church comes into being, it is the hope of the present writer that we shall see a concern for pure worship, and thus a reform in this area as well as in doctrine. The two go hand-in-hand together. Orthodoxy in doctrine should be expressed in orthodoxy in worship.”<sup>65</sup>

However, as events would prove, there was a disconnect in the PCA between those who committed wholeheartedly to the Confessional standards, and those who were merely fellow travelers—broadly evangelical, but not particularly Presbyterian or Reformed. Or, one could say that there was a marked difference between, on the one hand, the official documents which not only valued worship for its own sake but maintained that it is subject to strict regulation; and, on the other hand, a significant portion (possibly a majority) of the constituency, who viewed the worship service primarily as a time for evangelism.

One could also note the irony of the setting for one of Dr. Smith’s presentations of material from this chapter, including opposition to “pictures of Christ.” The Convocation of Sessions, a preliminary meeting leading up

65. Morton H. Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim: The Decline of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., As Reflected in Its Assembly Actions* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition; N.d.: The Steering Committee for a Continuing Presbyterian Church, Faithful to the Scriptures and the Reformed Faith, 1973) 95–105.

66. Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975).

67. Reid continues: “Psalm-singing had as its primary function the praise of God (p. 253f). ‘This attitude of the Reformers was greatly encouraged by their knowledge of the literature of the ancient Church. Countless passages of the Fathers could be quoted which indicate that the ancient Church was accustomed to singing Psalms in praise to God’ (p. 255). Thus, the Reformers preferred the Psalms to man-made hymns, not for principal but pragmatic reasons (pp. 262–263). They also opposed instrumental music in worship, once again because of the patristic position (pp. 265f). Other sections of Old’s book may be less controversial but are no less illuminating.” Thomas G. Reid, Jr., “The Acceptable Way of Worshipping the True God: Recent Writings on Worship of Particular Interest,” in *Worship in the Presence of God*, 343–344.

68. The main source in which Old traces the radical break with

to the official founding of the PCA, was held in May 1973 at the historic Westminster Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia; and from the pulpit, which is under a stained-glass window “picture of Jesus,” Dr. Smith voiced his desire that the new church would be faithful to the Standards regarding such images.

Hughes Oliphant Old:

*The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship*

The 1970s saw the appearance of another important historical work from the hand of a minister from a mainline liberal Presbyterian denomination, which underscored the early Reformed churches’ adherence to the regulative principle of worship. This was Hughes Oliphant Old’s *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship*.<sup>66</sup> About this work Thomas G. Reid writes:

Occasionally, a doctoral thesis rises above the merely academic and technical to deal in a provocative way with a familiar subject. Such is Hughes Oliphant Old’s 1970 Neuchâtel dissertation, published in 1975 as *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag). All subsequent historical writing on early Reformed worship will be either elaborations or denials of his thesis: the Reformers, caught in a battle with the Romaniſts, returned to what they considered the common heritage of all Christians, the Fathers of the Church, for their theory and practice of worship. Long quotations from the original sources permit the Reformers to express their own thoughts.<sup>67</sup>

Old qualifies the nature of his research at the opening of his paper:

Before we can begin our research on the question of whether the custom of the ancient Church can be considered a source of the Genevan Psalter of 1542, we must come to a certain clarity as to the historical evolution of the document. We might say that this document has three roots, a Scriptural root, a patristic root and an historical root. The subject of our work is the patristic root, and the main body of our work will be devoted to this subject. The Scriptural root was, of course, the main concern of the Reformers and therefore we cannot ever let it out of sight although it is not the subject of our inquiry.

Old goes on to say that when the Reformers embarked on a course of more radical reform of worship than simply a revision of the Roman Mass,<sup>68</sup> they “en-

gaged in a return to the sources. Primarily it was a return to the Scriptures, but the writings of the Fathers were read as witnesses to the purer forms of worship of the ancient Church.” Old emphasizes “the basic similarity behind all these attempts at reform” and attempts “to show that they are not basically motivated by a desire to express a so-called Zwinglian sacramental theology.” His intent is to demonstrate “that the Reformers were far more interested in worshiping as God had commanded than in developing a ceremony that would express their theology” (Old, *Patristic Roots*, 1).

Dr. Old’s section entitled “Ceremonies of Human Origin” is worth quoting in full:

The most important criticism which the Strasbourg Reformers had of the old forms of worship was that they were of “merely human origin.” The Reformers knew that many of the liturgical traditions which they had inherited were not of truly ancient tradition. This was not a startling discovery for, as we shall see, such authors as Platina, Clichtoveus, the Liber pontificalis and Pseudo-Isidore had carefully assigned the institution of most liturgical usages to one pope or another so that one could not easily escape from the impression that the Roman Mass was the creation of the Roman popes rather than a legacy which had been received from Christ and the Apostles. The Reformers wanted to worship God according to the commandments of God.<sup>69</sup> It is on this basis of “the clear and lucid Word of God” that they wanted to make their reformation of worship. By the reformation of the liturgy they meant “restoration of the correct, the old, and the enduring.”<sup>70</sup> They wanted to be delivered from “the confusion of so many entangled and ruinous laws and regulations of merely human origin.”<sup>71</sup>

From beginning to end the *Grund und Ursach* poses the question as to what is service that is τῷ θεῷ εὐάρεστον, “pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1–2; 14:17–19; Philippians 4:18; Hebrews 12:28; 13:21. All Biblical references are R.S.V.) It is interesting to note how often a variation of the phrase “ein gottgefelliger Dienst” appears in our text.<sup>72</sup> We assume that these phrases are an attempt to translate the Greek words which in the Revised Standard Version are translated by the “acceptable worship” or “logical worship” of Romans 12:1–2. The *Grund und Ursach* answers the question by saying that the “service” which pleases God is that service which God himself works in us (Hebrews 12:28; 13:21). It is that service which through the Holy Spirit the Church does in obedience to God. It is that service which God

has commanded of us. “Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to it or take from it,” (Deuteronomy 12:32). Only God can direct us to what service is pleasing to him [BDS, I, 207]. We have no right to invent new forms or “to enrich” existing forms. Ceremonies which are merely of human origin, “von der Menschen ... erdichtet,” add nothing to worship. It is on this basis, for example, that the Strasbourg Reformers can speak of the vestments of the mass as being “opposed to faith” [BDS, I, 232, BDS, II, 276–477]. It is because they do not come out of obedience and trust to God and his Word but rather from human fantasy and invention. For the same reason the Reformers of Strasbourg find it wrong to consider the holidays as a service to God [BDS, I, 263].<sup>73</sup> They have their basis in human tradition or even in heathen customs and since they have been established without the commandment of God [BDS, I, 267–268], it is hard to understand how they can be called a service to God. Quite simply put, the service of worship which pleases God is that service which God demands of us. That is why the Reformers searched the Scriptures to find out what service God commanded and what God through his Holy Spirit works in the hearts of his people<sup>74</sup> (Old, *Patristic Roots*, 24–25).

attempts simply to reform the Roman Mass, is Bucer’s *Grund und Ursach*. Martin Bucer, “Grund und ursach auss gotlicher schrift der neuierungen an dem nachtmal des herren ...,” *Deutsche Schriften* (4. vols.; Gütersloh: Robert Stupperich under sponsorship of the Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1960) 2.185–278. Dr. Old subsequently refers to this work as BDS.

69. “Cf., Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, VI, 25.”

70. Old notes: “The Reformers were willing to accept the tradition of the ancient Church in that it was a witness to the commandments of God and the practice of Christ and the Apostles. That is, they accepted the argument from tradition as it might be advanced by a Tertullian or an Irenaeus. What they objected to was not tradition but “man-made tradition.” To tradition which handed down the usage of Christ and the Apostles they had no objection.”

71. In a note Old has a quote from “BDS, I, 207–208; cf., also 218.”

72. Professor Old notes: “We find the same concern in the *Messgutachten*, BDS, II, 524.”

73. Old notes subsequently that while Bucer attacked feast days such as Christmas, the Circumcision, Epiphany and Ascension which fell on week days, he does not so attack those which were observed on the Lord’s day, such as Easter and Ascension (Old, *Patristic Roots*, 29 note 1).

74. “Zwingli in the *Apologia* uses the same principle, that the worship of the Church must be in obedience to the Word of God. He has, however, what might be called a ‘loose constructionist’ view of it. He insists that God has not directed us to a special order of worship. Whether the sermon comes before communion or after it is not important. God has not limited us to certain formulations of prayer such as the Lord’s Prayer but has rather given us in the Holy Scriptures

Old writes regarding “the great number of gestures required by the mass” which the Reformers rejected: “If these gestures had been prescribed by Scripture or recommended by ancient tradition, it would have been another matter” (31).<sup>75</sup> Again Old writes in conclusion of his section on *The Call for a More Radical Reform*: “The Reformers believed that the worship of the Church must be ‘re-formed’ according to the Word of God. They wanted nothing less than to find again the traditions established by Christ, handed down by the Apostles and practiced by the ancient Church” (38). And Old’s concluding points are noteworthy:

12. The liturgical texts of the post-Constantinian Church, the classical rites of the Orient, and the Latin sacramentaries of the early Middle Ages held little interest for the Reformers. The recent “High Church” liturgical movement was particularly inspired by precisely these texts. The difference between the “High Church” liturgical reform and that of the early Reformed Church can easily be understood when we remember that the Reformers gave special attention to earlier liturgical documents.

13. Being students of Christian Humanists, the early Reformed theologians were concerned to rediscover the original forms of Christian worship. They were not concerned with giving liturgical expression to their theology. Nor were they concerned with giving an archaeological reconstruction of the past. It was rather that they understood their attempts as a matter of Christian obedience. They wanted to worship God in obedience to his Word. First they turned to the Scriptures to see what forms Christ and the Apostles had instituted. Secondly, they searched the writings of the ancient Church to find examples of the worship which had been obedient to that institution (*Patristic Roots*, 340).

Vern S. Poythress

In 1974, Dr. Vern Poythress, a young, brilliant professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia,

a treasury of examples from which we may draw upon in formulating our own prayers. CR, LXXXIX, 622–624.” [*Corpus Reformatorum* (Berlin, 1834–; Leipzig, 1906–)].

75. Old gives the opinion regarding standing for prayer on the Lord’s day: “Here is a case where the early Reformed Church accepted a practice primarily because it was recommended by ancient tradition but which is not specified by Scripture” (31 n2).

76. Vern S. Poythress, “Ezra 3, Union with Christ, and Exclusive Psalmody,” *WTJ* 37 (1974) 1:74–94; “Ezra 3, Union with Christ, and Exclusive Psalmody (Sequel),” *WTJ* 37 (1975) 2:218–35.

wrote a two-part article for the *Westminster Theological Journal* which challenged the doctrine of exclusive psalmody.<sup>76</sup> What is especially important for our present study is the fact that, while purportedly adhering to the regulative principle, Professor Poythress largely guts it of any significance by attempting to negate the distinctions among several distinct elements of worship.

In the first half of the article, Dr. Poythress states that in Ezra 3, “we find a decided emphasis on the regulative principle. The passage says again, and again, implicitly or explicitly, that worship was conducted in accordance with the law of Moses and the appointments of David” (Poythress, 75).

However, he later writes:

As for present-day congregational singing of believers, we regard teaching-by-singing and teaching-in-the-narrow sense as simply two forms of teaching, each particularly effective in meeting certain needs and expressing certain aspects of Christian doctrine. Each has its advantages and limitations, due to the nature of the medium of expression. We challenge the exclusive psalmist position to prove *from Scripture*, rather than *assume*, that teaching-by-singing and proclaiming are “two separate elements of worship.” To us they appear little more “separate” than preaching to a visible audience versus preaching over the radio. If the unity of Ezra 3 is to be maintained, Christ’s work cannot be divided into fragments, and neither can our worship *in Christ* (Poythress, 225–226).

Dr. Poythress gives expression to at least two other peculiar views with regard to the “elements” of worship. One is that he believes that because there is a continuum of speech, the distinction between the spoken and the sung word is merely arbitrary; and thus cannot be used to distinguish a separate element that is characterized by singing (Poythress, 226). Another is that because there is a continuum between “words of a translation” and “words of preaching and counseling,” it is difficult to draw a clear-cut distinction between singing and preaching.

Both the translation of Scripture and words of preaching and counseling are phases or aspects of application of the canonical word of God to people. The translation has to be relatively close to a one-to-one (formal) rendering, since it must serve for many, many varieties of application that believers will then derive from it. Preaching and counseling are relatively more dynamic and interpretative renderings of Scripture, since they

are directed more to a specific application. But a continuum lies between the two. The argument that [G. I.] Williamson (legitimately) uses to point out that a translation can still be the word of God also shows that preaching and counseling can faithfully communicate the word of God (Poythress, 227).

Dr. Poythress later summarized his position as this:

The exclusive-psalmody position tends to see “singing” as a separate “element” of worship alongside prayer and preaching. The didascalia-position sees singing as another means, alongside poetic speech and prose speech, to praying, praising, confessing, teaching, preaching, admonishing, etc. (231).

There are several problems with Dr. Poythress’ views.<sup>77</sup> First, on the basis of his position, it would be impossible to distinguish meaningfully in public worship between the reading and the preaching of the word. The minister properly says, “Hear now the word of God as it comes to us from [whatever the Scripture text is].” If all speech is a continuum, and if there is a continuum between translating and preaching (such that there is no meaningful distinction), then how can one distinguish between reading from God’s Word and preaching one’s own text?

Secondly, the specialness of the reading of the word of God is taken away when the professor writes that the reason why there must be formal translation of Scripture is because of its value of application. No, on the contrary—even though Scripture does get applied, it is applied in its reading. The reason why we should try to be as faithful to the original and as accurate in our translation is, in the primary place, simply because Scripture is the word of God and is to be handled as such.

Thirdly, this seminary professor, in essence, denies that there are “elements” of worship at all; rather, in his view, there are mere “aspects” of worship. Accordingly, the regulative principle, which is designed to specify not simply content, but the actual acts in worship, is denied.

#### “New Life” worship

Founded by the late C. John Miller, New Life Presbyterian Church in suburban Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, had a profound influence on the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as the Presbyterian Church in America.

Godly, gracious, and aggressively evangelistic, Dr. Miller pioneered a style of ministry which embraced radical hospitality and folksy, informal worship in a context of Reformed theology. The New Life Church, which attracted numerous students from Westminster Theological Seminary (where Dr. Miller was a professor of practical theology), was known for not only guitar accompaniment of congregational singing, but also liturgical dance. Worship was conducted in an atmosphere of “sharing” with one another; but, in fairness, also featured strong, and convicting, preaching. Nevertheless, both in style and substance, the New Life approach did not celebrate the regulative principle of worship.

New Life’s influence was felt because of the numerous seminarians who worshipped there; because of the evident success of the New Life model; and because of other churches around the OPC which emulated this approach. At one time the largest OPC congregation, the original congregation, and most of its satellite churches, transferred into the PCA in the late 1980s.

#### Michael Bushell

In 1977, a Westminster Theological Seminary student by the name of Michael S. Bushell wrote a treatise defending exclusive psalmody. Entitled *The Songs of Zion: A Contemporary Case for Exclusive Psalmody*, the volume was first published in 1980, and has gone through two subsequent editions (1993 and 1999).<sup>78</sup>

In the first edition of this book, Mr. Bushell laid down the regulative principle as a necessary foundation for the discussion of the content of worship song. However, the later editions presented the arguments for the sufficiency of the psalter first, and then the regulative principle itself (Bushell, ii).

77. The views expressed by Professor Poythress are not unique to him. Indeed, many of them were derived from one of his professors at Westminster Theological Seminary, John M. Frame. Professor Frame would later publish books and articles on the subject of worship, but during the period under review, he first expressed his novel ideas regarding the regulative principle of worship in his course on the “Doctrine of the Christian Life.” As in his later writings, in these lectures the professor displays confusion over the doctrine of “circumstances of worship,” and demonstrates that he does not really hold to the regulative principle, as he rejects that the particular elements or parts of worship are prescribed in Scripture. John M. Frame, ST 323 Doctrine of the Christian Life, Lecture Outline, Part III, Spring 1979, 148.

78. Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion: A Contemporary Case for Exclusive Psalmody* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Crown and Covenant Publications, 1999). The work was circulating in mimeograph form in 1977. Dean R. Smith, “The Westminster Assembly and Worship,” in *Joint Study Conference on Psalmody*, 5 n15.

In writing of the historical background for the regulative principle, the author avers that “those who consider themselves to be children of the Calvinistic Reformation and yet who disparage to give due emphasis to the regulative principle of worship are Reformed in name only. The regulative principle is not merely an optional appendix to the Reformed faith. In a very real sense it is the Reformed faith” (Bushell, 115).

Michael Bushell sets forth the Confessional basis for the regulative principle, citing in particular Westminster Confession of Faith, I.6, XX.2, and XXI.1, Larger Catechism Q/A 109, and Shorter Catechism Q/A 51. He also quotes from James Bannerman’s classic nineteenth century work, *The Church of Christ*: “The Church has no authority in regulating the manner, appointing the form, or dictating the observances of worship, beside or beyond what the Scripture declares on these points, the Bible containing the only directory for determining these matters, and the Church having no discretion to add to or alter what is there fixed” (116–118).

What follows are several theological points supportive of and related to the regulative principle. The first of these, “the negative character of the principle,” means that

God may not be worshiped in any way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures. This way of stating the principle, in the form of a double negative, emphasizes in a rather striking way its negative, or prohibitive, character.... The negative character of the regulative principle is certainly that aspect that is most offensive to fallen man, because it dethrones his autonomy in worship, but it is in this aspect that the essence of the principle is to be seen most clearly. That essence lies in the fact that the regulative principle, again and again, drives man back to God’s word to find a warrant for his behavior in worship.”

The most important practical consequence of the prohibitory character of the regulative principle is that it places the burden of proof squarely on the shoulders of those who would introduce innovations or disputed practices into the worship of God. When there is a disagreement between two parties over whether a given practice (the singing of non-canonical songs, for example) should be introduced or continued in stated services of worship, the burden of proof rests with those who favor the practice. If a clear warrant cannot be produced for the practice in question, it must be prohibited. Whatsoever is not commanded is forbidden (Bushell, 118–119).

The second point is “the character of man’s relationship to God.” The Creator-creature relationship means that “the specification of the terms of man’s communion with God is and always has been the sole prerogative of the Lord God.” This is especially the case post-Fall, because of the “soteriological aspect”—that of the necessity of a Mediator for worship—“is at its very heart restrictive.” The regulative principle, therefore, is “a natural inference from the doctrine of total depravity.” It may also be seen “as the liturgical counterpart of the theological doctrine of salvation by grace. If it is true that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags (Isa. 64:6), it is likewise true that every act of worship that we presume to perform without a divine warrant is an abomination to God” (Bushell, 119–120).

Thirdly, “the sufficiency of scripture” is adduced as support for the regulative principle.

The sufficiency of Scripture cannot be seen as a purely abstract quality of the Word of God, divorced from the practical concerns of the Church. If the Scriptures are sufficient, then they are sufficient for something. If the Word of God directs us how to worship God, it does so in a manner sufficient to the needs of the Church and satisfaction of God’s holiness. If, therefore, it were necessary for us to add anything by way of precept or ordinance of worship to that divine record, it would have fallen short of its purpose. The only way to deny this chain of reasoning is to deny the sufficiency of Scripture.

Freedom of conscience, as taught by the Westminster Confession of Faith XX, “is likewise founded upon the sufficiency of Scripture. Only the Scriptures may bind the conscience of man in matters of faith and worship because only the Scriptures are a sufficient rule in those areas” (Bushell, 120–121).

The fourth point is on “proof by inference.” Here, Mr. Bushell notes: “Commandment in the narrow sense of the term is not necessary to establish divine prescription. Approved example or inference from relevant scriptural data is sufficient to determine the proper manner of worship”—a fact underscored by the Westminster Confession’s reference to “good and necessary consequence.” The author writes that valid inferences are not “less authoritative than the express declarations of Scripture. They simply make explicit what is already expressed implicitly in Scripture.” Even though there is danger in the application of this principle of inference, the principle is nevertheless an indispensable point of Biblical

hermeneutics. Far from being feared (because of the tendency to misuse and abuse it), “the principle of inference is in fact that aspect of the regulative principle that moderates and controls its inevitable tendency towards legalism.... It is ... that which gives life to the regulative principle and permits its application to new situations in a culture that is radically different from that of the New Testament Church.” Appeal is made to the Westminster Larger Catechism’s list of rules regarding the interpretation and application of the Decalogue. The sixth of those eight principles is that “under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto” (Q/A 99). This answer “asserts in substance that every command in Scripture contains an implicit warrant for the use of whatever lawful means are necessary for adherence to the requirements of the command in question” (Bushell, 122ff).

According to Michael Bushell, “adherents to the regulative principle have all too often failed to give it [the principle of inference] the proper place in their thinking.” However, “the principle of inference and the legitimate use of necessary means must be as carefully guarded and asserted as the regulative principle itself. They are essential to a right understanding of the regulative principle, and their judicious application is essential to prevent the regulative principle from becoming a legalistic and Pharisaical noose, fit only to dishonor God and choke the life out of His Church” (127).

A fifth point deals with “the scope of the regulative principle.” Here the author takes exception to the position staked out by Professor Norman Shepherd in the volume on worship published by the RPCNA, viz., that of the application of the regulative principle to all of life.

It is certainly possible to conceive of two senses to the term “regulative principle,” a broad sense (the sufficiency of Scripture for life) and a narrow sense (the sufficiency of Scripture for worship), but the two senses are not at all the same conceptually. And the term itself has been reserved historically for use in the narrow sense. In our opinion, therefore, the use of the term “regulative principle” in two conceptually different senses can only add unnecessary ambiguity to an already confusing subject. Such ambiguities can only serve to obscure the distinctive character of the regulative principle of worship.

The author notes that the restrictive principle (“what-

ever is not commanded is forbidden”) applies to worship, but not to life in general. “The Lord has seen fit to grant unto men rather extensive powers of discretion in the ordering of their lives, and they may exercise those powers freely, so long as they adorn their acts with a little ‘sanctified common sense,’ so long as they do not contradict or ignore the moral dictates and general rules of behavior laid down in Scripture, and so long as they do not attempt to modify, by addition or subtraction, the doctrines of Scripture or the patterns of worship enjoined therein” (Bushell, 127–129).

The sixth point was on “the circumstances of worship.” Michael Bushell writes that the notion of circumstance was “intended only to forestall an obvious and common objection to the regulative principle, namely, that it requires the impossible task of deducing an indefinite number of minute circumstances from the Scriptures” (129).

The author sets out the standard understanding of “circumstances,” as formulated by George Gillespie, Scottish commissioner to the Westminster Assembly. First, a circumstance must be truly “only a circumstance of Divine Worship, no substantial part of it, no sacred significant and efficacious Ceremony.” Secondly, a circumstance “must be one of such things as were not determinable by Scripture, on that reason which Camiro [*sic* Camero]<sup>79</sup> hath given us, namely, because *Individua are Infinita*.” Thirdly, “If the church prescribe anything lawfully, so that she prescribe no more than she hath power given her to prescribe, her ordinance must be accompanied with some good reason and warrant, given for the satisfaction of tender consciences” (Bushell, 131, 134, 141).

However, having affirmed the essential distinction between “substance” and “circumstance,” the author tends to confuse the issue, when he tries to distinguish between two different kinds of circumstance: “some of which fall within the jurisdiction of the Church, and some of which do not.” After quoting James Bannerman, Michael Bushell asserts that Bannerman’s position “implies that there are some circumstances of public worship that *do* properly and distinctively belong to it as worship” (130–131).

In our estimation, this not only misreads Bannerman, but also introduces confusion into the terminology. In the same way that the author correctly wants to guard against confusion between two different uses of the term “regulative principle,” we also want to guard

79. John Cameron (c. 1579–1625), or Camero as Gillespie here refers to him, was a Scottish theologian whose thinking shaped the views of Moses Amyrald.

against conflating the notion of circumstance. We understand why Mr. Bushell was trying to make this distinction, and was willing to concede that there was “overlap” between the categories of substance and circumstance. He wanted to be able to point out that the content of worship song cannot be regarded as a circumstance that is within the Church’s discretion. However, the proper way to make that point is by noting that the content of worship song is a substantial aspect of that particular element of worship, in the same way that the content of any of the elements is a necessary aspect of that particular element. In other words, whether it is an element with an objectively “fixed” content (such as the singing of praise and the reading of the Word), or an element with content which is “free” (such as prayer and the preaching of the Word), the nature of that content is determined by Scripture, and therefore is not a circumstantial matter.

After dealing with the Confessional basis, Mr. Bushell turns to the Biblical basis for the regulative principle. He begins this section by observing that the regulative principle should not be seen “as emanating from the structures of Old Testament liturgical practice. It is the one essential constituent of worship practice that is common to both dispensations. Its source is in the nature of the relationship that obtains between God and all men at all times, not in the passing ordinances of the Mosaic economy” (Bushell, 144).

The particular passages on which the regulative principle is said to be based are the following: the second commandment (Exodus 20:4–6); the offering of strange fire (Leviticus 10:1–3); warnings against false worship (Deuteronomy 12:28–32); Saul’s offering (I Samuel 13:8–14); the death of Uzza (I Chronicles 13:9–14; 15:11–15; II Samuel 6:6ff); the commandments of God and the traditions of men (Mark 7:7–13; cf. Matthew 15:7–9); worship in spirit and truth (John 4:20–24); and warnings against will-worship (Colossians 2:20–23; Bushell, 145–153).

The most extensive treatment, and perhaps the one that most advances the arguments for the regulative principle, is on the John 4 passage. The point of Jesus’ words, “an hour is coming and now is,” “is not that a new principle of worship has been instituted, but rather that the same abiding principle that is at the heart of worship in both dispensations is at last to be realized in its fullness, specifically in the person of Jesus Christ in whose name and through whose Spirit all true worship is to take place. The Old Testament saints worshiped in spirit and truth, just as we do, but they did so only in a proleptic sense. The glorious progress that we see in

worship practice as we pass from the Old to the New Testament is but the unfolding of this essential principle: ‘God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth’” (149).

Furthermore, the notion of “Spirit,” as seen both in the immediate context and in the light of the Old Testament, “generally has reference, not to spiritual as opposed to material being, but to spirit as life-giving, creative activity, as that which gives life to material beings.... The Spirit that is the source of eternal life must also be the source of true worship. If we assume that the Spirit works only in and through His Word, it is a fair inference from this principle that all true worship must be founded upon the Holy Spirit” (149).

The author takes issue with the common interpretation of this John 4 passage, which maintains that the omnipresence of God (who is Spirit) means that God “may be worshiped anywhere.” Instead, the proper point here is the exact opposite of that interpretation, viz., “because worship is dependent upon the Spirit of God who, like wind which ‘blows where it wishes’ (3:8), bestows life on whom He wishes, it is restricted to those times, places and conditions that He in His sovereign good pleasure determines. Because God is spirit (in the sense of sovereign, life-giving activity), He manifests Himself among His people in a sovereign and ultimately mysterious way.... It is not true, the omniscience of God notwithstanding, that God may be worshiped at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances, subject only to the whim of the worshiper. God is spirit, the author of life and the giver of grace in worship, and His presence among His people in that capacity is no more ‘automatic’ now than it was in Old Testament times” (Bushell, 150).

Mr. Bushell also takes issue with the idea that worship in “spirit” is primarily a subjective reference to man’s sincerity in worship—especially if the purpose of that interpretation is to posit a stark contrast between worship in the Old Testament and worship in the New. “The piety of the New Testament is patterned very closely after that of the Old Testament, and there is no substantial difference between the two Testaments with regard to the question of whether the essence of true worship is internal or whether it is external.” Instead, the term “spirit” should be taken to be a reference to the Holy Spirit; this is so for three reasons. One, in other passages, “spirit” without the definite article unquestionably refers to the third Person of the Trinity. Two, there is a close connection in John’s writings between the Holy Spirit and truth. Three, the preposition “in” occurs only once with the two words (“spirit” and “truth”) in John

4:24, “thus uniting them in thought. The phrase, “spirit and truth,” would be equivalent to “Spirit of truth”; and “truth” would here be

a reference to God’s revealed will in Scripture as the epitome, the source of truth.... The point, then, that Jesus is making in this passage is that true worship is such as is consonant with the character of God as life-giving spirit. As in salvation it is the Spirit of God who takes the initiative in the giving of life, so in worship it is the Spirit of God who through His Word takes the initiative in determining how and where and under what conditions God is to be worshiped. Acceptable worship must be consonant with the character of God as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures and must therefore be in conformity with that sufficient rule at every point. Only that worship that proceeds ultimately from the Spirit through His Word is pleasing to God. (Bushell, 151–152).

Michael Bushell’s treatment of the regulative principle is one of the most significant ones in the twentieth century. Although we would respectfully suggest that he is just a bit “fuzzy” regarding the categories of substance and circumstance, the basic thrust of his presentation is quite correct, and in accord with the traditional understanding of the regulative principle. Moreover, in this book, he advances the cause, and especially does so, by fighting the contemporary attacks on the doctrine.

*Robert D. Jarman*

The year 1977 also saw the appearance of perhaps the earliest thesis to make use of the term regulative principle in relation to a study of Puritanism. This was Robert D. Jarman’s “The Regulative Principle of Scripture: The Origin of a Cardinal Doctrine in the Early Elizabethan Puritan Movement.”<sup>80</sup> The body of the paper consists of the chapters: “The Regulative Principle in the Vestiarian Controversy,” “The Regulative Principle and the Presbyterian Movement,” “The Regulative Principle in the Reign of Edward VI,” “The Regulative Principle in the Reign of Queen Mary,” and “The Regulative Principle up to the Reign of Henry VIII.” Jarman concludes his research thus:

At the very outset we stated our intention of contributing something to the debate over Puritan origins that has been continuing for several years. We drew attention to the importance of the Puritan doctrine of scriptural authority known as the regulative principle.

We suggested that its importance was such that if we could trace its origin we would be able to draw certain conclusions as to the parallel question of the origins of Puritanism as [a] whole. The following closing remarks are made in the light of the evidence that has been presented.

Firstly, we feel that sufficient evidence has been given to substantiate our claim that the regulative principle was a cardinal doctrine of the early Elizabethan Puritan movement. Establishing this point implies the existence of a parallel between the origins of the regulative principle and that of Puritanism as such.

Secondly, such evidence as we have presented suggests strongly that the origins of the regulative principle are to be sought in the continental theologians, particularly Zwingli and Calvin.<sup>81</sup> We suggest that they both consciously taught and practised the regulative principle, so that their churches at Zurich and Geneva, together with other churches on the continent that followed their example, provided an object-lesson in what could be achieved through its application to church life and practice.

Thirdly, we suggest that there are definite links between these continental Reformed churches and the Puritan movement in England. While not calling Hooper a Puritan, his links with Zurich are clear, and his example was an inspiration to the later Puritans. John Calvin’s thought was brought to England in different ways, through the printing of books, through the provision of theological education at the Geneva Academy, but most powerfully by those Marian exiles who came to Geneva, and saw and heard for themselves. Here we refer to men like Whittingham, Gilby, Goodman, Lever, and Wood. In addition to these links, there was the influence and example of strongly reformed churches in London and other areas, in the reigns of both Edward VI and Elizabeth.

80. Robert D. Jarman, B.A., “The Regulative Principle of Scripture: The Origin of a Cardinal Doctrine in the Early Elizabethan Puritan Movement. A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts with a Major in Church History and the History of Christian Thought at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Deerfield, Illinois, June, 1977.” Serving as Chairman of the two-man committee that approved the thesis was Mark A. Noll

81. Jarman wrote earlier: “Our purpose here is to show that Calvin from his earliest days as a reformer, up to the most mature expression of his thought in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* consistently taught and applied the regulative principle of scripture.” Jarman, 111.

Lastly, while acknowledging the continuing survival of Lollard principles, as also the work of Tyndale, Frith and others, we feel that the provenance of the regulative principle on purely English soil cannot be adequately documented or proven. This by implication must weaken the claims of earlier historians as to the influence of Tyndale, Frith and the Lollards in the rise of Puritanism. In a similar way, the claims of Trinterud and Clebsch<sup>82</sup> would seem to need modification in the light of what has been presented.

We do not claim that Puritanism was simply imported into England from Zurich and Geneva. Yet we cannot agree with those who claim that Puritanism was a solely English phenomenon. There needs to be a balance in these views, and our suggestion is, that the seed of a principle that was essentially foreign in its origin fell upon ground prepared for its reception. If we wish to illustrate by further reference to our symphonic analogy,

82. L. J. Trinterud, "The Origin of Puritanism," *Church History* 20 (1951) 37–57. W. A. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants 1520–1535* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

83. Paul E. Engle, *Discovering the Fullness of Worship* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Great Commission Publications, 1978).

84. Engle, 72. The author also wrote *Worship Planbook: A Manual for Worship Leaders* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Great Commission Publications, [1981]). Although Dr. Engle does hold unambiguously to the regulative principle as traditionally expressed, it is also clear that he would allow for the use of uninspired hymns and musical instrumentation, as well as offerings.

85. Jack Martin Maxwell, *Worship and Reformed Theology: The Liturgical Lessons of Mercersburg* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: The Pickwick Press, 1976). "Within the German Reformed Churches in the U.S.A., a liturgical revolution occurred in the mid-nineteenth century under the leadership of the famous Mercersburg theologians John. W. Nevin and Philip Schaff. Jack Martin Maxwell believes that they were successful because they 'established and demonstrated the imperative practical and theoretical relationship between theology and liturgy' (... p. 5). Nathan D. Mitchell in his 1978 Notre Dame Ph.D. thesis *Church, Eucharist, and Liturgical Reform at Mercersburg, 1843–1857*, maintains that this coupling stems from the source of their theology: German liberalism (p. 5). Certainly the two were opposed to Calvin in some important particulars (e.g., pp. 456ff). On the other hand, Gregg Alan Maß sees the origin of Mercersburg's theology and liturgy of the Lord's Supper in the curious Catholic Apostolic Church or 'Irvingites' (*The Eucharistic Service of the Catholic Apostolic Church and Its Influence on Reformed Liturgical Renewals of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, Ph.D. thesis, Drew University, 1985). He also sees some lesser Irvingite influence in the worship of the Church of Scotland and the Dutch Reformed Church in America." Reid, "Recent Writings," in *Worship in the Presence of God*, 351. Avoiding the conventional tagging to German liberalism, Nevin receives more sympathetic treatment in D. G. Hart's *John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2005). While Dr. Hart consulted several doctoral dissertations he does not list either Maß or Mitchell among them.

we may say that the theme composed in its fundamental motifs by Zwingli and Calvin, that rose gradually from a background theme to become a leading motif in the Puritan symphony, was played enthusiastically by those who had an innate feeling and appreciation for the music they played (129–131).

Paul E. Engle

In 1978, Dr. Paul Engle was a minister in the Evangelical Free Church when he wrote *Discovering the Fullness of Worship*, a book issued by the publishing agency of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).<sup>83</sup> Seven years later, he joined the PCA, and subsequently served for three years as pastor of Christ Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Since 1991, he has labored "out of bounds," first at Baker Book House, and since 1999 at Zondervan.

In this book, the regulative principle is clearly enunciated. "True Worship" is pictured as "whatever is derived from Scripture only," while "False Worship" as "whatever is forbidden in Scripture or not derived from Scripture." With reference to the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, Dr. Engle wrote: "This event confirmed that God required Israel to worship in accordance with his revealed will" (Engle, 18–19).

Regarding "implementing" the regulative principle, Dr. Engle correctly noted the distinction between an "element" and a "circumstance" of worship: "The regulative use of Scripture pertains to all that is a 'part' of worship as distinguished from that which is merely a 'circumstance' of worship.... [Circumstances] would include the length of the service, the hour of the assembly on Sunday, the form of the seating, and the material from which the pulpit is made."<sup>84</sup>

#### Other Works for this Period

We mention simply by title a few additional pieces for this period of varying interest and usefulness. Jack Martin Maxwell's *Worship and Reformed Theology: Liturgical Lessons of Mercersburg*, has little on the regulative principle.<sup>85</sup> Of greater significance are the following: G.I. Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism for Study Classes*, 2 vols. (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1970; Rpt. 2003) 21–35; Geoffrey Thomas, "The Nature of Worship," in *The Banner of Truth*, 153 (June 1976) 1–3; Leslie A. Rawlinson, "Worship in Liturgy and Form," in *Anglican and Puritan Thinking* (London: Westminster Conference, 1977) 71–88; Robert W. Oliver, "The External of Worship," in *Anglican and Puritan*

*Thinking*, 58–70; Hector Cameron, “Purity of Worship,” in *Hold Fast Your Confession* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1977) 75–128; Douglas F. Kelly, “No ‘Church Year’ for Presbyterians” *Presbyterian Journal* (November 14, 1979); J. G. Davies, ed., *The Westminster Dictionary of Worship* (Philadelphia, Pa.: John Knox, 1979);<sup>86</sup> Robert A. Morey, “Exclusive Psalmody,” *Baptist Reformation Review*, 4.4 (Winter 1975).<sup>87</sup>

#### Overview: 1970–1979

In the 1970s, as the Presbyterian Church in America took its place on the church stage, it found that it now had to define not what it was against, but what it was for. Almost immediately, cracks appeared in what was supposed to be a united front against the PCUS liberals—cracks which eventually developed into deep divisions between those in favor of “traditional” Presbyterian worship (which for the most part meant mid-twentieth century Southern Presbyterian piety), and those for whom the worship service was a means to an end of evangelism and saving the lost.

Meanwhile, in Philadelphia, what had been regarded as a bastion of Reformed orthodoxy, Westminster Theological Seminary, began to enter a period of engaging in experimental theology. One of the results of the seminary’s avante-garde attitude was the breaking down of meaningful distinctions, including among various elements of worship. The enormous emphasis on a Biblical-theological approach, in contrast to systematic theology, contributed to an inability to embrace proper systematic theological rubrics (categories). The “unofficial” seminary of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church helped to shape that denomination in a direction that was accepting of “New Life” worship, which openly fostered liturgical dance and other innovations. At the same time, up and coming scholars, such as Michael Bushell, were rediscovering the Puritan roots of the Westminster Standards to which all conservative Presbyterians pledged allegiance.

#### V. THE 1980S: GROWING SUPPORT & INCREASING OPPOSITION

With the advent of the personal computer and desktop publishing, the period of the 1980s saw an increase in publishing activity regarding the regulative principle of worship as these technologies put the tools to publish in the hands of small presses and individuals alike. A tract finally appeared that would serve many as a general introduction to the principle, but formal opposition was

founded as well, which would continue and evolve over the succeeding decades.

#### Robert G. Rayburn

In 1980, Robert G. Rayburn, well-beloved President of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, wrote a book on worship, entitled *O Come, Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church*.<sup>88</sup> As the title implies, the work was designed for a broader audience than a specifically Reformed one.

Perhaps because of the intended readership, Dr. Rayburn hardly dealt with the regulative principle of worship, mentioning it in only the most cursory fashion. Moreover, at points where he seemed to allude to it, his subsequent comments in context demonstrate that the burden of his remarks were in a different direction from the classic expression of this doctrine.

For example, in writing of “Corporate Worship in the Old Testament”—a chapter which, by the way, contains much useful material regarding how to relate Old Testament worship to our worship today in Christ—the professor stated: “Whatever other business occupied Moses on the mount and whatever other disclosures were made to him during his forty days there, that which chiefly occupied him was the receiving of directions concerning the tabernacle. Again it must be noted that it was God who took the initiative in the building of this house of worship. ‘Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them, according to all that I show thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle’ (Exod. 25:8, 9). Again and again we are reminded in the Scriptures that our worship and service of God are simply a response to His grace and goodness. How careful we should be to make the proper response” (Rayburn, 56). All of that is true, of course. But Dr. Rayburn failed to drive home what is meant by making the “proper response.”

He does write: “Careful attention should be given to every indication in the Word of God of the very best ways to worship God. The Bible is our norm, and our

86. This work “covers ‘Reformed Worship’ from a very liturgical slant (pp. 331–332), and discusses ‘Psalmody’ only in terms of the early church.” Reid, “Recent Writings on Worship” in *Worship in the Presence of God*, 343.

87. “The Reformers wanted to re-establish the pure worship of the apostolic church. The regulative principle was their main instrument by which they sought to do this....” Morey, 46. Cited in Dean R. Smith, “The Westminster Assembly and Worship,” in *Joint Study Conference on Psalmody* (N.p. [1981]) 5. See more on this conference later in this article.

88. Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1980).

worship should always be judged by the standard of its teaching.” The context for those words is in the midst of his contention that the congregation should kneel for public prayer (184). But what is missing is any specific indication that the actual items (or parts or elements) of worship have been prescribed.

In dealing with “Elements in Worship,” President Rayburn uses the term in a non-traditional way, for he includes fellowship as an element (86–92). The difficulty with that perspective is that it confuses an aspect of worship (fellowship) with the particular practices of worship.

The author quotes from and appeals to the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 21, in order to undergird the use of “The ‘Amen’” as a corporate expression of agreement with prayer that is offered in the worship service. He writes: “Yet strangely enough, those churches which hold firmly to this confession and require their ministers to take a solemn vow upholding it have completely neglected the offering of the ‘Amen,’ which is so clearly given full scriptural authority” (149).

Dr. Rayburn specifically mentions the “regulative principle” in one place, viz., in conjunction with his differing with his brethren who maintain a *cappella* exclusive psalmody. He writes that that Covenanter teaching “is based upon the well-known regulative principle which is stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 21 ...” (94f.).

What we are left with in Dr. Rayburn’s book, therefore, is a volume, directed to the general evangelical church, which contains much helpful material (and much unhelpful material). But, for whatever reason, he declined in this venue to underscore the nature of the regulative principle of worship, and accordingly did not in any appreciable way advance the cause of Reformed worship.

89. *The Application of the Regulative Principle to Song in Worship* (N.p., [1981?]). The papers apparently were not published per se, but distributed during or after the conference. At least one paper was typed up after it was delivered from rough notes. See George Hall, “How the OPC Has Applied the Regulative Principle,” Preface. “The original address was delivered from notes and not from a manuscript, without any expectation that others would read it. So, I am recomposing this paper from those notes, with hopes of reproducing what was presented verbally at the Conference on Psalmody on June 4, 1981.”

90. Smith’s paper is also titled “The Westminster Assembly and Worship.”

91. Copeland’s paper is also titled “Exclusive Psalmody and Progressive Revelation.”

### 1981 Joint Study Conference on Psalmody

On June 4–5, 1981, ministers from the OPC and RPCNA gathered in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania for a joint study conference on psalmody.<sup>89</sup> The conference schedule, bound up with the set of (unpublished) papers held at Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary Library, notes the background:

A Joint Study Conference Arranged by the Committee on Ecumenicity of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Committee of Interchurch Correspondence and Study of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of NA on “The Application of the Regulative Principle to Song in Worship.”

Delegates to the General Assembly of the OPC and to the Synod of the RPCNA will be conference participants. Others are welcome as observers. The sessions will be taped.

The papers presented were as follows: Dean R. Smith, “A History of the Regulative Principle of Worship”;<sup>90</sup> Bruce C. Stewart, “How the RPCNA has Applied the Regulative Principle”; George Hall, “How the OPC has Applied the Regulative Principle”; Duncan Lowe, “What is Worship?”; Donald Poundstone, “Response”; Edmond Clowney, “Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16”; J. Renwick Wright, “Response”; E. Clark Copeland, “Psalmody and Progressive Revelation”;<sup>91</sup> Leonard Coppes, “Response”; Edward Robson, “The Concept of the New Testament Hymns”; and Lawrence Eyres, “Response.”

To one extent or another, all of these papers, even the more general ones, addressed the topic of exclusive psalmody either pro or con. Several have only a passing interest to this present study. Of the papers more generally on the regulative principle, Stewart’s is a very brief paper which explains the RPCNA’s practice from its constitutional documents. As to the Covenanter “distinctive” of a *cappella* exclusive psalmody, he writes: “The Reformed Presbyterian Church has not made exclusive Psalmody nor a capella singing our distinctive principles. Rather, those who have given up this practice of worship have made it to become distinctive for us. We stand today where all Presbyterian and Reformed churches historically stood” (Stewart, 2).

Hall’s paper, as he freely admits, is nothing more than a compendium of the material presented in the OPC reports on Worship Song.

Dean R. Smith opened the conference with a paper

focused on disproving the contention that while “the Westminster Assembly did adopt a principle for worship that ‘whatever is not commanded by Scripture is forbidden,’ they never intended it to apply to exclusive or a cappella singing.” This view contradicts that of Robert A. Morey, who, as noted earlier, had written in a 1975 *Baptist Reformation Review* article that

[t]he Reformers wanted to re-establish the pure worship of the apostolic church. The regulative principle was their main instrument by which they sought to do this.... The Reformers and the Puritans who established this principle and fought for it, never understood it to mean the exclusion of uninspired hymns from church worship.

Those who agree with Morey have tended to focus on publications prior to the Assembly to argue that the Westminster Divines meant something more than the 150 Psalms of David when they used the term “psalms” in WCF 21.5 and in the Directory for Public Worship. (Or at the least they argue that the Assembly did not mean to limit song to the Psalter.) Smith’s presentation, while not extensive, argues from the general practice of a *cappella* psalmody over the century prior to the Westminster Assembly and the Divines’ production of a new Psalter containing nothing but the 150 Psalms, to bolster the conclusion that the Assembly did indeed mean to authorize nothing but the Psalms of David for public worship in the three kingdoms. We may have opportunity to examine how well Smith’s argument holds up today in this and other aspects when Ned Needham’s more extensive 2003 article is reviewed in a subsequent section of this survey.<sup>92</sup>

John Deluvik, who attended the conference and gathered a set of the papers to present to the RPTS Library, is of the opinion that Robson’s paper is a significant piece that merits greater attention than the obscurity into which the collection has generally fallen.<sup>93</sup> We present here, then, Robson’s introduction and conclusion:

The Worship Committee’s assignment to me was to write on the subject of “hymnic elements” in the New Testament. This subject has received a great deal of discussion during the past 55 years, and positions pro “hymnic” and against “hymnic” abound. There are a number of books and periodicals which ably summarize the research on “hymnic elements.” This paper presents evidence which, in my judgment, leans against all the so called “hymnic elements.” I find that the arguments for “hymnic elements” are based upon a

defective methodology. For example, if 10% of the words of Phil. [sic] 2:5–11 must be removed to make the passage a “perfectly balanced hymn,” this is evidence that the passage is not a “hymn” as it stands.

I find that the arguments for “hymnic elements” do not take into account modern linguistic studies on the structure of language in general, and the structure of the relative pronoun in particular. This study touches on both language theory and the relative pronoun. The relative pronoun is supposed to be very important for locating “hymnic elements.”

I find that the arguments for “hymnic elements” use elusive criteria for locating the N.T. “hymns.” For example, the criterion of the hapax legomenon is not a criterion for anything except hapax legomenon. The following study uses as one of its criteria for evaluating “hymnic elements” the kai-configurations of both books and sections. Kai-configurations are strings of words joined by ‘and,’ which in Greek is ‘kai.’ The uses of ‘kai’ in a “hymn” will help to indicate whether the “hymnic element” is original to the book or not. Based on an analysis of the 8947 ‘kai’s of the Greek New Testament, I am convinced that there are no “hymnic elements” at all. (I do not classify quotations from the Old Testament as “hymnic”).

In summary, I am prepared to demonstrate that those passages which have been designated as pre-Pauline and pre-Christian “hymnic elements” are not “hymns” at all. In particular, I am prepared to demonstrate that Philippians 2:5–11 is not a “hymn” adapted by Paul, but is an original part of Philippians from the Apostle himself *de novo* (Robson, “Hymnic Elements in the Greek New Testament,” 1–2)

After presenting his case, Dr. Robson concluded:

92. Nick Needham, “Westminster and Worship: Psalms, Hymns? And Musical Instruments,” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century*, volume 2, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (2003; Reprint, Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2004). Lord willing, this evaluation will be presented in part two of this article, which is slated to appear in the 2007 issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

93. “If you want a ground breaking paper, the one by Ed Robson is it. His doctoral dissertation proved that the Greek word ‘kai’ is always equal to an equal sign when used in the NT. This has great implications for passages like the Great Commission which used the word kai to link Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From what I can tell, his work has been ignored.” Correspondence, John Deluvik to Chris Coldwell, March 1, 2006.

With the aid of the computer, and a great number of grammars of the Greek New Testament, all of the “hymnic elements” of the N.T. have been examined. On the basis of the usage of “kai” in these hymnic passages, it cannot be concluded that these “hymnic elements” are in any sense intrusions into the Gospels, Acts, Epistles, or Apocalypse. Neither can it be concluded that there are any features which link these so called “hymnic elements” by any generic features or structures. These observations are further confirmed by statistical analyses and graphs of the various passages.

Even more important is the evidence drawn from the uses of the relative pronoun plus ‘kai’ and the conjunction [sic] ‘dio’ plus ‘kai.’ The language complexity of these forms is more of an argument for the original nature of these forms than as an argument for their intrusion (Robson, 29).

Lawrence Eyers, who was drafted by John Galbraith just two weeks prior to the conference to present the rebuttal in favor of the presence of New Testament hymns, was a bit overwhelmed by Robson’s extensive research and made no attempt at a refutation.

Now I think I know where Dr. Robson is coming from and where he is going. Though he didn’t state it, I think it was so implicit that he didn’t need to state it. His thesis is that, if indeed the so-called hymnic elements or ‘purple patches’ in the New Testament Scripture are compatible with those Scriptures, then they did not come from a lost or unrecorded corpus of New Testament period hymnody, which corpus was not blessed with being brought under Scriptural inspiration. If that be so, then the assumption is that there was and is no corpus of early church hymnody, distinct from the Old Testament Psalter, used in the worship of the New Testament, Apostolic Church. Now certainly I am in no position to challenge that thesis. Rather I lean heavily on what some of the speakers from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church said yesterday and today in support of the point of view from which I come. Therefore, I’m not embarrassed by Dr. Robson’s conclusions, even if they are valid” (Eyers, 2).

*Robert A. Morey*

In 1984, Robert A. Morey penned *Worship Is All of Life*. This book, just over a hundred pages in length, seeks to

94. Robert A. Morey, *Worship Is All of Life* (Camp Hill, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1984) 9–10.

clarify the confusion between an approach to worship in which there is “total freedom” (leading to “confusion,” “emotionalism and carnal exhibitionism,” and “long on experience and short on teaching”), and an approach of “total form” (characterized by “absolute order,” “intellectualism and passivity,” and “long on teaching and short on experience”).<sup>94</sup>

Mr. Morey states professed support for the regulative principle of worship: “For the essentials of worship, only what God has commanded in Scripture is to be allowed. Nothing is to be viewed as essential to divine worship if it is not commanded in Scripture. The non-essential aspects of worship are left up to the freedom of the conscience, and the edification of the church” (Morey, 76ff.).

However, the author believes that this Calvinistic position, which he refers to as one of “form and freedom,” is in opposition to what he calls the “extreme” position of seventeenth century English Puritanism. “Some of the Puritans, in fighting the superstition and idolatry of their age, went to the extreme of reducing the worship of God to the absolute minimum of what was commanded by Scripture. Their fear of the abuse of freedom led them to embrace only the form of the essentials. They reduced the worship of God to the bare bones of a long sermon and a few hymns” (82–83).

This Reformed Baptist writer also claims that the Puritan position “is retrogressive in seeking to arrange Christian worship according to Old Testament Law”; and adds: “It is impossible consistently to carry out this position. It ultimately leads to legalism, absurdity and dead orthodoxy.” He rhetorically asks:

To those who tell us today that we cannot have a choir of special music because we do not have a verse in the New Testament where such things are commanded we must ask, ‘Where is there a verse for the pews you sit on? Where is the New Testament passage for having a hymnal? Where is the text for an organ or piano?’

He characterizes the Calvinistic “form and freedom” view as having this basis: “For essentials look to biblical form; for non-essentials seek the edification of the church”; and the “total form” view with the following basis: “Everything in worship must have a Scripture verse to validate it” (86–88).

Besides the fact that Puritan worship consisted of more than a long sermon and the singing of praise (actually, the singing of Psalms, not hymns), Mr. Morey seems to be confused on other points as well. The Puritan position always allowed that “good and necessary

consequence” would also be valid for the demonstration of a worship practice. But more to the point, it is difficult to understand how he can consistently maintain his position that Calvin and the Puritans differed with respect to the nature of elements of worship and the nature of circumstances. It is fair to say that the Puritans further refined and developed the theology of worship; but it is not fair to say that they and the great Genevan reformer substantially differed regarding the prescription of worship.

Moreover, Mr. Morey seems to be confused about what things constitute circumstances of worship. He writes: “What are the non-essentials of worship? A non-essential element is something or some act whose presence or absence does not validate or invalidate worship. It is a matter of convenience, circumstance, culture and aesthetic taste. They refer to where, when and how we worship. Whether you worship in a barn or a cathedral is unimportant. A choir, special music, pews, a church bell or special clothing are non-essentials” (81–82). But, he is, by means of this list, trying to mix and match things that are not of the same genus. The fact that he does not understand the nature of a circumstance of worship, means that he does not understand what an element of worship is, and therefore that he has not grasped the regulative principle of worship.<sup>95</sup>

*Kevin Reed and  
Presbyterian Heritage Publications*

Kevin Reed founded Presbyterian Heritage Publications in 1983, which sought to publish both historic and contemporary defenses of Presbyterian orthodoxy. Mr. Reed was an early defender of the regulative principle against, and critic of, the worship views of James B. Jordan. In 1984, he penned a stinging critique of Mr. Jordan and his Theonomic Reconstructionist compatriots in the long-since defunct Association of Reformation Churches, whose main church was Westminster Presbyterian of Tyler, Texas. Reflecting the affinity of the Tyler folk towards high-church Anglicanism, Mr. Reed’s booklet carries the outrageously funny title of *The Canterbury Tales*.<sup>96</sup>

Mr. Reed writes that *The Geneva Papers*,<sup>97</sup> which were produced at Tyler under the auspices of Geneva Divinity School, reveal

many alarming trends within the Tyler mentality of worship. Specifically, the activities of the church contain many corruptions of worship, under the guise of liturgical reconstruction. This corruption is evident by

(1.) their repudiation of the Reformed regulative principle of worship; (2.) their reintroduction of superstitious and unwarranted practices into the church; (3.) their rejection of confessional Presbyterianism (*Canterbury Tales*, 1).

Mr. Reed claims:

The primary indication of the Tyler corruption of worship is seen in their repudiation of the Reformed regulative principle of worship. This repudiation is manifested in four ways: by false portrayals of the regulative principle; by a failure to make proper distinctions within the regulative principle; by a faulty pairing of Reformed and Anabaptist notions; and by a failure to deal exegetically with the scriptural position of the reformers (and the Reformed confessions) on the topic of worship (*Canterbury Tales*, 2).<sup>98</sup>

95. Although it may seem like a fine point, notice even how he links the two concepts (“non-essential element”). However, if something truly is “elemental,” then it is not non-essential! Theologically speaking, circumstances and elements are mutually exclusive categories—yet Mr. Morley uses terminology that would conflate the two.

96. Kevin Reed, *The Canterbury Tales: An Extended Review and Commentary Based upon “The Geneva Papers”* (Kevin Reed, 1984; Dallas, Tex.: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1989). This work was later cited by Richard Bacon in a review of Jordan’s *Liturgical Nestorianism*, where Bacon remarked: “The title was intended as a play on words with the archbishopric of the Anglican church and the title of Chaucer’s famous epic.” This elicited from Mr. Jordan the comment that Bacon’s church was perhaps a synagogue of Satan for harboring those who had been excommunicated from the Westminster Presbyterian church of the ARC. This led to a subsequent issue of *The Blue Banner* where proof that the ARC itself had negated these judgments was presented. See “Beyond Canterbury, Reviews of James B. Jordan’s Views on Worship,” *The Blue Banner*, ed. Christopher Coldwell, 4:3–4 (March–April, 1995); “Tyranny in Tyler,” *The Blue Banner*, 4:7–8 (July–August, 1995). Although not noted by the magazine, the late Greg Bahnsen helped to address the question of ecclesiastical standing, by compiling the data presented and in drafting the “Note from the Editor.”

97. Volume one and some of volume two of these papers are currently available from Biblical Horizons. Among Jordan’s effusions, volume one contains his “Liturgical Notes,” as well as the 23 part series “Christianity & the Calendar.” *The Geneva Papers*, Volume 1:1–37 (1982–1985). An updated version of the calendar series is available with some “retractions.”

98. Speaking of exegetical abilities, Mr. Reed notes in a review of Jordan’s *The Law of the Covenant*: “Some places are marked by sound exegesis, while other sections abound in fanciful speculations.... The section on slavery also illustrates some of Jordan’s bizarre techniques of interpretation. Frequently, he launches into wild allegorical speculations. In many cases, he has first provided us with a sound exposition of the primary focus of the text. Yet, he then supplements the initial exposition with a highly symbolic (and highly questionable) extrapolation based upon the same text. Although these extrapolations do not always present objectionable opinions, the METHOD is

Regarding various historical matters, Mr. Reed says, “Jordan’s repetitious caricature of the Reformed position is comprised of broad undocumented generalizations; he often runs roughshod over the historical *facts* with vague unfounded historical generalizations.” This is true not only with regard to the purportedly close affiliation of Reformed and Anabaptist theology, but also with regard to other issues, such as the introduction of special religious holy days in the early church.

Kevin Reed also noted that James Jordan’s pedagogic use of ceremonies is precisely what the Reformers believed had been abrogated through the coming of Christ. Not only that, but we are especially forbidden from enacting man-made ceremonies in worship.

Turning his attention to some of the major Reformation-era creeds, Mr. Reed writes:

The progression of thought in the French Confession is quite illuminating. It illustrates that the regulative principle of worship is merely an outgrowth of the *sola scriptura* rule of Protestant theology. Inevitably, opponents of the regulative principle end up espousing a concurrent authority of the church to establish modes of worship.

The Scottish [First] Book of Discipline (1560) notes that the preaching of the gospel includes “not only the scriptures of the New Testament, but also of the Old: to wit, the law, prophets, and histories.” Does this sound like men suffering from the hangups of a baptistic hermeneutic, which Mr. Jordan claims is dispensationally applied “as if only the New Testament were allowed to teach us about worship” (*Geneva Papers*, #25)? (18).

After quoting from Calvin, Reed notes that Jordan

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what concerns us here....” Reed cites an example where in discussing “the Circumcision of the Ear,” Jordan writes: “Once Abraham is circumcised, he is able to circumcise Sarah, so to speak, for the woman also has a strip of flesh that hinders procreation. Women are not physically ‘circumcised’ in the Bible, for this would destroy the symbolism of the tokens of virginity (Dt. 22:13–21). The circumcision of the male child serves as a substitute for the woman, by pointing to the circumcision of the promised seed, Jesus Christ, the ‘bridegroom’ whose blood provides the tokens of virginity that an unfaithful wife (Israel, the Church) needs as legal evidence of her ethical purity (pp. 80–81).” Reid concludes: “We suggest that Mr. Jordan ‘cut off’ his typewriter, so to speak, before composing any more exegesis of this kind—especially since we have been warned that his books might ‘re-structure the way that Bible-believing scholars do theology.’ (We were trying to imagine a commentary on the book of Revelation written in this manner, and we suddenly remembered there were already at least a dozen of them.)” Kevin Reed, “Book Review. Of Exegesis and Eccentricity,” *The Counsel of Chalcedon* (1984) 21, 22, 23.

has clouded the issue. Perhaps we are beginning to see that the issue really concerns some fundamental differences of opinion between the Tyler assembly and a vast array of witnesses for the Reformed faith. Mr. Jordan complained as though the advocates of the regulative principle were unconcerned with “finding the large, overarching principles of worship in scripture, and noting particulars in that context” (*Geneva Papers*, #25). Yet, the overarching presupposition is precisely the point at issue. The regulative principle is the grand presupposition in the consideration of the means of worship. *Once this principle is recognized, the evaluation of particulars is placed in that context.* “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deut. 12:32). (20–21).

In excoriating the Tyler movement toward “superstitious” practices, the booklet states:

Consequently, we now find the Tyler community sporting an entire wardrobe bearing the designer labels of Rome and Canterbury. It is fashionable to support ministerial vestments, the litany, the ecclesiastical year (with saints’ days), the sign of the cross, and public healing services. Who knows? Next Spring we may hear talk of the re-churching of women after childbirth, the reading of apocryphal books from the pulpit, the burning of incense during worship services, and kneeling at communion. Why, the possibilities are endless for those with a fertile imagination! Shall we follow them on this pilgrimage to Canterbury or Rome? (22).

In evaluating the commitment (or perhaps we should say non-commitment) of the Tyler church to the Presbyterian faith, Mr. Reed observes:

In a recent issue of *The Geneva Papers* (#28), Mr. Jordan openly states his view that the Westminster Confession is a corpse, a dead symbol with a main value for study, in order to help the church write a new confession. Is this also the position of the Tyler assembly, which published this material? If so, we have a rather open denial of confessional Presbyterianism.

In retrospect, we marvel at Mr. Jordan’s frequent jabs and swipes at Presbyterianism, the position of the reformers, the Puritans (who, incidentally, wrote the Westminster Confession), and the confessional standards themselves. His writings often show more charity toward Papiſts, than toward the Reformed faith. He writes as if he hates Presbyterianism.

We believe it is time for the Tylerites to be more forthright in the representation of their church's position. Let them change their name to Canterbury Independent Anglican church. Or, let them petition to join the Episcopal denomination. But honesty requires them to announce to the world that they are not Presbyterians, for they have clearly rejected the Presbyterian doctrine of worship.

And, while they are at it, it might be in order to rename the newsletter to say, something like "Vatican Viewpoints." Otherwise, with a name like *Geneva*, people may wrongly assume they share Calvin's view of worship. If Calvin were present with us here today, he certainly wouldn't associate with the Tyler assembly, although he might pity their misguided zeal. Then again, maybe he would conduct a liturgy of malediction against those who corrupt the worship of God (25).

A later "afterword" to the original version notes:

Over the past few years, there have been significant changes among some of the principal figures mentioned in the article. The Westminster Presbyterian Church in Tyler has subsequently changed its name and affiliated with an Episcopal communion. Mr. Jordan is no longer associated with the congregation, but has continued to spread aberrant opinions among Presbyterian churches. Further, at least two families from the Tyler congregation have withdrawn and sought refuge within the pale of the church of Rome (backpage [28]).

More positively, Kevin Reed set forth a standard explanation of the regulative principle in a 1995 booklet, *Biblical Worship*.<sup>99</sup> The first chapter declares: "We believe that the scriptures contain a general prohibition against all elements in worship besides those which God himself has instituted. In other words, the burden of proof falls upon those who wish to introduce a practice into worship, to prove that God has required it in his word. This is the force of the scriptural law of worship; it guards against man-made innovations in worship."

The second chapter deals with worship in the Old Testament. Besides making the usual appeal to the Second Commandment, there is also a survey of Old Testament history in order to illustrate this principle: "The Lord detests corrupt worship and he punishes this sin."

The third chapter, on worship in the New Testament, appeals to Matthew 15 to discern Jesus' attitude regarding worship:

The Pharisees paid lip service to God. We know they made long prayers, fasted twice a week, and arranged financial bequests to the temple. As formalists, they were exceedingly concerned about outward conformity to man-made regulations. At first, we might not link their practices to "public worship," since many of these activities were conducted outside the temple and synagogue services. Yet, their traditional observances are accounted by Christ a measure of their worship. And their worship is declared to be *vain*. It is vain because it ignores scriptural directives; it is vain because it exalts human innovations (called traditions), thereby violating the spirit of the second commandment; and it is vain because it leads to perdition (Matt. 15:13–14).

Jesus' dealings with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 make clear that worship must be "in spirit and in truth." The term "spirit," according to Mr. Reed, implies sincerity; the term "truth" implies that

our worship must be in conformity to God's written revelation. There is, indeed, an outward measure for our worship. In the present day, it is common to hear comments that the "heart" is all that matters: a mistaken concept that sincerity of motive and fervent emotion are the substance of genuine worship. But Christ does not confine the essence of worship to worship in spirit; he adds the measure of truth. Acceptable worship is more than the gushy effervescence of a fervent heart. Without truth, such fervor is an offense before God; it is zeal, "but not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:2).

Kevin Reed also writes in this regard that the grouping of "fellowship" with acts of worship in the classic text on the gathering of the early church, points to the corporate nature of public worship. "It is in the context of the congregation assembled corporately that we find many expressions of public worship and service. Therefore we see why it was mentioned as an important factor that the early Christians continued steadfastly in apostolic *fellowship* (Acts 2:42). Corporate worship is the highest public expression of adoration rendered."

Other booklets on Biblical worship published by Mr. Reed at this time included the following: John Knox, *True & False Worship: A Vindication of the Doctrine that the Sacrifice of the Mass is Idolatry* (1988);<sup>100</sup> Carl

99. Kevin Reed, *Biblical Worship* (Dallas, Tex.: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995).

100. The introductory essay on John Knox in slightly expanded form was reprinted as Kevin Reed, "John Knox and the Reformation of Worship in the Scottish Reformation," *Worship in the Presence of God*,

W. Bogue, *The Scriptural Law of Worship* (1988);<sup>101</sup> and *Christmas: An historical survey regarding its origins and opposition to it. A Presbyterian Heritage Monograph* (1983).<sup>102</sup>

### *The Westminster Conference for 1985*

In 1985 Christopher L. Bennett presented one of the papers at the Westminster Conference for that year on the Puritan Regulative Principle.<sup>103</sup> He asks: “How can we summarize the Regulative Principle? It concerns the public worship of God in the Church, and says that all the significant events in worship must have positive warrant in Scripture, though incidentals are to be regulated by Christian common sense in the light of more general Scripture principles. It is often contrasted with the ‘Normative Principle,’ which has been associated,

ed. Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman (Greenville, S.C.: GPTS Press, 1992). The Knox piece itself was reprinted in *Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1559* (Dallas, Tex: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995).

101. The Bogue tract is discussed in the next section below.

102. This was the earliest form of Mr. Reed’s Christmas tract which was later paired with Michael Schneider’s *Is Christmas Christian* and published as: *Christmas: A Biblical Critique* (1993). Another PHP Christmas booklet, which is not the most irenic of pieces, was: David W. Cason, *Christmas-Keeping and the Reformed Faith: A Response to Professor David J. Engelsma* (1995).

103. Christopher J. L. Bennett, B.A., “Worship among the Puritans—the Regulative Principle,” in *Spiritual Worship: Westminster Conference 1985* (Printed in England: Published by The Westminster Conference, 1985) 17–31. The Westminster Conference again took up the topic of worship in 1989: *The Reformation of Worship* (Surrey, England: Westminster Conference, [1990]). Of these papers Alan Clifford’s “The Westminster Directory of Public Worship” is notable for discussing the regulative principle. The author also saw fit to take the position of exclusive psalmody to task, singling out Bushell, whose book he described as a “reactionary *tour de force* in favour of exclusive psalmody” which “nonetheless deserves the attention of chorus and hymn singers alike!” The author opined as well on Calvin’s position in a lengthy footnote where he also questioned the alleged exclusive psalmody in public worship of the early Scottish church: “The available evidence suggests that Calvin was really in sympathy with psalms and scripture-based paraphrases. Unlike earlier editions, the 1611 edition of the Scottish Psalter reflected Calvin’s position more closely. To say these hymns were acceptable for private rather than public worship is to rest a questionable argument on the mere size of the congregation! See Hector Cameron’s doubtful discussion of these points in ‘Purity of Worship’ in *Hold Fast Your Confession*, ed. Donald Macleod, Knox Press, Edinburgh, 1978, pp. 102–3. To say these ‘hymns’ were published in a public service book for only private use—when no such rule is indicated—is not very convincing.” As for this last statement, for further consideration see David Hay Fleming, “The Hymnology of the Reformation,” *Original Secession Magazine* (January–June and September 1884); reprinted in *An Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature*, 4 (Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 1991) 223–246.

especially since Richard Hooker’s *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, with the Anglican Church, which says that whatever is not forbidden in Scripture is allowed in worship” (“Worship Among the Puritans,” 17). Bennett then cites Westminster Confession 21.1 and 1.6 to underline this definition, and proceeds briefly to state why it is relevant to discuss worship: “If the Puritans are right about the Regulative Principle itself, and at least substantially right about the applications of it, many of the current trends in worship must be resisted tooth and nail” (18). Bennett then gives a very short “Historical Perspective” on the principle:

In some ways Puritan positions developed and became tighter: Dr Ames in his preface to William Bradshaw’s *English Puritanism* (1605) says that the Puritans had become somewhat more rigid than the Reformers and even the earlier Puritans (he mentions Cartwright and Perkins amongst others), because ‘miserable experience hath taught us many things which our fathers were ignorant of’ (preface to *English Puritanism in Puritanism and Separatism*, 1972, Farnborough, Hants.). The overall lines of the Regulative Principle, however, remained the same throughout the era. Indeed, the seeds of it can be found in Zwingli’s (1481–1531) removal of choral singing, organs, and clerical robes, and in William Tyndale (executed in 1536) who wanted scripture only to control both the Church’s government and worship. Men such as A Lasco, John Hooper and John Knox were in effect enunciating the Regulative Principle before the Puritan era proper. In a public disputation with the sub-prior of St. Andrews in 1547, Knox not only quotes Deut. 12:32, a famous Puritan text on this, saying ‘such ceremonies as God has ordained we allow, and with reverence we use them. But the question is of those God has not ordained ...’, but he also distinguishes the realm of God’s worship from ordinary daily affairs in this world, as far as *detailed* reliance on Scripture commands is concerned (quoted in note on pp. 362–3 of *The Church of Christ* by J. Bannerman, 1869); this is a fundamental Puritan distinction. Furthermore, we have the explicit testimony of the Presbyterians at the Savoy Conference in 1661, Baxter and Manton among them, that the cause of the Non-conformists had been stated in the troubles at Frankfurt, ‘and having continued still the same, you have no reason to suspect them of any considerable change’ (p. 50 in *The History of Non-Conformity*, 2nd ed., 1708). Horton Davies (in *Worship and Theology in England from Andrewes to Baxter and Fox, 1603–1690*, 1975, p.369) says that the *Exceptions of the Presbyterian brethren ... of 1661* is a good summary of Puritan

objections to the liturgy since the days of Cartwright, Travers, Field, and including the Hampton Court Conference and the preface to the Westminster *Directory for the Public Worship of God*. (“Worship Amongst the Puritans,” 18–19).

Two areas where there was some variation are whether any liturgical elements (set or precomposed prayers) are unlawful or just generally unsuitable, and whether Psalms can be sung in metre and in unison. But despite these variations as to the precise implications of the Principle, it was integral to Puritanism as a whole. If we have any remaining doubts about this, let Samuel Parker (in reply to whom Owen wrote *Truth and Innocence Vindicated*, 1669) put them to rest. He says in his attack on the Puritans that the foundation of all Puritanism is, “That nothing ought to be established in the worship of God but what is authorised in some precept or example in the word of God, which is the complete and adequate rule of worship” (quoted by Owen in his *Works*, Goold Ed., vol.13, p.462; Owen on the following page owns this principle as stated by Parker, with a little refinement) (19).

In the balance of the paper, Bennett states and defends the regulative principle from Puritan writings,<sup>104</sup> and covers at greatest length, some “Specific Issues.” Bennett lists these issues as “exclusive psalmody, structure and liturgy in prayer, open worship, the *charismata*, and other elements in the current worship scene” (“Worship Among the Puritans,” 22–23). Regarding the last, he names these as “drama, dance,<sup>105</sup> the use of music apart from the Psalms-hymns issue, and the use of visual impact generally (banners, processions, stunning architecture, etc....” He says: “Quite simply the Puritans did not go in for any of these” (28).

Regarding exclusive psalmody, the author, after noting some Puritan inconsistencies on the subject, concludes: “It would seem to me that if you go one inch beyond the Psalter for congregational praise, you can sing any hymn that is truly in accordance with Scripture’s doctrine and description of our relationship to God, because the content of such hymns can be defined as being derived from Scripture by just and necessary consequence, a Puritan doctrine.” On musical instruments in worship the author opines that if John Cotton allowed them in private worship to aid the singing, “[c]ould not this concession be applied to current English church life thus: that if for various reasons accompaniment in public worship is now necessary, it is allowable, provided the organ, piano, guitar, or

whatever is truly subservient to the furtherance of the singing and does not become a thing in itself” (“Worship among the Puritans,” 24).

On the second issue, that of “structured or even precomposed (or liturgical) prayers”, Bennett is not comfortable with some of the stricter Puritans’ absolute rejection of it. Noting that “as with the singing issue, there was variation within Puritanism,” he posits the questionable theory voiced by Horton Davies at least, that “if it had not been for the Independents at the Westminster Assembly, something more liturgical than a mere *Directory* would have been produced, something more akin to Knox’s *General Service Book* or the *Scottish Book of Common Order*” (25).

On the third and fourth issues Bennett largely agrees with the Puritan rejection of *charismatic* practices, and of allowing just anyone to lead in worship. On the latter he writes: “The clamour for participation, thus defined, in services of public worship seems akin to someone at a football match complaining that they cannot participate because they are not allowed onto the pitch! Surely they can be just as *involved*, in a sense, as the players (of course, the analogy breaks down at a certain point, as do most good analogies!). Could it not be that the desire for open worship is fuelled by a desire to ‘have a say’ oneself, in other words it is part of the world’s love for self-expression and its dislike for authority and submitting to it?” (27).

Bennett concludes his 1985 paper with remarks on Liberty of Conscience, a plea against radicalism, and honesty.

1. The Presbyterians at Savoy in 1661 made use of Romans 14 in their *Petition for Peace*: why drive people from Church and from preaching, or at least wound their consciences, by imposing things on them that you (Anglican Commissioners) admit not to be essential to worship, which others conscientiously object to? ‘We may conclude then, that it is good, even your selves to avoid such things unnecessary, by which your Brother stumbleth, is offended or made weak’ (*The History of NonConformity*, p.48–49). In the current situation, even if someone is very happy, as far as their own conscience before God is concerned, to introduce or go along with some recent innovations in Protestant worship, should

104. This he does mostly from the works of John Owen, William Bradshaw, William Cunningham, and James Bannerman (“Worship Among the Puritans,” 19–22).

105. Bennett notes appropriately on dancing that the “question about dancing among the Puritans was not, ‘has it a place in worship?’ but, ‘has it a place at all?’ at least mixed dancing” (28).

not such people restrain themselves if these things are not essential but likely to cause trouble to the consciences of other Christians and perhaps even to divide the Church?

2. Secondly, how rigorous should we be if we are convinced that the Regulative Principle is right and is pretty radical and far-reaching in its implications?... If we decide, having studied the Regulative Principle, that certain elements in our Church life must go, or certain others must be introduced, whether it be something to do with 'Christmas services,' or Psalm singing, or whatever, are we really obliged to implement it fully all at once? Is that necessarily God's will? I hope not, and I think not, and I believe that some at least of the Puritans would be with me. William Cunningham's words are surely apposite here: where innovations contrary to the Regulative Principle have crept in, 'we insist upon their being turned out, although, upon this latter point, Calvin, with his usual magnanimity, was always willing to have a reasonable regard to times and circumstances, and to the weaknesses and infirmities of the parties concerned.' (*The Reformation of the Church*, p.42).

3. My final remark is a challenge to honesty. Just as everyone, it seems, wants to be found on the same side as Calvin, be they Barthians, Amyraldians, or those traditionally called Calvinists, so to a degree there are many who want to be considered as heirs of the Puritans and who therefore would want to be thought of as upholders of the Regulative Principle; and fair enough too, for Church issues are at the heart of what is distinctively Puritan, and the Regulative Principle is a great issue as far as Puritan worship is concerned. But *if* we have to widen some of their categories almost beyond recognition, or enter into numerous tortured hypotheses about what they would have done if they had stood where we stand, knowing what we know (for example, about 'hot' and 'cool' communication) — if we have to do all this to maintain our profession of the Principle, it will be better to be honest and to admit that the Anglicans have been right all along!

### *Reformed Worship*

In 1986, a journal called *Reformed Worship* began publication, under the auspices of the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA). It is perhaps the

most misnamed magazine in church history. There is absolutely nothing distinctively Reformed about its content. Instead, its appearance helps to illustrate the theological downgrade within the CRCNA.

As a matter of fact, a search of its web site yielded no matches for the term "regulative principle." However, under the category of "classic" articles, one can find information on the use of drama, handbells, and movie clips in worship; songs for various seasons (Lent, Ascension, Pentecost, etc.); and avant-garde themes of worship and social justice—very fitting, given the CRCNA's increasing ecumenical ties with liberal Protestantism, as well as with Roman Catholicism.<sup>106</sup>

### *Naphtali Press*

In late 1986 Chris Coldwell formed the idea to found Naphtali Press to publish scarce and out-of-print classics of the Presbyterian and Reformed faith. In 1988 *An Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature* appeared under his editorship, which ran to five volumes. In addition to works covering a variety of subjects, there appeared in a 1989 issue of the *Anthology* an important extract relative to the regulative principle of worship. This was George Gillespie's "To All the Reformed Churches" which prefaced the young Scot's *Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies*, one of the most important pieces in the history of literature dealing with Presbyterian worship principles.

Besides all this, there is nothing which any way pertains to the worship of God left to the determination of human laws, beside the mere circumstances, which neither have any holiness in them, forasmuch as they have no other use and praise in sacred than they have in civil things, nor yet were particularly determinable in Scripture, because they are infinite; but sacred, significant ceremonies, such as cross, kneeling, surplice, holidays, bishopping, etc., which have no use and praise except in religion only, and which, also, were most easily determinable (yet not determined) within those bounds which the wisdom of God did set to his written Word, are such things as God never left to the determination of any human law. Neither have men any power to burden us with those or such like ordinances; For (says not our Lord himself to the churches), *I will put upon you none other burden: but that which ye have already hold fast till I come* (Rev. 2:24, 25). Wherefore, *pro hac*, etc., for this liberty we ought stoutly to fight against false teachers [*sic*].<sup>107</sup>

106. See [http://www.reformedworship.org/cprw\\_classics.htm](http://www.reformedworship.org/cprw_classics.htm).

107. George Gillespie, "To All in the Reformed Churches," *An Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature*, ed. Christopher

## Barry Gritters

On October 29, 1987, Barry Gritters, pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, delivered a Reformation Day Speech sponsored by the Lecture Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. It was so well received that it was turned into a pamphlet, entitled *Public Worship and the Reformed Faith*. In this address Pastor Gritters gave a standard presentation of the regulative principle: “Reformed believers teach that our worship is to be just what God commands it to be – nothing more, nothing less. This is of utmost importance for us to understand in connection with Biblical, Reformed worship. God does not leave it up to us to determine the manner of our worship of God. God’s Word regulates us in how we must worship Him.” He notes this is different from the Lutheran principle, “that whatever was not *explicitly forbidden* in the Bible was *permissible* in church.” “The Calvinists, on the other hand, held to what is called ‘*The Regulative Principle of Worship*.’ That regulative principle says, ‘We worship God only as He has *commanded* us in His Word.’”<sup>108</sup>

## Carl W. Bogue

In 1988, Dr. Carl Bogue, long-time pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church (PCA), Akron, Ohio, wrote *The Scriptural Law of Worship* for Presbyterian Heritage Publications. This is a standard, traditional defense of the regulative principle, which subsequently has served many as a succinct introductory tract on the topic. The booklet deals with the nature of worship, the Scriptural law of worship, a specific example from the Bible of the principle (Nadab and Abihu), and results when the principle has been violated.<sup>109</sup>

Part of his burden is to point out that denying the regulative principle enervates criticism of Roman Catholic superstition:

... Rome justifies many of her perversions on the grounds that they are not contrary to the Word. Worship of the Virgin Mary, confession to a priest, paying money to get one out of purgatory, sale of indulgences to cover sin, and a legion of other heresies are argued on such grounds. Even if some such things are not forbidden (which is rarely the case), the plea to permit in worship what is not forbidden is a Trojan horse filled with disaster. It was said that John Newton was a great lover of cats. Once he possessed a mother cat and a kitten. To aid the cats and keep down his own interruptions, he had two holes cut in the door—one for the old cat,

and a smaller one for the kitten. It had not occurred to him that the hole that would admit the larger cat would also admit the kitten; indeed, it would not only admit two cats, but any number of cats.

When you make an opening in the door of God’s house large enough to admit divided chancels, candles to aid worship, holy days and seasons such as Ash Wednesday (dare I say Easter and Christmas?), that same hole is likely in time to admit the worship of the Virgin Mary, prayers to St. Peter, confession to a priest, holy water, kissing the Pope’s toe, and a whole host of pollutions and monstrosities from which the Church, by God’s grace, escaped in the great revival of biblical Christianity during the Reformation of the sixteenth century (Bogue, 11).

A few years later, Dr. Bogue wrote on the regulative principle again touching upon the subject of integrity to subscription vows.

When I was a seminary student in the UPC [United Presbyterian Church], the conservatives were distressed by the blatant liberalism among the faculty. Here were men who had taken vows and subscribed to the creedal standards of the church, while in the classroom they would mock and ridicule such doctrines as the substitutionary atonement, the unique authority of the Bible, Christ as the only way of salvation, and other such issues.... And yet I submit to you that it is the same question of integrity which we face in our current struggle. Though the doctrinal error is not so extreme, the question of integrity is the same. When we promise to “receive and adopt” the Westminster Standards, only to turn around and worship God in ways He has not commanded, how may we not question a person’s integrity?<sup>110</sup>

Coldwell, 2.3 (Dallas, Tex: Naphtali Press, 1989) 9. The last part of the text cited here should be italicized as it represents a translation (this was corrected in the 1993 text). Mr. Coldwell also published in the *Anthology* an extract from David Calderwood’s *Perth Assembly* (1619), on “Reasons Against Festival Days,” 3.3 (1990).

108. This is available online at [http://www.prca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet\\_38.html](http://www.prca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet_38.html).

109. Carl W. Bogue, *The Scriptural Law of Worship* (Dallas, Tex.: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1988); later reprinted, with slight modification and additions, as *Scriptural Worship* (Dallas, Tex.: Blue Banner Books, 1993).

110. Carl W. Bogue, “Does the Regulative Principle Matter to the PCA?” *The Presbyterian Advocate*, ed. David C. Lachman, 3.3–4 (April–May 1993) 10.

*William Harrell*

On May 6, 1986, the Rev. William Harrell, pastor of Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Norfolk, Virginia, presented a paper to the Tidewater Reformed Ministers Fellowship. This paper (along with a postscript) was later published and distributed, at least partially in reaction to the opening worship service at the 1986 PCA General Assembly (see below). Entitled *Concerning Worship*, the pamphlet not only champions the regulative principle of worship per se, but also notes various consequences, including the hindering of evangelism:

... For many, the public worship of God is considered to be not so much a sacred and awesome duty and privilege, as it is a joyful (translated “entertaining”) spectacle, where everyone either wants to or is encouraged to get into the act. Hence we have adult choirs, children’s choirs, special music (often followed by applause!), lay readers of Scripture, orchestrated hand-raising and foot-stomping (purportedly as signs of the movement of the Holy Spirit), altar calls, elaborate liturgies, dramas, mimes, and the list goes on.

Such things gain their entrance into the Church under the heading of “every member ministry.” It is maintained that because a woman can sing a song, or a man can play a tuba, such abilities constitute spiritual gifts which must be exercised in the public worship of God, lest we grieve the Holy Spirit. Yet, does the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Word of God, lead us to believe that it is really His will for us to obscure the glory of Christ? For the obscuring of Christ is just what happens when a collection of professedly pious sideshows crowd around the preaching of the Word of God.

However people may seek to justify such intrusions in public worship, the practical message is very clear. It proclaims in actions (which speak louder than words) that if Jesus Christ, as He is presented to us in the gospel, is too offensive, or is not engaging enough, then there are other things in the program designed to arouse and hold one’s interest. This is nothing other than strange fire.

Indeed, such corruption has even invaded the preaching of the Word in those instances in which the minister

jokes, illustrates, simplifies, and abbreviates his message, lest he lose or offend his audience. The definite signal emitted from such preaching is apologetic in the worst sense. It is as if to say God’s Word is harsh and boring and full of antique complications which have no practical bearing on our lives, thus requiring the nice man in the pulpit to spice up the message. Is this not strange fire?<sup>111</sup>

Both William Harrell and Carl Bogue represent what might be termed “traditionalists” in their denomination. This is a broad term, and encompasses not only people who hold to a strictly Confessional understanding of the meaning of the regulative principle of worship per se, but also some who have subtly changed the meaning of the doctrine. Even among those who subscribe to the Confessional view of the regulative principle, not all would consistently maintain the implications of the doctrine on matters such as the content of worship song or the use of musical instrumentation. The unifying theme of “traditionalists” would include a rejection of “contemporary” worship (in the sense of “experimental”), particularly when such intrudes upon the proper reverence that should characterize public worship.

*The PCA*

But while traditionalists tried to hold the line in the PCA, other forces were moving the denomination in an opposite direction. Church bureaucrats spent thousands of dollars in 1983 on a multi-media presentation slated for the annual General Assembly meeting as part of “worship.” When the docket was adopted, the nomenclature was changed so that the event was no longer billed as a service of worship, but was rather an “inspirational service.” Even so, the slide show featured a “picture of Jesus.”

Three years later, the PCA General Assembly in Philadelphia deliberately included multi-media presentations as part of several worship services, and a local (non-PCA) church choir had the stage rocking during one of the times of public worship. Fifty commissioners to the General Assembly signed a formal protest which noted the “preponderance of musical presentations encouraged applause ... and a standing ovation...; practices which are in conflict with the Reformed understanding of worship, where recognition is given to God, not man.” The protest alleged that “the overall effect of these worship services was to produce approval and acceptance of non-Reformed traditions of worship, rather than to reflect the biblical basis and

111. William Harrell, *Concerning Worship* (Norfolk, Va.: Immanuel Publications, 1987) 5–6. Reprinted in *The Concerned Presbyterian Magazine*, ed. E. C. Case, 1.1 (Spring Quarter 1996) 19–23.

strength of our own distinct theology and practice of worship.”<sup>112</sup>

The General Assembly voted to answer the protest, and an ad hoc committee proposed a response that made a favorable reference to liturgical dance and bongo drums and endorsed applause during worship as a way of showing “appreciation to the singer and thanks to God as the author of all our gifts.” The response argued that “Insofar as the evening program contained worship, that worship was agreeable to Scripture [and] was a Biblical expression of the Regulative Principle of Worship.” The General Assembly, after a brief but spirited debate, approved the response (*Minutes*, 178–179).

Besides the obvious difficulties that this response poses in trying to reconcile it with a genuine understanding of the regulative principle of worship, what is also striking is the confusion evident in the minds of the members of the ad hoc committee. Their justification of various practices in what was billed as a worship service was predicated on their noting the fact that “The evening programs were intended to combine a worship time with programs which would illustrate and advance the great commission through the committees of the General Assembly. The programs were to include worship, but were not intended to be exclusively worship” (*Minutes*, 178). But, if the regulative principle has any meaning, and if there is not to be total confusion in our worship practices, then surely there must be services of worship which are dedicated totally to worship, and which are not cluttered or interfered with by matters of human innovation or of purely mundane interest.

Paradoxically, the same General Assembly took exception to the minutes of Texas Presbytery for its employment, in an installation service, of elements “not prescribed” in the Confession of Faith. Although not specified in the Committee on Review and Control report, the two practices which the Lone Star court had un-Constitutionally utilized were musical instrumentation and the singing of uninspired songs (*Minutes*, 200).

#### Other Works for this Period

Other works for the period include the following: Ernest C. Reisinger, *Thoughts on the Regulative Principle in a Reforming Situation* (Cape Coral, Fla.: Christian Gospel Foundation, 1982); Erroll Hulse, “Reformation of the Public Worship of God: A Plea for God-centered, Vertical, Structured Worship,” *Reformation Today*, 70 (November–December 1982) 3–9; Daniel E. Wray, “The Importance of Worship” in *The Banner*

*of Truth*, 253 (October 1984) 1–5; John Allen Delivuk, *The Doctrine and History of Worship in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (Pittsburgh: Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1982);<sup>113</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, *Worship that is Reformed according to Scripture* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1984);<sup>114</sup> and Edward A. Robson, “The Regulative Principle of Worship: A Reconsideration of Its Application,” *Covenantal Witness*, 100.2 (February 1984) 4–9; Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1986).<sup>115</sup> Dr. Robson’s work is one of the earliest writings to employ the abbreviation ‘RPW’.<sup>116</sup>

#### Overview: 1980–1989

In the 1980s, a growing re-awakening of interest in

112. *Minutes of the Fourteenth General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (N.p.: Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, 1986) 141–142.

113. “This work is comprehensive and careful, but does not quite give the ‘sense’ of Reformed Presbyterian worship, nor does it place that worship clearly in its current historical context. Still, as a description of a Reformed church that still seeks to worship only as the Bible commands, this work is illuminating.” Reid, “Recent Literature” in *Worship in the Presence of God*, 354–355.

114. “The second commandment tells us that we are not to use images or idols in our worship, for as the apostle Paul tells us, God is not represented by human art and imagination; God created us to be the reflection of his image (Acts 17:22–31). Taking this commandment seriously has been fundamental to the Reformed understanding of worship. If today American Protestant worship services have confused worship with art, or even worse, if we have confused it with entertainment, it is because we have failed to fathom the meaning of the second commandment” (*Worship that is Reformed*, 2). The book has an extensive bibliography; but “‘Reformed worship’ is defined as worship ‘according to Scripture,’ which he [Old] hastens to add is not ‘Bible-thumping literalism’ but using the Word as a general guide (p. 3). So it is not surprising that Dr. Old judges exclusive psalmody as ‘extreme’ (p. 55), although admitting that exclusive hymnody is as well!” Reid, “Recent Literature” in *Worship in the Presence of God*, 338.

115. The phrase regulative principle is employed once in J. I. Packer’s foreword (xvi), but Ryken, who discusses the Puritan notion of scriptural warrant and has a chapter on “Church and Worship,” does not. Packer employs the phrase in a similar context and manner in *Quest for Godliness* (1990), 28.

116. Dr. Robson “defends four theses in a fresh way: first, the R.P.W. (as he fondly terms it), is one principle among many; all are important. Second, the R.P.W. incorrectly applied becomes prohibitionism, which is the attitude that ‘condemns one evil in specific terms, but always misses or even practices the same type of evil in a different context’ (p. 6). Third, the R.P.W. inconsistently applied allows us to fall into didactic and theological error. The errors of hymns in the *Trinity Hymnal* and the *Psalter Hymnal*—of which he discusses a few—show this. Fourth, the R.P.W., correctly applied, is a source of praise to God and edification to man.” Reid, “Recent Literature” in *Worship in the Presence of God*, 340.

Puritanism clashed with the views of others who advocated what amounted to a “high-church” liturgical approach. The Presbyterian Church in America, ostensibly committed to the Westminster Standards, largely rejected an historic Presbyterian understanding of worship; while at the same time, PCA traditionalists could point, perhaps in a Pollyannaish fashion, to little victories as a portent of better days to come. On the other hand, the work of some small publishers, and the appearance of several articles and tracts, presaged a greater interest in publishing works old and new on the regulative principle of worship.

#### VI. THE 1990S: AN AVOIDABLE PRINCIPLE NO LONGER

The early 1990s saw more works on the regulative principle of worship materialize, as well as greater opposition to the Presbyterian doctrine. With the Internet’s growth in the mid 1990s, the amount of material began to come at a faster pace than ever before, further cementing the moniker for the Calvinistic and Puritan principle in popular and scholastic writing.

#### 1990 *Psalmody Conference*

This decade was kicked off so to speak with an historic Psalmody conference. “One of the key books in the early twentieth century was *The Psalms in Worship...*, originally published after two psalmody conventions in 1905, held in Pittsburgh and Chicago and sponsored by the United Presbyterian Church of North America (UPCNA).<sup>117</sup> Until the 1990 Psalmody Conference at Flat Rock, North Carolina, this was the last such gathering in the world...”<sup>118</sup> This 1990 conference probably ranks as one of the more important events in the latter part of the twentieth-century amongst factors contributing to a greater awareness of the regulative principle of worship. Certainly, at least one of the lasting effects was the renewed interest it sparked in conservative Presbyterian circles for a greater use of the Psalms in congregational singing. In reporting on a 2003 debate

117. John McNaugher, ed., *The Psalms in Worship: a Series of Convention Papers Bearing Upon the Place of the Psalms in the Worship of the Church* (United Presbyterian Board of Publication, Pittsburgh, Pa. USA, 1907). Reprinted by SWRB (Edmonton, Alberta: 1992). The editor’s name is McNaugher not McNaught as misspelled on the cover and new title page of the reprint.

118. Frank J. Smith, “Psalmody Revisited,” *Contra Mundum* 5 (Fall 1992) 70. The issues of *Contra Mundum* are archived at: <http://www.contra-mundum.org/journals.html>.

119. *Presbyterian & Reformed News* 9.1 (January–March 2003) 9.

on exclusive psalmody sponsored by Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, this present author, in his capacity as an ecclesiastical journalist, observed: “Throughout the Presbyterian and Reformed community, in relatively recent history, the question of the content of worship music has become a vibrant issue only over the past decade or so. For example, when the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) was founded in 1973, the issue within PCA circles, was almost totally unknown. However, through a variety of means, the question has, as it has done in centuries past, generated extensive discussion in the Reformed world. One of the factors which impacted the discussion was the 1990 International Psalmody Conference, held at Bonclarken, Flat Rock, North Carolina, a conference which was commended or endorsed by several denominations, including the PCA.”<sup>119</sup>

The initial concept and planning for such a conference was undertaken by The Presbyterian Reformed Church, a small denomination which was formed with the aid of Professor John Murray in 1965. A report printed in the pages of the church’s quarterly publication details the history of the idea for the conference and its apparent success:

Four years ago, on August 22, 1986, the Presbytery voted to appoint a committee of Dr. William Young and Arthur Lamoureux for the purpose of forming a group from other Presbyterian and Reformed denominations to plan a psalmody conference. This idea was originally suggested to the presbytery [*sic*] by G. I. Williamson on April 8, 1972. On August 1, 1990, after much planning and preparation the long awaited Conference became a reality.

The Conference was favored with excellent weather and the meeting place, Bonclarken Assembly in Flat Rock, NC, proved to [be] most enjoyable. Bonclarken is owned and operated by the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and included a hotel which is on the Historic Register, a spacious Chapel in which to meet and facilities to house and feed a multitude. There were 320 registered participants with many attending as a family. They came from 26 States as well as Canada and even a representative from Scotland. Over 15 denominations took part in this Conference. Seven outstanding papers were presented over the two and a half day Conference which also included four workshops, question and answer periods and activities for the younger children. In addition to the planned activities there was also sufficient time allotted for more spontaneous gatherings to

renew old acquaintances, make new ones, sing psalms, or discuss topics of interest.

A special Psalter/Program Book was printed and distributed to all participants. In addition to brief biographies of the Conference speakers, over 30 Psalm selections with tunes from five existing Psalters are contained in this composite Psalter.<sup>120</sup> During the course of the Conference, the gathered assembly had opportunity to sing almost the entire Psalter. The singing was entirely *a cappella* and directed by precentors from the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America.

The ten literature and book tables on display in the foyer of the Bonclarken Hotel were another highlight of the Conference. These were staffed by various participating denominations and by publishers and distributors of Christian books.<sup>121</sup>

From all indications, we can conclude that this undertaking was well received, apparently exceeding our expectations. Many have inquired as to the possibility of having similar meetings in the future. There was in general a good feeling of enthusiasm and fellowship. We sense that there has been a blessing through new relationships that were made and the dialogue that has ensued between various like minded Reformed believers.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt thanks to all groups and individuals who supported, participated in, or assisted in any fashion to bring this program to a successful conclusion and in so doing joined in this praise to the glory of God, through this very special emphasis on the Psalms.<sup>122</sup>

The lectures presented at the 1990 Psalmody Conference were “The Scriptural Regulative Principle of Worship,” by G. I. Williamson; “The Place of Psalm Singing in Public Worship,” by Frank J. Smith; “The History of Psalmody,” by Dr. William Young; “The Imprecatory Psalms,” by Rev. David Compton; “Christ and The Psalms,” by Dr. Randall Ruble; “The Psalms—The Christian’s Biography,” by Prof. Herman Hanko; and “The Psalms—Songs of Sanctification,” by Dr. Charles Butler.<sup>123</sup>

#### Clowney’s ‘Presbyterian Worship’

Another smaller but more ecumenical gathering pertaining to worship took place in 1990 in Cambridge,

England. In the autumn of the year the Faith and Church Study Unit of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship held a meeting. This study group had produced four previous collections of papers on doctrinal issues, and the fifth volume was to be on worship. D. A. Carson notes that the members had “agreed to write chapters in advance of a meeting where all the papers were subjected, paragraph by paragraph, to discussion and critique.”<sup>124</sup> Each tradition presented was tasked to “not only describe but also in some measure to offer thoughtful critique of his or her own tradition” in comparison to two general studies on Old and New Testament worship, which they were also

120. *1990 Psalmody Conference: Praising God with Psalms. Psalter and Program* (Printed in U.S.A.: Published by the 1990 Psalmody Conference Committee, 1990). The Foreword states: “At a meeting of the presbytery of the Presbyterian Reformed Church, held in Toronto, Canada on August 22, 1986, action was taken to explore the possibility of holding a non-denominational conference to encourage Psalm singing. Envisioned was a meeting on the North American continent similar to the Psalm-singers’ Conference held at Belfast, Ireland in August, 1902, although more limited in scope. The desire was to join more closely together in Christian fellowship the varying congregations who alike praise the Most High with the songs of Zion; also, to encourage a more extensive use of inspired and divinely authorized songs of praise in churches that profess adherence to the sufficiency of Scripture. In due time, there emerged seven dedicated churchmen, from several Presbyterian and Reformed church bodies, who formed the Conference Planning Committee, and preparations for this event began in earnest with the first meeting held in Pittsburgh, January 17–18, 1989. Their fervent prayer is that this unpretentious publication will serve as a lasting reminder, that the purposes noted above have been realized to the glory alone of our Lord. Grateful acknowledgements are hereby extended to those denominations and individuals who provided financial assistance and the meeting place; to all participants who so graciously agreed to serve as speakers, leaders, and in numerous unlisted capacities; and to the believers who were in attendance, that together we might enjoy praising God through the Psalms.” The committee contained the following members: Dr. Charles Butler, American Presbyterian Church; Prof. Herman Hanko, Protestant Reformed Churches; Mr. Arthur Lamoureux (Conference Director), Presbyterian Reformed Church; Rev. Frank Schutz (RPCNA); Rev. Frank Smith (PCA); Dr. John Stodghill (Committee Chairman), Associate Reformed Presbyterian; Dr. William Young, Presbyterian Reformed Church.

121. Among these were Chris Coldwell (Naphtali Press) and antiquarian bookseller David C. Lachman.

122. “News and Events: Psalmody Conference,” *The Presbyterian Reformed Magazine* 5.2 (Summer 1990) 98–99.

123. “The Program,” *1990 Psalmody Conference*, 1–2. Scans of the papers, conference brochure, conference psalter, and recordings of audio and video may be obtained from Brian Hanley. Contact Grace Presbyterian Church, PMB 112, 123 E Main Street, Suite 2, Denville, N.J. 07834.

124. D. A. Carson, ed., *Worship: Adoration and Action* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1993; reprint, Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002) 11–12.

free to critique where they disagreed with the “emphasis or details....” (Carson, *Worship*, 17) The perspectives presented ranged from the Anglican and Lutheran to the Charismatic. The Presbyterian view, appropriately entitled “Presbyterian Worship,” was penned by the late Edmund P. Clowney, at the time Emeritus Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. This paper was important in that it brought the Presbyterian concept of the regulative principle to a broader evangelical audience.<sup>125</sup> Dr. Clowney opens his contribution by stating:

If historic Presbyterian worship be judged distinctive today, it is surely not because the Scottish fathers sought to develop innovations in worship that might justify a brand name. Their desire was to reform Christian worship according to Scripture. They understood this to mean the elimination from public worship of all rites and ceremonies without divine warrant and the inclusion of only those elements of worship that God has commanded for his new covenant people. This conviction has not escaped the criticism of those who have viewed its generic, no-name-brand practice of worship as barren and sterile (110).

Following this introduction Dr. Clowney moves to a discussion of circumstances in worship by noting that even Rome via Vatican II “now sought to provide for cultural diversity in liturgy,” writing:

The Westminster Assembly, with a radically different agenda [from Rome], also took account of different customs and settings for worship. The Divines clearly recognized an area touching ‘some circumstances’ of worship ‘common to human actions and societies’ that may be ordered in the ‘light of nature’ without express warrant in Scripture [Westminster Confession, I.6]. Certainly the circumstances of worship have varied widely in Presbyterian history. Given these changing settings and the freedom of Presbyterian worship from fixed forms, can any worship be defined as distinctively

125. Peter Lewis discusses the regulative principle in reviewing the Puritan background to Free Church worship in his chapter: “Free Church’ Worship in Britain,” 147–157. In his introductory paper, Carson mentions the principle only in reference to Clowney, when, noting that there was no interaction amongst or rebuttals between the various writers, he remarks: “... that the thoughtful reader cannot help but be fascinated by the way, say, that Clowney deploys Scripture in seeking to establish (and delimit!) the regulative principle (‘Presbyterian Worship’), and the way that Alistair Brown deploys Scripture in defence of ‘Charismatically-Orientated Worship’. One cannot help thinking about how each would reply to the other in print” (17).

Presbyterian? So loyal a Presbyterian as the late Robert Rayburn subtitled his book on renewal in worship, *Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church*. It is true that Reformed and Puritan emphases have been a major factor in the development of evangelical worship; it is also true that the practice of worship in evangelical Presbyterian churches may often be broadly evangelical rather than distinctively Reformed. Nevertheless, Reformed and Presbyterian principles of worship have been developed from Scripture and brought to expression in practices that have a clear tradition. Freedom from any required form of worship has not produced chaos in Presbyterian worship; indeed, the Presbyterian churches have often rejected the dictates of king, pope, and bishop only to follow uncritically the dictates of custom. Yet historic Presbyterianism has taken account of the ordering of worship as well as of its freedom. The Westminster Assembly’s *Directory for the Public Worship of God* is markedly different from the *Book of Common Prayer*, but it does describe the elements of public worship and it presents an order for the services of the church. Its directions for prayers are not mandatory, but they do model the scriptural richness of the ministry of adoration, confession, and intercession (111).

Dr. Clowney then proceeds to lay out two “foundational convictions” of Presbyterian worship, before discussing several distinctions of the tradition. The first foundational conviction is “affirmed in the phrase *solī Deo Gloria*.” The Reformed churches emphasized “God’s electing grace in Christ. Reformed theology rejoiced to find God’s glory central, not only in salvation, but in all the works of the Lord. ‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.’ This answer to the first question of the Shorter Catechism shapes Presbyterian worship as well as theology. God does not exist for our sake, but we exist for God’s sake. Worship ascribes to God the glory due to his name” (111). While granting then that all “of life is a service to God,” the professor then proceeds to reason for setting apart time specifically for worship, which leads naturally enough to a discussion of the second foundational conviction of Presbyterian worship, “the Reformational emphasis on the Bible.” Only “Scripture gives that knowledge of God and of his will that is necessary to salvation” (112–113).

Observing the Westminster Assembly’s recognition “that the divine authority of Scripture was exclusive,” and sufficient, the professor remarks on the consequence this has for worship practices: “If in doctrine nothing may be added to the teaching of Scripture, so, too, in worship nothing may be added to what God has

revealed. A preacher, a church, a pope has no right to require Christians to believe what the Bible does not teach. No more does a preacher, a church, a pope have a right to require practices in worship that God has not required” (113). Dr. Clowney then cites the Assembly’s doctrine on Christian Liberty (Westminster Confession Chapter 20), and how this is “applied specifically to worship” in their chapter on worship (21.1); he summarized the doctrine thusly: “In worship, therefore, anything that God has not commanded is forbidden” (113–114). Clowney makes clear how the “Westminster Divines saw the issue respecting worship in terms of liberty of conscience,” and concludes: “No one—no state, church, or individual—may bind my conscience to believe what God has not revealed in Scripture. Neither may anyone require me to practice in worship what God has not required” (114).

Dr. Clowney writes that this principle is “strongly presented to Israel in God’s law,” and supports this from Leviticus 10:1–3 (cf. 16:12) and Deuteronomy 12:32. After asking the question “[d]oes this principle also continue in the New Testament?”, he cites J. I. Packer’s denial and his subsequent characterization of the principle as an innovation of the Puritans (114). While granting that there was amplification of the principle, and “an unduly legalistic development of it in the Puritan reformation,” the professor, who had previously criticized Packer’s position,<sup>126</sup> does so for a second time, maintaining that “to describe it as an innovation fails to take sufficient account of its advocacy by John Calvin and John Knox.”

He then discusses the Reformers on Christian liberty and their rejection of the notion that the church has power to create “new ordinances respecting worship beyond what God has commanded.” Half-way into the article, he finally uses the term ‘regulative principle’ for the first time.

Discussion of this so-called ‘regulative principle’ sometimes leaves out of account the context assumed by Calvin and the Westminster Divines: the regulation of worship by the church (or, indeed, the state). Liberty of conscience is the issue. ‘All arbitrary lordship is an encroachment upon God’s Kingdom.’<sup>127</sup>

After detailing John Knox’s statement and defense of the principle, Dr. Clowney again addresses Packer’s objection:

Packer objects that the regulative principle is not a necessary implication of the *authority* and *sufficiency* of

Scripture, but that it is a question of the *contents* and *interpretation* of Scripture. The mere fact that God has spoken in his Word, and that the Word of God is to be obeyed in all things, does not in itself exclude the possibility that God may have withheld a liberty of conscience such as the Westminster Confession describes. He may, for example, have licensed the church to determine how divine worship was to be offered. But suppose such a possibility were allowed with respect to doctrine. Could the Reformed doctrine of the *sufficiency* of Scripture then be maintained? If the church can promulgate new doctrines that bind the conscience (that *must* be believed for salvation), then the Scripture is not a sufficient revelation. But is the case different when worship is in view? Suppose the church does have the authority to determine what it will do in worship, apart from any particular teaching in God’s Word, would the worshiper’s conscience be left free, nevertheless, if the church did not make these practices binding? In the case of the Roman Mass, of course, the answer is clear, because that church *requires* participation in the Mass for salvation. But even if such a claim were not made, the problem remains. God does require participation in corporate as well as private worship. For this reason, public worship is not an optional exercise; to require attendance and participation, as it must, the church needs to be able to appeal to God’s authority. If it must then go beyond Scripture to determine what worship is acceptable to God, Scripture cannot be a sufficient rule for public worship (116).

Dr. Clowney defends the continuance of the regulative principle as expressed in Deuteronomy 12:29–32 for the New Testament church. He does so by appealing to “the authority of the Lord’s commandment (1 Cor. 14:37, 38),” and to the “term that Paul apparently coined” which expressed “his endorsement of the principle...” Paul “condemns the ‘self-imposed worship’ of the false teachers at Colosse” (Col. 2:23). Noting, as Calvin acknowledges (*Institutes*, IV.10.30), God’s wisdom in not prescribing a particular directory of worship in the New Testament “so that the church in various times and places could order its worship appropriately,” Clowney writes nonetheless that this allowance in the “proper ordering of corporate worship cannot be extended ... to include the introduction of new *elements* of worship.” He then proceeds to list the elements of

126. See Clowney, “Distinctive Emphases in Presbyterian Church Polity,” in *Pressing Toward the Mark*, 100–105. See Packer, “The Puritan Approach to Worship,” in *Diversity in Unity*, 4–5.

127. Dr. Clowney is citing Calvin’s *Institutes*, IV.10.7.

Christian worship by New Testament precept and example (116–117).

In the balance of his article Dr. Clowney covers some of the distinctive features of Presbyterian worship: a New Testament freedom regarding “appropriate arrangement of the *circumstances* of worship,”<sup>128</sup> its reflection of covenant theology, its being “anchored in the Presbyterian doctrine of the Lord’s Day as the Christian Sabbath,” and its care of the poor in recovering the diaconal ministry. He then concludes his paper by addressing the “history of the order of service in Reformed and Presbyterian history”:

It might seem that even a brief article on Presbyterian worship should discuss the history of the order of service in Reformed and Presbyterian history. This task

128. It is here where the author makes known his exceptions to the practice of a *cappella* singing and exclusive psalmody. “The long controversy over the use of instrumental accompaniment in singing seems to arise from a failure to grasp the implications of the Westminster Confession definition of a ‘circumstance’. If the use of instruments to accompany and support singing is a circumstance ‘common to human actions and societies’, it does not require New Testament authorization, for it is not in itself a religious observance, but only a culturally conditioned way of supporting singing” (117). Then in an endnote Dr. Clowney remarks: “Although in a service of dedication for a new organ, the instrument may be elevated to an element of worship—or almost a participant!” (238). Ironically, the implication of the first statement is that the Westminster Divines, who rejected instrumental music in worship, did not understand the implications of their own definition! For an opposing view to the notion that instrumental accompaniment may properly be regarded as a circumstantial matter, see Girardeau’s *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of God and Discretionary Power of the Church*. For the view current at the time of the Assembly, see Nick Needham’s “Westminster and Worship: Psalms, Hymns? and Musical Instruments” in *The Westminster Confession Into the 21st Century*, volume two. As for psalmody, Dr. Clowney grants its importance and that “the singing of Psalms was characteristic of the Reformation.” He writes that the “regulative principle was later invoked to require the exclusive use of the Psalms in worship” and argues against the support of the position from Ephesians 5:18–21 and Colossians 3:16–17 (117–118), concluding that “Paul surely would not have so described the production of spiritual songs if he had been speaking about the Psalms of the Old Testament.” He does grant that the “close connection in Scottish Presbyterian conviction between the regulative principle and the exclusive use of Psalms did keep worship focused on the glory of God, and undergirded it with a deep solemnity and earnestness. The richness of the God-centered piety of the Psalms shaped Presbyterian devotion.” Dr. Clowney goes on to write that “Psalm-singing Presbyterians readily understood the church as the people of God, but this understanding overshadowed their grasp of the church as the body of Christ and the fellowship of the Spirit. The Presbyterian emphasis well and truly maintained the unity of God’s covenant people in the old covenant and the new. If there was a weakness, it was in the need to take fuller account of the transformation of covenant renewal and fulfillment in Christ” (118).

has been often undertaken, making it evident that a fixed order of service has deep roots in the Reformed branch of the Reformation. Charles W. Baird’s book, *Eutaxia*, published in 1855, created a stir in Presbyterian circles at that time by presenting the orders of service with accompanying prayers from Reformed sources, including Calvin’s Geneva, Knox’s Scotland, and Baxter’s England.

Yet it would run contrary to the Presbyterian theology of liberty in worship to seek to develop a fixed liturgy. Even principles of ordering liturgy would have to be given Scriptural support before they could be made mandatory. One such principle, often stated in Reformed circles, is that the order of worship must alternate between God’s address to his people and their response to God. That the elements of worship include both cannot be disputed: God does address his people through the Scriptures, in preaching, in the blessing. The people also respond to God in prayer and praise. They say, ‘Amen’ to what God says (1 Cor. 14:16). But nowhere does the Bible require that worship must proceed with a fixed alternation of God’s address and response. Further, Scripture constantly blends the worship of God with the edification of his people. When God’s people meet in his name, they meet with each other even as they stand before him. It would be not only arbitrary but unscriptural to exclude from a service of worship the means by which Christians may encourage one another as they draw near to God (Heb. 10:25; Col. 3:16). We do not seek first to benefit the saints when we hallow God’s name, but hallowing God’s name does benefit the saints.

At the same time, Paul’s careful guarding of worship at Corinth makes clear that worship is not a human-centered social occasion, arranged for entertainment and conviviality, so that only the golden calf is missing. The goal of worship is met when the stranger, rebuked for his sin, falls down, and says, ‘God is really among you!’ (1 Cor. 14:25). So are the Old Testament promises fulfilled in the New (Isa. 45:14) as the people of God draw near to the heavenly festival, to Jesus, the Lord of glory, and to our God, a consuming fire. True evangelism and nurture are not impeded, but mightily advanced when the worshipping church sees with awe the Christ of the lampstands and the glory of the throne (Rev. 1:17).

*Worship in the Presence of God*

In 1992, more than a decade's worth of labor came to fruition with the publication of *Worship in the Presence of God: A collection of essays on the nature, elements, and historic views and practice of worship*.<sup>129</sup> Edited by a Presbyterian Church in America pastor (Frank J. Smith) and ruling elder (David C. Lachman), the volume was designed as the first treatment in the twentieth century of all of the elements of worship from the traditional Presbyterian and Reformed perspective.

Several of the essays clearly set forth the regulative principle. In the introductory chapter, "What is Worship?," Dr. Smith contends that worship is special (distinct from other areas of life), dialogical (in the form of a dialog between God and man), and prescribed. He illustrates the regulative principle this way:

Imagine a hillcountry war-hero, a man who led his troops victoriously in battle, who is going to be honored by his men after their return from the war. His fellow officers, however, are from Evanston, Illinois; Berkeley, California; and Short Hills, New Jersey; and they don't exactly understand their leader's tastes. As they prepare a great banquet in his honor, they think of how he enjoys listening to music, and eating, and drinking. So, they have the best chamber orchestra, caviar, and champagne that money can buy, all prepared for him and his wife whom they have flown in from their beloved hills. What's wrong with this? Well, yes, he enjoys music, but he'd much prefer stomping his feet to the sounds of a banjo, a guitar, and a fiddle. Yes, he enjoys eating, but what's this stuff called caviar? It's black-eyed peas, grits, cornbread, and venison or squirrel meat which has pleasure. Yes, he enjoys drinking, but champagne? His specialty is "Mountain Dew" (and we don't, of course, mean the product from Pepsi-Cola). The obvious point is that if they had really wanted to honor their hero, they would have found out about those things which pleased him and provided those for him, rather than trying to please him their own way. Similarly, if we truly want to please the Mighty Warrior who has effected our salvation, we will find out which things delight Him, and perform those things for Him. Just as it is not simply the fact of a banquet, but also the content which is important, so it is not just the fact of worship which is important. The content—the elements which comprise worship—is important as well (*Worship in the Presence of God*, 15–16).

The essay continues:

The parts of worship have often been called elements of worship. 'Element' is almost metaphoric, invoking images of scientific reality. What we are contending for is the truth that whether speaking of a chemical element or an element of worship, the term 'element' signifies that which is fundamental, foundational, irreducible—in chemical terms, you can't boil it down any farther.

When we argue for the necessity of 'forms,' we are not saying that the forms exist independently of the elements or that the forms must be preserved for their own sakes. We are, however, maintaining that an element comes as a package deal; that it generally has form, purpose, and content; and that we cannot divorce these constitutive aspects from one another and still have the element. It is significant that the main mark of the Church has form as well as content: it is the *preaching* of the Word, and not just the Word itself. (*Worship in the Presence of God*, 16).

Other essays also teach the regulative principle. In "The Fear of the Lord in Worship," Herman Hanko writes: "We are not in a position to decide how we ought to worship God any more than a subject of the queen of England is in a position to decide how he or she will enter the queen's presence. God alone must tell us how He is to be worshipped. We are bound, absolutely, to the principles which God Himself sets forth in Scripture. When we refuse to follow the Scriptures' instructions on this point, we break the Second Commandment, create a graven image, and bring down on us and our children the terrible judgment of God" (*Worship in the Presence of God*, 26).

In an essay entitled, "Hear Ye Him': Worship in the New Testament," Sherman Isbell rhetorically asks, "can we conjure the blessing of God upon our own inventions?"; and he answers: "When the Lord's few and simple ordinances must vie with human traditions in worship, human fancy may be satisfied, and there may be increase in numbers of people attending, in financial resources, in construction of facilities, and in ministry enterprises. But to the extent that this increase is not occurring through the observance of Christ's commands, it is not the expansion of the kingdom of God. The kingdom is not furthered by eschewing the prescriptions of Christ in the Scripture" (*Worship in the Presence of God*, 65).

129. Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, eds., *Worship in the Presence of God: A collection of essays on the nature, elements, and historic views and practice of worship* (Greenville, S.C.: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1992).

William Young's classic article on "The Second Commandment . . ." appears in this volume (75–90). So also does an original article by Dr. Lachman on "Christian Liberty and Worship," which utilized standard regulative principle proof texts (such as Leviticus 9:14–10:7; 1 Chronicles 15:2, 13; and Jeremiah 7:30, 31) to demonstrate that "worship, if it is to be pleasing to God, must be worship which He has commanded" (*Worship in the Presence of God*, 93).

Kevin Reed's historical piece, "John Knox and the Reformation of Worship in the Scottish Reformation," extensively illustrates Knox's commitment to the principle, as well as to its corollary, the purity of worship. The author applies Knox's teaching to today, by writing: "*The Church needs to reaffirm the regulative principle of worship.* Nothing should be admitted into the worship of God, unless it possesses a clear Scriptural warrant. This principle is merely an extension of the *sola scriptura* perspective of Protestant theology, as applied to the realm of worship. Anything less is a violation of the demands of the living God, who says, 'You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.' 'Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it' (Deut. 4:2; 12:32)." Kevin Reed also avers: "In the modern pluralistic age, the Church has lost a sense of the immorality of false worship. False religious opinions and practices are not simply academic differences; they are a form of moral corruption which destroys the souls of men. This truth should provide the Church with a sense of urgency as it confronts men in their false worship" (*Worship in the Presence of God*, 329, 332).

Of the remainder of the nineteen contributions, we would briefly take note of the final essay, as we have had occasion to reference it a number of times in this present survey. Thomas G. Reid's "The Acceptable Way of Worshipping the True God": Recent Writings on Worship of Particular Interest to Reformed Christians" is an excellent summary of the recent literature on the subject of Reformed worship which had appeared to that point in time (*Worship in the Presence of God*, 335–368).

*James B. Jordan*

In response to the Smith/Lachman book, James Jordan collated a series of articles into a book entitled,

130. James B. Jordan, *Liturgical Nestorianism: A Critical Review of "Worship in the Presence of God"* (Niceville, Florida: Transfiguration Press, 1994).

*Liturgical Nestorianism: A Critical Review of "Worship in the Presence of God."*<sup>130</sup>

Mr. Jordan states that the "main purpose" of *Worship in the Presence of God* "is to argue for a highly rarefied version of the Reformed position regarding worship, the so-called Regulative Principle of Worship." He asserts that the view "that whatever is not actually commanded in the New Testament to be done in worship, is forbidden," is "the 'sect' form of the Regulative Principle. The 'catholic' form, which commands the adherence of most of the conservative Calvinistic community, states that we are to worship only as the Bible teaches, and that such teaching is found by way of command, principle, example, pattern, and every other mode of communication God has determined to use. The sect form of the Regulative Principle comes to the Bible with the pre-determined notion that God can direct us only by means of explicit commands, a notion that does not arise from the Bible itself, and a notion that is actually unworkable in practice. The catholic form of the Regulative Principle, to which I adhere, allows God to decide how to communicate His will to us, and thus recognizes much more in the Bible about worship than does the sect form." He also writes that most of the volume's writers "seem aware of only a small percentage of what the Bible has to say about worship" (*Liturgical Nestorianism*, 9–10).

His proposal is for a "third way," which would steer between the two extremes of those who adhere to a "sect" form of the Regulative Principle, and those who do not adhere to the principle at all (11).

With all due respect to Mr. Jordan, he has mischaracterized the traditional regulative principle position. To the best of our knowledge, no one in the regulative principle of worship camp doubts that God has prescribed the church's worship not only by direct command, but also by approved example and by good and necessary consequence.

James Jordan calls those who hold to the "sect" form of the regulative principle "Minimalists," and he accuses them of being "dispensational." "They have erected an arbitrary wall between Old Creation and New Creation worship, and they do not understand how the Old Creation is transfigured into the New in Christ. In fact, they don't seem to understand the meaning of the fact that the sacrifices and rituals of the Old Creation never took away sin, and were always memorials, dramatized prayers." In his view, Christian worship is sacrificial. Furthermore, not only are Minimalists dispensationalistic—they are also "radically anti-covenantal." This is because they fail to recognize that "the patterns that God

established for His people in their childhood—such as festivals, vestments, incense, musical instruments, and songs other than the psalter—may well be of value in showing us the kinds of things God likes and that we may still do now that we have come to redemptive-historical maturity in Christ” (21–22).

Furthermore, he accuses the Minimalists of being rationalists, since their concern for “spiritual” worship means “immaterial and intellectual, which is a Greek understanding of the term.” In his view, “the Minimalists think that structure is opposed to Spirit, an idea thoroughly bathed in the thinking of the Enlightenment, so that while worship in the Old Creation was structured, now worship in the New Creation is ‘spiritual.’ All of this shows the influence of pagan irrationalism; none of it has Biblical foundation” (22–23).

Thirdly, Mr. Jordan accuses his opponents of being pagan in their philosophical orientation. He writes that

[t]he Minimalists are otherworldly in the pagan sense. The Tabernacle and Temple of the Old Creation were symbols of the cosmos, and we still worship God in the cosmos. God is enthroned in the cosmos, the Temple He built for Himself in Genesis 1. Thus, to build a house of worship and adorn it somewhat along the lines of the Tabernacle or Temple is not a mistake. Minimalist churches have bare white walls, and this is because they are otherworldly. (The influence here is Stoicism....) To be sure, the Christian house of worship is not the same as the Tabernacle, and it would be a liturgical mistake simply to copy it. But to beautify the walls of the house of worship, and to vest the minister robes of glory—these are fully Biblical (*Liturgical Nestorianism*, 23).

In response, let it be noted that the standard Reformed Protestant position regarding the regulative principle, including corollaries such as those which would be in opposition to the continuation of an outward showiness with respect to worship, is not based on Stoicism, but is based on the very Biblical distinction between the ceremonial worship of the Old Covenant, and the fulfilled, heavenly-oriented worship of the New Covenant.

Fourthly, Mr. Jordan accuses the Minimalists of tending “to be gnostic and anti-historical.” He writes:

They assume that the “simple” worship of the New Testament era must establish the boundaries of worship for all time, as opposed to setting the direction for the course of liturgical development.

James Jordan draws connections between worship and Old Testament civil legislation. In his view,

the social laws are presented in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy in a way that connects them radically to the Tabernacle service. In order to apply them today, as 2 Timothy 3:16–17 requires, we must study them in terms of principles and analogies, something the Minimalist hermeneutics forbids. According to the Minimalists, if these laws were not repeated in the epistles, one by one, without being tied to the Tabernacle, then they are gone for good.

Contrary to the Minimalists, the Bible shows a principle of maturation from glory to glory. The “simple” worship of the patriarchs transformed into the more complex and artistically rich worship of the Sinaitic Covenant, and then further with the Temple worship of the Kingdom Covenant. Revelation 2–3 shows us seven churches in seven different estates, and uses imagery from seven periods of Bible history to describe each of them. This shows us that churches will find themselves in varying situations in history, and that these situations are analogous to situations in Bible history. Worship may be “simple” in one cultural setting and more complex and artistically rich in another, without departing from the same fundamental norms. The Minimalist, however, denies the reality of historical maturation and differentiation. In point of fact, artistically rich worship is a characteristic of city culture, and artistically plain worship is a characteristic of countryside culture. The historical movement from the camp of Moses to the city of David is a movement from farm to city, as is the larger movement from the garden of Eden to the New Jerusalem. Thus, worship should grow in artistic richness as history matures toward the fullness of Christ’s kingdom.

Now, I and other Reformed students of liturgy have expressed such ideas as these in print, repeatedly, for a decade. It concerns me that virtually none of these matters are discussed in this volume.<sup>131</sup> To far too great an

131. Mr. Jordan apparently was not a little displeased that his own writings were not included in Thomas G. Reid’s chapter on recent literature on worship. “Jordan’s biggest disappointment with Thomas Reid’s essay is that he does not include more Eastern Orthodox (Alexander Schmemmann), Roman Catholic (Louis Bouyer), Lutheran (Luther Reed) and liberal (Geddes MacGregor) works in his bibliography. Or it may be that Mr. Jordan confesses his real reason for his criticisms when he says, ‘The first reason this essay disappoints me is that none of my numerous writings in this area are mentioned, nor are the works of my colleagues, past and present, in the liturgical

extent, most of the authors continue to bang the drum for tradition (*Liturgical Nestorianism*, 24–25).

Of course, one of the reasons why “Minimalists” may have chosen not to discuss these Jordanesque ideas may be that the traditionalists think it unwise to accord respect to these notions which are filled with non sequiturs and which might be regarded as just plain nutty. But in any case, what is clear is that Mr. Jordan rejects the regulative principle of worship. It is also clear that part of his theological misunderstanding comes from an inability to comprehend that the regulative principle, by definition, deals with systematic theology—a branch of learning that, of necessity, searches for unifying factors and universal rubrics.

Mr. Jordan himself seems to acknowledge our point regarding his lack of adherence to systematic theology. When discussing Frank J. Smith’s essay on the elements of worship, he writes that “the whole business of ‘elements’ is quite reductionistic”; and that the predisposition to think in such terms arises

from the continuing influence of late Medieval nominalism, which in this regard is the same as atomistic reductionism. In theology, a form of nominalism called terminism became dominant, and we can see this in the Westminster catechisms, which discuss theology almost exclusively by defining one term after another (“What is justification?”, “What is sanctification?”, etc.).

Another aspect of terministic and atomistic nominalism is the tendency to reduce everything in theology to laws and propositions. God does, of course, communicate to us in laws and propositions (statements of fact), but in the Bible He also uses symbol, type, analogy, architectural structures, and rituals, to mention only a few. Nominalism rapidly becomes blind to all these things, and converts them all into mere symbols of laws and propositions. Nominalism leads straight to a kind of legalism and a kind of doctrinalism. Thus, for instance, the nominalist looks at the Tabernacle and Temple and sees nothing but a series of symbols for Pauline theology; he does not see that God might be also

communicating something about beauty and glory.... Everything is reduced to doctrine, teaching. The communication of information to the mind becomes the sole, or virtually sole, aspect of revelation, eliminating whole-personed communication by ritual, etc. In this way, atomistic reductionism leads to intellectualism and gnosticism.

But it also leads to a kind of legalism, and we see this in the sect-form of the Regulative Principle. We must find distinct commands or laws for “elements” of worship. God is not permitted to communicate to us His desires through patterns or rituals.

... The Bible has a great deal to say about the order of worship, and the order of worship has as much to do with how the “elements” are employed, and even what the “elements” are. The Reformed tradition has, however, usually discussed “elements” in a vacuum, and there is no improvement on that discussion in the essays in the present volume (*Liturgical Nestorianism*, 61–63).

Of course, we can, as a result of these paragraphs, understand why Mr. Jordan has been off-base on a wide variety of theological subjects. When he rejects traditional Reformed systematic theology, believing that its formulations lead to intellectualism, Gnosticism, and legalism, it is easy to see why he rejects Reformed worship as well.

Jordan’s attack on William Young’s article on the regulative principle asserts, in reference to the classic text on the regulative principle (Leviticus 10:1–2), “Nadab and Abihu were killed because they committed a serious affront to God, not because they happened to do something He did not command. As with Jeremiah 7:31, ‘which God had not commanded’ has here the force of ‘which contravened God’s commandment.’” He summarizes his evaluation of Dr. Young’s position this way:

In my opinion, the view of worship advocated by Young errs in the direction of Nestorianism. Those who give virtually all power to man to decide how to worship are guilty of identifying man with God in a kind of liturgical Monophysitism, but those who radically separate man and God tend toward liturgical Nestorianism. A Chalcedonian Christology fits with what the Bible tells us about man, that he is the very image of God. God’s desire is for humanity to mature in His likeness. It is for this reason that God gives over to man progressively more responsibility as time moves along. The history in

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wing of conservative Presbyterianism.’ Given the repeated hostility and name calling that Mr. Jordan has exhibited toward Reformed worship, it is at least possible that many in the Reformed camp do not consider him ‘one of their own.’ Still, whether Mr. Jordan’s essays are numerous does not determine whether they are important.” See Richard Bacon’s review of *Liturgical Nestorianism* in “Beyond Canterbury: Reviews of James B. Jordan’s Views on Worship,” *The Blue Banner* 4.3–4 (March–April 1995) 3–4.

the Bible shows this, as does world history in general. Modern technology puts before us a whole host of complex moral problems not faced by earlier generations.

Orthodox Christology says that human nature is restored and brought to maturity in union with Christ's humanity. Humanity is so wonderful that God Himself joined with it, and will remain joined with it forever. Thus, Chalcedonian Christology affirms that in worship we listen first to God, but then as His images contribute something of real value to the dialogue.

Nestorian Christology, however, denigrates human nature, saying that God and man in Christ were not joined. Rather, the humanity of Christ was just a slave and instrument of His divinity, so that there were virtually two persons in Christ. A Nestorian view of worship will, thus, say that man is always but a slave who has nothing to say and who is simply to parrot God. I say that the view espoused by Young tends toward such a liturgical Nestorianism (55–56).

At this point, one hardly knows what to say. The positions put forth in these last several paragraphs not only mix and match disparate categories, but also approach heterodoxy. It simply is not true that "Chalcedonian Christology affirms that in worship we listen first to God, but then as His images contribute something of real value to the dialogue." No, James, anything which we offer in worship is accepted only because of God's grace.

It simply is not true that with respect to determining the "elements" of worship, man has a role to play. It is true, of course, that man is not a robot, but that he is to respond, in love, to God: we know of *no* Reformed theologian who has maintained to the contrary. But man, not only because of his creaturely status but also because of his sinful state, remains a servant of God when it comes to offering Him worship.

Finally, it simply is not orthodox to assert that there is anything other than a radical distinction between God and man. It is true, as Mr. Jordan has noted, that the Lord Jesus is both God and man, with two natures, and in one person, forever. However, it does not logically follow that therefore man qua man has been raised to a status of being able to determine how he should worship an infinitely holy God. To deny to man any such authority is not to be guilty of "Nestorianism." On the contrary, it is Mr. Jordan's assertions which call into question his own orthodoxy on such a matter as the Creator-creature distinction.<sup>132</sup>

#### Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

In the 1990s, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary published several works which dealt with the regulative principle. One of these was the book co-edited by Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman (noted above). Another was a book on drama, authored by Stephen Gonzales (see below). And yet another was an article by Dr. Morton H. Smith, founding faculty member at the South Carolina institution.<sup>133</sup>

Reprinted from *The Bulletin of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary*, the treatise affirms the basic outline of the regulative principle, based on passages such as the Second Commandment, Deuteronomy 12: 32, and Mark 7. Dr. Smith also enunciates as part of the principle that "we look primarily to the New Testament, not the Old," for determining the practices of worship; this is because of the abrogation of the ceremonial law and its temple worship (Smith, "The Regulative Principle," 3–5).

#### Ernest Springer/Old Paths Publications

In 1993, Ernest Springer, owner of Old Paths Publications, penned *Many Verses!*<sup>134</sup> This book came out of his experience at a PCA congregation in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, which was not in the habit of reading significant portions of Scripture during public worship. Although the book does not concentrate on the regulative principle of worship, it does set forth the principle's validity: "We are not to insert into the worship service any elements which are the fabrications and inventions of man. God is honored *only* when we worship Him according to means set forth in His Word (either by direct commandment or logical implication), and when

132. Other works by James Jordan on worship include *The Liturgy Trap: The Bible versus Mere Tradition in Worship* (Niceville, Fla.: Transfiguration Press, 1994) and *Theses on Worship: Notes Toward the Reformation of Worship* (Niceville, Fla.: Transfiguration Press, 1994). Jordan also wrote an earlier piece: *The Sociology of the Church: Essays in Reconstruction* (Tyler, Tex.: Geneva Ministries, 1986). In the introduction he notes the influence of three writers, none of whom was an orthodox Protestant. "They are a neo-orthodox Presbyterian, Geddes McGregor; a Roman Catholic, Louis Bouyer; and a Russian Orthodox, Alexander Schmemmann. This book would not be what it is without their insights, as an examination of the footnotes will reveal."

133. Morton H. Smith, *The Regulative Principle of Worship: Is It Biblical?* (Greenville, S.C.: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1995).

134. Ernest Springer, *Many Verses! The Importance of Reading the Scriptures in Reformed Worship* (Audubon, N.J.: Old Paths Publications, 1993).

we do not add to or take away from anything set forth therein" (*Many Verses*, 11).

### *Still Waters Revival Books*

Headquartered in Edmonton, Alberta, Still Waters Revival Books (SWRB) has, since the early 1990s, been a strong and often strident advocate for historic Puritan worship. The value of SWRB is in providing works at relatively cheap rates which would otherwise be difficult or expensive to obtain. After dabbling with some limited reprints of works supportive of the regulative principle,<sup>135</sup> they now mostly publish bound photocopies of works or CDs of scanned texts.<sup>136</sup>

### *The Blue Banner*

In 1992, the First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, Texas, a Dallas suburb, began publishing *The Blue Banner*,

135. E.g., James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (1991); the previously-noted *Psalms in Worship* (1992); and *Works of George Gillespie* (1991). The Gillespie was not a complete printing of the Hetherington edition of the works from the middle nineteenth century. The reprint was intentionally incomplete in lacking *Aaron's Rod Blossoming*, which was already in print via Sprinkle Publications, but deficient as well in omitting *Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland*. The author's name, however, was spelled correctly.

136. SWRB's founder, Reg Barrow, has written on the regulative principle. See "Worship: The Regulative Principle of Worship in History," *Christian Reformation Today* Issue #18–19 (July–Oct., 1991; revised Nov., 1995); reprinted in *Reformation Worship and Separation from Idolatry* (Edmonton, Alberta: Still Waters Revival Books, 1997). Mr. Barrow's writings on the regulative principle also brought him into a polemic against Douglas Wilson, pastor of Christ Church, Moscow, Idaho. The *causis belli* occurred in reaction to the publisher having maintained on an internet list that John Calvin would have excommunicated James Jordan and John Frame for their heretical views of worship. Reg Barrow, *Saul in the Cave of Adullam: A Testimony Against the Fashionable, Sub-Calvinism of Doug Wilson* (Editor of *Credenda/Agenda Magazine*); and, *For Classical Protestantism and the Attainments of the Second Reformation* (Edmonton, Alberta: Still Waters Revival Books, 1997). On the regulative principle, see also Greg L. Price, *Foundation For Reformation: The Regulative Principle Of Worship* (SWRB, 1995).

137. Having outgrown their property in Rowlett, in March 2005 the congregation acquired new property in Mesquite, Texas, and now goes by the name, Faith Presbyterian Church, Reformed.

138. Christopher Coldwell, "Indifferent Imaginations? The Case Against Images at Meetings of N. Texas Presbytery," *The Blue Banner* 3.7–8 (July–August 1994). Almost a complete run of *The Blue Banner* is archived in Adobe PDF format at <http://www.fpccr.org/bluebanner.htm>. The church ceased regular publication of the newsletter with the January–March 2004 issue, to focus its resources on the publication of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

139. Richard Bacon, "The Regulative Principle and Sufficiency of Scripture in 2 Chronicles 3," *The Blue Banner* 4.5–6 (May–June 1995). Of the many articles touching on worship, one of the more

patterned after J. G. Vos' publication of a previous generation.<sup>137</sup> The congregation was, and is, committed to fostering historic Presbyterian doctrine, worship and polity. Originally a member of the Presbyterian Church in America, the Rowlett church departed the PCA in 1994 over a failure of North Texas Presbytery either to remove or cover images of Jesus in church buildings where the presbytery was scheduled to be meeting.<sup>138</sup> The congregation united with several others to form the Presbyterian Church Covenanted Reformed, later renamed the Reformation Presbyterian Church, and today known as the American Reformation Presbyterian Church. At present, this tiny denomination has only the one congregation; however, it is also engaged in union talks with the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Hanover Presbytery, and has an agreement with the American Presbyterian Church for hearing judicial appeals.

Over the years, numerous articles in *The Blue Banner* have championed traditional Presbyterian views on topics such as musical instrumentation in public worship, the use of Psalms only for worship song, and the non-observance of holy days. Undergirding these positions is a commitment to the regulative principle of worship. Exemplifying that commitment is Pastor Richard Bacon's 1994 article, "The Regulative Principle and Sufficiency of Scripture in 2 Chronicles 3."<sup>139</sup>

Dr. Bacon writes that the "reformed principle of appointed worship," which can be found in the Chronicles passage, "is simply the plain reformation doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* as it applies to worship.... We are not making something special out of it. We are simply saying that God has given us all the instructions that we need to do every good work. When you take away all the argumentation on both sides, what it comes down to is this: either God has told us everything that we need to do in order to do his will or hasn't. If we have to add something—if we have to take the decrees of counsels, or the decrees of popes, or the decrees of the minister—then what we have is something that has been added to God's Word. At the point we add anything to God's Word, we are not following the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* or the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture" (Bacon, "Regulative Principle," 15).

### *George Gillespie*

As previously noted, besides editing *The Blue Banner*, and now *The Confessional Presbyterian*, Chris Coldwell is sole proprietor of Naphtali Press. In 1993, following up on the extract printed in 1989, he published a complete critical edition of George Gillespie's *Dispute*

*Against the English-Popish Ceremonies*. A Scottish commissioner to the Westminster Assembly, Gillespie authored what even opponents of historic Presbyterian worship (such as John Frame) acknowledge is an elaborate defense of the Puritan principle of worship.

In 1995, Joel R. Beeke penned a review of this now sadly out-of-print work, noting the following:

*English Popish Ceremonies* was a historically crucial work written by Gillespie at the age of twenty-four, to the astonishment of both friend and foe in Scotland. In trenchant style, Gillespie divided his work into four parts, arguing against (1) the necessity, (2) the expediency, (3) the lawfulness, and (4) the indifference of the English-popish ceremonies that Charles I was seeking to impose upon the Scottish church. It is a detailed, masterful polemic against human innovation in public worship.... This new critical edition of Gillespie's first renowned work will undoubtedly become the authoritative edition of *English Popish Ceremonies*.... This book still has lessons to teach us today, not only about the dangers of liturgical renewal movements and the church growth movement, but also about the need to retain the simplicity of scriptural worship at all costs. We would do well to ask ourselves the question: Are we allowing the simplicity of scriptural worship to slip through our fingers—perhaps slowly, subtly, almost imperceptibly—so that we are actually abandoning the very principles for which our forefathers were willing to live and die?<sup>140</sup>

John M. Frame

In a 1992 article in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Professor John Frame posed “questions” regarding the regulative principle of worship;<sup>141</sup> and in a subsequent issue of that journal, he received some significant “answers” from Professor T. David Gordon.<sup>142</sup> Undaunted, four years after the journal article,<sup>143</sup> Professor Frame encapsulated his ideas in a book entitled, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship*.<sup>144</sup> Despite his protestations to the contrary, the position he takes in these works denies the regulative principle of worship, even while he professes allegiance to it. This book received some well-deserved criticism in several notable reviews: (1) Brian Schwertley, “The Neo-Presbyterian Challenge to Confessional Presbyterian Orthodoxy A Biblical Analysis of John Frame’s *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*,”<sup>145</sup> (2) Dr. Joseph Pipa, Review: “Worship in Spirit and Truth,” *Presbyterian & Reformed News* 2.4 [Fall 1996]

10–11; (3) Kevin Reed, “Presbyterian Worship: Old

important by Dr. Bacon was a review of Benjamin Shaw’s *Studies in Church Music* entitled: “Worship Song Regulated by Scripture,” 2.12 (December 1993). Among valuable reprints of rare material compiled by the editor can be named the 1825 Letter by Samuel Miller to the *New York Commercial Advertiser* against the observance of Christmas (2.11, November 1993), and several letters to the *Richmond Watchman and Observer* of 1849 on the use of the organ in public worship (3.1–2, January–February 1994). The newsletter also republished lengthy articles such as John Girardeau’s *Discretionary Power of the Church* (8.5–6, May–June, 1999); James Begg’s *The Use of the Communion Table in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper* (7.11, November 1998; 7.12, December 1998; 8.1, January, 1999; 8.2, February, 1999; 8.3, March, 1999); John B. Adger’s *A Denial Of Divine Right For Organs In Public Worship* (12.3, July–September, 2003); and James Durham on *The Second Commandment*, 10.2 (April–June 2001) and 10.3 (July–September 2001), which was published subsequently in James Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, ed. Christopher Coldwell (Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 2001). Mr. Coldwell also contributed a lengthy historical piece taking up an entire issue, on the history of American Presbyterian opposition to the ecclesiastical observance of the days of the so-called Christian calendar, “The Religious Observance of Christmas and ‘Holy Days’ in American Presbyterianism,” 8.9–10 (September–October 1999). Mr. Coldwell’s interest in researching and writing this article was sparked by assertions in Mark Horne’s “*Celebrating a Calvinistic Christmas with a Clear Conscience*” (1997). Similar defenses for the ecclesiastical observance of the days of the ‘Christian calendar’ are Jeffrey Meyers’ “*Brief Defense of Christmas*” (December 2003) and “*Is the Church Year Biblical?*” (1997); see [http://www.hornes.org/theological/content/cat\\_worship.htm](http://www.hornes.org/theological/content/cat_worship.htm).

140. Joel R. Beeke, “Review,” *WTJ* 57.1 (1995).

141. John M. Frame, “Some Questions about the Regulative Principle,” *WTJ* 54 (Fall 1992) 357–366.

142. T. David Gordon, “Some Answers About the Regulative Principle,” *WTJ* 55 (Fall 1993) 321–329.

143. John Frame’s thoughts as expressed in the *Westminster Theological Journal* have appeared elsewhere, such as the internet; see [http://www.christiancounterculture.com/articles/worship\\_reg-principle.html](http://www.christiancounterculture.com/articles/worship_reg-principle.html). See also his “Reply to T. David Gordon,” *WTJ* 56 (Spring 1994) 181–83.

144. John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing Co., 1996). This book is an expansion of “The Lordship of Christ and the Regulative Principle of Worship,” as well as another paper written for the Worship Task Force of the Committee on Mission to North America, PCA, both unpublished. David C. Lachman reviewed the “Lordship of Christ” article in “Worship in the PCA: a Review article,” *The Presbyterian Advocate*, ed. David C. Lachman, 5.1–2 (April–May 1995) 16–20. Dr. Lachman concluded his article: “Taken as a whole Frame’s paper is highly irresponsible and divisive. It does not even have the merit of being a decent piece of scholarly writing: rather than take the time and effort to look into what the Reformed have thought (and this includes the *Confession*), Frame simply refers repeatedly to ‘some’ and ‘others’ and then supplies whatever opinion will best set up his arguments. That such is taken seriously in the PCA does not bode well for the future of the church” (20).

145. Published on the Internet at <http://www.reformed.com/pub/frame.htm>.

and New: A Review and Commentary upon *Worship in Spirit and Truth*.”<sup>146</sup> This book as well as Professor Frame’s other writings on worship were also critically surveyed previously by this author in *Reframing Presbyterian Worship*.<sup>147</sup>

### *Ballet in the PCA*

In the PCA the worship wars continued with practices at General Assemblies being characterized as “excellent,” or not, depending upon whether there was a ballet dance in the middle of the worship service.<sup>148</sup> Roger Schultz opined on the situation in a report on the 1992 PCA General Assembly.

Reformed Presbyterians stress the regulative principle of worship (see WCF, chapter 21). Worship is to be done only in the manner that God has shown in His Word. As Jesus put it, true worship must be heartfelt and sincere (“in spirit”) and in the way God prescribes (“in truth”). True worship is not done according to human innovations and trends.

Throughout scripture, apostasy began with deviation in worship. The major problem in the Old Testament was not with atheism, the denial of scriptural authority, or the outright repudiation of the true God; it was in unauthorized human innovations in the worship and service of God. Examples can be found in Gen 4:5, Ex 32:1, Num 16:40, 1 Ki 3:3, 2 Chr 26:18.... Holding these biblical and confessional principles, Presbyterians traditionally have been suspicious of irregular worship.

Recently, however, the PCA has witnessed a number of annoying deviations from the regulative principle. At the 1991 G.A., for instance, commissioners were subjected to a ballet spectacle at one of the worship services. It was defended as an uplifting and inspiring performance. (An elderly commissioner reportedly expressed relief after the exhibition—he thought it was going to be

a belly dance, instead of a ballet dance!) Dance happy ‘BRs’<sup>149</sup> have vigorously pushed their agenda in the denomination. In one enthusiastic congregation, a ‘TR’ elder, obviously with a ranching background, has “grown weary of the staged habits of the Worship Leaders who roll their eyes up into their heads like heifers in a hail storm!”

Experimentation with worship can be a slippery slope. If one’s worship is restricted only by a ‘pragmatic principle’—[i.e.] what people like, what attracts the unsaved, what is currently fashionable—there is no limit to what might be permitted. Conceivably, there could be belly dancing. (Think of how it would attract the unsaved!) An oldtime Baptist preacher in Fort Worth, Texas, Frank Noms, once brought a horse into the sanctuary to attract the city’s cowboys. Snakehandlers of southern Appalachia claim that their unique services enhance faith. ‘BRs’ who abandon the regulative principle have no grounds to reject such practices. They might even like the snake-handling services, since participants usually dance (yes, *dance!*) with the snakes.

### *John (Jack) Allen Delivuk*

On April 3, 1993, John Allen Delivuk, delivered a paper before The Evangelical Theological Society meeting in Philadelphia, entitled, “The Defense of the Regulative Principle of Worship by the Authors of the Westminster Confession.”<sup>150</sup> In this paper Dr. Delivuk used “documents produced by the Assembly and the writings of the members of the committee that wrote the Confession” to discuss the “reasons used in the seventeenth century to defend the regulative principle as God’s will for worship.” From the standards and the writings of committee members such as Robert Harris, Samuel Rutherford, Thomas Gataker, and George Gillespie, he concluded the following:

In this essay the arguments used to defend the regulative principle of worship have been examined. The authors of the Westminster Confession saw the regulative principle as an exception to the doctrine of good works because it had no place for adiaphora. They used the sufficiency of Scripture, liberty of conscience (their favorite), the Second Commandment, the hermeneutical principle that positive commands forbid their negatives, and the doctrine of uniformity as proofs to show whatever is not commanded in worship is forbidden. The use of these arguments involved principles of Biblical authority found in Chapter 1 of the Confession,

146. Published on the Internet at <http://www.all-of-grace.org/pub/others/regulativeprinciple.html>

147. Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, “Reframing Presbyterian Worship,” 116–150.

148. Roger Schultz, “PCA General Assembly, Irregular Worship,” *Contra Mundum* 5 (Fall 1992) 24.

149. “To put it simply, the denomination is divided between Reformed and Evangelical – the ‘TRs’ and the ‘BRs.’ Schultz, 24. These stand for ‘Truly Reformed’ and ‘Barely Reformed.’

150. This paper is available at [www.tren.com](http://www.tren.com). It was also printed in *Semper Reformanda* 2.1 (Spring 1993) 34–53. An expanded version ran in *WTJ* 58.2 (Fall 1996) 237–256.

especially the analogy of faith, good and necessary consequence, the sufficiency of Scripture, and Scripture as the sole judge of religious doctrines and practices. The arguments for the regulative principle give great insight into the Puritan-Presbyterians' love for their neighbor and their zeal for Scripture as God's will for the church and the judge of all other forms of revelation.

What lessons do the Westminster Assembly's doctrine of worship teach? First, the value of asking the right questions about worship. The Assembly asked: what does God want in his holy worship? What is the source of God's will concerning worship? These are the two fundamental questions that need to be answered before determining the acts of worship. Secondly, the value of theistic thinking in determining the acts of worship. The rising strength of humanism in our society has affected worship in the United States. As a result liturgical forms are frequently chosen by majority vote, or imposed by powerful clergy and/or other church leaders. Often these changes have admirable motives such as attracting the lost to the church, however, because the authority for the changes is man's will, we must ask whether Christ or man is king. Finally, the Assembly reminds us that love of our neighbors is a significant factor in determining worship changes. The Westminster Divines included strong declarations concerning liberty of conscience in the Westminster Standards in large part to protect the sensitive consciences of believers from unbiblical additions to worship. In my opinion, the Westminster Divines asked the most significant questions about worship, and answered them correctly (17–18).

*T. David Gordon*

Presbyterian Church in America minister T. David Gordon has been in the forefront of those in his denomination who have advocated a "traditional" approach to worship. Besides being a seminary and college professor, Dr. Gordon has also been a pastor, and thus in a position to bring his beliefs to bear in practical application.

In addition to some published exchanges with John Frame regarding worship,<sup>151</sup> Professor Gordon has written unpublished papers, some of which have gained wide currency on the internet and other places. One of his papers is entitled, "Nine Lines of Argument in Favor of the Regulative Principle of Worship."<sup>152</sup> His nine points are: Argument from the Limits of Church-Power (the regulative principle of church government lying behind the regulative principle of worship);

Argument from Liberty of Conscience ("to require a person, in corporate worship, to do something that God has not required, forces the person to sin against his/her conscience, by making them do what they do not believe God has called them to do"); Argument from Faith ("God cannot be pleased by worship which is unfaithful, that is, worship which is not an obedient response to his revelation"); Argument from the distance between the Creator and the creature; Argument from the character of God as jealous; Argument from those passages where piety is described as doing exclusively what God wishes; Argument from the severity of the temporal punishments inflicted upon those who offer to God worship other than what He has prescribed; Argument from the sinful tendency towards idolatry; and Argument from Church History.

However, Dr. Gordon has also carved out a third category in his dealing with the doctrine of worship—in addition to "elements" and "circumstances," he is a staunch champion of the notion that the elements may come to expression by a variety of "forms." By "forms," he means that the particular language in which an element of worship may be expressed is a matter of indifference, rather than being fixed.

While it is true that with regard to some of the elements of worship, the content is not fixed (such as the praying of prayer and the preaching of the word), it is also true that that principle is not universally valid for all of the elements of worship. For example, the content for the reading of the Word is, by definition, fixed, since we are confined to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments for that element. Similarly, we would suggest that the content of the singing of praise is likewise fixed. The point to be maintained here is that Scripture itself will determine whether the "form" is fixed or free; and that each element must be handled on an individual basis.

*Stephen Pribble and Sherman Isbell*

In a 1993 issue of *The Presbyterian Advocate* an article appeared by OPC minister Stephen Pribble, entitled "The Regulative Principle and Singing in Worship," which was later reprinted as a pamphlet by Greenville Seminary.<sup>153</sup> Pribble defines the regulative principle:

151. T. David Gordon, "Some Answers About the Regulative Principle," *WTJ* 55 (Fall 1993) 321–329.

152. One location for this article is [http://www.reformedprescambidge.com/articles/Regulative\\_Principle.html](http://www.reformedprescambidge.com/articles/Regulative_Principle.html).

153. Stephen Pribble, "The Regulative Principle and Singing in Worship," *The Presbyterian Advocate*, 3.9–10 (November–December

The regulative principle of worship requires man to worship God only as He has commanded in His Word. To add elements of human innovation into the worship of God brings His just displeasure.<sup>154</sup> As defined by the Shorter Catechism, “The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word” [WSC 51]. Presbyterian office holders take a solemn vow to uphold this fundamental principle.

Mr. Pribble subsequently proceeds to argue against the position of exclusive psalmody. This brought the following reply from Sherman Isbell, in a serially run article which first appeared in *The Presbyterian Reformed Magazine*:<sup>155</sup>

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1993; reprint, Greenville, S.C.: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1995). Online at: <http://www.all-of-grace.org/pub/pribble/hymnsing.html>.

154. Pribble comments: “Note how severely God punished such a human innovation in Leviticus 10:1–2: ‘And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.’”

155. Sherman Isbell, “A study on the regulative principle and worship song, including an examination of Calvin’s view respecting the singing of Psalms” in *The Presbyterian Reformed Magazine* 8.2 (Summer 1993), 10.3 (Fall 1995), 10.4 (Winter 1996). Two additional articles, “Regulated Worship,” and “The Heavenly Sanctuary,” are a finalized form of material published earlier as “Hear Ye Him: Worship in the New Testament,” in *Worship in the Presence of God*. These articles are online at <http://members.aol.com/rsichurch/worship.html>.

156. The author cites Pribble from *The Presbyterian Advocate* 3.9–10, pages 25–26, 29.

157. Isbell notes: “The section of the majority report dealing with the Old Testament material, apparently written by Edward J. Young, acknowledges that the biblical narrative identifies specific song texts used in worship, but Young does not consider the implications of this biblical specificity for the operation of the regulative principle. ‘Report of the Committee on Song,’ p. 53: ‘We know definitely from I Chronicles 16 that the content of some of our present psalms was used in worship. It is obvious from other psalms that they were intended for use in the public worship of God; see Pss. 95:2, 27:6, and 100:4. Another reference which clearly gives an indication as to the content of song is II Chron. 29:30, where Hezekiah expressly commanded the use of the words of David and Asaph the seer for a certain occasion of worship.’”

158. Isbell, “Study on the regulative principle...,” 10.4, 143–144.

159. John R. de Witt, “The Form of Church Government,” in *To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, ed. John L. Carson and David W. Hall (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994) 166.

160. Iain H. Murray, “The Directory for the Public Worship of God,” in *To Glorify and Enjoy God*, 176–178.

161. As noted previously, Rowland Ward characterizes Murray’s comments as too general a treatment of the regulative principle. Rowland S. Ward, “The Directory for Public Worship,” 8 n34.

In a recent discussion of psalmody, Stephen Pribble, a minister of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, claims that while the Bible authorizes the practice of worship song, it does not indicate any particular text to be used in worship song.<sup>156</sup> His argument is designed to deny a specific divine appointment, because where there is a specific appointment of worship elements or religiously-significant circumstances, the biblical regulative principle would exclude additions. This objection not only fails to appreciate that the biblical narrative specifically declares that the Psalms composed by David and the seers are for use in worship song,<sup>157</sup> but it also overlooks the canonicity of the Book of Psalms. The very inclusion of the Psalter in the canon constitutes a divine prescription for its use in the church’s worship song. It is passing strange to assert that the Lord has not indicated any particular text for use in worship song, when the Lord has given the church, in the canon of inspired Scripture, a collected book of one hundred fifty worship songs. Such assertions question whether the contents of the biblical canon are a reliable indication of what God intends to be used in the church’s worship; one might as well argue that the composition of the canon provides no specific indication that the sixty-six books in the canon are those to be used when the Word of God is read in the church’s worship.<sup>158</sup>

#### *Westminster Assembly 350th Anniversary*

In 1994, The Banner of Truth published a volume containing papers delivered in September 1993 at the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) commemoration of the 350th anniversary of the seating of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. The collection does not contain much on the regulative principle per se, but J. R. de Witt mentions the doctrine in its general form in passing in his paper on the Westminster Form of Church Government,<sup>159</sup> and Iain Murray’s paper on the Directory for Worship<sup>160</sup> contains a brief and very general treatment of the principle itself.<sup>161</sup> In his contribution to the volume, Murray states: “The lengthy discussions necessary on such points [e.g., the Scots’ pressing for use of a table in observing the Lord’s Supper] is a healthy reminder to us that merely to adhere to the regulative principle is not to resolve all questions instantly. Nor is it an easy solution to all questions.” And then he adds an endnote at this point:

The over-doing of the regulative principle has too often been its undoing. For example, some Seventh Day

Baptists sought to use it against all sung praise in worship. More often it has been used to claim that nothing is warranted in praise except the book of Psalms. The latter was not a question which came before the Assembly but clearly some of its leading members (e.g. Thomas Manton, who wrote ‘The Epistle to the Reader’ prefixed to the Confession) did not hold that position, notwithstanding their high view of the Psalter. See Manton on James 4:13 in his *Works* (London: Nisbet, 1872), vol. 4, p. 442” (326 n17).

In 2002 Murray wrote a short booklet against the position of exclusive psalmody in public worship where he made a similar appeal to Manton.<sup>162</sup> There are some problems with Murray’s comments regarding Manton. First, Dr. Manton, who wrote the preface in 1658 which has long been traditionally included in Scottish editions of the Westminster Standards,<sup>163</sup> was not a member of the Westminster Assembly. Second, Dr. H. M. Cartwright, in a rebuttal to this work,<sup>164</sup> suggested Murray was selectively quoting from Manton regarding psalmody and pointed Murray and the reader to the very next page (page 443) of the volume the latter referenced where Manton writes: “If the practice of the apostles may be interpreted by their instructions, the case will be clear. In Col 3:16 and Eph 5:19, Paul bideth us ‘speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs’. Now these words (which are the known division of David’s Psalms, and expressly answering to the Hebrew words *Shurim*, *Tehillim*, and *Mizmorim*, by which his Psalms are distinguished and entitled), being so precisely used by the Apostle in both places, do plainly point us to the Book of Psalms.”

Thomas Manton, along with twenty-four other eminent Puritan divines, also put his name to the preface of an English version of the 1650 Scottish Psalter, which expressed this opinion: “Now though spiritual songs of mere human composure may have their use, yet our devotion is best secured, where the matter and words are of immediately divine inspiration; and to us David’s Psalms seem plainly intended by those terms of “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,” which the apostle useth (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).”<sup>165</sup>

#### PCA “Consensus” Statement

In 1994, there was an attempt within the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) to devise a “consensus” statement regarding the on-going theological struggles between “strict subscriptionists” and “system subscriptionists.” That attempt, which had as its focal point

a meeting in September that year at the Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, proved to be abortive, as the organizers of the event were shocked at the strong grass-roots opposition to their direction.

In conjunction with this meeting in Knoxville, a “Proposed Statement of Identity” was printed and distributed to all PCA ministers. Among the matters addressed in the booklet was the issue of worship.<sup>166</sup>

First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, Texas, also weighed in, and put together a booklet in opposition to the “consensus” document. This present author was responsible for the chapter responding to the “statement of identity” with respect to worship,<sup>167</sup> and what follows in this section is taken almost verbatim from that work.<sup>168</sup>

The *Proposed Statement of Identity for the Presbyterian Church in America* begins the discussion on worship with some lofty comments, affirming that “[a]s Presbyterians, we are the grateful heirs of the Reformed tradition, which has clearly based its faith and practice on the Word of God alone. In particular, the Protestant reformers modified and sanctified the worship of God in their day to conform to the pattern of biblical, apos-

162. Iain H. Murray, *Should the Psalter be the only Hymnal of the Church?* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002)

163. The Manton preface first appeared in the 1658 edition which goes by the name “Rothwell B”. See “Antiquary: The Development of the Traditional Form of *The Westminster Standards*,” in *The Confessional Presbyterian* 1 (2005) 170.

164. H. M. Cartwright, “Psalms or Hymns in Public Worship,” *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* (May 2002). Online: <http://www.fpchurch.org.uk/EbBI/fpm/2002/March/article4.htm>.

165. *The Psalms of David In Meeter. Newly Translated ...* (London: Printed for the Company of Stationers..., 1673). The signers of the preface to the reader were Thomas Manton D.D., Henry Langley D.D., John Owen D.D., William Jenkyn, James Innes, Thomas Watson, Thomas Lye, Matthew Poole, John Milward, John Chester, George Cockayn, Matthew Meade, Robert Francklin, Thomas Dooolittle, Thomas Vincent, Nathanael Vincent, John Ryther, William Tomson, Nicolas Blaikie, Charles Morton, Edmund Calamy (the son of the Westminster Divine), William Carslake, James Janeway, John Hicckes, and John Baker.

166. *PCA Consensus: A Proposed Statement of Identity for the Presbyterian Church in America* (privately published and distributed by the Vision2000 Caucus of the PCA, [1994]).

167. Another collection of papers on the Proposed Statement of Identity, reproducing three papers from the FPCR collection, was published in *The Presbyterian Witness*, ed. Byron Snapp, Part One, 8.4 (Fall 1994); Part Two, 8.5 (Winter 1994). The chapter on worship was penned by Pete Hurst: “Worship: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly” (8.5.10).

168. *Answers to PCA Consensus: An Analysis of A Proposed Statement of Identity For the Presbyterian Church in America* (Dallas, Tex.: Blue Banner Books, 1994). Available on-line at [http://www.fpccr.org/blue\\_banner\\_articles/answers\\_to\\_pca\\_consensus.htm](http://www.fpccr.org/blue_banner_articles/answers_to_pca_consensus.htm).

toloc practice. In this respect, we believe our tradition still provides a model for true, spiritual worship. As we affirm our past, we are eager to live out these same principles in today's world. In order to do this carefully and fruitfully, especially when there are differences of opinion in the Church, we would always return to the first principle of our Reformation forefathers: *Sola Scriptura*, the Word of God alone."<sup>169</sup>

What follows are three fairly good statements about the place of worship in the life of the believer. The fourth statement affirms "a broader sense of worship, which includes the whole of the Christian life offered as a living sacrifice to God"; and denies that "either 'broad' or 'narrow' worship without the other pleases God." While we would have preferred that the life of Christian service not be called 'worship' even in a broad sense, we are grateful that the distinction is being made.

The fifth statement affirms "that worship which honors God will also edify believers . . . and challenge unbelievers." We wholeheartedly agree. There is an apologetic value to all of God's Law, including the Second Commandment; and, when worship properly emphasizes His transcendence and glory, people are brought to their knees in adoration and worship. However, we are disturbed by the last portion of the statement: "We deny that seeking the glory of God in worship requires us to ignore . . . our obligation to show the love of Christ to fellow worshippers (1 Cor. 11:17-34; John 13:35; James 2:1-4)." While the words themselves may in a technical sense be true, the implication seems to be that washing one another's feet, for example, may be appropriately a part of the worship itself. That, of course, would not be a warranted conclusion.

We would agree with the subsequent paragraphs that worship is "vertical" in focus: God-centered and Christ-centered, in and through the Holy Spirit"; and that "there is also a 'horizontal' aspect of worship, for glorifying God does not forbid, but requires, us in worship to edify one another (1 Cor. 14:26)." The only potential problem is that we need to make sure that the 'horizontal' aspect comes not for its own sake, but as a function of the 'vertical'—i.e., we must maintain that worship remains, principally, theocentric.

Statement six begins to get into where there are some fundamental disagreements. This thesis says that the elements of worship are to be "limited to those which God approves in Scripture, . . . in both the Old and New Testaments." Further, it denies "that human beings have liberty to devise elements of worship that God has not

prescribed or to disallow others to perform elements He has clearly approved."

On the surface, it might appear that these sentiments are quite sound and orthodox. But there are at least a couple of subtle problems with the way in which they are phrased. In the first place, although it is true that all of Scripture informs our worship, we need to be careful to affirm that the ceremonial worship of the Old Covenant has no place in the New Covenant. The abrogation of the ceremonial law, indeed, was set forth previously in the *PSI*. However, it is important to underscore the fact of the essential difference between the symbolical service, particularly as associated with the sacrificial system, and the streamlined, unadorned worship of the era in which we have been brought, as it were, into direct approach to our God. Part of the basic teaching of our *Confession of Faith* is that the New Covenant, in contrast to the Old, is administered with greater simplicity and less outward glory (WCF VII.6). This radical covenantal distinction must be maintained. The problem is that statement six, taken by itself, might be used by some to justify such practices as burning incense.

Secondly, this implication seems more plausible when we look at the curious way in which the denial is framed. Put simply, the regulative principle of worship is this: whatever God has commanded is required, whatever is not commanded is forbidden. The proper opposite, then, of the first part of the denial—human beings having liberty to devise non-prescribed elements of worship—should not be "to disallow others to perform elements He has clearly approved," but rather, "not to perform elements He has clearly approved." While we certainly believe that mere mortals should not forbid the performance of commanded worship practices, there is at least the possibility that the awkward wording could be used by some to justify such things as liturgical dance, since some might believe that that was a worship practice and one which God has clearly approved. With regard to that example, please note that if liturgical dance is that which is divinely approved, then its use not only should not be forbidden, but it would also be *mandated* for use in all churches.

Statement seven deals with what we might term the *adiaphora*—those things which are indifferent. We have no particular problem with the first two sentences, which speak of the 'circumstances' of worship. But then a novel, a-historical term is used—'expressions' of worship. We are not sure where exactly this term came from, although there is an attempt towards the close of the chapter to justify it bibliographically. The problem is that, in contrast to the paper's contention (*PSI*, 21), the

169. *PCA CONSENSUS: A Proposed Statement of Identity for the Presbyterian Church in America (PSI)*, Chapter V, 18-21.

“idea of a variety of ‘expressions’ of normative worship ‘elements’” does not appear conceptually in Calvin’s *Institutes*, nor in this author’s chapter on “The Singing of Praise” in *Worship in the Presence of God*, nor in Samuel Miller’s *Thoughts on Public Prayer*. Nor do the “concept and the terminology” appear in the Westminster Assembly’s *Directory for the Publick Worship of God*. The late (and beloved) Robert G. Rayburn can hardly be considered an authority on Reformed worship, as he did not give adequate treatment of the regulative principle in his book. Furthermore, to refer to Charles Baird as an expert on Presbyterian worship is like regarding Hillary Clinton as an expert on ethics and public policy. And William D. Maxwell cannot be viewed as approaching the topic from the historic Presbyterian perspective. All of which means that the document is left pretty much with no support for its position.

Much better would have been to remain with the standard terminology of ‘circumstance,’ which is the Confessional language (WCF I.6) and has a long history of definition and understanding. Circumstantial matters have to do with the time and place of worship, the order of the elements, the specific words of sermons, the tunes used, whether to have chairs or pews, and so forth. They are the ‘accidents’ of worship, without which the elements could not be performed.

The confusion engendered by use of the term ‘expressions’ of worship continues in statement eight, in which elements and expressions of worship are treated similarly. Of course, the elemental parts of worship and the circumstantial details of worship, by definition, are absolutely distinct—they may not be conjoined in any way. But here we see the attempt to deal with elements and expressions of worship as if they are of the same genus. This paragraph goes on to speak of “somewhat [!] controversial” practices of worship, “such as the use of drama, dance, musical instruments and vocalists, the lifting or clapping of hands, the use of women in liturgical leadership, and the use of various forms of art.”

Trying to unpack this list of these practices would require several essays in order to do justice to them. Briefly, we would simply say the following. Drama (i.e., play acting) is nowhere commanded in Scripture as an element of worship; and, indeed, the rise of such in the church’s liturgy has always, historically, been a sign of the degeneration of preaching. Similarly, dance has always been accompanied by a decline in genuine piety.<sup>170</sup> With regard to musical instruments and vocalists, the historic Presbyterian view is that of *a cappella* congregational singing during worship.<sup>171</sup> The clapping of hands is a form of instrumentation, and so,

if we follow the Presbyterian faith on this point, would be forbidden along with the other instruments (other than the human voice).<sup>172</sup> Raising hands, with palms upturned, during prayer seems to be perfectly Biblical and in accord with divinely-approved posture for that element of worship. Women are to keep silent in the church (1 Cor. 14:34)—which certainly means that they are not to exercise leadership in worship. In contrast to the contemporary practice in some PCA churches to have women read Scripture, Answer 156 of the Larger Catechism tells us that not everyone is to read the Word of God during public worship: the clear implication being that only elders should do so (with the allowance for others, such as ministerial candidates, who are in training for office). Art for its own sake has no place in worship—indeed, if such were allowed, there would be no possible hedge against ‘false’ worship, for almost anything can be fit under the category of ‘art.’

This last item helps to highlight the problem with the next sentiment found in statement eight: “... we affirm that the use of these elements and expressions, although not specifically prohibited by the Scriptures or the Directory of Worship, ought always to be decided with full reverence to God alone, and under the guidance of biblical principles, and with humble respect for the unity of the Church.” Now, we all can be grateful for the humble respect expressed for the Church’s unity. We trust that this desire may represent a change from what has occurred in the past, in which General Assembly Arrangements Committees have felt free to impose bizarre worship practices upon the entire As-

170. The best treatment of these two liturgical practices is Brian Edwards, *Shall We Dance? Dance and Drama in Worship* (Welwyn, Herts, England: Evangelical Press, 1984). Such practices are essentially the same as those that were tolerated in the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS), and which served as partial grounds for the withdrawal from the PCUS by the Continuing Presbyterian Church movement in order to form what is now the PCA. It is surely hypocritical for the PCA now to tolerate the same kinds of practices that not a generation ago were grounds for the exercise of discipline in reverse. If we expect revival and genuine church growth to occur, we must not experiment in worship practice, but rather be faithful to what God has revealed in His Word, remembering the dire consequences to many of God’s people throughout Biblical history for their innovations.

171. The best treatment of the question of musical instrumentation remains John Lafayette Girardeau’s *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Richmond, Va.: Whittet & Shepperson, 1888; rpt. Havertown, Pa.: New Covenant Publication Society, 1983). Girardeau was one of the premier Southern Presbyterian theologians in the nineteenth century.

172. Of course, applause would be inappropriate, whether directed to God or man; for God has not authorized such, and, if directed to man in worship, would be tantamount to idolatry.

sembly while knowing full well that that imposition would engender resentment and cause heartache for many of the commissioners. We trust also that this represents a mature view of the Church as being an organic whole, in which things that happen in one congregation are seen as affecting all of us (and thus, potentially, causing concern throughout the entire denomination). And, we trust that this principle of charity would inform PCA worship practices from now on.

The concern we have, however, has to do with the fact that worship elements (and expressions) are being legitimized on the basis of the principle of their not being ‘specifically prohibited.’ This, of course, is essentially the Catholic/Lutheran/Anglican position; it is also, stunningly, a complete reversal from the fine statements found in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. We are, quite frankly, at a loss to comprehend how the author(s) could subscribe to the regulative principle of worship, and then two pages later in essence deny it. If someone were writing a parody of a ‘loose’ theological position (or of the state of theological and intellectual reflection in today’s church), he could hardly do better than simply to quote from the document under consideration.

The eighth statement ends with the denial “that the Reformed tradition of worship should never change or that it should change without careful reflection in the Church.” This is, to say the least, very ambiguously worded. If what is being said is that the touchstone for determining the elements of worship is always Scripture, we have no problem with that. However, if it is saying that a subjective reverence to God alone, even under the guidance of (general) Biblical principles and even with humble respect for the unity of the Church, may change the substantive parts of worship, then we would be steadfastly opposed to this sentence.

Statement nine deals again with the adiaphoric aspects of worship (using the twin terminology again of circumstance and expression). We agree that circumstances are often determined by “the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed” (WCF I.6) We agree that decisions regarding circumstances should not be made without consulting Scripture, and with the idea “that we [do not] need specific scriptural warrant for every circumstance.” However, we would again point out that a circumstance is not just anything that any-

body wants it to be—that it must be genuinely ‘circumstantial’ (i.e., that it must have no liturgical significance in and of itself, and that it must be something that has to occur in order for the performance of the element).

We agree with statement ten that the New Testament gives freedom “in arranging the elements . . . of worship” and that that freedom “should be balanced with concerns for the unity of the worldwide church,” which “unity extends horizontally across the current generation of Christians throughout the world and also vertically across every age (and therefore back into biblical times). Sensitivity towards unity of form and style will also lessen the difficulty that believers experience when visiting other congregations or in relocating and transferring membership.” We concur with this thought, along with the denial “that churches are so free in developing their own styles that they should ignore the practice of other churches, losing sight of the unity of the church at worship.” It is truly a principle of Reformed worship that unity implies uniformity, in terms of the parts of worship. Moreover, even in terms of circumstantial matters, there does need to be sensitivity.

We affirm, with statement eleven, “that the regulative principle sets us free from the ‘traditions of men’”; and we agree with the denial “that the regulative principle should be used to promote an uncritical acceptance of tradition in worship, whether that tradition be Presbyterian or from some other branch of the Church.”

However, there are some difficulties with the next two paragraphs. In passing, we would note that there is the confusion of circumstances and parts of worship: the time of service and whether to use pews or chairs are circumstantial, while the use of a piano or a guitar is not. Also, there is the continuing use here of the term ‘expressions’ of the elements of worship, which, as we have pointed out, only causes confusion.

The final paragraph appears to be raising a straw man argument against the Reformed tradition. Again, let it be said that there are many circumstantial details regarding worship—including which tunes to use—that can, may, and do change throughout time. However, if our tradition, in terms of the elements/practices of worship, is thoroughly Biblical, then there is no reason to modify it. Indeed, why should it be so hard to believe that the Westminster Assembly, representing the pinnacle of Reformation thought and working during a time when the subject of worship was intensely debated, actually may have known what it was talking about with respect to it?<sup>173</sup>

Even though this 1994 review of the *Proposed Statement of Identity* goes beyond a consideration of the reg-

173. The article concluded with these words:

In conclusion, we may say that there are many fine precepts to be found in this section on worship, and many things which we

ulative principle per se, we believe that this material is important for at least two reasons. First, it demonstrates how a significant segment of the PCA was going about to reject the regulative principle, even while, in some sense, trying to affirm it. Secondly, this rebuttal delineates some of the implications of a rejection of the regulative principle.

*Steve Gonzales*

In 1995, Steve Gonzales, an organizing pastor for the Presbyterian Church in America in Clifton Park, New York, published a booklet which utilized the regulative principle in opposition to the use of drama in worship.<sup>174</sup> Among other points, he urges that worship is not entertainment, and worship does not aim to make people “feel good” (Gonzales, 6–7).

Pastor Gonzales states that determining the manner of our worship is not only according to Scripture’s explicit commands, but also by good and necessary consequence, deduced from Scripture (9).

Besides a basic affirmation of the regulative principle of worship, the booklet utilizes the tri-partite division of elements (which are non-negotiable), circumstances (always negotiable), and forms (which “must be intelligible and bring honor to God” and which “must be clear and in some way assist the worshipper in the offering of meaningful and biblical worship to his God”). (10–13).

Using this three-fold distinction, Pastor Gonzales maintains that drama cannot be justified on the basis of any of those three categories. Drama “is nowhere to be found in the New Testament either by explicit command or a command through inference.” Drama does not meet the standard definition of circumstance, for it is not “a means of communication that is ‘common to human actions and societies.’” And the issue of “form” with respect to drama is irrelevant, since the form “is not concerned with the vehicle through which the substance is conveyed” (13–19).

The author concludes his study by saying: “The application of these principles will assist the true worshiper in determining what is acceptable in worship on biblical grounds instead of basing one’s decisions on personal preferences with no rational, biblical grounds for such preferences” (20).

*Mark Dalbey*

In 1999, Mark Dalbey became Dean of Students and Assistant Professor of Practical Theology at Covenant

Theological Seminary in St. Louis. At the same time, he completed his D.Min dissertation at Covenant Seminary, entitled, “A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Look at the Regulative Principle of Worship.”<sup>175</sup>

By his own admission, Dr. Dalbey largely follows the views of John Frame with respect to worship. Therefore, there is the same Frame format of distinguishing among “elements,” “circumstances,” and “applications,” although Professor Dalbey tends to use terms such as “forms” and “styles.”

Among the churches which were observed in order to evaluate contemporary worship was a congregation of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Lutheran, Evangelical Presbyterian, and PCA congregations were also looked at. However, one of the weaknesses of the study is that “traditional Presbyterian worship” was not defined in terms of the view of the Westminster Standards; accordingly, other than a few passing references to the worship at the chapel at Geneva College, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America school in Beaver Falls,

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can all affirm in common. The conceptual problems, however, abound in this treatment of the topic, especially with regard to lack of clarity regarding the relationship of the Old Testament to New Covenant worship and with regard to total confusion over the difference between substantial and circumstantial matters in worship. If this document were to be given serious consideration by a church court, it would have to be significantly revised in order to clean up the terminology and the misconstrued concepts. However, instead of that, we would recommend the following. First, let there be a formal, public debate on the matter, preferably at General Assembly. We believe that that would help to clarify in many people’s minds what is at stake in terms of worship, and to enable them to come to a better understanding of this great subject. Second, perhaps there is a way of expressing consensus, constitutionally. For example, maybe next year or the year after there should be renewed consideration of the proposed Directory for Worship that came as Overture 10 to the 1988 General Assembly, which was designed specifically to state in positive terms what the church does believe regarding worship, while leaving controverted topics such as the content of worship song for future debate by means of using terminology that was deliberately nonspecific.

We believe that there can be significant agreement on many matters with regard to worship within the PCA, as evidenced by calls from Roy Taylor and ... John Wood for a rejection of entertainment during public worship. However, for all the reasons cited above, we do not believe that this series of theses from the *Proposed Statement of Identity* can possibly serve that purpose.

174. Steve Gonzales, *The Regulative Principle & Drama in Worship* (N.p. [Greenville, S.C.]: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1995).

175. Mark L. Dalbey, “A Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Look at the Regulative Principle of Worship” (unpublished dissertation, Covenant Theological Seminary, 1999).

Pennsylvania, there was no consideration of a genuinely Presbyterian service of worship.

In dealing with a couple of PCA churches in Indiana where he had been pastor, Dr. Dalbey notes that introducing contemporary worship had caused division in those congregations. However, his view of producing unity in the church appears to be that of “traditionalists” learning to submit to the imposition of new “forms” and “styles,” with never a thought given to how the others might learn to worship in accord with the norms of the Presbyterian faith.

At several points, he indicates that those who look to a particular period of church history—say, seventeenth century British Puritanism—as being an ideal time with respect to worship, are guilty of imposing historical-bound models upon the church; whereas those who are more “flexible” with respect to the regulative principle of worship are the ones who are more in tune with Scripture.

In short, one could say that this dissertation is filled with content-less platitudes with respect to worship, which are then bent in a certain pre-determined direction in order to underscore the author’s own predisposition toward “freshness of present expressions of biblical worship.” Perhaps the most telling factor in drawing this conclusion is the fact that the scholar deliberately did not choose to focus on even one congregation that would seek to emulate worship according to the Westminster divines’ understanding of worship—apparently, he does not believe that any such congregations are “relevant” to a “contemporary” society.<sup>176</sup>

#### Steve Schlissel

The Rev. Steve Schlissel is one of the more colorful characters in the Reformed world. A converted Jew, he at one time considered joining the Presbyterian Church in America and even appeared before the Candidates, Credentials, and Internship Committee of the PCA’s Northeast Presbytery in the early 1980s with a view

toward becoming a Presbyterian minister. Because of the greater “warmth” of the Heidelberg Catechism vis-a-vis the Westminster Standards, he eventually became Dutch Reformed, taking his Messiah’s Congregation into the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA). Subsequently, because of his stalwart stance against the liberals in the CRCNA, he was deposed in that denomination from the ministry. He continues as pastor in Brooklyn, New York, as well as chief visionary behind Messiah’s Mandate (a ministry to many of the ethnicities represented in the Metropolitan New York area), and a powerful and persuasive writer and speaker.

Mr. Schlissel has been caught up in several recent controversies. One of those has to do with his being one of the “Monroe Four”—a reference to his participation in the 2002 pastor’s conference at Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, Monroe, Louisiana, where comments were made by the speakers which, to many in the Reformed camp, seemed to imply a denial of justification by faith alone. Prior to that controversy, throughout 1999 and into 2000, he also caused alarm throughout Reformed circles by his attack on and rejection of the regulative principle of worship. His series of articles articulating his views appeared in *The Chalcedon Report* and also in the publication of his New York congregation.<sup>177</sup>

In the first of five articles, Mr. Schlissel takes the regulative principle head-on. He alleges that the principle is an example of an over-reaction against Romanist excesses; and he denies that the principle is founded on a solid Biblical foundation. Dealing with several of the classical texts adduced in favor of the regulative principle, Pastor Schlissel asserts that the standard Presbyterian exegesis ignores the context for those verses. Specifically, the context often indicates that when the Bible says “don’t add to nor take away from God’s worship,” what is really meant is that God has already prohibited what is in view. In his opinion, “Regulativists consistently ignore the Biblical contexts of their cited passages. One might say that they have, by sheer force of will, domesticated their pet verses.”

Mr. Schlissel also alleges that regulativists miss the point of the regulative principle in the classical text of Deuteronomy 12:32. His perspective is perhaps best summed up in these words: “The point, however, is that what is strictly regulated is the sacrificial system of worship, not worship per se. In fact, mere sacred assemblies are not covered by this rule.” He continues:

176. For his defense of the worship services at the 31<sup>st</sup> PCA General Assembly (2003) after they had been criticized, see [http://www.covenantseminary.edu/resource/Dalbey\\_Worship.pdf](http://www.covenantseminary.edu/resource/Dalbey_Worship.pdf).

177. Mr. Schlissel’s articles appeared in special editions of his church’s newsletter, *Messiah’s Mandate*, and in more numerous parts in the *Chalcedon Report*, throughout 1999 and into 2000. The Chalcedon series began with issue 404 (March 1999) and ran to ten parts. The series appeared as five letters in special issues of *Messiah’s Mandate*, in August, September, December 1999, and January, February 2000 (“First” through “Fourth Letter,” 1999, and “First Letter,” 2000). They are available on the world-wide web at <http://www.messiahnyc.org/articles.asp?catid=8>.

We have no evidence or suggestion that there were divinely originating directives for the elements found in these public assemblies. Clearly, prayer was a great part of it (calling upon the Lord), but the point is that they seem to have arisen from the covenant sensibilities of men, not from a known injunction from God.

The matter of sacrifice, on the other hand, was different. That was clearly set forth by God as the norm. We know this both from early Genesis and all subsequent Scripture. However, from the Fall until the entry to the promised land, even this sacrificial worship was largely unregulated. Noah offered sacrifices, as did Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These were offered perhaps in a general conformity to a pattern received from Adam or another. Indisputable, however, is the fact that the offerings were decentralized. There was no one place where God caused His name to dwell, where alone sacrifices could be lawfully rendered. They could be—and were—offered anywhere.

According to the New York pastor,

The Temple worship was strictly regulated because the Temple worship was the Gospel of the Messiah. Thus, when we come to the Scriptures composed after Messiah completed His earthly work—fulfilling the service of types (Col 2:17)—the rigors we read in the New Testament concern the Gospel and sound doctrine.

The New Testament application of the Tabernacle/Temple Regulative Principle is discovered in its intolerance to false doctrine. The RPW becomes the RPD: the Regulative Principle of Doctrine! This is why Paul could abide poor motives, so long as the content of Gospel preaching was sound.

In his estimation,

wherever we find truly orthodox Christianity being practiced we are among those who are abiding by the real Regulative Principle of Worship as found in the Old and New Testaments: covenant-keepers approaching God in faith through the atonement He has provided in His Son, our Lord. This does not mean that any and all things are permissible in worship, or that all manner of worship is equal! I only insist it means that the Biblical RPW is alive and well in orthodoxy, and there only.

Mr. Schlissel rejects the notion that the regulativists

are really genuine guardians of Christian liberty and liberty of conscience. “The regulative principle of worship, said to guard the people of God from the inventions of men, is itself an invention of men and therefore an imposition upon the consciences of those forced to accept it.”

He also bases his argument on the existence of the synagogue, and the fact that early Christian worship was based on synagogue, not temple, worship.

The very existence of the synagogue, however, undoes the regulativist’s position! For he knows that synagogues existed. And he knows that Christ and the Apostles regularly worshipped at synagogues without so much as a breath of suggestion that they were institutionally or liturgically illegitimate. And he knows that he cannot find so much as a sliver of a Divine commandment concerning what ought to be done in the synagogue. And, according to his principle, if God commanded naught concerning what ought to be done, then all was forbidden. And if all was forbidden then the whole of it—institution and liturgy—was a sinful abomination. But that brings him back to Christ attending upon the service of God there and Christ following its liturgy: did He sin by participating in an entire order of worship that was without express divine warrant? The thought is blasphemy!

But for us the synagogue presents no problem at all. We find that it is sacrificial worship only, from Deuteronomy 12 on, that is absolutely restricted in regard to place, performers and particulars. Such restrictions never governed common sacred assemblies.

In the second article, Pastor Schlissel attacks regulativists for their opposition to special religious holy days. Although such opposition was appropriate when fighting against the numerous, and onerous, observations of said days imposed by Roman Catholicism prior to the Reformation, now that the Protestant Church has grown up, she may, with the maturity of an adult, imbibe carefully of such observances.

He also excoriates regulativists for their unthinking opposition to “tradition.”

Without doubt, our Lord condemned any human tradition which obscured, nullified, set apart or contradicted the Word of God (e.g., Mark 7:9 and context). But there is no indication that He opposed traditions which supported, magnified or drew attention to the Word and works of God. It is not, for us, a question

merely of whether an observance can be traced to human tradition, but it is also a question of fidelity to Scripture, propriety in worship, and profitability to the people of God.

In this regard, he cites Jesus' attendance at synagogue worship. According to the author, not only is there no command for the institution of the synagogue, but there is also no command to read any Scripture other than the Mosaic law. But the fact of Jesus' participation in the synagogue, and the fact of His reading from Isaiah, are, for Pastor Schlissel, sufficient proof that Jesus did not hold to the regulative principle.

The New York minister proposes instead of the regulative principle of worship, what he calls the "informed principle of worship." Instead of "if not commanded, it is forbidden," he would say, "if not commanded, it might be forbidden." This "informed principle" is characterized, first of all, by being doctrinally-driven. That is to say, rather than being overly-concerned with "regulation," it is concerned with the teaching of all of Scripture (*tota Scriptura*), and especially with the idea that doctrine will govern one's worship. Secondly, the informed principle is Word-centered, in two senses. One, "informed worship is Word-centered because it self-consciously follows the synagogue pattern endorsed by our Lord and His apostles." It "insists that New Order worship be heavy on instruction." Two, "the clear Word" replaces "an entire system of approach to God." In the New Covenant, in contrast to the Old, we have the reality, a reality which can only be fully-realized in a word-oriented (rather than picture-show) system.

In teaching children we rely heavily on symbol. In teaching adults we rely heavily on words. Words are the things which penetrate the conscience and the heart. Words are what we use to make a direct appeal to a mature man's reason. Words are the true democratizing force behind the Gospel, in God's providence. For non-verbal symbols are indirect and not equally accessible by all, while virtually all people rely on verbal communication for nitty-gritty understanding. This is why the apostles urged, appealed, pleaded, reasoned and explained, and why they didn't dance the message.

Rome is looking for God in all the wrong places. In the Romish/High church approach to things, symbol remains paramount in their liturgy. Accordingly, their message is essentially authoritarian (the priest is the real actor while the audience is made up of rankless observers), is directed at child-like vassals (not

free men) and encourages implicit faith (faith in the clergy rather than faith in Christ). The drama of the Mass, for most of its existence, need not have been in the vernacular because its supposed efficacy was/is not dependent upon any self-conscious understanding on the part of the worshipper. The Word withers where emblems abound.

High church worship begins with alleged mystery and continues along a path of allusion wherein the true God is not directly encountered. Informed worship, on the other hand, begins with a direct encounter between God and His people through His own Word, and brings God and His people closer throughout worship by the very same means. It begins & ends with covenant clarity: I am your God, you are my people. Amen.

High church worship, by depending upon symbol, mystery and allusion, hides God and His Word behind incense, altars, confessionals, pantheons of saints, robes, colors, candles, and magic formulas. It is pure show business, keeping the true God apart from the people. High church worshippers are taught in one thousand gross and subtle ways that the God who created the world cannot be approached directly.

In the fourth article, Pastor Schlissel re-emphasizes the points he has made previously with regard to Deuteronomy 12:32 not teaching the regulative principle of worship as a universal, abiding principle.

Try to see what our regulativist friends have done. They've taken a principle and yanked it from its context wherein sacrificial worship—and that alone—was being regulated. Nevertheless, these same folks, recognizing that the system was to be observed only until the Christ, abstract the principle and then absolutize it. They themselves no longer practice the things the verse was (in context) given to guard, yet they continue to regard the verse as having an independent existence!

Regulativists don't have a human priesthood, which the verse protected—they believe in a priesthood of all believers. They don't have a human-constructed Temple, made according to exact requirements, which the verse guarded—they make church buildings any way they please. They don't have daily, weekly, monthly or annual blood offerings, which the verse oversaw—they use no blood at all in their rituals. They don't do pilgrimages, they don't honor the dietary restrictions, they don't refrain from mixing cloths, they don't keep the same

calendar, they don't do any of the things demanded in the verse's immediate context! And all this is well and good. They see in so many ways that all this must be interpreted in light of the whole Word of God. But when it comes to the principle which was part of the same package which terminated upon Christ's sacrificial work ...<sup>178</sup> Like men in a swoon and afraid of falling, they reach out to steady themselves with a principle rather than the Christ who was therein honored. They are left embracing a verse when all the while the verse was given only so that we might embrace the Christ! Its meaning is found in Him.

Careful now! We are not saying of this whole matter, That was the Old Testament! Rather, we are saying of the sacrificial system, That was Gospel declaration in the Sinaitic administration. The Gospel declaration today is guarded precisely the way it was then: it is forbidden to add to it or take from it (Galatians 1:8 makes that reasonably clear!).

Towards the end of the same article, he compares a proper understanding of 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3 (in light of all Scriptural teaching), to the subject of worship:

Just as women, though seemingly forbidden by 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3 from adorning themselves—just as they are actually, in view of all the Scripture, most certainly permitted to adorn themselves, in moderation, so also the people of God may adorn the historical deeds and commandments of God.

But just as a woman must abide by limits in her self-adorning, so must the people of God. Adornment must be just that. It must draw attention to the thing being adorned, not to itself. When adornment becomes obfuscation, deceit or mutilation, it has crossed the boundaries. God permits make-up, He forbids cross-dressing. Putting something on is not sinful in itself. It depends. And that's the Informed Principle of Worship.

Yes, this requires wisdom. Yes, this means we must operate without the convenience of the RPW. At least, we must operate without pretending that it is what God requires. If we'd only say, We've found the RPW helpful in keeping our communion free from Roman excesses, for example, all well and good. And if someone found another route to the same end, no harm done. But at least we'd be able to talk about worship in categories that hold promise for agreement, categories like good/

better/best, rather than I'm faithful and acceptable and you're a papist pig.

In the fifth article, the minister from Brooklyn asserts that the regulative principle is not a doctrine of most of the creeds of the Reformation, but is a construct found primarily within Presbyterianism.

The problem is not a Reformed one. To be perfectly frank, it is a Presbyterian one. Not all Presbyterians are guilty, to be sure, just as not all Reformed are innocent. But the RPW is held as a given far more commonly among Presbyterians. And it is often joined to the conviction that all the wide world must be compelled to conform to this odd and extra-biblical principle. It stands against Christian liberty just as other oddities of a like fundamentalism do: no long hair for men, no short hair for women, no pants for women, no kilts for men, no smoking, no drinking, no movies, and so on.... We should be able to commend Reformed worship to people without relying upon unproved assumptions, legalisms and impositions. A colleague in Virginia characterized the RPW as "Presbytranny." Too often this is true. For regulativists sometimes blithely eschew the sound reasoning that might persuade people of whatever wisdom there may be in the practices or convictions they advocate. Instead they try to impose them upon God's people.

Mr. Schlissel also claims that the difference between Continental Reformed and British Presbyterian reflects profound theological differences:

There is a very big difference between the regulativists and the Continental Reformed in their respective approaches to many things, worship being just one. It is the covenantal character of the Reformed that Presbyterians have sometimes been unable to understand and rarely have been able to emulate. (Speaking as a re-grafted son, it's hard enough keeping it alive among ourselves!) This difference in "approach" is discovered in the character of the Westminster Shorter Catechism compared to the Heidelberg. We might put it this way: In the Shorter Catechism we hear someone tell us what a Christian ought to believe. In the Heidelberg we hear the Christian who believes it. In the Shorter, the Word comes from outside. In the Heidelberg, it only comes to us after it has been absorbed by a transformed child of God. As such, our catechism is

<sup>178</sup> The ellipse is in the original.

militantly anti-abstractivist whereas the Westminster Standards, for all their magnificence, have come to us in a form which allows, invites or even encourages abstractivist theology.

This is a difference of note.... It helps explain why it is difficult for a Regulated Presbyterian to hear what is being said on this issue. It helps explain why our Confessions (particularly our catechism), while expressing the same truths as Westminster, express them in such a vitally different manner.

The Regulative Principle of Worship—and I refer to it here as it is understood and pressed by its “strict” adherents—is expressive of what might be a fundamentally different way of looking at the Law, the Bible, the Confessions and, in a very real way, expressive of a different way of looking at God. When the RPW (in the strict sense) becomes a core holding, a different character comes to inhabit the church. And that character is not compatible with the rich covenantal legacy as it has come down to us and as is presently enjoyed in some of our Reformed churches.<sup>179</sup>

Pastor Schlissel’s articles did not go unanswered. One of the strongest critiques came from the pen of Brian Schwertley.<sup>180</sup> Pastor Schwertley writes:

Even though, according to Schlissel, the regulative principle is unbiblical, legalistic, an invention of men, based on obfuscation and false exegesis, dictatorial, totalitarian, contrary to our legal obligations to God and a human imposition upon the consciences of men, what the Reformers did was not unethical because of their unique historical situation. They were just coming out

of Romanism. If the regulative principle is an unbiblical, dictatorial and human tradition that is a perversion of biblical worship (as our brother asserts), then what the Reformers did was positively sinful.

According to Mr. Schwertley, to repudiate the regulative principle is to repudiate the Reformed faith.

He also asserts that Steve Schlissel sets up a straw man opponent, in that he does not give full weight to the standard understanding of the regulative principle which allows for approved example and good and necessary consequence as well as direct command.

With regard to Mr. Schlissel’s argument regarding the synagogue, Mr. Schwertley notes:

If we accept Schlissel’s false version of the regulative principle (that an explicit divine imperative must be found for every worship practice) then this would be a good argument. However, since good and necessary consequence and approved historical examples are sufficient, this argument is worthless. The fact that Jesus Christ participated in synagogue worship without the slightest hint of disapprobation is warrant enough. Further, there are many passages by which synagogue sabbath worship can be deduced. Leviticus 23:3 says, “Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work in it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.”

After quoting classic Biblical commentators Matthew Henry and Matthew Poole, he continues:

Not only can one deduce weekly synagogue worship from the Bible, but also the basic worship elements of Scripture reading and exposition (cf. Neh. 8:7–8; Lev. 10:8–11; Dt. 17:8–13; 24:8; 31:9–13; 24:8; 31:9–13; 33:8; 2 Chr. 15:3; 17:7–9; 19:8–10; 30:22; 35:3; Ezra 7:1–11; Ezek. 44:15; 23–24; Hos. 4:6; Mal. 2:1, 5–8; Mt. 4:23; 9:35; 13:54; Mk. 1:21, 39; 6:2; Lk. 4:15–22, 44; 13:10; Ac. 15:21; etc.) and prayer (2 Chr. 6:34–39; Neh. 8:6; Isa. 56:7) can be deduced. Virtually all regulativists recognize that the Christian church was the natural outgrowth of the synagogue, in which the covenant people conducted weekly non-ceremonial public worship.

Pastor Schwertley contradicts Pastor Schlissel’s understanding of non-canonical revelation. Regarding standard Puritan exegesis, he writes: “based on the analogy of Scripture (Scripture cannot contradict itself and is its own best interpreter) and the clear

179. The notion that the regulative principle of worship is not found in Continental Reformed theology has been challenged. For example, see Wes Bredenhof’s 1997 internet article, “The Whole Manner of Worship... Worship and the Sufficiency of Scripture in Belgic Confession Article 7,” found on-line at <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLs/wholewes.htm>. Other writers referenced in this survey sufficiently show the facts to be otherwise as well.

180. See “A Brief Critique of Steven M. Schlissel’s Articles Against the Regulative Principle of Worship,” found on line at <http://www.reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/schlissel.htm>. For another critique, see also G. I. Williamson’s “A Critique Of Steve Schlissel’s All I Really Need To Know About Worship—I Don’t Learn From The Regulative Principle,” *The Blue Banner* 9.1–3 (January–March 2000). See also, [http://www.fpcr.org/blue\\_banner\\_articles/Schlissel.htm](http://www.fpcr.org/blue_banner_articles/Schlissel.htm). Peter J. Wallace takes a pox-on-both-your-houses approach in “Which Regulative Principle?: A Response to Steve Schlissel and Brian Schwertley” (2000). Online at <http://www.nd.edu/~pwallace/schliss.htm>.

need of divine warrant, it is assumed that historical examples that are not accompanied by explicit commands are based on some prior revelation that did not make it into the canon.” He continues: “Given the testimony of Scripture regarding human tradition and adding or subtracting from what Jehovah says, the Puritan view of approved historical examples (because not all prophecies and divine imperatives were inscripturated) makes perfect sense. Schlissel’s procedure of *assuming* that human traditions are the foundation of worship practices that are not accompanied by explicit inscripturated divine imperatives violates the analogy of Scripture and cannot be proved from the Bible. It is nothing but an assumption. Thus, a large portion of Schlissel’s argument against the regulative principle is nothing but pure speculation—a speculation that contradicts Scripture and supports the foundational principles of Romanism and rabbinical Judaism.”

Pastor Schwertley also addresses the New York minister’s desire to incorporate “human tradition” into worship:

Suppose the elders of a church decide that “Christian drama” should be introduced into public worship. Is it expressly forbidden in Scripture? Can it be profitable to the people of God? Can it be done in a tasteful orderly manner? Suppose the elders decide that readings from the Apocrypha and notable Christian authors should be introduced into public worship. Is it forbidden? Can it be profitable? Can it be done decently and in order? How about a new sacrament? Why not? It’s not forbidden. It certainly can be edifying. We promise it will only be done with proper solemnity. Or, how about a new holy day to commemorate the martyrs of the Reformation? One could come up with thousands of innovations which meet Schlissel’s conditions. Schlissel himself may not want to introduce such things into worship. He may even have a very old-fashioned, traditional Reformed service. However, the only difference between Schlissel and pastors who introduce such innovations is personal preference. Schlissel’s position regarding human tradition in worship is nothing but the typical evangelical understanding of worship.

Steve Schlissel is taken to task for his contention that the regulative principle applied only to temple and ceremonial worship. Mr. Schwertley writes that Mr. Schlissel’s argument fails to appreciate that temple worship included both ceremonial and non-ceremonial elements. Furthermore, if any Scripture passage affirms the regulative principle outside of temple worship,

then the argument linking the principle only to temple worship falls to the ground. Texts such as Matthew 15: 13, Colossians 2:20–23, and John 4:21–24 are adduced in order to demonstrate that the principle applies universally to worship.

Regarding Mr. Schlissel’s easy dismissal of the phrase, “which I commanded them not,” Pastor Schwertley counters:

If God in these passages is merely condemning violations of His law and is not also reminding the covenant people of God of the important principle that human innovations in worship are forbidden, then why is the phrase ‘which I commanded them not’ in these passages at all? Schlissel apparently assumes that if it can be shown that an express violation of God’s law has occurred, then explicit statements of the regulative principle by the Holy Spirit can be ignored. The statement “which I commanded them not” is the regulative principle. The prophet’s covenant lawsuit preaching clearly presupposes that the regulative principle is an integral part of God’s law. It presupposes that God’s people are only to base their worship practices on divine revelation. It makes perfect sense for God not only to condemn explicit violations of His law, but also to remind His people of the principle that underlies purity of worship.

Brian Schwertley concludes his critique with these words:

The regulative principle of worship (i.e., truly Reformed worship) is the only principle that can withstand all exegetical attacks and stem today’s sweeping tide of human worship innovations. It can withstand all exegetical attacks because it is founded upon the sacred Scripture and nothing else. It can stem the tide of human innovation in worship because it cuts off, at the root, all innovation, all human tradition and will-worship. The seeds of will-worship are killed before they can sprout. Humanly originated worship traditions are forbidden at the outset, and are thus not given the opportunity of taking root and displacing that worship which God has instituted. Everything in worship must have a divine warrant; i.e., it must be proved from the word of God. Thornwell writes: “As under the Old Dispensation nothing connected with the worship or discipline of the Church of God was left to the wisdom or discretion of man, but everything was accurately prescribed by the authority of God, so, under the New, no voice is to be heard in the household of faith but the voice of the Son of God. The power of the church is purely

ministerial and declarative. She is only to hold forth the doctrine, enforce the laws, and execute the government which Christ has given her. She is to add nothing of her own to, and to subtract nothing from, what her Lord has established. Discretionary power she does not possess.<sup>181</sup>

It is our prayer and desire that our brother would cease his arrogant attacks upon Reformed worship, and instead use his many talents to work for the reformation of worship in these times of serious declension.

We would venture another critique of Brother Schlissel's writings in this regard. It appears to us that he himself gives us the clue when he notes the difference between Continental Reformed and Presbyterian creeds and confessions. It is not that we would want to posit such a sharp bifurcation between the two—and, indeed, there is good evidence that the regulative principle was embraced, to a greater or lesser degree, in most of the Reformed creeds. However, in making this profound distinction, he also alludes to the fact that the theology of the Westminster Standards is “abstract.” Well, yes, of course—that is precisely what systematic theology is! One of the key problems in the Reformed world over the past several decades has been the reluctance to engage in systematic theology, coupled with the attempt to squeeze systematic theology into a Biblical-theological mold. (This is at least partially to blame for the current controversy over the doctrine of justification.) The

regulative principle of worship, by definition, is an abstract ideal, by virtue of its being a rubric of systematic theology. Mr. Schlissel's views fail to take that reality into account; indeed, they explicitly deny it.

Terry Johnson

Presbyterian Church in America pastor Terry Johnson has served quite capably since 1987 as senior pastor of the historic Independent Presbyterian Church, Savannah, Georgia. Besides helping to rejuvenate the ministry of an old downtown congregation, he has also helped revive interest in traditional worship, especially by taking the lead in the production of the *Trinity Psalter*, an inexpensive, words-only version of the metrical Psalter conceived as a supplement manual of praise for churches familiar only with hymnals.<sup>182</sup>

In 1996, Pastor Johnson published *Leading in Worship*, designed to aid modern churchmen in the practice of worship.<sup>183</sup> In a brief introduction, he postulates that not all forms of worship are suitable to perpetuate Presbyterian theology (“Charismatic [and] Episcopalian buckets [cannot] carry Presbyterian water.... repetitious choruses and litanies cannot accommodate the subtlety of Reformed theology”), laments the contemporary liturgical diversity among Presbyterians (“We may face the defection of a whole generation if we do not achieve a greater uniformity of worship”), and advocates the rediscovery of the regulative principle (*Leading in Worship*, 1–3).

Regarding the regulative principle, the Georgia minister argues for its validity not so much on the basis of proof texts, as from the character of Reformed theology as a whole: “Can the creature know how to please the Creator apart from His self-revelation? Can fallen humanity create a form of worship that is approved by a Holy God? May the church legislate ceremonies and rituals for use in public worship not commanded by God in His Word? The Reformed doctrines of Scripture's sufficiency, God's transcendence, man's infinitude, sin's corruptions, the limits of church power, and the Christian's liberty of conscience, to name a few, all require the restrictions of the regulative principle” (*Leading in Worship*, 5–6).

However, Pastor Johnson's presentation is not totally satisfactory. He does properly list the various elements of worship, according to the Westminster Confession of Faith; however, he then says: “While these elements are fixed and unchanging, *circumstances* (e.g., time of meeting; place of meeting; systems for lighting and voice amplification, etc.) and *forms* (e.g., written prayer vs.

181. The author cites James H. Thornwell, *Collected Writings* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1872) 2.163.

182. *The Trinity Psalter* (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Publications, 1994). In 1993 the Twenty-First General Assembly of the PCA received a report from the “Psalm-Singing” Subcommittee whose task was to “formulate practical ways in which Psalm-singing can be encouraged in the congregations of the Presbyterian Church in America and other Reformed churches” (21st General Assembly, 1993, Appendix D, Attachment 1, pages 362–366). The report is online at <http://www.pcanet.org/history/pca/psalmody.html>. At the end of the online text, an editorial note states: “One result of this report was the production in 1994 of the *Trinity Psalter*. As noted in the *Preface* to that work, it is essentially the *Book of Psalms for Singing*, reduced greatly in size by using only one version of each Psalm, by citing only one tune per Psalm, and through the elimination of the musical score. Besides Terry Johnson (who served as Chairman), the other members of this Sub-Committee were as follows: ministers Richard Bacon, Wallace “Bill” Marshall, J. Ligon Duncan III, Larry Roff, Anthony Dallison, J. Camerson Fraser, and Joseph Pipa; and ruling elders J. R. “Sonny” Peaster, J. Ligon Duncan, Jr., and George Caler.

183. Terry L. Johnson, ed., *Leading in Worship: A Sourcebook for Presbyterian Students and Ministers Drawing Upon the Biblical and Historic Forms of the Reformed Tradition* (Oak Ridge, Tenn.: The Covenant Foundation, 1996).

extemporaneous; hymns vs. Psalms; topical vs. expository sermons) are determined by the ‘light of nature and Christian prudence,’ leading us to expect more variety in these areas” (*Leading in Worship*, 5).

The problem, of course, is that his category of “forms” is too broad. While it is true that there is “freedom of speech,” so to speak, with respect to those elements of worship where the actual words are not prescribed (prayer and the preaching of the Word), it is not true to say that that same diversity applies to other elements of worship (such as in the singing of praise). Or, to put the point somewhat differently, the content of each of the elements of worship is prescribed as being a necessary part of that element, but in some elements the divine prescription allows for spontaneity, while in others (the singing of praise and the reading of the Word) it does not.

Furthermore, Pastor Johnson demonstrates his willingness to have the church’s worship modified based on practices of antiquity, rather than based solely on what is indicated in the Bible. For example, he writes: “While moderate liturgical worship developed very early (with use of the Ten Commandments, Creed, Confession, Lord’s Prayer), the responsive litanies (e.g., *sanc-tus, sursum corda, kyrie eleison*, the peace) are mainly a later development. Their use may tip the balance too far in the liturgical direction. Worship that employs only fixed forms is stifling. The complete absence of fixed forms, however, may leave the church unnecessarily vulnerable to the ever changing cultural-ecclesiastical environment” (*Leading in Worship*, 7). However, “using the (Apostles’) Creed” is not an element or practice of worship recognized by the Westminster Confession which he quotes with favor. And responsive litanies and responsive readings of Scripture also do not fit the approved categories. In fairness to Terry Johnson, he does advocate only “few fixed forms”; he urges resistance to the strong temptation “to move the church in a more liturgical direction”, insofar as that movement goes “beyond the use of the Lord’s Prayer, Creed, Ten Commandments, and confession of sin” (*Leading in Worship*, 17).

Another example of his willingness to appeal to what is historical is his favorable treatment of “seasonal services.” Pastor Johnson does reject “the full-blown calendar of ‘holy days,’” citing concerns over creating man-made “ceremonies and rituals not authorized in Scripture,” the resulting downplaying of the weekly Sabbath, the interference with “regular, sequential expository preaching,” and the fact that “the church year is both of dubious historical origins and contemporary

motivation.” Nevertheless, he also concedes that “Reformed churches would do well to follow the example of the Continental Reformed churches in limiting their church year to what has been called the ‘five evangelical feast days’: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. Some might add Trinity Sunday to this list as well (e.g., Nichols in *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition*). In this way, the high points of the Gospel message would be commemorated in Reformed churches annually along with most of Christendom, without becoming entangled in the full calendar cycle” (*Leading in Worship*, 103–104).<sup>184</sup>

Terry Johnson therefore represents a moderate regulative principle position. He very much wants to restrict worship to the several elements of worship. However, he uses an expanded concept of forms—a modification that can allow for the singing of uninspired hymns during public worship. Moreover, he is willing to engage in practices that have the pedigree of antiquity, but not the approbation of Scripture. These extra-Biblical approaches allows for expanded use of responsive litanies and readings, and moderate observance of the so-called Christian calendar.

Robert Godfrey

In 1999, as part of a series from the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, Robert Godfrey wrote *Pleasing God in Our Worship*.<sup>185</sup> President of Westminster Theological Seminary in California, Dr. Godfrey had witnessed plenty of deviation from regulated worship in the Christian Reformed Church of North America

184. Perhaps Terry Johnson is unaware of this, but James Hastings Nichols is a liberal, and certainly no friend to conservative Presbyterians. Nichols contended that “The Reformers did not ... attempt to emulate the forms of worship of the apostolic church,” but that they “accepted, rather, the patterns established in the second century and maintained by Catholic tradition.” He also wrote: “New Testament worship ... in its variety and flexibility, questions the finality of all liturgical regulations, and by its refusal to admit the cultic as such, it sets authenticity of religious life above all aesthetic criteria. In this sense the Reformers were faithful to the New Testament precisely in declining to pursue either New Testament or patristic patterns literally.” See James Hastings Nichols, *Corporate Worship in the Reformed Tradition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968) 19, 23. See also William Stacy Johnson, “Equally Yoked,” in *Presbyterian Outlook*, May 28, 2001, commenting on “Affirmation 2001,” a document which advocated homosexual ordination: “Made public at the Downtown United church of Rochester, N.Y., ‘Affirmation 2001’ claims to stand in the impressive tradition of Harry Emerson Fosdick, James Hastings Nichols, Henry Sloan Coffin and the Auburn Affirmation published in January 1924.”

185. Robert Godfrey, *Pleasing God in Our Worship* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1999).

(CRCNA), a denomination from which he transferred into the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA). Reflecting the burden of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (ACE), the booklet was targeted at the baneful worship practices in much of evangelical Christianity.

President Godfrey notes that idolatry entails not only worshipping false gods (the focus of the first commandment), but also worshipping the true God falsely (the focus of the second commandment): “This commandment clearly forbids the use of images of God in worship, but it also implicitly forbids all human invention in worship. This prohibition against images means that we must please the true God only in ways that please him. The people of Israel claimed they were worshipping the Lord as the true God when they fashioned the golden calf. They regarded the image as Jehovah (Exod. 32:5–6). But such false worship offended God and brought judgment on the people.” Appeal is made also to other standard texts which demonstrate the Reformed view of worship: Leviticus 10:1 (Nadab and Abihu offering “strange fire”), Colossians 2:23 (prohibition of “self-imposed worship”), and Matthew 15:6 (compared with Isaiah 29:13).<sup>186</sup>

While not using the term, “regulative principle of worship,” in his book, this church history professor is clearly intent on maintaining the principle. His desire in this regard can perhaps best be seen in an historical piece he wrote five years earlier on the worship views of John Calvin. Dr. Godfrey concluded the article this way:

For Calvin true worship must wed inward sincerity to outward faithfulness to God’s Word. Worship must be outwardly obedient to God’s inspired direction and also flow from the heart: “... it is not sufficient to utter the praises of God with our tongues, if they do not proceed from the heart...” In true worship the believer exercises faith and repentance as he meets with God and grows in grace. As Hughes Oliphant Old stated, “The outward form of worship and the inward adoration of the heart must remain firmly joined together.”

Calvin’s labor to relate the inward and outward dimensions of worship properly flowed out of his theology as a whole. Reformed Christianity for him was an integrated whole. His doctrine of sin made him deeply suspicious of human instincts and human desires in the matter of worship. His doctrine of grace led him to expect God

to be sovereign in directing worship. He would have insisted that those who think that they can preserve Reformed systematic theology while abandoning a Reformed theology of worship are wrong. Rather he would suggest that where theology stresses the sovereign power and work of God, where the priority of his action and the regulative authority of his Word are recognized, there a form of worship very like Calvin’s own will emerge. The church today needs to listen anew to Calvin on worship so that its worship will not be man-centered, but God-centered and God-directed.<sup>187</sup>

### *The PRCA*

The Protestant Reformed Churches in America is a denomination which, since its founding in 1925, has steadfastly maintained a traditional Reformed ministry. In a special 1998 edition of the denominational magazine, *Standard Bearer*, the Rev. Ronald VanOverloop, pastor of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church, Bauer, Michigan, set forth a standard understanding of the regulative principle. He wrote:

The second commandment’s prohibition of images speaks specifically to the manner in which the one true God is worshiped. Whereas the first commandment rejects all other gods for the one God, the second commandment determines the contents and manner of the worship of Jehovah. It emphasizes that the one God is to be worshiped only in the way He commands, and not as man imagines. An image is the effort of the human imagination to represent the deity, which representation is thought to be needed to regulate the relationship between the god and its worshipers. Thus the second commandment regulates the worship of the one true God.

Pastor VanOverloop appeals to the confessions of the Reformation, including those in the Continental tradition, as well as to standard Scripture proof texts. He also makes the appropriate distinction between “element” and “circumstance”:

By “elements” is meant an item or a matter which is included in the liturgy of the service of worship. “Circumstances” refer to the way in which the elements are included or practiced in the worship service. The elements which God’s Word authorizes to be used to worship Him are: salutation, blessings, singing of Psalms, reading of Scripture, prayer, the administration of the two sacraments, offerings, and chiefly the preaching of

186. *Pleasing God*, 14–16.

187. W. Robert Godfrey, “Calvin and the Worship of God,” *The Blue Banner*, 3.11–12 (November–December 1994) 1–10.

the Word. The regulative principle demands these elements to be a part of the service.

Although there is freedom with regard to circumstantial matters,

the way in which the elements are present in the worship service is to be always one of reverence, so that it is obvious that the Most High Majesty is being worshiped. Also solemnity, simplicity, orderliness, and stability are to characterize the way in which the elements are present in the worship service (1 Cor. 14:40). The way in which the elements of the worship of God are present should not be ritualistic and strictly external ceremony, on the one hand. And, on the other hand, the way in which the elements of a divine worship service are present should not be frivolous and entertaining.<sup>188</sup>

In the same issue of the *Standard Bearer* appears an article on preaching by David Engelsma, “Preaching in Worship: Voice of God, Voice of Christ.” In speaking to this subject the professor addresses his problems with a journal and writer mentioned already in this lengthy survey.

The question whether preaching is the Word of God or the word of man is forced on us at the present hour by the assault on preaching in the Reformed churches. It is this assault that drives the movement to overhaul Reformed worship.

One does not have to read many issues of the journal *Reformed Worship* to realize that in the restructured worship that this Reformed periodical envisions and promotes preaching is, at best, one element among many. Fact is, although the editors pay lip service to preaching, preaching does not have their heart. What truly interests them are banners, dialogue, dance, and especially music.

Whereas *Reformed Worship* damns preaching in worship with faint praise and scant attention, Presbyterian theologian John M. Frame expresses that the current renewal of worship in supposedly conservative Presbyterian and Reformed churches takes dead aim at preaching. He does this in his recent book, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship* (P&R, 1996). Under the heading “Preaching and Teaching” Frame denies that “teaching in the church is ... restricted to elders” (p. 91). He affirms that drama is a legitimate form of

preaching and teaching. He asserts that “teaching can take place through dialogue” (pp. 92–94).

This reputedly conservative and certainly influential Presbyterian theologian says, “I see no reason why some worship services should not be entirely musical” (p. 114).

Basic to his gutting of the regulative principle of worship (by so expanding it that it becomes meaningless) is his denial of any validity to the distinction between official, public worship by the church and informal worship at home by a family (pp. 44, 45). This effectively negates the necessity of preaching at church, for obviously we do not have preaching in our family devotions.

It comes as no surprise, then, that in the last chapter, “Putting It Together,” where Frame describes the ideal worship for which he has laid the foundation throughout the book (which also happens to be the public worship that Frame has created and leads in his southern California “New Life Presbyterian Church”), the preaching of the Word is lost in the shuffle. (I use the word “shuffle” deliberately since Frame also approves dance in the worship, pp. 130–132.) Not the preaching, but the lively praise songs; the choruses; the clapping; the whistling; the tapping of tambourines; John Frame’s prayer; hymn after hymn after hymn; John Frame’s talking to the congregation between the hymns; the Lord’s Supper; and John Frame’s directing the choir are on the foreground (pp. 145–154).

All these other activities take up most of the time. Unless they hold services for two hours or more in southern California, the sermon cannot be longer than 15 minutes.

The remaining articles in this issue of the *Standard Bearer* were Prof. Herman Hanko, “The Songs of Zion: What Shall the Church Sing?” (where the author argues for exclusive psalmody); Barry Gritters, “The Participating Pew;”<sup>189</sup> and Steven Key, “Reformed Worship: Fellowship with the Holy One.”

188. Ronald VanOverloop, “The Force of the Second Commandment in Worship,” *Standard Bearer* (January 1998); available on-line at [http://www.rsglh.org/saved%20files/reformed\\_worship.htm](http://www.rsglh.org/saved%20files/reformed_worship.htm).

189. Gritters writes: “Participation of the pew can be lost, really, in two directions. On the one hand, the pew can participate in the worship in an improper manner, either by usurping the place of the duly appointed officebearers or by involving itself in activities that are not required by Scripture. By allowing this improper participation, the church will inevitably lose the true worship of God.... On the other

The PRCA also makes available on line and in print *Psalm Singing: A Reformed Heritage*, by the Rev. J. Korterling. This pamphlet defends exclusive psalmody and gives a brief statement of the regulative principle from the Westminster Confession of Faith 21.1 as well as the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 35.<sup>190</sup>

Gregory Rickmar

A lay member of the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA), Gregory Rickmar helped lead reform efforts in, and later secession movements out of, the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA). In an on-line paper entitled "An Introduction to Reformed Worship," Mr. Rickmar attempts to incorporate insights from James B. Jordan with those who advocate the traditional regulative principle of worship.<sup>191</sup>

The paper's Abstract states: "This paper concludes that Scripture specifies that certain activities should be included in worship and the order that these activities should proceed. It also concludes that the Lord's Supper should be included in worship every Sunday."

Three characteristics of worship are set forth, viz., dialogue (between God and man), covenant renewal (an emphasis championed by James Jordan), and the fact that worship is regulated by the Word of God. Mr. Rickmar demonstrates that, even though the term "regulative principle of worship" is almost never heard in churches in the Dutch Reformed tradition, the principle is without doubt found in standard Dutch Reformed creeds and theologians, and rooted in the views of John Calvin himself.

The author argues that the Reformed church should begin to develop a greater understanding of worship, especially with regard to the order of public worship.

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hand, pew participation can be lost by a reversion to the mentality of Roman Catholic sacerdotalism, where the pew only observes the worship of the priests or ministers, but does not actually participate in the worship of God."

190. The pamphlet also ran as an article in *Reformed Witness*, 6.3 (March 1998), a newsletter published under the auspices of the Evangelism Committee of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church of Redlands, California. Online at <http://www.hopeprc.org/reformedwitness/1998/RW199803.htm>.

191. Available on-line at <http://pws.pserv.net/rickmar/aitrw.htm>.

192. The paper also appears in Biblical Horizons Occasional Paper No. 15, *Manual for Lord's Day Worship*.

193. The article, simply entitled "The Regulative Principle," is available on the web at [http://www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric\\_pratt/TH.Pratt.Reg.Princ.pdf](http://www.thirdmill.org/newfiles/ric_pratt/TH.Pratt.Reg.Princ.pdf). The paper is not dated but the file is dated 9/6/1999.

Citing the work of Anglican scholars on the Apocalypse, he writes: "This evidence suggests that New Covenant churches are required to follow the Old Covenant order of worship. After all, if the book of Revelation, which describes a heavenly Lord's Day worship service, repeats themes and ideas from the Old Covenant liturgy *in the same order*, it follows that New Covenant worship should follow that same sequence."<sup>192</sup>

Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

A Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr., has offered a redefinition of the regulative principle all the while professing to maintain it. In a brief article on the world wide web,<sup>193</sup> Dr. Pratt quotes from Westminster Confession of Faith 21.1 as providing "a very common statement of the regulative principle"; and then writes: "The word 'prescribed' has frequently led to the types of narrow assertions listed above, i.e., that we ought not to sing songs other than the Psalms or to use musical instruments in worship. A more helpful formulation of the regulative principle is: 'We must have positive biblical support for all that we do in worship.' This formulation keeps us from a Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, or other model. But it also acknowledges the hermeneutical complexities of deriving directives for worship from the Bible" (Pratt, 1).

Professor Pratt states that the regulative principle was designed to protect against two abuses: Roman Catholic idolatry, and Anglican violation of liberty of conscience with respect to worship. However, he then writes: "To apply the regulative principle appropriately today, we cannot simply repeat the way it was applied in earlier centuries. Rather, we must identify the idols and attacks on liberty of conscience that are present among our churches today. This will differ from church to church and from time to time. One of the principles which the Reformation embraced was *ecclesia semper reformanda est* — the church is always reforming. This means that we cannot represent the Reformed tradition without re-presenting it. Simply to repeat it is not to represent it at all" (Pratt, 2).

This RTS professor sees several contemporary forms of idolatry to be eschewed.

Evangelicals tend to reduce the throne room experience of worship to: a) a classroom for learning; b) a family reunion for mutual encouragement; c) a welcome wagon for visitors and seekers; d) a therapist's couch for psychological healing; and/or e) a variety show for

entertainment. None of these models is entirely wrong, but when any of these becomes the central model for worship, it also becomes idolatrous.

In many Reformed churches today, the idol is intellectualism. We turn worship into a classroom for learning. This emphasis on intellect was appropriate in earlier historical periods, and may become necessary again some day. But just as Hezekiah destroyed Moses' bronze serpent because it *became* and [*sic*] idol, we must destroy the tendency toward intellectualism that has *become* an idol in worship for many of us. There are other worship idols as well, and these must become the focus of our attention as we apply the regulative principle today (Pratt, 2)

With regard to violation of liberty of conscience, he writes: "Ironically, perhaps the closest thing in Reformed circles to the Anglican book of prayer is the insistence of some on particular practices such as Psalm singing. The biblical support for insisting that Psalms be sung (and sometimes exclusively) in every worship service is weak to say the least. In effect, it reflects the convictions of some being forced on others. This violates the regulative principle, and must be rejected in the spirit of the reformation" (Pratt, 2)

He concludes: "It is time for those devoted to continuing the Reformation to revive commitment to the regulative principle. The regulative principle has characterized our tradition for centuries, and we must stop yielding exclusive claim to it to those who have idealized its past applications. We should move forward by applying it in new ways so that we may worship God in the Spirit and in truth" (Pratt, 3)

But, of course, this seminary professor misses the point: the regulative principle of worship, properly understood, is universally applicable, so that the practice of worship should be uniform regardless of the place or time. Therefore, the elements of worship are determined according to Biblical prescription, not on the basis of whether some worship practice might be twisted in the minds of some into idolatry.

Furthermore, Professor Pratt also misconstrues the notion of freedom of conscience. Those who insist on singing only Psalms in public worship are affirming and upholding the principle of liberty, by pointing out that no one has the right to impose on the congregation that which cannot be shown to be Biblical.

While it is true that the Reformed church is always *being reformed*, this work of re-formation is properly the work of the Holy Spirit, not human cleverness. Dr.

Pratt's pleas for a new reformation sound dangerously close to the siren song of liberals.

#### Other Works for this Period

Two reprints of older works supportive of the Puritan principle of worship appeared about 1990: John L. Girardeau, "The Discretionary Power of the Church,"<sup>194</sup> and Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Worship*.<sup>195</sup> Other books and articles of interest for the period include Richard E. Bacon, "Corporate Worship and Covenant Children" (1992);<sup>196</sup> Henry Sikkema, "Understanding the Regulative Principle of Worship" (1999);<sup>197</sup> R. E. Pot, "In Pursuit of Plainness: The Puritan Principle of Worship" (Spring 1997);<sup>198</sup> and Dr. John F. MacArthur, Jr., "How Shall We Then Worship?" in the IFCA *Handbook* (May 1997).<sup>199</sup> G. I. Williamson's study guide to the Heidelberg Catechism describes the principle,<sup>200</sup> as does the guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith by Gerstner, Kelly and Rollinson.<sup>201</sup> W. Gary

194. John L. Girardeau, "The Discretionary Power of the Church," in *Life Work and Sermons* (Harrisonburg, Pa: Sprinkle Publications, n.d.) 369–412.

195. Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel Worship* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1990; reprint 1993).

196. Richard E. Bacon, "Corporate Worship and Covenant Children," in *The Presbyterian Reformed Magazine* 6.4 (Winter 1992) 196–199. "If the regulative principle is true, then God is to be worshiped only as He has ordained in His Word. But He has ordained that covenant children are to be present in congregational worship. Therefore, the unlawfulness of [church] nurseries seems to us to be most attractive" (196). Dr. Bacon subsequently penned a larger treatment of this theory, *Revealed to Babes: Children in the Worship of God* (Audubon, N.J.: Old Paths Publications, 1993).

197. Online at [http://prcedm.netfirms.com/documents/sikkema/understanding\\_spw.htm](http://prcedm.netfirms.com/documents/sikkema/understanding_spw.htm).

198. Pastor Pot writes as one not convinced of the stricter applications of the regulative principle, but presents an overview of writings pro and con. He concludes: "What marks the Puritan approach to worship, then, is an appeal to Scripture. And it is for this reason that the least we can do is give serious consideration to this approach, and provide a well-reasoned Biblical response. When we, as heirs of the Reformation, are accused of departing from the Reformational principle of sola scriptura, then surely we are at least compelled to give this accusation a fair hearing." Online at [http://www.geocities.com/r\\_e\\_pot/papers/puritan.html](http://www.geocities.com/r_e_pot/papers/puritan.html).

199. John MacArthur, "How Shall We Then Worship?" in the IFCA *Church and Ministers Handbook* (May 1997). Originally published in: John Armstrong, ed., *The Coming Crisis in Evangelicalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1996). [http://www.ifca.org/Handbook/Title\\_index\\_page.htm](http://www.ifca.org/Handbook/Title_index_page.htm).

200. G. I. Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism: A Study Guide* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 1993).

201. John H. Gerstner, Douglas F. Kelly and Philip Rollinson, *A Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith: commentary* (Signal Mountain, Tenn.: Summertown Texts, 1992). The treatment of the principle in

Crampton's study guide to the same asks "What is the Puritan (or regulative) principle of worship?"<sup>202</sup> The Rev. Dr. Rowland S. Ward's popular commentary on the Confession of Faith, which first appeared in 1992, addresses the principle, making particular note of it in the context of Chapter 20 and liberty of conscience.<sup>203</sup> James Bordwine's index to the Confession and Larger Catechism includes entries for the principle.<sup>204</sup> However, if one were to expect to turn and find an entry regarding the regulative principle in the 1999 *Dictionary*

this commentary seems rather mediocre given the attention the principle had received up to the date of this publication, and while the term 'regulative principle' is used in the index, it does not appear in the commentary itself. On the singing of psalms the writers acknowledge: "The singing of Psalms has also now just about died out. Originally Reformed churches only allowed congregational singing of the Psalms, because they were authentically and authoritatively Biblical and hence lacked the potential contamination of false teaching which might come from the mere human authorship of hymns. Subsequently, however, hymns (which are not even mentioned by the *Confession*) have been introduced into Reformed liturgical use and have virtually driven out what is mentioned and was once exclusively sung" (104–105).

202. W. Gary Crampton, *Study Guide to the Westminster Confession* (N.p.: Trinity Foundation, 1996) 56.

203. "Most editions of the Confession perpetuate a typographical error in that the word *in* replaces *if* in the statement of the original: '... and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word; or beside it, *if* matters of faith or worship.' The error obscures the fact that the conscience is never bound to anything contrary to God's word, and in matters of faith or worship is not bound to anything additional to what is revealed in Scripture (as explained in WCF 1:6). The result of the application of this 'regulative principle' to matters of faith and worship is simply to exclude all the additions of the ages, and bring us back to apostolic standards. It also places limits on the rights of civil government. A civil government may require us to use seat belts in our cars, contribute to a Pension Fund or pay a particular tax. These are not matters of faith or worship, nor are they contrary to Scripture. Such laws should therefore be obeyed." Rowland S. Ward, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: A Study Guide Expanded Edition* (Melbourne: New Melbourne Press, 2004) 178.

204. James Edward Bordwine, *A Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger Catechism, with Scripture proofs: also including chapter summaries and topical index* (N.p.: Trinity Foundation, 1991).

205. D. G. Hart and Mark A. Noll, eds., *Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America* (Westmont, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1999).

206. The RPCNA is said to hold "to classical Presbyterian beliefs and practices. Thus the RPCNA is committed to the regulative principle of worship and therefore sings the psalms exclusively without instrumental accompaniment, using a psalter last revised in 1973" (Hart and Noll, 211–212). "Reformed worship came to America along with the Puritans who settled New England. Puritans seemed radically Zwinglian. The Bible was their textbook, and what was not specifically mentioned in Scripture was banished from Sunday assemblies—God should be worshiped God's way" (282).

of the *Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America*, one would be disappointed.<sup>205</sup> The term is mentioned as a distinctive of the RPCNA, but the article "Worship, Presbyterian and," suffers from an obvious bias against Puritanism as well as from a false notion that there is a significant difference between the Reformers and the Puritans on the Scriptural rule governing worship.<sup>206</sup>

#### Overview: 1990–1999

This decade began with an important marker for interest in the regulative principle of worship with the holding of the 1990 Psalmody Conference. In the 1990s, discussion of the Scriptural rule of worship became more fashionable, indeed unavoidable within mainstream conservative Presbyterianism, with a resulting growth in the amount of literature, both pro and con. The publication of *Worship in the Presence of God* signaled a significant increase of interest in the doctrine, a fact borne out as well by the severity of criticism it received from those opposed to the principle.

In this decade also, various publishers of books and newsletters likewise contributed support to a traditional understanding of the doctrine. Less consistently, others supported the principle in general terms, but with sufficient modifications as to decrease its full import, and still others attempted to redefine the principle altogether.

Further to the left, the conception of the regulative principle itself was being questioned, not only by James Jordan's writings, but by people such as Westminster Seminary professor John Frame, who utilized the term "expressions" as a way of trying to insert into worship practices that, in his view, were neither properly "circumstantial" or "elemental." In the PCA, a "consensus" statement, that appeared the year before Professor Frame's *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, used similar terminology.

At the end of the decade, the most frontal attack upon the regulative principle itself came from the pen of Steve Schlissel, who totally rejected the doctrine, and advocated instead the "informed principle of worship." The assault was sufficiently met; however, Presbyterianism's regulative principle would face new foes in the early years of the twenty-first century.

[Editor's Note. Lord willing, this article will be concluded in the 2007 issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.] ■