

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

## Part Two (2000–2007)

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

### OVERVIEW (1946–1999)

In Part One of this two-part series covering the years 1946–1999, it was noted that 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. This principle is most simply defined this way: whatever is commanded by God for worship is required, and whatever is not commanded is forbidden. It is contrary to the view of worship embraced by Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Anglicanism, viz., that whatever is not forbidden in worship is allowed. The Calvinistic branch of the Reformation maintained this stricter view, which was refined during the time of the Second Reformation and the ascendancy of Puritanism, and classically defined in the Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 21:

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>1</sup>

However, adherence to this foundational principle of Presbyterianism began to wane in the eighteenth century, and it largely lost its hold in much of the Reformed community by the early nineteenth century. As was noted, the reasons for this development are many: the decline of Reformed piety and orthodoxy in general;

a rising of secularism founded in pluralism; the influence of the several revival movements toward an emotionalistic worship, and a breakdown in denominational distinctives; and an increasing rationalism leading to the diminution of the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. All of these trends pulled Presbyterianism in two somewhat disparate directions by the opening of the twentieth century: toward an evangelicalism that drank deeply from the well of maudlin Romanticism; and toward a high church liturgical perspective which aped Anglicanism.

By the 1940s liberalism had destroyed the Northern mainline church, and was in the process of destroying her Southern sister. However, the founding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by conservatives from the PCUSA led to an opportunity for a classic restatement and setting forth of this Reformational principle governing the worship of God. Drawing upon the literature of Scottish and nineteenth century Southern Presbyterianism, John Murray brought renewed if fledgling interest in the regulative principle in the 1946 paper on worship song.<sup>2</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s there were a few individuals who called attention to and defended the principle, but it remained very much true in America

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1. S. W. Carruthers, M.D., Ph.D., *The Westminster Confession of Faith: Being an account of the Preparation and Printing of its Seven Leading Editions, to which is appended a critical text of the Confession with notes thereon* (Manchester: R. Aikman & Son, [1937]) 129.

2. "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* [1946]).

what Iain Murray stated in 1963 regarding his country: the “Puritan teaching on the regulative principle of Scripture is almost as obsolete in England as the teaching that the earth is flat.”<sup>3</sup> While still small, awareness of the principle would continue to grow, and in the 1970s foundations for further interest were laid, as well as for future opposition. This blossomed in the 1980s through the work of some small publishers. The 1990s opened with an historic conference on Psalmody which heralded a large increase throughout that decade in the literature. Some supported the principle clearly, some less so, others sought to redefine it, and a few sought an all-out assault.<sup>4</sup>

#### VII. THE NEW MILLENNIUM<sup>5</sup>

With the growth of the Internet and interest in and continued controversy over the regulative principle of worship, the production of literature greatly accelerated over the first half of the first decade of the new millennium.

#### TERRY JOHNSON

A minister in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) who pastors the Independent Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia, Terry Johnson has been a major player in the discussion regarding worship. In the first part of this article, we considered his writings up through 1999. In the twenty-first century, he has continued to write as he develops his understanding of proper worship.

In March 2000, as part of the Truth for Life Series (sponsored by First Presbyterian Church, Jackson,

3. Iain H. Murray, “Scripture and ‘Things Indifferent’ A central issue in Puritan controversy,” *Diversity in Unity: Papers Read at the Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference, December 1963* (London: Available from *The Evangelical Magazine*, 1964) 17.

4. Since last year, several other works appropriate to discuss in earlier periods have come to our attention. Some of these will be noted at appropriate places. Here we would simply note an article penned by Dr. Robert G. Rayburn which gives an overview of contemporary evangelical worship (“Evangelical Worship in Our Day,” Edmund P. Clowney, ed., *Practical Theology and the Ministry of the Church, 1952–1984: Essays in Honor of Dr. Edmund P. Clowney* [Philipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990] 131–147). Although there was concern that worship glorify God rather than being entertainment, there was no mention of the regulative principle, and no discussion of its distinguishing features.

5. We realize that the twenty-first century (hence the new millennium) did not technically begin until January 1, 2001; nevertheless, for ease of reference, we are including works from the year 2000.

6. Terry L. Johnson, *Reformed Worship: Worship that Is According to Scripture* (Greenville, S.C.: Reformed Academic Press, 2000) 2–3.

Mississippi), Pastor Johnson penned *Reformed Worship: Worship that Is According to Scripture*. He clearly wants to steer a middle course between a “low” church approach which would “lack the sense of the glory and majesty of God that results from well-ordered God-centered worship,” and the “high” church approach which would “lack the spontaneous and personal ‘feel’ of Reformed worship with its free prayers and expository preaching.”<sup>6</sup> He proposes the following “narrow” and “precise” question for his readers: “What ought we to do in the public worship services of the Lord’s Day?”; and then proceeds to set aside several issues that might divert from a proper consideration of the matter at hand (pp. 3ff).

First, he maintains that there must be a distinction between public and private behavior. Secondly, he distinguishes between public worship on the Lord’s Day and that which “may glorify God generally.” Thirdly, “the question is not merely what may be permitted, or even what might one get away with and still be within the bounds of Scripture’s regulative requirements. Reformed worship may not be reduced to the regulative principle, particularly the regulative principle narrowly constructed, any more than the Reformed faith can be reduced to ‘Five Points.’ The regulative principle, interpreted merely as lists of approved and disapproved elements, does not address (when understood narrowly) a fundamental ingredient of worship: reverence. It does not address decorum. It does not address words and actions appropriate to a reverential approach to God. No, our question is what *ought* to be done in public worship.” Fourthly,

the question is not what *I* personally want, or what my congregation wants, or what my generation wants, or, heaven forbid, what my faction wants. The question is an “ought” question, and we raise it not for our group but for the *whole church together*. What ought we to do in public worship? For about a generation now this question has been answered idiosyncratically, with each minister or “worship team” or church or group making its own decisions without regard for the communion of the saints and unity of the broader church. This cannot continue to be acceptable for catholic and connectional denominations. There is, after all, only one baptism, not many (Eph 4:4ff). When baptisms or other forms of worship are multiplied, it becomes virtually impossible for the church to remain unified. If the church is not unified in worship it is not unified in any meaningful sense at all, whatever claims to the contrary might be made.

Further to this point, he rhetorically asks:

how will the conservative Presbyterian denominations keep from fragmenting into a thousand different factions if today's liturgical multi-culturalism is not restrained? The current "best thoughts" on missiology insist on ministry forms distinctive to the tastes and preferences of each subculture at home and abroad. Such ministry includes the church's public worship. So then, the young must have their worship and the old theirs. Similarly the Hispanics, the African-Americans, the Asians, and, presumably, the Rednecks, the Skateboarders, and the Surfers, etc.

Fifthly, "the question we wish to answer is what ought we do in a *worship* service, not what may we do in other settings on other days."

Johnson contends that both the heart of worship (its spirit) and its content and form (its truth) are essential. He writes:

Periodically the question is raised, "Are you saying that God isn't pleased with the worship of such and such group of very earnest, sincere, devout Christians?" The answer we give is that form is not irrelevant. God cares about the form and content of worship as well as its spirit. One may be very sincere, and yet sincerely wrong, offering to God worship in a form that He has not authorized. The extreme case of this is found in pagan worship, such as the worship of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, who practiced self-mutilation amidst their ceremonial dance and frenzied cries (1 Kgs 18:25–29). Were they earnest, sincere, devout? Absolutely. Likewise the ancient Canaanites offered their infants to Molech in human sacrifice. A more zealous expression of religious devotion can scarcely be imagined. But the form was utterly unauthorized, uncommanded, and wrong.

Form matters. Jesus says worship *must* be conducted with both the right *attitude* and the right *form*, with both spirit and truth (21–22).

The Georgia pastor next presents the regulative principle of worship, viz., that "whatever is not enjoined by Scripture (whether by command, example, or by deduction from broader principles) is forbidden" (23). He argues by using standard Biblical texts: Genesis 4:3–8 (Cain and Abel); Exodus 20:4 (the Second Commandment); Exodus 32 (the golden calf); Leviticus 10 (Nadab and Abihu); Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32 (warnings not

to add to or take away from God's commands); 1 Samuel 15:22 (the rejection of Saul's unprescribed worship); Jeremiah 19:6 and 32:35 (the rejection of pagan rites "which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind"); Mark 7:7, et al. (Jesus' rejection of Pharisaical worship); John 4:22 (the rejection of Samaritan worship); and Colossians 2:23 (the rejection of will-worship). He also utilizes T. David Gordon's work, which notes that rejecting the regulative principle of worship "would necessarily involve compromising central tenets of the Reformed faith;" examples of affected doctrine include the doctrines of God and man; the doctrine of sin; the doctrine of Scripture; the doctrine of the church; and the doctrine of divine sovereignty (23ff).<sup>7</sup>

PROFESSOR DAVID J. ENGELSMA

Throughout the year 2000 *The Standard Bearer* ran a four part series by Professor David Engelsma under the title, "Shall We Please God or (Certain Kinds of) People? or, The Regulative Principle of Worship?"<sup>8</sup> In the first two installments the professor lays out the basic principle, opening with the following salvo:

7. See also below under the header Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary for a discussion of other writings of Terry Johnson on the topic. In addition, two other pieces of his on the doctrine of worship are worthy of note. *The Pastor's Public Ministry* (Greenville, S.C.: Reformed Academic Press, 2001), the contents of which were originally delivered as the Den Dulk Lectures at Westminster Theological Seminary in California, contains helpful practical suggestions for how a minister should conduct public worship. In *The Case for Traditional Protestantism: The Solas of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, UK, and Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), he briefly touches on the reform of worship. His major points are as follows: "the Word of God must have the central place in worship;" "praise must be biblical and congregational;" "the sacraments must be restored to their Biblical simplicity;" and "the work of the Holy Spirit must be given precedence over forms" (pp. 125ff). Unless otherwise noted, all italicizations in quoted text are in the original.

8. David J. Engelsma, "Shall We Please God or (Certain Kinds of) People? Or, The Regulative Principle of Worship," Part 1, *The Standard Bearer*, 76.14 (April 15, 2000); Part 2, 76.15 (May 1, 2000); Part 3, 76.16 (May 15, 2000); Part 4, 77.3 (November 1, 2000). These and other papers by Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) ministers were published as: David Engelsma, Barry Gritters and Charles Terpstra, *Reformed Worship* (Grandville, Mich.: Reformed Free Publication Association, 2004). The volume contains the following: "The regulative principle of worship" (Englesma); "The basis of the regulative principle of worship" (Englesma); "The regulative principle of worship applied" (Englesma); "The regulative principle of worship and singing" (Englesma); "Contemporary worship practices" (Gritters); "A Reformed critique of contemporary worship" (Gritters); "Proper worship" (Gritters); "The active participation of believers" (Terpstra); "A conscious involvement" (Terpstra); "A serious preparation for worship" (Terpstra).

One of the most powerful winds blowing through the Reformed and Presbyterian churches today is the hurricane of “liturgical renewal,” or “progressive worship.” The service of public worship as the Reformed have conducted it for hundreds of years is summarily scrapped as “traditional” (“traditional” being uttered with scorn or with sorrow, as though describing a service that was either foolish or useless). The traditional service is replaced with a service of bands and singing troops; banners; films, skits, and drama; dialogues; dancing; and shallow, man-centered, Arminian, but lively “gospel songs.”

Or the two kinds of services are placed back-to-back on a Sunday morning. The traditional service is at 9 A.M., the progressive service is at 11. Every member can indulge his preference.

The assumption of those who spend their waking hours planning the demolition of the traditional Reformed worship and concocting new and more appealing activities of worship is that the church is free to shape the worship of God as she thinks best. And what is best is whatever pleases the worshiping people.

This assumption is shared by most of the “conservative” members of the churches where progressive worship is introduced. They dislike the innovations intensely. They complain. They attend only the 9 A.M., traditional service. But they tolerate the new worship.

*How* we worship is a matter of preference.

*Our* preference.

This assumption is shattered on the rock of the regulative principle of worship. By the regulative principle of worship is meant that God Himself regulates, or rules, the public worship of Himself by His church. God regulates worship by clearly prescribing in His Word what this worship must consist of. God Himself tells us *how* to worship Him. This “how” refers to the inner, spiritual disposition of the worshipers: “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). It also refers to the elements of the service of worship: the preaching of the gospel; the two sacraments, rightly administered; prayers and congregational singing; and the offerings, especially for the poor.

God does not leave the “how” of worship to the wisdom and whim of the worshiping people.

Professor Engelsma goes on in part one to express his dismay with the writings of Stevel Schlissel and John Frame.

It is discouraging then that reputedly conservative men in the Reformed and Presbyterian churches deny and even attack the regulative principle. Rev. Steve Schlissel is busy doing this. He has written a series of articles entitled, “All I Really Need to Know about Worship ... I don’t Learn from the Regulative Principle” (*Messiah’s Mandate*, 1999).

Although he pays lip service to the regulative principle, the Presbyterian theologian John Frame, professor at Westminster West Seminary, in fact, empties it of any governing power over his worship services in southern California and the worship services of anyone who heeds his instruction on worship. “It is virtually impossible to prove that anything is divinely required specifically for official services” (*Worship in Spirit and Truth*, P&R, 1996, p. 44).

Frame, supposedly a conservative at a reputedly conservative seminary, enthusiastically promotes the contemporary, progressive worship that is destroying the traditional Reformed worship regulated by God’s Word. Frame approves teaching in the services of public worship by people who are not elders; children’s church; drama as a legitimate form of preaching; teaching by means of dialogue; infant communion; worship services that are entirely given over to music, that is, services without any Bible reading or preaching; and liturgical dance.

This is to repudiate the regulative principle by gutting it and to substitute for it as the rule for worship the fancies of Presbyterians in southern California and the tastes of worship leader John Frame. Showing which way the wind is blowing, the book comes highly recommended by four leading Presbyterian theologians at two leading, purportedly conservative Reformed seminaries.<sup>9</sup>

In part two,<sup>10</sup> Engelsma defends the regulative principle as Biblical (from the second commandment), Confessional (citing the Three Forms of Unity as well as the Westminster Confession),<sup>11</sup> and traditionally Reformed (not just Presbyterian: citing Zacharias Ursinus,

9. The text of part one is online at [http://www.prca.org/standard\\_bearer/volume76/2000apr15.html](http://www.prca.org/standard_bearer/volume76/2000apr15.html).

10. The text of part two is online at [http://www.prca.org/standard\\_bearer/volume76/2000may01.html](http://www.prca.org/standard_bearer/volume76/2000may01.html).

11. “Accepting and practicing the regulative principle is con-

Gijsbert Voetius, and John Calvin). The professor then concludes:

The regulative principle of worship is Reformed, confessional, and biblical. We may and must worship God *only* as He prescribes in His Word. This worship is accepted by Him. Traditional Reformed worship is scorned by the “worship leaders” and shunned by the worshiping multitudes today. But one thing may be said in its favor, and we are bold by the grace of God to say it: It pleases God.

*Only* this worship pleases God.

Progressive worship is praised to the skies today, and the people through the courts of religious entertainment where actors act, dialogists dialogue, musicians make music, movie makers show movies, dancers dance, and the congregation sings mindless fundamentalist ditties and rank Arminian heresies. But one thing must be said against it, and we are bold by the grace of God to say it: It displeases God.

It is image worship.

In part three of the series, Professor Engelsma descends to some particular disagreements he has with some holders of the regulative principle who he thinks take it too far and misapply it; for example, those who oppose all forms and formulas in worship (e.g., the Apostles Creed, Lord’s Prayer, etc.), observance of Christmas, and instrumental music in worship. On holy day observance the professor makes the following comment:

Some Presbyterian advocates of the regulative principle vehemently denounce Reformed churches for observing Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, and Christmas with special worship services. Such observance is alleged to be violation of the regulative principle. Their argument is that God has not commanded the church to worship on April 21 or December 25 in observance of Good Friday or Christmas. In reality, they charge Article 67 of the Church Order of Dordt and thus the synod of Dordt and the entire Dutch Reformed tradition with image worship.

The charge rests on a misunderstanding of the regulative principle. The regulative principle prescribes the *content* of the public worship, not the *time* when the church worships. It is the fourth commandment that

prescribes the time of public worship. And, although the fourth commandment insists that the church worship on the Sabbath Day, it permits the church to worship also on other days. The Heidelberg Catechism explains the fourth commandment this way: “... that I, *especially* on the Sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God.”

One may like Dordt’s rule in Article 67 [Engelsma also cites the Second Helvetic Confession], or one may dislike it, but observance of Christmas and the other “Christian festivals” has absolutely nothing to do with the regulative principle whatever. What the regulative principle requires is this: *If* you have a service of worship to remember Jesus’ birth on December 25, this service must consist of the same elements as the worship on Sunday. The special Christmas service must consist of preaching, praying, congregational singing, and giving of alms. It may not take the form of dramatic presentations of the manger scene, liturgical dance, instruction by means of banners, and the like.

I plead with our Presbyterian brothers and sisters not to find differences that divide where none exist.<sup>12</sup>

Professor Engelsma is perhaps even a bit more pointed in his criticism of those opposed to the use of musical instruments in public worship, singling out the great Southern Presbyterian theologian John L. Girardeau for criticism for misstating the regulative principle:

Some zealots like to present the regulative principle as requiring biblical warrant for every detail of a worship service, but this is to mistake the principle. The southern Presbyterian worthy John Girardeau was guilty of this error. His is the dubious honor of having authored what may be the most violent assault upon instrumental accompaniment of congregational singing ever launched. He called the accompaniment of congregational singing by an organ or piano “heresy in the sphere of worship.” But Girardeau brought instrumental accompaniment under the condemnation of the regulative principle by misstating the principle. He described the regulative principle this way: “Whatever *in connection* with the

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fessional for Reformed and Presbyterian churches and people. Rejection of the regulative principle is attack upon the confessions. For an officebearer, this is transgression of his sacred vow to maintain and defend the confessions.” Engelsma, part two, *ibid*.

12. The text of part three is online at [http://www.prca.org/standard\\_bearer/volume76/2000may15.html](http://www.prca.org/standard_bearer/volume76/2000may15.html).

public worship of the church, is not commanded by Christ ... in His Word, is forbidden" (*Instrumental Music in Public Worship*, 1888, repr. New Covenant Publication Society, 1983, p. 200; emphasis added).

In fact, the church has liberty "in connection with public worship" to arrange a great many details of her worship: what time she meets; how often the Supper is administered, and how; the order of worship; sitting or standing for prayers and songs; form prayers in administering the sacraments and in exercising discipline; instrumental accompaniment of the singing, and more.

There are "circumstances" attending worship, as well as the elements themselves, and one reduces the regulative principle to an unworkable principle, if not to absurdity, if he attempts to apply it to every detail of worship. The New Testament church has liberty in Christ to arrange the details of her worship, and this liberty is important. The Belgic Confession claims this liberty for the Reformed church. In the context of "the worship of God," the Confession states that "it is useful and beneficial that those who are rulers of the church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the church" (Art. 32).

We appreciate the professor's sentiments expressed in the final part of his article that the "purpose of looking at these controversial matters is to plead that such differences in applying the regulative principle do not betray fundamental disagreement over the regulative principle itself. Thus, it is hoped, this examination of differing application of the regulative principle will make for peace among those who are truly one in ecclesiastical subjection to the second commandment." However, unhappily, we must point out that Professor Engelsma here misrepresents Girardeau's position and

13. See Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in Public Worship*, 139ff, and more particularly, his "Discretionary Power of the Church," reprinted in *The Blue Banner*, 8.5-6 (May-June 1999) at <http://www.thebluebanner.com>.

14. The text of part four is online at [http://www.prc.org/standard\\_bearer/volume77/2000novo1.html](http://www.prc.org/standard_bearer/volume77/2000novo1.html).

15. In 1992, the General Assembly turned down an overture from Eastern Carolina Presbytery which asked for a study of whether liturgical dance and drama were acceptable worship practices. Contributing to the defeat of the overture was the fact that the MNA Committee informed the Assembly that it had already appointed a task force on worship. The Committee was commended by the Assembly for "the caliber and balance of the task force assembled." Close to forty people, including several women, representing a variety of denominational backgrounds (including a liberal Methodist denomination), were on this task force. (Frank J. Smith, *The History*

compounds the problem unnecessarily in placing emphasis on the phrase "in connection with." The point of difference is not that Engelsma understands the distinction between what is elemental and what is circumstantial in the worship of God, and that Girardeau does not. The nineteenth century theologian actually goes into some detail on the nature of circumstantial matters and clearly understood the distinction. The point of difference is over the nature of the use of musical instruments in worship. Girardeau simply did not believe this was a circumstantial matter. In the interest of peace, however, we shall simply direct the reader to Girardeau's work on the subject.<sup>13</sup>

In the final installment Professor Engelsma discusses the subject of exclusive psalmody. He had previously introduced the subject at the end of part three this way:

There remains the question, whether the regulative principle requires exclusive Psalmody. Does the regulative principle demand that the Reformed church sing only the Psalms at church, or does it allow for the use of certain hymns? This is a controversial issue. Treatment of the issue in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) has sometimes been ambiguous, leaving both members and those without in doubt, what precisely the stand of the PRC is.

After explaining some history and reasoning on the subject, the professor concludes on the question of exclusive psalmody in the PRCA: "In terms of the regulative principle, which does, of course, govern our singing at church, the stand of the PRC is this: God requires the congregation to sing, and He requires the congregation to sing His Word; the soundest and safest and perfectly adequate policy is to sing *His Word* as found in the Psalms, which is, after all, the songbook that God has given us."<sup>14</sup>

#### PCA MISSION TO NORTH AMERICA COMMITTEE

In October 2000, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) Mission to North America (MNA) Committee received and approved "Guidelines for MNA Sponsored Church Planters: Principles and Practices of Worship," a report intended to give guidance to its church planters. This document was, in some measure, the fruit of a more extensive discussion which had taken place in the 1990s, when the MNA Committee, without General Assembly authorization, appointed a study committee on worship.<sup>15</sup>

The Rev. Dr. James C. Bland, III, MNA Coordinator, publicly thanked several churchmen for their work on the document, viz., Dr. Bryan Chapell, President, Covenant Theological Seminary; John Frame, Professor of Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida; Joseph “Skip” Ryan, Senior Pastor, Park Cities Presbyterian Church, Dallas, Texas; Dr. L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk, Presbyterian Church in America, and Mr. Wade Williams, Director of Worship, Christ Church, Atlanta, Georgia. None of these men has been publicly identified with what could be considered to be a traditional understanding of the regulative principle of worship.

The document that was finally approved begins by listing six “Key Principles of Public Worship Practices for MNA Church Planters,” consisting mostly of quotes from the PCA’s *Book of Church Order (BCO)*. The first of these principles, quoting from *BCO* 47–1, states: “Since the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice, the principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible, and from no other source.” The sixth of these principles does list elements of worship, in a quotation from the *BCO*; but then concludes with the following statement: “Exercise of every one of the elements in this list is not intended to be compulsory in every service nor is this list intended to be an exhaustive summary of all that the Bible teaches is appropriate for public worship. (cf. differing lists in WLC #108 and WCF 21.5).”

What is particularly noteworthy in this list of principles is that there was no appeal made to the more specific Confessional Standards of the Westminster Assembly. The first principle does speak of being governed by Biblical considerations—but please note that the wording from the *BCO* does not precisely state the regulative principle of worship. Almost anyone can agree that the *principles* of our worship should be Biblical. But the Presbyterian point is that each of the *elements* is prescribed, not simply the *principles*. (The fact that John Frame could sign off on the document should be a good clue that it is not a celebration of the Presbyterian faith.)

The document quotes from the PCA Statement of Identity—despite the fact that the General Assembly in 1999 had specifically stated that the denomination’s “statement of identity” was its Constitution, not something conjured up by those outside of the courts of the church.<sup>16</sup>

The paper argues that while the glorification of God is the primary focus in worship, edification and evangelism are proper secondary and tertiary concerns. It

also, while distinguishing between worship in the “narrow sense” and in the “broad sense,” does ascribe the nomenclature of “worship” to both.

The paper avers that “our worship should be accessible to the people to whom God calls us to minister without yielding to improper cultural influences. The prudential judgment required for weighing such matters is given to the leadership of individual churches who are urged to weigh biblical mandates over personal or societal preferences. Knowing that we will be judged by our extremes, the law of love requires that churches not take advantage of their liberties in worship to the detriment of the glory of God or the good of His people (both those present and those being called to Him).”

The document answers the question, “What degree of variation should there be in our various churches’ worship practices?” by saying:

We should not embrace worship or liturgical practices that exclude our praise of God, confession of our sinfulness, our dependence on His grace, and instruction motivated by love and gratitude....

We should embrace the diversity of proper expressions of biblical worship that indicate God is moving among every tribe and nation, language and people, and that indicate we are sensitive to the varying aspects of this mission that God gives to individual churches in the way that they exercise their worship liberties....

We have no right to impose a preferred style of worship on other bodies of believers. We are responsible to

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*of the Presbyterian Church in America: The Silver Anniversary Edition* [Lawrenceville, Ga.: Presbyterian Scholars Press, 1999] 516). In 1994, the General Assembly answered in the negative an overture from Westminster Presbytery, asking that this subcommittee be dismissed. However, the Assembly clarified the situation by stating that “the Worship Task Force ... is not functioning as an Ad Hoc Study Committee on behalf of the General Assembly; and its report will not have the force of such a study committee; and, nonetheless, at its completion, the General Assembly will be informed, and the report will be made available upon request, at the expense of those requesting it” (*Minutes of the Twenty-Second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* [Atlanta, Ga.: Office of the Stated Clerk, 1994] 175).

16. “The Presbyterian Church in America affirms that the only binding statement identifying this denomination is the Constitution of the Church as defined in the Preface of the *Book of Church Order*, Section III. All other statements are simply individual statements of opinions and are to carry no authority nor to be binding guides to practice within the churches, committees and courts of the church.” *Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Atlanta, Ga.: Office of the Stated Clerk, 1999) 173. For a discussion of the Statement of Identity, see Part One of this article, CPJ 2 (2006) 147–151.

challenge all members of the body of Christ to honor His priorities and glory in worship....

That last paragraph references BCO 47–6, which does not speak of style per se, but rather states that the Lord Jesus “has prescribed no fixed forms for public worship but, in the interest of life and power in worship, has given His Church a large measure of liberty in this matter.” However, the same Constitutional paragraph does in some measure speak of style, in that “reverence” and “the beauty of holiness” are held up as necessary, and adds: “From its beginning to its end a service of public worship should be characterized by that simplicity which is an evidence of sincerity and by that beauty and dignity which are a manifestation of sincerity and by that beauty and dignity which are a manifestation of holiness.” In other words, there *is a* preferred style of worship, in contrast to what the MNA document maintains.

The MNA production concludes by quoting from a 1997 book from the Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA), *Authentic Worship in a Changing Culture*.<sup>17</sup> The authors of that book wrote:

We concluded that it was not particularly helpful to talk about the non-negotiables of Reformed worship as though Reformed worship were something totally distinct from (and superior to) *Christian worship* and something that we must feverishly defend and protect lest it be forever lost. Rather, we concluded that it was more helpful and honest to talk about Christian worship and then to acknowledge that, like every other worship tradition, the Reformed worship tradition has both received gifts from and given gifts to Christian worship and that what it has given has arisen from what it first received. In that spirit we note some of the gifts to Christian worship that the Reformed tradition has made over the centuries and encourage the continued cultivation of these gifts.

The CRCNA book lists eight “gifts,” as follows: a

17. *Authentic Worship in a Changing Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: CRC Publications, 1997).

18. Andrew James Webb, *A Brief Guide to Presbyterian Worship, or, Why We Worship the Way We Do*, found on-line at <http://www.providencepca.com/essays/whyweworship.html>. The essay does maintain that Christians are required to sing uninspired hymns and spiritual songs (along with the Psalms), but offers no argument for such; and also maintains that “public confession of our faith” and “the collection” are proper elements of worship. Another article written in 2002 by Mr. Webb in opposition to the practice is *Why Do Presbyterians Observe Holy Days?* Available online at <http://www.providencepca.com/essays/holydays.html> (November 2002).

redemptive-historical perspective on worship; a fully Trinitarian emphasis in worship; an understanding of preaching that is proclamation of the Word of God, and not merely lecture or instruction; an emphasis on doctrinal (especially catechetical) preaching; the Calvinistic emphasis upon Christ’s real presence in the sacraments; an emphasis upon the acts of worship “that arise out of a view of worship as true encounter with God;” an emphasis upon congregational singing as being at the heart of worship music; a “strong appreciation of the Old Testament in general and of psalm singing in particular as part of public worship.” The astute reader will note that there is not one word about the regulation of worship, and no notion that this doctrine would form the basis for Reformed worship.

ANDREW WEBB

Offering a different perspective for PCA church planters is the Rev. Andrew James Webb, founding pastor of Providence Presbyterian Mission, Fayetteville, North Carolina (*Building Old School Churches*; <http://bible-based.wordpress.com>). In a 2002 on-line essay, *A Brief Guide to Presbyterian Worship, or, Why We Worship the Way We Do*, Pastor Webb clearly endorses the regulative principle: “The Bible, which is the Word of God, is entirely sufficient for everything in our faith, life, and practice and we do not need to add anything of our own, nor should we. Therefore our worship is to be ordered according to God’s instructions, and not according to our imaginations or traditions or in any way God has not prescribed for us.”<sup>18</sup>

#### “TRADITIONALISTS” IN THE PCA

Pastor Webb is one of a number of “traditionalists” in the PCA, who are striving, both through example and teaching, to turn their denomination away from “contemporary” (and non-regulated) worship. Among the major players in this effort are the Rev. David Hall, pastor of Midway Presbyterian Church, Powder Springs, Georgia; and the Rev. Dr. Ligon Duncan, pastor of the influential First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi, who has helped to sponsor annual conferences at Twin Lakes Conference Center, First Church’s retreat facility, designed to foster a traditional understanding of ministry and worship. Other influences include Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. The various works representing this perspective in the PCA are noted in semi-chronological order throughout the rest of this survey.

## WRS JOURNAL

The *WRS Journal* is the theological journal of Western Reformed Seminary, located in Tacoma, Washington, and associated with the Bible Presbyterian Church. In 2000, the two issues of the *WRS Journal* were dedicated to the subject of worship.

In the lead article in the first issue, Dr. Kevin M. Backus wrote:

When it comes to worship, we must be seeker-sensitive, but we must be clear on who that Seeker is that we are trying to please. We have been created to worship him. In fact, all of our life is worship to God. Since the fall, God has been calling men to worship Him, calling His people out. We see that continuing on through the ends of Scripture. If we get that Target Audience right, then the rest will fall in place. If we get that Target Audience right then we can take [Rick] Warren's advice and do the detailed demographic study—but that study will be called *theology!*

The Grand Island, New York, pastor referred to the Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 21 with regard to worship, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism Q/A 51 on the second commandment, and also observed “that good theology will produce good worship. Defective theology will produce defective worship. The relationship between theology and worship is so vital that you cannot change one without the other. And if there is a change, a major sweeping change in our worship, is it possible that our theology is unchanged?”<sup>19</sup>

In an article specifically on the regulative principle, the Rev. E. Bennett Robinson noted the great importance of both worship and salvation, and argues for the regulative principle of worship, but with some modifications.<sup>20</sup>

“What is worship that is regulated by God? The most useful definition is one that will describe worship as obedience in a general sense. So then, for our purposes, *worship is an activity in response to God's Lordship*. This is a definition of worship in its broadest and most general biblical sense.”

Having conceded that worship occurs in all of life, Mr. Robinson does maintain that not all worship is the same, and that the regulation of different types of worship accordingly will differ. However, he then confuses private worship as being synonymous with life in general. Furthermore, he states that public worship “is built indispensably on the practice of private worship, and is part of the fruit and practice of that worship. Public

worship, because it involves individuals, could be diagrammed as a subset of the larger set of general or private worship.”

The writer also seems confused when it comes to distinguishing between “formal” worship and “informal” worship. Logically speaking, a time of assembly is either worship or it is not. If it is a time of worship, it cannot be considered to be “informal” in either sense of the word—i.e., either as a relaxed time, or as one in which there are no “forms” (since the “forms” are necessary aspects of each of the elements of worship).

Mr. Robinson asks four basic questions regarding worship: (1) “Is this idea of exclusive regulation taught? If so, how and where?” (2) “Are we to then receive the instruction from the Old Testament in this regard?” (3) “Is the practice of the New Testament to be prescriptive when it is descriptive?” (4) “Is this a general rule to guide us in principles and elements or does it bind us to the utmost detail?”

He answers the first two questions together, by affirming the validity of the regulative principle, and also by averring that instruction must come from both the Old and the New Testaments. Regarding the third question, he states that although not all of the practices in apostolic times are normative for today, nevertheless, Christ and the apostles give us approved examples of how to worship. From their examples, the author compiles a list of worship practices, which he says reflects simplicity (in contrast to Roman Catholic worship) as well as the dialogical nature of worship (in which God speaks and man responds).

Regarding the fourth question, Mr. Robinson quotes from the nineteenth century Scottish theologian, James Bannerman, as he properly distinguishes between things that are elemental (*in sacris*—that is, “in worship as an element”) and those which are circumstantial (*circa sacra*—that is, “circumstances around worship”). On the basis of this distinction, Mr. Robinson argues against liturgical dance and drama; but is willing to entertain the notion of the spontaneous clapping of hands.

He ends his article with a quotation from the seventeenth century Puritan, John Owen, who wrote: “The principle that the church hath power to institute any thing or ceremony belonging to the worship of God, either as to matter or manner, beyond the observance of such circumstances as necessarily attend

19. Kevin M. Backus, MYTH # 2: “We Must Make Our Church Worship Meet Today's Standards,” *WRS Journal* 7/1 (February 2000) 1–7.

20. E. Bennett Robinson, “How Shall We Now Worship? Applying The Regulative Principle,” *WRS Journal* 7/1 (February 2000) 24–35.

such ordinances as Christ Himself hath instituted, lies at the bottom of all the horrible superstition and idolatry, of all the confusion, blood, persecution, and wars, that have for so long a season spread themselves over the face of the Christian world.”

In summary, one could say that Bennett Robinson’s piece represents the movement of many in the Bible Presbyterian Church, away from fundamentalism and towards a more Reformed understanding of church life, including worship. However, the article at points lacks cogency and clarity.<sup>21</sup>

One of the articles in the second issue of 2000 is an abridged version of a chapter from *The Reformation of Worship: Papers read at the 1989 Westminster Conference* (London: The Westminster Conference, 1989), on the Westminster Directory of Public Worship.<sup>22</sup> In it, the Rev. Dr. Alan Clifford, pastor of Norwich Reformed Church in England, wrote:

I would like to conclude on this note of joy in true worship. After all, the psalmist declared ‘In your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures for evermore’ (Ps. 16: 11). One wonders if this was always the dominant note during the seventeenth century. True,

21. For other BPC statements regarding worship, see papers in the denomination’s online Reading Room under the heading: “Music in Worship” which contains articles from the Northwest Presbytery on Exclusive Psalmody and the Regulative Principle of Worship. These papers are as follows: a “Response to the Petition from the Edmonton Bible Presbyterian Church Concerning Church Music From the Northwest Presbytery of the Bible Presbyterian Church” [this petition was received by the Presbytery on October 2, 1991]; a Paper in response entitled simply “Exclusive Psalmody,” which rejects that position and argues as well for musical instrumentation in worship and choirs; “The Music of the Church, a Paper by Pastor Edward E. Crawford,” and “The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Use of it; A Sermon by Isaac Watts,” in reaction to some exclusive psalmodists’ charge that Watt’s was anti-Trinitarian. See [http://www.bpc.org/reading\\_room/index.html](http://www.bpc.org/reading_room/index.html)

22. Alan C. Clifford, “The Westminster Directory Of Public Worship (1645),” *WRS Journal* 7/2 (August 2000) 1–11. NB. The official title of the Westminster document is “The Directory for the Public Worship of God.” In the same issue, pp. 12–17, John A. Battle’s article on “Scriptural Singing In The Church” contains this quotation: “While Luther retained many worship practices from the Roman church, as long as they did not contradict Scripture, Calvin upheld the regulative principle that only those practices commanded in Scripture should be allowed in the churches. He believed there should be no musical instruments used in worship, and had them removed from his churches. He also restricted singing to the OT Psalms” (fn 9, p. 17).

23. Bob Burrridge, *Survey Studies In Reformed Theology A Syllabus of the Genevan Institute for Reformed Studies*, “Unit 5: Nomology, Lesson 3a: Worship and the Sabbath (WCF 21): The Regulative Principle” (GIRS, 2000). <http://www.girs.com/library/theology/syllabus/nomindex.html>.

there were great theologians, mighty preachers, and occasional revivals. But there were also—to use the subtitle of Richard Baxter’s *Catholick Theologie* (1675)—the ‘dogmatical word-warriors,’ whose bitter disputings and ultra-orthodox contendings tended to drown the note of praise. Alas, the Puritans duplicated their confessions and their energies. It was a century which ended on the low notes of heresy, fragmentation, deadness, and secularism. And all this despite the faithful though formal attempts of the Puritans to complete the English Reformation. Do we not feel burdened by these things today? Do we not yearn for those seasons of revival and refreshment which would cure many—if not all—of our present ills? We dare not think that the mere reformation of worship will guarantee worship itself, any more than reformation itself automatically brings revival. There must be an earnest pleading with God and a humble dependence on the Holy Spirit.

BOB BURRIDGE

Bob Burrridge, pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (PCA), Pinellas Park, Florida, has written an on-line commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith.<sup>23</sup> In his treatment of Chapter 21 (“Worship and the Sabbath Day: The Regulative Principle”), he sets forth a standard Reformed understanding of the regulative principle of worship—the “prescriptive” rather than the “proscriptive” principle. He writes that “God has not left us to derive this teaching [regarding worship] by our reason. He has made it clear in his word by direct precept and recorded example that there is offense to God and danger to ourselves when we dare to imagine what God would be pleased with beyond what he has revealed. Therefore the regulative principle of worship is not only proscriptive, it is more precisely prescriptive.”

After dealing with various Biblical examples illustrating the regulative principle (the worship of Cain; Aaron’s golden calf; Nadab and Abihu; etc.), Pastor Burrridge then handles the question of Christian liberty in worship. Once again, he represents the standard Reformation view: “It should be kept in mind . . . that while the outward forms of the Mosaic law are changed in Christ, the principles they represented are not eliminated. They are brought to a greater level of clarity and blessing. The overwhelming evidence of the New Testament shows us that God is still very concerned that we worship in acceptable ways, only in ways revealed to us by the one who is to be worshipped. Many references in the New Testament detail the elimination of

the priesthood, of the sacrifices, of the many holy days, of the dietary laws and other temporal regulations. But these passages never tell us that it has become acceptable to introduce man made innovations. Only God may change and institute worship forms.”

JOSEPH C. MORECRAFT, III

In 2001, the Rev. Dr. Joseph C. Morecraft, III, well-known pastor of Chalcedon Presbyterian Church in suburban Atlanta, put together a book entitled, *How God Wants Us to Worship Him: An Exposition and Defense of the Regulative Principle of Worship*.<sup>24</sup> Much of the content of this volume consists of extensive quotations from both historic and contemporary authors (such as Brian Schwertley). One of the purposes of the book is to defend the practices of special music, instrumental music, and uninspired songs in public worship, while at the same time opposing religious holy days, liturgical dance and drama, and hand-clapping in public worship. The volume seems well-suited to serve polemically on behalf of Dr. Morecraft’s denomination, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in the United States (RPCUS).

NEW CITY FELLOWSHIP

While more and more information on the historic Presbyterian regulative principle of worship has appeared, there remains a great deal of misunderstanding about it. One of the more avant-garde PCA congregations is New City Fellowship, Chattanooga, Tennessee. Its understanding of the “Regulative Principal [sic] of Worship” is that

all that we can do in worship must be biblical. We believe that we are to be courageous to use all of ourselves in worship, so we follow the teachings of the Psalms to use our bodies in such things as clapping, raising our hands, shouting and dancing. The Psalms teach us to use instruments and to call on everything that has breath to praise the Lord. We don’t think that being truly Reformed means to only use a Northern European 16th century cerebral style and functional order to worship God. Our music is eclectic and often unique since many of our songs have been written here. We use James Ward songs, Black Gospel music, charismatic praise songs and traditional hymns. We value our Reformed heritage and see it as part of the treasure of the Kingdom of God. We use many different song leaders, and emphasize piano, electric instruments and

drums. We use praise teams, ensembles, and the choir at various times. We are concerned about the racial and cultural mix of all of our worship services. We pursue a building momentum of the worship and seek strong Biblical preaching.<sup>25</sup>

URCNA

The URCNA (United Reformed Churches in North America) is well represented as far as writings on the subject of the regulative principle. Shorter works include “Principles of Reformed Worship,” Adopted September 19, 2000 by the Consistory of the Escondido United Reformed Church,<sup>26</sup> and a chapter on worship in *What is the Reformed Faith*, an audio lecture series with workbook available at [start.URClearning.org](http://start.URClearning.org).<sup>27</sup> In addition, two prominent URCNA men associated with Westminster Seminary in California published works dealing with Reformed Worship in the time period under review.

Michael Horton

A minister in the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and an associate professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in California, Michael Scott Horton serves as president of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, and editor of *Modern Reformation* magazine. He has been a major player in the Reformed world from a relatively early age. Now in his forties, he continues to be prolific in his writings and passionate in his advocacy of traditional Reformed doctrine.

In February 2002, the curtain was drawn on his *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of Christ-Centered Worship*.<sup>28</sup> The author writes: “I am persuaded

24. Joe Morecraft, III, *How God Wants Us to Worship Him: An Exposition and Defense of the Regulative Principle of Worship* (Cumming, Ga.: Triumphant Publications, 2001).

25. From the church’s web site (<http://www.newcityfellowship.com/music.htm>). According to the Internet Archive the article’s earliest appearance was in December, 2001 (<http://www.archive.org/web/web.php>).

26. “Principles of Reformed Worship. Adopted September 19, 2000 by the Consistory of the Escondido United Reformed Church.” <http://public.csusm.edu/guests/rsclark/Principles.html>.

27. “What is the Reformed Faith, Section V, Chapter 2, Reformed Worship,” (Audio Lecture) [http://www.start.urclearning.org/audio/WITRF\\_5\\_2.mp3](http://www.start.urclearning.org/audio/WITRF_5_2.mp3). Rev. Adam M. Kalooſtian, *What is the Reformed Faith. Workbook* (Ontario United Reformed Church Ontario, Calif., USA 2006).

28. Michael Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of Christ-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books,

that one of the reasons why so many churches have gone to drama and other theatrical arts in worship is because the sermon and the larger liturgical setting have failed to provide the sense that something important and dramatic is happening here, now, as we gather before God. Divine and human action easily become ‘choreographed’ by the culture when we do not sense that it is occurring at all. The clamor for ‘more excitement’ and ‘more drama’ can lead to two simplistic solutions: a retrenchment or intellectualism or adding our own dramatic gimmicks to God’s worship. The goal of this book, however, is to recover the sense of redemptive drama that we not only see illustrated in Scripture but that the Word and Spirit actually bring into our communal gathering” (13–14).

In a chapter entitled, “What Should Our Service Look Like?” Dr. Horton writes that “God is jealous not only that no other object be the focus of our worship but that our worship consist in nothing more than or less than he has commanded, the character of our liturgy is of great importance. Since God is the director and playwright as well as the central actor, it is his skill and creativity and not ours that is normative for the service” (141).

He goes on to affirm the distinction between circumstantial matters (“the order of the various elements, what time we meet, whether we have communion every week, whether the minister wears a robe”), and “clearly required elements that God has commanded for his worship.” He writes: “Unlike the ‘gods of the nations,’ the God of Abraham and Jesus does not leave the matter of how we approach him in our hands. While there may not always be a clear black-and-white answer to all our questions about which style to use in a given context, it should be fairly obvious that liturgical style is more than the window dressing of worship. In fact, it is that which brings into an embodied form all our beliefs about God, ourselves, redemption, and the chief end of human existence” (142–143).

Professor Horton appeals to the classic example of Nadab and Abihu, but does so in a unique way, viz., by

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2002; paperback version, 2003). Michael Horton also mentions the regulative principle in the 2001 online article *Powerful Praise* (“Powerful Praise,” *Australian Presbyterian* [3 April, 2001] [http://www.ap.presbyterian.org.au/articles/april03\\_01.htm](http://www.ap.presbyterian.org.au/articles/april03_01.htm)). Referring to the regulative principle, Horton says: “Actually, it’s not legalistic; it’s liberating. It says: ‘Look, you can’t impose your particular preferences on me.’ It frees a congregation from the countless aberrations that a pastor could impose on it. It means the young people don’t have to be burdened with a lot of meaningless ritual and the older ones don’t have to feel like they’ve gone to a nightclub on Friday night. There is a real wisdom in God’s limitation of His worship to the elements we find prescribed in His Word.”

suggesting that they were guilty of “either a sub-biblical transcendence or a sub-biblical immanence.”

On one hand, they may have been looking for more transcendence—more ritual, another liturgical innovation. On the other hand, they may have had a desire for more immanence—a form of worship that seemed to bring God down to their level. In any case, they were sincere. They presumed to serve God in the way that they found “worshipful,” but they were unwilling to regard God’s commanded worship as sufficient. They thought this was the sort of business about which God might not care very much, at least as long as the worshiper’s heart was in the right place. They learned otherwise—with tragic results, confirmed by the anguish of their father, Aaron, who had himself accommodated to the people in fashioning the golden calf.

... God has already accommodated himself to our weakness. He is not far from us, if we will but attend to the ministry of the Word. Therefore, we must resist “the sky’s the limit” when it comes to accommodation. The Bible must be read, sung, and preached in the common language of the people, but when we introduce skits, musicals, and puppet shows on the basis of wanting to bring God down to the level of the people, they can only conclude that God has not already accommodated himself sufficiently through the ministry of the Word. There is accommodation and there is accommodation. When Moses confronted Aaron about the golden calf, Aaron replied, apparently even with the benefit of marketing surveys, “You know the people” (Exod. 32:22 NKJV) (144–145).

Dr. Horton properly distinguished between an element (something that is “necessary”) and a circumstance (something that is “up to the church’s discretion”). He then presents a list of “The Elements.” His list is as follows: The Invocation, God’s Greeting (Votum), The Reading of the Law, The Confession and Absolution, The Pastoral Prayer, The Preached Word, The Ministry of the Lord’s Supper, Thanksgiving and Offerings, and The Benediction (148ff).

From a Dutch Reformed perspective, this list may not seem novel; indeed, it pretty much follows a standard Continental-style pattern. However, it is somewhat novel from a Presbyterian perspective, for several reasons. First, notice that it distinguishes among various prayers, depending upon where in the service they are found (Invocation, Pastoral Prayer). By way of contrast, a Presbyterian would say that the element of worship,

which covers both instances, is “the praying of prayer.” Secondly, notice that The Reading of the Law is also stipulated as a separate element of worship. Again, the Presbyterian view is that “the reading of the Word” is the element that would cover all instances of the reading of Scripture. Thirdly, notice that there is no “reading of Scripture” in the list, other than “The Reading of the Law.” Fourthly, judging by the Westminster Standards, there is no place as such for The Confession and Absolution. Fifthly, there is no receiving of offerings as an act of worship in a Presbyterian service. Finally, notice that the singing of praise and the sacrament of baptism are not listed as elements. Dr. Horton does write of both practices as properly part of worship; however, he does not mention them at the point of his listing “The Elements.”

Reflecting the title of this volume, what Professor Horton is particularly concerned to convey is not the regulation of worship, but its intrinsic excitement. He writes:

The important thing to see in all of this [renewed interest in worship] is that worship is the divine drama. In it, the drama of redemption that unfolds in biblical history now unfolds as a play within a play before us in a particular place and our own time. In it, we join Abraham and Sarah at the table with their greater Son through whom all the nations of the earth are blessed. With circumcised hearts, we join the cloud of witnesses who longed for Jesus’ coming and the sending of his Spirit. Not just once but week after week, year after year, decade after decade, we are being reshaped by this counter-drama, as the plot of “this passing evil age” yields to “the age to come.”

There should be a lot of freedom here, although eclectic experimentation, whether in a “high church” or “low church” direction, must be carefully checked. There will be a liturgy at everybody’s church next Sunday. The question is whether it will be a good one or bad one, deliberately conceived and understood or followed out of unreflective routine (161).

*Robert Godfrey*

Westminster Theological Seminary of California President and URCNA minister Robert Godfrey’s earlier works on worship were noted in Part One of this survey.<sup>29</sup> In 2004 he published, *An Unexpected Journey: Discovering Reformed Christianity*.<sup>30</sup> In what one reviewer has called a “Reformed Theology Primer,”

President Godfrey introduces the reader to the regulative principle.

One of my early attractions to Reformed Christianity was the simplicity, seriousness, and Word-centered character of its worship. That early interest in worship has stayed with me throughout my life. I suppose that was inevitable in light of my studies of the Reformation. The Reformation was not just a reform of doctrine, but also a reform of Christian living and worship.

Medieval Christians’ experience of Christianity came primarily through worship and acts of piety. The ritual and mystery of the mass were the central focus of Christian life. So for many at the time of the Reformation, changes in worship were more immediately noticeable and made more of an impact on them than changes of doctrine.

... Luther regarded most matters of worship as things indifferent, that is, neither necessarily right nor wrong. Therefore, worship could be changed, but did not have to be changed.... The result of Luther’s approach was that many churches continued to look like Roman Catholic churches with images, altars, and ministers in vestments.

John Calvin and the Reformed fathers at the time of the Reformation were more critical of the tradition of worship that had developed in the late ancient and medieval church. They too wanted to remove anything that was forbidden in the Bible. But they went further and taught that only what the Bible positively commanded should be done in worship.

This Reformed view of worship would later be called the regulative principle of worship. This principle declares that the Bible must regulate or rule over our worship and that only what the Bible teaches either by declaration or by example can be done in our worship. The Heidelberg Catechism states this principle clearly in Question and Answer 96: “What does God require in

29. Robert Godfrey, *Pleasing God in Our Worship* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1999). W. Robert Godfrey, “Calvin and the Worship of God,” *The Blue Banner*, 3.11–12 (November–December 1994) 1–10; rpt. in *The Worship of God: Reformed Concepts of Biblical Worship* (Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, and Taylors, S.C.: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2005) 31–49. This is available online at the seminary website.

30. W. Robert Godfrey, *An Unexpected Journey: Discovering Reformed Christianity* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2004).

the second commandment? That we in no wise make any image of God, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word.”

The Reformed concern about worship arose from a great desire to avoid idolatry. As the early Reformed leaders read the Bible, they saw God’s passion for the purity of his worship. They saw how frequently the Bible presented idolatry as a form of spiritual adultery, in which God’s people abandoned their pure and exclusive relationship with God for the gods and forms of worship of the nations. They recognized that God in the summary of his law, the Ten Commandments, had devoted the first two commandments to the prohibition of idolatry: the first forbids the worship of false gods, and the second forbids worshipping the true God in a false way.

The second commandment in particular profoundly influenced Reformed thinking about worship. The judgment of God had fallen severely on Israel for worshipping the golden calf, even though they had called it Jehovah. Aaron’s sons were destroyed for offering strange fire on the altar of God. Uzziah was cursed with leprosy for usurping the functions of the priests in the temple. God took his worship seriously, and the Reformed concluded that they must as well.

The Reformed seriousness about worship led to much more profound changes in worship than had occurred among the Lutherans. The Reformed rejected the use of altars, images, and religious symbols in the decoration of their churches. They simplified the ceremonies of worship and the attire of ministers. They eliminated all or almost all the holy days of the church year and eliminated musical instruments from use in public worship. Reformed churches came to look very different from medieval churches.

Not all Reformed churches in Europe applied the regulative principle in the same way or were identical in their worship practices. For example, the Dutch Reformed kept a few hymns alongside their metrical psalms and continued to observe Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost—not as obligatory holy days, but as important occasions in redemptive history.

Scottish Presbyterians, on the other hand, sang only psalms and banished all elements of a liturgical calendar. When the Dutch Reform reintroduced musical instruments to worship in the seventeenth century, they did not reject the regulative principle, but rather applied it differently to the question of instruments (129–131).

#### C. MATTHEW McMAHON

C. Matthew McMahon has written “Strange Fire” (2002) and “The Regulative Principle in Worship: A brief article” (2002).<sup>31</sup> He begins the second article by quoting the identically-worded Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 21, Section 1, and the London Baptist Confession (1689), Chapter 22, Section 1. He also notes that the distinction upon which the regulative principle is premised, viz., that there is a profound difference between worship and the rest of life, can seem strange and oppressive to people. Nevertheless, God ordains how His house is to be ordered.

Reflecting his ecclesiastical roots, and perhaps appealing to Baptist brethren, he argues the regulative principle from the London Confession. There are, he writes, four Biblical reasons that serve as the basis for the regulative principle.

First, “It is the prerogative of God alone to determine the terms on which sinners may approach Him in worship.” He elaborates: “Should God decree that He will be worshipped only by those wearing white T-shirts, He would have the right to do so. If God did decree that every Christian should wear a white T-shirt to worship Him, I would imagine that all Christians, who truly love the Lord, will go out and buy a whole bunch of white T-shirts so that they never run out again. They would come to church wearing the white T-shirt that God commanded they wear for worship. God is the one who commands worship of us. What arrogance for man to think that he has the least business in determining how God will be worshipped!”

Secondly, “The introduction of extra Biblical practices into worship inevitably tends to nullify and undermine God’s appointed worship.... Human innovators pay lip service to the God appointed elements of worship and simultaneously, in the very act, nullify them. How strikingly this illustrates the subtlety with which extra biblical practices have the tendency to displace the divine the appointed altars of biblical worship! This tendency is illustrated in evangelical churches today were mundane or silly announcements, special music, testimony times, mime, puppet shows, liturgical dance and Christian movies either completely replace

31. C. Matthew McMahon, a former Reformed Baptist, is an up and coming scholar who is now a minister in the RPCGA. Mr. McMahon’s works can be found on his web site, A Puritan’s Mind. <http://www.apuritansmind.com/PuritanWorship/PuritanWorshipMainPage.htm>.

or severely restrict the ordained parts of worship. These or other traditions of men, for instance, often leave only 20 minutes for preaching.”

Thirdly, “if sinful men were to add any unappointed elements into worship, they would, by this action, be calling into question the wisdom of Jesus Christ and the complete sufficiency of the Scriptures alone.”

Fourthly, “The Puritans were very adamant to prove that the Bible explicitly condemns all worship that is not commanded by God.”

The article concludes:

The Puritans desired simple, biblical worship. They regulated their worship by the Bible instead of their own “wills.” They had no desire to offer strange fire no matter how “exciting” the strange fire would be to the spectators. They were not interested in putting on a show. When Elijah was on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18, he asked the people if they were ready to follow God or Baal. When posed with the question, the people were silent. When Elijah said he wanted to have a “contest” with the priests (a “show”), what did the people do? They were all excited about it. “Yes! Let’s have a show!” And so they did. The “contemporary church” is the same today. They want a show. They want fire to fall from heaven. They want the spectacular, or at least as entertaining as “church may be”. But God is displeased. And if it were not for the grace of God, most “churches” today would be consumed as Nadab and Abihu were.

May the God of worship open the eyes of the blind that they may see.

#### REFORMED AND SOUTHERN BAPTISTS

Even the Southern Baptists are rediscovering their roots with regard to the concept of the regulative principle and its name. In a book on the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention, Chad Brand and David E. Hankins write of the regulative principle, giving an historical overview that covers Presbyterian, Campbellite, and Baptist strands of thought.<sup>32</sup> They conclude that Baptists have generally held to the Regulative Principle, while they have “not always agreed as to the means of its employment or the extent and specificity of its application” and have “not always agreed about interpretations of specific texts that were relevant to its application. But they have generally agreed that Baptist churches ought to follow the biblical pattern to the best of their knowledge and ability when it comes to the order, worship, polity, internal life, and mission of the church.”

Samuel E. Waldron

Perhaps some influence in the increased awareness and adherence to the regulative principle in Baptist circles may be due to Samuel Waldron’s 1989 defense in his exposition of chapter twenty-two of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith.<sup>33</sup> After noting the debate between and difference in the Puritan and Anglican views at the time of the Westminster Assembly, and making use of G. I. Williamson’s work on Westminster Confession chapter 21, the author gives four biblical arguments for the principle. “First, it is the prerogative of God alone to determine the terms on which sinners may approach him in worship.” Here he cites Bannerman who “eloquently states this: “The fundamental principle that lies at the basis of the whole argument is this, that in regard to the ordinance of public worship it is the province of God, and not the province of man, to determine both the terms and the manner of such worship....”

Second, the introduction of extra-biblical practices into worship inevitably tends to nullify and undermine God’s appointed worship (Matt. 15:3, 8–9; 2 Kings 16:10–18). This tendency is illustrated in evangelical churches today where mundane or silly announcements, special music, testimony times and other such things often leave only twenty to thirty minutes for preaching.

Waldron uses John Owen to illustrate his third argument that “the wisdom of Christ and the sufficiency of the Scriptures are called into question by the addition of unappointed elements into worship. John Owen remarks: ‘Three things are usually pleaded in the justification of the observance of such rites and ceremonies in the worship of God: First, that they tend unto the furtherance of the devotion of the worshippers; secondly, that they render the worship itself comely and beautiful; thirdly, that they are the preservers of order in the celebration thereof. And therefore on these accounts they may be instituted or appointed by some, and observed by all.’ Reasoning such as Owen describes impugns the wisdom of Christ.”

For his fourth argument, that “the Bible explicitly condemns all the worship that is not commanded by

32. Chad Brand and David E. Hankins, *One Sacred Effort: The Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Publishing Group, 2006) 54–60.

33. Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Faverdale North, Darlington, England; Webster, N.Y.: Evangelical Press, 1989; 2005) 267–271. This confession is a revision of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

God,” Waldron addresses three classic passages, Deuteronomy 12:29–32, Colossians 2:23, and Leviticus 10:1–3. He then asks the question and answers it:

With this ample biblical support, why are men so lenient in their worship? It is because the God of modern men is not a God to be feared. Of all that is not appointed by God in his worship, we must hear Jesus saying, ‘Take these things hence!’ The child of God will not respond to the regulative principle as if it were an intolerable strait-jacket! He will pray, rather, ‘O Lord, teach me to worship you acceptably.’

Waldron concludes by explaining the important qualification at chapter 1.6 where “the Confession provides an important clarification of the regulative principle.”

When we say that what is not commanded is forbidden, we are speaking of the substance and parts of worship (see paras 2–6), not its circumstance. There are certain minor circumstantial details that God has left to be determined by the light of nature, Christian prudence and general rules of Scripture. 1 Corinthians 14 contains

34. Fred Malone, “Infant Baptism and the Regulative Principle of Worship,” *The Founders Journal* 35 (Winter 1999) [http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/FJ35/article1\\_fr.html](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/FJ35/article1_fr.html). See also Fred Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument for Credobaptism Versus Paedobaptism* (Cape Coral, Fla.: Founders Press, 2003), in which he also attempts to appeal to the regulative principle in order to attack the doctrine of infant baptism.

35. See C. Matthew McMahon, “The Rejection of the Baptism of Disciples Alone,” <http://www.apuritansmind.com/BookReviews/Sourpuss/MaloneFredBaptismDisciplesAlone.htm>.

36. Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005).

37. “All believers would agree that the written Word of God is sufficient to regulate their public worship. However, what they find in Scripture to justify their practices is as varied as the countless facets of prisms on a chandelier. How can we find the way ahead in this labyrinth? Let us begin by defining terms as the Reformers originally defined them when they spoke in terms of the regulative principle and the normative principle. The latter taught that if Scripture does not forbid it, it is allowed. The former said, in essence, that the only proper way to worship God is as He has commanded, instructed, and prescribed in His Word.

There is no problem with this definition of the regulative principle (especially if you add ‘supported’ after ‘prescribed’). However, we must realize that it is easier to state this principle than to apply it. This is where the debate rages—in its detailed application.” Jerry Marcellino, “Leading the Church in God-Centered Worship: The Pastoral Role,” ed. John H. Armstrong, *Reforming Pastoral Ministry: Challenges for Ministry in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001) 142.

38. The Theology Committee of the ARBCA: Rev. Don Lindblad – Chairman, Rev. Tom Lyon, Dr. Fred Malone, Rev. Fred Pugh, Dr. James Renihan, Dr. Mike Renihan, *A Position Paper Concerning the*

two examples of such general rules which God demands that we apply to our specific circumstance. They are the rules of edification and order (vv. 26, 40). God demands that these two rules be followed, but he has not given us a detailed list of what they mean in every situation. Churches may differ as to where the line is drawn between circumstances and substance and parts. As long as each church holds seriously to the regulative principle, reasonable differences should not be made the source of division. We must be charitable in such things, while clearly insisting on the regulative principle.

*Fred Malone*

Dr. Fred Malone, formerly a minister in the Presbyterian Church in America and now a pastor in the Southern Baptist Convention, argues against infant baptism based, at least in part, on the regulative principle. In a 1999 internet article on the web site of the Founders Movement (dedicated to helping Baptists rediscover their Calvinistic roots), he comments: “I am convinced that the ‘good and necessary inference’ which establishes infant baptism, has opened the door to other difficulties within the Reformed and evangelical Christian world. Theonomy, paedocommunion, and more recently, stated applications of the regulative principle of worship which have in fact transformed it into the old normative principle, are three such examples. Or could it be that infant baptism was always based upon the normative principle instead of the regulative? That is my conclusion. Perhaps we all, Presbyterians and Baptists alike, need to recommit ourselves to the biblically based regulative principle of worship and follow it where it leads us.”<sup>34</sup>

However, what Dr. Malone has refused to recognize is that the use of inference (“good and necessary consequence”) is a necessary component of any theological system. Furthermore, as C. Matthew McMahon has pointed out in his review of Dr. Malone’s work, he does not consistently follow his own stated principles.<sup>35</sup>

Other works by Baptists include the following: Dever and Alexander’s *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel, which has a chapter on the regulative principle*,<sup>36</sup> Jerry Marcellino’s “Leading the Church in God-Centered Worship: The Pastoral Role,” in *Reforming Pastoral Ministry: Challenges for Ministry in Postmodern Times*,<sup>37</sup> *A Position Paper Concerning the Regulative Principle of Worship A Report by the Theology Committee of the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America*,<sup>38</sup> a 2003 interview with author

and professor and Southern Baptist, Don Whitney;<sup>39</sup> Austin Lee Goggans's "Holding to a regulative principle in worship;"<sup>40</sup> Ernest C. Reisinger and Matthew Allen, *Worship: The Regulative Principle and the Biblical Practice of Accommodation* (Cape Coral, Fla.: Founders Press, 2001);<sup>41</sup> and Sam Waldron's "The Regulative Principle of Worship: The Text of a Message Given in South Africa."<sup>42</sup>

R. J. GORE, JR.

R. J. Gore, Jr., represents one of several scholars who desire to move from "simple" and "prescribed" worship, to a type of worship that is ecumenical in scope. In his 2002 book on worship, Dr. Gore sketches his pilgrimage from enthusiastic support to open rejection of the Puritan regulative principle. One finds that his initial motivations for questioning the principle were experiential.<sup>43</sup> These experiences led him to question what he believed; and, upon further study, he found the defenses of Puritan worship lacking—in his estimation, little more than sloganeering. In his words, "the exegesis of the key texts upon which the principle was based often appeared overstated and unconvincing." He also found it significant that so few hold to the regulative principle of worship today, and concluded the minority should be humble enough to learn from the majority.<sup>44</sup>

Given this pilgrimage, one is not too surprised to

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*Regulative Principle of Worship A Report by the Theology Committee of the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America* (Formally Approved by the General Assembly March 8, 2001). See <http://65.71.233.194/arbca/pdf/Principle.PDF>. In their conclusion the committee writes: "Our Confession [London Baptist of 1689] is a Puritan document; therefore, the model for our churches is Puritan and not one of a number of competing contemporary ones. Different models abound, but we reject each of them as contrary to New Testament policy and polity. We eschew the following models: Roman, Lutheran, Anglican, high church liturgical, Brethren, seeker-friendly, charismatic, evangelical, etc. Essential to this Puritan model is the regulative principle of worship. To deviate from the Confession at this point and to adhere to another would be to embrace a different ethos, an altered emphasis, and most probably additional elements. The regulative principle of worship is a non-negotiable part of a Reformed Baptist theology and methodology. It is systemic to the Confession, not subsidiary."

39. Jeff Robinson, "Whitney: Worship should be God-centered & biblical," *Baptist Press*, 11 November 2003. Online at <http://www.baptistpress.org/bpnews.asp?ID=17059>.

40. Pastor Austin Lee Goggans, Blue Pond Baptist Church, Rome, Georgia, "Holding to a regulative principle in worship," *Atlanta (Georgia) Christian Index* (November 24, 2005). <http://www.christianindex.org/1767.article>.

41. According to the publishers: "This book masterfully defines, explains, and defends the Reformed principle of worship—the regulative principle. Moreover, the principle is not left in the realm of

theory. The application of the principle in the context of modern evangelical life is developed, especially how to implement the regulative principle in congregations who do not yet fully understand or embrace this biblical principle." As previously noted in Part One of this survey, the late Ernest Reisinger wrote an earlier piece entitled, *Thoughts on the Regulative Principle in a Reforming Situation* (Cape Coral, Fla.: Christian Gospel Foundation, 1982). E. Bennett Robinson critiques this earlier piece. "The regulative principle is not concerned with the details of worship's circumstances in the early church. It is concerned with establishing what parts of worship make the worship assembly what it is. Cunningham says, 'It is a caricature of the regulative principle to paint it as effort to dictate the vagaries of New Testament worship as normative.'" Robinson then cites: "Cunningham, p. 39. See Ernest C. Reisinger, 'Thoughts on The Regulative Principle in a Reforming Situation,' p. 8, as an example of this misunderstanding." This quotation is not from Cunningham (the term regulative principle was not in use) and must be someone's synopsis of his actual comments on page 39 of "The Reformers and the Regulative Principle," in *The Reformation of the Church* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965; repr. 1987). E. Bennett Robinson, "How Shall We Now Worship? Applying the Regulative Principle," *WRS Journal* (7/1, February 2000). Online at [http://www.wrs.edu/journals/volume\\_7-1.htm](http://www.wrs.edu/journals/volume_7-1.htm). However, Bennett has his own misconceptions of the regulative principle as noted earlier in this article.

42. Here Waldron writes more expansively on the principle, making use of the same four biblical arguments noted above. Sam Waldron, "Regulative Principle of Worship: The Text of a Message Given in South Africa." <http://www.atgeneva.com/regulativeprinciple.html> [placed online circa July 17, 2004]. There are also audio lectures available by Waldron, Mark Chanski, and Jim Savaštio. Sam Waldron, *The Regulative Principle: 1. History & Theology Parts; 2. Scriptural Support; 3. Necessary Clarification; The Corporate Worship of the Church #18–19: The Regulative Principle: Prescribed Elements: Singing; Mark Chanski, Leviticus #8: Strange Fire (1994), Leviticus #9: The Regulative Principle (1994); Jim Savaštio, The Law of God Pt. 4: The Second Commandment (2002)*. Available at [http://www.npbccwebsite.org/html/audio\\_cassettes.html](http://www.npbccwebsite.org/html/audio_cassettes.html). The Chanski and Savaštio messages are also at this writing available at [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com).

43. The experiential influences he outlines include becoming increasingly unable to understand the difference between using "a visible, physical, and tangible symbol" such as a wooden cross, and the Bible's literary use of that symbol; having been greatly uplifted by means of a highly liturgical worship service at a presbytery meeting, and not knowing how to reconcile that experience with what he professed to believe; and, as a U.S. Army National Guard chaplain since 1986, having to justify his unwillingness to participate in a generic Protestant service—complete with altar set-up consisting of a brass cross and candlesticks—stipulated by the Army. R. J. Gore, Jr., *Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2002) 4–7.

44. While conceding that "the lack of adherents, in and of itself, does not negate the Puritan regulative principle of worship," Professor Gore also suggests not only that there should be an approach of humility by Presbyterians, but also a willingness to "learn from the church catholic." *Covenantal Worship*, 7.

Regulative Principle of Worship.”<sup>45</sup> It would appear that Dr. Gore moved in just a matter of a couple of years from questioning the regulative principle to completing a doctoral dissertation rejecting it. Sadly, for one so strongly moved to reject a doctrine once held, the paper does not present a convincing case for doing so. The work is seriously defective, as two noted scholars have pointed out. Dr. T. David Gordon has written that the seminary “committee should have never approved the dissertation, because the methodology was so seriously flawed.”<sup>46</sup> And according to Dr. David C. Lachman, the research was inadequate, Calvin was misunderstood and misrepresented, and the author almost completely failed “so much as to look into what the Puritans actually had to say on the subject.”<sup>47</sup>

Throughout the 1990s, Professor Gore continued to develop his anti-Confessional ideas,<sup>48</sup> and then summed up his thoughts in 2002 with his book, *Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle*, which is a revision of his earlier dissertation.<sup>49</sup> While the book was uncritically championed by some,<sup>50</sup> critical reviews were penned by Dr. Gordon, and by this author in the 2005 issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.<sup>51</sup>

Recently, Professor Gore replied to Dr. Gordon’s 2003 review in the pages of the *Westminster Theological*

*Journal*.<sup>52</sup> However, it remains the opinion of the 2005 reviewers of Gore’s work in this journal that a scholarly study of the Puritans involves first and foremost reading what the Puritans had to say on the subject. Since Dr. Gore purports to be critiquing the Puritan view of worship, the fact that he has apparently failed to read them on the subject renders his work of no real value.

TIMOTHY J. KELLER

In 2002, noted Presbyterian Church in America minister Timothy J. Keller contributed to a volume on worship, in which three different Protestant approaches were presented: “Anglican,” “free church,” and “Reformed.”<sup>53</sup>

Dr. Keller pastors Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. His chapter, “Reformed Worship in the Global City,” describes two broad competing schools of thought in the “worship wars,” viz., contemporary worship and historic worship. There is also a third alternative, called “blended worship” (193–196).

Contemporary worship advocates “consult the Bible and contemporary culture;” while the advocates of historic worship “consult the Bible and historic tradition.” But Dr. Keller proposes to consult “the Bible, the cultural context of our community, and the historic tradition of our church.” He writes: “In summary, I believe the solution to the problem of the ‘worship wars’ is neither to reject nor to enshrine historic tradition but to forge new forms of corporate worship that take seriously both our histories and contemporary realities, all within a framework of biblical theology” (197–198).

Dr. Keller posits that John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli both held to the regulative principle, but that they gave birth to two different traditions. Calvin’s perspective led to the Continental Reformed tradition, while Zwingli’s led to the Puritan and “Free Church” worship (199–200).

In Pastor Keller’s view, Calvin’s approach transcends the “overly simplistic processes for arriving at . . . corporate worship forms” which characterize the proponents of both contemporary worship and historic worship. According to the author, Calvin looked not only to the Bible as “the supreme authority and source for God-honoring worship,” but also consulted patristic worship practices, and was sensitive to the needs of the people and their edification. “Calvin refused to pit ‘the glory of God’ against the ‘edification’ of the participants. The basic elements of gathered worship are laid out by God in his Word, but our arrangement and utilization of them is strongly controlled by what helps and touches those who come” (202–203).

45. R. J. Gore, Jr. “The Pursuit of Plainness: Rethinking the Regulative Principle of Worship.” Ph.D. Dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1988.

46. Personal Correspondence, Dr. T. David Gordon, Professor of Religion and Greek, Grove City College, to Frank J. Smith, Ph.D., D.D., February 28, 2005.

47. See Dr. Lachman’s critique of this dissertation in “Reframing Presbyterian Worship,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 1 (2005) 141.

48. For example, see his review of 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*, in *Westminster Theological Journal* 56 (1994) 443–47; “Reviewing the Puritan Regulative Principle of Worship,” *Presbyterion* 20.1 (1994), pp. 41–50; and “Reviewing the Regulative Principle. Part II,” *Presbyterion* 21.1 (1995), pp. 29–47.

49. While a revision, the key defects in the dissertation noted by Dr. Lachman, remain in the book. “Reframing Presbyterian Worship,” *CPJ* 2, 135.

50. Charles Dunahoo, “Book Review. Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle by R.J. Gore, Jr.,” *Equip for Ministry* (May/June 2003). <http://www.pcanet.org/CEP/Publications/May03EFM.htm>

51. T. David Gordon, “Review Article: The Westminster Assembly’s Unworkable and Unscriptural View of Worship,” *WTJ* 65 (2003) 345–356; “Reframing Presbyterian Worship,” 141–150.

52. R. J. Gore, Jr., “Response – Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Critics,” *WTJ* 67 (2005) 363–79.

53. D. A. Carson, ed., *Worship by the Book* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002).

Of course, who in the Puritan tradition would argue with this? There is no reason to believe that a seventeenth-century Presbyterian would oppose utilizing the light of history, or a concern for intelligibility, as ways of determining those “circumstances” which, to quote Westminster Confession of Faith I.6, “are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.” In other words, Dr. Keller seems to be arguing against a straw man.

Dr. Keller suggests that Calvin held a “balanced” view of worship, in that he did not regard it as being sharply distinguished from the rest of life. Utilizing the notion of “balance,” the New York pastor also posits that “the ‘middle’ balanced view we are putting forth here means that there is no scriptural distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘official’ worship services and other gathered meetings of the church.” What does this lack of distinction mean practically? According to Dr. Keller, “You can become far too inflexible about what occurs within the worship service. For example, among many traditionalists in my denomination, it is allowable for a woman to teach a Sunday school class or small group, but not to speak from the pulpit during corporate worship” (203–206).

With regard to the “core” of Calvin’s corporate worship, Pastor Keller believes that it is to be found in the Calvinistic conception of grace, with the concomitant idea that worship involved God’s movement to the people, and not only the people’s movement to God. “God’s grace comes to us as *a word to believe*, rather than as a deed to be performed.” However, Calvin’s views led him not only to reject medievalism (in which the “emotional, ritual, mystical, and sacramental aspects were completely dominant”), but also to avoid “completely non-sacramental, rational, nonmystical meetings of the Zwinglians (and to a great degree the Anabaptists). It could be that he realized that there was a ‘worship-as-performance’ error on the Protestant side. Could not congregants fall into ‘performing the Word’ in order to get God to bless them?” (207–208).

Whatever may be said regarding the Zwinglian approach to worship, it is abundantly clear that the British Puritans and Presbyterians very clearly regarded Calvin as their spiritual progenitor. Furthermore, the Puritans and Presbyterians followed Calvin, not Zwingli, with regard to music in worship. However, from reading Dr. Keller, one might be (subtly) led to think that traditional Puritan and Presbyterian worship knows nothing of the Calvinistic sense of the transcendent.

Writing of “traits” of Reformed corporate worship,

Dr. Keller states that there are three: its voice—simplicity; its goal—transcendence; and its order—gospel re-enactment (208ff).

With regard to simplicity, he writes that Calvin and the Reformers rejected the “spectacle” of “pomp, ceremony, and spectacular architecture and performances” which characterized medieval worship. “Does God need a great performance before he will give us his favor? Therefore, Calvin asked not for mediocrity but for a lack of ostentation—in ceremony, music, and architecture” (209).

With regard to transcendence, “Calvin believed that the goal of gathered worship was to bring people face to face with God. His aim was not that people would simply learn information about God, but that they would truly hear God speak and know his presence in the service.” Simplicity of worship coincides with transcendence, first of all, by means of quality in worship; and, secondly, by means of a heart attitude of wonder, delight, and awe (211–214).

In terms of quality in worship, Dr. Keller writes that Calvin took a “middle way” between the Lutheran and Catholic approach on the one hand (with complex, professional musical performance), and the Anabaptist and Zwinglian approaches on the other (rejecting professionalism because of its “worldliness” and emotionalism, respectively): “Because professional musicians could turn the congregants into an audience instead of a community, he [Calvin] chose not to use choirs or soloists. But he by no means shared the view that artistic excellence was elitist.”<sup>54</sup>

This “third way” which Dr. Keller believes Calvin followed, allows him to write the following in a footnote:

Calvin’s service book (1545) included a hymn—an indication that he did not think it a sin to sing hymns.

54. We refer the reader to the work by Jarman surveyed in Part One, page 117, who does not see such a serious bifurcation between Zwingli and Calvin. Jarman writes, “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. 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.” 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,” 111.

However, as a “quality control,” he limited worship music to the singing of metrical psalms. He also avoided organs, most instruments, and even elaborate polyphony. As we saw above, these restrictions were not grounded in the same disdain of artistic excellence that led the Anabaptists to unaccompanied song. It was due to his concern for simplicity and intelligibility. (As we have seen, musical quality is important for transcendence.) Therefore, while Anabaptist theology of art would preclude accompaniment and choirs per se from worship, Calvin’s theology does not. His “middle way” between the Anabaptists and the Lutherans points the way for Reformed worship today to include the judicious use of accompaniment, ensembles, and solos—provided Calvin’s over-arching purposes of simplicity, transcendence, and edification are honored (212).

What in the world is our brother thinking? It is this type of sloppy “scholarship” that Calvin would have eschewed, and which also makes us evangelicals the butt of jokes in academia. Anyone with any clear knowledge of Calvin knows that his opposition to “special music” (such as choirs, instrumentation, etc.) was based on Biblical principle, particularly his view that in the New Testament, those Old Covenant ways of worship had been superseded. Furthermore, Calvin’s opposition was also based on the regulative principle of worship.

However, Dr. Keller is attempting to justify his own worship practices by high-jacking Calvin and claiming that the contemporary views are “Reformed.” This is exactly what liberals, as in the mainline denominations, do all the time. It has long been amusing to this present author to read feminists and other heterodox people, as they appropriate the term “Reformed” as a cloak for their strange views. In principle, this is precisely what this PCA clergyman is doing.

Dr. Keller also describes three “tests” of Reformed corporate worship: doxological evangelism, community building, and character for service (217–221). However, please note carefully that the regulative principle is not listed as a “test” of Reformed worship. Furthermore, it also was not listed as one of the “traits” of Reformed worship.

The minimal attention to the regulative principle

55. In conjunction with the classic sci-fi series *Star Trek*, the term “technobabble” is used to describe impressive terminology, employed by characters on the show, which is actually scientific gibberish; perhaps we should coin a new term, “theobabble,” to describe the type of nonsense which churchmen utilize in their desperate attempts to justify innovations as having historical pedigree.

becomes understandable when we consider that Dr. Keller’s concern is for worship that is Reformed and contemporary. He rejects “Reformed worship,” which does not interact with contemporary realities; and “Contemporary worship,” which does not interact with the Reformed tradition. The other two possibilities are “Reformed Contemporary worship” and “Contemporary Reformed worship,” the latter incorporating contemporary worship on a more Calvinistic base than the former (221–222).

Dr. Keller concludes his treatment by noting that Redeemer Presbyterian Church deliberately uses non-Christian musicians in the worship services. “Musical talent is the gift of God, and to ask a musician to offer up that gift in a service of worship is a good thing both for him or her and for us.” He concludes:

I believe Calvin’s own approach to music provides guidance for an approach somewhere in the middle, between, on the one hand, the evangelical church that pays its ministers but not its musicians, and, on the other hand, the mainline church that has non-Christians singing or playing as “just another gig.” When we incorporate non-Christians into our services, we pray that the gathered worship itself will have an impact on them. We model for them the difference between just performing and seeking to “catch the conscience” with our music. When we invite non-Christians to use their talents in corporate worship, we are simply calling them, along with every creature, to bring their “peculiar honors” and gifts to praise their Creator (239).

As we noted above, this Manhattan minister gives short shrift to the regulative principle—a fact which gives away what he regards as essential (and what he regards as not being essential) to corporate worship. Dr. Keller writes in an engaging fashion, and he certainly knows how to appeal to a broad audience—whether a group of yuppies in New York, or his fellow ministers in the PCA. However, what he has penned in this book turns a genuinely Calvinistic and Reformed understanding of worship on its head, and does so with enough of a façade of academic-speak to fool the undiscerning.<sup>55</sup>

DAVID C. LACHMAN

In January 2003, Dr. David C. Lachman delivered a series of lectures for a course on Scottish Presbyterianism at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, the seminary of the Heritage Reformed Congregations, located

in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His teaching touched upon a wide range of subjects, including worship.<sup>56</sup>

Quoting from the venerable Scottish church historian, David Hay Fleming, Dr. Lachman said that the one word by which the Scottish Reformation could be summed up is “thorough.” “The Scottish Reformers wanted to be thoroughly Scriptural.” John Knox and others wanted to have “a church that reflected the pure word of God.” Only the Reformed or Presbyterian approach could claim of being “not a man-made tradition.”

“The matter of the true worship of God is a great emphasis in Scottish Presbyterianism,” according to Dr. Lachman, as he considered the Scots Confession of 1560, the First Book of Discipline, and the Second Book of Discipline. These Scotsmen believed that “You cannot worship God in any way that He has not positively commanded.”

The Scots wanted to “abolish all honoring of God not contained in His word.” They were “very serious” about being Biblical—for example, as in sitting around the table for the Lord’s Supper (while also acknowledging that the manner of sitting was incidental). They also emphasized the avoidance of superstition and idolatry.

There was “no contrast” or “disparity” between the Scots Confession and the Westminster Confession of Faith: a person who subscribed to one was expected to be able to subscribe to the other (Lachman, Lecture 2).

The instructor also devoted one section of the course to Worship, both making substantial reference to Calvin, Cunningham and Bannerman, and spending a good bit of time on George Gillespie’s great work against the English-Popish Ceremonies. His purpose was to say that the Scottish Presbyterians sought to conform their worship to that which God has prescribed in His Word and to exclude all rites and ceremonies of human invention. They denied that the church has any power to introduce anything into the worship of God which God has not himself commanded. They rejected the ‘ceremonies’ imposed by the Roman and Anglican churches, against those who claimed such ceremonies were 1) necessary to be followed in deference to the authority of the Church, 2) expedient on the grounds that they had become the common practice of the Church, and 3) indifferent in that they were neither inherently good nor evil. The Scottish Presbyterians held that such ceremonies were unlawful as they were not instituted by God and consequently, with Gilbert Rule,<sup>57</sup> “hated ceremonies and holidays [holy days], and perhaps would have died rather than practise them.”<sup>58</sup>

JEFFREY J. MEYERS

A pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America in St. Louis, Missouri, Jeffrey J. Meyers has been involved in what he and others call “liturgical renewal.” In 2003, his substantial book (448 pages), *The Lord’s Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship*, was published by Canon Press.<sup>59</sup>

As the title implies, the book represents a continuation of the James Jordan school of thought with respect to worship. However, this volume argues the case more substantively and with greater academic care than other attempts.

Our focus here is on the treatment of the regulative principle, which occupies the eighteen pages of Chapter 16. Pastor Meyers states: “Controversy continues to swirl around the precise meaning and application of this principle, but I am convinced that the regulative principle of worship simply means that the content and ritual of our Lord’s Day corporate worship must be informed and regulated by the Word of God. Nothing should be added to the Church’s worship without biblical warrant.” He then quotes from the relevant sections of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger Catechism (Meyers, 298).

However, having professed allegiance to this Puritan principle, he then proceeds to attack what he says are “at least four unworkable applications of the regulative principle of worship.” The first of these “unworkable applications” is that of “reactionary regulations.” In his estimation, the Reformed church has often opposed a variety of practices simply because they were associated with Roman Catholicism and/or Anglicanism. Among the items he discusses here are liturgical forms,<sup>60</sup> and the observance of religious holy days. He writes:

56. David C. Lachman, CD (MP3 format), Course #327a, Scottish Presbyterianism (January, 2003), Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.

57. Gilbert Rule (c.1629–1701), Scottish Presbyterian minister and Principal of Edinburgh University.

58. James Walker, *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland 1560–1750* (Edinburgh: John Knox Press, Reprinted, with additional notes, from the second revised edition of 1888, 1982) 113. Walker references Rule’s *Good Old Way* (Gilbert Rule, *The Good Old Way Defended against the attempts of A.M. D.D. in his book called, An enquiry into the new opinions, (chiefly) propagated by the Presbyterians of Scotland ...* [Edinburgh: Heirs and successors of Andrew Anderson, 1697]).

59. Jeffrey J. Meyers, *The Lord’s Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2003).

60. Meyers (303) “confuses elements and forms.” 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*,

Consider the Church year calendar, for example. Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran churches do it, so it must be wrong. And where in the Bible are we commanded to have Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter? Confusion arises when statements like the following are advanced against the use of the Church year calendar: "Our heritage is rightly suspicious of the creation of ceremonies and rituals not authorized in Scripture." The problem with this is that technically the church year does not introduce new ceremonies or rituals; rather, it organizes and directs our Scripture readings, prayers, hymns, and sermons according to the life of Christ (Meyers, 299–302).

But, of course, the introduction of such special "holy days" does establish a sort of ritual. Furthermore, the observance of such days inevitably leads to the observance of various ceremonies.<sup>61</sup>

The second of these allegedly untenable applications Meyer's raises

concerns a too narrowly defined principle. The regulative principle is not well formulated when we say that only that which is commanded ought to be allowed in worship. Whatever is not commanded therefore is forbidden. Why should we need only explicit "commands"? This is completely unworkable, and in practice has never been followed. It makes for great rhetoric, but lousy biblical and liturgical theology.

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Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia Pa., November 21–22, 2004 (Unpublished; MS dated February 18, 2006) 8–9 n34. Dr. Ward's lecture has been published; see R. A. Muller & R. S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship* (Phillipsburg, Pa.: P & R, 2007) 98 fn.

61. Ed. Regarding the 'holy days' of the 'Christian calendar,' a primary concern of the Presbyterian reformers was the imposition of their observance by both the church and the state, which was a violation of their Christian Liberty [See George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies* (Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 1993) 1.7.31–36; 1.8.37–45. Hereafter *EPC*.]. They argued that observing a day as more holy than another without a prescription from God, was superstitious and even idolatrous. The observance of the church calendar as practiced by the Roman church should be rejected, to use the outline of George Gillespie's argument, for three reasons. First, because they were observed superstitiously (*EPC*, 3.1.7–15.140–153). Secondly, they were actually idolatrous three times over. 1. Because "they are monuments of by-past idolatry." Such monuments which were notoriously abused to idolatry should be destroyed. Retaining these would become a continual stumbling block toward idolatry (*EPC*, 3.2.154–180). 2. Because they are badges of present idolatry. "By communicating with idolaters in their rites and ceremonies, we ourselves become guilty of idolatry; even as Ahaz (2 Kings 16:10), was an idolater, *eo ipso* [for that very reason], that he took the pattern of an altar from idolaters" (*EPC*, 3.3, 181–197). And 3. Because they are formally "idols themselves" (*EPC*, 3.4.198–204).

In his view, the proper principle is that "the Church must have biblical *warrant* for the way she worships God; such warrant can be derived from biblical commands, principles, or examples" (Meyers, 303).

The difficulty with Pastor Meyers' statement is that, in the first place, he has set up a straw man, which no one holds; and secondly, that he apparently has misunderstood the fact that approved apostolic example forms a Biblical command.

The third "unworkable application" is that of applying the regulative principle "in a dispensational, semi-Marcionite way. In practice, then, the regulative principle means that we only look to the New Testament for biblical warrant. Only what the New Testament expressly prescribes ought to be done. All that ceremony and ritual, that was Old Testament worship." He attacks the Puritans (such as John Owen), as well as more contemporary authors: "Frank J. Smith asserts 'Romanism ... retained much of the Old Testament sacrificial system.' What exactly does this mean? How can Roman Catholicism be said to have 'retained' Old Covenant sacrificial practices? Did the error of the Mass develop because the Church returned to the liturgical elements of the Old Testament ceremonial system? Or did it develop as a result of the influence of alien philosophical (Aristotelian) categories on biblical teaching? Does Frank Smith want to suggest that the God-given sacrificial system was Romanist? Are we to believe that the corruption of the medieval church came about because of the influence of the Old Testament on the church's liturgy? This kind of argument is historically and theologically erroneous" (Meyers, 304–305).

The St. Louis minister proceeds to refer favorably to the work of Henning Graf Reventlow, published in 1985 by Fortress Press (a liberal Lutheran publishing house), whose scholarship showed that "English Protestants, particularly the Puritans, displayed a deep-seated hostility to anything that smacked of material ceremony and ritual and that they read the Old Testament with these colored lenses such that they tended to interpret Old Testament religion as a kind of Catholicism before Rome. Furthermore, this moralistic, anti-ceremonial bias fed right into (or possibly even 'caused') the rising humanistic antipathy to revealed religion, particularly that of the Old Testament, leading to the rise of higher critical methodologies that deconstruct the first four-fifths of the Bible. At any rate," Mr. Meyers writes, "Reventlow's research on the anti-ritual 'spiritualism' of the English post-Reformation theologians is extremely troubling. This work reveals something of the shortcomings of our own anti-liturgical, spiritualistic heritage"

(305). Mr. Meyers also castigates standard Reformed polemics for maintaining that “synagogue worship was ‘simple’ and a-liturgical and therefore must function as a model for ‘simple’ New Testament worship.” In his view, synagogue worship became “sacrificial worship without the animal sacrifices. Synagogue practice was modeled on the temple (e.g., prayers were described as ‘sacrifices,’ similar to the New Testament and the synagogue itself was considered holy space)” (306).

Before proceeding to Mr. Meyers’ fourth example of “deformations” of the regulative principle, we must pause here to evaluate what he has written regarding his third example. We are aware that those who are caricatured as “TR” (“Truly Reformed”) are often viewed as harsh in judgments about others. We would at this point simply note, however, that perhaps it is the critics of such narrow-minded “TRs” who need to examine their commitment to Christian charity. James Jordan penned an entire book, claiming that a Puritan approach to worship constituted “Liturgical Nestorianism.” Now, it is one thing to be accused of the ancient heresy of Nestorianism. But it is quite another thing altogether to be lumped in with Marcion, whose heretical views—such as denying inspiration to much of Scripture, and positing that the God of the Old Testament is not the God of the New Testament—put him well beyond the pale of Christianity. However, Jeffrey J. Meyers has clearly and unambiguously tarred the Puritan faith with the brush of Marcionism.

Yes, Roman Catholicism in point of fact does imitate a sacrificial approach that is akin to that of the Old Testament sacrificial system. It is not that the God-given sacrificial system was intrinsically erroneous (or Romanist); rather, the fact is that Roman Catholicism represents the tendency of a works-religion to be overly concerned with elaborate ceremony. Further, it is also true that it is God who has abolished the sacrificial system which He had established for a particular time and purpose. To continue with those sacrifices is to deny the gospel. Please note that we are not accusing Mr. Meyers of denying the gospel; instead, we are merely pointing out that because of the coming of Christ, the sacrificial system, of necessity, has been abrogated. But Romanism, with its emphasis not only on the ceremonial but also on the (purported) re-sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist, essentially continues the sacrificial system which was overthrown by the Messiah.

The fact that “sacrificial” language is employed to describe worship practices apart from the temple does not negate this reality, that the sacrificial, ceremonial law has been fulfilled by Jesus. Even Mr. Meyers has

to acknowledge the change in administration, when he writes, somewhat paradoxically, that synagogue worship was “sacrificial worship without the animal sacrifices.”

The fourth “deformation” about which he writes regarding the regulative principle of worship is that of a “New Testament-only approach” which “invariably ends up advocating an overly inward, rationalistic approach to worship.” In this section, he argues that the classic passage in John 4 regarding Jesus’ counsel to the Samaritan woman at the well of the necessity of worshipping God in spirit and truth, does not imply “a warning against all ‘outward’ and ‘external’ liturgical worship” (Meyers, 306–313).

In response, it would appear that Mr. Meyers has again constructed a straw man. We know of no one within the Reformed community who believes that there is no physicality involved in worship performed by people who have bodies.

Pastor Meyers concludes this chapter by quoting favorably A. A. Hodge’s commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith. Mr. Meyers rejects what he calls “an unworkable, overly strict formulation” (“whatever is not commanded is forbidden”); however, he then turns around and says that “God has prescribed for us in His Word how we may worship Him acceptably.” But, if God has “prescribed” how He is to be worshipped, then what is this other than a command? And if we are to worship according to that prescription, then what other conclusion can be drawn but that all other worship, being non-commanded, is forbidden?<sup>62</sup>

#### GREENVILLE PRESBYTERIAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

In March of 2003, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (GPTS) sponsored a conference on worship. Resulting from that conference was a book, which featured the addresses, including a formal debate on exclusive psalmody.<sup>63</sup>

62. Mr. Meyers’ views can also be accessed at his congregation’s web site: [www.prpc-stl.org/ministries\\_preach.html](http://www.prpc-stl.org/ministries_preach.html).

63. *The Worship of God: Reformed Concepts of Biblical Worship* (Fearn, Tain, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, and Taylors, S.C.: Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 2005). There have been other conferences friendly to a more faithful adherence to the regulative principle, such as the Growing Reformed Churches Conferences for 2001 and 2002. Some of this material may be in print in other forms, but the audio of the lectures is available from the library and bookstore at Westminster Theological Seminary in California. *Growing Reformed Churches (2001): Worship in Spirit & in Truth*, Westminster Theological Seminary, Escondido, California, February 16–17, 2001. Plenary sessions: 1. Worship and the Bible (Dr.

In the Preface, Dr. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., states that “there is nothing more perilous to our salvation than a distorted and perverse worship of God. The primary rudiments by which we are wont to train those whom we wish to win as disciples to Christ, are these; viz., not to frame any new worship of God for themselves at random, and after their own pleasure, but to know that the only legitimate worship is that which He himself approved from the beginning” (7)

Terry L. Johnson

Terry Johnson, writing on the regulative principle, stated that “the regulative principle includes both ‘form’ and ‘heart,’ both ‘truth’ and ‘spirit.’ The regulative principle is concerned with: (1) Content and form, or truth; and, (2) Heart and motive, or spirit” (11).

Pastor Johnson adopts the same paradigm as that of Dr. T. David Gordon, viz., of elements, forms, and circumstances. He writes:

The Reformed tradition generally, and *The Westminster Standards* specifically, distinguish between elements (which are Scripturally determined and unchanging), forms (the contents of the elements, regarding which there is considerable freedom), and circumstances, which are governed by broader considerations. For example, the element of prayer may be expressed through a written or extemporaneous form. The element of preaching may be textual or topical in form. The element of Scripture reading may be expressed in various forms: a few verses or a chapter or more, from Genesis or Revelation, or from anywhere in between. In

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W. Robert Godfrey); 2. Worship: where and what to do (Dr. Leonard Payton); 3. The regulative principle of the church (Pastor Samuel Waldron). *Worship in historical perspective*: 1. The elements of worship (Dr. W. Robert Godfrey); 2. Worship in the Old and New Testaments (Dr. Iain Duguid); 3. Transcendence and reverence in worship (Pastor Ken Jones); 4. Emotion vs. Emotionalism in worship (Pastor Earl Blackburn); 5. Worship in American Presbyterianism (Pastor Jim Garretson). *Worship in theological perspective*: 1. Centrality of the word in worship (Pastor Samuel Waldron); 2. Musical instruments in worship (Dr. Leonard Payton); 3. Confession and absolution in worship (Dr. Kim Riddlebarger); 4. The text of hymns (Pastor Chris Beamer); 5. High church vs. low church (Dr. Hywel Jones). *Worship in pastoral perspective*: 1. Seeker sensitive worship (Dr. Michael Horton); 2. Singing psalms and hymns (Pastor Lee Irons); 3. Sacraments in worship (Dr. R. Scott Clark); 4. Children in worship (Pastor Ron Scheuers); 5. The hymn controversy (Dr. Darryl Hart). *Growing Reformed Churches (2002): Spiritual Worship, A Reformed Perspective on Worship; Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship*, Bethel United Reformed Church, Jenison, Indiana, November 8–9, 2002. Speakers: Dr. W. Robert Godfrey, Dr. Michael Horton, and Rev. Terry Johnson.

each case the form is the content and structure through which the element is expressed (19).

In response, let us note that it simply is not true that the Westminster divines posited “forms” as some third category. Although it is true that the Larger and Shorter Catechisms speak of “that form of prayer” taught by Christ to His disciples (the Lord’s Prayer), it is surely significant that the Westminster Assembly used the term “form” only in that very limited way to speak of the pattern of prayer (WLC 186 says: “The whole word of God is of use to direct us in the duty of prayer, but the special rule of direction is that form of prayer which our Saviour Christ taught his disciples, commonly called The Lord’s Prayer;” WLC 187 says: “The Lord’s prayer is not only for direction, as a *pattern*, according to which we are to make others prayers; but may also be used as a prayer. . . .” [emphasis added]). Pastor Johnson quotes T. David Gordon, that “form” as a category “appears to be less well-known” than the categories of “element” and “circumstance.” Perhaps the reason why the term “form” is relatively unknown in the literature, is because it isn’t a separate category in the way that has been proposed. Furthermore, this paragraph demonstrates a confusion between an element of worship, and the particular instance of implementing that element. No one would maintain that, because the canonical books constitute the content for the reading of the Word, therefore the entire corpus of Scripture would have to be read every time the Word is read. And yet, that is the implication of the statement that “forms” are “the contents of the elements.”

Further confusion is evident in his next paragraph, when he takes exception to the views of John Frame. The Savannah pastor writes: “Are there any restrictions on forms? Indeed there are and must be, lest the integrity of the element be undermined. Forms are not limitless. The basic principle is this: A form must be consistent with the nature of the element. One may not ‘dance the sermon,’ primarily because a sermon by nature is spoken communication. Dance is not a form of preaching, but a new element, the argument of its proponents notwithstanding” (19).

Terry Johnson surely is correct that dancing would be a new element of worship, but it is not because it is a “form” in the sense in which he is using the term. When he and Dr. Gordon use the term “form,” they are referring to the particular words (the content). When John Frame uses the term “form,” he is referring to the manner in which the element comes to expression, such as through the art of preaching, or the art of dancing.

Pastor Johnson has fallen victim to confusion because of the two different ways in which the term “form” is used in contemporary parlance with respect to worship.

In the penultimate paragraph of his chapter, he writes:

It should be clear by this point that the real battleground today is not over elements but forms. Only a small minority of Reformed churches believe that dance and drama are legitimate elements of worship, and an even smaller minority will ever implement their use. Even the newest of New School theologians continue to affirm the regulative principle. The real debate is whether contemporary forms are adequate for the expression of the Reformed faith. Can contemporary buckets carry Calvinistic water? Can an informal, casual setting and tone, pop/rock music, minimal prayer and Bible readings, and needs based topical preaching produce a new generation of Puritans, Huguenots, and Covenanters—that is, brave, uncompromising souls who will shape civilizations? Those churches that abandon traditional forms for contemporary alternatives are unlikely to experience that depth of sanctifying grace, since it is in our Sunday public services that Reformed convictions receive their widest dissemination.... Only the historically Reformed worship can do the job. Only Presbyterian buckets can carry Presbyterian water (28f).

We certainly agree that “only Presbyterian buckets can carry Presbyterian water.” However, note once again that he has confused the notion of content (which he has said is what “forms” are all about) with that of the manner in which that content is expressed. That confusion weakens his critique, and undermines what he and most others at the Greenville Seminary conference are willing to tolerate or even promote, viz., the singing of uninspired hymns (since the “form,” defined as the content of an element, is, according to these churchmen, flexible).

To summarize our critique, the way that both Johnson and Gordon, on the one hand, and Frame, on the other hand, use the term “form” is unknown in historic Reformed theology. Both camps have picked up on this term and packed it with their own meaning for their own polemical purposes, and in so doing both miss the mark.

*Morton H. Smith*

The first Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), Dr. Morton H. Smith helped found two

seminaries: Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi, and Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. In a significant chapter, this Virginia native details “The History of Worship in Presbyterian Churches” (69–99).

Dr. Smith notes that “the American Presbyterian church moved away from its historical positions on instrumental music, as well as choirs without the benefit of careful, theological scrutiny” (91). Other deviations from historic practice which he mentions include the increasing observance of religious holy days.

In the 1960s, worship services in the Southern Presbyterian Church (PCUS) became bizarre. Dr. Smith quotes at length from Dr. G. Aiken Taylor, then Editor of the *Presbyterian Journal*, in his staunch opposition to the experimental worship that was carried on at Montreat, North Carolina, under denominational auspices.

However, even though these bizarre worship practices (coupled with an open denial of the gospel) compelled ecclesiastical separation (leading to the formation of the PCA in 1973), some of the same deviant practices have been witnessed in the “separated” Presbyterian denominations. Dr. Smith writes that because of “a reframing of Presbyterian principles, the PCA is marked by a looseness of principle and strikingly broad diversity of practice in public worship. He then quotes another Dr. Smith, who “has observed that ‘in practice, the PCA is not committed to uniformity in public worship’” (97).<sup>64</sup>

In his conclusion, Morton Smith offers the following observation:

Perhaps the most serious challenges to the regulative principle of worship are those being put forward within conservative Presbyterian circles today. Those who hold to the historic position regarding the regulative principle of worship ought to accept the challenge and carefully re-examine the Biblical teaching on this subject to determine whether the historic interpretation is the true view. If, on the one hand, the historic interpretation cannot be defended from Scripture, then we should advocate adjustments to the Standards to make them more Biblical. If, on the other hand, the historic interpretation is the proper Biblical position, then it is incumbent upon us to answer the challenges and to insist that the Church return to her Standards (98f).

64. The reference is to Frank J. Smith, *The History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, 519.

Joseph A. Pipa, Jr.

A PCA minister, and the President of Greenville Seminary, Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., wrote a lengthy chapter on “Reformed Liturgy” (121–160). The author attempts in this chapter to defend the notion of using formal liturgy for churches committed to the regulative principle of worship.

To do so, President Pipa employs the same nomenclature as have David Gordon and Terry Johnson, viz., that of three categories of “elements,” “forms,” and “circumstances.” However, he expands the definition somewhat: “Forms consist of the precise content of an element, the liturgical structure of the elements, and the postures used in the acts of worship (e.g., which song or Psalm to be sung, whether to use common prayer or free prayer, how to structure our worship, and which postures to adopt)” (130).

Cliff Blair

Cliff Blair, pastor of an Orthodox Presbyterian congregation in Charlotte, North Carolina, offered a piece in opposition to the use of choirs in public worship.<sup>65</sup> The author connects the appeal to Levitical choirs as necessarily “partaking of a sacerdotal theology that is completely at odds with the priesthood of all believers taught in the New Testament.” He adds: “Church history has shown that choirs have been advanced at just those times when sacerdotal theology was waxing (in the medieval period and in connection with the Anglo Catholic movement of the nineteenth century).” He concludes that “no place remains for choirs in worship independent of God’s people united in Christ” (234).

PETER J. LEIHART

Presbyterian Church in America minister Peter J. Leithart is a senior fellow of theology and literature at New St. Andrews College, Moscow, Idaho. He has long been an advocate of paedocommunion, and has long

65. “The Few on behalf of the Many: An Examination of Choirs in the Light of Scripture, Church History, and Practical Theology,” *ibid.*, 219–235. Other chapters in the volume include W. Robert Godfrey, “The Psalms and Contemporary Worship” (101–120); Brian Schwertley, “The Biblical Case for Exclusive Psalmody” (181–204); and Benjamin Shaw, “The Biblical Case for Hymnody” (205–218). The volume also contains Dr. Godfrey’s “Calvin and the Worship of God” (31–49), which is a version of the piece already noted in this article as well as in Part One.

66. Peter J. Leithart, *From Silence to Song: The Davidic Liturgical Revolution* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2003).

imbibed of the exegetical fancies that have characterized the writings of James Jordan. In 2003, Dr. Leithart wrote *From Silence to Song: The Davidic Liturgical Revolution*,<sup>66</sup> a book which continues in the same vein.

The author specifically rejects the Reformed regulative principle of worship. “In the hands of at least some writers,” he writes, “the regulative principle is, in practice, hermeneutically wooden and theologically Marcionite. It is wooden because an explicit ‘command’ is required for every act of worship, and it is Marcionite because it ignores the abundant Old Testament liturgical instruction in favor of exegeting a few passages of the New.” In a footnote, he explains: “Marcion was the early church heretic who believed that the god of the New Testament was a different deity from the god of the Old. I am using ‘Marcionite’ in this context to describe a system of theology (in this case, liturgical theology) that sharply separates between the Old and the New” (Leithart, 15–16).

Dr. Leithart summarizes his thesis this way:

Refuting the Marcionite assumption must be left for another time, but the woodenness of “regulativism” is directly addressed by the passages studied in this book. As I will argue below, David’s reorganization of worship at the tabernacle in Jerusalem was based on Mosaic ceremonial law, yet it was an expansive and creative application of the law, without ceasing to be an application. David’s liturgical revolution thus provides a *canonical* illustration of how the law was applied to liturgical matters. By examining these portions of Scripture, furthermore, we can see that the church’s “sacrifice of praise” grew out of an application of Levitical law. By showing the subtlety of the law’s relation to Davidic worship, this study offers some hints about the scriptural regulation of worship in general and shows the relevance of Levitical liturgics to Christian worship (16).

According to Dr. Leithart, David’s approach, instead of a “regulation-by-explicit-command,” was “regulation-by-analogy.” Applying this principle would lead the church today to place both candles and a tablecloth on the communion table (despite the absence of any such command), since such adornments “are consistent with the analogy—the *scriptural* analogy—between the Lord’s Supper and a wedding feast” (104–105).

However, as Presbyterians (such as seventeenth century theologian George Gillespie) have noted, the types of worship practices being urged by Dr. Leithart do go beyond Scriptural teaching, and actually impugn the integrity of the Bible by suggesting that the Word of

God is not sufficient for our worship. Furthermore, there really is no stopping point once such a scheme is put into practice; and there are no adequate safeguards to prevent the kinds of abuses to which a Romanizing tendency has subjected the church.

#### RPCNA

In 2003, the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) approved a study on worship which had been previously commissioned in response to queries from one of that denomination's ministers who was questioning the historic stance of his church. The report concluded that the regulative principle of worship, taught in the Westminster Standards and in the RPCNA Testimony, "is an essential part of Scripture's doctrine of worship;" and adduced many of the standard arguments in favor: "the need to preserve the purity of the gospel, God's holiness and man's creatureliness, the second commandment, the need to guard the liberty of conscience of the Christian worshiper together with the limited delegated authority of the Church on earth, and the unity of the Church expressed in her worship."<sup>67</sup>

What makes this study somewhat unique is that it grounds the principle in a Biblical-theological understanding of the covenant.

The fundamental issue concerning the public worship of God, then, is the nature of the assembly of the saints before God, for what reason it comes together, and what is required of it. The assembled congregation of the New Testament Church, like the assembled congregation of Israel, is God's people met together in His presence at an appointed time to review and renew their part in God's covenant with them, and to celebrate His gracious benefits toward them. In its worship the assembly of the saints expresses its faith and its loyalty to the God of the Covenant (16–17).

The study employs Jordanesque language—that of "covenant renewal"—in order to paint the background for the regulative principle. Regarding the New Covenant assembly, the committee wrote:

Weekly the saints rehearse and confirm their covenant commitment to be the Lord's. The historic public worship of the Church in its solemn assemblies moves generally through the parts of a covenant ceremony. The parties to the covenant know themselves and each other to be called by God to meet and worship Him. At their

baptism, the saints remember how the covenant was established between them and God through Christ. They review the requirements of the covenant, they are reminded that blessings and curses are attached to the covenant, and they reaffirm their part in the covenant by a pledge. The Lord's Supper is a covenant reminder: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25).

There is a correspondence between the *elements* of worship as defined by Westminster and the parts of a covenant ceremony. For example, the parties to the covenant communicate in the reading of Scripture and in prayer. The saints are reminded of God's past dealings with them in hearing the Bible read and explained. In particular, God's people are reminded how Christ by His death redeemed them from death and gave them life. Through the reading of the law and in the preaching of the Word, the saints are exhorted to live loyally to God. In singing psalms, the Church praises its God and instructs itself at the same time. In the Lord's Supper, the Church has a memorial sign of Christ's salvation, the experience of its present communion with God in Christ, and a reminder that it awaits the return of its King. The benediction expresses the blessings of the covenant, while the warnings against unbelief (Heb. 4: 1) and the exercise of church discipline in its gatherings remind the Church of the curses attached (see 1 Cor. 5:4–5; 11:29).

The authors gave a "Summary of a Biblical Theology of Worship," as follows:

God commanded His people under both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant to assemble before Him. There is some discontinuity in the nature of these assemblies, since Christ has now fulfilled the shadows of the earthly temple, the sacrifices, and the priesthood. There is also continuity in these assemblies because they are times for pledging loyalty to the God of the covenants and for being equipped by Him to persevere in the terms of the covenant. There is likewise continuity in the provision of sacrifice to atone for the sins of the worshipers; but whether before or after Christ's coming, true efficacy of sacrifice is found only in Christ's blood. Continuity can be found also in the covenant renewal of the assembly's worship in which Scripture is read and explained, prayers offered, psalms sung, and the

67. Committee on the Study of the Doctrine of Worship, *The Worship of the Church: A Reformed Theology of Worship* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Crown and Covenant, 2004) 10–11.

covenant signs observed. The Westminster standards' understanding of the public worship of the Church as being fundamentally covenantal is correct (20).

JOHN W. KEDDIE

In 1994, this Scottish accountant and historian turned gospel minister penned a booklet advocating exclusive psalmody. Nine years later, the second edition appeared in print.<sup>68</sup>

As might be anticipated in such a work, there is appeal to the regulative principle of worship. Chapter 4 (pp. 42–48), “The Regulative Principle,” begins this way: “All Christian churches are regulated in one way or another. It might be expected that all churches would at least claim to be regulated by the Scriptures. In many instances, however, churches have deviated from the Scriptures as their rule of doctrine and practice.” Pastor Keddie notes that the higher critical movement had a deleterious effect upon the authority of Scripture, including its regulative nature. He writes: “A church’s regulative principle in Christian faith and life by and large will be determined by a combination of the following factors: (a) the perceived *authority* of the Bible; (b) the acceptance of the *sufficiency* of Scripture; and (c) the application of a sound biblical *method* of interpretation.”

He points out the deficiencies of the Lutheran/Anglican approach to worship as a “broad principle”: “This do-what-is-not-forbidden approach really states that what the church says, either as a denomination, or for that matter as a local congregation, goes. It is hard to see how this does not amount to the imposition of commandments of men (see Matt. 15:6, 9; Mark 7:6–13; Col. 2:18–23).” Among the passages adduced in support of the principle (“To go beyond the revealed will of God was found to be perilous”), besides the customary ones, are Ezekiel 5:5–7; Malachi 2:1–17; and Revelation 2–3.

This Scotsman addresses two points raised by supporters of non-canonical songs “that are felt to qualify the more rigorous application of the regulative principle.” The first of these, the analogy with prayer and preaching, he answers by noting not only that each of

the elements is distinct from all others, but also that there is a difference between those elements which are “free” and those which are “fixed” in their content. The second objection is that of the alleged demands of the expansion of revelation. He answers this objection by arguing that it is “presumptuous to imply” from the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost “that there is thus a competence given to the Church to add non-canonical materials for congregational song. There was new revelation, of course, inscripturated in the New Testament, though, significantly, *no separate manual of praise*.”

WARREN PEEL

Writing in 2003 in the *Reformed Theological Journal*, published by Reformed Theological College (the institution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland), Warren Peel took aim at the views of John Frame.<sup>69</sup> Pastor Peel adopts the same approach as that of Michael Bushell with regard to the blurring of sharp distinction between elements and circumstances of worship. Nevertheless, the Irish minister also correctly critiques Frame’s position, particularly his lack of clarity as to how the Bible applies differently between specific worship and life in general. Towards the end of the article, Pastor Peel writes:

NT worship then, is both special and to be specially regulated, just as it was in the OT. It might be objected, however, that the NT does not give regulations for worship in the manner that God gave them to Moses in the OT. A number of points can be made in response to this:

(i) The second Commandment clearly and permanently forbids the worshipping of God in any way apart from divine prescription. This Commandment is as much in force in the NT as it was in the OT.

(ii) We must interpret Scripture by deducing good and necessary consequence as well as from explicit commands (WCF I.6). Whatever is rightly implied from Scripture’s statements is itself true and equally the word of God. Frame himself accepts this principle (‘I am not enough to deny that normative content can be derived that way. Indeed this is the way all theology proceeds.’) So the fact that regulations for worship are not as explicit in the NT as in the OT in itself proves nothing. ‘Consistent apostolic example can be as binding as the words spoken to Moses by angels.’

68. John W. Keddie, *Sing the Lord’s Song: Biblical Psalms in Worship* (The Knox Press, 1994; 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Pittsburgh, Pa.: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2003). John Keddie wrote previously on the regulative principle in 1980. John W. Keddie, “Whatsoever I have Commanded You,” *The Gospel Magazine* (November–December 1980) 262–267.

69. Warren Peel, “Framing the Regulative Principle,” *Reformed Theological Journal* Vol. 19 (November 2003) 17–28.

(iii) Deuteronomy 12:32, far from being revoked, is in effect reiterated by Jesus in Matthew 28.19–20. Paul speaks strongly against ‘self-imposed worship’ in Colossians 2.23—a term that makes no sense unless there is such a thing as ‘God-imposed worship’ identifiable in Scripture.

(iv) We should expect that there would be much less about regulations for worship in the NT, not because God wants us to invent elements ourselves, but because the reality, Christ, and the outpouring of the Spirit have come, the shadows are over and worship now consists more of the inward and less of the outward.

(v) There is nonetheless quite an amount of clear precept and example in the NT—for the reading and preaching of the word, for prayer, for singing God’s praise, and for the sacraments.

(vi) We might note also John 4.24. This text is often used to prove a relaxing of the regulative principle in the NT, but the major change anticipated here by Jesus is geographical. He is teaching that a time is coming when the issue of location will be irrelevant. D.A. Carson says, ‘Implicitly, this announces the obsolescence of the temple. Worship will be as geographically extensive as the Spirit, as God himself who is spirit.’ This does not mean a laxer attitude on God’s part to how his worship is to be conducted. Quite the reverse is implied by the phrase ‘in truth.’<sup>70</sup>

LARRY SIBLEY

A lecturer in practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia), Larry Sibley has written a brief book that approaches the subject of worship via inductive study of various Bible passages. However, there is no presentation of the regulative principle, or any interaction with any of the classical passages that support this doctrine.<sup>71</sup> This, of course, fits well with the contemporary attitude often manifest at Westminster Seminary with regard to the regulative principle.

MALCOLM H. WATTS &  
DAVID SILVERSIDES

In a 2003 work, Malcolm H. Watts, pastor of Emmanuel Church in Salisbury, England, responded to Iain Murray’s *The Psalter—The Only Hymnal?*<sup>72</sup> In making the case for exclusive psalmody, Pastor Watts alludes to the regulative principle (“God is *only* to be worshipped in

the ways prescribed in Scripture”), and the sufficiency of Scripture.<sup>73</sup>

This booklet was preceded by a 1998 work, co-authored with David Silversides (a Reformed Presbyterian minister in Loughbrickland, Northern Ireland), *The Worship of God*. This booklet consists of three papers that were read at the Salisbury Conference in October 1997.<sup>74</sup>

In “The Importance of Purity of Worship,” Pastor Watts states: “A study of the vocabulary of worship (‘a bowing down’ and ‘service’) will enable us to discover its true nature. It is *an approach to almighty God*,

70. Ibid., 26. The quotation at the end of point (ii) is from Christopher Bennett, “Worship Among the Puritans—The Regulative Principle,” in *Spiritual Worship* (The 1985 Westminster Conference Papers) 21.

71. Larry Sibley, *Worship: Discovering What Scripture Says* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Shaw Books, 2003).

72. Other reviews critical of this work by Murray were: Rev. H. M. Cartwright, “Psalms or Hymns in Public Worship,” *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* (March 2002); Rpt. in *The Blue Banner*, 11.1 (January–March, 2002) 23–27; Roy Mohon, “Iain H. Murray *The Psalter – the Only Hymnal?* A Review and Response” (© 2001) <http://www.truthzone.co.uk/WHCpsalmsIHM.htm>; John W. Keddie, “A Review of the Pamphlet *The Psalter – The Only Hymnal?* by Iain H Murray, Banner of Truth Trust” (circa October 27, 2002) <http://www.reformed.com/pub/psalter.htm>; Matthew Winzer, “Singing the Lord’s Song In A Strange Land. A Review of Iain Murray’s *The Psalter, The Only Hymnal?*” (*Credo Quarterly*, March 2002)). Murray briefly covers the controversy over the introduction of hymns in Horatius Bonar’s church in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in his well received work, *A Scottish Christian Heritage* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006), but other than a footnoted reference to the work above he does not cover the arguments pro or contra. He does note the rough handling some gave Bonar who wrote against his “ardent attempts to prove that the Reformers of Scotland used human hymns in the public worship of God,” to use the words of David Hay Fleming, who, while he wrote a definitive reply to Bonar, is not mentioned by Murray (David Hay Fleming, “The Hymnology of the Reformation,” *Original Secession Magazine* (January–June and September 1884; Rpt. in *An Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature* volume 4 [Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 1992] 223). Also in this later work, in a chapter on John Knox, there is a brief reference to the regulative principle in an attempt to demonstrate that Knox was a fresh innovator in circumstantial matters of worship and church order, citing the examples of frequency of the Lord’s Supper, the offices of Superintendent and Reader and weekly exercises, where those not ordained might exhort to the edification of the church (23–26). According to Murray, Knox “did not believe that what was later to be called the ‘regulative principle of Scripture’ has so determined everything in the church that we have one permanent blueprint that covers everything,” and in the areas noted legitimately adapted “plans and organization to the circumstances of the hour” (24).

73. Malcolm H. Watts, *God’s Hymnbook for the Christian Church: A Response to Iain Murray’s The Psalter—The Only Hymnal?* (N.p.: The James Begg Society, 2003) 15.

74. Malcolm H. Watts and David Silversides, *The Worship of God* (Edinburgh: Marpet Press, 1998).

acknowledging his transcendent excellence and our utter unworthiness, in order to give him the honour and devotion he so obviously deserves (Heb. 10:19–22; 1 Pet 5:6; Rev 4:10,11)” (4). Writing of the Standard of Pure Worship, the Salisbury minister quotes from John Calvin’s 1544 tract, “The Necessity of Reforming the Church”: “God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word;” and goes on to note that “the Calvinistic Reformers and the English Puritans . . . held that the Church was entirely bound by the Word of God in matters pertaining to worship and so was restricted either to what was enjoined by inspired institution or to what was sanctioned by approved scriptural example” (11). He argues for this view from the standard texts and considerations, but also adduces Hebrews 3: 1,2: “It is unthinkable to believe that Christ was somehow less proficient or that his directions failed to cover all aspects of worship. We must surely conclude from the apostle’s statement that, like Moses before him, Christ has delivered the whole will of God concerning the whole of the Church’s worship, thus supplying us with detailed and precise teaching on every single ordinance” (13). Malcolm Watts answers the contention that the attention to detail in worship was confined to the Old Testament: “God never repealed his law concerning worship. If Christians possess a greater liberty, it is *not* that the standard has been changed: it is rather that there is now welcome freedom from the multiplicity of minute regulations and cumbersome rituals (Gal 4:9,10; 5:1)” (15).

Seven reasons are given as to why pure worship is important: “it involves the divine glory;” “the Church, as a society, belongs to the Lord;” “divinely instituted ordinances excel in beauty and glory;” “as appointed by God, it is evidently acceptable and pleasing to him;” “it is Satan’s great aim to deny God his honour by corrupting the biblical ordinances;” “it is an effective means to make God known to the world;” “only what God has appointed can be a means of grace to his people” (19ff).

David Silversides gives a perspective on “The Westminster Directory of Public Worship.” The work of the Westminster Assembly, according to participants Samuel Rutherford and George Gillespie, in revising the Psalter, was in order to provide uniformity in Scotland and England, and eventually Ireland. Pastor Silversides avers:

There is an awesome scriptural chasteness in the Directory for Public Worship. The compilers stuck close to

75. Brian M. Schwertley, *Sola Scriptura and The Regulative Principle of Worship* (Southfield, Mich.: Reformed Witness, n.d.).

Scripture and to the ordinances of Scripture because they knew that it was through these ordinances that God is glorified and the people of God are edified. Our emotion in response to the truth in these ordinances is that godly emotion of which Scripture speaks in so many places (29, 31).

With respect to uniformity of worship, the Irish minister writes: “Can we really say, in our contemporary evangelical churches, the immense variety in worship is a wonderfully rich diversity? A better way of describing it would be a deplorable shambles. It is indicative of our failure even to attempt to bring our worship under the authority of God’s written Word” (35).

In dealing with the regulative principle of worship as such, David Silversides observes: “The parts or elements of worship are given in the Confession of Faith: the Directory seeks to apply this teaching and set it in the proper context. Each individual part receives separate attention. They do not assume that what is true of one part must therefore be true of others.” He distinguishes between “the public worship of God and the living of life to his glory;” and he also appeals to “the limited nature of church authority” as requiring the regulative principle. He argues that according to the Westminster Directory, “biblical warrant is either unabrogated Old Testament warrant or established New Testament warrant” (39ff).

Having laid out the principal of worship as enunciated in the Westminster Directory, this churchman from Ulster answers the question, “How Should Our Churches Worship Today” (48–71)? He deals particularly with the issue of musical instrumentation (opposing it), and the content of worship song (endorsing exclusive psalmody). In addressing the matter of utilizing various “gifts” or talents in worship, he writes: “The Westminster Assembly along with the Scottish Church used poetic gifts to provide us with a good and accurate rendering of the Psalms. This was a legitimate use of poetic gift. Isaac Watts did not use his poetic gift correctly when he tried to replace the Biblical Psalter with his own compositions” (70).

BRIAN M. SCHWERTLEY

Trained at the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, the Rev. Brian M. Schwertley has long rejected the Anglican (and other non-Reformed) approaches to worship, and has long embraced a Presbyterian understanding. His book, *Sola Scriptura and The Regulative Principle of Worship*,<sup>75</sup> lays

out the traditional Calvinistic perspective on the regulative principle.<sup>76</sup>

As implied by the book's title, Pastor Schwertley sees the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* as being foundational for the regulative principle, and the latter as being a necessary corollary to the former. Aspects of the doctrine of "only the Scriptures" include the Authority of Scripture, the Sufficiency and Perfection of Scripture, and the Completeness and Finality of Scripture. (Schwertley, *Sola Scriptura*, 13–21).

After noting the Jewish and Romanist rejection of *sola Scriptura*, the author takes on "Protestant Inconsistencies." These include the views of Episcopalianism, Lutheranism, Evangelicalism, and Reformed Declension (23–31; 33–64).

Regarding "Reformed Declension," Pastor Schwertley writes that "conservatives" in purportedly conservative Reformed denominations attempt to stem the tide of "contemporary" worship by arguing that worship must be "dignified, majestic, and reverent." However, in his eyes, one must cure not only the symptoms, but the root causes, of the present decline in Reformed worship: "As long as Reformed denominations reject or redefine the regulative principle, rendering it virtually useless, all efforts at serious reformation in worship will be seriously defeated. Without a strict interpretation of the regulative principle, the debate over worship shifts from an exegetical discussion of what is warranted by Scripture to primarily a debate over human preferences" (*Sola Scriptura*, 64).

The next section of the book deals with seven contemporary objections to the regulative principle, viz., The "False Understanding of Ethics and Adiaphora" Argument, The "All of Life Is Worship" Argument, The "Regulative Principle Only Applies to the Temple" Argument, The "Circumstances of Worship" Argument, The "Jesus Accepted and Participated in Human Traditions" Argument, The "Feast of Purim" Argument, and The "Misrepresentation of the Regulative Principle" Argument.

With regard to the first argument in opposition, the author contends: "If opponents of the regulative principle want to use Deuteronomy 4:2 as a proof text against the Reformed understanding of a strictly regulated worship, they need to demonstrate that worship ordinances belong to the sphere of life that is *adiaphora*. Are the parts or elements of worship that are delineated in Scripture in the same category as riding a bike, or wearing blue pants instead of grey pants, or planting beefsteak tomatoes instead of early girl tomatoes? The answer is: obviously not" (70).

Regarding the second objection, the author states that "the idea that all of life is worship and therefore no distinction exists between public worship and activities like mowing the lawn is absurd." He argues against this proposition on several bases: (1) the fact that Scripture is filled with instances of congregational meetings for worship; (2) that "Christ the king and head of the church has appointed public officers with special public functions that require a special public use;" (3) that "when the apostle Paul discusses the conduct of believers during public worship, he sets forth regulations that presuppose a sharp distinction between public worship and all of life" (such as prohibitions on women speaking in church services); (4) "the term for church (*ekklesia*) often denotes a society of professing Christians who constitute a local church that meets together for public worship in a particular location;" (5) "the Bible teaches that there is a special presence of God in public worship" (72–81).

In opposition to the notion that the regulative principle applies only to the temple, Pastor Schwertley advances several counter-arguments. First, the classic text of Deuteronomy 12:32, even though given in a context of dealing primarily with the tabernacle, applies (at least by inference) "to worship practices throughout the land of Israel." Secondly, passages (such as Deuteronomy 4:2) that are virtually identical to this verse "apply not only to the tabernacle/temple but to all of life." And with regard to the regulation of life, worship is a "prescribed matter of law" and does not belong to a class of *adiaphora*. Thirdly, one must not ignore the fact that the tabernacle/temple worship included not only ceremonial worship, but also non-ceremonial ordinances. "Therefore, it is overtly simplistic and exegetically unsound to argue that the regulative principle was annulled with the ceremonial order. If the regulative principle applied to the temple worship, then it also regulated the non-ceremonial worship that occurred there." Fourthly, numerous passages (such as Matthew 15:1–3; Colossians 2:20–23; and John 4:21–24) "apply the regulative principle outside the sphere of tabernacle/temple worship." In dealing with

76. See also Brian M. Schwertley, *The Regulative Principle of Worship and Christmas* (Haslett, Mich.: Covenanted Reformation Press, 2003), in which many of the arguments regarding the regulative principle are repeated and applied with respect to religious holy days. Other articles on worship published online by Brian Schwertley include: *Are Liturgies Authorized by Scripture? Paedocommunion: A Biblical Examination*; *Are Pictures of Christ Unbiblical? A Brief Critique of Steven M. Schlissel's Articles Against the Regulative Principle of Worship*; *Musical Instruments in the Public Worship of God*; *Exclusive Psalmody: A Biblical Defense*; *The Teaching of Jesus on Worship*; and *Head Coverings in Public Worship*.

the Matthew text (and its parallel in Mark 7), the author argues that the attempts to reject the application of those passages to worship are the same ones which Romanists have used in their rejection of the Reformed Protestant position (81–97).

With regard to the fourth argument used to oppose the regulative principle, Pastor Schwertley excoriates contemporary Presbyterians for their “clever side-stepping or back-door evasion of the regulative principle.” He writes that the attempt “to broaden the definition of the circumstances of worship, or to blur the distinction between worship elements and circumstances, or to merge distinct elements into broad categories, is unscriptural and anti-Confessional. One must never treat the elements of worship as abstractions that can be molded to fit one’s own preconceptions of what is permissible in worship. The proper biblical interpretive procedure lets the Bible tell us what the distinct elements of worship are and lets Scripture delineate the rules for each element. Although it is true that the elements of singing praise, preaching or teaching and prayer can have certain aspects in common . . . the idea that these distinct elements can be collapsed into one category (e.g., teaching) or that the specific rules given by Scripture for one element can be applied to the other parts of worship completely breaks down when one examines the specific rules and context that the Bible gives to each separate ordinance” (98–109).

With regard to the allegation that Jesus accepted and participated in human traditions, Pastor Schwertley addresses several arguments. One of them is that of Jesus’ use of wine at the Passover meal.

Is the use of wine a violation of the regulative principle? No, for the Passover was a meal, and the drinking of a beverage is an ordinary, necessary circumstance of eating (especially if one is eating roasted lamb, unyeasted bread and bitter herbs). During the feast of unleavened bread the Israelites were commanded to eat unleavened bread for seven days (Ex. 12:15ff). Yet nothing is mentioned whatsoever of any beverages to be drunk. Obviously God was not requiring the Jews to die of thirst in the hot Egyptian climate. The fact that Christ and the disciples drank wine with (or after) their meal was not significant at all until Jesus made it a gospel ordinance in the Lord’s supper.

The author also argues that the suggestion that Jesus rejected the regulative principle is based on speculation and arguments from silence; and that one should not reject the analogy of Scripture, nor should he violate

the basic hermeneutical principle that obscure passages should be interpreted in light of clear passages, not vice versa (109–119).

Regarding the sixth objection, viz., the feast of Purim, Mr. Schwertley argues that its observance came about not because of a private determination, but “because of a unique historical event in Israel’s salvation history” and because it was “decreed by the civil magistrate (the prime minister, Mordecai, and the queen, Esther). Religious leaders had nothing to do with it. Moreover, “the notion that Purim proves that men are permitted to make up holy days whenever they desire cannot be true, for if it were, Scripture would contain a blatant contradiction”—not only passages that instruct that God’s people are not to add to God’s authorized worship, but also 1 Kings 12:33, where Jeroboam is condemned for setting up his own feast day (119–123).

Finally, Pastor Schwertley deals with those who would try to circumvent the regulative principle by giving it “a false definition that is scripturally and rationally indefensible.” For example, one of the caricatures of the regulative principle is that the statement, “if it is not commanded, it is forbidden,” means that only direct command may be utilized, rather than direct command, good and necessary consequence, and approved example. The author quotes from numerous Reformed sources to demonstrate that good and necessary inference also carries the force of Scripture (123–136).

In summation, the author urges that anyone who mocks the regulative principle “should be intellectually honest and join an Episcopal church.” He lays out what he calls “insurmountable theological, exegetical, logical and ethical problems that are intrinsic” to all non-Reformed views of worship. Among these problems are the following: (1) adding to divinely-authorized worship “contradicts the express teaching of Scripture;” (2) it “is also a denial of the sufficiency and perfection of God’s word;” (3) such theories “do not properly take into account God’s nature and character . . . and man’s sinful nature;” (4) men cannot “impose human innovations in public worship without violating their congregants’ Christian liberty” (137ff).

The volume also contains two appendices. The first one consists of extensive quotes from John Calvin, in order to demonstrate his adherence to the regulative principle (143–171). The second one is entitled “The Neo-Presbyterian Challenge to Confessional Presbyterian Orthodoxy: A Biblical Analysis of John Frame’s *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*” (173–243).

D. G. HART AND JOHN R. MUETHER

In April 2002, D. G. Hart and John R. Muether published *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship*.<sup>77</sup> The book unabashedly advocates a traditional approach to worship. The authors write that, for the Reformed Church (in contrast to the Lutheran), “*sola Scriptura* means the reformation of doctrine, polity, and worship. All three are essential to the ministry of the church. Consequently, in applying the regulative principle to worship, the Reformed permitted only what God expressly prescribed in the Bible, believing that Scripture forbids in the church corporately identified whatever God does not command explicitly or by good and necessary consequence. In contrast to the normative principle, the *silence* of Scripture regarding a specific practice in worship, such as lighting candles or displaying banners, is just as much a prohibition as a direct condemnation of such a practice” (78).

The Hart-Muether contribution to the debate notes that the regulative principle was not invented by the Puritans, but rather enjoys a broad Reformed pedigree, including in the Continental Calvinistic churches. The authors quote from the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the writings of John Calvin, to demonstrate their point (79–80).

Messrs. Hart and Muether also argue for the regulative principle based on Reformed doctrine as a whole, such as God’s zeal for His own worship, man’s total depravity, and a proper conception of Christian liberty (81–85).

The authors contend that the regulative principle, along with the dialogical principle (that worship is in the form of a dialog between God and man), teach “not only what is permissible in worship, but also what is wise in worship. The Bible tells us that we must worship God with fear and sobriety in an orderly way. We do not merely meet God in prayer, Word, song, and sacraments, but we do so in a reverent fashion. So acceptable worship is a dialogue with God that displays awe and godly fear in an appropriate pattern of elements. It is not enough to have the Word of God preached by a properly ordained minister. To conduct these elements with flippancy or carelessness is to offer worship that is as displeasing to God as worship that had improper elements such as tongues and making the sign of the cross, or dance or drama” (119).

The book argues that the very detail-oriented worship of Leviticus must inform our worship today. Even though “the whole ceremonial law in Leviticus is

obsolete for the Christian,” it is also true that “Leviticus provides the theological categories for understanding Christ’s priesthood and for our worship through him. The same God who established the sacrificial system for Israel sent his own son as a sacrifice in the fullness of time. Consequently, the principles of worship revealed in Leviticus are still instructive for understanding the manner in which Christians approach God in public worship” (123–124).

As a matter of fact, the casual approach to worship taken by many contemporary Christians parallels the views of Marcion, a second century heretic.

Although the early church condemned him, Marcion could be the patron saint of many contemporary Christians because all too often we come to worship thinking like Marcion. Yes, God was strict in the Old Testament; Leviticus tells us that. But he became loving in the New Testament, or so it seems. New Testament worship is no longer formal or strict or highly regulated. The church needs to become informal, spontaneous, and user friendly—words that hardly fit the image of Leviticus (125).

The authors add several pages later:

In the end, reverent worship cultivates the sense that worshipers may offend God and will if they fail to come to him in the ways he has prescribed. Worship should be characterized by godly fear and humility. It is done not lightly but with care and diligence. It is the natural response of creatures in the presence of the holy and sovereign God. And it is worship that conforms to God’s Word ... (129).

But how does the regulative principle work itself out in practice? The authors set forth “three categories for delineating the parts of a worship service: elements, circumstances, and forms. They pertain to the what, when, and how of worship. *That* we sing in worship is established because song is an element of worship. *How often* we sing in worship is a circumstance to be determined by the session’s prudential judgment. *What*

77. D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2002). A brief discussion of the regulative principle appeared in a chapter on the worship of the OPC in an earlier work: D. G. Hart and John Muether, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Brief History of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia, Pa.: The Committee for Education and the Committee for the Historian of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1995) 165–179.

we sing in worship—whether psalms or hymns—is a form of worship. The same may be said of the other elements” (153).

This three-fold categorization is one which T. David Gordon embraces; however, these authors seem to go beyond Dr. Gordon’s perspective by urging that rather than avoiding forms, “we need to determine what the correct forms are” (155). They further argue that there is a necessary connection between theology and worship: “For Reformed churches to retain the theology that has been the genius of Calvinism, they must also maintain forms of worship that have historically made Reformed worship so obvious to spot” (158).

Towards the end of the book, in dealing with “Discernment in Worship,” the authors draw parallels between the liberals whom J. Gresham Machen confronted in the 1920s and 1930s, and liturgical innovators today.

Of course, we are not claiming that worship innovators are inevitably liberal in the old-fashioned sense. But in Reformed circles, when it comes to the meaning of the Reformed creeds and catechisms in their teaching on worship, we do find a similar kind of evasiveness about the historic meaning of these confessional statements that govern Presbyterian and Reformed church life. The point is that people will sometimes employ biblical and confessional language, wrongly understood, to baptize innovations. The implication is that Christians should not merely take other believers at their word but also look at their deeds. And one of the telltale signs of whether a person, congregation, or denomination is Reformed is worship. For faith cannot be divorced from practice (181–182).

In their estimation, theology undergirds worship. Therefore, “Our only standard for worship is what is revealed in Scripture, not our emotions, or what church-growth experts recommend. God’s Word is at the heart of Reformed worship, and it is the best way to be discerning about the way we gather to honor and give thanks to God” (182–183).

The book concludes with these words:

78. D. G. Hart, *Recovering Mother Kirk: The Case for Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003). Dr. Hart also engaged Professor John Frame in an email debate on the Warfield forum between February 5 to March 8, 1998. This is available as *The Regulative Principle: Scripture, Tradition, and Culture: A Debate Featuring Dr. D. G. Hart and Professor John M. Frame* (Glenside, Pa: Westminster Seminary Bookstore, n.d.). The text is available online at [http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame\\_articles/1998HartDebate.htm](http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/1998HartDebate.htm).

Worship ... is the most fundamental aspect of the Christian life. To worship God is to engage in the highest calling of our creation as God’s servants and image bearers. To worship acceptably, we must worship with discernment. And we must have courage. For it is not enough to spot false worship. We must be able to call it that when we see it.

In the end, Reformed theology is only as good, only as compelling, and only as binding, as Reformed worship. And that is what the fuss is all about (187).

D. G. HART

In April, 2003, D. G. Hart published *Recovering Mother Kirk: The Case for Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition*.<sup>78</sup> Academic Dean and Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary in California, what Dr. Hart means by “liturgy” carries a broader connotation than simply the use of fixed phrases and sentences in public worship.

He explains: “By liturgicalism I mean an understanding of Calvinism that is firmly rooted in the ministry of the church in her gathering for worship. Liturgicalism is not simply concerned with the content or order of worship services; it involves the life of the visible church through her officers, ordinances, and public worship” (12).

Dean Hart’s definition comes in a context of introductory comments, in which he notes that Reformed people have tended to divide along three lines: doctrinal precision, cultural outlook, and religious zeal. But, he contends that this “typology,” as accurate as it may be for defining the contemporary Reformed world, has a glaring omission: “If worship was so important to Calvin and the Reformed wing of the Reformation, why are contemporary expressions of the Reformed tradition not known for their interest in worship? In other words, why aren’t there at least four groups of Reformed—the doctrinalists, the culturalists, the pietists, *and* the liturgicalists?” (11–12).

Dr. Hart believes that the real divide in American Protestantism is not between liberals and evangelicals. Rather, since the 1700s,

the real divide, not just in American Protestantism but in American Christianity, has been between formalists and antiformalists, that is, liturgicalists and pietists. The popularity of revivalism combined with cultural factors in the United States that favor individualistic expressions of Christianity have made Protestant liturgicalism

scarce. But a high view of the church and the ministry of Word and sacrament was a substantial part of historic Protestantism prior to the middle of the nineteenth century. What is more ... high-church Calvinism may prove a welcome antidote to some of the coarseness and sentimentality that have prompted some evangelicals to look to Canterbury, Rome, or Constantinople for relief. If anything, this book's aim is to show that Geneva should be another option for Protestants seeking a corporate and liturgical expression of their faith. Just as important is the point that the Reformed tradition's understanding of the church, office and ordination, worship, and the sacraments is closer formally to other confessional traditions, such as Lutheran and Anglican, than it is to evangelicalism.... The Reformed tradition's regard for the church and ministry is so high that some of its exponents have maintained, in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, that outside the visible church "there is no ordinary possibility of salvation" (xxv.2) [16–17].

Speaking of the worship wars, it is contended by Professor Hart:

Most of the fronts in this battle stem from a misconception of worship's purpose and the church's ministry. For doctrinalists, worship is a time to teach; for culturalists, it is a time to exhort toward harder work; for pietists, it is a time to emote. But if worship is a time during which weary pilgrims feed on the Word incarnate through preaching and the sacraments and during which they respond in prayers of praise, thanksgiving, confession, and petition, then the centrality of worship and the work of pastors to the life of believers becomes apparent (18).

Given his burden and concerns, it is not surprising that Professor Hart embraces the regulative principle of worship. He does not draw a significant distinction between the Puritans and Calvin, but writes that both held to "the regulative principle, one of the hallmarks of the Reformed tradition."<sup>79</sup> He defines the principle as "the idea that whatever is done in public worship must find explicit warrant in Scripture. If the Bible does not require something, then it may not be done even if the thing proposed is not inherently sinful."<sup>80</sup> He later writes, in connection with pointing out that Reformed worship is "Spirit-filled" (since it is filled with the Word of God), that the Reformed faith "has insisted that worship conform to the teaching of Scripture.... Because the Bible ordains prayer, preaching, the singing of praise,

the reading of Scripture, and the administration of the sacraments, the Reformed believe that these elements must be part of worship. The question is not whether the Bible permits a certain practice such as dance or drama in worship. Instead, the regulative principle requires a direct charge from the Bible" (101). He adds: "Christian worship is not true only when Christians are moved. Rather, Christian worship is true when it conforms to Scripture, whether worshipers experience it or not. When the church gathers for the reading of Scripture with 'godly fear,' the sound preaching of the Word, prayer 'with thanksgiving,' the singing of praise 'with grace in the heart,' and the administration and 'worthy receiving' of the sacraments, then and only then is worship Spirit-filled (WCF, XXI.v.iii)" (103).

In a chapter entitled, "The Irony of American Presbyterian Worship," Dr. Hart explores the reasons why many so-called "conservative" Presbyterians are liturgical innovators, and why many "liberal" Presbyterians are traditionalists with respect to worship. In doing so, he compares and contrasts the works of Hughes Oliphant Old, a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and John M. Frame, a minister initially in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and now in the Presbyterian Church in America.

The differences between the two books stand out based on a cursory glance at the table of contents. Old organizes his book around the traditional elements of Reformed worship, devoting separate chapters to baptism, the Sabbath, praise, the Word, prayer, and the Lord's Supper. Frame, however, approaches the matter inductively, gearing his argument toward specific issues in contemporary debates.... In the "liberal" PCUSA, if Old's book is any indication, the traditional elements and rites of historic Reformed liturgy are firmly in place. But in the "conservative" PCA, using Frame as a guide, the conventional pieces of Reformed worship are in flux (182–183).

Professor Hart attributes this curious reversal of roles to American Presbyterian history, going back to

79. As noted in Part One of this article, the Rev. Dr. Rowland S. Ward has criticism for Dr. Hart and others regarding a citation from Charles Baird indicating that Calvin believed in the "necessity" of set forms for public worship. See *The Confessional Presbyterian 2* (2006) 106; R. A. Muller & R. S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship* (Phillipsburg, Pa.: P & R, 2007) 102.

80. *Recovering Mother Kirk*, 32, 71. See also page 101: "Calvin and the Puritans had good biblical and theological reasons for insisting that everything in worship have an explicit warrant from Scripture."

the revivalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Revivalistic piety, with its emphasis upon (often emotional and dramatic) conversion experiences, undid the traditional Reformed high-church perspective (188–194).

In the twentieth century, this “Presbyterian predicament” centers around evangelism and the debate over Biblical inerrancy. The pragmatic evangelistic thrust that trumps all other considerations, made conservative American Presbyterians susceptible to John Frame’s approach, which is that of ensuring the “intelligibility” of worship to visitors (194–198). Regarding the nature of the Bible, Dr. Hart suggests that “conservative Presbyterians congenitally regard tradition with suspicion because it appears to put human wisdom on a par with the Bible. In contrast, mainline Presbyterians, perhaps because they stress the humanity of Scripture, are more comfortable with the work that humans do in the service of God” (196–197).

The professor concludes that, in a Wesleyan culture and Pentecostal age, “American Presbyterians are faced with a dilemma. To make worship accessible to persons for whom informality is as common as the air they breathe is to gut Reformed worship of its reverence, dignity, and simplicity. But to do justice to the rigor of Calvinist worship is to burn fire that may please God but certainly smells foul to residents of the United States. American Presbyterians have tried to dodge that dilemma for almost two centuries, and the consequences have not [been] propitious for the propriety, uniformity, and dignity that Calvin believed should characterize Reformed worship” (199–200).

#### BOICE FESTSCHRIFT

In 2003, a festschrift appeared in memory of Dr. James Montgomery Boice, late pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia.<sup>81</sup> Several of the articles bear directly on the regulative principle of worship.

#### *J. Ligon Duncan*

The first two articles were penned by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan III, senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, Mississippi. In “Does God Care How We Worship?”, Dr. Duncan properly notes that the Reformers distinguished between life in general and worship in

particular. Because of God’s “full attention” to the matter of worship,

we are to exercise a special kind of care when it comes to this activity—a care distinct from that which we employ anywhere else in the Christian life. He told us what to do and how to do it, in such a way that the prime aspects of worship are a matter of following divine direction; and thus the decisions that remain to be made by us—thinking in accordance with the general principles of Scripture and sanctified common sense, in the absence of positive scriptural warrant—are relatively minor. It is not difficult to find this axiom being articulated, in various ways, from the earliest days of the Reformed tradition to our own time—and in all the representative branches of the Reformed community (21).

Pastor Duncan argues his point by referring to Calvin, Continental Reformed standards, Baptist standards, and the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order (a Congregationalist version of the Westminster Confession), as well as Anglican David Peterson and Hughes Old (21–22).

The author addresses whether the regulative principle is “outmoded,” and asserts that “the main reason why many evangelicals have a hard time embracing the regulative principle of worship is that they do not believe that God tells us (or tells us much about) how to worship corporately in his word.” In his view, evangelicals

do not generally believe that church government is established positively in the word; they often do not see the local church as essential to the fulfillment of the Great Commission or to the task of Christian discipleship; they are suspicious of order as restrictive of freedom; and they generally juxtapose the priesthood of believers and local church autonomy over against the didactic authority of established church norms, confessional theology, and the testimony of the *communio sanctorum* through the ages (under Scripture)....

... [W]hen we recall from our study of Christian ethics that every ethical action has a standard (a norm), dynamic (that which enables or empowers someone to do the action contemplated in the norm), motivation (that which impels someone to do the action), and goal (the final object[s] or purpose[s] of the action), we may say that evangelicals emphasize the dynamic of Christian worship (the grace of the Holy Spirit) and its motivation (gratitude for grace, a passion for God),

81. Philip Graham Ryken, Derek W. H. Thomas, and J. Ligon Duncan III, eds., *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship: Celebrating the Legacy of James Montgomery Boice* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2003).

but de-emphasize the standard (the Bible) and goal (the prime *telos* of glorifying and enjoying God).

Evangelicals do think that worship matters, but they also often view worship as a means to some other end than that of the glorification and enjoyment of God: some view worship as evangelism (thus misunderstanding the goal); some think that a person's heart, intentions, motives, and sincerity are the only things important in how we worship (thus downplaying the Bible's standards, principles, and rules for worship); and some view the emotional product of the worship experience as the prime factor in "good" worship (thus overstressing the subjective and often unwittingly imposing particular cultural opinions about emotional expression on all worshippers). Evangelicals believe these things about worship, but they do not think there are many biblical principles about how to worship or what we are to do and not to do in worship (25f).

Evangelicals properly reject high-church traditions (Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Anglo-Catholicism) with their "attempt to reimpose and reapply a christological version of the priestly ceremonialism of old-covenant worship or draw on the liturgical symbolism of Revelation (itself based on the worship practices of the old covenant) as normative for the church militant of the new covenant." However, evangelicals

tend to think that there are few if any abiding principles to be gained for Christian worship from the Old Testament, or they think the New Testament emphases on the heart, the activity of the Holy Spirit, and worship-in-all-of-life displace these Old Testament principles, or they think that the New Testament has correspondingly little or nothing to say about the how of corporate worship, and some even think that the category of corporate worship disappears altogether in the new-covenant expression of the economy of God. But these assumptions are as wrong in one direction as high-church approaches are in the other. And, not surprisingly, these assumptions help an evangelicalism enveloped in a culture of individualism, relativism, and situationalism remain, in its approach to the gathered worship of God's people, strong on the individual, weak on the corporate; strong on the subjective, weak on the objective; strong on the heart, weak on the principles (26).

Ligon Duncan next argues that both the Old Testament and the New Testament teach that God "does indeed very much care about how we worship." He cites

the account of Cain and Abel, the story of the Exodus, the first and second commandments, the story of the golden calf, Jesus' rejection of Pharisaic worship, Jesus' words to the woman at the well, Paul's rejection of the Colossian heresy, and Paul's directives for Corinth (26ff).

Regarding the Exodus, he writes:

[T]he highlighting of the specific activity of corporate worship in Moses' language and teaching about worship in the era of pretabernacle worship in Exodus (i.e., in his differentiation of the two types of worship [gathered praise and life service], in his description of the specific content of that gathered worship, in his interest in the initial location of that gathered worship [the mountain that God had shown], in the inclusion of the stipulations on corporate worship in the moral law, in his heavily emphasized accounts of the subsequent abuse of corporate worship in the rebellion of the golden calf, and more) teaches us to be circumspect in our approach to corporate worship (29).

Regarding the first two words of the Decalogue, he quotes a Jewish commentator, Nahum Sarna ("The forms of worship are now regulated"), and Neil Postman ("The God of the Jews was to exist in the Word and through the Word, an unprecedented conception requiring the highest order of abstract thinking. Iconography thus became blasphemy so that a new kind of God could enter a culture"). In Duncan's words, Israel's worship "was to be aniconic—without images and visible representation of deity—because the how of worship contributes significant components to our conception of God" (31–33).

Even the divine threats against deviation from God's Word illuminate God's seriousness about worship. "Betray God by idolatry, which is spiritual adultery, and he will deal with you like a red-eyed, jilted spouse" (34f).

The golden calf incident illustrates that "how we worship is very important to God." Duncan lists the following applications from the passage: "(1) impatience with God's timing is an enemy of faith; (2) we cannot choose our own mediator; (3) we cannot picture the true God as we wish or will; (4) we cannot worship the true God and something else; (5) we cannot worship the true God except in the way he commands; and (6) false worship leads to false living and immorality" (37).

Regarding Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees in Matthew 15 and Mark 7, this Mississippi pastor alleges that Jesus

does not critique the Pharisees for being too tied to old-fashioned practices, caring about what the Torah says too much, or being too nitpicky about God's law. He charges them with ignoring God's law and attacking God's law by adding to it! ... [Jesus' critique] has definite application to "all-of-life worship," but also to corporate worship (41).

With regard to Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:20–26), Dr. Duncan points out three (of numerous) essential principles of corporate worship: "Jesus indicates a redemptive historical shift regarding the place of worship;" "Jesus stresses that worship is response to revelation and thus must be according to revelation;" "Jesus reemphasizes the importance of worship in the new-covenant era" (42–44).

Paul's main points in Colossians 2:16–19 are that "the worship is not God-commanded but human-originated" and "the worship does not do justice to the person and exaltation of Christ or our union with him." He adds: "Worshiping according to our ideas, however sincere, is an act of self-worship and specifically the worship of our own wills and wants" (45).

Ligon Duncan also finds the regulative principle in Paul's instructions in I Corinthians 14. Furthermore, in contrast to those who parody Reformed worship as being overly-cerebral, the classic text on charismatic worship contains a strong emphasis upon the cognitive, as well as "form and order (silence, subjection, propriety)." The good doctor instructs his pupils: "The idea that order, or a concern for it, is inimical to the work of the Spirit and our response to it is dashed against the rocks by this new-covenant passage. The suggestion that applying the rule and order of Scripture will somehow quench the Spirit in corporate worship looks fairly ludicrous in light of this passage. Because God the Spirit who wrote the Lord's command is the same Spirit who enables true worship, there can be no ultimate conflict between form and freedom, between the rules of Scripture and the heartfelt expression of praise, between the precepts of worship and unfettered engagement with God." Moreover, Paul's commands were to be applied universally—that is, "in all churches, and not simply for Corinth" (47–49).

The author concludes this chapter by writing: "No matter what semantic designation is given in the New Testament for the general activity of the gathered people of God when it is engaged in reading, praying, preaching, and singing the word, it is clear that this constitutes corporate worship and that such a thing does exist even and especially in the new covenant. Only our modern

tendencies toward individualism and reticence about distinctions blind us to this fact" (50).

In the next chapter, "Foundations for Biblically Directed Worship," Dr. Duncan first posits "foundational realities." The regulative principle of worship is grounded not only in specific texts but also "on a set of even broader biblical theological realities: the doctrine of God, the Creator-creature distinction, the idea of revelation, the unchanging character of the moral law, the nature of faith, the doctrine of carefulness, the derivative nature of the church's authority, the doctrine of Christian freedom, the true nature of biblical piety, and the reality of the fallen human nature's tendency to idolatry" (51). He also adds a section on the testimony of church history, including these points: "Simple but powerful biblical worship always characterizes the worship of the church in its best ages.... There is every evidence in both biblical and postbiblical church history that declension in corporate worship is tied to declension in religion" (60).

The chapter continues with a discussion of several aspects of worship: that, what, whom, when, where, why, and how (61ff). Regarding the *that*, "Worship is the one thing he [God] 'seeks' (John 4:23)." "What corporate worship is matters to God too. It is not evangelism, nor is it even mutually edifying fellowship. It is a family meeting with God, it is the covenant community engaging with God, gathering with his people to seek the face of God, to glorify and enjoy him, to hear his word, to revel in the glory of union and communion with him, to respond to his word, to render praise back to him, to give unto him the glory due his name." "The *whom* of worship is, of course, central to true worship (John 4:22, 24).... We aim to worship the God of the Bible, God as he reveals himself, for we cannot worship him as we ought unless we know him as he is—and we cannot know him as he is except insofar as he has revealed himself to us in his word." "The *when* of corporate worship remains important in the new-covenant era." Of course, today, it is the Lord's Day. Regarding the *where*, "The place of new-covenant worship is no longer inextricably tied to a geographical location and a physical structure but to a gathered people. This is why in the old Scottish tradition, as the people gathered to enter a church building, it would be said that 'the kirk goes in' rather than, as we often say, 'we are going to church.' The new covenant *locus* of the special presence of God with the church militant is in the gathered body, wherever it might be—whether the catacombs or a storefront or beautiful colonial church building." In addition to glorifying and enjoying God, the why of

worship has many answers: “because God said to worship, because God created us to worship, because God saved us to worship, because it is our natural duty as creatures and joyful duty as Christians to worship, because our worship is a response of gratitude for saving grace, because those with new hearts long to hear his word and express their devotion, because God wants to bless us with himself, because God has chosen us for his own inheritance and seeks to commune with us in his ordinances, and more.” The *how* revolves around the second commandment, but also is a key concept in the New Testament. Ligon Duncan writes:

The Reformed tradition has not been concerned with forms and circumstances so much for their own sake as much as for the sake of the elements and substance of worship and for the sake of the object and aim of worship. The Reformers also understood two things often lost on moderns. First, they understood that the liturgy, media, instruments, and vehicles of worship are never neutral, and so exceeding care must be given to the “law of unintended consequences.” Often the medium overwhelms and changes the message. Second, they knew that the *how* of worship exists for the *what*, *whom*, and *why* of worship. The purpose of the elements and forms and circumstances of corporate worship is to assure that you are actually doing worship as defined by the God of Scripture, that you are worshipping the God of Scripture, and that your aim in worshipping him is the aim set forth in Scripture. So the Reformers care about the *how* of worship not because they thought liturgy was mystical or sacramental, but precisely so that the liturgy could get out of the way of the gathered church’s communion with the living God. Its function was not to draw attention to itself but to aid the soul’s communion with God in the gathered company of the saints by serving to convey the word of God to and from God, from and to his people.

The author also notes that the Reformers, in contrast to the interests of “modern evangelical worship theorists,” did not accommodate to the culture of their day. The Protestants “were against culture-derived worship and were more concerned to implement principles of Scripture in their specific cultures (and even to emulate the best of the Bible-inspired cultures of Scripture) than they were to reclaim current cultural forms for Christian use.”

Dr. Duncan next addresses the form and content of worship. “The regulative principle of worship helps assure that our corporate worship is Bible-filled and Bible-directed, that the substance and structure are biblical,

that the content and order are biblical. . . . Reformed corporate worship is by the book in two ways: both its marrow and means are supplied by the book” (65).

He then sums up the Reformed agenda for worship, by saying that it is simple, biblical, transferable, flexible, and reverent. Regarding the simplicity of worship, he takes to task those who would “liturgicalize” Reformed and evangelical corporate worship,” in a return of “Liturgical Romanticism.” Regarding the biblical nature of worship, he notes that historic Protestant worship did not derive from “north European culture,” but from Scripture. In terms of the transferable nature of worship, he argues that historic Protestant worship “is more culturally transportable for the work of missions than the more elaborate high-church forms or the more electronic and entertainment-oriented forms of contemporary worship;” and he illustrates his point with diverse examples from Peru to Philadelphia to London to Malawi to Melbourne. Regarding its flexibility, “Reformed worship does not produce a cookie-cutter pattern. Following the Westminster Directory for Public Worship’s guidelines does not eliminate diversity or different cultural expressions in the forms and circumstances of corporate worship.” And regarding the reverent nature of worship, he rhetorically asks, “If worship is meeting with God, how could it be otherwise?” (65ff).

He concludes the chapter this way: “This then is our corporate worship manifesto, our call for the doxological reformation of the church: *sola scriptura* and *soli deo gloria*” (73).

There is much in Ligon Duncan’s writings on worship which we appreciate. However, even though he does distinguish between life in general and worship in particular, he is willing to denominate the former as “worship”. In our estimation, this introduces confusion into the terminology. Also, although there is a sense of continuity among churches which “read the Bible, preach the Bible, sing the Bible, and pray the Bible,” and although it is certainly true that the regulative principle of worship transcends culture (such as Anglo-American culture); nevertheless, it is hard to see how worship patterns as diverse as those offered in an Anglican church, a Free Church of Scotland congregation, and a Baptist church (which features contemporary musical forms) can all be characterized as being faithful to the regulative principle. That, it seems to us, is a stretch.

Derek W. H. Thomas

In the festschrift for James M. Boice, Derek W. H. Thomas responds to recent criticism of the regulative

principle.<sup>82</sup> He defines the regulative principle this way: “Nothing must be required as essential to public worship except that which is commanded by the word of God” (75).

He laments that culture affects “our manner and style of worship more drastically than we give credit.” With reference to Marva Dawn and David Wells, he writes “that culture affects us in deep and serious ways and we had better wake up to it or find ourselves at culture’s mercy.” He adds that “what makes worship different is that its cultural ethos is determined by scriptural commands and principles rather than by personal or collective tastes or mores” (75).

Dr. Thomas applauds Jim Boice’s concern for a couple of things regarding worship: “on the one hand, a commitment to Scripture and its right to govern and oversee everything that we do, particularly the way that we worship God corporately, and, on the other hand, a respect for Calvinistic and Reformed tradition that confronts the arrogance of modernity and its distaste for the past.” In discussing these concerns, Professor Thomas states that the regulative principle is significant for two reasons. The first is that of liberty of conscience: the regulative principle “alone can defend true Christian liberty in worship. The church’s tendency to tyranny needs to be constantly guarded against.” The second issue is “the fallen propensity to idolatry;” and here he quoted Calvin’s famous aphorism of the human mind being “a perpetual factory of idols.”

This native Welshman addresses several contemporary arguments against the regulative principle. First, there is the criticism that the Puritan position goes beyond Calvin’s views. However, while making some valid points, Derek Thomas somewhat misstates the case. Certainly it is a truism that “Adherence to the regulative principle ... does not bring about uniformity of worship practice—it did not in the seventeenth century any more than it does today.” But, that is not to say that a consistent understanding of the regulative principle should not bring about uniformity of worship practice (on anything other than circumstantial matters). He goes on to say that this lack of uniformity “explains why the Westminster divines compiled a directory of worship, rather than a manual. Finally approved by parliament in 1645, the Directory for Public Worship was intended to produce a more uniform pattern in worship, but no more than that. It was never intended to legislate the order of worship in the way that, say, the

1662 Book of Common Prayer did for the Anglican communion” (78ff). However, we would respectfully respond by noting that this is to confuse elements and order of service. It is true that Westminster allowed for great flexibility regarding the precise order of worship; it is not true that Westminster envisioned incorporating into that order any additional elements (i.e., elements beyond what the divines agreed that Scripture had prescribed).

Another contemporary objection is that the regulative principle represents legalism of the worst sort. Here, the professor notes that “if we are not at liberty to corporately worship God in ways other than that which he has revealed, we are heading for tyranny and bondage, for then we are the mercy of someone’s personal taste or new discovered insight. But Scripture insists it is to be a matter of the will of God rather than our own will (Col. 2:23). Indeed, for Calvin as well as the Westminster divines, it is an issue of the role of conscience.” After bolstering his argument by reference to the nineteenth century scholar and theologian William Cunningham, Derek Thomas writes: “I recall being publicly scolded in a worship service in England for not participating in the required hand signals. Protestants may exercise a tyranny as fierce as Rome in the name of spirit-filled liberty! Only the regulative principle can maintain true Christian freedom. The regulative principle is not legalism for the simple reason that it is never legalism to obey what God has commanded out of a desire to please him and in response to the grace that he has shown” (84–86).

A further criticism which Dr. Thomas addresses is that offered by John Frame, which is referred to as “I believe in the regulative principle, I just understand it differently.” The heart of Professor Frame’s position is “that ‘the regulative principle for worship is the same as the regulative principle for life’”. Derek Thomas demonstrates that there is a necessary distinction to be made: “Is there an activity that Christians are to perform worshipfully in ‘all of life’ that would be wholly inappropriate in public worship? [Edmund] Clowney cites marital union. It is wholly appropriate within the privacy of the home but wholly inappropriate in a church service!” (86ff).

A fourth criticism has been offered by Steve Schlissel of New York City (88–91). One of Schlissel’s arguments is that “advocates of the regulative principle cannot agree with each other.” However, Dr. Thomas rebuts that argument by contending that a difference of the “form of worship” among churches that all profess allegiance to the regulative principle, is “liberating

82. Derek W. H. Thomas, “The Regulative Principle: Responding to Recent Criticism,” in Ryken, et al., *Give Praise to God*, 74–93.

and exciting. It provides breadth within a basic conformity.” However, in response to Derek Thomas, let it be noted that if a consistent application of the regulative principle implies a cappella exclusive psalmody, then the very “breadth” which he celebrates will represent, in some cases, an imposition on liberty of conscience. The second significant argument by Schlissel is that of synagogue worship: “Put simply, Jesus worshiped in the synagogue and according to its liturgy, but nowhere does the Bible legislate for the existence or use of the synagogue.” In response, Dr. Thomas observes that the synagogue service did not contain “an element of worship that was not warranted by the Old Testament”. He continues: “The fact is that synagogue worship was remarkably predictable, containing a call to worship, a cycle of prayers, the singing of psalms, the recitation of portions of Scripture (the Shema in particular), reading of Scripture, and something that we would now call preaching or exposition, followed by a blessing. It all sounds very similar to a traditional worship service!”

The final objection to the regulative principle is that “consistency will make us all either exclusive psalm singers or Reformed Baptists!” (91f). The author declines to address the baptism issue, and, concentrating only on the musical one, writes: “The case needs, then, to be established and maintained that the regulative principle is an argument based on what is warranted by God in Scripture as a whole, and not merely in the New Testament church. In this instance, as regards the use of musical instruments and choral accompaniment, temple practice provides all the warrant that is needed.”

But what could our brother from Wales be thinking? While it is true that our worship is informed by all of Scripture, this does not mean that there is no differentiation between what theologians have referred to as moral elements (i.e., elements of worship that are universal in all places and times) and ceremonial ones (i.e., those that are bound up with the ceremonial law). While our ascertaining what is meant by the regulative principle is basically inductive in approach, that does not imply that our Scriptural gleanings are a mindless enterprise, unable to distinguish between practices that are perpetually binding and practices which were intended only for the Jewish nation under a Levitical priesthood.

Dr. Thomas concludes his essay by writing that apart from the regulative principle, “we are at the mercy of tyranny and folly” (93).

*Donald S. Whitney*

A professor at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Donald S. Whitney wrote in the Boice festschrift on “Private Worship.”<sup>83</sup> His clear adherence to the regulative principle is another example of the resurgence of the doctrine, including among Baptists. In conjunction with the particular topic of his essay, he writes that “all the biblical elements of public worship that can be legitimately practiced in isolation from other believers constitute the elements of private worship. And while these elements may take somewhat different forms (for instance, one person might pray aloud in private worship, another silently), these elements are few and simple. This simplicity is not surprising since God has believing children of a wide variety of ages, intellectual capacities, and educational levels. So in the private worship of God, the basic elements are intake of the word of God, prayer, and worshipful song” (298f).

*Nick R. Needham*

In his chapter, “Worship Through the Ages,” Nick Needham writes:

The distinctively Reformed perspective on worship was pioneered by Zwingli, but it was really Bucer and Calvin who gave it its doctrinal shape.... [Calvin’s] approach to the form of worship in Strasbourg and Geneva was similar to, yet different from, that of Zwingli in Zurich. Calvin too believed that nothing should be done in Christian worship unless the New Testament authorized it (the regulative principle). So he followed Zwingli in rejecting most of the ritual of medieval Catholic worship—images, candles, priestly robes, and so on. However, Calvin and Bucer were rather more positive than Zwingli in seeking a constructive reformation of worship, based not only on the teaching of Scripture, but also on the worship practices of the patristic era. It was not exactly “patristic fundamentalism,” but Reformed worship in the sixteenth century did engage in a profound dialogue with the early church and fostered a genuine reprimatination of patristic forms, albeit always beneath the ultimate critical norm of Scripture (400).

*Hughes Oliphant Old*

Hughes Oliphant Old, well-known scholar in the area of

83. Donald S. Whitney, “Private Worship,” in Ryken, et al., *Give Praise to God*, 289–316.

worship, contributes for this volume a chapter entitled “Calvin’s Theology of Worship.” He considers Calvin’s views primarily from the perspective of his treatment of the first table of God’s Law.

Calvin understood that “with the coming of Christ the external ceremonies of the law abolished.” However, “as Calvin understands it, ‘the public worship that God once prescribed is still in force’” (416).

Under Professor Old’s consideration of the Second Commandment, he writes: “For Calvin, the worship that is according to Scripture is not conceived of in a literalistic way.” Calvin and the other High Rhenish Reformers acknowledged that there are matters “that are ‘indifferent’ in the public worship of the church.” This principle was especially true with regard to Calvin’s use of “prayer forms”: “These prayer forms were not written out word for word from Scripture, but they were nevertheless according to Scripture” (426f).

According to Dr. Old,

For Calvin, it was important that Christian worship be more than a mere human work. He understood that when our celebrations of worship are performed according to God’s command, in obedience to his command, then they are divine works. When our worship is made alive by his Spirit working in our hearts, then our worship is the work of God’s Spirit. Such worship is truly spiritual worship. For Calvin, spiritual worship is above all worship that is in obedience to God’s revealed will: “And then he makes us conform to his lawful worship, that is, a spiritual worship established by himself” In his commentary on John, Calvin says that worship in spirit and truth “is a matter of the spirit, because it is nothing other than an inner faith which expresses itself in prayer; it is purity of conscience and the renouncing of ourselves to the end of dedicating ourselves to the obedient service of God (427).

Calvin followed Lactantius<sup>84</sup> in his opposition to superstitious worship: “superstitious worship is the performing of rites invented by human beings in honor of gods that were invented by human beings. Superstition according to Lactantius is human-made religion.” Accordingly, “The Christian is not to use works of art as an aid to worship because, in the first place, God has

not given this to use as a form of worship. God has not asked us to serve him by making images and then venerating these images. It is not a service because it has not been asked of us” (427).

#### *Boice Festschrift Overview*

There is much that is helpful and edifying in this important volume. On the other hand, its weaknesses in understanding show through at numerous points, and therefore it should be used with a measure of caution.

RICK POSTMA

Representing the Free Reformed Churches of North America, is Rick Postma, whose June 2004 article in the denominational magazine, the *Messenger*, affirmed the regulative principle of worship. Entitled “Worship Wars,” the article begins by saying “the Bible is full” of “worship wars”:

The first one involved Cain and Abel, leading to the first murder in the history of the world. Aaron presided over one that involved a golden calf that the people insisted on worshipping in a similar fashion to the pagans around them. The question asked by the Samaritan woman of Jesus (John 4), to judge between the competing Jewish and Samaritan worship claims, represents still another worship war. Today, after skirmishes of varying durations, many churches have traded in a simple, reverent and Bible-centered liturgy—preaching, congregational singing, prayer and offerings of thanksgiving—for a worship format conforming as closely as possible to contemporary culture—talk-show format, preaching to felt needs, drama, entertainment provided in a soft-rock format to passive audiences.

Mr. Postma observes: “While innovations in worship are often made with the best of intentions, church history has shown again and again that there are serious consequences to placing man’s ideas above God’s Word.”<sup>85</sup>

JOSEPH F. “SKIP” RYAN

Well-known PCA minister “Skip” Ryan has recently penned his understanding of worship, in the thin volume, *Worship: Beholding the Beauty of the Lord*.<sup>86</sup> A perusal of the index reveals that there are three

84. Lactantius (c. 240–c. 320) was an early systematician of Christian theology.

85. Rick Postma, “Worship Wars,” *Messenger* (June 2004). Online at <http://www.frcna.org/Messenger/Archive.asp?Issue=200406>.

86. Joseph “Skip” Ryan, *Worship: Beholding the Beauty of the Lord* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2005).

references to “football,” but none to the “regulative principle of worship.”

There is a brief discussion of the distinction between “elements” and “circumstances” of worship (48–49), which is more or less accurate. On the other hand, Dr. Ryan’s discussion of the classic passage in John 4 regarding worshipping in spirit and in truth seems to miss the point. He argues that worship in spirit is speaking of worship from the heart; he writes: “To worship God in spirit is to worship in the sincerity and earnestness of our hearts. That is what God is concerned about. He is not concerned about the exterior forms. He is concerned about the reality of genuine worship in our hearts. So to worship God in spirit is to genuinely worship, not to play with it or to play at it or to go through the motions or just to stand up, sit down, lean to the left, lean to the right” (75). With respect to worship in truth, Pastor Ryan does state that “true worship will always be worship that is structured by, oriented around, defined by, and originating from the Scriptures. We don’t worship the Book, but the Book brings us the One whom we worship in truth” (75).

However, the author never fleshes out what is meant by having worship structured by and defined by the Scriptures. Perhaps this is not surprising, given not only his Episcopalian upbringing, but also the Anglican liturgical perspective he has brought to the churches where he has pastored.

Although there are helpful reminders in this book about the necessity of personal piety in worship, such reminders can be found more deeply and more eloquently expressed in numerous other places, including the Puritans. Overall, the book is disappointing. For one thing, it fails to demonstrate how the regulative principle provides the context heart-felt worship that is genuinely pleasing to God. For another, the writing style is more like a stream of consciousness with scattered thoughts, rather than a well-ordered treatise.

DOUGLAS F. KELLY

In a significant book on the Westminster Confession of Faith published originally in 2004, Professor Douglas F. Kelly presents his views on the Puritan regulative principle.<sup>87</sup>

Professor Kelly sees a continuity between the first Reformers (such as Calvin) and the Puritans of the later sixteenth century and seventeenth century (including those who produced the Westminster Standards). That continuity is expressed in terms of the sufficiency of Scripture (65f).

On the other hand, Dr. Kelly suggests that the Puritans went beyond Calvin, and he uses the writings of Hughes Oliphant Old and J. I. Packer (who in turn referred to Horton Davies’ classic *The Worship of the English Puritans*). In his estimation, the phrase, “whatever is not commanded or warranted by Scripture is forbidden,” which encapsulates the Puritan view, “goes beyond John Calvin” (72).

Professor Kelly paints the picture of the environment in which Puritans operated, and he observes that the Puritans “were so concerned with worship because they were so concerned with God. Puritanism budded during a revival movement, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which gave them an immediate sense of the nearness, the holiness, the beauty and grace of the Triune God.... Everything less than God was secondary to knowing and serving Him aright. Worship was first; even the most legitimate concerns were second. If worship then was of such supreme significance, what could matter more than to do it in a way that would please God?” (73).

The North Carolinian points out that the regulative principle is set forth in two places in the Westminster Confession, viz., Chapter 21.1 and Chapter 20.2 (regarding Christian liberty and liberty of conscience). However, following William Cunningham, he contends that WCF 1.6 “constitutes an ‘obvious modification’ of the regulative principle. Cunningham saw this modification to be a necessary one, since ‘The principle must be interpreted and explained in the exercise of common sense.’” This “modification” has to do with two issues. The first is that the elements may be determined not only by direct Scripture evidence, but also by logical deduction based upon “good and necessary consequence.” The other is that there are “circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed” (76–77).

Even though there are difficulties associated with discerning the difference between the elemental and the circumstantial, nevertheless, the Puritan regulative principle is Scriptural. However, Dr. Kelly rues the fact that, given the amount of material written on the subject, there is “a lack of careful discussion and a paucity of illustrations to help us distinguish the two. One has

87. Douglas F. Kelly, “The Puritan Regulative Principle and Contemporary Worship,” J. Ligon Duncan, III, General Ed., *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century 2* (2004; rpt. Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005) 63–98.

the impression that many who assert this distinction, fly from it as quickly as possible.” He believes that John Frame has offered an “intriguing suggestion,” viz., that there are “essentially two different strains of worship in Scripture bearing on worship, and that one of these firmly and plainly indicates the traditional understanding of the Puritans that what is not commanded in worship is forbidden as ‘will-worship’ (Col. 2:22f.). These passages require explicit and specific divine warrant for worship, such as Exodus 25:40, where God commands Moses to construct the tabernacle ‘according to the pattern shown thee on the mount.’” However, Frame also contends that with regard to the “holy convocations,” there is no detailed “Directory of Worship,” thus implying that the appropriate worship in that context is simply the general principles of Scripture applied to various situations (81–82).

However, as we have seen, the danger in John Frame’s position is that it allows for general principles to be expressed in a variety of ways, thus rendering meaningless the regulative principle itself. Although Professor Kelly opposes liturgical dance, drama, and incense, nevertheless, his opposition to such practices is based on personal opinion rather than the law of God. For example, he writes, “it seems to me that the introduction of incense into Reformed congregational worship is another ‘theatrical trifle,’ a turning back to shadows, after the full-bodied reality has come in the one whose ‘rich wounds, yet visible above in beauty glorified’ make all the offerings of our worship acceptable. As I contemplate the eclipse of serious expository preaching and regular administration of the sacraments by ‘theatrical trifles’ of dramatic presentations and incense, I cannot think of a better practical argument for the continuing relevance of the scriptural regulative principle in contemporary worship” (90–91).

But, the regulative principle, although it is eminently practical, does not derive its force from its practicality, but from the kingship of Christ over His church. The “it seems to me” is far from the certainty of a “thus says the Lord.”

This confusion in Dr. Kelly’s presentation is seen in the fact that he is uncertain as to whether the regulative principle addresses the question of religious holy days, and in the way in which he mishandles the issues of the

content of worship song and musical instrumentation. He attacks the position of John Lafayette Girardeau (that of non-instrumentation) as employing “a basically dispensational argument to cut out instruments from New Testament worship.” He writes that Girardeau “says that instruments were connected with temple worship, and, that now since the temple has passed away and been replaced by Christ, instruments, which were an accompaniment of that older order of worship have also passed away. I do not think there is that much clear-cut discontinuity between Old and New Testaments for one matter, and secondly, what do we make of the prominent use of instruments in the heavenly worship in the New Testament book of Revelation? If the church above uses instruments, why is it wrong for the church below to do so?” (94–98). But, could it not be argued that Dr. Kelly, based upon his own definition, has employed a dispensational hermeneutic in rejecting the burning of incense? We see therefore the inconsistency of his adherence to the Puritan regulative principle, to which he professes allegiance.

NICK NEEDHAM

Nick Needham, a British Baptist minister, wrote a lengthy chapter for the book for the same volume just noted. The burden of the chapter was specifically that of the Westminster Assembly’s view of worship, and particularly with respect to the question of the content of worship song and musical instrumentation.<sup>88</sup>

#### *Summary of “Westminster and Worship”*

He begins by remarking that the regulative principle of worship is “the Reformed and Westminsterian equivalent of the grammatico-historical principle in the field of biblical hermeneutics: an overarching meta-concept without which nothing else can be comprehended—the key that unlocks Westminster’s liturgical door” (223).

Pastor Needham says that although the “wider definition,” that all of life is worship, can be justified, “the narrower, more specific sense of the term is equally defensible;” and he appeals to Richard Baxter in making the distinction between the narrower and the broader (224). Focusing particularly on the regulative principle, the author says that “by ‘the acceptable way of worshipping the true God,’ the Confession probably has particularly in mind *a system of corporate worship*; and this the light of nature certainly does not reveal.” Indeed, the “*how of worship and the social dimension of worship are left determined by general revelation*” (226).

88. Nick Needham, “Westminster and Worship: Psalms, Hymns? and Musical Instruments?”, in J. Ligon Duncan, ed., *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly 2* (2004; rpt. Mentor Print of Christian Focus Publications: Fearn, Ross-Shire, Scotland, 2005) 223–306.

According to Needham, the five “ingredients” normally are these five: prayer; the public reading of Scripture; preaching; the singing of psalms; and the Lord’s supper. “Any church that accepts the meta-concept of the regulative principle, as the Westminster divines understood it, will practise a form of worship habitually marked by these five ingredients, and only these—except on the special occasions that require also the sacrament of baptism” (227f).

The Westminster divines fought on two fronts. First, they opposed Rome’s claim that God authorized “all kinds of ceremonies of worship which were admittedly not found in Scripture.” Secondly, they were in opposition to the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican view “that the Church could *itself* institute forms and rites of worship, as long as these forms and rites were not positively forbidden in Scripture.” Yet today, the Roman-Lutheran-Anglican perspective is “widespread,” “even among congregations within the Reformed tradition”—apparently not due to “any self-conscious theological repudiation of the regulative principle,” but instead “the product of a broadly man-centered attitude or mind-set concerning worship. The question which most evangelicals tend to ask of worship practices is, ‘Do I find this helpful? Is this meaningful to me? Does this make me feel closer to God?’ The question, ‘Is this how God actually wants to be worshipped?’ is rarely raised” (228ff). Nevertheless, that is the way that the Westminster Assembly construed the issue, as is evident in the Shorter Catechism as well as the Larger Catechism (231).

Needham makes quick work of the canard that the Confession of Faith is inconsistent through its use of “circumstances” of worship. “A ‘circumstance’ of worship is not a constituent act of worship;” in point of fact, “there are certain things which attach to all kinds of human actions and societies, whether secular or sacred in function, and without which those actions or societies would either not be possible at all, or not be capable of execution in the most effective way.” He elaborates upon the Westminster Confession Chapter I.6: “With reference to the constituent acts of worship, whatever is not authorized is forbidden; but with reference to the circumstances of worship, whatever is not forbidden is lawful (if it is wise and edifying)” (233f, 236).

He refers to Richard Baxter’s list of circumstances, which includes these matters:

The particular text or topic a preacher should choose for any given sermon; the particular method and style of handling that text or topic; the time of the meeting on the Lord’s Day, and the time of any religious meeting

other than on the Lord’s Day; the place of meeting; the particular sins we should publicly confess, and blessings we should seek or give thanks for; the particular passages of Scripture we should read out; the particular psalms we should sing; the particular translation of Scripture we should use; whether the preacher should use notes; whether the public prayers should be written out; the particular furnishings of a meeting place for worship, e.g. pulpits, tables, cushions; gesture and posture in preaching, public reading, and listening; the clothes we wear when we come to worship; and the particular things we use to assist our natural facilities when engaged in the divinely commanded acts of worship, e.g. “tunes, musical instruments, spectacles, hourglasses” (238).

He applies the notion of circumstance to the present century:

The advance of technology since Baxter’s time has added a number of other circumstances of worship which he did not specify, e.g. electric lighting, central heating, microphones, and overhead projectors. The use of these in the place or activity of worship is not sanctioned by Scripture. But none of these things is an act of worship. We should use them, not with a view to “spicing up” our worship or making it more *avant garde*, but merely to *facilitate* our acts of worship—to remove obstacles which might hinder the free and ready carrying out of those acts of worship which are sanctioned by Scripture. Our aim and intention must always be to regulate the circumstances of our worship by “the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed” (239).

He elucidates the matter this way: “the [regulative] principle *is* rigid and inflexible, and *does* rule out creativity (sanctified or otherwise), as far as the *ingredients* of our worship are concerned; but it equally allows us a measure of Christian liberty in the exact way that we mix or combine those ingredients. Form and freedom are both provided for. No one need fear that adopting the regulative principle will infallibly beget an untouchable, sterile sameness in a church’s pattern of worship” (240).

The chapter lays out the theological rationale for the regulative principle with these three points: God’s sovereignty; the believer’s “desire to please the Beloved” (“Today’s hedonistic creed of ‘Please yourself’ cannot apply in Christian worship.”); and God’s Word as the necessary basis “if worship is to be an act of faith” (240f).

In dealing with explicit Scripture texts, Needham asserts that “[a] more comprehensive statement of the regulative principle could hardly be imagined” than what is found in Deuteronomy 12:28–32. Numbers 15:39–40 is also adduced as an example of the “contrast between divine authority and human imagination” in a way that is “vividly expressed”. The author properly notes that the New International Version “obscures” the thrust of Leviticus 10:1–3 “by translating the phrase ‘which God had not commanded them’ as ‘contrary to God’s command.’” Other Scriptures to which he makes appeal are I Kings 12:26–33 and Jeremiah 19:5 (cf. 7:31; 32:35), which teach that false worship is condemned “not so much because it positively contracted God’s revealed will, but because it was of merely human origin.” New Testament evidence comes from Mark 7:6–7 (or Matthew 15:1–20) and Colossians 2:20–23. Regarding the latter, Needham quotes from Matthew Poole’s classic commentary on the meaning of “will-worship” (241–246).

Needham writes:

The great scriptural truth which lies behind the regulative principle in Christian worship is the Kingship of Christ. The New Testament Church is a theocratic, or (perhaps we should say), a Christocratic community. We are ruled by Christ our King in our doctrine, worship and organization, and have no right to add to, or take from, His royal Word in any of these areas (246).

Needham then goes on to consider the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith with regard to music.

We begin with the following important assumption: in the light of the Confession’s full-blooded commitment to the regulative principle, we must take it for granted that *the acts of worship the Confession explicitly authorizes are the only acts for which it finds scriptural justification*. It would be a more than mildly weird state of affairs for a confession of faith to espouse the regulative principle with great force and precision, then to state that what its framers believed to be the biblically authorized acts of worship—and yet for there to be other acts of worship, on which the Confession is completely silent, but which its framers believed to be equally divinely authorized. Such a position would be incoherent

89. Regarding this contention, we must ask that if singing is simply another way of praying, then how does this fit with the Confession’s listing of “the singing of psalms with grace in the heart” as a particular element of worship?

to the point of unreason. The only logical assumption we can make is that what Westminster actually sets down as the acts of worship authorized by God in Scripture are the *only* acts the Westminster divines believed were thus authorized (247f).

However, that clear statement does not mean that Needham adheres to what is known today as “exclusive psalmody”. In his estimation, “Reformed writers in the 17th century were quite capable of using the word ‘psalm’ to denote simply a religious song, whether found in the psalter, another part of the Bible, or composed by uninspired men.” In his view, the fact that the Westminster divines did not specify “David’s psalms” means that “it is therefore wholly possible and legitimate to interpret the unqualified word ‘psalms’ in [Westminster Confession] 21.5 either as David’s psalms, or as religious songs in general” (253).

Needham proceeds to give an overview of various views among theologians and the Reformed churches of France, Germany, the Netherlands, England, and Scotland. (253ff) In his view, the position of Westminster “was not exclusive psalmody. At its narrowest, it was the ‘all the songs of Scripture’ position; at its broadest, it took in newly written songs too” (277).

He subsequently argues that according to the Confession of Faith, “It is lawful to sing any spiritually edifying material (including, e.g., the Apostle’s Creed and extra-scriptural hymns)” (281). He supports his view by contending that the content of worship song is in “the category of circumstance” (284), and also that “singing to God is simply one mode of addressing God; i.e., it is a mode of prayer” (285).<sup>89</sup>

With regard to musical instrumentation, Needham states that

what the Westminster divines actually set down in the Confession as the acts of worship authorized by God in Scripture, were the only acts they believed were thus authorized; and they did not set down the playing of musical instruments as an act of worship authorized by God in Scripture for His New Testament Church. The Confession is deafeningly silent on the issue. So are all the other Westminster documents. Clearly the Westminster divines did not believe in the validity of instrumental worship.

He goes on to note that on May 9, 1644, the English Parliament voted to destroy all ecclesiastical organs (291).

However, Needham also writes that a distinction

can be made between instrumental worship and instrumental accompaniment, and that, as accompaniment, musical instruments might be justified as a matter of circumstance. However, such use would have to be “minimal,” and any congregation that employed musical accompaniment must always ask whether or not the instrument is “necessary” in order “to sing in time and in tune” (299f). He warns of the “insidious” nature of instrumentation, and writes that “if the process of corruption has begun, radical surgery may be necessary to arrest the instrumental gangrene, even to the good, old-fashioned Zwinglian and Calvinist lengths or abolishing the use of the instruments altogether (if not blowing them to pieces with dynamite)” (300).

#### *Flaws in “Westminster and Worship”*

In summary,<sup>90</sup> the author has carefully weighed the seventeenth century sources in order to explain the regulative principle of worship as espoused in chapter 21.1, of the Westminster Confession of Faith. However, it is regrettable that he does not appeal to any of the Westminster divines themselves, especially considering the fact that two of the Scottish commissioners—Samuel Rutherford and George Gillespie—wrote extensive treatments of the subject.<sup>91</sup> It is particularly in the area of “circumstances of worship” that problems begin to emerge in his analysis. He commits the mistake of supposing “human actions and societies” refers both to worship and government, whereas it is clear from the writings of the day that worship was considered an action while government related to societies. Hence a circumstance of worship is that which pertains solely to the carrying out of any action, i.e., the time and place must be ordered so as to enable the action of worship to be performed. Nevertheless, the author extends the idea of circumstances so as to go beyond things essential to the carrying out of an action, and to include also things which may make the action of worship better—an argument which was employed by Puritan antagonists to defend the power of the church to establish what they called insignificant rites.

In his treatment of the singing of psalms much of the author’s paper is concerned with showing that seventeenth century writers used the word “psalms” to refer to compositions other than the Old Testament book of Psalms. On this basis he concludes that the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 21.5, does not limit the singing of praises to inspired psalmody. Needham makes one reference to the writing of a Westminster divine, John Lightfoot, but it improperly represents

him as offering a personal interpretation when he was only stating the opinion of others. There is no reference given to the work of the Westminster Assembly in the particular field of preparing a book of psalms for use in congregational worship, nor is there any attempt to draw significant information from the historical records which have come down to us. Also absent is any interaction with those writings of the Westminster divines where they explicitly teach an exclusive psalmody position. Moreover, he was obliged to show how the phrase “singing of psalms” was understood in the seventeenth century since that is the precise wording the Confession uses. Instead he confines his research to the singular use of the word “psalms.” This enables him to avoid answering the question which is problematic to his thesis, namely, why do the writers of the day inevitably refer to the Old Testament book of psalms where they defend “singing of psalms” as a part of Christian worship?

The author attempts to provide a rationale for the use of musical instruments as a circumstance of worship. It is in this section of his paper that he strays farthest from the field. To a man the Puritans were against the use of musical instruments, and considered them a popish invention to be rejected. Nevertheless, he provides what he thinks are plausible reasons for considering musical instruments a mere circumstance and therefore consistent with Puritan thought. If Mr. Needham had more carefully defined “circumstances of worship” when outlining the regulative principle of worship, he could not have defended the use of instruments on the basis that they assist congregational worship; for he would have seen that the Puritans rejected the imposition of even insignificant rites where there was no warrant for such rites from the Word of God.

#### COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

#### The official seminary of the Presbyterian Church in

90. The authors thank the Rev. Matthew Winzer for the following analysis of Mr. Needham’s work. Given the importance of the subjects treated in Mr. Needham’s paper, and the need for a proper analysis of the historical material, the editors of *The Confessional Presbyterian* hope to provide a lengthy critique by Mr. Winzer in a subsequent issue of the journal (D.V.). For now we trust this synopsis suffices, and we also direct the reader to an appendix to this survey (page 211), regarding how best to settle the intent of the Westminster Assembly at Confession of Faith 21.5, regarding the phrase “singing of psalms.”

91. George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies* (1637; Dallas, Tex.: Naphtali Press, 1993) and Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church-Government and Excommunication: or A peaceable dispute for the perfection of the holy Scripture in point of ceremonies and church-government; ...* (London: John Field for Christopher Meredith [1646]).

America (PCA), Covenant Theological Seminary, has over the past couple of years conducted conferences on worship. In 2005, the conference was the Sacrifice of Praise Worship Conference; in 2006, the title was Worthy is the Lamb.<sup>92</sup>

There was much in both conferences that could be considered faithful. On the other hand, there was little to no discussion of the regulative principle of worship as such—a distinct contrast to the way in which Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary considered the subject.

Perhaps emblematic of the approach taken is President Bryan Chapell's 2005 address, "Worship as Gospel Re-Presentation". Dr. Chapell acknowledged that "not everything is up for grabs" with respect to worship; however, contextualization and a concern for missions must influence how we practice worship.

Much of the first half of his presentation was given over to an historical overview of worship across the centuries. In his view, what is most significant is not the differences among various traditions, but their commonalities. These "grand flows" and "unifying features" are manifest throughout church history because they represent Biblical themes, such as that of God appearing, giving instruction, and evoking a covenantal response.

According to Bryan Chapell, worship is "the re-presentation of the gospel in the presence of God and His people for His glory and their good."

He also contends that there is wisdom found in the fact that the New Testament does not contain an explicit account of a church service: this enables us not to be caught up in time-bound orders of service, but to concentrate on "transcendent gospel principles." In his view, "The service should be gospel in form." The order should be determined not by tradition, but by that which "serves presenting the gospel."

This gospel-driven approach applies not only to the order of service, but to the practices of worship: "As long as its gospel purpose is fulfilled, each aspect of the service may be expressed through a variety of worship

components." For example, the "need to confess" (or "corporate confession") can be expressed through pastoral prayer, private prayer of the people, unison prayer, responsive reading of Scripture, a corporate hymn of confession, a musical solo, a choral piece, or sentence prayers by congregants, among other practices. Worship, according to the President of the PCA's official seminary, is "stifled" when it is limited in certain fixed components.

After stating that the lists of elements of worship in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Larger Catechism are different, he suggests that this implies that the Westminster divines intended the list(s) to be suggestive rather than exhaustive. He stated that if he were ever called again to a pastorate, he would consider "testimony" as an element. He also suggested that "fellowship" could be expressed in numerous ways, such as passing the peace, shaking hands, and talking; fellowship, he said, could be considered an element within the worship, as an expression of God's goodness among His people.

Towards the end of his speech, Dr. Chapell celebrated "creativity" and "novelty of expression" on behalf of the gospel. He concluded by saying that "history and Scripture reflect much freedom regarding the use of worship components that express the aspects of this liturgy. The precedents of Scripture and history should guide us to maintain the aspects of our liturgy with a form that represents the gospel and re-enforces our mission for the glory of God and the good of His people." We have a "wonderful freedom available to us" and "a dear message entrusted to us."

By way of brief response, we would first of all note that the Confession of Faith and the Larger Catechism, technically, are addressing different issues, and also were created for different purposes, which may be at least part of the reason why the "lists" are different. Neither did the Divines consider their various productions independent of one another, but part of a set of documents called for by a covenant solemnly sworn. Secondly, Bryan Chapell's address clearly indicates a rejection of the regulative principle of worship, which mandates distinct worship practices ("parts" or "elements"), rather than a fluidity of various worship components.<sup>93</sup>

SEAN MICHAEL LUCAS

One of the up and coming scholars in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) is Sean Lucas. In his brief tenure at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis,

92. MP3 recordings from these conferences may be found online at [www.covenantseminary.edu](http://www.covenantseminary.edu).

93. In a Th.M. paper written for Covenant Seminary ("Regulative or Relative? The Regulative Principle in Southern Presbyterianism," 13 April 1994), George Robertson asserts: "The Southerners like the Puritans had a godly philosophy of worship but probably an impractical standard" (19). Besides reaching an erroneous conclusion, this paper is not very tightly argued. Its perspective fits nicely with these later conferences at the St. Louis institution, even though approaching matters from a different angle; at least Pastor Robertson mentioned the regulative principle.

he has already become Vice President for Academics, as well as being an Assistant Professor of Church History.

While some have viewed Covenant Seminary as being at least slightly to the left in the PCA spectrum with respect to worship, Dr. Lucas proves that his views lean in a more conservative direction. After quoting from the Westminster Confession and Larger Catechism, and referring to seventeenth century Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs and his sermons on “gospel worship,” the professor summarizes his perspective this way:

The regulative principle of worship claims that God has instituted “the acceptable way” of worship, that God has limited worship by his own revealed will, and that human beings are not to worship in any way not prescribed in Scripture. The popular way of putting this is that Christians are to worship God only as he has commanded, and whatever God has not commanded for worship in Scripture is forbidden. In recent days, this understanding has been challenged by some who desire to redefine the regulative principle to claim that Scripture norms every activity of life, or who believe that the Westminster Confession goes beyond the principles of other Reformers, becoming legalistic as it establishes the supremacy of Scripture in matters of faith and worship. Still, it is the case that Presbyterians historically have claimed that God’s Word serves to regulate our worship in such a way that our worship is based on what is revealed in Scripture. If we deviate from the scriptural pattern, we worship in a way that is unacceptable to God.

On the other hand, Dr. Lucas is not consistent with regard to the element of the singing of praise:

Music, as represented in the aspects of singing hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs, is one element that is not absolutely necessary to incorporate worship in the same way that the prayers or the reading and preaching of the Scriptures are. That is why Presbyterians confess that the means of grace are reading and preaching Scripture, receiving the sacrament, and making prayers; singing psalms and hymns has typically been seen as *a way of praying*, not as a discrete element of worship in itself. Therefore, questions about and arguments over musical expression and style stand in a subservient position to the broader principles of worship that we have been examining here. And that is why I believe that the contention with which I started this chapter is true: gospel-driven, biblical, and Reformed worship transcends

style; it can be expressed in a variety of local churches through a variety of valid expressions.<sup>94</sup>

JOHN PRICE

In *Old Light on New Worship*,<sup>95</sup> this Reformed Baptist pastor addresses the question of musical instrumentation in public worship. He notes at the beginning of the book that his purpose is not to argue for the regulative principle, but rather to apply it to the instrumentation issue.

In Chapter I, he notes that “it is often assumed, even by those who hold to the regulative principle, that musical instruments somehow fall outside of the realm of God’s authority. While God regulates every other element of His worship, somehow musical instruments are not recognized as coming under His regulation. Musical instruments are believed to be neither commanded nor forbidden, and, therefore, they are considered matters of indifference and liberty” (21).

By way of contrast, he writes: “There is no record in Scripture of a musical instrument ever being used in public worship without an explicit divine command.” His plan was to establish these three theological principles: “(1) The Old Testament worship in all of its outward ceremonies and rituals has been abolished; (2) We must look to Christ and His apostles alone for the worship of the church; and (3) With no command, example, or any indication whatsoever from the Lord Jesus that He desires musical instruments in His church, we have no warrant for their use” (21).

After dealing extensively with the Biblical data regarding instrumentation, and the history of musical instruments, Pastor Price in Chapter IV handles arguments in favor of instrumentation; the first such argument is that of alleging the instrumentation is a “circumstance” of worship.

In rebutting this argument, the minister from Rochester, New York, offers the following. First, that notion of appealing to “the category of ‘circumstances of worship’ contradicts the convictions and the intentions of its authors.” Secondly, that view “violates the limitations of the Word of God concerning such circumstances;” circumstances, Biblically-speaking, are a manifestation of the church’s discretionary power in order to maintain

94. Sean Michael Lucas, *On Being Presbyterian: Our Beliefs, Practices, and Stories* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2006); the quotations are from pp. 119 and 128.

95. John Price, *Old Light on New Worship: Musical Instruments and the Worship of God, A Theological, Historical and Psychological Study* (Avinger, Tex.: Simpson Publishing, 2005).

decency and order, and no one can argue that “the use of musical instruments falls into this category.” Thirdly, a circumstance “must be something that does not directly affect the commanded elements of worship.... The Lord Jesus has commanded singing with the voice in His church, and for the church to make any additions to this element, such as the use of musical instruments, is to push her authority beyond the boundary given to her.” Fourthly, a circumstance “must be something necessary (or essential) to the performance of the commanded element of worship. In other words, the circumstance must be of such a nature that if it is not carried out the element of worship cannot be performed.” However, this is clearly not the case regarding instruments: “Singing and playing musical instruments are two separate actions that can exist independent of each other. Musical instruments are not necessary or essential to the act of singing and therefore do not fall within the category of ‘circumstances.’” Fifthly, a circumstance “must be limited to those things undetermined by the Word of God.” Given the fact that musical instruments were part of the ceremonial worship of the Old Testament (which has now been abolished in the New Testament through the coming of the Messiah), “musical instruments are under God’s authority;” and apart from further Scriptural evidence, “we have no right to remove them from His authority by calling them ‘circumstances’ so that we may do as we please.” Sixthly, asserting that instruments are circumstantial “violates the limitations of the Confession [of Faith] itself,” since such instruments are not “common to human actions and societies.” Seventhly, many major theologians, who have acknowledged the reality of circumstances, have been opposed to the notion that musical instruments can be justified on the basis on this category (175–186).

In Chapter VII (“Conclusion”), John Price argues that the matter of instrumentation “is nothing less than a matter of sola scriptura.... The principle of sola scriptura demands that once God has made His mind known on any subject in the Scripture, we have no right to think otherwise apart from further evidence from those Scriptures. Once the truth has been established that He has placed musical instruments under His control, without further light from the Scripture we have no right to alter this perspective” (230f).

He pleads for a re-affirmation of the regulative principle. At the same time, it “must be used with Christian prudence, wisdom, and toleration. While we must hold

firmly to it, we must also understand that legitimate differences will exist among churches with respect to its specific application. Men who hold equally to this principle will differ in the arrangement or implementation of the details and legitimate circumstances of worship. When such differences exist, we must avoid the arrogance which believes that those who differ in circumstances are violating the regulative principle” (231).

He continues: “While we should allow for differences in the circumstances of worship, we cannot see how the use of musical instruments is among them. If the Word of God alone is our guide in this matter, we cannot escape the conclusion that musical instruments in Christian worship are a violation of the regulative principle. To bring them into the church is to transgress the authority of Christ in His worship” (231f).

#### MICHAEL P.V. BARRETT

Michael P.V. Barrett is a President of Geneva Reformed Seminary and Associate Minister at Faith Free Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina, a congregation of the Free Presbyterian Church of North America (FPCNA). (The FPCNA is the North American affiliate of Ian Paisley’s Free Presbyterian Church of Ireland.) In 2006, he penned *The Beauty of Holiness: A Guide to Biblical Worship*.<sup>96</sup>

As described on the back cover, Dr. Barrett is “convinced that the Bible does establish clear guidelines for both what we are to believe (issues of faith) and what we are to practice (issues of obedience) and that this direction includes matters of worship. If there is any overriding biblical truth that must circumscribe every worship practice, it is that worship is all about God and not about us.” This book is designed to be “a guide to what the Bible says about the object, manner, and the heart of worship. We must never shy away from what the Bible says regardless of how out of sync with culture it seems to be. God’s Word not culture—whether modern or medieval—defines the way of worship.”

While stating that extremes exist in both the regulative principle and the normative principle camps, Dr. Barrett professes his adherence to the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1:6 and Chapter 21:1. With regard to the detailed divine prescription under the Mosaic administration, he writes: “Together the details underscore the important truth that God orders the way of worship, and man cannot and must not alter that way. His instructions to make the Tabernacle so long and no longer, so wide and no wider, with this material and no other warn that He is

96. Michael P.V. Barrett, *The Beauty of Holiness: A Guide to Biblical Worship* (Greenville, S.C. and Belfast, Northern Ireland: Ambassador International, 2006).

concerned and takes notice of every facet and dynamic of worship. It is important not only that we worship the right God but that we worship the right God in the right way. The Tabernacle stood as constant visible witness that worship was God's way or no way. Or to use our theological jargon, the details of the Tabernacle illustrate the regulative principle of worship" (2–3, 128f).

#### THE ARP DIRECTORY FOR PUBLIC WORSHIP

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP) has been engaging in a re-writing of its Directory for Public Worship. A draft version of this Directory has been posted on the official denominational website ([www.arpsynod.org](http://www.arpsynod.org)).<sup>97</sup>

The Preamble of this new proposed Directory states that "the keystone of the 1645 *Directory*, as well as our documents over the past two hundred years, has been an endeavor to operate upon the foundational basis of *Scripture alone* (*Sola Scriptura*) for guiding and shaping our public worship. The Holy Scriptures are the Word of God, revealed to us for our faith and practice and leading us to the glory of the Triune God. Once again, *The Directory of Public Worship* holds the principle of *Scripture alone* as foundational."

Chapter I, "The Call to Worship," properly distinguishes between life in general (which is to be lived for the glory of God), and worship in particular ("It is also necessary that a due proportion of time be set apart for offering to God that worship which He has commanded all people to give. Such worship is to be given individually, in families, and in corporate gatherings of public worship."). However, in Chapter III, "The Nature of Worship," the document states that worship can be conceived broadly (including all of life) or narrowly.

Chapter II, "The Rule of Worship," quotes from the Westminster Confession of Faith ("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."); and it distinguishes between the "parts (elements) to be included in the worship of God" (which "are either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be derived from Scripture") and the circumstances (which "have not been fixed by a definite rule in the Holy Scriptures, such as the form or order of worship which is to be followed, the time or place for the gathering of God's people, or the music to be used in

singing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. In such matters or circumstances, the church must be guided by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.").

This proposed Directory is considerably better than that which was adopted three decades ago. However, even though it is chockfull of Scripture references, it is doubtful that several of the practices of worship which are advocated (such as unison and responsive reading of Scripture; instrumental music; taking up offerings; and recitation of creeds) can be justified by the proffered prooftexts. Furthermore, one of the footnotes, which contends that the listing of elements of worship in the Westminster Confession of Faith was not intended by the Westminster Assembly to be exhaustive, may open the door down the road for any number of other practices of worship.

DANIEL R. HYDE

A minister in the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA), Daniel R. Hyde has written a booklet intended to introduce visitors to a worship service in a Reformed congregation. This California pastor does proclaim allegiance to the regulative principle of worship:

Finally, and most importantly, we are not to worship God "in any other way than He has commanded in His Word" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 96). The particular things in the service of God are clearly commanded to us by God Himself, set forth in biblical examples, or deduced by solid principles of interpretation from the inspired Word of God. In this way "we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb 12:28). We call this the "Regulative Principle." We see this taught in the Ten Commandments, for example, where the LORD, the one true God, commands his people to worship him alone (first Commandment) and that they are to do this in the way he says (second Commandment).

The Scriptures abound with God sufficiently explaining to his people how he serves us and how he desires and deserves us to serve him. The acceptable elements of the service of the Triune God are elements of his ser-

97. DRAFT: "The Directory Of Public Worship Of The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church Presented to the 202nd General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church." File Date: June 6, 2006 [Accessed April 9, 2007].

vice to us in the Word and Sacraments and our service to him in Prayer (Acts 2:42 cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q&A 103).<sup>98</sup>

However, Pastor Hyde does not demonstrate how responsive readings of Scripture, taking up offerings, recitation of creeds, or singing songs authorized by the church fit with the regulative principle. Moreover, like many in the Dutch Reformed tradition, the elements are often considered in terms of their particular function and place in a worship service, rather than abstractly. For example, he lists “Prayer of Confession,” “Prayer for Illumination,” “Prayer of Humble Access,” “Eucharistic Prayer,” and “Prayer of Thanksgiving,” with the implication that each of these is a distinct “element” (21f). However, from the Presbyterian perspective, the “element” is that of “prayer,” with the understanding that there might be a wide variety of prayers (invocation, pastoral, consecration of the elements of communion, thanksgiving, etc.) which fit the category of “prayer”. This is a subtle distinction, but one which might help to explain one of the ways in which the Dutch and the British approaches to the regulative principle differ.

#### DANIEL F. N. RITCHIE

First-time author Daniel F. N. Ritchie is studying at the Queen’s University of Belfast for a degree in History and Politics. A member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, he, in *The Regulative Principle of Worship: Explained and Applied*,<sup>99</sup> defends the worship views and practice of his denomination.

Mr. Ritchie notes that “The Westminster Confession leaves no room open for the Church to invent and enforce the observation of religious ceremonies which are not set down in Scripture. . . . The Westminster Divines’ view of worship was simply the outworking of their doctrine that the Holy Scripture is the infallible and complete rule of faith and practice.” He concludes that “for something to be a regulative principle of worship, according to our Confession, it either must be explicitly commanded in Scripture or by approved historical examples in the Bible (such as synagogue attendance by Christ and the Apostles) or by good and necessary consequence be inferred from many passages of Scripture (such as infant baptism and Sunday Sabbath observance)” (16).

98. Daniel R. Hyde, *What to Expect in Reformed Worship: A Visitor’s Guide* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007) 11.

99. Daniel F. N. Ritchie, *The Regulative Principle of Worship: Explained and Applied* (N.p. [Longwood, Fla.]: Xulon Press, 2007).

In the chapter entitled “The Biblical Basis for the Regulative Principle of Worship,” the author argues first by means of an overview of the Biblical theology of worship; here he appeals to the nature of special revelation and divine sovereignty. Next, he presents the evidence from specific texts—Exodus 20:4–6; Leviticus 10:1–3; 22:31–33; Numbers 15:39; Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:28–32; 1 Samuel 13:8–14; 1 Chronicles 13:9–11; 2 Chronicles 26:16–19; Isaiah 29:13; Jeremiah 7:30–31; Matthew 15:1–2; 15:7–9; 28:18–20; John 4:20–24; Colossians 2:20–23 (19–62).

The next chapter answers objections to the regulative principle. The first objection he handles is the notion that “All of life is worship;” he writes:

If all of life was worship then how could the elders call a congregation to worship? Why would there be one day a week set apart for worship if God is to be worshipped equally everyday? If all of life is worship then unbelievers should be allowed to come to the Lord’s Supper, since it would be no different from eating an ordinary meal! The fact that non-Christians are forbidden from coming to the Lord’s Table (1 Cor. 11:27) shows us that it is a part of something distinct from ordinary life. According to this logic, Baptism would be no different from washing your forehead, preaching from making a speech, reading the Bible would be the same as reading a novel, congregational singing would be indistinct from singing nursery rhymes, and prayer would be no more sacred than chatting to your mate on the telephone. In the light of such nonsensical reasoning, we can only deduce that the worship of God is separate from other aspects of our lives.

The other items handled are “John Frame’s re-definition of the Regulative Principle;” “Jesus accepted Human Traditions;” “Misrepresentation of the Regulative Principle;” and “The Regulative Principle only applies to Public Worship” (63–77).

In the chapter on circumstances of worship, Mr. Ritchie contends that the matter of women wearing head coverings is a cultural rather than a universal consideration. He quotes from John Calvin, the Geneva Bible, Francis Turretin, Samuel Rutherford, and George Gillespie in support of his view; and also argues that “if the Westminster Divines believed that head coverings were a regulative principle of worship their failure to include it in the Westminster Standards was a serious mistake. The only conclusion left to us is that they did not consider the issue of head coverings to be a principle of worship, but instead a mere circumstance” (79–104).

Besides the chapters already noted, Mr. Ritchie deals with the following: “Worship is to be given to God alone;” “Image Worship;” “Biblical Prayer;” “Reading, Preaching and Hearing of the Word;” “Exclusive Psalmody;” “Instrumental Music;” “The Sacraments;” “The Subjects of Baptism;” “The Mode of Baptism;” “The Lord’s Supper;” and “The Christian Sabbath.”

There is much in this book that is commendable, and we would applaud this first effort by a university student. However, despite its length (351 pages total), it does at points lack a certain gravitas. Also, it is curious that he refers to each principle of worship as being “a regulative principle of worship,” rather than using the term (“regulative principle of worship”) to refer to all of the principles of worship as a whole.

DOUGLAS W. COMIN

Douglas W. Comin’s *Worship: From Genesis to Revelation: A Vindication of the Regulative Principle as the Unifying Standard of Corporate Worship in both the Old and New Testaments, Proved by a Survey of the Canonical Scriptures* (Lulu.com: Douglas W. Comin, 2007) is the result of a series of sermons preached while he was pastor of Triangle Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Covenanter congregation in Durham, North Carolina. With over 600 pages, this volume demonstrates, from every book of the Bible, the truth of the regulative principle. Commenting on 2 and 3 John, he writes that the Judaizing heresy “wasn’t simply a matter of their having a different ‘worship style.’ Maintaining the old external forms of worship was a practical denial of the sufficiency of Christ’s accomplished redemption, and thus a denial of the Gospel.” He adds, “It is no different when the Roman Catholic Church seeks to re-create those old external forms, thus leading worshippers to believe that they are pleasing God through their works. This is one of the reasons the Westminster Assembly identified the Pope as ‘that Antichrist’ (586–587). This book will help to move the discussion of the regulative principle beyond a few prooftexts, to all of Scripture.

#### “REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE” GOING MAINSTREAM?

The moniker “regulative principle of worship” has received increasing use within the conservative Presbyterian and Reformed community since it was used by John Murray in the 1946 OPC report on worship song. It is now common amongst conservative Presbyterians, Reformed folk and Reformed Baptist communities. Certainly, works dealing with Puritan history and

their principle of worship have come out under evangelical and liberal hands and presses since 1946 which describe the principle accurately, but these generally and perhaps understandably did not employ the newer phraseology.<sup>100</sup> An exception is Hughes Oliphant Old who did use the phrase in his 1984 book, but only in a comment buried in the bibliography, placing the origin of the principle with the Anabaptists.<sup>101</sup> Happily, more recent publications indicate that the term is getting mainstreamed and may become more commonly employed across a broader spectrum of scholarship.

Evangelicals no doubt are becoming more familiar with the phrase, even if only to dismiss it. The moniker appears in a collection of papers originally presented at the Forty-Sixth Annual Midwest Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society hosted by Grace Theological Seminary in March 2001, on the topic of “The Worshiping Church: Theology and Expressions of Worship for the Twenty-First Century Christian.”<sup>102</sup> It appears as well in a work published in 2004 on clergy

100. Of course, there are many contemporary liberal writings on worship which seem totally ignorant of the concept or the term. A recent example is a book by David A. Miller, *Contemporary Worship in the Reformed Tradition: Practical Approaches for Congregations* (Pittsburg, Pa.: Vital Faith Resources, 2001). Although the author makes reference to *sola scriptura* as a doctrine that “anchors our worship, not to changing human traditions, but the biblical pattern for worship,” and also writes that the PC(USA)’s Directory for Worship “uses the phrase ‘Reformed worship’ to describe the theology that should regulate worship in Presbyterian churches” (p. 118), it is obvious that he doesn’t have a clue as to what that means. On the other hand, another PC(USA) minister, Robert P. Glick, at least knows enough to attack the principle. In his recent book *With All Thy Mind: Worship That Honors the Way God Made Us* (Herndon, Va.: The Alban Institute, 2006), he chides the traditional Calvinistic approach as being too “left-brained,” and writes that “there is something in Zwingli’s thinking that runs counter to Scripture and even smacks of dualism” (p. 107). Professor Glick’s perspicacity in being aware of the regulative principle may be due to the fact that he is a colleague of R. J. Gore at Erskine Theological Seminary, the official seminary of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

101. The following comment surely could have used some further elaboration if only to understand what Old believed was meant by the phrase: “John Oecolampadius, *Antwort auff Balthasar Huobmeiers büchlein wider de Predicanten gespräch zuo Basel von dem Kindertauff*. Basel: Andreas Cratander, 1527. The three works listed here on baptism make clear that the so-called ‘regulative principle’ is not Reformed in origin but rather Anabaptist.” Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture* (1984; 2002) 185.

102. Thomas F. Atchison, “Developing a Practice of Worship that Unites,” in *Authentic Worship: Scripture’s Voice, Applying Its Truth*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2002) 180–181. The author dismisses the principle as unworkable. “It is doubtful, however, that the regulative principle can sustain the weight of the myriad of worship issues without collapsing into its own subjectivity (of interpretation) or becoming unduly

and politics, in which the PCA it seems cannot escape its connection to the principle. Under the section “Politics of Evangelical Protestant Clergy,” Brent F. Nelson and Beverly A. Gaddy describe the worship of the Presbyterian Church in America:

The past twenty years have seen remarkable church growth that has, in some ways, further exacerbated factional tension. Worship practice in the PCA has become very diverse with the evangelical wing adopting a range of “worship styles” from the radically contemporary, to the “blended” (contemporary and traditional), to the highly liturgical. Traditionalists decry the erosion

legalistic.” This comment is ‘backed up’ with references to Edmund P. Clowney’s “Presbyterian Worship,” in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, and Frame’s, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*.

103. Brent F. Nelson and Beverly A. Gaddy, “Presbyterian Church in America,” in *Pulpit and Politics: Clergy in American Politics at the Advent of the Millennium*, ed. Corwin E. Smidt (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2004) 143.

104. Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2002) 265–266.

105. Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 49.

106. “This notion which came to be known as the ‘regulative principle’ of worship, was to be the foundation of much of later Puritan thinking concerning Anglican reform....” Carl R. Trueman, “The Theology of the English Reformers,” *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology: Cambridge Companions to Religion*, ed. David Bagchi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 170. “Knox enunciated more than once what in later Scottish church history would be known as the ‘regulative principle.’” David F. Wright, “The Scottish Reformation: theology and theologians,” *The Cambridge Companion*, 179.

107. John MacCleod, *Dynasty: The Stuarts: 1560–1807* (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 2001) 165.

108. “The school [of thought], represented by Puritans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists, concluded that what was not explicitly commanded (what was not “lawful”) was forbidden in the worship of God. Following, therefore, what is termed the regulative principle of worship, their worship service did not in any way reflect the medieval mass.” David A. Weir, *Early New England: A Covenanted Society, Emory University Studies in Law and Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005) 78. Dr. Weir is an elder in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

109. Mrs. Junell Taylor publicly professes her adherence to the regulative principle of worship on her congregation’s web site. Mrs. Taylor writes in a paper (copyright © 2001): “What I believe is the fundamental purpose of the regulative principle is to keep practices out of the church which could possibly displease God. Most of the reformers produced this idea because of the Roman Catholic idolatries, ceremonies, and false practices, which picture the extreme of what man can put together from his own imagination if scriptural warrant is ignored. Compared to the gross practices of the Catholic Church, it may seem a tiny little detail to go off slightly into man’s

of Reformed worship and call for renewed adherence to the “regulative principle” (whatever is not commanded in Scripture is forbidden) while also developing a variety of styles that range from the austere (psalm singing; no instruments), to the traditional Presbyterian (hymns and creeds), to the Baptist (three hymns and a sermon).<sup>103</sup>

The principle in a broader context is unhappily connected to slavery in some works. Commenting on a chapter on Benjamin M. Palmer, “the ‘founding father’ of the Southern Presbyterian church,” Stephen R. Haynes writes in his *Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery*: “As Mark Noll has noted, the spirit of biblical interpretation that dominated nineteenth-century America was ‘a hermeneutic compounded of reformed theological instincts and commonsense literalism.’” The author elaborates in a footnote:

Noll notes three principles that were constitutive of the Reformed approach to scripture so prevalent in America before 1860: *scriptura sola* (the Bible as a unique authority), the “regulative principle” (the requirement to do what the Bible commands and not do those things about which the Bible is silent), and the “Third Use of the Law” (the view that the moral teaching of Scripture provided a blueprint for life). Mark A. Noll, “The Bible and Slavery,” in *Religion and the American Civil War*, ed. Randall N. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 43–73.<sup>104</sup>

One also finds the phrase used in the Oxford University Press title, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture*, by Timothy Ward.<sup>105</sup> Cambridge has issued *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, which contains articles by David F. Wright and Carl R. Trueman who both employ the phrase.<sup>106</sup> St. Martin’s press has issued a work that uses the term,<sup>107</sup> and Eerdmans has published a title in the Emory University Studies in Law and Religion series that makes use of the phrase as well.<sup>108</sup>

#### OTHER WORKS FOR THIS PERIOD

As we race now to bring this survey to an end, we mention briefly the following works: Mrs. Junell Taylor, Senior Warden for Providence Reformed Episcopal Church, Weatherford, Texas, “The Regulative Principle of Worship and Basic Definitions” (2001).<sup>109</sup> Brother

John (nom de plume), “God’s Cure for Liturgical Chaos: The Bible’s Hymnal” (c.2005); and “What is Worship?” (c.2002).<sup>110</sup> A blog maintained by Joshua Hicks called “Reformers and Puritans (and a geek)” has featured discussion on the regulative principle.<sup>111</sup> Rice and Huffstutler’s *Reformed Worship* has some historical notices of Puritanism but shows little understanding of the regulative principle as might be expected.<sup>112</sup> A work overlooked in Part One from 1997 is Stan Hall’s “Westminster Directory and Reform of Worship,” which mentions the regulative principle very briefly via a citation from Iain Murray’s 1994 paper on the directory.<sup>113</sup> Sam Waldron and L. Roy Taylor brandish their conceptions of the principle in support of their respective views of church polity against each other and against Episcopalian Peter Toon, and Paige Patterson’s single elder view, in *Who Runs The Church? Four Views of Church Government*.<sup>114</sup> PCA Minister Jeff Pennington has a brief 2003 position paper online, “Why I Believe in the Regulative Principle of Worship.”<sup>115</sup> The Rev. Anthony Dallison has a four part sermon series, “How Should We Worship God?” online at sermonaudio.com.<sup>116</sup> And finally, as Lee Irons’s lecture on “Singing Psalms and Hymns” was mentioned previously in a note on the Growing Reformed Churches conference for 2001, we note this author’s debate with him on that subject that took place in the year 2000.<sup>117</sup>

#### OVERVIEW: 2000–2007

In the first half a dozen years or so of the new millennium, the topic of worship has continued to be of tremendous interest and the literature has multiplied at a faster rate than in previous periods, no doubt mainly due to the Internet. Perhaps the most significant published writings that advocate a traditional approach are the academic and historical evaluations offered by D. G. Hart and Robert Godfrey; and the more popularized approach offered by Malcolm Watts and Daniel Ritchie.

Within the conservative Presbyterian world, the “mainstream” position, increasingly, has been either to reject the regulative principle, or to interpret it in a manner that makes it barely recognizable. On the other hand, some scholars have continued to maintain the doctrine; but, for the most part, they are not in the larger (conservative) denominations, or have been marginalized within them.

Of particular significance is the fact that the regulative principle of worship has, as it were, entered the “popular culture” of Christendom (as witnessed by a

variety of web sites which have taken up and have even embraced the doctrine). At the same time, the larger denominations seem, at an “official” level, to be going in an opposite direction. Do these conflicting trends perhaps portend that in the future, assuming a large-scale reformation and re-discovery of Puritanism, the larger “conservative” churches will be left behind?

#### VIII. OBSERVATIONS

As this lengthy survey comes to an end, several observations may be made.

(1) There was a general rediscovery of Reformed beliefs, starting in the 1930s and 1940s; and out of this renaissance (if we may use that term in this context) of Calvinism, has come a renewed interest in Reformed worship.

(2) The regulative principle of worship is essential to a Reformed or Presbyterian understanding of worship.

(3) The regulative principle includes, of necessity, the notion of “elements” and “circumstances.” Doing away

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imagination in worship in only a few doubtful instances. Would this be wrong? I believe Scripture sets forth a resounding ‘yes.’ [http://users2.ev1.net/~providencechurch/regulative\\_principle.htm](http://users2.ev1.net/~providencechurch/regulative_principle.htm).

110. The website for enigmatic “Brother John” appears to be gone. Visit these links to view the papers: <http://web.archive.org/web/20050225084551/http://www.geocities.com/reformedpresbyterian/worship.htm> and <http://web.archive.org/web/20021005002530/members.aol.com/Dbix7/canon.html>.

111. <http://www.reformersandpuritans.com/2006/04/02/the-right-way-to-worship-god-1/>.

112. Howard L. Rice and James C. Huffstutler, *Reformed Worship* (Louisville, Ky.: Geneva Press, 2001).

113. Stan Hall, “The Westminster Directory and Reform of Worship,” Calvin Studies. VIII: Presented at The Colloquium on Calvin Studies, held January 26–27, 1996, at Davidson College and the Davidson College Presbyterian Church, Davidson, North Carolina, ed. John H. Leith (n.p., [1997?]). Iain H. Murray, “The Directory for the Public Worship of God” in *To glorify and enjoy God: a commemoration of the 350th anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*, edited by John L. Carson and David W. Hall (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994).

114. Dr. Peter Toon, Dr. L. Roy Taylor, Dr. Paige Patterson, and Sam E. Waldron, *Who Runs The Church? Four Views of Church Government*, ed. Steven B. Cowan and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004).

115. Jeff Pennington, “Why I Believe in the Regulative Principle of Worship” (2003). [http://www.lakeside-church.org/Pos\\_Papers/pos\\_regulative\\_worship.htm](http://www.lakeside-church.org/Pos_Papers/pos_regulative_worship.htm).

116. Anthony Dallison, “How Should We Worship God?”. 1. The Principles of Biblical Worship. 2. Worshipping in Spirit. 3. Our Duty of Thanksgiving. 4. Trembling at God’s Word. [http://www.sermonaudio.com/source\\_detail.asp?sourceid=wpcus](http://www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=wpcus).

117. “Exclusive Psalmody Debate: Lee Irons and Frank Smith.” Warfield List, March 14th – April 17th, 2000. Privately Compiled and Edited 2005. This is available in the files section of the Warfield list, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bbwarfield/files/>.

with the traditional understanding of these, does away with the principle, as historically understood. Furthermore, there is no legitimate place for a third category, such as “expressions,” which may be used as a backdoor method for justifying various worship practices.

(4) Most everyone in the conservative Presbyterian and Reformed world today professes to believe the regulative principle of worship; however, there is not uniformity as to what is meant by the term, which has led to much confusion.

(5) Furthermore, part of the confusion is that all kinds of things are being justified in the name of the principle—things such as liturgical dance—that would have been regarded as bizarre by the Reformers who helped develop the doctrine of the regulative principle of worship.

(6) Regarding the doctrine itself, there are some who deny it (e.g., Steve Schlissel), others who modify it (Jeffrey Meyers, Peter Leithart), others who redefine it or explain it away (John Frame, Vern Poythress, Richard Pratt), and others who effectively neglect it (Timothy Keller, Bryan Chapell); while still others who apply it inconsistently (Joseph Morecraft, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary).

(7) Historiographically, it is the worship innovators, who have an ax to grind, who tend to drive a wedge between Calvin and the Puritans. In this matter, the tendency is to follow liberal scholarship, which has great antipathy to the Post-Reformation developments of the seventeenth century. Conservative scholarship would say that the Puritans did not repudiate Calvin, but appreciated and built upon his insights and theological foundation.

(8) The regulative principle of worship depends upon holding to systematic theology, not just Biblical theology. This is especially seen in the writings of Steve Schlissel, but it can also be discerned by considering that Westminster Theological Seminary, which has had a heavy emphasis upon “redemptive history” to the detriment of systematics, has been weak, to say the least, on the doctrine.

(9) It is also noteworthy that those who reject the regulative principle tend to be heterodox in other ways (such as with regard to justification). This is not a one-to-one correspondence; plus, some might cite Norman Shepherd as a counter-example. However, even with Professor Shepherd, it is interesting to note that the manner in which he formulated the doctrine—by

not making a significant distinction between the way in which worship is regulated and the way in which life in general is regulated—is not sound.

(10) The worship wars, including those regarding the regulative principle of worship, tend to be fought with respect to music.<sup>118</sup> Although the principle concerns matters other than music, the debate over music continues to be among the most emotional, and the area upon which the discussion often focuses.

## IX. QUESTIONS

Various questions, perhaps beyond the scope of this present article, suggest themselves.

(1) How does one’s hermeneutics affect one’s view?

(2) How does one’s predisposition to a theological perspective within Reformed theology (doctrinal, cultural, pietist) affect one’s view?

(3) How does love relate to the regulative principle of worship? Should it not be true that those who adhere most strongly to the principle should be known for their piety and their compassion and their hospitality? If that is the case, in what ways can this reality be manifested?

(4) We cannot all be experts at everything; however, in conjunction with the concept of “body life,” why can we not learn from each other in the areas where our brethren are expert? In other words, how can those who do not have a mature understanding of Biblical worship, be encouraged to learn from their brethren who have studied the matter extensively and have come to the correct doctrine?

(5) Reflecting D. G. Hart’s insights regarding American Presbyterian history, in what manner can American Presbyterianism overcome its “dilemma” and embrace fully a principled approach to worship?

(6) In what way(s) will the mutual interaction between American and global Christianity affect the universal church’s view of worship? Or, to make the point a bit differently, as Christianity becomes less “Westernized,” how can we who hold to the traditional understanding of worship assist the rest of the world to mature into the same understanding? And, in that process, are there ways in which we in the West can learn—even with regard to worship—from our brothers and sisters whose theological acumen may not be as developed?

## X. CONCLUSION

There has been an increased interest in Puritan worship over the past two decades; and all kinds of discussion

118. John Frame devotes a significant portion of his book, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, to the questions of exclusive psalmody and musical instrumentation; 123–130. See also R. J. Gore, *Covenantal Worship*, 183–184 n31.

over the internet. At the same time, other (competing) views have come to expression: high church liturgy (sometimes in the form of “Reformed Catholicity”), covenant renewal, New Life approach, contemporary worship, “informed principle of worship,” and “covenantal worship.”

Various “Presbyterian” denominations, even “conservative” and “evangelical” ones, have refused to take the regulative principle of worship seriously; and, far from enforcing this doctrine, tend to drive out (whether formally or otherwise) those who seek to uphold it. Those denominations, we would suggest, will not in the long run experience God’s blessing.

As in the time of the Protestant Reformation, the church today has tremendous opportunities to communicate rapidly. What the printing press was to the sixteenth century, the Internet is at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As information spreads more quickly, the truth regarding the regulative principle of worship will also spread, and, in God’s providence, be maintained.

The church today faces tumultuous times—new ethical issues, times of war, persecution, proselytizing by Roman Catholicism, doctrinal decline, even a Muslim threat. But, the church in the Reformation faced the same kinds of issues. And it was out of that turmoil that there was a reawakened, apostolic, perhaps we could say prophet-like, vision of what it meant to worship God.

For those whose breasts beat in harmony with a millennial hope of a Golden Age for the church, it may not be too whimsical to believe that someday, not only will the fluff which passes for worship be swept aside, but also the worship offered by Christ’s Bride will be self-consciously in accord with her Lord’s commands. But the expectation that the traditional Presbyterian advocacy of regulated worship will eventually triumph, will only be realized when men’s hearts are changed. It will only become a reality when the gospel itself triumphs, in a day when the knowledge of the glory of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.

#### APPENDIX: THE MEANING OF “PSALMS” IN THE CONTEXT OF THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS.<sup>119</sup>

To many it is perhaps surprising that so much ink is spent on disputing what the Westminster Assembly meant at Confession of Faith chapter 21.5 by the phrase “singing of psalms.” There is a long history of changing doctrinal standards when some Churches have determined they

have scriptural warrant to expand the corpus of sung praise in the worship of God to include uninspired hymns,<sup>120</sup> and so if there has been a misunderstanding, it has certainly been a long standing one. On the other hand, there has been perhaps some overstating of the case by the opponents of uninspired hymnody in public worship in portraying the Confession as teaching exclusive psalmody. It most certainly authorizes only the singing of psalms in public worship if the conclusion of this paper stands, but it is going beyond and against the known information to conclude the Divines did so because of an exclusive psalmody principle that developed through the “worship wars” of the succeeding centuries after Westminster. That it is clear that some of the Divines did not hold to exclusive psalmody as we know it, may explain why some have sought to go to sources external to the productions of the Assembly to seek a broadened interpretation of “singing of psalms.”

If one turns to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term “psalm” has a general and a specific use. In general, the term refers to “any sacred song that is or may be sung in religious worship; a hymn: esp. in biblical use.” Specifically the term “psalm” means “any one of the sacred songs or hymns of the ancient Hebrews which together form the book of Psalms; a version or paraphrase of any of these, esp. as sung (or read) in public or private worship.” As already noted it certainly seems to have been the case that churches over the years have understood the term in its specific sense when they changed their doctrinal standards accordingly. However, as they may have been mistaken, asserting a definition is not going to be persuasive.

Recent controversies hopefully demonstrate the pitfalls of going to individual writings of the Westminster Divines or simply contemporary writings, and imposing intent or meaning on their productions. However, there is a reasonable and fairly persuasive approach that clearly identifies what the Divines meant by “psalm” at WCF 21.5 which does not get one tangled up in going to sources external to their work or tripped up in anachronistic claims that they were an Assembly of exclusive psalmodists.

The case can be made that as an assembly the Westminster Divines authorized the singing of only

119. See the review of Nick Needham’s work on page 201 of this issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*.

120. The Calvinist Baptists (1689) changed their Confession to read: “teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,” the PCUSA (1789) authorized uninspired hymns via their revised Directory for the Public Worship of God, and the ARP (1946) approved the validity of singing evangelical hymns and subsequently added a note to the Confession reflecting that in 1959.

the 150 psalms in public worship for the three kingdoms over which their deliberations were intended to cover. There is nothing in this position that conflicts with Nick Needham's conclusion: "The only logical assumption we can make is that what Westminster actually sets down as the acts of worship authorized by God in Scripture are the *only* acts the Westminster divines believed were thus authorized."<sup>121</sup> The 'worship wars' over the content of worship song had not begun, and the doubtful question of what else might have been included was simply not addressed. That

121. Nick Needham, "Westminster and Worship: Psalms, Hymns? and Musical Instruments?", in J. Ligon Duncan, ed., *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly* (2004; rpt. Mentor Print of Christian Focus Publications: Fearn, Ross-Shire, Scotland, 2005) 2.247f.

122. Brian Schwertley, *Sola Scriptura And the Regulative Principle of Worship: Appendix B. The Neo-Presbyterian Challenge to Confessional Presbyterian Orthodoxy: A Biblical Analysis of John Frame's Worship in Spirit and in Truth*. This is online at [http://www.reformed.com/pub/sola\\_b.htm](http://www.reformed.com/pub/sola_b.htm). Mr. Schwertley apparently is directing this barb at Stephen Pribble who writes: "The Westminster Confession of Faith, in enumerating the 'parts of the ordinary religious worship of God,' lists 'singing of psalms with grace in the heart' (21:5). It is noteworthy that the term 'psalms' is used in its general sense of 'any sacred song . . . sung in religious worship' (Oxford English Dictionary); the Confession does not specify 'singing of Psalms' or 'singing of the Psalms.'" In a footnote he elaborates: "Exclusive Psalmists make a good case that the Westminster divines' own practice was exclusive Psalmody. But even granting this, it remains true that the final wording they adopted was 'singing of psalms' not 'singing of Psalms' or 'singing of the Psalms.' Given their tendency to over-capitalize (e.g., Atheism, Baptism, Godhead, Idolatry, Holy Scripture, King, Mediator, Original Sin, Priest, Prophet, Supreme Judge, Surety, Trinity, Virgin Mary, etc.), it makes their choice of the small letter p in 'psalms' all the more significant. Presbyterians are not bound by the divines' practice but by the wording of the Confession." Stephen Pribble, "The Regulative Principle and Singing in Worship," online at <http://www.all-of-grace.org/pub/pribble/hymnsing.html>. As demonstrated, there is no solid basis for this argument, and the same applies to the missing "the" which usage also occurs in the Directory's section "Of Singing of Psalms."

123. F. N. Daniel Ritchie, *The Regulative Principle of Worship: Explained and Applied* (Longwood, Fla.: Xulon Press, 2007) 175-176.

124. MS draft of a Directory for fasting and thanksgiving and Of Singing of Psalms. Chad Van Dixhoorn does not note the latter as included in the MS, but it follows the directory for thanksgiving at the end of the draft, which is the House of Lord's copy (MP 1 Jan 1644/45). Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, "Chronological Bibliography of the manuscript and published papers of the Westminster Assembly," in "Reforming the Reformation: Theological debate at the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1652," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2004, item 66, 1.370. Dr. Van Dixhoorn notes that the main papers of the House of Lords are housed at the House of Lords Record Office, and the Westminster related documents are in Historical Manuscripts Reports 4-7, filed by date, which is not necessarily the correct date of writing (1.362).

125. See the editions of the Confession of Faith and the Directory

does not mean the Divines were prescient in using the term loosely and generally to "cover" future controversies. No; they were very precise. They simply authorized that upon which they could all agree upon was a biblical practice. This practice was singing the 150 Psalms of David, which can be illustrated by looking solely at the work and official documents of the Westminster Assembly itself.

### *Psalm vs. psalm*

Before proceeding, it may be useful to address the question of whether the usage of a capital or small "p" has any bearing on the intent of the Divines. Brian Schwertley writes regarding the term "psalm" at 21.5, that some

like to point out the fact that the word psalm is not capitalized, as if this proves the word is used in some vague, generic sense. The problem with this argument is the simple fact that the authors [of] the Westminster Standards only capitalized the word Psalms when it was used as a *title* of the whole book.<sup>122</sup>

Daniel F. N. Ritchie, following Schwertley, argues as follows:

It is clearly evident that when the Westminster Divines referred to the title of the book of Psalms they used capitalisation. However, when they referred to an individual psalm or to a psalter (psalm book) they did not use capitalisation. So the fact that the word 'psalm' is not spelt with a capital in the *Westminster Confession* does not prove that it referred to any other songs outside the book of Psalms.<sup>123</sup>

In this writer's opinion, making an argument one way or the other is not determinative of anything. The fact of the matter is that editions of the Standards vary in their usage. In the first edition with Scripture proofs, in Confession of Faith 21.5, the term is capitalized, which would undercut those who would use lower case usage to argue for the general sense of "psalm." In the manuscript of the Directory for Worship presented to the House of Lords, it is not clear that there is any distinction in the case where the word "psalm" is used in the section on "Singing of Psalms,"<sup>124</sup> and in one of the earliest published editions the word is capitalized in every instance, all which obviates the unneeded attempt to answer the first claim.<sup>125</sup> On top of this, as demonstrated elsewhere, the printers were usually the ones to determine usage as to the accidentals of the text

such as capitalization.<sup>126</sup> The tendency at the time was also to overuse capitalization, all of which was rather uniformly stripped out for the first time in the E. Robertson edition of 1756.<sup>127</sup> Thus the controversy over big “P” versus little “p” doesn’t really resolve anything as far as the meaning of the word “psalm” at Confession of Faith 21.5.

*“Psalm” in the Context of the Westminster Standards*

The Assembly’s meaning of the term psalm has to be understood in the context of the development of their various productions and understanding the guiding principle laid out in the Solemn League and Covenant that the subscribers would “endeavour to bring the Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, Confession of Faith, Form of Church Government, Directory for Worship and Catechising; that we, and our posterity after us, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us.” The Assembly had an outline for their work.

*The Directory for Worship*

The first document the Assembly produced was the *Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, which states: “It is the duty of Christians to praise God publickly, by singing of psalms together in the congregation, and also privately in the family. In singing of psalms, the voice is to be tunably and gravely ordered; but the chief care must be to sing with understanding, and with grace in the heart, making melody unto the Lord. That the whole congregation may join herein, every one that can read is to have a psalm book...”

The Directory was completed late in 1644 and approved in January 1645. Those sections dealing with public worship included:

- Of Publick Reading of the Holy Scriptures.
- Of Preaching of the Word.
- Of the Sacrament of Baptism.
- Of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.
- Of Publick Solemn Fasting.
- Of the Observation of Days of Publick Thanksgiving.
- Of Singing of Psalms.

*The Psalter*

Regarding “Of Singing of Psalms,” the idea to publish an approved Psalter for public worship, was first

proposed in late 1643, a year prior to the completion of the Directory.

“The first thing done this morning was, that Sir Benjamin Rudyard brought an order from the House of Commons, wherein they require our advice, whether Mr. Rous’s Psalms may not be sung in churches; and this being debated, it was at last referred to the three Committees, to take every one fifty Psalms.”<sup>128</sup>

In the Directory the concern is expressed that “every one that can read” should have a psalm book, which at that point would have referred to the intended production by the Assembly. One of the guiding principles was that the new paraphrase envisioned be faithful to the original language; another, was that it would contain nothing but the 150 Psalms.

Prior to this time in Scotland, the practice had been exclusive or nearly exclusive psalm singing in public worship. Earlier Psalters did include what were called “conclusions,” and some “other Scripture songs,” and doxologies; but these were various introductions by the printers and were not authorized by the Scottish Kirk itself. The case presented over a century ago by the Scottish antiquary David Hay Fleming, is still sound, that it is very doubtful the other Scripture songs were used in public worship in Scotland.<sup>129</sup> On the other hand, the “conclusions,” and the Gloria Patria, neither

for Worship in *Westminster Standards: Limited Anniversary Edition*. CD version (Audubon, N.J.: Old Paths Publications, 1997).

126. Chris Coldwell, “Examining the Work of S. W. Carruthers: Justifying a Critical Approach to the Text of the Westminster Standards and Correcting the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Lineage of the Traditional Text,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 1 (2005).

127. *The Confession of Faith*, etc. (Edinburgh: E. Robertson, 1756). Prior 18<sup>th</sup> century editions capitalize “Psalms” at 21.5. This is the case in the important editions by Dunlop (1719) and Lumisden and Robertson (1728; 1736; 1744). The Reformed Presbyterian edition of 1725 (the rival to Dunlop’s collection of Scottish standards) and later reprints retained the capitalization of Psalms as well (*The Confessions of Faith, Catechisms*, etc. [Edinburgh: Lumisden and Robertson, 1725; 1739]; *The Confessions*, etc. [Glasgow: John Bryce, 1764, 1785]).

128. Lightfoot’s Journal, November 22, 1643 cited in *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie, A.M.*, ed. David Laing, Esq. (Edinburgh: Printed for Robert Ogle, [1841-1842]) 3:536–537.

129. David Hay Fleming, “The Hymnology of the Reformation,” *Original Secession Magazine* (January-June and September 1884). This was reprinted in *An Anthology of Presbyterian & Reformed Literature* 4 (1991) 223–246. How exactly to understand the fact that the Scottish General Assembly approved a project to render the “other Scripture songs” into meter at the same time they were working to improve the Westminster Assembly’s Psalter, which they would eventually adopt in 1650, is fraught with difficulties, since the original minutes are no longer extant. It clearly was not as serious a project as the Psalter and it may be doubted if the original intention was that it be for public worship, particularly since they had not been used before that time as demonstrated by Hay Fleming. Some

of which had any more official basis apparently than the other songs, probably slowly became customary to sing in worship from the time prelacy grew in Scotland until the 1638 Reformation (Hay Fleming, *Anthology*, 4.237). The singing of the doxology and another custom of the minister bowing in the pulpit were abolished as lacking Scripture warrant, the latter officially, the other left as Gillespie notes “to let desuetude abolish it” (*Anthology*, 4.242).<sup>130</sup>

The “conclusions” were apparently commonly sung by both Scottish Presbyterian and English Independent

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have used this fact to argue that the Kirk was open to expanding its corpus of song, but that this particular project failed because of the poor merit of the end result (William Annan, *Letters on Psalmody: A Review of the Leading Arguments for the Exclusive Use of the Book of Psalms* [Philadelphia, Pa.: W.S. & A. Martien, 1859] 134). If it was the desire of the Scottish Kirk to do so, it was still with the understanding the material had to be inspired Scripture. There is no hint in any extant material by the Assembly of Divines that they ever discussed whether the other songs in Scripture were to be sung in worship. This ‘other Scripture song’ project needs to be interpreted first in the context of the Scottish Kirk, before attempting to make it interpretive of the Assembly’s intent. Indeed, it is possible the project failed precisely because it did not square with the vision of uniformity laid out by the Solemn League & Covenant. Andrew Edgar writes in *Old Church Life in Scotland: Lectures on Kirk-session and Presbytery Records*, ([London: Alexander Gardner, 1885] 79): “Possibly Mr. Boyd’s labours were not found very satisfactory, for his Scripture rhymes have not the melody of Milton’s muse; but whether his labours were satisfactory or not, the deference thought due to the English Presbyterians in 1650, and the rise soon after of engrossing troubles in the kingdom, were sufficient to account for the temporary abandonment of the project compilation. After the great bubble of uniformity with England in doctrine, worship, and Church government, had burst, and the Church of Scotland was at the Revolution established anew on her old separate national Presbyterian basis, the attention of the General Assembly was again directed to the subject of Scriptural songs, as a supplement to the metrical version of the Psalms.”

130. The case of the Gloria Patria is interesting. Gillespie cites it in his Notes, and presents Calderwood as defending the singing of it because Ambrose and Hilarius, despite their strict rejection of singing any songs composed by men, did sing the Gloria Patria (*Anthology*, 2.242). Gillespie’s reply was to correct the reading, by noting the canon cited actually imported that the two did not sing it. This would seem to imply that underlying the agreement to let the practice lapse was the fact that it was not inspired, and since bowing in the pulpit was rejected as lacking scriptural warrant, perhaps an additional assumption might be made regarding uninspired hymnody? Baillie, as keenly as he defended the “conclusions,” did so as Scripture paraphrases (*Anthology*, 2.241, 246). And Hay Fleming notes: “In conclusion, it is worthy of remark that Baillie, Burnet, and Edwards, in pleading for the doxology, maintain that it is founded on Scripture. And, further, that Baillie, in his conference with those yeoman who refused to sing it, says, ‘We have it but once almost in one *spiritual song*, for every portion of the *Psalm*, which is right divided is a full *spiritual hymn* to us.’ And this may be taken as an indication of what that ardent champion of the doxology understood by the words Psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs” (*Anthology*, 2.246).

alike. Despite that, Baillie states that they were abandoned because the “Popish and Prelatical party did so much dote” on the practice. However, Hay Fleming, citing Livingstone, suggests that there may have been a more common objection to the “conclusions” among the Scottish populace (*Anthology*, 4.241). Whatever the reason, the result is that it was agreed to drop them in the new Psalter.

### *The Confession of Faith*

The latter part of *The Confession of Faith*, including chapter 21, was completed in December 1646, and it was approved in Scotland on August 27, 1647. Not surprisingly, the parts of worship that they articulate correspond to the sections of the Directory. The ordinary parts of worship are:

“The Reading of Scriptures with godly fear”  
 “the sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the word”  
 “singing of psalms with grace in the heart”  
 “due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ”

And the extraordinary are:

Religious oaths and vows  
 Solemn fastings and thanksgivings

This is the disputed passage where some wish to broaden the meaning of the term psalm beyond a reference to strictly the 150 Psalms of David. However, keeping in mind the work of the Assembly as a whole, and in the context of the goal of uniformity of worship as laid out by the Solemn League & Covenant, there is no reason to force another meaning upon the phrase “singing of psalms” in one document as opposed to the other. It is very clear the Directory is speaking of a Psalm book, the Psalter the Divines produced contained only the 150 Psalms, and the parts of worship noted in the Confession match those articulated in the directory. Thus the natural reading and reference in the full context of the Assembly’s work is to the singing of the 150 psalms of David as that which was authorized for the public worship of God in the three kingdoms.

Again, it has to be kept in mind that the work of the Assembly was a package deal outlined by the Solemn League & Covenant, and each production is not some disparate separate production to be interpreted without context. Further to illustrate this contention, the linkage of the Directory to the Psalter of just the 150 Psalms, and

both to the Confession, in conformity to the endeavor for uniformity in religion, is confirmed by the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly.

Gillespie said the following in his speech at the August 1647 meeting of the Scottish General Assembly:

For the next Head of our Commission, ye know the Directory for Worship is settled long ago by the Parliaments of both Kingdoms. I confess it is not yet observed by all there so as it ought, yet it is observed by many, to the great good of that land. We shall only add to that head, the matter of the Psalms; all grant that there is a necessitie of the change of the old Paraphrase. This new Paraphrase was done by a Gentleman verie able for the purpose, but afterward it was revised by a Committee of the Assembly of Divines, accordingly to the original, and was approved by the whole Assembly (Cited in Baillie, 3.451).

Baillie in his speech before the Assembly on August 6, 1647, remarks:

I was glad to be a carrier of a Confession of Faith; also of a Psalter, which to my knowledge had cost the Assembly some considerable paines, and is like to be one necessary part of the three Kingdoms uniformitie” (Baillie, 3.12).

And finally, in a paper by the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly to the Grand Committee in London, December 29, 1646, and subsequently presented by Baillie to the Commission of the General Assembly in January 1647, it is written:

Wherfor in pursuance of the ends of the Covenant, in discharge of that trust which is committed to us, as likewise that some of our number who are now to returne into Scotland may be able to give farther accompt to the Parliament of that kingdom, and to the Commissioners of the Generall Assembly at Edinburgh (both being now assembled), we have taken this occasion (without the least presuming to prescribe any wayes or to impose conditions) to renew our most earnest desires to the Honourable Houses of Parliament, and to the reverend Assembly of Divines for their part, that all possible care may be taken, and greater diligence used, to expedite the begun Reformation and Uniformity, to supply and make up those parts that are yet wanting, and to put on and make effectually what is already agreed upon. More particularly we do desire that

some effectually course may be provided by Ordinance of Parliament for the taking of the Solemn League and Covenant, by all persons, as well as in all places of this kingdom, and some considerable penalty or punishment (such as the honourable Houses in their wisdom shall think fitt) may be appointed for such as refuse to take it (much more for such as reproach it or speak against it), and that by authority of both Houses of the Parliament of England, the Covenant, Confession of Faith, Directory of Worship, Forme of Government and Catechisms may be settled in Ireland as well as in England, according to the first article of the Solemn League and Covenant. Wee also desire that the Catechisme (now before the Assembly of Divines) may be perfected so soon as is possible: that the Confession of Faith may be established by authority of Parliament and immediately thereafter sent into Scotland (as the Directory of Worship was), to be agreed unto by that Church and kingdom, it being the cheefe part of that Uniformity in Religion, which both kingdoms stand bound by Covenant to endeavour: that course may be taken for the better observing the Directory of Worship, which is, in many places of this kingdom, either wholly or in diverse material points neglected. And because the singing of psalmes in Churches is a part of the public worship of God, We desire that the Paraphrase of the Psalms in meter, as it is now examined, corrected, and approved by the Assembly of Divines here, and by the Commissioners of the Gen. Assembly in Scotland, may be likewise authorized and established by Ordinance of Parliament.”<sup>131</sup>

That the fulfillment of the need to provide for the

*Continued on Page 303.*

131. See *The Records of the Commissions of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland Holden in Edinburgh in the Years 1646 and 1647. Edited from the Original Manuscript by Alexander F. Mitchell, D.D., LL.D. and James Christie, D.D. with an Introduction by the former* (Edinburgh: Printed at the University Press by T. and A. Constable for the Scottish History Society, 1892) 182–183. See also Baillie, 3.540, where the last portion about the Psalter is cited. It has already been noted that capitalization is not a sound guide to meaning, but interestingly Mitchell as cited above does not capitalize “psalm” in both occurrences, while Laing does so in his transcription given in Baillie’s *Letters and Journal*. Laing, who also edited Knox’s Works and other such material from manuscript, obtained the MS Records for his work in preparing Baillie’s journals for publication, and possessed them for nearly fifty years, until Mitchell arranged to obtain them for his work, which he did shortly after Laing’s death. Both men, working from the manuscript of the Commissions’ Records sought to reproduce the text accurately as for spelling and capitalization, which indicates perhaps that there may be difficulty determining if in this case the “p” is capital or lower case in both instances.

Fourth, the students are required to memorize the Shorter Catechism. Ideally they go through the catechism three times in the four year curriculum. (Students from Continental Reformed denominations may substitute the Heidelberg Catechism.)

Fifth, we encourage exegetical/doctrinal preaching. Our students are encouraged to relate the truth of the text they are preaching to the doctrines of the Westminster Standards.

We live in a day with amazing resources. We need to pray that God will raise up godly men and that our seminaries will labor to provide the churches with an academic, confessional, and practical program for ministerial training. Why should we settle for less? Why should the people in the pew settle for less when our forefathers who lived in a less educated age with fewer resources had a ministry so superior? But as long as the church settles for less, as long as the church settles for mediocre preaching, as long as the church settles for men that cannot carry on a logical conversation, she will have a poorly educated ministry. On the other hand, if the church is guilty of wanting her ears tickled and not wanting doctrine taught and sin exposed, she is going to get a ministry that will meet her expectations. ■

*The Regulative Principle of Worship: Sixty Years in Reformed Literature Part Two (2000–2007), Continued from Page 215.*

“singing of psalms” is found in the approval of the Assembly’s “Paraphrase of the Psalmes,” which had been purged of nothing else, seems to confirm the specific use of the term “psalm” rather than a more general use to mean any spiritual song. Verifying the plain sense of the Divines from within the context of their work and the documents they produced is a sufficiently reasonable and conclusive approach to confirm their meaning, and avoids bean-counting opinions from outside their work to guess at what they “might” have meant by “psalm” in Confession of Faith 21.5. ■

*In Translation: John Brown of Wamphray Singing of Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs in the Public Worship of God, Continued from Page 279.*

each church would not be destitute of the ability to produce these songs, since in such public exercise the forerunning churches must take first place.<sup>20</sup> Christ surely has granted all necessary gifts to the church. This gift, however, is very rare, and not common either to the churches or its members.

(4) If Psalms and hymns so composed and written must be utilized, either the hymns must be examined or proved before they are actually introduced for public use, or not. If not, is it not likely that the church would end up with some erroneous, absurd songs and the like?<sup>21</sup> If they were examined and approved beforehand, with regard to both substance and form, isn’t it also likely that sometimes the occasion would

be lost for which the song was especially prepared before it had a chance of being introduced for use? And so, too often in public gatherings, either there would be at times no sacred songs, or, composed ahead of time, or insufficient use would be made with regard to the current occasion.

(5) It is certain that the Psalms and hymns in Scripture were dictated by the infallible Spirit. No one will deny that those hymns are superior which were composed by the infallible Spirit than those composed by private individuals, regardless of how gifted they may be. Who is going to believe that it was God’s will to replace his divine songs left to us with purely human ones?

(6) If this sort of thing happens, it turns out as it did in the papal psalters, as Martyr witnesses concerning 1 Cor. 14: 26, “Indeed, let the church not be led by its own inspiration, nor let ignorant pastors in their own judgment and prudence substitute bronze for gold, in place of the Psalms and spiritual songs which they celebrate as praise to God. These traditions are most frequently absurd, mere fables, and ridiculous.” So also Nicephorus witnesses in Book 9, chapter 24, Athanasius and Photius in *The Epitome of Philostorgius’ History*, Book 2, section 2, that Arius and his followers changed certain among the received hymns, and composed new songs, including for sailors, millers, and travelers, so that he might furtively lead people to his own impiety.

(7) The ancients sang the Davidic Psalter, as Augustine witnesses, Book 10, chapter 33, *Confessions*; Theodoretus, *Histories*, Book 2, chapter 24,<sup>22</sup> claims that Flavinus and Diodorus handed down the Davidic hymns to be sung. Augustine, Epistle 119, chapter 18, boasts that the divine songs of the prophets be sung solemnly in the church. He discusses the problem of the Donatists who abandoned the hymns of David and sang songs composed out of their own imagination. The Council of Laodicia, canon 59, forbid the speaking of private psalms in the church.

(8) How great an evil has arisen from this license in the Roman church has already been sufficiently noted.

(9) The apostle prescribes for us the substance of the songs in Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16, for *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs* are themselves titles of the Psalms of David and others....

(TO BE CONTINUED)

TRANSLATED BY N. E. BARRY HOFSTETTER, Th.M. ■

20. This argument is a bit obscure, but Brown appears to be making a reference to the practice in the ancient church, implying that the practice would have not only been clearly instituted by Christ, but would date back to antiquity.

21. Brown here appears to have risen to the level of prophet, considering some of the musical proclivities of the contemporary worship genre.

22. [Ed. This appears to be chapter 19 in *Nicene And Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series*, Vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (1892; Rpt. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, n.d.).]